

English Translation: KOJIKI: Translated with an Introduction and Notes
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CHAPTER 21

OPO-KUNI-NUSI CURES THE RABBIT AND WINS

YA-GAMI-PIME.

1 This OPO-KUNI-NUSI-NÖ-KAMĪ had eighty¹ brothers; but these eighty deities all ceded their lands to OPO-KUNI-NUSI-NÖ-KAMĪ. The reason for their doing so was [as follows]:²

2 All of the eighty deities wished to marry YA-GAMI-PIME of INABA. When they went together to INABA, they had OPO-NAMUDI-NÖ-KAMĪ carry their bags and took him along as an attendant.³

3 When they arrived at the Cape of KĒTA, there was a naked⁴ rabbit lying [by the way]. The eighty deities said to the rabbit:

4 “What you should do is this: bathe in this salt water, then lie down on the ridge of a high mountain peak where the wind will blow on you.”

5 The rabbit, doing as the eighty deities had told him, lay down. As the salt dried, the skin of his whole body cracked when the wind blew on it.

6 As he lay there crying in pain, OPO-NAMUDI-NÖ-KAMĪ, who came along last, saw the rabbit and said:

“Why are you lying here crying?”

7 The rabbit answered:⁵

“I was on the island of OKI and, though I wanted to cross over to this land, there was no way to cross over.

8 “Then I deceived a crocodile⁶ of the sea, saying:

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“Let us, you and me, see who has the most relatives. You bring as many relatives as you have and have them lie in a straight line from this island as far as the Cape of KĒTA; then I will run over them and count them as I run across. Then we will know whether they are more numerous than my relatives.’

9 “When they, deceived by what I had said, lay there in a line, I ran over them and counted them as I ran across. As I was about to get on land I said:

“‘You’ have been deceived by me!’

10 “Just as I finished saying this, the crocodile lying at the end of the line seized me and skinned off all my clothes. As I was crying and lamenting because of this, the eighty deities who went ahead commanded me, instructing me to bathe in salt water and to lie down where the wind would blow on me. When I did as they told me, my whole body became blistered.”

11 Then OPO-NAMUDI-NÖ-KAMĪ instructed the rabbit:

“Go quickly to this river-mouth and wash your body with its water. Then take the pollen of the *kama* grass of the river-mouth, sprinkle it around, and roll on it. If you do this, your skin will certainly heal as before.”

12 When he did as he was told, his body became as it was before.⁸

⁷ Singular in the original.

⁸ Undoubtedly, this tale is introduced in order to illustrate the healing powers of Opo-namudi (Opo-kuni-nusi), about whom the *Nihon shoki* says:

“Opo-ana-muti-nö-mikötö and Sukuna-biko-na-nö-mikötö united their powers and made their hearts one, and constructed the universe; they also determined the method of curing illnesses for the race of mortal men and for animals; they also determined magical methods for doing away with calamities from birds, beasts, and creeping things.” Asahi ed., I:122; Aston, I, 59.

Motoori, himself a doctor, disparaged Chinese medicine and recommended the invocation of Opo-kuni-nusi to heal illness, *Kojiki-den*, II, 507.

From his appearance in this section as a sort of medicine man or magic healer, modern commentators often see Opo-namudi as an archetype of the ancient shamanistic practitioners. Matsumoto concludes: “. . . the myths of Opo-kuni-nusi appear to have originated among a corporation of magicians in Idumo, who, being the religious rulers, had political power.” *Nihon shinwa no kenkyū*, pp. 148–50.

Matsumura (III, 282–84) agrees with this; he regards Opo-kuni-nusi as a personification of the activities carried on by such a group of magician-rulers.

¹ Or ‘many.’

² The narrative explaining this “reason” continues until 24:15. There is no account in the culminating chapter of the deities’ ceding lands to Opo-kuni-nusi.

³ I.e., they treated him as a lowly servant; cf. verse 14 below.

⁴ I.e., a rabbit with no fur.

⁵ See ADDITIONAL NOTE 13 for a discussion of the provenance of the tale of the rabbit and the crocodiles.

⁶ *Wani*, see ADDITIONAL NOTE 13.

- 13 This is called the white rabbit of INABA;⁹ nowadays it is called the rabbit-deity.¹⁰
- 14 This rabbit said to OPO-NAMUDI-NÖ-KAMĪ:
 “These eighty deities will certainly never gain YA-GAMI-PIME. Although you carry their bags, you shall gain her.”
- 15 At this time YA-GAMI-PIME replied to the eighty deities:
 “I will not accept your offers. I will wed OPO-NAMUDI-NÖ-KAMĪ.”¹¹

⁹ *Inaba nō siro-usagi*; or ‘the furless rabbit of Inaba.’

¹⁰ *Usagi-gami*. An interesting occurrence of primitive animal-worship. This verse is a gloss, interrupting the progress of the narrative.

¹¹ Motoori attributes Ya-gami-pime’s sudden willingness to marry Opo-namudi to the spiritual workings of the rabbit. *Kojiki-den*, II, 509.

The marriage was unsuccessful because of Ya-gami-pime’s fear of the chief wife, Suseri-bime (cf. 24:17). Some commentators see Opo-kuni-nusi’s marriage to Ya-gami-pime (the princess of a place called Ya-gami in Inaba) as a mythological reflection of a historical process by which Idumo consolidated its control over Inaba by means of ‘diplomatic marriages’ with the women of local chieftains. Matsumura, III, 270. See also note to 25:1.