The Hofu Tenmangu Shrine Museum displays a selection from some six hundred items that were presented to the shrine as votive offerings. This is a brief overview of some of the most important.

**Picture Scroll of the Shrine’s Origins**

**An illustrated biography 75 meters long**

The most important exhibit in the museum is the *Picture Scroll Showing the Origin of Matsuzaki Tenjin in Six Scrolls, Complete with Box* (*Matsuzaki Tenjin Engi Emaki Rokkan Hakotsuki*).

This is a set of six illustrated scrolls, with a total length of 75 meters when placed end to end. There are two versions of the scroll: the original Kamakura Edition, which dates from 1331, just before the end of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), and a copy called the Muromachi Edition, which was made between 1504 and 1520 during the Muromachi period (1336–1573).

The first five scrolls recount all the classic legends about Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) both in life—bidding farewell to the plum tree in his Kyoto garden on his way into exile; the ox at his funeral sitting down and refusing to move—and as the deity Tenjin—hurling vengeful thunderbolts at his enemies, for example. The sixth scroll, however, is devoted entirely to the story of Hofu Tenmangu. (The Matsuzaki in the title comes from the fact that Hofu Tenmangu was originally known as Matsuzaki Shrine.)

It was forbidden to exhibit the original Kamakura Edition of the scrolls outside Hofu Tenmangu. As a result, it was seldom unfurled and exposed to the light, and so the colors are extraordinarily vivid and the paper quite wrinkle-free for something almost 700-years-old. Ironically, because of this prohibition, the Kamakura Edition copy is actually in better condition than the Muromachi Edition, despite being nearly two hundred years older!

In addition to its artistic value, illustrations from the scroll proved of great practical use when the shrine had to be rebuilt after burning to the ground in 1952, allowing it to be reconstructed according to the original plans.

**Copper-Gilt Treasure Pagoda**

**A pagoda for peace**

This 40-centimeter-high Copper-Gilt Treasure Pagoda (*Kondo-hoto*) was presented to the shrine in 1172. It enshrines a bead of green glass designed to evoke an actual relic of the Buddha. In the late twelfth century when the pagoda was presented to the shrine, Japan was in a state of upheaval, as the imperial court was losing power to the shogun warlords. As the inscription on the pagoda explains, a local official, Fujiwara no Suesuk, presented the miniature pagoda to the temple to pray for the long life of Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa, rich harvests in Suo Province (modern Yamaguchi Prefecture), and the well-being of the people. The Copper-Gilt Treasure Pagoda is the oldest artifact of known provenance in all 12,000 Tenjin shrines in Japan, which makes it uniquely precious.

***Bonsho* Bell**

**The spoils of war**

Other exhibits include this *bonsho*, or Buddhist temple bell, which was struck to tell people the time. Dating from the Kamakura period (1185–1333), it was presented to the shrine by Ouchi Yoshitaka (1507–1551), the local daimyo, who had looted it from Tenfukuji Temple in Fukuoka.