

THE OHMI – SHRINE AND CLOCK

The time system in Japan was initiated on April 25, 671 (actually June 10 by the solar calendar and the present Japanese commemoration day as the "Time Day"). A water clock was constructed and installed in the Imperial Palace in Ōtsu. The time bell and drum chimed the hours in accordance with this water clock, enabling the people to know the accurate time. From then until late in Muromachi period, when a mechanical clock was introduced from abroad, the time system of Japan depended solely upon this water clock. According to ordinance stipulated by TAIHO STATUTE (established in 706), water clock specialists and twelve officers called "Shushinchō" (men responsible for chiming the hours) were responsible for day and night observation of water clock, its maintenance and informing.

Mechanical clocks were brought to Japan as a present from foreigners in the Azuchi-Momoyama period (late 16th century). The Japanese version of the mechanical clocks were based upon those foreign-made ones, and a full-fledged mechanical clock was produced as early as in the beginning of the Edo period. The Japanese clocks were developed with a unique shape and mechanism of their own, leading to the creation of an astro-timepiece, the first of its kind in the world, and a perpetual clock, the (page 2) product of ingenious technology and creativity.

Japanese chronometry adopted the method of indefinite time-keeping in conformity with the solar and lunar calendars. Time measurement also followed a unique method, which developed into a time system peculiar to Japan.

This museum was opened in 1963 and is the only one in Japan, which is exclusively devoted to clocks, exhibiting more than 3500 materials, documents and excavated articles focusing on historical Japanese clocks.

The Emperor Tenchi (A.D.626-671), to whom the Ohmi Shrine is dedicated and whose other name was Amemikoto Hirakasuwake-no-Sumeramikoto, was originally called Naka-no-Oye. The word "Tenchi" means deep, heavenly, limitless wisdom ("ten" means "heaven" and "chi" means "wisdom") and "Amemikoto Hirakasuwake" represents a token of respect for hi achievements in carving out the future of Japan according to the will of God.

Emperor Tenchi was illustrious lord of restoration who with his wisdom, courage and solidarity with the people, realized the great ideal of founding the nation. Japan until then had been in a very unstable condition under the pressure of an inflow of alien culture from the Chinese continent, while the ancient Japanese society was moving toward collapse. (page 3)

Over the 20-odd years of his hardship-filled reign, first as a prince and then emperor, he changed the social structure of private land and then subjected people, which was based on the clan system, into that of public land and public

citizens. He also arranged the central and local administrative organizations, effectuated the distribution and receipt of farmland according to census registry, and solidified the national economy through the formulation of a tax system. Further, he reinforced the national defense against invasion by foreign enemies, with whom he built up diplomatic relations on an equal footing. In this way, Emperor Tenchi energetically put into effect a series of both domestic and foreign policies.

Particularly striking among his achievements was the transfer of capital, since years after his enthronement, to Ohtsu in Ohmi. Here he established the Ohmi Statute (in which today's Constitution of Japan has its origin) and opened the way to national education by founding a university in the Capital and colleges in local cities.

Furthermore, the Emperor designed a water clock to keep the people's daily life well regulated and initiated the use of "burning soil" (coal) and "burning water" (oil). He thus accomplished the Reformation of the Taika Era, which was (page 4) essentially a political and economic reform.

Through enthusiastic efforts rendered by believers nationwide, the construction of the Ohmi Shrine was completed in 1940, here at the ancient site of the Ohtsu Capital, which is closely associated with Emperor Tenchi. At the same time, the Ohmi Shrine was ranked among the great Shrines of Kanpei (a group of greater shrines to which the Imperial House used to dedicate a votive offering in pre-war days), and is one of the Chokusai-Sha (a Shrine to which an Imperial envoy is sent) at the present time.

The Ohtsu Capital, whose byname is Ohtsu-no-Miya in Ohmi or Capital of Shiga, was transferred in 666 a. d. from Asuka, Yamato (now Nara) by Emperor Tenchi, with the aim of renewing public spirit in the course of the Taika Reformation. But only after five years or so, the Emperor passed away, and the capital was deserted during the civil war of Jinshin which broke out in the following year.

FEATURES OF THE OHMI SHRINE

THE SHRINE

The main shrine, prayer hall, inner gate, and warship hall are beautifully arranged within the precinct of the shrine, which is located at (page 5) Mt. Usa and commands a picturesque view of Lake Biwa. The worship hall, divided into the inner and outer worship halls and linked by a corridor, represents the "Ohmi" style of construction. This is said to embody a novel plan for shrine architecture as well as the quintessence of Shrine architecture as well as the quintessence of Shinto art.

THE SACRED GARDEN

most of the trees in the precincts were kindly donated by worshippers, the dense wood grows in sublimity year after year. The precincts command a superb view

– particularly of the distant Suzuka Mountain Range and the beautiful Lake Biwa and Mt. Ohmi-Fuji in the foreground. The sacred garden, glowing in the morning sun and reminding us of the scenery of mythological ages, purifies and refreshes the sprite of those who visit the shrine.

THE CLOCK MUSEUM

This museum associated with the water clock manufactured by Emperor Tenchi, the first ever manufactured in Japan, not only house excavated articles closely related to the Capital of Ohtsu, but also exhibits a vast variety of materials which give a historical account of the development of clocks. Exhibited in the outer garden of the museum are a water clock contributed by Omega, Switzerland, a fire clock in the shape of a dragon donated by Rolex, a precision sundial, and other items.