

Portrait of the Solitary Empress: Genmei Tennō in *Man'yōshū*

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Author's Statement

Genmei Tennō has, until now, largely been discussed in terms of her political accomplishments and not her humanity. However, this paper attempts to ask to what extent we might be able to understand the life and sentiments of the empress through her poetry.

Introduction

THE preface of the *Kojiki* 古事記 praises Tenmu Tennō 天武天皇, who commissioned the compilation's editing, remarking that “the way he governed surpassed that of the Yellow emperor/The virtue of his royal influence exceeded that of the Zhou Lord.”¹ At the same time, the text praises Genmei Tennō 元明天皇, who brought the project to its completion, saying, “Your majesty's repute exceeds that of the sovereign Cultured Mandate./Your Majesty's virtue surpasses that of the sovereign First of Heaven.”² That Genmei would be so exalted in this context alongside Tenmu is not entirely unsurprising.

It is without question true that, beginning with the move of the capital to Nara, the start of the Genmei Era 元明朝 was an epoch-defining imperial succession. If we are to follow the events proceeding from the composition of the *Kojiki*, from the progression of new cultural and political projects such as the minting of the *Wadō kaichin* 和同開珎, the Imperial rescript on setting a standard currency value (*chikusen joi* 蓄錢叙位) and for

* This article is a translation of Tosa Hidesato 土佐秀里, “*Kodoku na jotei no shōzō: Man'yōshū ga kataru Genmei Tennō*” 孤独な女帝の肖像—万葉集が語る元明天皇—. *Kokugakuin Daigaku kiyō* 國學院大學紀要 56 (2018), pp. 103–129. Translated by Nathaniel Gallant.

¹ Heldt, *Kojiki*, p. 55.

² Heldt, *Kojiki*, p. 58.

the composition of the provincial cadastral surveys (*Fudoki* 風土記), to the establishment of roads—such as the opening of the Kiso Road—and the new domains under the Ritsuryō State system (*Ryōseikoku* 令制国), such as Dewa 出羽 and Tango 丹後, all of these are the work of the Genmei era. The groundwork for each of these measures, however, has come to be seen as predicated on the principles of the Taihō Legal Code (*Taihō ritusryō* 大宝律令), set down during the reign of Tenmu. While the work of Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Fuhito 藤原不比等 is significant in having made such a reign possible, it still cannot be denied that the political might which made these works achievable was furnished by Genmei herself. Considering this, we must conclude that the verses in praise of Genmei in the *Kojiki* preface are not mere exaggeration or ornament.

However, Tenmu Tennō, whose reign was inaugurated by his victory in the Jinshin War (*Jinshin no ran* 壬申の乱), is memorialized as the singular hero of this period not only in the preface of the *Kojiki* but in the *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀, as well, and in comparison to his deified portrayal in the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, no praise for Genmei Tennō as the ideal sovereign can be found in either verse or traditional records. Even more curious is the issue of why the reign of Genmei also featured an absence of court poets who sang the praises of the sovereign? Kakinomoto no Hitomaro 柿本人麻呂 was banished to the provinces during the Monmu Era 文武朝, and the appearance of Ōtomo no kanamura 大伴金村 on the poetic scene was forestalled until the Genshō Era 元正朝. This period, in which it is thought that not just the *Kojiki*, but the *Nihon Shoki* and the *Fudoki*, as well as the first scroll of the *Man'yōshū* were all edited, is thus an interregnum in the creative efforts of “song,” or “poems” (*uta* 歌), contrary to the image of “completion” of this era in the editorial history of each of these collections.

As such, what shape did the *Man'yōshū* give to Genmei Tennō during her reign, which is otherwise a vacuum of court poets and song? And how does this differ from the image of Genmei as presented in the preface of the *Kojiki* or the subsequent *Nihon Shoki*? This essay will explore this question in detail below.

1. Imperial Succession from Son to Mother

On the fifth day of the sixth month of Keiun 慶雲 4 [707], Monmu Tennō 文武天皇 passed away at the young age of twenty-five. What followed was the ascension of the then forty-seven-year-old mother of Monmu, Genmei Tennō.³ What was at that time an unprecedented imperial succession from son to mother in and of itself speaks to the deep uncertainties of this period—on top of what must have been the agony of Genmei as an

³ There are many theories related to the “Law of Succession” and the within the context of the history of empresses with response to the unorthodox example of Genmei’s succession, however there is not space in this paper to give them full treatment. For a recent, representative example summarizing the theories of rule during the Genmei period and of Genmei Tennō, see Watanabe, *Genmei Tennō/Genshō Tennō*, or Yoshie, *Nihon kodai jotei ron*.

individual.

While there had been a precedent of empresses before the enthronement of Genmei, in the case of both Suiko Tennō 推古天皇, formerly the queen to Bidatsu 敏達, and Jitō Tennō 持統天皇, formerly the queen to Tenmu, the order of succession had been from husband to wife. Given that the same was true in the case of Empress Jingū 神功皇后, who essentially served the function of the sovereign, it is conjectured that Queen Yamatohime 倭姫皇后 also served in the place of the Tenji Tennō 天智天皇 immediately following his death. In other words, in the interregnum between reigns, a queen's role as acting sovereign could be considered to have been to a certain extent standard practice.

The succession from Seinei 清寧 to Queen Iitoyo 飯豊王 (Iitoyoao no himemiko 飯豊青皇女) remains as an outlier, since this instance overlapped with a major shift in lineages from the Ingyō line 允恭系 to the Richū line 履中系, and thus is rather distinct from the other examples of a queen's accession to the throne. The pseudo shrine-maiden life of Queen Iitoyo, who “ultimately desired no encounters with men”⁴ was modeled and popularly understood as in tandem to that of the pseudo shrine-priestly life of Seinei, who “had neither queen nor child”, and whose “hair was white from his birth.”⁵ In other words, precisely because Seinei had no “queen,” room was thus made for Iitoyo to inherit the throne. While Jingū Tennō's pseudo shrine-maiden life is, in the same fashion, an instance in which we can see some of the foundational logic of an empress's claim to power (the later accession of Genshō would also base itself on this principle of this shrine-maidenly quality), at the same time, this was not a reversal of the standard of succession from husband to wife, but rather shows other possibilities which are in line with those standard terms of succession.

Reconsidered in this sense, Genmei's accession is an anomaly among anomalies. So why were the precedents of imperial succession from parent to child, brother to sister, and husband to wife broken? It could be said that the fundamental ground was laid in the already unprecedented situation of Monmu's accession at the young age of fifteen.⁶ In a sense, Genmei's accession at the age of forty-seven was rather more in keeping with existing precedent. It is likely then that Monmu's premature accession and his premature death made possible the reversal in tradition that was the “son to mother” succession of the throne.

That being said, there were other factors besides these which prevented the “husband to wife” succession in the case of Monmu. Monmu never formally had a “queen,” and thus Fujiwara no Fuhito's daughter, Miyako 宮子, never occupied the position of “wife.” As

⁴ *Seinenki* 清寧紀 month seven, year three. *Nihon shoki*, SNKZ 3, pp. 216–217.

⁵ *Sokui zenki* 即位前紀.

⁶ On the issue of Monmu's accession, see Tosa, “Monmu Tennō no kanshi.”

can also be seen from the issues that arose from the treatment of Miyako, the biological mother of Shōmu 聖武, after his death, in her being neither the empress nor member of the imperial line, she would not have been permitted to serve in succession of Monmu.

However, Genmei Tennō, then Princess Ahe (*Ahe no himemiko* 阿閔皇女), also did not occupy the position of a queen. Princess Ahe was the royal consort to Prince Kusakabe 草壁皇子, whose accession never ultimately came to pass. Had the formal investiture (*rittaishi* 立太子) of Kusakabe actually occurred, Princess Ahe would have become the imperial consort of the Crown Prince (*kōtaishibi* 皇太子妃), though prior to the establishment of the Taihō Legal Code, it could not be said for sure whether that position would have ultimately been respected. After Monmu's accession, the status of living mother of the current sovereign granted one the position of Empress Emerita (*Kōtaihi* 皇太妃). Haruna Hiroaki 春名宏昭 reads the position of empress dowager, as determined by the Taihō legal codes, to have "equal capacity" to that of the sovereign, and therefore effecting "service in the place of imperial authority"⁷, however, whether or not this in fact was "equal" cannot be derived from in a circular fashion out of Genmei's succession, but rather requires further examples. In addition, in Haruna's explanation, the queen (*kōgō* 皇后), empress dowager (*kōtaigō* 皇太后), the mother of the empress dowager (*taikōtaigō* 太皇太后), the biological mother of the sovereign's mother (*taikōtaihi* 太皇太妃), her husband (*taikōtaifujin* 太皇太夫人), the biological mother of the sovereign (*kōtaihi* 皇太妃) and her husband (*kōtaifujin* 皇太夫人) are all said to be of "equal station." If this were indeed the case, one might be correct in thinking that from the Genmei Era onwards, this would have produced many further instances of divergent manners of imperial succession and representative rule, but the question of why Genmei would be the only outlier would still remain unexplained.

Alternatively, Ikegami Miyuki 池上みゆき has suggested Genmei as the *Ōtoji* 大刀自 (second wife) within the imperial line, thus considering her matrilineal position within the imperial clan as the basis of her accession.⁸ However, if this were the case, it remains strange that we find no other examples of similar accession from anyone besides Genmei. The notion that her place as the *Ōtoji*, within the logic of a society of clans, does not go so far as to rule out the potential of a psychological or emotional use for justifying Genmei's accession. Nevertheless, given that Genmei is the absolute single exception to the rule of accession, we cannot generalize using this logic.

Given its abnormality, asking why Genmei's accession was possible is not an altogether productive question. Asking why she was an anomaly will only give us back an answer that justifies her anomaly. That she was the empress emerita or the imperial consort offers

⁷ Haruna, "Kōtaihi Ahe no hime miko ni tsuite," p. 48.

⁸ Ikegami, "'Ōtoji' ron kara mita Genmei sokui no ichi yōin."

little more than justifications for the fact of her accession. At the time of Monmu's death, Prince Shiki 志貴皇子, Prince Naga 長皇子, Prince Toneri 舍人皇子, Prince Niitabe 新田部皇子, and Prince Hozumi 穗積皇子 were all alive and in good health. However, the fact remains that each of these powerful candidates for succession were passed over and the Princess Ahe took the throne. In light of this, we need not again ask why, against all reason, it had to be Princess Ahe that acceded—the answer is already clear. The fact is that it was precisely because there were so many other powerful candidates for succession that the possibility of their succession had to be actively quashed.

The often-cited discourse on the “persistence towards Tenmu's direct line” (*Tenmu chokkei e no kodawari* 天武直系へのこだわり) is very clearly a *post-facto* invention. The idea of Tenmu's direct line is no more than another justification, given that, as shown above, whichever prince ascended, they would have been of the bloodline of Tenji or Tenmu. It was the Jitō Tennō and Fujiwara no fuhito who “persisted,” in this case. As Jitō, whose prince was not able to ascend the throne, had longed for her grandson, the Prince Karu 軽皇子, to become the sovereign, Fuhito as well, who was married to [Jito's] daughter by Karu, also likely would have lost the chance of her grandson ascending as the Crown Prince. That “persistence” would have meant Prince Karu ascending the throne at age fifteen, or Genmei or Genshō being forced to ascend.

The long reigns of Jitō, Gemei and Gensho thus cannot be properly called “intermediary”. These women did not merely “take the baton,” as it were, but rather by ascending to the throne themselves, they did everything in their power to prevent the possibility of these princes' taking the throne. And for them to have the legitimacy of passing over these choices recognized required, more than anything, for them to secure their own reign for themselves. Thus, the aggressive policymaking during the reigns of Jitō, Genmei, and Genshō was indispensable to ensuring the certainty of these Empress's rules.

In considerations of why Genmei succeeded the throne, or why she was able to, it should thus be no surprise that it was a result of her ability to orchestrate her environment in this way. In fact, I would say that this shows that she was able to overcome the fact of her accession's unnaturalness and improbability, and that from this we must derive something of the extent of the fortitude required in the power wielded by Genmei herself.

In terms of how improbable or how unnatural it might have been, a simple look at the records prior to Genmei's accession from the *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀 and the declaration of Genmei's succession make matters clear. The *Sokui zenki* 即位前紀 states that, “In the eleventh month of the third year of Keiun, Toyo'ōji Tennō [Monmu] began making preparations, and first announced the intention of abdication. The sovereign [Genmei], with the greatest respect, firmly declined the offer and did not accept.” We can also trace this within the declaration of accession,

in the eleventh month of the previous year, I was addressed by the Sovereign, my Lord, [who said] ‘as a result of my exhaustion, I intend to take time in order to recover. I must impress onto you the duties of the throne, in which I sit according to the Great Mandate of Heaven,’ while understanding the great mandate which was before me, I replied with great sorrow, that “I could not take on [this responsibility],” and did not accept, however as a great many days went by, it weighed on me more and more heavily, and thus on the fifth day of the sixth month of this year, I have announced that ‘I accept the wishes of the sovereign.’

As such, Genmei’s enthronement is repeatedly emphasized as resulting from the “abdication” of Monmu.

This rhetoric effectively creates a situation in which no one else could have possibly known the facts of the situation outside of those involved, since from start to finish, the back and forth among those involved was conducted in complete secrecy. While an abdication from “prince to mother” may have been somehow “unnatural,” beyond being at the behest of the then late Monmu Tennō, it served Genmei’s logic that this must come to pass as his dying wish. While it may be somewhat suspect as fact, these conversations were held within the intimacy of the parent and child relationship, with no opportunity for mediation by a third party, and what’s more, because it was the wish of a now deceased son, it would be emotionally difficult to intercede with—thus, we can see the calculations at work.

While there remains the inexplicable issue of whether the intention to abdicate was expressed to his mother a half-year prior to his death, we can see how intentionally Genmei puts on display her initial refusal. What’s more, the witness for this was Genmei herself, and thus she can play both sides. In terms of the date of the eleventh month of Keiun 3, the *Monmu ki* 文武紀 shows that he had issued the Shiragikokuō 新羅国王 edict, and does not appear to have been afflicted with any illness, so this is not suggested in written records. In the first month of the following year of Keiun, an imperial rescript was issued for a discussion on moving the capital, and proceedings were underway for his own public appearance in the Great Hall of the palace. In the fourth month [of that year] emerged an announcement praising Fujiwara no Fuhito, and in month five he was awarded the position of envoy to Tang China. At least as visible in the *Shoku Nihongi*, Monmu appears unexpectedly energetic during this period, and thus his death seems rather sudden, occurring without warning in the sixth month of that year. Viewed in this light, the narrative of this having been Monmu’s dying wish seems somewhat suspect.

We can consider the “abdication” narrative to have been fabricated specifically because of the unnatural nature of the succession from son to mother. In other words, if Ahe were

to ascend the throne, precisely because she anticipated that there would be a great deal of opposition and skeptical sentiment from within the royal family and clans, she had to create the established fact that the sovereign had already desired to abdicate while he was still alive, and by including the story that, in response, she had initially declined, she herself seems to be attempting to emphasize the fact that her succession to the throne was not of her own doing (and was thus undesired).

Among the many irreconcilable opinions concerning the succession there is also the often-cited record of Prince Kadono 葛野王 in his *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻, which interrogates the conditions relating to the selection of a new sovereign in saying that there was no shortage of “people with things to say”. This is likely also a manifestation of the then still extant customary record of the selection of sovereigns based on the representative system (*gōgisei* 合議制) prior to the Taika 大化 (Great Transformation). If the discussion had turned to the decision of who would succeed Monmu, the potential to garner support for the irregular succession of prince to mother would have no doubt been low. In order to carry out this rather unlikely plan of imperial succession, it was necessary that the decision-making process go unspoken. In the first place, Monmu’s own accession had been through an “abdication” on the part of Jitō, so we can naturally assume that this had been a forceful measure taken up to ensure that no one raised objection to the dangers of enthroning someone so young. In using Monmu’s accession as a kind of “precedent,” the announcement of succession was an apparent effort to soften any possible psychological resistance to Genmei’s enthronement.

Within this announcement of succession, the much debated “Unchangeable Law of Imperial Succession of Tenji Tennō” (*Kawaru majiki tsune no nori* 不改常典) can be seen as taking a central role in the basis of Genmei’s own accession. The issue perhaps lies less in the matter of what is contained within this “Unchangeable Law of Succession,” but rather why it would be necessary in this case to call upon the this “Law”. The rules of imperial succession were not determined in Taihō legal code. It is possible that this is because imperial authority transcended the Taihō codes, however, more than this, according to custom, and the trends of the representative system, it was because the matter was of such difficulty that changing the rules of imperial succession, which had been arbitrarily carried over from earlier times, itself could be said to be impossible. So then why does this “Law,” the singular legal document capable of making the impossible possible, not ultimately make anything clearer? Within the pronouncement of accession, it is in neither the writing nor the content, but rather only the naming of the “Law” which confers the privilege of rule. The “Unchangeable Law of Imperial Succession of the Tenji Tennō” is in fact used not for its substance, but rather on authority alone. Its method of deployment is not to say that a matter has been set down in such and such a way in the “Law,” but rather that because something finds its basis in the “Law,” it is absolutely correct—

which is to say that the Law both cannot be challenged and can be used for any purpose. Without being subject to view, it was solemnly carried forth like prophecy—and in this case, in the name of Tenji Tennō, because Genmei was a “direct descendent of Tenji,” and in order to serve as the basis for Genmei’s accession. The “Law” could thus be considered further could be considered as yet another justification prepared for the enthronement of Genmei.

Incidentally, Monmu was cremated and interred in the eleventh month of the third year of Keiun, and thus given the appellation of *Yamato Neko Tōyo Ōji no Sumera Mikoto* 倭根子豊祖父天皇 (The Honored Imperial Grandfather, Seminal Son of Yamato).⁹ While it is somewhat strange that Monmu, who passed away at twenty-five, would be given the title of “Imperial Grandfather”, there was perhaps some intention here of forestalling questions of the failure of his accession at such a young age, and the essential goal of his posthumous name was thus no doubt to announce in advance that Monmu’s imperial line would be protected into the future. While there would be a temporary reversion in succession from son to mother, there was thus certainty that future imperial succession would be reserved for those in the direct lineage of Monmu, and he thus would have to be known as “Honored Imperial Grandfather”.

What we must observe in Genmei’s accession is, more than anything, the proliferation of a kind of rhetorical strategy. We can imagine that the more widespread this rhetoric became, the more difficult a situation Genmei’s accession was. As well, it was likely that Genmei herself, more than anyone, would have had a difficult time accepting her accession, having just faced the death of her son. In this sense, too, Genmei’s fulfilling her responsibility as sovereign, like Fujiwara no Fuhito, was seemingly the result of the sense of anticipation of the eventual succession of their grandchild as the heir apparent. On this count, Genmei and Fuhito’s interests were united.

2. “Stand the shields”

The poems handed down by the *Man’yōshū* related to Genmei are thought to offer a portrait of a solitary empress, one which does not appear in any official historical record. First, I would like to look at the following imperial composition (*gyosei* 御製) created during the change of the reign era to Wadō 和銅, in the second year of Genmei’s rule:

The first year of Wadō

Poem by the Empress Genmei

⁹ On the designation of Monmu as *ōji* 祖父 (“grandfather”), Shinkawa theorizes that this appellation fulfilled Monmu’s unrealized wish to abdicate and be in retirement. See Shinkawa, *Nihon kodai bunkashi no kōsō*.

I can hear the bowstrings twang
 on the brave men's leather armbands
 as the warrior's general
 stands the shields for drill. (1.76)¹⁰

Poem presented by Princess Minabe in response

Do not worry over things, my Lord,
 for I am ever by your side,
 where the gods have bestowed me. (1.77)¹¹

According to Keichū's 契沖 notes in the *Man'yō daishōki* 万葉代匠記, "This song was composed during the conducting of the *Daijōsai* 大嘗祭 rite," however this is contradicted by Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵, who says in his *Man'yō Kō* 万葉考 that:

At this time, when there was a rebellion in the outlying provinces of Echigo in Eizo, [the sovereign] dispatched his armies. Military exercises were thus [performed] in the capital, and on hearing the clamor of the drums and the sounds of the archers' leather armbands, the new sovereign was filled with feelings of sadness, and composed this song.

The mention of "stand[ing] the shields" would make Keichū's explanation seem more appropriate, however why is it that Mabuchi's, which lacks any basis in comparison, overwhelmingly supported? While it of course makes use of ideas about succession circulating within the factions internal to the National Learning School (*kokugakuha* 国学派), and beyond this, it lends more drama to the context to see the poem as occasioned by a military action, and to interpret Genmei's "worry over things" as a political issue, seem to strengthen support for Mabuchi's reading.

The person who has voiced the strongest opposition to the now rampant and thinly defensible reading by Mabuchi is Yoshinaga Minoru 吉永登.¹² Yoshinaga's critique of Mabuchi's reading follows a few key points: first, since the Ezo expedition did not occur until the following year, in Wadō 2, the poem thus could not have been from Wadō 1; second, that there are no attested incidents recounting any military actions in Wadō 1; and third, we do not see any examples of the term *ōigumi* 大臣 ("general") being used to mean the *shogun* 將軍; and finally, the phrase "stands the shields" was limited to the

¹⁰ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 75.

¹¹ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 75.

¹² See Yoshinaga, "Tate tatsu rashi mo' no haigo ni aru mono" and "Tate tatsu rashi mo' no haigo ni aru mono: Tsuikō."

occasion of funerals. I am in agreement with all of these observations. However, it is difficult to agree on the idea that the “concern” of this poem is for moving the castle to Nara. I thus feel Keichū’s explanation of its composition in celebration of the *Daijōsai* to be far more likely and reasonable.

We must first consider what kind of year Wadō 1 had been. Yoshinaga points to the imperial rescript on moving the capital to Nara in the second month of the year, however I would like to make note of the decree from the seventh month of that year issued to call on Minister of the Left Iso no Kami no Maro 石上麻呂 and Minister of the Right Fujiwara no Fuhito. The decree notes that “On consideration, based on the state of things from the [court officials], starting with the many ministers down to the people of the realm, we have opened on a period of harmony, a long-lasting peace,” the political situation seems to have been going well, indicating that there was a general understanding that there was harmony among the people of the realm. One wonders how those who support Mabuchi’s claims, and read Genmei’s concern as there being some movement of military unrest, would interpret this pronouncement of Genmei’s? Would they say that she was merely lying?

In addition, the *Daijōsai* ceremony of Genmei’s enthronement was held in the eleventh month of the first year of Wadō. Given the significance of this being the year in which she participated in the *Daijōsai*, this would have been a year deeply attached to the essential rites of Genmei truly becoming the sovereign.

That Iso no Kami (the *Mono no be* 物部) conducted the ceremony of “stand[ing] the shields” on the occasion of the *Daijōsai* and the enthronement conforms to Keichū’s descriptions.¹³ As recognized both before and after the Genmei era, at the enthronement ceremonies of a succeeding sovereign, “Mononobe no Maro no Ason stood the great shields,”¹⁴ and at the anniversary celebration of Monmu’s enthronement, “Iso no Maro, Ason of Yamato, Jikikōshi of Enoi Hiro[kuni] stood the great shields, and the Jikikōshi, Ōtomo Sukune Teuchi, stood the shields and spears,”¹⁵ and further at the same event honoring the Shōmu Tennō, it is recorded that, “The nobleman Ason of Iso no Kami of the Fifth rank of nobility, Iso no kami Ason no Iso no Maro, and the noblemen Ason Iso no Kami of the Sixth Rank, the Ason of Enoi Ōshima of the Seventh Rank, serving as the *Mono no be*, stood the shields for the *kami* at the north and south gates of the sacred grounds.”¹⁶ Into the Tenpyō 天平 period, if we follow the logic of Yoshinaga’s argument, we would see a “stand[ing] of the shields” ceremony related to moving the capital, however, all of the mentions of matters related to the moving of the capital are

¹³ On the *Mono no be* ceremonial role of standing the shields, see Emura, “Mononobe no tate o megutte.”

¹⁴ *Jitōki* 持統紀 month one, year four.

¹⁵ *Monmu* 文武 month eleven, year two.

¹⁶ *Jingi* 神龜 month eleven year one.

concentrated around the period of the so-called, “five years of wandering during the reign of Shōmu Tennō,” and seems thus to appear as an anomalous occurrence. Looking at its appearance in the historical records prior to this, in keeping with the above examples, this ceremony was conducted only in relation to the enthronement of new sovereigns. At the *Daijōsai* ceremony of the enthronement in the *Engishiki* as well, it was set down that “two persons each from the Iso no Kami and the Enoi Uji, wearing Court dress, lead 40 of the inner Mononobe [...] They set up shields and spears for the *kami* at the north and south gates of the Daijō-gū.”¹⁷ As recorded in the *Shokki* [*Shoku Nihongi*] from the eleventh month of the first year of Wadō, it is stated only that “[in] Tsuchinoto 己卯, there was a great celebration. The two lands of Tootoumi 遠江 and Tajima 但馬 participated in the ceremonies,” there being no other detailed records of other similar ceremonies on behalf of the sovereign. Thus, in the same fashion as the commemorative celebrations of Monmu before her and Shōmu after, that of Genmei also naturally saw the ceremony of the “stand[ing] of the shields.”

What is more, the minister of the left at the time was Iso no Kami (*Mono no be*) no Maro, who had stood the shields at the enthronement ceremony of Jitō. As Keichū and Kishimoto Yuzuru’s 岸本由豆流 *Man’yōshū kōshō* 万葉集攷證 point out, the *Mono no be shi* 物部氏 mentioned in the Genmei poem is no doubt referring to Minister of the Left Iso no Kami no Maro. Given the other examples of “*Mono no be shi*” being referred to as the “Great Hero Iso no Kami” (3.369), this is not an unreasonable assumption. From the poem in question, it is imagined that in the commemoration of Genmei’s enthronement, Iso no Kami no Maro, the top of the listed of ministers, had himself led the *Mono no be shi*, and conducted the ceremony of standing the shields.

Iso no Kami (*Mono no be*) was part of the military clan at the same time as being in the palace ritual clan. His armor and weaponry, as is clear by the selection of *kagura* 神樂 implements, were not only functional in their ability to injure (and to protect), but as well functioned as ritual implements with magical efficacy. In the origins of the ceremony in which the *Mono no be* stands the shields of course were contained militaristic elements, and precisely for this reason, if it were not for the palace divination rituals (*saishi girei* 祭祀儀礼), there would be no military action. In other words, within the rites of commemoration, in using weaponry and armor, it was of a form that was not entirely without an apparent display of military prowess or discipline. To immediately make the association to something threatening in response to the “stand[ing] the shields” must be considered the shortsightedness of those ignorant of ancient ritual.

As well, Kamochi Masazumi’s 鹿持雅澄 *Man’yōshū Kogi* 万葉集古義 critiques Keichū’s explanation of the *Daijōsai*, remarking that, “When an arrow is launched, the sound of

¹⁷ Translated in Bock, *Engi-shiki*, p. 46.

the leather arm band would certainly not be sung of [in a poem].” Yamada Yoshio’s 山田孝雄 *Man’yōshū Kōgi* 万葉集講義 also states that “there would be no acts of martial display such as the launching of arrows and thus the sounding of the leather armbands at a *Daijōsai*,” offering a similar interpretation. However, one wonders whether they might be limited in their readings, as well. As shown above, in addition to their being an intimate relationship between weaponry and the divine rites, within the day-long *Daijōsai* celebrations, which had a long history of being performed, we cannot say for certain that there were absolutely no scenes of ritual archery. There are thought to potentially be purification or exorcism rituals involving archery or swordsmanship as a means of ensuring the purity and solemnity of the ritual space (*saijo* 齋場), giving the site of a ritual its dignity. Looking now at the Engishiki from the *senso daijōsai shiki* 踐祚大嘗祭式 (“succession ritual”), we can gather that before and after a ritual in which armor and spears were used, “The various guards stand up their staves and the various officials line up the articles,”¹⁸ and that “The Left and Right Captains of the Inner Palace Guards and below each lead a squad and, dividing right and left, guard their respective sides,”¹⁹ armed imperial guards were mobilized and there were military demonstrations by the warriors (*aji* 衛士). These were rituals intended to protect the essential ceremony that is the enthronement rite of the sovereign, it is a performance meant to visualize that solemn act “protection,” perhaps in the wielding of a sword or the loosing of an arrow.

Yoshinaga Minoru interprets the *tomo no oto* 鞆の音 (“twang/on the brave men’s leather armbands”) as the reverberation of the string of the bow or the breaking of the string.²⁰ Nagase Osamu holds that the “armband” is a “divinely ritual object meant to drive away evil.”²¹ These explanations are more than sufficient. At the beginning of such an important ritual, it is likely that the “twang/on the brave men’s leather armbands” would be intentionally made as a means of first making the air around the site pure, and thus perform the function of driving away evil. In other words, the sounding of one’s armband is something akin to signaling the beginning of a sacred ceremony. By starting with this presumption, the logic by which we can assume Genmei encountered the “twang on the armband,” and based on this, the ceremony of “stand[ing] the shields” is clearer. They constitute different stages of the same, continuous ceremony, which describe the context in which the *Daijōsai* was inaugurated.

In following the above considerations, primarily that 1) the ceremony in which “the brave warrior stands the shields” is the ceremony by which the *Daijōsai* was conducted;

¹⁸ Translated in Bock, *Engi-shiki*, p. 46.

¹⁹ Translated in Bock, *Engi-shiki*, p. 46.

²⁰ Yoshinaga, “Tate tatsu rashi mo’ no haigo ni aru mono :Tsuikō.” The example of the sound of the arrows can also be seen in 4.532.

²¹ Nagase, “Tomo no oto,” p. 68.

2) that the year of Wadō 1 in the poem's notes was the year in which the *Daijōsai* was conducted to mark the occasion of the enthronement of Genmei; and 3) that in the course of that Wadō 1, seeing no signs of military activity, nor any easily confirmable evidence in the historical records, I would posit that Mabuchi's theory of military action does not hold up, and Keichū's theory of the *Daijōsai* thus proves to be the most likely scenario.

If we then take Genmei's composition in question to be of the occasion of her own enthronement ceremony, then what is the poem trying to say? We are thus left to ask this question again. Further, there is the issue of the meaning of Princess Minabe's song, offered in response to Genmei's. The life of Mabuchi's reading has been extended such that it has become synonymous with a general understanding that “the meaning must relate to how, on this occasion, given the victory they were about to achieve, an unquestionable one at that, the warriors played their victory song without reserve, and thus [she] beseeches her sovereign for peace throughout the realm to be protected.” Thus, we are left with the need to reassess the two verses.

First, in terms of the interpretation of the Genmei's poem, there are the *nari* なり and *rashi* らし auxiliary verbs (*jodōshi* 助動詞) that make up *oto su nari* 音すなり and *tatsu rashi mo* 立つらしも. On the expression of the two auxiliary verbs, we can see that Fujitani Mitsue's 富士谷御杖 *Man'yōshū tō* 万葉集燈 parses the difference between the “twang/on the leather armbands” as expressing as overheard speech, and that the “standing of the shields” as being non-overheard speech. However, this analysis alone will not suffice. Both *nari* and *rashi* are fundamentally auxiliary verbs which express a presumption. In the edited editions from the Edo period, while there are many places in which the overheard speech *nari* and the predicate *nari* are indistinguishable, there was no attention paid to the idea that the “twang/on the leather armbands” might be a presumptive declaration. The presumption of “standing the shields” might be based on the sound of the armband. However, since the “sound of the armband” could have only been presumptive, the poem is in fact expressing a presumption as based on a presumption.

This uncertainty, ultimately, shows the position of the poem's author. In other words, in that moment, Genmei Tennō was in a position in which she was unable to directly see and confirm whether or not there was in fact a “twang/on the armbands” or whether the “shields” were in fact being stood. What's more, her position would seem to have been in enough physical proximity to these events that it was possible to somehow (but barely) hear what seemed to have been the “twang/on the armbands”—so somewhere close to the ceremony but not within clear sight of it.

Matsue presumes this place to be the “eternal seat of the sovereign,” in other words the throne of the Seiryōden 清涼殿. However, if this were to have been in the middle of the Seiryōden, and the new empress has already entered the Great Palace, should we not have

seen the empress appearing in the ritual chamber (*kairyūden* 廻立殿) in order to change for the ritual bathing? Still, as the central figure of the enthronement, from the view of Genmei at the center of a secret ceremony, it would not have been possible for her to see with her own eyes what made the sound on the armband of the warriors, or the *Mono no be* standing the shields. Relevant to this too may be the hunting poems of Prince Nakatsu 中皇命 (1.3), in which we find the lines that, “[The sovereign’s catalpa bow’s] golden tips must be resounding (*nakahazu no oto su nari* 奈加弭の音すなり), and “Now he must be setting out on his morning hunt,” (*Asa’ak ni ima tatasu rashi* 朝璃に今立たすらし)(1.3), which are not unlike the contexts in which the position of the speaker has no direct sight of the events.

The presumptive tense as expressed by *nari* and *rashi* on the one hand can be said to show with certainty what the circumstances were, in which Genmei was located somewhere that she could not see the ceremony that was occurring outside, while she was in the inner sanctum of the ritual chamber. On the other hand, beyond this, while we would expect this to be a matter of her own coronation, this would amount to reading into this as though her feelings were those of another. Fundamentally, while *rashi* and *oto su nari* are expressions of blessing (*shukufuku hyōgen* 祝福表現)²², the *Man’yōshū* contains many opportunities to see that they may well have functioned to express a sense of distance within the presumptive tense.

In the case of the Uchi wild’s hunting poem, the two above cited phrases demonstrate the physical distance between the sovereign and the author of the poem, and the author’s distance can thus work in itself to show due respect towards the sovereign.²³ However, in the case of the Genmei poem, the figure at the center of the ceremony and the author of the poem are the same, and thus we would expect no such distance. In this sense, that Genmei, the expected center of affairs, would be declaring her sense of alienation (or reading into this as such), which is seemingly directed towards to the enthronement ceremony itself.

²² The *rashi* らし, such as in “Spring has passed, summer seems to be (*rashi*) coming” (1.38), and “the waters of Kei seem (*rashi*) calm” (3.256), or the *nari* in “it must be (*nari*) the sound of the catalpa bows,” (1.3) or the *kokoyu* of “[it] could be heard (*kikoyu* 聞こゆ) all the way inside the palace” (3.239), are all expressions of blessing (祝福表現) which express a deep sense of the will of the *kami*, connected to the tradition of travel poems (*kunimi uta* 国見歌), and exclaim fertility and arrival of auspicious days. Especially visible in poems in praise of the Osaka (Naniwa) Palace about fishery, such as 「海未通女棚無小舟榜ぎ出らし 客のやどりに梶の音聞こゆ」(6.930), or 「朝なぎに梶の音聞こゆ み食つ国野鶴の海子の船にしあるらし」(6.934) resemble the structure of Genmei’s poem. Although *nari* does differ with respect to *kikoyu* in its presumptive function.

²³ As can be seen in the use of *ramu* らむ in all three of Hitomaru’s “Three Poems Away from the Capital” (1.40 - 42), *ramu* was often used within the genre of travel poetry, and we can see how the speaker of the poems stays at a distance from things in their praising the imperial tours. On the other hand, it is the case that this “distance” calls on a sense of solitude, and thus functions contrary to the act of “praise”. The rhetoric of ritual/the rites continually offers a great deal of potential for emotional reinterpretation. See Tosa, “Gengo jujutsu no rinkai.”

As a result, where may Genmei's intentions have lain? If we are to read her as declaring she has overheard the smooth procession of the ceremonies, we could see Genmei as praising the ceremony for her own sake. However, if we are to read the ceremony, which is for her as being faintly audible to her as though she were someone else, it is also possible to see the enthronement as something which went against her true wishes, or in her alienation, a kind of sneering at all of the preparations made by the male court officials in the warriors and Lords.

In this way, Genmei's composition leaves us with room to interpret several possibilities in either direction. However, we find no use of language expressing anxiety or concern. So, if we were to consider why Genmei's poem has been read into as something expressing anxiety and concern, it would be a result of what was composed in the response of Princess Minabe—or rather, we could consider the response as an occasion to invite various speculations.

Let us then revisit the meaning of Princess Minabe's poem. This poem [contains a discrepancy among edition] in one of the verses (*shiku* 四句). in the Nishi Honganji 西本願寺 edition, the [third verse] reads 嗣而賜流, and the Kishū 紀州 and Hirose 広瀬 editions, it reads 副而賜流. While in the existing recensions the character 嗣 is used, in the latest recensions, such as the new collected editions and the Iwanami Bunko version, there is a trend towards using the character 副. Looking at the preference towards 副, expressing attachment to the body rather than the character 嗣, which expresses a sense of sequence or continuity in succession, it fits the content of the edited response poem better, and in this essay I have opted for 副. As such, the “I” (*ware* 吾) of Princess Minabe, thus is narrated with the devotional self-consciousness of one who is attached to Empress Genmei as “my Sovereign” and having been blessed by the Divine Sovereign (*sume kami* すめ神). Princess Minabe was the elder daughter of the same mother of Genmei. The interwoven senses of both intimacy with her younger sister and humility towards the empress shows in the choice of the term of being “attached” to. Contained within this single term is the resolution to protect Genmei as both older sister and as subject. The central purport of the poem lies in the assertion of Princess Minabe's own *raison d'être*, that “I am ever at your side.” It would deviate too far from the interpretation of the poem itself to read this as extending to the presence of Prince Nagaya, the son of Minabe.²⁴

²⁴ The notion that Minabe's response is somehow hinting at the Prince Nagaya has been accepted by a great deal of existing scholarship, see Watanabe, *Genmei Tennō/Genshō Tennō*, and Sasayama, “Tachi haki no toneri hokō,” however it would make Minabe a rather terrible sister to so insensitively declare to Genmei, whose child just passed away, that “My son is doing very well.” The level of sensitivity of scholars who would consider there being such malicious intent in this poem is no different, however one wonders whether Prince Nagaya was in that reliable a position, given that in the four years leading up to Wadō 1 he was a “commoner”. When he finally did receive a title, it was in the following year, Wadō 2, at the age of 31 when he was given station in the palace, and so there is reason to think that, from what we can tell about their relationship both before and after this, Genmei did not turn in Prince Nagaya in any matters,

What is being asserted here with certainty is the relationship between Genmei and Minabe, the destiny of their relationship as sisters.

As such, “Do not worry over things” needs not be seen as superficial encouragement. Originally, the phrases for “worrying over things,” *mono omoi* 物思ひ and *mono o omou* 物を思ふ, were not used in the context of facing pressing issues or real problems. Of its possible senses, it is a term whose nuance was of indistinct or incoherent preoccupation. Within the collection, these phrases are used in large part in correlation.

The road I treat/in the shadow of the orange trees/forks eight ways/and things confuse me (*mono o so omou* 物をそ念ふ)/unable to meet my girl. (2.125)²⁵

Acting as though absorbed in myself, without a care for others, I pretend as though all is well, but I am wracked with longing (*mono omou* 物念ふ). (4.613)

If I am to keep longing so intensely, I'd rather be a rock or tree, never longing for anything (*mono omowazu shite* 物思はずして) (4.722)

For example, *mono (wo) omoi* above could be said to have the same meaning as the word for to “long for,” *kou* 恋ふ in each instance. Since *kou* was a term to express the sensation of loneliness, *mono o omou* takes on the sense of loneliness when used in the *Man'yōshū*. Not encountering one's “younger sister” or “son” is lonesome, and thus one is made to “worry about things.” The reading of Genmei's “worry about things” as signifying not a political anxiety, but a personal reflection of solitude, would then align more generally with the *Man'yōshū*.

We can see the similarity of the wording and structure of Minabe's poem are very similar to the following poem, as well:

My love, do not worry about things/no matter what arises, whether fire or flood, I will be at your side (*waga nake naku ni* 吾莫けなくに). (4.506)

This is clearly a poem of longing. Abe no Iratsume 阿部女郎, guessing by this poem's placement [in the collection] is a poet from the second period of the *Man'yō's* composition, making her a contemporary of Genmei and Minabe. While the two poems

and only called on him on for the sake of Minabe. As well, as Nomura, “Genmei Tennō to Genshō Tennō” reads the final line of her response, *waga nake naku ni* as containing a sense of rivalry, confident that she will “forever take her place,” though if this were the case, Abe no Iratsume would then also then be telling her lover that she would “forever be taking your place.” When it comes to interpreting the *Man'yōshū*, we must make overall judgements from examples and patterns from the entire collection, rather than focusing in on the images of a single poem.

²⁵ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 94.

do not have an established relationship, the compositions are from around the same time and are similar in concept. As such, Minabe's composition must be understood as an emotional expression of her affection in verse. The poem says, I am with you, you need not "worry about things" (*mono omoi* 物思ひ), you are not alone. Minabe's poem also affects a similar mode of address.

What we must also consider here is that it has been a mere half-year since Genmei's own son, Monmu, passed away in the eleventh month of Wadō 1. The then forty-seven-year-old Genmei, was forced into inheriting in the responsibilities of sovereign, which would not have allowed her the space to mourn the death of her son. The death of her husband, Kusakabe, at twenty-eight, in the fourth month of Jitō 3, occurred twenty years prior. Thus, one can only imagine Genmei's sense of solitude. For Minabe as well, the death of her husband, Prince Takashi, ten years earlier in Jitō 10 must have left her living in an air of solitude, as well. The solitude of a younger sister is certainly not a solitary affair—but a shared experience in this case. Thus, for the older sister, Minabe, the phrasing of her sister's seeming distance from the "twang/on the brave men's armbands" and the "stand[ing] of the shields" perhaps felt as though she was writing a lamentation of her solitude, having had her heart broken. Much more so, then, for Minabe, since she would have overheard what "seems to have happened" (*nari* and *rashi*), this is certainly an address to her sister to not "worry about things". She seems to be saying, while everyone important to you may no longer be here, I am.

This composition by Genmei was written from her official station as sovereign. However, her older sister, deeply sensitive to the air of solitude surrounding her, offers her a "poem of solace", thick with personal sentiment. In other words, these two verses constitute a poetic exchange that is both personal and official. This can be considered then an intimate exchange precisely because it was between the solitary empress and her biological sister.

3. "Love" for the Dead

Genmei's poems collected in the *Man'yōshū* are few and far between. However, one occupies an ambiguous position,²⁶ and its authorship by Genmei is somewhat unclear. It reads:

In spring, the second month, the third year of Wadō [710], the capital was moved from the Fujiwara Palace to the Nara Palace. The following poem was written at this time, as the imperial carriage was stopped on the fields of Nagaya and the poet gazed back in the distance at our old home.

²⁶ Kikuchi, "Heijō sento tojōka kō" and Shinzawa, "Man'yōshū kan ichi nana-jū-hachi ban uta wa Genmei gyosei de attaka."

If I depart, and leave behind
 the village of Asuka,
 where the birds fly,
 I shall no longer be able
 to see the place where you abide. (1.78)²⁷

The poem's notes do not list the author. In the Nishi Honganji edition, however they use the honorific which marks a composition by a sovereign, *gosakka* 御作歌 however in the Genryaku and Hirose editions, it mere says that it was a *sakka* 作歌, without the honorific appellation. Since it was general practice to list compositions by sovereigns as a *gyosei* 御製, and this is listed as a *sakka* 作歌, it is difficult to think that this was a composition of Genmei's. However, given the use of the expression "the imperial carriage was stopped" (*mikoshi o tomete* 御輿を停めて), it would seem to make sense that this was the work of a sovereign. While this phrasing was not limited to use with sovereigns, it would be correct to identify it as a term of respect for the imperial family. As well, from the line's use of the second person pronoun *kimi ga atari* 君があたり, we can intuit that the author was likely a woman. As such, the author was either a female member of the imperial family or an empress.

In the context of the Heian period compositions such as the *Shin Kokinshū* 新古今集, this poem is clearly listed as a composition by Genmei. Within the history of reception of the poem, it has been even more decidedly recognized as Genmei's work, and it is certain that it came to be read in this way subsequently. While the phrasing of the poem's notes is ambiguous, in the expression of the poem, we could perhaps say that there are elements which point us towards reading this as the work of Genmei.

In the note appended to the heading of the poem, it relates that in "one writing," the poem is said to be the work of the "Retired Sovereign" (*daijō tennō* 太上天皇), and while there is a longstanding view that this abdicated sovereign is Genmei after her abdication from being empress, and it thus seems possible to attribute the poem to her on the basis of this, according to Itō Haku's 伊藤博 note in the *Man'yōshū shakuchū* 万葉集釈注, in Scroll 1 of the "Revised and Enlarged Edition" (*sōhobu* 増補部), when the term "retired sovereign" is used, it referred to the abdicated Jitō Tennō, and it would be difficult to consider only this instance as the outlier. In other words, as described in the *Shakuchū*, since this poem was originally a poem of lamentation for the old capital, composed by

both critique the idea that this was an imperial composition. Further, there are no shortage of examples in the collection which list a poem composed by an emperor as a *miuta* 御歌. We must acknowledge that there is no unity in the way the headings/titles were composed, and so we cannot make a determination of its provenance based on this.

²⁷ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 75.

Jitō Tennō on the occasion of the Fujiwara's move of the capital (from the Kiyomigahara to the Fujiwara), there is thought to have been a movement to revive the poem on the occasion of the move of the capital to Nara (from the Fujiwara to the Nara Palace), as well. This would as well be a natural way to see the poem in light also of the differences in the lines of the poem itself.

Looking at the “Song of Miwa Mountain” (*Miwa-yama no uta* 三輪山の歌) (1.17), considered to be the starting point of poems of lamentation to the old capital, we can see from the citation of the *Ruijū karin* 類聚歌林, that the notes read that this is an “Imperial Composition on seeing Miwa Mountain emerge on the occasion of moving the capital to Ōmi 近江国,” which has come to be understood as meaning that this was a composition of Tenji Tennō. If this were the case, then it is thus possible for a sovereign to compose a poem in lamentation of an old capital on the occasion of the capital being moved. Yet, regardless of the possibility of it having been written in his name only, if Tenji did in fact compose a poem of lamentation on the occasion of the capital's move to Ōmi, with this as precedent, it is possible to think that Jitō, at the time of the capital moving to the Fujiwara Palace, and Genmei, at the time of the capital moving to the Nara, could have composed a lamentation for the old capital which expressed their individual, private emotions. In both the method of expressing the distance from the old capital as affection, and the fact of no longer being able to see a place ever again that one longs to continue to see, we can see the influence of Song #78 from the “Song to Miwa Mountain”.

Given that when the Fujiwaras moved the capital to Kyoto, Prince Shiki composed the poem “The Asuka winds” (1.151), we can consider the potential that Jitō Tennō as well composed a lamentation for the old capital.²⁸ The move of the capital, in the twelfth month of the eighth year of Jitō era, occurred eight years after the death of Tenmu, and five years after the death of Kusakabe, however it was in the prior year that Jitō had memorialized Tenmu in a poem that he composed in a dream (2.162). That the thoughts of affection for the deceased husband of Jitō had in no way subsided is clear here. If Jitō did take Song #78 as the original source for his composition, the “you” (*kimi ga atari* 君があたり) written here is the burial site as circumscribed by Tenmu, or Mayu-oka 真弓岡 where Kusakabe rests. The departure from the Asuka Kiyomihara Palace meant being separated from the resting place of those passed in the “land of Asuka.”

That Jitō's composition may also speak for Genmei's feelings operates on the idea that, in addition to the resemblance between situations of outliving both her husband and son,

²⁸ The “Asuka Winds” poem's use of the “maiden's sleeve,” and “uselessness” means it is not simply a poem of lamentation for the old capital, but rather there is a certain craft being deployed to give the poem a sense of intimacy. If Poem #78 is indeed by Jitō, we can imagine that the site of this poem is what was called for by the poem's emotional logic. The idea of introduction a sense of personal intimacy to a poem about the old capital originates in Prince Nukata's “Song of Mount Miwa,” however it is possible to find traces of this in later poems about the capital.

Jitō's son—Kusakabe—was also Genmei's husband, and thus the objects of the poem's sorrow are one in the same. Jitō was Genmei's mother-in-law, an older sister of a different mother. Monmu was interred at the Mount Hinokuma no Ako 檜隈安古山 tomb, and Tenmu and Kusakabe had their resting places in the "land of Asuka." While the Fujiwara capital was close to Asuka, when it was moved to the Nara capital, they were then put at a great distance from Asuka. It would only be natural that Genmei would be overcome with sorrow at possibly needing to go to the "land of Asuka" where those who passed are at rest.

Even if we cannot say with certainty that the poem from the time of moving the capital to Nara was the work of Genmei, at the very least it speaks with certainty of Genmei's sentiments, and in aligning with the story eloquently told in the history of the reception of the edited poems, we cannot think it of absolute, essential importance whether or not Genmei was in fact the true author of the poem. Rather, I would like to turn our attention to a poem which reveals sentiments equivalent to those in song #78 among the prior poetic works of Genmei:

A song composed by the Princess Ahe, when crossing over Se Mountain.

Ah, here it is,
 the one I loved back in Yamato;
 the one they say lies by the road to Ki
 bearing his name,
 Se Mountain,
 "mountain of my husband." (1.35)²⁹

This poem was of the occasion of an imperial tour of Ki in the ninth month of the fourth year of Jitō's reign, long before Genmei's ascension. At the time, the Princess Ahe was thirty years of age. It was a mere half-year earlier when her husband, Prince Kusakabe, died during his own tour. Precisely for this reason, Ahe asserts her being in a state of constantly thinking longingly of "Se Mountain." The famed Mt. Imose on the road to Kii juxtaposes the coupled pair of the Imo (female or wife mount) and the Se (male or husband mount), and thus the name become known as such, and widely used in poetry. However, the Princess Ahe ignores Mt. Imo, contrary to expectation given its fame, and writes of having longed only for Se Mountain. In other words, Mount Imo is the Princess Ahe herself, and Mount Se represents her husband, the Prince Kusakabe. Ahe's composition suggest that now, she has finally encountered the husband who she has

²⁹ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 56.

been longing to see. In the opposing fashion, having until then been “back in Yamato” professes her having been wracked with feelings of solitude since his passing.

Princess Ahe’s “Song on Crossing Se Mountain”, at least on first glance, seems to merely be a verse resembling those from the imperial tours, which sings of famous sights along the route. However, if we consider the preference her poetic expression shows in longing for only Se Mountain, with no mention of the Imo Mountain, in combination with the proximity to her husband’s passing, the poem comes to express such a clear personal sense of affection and sorrow that we could not consider it to be the work of sightseeing. Thus, we find an Empress Genmei as poet, who in fact does compose on such topics.

The life of the Princess Ahe, later Genmei Tennō, was marked by repeated experiences of premature departures. Those who she loved were all too quickly taken from this world, one after another. And, left alone into her old age, she was then called upon to ascend the throne herself. We must consider Genmei Tennō, having taken on the sum of responsibilities of the sovereign under such cruel circumstances, and having been thrust into the reality of enormous political issues, to have been a woman of enormous strength. However, perhaps because of this, it is inevitable that she must have been consumed by both solitude and sorrow. The poems of the *Man’yōshū* and from the records of the “Preface” of the *Kojiki* and the *Shoku Nihongi*, document her appearance as one which was rather unfathomable. Song #78, regardless of its true authorship by Genmei, as well must be considered as one which reflects her solitude.

4. “I too will come and go”

Immediately following the previously cited song #78, there is recorded the truly mysterious composition, entitled “A Song” (*aru uta* 或歌) from the move of the capital to Nara. Perhaps this poem is directed to Genmei, conscious of her solitude. I will conclude here with an exploration into this anonymous *chōka* 長歌.

One book has the following poem, on the occasion of the move from the Fujiwara Palace to the Nara Palace

In awe of our Emperor’s command,
 we left our homes,
 and our soft living,
 and set our ships afloat
 down the Hatsuse River,
 down that hidden land.
 Not one of its eighty bends

did we sail by
without looking back
ten thousand times.

We trod til dusk
came over our path,
 straight as a spear of jade,
and reached the Saho River
by the capital at Nara,
 beautiful in blue earth.
As we perceived the morning moon
crystalline above our sleeping clothes
we saw, where evening frost had fallen
white as brilliant mulberry cloth,
the river frozen
like a bed of stone.

Come, o Lord, into the house
that we have toiled,
 back and forth,
in that chill night,
 unresting,
to build you. Come
for a thousand generations
and I too shall go
 back and forth
there, to serve you.

Envoy

I too shall go back and forth
to your house in Nara,
 beautiful in blue earth,
for then thousand generations
Do not think I may forget. (1.80)³⁰

There are many enigmatic parts in this poem, and it would be difficult to say that adequate interpretations have been reached even now. Because it was of a “house” built

³⁰ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, pp. 76 – 77.

to be gone to “back and forth,” (*kayoitsutsu tsukureru ie* 通ひつつ作れる家) the poem’s speaker could possibly be an official or courtier, however what might it mean then that someone of this position exclaims to their “Lord” (*Ookimi* おほきみ [多公]) that “I too shall go back and forth”. Given the pretense visible in the speaker’s tone, what might it mean that, in the first poem, even after the establishment of a new capital, that they do not live there, nor do they return to anywhere else, but rather that they “go back and forth” to Nara? In the first line of the poem’s envoy, we find the line “do not think I may forget,” (*wasuru to omou na* 忘ると念ふな), which shows an even more elevated position of the speaker, commented on by Kajikawa Nobuyuki as “friendly speech”.³¹

Kajikawa, in comparing the author of this poem to Ōtomo no Tauchi 大伴手拍, considers the “Lord” in the poem to be the Prince Shiki. Since the two were close as “old family acquaintances”, he says that they “spoke as friends”. However, regardless of how far back their knowing each other as family went, would an imperial subject use such a familiar way of speaking when creating something like a “song”? To say, “do not think I may forget” is an expression of the utmost intimacy, one which was not bound to the romantic relationships between men and women.³²

There are many who come/and flip their sleeves in careless departure/as though
beasts on the high mountains/but I will never forget you. (11.2493)

I shall not dispatch letter to you, my lord, out into the thicket of human folly,
but please do not think I have forgotten. (11.2586)

The other examples of this in the collection are all straightforward love poems. On the issue of the verb “to forget 忘る *wasuru*” in the *Man’yōshū*, there are contexts in which one pronounces that their romantic partner should never “forget” (忘れない *wasurenai*) their love, such as in *wasurete omoe ya* 忘れて思へや (“I would never forget”), *ware wa wasureji* われは忘れじ (“I will not forget”), *ware wa wasurezu* われは忘れず (“I have not forgotten”), or *ware wasureme ya* われ忘れめや (“How could I forget”), and so on. There are also instances of “wanting to forget” (忘れたい *wasuretai*) the love of one’s youth, such as the poetic phrases of *wasure gusa* 忘れ草 (“parting reeds,” a classical name for the tiger lilies) or *wasure gai* 「忘れ貝」 (“parted shell”). Regardless of the context in which these issues were taken up, they were all nevertheless about the depth of one’s romantic affection or love. In other words, “to forget” was a term of affection, and in particular

³¹ Kajikawa, “Tameguchi nano wa naze?”

³² Translator’s note: While difficult to reflect in the short form of translated “song”, this phrase uses no honorific speech in referring directly to the sovereign, which is very unusual in classical literary Japanese, implying the utmost intimacy.

when one asked another to “not forget,” it was almost certainly a pronouncement towards the object of one’s romantic affections.

Looking at this again from the perspective of romantic relationships between men and women, we can understand the necessity of using the term “to come and go” (*kayō* 通ふ) in this poem. The use of “to come and go” in the collection can be seen in use for the occasion of imperial tours, however the more common usage was of course to express when a man “visits” with a woman. There were examples of courtiers “coming and going” at the imperial villas, however, it would be impossible to “visit” the city in which one must have their permanent residence. However, if this is a man “visiting” the house of a woman, the phrase (comes through *kayō* pun)—the poem must have in some way been composed out of someone’s affections. In the unexpected phrasing of *waga yado taru kinu no ue* 我が宿たる衣の上, as well, it makes perfect sense to see this as an expression of familiarity. Indeed, for someone to speak “as equals” out of affection would not be strange at all. What, then, would the expressions of this verse look like reread from the perspective of affection?

Let’s begin again from the top of the *chōka*. We find here the line, “In awe of our Emperor’s command,” given that this is a poem from the occasion of the capital’s move to Nara, as described in the title, would of course make the “Emperor,” “my Lord” Genmei Tennō. As well, for the “building of the house”, given that this was on the “order of the emperor,” it would not make much sense if this “home” were either the residence of a subject or that of a prince. “Homes” built on imperial edict would almost certainly be those of the sovereign.

While it would be rather strange to call the imperial palace a “home,” in the *Man’yōshū*, this term refers not to a dwelling or building, but rather is a term of affection meaning something similar to “wife.”³³ Viewed together, regardless of the size of one’s dwelling or the relative rank of one’s station, one could be called *ie* 家. The *ie* (house) of Tenji Tennō’s “Constantly I would gaze/upon your house./Would that my house/were on Ōshima Peak/in Yamato.” (2.91)³⁴, is the residence of the imperial family, but having no relation to any actual structure, functions as a term implicating romantic relations. This being the case, we could consider there to be potential that the phrase *Tennō no ie* 天皇の家, as it stands, aligns the “sovereign” as the “woman,” and the poems speaker as the “wife.”

That a husband or lover would “build a house” is a bit odd, however if we look at the poem of Prince Nakatsu, which says that, “If you, my husband/lack the grass to build/

³³ On the difference in meaning between *ie* 家 and *yado* 宿 in the *Man’yōshū*, see Gotō, “Ie to yado” and Manabe, “Ie mo aranaku ni” for a detailed theory. Regardless, “Home” (*ie* 家) refers not simply to an edifice, but has a more personified sense.

³⁴ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 84.

your temporary shelter,/cut the grass/beneath the young pines”(1.11)³⁵, there were at least some similar precedents for temporary lodgings during travel. In Prince Nukata’s 額田王 poem, “I remember/our temporary shelter/by Uji’s palace ground,/when we cut the splendid grass/on the autumn fields/and sojourned under thatch,” (1.7)³⁶ too, it is based in the same idea. Regardless of when the imperial tours occurred, it would be difficult to imagine that the men of the imperial family were actually building temporary shelter with their own hands, however this is considered to be the form in which men built a “home” for women in intention. This was thus not an actual labor of constructing an edifice, but the thought by which an intimate space could emerge from in the form of a “home”.

On the other hand, the idea of a traditional *murohogai* 「室ほがひ」(“consecration of a residence”), was primarily the creation of central pillars and the thatching of roofs on homes, and thus a central motif of the poetic rhetoric about concrete structures. Looking at the language of consecrating new homes by wishing for their longevity (*murohogi* 室寿) in the era prior to the esoteric initiations (*kenshū sokui* 顕宗即位), or the incantations used in the Imperial Palace, individual portions of residences were sung of. Typical expressions such as *miya-bashira futoshiku* 宮柱太敷く (“May the palace pillars stand strong”), among others, were based in traditions of consecrating new homes as such, and thus in the two above poems by Prince Nakatsu and Nukata, the poeticization of the grass as roofing material is emphasized.

The next imperial compositions celebrate a “constructed house” as “eternal” (*yorozuyō* 万代), a point which can be seen in the expression of the edited song #79.

A Poem by the Retired Sovereign

May the house made using (*mochi tsukureru shitsu* 用ち造れる室) rough-cut lumber, decorated with pampas grass, flowing backwards in the wind, stand for all time. (8.636)

A Poem by the Sovereign

However long the house made using (*mochi tsukureru ie* 用ち造れる家) the mountain of Nara’s rough-cut timber stands, it will remain unadorned. (8.637)

The above is a *murohogi* poem sings of the visitation by the then abdicated Genshō Tennō and Shōmu Tennō to the sakura on the Saho River at the residence of Prince Nagaya. As a matter of course it praises the building material and structure, and sings of the permanence of the a “house” that had been built. From the use of the term “house made...” (*tsukureru ie* 造れる家) in these two verses, we can imagine that this term was

³⁵ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 44.

³⁶ Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 41.

a stock term of *nii murohōgi* 新室寿 (new building consecrations) praise for the long life of newly built edifices. We can likely then understand the “house” built in song #79 as containing same type of term of praise.

In the *nii murohōgi*, while the material is praised, in making a new house or in managing the construction of a new capital, the first thing needed is an enormous volume of timber. The central topic of the “songs of the laborers” is the process by which culled timber was transported along the flowing river from afar.

A poem composed by conscripted laborers for [building] the Fujiwara Palace

Our Great Lady, who is full of peace, a high shining child of the sun, at the same time as [she] deigned to think with [her] divine nature, to look over the land that [she] rules, from the top of Pudipara [Fujiwara] Field which is like rough cloth made from mulberry bark tree and to govern highly from [her] capital [there], both Heaven and Earth approached [to serve her]. Like jewel seaweed, [Heaven and Earth] make float down Udi river, where many clans of officials [live], the roughly cut cypress lumber, the split real trees, from Mt. Tanakami, which is like a sleeve, in Apumi province, where [gentle waves] run on the rocks. Intending to take that [lumber], the people making noises, too, forget about their homes, and being completely oblivious of themselves, are floating in the water like wild ducks. [When] unknown lands that [Empress] would bring closer, [come] along the Kose road to the Imperial Palace, which we are building, our country will become the land of eternal life. A miraculous tortoise carrying an [auspicious] writing [on its carapace] announced the new age. The roughly cut lumber of the real trees that [they all – Heaven, Earth, and people] bring over to Idumi river, [they] make [it] go up [the river] making it into [at least] fifty rafts, but short of a [sic] hundred. When [one] sees how [they all compete] it appears that [Empress] has the divine nature. (1.50)³⁷

On first glance, the “Song of the laborers at the Fujiwara Palace” and the “Song of moving the capital to Nara” have several points of similarity, and the latter seems to have been influenced by the former. Both poems hinge on the pathway to the new capital as a river. In the laborers’ poem, we can see poetic images of “scraps of cut cyprus” culled from Ōmi flowing down the Uji River, and then the Kizu River. That said, in song #79, the “I” goes from the Hatsuse River to the Saho River by boat, and does not mention hauling any lumber in the poem. While the laborers’ poem that explain the provenance of a building’s materials is expected of the tradition of *murohōgi*, this is similar but distinct in #79.

³⁷ Vovin, *Man'yōshū*, pp. 129-130.

The possible similarity between where the laborer dedicate themselves to a laborer who “forget[s] about [their] home” (*ie wasure* 家忘れ) and where the “I” of song #79 “leaves [their] worn in homes” (*nikibi nishi ie o oki* 柔びにし家を択き) is of course distinct in the way they are expressed. “*ie wasure*” is a phrase which emphasizes a kind of devotional attitude, whereas *ie o oki* has a meaning which emphasizes passage to the Nara capital. The “Gate of Light I made” and the “constructed house” are as well similar, however the authoritative “Imperial Palace” (*hi no Mikado* 日の御門) and the intimate space of the “house” show opposing differences in meaning.

In this way, in the laborer’s poem and poem #79 we can recognize some similarity in concept and rhetoric, however there are of course still some points where they diverge. The “I” of song #79 does not seem like a laborer by any means. The making of a home and its visitation implies a something of romantic relations—and precisely because of this there is the possibility of saying something such as “do not think I may forget.”

The readings which distinguish the “*Ōkimi*” 天皇 (sovereign) in the head of the *chōka* and the “*Ōkimi*” 多公 (“my lord”) of end of the *chōka* have largely been the focus until now, in which it has come to be said, without any basis, that the latter *ōkimi* 多公 is not the sovereign but rather the prince.³⁸ However, since they are both read “*ōkimi*” and both used in the same context, to suggest that they each refer to a separate person based only on the difference in how they are written is, I would say, an entirely irrational interpretation, which appears a bit too convenient.

If this were the original construction of the residence of a prince, and it were the case that the duties of the officials and laborers were over with its completion, then there would be no reason for anyone to continue passing through there after it was finished. To insist that, despite this, some laborers finishing the work were “all the time continuing to pass through” under the watch of the Prince would be rather strange. Or else, some might hold that the “I” is not a laborer, but a courtier under the prince, however if this were the case, then the courtier would then have made a “home” for the Prince. Perhaps there may exist some precedent for a courtier to have passed into town from afar to build a home for their Lord—however I am unaware of any such examples.

As I have already shown, the “house” for the “*Ōkimi*” was made at the order of the “*Tennō*.” As well, this “*Tennō*” is Genmei, and if we also take the *ōkimi* 多公 for whom the “I” is about to come for to be a woman, would it not make sense then to see them as one and the same. There would be no issue in seeing the use of 天皇 and 多公 as a case of variant kanji, and the use of *ōkimi* in the poem could be seen as referring to the very same Genmei Tennō who led the move of the capital to Nara. As such, the “house that

³⁸ See Omodaka, *Man'yōshū Chūshaku*; Itō, *Man'yōshū Shakuchū*; Kajikawa, “Tameguchi nano wa naze?” and Hashimoto, “Kan ichi nana-jū-kū ban uta wa Kasa no Kanamura no saku ka.”

was made” would of course become the imperial palace. We could as well understand the rather strange turn of phrase *Nara no ie* 寧樂の家 (“the house of Nara”) if seen to be an intentional moniker for the Nara Palace.

So, who was this “man” who was passing through under the watch of the now aging Genmei, having outlived her husband for quite some time by then? Who could have possibly been this great “man” who, while showing all due respect, we find in a context in which he can use vernacular speech to refer to the sovereign as an equal? Among actual people, the imperial family included, there was no one in existence who would match the description. It then being the case that this “man” was not an actual person, what kind of being was this? What’s more, this man, seeming to have been intending to continuously “pass into” the capital from the “outside,” where is this place?

Noda Hiroko 野田浩子 has suggested that the “I” of “I will pass through” could “perhaps be a *kami*.”³⁹ While the view the “I” is a *kami* seems accurate to me, Noda claims the subject of the poem is the *ietoji* 家刀自, and makes a complicated interpretation of the *kami* as appearing in a dream to the poem’s “I” as a woman in the form of the poem’s speaker—which is difficult to fathom. In Noda’s reading, the “I” of “my flowing river” (*waga yuku kawa* わが行く河) and “my abode” (*waga yado taru* わが宿たる) is the *ietoji*, and the “I” of “I too will come and go” seems to be the *kami*, however I do not quite understand why the subject would need to have changed. It was a general understanding of that period that the subject of “coming and going” (*kayō* 通ふ) was a man, and therefore we would expect that if this “I” were merely a single male figure, the text would make sense in this context from start to finish. This would mean then that this man is the *kami* in question.

Would it not be possible then that within the poem itself is established a basis to think that this non-human or divine “man,” is paying visits to the sovereign? This would mean then that a *kami* creating a home for the sovereign. It may sound strange, but it is not without precedent. If we look at the *Kogo Shūi* 古語拾遺, there is a record of Ame no Tomi no Mikoto 天富命, leading the descendents of Taoki Hōi 手置帆負 and Hikosashiri 彦狭知, and constructing the Kashiwara Palace 橿原宮 for Jinmu Tennō 神武天皇. This is a repeat succession, as transmitted down from the Inbe 忌部 clan themselves, for which it was recorded that under the direction of Futodama no Kami 太玉神, Taoki Hōi and Hikosashiri constructed the *Zuiden* 瑞殿 (lit. “Auspicious Palace”) for Amaterasu. Within the capital, there was held a ceremony wishing peace on the new palace (*Ōto no hogai* 大殿祭) for new construction or the moving of palace buildings, and the *Kogo Shūi* argues that it was the responsibility of the Inbe clan leader to preside over the ceremonies. If we look at the *Engishiki* for the incantations 祝詞 for the new palace ceremonies, it was

³⁹ Noda, “Akatsuki no yume, Ietoji no murohōgi,” p. 64.

Yafune Kukunochi no Mikoto 屋船久久遲命 and Yafune Toyoukebime no Mikoto 屋船豊宇気姫命 who protected the sovereign's "Auspicious Palace" (*mizu no miaraka* 瑞の御殿), and we can see *kami* here related to housing and building material from the names. As well, though it was not the Imperial Palace, if we look at the examples of recorded Taihō district names of Tatenui region 楯縫 or the town of Kizuki 杵築 in the Izumo region 出雲 from the *Izumo no kuni Fudoki* 出雲国風土記, we find tales in which various gods serve in the building of the Kizuki Shrine 杵築大社, also known as the Palace of Ōnamuchi. Thus, the idea that *kami* built and protected homes was not entirely out of place in this context.

On the occasion of the capital's move to Nara in the eleventh month of the first year of Wadō there was held a ceremony to pray to the *kami* of the land on which new construction is to occur (*Jichinsai* 地鎮祭). This ceremony was also held when the Fujiwara capital move occurred, and while the exact names of the divinities involved were not recorded, it was certainly a palace rite conducted for the principle land *kami* (*Jinushi no kami* 地主神) of Yamato. Both the protection and aid of the *kami* were necessary in the construction of the imperial palace. If we consider the "creation of a home for the sovereign" to refer to the overall construction of the Nara Palace, in other words the new capital, it is perhaps accurate to understand this to mean something closer to protection by the principal *kami* of that place, rather than about the actual act of constructing the edifice itself.

If the "I" is in fact a *kami*, what kind of *kami* are they? The biggest clue lies in the place name—the "river of Hatsuse". If we consider why the Hatsuse River was chosen as the starting place, we can see it as also designating the abode of that *kami*—the "*kami*" who, in order to protect the Sovereign and the new capital, set off by boat from Hatsuse, is endowed with the strength of power to defend the land of the Yamato kingdom, and is as well a male *kami* who could have been understood to have "visited" (*kayō* 通ふ) a woman. Such a *kami* who so perfectly fits these conditions could be thought as none other than the Ōmono nushi no *kami* 大物主神 of Miwa Mountain.

The Miwa Mountain poem of Prince Nukata was composed on the occasion of the capital's move, and so amidst this backdrop, we can guess that there was a divination rite at Miwa Mountain praying for a safe moving of the capital.⁴⁰ Because Ōmono nushi is a guardian deity, the principal land deity, Ōmono nushi of Yamato, there is a high probability that this ceremony was conducted on the occasion of the capital's move. At the very least, the recollection of the Miwa Mountain composition by Prince Nukada as a precedent for a poem composed on the occasion of a capital's move is a natural association, and it would seem there is an inevitability to Ōmono nushi's being at the

⁴⁰ See Tosa, "Nukata no ōkimi 'miwa yama no uta' no kinō."

center in this endeavor.

In the case of Prince Nukada's poem, the content is formed by announcing a separation from the *kami* of Miwa Mountain because of his leaving of the land of Yamato. In the case of the move of the capital to Nara, the move is taken place within the sphere of Yamato. Since compared to the Fujiwara capital move it was rather at a distance from the site of the Miwa Mountain divination ceremony, thus emerged the necessity to so strongly propitiate Ōmono nushi to ensure there was continuous protection of the palace after the move. Here, the aforementioned poem #78 becomes the model for the poem about Ōmono nushi "coming and going" (*kayō* 通ふ) to the new capital at the behest of the sovereign. As well, Ōmono nushi had come to have an image as an amorous *kami* who would "come and go" in the sense of "visiting" (*kayō* 通ふ) with women night after night. We can see the expressions and concepts which draw on the Miwa Mountain legends in various places in the *Man'yōshū*'s poems, such as Prince Inohe's 井戸王 response poem (*shōwa uta* 唱和歌) (1.19) or Princess Kagami 鏡王女 and Fujiwara no Kamatari's poetic exchange (2.93 – 94), among others.⁴¹ Therefore, we can think of the protection of the Nara capital as containing the intimate nuance of "visiting" the "house" of the sovereign.

If we consider these images together, the people at the service of the palace's poem in which the line "Will the great fields of Uda be remembered" (2.191)⁴² are presented as a connection of place to Prince Kusakabe, and Hitomaru composed a poem which associated "my lord, who passed away," (1.47), the spirit of Kusakabe, with the Aki hunting grounds, which are also⁴³ close to the Hatsuse River. Hatsuse was an ancient burial ground, and considering as well about the strong sense of otherworldliness in its association with rebirth and death in the *Man'yōshū*⁴⁴, in the image of Ōmono nushi taking a boat from the Hatsuse River, perhaps as well accords with the image of Kusakabe.

Still, there exists a possibility that this "*kami*" is the "husband" of Genmei. If we consider the possibility of Genmei, then long widowed, as "shrine maiden," it is not difficult to see the motif of the Miwa Mountain legend appearing here. The narrative⁴⁵ of a male deity traversing a long and difficult road is an element shared among many divine

⁴¹ On the reception of the Mount Miwa legend in the *Man'yōshū*, there are several examples, see Satake, "Hebi muko iri no genryū"; on the Inoe Poem. See Murata, "Shin'en no hōzō" for the Princess Kagami poem, and see Tosa, "Fujiwara no maro zōka san shu no shukō," for a new interpretation.

⁴² Translated in Levy, *Ten Thousand Leaves*, p. 122.

⁴³ On the interpretation of the Uchi wild's poem, see Tosa, "Yoru no jūgasha."

⁴⁴ On the relationship between death, rebirth and the otherworldliness of Hatsuse, see Wada, *Hatsuse Oguni*, for a detailed treatment.

⁴⁵ See Noda "Akatsuki no yume, Ietaji no murohogi," who sees the expressions of travel in poem #79 as having the character of the "celebration of divine marriage" poems. However, Noda does not consider this to be a case of divine marriage itself, but rather since it is seen as poem true to life, in which the *ōtoji* blesses the marriage of her daughter, this reading differs on this point from that of this essay.

marriage *setsuwa* 説話 (folk tales) such as the Yachihoko no kami 八千矛神 in the *Shingo* 神語, among others. In Scroll 21 of the *Man'yōshū*, we see a poem narrating a divine marriage (13.3310 – 3313) which shares common lines with the *Shingo*, so it would seem that song #79 was conceived out of the accumulation of divine marriage tales that developed around these uses of Miwa and Hatsuse.

Still, the original phrasing of the third line of the end of the poem in question, across various editions, was 「千代二手来座多公與吾毛通武」(in *Man'yōgana*), and so to follow this phrasing, it would read 「来ませおほきみよ」(“come forth, my lord”). In this case, it would be possible to understand this “come forth” as from the Fujiwara capital to the Nara capital. However, as Omodaka Hisataka 沢瀉久孝 says in the *Man'yōshū Chūshaku* 万葉集注釈, while we might expect the latter “*Ōkimi*” to reside in the “house” built in the poem, it would not follow to address the permanent occupant of that house with the phrase “come forth”. Therefore, Mabuchi’s *Kō* asserts that the *kanji* for “come” 来 is in fact an error, and should have been 尔, which we can reread then as “stay for a thousand years”—which has largely been the understanding of this passage up until today. While we must be careful about the basing our readings on simple transcription errors/misread *kanji*, to hazard a guess based on similar examples, such as 「常磐に座せ *tokiwa ni imase* 貴き吾が君 *tōtoki waga kimi*」(“May you remain here unchanged forever, my honorable Lord”)(6.988) or 「やつよにを *yatsuyo nio imase imase* わがせこ *waga seko*」(“May you stay, now and forever, in good spirits”)(20.4448), it would make sense to read 「千代までにいませ *chiyo madeni imase* おほきみよ *ōkimi yo*」 as “May you remain here, my Lord,” an expression of praise.

The *kami* said to the sovereign, “please remain here forever,” along with wishing for her long life and lengthy reign, the *kami* itself then remark that it will “visit on the empress’s palace forever,” a promise of eternal protection.⁴⁶ Such a verse becomes a poem whose narrative import is almost parodic of myth which celebrates a capital move through the imitation of a divine marriage. While we could not imagine Genmei’s solitude and boredom would have been cured through such a poem, if the empress were not a widow, she likely would not have been able to create a poem with such a conceit. To see this as a ritual poem would be incorrect, and it is at complete odds with the conception of divinizing the empress, yet because the center of the Nara palace is the “Empress,” we can imagine the conception of such a pseudo-divine-marriage poem. The effort to introduce

⁴⁶ Emura’s, *Kodai no miyako to kamigami* holds that propitiating the *kami* was a phenomenon from after the move of the capital to Heian, and during the Nara period, the *kami* would not be propitiated from within the capital for its protection. This assertion would offer a fitting explanation as to why *Ōmono no nushi*, who protects the capital, would have to “come and go” to the Nara capital. Further, that the *Ōmono no nushi*, who protects the line of the gods (*tenson* 天孫) is the *kunitsu kami* 国つ神, in other words, the principal land *kami* (*jinushi no kami* 地主神 or *ubusuna kami* 産土神, can thus be thought of as the fundamental reason why the *kami* would have to come and go from the “outside” of “heaven,” i.e., the capital.

narrativity and creativity to court poetry had flowered on all fronts during the era of Shōmu⁴⁷, and it is possible to see this poem as serving as their precedent.

As I have hoped to show in this essay, this strange, anonymous poem of the capital's transition to Nara can be said to speak with authority of Genmei Tennō's solitude.

Conclusion

Despite a lengthy discussion, I have tried here to conduct an orderly examination of five instances of “song” of the Genmei era as they were recorded in the *Man'yōshū*. Taken together, the poetry related to Genmei in the *Man'yōshū* can be said to concern simultaneously Genmei the “Empress” and Genmei the solitary “woman” who lost both son and husband. In other words, the *Man'yōshū* casts some light on the personal emotional life of Genmei, rather than her official posture.

These were sentiments which did not ultimately appear in the austere pronouncement of Genmei's accession, yet Genmei is decidedly not verbose in revealing her own sentiments in the *Man'yōshū*, either. Rather, the Genmei of the *Man'yōshū* can be said to show her sentiments in the body of peculiar expressions, and chose ambiguous expressions, which left much room for interpretation. The work of this essays, too, is no more than one interpretation of this polysemy. Yet, for the empress, the imperial family and the court officials must have needed a place to divulge their delicate sentiments, in forms ambiguous, and this place we can say was poetry.

The history told in the *Man'yōshū* is not different in substance from that of the *Nihon Shoki* and the *Shoku Nihongi*. Rather, they must be said to supplement each other. And while the few words spoken in the history of the Genmei era too accord without contradiction to the record of the *Shokki*, when it comes to the appearance of Genmei which arises in these works, the *Man'yōshū* can be said to contain a much darker visage—one on which I hope this paper has shed some light.

⁴⁷ As we enter the reign of Shōmu, Kasa no Kanamura 笠金村 created travel poetry in the conventions of a feminine voice, and Kuromochi no Chitose created poems of affectionate poetry in the genre of poems of the imperial tours. While they were not court poets, in the same period, Yama no Ue no Okura 山上憶良 also wrote in the voice of narrative poetry, thus is it possible to image that poem #79 could be of a similar style and lineage. Hashimoto, “Kan ichi nana-jū-kū ban uta wa Kasa no Kanamura no saku ka” theorizes that poem #79 is a work composed by Kanamura for Prince Shiki, which is interesting, however there are some issues with this, given that it was much too early for this to be a work by Kanamura (although Kanamura's oldest poem is from five years later), and the peculiarities of the author in the manner of notation. Yet, there is no doubt that, besides Kanamura, the author was a poet with particular ability. While the laborer poems and Mii poems, among others in Scroll 3 have been thought to be of the class of authors known as the “shadow court poets”, I would like to wait for further reflection on this matter.

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Abbreviation

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