

Wazuka Tenmangu Shrine

Wazuka Tenmangu Shrine has been an important site of worship for over a thousand years. It is the largest Shinto shrine in Wazuka and is dedicated to Tenjin, the deity of scholarship. Every autumn, the shrine hosts a lively festival to give thanks for a good harvest.

History

Though the exact founding date of Wazuka Tenmangu is unknown, one legend says it was founded in the late tenth century when Emperor Enyu (959–991) enshrined a painting of Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), the man who was posthumously deified as Tenjin. Michizane was an accomplished academic, poet, and high-ranking statesman who was exiled by his political rivals. After his death, natural disasters and other misfortunes led to the belief that the disgraced statesman had become a vengeful spirit. Eventually, however, he was thought to have been pacified when his achievements in life were honored by his deification.

Some scholars believe Wazuka Tenmangu exemplifies how culture and religion from influential cities spread to countryside areas via agricultural estates (*shoen*). In the tenth century, Wazuka was a *shoen* of Kofukuji Temple in Nara, and a shrine was founded for that temple's guardian deity, Kasuga Myojin. In the twelfth century, Wazuka became a *shoen* of Kitano Tenmangu, the head Tenjin shrine in Kyoto, which would have promoted Tenjin worship instead; this may have led to the founding of Wazuka Tenmangu.

Shrine Grounds

The main sanctuary was constructed in 1348 in the *nagare-zukuri* architectural style, which is characterized by an asymmetrical gabled roof. It is a designated National Important Cultural Property. Statues of oxen, sacred messengers of the deity Tenjin, are placed around the sanctuary.

Large votive tablets—the oldest dating to 1856—are hung in the prayer hall in front of the main sanctuary. The sanctuary is flanked by four small

subsidiary shrines. Three are dedicated to commonly worshiped deities, but Goryo Shrine, to the immediate right of the sanctuary, enshrines a figure unique to Tenjin worship: an elderly priest named Watarai no Haruhiko, who remained loyal to Sugawara no Michizane despite his exile.

On the south side of the grounds is a small shrine dedicated to Ebisu, a deity of prosperity and commerce. On the other side of the vermilion bridge are Umemiya Shrine, Kumano Shrine, and Kasuga Shrine, the latter a designated Cultural Property of Kyoto Prefecture. The presence of subsidiary shrines on the grounds is a tradition that allows pilgrims to pray to many popular deities all in one place.

Autumn Festival

The Wazuka Tenmangu *reisai* (annual festival) is held on the second Saturday and Sunday in October. Beginning at 2:00 p.m., the chief priest conducts a ritual to give thanks for a bountiful harvest. One large *mikoshi* (portable shrine) carried by adult men and two smaller ones carried by children are taken around the area to honor the deities and ritually show

them their domain. The shrine grounds are filled with various food stalls, and residents and visitors alike gather to eat and celebrate.

Access

Walk approximately 2 minutes from the Higashi Wazuka bus stop. Parking is available for cars and bicycles.