

De Berry, Keene, and Tanabe, ed. (Columbia University Press, 2001). Sources of Japanese Tradition: From earliest times to 1600.

## Chapter 12

### THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

Sometime in the late seventh century, as part of its long-term effort to construct a centralized, bureaucratic state on the Chinese model, the Japanese court developed a countrywide military system by establishing militia units in the provinces under the command of the provincial governors. These units, known as *gundan*, were made up of (1) foot soldiers conscripted from the peasantry as part of the corvée labor tax imposed under the Taika reform's equal-field system of landholding and (2) horse-mounted officers drawn from locally powerful families.

The origins of fighting on horseback in Japan are obscure, although it is possible that this form of combat was either introduced or greatly advanced by the importation of military technology, weapons, and equipment from the Asian continent—especially Korea—during the late fourth and fifth centuries. Terra cotta figurines (*haniwa*) of armor-clad, mounted warriors and their battle-ready mounts found on the surfaces of tombs from the fifth century suggest that by that time, if not earlier, a class of formidable equestrian warriors, armed with bows and swords, had evolved in Japan. The bow was the primary weapon, a fact reflected in the later description of the way of the warrior as the “way of the bow and horse” (*kyūba no michi*).

In addition to establishing *gundan* in the various provinces (usually one to a province), the court placed extra units in northern Kyushu to defend against possible invasion from the continent. Soldiers from some units were also as-

signed to perform guard duty in the capital, which from 710 on was Nara. When necessary, larger armies could be organized by mobilizing troops from two or more *gundan*. During such mobilizations, commanders favored men from the eastern provinces of the Kantō, which from earliest times was regarded as the home of Japan's best equestrian fighters. Kantō men had ready access to the finest horses, which were bred in the Kantō and in Mutsu Province just to the north, and these fighters were trained from infancy in riding, archery, and the other military skills.

The real test of the *gundan's* effectiveness came during the campaigns that the court conducted against the Emishi in northern Honshu during the last decades of the eighth century and the opening years of the ninth. In 801, the redoubtable commander Sakanoue no Tamuramaro (758–811) succeeded in conquering the Emishi and incorporating their land, which comprised Mutsu and Dewa Provinces, into the Japanese state. For this, Tamuramaro, who was the first to hold the title of *sei-i tai-shōgun* or “great general for subduing the eastern barbarians,” has also been celebrated as the first great warrior chief in Japanese history. Thus we read in an eleventh-century war tale:

Our court in ancient times often sent forth great armies. Although these armies destroyed many barbarians within the provinces [of Mutsu and Dewa], they never completely defeated them. Then Sakanoue no Tamuramaro was called upon to go down to Mutsu-Dewa, and he bequeathed his fame to myriad generations by conquering the barbarians throughout the six districts. He was like an incarnation of the god of the northern heavens, a general of distinction rarely to be seen.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Emishi were finally defeated, it took a long time and a number of campaigns. Whereas the Emishi were excellent horsemen and tough fighters, specializing in hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, the Japanese armies proved cumbersome and were often outwitted and embarrassed. The peasant foot soldiers, organized along Chinese lines and relying on the crossbow as their principal weapon, were largely ineffective fighters. Because of this and also because the conscription system as a whole had proved excessively burdensome to the peasantry, in 792—nearly a decade before Tamuramaro's great campaign—the court abandoned conscription. Although foot soldiers continued to be used in armies in the ninth and even tenth centuries, they were gradually eliminated, and warfare became almost exclusively the preserve of mounted warriors from locally powerful families. By the tenth century, a distinct warrior class drawn from these families had emerged in the provinces.

Much of our knowledge about the warrior class during its early centuries of

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1. *Mutsu waki*, in Hanawa, comp., *Gunsho ruijū*, vol. 20, p. 32.

evolution comes from a genre of writing called “war tales” (*gunki-mono*). The first of these tales, *The Chronicle of Masakado* (*Shōmonki*), which deals with the rebellion of Taira no Masakado (d. 940) in the Kantō in 939–940, was probably written in the late tenth century. Although war tales continued to be composed from this time until the seventeenth century, the finest of them recount the fighting that accompanied (1) the transition from the ancient age to the medieval age (or from the Heian period to the Kamakura period) in the late twelfth century and (2) the overthrow of the Kamakura shogunate and the ensuing War Between the Courts (1336–1392) in the fourteenth century.

Focused primarily on warriors and warfare, the war tales are based on historical events but have been embellished to various degrees. Hence they are mixtures of history and fiction. Little is known about the authorship of any of the tales, although in some cases, such as the two most important tales, *The Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*) and *Taiheiki*, they clearly are the products of more than one author. As the principal repositories of information about warriors, their values, behavior, and exploits for at least the tenth through the fourteenth centuries, the war tales are indispensable sources for historians investigating the early stages in the evolution of a warrior ethos in Japan. But historians also must be cautious, for when studying the tales, they constantly need to judge between fact and fiction.

Beginning with *The Chronicle of Masakado*, the early war tales were written in Chinese and therefore lack some of the flavor of the later tales (i.e., those from about the twelfth century), which were composed in a Japanese vernacular rich in the special vocabulary and lingo of the warriors. But even in *Masakado* and the other early tales in Chinese, we can see the essential character and style of the provincial warrior who was to dominate fighting in Japan for centuries to come. He was a man on horseback who specialized in archery and fought in a highly individualistic manner. When armies of warriors clashed, those on each side sought out opponents of equal or higher status on the other side with whom to engage in one-to-one combat. *The Chronicle of Masakado* tells us little about the relationships among the warriors of the same side or army, but in tales from the eleventh century we learn that they were bound by superior-inferior ties as lords and vassals and that the armies themselves were made up of bands of warriors, each consisting of a lord and his vassals.

The lord-vassal relationship, which became the central feature of what we call feudalism, is idealized in the war tales as a reciprocal compact bound by the highest degree of loyalty on the part of the vassal and by parent-like, loving care by the lord. Thus we read in *A Tale of Mutsu* (*Mutsu waki*), the story of a war fought in Mutsu Province in northern Honshu in 1056–1062, that because the chieftain Minamoto no Yoriyoshi (998–1075) “cared for [his vassals] and saw to their needs, more than half of the men of bow and horse east of Osaka became his followers.” And after a particular battle in the Mutsu war, Yoriyoshi is said to have

fed his soldiers and put their equipment in order. He personally went around the camp, tending to the wounded. The soldiers were deeply moved and all said: “We will repay our obligations (*on*) with our bodies. We consider our lives as nothing compared to loyalty [or honor, *gi*]. If it is for the general, we do not in the least regret dying now.”<sup>2</sup>

As portrayed in the war tales, the vassal warrior is typically motivated by great loyalty for his lord, but he is also highly sensitive to his personal honor and to the honor of his house. In this regard, warrior society in this age—and indeed throughout the premodern centuries—can aptly be described as a “shame” society, inasmuch as the maintenance of honor required that the warrior avoid shame above all or, if he has been shamed, that he avenge the insult and redeem his honor. And therein lay a problem, for the demands made on the warrior by loyalty to his lord on the one hand and personal honor on the other could easily lead to a clash of interests in which the warrior was obliged to choose between the two—that is, between loyalty (lord) and honor (self). Although the loyalty-honor clash is not, in fact, a theme found often in the war tales, it was always a potentially powerful issue among warriors. Thus, for example, in the tumultuous years of the Sengoku age (Age of the Country at War, 1478–1568), territorial chiefs known as *daimyō* staked their capacities to administer and maintain their domains largely on their success in preventing or stamping out the personal feuds over honor among their almost paranoically “face”-conscious vassals.

The war tales are celebrations of the warrior’s way and life, and much of their focus is on the portrayal of great warrior heroes. In some cases, these heroes are historically authentic fighters or chieftains of note; in other cases, they are fictional creations of the tales’ authors. In virtually all cases, however, the great heroes of the war tales have been inflated into larger-than-life—sometimes superhuman—champions. One of the earliest examples of such a champion is Minamoto no Yoshiie (1041–1108), the son of the aforementioned Yoriyoshi, who was in fact an eminent chief and probably also a very good combat warrior but who is described in *A Tale of Mutsu* in the following implausibly hyperbolic terms:

[Yoriyoshi’s] oldest son, Yoshiie, was a warrior of peerless valor. He rode and shot arrows like a god. Defying naked blades, he broke through the rebel’s encirclements, appearing first on their left and then on their right. With his large-headed arrows, he shot the rebel chieftains in rapid succession. He never wasted an arrow, but mortally wounded all those he attacked. Known throughout the land for his godly martial ways, Yoshiie

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

rode like thunder and flew like the wind. The barbarians scattered and fled before Yoshiie, not one willing to confront him. The barbarians called . . . him Hachiman Tarō, the firstborn son of the war god Hachiman.<sup>3</sup>

An example of a fictional champion or superhero in the war tales is Minamoto no Tametomo (1139–1177), who appears in *The Tale of Hōgen* (*Hōgen monogatari*), the story of a clash of arms in Kyoto in 1156. There was, in fact, a real Minamoto no Tametomo, but almost nothing is known about him. In *The Tale of Hōgen*, however, Tametomo almost single-handedly holds off an entire army during a nighttime attack. His credentials for doing this are stated in the *Hōgen* in these words:

More than seven feet tall, Tametomo exceeded the ordinary man's height by two or three feet. Born to archery, he had a bow arm that was some six inches longer than the arm with which he held his horse's reins. . . . [He used] a bow that was more than eight and a half feet in length.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Hōgen*, Tametomo is described as “unlike a human being” and “a demon or monster.”

## TAIRA AND MINAMOTO

As warrior bands took shape in the provinces in the middle and late Heian period, they drew their leadership largely from the great Taira (or Heike) and Minamoto (or Genji) clans. Taira and Minamoto were the surnames of former imperial princes who, beginning in the ninth century, had taken up posts in the provincial governments, become warriors, and established positions of power in the regions where they served. By the time of the revolt by Taira no Masakado in the mid-tenth century, many branches of both Taira and Minamoto were scattered throughout the Kantō and elsewhere. One reason that these clans branched out so rapidly and widely was that many men not related by blood joined them in order to call themselves Taira and Minamoto and share in the high prestige of these names.

In the late eleventh century, one branch of the Minamoto gained great fame through their participation in two wars in the Mutsu-Dewa region of northern Honshu. The first of these wars, fought in 1056–1062 and known as the Former Nine-Years War (although the fighting spanned only six years), pitted the Minamoto under Yoriyoshi against the Abe, independent-minded local officials who

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

4. Nagazumi and Shimada, eds., *Hōgen monogatari*, p. 81.

had flouted the orders of the Kyoto court. In the second war, the Later Three Years War, which actually lasted only two years, 1086 to 1087, Yoriyoshi's son Yoshiie, who helped his father defeat the Abe (in the process of which he was dubbed, according to *A Tale of Mutsu*, the "Firstborn Son of Hachiman" because of his fighting prowess), intervened in his capacity as governor of Mutsu in a dispute within the Kiyowara family. Although Yoshiie was able, under harsh climatic conditions and with great difficulty, to achieve victory for the Kiyowara chief he backed, he gained nothing personally from the Later Three Years War except enhanced status as a military commander. This, however, proved to be considerable: from this time on, Yoshiie was widely recognized as the first among warriors in the land.

Not long after Yoshiie gained renown in warfare in Mutsu-Dewa in the late eleventh century, members of a branch of the Taira family from Ise Province came into prominence in the service of senior retired emperors in Kyoto. During the twelfth century, both the Ise Taira and Yoshiie's line of the Minamoto became increasingly involved in court politics, the Taira as agents of the retired emperors and the Minamoto as armed guards or "claws and teeth" of the Fujiwara regents. In 1156, a factional dispute broke out between Emperor Goshirakawa (1127–1192) and Retired Emperor Sutoku (1119–1164), Goshirakawa's older brother. Fujiwara ministers lined up on both sides, as did Taira and Minamoto (some Taira and some Minamoto on each side). This dispute soon escalated into the first clash of arms in Kyoto since the early ninth century. Known in history as the Hōgen conflict, it lasted only one night and was won by Goshirakawa's side. Although brief, the Hōgen conflict was important because, in the words of a contemporary historian, it ushered in the "age of warriors."

### THE TALE OF HŌGEN (HŌGEN MONOGATARI)

On the night of the Hōgen conflict, Retired Emperor Sutoku and the courtiers and warriors who backed him gathered in the Shirakawa Palace in Kyoto, while Emperor Goshirakawa and his followers established themselves in the nearby Takamatsu Palace. In the following passage, the Sutoku side listens first to Minamoto no Tametomo on how to conduct the coming battle. Tametomo recommends that they attack the Takamatsu Palace and burn it. But Minister of the Left Fujiwara no Yorinaga (1120–1156), the ranking minister present, haughtily dismisses this advice as youthful impulsiveness and not at all appropriate to a situation in which men are fighting for an emperor and a retired emperor. Even assuming that this exchange between Tametomo and Yorinaga is apocryphal, it nicely contrasts the thinking of representatives of two ages: a courtier of the fast-vanishing ancient age, who looks with disdain on warriors as a lesser breed and does not hesitate to chide one for suggesting a breach of what he regards as the proper conduct of war, and a warrior chief from the provinces who, exemplifying the spirit of the advancing medieval age, cares nothing for "proper conduct" but thinks

only of what must be done to win. His advice rejected, Tametomo grumbles as he withdraws from the audience with the retired emperor that surely his older brother Yoshitomo (1123–1160), one of the chiefs on Emperor Goshirakawa's side, will seize the opportunity to attack and burn *their* palace, the Shirakawa Palace. And in the central irony of *The Tale of Hōgen*, that is exactly what Yoshitomo does.

Retired Emperor Sutoku and all the people with him gathered to see the celebrated Minamoto no Tametomo. When the Great Minister of the left, Fujiwara no Yorinaga, then ordered, “State your plan as to the conduct of battle,” Tametomo replied respectfully: “Tametomo has lived long in the Chinzei [Kyushu], and he has engaged in I do not know how many battles, great and small, in bringing under subjection the people of the Nine Provinces [of Kyushu]. Among them more than twenty required special effort. Whether to break strong positions though surrounded by enemy, or to destroy the enemy when attacking a fortified place, in any case there is nothing equal to night attack to achieve victory. Therefore if we bear down on the Takamatsu Palace immediately, set fire to it on three sides and hold them in check on the fourth side, those who escape the fire cannot escape the arrows, and those who fear the arrows cannot escape the fire. The warriors on the emperor's side are not awfully good. But only let my brother Yoshitomo and his kind try to rush out, I'll shoot them through the middle. All the more so with weak shots like Taira no Kiyomori. They are not likely to count for much; I'll sweep them away with my armor sleeve or kick them away. If the Emperor moves to another place, if it is clear that, begging his pardon, the people with him are going to get shot up a little, it is certain that the bearers will abandon the palanquin and try to escape. At that time Tametomo will come up and conduct the Emperor to this palace; putting our sovereign, Retired Emperor Sutoku, on the Throne should be like turning over my hand. Meeting and receiving the Emperor being only a matter of Tametomo letting off two or three arrows, what doubt can there be of settling the issue before dawn?”

When Tametomo had spoken thus freely, the Great Minister of the Left thereupon said: “What Tametomo proposes is a crude scheme which is quite out of the question. Perhaps it is something one does when one is young—a thing like a night attack is a private matter in a fight among you warriors, which involves only ten or twenty. In a struggle for the realm befitting the Emperor and Retired Emperor, when the issue is to be decided with every member of the Taira and Minamoto on one side or the other, it is completely out of the question. Besides, the Retired Emperor has summoned the soldier-monks from Nara. . . . We must wait for them, effect our joint arrangement of troops, and then engage the enemy.” . . .

Tametomo gave in to superior authority, but leaving the audience he grumbled to himself: “Since this is a matter in no way resembling either previous precedents in Japan or China, or the traditional rules for conduct of Court

ceremonial, he ought to leave the conduct of fighting to fighting men, but since he doesn't, what can one do about this senseless scheme? Since Yoshitomo is a man well versed in the stratagems of war, he must certainly intend to come at us tonight. If he postpones until tomorrow, the lay-monks from Yoshino and the soldier-monks from Nara will join us. If he advances now and sets fires upwind of us how can we possibly win, even if we fight? If the enemy follows up his advantage, not one of us is likely to escape."

[Wilson, trans., *Hōgen monogatari*, pp. 26–28; PV]

#### THE NIGHT ATTACK ON THE SHIRAKAWA PALACE

Until Yoshitomo resorts to arson, Tametomo the superhero almost single-handedly fends off all attackers from the Goshirakawa side during the night attack on the Shirakawa Palace. In this passage, Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181), leading a force that includes three members of the Itō family (Itō no Kagetsuna, Itō no Roku, and Itō no Go), prepares to attack the palace gate defended by Tametomo. Itō no Kagetsuna, representing Kiyomori, advances and identifies himself and his two kin and demands that Tametomo also identify himself—that is, perform the traditional “name announcing” (*nanori*) that was common among warriors before and even during battle. In the typical name announcing, a warrior recited his family genealogy, listed the honors and battle accomplishments of his ancestors and himself, and taunted his adversary. In this case, Tametomo, stating that he does not regard either Kiyomori or Kagetsuna to be “worthy enemies,” simply summarizes his genealogy and tells Kagetsuna to “clear out.” Reflecting the acute status consciousness of warriors of his time, Tametomo considers Kagetsuna in particular to be far too low socially to deserve the honor of fighting with him. But when Kagetsuna boasts in his name announcing about himself and insults Tametomo by calling him a “rebel against the Imperial Mandate,” Tametomo accepts the challenge. Brushing off an arrow shot by Kagetsuna, he launches one of his own that goes clear through the armor and body of Itō no Roku and lodges in the sleeve of Itō no Go. In awe, Kagetsuna likens this prodigious feat of strength to a similar feat by Tametomo’s ancestor Yoshiie, who, at the time of the Later Three Years War, shot an arrow through three suits of armor hung on a tree branch. Hearing this and other, similar comments, Kiyomori suggests that they leave Tametomo alone and attack another gate of the Shirakawa Palace.

Taira no Kiyomori had paused facing the west side of the east bank of the riverbed at Nijō. Fifty horsemen of his force went forward and advanced as vanguard. “What men are holding this place? Name yourselves! We who speak are dwellers in Ise province, of the band of the Lord of Aki, Taira no Kiyomori. We are the warrior Itō no Kagetsuna of Furuichi, and Itō no Go and Itō no Roku of the same family.”



Minamoto no Tametomo, hearing this, said, "I think even Kiyomori, the master of you fellows, is an unworthy enemy. Though the Taira are descendants of Emperor Kanmu, over the years they have degenerated. As for the Minamoto, who does not know about them? It is nine generations from Emperor Seiwa to Tametomo. I am Chinzei Hachirō no Tametomo, eighth son of the Rokujō Hōgen no Tameyoshi, grandson of Lord Hachiman (Yoshiie), seventh generation from Prince Rokuson. If you are Kagetsuna, clear out!"

Kagetsuna: "From ancient times, both houses, Minamoto and Taira, have furnished military commanders to the realm, and in striking those who rebel against the Imperial mandate, followers of both houses have had occasion to shoot down commanders on the other side. While I am of the same company, I have the honor of being known by the Court. For I am Kagetsuna who received the Imperial appointment as vice-commander-in-chief, having captured and bound Ono no Shichirō, the bandit ring-leader of Suzukayama in the province of Ise. See whether an arrow shot by a base fellow hits or not!"

So saying, he drew to the full and shot, but Tametomo made nothing of this. "Though I think you are an unworthy enemy, for the charm of your words I will give you an arrow; have it! And make it an honor in this life or a remembrance in the next!" With this he fitted one to his bowstring, of three-year-old close-jointed bamboo rubbed down a little, fletched with copper pheasant tail-feathers, and with a seven-and-a-half-inch round-edged broad head with tang more than a half-shaft in length. Pausing a moment, he let it off whistling. Piercing unchecked the breastplate of Itō no Roku who was in the lead, the arrow passed on the other side through the left sleeve of Itō no Go and stuck in the lining of his armor. Roku fell dead on the spot.

Itō no Go broke off the arrow and went before his commander, "Look at Tametomo's arrow! One cannot feel this the act of an ordinary man. Roku is already dead!" When he said this the Lord of Aki (Kiyomori) and all the warriors who saw the arrow wagged their tongues in fright.

Kagetsuna spoke: "[A]t the time of the Later Three Years War [my ancestor, Kiyowara no Takenori, said to Lord Hachiman (Yoshiie):] 'When struck by my lord's arrow, there is no such thing as impenetrable helmet or armor. May I see for certain the power of my lord with the bow?' Yoshiie piled up three suits of armor of good leather and hung them on a tree branch, and when he shot through all six layers, they feared him as the manifestation of a demon. From that time the warriors were all the more devoted to him, it is said, but I have only heard it told. Is such strength with the bow now before my eyes? Dreadful!" He spoke in terror.

Subjected to talk in this vein from many mouths, the commander said, "It is not that I, Kiyomori, have received orders to attack this particular gate without fail. It is only by chance that I have charged against it. Orders were only to charge in somewhere. So how about the east gate?"

## THE TALE OF HEIJI (HEIJI MONOGATARI)

The chieftain primarily responsible for victory in the Hōgen conflict was Minamoto no Yoshitomo, Tametomo's older brother. But the court chose to reward Taira no Kiyomori far more generously than he for his participation in the conflict. Disgruntled and resentful, Yoshitomo was drawn by the minister Fujiwara no Nobuyori (1133–1159), who was also dissatisfied with the court's recent actions, into a scheme to overthrow Kiyomori and the leaders at court. Choosing a time in 1159 when Kiyomori was absent from Kyoto on a religious pilgrimage, Yoshitomo and Nobuyori made their move, attacking and burning the Sanjō Palace, residence of the retired emperor Goshirakawa, and transporting Goshirakawa to the emperor's palace, where they placed him in confinement. But Kiyomori returned quickly to Kyoto and managed to smuggle Goshirakawa's son, Emperor Nijō, out of the palace disguised as a lady-in-waiting and to escort him to the main Taira residence at Rokuhara in the southeastern part of the capital. Kiyomori and the Taira now claimed that they were the "emperor's army" and branded their Minamoto adversaries "rebels." The Heiji conflict, as this clash came to be called, reached its climax soon thereafter in a battle that began at one of the gates of the imperial palace and ended in a decisive triumph for the Taira. Yoshitomo, the defeated Minamoto commander, tried to escape to the eastern provinces but was murdered on the way by a treacherous vassal.

### THE BURNING OF THE SANJŌ PALACE

Arson played a dramatic role in the Heiji conflict, as it had in the Hōgen conflict. The description in *The Tale of Heiji* of the burning of the Sanjō Palace, which started the Heiji conflict, is memorable as one of the few scenes in the war tales (at least before *Taiheiki* in the fourteenth century) that conveys some of the true brutality and horror of warfare. For the most part, though, the war tales romanticize militarism and warrior behavior, and most battle scenes are not graphic. Warriors and others are killed, to be sure, but there is very little description of the blood, gore, and suffering that must have accompanied such killing. The *Heiji's* description of the burning of the Sanjō Palace is doubly shocking because in a capital city that had not witnessed the bloodshed of war in two and a half centuries (except for the one-night Hōgen conflict, which seems to have involved only the combatants), "nobles, courtiers and even ladies-in-waiting" were wantonly "shot down or slashed to death." In their terror, some of these nonwarriors even jumped into wells where "the bottom ones in a short time had drowned, those in the middle had been crushed to death by their fellows, and those on top had been burned up by the flames themselves." There could be no more striking proof of how Japan's world was changing in the transition from rule by courtiers to rule by warriors. In samurai history, the burning of the Sanjō Palace is highlighted in

the account of it in *The Tale of Heiji* and also in a magnificent visual re-creation of the burning in the first scroll of the *Picture Scrolls of the Tale of Heiji* (*Heiji monogatari ekotoba*). This first scroll was obtained by Ernest Fenollosa in the late nineteenth century and placed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It remains one of the most valuable of Japanese art treasures held outside Japan.

At this time, on the night of the ninth day of the same moon, just at the hour of the rat [midnight], Lord Nobuyori, with Yoshitomo, the Director of the Stables of the Left, as his general and with more than five hundred of his mounted men, advanced on the Sanjō Palace, the residence of the Retired Emperor Goshirakawa. They secured the gates on all four sides, and Nobuyori, the Colonel of the Gate Guards of the Right, while mounted said, “Though I have received Your Majesty’s favor for years, I have heard that because of Shinzei’s slanderous statements, I, Nobuyori, am to be stricken down.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in order to save my life for a while, I am going down to the eastland.”

The Retired Emperor was greatly surprised at this and said in amazement, “Who would do away with you?” The Fushimi Middle Counselor, Lord Minamoto no Moronaka, then brought up the Imperial carriage and told him to hasten to get into it, while voices cried, “Hurry and set the fires.” The Retired Emperor mounted into the carriage in confusion, and his younger sister, Jōsai-mon’in, who was in the same palace, got into the carriage and the others surrounded them in front and rear and on the right and left and took them to the Imperial Palace. . . .

The situation at the Sanjō Palace was beyond description. Soldiers were guarding all the gates, and flames were shooting up here and there. Wild flames filled the heavens, and a tempestuous wind swept up clouds of smoke. The nobles, courtiers and even the ladies-in-waiting of the women’s quarters were shot down or slashed to death, for it was thought that they perhaps constituted the whole of Shinzei’s family. When they rushed out, so as not to be burned by the fire, they met with arrows. When they turned back, so that they would not be struck by the arrows, they were consumed by the flames. Those who were afraid of the arrows and terrified by the flames even jumped into the wells in large numbers, and of these, too, the bottom ones in a short time had drowned, those in the middle had been crushed to death by their fellows, and those on top had been burned up by the flames themselves. The palace buildings, built one beside the other, were swept by a fierce wind, and ashes spewed forth upon the ground. How could anyone at all have saved himself? The Imperial consorts and the ladies-in-waiting were not destroyed in the burning

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5. Fujiwara no Shinzei was an ally of Taira no Kyomori and Nobuyori’s chief ministerial rival at court.

of the A-fang palace, but the loss of life among the “moon nobles” and “cloud courtiers” in the burning of this retreat of a Retired Emperor was indeed terrible.

[Reischauer and Yamagiwa, trans., *Translations from Early Japanese Literature*, pp. 301–302; PV]

### THE TALE OF THE HEIKE (*HEIKE MONOGATARI*)

Victory in the Heiji conflict set the stage for the further rise of Kiyomori and the Ise Taira at court. Although warriors, the Taira now devoted themselves primarily to court politics and advancement within courtier society. Kiyomori, in particular, acquired steadily higher court ranks and offices, finally becoming chancellor (*daijō daijin*), the court’s highest appointive position. Having married his daughter into the imperial family, Kiyomori in 1180 capped his rise to supremacy at court by crowning his infant grandson as Emperor Antoku (1178–1185).

The rapid, and sometimes ruthless, advance of the Ise Taira incurred the resentment of many in Kyoto, including the retired emperor Goshirakawa, Kiyomori’s chief rival for power at court. In 1177, Kiyomori suppressed a plot against him to which Goshirakawa was privy. Three years later, in 1180, a prince who had been passed over in the imperial succession to make way for Antoku dispatched an edict to Minamoto chieftains in the provinces, calling on them to take up arms and overthrow Kiyomori and the Ise Taira. Among those who responded to the edict was Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), who had been exiled as a youth to the Kantō twenty years earlier in the wake of the Minamoto defeat in the Heiji conflict. In the five-year war (Genpei War, 1180–1185) that was sparked by the prince’s edict, Yoritomo gradually emerged as the supreme Minamoto commander, and it was under his orders that the Minamoto forces finally defeated and annihilated the Ise Taira at the naval battle of Dannoura in the straits between Honshu and Kyushu in 1185. Yoritomo himself remained at his headquarters at Kamakura in the Kantō throughout the Genpei War, simultaneously directing the Minamoto in battle from afar and establishing the offices of what became Japan’s first warrior government, the Kamakura shogunate.

“THE MIGHTY FALL AT LAST, THEY ARE DUST BEFORE THE WIND”

Like *The Tale of Hōgen* and *The Tale of Heiji*, *The Tale of the Heike* was first written in the early thirteenth century and subsequently underwent a long process of embellishment, primarily by guilds of blind monks who traveled the country telling its stories to the accompaniment of a lute-like instrument called a *biwa*. The most widely dis-

seminated version of the *Heike* was completed in 1371, nearly two hundred years after the events it covers.

More than any other war tale, the *Heike* is a work unified throughout by a single theme, the rise and fall of the Ise Taira. This theme is dramatically enunciated in the *Heike*'s opening lines, in which we learn that the Ise Taira, full of arrogance and hubris, have risen to dizzying heights at court and in courtier society but, because of their very success, are in for a great fall. The Taira are led by Kiyomori, whom the *Heike* ranks among the most heinous villains of Chinese and Japanese history. This demonization of Kiyomori—and, by association, the entire Taira clan—provides the main “reason” that the Taira will surely fall, but in the larger scheme of things, the fall of the Taira symbolizes the inevitable decline of the world as a whole in the dark and disastrous age of *mappō*, the “end of the Buddhist Law.”

The sound of the Gion Shōja bells echoes the impermanence of all things; the color of the *sala* flowers reveals the truth that the prosperous must decline. The proud do not endure, they are like a dream on a spring night; the mighty fall at last, they are dust before the wind.

In a distant land [China], there are examples set by Zhao Gao of Qin, Wang Mang of Han, Zhu Yi of Liang and Lushan of Tang, all of them men who prospered after refusing to be governed by their former lords and sovereigns, but who met swift destruction because they disregarded admonitions, failed to recognize approaching turmoil, and ignored the nation's distress. Closer to home [Japan], there have been Masakado of Shōhei, Sumitomo of Tengyō, Yoshichika of Kōwa and Nobuyori of Heiji, every one of them proud and mighty. But closest of all, and utterly beyond the power of mind to comprehend or tongue to relate, is the tale of Taira no Ason Kiyomori, the Rokuhara Buddhist Novice and Former Chancellor.

[McCullough, trans., *The Tale of the Heike*, p. 23; PV]

#### EASTERN WARRIORS

We have noted that from early times, the warriors of the eastern provinces of the Kantō were regarded as the best fighters in Japan. In the Genpei War, as narrated in the *Heike*, the eastern warriors (the Minamoto) are portrayed as so superior to the western warriors (the Taira) in martial ability that there is never any doubt about the war's outcome. We are made aware of this discrepancy in fighting ability at the very beginning of the war when the commander of a Taira army sent to chastise the rebel Yoritomo in the east asks one of the warriors in his army, Saitō no Sanemori, who is from the east and was previously a follower of the Minamoto, “How many men in the Eight Provinces [of the Kantō] can wield a strong bow as well as you do?”

Sanemori uttered a derisive laugh. “Do you think I use long arrows? They barely measure thirteen fists.<sup>6</sup> Any number of warriors in the east can equal that: nobody is called a long-arrow man there unless he draws a fifteen-fist shaft. A strong bow is held to be one that requires six stout men for the stringing. One of those powerful archers can easily penetrate two or three suits of armor when he shoots.

“Every big landholder commands at least five hundred horsemen. Once a rider mounts, he never loses his seat; however rugged the terrain he gallops over, his horse never falls. If he sees his father or son cut down in battle, he rides over the dead body and keeps on fighting. In west-country battles, a man who loses a father leaves the field and is seen no more until he has made offerings and completed a mourning period; someone who loses a son is too overwhelmed with grief to resume the fight at all. When westerners run out of commissariat rice, they stop fighting until after the fields are planted and harvested. They think summertime is too hot for battle, and wintertime too cold. Easterners are entirely different.”

[McCullough, trans., *The Tale of the Heike*, pp. 188–189; PV]

#### THE TAIRA AS COURTIER-WARRIORS

A major phenomenon in the history of the samurai was the merging of the *bu* (the military) and the *bun* (the courtly)—that is, the assumption of courtly tastes and the adoption of courtly ways by warriors. This phenomenon was especially marked during times when samurai leaders and their followers lived in Kyoto in proximity to the court, for example, during the Ise Taira’s residence there in the decades leading up to the Genpei War and during the entire Ashikaga or Muromachi period, 1336–1573, when the Ashikaga shogunate was situated in the imperial capital. In the *Heike*, the Taira are portrayed as no match militarily for the Minamoto, in part because they have lived so long in Kyoto, enjoying the elegance of court life and becoming soft and “courtly.” There are countless scenes in the *Heike* that portray the Taira as what can be described as courtier warriors. Probably the most famous such scene is “The Death of Atsumori,” in which, after killing the young Taira commander Atsumori, a Minamoto adherent, Kumagai no Naozane, is astonished to find a flute in a bag at Atsumori’s waist. Observing that no one in the Minamoto army would think of bringing such a thing as a flute into battle, Naozane observes, “These court nobles are refined men!” In his sense of awe and admiration for the socially and culturally superior, Naozane goes so far as to refer to the Taira as court nobles.

Kumagai no Jirō Naozane walked his horse toward the beach after the defeat of the Heike. “The Taira nobles will be fleeing to the water’s edge in the hope

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6. Arrows were measured by units determined by the width of a fist.

of boarding rescue vessels,” he thought. “Ah, how I would like to grapple with a high-ranking Commander-in-Chief!” Just then, he saw a lone rider splash into the sea, headed toward a vessel in the offing. The other was attired in crane-embroidered *nerinuki* silk *hitatare*, a suit of armor with shaded green lacing, and a horned helmet. At his waist, he wore a sword with gilt bronze fittings; on his back, there rode a quiver containing arrows fledged with black-banded white eagle feathers. He grasped a rattan-wrapped bow and bestrode a white-dappled reddish horse with a gold-edged saddle. When his mount had swum out about a hundred and fifty or two hundred feet, Naozane beckoned with his fan.

“I see that you are a Commander-in-Chief. It is dishonorable to show your back to an enemy. Return!”

The warrior came back. As he was leaving the water, Naozane rode up alongside him, gripped him with all his strength, crashed with him to the ground, held him motionless and pushed aside his helmet to cut off his head. He was sixteen or seventeen years old, with a lightly powdered face and blackened teeth—a boy just the age of Naozane’s own son Kojirō Naoie, and so handsome that Naozane could not find a place to strike.

“Who are you? Announce your name. I will spare you,” Naozane said.

“Who are you?” the youth asked.

“Nobody of any importance: Kumagae no Jirō Naozane, a resident of Musashi Province.”

“Then it is unnecessary to give you my name. I am a desirable opponent for you. Ask about me after you take my head. Someone will recognize me, even if I don’t tell you.”

“Indeed, he must be a Commander-in-Chief,” Naozane thought. “Killing this one person will not change defeat into victory, nor will sparing him change victory into defeat. When I think of how I grieved when Kojirō suffered a minor wound, it is easy to imagine the sorrow of this young lord’s father if he were to hear that the boy had been slain. Ah, I would like to spare him!” Casting a swift glance to the rear, he discovered Sanehira and Kagetoki coming along behind him with fifty riders.

“I would like to spare you,” he said, restraining his tears, “but there are Genji warriors everywhere. You cannot possibly escape. It will be better if I kill you than if someone else does, because I will offer prayers on your behalf.”

“Just take my head and be quick about it.”

Overwhelmed by compassion, Naozane could not find a place to strike. His senses reeled, his wits forsook him and he was scarcely conscious of his surroundings. But matters could not go on like that forever; in tears, he took the head.

“Alas! No lot is as hard as a warrior’s. I would never have suffered such a dreadful experience if I had not been born into a military house. How cruel I was to kill him.” He pressed his sleeve to his face and shed floods of tears.

Presently, since matters could not go on like that forever, he started to remove

the youth's armor *hitatare* so that he might wrap it around the head. A brocade bag containing a flute was tucked in at the waist. "Ah, how pitiful! He must have been one of the people I heard making music inside the stronghold just before dawn. There are tens of thousands of riders in our eastern armies, but I am sure none of them has brought a flute to the battlefield. Those court nobles are refined men!"

When Naozane's trophies were presented for Yoshitsune's inspection, they drew tears from the eyes of all the beholders. It was learned later that the slain youth was Tayū Atsumori, aged seventeen, a son of Tsunemori, the Master of the Palace Repairs Office.

After that, Naozane thought increasingly of becoming a monk.

The flute in question is said to have been given by Retired Emperor Toba to Atsumori's grandfather, Tadamori, who was a skilled musician. I believe I have heard that Tsunemori, who inherited it, turned it over to Atsumori because of his son's proficiency as a flautist. Saeda [Little Branch] was its name. It is deeply moving that music, a profane entertainment, should have led a warrior to the religious life.

[McCullough, trans., *The Tale of the Heike*, pp. 315–317; PV]

## THE MONGOL INVASIONS OF JAPAN

During the thirteenth century, Japan was subjected to the only two attempts in premodern times to invade its islands. These occurred in 1274 and 1281 when huge expeditions ordered by Kublai Khan, the Mongol ruler of China, and composed of recruits from both China and Korea (which was then under Mongol control) overran the islands of Tsushima and Iki in the Korean Strait and landed at points in northern Kyushu and its offshore islands.

In 1268, Kublai sent a letter to Japan demanding that it enter into a tributary relationship with China, a relationship that the Japanese, alone among the peoples of East Asia, had refused to accept from at least the time of Prince Shōtoku in the early seventh century. Acting on behalf of Japan, the Kamakura shogunate chose to ignore both this and a number of subsequent demands made by Kublai. Infuriated, the Mongol leader in 1274 dispatched his first invasion force, comprising some ninety thousand troops and sailors in two armadas, one from Korea and one from China, that made its main landing at Hakata Bay.<sup>7</sup>

The defending warriors of Japan, accustomed to fighting one against one, were confronted by invaders who were organized into trained units that re-

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7. Although we speak of the "Mongols" invading Japan, the invading forces included Mongols, Chinese, and Koreans.



sponded to signals from drums and gongs. In addition, the Japanese were exposed to weapons, including exploding balls and poisoned arrows, that were entirely new to them. But if the Mongols with their trained units and various weapons enjoyed superiority as fighters on the battlefield, as traditionally believed, they did not get much opportunity to exploit it, for on the very day they landed in Kyushu—again, according to traditional belief—a typhoon arose that forced them back into their ships and out into open water, where many of the ships were sunk and those remaining were obliged to straggle back to the continent.

Scholars continue to raise many questions about the Mongol invasions. For example, could the first invasion force have really been as large as ninety thousand (140,000 are said to have participated in the second invasion), and if so, how many actually fought? Also, the date of the first invasion was November 19, which is after the typhoon season has ended, so could Kyushu really have been struck by one at this time?

One question that is of particular interest to us in regard to the “way of the warrior” is whether the Japanese were as ineffectual in fighting against the Mongols as is usually thought.<sup>8</sup> However one evaluates the relative fighting merits of the Mongols and Japanese during the brief first invasion, the Japanese success in parrying and frustrating the Mongols during the much longer 1281 invasion suggests that the Japanese warriors—all of whom were from Kyushu—got the better of the fighting. In preparation for this invasion, the Japanese constructed stone walls (about three meters high) at Hakata Bay and other possible landing sites in northern Kyushu and prepared a navy of small ships to harass the large Mongol troop carriers. As a result of these preparations and, it appears, the Japanese warriors’ aggressive fighting style, the Mongols overran several islands during their six weeks or more in the waters north of Kyushu but were finally unable to land on Kyushu proper.

Unlike the first invasion, the second invasion took place during the typhoon season, and there is no question that a great storm destroyed many ships of the Mongol armadas (again from China and Korea). The Japanese believed that this typhoon and the one said to have occurred during the 1274 invasion were *kamikaze* or “divine winds” that would protect Japan in times of its greatest peril. Accordingly, belief in such divine winds of protection was resuscitated in the last, desperate days of World War II with the establishment of special forces (*kamikaze*) units of suicide pilots.

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8. For a discussion of the various questions raised here concerning the Mongol invasions, see Thomas Conlan’s *In Little Need of Divine Intervention*.

## THE MONGOL SCROLLS

We have an important visual record of the Mongol invasions of Japan in the Mongol scrolls, which are narrative picture scrolls (*emakimono*) commissioned by a local warrior of northern Kyushu named Takezaki Suenaga to commemorate his participation in both the 1274 and 1281 defenses against the Mongols. The following passage from the text of the Mongol scrolls is Suenaga's first-person account of how he and four followers fought during the 1274 invasion. On the day of the invasion, Suenaga and his men gathered with other warriors as a group under Shōni Kagesuke, their commander. But Suenaga, who yearned to be first in battle in order to receive reward, became impatient waiting for the commander to assemble his force and so finally set off alone with just his four followers toward Hakata Bay, where the Mongols had landed. In conjunction with his great wish to fight against the Mongols, Suenaga was much concerned about having someone witness his heroics. Yet when he confronted the Mongol invaders, he ignored the advice of one of his men to wait for witnesses and insisted, instead, that the "way of the bow and arrow" demanded that a warrior who wished to be deserving of reward should charge the enemy immediately. In the fighting that ensued, Suenaga and several of his men were wounded. Most fortunately for them, a larger group of Japanese warriors appeared on the scene just in time both to save them and to serve as witnesses. According to Suenaga's account, the Japanese warriors clearly outfought the Mongols.

I set off to attack before knowing how many warriors had assembled at Okinohama. Of all the members of my clan (*ichimon*), Eda Matatarō Hideie begged me to stand as his witness. We traded helmets so that we could recognize each other. Just at that time, we heard that the foreign pirates had set up a camp at Akasaka. As the warriors of our clan set off for battle, we saw the commander (*taishōgun*), Dazai no Shōni Saburō Saemon Kagesuke.<sup>9</sup> He dispatched Noda Saburō Jirō Sukeshige, who came up to Eda Hideie and said: "In order to be seen [we] should fight together. As Akasaka has poor terrain, you should pull back here. When the enemy attacks, as they most certainly will, bear down on them, firing at once." Determined to keep our word [to fight with Kagesuke, we all] pulled back. Nevertheless, I Suenaga said: "Waiting for the general will cause us to be late to battle. Of all the warriors of the clan, I Suenaga will be first to fight from Higo," and set off to attack.

I passed by the hills where Shōni Kagesuke, the commander of the day, had fortified his encampment. [Kagesuke's] retainer Ōta Saemon told me to dismount, but because I intended to attack [text missing] . . . I said: "We five horsemen are going to fight before you. We won't limit ourselves to merely

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9. Dazai refers to the Dazaifu, the Office of the Imperial Court established centuries earlier to handle overseas intercourse through the port of Hakata. Shōni was an office in the Dazaifu but later became the surname of a warrior family.

shooting down the enemy! I have no purpose in my life but to advance and be known [text missing]. I want [my deeds] to be known by his lordship.” Kagesuke said: “I don’t expect to survive tomorrow’s battle but if I do I will stand as a witness for you [text missing].” “I am ashamed to speak to you on horseback,” I said but Kagesuke merely replied: “As you were.” I followed his command and set off to attack Akasaka [text missing], first of all the warriors in my clan. From the Hakozaki encampment I made my way to Hakata.

Thinking that I was first to battle of all the warriors from Higo, I set off from the Hakata encampment. On my way to Akasaka, after passing the *torii* of the Sumiyoshi Shrine, I met a warrior on a dapple gray horse at Komatsubara. He wore purple armor with a reverse arrowhead design, and a crimson billowing cape (*horo*) and, having just defeated the invaders in their encampment, was returning with a hundred horsemen. The pirates had fled. Two had been taken. He looked most brave and had two retainers walking before him on his left and right carrying heads—one pierced on a sword, the other on a *naginata*.<sup>10</sup> “Who passes here looking so brave?” I asked, and he replied, “I am Kikuchi Jirō Takefusa of Higo province. Who are you?” I am Takezaki Gorō Hyōe Suenaga of the same province. Watch me attack!” Saying so, I charged.

Defeated by Takefusa at Akasaka, the invaders fled their encampment in two groups. The larger force retreated to Sohara; the smaller one fled to Tsukahara in Beppu. From Tsukahara, the smaller force attempted to link with the larger force at Shiohikata in Torikai. While pursuing the smaller force, my horse was slowed by the mud flats of the ebb tide and could not gain on the fleeing enemy. The invaders established their camp at Sohara and planted many battle flags. Shouting a battle cry, I charged. As I was about to attack, my retainer Tōgenda Sukemitsu said: “More of our men are coming. Wait for reinforcements, get a witness and then attack!” I replied: “The way of the bow and arrow is to do what is worthy of reward. Charge!” The invaders set off from Sohara and arrived at the salt-house pines of Torikai beach. There we fought. My bannerman was first. His horse was shot and he was thrown down. I Suenaga and my other three retainers were all wounded. Just after my horse was shot and I was thrown off, Shiroishi Rokurō Michiyasu, a houseman (*gokenin*)<sup>11</sup> of Hizen province, attacked with a formidable squad of horsemen and the Mongols retreated toward Sohara. Michiyasu charged into the enemy, for his horse was unscathed. I would have died had it not been for him. Against all odds, Michiyasu survived as well, and so we each agreed to be a witness for the other. Also a houseman of Chikugo province, Mitsumoto Matajirō, was shot through his neck bone with an arrow. I stood as a witness for him.

[Conlan, trans., *In Little Need of Divine Intervention*, pp. 37, 53, 64, 77; PV]

10. A pole-shaped weapon with a curved blade.

11. A vassal of the Kamakura shogunate.

## CHRONICLE OF GREAT PEACE (TAIHEIKI): *THE LOYALIST HEROES*

The Kamakura shogunate was overthrown in 1333 by “loyalist” forces supporting Emperor Go-Daigo (1288–1339). Triumphant over the shogunate, Go-Daigo proclaimed the “restoration” of governing power to the imperial court in Kyoto. But Go-Daigo’s restoration, known as the Kenmu Restoration, lasted a brief three years, until 1336. Ashikaga Takauji (1305–1358), a leading chieftain of the great Minamoto clan who had earlier helped Go-Daigo to power, turned against him and forced him to flee to Yoshino in the mountainous region south of the capital. There Go-Daigo, still claiming to be the rightful sovereign, founded the Yoshino, or Southern Court. Meanwhile, Takauji installed a member of another branch of the imperial family as emperor in Kyoto and, at the same time, founded a new military government, the Ashikaga or Muromachi shogunate (1336–1573), in the same city. The first half century of the Muromachi period, 1336–1392, is also known as the age of War Between the Northern (Kyoto) and Southern (Yoshino) Courts.

The protracted War Between the Northern and Southern Courts resulted from the only major dynastic schism in the history of the Japanese imperial family. In a way not seen in earlier or later conflicts during premodern times, imperial legitimacy was a central issue. The principal war tale that narrates the fighting between, first, the supporters of Go-Daigo and of the Kamakura shogunate and, later, after the failure of the Kenmu Restoration, those of the Northern and Southern Courts is the *Taiheiki* (*Chronicle of Great Peace*). The *Taiheiki* is often thought to be a tract whose anonymous author or authors argue that the Southern, and not the Northern, Court was the legitimate seat of imperial authority between 1336 and 1392. But the *Taiheiki* does not explicitly declare the Southern Court to be legitimate; rather, it portrays a group of warrior heroes whose loyalty to Go-Daigo and, subsequently, the Southern Court was of such a superbly self-sacrificing, admirable character that later generations of Japanese believed the Southern Court was legitimate in large part because they could not believe that such heroes could have fought and died for an “illegitimate” cause. Foremost among the *Taiheiki*’s loyalist heroes—and indeed, the man regarded as Japan’s greatest hero until at least the end of World War II—was Kusunoki Masashige (d. 1336).

In the following passage from the *Taiheiki*, we read how Masashige appeared almost magically to become the guiding spirit of Go-Daigo’s loyalist movement in the early days of the emperor’s opposition to the Kamakura shogunate. A consummate fighter in the new style of guerrilla warfare that had developed in the central and western provinces by the fourteenth century, Masashige speaks to Go-Daigo of using a “carefully devised strategy” to overcome the superior strength of the Kamakura shogunate’s

armies. He also tells the emperor, in words that were to become famous in Japanese history, that as long as he, Masashige, lived, the emperor's cause would prevail.

On the twenty-seventh day of the eighth month of Genkō,<sup>12</sup> Emperor Go-Daigo went to Kasagi Temple and made the temple's main hall his temporary palace. For several days, not a single person came to support His Majesty, because all feared the military might of Kamakura. But upon learning that an army from Rokuhara<sup>13</sup> had been defeated in battle at Higashi-Sakamoto at the foot of Mount Hiei, the monks of Kasagi and warriors from nearby provinces rode in from all directions. Even so, not a single noted fighter or great chieftain (*daimyō*) at the head of a force of one or two hundred riders had yet appeared. The emperor feared that the contingent that had gathered might be insufficient even to guard his temporary palace.

Dozing off, the emperor had a dream. The place of the dream appeared to be the garden in front of the Shishinden,<sup>14</sup> within which stood a giant evergreen tree whose branches grew densely. Those spreading southward were especially luxuriant. Beneath the tree, the three great ministers of state and all the other ministers were seated in rows according to their ranks. But the main seat, piled high with cushions, remained unoccupied. The dreaming emperor thought wonderingly, "For whom has this seat been prepared?" As he stood there, two youths with their hair parted in the middle and tied on each side, suddenly appeared. Kneeling before the emperor and drenching their sleeves with tears, the youths said, "There is no place in the land where Your Majesty can hide, even for a moment. But in the shade of that tree is a south-facing seat. It has been prepared as a throne for you, so please sit there awhile." So saying, the youths seemed to ascend high into heaven. Soon the emperor awoke from his dream.

The emperor believed that the dream was a message to him from heaven. Considering the written characters for what he had seen, he observed that, by placing the character for "south" next to that for "tree," together they formed a third character, *kusunoki*, or camphor tree. Hopeful, the emperor interpreted his dream this way: "The instructions of the youths to sit in the south-facing seat in the tree's shade meant that I will once again rule with sovereignly virtue and will draw the warriors of the land into the service of the court. This has been divinely revealed by the bodhisattvas Nikkō and Gekkō." When dawn broke, the emperor summoned Jōjubō, a priest of the temple.

The emperor asked Jōjubō, "Is there a warrior in these parts called Kusunoki?" The priest replied, "I have not heard of anyone with that name around

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12. 1331.

13. Rokuhara was in the southeastern section of Kyoto. The deputies of the Kamakura shogunate who administered Kyoto had their offices there.

14. One of the halls at the imperial palace in Kyoto.

here. But west of Mount Kongō in Kawachi Province is a man renowned as a wielder of bow and arrow named Kusunoki Tamon<sup>15</sup> Hyōe Masashige. Although he is said to be a descendant of the Ide Minister of the Left, Lord Tachibana no Moroe (himself a descendant in the fourth generation from Emperor Bidatsu), Masashige has long lived in the provinces. I hear that his mother, when young, worshiped Bishamon on Mount Shigi for one hundred days and gave birth to a child after receiving an oracle in a dream. She named the child Tamon.” The emperor, regarding this as confirmation of the oracle he had received in his dream the night before, ordered, “Summon Kusunoki Masashige immediately.” Lord Madenokōji Chūnagon Fujifusa, upon receiving the imperial edict, promptly summoned Masashige.

The imperial messenger, bearing the emperor’s wishes, proceeded to the Kusunoki residence and explained everything to Masashige. Believing there was no greater honor for a man of bow and arrow, Masashige, without any hesitation, went secretly to Mount Kasagi. The emperor, speaking through Lord Fujifusa, said to Masashige, “When I dispatched an imperial messenger to call upon you to subjugate the eastern barbarians,<sup>16</sup> you rode here immediately. I am most pleased. So, what plans do you have to undertake unification of the country? How can you win a decisive victory and bring peace to the four seas? Speak your thoughts freely, without omitting anything.”

Masashige respectfully replied, “The eastern barbarians, in their recent treasonous behavior, have drawn the censure of Heaven. If we take advantage of their weakness, resulting from the decline and disorder they have caused, what difficulty should we have in inflicting Heaven’s punishment upon them? But the goal of unifying the country must be carried out by means of both military tactics and carefully devised strategy. Even if we fight them force against force and although we recruit warriors throughout the more than sixty provinces of Japan to confront the men of the two provinces of Musashi and Sagami,<sup>17</sup> we will be hard-pressed to win. But if we fight with clever scheming, the military force of the eastern barbarians will be capable of no more than breaking sharp swords and crushing hard helmets. It will be easy to deceive them, and there will be nothing to fear. Since the aim of warfare is ultimate victory, Your Majesty should pay no heed to whether we win or lose in a single battle. So long as you hear that Masashige alone is alive, know that your imperial destiny will in the end be attained.” After delivering these earnest words, Masashige returned to Kawachi.

[Gotō and Kamada, eds., *Taiheiki*, vol. 1, pp. 96–98; PV]

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15. Another name for the Buddhist guardian deity Bishamon.

16. The men of the Kamakura shogunate.

17. These two provinces of the Kantō constituted the principal base of the Hōjō regents, who were the main power holders in the Kamakura shogunate.

In narrating the warfare that resulted in the overthrow of the Kamakura shogunate in 1333, the *Taiheiki* describes Kusunoki Masashige's innovative and brilliant methods for defending fortresses against attacks and sieges by huge shogunate armies. Indeed, the *Taiheiki* attributes much of the ultimate success of Go-Daigo's loyalist movement to the failure of the shogunate to deal promptly and effectively with Masashige. He kept the fires of antishogunate revolt burning until larger forces under Ashikaga Takauji and Nitta Yoshisada (1301–1338) could finally destroy the Kamakura regime.

After failure of the Kenmu Restoration in 1336, Go-Daigo, as we see in the first passage, rejects Masashige's advice about strategy and insists that he and Nitta Yoshisada, the leading loyalist general, meet in a showdown battle with Ashikaga Takauji at Minatogawa in Hyōgo. Masashige obeys with the knowledge that he will die in this battle, and symbolically, so also will Go-Daigo's cause.

The second passage relates the suicide of Masashige and his brother at Minatogawa after the battle has been lost.

As Lords Takauji and Tadayoshi headed toward the capital in command of a great army, Yoshisada sent a messenger on a fleet horse to the palace to report that he was pulling back to Hyōgo in order to establish a position from which to defend against the Ashikaga. The emperor, greatly alarmed, sent for Kusunoki Masashige. "Go quickly to Hyōgo to join forces with Yoshisada and do battle," he ordered.

Respectfully, Masashige replied, "Since Lord Takauji is already on his way up to the capital in command of an army from the nine provinces of Kyushu, his might will surely be as vast as clouds and mist. I fear that if a small, tired force like ours were to engage such a giant enemy army in high spirits, it would, by fighting in the conventional manner, undoubtedly be defeated. I recommend that Your Majesty recall Lord Yoshisada to Kyoto and have him accompany you again to Mount Hiei. I will go down to Kawachi and, with a contingent from the central provinces, defend Kawajiri. If we press Kyoto from two directions, north and south, and force the Ashikaga to exhaust their supplies, they will gradually tire and their numbers will dwindle. Meanwhile, our side will increase in strength day by day. Then, if Lord Yoshisada advances down from Mount Hiei and Masashige attacks from the rear, we can destroy the enemies of the court in a single battle. Lord Yoshisada undoubtedly agrees with me. But he is ashamed by the thought that he will be seen as cowardly if he avoids a battle while in the field. Hence he has decided to take a stand at Hyōgo. What matters most in war is who wins the final battle. I urge the court to make its decision after the most careful deliberation.

"Truly, war should be entrusted to warriors," the courtiers agreed. But Bōmon no Saishō Kiyotada again spoke out: "What Masashige says is not without merit. Yet to have His Majesty abandon the capital and proceed for a second time in the same year to Mount Hiei before an army, commissioned to pacify the country, has even fought one battle is tantamount to demeaning the imperial

position. It also goes against the way of an imperial army. Although Takauji is advancing toward the capital in command of a Kyushu army, it surely does not exceed the force he brought to Kyoto last year after conquering the eight eastern provinces. At that time, our side, although small, never failed to prevail over the larger enemy in each battle, from the start of fighting until the final victory. This had nothing to do with superior military strategy but was thanks entirely to the imperial destiny. Therefore, if you engage the enemy in decisive battle away from the capital, what difficulty should there be in emerging victorious? Masashige must go at once to Hyōgo.”

“I have no further objections,” said Masashige. On the sixteenth day of the fifth month, he left the capital and, with five hundred riders, went down to Hyōgo.

Because he knew that this would be his final battle, Masashige stopped, as he had planned, at Sakurai Station to send his oldest son, Masatsura, age eleven this year, who had been accompanying him, back home to Kawachi. As he bid farewell to Masatsura, Masashige gave these instructions to him, “It is said that three days after the lioness gives birth to a cub, she throws it off a stone wall several thousand *jō* high.<sup>18</sup> But because the cub has a lion’s nature, it is able, without having been taught, to right itself in midair and avoid being killed. The moral of this story applies even more to you, a young man who has passed his tenth birthday. You must heed my words and never disobey the advice I give you. The coming battle will decide the fate of the country. I fear this is the last time I will see your face in this life. If you hear that Masashige has died in battle, you will know with certainty that the country has fallen into the hands of the shogun, Takauji. But you must never surrender, and thus forsake years of unswerving loyalty by our family to the emperor, merely to preserve your transient life. So long as even one of the young men of our family survives, he must fortify himself in the vicinity of Mount Kongō and, if the enemy attacks, be prepared to expose himself to the arrows of Yang Yu<sup>19</sup> and fight with a devotion comparable to the loyalty of Ji Xin.<sup>20</sup> This will be your most important filial duty to me.” After Masashige had tearfully delivered these words, father and son parted, one going east and the other west.

Long ago, when Mu Gong attacked the state of Jin, Bai Lixi, realizing that defeat was inevitable, went to his son, General Meng Mingshi, and sadly bid him a final farewell.<sup>21</sup> In this age, Kusunoki Masashige, upon hearing that the

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18. The source of this story is not known. But “several thousand *jō*” is an implausibly great height.

19. Yang Yu was a famous archer of the Spring and Autumn period of early Chinese history.

20. Ji Xin was a loyal follower of Emperor Han Gaozu who, on one occasion, took the emperor’s place during an attack in order to enable him to escape.

21. This is a story found in Watson, trans., *The Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji)*, vol. 1, *Qin Dynasty*, pp. 14–15.



enemy army was approaching the capital from the west and realizing, with great regret, that the country would surely be overthrown, left his son Masatsura behind with the admonition that he remain loyal to the emperor until his own death. Bai Lixi was a splendid subject of another land, and Masashige was a loyal subject of our country. Although separated in time by a thousand years, they were as one in their sageliness both in this life and the next. They were wise men rarely to be found.

When Masashige arrived in Hyōgo, Nitta Yoshisada immediately came to inquire about what the emperor had said. After Masashige explained in detail both his own thinking and the decision of the emperor, Yoshisada said, “Indeed, a small army that has suffered defeat cannot hope to win against a great army full of spirit. But ever since losing the battle for the Kantō last year and then failing to hold the line against the enemy on the way back up to the capital, I have been unable to avoid the derision of people. On top of that, I was not able to reduce a single enemy fortification when I was recently sent down to the western provinces. If now, upon learning that the enemy has a great army, I should withdraw to Kyoto without fighting even one battle, it would be a humiliation I could not bear. Victory or defeat do not concern me. I wish only to display my loyalty in the coming battle.”

Masashige replied, “It has been said, ‘Listen not to the biased views of the many who are fools, but heed the opinion of one wise man.’<sup>22</sup> Do not pay attention to the slander of those who do not know the way of war. The superior commander advances only when he judges the situation right for battle and retreats when he knows it is not. Thus Confucius admonished Zilu with these words, ‘Do not follow the lead of one who would fight tigers with his bare hands and ford great rivers on foot, regretting not that he might be killed.’<sup>23</sup> Although it is said that destroying Hōjō Takatoki’s violent rule at one stroke at the beginning of Genkō and forcing Takauji and the other rebels to retreat to Kyushu this spring were due to the imperial destiny, in fact they were entirely because of your outstanding strategy. In the way of war, who is there to deride you? Especially now, in returning to the capital region from the western provinces, your actions have been exemplary at each and every stage.” At this, Yoshisada’s face brightened. Throughout the night he and Masashige talked, raising their sake cups many times. Thinking about it later, Yoshisada was saddened to realize that this was his final meeting with Masashige. [pp. 149–152]

Kusunoki Masashige, facing his younger brother Masasue, said: “The enemy is blocking us, front and rear, and has cut us off from our allies. There seems no way to escape now. I suggest that we first attack those in the front, drive

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22. Words similar to these can be found in several ancient Chinese texts, including *Shiji*.

23. “I would not take with me anyone who would try to fight a tiger with his bare hands or to walk across the River and die in the process without regrets” (*Analects* 7:11).

them away, then take on those in the rear.” “That’s fine!” said Masasue approvingly.

Aligning their force of seven hundred riders, the brothers drove into the center of the great enemy host. Ashikaga Tadayoshi’s men, seeing the Chrysanthemum and Water standard<sup>24</sup> and realizing that the attackers were worthy foes, sought to surround and smash them. But Masashige and Masasue struck the Ashikaga from east to west and drove them from north to south. Whenever they saw worthy foes, they rode up, grappled with them, and took their heads. When they encountered foes they considered unworthy, they drove them away with their swords. During the course of battle, Masasue and Masashige met up seven times, and seven times they were separated. Their only thought was to reach Tadayoshi, grapple with him, and kill him. At length, however, Tadayoshi’s force of five hundred thousand drove the Kusunoki seven hundred back, forcing them to retreat again toward Ueno in Suma.

The horse Tadayoshi was riding stopped, having picked up an arrowhead in its hoof. As it stood there lamely, favoring its right leg, the Kusunoki drove forward. Tadayoshi, it seemed, was about to be killed. But just then a single horseman, Yakushiji Jūrōjirō slashed the chests of the oncoming horses, felling one after another. In all, he cut down seven or eight riders. Tadayoshi, meanwhile, had changed mounts and fled far from the scene.

The shogun, Takauji, observing Tadayoshi’s retreat in the face of the Kusunoki attack, issued an order: “Bring in fresh troops, and make sure Tadayoshi is not killed.” Whereupon some six thousand riders of the Kira, Ishitō, Kō, and Uesugi galloped to the east of Minatogawa and surrounded the Kusunoki in order to cut them off from retreat. Turning back, Masashige and Masasue charged into the encircling horde, clashing with them, grappling them down, and killing them. During six hours they fought sixteen times but gradually their force was diminished until only seventy-three remained. Even then, if they had tried to break through the enemy and escape, they could have. But Masashige had decided when he left the capital that this would mark the end of his time in this world. So the Kusunoki fought without retreating a step, until their energy was exhausted. They then went north of Minatogawa and rushed into a house in one of the villages.

Masashige stripped off his armor in order to cut his belly. Examining himself, he found that he had suffered sword wounds in eleven places. Among the other seventy-two men, not one had fewer than three to five wounds.

The thirteen members of the Kusunoki family and their sixty retainers aligned themselves in two rows in the six-bay reception hall. Reciting the *nembutsu* ten times in unison, they cut their bellies as one. Masashige, occupying the seat of honor, turned to his brother Masasue. “Well now, it is said that one’s

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24. The standard of the Kusunoki family.

last thoughts in this life determine the goodness or evil of one's next incarnation. Into which of the nine realms of existence would you like to be reborn?" Laughing loudly, Masasue replied: "It is my wish to be reborn again and again for seven lives into this same existence in order to destroy the enemies of the court!" Masashige was greatly pleased. "Although it is deeply sinful, it is also my wish. Let us therefore be born again into this life to fulfill our cherished dream!" Stabbing each other, the brothers fell down on the same pillow.

Sixteen men from prominent families, including Hashimoto Hachirō Masakazu, the governor of Kawachi, Usami Masayasu, Jingūji Tarō Masamoro, and Wada Gorō Masataka, along with fifty of their followers, lined up in a row, each in his own way, and cut their bellies.

Kikuchi Shichirō Taketomo had come as the emissary of his older brother, the governor of Hizen, to observe the fighting at Suma-guchi and happened upon Masashige's *seppuku*. How, he thought, could he shamelessly forsake Masashige and return home? And so he too committed suicide and fell into the flames.<sup>25</sup>

From the Genkō era, tens of millions of people graciously came forth in response to His Majesty's call, served loyally, and distinguished themselves in battle. But since this rebellion erupted, people ignorant of the way of benevolence have flouted the imperial favor and joined the enemy. Feckless individuals, hoping to escape death, have surrendered and, contrary to their expectations, have been executed. Other ignorant people, not comprehending the trend of the times, have gone against the Way. In the midst of this, Masashige, a man combining the three virtues of wisdom, benevolence, and courage, whose fidelity is unequalled by anyone from ancient times to the present, has chosen death as the proper way. His and his brother's deaths by suicide are omens that a sagely sovereign has again lost the country and traitorous subjects are running amok. [pp. 158–160]

[Gotō and Kamada, eds., *Taiheiki*, vol. 2, pp. 149–152, 158–160; PV]

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25. This is the first mention of fire or flames.