

I 7

On Bronze Kannon Images Which Showed an Extraordinary Sign in Their Transformation into the Form of a Heron¹

In the nunnery² of Okamoto in the village of Ikaruga, Heguri district, Yamato province 大和國平群郡觸岡本尼寺,³ there were twelve bronze statues of Kannon. (In the reign of the empress at the Palace of Owarida, it was a residence for Prince Regent Kamitsu-miya 上宮皇太子,⁴ who made a vow and turned it into a nunnery.) In the reign of Emperor Shōmu, six bronzes were stolen, and they were sought without success. After that, many days and months passed.

There was a small pond to the west of the stagehouse of Heguri 平群驛.⁵ One summer in June, some herdsmen near the pond saw the tip of a stake above the water. There was a heron on it. Seeing the heron, they gathered pebbles and rocks, trying to hit it, but it did not fly away. Tired of throwing stones, they went into the pond to catch it. Hardly did they reach it, when it dived under the water. When they looked closely at the stake on which the heron had rested, they saw golden fingers. When the stake was pulled out of the water, the fingers turned out to be bronze Kannon. The pond was thus named "Pond of the Bodhisattva" because of the discovery, and the herdsmen told the whole affair to the people.

Eventually the rumor reached the nunnery. The nuns came to see the Kannon, which they identified as the stolen ones although the gilding had fallen off. Surrounding the bronzes, the grieving nuns said, "We have missed our sacred images day and night, and now we are fortunate to be reunited by chance. We wonder what offenses caused you, our venerable masters,⁶ to be stolen?" Then they prepared a palanquin, enshrined the images, and returned them to the temple. Clergymen and laymen in the crowd said, "They must have been stolen by those who forged coins, but the thieves eventually abandoned them, not knowing how to make use of them."

It was evident that the heron was not a real bird, but an incarnated

1. Cf. *Konjaku monogatari-shū* (XVI, 13).

2. Identified as Hokki-ji 法起寺. See Fukuyama, *Narachō jūin*, 41-50.

3. See I.4, n. 7.

4. See I.4.

5. Unlocated. For the stage, see I.30, n. 6.

6. 大師; honorific title for Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and eminent monks.

Kannon. There is no room for doubt. The *Nehan-gyō*⁷ says: "The dharma-body always exists even after the death of Buddha." This is nothing but the lesson of the present story.

I 8

On the Immediate Penalty of Being Given a Twisted Mouth and Death for Speaking Ill of the Monk, Devotee of the Hoke-kyō¹

In the Tenpyō era² there once lived a layman³ in Sagaraka district, Yamashiro province,⁴ whose name is unknown. At Koma-dera 高麗寺⁵ in the same district there was a monk named Eijō 榮常⁶ who used to recite the *Hoke-kyō* all the time. It happened that the monk and the layman had been playing *go* 碁⁷ for some time. Whenever the monk put down a stone, he said, "This is the Venerable Eijō's hand of *go*." The layman mocked and mimicked him, deliberately twisting his mouth and saying, "This is the Venerable Eijō's hand of *go*." He went on and on this way. Then, all of a sudden, the layman's mouth was distorted. In fear, he left the temple holding his chin with his hands. He had hardly gone any distance before he fell on his back and died immediately. Witnesses said, "Though he did not persecute a monk, mocking and mimicking got him a twisted mouth and sudden death. What, then, must the penalty be if one vengefully persecutes a monk?"

The *Hoke-kyō* gives a passage to this effect: "A wise monk and a foolish monk cannot be discussed in the same breath. Similarly, a long-haired monk and a wise, unshaved layman cannot be treated alike and served with the same dishes. If one dares to do so, he will swallow an iron ball which is heated on red-hot copper and charcoal, and fall into hell."⁸

7. See Chap. II(3)b, n. 148.

1. Cf. *Konjaku monogatari-shū* (XIV, 28). Similar to I.19.

2. (729-749).

3. 白衣; see I.19, n. 5.

4. See II.6, n. 2.

5. Once existed at present Kamikoma, Yamashiro-chō, Sōraku-gun, Kyoto-fu 京都府相樂郡山城町上狛.

6. Otherwise unknown.

7. See I.19, n. 4.

8. Unlocated in the *Hoke-kyō*.