

II-14 | Attributed to Toba Sojo, **DETAIL OF FROLICKING ANIMALS** Heian period, 12th century CE. Handscroll, ink on paper, height 12" (30.5 cm). Kozan-ji, Kyoto.

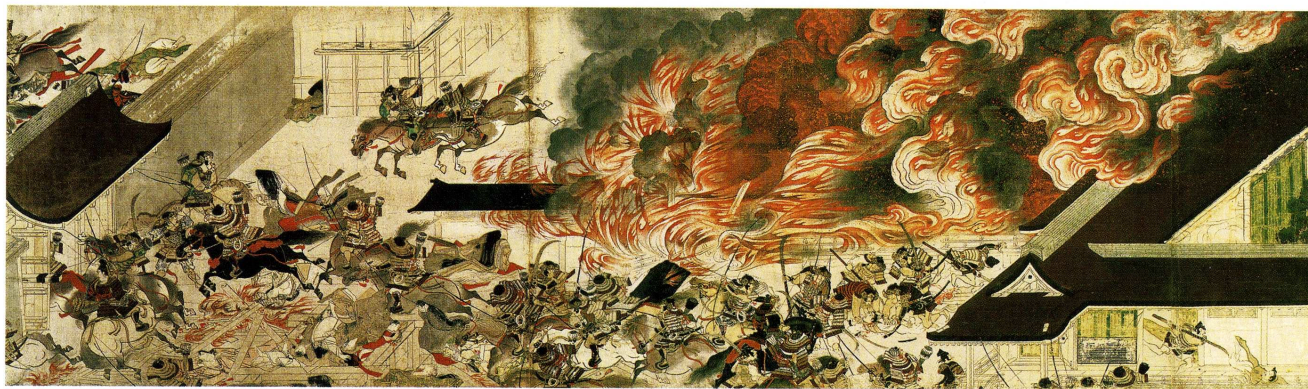


his prowess when he flings a rabbit to the ground (FIG. II-14). Playful and irreverent though it may be, the quality of the painting is remarkable. Each line is brisk and lively, and there are no strokes of the brush other than those needed to depict each scene. Unlike the *Genji* scroll, there is no text to *Frolicking Animals*, and we must make our own interpretations of the people and events being satirized. Nevertheless, the visual humor is so lively and succinct that we can recognize not only the Japanese of the twelfth century, but perhaps also ourselves.

KAMAKURA PERIOD

The courtiers of the Heian era became so engrossed in their own refinement that they neglected their responsibilities for governing the country. Clans of warriors—samurai—from outside the capital grew increasingly strong. Drawn into the factional conflicts of the imperial court, samurai leaders soon became the real powers in Japan.

A BATTLE HANDSCROLL. The two most powerful warrior clans were the Minamoto and the Taira, whose battles for domination became famous not only in medieval Japanese history but also in literature and art. One of the great painted handscrolls depicting these battles is **NIGHT ATTACK ON THE SANJO PALACE** (FIGS. II-15, II-16). Painted perhaps 100 years after the actual event, the scroll conveys a sense of eyewitness reporting even though the anonymous artist had to imagine the scene from verbal (and at best semifactual) descriptions. The style of the painting includes some of the brisk and lively linework of *Frolicking Animals* and also traces of the more refined brushwork, use of color, and bird's-eye viewpoint of *The Tale of Genji* scroll. The main element, however, is the savage depiction of warfare (see "Arms and Armor," page 389). Unlike the *Genji* scroll, *Night Attack* is full of action: Flames engulf the palace, horses charge, warriors behead their enemies, court ladies try to hide, and a sense of energy and violence is conveyed with great sweep and power. The era of



II-15 | **SECTION OF NIGHT ATTACK ON THE SANJO PALACE** Kamakura period, late 13th century CE. Handscroll, ink and colors on paper, 16¼ × 275½" (41.3 × 699.7 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Fenollosa-Weld Collection (11.4000)

The battles between the Minamoto and Taira clans were fought primarily by mounted and armored warriors, who used both bows and arrows and the finest swords. In the year 1160, some 500 Minamoto rebels opposed to the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa carried out a daring raid on the Sanjo Palace. In a surprise attack in the middle of the night, they abducted the emperor. The scene was one of great carnage, much of it caused by the burning of the wooden palace. Despite the drama of the scene, this was not the decisive moment in the war. The Minamoto rebels would eventually lose more important battles to their Taira enemies. Yet Minamoto forces, heirs to those who carried out this raid, would eventually prove victorious, destroying the Taira clan in 1185.



11-16 | DETAIL OF NIGHT ATTACK ON THE SANJO PALACE

poetic refinement was now over in Japan, and the new world of the samurai began to dominate the secular arts.

The Kamakura era (1185–1333 CE) began when Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–99) defeated his Taira rivals and assumed power as shogun (general-in-chief). To resist the softening effects of courtly life in Kyoto, he established his military capital in Kamakura. While paying respect to the emperor, Yoritomo kept both military and political power for himself. He thus began a tradition of rule by shogun that lasted in various forms until 1868.

Pure Land Buddhist Art

Rising militarism, political turbulence, and the excesses of the imperial court marked the beginning of the eleventh century in Japan. To many Japanese of the late Heian and Kamakura eras, the unsettled times seemed to confirm the coming of *Mappo*, a long-prophesied dark age of spiritual degeneration. Japanese of all classes reacted by increasingly turning to the promise of simple salvation extended by Pure Land Buddhism, which had spread from China by way of Korea. The religion held that merely by chanting *Namu Amida Butsu*, hailing the Buddha Amida (the Japanese version of Amitabha Buddha), the faithful would be reborn into the Western (Pure Land) Paradise over which he presided.

A PORTRAIT SCULPTURE. The practice of chanting had been spread throughout Japan by traveling monks such as the charismatic Kuya (903–72 CE), who encouraged people to chant by going through the countryside singing. Believers would have immediately recognized Kuya in this thirteenth-century portrait statue by Kosho (FIG. 11-17): the traveling clothes, the small gong, the staff topped by deer horns (symbolic of his slaying a deer, whose death converted him to Buddhism), clearly identify the monk, whose sweetly intense expression gives this sculpture a radiant sense of faith. As for

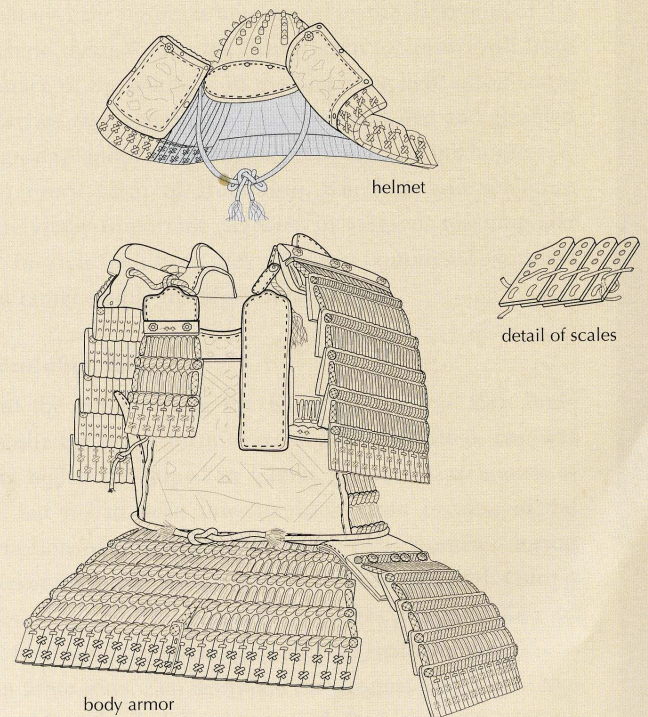
Art and Its Context

ARMS AND ARMOR

Battles such as the one depicted in *Night Attack on the Sanjo Palace* (SEE FIGS. 11-15, 11-16) were fought largely by archers on horseback. Samurai archers charged the enemy at full gallop and loosed their arrows just before they wheeled away. The scroll clearly shows their distinctive bow, with its asymmetrically placed handgrip. The lower portion of the bow is shorter than the upper so it can clear the horse's neck. The samurai wear a long, curved sword at the waist.

By the tenth century, Japanese swordsmiths had perfected techniques for crafting their legendary sharp swords. Swordmakers face a fundamental difficulty: Steel hard enough to hold a razor-sharp edge is brittle and breaks easily, but steel resilient enough to withstand rough use is too soft to hold a keen edge. The Japanese ingeniously forged a blade which laminated a hard cutting edge within less brittle support layers.

Samurai armor, illustrated here, was made of overlapping iron and lacquered leather scales, punched with holes and laced together with leather thongs and brightly colored silk braids. The principal piece wrapped around the chest, left side, and back. Padded shoulder straps hooked it together back to front. A separate piece of armor was tied to the body to protect the right side. The upper legs were protected by a skirt of four panels attached to the body armor, while two large rectangular panels tied on with cords guarded the arms. The helmet was made of iron plates riveted together. From it hung a neckguard flared sharply outward to protect the face from arrows shot at close range as the samurai wheeled away from an attack.





11–17 | Kosho, **KUYA PREACHING**
Kamakura period, before 1207. Painted wood with inlaid eyes, height 46½" (117.5 cm). Rokuhara Mitsu-ji, Kyoto.

Kuya's chant, Kosho's solution to the challenge of putting words into sculptural form was simple but brilliant: He carved six small *buddhas* emerging from Kuya's mouth, one for each of the six syllables of *Na-mu-A-mi-da-Buts(u)* (the final *u* is not articulated). Believers would have understood that these six small *buddhas* embodied the Pure Land chant.

During the early Kamakura period, Pure Land Buddhism remained the most influential form of religion and was expressed in the new naturalistic style of sculpture as seen in *Kuya* by Kosho. Just as the *Night Attack* revealed the political turbulence of the period through its vivid colors and forceful style, Kamakura-era portraiture saw a new emphasis on realism, including the use of crystal eyes in sculpture for the first time. Perhaps the warriors had a taste for realism, for many sculptors and painters of the Kamakura period became expert in depicting faces, forms, and drapery with great attention to naturalistic detail. As we have seen, Kosho took on the more

Sequencing Works of Art

12th century CE	Scene from <i>The Tale of Genji</i>
12th century CE	Toba Sojo (attributed), <i>Frolicking Animals</i>
Late 13th century CE	<i>Night Attack on the Sanjo Palace</i>
Early 14th century CE	Kao Ninga (attributed), <i>Monk Sewing</i>

difficult task of representing in three dimensions not only the person of the famous monk Kuya but also his chant.

RAIGO PAINTINGS. Pure Land Buddhism taught that even one sincere invocation of the sacred chant could lead the most wicked sinner to the Western Paradise. Paintings called *raigo* (literally “welcoming approach”) were created depicting the Amida Buddha, accompanied by *bodhisattvas*, coming down to earth to welcome the soul of the dying believer. Golden cords were often attached to these paintings, which were taken to the homes of the dying. A person near death held on to these cords, hoping that Amida would escort the soul directly to paradise.

Raigo paintings are quite different in style from the complex *mandalas* and fierce guardian deities of Esoteric Buddhism. Like Jocho's sculpture of Amida at the Byodo-in (FIG. 11–12), they radiate warmth and compassion. One magnificent *raigo*, a portrayal of Amida Buddha and twenty-five *bodhisattvas* swiftly descending over mountains, employs gold paint and slivers of gold leaf cut in elaborate patterning to suggest the radiance of their draperies (FIG. 11–18). The sparkle of the gold over the figures is heightened by the darkening of the silk behind them, so that the deities seem to come forth from the surface of the painting. In the flickering light of oil lamps and torches, *raigo* paintings would have glistened and gleamed in magical splendor in a temple or a dying person's home.

In every form of Buddhism, paintings and sculpture became vitally important elements in religious teaching and belief. In their own time they were not considered works of art but rather visible manifestations of faith.

Zen Buddhist Art

Toward the latter part of the Kamakura period, Zen Buddhism, the last major form to reach Japan, appeared. Zen was already highly developed in China, where it was known as Chan, but it had been slow to reach Japan because of the interruption of relations between the two countries during the Heian period. But during the Kamakura era, both visiting Chinese and returning Japanese monks brought Zen to Japan. It would have a lasting impact on Japanese arts.

In some ways, Zen resembles the original teachings of the historical Buddha. It differed from both Esoteric and Pure Land

II-18 | DESCENT OF AMIDA AND THE TWENTY-FIVE BODHISATTVAS

Kamakura period, 13th century. Colors and gold on silk, 57¼ × 61½" (145 × 155.5 cm). Chion-in, Kyoto.



Buddhism in emphasizing that individuals must reach their own enlightenment through meditation, without the help of deities or magical chants. It especially appealed to the self-disciplined spirit of samurai warriors, who were not satisfied with the older forms of Buddhism connected with the Japanese court.

Zen temples were usually built in the mountains rather than in large cities. An abbot named Kao Ninga at an early Zen temple was a pioneer in the kind of rough and simple ink painting that so directly expresses the Zen spirit. We can see this style in a remarkable ink portrait of a monk sewing his robe (see “*Monk Sewing*,” page 390). Buddhist prelates of other sects undoubtedly had assistants to take care of such mundane tasks as repairing a robe, but in Zen Buddhism each monk, no matter how advanced, is expected to do all tasks for himself. Toward the end of the fourteenth century, Zen’s spirit of self-reliance began to dominate many aspects of Japanese culture.

As the Kamakura era ended, the seeds of the future were planted: Control of rule by the warrior class and Zen values had become established as the leading forces in Japanese life and art.

IN PERSPECTIVE

The history of Japanese art illuminates an intriguing interplay between native traditions and transmitted culture. In the Japanese archipelago, the Jomon culture produced the world’s first ceramics, their early technology developing into a distinctive and long-lived pottery style. Jomon eventually gave way to a new culture, that of the Yayoi, apparently brought by immigrants from the Asian continent. Yayoi and the subsequent Kofun period saw technological developments, includ-

ing new ceramic techniques and the casting of bronze. With the Kofun period, mounded tombs appeared, with *haniwa* figures to guard them. Wooden architecture emerged, with elements that today we think of as distinctively Japanese.

During the Asuka and Nara periods, cultural transmission from China via Korea accelerated bringing a system of writing, the Buddhist religion, and a new tile-roofed architecture. A permanent capital city was established, built on a Chinese model, and Chinese-style government was developed. Magnificent temples were constructed in this city, called Nara, and some of those still stand today.

During the Heian period, the Japanese built upon recent trends in Buddhism imported from the continent, and developed sects of Esoteric Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism. The artistic legacy of these sects is seen today in mandalas and *raigō* paintings as well as in portrait sculpture. During this period, a distinctly Japanese writing system and calligraphy were created, with a syllabary of *kana* to supplement the *kanji* of Chinese origin. With the use of *kana*, calligraphic compositions diverged from the regulated Chinese forms into more spontaneous and asymmetrical compositions. Painting too embraced asymmetry and spontaneity, often combining these with gold decoration.

A warrior culture emerged at the end of the Heian period, and with the Kamakura period a long period of rule by military *shoguns* ensued. The *shogun* and *samurai* retainers adopted a new form of Buddhism from China, Chan or Zen, in which they found a self-reliant discipline. Ink painting, also from China, reflected both the restraint and the spontaneity of Zen, and became a highly developed and distinctly Japanese tradition.