THE Earliest Japanese Chronicles

The great native chronicles of early Japan, the Records of Ancient Matters (Kojiki) and Chronicles of Japan (Nihongi), were compiled as late as the first decades of the eighth century A.D., when Japanese writers were already strongly influenced by Chinese traditions. It is therefore difficult to distinguish any pure native traditions in these works or any reliable account of Japan’s early history. Many of the events described are anachronistic, and many of the legends are selected with a view to confirming the religious or political claims of the ruling dynasty. The emphasis on ancestry is already quite apparent, though other evidence indicates that family genealogies were in a very confused state before the introduction of writing and the Chinese practice of compiling genealogical records (see Chapter IV).

Passages betraying significant Chinese influence are included elsewhere. The following excerpts from the translations of Chamberlain and Aston are selected to show what seem to be the most unsystematic and unsophisticated of legends dealing with the Age of the Gods and the founding of the dynasty. Especially evident are the great number of gods, their close association with natural phenomena, and the near-chaos of the supernatural world. It should be noted that in the creation of the imperial line gods representing the Sun, Mountains and the Sea each made an important contribution.

From the Preface to Records of Ancient Matters (Kojiki)
[Adapted from Chamberlain, Ko-ji-ki, pp. 11-13]

Hereupon, regretting the errors in the old words, and wishing to correct the misstatements in the former chronicles, [the Empress Gemmyō], on the eighteenth day of the ninth moon of the fourth year of Wado [November 3, 711], commanded me Yasumaro to select and record the old words, learned by heart by Hieda no Are according to the imperial decree, and dutifully to lift them up to Her.

In reverent obedience to the contents of the decree, I have made a careful choice. But in high antiquity both speech and thought were so simple, that it would be difficult to arrange phrases and compose periods in the characters. To relate everything in an ideographic transcription would entail an inadequate expression of the meaning; to write altogether according to the phonetic method would make the story of events unduly lengthy. For this reason have I sometimes in the same sentence used the phonetic and ideographic systems conjointly, and have sometimes in one matter used the ideographic record exclusively. Moreover where the drift of the words was obscure, I have by comments elucidated their signification; but need it he said that I have nowhere commented on what was easy? . . . Altogether the things recorded commence with the separation of Heaven and Earth, and conclude with the august reign at Oharida. So from the Deity Master-of-the-August-Centre-of-Heaven down to His Augustness Prince-Wave-Limit-Brave-Cormorant-Thatch-Meeting-Incompletely makes the First Volume; from the Heavenly Sovereign Kamu-Yamato-Ihare-Biko down to the august reign of Homuda makes the Second Volume; from the Emperor Ō-Sazaki down to the great palace of Oharida makes the Third Volume. Altogether I have written Three Volumes, which I reverently and respectfully present, I, Yasumaro, with true trembling and true fear, bow my head, bow my head.

Reverently presented by the Court Noble Futo no Yasumaro, an Officer of the Upper Division of the First Class of the Fifth Rank and of the Fifth Order of Merit, on the 28th day of the first moon of the fifth year of Wado [March 10, 712].

That is, the simplicity of speech and thought in early Japan renders it too hard a task to rearrange the old documents committed to memory by Are in such a manner as to make them conform to the rules of Chinese style.

That is, if I adopted in its entirety the Chinese ideographic method of writing, I should often fail of giving a true impression of the nature of the original documents. If, on the other hand, I consistently used the Chinese characters, syllable by syllable, as phonetic symbols for Japanese sounds, this work would attain to inordinate proportions, on account of the great length of the polysyllabic Japanese as compared with the monosyllabic Chinese.

That is, commence with the creation, and end with the death of the Empress Suiko (a.d. 628), who resided at Oharida.

Kamu-Yamato-Ihare-Biko is the proper native Japanese name of the emperor commonly known by the Chinese “canonical name” of Jimmu. Homuda is part of the native Japanese name of the Emperor Ojin. Ō-Sazaki is the native Japanese name of the Emperor Nintoku.
Birth of the Sun Goddess

Note that in this account from the Nihongi the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, is identified not as the first of the gods or as the creator of the world, but simply as one among many offspring of the primal pair, Izanagi and Izanami.

[Adapted from Aston, Nihongi, I, 18-20]

Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto consulted together, saying: "We have now produced the Great-eight-island country, with the mountains, rivers, herbs, and trees. Why should we not produce someone who shall be lord of the universe?" They then together produced the Sun Goddess, who was called Ō-hiru-me no muchi.¹

(Called in one writing Amaterasu no Ō kami.²)

(In one writing she is called Amaterasu-ō-hiru-me no Mikoto.³)

The resplendent luster of this child shone throughout all the six quarters.⁴ Therefore the two Deities rejoiced, saying: "We have had many children, but none of them have been equal to this wondrous infant. She ought not to be kept long in this land, but we ought of our own accord to send her at once to Heaven, and entrust to her the affairs of Heaven."

At this time Heaven and Earth were still not far separated, and therefore they sent her up to Heaven by the ladder of Heaven.

They next produced the Moon-god.

(Called in one writing Tsuki-yumi no Mikoto, or Tsuki-yomi no Mikoto.)

His radiance was next to that of the Sun in splendor. This God was to be the consort of the Sun-Goddess, and to share in her government. They therefore sent him also to Heaven.

Next they produced the leech-child, which even at the age of three years could not stand upright. They therefore placed it in the rock-camphor-wood boat of Heaven, and abandoned it to the winds.

Their next child was Sosa no o no Mikoto.⁵

(Called in one writing Kami Sosa-no-o no Mikoto or Haya Sosa-no-o no Mikoto.)⁶

¹ Heaven-illumine-of-great-deity.
³ North, South, East, West, Above, Below.
⁴ Yomi means bow; yomi, darkness. Neither is inappropriate as applied to the moon.
⁵ Better known as Susa no o, a god particularly associated with the Izumo people, who was probably relegated to a subordinate role when these people were displaced or eclipsed in power by the Yamato group. [Ed.]
⁶ Kami, deity; haya, quick.

This God had a fierce temper and was given to cruel acts. Moreover he made a practice of continually weeping and wailing. So he brought many of the people of the land to an untimely end. Again he caused green mountains to become withered. Therefore the two Gods, his parents, addressed Sosa no o no Mikoto, saying: "Thou art exceedingly wicked, and it is not meet that thou shouldst reign over the world. Certainly thou must depart far away to the Nether-land." So they at length expelled him.

The Divine Creation of the Imperial Ancestors

In the following excerpt from the Kojiki it should be observed that the divine offspring from which the imperial line is traced were the joint creation of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, and Susa-no-o, the unruly storm god. They were actually produced from the mouth of Susa-no-o after he had chewed up the ornaments of Amaterasu, but she claimed them as her own on the ground that the seed or stuff of which they were made came from her. Thus the ordinary male and female functions are reversed in establishing the genetic relationship, which gives priority to the Sun Goddess but suggests the absorption of Susa-no-o's power into the imperial line.

[Adapted from Chamberlain, Ko-ji-ki, pp. 45-49]

So thereupon His-Swift-Impetuous-Male-Augustness (Susa-no-o) said: "If that be so, I will take leave of the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity (Amaterasu),¹ and depart." [With these words] he forthwith went up to Heaven, whereupon all the mountains and rivers shook, and every land and country quaked. So the Heaven-Shining-Deity, alarmed at the noise, said: "The reason of the ascent hither of His Augustness my elder brother is surely no good intent. It is only that he wishes to wrest my land from me." And she forthwith, unbinding her august hair, twisted it into august bunches; and both into the left and into the right august bunch, as likewise into her august head-dress and likewise on to her left and her right august arm, she twisted an augustly complete [string] of curved jewels eight feet long [of] five hundred jewels; and, slinging on her back a quiver holding a thousand [arrows], and adding [thereto] a quiver holding five hundred [arrows], she likewise took and slung at her side a mighty and high [sounding] elbow-pad, and brandished and stuck her bow upright so that the top shook; and she stamped her feet into the hard ground up to her opposing thighs, kicking away [the earth] like

¹ In what follows, the names of deities appearing frequently in these accounts are standardized and given an abbreviated translation or transliteration in place of the full title. [Ed.]
rotten snow, and stood valiantly like unto a mighty man, and waiting, asked: "Wherefore ascendest thou hither?" Then Susa-no-o replied, saying: "I have no evil intent. It is only that when the Great-August-Deity [our father] spoke, deigning to enquire the cause of my wailing and weeping, I said: 'I wail because I wish to go to my deceased mother's land'; whereupon the Great-August-Deity said: 'Thou shalt not dwell in this land,' and deigned to expel me with a divine expulsion. It is therefore, solely with the thought of taking leave of thee and departing, that I have ascended hither. I have no strange intentions." Then the Heaven-Shining-Deity said: "If that be so, whereby shall I know the sincerity of thine intentions?" Thereupon Susa-no-o replied, saying: "Let each of us swear, and produce children." So as they then swore to each other from the opposite banks of the Tranquil River of Heaven, the august names of the Deities that were born from the mist [of her breath] when, having first begged Susa-no-o to hand her the ten-grasp saber which was girded on him and broken it into three fragments, and with the jewels making a jingling sound having brandished and washed them in the True-Pool-Well of Heaven, and having crunchingly crushed them, the Heaven-Shining-Deity blew them away, were His Augustness Torrent-Mist-Princess, another august name for whom is Her Augustness Princess-of-the-Island-of-the-Offering; next Her Augustness Lovely-Island-Princess, another august name for whom is Her Augustness Good-Princess; next Her Augustness Princess-of-the-Torrent. The august name of the Deity that was born from the mist [of his breath] when, having begged the Heaven-Shining-Deity to hand him the augustly complete [string] of curved jewels eight feet [long] of five hundred jewels that was twisted in the left august bunch [of her hair], and with the jewels making a jingling sound having brandished and washed them in the True-Pool-Well of Heaven, and having crunchingly crushed them, Susa-no-o blew them away, was His Augustness Truly-Conqueror-1-Conquer-Conquering-Swift-Heavenly-Great-Great-Ears. The august name of the Deity that was born from the mist [of his breath] when again, having begged her to hand him the jewels that were twisted in the right august bunch [of her hair], and having crunchingly crushed them, he blew them away, was His Augustness Ame-no-hohi. The august name of the Deity that was born from the mist [of his breath] when again, having begged her to hand him the jewels that were twisted in her august head-dress, and having crunchingly crushed them, he blew them away, was His Augustness Prince-Lord-of-Heaven. The august name of the Deity that was born from the mist [of his breath] when again, having begged her to hand him the jewels that were twisted on her left august arm, and having crunchingly crushed them, he blew them away, was His Augustness Prince-Lord-of-Life. The august name of the Deity that was born from the jewels that were twisted on her right august arm, and having crunchingly crushed them, he blew them away, was His-Wondrous-Augustness-of-Kumanu. [Five Deities in all.]

The August Declaration of the Division of the August Male Children and the August Female Children
[Adapted from Chamberlain, Ko-ji-ki, pp. 49-50]

Hereupon the Heaven-Shining-Deity said to Susa-no-o: "As for the seed of the five male Deities born last, their birth was from things of mine; so undoubtedly they are my children. As for the seed of the three female Deities born first, their birth was from a thing of thine; so doubtless they are thy children." Thus did she declare the division.

Descent of the Divine Grandson with the Three Imperial Regalia
[Adapted from Aston, Nihongi, I, 76-77]

"All the Central Land of Reed-Plains is now completely tranquilized." Now the Heaven-Shining-Deity gave command, saying: "If that be so, I will send down my child." She was about to do so, when in the meantime, an August Grandchild was born, whose name was called Ama-tsu-hiko-hiko-ho-no-ninigi no Mikoto. Her son represented to her that he wished the August Grandchild to be sent down in his stead. Therefore the Heaven-Shining-Deity gave to Ama-tsu-hiko-hiko-ho-no-ninigi no Mikoto the Three Treasures, viz. the curved jewel of Yasaka gem, the eight-hand mirror, and the sword Kusanagi, and joined to him as his attendants Ame no Koyane no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the Naka-tomi; Futo-dama no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the Imbe; Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the Sarume; Ishi-kori-dome no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the mirror-makers; and Tamaya no Mikoto, the first ancestor of the jewel-
makers; in all Gods of five be. Then she commanded her August Grandchild, saying: "This Reed-plain-1500-autumns-fair-rice-ear Land is the region which my descendants shall be lords of. Do thou, my August Grandchild, proceed thither and govern it. Go! and may prosperity attend thy dynasty, and may it, like Heaven and Earth, endure for ever."

His Marriage with the Daughter of the Great Mountain Deity
[Adapted from Aston, Nihongi, I, 70-71]

Then Taka-mi-musubi no Mikoto took the coverlet which was on his true couch, and casting it over his August Grandchild, Ama-tsu-hiko-hiko-ho-ninigi no Mikoto, made him to descend. So the August Grandchild left his Heavenly Rock-seat, and with an awful path-cleaving, clove his way through the eight-fold clouds of Heaven, and descended on the Peak of Takachiho of So² in Hyūga.

After this the manner of the progress of the August Grandchild was as follows: From the Floating Bridge of Heaven on the twin summits of Kushibi, he took his stand on a level part of the floating sand-bank. Then he traversed the desert land of Sojishi from the Hill of Hitao in his search for a country, until he came to Cape Kasasa, in Ata-no-nagaya. A certain man of that land appeared and gave his name as Koto-katsukuni-katsu Nagasa. The August Grandchild inquired of him, saying: "Is there a country, or not?" He answered, and said: "There is here a country, I pray thee roam through it at thy pleasure." The August Grandchild therefore went there and took up his abode. Now there was a fair maid in that land whose name was Ka-ashi-tsu-hime.

(Also called Kami Ata-tsu-hime or Ko no hana no saku-ya-hime.)

The August Grandchild inquired of this fair maid, saying: "Whose daughter art thou?" She answered and said: "Thy handmaiden is the child of a Heavenly Deity by his marriage with the Great Mountain Deity."³

The August Grandchild accordingly favored her, whereupon in one night she became pregnant.

The Heavenly Grandchild and the Sea-God’s Daughter
[Adapted from Aston, Nihongi, I, 92-95]

The elder brother Ho-no-susori no Mikoto had by nature a sea-gift; the younger brother Hiko-hoho-demi no Mikoto had by nature a mountain-gift.⁴ In the beginning the two brothers, the elder and the younger, conversed together, saying: "Let us for a trial exchange gifts." They eventually exchanged them, but neither of them gained aught by doing so. The elder brother repented his bargain, and returned to the younger brother his bow and arrows, asking for his fish-hook to be given back to him. But the younger brother had already lost the elder brother’s fish-hook, and there was no means of finding it. He accordingly made another new hook which he offered to his elder brother. But his elder brother refused to accept it, and demanded the old hook. The younger brother, grieved at this, forthwith took his cross-sword and forged from it new fish-hooks, which he heaped up in a winnowing tray, and offered to his brother. But his elder brother was wroth, and said: "These are not my old fish-hook: though they are many, I will not take them." And he continued repeatedly to demand it vehemently. Therefore Hiko-hoho-demi’s grief was exceedingly profound, and he went and made moan by the shore of the sea. There he met Shiho-tsutsu ⁵ no Oji. The old man inquired of him saying: "Why dost thou grieve here?" He answered and told him the matter from first to last. The old man said: "Grieve no more. I will arrange this matter for thee." So he made a basket without interstices, and placing in it Hoho-demi no Mikoto, sank it in the sea. Forthwith he found himself at a pleasant strand, where he abandoned the basket, and, proceeding on his way, suddenly arrived at the palace of the Sea-God. This palace was provided with battlements and turrets, and had stately towers. Before the gate there was a well, and over the well there grew a many-branched cassia-tree, with wide-spreading boughs and leaves. Now Hiko-hoho-demi went up to the foot of this tree and loitered about. After some time a beautiful woman appeared, and, pushing open the door, came forth. She at length took a jewel-vessel and approached. She was about to draw water, when, raising her eyes, she saw

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¹ Be—hereditary guilds or corporations of craftsmen. [Ed.]
² It is this word which forms the second part of Kumaso, the general name of the tribes which inhabited the south of Kyushu.
³ Ō-yama-tsu-mi Kami.
⁴ A talent for fishing and a talent for hunting. The two brothers were the twin offspring of the August Grandchild and the daughter of the Great Mountain Deity. [Ed.]
⁵ Salt-sea-elder.
him, and was alarmed. Returning within, she spoke to her father and
mother, saying: "There is a rare stranger at the foot of the tree before the
gate." The God of the Sea thereupon prepared an eight-fold cushion and
led him in. When they had taken their seats, he inquired of him the
object of his coming. Then Hiko-hoho-demi explained to him in reply all
the circumstances. The Sea-God accordingly assembled the fishes, both
great and small, and required of them an answer. They all said: "We
know not. Only the Red-woman* has had a sore mouth for some time
past and has not come." She was therefore peremptorily summoned to
appear, and on her mouth being examined the lost hook was actually
found.

After this, Hiko-hoho-demi took to wife the Sea-God's daughter, Toyo-
tama' hime, and dwelt in the sea-palace.... When the Heavenly
Grandchild was about to set out on his return journey, Toyo-tama-hime
addressed him, saying: "Thy handmaiden is already pregnant, and the
time of her delivery is not far off. On a day when the winds and waves are
raging, I will surely come forth to the sea-shore, and I pray thee that
thou wilt make for me a parturition house, and await me there." . . .

After this Toyo-tama-hime fulfilled her promise, and, bringing with her
her younger sister, Tama-yori-hime, bravely confronted the winds
and waves, and came to the sea-shore. When the time of her delivery
was at hand, she besought Hiko-hoho-demi, saying: "When thy hand-
maiden is in travail, I pray thee do not look upon her." However, the
Heavenly Grandchild could not restrain himself, but went secretly and
peeped in. Now Toyo-tama-hime was just in childbirth, and had changed
into a dragon. She was greatly ashamed, and said: "Hadst thou not dis-
graced me, I would have made the sea and land communicate with each
other, and forever prevented them from being sundered. But now that
thou hast disgraced me, wherewithal shall friendly feelings be knit
together?" So she wrapped the infant in rushes, and abandoned it on the
sea-shore. Then she barred the sea-path, and passed away. Accordingly
the child was called Hiko-nagisa-take-u-gaya-fuki-aezi* no Mikoto.

A long time after, Hiko-hoho-demi no Mikoto died, and was buried in
the imperial mound on the summit of Mount Takaya in Hyūga.

* Aka-me, a name of the Tai (papyrus).
† Rich-jewel.
*Prince-beach-brave-cormorant-rush-thatch-unfinished.