

Tsuji Haiji: A Buddhist temple in ancient Harima with an enormous foundation stone to its pagoda and priests' quarters

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Harima Fudoki and ancient Buddhist temples

There are hardly any references to Buddhist temples in *Harima no Kuni Fudoki*. By contrast, there are depictions of temples and priests in the *fudoki* of Izumo, Hizen and Bungo, so it is unclear why not. Many ancient temples are known in Harima Province: in particular, more than thirty Hakuhō period temples (673–686 CE) were constructed in the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Typical of these is Tsujii Haiji ('disused temple').

Tsujii Haiji is on the flood plain of the old course of the Yumesaki River, sited on slightly higher ground at 19 meters above sea level, approximately 2 kilometres west-north-west of Himeji Castle. The Shosha Kaidō [road] runs from Himeji Castle towards Shoshazan Engyōji, and branches off in three directions. One of these leads south to the Imajuku Chōda Archaeological Site; one is the Shosha Kaidō, going north; and the other is a road newly built in 1980 as the Shosha Kaidō Bypass, going west.

A huge pagoda foundation stone

This whole area of the Tsujii Haiji corresponds to what was called Kochi Sato in *Harima Fudoki*. It records that the place name is derived from the fact that the Kochi family settled there. In the same entry, a tale appears in which the village Kusakami ['On the grass'] *Mura* was so called because when their founding ancestor Nara no Kochi Kana petitioned for this land and reclaimed it for rice fields, the roots of the grasses were extremely malodorous.

Among local hamlets, the place names Higashitōnomoto ['Under-the-Eastern-Pagoda'] and Nishitōnomoto [Under-the-Western-Pagoda] still remain, and it is said that there was raised platform-shaped ground there until some time before the Second World War. On the basis of this evidence, Kisoji KAMATANI [1902–] hypothesised that the temple compound's layout was similar to that of Yakushiji, with eastern and western pagodas. At Nishitōnomoto there were the remains of four corner pillar (*shitenbashira*) foundation stones and side pillar (*kawabashira*) foundation stones, centred on a foundation stone for the central pillar (*shinbashira*) of the pagoda, of which the dimensions are said to have been 7 metres square and 1 metre high. What became of this whole platform is unknown, and now only the central pillar stone remains in a residential area 50 metres south of the road. This has a mortise in the middle, measuring 40 cm in diameter and about 15 cm deep. Although it is thought to have been altered in later centuries, its present size is 2.3 metres long by 1.9 metres wide, so it was a huge stone of rhyolitic tuff. This is comparable to that of Mizoguchi Haijii, Kōdera-chō, Himeji-shi, which at 2.9 meters long by 2.2 metres wide is thought to have been the largest pagoda foundation stone in Harima.

Archaeological excavation of the Tsujii Haiji temple compound

Tsujii Haiji overlaps with the Tsujii Archaeological Site that is mainly Yayoi Period. Small scale digs had been carried out since before the war, but excavation has rapidly accelerated since the building of the bypass, and one of those digs is the site of the ancient Buddhist temple.

Although it became clear that the central foundation stone of the pagoda was still in situ where it had been originally placed, nothing at all remained of the structure, including traces of its podium, to give any idea of the pagoda as a whole. The *kōdō* (assembly hall) stood 40 meters to the northeast of the pagoda. Its foundation stones had been removed or lost. But judging by the traces of where they had been laid, the building had six pillars, in six places, meaning that there were five *ken* (intervals between pillars used in traditional Japanese architecture as a measurement), or 19 metres east-west as seen from outside. The extent of the north-south wall is unclear at the northern end, but at approximately 11.5 metres, it was more than 2 *ken*.

Immediately to the north of the assembly hall there were the priests' quarters (*sōbō*). This was the daily living space for priests, and is said to have been an indispensable facility for a

temple. Not many are known about, apart from those which are extant at Hōryūji and Gangōji, and those known through excavations at Yakushiji, the Kawaharadera Site, and Sanuki Kokubunji. These were long narrow buildings divided into residential units of 2–3 *ken* each. In the case of the priests' quarters at Tsujii Haiji, it was a building with pillars that were not underlain by foundation stones (*hottatebashira*), 13 *ken* or approximately 28.3 metres east-west, 2 *ken* or about 6.2 metres north-south, with eaves along the south side. It was divided inside every 2 *ken*, so it is assumed that there were six rooms in total. To the west of the assembly hall there was a building a little smaller than that, 9 *ken* in length north-south, thought to be likewise priests' quarters with four rooms. What was life like as a priest in these quarters? At Yakushiji, the flooring burnt at the time of a fire in Tenroku 4 (973 CE) was revealed during excavations, and as a result of detailed analysis of the presentation of the earthenware pottery found there, it was deduced that priests of differing status lived there in pairs. We should bear in mind that that was the late tenth century, but if we apply the same to Tsujii Haiji, there would have been twelve priests resident in the northern block and eight in the western block, making a total of twenty priests.

In *Izumo Fudoki*, the number of priests is recorded, such as five priests at the newly built temple in Hi Sato, Ōhara Kōri, two nuns at another newly built temple also in Hi Sato, and one person in Yaura Sato. According to the edict of Tenpyō 13 (741 CE) that ordered the construction of Kokubunji (Provincial Temples), it stipulated 10 priests were to be allocated per temple and 10 nuns per convent. It is unlikely, therefore, that the number of priests posted to Tsujii Haiji—a local Hakuō temple—would have been similar to a Kokubunji, so in all probability it was closer to that of the Izumo examples.

In front of the pagoda and some 50 metres to the south, there was a South Gate, a 1 *ken* rectangle or about 3.3 metres east-west and 2.5 metres north-south. There were doors on two pillars on the south-facing side, and in order to support them, it was made with *hottatebashira* pillars that had buttressing posts (*hikaebashira*) behind them. Apart from that several buildings were found to the north of the northern side of the northern block of priests' quarters: these buildings are *zassha*, miscellaneous outbuildings of which the use could not be determined.

This group of buildings was oriented as a whole to about 9 degrees west of north. The main prayer hall (*kondō*) was not found during excavations, but it is assumed to have been where the platform was in Higashitōnomoto, and that to the west of the main prayer hall there was the pagoda, and that to the north was the assembly hall, so its layout is thought to have resembled that of Hōryūji. No central gate or cloister has been found, and apart from the South Gate there is nothing such as walls dividing the facilities, so it is assumed that the area of the temple was 200 metres north-south and 150–200 metres east-west.

Buildings that predate the temple

Tsujii Haiji was built from around the end of the seventh century to the beginning of the eighth. The tiles used were principally in the style of Kawaradera,¹ having round roof end tiles with multi-petalled lotus blossom design (*fukuben hachiyō renga mon nokimarugawara*) and curved 'flat' roof tiles (*jūko mon nokihiragawara*). The ornamental 'kite-tail' roof tiles (*shibi*) were produced at the Mineaisan Kiln Site in Harima, in the distinctive style known as 'lotus design' (*renga montai*) *shibi* that is found throughout western Harima. However, during excavations, other buildings with central pillars were found underneath the assembly hall and pagoda, as though they were one on top of the other.

The largest among these buildings lay immediately to the south of the northern monks' quarters. It was 4 *ken* east-west and 2 *ken* north-south; although the southern edge was unclear, it was probably in a very formal style with eaves on all sides; altogether it was a large building about 14.5 metres east-west and more than 10 metres north-south, with a floor area of more than 150 square metres. Immediately to the south of the South Gate, the buildings cover the same area as the temple, including a gate with two pillars, but they differ insofar as their orientation was to nearly due north. This group of buildings had no tiles, and to judge by the earthenware that was excavated from them, they date from the first half of the seventh century. We may suppose that they formed the residence of the locally powerful family who claimed descent from the Kochi family in *Harima Fudoki*.

¹ Translator's note: an Asuka Period Buddhist temple, the site of which is near Gufukuji, Asuka-mura, Takaichi-gun, Nara Prefecture.

Ritual objects and *Uta Mokkan*² that were excavated from the riverbed

Traces of a river flowing north-south were discovered about 120 metres away from the site of the pagoda, on the eastern side of the temple compound. It is thought to have been a river channel from at least the Final Jōmon Period, but it seems to have been still flowing around the time of the temple, and a large quantity of wooden objects were excavated from it, particularly ritual objects, *mokkan* (wooden tablets), and implements for agriculture and crafts. The most notable among them are the ritual objects and *mokkan*.

The ritual objects include effigies of people (*hitogata*), horses (*umagata*), boats (*funagata*) and *igushi*, the sticks that staked out the extent of the exclusive sacred ground. From this assemblage, it may be deduced that purification rituals were carried out there to wash away various sorts of ritual impurities (*kegare*). Shigeru ŌHIRA believes that this site may be connected with the Kusakami Post Station, on account of its turning up more horse effigies than human effigies. The Kusakami Post Station was the first post station going westwards from the Harima Kokufu (Provincial Government Office), and it was where the Mimasaku Kaidō route branched off from the main Sanyōdō highway in ancient times. One theory is that its location was at the Imajuku Chōda Site approximately 1.2 kilometres south of Tsujii Haiji, but the routes of neither of the roads in this vicinity are fully identified, and so far no remains of the post station itself have yet been discovered.

Among the *mokkan*, one has drawn particular attention: on it is inscribed the famous poem on Naniwa Bay from *Kokin Waka Shū*.³ The full poem is *Naniwa Tsu ni / saku ya kono hana / fuyu komori / ima wa haru e to / saku ya kono hana* (*These flowers are blooming at Naniwa Bay, out of their winter hibernation. Now heading into spring, the flowers are in bloom!*), and the first part as far as ‘...*fuyu komori*’ is written in *man'yōgana*⁴ on a wooden tablet of which about 34 cm in length is extant. According to Towao SAKAEHARA [1946–], this *mokkan* would originally have been a large one about 2 *shaku* (approximately 60 cm) in length, with a line of the Naniwa Bay poem on one side. This kind of *uta mokkan* would have been held at extremely formal public rites and performances, and used to recite the poem out loud along with formulaic gestures and intonation, observed by a large audience. On such occasions, importance would have been placed upon the spectacle of holding the large *mokkan*, the gestures used, and the intonation of the recitation. The excavated *mokkan* later had the graphs for ‘self’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘house’ written on the reverse side of it, perhaps as calligraphy practice or doodling. Then after having been cut into two or more pieces, it was eventually discarded in the riverbed.

² Translator’s note: *Mokkan* were wooden tablets used as labels, etc. Some have been found to have a line of *waka* verse written on them, in which case they have been termed *uta mokkan*, ‘poem tablets’.

³ Translator’s note: *Anthology of Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times*, an imperial anthology dating to the late 10th–early 11th centuries.

⁴ Translator’s note: Specific Chinese graphs used in ancient Japan poetically, from which *kana* phonetic syllabic script developed.