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*On the Fish Which a Monk Wanted to Eat and Which
Turned into the Hoke-kyō to Defend Him
Against Popular Abuse¹*

On Mt. Yoshino there was a mountain temple called Amabe-nomine 海部峯.² In the reign of Empress Abe, a fully qualified monk lived an ardent life of self-discipline there. When he became too exhausted and weak to move around, he had a desire to eat fish and said to his disciple, "I would like to have fish. Will you go and get some for me to eat?" According to the master's wish, the disciple went to the seacoast of Kii province, bought eight fresh gray mullet,³ and returned with them in a small chest.

On the way he happened to meet three familiar patrons of the temple who asked him, "What are you carrying in the chest?" The acolyte⁴ answered, "This is the *Hoke-kyō*." However, the water from the fish dripped out of the chest, and it smelled. The laymen realized that it was not the scripture. Soon they came to the neighborhood of the market of Uchi in Yamato province 大和國內市.⁵ They rested beside the acolyte and pressed him, saying, "What you are carrying is not the scripture. It is fish." He replied, "It is not fish. It is nothing but the scripture." Then they forced him to open the chest. Having found it impossible to refuse, he opened it and discovered that the eight fish had turned into eight scrolls of the *Hoke-kyō*. At the sight the laymen were stricken with awe and wonder and left him.

One of them, however, was still suspicious, and, wanting to find out about the whole affair, followed him in secret. When the acolyte returned to the mountain temple, he reported to his master in detail what the laymen had done. Listening to him, the master felt wonder and joy in learning that heaven had protected him, and he ate the fish. Thereupon, the layman who had witnessed the whole series of events, prostrated himself on the ground and said to the *dhyāna* master,

1. Cf. *Sanbō ekotoba* (II, 16), *Konjaku monogatari* (XII, 37), *Genkō shakusho* (XII), *Hokke kenki* (I, 10).

2. Located at present Higashi-yoshino-mura, Yoshino-gun, Nara-ken 奈良縣吉野郡東吉野村.

3. 鱈 *nayoshi*, or *hora* in contemporary Japanese. See Sekine Shinryū, *Narachō shokuseikatsu no kenkyū*, 159-160, for its references in other documents.

4. 童子 *warawa*; see I.3, n. 8.

5. Unidentified.

"Fish turn into the *Hoke-kyō* when a sage eats them.⁶ Because of our ignorant and wicked minds, we disturbed and accused him without knowing the law of causality. Will you please forgive our sin? From now on I acknowledge you as a great master and will serve you with reverence and offerings." After that he became a great patron of the temple and made offerings to the master.

Indeed, we know that the master saved himself through his devotion to dharma. As to his food, even poison turns into honeydew; eating fish is no offense for him. For fish is turned into a scripture, and heaven in sympathy prepares a way for him. This is also a miraculous event.

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*On a Narrow Escape from Death with the Protection
of the Wooden Kannon Image*

Ōma Yamatsugi 大眞山繼¹ of the Senior Sixth Rank, Upper Grade, was of the village of Ogawa, Tama district, Musashi province 武藏國多磨郡小河郷.² His wife was a woman of the Shiragabe family.³ Yamatsugi became a soldier and was sent to the frontier to conquer the hairy men.⁴ While he was away, his wife made a wooden image of Kannon and worshipped it with great devotion and reverence, praying for her husband's safety. Untouched by disasters, he came home and served the Kannon with his wife, grateful for its protection.

Several years passed after that time. In the reign of Empress Abe, in the twelfth month of the first year of the dragon, the eighth year of the Tenpyō hōji era, Yamatsugi was involved in the rebellion of Nakamaro 仲麿,⁵ and was one of thirteen men sentenced to death.

6. Cf. I.5, n. 20. This means that even a forbidden food is all right for a sage who is free from precepts.

1. Unknown.

2. Present Akita-machi, Nishi-tama-gun, Tokyo-to 東京都西多摩郡秋多町.

3. See I.29, n. 2; also, *Shoku Nihongi*, XXXVIII (Enryaku 4:5:3). The Shiragabe family changed its name to Magabe because of the similarity to Emperor Shirakabe 白壁天皇.

4. 毛人 Emishi, indigenous people of the northeastern part of Japan, ethnically different from the people of the Yamato court.

5. Fujiwara no Nakamaro 藤原仲麿, later known as Emi no Oshikatsu 惠美押勝 (706-764), who rebelled against ex-Empress Kōken and Dōkyō and was executed. After this event, Kōken was re-enthroned as Empress Shōtoku. See III.38, n. 4.