

“Funayakata”, the Former State Barge Deckhouse

A National Important Cultural Property

- Important Cultural Property status from August 29, 1953
- Important Works of Fine Arts status from May 27, 1937 (former system)
- 2-story wooden structure
- Gable-roof construction with staggered cabin heights
- Cypress bark roof
- Approx. 9 m² x 1.8 m² in area



The Funayakata was once the deckhouse of the river-going pleasure barge for the *daimyo* (feudal lord) of the Himeji Domain, who used it for excursions along the river sometime during the Edo period (1603 - 1868).

During the Edo period, the *daimyo* in western Japan used pleasure barges to travel for their compulsory period of residence in the capital of Edo (modern-day Tokyo), so they vied with one another to build the most luxurious ones. However, only this Funayakata, the Funayakata Teahouse from the Tadotsu Domain (a Kagawa Prefecture Designated Tangible Cultural Property located in Saiko-ji Temple), and the Hosokawa Clan Funayakata from the Kumamoto Domain (a National Important Cultural Property located in the Kumamoto City Museum) still remain to this day. Of the three, the Funayakata in Sorakuen Garden is the sole river-going pleasure barge.

The interior is divided into two levels, with three deck cabins on each level. On the second level, the floor of the central cabin is elevated above the others. This “Raised Chamber” was used by the *daimyo* and was the most important cabin. The barge captain sat in the “Captain’s Chamber”, the cabin in the fore of the ship (the end facing the pond), and the retainers attended on the *daimyo* from the “Adjoining Chamber”, the cabin on the opposite end.

In its days as a river-going pleasure barge, the first level only extended as far as the top of the garden hedge that surrounds the building today. The crosspieces that run at the same height as the hedge make up the frame that separated the deckhouse from the hull of the barge.

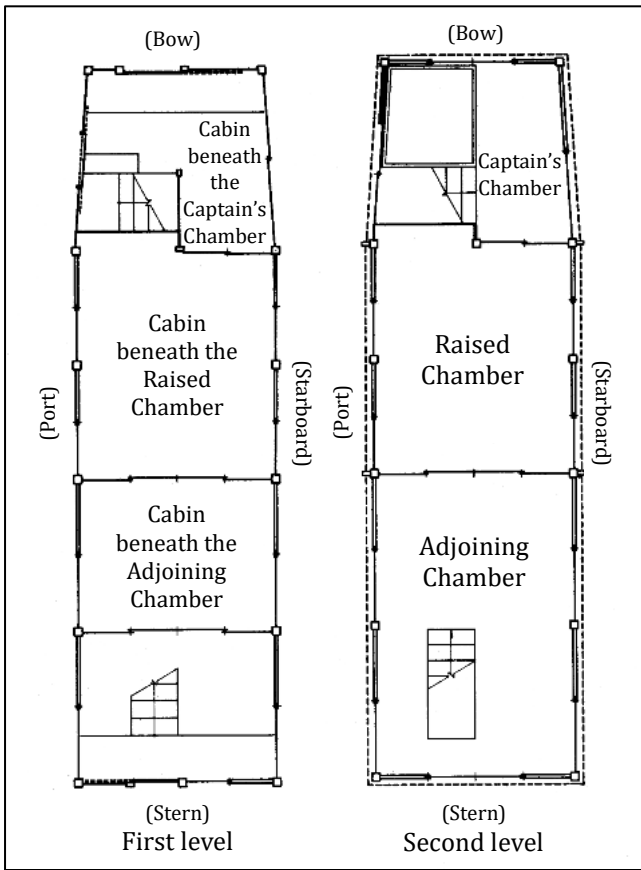
The wooden parts of the interior and exterior were entirely painted with either *Shunkei* lacquer (a clear lacquer in which the natural wood grain can be seen) or *Kuro-urushi* lacquer (a thick black lacquer). In addition, the tie beams and ends of the rafters were fitted with ornamental metal covered in gold leaf. Gold leaf was also pressed between the slats of the wooden sliding doors. The luxury of this splendid construction would reflect the *daimyo*’s elegant and refined lifestyle.

No documents remain that clearly indicate when the Funayakata was constructed. However, based on traces of the family crest on the ornamental metal fittings, the date of construction is estimated to be between the 2nd Year of Tenna (1682) and the 1st year of Hoei (1704), when Honda Tadakuni was appointed to rule Himeji.

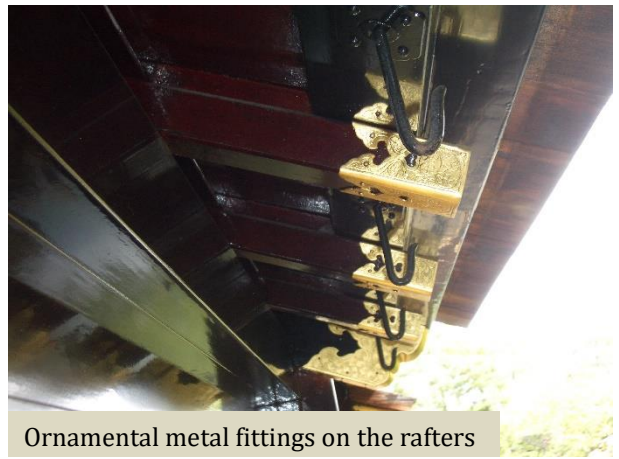
At the end of the Edo period and the start of the Meiji period in 1868, the barge was relocated from its berth near Shikama Port (in Himeji City) to a private residence in Takasago City. The deckhouse was detached from the hull and annexed to a building by its frame, and it was used as a teahouse there. At that time, only the two cabins from the front (bow side) remained, and the roof was also covered with *sangawara* tiles, so it barely resembled the deckhouse of a pleasure barge.

Afterwards, it was relocated once again to a private estate in Tarumi Ward (in Kobe City) in 1941. The deckhouse was reconstructed so that there were three cabins on both the upper and lower floors, including the addition of the lost “Adjoining Chamber”. It also underwent restoration work, such as repair of its partitions and rethatching of the roof with Japanese cypress bark.

In 1978 the City of Kobe received the barge as a donation from the previous owner. After relocating and repairing it in 1980, the Funayakata stands to this day in Sorakuen Garden.



Layout



Ornamental metal fittings on the rafters



Wooden sliding door and decorative railing



Interior ("Raised Chamber")



Ornamental metal fitting on a tie beam



Ornamental metal fitting on a stair handrail



Model of the pleasure barge in a restored state