

## 大国主神 “O-kuni-nushi-no-kami”

### 1. 稲羽の素兎 “White Rabbit of Inaba”

This O-kuni-nushi-no-kami<sup>1</sup> had many brothers, the so-called eighty deities. They ceded all of their lands to O-kuni-nushi-no-kami, because they had a plan to go and propose to Ya-gami-hime, the princess of the Province of Inaba, together. They took O-namuji-no-kami along as an attendant, and had him carry their bags<sup>2</sup>. When they arrived at Cape Keta, there was a rabbit lying with its fur all plucked out, and showing its bare skin. The eighty deities said to the rabbit, “We will tell you what you should do. Go and bathe in the seawater and lie down at the top of a high mountain, and let the wind blow on you.”

The rabbit lay down following their instruction. But as the wind blew and the seawater on its skin dried, the rabbit’s skin cracked and split. The rabbit was in terrible pain and crying, when O-namuji-no-kami came last of all. He saw the rabbit and asked, “Why are you lying there, crying?” The rabbit answered, “I lived on the island of Oki. I wanted to come over to this land, but had no way to cross the water. So I tried to trick a shark and said to him, ‘Let’s count the number of our relatives and find out which one of us has more relatives. Bring all of your relatives and have them line up from this island to Cape Keta. I will count them by stepping on the backs of them as I run across. Then, we will know which of us have more relatives.’ The sharks were deceived and made a line, and I stepped on them and crossed over counting the number of the sharks. I was about to step on shore, when I said, ‘You were tricked by me.’ I scarcely finished my words when a shark, which was the last in line, caught me and plucked off my fur. I was crying in pain, when the eighty deities came along and said to me; ‘Bathe in the seawater, and lie down where the wind blows on you.’ I did as I was told, and the skin of my body cracked and now it hurts worse than ever.”

So O-namuji-no-kami instructed the rabbit what to do; “Go quickly to the river-mouth and wash your body with fresh water. Then pick the male Kama, the cattails<sup>3</sup>, growing there, and spread their pollen on the ground. Roll over on it, and the cracked skin will be healed, just the same as before.”

The rabbit did as he was told, and he was completely healed, with his fur all recovered. This is the White Rabbit<sup>4</sup> of Inaba, now called the Rabbit deity. This Rabbit deity prophesied and said to O-namuji-no-kami, “These eighty deities will never marry Yagami-hime. Although you are carrying their bags, you will marry her.”

#### Notes | 注釈

#1 O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto is the 6th generation descendant after Susa-no-o-no-mikoto, and his parents are Ame-no-fuyu-kinu-no-kami and Sashi-kuni-waka-hime. O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto has 4 other names; O-namuji-no-kami, Ashi-hara-shiko-o-no-kami, Ya-chi-hoko-no-kami, Utsushi-kuni-tama-no-kami. He has 5 names in the Kojiki, and 8 names in the Nihon-shoki. This is because he is a complex manifestations of various gods. ‘O-kuni’, standing for ‘a large country’

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or ‘many provinces’, is a pronoun represents various characteristics. On the other hand, Susa-no-o-no-mikoto has only one name, being a very simple deity. O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto administers navigation, agriculture, commerce, matchmaking, and so on. But Susa-no-o-no-mikoto administers war, and curses, associated with roughness and violence. People seem to revere Susa-no-o-no-mikoto who curses them if they do not worship him properly. In contrast, they seem to love and worship O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto who offers various kinds of good luck. Still, according to the book called *The Province of the Gods*, Shimane, there are more shrines which enshrine Susa-no-o-no-mikoto than those which enshrine O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto in Shimane prefecture. This fact shows that Susa-no-o-no-mikoto is curiously popular among the people in Izumo.

#2 To carry bags is a very humble job, humiliating the carrier in public.

#3 We see here the reason why O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto is called a god of medicine. He knew that the cattail pollen could heal the cut and damaged skin. Later, O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto and Sukuna-hikona-no-mikoto engaged in medical practice together. They were doctors who spread the knowledge of medicine in the province of Izumo. There were nurses too; Umu-gi-hime and Kisa-gai-hime. These two shellfish goddesses revived O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto when he was burnt to death by catching a burning stone which was supposed to be a wild boar.

There are more than sixty medical plants mentioned in the *Izumo-no-kuni-Fudoki*, the ancient records of the culture and geography of the province of Izumo. This large number of medical plants shows that Izumo is one of the provinces where medicine had advanced. According to the *Fudoki*, there are also two major hot-springs which are medicinal; Tamatsukuri and Yumura hot-springs are said to cure all illness and wounds without fail if you bathe in them twice.

And O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto marries Suseri-hime, who is Susa-no-o-no-mikoto’s daughter. The time span here seems to be incoherent, but please take it as it is—this is the world of myth.

#4 The meaning of the Chinese character ‘素’ used and pronounced ‘shiro’ here is taken as ‘white’ like in ‘shiro-usagi’ or ‘white rabbit.’ But it is said that the white rabbits were brought to Japan either in the 16th century, Azuchi-Momoyama period, or in the 19th century, Meiji period. It means that there were no white rabbits in ancient Japan. The Chinese character ‘su’ ‘素’ actually means ‘naked or bare’, as in ‘bare skin’ and ‘bare foot.’ So we should take this ‘shiro’ as ‘bare or naked’ instead of ‘white.’ ‘Shiro-usagi’ then means ‘the naked rabbit, or the rabbit who was stripped to its skin.’ But the name ‘white rabbit’ has already established its position (has become a fait accompli). So let’s generously accept the present interpretation of ‘shiro-usagi,’ with the spirit of the world of myth.

This is a story of medical treatment and rebirth. As it is mentioned before, the province of Izumo is the place for healing and rebirth.

By the way, there is Aka-iwa shrine at the foot of Mt. Tema. ‘Aka’ means ‘red’, and ‘i’ means ‘boar’, and ‘iwa’ means ‘a stone.’ O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto is enshrined here. Mr. Taro, the

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author of the book called Kojiki-Gaiden published by Gentosya INC., talks about the rebirth of O-kuni-nushi-no-mikoto in his book. Then people will come to this shrine wishing for the rebirth, or to recover from their ailment, their failure, their lost love, and so on. The community prospers this way, and the people in Yonago, Tottori, are making good use of the Kojiki.