

## Izumo Grand Shrine: Founding

The “Izumo Grand Shrine and Its Rituals” gallery is a themed exhibition about the history, architecture, and rituals of Izumo Grand Shrine—a major Shinto shrine located next to the museum. The main deity worshipped at the shrine is Ōkuninushi no Kami (“Great Lord of the Land”), a god of agriculture, nation building, and *en-musubi* (“tying of bonds between people”). The concept of *en-musubi* comprises not only the relationships between couples, neighbors, and coworkers, but also the success of farmer’s harvests and other positive outcomes in people’s daily lives.

The exact founding of Izumo Grand Shrine is uncertain, but the shrine’s origin is depicted in the *kuni-yuzuri* (“relinquishing the land”) myth, which appears in the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*) and *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicle of Japan*). Another myth describing the shrine’s founding is recorded in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* (*Gazetteer of Izumo Province*). All three of these texts date from the eighth century and testify to the long-standing significance of the shrine.

Izumo Grand Shrine has been rebuilt many times throughout its history. The main sanctuary (*honden*) has generally followed the *taisha-zukuri* style, a type of shrine architecture based on ancient dwellings. *Taisha-zukuri* structures have a gable roof with stairs leading to an off-center entrance on the building’s gable end (one of the building’s shorter sides); this entrance is called a *tsumairi*. *Taisha-zukuri* structures also have a high floor raised on pillars. In the museum gallery, a rare early artifact—an earthenware pot dating to the first century CE—depicts this kind of elevated structure. Excavated in neighboring Tottori Prefecture, the pot is engraved with a building set on pillars and accessed by a long stairway.

Several other artifacts in the exhibit indicate that Izumo held special significance as early as the Yayoi period (800 BCE–300 CE). For example, a comma-shaped bead (*magatama*) and bronze dagger-axe (*dōka*) dating to the Yayoi period were excavated near the shrine. The bead was produced in what is now Niigata Prefecture, in northwest Japan, and the dagger-axe was produced in northern Kyushu, a main island to the west. The tremendous distance each of these artifacts traveled indicates the importance of Izumo in ancient times. Even stronger evidence is provided by the ritual burials of Yayoi-period bronze bells and swords that were found at sites nearby.

Ancient versions of the main sanctuary are said to have been truly grand structures, towering over the landscape at 48 meters in height. *Kuchizusami*, a tenth-century educational text for aristocratic children, describes Izumo Grand Shrine as the tallest building in the country at the time, alongside the Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall) at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara, and the administrative building of the imperial court in Kyoto. The large 1/10-scale model at the center of the gallery represents one interpretation of how Izumo Grand Shrine may have looked during the tenth century.