

Hōryūji Reconsidered

法隆寺の再検討



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Edited by

Dorothy C. Wong  
with Eric M. Field (design)



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## PREFACE

Designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1993, the Hōryūji temple complex includes some of the oldest and largest surviving wooden buildings in the world. The original Hōryūji temple was built between 601 and 607 by Prince Regent Shōtoku (573?–622), one of Japan’s best-known cultural heroes. The construction of the temple marked the introduction of Buddhism and Buddhist art and architecture to Japan from China, by way of the Korean peninsula, as promoted by Prince Shōtoku. After a fire in 670 that destroyed the site, the temple was rebuilt and enlarged. Hōryūji became one of Japan’s leading centers of Buddhist scholarship as well as a focus for the cult of its founder, Prince Shōtoku. Over the centuries numerous buildings were added and the temple became the repository of a great number of Buddhist works of art. Many of the temple’s buildings and artworks are now listed as National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties.

In October 2005, “The Dawn of East Asian International Buddhist Art and Architecture: Hōryūji (Temple of the Exalted Law) in Its Contexts” symposium was held at the University of Virginia. It drew participants from the disciplines of archaeology, architecture, architectural history, art history, and religion, with the goal of reconsidering Hōryūji from interdisciplinary perspectives and within broad cultural contexts, placing it at the threshold of an international Buddhist art and architecture in East Asia. The papers presented at the symposium now form Chapters One (J. Edward Kidder, Jr.), Two (Eric M. Field), Three (Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt), Five (Dorothy C. Wong), and Eight (Michael Como). Additional chapters were written by J. Edward Kidder, Jr. (Chapter Four), Mark L. Blum (Chapter Six), and Lori Meeks (Chapter Seven). Despite voluminous historical records and the large body of scholarship on the temple, these essays aim to shed new light on the Hōryūji complex by (1) examining new archaeological materials, (2) incorporating computer analysis of the structural system of the pagoda, and (3) including cross-cultural, interdisciplinary perspectives that reflect current research in various fields. I would like to thank all the contributors (especially J. Edward Kidder, Jr., who wrote two chapters) for their enthusiasm and academic vigor in participating in this enterprise.

John M. Rosenfield kindly wrote the Prologue, which broadly addresses the art and religion of Hōryūji and provides a framework for reading the chapters, each of which focuses on a specific topic. My senior colleague David Summers, who attended the symposium, penned the Epilogue as a response

to and a reflection on the larger art- and cultural-historical issues raised by this set of essays. These two pieces not only enhance the cohesiveness of the volume but broaden a horizon that allows an understanding of Hōryūji both within and beyond its specificity. I would also like to thank two other symposium participants and colleagues at the University of Virginia whose works are not represented herein: Yunsheng Huang of the Department of Architectural History, and Paul Groner (who served as discussant) of the Department of Religious Studies.

The symposium and the preparation of this volume have received a number of grants. The most substantial funding came from the Ellen Bayard Weedon Foundation, established in honor of William Stone Weedon (1908–1984), the first University Professor at the University of Virginia who taught (in addition to mathematics and philosophy) Asian art, culture, and architecture. We are much obliged to Mary Pollock, Director of the Weedon Foundation, for her support and encouragement of our endeavor. Within the University of Virginia, we received grants and other kinds of support from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies, the Lindner Center for Art History of the McIntire Department of Art, the University of Virginia Art Museum, and the East Asia Center. My special thanks go to Jill Hartz, former Director of the University of Virginia Art Museum, for facilitating the organization of the symposium. An outside grant from the Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies (Tokyo) also helped toward the publication of the volume.

Eric M. Field (one of the contributors) brought his expertise and talents to the design of this volume; his supervision of his two students in the University of Virginia School of Architecture, Heather Fischer and Janet Nguyen, in designing this publication is in the best tradition of teaching through practice. Andy Necessian (editor), Carol Koulikourdi, and Amanda Millar at Cambridge Scholars Publishing were a pleasure to work with, and I thank them for their support of this publication from the very beginning. Victoria R. M. Scott was the book's meticulous and tireless copy editor, and I much value her counsel. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the assistance rendered by the staff of the Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library of the University of Virginia, especially in digitizing a volume of photographs of the wall paintings of Hōryūji (Tanaka 1951) in the University of Virginia Small Special Collections Library.

In imposing on this multi-author volume a uniform style, some individual preferences were of necessity preserved. For example, for works in Asian languages, some authors preferred to include Asian characters in their bibliographies, whereas others provided English translations of the titles. The



opinions of the contributors do not represent those of the editors, though we do bear responsibility for any errors.

Dorothy C. Wong  
Charlottesville, Virginia  
February 2008



## PROLOGUE

### THE SHADOW OF SHŌTOKU TAISHI

JOHN M. ROSENFELD

“An institution,” as Emerson famously remarked, “is the lengthened shadow of a man.” If the Buddhist creed is the lengthened shadow of the historical Buddha, then Hōryūji is the shadow of Shōtoku Taishi.

Hōryūji is a middle-sized Buddhist monastery secluded amid the rice paddies, farm villages, and gently rolling foothills of the Yamato region, the cultural heartland of ancient Japan. It was founded in the early 600s, burned about 670, and rebuilt a few decades later (Plates 1–3). Since then it has miraculously survived the civil wars, earthquakes, and typhoons that have diminished the larger and more prominent temples in nearby Nara. Indeed, not only is Hōryūji the oldest continuously active Buddhist sanctuary in Japan, it is the oldest in all of Asia, offering vivid insights into how Mahāyāna Buddhism sparked the creation of Japanese artworks of transcendent beauty.

For the past hundred years, Hōryūji has been the subject of more public acclaim and scholarly analysis than any other sanctuary in Buddhist Asia. Few monuments in Europe or Asia have been as thoroughly analyzed; yet after an untold number of books and research papers, scholars have succeeded in piecing together only a plausible summary of its early history. When they attempt to write more detailed accounts, they remain bedeviled by contradictions and complexities in the evidence—cryptic temple records, fragmentary state chronicles, puzzling inscriptions, incomplete excavations, and pious legends. Though many puzzles remain to be solved, as the essays below show, the artifacts of Hōryūji—the temple halls, statues, paintings, and ritual implements—clearly reflect the visions and lofty ideals that Mahāyāna Buddhism imparted to its believers.

#### **Early Years**

A prince named Umayado (ca. 574–ca. 622), more familiarly known as Shōtoku Taishi, built Hōryūji next to his country palace. Born into the highest stratum of Japanese royalty, he was the son of Emperor Yōmei (d. 587) and nephew of the empress Suiko, who in 593 appointed him regent and the

effective head of government. Shōtoku Taishi is said to have created Japan's first state constitution. He promoted Buddhism in the face of intense opposition. He played a crucial role in the formation of the nation's historical and religious identity, and, as shown in David Summer's Epilogue, Hōryūji's buildings and icons became the most tangible relics of his existence.

Shōtoku's palace was located in the Ikaruga district, its name taken from that of a melodious songbird, a common variety of finch. (Documents of the eighteenth century also used the term Wakakusa, "Tender Grass," to designate the area.) There he and his mother built a temple to fulfill the wishes of his father, who, when gravely ill, had asked that a sanctuary be erected to the Healing Buddha, Yakushi. Though Yōmei died, the prince and his mother eventually built the temple and commissioned a bronze statue of Yakushi whose measurements would be coordinated with those of the late monarch (thus directing the Buddha's powers of salvation to the afterlife of Yōmei; Plate 4). Such a narrowly personal motive for building a temple and making a statue should not obscure its larger implication: the divine protection of the ruler was, in effect, the divine protection of the realm.

Originally called Ikarugadera, the new sanctuary was later given the more formal Chinese-style name Hōryūji (Temple of the Exalted, or Flourishing, Law). Initially it consisted of the seven structures that formed the symbolic and functional core of typical East Asian Buddhist monasteries: (1) a towering pagoda enshrining a holy relic; (2) an image hall (the *kondō*, or "golden hall") housing the paintings and statues of deities in worship; (3) a lecture hall where monks gathered for sermons and special rituals; (4) a tower whose great bell tolled the six watches of the day and announced the beginning of rituals; (5) a sutra storehouse for the basic Buddhist scriptures; (6) barracks-like dormitories housing the monks' small cells; and (7) a dining hall (Fig. P.1). Gateways, enclosure walls, and storehouses followed, as well as new votive halls when the worship of additional deities was introduced. To be sure, Ikarugadera was a sanctuary of the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism, which offered salvation to persons in secular life, but its monastic buildings still reflected the earlier forms of the faith, which preached that only monks and nuns who practiced celibacy and renounced the secular world could attain enlightenment.

Japan was then a backward, isolated chain of islands governed by loose confederations of clans, though it was beginning its transformation into a nation-state with a central government and a fixed seat of power. As Mark L. Blum's essay below explains, state unification was taking place in China and Korea in a similar fashion (with Buddhism playing a central role), and Korean rulers in the mid-sixth century encouraged their Japanese counter-

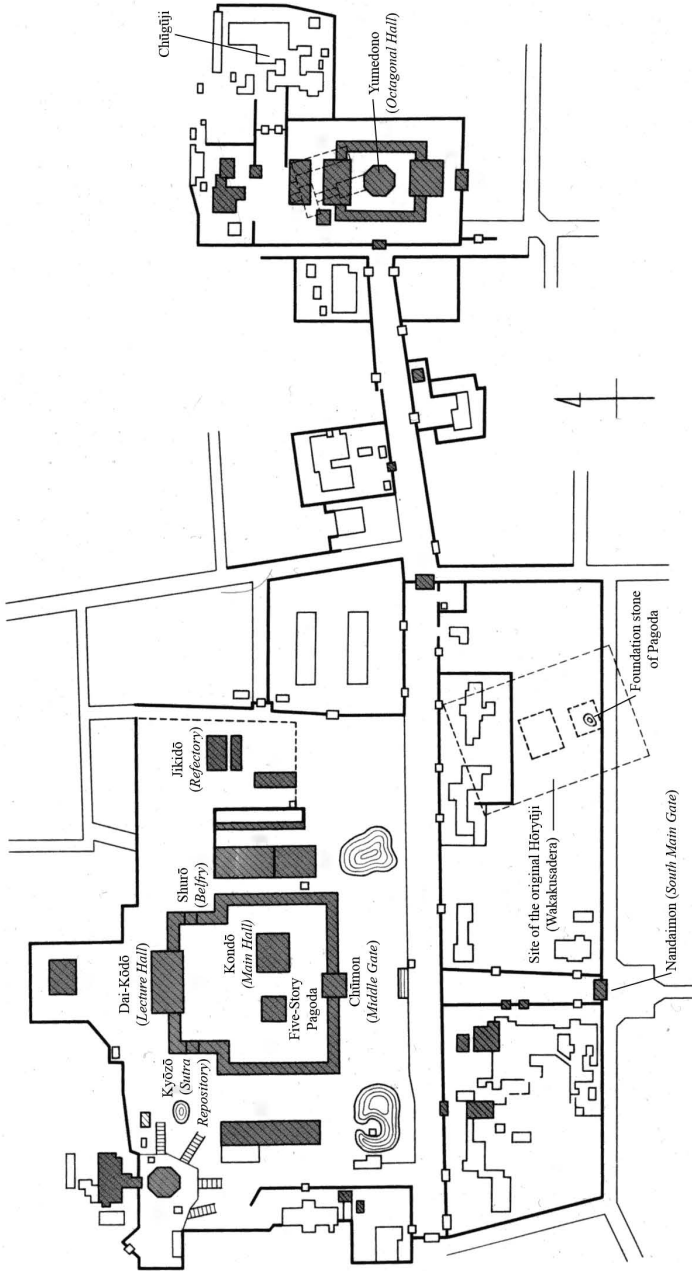


Fig. P.1. Ground plan of Hōryū-ji, including both Tōin and Sa'in. Adapted from Kuno and Suzuki 1966, Diagram on p. 227.

parts to adopt this exotic creed. Conservative Japanese courtiers resisted fiercely, claiming that Buddhism was hostile to local customs and deities. In 587 Shōtoku Taishi and his kinsmen in the Soga clan, ardent proponents of Buddhism, started building Japan's first large state-sponsored temple in what is now Osaka. Naming it Shitennōji, they dedicated it to the Four Heavenly Kings, mighty demigods whose supernatural powers, they believed, had helped them defeat the anti-Buddhist faction. In 594 Empress Suiko decreed Buddhism to be the official state religion of Japan. Shōtoku and his allies, using government resources to propagate the creed, were greatly abetted by the Korean kings who sent monks, texts, and images as well as builders, artists, and craftsmen. By the year 624 some forty-six Buddhist temples had been erected in the area extending from Kyoto to the southern end of the Nara plain.

East Asia in the seventh century was a theater of extraordinary developments. Under the emperors of the Tang dynasty (618–ca. 907), China expanded its rule into Central Asia and opened trade with the West along the Silk Road, resulting in a great upsurge of commerce and invention. Chinese Buddhist monks traveled to India and returned with texts and images. Indian missionaries brought new doctrines to the Chinese capitals. The Japanese royal court, reorganized along Chinese principles of administration, began constructing permanent seats of government. After experimenting with various sites, in 710 courtiers began to lay out a Chinese-style capital city, the Heijōkyō (Fortress of Peace), in the vicinity of present-day Nara, with the requisite halls for royal residences, state ceremonies, and administrative bureaus. At the edge of the new capital they erected a huge monastic compound popularly known as Tōdaiji (Eastern Great Temple); its main object of worship was a seated bronze statue of the Buddha Vairocana (J. Dainichi) over 50 feet tall, an emblem of the role of Buddhism in the unification of the state. Nearby, members of the rich Fujiwara family, who held the top positions in the court bureaucracy, built on a lavish scale their tutelary Buddhist temple (Kōfukuji) and shrine (Kasuga) to the native gods. In less than a century Hōryūji, though still much venerated, had become a relic of an earlier age and of simpler forms of Buddhism.

### **Reconstruction and Expansion**

About 622, as Prince Shōtoku lay dying, his family commissioned on his behalf the famous Shaka Trinity, bronze statues of Śākyamuni and two bodhisattvas (Plate 5). In 643, in a power struggle between the ruling clans, his family was exterminated and the Ikaruga Palace burned. About 670 fire virtually destroyed the monastery. About 700–710 a replacement was built,

and it has stood to this day, filling most of the so-called Western Precinct (the Saiin) of the compound. Scholars generally assume that the replacement buildings and icons reflected the lost originals, but as J. Edward Kidder's essays show below, it is not clear which parts of the original structures were salvaged, how many of the original images survived, or how faithfully the reconstruction emulated the lost originals. To these questions is added the problem of identifying prototypes in China and Korea for Hōryūji's buildings and images.

The wall paintings in the Kondō, for example, closely resemble early eighth-century murals in the Dunhuang caves in western China, as Dorothy C. Wong demonstrates (see illustrations in Chapter Five). The gilt-bronze Shaka triad on the main altar, however, retains features (patterns in the garment folds, configuration of the faces) that can be seen in sculptures in the Longmen caves of central China, dating in the early sixth century. The wooden statues of the Shitennō, guardian figures at the four corners of the altar, were carved in a far simpler style that reflects Chinese sculpture of the mid-sixth century. The Kondō and five-story pagoda (see Plates 2 and 3, respectively) reflect in only a tenuous fashion the layout and details of construction in Chinese and Korean Buddhist sanctuaries, as Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt's essay explains. The core Hōryūji buildings and images are of the highest quality and interest, but they were not all made at the same time or in a consistent style.

Shōtoku's mother must have established a nunnery in or near the old Ikaruga Palace, as Lori Meeks's essay explains. Called Chūgūji (Temple of the Royal Consort), it disappeared in 643 when the palace was destroyed, though some of its icons may have been saved. After subsequent rebuilding and relocation in the area, Chūgūji was placed on its current site adjacent to the Eastern Precinct of Hōryūji in the seventeenth century. It houses one of the most admired sculptures in the history of Japanese art—most likely a depiction of the bodhisattva Maitreya dating from the second quarter of the seventh century (see Fig. 5.39). Showing a slender young man seated half-cross-legged in meditation, his right hand touching his face, this image is suffused with a sense of harmony and ease befitting an agent of Buddhist compassion. The statue has strong affinities to images made in the United Silla kingdom in Korea and to a wooden statue in the old Kyoto temple of Kōryūji (see Fig. 5.38). (Incidentally, the founder of Kōryūji was a member of an immigrant family named Hata, allies of Shōtoku.) The Chūgūji bodhisattva is one of many distinctive works of art preserved at Hōryūji; as the years passed, the temple received donations of other statues and ritual objects that gradually formed one of the richest troves of ancient religious

imagery in the world.

### Doctrine

The essay below by Mark L. Blum discusses the complex issue of how Buddhist doctrines were transmitted from China and Korea to Japan, including the Chinese-language commentaries on three Mahāyāna sutras that have been attributed to Shōtoku. The commentaries seem to date from Shōtoku's time, but scholars still debate whether or not he was actually their author. In any event, certain of the many values and concepts expressed in the three texts are reflected both in the prince's biography and in the main Hōryūji images. One of the texts, the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (J. *Yuimakyō*), emphasizes a cardinal tenet of Mahāyāna—namely, that enlightenment and salvation are possible for laypeople active in society, and not only for monks and nuns who withdraw from the secular world. Many scholars believe that Shōtoku modeled his own career on this principle. Though he had been the crown prince, destined to become emperor, he refrained from mounting the throne and assuming the heavy ceremonial burdens of Japanese kingship. Though a pious, committed Buddhist, he did not become a monk but played an active role at court, using his authority as regent to promote the faith, and according to the principles of Mahāyāna, the path to buddhahood was nonetheless open to him. It is not by accident that an episode in the *Vimalakīrti* is prominently represented at Hōryūji by one of the four remarkable dioramas at the base of the five-story pagoda (Fig. P.2). (The other tableaux depict the death of Śākyamuni, the worship of his relics, and Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future.)

The other two sutras with commentaries attributed to Shōtoku, the *Lotus* (J. *Hokekyō*) and *Śrīmālādevī* (J. *Shōmangyō*), emphasize another core principle of Mahāyāna—the idea that countless divine entities (buddhas, bodhisattvas, devas, arhats) assist humankind to attain salvation. Accounts of the deities in those texts, however, are fluid and imprecise, and this is reflected in the unsystematic character of the main Hōryūji symbols. Statues on the altar of the Kondō, for example, represent no fewer than nine deities, and the wall paintings depict twelve. As Dorothy C. Wong shows below, the subjects of some of the wall paintings have never been settled, and one deity (Kannon) is shown four times. Thus the absence of an orderly, systematic iconographic program, so troublesome to many scholars, is entirely consistent with the early Mahāyāna texts and commentaries.

Later in the seventh century, Indian missionaries would come to China bringing the esoteric (or tantric) forms of Buddhism, in which members of an expanded pantheon were defined in far greater and more consistent





*Fig. P.2. Diorama of the Debate of Vimalakīrti (left) and Mañjuśrī (right), east side of base of pagoda, Hōryūji. Clay with pigments, ca. 711. From Nara Rokudaiji Taikan Kankōkai 1968–1973, Vol. 3, Pl. 1.*

detail. Esoteric Buddhist doctrines, known in Japan as *mikkyō*, began to reach that country in the eighth century, and by the early 800s, the esotericism of the Shingon and Tendai schools had become a powerful factor in Japanese religion. Hōryūji remained officially aloof from these new doctrines, but some of its monks studied *mikkyō* and attached new and improbable esoteric names to certain ancient icons. The Chūgūji meditating bodhisattva, which most scholars believe is a depiction of Maitreya, was renamed Avalokiteśvara, Bearer of the Wish-Fulfilling Gem and Dharma Wheel (Skt. Cintāmaṇi-cakra; J. Nyoirin Kannon). Several bodhisattva statues were given a new identity as Repository of the Void (Skt. Ākāśagarbha; J. Kōkūzō). Such incongruous names still appear in publications about Hōryūji.

### **Deification of Shōtoku Taishi**

In 739 the Hōryūji clergy, led by the formidable monk Gyōshin (d. 750), established a memorial to Shōtoku on the site of the ruined Ikaruga Palace, and this developed into Hōryūji's present-day Eastern Precinct (the Tōin). At



*Fig. P.3. Prince Shōtoku at age two, Kamakura period, ca. 1309. Enjōji, Nara. Wood with polychromy. Height 67.6 cm. From Itō and Kobayashi 1965, Pl. 41.*

the heart of the new compound, Gyōshin erected an eight-sided hall called the Yumedono (Hall of Dreams), named after a place in his palace where Shōtoku was said to have composed his commentaries (Plate 8). The evocative name was derived from legends telling that whenever the prince was sorely puzzled by a text passage, he would envision or dream of a “golden man” who would solve his dilemma. Placed in the center of the Yumedono is an octagonal shrine holding a wooden carving of Kannon, reputed to have been Shōtoku’s personal votive statue and, like other icons of the era, to have incorporated the measurements of his body (Plate 6). Nearly 7 feet tall, this grand icon was for centuries considered so holy that it was locked away, never shown to casual viewers, and thus preserved in pristine condition.

Other structures were added to the Tōin memorial compound—a lecture hall, with statues of Amitābha and attendants for rituals intended to ensure

the prince's auspicious afterlife; a relic hall, where his personal possessions were stored; and an image hall, which still houses a portrait statue (paraded on a palanquin through the temple grounds on ceremonial occasions) and sliding screens depicting his legendary life. Cells in one of the main Hōryūji dormitories were converted into the Shōryōin, a chapel in Shōtoku's memory enshrining statues of the prince, his three sons, and his Korean tutor.

In 739 Gyōshin inaugurated at Hōryūji the Shōrei'e, an annual ceremony to mourn Shōtoku's death and pray for his auspicious afterlife. Held before assemblies of priests and pious laypeople on the prince's death day (the twenty-second day of the second month), the liturgy included recitations of the *Lotus Sutra*, ritual dances, and donations of clothing, funds, and vegetarian meals for the clergy. The annual custom spread to Shitennōji and other temples throughout the Yamato region. A cult center grew up around Shōtoku's tomb in the Kawachi district east of Osaka, as pious priests and laity added offering halls, enclosure walls, gateways, and even Shinto shrines.

Folktales told of Shōtoku being revered as an avatar of either Mañjuśrī or Avalokiteśvara. He was declared an incarnation of the famous Chinese theologian Huisi (515–577), who was considered one of the patriarchs of the Tendai school of Buddhism and an avatar of Avalokiteśvara. In fact, the Tendai school listed both Huisi and Shōtoku among their patriarchs, and paintings produced for the Shingon and Pure Land schools represented Shōtoku Taishi together with their leaders.

More than a thousand statues and paintings of Shōtoku (some made by highly professional artists, others by village craftsmen) were reproduced in a survey edited by Ishida Mosaku and published in 1976. The prince was shown, for example, as a two-year-old child declaring his faith in the historical Buddha; as a concession to the most intimate forms of popular worship, devotees were encouraged to clothe these statues in real garments, as they would an infant (Fig. P.3). He was also depicted as a sixteen-year-old paragon of filial piety, holding an incense burner and praying for the recovery of his ailing father. Other images showed him seated, at age thirty-five, to deliver a sermon on the *Śrīmālā Sūtra*, or as the regent, holding the scepter of state power. Remarkably, as described by Michael Como below, he was also shown riding a miraculous horse that could fly over Mt. Fuji and traverse the nation in a few days.

### Later Years

Hōryūji was carefully maintained—leaking roof tiles replaced, gateways dismantled and repaired, rusting door hinges renewed, new buildings added,



Fig. P.4. One-hundred yen banknote with an image of Shōtoku and the Yumedono. Issued in 1946. From [http://aes.iupui.edu/rwise/banknotes/japan/JapanP89-100Yen-\(1946\)-donatedbn\\_f.jpg](http://aes.iupui.edu/rwise/banknotes/japan/JapanP89-100Yen-(1946)-donatedbn_f.jpg).

ancient rituals faithfully performed. Through the middle ages it was one of the six or seven old temples in the Nara region that were regularly visited by pilgrims and described in their journals. It remained intact through the long period of rule by the Tokugawa military government (1618–1868), which promoted Confucian state and family ethics and kept a tight rein on Buddhist temples. The monastery was relatively unscathed by the drastic 1868 edicts of the new Meiji government that made Shinto the dominant state religion and severely constricted the Buddhist community. It survived the turmoil occasioned by Japan’s militarist expansion on the Asian mainland and the consequent bombing and invasion of the Japanese homeland by the Western allies at the end of World War II.

In the mid-1870s, after Buddhism had been restored to a place of trust and respect, officials of the Meiji regime recognized Hōryūji’s cultural importance. The temple had proudly preserved a painting said to depict Shōtoku and his two sons (Plate 7), and in 1876 this picture was included among the 315-odd objects that Hōryūji “donated” to the Imperial Household in Tokyo; in return the temple received a “grant” of a large amount of money for much-needed repairs. After World War II, the painting of Shōtoku was often reproduced on banknotes and postage stamps as an emblem of benign, enlightened government—even though its early history and provenance were unknown and the identity of the figures uncertain (Fig. P.4). The painting

remains today one of the most highly prized possessions of the Imperial Household. (Most of the donated Buddhist statues and ritual implements are now on public display in an exquisite modern gallery on the grounds of the Tokyo National Museum.)

In 1884 a team of government officials, seeking to survey relics of the past, visited the temple and asked to inspect the statue of Kannon in the Yumedono. Even though the team presented an imperial edict allowing them full access, the temple priests resisted, citing a visit by government agents during the 1868 anti-Buddhist campaign. The priests said that when the agents had tried to open the Yumedono, the heavens had suddenly darkened and sent forth a violent clap of thunder, driving the frightened officials away. In 1884 it was the priests who fled when the survey team, including such notables as the American scholar Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) and his associate Okakura Kakuzō (1863–1913), opened the doors of the inner shrine. The Yumedono Kannon, swathed like a mummy in layers of cotton cloth, appeared dimly through the gloom and dust of a thousand years (see Plate 6). On this occasion the heavens did not protest the impious intrusion; the priests were mollified, and the statue was unwrapped and photographed.

Unwrapping the Yumedono Kannon epitomized the emergence of Hōryūji into the light of modern scholarship. The result is a history disentangled from legend and rendered highly technical—as in the computer modeling of the five-story pagoda by Eric M. Field, or the dendrochronology in J. Edward Kidder's essay. But even though the history of Hōryūji is no longer framed in supernatural terms, it is no less enthralling than before, for it is the record of early Mahāyāna Buddhism bringing to Japan its lessons of selflessness, spiritual composure, and salvation for all sentient beings.

Nowadays, long lines of giggling school children and noisy tour groups clog the ancient wooden buildings and the gloomy Treasure Museum. At sundown, however, the giant diesel busses leave, the souvenir shops are shuttered, temple caretakers close the gates, and silence descends. Hōryūji once more becomes a place of seclusion and worship as the priests, in darkened halls perfumed by sandalwood incense, solemnly intone their ancient prayers. From pine trees on the hillside come the chirping sounds of the Ikaruga finches. Hōryūji, as it has done for fourteen hundred years, continues to exalt the Buddhist law.

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## PART I

### ARCHITECTURE AND ART

The essays in Part I concentrate on the architecture and art of Hōryūji from the perspectives of an archaeologist, an architect, an architectural historian, and an art historian. The discovery in 1925, when repairs were being made to the temple, that the foot of the center pole of the five-story pagoda had rotted off, so that the pole was dangling in place, generated intense interest and many theories about the history and rebuilding of Hōryūji after the fire of 670. In Chapter One, “Reviving the Burning Question: The Hōryūji Fires and Its Reconstruction,” J. Edward Kidder, Jr., uses a more recent piece of archaeological evidence to reassess this controversy. Fresh dendrochronological tests on a section that was removed from the foot of the pole date the pole to 594 CE, suggesting that it came from the original pagoda before the fire. Kidder considers once again all the available archaeological and documentary evidence, surmising that although the fire of 670 was very destructive, subsequent rainfall probably left enough salvageable material, including the lower three stories of the pagoda, to make it practical to rebuild the temple to its original measurements, with the features of what was by then an archaic style. Thus he concludes that economy determined the characteristics of the rebuilt temple—and that the lower half of the pagoda’s original center pole was probably already in poor condition when it was used for the present temple.

The knowledge that the pagoda’s center pole is in fact suspended several feet in the air also casts doubt on the prevailing theory that the center pole—a continuous post reaching from ground to spire—served as a primary load-bearing member of the building’s structure. As an architect, Eric M. Field offers his solution to this mystery in Chapter Two, “The Central Core Structural System: A Three-Dimensional Analysis of the Five-Story Pagoda of Hōryūji.” Through three-dimensional computer-graphics modeling and geometric analysis, he considers the complete structural system and interlocking organization of the pagoda, including the central core post. Field maintains that it is the surrounding system of columns, cloud brackets, and horizontal cross-ties that serves as the pagoda’s primary structure—the same elements that provide the pagoda’s formal shape. The core post is then carried—and now suspended—by and within this, rather than the reverse.



He further argues that although the central core post does not carry any vertical load, it nonetheless plays a critical structural role bracing against lateral loads from wind and especially from earthquake activity.

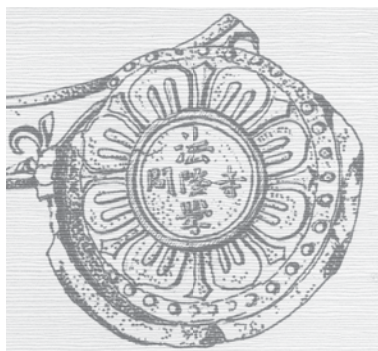
Many architectural historians have noted that by 711 CE, when the reconstruction of Hōryūji was completed, the monastery already looked antiquated because it was not in early eighth-century East Asian Buddhist architectural style. In Chapter Three, “Seeing Hōryūji through China,” Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt explains this enigma by comparing Hōryūji with the newest archaeological evidence from continental East Asia—both actual structures in China (no early wooden buildings survive in Korea) and excavated remains in China and Korea. The evidence shows nothing that is in any significant way similar to the Hōryūji main hall (*kondō*) or central gate (*chūmon*). Steinhardt next turns to ground plans. She demonstrates that even the most recent excavations provide evidence of only one monastery plan in China during the sixth century, and of that same plan, plus one other, in Korea in the sixth and seventh centuries—indicating that the plan of Hōryūji was known only in Japan at the time. Steinhardt offers two explanations for the architecture of Hōryūji. First, its architecture suggests that the current ground plan probably dates to the time of the rebuilding of Hōryūji around 700 and may, indeed, have been a Japanese plan. Second, the architectural features of Hōryūji’s main hall, pagoda, and gate apparently retain the style of the original monastery, built at the end of the sixth century. Steinhardt shows that one type of bracketing found in Hōryūji’s buildings flourished in sixth-century China, dying out by the mid-eighth century. She traces a second type of bracket design to the Han dynasty, or as early as the first two centuries CE, and also traces the long bracket arm found in Hōryūji buildings back to the Han. Steinhardt thus raises the possibility that the unique architecture of Hōryūji may preserve forms that were present in China and Korea in the fifth and sixth centuries but that are now lost.

Hōryūji is also an important repository of early works of Japanese Buddhist sculpture. J. Edward Kidder, Jr., focuses on some of the earliest and most important icons associated with the temple in Chapter Four, “Yakushi, Shaka, the 747 Inventory, and the Cult of Prince Shōtoku.” Through a close reading of inscriptional and documentary evidence, Kidder investigates the construction of the history of the temple and how the Yakushi image and the Shaka image were described by later writers/editors to suit current interests of the institution. He compares the lists of images and of the gifts presented to deities, recorded in an inventory of the property assets of the temple compiled in 747, with presently known images and objects to determine which ones might have been lost in the 670 fire and which might have survived.



With no mention of an earlier temple, the (rebuilt) Hōryūji was presented in the 747 Inventory as the original temple associated with Prince Shōtoku. In the record of donations, the Shaka image was identified as a *jōroku*, a term used to glorify the image, and Shaka Buddha thus became conflated with the prince himself. Kidder comes to the conclusion that the contents of as well as omissions in the 747 Inventory reveal its editors' vested interest in the promotion of the cult of Prince Shōtoku.

In Chapter Five, "Reassessing the Wall Paintings of Hōryūji," Dorothy C. Wong places the wall paintings in the *kondō*, executed during the reconstruction of the temple in the latter part of the Hakuho period (645–710), within the broader context of an emerging international Buddhist art idiom that was formulated in Tang China. Reviewing more than a century of scholarship on the wall paintings, she points out that physical evidence has led scholars to believe that the murals were direct copies of stencils brought from China to Japan, probably in the late seventh to early eighth century. The murals therefore closely reflect the kinds of Buddhist paintings that were done in the monasteries of the Tang capitals, all of which are lost. Comparisons with extant wall paintings from the cave-chapels at Dunhuang in northwest China elucidate the Hōryūji's connection with this cosmopolitan Buddhist art, which was facilitated by traffic on the Silk Road. Wong also discusses the Hōryūji murals—four panels of buddhas' assemblies/pure lands and eight individual bodhisattvas—in light of recent scholarship on devotional and artistic practices in East Asia in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Citing the murals' cosmopolitan style and novel subject matter, she maintains that by the time the wall paintings at Hōryūji were completed, Japan was on the verge of full participation in this international idiom of Buddhist art, despite the somewhat antiquated architecture of the reconstructed temple itself.



## CHAPTER ONE

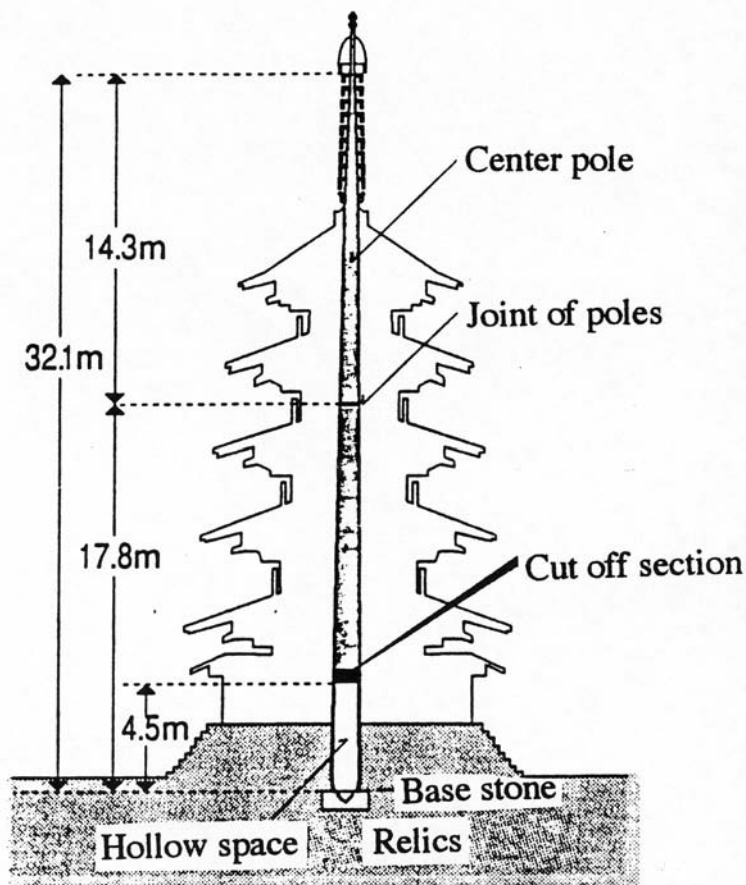
# REVIVING THE BURNING QUESTION: THE HÖRYŪJI FIRES AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION

J. EDWARD KIDDER, JR.

In March 2001 the newspapers announced that, through x-ray photography and dendrochronology, a date of 594 CE had been arrived at for a cross-section of the center pole of the Hōryūji pagoda, suggesting that the pagoda and therefore the temple may be a hundred years older than has generally been believed.<sup>1</sup> In a note on the April 2001 cover of the *Gekkan bunkazai hakkutsu shutsudo jōhō* 月刊文化財發掘出土情報 (Monthly reports of excavated cultural properties; hereafter *GBHSJ*), the interested public was assured that this was national news. The laboratory study was possible because when repairs were made to the foot of the cypress (*hinoki*) pole in 1941, a 160-centimeter section of it had been cut off and saved. Almost two decades earlier, in 1925, an unpublicized discovery had been made of a dangling pole, the bottom rotted off (Fig. 1.1).<sup>2</sup> The solution then had been to remove the relics that had been deposited in a hole in the base stone theoretically supporting the pole, make replicas of the relics and return the originals to the hole, cut the pole off at the point where it was still good, and then plug the gap between the pole and the base stone by including a concrete base support.

Hōryūji is a rather complicated story of two temples built in the same general area. The first was called Ikarugadera 斑鳩寺, named after its location (as all early temples were) in the northwest of the Nara Basin, but is now often called Wakakusadera 若草寺 (probably because it sounds more exotic; the first appearance of the name Wakakusadera in writing is 1707). The second, Hōryūji, is the temple visited today, a replacement for the Ikarugadera, which was burnt in a serious fire in 670. The change from the use of geographical names (the temple of Ikaruga) to Chinese-style names (the temple of exalted law, Hōryūji) was part of Emperor Temmu's 天武 sinicization campaign, which included setting the names of temples in 679, after which formal, more elegant titles were applied.

The information provided in 2001 by this tree-ring analysis of a section



*Fig. 1.1. Section of pagoda before dismantling and repairs in the 1940s. Adapted and modified from GBHSJ 2001/4, 48.*

of the Hōryūji pagoda's pole is critical to understanding the problems the temple faced in the rebuilding process. This chapter addresses these problems and then interprets the dendrochronological results in an effort to explain many of the archaic architectural features of the temple. Preceding this are (1) a sketch of the political and evolving Buddhist religious conditions in and around the Asuka capital in the late sixth and seventh centuries; (2) a summary of the controversy over the question of the fire; (3) an examination

of how many temples had existed, and where; and (4) a history of the studies of the pagoda's center pole.

The rulers had their palaces in Asuka, in the southeast corner of the Nara Basin. Prince Shōtoku (Shōtoku Taishi), who was regent for Empress Suiko (r. 592–628), worked in his Uenomiya 上宮 (Kamitsumiya) palace somewhat north of Asuka 飛鳥. Traditionally, he is believed to have moved to Ikaruga in 605 and by 607 to have built a temple there, just a few hundred yards west of his residence. His primary responsibility then was with foreign affairs, and it is widely thought that he spent a considerable amount of time studying the Buddhist scriptures, some of which he explained to the empress. According to the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), he had already erected the Shitennōji 四天王寺, a temple at the port of entry in Naniwa (Osaka).

Ikaruga was a one-day journey on foot from Asuka, making his palace and temple conveniently located without the fuss of an overnight stop, which for such ranked individuals required a burdensome amount of ceremony. Noted in popular lore for his horsemanship, the prince is said to have cut a diagonal road to Ikaruga, often called the Taishidō 太子道, thus shortening the trip on his fast horse to two hours.<sup>3</sup>

The *Nihon shoki*, presented to the court by its editors in 720, lists two fires, one for the Ikarugadera in 669 and the other for Hōryūji in 670, recorded in the eighth and ninth years of Emperor Tenji's 天智 reign.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore quite possible that when the *Nihon shoki* was being compiled, some old people in the area still remembered one or more fires at Hōryūji; moreover, the *Nihon shoki* was written only about 5 miles from Ikaruga. The first notation therein (669) seems quite incidental: along with other events, the temple of Ikaruga was burnt in the twelfth month. But the other reference (670) was written with finality, as though to leave little doubt as to the temple's total destruction: "fourth month, thirtieth day, after midnight a fire devastated Hōryūji. There was great rain and thunder. Not one building was left."

For the most part, the scholarly world has accepted these as references to the same fire.<sup>5</sup> The understanding has been that editors of the *Nihon shoki* were at a loss to correlate two sets of notes and included both to be on the safe side. There has also been general acceptance of the wording, which has been taken to mean that Ikarugadera was a complete ruin and reconstruction had to begin from scratch. The implication of a mortal body blow to the original temple is reinforced by other texts. The ninth-century *Jōgū Shōtoku taishiden hoketsuki* 上宮聖德太子傳補闕記 (Supplementary biography of Upper Palace Prince Shōtoku) states that the demoralized clergy scattered

after the fire, lacking any sort of agreement on where and how to rebuild.<sup>6</sup> A point to note, however: not only are the years different, but one fire occurred in the twelfth month, the other in the fourth month.

The construction date of 607 for the Ikarugadera is taken from an inscription on the back of the large halo of Yakushi Buddha, an image which sat in the center of the Golden Hall for many centuries and was therefore considered to be the chief icon of the temple (see Chapter Four and Plate 4). An inventory required by the government in 747, known as *Hōryūji garan engi narabini ruki shizaichō* 法隆寺伽藍縁起並流記資材帳 (hereafter the 747 Inventory), lists the Yakushi Buddha first in its record of the contents of the Golden Hall. In ninety characters it says that the emperor of the Ikenobe 池邊 palace (Yōmei 用明) ordered the making of a temple and a statue. He died, but the empress of the Oharida palace 小治田宮 (Suiko) and the prince (Shōtoku) were able to carry out his wishes in the *hinoto-u* 丁卯 year. This is Suiko 15, the equivalent of 607. But recently, as revealed through x-rays, comparative studies of the casting techniques of the Yakushi and the Shaka triad (see Plate 5) in the same hall—the latter unquestionably dated to 623, the year after the prince died—show the Yakushi to be much more advanced than the triad and therefore made several decades later.<sup>7</sup>

Both the statue and the halo had long been suspect for several reasons, but this is not the issue here. The halo carries what is probably a rough approximation of the original inscription, and the Yakushi Buddha was made to look archaic, perhaps using the Shaka as a model. One can assume, therefore, that it was lost in the fire, though it may have been so closely identified with the origins of the institution that it was important enough to cast a copy for the rebuilt temple.

The 607 date is accepted by most people because the prince moved to Ikaruga in 605, but unfortunately there are other dates to confuse us. The *Kokon mokuroku shō* 古今目録抄 (Catalog of old and new treasures), written by Hōryūji priest Kenshin 顯真 in 1238, says the Ikarugadera was started in Suiko 2, which would be 594, and the *Kōfukuji ryaku nendaiki* 興福寺曆年代記 (Kōfukuji calendrical chronicles), probably of the late eighth century, says Prince Shōtoku built the Hōryūji in Suiko 21, which would be 613.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, there were various documents available that had been concocted over the centuries. And, one must ask, what did the authors of these documents really know about the first temple? The huge stone for the pagoda's pole may have been underground for centuries (Fig. 1.2). If twentieth-century scholarship is any indication, it is quite possible that centuries of priests were actually ignorant of an earlier temple. Medieval documents—some obviously propaganda for the temple's antiquity and