

Introduction

This issue of CISMOR VOICE is written while the COVID19 pandemic is still threatening the lives of many people around the world. Although the disease was somewhat slower in spreading during the summer time, in Japan, it looks like it is coming back once people return to a semi-normal life in the fall. Since March 2020 the CISMOR center has had to cancel all its scheduled activities, including three conferences with the participation of visiting scholars from abroad. One large-scale international conference scheduled for the month of May was first postponed, but then had to be cancelled for this year. It is not only that the fear of the virus stopped travel between countries, but Japan also entered an emergency state for a period of a month and a half, experienced as a voluntary lockdown. People in Japan not only took all possible precautions advised by scientists and public officials, but also avoided leaving home as much as possible of their own accord. University teaching moved completely online through recorded classes, streaming, and the use of Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms.

The semester went by as we all tried to cope with the new challenge of online teaching. However, in May 2020 we restarted CISMOR's activity online, and our first workshop was held at the end of that month. Since May we have held several workshops organized by the center's researchers, and two co-organized workshops.

The online workshops are shorter than usual, but are certainly more focused, and thus very interesting. The online platform is not always stable for all participants, and therefore a lecture is sometimes interrupted, but this has become part of the regular disturbances accepted in our time.

Activities that took place and are covered in detail in this issue includes the first young scholars' workshop (5/30/2020), an international workshop on Jewish Studies with the participation of two scholars from Israel (9/3/2020), and CISMOR Research Fellows' workshop on the history and cults of the Ancient Near East (9/26/2020). In addition, CISMOR co-organized a workshop on Assyriological Studies #20 (9/10/2020) and a series of lectures by CISMOR research fellow Dr. Abe Tajii on economy in an international context (9/5, 12/2020).

Activities planned for the coming semester will continue online, with public lectures, seminars and workshops. We wish all our researchers, participants and followers good health and a safe fall and winter.

Ada Taggar Cohen, October 2020

Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions
(=CISMOR)