

NELLY NAUMANN

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On January 7, 1989, only a few hours after the death of Emperor Hirohito (posthumously styled *Shōwa-tennō*), the imperial seal, along with two of the “Three Regalia”, the sword and the jewels, were presented to the new Emperor Akihito (for details see Antoni 1989: 94). The accession ceremonies thus begun found their termination in the *daijōsai*, the Great Festival of First Fruits, in November 1990. These elaborate ceremonials have attracted worldwide attention (as did the funeral ceremonies of *Shōwa-tennō*), and the interest thus aroused has been met by a host of publications attempting to explain the rites and their historical and religious background, if mostly only along well-trodden and sometimes even misleading paths (e.g. Bock 1990). We shall not try to add to this literature but content ourselves with focusing our attention on a small but nevertheless important item: the sword, one of the Three Regalia.

The sword in itself is a symbol of power. It is with the help of the sword that a reign is established; it is with the help of the sword that a reign is maintained. But the sword is not only a symbol of power. Taken together with the other two regalia, the mirror and the jewels, and in its proper context, it appears to be an indispensable sign of legitimation. This shows unmistakably that not just any sword will do: as a sign of legitimation it must be a sword that in itself is connected with the founding of this legitimation. Viewed in this manner, the long history of the sword presented to the new emperor, and especially some moot points in this history, as well as its intrinsic and far-reaching symbolism will become clear.

But the sword presented to Emperor Akihito is not by any means the ‘original’ sword. The ‘original’ sword is supposed to be treasured in the Atsuta shrine, while a ‘copy’ was kept and handed down by the emperors. However, this copy too was lost in the Battle of Dan-no-ura (1185), where it sunk to the bottom of the sea when Emperor Antoku was drowned. The Ise shrine then provided a substitute from its treasury.

The history of the supposed early copy of the ‘original’ sword may be traced back to the reign of Empress Jitō (r. 687-697). Under the date of the 4th year of her reign (690), 1st month, 1st day, the *Nihongi* informs us: “Nakatomi.no Ōshima.no Asomi, Minister of the Department of the Gods, recited the Blessings of the Heavenly Gods. When this was over, Shikofuchi, Imbe.no Sukune, delivered to the Empress-consort the Divine tokens,² sword and mirror . . .” (NG 30 = NKBT 68: 500/501; cf. Aston 1956: II, 395). It seems that here for the first

¹ My thanks are due to Professor Dr. Roy Andrew Miller for his revision of my English draft.

² Aston translates “the divine seal, sword and mirror”. The question of which one of these interpretations of *shinji* 神璽 is correct seems still open.

time we meet with the accession ceremony as designed by Emperor Temmu (r. 672-686), who is widely responsible for the first steps toward the installation of a state ceremonial, the consolidation and codification of which was achieved in the beginning of the 8th century. Temmu's own accession, having taken place in the 2nd year of his reign (673), 2nd month, 27th day, is described quite laconically: "The Emperor commanded the functionaries to prepare an arena, in which he assumed the Imperial dignity at the Palace of Kiyomihara in Asuka" (NG 29 = NKBT 68: 410/411; Aston 1956: II, 321).

When Bock (1990: 37) writes: "It is clear that before the promulgation of the eighth-century codes the records concerning accession were not precise", we may add that very probably it was the accession itself that was not yet regulated by prescriptions. We may, moreover, even doubt whether before Temmu there had been any handing down of sword and mirror at all. Apart from Jitō, the *Nihongi* mentions only twice that sword and mirror were presented to an emperor on the occasion of his accession, and this for a time for which certainly no such data were available, that is, for Keitai-tennō and for Senka-tennō, both of whom are supposed to have reigned in the first half of the 6th century. Here, as in other cases, we may conclude that the compilers did not hesitate to insert anachronistic details on behalf of an artificial continuity.

While we may assume that it was the sword presented to Empress Jitō which afterwards was treasured in the imperial palace and handed down in succession, we do not know when this supposed 'copy' of the likewise supposed 'original' was manufactured. The *Nihongi* records that Mimaki'iri-biko (Sujin-tennō) dreaded the power of the two deities Amaterasu Ōkami and Yamato.no Ōkunitama, hitherto worshipped together within the emperor's great hall; therefore he entrusted Amaterasu to his daughter Toyosuki'iri-bime to be worshipped at the village of Kasanui in Yamato where he established the cult place (*himoroki*) of Shiki, while Yamato.no Ōkunitama he entrusted to his daughter Nunaki.no iiri-bime (NG 5 = NKBT 67: 238/239; cf. Aston 1956: I, 151 f.). But only the *Kogoshūi*, written in 808 by Imbe.no Hironari, adds that at the same time a mirror was cast and a sword was made as tokens of protection: "these are the divine tokens, mirror and sword, now presented on the day of accession. Again, in the village of Kasanui in Yamato there was erected the cult place of Shiki, and Amaterasu Ōkami and the *kusanagi* sword were sent there" (*Kogoshūi*, ed. Kōgaku sōsho 1: 551; cf. Florenz 1919: 437 f.). Under the reign of Ikume'iri-biko (Suinin-tennō) the *Nihongi* states further that Amaterasu was entrusted to princess Yamato-hime who moved the goddess to Ise, while the god Yamato.no Ōkunitama was enshrined in the village of Anashi in Yamato and eventually given into the care of the family of the Yamato.no Atae (NG 6 = NKBT 67: 269-270/271; cf. Aston 1956: I, 176 - 177).

Thus we are led to believe that here 'Amaterasu Ōkami' designates the mirror which, according to the mythical narrative, the sun-goddess Amaterasu herself had bestowed upon her grandson Ninigi as her 'image' when he descended from Heaven; that this same mirror is supposed to be the one now enshrined in Ise; and that a substitute for this mirror was made in order to be treasured in the imperial

palace. Together with the sword this mirror formerly was presented to the new emperor on his accession, but nowadays it is strictly enclosed and not taken out any more.

Regardless of the question when the Ise shrine was actually established, it seems very plausible that from the beginning a mirror was enshrined there as the emblem of the sun-goddess. Once the legitimation to rule over Japan was founded on the descent of the ruling dynasty from the sun-goddess and her command to do so, the mirror as her emblem and her mythical gift very naturally also became a sign of legitimation. This sounds very simple, indeed, almost simplistic. And there remains, first of all, the question of what then about the sword?

Considering that it was Temmu who gave political developments an entirely new turn, which found its expression, *inter alia*, in a newly created state ceremonial, one in which Chinese elements were combined with those derived from the indigenous tradition, and also that it was Temmu who initiated the collecting of the 'Imperial Chronicles' (*teiki*) and of the 'Words concerning the Origins' (*honji*)³ - at the same time "correcting" them, and thus leading to the compilation of the *Kojiki* (eventually Temmu would be responsible for the later compilation of the *Nihongi* as well) - we may expect that it would be in the mythical and legendary parts of these works that we would have to look for an explanation of, and for the concepts behind, the ceremonies and the objects used therein.

This is by no means an easy task. The deeper we probe into these mythical narratives the more we recognize that they represent extremely involved patterns, far from any so-called "primitive thinking" as well as from even the naïve or straightforward repeating of transmitted stories. There are such primitive, naïve, straightforward stories here, to be sure, but they always have to serve an end. This means they are recorded to verify and ensure the legitimacy of the ruling house from every possible angle. Thus these stories are not only densely interwoven to form the desired pattern, but they are also "corrected", which means they may have been distorted, mutilated, or supplemented. What then will we discover when we try to trace back the story of the sword - a story that ought properly to have as its aim confirming the legitimacy of the ruling house?

The difficulty of the matter in itself, its very complexity, has led to certain inconsistencies within the different narratives. These, however, can give us some first hints. We have already met one such inconsistency. We are told that two deities had been worshipped together in the imperial great hall, Amaterasu Ōkami and Yamato.no Ōkunitama, and it is implied that 'Amaterasu Ōkami' designates the mirror as the emblem of the goddess. But what was the emblem of the other deity? The *Kogoshūi*, on the other hand, names two emblems, 'Amaterasu', i.e. the mirror, and the *kusanagi* sword. Yet both these emblems were brought to Kasanui, and later to Ise, while we should expect the sword to be the emblem of the other god and thus given to his place of worship. There is enough reason for

³The translation of *honji* presents some difficulties. Chamberlain (1982 [1882]: 3) translates "original words", Philippi (1969: 41, n. 42) has "Fundamental Dicta". My translation takes into consideration that the *Kojiki* indeed endeavours to relate "the origins", be it in a mythical or historical sense.

this assumption. Tradition has it that the god Yamato.no Ōkunitama ‘Spirit of the Great Land of Yamato’ is identical with the god Utsushikunitama ‘Spirit of the Land of Mortals’, also known under the other names Ōkuninushi and Ōnamuchi. Though we are not told what his emblem may have been, the mythical narrative connects this god unambiguously with the sword as a symbol of sovereignty and of legitimacy. Hence it becomes clear that some special circumstances must be responsible for the distortion of the original tradition.

The sword mentioned in the *Kogoshūi* as being brought to Kasanui bears the name *kusanagi*, a term usually explained and translated as ‘grass-mower’. From the moment of its discovery it figures under this name, though the *Nihongi* mentions “one writing” giving its “original name” as Ama.no Murakumo.no tsurugi ‘the sword of the gathering clouds of Heaven’ (*Nihongi* 1 = NKBT 67: 122/123; cf. Aston 1956: I, 57). The story of this sword as related in the *Kojiki* and in the *Nihongi* (with several variants) is short and simple: it is found by the god Susa.no wo in the tail of the serpent he slew after he descended from Heaven, and it is subsequently given by him to the ‘heavenly god(s)’ or to the sun-goddess Amaterasu, who in turn bestowed it upon her grandson Ninigi when he descended to earth, as already mentioned.⁴

It is only when we take into consideration their full mythical context that the significance of these details comes to the fore. In so doing we have to be aware that the mythical narrative contained, from its inception, several strands of individual narratives which, although tightly entwined, were not only of different origin: they were based on a different intention and outlook as well. For our purposes it may suffice to single out here only two main lines with their main intentions.

The one line, purporting to describe the descent of the imperial family and thus chiefly bound up with the sun-goddess Amaterasu as the ancestress of that family, essentially shows a political design. What must be achieved is to rule over Japan as a political unit. The other line, connected chiefly with the god Susa.no wo, displays no such intention. It shows how the cosmos, how life and death have come to exist and work in the way human experience tells and the human mind expects. The Central Land of the Reed-plains, ruled by the god Ōkuninushi, son of Susa.no wo, is no political unit. It is a world of men, situated between Heaven and Underworld. His rule too is no political rule. In other words, while this strand of the mythical narrative seeks to show the very essence (“Wesen”) of life and death, it also seeks to show the essence of rule as such.

Susa.no wo in his part of the mythical narrative appears as the highest god of the pantheon; he is by no means a ‘storm-god’ as the nature-myth-explainers of the last century have ventured to label him.⁵

This same god Susa.no wo has wrought death to the earth and to the cosmos at large. But then life was restored by him, and thus the eternal cycle of death

⁴For the full account see *Kojiki* (KJK) = NKBT 1: 84/85-88/89, and 126/127; cf. Philippi 1969: 88-90 and 130; *Nihongi* (NG)1 = NKBT 67: 120/121-126/127 and NG 2 = NKBT 67: 146/147; cf. Aston 1956: I 52-58 and 76.

⁵For the story of this “interpretation” see Naumann 1985: 41.

and life set into motion.⁶ Now Susa.no wo descends from Heaven; and eventually he comes to Izumo where he slays the eight-headed serpent threatening to devour the maid Inada-hime. The mythical number eight, the number characterizing the world in its totality,⁷ pervades this whole story; but it is especially important as the number of the devouring heads of the serpent. The eight heads indicate very clearly that the mythical serpent is not only threatening the maid; it is a threat to the human world in its totality. Thus the serpent has to be slain by the one god responsible for the order of this world. It is only consequent that with the maid thus rescued, Susa.no wo engenders a son (designated to be the future ruler over this human world) before he himself takes his place in Ne.no kuni, the world of death where life has its very roots.

The sword Susa.no wo found in the tail of the slain serpent gains its significance out of this context. Being originally part of the eight-headed serpent as an incarnation of destructive power, the sword has now come into the hands of the same god who vanquished this power. In his hands it will turn into an instrument with the opposite aim, an instrument for the restitution of order, and a sign of legitimacy. The inner logic of the myth demands that when the time comes Susa.no wo will bestow this sword upon his son who is the one destined to rule over the human world.

But here the narrative bifurcates in a conspicuous way. On the one hand, we are told that Susa.no wo delivers this sword to the 'heavenly god(s)' or to Amaterasu. There is no reason for such an act except the wish of the compilers or manufacturers of the *political* myth to ensure this important symbol of sovereignty a place within their own mythical scheme from the beginning. When bestowed upon the Heavenly Grandchild, the sword has to come from the hands of the sun-goddess herself; thus later on it will serve as one of the regalia also proving the legitimacy of the ruling house to any part of the population that still may adhere to the tradition handed down in the myths centering around Susa.no wo and Ōnamuchi/Ōkuninushi.⁸

On the other hand, Ōnamuchi, son of Susa.no wo by the rescued maid Inada-hime, is led in due time to visit his father in the Other-world where he must pass several tests. In the end he tries to escape together with his wife Suseri-bime, daughter of Susa.no wo, taking with him 'the sword of life, bow-and-arrows of life, and the heavenly speaking cither'. The fleeing pair is detected, but Susa.no wo cries after them: "Take the sword of life and the bow-and-arrows of life which thou art holding, and pursue and smite thy half-brothers along the borders of the

⁶ A condensed account of the relevant mythical events can be found in Naumann 1988: 66-82. For a detailed study see Naumann 1979, 1982, and 1983.

Detailed study in Naumann 1971: 199-203. See also Miller/Naumann 1991.

⁸ In regard to the "mächtigen Nomadenreiche" Käthe Uray-Köhalmy (1987: 152) remarks: "So mußten die angehenden Herrscherdynastien zwangsläufig heterogenes Sagengut zur ideologischen Unterstützung ihrer Macht verschmelzen und mit den früheren dynastischen Mythen zusammenbauen, um endlich das ganze Gefüge mit der allgemeinen Machtsymbolik der Steppenreiche zu 'vergolden'. Die Mythen verschiedener Abstammung wurden dabei ohne Unterschied ineinandergeflochten", thus laying stress on a similar process for the *Secret History of the Mongols* and similar works.

hills, and pursue and sweep them down into the rapids of the rivers, and *thou* shalt be the god Ōkuninushi ‘Ruler of the Great Land’ and the god Utsushikunitama ‘Spirit of the Land of Mortals’, and make my daughter Suseri-bime thy chief wife, and dwell at the foot of Mount Uka . . .” - this last evidently was the early center of the Izumo region (KJK = NKBT 1: 98/99; cf. Philippi 1969: 102).

Nothing else is told about this ‘sword of life’. Yet the narrative itself points strongly into the direction alluded to above, i.e. that originally it was the sword found inside the serpent’s tail, the sword that now serves as a means to establish order, and as a sign of legitimacy. It is certainly not without interest in this connection that one variant of the *Nihongi* (NKBT 67: 126/127; Aston 1956: I, 57) informs us that the *kusanagi* sword “formerly was with the god Susa.no wo; now it is in the province of Wohari”.

But why then is it a ‘sword of life’? Apart from the intimate connection of Susa.no wo himself with the concept of life and life-giving forces, it is just this designation which again suggests a connection with the serpent. In our tale the serpent appears first of all as an incarnation of destructive power. But otherwise the serpent is a symbol of life, especially of newly gained life, of rebirth out of death, since the serpent itself ‘dies’, but in shedding its skin gains new life. The reversal of intent as well as of effect, namely, from destruction to life, is the same as that seen in the person of the god Susa.no wo himself. Once order is restored, the ‘essence’ of ruling appears to be to turn the instrument of destruction into a tool that gives life.

Here still another possibility presents itself. The sword *kusanagi* is found as a part of the mythical serpent. But may we not take this as an instance of *pars pro toto* and thus equate the sword as being identical with the serpent as such? Wolfram Eberhard has shown that in the Chinese tradition snake and metal are identical: “snakes occur as money and as metal from which weapons are made”; and he points further to “myths about the snake as a sword or the snake as copper money” (Eberhard 1968: 378, 379). The interchangeability of snake and money, or gold, is a well-known topos in Japanese folktales as well (cf. Naumann 1971: 221 sqq.).

We find a confirmation of this thought in the original name of the sword itself. Professor Roy Andrew Miller remarks:

“A link between ‘serpent’ and the sword-name OJ *kusanagi* is not difficult to postulate, even though one essential link in the etymology remains missing. New Korean *kulǒng’i* ‘a serpent, a large snake’ (Martin et al. 199 a) was first associated with Tungus cognates by Shiratori (# 159); the entry s.v. *kurggi* ‘a serpent - the Trionocephalus Bloomfoffi’ in Ramstedt 1949: 132, is one of the many articles of this book apparently taken over from Shiratori without acknowledgment. Middle Korean has *kulyǒng’i* in a single lexical entry (the reference books cite no texts), where it glosses Chin. 蟒 (*Hunmong chahoe* A 11 verso). For Tungus the TMS I. 428b now lists extensive cognates in Ev., Sol., Lam., Neg., Oroč., Udh., Olč., Orok., and Nan., with meanings as ‘ser-

pent', 'worm', 'insect', 'caterpillar', and the like. The Proto-Tungus form, reflected also closely in the Korean, would be **kulin-*; to this the Korean has added its reflex of the Tungus animal-name suffix **-ki* (Miller 1989: 147 sqq.), for a proto-form as **kulinki*. To associate this with OJ *kusanagi* we must postulate that the **-l-* in these Tungus and Middle, resp. New Korean forms goes back to earlier Proto-Altaic **-l₂-* in a proto-form **kul₂in-*; this would regularly have yielded an Old Korean **kusinki* which was then borrowed into Old Japanese to appear there as *kusanagi*. Then, as happened in many other words, the **-s- < *-l₂-* in Korean was later re-Altaicized to appear as Middle and New Korean *-l-*. To make the proposed etymology convincing, therefore, we require one link that is presently missing: evidence from Turkic to show that this Tungus and Korean *-l-* actually was Altaic **-l₂-*. The desired Turkic form(s) would be of the shape, e.g., OTk. **quš*. OTk. *quš* is attested only as 'bird; esp. falcon'. Everything else in this etymology fits together so neatly that I suspect it is largely correct; but without the Turkic link it is not as impressive as one might wish" (letter from Prof. Dr. R. A. Miller of Sept. 17, 1990).⁹

Thus the sword found within the serpent shows its identity with the serpent by its very designation, namely OJ *kusanagi* '*serpent',¹⁰ while the serpent itself is called by a tabu-name, (*yamata*) *worōti* 'the (eight-forked) tailed-one'. (For a Tungus etymology of *worōti* see Miller 1987: 45).

Having reached this point we may safely conclude that in the original mythical story the 'sword of life' used by Ōnamuchi/Ōkuninushi must have been the sword found by Susa.no wo within the tail of the eight-headed serpent. That it is the sun-goddess who will bestow it upon the Heavenly Grandchild and not Ōkuninushi when he surrenders his land, further helps to belittle the rôle of Ōkuninushi. In the end the story of the delivery of this sword into the hands of the heavenly

⁹The glosses to OJ *kusanagi* in the JBKD p. 256a, as well as in the commentary to the Nihonshoki, ed. NKBT 67: 563b, note 96, repeat an etymological attempt by Satake Akihiro to identify the *-nagi* of this word with various Ryūkyū terms for the blue-green snake (*Elaphe chmacophora*) called *aodaishō* in standard Japanese. This leaves Satake to wrestle unsuccessfully with the *kusa-* which he persists in identifying as 'stinking' (postulating an unconvincing semantic link 'stinking' → '*strongly stinking' → '*strong, fierce'); but it is nevertheless valuable because it demonstrates that even in the absence of the relative comparative materials, at least one perceptive Japanese student of the texts has also instinctively felt that somehow a word for 'serpent' lurks in the epithet *kusanagi*.

¹⁰The same thought of a former connection between serpent and sword may still be present when in some Mongolian epics the hero owns a sword, "das zehn Jahre lang im Rachen einer Riesenschlange gehärtet worden war, das gehärtet worden war dadurch, daß Galle einer Giftschlange hinzugerührt und beigemischt wurde" (Poppe 1975: 13; similar also pp. 38, 88, 152. Cf. also Heissig 1987: 72-73). Equally remarkable seems the correspondence with conceptions in the West. Thus, in regard to the Skaldic period, A. T. Hatto (1980: 243) speaks of "the idea that a sword is a snake". There is, as he further remarks (1980: 244) a "powerful association of sword-blades and their edges with venom"; it was supposed that the snake poison made, by way of magic, "edges hard, and so sharp and deadly". Hatto (1980: 245) shows that, within the Germanic world, the conception may be traced back to the 6th century.

god(s) or Amaterasu appears only as a stratagem, a political after-thought of the manufacturers of the political myth.

Thus it is in the political myth where we next meet the *kusanagi* sword, namely when Ninigi, the Heavenly Grandchild, is ordered to descend from Heaven and rule over Japan. Most significantly only the *Kojiki* and one out of the several variants of the *Nihongi* have, on this occasion, Amaterasu bestow the Three Regalia upon Ninigi - the *Nihongi* variant being more or less taken over from the *Kojiki*. The main text and several other variants of the *Nihongi* show the investiture of Ninigi with the 'Coverlet of the True Coach' as the actual ceremony of the bestowing of kingship, while the mirror, when it appears at all, is received as the image of the sun-goddess to be revered in her stead. In this connection the *Kojiki* again displays uncertainty in regard to a second cult object revered in the imperial palace in addition to the mirror (cf. Philippi 1969: 140).

Behind the arrangement of the *Kojiki* we may assume the very perceptive organizing and adjusting mind of Emperor Temmu. Hence it is not by accident that only the *Kojiki* relates the *whole* story of Ōnamuchi/Ōkuninushi; the *Nihongi* is content to give the account of Ōkuninushi surrendering his land to the Heavenly Grandchild. By the time the *Nihongi* was completed the coherence and significance of the myths around Susa-no wo and his son - as a whole as well as in many of its details - were not grasped any more, as several instances clearly reveal. Worse than this: to the fading awareness of the religious content of these myths, and to a growing rationalism of Chinese provenience, willful distortions serving political ends had already been added. The significance of the sword as still shown in the myths handed down in the *Kojiki* remains outside the comprehension of the compilers of the *Nihongi*. In other words, the sword *has* already found its firm place as one of the regalia. The 'political' history of the sword is already established.

We mentioned above that according to tradition, under the reign of Mima-ki'iri-biko the cult objects had been removed from the palace and brought to Kasanui, and hence, later on, to Ise. It is during the reign of Ōtarashi-hiko (Keikō-tennō) that we hear again something concerning the *kusanagi* sword: it is given to Yamato-takeru, son of Ōtarashi-hiko and one of the heirs to the throne, by his aunt Yamato-hime, cult maiden at the Ise shrine, when he first of all pays a visit to this shrine on his way to pacify the East.

The story, as far as the sword is involved, seems quite simple. When in Sagami (according to the *Kojiki*) or in Suruga (thus the *Nihongi*), the prince is lured into a moor, which is set on fire. He mows away the grass with the sword, produces a counter-fire, and makes his escape. Hence the place is called Yakitsu 'Burning Ford', and the sword receives the name *kusanagi* 'grass-mower'. Having accomplished several other deeds the prince comes to Wohari and marries Miyazu-hime, daughter of the Wohari family. He leaves his sword with her when he sets out to kill or subdue the deity of Mount Ibuki - an adventure that eventually resulted in his death. Thus, the *kusanagi* sword "which was first worn by Yamato-takeru, is now in the Atsuta shrine in the district of Ayuchi in the Province of Wohari" (NG

7 = NKBT 67: 300/301-312/313; cf. Aston 1956: I, 202-211; KJK = NKBT 1: 210/211-222/223; cf. Philippi 1969: 238-249).

It is evident that the first story serves to kill two birds with one stone: the explanation of the place name Yakitsu, and the explanation of the name of the sword, *kusanagi*, by way of the usual folk etymologies. This story we shall not further follow up; suffice it to remark that the wish to explain the word *kusanagi* merely shows that the original meaning of this word was no longer clear.

It is also evident that the second story mentioned serves to explain how it comes that this sword is treasured in the Atsuta shrine; it must have been brought there by the Lords of Wohari who thus founded the shrine. The simplicity of the story - the sword left in the house of the Wohari family - may prove to be fallacious. Have we not repeatedly been reminded that the sword "is now in the Atsuta shrine in Wohari"? We hear also that it is "under the administration of the *hafuri* of Atsuta" (NG 1 = NKBT 67: 125; Aston 1956: I, 56), evoking a rather archaic picture. This too seems to be a kind of 'pattern'.

So far we have tried to show that Temmu may have perceived the significance of the *kusanagi* sword as a sign of sovereignty and of legitimacy within the mythical narrative, and that he also may have been alert to the possibility of using this mythical pattern for his own ends. But would this alone have been sufficient for assigning this sword its prominent rôle as the 'original' behind the sword as one of the regalia? There are indeed noteworthy and curious bonds between Temmu and this 'original' sword. The last entry for the 7th year of the reign of Emperor Tenchi (688) says that in "this year the Buddhist priest Dōgyō stole the *kusanagi* sword and escaped with it, making for Silla. But wind and rain so perplexed him on his way, that he came back again" (NG 27 = NKBT 68: 370/371; Aston 1956: II, 290). It seems that at least from this time on the sword was kept in the imperial palace, for 18 years later, Shuchō 1 (686)/6/10, when Emperor Temmu was on his sickbed, "it was ascertained by divination that the emperor's disease was owing to a curse from the *kusanagi* sword. The same day it was sent to the shrine of Atsuta, in Wohari, and deposited there" (NG 29 = NKBT 68: 478/479; Aston 1956: II, 377).

The latter entry shows an interesting parallel with the tradition of Mimaki'iri-biko who dreaded the power of the emblems of the two gods hitherto revered in his palace hall. We might well ask whether this 'tradition' is only a reflex of Temmu's experience; but it seems more to the point to see in the verdict of the divination the very common fear of the numinous *endorsed* by this tradition. Nevertheless, these two entries in the *Nihongi* leave two questions open: 1. Whence was the sword stolen in 688? Had it been in the Atsuta shrine or in the palace? 2. In 686 was the sword "given" to the Atsuta shrine, or was it "given *back*"? And indeed, what was the connection of this sword with Atsuta, and also with the Lords of Wohari? Yoshi'i Iwao (though on the strength of arguments other than those we have brought forth) concluded that there was no original connection between the imperial family and the *kusanagi* sword, and put special emphasis on the relation between this sword and Atsuta/Wohari. But he restricted his conclusions to the

statement that there must be a deep relation between this sword and the Atsuta shrine, and that the sword can stand in opposition to the *tennō* (Yoshi'i 1979: 408-412).

This is not very elucidating, except that it lends force to our attempt to look further for connections with the Atsuta shrine, and with the Wohari family who supported it. This includes the connections of the Wohari family with the imperial house. It is important to note, first of all, that the Wohari.no Muraji were one of the local families who had backed Temmu in his succession war; thus, in 684, they had been granted the new title of Sukune.

The Wohari.no Muraji claim as their first ancestor Ho.no akari, one of the three sons of Ninigi, the Heavenly Grandchild (NG 2 = NKBT 67: 142/143; Aston 1956: I, 73), a high extraction indeed. They also boast being connected with the imperial family by marriage: one of the consorts of Keitai-tennō was Me.no ko, daughter of Kusaka, Wohari.no Muraji. She was the mother of two future emperors, Ankan and Senka (NG 17 = NKBT 68: 24/25; Aston 1956: II,5). Thus it may not be merely by chance that Keitai and Senka are the only two emperors of whom we are told that their accession involved the presentation of sword and mirror, anachronistic as it may be. We may pass over the absolutely unhistorical part of the imperial line; but whether we take it as a tradition with a historical background, or as the back-projection of these later events, Mimaki'iri-biko too is endowed with a lady coming from the Wohari family, and she bore him several children, one of whom we have already met: Nunaki.no iri-bime, who served the god Yamato.no Ōkunitama (NG 5 = NKBT 67: 237; Aston 1956: I, 150). This also shows our assumption that the *kusanagi* sword must originally have been the emblem of this god in a new light: there is at least a distant connection with the Wohari family and thus with Atsuta, where "now" the sword has its place.

We cannot enter here upon the difficult question of whether Yamato-takeru is a historical person or a sheer *Kunstfigur*. But it is quite obvious that his person, whether real or fictive, served as a convenient dummy upon which were placed all kinds of stories, traditional topics, folk legends and migratory motifs, stories based on folk etymologies and mostly without any background in reality, and the like. The interpretation of the two stories featuring Yamato-takeru in connection with the *kusanagi* sword as pious records of the miraculous way in which the wondrous sword from Ise protected the prince, and of his having left it behind when going to subdue the mountain deity being explained as the reason why he caught a deadly disease (e.g. Ueda 1986 [1960]: 128 ff.), seems quite out of place. Yet an interesting point raised by Ueda Masa'aki (1986 [1960]: 130) concerns a shrine under the administration of the Outer Shrine of Ise mentioned in the *Toyukegū gishikichō* of 804 (GR 1: 53 a) as Kusanaki-jinja. A later tradition of the Watarai family connects this shrine with a sword given to their family ancestor during the time of Suinin-tennō, used in a battle against bandits, and eventually revered as a god. It seems quite obvious that this is a relatively late tradition, late especially in regard to the myth about the *kusanagi* sword, and overtly modelled after the

stories in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*. It cannot help to solve the question of whether the *kusanagi* sword was ever brought to Ise.

The stories involving Yamato-takeru and the Ise shrine only look like another stratagem to corroborate the connection between the imperial family and this sword, and to provide a likely reason for its being enshrined in Atsuta. Considering the inconsistency of the tale around the two emblems removed from the imperial palace, the mythical background of the god Yamato.no Ōkunitama alias Ōkuninushi, and the relation of Nunaki.no iri-bime as his first priestess with the Wohari family, it seems most probable that the sword called *kusanagi* and “now” enshrined in Atsuta either has been there from the beginning, or was brought over not from Ise but from Yamato. The emphasis on the “now” would point to the latter possibility, but it does not exclude the possibility that the sword had only previously been brought to Yamato, whether from Atsuta itself or from somewhere else.

Looking back, we may trace three lines within the story of the *kusanagi* sword: 1) a mythical line, leading from Susa.no wo to his son Ōkuninushi; 2) a political line, Susa.no wo → Amaterasu → Ninigi/imperial palace → Ise/Yamato-takeru → Atsuta → Temmu; 3) a historical line, showing the sword under the administration of the *hafuri* of Atsuta being stolen and eventually restored.

No one would suggest that the sword actually enshrined in Atsuta *is* the mythical sword. Taking the tradition as given in the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* as a starting point, historians tend to the opinion that the object treasured in Atsuta has to be an iron sword and as such manufactured during the Kofun period. There is, however, a “record of actual inspection” during the Edo period describing it as a bronze sword (Naoki Kōjirō in *Kokushi daijiten* 1: 312a s.v. Ame.no murakumo.no tsurugi). It is most regrettable that this is all we are told; yet even this short notice tells us that the sword and the oldest tradition pertaining to it cannot be located in the Kofun period, and cannot, therefore, be connected with the early Yamato state. We must go further back.

Although some of the roots of the so-called Izumo myths (the myths around Susa.no wo and Ōkuninushi) reach much further back, for the most part they received their definite shape during the Yayoi period. We can perceive this shape only to a certain extent; too much has been distorted by the hands of the compilers of the transmitted texts. The prominent rôle of the sword, however, appears clear enough, and the cultural environment can only point to a bronze weapon. The bronze sword treasured in the Atsuta shrine fits precisely into this pattern. And who would, in this connection, not be reminded of the almost incredible number of bronze swords forming a single great hoard recently discovered within the old Izumo region!¹¹ Lastly, the *hafuri* of Atsuta, “administrators” of the sword, may for their part also very well point to a pre-Yamato institution.¹² Thus, not only the concept behind the sword presented to Emperor Akihito on his accession to the throne, but even the ‘original’ weapon serving as a model for the substitute

¹¹For a detailed description with illustrations see f.i. Watanabe 1986: 98 sqq.

¹²On the *hafuri* as an institution deriving from the pre-Yamato period see Miller/Naumann 1990 esp. chapter V.

handed down in succession, leads us far back in time - farther than the earliest political structure out of which the modern Japanese state has grown.

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