

Amaterasu

Amaterasu Ōmikami (天照大御神, 天照大神), often called **Amaterasu** for short, also known as **Ōhirume no Muchi no Kami** (大日靈貴神), is the **goddess of the sun** in **Japanese mythology**. Often considered the chief deity (*kami*) of the **Shinto** pantheon,^{[2][3][4]} she is also portrayed in Japan's earliest literary texts, the *Kojiki* (c. 712 CE) and the *Nihon Shoki* (720 CE), as the ruler (or one of the rulers) of the heavenly realm **Takamagahara** and as the mythical ancestress of the **Imperial House of Japan** via her grandson **Ninigi**. Along with two of her siblings (the moon deity **Tsukuyomi** and the impetuous storm-god **Susanoo**) she ranks as one of the "Three Precious Children" (三貴子, *mihashira no uzu no miko / sankishi*), the three most important offspring of the creator god **Izanagi**.

Amaterasu's chief place of worship, the **Grand Shrine of Ise** in **Ise, Mie Prefecture**, is one of Shinto's holiest sites and a major pilgrimage center and tourist spot. As with other Shinto *kami*, she is also enshrined in a number of **Shinto shrines** throughout Japan.

Name

The goddess is referred to as *Amaterasu Ōmikami* (天照大御神 / 天照大神; **historical orthography**: あまてらすおほみかみ, *Amaterasu Ohomikami*; **Old Japanese**: *Amaterasu Opomi₁kami₂*) in the *Kojiki*, while the *Nihon Shoki* gives the following variant names:

- Ōhirume-no-Muchi (大日靈貴; **Man'yōgana**: 於保比屢咩能武智; hist. orthography: おほひるめのむち, *Ohohirume-no-Muchi*; Old Japanese: *Opopi₁rume₁-no₂-Muti*)^{[5][6]}
- Amaterasu Ō(mi)kami (天照大神; hist. orthography: あまてらすおほ(み)かみ, *Amaterasu Oho(mi)kami*)^{[5][6]}
- Amaterasu Ōhirume no Mikoto (天照大日靈尊)^{[5][6]}
- Hi-no-Kami (日神; OJ: *Pi₁-no-Kami₂*)^{[5][6]}

Amaterasu is thought to derive from the verb *amateru* 'to illuminate / shine in the sky' (*ama* 'sky, heaven' + *teru* 'to shine') combined with the honorific **auxiliary verb** *-su*,^[7] while *Ōmikami* means 'great august deity' (*ō* 'great' + honorific prefix *mi*-^[a] + *kami*). Notably, *Amaterasu* in *Amaterasu Ōmikami* is not technically a name the same way *Susanoo* in *Susa no O no Mikoto* or *Ōkuninushi* in *Ōkuninushi no Kami* are. *Amaterasu* is an **attributive verb form** that modifies the noun after it, *ōmikami*. This epithet is therefore, much more semantically transparent than most names recorded in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, in that it means exactly what it means, without allusion, inference or etymological opacity, literally 'The Great August Goddess Who Shines in Heaven'. This usage is analogous to the use of **relative clauses** in English, only different in that Japanese clauses are placed in front of the noun they modify. This is further exemplified by (1) an alternative epithet, *Amateru Kami* (天照神,^[8] 'The Goddess Who Shines in Heaven'), which is a plain, non-honorific version of *Amaterasu Ōmikami*, (2) alternative forms of the verb *amaterasu* used elsewhere, for example its **continuative form** *amaterashi* (天照之) in the *Nihon Sandai Jitsuroku*,^[9] and (3) similar uses of attributive verb forms in certain epithets, such as **Emperor Jimmu**'s *Hatsu Kunishirasu Sumeramikoto* (始馭天下之天皇,^[10] 'His Majesty Who First Rules the Land'). There are, still, certain verb forms that are treated as proper names, such as the **terminal** negative *fukiaezu* in 'Ugayafukiaezu no Mikoto' (鸕鷀草葺不合尊, 'His Augustness, Incompletely-Thatched-with-Cormorant-Feathers')

Her other name, *Ōhirume*, is usually understood as meaning 'great woman of the sun / daytime' (cf. *hiru* 'day(time), noon', from *hi* 'sun, day' + *me* 'woman, lady'),^{[11][12][13]} though alternative etymologies such as 'great spirit woman' (taking *hi* to mean 'spirit') or 'wife of the sun' (suggested by **Orikuchi Shinobu**, who put forward the theory that Amaterasu was originally conceived of as the consort or priestess of a male solar deity) had been proposed.^{[11][14][15][16]} A possible connection with the name **Hiruko** (the child rejected by the gods **Izanagi** and **Izanami** and one of Amaterasu's siblings) has also been suggested.^[17] To this name is appended the honorific *muchi*,^[18] which is also seen in a few other **theonyms** such as 'Ō(a)namuchi'^[19] or 'Michinushi-no-Muchi' (an epithet of the **three Munakata goddesses**^[20]).

As the ancestress of the imperial line, the epithet *Sume(ra)-Ō(mi)kami* (皇大神, 𐰇𐰣𐰚𐰚, 'great imperial deity'; **also read as** *Kōtaijin*^[21]) is also applied to Amaterasu in names such as Amaterasu Sume(ra) Ō(mi)kami (天照皇大神, also read as 'Tenshō Kōtaijin')^{[22][23]} and 'Amaterashimasu-Sume(ra)-Ōmikami' (天照坐皇大御神).^[24]

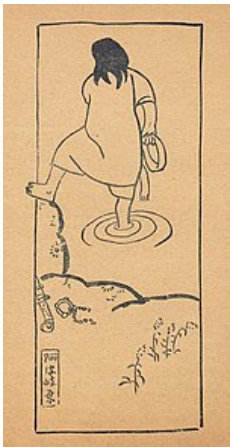
During the medieval and early modern periods, the deity was also referred to as 'Tenshō Daijin' (the *on'yomi* of 天照大神) or 'Amateru Ongami' (an alternate reading of the same).^{[25][26][27][28]}

The name *Amaterasu Ōmikami* has been translated into English in different ways. While a number of authors such as [Donald Philippi](#) rendered it as 'heaven-illuminating great deity',^[29] [Basil Hall Chamberlain](#) argued (citing the authority of [Motoori Norinaga](#)) that it is more accurately understood to mean 'shining in heaven' (because the auxiliary *su* is merely honorific, not causative, such interpretation as 'to make heaven shine' would miss the mark), and accordingly translated it as 'Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity'.^[30] Gustav Heldt's 2014 translation of the *Kojiki*, meanwhile, renders it as "the great and mighty spirit Heaven Shining."^[31]

Mythology

In classical mythology

Birth



Izanagi purifying himself (*misogi*) by immersing in the Tachibana River (*Natori Shunsen*)



Installation of the Sun Goddess (Amaterasu)

Both the *Kojiki* (c. 712 CE) and the *Nihon Shoki* (720 CE) agree in their description of Amaterasu as the daughter of the god [Izanagi](#) and the elder sister of [Tsukuyomi](#), the deity of the [moon](#), and [Susanoo](#), the god of storms and seas. The circumstances surrounding the birth of these three deities, known as the "Three Precious Children" (三貴子, *mihashira no uzu no miko* or *sankishi*), however, vary between sources:

- In the *Kojiki*, Amaterasu, Tsukuyomi and Susanoo were born when Izanagi went to "[the plain of] Awagihara by the river-mouth of Tachibana in [Himuka](#) in [the island of] [Tsukushi](#)"^[b] and [bathed](#) (*misogi*) in the river to purify himself after visiting [Yomi](#), the underworld, in a failed attempt to rescue his deceased

Amaterasu

Goddess of the [sun](#) and the [universe](#); the mythical ancestress of the [Imperial House of Japan](#)



Amaterasu emerging from the cave, [Ama-no-Iwato](#), to which she once retreated (detail of woodblock print by [Kunisada](#))

Other names	<div><i>Amaterasu-Ōmikami</i> (天照大神, 天照大神) <i>Amaterasu Ōkami</i> (天照大神) <i>Amaterasu Sume(r) Ōmikami</i> (天照皇大神) <i>Amaterashimasu Sume(r) Ōmikami</i> (天照坐皇大神) <i>Amaterasu Ōhirume no Mikoto</i> (天照大日雲尊) <i>Ōhirume no Muchi no Kami</i> (大日雲貴神) <i>Ōhirume no Mikoto</i> (大日雲尊) <i>Hi no Kami</i> (日神) <i>Tsukisakaki Izu no Mitama Amazakaru Mukatsuhime no Mikoto</i> (撞賢木蔽之御魂天疎向津媛命) <i>Tenshō Kōtaijin</i> (天照皇大神) <i>Tenshō Daijin</i> (天照大神)</div>
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Planet	Sun
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wife, [Izanami](#). Amaterasu was born when Izanagi washed his left eye, Tsukuyomi was born when he washed his right eye, and Susanoo was born when he washed his nose. Izanagi then appoints Amaterasu to rule [Takamagahara](#) (the "Plain of High Heaven"), Tsukuyomi the night, and Susanoo the seas.^{[35][36][37]}

Texts	<i>Kojiki</i> , <i>Nihon Shoki</i> , <i>Sendai Kuji Hongi</i>
Genealogy	
Parents	Izanagi (<i>Kojiki</i>) Izanagi and Izanami (<i>Nihon Shoki</i>)
Siblings	Tsukuyomi Susanoo (and <i>others</i>)
Consort	Unnamed sun god (One Myth) ^[1] Tsukuyomi (some myths)
Children	Ame-no-Oshihomimi Ame no Hohi Amatsuhikone Ikutsuhikone Kumanokusubi

After this Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto consulted together, saying:—"We have now produced the Great-eight-island country, with the mountains, rivers, herbs, and trees. Why should we not produce someone who shall be lord of the universe?" They then together produced the Sun-Goddess, who was called Oho-hiru-me no muchi. [...]

The resplendent lustre of this child shone throughout all the six quarters. Therefore the two Deities rejoiced, saying:—"We have had many children, but none of them have been equal to this wondrous infant. She ought not to be kept long in this land, but we ought of our own accord to send her at once to Heaven, and entrust to her the affairs of Heaven."

At this time Heaven and Earth were still not far separated, and therefore they sent her up to Heaven by the ladder of Heaven.^[6]

- A variant legend recorded in the *Shoki* has Izanagi begetting Ōhirume (Amaterasu) by holding a [bronze mirror](#) in his left hand, Tsukuyomi by holding another mirror in his right hand, and Susanoo by turning his head and looking sideways.^[38]
- A third variant in the *Shoki* has Izanagi and Izanami begetting the sun, the moon, Hiruko, and Susanoo, as in the main narrative. Their final child, the fire god [Kagutsuchi](#), caused Izanami's death (as in the *Kojiki*).^[38]
- A fourth variant relates a similar story to that found in the *Kojiki*, wherein the three gods are born when Izanagi washed himself in the river of Tachibana after going to Yomi.^[39]

Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi

One of the variant legends in the *Shoki* relates that Amaterasu ordered her brother Tsukuyomi to go down to the terrestrial world ([Ashihara-no-Nakatsukuni](#), the "Central Land of Reed-Plains") and visit the goddess [Ukemochi](#). When Ukemochi [vomited foodstuffs out of her mouth](#) and presented them to Tsukuyomi at a banquet, a disgusted and offended Tsukuyomi slew her and went back to Takamagahara. This act upset Amaterasu, causing her to split away from Tsukuyomi, thus separating night from day.

Amaterasu then sent another god, Ame-no-Kumahito (天熊人), who found various food-crops and animals emerging from Ukemochi's corpse.

On the crown of her head there had been produced the [ox](#) and the [horse](#); on the top of her forehead there had been produced [millet](#); over her eyebrows there had been produced the [silkworm](#); within her eyes there had been produced [panic](#); in her belly there had been produced [rice](#); in her genitals there had been produced [wheat](#), large beans and small beans.^[40]

Amaterasu had the grains collected and sown for humanity's use and, putting the silkworms in her mouth, reeled thread from them. From this began [agriculture](#) and [sericulture](#).^{[40][41]}

This account is not found in the *Kojiki*, where a similar story is instead told of Susanoo and the goddess [Ōgetsuhime](#).^[42]

Amaterasu and Susanoo

When Susanoo, the youngest of the three divine siblings, was expelled by his father Izanagi for his troublesome nature and incessant wailing on account of missing his deceased mother Izanami, he first went up to Takamagahara to say farewell to Amaterasu. A suspicious Amaterasu went out to meet him dressed in male clothing and clad in armor, at which Susanoo proposed a trial by pledge (*ukehi*) to prove his sincerity. In the ritual, the two gods each chewed and spat out an object carried by the other (in some variants, an item they each possessed). Five (or six) gods and three goddesses were born as a result; Amaterasu adopted the males as her sons and gave the females – later known as the [three Munakata goddesses](#) – to Susanoo.^{[43][44][45]}



Susanoo throwing the heavenly horse into Amaterasu's loom

Susanoo, declaring that he had won the trial as he had produced deities of the required gender,^[c] then "raged with victory" and proceeded to wreak havoc by destroying his sister's rice fields and defecating in her palace. While Amaterasu tolerated Susanoo's behavior at first, his "misdeeds did not cease, but became even more flagrant" until one day, he bore a hole in the rooftop of Amaterasu's weaving hall and hurled the "heavenly piebald horse" (天斑駒, *ame no fuchikoma*), which he had flayed alive, into it. One of Amaterasu's weaving maidens was alarmed and struck her genitals against a [weaving shuttle](#), killing her. In response, a furious Amaterasu shut herself inside the [Ame-no-Iwayato](#) (天岩屋戸, 'Heavenly Rock-Cave Door', also known as Ama-no-Iwato), plunging heaven and earth into total darkness.^{[46][47]}

The main account in the *Shoki* has Amaterasu wounding herself with the shuttle when Susanoo threw the flayed horse in her weaving hall,^[20] while a variant account identifies the goddess who was killed during this incident as Wakahirume-no-Mikoto (稚日女尊, lit. 'young woman of the sun / day(time)').^[48]

Whereas the above accounts identify Susanoo's flaying of the horse as the immediate cause for Amaterasu hiding herself, yet another variant in the *Shoki* instead portrays it to be Susanoo defecating in her seat:

In one writing it is said:—"The august Sun Goddess took an enclosed rice-field and made it her Imperial rice-field. Now Sosa no wo no Mikoto, in spring, filled up the channels and broke down the divisions, and in autumn, when the grain was formed, he forthwith stretched round them division ropes. Again when the Sun-Goddess was in her Weaving-Hall, he flayed alive a piebald colt and flung it into the Hall. In all these various matters his conduct was rude in the highest degree. Nevertheless, the Sun-Goddess, out of her friendship for him, was not indignant or resentful, but took everything calmly and with forbearance.

When the time came for the Sun-Goddess to celebrate the feast of first-fruits, Sosa no wo no Mikoto secretly voided excrement under her august seat in the New Palace. The Sun-Goddess, not knowing this, went straight there and took her seat. Accordingly the Sun-Goddess drew herself up, and was sickened. She therefore was enraged, and straightway took up her abode in the Rock-cave of Heaven, and fastened its Rock-door.^[49]

The Heavenly Rock Cave



Amaterasu emerges from the [Heavenly Rock Cave](#), bringing sunlight back to the world (Triptych by [Kunisada](#))



Origin of Music and Dance at the Rock Door by Shunsai Toshimasa, 1887



The Origin of Iwato Kagura by Utagawa Kunisada c1844

After Amaterasu hid herself in the cave, the gods, led by [Omoikane](#), the god of wisdom, conceived a plan to lure her out:

[The gods] gathered together the [long-crying birds](#) of Tokoyo and caused them to cry. (...) They uprooted by the very roots the flourishing [ma-sakaki](#) trees of the mountain Ame-no-Kaguyama; to the upper branches they affixed long strings of myriad [magatama](#) beads; in the middle branches they hung [a large-dimensioned mirror](#); in the lower branches they suspended white *nikite* cloth and blue *nikite* cloth.

These various objects were held in his hands by [Futotama-no-Mikoto](#) as solemn offerings, and [Ame-no-Koyane-no-Mikoto](#) intoned a solemn *liturgy*.

[Ame-no-Tajikarao-no-Kami](#) stood concealed beside the door, while [Ame-no-Uzume-no-Mikoto](#) bound up her sleeves with a cord of heavenly *hikage* vine, tied around her head a head-band of the heavenly *masaki* vine, bound together bundles of [sasa](#) leaves to hold in her hands, and overturning a bucket before the heavenly rock-cave door, stamped resoundingly upon it. Then she became divinely possessed, exposed her breasts, and pushed her skirt-band down to her genitals.

Then Takamanohara shook as the eight-hundred myriad deities laughed at once.^[50]

Inside the cave, Amaterasu is surprised that the gods should show such mirth in her absence. Ame-no-Uzume answered that they were celebrating because another god greater than her had appeared. Curious, Amaterasu slid the boulder blocking the cave's entrance and peeked out, at which Ame-no-Koyane and Futodama brought out the mirror (the [Yata-no-Kagami](#)) and held it before her. As Amaterasu, struck by her own reflection (apparently thinking it to be the other deity Ame-no-Uzume spoke of), approached the mirror, Ame-no-Tajikarao took her hand and pulled her out of the cave, which was then immediately sealed with a [straw rope](#), preventing her from going back inside. Thus was light restored to the world.^{[51][52][53]}

As punishment for his unruly conduct, Susanoo was then driven out of Takamagahara by the other gods. Going down to earth, he arrived at the [land of Izumo](#), where he killed the monstrous serpent [Yamata no Orochi](#) to rescue the goddess [Kushinadahime](#), whom he eventually married. From the serpent's carcass Susanoo found the sword Ame-no-Murakumo-no-Tsurugi (天叢雲剣, 'Sword of the Gathering Clouds of Heaven'), also known as [Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi](#) (草薙剣 'Grass-Cutting Sword'), which he presented to Amaterasu as a reconciliatory gift.^{[42][54][55]}

The subjugation of Ashihara-no-Nakatsukuni



Artist's impression of the three
Imperial Regalia of Japan

After a time, Amaterasu and the [primordial deity Takamimusubi](#) (also known as Takagi-no-Kami) declared that Ashihara-no-Nakatsukuni, which was then being ruled over by [Ōkuninushi](#) (also known as Ō(a)namuchi), the descendant (*Kojiki*) or the son (*Shoki*) of Susanoo, should be pacified and put under the jurisdiction of their progeny, claiming it to be teeming with "numerous deities which shone with a lustre like that of fireflies, and evil deities which buzzed like flies".^[56] Amaterasu ordered [Ame-no-Oshihomimi](#), the firstborn of the five male children born during her contest with Susanoo, to go down to earth and establish his rule over it. However, after inspecting the land below, he deemed it to be in an uproar and refused to go any further.^{[57][58]} At the advice of Omoikane and the other deities, Amaterasu then dispatched another of her five sons, [Ame no Hohi](#). Upon arriving, however, Ame no Hohi began to curry favor with Ōkuninushi and did not send back any report for three years.^{[58][56]} The heavenly deities then sent a third messenger, [Ame-no-Wakahiko](#), who also ended up siding with Ōkuninushi and marrying his daughter Shitateruhime. After eight years, a female [pheasant](#) was sent to question Ame-no-Wakahiko, who killed it with his bow and arrow. The blood-stained arrow flew straight up to Takamagahara at the feet of Amaterasu and Takamimusubi, who then threw it back to earth with a curse, killing Ame-no-Wakahiko in his sleep.^{[59][60][61]}

The preceding messengers having thus failed to complete their task, the heavenly gods finally sent the warrior deities [Futsunushi](#) and [Takemikazuchi](#)^[d] to remonstrate with Ōkuninushi. At the advice of his son [Kotoshironushi](#), Ōkuninushi agreed to abdicate and left the physical realm to govern the unseen spirit world, which was given to him in exchange. The two gods then went around Ashihara-no-Nakatsukuni, killing those who resisted them and rewarding those who rendered submission, before going back to heaven.^[68]



[Ninigi](#) and his retinue at Mount Takachiho

With the earth now pacified, Amaterasu and Takamimusubi again commanded Ame-no-Oshihomimi to descend and rule it. He, however, again demurred and suggested that his son [Ninigi](#) be sent instead. Amaterasu thus bequeathed to Ninigi, the sword Susanoo gave her, along with the two items used to lure her out of the Ame-no-Iwayato: the mirror Yata-no-Kagami and the jewel [Yasakani no Magatama](#). With a number of gods serving as his retinue, Ninigi came down from heaven to [Mount Takachiho](#) in the [land of Himuka](#) and built his palace there. Ninigi became the ancestor of the [emperors of Japan](#), while the mirror, jewel, and sword he brought with him became the [three sacred treasures](#) of the imperial house. Five of the gods who accompanied him in his descent - Ame-no-Koyane, Futodama, Ame-no-Uzume, [Ishikoridome](#) (the maker of the mirror), and [Tamanoya](#) (the maker of the jewel) - meanwhile became the ancestors of the clans involved in court ceremonial such as the [Nakatomi](#) and the [Inbe](#).^{[69][70][71]}

Emperor Jimmu and the Yatagarasu



[Yatagarasu](#) the sun crow guiding Emperor Jimmu and his men towards the plain of [Yamato](#)

Many years later, Ninigi's great-grandson, Kamuyamato-Iwarebiko (later known as [Emperor Jimmu](#)), decided to leave Himuka in search of a new home with his elder brother Itsuse. Migrating eastward, they encountered various gods and local tribes who either submitted to them or resisted them. After Itsuse died of wounds sustained during a battle against a chieftain named Nagasunehiko, Iwarebiko retreated and went to [Kumano](#), located on the southern part of the [Kii Peninsula](#). While there, he and his army were enchanted by a god in the shape of a giant bear and fell into a deep sleep. At that moment, a local named Takakuraji had a dream in which Amaterasu and Takamimusubi commanded the god Takemikazuchi to help Iwarebiko. Takemikazuchi then dropped his sword, [Futsu-no-Mitama](#), into Takakuraji's storehouse, ordering him to give it to Iwarebiko. Upon waking up and discovering the sword inside the storehouse, Takakuraji went to where Iwarebiko was and presented it to him. The magic power of the Futsu-no-Mitama immediately exterminated the evil gods of the region and roused Iwarebiko and his men from their slumber.

Continuing their journey, the army soon found themselves stranded in the mountains. Takamimusubi (so the *Kojiki*) or Amaterasu (*Shoki*) then told Iwarebiko in a dream that the giant crow [Yatagarasu](#) would be sent to guide them in their way. Soon enough, the bird appeared and led Iwarebiko and his men to safety. At length, Iwarebiko arrived at the [land of Yamato](#) (modern [Nara Prefecture](#)) and defeated Nagasunehiko, thereby avenging his brother Itsuse. He then established his palace-capital at [Kashihara](#) and ruled therein.^{[72][73]}

Enshrinement in Ise



[Hibara Shrine](#) at the foot of [Mount Miwa](#) in [Sakurai, Nara Prefecture](#). The shrine is identified as the place where the Yata-no-Kagami and the Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi were first enshrined after they were removed from the imperial palace.

An anecdote concerning [Emperor Sujin](#) relates that Amaterasu (via the [Yata-no-Kagami](#) and the [Kusanagi sword](#)) and [Yamato-no-Okunitama](#), the [tutelary deity](#) of Yamato, were originally worshipped in the great hall of the imperial palace. When a series of plagues broke out during Sujin's reign, he "dreaded [...] the power of these Gods, and did not feel secure in their dwelling together." He thus entrusted the mirror and the sword to his daughter [Toyosukiirihime](#), who brought them to the village of Kasanuhi,^{[74][75]} and she would become the first [Saio](#).^[76] and delegated the worship of [Yamato-no-Okunitama](#) to another daughter, Nunakiirihime. When the pestilence showed no sign of abating, he then performed [divination](#), which revealed the plague to have been caused by [Ōmononushi](#), the god of [Mount Miwa](#). When the god was offered proper worship as per his demands, the epidemic ceased.^{[74][75]}

During the reign of Sujin's son and successor, [Emperor Suinin](#), custody of the sacred treasures were transferred from Toyosukiirihime to Suinin's daughter [Yamatohime](#), who took them first to "Sasahata in Uda" to the east of Miwa. Heading north to [Ōmi](#), she then eastwards to [Mino](#) and proceeded south to [Ise](#), where she received a revelation from Amaterasu:

Now Ama-terasu no Oho-kami instructed Yamato-hime no Mikoto, saying:—"The province of Ise, of the divine wind, is the land whither repair the waves from the eternal world, the successive waves. It is a secluded and pleasant land. In this land I wish to dwell." In compliance, therefore, with the instruction of the Great Goddess, a shrine was erected to her in the province of Ise. Accordingly an [Abstinence Palace](#) was built at Kaha-kami in Isuzu. This was called the palace of Iso. It was there that Ama-terasu no Oho-kami first descended from Heaven.^[77]

This account serves as the origin myth of the [Grand Shrine of Ise](#), Amaterasu's chief place of worship.



[Yamato Takeru](#)

Later, when Suinin's grandson Prince Ousu (also known as [Yamato Takeru](#)) went to Ise to visit his aunt Yamatohime before going to conquer and pacify the [eastern regions](#) on the command of his father, [Emperor Keikō](#), he was given the divine sword to protect him in times of peril. It eventually came in handy when Yamato Takeru was lured onto an open grassland by a treacherous chieftain, who then set fire to the grass to entrap him. Desperate, Yamato Takeru used the sword to cut the grass around him (a variant in the *Shoki* has the sword miraculously mow the grass of its own accord) and lit a counter-fire to keep the fire away. This incident explains the sword's name ("Grass Cutter").^{[78][79]} On his way home from the east, Yamato Takeru – apparently blinded by [hubris](#) – left the Kusanagi in the care of his second wife, Miyazuhime of [Owari](#), and went to confront the god of [Mount Ibuki](#) on his own. Without the sword's protection, he fell prey to the god's enchantment and became ill and died afterwards.^{[80][81]} Thus the Kusanagi stayed in Owari, where it was enshrined in the [shrine of Atsuta](#).^[82]

Empress Jingū and Amaterasu's *aramitama*



[Hirota Shrine](#) in [Nishinomiya](#), [Hyōgo Prefecture](#), where Amaterasu's *aramitama* is enshrined

At one time, when [Emperor Chūai](#) was on a campaign against the [Kumaso](#) tribes of [Kyushu](#), his consort [Jingū](#) was possessed by unknown gods who told Chūai of a land rich in treasure located on the other side of the sea that is his for the taking. When Chūai doubted their words and accused them of being deceitful, the gods laid a curse upon him that he should die "without possessing this land." (The *Kojiki* and the *Shoki* diverge at this point: in the former, Chūai dies almost immediately after being cursed, while in the latter, he dies of a sudden illness a few months after.)^{[83][84]}



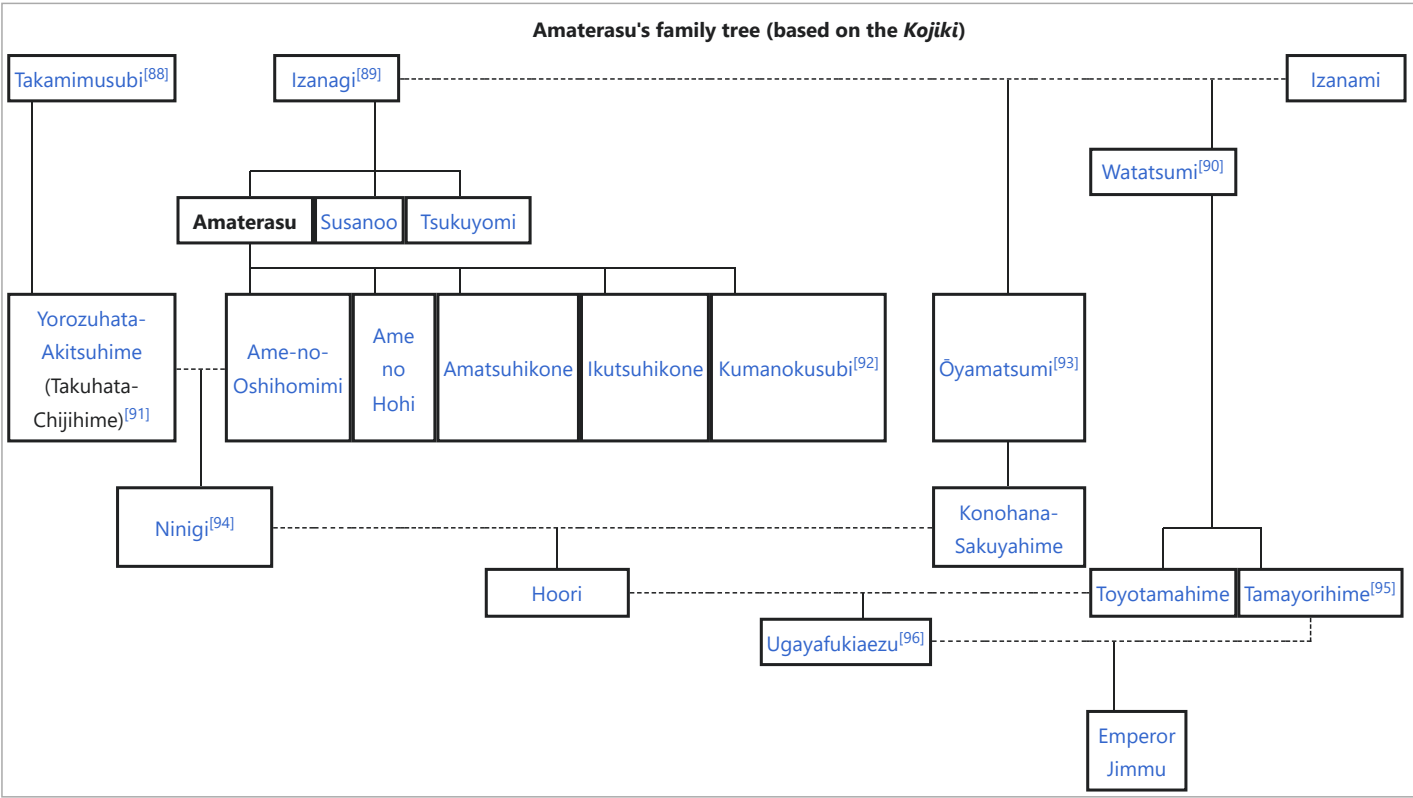
Empress Jingū

After Chūai's death, Jingū performed divination to ascertain which gods had spoken to her husband. The deities identified themselves as Tsukisakaki Izu no Mitama Amazakaru Mukatsuhime no Mikoto (撞賢木巖之御魂天疎向津媛命, 'The Awe-inspiring Spirit of the Planted *Sakaki*, the Lady of Sky-distant Mukatsu', usually interpreted as the *aramitama* or 'violent spirit' of Amaterasu), Kotoshironushi, and the three gods of Sumie (*Sumiyoshi*): *Uwatsutsunoo*, *Nakatsutsunoo*, and *Sokotsutsunoo*.^[e] Worshipping the gods in accordance with their instructions, Jingū then set out to conquer the promised land beyond the sea: the *three kingdoms of Korea*.^{[85][86]}

When Jingū returned victorious to Japan, she enshrined the deities in places of their own choosing; Amaterasu, warning Jingū not to take her *aramitama* along to the capital, instructed her to install it in *Hirota*, the harbor where the empress disembarked.^[87]

Family

Family tree



Consorts

She is a virgin goddess and never engages in sexual relationships.^[97] However, according to *Nozomu Kawamura*, she was a consort to a sun god^[98] and some telling stories place *Tsukuyomi* as her husband.^[99]

Siblings

Amaterasu has many siblings, most notably [Susanoo](#) and [Tsukiyomi](#).^[100] [Basil Hall Chamberlain](#) used the words "elder brother" to translate her dialog referring to Susanoo in the *Kojiki*, even though he noted that she was his elder sister.^[101] The word (which was also used by Izanami to address her elder brother and husband Izanagi) was *nase* (phonetically spelt 那勢^[102] in the *Kojiki*; modern dictionaries use the semantic spelling 汝兄, whose [kanji](#) literally mean 'my elder brother'), an ancient term used only by females to refer to their brothers, who had higher status than them. (As opposed to males using *nanimo* (汝妹, 'my younger sister') (那邇妹 in the *Kojiki*) to refer to their sisters, who had lower status than them.)^[103] The *Nihon Shoki* used the Chinese word 弟 ('younger brother') instead.^[104]

Some tellings say she had a sister named [Wakahirume](#) who was a weaving maiden and helped Amaterasu weave clothes for the other kami in [heaven](#). Wakahirume was later accidentally killed by Susanoo.^[105]

Other traditions say she had an older brother named [Hiruko](#).^[106]

Descendants

Amaterasu has five sons, [Ame-no-oshihomimi](#), [Ame no Hohi](#), [Amatsuhikone](#), [Ikutsuhikone](#), and [Kumanokusubi](#), who were given birth to by Susanoo by chewing her hair jewels. According to one account in the *Nihon Shoki*, it was because these children were male that Susanoo won during the ritual to prove his intent, even though they were not his children, but hers. This explanation of the outcome of the ritual contradicts that in the *Kojiki*, according to which it was because she gave birth to female children using his sword, and those children were his. The *Kojiki* claims he won because he had daughters to whom she gave birth, while the *Nihon Shoki* claims he won because he himself gave birth to her sons. Several figures and noble clans claim descent from Amaterasu most notably [the Japanese imperial family](#) through Emperor Jimmu who descended from her grandson [Ninigi](#).^{[107][99]}

Her son [Ame no Hohi](#) is considered the ancestral kami of clans in [Izumo](#) which includes the [Haji clan](#), [Sugawara clan](#), and the [Senge clan](#). The legendary [sumo](#) wrestler [Nomi no Sukune](#) is believed to be a 14th-generation descendant of Amenohohi.^{[108][109][110][111]}

Worship



[Amanoiwato Shrine](#) (天岩戸神社)

The [Ise Grand Shrine](#) (伊勢神宮 *Ise Jingū*) located in [Ise](#), [Mie Prefecture](#), [Japan](#), houses the inner shrine, Naiku, dedicated to Amaterasu. Her sacred mirror, [Yata no Kagami](#), is said to be kept at this shrine as one of the [Imperial regalia objects](#).^[112] A ceremony known as [Jingū Shikinen Sengū](#) (神宮式年遷宮) is held every twenty years at this shrine to honor the many deities enshrined, which is formed by 125 shrines altogether. New shrine buildings are built at a location adjacent to the site first. After the transfer of the object of worship, new clothing and treasure and offering food to the goddess the old buildings are taken apart.^[112] The building materials taken apart are given to many other shrines and buildings to renovate.^[112] This practice is a part of the Shinto faith and has been practiced since the year 690 CE, but is not only for Amaterasu but also for many other deities enshrined in Ise Grand Shrine.^[113] Additionally, from the late 7th century to the 14th century, an unmarried princess of the Imperial Family, called "[Saiō](#)" (斎王) or *itsuki no miko* (斎皇女), served as the sacred priestess of Amaterasu at the Ise Shrine upon every new dynasty.^[114]

The [Amanoiwato Shrine](#) (天岩戸神社) in [Takachiho](#), [Miyazaki Prefecture](#), [Japan](#) is also dedicated to Amaterasu and sits above the gorge containing [Ama-no-Iwato](#).

The worship of Amaterasu to the exclusion of other *kami* has been described as "the cult of the sun."^[115] This phrase may also refer to the early pre-archipelagoan worship of the sun.^[115]

According to the *Engishiki* (延喜式) and *Sandai Jitsuroku* (三代実録) of the **Heian period**, the sun goddess had many shrines named "Amateru" or "Amateru-mitama", which were mostly located in the **Kinki** area. However, there have also been records of a shrine on **Tsushima Island**, coined as either "Teruhi Gongen" or the "Shining Sun Deity" during medieval times. It was later found that such a shrine was meant for a male sun deity named Ameno-himitama.^[114]

Amaterasu was also once worshiped at Hinokuma shrines. The Hinokuma shrines were used to worship the goddess by the Ama people in the **Kii Provinces**. Because the Ama people were believed to have been fishermen, researchers have conjectured that the goddess was also worshiped for a possible connection to the sea.^[114]

Amaterasu was thought by some in the early 20th century until after **World War II** to have "created the **Japanese archipelago** from the drops of water that fell from her spear"^[116] and in historic times, the spear was an item compared to the sun and **solar deities**.^[117]

Differences in worship

Amaterasu, while primarily being the goddess of the sun, is also sometimes worshiped as having connections with other aspects and forms of nature. Amaterasu can also be considered a goddess of the wind and typhoons alongside her brother, and even possibly death.^[118] There are many connections between local legends in the Ise region with other goddesses of nature, such as a nameless goddess of the underworld and sea. It is possible that Amaterasu's name became associated with these legends in the Shinto religion as it grew throughout Japan.^[119]

One source interprets from the Heavenly Rock Cave myth that Amaterasu was seen as being responsible for the normal cycle of day and night.^[120]

A historical myth holds that she painted the islands of Japan into being, alongside her siblings **Susanoo** and **Tsukuyomi**.

In contrast, Amaterasu, while enshrined at other locations, also can be seen as the goddess that represents Japan and its ethnicity. The many differences in Shinto religion and mythology can be due to how different local gods and beliefs clashed.^[119] In the Meiji Era, the belief in Amaterasu fought against the Izumo belief in **Ōkuninushi** for spiritual control over the land of Japan. During this time, the religious nature of Okininushi may have been changed to be included in Shinto mythology.^[121] Osagawara Shouzo built shrines in other countries to mainly spread Japan's culture and Shinto religion. It, however, was usually seen as the worshiping of Japan itself, rather than Amaterasu.^[122] Most of these colonial and overseas shrines were destroyed after WWII.^[123]

Other worshiped forms

Snake

Outside of being worshiped as a sun goddess, some have argued that Amaterasu was once related to snakes.^[114] There was a legend circulating among the Ise Priests that essentially described an encounter of Amaterasu sleeping with the **Saiō** every night in the form of a snake or lizard, evidenced by fallen scales in the priestess' bed.^[114] This was recorded by a medieval monk in his diary, which stated that "in ancient times Amaterasu was regarded as a snake deity or as a sun deity."^[124] In the Ise kanjō, the god's snake form is considered an embodiment of the "three poisons", namely greed, anger, and ignorance.^[125] Amaterasu is also linked to a snake cult, which is also tied to the theory that the initial gender of the goddess was male.^[124]

Dragon



Amaterasu was identified with [Mahavairocana](#).

In general, some of these Amaterasu–dragon associations have been in reference to Japanese plays. One example has been within the [Chikubushima](#) tradition in which the dragon goddess [Benzaiten](#) was the emanation of Amaterasu.^[126] Following that, in the Japanese epic, [Taiheki](#), one of the characters, Nitta Yoshisada (新田義貞), made comparisons with Amaterasu and a dragon with the quote: "I have heard that the Sun Goddess of Ise ... conceals her true being in the august image of [Vairocana](#), and that she has appeared in this world in the guise of a dragon god of the blue ocean."^[126]

Another tradition of the Heavenly Cave story depicts Amaterasu as a "dragon-fox" (*shinko* or *tatsugitsune*) during her descent to the famed cave because it is a type of animal/*kami* that emits light from its entire body.^[127]

Relation to women's positions in early Japanese society

Because Amaterasu has the highest position among the Shinto deities, there has been debate on her influence and relation to women's positions in early Japanese society. Some scholars have argued that the goddess' presence and high stature within the *kami* system could suggest that early rulers in Japan were female.^[128] Others have argued the goddess' presence implies strong influences female priests had in Japanese politics and religion.^[128]

See also

- [Amaterasu particle](#)
- [Dakini](#)
- [First sunrise](#)
- [Himiko](#)
- [List of solar deities](#)
- [Ōkami Amaterasu](#)
- [Shinto in popular culture](#)
- [Solar Myths](#)
- [Tokapcup-kamuy](#)
- [Vairocana](#)
- [Zalmoxis](#)

Notes

- a. Rendered as "august" by [Basil Hall Chamberlain](#) in his translation of the *Kojiki*.
- b. 'Awagihara' or 'Awakihara' ([Old Japanese](#): *Apaki,para*) is a toponym meaning "a plain covered with *awagi* shrubs". Its actual location is considered uncertain,^[32] although a pond near [Eda Shrine](#) in modern-day Awakigahara-chō, [Miyazaki](#), [Miyazaki Prefecture](#) (corresponding to the historical [Himuka / Hyūga Province](#)) is identified in local lore as the exact spot where Izanagi purified himself.^{[33][34]}
- c. Female in the *Kojiki*, male in the *Shoki*.
- d. So the *Nihon Shoki*, the *Kogo Shūi*,^[62] and the *Sendai Kuji Hongi*. In the *Kojiki* (where Futsunushi is not mentioned), the envoys sent by the heavenly gods are Takemikazuchi and the bird-boat deity [Ame-no-Torifune](#).^{[63][64]} In the *Izumo no Kuni no Miyatsuko no Kan'yogoto* ("Congratulatory Words of the *Kuni no Miyatsuko* of Izumo" - a *norito* recited by the governor of Izumo Province before the imperial court during his appointment), Futsunushi's companion is Ame-no-Oshihomimi's son Ame no Hinadori.^{[65][66][67]}
- e. The *Kojiki*'s account meanwhile identifies the gods as Amaterasu and the three Sumiyoshi deities.^[85]

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