

Shiinetsuhiko of the ‘Ama People’ and the Yamato Court

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The Yamato no Atai as *ama* seafarers

The ‘*Itsubun*’ [*fragmentum*] for Akashi is presumed to have originally been included in *Harima no Kuni no Fudoki*, and there is a story in it about the family that is thought to refer to the Akashi no Kuni no Miyatsuko. *Kuni no miyatsuko* were ancient locally powerful families who represented districts that were allied with the Yamato polity. An entry appears in *Kokuzō Hongi*, Vol. 10 of *Sendai Kuji Hongi*,¹ that says that Tsumiji no Sukune was made Kuni no Miyatsuko of Akashi, and that he was son of Yashiro no Sukune who was of the same lineage as the Yamato no Atai. By contrast, with regard to the family called Monoimi no Atai of Settsu Province, the lineage of one Yashiro no Sukune appears as the ninth generation descendant of Shiinetsuhiko (in *Shinsen Shōjiroku*);² this Yashiro no Sukune is regarded as the Yashiro no Sukune who was the forebear of the Akashi no Kuni no Miyatsuko. One Shiinetsuhiko also appears as the founding father of the Yamato no Atai in the legend of Jinmu’s military expedition to the east, in both *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*.

In the light of all this, it seems that the Akashi no Kuni no Miyatsuko and the Yamato no Atai were both descended from Yashiro no Sukune, and belonged to a *dōzoku* (clan, or extended family) that held Shiinetsuhiko to be their founding father. In the tale of Jinmu’s expedition to the east, the place where we first see Shiinetsuhiko is in the Akashi Straits, so this too suggests that a kinship relationship existed between the Yamato no Atai and the district of Akashi, and hence, therefore, with the Akashi no Kuni no Miyatsuko.

Shiinetsuhiko as mentioned in the tale of Jinmu’s eastward expansion is an *ama*—man of the sea—who travels by boat, rides on turtles, navigates and fishes out to sea, and has a thorough knowledge of the complicated currents and shipping lanes. Shiinetsuhiko is encountered near the Akashi Straits and he guides Jinmu’s fleet through the navigation channels of Ōsaka Bay as their *umishirube* or pilot to Yamato, and thereby allows Jinmu to accomplish his pacification of Yamato. The image of him that this evokes is of a seaman who is active along the coast of Ōsaka Bay, with Akashi and western Settsu as his home base, and he is an expert in fishing and marine navigation.

The tale in *Harima Fudoki* that celebrates the Akashi no Kuni no Miyatsuko also has a strongly marine character to it: the Kuni no Miyatsuko is possessed by a deity that casts a spell over the naval fleet of Queen Consort Jingū to increase its speed, and this leads to her victory against Silla. This story also reflects the attributes of the Akashi no Kuni no Miyatsuko as a locally powerful seafaring clan (*gōzoku*) with Shiinetsuhiko as its founder.

The Yamato no Atai, on the other hand, is well known as the traditional extended family in Yamato that produced the heirs to the post of Yamato no Kuni no Miyatsuko, and who served as hereditary priests for generations at Ōyamato Shrine where rituals were conducted for the deity Yamato no Ōkuni no Tama no Kami (‘Deity of the Spirit of the Great Land of Yamato’). This Yamato no Atai also has some strongly marine characteristics and claimed descent from Shiinetsuhiko. In fact, in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, there are pointers to the kinship relationship between the Yamato no Atai and the *ama* of Awaji; stories of their involvement in boat building and navigation; and tales of their whole extended family being involved in crossings to the Korean Peninsula. In addition to belonging to the same extended family as the Akashi no Kuni no Miyatsuko, the kinship and bloodline relationships between the Yamato no Atai—who were strung along the coast from Akashi to western Settsu—and the Ama no Atai family—who are regarded as *ama* people—are also indicated in the written sources (entry for the 6th month of Jingo Keiun [769 CE], in *Shoku Nihongi* [797]). Accordingly, shrines dedicated to Yamato no Ōkuni no Tama no Kami

¹ Translator’s note: possibly eighth or ninth century.

² Translator’s note: 815 CE.

over which the Yamato no Atai presided, and shrines to their earliest ancestor Shiinetsuhiko, are dotted throughout western Settsu, Awaji and Awa.

So it seems that the Yamato no Atai family, who belonged to the same lineage as the Akashi no Kuni no Miyatsuko, were also *ama* people who were linked around the coast of Ōsaka Bay.

The northwestern Yamato Basin as the home base of the Yamato no Atai

In their role as Yamato no Kuni no Miyatsuko, the Yamato no Atai family presided over Ōyamato Shrine, which is in Niizumi-chō, Tenri-shi, Nara Prefecture. It is also claimed that the place where the rituals to Yamato no Ōkuni no Tama no Kami were first carried out was at Sai Shrine at the foot of Mt. Miwa. On account of this, it is assumed that the home base of the Yamato no Atai in their role as Yamato no Kuni no Miyatsuko was across the centre and southeastern part of the Yamato Basin. That the Yamato no Atai as a whole exerted its authority as a locally powerful family in this area is attested in the written records.

However, it is also clear from written sources that members of the Yamato no Atai family lived all over the northwestern part of Yamato, especially in Soejimo-gun, and that they held sway over the local society as a traditional and influential power. In fact, in the tale of the eastward expedition of Jinmu, the first route taken by Shiinetsuhiko to lead Jinmu into Yamato went east through Ōsaka Bay, up the Yodo River, crossed Mt. Ikoma, and then they surged into the northwest of the Yamato Basin. This was the route for a rapid invasion from the south.

In the tale of Jinmu's expedition to the east, the name 'Shiinetsuhiko' is first granted by Jinmu. And this tale also contains aspects of explaining the origins of the service of the Yamato no Atai family to the Yamato kings in their capacity as seafarers and marine navigators. In the tale of Jinmu's eastward expedition, we catch a glimpse of Shiinetsuhiko as navigator together with Jinmu having aimed for and positioned themselves in the northwestern Yamato Basin in order to pacify Yamato. This reflects that this district was one of the strongholds of the Yamato no Atai in Yamato. Moreover, it also tells us that a characteristic of this district was that the *ama* people who paid tribute to the Yamato polity belonged to the Yamato no Atai in their role as navigators.

Integration of the northwestern Yamato Basin and the coastline of Ōsaka Bay

The route of Shiinetsuhiko bespeaks that this district within the basin was regarded all as one with the Ōsaka Bay coastline: through the Akashi Straits and Ōsaka Bay sea lanes, then by water directly up into the Yodo River catchment. Shiinetsuhiko and Jinmu approached northwestern Yamato by going up the Yodo River and over Mt. Ikoma, and in the *Nihon Shoki* version it specifies further that the route was up the Yodo River from Naniwa, then up the Kizu River from Yamashiro, over Mt. Narayama and into northern Yamato.

What the tale of Jinmu's eastward expedition illustrates is that it was precisely because Shiinetsuhiko as an *ama* had such navigational skill that such integration could be achieved between the coast of Ōsaka Bay and the northwestern Yamato Basin. There is also a tale depicting that the *ama* people travelled back and forth between Naniwa and Uji, presenting fresh fish as tribute to the Yamato Court (*Nihon Shoki*). I think this story shows that, being easily linked with the coast of Ōsaka Bay via the waterways, the potential of this region could be fulfilled only through the mediation of *ama* communities. The historicity of such tales as these is clearly endorsed by the fact that the extended families of the Yamato no Atai stretched from northwestern Yamato right through the Ōsaka Bay coastline.

Izanagi Shrine at Soejimo-gun

The route that later became the Iwabune Kaidō (overlapping with present-day National Route 168), running north-south between northern Kawachi and Yamato, intersects with the Kiyotaki Kaidō running east-west (which National Route 163 follows nowadays), and they form the gateway into the Yamato Basin in the vicinity of Soejimo-gun. If you follow the Yamada River eastwards from there for just under ten kilometres, you reach the Kizu River. The route of the Iwabune Kaidō on its Northern Kawachi side goes as far as Hirakata-shi near the Yodo River, while the Kiyotaki Kaidō comes out at Shijōnawate-shi (both in Ōsaka Prefecture). It seems that in ancient times the main hub for water traffic on the Yodo River was in the vicinity of Hirakata and neighbouring Kuzuha; in later times a post station was established at Kuzuha, which was well-

known as a ferry crossing. And it also appears that Shijōnawate was a harbour on the ancient Lake Kawachi.³

Among the list of shrines in *Engishiki* [927 CE], the entry for Sofunoshimo *Kōri* (i.e., Soejimo-gun) has an Izanagi Shrine. Izanagi was a deity based in Awaji Island, and it was the representative deity venerated by *ama* communities around the coast of Ōsaka Bay. A version of the tale of Shiinetsuhiko appears in the family history of the Yamato no Atai family that was compiled in the Middle Ages. It contains the *kuniumi* ('giving birth to the land') myth in which Izanagi is the protagonist—this is all part of one whole.

Apart from that, Izanagi Shrines appear in *Engishiki* in Yamato Province: one each in Shikinokami *Kōri* and Katsuraginoshimo *Kōri*. According to the classification in *Engishiki*, the only one that was a *taisha* ('grand shrine') was the one in Sofunoshimo *Kōri*, while the others were *shōsha* ('small shrines'). The Grand Shrine among the three Izanagi Shrines in *Engishiki* was in Sofunoshimo *Kōri*, rather than the one in Shikinokami *Kōri* which had long been at the centre of Yamato. That fact, along with the strength of the links between this district and the *ama* people and thence also with the whole coast of Ōsaka Bay, reflects the importance of this district as a transportation hub, due particularly to their powers of navigation.

Viewed in this way, the Yamato no Atai became active as the agents of transportation influencing the centre of the Yamato polity, which was increasingly concentrating in the northwest of the Yamato Basin; this was against a background of having previously developed the transportation network of the Ōsaka Bay coastal region, extending into the Yodo River. That is how I should like to interpret the historical truth of the legendary Shiinetsuhiko, founder of the Yamato no Atai, who served the king as his navigator.

The first institution of *uji* (extended family) names is said to have begun in the early sixth century. The *uji* name of Yamato no Atai is said to indicate those who belonged to the traditional locally powerful family of Yamato who presided over Ōyamato Shrine. In the sixth century when this *uji* name appears, the Yamato no Atai had no doubt already become firmly established as a 'native' locally powerful family in Yamato. The activities of the seafaring *ama* Yamato no Atai who served the king seem to predate that; but from when is another story.

³ Translator's note: Lake Kawachi was silting up by around the fourth century and no longer exists.