

## Room Six: Calligraphy

### The Sutras of Japan

#### **N-10 *Shōsan Jōdobutsu Shōju-kyō* Sutra on the Pure Land and Salvation through the Grace of Buddha**

This sutra was translated by the Tang-dynasty (618–907) monk Xuanzang (602–664), and describes the merits of Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Pure Land and other Buddhist deities. It is a different translation of the *Amitabha Sutra*, which was translated by Kumārajīva (344–413). The sutra has been inscribed in standard script on nine sheets of yellow-dyed hemp paper joined together, giving it the appearance of a Tenpyō-era (729–749) sutra.

#### **N-14 Sutra of the Names of Buddhist Deities**

The *Sutra of the Names of Buddhist Deities* teaches that devotees can repent of their past mistakes and dispel their sins by memorizing and repeatedly reciting the names of Buddhist deities. The sutra is divided into three volumes: deities of the past, present, and future, and each of them lists a thousand names. According to the postscript of each volume, the Buddhist priest Ryūkei held a memorial service in 1141 for the first anniversary of the death of his predecessor, Master Rinkō, and combined this service with a ceremony during which this sutra was recited and dedicated.

## **Room 6: Textiles**

### **An Exquisite Obi and Textiles Woven with Various Techniques**

The textiles currently on view include fragments of a lavish obi (sash) that is said to have belonged to Emperor Shōmu (701–756), and textiles dyed and woven using different materials and techniques, such as *kumihimo* (cords made by interlacing threads in a repeated pattern), twill, silk, and felt. We hope that visitors will enjoy the rich variety of dyeing and weaving techniques of ancient Japan.

#### **N-49 Obi Fragment, With glass and pearls**

Nara period, 8th century

The colored yarns of this obi have been arranged in a pattern comprised of intersecting diagonal lines that changes from dark to lighter tones. The obi is said to have belonged to Emperor Shōmu. The decorations of pearl and glass beads in various colors applied to the braided yarns are particularly noteworthy. They indicate the obi must have been worn by a person of high social standing. Even in the Shōsōin Repository Collection in Nara no similar rare item remains.

#### **N-50-1 Fragment of *Ban* (Buddhist Ritual Banner), With arrowhead pattern**

Asuka–Nara period, 7th–8th century

This fragment of the upper part of a Buddhist ritual banner is made of braided yarns in multiple colors forming a braided cord with an arrowhead pattern. A similar pattern can be seen in the obi worn by Prince Shōtoku in a famous portrait of the prince.

#### **I-336-3a Cloth, With painted butterfly design on brown ground; with inscription “Tōin”**

Nara period, 8th century

This brown piece of silk cloth is decorated with ink paintings of butterflies spreading their wings viewed from above and side. The fold mark in the center indicates it was originally shaped like an obi.

#### **I-336-4 *Ra* Gauze, With small circles and flowers design in gold and silver block printing on yellow ground**

Nara period, 8th century

This fragment of *ra* gauze is decorated with a design of small round six-petaled flowers in gold and silver block printing on a finely woven diagonal grid-like *tasuki* pattern. Even though it is only a small fragment, it conveys a delicate impression.

#### **I-336-87 Fragment of Cloth, With lateral stripes design in assorted colors**

Nara period, 8th century

This cloth fragment is woven in alternating two types of bands to form horizontal stripes. One of the band types has an ikat-like look at first glance. The warp is quite thin, while the weft is made of two differently colored yarns twisted together to form a single yarn, known as *moku-ito*. Traces of a fold are still visible in the center, and similar textiles used around the edge of ritual banners can be found among Hōryūji Temple's treasures.

### **I-336-93 Embroidery, With dragons design on striped ground**

Asuka period, 7th century

This piece of silk cloth is decorated with a design of dragons on a base of horizontally arranged squares rendered in colored threads. The slender, relatively short dragon that stands on four legs closely resembles the design found in metalwork of the Kofun period (ca. 3rd–7th century).

Together with the *Tenjukoku Paradise Embroidery*, it is viewed as one of the oldest embroideries of its kind in Japan.

### **I-336-102 Embroidered Buddhist Image**

Nara period, 7th century

The Buddhist image of a heavenly figure and a wish-granting jewel is embroidered on a creased fabric, called *shijira*, woven with strongly twisted warp and weft yarns. The embroidery is rendered in a type of double-sided stitch that can create the same images on both sides of the fabric. It may have originally been a part of the *Kanjō-ban* (gilt bronze banner for the Kanjō ceremony) in the Hōryūji Treasures collection or a leg for a small gilt-bronze banner.

### **I-336-108 Rug, With flowers design on white ground**

Nara period, 8th century

This rug is made of compressed wool, which is comparable to modern felt rugs. Its white ground is decorated with fitted floral felt pieces dyed in indigo, blue, red, and light red. A few similar examples remain in the Shōsōin Repository, but this is the only rug of its kind passed down at Hōryūji Temple, making it an extremely valuable object.

### **N-319-14 Silk and Twill Banner Leg Fragments**

These fragments are the remains of the lower edge of a Buddhist banner and four banner legs. The dark red leg is made of twill and decorated with a *renjuen-mon* (dotted circles enclosing animals or plants) design, while the other legs in other colors are made of plain-weave silk. Scholars believe that this piece was originally made with five colors in mind, and one can imagine the vivid appearance of this banner in its original form when they were made over a millennium ago.

### **N-319-34 Silk Banner Fragments**

These fragments are the remains of the banner head, the lower part of the banner body, and the

upper part of the banner legs of a silk ritual banner. Yellow banners were used as offerings in memorial services for the repose of the souls of the deceased.

### **Twill Banner Legs**

**N-319-47-2 Fragment of Ban (Buddhist Ritual Banner): "Banner Leg" With arrowhead pattern**

**N-319-115 Fragment of Ban (Buddhist Ritual Banner): "Banner Leg" With alternating checkered pattern**

**N-319-117-1 Fragment of Ban (Buddhist Ritual Banner): "Banner Leg" With checkered pattern**

Asuka-Nara period, 7th-8th century

A large number of banners passed down at Hōryūji Temple is made of twill silk. Twill is a material created with orthogonal warp and weft yarns continuously crossing over the other in a set order. As time went by, Hōryūji twill changed from geometrical designs such as arrowhead and nested diamond patterns to larger figurative ones such as grape vines and phoenixes. As a monochromatic fabric, twill looks plain at first glance, but try observing the banner from a different angle and the pattern will emerge more clearly.

### **Silk Banner Legs**

**N-319-51-2 Fragment of Ban (Buddhist Ritual Banner): "Banner Leg"**

**N-319-52-2 Fragment of Ban (Buddhist Ritual Banner): "Banner Leg"**

Asuka-Nara period, 7th-8th century

Plain-weave silk is the simplest fabric to produce, with the warp and weft yarns crossing one another in turn. The fabric was commonly used for banner legs. While banners used in rituals for the deceased were dyed solely in yellow, banners used in other Buddhist ceremonies and to decorate the temple halls were dyed in a variety of colors. The main five colors were navy blue, red, yellow, green, and purple. These examples provide us with a glimpse of the seemingly simple but profound world of early dyed textiles.