PART ONE
THE GREAT KAMO PRIESTESS
"Among the many women who served over the ages as Kamo priestess (Sain) there were none who did not compose poetry." So observed the latter-day male officials of the Kamo Shrines who wrote Kamo chūshin zakki, an anecdotal history of their institution, in 1680 (Enpō 8). Though they were writing about an office that was occupied for just over four hundred years by some thirty-five different women of royal blood, they named only two Kamo priestesses as representatives of this collective literary achievement. Their first example, Uchiko Naishinno (807–47), the very first Saiin, was indeed "skilled in the ways of poetry of both Japan and China (Yamato Morokoshi no fumi no michi ni mo tsūjitamaeri)," and the Kamo chūshin zakki authors duly quoted the poem in Chinese (shi) that Uchiko wrote in the spring of 823 when her father, the emperor Saga, paid a state visit to the Kamo Shrines. The seventeen-year-old Uchiko's vivid description of the solitude of her life as Kamo priestess ("Silent was my lonely lodge among the mountain trees") is typical of literary accounts of the Saiin as a place removed both spatially and psychologically from court, the source and locus of light and goodness embodied here, as so often, in the person of the emperor who has graced her residence with his presence. The final lines of the poem ("If I should once more know the warmth of this fair face/ all my life I will give thanks to the azure skies")

1. Kamo chūshin zakki (hereafter "Zakki") was compiled under the direction of the high priest (kannushi) Okamoto Yasuyoshi. For the passage cited here, see Kokusho Kankōkai, ed., Zoku zoku gunsho ruiju 1: Jingibu (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1906), 603b.


The word Saiin was used for the institutional office of High Priestess of the Kamo Shrine, for her residence (separate from the shrine itself), and for the woman who occupied that office and that residence. The term will be used herein in a similar manner. In several poems by Senshi and her Saiin companions (for example, Daisain saki no gyōshi nos. 12 and 25; see SKT 3, 279), the priestess's residence is referred to as a yamazato, an isolated mountain dwelling-place. Though conventional, this trope relates the sense of separation and reclusion inherent in Saiin life, and this idea is as suitable in these waka as it is in Uchiko's shi.
are not just a daughter's declaration of affection and respect for her father but also an admission of the Saiin's sense of physical and social isolation. "The emperor praised this poem, and for generations it has been recited with admiration," the Zakki authors report, and then make what at first seems an abrupt shift in topic:

The subject of the taboos (gyokinki) customarily observed by the Kamo priestesses in recognition of the importance of their divine service appears in certain of their writings. Since this country is, originally, a country of kami, the priestesses avoided the very words "Buddha," "Buddhist teachings," and "Buddhist clergy" [Buppōsō], and were so careful about their language that they called the Buddha "Nakago," the sutras "somekami," pagodas "araragi," Buddhist priests "kaminaga" and nuns "mekaminaga," and referred to the Buddhist monk's single daily meal—which the monk calls "toki"—as "katasonae."^4

The purpose of this discussion of verbal taboos and approved euphemisms only becomes clear after what appears to be yet another abrupt shift. The Zakki authors are now ready to introduce their other example of a distinguished Saiin poet, although they have begun to explain her poem even before mentioning her name.

The daughter of the emperor Murakami who served as Saiin was named Senshi Naishinnō. All of the women who served as Saiin were women who were not as yet married. Also, if anything were to mar their purity, they were made to withdraw from service. But this Saiin—perhaps because she understood the will of the kami so well—served for as long as fifty-four years [sic].^5 She keenly sensed the mutability and the transience of this world, but, it is said, she composed the following poem to show that, though she had conceived of a desire for Buddhist enlightenment (Bodaishin o hosshitamaedomo), she still could not bring the Buddha into her life of service to the gods:

\[
\text{omoedomo imu to te iwanu koto nareba} \\
\text{sonata ni mukite ne o nomi zo naku}
\]

Though I think about it, it is taboo, a thing not to be said, and so all that I can do is turn in that direction and weep.\textit{6}

---

4. Zakki, 603b. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.
5. Senshi actually served for fifty-seven years. See below pp. 29, 51–52.
Like Uchiko's *shi*, this is Senshi's most frequently quoted poem, and it lent itself naturally to the *Zakki* authors' attempt to document a tradition of Saiin poetry with just two examples.\(^7\) Also, like Uchiko's *shi*, Senshi's *tanka* also speaks of isolation—in this case, the Saiin's unique isolation from Buddhism, a special problem for the Kamo priestesses of which this poem is perhaps the best emblem. The problem is represented within the poem by the reference to a special rule of abstinence (*imi*) that ostensibly governed habits of speech in the Saiin environment, and the way that the poem is introduced in the *Zakki* is typical of commentaries on it, in that it focuses on this element, the thing that makes the poem unusual and somehow especially representative of the putative Saiin poetic tradition. But for some reason the *Zakki* authors presented the poem without the *kotobagaki* (prose introduction) with which it is almost always encountered and upon which almost all commentaries on the poem depend. The earliest appearance of both the *kotobagaki* and the poem is in the last book ("miscellaneous poems") of *Shika wakashū*, the sixth *chokusenshū*, or imperial anthology of Japanese poetry, compiled by Fujiwara Akisuke between 1151 and 1174, over one hundred years after Senshi's death, where it is presented like this:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Kamo no itsuki to kikoekeru toki ni nishi ni mukaite yoteru} \\
\text{Senshi Naishinnō} \\
\text{omoedomo imu to te iwanu koto nareba} \\
\text{sonata ni mukite ne o nomi zo naku}^8
\end{align*}
\]

Translated, the *kotobagaki* says, "A poem composed while she was Kamo priestess, as she faced west." Twelfth-century readers of *Shika wakashū*, aided by this *kotobagaki* and recognizing the name of the poet that appeared along with it, must have understood this poem readily. Today, a little more explanation is needed in order to understand what is going on here—to understand what the *kotobagaki* and the poem together "tell" us, to perceive what it is that makes the poem a poem, other than its thirty-one-syllable *tanka* form, and to see why discussions of Senshi's Buddhist poetry inevitably begin with this one poem.

\(^7\) There does seem to have been an enduring association between the Kamo cult and the *waka* tradition. The *Kamo Kōtaijingū ki* names Fujiwara Shunzei (1112–1204) as the example of many individuals who received guidance in the "way of Japanese poetry" (*shikishima no michi*) from the Kamo deity, and reports that, in search of fulfillment of his prayer that his descendants might inherit his success in *waka* as art and profession for many generations, he visited and prayed at the Kamo Shrine each day for one thousand days in succession (*Kamo Kōtaijingū ki*, in Hanawa, ed., *Gunshō ruijū* 15, 523).

\(^8\) See SKT 1, 183.
As a unit, the kotobagaki and the poem “tell” us this: at the time of the composition of the poem, the poet, Senshi, a woman of royal birth, was High Priestess of the Kamo Shrines (Kamo no itsuki, i.e., Saiin), an imperial emissary to the native deities, guardian and symbol of the purity of the shrines themselves. And at the moment of the composition of the poem, this woman turned to the west (nishi ni mukaitte), an action immediately recognizable as a gesture of reverence toward Amida Buddha’s Pure Land, the most sought-after afterlife goal of Japanese Buddhists, attainable, according to Amida Buddha’s vows, through sincere expressions of faith in him. The poet then uttered, or silently “thought,” or otherwise composed (yomu) this poem.

The first word of the poem, omoedomo, means, “I think about it, but . . .” or “I yearn for it/ to do it, but . . .” Senshi, thinking about or yearning for the Pure Land, or thinking or yearning for Amida, intends to utter his name, but “to do so [most literally, ‘to utter that name’] is a thing to be abstained from” (imu to te), and so that name, “Amida Buddha,” is “a thing/word (koto) that cannot be spoken.” (As the Zakki authors explained, custom, though not law itself, forbade the utterance of the word “Buddha” [butsu, hotoke], and other defiling words like “to die” [shinu] and “blood” [chi] in the Saiin precincts.) “And so,” says the poem, “since that name is something that cannot be said [iwanu koto nareba], I can do nothing but turn my face in that direction [sonata ni mukite]”—the direction, west (nishi), specified by context, not by word—“and weep [ne o nomi zo naku].”

By itself, for any reader, the meaning of this poem may have been, and may be, hard to grasp. But when read with the kotobagaki or some other gloss, the meaning of its problematic elements—imu to te, sonata ni mukite, ne o nomi zo naku (What word is taboo? Facing which direction? Why the tears?)—and of the poem as a whole becomes almost too obvious. Is this a poem that could only be understood when glossed as it was by the kotobagaki attached to it in the Shika wakashū, or by the explanatory introduction given it by the Zakki authors? Can it now only be understood when glossed as above, or in one or another way that gives it context? Perhaps. What, then, makes it a poem, if its meaning can only be retrieved or reconstructed through these extrinsic appurtenances? (Nothing like such a question may have occurred to the Shika wakashū editor or the Zakki authors, but it is an important question for us.) For one thing, there is its diction, which, besides conveying literal meanings (meanings that may only be retrievable through reliance on the extrinsic appurtenances, as is most obvious in the case of the nonspecific sonata, made specific by the context provided by the kotobagaki, which literally supplies the equivalent nishi), is what makes this a poem like other poems, or at least, a Japanese poem like other Japanese poems. That first word, omoedomo, might be the first word of a love poem—“I yearn for him/ I think about him . . . [but there is some problem or obstacle, he does not come, I
cannot see him]"—but it is not a love poem in the usual sense. The object
yearned for is Amida Buddha, or his Pure Land, or access to them. The
last words of the poem are tautologically poetic, for "ne o naku" is a for-
mulaic substitute for or embellishment of the verb "naku," "weep." The
use of such language is one of the poet's ways of showing that this is a
poem, and that it has something in common with countless other waka in
which "ne o naku" conveys the sorrow of frustrated lovers, homesick trav-
elers, and other mourners.9

What is also poetic—what must have seemed so to the anthologizer,
and what should seem so to us, if we accept what we are told about the
context—is the "fact," documented by both the kotobagaki and the poem
itself, that the poet has expressed herself, about her situation and feelings,
in a poem, using the form of the tanka, and that she has done so in the
kind of language evolved and approved for use in waka by centuries of
tradition. The poet's subject—what she has to say—is not conventionally
the stuff of Japanese verse, but the way she says it is very much so, in fact
very typical of a broad range of poems that express feelings of dissatisfac-
tion, frustration, or inability to achieve objects of desire.10 Whether so
labeled or not, a jukkai ("expressing one's feelings") poem creates its own
context: the poet documents his or her emotional condition, which is the
poem's context, however explicit or inexplicit it may be.

There can be little question that these are her own feelings Senshi is
expressing in this poem, though there is, of course, no word in the poem
that corresponds to the word "I" used in the translation. But beginning as
it does with the verb omou, which tells us that someone is thinking or
feeling something, and ending with the emotive, emphatic ne o nomi zo
naku, the poem is most naturally read as a first-person utterance—or
rather, the readable representation of what ideally could be one. This

9. See, for example, Man'yōshū no. 481, where "ne nomi zo nak[u]" is preceded by a
makurakotoba, "asadori no," suggesting that the poet's cries for his dead wife resemble
those of morning birds, as well as Man'yōshū nos. 897–98, Ise monogatari section 65
("...warekara to ne o koso nakame yo o ba uramiji"—"I grieve that it was my own fault,
and shall not blame the world") or Kokin wakashū no. 536:

Ausaka no yûtsukedori mo waqa gotoshi
hito ya koishi ne nomi nakuran

Is the cock at the Ausaka Barrier crying like that as I do,
out of longing for someone?

These poems are quoted from the editions in the Nihon koten bungaku taikei (hereafter

10. Poems of this conventional type most frequently are complaints about aging or loss of
status. For a discussion of the place of jukkai poems in Heian waka composition, see
reading is further supported (or suggested) by the kotobagaki and the indication of the poet's name, as one reads them together in the anthology: they prompt one to read the poem as not simply some individual person's utterance but as the utterance of a particular person, Senshi, a "she" about whom we can think, speak, and write. She was a woman of high repute in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, a public figure and a literary tastemaker, so to twelfth-century readers the very appearance of her name beside this poem may have been enough to educe certain associations that would strongly color their reading of the poem. Later readers, too, might draw on knowledge of her gained through their reading of other works, especially accounts of her in rekishi-monogatari (semihistorical narratives) and in collections of setsuwa (anecdotal tales), and might bring this knowledge to their reading of the poem, too. In almost every encounter with the poem, the kotobagaki and the author's name would also be there, extrapoetic appurtenances preparing the reading of the poem, making sure that the process of reading it would always be preceded by a fixing in the mind of the reader of the notion that this poem was written by a real, particular, knowable person and that knowledge of this, and of the circumstances in which she wrote it ("Kamo no itsuki to kikoekeru toki ni . . .") was a key to any reading and understanding of the poem itself.

In the Zakki presentation of the poem the poet as historical persona was especially important—perhaps more so than the poem. But quoting the poem's kotobagaki apparently did not serve the Zakki authors' purpose—any more than it did those of the anonymous authors of the much earlier Kamo Kōtaijingū ki. It may be too much to suppose that they perceived that inclusion of the kotobagaki might make the whole quotation incriminating or embarrassing, but there certainly have been those who have read the kotobagaki and the poem in that sort of light. In the late eighteenth century, when Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) read the words "Kamo no itsuki to kikoekeru toki ni . . ." and then read the poem as he found them in Shika wakashū, he expressed great indignation—and almost disgust—at the very idea that Senshi, in these circumstances, should have expressed such sentiments as these in this way. His short essay on Senshi's poem, included in his miscellany Tamakatsuma, is an extended gloss on imu to te, the words in the poem that most need explication, but, as one

11. See the discussion in the prologue, above.
might expect, it is also a complaint against the pollution of Shintō institutions by Buddhism:

In the habitations of the Ise and Kamo priestesses, Buddhism was strictly taboo, and even the utterance of words having anything to do with it was officially forbidden. However, the people of this nation—the high and the low, the wise and the ignorant—all, without exception, believed in the teachings of the Buddha, and it became the custom to make bitter lamentation over the fact that service to the gods was a terribly sinful thing. Now, in order to serve the gods with true devotion, such resentment should not have been entertained under any circumstances, but this turning to the west in tears was an unspeakable abomination [iwanu kata naki magakoto ni zo arikeru]. In outward appearance she was devoted to the divine ancestral gods, but the heart within her was devoted exclusively to Amida. Even if she nurtured such sentiments in her heart, since there was this strict official prohibition, she should not have revealed her feelings in poetry. And even if she did compose such poems, she certainly should not have told anyone about them. How ashamed she must have been!

It would have been one thing, in Norinaga’s view, if Senshi had kept her yearning within her heart (onkokoro no uchi), but she went too far when she voiced that yearning in this poem. Norinaga equated the act of composition with an act of communication, “telling others about it” (hito ni katari), “revealing it in [the composition of] a poem” (uta nado ni yomiarawashitamau). An inside-outside dialectic is also at work in his description of Senshi, with her “outward appearance” (onkatachi) as a servant of the gods concealing the devotion to Amida that she nurtured in her heart (onkokoro). But, in his view, the time-honored justification of poetry as a means for releasing to the outside world that which would otherwise be pent up inside is not to be extended to Senshi if it is this kind of thing that she had to express. The conventions of poetic confession, in Norinaga’s view, have allowed Senshi to admit to feelings that she should have kept to herself.

Still, Norinaga is willing to excuse this hypocritical trespass against official strictures (omoki imashime) as an act of conformity with societal norms, misbegotten though they may have been, and he wonders if the gods themselves would not have been equally forgiving:

13. Ibid., 91–92.
PART ONE

But this princess was not the only one to err in this way. Even the wisest of people thought it was a splendid thing to ignore the gods and revere and practice the teachings of the Buddha exclusively, for it was the custom in that society to say and think that this Buddhism was a means by which one might learn sensitivity [kokoro fukaku aware naru waza]. Now, this princess was known as "Daisaiin" because she served as priestess through five reigns, from that of Emperor En’yū, in the Ten’en era, to that of Goichijō, in the Chōgen era, until she was close to the age of seventy. Given the customs of that time, it was perfectly reasonable for her to be terribly distressed by the fact that she was unable to practice the way of the Buddha until she had reached that advanced age. But surely the gods, acknowledging her long, untiring service to them, would have taken pity on this princess who gave so much of her heart to the Buddha [nakago ni onkokoro yosete] and "turned to the west to weep," for they would have seen that this was the custom of her time. Or perhaps all this, too, was the doing of those mischief-makers among the gods [magatsubi no kami].

So this magagoto, a perverse act, may really have been the work of magatsubi no kami, wayward spirits leading Senshi astray. Thus, Norinaga generously suggests that this otherwise admirable woman may not herself have been responsible for this one reprehensible act that happens to be recorded in a kotobagaki and poem in Shika wakashū. In fact, his main object in this essay in Tamakatsuma would appear to have been to use the poem as an example of the kind of syncretic religious practices and attitudes of which he took such a dim view (underscored by his use of the conventional euphemism when referring to Senshi’s devotion to the Buddha) rather than to comment on the poem itself or on the poet.

We may be tempted to take Norinaga to task for the biases and anachronisms in this analysis, and other critics have done so. But what we must notice first is that his reading of the poem takes its cue entirely from the kotobagaki: the information that it gives him is ineluctable, and what he does say about the poem is as much a commentary on the kotobagaki as it is a commentary on the poem itself. There may have been no other way that he could have read the poem, since it came to him equipped with this information—information that put him on the offensive so far as the poem was concerned, even before he read the poem itself. And there may have

14. Ibid.

been other factors that set his mind against the poem: it is not unlikely, for instance, that Norinaga’s encounter with the poem would have been influenced by what Kitamura Kigin (1624–1705) had to say about it in his annotated edition of *Shika wakashū* (in *Hachidaishū sho*). Kigin’s headnote was also essentially an informative gloss on *imu to te*, but it was far less judgmental: “In Shintō, Buddhism is taboo; the scriptures and the Buddhas, for example, are called *somekami* and *nakago*. Since, therefore, she could not perform the *nenbutsu*, she just turned toward the west and sat facing it, weeping.” This comment, too, is launched by the indication in the *kotobagaki* that the poem was written “while she was Kamo Priestess”: that historical and situational context serves as the key to the meaning of *imu to te*, the part of the poem that both Kigin and Norinaga felt most compelled to explain. (Actually, Kigin’s examples of euphemisms employed in place of certain Buddhist words are rather tangential.) But without the *kotobagaki* and such other knowledge as they may have had about the author of the poem, one wonders, would Kigin have explained *imu to te* in quite this way, and would Norinaga have been likely to have taken any notice of this poem at all? The power of a *kotobagaki* to steer interpretation in one direction or another is not to be underestimated, nor is the way that it can interact with such predispositions as the reader may bring to the reading of a poem.

Anthologies of Japanese poetry would no doubt be harder to read, and perhaps far less interesting, without *kotobagaki*, and the role that they play in the reading of poems is one that bears close examination. The *kotobagaki* attached to poems in the selective anthologies (*chokusenshū* and other *senshū*), beginning with the *Man’yōshū*, ostensibly inform the reader about some aspect of the moments in which the poems they introduce were conceived and created. Many *kotobagaki* are relatively explicit about time, place, and person (even when they simply identify the particular *utaawase*, or poetry contest, or other occasion on which the poem was composed, or simply name the topic), whereas these matters generally have no place in the poems themselves; the rarefied diction of *waka* for the most part precludes them. But the compilers of the selective anthologies—in some cases, though not always, the authors of the *kotobagaki*—expected their readers to read the *kotobagaki* and the poems together as units consisting of two parts in which two different kinds of language record and convey both “historical” information and “lyrical”

---


17. Ibid., vol. 2, 295.
expression about events or experiences that are thus presented as "real," even if they are but partially so. Even when a poem was recited from memory, in isolation from its kotobagaki, the unuttered kotobagaki attached to it in the anthology from which it was learned must have done much to shape the reciter's comprehension of the meaning of the poem and his or her nostalgic (and often imaginary) impression of the original poet's sentiments and circumstances at the moment of composition.

Once anthologized and equipped with kotobagaki, poems became virtually inseparable from the temporal and situational contexts thereby provided for them. The poem could no longer be read (if it ever could be) simply as language at play (or, perhaps we should say, at work) in the expression of feeling, sensation, or comprehension. It was now a record of the "fact" of its own composition, an historical artifact (which is one of the things it may have been in the first place). The equipping of the poem with such an apparatus was part of the historical process whereby poems became coated with layered effects of the many acts of reading, interpretation, classification, and annotation performed on them. Recollection and recitation of, or allusion to, any given poem thus invariably involves the recollection and reiteration of the many-layered appurtenance which that poem bears. The evocation of nostalgic sentiment through such recollection was always and still is one of the primary objectives of that recollection; another might be the creation of a new poem, the language and sentiments of which would be linked to those of the recollected poem. The value of such recollection, then, was positive, though often bittersweet; the Japanese word aware, with all its ambiguity, may be the word that best describes the emotional force of such acts of recollection and recreation.

A great part of the nostalgia involved in these acts would focus on the person of the poet, no matter how obscure or fictitious. The creation or recreation of a sense that he or she was at one time in such circumstances—physical, social, psychological—as described in greater or lesser detail in the kotobagaki, and that he or she thereby or therefore was moved to write the poem that follows, is the very object of the writing of the kotobagaki itself. When the poet's name is included, a creator's persona emerges in sharper focus, but even when the poet is unknown and unnameable—yomibito shirazu, as the anthologizers are so often compelled to record where they would otherwise wish to record a name for that persona—he or she is still a presence, however empty or anonymous, in the presentation of the poem. To say that the name of the poet is not known by no means lessens the power of the suggestion that there was a poet who wrote the poem and who could at least potentially be named if known, and the willingness to record the words yomibito shirazu in place of the poet's name indicates how important such naming was to the anthologizers.
So the account of a compositional context and motive and the attribution of the act of composition to some individual that are provided for in *kotobagaki* do more than make the poem and its creation an historical event; they also enhance the aware aspect of the experience of reading the poem by suggesting that it is a record of a recollectable, memorable experience, perhaps fleeting or even mundane but significant enough for the poet to have moved him or her to compose the poem, through which the reader can even now recollect the sentiments or sensations of that moment. A recollected sense of the historical moment of composition, the compositional motive, and the relationship of the poem to a persona and to that persona’s experience are all loaded into the reading of the poem as soon as the *kotobagaki* has been read, and it is thus that it intercedes between the reader and the poem to shape the reading of the poem. For Kigin and Norinaga, the *kotobagaki* to the "omoedomo" poem interceded in a way that determined in great part the way that they commented on it. Their commentaries, of course, reflected the way that they read not just the poem but the *kotobagaki*, the poet’s name, and the poem together as one historico-literary unit.

Documentation of the moment, motive for, and agent of composition is also the function of many of the *kotobagaki* written into the so-called *shikashū*, the comprehensive collections of the works of individual poets or groups of poets associated with certain individuals. In some of the *shikashū* the *kotobagaki* and poems can be read sequentially as chronicles of series of events across a span of time, with the poems composed in response to those events; thus, the poems are presented as lyrical responses to the events recorded historically in the *kotobagaki*. In some “group” *shikashū*, the *kotobagaki* and the series of poet’s names that follow them, along with their poems, allow the reader to sense that he or she is recollecting a set of lyrical responses to a given circumstance experienced by multiple personae. The compositional act thus recorded is a collective one, a social phenomenon, and the nostalgia evoked by the reading of such sets of poems arises from the sharing of an experience that is not just two-dimensional, between poet and reader, but three-dimensional, between the composer of a single poem, the group of poets who all composed poems in the same circumstances, and the reader, who is witness to the record of that experience. Of the three *shikashū* associated with Senshi, two are collective, while the third, *Hosshin wakashū*, appears to be entirely of her own composition but addresses a collective readership.¹⁸

---

¹⁸. Texts of all three collections—Daisaiin saki no gyoshū, Daisaiin gyoshū and HSWKS—may be found in SKT 3, 279–92.
The "omoedomo" poem, however, is not to be found in any of the three shikashu to which Senshi is a major contributor, so there is not even this means for corroborating the historical/situational context that has been provided for it in the Shika wakashū kotobagaki. Although the poem appears nowhere earlier than in Shika wakashū, a work compiled over a century after Senshi's death, that does not necessarily mean that Akisuke was the author of the kotobagaki, but it does appear that he or some other collector or editor of poems felt it appropriate to append this explanatory note in order to help the reader make one particular kind of reading of the poem. We have seen the effect of this on Kigin and Norinaga: it gave them a key to the problems of the poem, but left certain questions for them to clarify, and in so doing they drew a picture of the poet's state of mind at the time of composition that is, in its concreteness, almost more potent than the poem alone can be. What emerges, through the combined agency of kotobagaki, poem, and commentary, is an image of a woman overwhelmed by internal conflict, torn between her responsibilities to one religious institution and her inclination to devote herself to another. This may be an accurate image, though perhaps a bit too highly colored. But what the Kigin and Norinaga commentaries overlook, in their search for a fuller understanding of the poem through a sense of its historical and situational context and their inevitable drive toward the personification of the poet through the agency of the poem, is the poetic character of the poem itself.

This has also been the tendency in modern analysis of Senshi's other Buddhist poems, the poems for which she is best known, and particularly in discussions of her unique cycle, Hosshin wakashū. In it, Senshi's poems can at least potentially be read as one imagines she intended them to be read, for her presentation of them would seem not to have been altered in any significant way by later editors or kotobagaki authors. But there is a preface, ostensibly by Senshi herself, to be read as one might read a kotobagaki for an understanding of the poet's attitude toward her work, her purpose in creating it, and some of the circumstances of its composition; and, alongside each of the fifty-five poems in the cycle, where kotobagaki might otherwise be found, there are instead fifty-five passages from Buddhist scripture, serving as topic-lines (daï), each one the basis or point of reference for the poem that follows it. The problems involved in reading and understanding this work overlap in certain ways with those encountered in reading and understanding the "omoedomo" poem: again, there is a special kind of compositional moment and motive that at least partially explains itself, language both conventional and unconventional to poetry to be accounted for, and a realm of subject and image not central to the waka tradition, though certainly a part of it. But there is also the relationship of the two kinds of text—the Buddhist passages, recorded in Chinese, and the poem-texts, in metrical Japanese, written in mixed
script—to be puzzled out. The relationship of each scriptural text to each poem-text is partially analogous to the relationship between kotobagaki in anthologies (particularly those that simply name the topic) and the poems they introduce: in both cases, two different kinds of text, inscribed for different purposes, are paired and presented to be read as interacting segments of independent units arranged to be read in a series of such units. In Hosshin wakashū, however, the two texts are perhaps more structurally independent than they are in most kotobagaki and waka pairs, since the quotations from Buddhist scripture and the poems are not bound by any sort of syntactic links between them. And the combined impact of topic-text and poem in Hosshin wakashū is also something very different from the historical, personifying, contextualizing effect of kotobagaki-and-poem units in the anthologies. In Hosshin wakashū, Senshi explored the effects of the combination of particular kinds of texts as part of a creative exercise for which she claimed (explicitly in the preface, implicitly in the poems themselves) still other goals—religious goals, to be sure, but goals that were by no means divorced from her literary concerns. One effect of this combination of two kinds of text is the suggestion of a kind of dialogue between them, or rather, a series of dialogues in which several voices participate. These voices are encountered successively by the reader as the cycle of poems unfolds and the poet formulates a response to each in yet another voice, that of the "poem-speaker." The effect is analogous to that achieved by the reading of a series of poems on the same topic or related topics presented as the work of different poets in the selective anthologies; here, however, the reader understands that a single poet is the manipulator of the poem-speaker's voice, shifting it from position to position as her reading and interpretation of the succession of

19. Many kotobagaki that identify the topic of a given poem end with the attributive "X o yomeru," indicating that "what follows is a poem written [when so-and-so composed it] on the topic 'X.'" In many kotobagaki and other prose narrative introductions to all manner of poems, a pattern like "Y ni yomeru" is employed to indicate various aspects of the circumstances (place, time, social situation) of composition, or a cause and effect relationship between conditions described and poem yielded is indicated by a definite conditional, such as "Z o mireba" ("when he/she saw 'Z'") or "A o kikeba" ("when he/she heard 'A'").

20. One aspect of these dialogues that cannot be sufficiently explored here is their aural character, that is, the ways in which the sounds produced by an oral reading of the scriptural passages (in Sino-Japanese) may be responded to, imitated, or contrasted in the sounds produced by an oral reading of the poems paired with them. If enough were known about the precise manner of pronunciation of such scriptural texts by Heian readers, their aural character could be compared with the phonological characteristics of the poems. Roy Andrew Miller has called for such analyses of aural patterns in waka studies (see his review article, "No Time for Literature," Journal of the American Oriental Society 107.4 [October-December 1987]: 745–60), but no such studies have appeared as of this writing.
PART ONE

Topic-texts shifts and turns, often finding ways to suggest that more than one kind of voice could be “speaking” a given poem. The poem-speaker frequently does voice sentiments that we can identify with Senshi, as we think we know her, but the poem-speaker’s voice is really a voice that Senshi creates, or recreates, in each poem, casting it in various roles as the manner of her response to each passage takes shape. Most marked among these shifts are those from grave doubts about the speaker’s capacity to attain salvation, to certainty that she will, and then again to doubt. Such vacillation may have plagued the real Senshi, but in the cycle it is imposed upon and expressed by the poem-speaker—an anonymous, though in some poems not a genderless, identity—who, moreover, expresses her vacillations and other sentiments variously as reiteration, reinterpretation, or, in some cases, as challenge to the voice or voices in the scriptural passages. None of the poems is simply a translation from the Chinese to the Japanese: in each, something has been added, emphasized, shifted, recast, or redirected, so that while each poem appears to have been crafted to display its links to its topic-text, each one emerges from that text to stand alongside it as a wholly new and decidedly different utterance.

For these and other reasons, an encounter with the cycle of Buddhist poems in Hosshin wakashū, while raising many of the same questions, is very different from an encounter with the “omoedomo” poem as presented in the Zakki by mid-Tokugawa shrine officials or as Kigin and Norinaga encountered it in its Shika wakashū setting. There, those readers read the poem as the utterance of one voice, which they could not think of as that of anyone but Senshi’s, and they reacted to the poem accordingly. In Hosshin wakashū, the reader confronts a complex text in which multiple voices engage in a constantly shifting discourse. The challenge to the reader is to trace the ways that the poet, Senshi, shaped that discourse, using the language and rhetorical conventions of waka to form “new” utterances that interact with the utterances she took or received from scripture. What we know about her—particularly, what we can learn about her as a poet—helps meet that challenge, but it is the text itself that says the most about itself.

The Zakki introduction and the Shika wakashū kotobagaki to the “omoedomo" poem inevitably direct consideration of the poem’s literary character to questions about the poet herself—her social and official position, her state of mind, the meaning of the utterance that she is supposed to have made when she faced toward the west and away from her responsibilities as Kamo priestess. Pondering these things gives a certain kind of depth to the understanding of the poem derived thereby, but it is an understanding that depends largely on the consideration of matters that are extraneous to the poem. Kigin’s and Norinaga’s commentaries, which do focus on the words imu to te in the poem, and the Zakki introduction, which addresses the same problem, all inevitably direct a reader to the
consideration of extrapoetic matters. Perhaps such tendencies in commentary on certain poems are inescapable; indeed, there is surely no reason to erase all consideration of a poet's circumstances and motives from an analysis of that poet's poetry—at least not in cases where something about those circumstances and motives can be described with some accuracy. (Of course this is not always the case.) But the consideration of the literary character of a poem or group of poems should not stop there. There needs to be, at the same time, a consideration of the poem or poems themselves, not only as historical artifacts but as complex works in which language has been used in special ways to produce special literary effects. A real woman, with motives and goals of which she was highly conscious, wrote *Hosshin wakashū*, and no discussion of that work can ignore this woman and the motives she had for writing it. But such knowledge of her circumstances and motives as we may be able to obtain will be most useful if it helps us to understand Senshi's Buddhist poems as literary works—to deepen our understanding of her use of the language of poetry—rather than as elements of what can only be a fragmentary reconstruction of her biography.

Daughter, sister, and aunt of emperors, the imperial princess Senshi (964–1035) served for fifty-seven years, through five reigns, as High Priestess of the Kamo Shrine (*Saiin*). The Heian populace came to know her as the gracious and stately personage who appeared year after year as the chief officiant of the annual Kamo festivals, while in royal and aristocratic circles she was recognized as the centerpiece of a literary salon that was at least as prestigious as those headed by the most powerful women of the imperial court. She came to be known as *Daisaiin*, "the Great Kamo Priestess," but her public and private expressions of faith in Buddhism were as well known and as highly praised as was her long service at the shrine of the native gods. The late Heian- or early Kamakura-period author of a story about her, which is to be found in the collection of historical and semihistorical tales known as the *Kohon setsuwa shū*, wrote, "Though Buddhism was taboo for the Ise and Kamo priestesses, this *Saiin* revered Buddhism, and it was reported that she prayed and chanted every morning without fail and intoned the *Lotus Sutra* before an image of Amida all day long."21 Ōkagami and other sources relate that in the very midst of the Kamo festivities she directly addressed the viewing multitudes, encouraging one and all to strive together with her for Buddhahood ("Sanagara tomo

ni hotoke to naramu”).

And, in the cycle of poems composed in the autumn of 1012, which she called *Hosshin wakashū* (“A Collection of Japanese Poems for the Awakening of Faith”), she transformed a series of passages selected from the texts of Buddhist scripture into expressions of her own desire, and that of other women, for salvation.

She seems to have done so in the belief that the act of creating such poems—the application of the skills she had learned through the study and practice of secular verse to the composition of a devotional work—was the most meaningful demonstration of piety that she could make. The preface to *Hosshin wakashū* offers an explicit (and rather conventional) prayer, ostensibly Senshi’s own, that the merit earned through this creative act of devotion may be shared by all those who might read the work, which would offer them the revered words of scriptures together with original poems expressing the poet’s understanding of and reaction to those words. It was perfectly fitting that the language and forms of secular poetry should become Senshi’s vehicle for this endeavor, for it was to the cultivation of that language that she and the women who lived with her in the Kamo priestess’s official residence at Murasakino devoted much of their energies. She trained them, and trained herself, in the use of that language as an intense means for communicating among themselves and for sharing their sensibilities with the world outside the Saiin precincts; her use of that same language in the poems of *Hosshin wakashū* showed that the act of creating it was part of, not separate from, her other acts of poem making and poem sharing.

Over five hundred of the poems that Senshi and the women who lived with her at Murasakino wrote—examples of the kind of literary activity that established the Saiin’s reputation for elegance and refinement, but only a fraction of the many thousands of poems that must have been written during Senshi’s residence there—are preserved in two collections, *Daisaiin saki no gyoshū* and *Daisaiin gyoshū*, which include poems from 984–86 and 1014–19, respectively. The informal chronologies and compositional pretexts and contexts established by the *kotobagaki* in these
two collections make it possible to read these, like some other shikashū, as "poetic diaries" of these two periods. They also show how Senshi and her companions went about the writing of poetry, composing in a whole gamut of modes and moods, employing a range of strategies to suit such opportunities for poem making as might present themselves: ritual occasions, visits and communications from distinguished personages of the court and personal friends, partings and homecomings, and many instances in which the composing of poems was an almost spontaneous reaction to minute seasonal changes in the Saiin environment. On most such occasions, more than one person, often including Senshi herself, took part in the poem making, and the comparison of their poems among themselves, and the discussion of the merits or faults of each composition, must have filled many of the days and nights that these women spent in the Murasaki no mansion, waiting patiently for the months to pass between the Kamo festivals.

The lexical and rhetorical range of the poems these women produced is, as may be expected, rather comparable to the range of the poetry in the Kokin wakashū and the subsequent anthologies that adhered closely to its standards; and it will come as no surprise to find that the poems in Hosshin wakashū also employ essentially that same vocabulary (except, and it is an important exception, where new language is introduced into the discourse from the scriptural topic-texts), exercise the same rhetorical repertoire, and depend on the same shared understanding of what certain elements of the symbolic language of waka meant and how those elements should be used in waka. It was this kind of poem making, thoroughly ensconced within its tradition and conscious of being part of it, of which Senshi was regarded as a master; it was this that she practiced, in all her compositions, including Hosshin wakashū, and it was this that she shared with her protégées, in that particular work as in all her others.

A few samples from the Saiin collections may provide a good illustration of the kind of art cultivated by the Saiin poets, and will prepare us to
see how closely the poems in *Hosshin wakashū* are linked to those traditions of secular verse that governed their activities in other compositional settings. The *kotobagaki* of poem 39 in *Daisaiin gyoshu* introduces it as one Senshi sent to an absent attendant, “Kodaifu,” on a night when a bright moon was intermittently obscured by clouds (*tsuki no kumorimi harezumi suru hodo ni*), and hence unable to fulfill its most conventional *waka* role, that of nocturnal companion:

*kumogakure sayaka ni mien tsuki kage ni*  
machimi matazumi hito zo koishiki

The moon obscured by clouds (*kumogakure . . .*) sheds a light (*tsuki kage*) that barely allows the poem-speaker to see into the night (*sayaka ni mienu, “I cannot see it [the moon] clearly”*; nevertheless, she peers into the darkness, waiting for the reappearance of the moon from behind the clouds, then giving up in impatience, then looking out in hope again (*machimi matazumi, “waiting, then not waiting”*). Similarly, she waits anxiously for the return of the absent Kodaifu, yearning for her companionship (*hito zo koishiki*) as much as or perhaps even more than for that of the unhelpful moon. The juxtaposition of a similar construction in the *kotobagaki* (*kumorimi harezumi, “the moon clouding over, and not clearing”*) in the setting of the scene accentuates the sense of the discomfiture of the moment and the reflexive relationship between the moon, here a failed companion, and Kodaifu, an absent one. The language of this poem overtly imitates that of a poem attributed to Hitomaro in *Shūi wakashū*—

*mikazuki no sayaka ni miezu*  
kumogakure mimakuzohoshiki utate kono goro

_I cannot see the crescent moon clearly,  
for it is hidden in the clouds, and I do so wish to see it;  
what a trying time this is!_  

—but it is also allied with countless poems in which the obscured moon represents a deceased or otherwise absent sovereign or other beloved person for whom the poem-speaker pines, as in Ariwara Narihira’s allegorical poem (said to have been composed on a hunting expedition when his sovereign retired early in the evening)—

25. SKT 3, 289. The poem also appears as a “miscellaneous” poem in *Gyokuyō wakashū* (no. 2492), with a slightly revised *kotobagaki* (SKT 1, 474).

26. SKT 1, 81.
The moon hides so soon, before we have seen enough of it?
Let the peaks retreat and refuse to let it sink behind them!

—in which it is the mountains on the horizon (rather than clouds) that block the view of the yearned-for “companion.” In *Hosshin wakashū* no. 12, prompted by a scriptural text on “inviting the Buddhas to remain in this world,” Senshi pleads with another symbolic moon “not to hide itself amidst the clouds” (*kumogakuresede*) but to continue to shed its light on those who look up to it. (Here, “*kumogakuru*” reverberates with another of its meanings, “to die” [particularly of exalted personages, such as sovereigns, as well as loved ones].)

On another night, one on which the full moon shone in all its splendor (*tsuki no kumanaki akaki ni*), another absent attendant, “Taifu,” was sent this poem by her colleague “Ukon” (*Daisaiin gyoshū* no. 121; the poem also appears as an autumn poem in *Fūga wakashū* [599], where it is attributed to Senshi)—

```
kokoro sumu aki no tsuki dani nakariseba
nani o ukiyo no nagusame ni semu
```

Were there not at least this autumn moon that calms the heart, what would be my solace in this sad life?

—a suggestion that, in Taifu’s absence, the luminous moon will serve amply as substitute and solacing companion. This poem employs a rhetorical structure much like Narihira’s famed

```
yo no naka ni taete sakura no nakariseba
haru no kokoro wa nodokekaramashi
```

Were there no cherry blossoms in this world, how calm springtime hearts would be!

as does *Hosshin wakashū* poem 33. Taifu’s response (*Daisaiin gyoshū* no. 122) to Ukon is a claim to the same moon as her own substitute companion:

---

27. *Kokin wakashū* no. 884; *Ise monogatari* section 82.
28. SKT 1, 566.
29. *Kokin wakashū* no. 53.
kaze ni sou mugura no toko no hitorine mo
tsuki yori hoka no nagusame zo naki

For one who sleeps alone on a windblown pallet of grass, there is no solace other than the moon.

The unmistakably erotic subtext of this exchange is part of its poetic character: the two women are playing with images and sentiments that, in another context, would readily be read as explicit tropes of sexual desire—and in Hosshin wakashū, those same tropes are transferred to poems expressing the poet’s desire for “light” from a Buddha whose guidance and companionship she passionately craves.

In Daisaiin saki no gyōshū (nos. 316–22), still another moonlit night is the setting for a whole series of poems exchanged between some Saiin women and some male intruders from the outer world, and once more the moon becomes the focus of their interplay. A certain captain, visiting these precincts secretly (shinoburu Chūjō) tries to get the attention of the ladies inside the mansion with another mimicking of Narihira’s “yo no naka ni . . .,”

naka naka ni koyoi no tsuki no nakariseba
If there were no such moon as this tonight . . .,
to which one “Shin” rejoins from within,

sora ni kokoro no ukabamashiya
would my heart be floating up there in the sky?

—that is, “My heart has gone aloft to be with the moon, but perhaps there is someone else who seeks my company tonight!” The banter initiated by this exchange continues in verse until the somber bell of the nearby Urin’in monastery interrupts, whereupon the Captain soberly intones,

sayo fukete kaze ni tagueru kane no oto wa
mono omou hito no mi ni zo shimikeru

The night deepens, and the sound of the bell carried on the wind sinks into the very body of this man who is deep in his own thoughts.

at which point the bell is proposed as the topic for still more poems, and both visitors and visited respond to the call.30 Here we see yet another of

30. I am indebted to Robert N. Huey for his suggestions concerning the English rendering of this and the preceding poem.
the strategies the Saiin denizens employed in their gentle games of poetry, the very common one of composing on preselected topics (daiei). Elsewhere in *Daisaiin saki no gyoshu* we see Senshi asking her companions to compose poems on the exceptional appearance of the moon when it shines briefly through a gap in the clouds on a rainy night (no. 116), or, during a Koshin vigil, on the softness of autumn moonlight in a cloudless sky (nos. 365–66). On another occasion (nos. 330–32) she assigns the task of embedding a certain word—a conventional practice, producing poems of the kind classified as *mono no na* ("names of things") in the selective anthologies—but the word to be embedded is *kitsune* ("fox"), a word and topic rarely encountered in the canons of Japanese verse. *Daisaiin saki no gyoshu* also has poems on such unconventional topics as "the crying of the makuramushi" ("pillow bug"?, nos. 181–85) and a long series on the rare sight of tubs, called both *yubune* and *amabune* (the latter also suggesting "a fisherman’s boat" as well as "a nun’s boat"), set out to catch rain when it leaks through the roof of the Murasakino mansion (nos. 158–68).

*Hosshin wakashū* is obviously a special variant of this kind of topical composition, but in that instance Senshi set her topics for herself by selecting (or having someone select for her) a series of passages from the Chinese translations of the Buddhist scriptures. The fifty-five poems in *Hosshin wakashū* thus are examples of *kudai*, composition on quotations (especially quotations in Chinese), another conventional mode that is itself a variant of *daiei*. In Ōe Chisato’s *Kudai waka* (also known as *Chisato shū*), the earliest example of a collection of Japanese *kudai* poems (composed in 894 or 897), the *ku* (quoted lines of poetry) that constitute the *dai*

---


32. On a Koshin night, various entertainments—including collective poetry composition and other games—were devised in order to help the participants stay awake until dawn and thus to prevent the “three worms” (sanshi) believed to reside within the body from escaping while one slept. Were they to escape, they might report one’s evil deeds to the celestial gods of judgment, as a result of which one’s life span might be drastically shortened. For a study of Koshin beliefs and cults, see Kubo Noritada, *Koshin shinkō* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1956, reprinted 1971).

Using *kotobagaki* and poems from *Daisaiin gyoshū* and other *shikashu*, Hagitani Boku has reconstructed four *utaawase* held at the Saiin at various times during Senshi’s residence, three of which appear to have derived their central topic (*dai*) from a concurrent object-contest (*mono awase*): in the Kanna era (985–87) there was a “firefly contest” (*hotaru awase*) and an “insect contest” (*makewaza mushi awase*) during a Koshin vigil in the eighth month, and in the seventh month of 1017 there was a “grass contest” (*kusa awase*). See Hagitani Boku, ed., *Heianchō utaawase taisei*, 10 vols. (Kyoto: Dōmeisha, reprinted 1979), vol. 2, 625–26, and vol. 3, 745–46.
are all from secular Chinese poems (by Bai Juyi and others). There are examples of *kudai* poems in several other anthologies which suggest that this was a favored device whereby the topics of certain poetry matches (*utaawase*) were set. *Wakan rōeishū*, compiled in 1018 by Fujiwara Kintō (966–1041) is a collection of poems and parts of poems, both Chinese and Japanese, familiar at that time and frequently chanted to musical tunes, but its classification system, which groups pairs and series of "songs" as variations on given topics and on one another, also must have made it useful as a kind of handbook of topical composition in conventional modes and of *kudai* composition in particular.

*Hosshin wakashū* is an extended exercise in *kudai* composition engaged in neither playfully nor competitively but as a professed act of devotion. Its seriousness is established in its preface and is sustained throughout the cycle, lightened occasionally when Senshi senses the potential for amusing play between her scriptural topic-texts and her own poems. Most of the passages selected as topics for *Hosshin wakashū* are from verse-passages in the scriptures, but a few are prose. Among the topic-passages are twenty-eight from each of the chapters of the *Lotus Sutra*—the text to which she was reported to have been so particularly devoted—and Senshi's twenty-eight poems on them are among the earliest known examples of this particular form of devotion to that text. Fujiwara Kintō and the poetess known as Akazome Emon (active 957 or 964–1041) are two contemporaries of Senshi's who also wrote sets of verses on passages from each chapter of the *Lotus*, called *nijūhappon no uta*, which survive intact. Kintō's set is believed to have been composed in about 1002, as one of several sets commissioned by Senshi's powerful cousin Fujiwara Michinaga (966–1027) in connection with memorial services for his late sister, the dowager empress Higashi Sanjōin. In a preface to these sets of *nijūhappon no uta*, Fujiwara Arikuni (943–1011) named the Nara monk Gyōki (688–749) and the *Kokinshū* poets Henjō (816–90) and Sosei (fl. ca. 859–963), also monks, as forerunners in a tradition linking Buddhism and *waka*, but he noted that "no one has as yet used the *Lotus Sutra* as topic-

35. In SKT 3, 305–6, 322–26. The poems are preceded by the titles of the chapters of the *Lotus Sutra*, as *dai*; the specific passages alluded to are not reproduced, as they are in *HSWKs*. 
texts (imada Hokekyō o motte dai to seshi mono wa arazaru nari).”

Thus, Arikuni declares the sets composed by Kintō and his peers—the others were offered by Fujiwara Tadanobu, Minamoto Toshikata, and Fujiwara Yukinari—to be the first of their kind. All four poets (known collectively as the “Four Counselors” of the court of Emperor Ichijō and admired for their literary and administrative skills) were, as Arikuni noted, longtime retainers as well as relatives of the late empress and her brother. Akazome Emon was also in Michinaga’s family service. So Senshi’s own nijūhappon no uta series in Hosshin wakashū appears to be an example of a devotional literary form invented by others in her proximate social sphere not long before she herself adopted it.

Her twenty-eight Lotus poems, however, are framed by additional poems on the so-called “opening” and “closing” sutras (the Muryōgikyō and the Kanfugengyō) of the Lotus triad (Hokke sanbukyō) and are embedded within a compositional project of still larger proportions, in which many other scriptural sources are drawn upon in a parallel manner. In each of these fifty-five encounters between scriptural and waka texts we see part of a process of appropriation of waka diction, rhetoric, and symbol systems into religiously oriented contexts, as well as the incorporation of new or newly recast motifs and topoi introduced from the scriptural texts.
into the *waka* lexicon. The Buddhist scriptures to which Senshi turned her attention are extremely rich in figural and decorative language, tending particularly to floral and aquatic imagery that, as it happens, is frequently analogous to and easily assimilated in the conventional image systems of *waka*. Simile and metaphor are fundamental elements of scriptural rhetoric, as are hyperbole, pattern repetition, and, of course, parallelism, and this is particularly so in verse-passages (*gātha*), from which, not surprisingly, most of the *Hosshin wakashū* topic-passages are taken and which, thus extracted, provide much that can be readily imitated or reflected in the *waka* made to stand beside them. Some of these features were already organic elements of *waka*, but the special compositional situation that Senshi created for herself in undertaking the *Hosshin wakashū* project also allowed her to test the ways that the language of scripture might act upon the style and substance of her own verse.

*Hosshin wakashū* has been deemed the earliest independent collection of *Shakkyōka* (“poems on the teachings of the Buddha”) by a single poet—in contrast to the “Buddhist poems” selected from the works of various poets found in groups in some anthologies—by those who have considered its devotional nature and its *kudai* form as hallmarks of that genre, most descriptions of which de-emphasize the relationship that such poems may bear to those in the corpus that are not so labeled. The classifying label “*Shakkyōka*” was first employed as a subsection title in the miscellaneous section of *Goshūi wakashū*, the fourth imperial collection of poetry, compiled in the latter half of the eleventh century (1075–86).

---

41. In the analysis of the *HSWKS* poems that follows, we shall pay special attention to the ways that Senshi handles such elements of the *waka* lexicon as the poetic language of “meeting” (various forms of the verb *au*, in nos. 16, 26, 32, 35, 49, 51, and 52); “seeing” (*miru*, *miyu*, in nos. 18, 20, 40, and 41); and “seeking” (*tazunu*, *motomu*, in nos. 24, 25, and 31); the significances of “dream” (*yume*, in nos. 13, 25, 50) and of such old forms as the *makurakotoba* “kagerō no” (no. 42); and the symbolism of falling flowers (no. 41) and the seasonal and other associations of the imagery of “dew” (*tsuyu*, in nos. 28, 30, and 53), as occasions for their use are prompted by various elements of the scriptural topic-texts. We shall also see how some of those texts tested her ingenuity as poem-maker with their presentation of such special (and not inherently *waka*-like) topics as the obstructions that bar women from Buddhahood and the related idea of gender transformation (nos. 1, 2, 16, 36, 47, 48), and how she is prompted by those texts to manipulate such ubiquitous and potent *waka* images as the moon (*tsuki*) and the traveler’s path (*michi*) in specific ways.

42. This is the case with Ishihara Kiyoshi’s *Shakkyōka no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Dômeisha, 1980), which is nevertheless an extremely useful study of a large number of poems. Ishihara limits his discussion of *Shakkyōka* to poems so classified in the *chosuenshū*, an approach that sidesteps the issue of what does or does not distinguish these poems from other *waka* other than the fact that they have been thus classified by anthologizers.

43. See Morrell, “The Buddhist Poetry in the *Goshūishū*,” 89–90.
Then, beginning with the Senzai wakashū, the seventh anthology, compiled in 1183–87, Shakkyōka were allotted a separate section in most subsequent anthologies. The designation “Shakkyōka” was and has been applied to almost any poem that has anything to do with Buddhism, so it labels many poems that, were it not for this particular topical aspect or the presence of a distinctly Buddhist word or image, would not otherwise be distinguished as any sort of special group. What we may call “kudai Shakkyōka”—kudai poems that take Buddhist scriptural passages as their topics—are to be found among the Shakkyōka selected for inclusion in most of the anthologies with Shakkyōka sections, alongside other “Buddhist poems” that refer or allude obliquely to Buddhist doctrines, practices, or personalities but do not necessarily make direct allusion to any scriptural text either in their kotobagaki or in the words of the poem itself. Usually, something in the kotobagaki provided for each Shakkyōka poem, whether in a section of an anthology so labeled or not, makes clear what its relevance to the religion may be. Many, for example, say that the poem is composed on the subject (dai) defined as “the essential purport” or “underlying sentiment” (kokoro) of such and such a sutra, or a specific section or passage therein. Composition of such a verse might well follow upon the poet’s own recitation or silent reading of the scripture or a specific part of it, or in the aftermath of a rite during which priests or other officiants had chanted the sutra or even enacted passages in it. Many poems classified

44. Ishihara, Shakkyōka no kenkyū, II–12.

45. The Goshū wakashū and the Kin’yō wakashū are the first imperial anthologies in which kotobagaki with this formulation appear. It is clear that the poems thus introduced were composed on occasions when, for one reason or another, the composer had reason to focus attention on a specific passage and then to ponder its purport as a waka topic. Such circumstances can often be traced (fairly reliably) in fuller diarylike kotobagaki for poems found in shikashū that also were included in chokusenshu. It should be noted that the topical formulation X no kokoro o yomu is familiar from earlier secular waka contexts, such as occasions when lords asked their companions to compose on “the emotional essence of [the experience of] travel” (tabi no kokoro o yome), as in Ise monogatari section 9. It might be said that this is also the implied relationship between the topic-passages and poems in HSWKS, even though the scriptural quotations are not appended with “no kokoro o [yomeru],” but the absence of that phrase may imply, conversely, that the relationship between topic-text and responding poem is even more intimate than “no kokoro o” would suggest.

46. During elaborate readings of the Lotus Sutra as a series of “eight lectures” (hakkō), for example, the “Devadatta” chapter was often dramatized with a procession in which monks carried brushwood and vessels of water, in imitation of the activities of the ancient Buddha-to-be when he was the servant of a sagacious and strict ascetic. One of the most memorable accounts of such a procession is in the “Minori” chapter of Genji monogatari, where the performance prompts the composition of several poems by Murasaki, the sponsor of the rite, and the other senior ladies of Genji’s establishment who witness it with her.
as *Shakkyōka* seem to be close, almost mechanical renderings of the Chinese in the Japanese Buddhist canonical texts into Japanese language and *tanka* form, but such renderings may fittingly embody the devotee/poet’s wish to pay homage to what has just been read or heard by recapitulating it in a form that displays a kind of personal appropriation of its content and message. Or they may even have been conceived as substitutes for a reading of the sutras themselves when, for one reason or another (such as the exclusion of women from some religious precincts, or other social constraints) the poet/devotee could not be present at or participate in the reading, or was somehow incapable of carrying it out. Then, on the other hand, there is Izumi Shikibu’s famous

```
kuraki yori kuraki michi ni zo irinubeki
haruka ni terase yama no ha no tsuki
```

From darkness into a still darker path I must go,
so cast your light afar, oh moon upon the mountain ridge.

first anthologized in the miscellaneous section of *Shūi wakashū* (poem 1342). This poem uses the words of a passage in the “Parable of the Conjured City” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (a passage also employed as a topic-line by Senshi for poem no. 31 in *Hosshin wakashū*), but none of the versions of the *kotobagaki* attached to this poem in the various collections in which it appears (including some versions of the *Izumi Shikibu shū*) are explicit about the relationship between the source-text and Shikibu’s poem. Instead, they are concerned with the description of the poem’s compositional context—as part of a correspondence with the monk Shōkū of Mount Shōsha in Harima. Although the *kotobagaki* do not identify this poem as a *kudai* poem as such, its relationship to the language of a particular passage in a particular scriptural text is a very important part of the way it “works” as a poem. That relationship was probably quite clear to most of those who would have read or heard the poem when Shikibu composed it and for several centuries afterward, and this perhaps made any explicit identification of the source of the reverberant “*kuraki yori kuraki michi ni zo irinubeki*” unnecessary. At any rate, the authors of *kotobagaki* for this poem apparently preferred to emphasize its character as a message from the poet to the monk; this, in turn, allows the reader to perceive that the bright moon whose companionship and cooperation is

47. *SKT* 1, 93.

sought in this poem is not only the symbol of enlightenment—as it so often is in *Shakkyōka*—but also stands for the priest in Harima, the adept from whom Shikibu seeks guidance as she makes her way through the world.49

Its *kudai*-like form and the double intent of its imagery help make Izumi Shikibu’s “kuraki yori” one of the best known of all so-called “Shakkyōka.” The imagery of the moon as enlightened being and as spiritual guide—resonating with its other roles as “companion” in secular verse—is repeatedly employed by Senshi as well, and it is clear that this is one among many figures that poets almost automatically associated with the task of composing poems on Buddhist topics. The figuration of the moon as spiritual companion in Buddhist poetry may also bear a relationship to the *mikkyō* practice of contemplating an image of the full moon (*getsurinkan* or *gachirinkan*) as a symbol of, and in order to attain, the state of full enlightenment.50 We shall see how useful and potent these figures were for Senshi when she engaged in the task of writing a full cycle of Buddhist poems; they appear, of course, when directly suggested by the scriptural topic-texts, but also independently, and the reader senses the poet turning and returning to them as essential tools in the performance of her creative exercise.

A few of the poems that resulted from that exercise are included in the *Shakkyōka* sections of later anthologies, where their scriptural topic-lines usually serve in the place of *kotobagaki*.51 But a reading of them as a complete cycle, together with the scriptural quotations to which they are so closely bound, is very different from a reading of one or two of them cast together with other *Shakkyōka* of various kinds. Senshi designed *Hosshin wakashū* so that it could be read as a single sustained work employing two contrasting kinds of language—two kinds of text—woven together in one fabric. All the scriptural quotations and all the poems based on them can be read in sequence, as a kind of ritual exercise, a variant, in a sense, of *tendoku* readings of scripture, in which only selected parts of a Buddhist sutra are read but with the expectation that the impact of such reading—the salutary effect or the residual merit—will be equal to that which

---


51. See n. 1 in part two, below, for a list of *HSWKS* poems included in later *chokusenshū*. 
would come from a reading of the whole. The copying of whole sutras and groups of sutras may also be partially analogous to Senshi's idea of copying representative portions of a series of sutras and adding her own poems to them. In the autumn of 1007 (Kankō 4.8), Senshi’s cousin Michinaga, then at the apogee of his brilliant political career, took a set of sutras that he himself had copied and went to Kinbusen, a holy mountain in the Yoshino district, where he had them ritually buried. The set included a complete Lotus Sutra along with the Muryōgikyō, Kanfugengyō, Amidakyō, Miroku jōshōkyō and Miroku geshōkyō, and the Hannya shingyō ("Heart Sutra")—all of which, except for the Miroku (Maitreya) sutras, are among the sutras from which Senshi took quotations for Hosshin wakashū.

The copying and burying of scriptures were among the most conspicuous forms of text-focused devotional practice carried out or sponsored by Heian aristocrats. They also wrote, or had written for them, certain special literary works that were deemed venerable and meritorious because of their reliance on scriptural sources. Such a work, for example, was Sanbōe, the collection of Buddhist tales compiled in 984 by Minamoto Tamenori for the imperial princess Sonshi (Sensi’s niece and her predecessor as Saiin), and it also bears some resemblance to Hosshin wakashū in that much of its text consists of adapted quotations or summaries of passages from other works, including in particular a large number of scriptural sources. Tamenori emphasized this aspect of Sanbōe in presenting it to Sonshi, who had recently taken Buddhist vows: he claimed that the writing and reading of this kind of text—and the viewing of the illustrations that were supposed to go along with it—would add to the stores of merit that would eventually lead to good rebirths for both himself and his reader. At the end of the preface to each of the three volumes of the text, Tamenori described his own gesture of reverence toward it—a pious joining together of his palms over the manuscript, indicating his high estimation of its virtues—and in poems in Chinese at the end of each volume he repeated his praise for this text that he had created by culling its contents from other praiseworthy texts.53

One other analogue to Hosshin wakashū may be seen in Tamenori’s own description in Sanbōe 3.14 of the Kangakue ("Society for the Advancement of Learning"), an association formed in 964 by devout laymen (probably including Tamenori) and monks from the Enryakuji monasteries who

---

52. Takagi, Heian jidai hokke bukkyō shi no kenkyū, 207.
met at intervals to pray, to recite the scriptures, especially the *Lotus*, and to compose poems in Chinese on topics taken from the *Lotus* and other sutras. The men who participated in the Kangakue did so, according to Tamenori, in order to find a way to use their worldly learning for spiritual ends. Quoting the famous lines from a preface to poems that Bai Juyi presented to the Xiang-shan monastery, they proclaimed their collective desire to turn the "wild words and fanciful phrases" of their secular works into hymns in praise of the Buddhist teachings, and, emulating that prayer, they wrote offertory stanzas in Chinese on passages in the scriptures that presented them with powerful images of the Pure Land. It was the collective wish of this confraternity that all of its members might reach that Pure Land together, and they pledged to help one another in that endeavor.

Similarly, the preface to *Hosshin wakashū* expresses the desire to share the benefits that might accrue from the writing and reading of it—a quasi-scripture, containing both the words of the sutras and the author’s own poems inspired thereby—with any and all persons who might “see or hear it, in every life and every world,” with all of whom she is eager to form a spiritual bond. This sentiment was very much in keeping with the spirit of the scriptures from which she quoted, with their promises of salvation for all sentient beings. Most immediately, however, her audience would have been the women who lived with her at Murasakino, and in many ways the religious interests and experiences embodied in *Hosshin wakashū* are those that she would have shared most closely with them.

If the poems in *Daisaïn saki no gyoshū* and *Daisaǐn gyoshū* are an accurate indication, Buddhism did not loom overly large among the various interests of the ladies who lived with Senshi—at least not in any way that was disproportionate with the religion’s role in most of lay society. If anything, the women of the Saiin were most acutely aware that things pertaining to Buddhism were not supposed to be allowed to manifest themselves within their precincts, and especially not in their speech. Technically, the *Engi shiki* (procedural handbooks for the enforcement of legal codes, compiled during the Engi era, 901–22) only specified seven *imikotoba*—most literally, words to be abstained from—and euphemisms approved for use in the Saiin establishment. These seven, which are identical to the “outer” seven *imikotoba* specified for use in the Saigū, the residence of the High Priestess of the Ise Shrine, do not include euphemisms for any Buddhist words as such. The euphemisms for the seven

---


"outer" imikotoba are naoru, for shi or shinu, "to die"; yasumi for yamai, "sickness"; shiotare for naki, "weeping"; ase for chi, "blood"; natsu for utsu, "to strike" or "wound"; kusahira for niku, "flesh"; and tsuchikure for haka, "grave" or "tomb." Obviously, all have something to do with the chief sources of pollution to sacred sanctuaries and the purity of person that shrine officials and participants in ritual had to maintain, and the euphemisms substitute positive or neutral words (naoru suggests "recover from illness," yasumi suggests "rest," ase is a synonym for "sweat") for their negative counterparts. Also, whereas the "outer" list replaces native Japanese words with others of their kind, the "inner" imikotoba list for the Saigü replaces specifically Buddhist words that are almost all either translations or transliterations of Sanskrit words, and the euphemisms appear in most cases to be words invented for just this purpose. Thus, nakago is designated as the euphemism for Butsu or hotoke, "Buddha"; somekami for kyō, "sutra"; araragi for tō, "reliquary" or "pagoda"; kawarafuki for ji or tera, "Buddhist monastery"; kaminaga for sō, "Buddhist monk"; mekaminaga for ni or ama, "Buddhist nun"; and kataishi (or katasone) for sai or toki, the monastic morning meal or "vegetarian feast." (In addition, two "extra" words to be avoided [betsu imikotoba] and their substitutes were specified: koritaki for dō, "worship hall," and tsunowasu for ubasoku, a layman who adheres closely to the Buddhist vows.) This set of euphemisms may not be as positive or neutral as the "outer" ones are: somekami, suggesting "dyed paper," and kaminaga and mekaminaga, which suggest "long-hair" and "female long-hair"—the very opposite of the way that a real monk or nun would be groomed—must have had a rather derisive ring in some usages.

Most scholars assume that both the "inner" and "outer" imikotoba lists governed speech at the Saiin as well as at the Saigü, even though the letter of the codes does not seem to have required this. (Exceptions apparently were made to allow the use of the forbidden Buddhist words at the time of mourning for a deceased High Priestess.56) One does wonder how conscientiously these restrictions were observed—Norinaga's views on the "omoedomo" poem notwithstanding—and how such extraordinary rules of speech, if they really did require these women to say one thing when they meant another, might have affected other aspects of the language they used among themselves, both in formal and informal conversation and

56. Sasaki, "Daisaïrin Senshi Naishinntō no waka," 243. In a study of imikotoba originally published in 1917, Andô Masatsugu cited Senshi's "omoedomo" poem, with its Shiika wakashū kotobagaki, as evidence for the observance of the full set of prohibitions at the Saiin. He also quoted the Kamo chūshin zakki reference to the poem to support this interpretation. Andô Masatsugu, "Imyō ingō no kenkyū o nobete toku ni Saigü imikotoba o ronzu," in Andô Masatsugu chosakushu 5: Nihon bunkashi ronkō (Tokyo: Yūsankaku, 1974), 332–65.
even in their making of poems, an art that had its own peculiar codes and special valuations of specific words and usages. If the poems in the two Saiin collections can be used as evidence, it would appear that they were quite scrupulous in their observance of the strictures, for none of the forbidden words appear in their poems except the word *ama*—the only true *kago* or *utakotoba* (word included in the standard poetic lexicon) in the list—which could slip by when used for its alternate meaning of “fisherman” or “fisherwoman.” A poet identified as “Onna bettō” used this common pun when the Saiin received the news that another woman, called “Koseshi,” had become a nun (*ama ni narinuru yoshi kikoesasetaru*) at the end of the forty-nine days of mourning for “the former governor of Musashi”—presumably Koseshi’s husband or close relative (*Daisaiin gyoshū* nos. 34–35). But when “the wife of the chief of the Cavalry of the Right” informed Senshi that she was going to become a nun (“*migi no muma no kami no onna, ama ni naru to te kikoesasetaru*,” says the kotobagaki) she initiated an exchange of poems (*Daisaiin gyoshū* nos. 27–29) in which both correspondents managed to avoid the timeworn *ama* device. The new nun’s poem, a justification of her act and an announcement of her altered condition, says,

```
wagami sae arishi ni mo arazu narinikeri
   yo no tsunenasa o omoikoshi ma ni
I find that even I myself am no longer what I once was;
   the change has come upon me even as I brooded on the
transience of this world.
```

And Senshi’s reply says,

```
somukinuru utosa o sae wa omou ka na
   konata wa itodo yoso ni narinu to
I wonder if you give a thought to all the sadness from
   which you now have turned away,
   or sense how great has grown the gulf between us.
```

57. In *Kokin waka rokujo* book 2 there is a poem (no. 1450) attributed to “the Saiin”—probably Senshi—in which the image of a small fishing boat (*ama kobune*) becomes the focus of the poet’s sense of separation:

```
nami nagara sode zo nurenuru
   ama kobune noriokuretaru wagami zo omoeba
Amidst these waves my sleeves are soaked,
   so sorry am I to think that I have not boarded the little boat that bears the
fisherman/nun away.
```

In SKT 2; see also Sasaki, ibid., 243.
Like many poems on the occasion of the shukke (taking vows and becoming a Buddhist monk or nun) of friends and acquaintances, Senshi’s poem deals with separation, distance, a sense of being left behind or excluded, and envy—sometimes, in such poems, envy tinged with a gentle reproach against the one who has “gone ahead” or self-deprecation by the one who has “remained behind.” Here, the sadness (utosa) that the “wife of the chief of the Cavalry of the Right” has turned her back on is both the innate sadness of the mundane world—the “yo no tsunenasa” of the first poem—and the sadness of Senshi and the other old friends who have been left behind in that world, a world in which they already felt distanced from the Buddhist sphere that their former companion now has entered. And so they who remain behind are now separated (yoso ni narinu) from the new nun in a new way that only increases their sense of loss and their melancholy. The nun’s reply shows her respect for these sentiments and for the tenderness of their expression:

\[
\begin{align*}
kagerō no yo no tsunenasa o omoishiru \\
hito no kokoro o shiru hito mogana
\end{align*}
\]

I wish that I had here with me a person who understands the feelings of one who has understood how transient this world is.

She has returned to the first poem’s “yo no tsunenasa,” this time adding the makurakotoba “kagerō no,” which deepens the invocation of mutability; the echo of “omoishiru” in “hito no kokoro o shiru” also suggests that there is still much that the two women may have in common: so, all in all, the poem compliments Senshi for the sensitivity that she has shown and thereby hints that the gulf between the two women’s spiritual states may not be so great after all.

The conventions for abstinence or avoidance in language were only one manifestation of the exclusion of Buddhism from the lives of the Saiin women and of their exclusion from it. There were, of course, other restrictions that governed their behavior while in the Kamo service: when they menstruated, for example, they had to withdraw, as if quarantined, to special quarters designated the asedono, a euphemistic “hall for bleeding.” Literary sources also indicate that the Saiin herself was forbidden to shave her hair and could not have face-to-face social intercourse with

58. See also the discussion of HSWKS poem 42 in part two, below.
persons who had taken Buddhist vows.59 So most of the experience of Buddhism that these women could have was an experience of something that was going on in the world beyond the walls of their abode. The precise location of the Murasakino mansion is no longer known, but it was very close to the famous Urin’in, a monastary that was often favored by visitors from the imperial court, and the denizens of the Saiin were keenly aware of their comings and goings. Very late one night, according to a kotobagaki in Daisaiin saki no gyoshū (no. 223), “Muma,” another of Senshi’s women, was awakened by the hubbub of carriages returning to the palace after the evening’s nenbutsu service had finally come to a close (“Urin’in no nenbutsu ni kitaru kuruma no, yo fukuru hodo ni kikoyureba”). Muma’s poem records her thoughts as she lay awake listening to the bustle outside:

kumoi yori nori no kuruma zo kaeru naru
nishi ni katabuku tsuki ya auramu

Do the carriages that brought them from on high to hear the dharma turn homeward now because they have had their encounter with the moon that is sinking in the west?

Though it is not written in a strictly devotional context, this poem contains several elements frequently seen in poems classified as Shakkyōka. The carriages, which come from “on high,” literally “amidst the clouds” (kumoi yori)—that is, the court—are also nori no kuruma: not just “carriages on which they ride” (noru) but “carriages of the dharma” (nori)—vehicles that bear them to and from the place where they can receive and participate in the Buddhist teachings, and vehicles that evoke the carriages offered to his children by a devout Buddhist as symbols of the unity of the many forms of the religion in a famous parable in the Lotus Sutra. The same “nori no kuruma” appears in Hosshin wakashū (in poem 27). And once again, in the present poem, the moon seems to represent the fulfillment of the hopes held by those who have spent the evening in prayer at the Urin’in: they have been worshiping Amida, and in doing so may have achieved contact with his symbol, the moon, now declining over the western horizon, pointing the way to his Pure Land—where, Muma speculates, his worshipers are now more likely than even before to be able to join him for eternity. The poem encodes her yearning to be one with them—a desire that, for now, as a resident of the Saiin, she cannot act upon.

59. The “Koromo no tama” chapter of Eiga monogatari describes Senshi’s emotional reunion with her half brother, Prince Munehira, who took vows in 981 and therefore could not visit her until she retired as Saiin, in 1031. Matsumura Hiroji and Yamanaka Yutaka, eds., Eiga monotagari 2 (NKB 76), 384.
Senshi's own particularly acute sense of exclusion from the devotions pursued by others "outside," and of her distance and difference from them, surfaces repeatedly in her poems, to such an extent that a reading of those of her works that are included in the various chokusenshū may suggest that this was, for her, a dominant theme. One of its most succinct expositions is the poem that appears in the "laments" section of Shūi wakashū (poem 1337) with the kotobagaki, "Composed when she had the figure of a tortoise fashioned from gold to be sent as an offering for the Service of Eight Lectures sponsored by the Empress-Mother (Nyoin no gohakkō ni hōmochi ni kane shite kame no kata o tsukurite yomihaberikeru)." The sponsor of these lectures on the Lotus Sutra was the Saiin's sister-in-law Senshi, known as Higashi Sanjō-in, the consort of the emperor En'yū and the mother of the emperor Ichijō (the woman in whose memory, at a later date, the nijihappōno uta sets described above were composed). The date of the service is uncertain, but it probably occurred between Higashi Sanjō-in's initial tonsure (rakushoku) in 991 and her death at the age of forty in 1001; the Saiin Senshi would have been in her late twenties or her thirties at the time.60 The gift of the tortoise was an allusion to a well-known image in the Lotus Sutra itself, and so, in a more complex way, was the Saiin's poem:

\[ \text{gō tsukusu mitarashigawa no kame nareba} \\
\text{nori no ukigi ni awanu narikeri} \\
\]

I am a tortoise that must live out my destiny in this River of Purification, 
so I shall never encounter that "floating piece of wood" that is the dharma.

In the Myōshōgon bon chapter of the Lotus—in a passage that Senshi also used for poem-topic 51 in Hosshin wakashū—it is said that "a Buddha is as hard to encounter as it would be for a one-eyed tortoise to encounter a hole in a floating piece of wood": thus, those who do encounter a Buddha who can give them the teachings of the Lotus must know how very fortunate they are.61 Knowing, of course, that her sister-in-law would encounter this passage during the course of the Eight Lectures, the Saiin had

---


61. For a discussion of the figure nori no ukigi and related figurings of the dharma (nori), including some, such as nori no tomoshi ("the dharma torch") that are also employed in HSWKS (poem 33), see Katagiri Yōichi, Utamakura utakotoba jiten (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1983), 321–22.
commissioned an artisan to prepare an offering that would symbolize it, while she herself prepared a poem in which she spoke of herself as the tortoise. But this tortoise is one whose fate in this life, decreed by the karma of the past, is to spend its long life in the “River of Purification” (Mitarashigawa) at Kamo—the stream that flowed through the Kamo Shrine precincts and in which Senshi, as Kamo priestess, periodically had to perform a ritual cleansing of her person, particularly in the days prior to the Kamo festivals. Since it is her lot, she says, to serve in this post—to have served many years, and to anticipate serving many more, going on and on through time as does the tortoise—she has not really had nor will be likely to have an opportunity to “meet” (au) the Buddha’s teachings. She would no doubt have wished to attend the Hakkō herself, or to have sponsored one of her own, if only she could have. Thus, the poem she wrote on this occasion can be read as a frank expression of the resentment she must have nursed for years against a destiny that prevented her from participating in the rites of Buddhism while other women of her class, and of her family, were completely free to do so; or, less melodramatically, it may be a wittily contrived substitution for other forms of participation in worship from which she felt compelled to abstain, a means for making herself present, through a poem she crafted specifically for a special situation and event, in a place and time in which she herself could not be.

The composing of Hosshin wakashū, over ten years after this exchange with Higashi Sanjō-in, was perhaps also an attempt to assuage the resentments and anxieties that may have resulted from Senshi’s enforced neglect of Buddhist devotions, but surely, like this Mitarashigawa poem, it was conceived as an alternative, but in no sense secondary, means of expressing sincere faith and of enacting a kind of intimate encounter and exchange with the revered vessels of that faith: the Buddhist scriptures, which were themselves objects of reverence, both physically and in the abstract. Ostensibly, Senshi should not have had much to do with them: she should not have spent much time reading or studying them, and should certainly not have had direct contact with learned monks who might otherwise have explicated them to her. But obviously, in this case as in others, the letter of the legal codes carried far less weight with her than did the awesome words of the Buddhist canon. No records or memoirs reveal precisely how Senshi gained her knowledge of Buddhist scripture. Perhaps her knowledge of it was not extraordinarily vast or deep, but about the same as the average well-educated royal or noble laywoman

62. In Daisaiin saki no gyoshū no. 282, “Muma” explicitly compares the Priestess to a long-lived tortoise. In that instance, the tortoise is a figurine involved in games accompanying a “firefly contest” (hotaru awase), probably a session for composing poems on summer themes.
would have had. But there was one great difference in her case: in some sense, if only technically rather than practically, her involvement with Buddhist texts, whatever form it took, was a subversion of the unique customs that supposedly governed her behavior and activities. Things may have been the other way around, of course: she may have viewed the official or customary restrictions as unreasonable, even outrageous subversions of her natural right to do as other women might do, at least in the sphere of religious study and practice. But, after all, she lived the greater part of her life—including the period during which she wrote her "Buddhist poems"—in an extraordinary sphere, and perhaps the very length of the time spent thus was what allowed her to cultivate a sense of her own way of doing things and a conviction that she had a right to do them that way.

It is tempting to imagine how often Senshi must have asked herself "Why me?"—that is, why she, of all women who might potentially have done so, had to be the one not only to serve as Saiin but to serve for such an exceptionally long time. The post of Saiin was created in 810 by Emperor Saga and was filled for the first time by his daughter, Uchiko; the motive seems to have been to flatter the Kamo deities (principally Kamo Wake Ikazuchi no mikoto in the upper shrine, Tamayorihime no mikoto and Kamo Taketsunumi no mikoto in the lower shrine63) by creating a post similar to that of the High Priestess of the Ise Shrines and thereby to enlist their aid in suppressing the efforts of Fujiwara Kusuko to put her husband, the ex-emperor Heizei, back on the throne. One effect, besides the crushing of Kusuko's revolt, was the forging of closer ties than had existed before between the Kamo cult and the imperial family, and so, until early in the thirteenth century, the post of Saiin was continuously filled by young female relatives of reigning emperors. Ostensibly, a new Kamo priestess was to be chosen at the beginning of each reign, by divination, from among the unmarried female kin of the new emperor. After a period of ritual purification, usually lasting some months, the new priestess underwent a final ceremony of ritual cleansing in the waters of the Kamo River and then was installed in the official residence at Murasakino, which lay about halfway between the upper and lower Kamo Shrines.64 Her chief

63. The two shrines are familiarly known as Kamigamo Jinja and Shimogamo Jinja, "upper Kamo shrine" and "lower Kamo shrine," respectively. The official name of the "upper" shrine is Kamo Wake Ikazuchi Jinja, and one other name for the "lower" shrine, which lies downstream and to the southeast of the "upper," is "Kamo Mioya [‘esteemed parent’] Jinja," indicating a family relationship among the Kamo deities: Tamayorihime is the mother of Wake Ikazuchi, and Taketsunumi is the father of Tamayorihime.

64. See McCullough and McCullough, A Tale of Flowering Fortunes, supplementary n. 25, 386–88.
task thereafter was to preside over the annual observances of the Kamo festival, around the middle of the fourth month, and to participate in a number of other lesser rituals associated with the Kamo Shrines. Shortly before each Kamo festival, the priestess repeated her lustrations in the Kamo River; on the main festival day, the entire court and much of the city assembled along Ichijō-ōji, the northernmost east-west avenue of the capital, to watch the colorful procession that accompanied her to the lower Kamo Shrine, where she made offerings, and then to the upper, where the priestess passed the night. Next day, in a slightly less elaborate procession, she made her way back to the Murasakino residence, where, for the most part, she would remain until the festival of the following year—maintaining a constant vigil against all sources of pollution that might impair her capacity to serve the gods and the state.

On the third day of the fourth month of Ten'en 3 (975), the mother of Sonshi, the current Saiin, died. (This is the Sonshi mentioned above as the woman for whom Sanbōe was written in the following decade.) Because of her mother's death, Sonshi was unable to participate in the Kamo festival, which was scheduled a few days later, and on the eighteenth she left Murasakino for good. On the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month, the twelve-year-old Senshi, tenth daughter of the reigning emperor Murakami, was chosen as her successor. The choice was surely determined by certain factors besides the oracular: for one thing, her bloodlines were impeccable, since her mother, Fujiwara Anshi, who died just four days after giving birth to her, was a daughter of Morosuke (908–60), Minister of the Right during her father's reign, whose son, Kanemichi (925–77) was both dajōdaijin (chancellor) and kanpaku (regent) for the reigning emperor, Senshi's brother En'yū. Nor was she by any means too young for the post: a large number of the women who served as either Saiin or Saigū were named to their offices as children. Senshi had not completed all her rites of purification by the time of the next Kamo festival, but she did take up residence at Murasakino soon thereafter, in the fourth month of 977. It was to be her residence until 1031, by which time she was sixty-eight years old.

There was certainly a precedent for keeping a Saiin on through a change of emperor: Sonshi, for example, had begun her service at Kamo during her father Reizei's reign and had continued even after he abdicated and was succeeded by his brother En'yū. But no one ever did what Senshi

---

did: she went on and on, through the reigns of En’yū, Kazan (her nephew), Ichijō (another nephew), Sanjō (another nephew), and into the reign of Goichijō (her grandnephew). No doubt Senshi would have liked to retire long before she did, and it is not entirely clear why she did not so. Perhaps she was asked to remain by those who determined such things—the men who held political power at the time were all close cousins, including her first cousin Michinaga—out of fear of the deleterious effect that a change might cause, or perhaps, as has been suggested, because there were no really good (i.e., politically neutral) candidates to replace her.

The greatness that earned her the appellation “Daisain” was not only the greatness of her years (she lived much longer than most men and women did in her day) or her tenacity as High Priestess. The diaries of her literary contemporaries are ample in their expressions of respect for her character, deportment, and taste, though the praise is tempered by the mild spirit of rivalry that existed between the Sain retinue and those of the great ladies of the imperial court. The observations of Murasaki Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon, each of whom served one of her nephew Ichijō’s consorts, are typically perspicacious and competitive. In a section of her diary in which she evaluates the reputations of various ladies in aristocratic service, Murasaki is extremely critical of the pretensions of a Sain attendant, one “Chūjō,” whose letter Murasaki has seen by chance:

How could she be so odious? I realize it was a personal letter, but she had actually written: ‘When it comes to judging poetry, who can rival our Princess [i.e. Senshi]? She is the only one who could recognize a promising talent nowadays!’ There may be some point in what she says, but if she claims that much for her circle of friends, then how is it they produce so few poems of merit? Admittedly they do seem to be very elegant and sophisticated, but were you to make a comparison, I doubt they would necessarily prove to be any better than the women I see around me. They keep very much to themselves. Whenever I have visited them, for it is a place famous for beautiful moonlit nights, marvellous dawn skies, cherries, and the song of the wood thrush, the High Priestess has always seemed most sensitive. The place has an aura of seclusion and mystery about it, and they have very little to distract them. Rarely are they ever in the rush we are whenever Her


67. Tokoro points out that another Kamo priestess, Emperor Daigo’s daughter Onshi, was also referred to as “Daisain.” She served through two relatively long reigns, Suzaku’s and Murakami’s, for some thirty-six and a half years. Tokoro, “Senshi Naishinnō nenpu kō,” 41.
Majesty visits the Emperor, or His Excellency [Michinaga] decides to come and stay the night. Indeed, the place naturally lends itself to poetry. Amid such perfect elegance, how could one possibly fail to produce anything but excellent poems?  

So, in Murasaki's eyes, even if the products were not as impressive as they might be, the Saiin was at least potentially a very fine place in which to live quietly, devoting most of one's time to learning and practicing the art of poetry, with Senshi as mentor. Likewise, Sei Shônagon, in *Makura no sôshi*, listed the Saiin right after the palace and the private households of imperial consorts and princesses of the first rank as desirable places in which ladies of good birth might serve their superiors. But she too saw a problem: "Though the Saiin is a terribly sinful place," she wrote, "it is charming nonetheless (Saiin tsumifukakanaredo okashi)." The perceived or putative sinfulness, of course, did not arise from scandalous behavior but from the prohibitions that forced the denizens of the Saiin to neglect the Buddhist devotions that would have been a normal part of life in any other lady's household. At the Saiin, there was (again, at least in theory) no sutra copying to be done, there were no lectures by bright, inspiring preachers, nor even the freedom to utter the Buddha's name out loud.

In *Genji monogatari*, the characters who serve either as Saigû or Saiin are extremely anxious about this neglect and the resultant "sinfulness": the princess Asagao, for example, is very eager to counteract this evil by taking vows as soon as she can once her period of service as Saiin is at an end. It is evident from both her public and private behavior that this was probably an intention nursed by Senshi for a very long time, too. Such a desire was surely what prompted her pronouncement—"Sanagara tomo ni

---


69. Ikeda Kikan and Kishigami Shinji, eds., *Makura no sôshi* (NKBT 19), 328. See also the "shiki no mizoshi ni owashimasu koro" section, in which the empress Teishi gets extremely anxious about the preparation of poems to be sent in response to those received from the Saiin.

70. *Daisainin gyoshû* (nos. 90–91) records an exchange between some Saiin women and an apparently well-known (and good looking?) preacher, Ninkô Shônin. When "Mibu" went to hear him preach, she took a letter from some of the other women in which they said they were "dying to meet him in the Pure Land" (*monoguruhoshiu gokuraku ni matsuheki*); in a poem he sent back to them, he asked how they expected to achieve the Pure Land if all they could do was make jokes about it, and in turn they retorted, "a troth made with a saint, even in jest, should produce the seeds of Buddhahood!" The whole episode is rather reminiscent of the attitudes toward the priesthood described in *Makura no sôshi* (for example, in the dan beginning "Sekkyô no kôji wa . . . in NKBT 19, 73), and reveals an aspect of women's views of the clergy and what it represented that is very different from the pious sentiments emphasized here.
—in the midst of the Kamo festivities, as reported in Ôkagami, which also observes (in the present tense, since she would have been alive at the time that the Ôkagami narration is supposed to take place), that “concerned though the Princess may be with the life to come, she does not disregard worldly splendor,” and continues with anecdotes about her gracious—and politically astute—dealings with the brash, all-powerful Michinaga. The woman whom the world saw in the Kamo procession was cool and reserved but secure enough in the prestige of her position to risk an open display of religious sentiments not wholly in keeping with that setting. There seems to have been no censure of her declaration (the Ôkagami narrator does observe that she may have gone “a little too far”) but, if anything, an increase in public admiration for her poise and her determination, like that of a bodhisattva, to share her conviction with others.

Back at the Murasakino mansion, however, she was alone with her budding poets and the responsibilities that distracted her, even if they did not wholly prevent her, from pursuing her own way toward Buddhist salvation. Like her companions, she could not stop her ears against the sounds that came from those in the outside world who were able to pursue that goal more freely than she was. According to the kotobagaki to a poem (no. 671) in the second “miscellaneous” section of Kin’yô wakashû, she awoke one moonlit night in the eighth month to the sound of the chanting of a passing “Amida hijiri”—an itinerant monk devoted to worshiping Amida Buddha by intoning his name. Rather boldly, she had the monk brought into the house and had him deliver these lines to an attendant at home on leave of absence (Hachigatsu bakari ni tsuki akakarikeru yo Amida no hijiri no tôrikuru o yobiyosesasete sato naru nyôbô ni ittsukawashikeru):

Amidabu to tonauru koe ni yume samete
nishi e katabuku tsuki o koso mire

71. McCullough, Ôkagami, 133; see also NKBT 21, 123–24. In one of these anecdotes, Senshi and Michinaga exchange flattering poems after a Kamo festival procession during which Senshi was shown her imperial grandnephews in the arms of their proud maternal grandfather, Michinaga. The poems both make use of the double meaning of the word auhi, “day of meeting” (in reference to the familial encounter) and “heartvine” (one of the floral emblems of the festival). These poems also appear in Goshii wakashû (nos. 1107 and 1108) in SKT 1, 137.

The Ôkagami narration is supposed to take place at the Urin’in, close to the Saiin’s residence, and the narrator claims that Senshi is a regular patroness of the annual rite, the Bodaiko (“Enlightenment Service”), which is the occasion for his telling of his tale.

72. McCullough, Ôkagami, 133.

73. Ishihara, Shakkyôka no kenkyû, 98. A slightly different version is in SKT 1, 155.
Awakened from my dreams by a voice that chanted "Amida Buddha,"
it was the moon setting in the west that I saw.

The voice that broke the stillness of the night brought Senshi out of her dreams (yume)—and her use of this word, which also stands for the confused state of the unenlightened person, also suggests that hearing Amida's name pierce the darkness has brought new clarity to her mind. It has, at any rate, allowed her to see his symbol, the moon once again, declining over the western horizon toward his Pure Land (as it did when Muma yearned after it as she listened to the carriages returning from the Urin'in to court)—and perhaps also in the direction to which this message to her absent companion was to be sent. Barriers of one kind or another might lie between Senshi and the path she sought, but, this poem seems to suggest, signs and sounds of faith and of the faithful could not fail to reach her and to have their impact upon her as upon all others.

Pure Land proselytizers like this Amida hijiri and others did have a considerable impact on the aristocracy, whose demonstrations and expressions of their yearning for rebirth in Amida's paradise became more and more conspicuous toward the end of the tenth century. This seems to have been particularly so in the decade of the 980s, when, for both personal and political reasons, a number of Senshi's own close relatives took the greatest step toward their salvation that they could take: shukke. Her half brother Prince Munehira took vows in 981. Her niece Sonshi, who had become one of Emperor En'yū's wives, did so in 982, probably because of illness. Her brother En'yū, having retired from the throne, took vows in 985. Her nephew Kazan, Sonshi's brother, followed suit when he was forced to abdicate in 986. Her elder sister Shishi had already done so at the beginning of that year, a few months before her death. But Senshi remained just as she was, growing older while the years of her Kamo service went on and on. She was sixty-three in the first month of 1026 when the news reached her that the dowager empress Jōtōmon'in (her cousin Michinaga's daughter, wife of her nephew Emperor Ichijō and mother of two emperors, Senshi's grandnephews Goichijō and Gosuzaku) had taken her vows. The poem Senshi sent her appears in the "miscellaneous" section of Goshūi wakashū (no. 1027) and in Eiga monogatari as well:

---

75. SKT 1, 134.
76. NKBT 76, 265; McCullough and McCullough, A Tale of Flowering Fortunes, 715.
kimi sura mo makoto no michi ni irunari
hitori ya nagaki yami ni madowamu

I hear that now you, too, have entered upon the true way; shall I alone remain lost in the endless darkness?

Here, as in many poems in *Hosshin wakashū*, Senshi used the darkness that envelops the path of the unenlightened—the same dark path of Izumi Shikibu's famous poem—as an emblem for her own state, contrasting it with the brilliantly lit path of those who have found the true way (*makoto no michi*) to take through their lives. As long as she continued as Sain, her life remained enshrouded in that same darkness, lost in those same dreams. In the late years of her career, as it is described in *Konjaku monogatari shū* (no doubt with some exaggeration) the brilliance of the Sain establishment was also dimmed: chance visitors were shocked by the dilapidated condition of the Murasakino mansion but were nevertheless charmed by the air of antique refinement that filled the shadowy gardens that had been so resplendent in Murasaki Shikibu's day; meanwhile, the aging Senshi still prayed faithfully and constantly to Amida. In the fullness of her years, this trespass against the Kamo customs was beyond reproach—in spite of what Norinaga and others might have to say about it later on.

Finally, in the ninth month of Chōgen 4 (1031), claiming infirmity, Senshi asked to be relieved of her post. Before official sanction for her retirement had been granted, she left the Murasakino mansion for her private residence, the Muromachi palace. Six days later she took her first vows as a Buddhist nun from the monk Jinkaku, her maternal uncle; a few weeks later, the learned Tendai monk Kakuchō conducted the rite called *jikkai* for her, whereby she swore to uphold the ten fundamental precepts of a novice nun. She was too ill to make the trip to Karasaki, on the shores of Lake Biwa, where a rite of release for retiring Kamo priestesses was usually conducted. But it was four more years before she died, at the Muromachi palace, in the sixth month of Chōgen 8 (1035), having reached the age of 72.


78. *Sakeiki*, the diary of Minamoto Tsuneyori, then *Sain bettō* (the court-appointed superintendent of the Sain office) provides the most detailed account of Senshi's retirement. See *Sakeiki*, in Zōho shiryō taisei Kankōkai, ed., Zōho shiryō taisei 6 (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1965), 293–301; the relevant passages are quoted in Okazaki, “Daisain Senshi no kenkyū,” 124–25. See also Tokoro, “Senshi Naishinno nenpu kō,” 36–37. *Konjaku monogatari shū* 19.17 incorrectly names the priest Keiso (or Kyōso) of Miidera (Onjoji) as Senshi's preceptor. He died in 1019, twelve years before the recorded date of Senshi's retirement.
Some forty-three years earlier, when she wrote *Hosshin wakashū*, she was full of both frustration and hope. (In the fourth month of 1012, four months before she completed the cycle, she had been informed, for neither the first nor last time, that there would be no change of Saiin despite the fact that a new emperor had come to the throne.79) Though unable to pursue the kind of religious life that she may have liked to have had, she was free, in the privacy of her home, to bring the words of Buddhist scripture into the serious games of poem making that filled the days and nights she shared with her women companions. She perceived, as the *Hosshin wakashū* preface explains it, that since other forms of devotion were inappropriate—she could not commission the construction of “halls and pagodas,” as the great men of her family could, or “shave her head” and live the life of an ascetic on some mountainside, as others might—the writing of such a work was by far the best thing that she could do, as well as the most apt way for her to employ her literary expertise.

Her commitment to and love of literature—the strongest element of her bond with the women who dwelt with her at Murasakino—is probably what really lies behind the old and probably apocryphal story about the role she may have had in bringing about the writing of *Genji monogatari*: she supposedly asked the empress Shōshi (the latter-day Jōtōmon’in) if her women had any new romances to share with the women of the Saiin, whereupon Murasaki Shikibu undertook to produce one.80 We may think


80. There are no contemporary records of this exchange; the earliest account of it appears in Yotsutsuji Yoshinari’s commentary on *Genji*, the *Kakaišo*, completed in 1367. See Muromatsu Iwao, ed., *Kokubun chūshaku zenshō* 3 (Tokyo: Kokugakukai Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1908), 1. On the other hand, there is evidence of other kinds of personal exchanges between the two women. Michinaga’s diary, known as *Mido kanpaku ki*, notes that on the day of the Kamo festival in the fourth month of Kankō 1 (1004), the empress sent the priestess a fan; in the seventh month of Kankō 6 (1009), the priestess sent the empress a *biwa* (Japanese lute) and a *kin* (a seven-stringed *koto*). See Tōkyō Daigaku Shiryō Hensan Shō, ed., *Mido kanpaku ki* (Dai Nihon Kokiroku) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1952–54), vol. 1, 85, and vol. 2, 9.

Also, according to the *kotobagaki* for poem 1109 in *Goshū wakashū*, Senshi sent the following to the empress the day after a Kamo festival during which Shōshi, accompanying the emperor, attended part of the ceremonies but returned without stopping at Murasakino to visit in person with the priestess:

*miyuki seshi kamo no kawanami kaerusa ni*
*tachi ya yoru to zo machiakashitsuru*

In the wake of your royal visit to the Kamo River waters,

I lay awake ‘til dawn in hope that you might stop here.

(SKT 1, 137). *Kamo no kawanami* is “waves in the Kamo River” but also attaches to *miyuki seshi kamo* to suggest, “Did you really come here, or not?”—a frequent posture in poems about visits (usually between lovers) that do not come to pass, or end so quickly that they seem never to have occurred. *Tats[u]* and *yor[u]*, here combined to mean “stop by and pay a visit,” are also verbs associated with the action of waves. This intricate poem pays ample respect to the empress but may also express real regret over the two women’s failure or inability to take advantage of an opportunity to meet face to face.
of *Hosshin wakashū* as yet another literary work that was meant, first of all, to be shared by Senshi with the Saiin women, and indeed, many of its passages from scripture and the poems on them focus closely on images and messages of particular significance for women. The famous Murasaki no moonlight that Murasaki Shikibu recalled so vividly is there, too, but it is transformed into the light of a moon that represents the fulfilled promise of salvation—a promise not given to or taken by these women without restrictions, but a promise that they wanted very much to believe in. *Hosshin wakashū* itself was written to help them toward its realization—and to show them what might be done when the art of *waka* was enlisted in that endeavor.