

Scroll 1



Two-tiered lacquer box that originally held the *Kasuga Scrolls*.
The lid is decorated with wisteria flowers, the crest of the Fujiwara family.

Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity (*Kasuga Gongen Genki-e*)

Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity, or the *Kasuga Scrolls*, is a set of fourteenth-century handscrolls (*emaki*) depicting stories of the five deities that are collectively known as the Kasuga Gongen. *Emaki* depict stories through a combination of pictures and text that is revealed from right to left as the scroll is unrolled. *Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity* contains a wide range of genre stories from religious episodes to historical tales brimming with action, adventure, and miraculous events. The aristocrat Saionji Kinhira (1264–1315) commissioned the scrolls as an offering to the deities of Kasuga Taisha Shrine in Nara, and they were completed around 1309.





Example of Takashina Takakane's skill in depicting architecture (Scroll 1).



Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity

A Vibrant Glimpse into the Mundane and Miraculous

The Museum of the Imperial Collections, Sannomaru Shozokan



Scroll 12

The Making of the *Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity*

Saionji Kinhira (1264–1315) was the head of the Saionji family, which was a branch of the powerful and aristocratic Fujiwara family. In the beginning of the fourteenth century, Kinhira became involved in a dispute with Retired Emperor Gouda (1267–1324), and his position in the imperial court became unstable, culminating in his dismissal in January of 1306. Two months later, however, he had regained his courtly position, and in 1309 he was promoted to Minister of the Left (in practice, the most powerful role in the courtly bureaucracy). Kinhira's good fortune at court after the near destruction of his political career instilled in him a deep sense of gratitude and inspired him to commission this set of splendid scrolls for Kasuga Taisha, the patron shrine of the Fujiwara family.

Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity, or the *Kasuga Scrolls*, is considered to be a masterpiece of the *emaki* medium. The court artist Takashina Takakane (dates unknown) undertook the painting of the *Kasuga Scrolls,* producing 20 scrolls of stories describing the miracles associated with the Kasuga deities. As befit a religious offering, the scrolls were painted on silk instead of paper. In addition, they are exceptionally large and are difficult to unroll by hand. This was not an issue, however, as the scrolls were dedicated to Kasuga Taisha and were never meant to be read regularly.

Since the *Kasuga Scrolls* were rarely opened, they are remarkably well preserved, retaining their original vivid colors. Takakane's paintings are lauded for their remarkable detail and faithful rendering of architecture. From light snow dusting autumn forests at the turn of the season ❶ to a humorous depiction of a man tossing out foul-tasting food, ❷ the scrolls reveal charming surprises and a reverence for the commonplace minutiae of life.



Kasuga Taisha Shrine, Nara



Portrait* of Saionji Kinhira, who commissioned the *Kasuga Scrolls.*



春日権現験記

Kasuga Gongen Genki-e



Scroll 1

❷



❶

Scroll 19

What is the Kasuga Deity?

The Kasuga Deity, also known as Kasuga Daimyojin or Kasuga Gongen, refers to both the five deities of Kasuga Taisha Shrine and a single divine entity made up of the five. In their separate forms, the deities are: Takemikazuchi no Mikoto, Futsunushi no Mikoto, Ame no Koyane no Mikoto, Himegami, and Ame no Oshikumone no Mikoto. The deer that can be seen around Nara are considered to be the divine messengers of the Kasuga Deity.

Treasures of the Imperial Family: Sannomaru Shozokan

Opened in 1993, the Museum of the Imperial Collections, Sannomaru Shozokan, contains thousands of priceless artworks that were passed down over centuries by the Imperial Family. The museum's collection ranges from calligraphy and paintings to decorative arts, such as ceramics, lacquerware, and metalwork. Items and artwork used by Emperor Showa (1901–1989) and some of his siblings are also part of the collection. Most pieces are displayed only for a limited time to protect them from light and humidity. Conservation is an ongoing challenge, as many of the pieces are made from wood, paper, or silk and are extremely fragile.

Sannomaru Shozokan has no permanent exhibits; rather, the artwork on display is frequently rotated. Even so, fewer than half of the pieces in the Shozokan's collection have been shown to the public—leaving thousands of never-before-seen treasures awaiting their turn. No two exhibitions are the same, and visitors may never see the same artwork twice.

The museum is currently undergoing renovations that are due to finish in 2026. Part of the new museum building was completed and opened to the public in 2023. The new Shozokan is designed to echo the style of the Imperial Palace, blending modern simplicity with traditional architectural elements, such as diamond-patterned motifs, the verdigris of the copper roofs, and decorative chains that funnel rainwater from the eaves.



The Museum of the Imperial Collections, Sannomaru Shozokan
皇居三の丸尚蔵館

*Portrait of Saionji Kinhira is from *Illustrated Portraits of Emperors, Regents, and Ministers of State.*

Photograph of Kasuga Taisha Shrine is by Kuwabara Eibun; photographs of *Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity* (text and illustrations) are by Shirono Seiji, Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties.
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The Museum Website

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