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# The Chronicle of Muchimaro

## *The Lower Part of the History of the Fujiwara House*

### By the Monk Enkei 延慶

<https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2019-0017>

**Abstract:** The *Chronicle of Muchimaro* (Muchimaro den 武智麻呂伝) is the third and final extant part of the *History of the Fujiwara House* (Tōshi kaden 藤氏家伝), an eighth century history connected with, and partly attributed to, the courtier Fujiwara no Nakamaro (藤原仲麻呂; 706–764), Muchimaro’s son.<sup>1</sup> Attributed to Enkei, a monk who probably was close to Nakamaro, the text celebrates the virtues and achievements of Muchimaro, a courtier whose life was cut short during the smallpox epidemic of 737. This disaster heavily affected the Fujiwara family and court politics: the four main Fujiwara officials passed away in one year, along with about one-third of the entire population.<sup>2</sup> One of the consequences of the epidemic was the sudden rise of Tachibana no Moroe after 737 and the subsequent competition between him and Muchimaro’s sons, mainly Nakamaro. The compilation of *The History of the Fujiwara House* can thus be seen as part of an attempt to reestablish the authority of the Fujiwara line by Nakamaro. The text presents Muchimaro as close to the sovereign and celebrates his virtues as an official by referring to and drawing from a variety of continental sources, a characteristic that can also be discerned in the first two parts of the *History*.

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**Original Title:** Muchimaro den 武智麻呂, by Enkei 延慶 (?–?). The same monk is commonly identified as the author of the Chronicle of Jōe. Bauer 2017: 207. He is also referred to as Nakamaro’s ‘monk in residence,’ NST: 26. (NST refers to Yamagishi 1979).

<sup>1</sup> For the translations of the first two parts, see Bauer 2017 and Bauer 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from Muchimaro, his three brothers also passed away during the epidemic: Fusasaki 藤原房前 (681–737); Umakai 藤原宇合 (694–737) and Maro 藤原麻呂 (695–737).

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## Translation

The Fujiwara Great Minister of the Left called Muchimaro, was a man from the Sakyō district.<sup>3</sup> He was the oldest son of the Head of the Council of State Fuhito, and his mother was a daughter of the Soga Great Minister of the Treasury.<sup>4</sup> He was born in the mansion at Ōhara on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the ninth year since the enthronement of the sovereign Tenmu.<sup>5</sup> Because he cultivated righteousness, he received this name.<sup>6</sup> When he was still a young child, he mourned the loss of his mother. He wept tears of blood and broke down. Fluids did not enter his mouth and his health declined. From then on his condition was weak and although he made the effort to continue, he was of a poor constitution ever since.

As years went by, he did not associate himself with trivial matters.<sup>7</sup> His appearance was tall; his speech heavy and slow. His character was warm and good, and his heart was sincere and steadfast. What was not respectful, he did not adopt; what was not righteous, he did not request. He always liked neutrality; from afar he shunned conflict. One time, he played Go while the day passed; another time, he was reading all night. He did not love wealth or sensuality; never manifested either happiness or anger.<sup>8</sup> He valued honor and faith and acted out of compassion and righteousness.<sup>9</sup> When someone praised him, he never replied himself; when someone slighted him, he never engaged.

<sup>3</sup> 左京. Refers to the capital's (Heijōkyō) district where Muchimaro's residence was located.

<sup>4</sup> Fuhito is referred to by the character 史; see also TK: 291–292. The 'Soga Great Minister of the Treasury' (Soga no kura no ōomi 蘇我藏大臣) might refer to Soga no Umako's grandson. (TK refers to Okimori et al. 1999).

<sup>5</sup> *Tenmu Tennō sokui kyūnensai ji kōshin* 天武天皇即位九年歲次庚辰 (680). Kamatari is also said to have been born here, NST: 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Gishu moei ko* 義取茂榮故 'because he cultivated righteousness'. The character 茂 can be read as 'moshi', which inspired the 'muchī' of his name 'Muchimaro'; see also TK: 295. 'Muchī' means 'noble', NST: 26.

<sup>7</sup> The word used for 'trivial matters' is *shōsetsu* 小節 and refers to those matters not associated with righteousness (*gi* 義) or principle (*ri* 理). The word appears in several Chinese sources used throughout the Tōshi kaden, such as the *Shiji*, NST: 26.

<sup>8</sup> Wealth or sensuality refers to the compound *zaishoku* 財色; TK: 298.

<sup>9</sup> Bohner translates *shin* 信 as 'Vertrauen' (trust) but adds 'Glauben' (faith) as an alternative interpretation. Bohner 1942: 420. Benevolence (*jin* 仁) and Righteousness (*gi* 義).

He was honest and did not engage with dishonesty, he was incorruptible and did not engage with corruption. He fully comprehended the significance of the hundred scholars and the meaning of the Three Profound Teachings.<sup>10</sup>

He especially valued the teachings of Shakyamuni and combined these with Daoist practices.<sup>11</sup> He honoured those who followed the Way and he respected those who displayed virtue. He respected hardship and poverty, and felt compassion for the orphaned and the lonely. Each year in the third month of summer, he invited ten Great Virtuous Ones and listened to their explanation of the flower of the Dharma.<sup>12</sup> This permeated his soul. Admonishing the higher classes to him was just like pulling off his own clothes. Because his mansion was located to the south of the palace he was commonly called the Southern Courtier.<sup>13</sup>

One time, when he was young, Imperial Prince Hozumi met him at a banquet.<sup>14</sup> He reflected on the past and said to the assembled nobles: “Often I see children of the Fujiwara family. This child is of exceptional talent and differs from other people. I heard that ‘the cubs of tigers and leopards, although not yet fully grown, have the will to devour sheep. The chicks of geese and cranes, despite their wings not yet fully grown, have the will to fly across the four seas.’ This child will certainly attain the rank of the Ting cauldron.”<sup>15</sup>

In the first year of Taihō, scions of the good families were selected to become chamberlain.<sup>16</sup> As child of the three highest ranks he was ordered to be promoted to the sixth rank, and he was made chamberlain. He was twenty-two. An imperial rescript stated: “Your house illuminates the imperial household and your service to the emperor is included in the official texts.”<sup>17</sup> This rank that is now granted, does not yet fully celebrate you. Meanwhile, the issuing of the

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**10** ‘The hundred scholars’ (*hyakke* 百家) refers to ‘the teachings of many scholars,’ NST: 26. TK: 299. ‘The Three Profound Teachings’ (*sangen* 三玄) are the Zhuangzi (莊子), the Laozi (老子), and the I Ching (周易).

**11** ‘Daoist practices’ is the translation of the term 服餌, which refers to a type of medicine aimed at immortality; see also Yamagishi, *Kodai seiji*: 27; TK: 299.

**12** This ‘Flower of the Dharma’ (法花) is a reference to the *Hokke kyō* (Lotus Sutra; 法華經). Possibly this refers to the Hokke-e (ritual reading and explanation of the Lotus Sutra) at Kōfukuji, though it is not clear whether or in what capacity this ritual existed at this temple.

**13** For example, the *Shoki Nihongi* refers to him as the ‘southern courtier’ (*nangyō* 南卿) at times. TK: 300. SN Tenpyō Hōji 4 (760).8. His branch was therefore referred to also as the ‘Southern House’ of the Fujiwara.

**14** Imperial Prince Hozumi (?–?) was the fifth son of Emperor Tenmu.

**15** Meaning he will certainly attain a high bureaucratic rank.

**16** ‘Good families’ refers here to the noble class of the *ryōke* 良家, the term would later refer to a group that held proprietary rights. Chamberlain refers to *uchitoneri* (舍人). Taihō 1 or 701.

**17** Sakusho 策書. The term is translated by Bohner as ‘Kaiserliches Schreiben’ or ‘Imperial texts.’ Bohner 1942: 421.

new legal codes settled the country and the people.<sup>18</sup> Because of its articles this rank was conferred upon you.” The official of the Great Minister’s house Oharida no Shibi was dissatisfied and spoke<sup>19</sup>: “Ah! Why does this household’s heir hold this low rank?” In his heart he was unhappy and his complexion had the colour of shame. Someone informed the Great Minister. The Great Minister ordered his household: “Now the state has institutionalized new legal codes. Therefore, according to precedent, the rank has been conferred on this boy. Why be ashamed? Moreover, stop this slander.” As Chamberlain, Muchimaro could go in and out the palace. Those who saw him rejoiced in his good morality, those who associated with him turned towards his mildness and refinement. His contemporaries told one another: “People should be like the Great Minister’s eldest son.” Thus it was stated by his contemporaries.

In the first month of the second year he was promoted to the Ministry of Justice.<sup>20</sup> He attended to his bureaucratic position and fully understood matters. He was just and not selfish. He assessed people’s words and carefully looked at their expression.<sup>21</sup> Never did he miss their intentions. When deciding a doubtful case, he justified the verdict and made certain to resort to caution. Although there were great and small cases to be handled, his office did not have an established format. Legal documents were chaotic, and judgment was not just.

Thereupon he recorded the fore- and aftermath of judgments as legal articles and presented these to the court. Before the first year of the Taihō era these were not yet made into law, but afterwards they became part of the legal corpus. From then on plaintiffs settled their matters internally and no longer presented their case to the court. In the fourth month of the third year he became ill and withdrew.

In the third month of the fourth year he became vice-head of the Academy.<sup>22</sup> In previous years, following the demise of the Kiyomihara sovereign,<sup>23</sup> the state flourished and its people performed their many roles. In addition, the sovereign’s cart had moved to the capital Fujiwarakyō and since all were occupied no

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18 This refers to the promulgation of the *Taihō ritsu ryō*. However, these weren’t put into effect until 757 by Nakamaro.

19 ‘Great Minister’ (*ōomi* 大臣) refers to Fujiwara no Fuhito.

20 Taihō 2 or 702. ‘Ministry of Justice’ refers to the *Kyōbushō* (刑部省). Bohner translated this as Muchimaro becoming a ‘judge’ (Richter), Bohner 1942: 135.

21 This is a direct paraphrasing of a passage of the analects: ‘察言而觀色.’ The question raised in the analects pertains to the qualities of a distinguished official. *Analects*, Yan Yuan 20. Muchimaro is described in the same terms as the ideals described in this passage: not ‘notoriety’ (聞) but ‘righteousness’ (義) determined the quality of the official.

22 The *daigaku no suke* 大学助.

23 ‘The demise of the Kiyomihara sovereign’ (*Kiyomihara no Tennō no anga* 淨御原天皇晏駕) refers to Tenmu’s passing in 686.

one wanted to study at the time. Therefore the Academy had fallen in decline, and the students were scattered. Although it existed, it seems there was nothing that could be done.

When he entered the Academy, and saw it empty and deserted, he thought: “This Academy is a place where wisdom and talent are assembled, a place where the sovereign’s influence is valued. It rectifies the state, rectifies the households, and all depend upon its holy teachings. However, loyalty has withered, and filial piety has withered. We have distanced ourselves from the Way. Now, those who study are few, and the wind of *ru* does not blow.<sup>24</sup> This is not how one evokes the sacred Way, or supports the authority of the sovereign.”

Thereupon, along with the High Official Rōguō,<sup>25</sup> he consequently invited scholars and the Classics and Histories were debated and explained. Within twelve days the school flourished, and students from afar and nearby assembled like the clouds and lined up like the stars. The sound of recitation filled the ears.

In the second year of the Keiun era (705), during the mid-spring *sekiten*,<sup>26</sup> he said to the Ru scholar Tori Yasutsugu: “We have learned through transmission that ‘If for three years there are no rites, then the rites will surely fade away. If for three years there is no music, the music will surely perish.’ Now, the day of the *sekiten* has become obscure. I request a text be written to celebrate the spirits of our prior teachers, to pass them down to the customs of future generations.” Thereupon Yasutsugu wrote a text on the *sekiten*. The verses said:

On a given day, month and year, we, the families of the bureau of the Academy, respectfully celebrate the spirit of the Minister of Justice Lu Kung Hsuan-Fu with clear alcohol and sacrificial food.<sup>27</sup> Brilliantly you descend from mount Ni and celebrate.<sup>28</sup> Here, as leader and saint, you embody the extraordinary form of a thousand years, and you respond to the bad fate of a hundred kings. When the lord is lowly, there is rebellion. Rites cease and music is destroyed. Lamenting the fall of the Zhou, you returned to Qi having left Lu. Chen faced

<sup>24</sup> *Ru* 儒 refers to correct ritual practice.

<sup>25</sup> High Official or *chōkan/kami* 長官; Rōguō 良虞王 was from Baekje descent through his father Shōsei 昌成.

<sup>26</sup> Ch.: *shidian* 稊奠. The first mention of this ritual in Japan dates back to 701/2/14, as recorded in the *Shoku Nihongi*. James McMullen has pointed out the significance of this ritual being included in the section of the *gakuryō* 学令 (administrative ordinances for schools), rather than under the *Jingikan* 神祇官, the office in charge of overseeing *kami* rituals. McMullen also states that Muchimaro ‘rescued the university from the decline into which it had apparently fallen’ and refers to *Muchimaro den* translated here. McMullen: 50–52. The history of the ritual during the Nara period is closely connected with the figure of Kibi no Makibi (693–775). McMullen 52–54.

<sup>27</sup> Bureau of the Academy refers to the *daigaku ryō* 大学寮. ‘On a given day, month and year’ specifically refers to *sore no toshi tsuki hi no sakutei* 某年月日朔丁. ‘Minister of Justice’ refers to the title *shikō* 司寇. TK, 315–316.

<sup>28</sup> Boehner translates this as ‘Mount Gen Ni’ (Gen Ni-shan), Boehner 1942: 137.

misfortune and Kuang was encircled. Xia Cai experienced pain.<sup>29</sup> You had three thousand students, seventy were capable. You spread loyalty and piety from Si Shui, and investigated the virtue and righteousness of Tang Yao and Yu Shun. The verses of the Classic of Poetry all found their proper place, and robes and caps were accorded correctly.<sup>30</sup>

Why does one say it is difficult to contain crumbling mountains, why were the songs of the Liang so quickly recited?<sup>31</sup> The flow of the water does not stop, and between the two pillars rituals were organized.<sup>32</sup> Oh! How moving! Now, the holy court is grand, and the School is vast. The fragrant virtue is praised and acclaimed, the highest way is contemplated and admired. If there is a soul or a spirit it will transform and head to this feast.<sup>33</sup>

In the twelfth month of that year, he was promoted to the fifth lower rank.<sup>34</sup> At that time he was twenty-six. In the seventh month of the third year, he transferred and became Head of the Academy.<sup>35</sup> Quite often he entered the school building, assembled the students of *ru* and recited the Book of Odes and the Book of History, and he unrolled and perused the Book of Rites and the Book of Changes. He enforced and praised the school, and guided its students. The students of literature all applied themselves to their work.

In the third month of the first year of the Wadō era, he was promoted to Head of the Library which he combined with the position of Chamberlain.<sup>36</sup> He served at the Inner Palace at court and discretely received the commands of the sovereign. At that time he examined the textual depository of the library. Previously, following the disturbances and turmoil of the Jinshin years, the scrolls of the bureaucratic texts had been either scattered around or parts of the cases had been lost.<sup>37</sup> He appealed to the throne to call upon the people and

29 These are references to passages from the *Shiji*, TK: 318.

30 A paraphrase of 雅頌各得其所 taken from the *Lun yu* 9.15. As also explained in TK, the term is taken from the Book of Songs (*Shijing* 詩經); TK: 319.

31 ‘The songs of the Liang’ (梁歌) might refer to a passage from the *Liji*, TK: 319.

32 ‘The flow of the water does not stop’ refers to a passage from the *Lun yu*: 子在川上曰逝者如斯夫不舍晝夜. The image of the flowing stream can also be found in later Japanese literature, the most famous example being undoubtedly Kamo no Chōmei’s classical Japanese phrase ゆく河の流れは絶えずして、しかももとの水にあらず ‘the flow of the river is never cut, yet its water never remains the same.’ The ‘offerings between the two pillars’ is a reference to a passage from the *Liji*: 予疇昔之夜，夢坐奠於兩楹之間 ‘last night I dreamt that I was sitting with the offerings to the dead by my side between the two pillars’ (Trans. James Legge, <https://ctext.org/liji>).

33 ‘Soul’ or ch. *shen*, jap. *shin* 神.

34 *Jū goi ge* 從五位下.

35 Head of the Academy refers to *daigaku no kami* 大學頭.

36 ‘Chamberlain’ refers to *jiju* 侍從; Wadō 1 (和銅元年) or 708, indicating the reign of Genmei (元明天皇; 707–715).

37 The Jinshin 壬申 rebellion of 672 following a succession dispute after Tenji. The first part of the *History of the Fujiwara House*, the *Chronicle of Kamatari*, includes a passage in which

look for copies to make up for the lost sources. Hereupon, these bureaucratic texts were largely restored. As a bureaucrat he was diligent and therefore he did not slow down, nor did he rest. Because he embodied benevolence, he was able to lead men. Because he was pure and strong, he was able to handle matters skillfully. For this reason, he was promoted to the Vice Fifth Upper Rank in the fourth month.<sup>38</sup>

In the sixth month of the fifth year, he was appointed governor of Ōmi province. Ōmi province is a famous land under heaven. Its territory is vast and its people are many, the province is wealthy and its families are prosperous. To the East it intersects with the Fuha region, to the North it borders Tsuruga. When one passes through Yamashiro in the South one arrives at the capital.<sup>39</sup> Its water and sea are clear and vast, its mountains and trees are thick and high. Its soil is dark and its fields are of the best quality. Despite the danger of flooding, since ancient times there hasn't been a worry that wasn't removed. Therefore in the past, the holy lord and his wise servants moved the capital to this area. The young and the old jointly acted in accordance with Heaven, going around holding hands, dancing and singing on the large roads.<sup>40</sup> At the time, people said it was an era of the great peace and the region, with public and private coming and going, became the gateway to the Eastern and Western areas. If governing takes place in haste, then people loudly claim falsehood and flee afar; if governing is loose, then people look down upon authority and violate the land. He guided the people through virtue, and harmonized the people through rites.<sup>41</sup> Pardoning small offences, he initiated change; carrying out rule through contemplation, he listened to the masses. He entered the villages, respectfully visited the fathers and elders, understood the hardships of the common people and changed the detrimental policies of the state. He promoted agriculture and

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Kamatari prevents further violence after the future Tenmu throws a spear into the floor during a banquet at Ōtsu: “The sovereign invited his ministers and held a banquet in his beach pavilion. The wine was pleasant and pleasure reached its climax. Then, the younger brother of the sovereign took a long spear and pierced through a wooden board. The sovereign was baffled, became enraged and was about to punish and kill him. The Great Minister strongly warned him, and the sovereign consequently stopped.” Bauer 2017: 491. The implication might be that as a consequence, not only Tenji, but also Tenmu was indebted to the Fujiwara patriarch, Kamatari.

**38** Vice Fifth Upper Rank or *jū goi jō* 從五位上.

**39** The capital (京) here is Heijō-kyō.

**40** ‘Acted in accordance with Heaven’ is the translation for *mu’i* 無為.

**41** This passage appears in the *Lunyu* 2.3 道之以德，齊之以禮，有恥且格。The consequence is that a people led through virtue and rites, will ultimately become good, in contrast to a people led by law and punishment.



the cultivation of mulberry fields. The people were employed during the proper seasons.<sup>42</sup> When it was time for corvée, he put the rich and those who had many healthy servants first, and the poor and those who only had the weak to help, second.

He respected the elders and felt compassion for the young, allowing them to have their own belongings. The people of the country rejoiced: "When the noble one nears the border, the people are able to revive." In general, he was respected and all looked up to him.

In the first month of the sixth year, he was promoted to Vice Fourth Lower Rank.<sup>43</sup> At the time he was thirty-four years old. From a young age he respected and valued the Three Jewels, he eagerly listened to the Marvellous Law.<sup>44</sup> He wished to find the fruit of the Buddhist teachings, and even when finishing his meal he could not forget about it. Despite having civil duties, he always prayed at a site of worship. Once he unexpectedly entered a temple, and inside everything was in disarray and cold.<sup>45</sup> The halls and shrines were collapsing and falling down, the monks' quarters and hallways were empty and quiet. He turned to the people of the area, asking them about it and they replied: "The temple's donor fully administered the temple's possessions and land, and did not allow the monks and nuns to take care of it or use it freely. Therefore the temple is in disarray and damaged. But not just this temple, all the others as well." He spoke: "The Thus Come One appeared in the world, preached the entire Dharma and brought peace to suffering living beings. Thus, he brought about the root for good karma.<sup>46</sup> His teaching was deep and marvellous, and from the land of Tenjiku changed Shintan and reached these lands.<sup>47</sup> Those who understand the gate to the Dharma separate themselves from afflictions, those who lose the way to the Dharma turn the wheel of life and death.<sup>48</sup> How can white-clad donors thoughtlessly administer the

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42 Refers to the phrase in the *Lunyu* 1.5 使民以時, 'to employ the people during the proper seasons'.

43 SN Wadō 6 (713). 1. 23; TK: 331.

44 Marvellous Law or *myōhō* 妙法.

45 'Temple' or *dera* (寺) designating perhaps an official temple, in contrast to the 'site of worship' (*shōja* 精舍). The latter could also be translated as 'temple' but the former is an official designation.

46 The 'Thus Come One' (*nyorai* 如来) here refers to the historical Buddha. '... brought peace to suffering living beings' is implied in the term *kyōke* 教化.

47 *Tenjiku* 天竺 and *Shintan* 震檀 refer to India and China, respectively.

48 'Afflictions' (*gaiten* 蓋纏) that prevent one from gaining insight.

affairs of monks?<sup>49</sup> Not providing for the clergy and neglecting the temple?<sup>50</sup> This does not benefit the state's field of merit and results in bad karma harming living beings."<sup>51</sup>

Following he offered a memorial to the throne<sup>52</sup>: “Your servant, luckily immersed in the Great Change, is the protector of one province.<sup>53</sup> Because of his public duties he moves amongst the people and in his own time he went to pray at a site of worship. The people of the region do not understand cause and result, and the descendants of the lay patrons do not pay attention to bad karma resulting from negligent administration of monastic affairs, and solely devote themselves to raising women and children. The monks and nuns enter fictitious names in the temple registrars, are dispersed and live off the villages. In the past, the temple's destruction never was the intention, but it has reached the point where cows and horses trample and ruin it. This is not how the state regulates monks and nuns; this is not how the people are converted to Buddhism.<sup>54</sup> If we do not act, the Righteous Law might fall into decline. I humbly request to judge with clarity.”

An edict stated<sup>55</sup>: “The worship and celebration of the Treasury of the Dharma takes respect as its basis. The practice at Buddhist sites takes purity as its foremost concern. Now I have heard that the temples of the country are often not in accordance with the law. Either, when a thatched temple opens for the first time, the building is purified and the records are kept, banners are donated and following land is requested. Or, the buildings are not kept, and then cows and horses trample and ruin it, the gardens are overgrown and deserted, and thorns grow freely. As a consequence, the unparalleled image of the Buddha is eternally covered with dust and the immensely profound storehouse of the Dharma does not escape wind and rain. Many eras have passed and the temples have fallen in decline without being restored. Explaining this by pointing out these matters is showing the highest veneration and respect. If one explains by pointing out these matters, then surely this is far from respect. Therefore, in several areas a number of temples should be combined and form

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49 ‘White clad’ (*byaku e* 白衣) refers to the lay (in contrast with the monastic) patrons.

50 ‘Clergy’ (*hōryō* 法侶).

51 ‘Field of merit’ (*fukuden* 福田); a reference to the three treasures (*sanbō* 三宝) mentioned above.

52 The *Shoku Nihongi* included such a memorial from the fifth month of 716 (Reiki 2), in which Muchimaro addresses Genshō.

53 ‘Great Change’ or *taika* 大化. The purpose of this passage undoubtedly is to connect Muchimaro with Kamatari, the patriarch.

54 ‘Converted to Buddhism’ or *butsuke* 仏化.

55 See also the *Shoku Nihongi* for the 5th month of Reiki 2 (716).

one whole. We desire they combine their forces so that together they may restore the splendour of the declined Dharma. I clearly appeal for the National Lecturer, the monks and the lay patrons to provide a list of the internal temple, its profits and possessions, include this in a memorial to the throne and then wait for the proceedings.”<sup>56</sup>

Hereafter, the people of the province refrained from committing their crimes, and no longer continued to use the temple’s possessions. Cannot ‘The virtue of one’s Lord is like the wind,’ as stated by Confucius, be found in this?<sup>57</sup>

Thereupon, when he went to the district of Sakata to inspect whether the order was followed, he said, gazing at Yamagawa: “I desire to climb mount Ibuki and worship.”<sup>58</sup> The people of the region said: “If you enter this mountain, gales, thunder and rain will follow. Clouds and mist will blind all in obscurity, and swarms of wasps will fly up. In the past, Prince Yamato Takeru soothed evil demons and spirits of the Eastern lands and when he returned to this world he climbed the mountain.<sup>59</sup> When he had climbed half the mountain, he was harmed by the gods, changed into a white bird and flew to the sky.” He said<sup>60</sup>: “From when I was little till now, I have never neglected demons and spirits. If they possess knowledge, then why would they harm me? If they do not possess knowledge, then how can they surreptitiously harm people?” Thereupon, he cleansed himself and led five, six men at twilight to start climbing. When they were walking and about to arrive at their destination, suddenly two wasps flew to him, wishing to sting him. He raised his sleeves and whipped them off, ordering them by hand. They stopped and flew off. All those who followed him said: “His virtuous conduct touches the gods and thus he shall not be harmed.” Till the day ended they wandered about in good spirits, and they walked around and worshipped. The wind and the rain quieted down simultaneously and the skies cleared up. This was the result of his powers. Afterwards, during his own free time, he went to a mountain temple in Shiga. He paid his

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**56** The ‘National Lecturer’ refers to the position of *kokushi* 国師.

**57** Reference to the *Lun yu* 12.19: 君子之德風，小人之德草。草上之風，必偃 (*The relation between superiors and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass. The grass must bend, when the wind blows across it.* James Legge trans., <https://ctext.org/analects>).

**58** It is possible that this concerns an instance of ‘gazing over the country’ (*kunimi*, 国見), a ritual during which the authority of the sovereign over the country was confirmed. See also TK: 342.

**59** This passage refers to the *Nihon Shoki* in which Yamato Takeru climbed mount Ibuki and was cursed by a kami. In this episode, Yamato Takeru is also confronted with wind and rain, just like Muchimaro. The latter’s conduct, however, causes the stormy weather to cease: “The wind and the rain quieted down simultaneously and the skies cleared up” (below) TK: 343.

**60** ‘He’ refers to Muchimaro.

respects to the central image of worship and aroused the aspiration to attain enlightenment.<sup>61</sup> He cut the attachment to body and mind and repented his sins. He received the precepts, purified himself, and fasted.<sup>62</sup> He had a divine sword made and presented it to the throne through an emissary. The emperor greatly rejoiced and stated in an imperial edict<sup>63</sup>: “I have heard that ‘the sword is the virtuous man’s military preparation to protect the body.’<sup>64</sup> Lately our movement and rest are unsettled and it seems our soul is lost. When I take this divine sword, the drowsiness of the night settles completely. Truly, the divine sword given by Muchimaro, the governor of Ōmi province, is a symbol of the protection of the body. Previously, wise men said: ‘There is no virtue that is not announced, no word that is not rewarded.’ Ten *chō* will be given as reward for this sign of loyalty.” He conducted policy for the greater good and day by day rejoicing voices increased in number. Therefore, in the first month of the eighth year he was promoted to the vice fourth upper rank.<sup>65</sup> Thereupon, he cut down the amount of corvée in the country and the people had more free time. He respected the way of non-acting and comprehended the false and the arcane.<sup>66</sup> He wandered around gracefully and satisfied, and entrusted his mind to the unseen. Subsequently, he climbed Mount Hiei, and stayed there while the days passed. There, he planted a Yanagi tree and spoke to those who had followed him: “Ah! You, inform those who will come after us about how we wandered and how we breathed.”

In that year, people from the capital’s left district caught an auspicious turtle and the eighth year of the Wadō era became the first year of Reiki (715). In the past, the minister had met a strange man in a dream. His looks were unusual and he said: “Men and gods both know you adore and yearn for the law of the Buddha. Please construct a temple for me and help to fulfill my vow. I, because of past karma, became a god quite a long time ago. Now I wish to return to the way of the Buddha and perform meritorious deeds but I have not yet been able to grasp all karmic causes and conditions.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, I have come and made this announcement.” He wondered whether this was Kehi no Kami, and

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61 *Hotsugan* 発願 is here translated as ‘to arouse the aspiration to attain enlightenment.’

62 It is not clear what is meant with ‘he received the precepts’ (*jukai* 受戒), since it cannot be verified that Muchimaro ever received the precepts or was included into a particular lineage.

63 Edict or *mikotonori* 勅.

64 This is a quotation from the *Han shu*, TK: 346.

65 *Wadō hachinen* 和銅八年 or 715. This is also mentioned in the *Shoku Nihongi* in the first month of Wadō 8. TK: 349.

66 Refers to the arcane, unseen essence that underlies phenomena. ‘Non-acting’ again refers to *mu’i* 無為.

67 A reference to the concept of *innen* 因縁, ‘causes and conditions.’

although he wanted to reply, he couldn't as he woke up. Thereupon he prayed: "The ways of men and gods are different, the hidden and the apparent are not the same. I do not yet know the strange man of my dream last night, who was he? If the god reveals a sign, then surely I will build a temple!" Then, the god took Ubasoku Kume Katsutari and placed him at the top of a high tree, thus revealing the sign. Knowing it was real, he then built a temple. Now, this is Jingūji in Koshinomichi no kuni.<sup>68</sup>

In the tenth month of the second year of Reiki, he was promoted to senior official of ceremonial affairs.<sup>69</sup> In the ninth month of Yōrō 2, he became the minister of ceremonial affairs.<sup>70</sup> The ministry of ceremonial affairs assembles the state's evaluations of officials and the bestowal of ranks, copied for the court officials and the hundred bureaus.<sup>71</sup> The strength of the public official involved justice for the public, and the bestowal of ranks was arranged and managed through the evaluation of achievement and ability. He minutely understood the low and the high, and, through praise or negative evaluation, people would be judged to be promoted or not. From that moment on, the state's evaluations were cut off from falsehood and abuse of power.

In the first month of the third year, he proceeded to Lower Fourth Rank.<sup>72</sup> At that time, Mōke no kimi had his coming of age ceremony, and his disposition looked very good.<sup>73</sup> The weight of being a master and teacher renders a person beautiful. Then, in the seventh month, he was appointed mentor of the Crown Prince. He went in and out the Spring Palace, and assisted the Crown Prince, putting forward the study of literature to rectify him with the established tradition. The Crown Prince then gave up hunting and in the end turned towards the good karma of the study of literature. Because of this, after the enthronement, he always conducted good policy, showed compassion towards the people, and worshiped and valued the Buddhist Law.

In the first month of the fifth year, he proceeded to Vice Third Rank and was promoted to Middle Counselor.<sup>74</sup> In the ninth month, he combined this with

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**68** Jingūji 神宮寺 in Koshinomichi no kuni 越前国 was located in present-day Fukui, near Tsuruga. TK: 354.

**69** Reiki 2 or 716.

**70** Yōrō 2 or 718. Reference to the title of *shikibugyō* 式部卿.

**71** *Tenka* 天下 or 'state'.

**72** *Sei shi i ge* 正四位下.

**73** Mōke no kimi 儲后 is the later sovereign Shōmu (聖武天皇; 701–756), who was the son of Fujiwara no Fuhito's daughter Fujiwara no Miyako (藤原宮子; ? –754). In other words, Muchimaro was Mōke no kimi's direct uncle. 'His' refers to Muchimaro.

**74** Middle Counselor or *chūnagon* 中納言.

Minister of Construction of the Palace. At the time, he was forty-two years old. He led the construction workers, he planned and executed the inner palace and changed it based on the old one. Therefore, the palace was abundantly beautiful and people revered the sovereign. In the second month of the first year of Shinki (724), he proceeded to the Third Rank and oversaw the construction of the palace as before.<sup>75</sup> In the seventh month of the fifth year, he was appointed protector of Harima, which he combined with the position of royal inspector.<sup>76</sup>

In the sixth year he was promoted to Senior Counselor on the Council of State.<sup>77</sup> He was mild and refined, and prepared for all matters. Consequently he was the throat and tongue to support the way of the king.<sup>78</sup> He went out with the imperial palanquin; when they entered he was holding the central pole. When the court was in assembly, he maintained sincerity and remained in harmony. At court, the high and the low were peaceful and quiet, and in the state there was no hatred and pain.

At that time, Imperial Prince Toneri was the liaison between the throne and the Council of State, and Imperial Prince Niitabe was in charge of all general bureaucratic matters.<sup>79</sup> His younger brother, the Northern Noble, was in charge of the central matters.<sup>80</sup> The high nobles who were advisors on the Council of State, were Middle Counselor Tachihi no Agatamori, his third younger brother and official of rites Umakahi, his fourth younger brother and official of military matters Maro, official of the large repository Prince Suzuka, and Controller of the Left Prince Katsuraki.<sup>81</sup> As refined chamberlains there were Prince Mutobe, Prince Nagata, Prince Kadobe, Prince Sai, Prince Sakurai, Ishikawa no Ason Kimiko, Abe no Ason Yasumaro, Okisome no Takumi and others, more than ten people.<sup>82</sup> As for the Confucian scholars, there were Moribe no Muraji Ōsumi, Ochi no Atahi Hiroe, Seuna no Kōbun, Yatsume no Sukune Mushimaro, Shioya no Muraji Emaro, Narahara no Miyatsuko Azumahito, and others. As for literati, there were Ki no Ason Kiyobito, Yamada no Fubito Mikata, Fujii no Muraji

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75 *Shinki gannen* 神龜元年 or 724.

76 728.

77 Muchimaro becomes here *dainagon* 大納言 on the *daijōkan* ('Council of State').

78 To be the 'throat and tongue' of the sovereign is an expression found in several Chinese texts. For example, in the *Shijing*: 出納王命、王之喉舌。賦政于外、四方爰發; *Be the king's throat and tongue; Spread his government abroad, So that in all quarters it shall be responded to.* Trans. James Legge (<https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry>) .

79 Prince Toneri (舍人親王) was Tenmu's third son; Prince Niitabe (新田部親王) was the seventh son of Tenmu, TK: 367.

80 This refers to Muchimaro's younger brother Fujiwara no Fusasaki (藤原房前; 681–737).

81 The 'advisors on the Council of State' refers to the *sangi* 參議.

82 'Chamberlains' or *jijū* 侍從.

Hironari, Takaoka no Muraji Kawachi, Kudara no Kimi Yamatomaro, Ōyamato no Ikimio Azumahito. As for Geomants, there were Kichita no Muraji Yoroshi, Mitachi no Muraji Gomyō, Kinoe no Muraji Matate, Chōfukushi and others. As for Yin-Yang specialists, there were Tsumori no Muraji Tōru, Yo no Ma Hito, Ō no Chūmon, Ōtsu no Muraji Obito, Kokuna Kōju and others. As for those who calculate the calendar, there were Yamaguchi no Imikitanushi, Shiki no Muraji Ōji, Kusakibe no Iwamura, Shii Muraji Mitasuki and others. As for the masters of spells, there were Yononinkun and Karakuni no Muraji Hirotsu. As for the Ministry of Monastic Affairs, there were Shōsōzu Jin'e and Master of Precepts Dōji.<sup>83</sup>

Thereupon, the state thrived and prospered, and the storehouses were abundant and overflowing. All under Heaven was in Great Peace. On the street, quarters shone in vermillion and purple splendour, and saddled horses lined up the streets. The prisons were few and deserted. On the stones of happiness moss flourished. Accordingly, he embellished the capital and all postal stations; he allowed people to have tiled houses and to abundantly apply red and white. When spring and autumn arrived, he used to assemble the men of letters and talent in Suge to accrue good merit, this was called the literary gathering. Scholars of the time competed, desiring to receive a seat at this event. This was called 'the summing up of points at the dragon's gate.'

In the ninth month of the third year of the Tenpyō era (731), he was appointed official of Dazaifu in Tsukushi. Tsukushi was of strategic importance for the state, and being located at the coast, it was a headquarters for the defence against piracy. He protected the state's large network and he generally conducted gentle rule. Despite himself having been in the imperial palace, the people's desires were for him similar to those of an arrived guest. Therefore, the sovereign's spring and autumn greatly flourished, and the matters of state were not neglected. In his heart there was benevolence and love, and through his intentions he conducted good rule. For the position of Great Minister there had not yet been a man like this. Because his actions were very measured and well prepared, and because he was able to correctly follow the regulations, he was promoted to second rank to become Grand Minister of the Right. That year was the sixth year of the Tenpyō era (735) and he was fifty-five years old.<sup>84</sup>

He was involved in evaluations and laboured tirelessly till the end of day. He pacified the state and consoled the people. Despite his rank and position being awe-inspiring, he was integer and increasingly modest. He divided his possessions at home and he assembled and protected the poor and the lonely;

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<sup>83</sup> 'Master of Precepts' or *risshi* 律師. The 'Ministry of Monastic Affairs' refers to the *sōgō* 僧綱.

<sup>84</sup> 天平六年 or 734.

he dispersed yarn and cotton and always donated to the Three Jewels. He frequently reflected upon the court's policies, and always worried about policies being deficient. When it came to matters of state, there was nothing that he knew of and had not acted upon; when it came to compassionate orders, there was nothing he had heard of and had not granted. Based on this, calamities under heaven increasingly declined, and the demons and gods did not retaliate. The people's houses were sufficient, the people were content, and the court appeased the state through not acting.<sup>85</sup>

In the seventh month of the ninth year (737), he fell ill and increasingly stayed at home, to the lament of the court. On the twenty-fourth day, the imperial consort herself went to him, she issued a decree inquiring about his illness.<sup>86</sup> He was promoted to the second rank and proceeded to the position of Grand Minister of the Left. The following day he passed away at his private residence in the left district of the capital. He was fifty-eight springs and autumns. When the emperor heard of his death, he incessantly felt sorrow in his chest. The court halted for three days. He was honoured with drapes of feathers and with music of drums and flutes. On the fifth day of the eighth month, he was cremated on the Saho mountain and rites were held.

His legitimate wife was through her mother a grandchild of Grand Minister Abe. She raised two sons. The oldest one was Toyonari, the younger one Nakamaro. They were made to study under scholars, often silk garments were offered to soften the labor of their teachers. Thereupon, having talent for study, both sons' good reputation spread to the people. Toyonari achieved the position of Great Minister of the Left and Second Rank. Later, when he did not report an anomaly to the throne and did not do anything about it, he was demoted to governor in Dazaifu.<sup>87</sup> Nakamaro had his name changed into Oshikatsu.<sup>88</sup> Through appointment he reached the position of Daishi and he entered the second rank. As feathers and wings of the emperor he gently stroke all under heaven. A eulogy states: "After having accumulated good karma, his remaining virtue was utmost. All caps succeed each other, supporting the imperial cart, since several generations, they have become the emperor's ears and eyes. Heaven above is in peace and the state below is prosperous. Demons and gods are close and in harmony. The state and the family were joined together. Esteemed because of his loyalty and devotion, this man was like a gem."

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**85** 'Non acting': this is again ch. *wu wei*, jap. *mu'i* 無為.

**86** 'Consort' or *kōgō* 皇后, here refers to Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701–760).

**87** *Ingai no sochi* 員外師.

**88** Oshikatsu 押勝.



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