

Just to the left of the Sanjūsangendō is a Nō performance. Nō, evolved in part out of the *kagura* dances which had been performed at the imperial court and imperial-cult shrines since time immemorial. These and both ancient and more recent peasant dance traditions were combined to create a unique dramatic art. Narrated by a chorus to the sounds of drums and wind instruments, the actors convey their thoughts and emotions through a combination of chanted dialogue and dance. The dramas usually focus on a single character whose inner conflicts must be resolved before his or her soul can achieve peace. Secondary Nō characters enable the main character to accomplish this goal. Credit for the development of Nō goes to the father and son Kan'ami and Ze'ami, who in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries formulated this dramatic art under the patronage of the Ashikaga shoguns, and particularly that of Yoshimitsu.

Two other of Japan's enduring performance arts also have their roots in these tumultuous centuries, although they would be more properly established in the more peaceful seventeenth century. However, the prototypes of both Bunraku and Kabuki began as entertainments in summer festivals such as the Gion. They probably developed from street performances dating as far back as the Heian period, but they began to take on something like their modern format in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The first are the puppet shows that grew out of simple performances on a level with the Western Punch and Judy, evolving into a sophisticated art form using large figures manipulated by puppeteers clad in black to render them inconspicuous. Now known as **Bunraku**, these shows also featured a seated chanter, who would recount the plot and speak the dialogue while a *samisen* (a kind of lute) player provided musical accompaniment. **Kabuki**, still the most popular of the traditional theater forms, developed alongside the puppet shows and took on its definitive form around 1603. It employs live actors—males who specialize in either *onnagata* (female roles) or *tachiyaku* (male roles)—and features gorgeous costumes and elaborate sets. Musical accompaniment is usually provided by an offstage musician playing a *samisen*. The plots of Bunraku and Kabuki plays are very similar, dealing with historical events, moral conflicts, duty, and personal desire, and even ghost stories—frequent summer fare because the shivers they produce trick one into feeling cool.

At the bottom of the first panel on the right-hand screen of the Rekihaku set begins Muromachi Street, which leads into the district on the first part of the left screen where the Ashikaga made their base from the end of the fourteenth century onward. At the top of the right screen's third panel is the Gion shrine, with people pulling a *mikoshi* from it across the river and into the city as part of the festival. In the middle of the fourth panel is the Buei *shinden*, one of the few mansions left standing in an area that would remain largely abandoned until the seventeenth century. In the middle of the fifth and sixth panels is the imperial palace. It is in some respects easily overlooked amidst the other buildings, no longer supported by

the massive structure of the Daigokuden and other great public buildings. The palace was almost completely destroyed during the civil wars, and one suspects that even this much reduced image is something of an idealization. During the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, refugee shanty towns were known to have sprung up within the imperial grounds. In the Momoyama and Edo periods, peace and prosperity would once again bring the Capital of Flowers into bloom, as the *rakuchū rakugai* screens of that period amply testify (see Fig. 281).

### Decorative and Applied Arts

As can often happen in human societies, these periods of great social turbulence were also times of great artistic innovation. Certainly the general course of development in the decorative and applied arts hardly seems to pause throughout all the wars, plagues, and natural disasters of the medieval period. At first the center of all fashion in the decorative arts remained the imperial capital, but, as time wore on and patronage shifted increasingly to the *bakufu* and daimyo, the craftsmen grouped into guilds in Kyoto began to disperse to regional centers where their samurai clients were based, and which, by the fifteenth century, might be considerably safer than Kyoto itself. By the end of the period, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi reunified the nation under his rule and set about restoring the capital to its former glory, he was able to draw on an artisan class expert in creating anything a great lord could possibly desire.

#### ARMOR AND LACQUERWARE

Armorers and lacquer craftsmen, in particular, made great advances in their art during the medieval period. Both found ample patronage from the newly wealthy samurai class. Armorers especially were never out of favor. Where in the Heian period there was often a division in arms and armor between those sumptuously worked pieces made for aristocratic patrons, and meant for court ceremonial, and those expertly crafted tools meant for the battlefields of the provinces, once power shifted into samurai hands, much more attention was given to combining these two approaches, so that the strong and deadly weapon also became something of great aesthetic beauty.

The Japanese armorers excelled especially in the manipulation of metal alloys. Their steel blades were renowned throughout Asia for their combined elegance and durability, and the swordsman's accoutrements—from the sword handles and handgrips to the hairdressing tools for his elaborate *chignon*—were made of special alloys utilizing gold, silver, copper, and lead that created a luxurious but deeply masculine aesthetic. Suits of armor became no less opulent, and a *yoroi* suit from the early fourteenth century provides an excellent example of how a daimyo would be attired for battle (Fig. 204). The main part of the armor is a densely woven padding of lacquered iron and leather, the decorative areas being



205 Toiletry box with scene of Mt. Hōrai. Kamakura period, 13th century. Black lacquer on wood with a *maki-e* (gold) design; 9 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 7 1/2 in. (24.4 x 32.5 x 18.5 cm). Kyoto National Museum.

constructed from silk, gilt copper and doeskin. In the center of the breastplate is a beautifully stenciled and colored image of Fudō, the Immovable, on lacquered doeskin. Although this suit could well have been present at the battles attending the collapse of the Kamakura *bakufu*, the intactness of the decoration on the doeskin probably indicates that it never received a single sword stroke or arrow. Great daimyo, like their European equivalents, did not—contrary to romantic fiction—constantly ride into the thick of battle, but often watched and directed events at a distance.

Lacquerware of the medieval period continues to draw on the landscape imagery of the aristocratic poetry traditions, but the shapes of the different boxes and vessels become even more refined, as do the methods of decoration. A small thirteenth-century toiletry box in black lacquer (Fig. 205) is



206 Inkstone case with poetic scenes of *Shio no yama*. Muromachi period, 15th century. *Maki-e* (gold) lacquer on wood; 1 1/2 x 10 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (4.8 x 25.7 x 23.8 cm). Kyoto National Museum.

painted on four sides with gold designs of flying geese and trees which are pure *kara-e*. The scenes are meant to be of Mount Hōrai (CH. Fenglai), one of Chinese Daoism's mythical mountains from whence the elixir of immortality might be obtained. Asymmetrically placed at one side of the composition, a weathered rock with a stunted cypress tree growing out of it sits on the shore of a lake. Towards it, from the left, fly two groups of geese. However, such weathered rocks were reputedly derived from a specific lake in southern China, not far from the then capital of the Chinese Southern Song (1126–1279) at Hangzhou. And the image of geese flying south for winter speaks of the gentle melancholy felt at this annual event, evocative as it is of the passage of time and the coming of winter.

A no less refined image of birds over a landscape can be found in a stunning *maki-e* inkstone case of the fifteenth century (Fig. 206). An essential part of the well-equipped writer's or painter's paraphernalia are such cases. Inside the sparkling gold-lacquer casing would be the slanted stone slab into which, when some water has been added, the stick of dried ink is rubbed in order to dissolve it (see page 220). The gold *maki-e* design has been created on a red lacquer base with inset silver rock forms in a landscape meant to evoke scenes of Shiogama, a coastal site in northern Honshū noted for its production of salt. These salt flats became a favorite image in poetry and were meant to evoke a beautiful, but melancholy solitude. Not surprisingly, Shiogama imagery made its way also into garden design, and some enthusiasts would even install a peasant in their garden who would burn salt on the shore of their miniature sea.

#### TEXTILES

Although imperial court costume remained frozen in the style of the Heian period, some adjustments were made. The twelve layers of robes a lady was expected to wear were significantly reduced. Indeed, great ladies of the samurai class often wore only one silk or cotton robe under their beautifully decorated outer *kimono*. Samurai men would wear more masculine versions of the same two robes, and over both of these pull on a pair of trousers known as *hakama*. Textile survivals from the medieval period are rare, but one such pair of *hakama* from the fifteenth century has survived (Fig. 207). Woven of bronze and white silk and decorated with floral roundels of green, yellow, and orange, these trousers would have been complemented on samurai of high rank with a short highly starched jacket, whose shoulders bore the circular clan crest, or *mon*.

#### CERAMICS

In the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries three elements combined to profoundly affect Japanese ceramics, which had previously languished behind the other applied arts in terms of development. The first element involved the increase of private trade with China and Korea. In the tenth century, both of

these countries had begun producing ceramics of a far more refined nature. While ceramic vessels and containers were a staple of any household, they were usually not fine enough to be placed on the imperial or aristocratic table. Their table settings would have been either of metal or lacquer ware. However, with the passing of the Tang empire and its glamorous and exuberant culture, the elites of China and Korea looked to furnish their tables in accord with the new sobriety that characterized the intellectual and artistic life of both countries. At the same time, advances in ceramic technology had perfected the firing of a strong, durable stoneware that could be decorated with equally durable high-fire glazes. The colors of these glazes ranged from the transparent to dark and glistening black, but the most famous were a range of greenish-blue glazes with a jade-like quality to their finish that were collectively called celadon. Sei Shōnagon mentions beautiful celadon ceramic vases already in the late tenth century, and by the twelfth century kiln output of ceramic wares on the continent had increased enough to be able to meet the increased and enthusiastic demand that came from Japan's new samurai elite.

The second element in the Japanese ceramic revolution was the importation of this new, more efficient kiln technology from the continent. In the Nara and Early Heian periods, ceramics were typically fired in a reduction kiln—that is, a kiln in which no air was permitted to enter the oven after the firing had begun. As the wood fire burned, the oxygen in the combustion chamber was reduced and the strength of the flame diminished. In tenth-century Japan, an oxidation kiln was developed that permitted air to enter during the firing process, making it possible to control the intensity of the flames more effectively and thereby maintaining them at the higher temperature levels that yielded a more durable ceramic. However, during the political disruptions of the twelfth century, ceramic production declined, some kiln sites were abandoned, and the full potential of the native developments of this type of kiln was not realized. In the new, more sober climate following the Genpei Civil War, ceramics gained a new prominence in the arts, as they had on the continent, and this renewed demand provided the impetus for further advances in oxidation-kiln technology, specifically separating the combustion chamber from the oven proper, and thereby improving the efficiency and controllability of the kiln. This permitted firing at the high temperatures needed to produce a native stoneware.

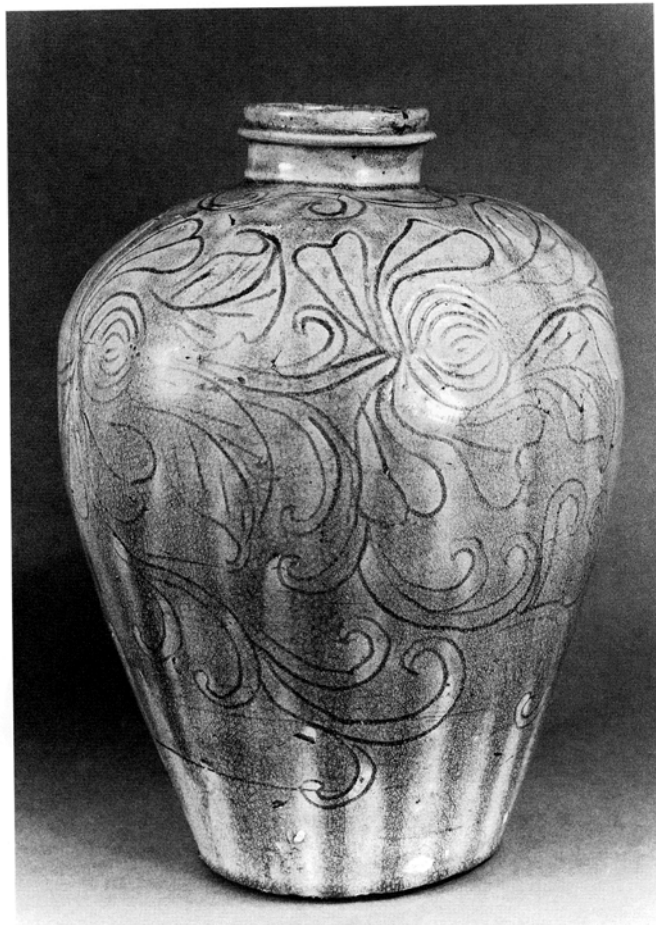
The third element was the native development of glazes to imitate those on the continent. Before this, natural glazing had occurred as an accident of the firing process, when ashes from the fire fell on the vessel surface creating a glossy patch. Potters began experimenting with wood ash suspended in a watery solution and then applied before firing either evenly to the surface of the vessel, yielding an overall color, or unevenly with the desired result of an irregular pattern of streaks. When fired in an oxidation kiln, these ash glazes produced a brown or amber surface; in a reduction kiln, they produced a greenish-yellow one.



207 Pair of men's trousers. Muromachi period, 15th century. Silk; 51 ¾ x 18 ¾ in. (131.5 x 47.5 cm). Kyoto National Museum, National Treasure.

A narrative, most probably apocryphal, attributes these innovations to the potter Katō Shirozaemon Kagemasa, also known as Tōshirō. In 1223, Tōshirō traveled to China in the entourage of the Zen monk Dōgen (1200–53), founder in Japan of the Sōtō school of Zen, and he stayed on in China for several years after Dōgen's return to study Chinese ceramic techniques. When he came back, he settled in the region known as Seto, near the modern-day city of Nagoya in Aichi prefecture (to the east of Kyoto). It is a region rich in the type of clay that makes stoneware. So famous was this region for its wares that its name forms the root for the Japanese word for ceramics, *setomono*. Although we may not accept the Tōshirō story as fact, it does account for a number of the characteristics of ceramics of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries.

Until recently, ceramic production in this period was thought to have been concentrated in six "old" kiln sites: three in the area around Nagoya (Seto, Tokoname, and Shigaraki); two further to the west (Tamba and Bizen), the former close to Kyoto, the latter near modern-day Okayama; and Echizen on the west coast, not too far from modern Kanazawa. However, in recent years archaeologists have discovered more than thirty centers for the production of unglazed stoneware in locations ranging from Miyagi prefecture in the north to Okayama in the south of Honshū. Even further south, on the



208 Jar with peony design. Ko Seto ware. 13th to 14th centuries. Ceramic with yellow glaze; height 12 in. (30.5 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

islands of Shikoku and Kyūshū, a further two kiln sites have been uncovered.

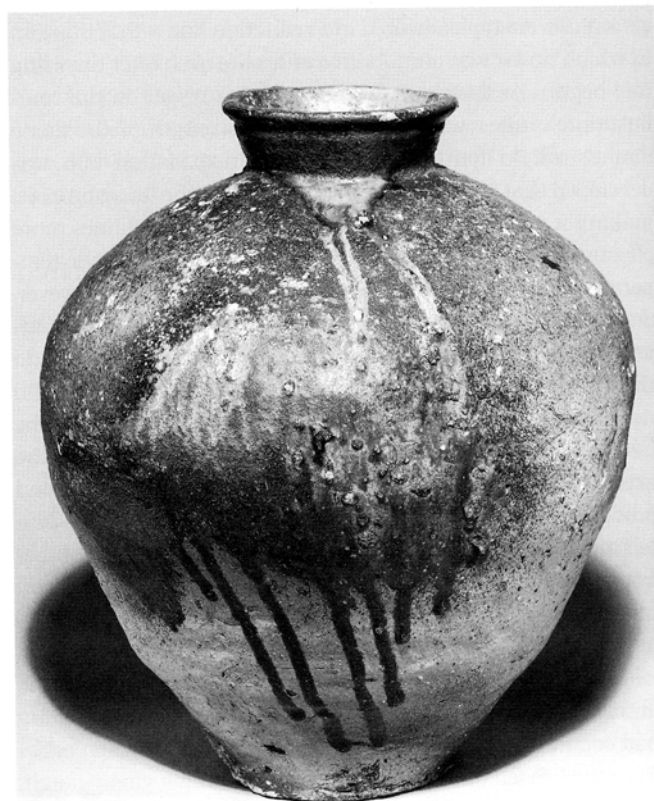
Of these many sites, Seto is undoubtedly the most important, producing in the last decade of the thirteenth century a unique style of ceramics known as Ko Seto, or Old Seto, to distinguish it from wares made in the region in succeeding periods. Ko Seto wares exhibit a refinement of shape, a perfection of technique, and an elegance of decoration not found in ceramics from the other kiln sites. In large measure this is due to the receptivity of local potters to the techniques and aesthetics of Chinese Song-dynasty ceramics.

A Ko Seto jar, in a shape most often identified as a wine bottle or saké decanter, displays not only the distinctly Chinese peony design, but also the shape known in China as *meiping* (Fig. 208). The jar is taller than it is wide, and contrasts a narrow neck, articulated by the horizontal lines formed by an upper and lower lip, with a long body that swells at the shoulder and re-forms itself into a narrow circle at the base. Apart from the design of peony blossoms, incised in the clay before

firing, the shape is further embellished by a pattern of streaks achieved by the over-application of the glaze. This particular vessel would not pass muster in China, but the fact that it was produced in the Seto region and preserved over the centuries is a clear indication that Japanese potters were not attempting merely to copy Chinese ceramics, but rather to adapt elements which interested them into a native vernacular.

A vessel typical of the period is a storage jar thought to have been produced in Shigaraki in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries (Fig. 209). The vessel was formed out of coils of clay that were built up and then formed into the final jar shape. Because the clay had a high iron content when it was fired, the unglazed portion became brick colored, but the shoulders of the vessel, which were ash glazed, turned grayish and produced a small, bib-like patch of shiny greenish glaze.

The aesthetics of roughness and simplicity embodied in the Zen concept of *wabi* had a profound influence on ceramic production during this period. Indeed, Zen masters and adherents would be some of the greatest clients for high-quality stoneware, and particularly tea bowls—even before the development of the tea ceremony in the fifteenth century, which will be discussed below (see Fig. 269).



209 Storage Jar. Shigaraki ware. 14th to 15th centuries. Stoneware with natural ash glaze; height 18 3/8 in. (46.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Collection of Asian Art, Gift of Harry G.C. Packard and Purchase, Fletcher, Rogers, Harris Brisbane Dick and Louis V. Bell Funds, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and the Annenberg Fund, Inc. (1975.268.428).