

## Monument with Verses Praising the Buddha's Footprint

Inscribed on this slate monument are 21 Japanese poems that mostly extoll the virtues of the Shakyamuni Buddha's footprint. The monument, which was designated a National Treasure in 1952, is often said to have been made to accompany the footprint stone itself, although no historical documentation substantiates that view. There is also no date inscribed, though the style of verse and the use of characters has led some to believe it dates back to around 770, while others believe it may have been made in the Tenpyo era (729–749). Standing at 1.88 meters tall and 47 centimeters wide, the monument has suffered some damage over the years, and, as a result, some characters inscribed near the edges, particularly on the right and left sides, are illegible. Furthermore, it appears that at some point inscriptions were added to these damaged portions, examples of which can be found at the top right of the monument and in the final verse at the bottom left. All the poems have a distinctive metric structure consisting of 38 characters divided into six lines of 5, 7, 5, 7, 7, 7 syllables. Each poem is written in *man'yogana*, the ancient Japanese syllabary in which Chinese characters were employed to represent only sounds rather than meanings, as they do today. *Man'yogana* was used in Japan's oldest extant poetry anthology, the *Man'yoshu*, which was compiled in the Nara period (710–794). One of the poems (No. 16) reads:

As you walk around  
these sacred footprints  
there comes to mind,  
indeed one can almost see,  
the precious form  
of he who made them.

(*Kono mi-ato wo / mawari matsureba / atonushi no / tama no yosohohi / omohoyuruka mo / miru goto mo aru ka*)