

C. SCOTT LITTLETON

Occidental College, Los Angeles

Yamato-takeru: An “Arthurian” Hero in Japanese Tradition

Abstract

The curious similarities between the legendary Japanese hero Yamato-takeru and King Arthur do not appear to be merely fortuitous. We now know that between the second and the fifth centuries A.D. the folklore of both Japan and Western Europe was influenced — both directly and indirectly — by that of several nomadic Northeast Iranian-speaking tribes (Sarmatians, Alans, etc.). These tribes originated in the steppes of what is today southern Russia and the Ukraine. The last surviving Northeast Iranian speakers, the Ossetians of the north-central Caucasus, preserve a corpus of legends about a hero called Batraz who closely resembles both Yamato-takeru and Arthur. It is suggested that Yamato-takeru, Arthur, and Batraz derive from a common Northeast Iranian prototype.

Key words : Yamato-takeru — Northeast Iranians — King Arthur — Batraz — comparative folklore

OF all the heroes in Japanese legendry, none is more “Arthurian” than Yamato-takeru 倭建(日本武尊), “The Brave of Yamato.” Indeed, the tales of Yamato-takeru’s strength, courage, leadership, feats of arms, love affairs, magical sword, and untimely death all bear a remarkable resemblance to the legends surrounding the life and death of King Arthur, as related in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* (BAINES 1962) and a host of other medieval British and continental texts. In the present paper I propose that the legends of these two heroes, as well as those of Lancelot du Lac and Batraz (a hero celebrated by the Ossetians of the north-central Caucasus), all derive from the *same* ancient source, and that this heroic tradition has managed to span the Eurasian landmass from one end to the other. But before proceeding to this comparison, let us summarize the relevant portions of the legend of Yamato-takeru.

THE LEGEND OF YAMATO-TAKERU

The oldest versions of the Yamato-takeru legend are found in the *Kojiki* 古事記 (A.D. 712), the *Nihonshoki* 日本書紀 (A.D. 720) and an eighth-century gazetteer known as the *Hitachi fudoki* 常陸風土記 (PHILIPPI 1968, 233, n. 7; MORRIS 1975, 335). According to these sources, Yamato-takeru was born O-usu-no-mikoto 小碓命, the second son of the twelfth emperor, Keikō 景行, and was destined for greatness from an early age. At age sixteen, after demonstrating both his loyalty and his ferocity by killing his rebellious elder brother (*Kojiki* 2.79.1–7; *Nihonshoki* 8.18),¹ he was ordered by his father to subjugate the Kumaso 熊襲(熊曾) tribe, which had refused to submit to imperial authority. The boyish O-usu-no-mikoto disguised himself as a girl with clothes provided by his aunt Yamato-hime 倭比賣(倭姬), the high priestess of the Ise Shrine, and proceeded to the headquarters of the two powerful brothers who led the Kumaso. A feast was in progress, and the Kumaso brothers, taking a fancy to the new “girl,” asked her to sit between them. When the festivi-

ties were at their height the disguised prince drew from his bosom a small sword his aunt had given him and stabbed the elder Kumaso to death (*Kojiki* 2.80.1–14).² He then pursued the younger brother and stabbed him through the buttocks. Before he died, the younger Kumaso bestowed upon his slayer the name he would be known by from then on: Yamato-takeru (*Kojiki* 2.80.15).

The hero's next and most important assignment was to subdue the unruly deities and people who inhabited what was then the eastern periphery of the realm (present-day Kantō and adjacent regions). This time he was accompanied by a small band of lesser heroes, including Takehiko 建日子(武彦), Take-hi-no-muraji 武日連, and Nana-tsuka-hagi 七拳脛, his steward.³ Before setting out Yamato-takeru once again visited his aunt, who bestowed on him the most sacred and magical sword in Japanese tradition: Kusanagi 草薙 (the "Grass Mower"), discovered by the god Susano-o 須佐之男 in one of the tails of the dragon Yamata no Orochi 八俣之大蛇 (*Kojiki* 1.19.20–21; *Nihonshoki* 1.51–52)⁴ and brought to earth by Amaterasu's grandson Ninigi 邇邇芸 as one of the three sacred symbols of the imperial household (*Kojiki* 1.38–39). Yamato-hime also gave him a bag containing flint for starting fires, advising him to open it in case of emergency.

His first stop was in the land of Owari 尾張, where he paid court to the princess Miyazu-hime 美夜受比売(宮簀姫), with whom he had fallen in love. Promising to marry her when he returned from his mission, Yamato-takeru and his band set forth to subdue the Emishi 蝦夷, the Eastern Barbarians.⁵

At Sagami, in what is today Kanagawa Prefecture, he encountered a chieftain who attempted, through deceit, to entrap him in a grass fire. With the aid of his magical sword, however, he mowed down the grass in the immediate vicinity⁶. Then, removing the fire-starting equipment from the bag his aunt had given him, he kindled a backfire and thereby managed to escape the trap (*Kojiki* 2.83.2). After killing the treacherous chief he crossed Sagami Bay⁷ to what is now Chiba Prefecture, where he subdued the Emishi.

After another series of adventures, Yamato-takeru finally returned to his princess in Owari, married her, and then attempted one final exploit before returning to Yamato and the palace of the emperor. Leaving his magical sword behind, he set out to subdue with his bare hands the deity that lived atop Mt. Ibuki 伊服岐 on the western border of present-day Gifu Prefecture (*Kojiki* 2.86.1–6). This proved to be a fatal mistake. As he climbed the mountain he encountered a giant white boar, which he took to be the deity's messenger, and decided to delay killing it until he

had felled the deity himself. The boar was the transformed god, however, and he caused a violent hailstorm to strike Yamato-takeru as the hero continued up the mountain. Yamato-takeru descended in a daze, and later fell victim to a fatal illness (*Kojiki* 2.86).

Carried to the seashore near Otsu 尾津, where he had left another sword under a pine tree, Yamato-takeru soon passed away (*Kojiki* 2.87).⁸ The emperor was grief-stricken when he heard the sad news and ordered that the dead hero be buried under a tumulus. But Yamato-takeru's soul, in the form of a giant white bird, escaped from the tomb and flew toward the beach (*Kojiki* 2.88.8).⁹ Stopping at two places along the way (where tumuli were later built), the bird eventually reached Heaven.¹⁰ Thus passed the greatest of Japan's legendary heroes.

YAMATO-TAKERU AND ARTHUR

The parallels between the career of Yamato-takeru and that of King Arthur are obvious. Like Arthur, Yamato-takeru is associated with *two* magical swords: the first, the one he uses to slay the Kumaso brothers, validates both his potential as a warrior and his capacity to lead (as with Arthur and the "first Excalibur," which the young king-to-be pulls from the stone; see LITTLETON 1982a). Kusanagi, the second and far more important sword, is obtained from a woman with supernatural powers and becomes almost an alter ego (YOSHIDA 1979, 125; ŌBAYASHI and YOSHIDA 1981, 67–69), paralleling the relationship between Arthur and the "second Excalibur," which he receives from the Lady of the Lake.¹¹ Armed with this latter sword, Yamato-takeru, again like Arthur, becomes the leader of a war band and defeats many enemies; among his exploits is an expedition that takes him across the narrow straits between Sagami and Chiba, just as Arthur crosses the channel between Britain and Gaul (LITTLETON and MALCOR 1994, 62–66). Both heroes eventually succumb in the course of a conflict with a powerful adversary and die after giving up the magical sword to a female figure (Miyazu-hime; the Lady of the Lake). Both heroes also have their more important magical sword (or other weapon) secreted near the site of their impending death, which is on the shore of a sea or lake; death only occurs after the sword is rediscovered. Finally, in both cases the hero is transported to the afterworld, one in the form of a bird (to heaven) and the other in a barge (to Avalon).

Admittedly the details are different, and the Japanese tale reverses the ending so that the hero gives up his magical sword *before* he receives his fatal affliction. Nor do the Japanese hero's early adventures correspond to those of the young Arthur; the transvestite episode, for ex-

ample, is far more redolent of Thor,¹² or even Achilles, than it is of Arthur. In the absence of historical or archeological evidence of a direct connection between the two traditions prior to A.D. 700, one could easily conclude that these curiously parallel tales found at opposite ends of Eurasia are simply reflections of an extremely widespread or perhaps universal hero myth, of the sort that RANK (1952), RAGLAN (1937), and CAMPBELL (1968) were so fond of analyzing.¹³

But there is, as I suggested at the outset, another possibility: that Yamato-takeru and Arthur are in fact independent expressions of a common, historically and geographically identifiable source (i.e., *not* a universal theme or myth), one that took shape somewhere other than in Western Europe or Japan. It is to this very real possibility that we turn next.

THE SCYTHIAN CONNECTION

In a brilliant series of books and articles, Yoshida Atsuhiko has demonstrated — at least to this author's satisfaction — that a significant number of symbols in Japanese mythology (e.g., the imperial regalia: the mirror, the sword, and the fertility beads) were colored by the three Indo-European ideological "functions" identified by the late Georges Dumézil.¹⁴ He hypothesizes that this tripartite ideology, along with a variety of other Indo-European traits, was carried to Japan by a band of horse riders from the Asian mainland who are thought by some scholars to have invaded Japan via the Korean Peninsula and imposed themselves as a ruling elite in the late fourth century A.D. (e.g., YOSHIDA 1962, 1974, 1977).¹⁵ It is, of course, remotely possible that these equestrian nomads were themselves Indo-Europeans; more probably, they were Altaic speakers of one sort or another — Huns, Puyo 扶余,¹⁶ etc. — who had previously come into sustained contact with an Indo-European speaking community in Central Asia and who had assimilated a significant portion of that community's worldview, mythology, and heroic epos.

In any case, given the spatial and temporal parameters here (Central Asia circa A.D. 300–400), there are only two Indo-European-speaking groups that could have been responsible for this impact: the Tocharians, who lived in the Tarim Basin in the early centuries of the Christian era, and the Alans, who formed the easternmost of the Northeast Iranian-speaking (or "Scythian") nations, some of whom (called Wu-sun 烏孫 by the Chinese)¹⁷ still lived within the borders of the Han Empire as late as the time of Christ (VERNADSKY 1943, 82–84). The Tocharians, known only from their language, appear to have been a sedentary community composed primarily of Buddhist monks. Thus, unless PULLEYBLANK is correct in suggesting that the Yuë-chi 大月氏 and other curious peoples

noted in the Chinese annals and who lived as far east as Kansu Province were “nomadic Tocharians” (1966),¹⁸ the aforementioned Alans are the best candidates for having had an Indo-European impact, directly or indirectly, on Japan.¹⁹

But before we consider the extent to which this impact may be reflected in the traditions surrounding Yamato-takeru, we need to take a closer look at the Alans and their ethnic cousins, the Sarmatians, who shared a similar culture and nomadic lifestyle.²⁰ We also need to understand the connections between these two Central Asian peoples and the genesis of the Arthurian legends.

ALANS AND SARMATIANS, THE NARTS AND THE KNIGHTS

As BACHRACH has pointed out (1973), the great majority of the ancient Alan tribes migrated westward under pressure from their eastern neighbors, the Huns. Certain of these Northeast Iranian horse-riding groups, in alliance with various Germanic tribes, played an important role in the collapse of the Roman Empire. Such movements left Alan settlements in many parts of Western Europe, as evidenced by toponyms like Alençon and Allenville in France, Alano in Spain, and Landriano in northern Italy (BACHRACH 1973, 136). Also indicative is the widespread popularity in Europe of such male names as Alan and Alain, an apparent reflection of the fact that *alan* became synonymous with “fierce warrior.”²¹ Indeed, many scholars now think that the basic medieval European style of fighting — emphasizing heavily armored horsemen with lances and long slashing swords rather than disciplined, Roman-style infantrymen with javelins and short stabbing swords — is derived from the steppe style of warfare, introduced to Europe by the Alans and their Sarmatian cousins at the end of the Roman period (NICKEL 1975, 13–18).

It is now clear that the Alans and Sarmatians brought with them more than simply a new style of fighting; and here we must consider the folklore of the last surviving remnant of the ancient Alans, a people known as the Ossetians.

Split between what is now the Russian Federated Republic and Georgia in the north-central Caucasus region, the Ossetians, who number about half a million altogether (including émigrés in Turkey and elsewhere),²² preserve a corpus of heroic sagas centering around the adventures of a band of heroes called the Nartah, or Narts.²³ Their leader, named Batraz,²⁴ was the proud possessor of an Excalibur-like magical sword obtained with the help of a seeress called Satana, “The Mother of a Hundred Sons” (that is, the ancestress of the Narts [COLARUSSO 1989, 4]), and the aunt of the young hero. Armed with this mighty weapon,

Batraz avenged his father's death and then led a band of his fellow Narts on many wonderful adventures. They also spent many hours feasting and boasting of their conquests and fighting abilities.

All good things must come to an end, however. After slaughtering vast numbers of his own people in a climactic internecine battle and after resisting all the afflictions that God could throw at him, Batraz took pity on the handful of survivors that remained. He now acquiesced, he told them, in God's decision that his time to die had come. Death was impossible, however, unless his magical sword was thrown into the sea, so he ordered the surviving Narts to consign it to the waves. At first they were reluctant to do so, the sword being so heavy that only Batraz could wield it with ease. So they hid the weapon and reported back that they had followed his instructions. Batraz, however, knew what would happen when the sword entered the water, and soon realized that he had been deceived. Finally, with great effort, the Narts managed to throw the sword into the water, and as the blade began to sink the sea roiled and turned blood-red; hurricanes raged and lightning bolts streaked across the sky. Once all of this was reported to the dying leader, he willingly passed on to his reward (DUMÉZIL 1930, 69).²⁵

One need not be a specialist in Arthurian literature to recognize the parallels between the foregoing tale and the famous episode in Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* wherein the dying king asks Sir Bedivere to throw Excalibur into the sea (BAINES 1962, 500). Just as in the Nart saga, the companion is loath to dispose of the magical sword and attempts to deceive his master; moreover, once the sword is finally flung into the water a prodigious thing happens: a hand reaches up from the depths, grasps the wondrous weapon, flourishes it, and then slowly sinks beneath the surface.

The first scholar to point out this curious parallel was the eminent French medievalist Joël GRISWARD (1969, 1973). Shortly thereafter I discovered a historical connection between the ancient Sarmatians and Roman Britain (LITTLETON and THOMAS 1978). In A.D. 175, at the conclusion of the Marcomannian War in what is now Hungary, the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius posted 5,500 newly impressed Sarmatian *cataphracti* (heavy auxiliary cavalry) to Hadrian's Wall at the northern limit of effective Roman control in Britain.²⁶ Few if any of these Sarmatians, who belonged to a tribe known as the Iazyges, managed to return to their steppe homeland north of the Danube, as it lay outside the frontiers of the empire. When their enlistment was up they were settled at a cavalry fort called Bremetennacum Veteranorum near the modern village of Ribchester in western Lancashire.²⁷

The quasi-historical King Arthur, the *dux bellorum* whose descendants won the battle of Badon Hill (ca. A.D. 500), who seems to have campaigned on the Continent, and who may also have been called Riothamus (ASHE 1981; 1985, 96), was probably a leader of this community in the years immediately following the Roman withdrawal.²⁸ More recently, my colleague Linda A. Malcor (née Peterson) has demonstrated that the Alans who settled in Gaul brought with them their own version of the same Northeast Iranian heroic tradition described above (LITTLETON and MALCOR 1994, 26–39). PETERSON has also brought to light the strong possibility that the continental figure Lancelot, whose name she derives from **Alanus à Lot*, or “the Alan of Lot,” is thematically cognate to both Batraz and Arthur (1985).²⁹

Let us now return to the Yamato-takeru saga and see how *it* compares to the Ossetians’ heroic tale and, by extension, to that of the ancient Northeast Iranians/Scythians.

YAMATO-TAKERU, BATRAZ, ARTHUR, AND LANCELOT: REFLECTIONS ON A COMMON SOURCE

In some respects, Yamato-takeru more closely resembles Batraz than he does Arthur. Like Batraz, the Japanese hero has a propensity for violent outbursts, in some cases directed against his own people (as when he ferociously slaughters his elder brother).³⁰ In this respect, both heroes have less in common with Arthur than with Lancelot, who is also a ferocious fighter and constantly attacks the other knights of the Round Table (cf. LITTLETON and MALCOR 1994, 103–104).³¹ Other features support such a link, despite the absence of a sword-related death scene in the Lancelot corpus. For example, the relationship between Lancelot and his foster mother, the Dame du Lac, almost exactly parallels the relationship between Batraz and his aunt Satana and between Yamato-takeru and Yamato-hime. Moreover, one of Lancelot’s magic items is a mirror; as MAENCHEN-HELFEN has pointed out (1973, 340–42), the ancient Sarmatians were wont to carry mirrors and to place them in tombs (cf. SULIMIRSKI 1970, 120). Although mirrors do not play an explicit part in the Yamato-takeru legend, a possible tie between the ancient Japanese tradition and that of the Alano-Sarmatians is suggested by the presence of a mirror in the aforementioned imperial regalia.³²

In any case, Yamato-takeru, Arthur, Lancelot, and Batraz all appear to derive from a common Northeast Iranian heroic — and perhaps ultimately divine — prototype (cf. DUMÉZIL 1978, 21). Table 1 summarizes the evidence.

The pluses in the table outnumber the minuses 43 to 13, and I

TABLE 1

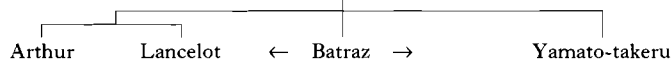
Motif	Arthur	Lancelot	Batraz	Yamato-takeru
Possesses (or has access to) magical sword	+	+	+	+
Receives two successive swords	+	+	-	+
Receives at least one sword from a seeress/ priestess	+	+	+	+
Sword bestower is a close kinswoman	-	+	+	+
She and/or hero is associated with water	+	+	+	-
Leads war band	+	+	+	+
Crosses a narrow body of water	+	+	-	+
Suffers mortal wound (or illness) in key episode	+	-	+	+
Kills own people	+	+	+	+
Sword hidden by comrade(s)	+	-	+	-
Dies by the sea	+	-	+	+
Dies after giving (or ordering companion[s] to give) a sword to a female	+	-	+	+
Sword consigned to water	+	-	+	-
Physical remains miraculously transported to another realm	+	-	-	+

submit that the correspondences are too specific to permit an explanation in terms of polygenesis. Rather, what emerges rather clearly is the extent to which the surviving Ossetic/Alanic variant links the otherwise independent traditions on the eastern and western peripheries of Eurasia. One sees the ties even in certain apparently minor details: not only do both Yamato-takeru and Batraz receive their magical sword from a mystically endowed kinswoman, but the kinswoman is also explicitly described as the hero's *aunt*. The documented historical connections between the peoples in question make it even less likely that the common features of the various heroes are the result of mere chance.³³ The fact that Ossetia is geographically intermediate between Western Europe and Japan may in part account for the fact that Batraz is thematically intermediate between the European reflexes of this heroic tradition and that which surfaced in Japan.³⁴

Table 2 summarizes the proposed "genealogy" here:

TABLE 2

Northeast Iranian prototype



In sum, I suggest that both Japanese and European legendry were subject to Northeast Iranian cultural influences at approximately the same period of time (from the second to the fifth centuries A.D.), and that this is why the legends of Yamato-takeru have such an Arthurian feel to them.³⁵ Celticists who follow the lead of Roger Sherman LOMIS (1927) in asserting that the Arthurian legends are totally embedded in the ancient Celtic tradition must now come to terms with the evidence we have uncovered relative to the real roots of these legends, just as Japanologists must rethink the ultimate provenance of *their* most famous legendary hero. The end result will be an appreciation of an important ancient link — indirect though it may have been — between the civilizations that arose in Europe and Japan circa A.D. 500.

NOTES

* This paper is an expanded, English-language version of an essay scheduled to appear in a Festschrift honoring Professor Yoshida Atsuhiko of Gakushuin University, Tokyo. The volume will be published by Seidosha. I would like to thank Professor Yoshida for his astute comments and suggestions, and Yoshida Mizuho for her help with the Japanese transcriptions. I also thank Victor H. Mair, Linda A. Malcor, and Professor Wellington K. K. Chan of Occidental College for their most helpful comments and suggestions. Finally, I am deeply indebted to the Japan–United States Educational Commission for awarding me a Fulbright research grant in 1994, which greatly facilitated the preparation of this essay.

1. The editions of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki* utilized in this paper are, respectively, those of PHILIPPI (1968) and ASTON (1972).

2. There is a curious parallel to this episode in the Norse text *Elder Edda*. After the giant Thyrn steals his hammer, Thor, advised by the clever Loki, disguises himself as the goddess Freyja, Thyrn's would-be bride. At the appropriate moment the Norse god throws off his disguise, retrieves his weapon, and kills Thyrn. See DAVIDSON 1964, 44–45; see also YOSHIDA 1979 (116–29), which discusses the parallels between Yamato-takeru and a variety of Indo-European heroes, including Thor.

3. See LITTLETON 1983, 74. The names of Yamato-takeru's companions are specifically mentioned in the *Nihonshoki* (7.23); however, according to the *Kojiki* (2.82.4), the hero does not seem to have considered his band an army, since he plaintively asks, "Why did he [the Emperor] dispatch me . . . without giving me troops?" This complaint is not recorded in the *Nihonshoki*.

4. The sword was originally called Mura-kumo 那雲, or "Assembled Clouds" (*Nihonshoki* 1.26; see also LITTLETON 1981, 272).

5. Most likely the ancestors of the Ainu, although some scholars believe that they were simply a backward tribe of ethnic Japanese (PHILIPPI 1968, 469).

6. The name "Grass Mower" was taken from this episode. See *Kojiki* (2.83.4). In the *Nihonshoki* (7.24) it is said that the famous weapon wielded itself. The latter text also locates

the episode in Suruga 駿河 rather than Sagami.

7. During the crossing, Yamato-takeru arouses the anger of the deity that lives in the bay. To appease the wrathful kami, a young princess who was traveling with the hero sacrifices herself to the waves so that his mission might continue. Deeply moved, Yamato-takeru laments the woman's death for the rest of his short life (*Kojiki* 2.84.1–13). This famous episode, unrelated to any specific Arthurian motif, marks a turning point in Yamato-takeru's career. From that point on he becomes increasingly introspective, and his subsequent adventures involve for the most part encounters with malevolent deities — as if he were attempting to even the score and avenge his savior's self-sacrifice. See MORRIS 1975, 8.

8. Otsu and Nobono 野煩野(能褒野), the site of Yamato-takeru's death, are both in present-day Mie Prefecture.

9. The *Nihonshoki* (7.31) gives the direction as "towards the Land of Yamato."

10. Or so it would appear from the *Kojiki*: "From that place [the white bird] again soared through the heavens and flew away" (2.88.30), although the text does not say precisely where Yamato-takeru's final journey ended. However, the *Nihonshoki* (7.32) states specifically that "at last it [the bird] soared aloft to Heaven, and there was nothing buried but his [Yamato-takeru's] clothing and official cap."

11. See MORRIS 1975 (337), who explicitly compares Kusanagi to "the magical sword Excalibur," as well as the role played by Yamato-hime to that played by the Lady of the Lake in the legends of King Arthur.

12. See note 2.

13. Despite his insightful comments on the parallels between Excalibur and Kusanagi, and between Yamato-hime and the Lady of the Lake (see note 11), MORRIS, explicitly invoking Campbell's "universal myth" in a note (337), goes on to assert that "in some ways, Yamato-takeru is a standard folk hero that we can find in almost every culture on the boundary between legend and history" (1975, 2).

14. These include, in hierarchical order, ultimate sovereignty (first function), the exercise of physical prowess (second function), and the promotion of plant, animal, and human fertility (third function), and are reflected in most ancient Indo-European mythologies; see, for example, DUMÉZIL 1958. For a discussion of Dumézil's ideas, see LITTLETON 1982b.

15. Another scholar who has contributed significantly to this research is ŌBAYASHI Taryō (e.g., 1960, 1977). The first to suggest that Japan was invaded by horse-riding nomads from the Asian mainland was EGAMI Namio (1964, 1967). See also LEDYARD 1975 and LITTLETON 1985.

16. LEDYARD (1975, 233–35) makes a good case, based on the Korean evidence, for the view that the bulk of the horse riders were Puyo, whose immediate homeland lay in north-east Manchuria along the Sungari 松花 River. After A.D. 372 the kings of Paekche, the southernmost of the three ancient Korean kingdoms and almost certainly the staging area for the invasion of Japan, have Puyo-sounding names.

17. Most likely a phonological rendering of the widespread self-identification term *Oss*; cf. the Ossetians (Alans) of the north-central Caucasus (see below). A variant form of this term is *As* (or *Az*, as in the Sea of Azov: "Sea of the Az").

18. For a more detailed discussion of this matter, see LITTLETON 1981, 380, n. 34. Some Indo-European-looking burials — that is, single interments under large, *kurgan*-like tumuli (cf. GIMBUTAS 1970) — dating from the middle of the first millennium B.C. have recently come to light in northwest China (MAIR 1995; Elizabeth Barber and Victor H. Mair, personal communications) and may possibly be Pulleyblank's peripatetic Tocharians, although the ethnicity of the skeletons is apparently still unresolved. A forthcoming issue of *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, edited by Victor H. Mair, will be devoted to this subject.

19. This identification is reinforced by the fact that the ancient Scythian origin myth, as related by Herodotus (4.5–6), also involves three sacred objects that fall from the sky, in

this case a cup (first function), a battle-ax (second function), and a yoked plow (third function). For a discussion of the extent to which this Northeast Iranian myth is reflected in the Japanese account of the imperial regalia, see LITTLETON 1982b, 260.

20. For an overview of what is known about the Sarmatians, see SULIMIRSKI 1970.

21. As in the Breton expression "cet homme est violent et allain" (BACHRACH 1973, 119).

22. For a comprehensive account of modern Ossetia, see ROTHSTEIN 1954.

23. The Ossetic Nart legends have been collected over the years by a number of scholars, including Vs. MILLER (1881), Adolf DIRR (1925), and, most importantly, the late Georges DUMÉZIL (e.g., 1930, 1965, and 1978). A colleague, John Colarusso of McMaster University, is currently translating a major corpus of Circassian Nart sagas. When completed, this text will add an important new dimension to our knowledge of this most important body of folklore.

24. His name is closely connected with that of the ancient Scythian god Don Bettyr, who seems to have been associated with the Don River (DUMÉZIL 1978, 214–16).

25. The Ossetic text, as translated by DUMÉZIL (1930, 69), states simply that "il [Batraz] rendit le dernier soupir," although the implication here is that his mortal remains, if not his soul, remained in the tomb his followers prepared for him.

26. The *locus classicus* for the arrival of the Sarmatians in Britain and the events that led up to their being assigned there is the account of the Marcomannian War by the third century A.D. Roman historian Dio Cassius (72.22.16; CARY 1927, 35), written about fifty years after the fact. See also SULIMIRSKI 1970, 175–76.

27. For detailed archaeological descriptions of the Sarmatian community at Ribchester, which seems to have persisted until the end of the Roman period in A.D. 410, see RICHMOND 1945 (15–29); EDWARDS and WEBSTER 1985–87.

28. As MALONE long ago pointed out (1925), the name Arthur does not appear to be Celtic in origin and most probably comes from the gentile name of the first Roman commander to whom these Sarmatian auxiliaries were assigned: Lucius Artorius Castus, Prefect of the VI Legion Victrix. A Dalmatian by birth, Artorius seems to have been a career officer; like the Arthur of legend and Riathamus, he also campaigned in Gaul, thus reinforcing the identification.

29. Like Arthur, Lancelot also possesses two swords: the one he receives from the Lady of Lake and the one he later picks up from a stone altar. It would be impossible here even to mention, let alone discuss, all of the evidence that Malcor and I have brought to bear on this and other matters relating to what we have dubbed "the Sarmatian connection" (more properly, the Northeast Iranian connection). For example, we suggest that the Holy Grail legends, so closely tied to the Arthurian corpus, are also rooted, at least in part, in the ancient Northeast Iranian tradition (LITTLETON 1979; PETERSON 1986; LITTLETON and MALCOR 1994, 209–80). This suggestion is supported both by the prominent role played by cups in Scythian mythology (e.g., the aforementioned account of the sacred cup that fell from Heaven [n. 19]) and by the importance in the Ossetic sagas of a magical cup (or cauldron) called the Nartæamongæ, to guard which several Nart heroes embark upon what amounts to a "quest"; as it turns out, Batraz is the only one brave enough for the job (DUMÉZIL 1930, 58–59, 136–37). Another link between the two traditions is the ancient Alan practice of worshipping swords thrust in the earth (Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus 31.4.22 [ROLFE 1939, 395]). Although there is no attested evidence that the Alans ritually withdrew such swords, the famous episode in which the young Arthur withdrew an embedded sword (the "first" Excalibur) and thereby validated his right to the kingship suggests that such a ritual — most likely a warrior initiation ritual — probably existed (LITTLETON 1982a, 53–67; LITTLETON and MALCOR 1994, 181–93). I should emphasize that neither of these elements — the quest for a magical cup and the presence of an embedded sword (save for a curious episode in *Kojiki* 1.35.8 in which a sword is embedded in a wave, point up) — are present anywhere in Japanese mythology, let alone the Yamato-takeru legend.

30. According to *Kojiki* 2.79.6, Yamato-takeru surprised his elder brother in the privy, where he "grasped him and crushed him, then pulled off his limbs, and wrapping them in a straw mat, threw them away."

31. Malcor and I strongly suspect that, after the Arthur and Lancelot legends merged into a single tradition (ca. 1100), whatever sword-related death scene that might have formed part of the latter corpus was consciously edited out (LITTLETON and MALCOR 1994, 105). The motive here seems to have been to differentiate between two figures who were, at bottom, reflexes of the same Alano-Sarmatian prototype. This is underscored by the fact that both are effectively "married" to the same woman (Guinevere), and that Lancelot is the only knight of the Round Table who has the right to wield Excalibur (LITTLETON and MALCOR 1994, 105). Moreover, although he is consistently portrayed as less ferocious than Lancelot, Arthur does kill his own people at the battle of Camlann shortly before his own death.

32. Another link of this sort — one that suggests a connection between the two traditions but that does not directly involve Yamato-takeru — can be seen in the legend of Tetsujin 鉄人, or "Iron Man." As ŌBAYASHI has demonstrated, Japanese folklore is replete with stories about a figure who, in his youth, is covered with iron and thus, save for a single spot (usually an eye), rendered invulnerable (1975). Batraz, too, is an "iron man." As a youth he implored the divine smith Kurdalagon to encase him in steel (DUMÉZIL 1930, 54). It is said that the resulting invulnerability is what allows him to slaughter his fellow Narts with impunity, and is what accounts for the fact that God alone can cause his death. Again, Yamato-takeru does not share this trait, but the fact that both Ossetic and Japanese folklore know such a figure reinforces the probability of an ancient connection between the two traditions in question (cf. LITTLETON 1982a, 75–76).

33. The fact that Lancelot more closely resembles Batraz (again, except for the death scene) than he does Arthur seems a reflection of the point in time when his immediate prototype, the "Alan of Lot" (see above) arrived in Western Europe. The Alans, it will be recalled, arrived in Gaul in the early fifth century, whereas the Sarmatians who brought the prototype of Arthur to Britain arrived in A.D. 175. See LITTLETON and MALCOR 1994, 103–108.

34. For a discussion of the parallels between Batraz and Yamato-takeru, framed in the context of DUMÉZIL's concept of the "second function" hero (e.g., 1983), see YOSHIDA 1962, 29–35; 1979, 116–29.

35. Chinese legendry also seems to have been subjected to a Northeast Iranian influence during the period in question. As this essay goes to press, it has come to my attention that the sword-thrown-into-the-water motif is reflected in an eighth-century A.D. popular tale about a hero called Wu Tzu-hsü. After Wu Tzu-hsü throws his sword into the water,

the god of the river . . . roiled the waters in a great and frothing frenzy. The fish and turtles were thrown into a panic and burrowed into the mud. Dragons raced along the waves and leaped out of the water. The river god held up the sword in this hand . . . (MAIR 1983, 141)

Although the rest of the Wu Tzu-hsü story does not conform to the "Arthurian" model, the foregoing account, which includes both roiling and a supernatural hand, is in fact an amalgam of the prodigious events that occur when Excalibur and Batraz's magical sword are consigned to the water (see above). I am indebted to my colleague Victor H. Mair for calling this passage to my attention.

REFERENCES CITED

- ASHE, Geoffrey
1981 A certain very ancient book. *Speculum* 56: 301–23.

- 1985 *The discovery of King Arthur*. New York: Doubleday.
- ASTON, W. G.
1972 *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the earliest times to A.D. 697*. Tokyo: Tuttle.
- BACHRACH, Bernard
1973 *A history of the Alans in the West*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- BAINES, Keith, trans.
1962 *Malory's Le morte d'Arthur*. New York: New American Library.
- CAMPBELL, Joseph
1968 *The hero with a thousand faces*. Second edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- CARY, Earnest, trans.
1927 *Dio's Roman history*, vol. 9. New York: Putnam.
- COLARUSSO, John
1989 The women of the myths: The Satanya cycle. *Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia* 3: 3-11.
- DAVIDSON, Hilda Roderick Ellis
1964 *Gods and myths of northern Europe*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- DIRR, Adolf
1925 *Caucasian folk lore*. New York: Dutton.
- DUMÉZIL, Georges
1930 *Légendes sur les Nartes*. Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré-Champion.
1958 *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens*. Bruxelles: Collection Latomus.
1965 *Le livre des héros*. Paris: Payot.
1978 *Romans de Scythie et d'alentour*. Paris: Payot.
1983 *The stakes of the warrior*. Trans. David Weeks. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- EDWARDS, B. J. N. and P. V. WEBSTER
1985-87 *Ribchester excavations*, 2 vols. Cardiff: University College.
- EGAMI Namio 江上波夫
1964 The formation of the people and the origin of the state of Japan. *Memoirs of the Tōyō Bunko* 23: 35-70.
1967 *Kiba minzoku kokka: Nihon kodaishi e no apurōchi* 騎馬民族国家——日本古代へのアプローチ [The horserider state]. Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha.
- GIMBUTAS, Marija
1970 Proto-Indo-European culture: The Kurgan culture during the fifth, fourth, and third millennia B.C. In *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans*, ed. George Cardona, Henry M. Hoenigswald, and Alfred Senn, 155-98. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- GRISWARD, Joël
1969 Le motif de l'épée jetée au lac: La mort d'Artur et la mort de Batraz. *Romania* 9: 289-340.
1973 Trois perspectives médiévales. *Nouvelle école* 21-22: 80-89.
- LEDYARD, Gari
1975 Galloping along with the horseriders: Looking for the founders of Japan. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 1: 217-54.
- LITTLETON, C. Scott
1979 The Holy Grail, the cauldron of Annwn, and the Nartyamonga: A further note on the Sarmatian connection. *Journal of American Folklore* 92: 326-33.
1981 Susa-nō-wo versus Yamata nō worōti: An Indo-European in Japanese mythology. *History of Religions* 20: 269-80
1982a From swords in the earth to the sword in the stone: A possible reflection of an Alano Sarmatian rite of passage in the Arthurian tradition. In *Homage to Georges Dumézil*, ed. Edgar C. Polomé, 53-67. *Journal of Indo-European Studies*

- Monograph 3. Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of Man.
- 1982b *The new comparative mythology: An anthropological assessment of the theories of Georges Dumézil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1983 Some possible Arthurian themes in Japanese mythology and folklore. *Journal of Folklore Research* 20: 67–81.
- 1985 The Indo-European strain in Japanese mythology: A review of some recent research. *Mankind Quarterly* 26: 152–74.
- LITTLETON, C. Scott, and Linda A. MALCOR
 1994 *From Scythia to Camelot: A radical reassessment of the legends of King Arthur, the knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- LITTLETON, C. Scott and Ann C. THOMAS
 1978 The Sarmatian connection: New light on the origin of the Arthurian and Holy Grail legends. *Journal of American Folklore* 91: 512–27.
- LOOMIS, Roger Sherman
 1927 *Celtic myth and Arthurian romance*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- MAENCHEN-HELFEN, Otto
 1973 *The world of the Huns*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- MAIR, Victor H.
 1983 *Tun-huang popular narratives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 1995 Mummies of the Tarim Basin. *Archaeology* 48: 28–35.
- MALONE, Kemp
 1925 Artorius. *Modern Philology* 22: 367–77.
- MALORY, Sir Thomas
 1969 *Le morte d'Arthur*, 2 vols. Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin.
- MILLER, Vs.
 1881 Skazanija o Nartah. *Ossetische Studien* 1. Moscow.
- MORRIS, Ivan
 1975 *The nobility of failure: Tragic heroes in the history of Japan*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- NICKEL, Helmut
 1975 Wer waren König Artus Ritter? Über die geschichtliche Grundlage der Artussagen [Who were King Arthur's knights? About the historical foundation of the Arthurian legends]. *Zeitschrift der historischen Waffen- und Kostümkunde* 1: 1–18.
- ŌBAYASHI Taryō 大林太良
 1960 *Nihon shinwa no kigen* 日本神話の起源 [The origins of Japanese mythology]. Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten.
 1975 Hanchō Tetsujin denki 班長鉄人伝記 [The life of chief Ironman]. *Kikan minwa* 季刊民話: 95–106.
 1977 The structure of the pantheon and the concept of sin in ancient Japan. *Diogenes* 98: 117–32.
- ŌBAYASHI Taryō, YOSHIDA Atsuhiko 大林太良, 吉田敦彦
 1981 *Tsurugi no kami, tsurugi no eiyū: Takemikazuchi shinwa no hikaku kenkyū* 剣の神, 剣の英雄——タケミカヅチ神話の比較研究 [Sword gods, sword heroes: A comparative mythology of Takemikazuchi]. Tokyo: Hosei Daigaku Shuppan-kyoku.
- PETERSON (= MALCOR), Linda A.
 1985 The Alan of Lot: A new interpretation of the legends of Lancelot. *Folklore and Mythology Studies* 9: 31–49.
 1986 The Alans and the Grail: The theft, the swindle, and the legend. *Folklore and Mythology Studies* 10: 25–41.
- PHILIPPI, Donald L.
 1968 *Kojiki* [Record of ancient matters]. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press.

PULLEYBLANK, E. G.

1966 Chinese and Indo-Europeans. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*: 9-39.

RAGLAN, Lord (Fitz Roy Richard Somerset)

1937 *The hero: A study in tradition, myth, and drama*. New York: Oxford University Press.

RANK, Otto

1952 *The myth of the birth of the hero: A psychological interpretation of mythology*. New York: R. Brunner.

RICHMOND, I. A.

1945 The Sarmatae, *Bremetennacum veteranorum*, and the *Regio bremetannacensis*. *Journal of Roman Studies* 35: 15-29.

ROLFE, John Carew, trans.

1939 *Ammianus Marcellinus*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

ROTHSTEIN, Andrew

1954 *A people reborn: The story of North Ossetia*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

SULIMIRSKI, Tadeusz

1970 *The Sarmatians*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

VERNADSKY, George

1943 *Ancient Russia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

YOSHIDA Atsuhiko 吉田敦彦

1962 La mythologie japonaise: Essai d'interprétation structurale, 3-4. *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 161: 29-35.

1974 *Nihon shinwa to In'ō shinwa* 日本神話と印欧神話 [Japanese mythology and Indo-European mythology]. Tokyo: Kōbundō.

1977 Japanese mythology and the Indo-European trifunctional system. *Diogenes* 98: 93-116.

1979 *Yamato-takeru to ōkuninushi* ヤマトタケルと大国主 [Yamato-takeru and Ōkuninushi]. Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō.