

## The Tale of Ou no Sukune and the *Ama* Seafarers of Awaji

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### An Archaeological View of the Tale of Ou no Sukune

There are several entries in *Harima no Kuni Fudoki* in which Izumo is mentioned. For example, it records that Nomi no Sukune from Izumo died at Tatsuno in Ihibo *Kōri*, while he was going back and forth between Izumo and Yamato, and they built his burial mound there. And in the story of Hirikata *Sato*, likewise in Ihibo *Kōri*, the Great Deity of Izumo appears, who impedes the passage of people travelling to and from Izumo. Such tales indicate the importance of the standing that Harima held as a transportation route linking Izumo and Yamato Provinces.

An interesting story about the transportation links between Izumo and Yamato is recorded in the preamble to the accession of King Nintoku in *Nihon Shoki*. It says that in order to clarify the ownership of the rice fields (*mita*) and granaries (*miyake*) of Yamato, Ou no Sukune, ancestor of the Izumo no Omi, received an order from Ōsazaki no mikoto (later King Nintoku) to cross to the Korean Peninsula, taking with him a crew from the *ama* seafarers of Awaji Island, in order to recall to Japan Agako, who was the ancestor of the Yamato no Atai. Research in the past has not taken this tale seriously as reflecting much historical truth. However, recent archaeological excavations have started to elucidate that the chiefs of eastern Izumo who would have been the model for Ou no Sukune were closely connected with the Yamato polity, and that their going to negotiate with the Korean Peninsula was an historical fact, at least in the fifth century. The presence of an official residence for chiefs in the fifth century along with a lot of Korean earthenware pottery found during excavation of the site of the Izumo Kokufu (Provincial Office) is indeed reminiscent of Ou no Sukune's voyage to Korea and back. Those who play a major role in this story are the *ama* seamen of Awaji who navigate for Ou no Sukune on the crossing to Korea, and Yamato no Atai Agako, who is said to have known the origins of the Yamato paddy fields and granaries. In the following, I should like to probe into some of the archaeological background to this tale.

### The *ama* community of Awaji, as seen through archaeology

Two important sites as regards the *ama* community of Awaji that we see depicted in *Nihon Shoki* are the Kidohara and Uryū Sites (see Fig. 1). One aspect that both sites have in common is the presence of earthenware of Korean provenance (see Fig. 2). Since this pottery included cooking pots, it means that immigrants from the Korean peninsula must have lived here, at least temporarily. In the well-known tale of Ame no Hiboko, the Yamato Court designated Idesa *Mura* in Awaji and Shisawa *Mura* in Harima as temporary residences for him. At the Kidohara Site, in fact, a large pit dwelling was discovered which yielded Korean-style earthenware, so it has been suggested that this could have been temporary accommodation for continental immigrants. The presence of such Korean-style pottery there plainly indicates the nature of Awaji's *ama* people as fulfilling an important role in transportation between Yamato and the Korean peninsula.

Pottery other than the Korean-style earthenware is also conspicuous. In particular, pots from the Tōkai region called Udagata ware were unearthed at both sites. Finds of fifth century Tōkai ware in western Japan are rare, and this strong connection between the *ama* communities of Awaji and Tōkai evokes the tale of Agako building a boat in Tōtōmi Province (present-day western Shizuoka Prefecture) in the Nintoku entry in *Nihon Shoki*.

At both sites collections of earthenware were found that were finished with black or red colouring on the surface and whose shape was modelled on that of *sue* stoneware. There are hardly any examples of similar *sue*-ware-style earthenware elsewhere in the Kinai region, and since earthenware finished in black is concentrated in northern Kyūshū, it is possible that it was brought from there. Either way, it is indicative of the wide range of interactions of the Awaji *ama*.

Apart from the pottery, iron ingots used as the raw material for ironware were excavated from the Kidohara Site. Replica items in talc were also found in the structures where these ingots were unearthed; and judging by the fact that some of the remains were charred, it is thought that they were ritual objects. Many similar ritual structures have been discovered along the coasts, such as at the Shussaku Site in Ehime Prefecture and the Chitose Shimo Site in Kyōto Prefecture,

so they are presumed to have been ritual sites associated with marine transportation. The *ama* communities were thus deeply involved in the circulation of iron, which was an important commodity at the time. And from the fact that a large number of blacksmiths' forges were found at the Uryū Site, there is a strong possibility that they played some part in the transmission of blacksmithing techniques. Judging by the Gossa Kaito Site, their origins go back to the Late Yayoi Period.

This archaeological evidence covers diverse regions and broad-ranging interactions, and eloquently bespeaks the activities of the *ama* people of Awaji as recorded in *Nihon Shoki*. The presence of immigrant-style artefacts such as pottery of Korean provenance coincides well with the entry about Ou no Sukune crossing to the Korean Peninsula with *ama* seamen from Awaji as his crew.

### **Awaji and Izumo: an archaeological viewpoint**

There is something else that is a noteworthy source for indicating transportation links between Izumo and Awaji as seen in the tale of Ouno Sukune: that is the presence of jasper from Kasenzan in Matsue-shi at both of the above sites. This was a gemstone used in bead making. Flakes of Kasenzan jasper were found within a dwelling at the Kidohara Site, albeit in small quantities. This means that they were not engaging in full-scale bead manufacture, but were making beads for specific ritual purposes, and we can assess this as indicating that they were trading with Izumo. And the raw material of Kasenzan jasper was found at the Uryū Site, dating to the end of the fifth century. Large-scale bead manufacture was in progress at that time at the Soga Site in Yamato, which greatly contributed to the rise of the Yamato polity, and large quantities of Kasenzan jasper were used in its production there. The Kasenzan jasper at the Uryū Site suggests that Awaji was the entrepôt for delivering Kasenzan jasper from Izumo to Yamato.

Furthermore, piemontite schist started to be used in large quantities from the fifth century at the bead workshops in Izumo, as whetstones for manufacturing and polishing beads. The source of this piemontite schist has not been located, but it is thought that it might have been taken there from the Sanbagawa metamorphic zone of the Kinogawa River catchment area (Kii Peninsula). As far as the geographical conditions are concerned, it is highly likely that the *ama* people of Awaji contributed to its distribution. In short, Awaji in the fifth century was the base for marine transportation between Izumo and Yamato.

### **The *ama* and the royal palaces**

Apart from in the preamble to the entry for Nintoku, Yamato no Atai Agako appears in the entry about the rebellion of Prince Suminoe no Nakatsu no Ō in the *Nihon Shoki* entry for Richū, prior to the King's accession. Agako joins forces on the side of Suminoe. The fact that he has a close connection with the *ama* of Noshima in Awaji who were organised by the Azumi no Muraji<sup>1</sup> indicates the depth of the ties between the Yamato no Atai and the *ama* community. Richū escapes from Naniwa and takes refuge in Isonokami Furunokami Shrine. Near to the place that is putatively the site of this shrine is the Furu Archaeological Site in Tenri-shi. There they found all kinds of objects associated with ritual and handicraft manufacture, in addition to a large-scale fifth century irrigation channel that is inferred to be the Isonokami no Unade (irrigation ditch) mentioned in the *Nihon Shoki* entry for Richū's reign. It is therefore quite likely that there was a palatial Yamato political stronghold in this vicinity.

What is noteworthy here is that a large number of artefacts associated with the *ama* were excavated from the Furu Site. In particular, it boasts by far the largest quantity of salt-making pots in Yamato. In addition there was a lot of earthenware of Korean provenance and the kinds of pottery that were found at the Kidohara and Uryū Sites in Awaji, including a lot of earthenware imitations of *sue* ware and earthenware from the Tōkai district. Such an assemblage of *ama* related artefacts demonstrates that the *ama* communities around Ōsaka Bay in close proximity to the royal palaces in the fifth century were in direct service to the Yamato Court.

Another noteworthy point is that items for the manufacture of Kasenzan jasper beads were also found at the Furu Site. Judging by the presence of the *ama*-associated objects described above, these materials were probably taken to Furu by the *ama* communities of Ōsaka Bay. In

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: The Azumi are known to have been a powerful *ama* family along the coasts of the Inland Sea; *Muraji* is the *kabane* rank of their leader.

short, the *ama* communities around Ōsaka Bay played an important part in transportation between the centre of the Yamato polity and Izumo in the fifth century.

Above I have added background archaeological evidence to the stories of Ou no Sukune and Yamato no Atai Agako. I have explained how the *ama* communities of Awaji, including first and foremost those of Mihara, played a crucial role in the Yamato polity's conduct of overseas intercourse with the Korean peninsula, and also how the Yamato Court maintained transportation links with the chiefs of Izumo through the *ama* communities of Awaji. The structures and objects found at the Kidohara and Uryū Sites have given us a glimpse of unknown interactions that took place between Izumo, Awaji and the Yamato Court, along with a more vivid image of the *ama* communities of Awaji that are mentioned in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*.