

## Sanage Festival

The annual Sanage Festival offers the rare opportunity to watch performances of *bo no te* (“pole in hand”), an acrobatic martial art that has been practiced in what is now Aichi Prefecture since the sixteenth century. The festival takes place at Sanage Shrine on the second weekend of October and is held to pray for a plentiful harvest in the coming year.

*Bo no te* is both a ceremonial display of fighting skill and a form of folk entertainment. Practitioners perform a variety of loosely choreographed movements with weapons that include wooden poles, swords, spears, and scythes. It is thought to have originated during the Sengoku period (1467–1568), a time of great turmoil and frequent warfare. Farmers, perhaps encouraged by their local daimyo lord, may have sought to acquire martial skills for self-protection. *Bo no te* was later organized into several local schools, each with distinct choreographies, and came to be performed at shrines in honor of deities. During the Edo period (1603–1867), when the use of weapons was limited to members of the warrior class, *bo no te* performances were the sole opportunity for local farmers to wield arms. This made the martial art very popular, and troupes from more than 180 villages in the area that is now Aichi and Gifu Prefectures once gathered at Sanage Shrine to show off their skills.

*Bo no te* is no longer as widely practiced as it was in the Edo period, but it remains a central element of the Sanage Festival. The festivities start on Saturday when a pair of *mikoshi* (portable Shinto shrines) are brought down to the main precincts of Sanage Shrine from the sanctuary’s two subsidiary shrines on the slopes of Mt. Sanage, Higashinomiya (Eastern Shrine) and Nishinomiya (Western Shrine). The *bo no te* performances begin in the evening when the *mikoshi* are illuminated with traditional lanterns. They continue throughout Sunday and are accompanied by sacred dances and a *yabusame* (mounted archery) ritual.