

## **Legend Mikeiri no Mikoto and Kihachi**

(An imperial son defeats a fearsome *kami*)

(Overview)

In the ancient *Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan)* it is written that Mikeiri no Mikoto, the older brother to the first emperor of Japan, was lost at sea while heading to the east of Japan. However, Takachiho legend says that Mikeiri was not lost but instead returned to his hometown of Takachiho, and that upon his return, he battled and vanquished a fearsome deity named Kihachi. Kihachi had terrorized the local populace and seemed undefeatable. However, after a fierce battle, Mikeiri cut Kihachi up and buried him in three pieces, putting him to rest.

The Kihachi legend is a well-known one in Takachiho to this day, and traces of it can be found around the Takachiho area. Every year, Takachiho Shrine hosts the Boar Offering Festival to appease Kihachi's spirit so he does not rise to cause trouble again.

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### **Saving Princess Unome**

It is said that long ago, a fearsome *kami* deity named Kihachi lived in a cave on Mt. Futagami. He descended the mountain to terrorize the people of Araragi Village, and thereafter, kidnapped Princess Unome and hid away in Oniga Iwaya cave.

Mikeiri no Mikoto, older brother to the first emperor of Japan, and a renowned warrior, had returned to his hometown Takachiho, and while crossing Takachiho's Gokase River spotted a beautiful woman reflected in the surface of a pond. He was immediately captivated. This reflection was of Princess Unome, and it revealed to him a terrible problem: Kihachi had stolen her to marry against her will. Moved by this plea for help, Mikeiri decided to vanquish Kihachi. Gathering forty-four vassals, he raided Kihachi's cave.

### **Fighting the Fearsome Kihachi**

A fierce battle commenced, and Kihachi's strength proved formidable. Mikeiri managed to defeat Kihachi, but this was not the end. After a single night, Kihachi's buried remains returned to life, and he rose from the earth in a rage. At their next battle, Mikeiri divided Kihachi into three parts—head, torso, and limbs—and buried them in separate places. This, at last, saw to it that Kihachi did not rise

again. Mikeiri then married the rescued Princess Unome, and together they had eight children. His descendants are said to have ruled over Takachiho.

### **Legendary Sights in Takachiho**

The physical remnants of this legend can be found around Takachiho today. Several are near Takachiho Gorge, including Nanatsuga Pond, where Mikeiri is said to have first seen Princess Unome, and the Stone of Kihachi's Might (Chikara Ishi), a 200-ton rock Kihachi is said to have hurled during that first battle. The three spots where Kihachi's parts are buried, indicated with stone monuments, can be visited. Kihachi's head is near Solest Takachiho Hotel, his torso is 50 meters west of Ryokan Shinsen, and his limbs are at the remains of Awaji Castle behind Takachiho High School.

As for the legend today, it is said in Takachiho that although Kihachi has been vanquished, his vengeful spirit sometimes rouses, bringing early frost to ruin crops. So, Takachiho Shrine holds an annual festival to placate Kihachi. A boar is offered, and Shinto priests chant a special song to put Kihachi to sleep. *Kagura*, a theatrical Shinto dance, is also performed. The festival is called the *Shishikake* (Boar Offering) Festival, and it is held on the third day of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar, which is in January most years.