

# DOCUMENTS

## Poems from *Nihon shoki* and *Man'yōshū*

*Compiled in the early eighth century, these documents include poems first composed centuries before. Here we see depicted fifth- to seventh-century rulers in the process of consolidating power by performing rituals to take possession of the land through viewing and naming, building magnificent palaces, making excursions, and planning for eternity. Even poems expressing personal feelings had a public dimension because the poet's hope for political advancement explains the poem's creation.*

6th year [462 C.E.], Spring, 2nd month, 4th day. The ruler [Yūryaku] made an excursion to the small moor of Hatsuse. There, viewing the aspect of the hills and moors, in an outburst of feeling, he made a song, saying:

The mountain of Hatsuse  
Of the hidden country  
Is a mountain  
Standing beautifully,  
Is a mountain  
Projecting beautifully  
The mountain of Hatsuse  
Of the hidden country  
Is truly lovely,  
Is truly lovely.

Thereupon he gave a name to the small moor, and called it Michi no Ono.

Poems by Kakinomoto Hitomaro at the time of the procession [by the divine monarch Jitō] to the palace at Yoshino.

Many are the lands under heaven  
And the sway of our Lord,  
Sovereign of the earth's eight corners,  
But among them her heart

Finds Yoshino good  
For its crystal riverland  
Among the mountains,  
And on the blossom-strewn  
Fields of Akitsu  
She drives the firm pillars of her palace  
And so the courtiers of the great palace,  
Its ramparts thick with stone,  
Line their boats  
To cross the morning river,  
Race their boats  
Across the evening river.  
Like this river  
Never ending,  
Like these mountains  
Commanding ever greater heights,  
The palace by the surging rapids—  
Though I gaze on it, I do not tire.

Envoy  
Like the eternal moss  
Slick by the Yoshino river  
On which I do not tire to gaze,  
May I never cease to return  
And gaze on it again.

Our lord  
Who rules in peace,

A very god,  
Manifests her divine will  
And raises towering halls  
Above the Yoshino riverland  
Where waters surge,  
And climbs to the top  
To view the land.  
On the mountains  
Folding upward around her  
Like a sheer hedge of green  
The mountain gods present their  
offerings.

They bring her blossoms in springtime  
To decorate her hair  
And, when autumn comes,  
They garland her with yellow leaves  
And the gods of the river  
That runs alongside the mountains  
Make offerings for her royal feast.

They send cormorants forth  
Over the upper shoals,  
They cast dipper nets  
Across the lower shoals,  
Mountain and river  
Draw together to serve her—  
A god's reign indeed!

A very god  
Whom mountain and river  
Draw together to serve,  
She sets her boat to sail  
Over pools where waters surge.

Poem by Kakinomoto Hitomaro when he  
parted from his wife in the land of Iwami  
and came up to the capital.

At Cape Kara  
On the sea of Iwami,  
Where the vines  
Crawl on the rocks,  
Rockweed of the deep  
Grows on the reefs  
And sleek seaweed  
Grows on the desolate shore.  
As deeply do I  
Think of my wife  
Who swayed toward me in sleep  
Like the lithe seaweed.  
Yet few were the nights  
We had slept together  
Before we parted  
Like crawling vines uncurled.  
And so I look back,  
Still thinking of her  
With painful heart,  
This clench of inner flesh,  
But in the storm  
Of fallen scarlet leaves  
On Mount Watari,  
Crossed as on  
A great ship,  
I cannot make out the sleeves  
She waves in farewell. . . .  
And even I  
Who thought I was a brave man  
Find the sleeves of my well-worn robe  
Drenched with tears.

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Source: Gary L. Ebersole, *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 27, 30-32, 50-52, modified.