

Chapter 11 The land of Yomi (3)

Finally, his sister-spouse Izanami no mikoto herself joined the pursuit. Thereupon [Izanaki no mikoto] pulled a boulder on to the Yomi border slope that was [so huge] as to need a thousand people to pull it and closed the border. Confronting each other on either side of the boulder, [Izanami and Izanaki] declared their eternal estrangement (1).

“Oh, my beloved brother-spouse!” said Izanami. “If you do this, every day I will strangle to death one thousand of the mortal blades of grass of your land.”

“Oh, my beloved sister-spouse!” Izanaki proclaimed. “If you do that, every day I will build one thousand five hundred parturition huts.”

This is why every day without fail one thousand people die and every day without fail one thousand five hundred people are born.

Because of these things, Izanami no kami no mikoto is called Yomotsuōkami 黄泉津大神. It is also said that because she pursued [Izanaki], she is called Chishiki no ōkami 道敷大神. The boulder that blocked the Yomi border is called Chigaeshi no ōkami 道返之大神 and also Sayarimasu yomotsuto no ōkami 塞坐黄泉戸大神.¹ Also, it is said that what is called the Yomi border slope is the present Ifuya border slope in the land of Izumo (2).

Text Notes

1. “They declared their eternal estrangement” (*kotodo o watasu* 度事戸)

The meaning of the term *kotodo* 事戸 remains uncertain. Many understand it as a formula for breaking conjugal ties that one party proclaims to the other. Such interpretations take the graph 戸 (literally “door,” “household”) as a phonetic morpheme conveying the sense of a verbal conjuration. Some, however, see the graph as referring not to an utterance, but a place.

Further comment: Hypotheses about the meaning of the term *kotodo o watasu* 度事戸 include the following:

1. Kamo no Mabuchi, as cited by Motoori Norinaga, reads the phrase as *kototo ni wataru* and takes it to mean that spouses, having become estranged, go (*wataru* 度) to live in separate households (*kototo* 別戸).²

¹ These deity names all have a descriptive character linked to the developments depicted in this episode. Izanami’s alternative names mean “great deity of Yomi” and “great deity who pursued [Izanaki] to the road.” The boulder’s names mean “great deity who turns people back” and “great deity who blocks the Yomi portal.” (TN)

² Motoori Norinaga, *Kojiki den*, MNZ 9, p. 255.

2. Motoori Norinaga takes *kotodo o watasu* to express the breaking of conjugal ties. He sees the precise meaning of *kotodo* as uncertain but hypothesizes that it might derive from the practice of the man's handing back to the woman's family the zither (*norikoto* 詔琴) that served as a pledge of conjugal ties; *kotodo* might also be a contracted form of *kototokegoto* 事解言 (declaration of the dissolution of a matter).³
3. Tsugita Uruu sees the phrase as meaning to declare the breaking of conjugal ties, with *kotodo* indicating "different place" (異処). Nakajima Etsuji takes the same view but interprets *kotodo* as "separate place" (別所).⁴
4. Ogiwara Asao sees the phrase as a declaration of estrangement, with *kotodo* representing a combination of the elements "separation" (*koto* 別) + "conjuration" (*to/do*).⁵
5. Kurano Kenji takes the phrase to indicate the pronouncement of a vow, with *kotodo* meaning "to speak" (言) + the particle *do* = "to proclaim".⁶
6. Saigō Nobutsuna interprets the phrase as a malediction declared to the dead to prevent them from returning ("separation" + "conjuration").⁷
7. Nishimiya Kazutami takes the phrase as combining a declaration of the breaking of conjugal ties with one of separation of the living from the dead.⁸
8. Kōnoshi Takamitsu and Yamaguchi Yoshinori see the phrase as expressing mutual imprecations exchanged by Izanaki and Izanami, with the intent of breaking conjugal ties.⁹

As the above examples show, commentators have taken *koto*, transcribed here as 事, to represent variously terms meaning "zither" (琴), "separate" (別), "different" (異), "to speak" (言), and "matter" (事). As Kurano Kenji points out, however, no examples can be found in the *Kojiki* of the graph 事 being used phonetically to represent the meaning "separate" or "different." Similarly, as Kōnoshi and Yamaguchi argue, if the compilers had intended to convey the meaning of "to speak," they likely would have used the graph 言. Considered in this light, the intended meaning is thus probably that of the graph used, 事 ("matter").

³ Motoori Norinaga, *Kojiki den*, MNZ 9, pp. 255, 458–59.

⁴ Tsugita, *Kojiki shinkō*, pp. 64–65; Nakajima, *Kojiki hyōshaku*, p. 64.

⁵ Ogiwara, *Kojiki, jōdai kayō*, p. 66n8.

⁶ Kurano, *Kojiki zenchūshaku*, vol. 2, pp. 263–65.

⁷ Saigō, *Kojiki chūshaku*, vol. 1, pp. 193–94.

⁸ Nishimiya, *Kojiki*, p. 39n13.

⁹ Kōnoshi and Yamaguchi, *Kojiki chūkai*, vol. 2, pp. 228–32.

Do (戸) has been interpreted variously as intended to represent terms meaning “door”/“household” (戸), “place” (所), “words” (言, i.e., “conjuration,” 呪言) or as a particle. Since the parameters of the *Kojiki*’s usage of the graph 戸 do not seem that sharply defined, it is difficult to reach a definitive conclusion. Most commentators agree that *watasu* here means “to declare” (*iiwatasu* 言い渡す). Kōnoshi and Yamaguchi hold that the context in which the phrase occurs, where Izanaki and Izanami are described as “confronting each other,” militates against Saigō’s interpretation of it as a malediction directed at the dead by the living, but can that be said so unequivocally?

The sixth variant of the fifth section of the *Nihon shoki* Age of Deities chapter relates that “[Izanaki] proclaimed his intent to divorce his wife” (建絶妻之誓), and the seventh variant of the same section gives the phonetic gloss *kotodo* 許等度 for the graphs 絶妻之誓.¹⁰ These renderings would appear to have influenced interpretations of the *Kojiki*’s 事戸, but the meaning embedded in the graphs adopted by the *Nihon shoki* sixth variant conveys a specificity not seen in the *Kojiki*. If the “wife” (妻) in the variant’s sequence of graphs indicates Izanami, the action described by the sequence is also much more unidirectional than that depicted in the *Kojiki*.

Let us examine a little more fully the implications of the graphs 事 (“matter”) and 言 (“word,” “speech”) as used elsewhere in the *Kojiki* to transcribe the morpheme *koto*. Apart from this instance and the deity names Ōkoto oshio no kami 大事忍男神 and Kotoshironushi no kami 事代主神, the *Kojiki* includes the following examples of the graph 事 used in combination with a following element: four instances in the term *kotoyosashi* 事依 (“entrust,” “charge with”) and two instances in the terms *makoto towazu* 真事登波受 (“unable to speak properly”) and *makoto towamu* 真事登波牟 (“will speak properly”).¹¹ In these cases, the following element is a verb; there are no other instances where the following element is a noun, as appears to be the case here with 戸. The term *kotoyosashi* is also written with the graph 言 as 言依 (five instances, as well as one written as 言因). The above instances of *makoto* 真事 may likewise be said to carry a connotation of speech.

Apart from these instances of *kotoyosashi* written with the graph 言, other combinations of this graph with a following element in the *Kojiki* also tend to have a verbal construction as the second element. Examples are *kotodatsureba* 言立者 (“if [they] say something particular”; chronicle of Emperor Nintoku), *kotomuke* 言向 (“convince to submit”; nine instances); *kotomuke* 言趣 (same meaning as with the digraph 言向; two instances); *kotoage* 言拳 (“proclaim loudly”; chronicle of Emperor Keikō); and *kotosaka* 言離 (“to assert firmly”; chronicle of Emperor Yūryaku). If the search is expanded beyond the *Kojiki*, examples can be found in other texts of terms

¹⁰ Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 2, pp. 46–47, 52–53.

¹¹ For *kotoyosashi*, see chapter 14; for *makoto* (in the chronicle of Emperor Suinin), see Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi, *Kojiki*, pp. 204–207.

combining *koto* in the sense of “speech” or “word” with a noun, such as *kotowaza* 諺 (“proverb”) or *kotodama* (“[word] spirit”). Whether the *koto* of *kotowaza* can be equated solely with the graph 言 is open to question, however. In the case of *kotodama* as well, one can find examples of the graphic combination 事靈 (*Man'yōshū* poems 2506, 3254) as well as 言靈 (*Man'yōshū* poem 894).¹²

Commentators point out that the *Kojiki* generally does not use the graph 言 as an alternative representation (*shakuji* 借字) of the graph 事. The text’s compilers likewise evidently distinguished between the two graphs when using both with the reading *koto* in the same phrase. As noted above regarding *makoto* 真事 (“true matters,” “[speak] properly”), however, the graph 事 may carry connotations of speech in some instances. Such examples may be said to involve a movement from words to act. Whereas the graph 言 appears to be used only in reference to words, 事 can express such movement. This possibly is also the case with *kotodo*.

The graph 戸 occurs in a variety of contexts. Leaving aside its wide use in the names of deities and people and in the sense “door,” the following three warrant attention here:

1. “Ame no koya no mikoto, offering words of praise, beseeched [Amaterasu] to majestically proclaim [her presence] . . .” (*Ame no koya no mikoto futo noritogoto hokimōshite* 天兒屋命布刀詔戸言禱白而).¹³

This passage poses several interpretive challenges, which here I can only touch on briefly. The term *norito* subsequently came to mean a liturgy offered to the deities, but it is questionable whether that meaning applies here. Does not the graph 詔 (*mikotonori*, “imperial/divine pronouncement”), suggest that Ame no koya’s action is intended to bring about Amaterasu’s “proclamation,” that he is beseeching her *noritogoto*?¹⁴ The meaning of *to* in *norito* is uncertain. Some, pointing to the examples of the terms *tonau* (“to intone”) and *togoi* (“conjuration against another”), take *to* as meaning “words,” but terms such as *hoto* (genitals), *kumido* (a secluded place), and *minato* (harbor), suggest it could also be interpreted as “place.” Opinions divide as to whether the graph 言 in the passage at hand should be seen as attached to the preceding 詔戸 or not. One might argue that its presence immediately following 戸 militates against interpreting the latter graph as having to do with words. On the other hand, if 戸 is taken in this instance to imply “place,” *norito* here would mean “place to hear the deity’s words,” which would not fit readily in the context.

¹² Kojima et al., *Man'yōshū*, SNKBZ 8, pp. 204, 405; 7, p. 72.

¹³ Chapter 18.

¹⁴ The *Kojiki* typically reserves the graph 詔 (*mikotonori*) for pronouncements or commands by the heavenly deities, emperors, or entities of comparable status. (TN)

2. “Thereupon the myriad deities conferred together and levied a penalty of one thousand expiatory items (*chikura no okito* 千位置戸) on Susanoo; cut his beard, fingernails, and toenails; had [his wrongdoings] dispelled; and expelled him with a divine expulsion.”¹⁵

Chikura no okito (“one thousand expiatory items”) refers to the penalty levied as part of the process of dispelling wrongdoings. *Okito* may have originally indicated the place where the items were placed and evolved to mean the items as such. In this context it clearly means the objects to be offered up.

3. The third example occurs in the story from the chronicle of Emperor Ōjin of the elder brother who fails to pay his younger brother a wager after the latter wins a maiden both had pursued. Angry at her elder son, their mother took a “bamboo stalk of one node from an island in the Izushinokawa 伊豆志河 river and made a coarse eight-meshed basket, [in which she placed] stones from the river mixed with salt and wrapped in leaves from the bamboo.” She then placed the basket on the hearth and had the younger brother “pronounce a conjuration” (*togowashimuraku* 令詛) in which he declared that the elder brother should flourish and wither in turn like these objects. When the elder brother, having fallen ill and withered, pled with his mother, she had the “conjuration items” (*togoito* 詛戸) handed over to him.¹⁶ Here, as with the preceding *chikura no okito*, *to* is used in reference to items of a special magical nature.

To 戸 in the *Kojiki* thus sometimes carries the meaning of a boundary-like place and other times indicates objects of a magical nature. The morphology *norito* 詔戸 (example 1 above), consisting of a verb + *to*, would appear to resemble that of *okito* 置戸 (example 2) and *togoito* 詛戸 (example 3). As *to* in *norito* 詔戸 does not have to do with a concrete object, perhaps it points to the content of the words to be “proclaimed.” From the perspective of graphic representation, on the other hand, in example 1, what separates Amaterasu, the source of the anticipated “proclamation” (*nori* 詔), from the other deities is the “door of the rock cave” (*iwaya no to* 石屋戸). *Norito* 詔戸 here thus may also incorporate a graphic allusion to the cave.

The account of Ōkuninushi’s visit to Nenokatasukuni 根之堅州国 (“the bedrock root land”), contains yet another pertinent instance of the graph 戸:

[Ōkuninushi/Ōanamuji] grabbed [strands of Susanoo’s] hair and tied them to each rafter of the chamber. He blocked the door to the chamber (*muro no to* 室戸) with a boulder [so huge as to need] five hundred people to pull it. Carrying his spouse

¹⁵ Chapter 20.

¹⁶ Yamaguchi and Kōnoshi, *Kojiki*, SNKBZ 1, pp. 280–81.

Suseribime 須勢理毗壳 on his back, he seized the great deity's sword of life and bow and arrows of life and his heavenly resounding zither (*ame no norigoto* 天詔琴), and fled. The heavenly resounding zither brushed against a tree, and the earth thundered.¹⁷

The *to* of the “door to the chamber” here has the meaning of “portal,” but the setting, with Ōkuninushi blocking it with a “boulder needing five hundred people to pull it” and then fleeing, has several features in common with the *kotodo* passage. Although Susanoo is ultimately able to get past this boulder, blocking the door with it separates two different realms. In this sense *to* in this passage resembles the *to* in both *kotodo* and *iwaya no to*.

The following account in the tenth variant of the fifth section of the *Nihon shoki* Age of Deities chapter may also bear on the expression *kotodo*:

Pursuing Izanami, Izanaki reached the place where she was. Addressing her, he said, “I have come because I grieved for you.” “My kin (*ugara* 族),” Izanami responded, “do not look upon me.” Izanaki did not do as she said and observed her. Ashamed and resentful, Izanami thereupon said, “You have seen my true state. I will thus look at your true state.” Izanaki then felt shamed and sought to go back. However, instead of going back directly without saying anything, he declared a vow: “Our kinship is severed!” He also declared, “I will not be defeated by my kin!” The deity that [emerged from] his spit was named Hayatamanoo 速玉之男. The deity that next [emerged when the pollution of Yomi] was swept away was named Yomotsukotosakanoo 泉津事解之男. There were two deities in total. When he then battled with his sister-spouse at the Yomi border slope, Izanaki declared, “How weak of me to have first grieved and longed for my kin!” The road guardian of Yomi then said, “[Izanami] has a statement: ‘I have already borne the lands with you. Why should I further seek to live? I will stay in this land and will not return with you.’” Thereupon Kikurihime no kami 菊理媛神 made a statement. Hearing it, Izanaki praised it and departed.¹⁸

In this variant's account of Izanaki's and Izanami's estrangement, Izanaki declares “Our kinship is severed!” and “I will not be defeated by my kin!” The deity who sweeps away the evils of the Land of Yomi is named Yomotsukotosakanoo. The compilers of the SNKBZ edition of *Nihon shoki* explain *kotosaka* 事解 as meaning “to leave behind (*saru* 避る) or to separate oneself (*sakaru* 離る) from a matter or words. The name means ‘male deity who oversees separation from the affairs of the Land of Yomi, breaking the relationship.’”¹⁹ It is a deity name that carries a meaning close to that of *kotodo o*

¹⁷ Chapter 27.

¹⁸ Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 2, pp. 54–57.

¹⁹ Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 2, p. 56, headnote 12.

watasu. Norinaga's hypothesis that *kotodo* might be a contracted form of *kototokegoto* 事解言 may bear reconsideration.²⁰

Taniguchi Masahiro, *Ancient Japanese Literature*

2. “The Ifuya border slope in the land of Izumo” (Izumo no kuni no Ifuyasaka 出雲国之伊賦夜坂)

An Iya 揖屋 Shrine stands in a locale of the same name in present Higashi-Izumo-chō 東出雲町 (Matsue 松江 city, Shimane Prefecture). A site long said to be the remains of the Yomi border slope can be found in the same area. Historical evidence regarding Iya Shrine includes mention of an Ifuya no yashiro 伊布夜社 in the section of the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* on Ou 意宇 district.²¹ The list of shrines in *Engi shiki* records an Iya jinja 揖屋神社 in the same district.²²

The *Nihon shoki* chronicle of Empress Saimei 齊明 also contains a reference to a Ifuya 言屋 Shrine. It relates that in the fifth year of the empress's reign (659 CE), the traditional chief local authority in Izumo, the *kuni no miyatsuko* 国造, was commanded to repair a shrine. (Some commentators take this command to refer to the Kumano Taisha 熊野大社, located in Yakumo-chō 八雲町, Matsue city, others to the Izumo Taisha 出雲大社). The narration continues:

A fox bit off the end of a vine that a service laborer from the district of Ou had collected and ran away. Further, a dog chewed off a dead man's arm and left it in the Ifuya 言屋 Shrine. (These were portents of the empress's impending death.)²³

It is difficult to know whether the compilers intended to connect the strange actions of the fox and the dog to the preceding statement about repair of a shrine, but the mention of Ifuya Shrine in connection to these inauspicious events suggests that people associated it with the realm of death.

The implications of “Ifuya border slope” should also be considered in conjunction with those of Hibanoyama mountain, which the *Kojiki* has previously identified as the place where Izanami no kami was buried, and the site identified as “the foot of Temanoyama mountain 手間山本 in the land of Hōki,” a locale presumably near

²⁰ Norinaga refers to this *Nihon shoki* variant in suggesting that *kotodo* might be a contraction of *kototokegoto*, arguing that 解 could be read *toke* as well as *saka*. Motoori Norinaga, *Kojiki den*, MNZ 9, p. 255. (TN) For further discussion of the issues taken up in this comment, see Taniguchi Masahiro, *Kojiki no hyōgen to bunmyaku*, pp. 98–111.

²¹ Uegaki, *Fudoki*, SNKBZ 5, pp. 150–51.

²² Torao, *Engi shiki*, vol. 1, p. 668.

²³ Kojima et al., *Nihon shoki*, SNKBZ 4, pp. 228–29.

Hibanoyama, where Ōkuninushi's brothers subject him to multiple torments.²⁴ Also pertinent are the “Yomi slope, Yomi hole” (*Yomi no saka Yomi no ana* 黄泉之坂黄泉之穴), mentioned in the section on Izumo district in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*, and “the base of Ukanoyama mountain” (*Ukanoyama no yamamoto* 宇迦能山之山本). The *Kojiki* subsequently relates that Susanoo names this last site as the locale where Ōkuninushi should erect his hall after the latter escapes from Nenokatasukuni. Ukanoyama is located in the same district as the “Yomi slope, Yomi hole” mentioned in *Izumo no kuni fudoki*.²⁵

Bibliographic Data

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²⁴ Hibanoyama is described as situated on the border between the land of Izumo and the land of Hōki (chapter 7). For Temanoyama, see chapter 26.

²⁵ See Uegaki, *Fudoki*, pp. 212–23, and chapter 28.