

## **Mirrors**

The mirror is an important symbol in Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion that revolves around the worship of deities that dwell in the natural environment. In Japanese mythology, a mirror was used to coax the sun goddess, Amaterasu Omikami, out from a cave where she had been hiding, restoring light to the world. Visit a shrine today and you will likely see a bronze mirror sitting atop its altar.

Many bronze mirrors dating to the fourth century were found at the oldest ritual sites on Okinoshima, alongside swords and comma-shaped stone beads (*magatama*, often described as “jewels”). According to the creation myths recorded in Japan's oldest historical chronicles, Amaterasu Omikami gave these Three Sacred Treasures to her grandson, Ninigi no Mikoto, when she sent him to earth. He became the founding ancestor of Japan's imperial line, and the Three Sacred Treasures (the mirror, the jewel, and the sword) are revered as symbols of the emperor's divinity.

The mirrors are thought to be of Chinese origin, with some later made in a similar style in Japan. The most prominent and well-preserved example is a triangular-edged mirror, bearing the designs of Queen Mother of the West and King Father of the East—two gods of Chinese mythology that were popular during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE)—surrounded by holy beasts.