Hyakutai Jinja Shrine

Hyakutai Jinja is a small shrine founded in the eighth century to appease the spirits of the Hayato people of southern Kyushu who were subjugated by the Yamato court. It is a subsidiary shrine of Usa Jingu Shrine located along the Chokushi Kaido Road, to the east of the Kesho Ido Wells and Kyoshuzuka Tumulus.

According to ancient records, the Hayato rebelled in the early eighth century, resisting the rule of the Yamato court and its expansion into southern Kyushu. When the Yamato forces set off for Hayato territories in 720, the deity Hachiman accompanied them in a portable shrine (*mikoshi*) as a divine guardian. The fighting was fierce, and the Hayato people were able to successfully defend their positions for some time.

In the end, the Yamato implemented a strategy to distract the Hayato with *kugutsu* puppet performances. Fascinated by the entertainment, the Hayato forces lowered their guard and were finally defeated; after that, the remaining members of the tribe were subjugated. It is said that as proof of victory the Yamato warriors brought one hundred heads back to Usa, which were later interred in the area.

In the years after the rebellion, plague and famine swept through the region, and people believed that it was caused by the vengeful spirits of the Hayato. At that time, an oracle was received from Hachiman that expressed regret for the killings committed during the rebellion and declared that a *hojo-e* ("rite for the release of living beings") should be held annually in atonement. When that alone did not bring an end to the misfortunes in Usa, Hyakutai Shrine was founded to enshrine the deceased Hayato and appease their spirits.

Though over a thousand years have passed, the *hojo-e* ritual and prayer services for the Hayato are still held as integral parts of the autumn Chushusai festival at Usa Jingu. On the last day of the festival, a portable shrine with Hachiman's spirit is carried to Hyakutai Shrine, where priests pray for the repose of the enshrined Hayato spirits before Hachiman is returned to Usa Jingu. The rituals used to include *kugutsu* performances thought to be the same as those staged during the Hayato Rebellion, as well as *kamizumo* puppet wrestling enacting sumo matches between deities. Although in Usa the tradition died out in the twentieth century, it continues at two other Kyushu shrines: Hachiman Kohyo Jinja Shrine in Yoshitomi and Koyo Jinja Shrine in Nakatsu. It is said that the sacred vessels housing the spirits of the deities worshipped at the two shrines are the *kugutsu* puppets that were originally used to distract the Hayato.