

Emperor Sutoku

Emperor Sutoku (1119–1164) was the 75th emperor of Japan, according to the traditional order of succession that starts with the legendary Emperor Jimmu. He ascended the throne at the age of three after his father's abdication and ruled until 1141, but is remembered mainly for what happened after his reign. When Sutoku's father, the former emperor Toba (1103–1156), died, a power struggle broke out at court among Toba's sons and their respective factions. This conflict ended in defeat for Sutoku, who was exiled to Sanuki province (present-day Kagawa Prefecture) by his younger brother, Go-Shirakawa (1127–1192). Sutoku traveled across the Seto Inland Sea to what is now the city of Sakaide, in and around which places claiming an association with him are located. One of these is the site of the Kumoi Palace, where Sutoku is said to have spent the first three years of his exile. Another is the presumed site of the Konomaru Palace, to which he moved later. The latter site is now occupied by Tsuzumigaoka Shrine.

During his time at the Konomaru Palace, Sutoku is said to have dedicated himself to copying Buddhist sutras. Hoping to one day return to Kyoto, the capital, he spent three years in this pious pursuit, which he thought could earn him the forgiveness of the court. In an effort to offer the sutras to one of the influential temples around Kyoto or perhaps dedicate them to his dead father, Sutoku sent his scrolls to the capital. But the court refused to accept correspondence from a convicted criminal, and returned the sutras. Devastated, Sutoku stopped caring for his health, and passed away without ever seeing Kyoto again. His modest grave is at Shiromineji Temple on Mt. Shiramine, between the cities of Takamatsu and Sakaide. Also in Sakaide are Shiromine Shrine, which enshrines Sutoku as a deity, and the sacred Yasoba spring where, according to legend, his body was kept while awaiting cremation.