

Dazaifu Tenmangu Through the Ages

Umasake Yasuyuki built the first incarnation of Dazaifu Tenmangu in 905 to honor his master, Sugawara Michizane (845–903). Over the centuries, fire, war, natural disasters, and large-scale renovations have altered the shape and scale of Dazaifu Tenmangu.

Various paintings and maps chronicle the changes to the shrine complex over the years. The oldest existing sketch showing the layout of the shrine dates from some time after 1498, but accurately lists all the facilities referenced in a 1294 document. Map 10—itself a National Important Cultural Property—dates from the end of the seventeenth century and depicts the shrine’s precincts.

The painting included here dates from the Edo period (1603–1867). It shows a nine-story pagoda and a five-story pagoda within the shrine precincts that are missing from other depictions. The main sanctuary you see today was built in 1591 and is an excellent example of Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1603) architecture. It is ornate and colorful and represents a significant change from the somber look of Muromachi-period (1336–1573) structures.