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Kokinshū

A COLLECTION OF POEMS
ANCIENT AND MODERN

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*Including a study of Chinese Influences
on the Kokinshū Prefaces
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*and an Annotated Translation of
the Chinese Preface
by Leonard Grzanka*



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BOOK I

Spring (1)

I • *Written when the first day of spring came within the old year.*

toshi no uchi ni	spring is here before
haru wa kinikeri	year's end when New Year's Day has
hitotose o	not yet come around
kozo to ya iwan	what should we call it is it
kotoshi to ya iwan	still last year or is it this

Ariwara no Motokata

The new year, according to the lunar calendar, generally begins in solar February or March. Thus the first signs of spring, or the solar-calendar first day of spring, sometimes occurred before the first day of the First Lunar Month. This poem is a good example of the disingenuous reasoning that often appears in *Kokinshū* waka. Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867–1902), who glorified the *Man'yōshū* style, cited it as an example of “mere grinding away at logic” (rikutsu o koneta dake 理屈をこねただけ) in “Essay on Reading Poetry” (Utayomi ni atauru sho 歌読みに与ふる書). Poets' dates and other biographical information will be found in the Author Index.

2 • *Written on the first day of spring.*

sode hijite	today long-awaited
musubishi mizu no	day when spring begins will
kōreru o	the breeze melt icebound
haru tatsu kyō no	waters in which we once dipped
kaze ya toku ran	cupped hands drenching summer robes

Ki no Tsurayuki

This poem is based on a line from the *Li Chi* (*Book of Rites*): “In the first month of spring, the eastern wind melts the ice.”

3 • *Topic unknown.*

harugasumi	where is it that the
tateru ya izuko	warm mists of spring are rising—
miyoshino no	here on the slopes
yoshino no yama ni	of lovely Mount Yoshino
yuki wa furitsutsu	the snows continue to fall

Anonymous

Yoshino in Nara Prefecture, famous for its natural beauties, often is modified by the decorative prefix “mi” (lovely, fair). The simplicity of expression of this anonymous poem contrasts with Tsurayuki’s more complex treatment in poem 2. However, not all anonymous poems are necessarily of an earlier age: some poets may have wished to remain anonymous because of the private nature of their poems, whereas others may have been deliberately slighted by the compilers.

4 • *Composed by the Nijō Consort on the beginning of spring.*

yuki no uchi ni	spring has come amidst
haru wa kinikeri	the icy lingering snows
uguisu no	of winter surely
kōreru namida	now the frozen tears of the
ima ya toku ran	mountain thrush will melt away

The Nijō Consort, Fujiwara Takaiko 高子, was Consort of Seiwa tennō. Because of a romantic liaison with the priest Zenyū 善祐, she was demoted in 896. She died in 898, but was posthumously reinstated as Consort [kisai 后] in 943). The *uguisu*, *cectia diphore*, here translated as “mountain thrush,” was conventionally made to await the coming of spring in the mountain valleys and move to the villages when warm weather came. This poem is the first of a series treating “elegant confusion” as to whether plum blossoms or snow whitens the branches.

5 • *Topic unknown.*

ume ga eda ni	he cries on and on
kiiru uguisu	the mountain thrush perched on the
haru kakete	branches of the plum
nakedomo imada	long-awaited spring has come
yuki wa furitsutsu	still the snows of winter fall

*Anonymous*6 • *Snow on the trees.*

haru tateba	has he come to see
hana to ya miran	if those are not spring’s blossoms—
shirayuki no	white snow clusters rest
kakareru eda ni	heavily on bare branches
uguisu no naku	where now the mountain thrush cries

*Sosei*7 • *Topic unknown.*

kokorozashi	so longingly have I
fukaku someteshi	awaited the fresh flowers
orikereba	of spring that they have
kieaenu yuki no	dyed my soul and I see snow
hana to miyuran	as clustered blooms on branches

*Some say this poem was composed by the former Chancellor.**Anonymous*

The former Chancellor was Fujiwara no Yoshifusa

8 • *Ordered by the Nijō Consort (who was then known as Lady of the Bedchamber) to compose a poem about the snow falling on his head in the sunshine, as he stood in audience before her on the third of January.*

haru no hi no	though I bask in the
hikari ni ataru	comforting warmth of spring’s light
ware naredo	how melancholy
kashira no yuki to	to think that my hair now
naru zo wabishiki	wears a crown of winter snow

Funya no Yasuhide

The Nijō Consort, Takaiko, was mother of Yōzei tennō, who was Crown Prince when this poem was composed. “Spring” alludes to the Spring Palace, residence of the Crown Prince. The poem expresses gratitude for the Consort’s favor (“spring’s light”), as was appropriate at the New Year.

9 • *On falling snow.*

kasumi tachi	when the warm mists veil
ko no me mo haru no	all and buds swell while yet the

yuki fureba spring snows drift downward
hana naki sato mo even in the hibernal
hana zo chirikeru village crystal blossoms fall

Ki no Tsurayuki

“Haru” here is a kakekotoba, meaning both “spring” and “to swell,” serving to link the jo, the first two lines (when warm mists veil all and buds swell), to the main statement (while yet the spring snows drift downward . . .).

10 • *At the beginning of spring.*

haru ya toki has spring come early—
hana ya osoki to or are the plum blossoms late—
kikiwakan I would like to know
uguisu dani mo but not even the song of
nakazu mo aru kana the mountain thrush trills the answer

Fujiwara no Kotonao

The song of the mountain thrush would announce the arrival of spring.

11 • *A poem on the beginning of spring.*

haru kinu to already they say
hito wa iedomo spring is here but as for me
uguisu no while yet there is no
nakanu kagiri wa song from the mountain thrush I
araji to zo omou cannot believe spring has come

Mibu no Tadamine

12 • *A poem from the poetry contest held at the residence of the Consort in the Kanpyō era (889–898).*

tani kaze ni warm breezes blowing
tokuru kōri no down the valley slopes melt the
hima goto ni winter's ice at each
uchiizuru nami ya crack a foamy wave bubbles
haru no hatsu hana upward spring's first showy blossoms

Minamoto no Masazumi

This poem too alludes to a line from the *Book of Rites*; see poem 2.

13 • *From the same contest.*

hana no ka o on the wings of the
kaze no tayori ni wind I'll send the fragrant scent
taguete zo of plum blossoms
uguisu sasou a summons of spring to guide
shirube ni wa yaru that longed-for mountain thrush to me

*Ki no Tomonori*14 • *From the same contest.*

uguisu no were it not for the
tani yori izuru song of the mountain thrush that
koe nakuba rises from the glen
haru kuru koto o who would even suspect that
tare ka shiramashi spring has at long last arrived

Ōe no Chisato

This poem is based on lines from a poem in the *Shih Ching (Book of Songs)*: “The felling of trees sounds *cheng cheng*; / The birds calling *ying ying* / Rise from the dark valleys, / And move to the tall trees.”

15 • *From the same contest.*

haru tatedo no flowers show their
hana mo niowanu beauties in the lonely mountain
yamazato wa villages though spring
monoukaru ne ni has come the very notes of
uguisu zo naku the mountain thrush are cheerless

*Ariwara no Muneyana*16 • *Topic unknown.*

nobe chikaku because I make my
iei shisereba home near the fields and meadows
uguisu no each and every
naku naru koe wa morning I hear the song of
asa na asa na kiku the mountain thrush trilling spring

Anonymous