

Room 6: Calligraphy

Buddhist Sutras of Ancient India and Japan

N-8-1 *Hannya-Shingyō* (Heart Sutra) and *Dharani Mantra* in Sanskrit

These are palm-leaf manuscripts featuring Sanskrit transcriptions of the *Heart Sutra* and a mantra called the *Sonshō Dharani* (lit. “the victor’s chant”). In ancient India, palm leaves were used for Buddhist transcriptions before being replaced by paper. The round edges of dried palm leaves were cut to form rectangles, and ruled lines were added to aid the writer. These particular pieces are among the oldest extant examples of palm-leaf manuscripts.

N-8 Transcription of the *Hannya-Shingyo* (Heart Sutra) and *Dharani Mantra* in Sanskrit with annotations in Chinese

The palm-leaf manuscripts of the *Heart Sutra* and the *Sonshō Dharani* (lit. “the victor’s chant”) were carefully preserved at Hōryūji Temple for nearly a thousand years before being transcribed here by the monk Jōgon (1639–1702). Jōgon is known for founding Reijunji Temple in the Yushima district of Tokyo (then Edo) and was an expert on Sanskrit’s ancient Siddham script—the script used in the original manuscripts. He added explanatory notes and marks in red along with an afterword to aid in understanding the Chinese text.

N-14: *Butsumyō-kyō* (Sutra of the Buddhas’ Names)

The *Sutra of the Buddhas’ Names* preaches that if a person repents, their sins can be obliterated by the power of chanting the *nianfo* (*nenbutsu*) and remembering all the names of the buddhas. This version of the sutra consists of three volumes—one each for the past, present, and future—with each volume listing the names of a thousand buddhas. According to the colophon, in 1141 a monk named Ryūkei held a ceremony commemorating the one-year anniversary of the death of his mentor, Rinkō Taishi. At the ceremony, this sutra was read aloud in prayer and given as an offering to the temple afterwards.

N-11 Surviving Portion of the *Kengu-kyō* (Stories of the Wise and Foolish Sutra), Known as *Ōjōmu*

This fragment was sourced from a thirteen-volume transcription of the *Sutra on the Wise and Foolish*. The handwriting is more majestic and powerful than other transcriptions, and its name *Ōjōmu* (lit. “Great Shōmu”) implies that it was brushed by Emperor Shōmu. However, the text is not in his handwriting.

N-14-1: *Butsumyō-kyō* (Sutra of the Buddhas’ Names)

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this sutra translated by the Indian monk Bodhiruci (d. 535) is particularly well known. This version of the sutra consists of three volumes—one each for the past, present, and future—with each volume listing the names of a thousand buddhas. According to the colophon, in 1141 a monk named Ryūkei held a ceremony commemorating the one-year anniversary of the death of his mentor, Rinkō Taishi. At the ceremony, this sutra was read aloud in prayer and given as an offering to the temple afterwards.

Room 6: Textiles

White Rug and Mat with Scrolling Grape Vines

The current exhibition features a white rug and a brocade mat decorated with scrolling grape designs as representative examples of the Hōryūji Treasures. The white rug is thought to have originated in Central Asia, and the exotic scrolling grape vine designs provide a glimpse into the cosmopolitan nature of Japanese material culture of the 8th century.

N-38-1,2: Joku Mat, Design of scrolling grape vines

Originally, mats of this kind were made by wrapping a rush mat with hemp cloth, which formed a core, and applying brocade to the front and tie-dyed plain silk to the back.

Scrolling grape vines were a very popular design in the Nara period (710–794). The hemp cloth used for *Joku Mat, Design of scrolling grape vines* (N-38) has an inscription in ink stating that it was offered as a tax to the central government by the Hitachi Province in the 6th year of the Tenpyō Shōhō era (754).

N-54-1: White Rug

This white rug is made of wool like carpets today. Buddhist monks used rugs of this type as mats and decorations in ancient temples. Extant examples in Japan only remain in the collections of Hōryūji Temple and the Shōsōin Repository.

Wool was laid out thickly, moistened, rolled up and compressed, and as it dried, the wool intertwined to form a single rug. In other words, the felting technique as we know it today was used to create this rug.

Similar rugs are still used by nomads today. This one was probably made in Central Asia and then sent to Tang-dynasty (618–907) China. From there it was brought to Japan by envoys crossing the sea. As a utilitarian object, this rug may seem mundane, but it tells a great story about international exchange in the 8th century.