

The Three Female Deities of Munakata

The three deities worshipped at Munakata Taisha are said to be the daughters of Amaterasu Omikami, the sun goddess.

An Ancient Legend

According to Japan's oldest written chronicles, the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihon shoki* (720), Amaterasu had a disagreement with her younger brother Susanoo no Mikoto. She took his sword and separated it into three pieces, purified each one in a sacred spring, then chewed the pieces in her mouth, and blew out three daughters, the Three Female Deities of Munakata. The eldest daughter, Tagorihime no Kami, whose name means "fog," is enshrined at Okitsu-miya on the distant island of Okinoshima. The second daughter, Tagitsuhime no Kami, whose name means "swirling tide," is enshrined at Nakatsu-miya on the island of Oshima. The third and youngest daughter, Ichikishimahime no Kami, whose name means "island dwelling of deities," is venerated at Hetsu-miya on the mainland.

Three Sisters Reunited

These three deities are known as protectors of sea routes and seafarers, and rituals and prayers continue to be performed at all three shrines in their honor. At a time when sea journeys between Japan and the Asian mainland were long and dangerous, the Three Female Deities of Munakata played an important part in Japan's connection with the rest of the world. Their worship spread across the whole of Japan, and other significant seaside Shinto shrines were built to honor them, including Itsukushima Shrine on Miyajima in Hiroshima Prefecture, and Enoshima Shrine in Kanagawa Prefecture. Once a year, Munakata's two island-dwelling deities are escorted to the mainland by a flotilla of fishing boats and reunited with their sister, as part of the colorful Miare Festival.