

Religion pervades all Lythian cultures and levels of society. Most folk share a common set of pantheistic beliefs. They roughly agree on the same story of creation, accept the existence of ten major deities, but most worship only one.¹

THE NATURE OF THE GODS OF SHOJU

No one questions that the gods exist. The Empire itself supports the worship of three and forbids the worship of all foreign or evil gods, although such laws are rarely enforced. Those who do not wish to believe are wise to remain silent, or at least pay lip service for the gods and spirits can be vengeful and contemptuous.

Divine supersession is rampant throughout the Empire, and occurs in three forms: worship of the gods, animism and ancestral worship. All three forms exist throughout all castes of society, although the nobility tends to practice worship of the gods and ancestral worship more prominently than animism. The lower the caste, the more animism becomes important to the people.

Worship of the gods is embodied in the Empire by the worship of The Three (Waruko, Toji and Sabomu). The three gods are considered separate entities that work together. Tekikuko (the scholar-warrior) is often depicted in shrines to the Three, and libraries are dedicated specifically to him. Akujo and Akichiko officially have no temples, although they have their followers. Akujo is seen as Waruko's rival and eternal tormentor while Akichiko is considered the cause of all dishonor and bad luck. Naveh is considered to be a foreign god and his worship is forbidden. Mako is the only goddess dedicated to a lesser caste - artists, entertainers and merchants.

Animism is the respect and honors paid to a wide variety of spirits, beings and folk that have powers both greater than and less than those of mankind. These spirits must be appeased for any venture to work. They exist in the rivers, the stones, the buildings, everywhere. They accept gifts of food or small crafts and appreciate buildings built just for them. In return they help protect the people, perform spiritual errands and help when and how they can. There are hundreds of known spirits that embody the best, or the worst, of an animal or a place. Each of these has their own small shrine, built by the faithful, the wanting and the thankful.

Ancestor worship appears, at first, very much like Animism. The belief that the dead members of the family strive to assure the family is protected from the spiritual world by their dead relatives is an ancient belief that not even the Emperor dares question. Life is seen as eternal, with death being a transition from this world to another. Ancestors protect the family's honor, serve Waruko (The First Emperor), and strive to negotiate for good lives for the living. The larger and more wealthy families hold festivals and build giant shrines to their dead that act as their own temples. Lesser families often have shrines in their homes to honor at least one or two generations of their past.

THE PANTHEON

Waruko (Sarajin)

The First Emperor, he demands honor and bravery from his adherents, mostly Samurai and courtiers. He embodies the Empire and its demand for growth, obedience and embodiment of duty.

Toji (Peoni)

Wife to Waruko, Toji is the goddess of rice. She embodies the land of the empire - its agriculture, its wealth and its fertility. She is also the goddess of money and the hearth.

Sabomu (Larani)

Sometimes called the protector, Sabomu is the unwilling warrior. A woman, trained as a soldier she is tasked with protecting her sleeping lord, Waruko. She is unseen until needed. She assists Toji in all her tasks and provides everything as needed.

Akujo (Agrik)

The last samurai, Akujo is depicted as ruthless, battle hungry and cruel, but always civilized and scrupulous to his word. Akujo is the perfect depiction of an evil master. He is only savage to his enemies and is often blamed for all battles and honor slights; which must be avenged.

Tekikuko (Save-K'nor)

The artist samurai, Tekikuko is both a warrior and a scholar. His two aspects are often worshipped separately, although depictions of one share similarities with the other. Prayers to him are in the form of poetry and as gifts he prefers riddles and puzzles.

Akichiko (Morgath)

Master of the void, he is sometimes also called the Lord of Dishonor. He guards the underworld where those cast out by family spirits must reside until they are redeemed, or forgotten. He despises all things fair and noble and seeks their corruption. Those who loose duels of honor must face him and be judged.

Naveh (Naveh)

Known as the Evil One, he is a god of darkness and a bringer of nightmares from the west. His followers are thieves and assassins skilled in the silent arts of death. His religion is always practiced in secret. He is considered a foreign god.

Mako (Halea)

The goddess of the entertainers, artisans and merchants, she stands between the darkness and the light. The shadowed lady is known to be vain and mysterious; gamblers try to seduce her with presents to win her luck. Merchants say she is the embodiment of money rather than kind.

1. Taken, with very little modification from HårnMaster Religions, Religions 1.

HOW THE GODS CAME TO SHOJU

When the island of Shoju arose from the sea, it was Waruko who poured forth the water onto the land and made it fertile. Numerous spirits and beings were curious and came to see this new and special place. Waruko made his home atop the highest point and told all they were welcome. Many stayed and made it their home. Many others progressed further west and passed on from memory.

The first to come was Mako. She was so very beautiful and graceful that Waruko came down from his high place and gave her three gifts: a paintbrush filled with green, a piece of white clay and a gem from the earth. She took the gifts gratefully, but soon tired of them and tossed them into the sea. She would not settle or talk to Waruko; and when he asked her to marry him, she laughed and ran away. Waruko could not be angry at Mako for she was too beautiful, and so he built her a place at the edge of his high place, near the sea. She visited him sometimes and he felt less lonely.

The second to come was Sabomu. Old and wise, she hid from Waruko and refused to come out from dark places. He called to her and still she hid in dark places. Thinking her perhaps ugly or deformed, he brought her fine clothes. But she turned them to rags. She would talk to him, and they spent long hours discussing the new land and the way of things.

The third to come was Akujo. He did not like this place and wanted it for his own, so he could remake it; but Waruko forbade Shoju's destruction. Akujo was soon joined by Akichiko and together they plotted Waruko's downfall. But Sabomu heard their plotting and ran to tell Waruko. But she was too late. Akujo challenged Waruko and in his first strike cut open Waruko's tunic. Waruko's blade shattered as he fell, for Akujo's blade had been poisoned by Akichiko. Sabomu had to stand between Waruko and the forces of darkness while Mako and many others ran away in fear. With Mako's passing, Shoju passed into darkness. But Sabomu was not afraid of the dark and she held her ground against Akujo and Akichiko.

Mako was the only one brave enough to travel east, across the waters. And there, at the beginning she met up with Toji and Tekikuko. They listened to her problems and brought her back to Shoju and with her came the sun. Toji healed Waruko while Tekikuko dissolved Akichiko's evil magics. Sabomu, freed from protecting her lord took up a piece of his broken sword and bound it to a staff. With this she attacked Akujo and wounded him badly. The blood that fell created the spirits of bloodless, cowardice and dishonor. They fled to the far corners of the land along with their master.

Sabomu tried to follow Akujo, but Toji called her back. Together they brought a healing Waruko back to his high place and Tekikuko built a fortress that no dark magic nor evil warrior could ever enter. As Waruko healed, Toji found Mako's green paintbrush and filled the lands with green and fertile plants. She scattered the white clay atop the green and rice grew. Sabomu patrolled the shadows, telling Mako where to best open shadows to light and thus destroy the evil that might be festering there.

When Waruko was better he brought Toji, Mako, Tekikuko and Sabomu to him and thanked them. He offered them a place in his house. Tekikuko politely refused but promised to visit. Mako did not stay long enough to hear the offer. Toji and Sabomu accepted readily. Then he asked Toji to marry him and she said yes.

But What About...

Siem

This is the god of the mystic races (the elves and the dwarves). While there are many rumors about these races, they are not known to the Empire. A few practitioners of magic or scholars of wild places worship Siem as the god of mystery, the wild and magic; but their religion is neither organized nor wide spread.

Ilvir

A western god, Ilvir's creatures are better known on Shoju than Ilvir himself. Ivashu, called demons here, are believed to be bits of chaos made flesh. The beast god has no followers, but many spirits are said to be of his crafting. Ilvir is followed only by a few sects, each with unique beliefs and structures that all claim to be the one true religion.

The Others

There are dozens of other, lesser gods and thousands of spirits on Shoju. The greatest of these have temples that rival those of Mako or even Tekikuko. These lesser gods are often only known in a few small regions. Some, considered related to specific clans, events or places, have great powers and sway while others show no proof of ever answering prayers or even existing outside their follower's devotions.

Shoju is a highly spiritual place where gods listen and spirits watch.

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