

Itsukushima Shrine: Images of Three Lucky Gods

The Seven Lucky Gods in Japanese mythology are a common motif for *ema* paintings presented to shrines as a sign of one's faith and as a gift to please the deities. The Lucky Gods are Ebisu, the god of prosperity and commerce; Daikokuten, agriculture; Bishamonten, protection against evil; Benzaiten, beauty and the arts; Fukurokuju, wisdom and longevity; Jurojin, health and longevity; and Hotei, happiness. References to these deities as a group first emerged in the Muromachi period (1336–1573), although each figure has its own history of origin. Some have roots in Buddhism, others in Hinduism, and Ebisu is purely Japanese.

These three hanging scrolls depict Daikokuten, Jurojin, and Hotei and are the work of Kano Tanyu (1602–1674). Tanyu was one of the foremost artists of the Kano school, which enjoyed the favor of the government and dominated the world of painting in Japan throughout most of the Edo period (1603–1868). How the scrolls ended up at Itsukushima Shrine is unfortunately not clear.