

was chosen because the country was so close to where the sun rises. Some say [on the other hand], that Nippon was a small country which had been subjugated by the Wa, and that the latter took over its name. As this envoy was not truthful, doubt still remains. Besides the envoy was boastful, and he said that the domains of his country were many thousands of square *li* and extended to the ocean on the south and on the west. In the northeast, he said, the country was bordered by mountain ranges beyond which lay the land of the hairy men.

[Tsunoda and Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories*, pp. 38–40]

THE EARLIEST JAPANESE CHRONICLES

The great native chronicles of early Japan, the *Records of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*) and the *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihongi*), were completed as late as the first decades of the eighth century C.E., when Japanese writers were already strongly influenced by Chinese traditions.¹³ It is therefore difficult to distinguish any pure native traditions in these works, nor are they fully reliable as accounts of Japan's early history. Many of the events described are anachronistic, and many of the legends are selected with a view to confirming the religious or political claims of the ruling dynasty. The emphasis on ancestry is already quite apparent, although other evidence indicates that family genealogies were in a very confused state before the introduction of writing and the Chinese practice of compiling genealogical records (see chapter 4).

The following excerpts from translations by Chamberlain and Aston were selected to show what seem to be the most unsystematic and unsophisticated of legends dealing with the age of the gods and the creation of the land. In contrast to the founding myths of the Confucian *Classic of Documents* (*Shu-jing*), which focus on the sage-kings as the founders of civilization and culture heroes, the focus of attention here is on the creative role of numerous gods in the formation of many islands. Again in contrast to the Chinese classic account, which is uncentered and projects a single moral and political authority, the Japanese mythic world is polytheistic, polycentric, nature oriented, and alive with an almost ungovernable spiritual élan, riotous creativity, and irrepressible fertility.

BIRTH OF THE LAND

Before the land was created, there were twelve deities, whose "forms were not visible." Izanami and Izanagi were the last of these, not the first, but they were directed by the

13. Footnotes to translations from the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, unless otherwise identified, are those of Chamberlain and Aston, respectively, in some cases abbreviated or adapted to the usage in this text.

other deities in concert to solidify the drifting flotsam and jetsam on the sea to shape the land. In the subsequent profusion of creativity, many islands and regions were formed, each reflecting the Japanese people's strong sense of place and pluralism.

Izanagi and Izanami stood on the floating bridge of Heaven and held counsel together, saying, "Is there not a country beneath?" Thereupon they thrust down the jewel-spear of Heaven¹⁴ and, groping about therewith, found the ocean. The brine which dripped from the point of the spear coagulated and became an island which received the name of Ono-goro-jima.

The two deities thereupon descended and dwelt in this island. Accordingly they wished to become husband and wife together, and to produce countries.

So they made Ono-goro-jima the pillar of the center of the land.

Now the male deity turning by the left and the female deity by the right, they went round the pillar of the land separately. When they met together on one side, the female deity spoke first and said, "How delightful! I have met with a lovely youth." The male deity was displeased and said, "I am a man, and by right should have spoken first. How is it that on the contrary thou, a woman, shouldst have been the first to speak? This was unlucky. Let us go round again." Upon this the two deities went back, and having met anew, this time the male deity spoke first and said, "How delightful! I have met a lovely maiden."

Then he inquired of the female deity, saying, "In the body is there aught formed?"

She answered and said, "In my body there is a place which is the source of femininity." The male deity said, "In my body again there is a place which is the source of masculinity. I wish to unite this source-place of my body to the source-place of thy body." Hereupon the male and female first became united as husband and wife.

Now when the time of birth arrived, first of all the island of Ahaji was reckoned as the placenta, and their minds took no pleasure in it. Therefore it received the name of Ahaji no Shima.¹⁵

Next there was produced the island of Ō-yamato no Toyo-aki-tsu-shima.¹⁶ (Here and elsewhere [the characters for Nippon] are to be read Yamato.)¹⁷

14. Considered by some commentators to resemble a phallus. Compare Aston, *Nihongi*, I, p. 10.

15. "The island which will not meet"; that is, it is unsatisfactory. Ahaji may also be interpreted as "my shame." The characters with which this name is written in the text mean "foam-road." Perhaps the true derivation is "millet-land."

16. Rich-harvest (or autumn) island of Yamato.

17. Yamato probably means "mountain gate." It is the genuine ancient name for the province containing Nara and many of the other early capitals of Japan, and it was also used for the whole country. Several emperors called themselves *yamato-neko*, and it is mentioned by the historian of the Later Han dynasty of China (23–220 B.C.E.) as the seat of rule in Japan at that time.

Next they produced the island of Iyo no futa-na¹⁸ and next the island of Tsukushi.¹⁹ Next the islands of Oki and Sado were born as twins. This is the prototype of the twin-births which sometimes take place among mankind.

Next was born the island of Koshi,²⁰ then the island of Ō-shima, then the island of Kibi no Ko.²¹

Hence first arose the designation of the Great Eight-Island Country.

Then the islands of Tsushima and Iki, with the small islands in various parts, were produced by the coagulation of the foam of the salt-water.

[Adapted from Aston, *Nihongi*, I, pp. 10–14]

PREFACE TO *RECORDS OF ANCIENT MATTERS* (*KOJIKI*)

This preface, from the earlier *Kojiki*, continues the mythic account to the founding of the imperial line.

Now when chaos²² had begun to condense but force and form were not yet manifest and there was nought named, nought done, who could know its shape? Nevertheless Heaven and Earth first parted, and the Three Deities performed the commencement of creation; yin and yang then developed; and the Two Spirits [Izanagi and Izanami] became the ancestors of all things. Therefore with [Izanagi's] entering obscurity and emerging into light, the sun and moon were revealed by the washing of his eyes; he floated on and plunged into the sea-water, and heavenly and earthly deities appeared through the ablutions of his person. So in the dimness of the great commencement, we, by relying on the original teaching, learn the time of the conception of the earth and of the birth of islands; in the remoteness of the original beginning, we, by trusting the former sages, perceive the era of the genesis of deities and of the establishment of men. Truly we do know that a mirror was hung up, that jewels were spat out, and that then a hundred kings succeeded each other; that a blade was bitten and a serpent cut in pieces, so that myriad deities did flourish. By deliberations in the Tranquil River the empire was pacified; by discussions on the Little Shore the land was purified. Wherefore His Augustness Ho-no-ni-ni-gi²³ first descended to the Peak of Takachi, and the Heavenly Sovereign Kamu-Yamato²⁴

18. Now called Shikoku.

19. Now called Kyushu.

20. Koshi is not an island but comprises the present provinces of Etchū, Echigo, and Echizen.

21. These two are not clear. Kibi is now Bingo, Bizen, and Bitchū. Ko, "child" or "small," perhaps refers to the small islands of the Inland Sea.

22. The primordial state of nondifferentiation and dispersion.

23. The abbreviated form of the name of the Sun Goddess's grandson.

24. That is, the first "human emperor," Jimmu.

did traverse the Island of the Dragon-Fly.²⁵ A weird bear put forth its claws, and a heavenly saber was obtained at Takakura. They with tails obstructed the path, and a great crow guided him to Eshinu. Dancing in rows they destroyed the brigands, and listening to a song they vanquished the foeman. Being instructed in a dream, he was reverent to the heavenly and earthly deities and was therefore styled the Wise Monarch;²⁶ having gazed on the smoke, he was benevolent to the black-haired people,²⁷ and is therefore remembered as the Emperor-Sage.²⁸ Determining the frontiers and civilizing the country, he issued laws from the Nearer Afumi;²⁹ reforming the surnames and selecting the gentile names, he held sway at the Farther Asuka.³⁰ Though each differed in caution and in ardor, though all were unlike in accomplishments and in intrinsic worth, yet was there none who did not by contemplating antiquity correct manners that had fallen to ruin and, by illumining modern times, repair laws that were approaching dissolution.³¹

[Adapted from Chamberlain, *Ko-ji-ki*, pp. 4–7]

25. That is, Japan.

26. "Emperor Sūjin" must be mentally supplied as the logical subject of this clause.

27. Chinese term for the people of China, which is applied here to the Japanese.

28. That is, Emperor Nintoku.

29. That is, Emperor Seimu.

30. That is, Emperor Ingyō.

31. Characteristics of the Chinese sage-kings that are hardly appropriate here.

Chapter 2

EARLY SHINTO

From the early days of the opening of Japan, Western scholars, intrigued by what they imagined to be the indigenous nature of Shinto, have devoted considerable attention to this religion. By the turn of the twentieth century, scholars from many Western nations were studying what has been termed the “national faith of Japan” in the hope of discovering in it an explanation of Japanese characteristics long obscured to foreigners by the country’s self-imposed isolation. Strictly speaking, however, Shinto is not a purely indigenous religion, for it shares continental features and absorbed foreign elements from earliest times. Thus it is both native and hybrid. Shamanistic and animistic practices similar to those of Shinto, which seem to spring from some earlier common religious ground, have been found throughout northeast Asia, especially Korea.

Shinto had diverse origins and remained an aggregate of heterogeneous cults well into historical times. Its failure to develop into a unified religion can be largely attributed to Japan’s natural features and the people’s strong sense of regionalism. That is, the numerous tribal communities living in the river basins held to their own beliefs even after the unified control of the central government began to be felt early in the seventh century.

The objects of worship in all Shinto cultures were known as *kami*, a term for which it is difficult to find a translation. A famous student of Shinto, Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), wrote:

I do not yet understand the meaning of the term *kami*. Speaking in general, however, it may be said that *kami* signifies, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient records and also the spirits of the shrines where they are worshiped.

It is hardly necessary to say that it includes human beings. It also includes such objects as birds, beasts, trees, plants, seas, mountains and so forth. In ancient usage, anything whatsoever which was outside the ordinary, which possessed superior power, or which was awe-inspiring was called *kami*. Eminence here does not refer merely to the superiority of nobility, goodness or meritorious deeds. Evil and mysterious things, if they are extraordinary and dreadful, are called *kami*. It is needless to say that among human beings who are called *kami* the successive generations of sacred emperors are all included. The fact that emperors are also called “distant *kami*” is because, from the standpoint of common people, they are far-separated, majestic and worthy of reverence. In a lesser degree we find, in the present as well as in ancient times, human beings who are *kami*. Although they may not be accepted throughout the whole country, yet in each province, each village and each family there are human beings who are *kami*, each one according to his own proper position. The *kami* of the divine age were for the most part human beings of that time and, because the people of that time were all *kami*, it is called the Age of the Gods (*kami*).¹

Primitive Shinto embraced cults of diverse origins, including animism, shamanism, fertility cults, and the worship of nature, ancestors, and heroes. Over time, the distinctions among these various cults gradually disappeared. The Sun Goddess, for instance, became the chief deity not only of nature worshipers but of ancestor worshipers as well. She was also considered to be the dispenser of fertility and of the fortunes of the nation. Similarly, an object of animistic worship could assume the role of a fertility god or shamanistic deity or even pose as the ancestor of the land on which a community lived. Before Shinto could become the “national faith” of Japan, however, it had to be successively bolstered by the philosophical and religious concepts of Han Confucianism, Esoteric Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, and, finally, Christianity. The forms of these influences will be discussed in later chapters. In the early period with which we are concerned here, Shinto was still a primitive and almost inarticulate group of cults.

The oldest center of Shinto worship was the Izumo Shrine on the Japan Sea coast, which was close to the Korean peninsula and by way of which continental civilization reached Japan. The Kashima and Katori Shrines in the Tone River

1. Holtom, *The National Faith of Japan*, pp. 23–24.

basin to the north for a long time marked the frontier between the lands of the Japanese and those of less civilized inhabitants. The shrine at Ise, that of the Sun Goddess, came to be the most important, and it was there that various symbols of the imperial power were displayed.

The buildings of the shrines were architecturally very simple, generally consisting of a single room (which was sometimes partitioned) raised off the ground and entered by steps at the side or front. The building was invariably made of wood, with whole tree trunks used for beams. A mirror, sword, or other form of “god embodiment” (*shintai*) might be enshrined within, but often the building served merely as a place where the *kami*, visible or invisible, could be worshiped.

Outside the shrine’s main building, two other architectural features usually are found, a gateway called a *torii* and a water basin where worshipers could wash their mouth and hands. Indeed, the characteristic Japanese insistence on cleanliness finds its expression in many forms, and two important acts of worship at Shinto shrines, the *harai* and the *misogi*, reflect this tendency. The former apparently originated in the airing of the cave or pit dwellings of prehistoric times and came to refer to both the sweeping out of a house and the special rites of chasing out evil spirits. The latter refers to the washing of the body, an act of increasingly spiritual significance. In addition to these formal acts of religion, formulas, prayers, and ritual practices were associated with almost all human activities (but especially the arts and crafts), whereby divine power was invoked to ensure success.

Worship at a Shinto shrine consisted of “attendance” and “offering.” Attendance meant not only being present and giving one’s attention to the object of worship but often also performing ceremonial dances or joining in processions, which have always been an important part of Shinto ritual. The offerings usually consisted of the firstborn of a household, the first fruits of the season, or the first catch from the water but might also include booty of war, such as the heads of enemies. The shrine was in the charge of a medium who transmitted messages from both the *kami* and the political rulers. The mediums were assisted by “supplicators”—the general term for officers of the shrine—and ablutioners. Some of the texts of the prayers and rituals of this early time have been preserved and often are beautiful, with a simplicity characteristic of Shinto.

LEGENDS CONCERNING SHINTO DEITIES

There is virtually no documentary evidence to indicate the original character of Shinto belief. Before the introduction of Chinese writing and Chinese ideas, the Japanese were unable to record their religious beliefs, and there is little reason to believe that they had produced an articulate body of doctrine or dogma. The legends in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, often cited as containing the

original deposit of Shinto folklore, are late compilations in which political considerations and specifically Chinese conceptions intrude themselves almost everywhere. This intrusion was recognized by the great Neo-Shinto scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who tried almost in vain to find in these texts any evidence of pure Japanese beliefs. Elements of Chinese cosmology are most apparent in rationalistic passages explaining the origin of the world in terms of the yin and yang principles, which seem to come directly from Chinese works such as the *Huainanzi*. The prevalence of paired male and female deities such as Izanagi and Izanami may also be the result of conscious selection with the yin and yang principles in mind. Also, the frequency of numerical sets of deities, such as the Five Heavenly Deities of the *Kojiki* and the Seven Generations of Heavenly Deities of the *Nihongi*, may represent an attempt at selection and organization in terms of a Chinese cosmological series, in this case the Five Elements and the Seven Heavenly Luminaries.

Chapter 1 showed us the strong sense of place in early myth and the special preoccupation with the creation of the Japanese islands. Since the first histories were produced in an era when the Yamato house was asserting its hegemony over other communities, the historians, writing at their ruler's direction, naturally were concerned with establishing the dynasty's bid for sovereignty, which they based on genealogy, claiming descent from the gods. Because we have little besides these official accounts to go by, it is easy to understand how these dynastic myths came to dominate the scene. However, even passages meant to assert dynastic supremacy or that became systematized along this line betray the existence of diverse and competing cults or inadvertently reveal traditional attitudes and practices taken for granted by all. Note, too, in the following excerpts that the names of deities and semidivine beings are composed of vivid images from nature and that often their activities suggest a concern with fertility, ritual purification, ancestor or hero worship, and animism.

BIRTH OF THE SUN GODDESS

In this account from the *Nihongi*, the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, is identified not as the first of the gods or the creator of the world but simply as the Sun Maiden or Sun Princess, one among the many offspring of the primal pair Izanagi and Izanami.

Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto consulted together saying, "We have now produced the great-eight-island country, with the mountains, rivers, herbs, and trees. Why should we not produce someone who shall be lord of the universe?" They then together produced the Sun Goddess, who was called Ō-hirume no muchi.²

2. Great-noon-[sun] maiden-of-possessor.

(Called in one writing Amaterasu no Ō-hiru-me no muchi.)³

(In one writing she is called Amaterasu-ō-hiru-me no Mikoto.)⁴

The resplendent luster of this child shone throughout all the six quarters.⁵ Therefore the two deities rejoiced saying, “We have had many children, but none of them have been equal to this wondrous infant. She ought not to be kept long in this land, but we ought of our own accord to send her at once to Heaven and entrust to her the affairs of Heaven.”

At this time Heaven and Earth were still not far separated, and therefore they sent her up to Heaven by the ladder of Heaven.

They next produced the Moon-god.

(Called in one writing Tsuki-yumi⁶ no Mikoto or Tsuki-yomi no Mikoto.)

His radiance was next to that of the Sun in splendor. This god was to be the consort of the Sun Goddess and to share in her government. They therefore sent him also to Heaven.

Next they produced the leech child, which even at the age of three years could not stand upright. They therefore placed it in the rock-camphor-wood boat of Heaven and abandoned it to the winds.

Their next child was Susa no o no Mikoto.⁷

(Called in one writing Kami Susa-no-o no Mikoto or Haya Susa-no-o no Mikoto.)⁸

This god had a fierce temper and was given to cruel acts. Moreover he made a practice of continually weeping and wailing. So he brought many of the people of the land to an untimely end. Again he caused green mountains to become withered. Therefore the two gods, his parents, addressed Susa-no-o no Mikoto, saying, “Thou art exceedingly wicked, and it is not meet that thou shouldst reign over the world. Certainly thou must depart far away to the Nether-land.” So they at length expelled him.

[Adapted from Aston, *Nihongi*, I, pp. 18–20]

THE DIVINE CREATION OF THE IMPERIAL ANCESTORS

In the following excerpt from the *Kojiki*, notice that the divine offspring from which the imperial line is traced were the joint creation of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, and

3. Heaven-illumine-of-great-noon-maiden-deity.

4. Heaven-illumine-great-noon-maiden-of-augustness.

5. North, south, east, west, above, below.

6. *Yumi* means “bow”; *yomi*, “darkness.” Neither is inappropriate as applied to the moon.

7. Better known as Susa-no-o, a god particularly associated with the Izumo people, who was probably relegated to a subordinate role when these people were displaced or eclipsed in power by the Yamato group.

8. *Kami*, “deity”; *haya*, “quick.”

Susa-no-o, the unruly storm god. They were produced from the mouth of Susa-no-o after he had chewed up Amaterasu's ornaments, but she claimed them as her own on the ground that the seed or stuff of which they were made came from her. Thus the ordinary male and female functions are reversed in establishing the genetic relationship, which gives priority to the Sun Goddess but suggests the absorption of Susa-no-o's power into the imperial line.

So thereupon His-Swift-Impetuous-Male-Augustness (Susa-no-o) said, "If that be so, I will take leave of the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity (Amaterasu)⁹ and depart." [With these words] he forthwith went up to Heaven, whereupon all the mountains and rivers shook, and every land and country quaked. So the Heaven-Shining-Deity, alarmed at the noise, said: "The reason of the ascent hither of His Augustness my elder brother is surely no good intent. It is only that he wished to wrest my land from me." And she forthwith, unbinding her august hair, twisted it into august bunches; and both into the left and into the right august bunch, as likewise into her august head-dress and likewise on to her left and her right august arm, she twisted an augustly complete [string] of curved jewels eight feet [long] of five hundred jewels; and slinging on her back a quiver holding a thousand [arrows], and adding [thereto] a quiver holding five hundred [arrows], she likewise took and slung at her side a mighty and high [-sounding] elbow-pad and brandished and stuck her bow upright so that the top shook; and she stamped her feet into the hard ground up to her opposing thighs, kicking away [the earth] like rotten snow and stood valiantly like unto a mighty man, and waiting, asked: "Wherefore ascendest thou hither?" Then Susa-no-o replied, saying: "I have no evil intent. It is only that when the Great-August-Deity [our father] spoke, deigning to inquire the cause of my wailing and weeping, I said: 'I wail because I wish to go to my deceased mother's land'; whereupon the Great-August-Deity said: 'Thou shalt not dwell in this land' and deigned to expel me with a divine expulsion. It is therefore, solely with the thought of taking leave of thee and departing, that I have ascended hither. I have no strange intentions." Then the Heaven-Shining-Deity said: "If that be so, whereby shall I know the sincerity of thine intentions?" Thereupon Susa-no-o replied, saying: "Let each of us swear, and produce children." So as they then swore to each other from the opposite banks of the Tranquil River of Heaven, the august names of the deities that were born from the mist [of her breath] when, having first begged Susa-no-o to hand her the ten-grasp saber which was girded on him and broken it into three fragments, and with the jewels making a jingling sound having brandished and washed them in the

9. In the following, the names of deities appearing frequently in these accounts are standardized and given an abbreviated translation or transliteration in place of the full title.

True-Pool-Well of Heaven, and having crunchingly crunched them, the Heaven-Shining-Deity blew them away, were Her Augustness Torrent-Mist-Princess, another august name for whom is Her Augustness Princess-of-the-Island-of-the-Offing; next Her Augustness Lovely-Island-Princess, another august name for whom is Her Augustness Good-Princess; next Her Augustness Princess-of-the-Torrent. The august name of the deity that was born from the mist [of his breath] when, having begged the Heaven-Shining-Deity to hand him the augustly complete [string] of curved jewels eight feet [long] of five hundred jewels that was twisted in the left august bunch [of her hair], and with the jewels making a jingling sound having brandished and washed them in the True-Pool-Well of Heaven, and having crunchingly crunched them, Susa-no-o blew them away, was His Augustness Truly-Conqueror-I-Conquer-Conquering-Swift-Heavenly-Great-Great-Ears. The august name of the Deity that was born from the mist [of his breath] when again, having begged her to hand him the jewels that were twisted in her august head-dress, and having crunchingly crunched them, he blew them away, was His Augustness Prince-Lord-of-Heaven. The august name of the deity that was born from the mist [of his breath] when again, having begged her to hand him the jewels that were twisted on her left august arm, and having crunchingly crunched them, he blew them away, was His Augustness Prince-Lord-of-Life. The august name of the deity that was born from the jewels that were twisted on her right august arm, and having crunchingly crunched them, he blew them away, was His-Wondrous-Augustness-of-Kumanu [five deities in all].

Hereupon the Heaven-Shining-Deity said to Susa-no-o: “As for the seed of the five male deities born last, their birth was from things of mine; so undoubtedly they are my children. As for the seed of the three female deities born first, their birth was from a thing of thine; so doubtless they are thy children.” Thus did she declare the division.

[Adapted from Chamberlain, *Ko-ji-ki*, pp. 45–59]

LEGENDS CONCERNING SUSANO-O

The part of Amaterasu's unruly brother Susa-no-o in creating the imperial line has been described. His other activities are of interest because they reflect the importance of regional cults incorporated into the Yamato system of Shinto. After his banishment from Heaven, Susa-no-o is reported in one account to have gone to Korea, an indication that the gods' activities were no more limited to Japan than were those of the people themselves. In any case, this black sheep of the gods settled in Izumo, where he married the local princess and rid the land of a dreaded serpent, in whose body was found the Great Sword, which became one of the Three Imperial Regalia (another of the regalia, a curved stone or jewel, is produced in both Izumo and Korea).

SUSA-NO-O AND THE SUN GODDESS

After this Susa-no-o no Mikoto's behavior was exceedingly rude. In what way? Amaterasu [the Heaven-Shining-Deity] had made august rice fields of Heavenly narrow rice fields and Heavenly long rice fields. Then Susa-no-o, when the seed was sown in spring, broke down the divisions between the plots of rice and in autumn let loose the Heavenly piebald colts and made them lie down in the midst of the rice fields. Again, when he saw that Amaterasu was about to celebrate the feast of first fruits, he secretly voided excrement in the New¹⁰ Palace. Moreover, when he saw that Amaterasu was in her sacred¹¹ weaving hall, engaged in weaving garments of the gods, he flayed a piebald colt of Heaven and, breaking a hole in the roof tiles of the hall, flung it in. Then Amaterasu started with alarm and wounded herself with the shuttle. Indignant of this, she straightway entered the Rock-cave of Heaven and, having fastened the Rock-door, dwelt there in seclusion. Therefore constant darkness prevailed on all sides, and the alternation of night and day was unknown.

Then the eighty myriads of gods met on the bank of the Tranquil River of Heaven and considered in what manner they should supplicate her. Accordingly Omoi-kane¹² no kami, with profound device and far-reaching thought, at length gathered long-singing birds¹³ of the Eternal Land and made them utter their prolonged cry to one another. Moreover he made Ta-jikara-o¹⁴ to stand beside the Rock-door. Then Ame no Koyane no Mikoto, ancestor of the Nakatomi deity chieftains,¹⁵ and Futo-dama no Mikoto,¹⁶ ancestor of the Imibe¹⁷ chieftains, dug up a five-hundred branched True Sakaki¹⁸ tree of the Heavenly

10. For the sake of greater purity in celebrating the festival.

11. The Chinese character translated here as "sacred" has the primary meaning of "abstinence, fasting." In the *Nihongi*, however, it represents avoidance, especially the religious avoidance of impurity.

12. "Thought combining" or "thought including."

13. That is, roosters.

14. Hand-strength-male.

15. Nakatomi probably means "ministers of the middle," mediating between the gods and the emperor and the emperor and the people. In historical times, their duties were of a priestly character. Worship and government were closely associated in ancient times in more countries than Japan. *Matsurigoto*, "government," is derived from *matsuri*, "worship." It was the Nakatomi who recited the Harai or purification rituals. Here the Nakatomi stand for the Fujiwara and their hereditary claim to the prime ministership.

16. *Futo-dama*, "big jewel."

17. Imi-be or imbe is derived from *imi*, the root of *imu*, "to avoid, to shun, to practice religious abstinence," and *be*, "a hereditary corporation."

18. The *sakaki*, or *Cleyera japonica*, is the sacred tree of the Shinto religion and is still used in Shinto religious ceremonies.

Mount Kagu.¹⁹ On its upper branches they hung an august five-hundred string of Yasaka jewels. On the middle branches they hung an eight-hand mirror.²⁰ . . . On its lower branches they hung blue soft offerings and white soft offerings. They recited their liturgy together.

Moreover Ame no Uzume²¹ no Mikoto, ancestress of the Sarume²² chieftain, took in her hand a spear wreathed with Eulalia grass and, standing before the door of the Rock-cave of Heaven, skillfully performed a mimic dance.²³ She took, moreover, the true Sakaki tree of the Heavenly Mount Kagu and made of it a head-dress; she took club-moss and made of it braces; she kindled fires; she placed a tub bottom upwards²⁴ and gave forth a divinely inspired utterance.

Now Amaterasu heard this and said, "Since I have shut myself up in the Rock-cave, there ought surely to be continual night in the Central Land of fertile reed-plains. How then can Ame no Uzume no Mikoto be so jolly?" So with her august hand, she opened for a narrow space the Rock-door and peeped out. Then Ta-jikara-o no kami forthwith took Amaterasu by the hand and led her out. Upon this the gods Nakatomi no Kami and Imibe no Kami²⁵ at once drew a limit by means of a bottom-tied rope²⁶ (also called a left-hand rope) and begged her not to return again [into the cave].

After this all the gods put the blame on Susa-no-o and imposed on him a fine of one thousand tables²⁷ and so at length chastised him. They also had his hair plucked out and made him therewith expiate his guilt.

[Adapted from Aston, *Nihongi*, I, pp. 40–45]

SUSA-NO-O IN IZUMO

So, having been expelled, Susa-no-o descended to a place [called] Torikami at the head-waters of the River Hi in the land of Izumo. At this time some chopsticks came floating down the stream. So Susa-no-o, thinking that there must be people at the headwaters of the river, went up it in quest of them, when he

19. Mount Kagu is the name of a mountain in Yamato. Here it is supposed to have a counterpart in Heaven.

20. It is said to be this mirror that is worshiped at Ise as an emblem of the Sun Goddess.

21. Terrible female of Heaven.

22. Monkey female.

23. This is said to be the origin of the Kagura, or the pantomimic dance now performed at Shinto festivals.

24. Strangely, the *Nihongi* neglects to say that—as we learn from the *Kojiki*—she danced on this and made it give out a sound.

25. These gods' names were properly Koyane no Mikoto and Futo-dama no Mikoto (see the preceding), but here the names of their human descendants are substituted.

26. A rope made of straw or rice that has been pulled up by the roots.

27. That is, tables of offerings.

came upon an old man and an old woman—two of them—who had a young girl between them and were weeping. Then he deigned to ask: “Who are ye?” So the old man replied, saying: “I am an earthly deity,²⁸ child of the Deity Great-Mountain-Possessor.²⁹ I am called by the name of Foot-Stroking-Elder, my wife is called by the name of Hand-Stroking-Elder, and my daughter is called by the name of Wondrous-Inada-Princess.” Again he asked: “What is the cause of your crying?” [The old man] answered, saying: “I had originally eight young girls as daughters. But the eight-forked serpent of Koshi has come every year and devoured [one], and it is now its time to come, wherefore we weep.” Then he asked him: “What is its form like?” [The old man] answered, saying: “Its eyes are like *akakagachi*, it has one body with eight heads and eight tails. Moreover on its body grows moss and also *chamaecyparis*³⁰ and cryptomerias. Its length extends over eight valleys and eight hills, and if one looks at its belly, it is all constantly bloody and inflamed.” (What is here called *akakagachi* is the modern *hohozuki*.)³¹ Then Susa-no-o said to the old man: “If this be thy daughter, wilt thou offer her to me?” He replied, saying: “With reverence, but I know not thine august name.” Then he replied, saying: “I am elder brother to the Heaven-Shining-Deity. So I have now descended from Heaven.” Then the Deities Foot-Stroking-Elder and Hand-Stroking-Elder said: “If that be so, with reverence will we offer [her to thee].” So Susa-no-o, at once taking and changing the young girl into a multitudinous and close-toothed comb which he stuck into his august hair-bunch, said to the Deities Foot-Stroking Elder and Hand-Stroking-Elder: “Do you distill some eightfold refined liquor.³² Also make a fence round about, in that fence make eight gates, at each gate tie [together] eight platforms, on each platform put a liquor vat and into each vat pour the eightfold refined liquor and wait.” So as they waited after having thus prepared everything in accordance with his bidding, the eight-forked serpent came truly as [the old man] had said and immediately dipped a head into each vat and drank the liquor. Thereupon it was intoxicated with drinking, and all [the heads] lay down and slept. Then Susa-no-o drew the ten-grasp saber that was augustly girded on him and cut the serpent in pieces, so that the River Hi flowed on changed into a river of blood. So when he cut the middle tail, the edge of his august sword broke. Then, thinking it strange, he thrust into and split [the flesh] with the point of his august sword and looked, and there was a sharp great sword [within]. So he took this great sword, and thinking it a strange

28. Or “Country Deity,” “Deity of the Land.”

29. O-yama-tsu-mi-no-kami.

30. A coniferous tree, the *Chamaecyparis obtusa*, in Japanese *hi-no-ki*. The cryptomeria is *Cryptomeria japonica*.

31. The winter cherry, *Physalis alkekengi*.

32. In Japanese, *sake*.

thing, he respectfully informed³³ Amaterasu. This is the Herb-Quelling Great Sword.³⁴

So thereupon Susa-no-o sought in the land of Izumo for a place where he might build a palace. Then he arrived at a place [called] Suga and said: “On coming to this place my august heart is pure,”³⁵ and in that place he built a palace to dwell in. So that place is now called Suga. When this Great Deity first built the palace of Suga, clouds rose up thence. Then he made an august song. That song said:

Eight Clouds arise. The eightfold fence
of Izumo makes an eightfold fence
for the spouses to retire [within]. Oh!
that eightfold fence.

[Adapted from Chamberlain, *Ko-ji-ki*, pp. 60–64]

DESCENT OF THE DIVINE GRANDSON WITH THE THREE IMPERIAL REGALIA

In this account, the Sun Goddess commissions the Divine Grandson to rule the land, bearing the so-called Three Imperial Regalia—a mirror, a sword, and a curved jewel—as symbols of divine authority. Actually the bronze mirror, long sword, and curved jewel are of continental origin (found earlier in north China and Korea), so originally they represented not native tradition but prestigious items of a higher civilization, of which the dynasty was the proud bearer among culturally less advanced tribes.

Note also that the legitimacy of the ruling house is shared with its supporting clans and service corporations, whose primal ancestors likewise received their charge from the Sun Goddess. These include the Nakatomi, from whom the Fujiwara derived their own claim to share in imperial rule. No such pluralistic arrangement was attached to Chinese conceptions of dynastic sovereignty.

“All the Central Land of Reed-Plains is now completely tranquilized.” Now the Heaven-Shining-Deity gave command, saying: “If that be so, I will send down my child.” She was about to do so when in the meantime an August Grandchild was born whose name was called Ama-tsu-hiko-hiko-ho-no-ninigi no Mikoto. Her son represented to her that he wished the August Grandchild to be sent down in his stead. Therefore the Heaven-Shining-Deity gave to Ama-tsu-hiko-

33. According to some sources, “sent it with a message to.”

34. Reputedly one of the Three Imperial Regalia.

35. That is, “I feel refreshed.” The Japanese term used is *suga-sugashi*, whose origin is attributed to the name of the place Suga. More probably the name gave rise to this detail of the legend.

hiko-ho-no-ninigi no Mikoto the Three Treasures, viz. the curved jewel of Ya-saka gem, the eight-hand mirror, and the sword Kusanagi and joined to him as his attendants Ame no Koyane no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the Nakatomi; Futo-dama no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the Imbe; Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the Sarume; Ishi-kori-dome no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the mirror makers; and Tamaya no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the jewel makers; in all gods of five *be*.³⁶ Then she commanded her August Grandchild, saying: “This Reed-plain-1500-autumns-fair-rice-ear Land is the region which my descendants shall be lords of. Do thou, my August Grandchild, proceed thither and govern it. Go! and may prosperity attend thy dynasty, and may it, like Heaven and Earth, endure for ever.”

[Adapted from Aston, *Nihongi*, I, pp. 76–77]

PRINCESS YAMATO AND PRINCE PLENTY

The shrine in Izumo, Kitsuki-no-miya, dedicated to the son of Susa-no-o, is the most ancient shrine in Japan and therefore is called “the shrine ahead of those to all other gods” (*kami-mae no yashiro*). Perhaps because it was here that Susa-no-o, from the Yamato line, married the Izumo princess and their son Prince Plenty or the Great Landlord God (*Ōnamochi* or *Ō-mono-nushi*) married a Yamato princess, this shrine is particularly thought of as symbolizing union and compromise. A visit to the Izumo Shrine is regarded therefore as especially beneficial to those with hopes of marriage or those desirous of promoting greater harmony and understanding in their own families.

After this, Yamato-toto-hi-momo-so-bime no Mikoto [Princess Yamato] became the wife of *Ō-mono-nushi no Kami* [Prince Plenty].³⁷ This god, however, was never seen in the daytime but came at night. Princess Yamato said to her husband: “As my Lord is never seen in the daytime, I am unable to view his august countenance distinctly; I beseech him therefore to delay a while, that in the morning I may look upon the majesty of his beauty.” The Great God answered and said: “What thou sayest is clearly right. Tomorrow morning I will enter thy toilet case and stay there. I pray thee be not alarmed at my form.” Princess Yamato wondered secretly in her heart at this. Waiting until daybreak she looked into her toilet case. There was there a beautiful little snake,³⁸ of the length and thickness of the cord of a garment. Thereupon she was frightened and uttered an exclamation. The Great God was ashamed and, changing suddenly into human form, spake to his wife and said: “Thou didst not contain thyself but

36. *Be*, hereditary guilds or corporations of craftsmen.

37. Or “the Great Landlord God.”

38. This is one of numerous evidences of serpent worship in ancient Japan.

hast caused me shame: I will in my turn put thee to shame.” So treading the Great Void, he ascended to Mount Mimoro. Hereupon Princess Yamato looked up and had remorse. She flopped down on a seat and with a chopstick stabbed herself in the pudenda so that she died. She was buried at O-chi.

[Adapted from Aston, *Nihongi*, I, pp. 158–159]

THE FOUNDING OF IZUMO

A somewhat different tone is found in the mythic account of the founding of Izumo as given in the local “history,” *Izumo no kuni fudoki*, which asserts its independent creation and distinctive autonomy in relation to Yamato hegemony.

Izumo was named for the words of the God Yatsukamizu Omidzunu. The august Omidzunu, who performed the *kunihiki* (also *kunubiki*, meaning “land pulling”), spoke majestically [thus], “Clouds-Rising Izumo is a narrow strip of young land. [When the creator gods established the land of Izumo] they made it small. Therefore, it must be enlarged with the addition of more land, which is to be attached [to the original land of Izumo].”

“As I looked at the cape of white Shiragi in search of spare land,” he said, “I could see that Shiragi had an overabundance.” Thereupon, he took a wide spade shaped like a maiden’s chest, thrust it into the land as though he had plunged it into the gill of a large fish, shook it about as if brandishing pampas grass [and broke off a piece]. Then he looped a three-ply rope around the land and began to pull it. He pulled the rope slowly as if reeling in [a fishing line]. As it came near, it looked like a huge riverboat [being] pulled by his august might. “Come land, come hither,” said the god. Thus, he added [to Izumo] the portion of land called the cape of Kizuki, which protrudes from the inlet of Kozu. . . .

Similar “catches” are made by the god, incorporating other lands into Izumo, and then the account continues by claiming autonomy for Izumo and its tutelary shrine.

“Now I am finished pulling the land,” said the god. Thereupon, the God Omidzunu set his cane in the ground of Ou and uttered a word, “O-e.” That is why [this place] is called Ou. (What is known as the sacred woods of Ou is situated on a small hill northeast of the district office. The diameter of this mound is about forty-four feet. There is a lofty tree atop the hill.)

Township of Mori. Mori is situated 13.1 miles southeast of the district office. The Great God Ohonamuchi, when he walked along Mount Nagaye on his return from his campaign to pacify Yakuchi in the land of Koshi, said, “The land that I have opened and governed shall be entrusted hereafter to the Imperial Grandson for his peaceful administration. As for the land of Izumo, it

shall be kept as my territory and I will dwell in it forever. I will protect it like a precious jewel. Green hills and mountains shall surround Izumo, and I shall protect it. Therefore, the place will be called Mori, meaning ‘to defend.’” (The [new] graphs for *mori* were adopted in 726.)

Township of Yashiro. Yashiro is located thirteen miles east of the district office. “This is the shrine in which I will reside,” said the God Amatsuko, the ancestor of Iki of Yashiro, when he came down from heaven with Ame no Hohi. That is why the place is called Yashiro, meaning shrine.

[Aoki, *Izumo no kuni fudoki*, pp. 80, 82]

ENSHRINEMENT OF AMATERASU

The following entries in the *Nihongi*, for the twenty-fifth year of Emperor Suinin’s reign (5 B.C.E., according to traditional dating, but more probably around 260 C.E.), describe the founding of the great shrine to Amaterasu at Ise. The moving of the Sun Goddess no doubt refers to the transporting of the mirror thought to be her embodiment.

25th year, Spring, 2nd month, 8th day. The emperor commanded the five officers, Takenu Kaha-wake, ancestor of the Abe no Omi; Hiko-kuni-fuku,³⁹ ancestor of the imperial chieftains; O-kashima, ancestor of the Nakatomi deity chieftains; Tochine, ancestor of the Mononobe deity chieftains; and Take-hi, ancestor of the Ōtomo deity chieftains, saying: “The sagacity of our predecessor on the throne, the Emperor Mimaki-iri-hiko-inie, was displayed in wisdom: he was reverential, intelligent, and capable. He was profoundly unassuming, and his disposition was to cherish self-abnegation. He adjusted the machinery of government and did solemn worship to the gods of Heaven and Earth. He practiced self-restraint and was watchful as to his personal conduct. Every day he was heedful for that day. Thus the weal of the people was sufficient, and the empire was at peace. And now, under our reign, shall there be any remissness in the worship of the Gods of Heaven and Earth?”⁴⁰

3rd month, 10th day. The Great Goddess Amaterasu was taken from [the princess] Toyo-suki-iri-hime⁴¹ and entrusted to [the princess] Yamato-hime no Mikoto. Now Yamato-hime sought for a place where she might enshrine the Great Goddess. So she proceeded to Sasahata in Uda. Then turning back from

39. Both these men are named in Emperor Sūjin’s reign, tenth year, eighty-five years earlier, according to the traditional reckoning.

40. This speech is thoroughly Chinese and Confucian. Much of the language comes from the Canon of Yao in the *Classic of Documents*.

41. To whom she had been entrusted in 92 B.C.E., eighty-seven years earlier.

thence, she entered the land of Ōmi and went round eastward to Mino, whence she arrived in the province of Ise.

Now the Great Goddess Amaterasu instructed Yamato-hime, saying: “The province of Ise, of the divine wind,⁴² is the land whither repair the waves from the eternal world, the successive waves. It is a secluded and pleasant land. In this land I wish to dwell.” In compliance, therefore, with the instruction of the Great Goddess, a shrine was erected to her in the province of Ise. Accordingly an Abstinence Palace⁴³ was built at Kawakami in Isuzu. This was called the palace of Iso. It was there that the Great Goddess Amaterasu first descended from Heaven.

[Adapted from Aston, *Nihongi*, I, pp. 175–176]

SHINTO PRAYERS (NORITO)

The *norito* are prayers or mantras uttered on ritual occasions or festivals. Those presented here are mostly preserved in the *Engi-shiki* of 927 C.E., a compilation of the Heian court that reflects the codification of Shinto practice in relation to the unification and bureaucratization of the state but that also records many aspects of Japanese religion long antedating the process of state building.

Most of the *norito* thus preserved are highly formulaic, ritualized, and repetitive. Typically they consist of an invocation of a god or gods; a recollection of the founding of the shrine, which is the site of the ceremony; an identification of the recitant and his status; a list of offerings; a petition for certain benefits or blessings; a promise of recompense to be made in return; and a final salutation. Along with this generalized formality, there is great specificity in regard to particular deities, places, and details of local history and myth. Here, however, the main focus is on the imperial house and its Grand Shrine at Ise.

NORITO FOR THE FESTIVAL OF THE SIXTH MONTH

This prayer was offered in the sixth month by a priest of the Nakatomi clan to pray for the well-being of the emperor and imperial house. It is similar to one offered at Ise for the success of the grain-growing season. Although much of it is addressed to the Sovereign Deities in general, the following excerpts focus on a prayer to Amaterasu on behalf of the reigning emperor, spoken of here as the Sovereign Grandchild.

42. This is a stock epithet (*makura kotoba*) for this province.

43. Abstinence Palace or Worship Palace: “On the accession of an Emperor, an unmarried Princess of the Imperial House was selected for the service of the Shrine of Ise, or if there was no such unmarried Princess, then another Princess was fixed upon by divination and appointed worship-princess. The Worship-Palace was for her residence” (Aston, *Nihongi*, I, p. 176).