**Ueno Toshogu Shrine: Copper Lanterns**

When strolling the grounds of Ueno Toshogu, you are bound to notice the rows of tall lanterns placed along the pathways and in front of the ornate Karamon Gate. The lanterns further away from the shrine buildings are mostly made of stone, while those closer to it are of copper. All but one of the copper lanterns were donated to Ueno Toshogu in 1651, when the current shrine buildings were completed. The donors were wealthy daimyo (feudal lords), who presented these bulky and very expensive ornaments to show their loyalty to the Tokugawa shogunate. Ueno Toshogu, after all, enshrines Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the founder of the shogunate, as a Shinto deity. Of the 49 lanterns donated in 1651, six were given pride of place flanking the Karamon Gate. Two each were from the Owari, Kii, and Mito families—the Tokugawa *gosanke* or “three houses” that were descended directly from Ieyasu and would provide the next shogun should the current ruler fail to produce an heir.

The upper parts of the lanterns are decorated with motifs ranging from shapeshifting sea monsters (*shin*) to Buddhist imagery such as lotus flowers, while the bases are inscribed with the name and rank of the donating daimyo. These bases are octagonal, distinguishing the lanterns donated in 1651 from the single one that precedes them. See if you can find the copper lantern with a round base, donated to Ueno Toshogu in 1627—the year of its establishment—by Todo Takatora (1556–1630), the founder of the shrine.

The lanterns, which are purely decorative and were never used for illumination, were scattered around the vast shrine grounds for centuries, until the precincts were drastically reduced in size after the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867. The lack of space meant the lanterns had to be placed closer together. They were registered as National Treasures before World War II to preserve them from being requisitioned and melted down for military purposes, but two lanterns were nonetheless stolen during the war. The 48 that remain are now designated Important Cultural Properties.