

Aoshima Shrine: *Ama no Hiraka*

A *hiraka* is a type of unglazed clay plate that has been used for religious purposes in Japan since the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE). In the *Nihon Shoki*, a record of classical Japanese history completed in 720, the dish appears in words attributed to Jimmu, the mythical first emperor. He describes the *hiraka* as a divination tool, encouraging devotees using the plates to purify both mind and body before intoning an incantation to have their wishes come true. *Hiraka* were in use for fortune-telling at the royal court by the Nara period (710–794), and similar clay dishes were also employed when making offerings of food to deities. Large quantities of plates used in ancient rituals have been excavated at Motomiya Shrine, and visitors can try to uncover their fortune by throwing a *hiraka* made from local clay toward the sacred site beyond the fence by the shrine. Before tossing your plate, bow twice in the direction of the target and think of something to wish for. It is said that your wish will come true if the *hiraka* lands within the sacred spot, while having the dish break upon landing should result in good luck and protection against evil. Please make a ¥200 donation to the shrine for each plate.