

Unkei: The Kamakura Shogunate and the Miura Clan”

Highlights and Main Works on Display

Who were the Samurai?

The samurai, which emerged in the middle of the Heian period (794-1185), rose to power by quelling local rebellions and serving as guards and servants to the emperor and nobility. The two most prominent examples are the Minamoto Clan, descendants of Emperor Seiwa, and the Taira Clan, descendants of Emperor Kanmu. At the end of the Heian period, the presence of the Minamoto and Taira clans could not be ignored as a result of the mobilization of warriors in internal conflicts among the emperors and nobles, which led them to enter the central political arena. At this time, the samurai status started to be recognized and came to be known as the buke (warrior class).

What is the Kamakura Period?

The Kamakura period generally refers to the 150-year period from the establishment of the shogunate in Kamakura by Minamoto no Yoritomo until the fall of the Kamakura shogunate. After the death of Yoritomo, conflicts among the feudal lords who served the shogun intensified. The regent Hojo Clan prevailed over this conflict, and thereafter became the dominant power in the shogunate. On the cultural front, the teaching of nenbutsu (Pure Land Buddhism), Zen Buddhism, and other new forms of Buddhism spread among commoners, warriors, and aristocrats.

What is a Buddhist image?

A Buddhist image is a sculptural or pictorial representation of the Buddha, the icon of worship. In a narrow sense, it refers to images of Buddha, such as Shakyamuni Buddha (the historical Buddha) and Amida Nyorai, but it is generally used in a broader sense that includes images of Bodhisattvas, Myōō, Heavenly deities, and others.

In Japan, wood carvings are the most common type of sculpture, and with the exception of one statue (exhibit No. 9, made of gilt bronze), all of the Buddhist statues in this exhibition are wood carvings.

The reasons for the production of Buddhist images vary widely, but some of the images featured in this exhibition are said to have been made at the request of a particular person who, in accordance with a tradition, entrusted them to the Buddha to fulfill his or her wishes in this life and the next.

Who is Unkei?

Unkei was a Buddhist sculptor (a master in making Buddhist images) active in the late 12th century.

He was born around the mid-1100s as the son of Kokei, one of the Nara-based Buddhist sculptors.

Unkei is best known for the Kongorikishi statue at Todaiji Temple in Nara, but this exhibition focuses on Unkei's earlier works.

Unkei managed to gain the trust of the warriors of the East during that period of political turmoil that led to the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate.

What was the Miura Clan?

The Miura Clan was a family of samurai who established their power in the Miura Peninsula between the 11th and 12th centuries. According to a theory, the Miura Clan was founded by Taira no Tamemichi, who was given the land of Miura by Minamoto no Yoriyoshi for his military service and took the name "Miura."

He served the Minamoto Clan well, and when Minamoto no Yoritomo established the Kamakura shogunate, he was respected for his loyalty. However, later generations came into conflict with the Hojo Clan, and by the mid-13th century, the main line of the Miura Clan had been destroyed by the Hojo Clan.

The power of the Miura Clan in Yokosuka and the Miura Peninsula was thus lost, but many temples built at the time or involved with the creation of Buddhist statues have remained in the area.

The Buddhist statues of the Jorakuji Temple in Yokosuka, which links the area to the Buddhist priest Unkei, are a notable example. Furthermore, there are many families in the area that claim to be descended from the Miura Clan, and the story of the Miura Clan's work was passed down to the Edo period (1603-1868). This exhibition introduces the cultural influence of the Miura Clan, which continues to the present day, through Buddhist temples and statues associated with them.

Highlights of Exhibition Hall No 1



• Artifacts from the Kinugasa-jo Sutra Mound (Tokyo National Museum Collection)

This blue-and-white porcelain lid was unearthed near the top of a mountain, the site said to be the main citadel of Kinugasa Castle. It is believed to be from the Jingdezhen region in China, dating from the end of the Heian period (794-1185). It demonstrates that high-end, cutting-edge items were used at the time at Kinugasa Castle, the home of the Miura Clan.



• Standing Tenno (Daizenji Temple Collection)

This statue belongs to Daizenji Temple, a temple associated with the Miura Clan and located at the foot of the ruins of Kinugasa Castle. It is said to resemble the Zōchōten statue of Chuson-ji Temple's Konjikido (Golden Hall) in Hiraizumi, Iwate Prefecture. The Miura Clan may have been among the first to adopt the luxurious style of Hiraizumi's Buddhist statues.

◎ Seated Statue of Miura Yoshiaki (Manshoji Temple Collection); National Important Tangible Cultural Property

This is a seated statue of Miura Yoshiaki (1092 - 1180), chief of the Miura Clan in the late Heian period. He is famous for his loyalty to the Minamoto Clan and also for his dramatic death at the Battle of Mount Kinugasa (1180).

It is said that Minamoto no Yoritomo offered him a grand memorial service for his contribution to the establishment of the Kamakura shogunate, and that he was eventually deified.

This statue was created in the late Kamakura period (1185-1333). *On display until July 31.



Highlights of Exhibition Hall No 2



◎ Standing Fudō Myōō (Acala) (right) and Bishamonten (Vaisravana) (left) by Unkei, 1189 (Jorakuji Temple Collection). Both statues are designated National Important Tangible Cultural Properties

The two statues, along with an Amida triad, belong to Jorakuji Temple in Ashina, Yokosuka. In 1959, a wooden plank (nameplate) found inside the standing Bishamonten revealed that Wada Yoshimori, a powerful retainer of the Kamakura shogunate, and his wife, Ono (family name), commissioned Unkei to create these statues in 1189.

The fact that there is no statue of Unkei left even in Kamakura, the capital of Japan at that time, makes the statue valuable in itself, but it is also significant in terms of research that we have been able to ascertain the year and the person who ordered the work.



• **Standing Bishamonten (Vaisravana)** (Seiunji Temple Collection)

This statue belongs to Seiunji Temple in Kinugasa, Yokosuka, where the Miura family's tomb is said to be located. The moving pose and the skillful expression of the robe pattern suggest that this is a work of the Kei school of the early Kamakura period (late 12th century). One of the features of this statue is its plump cheeks, which give it the appearance of a young child. There is a rather amusing anecdote about this statue: it is said that it helped Wada Yoshimori during the Battle of Wada (1213) by receiving and picking up arrows on his behalf.



• **Onigawara** (tile excavated from the site of Yōfukuji Temple)

This onigawara (devil's face tile) was excavated from the site of Yōfukuji Temple in Kamakura. The wood grain that can be seen on its surface suggests that it was made using a wooden mold. Yōfukuji Temple was built around 1190, under the Kamakura shogunate, and the temple's Buddhist statues may have been the work of Unkei's Kei school. The artist who made the onigawara mold is also a matter of interest, but is unknown at this time.



◎ **Standing Kannon Bosatsu (Avalokiteśvara) (right)**
Standing Jizō Bosatsu (Kitigarbha) (left)
(Manganji Temple Collection). Both statues are designated National Important Tangible Cultural Properties

These statues are from Manganji Temple in Iwato, Yokosuka. They are believed to have been made by the Unkei workshop in the early Kamakura period (1185-1333). Manganji Temple is said to have been founded by Sahara Yoshitsura, who is also said to have had this statue made. However, excavations and research have led to the theory that the Kamakura shogunate may have been directly involved in the temple's construction, and this theory is garnering increasing attention.



◎ **Standing Figures of the Twelve Heavenly Generals**
(Sogenji Temple Collection), National Important Tangible Cultural Properties

These statues belong to Sōgenji Temple, which has its origins in an ancient temple. Based on documents found inside the statues, it is highly likely that they were made by the Unkei workshop or a Buddhist sculptor related to Unkei during the last decade of the 12th century. However, the original zodiac signs carved on the statues' heads were lost, and when they were restored during the Edo period (1603-1868), some of the statues had their zodiac signs changed to animals different from their original zodiac signs. For the first time in 24 years, all 12 statues have been returned to Yokosuka to be displayed!

Highlights of Exhibition Hall No 3



Unkei and the other major members of the Miura Clan passed away, leaving behind a legacy that was spread around the country by following generations.

• **Standing Fudō Myōō (Acala) Triad** (Jofukuji Temple Collection)

These statues were originally housed at Seiei-ji Temple, affiliated to the Kano Shrine (West Kano Shrine), located in Uruga, Yokosuka and associated with Minamoto no Yoritomo. They were moved to the nearby Jofuku-ji Temple during the separation of Shinto and Buddhism in the Meiji period (1868-1912). It is believed to be a work from the lineage of Kei school Buddhist sculptors from the latter half of the Kamakura period. The original decorations and coloring patterns on the chest ornament of the Fudō Myōō and on the decorative parts of each side statue are still faintly visible today.



• **Seated Shō Kannon Bosatsu** (Avalokiteśvara)
(Muryoji Temple Collection)

This statue is characterized by its hair tied up in a high knot (motodori). It is assumed that it was modeled after ancient Nara sculptures and Buddhist paintings of the Sung dynasty. At first glance, it looks different from the other exhibits, which are believed to be works by Unkei or his workshop, but it is thought to be a "development" of the Kei school, produced by a local Buddhist sculptor who was influenced by the Kei school in the mid-13th century. *On display until July 31.



• **Map of Oyabe Village, Miura County, Sagami Province**
(Yokosuka City Central Library Collection)

This map, dating from 1825, was passed down through the Shimazaki family, who were the feudal lords of Oyabe Village for generations. In addition to Manshoji Temple and Seiunji Temple, it records temples and shrines associated with the Miura Clan that have since disappeared, indicating that temples and Buddhist statues have been carefully passed down since the Kamakura period. This exhibition also features many other valuable documents left behind by local families descended from the Miura Clan, as well as books and other items that tell the story of the Miura Clan. Please take your time to view the exhibition and learn about the cultural influence of the Miura Clan, which has been passed down from generation to generation over time.