PAPERS COMMUNICATED

**11. *Has there ever been handed down a Holograph
Copy of Prince Shōtoku's "Constitution
in Seventeen Articles."***

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The standard text of Prince Shōtoku's "Constitution in Seventeen Articles" which was promulgated in 604, A.D., is found in the Nihongi or "Chronicles of Japan,"¹⁾ while the oldest extant manuscript of the Chronicles containing that part of the text is the one in possession of Baron Iwasaki which is believed to come down from late ninth century. On the other hand a holograph copy of the Prince's Commentaries on the Hokkekyō (Lotus of Truth) has been handed down in the Hōryū-ji monastery and is now deposited in the Imperial Household Archive. Its authenticity was once questioned by some scholars but is now an almost established fact. The present writer has reproduced letters (Chinese characters) from the Commentaries for reconstructing the text of the Constitution to see it as if in the Prince's own manuscript. This was done simply out of curiosity, with a pious desire of restoring something resembling the first hand manuscript, therefore to no scholarly purpose. But when a larger part of the text was reconstructed in this way, a striking fact became visible that some of the characters in the ninth century manuscript were quite similar to the Prince's own hand-written ones, in spite of the general difference of the calligraphic style between the two manuscripts separated by the intervening three centuries.

To be more precise, the characters in the ninth century manuscript are largely in the *kaisho* 楷書 style, viz. regular rectangular one, while the Prince's is in the *gyōsho* 行書 style, viz. more fluid, curved style.

In spite of this difference, the ninth century manuscript uses the *gyōsho* style in the character 元 which is a free form of 無, meaning *not* or *without*. This character occurs eleven times in the text, and the ninth century script uses the free form five times and the regular six times, while in the other parts of the scroll the free form is never used. On the other hand the Prince never uses the regular form in the several hundred cases throughout his Commentaries. Here the similarity :

The Chronicles MSS :

元

The Prince's MSS :

元 元

1) See : Aston, Nihongi, ii, pp. 128-133 ; F. Brinkley, A History of the Japanese People, pp. 140-142.

May this not indicate the dependence of the ninth century script upon an older manuscript based upon the Prince's holograph copy?

Similar is the instance of the character 亦 meaning *also*, which is always written in the fluid form in the Prince's manuscript. The ninth century script never uses the regular form but a more or less fluid form like yet tending to the regular form. In fact the character occurs seventeen times in the whole scroll, five being in the seventeen articles. It is noteworthy that the free form is repeated three times among the five, while all other twelve tending to a more rectangular style.

The relatively rectangular style:

The more fluid style:

The Prince's MSS:

This seems to suggest that the later script imitated, perhaps unintentionally, the fluid style of the Prince's from an older manuscript, either the Prince's own or one based upon it.

Beside these there are several other instances of remarkable resemblance of style in the two manuscripts. One of those is the character 私 which is written in the Prince's holograph and in the ninth century one, occurring three times. Other instances are of solitary occurrence and are too slender as evidence, yet taken together with the instances adduced above they may suggest the presence of an older copy based upon the Prince's holograph copy before the ninth century script. The cases of later manuscripts and prints will be reported later on.