



Inasa Beach near Izumo Grand Shrine, where deities from all around Japan are believed to congregate every year during the 10th month of the ancient Japanese calendar
©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation

Izumo: Land of Gods, Myths, and Metals

From the prehistoric bronze bells of Kojindani and the tatara steel swords to the silver mines of Iwami

Simon Kaner, Great Britain

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Kamimukae Shinji is a sacred ritual welcoming the deities to the Izumo Grand Shrine, ©Izumo Taisha

Motivation Shimane has the second lowest population of all Japan's 47 prefectures and is also among the least visited. And yet it has one of the richest histories, including the territory of what used to be known as Izumo, associated with one of the most intriguing figures of Japanese mythology, Susanoo, as well as being the location of the entrance to the afterworld, *Yomi*. The modern prefectural capital, Matsue, is closely associated with one of the most renowned Western commentators on Japan, Lafcadio Hearn.

Objective This short essay introduces some of the highlights that can be enjoyed during a short visit to Izumo. These include the Izumo Grand Shrine, dedicated to the deity Okuninushi, today second only to the Ise Grand Shrine in significance, and the neighbouring Museum of Ancient Izumo, one of the very best regional museums in Japan, which presents the rich history and traditions of the region and makes an excellent jumping off point for further exploration. One way to experience Izumo is through the metal crafts that made Izumo so important for much of Japanese history: the bronzes of Kojindani and Kamoiwakura, the iron of the tatara furnaces, and the silver of Iwami.

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Hii River, setting for the legend of Yamata no Orochi, the eight-headed-and-tailed serpent, ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation

Context Interest in ancient Japanese history is enjoying a renaissance, and no understanding of Japanese history is complete without Izumo. In this age of delayed marriage, young women flock to the Izumo Grand Shrine in the search of the right marriage partner. The Izumo region is full of 'power spots' and locations full of significance in the ancient chronicles of Japan. And with the boom in interest in Japanese traditional crafts, the furnaces and workshops associated with the steel required for making Japanese swords more than merit attention. A great proportion of the world's silver was produced in Iwami, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

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The remains of pillars considered to be part of the original Izumo Grand Shrine, measuring 3 meters in diameter

©Izumo Taisha



The Izumo Grand Shrine enshrines Okuninushi, the deity who is believed to have created the land of Japan, ©Izumo Taisha

The earliest written references to the Japanese archipelago appear in the ancient Chinese chronicles, the *Wei Zhi*, and date from the 3rd century CE. These describe how the country, referred to by the name of *Wa*, was divided into a number of distinct regional polities, or *kuni*. It was only in the 7th century CE that larger swathes of what we now know as the nation of Japan were brought together under the control of the Yamato clan, based in what was to become the capital area of Japan until the later 19th century around the modern-day cities of Nara, Kyoto, and Osaka. As remains the case today, technology was the key to control, and in the first centuries CE, it was the technology of metalworking that was essential. The Yamato heartlands do not have extensive metal resources, but the ancient province of Izumo, now Shimane prefecture, certainly does. And this is one of the reasons this beautiful region of the San'in coast, facing the Sea of Japan in western Honshu, was Yamato's main rival in antiquity.

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Statue of Okuninushi symbolizing a scene from the mythical legend The White Hare of Inaba, ©Izumo Taisha

It was not until the early 8th century that the first histories were written in Japan itself, *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, commissioned by the increasingly powerful Yamato rulers who claimed direct descent from the sun goddess Amaterasu, and designed to legitimate their claim to rule over the whole country. Amaterasu was enshrined in the Grand Shrine of Ise on the Pacific coast of what is today Mie prefecture. According to the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, Amaterasu had a brother, Susanoo, who is associated with the Izumo region. But by the time the early histories were being compiled the regional centre of Izumo was already in decline, eclipsed by the coalescing central power in Yamato. And yet in many ways Izumo retained its distinctive character and personality and a visit, even if just of a few days, will more than reward those curious about this intriguing corner of Japan. Part of this character is revealed in the *Izumo no Fudoki*, one of a series of local gazetteers, also dating to the 8th century, which describe the history, topography, myths and settlements of the Izumo region.

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1/10 scale model reconstruction of original main building of the Izumo Grand Shrine, ©Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo



Interior design at Izumo Airport based on Izumo myths and the theme of Enmusubi, ©Izumo Airport Terminal Building Co., Ltd.



*The museum adjacent to the Izumo Grand Shrine was established to introduce the distinctive history and traditions of the region
©Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo*

For many, Shimane is now where you head in order to find a suitable marriage partner. Izumo Airport is the *Enmusubi* airport, whose name evokes alliances and trusts. Today pilgrims flock to the great Izumo Grand Shrine, second only to the Ise Grand Shrine itself. Adjacent to the shrine is the exceptional Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo where you can encounter not only the rich history of the shrine itself – there are indications that the original honden was up to 48 metres in height – but also remarkable traces of earlier alliances. During the Yayoi period, whose end coincided with the writing of the Wei Zhi, great quantities of bronze objects were deposited at particular locations in the region.

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The bells bore intricate designs, and were probably used for ceremonial purposes

©Shimane Prefectural Investigation Center for Buried Cultural Items



Bronze swords and bells discovered at Kojindani and Kamoiwakura make a spectacular display

©Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo



Excavations at Kojindani unearthed 358 bronze swords and other items

©Kojindani Site



The weapons and the bells buried at Kojindani 2,000 years ago were probably ceremonial rather than purely utilitarian

©Shimane Prefectural Investigation Center for Buried Cultural Items

Unlike in Europe, where we can clearly distinguish between a Bronze Age followed by an Iron Age, in Japan both bronze and iron technologies were introduced from the continent during what is known as the Yayoi period, probably in association with the introduction of paddy rice agriculture. Bronze, shiny, hard and often with devastatingly sharp edges, cast and forged at high temperatures, rapidly took on special significance. Bronze was used to make mirrors, bells, and weaponry. The weapons, modelled on continental prototypes, were often more ceremonial than purely utilitarian, with impractically wide blades. The bells – *dotaku* in Japanese – sometimes show no evidence of actually being rung. Given the work that went into their production, these objects were highly valued, and yet they were often deposited in the ground, unused, possibly as offerings to the local spirits, or to seal alliances between the regional polities that were developing at this time.

From 1984 to 1985, an extraordinary cache of bronze objects, both bells and weapons were discovered on a hillside at a place called Kojindani. The scale of the discovery is immediately apparent through the excellent displays at the Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo, where the originals, now designated as National Treasures and dulled by the patina of age, are exhibited alongside a spectacular set of shiny replicas. A visit to the site of Kojindani itself makes a wonderful excuse to explore some of the beautiful hinterland of Izumo. The onsite Kojindani Museum recreates the excitement that surrounded the discovery of this remarkable hoard of objects, and standing before the site itself encourages us to reflect on what religious or political motivations underlay their deposition in the ground.

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Extracting iron sands in the early 20th century, Oku Izumo
©Hitachi Metals, Ltd.



At Sugaya Tatara in Sannai, Unnan, the entire village was involved in iron-working ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation

Heading deeper into the gentle mountains of central Shimane, on the way to the Inland Sea and Hiroshima, the landscape takes on a different character. Travelling along the country roads of Oku Izumo, hummocks and strange cuttings through the hills are testament to human impact on the environment on a massive scale. For over 1300 years Oku Izumo has been the centre of an exceptional iron-working tradition, known as *tatara*. Hungry furnaces have consumed much of the earth of the region, rich in ironsands, producing immensely heavy but exquisitely coloured pigs of steel, which in turn are forged into Japan's finest sword blades. Buildings containing these furnaces, can still be found dotted across the countryside.

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A single smelting required the furnace to be fired for 3 days and nights

©Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai



Less than half the total number of pigs of steel (tamahagane) are suitable for making the finest Japanese swords

©Iron Road Culture Promotion Conference



Demonstration of swordsmithing by Kobayashi Syunji, ©Oku Izumo Tatara and Japanese Sword Museum

The furnaces they contained breathed flames that would put many western dragons to shame, and can still be seen in action in remote workshops. The immense glittering pigs of steel that emerge from these furnaces, azure like the mythical *Dragon of the East*, after sweltering days and nights of smelting the iron sands, are broken up to provide the raw materials for traditional Japanese swords, whose craftsmanship is renowned worldwide. A visit to any of the small atmospheric museums offers a glimpse of the sophistication of the traditional steel making industry.

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Red-brown roofed buildings characterize the townscape of Omori, ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



Entrance to the Ryugenji Mabu Mine shaft gallery, ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



Rakanji Temple offers repose to the souls of deceased miners, ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



Okubo Mabu, the largest mine shaft gallery in the region, ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



With a 20-room mansion and 5 store-houses in their estate, the Kumagai Family enjoyed prosperity from silver mining, ©Ie no Onnatachi



The mining town of Omori, ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation

Head back towards the coast, and a visit to the silver town of Iwami Ginzan more than repays the effort of finding it. Japan was known as the Isles of Gold, but in fact it was silver that really attracted international attention. The silver mines of Iwami and the associated town that grew up to service them are now inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage sites. Many of the traditional wooden buildings of the town have been refurbished to a high standard, and visits to the museums, temples, shrines, residencies, and other buildings, including the former post office, lovingly repurposed as perhaps the smallest opera house in the world, provide a vivid picture of life in this former boom town.

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Morotabune Shinji is a ritual event at Miho no Seki based on the myth of the Kuniyuzuri, the Transfer of the Land from the earthly deities to the deities of Heaven, ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



*Yomotsuhira Saka, Matsue, sloping down to the realm of the dead
©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation*

Shimane prefecture was previously known as Izumo province, and is one of just a handful of provinces in Japan for which we have very early records, known as the *Fudoki*, commissioned by the ancient Yamato government after it had assimilated the region, just as William the Conqueror commissioned the Domesday Book in England after his conquest of 1066. The *Fudoki* contains many myths and legends about this enchanting part of Japan, which complement the stories in the *Kojiki*.

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Amaga Fuchi. The eight-headed-and-tailed serpent lived in this river
©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation



The legends and history of Izumo was a major source of inspiration for Lafcadio Hearn, ©Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum



Stone sculptures at Yamata no Orochi Park, Unnan, showing Susanoo facing the eight-headed-and-tailed serpent, ©Shimane Prefecture Tourism Federation

It was the heady mix of myth, legend and history contained in the Kojiki that captured the attention of Shimane's most famous non-Japanese resident, Lafcadio Hearn, also known by his Japanese name, Koizumi Yakumo. A journalist by trade, as a child Hearn was fascinated by the myths and legends of classical Greece and Ireland, and his famous works such as *Kwaidan* are inspired by the stories recounted to him by his beloved wife.

No visit to Shimane is complete without a visit to the beautiful castle town of Matsue on the shores of Lake Shinji, and to the Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum adjacent to his residence there. With the Kojiki and the works of Hearn as your guide, you are then well equipped to explore this corner of Japan. Watch out for the shades of Susanoo, troublesome brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu, listen for the hissing of the eight-headed-and-tailed serpent, the terrifying *Yamata no Orochi*, and the travails of the fire-god, so important to the metal-working for which the region excels since ancient times.

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Karasade Sai is a sacred ritual to bid farewell to the deities as they leave the Izumo Grand Shrine after their annual congregation

©Furukawa Makoto



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Extensions

Izumo rewards multiple visits. This essay has merely scraped the surface to reveal a glimpse of the riches that shine beneath the patina of obscurity that has diverted the eyes of the world from this fascinating region of Japan. Equally rewarding are visits to the Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum, or the stunning Adachi gardens, or a drive around the calmness of Lake Shinji, stopping of course to indulge in that local delicacy, the shijimi clam, or the Izumo soba noodles, contemplating just how Okuninushi managed to *pull* the land that comprises the Shimane Peninsula across the Sea of Japan from Korea.

I first visited Izumo over thirty years ago, since when it continues to haunt and inspire my imagination.

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Simon Kaner is an archaeologist specializing in the prehistory of Japan. He is Director of the Centre for Japanese Studies at the University of East Anglia, and Head of the Center for Archaeology and Heritage as well as being Executive Director at the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures. His notable publications include a 2009 catalog for *The Power of Dogu: Ceramic Figures from Ancient Japan*, a major exhibition at the British Museum that subsequently transferred to the Tokyo National Museum and *An Illustrated Companion to Japanese Archaeology* (Archaeopress) in 2016.

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Places **Amaga Fuchi**

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An abyss located in a deep valley set among woods and rocks along the upper reaches of the Hii river, according to legend the abode of the eight-headed-and-tailed serpent Yamata no Orochi. Nearby, visitors can enjoy views over the abyss at the Amaga Fuchi Park.

699-1343 Shimane ken, Unnan shi, Kisuki cho, Yumura

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Archaeological Museum of Kojindani

The museum showcases discoveries from the adjacent archaeological site of Kojindani. The displays feature excavated items, now designated as National Treasures, and accurate replicas, bringing the extraordinary discoveries made nearby to life. In June, visitors can also enjoy an exceptional display of ancient lotus flowers in the paddy fields of the 5,000sqm site park.

699-0503 Shimane ken, Izumo shi, Hikawa cho, Kanba 873-8

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

House of the Kumagai Family

The grandest merchant residence in Omori, established in 1801. The 1,500sqm estate includes a 20-room-mansion and 5 storehouses. During the 17th century, the Kumagai family was involved in the management and administration of Iwami Ginzan, and their business extended to running a sake brewery at the end of the Edo period. The estate also acted as a guest house for merchants and officials.

694-0305 Shimane ken, Oda shi, Omori cho ha 63

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Inasa Beach

Located within walking distance from the Izumo Grand Shrine, this beach is believed to be the place where deities from all around Japan gather for their annual congregation in the 10th month in the traditional Japanese calendar.

[web-site](#)

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Places **Ise Grand Shrine**

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Located in Ise, Mie Prefecture, one of the most important and sacred Shinto shrines in Japan, dedicated to the sun goddess, Amaterasu. The Ise Grand Shrine comprises two main components, the Naiku, or Inner Shrine, and Geku, or Outer Shrine, along with an additional 123 subsidiary shrines. According to the Nihon Shoki, the shrine was established at Ise as a result of instructions receiving words from Amaterasu when Yamatohime no Mikoto, a daughter of the Emperor Suinin, was seeking the most appropriate location to enshrine and worship the goddess.

516-0023 Mie ken, Ise shi, Ujitachi cho 1

[web-site](#)

Iwami Silvermine Museum

Formerly used as the magistrate's office during the Tokugawa Shogunate, the building houses historic documents and items about the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine. A special exhibition is held annually in the autumn.

694-0305 Shimane ken, Oda shi, Omori cho, ha 51-1

[web-site](#)

Izumo Grand Shrine

Officially called Izumo Ooyashiro, but also known as Izumo Taisha, this is one of the earliest Shinto shrines, and is dedicated to Okuninushi no kami, the deity of good fortune and marriage, a descendant of Susanoo. The myth of *Kuniyuzuri*, the *Transfer of the Land*, records that the shrine was originally a gift to Okuninushi from Amaterasu, in return for his granting the Izumo region to Ninigi no Mikoto, Amaterasu's grandson, as his domain.

699-0701 Shimane ken, Izumo shi, Taisha cho, Kizuki Higashi 195

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Kamoiwakura Site

An archaeological site situated in Kamo cho, Unnan, discovered in 1996 during the construction of a road. A total of 39 bronze bells unearthed from the site were registered as National Treasures. There is an information facility next to the site.

699-1115 Shimane ken, Unnan shi, Kamo cho, Iwakura 837-24

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

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Places **Kojindani Site**

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An archaeological site located in Hikawa cho, Izumo. The site was discovered in 1983 during the construction of a major new road. 358 swords, 6 bells and 16 spearheads made of bronze were unearthed from the site, indicating that this is where the capital of ancient Izumo was located. Visitors can see the site itself, reconstructed as it was at the time of the excavation. The adjacent Archaeological Museum of Kojindani provides information about the discoveries and life of ancient Izumo, illustrated with excellent replicas, as well as presenting the newest research on the site. The original objects are exhibited at the Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo.

699-0503 Shimane ken, Izumo shi, Hikawa cho, Kanba 873-8

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Lafcadio Hearn Memorial Museum

This small museum offers an interesting and comprehensive overview of Lafcadio Hearn's remarkable life and works. His former residence is located next to the Museum.

690-0872 Shimane ken, Matsue shi, Okudani cho 322

[web-site](#)

Miho No Seki

Situated on the eastern tip of Shimane peninsula, Matsue, this fishing town is closely associated with the myth of *Kuniyuzuri*, the *Transfer of the Land*, in which Kotoshironushi, a son of Okuninushi and more commonly known as Ebisu, decides to hand over his land to the descendants of the sun goddess, Amaterasu. A sacred ritual based on the myth is held every year on December 3rd.

Shimane ken, Matsue shi, Mihonoseki cho

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Okubo Mabu Mineshaft

Named after the first magistrate, Okubo Nagayasu, this is the largest of the more than 600 mineshafts discovered at Iwami Ginzan. The site preserves the traces of technological developments at the mines. Okubo Mabu is only accessible with a guided tour. Reservation is required.

694-0305 Shimane ken, Oda shi, Omori cho

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

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Places **Omori Za**

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Founded in 1915 by mining companies in Omori, the original Omori Za was a popular theatre that offered performances every day. Even as the town became depopulated, it continued to function as a theatre, showing films and school plays until it was demolished in 1964. In 2014, Nakamura Brace Co. Ltd., a maker of medical devices, converted Omori's former post office into the world's smallest opera house, naming it the new Omori Za. 694-0305 Shimane ken, Oda shi, Omori cho

Rakanji Temple

The temple was established in 1764 in Omori cho, Oda, for the repose of the souls of miners who lost their lives labouring in the silver mines. Crossing the stone bridge, visitors encounter Gohyaku Rakan, around 500 stone statues, in a cave. *Gohyaku* literally means five hundred, and *Rakan* means the highest rank of Buddhist priest.

694-0305 Shimane ken, Oda shi, Omori cho 804

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

Ryugenji Mabu

Mabu is the Japanese term for mine shaft or gallery. Among 600 shafts and galleries at Iwami Ginzan, the Ryugenji Mabu, established in 1715, is one of just two that are open to the public. Visitors can walk along half the length of the shaft, and observe the traces of the hard labour that created the mines.

694-0305 Shimane ken, Oda shi, Omori cho

[web-site](#)

Sannai Village Sugaya Tatara

The last surviving village in Japan involved in traditional iron work. The cultural landscape is preserved, allowing visitors to see the villagers' residences, museums, and an iron-making facility. The building called *Takadono* houses a furnace which produces pigs of steel.

690-2801 Shimane ken Unnan shi, Yoshida cho, Yoshida

[web-site](#)

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Places **Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo**

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Located adjacent to Izumo Grand Shrine, the Museum showcases the heritage of ancient Izumo. Visitors are introduced to the history of the shrine by means of a scale model of the original honden and remains of massive pillars that formed part of the original structure, and encounter the great quantities of deposited bronze weaponry and bells excavated at the Kojindani and Kamoiwakura sites.

699-0701 Shimane ken, Izumo shi, Taisha cho, Kizuki Higashi 99-4

[web-site](#)

Yomotsuhira Saka

Located slightly to the south of Route 9 in Higashi Izumo, Matsue, is a slope associated with the myth of Yomi no Kuni, the realm of the dead. According to the myth, the slope is the place where Izanagi, a deity born of the seven divine generations in Japanese mythology, escaped from the realm of the dead when he tried to bring back his beloved wife, Izanami.

699-0101 Shimane ken, Matsue shi, Higashi Izumo cho, Iya 2376-3

[web-site](#) (Japanese)

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Publications

Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697

Translated by Aston, William George

Routledge, 2011, Oxon

An invaluable ancient source on Japanology

[web-site](#)

The Kojiki: An Account of Ancient Matters

O no, Yasumaro; Translated by Heldt, Gutav

Columbia University Press, 2014, New York

A complete and accessible translation of Kojiki

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Web-Sites

Encyclopedia of Shinto

One of the most detailed and comprehensive English sources on Shinto religion. It includes an index of various Shinto deities.

[web-site](#)

History and Development of Tataru

Comprehensive introduction on Tataru, traditional iron-making

[web-site](#)

The Study Group for Izumo Myth Translation

Translation and research project on Izumo myths at The University of Shimane Junior College

[web-site](#)

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Glossary

Amaterasu

Also referred to as *Amaterasu O Mikami*, she is the sun goddess, and a major Shinto deity, a daughter of Izanagi and the sister of Tsukuyomi, the god of the moon, and Susanoo, the god of storms and the sea. In Japanese mythology, the Japanese emperors are her direct descendants. The most famous story about Amaterasu, the *Legend of Amano Iwato*, tells of a conflict with Susanoo that caused her to hide in a cave, plunging the world into darkness until she was persuaded out.

► Susanoo

[web-site](#)

Dotaku

Cast bronze bells produced during the Yayoi period (circa 300BCE-300CE), typically decorated with images from nature and animals. It is thought that they were used for ritual purposes, and buried between rituals.

► Yayoi Period (circa 300BCE-300CE)

En-Musubi

En means opportunity and *Musubi* means connection. Together they refer to forming an alliance or good relationship, particularly a good marriage.

Hii River

A 153km long river running from Mt. Sentsu to Lake Shinji. Many locales related to myths and Izumo's ancient history lie along its banks. Some have portrayed the river itself as a troublesome eight-headed-and-tailed serpent of the legend Yamata no Orochi, due to frequency of its floods.

► Susanoo

► Yamata no Orochi

Honden

The most sacred building in a Shinto shrine, where the deity is enshrined; usually at the rear and closed to the public

[web-site](#)

Honshu

The largest and most populated of Japan's four main islands

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Glossary

Iwami

An old province, today the western part of Shimane Prefecture

- Iwami Ginzan
- Omori
- Shimane

Iwami Ginzan

Iwami Ginzan (1526-1923) was a group of silver mines located in Oda, Shimane. The site was discovered and developed by Kamiya Jutei, and was in operation until 1923. At its peak in the early 17th century, one third of the world's annual silver production came from the mines. Traded as *Soma Silver*, and known in East Asia and Europe for its high quality, it enjoyed the highest trading credit in East Asia.

The mines, mining structures, and the surrounding cultural landscape were recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007.

- Iwami
- Omori

[web-site](#)

Izumo

Known as the land of gods, Izumo is now the eastern part of Shimane prefecture. In Shinto myths, it was once the capital and ruled over the country of Japan.

- Shimane

Kojiki

The *Kojiki*, Records of Ancient Matters, is one of the earliest chronicles of Japan, compiled by O no Yasumaro in the 8th century. It starts with Japan's creation myth and continues through to the early 7th century. Along with the Nihon Shoki, the legends and practices recorded in the Kojiki became the basis for Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion.

- Nihon Shoki
- Yamata no Orochi

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Glossary

Kuni

Today the Japanese term *kuni* is understood as meaning a country that has sovereignty over a defined territory. Before its unification under the name *Wa*, Japan was divided into a number of distinct regional polities, also known as kuni.

- Wa
- Yamato Clan

Kwaidan

Kwaidan are ghost stories. The most celebrated collection in English was translated by Lafcadio Hearn as *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*.

- Lafcadio Hearn, Patrick (1850-1904)

Lafcadio Hearn, Patrick (1850-1904)

Also known by his adopted Japanese name Koizumi Yakumo.

Born in Greece and spending his early years in Ireland, Hearn was fascinated by myths and legends. Hearn arrived in Japan as a magazine correspondent in 1890 and settled in Matsue, Shimane Prefecture, where he drew inspiration from stories told by his wife, Koizumi Setsu, and went on to publish 17 books on the culture and folklore of Japan.

- Kwaidan

Nihon Shoki

The Nihon Shoki, completed in 720, stands with the Kojiki as the oldest extant chronicle of Japan. It starts with Japan's creation myth and continues through to the early 8th century, and had a great influence on shaping Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion. Although much of the early sections are legendary rather than historical, the Nihon Shoki is considered by scholars as the most complete and detailed of Japan's ancient historical manuscripts.

- Kojiki
- Yamata no Orochi

Oda

On the Sea of Japan coast in Shimane Prefecture, home to the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine

- Shimane

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Oku Izumo

A town in Nita district, Shimane prefecture, an early center of Tataru steel smelting, and today the only source of high quality steel pigs for traditional sword making. Also known as the place where the events of the Yamata no Orochi legend took place.

Omori

A mining town in the mountains southwest of Oda. As the center of the Iwami Ginzan Silver Mine, the population reached a peak of 200,000 in the 17th century. Extending about 1.5 kilometers north of the mine, the town retains the cultural landscape developed alongside silver mining, including administrative offices, merchant houses, temples and shrines and the former post office.

- Iwami
- Iwami Ginzan
- Shimane

Shimane

A prefecture in the western part of Honshu, Japan's main island. It comprises Izumo in the east, Iwami in the west, and the Oki islands.

- Honshu
- Iwami
- Izumo
- Oda
- Oku Izumo
- Omori

Susanoo

Susanoo no Mikoto, the god of storms and the sea and a major Shinto deity. He is a son of Izanagi, and the brother of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, and Tsukuyomi, the god of the moon. When Susanoo was banished from heaven as result of his rivalry with Amaterasu, he descended to *Ashihara no Nakatsukuni*, the *Central Land of Reed Plains*, where he defeated Yamata no Orochi, an eight-headed-and-tailed serpent that was terrorizing the land. From the serpent's tail he took the sword Kusanagi, part of Japan's Imperial Regalia. He married the princess he saved from the serpent and settled in Izumo.

- Amaterasu
- Hii River
- Yamata no Orochi

[web-site](#)

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Tatara

A steel smelting technique brought to Japan from the Asian mainland in the 6th century and subsequently refined. It can also refer to the steel and the furnace itself. Tatara produces very high quality steel, *tamahagane*, that was forged into fine sword blades. The technique matured in the Edo period (1603-1867), but production almost disappeared with the end of World War II. Today, Nittoho Tatara, managed by the Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords, is the only facility certified to supply tamahagane for Japanese art sword making.

[web-site](#)

Wa

Wa, also read as *Yamato*, is the former name for the Japanese archipelago. It was replaced by *Nihon*, or Japan, at around the end of the 7th century.

►Wei Zhi

Wei Zhi

Wei Zhi, the Records of Wei, is a part of an ancient Chinese ancient chronicle, *San Guo Zhi*, or *The Records of the Three Kingdoms*, compiled by Chen Shou (233–297) in the 3rd century. Wei Zhi covers the Wei dynasty (220–265) and contains the earliest mention of the Japanese archipelago.

►Wa

Yamata no Orochi

A legendary fearsome serpent, with eight heads and tails, killed by Susanoo, the Shinto god of storms and the sea

►Amaterasu

►Hii River

►Kojiki

►Nihon Shoki

►Susanoo

Yamato Clan

The powerful Yamato clan is believed to have unified more than half the main islands of Japan and established a political state during the Kofun period (circa 3rd century-7th century).

►Kuni

►Wa

[web-site](#)

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Yayoi Period (circa 300BCE-300CE)

Japan's bronze and iron age, named after the Tokyo neighborhood where Yayoi-style pottery was first discovered. The period is defined by its distinctive pottery, and the introduction from the Asian mainland of paddy-rice agriculture and techniques for working bronze and iron.

►Dotaku

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