

**Buddhist Sculpture and the State: The Great Temples of Nara**  
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**Brief Chronology**

- 694 Founding of the Fujiwara Capital
- 708 Decision to move the capital again is made
- 710 Founding of the Heijō (Nara) Capital
- 714 Kōfukuji is founded
- 716 Gangōji (Hōkōji) is moved to Heijō
- 717 Daianji (Daikandaiji) is moved to Heijō
- 718 Yakushiji is moved to Heijō
- 741 Shōmu orders the establishment of a national system of monasteries and nunneries
- 743 Shōmu vows to make a giant gilt-bronze statue of the Cosmic Buddha
- 747 Casting of the Great Buddha is begun
- 752 Dedication of the Great Buddha
- 768 Establishment of Kasuga Shrine
- 784 Heijō is abandoned; Nagaoka Capital is founded
- 794 Heian (Kyoto) is founded

**Yakushiji**

First established at the Fujiwara Capital in 680 by Emperor Tenmu on the occasion of the illness of his consort, Unonosarara, who later took the throne as Empress Jitō. Moved to Heijō in 718.

Important extant eighth century works of art include:

Three-storied Pagoda

Main Image, a bronze triad of the Healing Buddha, ca. 725

**Kōfukuji**

Tutelary temple of the Fujiwara clan, founded in 714. One of the most influential monastic centers in Japan throughout the temple's history. Original location of the statues of Bonten and Taishaku ten in the collection of the Asian Art Museum.

Important extant eighth century works include:

Statues of the Ten Great Disciples of the Buddha  
Statues of the Eight Classes of Divine Protectors of the Buddhist Faith

### **Tōdaiji**

Temple established by the sovereign, Emperor Shōmu, and his consort, Empress Kōmyō as the central institution of a countrywide system of monasteries and nunneries. Site of the official Buddhist sculpture workshop and a scriptorium. Home to the Great Buddha, the largest Buddhist image in Japan, cast between 747 and 752. The statue and the hall that house it have burned twice in the temple's history.

Important extant eighth century works include:

Great Buddha (only part of the pedestal and lower torso date from the original casting)  
Statues of the Four Divine Kings housed in the Ordination Hall  
Painting of Śakyamuni Preaching on Vulture Peak, originally from the Sangatsudō and now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

### **Tōshōdaiji**

Temple established by Jianzhen (J: Ganjin; 668-763), a Chinese monk versed in Buddhist precepts who was invited to Japan by Emperor Shōmu to strengthen the Japanese Buddhist community. Completed by his disciples after his death. Site of an important sculpture workshop in the late eighth century.

Important extant eighth century works include:

Main Image Hall  
Statues of the Cosmic Buddha, the Healing Buddha, and Thousand-armed Kannon in the Main Image Hall  
Portrait of Jianzhen  
Statue of the Healing Buddha carved from a single solid block of wood

### **Kasuga Shrine (Kasuga Taisha)**

Tutelary shrine of the Fujiwara clan and protective shrine of the Heijō Capital. Established at the foot of Mt. Mikasa at the eastern edge of the Heijō capital in 768. The present shrine structures are of later date, however, they reflect shrine architectural styles of the early Heian period. Closely affiliated with Kofukuji.

### **Major Patrons**

Fujiwara no Fuhito (659-720), patriarch of the clan and father of Kōmyō.  
Shōmu (701-756; r. 724-749), 45th emperor of Japan.  
Kōmyō (701-760), consort of Shōmu, member of Fujiwara clan.  
Kōken (718-770; r. 749-758 and 764-770), daughter of Shōmu and Kōmyō,

46th monarch.

### **Sculpture Techniques**

Bronze (lost-wax)

Clay

Hollow dry-lacquer

Wood

### **Suggested Reading**

Mino, Yutaka and John M. Rosenfield. *The Great Eastern Temple: Treasures of Japanese Buddhist Art from Tōdaiji*. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1986.

Moran, Sherwood F. "Ashura, a Dry Lacquer Statue of the Nara Period." *Artibus Asiae*, vol. XXVII (1966), pp. 91-133.

Morse, Samuel C. "Japanese Sculpture in Transition: An Eighth-Century Example from the Todai-ji Buddhist Sculpture Workshop." *Museum Studies [Art Institute of Chicago]* 13, no. 1 (1987): 52-69.

Nishikawa Kyotarō. *The Great Age of Japanese Buddhist Sculpture*. Fort Worth, Texas: Kimball Art Museum, 1982.

Sugiyama, Jirō. *Classic Buddhist Sculpture: The Tempyo Period*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1982.