Bon Lantern Dance in Northern Kyoto

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The Picture of the Nagatani Hachimangu Decorated Lantern（風流灯籠）Dance, one page of a document held in the collection of the National Museum of Japanese History, is an illustration of the decorated lantern dance of Northern Kyoto. This bon lantern dance was performed in the Nagatani Hachimangu shrine situated in the east of the Iwakura basin in Sakyō-ku, Kyoto. Although this tradition has disappeared today, participants included not only people living in the settlement of Nagatani, but villagers living in Iwakura, Hanazono and Nakamura as well. Various different motifs were made for the lanterns, including water mills, boats used by the imperial family and the elite, peonies, torii gates and shrines, plums, camellias, willows in tubs, and vases. The lanterns have a thick base so as to make it impossible for people to put on them. As for performing arts staged in Kyoto during Bon today, there is the Rokusai in southwest Kyoto, and the Amitabha Buddha Nembutsu dance and the Nichiren Sect Daimoku dance in northeastern Kyoto. Themes from the elaborate dances of the Early Modern Period that were popular in urban Kyoto up to the 16th century remain alive in the Rokusai stick dance (Chudo-ji temple and Mibu) and the Yasurai-hana of Imamiya. Traces of the lantern dance are to be found in only the north of Kyoto in rural villages located along the Wakasa highway along the Takano River. Today, there are but two dances that carry on the lantern dance legacy. These are the Hanagasa dance of Kuta in Sakyō-ku, and the Shamenchī dance in Yase, also in Sakyō-ku. Viewed from the standpoint of documents and illustrated materials from the Early Modern Period, a Bon decorated lantern dance filled with the Muromachi spirit was also performed at Nagatani Hachimangu.