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## The Tale of the Tokugawa Artifacts: Japanese Funerary Lanterns at the Penn Museum

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# The Tale of the Tokugawa Artifacts: Japanese Funerary Lanterns at the Penn Museum

## Abstract

That previously stood at the back of the quiet inner courtyard of the Penn Museum waited many years for its significance to be rediscovered. It is one of the Tokugawa lanterns that long illuminated the shogunate family's grand mausoleums during the Edo period (1603–1868 CE) in the Zōjōji temple in Tokyo, Japan. Photographs taken around 1930 show the lanterns flanking the Museum entrance in the Stoner Courtyard. The prominent placement of these objects suggests that, in those days, the Museum acknowledged the significance of the lanterns. One of the lanterns was subsequently moved to Museum storage after suffering damage from an act of vandalism in the 1950s or 1960s. Although it is not clear exactly when the lanterns left Japan and arrived in the United States, Stephen Lang, Lyons Keeper in the Asian Section at the Museum, has determined that the lanterns came into the Museum collection as a loan in 1919 from Mrs. Richard Waln Meirs (Anne Walker Weightman Meirs Rush, 1871–1958). They may have been sent from Japan by Mrs. Meirs' uncle, Robert Jarvis Cochran Walker in the late 1880s to be displayed at Meirs' Ravenhill Mansion. [excerpt]

## Keywords

Tokugawa, Japan, museum collection, funerary lanterns, Keisho-in

## Disciplines

Asian Art and Architecture | East Asian Languages and Societies | Japanese Studies



ABOVE: The Mausoleum of Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu, with whom Keishō-in had a son, the fifth shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate of Japan, Tsunayoshi. Note the elaborate bronze funerary lantern. Photo by Coward Lion/Alamy. OPPOSITE CENTER: The Tokugawa family crest. Image from the Dover Pictorial Archive.

THE TALE OF THE  
**TOKUGAWA**  
• ARTIFACTS •

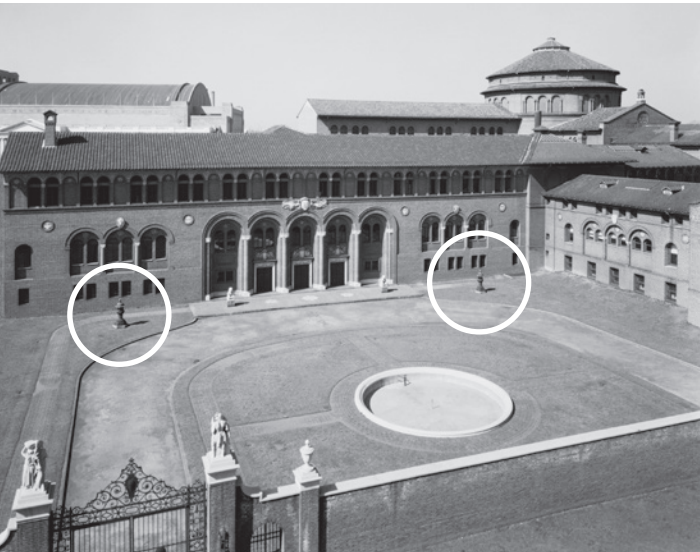


*JAPANESE FUNERARY LANTERNS  
AT THE PENN MUSEUM*

The fortunate arrival at the Penn Museum in 1919 of a pair of bronze lanterns from Japan's Edo period has only recently been fully appreciated. The lanterns—rare historical treasures in the Museum's collection—provide insight into the delicate place and power of women in elite Japanese society during that time.

• BY YOKO NISHIMURA •

# A BRONZE DEDICATORY LANTERN



ABOVE: A photograph taken around 1930 shows the Keishō-in bronze lanterns flanking the Museum entrance in the Lower (now Stoner) Courtyard. PM image 13468, PM objects A1829 (left) and A1828 (right).

THAT PREVIOUSLY STOOD at the back of the quiet inner courtyard of the Penn Museum waited many years for its significance to be rediscovered. It is one of the Tokugawa lanterns that long illuminated the shogunate family's grand mausoleums during the Edo period (1603–1868 CE) in the Zōjōji temple in Tokyo, Japan. Photographs taken around 1930 show the lanterns flanking the Museum entrance in the Stoner Courtyard. The prominent placement of these objects suggests that, in those days, the Museum acknowledged the significance of the lanterns. One of the lanterns was subsequently moved to Museum storage after suffering damage from an act of vandalism in the 1950s or 1960s. Although it is not clear exactly when the lanterns left Japan and arrived in the United States, Stephen Lang, Lyons Keeper in the Asian Section at the Museum, has determined that the lanterns came into the Museum collection as a loan in 1919 from Mrs. Richard Waln Meirs (Anne Walker Weightman Meirs Rush, 1871–1958). They may have been sent from Japan by Mrs. Meirs' uncle, Robert Jarvis Cochran Walker in the late 1880s to be displayed at Meirs' Ravenhill Mansion.

The lantern that recently stood in the Museum courtyard faced the wrong way. Consequently, its inscription could not be easily read. This inscription states that the donor is Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu (1659–1714 CE), a famous feudal lord loyal to the fifth shogun. Shoguns were the military generals who controlled the shogunate government, which lasted until 1868. During the Edo period, each shogun was born from the Tokugawa clan. Yanagisawa is also known for his possible involvement as the mastermind in the famous historical event referred to as the revenge of the Forty-Seven Rōnin, in which a band of Rōnin (masterless samurai) acted in accordance with the warrior code and avenged the honor of their master, who had killed himself by committing ritual suicide.

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ABOVE: The better-preserved Edo-period bronze dedicatory lantern at the Penn Museum. This lantern is not ornate but delicate in style and design. It stands 203 cm (just over 6.6 feet) high. PM object A1828.



ABOVE: The inscription engraved on the shaft part of the lantern includes the names of the donor, the honoree, and the bronze caster. The Buddhist *rinpo* symbol (Wheel of Law) is found on the lantern.



ABOVE: Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu (1659–1714 CE), a famous feudal lord loyal to the fifth shogun, originally donated the two lanterns in honor of Keishō-in. Image by The History Collection/Alamy.

When a member of the Tokugawa shogunate family died, the living built a mortuary stupa or commemorative monument and buried the deceased beneath it. It was customary for feudal lords to offer their condolences and show allegiance by donating one or two stone or bronze lanterns to decorate the elite grave. Only high-ranking lords were permitted to donate bronze lanterns and, as such, the bronze ones were much rarer compared with those of stone and were placed in prominent places within the mausoleums. The light of the lanterns was believed to purge noxious spirits and to lead the way to the gods for stray souls of the deceased.

Yanagisawa gave the lanterns to the grand mausoleum of a renowned elite woman when she passed away on August 11, 1705. Her Buddhist name was Keishō-in; she was the mother of the fifth shogun and achieved the highest rank a woman could at that time. The inscription on the lanterns informs us that Yanagisawa had Shīna Iyo Shigeyasu, a metal caster working for the shoguns of his time, cast these lanterns. The fact that this notable caster also constructed Keishō-in’s elaborate bronze stupa that stands just northwest of Tokyo today, is an indication that Keishō-in was treated as equal to the shoguns, at least regarding funerary customs associated with her death.

### Keishō-in: An Elite Woman of the Shogunate

Keishō-in was born in 1627 into a family of humble origin. She was a beautiful woman, and the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu (1604–1651 CE), fell in love with her. She became Iemitsu’s concubine and, at the age of 19, gave birth to Tsunayoshi, who became the fifth shogun. The Japanese expression of *tama-no-koshi* (marrying a man of wealth) is said to be derived from her common name. In addition to her dramatic ascent in the social hierarchy via marriage and childbirth, Keishō-in is also known for a famous edict, called *Shōrui Awaremi no Rei*, which forbade cruelty to animals and insects. Keishō-in, behind the name of her shogun son, is believed to have enforced this edict for 20 years until her death. Keishō-in was the first woman who, while alive, acquired the highest honorable rank a woman could possibly achieve, the Junior First Rank, which was bestowed on her in 1702 by the Emperor of Japan. It is said that the feudal lord Yanagisawa may have greatly contributed to Keishō-in’s



ABOVE: Portraits of Keishō-in. Note the presence of the Tokugawa family crest attached to her clothes (right) and the frames of the hanging scroll (left). Image on the left by Nara, Hase-dera 奈良・長谷寺. Image on the right by Kyoto, Nishiyama Yoshimine-dera, "Keishō-in sama Mikage" 京都西山善峯寺「桂昌院様御影」.

acquisition of this rank by making arrangements with other powerful shogunate members. When she died at age 79 in 1705, the customary order of banning theatrical and other entertainment events for weeks was issued to express grief over the death of the venerated woman.

Despite the position of Keishō-in in society, it is surprising to discover that funerary lanterns made of bronze were given to a woman, since these were almost exclusively reserved for the shoguns. Stupas made of bronze were relatively common during Keishō-in's time, but her

stupa was the only bronze example made for a woman in the Edo period. Indeed, the absence of the prestigious family crest of the Tokugawa clan on Keishō-in's bronze lanterns and stupa provides an interesting insight into the ambiguity and precariousness of the symbolic prestige that this elite woman obtained in her final resting place. In lieu of the Tokugawa family crest, these lanterns, as well as her bronze stupa, bear the Buddhist *rinpō* and the heart-shaped mark called *inome*. Historical documents show that the Keishō-in stupa initially

*continued on page 36*



THE TOKUGAWA ARTIFACTS



ABOVE: Yashamon Gate at Taiyuinbyo, the Mausoleum of Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu in Nikko, Japan. Note the numerous elaborate bronze funerary lanterns. Photo by Coward Lion/Alamy.





LEFT: Gate of the Mausoleum (Ancestral Hall) of the 7th Tokugawa Shogun in Shiba Park, Tokyo, Japan, ca. 1910. Photo by Chronicle/Alamy.

bore the family crest, but it was immediately erased and replaced with the *rinpō* mark.

Only six years after he dedicated the lanterns to Keishō-in, Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu offered a funerary bronze lantern to the grand mausoleum of the sixth shogun, which was located right next to Keishō-in's grave in the Zōjōji temple. This lantern is very similar in style to Keishō-in's bronze lanterns, but the one for the shogun rightly displays the Tokugawa symbol. While Yanagisawa dedicated only one bronze lantern to the sixth shogun, the pair of bronze lanterns sent to Keishō-in's mausoleum reaffirm how the treatment of her grave was unprecedented for a woman.

These funerary features illuminate the complex negotiation of the symbolic prestige within the Tokugawa burial ground. If the prestigious family emblem had been attached to Keishō-in's bronze lanterns, they may not have been released from Japan and might never have come to the Penn Museum.

### The Fate of the Tokugawa Lanterns

After the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868, dedicatory lanterns were an example of Buddhist art and architecture that suffered various historical misfortunes. Tomoki Itō, in writings of his *Zōjōji Ishidōrō Genkyō*

*Chōsa Hōkokusho* (2016), estimates that about 1,000 bronze lanterns resided in the Tokugawa family temples at the end of the Edo period, of which only about 200 are known today. A great number of the missing lanterns were burned and destroyed during the civil war in the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and later by the Great Kanto earthquake of 1923. Many were also sold off as a result of financial difficulties that the temples encountered with the expulsion of Buddhism after the Meiji Restoration. Later, bronze lanterns were collected and melted down as a metal resource for the manufacture of weapons during the Second World War, in response to the Metal Collection Act of 1943 imposed by the government. The bombings of Tokyo by the U.S. Armed Forces after 1943 also devastated the lanterns, along with many other historical and cultural properties, including sanctuary buildings, stupas, temple bells, and Buddha sculptures.

Meanwhile, Japanese art and craft objects, and, in particular, the Buddhist artifacts, experienced high demand in foreign art markets. The second half of the 19th century was the era of world expositions in industrialized foreign countries such as England, France, Switzerland, Spain, Australia, and the United States. This greatly raised awareness and interest in Japanese arts and crafts, including Buddhist sculptures and texts, woodblock

## Gifts of Allegiance

RIGHT: Keishō-in's bronze lantern given by Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu in 1705, and now in the Penn Museum collection. FAR RIGHT: The bronze dedicatory lantern offered by the same donor to the sixth shogun in 1712. Note the presence of the family crest of the Tokugawa clan on the lantern for the shogun. Image on the far right from: Saitama Prefecture Tokorozawa-City Board of Education 埼玉県所沢市教育委員会, 2008. Sayamayama Fudōji Shozai Dōtōrō Chōsa Hōkokusho. 山山不動寺所在銅燈籠調査報告書, pp. 110.



## Lanterns as Collectibles

RIGHT: One of the bronze lanterns bearing the Tokugawa family crest at the Rockefeller Estate located in Kykuit, New York. Photo by Cynthia Altman. FAR RIGHT: A stone lantern bearing the Tokugawa family crest in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York.





ABOVE: The original location of the bronze lanterns in Keishō-in's mausoleum in the Zōjōji temple. It is highly likely that the bronze lanterns flanking the entrance to Keishō-in's mausoleum in this late 19th century photo are the ones currently in the Penn Museum collection. Photo courtesy of the Tokyo National Library: the Database for Old Photographs (ID#12422/PCDB-012450)東京国立博物館所蔵:古写真データベース. Zōjōji, Meiji 19th century 増上寺, 明治, 19世紀.

prints, silk textiles, porcelains, and bronze pieces. As Buddhist temple objects, Tokugawa lanterns became the focus of collectors and were exported commercially around the world. In the United States, for instance, Kykuit, the Rockefeller Estate located in Phillipstown Manor north of New York City, owns a pair of splendid bronze lanterns that glint with the crest of the Tokugawa clan, the three-leaf hollyhock in a circle. These lanterns do not bear inscriptions, probably because they were not funerary dedicatory lanterns; they may have originally been placed within the Edo castle. According to Ms. Cynthia Altman, the curator of the collections at Kykuit, records indicate that the Rockefeller Estate purchased these items in 1908 from Silo's Fifth Avenue Art Gallery, located in New York City.

The enthusiasm to obtain Edo period shogun lanterns by wealthy art collectors and museums in the United States continued in the late 20th century. Despite their lesser value than that of the bronze ones, stone lanterns from Tokugawa mausoleums have more recently been given by Japan to the United States as gifts to mark the amity between the two countries. A stone example bearing the Tokugawa crest is known to exist in West Potomac Park in Washington, D.C. This is one of a pair that was constructed to commemorate the death of the third shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, in 1651. The governor of Tokyo gave this stone lantern to the United States in 1954 as a symbol of friendship and peace between the two countries, while the second of the twin lanterns remains in a Tokugawa family temple in Tokyo. Another stone example created at the time of the death of Iemitsu is found near the pond at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York. It was originally presented by a high-ranking feudal lord to mourn the death of Iemitsu in 1651. According to a plaque at the site, this stone lantern was given to the city of New York in 1980 to celebrate the lasting New York-Tokyo sister city affiliation.

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when imperial rule was restored to Japan, wealthy families, such as the Ōkura family, endeavored to preserve shogunate and Buddhist properties. Included with these properties was the mausoleum of Keishō-in, which the founder of the Ōkura family purchased soon after 1868, and later displayed in the Ōkura Museum of Art in Tokyo. It is possible that the Keishō-in bronze lanterns were part



ABOVE: Various arts and crafts were on display in the Japanese section of the 1876 Centennial International Exhibition in Philadelphia. Photo by the Free Library "Shippokuwaisha's exhibit-Japanese section," call number C022247.

of the mausoleum at that time, and survived wartime destruction because they were already in Philadelphia in 1919.

The precious bronze lanterns dedicated to the Edo period shogunate woman were sadly detached from their original prominent placement in her tomb. Their overall fate, however, is a fortunate one since they have miraculously survived the various historical misfortunes and destructions and have been preserved, as a pair, at the Penn Museum. As the only known extant testimony, the lanterns and the stupa teach us that major funerary features made of bronze were in fact offered to a woman. But the degree of symbolic prestige was still subject to scrutiny, due to the simple fact that Keishō-in was not a male shogun, no matter how politically influential she was while alive. Keishō-in's bronze lanterns are currently in need of conservation and restoration work, but their historical significance makes them worthy of display again someday. ●

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