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The Documents of the Shōsōin Treasury and the History of Their Study

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Abstrtact

One of the most important features of the documents from the Shōsōin treasury is the opportunity for researchers not only to study the events, institutions, and sources of the Nara era, but also to see the Japanese 8th century "with a human face." Among the documents, there is a lot of material that talks about the everyday life and service of the sovereign's subjects. This is of special interest for the author of the article, who aims to see a person who lived in ancient Japan. To create a basis for future research, the author conducts a source study of the Shōsōin documents as a preparatory stage for their study.

The objectives of the article are to discuss where and why the Shōsōin documents were created; find out how they were placed into the treasury and how they were stored in it; give their classification, describe the types of documents; find out what happened to them after the conservation of the Shōsōin at the end of the 8th century, how the documents were rediscovered in the Edo period, how and why they were studied in the 19th and 20th centuries; talk about the scholars who were involved in their research, and about the modern study of the Shōsōin documents.

Keywords: Japanese history, Nara period, Buddhism, Shōsōin documents, classification, features.

Introduction

Every fall for two weeks the Nara National Museum hosts an event that attracts a variety of visitors. Antiquity enthusiasts come to the museum to see an exhibition on the world-famous Shōsōin (正倉院) treasury, which houses treasures from the Nara period (710–794). Each year, about 60 items are selected for the exhibition. In 2023, it will be held for the 75th time.

In addition to articles of clothing, Buddhist ritual utensils, musical instruments, etc., the treasury also contains the so-called Shōsōin documents (*Shōsōin monjo* 正倉院文書). They are of particular interest to researchers around the world. There are about 10 thousand documents, which date back to the 8th century and represent a unique material for research. It is difficult to give them a generalized characteristic. V. Farris, one of the few European researchers of Shōsōin documents, characterized them as follows: "This is a real mishmash of documents, which, however, on its scale and complexity has no analogues in the world" [Farris 2007, p. 398].

The treasury is located in Nara, the first permanent capital of Japan, in the territory of the Tōdaiji temple complex. Like the temple and many other Buddhist buildings of the 8th century, the treasury is associated with the activities of sovereign Shōmu (701–756, r. 724–758) and his family: sovereign consort Kōmyō (701–760) and his daughter, Princess Abe (718–770), who ruled as Kōken in 749–758 and as Shōtoku in 764–770.

The order to build the Tōdaiji temple and Buddhist complex was issued by Emperor Shōmu in 743. The idea to build the temple was connected, as we think, with the emperor's worldview. During his reign there were many misfortunes: the death of his firstborn son, a terrible epidemic of smallpox. The chronicle *Shoku Nihongi* (797) and the Shōsōin documents themselves show that Shōmu viewed these misfortunes largely through the prism of Buddhist texts: the ruler is constantly threatened by demons, he is constantly watched by the Four Heavenly Sovereigns.[1] Familiarity with the

[1] *Shitennō* 四天王, guardian gods of the four sides of the world. According to the texts of sutras, for example, the Sutra of Golden Splendor, it is evident

sutras influenced the perception of the real world and structured the picture of the world in accordance with Buddhist values. The edicts of Shōmu included in *Shoku Nihongi* (e.g., from 741, Tempyō: 13-3-24) recognize the ruler's responsibility for everything that happens in the country, the need to lead a virtuous life and to create additional means of protection. One such means was to be a network of *kokubunji* 国分寺 (one male and one female Buddhist monastery in each province), and the system was to be headed by a capital temple of unprecedented size, the Tōdaiji. In this temple, in 745, the sovereign ordered a huge statue of the Great Buddha to be erected. If we trust the legends about monk Gyōki (668–749), who collected donations for the temple and the statue, we can say that this was not just a state endeavor, although the initiative came from the sovereign, but the work of all those people of ancient Japan who believed that they lived in the age of the five pollutions[2] and wished to protect themselves.

Tōdaiji absorbed all the power of the country and became its sacral center. According to *Shoku Nihongi*, it can be assumed that Shōmu even valued the temple more than the sovereign's palace – he spent almost all his time in Tōdaiji and provided it with huge resources.

Apparently, even during the lifetime of sovereign Shōmu (it is not known exactly when), a treasury appeared in the territory of the temple complex. It was first mentioned in 756, when Empress Kōmyō presented precious things of the deceased sovereign to the Great Buddha statue on the occasion of mourning for the deceased in the same year. The history of the treasury, as well as the history of the treasures and some of the Shōsōin documents, begins with this year.

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that, in addition to protection, the functions of the Four Heavenly Sovereigns included supervision and punishment for misbehavior. The Four Heavenly Sovereigns were especially strict in their supervision of a ruler in whose country the Buddhist Law, the Dharma, was prevalent.

[2] A view influenced by the Sutra of Protection of Body and Life (救護身命經). In it, the Buddha on his deathbed describes a picture of a bleak future – the "evil age of the five pollutions," *gojoku akuse* 五濁惡世, when the world is full of demons, vices, sorcery, and chaos flourishes.

The word *shōsō* 正倉 refers to a vault affiliated to a temple or a shrine. Originally there were many such vaults, but, over time, it was the Tōdaiji temple treasury that this term began to refer to.

Shōsōin is a wooden building in the *azekura-zukuri* 校倉造 style. The first buildings of this style appeared in the 4th – 3rd centuries B. C. at the beginning of the Yayoi period and had the form of piled log structures designed to house the head of the chiefdom and to store supplies. The Ise shrine complex was built in the *azekura* style. Later, this style was also used in Buddhist architecture, and it was buildings of this type where the *shōsō* storages were arranged, while the function remained the same – preservation. The Shōsōin building is 33 meters long, 9.4 meters wide and 14 meters high. It was built of triangular logs; like other *azekura* buildings, it was constructed without nails or other metal parts. Forty wooden piles support the floor, but not the roof; this structure protects against earthquakes by preventing the transmission of tremors to the upper part of the treasury. The wood used for such structures, both in ancient times and today, is Japanese cypress, the odor of which repels pests and makes the structure suitable for storing objects made of both organic and inorganic materials. The treasury has three floors; the first and second floors are divided into three compartments: north, south, and middle; the third, upper floor is arranged as a single space without dividing walls. For a long time, there was an opinion among researchers that the northern and southern compartments were originally erected, connected by a single roof, and, in place of the central compartment, there was a void (this type of construction is called *narabigura* 双倉). However, the latest research on the building structure using the dendrochronological dating method has shown that the middle compartment was in Shōsōin originally.

The Shōsōin building has been well preserved because, firstly, access to it has been extremely limited and, secondly, it has been regularly renovated. Since 1997, the treasury building has been registered as a national heritage site, and, since 1998, as a UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site.

In total, there are about 9,000 antiquities in Shōsōin. In 756, sovereign consort Kōmyō presented approximately 650 items to Tōdaiji (and then made four other offerings). Among them we can find items from Tang China, India, Persia, Greece, and Egypt that came to Japan along the Silk Road, and items produced in Japan during the Tempyō years (729–748). But there are also later items in Shōsōin, though a minority of the whole collection. The earliest dated item was produced in 707, and the latest dated in 1693; it was placed in the treasury during one of its openings in the Edo period (1603–1868). All these treasures were kept in the northern compartment, which was closed with the sovereign's seal *chokufū* 勅封, and was supposed to be accessible only with the sovereign's permission and after appropriate ceremonies. In addition to the sovereign's offerings, Shōsōin treasures include the cult utensils of Tōdaiji temple, which were used in the 8th century.

Many of the treasures have been very well preserved. This was due to both the construction of the building and the *karabitsu* 唐櫃 crates, in which the items were placed. The shape and ornamentation of the crates were borrowed from Tang China. They were made of cedar, which prevented moisture and insects from entering.

The closing of Shōsōin and the preservation of the treasures occurred in 787. When the sovereign's court left Nara, the abandoned capital gradually became empty. The documents in the northern section of the treasury (discussed below) show that, in 787–856, the treasures were regularly monitored and cared for. Later, there was no surveillance, and the treasury was frequently opened, including at the behest of very noble persons. It is known that the treasury was opened at the request of Fujiwara-no Michinaga (966–1028), the abdicated sovereigns Toba-in (1103–1156) and Goshirakawa-in (1127–1192), Kamakura-era regents Kujō Michiyo (1193–1252), Konoe Kanetsune (1210–1259), shoguns Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), Yoshimasa (1436–1490), as well as Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616). All of them had no trouble obtaining permission to open the sovereign seals and "borrow" treasures. For

example, during the Ashikaga period (1333–1572), there was a belief in high circles that possession of the fragrant *ranjatai* 蘭奢待 tree (the documents of the northern compartment of the treasury use the listed name *Ōjukukō* 黄熟香) helped those aspiring to power to realize their ambitions. Therefore, many nobles tried to get a piece of this tree.

A new period in the history of Shōsōin began in the 17th century, when the treasury attracted Tokugawa scholars and antiquities enthusiasts. During the 17th century alone, the bakufu authorities opened the treasury four times (1602–1603, 1612, 1666, 1693) to repair the building, inspect, enumerate, and classify the treasures. Since that time, it has been customary to use the following conventional classification of artifacts stored in Shōsōin [Maruyama 1999, p. 40–57]: Buddhist utensils (仏具); clothing and jewelry (服飾); furniture (調度品); games (遊戯具); musical instruments (楽器); weapons (武事).

The scientific interest in the treasury items is very important in the context of our work. The fact is that with the beginning of the study and description of the treasures, Tokugawa scholars also paid attention to the Shōsōin documents.

Shōsōin documents

The documents we are interested in date from 720 to 780 and represent the richest, most diverse, and heterogeneous source on 8th century Japan. If we try to classify this, as Farris put it, “mishmash,” the documents belong to the clerical type of historical sources: their main task was “to document decisions and tasks on various issues and the execution of these decisions” [Golikov, Kruglova 2014, p. 62].

Paper in the 8th century was expensive. As Minami Hirakawa writes, the average price of paper in the middle of the 8th century was two *mon* 文, and one *mon* was equal to six *shō* of rice (1 *shō* = 600 g), about 0.5 *mon* was the daily subsistence minimum, and the salary of scribes was 10 *mon* [Meshcheryakov, Grachev 2010, pp. 299–300;

Hirakawa 1994, p. 145]. Paper was saved, people tried to use both the front and the back side. A part of Shōsōin documents is written on the reverse side of paper already used by other departments, the so-called "discarded paper" *hogo bako* 反古箱, containing discarded official documents *kumon* 公文, sent most often from higher departments for repeated use. These include account and tax books, ward registers, registers of incoming and outgoing documents, etc. The reverse side of the discarded paper was used for unofficial, internal documentation, a very important category of treasury documents.

The discarded paper was not individual sheets of paper. They were scrolls into which documents were bound. When they arrived at Shōsōin, the integrity of the scrolls was of no value to the clerks: they were cut and glued together in random order.

The classification of documents is based on the works of Sakaehara Towao and Yoshida Takashi [Sakaehara 2011, p. 22; Yoshida 1983, pp. 298–299]:

Table 1

Classification of documents

Front side	Back side
I. Documents related to the Shōsōin treasures and stored in the sealed room of the **northern** compartment of the treasury. Property of the Ministry of the Court 宮内省.	
A. Records of what items came into the treasury (*senyū* 施入), when and by whom treasures were borrowed and returned (*suitō* 出納), how and when treasures were cleaned, aired, and inspected (*bakuryō* 曝泳). 17 scrolls	Back side is empty
B. Documents accompanying storage units (tags, wrappers, etc.)	– Records of the Tōdaiji Shrine Construction Office that have been retired from the records of other agencies – Old records of other agencies
II. Records of the Sutra Correspondence Office of the Scriptorium Office at Tōdaiji 写経所, stored in the **middle** compartment. 667 scrolls and 5 volumes	

A. Documents of the Scriptorium	
1. Documents created in the scriptorium: – Internal (service) documents of the scriptorium – Interdepartmental correspondence – Copies of documents sent from the scriptorium – Documents created in the scriptorium, sent and later returned – Draft documents – Others	Scriptorium documents that have become unneeded: – Documents with blank reverse side – Drafts of the monthly financial reports of the Tōdaiji Shrine General Construction Office – Records of the Tōdaiji Shrine Construction Office that have been removed from the records – Deleted documents of the Kōmyō Consort Court Administration Office – Records of central government offices (tax and financial reports, household registers, house books, etc.) removed from the records of the central government offices
2. Incoming documents from higher authorities – Documents from the Tōdaiji General Construction Office – Records from the Kōmyō Consort Court Office	– Records of the Tōdaiji Shrine Construction Administration which have been withdrawn from the case file – Records relating to the management of the court of Lady Consort Kōmyō withdrawn from the records
B. Documents related to the construction of Ishiyamadera Temple	

According to Sakaehara Towao, documents I (A) are the most appropriate to be called "Shōsōin documents" [Sakaehara 2011, p. 23]; more often researchers call them "documents from the northern compartment of Shōsōin", *hokusō monjo* 北倉文書. They date from 756 to 856, that is, they belong to a time when treasures were regularly accounted for and controlled.

They have the following structure:

1) Records of Empress Kōmyō's offerings to the Great Buddha statue (5 scrolls):

– Records of the offerings of sovereign treasures 国家珍宝帳 – Tempyō Shōhō 8-6-21 (756)

– Records of offerings of various potions and medicines – Tempyō Shōhō 8-6-21 (756)
– Records of the offering of folding screens *byōbu* 風花氈等帳 favored by Sovereign Shōmu – Tempyō Shōhō 8-7-21(756)
– Records of an offering of calligraphy to Wang Xizhi and his son (大小王真跡帳) – Tempyō Hōji 2-6-1 (758)
– Records of Sovereign Kōmyō's offering of the screens belonging to her late father Fujiwara-no Fuhito 藤原公真跡屏風帳 – Tempyō Hōji 2-10-1 (758)

2) Documents on the care of treasures after the conservation of Shōsōin in 787 (5 scrolls). Dated 787–856.

3) Documents on the recovery and return of treasures (7 scrolls).

These documents are one of the most important sources on the history of the treasury, but not only that. For example, one might wonder what such rich gifts from sovereign Kōmyō mean and what the perceptions behind them are.

Documents I (B) are related to the functioning of the treasury. They are tags attached to treasures and containing information about them, or wrappers of sutra scrolls.

The tags contain, for example, information about the weight of cinnabar pieces (this mineral was attributed magical properties). The tag of the six-paneled screen door *Beauties Under the Tree* (*Torige ritsujō byōbu* 鳥毛立女屏風) includes a letter dated 752 from Japanese nobles to Korean ambassadors arriving from Silla to Japan in 751 with a list of goods they wished to buy from the embassy.

Documents II (A) are of most interest to researchers. They were created in the Sutra Copying Bureau, *Shakyōjo* 写経所, which was engaged in copying Buddhist texts – we will call this bureau a scriptorium. As G. Schopen points out, Buddhist culture is a culture of the book [Schopen 2010, p. 39]. This is especially true for Japan, as the main channel for the spread of Buddhism here was the text. Buddhist texts as a part of ritual for thousands of years formed the picture of the world, structured society, and human identity. Ritual, as K. Bell writes, is not just a symbolic practice, but a pragmatic action pursuing specific

goals [Bell 1992, p. 74]. Copying sutras, as part of Buddhist ritual in a broad sense, made people, as they themselves believed, more pious and righteous.

The genre of sutras is one of the most important genres of Buddhist literature. These texts represent the sermons of the Buddha. In a ritual sense, the sutra is equivalent to the body of the Buddha – the texts are placed in pagodas together with the remains of the Buddha. Here is what, for example, the Lotus Sutra (translated by A. N. Ignatovich) says about the veneration of the sutra text: "...if [any] person will perceive and keep at least one gatha of the Dharma Flower Sutra, will recite, explain, copy [it] and look at the scrolls of this Sutra with the same reverence as the Buddha, make [them] various offerings – flowers, incense, garlands, fragrant powder, fragrant rubbings, incense, silk canopies, banners, flags, robes, music and to give [them] honors by joining palms, then, the King of Healing, [you] truly should know that this person has already made offerings to ten thousand koti buddhas, has fulfilled, being near buddhas, [his] great vow and out of compassion for living beings [is] born again in the form of a human being" [Sutra... 2007, p. 83].

The regular copying of Buddhist texts began in Japan after the 7th century. One of the first records of a state order to copy sutras can be found in *Nihon Shoki* under the year of 673. Thereafter, records of sutra copying became more and more numerous. The *Shoku Nihongi* is replete with them. Very often prayers and rewriting of sutras were turned to in difficult times for the state: during epidemics, natural disasters, crop failures [Meshcheryakov 2010].

B. Lowe in his work on Buddhist texts of the Nara period argues that the world of ancient Japan was permeated with ritual rewriting of sutras [Lowe 2017, p. 65]. For this purpose, he conducts a study based on a microhistorical approach. Just from the Shakyōjo documents, he studies the lives of the rulers (sovereign Shōmu, sovereign consort Kōmyō, and princess Abe) and the ordinary sutra scribe Karakuni-no-Muraji Hitonari 韓(辛)國連人成 (721–?). Based on such seemingly heterogeneous anthropological material, Lowe concludes that the very proximity to a ritual text forms a special world around the individual. Copying sutras

is not just a religious event; it encompasses other facets of human life as well. Through this practice, various strata of the population of ancient Japan – high dignitaries, ordinary people, and monks, often not noble at all – were united into communities the purpose of which was to copy sutras and accumulate merit. (The famous Dōkyō 道鏡 (700-772), who almost became Japanese sovereign because of his friendship with Lady Kōken, came from a provincial family).

The rulers, by turning to Buddhist texts, to the practice of reproducing them, protected themselves and the state. The sutras encouraged people in 8th century Japan to fear evil demons, to believe that the coming age is the age of the five pollutions, and the time of the end of the Law, *mappō* 末法, would soon come, so one should lead a pious life, observe purity of body and mind, and also take protective measures: to copy sutras or, more often, to order their copying; in the understanding of the Japanese of that time, the one ordering a sutra received more merit than the copyist, who was just a "tool" to achieve a good result by the customer. This is what scriptoria were created for in Nara Japan: private (examples are the scriptoria of Prince Nagaya 長屋王 (684–729) or Fujiwara-no Fusasaki 藤原房前 (681–737)) and public ones. The scriptorium the documents of which we are examining was a state scriptorium, the main and largest in the country. Its history is closely linked to sovereign consort Kōmyō and her family: her daughter Princess Abe (the future sovereign Kōken/ Shōtoku) and her husband, Emperor Shōmu.

Empress Kōmyō came from the Fujiwara family, her father was the most influential early 8th-century courtier Fujiwara-no Fuhito 藤原不比等 (659–720), and her grandfather was the founder of the clan, Fujiwara-no Kamatari 藤原鎌足 (614–669). Both of these "titans" of the Fujiwara clan integrated Buddhism into the system of state administration, relegating it to performative instrumental functions. As Mikoshiba Daisuke, who studies Kōmyō and her connection with Buddhism, writes, Kōmyō's mother, Agatainukai no Michiyo 県犬養三千代 (655?–733), was a devout Buddhist [Mikoshiba 2002, p. 27]. It can be assumed that Kōmyō's worldview was largely shaped by Buddhism and its texts. Kōmyō believed that ritual reproduction of sutras would bring her merit

and protection, so she created her own (still private) scriptorium. The first mention of the scriptorium dates to the third moon of 727. At that time, Kōmyō was carrying her first son, the future heir to the throne. She commissioned the scriptorium to copy the Maha-Prajñaparamita Sutra. Both the scriptorium and the copying of the sutra were to be a guarantee of the birth of a healthy baby, which was significant for both sovereign Shōmu and the Fujiwara clan [Sakaehara 2011, p. 15].

In 729, Kōmyō was appointed sovereign consort, *kōgō* 皇后. Most likely, from that year, the scriptorium acquired official status and became part of the palace administration of the empress consort, and its capabilities increased [Sagimori 1996, p. 8–11]: the staff of scribes and funding rose, and the scriptorium itself moved to the territory of the Sumidera 角寺 Temple, which was patronized by Kōmyō. In 730, the scriptorium began transcribing the complete Buddhist canon of 6,500 scrolls. The work lasted 24 years, a project of such magnitude that speaks to the power of the scriptorium.

According to Shōsōin documents, in the late 730s another patron and frequent customer of the scriptorium was Princess Abe, who became the first hereditary princess in Japanese history in 738 (due to the death or undesirability of other possible heirs). To protect and support Abe, the scriptorium was transformed that same year into the state Sutra Copying Office, Shakyōshi 写経司. In 742, the scriptorium moved to the grounds of the Tōin 東院 Temple (later to be renamed Fukujuji 福寿寺, then Konkōmyōji 金光明寺), and then to Tōdaiji. Finally, in 747, the scriptorium was named東大寺写経所, Tōdaiji-shakyōjo, and continued copying the complete Buddhist canon.

Shakyōjo was subordinate to the Tōdaiji Construction Bureau (造東大寺司) and had an extensive structure. Yamashita, studying Shōsōin documents, describes it as follows [Yamashita 2006, pp. 15–19]. It was surrounded by a wicker fence (柴垣) and consisted of several buildings: a sutra copying hall (經堂, *kyōdō*), an office (曹司, *zōshi*), paper storage (紙屋, *kamiya*), dormitories for scribes (宿所, *shukusho*), kitchen (料理供養所, *ryōri kuyōjo*), baths (湯屋, *yuya*), and archive (檜皮葺殿, *hiwadafuki den*).

It is the documentation of this department and the institutions under it for the years 720–780 that is commonly referred to as the Shakyōjo documents or simply the Shōsōin documents. The internal documentation is based on texts from which we can learn about the lives of officials, sutra scribes, aristocrats, and even sovereigns: what sutras were ordered, who ordered them, for what purpose, how much material resources were spent on it; what sutra scribes ate, where they slept, bathed, how they observed ritual purity, what they wore, how, when, and why they took time off, etc.

The scriptorium at Tōdaiji Temple produced texts for the protection and support of the princess, who became sovereign Kōken in 748, and her family, as well as for the protection of the state. These functions were unified because the sovereign was thought of as identical with the state: many of the sutras transcribed for the protection of the state include prayers for the health of Kōmyō's parents (she was still the principal patroness of the scriptorium), for the protection of her daughter, and Kōmyō's vow to enter the bodhisattva path.

Tōdaiji shakyōjo existed until 776, and, in 784, the court moved to Nagaoka from Nara, and the system of the "law-based state," *ritsuryō kōkka*, which the court at Nara embodied, gradually began to decline. How and when Shakyōjo's bureaucratic documents found their way into Shōsōin's treasury is unclear. What is known is that they were originally kept in a special archive at Tōdaiji, but, at the very end of the 8th century, they were moved to the middle section of the treasury. They have no relation to the Shōsōin treasures.

The process of creating documents, according to Sakaehara Towao's reconstruction, went like this. The paper preparer (*anzu* 案主) and his assistants (*toneri* 舎人 and *zassho* 雑掌) were responsible for preparing paper and creating documents. They compiled paper register-scrolls (*tōbo* 帳簿), the form in which all of Shakyōjo's records were kept.

For this purpose, they took unneeded discarded documents sent from other departments (household lists, tax books, old financial statements, etc.). Before they were handled by the scripotria's superintendent, these documents looked as shown in *Fig. 1*.

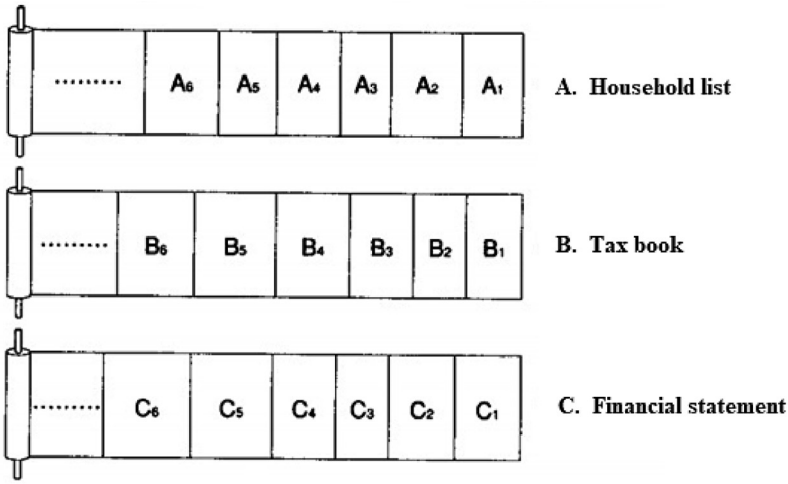

Fig. 1. Discarded documents 公文 before arriving at Shakyojo

The back side of the scrolls, which was what the Shakyōjo clerk needed, was blank or partially blank. The clerk would take a scroll of written documents, examine the blank back side, and cut out the blank pieces to the size (*dankan* 断簡) he wanted. He was not interested in the integrity of the original document, so, when compiling a new paper register, he simply glued together a scroll from scattered fragments of written documents, which were mixed randomly – after all, the main task at this stage was to provide the scriptorium with scrolls suitable for writing. The reverse side of the scrolls (which did not interest Shakyōjo staff) looked as shown in *Fig. 2*.

Thus, the front side of the discarded documents became the back side, and the blank back side became the front side. It was on this side that Shakyōjo employees kept the internal records of the department, which we now call Shōsōin records.

The documents related to the construction of the Ishiyamadera Temple, which began in 747 in Ōmi province, are not directly related to the Shōsōin treasury. Ato-no Orai 安都雄足 (life years unknown), the head of the Ishiyamadera construction department, was simultaneously the head of the scriptorium. In 762, the scriptorium even temporarily moved

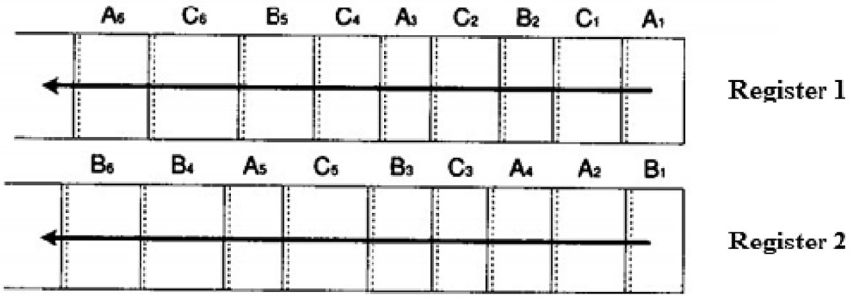

Fig. 2. Chaotically scattered official documents 公文 ou thereverse side of the Shakyojo registers

to Ishiyamadera to copy the Maha-Prajñaparamita Sutra for this temple. When construction was completed in 762 and the sutra was finished, Ato-no Orai moved the documents on Ishiyamadera's construction to the Shakyōjo archives at Tōdaiji. Later, together with the Shakyōjo documents, these documents were transferred to Shōsōin.

The Fate of the Shōsōin Documents After the 8th Century

In the 8th century, the Shakyōjo documents underwent the standard archiving procedure and were placed in a special vault. Later, probably at the very end of the 8th century, they were moved to the mothballed Shōsōin treasury. If the treasury was opened, it was only for the sake of the treasure; no one was interested in the documents, and they were forgotten for almost eight centuries.

In the Edo period, peace prevailed in the country, Buddhist religious escapism gradually receded into the background, and Neo-Confucianism, which emphasized pragmatism and rationality, prevailed. The school of "native sciences," *kokugaku* 国学, gradually developed the construct of Shinto, and, in the isolation of the country, the thinkers of this school began to regard foreign countries as an area of misrule. The Japanese came to love their country, which they had previously perceived

as remote from civilization (China and India), small and poor. Japan was elevated to the status of a divine country, *shinkoku* 神国, and, against this background, the craving for antiquity increased. Scholars began to search for a "golden age" – something lost but felt by the Japanese on an intuitive level, in their hearts.

Therefore, when Shōsōin began to be opened little by little for treasure research (classification, reorganization, restoration, etc.) from the 17th century onward, it attracted many scholars. Most were interested in the treasures, but there was one among them who noticed the documents stored in dusty, long unopened boxes in the middle compartment of the treasury. That was Hoida Tadatomu 穂井田忠友 (1791–1847), a scholar of the Kokugaku school, a student of one of its key members, Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843). Hoida rediscovered the Shōsōin documents to the world, but also radically changed their appearance.

In the tenth moon of 1833, the treasury was opened to scholars for three years. It was then that Hoida appeared there and gained access to the documents. It is believed that his close friendship with the Shogun governor (奉行, bugyō) of Nara Kajino Yoshiki 梶野良材 (1773–1853), whose younger wife was Hoida's daughter, helped him [Farris 2007, p. 407].

Hoida began his research. But it was not the scriptorium's documents that interested him, but the back of the scriptorium, which contained scattered documents from other departments, scattered in chaotic order. As Sakaehara Towao writes, based on the works of Minagawa Kan'ichi, about whom we will tell later, the main goal of Hoida was to create an exemplary collection of ancient official documents, the internal structure of which would correspond to the hierarchy of departments and ranks provided by the *ritsuryo* system [Sakaehara 2011, p. 37]. Such a focus of interest can be explained by the cool, almost dismissive attitude towards Buddhism, which is characteristic of both Edo-era Neo-Confucianism in general and *kokugaku* attitudes. Hoida also intended to create an album of the seals used by the various departments of the Nara period. He was particularly interested in the

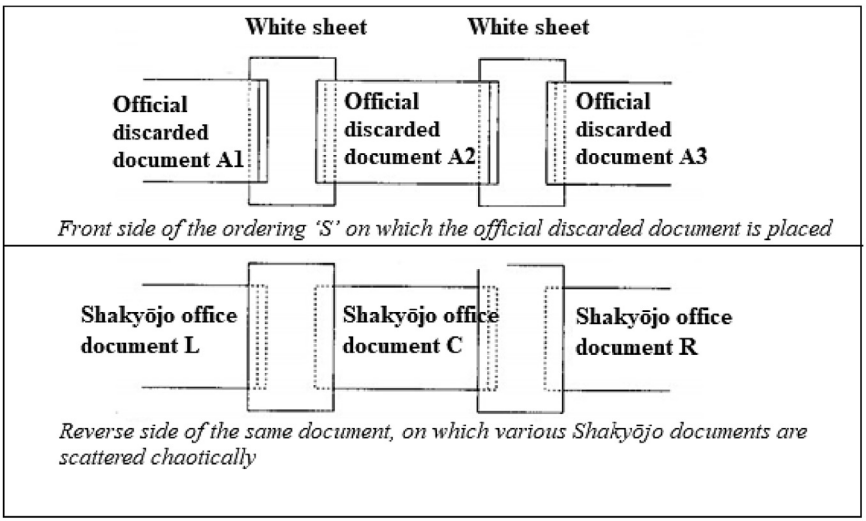

Fig. 3. The condition of documents
after Hoida Tadatomi's work on them

seals of Yamato Province, where Nara was located; they were extremely valuable to antiquarians of the time. Minagawa writes that Hoida was even more interested in the aesthetic value of the documents than in their historical significance [Minagawa 1972, p. 530].

To do this, the researcher conducted a "document arrangement", *seiri* 整理. He cut out the "fragments" (*dankan* 断簡) of official documents he was interested in from the back side of the Shakyōjo documents and glued them together according to his understanding of the hierarchy of the Nara period. He was not interested in the front side, i.e., the Shakyōjo documents; in other words, he treated the back side as the front side (see *Fig. 3*).

He acted in this way for several months and processed 25 percent of all the documents. By the third moon of 1836, by the time Shōsōin closed, he had compiled a collection of official documents and seals, which was originally called Documents Gathered into Scrolls (*Seikan Monjo* 成巻文書) but was renamed True Collection (*Seishū* 正集, hereafter S) during the Meiji period. The arranged S consisted of 45 scrolls (*maki* 巻).

Although Hoida "opened" Shōsōin's documents, he did great damage to them. First of all, he compromised their integrity and appearance. By cutting out the fragments he was interested in, he completely disregarded the Shōsōin documents and the order in which they were in. In addition, he laid down a trend for more than 100 years in which scholars were only interested in discarded documents. Hoida's followers also cut out the discarded documents for their compilations, compromising the integrity of the Shakyōjo documents. Attitudes towards the study of Shōsōin-monjo did not change until the 1960s.

The technique of Hoida's work is as follows. He cut the paper seams (*shichigume* 紙継目) of the Nara era that were used to bind documents together and glued the pieces he needed into scrolls, not directly seam to seam, but by inserting thin white sheets of paper (*shiroi-kami* 白い紙) between them. He pasted the sheet of paper on the side containing Shakyōjo's documents, that is, the side he considered the reverse side. The white sheet covered the edges of the sheets containing the text. This makes it difficult for modern scholars to reconstruct the original order of the Shakyōjo documents. That said, white sheets of paper are not such a bad solution. If Hoida had joined the sheets directly, then what was written on the edges would most likely have been lost to us, since it is impossible to see anything under a thick sheet of 8th-century paper, but, under Hoida's white loose sheet, it is possible. As V. Farris writes, modern researchers of Shōsōin documents should still be grateful to Hoida [Farris 2007, p. 407]. In the Edo period, scholars did not preserve the original manuscripts: it was customary to completely cover the weathered back side with a white sheet of paper, as well as to cut the source and insert comments. Hoida did neither of these things. He used a thin white sheet only to join the edges of the fragments, leaving most of the backside visible.

Hoida also did much to popularize the Shōsōin documents, or, rather, what interested him in them. When he was in the process of compiling the S collection, he talked a lot in correspondence with scholar friends about how his work was going. He also secretly made copies (*shohon* 書本) of documents he found particularly noteworthy and sent them

to his friends. Several copies were presented to Emperor Ninkō (r. 1817–1846) during the sealing ceremony of the treasury in 1836. Hoida's copies were made very accurately and were used by scholars of the Meiji period [Ibid., p. 408].

After Hoida finished his work, the treasury was not opened again in the Edo period. The S collection was deposited at the Iwashimizu Hachimangū shrine 石清水八幡宮 in Kyoto. Minagawa points out that someone added to S some documents that once belonged to the Ministry of People's Affairs 民部省 [Minagawa 1972, p. 583].

Everything changed with the advent of the Meiji period (1868–1912), following the fundamental changes in Japanese reality. In 1873, the Shōsōin Treasury was reopened, with the main purpose of auditing the treasures. The commission was headed by Ninagawa Noritane 蜷川式胤 (1835–1882), an official of the Ministry of Education 文部省, established in 1871. The documents were not dealt with in 1873. Then the treasury was opened in 1875, at which time serious study of all items, including documents, began. The management of Shōsōin was transferred from Tōdaiji to the Ministry of the Interior 内務省, and then to the Ministry of the Court 宮内省, under whose auspices the treasury still stands today. Since then, it has been continuously open to researchers.

The documents were shown at an exhibition at the Great Buddha Hall in Tōdaiji in 1875. They attracted the attention of scholars, so it was decided to make copies (*tōshahon* 謄写本) and study them. In the same year, the documents were sent to the Asakusa Science Book Foundation (*Asakusa Bunko* 浅早文庫) in Tokyo, where employees of the newly formed Historical Documents Research Bureau 修史局 (run by the Ministry of the Interior) began to study them.

At first, mere copies of documents were made in Asakusa. These copies are commonly named after the people who made them: Ōhashi 大橋 (after Ōhashi Nagayoshi 大橋長喜, an official from Nara) and Kosugi 小杉 (after Kosugi Sugimura 小杉相邨, an official from the Ministry of Education). Ōhashi and Kosugi included documents from Hoida's S collection and many other tax records, house books, etc. that he had not researched.

Later, the same scholars began a new arrangement of the remaining documents (also called *seiri* 整理). They worked, like Hoida, with the originals. Each new "ordering" came out as a continuation of the S collection. In total, in Asakusa, there were three of them between 1875 and 1882: *Continuation of the True Collection* (*Seishū zokushū* 正集続修, or, for short *Zokushū* 続修, 50 scrolls, hereafter Z), *Further Continuation of the True Collection* (*Zokushū Kōshū* 続修後集, 43 scrolls, hereafter ZK) and *Supplement to the Continuation of the True Collection* (*Zokushū betsushū* 続修別集, 50 scrolls, hereafter ZB).

Collection Z included tax account books and house registers unrecorded by Hoida, as well as some Shakyōjo documents that, although included in the collection, were ignored by scholars at the time. The ZK collection focused on the documents of Shakyōjo and the Ishiyamadera Temple construction bureau. The ZB collection again contained mostly documents of Shakyōjo and the Ishiyamadera Temple construction bureau. However, the latter two collections did not attract the interest of scholars of the time. At the beginning of the Meiji period, scholars were interested in account and tax books, household registers, and the contents of written records because it was thought that the information contained in them could help draw parallels between Japanese antiquity and European antiquity. It was seen as a way of proving that the Japanese were not different from Europeans. For intellectuals in the early Meiji era, who suffered from a pervasive complex of inferiority to Europeans in all areas of life, this was extremely important. The Buddhist reality depicted in the Shakyōjo documents showed otherwise, so they were neglected.

The methods of the Meiji scholars were the same as those of Hoida: they cut out the fragments that interested them, literally tearing them out of the scriptorium documents, and put them together in a convenient order according to their goals and objectives.

A little later, in honor of the Meiji Emperor's visit to Nara in 1877, another arrangement of the remaining documents was carried out, which, however, differed from the previous three. It was conducted not at Asakusa, but at the library department of the Ministry of the Interior 内務省図書局. It was called the Damaged Documents (*Jinkai* 塵芥, literally

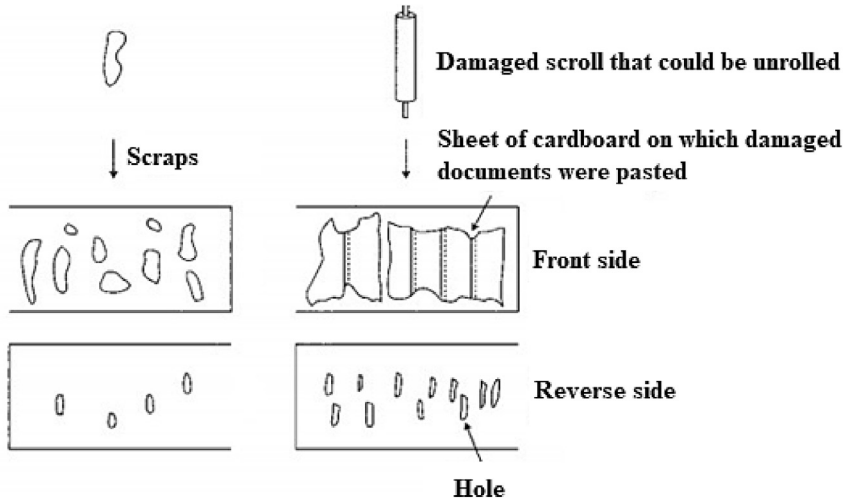

Fig. 4. Damaged documents from the J collection

"trash," 39 scrolls and three volumes, hereafter J). The J collection consisted of indecipherable fragments cut out and compiled into an arbitrary compilation – there is no connection between the fragments. The worst preserved documents in Collection J are those that contain the names of the monks who attended the opening ceremony of the Great Buddha's eyes at Tōdaiji in 752 (東大寺盧舎那仏開眼供養供奉僧名帳).

The damaged parts of the scrolls were cut out and pasted on thick sheets of cardboard, the front side being the one containing the discarded documents. To view the back side, holes, "windows," or *mado* 窓, were cut in the cardboard (see *Fig. 4*).

If a document was so damaged that only small scraps *haken* 破片 were left, they were glued to thick white sheets of cardboard with holes cut in the back to give them some shape. The scraps are smaller, collected in three separate volumes.

It is impossible to read the Shakyōjo documents hidden beneath the thick sheets of cardboard, even throught the holes. Today, researchers are treating the cardboard with a special solution and cutting large pieces out of it.

Among the "damaged documents" there is a separate type of documents that are not placed either in the 39 scrolls or in the three book volumes. These are the so-called "candle documents" (*rōsoku bunsho* 蝋燭文書), and there are 24 of them. These scrolls, which resemble the shape of candles, are so hardened by moisture that it is impossible to unroll them. Only recently has it been possible to study their contents using infrared light: most of them, like the excerpts in the three book volumes, contain the names of the monks who attended the Great Buddha's eye-opening ceremony.

The last ordering of the Shōsōin monjo, made before the important 1901 document history, was done in 1892 by the Shōsōin Treasures Ordering and Classification Office 正倉院御物整理掛. Its outcome was *Further Continuation* (*Zokuzokush* 続々修, 440 scrolls and two volumes, hereafter ZZ). The ZZ collection differs from the earlier ones: Hoida and scholars after him, in excising the official documents they needed, did not take care to preserve the order of the Shakyōjo documents, and consequently fragments of these documents ended up scattered in a chaotic order. The method used by the compilers of the ZZ was to organize the fragments of the Shakyōjo documents into groups according to their contents. Each fragment was labeled with a tag (*fusen* 付箋, 5 cm long and 1 cm wide) indicating the subject group of the document and the place of extraction. These tags make it possible to understand the original location of each fragment. In addition, fragments or groups of fragments were labeled with red tags with the sequential number of the group. This approach to ordering undoubtedly makes the documents comprising the ZZ more suitable for scholarly study. Table 2 summarizes all the orderings.

The publications and research to be discussed next are very different from those described above. It is no longer just organizing documents but creating research-friendly publications. The publications after 1901 through 1965 were far from perfect, but they allowed scholars to at least pay attention to a part of the Shōsōin documents that had previously been ignored.

Table 2

Orderings (整理) of the Shōsōin documents

Title	Number of scrolls	Abbreviation	Person or institution who conducted ordering	Volume in *Shōsōin Documents Register* 正倉院文書目録	Volumes in *Shōsōin Documents Photo Catalogue* 正倉院古文書影印集
True Collection 正集, *Seishū* (previously 成巻文書)	45	S	Hoida Tadatomi	1	1–4
Continuation of the True Collection 続修, *Zokushū*	50	Z	Asakusa bunko	2	5–8
Further Continuation of the True Collection, 続修後集, *Zokushū kōshū*	43	ZK	Asakusa bunko	3	9–11
Supplement to the Continuation of the True Collection 続修別集, *Zokushū betsushū*	50	ZB	Asakusa bunko	4	12–14
Damaged documents 塵芥, *Jinkai*	39 + 3 volumes	J	Library department of the Ministry of the Interior	5	15–17
Further Continuation 続々修, *Zokuzokushū*	440 + 2 volumes	ZZ	Shōsōin Treasures Ordering and Classification Office	6 Publication continues	Publication continues

The Old Documents of Great Japan in Chronological Order (*Dainihon komonjo (hennen)* 大日本古文書 (編年), hereafter DNK), is a transcribed printed publication of Nara documents in chronological order; 90 percent of the documents here are precisely Shōsōin monjo. One might even say that this is a new ordering, the purpose of which was to restore the chronological sequence of the documents. The compilers of the DNK studied documents from collections of ordered and copied documents. The DNK consists of 25 volumes and is considered one of the most important editions of the Shōsōin documents. Its volumes can be found in numerous libraries and now in partially digitized form on the website of the National Diet Library 国立国会図書館[3] or on the website of the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo 東京大学史料編纂所.[4] Shōsōin papers published in DNK are available to anyone interested. This was an undoubted breakthrough – after all, before this publication, only a select few could work with them.

Publication began in 1901 and took almost forty years, with the last volume published in 1940. The Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo was responsible for the publication.

The DNK can be divided into three parts according to the time of appearance of the volumes; let us call them parts A, B, C (Table 3).

Table 3

Parts of DNK documents

	Scrolls	Start of publication	End of publication
A	1–6	1901	1904
B	7–23	1907	1937
C	23–25	1937	1940

[3] Kokuritsu kokkai toshokan. https://ndl.go.jp/

[4] Tōkyō daigaku shiryō hensanjo. https://www.hi.u-tokyo.ac.jp/

These three groups consist of chronologically arranged documents. Many documents from one group repeat documents from another.

Group A includes the documents that Meiji scholars considered most important: household registers, tax records, and tax reports taken from discarded official documents. The documents in Group A have a significant drawback: the fact is that, just at the time of their study and publication, scholars from the same Department of Humanities, Institute of Historiography at the University of Tokyo, were engaged in making copies of the original documents by the method of tracing and carefully checking them against the originals ("shadow copying," *kageutsushi* 影写). The method consisted of placing a sheet of thin Japanese paper on the original and using a brush and ink to exactly copy what was written. Therefore, during the period of work on the documents of Group A, the originals were not available, and the scholars had to use the copies of Ōhashi and Kosugi, which were outdated by that time. As a result, the fragments were incomplete and contained errors.

The researchers from the Historiographical Institute tried to correct many errors by publishing the next group of documents: group B. Group B documents were published for a much longer period of time, from 1907 to 1937, but already during their publication it became clear to the researchers that they also contained many inaccuracies and omissions. Therefore, it was decided to make an additional publication of documents (group C), which would correct at least some of the inaccuracies in publications A and B.

In DNK, passages are often not connected correctly. Sakaehara Towao gives as an example a long scriptorium document *Records of Lining Paper Issuance* (間紙充帳) [Sakaehara 2011, p. 56]. There were a variety of official documents on the back of this document, so this report was cut into several fragments during the previous collections. The DNK compilers were unable to restore the document in its original integrity, and the fragments ended up in different volumes under different titles. Since the document is very voluminous, in Table 4 we present the fate of only six of its fragments (without translation of the title).

Table 4

Fragments of the report
Records of Lining Paper Issuance (間紙充帳)

Fragment title in DNK	Volume and page in DNK	Scroll with the fragment in collection	Original dating of 8th century	Document on the back side
写経疏集間紙充帳	8, p. 560	S 20	Tempyō 17-5-25 (745)	Household register of Oshima Village in Katsushika County, Shimosa Province 下総国葛飾郡大嶋郷戸籍
経師充紙帳	8, p. 573	S 25	Tempyō 17-9-8 (745)	Household register of Miita Village in Yamakata County, Mino Province 御野国山方郡三井田里戸籍
写疏紙経師充帳	24, p. 352	ZB 46	Tempyō 18-3-7 (746)	none
写疏紙経師充帳	24, p. 353	ZZ 37	Tempyō 18-8-14 (746)	none
六巻鈔充紙帳	9, p. 332	S 21	Tempyō 19-2-2 (747)	Household register of Ofu Village in Kurama County, Shimosa Province 下総国倉麻郡意布郷戸籍
六巻鈔充紙帳	9, p. 335	S 21	Tempyō 18-2-6 (746)	Household register of Ofu Village in Kurama County, Shimosa Province 下総国倉麻郡意布郷戸籍

DNK is an undoubted breakthrough for its time in the study of the Shōsōin documents. To this day, this publication is still useful for researchers, although working with it requires some skill. The text contains many inaccuracies, and they should be taken into account.

Microfilming of documents was conducted by the Department of Archives and Tombs of the Imperial Court Administration (宮内庁書陵部) from 1954 to 1965. The scrolls were unrolled on black cloth and negatives of the front and back sides were made. They could be viewed through a microreader in research libraries. A little later, printed paper copies of the negatives began to appear. All of this led to more opportunities to study documents and more people wanting to study them. And this way of publishing documents has its pros and cons.

The most important thing to keep in mind when working with microfilms and photocopies is that we see the fragments in the order they were arranged: this is not a reconstruction of the original appearance of the documents, but a reflection of their actual state. Some of the text in the photographs is hidden by the white sheets of paper that were used to join the fragments during the arrangement. Seams, glue marks, scuffs, etc. are not visible. Also poorly visible are places written in red ink or just written faintly or illegibly. But in DNK, with all the errors, one can see everything, and often there are notes on what color the text is written in.

Microfilms and film photographs from the 1950s and 1960s are only suitable for confirming text from DNK. It is impossible to make connections between documents. However, they were valuable for their time – researchers were finally able to see the documents in the original and make at least some comparisons.

The turn from the study of transcribed official documents to the study of scriptorium documents and the restoration of their original appearance (*fukugen* 復原) was made by Minagawa Kan'ichi 皆完一 (1928–2011). A graduate of the Department of History at the University of Tokyo, he worked at the Historiographical Institute at the same university from 1956. The time of his early scholarly career was during the easier access to Shōsōin documents associated with the release of DNK, the advent of microfilm, and the publication of the first film photographs. Whereas

DNK and microfilm documents simply stated the fact that Shakyōjo documents existed, Minagawa set about studying them and developing a methodology for doing so. In 1962, his first work related to the study of Shakyōjo documents, *On the Copying of the Complete Buddhist Canon Under Sovereign Consort Kōmyō* (*Kōmyōkōgō gankyō gogatsu tsuitachi kyō no shosha ni tsuite* 光明皇后願経五月一日経の書写について), was published. The study focuses on the sutra copying process reconstructed from scriptorium documents. In a sense, it is one of the first anthropological studies of Shōsōin documents, as the process of copying sutras reveals many of the personal motivations and traits of both customers and scribes. With this work, Minagawa laid the foundation for further research and reconstruction of the scriptorium documents. The process of reconstruction is the joining of disparate fragments together, *setsuzoku* 接続. Minagawa pieced together disparate fragments, studied the edges of fragments (*tambu* 端部), paper seams, etc. Many of the terms we have used in this paper were introduced by him.

One of Minagawa's most important accomplishments was the document study seminars he conducted from 1983 to 1988. These seminars attracted new people to the study of Shōsōin monjo, who later continued Minagawa's work, turning the study of Shōsōin documents into a separate field of study of ancient Japan. One of Minagawa's famous students and a participant in his seminars is Sakaehara Towao 栄原永遠男 (b. 1946), whose work we have cited many times.

At the seminars, Minagawa-sensei and his students studied the connections between the fragments of Shakyōjo documents that had been scattered after ordering and developed methods for restoring their original appearance and order. They derived an axiom of the whole process of studying documents: the connection between fragments can be confirmed only by comparing the state of the edges and the texts written on them. This work is quite laborious, since only a few researchers have physical access to the documents, and many of the edges of the fragments of the Shakyōjo documents are hidden by white paper, which was used in the ordering process. Little by little, however, Minagawa and his students were able to restore the original order of

some fragments and compile catalogs that included information about the connections and condition of the edges (*setsuzoku jōhō* 接続情報). Because of this, further study of the Shakyōjo documents became possible. With this information, it is easy to reconstruct the original Nara order of the documents and begin to study the texts. Therefore, it can be confidently said that Minagawa radically changed the way researchers view the Shōsōin documents.

Even during the seminars, based on the work of Minagawa and his students, the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo began to publish a register of information on the recovery of documents and other "technical" information, the *Shōsōin Document Register* (*Shōsōin monjo mokuroku* 正倉院文書目録). It began publication in 1987 and continues to be supplemented to this day. To date, it has six volumes, with each volume devoted to one of the six orderings (S to ZZ). The register serves as a key to the study of documents. The texts of the fragments are not presented in it (only the initial and final phrases), but there is a reference to DNK and all the technical information: how many fragments the document consists of and which number the fragment has, the title of the document, the date, which parts are missing (previous, subsequent, or both); the presence of a seal, type and quality of paper, data on how the fragment was cut, the condition of the edges, traces of glue, etc. are indicated. Both sides of the fragment are placed on one spread of the register: on the first page is the document that was on the reverse side in Nara times, i.e., the discarded document; on the second page is the Shakyōjo document.

At the end of each volume of the register there is a *Catalog of DNK Comparisons* (*Dainihon komonjo taishō mokuroku* 大日本古文書対照目録). It provides information about the Shōsōin documents collected in the pages of the DNK: specifying the number of each fragment, the name of the document to which it refers, and giving the volume and pages on which it is located in the register. This makes it easier to read the texts of the documents. At the very end of the catalog is a list of documents that are in the original orderings but, for some reason, are missing from the DNK (*mishū* 未収).

Another important catalog is the *Shōsōin Photographic Document Collection* (*Shōsōin monjo eiinshū* 正倉院古文書影印集). It has been published from 1988 to the present. There are now 17 volumes issued, organized according to six ordering collections.

Already in the 1980s, it was clear at the Minagawa seminars that the microfilm and first film photographs of the 1960s were a great achievement for their time, but that they were of little use to the modern researcher seeking to restore the original order of documents. Therefore, with the end of the seminars, some scholars have taken to creating new digital copies from the original documents. These photographs are very clear, the inscriptions in red ink and the paper seams are clearly visible. One can also make out inscriptions hidden under the white paper on the edges. There are also notes where to look for a fragment in the DNK. If some fragment is not in the DNK, the photo catalog indicates that as well. Each volume has detailed explanations describing the fragments and their physical condition, which can sometimes be difficult to assess from a photograph. Recently, some of the volumes have been posted on the official Shōsōin website.[5]

Many dictionaries, indexes, and databases, including electronic ones, are now being published to help to work with the Shōsōin documents and reveal their contents: *Index of Commentaries on the Buddhist Texts of the Nara Documents* (奈良朝典籍所載仏書解説索引), compiled by Kimoto Yoshinobu 木本好信, *Index of Things and Objects Referred to in the Shōsōin Documents According to the DNK Text* (正倉院文書事項索引), compiled by Sekine Senryu 関根真隆, *Index of Government Departments, Government Posts, Toponyms, and Temples and Shrines Mentioned in the Shōsōin Documents According to the DNK Text* (正倉院文書索引 ：官司・官職・地名・寺社編), compiled by Naoki Kajiro 直木孝次郎, *Dictionary of Names and Biographies of Personalities Mentioned in the Shōsōin Documents* (日本古代人名辭典), compiled by Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三 and his assistants, *Catalog of Sutras,*

5 Shōsōin. https://shosoin.kunaicho.go.jp.

Transcribed in Ancient Japan (日本古寫經現存目錄) by Tanaka Koida 田中塊堂, an electronic database of documents on the Treasury website or on the website of the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo. Collections of studies of Shōsōin documents are also published.

Thus, we see that Minagawa Ken'ichi's seminars changed the perception of Shōsōin documents: Shakyōjo documents became a serious object of study for scholars and opened up a whole new world on the way to the study of people and their life in the Nara period. Of course, no one diminishes the importance of the written documents, but they have already been studied, which is not the case with the scriptorium documents. After the seminars, scholars focused on restoring the original appearance of the Shōsōin documents, the information about which was collected in catalogs. Using this information, if one uses it correctly, the documents can easily be reconstructed and read. Thus, a lot of information about the life and worldview of people of the 8th century is revealed to us.

Conclusion

The documents of the Shōsōin Treasury are the most important source for the study of the Nara period and its people who lived in Buddhist reality. The purpose of our article was to lay the groundwork for future work with this complex set of documents, to create an understanding of what this source is and how to deal with it.

The Shōsōin documents were originally kept in the archives at Tōdaiji temple and were only transferred to the treasury at the very end of the 8th century. They are official records of the Shakyōjo scriptorium at Tōdaiji temple, for which the reverse sides of official documents from other departments were used. When a scholar of the kokugaku school, Hoida Tadatomu, discovered and studied them in the 1830s, he was interested not in the scriptorium documents, but in the documents on the back of the scriptorium documents, which provided information about the *ritsuryo* system. He decided to make a collection of documents, and,

for this purpose, he cut out the fragments of the documents from the scrolls of the Shakyōjo documentation. In other words, the back and front sides of the scrolls were reversed again. Scholars of the early Meiji period followed Hoida's example and made five more collections. In this way, the Shakyōjo documents became fragmented. It was not until the 1960s that attitudes towards them began to change. Minagawa Kan'ichi made the turn from the study of written records to the study of Shakyōjo documents. He and his students developed a methodology for studying documents and began to compile the first registers with the technical information needed to restore the original appearance and order of Shakyōjo documents. Now their methods have been refined, the registers are constantly updated, and the study of Shakyōjo documents has become a separate field of Japanese historical research.

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