

Rituals on Okinoshima

Japan's indigenous religion, Shinto, evolved gradually from the spiritual practices of the Jomon period, Japan's Neolithic period dating back more than 10,000 years. At the mercy of the elements, people developed a deep respect for nature. Rituals and festivals were held to pray for good harvests and safe journeys, and natural sites and objects were worshipped as deities.

Votive Objects

Some handmade objects were also believed to have spiritual powers, such as mirrors, swords, and precious stones (often carved into comma-shaped beads, or *magatama*). These three objects form the Imperial Regalia, symbolizing the legitimacy of Japan's imperial family.

Changing Ritual Sites

Tens of thousands of objects, from mirrors and precious *magatama* beads to coins and pottery, were used on Okinoshima in open-air rituals that predate Shinto as it is known today. The first known rituals on Okinoshima were performed on top of rocks, open to the sun and moon. Around the fifth century these rituals took place near the center of the island. Mirrors and iron ingots have been found at these sites. Over the next two centuries, the rituals moved to areas in the shade of large rocks, under deep overhangs. By the seventh century, offerings were being placed in the partial shade of the rocks, and in the eighth to ninth century transitioned to open-air offerings in clearings, near the current site of the Okitsu-miya shrine building.