CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE PERFECT SITE FOR A NEW CAPITAL CITY

As had been the case for the construction of the Nagaoka capital, thousands of workers were mobilised. Kanmu also issued numerous edicts to make sure the taxes and tribute essential to the realisation of his plans were sent to the construction site. He complained about defaults in the delivery of tax (mishin) and forbade the common people to change their names and thereby avoid payment of personal taxes (kaeki). The imperial princes, the princes, and the ministers were ordered to collect taxes-in-kind and labour tax from any vagrant (rōnin) temporarily taking up residence on their domains.

However, Kanmu was also well aware of the suffering caused by his project, for he issued a decree saying “when a capital is constructed in a realm, the toil and hardship on the whole nation is exceptionally severe. Again we exempt [the people] from this year’s rice-paddy taxes”. To decrease the burden on the farmers, Kanmu decided to lower the interest on the suiko-loans from fifty to thirty percent, and the inhabitants of the districts of Otokuni, Kadono and Atago, the districts in the immediate vicinity of the Heian capital, were exempted from paying the rice-paddy taxes. He also encouraged the provinces to send labourers by remitting the rice-paddy taxes when they did so. To persuade people to take up residence in the new capital, Kanmu offered them favourable terms such as exemption from certain taxes.

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1 In an entry dated Enryaku 16 (797) 3/17, the Nihon kōki mentions a total of twenty-four thousand workmen coming from various provinces. Other documents mention five thousand workmen in the fifth month of Enryaku 13 (794) and ten thousand people in the tenth month of Enryaku 19 (800).

2 RSK 8 Enryaku 16/4/16; EKS Enryaku 16/8/3; EKS Enryaku 14/7/27; RSK 17 Enryaku 17/2/8; and RSK 8 Enryaku 16/8/3.

3 RK 83 Enryaku 16/6/28.

4 RSK 14 Kōnin 1/9/23, quoting a decree dated Enryaku 14/int.7/1; NKō Enryaku 18/6/26; RK 83 Enryaku 18/6/26; RK 83 Enryaku 16/6/28; RK 159 Enryaku 19/11/26. However, it seems that some of them abused Kanmu’s offer and continued to live in the countryside despite being registered in the capital. Therefore he issued a decree that forbade outsiders to register their domicile in the capital and thus evade the taxes. For a discussion on Kanmu’s policy of inviting peasants to reside in the capital, see Kida, “Kanmuchō ni hajimarū chihōnin no Kyōto kanpū ni tsuite”.

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He was less generous to the more well-to-do inhabitants of the former Nagaoka capital. Ten years after the move from Nara, some of them had attained a luxurious lifestyle. This is evidenced by the fact that Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Tsugutada issued a proclamation in 792 condemning the lavish burial ceremonies of certain people. From then on, funerals were to proceed more modestly. This directive had to be displayed in every ward and on the major roads, indicating that the custom must have been widespread. The directive was clearly not aimed at the ordinary peasants but rather at the merchants, entrepreneurs, and low-ranking officials. They had accumulated great wealth by supplying the city with straw for roofs, reed for blinds, and various other construction materials and daily commodities. Some of the newly rich were construction workers who had earned good money by constructing the private residences of the various other inhabitants of the city. Still others had become rich through money-lending schemes using the house lots as collateral security, despite a ban on this practice in 783.

When the announcement of the transfer was made, these money-lenders saw their profits immediately disappear. The value of the house lots given as collateral decreased sharply; and rather than paying back their debts, people allowed their land to be confiscated, knowing they would be able to start over again in the new capital. Some inhabitants of the Nagaoka capital therefore petitioned the throne to have the value of the house lots reimbursed. Kanmu, however, refused and thus reduced the economic surplus gathered by certain people. So the decision to move to the Heian capital dealt a serious financial blow to the middle class, merchants, and commoners living in Nagaoka. Although the land in the new capital was distributed for free, these people were required to finance the construction of their homes themselves. Thus, by moving to a new capital, Kanmu temporarily weakened the financial power of influential families, and at the same time he strengthened his own imperial prestige and political power.

With the move to Uda village, Kanmu was convinced he had found the perfect site for an imperial capital. To assure the longevity of the Heian capital, he tried to obtain the benevolence and protection of various deities. According to the seventeenth-century Honchō tsugan,

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5 RSK 19 Enryaku 11/7/27.
6 SN Enryaku 2/12/6.
7 NKi Enryaku 12/12/18.
immediately after Kanmu moved to the capital, work began on the construction of the Park of the Divine Spring (shinsen’en), the Tōji, the Saiji, and the Mound of the General (shōgunzuka).8

The Park of the Divine Spring, an imperial garden stretched out over eight city blocks, was located south of the Heian palace on the east side of Scarlet Phoenix Avenue. The planning of the park was based on Taoist concepts, and the grounds contained various halls, which were erected around a large pond with a central island.9 Kanmu visited this park on many occasions to hold banquets and poetry parties, and to view the cherry blossoms flourish and the autumn leaves change colour.10 In a poem, the monk Kūkai later described the park as follows: “the stately mansion looks as is if it has been constructed by the deities; I do not think it is the work of man”.11

Construction on the Tōji and Saiji, located symmetrically east and west of Scarlet Phoenix Avenue near Rajō Gate, may have started as early as 796, even though the earliest reference in the official court records to both temples appears only in 804.12 The planning of two Buddhist temples in the Heian capital was a clear break from the Nagaoka capital, where no new Buddhist temples had been erected.

The Mound of the General is first mentioned in the thirteenth-century Heike monogatari.13 According to this source, Kanmu ordered a clay statue dressed in iron armour to be buried in the mountains east of the Heian capital as a guardian to the city. It is believed that this

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8 Honchō tsukan, bk. 16, 3: 435–36.
9 Takahashi, Dōkyō to Nihon no kyūto, 162.
10 See NKi Enryaku 19/7/19; NKi Enryaku 19/8/13; NKi Enryaku 20/4/2; NKi Enryaku 20/6/4; NKi Enryaku 20/9/8; NKi Enryaku 21/2/1; NKi Enryaku 21/2/6; NKi Enryaku 21/2/12; NKi Enryaku 21/2/16; NKi Enryaku 21/3/11; NKi Enryaku 21/3/17; NKi Enryaku 21/6/17; NKi Enryaku 21/7/2; NKi Enryaku 21/8/1; NKi Enryaku 22/3/25; NKi Enryaku 22/4/4; NKi Enryaku 22/4/18; NKi Enryaku 22/6/1; NKi Enryaku 22/7/1; NKi Enryaku 22/9/5; NKi Enryaku 22/10/1; NKi Enryaku 23/1/25; NKi Enryaku 23/7/1; NKi Enryaku 23/9/8; NKi Enryaku 23/10/21; NKi Enryaku 23/11/6; and NKi Enryaku 23/12/1.
12 McCullough, “The Capital and its Society”, 117. In 804, Tajihō no mahito Ietsugu was appointed associate director of the Tōji Construction Agency (zō-Tōji-jikan) and Kusakabe no Tokutari was appointed associate director of the Saiji Construction Agency (zō-Saiji-jikan) [NKō Enryaku 23/4/8].
13 Heike monogatari, bk. 5, 335. The mound is believed to be located in Awataguchi, Higashiyama Ward. Takahashi Tōru once more sees Taoist influence with the warrior being the spirit of kinsei (Venus), the planet that controlled the army and caused victory or defeat in rebellions and battles. Takahashi, Dōkyō to Nihon no kyūto, 166.
Mound of the General rumbled whenever someone tried to relocate the capital or when an unpropitious incident threatened the realm.

Furthermore, Kanmu could continue to perform rites in the sanctuary where he twice worshipped heaven, because the area of Katano was still located south of the capital; and tradition has it that Wake no Kiyomaro, who suggested the site of the Heian capital to Kanmu, was buried northwest of the capital to serve as an eternal guardian to the city.

Official construction on the Heian capital continued until 805, when Kanmu summoned Fujiwara no Otsugu and Sugano no Mamichi and asked for their advice on correct government. Although the city was still incomplete, both construction and warfare were halted. At that time, Kanmu was seriously ill. Astoundingly, almost a year and a half earlier, he had predicted his own illness:

There was heavy rainfall and a storm [raged]. The west tower of the middle precinct was blown down, crashing an ox to death. The left and right pavilions in the Park of the Divine Spring as well as houses in the capital also collapsed. Various provinces sustained a lot of damage. The Emperor was born in a Year of the Ox [hinoto-ushi]. Lamentingly the Emperor said: “Oh, We are not doing well. Before long, We will fall ill, and in the end We will part with the world”.

This symbol of the Ox was a constant presence throughout Kanmu’s life. For his personal peace of mind, Kanmu therefore forbade the practice of killing oxen on several occasions. These oxen were killed during a ritual in honour of Chinese deities (kara kami) to pray for rain, to ask for good luck upon raising an army, and to get rid of defilement.
However, the symbol of the Ox was too important for Kanmu to permit these rituals. No more than a few days before Kanmu fell ill, he again stressed the economic value of oxen and strongly forbade the slaughtering of calves:

The Emperor decreed: “The use of oxen in the country is very important. They carry heavy loads on their backs and go to distant places. They surely have many merits. As We have heard, villainous men, riving all other in haughtiness and selfishness, kill and skin specked calves to use [their] skin as saddle or saddle cloth, vying to be the best. They cause a lot of damage. By all means, [this practice] must be forbidden and eradicated. From hereafter, killing and skinning [calves] and using [their skin] for equipment such as saddles or quivers is absolutely forbidden. If [this prohibition] is violated, the punishment for disobeying an imperial decree should be inflicted. It the officials responsible [for this matter] try to cover up [the crime], they should receive the same punishment.”

Ultimately, the crushed ox was indeed a sign of Kanmu’s imminent demise. Kanmu never recovered from his illness, even though he requested senior priest general Shōgu, a Hossō monk, to release all the imperial hunting dogs and falcons. Two months later, Kanmu died at the age of seventy, and it was decided that he would be buried in Utano in the Kadono district. This corresponded to the inui direction and indicates that Kanmu was supposed to act as guardian of the Heian capital. However, fires immediately broke out on the mountains north and west of the capital. For two nights in a row, there was an eclipse of the moon. Fires continued to rage on the Ōi, Hiei, Ono, and Kurusu mountains; smoke and ashes clouded the sky, and even at noon darkness covered the city.

The new Emperor Heizei revealed that when divinations were made about the location of his father’s tomb, the bamboo oracle approved of the suggested location, but the turtle oracle did not. Heizei was convinced that the Kamo deities were displeased at having the late Emperor’s tomb close to their shrines. Kanmu was therefore buried in

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20 NKō Enryaku 23/12/21. A translation into German is available in Lewin, “Die Regierungs-annalen Kammu-Tenno”, 483–84. The edict has also been preserved in the Ruijū sandai kyaku [RSK 19 Enryaku 23/12/21].
21 NKō Enryaku 24/1/14 and RK 34 Enryaku 24/1/14.
22 NKō Daidō 1/3/17 and NKō Daidō 1/3/19. This probably corresponds to present Utano, Ukyō Ward.
23 NKō Daidō 1/3/19; NKō Daidō 1/3/21; NKō Daidō 1/3/22; and NKō Daidō 1/3/23.
Kashiwabara in the Kii district, east of the Nagaoka capital. However, a short while later, the Kii district suffered damage from floods, and the mausoleum was removed to Mt. Fushimi in present Fushimi Ward. 24

24 Engi shiki, bk. 21, 761. It is strange that the Kamo deities were upset, because Utano is quite a distance from the Kamo shrines and in later times, mausoleums were built in or near Utano for emperors Montoku, Kōkō and Murakami. The mausoleums of emperors Ichijō and Horikawa were constructed at the foot of Mt. Kinugasa due west of Shimogamo shrine, and the mausoleum of Emperor Go-Ichijō was built within walking distance of the same shrine. Takahashi Tōru therefore suspects that the explanation given in the chronicles was a sophism. He supposes that, contrary to Kanmu’s wishes, the Divination Bureau decided he should be buried to the northwest of the Heian capital. People close to Kanmu, however, knew he actually wished to be buried east of his capitals, so that his tomb would be a reference to the Taoist island of the immortals floating in the Eastern Sea. Takahashi, Dōkyō to Nihon no kyūto, 239–42.