

---

# SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

Number 209

April, 2011

---

## Japan and Inner Asia: Some Connections

by  
Mark A. Riddle

Victor H. Mair, Editor  
*Sino-Platonic Papers*  
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA  
vmair@sas.upenn.edu  
www.sino-platonic.org

# SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

FOUNDED 1986

*Editor-in-Chief*  
VICTOR H. MAIR

*Associate Editors*  
PAULA ROBERTS                      MARK SWOFFORD

*ISSN*  
2157-9679 (print)                      2157-9687 (online)

SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS is an occasional series dedicated to making available to specialists and the interested public the results of research that, because of its unconventional or controversial nature, might otherwise go unpublished. The editor-in-chief actively encourages younger, not yet well established, scholars and independent authors to submit manuscripts for consideration. Contributions in any of the major scholarly languages of the world, including romanized modern standard Mandarin (MSM) and Japanese, are acceptable. In special circumstances, papers written in one of the Sinitic topolects (*fangyan*) may be considered for publication.

Although the chief focus of *Sino-Platonic Papers* is on the intercultural relations of China with other peoples, challenging and creative studies on a wide variety of philological subjects will be entertained. This series is **not** the place for safe, sober, and stodgy presentations. *Sino-Platonic Papers* prefers lively work that, while taking reasonable risks to advance the field, capitalizes on brilliant new insights into the development of civilization.

Submissions are regularly sent out to be refereed, and extensive editorial suggestions for revision may be offered.

*Sino-Platonic Papers* emphasizes substance over form. We do, however, strongly recommend that prospective authors consult our style guidelines at [www.sino-platonic.org/stylesheet.doc](http://www.sino-platonic.org/stylesheet.doc). Manuscripts should be submitted as electronic files, preferably in Microsoft Word format. You may wish to use our sample document template, available here: [www.sino-platonic.org/spp.dot](http://www.sino-platonic.org/spp.dot).

Beginning with issue no. 171, *Sino-Platonic Papers* has been published electronically on the Web at [www.sino-platonic.org](http://www.sino-platonic.org). Issues 1–170, however, will continue to be sold as paper copies until our stock runs out, after which they too will be made available on the Web.

Please note: When the editor goes on an expedition or research trip, all operations (including filling orders) may temporarily cease for up to three months at a time. In such circumstances, those who wish to purchase various issues of *SPP* are requested to wait patiently until he returns. If issues are urgently needed while the editor is away, they may be requested through Interlibrary Loan. You should also check our Web site at [www.sino-platonic.org](http://www.sino-platonic.org), as back issues are regularly rereleased for free as PDF editions.

*Sino-Platonic Papers* is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

# Japan and Inner Asia: Some Connections

By Mark A. Riddle

Pleasant Grove, Utah

## Introduction

In 1966 pioneering Japanese ethnologist Ishida Ei'ichirou wrote that "Many of the Japanese legends preserved from ancient times have connections, not only with the neighboring cultures of Eastern Asia, but with the cultures of people living in regions far removed from Japan."<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this essay is to recognize not just these legends but also other features of Japanese culture whose provenance can be traced to "regions far removed from Japan." For each of the eleven such features identified herein, an attempt will be made to identify a possible origin.

### 1. Heraldry

The first point of similarity we will take up is the uncanny resemblance between Japanese and Western heraldry practices: "From the second quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe, heraldic designs are found in general application. Elsewhere, a similar system is to be found only in Japan, in the *mon*, also dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century." "The reservation of the *kiku-no-mon* to the Emperor, with junior members of the imperial family using a different variety of the flower...corresponds exactly to the rules of heraldic practice that apply to the European royal families."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Takayanagi, Shun'ichi, *Monumenta Nipponica* 30:3 (1975):335–339, p. 339

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica* 15<sup>th</sup> ed. (1981), VIII:782–783. This parallel is striking, but any explanation of how the two could be connected is necessarily speculative. We know that European heraldry originated in the Crusades, from Near Eastern influences, and that Near Eastern traders (Jews and Arabs especially) were prominent throughout the Silk Road trade routes, at least as far as China, in the twelfth century. What remains to be explained is how the Japanese could have learned the details of, and why at such a late date they would have so precisely adopted, a Near

The first use of the *mon* in Japan came in 1156 in the *Hougen* Civil War, and it was in common use by the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> "The language of insignia in feudal Japan is close to that of Europe in many respects."<sup>4</sup> Our purpose here does not require examination of the details of heraldry; we leave that for future study. But we will judge here that the similarities noted by the experts cited are certainly not coincidental, are not universals, and demand the assumption of some direct historical connection. On the other hand, we know of no easy explanation of how there could have been a direct connection between Japan and the Near East in the first half of the twelfth century. This parallel remains an anomaly, an important unsolved mystery.

## 2. The Sacred Horse Cult

Beginning in the fourth century A.D., horses of Inner Asian provenance were brought to Japan,<sup>5</sup> and the fifth century saw the apogee of the mounted warrior culture. It was not just horses, but also the Indo-European *horse cult*, which was brought to the archipelago. The principal features of the Indo-European or Central Asian cult of the sacred horse were as follows.

- The horse was a religious symbol that pervaded both myth and ritual.
- Special rituals involved the sacrificial killing of a white stallion.
- A white horse symbolized the sun and was often sacrificed to the sun.
- A fertility cult was associated with the horse.
- The horse is associated with rain.
- Horses are associated with the underworld and funereal symbolism.<sup>6</sup>

---

Eastern practice.

<sup>3</sup> H. Carroll Parrish, "The Mon," *The Augustan* XIV:3 (May–June 1971):122–137, p. 124

<sup>4</sup> Salvatore Merge, "Emblems and Insignia — Japan," *Encyclopedia of World Art* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1959–1968), IV:723

<sup>5</sup> "The horse is entirely unknown in Yayoi pictorial art." Archaeological evidence shows that horses arrived in Japan in considerable quantity in the Early Kofun Period, and in even greater numbers beginning in the Middle Kofun Period (J. Edward Kidder, *Early Japanese Art: The Tombs and Treasures* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1964], pp. 88, 189–190).

<sup>6</sup> Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion* (NY: Collier Macmillan, 1987), VI:463; hereafter cited as 'ER.' See

The Uralo-Altaic peoples of Central Asia and Siberia sacrificed horses to the supreme gods of the sky well into modern times. The horse was identified with the cosmos, and the sacrifice of the horse symbolized and reproduced the act of creation and was also an initiation ceremony.<sup>7</sup>

The horse also had a special connection with kingship — among the Iranian peoples, the king is chosen by an omen given by the sun god through his special animal, the horse,<sup>8</sup> and horse sacrifices, from Ireland to India, commonly accompanied the coronation of a king.<sup>9</sup> According to Herodotus, Xerxes' army was accompanied by a "chariot of the sun" drawn by white horses, and along the route were led horses to be sacrificed to the sun.<sup>10</sup>

The following evidence the presence of the Indo-European or Altaic steppe culture horse cult in Japan:

- in Japan, up to the present, a sacred white horse is led thrice monthly before the divinities of the *honden* (main shrine building) at the Ise Shrine, combining in one act the elements of sun worship (the principal deity of Ise is the sun goddess, Amaterasu) and sacral kingship (Ise is the emperor's personal shrine).<sup>11</sup>
- Horses appearing in early Japanese tomb paintings seem to be credited with supernatural powers, such as being able to communicate between deities and human beings, relying on their speed to do so.<sup>12</sup>

---

also Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1958), pp. 143–148.

<sup>7</sup> Eliade (1958), p. 96; Kidder (1964, pp. 151–152) assumes that horse sacrifice was brought to Korea and Japan by nomads, from Siberian shamanism, and attributes the association in Japan of horses with birds and boats to North Asian shamanism.

<sup>8</sup> Geo. Widengren, "The Sacral Kingship of Iran," in *The Sacral Kingship* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), p. 244

<sup>9</sup> *Encyclopedia of Religion*, op.cit., XIV:137; hereafter cited as 'ER'

<sup>10</sup> Cited in ER, XIV:137

<sup>11</sup> Robert S. Ellwood, "Harvest and Renewal at the Grand Shrine of Ise," *Numen*, Vol. 15, Fasc. 3 (Nov., 1968): 165–190, p. 170

<sup>12</sup> Kidder (1964), p. 90

- “The horse has been important in Shinto thought from early times, serving not only as a vehicle for various gods, but also as a messenger between the temporal and celestial worlds.”<sup>13</sup>
- The *Shoku Nihongi* (an official court history of 797 A.D.) mentions horses dedicated to shrines in order to bring rain or stop it, and small clay statuettes of horses have been retrieved from wells, probably dating from rituals of the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>14</sup>
- The *mukae-uma* (‘greeting horse’) of the July 7 Tanabata Festival of eastern Japan is a straw horse hung from gates and trees and placed on rooftops, offered as a mount to the visiting deity. The *mukae-uma* is also offered to visiting ancestors at *O-bon* and to the rice-paddy deity at field-viewing time.<sup>15</sup>

One important vestige of the Indo-European or Altaic horse cult in Japan is the *ema*, now standardized as a painting on wood of a horse, given as a votive offering to a shrine; *ema* are often hung for display in an *ema-dou*, a pavilion devoted to that purpose. The practice developed from the ancient belief that the deities descended to the temporal world riding on horses; horses were also dedicated to a shrine to placate or petition a deity. A white horse (representing the sun) would be dedicated to stop rain and a dark-color horse (the color of a rain cloud) offered in time of drought. It seems the financial burden of offering a live horse led to substitution of wooden and clay models, then of the even simpler *ema*, paintings of horses on wood.<sup>16</sup>

The earliest documentary evidence of live horse offering is the mention in the *Hitachi-no-kuni Fuudoki* (one of a series of local gazetteers compiled by the court from 713 A.D.) of Emperor Suujin’s (r.219–249 A.D., revised chronology) offering of a horse to the Kashima Shrine. The earliest *ema* found in the archaeological record date from the eighth century.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> M. Hickman, “Ema” in *Encyclopedia of Japan* (NY: Kodansha, 1983), II:196

<sup>14</sup> Kidder (1964), p. 131

<sup>15</sup> Nishitsunoi, Masayoshi, *Nenjuu Gyouji Jiten* (1965), f p. 465

<sup>16</sup> Yasui Kompira-guu, “Ema no Yurai to Kompira Ema-kan no Tanjou,” n.d.; [a Kyoto shrine museum guide, ca. 1992, in the possession of the author]

<sup>17</sup> Kawada, Sadamu, “Ema no Kigen,” *Kyoto-shi Bunkazai Dayori*, No. 20 (1993), p. 2, in the possession of the

This evidence for the presence of the Inner Asian horse cult in Japan seems to permit only the assumption of a direct historical connection between Central Asia and Japan. Other evidence corroborates this postulation, but the Japanese chronicles do not readily yield an identification of the means by which the Inner Asian horse cult came to Japan; this topic must also be left for future study

### 3. Orientation

*Orientation* is the religious act of defining and assuming a proper position in space, fixing the place of human habitation with reference to the sacred, making the house, the city, the nation, the cosmos, *habitable*. The various forms of orientation to sacred reality, including the location of the sacred center, or orientation with respect to the cardinal directions or a sacred axis — all these highlight the human desire to live in a sacred world, and permeate human actions of all kinds as they provide the individual with a sense of his significance in relation to the powers and other beings of the cosmos.<sup>18</sup>

There were *two* dominant cosmological schemas in pre-modern Japan: (1) orientation to a north–south axis, the dominant cosmology of the Chinese realm; and (2) orientation to an east–west axis, which came to Japan from the Altaic homeland in Central Asia. As the revolving of the stars about the north celestial pole was the central phenomenon of Chinese cosmology, so the rising of the sun in the east dominated the Altaic worldview. Personification of the sun and deification of rulers accompanied sun worship among early Altaic peoples, as shown by Altaic regnal titles derived from words denoting the sun.<sup>19</sup>

---

author

<sup>18</sup> Mircea Eliade and Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Orientation," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *ER*

<sup>19</sup> Wang, Penglin, "Tokharian Words in Altaic Regnal Titles," *Central Asiatic Journal*, 39:2 (1995):165–207, p. 167; in Altaic communities the entrance to a building is to be kept in the eastern side. Solomon's temple faced east and is important evidence of a dominant east–west axis among the Hebrews; for this and other evidence of solar elements in Israelite religion see J. Glenn Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 67ff. Because of the proximity and priority of the Altaic orientation to the east, there is no need to posit a connection between Japan and ancient Israel in this case.

Japanese scholar Yoshimura Teiji cites Japan's Jomon-era stone circles, the largest of which are in Akita Prefecture, which are aligned to sunrise at the winter solstice, as evidence of an early east–west axis orientation in Japan.<sup>20</sup> Linguist Roy Andrew Miller points out that Japanese preserves lexical evidence for an east-facing orientation like that of the earliest Turkic peoples, connected with the cult of the rising sun.<sup>21</sup> Although the first imperial capitals of Japan (late seventh and early eighth century) were built with a north–south orientation, modeled on the Chinese cosmopolis, the largest of the early *kofun* burial mounds of the Nara Basin (third to fourth century) were oriented to sunrise at the solstices over mountain peaks to their east.<sup>22</sup> New Zealand scholar Edwina Palmer cites as evidence of the dominance of the east–west axis in early Japan the fact that to the present day, the wrestlers in sumo tournaments are divided into east and west sides, with the former ranking higher.<sup>23</sup>

In support of Palmer's thesis, we can note that the opening lines of one of the oldest of Japan's historical documents, the *Izumo Fudoki*, describe Izumo, a province in western Japan, as lying "with its head facing east and its tail extending toward the southwest."<sup>24</sup> But even with its "head" to the east, and even as the site of the Grand Kizuki Shrine, Izumo ranked lower in status than Ise, in the auspicious east. Izumo was the site of Japan's Yellow Springs, a Chinese-style nether world and place to which the mythical deity Susa-no-o was banished. All the traditional sites to which disgraced Japanese courtiers were banished lay in the west — Oki, Iwami, Izumo, Dazaifu. Just as the courtyard of the Kyoto Imperial Palace (*Go-sho no*

---

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Edwina Palmer, "Land of the Rising Sun: The Predominant East–West Axis among the Early Japanese," *Monumenta Nipponica* 46:1 (1991):69–90, pp. 78ff.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 86; among the Yakut, northernmost of the Turkic peoples, bright, creative spirits reside in the east, and dark, harmful spirits in the west (*ER*, XV:493–494).

<sup>22</sup> Palmer (1991), pp. 85–86, citing Japanese scholar Oowa Iwao

<sup>23</sup> Palmer, *op.cit.*, p. 89; other evidence also links sumo, an ancient sport in Japan, with Central Asia (see below).

<sup>24</sup> Aoki, Michiko, *Records of Wind and Earth: A Translation of Fudoki, with Introduction and Commentaries* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Association for Asian Studies, 1997), p. 75



*Shishinden*) has a Sun gate to the east and a Moon gate to the west, so Izumo played the role of "moon" to Ise's "sun."<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. Sumou (Sumo Wrestling)

"Sumo" is sometimes thought of as a uniquely Japanese sport, and indeed it is. But antecedent forms and vestigial remnants may be found across Asia as far west as Mesopotamia. The parallels with the Korean *sirum*, the Mongolian *bokh* (*khapsagay*) wrestling of the Naadam Festival and the *khuresh* wrestling of Turkic peoples of Central Asia are obvious. Compared with these, Japanese sumo is highly ritualistic, retaining symbols and rites that we can only assume have been preserved from antiquity. But two aspects of sumo — the *fundoshi* loincloth and the *chonmage* topknot hairstyle — we know are very old because they can be found in archaeological evidence dating back some millennia.

*Haniwa* (clay figurines) found at the Inbe Hachiman-san *kofun* (burial tumulus) site in Wakayama Prefecture, dated at ca. 500 A.D., the largest keyhole-shaped kofun of the Late Kofun Period in Wakayama, included horses and hawks, but the most interesting find was a human figure, naked except for a *fundoshi* and showing hair pulled up in a *chonmage*.<sup>26</sup> The *fundoshi* is also found in a tomb wall painting from the same era in what is now Anak, North Hwanghae Province, in Korea. The fresco of a wrestling scene in what was then Koguryo territory features two bearded men dressed only in loincloths, and with topknots, like the Japanese sumo wrestlers of today.<sup>27</sup> The same costume elements can be seen on figurines found among the stone Buddhas of Dunhuang, in western Gansu, China.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> In ancient Mesopotamia, entry into the world of the dead was gained through the West, where the sun sets, where there is an enormous dark cave, an entry into the domain of the dead (*ER*, VII:137). The corresponding Japanese concept is 'ne-no-kuni.'

<sup>26</sup> Ueda, Masaaki, et al., eds, *Kodai Nihon to Chousen* (Tokyo: Chuukou-bunko, 1982), p. 63

<sup>27</sup> Okazaki, Takashi, "Japan and the Continent," in Delmer M. Brown, ed., *Cambridge History of Japan*, Vol. I, *Ancient Japan*; a photo of this fresco is reproduced in Ueda (1982), p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Mori Kouichi, in Ueda (1982), p. 64

The most remarkable evidence of the antiquity, and origin, of sumo is found in Mesopotamia. A jar with a pedestal formed from two wrestling figures, from the Nintu Temple at Tutubu (modern Khafajah), dated to the Early Dynastic Period (2500–3000 B.C.) is remarkable for the *fundoshi*-like loincloths worn by the otherwise-naked wrestlers. Sumerian wrestling was practiced at the New Year in the Akitu Festival, which included a rite of sacred marriage.<sup>29</sup> We may be permitted to speculate that many of the ceremonial aspects of sumo, especially the cosmological symbols, may be of ancient Mesopotamian origin. We know that modern Japanese sumo has conserved elements dating back 1500 years; we may very well assume that this highly ritualized sport preserves archaic elements going back even further.<sup>30</sup>

### **5. Central Asian Marriage Customs in Japan**

A passage in the Chinese history *Sui Shu* (626 A.D.) description of Japan mentions two marriage customs, surname (patrilineal) exogamy and purification of the bride by means of a fire ritual. Oobayashi Taryou, the brilliant Japanese ethnologist, has pointed out that both these features of ruling class marriage in fifth–sixth-century Japan are of Altaic provenance.<sup>31</sup> “Purification by means of fire was a long-established custom among the Turkish and Mongolian pastoral peoples.” Well-attested practices of northern peoples show a fire ritual, the bride passing between two fires before entering her new (the bridegroom’s) home was another expression of patrilineality, intended to purify her of the influence of the spirits of her natal family. These Altaic customs evidently came to Japan after the third century A.D., as no such practices are

---

<sup>29</sup> A photo of this artifact is reproduced in Nara Kenritsu, Bijutsu-kan, eds., *Silk Road: the Oasis and Steppe Routes* (1988), pp. 204–205. For Akitu, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akitu>.

<sup>30</sup> Sumo is performed in a circular ring on a square platform; for more on the cosmology of the circle and square in Japan, see my essay, “Circle and Square in Japan” [September 2010].

<sup>31</sup> Obayashi, Taryo, “Uji Society and Ie Society from Prehistory to Medieval Times,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 11:1 (Winter 1985):3–28, pp. 14ff.

mentioned in earlier Chinese historical accounts of Japan, such as the fairly detailed account of the Japanese found in the *Wei-zhi*, of ca.300 A.D.<sup>32</sup>

## 6. West Asian Music and Dance Drama in Old Japan

Japanese *gigaku*, an ancient form of musical theater involving music and dramatic dance performance, and a variety of costumes and masks, is said to have been brought to Japan from Korea early in the seventh century A.D. Still extant in the Shousou-in and older temples of Nara are *gigaku* masks from a very early period, with exaggerated facial features including long noses. Gigaku masks include features which art historians consider to be "a departure from the figural expressions of Far Eastern art," and many scholars believe the masks are more Western than Chinese, reflecting "distant Greek and Hellenistic figural motifs."<sup>33</sup> One such scholar is Benito Ortolani, who writes:<sup>34</sup>

Gigaku masks...represent myths and types which are certainly not Chinese. The face masks seem to be connected with the carving art of the Scythians. The head masks have occasioned many attempts to prove the existence of a bridge between the theater of China and Japan, and the theater of Greece and Rome, across the Near East and India.

Ortolani goes on to give particulars, and cite other examples of Greek cultural influences in Japan contemporary to *gigaku*, and notes the long arc stretching across the steppes, mountains and deserts of Central Asia "from the Near East to Japan" by which these were transmitted.

China had a long history of cultural borrowing from the West. According to historian L. Carrington Goodrich, "About the middle of the 3rd century B.C. [i.e., some decades after Alexander conquered Bactria, in Central Asia], the Chinese began to divide the octave into

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Adolfo Tamburello, "Masks — Japan," in *Encyclopedia of World Art* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1959–1968), IX:546; hereafter cited as 'EWA.'

<sup>34</sup> Benito Ortolani, *Japanese Theater* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), p. 36

twelve semitones. It is believed that in the wake of the Alexandrian conquest the influence of Greek musical theory had penetrated far into East Asia from Bactria via Central Asia."<sup>35</sup>

And Central Asian influences reached Japan — one *bugaku* (a successor form of *gigaku*) number popular in Japan, the 'Somaku-sha,' "is not a native Japanese dance. It has a long history and a most complex development on the Asiatic mainland." One expert, Hans Eckardt, following the famous Sinologist Paul Pelliot, interprets it as a celebration of an East Iranian–Sogdian rain cult.<sup>36</sup> The *biwa* lute, which derives ultimately from a Persian/Middle Eastern lute called the *barbat*, was brought from China to Japan by Kibi no Makibi in 735, along with the board game *go*.<sup>37</sup>

## 7. Indo-European Myths in Japan

The telling of mythical stories of heroes and their trials and triumphs was pre-modern mankind's method of explaining the meaning of life, providing a context for the ceremonies which supported human life, and asserting a rationale justifying the existing socio-political structure. Because mankind's myths preserve archaic points of view, the field of comparative mythology, or comparative folklore, provides clues revealing the origins and histories of peoples.

American comparative folklorist C. Scott Littleton, following the lead of Japanese scholars Yoshida Atsuhiko and Oobayashi Taryou, has found in Japanese myths close parallels with motifs of Indo-European mythology. Specifically, Littleton finds the parallels between the stories of Japanese Prince Yamato-takeru and those of the Arthurian cycle show that the two are "independent expressions of a common, historically and geographically identifiable source (i.e., *not* a universal theme or myth), one that took shape somewhere other than in Western Europe or

---

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Eta Harich-Schneider, *A History of Japanese Music* (Oxford, 1973), p. 135

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Harich-Schneider (1973), p. 163; Pelliot pointed out the similarity between New Year's festivals in China's Tarim Basin and the Iranian *nowruz* celebration of the New Year, a correspondence now widely recognized (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nowruz>).

<sup>37</sup> Edmond Papinot, *Historical and Geographical Dictionary of Japan* (1909; many repr., inc. Tokyo: Tuttle, 1972), p. 254; one *biwa* preserved at the Nara Shousou-in is decorated with Central Asian themes, including a camel (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biwa>).

Japan." And Littleton identifies the Indo-European Tocharians of the Tarim Basin and the Alans, easternmost of the "Scythian," or Iranian peoples, as the only two groups that could have been responsible for this impact.<sup>38</sup>

Littleton also found an Indo-European theme in the Japanese story of Susa-no-o, the hero who slew the eight-headed dragon, Yamata-no-orochi.<sup>39</sup> The myth of the divine hero who slays the dragon/serpent is judged on linguistic grounds to be a cultural "proto-text," a central part of the symbolic culture of the speakers of Proto-Indo-European, as it "recurs in texts from the Rig Veda, the Old and Middle Iranian holy books, Hittite myth, Greek epic and lyric, Celtic and Germanic epic and saga, down to Armenian oral folk epics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>40</sup> The appearance of this motif in Japanese mythology is evidence of a pre-historical connection between Japan and the Indo-European realm. Susa-no-o's career also parallels the "three sins of the warrior" of Indo-European mythology — Indo-European warrior figures typically commit three "canonical sins," and Susa-no-o was banished to Izumo by the sun-goddess Amaterasu for "sins" which appear to have disrupted agriculture and weaving.<sup>41</sup>

Earlier, Yoshida Atsuhiko had outlined the evidence of Indo-European tri-functionalism in Japanese mythology.<sup>42</sup> Yoshida, a Hellenist who studied under Dumézil in France, "demonstrated the strong probability that the development of Japanese mythology was profoundly influenced, either directly or indirectly, by Indo-European themes" in the fourth and

---

<sup>38</sup> C. Scott Littleton, "Yamato-takeru: An 'Arthurian' Hero in Japanese Tradition," *Asian Folklore Studies* 54 (1995):259–274

<sup>39</sup> in "Susa-no-wo versus Yamata no woroti: An Indo-European Theme in Japanese Mythology," *History of Religions* 20 (1981):269–280

<sup>40</sup> Calvert Watkins, *ER*, s.v. "Cultural History and Historical Linguistics;" see below for more connections between Japan and Hittite myths.

<sup>41</sup> *ER* VII:210–211; see also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Susanoo>.

<sup>42</sup> Yoshida, Atsuhiko, "Japanese Mythology and the Indo-European Trifunctional System," *Diogenes* 98 (1977):93–116; Yoshida said the resemblances between I-E and Japanese myths "are too conspicuous to be regarded as either accidental or the result of a similitude of human mentalities" (p. 93). Yoshida (1977, p. 115): Scythian myths diffused to Japan "as a result of the migration of the nomadic peoples" of Eurasia.

fifth centuries A.D., "and that the most likely source of this influence was one or another tribe of North Iranian-speaking steppe nomads (Scythians, Alans, etc.) that managed to reach East Asia during this period."<sup>43</sup>

Yoshida's work compares the Greek Orpheus and Demeter to the Japanese Izanagi and Amaterasu, and identifies Amaterasu with the Scythian Great Goddess. The three imperial regalia of Japan he compares to the Scythian royal treasures mentioned by Herodotus. Yoshida showed how the legends of the Narts, preserved by the Ossettes of the Caucasus, show that Japan and Greece are the two extreme poles of the diffusion of Indo-European myth.<sup>44</sup> Yoshida joined historian Egami Namio (1906–2002) in ascribing the origin of the ruling class in Japan to "a Central Asian nomadic race."<sup>45</sup>

Other parallels to have gone relatively unnoticed include the similarities between the crane/weaver of Japan's folk-tale *Tsuru no On-gaeshi* and the European swan-maiden myths which may reflect "a very old Indo-European motif."<sup>46</sup> The close parallels between the careers of the Japanese hero Yuriwaka and Homer's Odysseus have been attributed to seventeenth-century Jesuits' telling of the Homeric tale in Japan, and are best studied as a model of how Indo-European myths were introduced into Japan in an earlier age.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> *ER*, VII:211; art historian J. Edward Kidder found a "remarkable resemblance" between a Scythian gold crown of the Treasure of Novocherkassk and a gilt bronze crown from the Sanmaizuka Tomb of Ibaraki Prefecture (in *Early Japanese Art* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1964], pp. 102,105, illustrated) and opined that "Many characteristics of the Japanese proto-historic period might ultimately be traced to the Scythian culture" (*ibid.*, p. 106).

<sup>44</sup> On the epic of the Narts, see John Colarusso, *Nart Sagas from the Caucasus* (Princeton U., 2002), which is nicely summarized by the author at <http://www.circassianworld.com/nartsagag.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Takayanagi, Shun'ichi, review of Oobayashi and Yoshida, *Monumenta Nipponica* 30:3 (1975):335–359; Oobayashi maintained that Japanese myths "are linked to the myths of Inner Asia" but had reservations about Egami's thesis — see Oobayashi Taryou, "The Ancient Myths of Korea and Japan," *Acta Asiatica* 61 (1991):68–82, p. 81.

<sup>46</sup> *ER*, VI:466

<sup>47</sup> James T. Araki, "Yuriwaka and Ulysses," *Monumenta Nipponica* 33:1 (Spring 1978):1–36; Yuriwaka has been integrated into the Japanese consciousness as a hero of the thirteenth-century Mongol wars; his bow is enshrined at the Kibitsu Shrine, near Okayama.

## 8. Amaterasu's Mirror

The sacred mirror is an attribute of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, ancestress of the imperial lineage, founder of the Japanese nation and its supreme deity. The mirror, *yata no kagami*, first appears in myth when used to lure Amaterasu from her hiding place in a cave. Later, when she sends her grandson Ninigi-no-mikoto to earth to establish the nation, she invests Ninigi with the three sacred regalia, the sword, the jewel and the mirror, saying to Ninigi, "Regard this mirror exactly as if it were our august spirit, and reverence it as if reverencing us" (*Kojiki* 130). The mirror that is the *shintai* (locus of divine presence) at the Ise shrine is said to be this same mirror, entrusted to Ninigi; a replica of the mirror is said to be present in the Imperial Palace.

Golden plaques found in Scythian *kurgan* burial mounds at Kul Oba, Solokha, Chertomlyk, north of the Black Sea, show a goddess seated on a throne, with a mirror in her hand.<sup>48</sup> Among terracotta statuettes found in both Greco-Bactrian and Kushan strata in Bactria, in what is now Tajikistan, Central Asia, "a dominant place is held by a goddess with a mirror."<sup>49</sup> One scholar, David Kinsley, has dedicated a full-length study to the subject of the goddess with the mirror, from Inanna and Isis to Amaterasu.<sup>50</sup>

One of the most interesting of the Indo-European goddesses is Satana, heroine of the *Epic of the Narts*, the saga of the Ossetes of the Caucasus, said to be the last surviving remnant of the ancient Alans, a Scythian people. Satana is "the essence through whom all things flow, the mother of the people, the provider and mentor of heroes, the wise counselor, the omnipotent sorceress and the guiding force without whose intervention nothing can be accomplished,"<sup>51</sup> a status reminiscent of that accorded Amaterasu in Japan.

---

<sup>48</sup> "Herodotus among the Scythians," *UNESCO Courier*, December 1976, p. 49

<sup>49</sup> B. Gafurov, et al., eds., *Kushan Studies in the USSR* (1970), p. 171

<sup>50</sup> David Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine from East and West* (Albany: SUNY, 1989)

<sup>51</sup> "The Ossetes: Scythians of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *UNESCO Courier*, December 1976, p. 49

The most revered figure of the Scythian pantheon, according to Herodotus, was the goddess Tabiti, who is depicted sitting on a throne in a high headdress, and who is also connected with the royal house.<sup>52</sup>

One early depiction of the Great Goddess seated on a throne and shown with a prominent headdress is seen on a felt appliqué hanging found in a burial mound at Pazyryk, in the Altai, dated to the fifth century B.C. The goddess holds in her hand a Tree of Life and is granting audience to a mounted warrior.<sup>53</sup> American scholar Jeannine Davis-Kimball says the Tree of Life motif of the goddess or priestess depicted at Pazyryk, and images found on the hat of the "Golden Princess" unearthed at Issyk, in Kazakhstan, and others found in Late Sarmatian (first century A.D.) burials in the southern Don area, are all manifestations of a fertility cult and may be related to the Japanese *kazura* headdress, notably worn by the goddess/priestess Ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto in the story of Amaterasu.<sup>54</sup>

Indo-European "priestesses" also possessed mirrors; goods found in Sauromatian and early Sarmatian burials at Pokrovka, on the border of Russia and Kazakhstan, included bronze mirrors.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, it is believed that the deliberately broken mirrors found in Sarmatian graves indicate that the Sarmatians regarded the mirror as a person's "double."<sup>56</sup> We may assert

---

<sup>52</sup> Vladimir N. Basilov, *Nomads of Eurasia* (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Academy of Sciences, 1989), p. 34

<sup>53</sup> T. T. Rice, *Ancient Arts of Central Asia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), p. 39; the Kazakh *saukele* was a tall, conical headdress with pendants — its construction and ornaments are symbolic of 'the World Tree' (Basilov, op.cit., pp. 112–113). For more on conical head-gear, see notes 60 through 63 below.

<sup>54</sup> Jeannine Davis-Kimball, e-mail to the author, 03/01/99; for the *kazura* headdress, see <http://www.tsubakishrine.org/history/ame-no-uzume-no-mikoto.html>. For many references to the *kazura* in Japanese classics, see Kevin Collins, "Integrating Lament and Ritual Pacification in the Manyoushuu Banka for Tenji Tennou," *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, 34:1 (April 2000):44–77, p. 74, note 30.

<sup>55</sup> Jeannine Davis-Kimball, "Statues of Sauromatian and Sarmatian Women," Center for the Study of the Eurasian Nomads, <http://www.csen.org/WomenWarriors/Womens.status.html>, accessed by the author on 03/02/99; hardcopy in the possession of the author. See *Archaeology* 50:5 (Sept/Oct 1997), p. 41.

<sup>56</sup> *ER*, XIII:72–73; note Amaterasu's instructions to Ninigi regarding her mirror, above.



with confidence, on the basis of this evidence, that the cult of Amaterasu links Japan with Inner Asia.

### 9. Equestrian Haniwa in Eastern Japan

The *Nihon Kouki*, third of six official court histories of proto-historical Japan, describes Saka-no-ue no Tamuramaro (758–811), the first shogun of Japan, as having “a red countenance and a yellow beard” (entry date 804) and another official, Yamato Yakamaro, as a “barbarian” with a ruggedly honest character.<sup>57</sup> Who were these “barbarians” in early Japan? Archaeological evidence attests to the presence of Central Asian equestrians in prehistoric Japan. *Haniwa* (clay figurines) found at the Ningyouzuka *Kofun* (burial mound) site in Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture, include equestrian haniwa and bow-legged human figure haniwa with full, heavy beards and tall hats, and wearing swords and riding trousers.

Warrior *haniwa* figures with full beards like these are characteristic of the former Sanbu district facing the Kujūkuri plain in Chiba Prefecture. Characteristic motifs such as the broad-brimmed hats and leather boots are also held in common. Previously found clustered at the Tonozuka and Himezuka tombs in the town of Yokoshibahikari, at the Kyōsōzuka tomb in Sanmu and elsewhere, the Ningyōzuka example is the first to be excavated outside the former Sanbu county district.<sup>58</sup>

Easily the most remarkable aspect of these equestrian haniwa figures are their tall, conical hats — the characteristic headgear of the Central Asian warrior from at least the time of the Saka delegation to Achaemenid Iran depicted in relief on the walls of Darius’ Parsa (Persepolis) wearing the *kolpak*, a high pointed hat.<sup>59</sup> The wide-brimmed, high, conical Central

---

<sup>57</sup> Sakamoto, Tarou, *The Six National Histories of Japan*, John S. Brownlee, trans. (Tokyo U., 1991), p. 136; on Tamuramaro, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sakanoue\\_no\\_Tamuramaro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sakanoue_no_Tamuramaro).

<sup>58</sup> See: <http://archaeology.jp/sites/2007/ningyo/001.htm>, with photos.

<sup>59</sup> For images of the Central Asian hat on *haniwa* figurines from Himezuka Kofun, Sambu, Chiba Prefecture, see:

<http://imagesvr.library.upenn.edu/cgi/i/image/image-idx?type=simple&q1=aaaKofun%2C%20%28Japanese%29aaa&cat1=All%20Categories&thsz=12&txsz=50&slsz=>

Asian hat is still worn today in Tibet;<sup>60</sup> the "state crown" of the Dalai Lama is a cone-shaped hat.  
<sup>61</sup> Women of Central Asia also wore the conical hat — a twelfth-century sculpture at the Tanais Museum, north of the Black Sea, has a wide-brimmed, conical hat "similar to one excavated in the Tarim Basin, made of felt and found in a Saka female's burial" of many centuries previous.<sup>62</sup> In 2003, Chinese archaeologists discovered China's earliest known (ca.220–420 A.D.) painting on paper in a wooden coffin unearthed in Yumen, Gansu Province. The painting shows a woman "dressed in bright colors and wearing a high peaked hat."<sup>63</sup>

### The Hittite Connection

Additional evidence shows that the high conical hat was the customary costume of the Indo-Europeans as far back in time as the Hittites. Near the second millennium B.C. Hittite capitol, Hattusas, near present-day Yozgat, Turkey, is Yazilikaya, a natural rock sanctuary where monumental expressions of Hittite religion are preserved, carved in stone. The headgear of the

---

[l&c=fisher&sstr=61&res=thumbnail](#). Images of the Saka delegation to Persepolis are widely reproduced; see, e.g., *World Atlas of Archaeology* (Boston: G.K.Hall, 1985), p. 217. For the high conical hat of the 'Golden Man' of Issyk, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Issyk\\_kurgan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Issyk_kurgan). For 'kolpak,' see Basilov (1989), p. 111. The 'kulah,' a high cylindrical or conical felt worn as early as 2000 B.C., was worn until recent times in Iran (*EWA*, IV:27).

<sup>60</sup> Ian Baker, "Tibet Embraces the New Year," *National Geographic* (January 2000):82–93, with photos. In northeast Tibet, women wear a tall, conical hat with a brim (*EWA*, IV:30).

<sup>61</sup> Newspaper reproduction of a photo of the current Dalai Lama wearing his 'crown,' in the possession of the author; the high, conical hat of Central Asia may have a Near Eastern origin: an early Babylonian seal dated to the Akkadian period, ca.2360–2180 B.C., shows Ea and the sun god wearing brimmed, high, conical head-gear (*Illustrated Bible Dictionary* [Tyndale, 1980] I:167).

<sup>62</sup> Jeannine Davis-Kimball, "Statues of Sauromatian and Sarmatian Women," note xxxvii; Davis-Kimball probably refers to the "two-foot-long black felt peaked hat with a flat brim" found in a gravesite near Subashi, in Xinjiang, dated to the fifth-century B.C. (Evan Hadingham, "The Mummies of Xinjiang," *Discover*, April 1994, at <http://discovermagazine.com/1994/apr/themummiesofxinj359>).

<sup>63</sup> "China's Earliest Paper Painting," *People's Daily*, Sept. 17, 2003; accessed on-line by the author on 09/22/03 at [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200309/17/eng20030917\\_124426.shtml](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200309/17/eng20030917_124426.shtml).

figures seen at Yazilkaya, and on others carved in relief at Malatya, Turkey, is very much like those seen on the *haniwa* figurines at Himezuka, in Japan.<sup>64</sup>

Other parallels between the Hittite and Japanese myths are also worth noting: (1) the procession of the Hittite pantheon seen at Yazilikaya is headed by Wurusemu, the sun goddess of Arinna. At the apex of the Japanese pantheon is also a sun goddess. (2) The west side of the Great Gallery at Yazilikaya features male gods, led by the Weather God of Heaven (equivalent to Susa-no-o, the male Japanese storm god, associated with Izumo, to the west of Yamato, the sacred center). The east side of Yazilikaya belongs to female deities, headed by the sun goddess (equivalent to the sun goddess Amaterasu, associated with Ise, to the east of the Yamato center).<sup>65</sup> (3) Hittite mythology also knows a disappearing goddess, Hannahannah, the mother of all the gods. When she disappears in a fit of anger, like Amaterasu, both human and animal mothers take no account of their children until her anger is ritually assuaged and she returns.<sup>66</sup> (4) The Hittites also knew the hero who slays the dragon, like Susa-no-o. One Hittite version, the cult myth of the mortal hero Hupasiyas who, on behalf of the gods, battles the serpent Iluyankas, was recited annually at the late summer festival of Puruli. In other versions it is the storm god

---

<sup>64</sup> Ewa Wasilewska, "The Hittites of Anatolia," *Saudi ARAMCO World*, 45:5 (Sept/Oct 1994):16–23, illustrated; note also the similar tunics, leggings and boots.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23; a straight line drawn on a map, connecting Ise and Izumo, passes through the Yamato site of the early Japanese imperial capitols. This east–west axis may be further evidence for an Indo-European tripartite structure evident in the cult of the three shrines Ise, Iso-no-kami (in Yamato) and Izumo (cited in Takayanagi [1975], p. 338). Of Japan's shrines, these three are called 'miya' in the early Japanese chronicles and all others are called 'yashiro.' Ise=priests (mirror), Isonokami=warriors (sword), and Izumo=agriculturalists (the *magatama*, 'curved jewel,' symbol of fecundity) — is the way these three (and the three imperial regalia of Japan) fit Dumézil's trifunctional schema (Oobayashi, Taryou, "The Structure of the Pantheon and the Concept of Sin in Ancient Japan," *Diogenes*, 98 [1977]:117–132).

<sup>66</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hannahannah>. In addition to these four points, Hittite myth includes goddesses who spin the thread of life, like the Roman Parcae and the Japanese weaver, Wakahirume; the Japanese for 'thread of life' is 'tama no o'; see Hans G. Guterbock "Hittite Mythology," in S.N. Kramer, ed., *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (Anchor Doubleday, 1961), pp. 138–179.

who slays Iluyankas; most significant is that, in both the Hittite and Japanese versions of the myth, a many-headed dragon is overcome by enticing it to become drunken!<sup>67</sup>

Similarities between Japan and the Hittites extend even to literary devices. Ian Hideo Levy, in comparing the Japanese *makura-kotoba* ('pillow words') with the ancient Mediterranean epithet, noted that "The Hittite treatment of place names and god names is quite similar to that in the traditional Japanese epithet."<sup>68</sup>

The Court Jester of Fukushima

One conical hat found on a *haniwa* figurine, at the seventh-century Kamiyasaku kofun in Fukushima Prefecture, is certainly *not* that of a warrior.<sup>69</sup> Instead, the hat and other aspects of the figure's costume are remarkably similar to the costume of the medieval European *court jester*.

---

<sup>67</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iluyanka> ; the dragon is portrayed with many heads on reliefs at both Malatya and Karatepe (*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* [NY: Abingdon, 1962–1976], s.v. 'Cosmogony,' I:706). For the Hittite portrayal of Iluyankas at Malatya, see *EWA* X:plate 241. The myth of primordial combat with a dragon is widespread — Baal vs. Yammu (Ugaritic), Marduk vs. Tiamat (Babylonian), Ninurta vs. Asag (Sumerian), Re vs. Apophis (Egyptian), Zeus vs. Typhon, Indra vs. Vrtra (Hindu), and Yahweh vs. Leviathan/Tannin/Rahab. A many-headed dragon is mentioned in Psalms 74:13–14; and in the Akkadian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Labbu, the dragon slain by Enki, has seven heads. And the first Indo-European warrior, Triton, kills a three-headed monster, Trisaris, by offering intoxicants (*ER*, VII:200), but no two myths are quite as much alike as the Hittite and Japanese versions, permitting us to speculate that these two forms have a common origin in a very early Indo-European/Central Asian steppe version of the myth. For a comparative study of primordial dragon combat, see Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Bollingen, 1971), pp. 54ff.

<sup>68</sup> Ian Hideo Levy, *Hitomaro and the Birth of Japanese Lyricism* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 131–133; those not inclined to credit parallels so distant in time and place should consider the following:

Amaterasu, sun goddess born from the left eye of Izanagi (Japanese)

Tsuki-yomi, moon god born from the right eye of Izanagi

Shu, sun god born from the right eye of Temu (Egyptian)

Tefnut, moon goddess born from the left eye of Temu.

(E.A.W. Budge, *Egyptian Ideas of the Future Life* (London: Kegan Paul, 1899), p. 93

<sup>69</sup> This figure may be seen at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wa\\_%28Japan%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wa_%28Japan%29). See also Watanabe, Yasutada, *Shinto Art: Ise and Izumo Shrines* (NY: Weatherhill, 1974), p. 154, illus.140.

Miki Fumio wrote that “the unique pointed crown decorated with small bells and triangular designs probably indicates some ceremonial function, and the ritualistic gesture seems to reinforce this supposition.”<sup>70</sup> Art historian Edward Kidder has said that its arm gestures identify the figure as religious — “His peaked hat, probably of nomadic [i.e., Central Asian steppe] origin, has stiff tassels terminating in spherical bells of the shamanistic [i.e., Central Asian/Siberian] type,” and Kidder notes the similarity to the hat of a “shaman” figure in a “Scythian” detail of a wall hanging appliqué felt from a Pazyryk tomb in the Altai, in southern Siberia.<sup>71</sup>

### 10. “Turkic” Balbal in Western Japan

At the Rakan-ji Temple in Houjou-chou, Kasai City, in western Hyougo Prefecture, are some unusual stone sculptures. The entire collection is called the ‘*Go-hyaku Rakan*,’ (‘five hundred *arhat*’ — an *arhat* is a disciple of Buddha), and *some* of the sculptures at Rakan-ji are very much like Buddhist statuary seen elsewhere, throughout Japan.<sup>72</sup> But *others* are very unusual — they are not like the stone images of Jizou found everywhere in Japan;<sup>73</sup> they are unlike the *douso-jin* stone sculptures.<sup>74</sup> They are very unlike the *tolharubang* (‘grandfather figures’) found on Cheju Island, Korea, and the very similar figures of Hayato-zuka, in Aira-gun, Kumamoto Prefecture.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Miki, Fumio, *Haniwa*, trans. Gina Lee Barnes (NY: Weatherhill, 1974), p. 97

<sup>71</sup> J. Edward Kidder, *Early Japanese Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964), pp. 92, plate 371; p. 106 and compare p. 193. A research hypothesis combining these comparisons would seek the origin of the medieval court jester and his costume in ancient Indo-European shaman ritual.

<sup>72</sup> There are other ‘*Rakan*’ temples in Japan; see, e.g., <http://www.flickr.com/photos/53347418@N00/607639842/> (in Hiroshima Prefecture); <http://wikimapia.org/14010748/500-Statues-of-Rakan-of-the-Kita-in-Temple> (in Saitama Prefecture); for more examples, and the cultural background, see: <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/rakan-arhat-lohan.shtml>.

<sup>73</sup> For *Jizou*, see: [http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&noj=1&q=jizo+statues&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=z4y7TL6sNoHmsQPQ\\_4imDw&sa=X&oi=image\\_result\\_group&ct=title&resnum=7&ved=0CFUQsAQwBg&biw=1024&bih=578](http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&noj=1&q=jizo+statues&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=z4y7TL6sNoHmsQPQ_4imDw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=7&ved=0CFUQsAQwBg&biw=1024&bih=578).

<sup>74</sup> For *douso-jin*, see Michael Czaja, *Gods of Myth and Stone* (NY: Weatherhill, 1974).

<sup>75</sup> See image at: <http://www.pbase.com/image/23591239>.

Indeed, Japanese photographer-author Wakasugi Kei judged the unusual 'rakan' sculptures of Houjou-chou to be unlike anything else seen anywhere in Japan, unlike any *rakan* statuary found anywhere else in the world, and questioned whether they were really *rakan* at all — and in that, he was right.<sup>76</sup>

Actually, the unusual 'rakan' sculptures of Houjou-chou are very similar to, indeed quite the same as, "Turkic" *balbal* found in Central Asia. 'Balbal' have been described by archaeologists as "stylized anthropomorphic statues over graves [which serve] as a marker for the movement of Turkic-speaking peoples from east to west — from southern Siberia and eastern Central Asia across the Eurasian steppe all the way to Azerbaijan" and northern Iran.<sup>77</sup> They are thought to commemorate fallen warriors.<sup>78</sup>

The present author has compared scores of images of Central Asian *balbal* from many sources, in four languages, including book-length studies in both Russian and Chinese, with the unusual 'rakan' figures of Houjou and concludes that there is ample reason for the identification of the Houjou figures as *balbal*. A full explication of the grounds for this identification is beyond the scope of this essay, and will be presented elsewhere. Here we will rest our case that the Houjou figures can be identified as "Turkic" *balbal* with the observation that many show the left arm flexed forming an obtuse angle and resting on a sword or belt, with the right arm flexed at an acute angle and holding a cup, with both forearms roughly parallel diagonally across the chest. Such a precise correspondence cannot be either accidental or a result of a natural archetype. But the implication is clear — the existence of "Turkic" *balbal* in Japan means Central Asian (perhaps Turkic) warriors were present in pre-historic and or proto-historic Japan.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Wakasugi, Kei, *Sekibutsu Hyakkei* (Tokyo: Koufuu-sha Shouten, 1977), p. 181

<sup>77</sup> Philip L. Kohl and Gocha R. Tsetskhladze, "Nationalism and Archaeology in the Caucasus," in Kohl and Clare Fawcett, eds., *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 153

<sup>78</sup> See image at <http://www.lonelyplanetimages.com/images/57440> ; note that this *balbal* shows the arm gestures which permit the precise identification of the Houjou sculptures as *balbal*.

<sup>79</sup> Caveat: the present author follows convention in speaking of *balbal* generically as 'Turkic.' But *balbal* have an origin in pre-history that long antedates the appearance of Turkish peoples on the historical stage, and the people who created the *balbal* of Houjou-chou, Japan, were not necessarily Turkic — they may have been Scythian,

### Japanese Contacts with Central Asians in Historical Times

In a previous essay, I cited Arabic-language accounts of colonies of Arab merchants residing in Silla, Korea.<sup>80</sup> Chang'an, the capital of Tang China, was also a cosmopolitan city — several thousand Persians lived around its western market, refugees from the fall of the Sassanian Empire in 651.<sup>81</sup> So, the Japanese elite of the seventh century must have had considerable knowledge of distant places and events in far-off lands as a result of the international connections of their neighbors Silla and Tang. Early Japanese chronicles report that on several occasions beginning in 654, "people of the *country* of Tokara" drifted ashore in Kyushuu and were brought to court.<sup>82</sup> There is an island chain south of Kyushuu known as "Tokara," but it certainly would not have been called a "country." It was also a known quantity to the seventh-century Japanese court and an unlikely subject of special attention and mention in its histories. Certainly, Japanese 'Tokara' is cognate with Gk. Τόχαροι, and is the name by which the Japanese knew the Tocharians, and the Kushan people of Bactria, known to the Chinese as the Yue-zhi when they lived in Gansu and Xinjiang. It probably was the fall of Sassanian Persia to the Saracens in 651 that ultimately brought these refugees to Japan.<sup>83</sup> The identification of the 'Tokara' of the early chronicles with Tokharistan (Kushan Bactria) has been accepted by Japanese scholars since the time of the compilation of the *Dai Nihon-shi* in the latter half of the seventeenth century.<sup>84</sup>

---

Sogdian, Khotanese, or some other 'Iranian' people of Central Asian provenance. The author is indebted to Prof. Victor H. Mair for this insight.

<sup>80</sup> "Silla, Korea and the Origin of Japan's Hata Clan" [July 2010]

<sup>81</sup> Hayashi, Ryouichi, *The Silk Road and the Shoso-in*, trans. Robert Ricketts (NY: Weatherhill, 1975), p. 87

<sup>82</sup> Seven mentions of 'Tokara,' from 654 to 676, are cited in Enoki, Kazuo, "A History of Central Asian Studies in Japan," *Acta Asiatica* 41 (1981):95–117.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Karl Reischauer and Jean Reischauer, comps., *Early Japanese History* [Princeton, 1937; repr. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1967], p. 149. Many noble families of the Sassanian dynasty took refuge in Chang-an — the son and grandson of the last Sassanian emperor lived and died in Chang-an (Maejima, Shinji, "The Zoroastrian Kingdoms in Mazandaran and the Tang Empire," *Acta Asiatica*, 41 [1981]:29–46, pp. 44–46).

<sup>84</sup> Enoki (1981), p. 97

Persia itself was known to the Japanese as '*Hashi*.' A Persian named 'Li-mi-i' arrived in Japan in 736 and was granted a court rank.<sup>85</sup> The Persian music of the Tang court was brought to Japan in the eighth century, as *gagaku*.<sup>86</sup> A recent president of the Japan Gagaku Association, Oshida Hisaichi, is quoted by the Rev. Ken Joseph as saying that the *gagaku* music entitled 'Etenraku' (越天楽, 'music from the heavens') is Nestorian Christian music that came from Persia.<sup>87</sup> The Shousou-in, imperial treasure house at Nara, preserves Sassanian ewers and cut glass bowls similar to those found in Central Asia and Iran, at Palmyra, Syria, and scattered across Eurasia as far west as Poland. Persian art motifs such as the Tree of Life and techniques such as *mokuga* marquetry, mosaic inlay woodwork, influenced Japan in the eighth century.<sup>88</sup> And Persian words made their way into Japanese, as well (e.g., J. *ichijiku*, 'fig,' from *anjir*).<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

I began this essay with the observation of Japanese ethnologist Ishida Ei'ichirou that "Many of the Japanese legends preserved from ancient times have connections, not only with the neighboring cultures of Eastern Asia, but with the cultures of people living in regions far removed from Japan."<sup>90</sup> In this essay I have cited many such connections, not just in mythology, but also in cosmology, ritual, marriage customs, musical theater and archaeology. This evidence

---

<sup>85</sup> Enoki, op.cit., p. 104; Hayashi (1975), p. 85

<sup>86</sup> Hayashi, op.cit., pp. 96–100

<sup>87</sup> In Ken Joseph, *Lost Identity*, <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/LostIdentity.pdf> , p. 54; a stele erected in Chang-an in 781 by Nestorian Christians suggests that many Chinese were counted among the faithful (Hayashi, p. 88).

<sup>88</sup> Hayashi (1975), pp. 89ff.; the Nara Shousou-in is called "the eastern terminus of the Silk Road." For a good short account of the Silk Road in Tang times, including the cultural influence of Persian and Sogdian refugees in China at its apogee in 713–756, in both Japanese and English, see Egami, Namio, "The Silk Road and Japan," in Nara Kenritsu Bijutsukan, ed., *Silk Road: The Oasis and Steppe Routes* (1988).

<sup>89</sup> *Koujien* (1955), p. 123

<sup>90</sup> Cited in Takayanagi (1975), p. 339



clearly demonstrates the ethnic diversity of pre- and proto-historical Japan. All aspects of early Japanese history must be reconsidered in light of these international connections with "people living in regions far removed from Japan."

It may be wondered why more "mainstream" Japanese historians and Western historians of Japan have not taken up these themes. Part of the answer lies in the segmentation resulting from the isolation of academic fields. In this essay we noted the uncanny resemblances between Japanese and European heraldry. Another such seeming anomaly is the Japanese *junk* (ship), which is "very different from the Chinese *junk* in nearly every respect" but very much like "the old Roman *artemon* in the short foremast canted up in the bows to take the square sail."<sup>91</sup> But academic historians and archaeologists routinely ignore even evidence from the field of comparative mythology; what could they possibly know of sailing ships and family crests?

Evidence adduced herein permits us to conclude that *it is highly probable that diverse groups of peoples migrated to early Japan from Central Asia*, some with roots in or connections to West Asia or even Mediterranean lands, bringing with them their cosmology, rituals, marriage customs, music and theater, mythology, costumes, funerary monuments and religions.

---

<sup>91</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1981 ed.), 16:159, s.v. 'Sails and Sailing Ships'

Since June 2006, all new issues of *Sino-Platonic Papers* have been published electronically on the Web and are accessible to readers at no charge. Back issues are also being released periodically in e-editions, also free. For a complete catalog of *Sino-Platonic Papers*, with links to free issues, visit the *SPP* Web site.

[www.sino-platonic.org](http://www.sino-platonic.org)