

## **Hida no Takumi, the Legacy of Takayama's Master Carpenters**

In 757, Chancellor Fujiwara no Nakamaro (706–764) promulgated a body of law called the Yōrō Code. These ancient laws contained a special clause for Takayama and the larger Hida Province: taxes that were normally paid in rice could instead be paid with the labor of craftsmen and carpenters. Referred to as “Hida no Takumi” (literally, the “Experts of Hida”), these carpenters built some of the oldest temples and shrines in Japan, including Tōdaiji Temple, Ishiyamadera Temple, and Kasuga Taisha Shrine.

Per the terms of the Yōrō Code, approximately 100 carpenters and woodworkers from Hida were sent to work in the capital each year. They were dispatched in five-person units; four men were responsible for repairs and planning, and the fifth was an apprentice who assisted the experts and prepared food. In exchange for their services, each worker was allocated 2 *shō* (about 1.2 kilograms) of rice a day and 1 *shō* (about 600 grams) of salt each month. This was a very impressive sum at the time: just 50 days' worth of payment was considered enough to feed each worker for an entire year.

In the Kamakura period (1185–1333), governmental power shifted from the emperor to the shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), and the laws that had created the role of the Hida no Takumi were rewritten, ending the practice. But by that time, Hida no Takumi had come to be respected throughout Japan, and they continued to build temples and other elaborate structures. Mention of woodworkers from Hida can be found in many literary works, including the *Man'yōshū* (the oldest collection of Japanese poetry) and the *Konjaku monogatari* (a collection of Buddhist tales from the twelfth century).

The Takayama Festival floats and their wooden carvings were also created by Hida artisans. In the early 1800s, Hida became known for *netsuke* (small, sculptured toggles) and other items carved from Japanese yew. *Netsuke* are used to fasten items to the waistbelt when wearing a kimono, and they were prized accessories.

At the end of the Edo period (1603–1867), the class regulations and sumptuary laws established by the shogunate were abolished, and many of the wealthy merchants in Takayama hired Hida no Takumi to build new houses for them using materials and ornamentation that had previously been prohibited. As Japan modernized and other building styles became more common, Hida no Takumi became associated with high-quality furniture and other wooden goods.