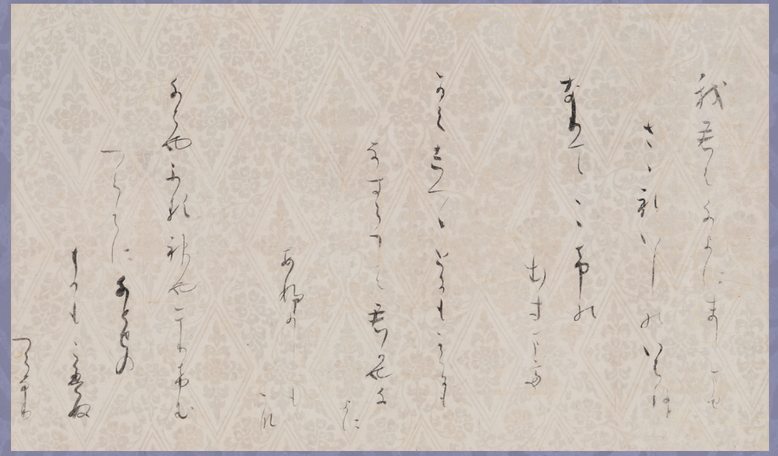
Three Poems from *Collection of Japanese Poems Ancient and Modern*, Volume 7: Congratulations



From right to left: poems 343, 347, and 348.

waga kimi ha
chiyo ni mashimase
sazareishi no
iwaoto narite
koke no musu made

my lord
may you live a thousand years
till pebbles grow to
ancient boulders and dark
green moss covers their sides

Poem 343, *Author unknown*
This poem expresses a wish for the emperor's longevity. The lyrics of the Japanese national anthem are derived from this poem.

kaku shitsutsu
to ni mo kaku ni mo
nagaraete
kimi ga yachiyoni
au yoshi mogana

may life go on like this
flowing smoothly with no ripple
to mar it
until we meet each of us
in our eight-thousandth year

Poem 347, *Emperor Kōkō*
This poem was composed by Emperor Kōkō (830–887) to celebrate the poet Henjō's (816–890) seventieth birthday. Henjō and Emperor Kōkō are thought to have had a close relationship formed through writing and sharing *waka*.

chihayaburu
kami ya kirikemu
tsuku kara ni
chitose no saka mo
koenu bera nari

is this the handiwork
of one of the awesome gods—
thrusting it before me
I shall cross even the
great hill of one thousand years

Poem 348, *Henjō*
This poem was composed by Henjō in praise of a silver cane that Emperor Kōkō commissioned as a birthday gift to one of his female relatives. The poem anticipates her delight and praises the gift's beauty.

The translations are modified versions from those in *Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern* by Laurel Rasplica Rodd and Mary Catherine Henkenius, in order to match differences in the source Japanese.

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

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Museum website

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Three Celebratory Poems from *Collection of Japanese Poems Ancient and Modern*

A Glimpse into the Aesthetics of the Heian Court through Paper, Calligraphy, and Poetry

Calligraphy

The calligrapher of this piece is unknown, but the brushwork indicates outstanding skill—only an aristocrat could have possessed this level of mastery.

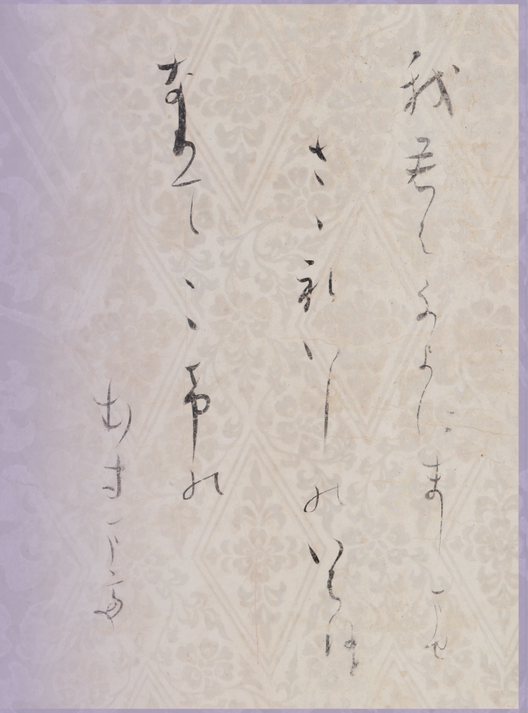
The poems are written in *chirashigaki* (literally, "scattered writing"), meaning the beginning of each line of poetry does not conform to traditional line breaks. The calligrapher has instead chosen to vary the length and number of lines used to write each poem. This asymmetry extends across the paper, and the shape of the poems themselves becomes art.

The anthology from which the poems were taken, the *Kokin wakashū*, was one of the first works of literature to be written in a mix of Chinese and Japanese characters. This writing style evolved into modern Japanese, and some of the characters in this piece may be familiar to readers of Japanese.



Detail of the double-rhombus and floral vine pattern.



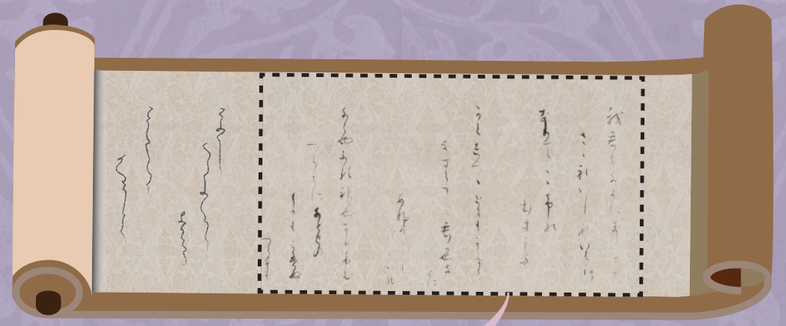


Detail of poem 343 written in *chirashigaki*, or "scattered writing."

Karakami Decorated Paper

The three poems are written on *karakami* paper. *Karakami* (literally, "Tang-dynasty paper") originally referred to finely crafted paper imported from China. It was highly valued by the Japanese imperial court. By the twelfth century, similarly decorated paper was being made in Japan; it was also called *karakami*. For centuries after, *karakami* was used solely by the aristocracy for special purposes, such as gifts of poetry and calligraphy.

Making *karakami* is labor-intensive, and even today, the paper is very expensive. The paper used in this piece was made from plant fiber and is covered with a primer made from powdered seashell. The paper was then decorated with a paste containing mica flakes. The mica causes the surface of the *karakami* to glitter, contrasting beautifully with the black ink of the calligraphy.



The three poems were originally one section of a larger handscroll.



The poems were mounted on a hanging scroll.

Three Poems on *Karakami* Paper

This piece features calligraphic renderings of poems 343, 347, and 348 from the *Kokin wakashū* artfully written on *karakami* decorated paper. The *Kokin wakashū*, or *Collection of Japanese Poems Ancient and Modern*, was completed around 914. It was the first anthology of *waka* (literally, "Japanese poems") to be commissioned by the Japanese emperor. The three poems are from the seventh volume of the anthology, which contains poems of congratulations. The *Kokin wakashū* represented the pinnacle of Japanese poetry at the time and set the standard for all future *waka* composition.

These three poems were cut from a longer, twelfth-century handscroll and mounted to a hanging scroll. Although the act of cutting up great works of calligraphy may seem irreverent today, it was a relatively common practice in tea-ceremony circles during the Edo period (1603–1867). Pieces of calligraphy were cut out and transferred to personal albums or onto hanging scrolls, which allowed them to be appreciated in the context of tea gatherings. The excellent condition of this piece indicates that it was cherished and handled with extraordinary care.