

Andrew M. Watsky
Chikubushima: Deploying the
Sacred Arts in Momoyama Japan

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In *Chikubushima*, Watsky enfolds a captivating detective story within the larger context of sacred architecture in Momoyama period Japan. He untangles the history of a composite building, the Tsukubusuma Main Hall on the island of Chikubushima, the best-preserved example of divine adornment from the era. The result is a thoughtful study that may act as a model of how to make Japanese art accessible as well as meaningful to those outside of the field.

His purpose throughout is to show the ways in which the sacred was manipulated by the Toyotomi clan, military warlords of Japan's tumultuous era at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries before the long and stable rule of the Tokugawa shogunate. As Watsky explains, "the sacred was traditionally a source of sanction for secular authority" and the most powerful material form of the sacred was religious architecture. In particular, the ensemble structure of the Tsukubusuma Main Hall, as the best surviving evidence of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's relationship with the sacred, is taken as the central case study. On the island in the middle of Lake Biwa outside Kyoto, a region that was Hideyoshi's first domain (Ōmi), stood a shrine devoted to the worship of the deity Benzaiten whose buildings were largely destroyed in 1558 by fire. This led the way for the Toyotomi to reshape Chikubushima as they saw fit. The hall as it now stands is actually made up of two once unrelated structures; what Watsky calls the *hisashi* was likely a building that was reconstructed after the 1558 fire, and later modified when a new central core or *moya* was inserted into it. The *moya* was once a separate building first built in Kyoto as part of a memorial shrine to Hideyoshi's infant son Sutemaru who died in 1591 at the age of two, then Hideyoshi's sole heir. Watsky provides evidence that in 1602, this building

was moved to Chikubushima and inserted into the pre-existing structure that was altered quite precisely to accommodate it and give the appearance that the composite building was instead one unified whole.

Chikubushima was already a sacred sight before Hideyoshi turned his attentions to it. In chapter one, Watsky chronicles the rise of Oda Nobunaga and his use of the sacred, setting the stage for Hideyoshi's relationship with it, and more specifically, how the island came under his rule. Chapter two describes Hideyoshi's impact on the city of Kyoto and its outlying areas through building projects such as Osaka castle, the Jurakutei residence, and The Great Buddha Hall at Hōkōji. It is here that Shōunji, the memorial temple to Hideyoshi's son Sutemaru makes its appearance. Watsky believes this was the original grounds of the *moya*.

In chapter three, the author deftly describes the composite structure, the physical evidence for its appearance in the beginning of the seventeenth century, and, most intriguing of all, the analysis of the decorative scheme to prove that the building could only have been done for Sutemaru. The predominantly floral adornment is revealed to point towards the young boy specifically, who was referred to as the flower *fuyō* in eulogies by Nanka Genkō, abbot of Shōunji. Cranes and pines on the exterior, or *tsuru* and *matsu* form a rebus of Sutemaru's nickname. While chapter three describes the meaning of motifs, Watsky goes one step further in chapter four by discussing the meaning of the materials themselves, that is, what the painting, wood carving, lacquer, and metalwork on the building say about its origins, function, and importance. By treating the whole, the ensemble, Watsky overcomes the weaknesses of studies that focus on only one medium or type of decoration at a time. Chapter five chronicles the way in which the Toyotomi clan continued to manipulate the sacred through building projects and festivals to commemorate the spirit of Hideyoshi. From that wide view, the author again focuses on Chikubushima in the final chapter and relates how the island and its shrine continued to make an impact on the minds of the people through the worship of its central deity, Benzaiten, related festivals, and a Nō play.

Among the strengths of the book is Watsky's copious use of contemporary Portuguese accounts to give the Western reader leverage in analyzing the Japanese aesthetics of the era. Through the words of the Jesuit missionaries João Rodrigues and Alessandro Valignano, the author successfully compares Western and Japanese concepts without falling into the trap of many comparative studies in which differences are revealed but no conclusions reached. Watsky critiques the Portuguese statements as well as the contemporary Japanese sources and helps the reader navigate their observations. An appendix contains the Japanese sources referred to in the text, both in Japanese (if they are previously unpublished) and in English translation. Another tool that the author employs to great effect is the use of paintings to describe the context of the times. Specifically, folding screens of sights in and around Kyoto as well as maps illustrate the predominant position that Chikubushima held in the minds of the Japanese are cited.

The compelling detective story of the structure of the Main Hall itself tends to get a bit buried among the rest of the material of the book, but surely what is gained in context is much more than what is lost. Also, one wishes that the brief discussion of the attribution of the decorative program to Kano Mitsunobu could have been more fully developed.

With its creative use of primary sources, accessibility to those outside of the field, and its pioneering discussion of the meaning of materials and decoration, *Chikubushima* is a stimulating breath of fresh air for premodern Japanese art studies.