

Treasures of the Maeda Family: The Sonkeikaku Bunko

The Maeda Ikutokukai Gallery displays a selection of items from the Sonkeikaku Bunko, a repository of classical texts, historical documents, ornamental armor, campaign jackets, paintings, and other treasures collected by the wealthy Maeda family. The Maedas governed Kaga domain (present-day Ishikawa and Toyama Prefectures) from 1583 until 1871.

The full Sonkeikaku Bunko collection comprises over 10,000 items, and the repository is located in Tokyo. Because of the Maeda family's historical connection to Kanazawa, the Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art is permitted to hold and display approximately 400 of the repository's artifacts and works of fine art.

Historical Background

By the start of the Edo period (1603–1867), the Maedas were one of the wealthiest families in Japan, and the annual income of Kaga domain was second only to that of the shogunate. The Maedas' resources enabled them to invest in promoting the arts and collecting many fine pieces. Significant portions of the Sonkeikaku Bunko collection were amassed by the third lord of Kaga, Maeda Toshitsune (1594–1658), and by his grandson Maeda Tsunanori (1643–1724), the domain's fifth lord.

Historically, some of the treasures were kept at the Maeda family residence in Edo (now Tokyo). During the Edo period, a domain lord had two main residences: one in his own domain and one in Edo. Under the shogunate policy of “alternate attendance” (*sankin kōtai*), every year domain lords had to alternate between living in Edo and living in their own domains. Because of this system, part of the collection was in Tokyo when the shogunate fell in 1867. As for the rest, treasures kept in the Kanazawa residence were transferred to Tokyo when the family moved there permanently during the Meiji era (1868–1912).

In 1926, Maeda Toshinari (1885–1942), the sixteenth head of the Maeda family, established the Maeda Ikutokukai Foundation in Tokyo to organize and preserve the family's collection. In its entirety, the Sonkeikaku Bunko contains 22 National Treasures and 77 Important Cultural Properties—a remarkable number for a single family to have amassed. The vast majority of the repository contents are texts, many quite old and valuable, that remain in Tokyo and are restricted to authorized researchers.

The Maeda Ikutokukai Gallery at Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art is the only place where the general public can view items from this historic collection.

The Maeda Ikutokukai Gallery

The gallery rotates items on a monthly basis according to exhibition themes, such as paintings, arms and armaments, noh costumes, and implements for tea ceremony.

Displays may include the Maeda lords' numerous sets of armor, campaign jackets, stirrups adorned with Kaga metal inlay, tea utensils, landscape paintings, Japanese calligraphy, and—on rare occasions—the Hyakkō Hishō, an unusual collection of samples illustrating craft techniques.

The gallery offers visitors an opportunity to see these well-preserved treasures up close and to appreciate masterworks that were the pride of one of Japan's wealthiest samurai families.