

Itsukushima Shrine: Hand Fan

The original of this ornate fan is one of the oldest surviving items of its kind in Japan and dates back to the twelfth century. It is made of paper attached to five lacquered strips of wood, as was typical of summer fans favored by the aristocracy in the Heian period (794–1185). The paper is decorated with gold and silver leaf and inscribed with three poems from the *Shikashu* (Collection of Verbal Flowers), a court anthology of waka poetry dated to 1151. According to shrine documents, the fan was donated by Emperor Takakura (1161–1181) upon his visit to Miyajima in 1180, only months after he had been forced to abdicate the throne in favor of his infant son. The calligraphy is said to be by Minamoto no Michichika (aka Tsuchimikado Michichika; 1149–1202), an aristocrat and statesman who accompanied the retired emperor to Miyajima and went on to become one of the most powerful individuals at court in the late 1100s. The visit by retired emperor Takakura and Michichika, as well as the donation to Itsukushima Shrine, speak of the high regard in which the aristocracy held the shrine in the late Heian period. The fan displayed here is a reproduction. The original, designated an Important Cultural Property, is exhibited only on special occasions.