

Sessions 06-07 Faces of Nara

0. Intro

- The maturation of the imperial system during the Nara period as seen in three different “faces”: its private face, public face, its cosmopolitan face.

- Three cultural productions (not without political ramifications) will anchor our study of the Nara period this week as they represent these three faces of Nara: Man'yôshû (an anthology of poetry), Tôdaiji (a huge Buddhist temple), Shôsôin (an imperial storehouse).

- Monday's session will focus on #1, Man'yôshû. Wednesday's session will consist of a slide presentation covering #2 and #3 (Tôdaiji and Shôsôin).

1. The Private Face: Man'yôshû (“Collection of 10,000 Leaves”)

- Over 4500 poems put together during Nara period.
- Preface is in Chinese and it followed the form of Chinese collections.
- Contains *chôka* (long poems) and *tanka/waka* of 5/7/5/7/5 syllable pattern.
- They generally express private sentiments, but do contain political aspects.

NOTE: We will spend the last half of our Monday session discussing your favorite poems so be prepared by picking out a couple and thinking about what and how they tell us about Nara period Japan and its people.

2. The Public Face: Tôdaiji

- Emperor Shômu (724–749) est. Tôdaiji and heavily patronized Buddhism.
- Commissioned Tôdaiji (built 743–752) in NE hills of Nara
- Main hall contains huge Vairocana/Roshana Buddha: 60 feet tall, 360 tons.
(designed by 2nd generation Korean immigrant)
- Done in Tang China style temple architecture. Rebuilt in 1710.

3. The Cosmopolitan Face: Shôsôin

- Built in 756,
- Raised about 8 feet and built in a “log cabin” type style.
- Contains Emp. Shômu's personal artifacts and items from continent.
- Many of its contents are still in very good condition:

Buddhist sutra of cause & effect

“Birth of the Buddha bowl”

Incense pedestal

Priest's staff & other religious articles

musical instruments

jade bowls

mirror and enamel cloisonné

ink stones, brushes and ink

go game board

Emperors' belt and chair, etc.