

Literature and Arts C-42: Constructing the Samurai

Review Summaries of Sourcebook Readings

Kojiki

Record of Ancient Matters – the oldest Japanese book, presented to the court in 712. Mixture of myth (creation stories, folk etymologies of place names, etc.) and sensationalized accounts of early Japanese history. Sourcebook extracts deal with the legend of **Yamato Takeru**, “the hero of Yamato” and an account of **Jimmu**, the legendary figure considered to be the first emperor of Japan.

Yamato Takeru, the ferocious son of Emperor Keiko, is sent out by his father to pacify provincial barbarians disrespectful of government authority. He travels around the country pacifying the **Emishi** and **Kumaso** barbarians, and dispatching assorted enemies of the court with a mixture of ruthlessness and cunning until his final encounter with a white boar deity on Mt. Ibuki, after which he dies, longing for home. He changes into a great white bird and takes to the sky.

Yamato Takeru
Jimmu

Nihongi

Also known as *Nihon Shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*), completed in 720. Chinese-style history of ancient Japan. More purely historical than the *Kojiki*—though not without its fantastical moments, it stays closer to the sober-minded model of the Chinese dynastic histories. Sourcebook extracts deal with a variant version of the same Yamato Takeru story already told in the *Kojiki*.

Yamato Takeru (Yamato-dake no Mikoto)
Takechi no Sukune
Yorodzu

Tales of Times Now Past (Konjaku Monogatari)

Probably compiled c. 1130-1140. A collection of more than 1000 stories and fables from India, China, and Japan—many of them with a Buddhist moral at the end. The last ten books deal with nobles and commoners, and are often very funny. The subjects of the two stories in the sourcebook are:

1. How the Governor of Echizen province (**Fujiwara no Tamemori**) uses salty food and sour wine to subdue an importunate group of palace guards who have come to dun their overdue wages out of him; and

2. The story of a lord, **Taira no Sadamori**, who will perish of an incurable arrow wound unless he can get his hands on a medicine made from the liver of a child plucked from its mother's womb.

Shomonki (Story of Masakado)

Probably written not long after the death of Masakado in 940. Tells the story of **Taira no Masakado** (?-940), a warrior from the east and a descendant of Emperor Kammu. After victories over local warlords, he declares himself the New Emperor of Japan in 939, backed by an oracular message supporting his claim from **Hachiman**, the Shinto god of war. Masakado is defeated by his nemesis (and cousin), **Taira no Sadamori**, and his head is sent to the capital for ritual chastisement.

Taira no Masakado
Hachiman
Taira no Sadamori

Tale of Mutsu (Mutsu Waki)

Written in Chinese, probably by someone living in the capital not long after the events described in the tale. It tells of a successful campaign led by **Minamoto no Yoriyoshi** to impose court authority on the rebellious **Abe family** of Mutsu, in the northeast of Japan. The Abe family were well-established district magistrates and local potentates who refused to pay taxes, etc. to the court in Kyoto. The struggle to subdue them is known as the Former Nine Years War, and lasted from 1051-1062.

Minamoto no Yoriyoshi
Abe family

Tale of the Disorder in Hogen (Hogen Monogatari)

The earliest manuscript dates from 1318, though the tale probably existed in some form a good deal earlier. The first of the great quasi-historical war tales (*gunki monogatari*), often recited by itinerant musicians to the accompaniment of a lute-like string instrument called a *biwa*.

The tale deals with an armed skirmish that broke out in Kyoto in 1156. The conflict begins as a dispute over imperial succession between the reigning emperor **Go-Shirakawa** and his brother, the Retired Emperor **Sutoku**. Several of the leading noble families are split by the conflict - including the two most important military families, the Taira and the Minamoto. **Minamoto no Yoshitomo**'s loyalty to Go-Shirakawa requires him to execute several members of his own family, including his father **Minamoto no Tameyoshi**. Sutoku is defeated and many of his supporters are killed, including the hero **Minamoto no Tametomo**. Sutoku himself dies in exile. [See Study Guide for further details.]

Sutoku
Go-Shirakawa
Minamoto no Tameyoshi
Minamoto no Tametomo
Minamoto no Yoshitomo
Taira no Kiyomori

The Tale of Heiji (Heiji Monogatari)

Probably composed around the same time as the Hogen Monogatari. The tale is an account of another clash between members of the court, which takes place in 1159-60, in the aftermath of the Hogen disturbance.

Two major figures from the Hogen appear again here: **Taira no Kiyomori**, now well on his way to becoming the most powerful man in the country; and **Minamoto no Yoshitomo**, embittered after what he sees as insufficient reward for the sacrifices he made fighting on Go-Shirakawa's side in 1156. Yoshitomo is eventually defeated, but Kiyomori spares the lives of Yoshitomo's two sons: Yoritomo and Yoshitsune. He will live to regret this decision. [Refer to Scroll Three in SB reading (page 138) for further details, and *Yoshitsune* readings.]

Taira no Kiyomori
Taira no Shigemori
Minamoto no Yoshitomo
Minamoto no Yoshihira
shoen
bakufu

Shokyuki (An Account of the Shokyu [Jokyu sic] War of 1221)

Yet another disturbance, this one taking place in 1221 when the **Retired Emperor Go-Toba** attempts to assert his supremacy over the bakufu in Kamakura. Go-Toba wants to give two estates (*shoen*) to his favorite dancing girl. When the steward (*jito*) in charge of the estates (and appointed by Kamakura) refuses, Go-Toba orders the shogunate to have the steward replaced. **Hojo Yoshitoki**, the shogunal regent in Kamakura, ignores his orders. Go-Toba's men attack the Kyoto residence of **Iga no Mitsusue**, the bakufu's man in Kyoto, and are initially successful. But in the battles that follow, Go-Toba's side suffers total defeat. Go-Toba is sent into exile (along with his dancing girl); his followers are all beheaded.

Go-Toba
Hojo Yoshitoki
Iga Mitsusue

The Taiheiki: A Chronicle of Medieval Japan (Record of Great Peace)

Probably written during the 1370s. Deals with the events surrounding the Kemmu Restoration of 1333, an attempt by emperor **Go-Daigo** to wrest authority away from the warriors and to rule single-handedly. With the help of warrior figures such as **Kusunoki Masashige**, **Nitta Yoshisada**, and (for a time) **Ashikaga Takauji**, he escapes from exile and destroys the Kamakura bakufu. But success is short-lived. Three years later, Ashikaga Takauji turns against the emperor and sets up his own military government. Go-Daigo flees, and until 1392 Japan has two rival courts.

Go-Daigo
Hojo Takatoki (Sagami Lay Monk)
Kusunoki no Masashige
Nitta Yoshisada
Ashikaga Takauji

Yoshitsune (Gikeiki)

Written probably in the 15th century, some 200+ years after Yoshitsune's death, this is an almost entirely fictionalized account of the life of one of Japan's great heroic figures: **Minamoto no Yoshitsune**, accompanied always by his faithful sidekick, the slightly psychopathic but wholly loveable warrior-monk **Saito Musashibo Benkei** and another loyal follower, **Sato Tadanobu**. The sourcebook extracts are devoted to the recreation of Yoshitsune's childhood and his flight from his vengeful brother, **Minamoto no Yoritomo**.

Minamoto no Yoshitsune (Yoshitsune)
Saito Musashibo Benkei (Benkei)
Fujiwara Tadahira (Izumi no Saburo)
Minamoto no Yoritomo
Kajiwara Kagetoki

Izumi's Fortress

Written for performed recital, probably sometime during the 16th century. Again, deals with incidents in the life of **Minamoto no Yoshitsune**, and focuses particularly on the figure of **Izumi no Saburo** and his loyalty to Yoshitsune—even unto death.