

*Kibi Daijin nittō ekotoba*

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## Overview

### I.

The *Kibi Daijin nittō ekotoba* (Minister Kibi's Adventures in China) consists of one scroll. However, originally there might have been two scrolls. In the entry in the *Jinson daisōjōki* from the seventh day, seventh month of the eleventh year of Bunmei (1479), it is written: "the *Kibi Daijin e* was completed and it has two scrolls", which means there was a two scroll version, but this version was housed in the Daijōin in the Kōfukuji Temple, Nara. However, according to the entry in the *Kanmon gyōki* from the twenty-sixth day, fourth month, first year of Kakitsu (1441), the extant *Kibi Daijin nittō ekotoba* had only one scroll: "There are several picture scrolls in Shin-Hachimangū, in Matsunaga-shō village, Jakushū province. At the request of Jōki, the following 4 scrolls were borrowed: the *Hikohohodemi no Mikoto e* (two scrolls), the *Kibi Daijin e* (one scroll), and the *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* (one scroll). They arrived today. Apparently the illustrator is Kanaoka. The ends of the text are torn, making it hard to read. They are extremely old scrolls, but were well preserved." There were thirty-eight years between the Kakitsu and Bunmei eras, which proves that apart from the scrolls in Daijōin, there was another scroll at Hachimangū. This scroll was later taken by Kinoshita Katsutoshi, and then became the possession of the Sakai family of Obama, Wakasa Province. At the end of the Taisho era, the scroll was auctioned, and is now part of the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* has three scrolls, not one. There were three scrolls from the beginning, so it seems that the court borrowed only one scroll. The entry in the *Kanmon gyōki* noted that even at that time, the text was already damaged. Umezu Jirō has pointed out that there were two copies of this scroll.

This scroll is made of paper, is 24.41 meters long and was probably painted at the beginning of the Kamakura period. From the old days, Tokiwa Mitsunaga is thought to be the painter, but it is not clear. However, judging by the style and by the fact that it was kept at Hachimangū, it is considered to have the same painter as the *Ban Dainagon ekotoba*.

### II.

The summary is as follows. Minister Kibi no Makibi, became Minister of the Right, with the support of Empress Shōtoku. He contributed to the introduction of Chinese culture to Japan. The *Gōdanshō* tells the story of his trip to China during the Tang dynasty, where he survived various trials by means of his superior talent and knowledge. He returned to Japan, having assimilated Chinese culture. According to this story, in the fourth year of Tenpyō-shōhō (752), he went back to China as vice-ambassador, but he was locked in a tower gate in the Imperial Palace in order to starve him to death. An *oni*, a demon-like being, appeared and told him that he was the ghost (*rei*) of Abe no Nakamaro, and that he would help him. At the Tang court he was asked

to read difficult verses from the *Wen Xuan*, and he was able to read them with the help of the *oni*. Next the Chinese tried to defeat him in a game of *go*, but again he won using his wit and the *oni*'s help. That was when the Chinese stopped giving him food in order to starve him to death, but the *oni* brought him food and saved him. Then the Chinese had him read *Yemataishi*, a difficult poem. A spider appeared and showed him the order in which he should read the Chinese characters. The people at the court were terrified by such talent, so they locked Makibi in a tower gate and tried to stone him to death. Makibi asked the *oni* to bring him the *sugoroku* container and its lid, in which he locked the sun and the moon of China. The court was in great difficulty and they let Makibi return to his country. The scroll ends with the *go* game scene, and one can imagine the story continues in a second scroll.

The scroll depicts the legend above and it presents aspects in the Tang court, so the details of the pictures are not highly reliable. But the vessels of the Japanese envoys to China are painted faithfully and the scroll is probably the source which best renders the aspect of these vessels. There are several sources which depict the vessels of the Japanese mission to China, but they are either painted from imagination or based on other pictures. In the case of this scroll, it is not clear which picture the painter used as a model, but it has numerous details, rendering very well the image of the vessels.

Moreover, in this scroll there are also images of the *go* game and of the *go* board, making it a valuable source for knowing the aspect of *go* in those times. Though the story is set in Tang dynasty China, the *go* board depicted had as a model the boards used in Japan.

In conclusion, this scroll is discussed here because it has elements such as the vessels of the Japanese envoys to China and the *go* board, which are related to the lives of the Japanese people.

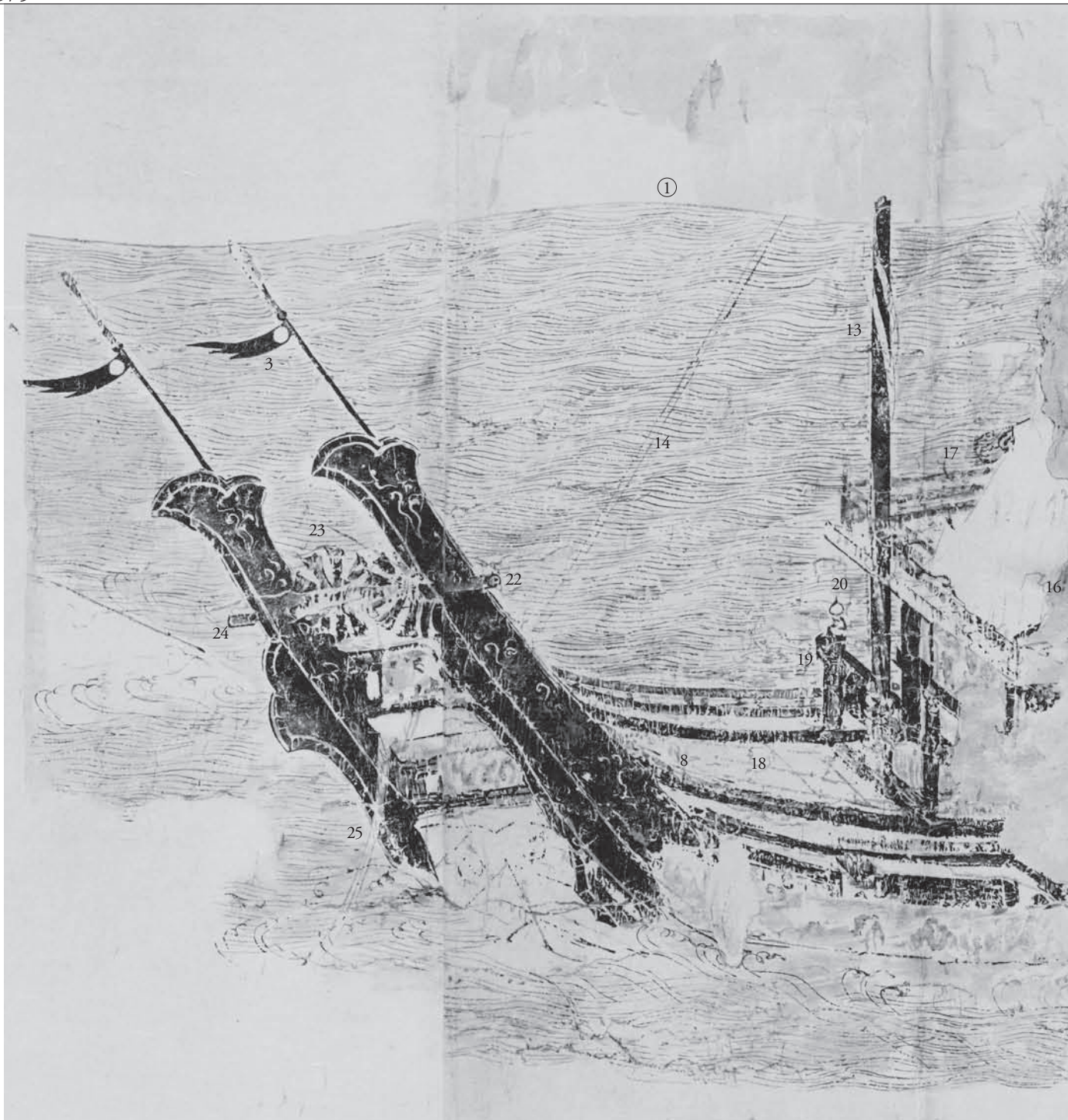


### 374 Go

Several remarks have already been made on games of *go*, but this particular one represents the game that Minister Kibi played against an expert *go* player from Tang China. According to the explanation in the scroll, Minister Kibi did not know how to play *go*, which implies that around the time when he traveled to China, games of *go* were not yet known in Japan until this time, and the *Gōdanshō* describes how *go* was introduced into Japan by Minister Kibi. However, the game seems to have been around even before that, for according to the *Ryōnogige*, “Priests and nuns are punished for a hundred days for playing music or gambling. However, they are allowed to play the *koto* and *go*.” Hence *go* was a game that already existed and was played by the people in Japan at the time, and furthermore, it was a game that people were allowed to play without any restrictions. An *oni* tells Minister Kibi that there are three hundred sixty-one points of intersection on the *go* board, nine of which are marked by black points. It is assumed that the *go* board that was around at the time this picture scroll was made is quite similar to the one used today, but the one that was created and that developed in China was rather different. Games of *go* were already popular during the Han dynasty, and the *go* board consisted of seventeen lines and two hundred eighty-nine points of intersection. The *go* board that is preserved in the Shōsōin is quite similar to the ones used today. It has nineteen lines and seventeen black points, eight more than the one in use now. In order to arrive at its present form, the *go* board had to go through a transformation during the years between Tenpyō and the late Heian period.

- ① man playing *go*
- 2 *kanmuri*
- 3 *sokutai* attire
- 4 *hakama*
- 5 *kyo*
- 6 *go* board
- 7 *go*-stone container
- 8 headwear
- 9 sleeveless kimono
- 10 *obi*
- 11 Chinese style robe
- ⑫ sitting cross-legged
- 13 headwear
- ⑭ shading eyes with the hand
- 15 paper
- ⑮ sitting with one knee up



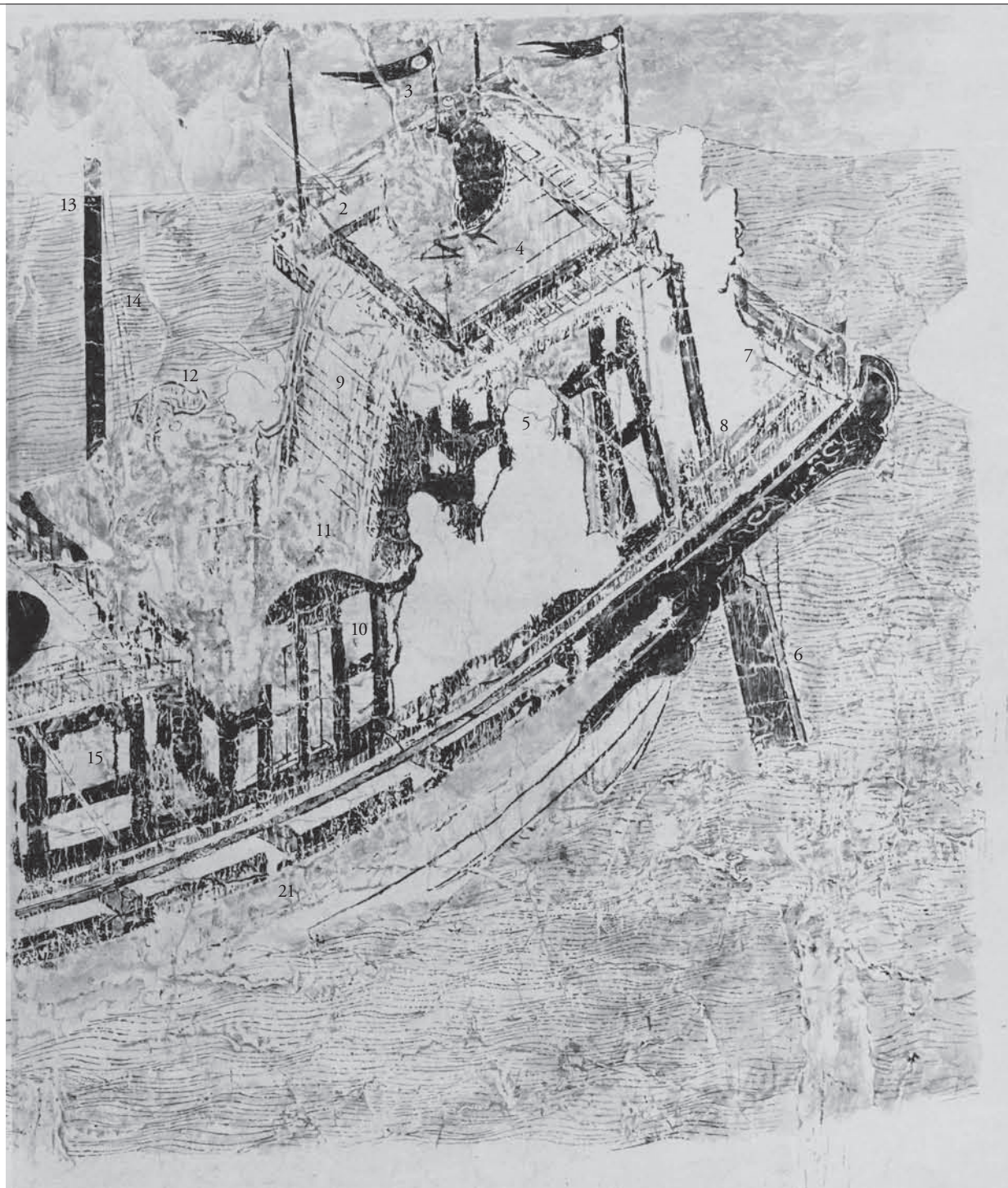


### 375 Ship Taking the Japanese Envoys to Tang China

Normally there were four ships that set sail to China to take the envoys from Japan. The ships that set sail in the first year of Taihō (701) under Emperor Monmu were constructed in Suō and the ones from the fourth year of Tenpyō (732) were made in Ōmi, Tanba, Harima, and Bitchū. As the ships were constructed inland in such places as Ōmi and Tanba, they could not reach too deep into the water or else they would not be able to travel down the river. However, the ships apparently got bigger and were constructed in Harima in the second year of Tenpyōhōji (758), and in Aki in the fifth year of Tenpyōhōji (761) and the sixth year of Hōki (775). It is

unknown where Kibi's ship was constructed, but according to the *Shoku-nihongi*, Kibi's retinue consisted of two hundred twenty-two people. When they returned to Japan, they brought the Chinese priest Ganjin with them. The ships at the time were *kōzosen*, but their parts were held together by clamps, which indicates how crude the technique of constructing ships then was. In order to travel far, sails were used with two masts to provide ample support. Although equipped with a rudder as well, those on board had to row when there was no wind, which is suggested by the "shelves" for oars on the outer part of the gunwale. As it is a passenger ship, it has a house built in the middle, and on its stem is an anchor winch for hauling in the anchor.





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|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ① ship of envoys to Tang China                         | 14 halyard                   |
| 2 lookout                                              | 15 small high-rise structure |
| 3 flag                                                 | 16 lookout                   |
| 4 <i>tatami</i>                                        | 17 railings                  |
| 5 high-rise structure                                  | 18 deck                      |
| 6 rudder                                               | 19 ornamental pillar         |
| 7 stern                                                | 20 ornamented pillar top     |
| 8 railings                                             | 21 oarsmen's seat            |
| 9 steps                                                | 22 bow                       |
| 10 roofed cabin                                        | 23 anchor winch              |
| 11 cypress bark thatching                              | 24 axle                      |
| 12 ornament of <i>shachi</i> (an imaginary sea animal) | 25 anchor rope               |
| 13 mast                                                |                              |