

Toyotamahime

The legend of Toyotamahime, a Shinto deity known for her beauty, has been extensively recorded in the texts of Japan's two most ancient histories, the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan).

Toyotamahime, the story goes, married Prince Hoori no Mikoto, a mythical ancestor of the Japanese imperial line. After marriage, they resided under the sea for three years before returning to land. When Toyotamahime became pregnant, she made Hoori no Mikoto promise not to watch her while she was giving birth. The prince broke his promise, however, and discovered that Toyotamahime's true form was that of a huge shark. Ashamed, she fled back into the sea, never to return.

The hot springs in Ureshino are believed to have medicinal properties for skin diseases, and many bathers suffering from skin diseases have visited the area since antiquity. The picture of a catfish in the Ureshino River must have been the work of one such ancient visitor. The catfish was believed to be a servant of Toyotamahime in Ureshino, and is worshipped at the Toyotamahime Shrine.

At Toyotamahime Shrine today, local hot spring water flows into the hand-washing basin (*chozuya*). People purify their hands there before entering the shrine. On the shrine grounds, there is a white statue of a catfish nicknamed "Namazu-sama." Many people come to this shrine to pray for beautiful skin and good health.