

Chapter 1

Buddhist Culture of Ancient Usa

Buddhist culture crossed the ocean from distant lands to reach Toyonokuni, where it mingled with the beliefs and practices of Yamato's capital and government outposts, known as Dazaifu, in the Tsukushi region. The magnificent roof tiles that adorned ancient temples and the ancient Buddhist statues that slumber in caves tell the story of how Buddhist culture developed here. Tem-

ple buildings and pagoda have long since rotted away to leave only their foundation stones and fragments of roof tiles, but when pieced together, those vestiges trace the outline of the great temples of times past. It was in ancient Usa, particularly in the area around Mirokuji Temple, that Buddhist culture took the first, sure steps on the journey that would lead to Rokugo-manzan.



Mirokuji Temple as depicted in a model of the precincts of Usa Jingu Shrine (Oita Prefectural Museum of History)

The Mirokuji Temple Site

Usa Jingu Shrine has maintained close ties to the Imperial court since ancient times. During the construction of the Great Buddha, which was a key policy of Emperor Shomu, it is said that the deity Hachiman rode on a portable shrine to worship at Usa Jingu Shrine. The location of Mirokuji Temple within the premises of Usa Jingu Shrine suggests that Shinto-Buddhist syncretism was already well underway in the

Nara Period. Meanwhile, paintings dating back to the Heian Period depict deity Hachiman as a Buddhist monk, so syncretism of the Shinto and Buddhist faiths can be confirmed from several sources.

Many royals, including former emperors, and nobles donated goods and money to Mirokuji Temple, and the temple held manors in the Kunisaki Peninsula and

throughout Kyushu. The Buddhist culture that was part of the Shinto-Buddhist syncretism that sprung up in ancient Usa and the development of manors in the Kunisaki Peninsula by Usa Jingu Shrine and Mirokuji Temple both formed the cultural and economic foundations for the Rokugo-manzan culture that would flourish in later years.





Ogre-faced End Tile

Nara Period
8th c.; from Mirokuji Temple site
Earthenware
H: 23.0; W: 29.0
Oita Prefectural Museum of History, Usa City

The roof of Mirokuji Temple features ogre-faced end tile, or *onigawara*. Although the bottom was severely damaged, the piercing eyes are still clearly visible. The wide-open eyes are supposed to intimidate anyone who falls within its line of sight. There are layers of deep wrinkles between the eyebrows, whose tips point sharply upward toward the heavens. The protruding nose and cheeks and the prominent forehead all evoke a sense of strength.

The expressive *onigawara* of Mirokuji

Temple was modeled on the *onigawara* of Dazaifu. The *onigawara* of Dazaifu employed three-dimensional expressions like those seen on Buddhist statues, which set them apart from the conventional *onigawara* of that time. After this, *onigawara* modeled on those from Dazaifu spread throughout all of old Kyushu (known back then as Saikaido), and the one unearthed at the Mirokuji Temple site can be considered a continuation of the Dazaifu style.



Important cultural property Ogre-faced End Tile

Nara Period
8th c.; from Dazaifu Government Offices site
Kyushu National Museum

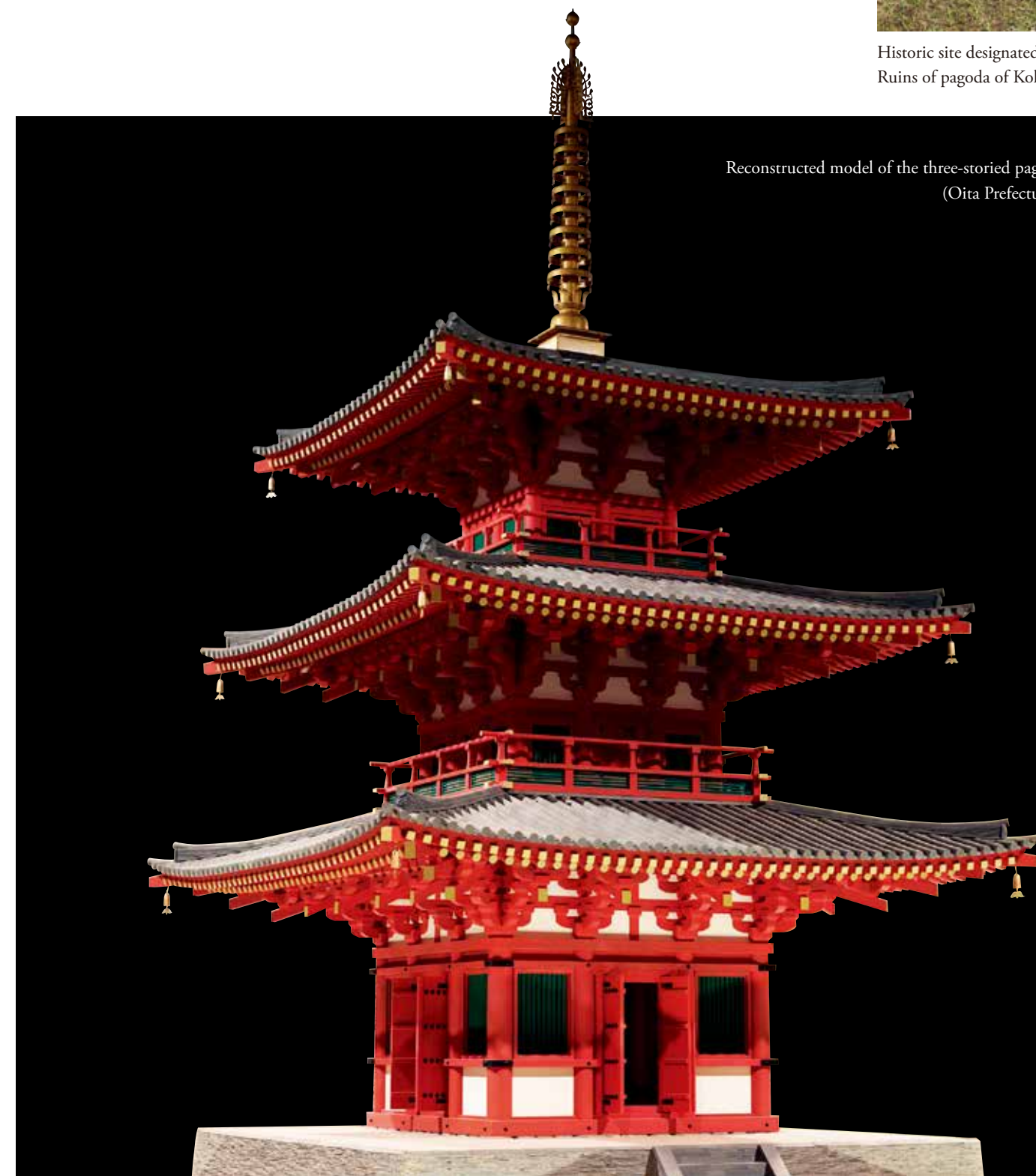
The Kokuzoji Temple Site

Kokuzoji Temple is an ancient Buddhist temple that was discovered in the Yamamoto district of Usa City. Excavations thus far have revealed that it was built in the Asuka Period (late 7th century). The ruins, which consist of preaching hall, main hall, front gateway, pagoda, and surrounding corridor, were discovered within a square measuring about 120 m on each side. All that remains of the pagoda are the stone foundations, and these can be toured as a historic site. The foundation stones that supported the pagoda pillars exist in

their original condition. Although they are currently buried underground, the exterior surfaces of the original pagoda foundations were covered in tiles. Looking at the position of the foundation stones that supported the pagoda pillars and the size of the pagoda foundations, scholars believe that a three-storied pagoda once stood on the grounds of Kokuzoji Temple. The visitors can view a one-tenth scale reconstructed model of this pagoda at the Oita Prefectural Museum of History.



Historic site designated by Oita Pref.
Ruins of pagoda of Kokuzoji Temple



Reconstructed model of the three-storied pagoda of Kokuzoji Temple
(Oita Prefectural Museum of History)



Square Tiles with Buddha in Relief

Asuka Period
7th c.; from Kokuzoji Temple site, Shimobayashi site
and Takasu Kannon site
Fired clay
H: 7.0; W: 5.0; thickness: 1.5
Usa City Board of Education

Square tiles with Buddha in relief, or *senbutsu*, were made by pouring clay into the molds used to make temple roof tiles. Although each tile differs, they are rectangular, roughly measuring 7 cm in height by 5 cm across. Because numerous tiles were excavated from the area around the pagoda foundations at the Kokuzoji Temple site, it is believed that *senbutsu* were used to decorate the inside walls of the pagoda. If this is true, this would be the only example in Kyushu of a building with walls decorated with *senbutsu*. In the design of *senbutsu*, one can see intricate drawings of a seated Buddha with its legs open and holding its

right hand up in the center in the gesture meaning “fear not.” What’s more, because the pagoda was likely destroyed by fire, some of the *senbutsu* have turned red from being burned.

Similar *senbutsu* to those excavated from the Kokuzoji Temple site have also been discovered at Minamihokkeji Temple in Nara Prefecture. Scholars believe the *senbutsu* from Kokuzoji Temple were patterned off those from Minamihokkeji Temple, which suggests that Buddhist culture in ancient Usa was incorporating elements from the ancient capital region.



The Inner Sanctum of Tenpukuji Temple

At Tenpukuji Temple, a Zen temple located in the hills of the Usa City, a hall known as the inner sanctum was built inside a cavern near the peak of a rocky mountain behind the temple. The structure is divided into three rooms, the center one of which housed a seated statue of Acalanatha that is believed to date from the Heian Period

(12th century). The left and right room contained Buddhist statues made of clay that date to the Nara Period (8th century) and a large number of wooden Buddhist statues. Of the total of 72 statues stored in the rooms, many are significantly damaged, making their expressions difficult to discern, but they include images of

the Tathagata, Bodhisattvas, and Devas. It is thought that none of them were displayed at Tenpukuji Temple at the time it was built, but rather were moved there for safekeeping from nearby temples after they were abolished.



Fudo-do Hall in the inner sanctum of Tenpukuji Temple



View from the inner sanctum of Tenpukuji Temple



These two statues were enshrined at the inner sanctum of Tenpukuji Temple. Each portrays the Buddha in its entirety carved from a single block, with arms that were made separately and subsequently attached. This style, known as *ichiboku-zukuri*, was often used for Buddhist statues in the 8th and 9th centuries, and an analysis of the radioactive isotopes of carbon they contain indicates that indeed these two specimens were fabricated during that period. The standing Tathagata statue is presumed to represent Tathagata based on its protruding

head and spiral-shaped curls of hair, while the standing Bodhisattva is presumed to represent a Bodhisattva with at least four arms.

More than 70 Buddhist statues of a variety of sizes were kept at the inner sanctum, where it is thought statues that had been kept at temples in the area were collected after the temples that originally held them were abolished. Today, most of those statues are stored at the Oita Prefectural Museum of History.



Tangible cultural property designated by Oita Pref.

**Standing Tathagata
from the Buddhist Statues in
the Inner Sanctum of
Tenpukuji Temple**

Nara to Heian Period
8th–9th c.
Wood
Statue - H: 147.5
Kuro District, Usa City

Tangible cultural property designated by Oita Pref.

**Standing Bodhisattva
from the Buddhist Statues in
the Inner Sanctum of
Tenpukuji Temple**

Nara to Heian Period
8th–9th c.
Wood
Statue - H: 153.5
Kuro District, Usa City

