

Japanese Art and Design

15

Shintō household altar (*kamidana*)
Designed by Toshihiko Sakai (b.1964); manufactured by Eiichi Yokota, Jinguji Kamidana Company
Japanese cypress, glass, porcelain
Kōfu; 2014
V&A: FE.9-2015



Sakaki is written with the ideograms for 'tree' and '*kami*'. The term is first mentioned in the *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*; compiled in AD 712), which, along with the *Nihon shoki*, recounts Japan's history from its mythical beginnings up to the end of the seventh century. Both books are key sources about Shintō and include myths and legends about the creation of Japan by the *kami* and the early history of the imperial family. The Shintō pantheon is large and ever-changing, but certain principal figures remain constant: Izanami no Mikoto and Izanagi no Mikoto, who were responsible for creating the Japanese archipelago by stirring up the sea with a jewel-encrusted spear; Sarutahiko no Mikoto, the leader of the earthly *kami*; and Susano-ō no Mikoto, the turbulent *kami* of the sea and storms. Susano-ō no Mikoto was the brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu Ō-Mikami, from whom the Japanese imperial family was traditionally believed to have descended.