

The Macabre History of Gangōji's Frog Rock (Kaeru-ishi)

A subtly frog-shaped boulder sits in a small garden on the north side of the **Gokurakudō**. This rock has occupied Gangōji's grounds as a totem of good fortune since 1957, but it carries a surprisingly lurid history that began in the late 1500s.

The rock was discovered on a riverbank somewhere in the Kawachi neighborhood of Osaka. It was offered as a gift to Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), then lord of Osaka Castle, who was purportedly very fond of it. Hideyoshi eventually died, leaving his son Hideyori (1593–1615) to vie for power with Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), the first of the Tokugawa shoguns. Ieyasu attacked Osaka Castle in 1614 and 1615, destroying both the castle and the Toyotomi family.

Hideyori was supported in his bid for power by his mother, a consort of Hideyoshi's named Yododono. It is believed that Yododono participated in the defense of Osaka Castle and died together with her son. According to legend, Yododono's remains were buried under the frog rock, which was placed near the castle's moat. After Yododono's death, rumors arose of people who suddenly threw themselves into the moat, and those who drowned inevitably washed up near the frog rock.

These grisly events continued into the twentieth century. In 1940, a man who was saved from drowning reported that he had been sitting on the frog rock when a woman in courtly robes appeared and beckoned him toward the moat with a folding fan. This story was picked up by the local newspapers, and people flocked to Osaka Castle—which was then the Headquarters of the Fourth Division of the Imperial Japanese Army. In order to deter the flood of curious visitors, army officials had the frog rock moved away from the castle.

In 1957, the frog rock was rediscovered in Hōenzaka, a neighborhood just south of Osaka Castle. The man who found it was acquainted with Tsujimura Taien (1919–1978), the head of Gangōji Temple. The rock was relocated to the temple grounds, where Buddhist funeral rites were performed for Yododono's vengeful spirit.

Since then, there have been no strange occurrences associated with the frog rock. Each year on July 7, a special ceremony is performed for the sake of all those who died in the siege of Osaka Castle and were reborn in the realm of "hungry ghosts" (*gaki*). During the ceremony, the monks chant sutras and make offerings of fruit and vegetables. Afterward, the rock is anointed with water containing salt and the staple grains of rice, soybeans, adzuki, and sesame.