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Review: Barbara R. Ambros, *Bones of Contention: Animals and Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Hawai'i, 2012).

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Ambros, Barbara R. *Bones of contention: animals and religion in contemporary Japan*. Hawai'i, 2012. 265p bibl index afp ISBN 9780824836269, \$55.00; ISBN 9780824836740 pbk, \$29.00

Ambros (Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) provides a nuanced and well-researched analysis of the complex topic of animal death in contemporary Japanese religion. Employing both textual sources and ethnographic methods, the author skillfully limns the manifold social, religious, and practical tensions involved in the growing practice of "pet funerals," situating the trend clearly within the context of modernity. She highlights the differences between memorial rites for animals that are not pets (which tend to be largely uncontroversial) and those connected to pets (which, despite growing acceptance, still face criticism on the grounds of being "selfish" and "wasteful"). By focusing on pet funerals as rituals of "contestation and negotiation," this book raises important questions regarding Japanese Buddhist (and neospiritualist) attitudes toward death, the afterlife, spirit pacification, and the ontological status of animals--and how these may be changing in the face of modernity (and postmodernity). Finally, this volume stands as a devastating rebuke to those tempted to rely on romantic and/or simplistic assumptions about Japanese connections to animals and the natural world. A valuable resource for undergraduate courses in Japanese religion, death in comparative religion, and religion and the environment. Summing Up: Highly recommended. Lower-division undergraduates and above. -- J. M. Shields, Bucknell University