

About the Cover

Tametomo no bui toukigami wo shirizoku zu

Ukiyo-e woodcut print by Yoshitoshi, c. 1890

Naito Museum of Pharmaceutical
Science and Industry

Hashima, Gifu, Japan

The first record of smallpox in Japan was found in the Nihon Shoki, published in 735 (the 7th year of Tempyo). The incident was also described in Ishinho, the oldest medical book in Japan, issued by Yasuyori Tanba in 984 (the 2nd year of Eikan). Smallpox, called Hosō in Japanese, came to Japan in the same era as Buddhism. The disease was considered very dangerous. Even those who recovered could have pockmarks or loss of sight. Parents were constantly concerned about their children becoming ill with smallpox.

The color red was used in prints and other smallpox illustrations because it was believed that Hosō-Kami, the god of smallpox, felt strongly about this color. When the skin rash was purple, the patient's condition was considered serious. If the rash turned red, the patient would recover safely. Shoni-Hitsuyo-Yoikugusa, written by Gyuzan Kazuki in 1798 (the 10th year of Kansei), recommended that children with smallpox be clothed in red garments and that those caring for the sick also wear red.

"Hosō-e" color prints against smallpox were used in prayers to boost the morale of ill children. After the patients recovered, these pictures were burned or floated down the river. Therefore, few examples are left of prints in which the color red predominates. The pictures drawn as protection against smallpox depicted heroic figures to give people courage against smallpox. Tametomo, a heroic samurai, was a representative genie. Legend has it that Tametomo was once banished to Hachijyo Jima, a small island far from main island in Japan, and that is why smallpox never occurred there.

Reference

Rotermund, Hartmut O. *Hôsôgami ou la petite vérole aisément*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1991.

EMERGING INFECTIOUS DISEASES

A Peer-Reviewed Journal Tracking and Analyzing Disease Trends Vol. 8, No. 8, August 2002

In the next issue

Passive Antibody Administration
(Immediate Immunity) as a Specific
Defense Against Biological Weapons

West-Nile Outbreak in Horses in
Southern France, 2000: Results
of a Serosurvey

Outbreak of Cyclosporiasis Associated
with Imported Raspberries,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2000

Genetic Homogeneity of Measles
Viruses Associated with a
Measles Outbreak, São Paulo, Brazil

Genetic Characterization of Hantaviruses
Carried by the Korean Field Mouse
(*Apodemus peninsulae*), Far East Russia

Haemophilus Aphrophilus Endocarditis
Following Tongue Piercing

Infantile Pertussis Rediscovered in China

Jet Black Eschar

Polymerase Chain Reaction for
Screening Blood Donors at Risk for
Malaria: Safe and Useful?

A New Pathogenic Spotted Fever
Group Rickettsia in South Africa

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ahead of print publication, see
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