

focus on a pigment itself an homage to Smith's study of "Berlin blue") is at its heart about things in motion. Without the trade in Chinese ceramics, Cort shows, this quintessentially Momoyama color might never have been added to the Japanese potter's palette. By extension, Momoyama green pots take on other meanings when transported to a North American museum collection.

Finally, the relationship of a picture or thing with a text adds an important dimension to several papers. Texts themselves are treated here as visual and material artifacts. The text is recognized as a picture just as the picture is always also a thing. Satow, for example, shows how a reproduced page of manuscript acts as a living trace of the writer not only because of what is written but because of the relation of handwriting to the body. The essays by David Lurie and Miriam Wattles appear at first glance to be analyzing texts, but these texts are as interesting for their appearance as for their verbal information. In this sense, both recall Henry Smith's work on the history of the book and on the written word in Japan. In the "picture dictionary" that Wattles analyzes, playfulness trumps communication. By contrast, Lurie's ancient mirror inscription is so opaque that scholars have struggled to derive any certain meaning from it. Their perplexity seems to be partly due to the fact that the words have a largely decorative function and partly due to the seeming lack of skill of the inscriber. In this sense, Lurie's artifact is not unlike a contemporary Japanese T-shirt printed with chic but garbled English words. And indeed, reading the first and last essay in this collection alongside each other discloses another link between the sixth century and the twenty-first: just as Lurie's object presents a face for text and a face for reflection, the recent mobile phones described by Richter are both text media and cosmetic mirrors.

Matsuura Takeshirō named his record of the One-Mat Room "A Solicitation of Scraps" (*Mokuben kanjin*) to document and commemorate the many contributions of which it was composed. He wrote that the room was intended for "remembering my friends." During preparations for the Festschrift symposium, we often referred to our event with the same name. The poetic phrase expressed the sense we felt that the occasion should mark a similar gathering of small donations from Henry Smith's friends and admirers far and wide. We hope that our scraps have built a room in which he may wish to dwell from time to time.

## THE SUDA HACHIMAN SHRINE MIRROR AND ITS INSCRIPTION

DAVID BARNETT LURIE

MIRRORS AND COINS IMPORTED TO JAPAN beginning around the first century BCE bear short inscriptions in Chinese characters, but no domestic attempts at writing beyond a few scattered scribbles are found prior to the fifth century CE. From the fifth century, however, a handful of inscriptions attests that scribes of Korean origin were in the employ of the "Great Kings" of the Yamato region, presumably the same rulers who left behind immense mounded tombs (*kofun*) in the Nara basin and parts of modern Osaka to its west. It is not until the seventh century that one sees more widespread use of writing—for bureaucratic administration, official historiography, religious ritual, belletristic exchange and so on—but the earlier epigraphs nonetheless represent an important milestone in the history of writing and literacy in Japan.<sup>1</sup> The most famous are two sword inscriptions, on blades discovered in the Sakitama-Inariyama mound (in Saitama Prefecture, north of Tokyo) and the Eta-Funayama mound (in Kyushu, near Kumamoto).<sup>2</sup> After these swords, the most extensive pre-seventh-century written artifact is a domestically cast bronze mirror bearing an unusual cryptic inscription on its back. Now held in the Tokyo National Museum, the mirror is a treasure of the Suda Hachiman Shrine of northeastern Wakayama Prefecture near the border with Nara, in Hashimoto City (fig. 1a, b).

As an apparently authentic piece of writing from the Tomb period (c. 250–c. 700)—most probably from the early sixth century—the Suda mirror inscription portends precious insights, but it remains among the most inscrutable texts of early Japan. Unlike most other inscribed items from the period, the mirror is scarcely corroded, and the characters of the inscription are intact and clear. But the text itself is so garbled that only tentative readings are possible. Along with a host of interpretative problems, subject to decades of contentious scholarly argument, the inscription raises fundamental questions, such as why and how something so muddled was made. In addition, what value might it have held at a time when few, if any, of the elites who presumably commissioned it would have been able to "read" it in the sense we are accustomed to?<sup>3</sup>

Suda Hachiman is a branch shrine that was established, most likely in the eleventh century, on Suda no Shō, an estate (*shōen*)

Fig. 1a. Suda Hachiman Shrine Mirror, line drawing from *Famous Places of Kii Province Illustrated* (*Kii no kuni meisho zue*), early 19th century. From Nihon Meisho Zue Kankōkai, ed., *Dai Nihon meisho zue* (Famous places of Japan illustrated), second series, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Dai Nihon Meisho Zue Kankōkai, 1921–22), 218–19

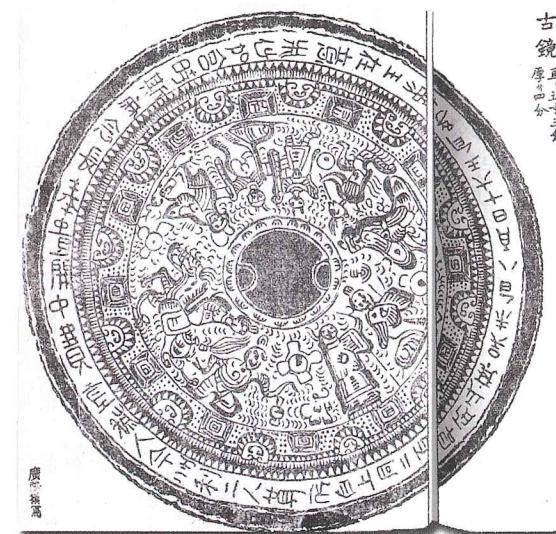




Fig. 1b. Suda Hachiman Shrine Mirror. 6th century. Bronze. Diam. 19.8 cm. Suda Hachiman Shrine, Hashimoto City, Wakayama Prefecture. National Treasure. Photo: TNM Image Archives. Source: <http://TnmArchives.jp/>

It is not clear how or when the Suda shrine came into possession of the mirror. Some say that it was unearthed nearby during the Edo period (1615–1868) along with a sword and some pottery, while others have speculated that it was held from antiquity by an earlier shrine that the Suda shrine supplanted.<sup>6</sup> The first mystery of the mirror, then, is its provenance, which is all the more puzzling in light of the fact that the inscription has no connection with the Suda shrine or its vicinity.

The Suda mirror, which was designated a National Treasure in 1951, is 19.8 centimeters in diameter. A large hemispherical knob at the center of the raised-relief back is surrounded by concentric bands, the widest of which contains nine human figures, one of them mounted on a horse. Next to the flat outermost band is one that features an inscription of forty-eight characters, beginning counter-clockwise at four o'clock. The pictorial design is what scholars call the “human-image mirror” (*jinbutsu gazōkyō*) type, here a crude copy of a similar pattern found on imported Chinese cast-bronze mirrors of the Later Han and Six Dynasties periods (fig. 2). Several Chinese mirrors excavated from burial mounds in the Japanese archipelago appear to have been cast from the same mold as the original from which the Suda design was copied, or from molds based on the same model.<sup>7</sup>

that belonged to the Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine of Kyoto.<sup>4</sup> The first reference to the mirror is in the nineteenth-century gazetteer *Famous Places of Kii Province Illustrated* (*Kii no kuni meissho zue*), compiled by Takechi Shiyū (1751–1823) and Kanō Morohira (1806–1857) and published in Wakayama City in four installments between 1811 and 1851.<sup>5</sup> Although the late emergence of the mirror is not necessarily suspicious, it is puzzling to find such an ancient artifact preserved by a relatively new shrine. The badly damaged inscription on the famous Seven-Branched Sword, thought to have been sent to Japan from the Korean state of Paekche in the fourth century, was also not discovered until the nineteenth century, but the sword is a treasure of Isonokami Shrine, one of the most storied and venerable shrines of the Nara region.

Fig. 2. “Human-image” Mirror. China, Six Dynasties Period, 3rd century. Bronze. Diam. 20.1 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Denman Waldo Ross Collection, 17.836. Photograph © 2009 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

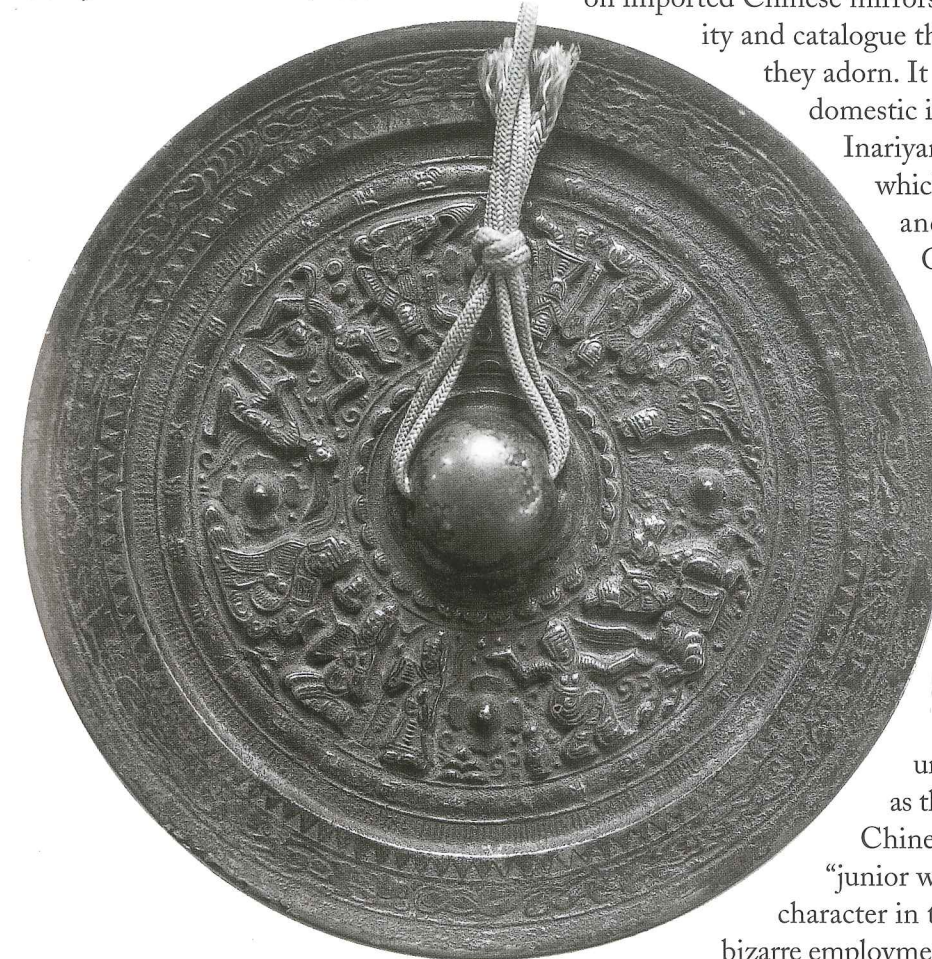


Fig. 3. Transcription of the Suda mirror inscription

矣未年八月日十、  
 大王年、男弟王在  
 意柴沙加宮時、斯  
 麻念長奉、遣開中  
 費直穢人今州利  
 二人等、所白上同  
 二百早、所此竟

Riddled with malformed characters and undoubted mistakes, the mirror’s inscription appears to be the product of a scribe and a caster (or single scribe/caster) lacking skill or concern for legibility.<sup>8</sup> Much about it is disputed, but it seems to say something like the following (fig. 3):

On the tenth day of the eighth month of the twentieth year of the cycle [503?], during the reign of the Great King, when his younger brother the prince resided in Oshisaka Palace, Shima thought to serve him for a long time, and had Kawachi no Atai and Ayahito Imasuri, the two of them, take two hundred-weight of white bronze and make this mirror.

The inscription has little in common with the impersonal formulas found on imported Chinese mirrors, which usually laud the high quality and catalogue the magical benefits of the artifacts they adorn. It is much closer to the fifth-century domestic inscriptions seen on the Sakitama-Inariyama and Eta-Funayama swords, which also focus on particular individuals and their relationships with the Great King.

The Suda inscription shows signs of Korean influence parallel to those seen in other early texts of the Japanese archipelago, but more striking are the many blunders it contains. These include stylistically awkward phrases and characters inverted left to right (the latter, admittedly, is a common occurrence in cast inscriptions). But the inscription also contains errors, or at least wildly unconventional substitutions, such as the use of a final particle (modern Chinese *yi*) for the tenth “stem” (*gui*; “junior water”) in the initial date (the first character in the first line of figure 3) and the bizarre employment of a relative pronoun (*suō*) for verbs that mean “take” and “make” (the fourth characters

in the sixth and seventh lines of figure 3). Such “substitutions,” and other interpretive leaps that make a tentative translation possible, are supported by a long and contentious tradition of reconstruction attempts by epigraphers.

The shoddiness of the Suda mirror’s inscription is echoed by another element of the design. Between the figural and the inscription band, there is a ring of alternating square and semicircular bosses within a higher comb-tooth ridge, probably based on another model mirror. On some imported mirrors, studs of this sort often contain the characters of an inscription. Since there are twelve of them on the Suda mirror, one might expect that they would contain the twelve characters of the zodiacal “branches,” but

they are graphlike patterns with no determinate readings. Such pseudo-inscriptions are common on other domestically cast Tomb-period mirrors.<sup>9</sup>

Because one band contains a real inscription, the presence of the pseudo-inscription indicates that those who produced the mirror mold were not ignorant of writing, but it suggests that “legibility” was not their priority. The crudity of the pictorial portion of the mirror may stem from a lack of technical ability, but it can also be taken to mean that the identity of the figures on the original Chinese mirror(s)—the Queen Mother of the West (a goddess associated with longevity and immortality) and her consort the Father of the East—was of little importance to the copier, and, most likely, to those for whom the mirror was made. Similarly, the fact that the cyclical signs within the bosses were not deemed worthy of faithful reproduction may mean that the artisan was simply incapable of including detailed characters in small squares, but it also suggests that legible graphs were not required.

From the perspective of the history of writing and literacy, the Suda mirror is significant because it hints at the varied uses of inscription in Japan during the period when it was made, many of which uses do not involve “reading” as we know it. That the departures of the inscription and the pictorial band from expected norms are often conceptualized as failures is not necessarily anachronistic, as there are earlier and contemporary examples of similar objects and inscriptions without the same puzzling substitutions and oddities. But casting this bronze artifact would have been a tremendously costly undertaking, and its fine condition suggests that it was carefully preserved. Despite its faulty inscription, the mirror was apparently valuable to those who commissioned it, especially at a time when the difference between a skillful inscription and a botched or even fake one would have been apparent to a minuscule proportion of its “audience.” Given how little is known about the provenance of the Suda mirror, one cannot expect a final answer to the fundamental question of what its inscription means. But its riddles serve as a reminder of how deeply dependent on context—in ways we may not fully realize—are our evaluations of the creation and reception of all artifacts, even those that can be situated in incomparably better-known circumstances. ☉

#### NOTES

1. For surveys of the history of writing in early Japan, see David Lurie, “The Origins of Writing in Early Japan” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2001), 68–175, and Christopher Seeley, *A History of Writing in Japan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 9–39.

2. In addition to the extensive discussions in the Seeley and Lurie surveys, English-language introductions to these sword inscriptions may be found in Anazawa Wakou and Manome Jun’ichi, “Two Inscribed Swords from Japanese Tumuli: Discoveries and Research on Finds from the Sakitama-Inariyama and Eta-Funayama

Tumuli,” in *Windows on the Japanese Past*, ed. Richard Pearson et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Japanese Studies, 1986); and Murayama Shichirō and Roy Andrew Miller, “The Inariyama Tumulus Sword Inscription,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 2 (1979): 405–38.

3. Even without regular correspondences to particular utterances or specific behaviors, the marks of this and other inscriptions can serve in toto as effective and valuable methods of communication. Whether this function constitutes “reading” is a definitional question I will not address here.

4. On the origins of the Suda estate and the Suda Hachiman Shrine, see Hashimoto Shishi Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Hashimoto shishi* (The history of Hashimoto City) (Hashimoto: Hashimoto Shiyakusho, 1974–75), vol. 1, 108–11, 135–37, and vol. 3, 469–76; and Okuda Masahiro, *Chōsei bushidan to shinkō* (Medieval warrior bands and religion) (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 1980), 180–88. For a brief discussion in English, drawn from Okuda, see Miyazaki Fumiko, “Religious Life of the Kamakura Bushi: Kumagai Naozane and His Descendants,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 47 (1992): 450–51.

5. A movable-type edition of *Kii no kuni meisho zue* makes up vols. 7–10 of the second series of *Dai Nihon meisho zue* (Famous places of Japan illustrated), ed. Nihon Meisho Zue Kankōkai (Tokyo: Dai Nihon Meisho Zue Kankōkai, 1921–22).

6. The claim that the mirror was unearthed during the Edo period is referred to in Andō Seiichi, *Wakayama-ken no rekishi* (History of Wakayama Prefecture) (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1970), 22. For speculation about its transmission by a local precursor to the Suda shrine, see Okuda, *Chōsei bushidan to shinkō*, 181–82. It is possible that the mirror was excavated from a local burial mound at some point, but there are few candidate sites in the vicinity of the shrine. See Kobayashi Yukio, *Kokyō: Sono nazo to minamoto o saguru* (Ancient mirrors: Exploring their origins and mysteries) (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1965), 103.

7. On the Suda mirror design as a crude copy, see Kobayashi, *Kokyō*, 108–12; Sakamoto

Yoshitane, “Suda Hachiman jinja jinbutsu gazōkyō” (The Suda Hachiman Shrine human-image mirror), in *Kodai Nihon kinsekibun no nazo* (Mysteries of ancient Japanese inscriptions), ed. Naoki Kōjirō et al., *Ekōru do Roiyaru kodai Nihon o kangaueru* (Ecole de Royal: Considering ancient Japan) 15 (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1991), 80–84; Tanaka Migaku, *Kokyō* (Ancient mirrors), *Nihon no bijutsu* (Arts of Japan) 178 (Tokyo: Shibundō, 1981), 38–40.

8. This translation is based on commonly adopted interpretations of the many controversial aspects of the inscription. For surveys of the major points of contention, see Lurie, “The Origins of Writing in Early Japan,” 155–67, and Seeley, *A History of Writing in Japan*, 17–19. For simplicity’s sake, the proper nouns have been provisionally rendered as romanizations of the conventional modern Japanese pronunciations of common speculative readings. For a brief introduction to some of the linguistic issues surrounding the Suda mirror and other early texts, see Marc Hideo Miyake, *Old Japanese: A Phonetic Reconstruction* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 9–12.

9. For an excellent recent survey of Yayoi- and Tomb-period mirrors and writing that discusses the Suda mirror and the phenomenon of the “pseudo-inscription,” see Morishita Shōji, “Kagami, shihai, moji” (Mirrors, rulership, writing), in *Shibai to moji* (Rulership and writing), ed. Hirakawa Minami et al., *Moji to kodai Nihon* (Writing and ancient Japan), vol. 1 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2004), 10–24.



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