

Imamiya Shrine

Imamiya Shrine is a modest sanctuary located in a grove some distance behind the main shrine complex. It enshrines the souls of three emperors who unsuccessfully rebelled against the Kamakura shogunate, the first warrior-led government in Japan, and were punished severely for their actions. The establishment of the shogunate by the Minamoto clan in 1192 had left the court in Kyoto virtually powerless and the aristocracy resentful. But an opportunity to wrest back control of the country seemed to present itself in 1221. Two years earlier, the line of Minamoto shoguns had died out with the death of Sanetomo (1192–1219), the third shogun, leaving the legitimacy of the samurai government in question.

The retired emperor Gotoba (1180–1239) declared Hojo Yoshitoki (1163–1224), regent to the shogun and the de facto ruler, to be an outlaw and assembled a force against him. The samurai of eastern Japan, however, remained loyal to the shogunate, and the rebellion was crushed. Gotoba and his sons, the retired emperor Tsuchimikado (1196–1231) and Emperor Juntoku (1197–1242), were banished from Kyoto. They were sent into exile and died without ever seeing the capital again.

In medieval Japan, people believed that the spirits of those who had suffered injustice in life could come back to avenge those who had wronged them. Imamiya Shrine was established in 1247 to appease the spirits of these three emperors and has been tended by Tsurugaoka Hachimangu ever since.