

## Chapter 10 The Land of Yomi (2)

Horror-stricken by the sight (1), Izanaki no mikoto fled and sought to escape [from the Land of Yomi].

“How dare you bring shame on me (2)!” his sister-spouse Izanami no mikoto said, and she dispatched the hags of Yomi (3) to pursue him.

Thereupon, Izanaki no mikoto undid the black vine binding his hair and tossed it aside. Grapes instantly formed [from it]. While [the hags] were gathering the grapes and eating them, he got away. The [hags] again pursued him. Next he broke off the teeth of the wondrous *tsumakushi* comb he wore in his right hair bun and tossed them aside. Bamboo shoots instantly formed [from them]. While [the hags] were pulling the shoots up and eating them, he got away. Thereafter, [Izanami] ordered one thousand and five hundred Yomi forces to join the eight thunder deities in pursuing [Izanaki]. Izanaki drew the ten-hands-long sword he carried at his waist and, brandishing it behind him, got away [once more], but the [Yomi forces] continued to pursue him.

When Izanaki reached the foot (4) of the Yomi border slope (5), he took three peaches from the tree that grew there. Standing his ground [with them], he struck at [the approaching forces]. [The Yomi thunder deities and forces] all turned back and fled (6). Thereupon, Izanaki made a pronouncement to the peaches:

“Just as you have aided me,” he declared, “you should come to the aid of all the verdant blades of grass, the mortals who dwell in the visible realm (7) of Ashihara no nakatsukuni (8), whenever they fall into peril and lament in despair.”

He then gave those peaches the name Ōkamutsumi no mikoto 意富加牟豆美命.

### Text Notes

#### 1. “Horror-stricken by the sight” (*mikashikomite* 見畏而)

The graph 畏 (“to fear,” “fearsome”) occurs a total of seventeen times in the *Kojiki*; seven of these are in the digraph 見畏 (“to see and fear”). The text uses other graphs as well to express a sensation of fear, such as 惶, 懼, and 恐. In all instances where the graph for fear is combined with the graph 見 (“to see,” “sight”), however, the graph adopted is 畏. This pattern points to a conscious choice. Many instances of the compound 見畏 appear in stories of intermarriage between different species. In these stories the digraph serves to convey one partner’s reaction to catching sight of the other’s true nature, an event that is followed by the observer’s fleeing the scene. Mibu Sachiko 壬生幸子 holds that the expression 見畏 typically is used in situations where an inferior has done something that causes an actor of superior status to become aware



of the inferior's unexpected true nature. This development leads to the superior figure's taking fright and trying to escape the scene or keep the inferior at a distance.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. “Shame” (*haji* 辱)

The term “shame” (*haji*) almost invariably accompanies the breaking of the looking taboo in stories of intermarriage between different species. This is true of the stories of this sort found generally in ancient Japanese literature as well as those specific to the *Kojiki*. “Shame” in these contexts has been interpreted as both related to social norms and carrying religious overtones. The section on Kashima district in the *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* includes a story of the “young people pine grove” (*unai matsubara* 童子女松原) in which a young man and woman enjoying a tryst feel “shame” when they realize they might be observed and transform themselves into trees.<sup>2</sup> The identification of the two as a “man-deity” and a “woman-deity” suggests that “shame” was seen as something linked to religious norms and taboos.

## 3. “The hags of Yomi” (*yomotsushikome* 予母都志許売)

The sixth variant of the fifth section of the *Nihon shoki* Age of Deities chapter uses the graphs 泉津醜女 for the term “the hags of Yomi.” The seventh variant indicates that the digraph 醜女 should be read *shikome*.<sup>3</sup> Two different interpretations exist regarding the meaning of the morpheme *shiko*: that it means “ugly”/“wretched”/“hateful” or that it conveys that the person so described is powerful and stalwart.

The term *shiko* occurs in multiple *Man'yōshū* poems: *shiko masurao* 鬼之益卜雄 (“this stalwart man”) in poem 117; *shiko no mitate* 之許乃美多弓 (“your stalwart guardian”) in poem 4373; *shiko no shikogusa* 鬼乃志許草 (“these wretched weeds”) in poems 727 and 3062; *shiko hototogisu* 志許霍公鳥 / 四去霍公鳥 (“this wretched cuckoo”) in poems 1507 and 1951; *oya no shiko ya ni* 小屋之四忌屋尔 (“this wretched hut”) and *shiko no shiko te o* 鬼之四忌手乎 (“these wretched, wretched hands”) in poem 3270; *shikotsuokina no* 之許都於吉奈乃 (“that wretched old man”) in poem 4011.<sup>4</sup> Some see the first two examples as grounds for taking *shiko* to mean “stalwart,” yet the poetic context suggests that its use in these instances may not be entirely straightforward.

The same is true of the morphological correspondence between *yomotsushikome* (“the *shiko* females of Yomi”) and Ashihara shikoo 葦原色許男 (“the *shiko* male of Ashihara [no nakatsukuni]”), one of the alternative names for Ōkuninushi. Although

<sup>1</sup> Mibu, “Amaterasu ōmikami no ‘mikashikomu.’”

<sup>2</sup> Uegaki, *Fudoki*, pp. 398–401.

<sup>3</sup> Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 2, pp. 44–45, 52–53.

<sup>4</sup> Kojima et al., *Man'yōshū*, SNKBZ 6, p. 94; 9, p. 403; 6, p. 357; 8, p. 343; 7, p. 324; 8, p. 63; 8, p. 412; 9, p. 214.



some would see the association with Ōkuninushi as evidence for understanding *shiko* to mean “stalwart,” again the context indicates that Ashihara shikoo might well be understood as “the wretched man of Ashihara [no nakatsukuni].”<sup>5</sup> The later episode of the sisters Konohana no sakuyabime and Iwanagahime 石長比売 in the Ninigi narrative suggests, on the other hand, that the graph 醜 used in the *Nihon shoki* to represent *shiko* does not indicate “ugly” simply in the ordinary sense of “unattractive.” The *Kojiki* contrasts the former sister as “beautiful” (*uruwashiki otome* 麗美人) and the latter as “extremely ugly” (*ito minikuki* 甚凶醜), but in both cases the intent seems to be to convey a power or force outside the norm.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. The foot [of the slope] (*sakamoto* 坂本)

As discussed more fully in the following text note, the presence here of the term *sakamoto* 坂本 has been the source of uncertainty regarding the location of the Land of Yomi. The expression does not occur in the *Nihon shoki*. The corresponding account in the sixth variant of the fifth section of the Age of Deities chapter relates that “[Izanaki] had already reached the Yomi border slope” (*sude ni Yomotsuhirasaka ni itarimasu* 已到泉津平坂) and “[Izanaki] closed off the border path” (*sono sakaji ni saite* 塞其坂路). The seventh variant states that “a big peach tree stood near the path” (*michi no he ni ōki naru momo no ki ari* 道辺有大桃樹). The tenth variant describes the situation as “When fighting against his sister-spouse at the Yomi border slope” (*sono imo to Yomotsuhirasaka ni aitatakau ni itarite* 及其与妹相闘於泉平坂).<sup>7</sup> None of these passages refer to the “foot of the slope,” nor does the context imply literally sloping terrain. It may be that Ashihara no nakatsukuni and the Land of Yomi came to be understood as situated in a vertical relationship only after the graphs 黄泉 (“yellow springs,” a Chinese term connoting “underworld”) had been adopted to transcribe Yomo/Yomi. Later expressions such as “envoy of the nether region” (*shitahe no tsukai* 之多岐[下边]使) in *Man’yōshū* poem 905, or “land below” (*shitatsukuni* 下津国) in the Chinkasai liturgy for praying for protection from fire, suggest that over time, the Land of Yomi came to be seen as located in a lower realm.<sup>8</sup>

#### 5. Yomi border slope (Yomotsuhirasaka 黄泉比良坂)

A reading gloss from the seventh variant of the fifth section of the *Nihon shoki* Age of Deities chapter states, “the graphs 泉津平坂 should be read Yomotsuhirasaka.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See the further discussion of this point in chapter 12, text note 3, and chapter 24, text notes 17 and 19.

<sup>6</sup> Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi, *Kojiki*, pp. 120–21. For further discussion of these points, see chapter 12, text note 2.

<sup>7</sup> Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 2, pp. 46–47, 54–55, 56–57.

<sup>8</sup> Kojima et al., *Man’yōshū*, SNKBZ 7, p. 94; Kurano and Takeda, *Kojiki, Norito*, pp. 430–31.

<sup>9</sup> Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 2, pp. 52–53.



The term Yomitsuhirasaka 与美津枚坂 appears in the abovementioned Chinkasai liturgy.<sup>10</sup> The “Yomi border slope” can be described as the boundary between the Land of Yomi and Ashihara no nakatsukuni. It is generally held that the original meaning of the morpheme *hira* is a cliff-like terrain or sloping land and that *saka* indicates “boundary.” To what extent the *Kojiki* retains these primary meanings is unclear. Overall the meaning of *saka* 坂 in the *Kojiki* does not appear to differ greatly from the modern usage of this term to mean “slope.” Yet, the *saka* that figure in the myths, as in the subsequently mentioned *unasaka* 海坂 (“sea border”), do seem to carry a strong connotation of “boundary.”<sup>11</sup> The following chapter 11 states: “It is said that what is called the Yomi border slope is the present Ifuya\_border (*Ifuya saka* 伊賦夜坂) in the land of Izumo.”<sup>12</sup>

**6. [The Yomi thunder deities and forces] all turned back and fled (*kotogotoku hikikaeriki* 悉扳返也)**

This passage has been the subject of ongoing debate. The extant manuscripts of the *Kojiki* adopt different graphs for the second graph (here 扳), and the choice bears on the issue of the location of the Land of Yomi. The earliest extant manuscript, the Shinpukuji-bon (1371–1372), gives the sequence of graphs as 攻返也 (“attacked and turned back”), while the Dōka-bon 道果本 (1381), Dōshō-bon 道祥本 (1424), and Shun’yu-bon 春瑜本 (1426) manuscripts from the same Ise-bon lineage give it as 逃返也 (“turned back and fled”). These instances carry no implications as to the location of Yomi, from which the thunder deities and forces came and to which they turn back. The Urabe-house manuscript lineage, beginning with the copy transcribed by Urabe Kanenaga in 1522, however, give the sequence as 坂返也 (“turned back [at] the border slope”). Considered in conjunction with the term *sakamoto* (“foot of the slope;” see text note 4), this might be seen to imply that the Yomi thunder deities and forces, which had been chasing Izanaki down the slope, returned up it. In other words, the Urabe-lineage manuscripts’ rendering might be understood to suggest that Yomi lies at the top of the slope. Further, if the thunder deities and forces retreated from the foot of the Yomi border slope after having descended it, one might also conclude that the slope is part of the territory of the Land of Yomi, which would account for the name “Yomi border slope.”

Nishimiya Kazutami argues that the sequences 攻返也 and 逃返也 adopted respectively by the Shinpukuji-bon and the other Ise-lineage manuscripts are both

<sup>10</sup> Kurano and Takeda, *Kojiki, Norito*, pp. 430–31.

<sup>11</sup> *Unasaka* appears in the myth of “the luck of the sea and the luck of the land” (*umisachi yamasachi* 海幸山幸), which narrates the story of the brothers Hoderi 火照理 and Hoori, children of Ninigi. Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi define *unasaka* as the “border between the sea world and the land of Ashihara no nakatsukuni.” See Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi, *Kojiki*, p. 136n5. (TN)

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 11, text note 2.



problematic. He holds that the action of “attack and turn back” is improbable and that the graph 逃 (“fled”) likely was adopted under the influence of the version of this episode found in *Sendai kuji hongī*. On the grounds that the 攻 (“attack”) of the Shinpukuji-bon is graphically close to 坂 (“slope,” “boundary”), Nishimiya follows the Urabe-lineage manuscripts and opts for 坂返也, reading the three graphs as *saka o kaeriki* (“turned back at the border slope”).<sup>13</sup>

From a graphic perspective, 坂 is plausible. It should be noted, however, that choosing it does not necessarily resolve the issue of the location of the Land of Yomi. For one thing, the gloss marks of the Urabe-lineage manuscripts indicate that 坂返也 is to be read as “return at the slope” (*saka yori kaeru*). Inserting the term “slope” here might indicate the point at which the action of “returning” begins, but it would not specify the direction of that action. As Yoshino Masaharu 吉野政治 observes, the statement that Izanaki reached the “foot of the slope” could mean that he reached the point from which an ascent begins as well as the point at which a descent terminates.<sup>14</sup> If the main implication of the term Yomotsuhirasaka is that it signifies a “border,” that one side of the border lies uphill and the other downhill becomes a secondary matter.

To sum up these issues, opting for the graphs 坂返也 would not lend support to the interpretation of Yomi as located at the top of a slope (in other words, the interpretation of Yomi as a morpheme deriving from *yama* = mountain). Yomotsuhirasaka may be considered the “exit” from the Land of Yomi, but taking this passage as the ground for judging whether the Land of Yomi lies above or below the slope does not seem particularly meaningful. Is not such a schematization itself overly simplified?

In this commentary we thus have not adopted any of the graphs found in the manuscript versions of the text. As Nishimiya points out, the graph 攻 found in the earliest extant manuscript, the Shinpukuji-bon, is problematic, and it is difficult to accept it as is. On the other hand, the form of the graph 逃 found in the other Ise-lineage texts diverges too far from that of the Shinpukuji-bon’s 攻 to choose it as an alternative. As for the digraph 坂返 found in the Urabe-lineage manuscripts and adopted by Nishimiya, the method of transcription seen in *Kojiki* suggests that the reverse sequence of 返坂 would be more likely if the intent were to express the sense of “return at the slope.” We thus have not opted for this possibility either. Rather, following Nakamura Hirotohi’s thesis, we have provisionally chosen 扳 (*hiku*, “to pull”), which in its handwritten graphic form can resemble 攻.<sup>15</sup> The graph 扳

<sup>13</sup> Nishimiya, *Kojiki shūteiban*, p. 36. For the *Sendai kuji hongī* passage, see Kamata, *Sendai kuji hongī no kenkyū: Kōhon no bu*, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Yoshino, “Yomotsuhirasaka no sakamoto,” pp. 43–44.

<sup>15</sup> Nakamura, *Shinpan Kojiki*, p. 33; Takeda and Nakamura, *Shintei Kojiki*, p. 29n23.



appears in the graph dictionary *Shinsen jikyō* (ca. 900) with the meaning “to pull” (*hiku* 引).<sup>16</sup>

**7. All the verdant blades of grass, the mortals who dwell in the visible realm”**  
(*utsushiki aohitokusa* 宇都志伎青人草)

This phrase combines the adjective *utsushi* (“visible,” “actual”) and the noun *aohitokusa* (“the verdant blades of grass, the mortals”). Some interpret it as likening humans living in the actual world to lush grass, others as characterizing human existence as frail and evanescent.

**Further comment:** What, in fact, are the connotations of the term *utsushi*? Apart from this passage in the Land of Yomi episode, the *Kojiki* includes the following other instances:

1. The Azumi no muraji 阿曇連 are the descendants of Utsushi hikanasaku no mikoto 宇都志日金析命, the child of this Watatsumi no kami 綿津見神.<sup>17</sup>
2. Another name is Utsushikunitama no kami 宇都志国玉神.<sup>18</sup>
3. Become Utsushikuninushi no kami 宇都志国主神.<sup>19</sup>
4. Distressed, [Haruyama no kasumi otoko 春山之霞壮夫] told his mother [about his elder brother’s failure to do as he had promised]. His mother said, “In this, our realm, actions should adhere to the customs of the deities. Is it because he follows the customs of the verdant blades of grass, the mortals who dwell in the visible realm (*utsushiki aohitokusa* 宇都志岐青人草), that he does not give over [what he promised]?<sup>20</sup>
5. The emperor spoke with fearful reverence: “With awe I address the great deity! I did not realize that you might appear manifest in this visible realm (*utsushi omi* 宇都志意美)!” He had the myriad officials set down their swords and bows and arrows and take off their robes, and [he] presented these reverently [to the deity].<sup>21</sup>

In the first example, the Azumi no muraji lineage is described as worshiping as its ancestral deity (*oyagami* 祖神) the threefold Watatsumi deity that emerged from Izanaki’s ablutions after escaping from Yomi. This is the only occurrence in the

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<sup>16</sup> *Shinsen jikyō*, vol. 5 (*kan* 10), fol. 12b.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 13.

<sup>18</sup> Chapter 24.

<sup>19</sup> Chapter 28.

<sup>20</sup> Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi, *Kojiki*, pp. 280–81.

<sup>21</sup> Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi, *Kojiki*, pp. 348–49. Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi interpret this passage to mean: “Since your servant dwells in this visible realm, I did not realize it was you!” (TN)



*Kojiki* of the term “ancestral deity.” The Azumi no muraji is identified as the descendant (*sue* 子孫) of Utsushi hikanasaku, the child of the Watatsumi deity. The attachment of the element *utsushi* to the name of the entity that connects “ancestral deity” and “descendant” is likely intended to show its function as a link between deities and human beings. This passage is also the first of the *Kojiki*’s “ancestral origin” accounts. This combination of elements makes it relevant to the *Kojiki*’s view of the continuum between “deity” and “human.”

Items 2 and 3 are alternative names of Ōkuninushi. Many present-day editions modify the *nushi* 主 of Utsushikuninushi no kami in item 3, changing it to *tama* 玉 (as in item 2). Based on critical examination of the different manuscripts and contextual reading, we have retained the transcription Utsushikuninushi no kami for item 3.<sup>22</sup>

In the fourth example, from the chronicle of Emperor Ōjin, the elder brother Akiyama no shitahi otoko 秋山之下氷壯夫 and the younger brother Haruyama no kasumi otoko make a wager as to whether the younger brother can win a maiden desired by both. The younger brother succeeds in making the maiden his spouse, but the elder brother refuses to give him the items promised in the wager, leading their mother to make the statement quoted above. Although the elder brother should have adhered to the customs of “our realm” (*waga miyo* 我御世), he likely did not give over the promised items because he followed instead the customs of “the verdant blades of grass, the mortals who dwell in the visible realm.” The two sets of “customs” (*narai* 習) indicate that the realm of the deities and that of “the verdant blades of grass, the mortals,” exist parallel to each other and have alike the potential to exert influence on the elder brother.

Item 5 is part of the story of an encounter between Emperor Yūryaku and Hitokotonushi no kami 一言主神, whom the emperor does not initially recognize as a deity. Various theses have been advanced regarding the phonetic transcription *utsushi omi*. An earlier interpretation held *omi* to correspond to the graphs 大身 (“great personage”) and took the phrase to mean “the great personage [Hitokotonushi] who has taken visible form.” The equation of *omi* with “great personage” has been rejected, however, on grounds that the conventions of ancient phonetic transcription distinguish between the pronunciation of *mi* rendered as 美 (as in this passage) and *mi* rendered as 身. Current interpretations include the thesis that the phrase means “the great spirit (大靈) that has taken visible form,”<sup>23</sup> or “the attendants (臣) [of Hitokotonushi] taking visible form.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 24, text note 17, and chapter 28. See also Taniguchi Masahiro, “Ōkuninushi no kami no ‘mata na’ kisai no igi.”

<sup>23</sup> Nishimiya, *Kojiki shūteiban*, p. 200n1.

<sup>24</sup> Mōri, “‘Utsushi omi’ to ‘utsusemi, utsusomi’ kō.”



None of these theses about this instance from the chronicle of Emperor Yūryaku has been accepted as definitive, but it unquestionably differs from the four other allusions to the “visible realm.” Whereas they refer to the “visible realm” from the perspective of the deities, in this one Emperor Yūryaku speaks of the “visible realm” from the perspective of one who dwells in it. When spoken about from the side of the deities, the “visible realm” is something that pertains to human beings. By contrast, when spoken about from the human side, as in the case of item 5, the “visible realm” can pertain to deities who have made themselves visible as well as to human beings. The following example from the *Nihon shoki* confirms this point:

At this time [Prince Iwarebiko 磐余彦, the future Emperor Jinmu,] proclaimed to [his attendant] Michi no omi 道臣, saying, ‘I myself shall call forth Takamimusuhi no mikoto to be worshiped in visible form (*utsushi iwai* 顯齋).<sup>25</sup>

The text adds a gloss specifying that the graphs 顯齋 are to be read *utsushi iwai*. The compilers of the SNKBZ edition append the following explanation of this term:

*Utsushi iwai* means to worship reverently in such a manner that the deity, which cannot be seen, becomes manifest. Here it means concretely that by making himself the repository (*tsukibito* 憑人) for the divine spirit, Jinmu will in his person become Takamimusuhi and thereby make manifest the deity to be worshiped.<sup>26</sup>

*Utsushi* in this interpretation refers to a circumstance in which something from the realm of deities that is intrinsically invisible manifests itself in the human realm in a visible form.

These examples suggest that within the human realm, *utsushi* refers to the manifestation of an entity from the realm of deities, whereas for those from the latter realm, it refers to human beings. Within the world of the myths the human realm (the realm of the mortal verdant blades of grass) and the realm of the deities exist parallel to each other. The present episode thus likely expresses the idea that Izanaki and Izanami oversee human birth and death. Izanaki’s declaration to the peaches that they should “come to the aid of all the verdant blades of grass, the mortals who dwell in the visible realm of Ashihara no nakatsukuni, whenever they fall into peril and lament in despair,” simultaneously serves to situate the Land of Yomi as the destination of the “verdant blades of grass” when they die.

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<sup>25</sup> Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 2, pp. 214–15.

<sup>26</sup> Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 2, p. 215.



## 8. Ashihara no nakatsukuni 葦原中国

This is the first occurrence of this name in the *Kojiki*. Within the world of the *Kojiki* myths, the name designates the earthly realm while also reflecting the perception of the earthly realm as seen from outside it. The fact that it first occurs in association with the expression “all the verdant blades of grass, the mortals who dwell in the visible realm” (*utsushiki aohitokusa*) suggests a deep connection between the two notions. This connection can be seen as well in the alternative names for Ōanamuji (Ōkuninushi) of Ashihara no shikoo and Utsushikunitama (or Utsushikuninushi).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See text notes 3 and 7 above.