

CHAPTER 6

EARLY KAMI WORSHIP

From prehistoric times the Japanese have revered animistic spirits and deities called *kami*. Eventually the worship of kami developed into a religious system known as Shinto or “the kami way.” The two Chinese characters used in Japan for writing “Shinto” had been used for centuries in China to refer to the supernatural or the mysterious. Adopted in Japan at the end of the sixth century A.D., these characters were employed to distinguish native kami worship from Buddhism (the Buddha way), recently imported from the Asian continent. Early sources suggest that Shinto was then synonymous with the old word *kamunagara*, which denoted a “way” handed down by the kami themselves without human revision.

By the time that Japan’s native religion was identified as Shinto, kami worship had moved beyond awe of natural forces to institutionalized rituals believed to ensure protection and prosperity for the clans (*uji*), and to provide religious sanction for the clan chieftains and territorial rulers. This chapter will therefore be devoted mainly to showing how kami beliefs and practices, while retaining their animistic core, moved from simple to complex forms.

GENERAL PROBLEMS

The concept of kami

The standard translation of kami is “deity,” a word suggesting the Western concept of a transcendental divinity such as in the Judaeo-Christian God. But the gulf between divinity and humanity found in the Judaic religions does not exist in Shinto. Even though the Shinto kami are given credit for creating various parts of the universe, kami are neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and unlike the ancient Greek gods, they are not necessarily immortal.

The classic definition of kami is the one advanced by Motoori

Norinaga (1730–1801), a distinguished scholar of Japanese history and literature:

Kami are, first of all, deities of heaven and earth and spirits venerated at shrines, as well as the humans, birds and beasts, plants and trees, oceans, and mountains that have exceptional powers and ought to be revered. Kami include not only mysterious beings that are noble and good but also malignant spirits that are extraordinary and deserve veneration.¹

Western scholars of Shinto tend to accept Motoori's definition: F. H. Ross wrote that kami are mysterious beings associated with feelings of "awesomeness" and "the holy,"² and A. C. Underwood defined kami as including all supernatural beings, good or bad.³

In general, the Japanese believed that any extraordinary phenomenon possessed charismatic power. That is, the spirit of a kami might reside in heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, and stars or in the forces of nature such as wind, rain, and lightning. Thunder, for instance, was called "the kami that rumbles." Striking topographical features such as oceans, rivers, and mountains, or even manufactured objects (buildings, boats, combs, or hearths) might house a kami. A charismatic ruler or aristocrat was often named a kami, and certain animals were known as kami, such as tigers, wolves, hares, and serpents, if they were exceptional for their species. An ancient myth even tells of a peach seed with the power to repel evil demons and names the seed Ōkamutsumi (the "great kami seed"). The charisma that a kami possesses resembles *mana*, the extraordinary power that the people of Melanesia associate with supernatural phenomena or fearsome objects.

Although some spirits were honored and feared by the ancient Japanese and called kami, many were given other names with subtle differ-

1 Motoori Norinaga, *Kojikiden* pt. 1, chap. 3, vol. 9 of *Motoori Norinaga zenshū* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1976), p. 125.

2 Floyd Hiatt Ross, *Shintō: The Way of Japan* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 32.

3 A. C. Underwood, *Shintōism: The Indigenous Religion of Japan* (London: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 32. Other Western scholars have grappled with the essential nature of kami belief and worship: see D. C. Holtom, "The Meaning of Kami," *Monumenta Nipponica* 3, no. 1 (1940): 1–27; 3, no. 2 (1940): 392–413; and 4, no. 2 (1942): 351–94; Richard Arthur Brabazon Ponsonby-Fane, *The Vicissitudes of Shintō* (Kyoto: Ponsonby Memorial Society, 1963); and Jean Herbert, *Shintō: At the Fountain-Head of Japan* (New York: Stein & Day, 1967). Studies by two distinguished Japanese scholars of Shinto have been translated into English: Tsunetsugu Muraoka, *Studies in Shintō Thought*, trans. Delmer M. Brown and James T. Araki (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1964); and Genichi Kato, *A Historical Study of the Religious Development of Shintō*, trans. Shoyu Hanayama (Tokyo: Ministry of Education, 1973). Other Western works on Shinto are listed in Genichi Kato, Karl Reitz, and Wilhelm Schiffer, comps., *A Bibliography of Shintō in Western Languages, from the Oldest Times till 1952* (Tokyo: Meiji jingū shamusho, 1953); and in Arcadio Schwade, *Shintō Bibliography in Western Languages: Bibliography on Shintō and Religious Sects, Intellectual Schools and Movements Influenced by Shintōism* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

ences in meaning. There were *tama* (souls), *mono* (demons), *tsuchi* and *mi* (animistic spirits), and *chi* and *itsu* (spirits that possessed magical powers). Kami were chosen from that crowd of spirits, elevated in rank, further sanctified, and later anthropomorphized. The kami of the mountains, for instance, were thought to control the spirits, animals, and plants in a specific mountain region, and the kami of the ocean to control ocean life. In a later stage of development, such kami were often given names and selected as tutelary deities by important clans. The Ochi clan of Shikoku's Iyo Province (present-day Ehime Prefecture) adopted a mountain kami as its tutelary deity (*ujigami*), and an ocean kami was taken as the *ujigami* of the Azumi clan based in the seacoast province of Chikuzen (Fukuoka Prefecture).

Finally, the most important kami often possessed the power to create. Though there is no equivalent in Shinto to the Judaic God's creation of the cosmos and everything in it, kami did give birth to familiar portions of the universe. Myths tell us, for instance, that the husband and wife kami, Izanagi and Izanami, created the islands of Japan.⁴ Moreover, the word *musubi* attached to the names of many kami – the high-ranking Takamimusubi is one important example – connotes creative power. Creator and life-giving kami such as Izanagi, Izanami, Takamimusubi, and Amaterasu (the Sun Goddess who became the ancestral kami of the imperial clan) all occupied high positions in the “myriad kami” pantheon appearing in Japan's earliest recorded myths.

Ethics and ritual purity

The ethical content of Shinto is weak in comparison with that of such universalistic religions as Christianity and Buddhism. Shinto stresses ritual purity rather than ethics and morality, and Shinto rituals are designed to counteract ritual pollution. The word *tsumi* indicates an offense or pollution that must be neutralized by ritual cleansing. The concept of *tsumi* also differs from the Christian concept of original sin, an evil inherent in human nature and one that can be purged only by confessing to God and receiving his forgiveness. The Shinto concept also differs from the “carnal passions” that obstruct one's understanding and acceptance of Buddhist truth. *Tsumi*, moreover, were not believed

⁴ *Kojiki*, bk. 1 in Sakamoto Tarō, Ienaga Saburō, Inoue Mitsusada, and Ōno Susumu, eds., *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* (hereafter cited as NKBT) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 54–57; trans. Donald L. Philippi, *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), pp. 49, 53–54. *Nihon shoki*, bk. 1, NKBT 67.81–90, trans. W. G. Aston, *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (hereafter cited as Aston) (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), pt. 1, pp. 12–18.

to result in retribution after death. *Tsumi* included offenses for which a person was responsible as well as calamities over which he or she had no control. Certain acts resulting in bodily harm to others were lumped together with epidemics and natural calamities as forms of *tsumi* that were referred to as “troublesome things” (*magagoto*). In general the ancient Japanese equated physical purity and brightness with righteousness and virtue; conversely, physical defilement and darkness were seen as evil and injustice. Ablutions were used as magic rites to eliminate *tsumi*.

As Japanese mythology demonstrates, the concept of *tsumi* was thought to have developed in the “age of the kami,” long before humans inhabited the earth. In one myth, the kami Izanagi visited his dead wife Izanami in the land of the dead beneath the earth (Yomi no Kuni). After Izanagi returned, he purified himself, by washing in the ocean, from the pollution he had acquired in that dreadful place. The kami of misfortune (Magatsuhi) was born from this pollution, and to counteract that calamitous event, the kami of purity (Naobi no kami) was born from the water. Accordingly, pollution originated in the land of the dead and could be removed by washing in water, a ritual based on Izanagi’s action.⁵

Still another myth assigns archetypal offenses against ritual purity to the age of the kami. This tale concerns the violent actions of Susa no O, younger brother of the Sun Goddess, when he was in the heavenly regions of Takamanohara. Susa no O violated his sister’s rice paddies in a number of ways: He destroyed the irrigation channels, the bamboo irrigation pipes, and the divisions between the paddy fields; and he sowed the field with tares and set up his own markers of occupancy. In other words, he interfered in various ways with agricultural production. He also committed defiling acts such as strewing excrement around his sister’s palace and throwing a piebald colt (which he had skinned from back to front) into her room. Some theorize that the designation of this act as an offense points to the post-645 ban on the sacrifice of live animals.⁶

The *tsumi* termed “offenses of heaven,” exorcised during the Great Purification Ceremony (Ōharae) conducted twice annually at the imperial palace in ancient times, were equated with Susa no O’s actions. These *tsumi* included damage to sacred fields where rice was grown for festival offerings and desecrations of sacred places, and they were

⁵ *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.63–71, Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 61–70; and *Nihon shoki*, bk. 1, NKBT 67.94–95, Aston, 1.24–25.

⁶ *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.78–81, Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 79–80; and *Nihon shoki*, bk. 1, NKBT 67.111–17, Aston, 1.40–49.

apparently labeled “offenses of heaven” simply because they had first occurred, according to the myths, on the High Plain of Heaven (Takamanohara). The Ōharae ceremony’s ritual prayers (*norito*), recorded in the tenth-century *Engishiki*, list a second category of *tsumi*, “offenses of earth.” These were probably so named because they included misfortunes in human society and had no prototype in the Takamanohara myths. These offenses included crimes and illnesses, as well as wounding another person so that his or her blood was spilled, desecrating a corpse, committing bestiality and incest, and contracting leprosy. Also listed are sorcery, natural calamities, and insect blight.⁷ The fact that the *norito* did not cite actions that were in later ages considered criminal, such as murder (without the spilling of blood) and theft, only underlines the gap between the ancient Japanese view of *tsumi* and more theologically advanced concepts of sin.

A special Ōharae ceremony was conducted three months before the Daijōsai, the Great Feast of Enthronement that followed an emperor’s enthronement. This Ōharae, held to purge ritual impurities that might harm agricultural production, involved magical rites to expel such *tsumi* to the land of the dead across the sea (Ne no Kuni)⁸ and to pray for a bountiful harvest. Later on, the ceremony lost its agricultural character, and rites were conducted to prevent such mundane misfortunes as illness, natural calamities, and certain crimes. Thus, “offenses of earth” were added to the list of “troublesome things” that had to be purged. The Ōharae ceremony customarily utilized a scapegoat, a doll that took on all offenses and was cast into the river and exiled. This rite mirrored the myth in which Susa no Ō was expelled from heaven for his violent actions.⁹

7 *Minazuki tsugomori no ōharae*, included in *Kojiki*, NKBT 1.423–6. The ritual appears in English translation in Felicia Gressitt Bock, *Engi-shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era*, Books 6–10 (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1972), pp. 85–87. For a comparison of the acts of pollution committed by Susa no Ō with the “offenses of heaven” listed in the Ōharae, see Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 403–4.

8 The *norito* or ritual prayers in this Ōharae ceremony refer to the land of the dead as Ne no Kuni, a land beyond the sea. The ancient Japanese image of the land of the dead, however, combined two concepts of separate origin. The concept of Ne no Kuni was probably derived from south Asian beliefs that the netherland lay across the sea. The name, which means “root country,” suggests that Ne no Kuni was also seen as the original overseas homeland of the Japanese people. Ne no Kuni eventually came to be identified with Yomi no Kuni, the land of the dead beneath the earth in beliefs of north Asian lineage. For a discussion of Ne no Kuni, see Yanagita Kunio, “Kaijō no michi,” in *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shū* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 85–109.

9 The *Engishiki*, in Kuroita Katsumi, ed., *Shintei zohō: Kokushi taikēi* (hereafter cited as KT) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1937), vol. 26, p. 26; Bock, *Engi-shiki*, 1. 83, lists effigies among the artifacts used in the biannual Ōharae. For the Ōharae ritual, see the *Engishiki*, KT 26.169–70, Bock, *Engi-shiki*, 2.87.

The common element that links all *tsumi* is their danger to the cosmic and social order.¹⁰ The primitive Japanese believed that society and the cosmos were interrelated and that disturbing one could disturb the other. As violations of the normal order of things, *tsumi* were to be feared because it was thought that they would invite calamity. Improper sexual relations, for instance, might lead to poor harvests. Thus rules for conduct were not based on principles considered inherently moral, and the danger caused by improper actions or unfortunate events might be removed completely by conducting the appropriate magical rites.

Shinto literature and the structure of Shinto mythology

Various literary and historical works of the eighth to the tenth centuries provide considerable information about Shinto practices and the development of Shinto mythology. Particularly useful texts include the semihistorical chronicles *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihon shoki* (720), compiled under the auspices of the imperial court; *fudoki*, provincial gazetteers also compiled under imperial orders; the *Kōtai jingū gishikichō* and *Toyuke no miya gishikichō* (804), records of the Grand Shrine at Ise; Imbe no Hironari's *Kogoshūi* (807), which records the history and traditions of his family; and the *Engishiki* (Procedures of the Engi period, 927) which includes ceremonial prayers (*norito*), descriptions of imperial rites, and records of officially sanctioned shrines.¹¹

Shinto mythology is described most systematically in the "age of the kami" chapters of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, chronicles compiled to justify the efforts of one powerful clan, based on the Yamato plain of central Honshu, to extend its rule over Japan and call itself the imperial clan. The *Kojiki*, in particular, takes hitherto unrelated myths and weaves them into a narrative tale that moves directly from the creation of the universe to the creation of the imperial house. This neat sequential arrangement suggests manipulation for political purposes. Indeed, political rather than ethical or theological concepts lie at the core of

¹⁰ This hypothesis is advanced by Ōbayashi Taryō, "Kodai Nihon ni okeru bunrui no ronri," in Ōbayashi Taryō, ed., *Shinwa, shakai, sekaikan* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1972), pp. 329–56; and Matsumae Takeshi, "Shizoku shakai no shisō," in Furukawa Tetsushi and Ishida Ichirō, eds., in vol. 1 of *Nihon shisōshi kōza* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1977), pp. 7–26.

¹¹ *Fudoki*, NKBT, vol. 2, trans. Michiko Yamaguchi Aoki, *Izumo fudoki* (Tokyo: Sophia University Press, 1971); "Kōtai jingū gishikichō," in Hanawa Hokinoichi, ed., *Gunsho ruijū* (Tokyo: Keizai zasshisha, 1898), vol. 1, pp. 1–51; Ōnakatomi no Matsugu et al., eds., "Toyuke-gū gishiki chō," in *Gunsho ruijū*, 1.52–83; Imbe no Hironari, ed., "Kogoshūi," in *Gunsho ruijū*, 16.1–19, trans. Genchi Katō and Hikoshirō Hoshino, *Kogoshūi: Gleanings from Ancient Stories* (London: Curzon Press, and New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972, reproduction of 1926 ed.).

this “official” formulation, and religious emotion is lacking. The myths, embellished and modified to trace a single line of descent from the ancestral kami to a succession of human rulers, were clearly meant to strengthen and sanctify the imperial clan’s control over the whole of Japan.

According to the thesis proposed by the literary historian Tsuda Sōkichi, the myths were consciously manipulated by Yamato court nobles of the sixth and seventh centuries. The principal kami – the Sun Goddess, Susa no O no Mikoto, the creator kami couple (Izanagi and Izanami), and the kami of Izumo (Ōnamuchi) – were not venerated among ordinary people. Rather, myths about these kami, according to Tsuda, were products of a conscious effort to construct a political ideology for the Yamato court.¹² Tsuda’s is the most scientific, critical, and objective of the scholarly explanations advanced before World War II. In the ultranationalistic years preceding and during that war, his theory was suppressed by the authorities, who claimed that it showed irreverence to the imperial house. But after the war, when the emperor renounced any claim to divine descent, Tsuda’s thesis was once more acclaimed and was further developed by other scholars.

But such an explanation seems to suggest too much conscious rationalism by early Japanese aristocrats. Although it is undoubtedly true that the myths were revised and structured during the sixth and seventh centuries for political purposes and that the kami pantheon was arranged with the imperial ancestor kami (the Sun Goddess) at its apex, most scholars now maintain that these myths and kami originated among the people, that the kami began as nature spirits, and that the myths were originally animistic tales told by peasants and fishermen.

Several factors point to this conclusion. Similar tales appear in popular folklore. Even today, we can pick out primitive elements in the shrine rituals that venerate these kami, and identify these elements with local beliefs and customs. These myths, moreover, manifest influence from other parts of Asia. For example, one Japanese myth about the marriage of the creator kami Izanagi and Izanami is similar to tales told in southeast Asian folklore.¹³ The stories of how Izanami and Izanagi gave birth to the islands of Japan and how Izanami was killed and descended to the land of the dead also have their counterparts in

¹² Tsuda Sōkichi, *Nihon koten no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1948), vol. 1.

¹³ Matsumoto Nobuhiro, *Nihon shinwa no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1929), pp. 168–80; Matsumura Takeo, *Nihon shinwa no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Baifūkan, 1955), vol. 2, pp. 232–72; Matsumae Takeshi, *Nihon shinwa to kodai seikatsu* (Tokyo: Yūseidō shuppan, 1970), pp. 108–53.

Polynesia.¹⁴ Folk tales of the Miao people of southern China resemble the tale of how the Sun Goddess became angry with her brother Susa no O's violence, retreating to a cave and remaining there until she was coaxed to come out.¹⁵ Korean myths contain motifs similar to that in the one about the descent to earth of the Sun Goddess's grandson (Hononinigi), whose descendants, according to the chronicles, became Japan's emperors.¹⁶ Moreover, the *Kojiki* tale of the marriage between a human maiden and the kami Ōmono Nushi is similar to Korean and Manchurian myths.¹⁷ It thus is likely that these imported elements were transmitted through migrations and visits over a long period of time and were gradually incorporated into popular mythology. Thus the chronicle myths seem to have emerged from popular sources and then to have been consciously embellished, modified, and arranged for political purposes.

Periodization

From the myths that appear in the chronicles and gazetteers (*fudoki*), the general outlines of kami-worship development can be roughly traced. Because Shinto is a complex belief system that has retained primitive elements even while gradually becoming more sophisticated, the myths themselves represent levels of evolution from simple animism to a political ideology supporting the Yamato court. Of particular value for such historical reconstruction is the *Nihon shoki*, which contains different versions of a particular myth, in addition to the one presented as "authentic." These variations often represent different stages in a process of mythological and cultural evolution.

According to Mishina Shōei, Japanese mythology developed in three distinct stages. In the "primitive-myth" stage of the Yayoi period (approximately 200 B.C. to A.D. 250), apolitical myths functioned as rituals of worship and petition designed to secure certain effects by magical means. The next period, the "ceremonial-myth" stage (A.D.

¹⁴ Matsumoto, *Nihon shinwa no kenkyū*, pp. 157–94; Matsumae Takeshi, *Nihon shinwa no shin kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1961), pp. 32–61.

¹⁵ Matsumura, *Nihon shinwa no kenkyū*, 3.71–73; Ishida Eiichirō, *Momotarō no haha* (Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku shuppanyoku, 1956), pp. 56–57. Ōbayashi Taryō discusses similarities between southeast Asian solar eclipse myths and the Amaterasu myth in *Nihon shinwa no kigen* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1961), pp. 121–40.

¹⁶ Matsumura, *Nihon shinwa no kenkyū*, 3.510–16; Mishina Shōei, *Nihon shinwa ron* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1960), pp. 28–32, 122–143; Oka Masao, Ishida Eiichirō, Egami Namio, and Yawata Ichirō, *Nihon minzoku no kigen* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1958), pp. 70–73.

¹⁷ Torii Ryūzō, *Yūshi izen no Nippon* (Tokyo: Isobe kōyōdō, 1925), pp. 428–48; Seki Keigo, "The Spool of Thread," in Richard Dorson, ed., *Studies in Japanese Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 267–8.

250 to 500 in the Burial Mound age), is characterized by myths focused on rites for ensuring the production of good rice harvests. As the Yamato court gradually extended its dominion during this period, myths came to reflect the local chieftains' acts of submission to central authority. The Yamato ruler's role as a sacred priest-king was strengthened, and to some extent, secular government and worship were fused. Thus Mishina's second-period myths contained both political and religious elements that were reflected in rituals conducted by both the Yamato court and local clans. In Mishina's third "political-myth" period, myths lost much of their religious character as their political overtone was deepened. This period began in the late sixth century and ended in the eighth, when the myths – embellished and revised to serve political ends – were recorded in the chronicles.¹⁸

Though I agree in general with Mishina's periodization, I suggest a more complex scheme that traces the development of Shinto as a whole. This four-part scheme, providing the framework for the remainder of this chapter, takes in all aspects of Shinto from primitive times to the end of the Nara period in 784. It has emerged from a consideration not only of myths but also of beliefs, festivals, rites, the institutionalized priesthood, architecture, and iconography.

In my first period, the Jōmon–Yayoi age, the roots of Shinto developed from animistic forms of nature worship. Though religious practices were changed during the succeeding Burial Mound period, many elements of early nature worship were retained. In this first period, people venerated spirits of the mountains, the fields, and streams near their villages, and they related tales that pertained to nature and the origins of the most remarkable features of their environment. People of this period developed magical rites to aid them in hunting, fishing, and farming, and they told tales that explained the origin of these rites.

During my second period – the fourth and fifth centuries and roughly the first two centuries of the Yamato state – animistic spirits were personalized, honored at special places of worship, and frequently adopted as tutelary deities of local clans, which had seized control of certain regions.

My third period, spanning the sixth and seventh centuries of Yamato history, is highlighted by the Yamato court's use of Shinto to

¹⁸ Mishina, *Nihon shinwa ron*, pp. 66–69. A recent study of interaction between kami worship and political control at the second "ceremonial-myth" stage was made by Robert S. Ellwood in "The Sujin Religious Revolution," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 17, nos. 1 and 2 (June and September 1990): 199–217.

centralize its control. Efforts of this sort were made first in some regions as early as the fifth century but were expanded and intensified during the sixth and seventh. The extension of the court's sacred authority eroded the clans' sacred authority as clan rituals and myths were incorporated into the ceremonial structure that supported and sanctified Yamato rule.

In my fourth and final period – the late seventh and eighth centuries – the adoption of Chinese political and cultural forms was associated not only with the formation of the sinified *ritsuryō* state but also with the further development of Shinto as a prop for the centralized power of the “imperial system.” Though the imperial institution was modeled on that of the Chinese bureaucratic state, ancient Shinto rites, myths, and beliefs were also revised and affirmed, thereby establishing the emperor as the highest Shinto priest of the land and a direct descendant of the Sun Goddess. National chronicles were compiled in this last period in order to record the official version of Japan's historicized mythology and to show that each emperor was descended directly from the Sun Goddess. A Council of Kami Affairs (*Jingikan*) was placed directly under the emperor in the new bureaucratic order, and Japanese emperors began to refer to themselves in imperial edicts as manifest kami (*akitsukami*). At the same time, Shinto itself was being changed by the culture imported from China and Korea, perhaps most strongly by Buddhism, which influenced all aspects of native beliefs, from ritual to iconography.

Scholars of modern-day Shinto often divide the religion into two types: the popular Shinto of village shrines, and the state Shinto of rites performed under the auspices of the central government. The former is rooted in early animistic worship and focuses on the veneration of mountain kami, kami of the fields, roadside guardians, and kami that protect the livelihood of the common people. State Shinto, on the other hand, began to emerge in my fourth period when a strong centralized and sinified legal order was formed and Japan's “emperor system” was developed. But there has always been interaction between the two. Popular beliefs have continued to lie at the base of ceremonies performed at state shrines. State ceremonies have continued to affect popular kami worship as local heroes were transformed into national heroes and as imperial representatives were dispatched to validate and control worship at local shrines. But state recognition and regulation gradually eroded the original popular character of kami worship at the village level.

In order to reconstruct the history of ancient Shinto, the available literature must be examined scientifically and critically. In addition,

archaeological methods must be applied to the study of religious artifacts, and folklorists' methods must be used in the examination of ceremonies currently conducted at Shinto shrines that undoubtedly contain elements from the past. Our ability to retrace ancient Shinto has been enhanced considerably by the proliferation of research in the free intellectual atmosphere that followed World War II. The efforts of many postwar scholars have solved some of the riddles of the ancient period.

Basic research in this area has been carried out by numerous scholars. Naoki Kōjirō, Tsukushi Nobuzane, Okada Seishi, and I have studied the origins of the worship of the Sun Goddess and of festivals held at Ise Shrine, the most important national shrine and the one where the Sun Goddess has been worshiped since the beginning of my fourth period. Ueda Masaaki and Yoshii Iwao have examined relationships between provincial clans and the ancient imperial court. Mizuno Yū, Torigoe Kenzaburō, and I have conducted research into the legends of Japan's Izumo region. Saigō Nobutsuna, Tanaka Hatsuo, and I have studied court ceremonies such as the Great Feast of Enthronement conducted at the beginning of a new reign and the yearly winter festival, the Chinkonsai ("Soul-quieting festival"). In the field of art history, important contributions have been made in Shinto architecture by Fukuyama Toshio, Watanabe Yasutada, and Inagaki Eizō. Kageyama Haruki's studies of iconography, Ōba Iwao's archaeological investigations, and Nishida Nagao's intensive examination of old shrine documents have been important.¹⁹ In this chapter,

19 Naoki Kōjirō, *Nihon kodai no shizoku to tennō* (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1965); Tsukushi Nobuzane, *Amaterasu no tanjō* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1961); Okada Seishi, *Kodai ōken no saishi to shinwa* (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1970), pp. 37–150; Matsumae Takeshi, *Kodai denshō to kyūtei saishi* (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1974); Matsumae Takeshi, *Nihon no kamigami* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1974), pp. 90–182; Ueda Masaaki, *Nihon shinwa* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1960); Yoshii Iwao, *Tennō no keifu to shinwa*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1967 and 1976); Mizuno Seiichi, *Izumo shinwa* (Tokyo: Yagumo shobō, 1972); Torigoe Kenzaburō, *Izumo shinwa mo seiritsu* (Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1966); Matsumae Takeshi, *Nihon shinwa no keisei* (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1970); Matsumae Takeshi, *Izumo shinwa* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1976); Matsumae Takeshi, "The Origin and Growth of the Worship of Amaterasu," *Asian Folklore Studies* 38 (1978): 1–11; Matsumae Takeshi, *Yamato kokka to shinwa denshō* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1986); Saigō Nobutsuna, *Kojiki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1975); Tanaka Hatsuo, *Senso Daijōsai* (Tokyo: Mokujisha, 1975); Fukuyama Toshio, *Nihon kenchiku shi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Bokusui shobō, 1968); Fukuyama Toshio, *Nihon no yashiro* (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 1962). Also see Yasutada Watanabe, *Shinū Art: Ise and Izumo Shrines*, trans. Robert Ricketts (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1974); Inagaki Eizō, *Kodai no jinja kenchiku* (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 1973); Kageyama Haruki, *The Arts of Shinū*, trans. Christine Guth (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1973); and Ōba Iwao, *Saishi iseki: Shinū kōkōgaku no kisoteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1970). For detailed studies, see Ōba Iwao, ed., *Shinū kōkōgaku ronkō*, 6 vols. (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1971); Nishida Nagao, *Nishida Nagao zenshū*, 10 vols. (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1978–79).

I shall use the results of this many-faceted and rapidly progressing research.

THE EVOLUTION OF SHINTO

Using these four periods as a chronological framework, I propose to trace the evolution of Shinto from its origins in the magical rites of preagricultural times to the establishment of a systematic religion supporting the centralized state.

Period 1: Genesis and early forms

Scholars have advanced a variety of theories to explain how the concept of kami originated and developed. The most likely explanation places the roots of kami worship in animistic forms of nature worship. Evidence for this view can be found in both ancient texts and present-day customs in which traces of primitive beliefs still linger. The eighth-century chronicle *Nihon shoki* depicts a world full of demons and animistic spirits: "In that land there were many kami that shone with a luster like that of fireflies, and evil kami that buzzed like flies. There were also trees and herbs that could speak."²⁰ In some rural areas even today, elderly villagers face the rising sun each morning, clap their hands together, and hail the appearance of the sun over the peaks of the nearby mountains as "the coming of the kami." Another example, which combines animistic Shinto with Buddhism, is the welcoming of the full moon with ritual chanting of Amida Buddha's name; the moon is called *nonosan* or *attosan*, words used to refer to either kami or Buddhas.

Some scholars maintain that the origin of Shinto lies in cults that venerated heroes or worshiped ancestors, that kami were originally human beings. Indeed, one aspect of Shinto as it developed in later ages was the veneration of historical and legendary figures, or ancestors of powerful families and clans. But as I shall demonstrate later in this chapter, elements of hero and ancestor worship were added at a later time. In the late Nara and early Heian periods, it was common to deify dead humans and to revere them at shrines, especially if people feared vengeance from their spirits for some political injustice. But in the earliest stages of the development of Shinto, kami were worshiped

²⁰ *Nihon shoki*, bk. 2, NKBT 67.134–5, Aston, 1.64.

at shrines and humans were buried in graves. The two were strictly kept separate.

Finally, Shinto was not an entirely indigenous development. The Shinto view of the cosmos, for example, is a complex and not wholly integrated view that contains influences from various parts of Asia and even Oceania. In this worldview, the physical universe is divided into five parts, each governed by the appropriate kami. First, there is the High Plain of Heaven (Takamanohara) where many of the most important kami reside. Earth is the second part, and beneath the earth lies the kingdom of the dead and of evil spirits (Yomi no Kuni). The oceans make up the fourth part, called Watatsūmi no Kuni, the domain of all kinds of creatures, from ordinary fish to dragon kings. Somewhere across the sea lies the fifth part: Tokoyo no Kuni, a utopian land whose denizens neither age nor die.

The division of the cosmos into three parallel levels also appears in the shamanistic beliefs of northern Asia, for example, in Siberia, Mongolia, and the Altaic regions. Tales of a “dragon king’s palace” at the bottom of the ocean can be found in the folklore of south Korea, the south central regions of China, and southeast Asia and India, and myths in China, south Korea, the Ryūkyū Islands, southeast Asia, Indonesia, and Polynesia speak of a utopian land in the middle of the sea. Thus elements of continental and island Asian culture were projected onto aboriginal beliefs to form the nascent Shinto religious system.

The search for Shinto’s beginnings leads us to the prehistoric Jōmon and Yayoi periods. Though there is considerable discontinuity between the beliefs of these early periods and later ones, certain primitive strains were preserved in later religious practices. Our understanding of this prehistoric era is based primarily on archaeological evidence. The difficulty of interpreting such evidence makes it difficult, however, to reach a firm understanding of prehistoric rituals, myths, or concepts of the cosmos and divinity. But archaeologists have uncovered many artifacts that seem to have been used for religious purposes in very early times. For a somewhat later time, fragmentary historical evidence appears in Chinese chronicles, amplifying and clarifying the archaeological data.

The neolithic Jōmon culture was supported by hunting, fishing, and gathering and later by primitive forms of agriculture. The succeeding Yayoi culture, on the other hand, was an agrarian culture in which bronze and iron implements were used and rice was grown as a staple food. It is likely that religious practices during these periods reflected,

in part, the methods that people used to make their living. Jōmon culture artifacts suggest that people of those days carried out magical-religious rites to guarantee the fertility of human beings as well as the fertility of the animals they hunted and the plants they gathered. After primitive forms of agriculture were introduced, probably from abroad, some of these rites took on an agrarian nature.

Perhaps the most striking of Jōmon artifacts are the *dogū*, human figurines that nearly all represent women whose exaggerated breasts and distended bellies indicate pregnancy. Some were even shown with a child protruding from the womb. Many have been unearthed near residential sites, and their placement within stone enclosures or on top of stone piles suggests that they were deliberately set apart, perhaps as objects of worship. This has led scholars such as Kokubu Naoichi to believe that the figurines were maimed, buried, and exhumed in magical rites that symbolized death and resurrection.²¹ Many archaeologists have surmised that the *dogū* represent female deities who managed the procreation of the earth and of human beings. The folklorist Hotta Yoshio identified primitive forms of the worship of fertility-mother deities called *yama no kami* (mountain kami) in hunters' and woodcutters' rituals that linger in the folk beliefs of northeastern Japan. Hotta suggests that the figure of the *yama no kami* in present-day folk beliefs originated from the prehistoric fertility goddesses represented by *dogū*.²² Other Jōmon artifacts, probably used in fertility rites, are stone rods shaped like the male phallus. These rods have been found in the centers or corners of rooms at the sites of Jōmon period houses and seem to have been objects of worship.

The functions of other items from the Jōmon period are somewhat more difficult to identify. Pottery is often decorated with images of serpents, and in later times, at least, serpents were believed to be the spirit of the water that was necessary for cultivation. Other artifacts that may have been used in some form of magical-religious ritual were clay and stone masks, and wooden plaques incised with human forms or carved in the shape of human faces.

Some of the archaeological evidence from the middle of this period demonstrates the transmission of elements from south Asian, southeast Asian, and south Pacific island cultures. Jōmon initiation rites that involved ritual tooth extraction and the custom of tattooing – apparent in the design of the *dogū* – were also practiced by southern peoples. In

21 Kokubu Naoichi, ed., *Daichi to jujutsu* (Tokyo: Gakushū kenkyūsha, 1969), p. 135.

22 Hotta Yoshio, *Yama no kami shinkō no kenkyū* (Nagoya: Ise minzoku gakkai, 1966), pp. 356 ff.

addition, it seems that the cultivation of taro root was introduced from these areas.²³

The importation of taro root cultivation may have given rise to the belief in a “guest” kami or spirit (*marebito*), who was given credit for introducing this early form of agriculture. In prehistoric times, according to Orikuchi Shinobu, each village probably conducted yearly rites on a set day to welcome the guest kami from Tokoyo no Kuni, the utopian land of boundless fertility across the sea. As a gift, the guest kami would bring a bountiful harvest, and he was also responsible for introducing and conducting coming-of-age ceremonies. Orikuchi finds evidence for his hypothesis in literary works of later times such as the *Kojiki* and the *Man'yōshū*, in extant New Year customs in the Tōhoku region of Honshu, and in Okinawan harvest festivals hailing a visitor deity.²⁴ Oka Masao points out the resemblance of these rites to those practiced in Melanesia, New Guinea, and elsewhere in the south Pacific.²⁵ The masks unearthed from Middle Jōmon sites might have been used by people who assumed the guest’s role at festival times. In sum, the religious practices of the Jōmon period probably involved fertility rites that acquired agrarian elements, many from other Asian and Pacific cultures, when cultivation was introduced.

Thanks to accounts written by Chinese visitors to Japan, we understand the religion of the Yayoi culture somewhat more clearly than we do that of the Jōmon. Still, the evidence is fragmentary and often requires some ingenuity to interpret. But it seems that the basic elements of Yayoi religion included shamanism that used oracle bone divination and other methods to guide the course of secular government, and the worship of a “rice spirit” that accompanied the introduction of wet-rice cultivation.

The Yayoi culture differs from the Jōmon in its reliance on rice as a staple food. Yayoi religion reflects the importance of wet-rice agriculture. Harvest festivals described in literary sources and surviving rice-

23 Kanaseki Takeo, *Ryūkyū minzokushi* (Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku shuppanyoku, 1978), pp. 66–151; Kokubu Naoichi, *Nihon minzoku bunka no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Keiyūsha, 1970), pp. 16–120. These two scholars maintain that the taro cultivation of the later Jōmon period was brought from the south Pacific islands through the Philippine and the Ryūkyū islands and then to Japan. But Sasaki Kōmei argues in *Inasaku izen* (Tokyo: Nihon hōsō shuppanyoku, 1971) that the original home of taro cultivation was southeast Asia. Ezaki Teruya and Fujimori Eiichi maintain that primitive agriculture was practiced in the later Jōmon period; see Esaka Teruya, *Nihon bunka no higen* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1967), and Fujimori Eiichi, *Jōmon nōkō* (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1970).

24 Orikuchi Shinobu, *Kodai kenkyū*, vols. 1–3 of *Orikuchi Shinobu zenshū* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 1954).

25 Oka Masao, “Ijin sonota,” in Yanagawa Keiichi and Tsuboi Hirobumi, eds., *Nihon saishi kenkyū shūsei* (Tokyo: Meicho shuppan, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 23–52.

cultivation customs resemble those of southeast Asia and Indonesia,²⁶ indicating that wet-rice agriculture may have been introduced from southern regions. The important element in these festivals is the veneration of the rice spirit, believed to dwell at harvest time in specially reaped sheaves of rice. These sheaves were enshrined in a grain storehouse. The ritual prayers (*norito*) that hint at primitive agrarian beliefs identify the food kami Toyouke as the spirit of the rice. Another name for her is Ukanomitama, a name that can be translated literally as “food spirit.”

Veneration of the rice spirit was an important element in the development of Shinto. Shinto’s indebtedness to Yayoi period agrarian ritual is disclosed in the construction of shrine buildings at such early shrines as the Ise Great Shrine, which consists of two main sanctuaries: one for the worship of the Sun Goddess and another for the worship of the food kami Toyouke. The main hall of both Ise sanctuaries is built with a raised floor, ornamental roof crossbeams, and other architectural details that historians believe typify grain storehouse construction.²⁷ Such structures were probably used in the Yayoi period: an image of one is cast in relief on a Yayoi period ceremonial bronze bell that was found on the island of Shikoku.

Mythology underlines the religious importance attached to agriculture by placing the origin of cultivation in the age of the kami. In the *Kojiki* version of one such myth, the Sun Goddess’s renegade brother Susa no O murders a food kami, Ōgetsuhime, and from her body sprout five staple crops: rice, barley, millet, soybeans, and red beans.²⁸ The *Nihon shoki* version of this tale names another food kami, Ukemochi, as the murder victim and the moon kami Tsukuyomi as the killer. From Ukemochi’s body come not only grains and beans but also silkworms, cattle, and horses.²⁹ The German scholar Adolf Jensen classified this myth as a “Hainuwele” myth that is similar to tales told in the Solomon Islands, in which taro root sprouts from the corpse of a slain maiden named Hainuwele. Myths of this type, according to Jensen, explain the origins of primitive agriculture.³⁰ Similar tales have

26 Uno Enkū, *Maraishia ni okeru tōmai girei* (Tokyo: Tōyō bunko, 1944), pp. 670–85; Iwata Keiji, *Kami no tanjō: genshi shūkyō* (Kyoto: Tankōsha, 1960), pp. 198–266.

27 See Fukuyama, *Nihon no yashiro*; Watanabe, *Shintō Art*, pp. 32, 104–21; Gina Lee Barnes, *Prehistoric Yamato: Archaeology of the First Japanese State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies and Museum of Anthropology, 1988).

28 *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.84–85; Philippi, *Kojiki*, p. 87.

29 *Nihon shoki*, bk. 1, NKBT 67.102–3, Aston, 1.32–33.

30 Adolf Ellegard Jensen, *Myth and Cult Among Primitive Peoples*, trans. Marianna Tax Choldin and Wolfgang Weissleder (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 107–12, 121–2, 166–8, and *passim*.

been told around the world, and Ōbayashi Taryō identified the Japanese version as a product of the slash-and-burn cultivation of millet practiced in south China.³¹

One artifact characteristic of the Yayoi period is the *dōtaku*, or bronze bell. These bells are found mainly in western Honshu and in the Tōkai District. Though *dōtaku* were undoubtedly employed in religious ritual, we do not know whether they were used by the chieftains of small principalities or by villages in public community festivals. The *dōtaku* were buried on hillsides near agricultural plains. Perhaps they were temporarily stored underground between religious festivals. Inscriptions on the *dōtaku* depict flowing water, waterfowl, fish, boats, and objects related to agriculture, and these have led some scholars to conclude that the bells were used in agricultural festivals and rites to pray for rain.³² It seems likely that they were also connected with hunting and fishing rites. Bronze weapons such as swords, spears, and halberds were buried much in the same manner as the *dōtaku* were. Their distribution was centered in northern Kyushu, but their ritual significance is not clear.

A hierarchical social structure, the formation of small kingdoms in certain regions, and the shamanic nature of the religion and government in at least one region of Japan are documented in the Chinese chronicle *Wei chih*, compiled in the third century. According to a report by contemporary Chinese envoys who visited Japan, the small kingdom of Yamatai – whose exact location is still the subject of much scholarly debate – was ruled by a woman named Himiko.

[Himiko] occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people. Though mature in age, she remained unmarried. She had a younger brother who assisted her in ruling the country. After she became the ruler, there were few who saw her. She had one thousand women as attendants, but only one man. He served her food and drink and acted as a medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockades, and her armed guards were in a state of constant vigilance.

The text also indicates that political actions were guided by a divination method in which heat was applied to a deer's scapula and answers to questions were deduced from the length and shape of the fissures

31 Ōbayashi Taryō, *Inasaku noshintwa* (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1973), pp. 23–103.

32 Fujimori Eiichi, *Dōtaku* (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1964), pp. 236–56; Mishina Shōei, “Dōtaku shōkō,” *Kodai saisei to kokurei shinkō* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), pp. 11–28. For pictures of these bells, see Namio Egami, *The Beginnings of Japanese Art* (Tokyo and New York: Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1973), pp. 138–40.

that resulted.³³ Such practices are found all over north Asia, perhaps the best-known case being that of Shang dynasty China. Some scholars have pointed to the parallels between Himiko and female shamans active in more recent times in Okinawa. Like Himiko, the Okinawa shamans dealt with religious affairs, whereas their brothers handled secular affairs.

Though it is clear that Himiko was a shaman, we know little about her religious duties. Possibly they involved some form of sun worship, as the name Himiko suggests a child or priestess of the sun. Furthermore, the *Wei chih* depicts Himiko's people as "water people" who "were fond of diving into the water to get fish and shells" and "decorated their bodies in order to keep away large fish and waterfowl."³⁴ It seems likely that these fishermen and divers were related to south Chinese or southeast Asian seafarers who worshiped the sun.

Shamanism and divination by oracles formed a part of later Shinto, and rites to ensure agricultural prosperity continued as one of Shinto's most basic elements. All these were Yayoi period contributions to the development of Shinto. But the name "Shinto" cannot be given properly to either the Yayoi or, of course, the earlier Jōmon beliefs and practices. Certain features characteristic of Shinto – definite places of worship that later developed into permanent buildings, or *shintai* (kami body), the sacred objects in which the kami were thought to lodge – simply did not exist during these times. More important, perhaps, is the fact that Yayoi period artifacts are rarely found at sites of ancient shrines established in later periods.³⁵ This suggests a discontinuity between Yayoi period religious practices and those of the succeeding Burial Mound period.

Period 2: From primitive Shinto to clan Shinto

In the Burial Mound period (roughly A.D. 250 to 600), primitive forms of shrine Shinto began to develop hand in hand with an evolving political system. Animistic spirits were given specific names and functions, and a permanent sacred space was set aside to worship them.

³³ *Wei chih* 30.25b–31a, trans. Ryusaku Tsunoda and L. Carrington Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories* (South Pasadena, Calif.: P. D. and Ione Perkins, 1951), p. 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁵ A few exceptions can be found. For example, fragments of a Yayoi period *dōtaku* or bronze bell have been discovered underneath the sacred rock at the Kamikura Shrine in Shingū, Wakayama Prefecture. And a bronze sword, also dating from the Yayoi period, has been unearthed in the precincts of the Izumo Grand Shrine.

Later on in the period, certain kami took on political functions as the tutelary kami of powerful clans (*ujigami*).

Archaeological evidence is still crucial to our understanding of this period. The fact that Burial Mound period artifacts have been unearthed in the precincts of present-day shrines indicates that later shrine Shinto developed directly out of this period's beliefs and practices. Another form of evidence that we can now use with increasing efficacy is that of mythology. In particular, the myths recorded in eighth-century chronicles and gazetteers supply us with many tales about the adoption of tutelary kami by powerful clans.

In the early part of this period, kami were regarded largely as spirits of nature who resided in and controlled various topographical features. The concept of sacred space had begun to develop, and kami were thought to take lodging in readily identifiable locations. Some of these lodgings were completely natural, such as great rocks (*iwakura*) or giant trees (*himorogi*). Other locations were determined by people who set rocks in a certain pattern (*iwasaka*) or made arrangements of cut trees (also called *himorogi*). Kami were sometimes thought to descend to such places temporarily at festival time and sometimes to live there permanently. People would mark off these places of worship with sacred rope (*shimenawa*) and decorate them with mirrors, swords, beads, and lengths of cloth. Not until a later time were sacred objects regarded as the *shintai* in which kami were believed to reside. There were no permanent shrine buildings in these early days.

The utilization of natural features as sacred space can be found in certain present-day shrine practices. Ōmiwa Shrine in Nara Prefecture, for example, has no main hall to house the emblem of its kami. In place of the main hall is the holy Mt. Miwa itself, which rises behind the ritual hall and where prayers to the kami are offered. Sacred rocks found on the mountain's summit are believed to be the seat of the kami. Suwa Shrine in Nagano Prefecture also takes a holy mountain as its main hall, and similar practices once characterized Isonokami Shrine in Nara Prefecture and Munakata Shrine in Fukuoka Prefecture.

By the Burial Mound period, people had begun to differentiate and rank the kami according to their functions. The most important kami were those of the sun and the moon and those given responsibility for creation. Ranked below them were kami of the fields, mountains, streams, and such and those related directly to people's daily lives, such as kami of the hearth, fire, agriculture, or fishing. These kami

were venerated at communal rites. They were not yet anthropomorphized, nor were they organized into a hierarchical pantheon, and early myths regarding these kami lack the political elements common to myths of later times.

From at least the time of Himiko, religious belief had influenced the conduct of secular government, and religious authority was used to sanction the seizure and maintenance of temporal power. At the beginning of the Burial Mound period, certain powerful clans began to assume control over specific territories, and it seems that they found it necessary to claim the religious authority attached to the worship of their regions' important kami. In particular, they embraced such kami as the *kunitama* (province soul) that protected a region's lands or the water kami that guaranteed the area abundant rain and harvest. Clan members claimed common ancestry, although many blood-tie claims were probably fictitious. A tutelary kami was sometimes adopted as the clan's ancestral kami. But judging from the names of kami listed in the *Engishiki*, this was not a common development.³⁶ For example, the Mononobe, Nakatomi, Izumo, and Munakata clans did not consider their tutelary kami to be their ancestral kami.

Yanagita Kunio, the dean of Japanese folklore scholars, sought the origin of shrines and the concept of kami in the deification of dead ancestors. According to Japanese folk beliefs, a soul loses its individual character either thirty-three or fifty years after death and thereupon becomes a beneficent kami. Yanagita maintained that these kami were thought to watch over and help their descendants. In the winter, the kami would remain quietly in the mountains but would descend to the plains every spring to guard the ripening grain in their descendants' fields. After the autumn harvest they would return to the mountains. Thus the winter "kami of the mountain" became the spring "kami of the fields." In the second or fourth month of the old calendar, festivals welcomed these kami, which were sent off again in the eleventh month. Such rites are conducted even today.

Yanagita pointed out that at many ancient shrines, there are two places of worship, one at the mountaintop and another in the village at the foot of the mountain that housed the kami from the planting season through harvest time. He argued that the mountain sanctuaries that enshrine the tutelary kami of two Ise priest families, the Arakida and the Watarai, were once actually the graves of these families' ances-

³⁶ Ōta Ryō, *Zentei Nihon jōdai shakai soshiki no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kunimitsu shobō, 1955), pp. 297–313; Harada Toshiaki, *Jinja* (Tokyo: Shibundō, 1961), pp. 15–24, 107–10.

tors, and he concluded that this was the original function of mountain sanctuaries in general.³⁷

Many folklore scholars today support Yanagita's hypothesis, but I believe that there is much evidence to the contrary. Even when a shrine consists of two separate places of worship, one on the mountaintop and another at the foot, the kami enshrined at the mountain sanctuary is not necessarily anyone's ancestor. Kami of the sun and the moon or the mountain itself are often the objects of worship. In fact, most of the examples that Yanagita cites as *yama miya*, or mountain sanctuaries, are shrines to nature deities such as the mountain kami of Hie Shrine in Shiga Prefecture and the female kami of Mt. Fuji in Shizuoka Prefecture. Nor is it common to find graves, on mountains or elsewhere, that are believed to be the *shintai* where the kami reside. The shrines listed in the Register of Kami in the *Engishiki*, moreover, are dedicated to nature kami such as Amaterasu (the Sun Goddess), Tsukuyomi (the moon kami), or Watatsumi (the kami of the sea). On the other hand, historical emperors, empresses, or princesses were buried in graves away from the shrine precincts.³⁸ Sometimes, of course, historical or legendary figures such as King Ōjin or his mother, Queen Jingū, were enshrined as kami, but this practice dates from the Nara period rather than from the period of primitive Shinto.

The mountains, moreover, are not the only route by which kami enter the world of human beings. The sea may be used as well. In some festivals held at oceanside shrines, a boat containing a kami's *shintai* or its substitute is set afloat on the water. For example, in the spring festival of Miho Shrine in Shimane Prefecture, two sacred boats decorated with *sakaki* leaves float on the sea and approach the shore. On board each boat a man and a woman – who have undergone purification rites – sit as substitutes for the kami. When they arrive, they disembark and enter the shrine. It appears that rituals such as this originally represented the welcoming of the kami from across the sea.³⁹ In other coastal villages, it is believed that the kami came from across the sea in the form of a stone, and the stone was later enshrined. At festival times a *mikoshi* (the sacred portable carriage that houses the *shintai*), sometimes containing this stone, is brought to the place where it was originally discov-

37 Yanagita Kunio, "Yama miya ko," in *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shū* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1963), vol. 11, pp. 295–358; Yanagita Kunio, "Senzo no hanashi," in *Teihon Yanagita Kunio shū*, 10.114–52.

38 The Register of Kami comprises Books 9 and 10 of the *Engishiki*, KT 26.179–320; Bock, *Engi-shiki*, 2.113–71.

39 Hagiwara Tatsuo, *Matsuri fudoki* (Tokyo: Shakai shisōsha, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 167–70.

ered.⁴⁰ Such kami certainly resemble the ancient *marebito*, the guest kami who was believed to visit villages, bearing the harvest of rice and other crops. These kami were undoubtedly fertility deities and were naturally honored in important agricultural seasons, in spring when the rice was planted or in the fall when the crops were harvested.

Both the mountains and the seas can be regarded as entrances to the human world. Kami were thought to descend to mountains from the heavens, and mountains were sometimes referred to as “ladders.” At the Kamo and Fushimi Inari shrines in Kyoto, kami are further assisted down to earth by a branch from a sacred tree. The tradition of the kami’s descent from mountain to earth by branches probably has a north Asian lineage, and that of the kami’s arrival from a distant shore probably has a southern lineage.⁴¹ In later years the two traditions became mixed. In any case, the resemblance between oceanside festivals and harvest festivals that welcome a guest kami suggest that these deities were thought of as travelers to the human world and should be classified as nature deities, not ancestral spirits.

Nevertheless, some tutelary kami are believed to be blood ancestors of their clans. Does this support Yanagita’s theory? It appears that even in these cases, clans adopted kami that were already worshiped as nature spirits. As George Sansom pointed out, “Making your god into an ancestor and making your ancestor into a god are not the same thing.”⁴² The process by which one such kami became a clan ancestor is reflected in a *Kojiki* myth that should be examined closely.

The myth concerns the ancestor and founder of the Miwa clan, prominent among clans based near Mt. Miwa in the early years of the Burial Mound period. The myth begins with Ōmono Nushi, the rain kami of Mt. Miwa, coming nightly to the home of a daughter of the chief of an occupational group (*be*) that manufactured pottery. The daughter never really saw what her lover looked like and did not know that he was a kami. But her curiosity understandably became quite strong when she became pregnant. So one morning she attached a thread to her lover’s clothing and followed him. When she found him at the Miwa Shrine, she realized that he was Ōmono Nushi appearing in the form of a serpent. Later she gave birth to a son, a kami–human ancestor of the Miwa clan.

40 Manabu Ogura, “Drifted Deities in the Noto Peninsula,” in Dorson, ed., *Studies in Japanese Folklore*, pp. 133–44.

41 Oka et al., *Nihon minzoku no kigen*, pp. 60–62.

42 George B. Sansom, *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (New York: Appleton–Century–Crofts, 1962), p. 54.

Some generations later, Japan was stricken by a plague. The ruler dreamed that Ōmono Nushi appeared, declaring that the plague would be eradicated if he were appropriately worshiped at court. Discovering that Ōmono Nushi had produced a human son, the ruler summoned the son and placed him in charge of rites to venerate the serpent kami.⁴³

Archaeological evidence, and that of comparative mythology, support the conclusion that this tale has a historical basis. Myths from Manchuria and Korea tell of a woman who followed her lover by attaching a thread to his clothing. In the middle of the fifth century, moreover, potters migrated from Korea to Kawachi Province (not far from Mt. Miwa) where archaeologists have found the remains of unglazed ceramic ware called *sueki*.⁴⁴ Examples of this pottery, dating from the sixth or seventh century, have been found at the foot of Mt. Miwa in Yamato Province (Nara Prefecture). The potters had no doubt moved to Yamato, carrying their legend along with their artisans' techniques. Later, when the Miwa clan decided to claim religious authority that stemmed from monopolizing the worship of the Mt. Miwa rain kami, they must have been influenced by old Korean myths in selecting a human descendant of their kami as the clan's founding ancestor.⁴⁵

This sort of myth is not uncommon, as it appears elsewhere in Japan and in other parts of the world. Such tales also are sometimes found in medieval sources. For example, a legend regarding the ancestry of the hero Ogata Saburō appears in the medieval war epic *Heike monogatari*. This legend, which resembles the Miwa tale, tells of a young woman in Bungo Province (Ōita Prefecture in Kyushu) who had a mysterious lover. In order to find out what he looked like, the woman attached a needle and thread to his clothing and followed the thread to his dwelling place, a cave on the mountain Ubagatake. There she saw her lover in his true form, that of a giant serpent, with a needle stuck in his neck. She and her servants fled in terror. Later, the woman gave birth to her lover's son who grew up to become the heroic founding father of the Ogata clan. Subsequent generations of the clan were said to have had the scales of a serpent's tail marked on their bodies, a sign of their serpent-kami ancestry.

43 *Kojiki*, bk. 2, NKBT 1.178–81, Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 201–2.

44 It was in later times, of course, that the tale was set in Sujin's reign.

45 Matsumae Takeshi, "Miwayama densetsu to Ōmiwa uji," *Sanpendō* 19 (1975): 1–11. Later this thesis was republished in Matsumae Takeshi, *Yamato kokka to shinwa denshō* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1986).

Variant forms of this legend can be found in other Japanese sources. For example, there is the story, found in *Honchō jinja kō* (a collection of shrine legends compiled by Hayashi Razan, 1602–57), about a famous Confucian scholar of the Edo period. According to this version, set in Hyūga Province (Miyazaki Prefecture), the young woman found her lover dead, poisoned by the iron of a needle. In other important details, however, the version agrees with the one that appears in the *Heike monogatari*.⁴⁶

Such myths do not represent the deification of actual clan ancestors, as it is clear that the kami had been venerated before the clan claimed to be his descendants. A clan that honored a nature kami might eventually designate one ancestor as the clan's founding hero and claim that he was descended from the worshiped kami. Myths told about the hero's conception might follow the Miwa pattern: the visit of a kami to a young woman, her impregnation, the birth of the hero child, and, later, the designation of the hero's descendants as priests charged with worshiping the kami. Such myths explained the origins of particular lineages and occupational groups, affirmed the power of the clan chieftains, and justified the clan's monopoly of a sacred authority derived from the priestly role of clan chieftains.

Another interesting feature of the Miwa legend is that the kami takes an animal form. There are many examples of this in Japanese mythology: The hero Yamato Takeru no Mikoto encountered a kami in the form of a white boar (or, in some versions, a serpent), and Jimmu was challenged at Mt. Kumano by an evil kami in the form of a bear. Watatsumi, kami of the sea, appears as a dragon or *wani* (sometimes translated as crocodile and sometimes as shark).⁴⁷

The serpent form is particularly common. Ōmono Nushi appears as a serpent in several *Nihon shoki* episodes; in one, he takes the shape of a small snake and hides himself in a princess's comb box.⁴⁸ The serpent was once regarded as the spirit of the water and rain, perhaps

46 *Heike monogatari*, NKBT 33.130–1, translated by Helen Craig McCullough in *The Tale of Heike* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Hayashi Razan, *Honchō jinja kō*, vol. 7 of *Dai Nihon fūkyō sōsho* (Tokyo: Dai Nihon fūkyō sōsho kankōkai, 1920), pp. 38–39. Also see Seki Keigo, *Mukashi banashi to warai banashi* (Tokyo: Iwasaki bijutsusha, 1960), pp. 67–108; Takagi Toshio, *Zōtei Nihon shinwa densetsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), vol. 2, pp. 216–26; Torii, *Yūshi izen no Nippon*, pp. 428–54.

47 Toyotama Hime, Watatsumi's daughter, appears as a *wani* in myths recorded in the chronicles. See *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.144–5, Philippi, *Kojiki*, p. 157; and *Nihon shoki*, bk. 2, NKBT 67.167, Aston, 1.95. The Yamato Takeru tale appears in the *Kojiki*, bk. 2, NKBT 1.218–19, Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 246–7, and *Nihon shoki*, bk. 7, NKBT 67.308–9, Aston, 1.208–9. The tale about Emperor Jimmu appears in the *Kojiki*, bk. 2, NKBT 1.150–3, Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 167–8.

48 *Nihon shoki*, bk. 5, NKBT 67.246–7, Aston, 1.158–9.

because its form resembles the jagged shape of the lightning bolt that accompanies summer storms. Whatever the reason, the veneration of the serpent as the rain (or thunder and lightning) deity appears not only in Japan but also in China, Korea, southeast Asia, and India.

Other myths tell of the marriage of a female kami and a human prince. In one tale, a prince weds the maiden Toyotama Hime, whose true form is that of a dragon or, in some versions, a *wani*.⁴⁹ Orikuchi Shinobu, Matsumura Takeo, and others take such myths as evidence for totemic practices among the ancient Japanese.⁵⁰ But I maintain that these tales, like the tales of the marriage of women and serpents, are water-related myths with parallels in Korea, China, southeast Asia, and India, as well as the Middle East and Europe.

The Japanese belief that kami take animal shape is not a form of totemism. In primitive totemism, a particular animal species is related to a certain clan; both are believed to have a common ancestor, and their proliferation is thought to be interrelated. Thus the clan frequently conducts magic rites to ensure the species' fertility, and clan members distinguish themselves by wearing the animal's crest. Such elements simply did not exist in the Japanese veneration of animal kami. The Miwa clan, for instance, venerated one particular mythological serpent, but serpents as a species were not especially honored. The adoption of one specific serpent as an ancestor points to the conscious embrace of the sacred (hence secular) authority that became attached to the worship of an already important kami.

In short, the early Burial Mound period was one in which Shinto took on the basic forms that characterize it today. Nature kami were named, and their functions and places of operation were delineated. Clans adopted kami as tutelary deities, sometimes claimed them as ancestors, and monopolized their worship. The connection between sacred and secular authority was further strengthened, and the stage was set for sanctioning the positions and actions of the Yamato nobility through religious means.

Period 3: From clan Shinto to state Shinto

In the sixth and seventh centuries, the Yamato court gradually deprived powerful provincial clans of their temporal power and magical–

⁴⁹ *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.135–45, Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 150–8; *Nihon shoki*, bk. 1, NKBT 67.164–85, Aston, 1.93–108.

⁵⁰ Orikuchi Shinobu, *Orikuchi Shinobu zenshū*, vol. 2 of *Kodai kenkyū* (Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha 1955), pp. 269–309; Matsumura Takeo, *Nihon shintwa no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Baifūkan, 1955), vol. 3, pp. 761–800.

religious authority. The clans themselves formed a court nobility loyal to the imperial clan, and their traditions were adopted by the imperial line and used to enhance the emperor's authority. A solar kami, Amaterasu (the Sun Goddess), was adopted as the imperial ancestor and promoted to the highest seat in the kami pantheon. Thus we see the beginnings of the organization and systemization of Shinto on a nationwide scale.

The available written evidence, though increasingly contemporary, must be interpreted carefully in the light of its obvious political bias. To aid in evaluating the chronicles and other documents compiled under imperial auspices, we should examine not only the archaeological evidence but also local traditions, myths, and shrine ceremonies that retain traces of the past.

The Yamato court's assumption of supreme religious authority was a gradual process, involving the appropriation of local ceremonies, myths, sacred treasures, and kami. Parallels between the rites and myths of Yamato and other provinces demonstrate this process. To begin with, powerful local clans strengthened the connections between their sacred and secular functions. Those who had assumed religious authority by monopolizing the worship of important kami came to regard certain of their predecessors as kami also. Such individuals combined secular with religious authority in a sort of "sacred kingship," affirmed by the possession of regalia and the periodic repetition of ritual. Some of these rituals are conducted even today, although priests lost their temporal power more than a millennium ago.

One example is the ceremony that confirms the accession of an individual to the post of *kuni no miyatsuko* (provincial governor) of Izumo, an office that once exercised territorial power over Izumo Province (Shimane Prefecture) as well as priestly functions at the Izumo Grand Shrine. According to tradition, the initial occupant of this post was a kami who had descended from heaven to venerate Ōnamuchi at the Izumo Shrine. The kami's transmission of his authority to his "descendants" is confirmed in rites that sanctify each new occupant of the post as a kami incarnate. The new priest communes with his "ancestor" kami by sharing with him a meal cooked by a fire made by rubbing sacred sticks and boards together, and in water drawn from a sanctified well. Similar rites were also conducted yearly, perhaps symbolizing the renewal of the governor's authority and the rejuvenation of the cosmos and the earth.⁵¹ Most

⁵¹ Senge Takamune, *Izumo taisha* (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1968), pp. 211–12.

other provincial clans probably held such ceremonies in ancient times.

Similar rites were conducted at the imperial palace. At the Daijōsai festival following his enthronement, the emperor shared a communal meal with Amaterasu, his ancestral kami. Like the governor of Izumo, the emperor also participated in similar rites, held yearly, that were meant to renew his sacred power. In these rites, performed during the Niinamesai (harvest festival) at the imperial palace, the emperor partook of newly harvested rice believed to house the rice spirit.⁵²

Like the emperor and the provincial governor of Izumo, provincial priest-rulers were once regarded as incarnations of kami. According to medieval records of the Suwa Shrine in Shinano Province (Nagano Prefecture), the high priest assumed office in a rite called “the enthronement ceremony.” In this rite, the priest occupied a rock beneath a holly tree and held three sacred symbols. It was believed that through this rite, the priest became the incarnation of the kami worshiped at the shrine.⁵³ At festival time at both Izumo and Suwa, the priests sat in the kami’s seat and were venerated by other priests and laypersons. Other shrines in Japan, such as the Munakata Shrine in Chikuzen Province (Fukuoka Prefecture) and the Aso Shrine in Higo Province (Kumamoto Prefecture) conducted similar rituals, which seem to date from a time when the provinces were governed by sanctified rulers.

One of the best-known myths in the chronicles is the tale of the marriage of the kami Izanagi and Izanami and how they gave birth to the islands of Japan. Izanagi is also depicted as the father of the Sun Goddess, the imperial ancestral kami. Emperors are thus linked with the kami that are said to have created the very land they ruled.⁵⁴

Creation myths, however, were not limited to kami associated with the imperial clan. Like the Yamato rulers who became Japan’s emperors, the clan chieftains – descendants of the sacred priest-rulers – were conscious of old traditions. A legend recorded in the *Izumo fudoki*, compiled in 733 by nobles of the Izumo clan, tells of the province’s own creator kami, Yatsuka Mizu Omi Tsunu. This kami would travel to far-off places such as Silla in Korea and the Noto peninsula in north Honshu. When he saw a piece of land he favored, he would work his spade into it, haul it back to Izumo as if he were harpooning a fish, and attach it to the Izumo coast. This Izumo creation myth explains the

⁵² *Engishiki*, KT 26.172, Bock, *Engi-shiki*, 2.92.

⁵³ Fujimori Eiichi, *Suwa taisha* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 1965), pp. 15–18.

⁵⁴ *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.70–71, Philippi, *Kojiki*, p. 70; *Nihon shoki*, bk. 1, NKBT 67.95, Aston, 1.27–28.

many capes and inlets on the jagged coastline of the Shimane peninsula where the Izumo Grand Shrine is located.⁵⁵ Yet another creation myth, related in a poem in the eighth-century collection *Man'yōshū*, tells of the mountain-building activities of two important kami.⁵⁶

The creator kami adopted as ancestor of the imperial clan was, in fact, once the kami worshiped by other people. The Izanagi creation myths were originally tales told by the fishermen of Awaji Island, where the worship of this kami originated. In fact, Izanagi appears as a fisherman's kami even in the *Nihon shoki*, which includes versions of myths other than those officially adopted by the court. In these tales, recorded in chapters on the reigns of the fifth-century kings Richū and Ingyō, Izanagi was simply the tutelary kami of Awaji Island, a kami worshiped by fishermen with offerings of pearls. He had no connection with the imperial clan.⁵⁷

From the fourth century, however, Awaji was linked to the Yamato court. The island was responsible for supplying the court with table salt and other ocean products, and it was under the court's direct jurisdiction. In the reign of Ōjin, Awaji was a major holding of the Azumi clan that controlled the fishermen of all provinces and supplied the imperial dining table.⁵⁸ It was probably through such connections that the Izanagi–Izanami legends were spread throughout Japan and introduced to the court.

The imperial clan claimed descent from Izanagi and the Sun Goddess through the latter's grandson, dispatched to earth from Takama-nohara. Other clans told similar myths about their kami ancestors. The *Kuji hongī*, an early Heian period text that records the traditions of the Mononobe clan, tells how the clan's ancestral kami Nigihayahi descended from heaven in a boat made of stone. He carried with him ten kinds of sacred treasures, including two mirrors, a sword, jewels (that bestowed life, brought perfect health, resurrected the dead, and drove off evil spirits), and a scarf that repelled harmful insects. Attended by other kami, Nigihayahi landed on Mt. Ikaruga in Kawachi Province.⁵⁹ This tale – too well known, perhaps, to be suppressed, despite its obvious parallels with the imperial ancestor's descent – also appears in an abbreviated form in the *Nihon shoki*.⁶⁰ Other clans also claimed descent from kami who had come from heaven in a similar

⁵⁵ *Izumo fudoki*, NKBT 2.99–103, Aoki, *Izumo fudoki*, pp. 81–83.

⁵⁶ *Man'yōshū*, vol. 2, NKBT 5.232–3, trans. H. H. Honda, *The Manyōshū: A New and Complete Translation* (Tokyo: Hokuseidō, 1967), p. 104.

⁵⁷ *Nihon shoki*, bk. 13, NKBT 67.426–7, 446–8; Aston, 1.307, 322–3.

⁵⁸ *Nihon shoki*, bk. 13, NKBT 67.364–5; Aston, 1.256. ⁵⁹ *Kuji hongī*, KT 7.25.

⁶⁰ *Nihon shoki*, bk. 3, NKBT 67.188–9; Aston, 1.110–11.

fashion. The Izumo provincial governor's family was one of these clans. The *Shinsen shōjiroku*, a text compiled in 815 that lists the names and lineages of important clans, traces the ancestry of the head of the Yoshino Kuzu clan to a kami from Takamanohara.⁶¹

A myth recorded in both the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* tells how Ame no Hiboko, son of the king of Silla in Korea, sailed to Japan bearing magical jewels that calmed the winds and waves.⁶² Ame no Hiboko appears in the chronicles as a human being, but the *Harima fudoki* identifies him as a kami from Silla who challenged the powerful kami Ōnamuchi.⁶³ Ame no Hiboko was probably venerated by Korean immigrants. Moreover, myths about the descent of kami from heaven were sometimes set in Korea rather than in Japan. In an extant fragment of the *Chikuzen fudoki*, for instance, a powerful northern Kyushu family claimed as its ancestor a kami named Hiboko (identified by some scholars as Ame no Hiboko) who had descended to a mountain peak in the northern Korean kingdom of Koguryō.⁶⁴ The sacred symbols that Ame no Hiboko bore parallel regalia traditionally carried by kami who came down from heaven, and they indicate that Ame no Hiboko – like the ancestor of the imperial clan and other important clans – was once seen as the descendant of a heavenly kami.

Perhaps the central element of state Shinto, as it developed later, was the veneration of Amaterasu (the Sun Goddess) as the imperial ancestor. By claiming descent from a kami who could be regarded as supreme, the imperial clan justified its seizure and maintenance of temporal power. Like many other elements in the mythological structure that affirmed imperial-clan power, sun worship was common throughout Japan. Indeed, the names of many kami refer to the sun. Ame no Hiboko, for instance, means Spear of the Heavenly Sun. In one *Kojiki* tale, his wife Akaruihime (Shining Princess) was originally a red, sunlike jewel who was transformed into a beautiful woman.⁶⁵ Other clans besides the imperial clan venerated a sun kami from whom they claimed descent. My recent research and that of others show that many kami worshiped at shrines listed in the *Engishiki* were kami of the sun, kami with names like Amateru (Heaven Shining) and Amateru Mitama (Heavenly Shining Sacred Spirit).⁶⁶

⁶¹ *Shinsen shōjiroku*, *Gunsho ruijū*, 16.177.

⁶² *Nihon shoki*, bk. 6, NKBT 67.260–1; Aston, 1.168–9; *Kojiki*, bk. 2, NKBT 1.254–8; Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 291–3.

⁶³ *Harima fudoki*, NKBT 2.304–7. ⁶⁴ *Chikuzen fudoki*, NKBT 2.503–4.

⁶⁵ *Kojiki*, bk.2, NKBT 1.254–7; Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 292–3.

⁶⁶ These shrines are listed in the Register of Kami in Books 9 and 10 of the *Engishiki*, KT 26.179–320; Bock, *Engi-shiki*, 2.113–71.

The festivals and traditions of Amateru Shrine on the island of Tsushima are colored by elements of sun worship. In the *Kuji hongī*, the Tsushima kami is called Amenohi Mitama (Heavenly Sun Spirit) and is claimed as an ancestor by the local powerholders, the Tsushima no Atae. The *Kuji hongī* relates that this kami descended from heaven along with Nigihayahi, ancestor of the Mononobe clan.⁶⁷ The legend of the Tsushima kami's descent was probably once an independent tradition but was later absorbed into the myths of the Mononobe clan, much as other provincial myths were absorbed into the imperial myth structure.

Another clan that worshiped a sun kami was the Owari. According to the chronicles, that clan's ancestor was a son or younger brother of the Sun Goddess's grandson, Hononinigi.⁶⁸ Once, perhaps, the Owari traced their descent back to Amateru Mitama (Heavenly Shining Sacred Spirit) or to Ama no Oshihi (Heavenly Great Sun). The sun kami venerated by the Ōtomo clan rode a stone boat down from heaven, according to the *Man'yōshū*;⁶⁹ in the chronicles, this kami becomes an attendant of Hononinigi.⁷⁰ A branch of the Ōtomo clan was called the Himatsuri (sun worshippers), and many of the clan's heroes in legends of subsequent generations had the character for "sun" in their names. Though the tales of the Owari and the Ōtomo clans were later subsumed into the imperial mythological structure, they probably once represented independent traditions.

The kami worshiped by the Izumo clan was also a sun kami. His name, Ame no Hohi, means Heavenly Grain Sun, and his sons are called Ame no Hinadori (Heavenly Sun Bird) and Takehi Nateru (Brave Sun Shining). Myths tell us that Ame no Hinadori descended from heaven bearing the sacred treasures that became the clan's regalia,⁷¹ and initiated the Izumo fire festival (cited earlier in this chapter). Other items in the chronicles also mention Ame no Hohi but assign him a less-than-heroic role. According to tales in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, Ame no Hohi was sent to earth to prepare the way for Hononinigi's descent by securing the submission of Ōnamuchi, the powerful kami who ruled Izumo. Instead, however, Ame no Hohi

67 *Sendai kuji hongī*, KT 7.25–26.

68 *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.124–7; Philippi, *Kojiki*, p. 137. See Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 634–5, for a note on the ancestry of the Owari (Wopari) clan.

69 *Man'yōshū*, vol. 4, NKBT 7.372–3; Honda, *The Man'yōshū*, p. 321.

70 *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.127–9; Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 139–41; *Nihon shoki*, bk. 2, NKBT 67.156; Aston, 1.86.

71 *Nihon shoki*, bk. 5, NKBT 67.250–1; Aston, 1.162.

surrendered to Ōnamuchi and failed to return to Takamanohara.⁷² The Izumo myths provide us with another example of an independent tradition of sun worship and a kami who bore sacred treasures from heaven, myths and treasures that were then appropriated by the imperial clan.

We do not know for certain when the imperial clan decided to choose a sun kami as its ancestor, or why the Sun Goddess, worshiped at Ise, was chosen. It appears that Takamimusubi was originally the tutelary deity of the imperial clan, and many elements of the worship of Takamimusubi were retained in court ceremonials of later periods. He was considered responsible for the emperor's long life and prosperity, and he was one of the eight kami venerated in the Hasshinden, the palace chapel of the government's Council of Kami Affairs. Moreover, he also played an important role at the Chinkonsai (the annual winter festival held in order to rejuvenate the emperor's soul) and the Kinensai (the spring agricultural festival).

"Musubi," the final portion of Takamimusubi's name, means "the creating spirit." In other words, he was an agricultural kami. He was enshrined along with seven other kami in a temporary sanctuary near the sacred fields where rice was cultivated for the Daijōsai.

Amaterasu was not enshrined at the Hasshinden in the imperial court, although from the middle of the Heian period the emperor did venerate her elsewhere in the palace. Nor did she originally figure in the Daijōsai. Moreover, in the simplest and apparently oldest myth concerning the imperial ancestor Hononinigi, the grandfather Takamimusubi sends him to earth as a newborn baby, wrapped simply in a coverlet.⁷³ The story that later came to represent the founding of the imperial line originally seems to have told how Takamimusubi, the kami of productivity, sent to earth the rice kami, Hononinigi, whose name means "rich harvest of rice." The *Kojiki* version of the myth casts Hononinigi as the Sun Goddess's grandson and sends him to earth in grand fashion, accompanied by regalia and attendant kami.⁷⁴ These were undoubtedly embellishments added at a later time.

Oka Masao has argued that the parallel Takamimusubi and Amaterasu myths represent the contact and fusion of people of southeast Asian lineage (who worshiped Amaterasu) with north Asian Tungusic people who invaded Japan in the third and fourth centuries and

⁷² *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.111–13; Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 120–2; *Nihon shoki*, bk. 2, NKBT 67.134–5; Aston, 1.64.

⁷³ *Nihon shoki*, bk. 2, NKBT 67.140; Aston, 1.70.

⁷⁴ *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.125–9; Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 137–41.

brought with them the worship of the heavenly kami Takamimusubi. According to Oka's theories, these north Asian people subjugated Japan's earlier agrarian inhabitants.⁷⁵ But I maintain that Amaterasu was originally a local sun kami consciously adopted by the imperial clan in an effort to enhance its power. The parallelism of the myths is based not on the amalgamation of two different racial cultures but on the linkage between the Yamato court and the Ise shrine.

It was probably fishermen and other seafaring people of Ise to the east of Yamato who originally worshiped the Sun Goddess and transmitted tales that later occupied positions of importance in the imperial mythology. According to the *Nihon shoki*, Amaterasu (the Sun Goddess) was first worshiped at the imperial palace, but in the reign of Sujin, her sacred mirror (her *shintai*) was enshrined in a Yamato village, and an imperial princess was appointed to conduct rites in her honor.⁷⁶ In the next reign, a more suitable place of worship was sought as an imperial princess traveled around the country with the mirror, finally reaching Ise. The Sun Goddess then expressed her wish to be enshrined at the place, which became the Inner Shrine at Ise.⁷⁷ The myth justifies the imperial adoption of the Ise sun kami as its ancestral kami by claiming that the Sun Goddess was originally worshiped at the palace and was later moved to Ise. Further, it justifies the custom, practiced since the early sixth century, of choosing in every reign an imperial princess to serve the Ise Shrine as a *saiō* or shaman. The legend itself was probably fabricated in the seventh century or even later.⁷⁸

Amaterasu may have been adopted as the imperial ancestor in the following way: In the fifth and sixth centuries, the Yamato court maintained extensive political, military, and diplomatic contacts with the kingdoms of Korea. Sun worship was common in the Korean kingdoms, and royal founding ancestors were frequently named as children of the sun.⁷⁹ In order to deal with these kings on an equal

⁷⁵ *Nihon minzoku no kigen*, pp. 60–62, 87–89.

⁷⁶ *Nihon shoki*, bk. 5, NKBT 67.238–9; Aston, 1.151–2.

⁷⁷ *Nihon shoki*, bk. 6, NKBT 67.269–70; Aston, 1.176.

⁷⁸ The first *saiō* as a historical person was probably Princess Sasage, appointed during the reign of Keitai (507–31), *Nihon shoki*, bk. 17, NKBT 68.24–25; Aston, 2.6. According to apparently reliable evidence in the *Nihon shoki*, *saiō* were sent to the Ise Shrine in every subsequent reign. References to *saiō* serving earlier than Keitai's reign – in other words, during the reigns of Sujin and Suinin – are probably not based on historical fact.

⁷⁹ For example, King Chumong, the founder of the Koguryō kingdom, King Hyokkose, founder of Silla, and King Suro, founder of Kumgwan. See Ha Tae-hung and G. K. Mintz, trans., *Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1972), pp. 45, 49, 43. King Suro was actually born from an egg, according to the account, but the egg is considered a symbol of the sun.

basis, the Yamato rulers had to claim lineage of equal dignity. They also felt that their ancestral kami ought to belong exclusively to the imperial clan. Their original tutelary kami, Takamimusubi, was unsuited for such a purpose, as by that time he had been adopted as an ancestral kami by a number of other clans. So the Yamato court looked around the regions under its control for a sun kami suitable as an imperial ancestor. Kami venerated by already powerful clans were ruled out. Then the court's attention was drawn to Ise Shrine, dedicated to a sun kami worshiped since ancient times by fishermen. The shrine's location – to the east of Yamato, in the direction of the rising sun – was a suitable place for the enshrinement of a sun kami; moreover, there were few powerful provincial families there to challenge the imperial clan's appropriation of that local kami.

The court dispatched an imperial princess to serve as shaman, and representatives were sent from the Nakatomi and Imbe clans to serve as high priests, standing above the priests of local clans. Two of the ancient nature myths thought to have been told among Ise fishermen were embellished and subsumed into the imperial mythology: the Ama no Iwaya story, in which the sun hides itself in a cave and has to be coaxed out, and the story of the quarrel between the sun and her brother, the moon (Tsukuyomi), and how they went off to live separately in the daytime and nighttime heavens.⁸⁰

Not only were the myths of provincial clans appropriated and woven into the Yamato court's mythological tradition, but the regalia – the physical symbols of the clans' sacred power – were seized by the court as well. This was an effective way of reducing the religious authority of the local clans and of forcing them to take subsidiary positions in the centralized Yamato system. For example, in a *Nihon shoki* item for the sixtieth year of Sujin's reign, Sujin dispatched a general of the Mononobe clan to seize the treasures brought from heaven by the Izumo clan's ancestral kami and kept at the Izumo Shrine. Another *Nihon shoki* account for the eighty-eighth year of Suinin's reign reports that Suinin ordered the seizure of treasures brought from Korea by Ame no Hiboko. Although most of Ame no Hiboko's descendants were inclined to comply with the order, one hid a sword beneath his clothing. But the sword was discovered and seized.⁸¹

These legends, and many others concerning the Yamato pursuit of

80 For the Ame no Iwaya story, see the *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.82–83; Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 81–86; and the *Nihon shoki*, bk. 1, NKBT 67.112–8; Aston, 1.41–49. For the Tsukuyomi story, see *Nihon shoki*, bk. 1, NKBT 67.102–3; Aston, 1.32.

81 *Nihon shoki*, bk. 5, NKBT 67.250–1, and bk. 6, pp. 277–8; Aston, 1.162, 185–6.

centralized power, are centered on symbols of religious authority that are prominent in the chronicle's chapters devoted to the reigns of Sujin and his successor Suinin. Tradition assigns those reigns to the first centuries B.C. and A.D., but they can probably be dated sometime in the fourth century A.D. Sujin is given a position of special importance by the *Nihon shoki*: He is the first emperor after Jimmu about whom considerable detail is provided,⁸² and he is regarded as the ruler who first pacified certain regions. In other words, many of the Yamato court's efforts in the fifth and sixth centuries to reinforce its power were projected backward in time to the reign of Sujin and his successor, an apparent attempt to enhance imperial authority with the weight of tradition. The fact that the Mononobe clan, which became militarily powerful during Keitai's reign (507–31), figures in some of these earlier tales only serves to support the conjecture that the actual events reflected in early legends probably occurred in the sixth century.⁸³

At Japan's most important imperial-court ceremony, the Daijōsai celebrated at the beginning of each reign, the clans performed services and told and acted out myths that symbolized their subservience to the court. The Nakatomi clan of ritualists offered prayers for the emperor's long life and health and for a bountiful harvest; the Imbe presented the emperor with the three imperial regalia; the head of the Kataribe (the storytellers' *be*) recited old legends; and the Mononobe and Ōtomo clans guarded the palace. In the services performed and tales related at the Daijōsai, nobles of powerful clans affirmed their fealty to the sovereign. The legends that explain these duties contain elements from once independent traditions that were subsumed into the imperial order.⁸⁴

The court also incorporated many local shrines, honoring nature kami, into a centralized system. Imperial messengers were dispatched to local shrines, and the shrines were presented with sacred treasures. Shinto on the local level was further systematized through the construction of permanent shrine buildings. The court had a hand in this process, too, as the sponsorship of shrine construction projects was one way of increasing imperial authority and control at local levels.

82 Sansom, *Cultural History*, p. 32.

83 *Nihon shoki*, bk. 17, NKBT 68.35–37; Aston, 2.15–16.

84 For a description of Daijōsai ceremonies, see the *Engishiki*, KT, 26.143–57; Bock, *Engi-shiki*, 2.30–56. Notable recent Western studies of the Daijōsai are those by Felicia G. Bock, "The Great Feast of Enthronement," *Monumenta Nipponica* 45 (Spring 1990): 27–38; Nicola Liscutin, "Daijōsai: Aspects of Its History and Meaning," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 5 (1990): 25–52; and Carmen Blacker, "The *Shinza* or God-seat in the Daijōsai – Throne, Bed, or Incubation Couch?" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 17 (June–September 1990): 180–97.

One reason, perhaps, for erecting permanent buildings was to enshrine the *shintai*, sacred objects that had lately come to be regarded as lodging places for kami. The *shintai* were often the sorts of sacred treasures that the kami were thought to have brought with them from heaven: mirrors, swords, spears, and jewels. It was in this period of Shinto history, too, that permanent and important buildings were constructed at the shrines of Ise and Izumo: The one at Ise took the form of a grain storehouse, and the one at Izumo was modeled on a priest's residence.

In short, many features of official shrine Shinto developed during this period. At the popular level, the worship of nature kami probably continued much as it had before. But popular Shinto was also affected by the concept of the *shintai* and the construction of permanent shrine buildings. The simple veneration of vaguely conceived kami and spirits had begun to develop into a loosely organized religious system.

Period 4: The maturation of state Shinto

Early Shinto's final stage of evolution was paralleled by attempts of the central government to build a bureaucratic state like that of China. In the process, religion and polity influenced each other's development; the political urge to make the Yamato king into a Chinese-style emperor reinforced the Shinto hierarchical structure and organization; and the religious stress on the emperor as child of the sun kept his functions more sacred than secular, contributing to his eventual isolation from politics. For a time, however, the emperor did play an active role in governmental affairs, and his political position was strengthened by the Shinto idea that his lineage was superior to that of any other clan.

From the mid-seventh century to the end of the eighth, the *ritsuryō* (Chinese penal and administrative law) period, the imperial court adopted reforms modeled on the bureaucratic forms and legal practices of T'ang China and actively encouraged the introduction of other forms of Chinese culture. Superficially at least, the court intentionally became a near replica of the T'ang court. One important difference, however, was the establishment of the Council of Kami Affairs (*Jingikan*) at the same level as the Council of State (*Daijōkan*). The Council of Kami Affairs, fundamentally different from any unit in the Chinese bureaucracy, assumed control of Shinto affairs at both court and local levels.

Under the new *ritsuryō* system, many chieftains of old local clans

such as the Izumo governor were appointed as district supervisors (*gunji*), continuing to perform magical–religious functions, possessing spiritual authority, and governing the territory and people of the same clan. An appointment as district supervisor thus meant that a chieftain’s authority had been confirmed by a king.

Contemporary records, such as those kept by shrine officials, help us evaluate the chronicles and other official histories. The chronicles themselves were compiled during this period as an effort by the court to use history to its advantage. Not only did the court order the compilation of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, which traced Japanese history from the mythical age of kami through early legendary emperors to contemporary times, but it also ordered the compilation of information and traditions about the provinces of other clans. The resulting local gazetteers (*fudoki*) were often arranged so that they too supported the imperial clan’s claim to supreme authority. In the year after the *Nihon shoki* was compiled, the court summoned its nobles and officials and had scholars read and comment on the text of that official chronicle.⁸⁵ Perhaps the court was attempting to affirm the ideology of political unity (under emperors descended from the Sun Goddess) by drawing attention to the official version of the state’s traditional myths and history.

In connection with its efforts to establish a centralized bureaucratic order under the emperor, the court reformulated the old myths, creating a kami pantheon headed by the Sun Goddess. Both she and Takamimusubi were placed above the ancestral kami of other clans. All were divided into two categories, the kami of heaven and the kami of earth. This division has given rise to the hypothesis that the kami of heaven were worshiped by an invading force and that the kami of earth were venerated by the subjugated aboriginal peoples. Other scholars have suggested that the division arose from a dualistic mode of thinking – often found in primitive societies – according to which all phenomena are seen as existing in pairs of opposites.

⁸⁵ References to these initial lectures on the *Nihon shoki* can be found in several sources, some of which have not been published. One such source is the *Kōnin shiki-jo*, Ōno Hitonaga’s preface to his commentary on his own public lectures on the *Nihon shoki*, held in 812. According to this source, Ōno Yasumaro presented a lecture – the first in a series of seven held in the Nara and early Heian periods – in 721. The *Kōnin shiki-jo* has not survived, but portions are quoted in the Kamakura period collection *Shaku Nihongi*, KT 8.14. Another source documenting Ōno Yasumaro’s lectures on the *Nihon shoki* is the *Nihon keien waka*, a collection of poems written on the occasion of the lectures. The oldest copy of this unpublished collection is kept at the Honmyō-ji in Kumamoto City. See the mid-Heian period work in Minamoto no Takaakira, *Saikyūki*, vol. 28 of *Kaitei shiseki shūran* (Tokyo: Kondō kappansho, 1902), pp. 356–7.

In both Greece and China, similar distinctions were made between celestial and terrestrial deities, but the offerings and methods of worship differed. No such differences existed in Japan, however. The chronicles simply designate Hononinigi and the kami who accompanied him on his descent from heaven as the kami of heaven; those already residing on earth were called the kami of earth. The criteria for making the distinction were probably based on the relationship between the court and the clan that venerated the kami in question. The kami of heaven represented clans who were considered loyal retainers of the imperial court, whereas those of earth represented clans whose local power bases gave them a degree of independence.

The kami of especially important clans, moreover, were cited frequently in the chronicles. During this fourth period, the Fujiwara (formerly Nakatomi) clan became the most powerful of the court nobility, dominating other clans such as the Ōtomo and Mononobe. The Fujiwara undoubtedly influenced efforts to revise and embellish the mythology in the chronicles and the *fudoki*. Thus the prestige that the Fujiwara had attained is reflected in the importance of the roles assigned to their three guardian kami: Takemikazuchi, Futsunushi, and Ame no Koyane.

In their effort to forge ideological underpinnings for imperial authority, the court had myths of “the age of the kami” arranged in a logical sequence, beginning with the creation of the universe and ending with the divine birth of the first human emperor. The *Kojiki* relates these myths in their most coherent sequence. Each tale leads into the next, forming a logical narrative that links the emperor with the primeval creator kami.⁸⁶ Although no such coherent sequence exists in the *Nihon shoki*, which contains many tales irrelevant to the main narrative, the basic theme is the same: the divine origins of a single line of priestly emperors.

The *Kojiki* arranges the myths in this way: Seven generations of kami follow the appearance of three primeval creator kami, and finally Izanagi and Izanami enter the scene. First they produce an island from the middle of the ocean; then after their marriage there, they give birth to the main islands of Japan. Izanami then produces the fire kami and in so doing is burned to death. Her husband goes to the land of the dead in search of his deceased spouse and, upon his return, purifies himself in the ocean, creates three kami (the Sun Goddess, Tsukuyomi, and Susa no O), and assigns them to three parts of the universe.

⁸⁶ *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.42–147; Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 47–159.

The tale of Susa no O's violent offenses follows. Angered, the Sun Goddess hides herself in a cave and has to be coaxed out, and Susa no O is exiled to the land of Izumo. The *Kojiki* then tells how Susa no O defeats the monster serpent Yamata no Orochi and marries the princess that the serpent was about to devour. Susa no O's descendant Ōnamuchi takes charge of Izumo. Then the Sun Goddess's grandson Hononinigi is dispatched to earth, where he settles on the island of Kyushu and persuades Ōnamuchi's descendants to hand over the rule of Izumo. Three generations of descendants then rule the land. The second volume of the *Kojiki* continues with the story of later descendants, beginning with the nation's founder (Jimmu) who leads an expedition to central Honshu and settles in the Yamato basin.

Both the chronicles and court ceremonies emphasize the emperor's role as the "child of the sun." Like other provincial (or clan federation) priest-kings, the emperor came to be regarded as a kami incarnate. Perhaps the most significant of the rituals stressing this concept was held at the Daijōsai, conducted upon the emperor's accession to the throne. In this ceremony, the emperor communed with Takamimusubi and other kami by sharing with them a meal prepared from rice grown in consecrated fields. (Later, the Sun Goddess replaced Takamimusubi as the central figure in this rite.) During this fourth period, the Daijōsai was clearly distinguished from the yearly harvest festival (the Niinamesai), and its sacred affirmation of imperial authority was emphasized. The ceremonies that other clans held to symbolize their submission to the throne were made into rituals, giving them their most complex and impressive form.

Though Shinto was well on its way to becoming an institutionalized religion that supported the state, the agricultural elements were retained. One of the customs that developed during this fourth period reminds us of Shinto's earlier roots: Every twenty years the buildings at Ise Shrine are torn down, and new ones are built at an alternative site. At one time this custom was practiced not only at Ise but also at the Sumiyoshi Shrine in Settsu Province (Osaka Prefecture), the Katori Shrine in Shimofusa Province (Chiba Prefecture), and the Kashima Shrine in Hitachi Province (Ibaraki Prefecture).⁸⁷ Once, as we have seen, the kami were thought of as visitors, and temporary sanctuaries were built to welcome them. Later on, permanent shrine buildings were erected. The custom of periodically destroying and

⁸⁷ The chronicle *Nihon kōki*, vol. 5 of the *Rikkokushi* (Osaka: Asahi shimbunsha, 1929), compiled in the early Heian period, describes these early shrine customs. Also see Inagaki Eizō, *Jinja to reibyō* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1971), pp. 178–9.

reconstructing shrine buildings seems to hark back to a time when kami were housed in structures built only at festival time.

During this period, imported Buddhism challenged and influenced Shinto, finally embracing it to form a syncretic faith. Immediately after Buddhism was introduced in the sixth century, disputes arose between its adherents and clans which maintained that their kami were offended by the adoption of a foreign religion. But Buddhism was regarded as an efficacious form of magic that ensured the welfare of the emperor and state. It was argued, moreover, that Buddhism was an integral part of the Chinese culture that was sure to strengthen the state and enhance imperial authority. Finally Buddhism was a support of the state. Its doctrines were spread among the nobility, some of whom comprehended Buddhist teachings with increasing degrees of sophistication. The court sponsored the construction of temples and supplied them with sacred images; Buddhist monks were invited to recite the sutras at court; and Buddhist rituals were included in state ceremonials. Court-supported Buddhism flourished especially in the Nara period (710–94), when great temples were constructed in the new capital, monks were given official ranking and their ordination was regulated by the state, and in all provinces temples were built under official auspices. The function of the official Buddhism of this period was to ensure the welfare of the state. The salvation of individual souls or the rebirth of individuals after death were concerns left largely to the unordained clergy, who also practiced magic, divination, and shamanic methods of healing and were persecuted for their heresy.

The aristocratic Buddhist faithful did not abandon the native kami but simply, it seems, assigned different functions to Shinto and Buddhism. Shinto explained the origins of the Japanese state and sanctified the position and functions of emperors, even though aristocrats below the emperor claimed descent from other kami. Shinto, moreover, linked the court to its own past and to the animistic nature worship that still underlay the whole structure of Japanese society. Buddhism, on the other hand, provided a metaphysical cosmic view elaborated by sophisticated teachings. The Japanese state order was seen as a reflection of the Buddhist world order. For example, Emperor Shōmu (r. 724–49) installed a statue of the Rushana Buddha (Vairocana) as the central object of worship at the great Tōdai-ji. In the doctrines of the Kegon sect, Vairocana occupies the center of the cosmos, and all the Buddhas who surround him are his manifestations. The emperor seems to have related his idea of imperial hegemony to

the centrality of Rushana within the Buddhist system.⁸⁸ Thus Buddhism could be used to support the throne's supremacy, but the imperial clan's claim to the throne was ultimately guaranteed by Shinto, which declared the emperor to be a descendant of the Sun Goddess and a kami incarnate.

At the end of the Nara period, Buddhism and Shinto began to form a syncretic system. The kami were seen as sentient creatures, one step higher than human beings but still possessed by carnal passions and in need of the Buddha's salvation. On the other hand, kami were regarded as guardians of the Buddhist law. The development of this syncretism reflects similar efforts in India and China to incorporate native deities into the Buddhist order.

The *Nihon ryōiki*, compiled in the early Heian period by the Yakushi-ji monk Keikai, is thought to contain many folk tales that reflect the popular Buddhism of the Nara period. Some of these point to the existence of a Shinto-Buddhist syncretism at a popular level. In one *Ryōiki* tale, the kami venerated at Tago Shrine in Ōmi Province (Shiga Prefecture) appeared as a small white monkey and asked that a Buddhist monk read the sutras to him. The *Ryōiki* also tells how En no Ozunu, a legendary practitioner of both Buddhist and Shinto magic arts, forced the fearsome kami of Mt. Kazuraki, Hitokotonushi, to sling a bridge from Kazuraki to Kinpu, a distant mountain.⁸⁹ The kami in both tales were connected with the imperial clan in legends that appear in the *Kojiki*, if not in the *Ryōiki* itself: The kami of Tago shrine is identified as Izanagi, and the Mt. Kazuraki kami revealed himself to King Yūryaku (r. 456–79) when he visited that mountain.⁹⁰

Beginning in the Nara period, the highest levels of Buddhism and Shinto were affected by the belief that kami were guardians of the Buddhist law. Buddhist temples called *jingū-ji* (shrine temples) were established on the precincts of the nation's most important shrines, such as Usa, Ise, Tado, Sumiyoshi, and Kashima. Buddhist monks read sutras to the kami, and the kami themselves were often called *bosatsu* (bodhisattvas). In 741, during the reign of Emperor Shōmu, the court presented copies of the Lotus Sutra to the Usa Shrine, and monks were sent to read the sutra to Hachiman, the kami worshiped

88 Daigan Matsunaga and Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundations of Japanese Buddhism* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 119–22.

89 *Nihon ryōiki*, NKBT 70.385–9, 135–7, trans. Kyoko Motomichi Nakamura, *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon Ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 253–5, 140–2.

90 *Kojiki*, bk. 1, NKBT 1.73; Philippi, *Kojiki*, p. 73; and *Kojiki*, bk. 3, NKBT 1.316–17; Philippi, *Kojiki*, pp. 360–1.

there. In 749, when the Tōdai-ji and its great Rushana image were completed, Empress Kōken issued an imperial decree thanking Hachiman for his assistance with the project.

The *Shoku Nihongi* describes Kōken's visit to Tōdai-ji on this occasion. The empress was accompanied by her father Shōmu, who had ordered the making of the great Buddha statue, and by Ōga Morime, priestess of the Usa Grand Shrine. As a representative, perhaps, of Hachiman, the priestess was carried to the temple on a purple-colored palanquin. The empress had fifty monks pay homage to the Buddha image and chant sutras, and various dances were performed in honor of the Buddha and of Hachiman. Empress Kōken then bestowed the highest court rank on Hachiman.⁹¹

Buddhism also influenced Shinto arts and architecture. There were no images of kami before the development of Shinto iconography in the Nara period. Though the earliest extant examples of Shinto images date from the Heian period, records suggest that the practice of making such images began slightly earlier. For example, an image of the kami at Tado Shrine of Ise was installed and venerated there, according to shrine records dated 763. The text also names the kami a *bosatsu*.⁹² The *Gishikichō*, records of the Ise Shrine compiled in 804, mentions the earlier completion of an image of Tsukuyomi as a man riding a horse.⁹³

By the end of the Nara period, Buddhist architectural style began to influence the construction of shrine buildings. Early shrines such as Izumo and Ise had been built in simple form that resembled native buildings used for dwellings or storehouses. Natural, unpainted wood was used. But shrines constructed in the Nara period, such as Kasuga in the capital and Usa, were sometimes more elaborate. Roofs took on curved lines; pillars and railings were stained with vermilion lacquer; and the pillars were set on foundation stones. The main hall at Usa, in particular, was modeled on the Buddhist architectural style in which two symmetrical halls are joined under one roof. Perhaps it was felt that such a setting would be a suitable place for monks to recite sutras to the kami.⁹⁴

Thus by the end of the eighth century, Shinto had evolved into a complex religious system that supported the Japanese state, and it formed a syncretic relationship with Buddhism. Though official Shinto

91 For the presentation of sutras to Usa Shrine, see *Shoku nihongi*, KT 2.165. For the Usa priestess's visit to the Tōdai-ji, see p. 206.

92 *Ise no kuni Tado jingūji garan engi narabi ni shizaichō*, in Hanawa Hokiichi, ed., *Zoku gunsho ruijū*, vol. 27 (Tokyo: Zoku gunshoruijū kanseikai, 1927), 2.350.

93 *Kōtai jingū gishikichō*, in *Gunsho ruijū*, 1.15.

94 Inagaki, *Kodai no jinja kenchiku*, pp. 78–81; Hayashino Masunori and Sakurai Toshio, *Jinja no kenchiku* (Kyoto: Kawahara shoten, 1974), pp. 309–14.

would change after the Nara period, it was given a certain fixed form when some of its basic myths were committed to writing. Shinto was retained in the Japanese belief structure, even though it never developed the metaphysical worldview or system of ethics that characterize world religions. Perhaps this was because of its close connection with Japanese Buddhism, which had enough metaphysics and ethics to serve both. On the popular level, Shinto still functioned as the guarantor of a plentiful supply of food, whether from field, mountain, or sea. Thus Shinto continued to be focused on people's most basic fears – illness, natural disaster, infertility, and harvest failure – and to give them hope that such disasters could be prevented by supernatural intervention.

In summary, the history of Shinto demonstrates the retention of primitive elements, even as the religion evolved into more complex forms. The kami that appear in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* had their origin in the animistic beliefs of the Jōmon and the Yayoi periods. By the seventh and eighth centuries, these primitive beliefs had been incorporated into an official, written mythological system arranged to support imperial power. Other primitive beliefs and practices – such as shamanism, divination, and magic – were retained in Shinto, but with considerable alteration.

The early development of Shinto reflects its animistic origins. Natural objects such as rocks and trees must have seemed appropriate lodgings for kami who were regarded as spirits of mountains or forests, and the first buildings that enshrined kami were only temporary structures. The ancient Japanese thought of kami as nature spirits, not as their own dead ancestors. But in the Burial Mound period, powerful clans began to trace their descent back to important local kami.

State Shinto developed as the Yamato court appropriated the worship of provincial kami. During this period, certain features common in present-day Shinto emerged: permanent shrine buildings and the use of objects such as mirrors, swords, and jewels to house and represent the kami.

In the final period of development, the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, was placed at the apex of the Shinto structure. The final systemization of Shinto, culminating in the recording of officially approved versions of the myths in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, accompanied the adoption of Chinese-style governmental patterns. Even as Shinto became an organized religious system that sanctioned the highest temporal authorities, the newly imported Buddhism transformed the artifacts, practices, and beliefs of Japan's ancient native faith.