

The Myths of Japan: Yamasachi-hiko and Umisachi-hiko

Among the three children of Konohanasakuya and Ninigi are Yamasachi-hiko, who grows up to be a master hunter, and Umisachi-hiko, who becomes an expert fisherman. One day, Yamasachi-hiko proposes that the two exchange tools for a while to get to know each other's trades.

Yamasachi-hiko sets out to fish with his brother's hook, while Umisachi-hiko tries his hand at hunting. But Yamasachi-hiko loses the hook he has borrowed and cannot find it, no matter how hard he tries. He breaks up his sword and makes many new hooks, but Umisachi-hiko refuses to accept them.

The despairing Yamasachi-hiko is visited by an old man named Shiotsuchi, who tells him to board a boat and search at the palace of Wadatsumi, god of the sea. Yamasachi-hiko does as he is told, and upon his arrival at the palace meets Princess Toyotama, Wadatsumi's daughter. The two fall in love, and Wadatsumi approves of their relationship because of Yamasachi-hiko's divine lineage. Yamasachi-hiko is invited to a grand feast and eventually marries Toyotama. The two live together happily for three years.

As time passes, Yamasachi-hiko grows worried. He remembers the reason he set out to sea in the first place: to recover his brother's lost fishing hook. Toyotama asks her father to help with the search. Wadatsumi orders all the fish in the sea to assemble at his palace so that the hook Yamasachi-hiko is looking for can be found. The fish all come, except for the sea bream, which is said to have hurt its mouth. Wadatsumi calls for the sea bream, whose pain is found to be caused by a stuck fishing hook that Yamasachi-hiko recognizes to be his brother's.

Having recovered his brother's lost hook, Yamasachi-hiko determines to return to dry land. As a parting gift, Wadatsumi gives him a pair of orbs with which to control the tides. Yamasachi-hiko attempts to return the fishing hook to Umisachi-hiko, who still refuses to accept it and threatens his brother. Yamasachi-hiko uses the orbs given to him by the god of the sea and calls in the tide, almost drowning Umisachi-hiko, who finally relents.

Several Shinto shrines in coastal Miyazaki enshrine the characters of this tale as deities. One of these sanctuaries is Aoshima Shrine, where an annual winter festival reenacts the scene of Yamasachi-hiko's return from the sea god's palace and his welcoming at shore by a delighted crowd. Participants wearing only loincloths rush into the cold waves to greet the deity and undertake a ritual purification.