

Komamiya Shrine

The area that is now Miyazaki Prefecture has been famous for horse breeding since at least the Nara period (710–794), when horses from this then-remote part of the country were prized at the imperial court. That history lives on at Komamiya, or “horse shrine,” whose grounds include a number of horse statues. The site of the shrine, an ancient coastline, is believed to have been a sacred place since prehistoric times, when people may have worshiped the cliffs behind the present shrine building as the abode of the divine. After the sea retreated, the lands nearby were used for farming and grazing, and Komamiya Shrine became the religious focal point of an agricultural community.

During the Edo period (1603–1867), Komamiya was protected by the Ito family, daimyo lords of the Obi domain (the southern coastal region of present-day Miyazaki Prefecture), who donated a horse to the shrine every year as a symbol of their faith and patronage. Present-day Komamiya Shrine enshrines Jimmu, the mythical first emperor of Japan. It is said that the Emperor Jimmu spent his youth here, an aspect that was emphasized particularly following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The government of Emperor Meiji (1852–1912) institutionalized Shinto as the state religion and encouraged the worship and maintenance of sites associated with native mythology and legends concerning the origins of the imperial family.