



127 Illustration from *Ban Dainagon ekotoba*, scroll 1, scene 2, showing the interior of the Seiryōden, Imperial Palace, Kyoto, attributed to Tokiwa Mitsunaga. 2nd half of the 12th century. Hand scroll, ink and color on paper; height 12 3/8 in. (31.5 cm). Idemitsu Art Museum, Tokyo.

of rebuilding every effort was made to reproduce the originals (Fig. 126). The contrast between the two structures offers considerable insight into the way in which Tang culture was assimilated in Japan in the ninth century. The Shishinden, being intended for ceremonial use, is an imposing building supported on tall pillars and capped with a massive double roof of cypress bark. The interior has a wood-plank floor and large wooden platforms; panels depicting Confucian sages stand behind the platforms, forming a wall. The Seiryōden, on the other hand, is much more intimate in scale. It is set on low pillars and has a single cypress-bark roof. Their common roofing material of cypress bark, however, signals another important change. Where great public buildings like the Daigokuden were roofed with tiles, there now is a volte-face in courtly taste for the previously humble and native cypress bark.

Inside these buildings, life continued to be lived on the floor with tatami mats used for sitting and sleeping surfaces. Some idea of the original appearance of the room can be obtained from an illustration in a twelfth-century narrative scroll, the *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* (Fig. 127). In this scene, the emperor, conducting an informal audience with the retired prime minister of the Fujiwara clan, sits on a pillow placed on a low, tatami-covered platform. His back is to a wall formed by

sliding doors (*fusuma*) decorated with Japanese-style (*yamato-e*) landscapes. Outside, on the veranda, a messenger awaits their decision. Behind him is a standing screen decorated with a Chinese-style, or *kara-e*, painting of Lake Kunming, the lake to the south of the Tang emperor's summer retreat. In the last analysis, the Japanese court of the Heian period still looked to China for certain models, but both its public and private rooms become increasingly indigenous in flavor, with occasional Chinese touches to demonstrate its sophistication and education, such as the Lake Kunming screen.

LIFE AT COURT

During this period, the aristocracy living in Heian numbered perhaps no more than one thousand people, but the choices they made about where and how they lived, what they did with their abundant leisure time, and even how they worshiped set the tone for artistic creation in the Heian period and permeated almost every aspect of life in the capital. The ideal of beauty for a woman was to have a round face with tiny features framed by long, flat black hair, her face powdered white, her eyebrows plucked and re-pencilled in, and her teeth blackened. She would dress in the voluminous (and certainly heavy), many-layered silk robes of the period (see Fig. 137). The ideal man would also have a round face and tiny features, and would dress in carefully chosen silk robes of several layers, but of a different cut (see Figs 127, 133, 134, and 135). Both the Heian gentleman and gentlewoman were expected to be the products of, and contribute to, a highly refined courtly

aesthetic, the language of which was expressed in poetry which any one of character and breeding could compose at the drop of a hat. As well as their calligraphy, their clothes and how they wore them and the incense with which they perfumed themselves would all be observed and judged by their peers on both private and public occasions.

Much of the flavor of court life in this era derives from the practice of polygamy. For several reasons, within Heian society it was desirable for a nobleman to have more than one wife. Women often died young, in childbirth, and it was essential that the Heian nobleman have many children as they were the best way for him to gain advancement in rank through the arrangement of an advantageous marriage between a daughter and a courtier of higher rank than himself. The status of a man's wives was strictly governed by their rank within the society of the court. A man was expected to take on as principal wife a woman whose family rank was at least equal to his. The marriage was usually arranged between the parents of the couple, who were often mere children at the time. The preferred minimum age for marriage was fourteen for a boy, twelve for a girl, but it was not uncommon for the bride or groom to be younger. A man was also free to take other women as secondary wives, in openly announced and accepted marriages. He might also have dalliances with women he had no intention of taking under his wing. The example of Fujiwara no Kaneie (929–90) is instructive. In addition to his principal wife, he had eight others. One of them, a nameless woman known only as the mother of the painter Fujiwara no Michitsuna was the author of a diary—the *Kagerō nikki* (*Gossamer Years*), which records that Kaneie had at least one affair with a noblewoman who was of embarrassingly low rank and probably a good many more that the diarist did not bother to record.

The quality of life for a noblewoman in the Heian period was not one most twenty-first-century women would envy at all. From diaries, we know that custom required her to remain hidden from the eyes of all men except for her father and her husband. Consequently, she rarely went outdoors, and indoors she lived in the shaded world of the *shinden*, or mansion, with its large overhanging eaves, its curtains of state, and the folding screens used to partition off areas of the inner space. Since she had a household of servants, she was seldom troubled with routine housekeeping or even the raising of her children, and she was rarely called upon to care for her husband beyond preparing for his occasional visits. Festivals and ceremonies did provide a welcome break, and calligraphy practice and music lessons also occupied some of her hours. Noblewomen, although they were allowed to inherit property and were taught reading, writing, and the cultural pursuits of the day, did not oversee the administration of their economic affairs. A woman, therefore, needed the help of either a husband or male relatives, lovers, or retainers to survive. Thus polygamy was not only an accepted custom among the Heian aristocracy, it was considered to be a social responsibility and also a political necessity.

SHINDEN

Normally, a nobleman did not at first establish his own household, but rather visited his principal and secondary wives in their own or their parents' residences. However, if after the death of his father the husband succeeded to the position of head of the family or leader of the clan, he would build his own palace and install his wives in separate apartments within the residence. To accommodate live-in wives, a nobleman's *shinden* consisted of a series of halls and smaller buildings linked by covered walkways (Fig. 128). The lord's own quarters were to the south of the other halls. Directly behind and to the north was the hall allotted to the principal wife, the residence from which she derived her title of *kita no kata*, or the person to the north. Behind her hall were the kitchen, servants' quarters, and storerooms. Other wives might be housed in separate halls to the east and west of the mansion's central, north/south axis, but certainly at a discrete distance from the operational center of the principal wife's northern wing. Personal communication between the wives was not the norm, and indeed they could live and die in their lord's mansion without ever laying eyes on one another. In front of each wife's residence hall was a small courtyard garden, and to the south of the lord's quarters was a magnificently landscaped one centered on an artificial pond.

Interior Decoration

Most of life for either the nobleman or noblewoman in the Heian period took place inside these mansions. Built of wood and roofed with bark, none of these original structures or their interiors survive in present-day Kyoto. However, the ample literature of the period, such as the *Genji monogatari* (*Tale of Genji*) and the *Makura no Sōshi* (*The Pillow Book*), as well as illustrated scrolls, such as the *Ban daïagon ekotoba* and *Genji monogatari emaki*, provide a surprising amount of description and illustration of the typical *shinden* interior during the Heian period. As demonstrated by the illustration of the imperial Seiryōden in the *Ban Daïagon* scroll (see Fig. 127)



128 Diagram of *shinden zukuri* architecture, looking from the garden onto the southern quarters belonging to the lord of the house. (After Dr. Mori Ōsamu.)

and another of the aristocratic interior of the Ōtomo household (see Fig. 147), the *shinden* room was subdivided into spaces by large folding screens often painted with *kara-e* themes or by hanging panels of cloth (often silk), known as curtains of state. The exterior walls of these rooms were actually great latticed wooden shutters covered on the interior with a thick semi-translucent paper which, if the weather was good, could be cantilevered up, exposing the room to the garden or courtyard outside. Privacy would be provided by hanging bamboo blinds or cloth panel curtains that could be raised or dropped at will (for example, see Figs 133, 134, 140, 141, and 147). As life was still conducted from the floor, the interior furnishings continued to develop as clever and highly portable variations on small raised tables and storage boxes (see Fig. 147). From the Asuka to Nara periods the craze for Chinese culture was such that for the elite the greatest prize was to have as many of one's possessions as possible imported from the continent. In the Heian period, while the demand for imported *kara-e* screens seems to have continued unabated, aristocratic preference in other crafts—particularly lacquer and metal wares—seems to have shifted to those of Japanese manufacture and, increasingly, of Japanese-style decoration.

Given their daily use and the wear and tear of time, these objects are better preserved in painting than they are as artifacts. However, one well-preserved example of a food stand in red lacquer of the eleventh or twelfth century has survived (Fig. 129), and varies only slightly from the one depicted in the center of the room at the Ōtomo family's *shinden* (see Fig. 147). Plain red and black remain the standard colors of Japanese lacquer to this day, and are known as *negoro* wares. The red food stand in Figure 129 is modeled on a wooden core as it would be expected to take the weight of other vessels.



130 Cosmetic Box. Heian period, 12th century. Black lacquer with gold lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlay; 5 1/8 x 12 x 8 1/8 in. (13.5 x 30.6 x 22.4 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

However, lightness and plasticity were at a high premium in lacquerware, and many objects eschew wood for a *hempen* core, the dried layers of lacquer providing rigidity to the final shape of the piece.

The cosmetic box in Figure 130 has almost certainly a *hempen* core, and in addition is decorated with gold lacquer in a style that is known as *maki-e*, meaning literally “sprinkle painting.” The gold design is achieved by sprinkling gold (and often also silver) powder onto the damp lacquer layer covering the previously drawn motifs. Depending on the density of the sprinkled gold dust, the object can appear to be either made of or inlaid with gold. Another layer of black—but also sometimes red—lacquer is then applied and polished until the underlying gold reappears. Finally, the entirety is covered in a coat of transparent lacquer effectively to seal it. In the instance of this cosmetic box of the twelfth century, mother-of-pearl and *kirikane*, or cut gold, have also been included in the creation of the motif of wooden wagon wheels left to soak in water as part of their curing process. This popular motif of the Heian period is purely Japanese in concept and design and is derived from poetic imagery.

Another rare survival of the Heian period is an example of one of the larger pieces of lacquer furniture to be found in either a private *shinden* or in a public building or temple. A black lacquer altar table from the provincial temple of Chūsonji in Hiraizumi (Fig. 131) represents the standard type of chapel altar in public temples as well as in the private chapels that noblemen's houses were required to have. There is a row of such altar tables depicted inside the imperial chapel of Shingonin in a scene from the *Nenjū gyōji emaki* (*Scroll of Events Throughout the Year*) (see Fig. 191). The overall design of this style of altar table remains Chinese in flavor as its prototype

129 Food stand. Heian period, 11th/12th century. Red lacquer; height 12 1/2 x 15 1/4 x 16 1/4 in. (31.6 x 38.7 x 41.2 cm). Kyoto National Museum.

undoubtedly was. In addition the dense floral pattern of the Chūsonji table is Chinese in character, and possibly derived from brocade designs, but its execution in mother-of-pearl inlay and its almost gaudy *horror vacui* betray a Japanese taste in Chinese style decoration. The native Japanese taste in Japanese-style decoration, however, is a great deal more elegant and finely balanced, as demonstrated by a saddle of black lacquer also inlaid with mother-of-pearl (Fig. 132). The design of clover sprays and spider webs—once again derived from poetic imagery of nature and the seasons—cover the entire surface of the saddle, but do not overcrowd it. This saddle, probably made for a ceremonial procession in the capital and never used outside it, and the cosmetic box are excellent examples of Japanese decoration and both demonstrate how fully the poetic sensibility permeates almost everything in Heian culture.

Gardens

Because Kyoto is situated on a well-watered, slightly sloping plain, it was possible for almost all Heian's *shinden* to be provided with a stream flowing southward to feed a pond merely by digging down in the right spot. Thus there was an even greater explosion of gardens throughout the city than had been the case in either Heijō or Fujiwara. Usually a stream was



131 Altar table. Heian period, early 12th century. Black lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay; $30 \frac{1}{2} \times 26 \frac{1}{8} \times 13 \frac{1}{8}$ in. (77.5 x 66.5 x 33.5 cm). Chūsonji, Iwate.



132 Saddle. Heian period, 12th century. Black lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay; height $11 \frac{3}{4}$ in. (30 cm), width $17 \frac{1}{4}$ in. (44 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

made to flow underneath the short pilings on which the residence was built, and to curve gracefully through the yard to the pond. Covered walkways attached at right angles to the lord's quarters in a typical *shinden* extend east and west toward the pond, and the west corridor usually ends in a small building that functioned as a boathouse. An excellent image of what such a garden would look like and how it would be viewed is supplied by a scene from a **hand scroll** in which the lord of the manor—in this case Sugawara no Koreyoshi (812–80)—receives the miraculous manifestation of his yet unborn son while he sits gazing out at his garden (Fig. 133). The meandering stream cuts through the garden, finding its way through miniature landscapes of moss-grown rocks and dwarfed trees. At the front of the veranda there is a broad step for making one's way into this world in miniature, although one feels that its appreciation was more often enjoyed from the vantage of the veranda than by taking a stroll or sitting in the garden.

If the *shinden* and its grounds were grand enough, however, then the pond could become instead a small lake, where boating parties of fanciful craft might be held. A scroll illustrating the diary of a lady-in-waiting in service to Empress-consort Shōshi (988–1074), a daughter of Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1027), who was the most powerful leader of the Fujiwara clan, depicts just such a festivity. Celebrating the birth of his grandson and the imperial heir, the great statesman Michinaga stands on the veranda of his boathouse, which extends over the lake, watching courtiers enjoying themselves in the elaborate boats he has provided (Fig. 134). The lady-in-waiting, Murasaki Shikibu, would go on to compose the first great masterpiece of Japanese prose, the *Genji monogatari* (*Tale of Genji*).



130 Cosmetic Box. Heian period, 12th century. Black lacquer with gold lacquer and mother-of-pearl inlay; 5 1/8 x 12 x 8 3/8 in. (13.5 x 30.6 x 22.4 cm). Tokyo National Museum.



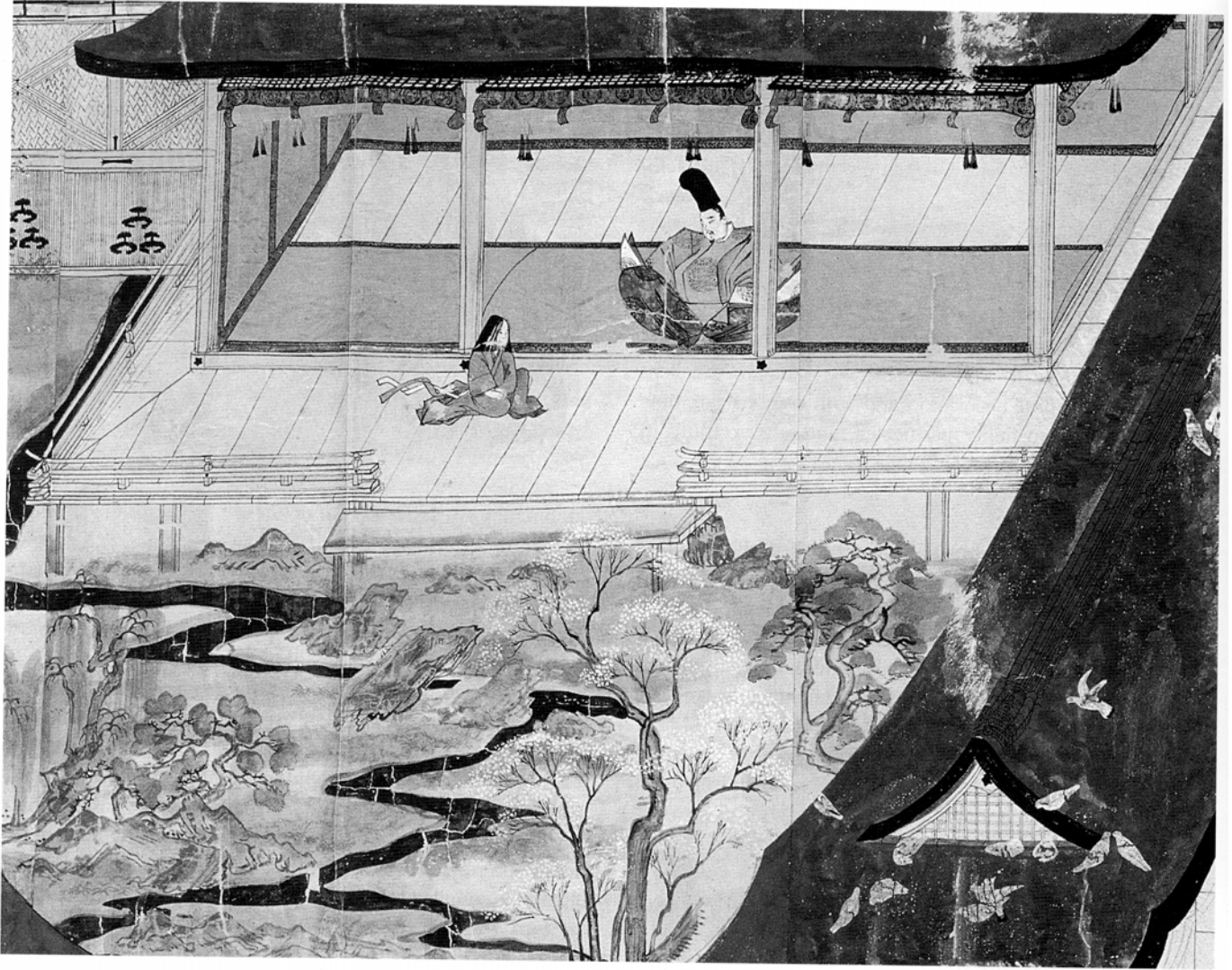
129 Food stand. Heian period, 11th/12th century. Red lacquer; height 12 1/2 x 15 1/4 x 16 1/4 in. (31.6 x 38.7 x 41.2 cm). Kyoto National Museum.



132 Saddle. Heian period, 12th century. Black lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay; height 11 1/2 in. (30 cm), width 17 1/4 in. (44 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

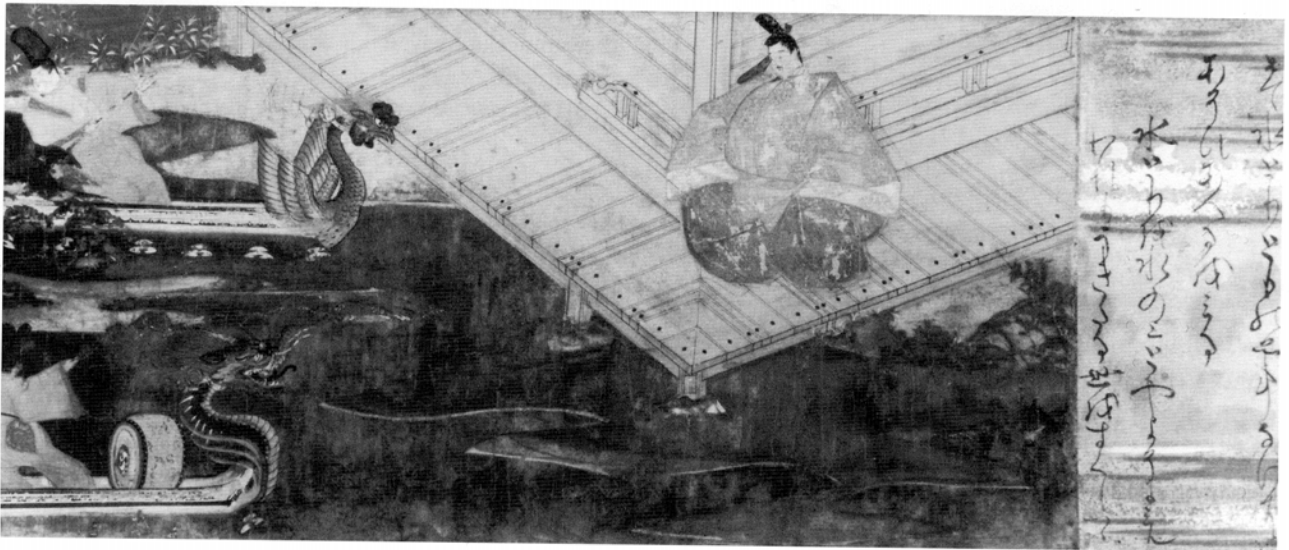


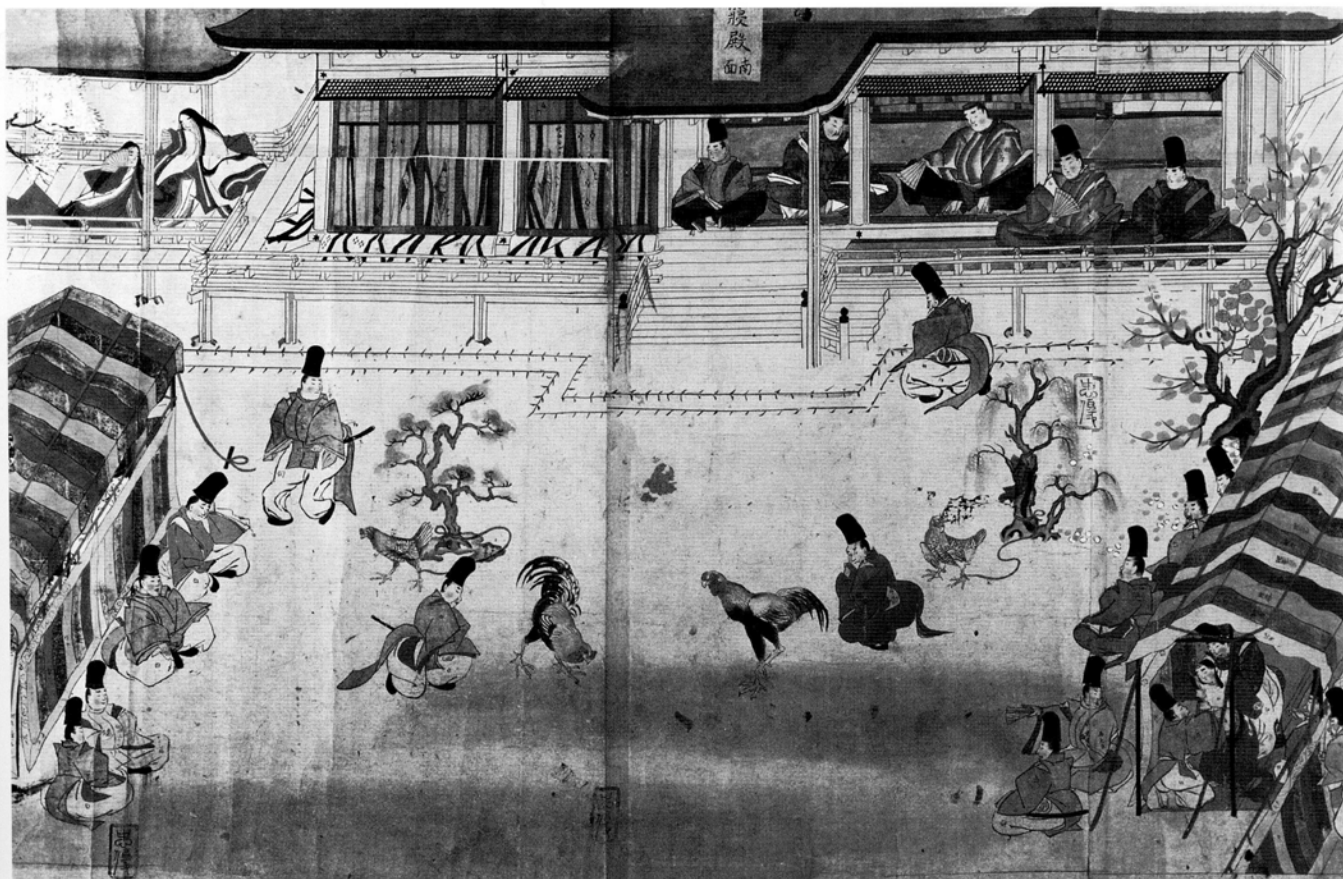
131 Altar table. Heian period, early 12th century. Black lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay; 30 1/2 x 26 1/2 x 13 1/2 in. (77.5 x 66.5 x 33.5 cm). Chūsonji, Iwate.



133 (above) Scene of the future Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) manifesting as a child in front of his father Sugawara no Koreyoshi (812–80) as he sits in his hall looking out onto his garden, *Kitano Tenjin-engi*, scroll I, scene 2. Kamakura period, c. 1219. Ink and colors on paper; height 20 1/4 in. (52.1 cm). Kitano-Tenmangu, Kyoto.

134 (below) Section of *Murasaki shikibu nikki emaki*, Fujita scroll, scene 5, showing Michinaga on a veranda observing two boats. 1st half of the 13th century. Hand scroll, color on paper; height 9 3/8 in. (23.9 cm). Fujita Art Museum, Osaka.





135. Section of *Nenjū gyōji emaki*, scroll 3, scene 3, showing a cockfight at a nobleman's house. 17th century copy by Sumiyoshi Jokei of the mid-12th century original by Tokiwa Mitsunaga. Hand scroll, color on paper; height 12 ½ in. (31.8 cm). Private collection, Tokyo.

In another scene from the *Nenjū gyōji emaki*, a scroll depicting annual ceremonies and celebrations of the imperial court, there is an illustration of a cockfight in the garden of a typical *shinden* (Fig. 135). The latticed shutters on the south side of the lord's own quarters have been raised, and he and his guests can be seen seated, the lord in formal court dress, holding a fan, the others well positioned for watching the activities in the garden. On the left side of the hall, female faces are visible through lowered blinds between the blind panels that have been placed to shield them from public view. Just to the right of the *shinden* veranda stands a tree with gnarled branches, and to the left is a cherry tree. A cockfight is traditionally held on the third day of the third month according to the lunar calendar, when all the trees are bursting into bloom.

LITERATURE AND CALLIGRAPHY

The standard of the Japanese gentleman's and gentlewoman's education was possibly never higher than in the Heian period. Although by the end of the ninth century official contact with the continent had ceased, the curriculum at the imperial university was still one rigorously based on studies of the Chinese classics and history in the Chinese language, much as Greek

and Latin literature and language remained the basis of Western education until relatively recently. Although the aristocratic Heian lady could not hope to study at the university—and would have been actively discouraged from studying the Confucian classics even at home—she was still expected to be able to read and write. At the beginning of the ninth century, the *manyōgana* system of writing—using Chinese characters phonetically to spell out the inflections of Japanese grammar or the language's many polysyllabic terms—was replaced by the invention of a purely Japanese syllabary known as *hiragana*. Its creation has been traditionally attributed to the monk Kūkai (774–835), who founded the Japanese *Shingon* Buddhist sect. It is this syllabary that Heian gentlewomen were encouraged to use; indeed, they were discouraged from learning or using the Chinese characters that their seventh- and eighth-century female ancestors would have known. Great Japanese works of literature by women, such as the *Genji monogatari*, were therefore almost entirely composed in *hiragana* script. The use of *hiragana*, however, was of such convenience that it also proved very popular with men, who would often mix Chinese characters and *hiragana* “letters” together in their writing, especially in their composition of *waka*, thirty-one-syllable poems.