Emishi chief Ryōkō/Ri-o-kur 綾糠 from the scroll about emperor Bidatsu

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Abstract

In the 20th scroll of Nihon shoki there is a name of Emishi chief 綾糠 that is read as Ayakasu. This reading is unlike typical Emishi/Ainu names of chiefs: Emishi were a branch of Ainu, and names of Ainu chiefs usually end with kur – “person”. It seems that Ayakasu was ascribed to these kanji in late time. The kan’on of 綾糠 is ryōsō, but if a name ending with kur is recorded by kanji then such recording evidently should end with a kanji sounding like kur (with a kanji that is read as ki/ko/kō/ku). Probably the original kanji of the name were 綾糠 and it was pronounced as Ryōkō, later 糠 was mistakenly replaced by 糠. Ryōkō originally was Ri-o-kur; it consists of the following components: kur – “man/person”; ri – “to be tall/high”, “to be growing”; o – “penis”. Thus, Ri-o-kur means “A man with an erected penis”.

Keywords: Emishi; Nihon shoki; Ainu

1. Introduction

In the 20th scroll/book of Nihon shoki is described the biography of emperor Bidatsu. The paragraph devoted to the 10th year of his reign contains a story about a rebellion of Emishi. The text of the paragraph is the following (the original text of Nihon shoki was taken from Nihon shoki nihongo yaku...)

1) 十年春潤二月、蝦夷數千冦於邊境。

[In] the 10th year, spring, 2nd intercalary month, several thousand of Emishi invaded the border area.

2) 由是、召其魁帥綾糠等魁帥者、大毛人也詔曰「惟、儞蝦夷者、大足彥天皇之世合殺者斬應原者赦。今朕遵彼前例、欲誅元惡。」

Due to this, imperial decree [was proclaimed] to the chief 綾糠 Ayakasu and also the other chiefs, to [these] Emishi chiefs imperial decree said [the following]: “Well, you, Emishi people, in the reign of emperor Opo-tarashi-piko¹ those of you who were killers were beheaded, and the obedient were forgiven. Now I, following this precedent, want to punish the leaders of the evil”.

¹ Opo-tarashi-piko is one of the names of the emperor Keikō.
3) 於是、綾糟等、懼然恐懼、乃下泊瀬中流、面三諸岳、歃水而盟曰「臣等蝦夷、自今以後子々孫々古語云、生兒八十綿連用淸明心、事奉天闕。臣等若違盟者、天地諸神及天皇靈、絕滅臣種矣。」

Due to this/hereupon Ayakasu and the others, filled with fear and awe, entered into the stream of Patuse river®泊瀬, turned their face toward mount 三諸 Mimoro®, rinsed their mouths with water and say the following oath: “We, Emishi, our future children and our grandchildren [according to old saying] eighty continuous generations will serve Mikado with a pure heart. If we break the oath, let the kami of heaven and earth, and spirits of emperors will exterminate our seed.

Fig. 1. Patuse river and mount Mimoro in the island of Honshū (map has been drawn after Wikimedia maps)

This fragment is especially interesting since it contains the name of an Emishi chief, i.e.: 綾糟. This name is usually read as Ayakasu: late Japanese commentators of Nihon shoki read this name as Ayakasu アヤカス (see fig. 2), in the English translation of Nihon shoki made by W. G. Aston the name 綾糟 also is transcribed as Ayakasu (see Nihongi 1896: 96).

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2 Patuse river (see fig. 1) is now named Hasegawa 初瀬, it is the upper part of Yamato river (for more details see Hasegawa).

3 Mount Mimoro (fig. 1) is now named 三輪 (see Mount Miwa).
However, I suppose that the reading Ayakasu appeared at a very late time when the original reading of the signs was forgotten. In this paper I want to restore the true name of the chief and to correct mistakes that there are in this paragraph of Nihon shoki.

Fig. 2. The name of the Emishi chief with Ayakasu reading ascribed to it (image source – Nihon shoki daijūkyūkan – dainijūkan)

2. Why name Ayakasu doesn’t look like typical names of Emishi/Ainu chiefs

Emishi were a branch of Ainu (see Kindaichi 2004). Names of Ainu chiefs/prominent persons usually have the following structures: X kur or X aynu where the component kur means “person” / “respected person”, “man”, and aynu means “human being”, “man”. The component of kur is used more often than that of aynu.

The people who compiled Nihon shoki had no aim to record names of Emishi precisely, but anyway it was hardly possible to record a name that most probably ended with kur as Ayakasu.
That’s why I suppose that reading Ayakasu is nothing else, but a very late nanori⁴ that was ascribed to the kanji 綾糟. However, the problem appeared to be more serious.

3. Kan’on reading doesn’t resolve the problem

First I supposed that the kan’on⁵ reading of 綾糟 would better meet the form of a typical Ainu name, I supposed that the kan’on of 綾糟 would end with kō, i.e.: with a syllable that sounds alike kur.

However, the kan’on of 綾糟 is ryōsō, and it doesn’t correlate with the fact that if a name ending with kur is recorded by kanji then such recording evidently should end with a kanji sounding somehow alike kur, i.e.: with a kanji that is read as ki/ko/kō/ku.

4. The name was written with a wrong kanji

It seems to be fairly natural and logical to suppose that originally the name 綾糟 ended with a sign that was read as kō in the Nara period⁶. And also such sign should be look somehow alike糟 (i.e.: it should have the same radical 米 “rice” and looks somehow alike糟 in general). And there is the only such sign, namely: 糠, and the kan’on of this sign is the desirable kō.

Thus, it is possible to say that originally the name of this Emishi chief was recorded as 綾糠 and was pronounced as Ryōkō, later the sign of 糠 was replaced by糟 (it is possible to suppose that the replacement of kanji by mistake could take place during copying of scrolls of Nihon shoki) and then the name of Emishi chief became 綾糟 Ryōsō and later its reading was changed to Ayakasu.

5. Possible meaning of the name

Kanji used to record the names don’t have any touch with its original meaning anyhow, both sets of kanji used for recording the name are nothing else but completely meaningless combinations intended only to express somehow the original sounds: 綾 means “design”, “figured cloth”, “twill”; 糠 means “dregs”, “sediment”, “grounds”; 糠 means “rice bran”.

To understand the meaning of the name we should, first of all, reconstruct its original form.

As it has been concluded above the original name must have been close to Ryōkō, so it is possible to suppose that the original name most probably was Ri-o-kur.

And now it is possible to decode this Ri-o-kur since it consists of well-known Ainu roots. As it has been mentioned above, the component kur means “person”, “man” and is a standard ending in names of Ainu chiefs. The component ri means “to be tall”, “to be high”; “to be growing” (Kayano 2005: 467). The component o means “bottom”, “butt” or “penis” (Kayano 2005: 164).

⁴ Nanori (lit.: 名乗り “to say or give one’s own name”) non-standard reading/pronunciation of kanji that can be found mostly in Japanese names.

⁵ Kan’on (literally 漢音 Han sounds), one of the sources of pronunciation of kanji. Kan’on was borrowed and became widely spread in Nara period, i.e.: if we want to restore original pronunciation of words from Kojiki and Nihon shoki we have to turn to kan’on.

⁶ Nara period lasted from 710 to 794 AD.
And thus, it is possible to say that the name Ri-o-kur means “A man with an erected penis”. Such a name looks pretty much physiological/vulgar, but it was a usual practice for Ainu to describe in personal names certain characteristic features of a person, and sometimes these features were very physiological.

6. Conclusion

Thus, it is possible to state that Nihon shoki contains much information on Emishi, and to get this information and to interpret it in a proper way one should not just simply read hard the original text of Nihon shoki, but one should first of all base an interpretation on a certain theory, and should also pay due attention to different contexts.

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