

Hatogaya Hachiman Shrine

Hatogaya Hachiman Shrine is thought to be one of the oldest places of reverence in Shirakawa. Beyond its torii gate, which marks the boundary between the sacred and the secular, lie several natural features believed to have played a part in ancient nature worship.

The rock formation directly in front of the worship hall functioned as a *yorishiro*, or an object capable of attracting a deity and providing its spirit a place to occupy during religious ceremonies. The giant Japanese cedar trees on the shrine grounds are also thought to have been used as *yorishiro*. To the right as seen from the front of the worship hall is a circle of smaller trees that marks the site of a *haraedo*, or place of ritual purification.

Directly beyond the torii gate is a spring believed to be the reason this place first came to be considered sacred. Prayers for rain were made to the deity of water, which in this area was synonymous with the deity of nearby Mt. Haku. The peak continues to play a key role in distributing water throughout the valleys around it, and shrines dedicated specifically to the Mt. Haku deities remain numerous throughout the Sho River valley.

The deity of water is likely to have been the Hatogaya shrine's original target of worship. The shrine only came to be associated with Hachiman, the guardian deity of the warrior class, in the sixteenth century, when warlord-led families consolidated their rule in the area.