New Additions to the ARAS Permanent Collection

Four in an ongoing series of Archetypal Commentaries

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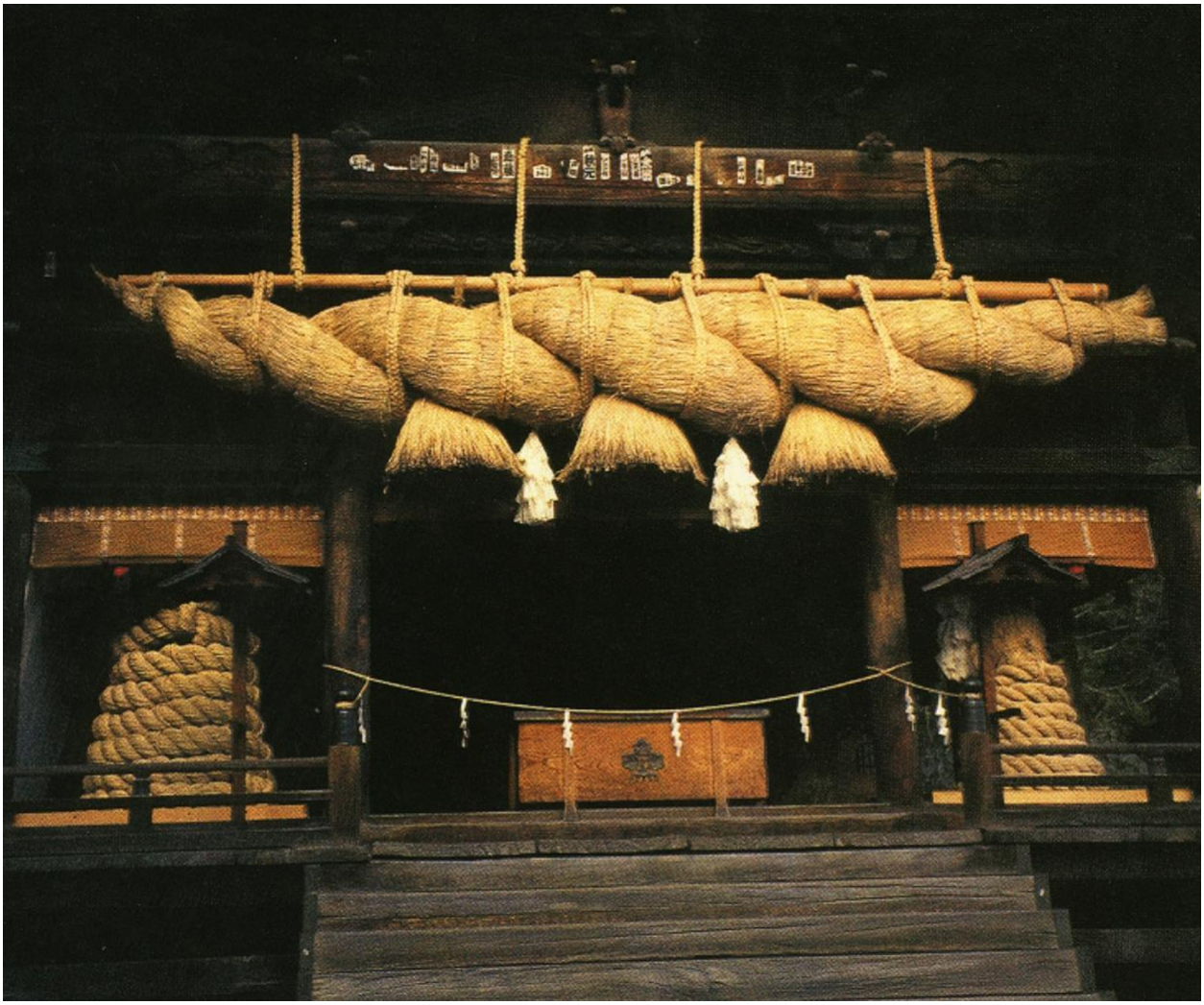

Giant Shimenawa (Suwa Grand Shrine, Nara Period)

Archetypal Commentary

Linguistically, Shimenawa is divided into "Shime" and "Nawa". The latter means ropes, and the former means "occupation." This hints that the area beyond the Shimenawa is occupied by the gods (in the Shinto sense) and that things that are impure or evil spirits cannot step in.

The origin of Shimenawa is said to be found in the mythology of Amanoiwato-kakure, in which the supreme goddess of the sun withdraws into a cave and shuts the cave entrance with a rock. As the world was plunged into darkness, the gods tried to pull the goddess out. After the efforts of the gods succeed and Amaterasu comes out of the cave, the gods put the Shimenawa at the cave entrance, so that Amaterasu would never enclose herself again (Nihon-shoki, 1:78). The narrative suggests that the Shimenawa is put in place as a border between light and shadow, gods and non-gods, the sacred and the ordinary worlds.

Functioning as a boundary between two opposites, Shimenawa contains two strands entwined with each other. Regarding ropes and their shape, the comparison with knots gives us a deeper understanding of Shimenawa. Shimenawa is made by rotating threads into a thicker bunch of threads, and intertwining the strands tightly. The similarity to knots is the strong concentration of material, but Shimenawa is not being tied to make a knot. Rather than the aspects of eternity and circulation, which are symbolized by the Celtic knot or Tibetan Endless knot, *Shimenawa seems to stress the linear function of dividing two opposites*.

However, despite its linear function, the physical form of the Shimenawa itself tells another story. The form of Shimenawa, which has the thickest part in the middle and thinner ends at both sides, evokes a three-dimensional impression. Namely, the threads of a Shimenawa can be seen as symbolizing a part of a much larger, unseen cord—one that encircles and safeguards the sacred realm. This idea finds a fascinating parallel in Norse mythology with the Midgard Serpent, also known as Jörmungandr. In a test of his strength, Thor, the god of thunder, famously attempts to lift a huge cat, unaware that it

is actually Jörmungandr in disguise. The serpent is so immense that it encircles the entire world, gripping its own tail, and its existence becomes crucial for maintaining the foundation of the world. Interestingly, the Shimenawa's symbolism can be interpreted similarly. A giant Shimenawa, like our image, can be seen as a metaphorical representation of a serpent or two entwined serpents. Given that the Izumo Shrine is associated with dragons and sea serpents, and the Suwa shrine (our image) is its branch, this interpretation (that of a protective force) feels even more potent. This parallel suggests a shared mythological archetype across different cultures: the powerful, serpentine entity that defines and protects the very borders of the world.

Keywords

shimenawa, boundary, integration of opposites

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ARAS No.: 7Nm.005

"Hatō zu" ("Rough Waves")

Archetypal Commentary

The dynamic and turbulent waves depicted in Korin's Hato zu Byobu (folding screen) immediately convey a sense of immense power. There are records of large earthquakes and tsunamis in Japan dating back to ancient times, and Korin's knowledge of natural disasters probably contributed to his works. We can imagine the waves depicted in the image representing the forces that disrupt and devastate our everyday lives. The crests

of the waves, with their finger-like projections, evoke the terrifying image of a tsunami relentlessly pursuing those fleeing its swallowing force.

The destructive potential inherent in the wave imagery of Hato zu Byobu aligns with the characteristics attributed to powerful sea gods in various mythologies. For instance, one of the Japanese supreme gods, Susanoo's legendary outbursts of rage often manifested as violent storms and turbulent seas, mirroring the untamed energy captured by Korin. Likewise, Poseidon's capacity to unleash devastating waves and earthquakes echoes the artwork's depiction of nature's destructive power.

Beyond the immediate visual impact of the turbulent waves in the image, a deeper layer of meaning emerges when considering the linguistic and mythological associations of the sea in Japanese culture. The very words for 'waves' (Nami) and 'calm sea' (Nagi) form an inherent opposition, a duality that resonates with the primordial divine couple, Izanagi (a male god) and Izanami (a female god). As the parents of the gods, their union and interplay symbolize the fundamental forces that give rise to the cosmos. Therefore, the dynamic and potentially destructive Nami (waves) depicted by Korin can be seen not just as a natural phenomenon, but as the psychological expression of the very energies that, having lost the balance with Nagi, devour and annihilate everything, to create a mass from which something new will grow.

The sheer magnitude and dynamic energy of the central wave in Korin's Hato zu Byobu transcend a mere depiction of a natural phenomenon. Instead, it might be experienced by the viewer as a direct encounter with the very forces of creation. This raw, untamed power, capable of both shaping and destroying, can evoke a profound sense of awe

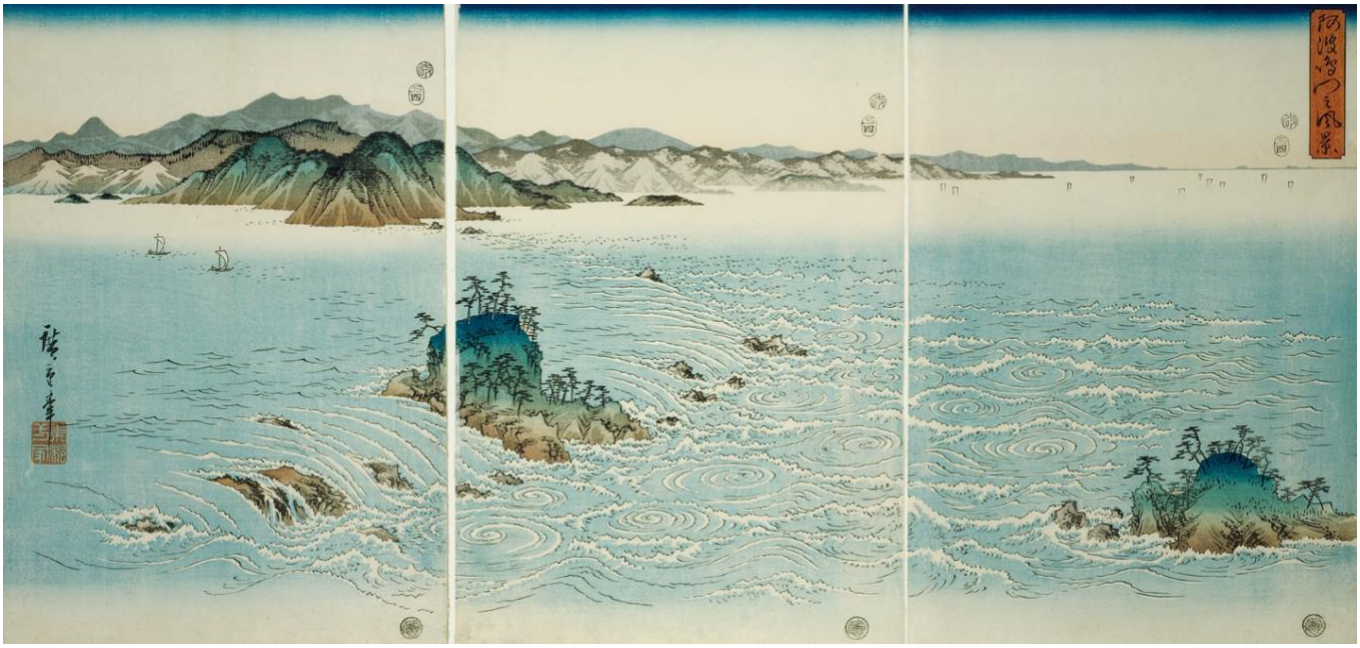
mingled with overwhelming fear. It is as if we are witnessing the primordial energy from which the world itself emerged, a force that dwarfs human existence and control.

See: Izanagi and Izanami ARAS No. 7Nm.011

Keywords

waves, destruction and construction, mythological power

ARAS No.: 7Nm.007



Landscape with the Whirlpools at Awa (Awa no Naruto no fukei), Hiroshige Utagawa

Archetypal Commentary

Awa Island, situated in Japan's Seto Inland Sea, is home to the remarkable whirlpools observed between its northern tip and the mainland. Mythologically, this island holds a significant place as the first land created by the deities Izanagi and Izanami (See: ARAS 7Nm.011), preceding the formation of other Japanese territories.

The whirlpools at Awa are sometimes connected to dragon mythology through an old poem:

> わたつみの鳴門は竜の門なれば潮も滝と落つるなりけり
>
> (*"Watatsumi no Naruto wa Ryu no Mon nareba Ushio mo Taki to otsuru narikeri"* : Shimokōbe, *Rin'yō-ruijin-shū*, 1670)

This poem translates to: "*Naruto* [the entrance to Awa island], domain of *Watatsumi* [the sea god], is a Dragon's Gate; thus, the tide itself plunges like a waterfall." Interestingly, just as Greek mythology portrays whirlpools as dangerous monsters like Charybdis, here we see the image of a dragon aligning with the whirlpool. The poem's profound imagery resonates with the very structure of the Japanese language. The kanji, or character, for 'waterfall' (滝, *taki*) inherently incorporates the character for 'dragon' (竜, *ryū*) and the 'water' radical (氵). This literally implies "water-dragon," or water that behaves like a dragon—surging, powerful, and often plunging. By juxtaposing the 'Dragon Gate' with the tide that 'falls like a waterfall,' the poet subtly leverages this inherent linguistic connection, thereby reinforcing the idea that the surging power of the *Naruto* whirlpools is a manifestation of draconic energy and a truly divine, if formidable, gateway. The image of whirlpools, therefore, symbolizes an intense, overwhelming power of concentration or psychic absorption into the depth of the sea, capable of utterly engulfing human consciousness.

In Jungian psychology, the centering process, also known as the individuation process, holds great importance. Jung states,

> *This process creates nothing less than a new center of personality, which the symbols show from the first to be superordinate to the ego and which later proves its superiority empirically. The center cannot therefore be classed with the ego, but must be accorded a higher value. Nor can we continue to give it the name of 'ego,' for which reason I have called it the 'self.' (CW16, par.219)*

The centering process, as formulated by Jung, regards the involvement of the ego as essential, which may align with the experiences of Odysseus, the ego personality, on his journey. He struggled against Charybdis and Scylla, when he navigated through the whirlpools.

However, Hiroshige's depiction of this landscape is notably undramatic and unaggressive. It illustrates a peaceful and calm scene, featuring a light blue sea and lush green mountains. The floating ships appear to maintain a safe distance and remain unaffected by the whirlpools. Hiroshige's portrayal of the whirlpools suggests a unique aspect of Japanese consciousness, which could be symbolized by the ships' ability to co-exist with these powerful natural phenomena. This implies an ego that respects, rather than confronts, the primordial energies of the collective unconscious, maintaining a harmonious distance while acknowledging their presence as a 'Dragon's Gate'—a powerful, transformative portal that is observed rather than directly battled.

Keywords

whirlpools, concentration, centering process, the relationship between ego and the unconscious

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ARAS No.: 7Nm.034

Kajikazawa in Kai Province from the "Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji" series

Archetypal Commentary

In this image, two prominent triangles emerge: first, the implied form of Mt. Fuji's peak in the background, and second, the dynamic configuration shaped by the fisherman perched atop a rocky outcrop and his taut fishing lines. Mt. Fuji remains closely connected with religious feeling for the Japanese, even today; however, at the time Hokusai was commissioned to create this series, Mt. Fuji was enthusiastically worshipped by people. In addition to the triangle shapes themselves, the spirituality

associated with Mt. Fuji and the pairing of a father and a child can be linked to the concept of the Holy Trinity in Christianity. As Jung noted, the trinity is often associated with the masculine principle (*CW* 11, par.107), this masculinity is also observed in the fisherman himself and his actions. Namely, his attempt to catch a fish implies our mind's effort to draw material from the unconscious into awareness, distinguishing it from the undifferentiated depths. The conscious striving of the father is mirrored by the child, who carefully looks into a bag where the caught fish is presumed to be. These intellectual acts of discerning or investigating something can be assigned to the masculine principle.

However, this image simultaneously emphasizes a powerful downward movement and an openness to the chthonic realms. The fisherman's struggle to draw life from the turbulent ocean, represented by the rough waves, speaks to an arduous engagement with the often-unpredictable unconscious. Furthermore, the child, mirroring this downward focus, gazing intently into his bag, hints at an exploration of inner resources or a grounding in the tangible world. Crucially, these triangles are not closed, stable forms, but rather open downward, signifying a profound receptivity, and entanglement with the depths. This imperfection of the triangles is of high importance, given that Japanese religions such as Buddhism, Zen-Buddhism, and Shinto highly value the image of the circle. For example, Daisetz T. Suzuki, a Zen philosopher, describes the 'great circle' of Zen—an infinite, centerless form where the "center can exist everywhere" (Suzuki, 1972, p.114). In this view, the circle symbolizes a reality where the boundaries between self and other, or subject and object, are dissolved into a seamless whole. For Jung, too, the image of the circle and the quaternity were prominent. Jung says,

> *[…] what the modern man also tries to express when he draws patterns of circles and quaternities, is wholeness—a wholeness that resolves all opposition and puts an end to conflict, or at least draws its sting. (CW 16, par.537)*

Further, in the context of Christianity, he found the quaternity to hold importance over the trinity, notably in the Assumptio Mariae (Assumption of Mary). For Jung, femininity serves to transform a world that is ruled by the masculine principle, paralleling the way the Self overcomes an ego-centered mode of consciousness. This principle resonates powerfully with Hokusai's image. The ocean is often associated with the feminine, embodying a primordial and life-giving force. Hokusai, by portraying an "imperfect" triangle open to the sea, captures a cultural wisdom acknowledging that the masculine figure striving toward consciousness (the fisherman) must engage with and be balanced by the receptive, feminine power of the unconscious (the ocean). Thus, this artwork teaches a cultural wisdom in the imperfection of perfection, suggesting that true wholeness lies not in a static, closed ideal, but in the dynamic integration of opposing forces.

Keywords

trinity, masculinity, Japanese religions, circle, femininity

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