

Kengoshizuka tomb (Koshi, Asuka village, Takaichi district)

The Kengoshizuka tomb is located in the Koshi section of Asuka village, at a place about 10 minutes' walk west from the Asuka station on the Kintetsu Yoshino line. It is an octagonal mound measuring 22 m on a side and 4.5 m high, with a paving of dressed stones of volcanic tuff encircling the mound, and a pavement of packed cobbles confirmed on its western side. As the burial facility, it has a horizontal side-entrance stone compartment hollowed out of a single huge boulder of volcanic tuff, divided into two burial chambers, with a stone slab thought to have been fitted with decorative metal fittings at four locations used as an inner seal for the entrance, and an outer entrance stone 245 cm vertically by 270 cm horizontally making a double seal. Each burial chamber had the floor carved with a raised platform to receive the coffin, with the scale nearly equal at 195.5 cm long by 81.5 cm wide for the eastern side and 195 cm long by 80 cm wide to the west, thus both being made to the scale of a coffin for an adult. From within the stone compartment were recovered human skeletal remains along with the remains of dry-lacquer coffins, cloisonné casket fittings in shapes of tortoise shell scales, gilt-bronze eight-lobed floral pattern fittings, and numerous glass beads and so forth. From an analysis of the remaining teeth, one of the interred was aged 30–40 years, and while it was difficult to make a positive determination of the sex, the measurements were reported to be close to the average size for women. Also, in recent years another tomb with a side-entrance stone compartment (Koshitsuka Gomon) has been newly confirmed to the southeast of Kengoshizuka.

The Kengoshizuka tomb has the octagonal mound shape that was adopted for mausolea of the imperial family, and as the burial facility is a side-entrance stone compartment with two chambers hollowed-out of a single boulder, thus indicating it was intended for use as a double burial from the time it was built, and also from its location in Koshi (possibly a corruption of Ochi), considerable attention is focused on its relation to a passage in the *Nihon shoki* chronicle for the 27th day of the 2nd month of 667, stating that Empress Saimei and her daughter, Imperial Princess Hashibito, were buried together at the mausoleum named Oka no Ue in Ochi, and that in front of this Imperial Princess Ōta (Saimei's granddaughter) was also buried.

Excavation of the Kengoshizuka has been conducted from early decades of the twentieth century, the tomb was designated a Historic Site in 1923, and in 2014 the Koshitsuka Gomon tomb was added to the designation and the official name changed to Kengoshizuka/Koshitsuka Gomon Historic Site. Also, the artifacts recovered in an investigation in 1914 were designated an Important Cultural Property, and are part of the regular exhibit at The Museum, Archaeological Institute of Kashihara.