



Susa-nö-wo versus Ya-mata nö woröti: An Indo-European Theme in Japanese Mythology

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Source: *History of Religions*, Feb., 1981, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Feb., 1981), pp. 269-280

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

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SUSA-NÖ-WO VERSUS YA-MATA NÖ WORÖTI: AN INDO-EUROPEAN THEME IN JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

In recent years, thanks to the pioneering research by Atsuhiko Yoshida and Taryo Ōbayashi, it has become apparent that Japanese mythology, as preserved in the *Kojiki* (A.D. 712), the *Nihonshoki* (A.D. 720), and other ancient texts, was subjected to an intense Indo-European influence at some point before the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century A.D.¹

The research on which this paper is based was done in the spring of 1980 while the author served as a Visiting Fulbright Lecturer in Japan. He would like to express his profound gratitude to Professors Atsuhiko Yoshida, of Seikei University, and Taryo Ōbayashi, of the University of Tokyo, not only for having led the way, but also for their astute advice and enthusiastic encouragement throughout. Yoshida was kind enough to read several drafts of the paper and to make a great many extremely important comments and suggestions; indeed, his contributions to the project have proved invaluable. The author also wishes to thank Mr. Kazuo Matsumura, and Professor Udo Strutyuski, both of whom read and commented on drafts of the manuscript; and Mrs. Caroline Atsuko Yang and the Japan–United States Educational Commission for making it all possible. To one and all: *Dōmoarigatōgozaimashita!*

¹ See, for example, Atsuhiko Yoshida (“La Mythologie japonaise: Essai d’interprétation structurale, I–II,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 160 [1961]: 47–66; “La Mythologie japonaise: Essai d’interprétation structurale, III–IV,” *ibid.*, 163 [1963]: 225–48; “Sur quelques figures de la mythologie japonaise,” *Acta orientalia* 29 [1965]: 221–33; *Nihon Shinwa to Indo-Shinwa* [Tokyo, 1974]; “Japanese Mythology and the Indo-European Trifunctional System,” *Diogenes* 98 [1977]: 93–116; and “Dumézil et les études comparatives des mythes japonais” [in press]). See also Taryo Ōbayashi (*Nihon Shinwa no Kigen* [Tokyo, 1960]; “Senshin Toshiteno ken no Suhai,” in *Shinwa to Shinwagaku* [Tokyo, 1975]; and “The Structure of the Pantheon and the Concept of Sin in Ancient Japan,” *Diogenes* 98 [1977]: 117–32).

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The Indo-Europeans immediately responsible for this influence were most likely members of a Scythian tribe who somehow managed to join forces with the band of horse-riding nomads who, as Namio Egami and, more recently, Gari Ledyard have convincingly shown, successfully invaded Japan in the latter part of the fourth century A.D. (that is, at the beginning of the Kofun, or Tumulus period, ca. A.D. 350–550).² Indeed, although the evidence is still far from certain, it is now possible to suggest that these horsemen from the Asian mainland, who also conquered most of the Korean peninsula, were initially ruled by a Scythian elite which, before it was fully assimilated, managed to impose a fair amount of its Indo-European mythological and religious heritage on the indigenous Yayoi population.

Even if there were no ethnic Scythians among the invaders, who, for the most part, seem to have been Altaic speakers of one variety or another, they had almost certainly absorbed a great many Scythian ideas in the course of their migration.³ In any case, the end result seems to have been a syncretism wherein a variety of Indo-European figures and themes, many of which were expressions of the common ideology so thoroughly delineated by Georges Dumézil in the course of the last half-century,⁴ fused with the indigenous religious and mythological traditions of Japan.

A good example of this syncretism can be seen in the important Japanese warrior god Susa-nō-wo (more fully, Paya-Susa-nō-wo-nō-Mikötö), who, as Yoshida has demonstrated, shares many traits in common with Indra, Thor, Heracles, Cúchulainn, Batraz, and other Indo-European gods and heroes

² Namio Egami ("The Formation of the People and the Origin of the State of Japan," *Memoirs of the Tōyō Bunko* 23 [1964]: 35–70; *Kiba Minzoku Kokka: Nihon Kodaishi e no Apurochi* [Tokyo, 1967]); Gari Ledyard ("Galloping along with the Horseriders: Looking for the Founders of Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 1 [1975]: 217–54). For a sympathetic overview of this thesis, see Eiichi Ishida (*Japanese Culture: A Study of Origins and Characteristics*, trans. Teruko Kachi [Honolulu, 1974], pp. 69–93).

³ Yoshida, "La Mythologie japonaise, IV," p. 248.

⁴ It would be impossible here to list all of Dumézil's major works. Perhaps the most succinct overview of his thesis is contained in *L'Idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens* (Brussels, 1958). Other representative works by him include *Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus* (Paris, 1941); *Les Dieux des Indo-Européens* (Paris, 1952); *Archaic Roman Religion*, trans. Phillip Krapp (Chicago, 1970); *The Destiny of the Warrior*, trans. Alf Hiltebeitel (Chicago, 1970); *Mythe et épopée* (Paris, 1973), vol. 3; and *Les Dieux souverains des Indo-Européens* (Paris, 1977). For a comprehensive review and analysis of his work, see C. Scott Littleton (*The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil* [Berkeley, 1973]).

whom Dumézil assigns to what he terms the “second function” (that is, the divine stratum principally concerned with warfare and the exercise of physical prowess).⁵ Born from the nose of the primeval divinity Izanagi (*Kojiki* 1.11.24), Susa-nō-wo is the “brother” of the sovereign sun goddess Ama-terasu-opo-mi-kamī, who was born from Izanagi’s left eye. However, unlike his regal “sister,” who, Yoshida suggests, is a reflection of the “first function” (that is, the divine stratum principally concerned with the maintenance of cosmic and social order),⁶ the god in question was every bit as rebellious, at least in his youth, as the most recalcitrant of the several Indo-European second-function figures just mentioned. Endowed with great physical strength and courage, the young Susa-nō-wo nevertheless committed a series of outrages against the divine order, chief among them the act of throwing a horse through the roof of the divine weaving hut (*Kojiki* 1.16.7), and as a result he was banished from heaven.

Thus, Susa-nō-wo was forced to descend to earth, and shortly after he arrived there an episode occurred that links him even more firmly with the Indo-European tradition. To date, this episode has not received the attention it deserves, at least from the standpoint of the new comparative mythology, and the purpose of this paper is to discuss yet another important piece of evidence indicative of the extent to which the Japanese tradition was influenced by that of the ancient Indo-Europeans.

According to the *Kojiki* (1.19.1–22; an almost identical account is contained in *Nihonshoki* 1.52),⁷ Susa-nō-wo arrived on earth in the land of Idumo (Izumo) near the headwaters of the Pi (Hi) River at a place called Tori-kami. Seeing a chopstick floating down the river, he correctly reasoned that there must be people farther upstream and set out to investigate. After a brief search, the expelled god discovered an elderly couple accompanied by a young maiden. As the three of them were weeping bitterly, he identified himself and asked the cause of their grief. The old man, whose name was Asi-na-duti, told him that the girl, called Kusi-nada-pime, was the last of his

⁵ Yoshida, “La Mythologie japonaise, III,” pp. 227–29. See also Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, pp. xi–xiii.

⁶ Yoshida, “La Mythologie japonaise, I,” pp. 60–66.

⁷ The *Nihonshoki* contains several versions of this episode in addition to 1.52, each of which differs in some details. However, all of them agree as to the basic sequence of events. See W. G. Aston, *Nihongi* [= *Nihonshoki*]: *Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (Tokyo, 1972).

eight daughters, and that like the others she was about to be devoured by Ya-mata nō worōti, a ferocious eight-headed, eight-tailed dragon. Enamored of the girl, Susa-nō-wo asked for her hand in marriage and prepared to slay the creature.

Changing Kusi-nada-pime into a haircomb, which he inserted into his hair, the god instructed Asi-na-duti and his wife (Te-na-duti) as follows: “Distill thick wine [i.e., sake, usually reserved for the gods] of eight-fold brewings; build a fence, and make eight doors in the fence. At each door tie together eight platforms, and on each of these platforms place a wine barrel. Fill each barrel with the thick wine of eight-fold brewings, and wait” (*Kojiki* 1.19.16).⁸

After these preparations had been made, Ya-mata nō worōti appeared. But the sight of the wine barrels, as well as the apparent absence of the maiden he had come to devour, distracted him: “Putting one head into each of the barrels, he drank the wine; then, becoming drunk, he lay down and slept. Then Paya-Susa-nō-wo-nō-Mikōtō unsheathed the sword ten hands long which he was wearing at his side, and hacked the dragon to pieces, so that the Pi river ran with blood” (*Kojiki* 1.19.18–19). In the process of dismembering the dragon, Susa-nō-wo discovered embedded in its middle tail the famous Kusa-nagi sword, which eventually became part of the three imperial regalia brought down from heaven by Ninigi, Amaterasu’s grandson.

Having dispatched Ya-mata nō worōti, Susa-nō-wo built a palace, married Kusa-nada-pime (once again restored to mortal shape), and, as the *Kojiki* (1.20.13) puts it, “commenced procreation.” Among his offspring (or immediate descendants)⁹ was the great agricultural divinity Opo-kuni-nushi, enshrined at Izumo, who Yoshida suggests is a prime reflection of the “third function” (that is, the divine stratum principally concerned with the promotion of fertility, physical well-being, wealth, etc.).

As can well be imagined, despite the fact that it has been

⁸ The English translation of the *Kojiki* quoted in this paper is that of Donald L. Philippi (Tokyo, 1968). For consistency’s sake, I have used Philippi’s transliterations of Japanese mythological names throughout.

⁹ There is some confusion in the texts themselves as to the exact relationship between Susa-nō-wo and Opo-kuni-nushi. According to the *Kojiki* (see Philippi, p. 92, n. 11), Opo-kuni-nushi is six generations removed from Susa-nō-wo; however, in at least one of the several versions recorded in the *Nihonshoki* (1.59) the god is reckoned as one of Susa-nō-wo’s sons.

overlooked by comparativists, this story has over the years received its fair share of scholarly interpretations. For example, many traditional commentators have interpreted Susa-nō-wo's slaying of Ya-mata nō worōti—correctly, as we shall see—as an act of expiation: By killing the monster he “wiped away” his past sins and thus became eligible for his eventual reconciliation with the Heavenly Divinities.¹⁰ More recently, Nobutsuna Saigō, a Marxist, has suggested that the story represents man's conquest of nature through the use of metal implements.¹¹ The folklorist Cornelius Ouwehand, again with good reason, interprets Susa-nō-wo as a positive double of the eight-tailed dragon;¹² while Donald Philippi asserts that the account is simply a localized Japanese folktale and that attempts to tie it to some larger theme or motif are unwarranted.¹³

However, in Mahābhārata 5.9.1–40 there is a remarkable parallel to this Japanese story, one that so far seems to have escaped the attention of those who would explain its origin.¹⁴ The text in question, echoed elsewhere in the ancient Indian tradition, can be summarized as follows. To challenge Indra, Tvastr, “the best of the gods and a great ascetic,” begat a monstrous three-headed son. With one of his mouths he studied the Vedas and drank Soma; with the second mouth he seemed to be on the verge of swallowing the world, and with the third he drank copious amounts of wine. When Indra realized that this creature, who was called Viśvarupa (or Trisiras; i.e.,

¹⁰ See Philippi (p. 406, n. 12), who emphasizes this point. However, before expelling him, the Heavenly Divinities forced Susa-nō-wo to give up his beard, fingernails, and toenails (*Kojiki* 1.17.25). As this punishment is specifically referred to as an “exorcism,” it is possible to suggest that his sins had been wiped away before his descent to earth (see Philippi, p. 86, n. 25).

¹¹ Nobutsuna Saigō, *Kojiki* (Tokyo, 1947).

¹² Cornelius Ouwehand, “Some Notes on the God Susa-no-wo,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 14 (1958–59): 138–61.

¹³ Philippi, p. 406, n. 12.

¹⁴ A recent exception is Robert Ellwood, who makes passing reference to the Indian parallel in an unpublished paper concerned with the extent to which Susa-nō-wo can be interpreted as a trickster figure. I thank him for making a draft of it available to me prior to publication. The more general similarities between Susa-nō-wo and Indra have been recognized by Japanese scholars since the late nineteenth century, beginning with Masaharu Anesaki (“Susanowo no mikoto no Shinwa Densetsu,” *Teikoku Bungaku* 5 [1899]: 875–99) and Chōgyū Takayama (see Toshio Takagi, *Nihon Shinwa Densetsu no Kenkyū*, ed. Taryo Ōbayashi [1925; reprint ed., Tokyo, 1973], pp. 81–87; also Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* [Berkeley, 1959], pp. 200–204, 500–504; and Udo Hetzner, *Andromeda und Tarpeia* [Meinheim am Glans, 1963], pp. 20–24). However, to the best of my knowledge, no one save Ellwood has focused specifically on the parallels between the slayings of Ya-mata nō worōti and Viśvarupa.

“Tricephalus”), coveted his power, he resolved to get rid of him. His initial ploy was to have the lovely Apsaras seduce Viśvarupa, but this proved unsuccessful, so Indra decided to slay him: “I shall smite him this very day with my thunderbolt [*Vajra*], and he will soon cease to exist. A growing though still weak enemy should not be ignored by a stronger man” (Mahābhārata 5.9.21).¹⁵ Apparently in a drunken stupor, the creature offered no resistance, for as the text puts it: “Hit hard by the thunderbolt, Trisiras fell dead as a mountain peak, shaken loose, falls on earth” (Mahābhārata 5.9.23).

Even in death the three-headed monster looked awesome, so Indra ordered a nearby woodcutter to dismember it. But the man was reluctant to help the god, for despite his appearance Viśvarupa was the son of a divine Brahman and therefore a Brahman himself. However, Indra persisted, and when the woodcutter was finally persuaded to cut off the three heads, several species of birds flew out of each lifeless mouth.

Similar accounts can be found in other Indian texts. One is contained in Rig Veda 10.8.8, wherein the slayer of Viśvarupa is called Trita Āptya, or the “Third” Āptya (see p. 276 below); another, which closely approximates the Mahābhārata version, can be found in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.6.3.1–5.

Although they differ in several important details—most notably in the number of heads described—the overall similarity between the Indian and Japanese stories is indeed remarkable. In both cases a voracious, multiheaded monster, bent on swallowing the world and/or its inhabitants, drinks liquor ordinarily reserved for the gods, falls into a drunken stupor (this is clearly implied in the Indian text), and offers no resistance whatsoever when a warrior divinity smites him. Subsequently, the creature is dismembered, and from its remains issue marvelous things, respectively, a variety of sacred birds and a divine sword. Moreover, women play a part in both tales, although to be sure the circumstances are reversed: In the Japanese myth the monster is described as rapacious, while Viśvarupa resists the efforts of the Apsaras to seduce him. Nevertheless, despite these differences in details, the points of agreement are more than enough to warrant the

¹⁵ The English translation of the Mahābhārata quoted in this paper is that of J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago, 1978).

conclusion that the resemblance between the two dragon slaying episodes is not fortuitous.

Moreover, as Dumézil has convincingly demonstrated, the Indian story of the slaying of Viśvarupa is but one component of a much larger and more widespread Indo-European myth-complex;¹⁶ and in order to understand fully the degree to which the Japanese myth of the slaying of Ya-mata nō worōti is rooted in the Indo-European tradition, it would be necessary to review all of the Indo-European accounts in which multi-headed monsters (or at least triple adversaries) are slain by warrior figures equivalent to Indra and Susa-nō-wo (e.g., the Iranian figure Ɔraētauoā vs. Aži Dahāka; Horatius vs. the three Curiatii; the Irish figure Cúchulainn vs. the three sons of Nechta; Heracles vs. the three-headed figure Geryon; Thor vs. the giant Hrungnir, who is described as having a “three-horned” heart; as well as the Hittite story of the slaying of Illyuyankas, in which drunkenness plays a major role).¹⁷ Obviously, this would be impossible in a paper of this scope. Nevertheless, there is one other Indo-European dragon-slaying myth which, although it does not directly involve a multi-headed creature, should be mentioned here, as it immediately reflects the “Scythian” tradition that seems to have impacted Japan.

This myth, which forms part of the oral tradition preserved by the Ossets, a contemporary Caucasian people who have the distinction of being the last surviving speakers of a Scythian (i.e., North Iranian) dialect, concerns an important episode in the early career of the hero Batraz, who in most respects is a typical Indo-European second-function figure.¹⁸ In his youth, Batraz asked the divine smith Kurdalagon to encase him in a body of steel which would render him invulnerable to wounds. In order to obtain the charcoal necessary to the forging process, Kurdalagon told the young hero to kill dragons and bring him their corpses. Batraz did so, and shortly thereafter received his new metal “skin.”¹⁹ While the Ossetic tradition does not explicitly mention whether these dragons were multiheaded, or whether they offered any resistance when Batraz slew them,

¹⁶ See Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, pp. 12–46.

¹⁷ See O. R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (Harmondsworth, 1952), p. 181.

¹⁸ See Dumézil, *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour* (Paris, 1978), p. 57.

¹⁹ Dumézil, *Le Livre des héros* (Paris, 1965), pp. 188–89.

it nevertheless reflects some fundamental themes also reflected in the other two myths we have discussed. Let us consider these themes.

Like Indra and Susa-nō-wo, Batraz undergoes what amounts to a rite of passage. Just as the Indian and Japanese figures must slay their respective dragons before they can go on to bigger and better things, as it were—in the case of Indra it will be the slaying of the monstrous serpent Vṛtra, who has swallowed all the waters; in Susa-nō-wo's case it will be the procreation of agricultural gods and his eventual reconciliation with the Heavenly Divinities—so Batraz must slay his dragons before undergoing the final transformation into a fully “adult” warrior. Indeed, from a symbolic standpoint, the whole episode can be interpreted as a “rebirth.” Similarly, Susa-nō-wo, by killing Ya-mata nō worōti, not only wipes away his childhood sins, as has often been suggested, but also demonstrates that he has finally become a respectable adult. Thus, the most important theme that links these three traditions is that of initiation.

Another important theme is the close connection of both the victor and the vanquished with water. Indra, as we have seen, goes on to fight the water-swallowing demon Vṛtra, and Ya-mata nō worōti has often been interpreted as the personification of a river.²⁰ Indeed, in many respects the Japanese creature bears more than a passing resemblance to Indra's antagonist. It is perhaps significant here that the name of the girl Susa-nō-wo rescues, Kusa-nada-pime, means “Wondrous Rice Paddy Princess,”²¹ as it implies that one result of Ya-mata nō worōti's demise was the restoration of a disrupted irrigation system. Moreover, the sword which Susa-nō-wo discovered in the monster's tail was originally called Ama no Mura-kumo no tsurugi, or “the sword of the gathering clouds of heaven” (*Nihonshoki* 1.52).

The victors, too, are connected with water. In the Indian versions where the slayer is called Trita Āptya (see p. 274 above) the *āp* element in the name clearly derives from the Sanskrit word for water,²² and in *Kojiki* 1.1.16 (cf. *Nihonshoki* 1.26) Susa-nō-wo is explicitly associated with bodies of water,

²⁰ See Takeo Matsumura, *Nihonshinwa no Kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1955), 3:118–89.

²¹ See Aston, p. 52, n. 3.

²² I.e., *āpah*, “waters”; see Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, p. 16.

including the ocean.²³ In short, it is possible that both the Indian and Japanese versions reflect a very ancient Indo-European concern with free-flowing water and its restoration when disrupted by nature on the rampage—that is, by drought, an earthquake, etc.

Indirectly, the Ossetic tradition also reflects this water theme, although it has been displaced in an earlier myth in the cycle. In one variant of the myth describing Batraz's birth, the infant hero, who was born from a miraculous sack that grew on his father's back, emerged in flames and thus had to be "quenched." In order to obtain the water for this purpose, Satana, the great Ossetic mother-figure who assisted at Batraz's birth, had to sleep with a seven-headed dragon who controlled the precious liquid's source.²⁴ The burning infant was subsequently immersed in several cauldrons of this hard-won water and thereby managed to survive his fiery birth.²⁵ Thus, Batraz's later dragon-slaying exploit would seem related to this earlier account of how a dragon exacted a toll for access to water; like Indra and Susa-nō-wo, the Ossetic hero would appear to be "releasing" water from captivity. (It is relevant, perhaps, that after receiving his metal body Batraz, at his own suggestion, was thrown into the sea for a week to temper the steel.)²⁶

Yet another theme involves actual or potential sexual intercourse. We have already commented on the respective roles of the Apsaras and Kusa-nada-pime in the Indian and Japanese myths. Satana's role in the Ossetic story would seem broadly equivalent to that played by Kusa-nada-pime: A water-hoarding dragon has (or contemplates) sexual intercourse with a female figure concerned with and/or personifying the proper use and distribution of water. In the previously mentioned Hittite myth of the slaying of Illyuyankas there is a curious parallel to Satana's prostitution. After plying the beast with wine, the goddess Inaras had intercourse with a mortal in exchange for the latter's promise to bind Illyuyankas. Thus immobilized, the dragon was easily dispatched by the Weather

²³ Further evidence in support of this connection between Susa-nō-wo and water can be seen in the identification with islands in the sea of the god's first three daughters, Takiri-pimi, Itiki-sima-pime, and Takitu-pime, born miraculously before his exile (*Kojiki* 1.15.2-4).

²⁴ Dumézil, *Horace et les Curiaces* (Paris, 1942), p. 59.

²⁵ Dumézil, *Légendes sur les Nartes* (Paris, 1930), pp. 50-53.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

God.²⁷ Thus, Satana's action (and perhaps Kusa-nada-pime's anticipation of her fate—that is, until the fortunate arrival of Susa-nō-wo) has a possible counterpart elsewhere in the ancient Indo-European domain.

Finally, there is, of course, the theme of multiheadedness (or some approximation thereof) on the part of either the monster, the slayer, or both. In the Indian versions, as well as in the other Indo-European accounts to which Dumézil compares them (e.g., the slaying of the Curiatii, a set of Alban triplets whom he interprets as an historicized approximation of the three-headed dragon figure), the monster is manifestly tripartite.²⁸ Moreover, the Indian name "Trita" means, as we have seen, third, as does the initial element in the Iranian name Өraētaona, and Dumézil suggests that in these and the other Indo-European traditions in question there is an element of "thirdness" about the hero as well as his antagonist (e.g., Heracles was conceived during a night that was three times longer than normal; Cúchulainn was conceived in the course of three separate nights; Horatius was the last survivor of a set of triplets, etc.).²⁹ The Ossetic version, as we have seen, although it agrees generally with the others, lacks this element of multiheadedness (at least as far as the dragons slain by Batraz are concerned), let alone thirdness; while the Japanese myth describes an eight-headed (and eight-tailed) creature.

Why the Ossetic myth lost the motif of thirdness is as yet unclear, for, given the other Indo-European manifestations thereof—to say nothing of the well-known Indo-European preoccupation with triads per se, which Dumézil has so systematically documented over the years³⁰—it was probably present in the ancient Scythian prototype. However, the reason Ya-mata nō worōti is described as eight headed can be more readily understood.

Even a cursory reading of the *Kojiki* and other early Japanese texts will reveal the importance of the number eight. It occurs throughout the text discussed in this paper and seems to have been as sacred in ancient Japan as the number three was among the early Indo-Europeans. Indeed, eightfold paradigms are so numerous, so pervasive that one is forced to the conclusion

²⁷ Gurney, p. 181.

²⁸ Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior*, p. 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See Littleton, pp. 231–32.

that the sacredness of the number eight—which also seems to have stood for the idea of “many”—long predated the onset of the Indo-European influence in the fourth century A.D.³¹

Thus, although the basic themes reflected in the story of Susa-nō-wo and the multiheaded Ya-mata nō worōti are most likely Indo-European in origin, the three-headed monster rapidly evolved into an eight-headed (and eight-tailed) one as the Scythian and indigenous Japanese traditions began to merge. By the time the *Kojiki* was compiled, almost four centuries after the arrival of the horse riders, the syncretism was complete. The Indo-European notion that the slayer is to some degree a “positive” counterpart of the monster—that is, that he is endowed with a tripartite character of one sort or another—also carried over, but it is manifested more in the god’s personality and connection with water than in any specific numerical value, eightfold or otherwise, in his makeup.³² Indeed, Ouweland’s previously mentioned suggestion that Susa-nō-wo can be interpreted as a double of Ya-mata nō worōti makes good sense in light of the evidence we have presented, for in the course of events leading to his banishment the god in many ways came to resemble a raging, rapacious dragon.³³

In sum, the story of Susa-nō-wo’s encounter with Ya-mata nō worōti is a complex blend of indigenous, deep-rooted Japanese elements, such as the prominence of the number eight,

³¹ However, Yoshida has recently made an interesting, albeit by no means definitive, case for the possibility that eight was also an important Indo-European number: one that reflected the notion of “completeness” (see n. 34 below). This is reinforced by the fact that the Indo-European conception of “nine” seems to imply “newness” (e.g., German *neu*, OHG *niun*, Latin *novem*, Greek *ennea*, etc.) and perhaps the beginning of a new sequence of some sort. Thus, the ancient Japanese penchant for eightfold paradigms may also perhaps be part of the Indo-European input here; see Yoshida (“Kazu no Hikaku Shinwagaku,” *Episteme* II [1977]: 34–42). Please see the addendum at the end of this article.

³² Yoshida has suggested (personal communication, 1980) that Susa-nō-wo does in fact have an aura of thirdness about him, as he is the youngest of a trio of major divinities born from Izanagi. This trio, which also includes Ama-terasu and Toku-yomi-no-mikōtō, the Moon God (born from Izanagi’s right eye; see *Kojiki* 1.11.22–24), is explicitly set apart from the rest of the divinities produced by Izanagi and may reflect a dim survival of the Indo-European concern with tripartition. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no evidence whatsoever that links Ya-mata nō worōti to any number other than eight.

³³ In addition to throwing the horse into the weaving room (*Kojiki* 1.16.7), Susa-nō-wo trampled down the dikes between the divine rice paddies, forced horses to lie in the fields at harvest time, and defecated during a first-fruits ceremony (*Kojiki* 1.16.3; *Nihonshoki* 1.37). The end result, of course, was Ama-terasu’s famous withdrawal into a cave, which caused the sun to disappear. As Susa-nō-wo was the direct cause of this withdrawal, it is perhaps possible to suggest that he caused the sun to be “swallowed,” just as Ya-mata nō worōti was wont to swallow maidens.

and a myth-complex which, in a wide variety of manifestations, is known from Ireland to India and which forms an integral part of the common Indo-European mythological heritage. Whatever else it may be,³⁴ this story is not, as Philippi has suggested, simply a local folktale, but yet another bit of evidence of the extent to which the Japanese and Indo-European traditions have more in common than is generally realized.

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³⁴ Professor Taryo Ōbayashi has recently suggested (personal communication, 1980) that the presence of this Indo-European myth in the Japanese tradition may precede the impact of the horse riders, and that it perhaps arrived in Japan (via Korea) at the time wet-rice cultivation was introduced (ca. 350 B.C.). Ōbayashi bases his suggestion on the presence of a number of generally similar dragon-slaying myths in South China, Korea, and Southeast Asia, plus the previously noted connection between the slaying of Ya-mata nō worōti and the restoration of a disrupted irrigation system. As he sees it, the myth in question probably diffused from an as-yet undetermined Indo-European source in Central Asia (perhaps Tocharian; see E. G. Pulleyblank, "Chinese and Indo-Europeans," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* [April, 1966]: 9-39). Thus, the situation may be much more complex than it would seem at first glance; perhaps the version brought in by the Scythian (or Scythianized) nomads merely reinforced a previously diffused Indo-European myth, one that had come to Japan indirectly almost a millennium earlier.

ADDENDUM: After submitting this communication the author learned that the number eight is extremely important in the mythology of Western Polynesia (Tonga, Hawaii, etc.) and refers to Susumo Ōno's work *Nihongo no Sekai* (Tokyo, 1980, pp. 38-40) that suggests a probable and very ancient connection between Japan and the ancestors of the Malayo-Polynesians.