

Richard TORRANCE

## Ōnamochi

### The Great God who Created All Under Heaven

In the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*, the deity Ōnamochi no mikoto, most commonly known as Ōkuninushi no mikoto, is customarily referred to with the designation “The Great God who Created All Under Heaven.” This study, which is indebted to the research of Kanda Norishiro, examines what the title “The Great God who Created All Under Heaven” signifies. Eighth-century texts, primarily the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* but also the *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, *Manyōshū*, and *Harima no kuni fudoki*, establish that Ōnamochi is a deity who attracted a number of divine characteristics over time. The geographical extent of “all under heaven” is first defined as embracing the entire terrestrial realm, not just Izumo. The heroic Ōnamochi, Ōnamochi the god of agriculture, Ōnamochi as the great lover, Ōnamochi’s transformation into a bird, and Ōnamochi as a god who guards the sea and welcomes deities from beyond the horizon are described. In conclusion, the continued vitality of the god in Izumo is examined.

KEYWORDS: Ōnamochi no mikoto—Ōkuninushi no mikoto—Yayoi ritual—Izumo myth—sacred birds—*amatsugami/kunitsukami*

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THE GOD known as Ōnamochi no mikoto 大穴持命 in the *Izumo fudoki* is the most important deity of Izumo's several gods of creation. He is customarily referred to in the *Izumo fudoki* as “The Great Deity who Created All Under Heaven” (Ame no shita tsukurashishi ōkami 所造天下大神). In the *Nihon shoki*, he is referred to as Ōkuninushi no kami 大国主神, Ōmononushi no kami 大物主神, Kunitsukuri Ōanamuchi no mikoto 国造大己貴命, Ashihara no shikoo 葦原醜男, Yachihoko no kami 八千戈神, Ōkunidama no kami 大国玉神, and Utsushikunidama no kami 顯国玉神 (SNKBZ 2: 102–103). In the *Kojiki*, he is referred to as Ōkuninushi no kami 大国主神, Ōnamuji no kami 大穴牟遲神, Ashihara no shikoo 葦原色許男神, Yachihoko no kami 八千矛神, and Utsushikunidama no kami 宇都志国玉神 (SNKBZ 1: 74–75). For consistency, the deity is referred to here by his name in the *Izumo fudoki*, Ōnamochi, except in those instances in which he is referenced by a different name in a specific source. That said, the most frequent names for the great god reference much the same thing: Ōnamuchi no mikoto 大己貴命, Ōnamuji no kami 大穴牟遲神, Great Land Revered Noble Lord, Ōkuninushi, Great Land/Country Ruler, Ōnamochi, Great Land Possessor (TAKIOTO 1998b, 35–38; PHILIPPI, 1968, 543, 545–46).

This core ensemble of names would appear to be regional dialectal or translational variations of what may have been the original Ōnamochi. Utsushikunidama no kami, “Land-spirit deity of the visible land” (PHILIPPI 1968, 625), is probably an interpretive title given by the compilers of imperial myth to draw a distinction between gods of the terrestrial (visible) realm as opposed to gods of the heavenly realm. Ōmononushi is worshiped as a separate deity at a number of shrines, but is identified as the “gentle spirit” (*wakon* 和魂) of Ōnamochi in specific circumstances and rites, notably in the *Nihon shoki* and the rite of Izumo no Kuni no Miyatsuko no Kamuyogoto 出雲国造神賀詞 (Divine Congratulatory Words of the Kuni no Miyatsuko of Izumo) (BOCK 1972, 102–105).<sup>1</sup>

Mizuno Yū, a doyen of Izumo studies, argued that there are two Izumo mythologies. The first, partially represented in the *Izumo fudoki*, consists of local

1. This was a rite performed at court by the Izumo Kuni no Miyatsuko to pray for the emperor's longevity and the prosperity of his reign. Ōnamochi installed his benign spirit in a mirror with the name Ōmononushi in the divine woods of Mt. Miwa 三輪 (ANDREEVA 2017, 58–59; ZHONG 2016, 126–27). However, as Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) argued at some length, “Ōmononushi is the name of the spirit of the deity ensconced at Mt. Miwa and is not one of the names of Ōnamuji no mikoto. Ōmononushi should be recognized as Yamato Ōmononushi” (*Kojiki den* 10: 422–23). I will not deal with this deity as a manifestation of Ōnamochi.

religious beliefs, practices, rituals, and deities of the people of Izumo and other regions. The other is the imperial Izumo mythology intended to subordinate and incorporate the gods of Izumo to the imperial pantheon (MIZUNO 1998, 12).<sup>2</sup> Since this study focuses on the former, I refer to him by his name in the *Izumo fudoki*, though I often abbreviate his title as “The Great God who Created All Under Heaven.” Those in positions of authority in the center—in this case, the Nara aristocracy—depict regions in terms of status as a “spacialization” of social hierarchy, with people and deities in the exterior occupying an inferior space to those in the interior. Regarding the discourse surrounding the Great God in the *Izumo fudoki*, this specialization was cast in terms of the terrestrial realm in contrast to the heavenly realm. One way to counter this distorting tendency is to emphasize the beliefs and perspectives of those living in the “periphery.” This constitutes the majority of people living on the Japanese archipelago at any period of time, people for whom the periphery is the center.<sup>3</sup> However, reconstructing the beliefs, rituals, and perspectives of people living in the countryside during the Nara period is difficult. The imperial histories, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, are important sources, but the information about the provinces was shaped by the main ideological thrust of the imperial mythic histories: the subordination of earthly deities to heavenly deities and thus the supremacy of the imperial institution (TEEUWEN and BREEN, 2017, 20–22).<sup>4</sup>

The *Izumo fudoki* is a unique and invaluable resource among eighth-century narratives.<sup>5</sup> It is one of only five extant *fudoki* 風土記 (regional gazetteers) and the only one that has almost completely survived. The *Izumo fudoki* is the only *fudoki* that was compiled by local officials.<sup>6</sup> The others were completed by governors and other officials sent to the province from the Nara court. As a result, the *Izumo fudoki* is far more detailed in the geographical and other specifics of the province. The multiple compilers of the work obviously knew the region

2. For a brief biographical sketch of Mizuno, see ZHONG (2016, 207).

3. I have adopted a similar argument in the context of the modern period (TORRANCE 1996).

4. Okamoto Masataka argues that this distinction between heavenly and terrestrial deities was the basis for the division between the Yamato *minzoku* 民族 as descendants of heaven and Izumo *minzoku* as a people who would not submit (OKAMOTO 2014, 5). Kōnoshi Takamitsu provides an excellent summary of how over time the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* were used as a political tool to support the imperial institution (KŌNOSHI 2000).

5. In 713, an order was sent out to all provinces to submit a report detailing such matters as the individual province’s natural resources, fauna and flora, local myths and gods, and so on. The *Izumo fudoki* was one of these reports.

6. The *Izumo fudoki* was signed by the magistrate (*kuni no miyatsuko* 国造), Izumo no Omi Hiroshima 出雲臣広嶋, and his assistant from the Aika District, Miyake no Omi Kanatari 宅臣金太理. However, multiple local officials from each district had to sign off on the report for their individual districts. For an account of the textual history of the *Izumo fudoki*, see SIKFS 15–26. For an account in English, see CARLQUIST (2005, 70–77).

well. The other *fudoki* frequently reference the heroic deeds and received benefices of emperors, empresses, imperial princes, and gods of the imperial line. The *Izumo fudoki*, in contrast, mentions the emperor only four times, and these are merely to date the action in the context of local affairs. Moreover, a spirit of independence is openly expressed. Since this study discusses the deity Ōnamochi in the context of the Izumo region, the *Izumo fudoki* will be regarded as the primary text and the *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and other sources as supplements.

### *Ōnamochi in Izumo and the Terrestrial Realm*

Ōnamochi's multiple names indicate that Ōnamochi is a composite of many deities. To paraphrase BARBER and BARBER (2004, 124–25), as tales of gods are told and retold, the actions of lesser gods are attributed to greater gods. This process of distillation means that often the major gods in oral narratives have existed longer than myths dominated by lesser gods. Or put another way, with the emergence of powerful regional chieftains and kinship groups and the expansion of their areas of influence in the west of Izumo during the first century, their gods, such as Ōnamochi, began to subsume the identities and functions of the local deities of smaller communities. The process by which Ōnamochi became the chief god of Izumo and came to be a figure worshiped beyond its borders probably required several centuries. One can surmise that the process began approximately 1,900 to 2,000 years ago at around the time 419 bronze ceremonial objects, including forty-six bronze bells, were buried in the west of Izumo at Kōjindani 荒神谷 and Kamo Iwakura 加茂岩倉, and the subsequent creation and spread of the four-cornered extended burial mounds (*yosumi tosshutsugata funkyūbo* 四隅突出型墳丘), so named because their four corners extend out from the burial platform (PIGGOTT 1989, 46–51; TORRANCE 2016, 11–12).

This Izumo deity, then, is complex and multifaceted. To understand the god, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the title “The Great God who Created All Under Heaven,” which is consistently applied to Ōnamochi no mikoto in the *Izumo fudoki* and on occasion in other eighth-century texts. The first question to be clarified concerns what geographical realm is being referred to. Is it Izumo alone, or is it the entire terrestrial realm? The consistent reference to Ōnamochi in the *Izumo fudoki* as the creator of the terrestrial realm refers to a realm beyond that of Izumo alone. Ōnamochi's non-surrender of Izumo makes this clear:

The lands I created and over which I ruled I have entrusted to the benevolent governance of heaven and its descendants in order to bring peace to the world. All except this land of Izumo, this land of eight-fold clouds where my spirit resides in peace, this land surrounded by fences of green mountains, I shall love it as a jewel, I shall attach to it my jeweled spirit, and I shall defend it.

(SIKFS 83; AOKI 1997, 82)

As Murai Yasuhiko has argued, this passage was a strong statement on the part of Izumo's elite, which may well have traced their lineages back to the age of the Izumo gods in the Yayoi period, declaring the independence of the region and warning the Nara imperial court not to interfere in the region's affairs or make incursions into Izumo territory. In this sense, the *Izumo fudoki* is a forceful contemporary political document (MURAI 2015, 25).

This notion of Ōnamochi's creation and control of the terrestrial realm is unequivocally stated in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. In the *Kojiki* and first variant of the *Nihon shoki*, Ōnamochi is the ruler of all the terrestrial realm, so when he surrenders, Takemikazuchi no kami 建御雷神 and Amenotorifune no kami 天鳥船神 return to the heavenly realm to report the success of their mission: the securing of the whole of the terrestrial realm for the rule of Amaterasu's grandson Ninigi no mikoto 瓊瓊杵尊 (SNKBZ 1: 112–13; 2: 128–29). However, in the main text of the *Nihon shoki* (SNKBZ 2: 118–19) and in the second variant (SNKBZ 2: 136–37), Futsunushi no kami 経津主神 and Takemikazuchi no kami 武甕槌神 go on to conquer all the rebellious deities and spirits, which suggests that Ōnamochi's rule is limited to Izumo.

On the other hand, most references in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* suggest that Ōnamochi created and ruled over the terrestrial realm. In the *Kojiki*, after vanquishing the myriad evil deities, Ōkuninushi “began to create the land” (SNKBZ 1: 84–85). Or again, Kamimusubi no kami's 神産巢日神 child, Sukunabikona no kami 少名毘古那神, arrives from across the sea, and the goddess instructs both deities to work together to create and solidify the terrestrial realm. “Ōnamuji and Sukunabikona no kami thereupon created and solidified the land together” (SNKBZ 1: 94–95). Similarly, the *Nihon shoki* states:

Ōanamuchi no mikoto and Sukunabikona no mikoto worked together with one heart to create the terrestrial realm. Moreover, for the benefit of humankind and animals, they established methods to cure illness. And they also developed rites and invocations to prevent the harm caused by insects and birds and beasts and creeping things. Thus it is that humankind down to the present owes a great debt of gratitude to Ōanamuchi no mikoto and Sukunabikona no mikoto. (SNKBZ 2: 102–103)

It is in this passage as well that Ōnamochi is described as “He who Created the Land” (Kunitsukuri no Ōanamuchi no mikoto 国作大己貴命). And, it is only after having created the terrestrial realm that Ōnamochi proceeds to Izumo and reigns over that land.

The literature of the eighth century, then, indicates that Ōnamochi was regarded by many as the ruling deity of the terrestrial realm. If taken literally as reflecting an historical reality, this would mean that Izumo preexisted the Yamato as the dominant power in the archipelago and that the people of Izumo were an

indigenous people who were displaced by the superior Yamato.<sup>7</sup> This impression is further strengthened by the fact that, from at least the historical period, a distinction was drawn between the gods of heaven (*amatsugami* 天津神, *tenjin* 天神) and the gods of the earth (*kunitsukami* 国津神, *chigi* 地祇), who were held to be the ancestors of Izumo people.<sup>8</sup>

However, Mizuno cogently argues that given the fact that it required some three centuries for the Yamato—a relentlessly expansionary power utilizing the latest technology, ideas, and peoples from the Asian continent—to establish a widely recognized central authority, it makes no sense to maintain that Izumo had control of much of the Japanese archipelago during the Yayoi period (MIZUNO 1972, 105). That said, archaeological and other evidence does support the idea that there was an Izumo cultural zone based on a confederacy that extended along the Japan Sea from Mt. Sanbe 三瓶 to somewhere around Kurayoshi 倉吉 in present-day Tottori Prefecture. Based on the distribution of the four-cornered extended burial mounds, which were first created in Izumo and spread throughout the region and beyond, Ishizuka Takatoshi and others have argued convincingly for the existence of the Izumo cultural zone (ISHIZUKA 2004, 15–22; ASHIDA and HARA 2010).

The Izumo confederacy was linked in alliances to Tsukushi 筑紫 and Koshi 越, and shrines dedicated to Ōnamochi were widespread along the Japan Sea coast and down into Harima 播磨 and other regions.<sup>9</sup> From at least the first century,

7. Murai Yasuhiko has recently proposed a complex variation on this idea. To simplify, based in part on the Izumo lineages claimed by such powerful imperial court-related groups as Ōmiwa, Kamo, and Katsuragi, the texts of the *Nihon shoki* and *Kojiki*, and the distribution of Izumo related shrines, Murai claims that Izumo led an alliance that installed the Yamatai state 邪馬台国 in the Nara basin centered at the Karako/Kagi 唐古·鍵 archaeological sites. This political power was overthrown by the Yamato, and Izumo was confined to its home region along the Japan Sea coast (MURAI 2015, 3).

8. MIZUNO (1969, 266–69) has established that arguments concerning definitions of Yamato and Izumo peoples as distinct ethnic groups are simply not tenable.

9. Based on the 1747 survey of shrines listed in the *Engishiki jinmyōchō*, Itō Tomokazu concludes that there were 361 Ōkuninushi-related shrines nationwide. However, this research was carried out some eight hundred years after the creation of the *Engishiki jinmyōchō* and provides unreliable evidence concerning the distribution of Ōnamochi worship prior to the tenth century (ITŌ 2014). A conservative assessment of the *Engishiki jinmyōchō* as it concerns Ōnamochi must depend largely on the shrines that bear the name Ōnamochi or some variation. There are seventeen shrines dedicated to Ōnamochi distributed in Yamato, Noto, Izumo, Harima, Echigo, Hyūga, and Osumi. It is interesting to note that there is one Ōkuninushi shrine in Kawachi, which suggests that the Ōnamochi shrines could well have preexisted, or at least were not influenced by imperial myth, the main source where the name Ōkuninushi appears (*Engishiki* 1: 522, 525, 546, 640, 667–75, 682, 713, 718, 719). In addition, the numerous Keta shrines along the Japan Sea coast, particularly in the former confederacy of Koshi, were likely devoted to Ōnamochi, as were the Hikawa shrines in the Kanto region. From what can be gleaned from this early record, Ōnamochi was widely worshiped in a variety of locales in the archipelago. As a point of comparison,

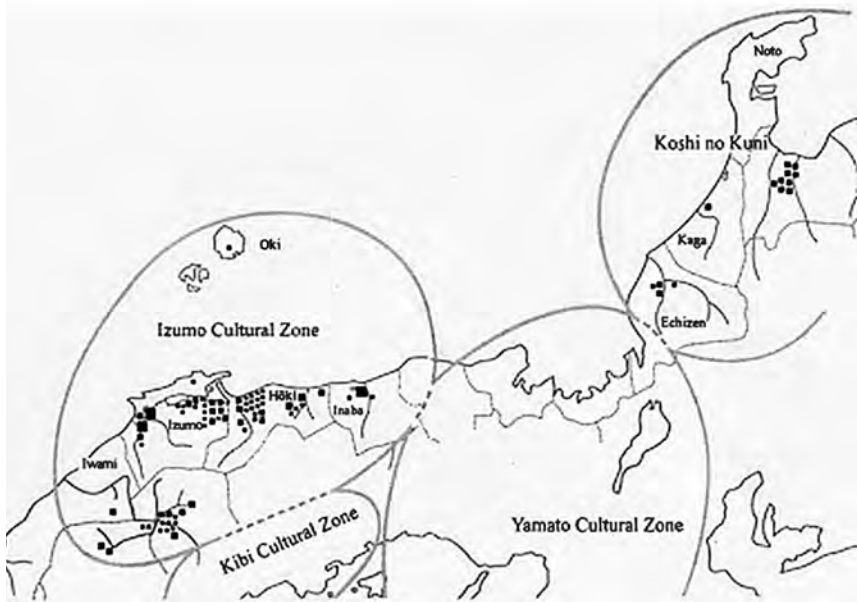


FIGURE 1. Map of the Izumo cultural zone with black squares representing the over ninety excavated four-cornered extended burial mounds of varying sizes. Adapted from ISHIZUKA (2004, 18–19).

the Izumo cultural zone was also a focal point of a trade network: iron ingots directly from the Korean Peninsula and indirectly from northern Kyushu, ceremonial swords from Silla, pottery from Kibi and Koshi, bronze ceremonial objects from Yamato, obsidian from the Oki Islands, and so on. At the eastern edge of the Izumo cultural zone at the trading outpost Aoya Kamijichi 青谷上寺地—around where Ōnamochi is said to have encountered the Inaba white rabbit—archaeologists have unearthed a bronze mirror cast in China during the first century BCE, Chinese coins minted between 14–40 CE, jasper from Komatsu 小松, Ishikawa Prefecture, and numerous other imports from regions outside the zone. Izumo exports included forestry products, probably from Izumo, discovered in the south of the Korean Peninsula, *tama* 玉 jewels of agate, jasper, and jade found throughout central Honshu, iron tools, and *haniwa* 埴輪 (TAKIOTO 2001, 187–89; TORRANCE 2016, 17–18).<sup>10</sup>

Bock lists ten shrines dedicated to Amaterasu and the probably male deity Amateru (BOCK 1972, 109). On the Keta and Hikawa lineage of shrines being originally dedicated to Ōnamochi, see OKAMOTO (2016, 80–81, 288–91).

10. Iron objects created from Korean imported ingots were common throughout the Izumo cultural zone during the late Yayoi period (URABE 2006, 16).



Faced with the reality that Ōnamochi was widely worshiped within Izumo and in a number of regions throughout the archipelago, the compilers of imperial myth had to accommodate their relatively recent mythic pantheon with Amaterasu at its head to a preexisting religious tradition centered in Izumo, a body of myth so widely believed that it had to be incorporated.<sup>11</sup> By creating the duality of “gods of heaven” and “gods of the terrestrial realm” and giving vastly superior status to the gods of heaven, the compilers solved the problem.

In this analysis of the title “The Great God who Created All Under Heaven” it seems clear that “all under heaven” signified the terrestrial realm extending beyond the boundaries of Izumo. The next question to be addressed is, what actions or characteristics constituted the creation or creator of “all under heaven”? To address this question, the following themes will be explored: Ōnamochi as heroic figure; Ōnamochi as the god of agriculture; Ōnamochi as the great lover; Ōnamochi’s transformation into a bird; and Ōnamochi as guardian of sea routes and a god who welcomes deities from beyond the horizon.

### *Ōnamochi as Heroic Figure*

In the *Kojiki*, Ōnamochi, first under the name Ōnamuji and then Ōkuninushi, is put through a series of tests from which he emerges as a hero and leader of the terrestrial realm. The story is well known: (1) Ōnamuji heals the rabbit and wins the love of Yagami hime 八上比売; (2) the jealous eighty evil brother gods (Yasogami 八十神) kill Ōnamuji twice, but he is resurrected first by Kiskai hime 蛸貝比売 (Ark Shell goddess) and Umugai hime 蛤貝比売 (Clam goddess) who are both sent to do so by Kamimusubi no kami 神産巢日神 and then by his mother; (3) Ōnamuji flees to the side of Susano no mikoto 須佐野男命, who resides in Ne no katasu kuni 根の堅洲国, regarded as an alternate term for Yomi no kuni 黄泉の国 (Land of the Dead). Susano’s daughter Suseribime no mikoto 須世理毘売命 falls in love with Ōnamuji at first sight; (4) Susano subjects Ōnamuji to sleeping with snakes then to a burning plain where he is saved by a mouse; (5) Ōnamuji tricks Susano and flees with Suseribime and Susano’s magic sword, bow and arrows, and *koto* 琴; (6) Susano gives Ōnamuji the names Ōkuninushi and Utsushikunidama no kami and orders him to do battle with eighty evil gods; (7) Ōkuninushi defeats the evil deities and begins to create the terrestrial realm;

11. Amaterasu was of relatively recent origin as head of the imperial pantheon of gods (KIRKLAND 1997, 123; BREEN and TEEUWEN 2010, 134). Incorporating competitors’ deities into one’s own pantheon appears to be a logical and universal practice: “If two cultures become closely familiar with each other’s religions, thanks to invasion or intense trade, people begin to see yet more aspects of the world than before, aspects which their new acquaintances view as willful and hence potentially dangerous if slighted. Prudence suggests that one adopt these new divinities” (BARBER and BARBER 2004, 62).



(8) Sukunabikona no kami and Ōkuninushi create the terrestrial realm; (9) Ōkuninushi surrenders his realm to the heavenly deities; and (10) Ōkuninushi demands that he be worshiped at a shrine, which towers to the heavens, constructed for him.

This account of Ōnamochi in the *Kojiki* is one of the few that is broadly congruent with the accounts of deities in the *Izumo fudoki*: (1) Ōnamochi offers his lands outside of Izumo to the heavenly deities but vows to protect Izumo as his own; (2) He pacifies Koshi no yakuchi 越八口; (3) At the township of Tashimi 手染, Ōnamochi states that “this is a fine land I have created”; (4) Ōnamochi tours the realm with Sukunahiko no mikoto 須久奈比古命; (5) Ōnamochi woos Wakasuseri hime no mikoto 若須世理比壳命; (6) Ōnamochi battles the eighty evil gods; (7) Yatsukamizu omizuno no mikoto 八束水臣津野命 and Kamimusubi no mikoto 神魂命 create a shrine for Ōnamochi that towers to the heavens;<sup>12</sup> (8) Kamimusubi’s child Umukai hime 宇武賀比壳 transforms into a warbler; (9) Kamimusubi’s child Kisaka hime 支佐加比壳命 gives birth to the Great God of Sada (Sada no ōkami 佐太大神); and (10) the entrance to the world of the dead (Yomi no saka/ana 黄泉之坂/穴) is recorded as existing in Uka 宇賀 Township.

Matsumoto Naoki writes that in order to create a “new mythology” to support a new Yamato state, the compilers of imperial myth had to incorporate existing myth, not only the myth of the groups forming the Yamato confederacy but also the myths in the regions outside the confederacy, and “vestiges of myths common among the general population remain in the ‘myths’ of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*” (MATSUMOTO 2016, 31). The broad outlines of Izumo’s Ōnamochi hero myth as it was originally transmitted to the center by *kataribe* 語部 are discernible in imperial myth.<sup>13</sup> However, at critical points, the compilers of imperial myth manipulated Izumo’s Ōnamochi myth to reinforce imperial claims of sovereignty over the terrestrial realm. One of these manipulations was the invented relationship with Susanoo.

If one were to define the gods of Izumo according to the Izumo cycle of myth in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, then it would make sense to argue, as does James Grayson, that “The Izumo mythic cycle is a foundation myth demonstrating that the central figure of the narrative, Susa-no-o, is the primal ancestor of the ruling house of the area [Izumo]” (GRAYSON 2002, 467). Since imperial myth contains several references to connections between Susanoo no mikoto 須佐能袁命 and Silla and the archaeological evidence supports the influence of Silla on Izumo, as does the *Izumo fudoki*, it would follow that Ōnamochi no mikoto as a descendant

12. Morita Kikuo points out many of these similarities (MORITA 2014, 14–16).

13. Kadowaki Teiji reconstructs the multiple routes by which the *kataribe*’s Izumo myths may have been transmitted to the compilers of imperial myth (KADOWAKI 1987, 241–45).

of Susanoo is a lineage traceable to a Korean origin.<sup>14</sup> The problem with this theory is that in the *Izumo fudoki*, which is fairly detailed in describing the lineage of deities, there is no mention of Ōnamochi being a descendant of Susanoo. Indeed, Susanoo is the least important of the Izumo's gods of creation, which include Ōnamochi, Kamimusubi no mikoto, and Yatsukamizu omizuno no mikoto. Susanoo's activities are mentioned only four times in the *Izumo fudoki*. These activities are limited to the fertile valleys of Izumo's mountainous south, and there is nothing particularly heroic or monumental about them. Early on, Mizuno Yū posited that Susanoo was a deity who entered Izumo together with Silla immigrants. Finding the fertile Ou, Izumo, and Nogi plains already populated, the immigrants made their way into the mountainous south, rich in iron sand, where they ultimately prospered as workers in iron (MIZUNO 1972, 198–99). The earliest definitive evidence for iron smelting in Izumo is the sixth century, though there are indications that it may have been as early as the late third or the beginning of the fourth century (TANAKA 2011, 419–23). If Mizuno's thesis is correct and the immigrants from Silla found a niche by exploiting the iron sands in the mountainous south, the god they worshiped, Susanoo, was a relative newcomer to Izumo.<sup>15</sup>

As Yamaguchi Hiroshi has written, “The *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* compiled in the center have detailed and vivid descriptions of Susanoo, but it is clear that in the locally produced *Izumo no kuni fudoki* or *Amabe shi keizu*, Susanoo was merely a minor, undistinguished deity. Susanoo was simply a god of agriculture in mountain communities” (YAMAGUCHI 2012, 46).<sup>16</sup> He concludes that Susanoo was a deity created by the imperial polity. Similarly, Tsuda Sōkichi, as early as 1924, wrote, “Susanoo was nothing more than the creation of the minds of the authors of mythic history...” (TSUDA 1924, 421 [218]). Maeshiro Naoko argues that the creation of a direct line of descent from Susanoo to Ōnamochi was a crucial element of the imperial mythology created in an attempt to unify the

14. ANDREEVA (2017, 44) follows Grayson's line of reasoning. She also states that the *Izumo fudoki* describes the peaceful surrender of Izumo. This is not the case. For example, the archaeologist Kawahara Kazuto notes that the importation of goods and farming techniques into Izumo from Korea continued from the late Jomon period on (KAWAHARA 2017, 45), and he concludes of Izumo in the latter half of the seventh century to the mid-eighth century, “Judging from the ancient roofing tiles excavated, one can probably say that Izumo's relationship with Silla was quite deep and extensive” (KAWAHARA 2014, 231).

15. For further evidence supporting the idea that Susanoo was a deity worshiped by Korean immigrants involved in iron smelting, see TAKIOTO (2001, 62–64).

16. The *Amabe shi kanchū keizu* section of the *Amabe shi keizu* has it that the ancestor deity of the Amabe was the heavenly deity Hoakari no mikoto 火明命 who wed Ōnamuchi no kami's daughter Ama no michi hime no mikoto 天道日女命. The twelfth-generation descendant of this union was Takeinadane no mikoto 建稲種命, who has the alternate name Susanoo no mikoto 須佐之男命 (*Amabe shi keizu*, 24–25, 39). This manuscript is one of Japan's earliest genealogies and was designated a national treasure in 1976.

country and its gods under central leadership. Susanoo, a heavenly deity, commands his descendant, Ōkuninushi, to create the terrestrial realm. Ōkuninushi thus becomes the representative deity of all terrestrial deities, and this legitimized his later surrender of the terrestrial realm (*kuniyuzuri* 国譲り) to the heavenly deities (MAESHIRO 2003, 4–7). From what can be inferred from the *Engishiki jinmyōchō* 延喜式神名帳, at the beginning of the tenth century, Susanoo no mikoto was worshiped at only four identifiable shrines: two in Izumo, Susa 須佐 Shrine, and Susanoo 須佐袁 Shrine, a sub-shrine of Asuki 阿須伎 Shrine, a Susanoo Shrine in the province of Bingo 備後, and a Susa Shrine in the province of Kii 紀伊 (*Engishiki* 1: 673, 675, 691, 699).

The creation of the ancestral relationship and the subsequent contest between the two deities was a narrative invention and ideological projection on the part of the creators of imperial mytho-history to establish subordination of terrestrial gods to the heavenly deities and to establish Ōkuninushi with the legitimate right, as vested in him by the heavenly god Susanoo, to surrender the terrestrial realm to Amaterasu's descendants.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, this surrender, the so-called *kuniyuzuri* in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, is the non-*kuniyuzuri* (the non-surrender) in the *Izumo fudoki*.

One has to admire the creativity with which the compilers of imperial myth turned this relatively unimportant deity into the major protagonist of the Izumo cycle of myth, which constitutes about a third of the account of the age of gods in the *Kojiki*. As Cornelius Ouwehand has argued, it is the ambiguous character of the god—good god and bad god, heavenly god and earthly god, destroyer of life and bestower of life—that enables him to be a conduit for various imperial ideological motives and to assert explanatory authority over local folk rituals and tales for the Nara court (OUWEHAND 1958–1959, 386). The fact that the accounts of Ōnamochi in imperial myth and local Izumo myth do coincide on some major points leads one to believe that elements of the Ōnamochi becoming hero myth were in broad circulation in seventh century Japan and that these were enhanced and dramatized in their incorporation into imperial myth. Ōnamochi was the principal deity of the Izumo region. However, other than manipulated lineages in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, there is a lack of objective evidence for

17. On the main ideological thrust of the imperial mytho-history being the subordination of earthly deities to heavenly deities, and thus the supremacy of the imperial institution, see TEEUWEN and BREEN (2017, 20–22). That this relationship, and indeed many aspects of the Susanoo and Ōkuninushi myths in the imperial histories were invented by the compilers of imperial myth, see MATSUMOTO (2016, 49–74). Emilia GADELEVA (2000, 199) comes to much the same conclusion concerning the imperial court's "invention" of the line of descent from Susanoo to Ōnamochi.

assuming that Ōnamochi as he was originally worshiped in the Izumo region was a foreign deity from Korea.<sup>18</sup>

The *Izumo fudoki* provides a fairly clear view of the distribution of major gods worshiped by kinship groups in the Izumo region. Susanoo no mikoto's activities are limited to the mountainous south. Kamimusubi no mikoto's presence is most marked in the northern coastal regions of the Shimane Peninsula, the districts of Tatenui 楯縫, and Izumo. Yatsukamizu omizuno no mikoto was probably the god of seafaring people, who formed trade and migration relations broadly with Silla, the Oki 隱岐 Islands, and the Noto 能登 Peninsula, among other regions, and was worshiped primarily in the Izumo District. Only the god Ōnamochi was worshiped in almost all regions of Izumo. His name and actions appear in the *Izumo fudoki* more frequently than any other deity in the work. Katō Yoshinari argues that Izumo deities began as local communal gods, and, as the influence of local leaders gradually expanded, so did worship of their gods. The gods of the west came to dominate over time and were worshiped throughout Izumo, while the gods of the east fell into relative silence (KATŌ 1996, 2: 38). Since the archaeological record seems to show that the rise of the west of Izumo economically, agriculturally, and in terms of trade occurred between the first and fourth centuries, it follows that the spread of Izumo's western gods, particularly Ōnamochi, throughout Izumo took place during this period forward (KAWAHARA 2017, 88–167; TORRANCE 2016, 13–16). Ōnamochi is the god of gods in Izumo, and in Katō Yoshinari's words, "The deity represents an ideal, and he was esteemed as such" (KATŌ 1996, 2: 16). He is the protector of the realm, honored by Izumo's other gods of creation, Yatsukamizu omizuno no mikoto and Kamimusubi no mikoto, by their creation of his dwelling reaching to the sky. The deity names the land in almost all the districts of Izumo.

After subduing and bringing peace to Yakuchi in the distant realm of Koshi, Ōnamochi, the great god who created all under heaven, arrived at a well-wooded place in the Ou District and thereupon declared, "This place invigorates me *hayashi* 波夜志." Thus, the township is called *hayashi* 林 (forest) (SIKFS 113). Similarly, in the east, he names the township of Tashimi in the Shimane District (SIKFS 185). In the west, he names the township of Kutami 玖潭 in the Shimane District (SIKFS 288), in the south, the district of Nita 仁多 (SIKFS 406), and the township of Mitokoro 三処 (SIKFS 407).

Ōnamochi is also the martial god who strikes and conquers his enemies. In the Ōhara 大原 District, this township was the place where the great god, he

18. ZHONG (2016, 201–10) points out that the idea of Ōkuninushi being a Korean god has a long history and was used during the Meiji period to promote the idea of *nissen dōsoron* 日鮮同祖論 (the theory that Japan and Korea share a common ancestry), which in turn was used to justify Japan's colonial rule. The theory's methodology based on mythology fell into disfavor after the war.



FIGURE 2. Map of Izumo districts during the Nara period.

who created all under heaven, built a fortress and shot arrows at his enemies. Thus this township is called Yashiro 矢城 (Fortress of Arrows) (SIKFS 431). In the township of Kisuki 来次 in the Ōhara District, the great god, declared, “The eighty [myriad] gods are encamped in the back of Mt. Aogaki 青垣. I shall not permit it.” Thereupon, he attacked and dispersed them (SIKFS 438). At Mt. Kinahi 城名樋 in the Ōhara District, the great god built a fortress to strike the eighty gods (SIKFS 448).

The deity is the possessor of powerful religious ceremonial objects. In the Ōhara District, the great god stored his divine treasures. Thus, the place was known as the Kamumitakara 神御財 (Divine Treasures) Township (SIKFS 430). In a cavern on a mountain peak in the district of Iishi 飯石, the great god placed his sacred musical instrument, the *koto*. Thus this place is called Mt. Kotobiki 琴引 (SIKFS 395).

The great god is at times portrayed as gigantic. Uhitakiyama 宇比多伎山, the mountain, is the god’s residence; Inazumiyama 稲積山, the mountain, is the great god’s piled rice sheaves; Kageyama 陰山, the mountain, is the great god’s headdress; Ineyama 稲山, the mountain, is the great god’s rice field; Hokoyama 柰山, the mountain, is the great god’s spear; Kagafuriyama 冠山, the mountain, is the great god’s hat (SIKFS 371–73). These gigantic items of clothing, foodstuffs, housing, and implements indicate the local belief that Ōnamochi was a giant (SIKFS 374). All of these mountains are in the Kando District.

The *Manyōshū* contains several poems that indicate that Ōnamochi and Sukunahiko were regarded as ancient gods of creation. In Ōnanchō 邑南町 in the

city of Ōda 大田, Shimane Prefecture, close to the border of Hiroshima Prefecture, there is a gigantic rock formation called Shitsu no Iwaya 志都の岩屋. Oishi no Saguri no Mahito 生石村主真人 (d.u.) composed the following poem: “How many ages have passed/Since the gods Ōnamuji and Sukunahiko/Dwelt within this giant cliff, the Shitsu no Iwaya” (SNKBZ 6: 211). Ōtomo no Sakanoue no Iratsume 大伴坂上郎女, on leaving the Dazai official residence of Ōtomo no Tabito 大伴旅人 (665–731) to return to the capital, arrived in the Munakata 宗像 District in the province of Chikuzen 筑前. She was going over the pass at Mt. Nago 名兎, when she composed the following poem: “The gods Ōnamuji and Sukunahikona first named this mountain, Mount of Comfort (Nagoyama 名兎山), but it does not provide me with the slightest consolation for the pain of longing for his love” (SNKBZ 7: 131). There are two mountains in the province of Kii on the northern bank and southern bank of the Ki 紀 River. These two mountains (Imoseyama 妹背山) have often been used in poetry as metaphors for a husband yearning for his wife. An anonymous poet wrote, “The gods Ōnamichi and Sukuna mikami created the mountains Imoseyama. How beautiful they are!” (SNKBZ 2 [7], poem 1247: 231). In yet another poem from the *Manyōshū*, Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 (d. 785) lectures his scribe Owari no Okui 尾張少咋 (d.u.) on the virtue of remaining loyal to one’s wife. Again, Ōnamuchi and Sukunahikona appear as gods existing since time immemorial. The poem begins as follows:

The words come down to us from the time of Ōnamuchi and Sukunahikona,  
the age of the gods,  
On seeing one’s parents, one is respectful,  
On gazing on one’s wife and children, one is overcome by love  
as if one’s heart is about to break.  
This is the principle of this world, a world like cicada’s shell.  
A promise that binds humans in this realm. (SNKBZ 9: 265–66)

Again in the *Manyōshū*, Ōnamochi, under the name Yachihoko 八千杵, is portrayed by the poet Tanabe no Sakimaro 田辺福麻呂 (d.u.) as indirectly the guardian of the sea, protector of the bay at Minume 敏馬, part of present-day Kobe:

Since the age of Yachihoko, the age of the gods,  
multitudes of ships, coming and going,  
have anchored here  
Seafarers by the hundreds throughout the land  
know Minume Bay,  
refuge from the open sea. (SNKBZ 7: 177)

In the *Manyōshū*, there is the familiar image of the heroic Ōnamochi: he who creates and names the land and who has existed from times immemorial to protect the terrestrial realm.

Another aspect of Ōnamochi as protector of the land is contained in the *Harima no kuni fudoki*. Ōnamochi, under the name Ashihara no shikoo 葦原色許男神, does battle with the foreign deity, Ame no hiboko no mikoto 天日槍命. Ame no hiboko arrives from Silla and observes that Ashihara no hikoo is the sovereign of the land. He begs for lodging but Ashihara no shikoo will only allow him to stay offshore. Ame no hiboko stirs up the sea with his great sword and rests on the resulting whirlpool. This act of heroic dimensions alarms Ashihara no shikoo who fears the foreign deity plans to conquer the land, and he climbs a hill to have a meal to bolster himself for battle. Kernels spilled from his mouth. Thus, this place is called Rice Kernel Hill (Iibo Oka 粒丘) (SNKBZ 5: 70–71). After several battles, the conflict between the two deities is settled by a nonviolent contest. Each god took up three lengths of rope of *kuzu* plant. With their feet, they threw the three lengths from the top of a tall mountain, Shinitake 志尔嵩. Where the lengths land would determine where the gods would rule. Ashihara no shikoo's ropes fell in Tajima's 但馬 Keta 気多 and Yabu 夜夫 districts and Mikata no sato 御方里 in Harima, which is the name of this township (Three Length Township). All of Ame no hiboko's lengths fell in Tajima (SNKBZ 5: 90–91). Ashihara no shikoo fought Ame no hiboko on four occasions, while the local god Iwa no ōkami 伊和大神 fought him twice.<sup>19</sup> This has led some scholars to theorize that Iwa no ōkami and Ōnamochi are the same deity. However, this is probably not the case (SNKBZ 5: 90 annotation 1).

### *Ōnamochi as the God of Agriculture*

A crucial element of Ōnamochi's mythic presence as the creator of the terrestrial realm is his reputation as the god of agriculture and advanced farming techniques. The *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* clearly portray Ōnamochi as a god who created the terrestrial realm, but there is little concrete reference to what this creation actually entailed. Other eighth century sources closely relate the deity to agricultural activity. As Kanda Norishiro has written, "We can probably conclude that Ōnamochi was a 'divine cultural hero' who promulgated agriculture" (KANDA 1992, 187). It is unreasonable to envision Ōnamochi and Sukunahiko in flight in the following from the *Izumo fudoki*: "The Great God Ōnamochi, He who Created All Under Heaven, and the god Sukunahiko no mikoto 須久奈比子命 were touring the terrestrial realm, and when they arrived at this place in the Iishi District, they dropped rice seeds. Thus, this township is called Tane 多禰 (Seeds)" (SIKFS 388). There is a similar passage in the *Harima no kuni fudoki* in

19. Michael Como outlines the strong ties Ame no hiboko had with the immigrant populations in Tajima and other ports along the Japan Sea coast. This sequence, the *Harima kuni fudoki*, however, registers conflict as Ōnamochi defends territory threatened by the god from Silla (COMO 2008, 41–42).



which the pair Ōnamochi and Sukunahiko appear to introduce rice cultivation to a region:

The two deities Ōnamuchi 大汝命 and Sukunahikone 少日子根 stood atop Ikuno Peak 生野岑 in the Hanioka 壱岡 Township, Kamusaki 神前 District, and they gazed on this mountain in the distance and said, “We should place rice seeds there.” They thereupon sent rice seeds to the mountain, where the seeds were piled up at the peak. Moreover, the mountain itself has the shape of a pile of bundled rice stalks. Thus, the mountain is called Rice Seed Mountain (Inadaneyama 稲種山). (SNKKBZ 5: 54–55)

In the Ou District section, the *Izumo fudoki* relates:

These villages and farmlands are dedicated to the beloved child of Izanaki 伊弉奈積, Kumanu kamuro no mikoto 熊野加武呂乃命, and He Who Wields Five Hundred Hoes (*Ihotsusukisuki nao tori torashite* 五百津鋤鋤猶所取々而), the God who Created All Under Heaven, Ōnamochi. Thus, these lands are called divine lands, Izumo kamube 出雲神戸. (SIKFS 120)

The secondary title given to Ōnamochi, “He Who Wields Five Hundred Hoes,” is a clear reference to Ōnamochi’s close association with agriculture. From these brief descriptions, one can well imagine the giant Ōnamochi and his partner the diminutive winged Sukunahiko striding or flying through the terrestrial realm broadcasting seeds as they go, and the great god Ōnamochi wielding a myriad of gigantic hoes to prepare vast areas of land for planting. The joining of Ōnamochi with the principal deity of the Kumano Shrine, Kumanu kamuro no mikoto, a god of plentiful food, strengthens the association of Ōnamochi with agriculture.

In the *Izumo fudoki*, Ōnamochi is portrayed as actively involved in agriculture in Izumo kamube (SIKFS 120), Tane Township (SIKFS 388), Kutami Township (SIKFS 288), and Mitokoro Township (SIKFS 407). He is associated with granaries in Hayashi Township (SIKFS 113), Tashimi Township (SIKFS 185), Mitoya 三屋 Township (SIKFS 386–87), and Yashiro Township (SIKFS 431). Ōnamochi’s offspring are also associated with agriculture and include Ajisukitakahiko no mikoto 阿遲須積高日子命, Kamo no kamube (SIKFS 122), Wakafutsunushi no mikoto 若布都努志命, Mitami 美談 Township (SIKFS 315), and Yamashirohiko no mikoto 山代日子命, Yamashiro 山代 Township (SIKFS 112). Ajisukitakahiko no mikoto is particularly closely related to agriculture, as his name contains the word for hoe (*suki* 須積), the single most important metal tool leading to increased agricultural production (SIKFS 123). He appears in agriculturally related contexts in several Izumo townships and is attested in eighth century sources other than the *Izumo fudoki*. Wakafutsunushi no mikoto is described as follows: “Wakafutsunushi no mikoto, the son of the Great God who Created All Under Heaven, served as the steward of Ōnamochi’s rice fields of heaven created after

heaven and earth were divided” (SNKBZ 5: 212 annotation 7; TAKIOTO 2001, 183). This deity resides at Mitami, which means “observing the rice fields” (SIKFS 315).

In the *Harima no kuni fudoki*, Ōnamochi/Ōnamuchi 大汝命 appears as a leader of agricultural practices and culture and as a political leader (KANDA 1992, 175). Ōnamuchi’s son Hoakari no mikoto 火明命 was a violent and misbehaving child. In order to escape his raging son, Ōnamuchi flees in a boat. Angered at being left behind, Hoakari conjured up a great wind and sent it after his father. The boat wrecked and where it fell was called Boat Hill (Funaoka 船丘), where the giant great wave struck ashore is called Wave Hill (Namioka 波丘), where his *koto* fell is called Koto Deity Hill (Kotokamioka 琴神丘), where Ōnamuchi’s chest fell, was called Chest Hill (Hakooka 箱丘), where his box of grooming utensils landed is named Box Hill (Kushigeoka 梳匣丘), where his winnow for winnowing grain fell is called Winnow Hill (Mikataoka 箕形丘), where his saké jar fell is called Jar Hill (Mikaoka 甕丘), where his rice fell is called Rice Hill Inamure no oka 稻牟礼丘, where his helmet fell is called Helmet Hill (Kabutooka 冑丘), where his anchor fell is called Anchor Hill (Ikarioka 沈石丘), where a rope woven from wisteria fell is called Wisteria Hill (Fujioka 藤丘), where his deer fell is called Deer Hill (Shikaoka 鹿丘), where his dog fell is called Dog Hill (Inuoka 犬丘), and where his silk worms fell is called Silk Worm Hill (Himejioka 日女道丘). Ōnamuchi told his wife, Notsu hime 弩都比売, that he had run away from his evil son but a giant wind-driven wave had overcome him (SNKBZ 5: 32–35).<sup>20</sup>

However, through the benefices of the god, winnow, *koto*, silk worms, rice, saké, deer, and dog—all objects common to everyday life and nourishment from at least the late Yayoi period—came raining down on Iwa 伊和 Township in the Shikama 飴磨 District. In Harima’s Mihashiyama 御橋山 Township in the Iibo 揖保 District, Ōnamuchi builds a ladder to heaven with bales of grain (SNKBZ 5: 50–51). Again the connection to agriculture is clear, and the scale of agricultural production indicates immense strength. What the ladder was created for is unclear, but it suggests the deity’s ability to travel between heavenly and terrestrial realms (KANDA 1992, 165–66).

It is almost universally the case that sacred personages, deities, and events are subject to parodic treatments, and such is the case with Ōnamochi. It will be remembered that a shamanistic duel known as *ukehi* 宇気比 takes place between Amaterasu and Susanoo by which Amaterasu creates female children from Susanoo’s sword and Susanoo creates male children from Amaterasu’s jewels, and Susanoo claims victory. A similar sort of magical contest is being parodied in the following tale from the *Harima no kuni fudoki*:

20. COMO (2008, 104) states that Ōnamuchi is killed by his son, but Ōnamuchi immediately tells his wife about his painful experience at his son’s hand. See also AOKI (1997, 175–76). Hoakari is also portrayed as the son-in-law of Ōnamuchi (*Amabe shi keizu*, 24–25, 39).

Long ago, Ōnamuchi no mikoto and Sukunahikone no mikoto were arguing. To resolve the matter Sukunahikone no mikoto proposed a contest. “Let us start walking and one of us carry a load of red clay and the other not poop and see who can go the farthest.” Ōnamuchi no mikoto said, “I won’t poop.” Sukunahikone no mikoto said, “I’ll carry the load of clay.” “I can’t bear to go farther,” Ōnamuchi no mikoto declared after several days and he crouched down and pooped. Sukunahikone no mikoto laughed and said, “I think you suffered.” He then threw down his load of clay (*hani* 壘) on a hill (*oka*). Thus this place is called Hanioka 壘岡. Moreover, when Ōnamuchi no mikoto was pooping, a bit of the shit rebounded off (*hajikiagete* 弾き上げて) a small bamboo plant and fell on the god’s clothes. Thus, this place is called Hajika 波自加. The clay and shit turned to stone and exist down to the present.

(SNKBZ 5: 93–95)

In order to function as effective parody, elements of the original discourse need to be incorporated and turned inside out; there is a contest between two divinities, the weaker, a midget, is victorious against a giant, and in the contest Ōnamuchi gives birth not to deities but to poop. In place of sacred items, there are everyday, useful objects: the shit, used as night soil, an important source of fertilizer for agriculture, and the clay, the *hani* of haniwa, for which Izumo’s Nomi no sukune 野見宿禰 was famous.

In addition to bringing the primary materials for agricultural production—seeds, seedlings, harvested plants—to areas in Harima, Ōnamochi is also credited with introducing the techniques for processing crops: “Long ago, the place where Ōnamuchi created a mortar (*usu* 碓) to polish rice is called Mortar Valley (Usui no tani 碓居谷), the location where he placed a winnow (*mi* 箕) is called Winnow Valley (Mi no tani 箕谷), and the place he created to make saké (*sakaya* 酒屋) is called Saké Valley (Sakaya no tani 酒屋谷)” (SNKBZ 5: 108–109). Or again, “In the village of Shimokamo 下鴨, Ōnamuchi no mikoto caused rice to be polished. Bran (*nuka* 糠) flew from the mortar and landed on this hill (*oka*). Thus, this place is called Bran Hill (Nukaoka 糠岡)” (SNKBZ 5: 110–11). That Ōnamochi was worshiped in this region of Harima can be judged by the following: “Offerings of cooked rice (*ii* 飯) to Ōnamuchi no mikoto were heaped up (*mori* 盛) at the top of this mountain. Thus the mountain is called Plentiful Rice Mountain (Iimoritake 飯盛嵩)” (SNKBZ 5: 110–11).

During the Yayoi period, probably between the first century BCE and the first century CE, populations on the Izumo plain began to expand owing to the spread of agricultural techniques that were first introduced late in the Jomon period directly from the Korean Peninsula and later during the Yayoi period from Kyushu by way of the Japan Sea. This cumulative process was probably a crucial factor in the emergence of a mythical presence who caused these bene-

fices to accrue to humankind.<sup>21</sup> There are a number of gods of agriculture in the Japanese pantheon, including Toyouke ōmikami 豊受大神, Ōgetsu hime 大宜都比売, Uga no mitama no kami 宇迦之御魂神, Kuebiko 久延毘古, the scarecrow god who identifies Sukunahikona for Ōnamochi, and others. There are other gods of agriculture in Izumo as well, for instance Izanaki's beloved son, the aforementioned Kumanu kamuro no miko. But, over time, as the west of the region grew more prosperous, lesser gods of agriculture coalesced in Ōnamochi, who came to represent the origin of agriculture and population increase among other attributes. Perhaps the worship of Ōnamochi, or some pre-incarnation, spread to the east at around the same time as the four cornered extended burial mounds spread throughout Izumo during the late Yayoi period. In any case, as the west declined and the east took over leadership of the region, Ōnamochi could not be displaced, and the gods of the east, such as the Great God Nogi 野城, went into decline as the new leadership moved at some level to identify with Ōnamochi.

Izumo occupied a pivotal location along the Japan Sea coast and served as a conduit for the diffusion of agricultural techniques and metal technologies to other regions within the Izumo cultural zone and beyond to Koshi, Shinano, Harima, and the Kanto plain.<sup>22</sup> One can well imagine that the tales of Ōnamochi's mythic powers accompanied this diffusion, and this is an important reason why he is regarded as a god who created and solidified the terrestrial realm.

### *Ōnamochi as the Great Lover*

Ōnamochi is also the great lover in Japanese mythology, and so he is also the god of procreation and fertility. The *Izumo fudoki's* portrayal of Ōnamochi's relations with female deities casts Ōnamochi not only as the embodiment of reproductive power but also illustrates the alliances within Izumo that unified the region.

21. The cultivation of rice began very early in Izumo, in the late Jomon period. Simple agricultural techniques were at first brought to the area from the Korean Peninsula. Advanced techniques of wet rice cultivation came comparatively early to Izumo by way of northern Kyushu (KAWAHARA 2017, 40).

22. Based on local histories and folklore surrounding Suwa 諏訪 Shrine, Elaine Gerbert offers an illustration of this diffusion. Izumo people traveled by sea along the Japan Sea coast to Etsu no kuni, where Ōkuninushi wed Nunakawa hime 沼河北売, the daughter of the local chieftain. Nunakawa hime subsequently gave birth to Takeminakata 建御名方. The migrants from Izumo then moved south to Suwa, taking with them the deity Takeminakata. Possessing metal objects and agricultural skills unknown to the inhabitants of the Suwa basin, the Izumo migrants overwhelmed the local elites, who still used weapons and tools of stone. Takeminakata was installed in the Suwa Shrine as the guardian deity of the Izumo people and eventually of all who dwelt in the region. The regional ruling elite, the Suwa kinship group, claimed Takeminakata as their ancestor. Nunakawa hime is worshiped as the patron goddess of Itoigawa in Niigata Prefecture (GERBERT 1996, 325). Though the *Kojiki* has Takeminakata as Ōkuninushi's son, he was probably originally a powerful god of the Suwa region.

In the *Izumo fudoki*, Ōnamochi has particularly close ties to Kamimusubi no mikoto, who is his supporter and who is the ancestor of seven Izumo gods. Ōnamochi woos and weds Kamimusubi's daughters Ayato hime no mikoto 綾門日女命 and Matamatsukutama no mura hime no mikoto 真玉著玉之邑日女命. "Ōnamochi no mikoto, He who Created All Under Heaven, sought to woo Kamimusubi no mikoto's daughter, Ayato hime no mikoto. She refused him and fled and hid herself. The Great God secretly sought her out and found her hiding in this place. Thus, this place is called Uka (Search For)" (SIKFS 316–17).<sup>23</sup> The Uka Township was probably once a part of the territory, consisting of much of the Shimane Peninsula, which was occupied by kinship groups that worshiped Kamimusubi no mikoto. "Matamatsukutama no mura hime no mikoto resided in the village of Asayama. Ōnamochi no mikoto, He who Created All Under Heaven, desired to wed this daughter of Kamimusubi no mikoto, and every morning went to woo her. Thus, this place is called Asayama 朝山 (Morning Mountain)" (SIKFS 353–54).<sup>24</sup> This area is associated with Ōnamochi. It is a part of the series of mountains or hills that constitute the giant Ōnamochi's everyday objects, his residence, his rice fields, his hat, his ceremonial spear, and so on. These marriages suggest close alliances between communities in these areas.

Perhaps to unify the region, marriage alliances were formed with groups that formerly occupied the mountainous south and worshiped Susanoo and then subsequently moved to the more prosperous south. Suseribime becomes a primary actor in the Susanoo drama in the *Kojiki*, and this alliance was taken up and transformed by the compilers of imperial myth to again legitimize imperial rule. However, in the *Izumo fudoki*, the marriage alliance is purely a local affair: "Susanoo no mikoto's daughter, Wakasuseri hime no mikoto, resided here. Ōnamochi made her his wife and visited her. In front of her shrine was a boulder. Its surface was very smooth. Thereupon, he exclaimed, 'Such a smooth boulder!' (*nameshi iwa* 滑磐岩). Therefore, this place is known as Namesa 滑狭 (Smooth)" (SIKFS 359).<sup>25</sup> This area was on the border of kinship groups in the southern mountains who believed in Susanoo as their principal deity.

Yanu was the center of the population and of the late Yayoi Izumo confederacy on the Izumo plain (KAWAHARA 2017, 89–90). It was clearly within the zone of Ōnamochi's religious influence: "Susanoo no mikoto's daughter, Yanu-waka hime no mikoto 八野若日女命, resided here. Ōnamochi desired to woo her and had a house built. Thus, this place is called Yanu 八野 (House on the Plain)"

23. Ayato hime no mikoto is enshrined at Uga Shrine in Kuchi Ugachō 口宇賀町 in Izumo.

24. Matamatsukutama no mura hime no mikoto is enshrined at Asayama Shrine in Asayamachō 朝山町 in Izumo.

25. Namesa Shrine is located in Jinzaichō 神西町, and Wakasuseri hime no mikoto is enshrined there. The boulder was probably located at the subsidiary shrine Iwatsubo Daimyōjin 岩坪大明神.

(SIKFS 356).<sup>26</sup> Again there is a convergence of representative deities and kinship territories.

The *Izumo fudoki* refers to a marriage alliance between Izumo and distant Koshi:

Ônamochi, He who Created All Under Heaven, wed Nunakawa hime no mikoto 奴奈宜波比売命, daughter of Hetsukushii no mikoto 俾都久辰為命 whose father deity, Okitsukushii no mikoto 意支都久辰為命, abides in the land of Koshi 高志国 (越). Nunakawa hime no mikoto gave birth to Ônamochi's daughter, Mihosusumi no mikoto 御穗須須美命. Mihosusumi no mikoto abides here. Thus, this place is called Miho 美保. (SIKFS 186)<sup>27</sup>

The sexual unions and marriage alliances beyond the borders of Izumo generally fall within the Izumo cultural zone or in allied regions. As discussed above, Ônamochi wed Notsu hime and fled from his enraged son Hoakari no mikoto in the Iwa Township in Harima. The *Kojiki* records the following wives of Ônamuji/Ôkuninushi: Yagami hime, mother of Kinomata no kami 木俣神, Takiribime no mikoto 多記理毘売命, mother of Ajisukitakahikone, god of the hoe in the *Izumo fudoki*, Kamuyatate hime no mikoto 神屋楯比売命, mother of Kotoshironushi no kami, and Totori no kami 鳥取神, mother of Torinarumi no kami 鳥鳴海神, and, of course, Suseribime (SNKBZ 1: 85, 92–93). Of these wives, Takiribime no mikoto was one of Susanoo's three daughters Amaterasu created from Susanoo's sword. She and her two sisters are worshiped at the Munakata 宗像 Shrine in northern Kyushu. Ônamochi's wife Yagami hime is enshrined at the Menuma 賣沼 Shrine in Tottori City, and Totori no kami was probably a deity who dwelt in Inaba. Thus we see from mythic accounts of Ônamochi's wives that the deity's marriage alliances with goddesses stretch along the Japan Sea from northern Kyushu to Koshi and across the mountains into Harima. These alliances and other mythic elements correspond to the geography described by the archaeological record

26. This goddess is presently enshrined in Yano Shrine in Yanochō, Izumo.

27. Nunakawa hime no mikoto is worshiped within the precincts of Miho 美保 Shrine in Mihonosekichō 美保関町, Matsue 松江. Mihosusumi no mikoto is enshrined in a nearby subsidiary shrine. For a more detailed discussion of Nunakawa hime at the Suwa Shrine, see GERBERT (1996, 325). The principal deities of the Miho Shrine are Mihotsu hime 三穗津姫 and Kotoshironushi no kami 事代主神. According to the second variant of the *Nihon shoki*, Takamimusubi 高皇產靈神 did not trust that Ômononushi no kami would remain loyal if he married a female deity of the terrestrial realm, so he ordered Ômononushi to take his daughter Mihotsu hime as his wife (SNKBZ 2: 136–37). As the power of the imperial court and myth grew and the port of Miho became more important as a trading center with Korea, Miho Shrine adopted the heavenly goddess as its principal deity along with Kotoshironushi, demoting the former principal deity Mihosusumi no mikoto, a goddess protecting local seafaring people, to a subsidiary shrine. As a part of this move, the shrine maintained that Mihotsu hime was Ôkuninushi's wife. However, this change in principal deities probably occurred at some point after the tenth century (TAKIOTO 2001, 285).

of the Izumo cultural zone and patterns of influence and trade from northern Kyushu that existed probably well into the eighth century (TAKIOTO, 1998a, 128; TAKIOTO 2001, 187–89). Finally, the *Nihon shoki* states that Ōnamuchi no mikoto fathered 181 deities (SNKBZ 2: 103).

*Ōnamochi's Transformation into a Bird*

Ōnamochi's acts of mythic procreation had universal and cosmological significance. The richest and most revealing evidence of this significance is found in a poetic sequence in the *Kojiki* termed “the love poems of Yachihoko/Ōkuni-nushi.” Ōnamochi, under the name Yachihoko no kami 八千戈神 (Deity of the Eight Thousand Spears), searches the eight islands for someone to share his bed, and he hears of a wise and beautiful goddess in the far distant land of Koshi. The great god appeared at the goddess's door and hammered on it and shook it but could not gain entry. The surrounding birds seem to protect her.

In the green mountains,  
                   the plaintive cries of the mountain thrush,  
 Wild birds of the field,  
                   the shrieking of a pheasant  
 Within the yard,  
                   the crowing of the cock.  
 These accursed birds,  
                   crush them, kill them  
                   make them stop.  
 My bird messengers  
                   take flight and tell my beloved  
                   of my true devotion.

Nunakawa-hime does not accede to the god's demands, and she answers in song from behind her still closed door:

Noble Deity of the Eight Thousand Spears,  
 I am but a woman  
                   a slender blade of grass.  
 My heart is a sad bird on an inlet's  
                   sandy shore.  
 Now, I am my own bird,  
                   later, I will be your bird.  
 So do not kill the bird  
                   announcing the dawn.  
 Messengers, take flight  
                   and report my words.

(SNKBZ 1: 85–87)



Yoshida Atsuhiko argues persuasively that the eight thousand spears of the title “Deity of the Eight Thousand Spears” refers not to weapons but phalluses. He cites a number of examples from eighth-century texts in which the “broad spear” (*hirohoko* 広矛) is used as a staff to strike the earth and impregnate it, or as an ejaculator of seed to create the land; the most famous example is Izanagi and Izanami, who stand on the heavenly bridge and wield a jeweled spear (*nuboko* 沼矛) (YOSHIDA 2012, 97–98). Penetrating the sea below, they stirred the brine and lifting the spear, from its tip drops of brine fell to create an island (SNKBZ 1: 31). Following Yoshida’s argument, then, Ônamochi is a god of limitless potency and fertility.

According to Saigō Nobutsuna, this poetic sequence is a mixture of song and narrative that was originally performed (SAIGŌ 1967, 115). Indeed, Brower and Miner in their translation provide staging directions (BROWER and MINER 1961, 62–64). It may well have been the case that the poetic performance was a religious rite of reenactment of Ônamochi’s and Nunakawa hime’s transformation into birds. The Yayoi archaeological record in Izumo and elsewhere contains many examples of wooden models of birds used in religious ceremonies and burial rites, and there are drawings of birds and human-like figures dressed as birds sketched on pottery and bronze objects (YOSHIDA 2012, 119–28). In the next sequence, Ônamochi’s wife of long-standing, Suseribime no mikoto, is extremely jealous of his numerous affairs. To escape her wrath, Ônamochi is about to mount his horse with the intention of departing for Yamato, and he proclaims:

Dark as dark,  
     I dress with care in the blackest robe  
     Like a drake in the offing  
     gazing at my breast  
     flapping my wings  
 This robe will not do.  
 I cast it away in the waves  
     lapping the shore.

I dress with care in a robe  
     of kingfisher blue  
 Like a drake in the offing  
     gazing at my breast  
     flapping my wings  
 This robe will not do.  
 I cast it away in the waves  
     lapping the shore.

I dress with care in a red robe  
     dyed with the crushed root of the madder

plant grown in mountains fields.  
 Like a drake in the offing  
     gazing at my breast  
     flapping my wings  
 This robe will do.

My beloved wife  
 Revered one, noble one  
 If I leave together with a flock of birds  
 If I depart following a flock of birds  
     you say you will not weep.

But like a single reed of *susuki* grass  
     drooping in the mountains  
     you will bow your head and weep  
     your grief rising to the morning sky  
     to become a deep mist.  
 My beloved noble wife  
     youthful as the first grasses of spring.

Suseribime no mikoto serves Yachihoko no kami no mikoto wine and recites the following, explicitly referring to Yachihoko no kami as Ōkuninushi:

Yachihoko, my Ōkuninushi  
 You are a man  
     journeying from cape to cape on every island  
     visiting each inlet on every shore  
 Your wives are as numerous as  
     spring grasses  
 But I am a woman  
     I have no other lover than you  
     I have no other husband than you

Surrounded by curtains of billowing silk  
     beneath covers of gentle silk  
     beneath rustling covers of soft fiber  
 With sinewy white arms  
     you embrace my youthful breast  
     pale as snow  
 We shall caress  
     your jewel-like hand entwined with mine  
     your arm my pillow  
 Stretch out your legs and sleep.  
 Drink, my lord, of the plentiful wine.

Yachihoko/Ōkuninushi and Suseribime are reconciled, and the male deity stays in Izumo with his wife. Ōkuninushi remains today the god to which people pray for a good marriage, so the deity continues to be worshiped within one of the same parameters: the ideal male lover. Moreover, these poetic sequences may be a representation of what was once a religious ritual involving birds, which may date from the Yayoi period. The archaeologist Kanaseki Hiroshi argues,

During the entire Yayoi period, rituals for agricultural fertility were carried out by individuals dressed as birds. By the mid-Yayoi period, sites for religious observance were determined, and agricultural rituals were carried out that performed the important function of uniting the community.

(KANASEKI 1985, 15)

Citing the poem sequence above, Kanaseki posits that it is the linguistic archaeological remnant of ritual performances that took place during the Yayoi period, and they possibly involved both women and men together transformed as birds (KANASEKI 1985, 16).<sup>28</sup>

The physical archaeological evidence for this argument is compelling. Dozens of Yayoi period carvings of model birds with notches for the purpose of mounting on wooden or bronze staffs have been discovered in archaeological sites in Japan. At the Nishi Kawatsu 西川津 site in Matsue, one of the earliest Yayoi carvings of a bird was unearthed. With a hole bored through the model for mounting, the 30 centimeter model could, when mounted on a staff, represent a bird in flight. Yet another wooden bird model was discovered from the mid-Yayoi period at the same site. At the nearby Ike no uchi 池ノ内 site in Yonago 米子, a wooden bird carved in the late Yayoi period also exhibits a hole for mounting on a staff to mimic flight (NISHIKIDA 1993, 15–16). Yayoi period model wooden birds and clay model birds seem to be clustered around the Izumo and Osaka regions, though examples have been found in northern Kyushu and Yamaguchi, Aichi, and Shizuoka prefectures (NISHIKIDA 1993, 16–22).

The bird rituals may have come from the Asian continent together with rice culture. In the vicinity of present-day Daejeon-gwangyeoksi, South Korea, there were unearthed fragments of a bronze plate.<sup>29</sup> It was probably cast in the third century BCE. Inscribed on one of the faces of the bronze object is a large tree where three birds are perched. On the other face are three people wearing feathered headdresses. One is tilling, one holding something like a sickle, and one

28. Mark J. Hudson cites many of these aspects of bird worship in the broader context of Japanese archaeology as a whole in his extensive and informative discussion of Yayoi ritual. He specifically discusses Sahara's and Harunari's theories concerning the primacy of birds and the influence from Mahan (HUDSON 1992, 146–48).

29. This is a bronze ritual piece representing Korean military defensive positions. The shape has been compared to a kite (the bird) (HARUNARI 1987, 29).

can be seen as being in the process of raising a model bird on a pole of some sort (KANASEKI 1985, 11). It is easy to imagine that these pictures represent a ritual involving the sanctification of birds and people imitating birds to carry out the ritual, and it was quite likely similar rituals accompanied advanced agricultural techniques to Japan at the start of the Yayoi period.

Kanaseki also maintains that such religious rites involving birds are described in the Mahan 馬韓 and Jinhan 辰韓 (in the south of the Korean Peninsula) sections of the *San Guo zhi* 三国志 (Records of the Three Kingdoms), *Wei shu* 魏書 (Book of Wei), and the *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (History of the Late Han). To summarize, the *Wei shu* states that the people of Mahan after the sowing of crops in the fifth month gather in groups, sing and dance, and drink wine. The celebrations continue day and night. Dozens of people form a circle, and in unison stamp the ground and raise and lower their hands. They repeat the celebration in the tenth month when the harvest is finished. The people believe in spirits and gods that bring blessings and misfortunes. In each town and village of every *kuni* 国, a person is chosen to take charge of the worship of the gods of heaven (*tenjin* 天神). The person is called servant of heaven. Moreover, in every chiefdom, there is a special sacred area designated 蘇塗. Great timbers are erected, bells and drums and the like are attached to them, and the spirits and gods are worshiped there. Persons fleeing for whatever reason find refuge in these sacred grounds and cannot be turned away (TŌA KODAIISHI KENKYŪJO 2013).

Kanaseki maintains that the term 蘇塗 that appears in the *San Guo zhi* and *Hou Han shu* originally referred to the religious ceremonies involving birds and, by extension, over time, came to refer to these sacred spaces (KANASEKI 1985, 10).<sup>30</sup> The Jin Han section of the *Wei shu* states that in terms of customs and manners, distinctions between men and women are observed at formal occasions such as weddings and rites. They send off their dead with the wings of large birds. They desire that the dead should fly off high to the heavens (TŌA KODAIISHI KENKYŪJO). One need only consider the myth of Yamato Takeru's transformation into a great white bird on his death or the Hagaromo legend of the heavenly feathered robes to assume that the belief in the sacredness of birds and their transformations was widespread in the Yayoi period.<sup>31</sup>

Following Kanaseki and others, religious beliefs in the deification of birds entered the Japanese archipelago with the introduction of advanced agricultural

30. Kanaseki follows the scholar Son Jint'e's argument that the characters 蘇塗 should be read in Japanese as *sotē*, *sotte*, or *sorute*, and they refer to the Korean folk practice of affixing wooden models of birds to the "god pillars," which Son had personally documented. A photograph of the practice is included in KANASEKI (1982, 286–87).

31. Of the widespread Hagaromo legend, Alan Miller writes, "The fact that almost always the [woman's or women's] garment is specifically a feather cloak (*hagaromo*) and always conveys to its wearer the power of flight strongly implies a connection with the bird form" (MILLER 1987, 313).

techniques at the start of the Yayoi period, or perhaps such beliefs merged with older religious rituals of the Jōmon population. That said, the religious functions of birds varied over the more than six centuries that constituted the Yayoi period. The communal ceremony of acting as birds or as the representation of gods' transformations into birds probably continued throughout the Yayoi period. The following is a picture inscribed in Yayoi period pottery of what Harunari Hideji has termed a "bird man," a human figure with an enormous wing (HARUNARI 1987, 20).

Birds flying off over the horizon were believed to be in communication with other realms and, as messengers of the gods, brought benefices. FIGURE 4 on the following page is from a mid-Yayoi bronze bell unearthed in Izumo but probably cast at the Yasunagata 安永田 site in Saga Prefecture and transported to Izumo. The huge deity stares out from an eerie, non-human realm and below him, as if waiting to be summoned, is a crane or an egret (HARUNARI 1987, 18).

Yet another function of birds in the belief systems of Yayoi communities is reflected in the numbers of folktales that abound throughout the archipelago concerning the relation between birds and the origins of rice culture (HARUNARI 1987, 38; YOSHIDA 2012, 151–54). For example, in the *Yamato hime no mikoto seiki*, there is the following passage in which a bird brings rice culture to the Ise Shrine:

In the autumn of the twenty-seventh year of Suinin 垂仁, the cries of a bird resounded day and night without cease and were vexing. This struck Yamato hime no mikoto as strange, so she sent Ōhatanushi no mikoto 大幡主命 and Miyatsuko Ki no Asamaruyoshi 舍人紀麻呂良 to investigate why the bird was crying. In the marshy area above Izawa no miya in Shima no kuni rice was growing. From a single hill grew one thousand ears of grain. A white-naped crane with a stalk of rice in its beak flew around and around constantly calling. After they observed all this, the crane fell silent. The two reported this to Yamato hime no mikoto. "Amazing! Even a speechless bird created a rice field to offer up to Amaterasu ōmikami," Yamato hime no mikoto declared, and, for the first time, she withdrew in ritual abstinence.

(*Yamato hime no mikoto seiki*, 24)

What follows is a series of first rituals involving rice offerings to Amaterasu and a description of how in the following year a white-naped crane flies over the shrine from the north and its incessant cries cause Yamato hime no mikoto to send a deity to look into the matter. Once again, the bird guides the deity to a marshy field where it had established a bountiful planting of rice, a single hill producing eight hundred ears of grain. On hearing the news, Yamato hime no mikoto is overjoyed and states that because Amaterasu is enshrined here, even the birds and beasts, grasses and trees make offerings and worship her (*Yamato hime no mikoto seiki*, 25).

FIGURE 3. Mid-Yayoi pottery fragment discovered at the Nara Prefecture Tsuboi 坪井 site. Sketch adapted from HARUNARI (1987, 20).

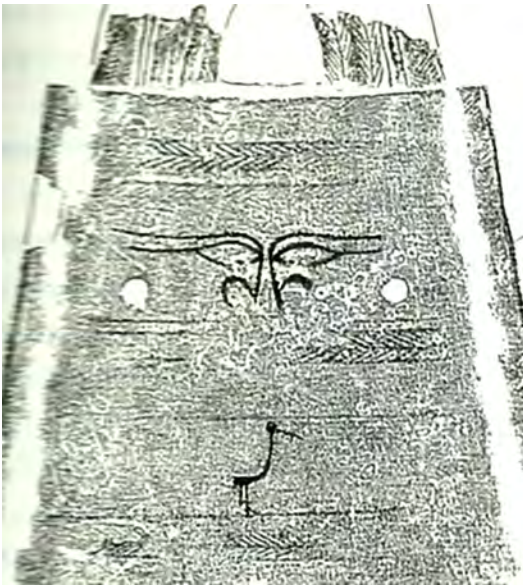
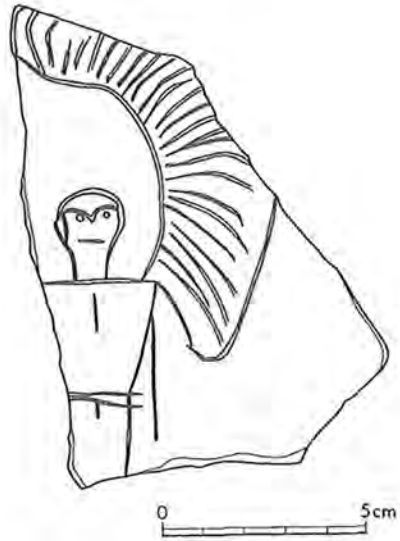


FIGURE 4. Mid-Yayoi bronze bell unearthed in Izumo but probably cast at the Yasunagata site in Saga Prefecture and transported to Izumo. Sketch adapted from rubbing in HARUNARI (1987, 19).

There are a number of myths concerning the origin of rice and other grain cultivation. Similar tales to the ones in *Yamato hime no mikoto seiki* and the many birds inscribed on Yayoi period bronze objects suggest that the idea of birds bringing the cultivation of rice to humankind was prominent among these myths. Of the animals pictured on the bronze bells, only cranes or egrets, or a similar bird—which may represent the origins of grain cultivation—are to be found from the beginning of the Yayoi period until the end (SAHARA 1973, 50–51).

One can surmise that aspects of the Yayoi belief system concerning birds as intermediaries between the terrestrial and other realms were at some point assimilated into the Ōnamochi/Yachihoko/Sukunahiko myths. We remember that in the *Izumo fudoki*, Ōnamochi and the definitely bird-like Sukunahiko drop seeds, like the cranes, and the location where they dropped them is called Tane (seeds). Eighth-century sources examined above show Ōnamochi and Sukunahiko traveling throughout the land, and, particularly in Harima and Izumo, introducing rice cultivation and spreading agricultural methods. Moreover, there is a resemblance between the “bird men” etched in bronze and pottery and the performative archaeological traces of Yachihoko/Ōnamochi’s manifestation as a bird in the love songs in the *Kojiki*. His partner in the creation of the terrestrial realm, Sukunahiko, has the wings of a bird and in the view of several scholars transforms into a manifestation of the crane who delivers grains, including millet, to humankind (YOSHIDA 2012, 156–57). These transformations reflect religious rites performed throughout the Yayoi period by people imitating birds. The roots of the ceremonies can be traced to the Korean Peninsula and beyond (KANASEKI 1985, 16). In some form they survive in the present. There is the custom in Yodoechō 淀江町 in Tottori Prefecture of planting wooden model birds over graves in the hope that the birds will guide the souls of the dead (KANASEKI 1982, 296). At Yasaka 弥栄 Shrine in Shimane Prefecture, there is an annual festival in which people in beautiful bird costumes do the “Dance of the Egrets” (SAHARA and HARUNARI 1997, 83).

The god Ōnamochi had multiple aspects. Journeying through the land, creating all under heaven, dispensing agricultural culture, wielding five hundred hoes, eight thousand spears, at times transformed as a bird, Ōnamochi was concurrently a god of insemination. In Yoshida Atsuhiko’s formulation:

Through copulation, Ōkuninushi planted his “seed” in the wombs of female deities, and it seems clear that there are concurrent outcomes at work. The action creates the fertility that produces the abundance of the earth, the earth that the female deities embody. At the same time the sacred birds that during the Yayoi period were believed to bring the blessings of rice to humankind were a manifestation of the god. (YOSHIDA 2012, 123)



*Ōnamochi as the God who Guards the Sea  
and Welcomes Deities from Beyond the Horizon*

Kizuki Taisha 杵築大社 is the principal shrine devoted to Ōnamochi.<sup>32</sup> The unique architectural characteristics of the shrine's construction inform yet another aspect of the deity Ōnamochi.

One curious feature of the shrine is that while the entrance to the main inner shrine faces south, the seat of the god faces west toward the sea. There are various theories as to why this is so. It has been suggested that perhaps the great god is facing Korea, or that he looks to northern Kyushu, or that he intends to protect Japan from continental invasion. Today, the inner shrine is four or five hundred meters from the beach at Inasa no hama 稲佐の浜, but for much of its history Kizuki Taisha was quite close to the sea. Other than that the original shrine was probably built according to a nine-pillared system distinctive to the Izumo, it is difficult to tell exactly how or when the original shrine was constructed (TAKIOTO 2014b, 25).<sup>33</sup> However, in Minamoto no Tamenori's 源為憲 *Kuchizusami* 口遊 (Verbal Play), a textbook for teaching arithmetic and writing to the children of aristocrats, there is this puzzle for recitation: "Unta 雲太, Wani 和二, Kyōsan 京三," which means first is the Grand Shrine of Izumo, second, the Hall of the Great Buddha at Nara, third, the Main Hall of the Imperial Palace at Heiankyō. This refers to the heights of these structures, the Kizuki Taisha being the tallest (TAKIOTO 2001, 162).

The Buddhist priest and poet Jakuren Hōshi 寂蓮法師 (ca. 1139–1202, also known as Fujiwara no Sadanaga 藤原定長) traveled on a pilgrimage to Izumo in the mid-Heian period and wrote the following on gazing up at the Kizuki Taisha:

The Buddha, in all his mercy,  
Has taken the form of our gods,  
Filling the sky with the light of his wisdom.  
Cross beams of the Great Shrine, soaring  
Up to the heavens, piercing the clouds

32. Izumo Taisha was originally called Kizuki Ōyashiro 杵築大社 (s1kfs 320). Perhaps at some point in the Heian period the characters for Ōyashiro were pronounced according to their Sino-Japanese reading, resulting in Kizuki Taisha. The shrine was officially named Izumo Taisha by the new Meiji government in 1872. I have referred to the pre-1872 shrine as Kizuki Taisha and the post-1872 shrine as Izumo Taisha.

33. To my mind, it seems certain that Kizuki Taisha was first constructed by the inhabitants of Izumo. The Izumo Taisha is of the *taisha zukuri* 大社造り type of shrine. The *taisha zukuri* type of construction probably originated in the mid-Yayoi period and is unique to the Izumo region. It is elevated and supported by nine pillars. The pillars are arranged in a square, three by three with a large pillar at the center (*shin no mihashira* 心の御柱). Tatsumi Kazuhiro points out a number of other crucial differences between the ceremonial structures of the Izumo and Kinai regions (TATSUMI 2012; TORRANCE 2016, 28–29).

I visited Great Shrine at Izumo, and looking up, the sharpened ends of the roof's ornamental cross beams seemed to reach up to the drifting clouds floating at the midpoint of the mountain in the background. I felt as though it was a scene not of this world. *(Fuboku wakashō 22: 548–49)*

These are Heian period observations, centuries after the period under discussion, but there are mid-Yayoi period images that seem to indicate that during the Yayoi period very tall structures were being constructed within the Izumo cultural zone, and these may have served multiple functions: as places of worship; as storage buildings; and/or as beacons for passing ships, either as an invitation to trade or for navigation.

Unearthed at the Inayoshi Sumida 稲吉角田 site in Yodoechō 淀江町, Yonago, Tottori Prefecture, within the Izumo cultural zone, a shattered mid-Yayoi period pot was inscribed around the neck with a set of images that would seem to picture a microcosm of several of the elements of Yayoi Izumo culture discussed here. These images have been reconstructed as follows (see FIGURE 5 on following page). The deer (FIGURE 5a) was a frequent Yayoi image and was often accompanied by bow-wielding men, indicating that it was an important food source. FIGURE 5b is the sun, perhaps symbolizing the widespread cults of sun worship. The objects hanging in FIGURE 5c can be interpreted as bronze bells. FIGURE 5d is a house, symbolizing a peaceful village. FIGURE 5e has been interpreted as both a storehouse and the prototype of Kizuki Taisha, or Kizuki Taisha itself. The last image (FIGURE 5f) can be seen as bird people shamans (*chōjin* 鳥人) bringing beneficial plants from other realms in a boat, perhaps traversing through the sky.<sup>34</sup>

There is a similarity between the reconstructed scene pictured on the pottery and the descriptions of Mahan sacred places in the *San Guo zhi*: “Great timbers are erected, bells and drums and the like are attached to them, and the spirits and gods are worshiped there” (TŌA KODAIISHI KENKYŪJO). But more importantly, the pottery fragments at Inayoshi Sumida, some sixty kilometers from Kizuki Taisha, and other evidence suggests that these sorts of structures may have been common along the Japan Sea coast within the Izumo cultural zone and that one can surmise that the prototype for the towering structure at Kizuki existed in the Izumo cultural zone from the Yayoi period (TAKIOTO 2014a, 371–78).<sup>35</sup> Such a towering structure corresponds as well to the description of the grand structure erected for Ōnamochi by Kamimusubi no mikoto in the *Izumo fudoki* (SIKFS 283).

34. Hudson cites a similar reconstruction in his broader discussion of Yayoi ritual (HUDSON 1992, 146).

35. For a recreation of one such structure at the Hōki Kodai no Oka Kōen 伯耆古代の丘公園, see [http://www.hakuhou.jp/oka\\_top.html](http://www.hakuhou.jp/oka_top.html) (accessed 10 July 2019).

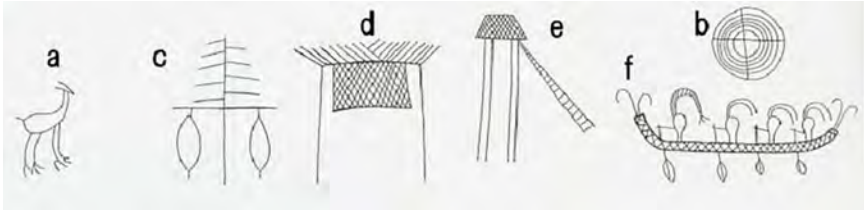


FIGURE 5. Adapted from Saharu and Harunari's reconstruction of images from the shattered pot neck and rim from the Inayoshi Sumida site (SAHARU and HARUNARI 1997, 81).

Makabe Yoshiko interprets these bird men etched in the pottery fragments as healers. She notes the special affinity Izumo myth has with healing. The number of healing herbs mentioned in the *Izumo fudoki* corresponding to medicinal herbs cited in classical Chinese medical texts also supports the mythic association of Izumo with medicine. While the knowledge of the use of some of these medicinal plants doubtless came from the Asian continent, Katō cites the *Engishiki* and the *Honzō wamyō* 本草和名 to document that Izumo was one of the exporters of the largest variety of medicinal herbs to the imperial court (KATŌ 1995, 300–19).<sup>36</sup> Of these, wolfsbane (*torikabuto* 鳥兜) was particularly verdant in Izumo and was both medically efficacious and poisonous. It was used as a local anesthetic and as a stimulant in the case of heart attack. One can imagine that it was used to bring the dead back to life or to help the injured endure extreme pain, much as Ōkuninushi in the Izumo cycle of myth was revived again and again (MAKABE 1999, 200–205). Izumo myth in the *Kojiki* often refers to healing and medicine: Ōkunishi's healing of the rabbit, Kisakai hime and Umukai hime resurrecting Ōkuninushi, and so on.

Makabe associates Sukunahikona with China's legendary physician Bian Que 扁鵲 (ca. 500 BCE). She points out that the legendary founder of Chinese medicine Bian Que is represented as a bird man in the Eastern Han period (25–220 AD) stone tomb carvings discovered in Shandong Province in the 1970s. In a rubbing of the carving, we see a winged physician treating the Daoist goddess Xi Wangmu 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West) (MAKABE 1999, 75–78). Makabe writes,

I believe it is only natural that a god of healing, of medicine, in the form of a bird, came to Izumo from the area of Shandong. Izumo was, after all, the focal point of transportation and commerce of seafaring traffic along the Japan Sea coast. Thus, the winged god in a boat bearing a profusion of medicines appeared in Izumo. (MAKABE 1999, 136)

36. CARLQUIST (2007) provides an excellent summary of the plants and animals listed in the *Izumo fudoki*.

COMO (2008, 42–45), on the other hand, draws a connection between the Queen Mother of the West, the Queen’s realm of the immortals, which he interprets as *tokoyo* 常世, and the incorporation by the Silla immigrant group (Miyake Muraji 三宅連) of these mythical elements into their own ancestral legends. He relates Sukunahikona to other immigrant deities, Ame hiboko and Tsunuga Arishito based in part on Sukunahikona’s arrival at Izumo’s port of Isasa 五十狭狭, Isasa being the name of a sword (Isasa no tachi 胆狭浅大刀) enshrined at Ame hiboko’s Izushi Shrine. He writes, “The name of this port, Isasa, provides strong evidence that the cult of Sukuna Hikona no Mikoto had put down roots very similar to the cults of Ame Hiboko and Tsunuga Arishito” (COMO 2008, 44).<sup>37</sup>

I think the original figure of Sukunahiko in the Japanese archipelago could have come from Shandong by way of the Korean Peninsula, but if so, the winged deity arrived in Izumo quite early, as indicated by the engraving on the vessel pictured in FIGURE 5. In the *Kojiki*, Kamimusubi no mioya no mikoto states that Sukunahikona no kami is her child (SNKBZ 1: 95). Since Kamimusubi is one of the three deities who first came into existence at the beginning of heaven and earth, and in the *Manyōshū*, *Izumo fudoki*, *Harima fudoki*, *Nihon shoki*, and other eighth-century texts Sukunahikona is portrayed as partnering with Ōnamochi in the creation of the terrestrial realm and the introduction of agriculture, it follows that Sukunahikona no mikoto is a deity of very old provenance. Though Kamimusubi no mikoto, the mother of Sukunahiko no mikoto, is closely associated with Izumo, it may well have been the case that later immigrant groups laid claim to the tiny deity. Perhaps the reason Ōnamochi is facing the sea is to welcome deities, such as Sukunahiko, and the benefices they bring from over the horizon.

### Conclusion

Ōnamochi is a complex, composite deity created over centuries. Yayoi people first established settlements in northern Kyushu. From there, they moved along the coasts in search of arable land. On the Izumo plain, one of the largest alluvial plains on the Japan Sea coast, they found areas suitable to early rice cultivation. The first rice fields were established on marshy lands off the coast (KANASEKI and SAHARA 1976, 19–20). Intercut by two moderately large rivers and numerous

37. This is a bit of a stretch. Nishimiya Kazutami’s and Kojima Noriyuki’s annotation for “isasa no ohama” suggests Inasa no hama as the likely location of Sukunahikona’s arrival. This is a place name attested in the *Izumo fudoki*. In any case, it states the location indicated by the term “Isasa” is unclear, though it suggests “isasa” might refer to a sacred place (SNKBZ 2: 106 note 18). There is no mention of Isasa no ohama in the *Izumo fudoki*. The “Isasa no ohama” entry in the *Kokushi daijiten* (accessed through JapanKnowledge 20 November 2019) and other references state that this is an alternate name for “Inasa no ohama.” Perhaps it was just an error by the compilers of the *Nihon shoki*.

streams and large lagoons and lakes, the Izumo plain was well-suited for this sort of early wet rice cultivation.

As agricultural techniques advanced, irrigated paddies developed on higher ground, and kinship alliances and trade ties were formed with the east. At around the time some two thousand years ago when 419 bronze ceremonial objects were buried in the west at Kōjindani and Kamo Iwakura, there emerged kings or chieftains in the west as evidenced by the appearance of four-cornered extended burial mounds. The worship of Ōnamochi seems to align geographically with the spread of these burial mounds. The first in Izumo appears near Kizuki Taisha at around the mid-first century AD at the northern part of the plain. A cluster of much larger burial mounds were constructed in the foothills at the southern edge of the plain. The creation of these kinds of tumuli next spread to the foothills of the eastern Ōu and Nogi plains and further east into what was later Hōki Province to Inaba and further up the coast to Koshi. Tumuli of this type have also been found across the mountains into Kibi and Harima. It seems logical to assume, given the eighth century literary sources, that the worship of Ōnamochi expanded along the Japan Sea coast with the spread of these tumuli and with exports of iron tools, *tama*, agricultural techniques, medicines, and other objects and knowledge.

Ōnamochi was the principal god of Izumo. The deity most probably originated in the west of the region, on the Izumo plain. He was at first a god of agriculture. As the focal point of a Yayoi trade network along Honshu's Japan Sea coast that included the allied "city states" Mukibanda and Aoya Kamijichi, Izumo maintained trade relations with northern Kyushu, the Korean Peninsula, the Oki Islands, Koshi, Kibi, and Kinai. It was through trade routes to other regions in the archipelago that the gods of Izumo accompanied the diffusion of innovations in various technologies that first entered Izumo from northern Kyushu and the Korean Peninsula. Thus, Ōnamochi's reputation as a god of agriculture spread widely during the late Yayoi and Kofun periods.

Ōnamochi came to embody myths concerning the origins of grain cultivation. During the early Yayoi period, wooden models of birds were being used in Izumo as religious symbols inviting the benefices of the gods, especially for grain cultivation. At some point, this rite enacting the origin and continuity of fecundity merged with the Ōnamochi myth. Ōnamochi and his partner, the winged Sukunahiko, traveled the terrestrial realm, planting seeds and introducing agricultural tools and methods.

Was Ōnamochi the god of insemination of women deities and thus the god of insemination of the earth, or the god of the insemination of the earth and by extension god of insemination of women deities? In either case, this sexual aspect of Ōnamochi continues down to the present. The goddesses Suseribime, Kisakai hime, Umukai hime, and Takiribime are enshrined within the walled

inner precincts of Izumo Taisha. Every day multitudes of people arrive at the shrine to pray for a propitious union or other blessings from the god.

Finally, Ōnamochi came to be regarded as a guardian of sea routes and a deity welcoming gods from beyond the horizon who brought with them foreign technologies that entered Izumo and spread beyond, and perhaps because of this association with knowledge from abroad and the abundance of medicinal plants in Izumo, he became associated with the healing arts.

Ōnamochi's title as "The Great God who Created All Under Heaven" derives from the composite nature of the god, the process over time in certain regions by which he attracted tales of origin that explained the growth of agricultural production and population and the introduction of new technologies. In his edifying research, Hara Takeshi has chronicled the "twilight of the Izumo gods": Ōkuninushi's official downgrading in status in relation to Amaterasu in the course of the early Meiji-period Pantheon Debate (*saijin ronsō* 祭神論争). This also involved the subordination of Izumo Taisha to Ise, the apparatus of State Shinto and the educational system mobilizing the citizenry to devotion to the emperor and Amaterasu, the postwar decline of the Ōmiya Hikawa 大宮氷川 Shrine, and so on (HARA 1996, 113–205).

Yijiang Zhong's study is the most thorough in English of Izumo Taisha and the status of Ōkuninushi from the fifteenth century down to the postwar period. He also records the rise and vanquishing of the gods of Izumo again and again over the centuries—this, in the end, in order to secure the legitimacy of the imperial court's rule of the archipelago (ZHONG 2016, 3–5).

The title of Hara's study suggests that the Meiji state erased (*massatsu* 抹殺) the gods of Izumo, particularly Ōnamochi. Yet the question arises, when didn't the imperial center attempt to denigrate older competing religious traditions represented by Onamochi? Because Ōnamochi represented an alternate, independent, and older religious tradition, the center has, from at least the time of Tenmu 天武 (d. 686), attempted to erase the deity, or at least coopt the religious traditions he came to represent. One need only revisit a version of Ōnamochi's surrender of the terrestrial realm to the heavenly deities.

The gods of Izumo are portrayed as contemptible. The emissaries of heaven, Takemikazuchinoō no kami 建御雷之男神 and Amenotorifune no kami 天鳥船神, are sent to Izumo to demand that Ōkuninushi surrender his realm to the descendants of Amaterasu. Ōkuninushi is addressed as an inferior by the emissaries who threaten him with violence. He temporizes and defers the decision to surrender to his two sons. Kotoshironushi submits and withdraws. His brother, Takeminakata no kami, refuses and challenges Takemikazuchinoō to a contest of strength. Takemikazuchinoō rips off Takeminakata no kami's arm and flings it away. Pursued by Takemikazuchinoō, Takeminakata flees to the shore of Lake Suwa. There he begs Takemikazuchinoō not to kill him, and he surrenders the

terrestrial realm to the descendants of heaven. After learning that both his sons capitulated, Ōkuninushi yields to the demands of the two emissaries. In return, he demands that a heavenly dwelling soar to the heaven be built for him. This demand is not met, and instead Ōkuninushi is forced to build a structure to offer up a ceremonial feast of surrender to the conquerors (*Kojiki*, SNKBZ 1: 107–13, particularly 111, annotation 16).<sup>38</sup>

It is difficult to imagine a more humiliating treatment of the Great God, he who created all under heaven, who wields five hundred hoes and eight thousand spears, the great lover, who at times transforms into a bird (MIURA 2013, 38–42). He passively refuses to fight by deferring his decision, observes his son's arm being torn off and his son begging for his life, and then Ōkuninushi surrenders his realm in exchange for “stuff.” But, of course, this is the definition of Ōnamochi from the point of view of the imperial court. In the *Izumo fudoki*, Ōnamochi does not surrender Izumo.

In Izumo, Ōnamochi remains a potent divine presence. In 2013, for example, a little over eight million worshipers visited Izumo Taisha (TAKIOTO 2014b, 13). It would seem that it is a state-centric interpretation to conclude that the gods of Izumo have been silenced. Over the centuries, some elements of the imperial plot line—“how the heavenly gods imposed order on the unruly gods of the earth by forcing them to relinquish power over the land to the ‘grandsons of heaven,’ the royal lineage of Yamato” (TEEUWEN and BREEN 2017, 20)—were incorporated in Izumo, but the evidence seems to indicate that in the eighth century, few in Izumo knew of or believed in this plot line.

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38. This relatively new interpretation (see PHILIPPI, 1968, 135, for the older interpretation) of the structure as not the origin of Kizuki Taisha is supported by MIURA (2013, 38).



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