

## Awa no Wanasa and Mimatsuhiko: Ama seafaring groups moved over a wide area

Akira FURUICHI (trans. Edwina Palmer)

### The freshwater clam of Wanasa in Shijimi Sato

As the origin of the place name Shijimi Sato in Minagi Kōri, *Harima Fudoki* relates that when Izahowake no mikoto arrived there, he watched a freshwater clam [*Corbicula*] climb up his tray table, and remarked that he had once eaten such a clam himself at Wanasa in Awa Province (Shikoku). That was why this place was called Shijimi [‘freshwater clam’] (entry for Shijimi Sato Minagi Kōri). The name Izahowake denotes King Richū (Ōe no Izahowake no mikoto).

King Richū’s visit to Shijimi does not appear in *Kojiki* or *Nihon Shoki*, and this story of a clam from Awa Province appearing in the mountainous district of Minagi Kōri does not ring true. Even so, given that this kind of tale had remained in the district of Shijimi, it may reflect the movements of the *ama* seafaring people over a wide area, between Awa and Harima, and between them and the Japan Sea provinces of Izumo and the Oki Isles, during the fifth century.

### The geographical distribution of ‘Wanasa’

Wanasa in Awa Province was Wanasa Sato, Naka Kōri (notably known as Amabe Kōri from the end of the Heian Period) in Awa Province; it is thought to have referred to present-day Nasa, Shishikui-ura, Kaifu-chō, Kaifu-gun, Tokushima Prefecture, which faces the Pacific Ocean (see Map 1). Why would the place name of Wanasa near the southernmost tip of Tokushima Prefecture have been mentioned in the vicinity of Shijimi?

What is noteworthy is the presence of the *ama* (seafarers) at Wanasa. It is recorded in *Awa no Kuni Fudoki Itsubun* that the seafarers (*amabe*) of Wanasa called waves ‘*na*’. Nasa Bay is a good harbour where the peninsula jutting into the Pacific shelters it from rough oceanic waves: it is an appropriate landscape for the *ama* to have told stories about (see Photograph).

A tale about Osashi, an *ama* man from Naka Mura (i.e., Naka Kōri) in Awa Province, is related in *Nihon Shoki*. The gist of the story is that when King Ingyō wanted to hunt on Awaji Island, the deity of the island demanded a pearl from the seabed at Akashi, and although Osashi brought it to the surface, it was such an unreasonable depth to dive that he had died in accomplishing it. Osashi’s grave was said to be still there (Ingyō 14th year, 9th month).

It has been handed down orally that Osashi’s grave is one or other of the burial mounds in the Ishi no Neya *Kofun* cluster at Iwaya on the northern tip of Awaji island, facing the Akashi Straits. This *kofun* cluster dates from the latter half of the sixth century, so it does not match with Ingyō’s reign, which is thought to have been in the first half of the fifth century. But at any rate, this tale would have been predicated upon there being some kind of connection between the *ama* communities of Naka Kōri in Awa Province and Awaji Island.

Awaji Island is another place where there was a concentration of *ama* people. One of these, the Yamato no Atai, had Yamato as their base in the Nara Period, but originally they were an *ama* community based on the coast of Ōsaka Bay, as several tales in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* attest that their ancestors were active along the Ōsaka Bay coastline. The Yamato no Atai lived not only on Awaji Island but also in Akashi Kōri, and there was a close connection between the *ama* people and Akashi.

There is a certain logic, therefore, if we take these relationships into consideration, that the tales of Wanasa in Awa would have crossed the Akashi Straits to Harima. It is likely that the movements of the *ama* of Wanasa did not stop at Shijimi: the name Wanasa also appears in Izumo Province. It is recorded in *Izumo Fudoki* in the entry for Funaokayama in Ushio Sato, Ōhara Kōri, that the boat that Awakihe Wanasahiko hauled here turned into a hill, otherwise known as Wanasayama (see also the entry for Kimachi River, Ou Kōri). ‘Awakihe’ means ‘Came from Awa’. In the entry for Ushio Sato it says that a deity had come there from Wanasa in Awa. The *ama* community from Wanasa left such traces of themselves via Shijimi to as far away as Izumo.

The name Wanasa also appears in *Tango no Kuni Fudoki Itsubun*: an elderly couple called Wanasa steal the robes of a celestial maiden at Hijiyama in Taniha Kōri in Tango Province. Tango’s

connections with Harima run deep. It is recorded that Kusakabe no Muraji Omi fled with Princes Oke and Woke (later Kings Kensō and Ninke, whose father, Prince Ichibe no Oshiha had been assassinated) via Yosa *Kōri* in what was then Tango (in the original texts it is called Tanba Province), then took them to Shijimi in Harima. The tale of Urashimako of Mizue in Yosa *Kōri* claims that Shimako was the founder of the Kusakabe no Obito family. So from the above connections, it is highly likely that the *ama* of Wanasa went back and forth between Shijimi and Tango.

### The spread of Mimatsuhiko tales

The insight that *ama* groups from Awa travelled long distances to places like Izumo and Tanba via Harima might seem far-fetched at first sight. However, the examples that suggest that the *ama* of Awa covered a wide area include more than just Wanasa. There is a place name origin story in *Harima Fudoki* in which Shikama *Kōri* was so called because a huge stag [*shika*] roared there when Ōmimatsuhiko no mikoto built a lodge and stayed there while passing through Shikama. No place name 'Mima' appears in Shikama, so we can but assume that Ōmimatsuhiko was a deity from elsewhere. Apart from in Shikama, there is one other example of a tale about a Mimatsuhiko—in Sayo *Kōri*, but there is no place name such as Mima in Sayo either.

The indigenous name of the fifth Emperor, Kōshō, is said to have been Mimatsuhiko Kaeshine, but his historicity is dubious; however, it is noteworthy that there are extant historical records concerning a Mimatsuhiko in Awa. There is a *shikinaisha* [shrine listed in *Engishiki*, 927 CE] called Mimatsuhiko Shrine in Nakata *Kōri*. According to *Kuni no Miyatsuko Hongi*, there was a Naga no Kuni no Miyatsuko based in Naka *Kōri*, and the man appointed *kuni no miyatsuko* was Karase no Sukune, ninth generation descendant of Mimatsuhiko Irodo. The word *irodo* refers to siblings with the same mother, so the name Mimatsuhiko Irodo means 'younger brother of Mimatsuhiko by the same mother.' We saw above that Naka *Kōri* was a stronghold of the *ama*, so we can verify the geographical spread of *ama* groups, based on this and similar information. For example, *ama* groups including the Ama no Atai and Azumibe families also lived in Nakata *Kōri*, and there were *shikinaisha* shrines there dedicated to sea deities, such as Ama no Iwato no Toyotamahime Shrine and Wadatsumi Toyotamahime Shrine.

This suggests that the tales of Mimatsuhiko in Shikama and Sayo were transmitted there by *ama* people from Awa Province. There is another example of the name Mimatsuhiko in Oki Province. The founding ancestor of the Oki no Kuni no Miyatsuko is recorded as Totsukahiko no mikoto, fifth generation descendant of Mimatsuhiko Irodo (*Kuni no Miyatsuko Hongi*). There was an Amabe *Kōri* in Oki Province; and a large number of *mokkan* (wooden labels) excavated from the Heijō Capital and Palace sites [Nara] that are connected with Oki Province include the names and titles of *ama* groups such as the Azumi family and Azumibe. Moreover, a post station is recorded in *Izumo no Kuni Fudoki* called Chikumi no Umay, which is thought to have been the crossing-point to the Oki Isles. This was the birthplace of Tsukutsumi no mikoto, and his first ancestor was Izanagi. Izanagi was worshipped originally by the *ama* groups of Awaji, so the route of transmission of Mimatsuhiko tales to the Oki Isles can be logically explained.

The tales of Wanasa and Mimatsuhiko both reflect the extent of the influence of the *ama* people of Awa Province, and relate how they spread to the Japan Sea coast of Izumo, Oki and Tango via Harima (see Map 2). Why was this mobility over such a wide area necessary? This question is doubtless bound up with the character of the *ama* groups. What was most important for the ancient *ama* people was ocean-going navigation for crossing to the Korean Peninsula. Without the expertise in seafaring by the *ama*, there would have been none of the indispensable imported resources of iron and high-level technology needed for regional development in ancient Japan. Tales of the *ama* people of Awaji crossing to the Korean Peninsula appear in *Nihon Shoki*, but the ocean-going navigational skills of the *ama* were not only confined to those in Awaji. The *ama* of Awa Province also conducted ocean-going trips. It is highly likely that their movements towards the Japan Sea coast were all part of the provisioning of a system for the military mobilisation of all the provinces of the Japan Sea coast by the central government of the Yamato kings. In research about the *ama* people to date, the emphasis has been on how the local powers of provinces such as Kibi and Ki subjugated them, but here I have ascertained that there were instances of them linking directly with the Yamato centre. If we accept the archaeological findings that huge keyhole-shaped *kofun* [burial mounds] were constructed in rapid succession in the mid-fourth century in places where the *ama* were based such as Harima and Tango, it is highly likely

that the movement of the *ama* groups of Awa Province to the Japan Sea coast took place from then on and throughout the fifth century.