

= Inari ?kami =

Inari ?kami (稲荷神 , also Oinari) is the Japanese kami of foxes , of fertility , rice , tea and Sake , of agriculture and industry , of general prosperity and worldly success , and one of the principal kami of Shinto . In earlier Japan , Inari was also the patron of swordsmiths and merchants . Represented as male , female , or androgynous , Inari is sometimes seen as a collective of three or five individual kami . Inari appears to have been worshipped since the founding of a shrine at Inari Mountain in 711 AD , although some scholars believe that worship started in the late 5th century .

Worship of Inari spread across Japan in the Edo period , and by the 16th century Inari had become the patron of blacksmiths and the protector of warriors . Inari is a popular figure in both Shinto and Buddhist beliefs in Japan . More than one @-@ third (32 @,@ 000) of the Shinto shrines in Japan are dedicated to Inari . Modern corporations , such as cosmetic company Shiseido , continue to revere Inari as a patron kami , with shrines atop their corporate headquarters .

Inari 's foxes , or kitsune , are pure white and act as their messengers .

= = Depiction = =

Inari has been depicted both as male and as female . The most popular representations of Inari , according to scholar Karen Ann Smyers , are a young female food goddess , an old man carrying rice , and an androgynous bodhisattva . No one view is correct ; the preferred gender of depiction varies according to regional traditions and individual beliefs . Because of their close association with kitsune , Inari is often believed to be a fox ; though this belief is widespread , both Shinto and Buddhist priests discourage it . Inari also appears in the form of a snake or dragon , and one folktale has Inari appear to a wicked man in the shape of a monstrous spider as a way of teaching him a lesson .

Inari is sometimes identified with other mythological figures . Some scholars suggest that Inari is the figure known in classical Japanese mythology as Ukanomitama or the Kojiki 's ?getsu @-@ Hime ; others suggest Inari is the same figure as Toyouke . Some take Inari to be identical to any grain kami .

Inari 's female aspect is often identified or conflated with Dakiniten , a Buddhist deity who is a Japanese transformation of the Indian dakini , or with Benzaiten of the Seven Lucky Gods . Dakiniten is portrayed as a female or androgynous bodhisattva riding a flying white fox . Inari 's association with Buddhism may have begun in the 8th century , when Shingon Buddhist monk and founder , K?kai , took over administration of the temple of T?ji , and chose Inari as a protector of the temple . Thus , Inari is still closely associated with Shingon Buddhism to this day .

Inari is often venerated as a collective of three deities (Inari sanza) ; since the Kamakura period , this number has sometimes increased to five kami (Inari goza) . However , the identification of these kami has varied over time . According to records of Fushimi Inari , the oldest and perhaps most prominent Inari shrine , these kami have included Izanagi , Izanami , Ninigi , and Wakumusubi , in addition to the food deities previously mentioned . The five kami today identified with Inari at Fushimi Inari are Ukanomitama , Sarutahiko , Omiyanome , Tanaka , and Shi . However , at Takekoma Inari , the second @-@ oldest Inari shrine in Japan , the three enshrined deities are Ukanomitama , Ukemochi , and Wakumusubi . According to the Nij?ni shiki , the three kami are ?miyame no mikoto (water ,) Ukanomitama no mikoto (grain ,) and Sarutahiko no mikami (land .)

The fox and the wish @-@ fulfilling jewel are prominent symbols of Inari . Other common elements in depictions of Inari , and sometimes of their kitsune , include a sickle , a sheaf or sack of rice , and a sword . Another belonging was their whip ? although they were hardly known to use it , it was a powerful weapon that was used to burn people 's crops of rice .

= = History = =

The origin of Inari worship is not entirely clear . The first recorded use of the present @-@ day kanji

(characters) of Inari 's name , which mean " carrying rice " , (literally " rice load ") was in the Ruij? Kokushi in 892 AD . Other sets of kanji with the same phonetic readings , most of which contained a reference to rice , were in use earlier , and most scholars agree that the name Inari is derived from ine @-@ nari (growing rice) (???) . The worship of Inari is known to have existed as of 711 AD , the official founding date of the shrine at Inari Mountain in Fushimi , Kyoto . Scholars such as Kazuo Higo believe worship was conducted for centuries before that date ; they suggest that the Hata clan began the formal worship of Inari as an agriculture kami in the late fifth century . The name Inari does not appear in classical Japanese mythology .

By the Heian period , Inari worship began to spread . In 823 AD , after Emperor Saga presented the T? @-@ ji temple to K?kai , the founder of the Shingon Buddhist sect , the latter designated Inari as its resident protector kami . In 827 , the court granted Inari the lower fifth rank , which further increased the deity 's popularity in the capital . Inari 's rank was subsequently increased , and by 942 , Emperor Suzaku granted Inari the top rank in thanks for overcoming rebellions . At this time , the Fushimi Inari @-@ taisha shrine was among the twenty @-@ two shrines chosen by the court to receive imperial patronage , a high honor . The second Inari shrine , Takekoma Inari , was established in the late ninth century .

Inari 's popularity continued to grow . The Fushimi shrine , already a popular pilgrimage site , gained wide renown when it became an imperial pilgrimage site in 1072 . By 1338 , the shrine 's festival was said to rival the Gion Festival in splendor .

In 1468 , during the ?nin War , the entire Fushimi shrine complex was burned . Rebuilding took about thirty years ; the new building was consecrated in 1499 . While the old complex had enshrined three kami in separate buildings , the new one enshrined five kami in a single building . The new shrine also included a Buddhist temple building for the first time , and the hereditary priesthood was expanded to include the Kada clan .

During the Edo period , Inari worship spread across Japan ; it became especially prominent in Edo . Smyers attributes this spread to the movement of daimyo (feudal lords) . Inari had by the sixteenth century become the patron of blacksmiths and the protector of warriors ? for this reason , many castle compounds in Japan contain Inari shrines ? and the daimyo took their belief in their protector kami with them when they relocated to a new domain . Inari 's divine role continued to expand ; on the coast , they became a protector of fishermen ; in Edo , they were invoked to prevent fires . They became the patron of actors and of prostitutes , since their shrines were often found near the pleasure quarters where these individuals lived . They began to be worshipped as the Desire @-@ Fulfilling Inari , a deity of luck and prosperity ; a common saying in Osaka was By? K?b? , yoku Inari (For sickness [pray to] K?b? , for desires [pray to] Inari) . Ironically , Inari also began to be petitioned for good health ; they are credited with curing such diverse afflictions as coughs , toothaches , broken bones , and syphilis . Women prayed to Inari to grant them children .

After a government decree mandated the separation of Buddhist and Shinto beliefs , many Inari shrines underwent changes . At Fushimi Inari , for instance , structures that were obviously Buddhist were torn down . Among the populace , however , the blended form of worship continued . Some Buddhist temples , such as Toyokawa Inari , maintained Inari worship by arguing that they had always been devoted to a Buddhist deity (often Dakiniten) , which the common folk had mistaken as Inari .

In the Tokugawa period , when money replaced rice as the measure of wealth in Japan , Inari 's role as a kami of worldly prosperity was expanded to include all aspects of finance , business , and industry . At the beginning of the eighteenth century , followers of Inari at the Ginza mint struck coins meant for offerings to Inari , which featured pictures of two foxes and a jewel or the characters for long life and good luck .

= = Shrines and offerings = =

Inari is a popular deity with shrines and temples located throughout most of Japan . According to a 1985 survey by the National Association of Shinto Shrines , 32 @,@ 000 shrines ? more than one @-@ third of Shinto shrines in Japan ? are dedicated to Inari . This number includes only Shinto

shrines with full @-@ time resident priests ; if small roadside or field shrines , shrines kept in a home or corporate office , smaller shrines without full @-@ time resident priests , and Buddhist temples were included , the number would increase by at least an order of magnitude .

The entrance to an Inari shrine is usually marked by one or more vermilion torii and some statues of kitsune , which are often adorned with red yodarekake (votive bibs) by worshippers out of respect . This red color has come to be identified with Inari , because of the prevalence of its use among Inari shrines and their torii . The main shrine is the Fushimi Inari Shrine in Fushimi , Kyoto , Japan , where the paths up the shrine hill are marked in this fashion . The kitsune statues are at times taken for a form of Inari , and they typically come in pairs , representing a male and a female . These fox statues hold a symbolic item in their mouths or beneath a front paw ? most often a jewel and a key , but a sheaf of rice , a scroll , or a fox cub are all common . Almost all Inari shrines , no matter how small , will feature at least a pair of these statues , usually flanking or on the altar or in front of the main sanctuary . The statues are rarely realistic ; they are typically stylized , portraying a seated animal with its tail in the air looking forward . Despite these common characteristics , the statues are highly individual in nature ; no two are quite the same .

Offerings of rice , sake , and other food are given at the shrine to appease and please these kitsune messengers , who are then expected to plead with Inari on the worshipper 's behalf . Inari @-@ zushi , a Japanese sushi roll of packaged fried tofu , is another popular offering . Fried tofu is believed to be a favorite food of Japanese foxes , and an Inari @-@ zushi roll has pointed corners that resemble fox ears , thus reinforcing the association . Priests do not normally offer these foods to the deity , but it is common for shops that line the approach to an Inari shrine to sell fried tofu for devotees to offer . Fox statues are often offered to Inari shrines by worshippers , and on occasion a stuffed and mounted fox is presented to a temple . At one time , some temples were home to live foxes that were venerated , but this is not current practice .

= = Festival = =

Inari 's traditional festival day was the first horse day (the sixth day) of the second month (nigatsu no hatsuuma) of the lunisolar calendar .

In some parts of Ky?sh? , a festival or praying period begins five days before the full moon in November ; occasionally it is extended to a full week . This is accompanied by bringing offerings of rice products to a shrine to Inari each day and receiving o @-@ mamori (protection charms) .