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READING, TRANSLATING, SEXING EARLY JAPAN.
THE *KOJIKI* 古事記 AS QUINTESSENTIAL SOURCE
LANGUAGE TEXT

FROM STORYTELLING TO STORYWRITING AND BACK

The *Kojiki* 古事記, the first extant Japanese literary work, is a sourcebook of mythological and protohistoric content. Its preface dates the completion of the work to 712.¹ Yasumarō 安萬侶, the author or rather the compiler, therein states that he records in the best available graphic form the oral narration into which Are 阿礼, a sort of storyteller, pours the stories contained in previous written sources he has memorized (K 1982: 14-17).² The text of the *Kojiki* should therefore convey to its reader the Japanese language of some thirteen centuries ago. It is about as distant in time from today's Japanese as the language of Beowulf is from today's English. The old poem's verses are, probably from its very incipit «*Hwæt we Gardena in geardagum*», puzzling to a twenty-first century native English speaker without suitable learning. I for one,

1 The fifth year of the *Wadō* 和銅 period.

2 Terms from the *Kojiki* in the present essay are generally transcribed according to the phonetic bipartitions of the early Japanese eightfold vocalic system, recorded in K 1982's reading of the text through the *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries. Umlauted vowels romanize *katakana* syllables. When other references ignore such bipartition the common romanization is used.

as an italoophone, would easily misunderstand the meaning of the early Italian short text known as “Veronese Riddle”, dating back to the eighth or ninth century, whose opening words’ diplomatic transcription reads «*separebabouesalbaprataliaaraba*». Any person’s mother tongue is insufficient to grasp its ancestral written language of a dozen centuries ago, but the *Kojiki* presents learned and unlearned Japanese native and foreign readers with further problems.

During the evolution of many modern European languages, literate people accustomed to the Latin alphabet are probably not much troubled in adapting it to their living idioms. Roman script has been used for centuries, not only by learned individuals to write on parchment, also by common people to scratch graffiti on walls. Eighth-century Japan is on the contrary still digesting the writing system just adopted from China. It is designed to record a language alien to the morphology and syntax of Japanese, and the literati are aware, as Yasumarō’s remarks in the Chinese preface to the *Kojiki* show, that it is not satisfactory to convey the idiom of the archipelago.

The various manuscripts of the *Kojiki* rarely diverge from each other in a significant way. The codex known as *Shinpukujibon* 真福寺本, from the name of the Nagoya temple on the initiative of whose clergy it is copied in the 1370s, is highly regarded as the oldest surviving and most reliable one.³ It contains only small, easily emendable scribal errors, and usually constitutes the basis of the original text established by the critical editions. Images 1 and 2 (*infra*: 150-151) are facsimiles from this manuscript. Image 1 is the first page of the preface authored by Yasumarō. The prose he uses to introduce the work is grammatically and lexically Chinese, full of phrases modeled after its ornamental rhetoric. Image 2 is the page containing the passage (fifth character of the third column from the right) between the preface and main text of the *Kojiki*. Nothing shows that the language has changed. As a matter of fact the seamless sentence writing about «the time of the origins of the cosmos» 天地初發之時 may be read in Chinese, conventionally romanized *tiāndì chū fā zhī shí* today, and understood without any knowledge of Japanese. The restitution of such Chinese-looking prose to the oral lesson Yasumarō associates with his aural reception of Are’s storytelling requires many suppositional efforts. The *Kojiki* contains very scarce information regarding the phonetic values of its apparently Sinitic wording and it would not be too bizarre to consider the premodern Japanese philologists as the earliest translators of the work. When the nativist scholars of the Edo period (1603-1868) promote a revival of early Japanese culture the quest of an accurate versional reading gains momentum. In 1798 Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 provides in the commentary *Kojikiden* 古事記傳 the first complete, conjectural but trustworthy reading of the sourcebook’s prose, and many contemporary critical editions still accept the authoritative spellings

³ The informations about authorship and date are from the manuscript’s wooden case. Cf. Yamada 1924-25: frame 40 (URL <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/1185390/1/40> visited on 2023-10-03).

established by the eighteenth-century philologist.

It remains nonetheless undeniable that, to say it in the words of an outstanding scholar such as Kamei Takeshi 亀井孝 «nobody knows how to read the *Kojiki*» (Kamei 1957). Even an adverb often opening a sentence like *ěr* 爾 ‘thus’ is variously read: *shikashite*, *sunahachi*, *kare*, *shikakushite*. And the name of the work may also be questioned. Motoori questions it and, highlighting the blurring boundary between reading and translating from the beginning, transcribes the title *furukotobumi* instead of *kojiki* (MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 16, 65). From time to time he repeats that one should not stick to the Chinese characters, a somehow paradoxical opinion in the glosses about the Chinese signifiers in which the whole work is written down and generally make its meaning much clearer than the few passages which, thanks to the Chinese characters used to represent speech sounds, record Japanese expressions. Behind his suggestion lies a belief in verbal potency: the reciting of the text releases the mythopoetic emotion that gave birth to it. Many philosophico-political inferences and conclusions that Motoori draws from the Japanese mythology also present fideistic nuances associated with his speculations about the effectiveness of words. The eighteenth-century scholar’s visionary philodynamic loyalism, for example, rests on his faith in the sacred kingship mythicized in the *Kojiki*. It will, contrary to rational expectations, find its way into the 1889 Constitution of the Empire of Japan. The link between linguistic theory and political action envisioned by Motoori is consistent with the discourse about the “power of words”, sometimes referred to through the term *kotodama* ‘word/thing-spirit’ - the early Japanese *kōtō*, not dissimilarly to the biblical Hebrew *dābār* (cf. Robson 2016) has such a double meaning - which, in turn, is consistent with the nativist glorification of the protohistoric lifestyle of the archipelago: pre-sinicized Japan privileges orality, if only because literacy is still to come from China. The *Kojiki* tells anecdotes where words, not least efficacious maledictory formulas, are capable of affecting actuality, and the future is the object of vaticinal requests in early Japan as elsewhere. In the *Man’yōshū* 萬葉集 (late eighth century) a poet, standing by the crossroads when night falls, obtains the oracular answer «my beloved will come» *imo ha ahiyoramu* 妹相依 (M 1999-2003, III: 41).⁴ I think we can understand the expression «that has the spirit of words/things» (*kotodama no*) in his verses associated with the crossroads without resorting to historico-religious explanations. May not the poet just hear the sentence «my beloved will come» from a passerby?

The close relation between words and events transcends the limits of beliefs experienced by preliterate humans in the grip of some strong emotion or desire. First, because events we witness are extremely few. To say it simplistically, words have to be valid substitutes for facts in order to allow spoken or written languages to function.

4 The poem «事靈/八十衢/夕占問/占正謂/妹相依» *kotodama no/yaso no chimata ni/yufuke tofu/ura masa ni noru/imo ha ahiyoramu* is ascribed to Kakimoto no Hitomaro 柿本人麻呂 who flourishes in the second half of the seventh century.

Second, words actually establish, bring about, found things, events, institutions, as declarations of war, for example, or declarations of marriage, do. Newspaper editors know how impressive a glance at headlines can be. A fake news can cause riots, and not infrequently false testimonies can send people to jail.

To give an idea of how the relation between the *Kojiki*'s original, its reading, its comprehension, its translation may work, I will concentrate attention on a couple of passages.

The following excerpt describes Amaterasu (*amaterasu ohomikami* 天照大御神) asserting the innocence of Susanōwo 須佐之男, who has just damaged the watering facilities of the wet rice fields. The quotation of the direct speech the deity utters in order to paper over the cracks of such mischievous behaviour, also include a short sentence which optimistically reports, in a way that approximates a quotation inside the quotation, the alleged friendly, soil-sparing urge of the wrongdoer. The text from the *Kojiki*'s apparently Sinitic prose is followed by the *lectio* established by Motoori, and by a tentative comprehension of the original I clothe in English words. The underlining is mine, marking a few portions whose meaning is impossible to grasp in Chinese.

[...] 離田之阿埋溝者地矣阿多良斯登許曾 自阿以下七字以音 我那勢之命為如此
 登 此一字以音 (K 1982: 48-50)⁵ *ta no a hanachi mizo umuru ha tokoro wo atara-*
shi to koso a ga nase no mikoto kaku shitsurame to (MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 341)⁶
 [...] with regard to the fact that he razed the fields' mounds and with their earth blocked the irrigation channels, it's something that 'the ground, alas, what a waste! thinking and nothing else the seven characters from A are phonetic my dearly loved highness carried out that way" this character is phonetic.

The opening clause describes the thing done by Susanōwo. Its Chinese phrasing *lí tián zhī à mái gōu zhě* 離田之阿埋溝者 clearly means 'the action of obstructing the irrigation channels with the earth from the field's mounds broken into pieces'. Motoori corroborates part of his reading *ta no a hanachi mizo umuru ha* resorting to parallel references from two ancient sources. Neither of them, in truth, contain the same wording of the *Kojiki*. The parallel account in the *Nihonshoki* 日本書記 (720) states in Chinese that Susanōwo *hǔiqipàn* 毀其畔 'destroys the field boundaries' and annotates that *hǔi* 毀 writes down the Japanese *hanatsu* (毀此云波那豆). The *Kogoshūi* 古語拾遺 (early ninth century) glosses in Japanese respectively *a hanachi* and *mizo ume* the Chinese dyads *hǔipàn* 毀畔 and *máigōu* 埋溝 (MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 343). Motoori inflects *hanatsu* in *hanachi* to connect this verb to the next part of the period, where the attributive form *umuru* substantivizes the verb *umu* 'to fill with earth' and the final *ha* marks the topic of the discourse. His erudition does not however silence the inventiveness of later scholars. What he unravels into *mizo umuru ha*, for example, elsewhere becomes *mizō umu ha* (K 1982: 49), somewhere else reads *mizo wo umitsuru ha* (K 1979: 49), somewhere else again *mizo wo umu ha* (K 1997: 63).

With the next phrase in Amaterasu's account, the thoughts of Susanöwo are conveyed. It is not implausible to look upon the first two words (地矣) as Chinese. The particle *yǐ* 矣, which has among other functions the force of exclamation, precedes the noun *di* 地 'ground, land' thus producing an expression of complaint we may translate in English as 'the soil, alas!'. Motoori likewise reads, or if you prefer translates, the two words *tokoro wo*, that is to say a Japanese word for 'earth, land' marked by the particle *wo*, which also is an interjection voicing a pitiful lament (cf. Ōno *et al.* 1974: 1446).

No proficiency in Chinese helps the reader to grasp the meaning of the following «阿多良斯登許曾». As the interlinear note in the *Kojiki* informs «the seven characters from *a* represent sounds». They record the Japanese wording *atarashi tö kösö*.⁵ The paradox is that even Motoori has to resort to Chinese to best explain *atarashi*. The four poems he quotes, which phonetically record the Japanese expression, are indeed much more enigmatic than the simple sentence he premises to the lyrics: «in old books the character 惜 is glossed *atarashi*» 古書どもに、惜ノ字を阿多良斯と訓り (MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 346). The Chinese *xí* 惜 denotes something 'to be regretted, to pity, to feel sorry for'. The particle *tö* marks, like today's *to*, the end of a quotation, or an intent, not necessarily followed by verbs as 'to say, to think, etc.' It is useful, when translating in English, to add something like "thinking, saying to himself" as I do in my tentative version after closing the inverted commas that render the particle *tö*. The postposition *kösö* 'just that, that's all' places emphasis on the phrase.

Motoori reads *a* the Chinese first person pronoun *wǒ* 我 and marks it with the attributive particle *ga* to link it with the early Japanese word *nase*, whose function and meaning 'loved one' are dealt with in the second half of the present essay.⁶ The idea intended to convey by the possessive particle *zhī* 之 is as clear as the Japanese rendering *no* (*nö*). The character *mìng* 命 needs on the contrary an explanation as does its reading *mikötö* and its English translation "his highness". The Chinese meaning 'order, command' suits the meaning of the Japanese term *mikötö* (or simply *mikoto* in Motoori transcription) in the acceptance of 'sacred word, holy decree' but it is possibly to understand in the acceptance of 'holy thing, sacred entity' of the same word *mikötö*. As a matter of fact the *Nihonshoki* writes by means of the title of respect *zūn* 尊 'venerable, his eminence' the name ending *mikötö* of many deities which in the *Kojiki* is *mìng* 命 (cf. MNZ 1968-1987, IX:158).

The *Kojikiden*'s reading *kaku* 'thus, that way' *shitsurame* 'might have done' of the original *wéi rú cǐ* 為如此 'act like this' owes its verbal aspect to the agglutination here

5 Motoori doesn't take notice of the phonetic bipartitions of the early Japanese eightfold vocalic system and transcribes the seven characters *atarashi to koso*.

6 *Infra* p. 10.

summarized in footnote.⁷ The final character writes as before the Japanese sound *tō*, there to mark the end of the words the *Kojiki* puts on the lips of Amaterasu.⁸ An interlinear note, rather pleonastical close as it is to the previous one, warns again that *dēng* 登 is to be taken for its phonetic function.

More usefully, other notes inserted in the main text of the *Kojiki*'s original provide from time to time the Japanese reading of words. When Susanōwo throws a flayed horse amidst the female weavers intent on their work, one of the women startles and dies as she dashes her private parts against the shuttle, and the note tells us that the term for genitalia sounds *hotō*: «訓陰上云富登» (K 1982: 50). As far as the Chinese *sǐ* 死 is concerned, on the contrary, while it doubtlessly states that the weaver passes away, nothing is said about its Japanese pronunciation. We are free to agree with a few modern critical editions or with Motoori's commentary, which respectively render the verb *shiniki* and *miuseki* (K 1979: 50; K 1982: 51; K1997: 63; MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 341, 349-350). The horse of the misdeed, elsewhere *uma*, according to the *Kojikiden* is *koma* or *goma* (*ibid.*).

Here follow some further diverging lessons I pick up from the sequel of Susanōwo's exploits. The 'screaming' (*shēng* 聲) of the deities, occurring when the concealment of Amaterasu obscures the cosmos, fluctuates between *otonahi* and *kōwe* (or *kowe*). The 'gathering' (*jí* 集) of cocks, perhaps a sympathetic magic tending to evoke the dawn, in some cases is *tsudohe* in others *atsumē* (or *atsume*). The 'belt of the clothing' (*chángxù* 裳緒) Amēnōuzume 天宇受売 pushes down to show her genitals swings between *mohimo* and *mo nō wo* (or *mo no wo*). The heavenly 'quake' (*dòng* 動) that follows the striptease performed by the goddess in some cases is *tōyōmi* (or *toyomi*), in others is *yusuri* (MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 351; K 1979: 50-51; K 1982: 51-53 ; K1997: 63-65).

Reading the Chinese-looking prose of the first extant Japanese literary work is in many respects no less problematic than a translation, it being fraught with difficulties in choosing between multiple options. The rendering of the *Kojiki* into languages other than Japanese challenges translators with other choices. I will focus on the relation between behavioral and grammatical gender through a review of the textual clues possibly suggesting that Amaterasu is a womanly mythical character and the way some dozen translations deal with the topic.

7 The perfect *shitsu* 'someone has performed an action' (from the verb *su* 'to do') is in turn inflected in a conjectural mode through the suffix *-ramu*, resolved to *-rame* for the presence of *kōsō* in the sentence.

8 This time the quotation is closed by the verb *noritamafu* 'to declare, to proclaim' (through the Chinese character *zhào* 詔) reserved for the words uttered by eminent divine or kingly beings (cf. K 1982: 50).

SEXING GENDERLESS AMATERASU

Scholars, common people and artificial intelligence resources share the grounded opinion that Amaterasu is a goddess. The venerable sourcebook of Japanese culture *Kojiki*, however, more than substantiating perhaps only suggests such womanly identification, which is based on philological data clearly expressed in other early texts. Sexing Amaterasu may seem a futile concern, but it affects translation into languages grammatically gendered to a greater degree than the Japanese language.

According to the *Kojiki* Amaterasu comes into existence when Izanaki 伊耶那伎 washes his left eye. The text only transcribes the name of the newborn and quotes the words the figurative parent utters to grant the child power over the realm of heaven (K 1982: 40-41). Neither the solar name 天照大御神 ('Sky Shining Great Spirit') and its Japanese rendering *amaterasu ohomikami* nor the pronominal title (汝命 *imashi mikötö*, something like 'your highness') by which Izanaki bestows the investiture upon his offspring tell us anything about the neonate's sex because they may refer to both male and female deities.⁹ Chinese and Japanese do not lack ways to mark the gender of people, also in personal names. The *Nihonshoki* mentions two heteronyms for Amaterasu, possibly transcribing Japanese names *ohohirumemuchi* and *amaterasu ohohirume no mikoto*, which contain a Chinese character (*ling* 靈) for 'woman' (perhaps 'female medium'): 大日靈貴 and 天照大日靈尊 (N 1965-1967, I: 87).¹⁰ Similarly feminine is the theonym 天照日女之命 found in the *Man'yōshū* and probably to be read *amaterasu hirume no mikoto* (M 1999-2003, I: 130-131).

Most of the episodes regarding Amaterasu in the *Kojiki* do not clue us in on how to sex this deity. The gender connotation of Susanōwo, who also comes into existence from the ablutions of Izanaki, is clearer from the beginning as his name's syllable *wo* is written down with a Chinese character for 'male' 男. In the story of his slaying the dragon he declares to be the 'brother' (伊呂勢 *iröse*) of Amaterasu but the words concerning his sibling are ungendered (K 1982: 56-59).¹¹

Equally genderless are all the expressions regarding the role of Amaterasu in entrusting the heavenly descendants with the mission to rule the earthly realm and in choosing the various envoys dispatched to pacify the country (K 1982: 80-97). Later in the text of the *Kojiki* Amaterasu features without any gender connotation in a dream, commanding a chieftain to present a magic sword to the king Jimmu 神

9 *Infra* p. 145.

10 The perfect *shitsu* 'someone has performed an action' (from the verb *su* 'to do') is in turn inflected in a conjunctive mode through the suffix *-ramu*, resolved to *-rame* for the presence of *kösö* in the sentence.

11 This time the quotation is closed by the verb *noritamafu* 'to declare, to proclaim' (through the Chinese character *zhào* 詔) reserved for the words uttered by eminent divine or kingly beings (cf. K 1982: 50).

武 (K 1982: 120-121). Then, more interestingly, as an oracle who speaks through a woman, namely as the ghost who imparts to the possessed queen Okinagatarashi 息裳帶 oracular instructions for conquering the rich lands overseas (K 1982: 194-199). The feminine gender of the medium deserves consideration, even if the oracle itself ascribes its content not only to ‘the will of Amaterasu’ 天照大神之御心 but also of three others, onomastically male (底筒男中筒男上筒男) deities.

The episode describing the rite performed to lure the shining deity out of its hiding place and bring the light back to the world is the one that best develops the symbolic equivalence between Amaterasu and the sun (K 1982: 50-53). The story imaginatively re-creates the feminine anatomy of Amēnōuzume - she, elsewhere in the *Kojiki* defined ‘weak-limbed woman’ 手弱女人 (K 1982: 96), exhibits her breasts and genitalia - but does not unveil the gender of the solar embodiment.

The only pieces of evidence, if any, of Amaterasu’s femininity in the *Kojiki* transpire from the episodes of the confrontation with Susanōwo. The divine gender identity may be indirectly and by allusion conveyed by the sort of disguise the deity assumes, an acquired appearance allegedly opposite to the actual nature. Fearing that Susanōwo wants to usurp the power over the realm of heaven, Amaterasu begins an elaborate preparation ‘letting the hair down and binding it in a majestic *midura*’ 解御髮纏御美豆羅而 (*mikami wo tōkashite mimidura ni makashite*. K 1982: 42-43). After adorning this coiffure and other body parts with jewels, the deity arms for combat: puts on a bracer and no less than two quivers full of arrows, then, brandishing a bow, stamps the feet on the ground ‘in a powerful way’ or, translating 伊都之男建 (*itsu no wotakebi*. K 1982: 44-45) in a slightly different way, ‘in a tough and macho manner’.

In the *Kojiki* the word *midura* occurs phonetically transcribed in the form *mimidura* (御美豆良 or 御美豆羅) whose first element is the frequent prefix underlining the majesty of something. As the expression denotes a hairstyle made up of two locks of hair tied on both sides of the head, the question raised by Philippi whether it may not stand for ‘ear (*mimi*) bunch (*dura*)’ (Philippi 1968: 62⁷), may indeed be worth asking even although in the *Man’yōshū* the hairdo is called *midura* instead of *mimidura*. Whatever be the origin of the term, it names a man’s coiffure. Izanaki wears it on the left (左之御美豆良) and on the right (右御美豆良) during the visit to his dead spouse Izanami 伊耶那美 in the underground realm (K 1982: 34-35). The graphic scene relating the outspoken way he woos her leaves little doubt about gender.¹² Susanōwo also wears a majestic *midura* into which he tucks his future wife metamorphosed into a comb (K 1982: 56-57), and a man in the *Man’yōshū*, lost perhaps in reveries of such magic, wishes that his loved woman was a gem so that he could wrap her into his *midura* (美都良乃奈可尔阿敝麻可麻久母 *midura no naka*

12 天照 in the name of the deity might also be read *amateru* as Motoori does, who anyway prefers to read *amaterasu* (MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 283).

ni ahemakamaku mo (M 1999-2003, IV: 416).

«Hilary undressed, mannishly put on a military uniform and challenged their brother to combat». Would in a present-day court of justice such testimony prove anything more than someone with an unisex name, because of a family feud, disrobes and wears a martial outfit? The narration of Amaterasu preparing to defend the realm of heaven similarly doesn't tell us that the protagonist is a woman. But if the readers know from extratextual information about the deity's femininity they will nonetheless imagine the scene as a womanly performance. They will read other acts the same way, for example the supervision of 'girls weaving celestial robes' (天服織女 *amē nō hatorime*) in a sacred hall that an ungendered Amaterasu carries out (K 1982: 50-51).

Another detail of information of some potential use in sexing Amaterasu is to be found in a lexical analogy with the conversation between Izanaki and Izanami in the underworld (K 1982: 32-33; 36-37). In reply to his addressing the dead wife with *wa ga nanimo nō mikötō* (我那邇妹命) she addresses him with *wa ga nase nō mikötō* (我那勢命).¹³ Both expressions stand in their dialogue for something like a respectively feminine and masculine 'you, my dear' or 'you, my spouse'. The same affectionate locution which Izanami uses as a vocative toward her husband is uttered thrice by Amaterasu as a third person form – a sort of 'my dear brother, he' – to voice conventional courtesy toward Susanōwo, so that a symmetrical gender proportion may come to mind. The fraternal pronoun opens the deity's warlike preparation, here-inbefore dealt with, thus supporting the wishful image of a confrontation between female and male members of a family. 'My brother is surely coming with bad intents' is the meaning of the sentence containing the first of the three *wa ga nase nō mikötō* the *Kojiki* puts on the lips of Amaterasu (K 1982: 42-43). The other two are the way the deity names Susanōwo in justifying his mischievous conducts (K 1982: 48-51). But the term *nase*, while certainly masculine, is not univocally uttered in the *Kojiki* by a female character. As Motoori observes, it also occurs in dialogues between male familiars, being for example the form of address that prince Woke 遠祁 uses to call prince Oke 意祁.¹⁴

Later on, during their face-to-face meeting, Amaterasu and Susanōwo, chewing and spitting each other's objects, produce their own offspring (K 1982: 44-49). The only gender content of this sequence concerns the sex of the newborn beings. Amaterasu declares «the five males born from my things are my sons, the three earlier born

13 Another reading for 我那勢命 (or 我那勢之命) is *a ga nase nō mikötō*.

14 At least *nase* is the reading that Motoori and modern critical editions assign to the compound 汝兄 in the following passage, which also attests that the two characters are male siblings: 令儻其少子等爾其一少子曰汝兄先儻其兄亦曰汝弟先儻 (K 1982: 284-285). 袁(ヲ); 袁祁(ケノ); 祁命は御兄(アニ); 兄を指て汝兄(セ); 兄と詔ひ、[...] 男ども然呼(ヨブ); 呼こと、妹といふ例の如し. (MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 242. Cf. MNZ 1968-1987, XII: 335).

females that have come into existence from your things are your daughters» 所生五柱男子者物實因我物所成故自吾子也先所生之三柱女子者物實因汝物所成故乃汝子也, and Susanöwo emphasizes his children's femininity defining them 'weak-limbed women' (手弱女).

The *Kojiki* has been repeatedly rendered in many languages. Modern Japanese is among them, and somehow ancient Japanese too. As already outlined herein, the constitution of the *Kojiki*'s eighth-century text affects its reading to the point that its translations in a sense begin long before versions in foreign languages. Motoori's explanatory notes in the *Kojikiden* do not question the feminine gender of Amaterasu. Further, he firmly rejects the assertion presented by some Japanese sinologists that Amaterasu is a male (MNZ 1968-1987, IX: 284). But his recitable renderings of the *Kojiki* do not show the gender of the deity. Translations in modern Japanese - the one by Takeda Yūkichi 武田祐吉 (Takeda 1956) is a good example - can disregard sexing Amaterasu. On the contrary, when rendering the *Kojiki* in many European languages, except resorting to some constrained writing techniques like those conceived by the francophone authors of the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*, one is sooner or later almost compelled to choose the gender of Amaterasu. A sort of scholarly bias should also be brought into account, I believe, for the gendered translation choice. The extratextual conditioning is so overwhelming that even in Hungarian, a language without grammatical gender, the translator sexes Amaterasu from the very first appearance, rendering within brackets the genderless Japanese word *kami* in the deity's name as *Istennő*, that is to say 'Goddess' (Kazár 1982: 62).¹⁵

Most versions sex Amaterasu from the very debut of the deity on the mythological stage. Many do it straightaway, and all but one, as far as I know, do it after translating about 170 characters from the first appearance of the name *amaterasu* in the source text. In the following chronologically arranged quotations I mark in bold letters the terms explicitly conveying the gender of the deity.

Chamberlain's pioneering 1882 rendition doesn't sex Amaterasu before recurring to a feminine pronoun absent in the original text:

«The name of the deity that was born as he thereupon washed his left august eye was the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity. [...] At this time His Augustness the Male-Who-Invites greatly rejoiced, saying: "I, begetting child after child, have at my final begetting gotten three illustrious children," [with which words,] at once jingly taking off and shaking the jewel-string forming his august necklace, he bestowed it on the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity, saying: "Do Thine Augustness rule the Plain-of-High-Heaven." With this charge he bestowed it on **her**» (Chamberlain 1982: 46-50)

Marega's *dea*, given that the translator later uses the ungendered signifier *divinità*, is possibly meant to deliberately inform without delay the reader about the gender of

15 I have no Hungarian. I owe this information to Professor Agi Berta.

Amaterasu:

«In quest'occasione mentre si lavava l'augusto occhio sinistro, il nome della **dea** che nacque è: AMA-TERASU-OH-MI-KAMI. [...] In quel tempo l'augusto Izanagi, gioiando grandemente parlò così "Io ho generato e generato dei figli. Alla fine di tale procreazione sono riuscito ad avere tre nobili figlioli". Tolsse subito, facendo un rumore: moyura! le gemme, trapassate da un filo, dell'ornamento del suo augusto collo e facendole tintinnare: yura! le regalò all'augusta grande divinità che splende in cielo e parlò così: "Tu, **o augusta**, governa la pianura dell'alto cielo!". Così si degnò di **darle** l'incarico» (Marega 1938: 48-49)

China's writing system is the only one which has in theory a chance to re-create excerpts of the *Kojiki* in the ironic way outlined by Jorge Luis Borges in *Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote*. Commonsensically instead, the 1963 Chinese translation highlights through a modern pronoun, amidst a couple of logograms ravaged by the Maoist orthographic reforms, the gender of the one Izanaki talks to:

«伊邪那岐命洗左眼时化成的神, 名叫天照大御神。[...] 这时候, 伊邪那岐命非常高兴地说: “我生了不少孩子, 最后终于得到三个贵子。” 于是取下脖子上戴的玉串, 摇动得琮琤作响, 赐给天照大御神, 并对**她**说: “去治理高天原!”» (Zou *et al.* 1979: 15)

Philippi somehow doubles Chamberlain's translation choice:

«Then when he washed his left eye, there came into existence a deity named AMA-TERASU-OPO-MI-KAMI [...] At this time IZANAGI-NÖ-MIKÖTÖ, rejoicing greatly, said: "I have borne child after child, and finally in the last bearing I have obtained three noble children." Then he removed his necklace, shaking the beads on the string so that they jingled, and, giving it to AMA-TERASU-OPO-MI-KAMI, he entrusted **her** with **her** mission, saying: "You shall rule TAKAMA-NÖ-PARA."» (Philippi 1968: 70-71)

The 1969 French rendering assigns the sexing task to an adjectival inflection which translates the genderless *oho* of the name of the deity:

«Alors le kami né lorsqu'il lava son œil gauche est: **Grande-Auguste-Kami-Illuminant-du-Ciel**. [...] a ce moment Izanaki-no-mikoto s'écria en grande joie: "J'ai procréé! J'ai procréé et à la fin de cette procréation, j'ai obtenu trois enfants nobles". Ayant dit, il donna à **Grande-Auguste-Kami-Illuminant-du-Ciel** son collier qui, en bougeant, rendit un joli son et il déclara: "Toi, Majesté, gouverne la Haute-Plaine-du-Ciel!" et l'en chargea" (Shibata 1969: 76-77).

The Russian version straightaway lets the reader know that Amaterasu is female through the grammatical inflections of the words which translate the theonym, then through the noun put on Izanaki's lips in addressing his child, further through a pronoun:

«И вот, имя божества, что явилось, когда [бог Идзанаги] свой левый глаз омывал, [было] Амаэрасу оо-ми-ками --- **Великая Священная Богиня, Освещающая Небо**.

[...] Тут бог Идзанаги-но-микото, сильно обрадовавшись, сказал: “Я детей рождал-рождал, и напоследок трех высоких детей получил”, --- так сказал и тут же снял шею ожерелье из жемчужин и, тряся его так, что звенели [они], передал [его] **Великой Священной Богине** Аматэрасу оо-ми-ками и сказал: “Ты, **богиня**, велей Равниной Высокого Неба», --- так **ей** наказал” (Pinus1994: 50)

I myself cannot help sexing Amaterasu:

«Izanaki si lavò poi l'occhio sinistro e spuntò un essere che chiamiamo Amaterasu grande **sovrana** e **sacra** [...] “Figli ne ho generati anche io, e alla fine ne ho avuti tre davvero straordinari!” gioì il maestoso Izanaki. Prese il filo di perle che portava al collo, ne accentuò il ticchettio e lo donò ad Amaterasu grande **sovrana** e **sacra**. “Sta a te, **mia cara** - sentenziò solenne - prenderti cura delle pianure del sommo cielo”» (Villani 2006: 43-44)

Nor in 2008 can, in their way, the Spanish translators:

«Después, cuando el dios Izanagi se lavó el augusto ojo izquierdo nació [**la diosa**] Amaterasu-ō-mi-kami. [...] Entonces el dios Izanagi, movido por una profunda dicha, dijo: - He procreado uno tras otro a mis descendientes y, al final, he logrado tener a tres hijos augustos. Tomó el collar de cuentas que le colgaba del cuello y agitándolo suavemente hasta hacer sonar el delicado sonido de sus cuentas, se lo entregó a Amaterasu con estas palabras: - Tú gobernarás el Altiplano del Cielo» (Rubio *et al.* 2012: 67-68)

Neither the 2011 French version nor the 2012 German one can help resorting to feminine grammatical inflections:

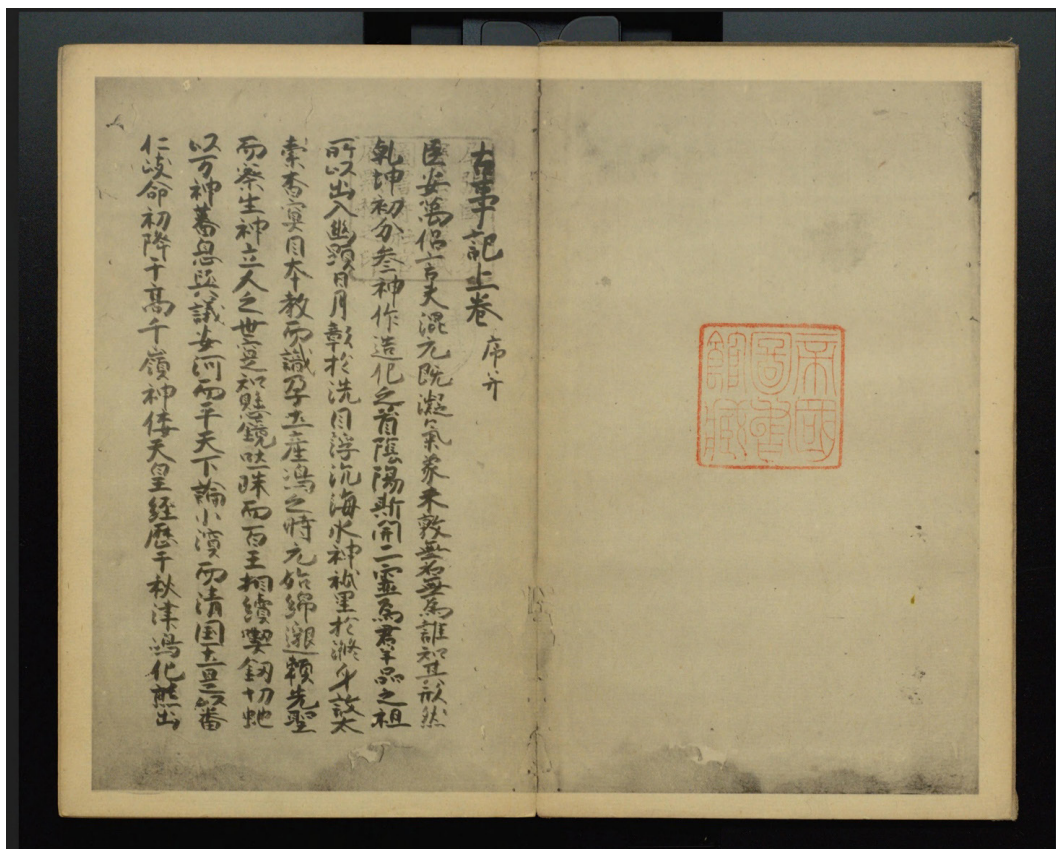
«Le nom de **la Supérieure** qui nacquit ensuite lorsque L'Engageant lava son auguste œil gauche fut Sa Majesté **Supérieure Brillante**-au-Ciel. [...] Grandement, L'Engageant se réjouit: “J'engendre des enfants les uns après les autres – et voilà que j'en fais trois illustres d'un coup!” Après ces mots il souleva, agita la chaînette de pierres précieuses dont il se servait comme collier et, la donnant à **Brillante**-au-Ciel, il lui dit: “Oh! Que Ta Majesté gouverne Plaine-du-Haut-Ciel”» (Vinclair 2011: 33-34)

«Nun, als er sein linkes Auge wusch, entstand eine Gottheit mit Namen Ama-terasu-oho-mi-kami [...] Zu dieser Zeit war Izanagi-nó-mikótó voll großer Freunde und sprach: »Nun habe ich Kind um Kind geboren, und ganz zum Schluß habe ich drei besonders edle Kinder erhalten.« Da nahm er die Perlen ab, welche er als Juwelenschmuck an einer Schnur um den erlauchten Hals trug {vier Zeichen dem Laut nach}, schwenkte sie, daß es nur so klang, und überreichte *sie* Ama-terasu-oho-mi-kami mit den Worten: »Du **Erhabene**, herrsche über *Takama-nó-hara*, das Hohe Himmelsgefilde!« So wies er **sie** an» (Antoni 2012: 31-32)

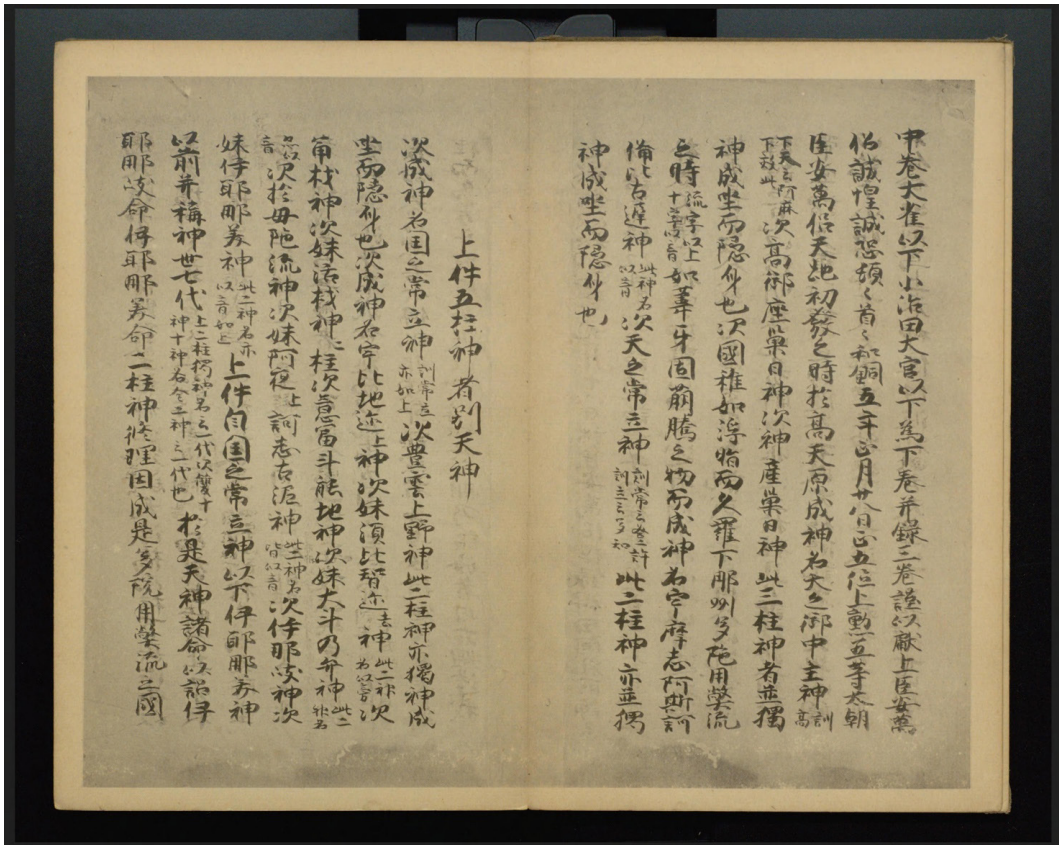
The following 2014 English version is the only one I know which sexes Amaterasu further into the story than the others. It acknowledges the deity's gender after translating about 600 characters from the first appearance of the name *amaterasu* in the source text. Such delayed acknowledgement may be intentional since it coincides with the above-mentioned episode allegedly suggesting the feminine nature of the deity:

«Now he washed his mighty left eye, and the spirit named the great and mighty spirit Heaven Shining came into being [...] Now the mighty one He Who Beckoned was overjoyed and proclaimed: “After making child after child, I have at last gained three noble children!” And so saying, he straightaway set the string of pendants on his mighty necklace to jingling as he entrusted it to the great and mighty spirit Heaven Shining, proclaiming: “Go now and rule the high plains of heaven, o mighty one.” [...] the great and mighty spirit Heaven Shining was alarmed and proclaimed: “The reason my mighty brother has come up here is surely not a good one. He must want to seize my land.” And so saying, **she** straightaway undid **her** mighty hair and swiftly parted it into two mighty looped locks to **her** left and right in the manner of a man» (Heldt 2014: 18-19)

In conclusion, sexing Amaterasu through the text of the *Kojiki* is as unlikely to occur as is not sexing Amaterasu when translating the eighth-century Japanese text into most European modern languages.



(Image 1) Facsimile, from the *Shinpukujī* manuscript, of the first page of the preface authored by Yasumarō. Koten Hozonkai 1924-25, vol. 1 frame numer 5 (URL <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/1185374/1/5> visited on 2023-09-29)



(Image 2) Facsimile, from the *Shinpukuji* manuscript, of the page containing the passage (fifth character of the third column from the right) from the preface to the main text of the *Kojiki*. Koten Hozonkai 1924-25, vol. 1 frame number 8 (URL <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/1185374/1/8> visited on 2023-09-29).

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