On the Seated Statue of Shōkū Shōnin, in the Kaizandō at Enkyōji

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Shoshazan, located in the northwest of Himeji in Hyōgo, is the site and epithet of the Tendai Buddhist temple Enkyōji, which was founded by the mid-Heian period monk Shōkū (?–1007). In the Oku-no-in Kaizandō (Founder's Hall), which is dedicated to the worship of the founder, Shōkū, is found a life-sized, seated statue of Shōkū that serves as the main worship object of the temple. The existence of the statue has long been recognized, but its significance has not been fully appreciated.

I had previously been intrigued by this statue as it seemed possibly an example of portrait sculpture that could be traced back to the middle ages, and I was able to make an examination of the statue in preparation for its appearance in the *Thirty Tree Sites of the Western Provinces*, an exhibition at the Nara National Museum in the summer of 2008. As a result, I was able to establish with certainty that the statue was in fact a masterpiece that could be traced back to the Kamakura period. In addition, the details of the provenance of the statue were clarified on the basis of previously known documents and records and a newly discovered inscription of repair found in the portable shrine housing the statue.

A portrait sculpture of Shōkū was carved by the Buddhist sculptor Anchin shortly after Shōkū's death and installed in the Gobyōdō (mausoleum), the precursor of the Kaizandō. The Gobyōdō was completely destroyed in a fire of 1286 (Kōan 9), and the statue of Shōkū was also lost to the flames. The statue was recreated two year later in 1288 (Shōō 1) by the Buddhist sculptor Keikai Hōgen from Kyōto. On that occasion, Keikai worked from a portrait (lost in a 20th–century fire) by Kose no Hirotaka that had been commissioned by Kazan Hōō, a former emperor who had taken the tonsure and was devoted to Shōkū. The extant, seated image of Shōkū appears in deed to be Keikai's recreation.

In addition, the glass container that holds the ashes of Shōkū, which had been placed in the original statue of Shōkū shortly after his death, was discovered after the fire of 1286, and again placed in the recreated statue. It was rediscovered during the Edo-period repairs on the statue and once again placed within the statue. Although the glass container cannot be seen from the bottom of the statue, the existence of the glass container and its contents, which appear to be the remains, were confirmed by x-ray photography taken during the exhibition. On the basis of a comparison with other funerary objects, the glass container appears to have been produced in China during the Northern Sung period. Furthermore, in terms of Japanese portrait sculpture containing the remains of the subject, this work is second only to the seated statue of Chishō Daishi Enchin (known as the Gokotsu Daishi) at Onjō-ji temple in Shiga prefecture, and the theoretical basis for it seems to be the tradition in China of producing images of eminent priests from their ashes.