

Designated as National Important Cultural Property

Objects Excavated from an Earthen Pit of the Aki-kokubunji Temple Site

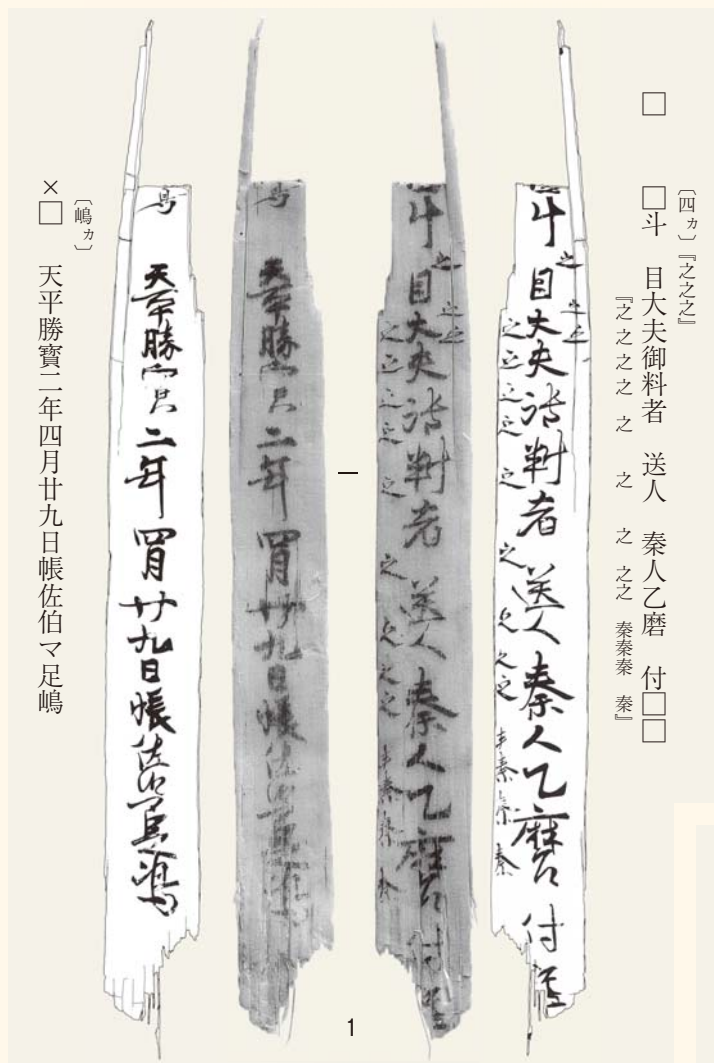
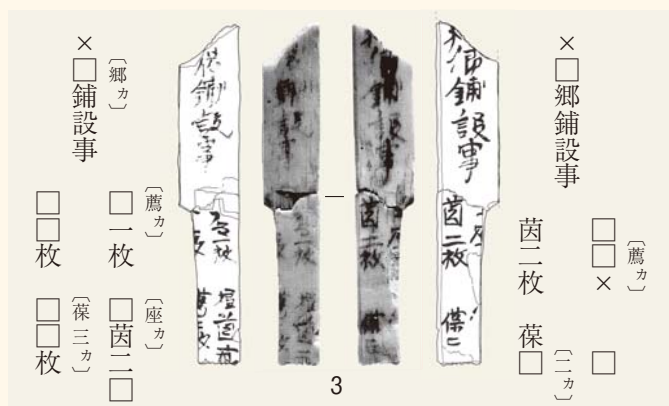
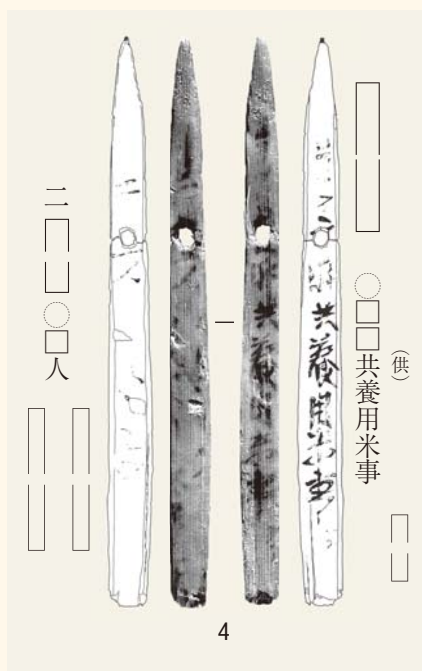


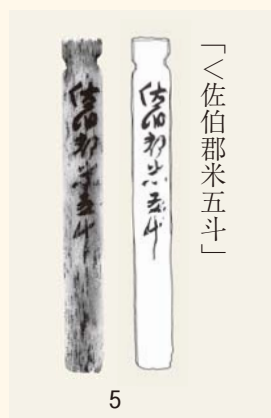
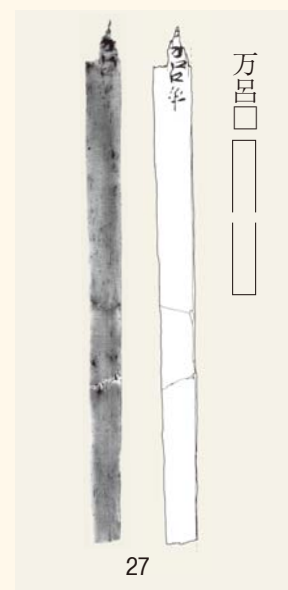
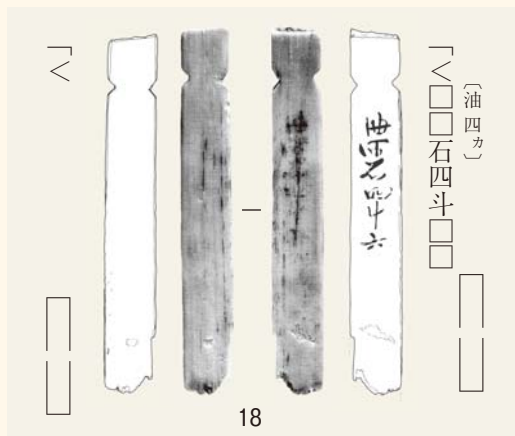
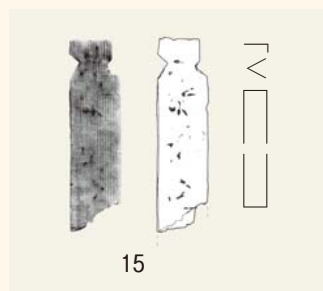
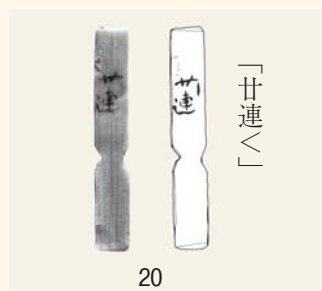
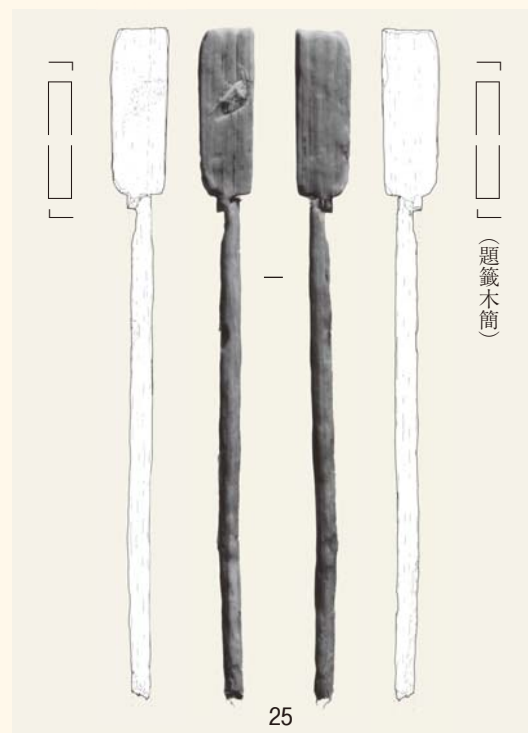
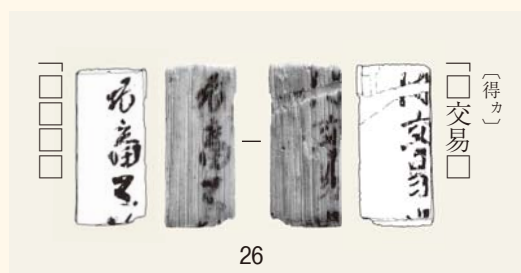
In an earthen pit excavated within the grounds of the Aki-kokubunji Temple (built in the Nara period, 710-794 A.D.), a wooden writing tablet (*mokkan*) bearing the year 750 (Tempyō-shōhō 2), wooden baggage label tablets, seal tablets inscribed with the names of districts, administrative units, products, etc. were found. Wooden axis of hand scrolls, as well as pottery with ink inscriptions indicating religious events such as [*ango*] and [*saie*], wooden objects such as rulers, writing utensils, bobbins, formal folding fans made of thin *hinoki* cypress slats, ladles, chopsticks, and roasted salt pottery (salt transport vessels; by reheating the entire vessel with salt upon arrival at the destination, moisture and bittern – *nigari* magnesium chloride – was removed) etc. were also unearthed. Because the excavated objects were deposited together and confined to a distinct time phase, and in recognition of the high scientific value of the material, as well as showing specific aspects of Buddhist events held at a state-sponsored provincial temple (*kokubunji*) soon after its foundation, the unearthed objects were designated as National Important Cultural Property.

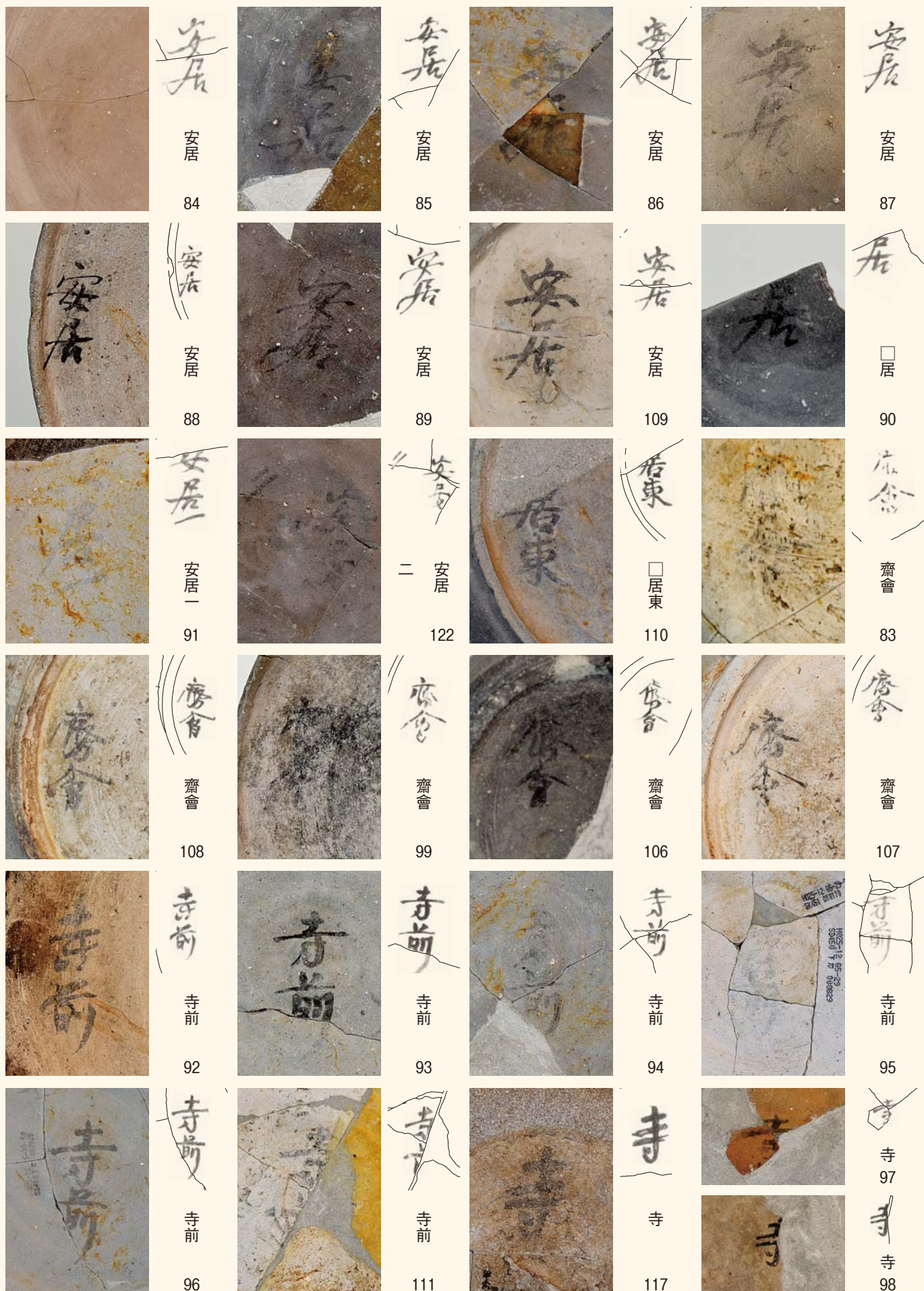
2025

Higashi-Hiroshima City Board of Education

Wooden writing tablets (mokkan)







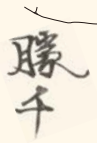
84-90, 109 [jap. *ango*; summer ascetic practices]

83, 108, 99, 106, 107 [jap. *saie*; offering food to the temple]



勝千

112



勝千

118



乙万呂

103



佛

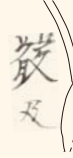
123



大

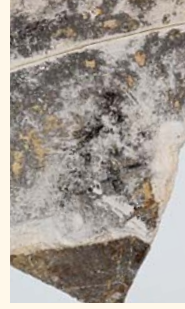
大

100(外)



嚴及

100(内)



大代

121



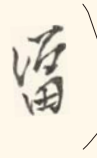
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101



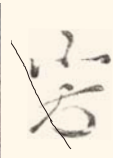
沼田

114



沼田

119



小方

113



原

102



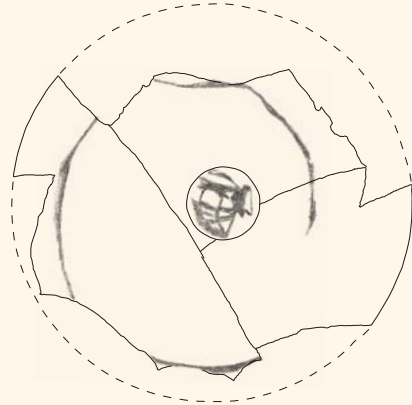
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120



二

124



marks or
drawings
105



122



117



119



110



83



123

Wooden objects

recycled wooden tablets



203



205



204



206

wooden rulers (monosashi)



237



236

wooden bobbins



207



208

formal folding fans made of thin hinoki cypress slats



209

formal folding fans made of thin hinoki cypress slats



210



211



212



213



214



215

writing utensils made of pointed wood (kakuhitsu)



238



239



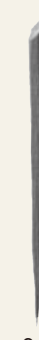
240



241



242



243

unidentified wooden objects



(shaped like a wooden ritual blade *igushijō*)
245



(fine-tooth comb?)
247



(fine-tooth comb?)
248



(hair pin?)
249



(hair pin?)
250



(bird-shaped)
244



(stepped shape)
246

chopsticks



224



227



228



229



230



231



232



233

ladles



216



217



218

unidentified wooden objects



(sword-shaped)
251



252

roasted salt pottery



187



195



196

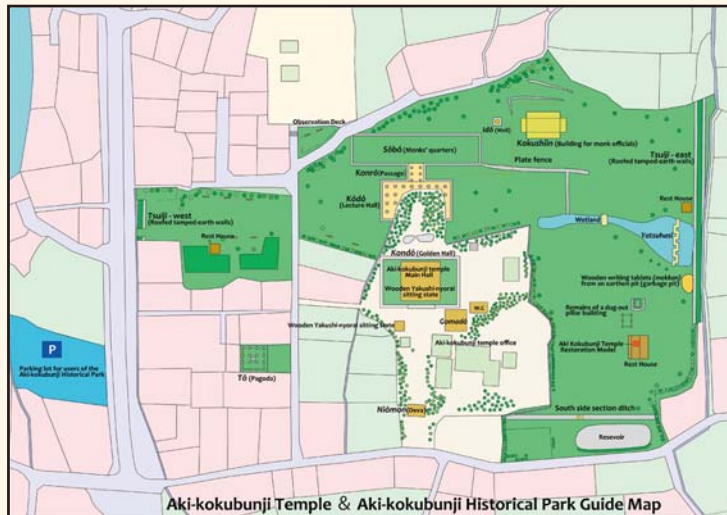
The content of the discovered objects in the earthen pit

Wooden writing tablets (<i>mokkan</i>)	82 items
Pottery with ink inscriptions	42 items
Pottery	78 items
Sue ware	57 items
Haji ware fragments	5 items
roasted salt pottery fragments	16 items
Wooden vessels, objects	50 items
Recycled wooden tablets	4 items
Bobbin fragments	2 items
Fragments of folding fans made of thin <i>hinoki</i> cypress slats	7 items
Ladles	3 items
Chopsticks	17 items
Wooden ruler fragments	2 items
Wooden writing utensils (<i>kakuhitsu</i>)	6 items
Unidentified wooden objects	9 items
(all together)	252 items

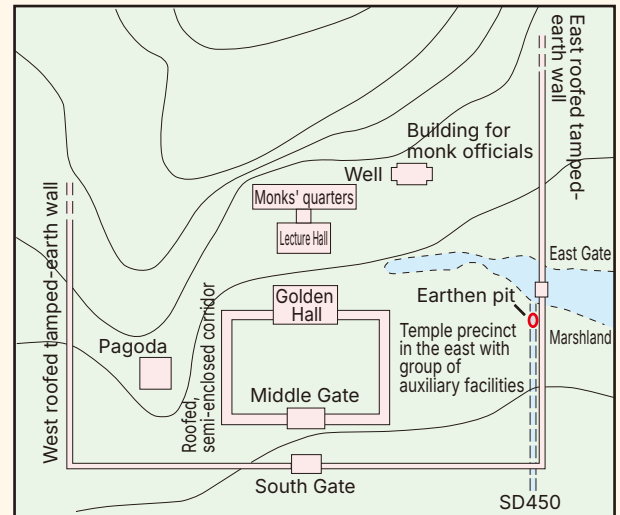


Photo taken during the excavation

Objects Excavated from an Earthen Pit of the Aki-kokubunji Temple Site



General map of the Aki-kokubunji Historical Park



Schematic plan of the remains of the Aki-kokubunji Temple

The Earthen Pit where the Objects were Found

Since the Aki-kokubunji Temple was designated as a Historic Site, excavations have been conducted for the purpose of maintenance in conjunction with public ownership. The Historical Park was opened in 2012 and is now being used as a place where citizens can experience history.

The earthen pit in which the designated objects were found was discovered during an excavation conducted in 2000, near the remains of a roofed tamped-earth wall that divides and marks the eastern boundary of the temple grounds on the inside. It is approximately 9 m long, 4-5 m wide, and 0.8 m deep, in a long trapezoidal shape from north to south, and is thought to have been a garbage pit for items that were no longer needed due to breakage or other reasons.

After the pit was filled in, a ditch was dug which was used from the second half of the 8th century to the first half of the 9th century, suggesting that the pit was only used for a very limited span of time in the second half of the 8th century after 750. The location where the pit was found was a marshland, and since it is still a water-rich zone, it is believed that many wooden objects, including wooden tablets, were preserved there.

Significance of the Objects Excavated from the Earthen Pit

According to written records, an imperial decree for the construction of state-sponsored provincial temples (*kokubunji*) was issued on Tempyō 13 (741). But even before that, orders were issued for the recitation and copying of sutras, the making of Buddhist implements and the construction of pagodas. Even after the decree was issued, the construction of provincial temples did not seem to make much progress nationwide, and requests for their construction were frequently made. On the other hand, excavations of provincial temples were carried out throughout the country, but no materials directly related to temple construction were found.

A wooden tablet (*mokkan*) with the inscription April 29, Tempyō-shōhō 2 (750), deposited together with various items sent from different parts of Aki Province and pottery with ink inscriptions indicating religious events such as [jap. *ango*; summer ascetic practices] and [jap. *saie*; offering food to the temple], suggests that Aki-kokubunji Temple at least had facilities for holding Buddhist rituals around 750 and that the temple was in operation at that time. This indicates that Aki Province cooperated in the administration of the temple. We have been able to learn to some extent what Buddhist rituals were held here.

Among the objects unearthed were *kakuhitsu*, writing utensils made of pointed wood, the oldest known items of its kind and the first ever found at an archaeological site; chopsticks, which are thought to have been used as wooden skewers (*chū*) to confirm the number of monks; and rulers (*monosashi*), which are thought to have been used for lines concerning the copying of sutras, etc..

These discoveries have caused a stir among excavations throughout the country.