

URASHIMA TARO AND THE TAMATEBAKO

This is the story of the fisherman who is invited to **Ryugu-Jo**, the magnificent palace of the mistress of the sea, **Oto-hime**. Urashima thinks he has been away for 3 days (some texts say 3 months) but he has actually been gone for 300 years. Oto-hime sends him back to his village with a parting gift, a **Tamatebako**, which in fact contains his age.

Folktales of the same motif are found throughout Japan. The earliest version, in which the man is referred to as Sima no Ko, appears in the Tango fudoki itsubun (local records of the Tango Province.)

A shrine on the western coast of the Tango Peninsula, named Urashima Jinjya, contains an old document describing a man, Urashimako, who left his land in 478 A.D. and visited a land where people never die. He returned in 825 A.D. with a Tamatebako. Ten days later he opened the box, and a cloud of white smoke was released, which turned Urashimako into an old man. Later that year, after hearing the story, Jyunna Tenno ordered Ono-no-Takamura to build a shrine to commemorate Urashimako's strange voyage and to hold his spirit and the Tamatebako.

An origami Tamatebako was discovered in a Japanese book of wood engravings from the year 1734. It is a modular cube design that can be opened from any side. If more than one face of the model is opened, the cube falls apart and cannot easily be reconstructed. The model, and the directions for creating it, had been lost for centuries and only recently rediscovered.