

Omi Jingu Shrine

Omi Jingu Shrine was established in 1940 to enshrine Emperor Tenji (626–672), a prominent figure in the history of Otsu. Tenji moved the country's capital from Asuka (in what is now Nara Prefecture) to Otsu in 667, and the shrine is situated near where his palace used to be. The emperor is enshrined in the main sanctuary behind a large worship hall. In front of this structure is a towering, bright red gate (*romon*) that stands out amid the dense greenery of the surrounding forest.

Emperor Tenji is famous for having started the system of timekeeping in Japan and building the country's first water clock (*rokoku*) based on techniques introduced from China. Omi Jingu's clock museum has numerous examples of timepieces from Japan and around the world. Outside, a full-size working replica of the water clock is displayed in front of a small pond, while nearby stands a dragon-shaped "fire clock." Every year on June 10, a festival is held to commemorate the building of the water clock.

Emperor Tenji is also closely associated with *waka* poetry. He composed the first poem in the famous *Hyakunin Isshu* compilation of 100 poems written by poets of medieval times including many prominent members of the court. The poems are the basis for a popular card game called *karuta*, in which players compete to find cards with the last part of a poem as the first part is read aloud.

Omi Jingu is a key venue of the highly competitive *karuta* scene, hosting both the annual finals of the national high-school championship and the Meijin and Queen finals, which are Japan's national championship. Tournaments are held in a modern hall. Fans of the anime, manga, and film series *Chihayafuru*, which is based on competitive *karuta*, may recognize Omi Jingu from its appearances in the series. Traditional costumes can be rented to wear around the shrine, where sets of *karuta* cards and rice crackers shaped like them are also sold.