

【Festivals】

The shrines are important sites for rituals and festivals. In modern times, even though rituals held in the big shrine seem to have been revised and simplified to be easier, we still follow the old ritual. Now we plan to celebrate the biggest festival, “Heikoku-Sai” (the festival of the country), which is open to everyone, and “Ou-Matsuri (ou means a cormorant in Japanese), which is a unique festival that modern individuals have never experienced.

○ Heikoku-Sai

This is the big festival honoring gods from Nanao (Ishikawa) in the Keta main shrine at Hakui Kashima. It is held from the 18th to the 23rd of March, every spring. A long line of people carry a mikoshi (a portable shrine) all over the city in the early spring, providing a magnificent spectacle for which people come out on the road to follow and welcome. Moreover, it is known as Oide-Matsuri (oide means come out, and matsuri means festival). Winters are long in north Japan, and people wait for this festival because it represents



spring. It is worth watching the parade of people and gods getting together for the long walk to the Keta main shrine.

The mikoshi is enclosed in the main shrine until the 3rd of April, the day of the main festival, which is called “Reitai-Sai,” or the end of Heikoku-Sai. On the 21st of March, which is the day at the midpoint between the outward and homeward journeys, it is notable that we stopped by Sukunahiko-Kataishi Shrine (Kanemaru, Rokusei), enshrined Sukunahikonano-Mikoto for a night, and the very next day, we organized the festival with them going to the Keta main shrine in Nanao, and returned. It shows that Keta-Taisya had been associated with other shrines all over the Noto in historic times.

At the Reitai-Sai, there is an event in which a Shinto priest hit an arrow, spear and stick by a hatchet to a certain mark, reenacting a historical event in which a Shinto priest conquered a poisonous monster that lived in Ouchigata (Hakui, Ishikawa). This event, known as yabusame (horseback archery) according to the Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters), had become a standing (non-horseback) event in the intervening years. In 1998 (Syowa 63), the traditional practice of yabusame was revived after an interval of 450 years. The festival of Heikoku-Sai is very important meaning of the birth of this shrine. It is here that a prayer service is held for a good crop.

○ Ou -Matsuri (Cormorant Festival)

The Cormorant Festival is an important folk-cultural event, held before dawn on the 16th of

December, in the gray morning. Five days ago from then, a cormorant is caught in Unoura-Machi (Nanao, Ishikawa) and taken back to Keta-Taisya; this trip takes three days. From the time it is caught until the festival, the cormorant is not fed, because it became a god when it was caught, and it is called “Ou-Sama” (sama is the most respectful and polite form of address). As the cormorant is carried to the shrine, people worship and bow to it in its birdcage because they believe that they cannot have New Year if they fail to do so.



After 3:00 a.m. on the 16th, there is a festival in the shrine. A Shinto prayer is recited, votive offerings are removed, and all the lights are turned off so that the main shrine, rather than being brightly lit, is in pure darkness. Then the priest recites with solemnity, “Take down the birdcage, open the door, and let the cormorant go wherever it should be!”

The person who caught the cormorant lets it go toward the main shrine, and the cormorant shall approach to there in following a beacon and stop by a pedestal. Then, the person catches the cormorant again, takes it to the ocean, and lets it go. The cormorant flies way and fades out in the dark; nobody knows where it goes.

The origin of this festival is unknown. According

to one fable, Okuninushi-no-Kami—a deity of magic and medicine later viewed as equivalent to Daikokuten (celebrated at Izumo Grand Shrine)—visited Kashima. In the age of gods, Unoura-Machi, at the Mikado Nushi Hiko (a gate of the imperial residence), got a cormorant and offered it to him. Or the ritual may be based on the historical fact that Kushiya-Tama-no Kami (a highly spirited and active god) was incarnated as a cormorant, caught many fish, and offered.

The festival is a totally spiritual event—a religious service held during the Niiname-Sai, which is a ceremonial offering by the emperor of newly harvested rice to the deities. In a general survey of the events of Keta-Taisya, we might compare the nature of this festival with that of Kinen-Sai, held on February 17th, and with that of the Heikoku-Sai through the Reitai-Sai (November 23rd).

Furthermore, there is an ancient folk tradition that how the cormorant goes toward the main shrine on the night of this festival predicts how the year will go. Maeda Toshiie has written on the importance of this: “This is the auspicious event we should never be through.” In 1518 (Tensyo 13), the cormorant went well at the festival, and many donations were offered to Unoura. It should be noted that this religious service became the Noh (Japanese musical) Ou-Matsuri, following the style of Konparu-Ryu.

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— History of Keta —



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【History】

In 741 CE (Tenpyo 13), the era in which Noto (North Ishikawa) was part of Etyu-no-Kuni (see below), Ichinomiya in Etyu-no-Kuni was known as Keta-Taisya. (Taisya means “the grand shrine.”)

The name Keta-Taisya first appears in the “Man’ yoshu,” the oldest existing collection of Japanese poetry. In 748 CE (Tenpyo 20), Otomo-no-Yakamochi (718 CE–October 5, 785 CE), who was a Japanese statesman and poet in the Nara period, went on a suiko—a provincial tour for disposing of money or property with the expectation that the same thing or an equivalent will be returned). At that time, he paid a visit to the shrine and composed a tanka or poem:

[All the way coming here, Hakui,
looking over the ocean view and feeling
the breeze is definitely amazing.
I wish I could have some boat or
coxswain to launch to this huge ocean.]

From this poem, it is evident how important the central government considered us, and what sacred power we had on the old nation. Even though it was located in the region west of Tokyo on the Japanese Sea side, the

Imperial Court had come to the shrine and offered a wand with hemp and paper streamers to a Shinto god in 768 CE (Zingo-Keiun 2). Around 855 CE (Saikou 2), a permanent Shinto priest was installed in Jinguuzi (the accompanying shrine), and the relative rank accorded the gods of Shintoism was promoted.

Because of this respectful treatment from ancient times, Keta-Taisya is an appropriate site to govern northeast Japan and for international negotiation with China.

905 CE (Engi 5) was the time set for Engi-no-Sei, which was a dedication of a sacred item—a rope, cloth, piece of paper, or another item—anything except money. According to the Zinmyou-Cho (the catalogue of shrine names), there were many shrines named for Keta-Taisya, including Tazima-no-Kuni (north Hyogo), Noto-no-Kuni (north Ishikawa), Etyu-no-Kuni (Toyama), and Echigo-no-Kuni. Moreover, there were shrines with similar names, such as those at Kota Zinzya (Niigata) and Keta-Miko-Zinzya (zinzya means a shrine) in Kaga (Komatsu, Ishikawa). At Kokusi-Genzai-Sya, which is written in Rikkokushi as a high rank shrine, there is Keta-Taisya in Echizen-no-Kuni (Fukui).

This shows that the god of Keta had been enshrined all over the Sea of Japan, and reminds us of the god’ s historical influence.

In 1217 CE (Kenpo 5), General Minamoto-no-Sanetomo donated the tons of fief. At the end of

the Heian period, Sir Hatakeyama, who dominated Noto (North Ishikawa), built a new shrine for Keta and dominated new fief for the god Keta.

In the early modern period, successive feudal lords venerated Keta, and donated land and built shrines to this god. One of these lords was Maeda Toshiie (January 15, 1539–April 27, 1599) who was one of the leading generals of Oda Nobunaga following the Sengoku period (16th CE) and extending into the Azuchi-Momoyama period.

Honden (the main shrine), and the shrines of Haiden, Zinmon, Wakamiya, and Hakusan have all been designated National Important Cultural Properties. The shrines of Zinko and Zuisinnmon are Prefectural Important Cultural Properties. In addition, there is a designated National Treasure in Keta-Taisha, called “Irazu-no-Mori” (the wood nobody can enter). Around 1871 (Meizi 4), Keta-Taisya became the biggest and most respected shrine.

Note

1. On May 22nd, 1983 (Showa 58), Emperor Showa visited Irazu-no-Mori and composed a poem about Keta-Taisya:
[No ax allowed, never come, still wild amazing plants are lively breezing and blessing, just alive.]

It means that nobody may get anything here, these plants are never to be killed, and the emperor wishes the plants to live forever. It is joyous to know that these energetic plants are living there still.

Rituals and Festivals at Shrine Keta-Taisya

Rituals and services are performed year-round. Tsukunami-Sai is held on the first of every month.

January	1 Gantan sai 11 Okitsushimasha reesai 11 Kadode shiki	July	1 Tsuitachi musubi
February	1 Tsuitachi musubi 11 Kigen sai 17 Kinen sai 20 Wakamiyasha reesai 25 Sugawarazinzya reesai	August	13–14 Kokoromusubi taisai
March	1 Tsuitachi musubi 3 Yanaidasha reesai 17–23 Heikoku sai	September	1 Tsuitachi musubi 1 Hakusansha reesai 1 Wakamiyasha tsukinamisai 1 Minie sai
April	1 Tsuitachi musubi 3 Reitai sai 4 Chinka sai 4 Futodamasha reesai	October	1 Tsuitachi musubi 17 Zingu sai 20 Wakamiyasha reesai
May	1 Tsuitachi musubi 1 Minie sai 1 Hakusansha reesai 1 Wakamiyatsukinami sai	November	– Shichigosan mairi 1 Tsuitachi musubi 23 Niiname sai 30 Innyakusya reesai
June	1 Tsuitachi musubi 30 Ohharai shiki	December	1 Tsuitachi musubi 16 U matsuri 20 Seiden sai 29–31 Kinoha matsuri 31 Ohharai shiki 31 Okumiya reesai 31 Otabisya reesai 31 Joya sai

