

## Festivals at boundaries at which jugs are laid down: the tale of Mikasaka, Taka Kōri

Wataru SAKAE (trans. Edwina Palmer)

### Ritual objects

All kinds of paraphernalia were used in ancient Japanese festivals, depending on their aims and methods. In the extant *Fudoki* of the various provinces (including *fragmenta*), there are such tales of human effigies, effigies of horses, tools for weaving, streamers, mirrors, jingle bells, *koto* (Japanese zithers), staves, bows and arrows (the ‘red-painted arrow’), etc., which are all suggestive of this. In *Harima Fudoki* alone there are *koto*, jugs and jars, stoles (scarves), boxes, kudzu vines, staves, and chaplets (head garlands). What I should like to take up here is the place name origin myth for Mikasaka, in which there is the story of a jug, called at that time a *mika* or *motai*.

### Stories of jugs being enshrined at boundaries

In the entry for Mikasaka in Hafuda Sato, Taka Kōri, it says, ‘According to one source, when they were determining the boundaries of Tanba and Harima Provinces, they buried a large jug on top of this hill, and thereby made that place the provincial boundary. That is why it is called Mikasaka [Jug Pass].’ As is indicated by the expression ‘According to one source’, this is recorded as a variant place name explanation for the preceding entry in which a deity called Takeiwa no mikoto placed his *mikage*<sup>1</sup> (chaplet) on this hill. But according to this version, when there was once a territorial dispute over the boundary between Tanba and Harima, they buried a large jug (*mika*) on this hill and made that the boundary marker, and that explains the place name. It does not explicitly say it was the boundary marker, but since the deity Takeiwa no mikoto appears in the previous entry, we should regard it as some kind of divine action.

The place name Mikasaka no longer exists there nowadays, but the most likely candidate for this place is present-day Nikasaka at the boundary of Kasai and Nishiwaki towns. If that is correct, it means that the boundary between Tanba and Harima had quite a southward kink in it, but no details are known. At any rate, it indicates that there was a festival at which a jug was used on a hilltop pass at the boundary somewhere or other in Taka Kōri. Stories of jugs located on hilltop passes can be seen not only in *Harima Fudoki* but also in *Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki*, and *Tsukushi no Kuni Fudoki Isubun*. I shall now consider these sources with reference to boundary festivals that used jugs.

### The tale of the *iwaibe* (sacred jug or jar) at Wanisaka

A tale of a jar or jug appears in the chapter on King Sujin in *Kojiki*.<sup>2</sup> According to that, when Hikokunibuku, ancestor of the Wani no Omi family, set off in order to quell an uprising by Prince Takehaniyasu of Yamashiro Province, he placed an *iwaibe* (sacred jug or jar) at Wanisaka [‘Wani Saddle’]. Likewise, in *Nihon Shoki* it says that Hikokunibuku offered an *iwaibe* on the summit of Wani no Takesukisaka [Wani no Takesuki Saddle], and then advanced his troops over Mt. Nara (Sujin, 10th year, 9th month).<sup>3</sup> In both instances these stories are predicated upon a ritual being carried out at the boundary, Wanisaka, of the stronghold territory of the Wani no Omi family. This indicates that in ancient Japan they performed rituals of placing sacred jars and jugs at

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<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: a circular garland or wreath of woven foliage worn at festivals or ceremonial occasions, similar to Roman laurel wreaths, traditional English floral wreaths, or Māori *pare kawakawa*. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wreath\\_\(attire\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wreath_(attire))

<sup>2</sup> Translator’s note: see Philippi, Donald L. (trans.), *Kojiki*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968, p. 206, stanza 20.

<sup>3</sup> Aston, W. G. (trans.), *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*, p. 157.

boundaries (*sakai*) that were hill passes (*saka*) in many places, not just at Taka *Kōri* in Harima Province.

### **The calling down of a spirit into a hollow vessel**

It is thought that such sacred jugs or jars were placed at boundaries on these occasions, as being vessels for offering oblations of *sake* to the deities. But not only that, these jars and jugs were also regarded as ritual objects into which the spirit of the boundary hill was summoned. In ancient Japan hollow containers such as jugs, jars, boxes and gourds were utilised as magical or ritual vessels into which to attract a deity. It appears that round-bottomed jugs were particularly characteristic of those that were buried in the ground.

According to Hirokazu SANO, archaeologist of Shintō, jugs and jars held a special significance for delineating borders. He notes that they were not simply signs or markers, but that it was believed that they attracted the guardian deities and spirits of the boundary into the jug or jar, to prevent misfortune and disasters from entering from outside the territory, and to protect the peace of their own world. This is a plausible view. In addition to Sano's theory, and based on the famous poem 3–379 of the *Manyōshū* by Ōtomo no Saka no Ue no Iratsume,<sup>4</sup> “I invoke the deity, burying a sacred jug”, I think that this would have been accompanied by orally transmitted oracles just like those of invoking one's lover, when making invocations to the vessel.

In this way, the deity called down to enter the jug had the characteristics of a local guardian deity confronting calamities from the outside world, as asserted by Sano. We can take the deity summoned in the tale of Hikokunibuku above to be the actual tutelary deity itself of the Wani no Omi, worshipped at the ‘Wani ni imasu Aka Saka Hiko Shrine’ (Soekami-gun, Nara Prefecture). It is written that Hikokunibuku set off immediately thereafter to quell the rebels, and that he won the battle. So it is possible to view the ritual act of burying the jug as being a ‘pre-battle ritual at the boundary’ in the eyes of the Wani no Omi, to pray for success. This tale was probably originally handed down internally among the Wani no Omi family as an origin myth for the festival of their own tutelary deity.

Furthermore, an entry appears in the chapter on King Kōrei in *Kojiki* in which Kibitsuhiko and Wakatake Kibitsuhiko are dispatched to quell dissent in Kibi Province, and they place a sacred jug ‘at the Hi River Bluff in Harima’.<sup>5</sup> It is highly likely that this also reflects the practice of rituals performed at boundaries, like those mentioned above.

In contrast to these, the story about Mikasaka in Taka *Kōri* in Harima Province contains no direct description of warfare or setting off to do battle. Nevertheless, *Harima Fudoki* does say that a boundary dispute with Tanba prompted the burying of ‘a large sacred jug’, so it probably had some such military significance originally.

### **A festival to seal off epidemics and disasters**

By the time *Harima Fudoki* was compiled in the Nara Period, such martial elements of ritual seem to have become attenuated. What was considered more important was the prevention of the entry of epidemics and disasters into the territory. As has been elucidated in recent research, it was a reality of life around the eighth century that epidemics (contagious diseases) and famine were chronic and severe, and many people died young. As a consequence, it is thought, local communities all over Japan conducted rituals for their local tutelary deities at their territorial boundaries, such as on the edges of the settlement (*mura*) or at mountain passes, cols and saddles (*saka*), in order to prevent the incursion of epidemics and disasters. This was the festival for what was later called ‘Sae no kami’.<sup>6</sup> No doubt the ritual conducted at Mikasaka was of this type.

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<sup>4</sup> Translator's note: literally, ‘Maiden of the hilltop of the Ōtomo family’. See Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai (ed.), *The Manyōshū*. Tokyo: 1965, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> Translator's note: see Philippi, Donald L. (trans.), *Kojiki*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968, p. 191, stanza 8.

<sup>6</sup> Translator's note: *Sae no kami* or *Sai no kami* were also known as *Dōsojin*, the guardian deity of travellers. See Czaja, Michael, *Gods of Myth and Stone: Phallicism in Japanese Folk Religion*. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1974; and Turnbull, Stephen, *Japan's Sexual Gods: Shrines, Roles and Rituals of Procreation and Protection*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015.

### **Sacred jars and shamanesses**

Based on folklore throughout Japan, in general the rituals associated with 'Sae no kami' often included the setting up of so-called *yōbutsu*, decorative phalluses, in addition to stone statues of Dōsojin, the Wayside Deity, which comprised a male–female pair at the side of the road. However, it is noteworthy that at Mikasaka it was not a phallic stone but a concave hollow vessel that was used. As we saw in the *Manyō* poem above, it was a woman called Ōtomo no Saka no Ue no Iratsume who buried the jar and directly invoked the deity to enter the 'sacred jug'.

According to the place name origin myth for Tsukushi Hill in *Tsukushi no Kuni Fudoki Itsubun*, it was a female deity called 'Mikayorihime', [Maiden who summons the deity to the jug], first ancestress of the Tsukushi no Kimi family (rulers of Tsukushi), who ultimately pacified a fearsome 'malevolent deity' on the hill. From this it can be seen that in rituals that involved sacred jugs and in rituals at boundaries, it was a woman from a specific family who lived nearby, and who had shamanistic characteristics, who acted as priestess. Hollow vessels such as jugs were objects that symbolised such women.

In the tales at the beginning of this section, Takeiwa no mikoto placed his own *mikage*, chaplet, on Mikasaka [Hill], and it seems that he was notorious as an indomitable and malevolent deity in Taka Kōri (*Harima Fudoki*, entries for Hafuta Sato and Tsuma Sato, Taka Kōri). In the ritual at Mikasaka, this Takeiwa no mikoto was probably summoned as the deity of the festival, and a ceremony conducted for him as the local tutelary deity, in which a shamanistic woman presided as priestess.