

Picture Scroll Showing the Origin of Matsuzaki Tenjin in Six Scrolls, Complete with Box

(Matsuzaki Tenjin Engi Emaki Rokkan, Hakotsuki)

This set of six illustrated scrolls tells the life story of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) and his apotheosis into the god Tenjin. Placed end to end, the six scrolls measure a total of 75 meters. This set, known as the Kamakura Edition, dates from 1331. Because it was forbidden to display the scroll outside the shrine, it was seldom exposed to light, and as a result it is in extraordinarily good condition for something almost seven hundred years old.

The sixth scroll in the series is devoted entirely to the story of Hofu Tenmangu, and the scenes of the shrine in it were an important reference when the shrine had to be entirely rebuilt after a fire in 1952. The name “Matsuzaki” comes from the fact that Hofu Tenmangu was originally called Matsuzaki Shrine. It is extremely rare for a scroll this old to still have its original storage box, hence the mention of the box in its full title.

Picture Scroll Showing the Origin of Matsuzaki Tenjin in Six Scrolls (Muromachi Edition)

(Matsuzaki Tenjin Engi Emaki Rokkan)

This set of six illustrated scrolls tells the life story of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) and his apotheosis into the god Tenjin. Placed end to end, the six scrolls together measure a total of 75 meters. The Muromachi Edition of the scrolls was made between 1504 and 1520 and is a copy of the original 1331 Kamakura Edition. The copy was made to get around a prohibition against displaying the original scrolls outside the shrine. Because it was shown to more people, the newer copy is actually somewhat less pristine than the older original.

The first five scrolls recount all the classic legends from the life of Michizane, such as him bidding farewell to his plum tree before going into exile and the ox that pulled his hearse sitting down and refusing to move, but the sixth is devoted entirely to the story of Hofu Tenmangu.

Copper-Gilt Treasure Pagoda

Treasure pagodas like this contain crystals designed to evoke the sacred relics of the Buddha. In this case, the bones are represented by a green glass bead. A local official, Fujiwara no Suesuke, presented this 40-centimeter-tall treasure pagoda to Hofu Tenmangu in 1172. At the time, Japan was in a state of upheaval, with the emperor losing power to the shoguns. On the pagoda is a prayer for the long

life of Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa, rich harvests in Suo Province (modern Yamaguchi Prefecture), and the well-being of the people. It is the oldest artifact of known provenance in all 12,000 Tenjin shrines in Japan.

Temple Bell

This *bonsbo*, or Buddhist temple bell, was struck to announce the hour. Dating from the Kamakura Period (1185–1333), it was presented to Hofu Tenmangu by Ouchi Yoshitaka, the local daimyo, who looted it in the 1530s from Tenfukuji Temple in Fukuoka, Kyushu when he was fighting the Shoni clan.