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A Study on the Swordsmanship (Swords) Symbolized by Myths and Legends (1)

By *Kunikichi Kaneko**

1. Preface

The God appearing first in the history of the swordsmanship is God Takemikazuchi. In the world of myth, although swords are told as weapons, the characteristics as a sacred treasure and a holy shell are expressed strongly. Therefore, the writer likes to understand that the art of manipulation of swords is buried in an idea and is told in such way.

A study is made on whether the real nature of God Takemikazuchi is appropriate or not as the first God of swordsmanship.

2. Curse Ceremony with Swords

Many Gods were born from farming life. The growth and development of myths were made with the places where they were told as media. Nextly, the myths to be told veered to myths to be read, and in such course, they were transfigured, and their ceremonial and faithful nature was lost. Among the people who had such faith in ancient times, what meaning had swords?

The sword culture may probably have originated in the sword legend on the continent, and it is clear that this culture underwent changes so as to suit to the climate and habit of our country. And it is certain that its area was very extensive.

In addition to earthenwares and stonewares, swords were used extensively in ceremonies as ceremonial objects. Ceremonies were performed periodically.

The importance of swords is not found in the act to use them, but rather in the ceremony for which they were used. The origin of the spiritual sword, and its mystical nature by which people were bestowed with miracles are important. For example, God Susano has the character of thunder, and the treasures which were necessary for the management of the country, such as the sword, bow and arrow

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and harp, were handed over to God Okuninushi; these treasures were the symbol of the throne. We have many other myths concerning spiritual swords. In actuality, spiritual swords were the swords in which spiritual power dwelt, and they were curse shells which symbolized the qualifications for a king. Spiritual swords, like the spirit of thunder and that of fire, were the subjects of faith, and had the character of Thunder God. The awe and respect and belief which the people in ancient times had toward fire meant the authority of a chief. Persons who had the qualification for a king were symbolized by the character of fire and thunder.

3. Legend of God Takemikazuchi

The legends about this God which appeared in the myths in "Kojiki" and "Nihonshoki" (Records of Ancient Matters and Chronicles of Japan) are:

1) Myth of Fire God

This God made his appearance as a child of the sword when God Izanagi cut Fire God Kagutsuchi with a sword. This is the cast shadow of legend called natural fire or cultural fire, which tells the death of Fire God and his revival. "Kojiki" denies God Futsunushi, and instead, specifically establishes God Ameno-ohabari.

2) Myth on Transfer of Region

The God told in this myth is not the God of Jar, but the God of military affairs and swords. This God descended from heaven onto Inasa Beach and wielded his sword vigorously. Symbolized by this myth is a sorcerous ceremony in which the indigenous belief submits to this God; shown in this myth is a curse on the beach, and a ceremony for the repose of the departed souls, transmitted from ancient times.

This God makes his appearance together with God Futsunushi. He makes no appearance in "Fudoki" (An old book in which natural features of regions are described), the God described extensively in literature is God Futsunushi. God Futsunushi was memorized as the God of Sword who was on the side of Izumo Regions and suppressed the civil wars in the region. While, God Takemikazuchi makes his appearance only in some legends contained in "Kojiki" and "Nihonshoki."

3) Story on Eastern Expedition by Emperor Jimmu

The Emperor's army that fell into a fantastic state at the appearance of a

divine bear at Kumano was protected. Since the divine sword is called Saji-futsumikafutsu, it is suggested that the sword was the divine sword dedicated to Ishikami Shrine, which had relations with the Mononobe Family. A divine sword for the existence of which God Takemikazuchi and God Futsunushi are overlapped. With the appearance of the Sun Goddess, whose original nature was a new God, God Futsunushi, who had originally been a divine sword, was replaced by the Sun Goddess.

4) A legend based on the original legend of God in Mt. Miwa

Description is made in the genealogy on the relations between God Omononushi and Otataneko. This genealogy has concern with production of earthenwares, therefore, it can be understood that God Takemikazuchi was the God of Jar.

Seeing from the common point that earthenwares and metal wares use fire, the existence of relations between God Omononushi and Takemikazuchi is understandable.

In "Kojiki" and "Nihonshoki," the letters "Jar" and "Thunder" are used, therefore, as the letters represent, consideration should be given to the real nature of God. Interpretation of God Takemikazuchi as the God of Thunder is generally accepted. As a symbol of lightening, there existed a faith in swords, and the spirits of fire, thunder and swords are placed on the same line of faith.

To consider God Futsunushi as the son of God Ameno-ohabari was to eliminate God Futsunushi. What is told in the story is an idea to repose the departed souls by the power of swords. The original form of the story was to talk about the divine authority of Ishikami Shrine erected by the Mononobe Family. The God enshrined in Ishikami Shrine was later worshipped as a guardian God by the Nakatomi Family upon their seizure of the power to control festivals and politics.

4. Conclusions

The Fujiwara Family added a new character—God enshrined in Kashima Shrine—to God Takemikazuchi (the God of Jar) who played an important role in the myths contained in "Kojiki" and "Nihonshoki."

With the political development made by the Fujiwara Family, God Takemikazuchi walked his way as the God of military affairs and as the God of weapons, and was transfigured as he was worshipped as the God of the Fujiwara Family. God

Takemikazuchi, thus, has not the character of the God of swordsmanship. The understanding of God Futsunushi as the God of Fujiwara Family should rather be supported strongly.