

**The Power of a Tourney: Physical Competitions in Heian Japan**

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### **Declaration**

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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## **Abstract**

My thesis discusses the social, political, and economic importance of organized physical competitions at the Heian court during the Heian period (794–1185) with an emphasis on the late tenth and early eleventh centuries when the frequency and importance of these physical competitions reached their zenith. I conducted this research by reading the thousands of extant court records and contemporary diary entries from the most powerful courtiers of their age detailing the many facets of physical competition in their time as well as contemporary and near-contemporary literature that includes scenes of physical competition. My work answers to what extent physical competitions were integral to Heian life; why that was the case; and challenges the lack of historiographical analysis in both anglophone and Japanese scholarship on the topic despite the prevalence of physical competitions in Heian society.

The three physical competitions I use are sumo wrestling, horse racing, and archery. I describe the unique facets of each competition individually as well as the greater conclusions made from their congruous impact. Some individual examples include the relationship between the Annual Sumo Tournament and the capitulation of the provinces to the emperor, the boom of horse racing as a privately funded spectacle being due to one man's singular love of horse racing, and how princes and elite courtiers regularly participated in archery competitions on top of the annual competition between the skilled archers in the guardhouses. When the three competitions are viewed together, the influence physical competitions had on the lives of courtiers from the highest ranks to the lowest can be seen. I examine the competitors, spectators, organizers, and hosts of these large spectatorial occasions as each group used physical competitions to further their careers, increase their livelihoods, and define their standing within the social pecking order. Finally on the macro level, my research adds to historiographical debates on the Heian period including political competition, courtier activity, personal agency, and privatization.

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## **Notes on Translation and Historical Figures**

Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

My arguments on the longevity and pervasiveness of competition in and around physical competitions during the Heian period require that I detail the actions of many historical figures, most of whom will be familiar only to scholars of mid-Heian politics. Moreover, my work thrusts figures to the forefront who are usually relegated to background players, like Fujiwara no Sanesuke. Because my study deals with many unknown or insignificant characters in other Heian treatises, I have borrowed an organizational technique from literary works to guide the reader. At the beginning of every chapter is a list of the prominent players within the chapter divided into three sections: members of the Northern Fujiwara Branch, emperors and other courtiers, and competitors. These are the men that the reader should remember from chapter to chapter because prominent players will appear in multiple chapters, such as Fujiwara no Michinaga and Sanesuke who appear in every chapter. That does not mean that prominent players were chosen simply because of the frequency of their name appearing; they are highlighted because their actions or views are central to my arguments. Emperor Ichijō, for example, appears in every chapter, but he is not a prominent player because he did not take impactful personal action. The names on the list of prominent players at the beginning of each chapter are in order of birth or their first appearance in a court record. The appendix includes a full list of the prominent players with descriptions for reference.

Another challenge is to give an accurate and succinct translation of the many posts that were held by the lower-tier courtiers that were often the competitors and organizers of a competition. To solve this problem, I have kept the common English translations of unique posts such as Minister of the Left and Chancellor, but I use my own system for posts within a multi-tiered department. It is a simple numerical system where I designate the top tier of a group as First, the next tier as Second, and so on. This allows me to talk about courtiers on the bottom of certain institutions without the reader getting lost in long, complicated names or direct translations that use differing terminology between departments. This applies to every multi-tiered office, including those with common English translations. For example, the common English renderings of Major, Middle, and Minor Councilor have been replaced with First, Second, and

Third Councilor. One caveat is that some posts had only one vacancy while others had multiple vacancies with the same title. The following chart of the Guard and the Watch consolidates the information in this paragraph:

Tiers of the Guard (近衛府, <i>konoefu</i> )			Tiers of the Watch (兵衛府, <i>hyōefu</i> )		
English	Japanese	No. of members	English	Japanese	No. of Members
First Guard	大将	1	First Watchman	督	1
Second Guard	中将	1–4	Second Watchman	佐	1
Third Guard	少将	2–4	Third Watchman	大尉	2
Fourth Guard	将監	1–10	Fourth Watchman	少尉	2
Fifth Guard	将曹	4–20	Fifth Watchman	大志	2
Sixth Guard	近府	1–6	Sixth Watchman	少志	2
Seventh Guard	番長	1–6			



## Introduction

According to multiple versions of *The Tale of the Heike* (平家物語, *Heike monogatari*), the court could not decide between two capable successors to the throne after the death of Emperor Montoku (827–858, r. 850–858). The elder candidate, Prince Koretaka (844–897), was the first-born son and strove to be a benevolent ruler. The younger candidate, Korehito (850–880), was Montoku's fourth son, but his maternal grandfather was the powerful Fujiwara courtier, Fujiwara no Yoshifusa (804–872). The political stalemate prompted those in power to let ten horse races and a sumo wrestling match determine the next emperor. The special competition drew an impressive audience with every courtier coming to watch the proceedings. The noble spectators split into two camps in support of one prince over the other. The races were fittingly close, the riders representing Koretaka bested their opponents in the first four races before dropping the next six to Korehito's riders. Thus, the fate of the next emperor came down to the sumo match. Koretaka's representative was First Watchman of the Right (右兵衛府督, *uhyōefu kami*) Natora, who had the strength of sixty ordinary men. Korehito's Champion was the smaller Third Guard of the Right (右近衛少将, *ukonoe shōshō*) Yoshio.<sup>1</sup> When the two wrestlers clashed for the first time, Natora threw Yoshio some twenty feet, but the nimble Yoshio stuck his landing. The two grappled once again and it appeared that Yoshio would succumb to Natora's strength. Fearing an imminent defeat, Korehito's mother sent word about the dire situation to the Enryakuji monk who was praying for the younger candidate's victory. Upon hearing the news, the monk took his vajra, bashed his head with it, and then offered his brain matter to turn the tide of the match. Miraculously, Yoshio defeated his larger opponent, and Korehito ascended the throne as Emperor Seiwa (r. 858–876).<sup>2</sup>

The events in this thrilling account of a ninth-century succession dispute are apocryphal, but they were inspired by the political realities of the Heian period (794–1185). This study

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<sup>1</sup> Court posts will be described as needed through the study.

<sup>2</sup> *Heike monogatari* 8.2. For a complete translation of the event, see Helen Craig McCullough, *The Tale of the Heike* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 260–261.

examines those political realities by exploring the social, political, and economic importance of physical competitions held at the Japanese imperial court until the dissolution of annual competitions in the twelfth century. The bulk of my research concerns the ninth to eleventh centuries of the Heian court when physical competitions reached their zenith across all notable metrics. In exploring those topics, I address multiple lines of inquiry. To what extent and in what ways were physical competitions integral to Heian life? Why was that the case? How did competition at court correlate with the level of competition in physical competitions? And if they were as important as the thousands of courtier diary entries and court records suggest they were, why has there been virtually no historiographic literature on the topic?

Before diving into those questions, I must first define what activities should be considered physical competitions and why. The three activities I have grouped into the category of physical competitions are sumo wrestling, horse racing, and archery. This grouping is far from arbitrary as the three were linked together, to the exclusion of other activities, by many compelling factors that are discussed throughout this study. One direct example was an 868 decree during the reign of Seiwa that made the logistics of the Annual Sumo Tournament (相撲節, *sumai no sechi*) the purview of the same office that oversaw the annual Prize Archery Competition (賭射, *noriyumi*) and the equine competitions of the 5/5 Festival (端午の節句, *tango no sekku*)—equestrian archery (騎射, *kisha*) and horse racing.<sup>3</sup> That direct link created in 868 was not severed for centuries thereafter even with multiple changes to which office oversaw the three events.

Although the intrinsic and exclusive connections between these activities were apparent to contemporary courtiers, those connections are not present in most academic literature, so I must explain my definition of what a physical competition is to differentiate it from similar activities. Physical denotes activities where the competitor's physical attributes, like strength or flexibility, or mastery of physically demanding disciplines, like shooting an arrow or controlling a galloping horse, determine the outcome of the competition. Using this definition, popular Heian-

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<sup>3</sup> *Sandai jitsuroku* (三代実録), Jōgan 10 (868)/6/28. Sakai Tadamasa, *Nihon sumō shi* (Tokyo: Baseball Magazine, 1956–1964), 11.

period competitions like the poetry contest (歌合, *uta'awase*), picture contest (絵合, *eawase*), things contest (者合, *monoawase*), or board games like Go (囲碁, *igo*) are excluded. Competition denotes an activity that pits at least two sides against one another with winners and losers, so cooperative physical activities like kickball (蹴鞠, *kemari*) and dancing (舞楽, *bugaku*) do not apply. The final criterion is that physical competitions were both annual events (年中行事, *nenchū gyōji*) built into the imperial calendar and were large spectatorial affairs at the private residences of courtiers. For this reason, all previously mentioned activities as well as cock fighting (鳥合, *toriawase*) and polo (打球, *dakyū*) are not included. Following these three criteria, sumo, horse racing, and archery are the only Heian activities that I define as physical competitions.

Those distinctions should not be overlooked. Physical competitions were the only forms of competition embedded into the annual calendar as annual events. Poetry contests, which have received the most academic consideration of any Heian competition, were numerous, but they were not an annual affair nor did most of the court attend each one. The picture contest in *The Tale of Genji* is a pivotal moment in the narrative, so it is worthy of the attention it garners, but verifiable picture contests were exceedingly rare. In contrast, a preeminent ninth-century courtier had this say about the Annual Sumo Tournament, “Regarding sumo, since the time of Emperor Kanmu [736–806, r. 781–806], the emperors through the ages have all enjoyed [it]. Since the Jōgan Era [859–876], it has been done without fail.”<sup>4</sup> For the next two centuries following that minister’s comment, the frequency of the annual tournament and the number of ancillary annual sumo events only increased. In fact, despite the enormity of the Annual Sumo Tournament, and the complex logistics required to effectively run it, there was never a gap exceeding three years between tournaments from the Jōgan Era until after the 1116 tournament.

Of course, other annual events such as the White Horse Banquet (白馬節会, *aouma no sechie*) or the 5/5 Festival were held as often as physical competitions were. The important difference there is that all other annual events lacked the variability that comes with competition.

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<sup>4</sup> The full quote is translated and put into context in Chapter 1.

Those annual events are far better understood as an intricate set of rituals by which the Heian court oriented and entertained itself. During the White Horse Banquet, for example, a series of twenty-one horses were paraded in front of the imperial family and elite courtiers because gazing upon the colors of the horses was seen as auspicious. When the event ran as intended, the proceedings were locked into comfortable familiarity. Compare that to the twenty horses and their riders that competed in head-to-head horse races where the spectators did not know whether the rider of the Left or the Right would steer his mount across the finish line first. The stimulating and unpredictable events of races—the close finishes, unhorsed riders, and massive upsets—filled diary entries and literary stories alike. That unpredictability also bled into the actions that a spectator took following a match. If his rider won, he would cheer and give the rider a gift; if his rider lost, his rival peers from the other side would force him to drink punitive spirits (罰酒, *basshu*) before they performed their victory dances in front of him.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, while the White Horse Banquet and the horse races of the 5/5 Festival were both annual events and potentially used the same horses, they were not the same kind of event.

When physical competitions are grouped with other annual events without distinction, as has been the case in Japanese and Anglophone scholarship, they are often stripped of their competitive elements to better fit arguments emphasizing the ceremonial and religious aspects of annual events. To further this view, it is often purported that the outcome of the matches in a physical competition were inconsequential, with some going as far as saying the matches were fixed.<sup>6</sup> The discussion on fair competitive play is a complex one that I address throughout the study, but the outcome of a physical competition was demonstrably consequential. Returning to *The Tale of the Heike* account that opened this study, the result of a sumo match determined the next emperor—a matter of the grandest consequence in my estimation. Further, there are factual accounts in this study with comparable stakes, including the Annual Sumo Tournament of 1013

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the victory dances of sumo, horse racing, and Prize Archery, see Yamamoto Kana, “*Gishikisho ni miru heian jidai no shōbu girei no shōhai to shōbu gaku*,” in *Hiroshima daigaku daigakuin kyōikugaku kenkyūka kiyō* 2, no. 57 (2008), 87–96.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see P. L. Cuyler, *Sumo: From Rite to Sport* (New York: Weatherhill, Inc., 1979), 39.

discussed in Chapter 3 and the grand horse racing competition held one month later, as detailed in Chapter 4.

As stated previously, the spurious account in *The Tale of the Heike* reflected political realities of ninth-century Heian Japan. By the reign of Montoku's father, Emperor Ninmyō (808–850, r. 833–850), physical competitions were an integral part of Heian society with various annual spectatorial competitions held throughout the year. A sumo match was the most appropriate competition, physical or otherwise, for determining the new emperor because, as discussed in Chapter 3, the Annual Sumo Tournament represented and reinforced the emperor's authority over the provinces for centuries. Horse racing did the same, to a lesser extent, as the horses used for the annual horse races were tributary animals from the provinces. Similarly, the multiple archery demonstrations held every year had varying purposes from displaying imperial fealty to giving courtiers an excuse to compete against one another. All three martial displays represented the authority of the emperor and the imperial state.

Physical competitions also had an added emphasis on the individual overcoming his opponent that grew in importance as the court went from a centralized state to a political landscape that was shared and competitive. In this way, physical competitions were spectacles that were interwoven with courtier life and grew through the centuries, mirroring the evolving society they entertained. Their impact went beyond a mere reflection of the competitive nature of the Heian court, however, because physical competitions were unique opportunities that were weaponized by the most talented individuals to flaunt and enhance their personal position within the outwardly rigid social and political hierarchy. Consequently, physical competitions were the arenas through which multiple tiers of adversarial forces jockeyed for personal advantage over their peers, with the most skilled athletes and the most astute political players rising to the top.

At the lowest level were the competitors—oftentimes low-ranking courtiers or provincial tributes—who received gifts, fame, and promotions for winning. At the next level was the audience comprised of courtiers of higher rank who split into rival Left and Right contingents as per the demarcation of political posts during the period. The raucous crowd would cheer for the competitors representing their team, reward the winners, disparage the losers, and then spend the rest of the evening dancing, eating, and drinking. At the highest level were the most powerful

men of their age for whom the competitions were held. Powerful regents and influential courtiers from the preeminent branch of the Fujiwara hosted grand physical competitions at their private residences to show off their wealth and affirm their spot atop the political pyramid. Active emperors who combated Fujiwara hegemony hosted their own events and used powers reserved solely for the divine sovereign at physical competitions to impart their own will.

The political and social ramifications of grand physical competitions were not the only reason for their frequency throughout the Heian period. Physical competitions were also popular events that aimed to entertain, doing so with singular efficacy. There are a plethora of courtier diary entries pertaining to physical competitions filled with vivid descriptions of fierce competitions, exclamations of victory and defeat, and declarations of incomparable amusement. Physical competitions were also enormous undertakings requiring complex logistics to function, as many diary entries are also filled with harsh criticisms of those that could not follow proper etiquette, painstaking detail on the months of preparation, and stark reminders of the punishment for negligence. Whole careers were defined by some men's aptitude to either entertain the crowds or to perform the many organizational tasks behind the scenes, leading to specialization for both roles as discussed in chapters two and six.

Individual competition and specialization contributed to an increase in personal agency. Because a competitor could better his station by besting his opponents, the most successful competitors were those that consistently displayed the most skill. As will be seen with the competitors that were continually the best riders or archers, they were often poor at the other duties tied to their role. This not only suggests that competitors were allowed to train to sharpen their skills, but that doing so to the detriment of their other duties was seen as an acceptable consequence by the competitors and their superiors. Specialization occurred outside the competitive field of play as well, most notably when the rigors of organizing the Annual Sumo Tournament went from the shared purview of a large committee of over twenty nobles to the charge of one man and his subordinates. That man, the First Guard (近衛大将, *konoe taishō*) of the Left or Right, also oversaw his half of the competitors in horse racing and the competitive forms of archery, setting the tone for the competitors underneath him. As will be seen with the multiple First Guards discussed in this study, their approaches to their position directly impacted

the performances of the competitors, which in turn defined their capabilities as First Guards. This was how some First Guards, most notably Fujiwara no Sanesuke (957–1046), managed the competitors under them to great success despite institutional handicaps disrupting fair play, and how other First Guards continually failed despite the advantages afforded them. To what extent one could overcome some of the obstacles embedded in Heian society through personal agency is one of the major lines of inquiry addressed in my study.

Any discussion of personal agency in the Heian period inevitably leads to the question of privatization. The extent to which power was wielded in the “private” or “public” spheres is a matter of considerable debate, though most historians of the Heian period see the process of privatization occurring from the mid-tenth century. My discussion of physical competitions introduces multiple new factors to consider when determining privatization in the Heian period, with the most important one being the circumstances surrounding the hosting of physical competitions, particularly from the end of the tenth century. Nevertheless, my focus is less on the debate between private and public and more on the interpersonal relationship of those involved in physical competitions. Where those relationships overlap with personal agency is where my work informs ideas of privatization.

Despite these considerations and others found in thousands of surviving contemporary entries, academic scholarship on the Heian period has either ignored or diminished the importance of physical competitions because of two primary misconceptions. The first misconception is best summarized with a passage from the introduction of Helen Craig McCullough’s translation of *The Great Mirror* (大鏡, *Ōkagami*), “In rounding out his description of [Fujiwara no] Michinaga [966–1028] the author states that he was handsome and a good poet. The Heian love of beauty and the esteem for poetry are so well documented that we are prepared for both attributes to be singled out for comment. For readers of *The Tale of Genji*, what is less expected is the equal attention devoted to Michinaga’s skill as a rider and archer. Masculine sports, of which we hear almost nothing from feminine authors, flourished in the early Heian

period and were still popular in Michinaga's day. Wrestling was one... A third was archery... Finally, riding...<sup>7</sup>

First, I must briefly contend that masculine sports, as McCullough calls them, flourished in early Heian, continued to grow until they peaked during Michinaga's time as the preeminent courtier of his age, and remained strong for a century thereafter. The more important observation she makes, however, is on the expectations of readers of *The Tale of Genji*. For many, including those in academe, the Heian court is still the world of the shining prince. Ivan Morris saw fit to only use three paragraphs in his titular book to describe kickball, archery, horse racing, polo, hunting, falconry, sumo, cock fighting, and boat racing (船競, *funa kurabu*).<sup>8</sup> For every literature lover or freshman undergraduate that is understandably introduced to the Heian period through *The Shining Prince* or seminal works like *The Tale of Genji* or *Pillow Book* (枕草子, *Makura no sōshi*), there is little reason to consider physical competitions further. The main competition in *Genji* is a picture contest, and *Genji's* author, Murasaki Shikibu, makes no reference to physical competitions in her diary. The author of *Pillow Book*, Sei Shōnagon, devotes some lines to physical competitions, but they are far from flattering depictions. She describes sumo wrestlers as rude, wrestlers who lose their matches as undignified, and disparages the Annual Sumo Tournament for elevating a plebian act.<sup>9</sup> When she and some fellow ladies-in-waiting (内侍, *naishi*) are invited to watch the equestrian archery for the 5/5 festival, they agree only because they are told elite members of the Guard were present; upon noticing that the contestants are all of sixth rank (位, *i*) or lower, they promptly leave.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The second "sport" was falconry. Helen Craig McCullough, *Okagami, the Great Mirror, Fujiwara Michinaga (966–1027) and His Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 47.

<sup>8</sup> Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan* (New York: Vintage Books: A Division of Random House, inc., 2013), 153.

<sup>9</sup> See sections 125–126, 156, and 258 of Sei Shōnagon, *Makura no sōshi* (Tokyo: Yuhodo, 1929), accessed through Japan Text Initiative, May 22, 2023. <http://jti.lib.virginia.edu/japanese/sei/makura/SeiMaku.html>

<sup>10</sup> See section 99 in *idem*.



Clearly, physical competitions were not important to these two influential writers, but that was not true of all Heian authors. There is an entire chapter devoted to the grand horse racing competition of 1024 in *The Tale of the Flowering Fortunes* (栄花物語, *Eiga monogatari*), though the anonymous female author focuses on the poems that were written after the races more than the races themselves.<sup>11</sup> The male authors of *The Great Mirror* and *The Tale of the Cavern* (宇津保物語, *Utsuho monogatari*), however, feature physical competitions prominently. Similarly, most collections of didactic anecdotes (説話, *setsuwa*) include numerous stories of Heian wrestlers, riders, and archers. Physical competitions, therefore, are present in many pieces of contemporary and near-contemporary literature, they just did not concern Lady Murasaki or Sei Shōnagon.

I will not fault the two for their disinterest in physical competitions. Heian society was bifurcated across lines of sex in many areas, and few were as stark as physical competitions. Only men could compete in or train for physical competitions, while men and women enjoyed participating in many non-physical competitions. Sei Shōnagon discusses a contest of riddles, for example, with far more interest than she has in sumo or archery.<sup>12</sup> There is a delightful competition between Fujiwara no Teishi (977–1001) and her ladies-in-waiting, of which Sei Shōnagon was one, on who could accurately predict when a patch of snow in the courtyard would melt. The ensuing events show a conspicuous passion for competition in the group of women when it does not concern male-dominated activities.<sup>13</sup>

Still, women were common spectators of physical competitions, and it seems unlikely that they all viewed physical competitions in the same way Sei Shōnagon did. Retired Consort (女院, *nyōin*) Fujiwara no Senshi (962–1001) was the guest of honor at a grand horse racing competition

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<sup>11</sup> Although the author is anonymous and the number of authors is debatable, the academic consensus is that she or they were female. For a discussion on the authorship of the tale, see William H. McCullough and Helen Craig McCullough, *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes: Annals of Japanese Aristocratic Life in the Heian Period*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 37–50.

<sup>12</sup> See Sei Shōnagon, *The Pillow Book*, trans. Meredith McKinney (London: Penguin books, 2006), 145–146.

<sup>13</sup> *Idem*, 78–85.

hosted by her younger brother, Michinaga, in 999. Fujiwara no Shōshi (988–1074), daughter of Michinaga and consort to the emperor, joined the two as the only other spectator of some horse races when Michinaga visited the imperial palace in 1012.<sup>14</sup> At the Annual Sumo Tournament of 993, ladies-in-waiting looked over the railings of the Southern Hall (紫宸殿, *shishinden*) (see figure 3) from behind a bamboo screen and watched the courtiers and wrestlers file in, as they often did.<sup>15</sup> Their attendance was common, if sporadically recorded, as evidenced by the diarist, Sanesuke, giving no added comment to their presence. He only includes them in the diary entry because the bamboo screen was lifted improperly at one point and the faces of the ladies-in-waiting were seen, which was an act of impropriety. As will become abundantly clear with the hundreds of entries from his diary, *Shōyūki* (小右記), in this study, Sanesuke never missed a chance to comment on breaches of decorum or surprising events, so he would have noted female spectators more often if it was not standard for them to be present. Unfortunately, I have not found any extant contemporary records of the opinions of a female spectator on physical competition. Nevertheless, physical competitions were a popular form of entertainment that was certainly enjoyed by the men *and* women of the court at varying levels of enthusiasm.

While I will not criticize Lady Murasaki and Sei Shōnagon, the first misconception I spoke of earlier is that many modern academics and readers believe that the descriptions and views in works like *The Tale of the Genji* or *Pillow Book* are the totality of life in the Heian court. That is not to say that I am against using literary sources or viewing the period through the female perspective, because both are crucial to its understanding. My first foray into Heian physical competitions was through the amazing stories in didactic anecdotes. I am speaking more generally of the non-gendered characterization of Heian courtiers as *effete*—that near-ubiquitous descriptor that is continuously recycled and reinforced by scholarship. For those so tenaciously tethered to that adjective, the high-brow, esoteric, and aesthetic pursuits become paramount, and therefore topics like poetry, fashion, elaborate ritual, Buddhist scripture, and *aware* (哀れ) are emphasized.

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<sup>14</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki* (御堂関白記), Chōwa 1 (1012)/9/12.

<sup>15</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/27.

There is little room in that worldview for two large, barely clad men from the provinces aggressively throwing each other into the dirt or two galloping horses kicking up dust and debris as their riders strive for such a base human impulse as proving they were the better rider. The reality of the period, however, is that sports, to use the modern term, were as integral to Heian society as the aesthetic pursuits that have dominated academic consideration to this point.

I use the modern term sports because the manufactured dissonance between the same members of a society being passionate about high art *and* “low brow” physical competition is a modern restriction to which the Heian courtier did not adhere. The narrowness of the modern view cannot conceptualize the two passions coexisting, choosing instead to erase the competitive and physical natures inherent in physical competitions until only the ritual remains, or discarding their importance entirely. Similarly, Mikael S. Adolphson points out in his analysis of “monk-warriors” that the depictions of monastic warriors in academe and modern media are erroneously informed by the modern sensibilities that violence conducted through religious ideology is disturbing and that politics and religion should be viewed as distinct spheres. He challenges both views as they are not representative of premodern Japan.<sup>16</sup> My work analyzes the Heian period through contemporary sources to challenge the modern restrictions placed on the interests of Heian courtiers that have dominated historiographic discourse on the period.

I will return once again to Morris’ work, which is admittedly nearly six decades old but speaks to the enormity of its justified influence, for a final quote discussing the effete nature of the Heian court, “Though emotional sensitivity was a mark of the true gentleman, it was kept within limits of the accepted aesthetic code and rarely developed into wild passion or unrestrained romanticism. Even when Murasaki’s characters are plunged into the most agonizing grief over the death of someone who has been close to them, they express their emotions in elegantly-turned poems of thirty-one syllables, whose central images of dew and dreams belong to the conventional aesthetic vocabulary.”<sup>17</sup> That restrained, elegant nature was not on display at a grand horse racing

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<sup>16</sup> Mikael S. Adolphson, *The Teeth and Claws of the Buddha: Monastic Warriors and Sōhei in Japanese History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007), 1–5.

<sup>17</sup> Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince*, 196.

competition held at one of Michinaga's palatial estates in 1014 when the crowd of elite courtiers verbally ridiculed one of the riders because he was afraid to race his opponent. The jeers only intensified once the rider eventually forfeited and exited the racing grounds.<sup>18</sup> That event, and the many like it, show that there were more facets to the Heian courtier psyche than Morris suggests. To put it simply, while *The Tale of Genji* had the picture contest that conforms to the accepted view of Heian life, in *The Great Mirror*, Michinaga wagered his future regency on his ability to hit a target with his bow and arrow. It was his martial ability, not his poetic acumen that signaled his eventual rise to prominence.

To put my challenge of the conventional literary view of the Heian court in perspective, here are some concrete, period-specific examples from the courtier diaries. Fujiwara no Yukinari (972–1027), one of the most renowned calligraphers of the Heian period, recorded in his diary, *Gonki* (権記), that he visited one of Michinaga's estates to watch horse racing on fifteen separate occasions between 999 and 1006.<sup>19</sup> A more striking and concise image is painted when you compare the number of entries in the diaries of preeminent Fujiwara courtiers that pertain to poetry contests with the number of entries on physical competitions. I have only included three diaries for the sake of brevity, but the lopsided results are consistent in every diary I used in this study:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This event and its context are discussed in Chapter 4. *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 3 (1014)/5/16.

<sup>19</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>20</sup> This data was pulled from the *kokiroku* database (古記録データベース) of the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo that can be found at <https://wwwap.hi.u-tokyo.ac.jp/ships/w16/search>. I accrued these results by searching the terms for poetry contest, sumo, horse racing, Prize Archery, and equestrian archery in the diaries. There are many more entries, particularly in *shōyūki*, that address a matter related to physical competitions that does not include the key word. I have not counted those because my point is clear without them. Also, I have accounted for duplicate entries in the database, as they are common with *Shōyūki* and *Chūyūki*, so each entry is an independent one.

	Poetry	Sumo	Horse Racing	Prize Archery	Equestrian Archery
<i>Shōyūki</i> (982–1032)	4	358	81	139	26
<i>Midō kanpaku ki</i> (998–1021)	0	45	19	5	3
<i>Chūyūki</i> (1087–1138)	5	82	25	27	15
<b>total</b>	9	485	125	171	44

Of course, I am following a long line of historians and scholars who have already challenged the literary view of the Heian court with the same courtier diaries and court records that I use. The competitive nature of the Heian court has been emphasized in all the major anglophone handbooks detailing Heian Japan for at least the past two decades from *The Cambridge History of Japan* to *Routledge Handbook of Premodern Japanese History*. The contributors to those two volumes and the contributors to *Heian Japan, Centers and Peripheries* have shaped anglophone understanding of the Heian period through studies of warriors, temples and shrines, central relations with the provinces, and so on. The studies convincingly reassess former ideas on courtier levels of competitiveness, engagement in non-aesthetic pursuits, and personal agency in the period. Unlike the former group of scholars that my conclusions threaten, this group will hopefully find that my contribution adds to the arguments they have made.

The inescapable reality that my work is the first to extensively look at the topic of physical competitions in the Heian period, however, leads me to the second misconception I challenge: that sports, again to use the modern term, is not a topic worthy of academic history. It has been over forty years since the McCullough quote that I pulled from *The Great Mirror*, and yet, physical competitions remain invisible in studies of the political, social, economic, martial, religious, and interpersonal spheres of Heian Japan. The disregard for competitions, therefore, seems to be the consequence of a bias against viewing sport in an academic context, conscious or otherwise, even

when the inclusion of physical competitions would bolster the points being made or add necessary context.

The most obvious example is with G. Cameron Hurst III's otherwise informative article on Michinaga's relationship with the provincial governors (守, *kami*) in *Heian Japan, Centers and Peripheries*.<sup>21</sup> Hurst uses data from Murai Yasuhiko to point out that Michinaga received over three hundred horses as gifts through the entries in his diary, *Midō kanpaku ki*, though Michinaga no doubt received far more than recorded.<sup>22</sup> Hurst brings up the question of what Michinaga did with the horses and why he received so many, settling on that some of the horses were regifted, before he moves on to another topic. That Hurst, or Murai before him, does not consider the dozens of recorded horse races that Michinaga hosted at his personal estates with his own horses as the only feasible reason for Michinaga housing so many horses is baffling. To his credit, Ōtsu Tōru saw how many horses Michinaga owned, including the over one hundred horses in Michinaga's stables when he died in 1027, and connected it to Michinaga's love of horse racing, but Ōtsu does not directly connect that point to the conspicuous surge in horses being used as bribes and gifts while Michinaga was in power.<sup>23</sup> Both points are discussed in Chapter 4.

Some less obvious conclusions from my research conflict with the picture William Wayne Farris paints of the Heian court. In his work, *Japan to 1600: A Social and Economic history*, he does not find the space to mention any physical competitions despite their importance in the social and economic spheres, though he discusses the extravagant wealth and effete interests of the courtiers.<sup>24</sup> The main point I wish to contend in that book is his statement that Michinaga was unchallenged from 995 until his death in 1027. Although that is a commonly held perception,

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<sup>21</sup> G. Cameron Hurst III, "Kugyō and Zuryō: Center and Periphery in the Era of Fujiwara no Michinaga," in *Heian Japan, Centers and Peripheries*, ed. Mikael Adolphson, Edward Kamens, and Stacie Matsumoto (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 66–104.

<sup>22</sup> Murai Yasuhiko, *Heian kizoku no sekai* (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1968), 337

<sup>23</sup> Ōtsu Tōru, *Nihon no rekishi 6: Michinaga to kyūtei shakai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2001), 56–58.

<sup>24</sup> William Wayne Farris, *Japan to 1600: A Social and Economic History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 71–73, 78–80.

Emperor Sanjō (976–1017, r. 1011–1016) challenged Michinaga throughout his short reign, with some of the most intense portions of that political battle playing out through the physical competitions of 1013, as described in chapters three and four.<sup>25</sup> His statement speaks to a larger idea that one group or individual dominated the political landscape without detractors or rivals until the next group or individual did the same. My research adds some much needed nuance to those ideas with examples of how competition thrived throughout the mid-Heian period.

Moreover, Farris' work on famine would have benefited greatly from the inclusion of sumo records. After noting the marked difference between the number of drought records in the ninth and tenth centuries, he asks, "Is it reasonable, for instance, to believe...that the incidence of famine would have dropped from more than once in three years in the ninth century to once in twenty in the tenth?" After correctly surmising it is not, he then posits that it is the fault of the tenth century sources, but his data clearly indicates that he has not read the sources related to the Annual Sumo Tournament.<sup>26</sup> His presumably exhaustive list of recorded droughts in the tenth century does not include 920, 925, 948, and 985 that have records that clearly state that the Annual Sumo Tournament was canceled because of drought.<sup>27</sup> There are also other sumo records that state special circumstances due to drought, such as in 910 and 956.<sup>28</sup> Further, Farris quantifies the strong correlation between famine and epidemics, so the 909, 960, 995, and 998 tournaments that were canceled due to epidemic suggest more drought years.<sup>29</sup> That was certainly the case as

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<sup>25</sup> Farris, *Japan to 1600*, 58.

<sup>26</sup> William Wayne Farris, "Famine, Climate, and Farming in Japan, 670–1100," in *Heian Japan, Centers and Peripheries*, 277–278.

<sup>27</sup> His list is on Farris, "Famine," 281–283. The records on the canceled tournaments are: *Nihon kiryaku* (日本記録), Engi 20 (920)/7/?; *Fusō ryakuki* (扶桑略記), Enchō 3 (925)/7/13,21; *Saikyūki* (西宮記), Enchō 3 (925)/7/15; *Nihon kiryaku*, Tenryaku 2 (948)/6/14; *Shōki mokuroku* (小記目錄), Kan'na 1 (985)/7/23.

<sup>28</sup> *Saikyūki*, Tenryaku 10 (956)/7/29 says they followed the precedent set in 910.

<sup>29</sup> He states the correlation coefficient is .88 on Farris, 292. Canceled tournaments: *Nihon kiryaku*, Engi 9 (909)/7/?, Tentoku 4 (960)/5/28, Chōtoku 1 (995)/4/27; *Fushimi nomiya kiroku* (伏見宮記録), Chōtoku 4 (998)/7/5.

seen with the 909 cancelation due to an epidemic and the 910 adjustment due to drought. Following Farris' statistics, these additional records would more than double his records of droughts in the tenth century and could potentially triple it if the three tournaments that were canceled without a recorded reason were for drought. While the reason is not apparent in those three cases, the most recorded reason in any century for the cancelation of the Annual Sumo Tournament was in response to some calamity, usually a drought or epidemic.

The most important point with these canceled tournaments, however, is that the cancelation of a tournament was a form of tax relief. The temporary reprieve to the provinces released them from the obligation of funding the lengthy stay of their representative wrestlers in the capital. In 994, for example, the court received a message about the devastating epidemic sweeping Kyushu from *Dazaifu* (太宰府), the government office that oversaw all the provinces in Kyushu, that specifically requested that they be exempt from sending wrestlers to that year's tournament.<sup>30</sup> Those cancelations show the active involvement of central elites in the affairs of the provinces that contradicts Farris' concluding claim that, "...the horror of frequent famines, along with epidemics, may have been a major factor in convincing the capital aristocracy to leave the details of local administration to the custodial governors and emphasize its own refined worlds of art, literature, and religion."<sup>31</sup>

Most other cases are more muted where a few lines on the corresponding aspect of physical competitions would bolster the argument without necessarily altering its context. In discussing the rise to power of the powerful emperor and retired emperor, Shirakawa (1053–1129, r. 1072–1086), Adolphson states, "It should be added, though, that Shirakawa's efforts to control religious centers and ceremonies more directly during his early years indicate a more planned and gradual surge to power."<sup>32</sup> Adolphson goes on to effectively argue this point, focusing mainly on the religious centers and the ceremonies directly tied to those religious centers.<sup>33</sup> There is no

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<sup>30</sup> *Honchōseiki* (本朝世紀), Shōryaku 5 (994)/5/10.

<sup>31</sup> Farris, "Famine," 299–300.

<sup>32</sup> Mikael S. Adolphson, *The Gates of Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press: 2000), 76.

<sup>33</sup> Adolphson, *The Gates of Power*, 75–124.



mention, however, of Emperor Shirakawa hosting an Extraordinary Sumo Competition (臨時相撲, *rinji zumō*) in 1079 before he hosted two more at his private residence in 1088 and 1095 as a retired emperor even though all previous Extraordinary Sumo Competitions since their inception were the prerogative of the sitting emperor. Further, Retired Emperor Shirakawa gave his office the authority to summon wrestlers from the provinces from 1098 onwards, taking that authority away from the emperor who had held it for at least four centuries—a striking move when the Annual Sumo Tournament is understood for its political and symbolic importance. In the following chapter, Adolphson looks at Go-Shirakawa (1127–1192, r. 1155–1158), where including how Emperor Go-Shirakawa held the first proper Annual Sumo Tournament in 36 years only two weeks before he abdicated, and then oversaw the final two Annual Sumo Tournaments in 1168 and 1174 as a retired emperor would have added to his compelling arguments on Go-Shirakawa trying to reassert the imperial authority that had been challenged by the rising warrior class.<sup>34</sup>

Speaking of the Heian warrior class, Karl F. Friday puts one of his many convincing conclusions thusly, “The incentive for provincial elites and lower-tier central nobles to develop private skills-at-arms came from two main sources: state military policy, and the growing competition for wealth and influence among various parties and factions in both the capital and the provinces. Both served to create continually expanding opportunities for advancement for those with martial talent.”<sup>35</sup> His argument here, and in other places, is supported by what I discuss in Chapter 5 with both standing and equestrian archery competitions. One example is how the predominant format of competitive equestrian archery went from two teams of Left and Right Guards competing for the sake of the elite courtiers on the same side to a new competition where the competitors were provincial warriors competing individually for prizes starting in the eleventh century. The new form of mounted archery will be called horse-borne archery (流鏑馬, *yabusame*) to differentiate it from standard equestrian archery. Archery competitions, standing and equestrian, are absent from Friday’s analysis, however, save for one line in translation where an

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<sup>34</sup> Adolphson, 125–184.

<sup>35</sup> Karl F. Friday, *Hired Swords: The Rise of Private Warrior Power in Early Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University press, 1992), 173–174.

eleventh-century author uses the warrior's prowess in multiple forms of competitive equestrian and standing archery to drive home his claim that the warrior is indeed the best in the land.<sup>36</sup>

There are many other examples, such as wrestlers being used in negotiations between the provinces and the center over gubernatorial disputes that adds an interesting layer to studies on provincial petitions, including Charlotte von Verschuer's work on the Owari petition of 988 (尾張国解文, *Owari no kuni no gebumi*).<sup>37</sup> Rather than continuing to list every one, however, I hope that the examples given so far and the research done in this study will encourage anglophone scholars of the Heian period to consider physical competitions when they discuss the Heian period in the future.

### Theoretical Framework

While most scholars who have considered physical competitions, however briefly, have relegated physical competitions to the martial, ceremonial, or religious spheres, competition and entertainment are the primary lenses through which physical competitions should be viewed to understand them in the Heian context.<sup>38</sup> Of course, analyzing physical competitions through competition and entertainment alone would also diminish their impact on Heian society. Heian physical competitions existed at the unique intersection of all five spheres—competitive, entertaining, martial, ceremonial, and religious—but it was through competition and entertainment that they thrived, like modern sports do. Many of the concepts discussed and the terms used in this study are also found in modern sports. Although that is intentional, they are not

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<sup>36</sup> Friday, *Hired Swords*, 71–72.

<sup>37</sup> Charlotte von Verschuer, "Life of Commoners in the Provinces: The *Owari no gebumi* of 988," in *Heian Japan, Centers and Peripheries*, 305–328.

<sup>38</sup> For a martial example, see Katō Tomoyasu, *Sekkan seiji to ōchō bunka* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2002), 51. For ceremonial, see Obinata Katsumi, *Kodai kokka to nenchū gyōji* (Tokyo: Kōdansha gakujutsu bunko, 2008), 10–13. For religious, see Wakamori Tarō, *Sumō ima mukashi* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1963), 15–31.

directly comparable. Most academic literature that has critically discussed any facet of Heian physical competitions does so to highlight the changes in sports, particularly sumo, from the premodern to the modern.<sup>39</sup> That model forces the authors and the readers to unjustly judge physical competitions in the Heian period by modern standards.

Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson have offered the most complete version of this common model by differentiating between premodern sports and modern sports across seven crucial criteria: secularism, equality, bureaucratization, specialization, rationalization, quantification, and the obsession with records.<sup>40</sup> It is a solid sociological system to argue the evolutionary nature of sports because a modern sport will consistently and definitively surpass a premodern one in every category. While a discussion about whether premodern or modern sumo is more secular would be a fascinating challenge to their paradigm, that discussion once again would force an inappropriate comparison between the two activities. The changes in physical competitions *throughout* the Heian period, however, satisfy all seven of their evolutionary metrics. This is a more appropriate application because the qualification of competition in the Heian period should not be based on a comparison to modern sports, but rather judged by other events that were held during the same period to see the concordant relationship between the realities of the court and the nature of physical competitions. Put another way, Heian sumo should be compared to other annual events of the period, or the poetry contests enjoyed by the same people, and not compared to sumo in Edo and beyond.

From a similar perspective, multiple historians frame sumo wrestling as nothing more than a ritual, with or without a religious component. Those that push the religious agenda do so to show a millennia-old connection between sumo and the nativist religion, Shinto.<sup>41</sup> Guttman and Thompson focused less on the religious elements and more on the ceremonial, borrowing heavily from the work of Obinata Katsumi. Obinata convincingly argues that certain annual events like the

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<sup>39</sup> For example, see Nitta Ichirō, *Sumō: sono rekishi to gihō* (Tokyo: Baseball Magazine, 2016), 26–30.

<sup>40</sup> Allen Guttman and Lee Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 2–4.

<sup>41</sup> For example, Yamanaka Yutaka, *Heianchō no nenchū gyōji* (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1972), 221–222. Or Cuyler, *Sumo: From Rite to Sport*, 13, 21–32

Annual Sumo Tournament and the Ritual Archery Demonstration (射礼, *jarai*) were yearly displays of obeisance to imperial rule.<sup>42</sup> My findings fully support this theory. Obinata, and by extension Guttman and Thompson, take this one step further to argue that those ceremonial displays were not competitive. In the case of the Ritual Archery Demonstration, they are correct, but the overwhelming evidence in contemporary courtier diaries contradicts that same description of sumo. To complicate generalizations further, while the Ritual Archery Demonstration was not competitive, the Prize Archery Competition the following day and the Equestrian Archery Competition in the fifth month were. So, some archery events were purely ceremonial, and others were competitive and entertaining. Then there were the horse races that were undeniably fixed in the ninth century before becoming competitive, like sumo and Prize Archery, prior to the turn of the tenth century. These finer points are what necessitate my comprehensive study of physical competitions in the Heian period where the ceremonial, religious, and martial are combined with the competitive and spectatorial.

The ceremonial function, though largely left out of this study due to constraints on length, should not be understated. Its primacy in the historiography of the Heian period is merited because the Heian government was more than merely ceremonial, the ceremony *was* the government.<sup>43</sup> This was why the annual calendar held such importance to the Heian court and why high-ranking courtiers kept diaries and wrote treatises on etiquette. A courtier's adherence to precedent and proper protocol was one of the most important factors to his advancement at court outside the genealogical restrictions described in Chapter 1. To put it another way, the courtiers were actors, and the various ceremonial aspects of every social interaction were their stage directions. Clifford Geertz coined the term theatre state to describe this phenomenon.<sup>44</sup> While his initial work looked at the ritualized spectacle of nineteenth-century Bali, the concept is apt in multiple contexts, including Heian.

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<sup>42</sup> Obinata Katsumi, *Kodai kokka to nenchū gyōji*, 16–37, 164–174.

<sup>43</sup> See the work of Yamanaka Yutaka or Kurabayashi Shōji as examples.

<sup>44</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 13–14, 135–136.

These reflective elements alone, however, cannot encapsulate the importance of physical competitions in the Heian period. An analysis of the true impact of physical competitions requires study of those who used physical competitions for social, political, and economic gain through competition and spectacle rather than spectacle alone. I use the term “competitive capital” to describe the benefits earned from the participation in, or the hosting of, a competition. Although that is a new term, the framework is derived from the long sociological discourse around Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural and social capital. He argues that capital was divided into three parts: cultural, social, and economic. Humans use these forms of capital independently or jointly to rise in station among various peer groups. He asserts that cultural capital are the assets of an individual that improve social mobility within a stratified society that include one’s education, style of dress, manner of speech, intellect, and other symbolic measures of status that are worth seeking within that society.<sup>45</sup>

In the Heian context, the concept of cultural capital synergizes with the ideas on court culture by another famous sociologist, Norbert Elias. Elias states that intense and specialized competition for prestige and the compulsion to display were present in courtly societies where the ranks were fixed but the possession of those ranks was fluid.<sup>46</sup> This was especially true in the context of a society where people’s social existence depended so heavily on prestige and their standing at court.<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that Elias is discussing the French aristocracy and not the Heian court, so some of the examples he uses or the extent to which the court should be defined as “fluid” does not directly correlate to the Heian court. His overall conceptualization of competition and specialization in a court obsessed with prestige and other aspects of cultural capital, however, is fundamental to understanding Heian court dynamics.

One crucial area where Elias’ conclusions may be more fitting to the Heian context than the French example, or by extension the European one, is that privatized military might was not as impactful on a courtier’s position during the Heian period, particularly prior to the twelfth century.

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<sup>45</sup> For example, see Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 241–258.

<sup>46</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 93.

<sup>47</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, 80.

This reality likely adds to the standard notion of the effete Heian courtier because they were not concerning themselves with the number of warriors they had under their employ. That being said, studies on the arbiters of violence, be they private provincial warriors or those under the auspices of temple leadership, have already complicated this view that the Heian court was ever completely severed from martial matters. Organized physical competitions comfortably sit within those potentially competing ideas. While the Heian courtier may have balked at wanton acts of aggression, they packed the seats to watch organized forms of violence occur. Wrestling, horse racing, and archery all have their spots within the martial ethos, and the courtiers consumed these spectacles regularly and rewarded their best practitioners.

Jonathan Stockdale masterfully uses both Bourdieu and Elias to create a theoretical framework for the various forms of “currency” at court, and to explain how the winners of the famous picture contest from the *Tale of Genji* benefited from their victory.<sup>48</sup> A synopsis of the story is as follows: there were two potential candidates competing for the right to become the emperor’s next consort. It was decided that a picture contest would determine who the next consort would be. The supporters of each consort were split into a Left and Right side to compete on behalf of their chosen consort. The pictures themselves were not the only things judged as there were many comments on the frames and other materialistic aspects of the presentation. The young emperor would cast the deciding vote, simultaneously designating the aesthetic merits of one side as superior and agreeing to a new consort. He found that choice difficult, however, because both sides were performing well. In typical dramatic fashion, the decisive picture was the final picture by the titular Genji himself. His submission was so spectacular that it brought the room to tears. The emperor chose the consort represented by the Left, and Genji’s influence grew. As Stockdale points out, while supporting the consort did not automatically result in a meteoric rise in power for Genji, the connection proved advantageous later when that consort became one of the emperor’s favorites. The episode clearly demonstrates that both the consort and Genji

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<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Stockdale, *Imagining Exile in Heian Japan: Banishment in Law, Literature, and Cult* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2015) 11-13.

benefited from cultural capital gained from the contest because that capital was a cultural and social commodity within the court.<sup>49</sup>

Stockdale also includes poetry contests in the same framework, echoing multiple academics. Thomas Lamarre impresses upon his readers that poetry contests boosted the quality and quantity of poetry at court.<sup>50</sup> Included in his analysis of poetry from poetry contests is his rebuttal to Helen McCullough's disparaging remarks that poetic play was "negligible literature."<sup>51</sup> As stated before, similar sentiments are the likely culprits to why so few academics have considered the competitive and spectatorial elements of physical competitions.<sup>52</sup> Thankfully, the academic literature around poetry contests in Japanese and anglophone scholarship has increased in recent years. Thomas E. McAuley wrote a multivolume translation and commentary on the six hundred round poetry contest of 1192 in which he makes two pertinent points. The first is that there were 450 recorded poetry contests from 887 to 1189, showing its popularity.<sup>53</sup> The second is that despite there being so many, there were lulls and booms in the frequency of said contests. The level of personal interest that the emperor or retired emperor had in poetry correlated with the frequency of the event.<sup>54</sup> The same was true with physical competitions, though there was also the added effect of the top Fujiwara's interest level, that speaks to the entertainment value of competitions and contests.

McAuley and Lamarre regularly reference the work of Hagitani Boku and Taniyama Shigeru for their facts and figures on poetry contests. The Japanese duo argue that the poetry contests were political tools and that sponsoring contests was an assertion of wealth, status, and influence.

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<sup>49</sup> Stockdale, *Imagining Exile in Heian Japan*, 57–60.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Lamarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan: an Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription* (Duke University Press, 2000), 60–73.

<sup>51</sup> Lamarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> One exception was Kurabayashi Shōji who emphasized strength and technique in his discussion on Heian sumo. Kurabayashi Shōji, *Nihon matsuri to nenchū gyōji jiten* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1983), 239–240.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas E. McAuley, *The Poetry Contest in Six Hundred Rounds: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas E. McAuley, *The Poetry Contest in Six Hundred Rounds*, 5.

They even go so far as to say that poetry contests had profound effects on who was considered the most powerful person at court. Retired Emperor Uda (866–931, r. 887–897), for example, held a poetry contest in 913 to stave off Fujiwara supremacy.<sup>55</sup> Hagitani and Taniyama would not be surprised to see my argument that Uda used similar tactics with physical competitions for the same reason. In the introduction to their book, they make multiple connections between poetry contests and three other competitions they consistently group together: sumo, horse racing, and archery.<sup>56</sup>

To be clear, I consider every aspect of the previous few paragraphs to be examples of competitive capital. My work focuses on physical competitions, which affected the court in some unique ways, but there were many similarities to other competitive endeavors like the poetry contest and the picture contest. I also include some dialectic religious debates under the umbrella of competitive capital. The Ōwari debates of 963, for example, pitted two schools of thought against one another, and saw the victorious monk Ryōgen (912–985) gain prestige and a political post thereafter.<sup>57</sup> It was not unusual in the Heian period for courtiers to be interested in religion, poetry, horseback riding, and archery—especially when it was experienced through competition.

### Sources

My sources come primarily from the courtier diaries of the Heian period. In this study, I use the diaries from *Teishinkōki* (貞信公記, 907–948) to *Chūyūki*. Many of the most powerful men of their age wrote these records that served a political function beyond that of modern personal diaries.<sup>58</sup> Because Heian society was predicated on precedent, courtier diaries served as

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<sup>55</sup> Hagitani Boku and Taniyama Shigeru, *Utaawaseshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1965), 8, 53–67.

<sup>56</sup> They connected the events on twelve points. Hagitani and Taniyami, *Utaawaseshū*, 11–18.

<sup>57</sup> See Paul Groner, *Ryōgen and Mount Hiei* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 94–117.

<sup>58</sup> For an English discussion, see Yoshida Sanae, “Aristocratic Journals and the Courtly Calendar: The Context of Fujiwara no Tadahira’s *Teishinkōki*,” in *Teishinkōki: The Year 939 in the Journal of Regent Fujiwara no Tadahira*, ed. Joan R. Piggott and Yoshida Sanae (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University East Asian Program,



instructions for future generations on how to handle events. Consequently, the longest records were usually how the court decided to resolve some aberrant circumstance—like when one sumo wrestler bit the hand of his opponent so hard it caused bleeding—so that courtiers could be prepared the next time that a similar situation occurred.<sup>59</sup> The contents of the diaries, though of public importance, were fiercely guarded family heirlooms designed to help the author while he was still alive and his later descendants. They are invaluable sources without which my research would be impossible. The largest gaps in primary sources in this study coincide with the years between the ending of one extant diary to the beginning of another, most notably the gap between the end of *Shōyūki* to the beginning of *Chūyūki* over fifty years later.

Elite courtiers also wrote two other sources used in this study: national histories and handbooks on court ritual (儀式書, *gishikisho*). The national histories that are used are known as the six national histories (六国史, *rikkokushi*) detailing important events from mythical origins to the year 887. For handbooks on court ritual, the format was to list the annual events in chronological order and then describe those events using as many examples across however many years as was deemed appropriate before moving onto the next event and starting the same process. This allowed handbooks to often include long descriptions of events that happened before the author was born to explain aspects of a ritual from its origin. The most important handbooks used in this study are *Ononomiya nenchū gyōji* (小野の宮年中行事), *Hokuzanshō* (北山抄), *Saikyūki*, *Gōkeishidai* (江家次第), and *Zoku honchō ōjō den* (続本朝往生伝).

In addition to these sources, I use multiple contemporary and near-contemporary literary sources, broadly defined. *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature* defines the subgenres to which my sources belong to explain the nuances between them. *Kagerō nikki* (蜻蛉日記) is an example of a literary diary, separated from the more official courtier diaries because it was written

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2008), 8–21. For Japanese, see Hashimoto Yoshihiko, *Heian no kyūtei to kizoku* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1996), 225–229.

<sup>59</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/27.

in *kana* rather than *kanbun* and the author focused more on emotional reactions to an event than the event itself.<sup>60</sup> *The Tale of Flowering Fortunes* and *The Great Mirror* are vernacular histories, characterized by imitating the dynastic histories of China and the six national histories of Japan, though written in *kana*.<sup>61</sup> *The Tale of the Cavern* is a “made up tale” (*tsukuri monogatari*) because it is an entirely fictional tale where the amount of prose far outweighs the poetry.<sup>62</sup> The inimitable *Pillow Book* defies genre definition, but the author’s primary contributions have been explained in my introduction.<sup>63</sup> Finally, stories of physical competitions are found in collections of didactic anecdotes, like *Tales of Times now Past* (今昔物語集, *Konjaku monogatari*) and *Notable Tales Old and New* (古今著聞集, *Kokon Chomonjū*), as well as in war tales (軍記物, *gunki mono*), like *Tale of the Heike* and *Gempei jōsuiki* (源平盛衰記).<sup>64</sup>

While my sources are primarily courtier diaries, the inclusion of physical competitions in such a broad spectrum of literary sources does more than simply validate Helen McCullough’s comment in her translation of *The Great Mirror*. Physical competitions should be considered in historical and literary treatments of the period alike.

## Chapter Overview

The first chapter provides a political background of the Heian court with special attention paid to the competitive elements outside physical competitions. I describe the rival blocs of power, the rivalries within said blocs, and the rivalry between the Left and Right contingents of the

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<sup>60</sup> Sonja Arntzen, “15: Heian Literary Diaries: Tosa nikki to Sarashina nikki,” in *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature*, ed. Haruo Shirane, Tomi Suzuki, and David Lurie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 165–175.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Oyler, “19: Vernacular Histories: *Eiga monogatari*, *Ōkagami*, *Gukanshō*,” in *ibid*, 193–205.

<sup>62</sup> Joshua S. Mostow, “10: Early Heian court Tales,” in *ibid*, 121–128.

<sup>63</sup> Haruo Shirane, “14: The Pillow book of Sei Shōnagon,” in *ibid*, 161–164.

<sup>64</sup> Haruo Shirane, “28: Setsuwa (anecdotal) literature: *Nihon ryōiki* to *Kokon chomonjū*,” in *ibid*, 280–286.

government. Finally, I describe the imperial veto, a tool exclusive to the emperor when he attended physical competitions, and explain why certain emperors employed it more than others.

The second chapter looks at aspects of physical competition that are shared by the three events. These largely entail descriptions of the duties required to successfully run all the physical competitions and the offices within the Guard that specialized in said duties. There is also a combined timeline to show that the evolutions in each competition described in their respective chapters occurred around the same time and were always heading in the same direction towards more competitive play.

The following three chapters look at each competition individually. Chapter 3 is on sumo, four is on horse racing, and five is on archery. The third chapter on sumo is considerably longer than the other two because sumo was the most important competition of the three and has received the most interest in academic study. Some logistical information, such as the order in which courtiers arrived at a competition, is more detailed in the sumo chapter because it is the first of the three competitions described. Such logistical concerns reflect horse racing and archery competitions in the same way except when specified otherwise.

While the first five chapters are predominantly concerned with the politics behind competitions and the impact competitions had on the hosts, organizers, and spectators, the final chapter focuses solely on competitors. I discuss the tangible rewards competitors received after a competition. I describe a competitor's ability to excuse himself from participating in a competition due to an injury. I also look at the promotions that Guards and wrestlers received for continued excellence in competition. I conclude with the competitive capital gained by the best competitors that was converted into celebrity, expanded landholdings, and enduring legacy.

## Chapter 1: Competition at Court

Prominent Players		
Northern Fujiwara Branch	Emperors and Courtiers	Competitors
Tadahira	Emperor Uda	Magami no Katsuoka (sumo)
Saneyori	Emperor Daigo	
Morosuke	Emperor Sanjō	
Kaneie	Emperor Shirakawa	
Michinaga	Sugawara no Michizane	
Sanesuke		
Kintō		

Physical competitions cannot be appreciated as a mirror into the milieu of the court through which competitors, spectators, and hosts jostled with their peers without understanding the environment in which they thrived. Thus, an overview of the political structure of the Heian court is imperative. Many monographs and lengthy articles have been written on this topic, but the recreation here will be through the lens of competition at court with special attention paid to the interplay between individual members of different blocs of power.<sup>65</sup> This retelling is to provide background information to contextualize physical competitions as well as address some fundamental questions about competition. For example, to what extent did different groups compete with one another? How much did personal agency factor into competition within a mostly static system? And how much does competition and personal agency affect the discussion of periodization in historiography?

To begin the overview, many of the foundational pieces of the Japanese legal and political system were adapted from the Chinese model beginning in the late seventh and early eighth

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<sup>65</sup> The most accessible overviews of the court can be found in William H. McCullough, “The Heian Court, 794–1070,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 2: Heian Japan*, ed. Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 20–96; and William H. McCullough, “The Capital and Its Society,” in *ibid.*, 97–182.

centuries. The Japanese spent much of the eighth century working on their interpretation of the Chinese system to create what historians call the *ritsuryō* (律令) state.<sup>66</sup> The Japanese did not adopt the Chinese system wholesale, however, because while the Chinese system provided a legal framework that the previous Yamato polity lacked, they wanted to adapt that framework to fit native circumstances and sensibilities. One of the most fundamental differences was the source of imperial legitimacy. In the Chinese system, the emperor assumed total authority by possessing the Mandate of Heaven. Conversely, the authority of the Japanese emperor was tied to his direct descentance from the Goddess Amaterasu, and his religious guarantee of agricultural production effected through celebration and harvest rituals—of which the Annual Sumo Tournament was one of the most important.<sup>67</sup> The difference in imperial legitimacy is an important one because whereas in the Chinese model a person in possession of a physical object assumed control, the Japanese model moved away from the emperor as an individual, making him or her the embodiment of the state rather than its top agent.

Despite this difference, Japanese emperors and empresses held considerable direct control throughout the Nara period (710–794) until the mid-ninth century. The Nara period saw the last Japanese empress who ruled outright, reigning from 749–758 and again from 764 until her death in 770, though many imperial consorts and Grand Imperial Dowagers (皇太后, *kōtaigō*) wielded considerable power behind the scenes for centuries thereafter.<sup>68</sup> Another political group, the courtiers, used similar paths to increase their influence, effectively loosening the emperor's grip on the court from the mid-ninth century. The most powerful house to emerge during that

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<sup>66</sup> For an overview of the historiography of the *ritsuryō* state, see Sakaue Yasutoshi with Kristopher L. Reeves, "The *Ritsuryō* State," in *Routledge Handbook of Premodern Japanese History*, ed. Karl F. Friday (Milton Park: Routledge, 2017), 82–99. For a more in-depth treatise, see Yoshikawa Shinji, *Ritsuryō kanryōsei no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Hanawa shobō, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> Sakaue, "The *Ritsuryō* State," 91.

<sup>68</sup> See Fukutō, "From Female Sovereign to Mother of the Nation," 15–34.

time was the Fujiwara who dominated many of the top political posts throughout the mid-Heian period.<sup>69</sup>

They were able to do so for two reasons that were once again deviations from the Chinese system. The first was that the Japanese used the new legal structure to codify the system that was already in place prior to the *ritsuryō* state so that a small group of prominent houses continued to wield the majority of power.<sup>70</sup> They did so by only allowing certain houses the privilege to hold top positions within the new posts that they borrowed from the Chinese. This stifled political mobility because genealogy became the most important determinant of a courtier's career trajectory. All but the most exceptional courtiers were chained to a narrow range of posts or ranks because they could not rise too far above, or fall too far below, the level determined by their family background. Furthermore, members of the elite houses were given fast tracks to promotions that other courtiers could not match regardless of talent, creating well-defined tiers within the already selective pool of courtiers. Courtiers from the most prominent Fujiwara lines, for example, began their careers at a mid-tier post before jumping each rung of the political ladder in a matter of years, whereas it took some courtiers decades to move up one rung. One of the more fascinating consequences of the vertical gridlock was that it created an environment in which officials of different levels worked together to better their respective positions because there was no fear of the lesser noble displacing the higher one.

The second way the Fujiwara were able to hold considerable power throughout the mid-Heian period was by marrying their daughters or nieces to sitting emperors in hopes that the union would result in grandsons. The Heian system for childrearing was uxorilocal, so the children were raised by their mothers in locations separate from the emperor. In this way, the maternal grandfather or uncle could have considerable influence over the young heir to the throne. The next step was to have an adult emperor abdicate so that the next Fujiwara grandson could rule as a child emperor with his Fujiwara grandfather serving as regent. The Fujiwara served as regents to

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<sup>69</sup> For an anglophone study on the eighth-century Fujiwara, see Mikaël Bauer, *The History of the Fujiwara House: A Study and Annotated Translation of the Tōshi Kaden* (Folkestone, Kent: Renaissance Books, 2020).

<sup>70</sup> For more on this reconfiguration, see Joan R. Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 166–184.

adult emperors as well, though they had considerably less influence over adult emperors. This was especially true if the emperor took the throne as an adult, as will be seen with multiple examples in this study.<sup>71</sup>

Due to these factors and the importance of inheritance to the Heian polity, multiple powerful lines emerged to compete for influence at court during the Heian period. There was first the imperial line that was supposed to be a direct link back to Amaterasu and therefore could not be supplanted directly by non-imperial Fujiwara. There were the select lines of the Fujiwara, described later, who installed the female members of their line into the imperial chambers to exert influence as regents. There were also other powerful houses and institutions that both worked together and jockeyed for power that waxed and waned with the centuries. Which group held the most power at one time has been the primary way that historians have tried to periodize the ninth through twelfth centuries of Japanese history. There are two prevailing theories that have tried to categorize and explain political power during those centuries that my findings will qualify.<sup>72</sup>

The first is called *ōchō kokka* (王朝国家). This theory describes the balance of power during the Heian period beginning with a more centralized state around the emperor in the early ninth century before that system eventually gave way to a period of courtier dominance that corresponded with the long-lasting Fujiwara regency in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. Near the turn of the twelfth century, retired emperors supplanted the courtiers by using the same tactics the Fujiwara had used and combined them with the authority inherent in their previous title. The period known as *ōchō kokka*, therefore, is the period after imperial hegemony and before the retired emperors, and then the warriors, took power away from the courtiers.

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<sup>71</sup> Kuramoto Kazuhiro complicates this view as well showing the strength of blood relation between thirty emperors and regents. See, Kuramoto Kazuhiro, *Sekkan seiji to ōchō kizoku* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2000), 3–23.

<sup>72</sup> For an overview of the historiography of both theories, see Mikael S. Adolphson, “From Classical to Medieval?” *Ōchō kokka, kenmon taisei, and the Heian Court*,” in *Routledge Handbook of Premodern Japanese History*, 99–115.

The timeline and accuracy of those shifts in power, however, are sources of considerable debate. It is indisputable that the apex of courtier power was during the Heian period, coinciding with similar heights in high-brow courtier culture like poetry, literature, and extravagant spectatorial competitions. The duration of that period of courtier dominance, however, is less apparent. The genesis of the period is especially contentious with a century dividing the two starting points that are most argued. Some historians say the period began in 858 when Yoshifusa became regent to Seiwa.<sup>73</sup> If so, the events in *The Tale of the Heike* story that opened this study become the unheralded instigator of that period. Others say it was the latter half of the tenth century when new economic and social policies were implemented so that power was increasingly derived from private relationships.<sup>74</sup> This timeline is also sometimes used to differentiate the classical age from the medieval one.<sup>75</sup> If so, then the unprecedented physical competitions that Michinaga's father, Fujiwara no Kaneie (929–990), hosted at his private estates in the 980's become one more example of the privatization that separates the latter half of the tenth century from the previous period.

There is little consensus on the terminus of the period as well. Some see the period ending when Regent Fujiwara no Yorimichi (992–1074) lost the regency in 1068.<sup>76</sup> Others see the abdication of Emperor Shirakawa in 1086 to exert control as a retired emperor as the beginning of a new period of rule by retired emperors known as the *Insei* (院政) period (1086–1185).<sup>77</sup> Some historians say that *ōchō kokka* lasted until the creation of the Kamakura Bakufu a century later, thus including the entirety of the *Insei* period.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> For example, Morita tei, *Ōchō seiji* (Tokyo: Hanbai kyōikusha shuppan sābisu, 1979), 15.

<sup>74</sup> For example, Yoshikawa, *Ritsuryō kanryōsei no kenkyū*, 417–418.

<sup>75</sup> For example, Kuriyama Keiko, *Chūsei ōke no seiritsu to insei* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2012), 5.

<sup>76</sup> See, Jeffrey Mass, *Antiquity and Anachronism in Japanese History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 13–15

<sup>77</sup> For example, Kawane Yoshiyasu, “Chūsei shakai seiritsu ki no nōmin mondai,” *Nihonshi kenkyū*, no 71 (1964), 14–26.

<sup>78</sup> For example, Toda Yoshimi, “Chūsei seiritsuki no kokka to nōmin,” *Nihonshi kenkyū*, no. 97 (1968) 19, 29–31.



Much of that contention surrounding *ōchō kokka* stems from using a top-down approach where the focus is on when a particular group takes total control until they are usurped by another group. The problem with this approach is that even when one group lost primacy, they remained an integral cog in the political system because the system could not function without them. The interplay between these rival yet collaborative power blocs in the Heian period forms the basis of the *kenmon* (権門) theory.<sup>79</sup> In that theory, the three power blocs of the mid-Heian period—the imperial line, the Fujiwara, and the elite temples—change in the twelfth century to a different triumvirate: the courtiers and imperial line in one power bloc, the temple and shrines in another, and the emerging warrior class as the final bloc. While the main aim of the *kenmon* theory is to describe temples and shrines as political agents rather than simple religious institutions, which factors little into physical competitions until the end of the twelfth century, there are a few conclusions from this theory that are pertinent to this study.

The first is that no group dominated the others so comprehensively as to render the other power blocs useless. While this is used to highlight the collaborative nature of the different power blocs, my use is to highlight that competition thrived even when one group exerted more control than the others for an extended period. The second is that each bloc used private assets to perform the functions of government, issuing orders in matters of governance from their own administrative headquarters.<sup>80</sup> One of the functions of the government was to hold annual events like Prize Archery, horse racing, and the Annual Sumo Tournament. These annual functions continued to be held throughout the Heian period, but from the tenth century, individuals started to host grand physical competition at their private estates at their expense and outside the annual calendar. While private estates are not administrative headquarters, they are certainly different from public spaces like the Southern Hall in the imperial palace. This is not to argue that the genesis of the *kenmon* theory should be moved to the beginning of the tenth century, but rather

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<sup>79</sup> The *kenmon* theory was pioneered by Kuroda Toshio. See Kuroda Toshio, *Nihon chūsei kokka to shūkyō* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1980), 17–21.

<sup>80</sup> Adolphson, “From Classical to Medieval?,” 107.

to focus on how private estates became the locales for grand spectatorial competitions that most of the court attended.

As stated in my introduction, I focus primarily on questions surrounding competition and personal agency in a rigid hierarchical structure, looking at the power bloc dynamics from the bottom-up rather than the top-down. In other words, I focus on how the individual operated within the group and use that to qualify larger considerations of group dynamics such as privatization and the relative power of one power bloc over another. Before discussing physical competitions specifically, I must first discuss three key competitive elements of Heian society that are rarely considered to contextualize physical competitions in the Heian period. They are the rivalry between the Left and Right contingents of the government, the intrafamilial rivalries of the Fujiwara, and the Emperor's use of the imperial veto.

### Left and Right

When the Japanese adapted the Chinese legal system, they also divided their government posts equally into Left and Right contingents. In the Chinese model, the Left and Right alternated in terms of which side was the most prestigious.<sup>81</sup> In contrast, the Japanese froze their model so that the Left was always considered superior to the Right in terms of prestige despite the two sides being equal by most other metrics including official duties, salary, or the rank required to hold the post.<sup>82</sup> Using the top two ministerial positions as an example, the Minister of the Left (左大臣, *sadaijin*) was above the Minister of the Right (右大臣, *udaijin*), but the Minister of the Right

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<sup>81</sup> For more on the ever-shifting importance of the Left and Right in the Chinese model, see Joseph P. McDermott, "Dualism in Chinese Thought and Society," in *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Frederick J. Adelman (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1982), 5–11.

<sup>82</sup> For example, the Minister of the Left and Right received 30 *chō* (町) of land and 2000 vassal houses (職封, *shikifu*). Although the exact size of one *chō* was not uniform in the Heian period, one standardized *chō* equates to approximately 2.94 acres. See chart in Hashimoto Yoshihiko, *Heian kizoku* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1986), 10.

was above all other positions Left or Right. In most historiography, this difference is merely stated without ever being justified or challenged. While the rivalry between the Left and Right *vis-à-vis* physical competitions is at the forefront of this study, the dichotomy between the two sides was pervasive throughout all court culture. By analyzing the ways in which the Left were afforded more privilege than the Right, I can explain multiple layers of Heian society to qualify competitive capital and personal agency in the period.

One of the reasons why historians do not state the justification for the Left over the Right is that the justification was rarely explicitly stated in contemporary records. One potential theory is that the Left was the more prestigious side in the Chinese government when the system was adapted. While that certainly may have been the case, that does not explain the persistence of the Left over the Right. The reasoning becomes clear when looking at physical competitions, however, as the Left was the side that represented the emperor from at least the mid-ninth century. When competitors representing the Left won their match, their victory was in turn a victory for every courtier on the Left, but more importantly it was a victory for the emperor. That same association must have been true outside physical competitions as well. Therefore, the initial decision to have the Left be over the right could have been arbitrary or due to the Chinese practice at the time, but the Left's connection to the emperor was what afforded those on the Left more prestige. This remained true even when the personal power of the emperor waned.

The split between the Left and the Right was not simply a neutral organizational tool. As shown with the many competitions in this study, the Left and Right were rivals who fervently supported their side's victory over their opponents at every turn. Outside competition, the rivalry was less direct, but the Left's superiority over the Right was used to influence other forms of competition. For example, prior to the Fujiwara assuming the top ministerial positions on the Left and Right, they used the social superiority of the Left to gain advantages over rival houses by filling the positions on the Left and forcing others to fill positions on the Right regardless of talent.

One of the starkest examples of this was in 899 when Emperor Daigo (885–930, r. 897–930) nominally promoted two courtiers from different houses to the top ministerial posts. The new Minister of the Left was Fujiwara no Tokihira (871–909) who was the son of the regent. The new Minister of the Right was famed poet and scholar Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) who was

decades older than Tokihira and far more accomplished. The disparity between their ability and their position is a blatant example of nepotism that without context offers compelling evidence to the argument that the court was static rather than competitive. It is true that the Left enjoyed elevated status and privilege over the Right, which in turn added an extra obstacle to outsiders competing with established lines due to the Heian concept of inherited positions. That imbalance will be present throughout all the examples given in this study, but the important distinction is that even though it was not an even playing field in terms of Left or Right, that did not preclude the existence of competition.

The same example of Michizane and Tokihira proves that. The imperial line could not outright deny the Fujiwara request to name Tokihira Minister of the Left, but Daigo's father, Uda, insisted that Michizane be made Minister of the Right. Both parties had to play a more nuanced game because court politics did not allow Uda or Daigo to unilaterally dismiss the Fujiwara nor could the Fujiwara disregard Uda's wishes outright. Uda told his son to seek the counsel of Michizane over Tokihira despite Michizane's position on the Right, and by all accounts, Daigo took his father's advice. This forced the Fujiwara to resort to falsely implicating Michizane in a scandal whereby he supposedly supported a rival prince over the current heir, effectively supporting a coup. The successful plot forced Michizane into exile where he never threatened the Fujiwara again while he was alive.<sup>83</sup> Although the Fujiwara removed Michizane from power, they had to resort to underhanded tactics to do so, showing that some courtiers with the right combination of talent and favorable genealogy could overcome disadvantages inherent in the system. The plot shows that there was competition because such acts would not be necessary in a system where the advantages of being in a superior house or being a member of the Left were unsurmountable.

Still, the Left held the higher position, as seen with the process for promotion. There are no cases of a courtier moving from a post on the Left to the same post on the Right while there is a preponderance of cases of the inverse—most notably going from Minister of the Right to Minister

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<sup>83</sup> The vengeful spirit of Michizane plagued the court for decades because of his unjust exile until his spirit was eventually appeased. See Robert Borgen, "8: Sugawara No Michizane, a Heian Literatus and Statesman," in *The Cambridge History of Japanese Literature*, 102–9.

of the Left.<sup>84</sup> Promotions, therefore, were from Right to Left of the same post or to a higher post Left or Right. Although these promotions from Right to Left of the same post may seem like a trivial point because the promoted courtier's tax revenue stayed the same, the social capital gained by joining the more prestigious side should not be overlooked. The promotion came with minor benefits, such as being seated first at annual events if you were a spectator, to more impactful ones, such as preferential treatment if you were competing on behalf of the Left at any of the competitions covered in this study.

These differences affected a courtier's life for extensive periods of time. Courtiers from less prominent houses, whose promotions at court occurred far more irregularly than the fast-tracked elites, would spend vast swathes of time in a single position, consequently serving the Left or Right for that duration. Using examples from sumo, of the fifteen elite to mid-tier courtiers who served on at least two of the four documented Sumo Committees (相撲司, *sumai no tsukasa*) between 865 and 887 only three represented a different side in a different year.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, sumo wrestlers never switched sides even if they wrestled for decades at court. Only the most powerful houses, most notably the Northern Fujiwara Branch (藤原北家, *Fujiwara hokke*), were rapidly promoted from Left to Right to speed up their political climb. Once reaching the highest positions, however, even the most powerful had to wait longer for a promotion because the next post was often filled by a more senior member of their branch.

Which member of the line held the Left or Right post was a consequence of another court preference: elder sons over their younger brothers. Preference is the optimal word because the Japanese did not have a system like many countries in medieval Europe where the eldest son automatically inherited the titles regardless of ability or temperament. Further, Heian courtiers had multiple consorts, with one usually considered the primary consort. Her sons usually enjoyed easier tracks to top posts, but some elder sons of another consort were considered for high positions as well, creating an even larger pool of competition. The important consequence of this

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<sup>84</sup> I make this claim after looking at every Minister of the Left and Right, every First Guard of the Left and Right, and the promotions of the many men included in this study.

<sup>85</sup> Sumo Committees will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

system is that it promoted intense rivalry between brothers without requiring bloodshed. Heian history is rife with cases of superior courtiers surpassing their elder siblings not with violent deeds but rather by performing proper etiquette at annual events and showing their superior acumen, thus accruing competitive capital. Still, the general rule was that if the skills of the sons were comparable then the eldest son of the primary consort was above his younger brothers in office.

One primary example of this involves three important figures in this study: the powerful Regent Fujiwara no Tadahira (880–949) and his two eldest sons—Saneyori (900–970) and Morosuke (909–960). Both sons had similar career trajectories, but Saneyori remained one step ahead of Morosuke in terms of promotions throughout their lives despite Morosuke being considered the superior courtier.<sup>86</sup> As the two men climbed the ranks, Morosuke took the posts that Saneyori vacated, most notably when Saneyori went from First Guard of the Right to First Guard of the Left in 946 and when Saneyori was promoted from Minister of the Right to Minister of the Left in 947. During the subsequent decade, Morosuke held the Right post to Saneyori's Left, placing Morosuke in a less prestigious role. Court custom combined with Saneyori's capable statesmanship did not allow Morosuke to surpass his elder brother despite being considered the superior politician.

A final example is that of the eight men who became regent in the tenth century, only three of them rose to that station from a post on the Left. This proves that ultimate success at court was not the preordained destiny of a single man from birth, but the prize taken by the most fortuitous—or aggressive—courtier from a small pool of individuals. Combining the cases detailed in this section and the myriad examples throughout this study, it becomes evident that the Left enjoyed advantages over the Right in politics and in physical competitions, but those barriers were far from impregnable. Both points are crucial to understanding how competition could thrive in a seemingly rigged system. Similarly, despite the Fujiwara holding most positions of power in the court, ostensibly making competition for posts a moot point, a deeper look at the top members of the Fujiwara shows that they were far from a unified front.

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<sup>86</sup> McCullough, "The Heian Court, 794–1070," 62–63.

## The Splintered Fujiwara House

There is no doubt that the Northern Fujiwara was the most dominant branch throughout the mid-Heian period. Their influence was so pervasive that some historians would say that the only debate to be had is what sliver of the remaining power any other entity at court, be they emperors or other aristocratic families, could carve for themselves among the political behemoths. Although many sections of my study highlight those oppositional slivers, the Fujiwara having a stranglehold on the top political positions from the beginning of the tenth century to the end of the eleventh century shows that the Northern Fujiwara were the most dominant political force. One important qualifier that can get lost when a reader sees one hundred men with the same family name across a single paper, however, is that even though these men share that name, or even share the same parents, they were not necessarily allies.<sup>87</sup>

Inevitably, the Northern Fujiwara Branch successfully sequestering the lion's share of political power from most outside players resulted in contentious internal rivalries. These internal power struggles within the house, therefore, amplify the argument of the adversarial competitive nature of the time. While there were many Fujiwara to consider when discussing competition, the internal struggles were epitomized by the members of the two most powerful lines within the Northern Fujiwara, the Regental line (九条流, *kujōryū*) and the *Ōnonomiya* line (小野宮流). As those courtiers were also the most important players in this study of physical competitions, they will be the example used to show internal competition.

The two sons of Regent Tadahira, Saneyori and Morosuke, were the progenitors of those lines. Saneyori's line was the *Ōnonomiya* line and Morosuke's line was the Regental line. As stated previously, Saneyori held a higher position at court than Morosuke throughout their careers, but Morosuke did not sit idly by in Saneyori's shadow. Both men had one of their daughters marry Emperor Murakami (924–967, r. 946–967). Saneyori's daughter did not produce any children while

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<sup>87</sup> Similarly, historians have cautioned against viewing other houses as united. One such example is seen in the complication of calling the Genpei War (1180–1185) a civil war between the Taira and Minamoto. See Jeffrey Mass, *Yoritomo and the Founding of the First Bakufu: The Origins of Dual Government in Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 7, 13–36, 65–101.

Morosuke's daughter became the primary consort and produced seven children, two of whom became emperor. Had Morosuke not died in 960, he would have undoubtedly assumed the regency of his grandsons starting in 967. Instead, Saneyori became the regent when Murakami abdicated, but he also knew that his power was not stable, going as far as describing himself as merely a nominal regent.<sup>88</sup> He must have seen that the next generation of elite courtiers was going to be ruled by his nieces and nephews. One disadvantage for the *Ōnonomiya* line was that Saneyori only had two biological sons, neither of whom could best their cousins. Conversely, Morosuke sired nine sons who occupied many important posts for decades to come.

After Saneyori's death in 970, there was a scramble for power between four courtiers: Morosuke's three eldest sons and Saneyori's eldest surviving son, each vying for power in the mid-tenth century to varying effect. The three brothers: Koretada (924–972), Kanemichi (925–977), and Kaneie saw each other as their primary adversaries rather than their cousin Yoritada (924–989). The eldest Koretada and his cousin Yoritada held the highest post in the Guard by 970, making them the two obvious choices to assume the regency once Saneyori died. Prior to Saneyori's death, Koretada got himself promoted to Minister of the Right, and from that higher post, he grabbed the regency. It was a short-lived regency, however, as Koretada died two years later.

The next two front runners for the regency should have been Yoritada and Kanemichi, but Kanemichi's career had been floundering. He was mired in unremarkable posts while his younger brother, Kaneie, surpassed him in every way. Kanemichi knew he could not compete with Kaneie or Yoritada through normal means, so he hatched a plot to become the next regent. He produced a letter supposedly written by the mother of the current emperor, saying that it was her wish that the regency would fall to her brothers in order of birth. The emperor honored his mother's supposed wishes, and in an unprecedented move, elevated Kanemichi to regent over his two rivals from the lowest station before or since.

Like the two previous regents, Kanemichi served a short term before his death in 977. Before he died, he went against the wishes expressed in the supposed letter by ensuring that

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<sup>88</sup> McCullough, "The Heian Court, 794–1070," 62.



Yoritada would become the next regent. This move had less to do with Yoritada and more to do with Kanemichi's rivalry with Kaneie. Kanemichi also shockingly demoted Kaneie from First Guard of the Right to the mid-tier post of First Civil Administrator (治部卿, *jibukyō*). It was shocking because demotions were exceptionally rare and usually involved a corresponding exile, like what happened to Michizane. Although Kaneie was not exiled, the demotion could have permanently halted his political ambitions. The new Regent Yoritada, however, raised Kaneie to Minister of the Right in 978, thus restoring him to a powerful post. Kaneie repaid that kindness in 986 by convincing the young Emperor to abdicate in favor of one of his grandsons. Kaneie took the post of regent from Yoritada with the change of emperors, marking the only time that a living Fujiwara lost the regency to a plot by another Fujiwara.

Kaneie positioned his line well before dying in 990, setting the stage for another sibling rivalry between three of his sons. The eldest, Fujiwara no Michitaka (953–995), inherited the regency after his father's death and held the post until he succumbed to a smallpox epidemic sweeping the capital in 995. Fujiwara no Michikane (961–995), eight years Michitaka's junior, took the mantle of regent for seven days before dying of the same cause. This left Michinaga, his third and final son by his primary consort, as the most powerful member of the Regental line. Surprisingly, Michinaga did not follow in the footsteps of his brothers by becoming regent or dying of smallpox. Instead, he became Inspector of Imperial Documents (内覧, *nairan*) which afforded him many of the same powers as a regent. This was one of many moves made by Michinaga to maintain power at court for the next two decades and become the paragon of Fujiwara preeminence.

The many political battles fought and won by Michinaga are present throughout this study, so I will not detail them here. The examples offered in this section effectively illustrate that the tenth and early eleventh centuries were rife with internal battles that complicate the view of a seemingly stagnate hierarchical structure ruled by a unified house. The Heian court was a hotbed of competition between ambitious nobles working tirelessly to improve their position over comparable adversaries even when those adversaries were close family relations. To further complicate the idea of Fujiwara hegemony was another political player, the emperor. For every

two emperors that were mere puppets to their Fujiwara relatives, there was one emperor who challenged courtier rule. One of the ways that an emperor could actively enforce his personal influence was one of the defining features of physical competitions in the Heian period.

### **The Emperor's Veto**

The imperial veto (天判/勅判, *tenban/chokuban*) was a tool exclusive to the emperor that allowed him to determine the outcome of any match in a competition or contest that he attended. Due to his affiliation with the Left, he invariably used this power to benefit the competitors on the Left because their victory meant his victory. Some emperors used the veto sparingly while some of the more ambitious emperors used the power frequently as a display of their personal power. Although the term *tenban* appears in physical competitions and aesthetic contests, like poetry contests and the picture contest from *The Tale of Genji*, they served different functions. In aesthetic contests the emperor was the judge of the competition, and therefore the power could be translated as the emperor's decision rather than the emperor's veto. The reason I have translated it as imperial veto is because of its direct use in physical competitions and the more indirect implication in artistic contests. Although judging the artistic merits of two competing poems is a more subjective affair than judging which of the two horses crossed the finish line first, the emperor could still use this power to vastly affect the competitive results of any contest. The poetry contest of 913 that was judged by Uda is a prime example of the veto working in his favor during an artistic contest.

Uda was the first recorded emperor to use an imperial veto on any competition or contest, and he did so regularly. As described in the introduction, because Uda used competitions and contests to stave off Fujiwara ascendancy, the imperial veto became a weapon of considerable personal power to the emperor. Moreover, Uda's imprint on the results of the 913 poetry contest is undeniable when considering his use of the veto in physical competitions as well. In the poetry contest, the Left won nine matches and the Right won five. While those numbers do not immediately suggest unfair judgement by Uda, those results do not convey the full picture. Of the five victories for the Right, three were because the poet for the Left broke a rule, leading to an

automatic disqualification. Consequently, the Right only won two rounds where both poets were within standard protocol of the thirty rounds held that day. Of course, the Left only won nine as the other sixteen rounds were deemed draws (持, *mochi*).<sup>89</sup> Draws may have been commonplace in poetry contests, but draws usually indicated that the Right had won, but the emperor would not allow the Left to lose. This was the most common way the imperial veto was used in physical competitions and is the reason why I translate the term as a veto because the emperor changed the real result of a Right victory to either a tie or even a victory for the Left.

There are many records in this study of courtiers complaining about the imperial veto during a physical competition because it hampered the enjoyment of the competition and was considered an overreach by the emperor. That was likely due to the nature of physical competitions where it is obvious which horse finished first or which wrestler touched the ground first. By Heian standards, most matches in a physical competition had a clear winner. Furthermore, while each emperor had the right to use the veto, its implementation was not uniform. Some emperors used the power often while others used it intermittingly. The emperors who used it often were criticized. Uda's use of the imperial veto drew the ire of contemporary courtiers and later nobles alike. At the first sumo tournament held after his ascension in 889, a wrestler for the Right beat a wrestler of the Left, but Uda vetoed the results and changed it to a victory for the Left.<sup>90</sup> A few days later, Minister of the Left Minamoto no Tooru (822–895), who had been a member of the Sumo Committee since the first extant record in 865, visited the imperial palace (内裏, *dairi*) and said:<sup>91</sup>

Regarding sumo, since the time of Emperor Kanmu, the emperors through the ages have all enjoyed [it]. Since the Jōgan Era [859–876], it has been done without fail. A virtuous ruler (聖王, *seiō*) would not abandon this. Is [Emperor Uda] not interested?

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<sup>89</sup> Hagitana and Taniyama, *Utaawaseshū*, 53–66.

<sup>90</sup> *Hokuzanshō*, Kanpyō 1 (889)/7/28.

<sup>91</sup> *Fusō ryakuki*, Kanpyō 1 (889)/8/10.

In the following year, Uda used his veto on a horse race that garnered severe criticism from Sanesuke over a century later.<sup>92</sup> The most vocal critic of Uda's tactics was Sanesuke contemporary, Fujiwara no Kintō (966–1041). He criticized Uda's decision to selfishly change the victory to the Left in 889 before adding the following statement about the 892 sumo tournament:<sup>93</sup>

It says in the imperial diary during the Kanpyō era [889–898] that on 892/8/1 [sic] in the Southern Hall (紫宸殿, *Shishinden*) . . . there were wrestlers of the Left and Right for seventeen matches. The Left won eleven, the Right two, and two were undecided.<sup>94</sup> There were many victories for the Left this time, but this was likely not the reality. The emperor, thinking on the reasoning behind the veto, asked [Regent] Yoshifusa about it. [He said that] regarding choosing who won or lost, it was said the Left was for the emperor. This was especially true until the Jōgan era, and the same reasoning has been chronicled since the Gangyō era [877–885]. Has it been so since the so-called ancient times?

While the importance of the Annual Sumo Tournament as a symbol of the emperor's authority vis-à-vis the provinces would have compelled him to wield his veto more often during a sumo tournament than any other event, records of the veto being used at horse races and Prize Archery Competitions prove that the emperor could determine the outcome of any competitive match held in his presence. Kintō's comments suggest that the imperial veto was used less often in his time than it was used previously—a perception supported by extant competition results during his lifetime. The actual number of events that were impacted by the imperial veto cannot be quantified, as Kintō's commentary questioning the origins of the practice proves that there were no definitive records of the imperial veto nor are there any extant explanations about the reasoning behind the veto except for the comment above. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the

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<sup>92</sup> *Ononomiya nenchū gyōji*, Kanpyō 2 (890)/5/6.

<sup>93</sup> *Hokuzanshō*, Kanpyō 2 (892)/7/28.

<sup>94</sup> The results only account for fifteen matches. As is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, the final two matches were rarely fought.

veto, and courtier perceptions of the veto, can be gleaned from the disparate diary entries discussing them.

Unfortunately, Tooru's complaint is the only record of a personal courtier's opinion of the veto until a century later, but there is evidence of how courtiers felt differently about the veto depending on whether they were members of the Left or Right. During the Annual Sumo Tournament of 946, the Right won the first match of the tournament, prompting the Left courtiers in attendance to appeal to Emperor Murakami to change the decision. The emperor agreed with the Left and changed the victory to his side. Appeals to the emperor to decide which side had won a tournament was an old practice, the oldest example of which came right before the start of the Jōgan era that Tooru and Kintō emphasized.<sup>95</sup> At the conclusion of any physical competition, the winning side gave a victory shout (乱声, *ranjō*), but when the results were close, and especially when they were even, *both* sides would do their victory shout so that the emperor would choose their side as the victors. The 946 situation was different, however, because the appeal was made for a single match rather than the whole tournament and because the victor was clearly the Right. Understandably, the courtiers of the Left were pleased with the decision and the courtiers of the Right were not. The author of the diary entry, Regent Tadahira, was matter of fact in his report.<sup>96</sup> Courtiers kept these attitudes even as the physical competitions became more competitive. By the early eleventh century, courtiers on the Left would not appeal cases like the one in 946, reserving their appeals for closer results they thought could be overturned to varying effect.

There is no evidence that there were definite rules to the imperial veto other than the result must favor the Left. Despite the lack of a rulebook, the courtiers had a sense of what was a normal use of the veto and what was a stretch. Surviving evidence shows that the veto was cast most consistently to guarantee that the result of the first match of the sumo tournament was no worse than a draw for the Left. If the Left participant won the first match, then the result was unaltered. If the Right won the first match, however, as was the case during the tournaments of

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<sup>95</sup> *Montoku jitsuroku* (文徳天皇実録), Ten'an 2 (858)/7/21

<sup>96</sup> The reason for this is explained in Chapter 2. *Teishinkōki*, Tengyō (946)/7/28.

997, 1000, and 1006, a veto was cast to change the result to a draw.<sup>97</sup> The sumo tournament of 1031 is the only extant tournament of the Heian period where the Right was allowed to keep their victory in the first match, which can be attributed to the work of First Guard of the Right Sanesuke as explained in Chapter 2.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the nearly ubiquitous implementation of the veto on the first match of the sumo tournament, the gravity attributed to said match was neither explained nor consistent across other types of competitions. In horse racing, the competitors of the first race were the best riders; and yet, the veto was not used consistently to change the result.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, vetoes were not cast when the sumo Champions (最手, *hote*) of the Left and Right fought one another during the first round of the playoffs following a sumo tournament. Nonetheless, the records show that the first match of each competition held more importance than most other matches. The account of the Juvenile Sumo Competition (童相撲, *warawa zumai*) of 1006 distinguished the Left wrestler as the victor of the first match before saying that the Right won the next seven—including the final round between the two juvenile Champions.<sup>100</sup> The *Gonki* record of the 993 Annual Sumo Tournament singled out that the Left won the first match and then gave the final tally of the tournament.<sup>101</sup>

There was also a sense that the emperor would use the veto if the Right was winning too many matches in a row or if the Right's total victories were outpacing the Left. Vetoes kept the Right from winning the sumo tournament of 997 and let the Left sneak by with a one match advantage at the sumo tournament of 1019. Emperor Sanjō vetoed the tie at the conclusion of the 1013 tournament, much to the surprise of Michinaga and Sanesuke.<sup>102</sup> The implementation of the veto was not organized enough, however, to argue that it was a rule rather than a strong preference that the Left won. There are too many examples in this study of the Right winning a

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<sup>97</sup> *Gonki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/7/30; Chōhō 2 (1000)/7/27; *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/7/30.

<sup>98</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōgen 4 (1031)/7/29.

<sup>99</sup> For example, *Kyūreki* (九曆), Tengyō 7 (944)/5/6.

<sup>100</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/8/17

<sup>101</sup> *Gonki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/27.

<sup>102</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki* and *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/29.

competition to say that the Left had to win.<sup>103</sup> The sumo tournament of 1031 discussed previously, for example, was not only the first time the Right won the first match, but the Right smashed the Left eleven matches to two for the most lopsided victory, Left or Right, since Uda's veto-riddled tournament of 892.

Furthermore, the Right sincerely competed for victory even though the sitting sovereign and half the court wanted the Left to win. The number of vetoes during the sumo tournaments of 1005 and 1023 were "numerous" because the Right won many matches.<sup>104</sup> Eventual Champion of the Right Magami no Katsuoka made his documented debut representing the Right in the first match of the 997 tournament where his victory was vetoed. He avenged the draw the next day by winning his match against another Left opponent who had won his match the day prior—his first of many victories in a decades-long career. Not only did the wrestlers, riders, and archers of the Right battle through an uneven playing field, but the courtiers, particularly the First Guard of the Right, were invested in the Right's success as well. Michinaga voiced his annoyance that a veto had to be cast to change the first match of the 1006 Annual Sumo Tournament, blaming First Guard of the Right Sanesuke for inspiring the Right to compete in a match they were not allowed to win.<sup>105</sup>

Michinaga's relationship with the imperial veto was a complex one. He was Minister of the Left when he complained about the imperial veto in 1006. Normally, a courtier of the Left would be pleased, but Michinaga was different because he was playing a different game. For one, as will become evident in the following chapters, Michinaga loved watching physical competitions and he was far more interested in exhilarating play than to see the Left win on a technicality. The more important reason that he opposed the veto, however, was the power it afforded the emperor during events that held significance. Each time the emperor used it, it was a reminder of the influence that the emperor could have over his courtiers. Uda had extensively wielded the veto much to the displeasure of his courtiers. Sanjō used the veto as a direct attack against Michinaga.

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<sup>103</sup> For example, *Saikyūki*, Engi 12 (912)/7/27; *Gonki*, and *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 7 (1010)/7/27

<sup>104</sup> This is stated in *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/7/28; *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/7/29, Jian 3 (1023)/7/27.

<sup>105</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/7/30.

Shirakawa followed Uda's example for similar reasons with similar results.<sup>106</sup> Although the veto was not wielded often when looking at every competition during the Heian period, it was the mechanism by which the emperor was more than a mere observer during the competitions he attended; but more than that, the veto gave the oft-maligned emperor the opportunity to be his own agent during a time characterized with the marginalization of his office and the external privatization of power.

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What separates the first century and a half following the adaptation of the Chinese legal system from the centuries afterwards is that the power was spread among a small group of collaborative yet competing power blocs rather than being consolidated by one power bloc to the exclusion of the rest. The avenues by which an individual could exert political influence within those power blocs multiplied as the Heian period progressed, leading to an expanded pool of candidates for political power even if the those within the pool did not have equal opportunity. These changes to the overall court culture are mirrored in the competitiveness allowed in physical competitions, which in turn becomes a telling barometer for the political realities of the period. For example, competitive results, meaning that the Right was allowed to win matches, first appear around the same time that the distribution of power diversifies. Because the Left was the side that represented the emperor, the Right winning was a sign that the emperor no longer held as firm a grip as the position once commanded. Nevertheless, the emperor remained an active agent throughout the period using the conceptualization of his legitimacy to his advantage in many ways, including the imperial veto.

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<sup>106</sup> While Shirakawa is discussed, his time is largely outside the purview of this study. For more on him and the political situation after him, see Adolphson, *Gates of Power*, 75–184. Or, G. Cameron Hurst III, *Insei: Abdicated Sovereigns in the Politics of Late Heian Japan, 1086–1185*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).



Competition, therefore, thrived at the Heian court both within physical competitions and within the greater court culture. It thrived despite the many rules and protocols that created an uneven field such as the Left over the Right or one branch monopolizing most of the top ministerial positions in the court. This was due to two reasons. The first is that no group was a unified front, as seen with the many intrafamilial rivalries in the Northern Fujiwara. The second is a theme that echoes throughout this study, namely that competitors, both in physical competitions and beyond, used personal agency and competitive capital to challenge or even overcome the rigged status quo. Some emperors, for example, continued to challenge Fujiwara hegemony during the supposed period of courtier dominance by using a variety of tools at their disposal, as seen in almost every chapter. The First Guard of the Right and the competitors under him fought for competitive results even though the emperor could wrest that victory away. Even shrewd machinations like Kanemichi's forged letter prove that the Heian court structure was far from frozen, allowing for intense, and sometime deceitful, competition without resorting to bloodshed.

## Chapter 2: Physical Competitions at Court

Prominent Players		
Northern Fujiwara Branch	Emperors and Courtiers	Competitors
Tadahira	Emperor Ninmyō	Harima no Yasunobu (racing)
Saneyori	Ki no Masakata	
Morosuke		
Sanesuke		
Michinaga		
Yorimichi		

The Taihō codes of 701 were the first records that codified sumo, archery, and horse racing as annual events, but records of sumo and archery predate the codes by centuries. Even after the codes were established, physical competitions went through a prolonged period of growth before maturing into the important spectacles they became. The changes to each competition were not uniform, so the changes unique to each competition are discussed in their corresponding chapter. In the middle of the ninth century, however, there were a series of meaningful changes to physical competitions that started with the reign of Emperor Ninmyō. In 833, his inaugural year as emperor, there was a shift in the focus of the Annual Sumo Tournament from one of fun (娯遊, *goyū*) to one of fun *and* martial practice.<sup>107</sup> The emphasis on competitive martial ability must have quickly accelerated sumo excellence at court because the same emperor used two famous sumo Champions as his comparison when praising the eristic prowess of two rival academics who debated in front of him.<sup>108</sup> The emperor's comparison clearly shows both a spectatorial interest in physical competitions and a clear appreciation of the physical abilities of

<sup>107</sup> The same record was also the oldest extant list detailing the provinces from which wrestlers must be sent. There were twelve provinces at the time: Echizen, Kaga, Noto, Sado, Kōzuke, Shimotsuke, Kai, Sagami, Musashi, Kazusa, Shimofusa, and Awa. See *Shoku Nihon kōki* (続日本後紀), Tenchō 10 (833)/5.

<sup>108</sup> Sakai, 55.

wrestlers as early as the mid-ninth century. Those abilities were seen as not only comparable to brilliant cognition, but an apt example to characterize fierce and exceptional competition.

Similar evolutions were happening in archery during Ninmyō's reign. The first competitive record of equestrian archery was in 836.<sup>109</sup> In 847, Ninmyō made his final appearance at the ritual archery event. Subsequent emperors followed suit, ditching the hundreds of years of attendance at the event to instead watch the far more competitive Prize Archery Competitions held the following day. The focus gradually went from a ritual representing fealty to the emperor to a spectator event where the elite nobles enjoyed watching a competition between the Left and Right contingents of the Guard and Watch. This transition mirrored the gradual shift from a stronger centralized state around the emperor to the age with shared blocs of power.

Competition continued to expand until horse racing became competitive near the turn of the tenth century after the reign of Uda. The hallmark of competition in the Heian context, namely that competitors for the Right were regularly allowed to keep their victories, was evident in records of the three physical competitions by the early tenth century.<sup>110</sup> That focus on competition grew while specialization in the Guard vis-à-vis competitions began to take shape. Of course, there was specialization among the competitors, as discussed throughout the study, but the various logistical necessities of successfully running such large spectatorial events also required specialized knowledge. That was why every guard, from first to ninth, was involved in physical competitions whether they were competitors or organizers.

While the exciting exploits of the Guards who competed will be seen in the following chapters, this chapter focuses on the Guards whose specific role it was to perform the various logistical functions of running a successful physical competition. Despite never beating others in a race or throwing their opponent to the ground, these organizers cultivated competitive capital and traded it in for rewards, reputation, and job security just the same. Adept organizers were responsible for preparations that could begin six months prior and for resolving any of the myriad complications that arose during the competition. These responsibilities fell squarely on the

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<sup>109</sup> *Shoku Nihon kōki*, Jōwa 3 (836)/5/5.

<sup>110</sup> For example, see *Saikyūki*, Engi 12 (912)/7/27, Enchō 4 (926)/1/18.

shoulders of the First Guard who then delegated the many tasks needed to run the competitions to his subordinate Guards. The following sections describe the duties of these Guards from the elite First Guards to the lower tiers. The chapter also explores the nuance between the martial and logistical spheres of the Guard as they relate to non-competitors, addressing questions of specialization, personal agency, and the interplay between the different rungs of the political hierarchy.

### **The First Guard**

The First Guard of the Left and First Guard of the Right were prestigious appointments held by the most elite courtiers in the Heian period as they were usually the final steps before rising to Minister of the Left or Right. Like those two higher positions, only one courtier could be the First Guard of the Left or Right at a time. From 909 to 1093, a member of the northern branch of the Fujiwara held one of the two positions, and both posts were held simultaneously by the northern branch from 913 to 1065. The Fujiwara saw the benefit of filling the two posts with their own in the same way they filled the other top ministerial positions. What separated the First Guard from those other positions was the primary duties of the post. First Guards were personally responsible for making sure physical competitions were a success, doing so by properly managing the Guards underneath them. While the position was largely bureaucratic, as First Guards were never asked to demonstrate their riding or shooting abilities, some First Guards, such as Michinaga and Michitsuna, were avid riders and archers themselves. Even those with little interest in personal displays of martial prowess, however, had to actively manage martial activities.

The job was demanding and time-consuming, requiring constant engagement throughout the year because competitions were held regularly. Some competitions, like the Annual Sumo Tournament, required months of preparation, with the workload only increasing the closer they got to the tournament. This was perhaps put best in a line from *The Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, “Wrestlers from the provinces arrived on about the Seventh Day, and thenceforth the [First Guards] of the Left and Right enjoyed few leisure moments. Since the Crown Prince was to be a spectator that year, everyone was determined that no detail shall be neglected, and there was an

amusing bustle of preparation.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, the author of *Kagerō nikki* said Kaneie was busy during the sumo season when he was First Guard of the Right.<sup>112</sup> Events like the Annual Sumo Tournament and the equine events of the 5/5 festival put First Guards in constant contact with provincial governors, as evidenced in Sanesuke’s diary. Consequently, the First Guard was one post that contradicts the perception of elite courtiers having no interest in what was happening in the provinces, because troubles in the provinces impacted a First Guard’s ability to do his duty properly, as we will see.

The earliest records of First Guards overseeing every physical competition were not until future Regent Tadahira served as First Guard of the Right from 909 to 913 and then First Guard of the Left from 913 to 931, though First Guards were certainly responsible for physical competitions before then. By all accounts, Tadahira stressed the importance of annual events—a conclusion supported by his track record while First Guard.<sup>113</sup> Tadahira had success in his short stint as First Guard of the Right, managing the Right to victories in the Prize Archery Competitions of 911 and 912 and the Annual Sumo Tournament of 912.<sup>114</sup> He continued his winning ways as First Guard of the Left as well, winning the Annual Sumo Tournament the following year in 913 for the Left, among others.<sup>115</sup> His results as a First Guard match his reputation as an astute politician and titan of his time. It was not until Sanesuke nearly a century later that a First Guard met and surpassed Tadahira’s record.

Unfortunately, Tadahira’s written records as First Guard have little detail, though he offered brief descriptions on afterparties (還饗, *kaeri aruji*), box seats (出居, *idei*), and several

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<sup>111</sup> I have altered the translation to include First Guard rather than using “Major Captain” which is their translation of 大将. McCullough and McCullough, *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* vol. 1, 227.

<sup>112</sup> For a full account of her thoughts on that tournament, see Edward Seidensticker, *The Gossamer Years: The Diary of a Noblewoman of Heian Japan* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1964), 117.

<sup>113</sup> For a general discussion on Tadahira, see Joan R. Piggott, “What Did a Regent Do? Fujiwara no Tadahira in the 930’s,” in *Teishinkōki*, 23–68.

<sup>114</sup> *Teishinkōki*, Engi 11 (911)/1/18, Engi 12 (912)/1/18; *Saikyūki*, Engi 12 (912)/7/27.

<sup>115</sup> *Teishinkōki*, Engi 13 (913)/7/26.

other aspects related to the Guard and physical competition that will be described later in the chapter. While the short entries may seemingly belie his deep interest in physical competitions as annual events, the short extant entries come from notes made by then Minister of the Left Saneyori sometime after 960 when he no longer needed to copy the long entries Tadahira likely made as a First Guard.<sup>116</sup> Tadahira had instructed both his sons, Saneyori and Morosuke, on the importance of annual events. It was a lesson both men took to heart, transmitting that same passion to their grandsons, Sanesuke and Michinaga respectively. In the case of Saneyori, that transmission was literal as he had a profound impact on his young heir until the former's death in 970. Morosuke never told Michinaga anything directly because Morosuke died six years before Michinaga was born, but Morosuke wrote his own ritual handbook, and no doubt explained the political importance of annual events to his many sons who also emphasized annual events.

Saneyori was First Guard of the Right from 939 to 945 and conducted himself well. His archers beat the Left in 939 and 942 and forced an imperial veto to break a tie in 943.<sup>117</sup> His riders lost the races of 944 on a dubious call that would have otherwise resulted in a tie.<sup>118</sup> The results of the annual tournaments during his tenure are unfortunately unknown. Clearly, Saneyori showed a capability of managing the competitors that was comparable to his father, but he did not have a worthy rival until he took First Guard of the Left in 945 and Morosuke became First Guard of the Right at the same time. The two brothers remained in those positions for a decade, and their exploits during that time add new layers to the academic consensus that Morosuke was a better politician than Saneyori.

Morosuke's archers won the first three Prize Archery Competitions while he was First Guard of the Right.<sup>119</sup> His team barely beat out Saneyori's in 952 by one arrow and the two teams tied in 953.<sup>120</sup> While it must be stated that the results of every competition are not recorded, the

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<sup>116</sup> Yoshida Sanae, "Aristocratic Journals and the Courtly Calendar," in *Teishinkōki*, 18–20.

<sup>117</sup> The 943 case is a reference in a record from 1005. *Teishinkōki*, Tengyō 2 (939)/1/18; *Hokuzanshō*, Tengyō 5 (942)/1/18; *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/1/18.

<sup>118</sup> *Kyūjō nenchū gyōji*, Tengyō 7 (944)/5/6.

<sup>119</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Tengyō 9 (946)/1/18; *Teishinkōki*, Tenryaku 2 (948)/1/18; *Kyūreki*, Tenryaku 4 (950)/1/18.

<sup>120</sup> *Saikyūki*, Tenryaku 6 (952)/1/18; *Gōkeshidai*, Tenryaku 7 (953)/1/18.

Right winning or tying every Prize Archery Competition with a result over the fourteen-year period must not be ignored. It leaves little doubt that the Right was allowed to continually compete on an almost equal field from Tadahira to Sanesuke. Moreover, it strengthens the argument that Guards were allowed to train for competitions to compete at a high level. Sadly, the records do not include the names of the archers during this stretch, but reason dictates that some or many of the archers under Saneyori when he was First Guard of the Right continued to compete under Morosuke in the same position.

The sumo tournaments during that decade were a different story, with the Left winning every tournament with a result. The circumstances of the 949 tournament were particularly damning for Morosuke, and offer the starkest contrast with Saneyori. Due to a drought, many wrestlers did not show for the Left or the Right. Saneyori, to his credit, was able to arrange for more wrestlers to come than Morosuke did, and Saneyori was actively engaged in reporting to the emperor and dealing with the wrestlers who did not come. Morosuke, on the other hand, did not report to the emperor about the low numbers before retiring from the proceedings. Further, he did not offer justification or admonishment for the embarrassment in his diary. His failure was serious enough, however, for future First Guard Minamoto no Taka'akira (914-983) and Kintō to include it in their manuals written decades later.<sup>121</sup>

So, contrary to the normal depiction of Morosuke and Saneyori, Morosuke did not outperform his older brother when it came to the duties required of a First Guard. Morosuke may have bested Saneyori in archery, but it is likely that the same archers who performed well for Saneyori continued to do so under Morosuke. In sumo, Saneyori's teams consistently beat Morosuke's, with the 949 tournament showing that Morosuke was either indifferent or incompetent when it came to coordinating with the provinces. These realizations are certainly not enough to reverse the narrative of Morosuke over Saneyori, but they do make Saneyori seem less hapless than he is often depicted.

Other First Guards like Kaneie and Michitsuna left their own marks on competition during their time, as will be discussed in the archery chapter, but Sanesuke was the most distinguished

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<sup>121</sup> *Saikyūki*, Tenryaku 3 (949)/7/27; *Hokuzanshō*, Tenryaku 4 (949)/7/?.

First Guard of the Heian period, Left or Right, holding the position of First Guard of the Right for over four decades from 1001 to 1043. That long-term posting was the second longest of the Heian period. The honor of the longest tenured First Guard went to his contemporary, Fujiwara no Norimichi (996–1075), who was First Guard of the Left from 1017 to 1062, but that was the only area in which Norimichi surpassed his rival on the Right. Competitors on the Right consistently won competitions during Sanesuke's tenure, particularly during the years that Norimichi and Sanesuke overlapped. Guards and wrestlers representing the Right under Sanesuke's purview overcame social biases to perform at the highest standards due in large part to how the fastidious Sanesuke approached his duties of First Guard with an unparalleled level of dogged commitment.

Ironically, Sanesuke's devotion to his work did not come from a personal interest in watching physical competitions. Unlike Morosuke and archery or Michinaga and horse racing, Sanesuke did not focus his resources or energy on a specific event that he found more interesting than others because he did not seem to care to watch any of them. He was often absent from competitions for which he spent months personally handling the preparations, relying instead on reports from his subordinates on the events of the competition. When he was present for a competition, he was as likely to leave as soon as it was clear that his work was done as he was to stay and watch. For example, he stayed the entire day to watch over the trial races and rehearsals for racing protocol in the courtyard of the Right Guard (see figure 3) one day in 1013; but some days later, when Michinaga ordered Sanesuke and his riders to Michinaga's *Tsuchimikado* (土御門殿, see figure 1) estate for some trial races to determine the card for the competition, Sanesuke left long before the races finished and the evening festivities began.<sup>122</sup>

His dislike of what he considered frivolous pursuits did not preclude his deep interest in the results of competitions.<sup>123</sup> In his diary, he challenged imperial vetoes as often as they happened, often bluntly stating that the Right was the real winner.<sup>124</sup> He launched thorough

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<sup>122</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/10, 13.

<sup>123</sup> He often criticized courtiers for their interest in such things. See a criticism of Michinaga here: *Shōyūki*, Jian 1 (1021)/3/19, and a criticism of Emperor Sanjō here: *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/16.

<sup>124</sup> For example, *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/29.



investigations into older diaries to find precedent to questionable decisions, such as when Emperor Ichijō used his imperial veto to change a tie in the Prize Archery Competition of 1005 to a victory for the Left.<sup>125</sup> He also chronicled strong feelings towards other courtier's reactions to results to competitions. His nuanced investment in competitive results may have been due to his scrupulous nature; but it was more likely that he cared as much as he did because those results reflected him and his office.

His entries on sumo support that conclusion. There were exactly thirty recorded sumo tournaments over the fifty years of Sanesuke's diary spanning 982–1032. His records of the sumo tournament prior to when he became First Guard of the Right in 1001 are sparse in comparison to when he held the post. Less than sixty of his over 350 entries on sumo pertain to the first two decades of his diary before he became First Guard, while the hundreds of remaining entries cover his first thirty years as First Guard. The bulk of his entries pertain to the many tasks that he and his subordinate Guards had to accomplish to run a successful competition. There were over forty entries pertaining to sumo in the year 1013, for example, ranging from determining sumo envoys (相撲使, *sumai no tsukai*) in the first and second months to promoting a guard at the end of the eighth month for his adept work as a sumo envoy.<sup>126</sup> In between those two related tasks is receiving the wrestlers, inspecting them, organizing the music and food for the annual tournament, arranging the playoffs, and funding the afterparty for the wrestlers and the Guards.<sup>127</sup>

That was how most years went for him for the next three decades thereafter. It must have been work that he found fulfilling because he never recorded a desire to switch to First Guard of the Left nor did he stop being First Guard of the Right after he became Minister of the Right in 1021. Other top ministers had concurrently held a First Guard post for a short period of time, but Sanesuke balanced the two positions for two decades. Further, the continued success of the Right competitors after 1021 across all three physical competitions proves that Sanesuke did not shirk

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<sup>125</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/1/18.

<sup>126</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/1/26, 8/25.

<sup>127</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/6–8/16.

his duties as First Guard after taking the higher position. He was eighty years old when he asked the emperor to relinquish him from his post as First Guard of the Right. The emperor refused. Unfortunately, the extant portions of Sanesuke's diary end in 1032, so we do not know the circumstances behind the request or how he felt about the denial. Regardless, he served another six years in that capacity before his next request was granted.

Although Sanesuke's singular attention to detail as First Guard of the Right was not fueled by a burning passion to watch them, his dedication to his duties was unmatched. Sanesuke had little time for other forms of pleasurable time-wasting as well, showing little interest in poetry, courtship, and all other literary hallmarks of an elite Heian courtier. Perhaps it was best he kept the position for as long as he did because it kept him busy, as evidenced by the over six hundred entries he has directly related to physical competitions. His record keeping and decades of service in the same position make him the prime candidate to qualify many statements about Heian courtiers and competition in the Heian period.

For instance, the competitors under him could not have been consistently successful while he was First Guard if the competitions were not competitive affairs. If the court was as predisposed to the Left winning as has been argued by Obinata or Guttman and Thompson, then Sanesuke would have never been allowed to remain the First Guard of the Right for as long as he had. His success also speaks to how the abilities of the man in the post could affect the performances of those underneath him. Tadahira and Saneyori certainly add to that argument, but it is the decades under Sanesuke that definitively show that excellence came from the individual, not the post. Sanesuke's success stemmed from his active engagement in all the duties pertaining to his post, including personally seeing to matters like training and protocol rehearsal.

What those three Fujiwara First Guards also prove is that some courtiers took their duties seriously, showing pride and competitive spirit regardless of political aspirations. Tadahira aspired to and became regent, putting together a dominant career that was no doubt aided by his impeccable track record as a First Guard for twenty years. His is the most obvious case of the three of a courtier using his competitive capital, among his many other resources, policies, and machinations, to advance his position. Following in his father's footsteps, Saneyori performed well as a First Guard for over a decade, accumulating a reputation for his understanding of annual

events. He never became the kind of regent that Tadahira had been, though it is unclear if that was ever his aim. As described in Chapter 3, Sanesuke had ample opportunities to expand his position at court from the reign of Emperor Sanjō in the 1010's to the decades following Michinaga's death in 1027, but he did not press his advantages. He even turned down a request from the emperor to give him a favorable post, citing that he was too old for the role decades before he stopped being the First Guard. His commitment to First Guard, therefore, was not a means to an end or some political calculation like so many other courtiers, but his industrious nature regardless should be considered whenever discussing how Heian courtiers viewed their posts and their work.

Of course, Sanesuke was only one man at the head of a large organization. He had to coordinate with the Guards below him to organize successful competitions year-round. Before discussing what those lower-ranked Guards did for the Guard, I will explain one final core responsibility of a First Guard, namely, to host an afterparty to reward his competitors and facilitators for their role in their team emerging victorious from yet another competition.

### **Afterparties**

After the conclusion of a Prize Archery Competition or the Annual Sumo Tournament, an afterparty was held by a First Guard for the entertainment of those who participated on behalf of the Left or Right at said competition as well as the Guards that facilitated the proceedings. The afterparty included food and alcohol, the distribution of gifts based on rank and performance, and games—such as tug-of-war (布引, *nunobiki*) during the sumo afterparty. Afterparties were the official end of festivities, with wrestlers usually returning to the provinces soon thereafter and Guards returning to their normal duties. Unlike most official events, there are no records to indicate that afterparties were held in the Greater Imperial Palace. They were held, likely from their inception, at the residence of the First Guard. Unfortunately, the source material for these afterparties is scattered among multiple diaries and has led to conflicting interpretations. The primary conflict concerns whether these afterparties were a foregone conclusion after each

competition or whether the outcome of the competition determined which side held an afterparty.<sup>128</sup>

Literary interpretations of afterparties elicit some interesting comparisons with their historic counterparts, particularly because of the paucity of diary entries on the subject. The literary work, *The Tale of the Cavern*, points towards an afterparty only being held by the side that won the competition. Following the Right's triumph in the Annual Sumo Tournament, an afterparty was held at the First Guard of the Right's residence. Many preparations went into the proceedings, including the building of a new pavilion specifically for the occasion. The event had many guests including wrestlers, Guards, courtiers, musicians, and ladies-in-waiting.<sup>129</sup> The fictional preparations were similar to the preparations that Saneyori made when he hosted his first afterparty as First Guard of the Right following the 939 Annual Sumo Tournament.<sup>130</sup> There are no diary references to corroborate that women were present at historic afterparties, but it seems likely that they were. Ladies-in-waiting and consorts were often present at physical competitions, though rarely mentioned, so they likely were present at afterparties as well.<sup>131</sup>

The next literary afterparty was at the First Guard of the Left's residence following the Left's win over the Right in the Prize Archery Competition in the first month of the following year. Multiple princes and many courtiers and Guards on the Left and Right joined the celebration.<sup>132</sup> This is the most peculiar situation because there are no records of the rival factions joining the

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<sup>128</sup> Compare Sakai, *Nihon sumō shi*, 51 where he makes no reference to winning or losing; Obinata, *Kodai kokka*, 39 where the connection is ambiguous; and the entry for afterparty in *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (日本国語大辞典) that explicitly states that the First Guard of the winning side would hold the afterparty.

<sup>129</sup> For an English translation, see Ziro Uraki, *The Tale of the Cavern (Utsuho monogatari)* (Tokyo: Shinozaki shorin, 1984), 111.

<sup>130</sup> *Saikyūki*, Tengyō 2 (939)/閏 7/13.

<sup>131</sup> Some examples of when they were recorded at physical competitions: *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/27, Chōhō 1 (999)/9/13.

<sup>132</sup> Uraki, 112–113.

same afterparty, and as will be seen, for good reason. There were banquets where the Left and Right were both invited, but those were private affairs separate from the afterparty.

The final afterparty in the text involved an amusing exchange between a principal character and his mother who asked which side had won the sumo tournament. When the character responded that the Left had won, the mother displayed regret. Her son said that she should be happy that the Left won because he was on the Left, but she smiled and teasingly said that she had already prepared for the Right because she thought the Right would win.<sup>133</sup> While diary entries were too formal to have an amusing back-and-forth like that, it is surprising that there is no discussion in diaries about contingencies based upon which side won.

The clearest evidence on the nature of afterparties, at least in the tenth century, came from the diaries of Tadahira and Morosuke. Tadahira was the only courtier on record to have hosted afterparties as a member of the Left and Right, confirming that both sides could have the afterparty. Before Tadahira became regent in 930, he served as First Guard of the Right from 909–913 and First Guard of the Left from 913–931. As head of the Right Guard, he held sumo afterparties in 910, 911, and 912. The results of the 910 and 911 tournaments are unknown, but the Right won in 912. He only recorded five afterparties as First Guard of the Left despite the eleven tournaments during his term. Unfortunately, 927 was the only tournament of those five where the results of the tournament are extant—a victory for the Left. From this limited data, Tadahira never held an afterparty following a tournament loss, but it is impossible to determine whether an afterparty was held each time his side won. It is also important to note that Tadahira never mentioned a Prize Archery afterparty, win or lose.<sup>134</sup>

Morosuke, however, chronicled multiple afterparties following Prize Archery Competitions, with his records from 938 and 948 being of the most importance. In 938, Morosuke wrote that an afterparty was held for the Right and a winner's afterparty (勝饗, *kachi no aruji*) held by the Left. That is the sole courtier record that confirms and differentiates the two parties in the same year. Further, 938 and 948 were the only diary sources that used the term for a winner's

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<sup>133</sup> Uraki, 238–239.

<sup>134</sup> *Teishinkōki*, Engi 10 (910)/8/6; Engi 11 (911)/8/13; Engi 12 (912)/8/8; Enchō 5 (927)/8/14.

afterparty. Morosuke's entry from 948, when he was First Guard of the Right, said that the Right held a winner's afterparty at the estate of Taka'akira. Taka'akira's own treatise on annual events included a line stating that the First Guard of the winning side held the party after the Prize Archery Competition with no mention of whether the losers did as well. This raises the possibility that the winning side was obligated to hold an afterparty, while the First Guard of the losing side had the choice to reward his competitors and subordinates.<sup>135</sup>

Morosuke's records on the afterparties following the Annual Sumo Tournament support this theory because Saneyori and Morosuke both held afterparties following the tournaments of 947 and 949. Those two tournaments, and the previously mentioned Prize Archery Competition of 948, are the only instances of both Saneyori and Morosuke holding afterparties following the same competition during their decade on rival sides of the same post. Unlike the 948 Prize Archery Competition and the 949 tournament, however, the results of the 947 tournament are unknown. This raises the possibility that the tournament ended in a tie, prompting both men to have afterparties. Of course, ties were rare in sumo tournaments due in large part to the odd number of matches and the emperor vetoing matches. It becomes even less likely when factoring in Morosuke's track record with sumo. The most likely conclusion, therefore, was that Morosuke held his own afterparty following a loss to the Left in the tournament in 947, just like how Saneyori did after losing to Morosuke in the Prize Archery Competition in 948, and Morosuke did following the sumo tournament of 949. This suggests, once again, that the winners must have an afterparty and the First Guard of the losers had the choice to hold one.

That conclusion is supported by the extant records. The following chart breaks down sumo afterparties into different categories based on the results of the competition from Tadahira's first record in 910 to Sanesuke's final record in 1029:

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<sup>135</sup> *Kyūreki*, Tenryō 1 (938)/1/15; *Tenryaku* 2 (948)/1/18; *Saikyūki*, 97.

Recorded afterparties following a sumo tournament (912–1029)	Left	Right
An afterparty held after a confirmed victory	927, 946	912, 1031
An afterparty held after a confirmed loss	n/a	1013*, 1019*, 1023*
An afterparty held after an unknown result	918, 919, 924, 926	910, 911, 939, 945, 959, 972 <sup>136</sup> , 978, 980, 1026, 1027
An afterparty held in unusual circumstances		932 <sup>137</sup>
Both sides had an afterparty after a confirmed result	1019	1019
Both sides had an afterparty after an unconfirmed result	947, 949, 1029 <sup>138</sup>	947, 949, 1029

From this data, it is unlikely that afterparties were traditionally held by both sides every year as there were only three instances of that occurring. The records here support the statement made in Taka'akira's handbook that the winning side must hold an afterparty. As that was the case, the many records of the First Guard of the Right hosting an afterparty suggests that the Right won many more tournaments. The more nuanced approach appears to be the right one, however, that the winners had to host one and the First Guard of the losers had a choice.

That conclusion raises the question why the First Guard of the losing side would choose to hold one. In the case of Morosuke and Saneyori, it could have been their political rivalry or the

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<sup>136</sup> The only source for this afterparty is *Kagerō nikki*. There is no other information on sumo this year.

<sup>137</sup> The First Guard of the Left died early in the eighth month of 932. This may have prompted the First Guard of the Right to hold the party. That same First Guard of the Right became First Guard of the Left at the end of the month.

<sup>138</sup> The Left did not have an afterparty in 1029 according to Sanesuke. I have put 1029 here because it is the only time Sanesuke noted that the Left did not have an afterparty. He had only two other references to afterparties held by the Left throughout his fifty-year diary and therefore a record saying whether the afterparty was held or not is important. I conclude that the Left was supposed to have an afterparty, perhaps due to a draw at the tournament, but did not do so.

close results that fueled the dual afterparties following the Annual Sumo Tournament of 947 and the Prize Archery Competition of 948. The disastrous 949 tournament does not fit that mold, however, as the results were not close nor did the Right Guard perform their duties as required. The more likely conclusion was that Morosuke wanted to use his wealth and resources to cultivate goodwill by rewarding those underneath him despite the results of the tournament. The political favor gained from an event like an afterparty seems to be the only explanation for Morosuke hosting his afterparty following the events of the 949 tournament.

To that end, it must be restated that afterparties were hosted and funded by the First Guards at their personal estates and were never held in palatial buildings that were used for the competition. The grounds of the Right Guard located within the Greater Imperial Palace, for example, may have been the site for days of training, rehearsing, and even the staging of a competition, but the afterparty was held outside the confines of the Greater Imperial Palace at a private estate. At the afterparty, the Guards, and wrestlers in the case of the sumo afterparty, received their rewards for their work directly from the First Guard, enforcing the private relationship between them. That relationship was somewhat muted when the First Guard of the winning side was required to host an afterparty. In those instances, the competitive capital gained was more in line with the other courtier guests joining the party to revel in the victory of the team that represented their side of the government. The First Guard's competence as well as his wealth were on display at the winner's afterparty.

But when the First Guard of the losing team hosted an afterparty, it was not to revel in victory, but to reward those for their hard work. His choice to fund one in the face of defeat shifts the focus from showing off his competence at his post and ventures more into his generosity and appreciation, imagined or otherwise, for the work done by his subordinates. Private displays of magnanimity, as will be seen with many examples throughout this study, were often done by the wealthiest and most powerful courtiers in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the context of afterparties, hosts could still gain competitive capital even though their side lost through these extravagant parties.

That same desire to display wealth and generosity led courtiers who were not First Guards to host their own banquets for the competitors at their residences. Future Regent Fujiwara



no Yorimichi hosted a banquet for all the Wrestlers of the Right prior to the tournament in 1005 even though he was merely a Third Guard of the Right.<sup>139</sup> He also held an impromptu party in 1006, but it was only for the Wrestlers of the Right who had lost their exhibition matches that day.<sup>140</sup> In 1010, two of Michinaga's other sons, Norimichi and Yorimune (993–1065), who were Second Guard of the Left and Right respectively, held a banquet for all the wrestlers and many of the courtiers before the tournament.<sup>141</sup>

There was also an interesting case in 997. A Second Guard of the Left hosted a banquet for all those involved in the sumo tournament on both sides. This banquet was like the one that was described in the *Tale of the Cavern* at the beginning of the section. The banquet fell on a day that would normally be reserved for the afterparty, and the guests were the same as those who would attend an afterparty. The imitative get together even included tug-of-war bouts that angered Sanesuke enough to record in his diary that tug-of-war was exclusively the purview of afterparties conducted by First Guards. His criticism concerned decorum rather than a reaction to some personal slight because he would not become First Guard of the Right for another few years. To further his point, he uses a different term for this party, though no official afterparty was held that year. If this banquet was held in lieu of an official afterparty, Sanesuke's remarks make it clear that he did not consider it the same event.<sup>142</sup>

Sanesuke's relationship with the afterparty is even more telling. He records in 1005 that he is preparing for the Prize Archery Competition afterparty the day before the competition takes place. His record suggests that he was going to host an afterparty regardless of the result of the competition, though the language was vague enough that he may just have been preparing the materials in the event that the Right won. If he was going to stage an afterparty win or lose, he did not make any distinctions between the two, implying that there was no difference, at least in terms of the gifts given, food, drink, etc., between a winner's afterparty and a loser's afterparty following the Prize Archery Competition. Unfortunately, the results of the 1005 prize competition

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<sup>139</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/7/25.

<sup>140</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/7/28.

<sup>141</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 7 (1010)/7/26.

<sup>142</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/8/11.

were marred by an imperial veto that changed an overall draw to a victory for the Left.<sup>143</sup> Sanesuke held the afterparty despite the imperial veto—an action he repeated on numerous occasions.

During Sanesuke's long tenure as First Guard of the Right, he held a sumo afterparty despite a loss in 1013, 1019, and 1023. This confirms that afterparties could be held by the losing side. Upon closer inspection, however, the tournaments were far from ordinary. As previously explained, the 1013 Annual Sumo Tournament ended in a draw, and Emperor Sanjō's veto to make it a victory for the Left shocked both Michinaga and Sanesuke.<sup>144</sup> In 1019 and 1023, the Right would have won the tournament if the imperial veto had not been used. Add those three examples to the 1005 Prize Archery Competition and an obvious pattern emerges. Sanesuke held these afterparties in defiance of the imperial veto that he constantly criticized because he believed that the Right had won. This conclusion is supported by the absence of even one record of Sanesuke holding an afterparty after a confirmed victory by the Left that was not determined by veto, such as the annual tournament of 1004 that saw the Left comfortably beat the Right without imperial interference.<sup>145</sup>

Those sections of Sanesuke's diary are sadly missing, but the fact remains that over the thirty years that his diary and his position of First Guard overlapped, he only recorded an afterparty following a confirmed victory for the Right, an unknown result, or a competition he thought the Right should have won. Regrettably, he did not record an afterparty following every competitive victory for the Right, so the results are not conclusive. He also never wrote about attending an afterparty for the Left, nor did he give comments on what happened at an afterparty for the Left. That would be an odd omission if, as *The Tale of the Cavern* suggests, both sides were supposed to attend the afterparty thrown by the winning First Guard. Given his stance on frivolous activities and the dedication to his job, it is possible that he did not join any afterparties for the Left out of some form of competitive zeal or embarrassment he felt as leader of the Right Guard.

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<sup>143</sup>This competition is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/1/17–19.

<sup>144</sup>*Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/27.

<sup>145</sup>*Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 1 (1004)/7/28.

He was not embarrassed, however, to host a party for his competitors and subordinates in defiance of the emperor's meddling. It is unclear if the Guards under him knew the reason why Sanesuke held those afterparties. Logic dictates that they did because there are multiple accounts, as seen in other chapters, of spectators and Guards getting angry with imperial decisions or trying to perform victory dances despite an imperial veto for the Left. The Right were as passionate as the Left about winning competitions, so they would have fully supported a First Guard like Sanesuke hosting an afterparty when they collectively felt they had won. There may be no evidence of Sanesuke ever verbally expressing his dislike of the imperial veto, but his diary entries and afterparties spoke volumes.

The afterparty ceased to exist sometime soon after Sanesuke. By the end of the eleventh century, banquets that had competitors as guests more closely resembled the private banquets of Yorimichi than they did the afterparties of Morosuke or Sanesuke. Future Regent Fujiwara no Moromichi (1062–1099) held a small banquet for a handful of Left Wrestlers following the Annual Sumo Tournament of 1093 even though he had retired from his position of First Guard of the Left the year before.<sup>146</sup> In 1095, the young First Guard of the Left, Fujiwara no Tadazane (1078–1162), invited Wrestlers of the Left and Right to wrestle in front of him in a competition outside the standard sumo tournament season before treating them all to a banquet.<sup>147</sup> In 1111, the First Guard of the Right held a banquet following a tournament victory, but his record did not state whether people from both sides were invited.<sup>148</sup> This odd assortment of banquets shows that afterparties as an official responsibility of First Guards following competitions merged with personal agendas and became far less uniform as the Heian period entered its final century.

For two centuries, however, afterparties served as the occasion that First Guards personally rewarded those in their employ for their work on the most important events of the year for the Guard. The following two sections look at what those tasks were for the non-competitors,

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<sup>146</sup> *Go nijō moromichi ki* (後二条師通記), Kanji 7 (1093)/8/6.

<sup>147</sup> *Chūyūki*, Kashō 2 (1095)/8/10–12.

<sup>148</sup> *Chūyūki*, Ten'ei 2 (1111)/8/20; *Denryaku* (殿曆), Ten'ei 2 (1111)/8/24.

beginning with the Second Guards (近衛中将, *konoe chūshō*) and Third Guards (近衛少将, *konoe shōshō*).

### Box Seats (and the Referees Who Sat in Them)

The Heian term *idei* (出居) had multiple meanings, the broadest of which was a member of the court who had a specific role at a ceremony or event. In the context of physical competitions, it meant the temporary outdoor seating that was brought into venues, such as Southern Hall, so that the second and third members of one of the guardhouses, usually the Guard, could sit and perform their duties pertaining to a competition.<sup>149</sup> It was also a moniker used to describe those Guards during the competition. According to Sakai Tadamasa, their role in the sumo tournament was to play referee and determine the winner of a match.<sup>150</sup> At the conclusion of any annual physical competition, the referees sitting in the box seats of the side that had won would give a victory shout. In the case of a close result or a tie, both sides would give a victory shout. Once the victory was confirmed, both sides would perform dances based upon the result.<sup>151</sup> There was also at least one Second Guard or Third Guard that was designated the box seat attendant who was charged with bringing out the box seats and setting them up prior to the commencement of the competitions.

The diaries and handbooks of First Guards like Tadahira, Morosuke, Taka'akira, and Sanesuke are filled with entries about box seats, referees, and attendants, showing their importance to First Guards. The first record of box seats in *Teishinkōki* was in 913, mere months after Tadahira had assumed First Guard of the Left, and his last record of box seats pertaining to a physical competition was made fourteen years later while he held the same position.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, the first record of box seats in *Kyūreki* was in 931 following Morosuke's promotion to Third Guard

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<sup>149</sup> There are examples of Watchmen and Stablemen participating, but not Sentries.

<sup>150</sup> Sakai, *Nihon sumō shi*, 40.

<sup>151</sup> For more on the dances performed, see Sakai, 52–54.

<sup>152</sup> *Teishinkōki*, Engi 13 (913)/7/28, Enchō 5 (927)/4/29.

of the Right. The entry must have been important to him, or a future reader, as this record is one of only three extant entries from 931 in Morosuke's diary.<sup>153</sup> The following sixteen accounts throughout Morosuke's career, including his ten years serving as First Guard of the Right, show box seats attendants at events such as Prize Archery, horse racing, equestrian archery, and seasonal ceremonies (旬儀, *shungi*).<sup>154</sup> Taka'akira includes numerous references to box seats in sumo and archery despite only being First Guard of the Left from 965–969. The accounts in Sanesuke's diary, which number well over one hundred and span from 977 to 1031, cover every kind of physical competition and many ceremonial events.<sup>155</sup>

Box seats were important to First Guards for two main reasons. The first was that seating, spacing, and the order in which courtiers arrived was of extreme importance at every annual event during the Heian period. The second was that the referees that sat in those box seats at physical competitions called out the winners of each match. Because the competition could not proceed without them, their presence effectively became more important than some of the higher-ranked courtiers in the audience. For example, there are many cases of First Guards not attending a competition, most notably Sanesuke and his many absences, but their absence rarely caused a pause in the proceedings. Despite the importance of the positions, however, many records describe how box seat referees and attendants performed their roles unsatisfactorily.

Sanesuke's record of the referees at the archery commencement competition (弓場始, *yuba hajime*) of 984 includes his lamentations that the referees had not arrived promptly—a common complaint lodged towards those in the box seats.<sup>156</sup> These complaints seem to have been a mixture of courtier impatience and an apathetic attitude from those who served as the referees. At the sumo tournament of 993, the box seat referees were called to enter but only a few did so.

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<sup>153</sup> *Kyūreki*, Jōhei 1 (931)/閏 5/27. The other two entries are on the twenty-ninth of the same month as well as the twelfth day of the eleventh month. Both entries discuss seating (座, *za*), but do not include box seats.

<sup>154</sup> For example: *Kyūreki*, Jōhei 7 (937)/1/19, 3/28, 8/15, Tengyō 7 (944)/5/5, Tengyō 8 (945)/10/1.

<sup>155</sup> There are 169 extant entries in *Shōyūki*. There are even more in *Chūyūki* (229).

<sup>156</sup> This competition is discussed in Chapter 5. *Shōyūki*, Eikan 2 (984)/10/24.

After waiting a long time and repeatedly requesting for the referees, the higher nobles were told that none were available. This understandably irked the nobles in attendance. Sanesuke later launched an investigation into why the referees did not appear on the day of the tournament when they were present the day before, but he did not receive a satisfactory answer. He later complained that it was impossible to award victories in such circumstances.<sup>157</sup>

Who was charged with replacing an absent box seat referee or attendant depended upon whether the absence was known ahead of time. Three seats reserved for Second Watchmen of the Left (兵衛府佐, *hyōefu suke*) were instead filled by Second Stablemen of the Left (馬寮佐, *meryō suke*) at the same 993 sumo tournament because a smallpox outbreak ran through the Left Watch. The Stablemen that replaced the Watchmen were of the same tier and held the same courtier rank, so the replacements were along horizontal positions in court rather than falling to those higher or lower. Further, as there are no records of a Guard, Watchmen, or Stableman below the third tier refereeing from a box seat, those duties likely could not fall below the junior fifth rank.<sup>158</sup>

But what happened if the absence was not expected? They had no remedy for the unplanned vacancies at the sumo tournament of 993; and that debacle may have influenced the incident at the sumo playoffs of 994 when a similar problem arose. Newly minted Third Guard of the Left Minamoto no Nagatsune (dates unknown) was not present to perform his duties, so they asked fellow Third Guard of the Left Fujiwara no Yorichika (972–1010) to perform Nagatsune's duties, but Yorichika strongly refused. They then asked another Third Guard of the Left, Minamoto no Tsunefusa (969–1023), who also refused. Finally, Nagatsune's task fell to Second Guard of the Left Fujiwara no Masamitsu (957–1014), who agreed to do the duty. The three men who shirked their duties—Nagatsune, Yorichika, and Tsunefusa—were summoned by concurrent Minister of

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<sup>157</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/27.

<sup>158</sup> Third Watchmen and Stablemen were jr. 5<sup>th</sup> rank and Third Guards were sr. 5<sup>th</sup> rank. Fourth-tier members of all three groups were sr. 6<sup>th</sup> rank.

the Center and First Guard of the Right Michikane for an inquiry. The punishments administered, if any, are unknown.<sup>159</sup>

At first glance, the situation in 994 shows that serving as a box seat referee was far from prestigious with one junior courtier missing the event entirely and two others refusing to do his share. It is important to remember, however, that Yorichika and Tsunefusa—not to mention Masamitsu who performed Nagatsune's duties as well as his own—had their own roles to play in the competition. Their refusal may not have been because they did not want to be box seat referees, as they already were, but likely they did not want to do any extra tasks beyond the ones they were originally given. This means that box seat referees likely did more than simply choose who won or lost, and it is possible that each box seat referee had a different task to perform for his side. Further, of the three Third Guards, Nagatsune was the newest member of the Third Guard, which likely meant that he had to perform the least reputable or most arduous jobs at the tournament. Speculation aside, it was customary for a full contingent of box seat referees to be present at a competition, and if one spot was unexpectedly vacant, then they attempted to fill it with those present or with appropriately ranked junior nobles who were not already serving in that capacity.

The refusal by Yorichika and Tsunefusa shows a surprising level of insubordination that was tolerated from young courtiers of elite stock. The twenty-one-year-old Yorichika was the second son of the current regent and perhaps thought that his place at court precluded him from having to perform the tasks outside his assigned post. Tsunefusa was the fifth son of former Minister of the Left Taka'akira, so he came from a similarly high status, though Taka'akira would have been incensed to see one of his sons not perform a needed duty at an annual event. Both young men probably saw little reason to perform the duty because punishments for elites were usually light. This event may have been indicative of their blasé attitude towards work that did interfere with their careers. Of the two, Tsunefusa fared better, serving as governor in many provinces and rising to Second Councilor (中納言, *chūnagon*). Yorichika, on the other hand, never rose above Second Guard and his career floundered. He had also been overlooked for his younger

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<sup>159</sup> Sakai, 21.

brother Korechika (974–1010) who pushed Michinaga for power just a few years later. Masamitsu was theoretically of the same stock as his cousins Yorichika and Korechika, but his position at court was far less tenable. He was the fifth son of a chancellor that had died over a decade earlier and who had a less than cordial relationship with the current regent when he was alive. This may have factored into Masamitsu agreeing to do the job despite being of higher status because he had to eke out what he could. To his credit, he eventually made it to Advisor (参議, *sangi*) and served as governor to multiple provinces.

Of course, these were not the only examples of box seat referees and attendants shirking their duties. First Guards emphasized the importance of proper conduct in their diary entries, but that does not mean that everyone followed their orders to the letter. There is no evidence to show that a First Guard would be punished, scolded, or penalized for his subordinate's poor handling of box seat duties at any events. Even so, if courtiers benefited from excellent performances by those under them, then public displays of subordinate ineptitude must have had some social repercussions. Regardless, the smooth operation for box seat duties during events was a constant concern of those who oversaw their organization. More importantly, as these courtier diaries were meant as guides and commentaries on court practice, the prevalence of entries on proper and improper box seat protocol shows that the upper echelon put great importance on the role—even if those a few rungs lower on the political ladder did not.

### **Fifth Guard Ki no Masakata**

Among the Guard, the fourth and Fifth Guards were given the most varied tasks. This should come as no surprise as there were more Guards in those two positions than the other five combined. Most of these duties were connected to the preparation of, or the participation in, a physical competition as Guards of this tier were involved in all events related to Annual Sumo Tournaments, horse races, and archery competitions.<sup>160</sup> Most of the duties fell to a group of Guards in rotation, and there is no evidence to show that new duties were created because of a

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<sup>160</sup> They also consistently performed duties for the Kasuga Festival (春日祭).



guard's aptitude for certain work, nor were duties tied to a higher rank given to these Guards for the same reason.<sup>161</sup> Rather, there were some Guards whose frequency of performing a specific task was conspicuously higher or lower than their counterparts. In other words, while the list of duties performed by fourth and Fifth Guards did not change based on the abilities of the Guards currently in post, certain tasks within that list were regularly, and sometimes exclusively, meted out to Guards who could perform them well. Consequently, the most proficient Guards were consistently performing a much narrower range of tasks than many of their less specialized fellow Guards who performed varied tasks in rotation.

Fourth Guard Harima no Yasunobu, who never lost a recorded horse race and was promoted solely on his merits as a rider, and Fifth Guard Ō no Masakata, who was an acclaimed dancer, are only two examples of Guards who were singled out for their skill at performing a particular activity.<sup>162</sup> Both were involved in other events as standard members of the Guard, but while they received praise for riding and dancing respectively, it seems neither man took other duties quite as seriously. Sanesuke notes in his diary that Yasunobu and Masakata did not hold torches to illuminate a nightly event in 1013 despite both being present and this duty being a common requirement of Guards. Another entry from 1027 states that Masakata was reprimanded for being absent from a sumo event after the annual tournament.<sup>163</sup>

But the best evidence for the nature of duties performed by the lower tiers of the Guard, as well as the relationship between the lesser Guards and the elite members of the Guard, is seen in the over one hundred and fifty accounts of another Masakata, Fourth Guard Ki no Masakata, in *Shōyūki* from 1011 to 1031. While many Guards served Sanesuke during his long tenure as First Guard of the Right, none garnered as much attention as Masakata. Unfortunately, Sanesuke did

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<sup>161</sup> Saitō Takumi, "*Sekkanke no konoefu fumu unei to kakyū kannin: migi konoefu nenyō shōsō ki masakata wo chūshin ni*," *Shijin*, no. 3 (May 31, 2011): 33–42, <https://doi.org/10.15027/42830>, 36.

<sup>162</sup> Yasunobu's competitive horseracing prowess will be discussed in Chapter 4. For (Ō) Masakata's dancing, see *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/7/24; Jian 1 (1021)/12/14; or his entry in *Jigekaden* (地下家伝).

<sup>163</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chouwa 2 (1013)/1/26; Manju 4 (1027)/7/29. These two entries, and the following six, are also discussed in Saitō, "*Sekkanke to konoefu*," 34–38.

not leave a record of their personal relationship, and little of Masakata's life outside his working relationship with Sanesuke is known. Regardless, the entries on Masakata in *Shōyūki* are a window into the lives of lesser nobles in the early eleventh century and describe how Guards were embedded into the logistical framework of physical competitions without necessarily being competitors.

Unlike Yasunobu and many other Guards described in this dissertation, Masakata was not known for his martial capabilities. In fact, there is no recorded instance of Masakata being asked to perform horse racing or archery despite his two decades of service to the Guard.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, Masakata played an integral role at court as the predominant point of contact between Sanesuke and other branches of the government. For example, the conflagration of the imperial consort's residence shortly after the new year in 1013 prompted a First Secretary (大外記, *daigeki*) to use Masakata to deliver a notice to Sanesuke about the cancellation of the women's dancing event (女踏歌, *on'na tōka*) and the postponement of the Ritual Archery Demonstration and Prize Archery Competition to the third month.<sup>165</sup> In 1016, Masakata was entrusted to deliver a note from the Crown Prince's Office (春宮坊, *tōgūbō*) that asked for the stable grounds of the Right to be cleaned and for leather to be attached to the archery targets for an upcoming competition. The competition was for servants of the crown prince to receive the privilege to carry a sword (帶刀試, *tachihaki kokoromi*) that was ironically decided by an archery competition.<sup>166</sup> In both situations, it is clear that the Right Guard needed to be notified because of upcoming physical competitions, and both agencies were comfortable using Masakata as the messenger.

Masakata was also the primary messenger for internal affairs. He was tasked with drafting the initial letter conferring the promotion of a Seventh Guard to sixth and gathering the signatures of the various members of the Guard for the letter in 1019 as well as 1025. In 1019, he drafted the

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<sup>164</sup> Saitō, 39.

<sup>165</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chouwa 2 (1013)/1/16.

<sup>166</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 1 (1016)/9/9.

letter, had it checked—and corrected—by Sanesuke, then took it to the Fourth Guard who was supposed to officially recommend the applicant for promotion despite the letter already being drawn. After receiving his approval, Masakata gathered the remaining signatures and then delivered the completed missive to a Second Controller of the Left (左中弁, *sachūben*).<sup>167</sup> The sequence in 1025 was similar except for an extra step involving a Second Guard.<sup>168</sup>

Masakata's role also extended to delivering bad news and enforcing punishments. In 1023, he was ordered to confine multiple escorts (隨身, *zuishin*) who had been caught gambling to a guard warehouse.<sup>169</sup> A few years later in 1027, he delivered the punishments to four Guards who were absent from the Annual Sumo Tournament the day prior.<sup>170</sup> That two of the perpetrators were fellow Fifth Guards shows that he could carry out the punishment of men who held the same rank as him. It is unclear whether Masakata had the latitude to self-impose punishments or if he was supervised by a superior as there is no mention of another guard involved in any of the predicaments in which Masakata found himself.

Most importantly to the Right Guard, however, Masakata was often the messenger dispatched to the provinces. Not only was he sent far from the capital to deliver the two promotional letters he drafted in 1019 and 1025, but he handled the summons for the sumo tournament on a yearly basis. The first record of him doing so was when he was a Seventh Guard in 1005, and he continued to serve Sanesuke in this capacity until at least 1026.<sup>171</sup> This duty, which entailed delivering a signed request from Sanesuke to the provincial elite to supply wrestlers to represent the Right during the tournament, was perhaps the most important task performed by the Guard for the tournament, which in turn was the grandest event involving the Guard. Of course, to reach all the provinces in a timely manner, multiple Guards were sent to deliver the

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<sup>167</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/2/11.

<sup>168</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 2 (1025)/2/17.

<sup>169</sup> *Shōyūki*, Jian 3 (1023)/9/22.

<sup>170</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 4 (1027)/7/28.

<sup>171</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/2/20; Manju 3 (1026)/7/30.

summons each year, but Masakata was consistently dispatched over twenty years while other Guards worked in rotation.

The near-ubiquitous utilization of Masakata for important duties involving letters must have meant that he was particularly adept at writing and delivering these messages to be called upon as readily as he was during his career, but the Fifth Guard was far from infallible. In 1023, he committed an unspecified blunder that required him to be put under house arrest and issue an apology. In 1026, he drew the ire of Sanesuke with a series of infractions. First, he unknowingly sent a high-ranking wrestler to the court even though the wrestler had recently defiled himself by touching his dead uncle. Sanesuke noted that Masakata should have sent a replacement wrestler before returning to the capital—something Masakata presumably did not do. Second, he failed to get the next highest-ranking wrestler to come to the court in time, using the flimsy excuse that the wrestler lived far away. This situation eventually prompted the Governor of Iyo to get involved and Sanesuke summarized the whole situation as utterly moronic—a judgement he no doubt extended to his subordinate envoy. Sanesuke ordered Masakata to write an apology, and as that apology had not arrived in time for the sumo afterparty held one week after the tournament, Sanesuke refused to give Masakata his usual rewards and instead ordered the Fifth Guard to leave until he had finished the apology.<sup>172</sup>

Perhaps due to old age, poor health, or a recently poor track record, Masakata was no longer ordered to deliver the summons for the Annual Sumo Tournament after 1026. He was still involved in the tournament, however, as he remained one of Guards who oversaw the preparations for the tournament until 1031. He was also tasked with the preparations for the Kasuga Festival in the same year, so his absence from delivering sumo summons may indeed have been related to age or health. Masakata's final appearance in *Shōyūki* is appropriately at the sumo afterparty for the tournament in 1031 where he received one roll of silk and roll of cloth for his involvement. There is no indication in the final entry as to why this would be the last time

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<sup>172</sup>*Shōyūki*, Jian 3 (1023)/8/10; Manju 3 (1026)/7/30, 8/7.

Masakata was mentioned in Sanesuke's diary and unfortunately nothing is known of him after this point.<sup>173</sup>

It must be stated that 1031 was the last year of Sanesuke's diary with many entries still extant. The records of 1032 are severely fragmented, with a short note on the Prize Archery demonstration as the only remaining entry related to physical competitions. The likely conclusion, therefore, is that Masakata continued to work for Sanesuke for as long as the two were still alive and in their respective positions. Unfortunately, there is no record of whether he was promoted to Fourth Guard within that extra decade of service.

Masakata left behind an interesting legacy that was equal parts unique and typical of his position at court. He was a guard who excelled in drafting letters, delivering missives, and being the trusted errand boy of the First Guard, and it is in this relationship with Sanesuke that we can clearly see how a courtier of low rank interacted with those in the upper echelon. There is no evidence that Masakata performed any duty above his station, and yet he was called upon by Sanesuke with such regularity as to separate him from other Guards. Further, Masakata was conspicuously absent from performing duties at horse races and archery competitions despite years of service to the Annual Sumo Tournament. In contrast, other contemporary Guards would sporadically serve alongside Masakata for the Annual Sumo Tournament while also managing or performing in horse races and archery competitions.

Saitō Takumi contends that even though he could not find any clear records of Masakata's involvement in archery competitions, he likely performed these duties because it was common for Fifth Guards to do so.<sup>174</sup> It is true that those duties were common for Fifth Guards, but I argue that Masakata's dozens of accounts related to sumo with no equivalent accounts of archery is compelling evidence for specialization within the Guard. Specialization was true of the best riders

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<sup>173</sup>*Shōyūki*, Chōgen 4 (1031)/2/6, 8/13.

<sup>174</sup> Saitō, 36.

and archers, so why not the best writers or the best-versed in dealing with provincial governors during the annual tournament season?

I will take it one step further and say that his climb from Seventh Guard in 1005 to Fifth Guard in 1011 was directly related to his specialized talents. Ironically, his disinterest or inability in martial activities may have been what kept him from rising to Fourth Guard even though he served at fifth for at least twenty years. He clearly knew how to ride a horse well if he was annually sent to the provinces, but perhaps he had no skill in riding one competitively. Nevertheless, the number of records of him performing his specialized talents dwarfing the records of his fellow Guards doing the same shows that he must have had some level of competence beyond his numerous peers in certain important duties.

Due to the nature of the work Masakata did, it is also important to distinguish him from others outside the Guard who did similar work. One may look at Masakata as the poster boy for the change in the Guard from a martially focused unit to one of ceremony, but that would be an oversimplification. Masakata may have drafted and delivered missives, two actions that are decidedly not martial activities, but most of his tasks were martial adjacent. Every example used here, except his work with the Kasuga Festival, was related to some martial activity whether it was the sumo tournament, the postponement of the Prize Archery Competition, or the archery competition to wear a sword. For non-martial matters, Sanesuke's messenger was often his adopted son, Sukehira (986–1068). The messages Sukehira brought were related to Sanesuke's position at court beyond First Guard, as most were personal conversations between Sanesuke and his brother or the emperor. While a member of one of the elite lines was more appropriate for transmitting information between the emperor and Sanesuke, no such consideration would have been necessary with Sanesuke's brother who had a modest career given his high social standing. Further, Sukehira was not used for official business concerning the Guard, so the division between Masakata and Sukehira seems clear. Masakata was a member of the Guard, and he dealt with the matters that were pertinent to the Guard, namely, martial ones, and he advanced and maintained his career through specialized work that was necessary to run a successful competition. He was a low-ranking, behind-the-scenes player who nonetheless gained the confidence of one of the most powerful men at court, showing that competitive capital came in a variety of forms.

Ultimately, Masakata's story adds a nuance to the martial perceptions of the Guard. Although the Guard had ceased performing many of the military directives assigned to them at their inception, there are many examples included in this thesis of Guards who were promoted based on their ability to perform in physical competitions. But some Guards, like Masakata, preferred the brush to the bow.<sup>175</sup> It is no surprise that the duties that befell the fourth and Fifth Guard were the most diverse as there were more members at those two tiers than the other tiers combined. Some of the Guards in those two tiers specialized in a narrow field of martial or non-martial activities while others were routinely rotated. Masakata carved out his own niche, effectively separating himself from his peers with his superior skillset. His advancement was a competition of its own, even if it did not take place on the racetrack, and in that regard, he was victorious.

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In the centuries following the adoption of the *ritsuryō* codes, the composition of the guardhouses, and the duties of each branch therein, were reconfigured to adapt to the needs of the time. By the tenth century, the duties of the Left and Right Guard had diversified from being unilaterally martial to a synthesis of martial and logistical affairs. Many of these roles were codified from the late eleventh century, but variegated specialization within the Guard was present well before. This was true at every level, from the powerful men at court occupying the First Guard to the lower tiers of competitors and organizers. While the specialization of competitors is more obvious, this chapter has shown that non-competitors could have their own form of specialization because the competitive nature of physical competitions, and court politics on a larger scale, required dedication to maximizing a small subset of skills to consistently come out on top. And while some Guards served as competitors in rivalries with their counterparts in

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<sup>175</sup> Multiple examples include lesser courtiers who were Guards at one point and held irrefutably non-martial positions in the Imperial Secretariat (藏人所, *kurōdo dokoro*) at another point in their careers. See Saitō, 39.

the other guardhouse, others served ritual and logistical functions associated with those physical competitions without ever donning the cap of an archer or horseman.

Ki no Masakata did just that, gaining the confidence of Sanesuke by performing many of the most important tasks someone of his station could perform. His relationship with Sanesuke is also a window into the court dynamics at play between different levels of courtier. Masakata had to be diligent to avoid house arrest and apology letters while Yoricika blatantly refused an order at the 994 Annual Sumo Tournament without similar repercussions. Relatively speaking, however, Masakata diligently built a successful career while Yoricika squandered his lofty position. That is not to say that the Heian court should be defined as meritocratic; Yoricika still enjoyed a far more lavish lifestyle and had far more opportunities for success and power than the hardworking Masakata. Their differences do, however, speak to the horizontal competition present in the Heian court in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and how personal agency factored into those political competitions.

Both points are exemplified by the men who inhabited the post of First Guard. Tadahira led the Right to multiple victories before finding similar success on the Left. His short time as First Guard of the Right is even more impressive given that Retired Emperor Uda was still actively challenging Fujiwara rule. The recent victories by the Fujiwara-backed Right in Prize Archery and sumo in 912 recontextualize Uda's veto-laden poetry contest in 913. Daigo must have been unwilling or unable to use the veto as freely as Uda had previously, so Uda resigned himself to make up the ground lost in physical competitions with a poetry contest. That is one of the earlier examples in this study of physical competitions being entangled with political machinations at court, as the competing interests of courtiers and emperors, both sitting and retired, continued to grow throughout the period. During the sixteen-year reign of Emperor Suzaku (921–952, r. 930–946), and therefore Regent Tadahira, the imperial veto was only used once, showing that Tadahira did not let the imperial power compromise the position of his son, Saneyori, as First Guard of the Right.

Competition intensified when Saneyori and Morosuke filled rival sides of the First Guard. Saneyori bested Morosuke in the Annual Sumo Tournaments during their tenures while Morosuke won the Prize Archery Competitions. The important caveat to Morosuke's winning streak in Prize



Archery is that Saneyori also won Prize Archery Competitions when he was First Guard of the Right, suggesting that there were excellent archers for the Right that competed for both Saneyori and Morosuke. Their respective track records in the same position for a decade qualifies the academic treatment of the two courtiers by elevating Saneyori's abilities and relegating Morosuke from the superlative politician of his time to merely the most adept player within an evolving competitive structure. That evolving structure persisted through the tenth century and into the eleventh, as evidenced by Sanesuke's success over his four decades at First Guard, though that time is described in further detail in the following chapters.

This chapter has also shown the inextricable link between the three physical competitions and their relationship within the Guard by focusing on those within the Guard that facilitated the smooth operation of competitions. Future chapters focus on the hosts and competitors, but physical competition intermingled with politics and impacted the lives of those at court in ways that are less obvious than the examples given hereafter. From the First Guards overseeing the competitors to high-ranking Guards working as referees to lower-ranked Guards riding out into the provinces to procure wrestlers, each were an integral cog in the machine that kept some of the court's favorite yearly events running. The First Guard was especially important, and through the extant records of First Guards like Tadahira, Saneyori, Morosuke, and Sanesuke, the evolution of competition throughout the Heian period can be qualified even though they never hosted or performed in a physical competition themselves.

### Chapter 3: Sumo

Prominent Players		
Northern Fujiwara Branch	Emperors and Courtiers	Competitors
Kaneie	Emperor Uda	Takakura no Fukushin (sumo)
Sanesuke	Emperor Daigo	Kisaichi no Munehira (sumo)
Michinaga	Emperor Sanjō	Ochi no Tsuneyo (sumo)
Korechika	Emperor Shirakawa	Magami no Katsuoka (sumo)
Yorimichi	Fujiwara no Nariie	Agata no Takahira (sumo)
	Taira no Korehira	

The Annual Sumo Tournament was the most important physical competition of the Heian period, an event that indelibly altered the lives of wrestlers, Guards, provincial elites, courtiers, and emperors both reigning and retired. The tournament served many purposes throughout the period, as will be discussed in this chapter, but those purposes stemmed from its most important role as a symbol of provincial capitulation to central authority. As stated in the introduction, the provinces were tasked with sending wrestlers to the court as a form of annual tribute. The wrestlers as tributary items differed from other taxable items like rice and material goods because the wrestlers were a symbolic commodity rather than an economic imperative. Due to the importance of ritual to the Heian court, however, these symbolic commodities served an integral role to the functionality of the theatre state in Heian Japan.

The first annual tournaments were more immediately tied to conflict between the central Yamato polity and hostile groups in the periphery. But even as the military need for such frequent displays of subservience waned after centuries of peace, the tournament continued to grow in spectacle and became a fundamental part of Heian society. It was so integral that from the ninth century to the twelfth, there was never more than a three-year gap between Annual Sumo Tournaments despite the sheer scale of the tournament, the many subsidiary events held around the tournament, the complex cooperation between the provinces and the capital required to hold a successful tournament, or the many calamities that plagued the Heian world.

The following explanation is extensive due to the enormity of the Annual Sumo Tournament and the myriad events related to it. The lengthy description herein aims to address the same tenets in each chapter of competition, personal agency, specialization, and competitive capital while also answering questions that are unique to sumo. Why did the emperor use his imperial veto on sumo more than any other event? Why did the author of *The Tale of the Heike* choose a sumo match to determine the next emperor? Why was the sumo tournament so much larger than any other similar event? And why has sumo, among all other competitions, been a subject of interest for academics and laymen alike?

### **Before Heian**

More than any other form of competition in Japan, the genesis of sumo wrestling is as controversial as it is important to those who seek to define it. Unlike horse racing, archery, and non-martial competitions, such as poetry competitions or dialectic debates, sumo is seen by many as a wholly Japanese phenomenon even in the modern era.<sup>176</sup> The continued existence of sumo today, though far removed from its premodern and even early modern form, has been linked to some unique, indelible Japanese identity both domestically and internationally since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>177</sup> In response to the influx of Western ideas around the time, there was an attempt to tie the native sport to other aspects of the culture, most notably the nativist religion known today as Shinto. The sumo museum in Ryōgoku, the definitive authority on sumo and the largest repository of sumo-related documents, continues to connect the mythical origin of the Japanese race to a sumo match. Their source is a legend found in *Kojiki* describing how the

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<sup>176</sup> Lora Sharnoff opens her book with former Yokozuna Takanohana explaining that sumo should not be considered wrestling due to its unique history. See Lora Sharnoff, *Grand Sumo: The Living Sport and Tradition* (New York: Weatherhill Inc., 1993).

<sup>177</sup> When Perry's men arrived on Japanese land in 1854, they were treated to a sumo match by the shogunate.

thunder deity Takemikazuchi defeated fellow deity Takeminakata in a bout of strength by crushing the weaker deity's hand within his own, thus securing the Yamato region.<sup>178</sup>

The connection the legend has with sumo is dubious, however, as the record of the hand-to-hand combat between the two deities does not use the characters for sumo (相撲) nor do the details of the competition resemble sumo wrestling at any stage. Other scholars have looked at a similar, albeit more mundane, story in *Nihon shoki* as the first sumo match between mortals.<sup>179</sup> The tale says that during the early portion of Emperor Suinin's century-long reign (69 BC–70, r. 29 BC–70), there was a man at court named Taima no Kehaya who believed he was the strongest man in the realm.<sup>180</sup> The emperor was displeased with the braggart's conduct, but there were no worthy challengers for Kehaya until a skilled potter named Nomi no Sukune agreed to wrestle. Suinin watched as Sukune killed Kehaya by kicking him once in the ribs and once in the back. The elated emperor rewarded Sukune for his victory by bequeathing the deceased man's land to him.<sup>181</sup>

The characters for sumo do not appear in that tale either, but they do make their oldest appearance in another story in *Nihon shoki*. During the reign of Emperor Yūryaku (418–479, r. 456–479), there was a carpenter who tells the emperor that he has never made a mistake when using his tools. Angered by the man's hubris, Yūryaku commanded two of his female servants to disrobe and wrestle in front of the carpenter as a distraction. The display caused the carpenter to make a mistake and the emperor initially called for his execution before staying his hand and reflecting on his cruel nature.<sup>182</sup> The reason why this salacious story is overlooked by those who

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<sup>178</sup> The English-language pamphlet from 2014 is still distributed at the museum and can be found online at [www.sumo.or.jp/en](http://www.sumo.or.jp/en) as of January 2023.

<sup>179</sup> For example, Shirai Seiji, *kodai ochishi no kenkyū* (Matsuyama: Sōfusha Shutsuban, 2010), 443; or Jörg Möller, *Spiel und Sport am Japanischen Kaiserhof* (Munich: Iudicium, 1993), 38.

<sup>180</sup> For a translation of the event, see William George Aston, *The Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle, 1972), 1: 173–174.

<sup>181</sup> His descendants remained powerful players at court for centuries. Famed scholar and Minister of the Right, Sugawara no Michizane, claimed direct descentance from Nomi no Sukune.

<sup>182</sup> Aston, *The Nihongi*, 1:361–362.

tout sumo's ancient religious connections—despite it being the first extant use of the term—is obvious. Older histories sometimes include the story without the exploitative context, while most modern histories include the story but state that the match won by Sukune is the more appropriate origin story.<sup>183</sup>

There is no evidence to determine whether sumo was an organized competition by the fifth century, as the fake female match may imply, but there are later entries in *Nihon shoki* that state that sumo was performed in front of the emperor or empress in 642, 682, and 695. The texts of these seventh-century sumo tournaments are scant, however, and what they describe bears little resemblance to the organized sumo of the Heian period. In 642, sumo was performed in front of Empress Kōgyō (594–651, r. 642–645) and an exiled Korean royal named Gyōki (dates unknown) without any further description.<sup>184</sup> Emperor Tenmu (631–686, r. 673–686) held a tournament in 682 at the court in Asuka, located south of the future capital of Nara, where wrestlers from Ōsumi Province, on the southern tip of Kyushu, defeated neighboring wrestlers from Ata Province. Although the wrestlers were grouped by their home provinces, they did not represent the Left or Right as was the case in later tournaments. The final example was when Empress Jitō (645–703, r. 686–697) had wrestlers from the same regions compete for her in the newly built capital of nearby Fujiwara-kyō in 695 while she sat underneath a zelkova tree.<sup>185</sup>

There is no recorded reason why the wrestlers came exclusively from those two provinces, though it was likely related to the recently resolved conflicts between the people of those provinces and the Yamato court. As stated earlier, the primary purpose of the Annual Sumo Tournament was to send wrestlers to the court as tribute, thus recognizing central authority. While this was indisputable in later centuries, it is possible that the sumo tournament functioned

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<sup>183</sup> For an example of the former, see Wakamori Tarō, *Sumō ima mukashi*, 22. For a view that looks at both stories, see Nitta Ichirō, *Sumō no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1994) 38–41, 80–81.

<sup>184</sup> This Gyōki (翹岐) should not be confused with the more famous Japanese Buddhist priest Gyōki (行基) who also lived in the seventh century (668–749). *Nihon shoki* (日本書紀), vol. 24.

<sup>185</sup> Nishimoto Masahiro, *Nihon kodai no ōkyū to girei* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 2008), 215. *Nihon shoki*, vol. 29 and 30.

in a similar, albeit more limited, manner as early as the seventh century. The people of Ōsumi and Ata, known as Hayato (隼人), were not ethnically Yamato and had periodically resisted Yamato rule throughout the seventh century.<sup>186</sup> These two tournaments may have been public demonstrations of the influence that the Yamato polity had over the Hayato by having their strongest perform in front of the divine Yamato leader. What is not explained by those tournaments is why wrestlers were not also drawn from the other provinces as they would in later years.

As the seventh century drew to a close, the first recorded steps to solidifying sumo as an important event occurring annually, rather than every few decades, was the promulgation of the Annual Sumo Tournament as part of the Taihō Code in 701. Like many other aspects of the codes, however, the development of the tournament was slow. The first major advancement came with an edict in 728 during the reign of Emperor Shōmu (700–756, r. 724–749) that required provincial governors to employ men skilled in wrestling and archery, both standing and equestrian, and send them to the capital as part of the annual tribute of the province. This is the first extant record that shows the connection between the three physical competitions as they relate to provincial governors. The governors were required to find competent wrestlers, archers, and riders because failure to do so could lead to the negligent governor being stripped of his office.<sup>187</sup>

The importance that the court placed on finding men skilled in these physical activities is not only apparent with the consequence to governors who failed, but also how richly individual competitors were rewarded even in the eighth century. The superlative example of the latter was Takakura no Fukushin (709–789) whose wrestling prowess as a boy launched his illustrious career. The 789 passage in *Shoku Nihongi* that serves as his obituary reads:<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> There was a final, short-lived rebellion (隼人の反乱, *hayato no hanran*) from 720–721. For more on the Hayato, see Nagayama Shūichi, *Hayato to kodai Nihon*, Dōseisha kodaishi sensho 6 (Tokyo: Dōseisha, 2009).

<sup>187</sup> Nitta, *Sumō no rekishi*, 86.

<sup>188</sup> *Shoku Nihongi* (続日本紀), Enryaku 8 (789)/10/17.

Enryaku 8 (789)/10/17, jr. 3<sup>rd</sup> (without office) Takakura no Fukushin died.<sup>189</sup> Fukushin was from the Koma District of Musashi Province. His original family name was Sena. His grandfather, Sena no Fukutoku [dates unknown], was serving when Pyongyang Castle (平壤城) fell [in 668] to Tang General Riseki [李勣 594–669]. He fled to Japan to live in Musashi Province...When [Fukushin] was a boy, he accompanied his uncle, Sena no Yukifumi [dates unknown], to the capital. One evening, [Fukushin] wrestled (遊戯相撲) another boy at *Iso-no-kami-no-machita*. He defeated his opponent with strength and skill. News of this reached the imperial palace and he was ordered to become a page. From then on, he became famous. First, he served as Fifth Sentry of the Right (右衛門府大志, *uemonfu daisakan*) and soon thereafter received provincial sr. 5<sup>th</sup> low in the Tenpyō era [729–749]. He served as Second Steward to the Crown Prince (東宮亮, *tōgūryō*), and Emperor Shōmu was exceedingly fond of him...He was awarded jr. 3<sup>rd</sup> in the first year of Tenpyō-jingo [765]...<sup>190</sup>

Due to limited sources, it is unclear whether Fukushin wrestled in any official tournaments while in the emperor's employ. Even if he did, Fukushin predated the concept of career wrestlers seen in later centuries. Regardless, Fukushin is the oldest verifiable example of a man who rose in rank, esteem, and wealth due to his dominant wrestling ability, serving as a model for future talented wrestlers as the Annual Sumo Tournament grew in political and social importance. His most impressive accomplishment was making the rare transition from the provincial ranks, which

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<sup>189</sup> A courtier's rank and office were intrinsically tied because one had to be a certain rank to hold a specific post. There were occasions such as this one, however, where a courtier had no post but kept whatever rank he had with his last posting.

<sup>190</sup> For brevity, I have not translated the end of the passage, but it concludes with how he was granted the ability to change his family name from one of Goguryeo descent to Takakura.

capped at the fifth rank, to the central ranks where he rose to third rank—a quintessential example of turning competitive capital into promotions and prestige.<sup>191</sup>

A few years after Fukushin's death, Emperor Kanmu moved the capital to Heian-kyo (Kyoto), and it was in those final years at the turn of the ninth century that the sumo tournament truly became a yearly event. I will remind the reader of Minister of the Left Tooru's complaint about Emperor Uda where Tooru says that every emperor from Kanmu enjoyed sumo. As Kanmu was the first emperor of the Heian period, Tooru's comments do not simply mean that emperors have been enjoying sumo for a long time. He is emphasizing the link between sumo and the Heian court—a claim supported by the records. There are only four extant records of Annual Sumo Tournaments in the eighth century while there are fifty-five in the ninth. Those fifty-five tournaments include a seventeen-year span when only one tournament was held. That long gap was followed by the Jogan era from which Tooru said that the Annual Sumo Tournament was held without fail.

### **Annual Preparations for Sumo at the Heian Court**

Planning for the Annual Sumo Tournament was a year-long endeavor that required continuous cooperation between the highest ministers and the provincial governors to function. Unlike horse racing and archery, where the competitors were drawn from the Guards stationed in the capital, wrestlers travelled from their home provinces to the court specifically for the tournament each year. First Guards assumed the lion's share of the responsibility throughout the year from the beginning of the tenth century until the mid-twelfth century. The first entity tasked with organizing the tournament as it became an annual event, however, was the Sumo Committee. The committee was created in 812 and then expanded in 813 with a Left and Right committee to combat some of the logistical concerns of the tournament. The most pressing concern was the punishment of tardy wrestlers. While the records of the early ninth century do

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<sup>191</sup> For more on the differences between the provincial and central promotions, see Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship*, 201, 311.



not state how the wrestlers were punished, they were most likely jailed as this was the consequence for tardiness in later years.<sup>192</sup>

Members of the committee were chosen from a pool of prominent courtiers in the sixth month.<sup>193</sup> Those chosen often served in this capacity for multiple tournaments. There were traditionally twelve men to each side consisting of one third-ranked courtier on top followed by a collection of men from the fourth and fifth rank. If a crown prince was included in the group, he would lead the committee with the third-ranked courtier just below him. The committee was composed of an eclectic assortment of posts, including Second Councilor, Advisor, Governor, Second Guard, and the heads of the Stables (馬督, *uma no kami*), Watch (兵衛督, *hyōe no kami*), and Sentry (衛門督, *emon no kami*). The First Guard was conspicuously absent from any committee in the ninth century and no Ministers of the Left or Right served.

It is unclear what effect the Sumo Committee had on the logistics of the tournament, as the sumo season was far more organized under the First Guards in later decades. It must have been considered an opportunity, or at least not a burden, to be included on the committee because so many men returned to fill the roster even when they achieved higher ranks in court. The committee may have served less as a functioning body and more as an exemplar of prestige or a steppingstone in a mid-ranked courtier's career. This can be seen by the care the chroniclers of *Sandai jitsuroku* took to list each member of the committee without describing what they did or paying any attention to the wrestlers or tournament results. One of the writers of *Sandai jitsuroku* was Minister of the Right Sugawara no Michizane who is also the author of the oldest extant court treatise on sumo. Despite claiming direct descentance from wrestler Sukune, Michizane's treatise

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<sup>192</sup> *Nihon Kōki* (日本後紀), Kōnin 3 (812)/7; *Kyūjō nenchū gyōji* (九条年中行事), Engi 19 (919)/7, Engi 22 (922)/7.

<sup>193</sup> There are four full lists of committees in the ninth century. *Sandai jitsuroku*, Jōgan 7 (865)/6/26, Gangyō 6 (882)/6/26, Ninwa 2 (886)/6/25, Ninwa 3 (887)/6/25.

on sumo says nothing on wrestling, instead discussing the intricacies of the sign boards used to decide seat order at the tournament.<sup>194</sup>

This did not preclude members of the committee from caring deeply about the tournament, however, as Tooru had been a member of the Sumo Committee prior to becoming Minister of the Left and making his comments about Uda. Despite men like Tooru no doubt being on the committee, there is no evidence to suggest that the committee oversaw the tournament with the same skill as the First Guard and his subordinates in later years. Subsequently, the importance of the committee waned in the following years to the point that by the turn of the millennium, Sanesuke outlined many of the participants of tournaments, the results, and even the messengers sent to the provinces, without disclosing the courtiers on the committees. There are some references in diaries that discuss a crown prince heading a new committee, but they are exceedingly rare beyond the early tenth century.<sup>195</sup> Even court records do not discuss committees. The contribution of the committee to the functionality of the tournament, therefore, seems minor, even if the Sumo Committee lasted long enough for Retired Emperor Shirakawa to wrest away the prerogatives of the committee—and more importantly, the First Guard—in the late eleventh century, as discussed later in the chapter.

Regardless of who was issuing commands, discussions about that year's tournament started as early as six months prior to the event. The first and second months were reserved for deciding which mid-ranking members of the Guard would be dispatched to deliver the court's summons to the provincial governors.<sup>196</sup> Declarations that the tournament would be canceled could come as early as the fifth month or as late as just before the tournament in the seventh month. Those coming in the fifth month were usually related to famine, drought, or epidemic—three common reasons for the cancellation of the tournament in every century. The cancellations in the seventh month were usually due to an unexpected death in the royal family. One such

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<sup>194</sup> *Hidari sumai tsukasa hyō shoki* (左相撲司標所記).

<sup>195</sup> For the sole example in *Shōyūki*, see *Shōyūki*, Tenryaku 10 (956)/6/19.

<sup>196</sup> Some of those Guards would also escort the wrestlers to the capital. Sanesuke wrote about these discussions multiple times. For example, *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/2/20; Chōwa 2 (1013)/1/26, 2/14–21.

example is detailed in *The Tale of Flowering Fortunes* when “The Empress’s death [Kōshi (947–979)] had caused the cancelation of the wrestling matches, and the court was quiet and lonely.”<sup>197</sup>

In a normal year devoid of agricultural disaster or imperial tragedy, wrestlers would arrive in the capital early in the seventh month a few weeks prior to the tournament. The first order of business was to bring the wrestlers to their respective guardhouses, Left or Right, where they would be evaluated by the First Guard. In cases where the First Guard deemed the candidates too weak or incapable of wrestling, they were reprimanded or even sent back to their home provinces. Sanesuke was critical of wrestlers from *San’indō* (山陰道) on multiple occasions, including when he sent two wrestlers from Tanba Province home in 1019.<sup>198</sup> The wrestlers were not the only men to be remonstrated with; Sanesuke berated the envoys for bringing in such weak recruits, and one can imagine that the poor tributes sent by the governors in those provinces were factors in their evaluations for reappointment.

The court’s emphasis on evaluating whether these men were physically strong and technically adept wrestlers cannot be overlooked. While those considerations would be self-evident in any modern competition, the stress placed on these attributes during this time invalidates any attempt to give a historical depiction of sumo wrestling during the Heian period without including its spectatorial and competitive elements. Moreover, while the tournament peaked in the mid-Heian period, there was a long track record of demanding capable wrestlers well before the likes of Sanesuke. The 728 command for governors to find subordinates skilled in wrestling and archery was followed by a call for strong men (膂力人, *ryōryoku bito*) from the realm (天下諸国, *tenka shokoku*) in 809. I join Sakai Tadamasa in his analysis that this call was for sumo wrestlers as the verbiage is consistent with later sumo-related entries, though neither the

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<sup>197</sup> McCullough and McCullough, *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes: Annals of Japanese Aristocratic Life in the Heian Period*, vol. 1, 117.

<sup>198</sup> *San’indō* was the name for the region in the northern part of the modern-day Chūgoku region. It consisted of eight provinces: Tango, Tanba, Tajima, Inaba, Hōki, Izumo, Iwami, and Oki. Sanesuke commented on wrestlers from this region in 1019 and 1025. *Shōyūki*, Kan’nin 3 (1019)/7/14, Manju 2 (1025)/7/20.

provinces instructed nor the reason for the call were defined. An edict one year later in 810 is more direct. That order requires men from the provinces who are both strong and skilled in wrestling.<sup>199</sup> A couple decades later in 833, Emperor Ninmyō said the tournament was for entertainment *and* martial practice.<sup>200</sup> The necessity for strong wrestlers grew until sumo wrestlers came to epitomize strength. The starkest example of this was a list of the prominent people during the reign of Emperor Ichijō (980–1011, r. 986–1011) that included a section for men of unparalleled strength where every man on that list was a sumo wrestler.<sup>201</sup>

Sumo wrestlers are the most obvious models for the specialization of competitors because their sole reason for coming from the provinces to the capital was due to them being big, strong, and talented wrestlers. These physical stipulations, which continued throughout the Heian period, were a requirement from at least the early Nara period. Wrestlers that did not meet the physical criteria were turned away by diligent First Guards like Sanesuke. Those that passed the initial examination spent the remaining weeks training until they competed in front of the emperor in exhibition matches (内取, *uchitori*).

### Exhibition Matches

Prior to the creation of the exhibition matches in 903, the emperor would sort the wrestlers from strong to weak following the tournament and have the strongest perform in the playoffs. Emperor Kōkō (830–887, r. 884–887), who had previously served as a member of the Sumo Committee when he was crown prince, performed this duty in 886 and 887.<sup>202</sup> By 903, it was determined that the exhibition matches and playoffs would be separate events with the evaluation of a wrestler's ability understandably coming before the annual tournament. After the wrestlers passed the initial review, they spent a few days around the Guardhouse of their respective side

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<sup>199</sup> See *Nihon Kōki*, Daidō 4 (809)/2, Kōnin 1 (810)/7/9; Sakai, 8.

<sup>200</sup> *Shoku Nihon kōki*, Tenchō 10 (933)/5.

<sup>201</sup> That list will be discussed in Chapter 6. *Zoku honchō ōjō den*, Kankō 8 (1011)/6/22.

<sup>202</sup> *Sandai jitsuroku*, Tengyō 6 (882)/6/26, Ninwa 2 (886)/7/27, Ninwa 3 (887)/7/27.

before they were summoned for exhibition matches a couple days prior to the tournament, typically between the twenty-second and twenty-sixth of the seventh month. The first documented instance of exhibition matches was in 903 at *Ryōkiden* (綾綺殿, see figure 3).<sup>203</sup> They became more frequent throughout the century until an order in 981 made them an annual requirement.<sup>204</sup> By that point, the event had been moved to its permanent location, *Jijūden* (仁寿殿, see figure 3), starting in 953. There wrestlers showcased their abilities in front of the emperor and high-ranking courtiers. The exhibition matches were important enough that they were held in front of the emperor even if he was observing abstinence (物忌, *monoimi*) as seen with Emperor Ichijō in 1000.<sup>205</sup>

Exhibition matches differed from the tournament in a few ways. One odd contradiction to all other sumo-related events, and all other physical competitions, was that the wrestlers representing the Right went before the ones on the Left. Sometimes both sides would wrestle on the same day, with the Right going first, but usually the Left wrestled the following day after the Right. The scheduling hints to the most important difference between exhibition matches and the other sumo events—namely that it was a competition between the wrestlers of each side rather than against the opposing side. The purpose of this competition was to determine the order of the wrestlers within each side, Left or Right, so that they could be matched with their equivalents on the other side in the upcoming tournament. Crucially, this was the event where wrestlers competed for higher positions such as Champion (最手, *hote*) and Contender (脇, *waki*).

The initial seeding going into the exhibition matches was determined by a combination of a wrestler's rank in the previous tournament and their performance leading up to the initial matches. Returning Champions and Contenders of the previous year always kept their position until the exhibition matches. There is no evidence of the remaining fifteen wrestlers receiving any

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<sup>203</sup> Sakai, 12.

<sup>204</sup> *Chonōshō* (樗囊抄), Engi 3 (903)/7/24; *Shōki mokuroku*, Tengen 4 (981)/7/25.

<sup>205</sup> *Gonki*, Chōhō 2 (1000)/7/25.

positional security related to previous success. The Contender was the only wrestler who could challenge the Champion for the top spot. Champions did not have to accept the challenge, however, as many would submit injury exemptions (故障, *koshō*) to bypass the risk of losing their title. The Champion bore all the risk of a match with the Contender because the Contender did not lose his spot if he lost, but he supplanted the Champion if he won, such as in 953 and 1005.<sup>206</sup> Most of the time, however, the Champion made quick work of his rival or chose to bypass the match altogether. It is unclear how many wrestlers could challenge the Contender for his spot. There are no records stating that a wrestler had to wrestle more than once during exhibition matches, suggesting that only one wrestler could challenge the Contender if the Contender did not challenge the Champion. Further, there are no records of the Contender losing to anyone other than the Champion at the exhibition. Given those two facts, the most likely scenario is that the positions of Contender and Champion were decided before the start of the exhibition matches, likely during the preliminary inspections and initial matches at the Guardhouse, and the only change in rank that was possible at the exhibition matches was for the Contender to leapfrog the Champion.

For many years, the exhibition matches were the final official hurdle before the wrestlers fought one another in the annual tournament. That began to change near the end of the tenth century when wrestlers were inspected by the Minister of the Center at his private residence. Around the same time, courtiers who were not directly involved in the preparations for the sumo tournament invited wrestlers to their estates where the hosts entertained the wrestlers with a feast and the wrestlers entertained the hosts with matches. When future Regent Yorimichi was just Third Guard of the Right, for example, he held two large banquets for the wrestlers of the Right before the start of the Annual Sumo Tournament. He held private events after the tournament as well, such as when he gave the Champion and Contender of the Right horses following their victories in the tournament of 1005.<sup>207</sup> Private events notwithstanding, exhibition

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<sup>206</sup> *Saikyūki*, Tenryaku 7 (953)/7/25; *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/7/26.

<sup>207</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/7/25, Kankō 3 (1006)/7/28. *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/8/10.

matches were the final test before the wrestlers joined the large procession signaling the beginning of the Annual Sumo Tournament.

### The Annual Sumo Tournament

The procession was an elaborate affair that included nearly three hundred men marching to the imperial palace. The oldest description of the event can be found in *Jōgan shiki* from the late ninth century.<sup>208</sup> It went through minimal changes for the next two centuries with most changes coming in the form of reactions to unforeseeable circumstances. Such was the case in 997 when it was decided that music was not going to be played during any sumo events that year due to an imperial consort recently dying and Michinaga falling ill.<sup>209</sup> Similar reasoning was used for the silent procession in 1000, and subsequent iterations either included music by following the ninth-century model or were silent following the 997 model.<sup>210</sup>

To describe the procession briefly, the Left and Right were mirrored throughout the procession with the Left coming up the eastern side and the Right the west.<sup>211</sup> At the helm were ten Sentries, five of the Left in single file and five of the Right beside them. Behind them were two Fourth Guards who were picked for the Sumo Committee that year and two Fifth Guards who were flanked by ten Watchmen that briefly expanded the columns to four.<sup>212</sup> They were followed

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<sup>208</sup> The Jōgan era was from 859–877. While no official date is possible for its creation, it is believed to have been completed sometime between 874 and 877.

<sup>209</sup> There was no insight to how sick Michinaga was. He fell gravely ill the following year as well. It is believed he suffered from ailments related to diabetes. For more on this, see G. Cameron Hurst, “Michinaga’s Maladies. A Medical Report on Fujiwara No Michinaga,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 34, no. 1 (1979): 101–12.

<sup>210</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/7/28; *Gonki*, Chōhō 2 (1000)/7/27.

<sup>211</sup> The reason why the Left was on the east and the Right on the west was because they corresponded to the emperor’s frame of reference who faced south.

<sup>212</sup> From here on, the total number of Left and Right are detailed without differentiation because they were mirrored. For a large graphic rendering of the procession, see Sakai, 42. For a full breakdown of the procession, see Sakai, 42–44.

by eight mixed members of all three guardhouses and then an assortment of men holding rope, inkstones, and the like. Following them was a set of fifth and fourth-ranked courtiers, four Advisors and two princes. Behind them in four columns were various musicians, forty dancers, forty-four *sangaku* performers, and sixteen percussionists. Near the end were chanters, scorekeepers, and announcers before twenty-six spearmen. Finally, there were forty wrestlers, eight sumo attendants (相撲長, *sumai no osa*), and five more spearmen bringing up the rear.<sup>213</sup>

Concurrently, there were many steps taken in the Southern Hall to receive the wrestlers.<sup>214</sup> First, the high-ranking courtiers arrived, followed by the emperor and the crown prince. Ladies-in-waiting looked over the railings of the Southern Hall before they slipped behind the bamboo screen held for them by the regent or another high-ranking official. Once box seats were placed on the deck of the hall, the emperor joined his ladies-in-waiting behind the screen. Then, the crown prince sat upon an elevated box seat before the courtiers took their seats beside him. Attendants first placed box seats in the courtyard for the mid-ranking courtiers who would serve as box seat referees before erecting two long curtains that obfuscated the wrestlers from the courtiers, and finally placing circular mats upon which the wrestlers would sit.

The Wrestlers of the Left, led by their Champion, would enter from the eastern side in single file and present themselves to the courtiers before performing a ritual and taking their seats near the Cherry Tree of the Left (左近の桜, *sakon no Sakura*, see figure 3). The Wrestlers of the Right mirrored those of the Left before flanking the Mandarin Orange Tree of the Right (右近の橘, *ukon no tachibana*, see figure 3).<sup>215</sup> The tournament consisted of seventeen matches between the

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<sup>213</sup> Sakai's graph includes forty wrestlers when there were only thirty-four wrestlers per tournament.

<sup>214</sup> The remaining paragraphs of this section are an amalgamation of Sanesuke's description of the playoffs of 890 that followed the same protocol as the tournament due to inconclusive results the day prior and his description of the tournament of 993. Sakai translated the lengthy 890 entry from *Ononomiya nenchū gyōji* into modern Japanese on pages 49–50.

<sup>215</sup> These two saplings were present at all Heian-period events and ceremonies held in the Southern Hall. In the sumo tournament, they served as unofficial boundary lines. Unlike in modern sumo, pushing an



Left and Right with the contenders and champions fighting in the final two bouts if there was time. Those final bouts were rarely held, however, as there was only time for thirteen to fifteen matches in a day due to the combination of music, dancing, and ritual that was performed after each match. Deliberations also often stalled the entertainment. If a wrestler was injured and petitioned to be exempted from his match, which would result in a draw, the courtiers in attendance debated whether to accept or deny the request—sometimes for hours. They also debated close matches and any breaches of protocol by the wrestlers. Thankfully for the spectatorial aspect of the tournament, there was little need to see the matches between the strongest wrestlers on the day of the tournament because the Champions and Contenders always fought first during the playoffs the next day.

In fact, it was so rare for the Champions to compete at the tournament that an exciting tall tale is told in *Tales of Times now Past* about why that is the case.<sup>216</sup> In the story, Champion of the Left Magami no Narimura and Champion of the Right Un no Tsuneyo have enjoyed continued success at the tournament over the years and neither want to suffer the embarrassment of a loss.<sup>217</sup> When they are requested to wrestle at the conclusion of the 984 tournament, Narimura repeatedly tries to evade facing Tsuneyo by submitting six injury exemptions. Tsuneyo also submits an injury exemption, but the courtiers deny each attempt. Upon the seventh refusal, Narimura rushes Tsuneyo and rams his head into Tsuneyo's chest with great force. The two men continue grappling until they both crash to the ground. The nobles debated for hours over who had won the match until it was decided that Tsuneyo was the victor because he had landed on his side while Narimura had landed on his back. During the deliberation, Tsuneyo had been carried to a room to the side of the courtyard. After the decision, First Guard of the Right Fujiwara no Naritoki (941–995) and many other Guards give Tsuneyo an article of their clothing.<sup>218</sup> He does not get to enjoy his victory for long, however, as he dies shortly thereafter of broken ribs. Narimura

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opponent beyond the boundary did not award a wrestler the win. They likely would have simply brought them back to the middle to start again.

<sup>216</sup> This is a condensed retelling of *Konjaku monogatari shū* 23:25.

<sup>217</sup> This story has a mixture of factual and fictitious elements.

<sup>218</sup> Naritoki was First Guard of the Right from 977–990.

never returns to the capital after the defeat and Emperor En'yū (958–991, r. 969–984) abdicates shortly after the tournament. The story concludes by saying that it was for this reason that it was considered inauspicious for Champions to wrestle during the tournament.

During a normal tournament, the setting sun often signified the end of the matches, but the festivities would continue long into the night. The courtiers were brought meals and alcohol that they consumed by torchlight. Subordinate officials filled the cups of their superiors before having their vessels filled by those lower than them. There were dances performed by those sitting in the box seats and wrestlers would sometimes do informal matches. The dances would be done one at a time with the Left going before the Right unless they were forced to do them simultaneously when pressed for time. There was a separate list of dances performed by the Left and Right, and which one they danced was based upon the result of the tournament.<sup>219</sup> After the conclusion of the dances, the emperor and crown prince retired, and the box seat referees lined up to receive their cloth rewards.

### **The Playoffs**

The playoffs were held the following day in the same location as the tournament. A special board was created in 712 to determine which wrestlers would participate in the playoffs until that determination was taken over by the emperor. By the tenth century, the courtiers were once again deciding who would wrestle in the playoffs, but the structure of the playoffs had been refined to a process with little guess work. Each spectator and box seat referee from the day before was expected to be at the playoffs, though only the best wrestlers returned. The first two matches were the same each year, seeing the Champions and Contenders face off against one another.<sup>220</sup> The matches that followed, however, varied in number and format. Some tournaments only had one additional match, and some went as high as five additional matches. The following matches fell into two groups. First, matches were reserved for any bouts between lower-ranked

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<sup>219</sup> For more on these dances, including the names of the dances performed, see Sakai, 54.

<sup>220</sup> These were fought even if the top wrestlers had competed the day before, though that was rare occurrence.

wrestlers that were not held during the tournament due to time constraints. If none of those remained, they would schedule new matches.

There were multiple factors that determined which combatants were chosen for the new matches. The most common matchup was between a victorious Wrestler of the Left and a Wrestler of the Right who had his victory turned into a draw by imperial veto during the tournament. Though it was not explicitly expressed, this configuration served two purposes. The first was to placate the Right because a victory was taken from them. The second was to make him face a better opponent to increase the chances that he would not repeat his victory. Of course, the wrestlers of the Right, still hot from their victories being overturned the day prior, did not have to oblige the Left in the playoffs. Such was the case with the playoffs of 997 when three of the four new matches held that day followed the format described above with the Right winning each one.<sup>221</sup> Another common participant in a new match during the playoffs were any wrestlers whose match was deemed a draw because his opponent successfully petitioned for an injury exemption. An interesting difference between the Left and Right competitors was that wrestlers of the Left who lost their match the day prior could be selected for these playoffs, but there are no such extant examples of the same treatment for the Right, excluding the rare instance where the Contenders fought during the tournament.

These sophisticated measures for determining the best possible matches to watch during the playoffs should not be overlooked. While the logic behind having Champions and Contenders wrestle during the playoffs every year is straightforward, the system by which they chose the other matches required more nuance. More importantly, it shows that the courtiers were acutely aware of the competitive elements discussed throughout this dissertation, particularly as they relate to imperial vetoes and injury exemptions.

Further, it should be noted that the Heian courtiers used two separate terms to describe matches during the playoffs—*nukide* (抜出) and *oisumai* (追相撲). Historians have often used the terms interchangeably, but there is a nuance between them even if I have combined them into one umbrella term for the sake of brevity. As the terms are never expressly explained in any extant

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<sup>221</sup> *Gonki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/7/30–8/1.

records, however, that nuance is difficult to disseminate. For example, in reference to the playoffs of 993, *Shōyūki*, *Gonki*, and *Saikyūki* only use the term *nukide* with no mention of *oisumai* while later works such as *Nihon kiryaku* and *Honchōseiki* use *oisumai* with no mention of *nukide*.<sup>222</sup> Other records in *Shōyūki* help to clear the confusion such as Sanesuke's accounts of the playoffs of 1005 and 1013 where both *nukide* and *oisumai* were performed. From these limited texts, it is clear that *nukide* was reserved for matches that were not held the day before due to time constraints while *oisumai* were new matchups.<sup>223</sup> Regardless of which types of playoff matches were held, the evening after the matches unfolded identically to the tournament.<sup>224</sup>

One final point on the playoffs is that they were the birthplace of one of the most popular nightly pastimes with the wrestlers—tug-of-war. The tug-of-war matches were the result of an unexpected incident that happened following the 890 playoffs. During the night, two wrestlers clashed in an unofficial bout for the amusement of the courtiers as they ate and drank, as was customary. On this occasion, however, a wrestler who had lost one of these unofficial bouts marched over to the waiting area of the victorious wrestler and pulled down the curtain boundary. Upon seeing this, the victorious wrestler rushed to his opponent's side and did the same. The defeated wrestler rushed back to his side and grabbed hold of the curtain that the victorious wrestlers had snatched. The two men began to pull on the curtain to wrest it from the hands of the other. The scene must have amused the spectators greatly as it became a common game thereafter in the evening of sumo-related events.<sup>225</sup>

### Other Sumo Events

In some years, the exhibition matches, annual tournament, playoffs, and afterparty were simply not enough excitement for one sumo season. To sate the desire for more wrestling, the

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<sup>222</sup> *Shōryaku* 4 (993)/7/28.

<sup>223</sup> Fujiki Kunihiro also came to this conclusion. See Fujiki Kunihiro, *Heian jidai no kizoku no seikatsu* (Tokyo: *Shibundō*, 1960), 187.

<sup>224</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/7/29, Chōwa (1013)/8/1.

<sup>225</sup> For example, *Nihon kiryaku*, Engi 7 (907)/8/9; *Shōyūki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/8/11

normal schedule would be augmented for the enjoyment of the emperor, retired emperor, or even a courtier. The events fell into four categories: a grand event at the behest of the emperor called an Extraordinary Sumo Competition, a more intimate showing at the residence of a retired emperor, a Juvenile Sumo Competition, or a private event held at a courtier's estate. The attendees of those private events could be as few as two brothers or as many as most of the court at larger events. In all cases, save for the Juvenile Sumo Competition, the competitors were the wrestlers who participated in the tournament that year. Naturally, the events happened outside the normal list of sumo events, thus stretching the time in which the wrestlers were present in the capital.

Moreover, the records show that these events were planned with little advanced notice. Wrestlers were given gifts at the end of each special event as compensation for participating in competitions beyond the standard annual duty of a wrestler called to the capital, though the reason behind the extra payments seems more to do with standard protocol than any sympathy towards the wrestlers having to do extra work. The rewards may have also been used to entice the better wrestlers to participate. Unlike official events, there is no evidence to suggest that wrestlers who chose to not participate in the extra events would be imprisoned like they would if they had missed the tournament. This shows that the events that were held outside the calendar were considered separate from official events and should be viewed through their own lens.

The thread that linked these unofficial competitions was entertainment, which in the case of physical competitions, could be as compelling as the ubiquitous political and social posturing of Heian court culture. Unlike the events surrounding the annual tournament that took months of preparation and hundreds, if not thousands, of people to function properly, these impromptu events were neither uniform nor predictable. Some events showed the political and social power of the host while others went unannounced to the rest of the court. Some copied many of the protocols of the annual tournament while others had no accompanying music, dancing, or formal seating arrangements. What connected this otherwise disparate set of occasions, therefore, was that they were fueled primarily by a desire to watch sumo wrestling. Unsurprisingly, the number of these unofficial events increased as courtiers gained more private power in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. In order to understand these events as a whole, however, each event much be

explained within its unique context, beginning with the most important—the Extraordinary Sumo Competition.

### Extraordinary Sumo Competition

The first Extraordinary Sumo Competition was held in 907 at *Jijūden* for Emperor Daigo and set the precedent for future iterations.<sup>226</sup> There were five matches between the top wrestlers as well as tug-of-war. This competition was unique in that there were no Contenders, and the Champion of the Left and the Champion of the Right did not wrestle one another. Instead, the Champion of the Left fought in the first match, and the Champion of the Right in the second.<sup>227</sup> The wrestlers of the Left swept the Right before every wrestler was treated to confectionary, fish, and a bolt of silk. The losers on the Right were forced to drink alcohol before all wrestlers competed in tug-of-war. The sweep by the Left could have been a competitive result, but it seems more likely that Uda had his hand in the event even though the competition was nominally held by Daigo in the imperial palace. Further, this sweep of the Right predates Tadahira becoming First Guard of the Right in 909, showing once again his impact on competition.

Emperor Murakami had the next two Extraordinary Sumo Competitions in 950 and 956.<sup>228</sup> Both competitions included five matches of sumo and seven matches of tug-of-war. The Left won in 950 while the Right won in 956. The wrestlers were treated to food and a roll of silk for participating. The Champions received two extra rolls of cloth as an additional perk of their position in 950 but were only given one extra roll in 956. Both competitions were held in the courtyard of *Jijūden*.

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<sup>226</sup> The *Saikyūki* entry for 950 stated that they followed the precedent of 907 and the *Gonki* entry for 1000 said they followed the 950 precedent. *Saikyūki*, Engi 7 (907)/8/9, Tenryaku 4 (950)/8/10; *Gonki*, Chōhō 2 (1000)/8/12.

<sup>227</sup> *Chūyūki*, Engi 7 (907)/8/9. The concept of Champions was a relatively new concept in 907. The Champions started facing one another by 912. *Saikyūki*, Engi 12 (912)/7/27.

<sup>228</sup> *Saikyūki*, Tenryaku 10 (956)/8/19.

The following three Extraordinary Sumo Competitions were during the reign of Emperor Ichijō in 987, 1000, and 1007.<sup>229</sup> The circumstances surrounding each competition, however, make those during Ichijō's reign different from those held by other emperors. The 987 competition, for example, was held when Ichijō was only seven years old, so it is clear that Regent Kaneie was the one that ordered the competition. Further, Kaneie's actions with subsequent competitions explained in the following sections shows that he was not organizing these competitions for Ichijō's benefit, but rather for his own. In this way, the competition can be seen as a private event held by Kaneie through Ichijō. The 1007 competition falls into a similar category and is therefore described in the section on private events.

The circumstances around the Extraordinary Sumo Competition of 1000, however, are less obvious. On that occasion, Ichijō invited courtiers to his temporary palace (里内裏, *satodairi*) outside the walls of the imperial palace to enjoy watching sumo with him and his ladies-in-waiting. Neither *Shōyūki* nor *Midō kanpaku ki* have surviving records of the day, so Michinaga's influence on the proceedings are unknown. There is a rather detailed account in *Gonki* including how the Champion of the Left submitted an injury exemption because the Champion of the Right had defeated him so soundly in the playoffs just a few days prior that the Champion of the Right was congratulated by courtiers on the Right *and* Left. The final match saw an ill-fated wrestler perform an inauspicious act by stepping on his curtain as he was being pushed back. The wrestler died soon thereafter. The tournament concluded with all wrestlers receiving food and silk as was customary, but Ichijō generously gave the Champions an additional two bolts of Shinano crimson cloth (信濃布, *Shinano no nuno*).<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> This was according to a list made by the author of *Chūyūki*, Fujiwara no Munetada (1062–1141). He grouped what he considered to be all the Extraordinary Sumo Competitions and listed them in chronological order beginning with 907 and ending in 1072. Munetada's list is likely comprehensive as there are diary entries in *Saikyūki*, *Nihon kiryaku*, *Gonki*, and *Midō kanpaku ki* to corroborate those dates while there are no records of Extraordinary Sumo Competitions happening on any date other than those in Munetada's list.

<sup>230</sup> *Gonki*, Chōhō 2 (1000)/8/12.

Extraordinary Sumo Competitions disappeared after 1000 for nearly a century as private events by courtiers became the predominant form of impromptu sumo. There was a resurgence of emperor-backed Extraordinary Sumo Competitions, however, in the late eleventh century beginning with Emperor Go-Sanjō (1032–1073, r. 1068–1072) in 1072. His son, Shirakawa, held the next one in 1079. The final two Extraordinary Sumo Competitions were held during the reign of Emperor Horikawa (1079–1107, r. 1086–1107) in 1088 and 1095 but were held at Retired Emperor Shirakawa’s residence.<sup>231</sup> Disregarding the outlier Ichijō, whose position is best understood as the puppet of Kaneie and Michinaga who steered court entertainment towards the private, the comprehensive list of emperors who held these competitions—Daigo, Murakami, Go-Sanjō, Shirakawa, and Horikawa—synchronizes with historical narratives of strong emperors who opposed Fujiwara rule in the ways that they could, though in the cases of Daigo and Horikawa it was their retired fathers pulling the strings.<sup>232</sup> With that caveat in mind, the connect between strong imperial presence and the hosting of Extraordinary Sumo Competitions becomes apparent. It speaks to how physical competitions were a mirror of the court generally, and sumo a mirror of the emperor specifically.<sup>233</sup> Further, the following list of retired emperors who had sumo competitions at their private estates removes any doubt of this correlation.

### Sumo for the Retired Emperor

Competitions held to entertain retired emperors were the first special competitions ordered outside the confines of the Annual Sumo Tournament. The first two instances happened in successive years when the wrestlers went to the estate of Retired Emperor Saga (786–842, r.

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<sup>231</sup> *Chūyūki*, Enkyū 3 (1072)/8/3, Jōryaku 3 (1079)/8/17, Kanji 2 (1088)/8/7, Kahō 2 (1095)/8/8.

<sup>232</sup> This list is echoed in William H. McCullough, “The Heian Court, 794–1070,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 2: Heian Japan*, 51. Or G. Cameron Hurst III, “Insei” in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, 585. For the political interests of Shirakawa, see Adolphson, *The Gates of Power*, 75–124.

<sup>233</sup> McCullough also included Emperor Sanjō in his list of emperors who opposed the Fujiwara. His resistance to Fujiwara rule is discussed at the end of the chapter.



809–823) in 830 and 831.<sup>234</sup> The records do not divulge what level of pomp and circumstance were attached to the proceedings, such as whether there was a procession or how many spectators and auxiliary performers were present. Saga saw ten matches that day, therefore there must have been at least twenty wrestlers participating. The next time sumo was held at the residence of a retired emperor was in 899 when Retired Emperor Uda had two days of playoffs at his *Suzakuin* (朱雀院)(see figure 1).<sup>235</sup> Uda also attended a Juvenile Sumo Competition in 928 as a retired emperor—an unprecedented act with no other extant examples until Shirakawa.<sup>236</sup>

In fact, the next sumo competition for a retired emperor did not happen for nearly two centuries until Shirakawa resurrected the practice. The two Extraordinary Sumo Competitions he held during his son's reign were grand affairs on par with Ichijō's. The entire court showed up to watch seven matches along with tug-of-war, dancing, and music. Shirakawa was not only interested in the Extraordinary Sumo Competitions, however, as he ordered many other sumo competitions of varying sizes without his son. He held a competition at Michinaga's old estate of *Tsuchimikadō* in 1091. He even ordered Guards to wrestle for him if he was so inclined when the wrestlers were not present. There is a particularly mundane story in *Notable Tales Old and New* that states that in 1098 Shirakawa wanted to see some wrestling, so he ordered the *takiguchi* imperial guard (滝口) to split into Left and Right and meet him at the horse track of *Butokuden* for some matches. His plans were dashed, however, because the track was being used for another event that day. Undeterred, Shirakawa had the Guards wrestle for him that evening at *Seiryōden*.<sup>237</sup> The *Chūyūki* entry of the same event adds that the Left lost many matches during this secret competition.<sup>238</sup>

The *takiguchi* guard is another connection between Shirakawa and Uda. The *takiguchi* guard was a special group of bodyguards for the emperor that was created by Uda. He created the

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<sup>234</sup> Sakai, 9.

<sup>235</sup> *Chonōshō*, Shōtai 2 (899)/7/28, 30.

<sup>236</sup> *Chonōshō*, Enchō 6 (928)/閏 8/6.

<sup>237</sup> *Kokon chomonjū* 15.6.

<sup>238</sup> *Chūyūki*, Jōtoku 2 (1098)/8/3.

unit to protect himself from the mercurial and homicidal Retired Emperor Yōzei (869–949, r. 876–884) who will be discussed in Chapter 4. Notably, Shirakawa was ordering the *takiguchi* guard as retired emperor even though the unit was supposed to serve the reigning Horikawa. This is yet another example of Shirakawa exerting his will as retired emperor in ways that Saga and Uda would have approved of as powerful retired emperors.

The limited list of retired emperors who held sumo competitions at their own estates—Saga, Uda, and Shirakawa—once again corresponds with the list of retired emperors who exerted the most control during the reigns of their sons.<sup>239</sup> Shirakawa eventually oversaw the transition of the responsibility of calling wrestlers to the capital from the First Guard to the retired emperor, signaling his complete control over sumo. What the secret competition in the evening of 1098 highlighted was that even if Shirakawa’s primary goal for taking over the sumo competition as a retired emperor was the powerful symbolism of that political shift from the reigning ruler to the retired one, it was not his sole reason. Even the most Machiavellian interpretation of Shirakawa cannot disregard his personal interest in watching sumo when he held a competition in secret that had been postponed and was performed by lesser wrestlers.

### Juvenile Sumo

The first Juvenile Sumo Competition was held in 861 as a form of entertainment for the young Emperor Seiwa.<sup>240</sup> The same event was held for the next three years at the Southern Hall, though future events were never held there again. While the location changed often, the purported reason for the tournament stayed the same: to entertain a juvenile emperor or crown prince. The list and age of emperors who had juvenile sumo competitions organized for them, however, betrays an importance beyond simple juvenile entertainment. Uda held one shortly before his retirement when Daigo was seven, an age where it seems unlikely such an event would hold his attention.<sup>241</sup> The same could be said for the tournament held for Emperor Ichijō, which

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<sup>239</sup> Hurst, “Insei,” 581.

<sup>240</sup> Sakai, 50.

<sup>241</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Kanpyō 7 (895)/7/7.

was likely organized by Kaneie, when Ichijō was only eight.<sup>242</sup> Other competitions were held when emperors were of a more appropriate age, including another one for Daigo when he was thirteen as well as one for Horikawa at the same age.<sup>243</sup> Of course, the list of young emperors who had these competitions organized for them once again coincides with powerful men behind the scenes. The reasons for Uda and Shirakawa holding these kinds of competitions during the reigns of their sons is straightforward, but Kaneie's reason for holding one during Ichijō's reign is less obvious. I will expand on that point in the following section.

Regarding the logistics of the Juvenile Sumo Competition, they followed many of the same protocols as the adult version, including the splitting of wrestlers into Left and Right, the members of the Guard facilitating the proceedings, the matches being bookended by dances and music, and a final match being fought between juvenile Champions.<sup>244</sup> The number of matches ranged from nine to fifteen and could go well into the night. Aside from the emperor and courtiers, the spectator list included the adult Champion if he was in the capital, as seen in 984, which must have excited the young boys.<sup>245</sup>

Sadly, there are no records that name any child wrestlers, nor do we know from what pool of people the wrestlers were chosen. As there is no evidence of messengers being sent to the provinces for juvenile sumo, the wrestlers must have been living in or near the capital. It is also possible that young strong boys visiting the capital from the provinces, like Takakura no Fukushin, would also participate. This may mean that unofficial matches like the one Fukushin won were a normal occurrence in Kyoto. If so, perhaps the young wrestlers were a combination of victors of less formalized street sumo matches and the sons of low-ranked courtiers. This would explain how

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<sup>242</sup> *Shōyūki*, Eien 2 (988)/8/19.

<sup>243</sup> *Fusōryakuki*, Engi 1 (901)/7/28; *Chūyūki*, Kanji 6 (1092)/8/3–5.

<sup>244</sup> The term used for the child Champion, *urate* (占手), was different from the adult version (最手).

Originally, *urate* was the term that denoted the Contender (脇) in the Annual Sumo Tournament before being used exclusively for the juvenile iteration. *Urate* was also the term used for the best performer at a poetry competition.

<sup>245</sup> *Shōyūki*, Eikan 2 (984)/8/19.

members of the Guard were able to procure enough boys for a juvenile competition one day after it was ordered by Retired Emperor Shirakawa in 1092.<sup>246</sup>

There is also no surviving evidence explaining to what extent young boys would receive organized training in wrestling.<sup>247</sup> The only recorded requirement came in 928 when it was determined that the wrestlers must be at least 136 centimeters tall.<sup>248</sup> There are numerous literary records from later centuries that suggest that wrestling was a common pastime for young boys and men of the time such as *Gigeiki* (義経記) and *Tales of Times Now Past*.<sup>249</sup> While this is to be expected, there are no contemporary records to discern whether boys received formal training in sumo or if it was closer to the roughhousing in which children engage irrespective of time, location, or culture.

Further, if the participants of the juvenile competitions were sons of provincial courtiers traveling to the capital to get noticed, it is quite possible, if not likely, that some boys who participated in the juvenile competition grew up to represent their provinces at the adult annual tournament. There is no definitive example to corroborate this, but if the names of the boys in juvenile competitions were submitted to the court at the tournament's end, as was customary, it is logical to presume that that list of names could be passed on to the provincial governors for future consideration. In the provinces, the relatives of the juvenile wrestler could argue that because the boy's name was already recorded at the court as a wrestler, he should be chosen to represent the province at the annual tournament when he comes of age.

Regardless of whether the boys terminated their wrestling before becoming men or they matured into provincial representatives in adulthood, the juvenile competition was taken seriously by the courtiers in attendance. They kept records of the winners and losers like they did with the annual tournament with an emphasis on the first match, the bout between Champions, and the

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<sup>246</sup> *Go nijō moromichi ki* or *Chūyūki*, Kanji 6 (1092)/8/1–13.

<sup>247</sup> A question without an answer for their adult counterparts as well.

<sup>248</sup> The contemporary measurement given was four *shaku* (尺) and five *sun* (寸) which equates to 136.35 cm.

<sup>249</sup> *Gigeiki*, 3.2; *Konjaku monogatari*, 15:10, 23:21.

team record. Similarly, there was a strong spectatorial element present at both competitions. This can be seen, for example, when Michinaga held a large private juvenile competition at his estate just seven days after one was held for Prince Atsuyasu (999–1019) in 1006.<sup>250</sup> Michinaga described his juvenile competition as such:

[Kankō 3 (1006)]/8/23, There was a Juvenile Sumo Competition [at my estate] with fifteen matches.<sup>251</sup> Curtains were erected on the south, east, and west sides to create an area for the wrestlers. There was a judge and a supervisor for each side. The Right won the first match and three more matches than the Left overall, [but] the Left won the Championship. The Left performed the winning dance because the Left Champion won. The Right performed their dance after. The courtiers of the fourth rank and higher separated into Left and Right. Fourteen courtiers came today. The whole thing was endlessly entertaining. The Left and Right Second Watchmen [Michinaga's sons] submitted a list of the wrestler's names [to Michinaga].<sup>252</sup>

The Right winning more matches than the Left was not uncommon in the Juvenile Sumo Competition. In fact, the Right had more total victories and won more competitions across all extant records. The earliest competition victory for the Right was in 901, no doubt aided by the absence of imperial vetoes. The most dominant performance, Left or Right, came in 1006 in front of Prince Atsuyasu when the Right won seven of the eight matches, including the bout between Champions. Of course, by the time of the juvenile competition of 1006, the Right was winning more and more bouts in the adult competitions as well.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Atsuyasu was the eldest son of Emperor Ichijō, but the crown prince was Ichijō's elder cousin, future Emperor Sanjō.

<sup>251</sup> We know it was at his estate from the *Gonki* entry of the same date.

<sup>252</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/8/23.

<sup>253</sup> The competitions with results between 901 and 1006 can be found in *Fusōryakuki*, Engi 1 (901)/7/28; *Teishinkōki*, Engi 14 (914)/7/28; *Shōyūki*, Eikan 2 (984)/8/19; *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/8/17, 23.

## Private Competitions

The juvenile competition of 1006 held by Michinaga was neither the first nor last private sumo competition organized by a courtier. The first recorded competition was held at Regent Kaneie's *Higashi sanjōin* (東三条院) mansion (see figure 1) in 987. He held it ten days after the completion of the 987 playoffs and deliberately copied the format of an Extraordinary Sumo Competition. The unprecedented competition was a public display of Kaneie's power as regent as he willed the entire court to his private residence by emulating an event exclusively reserved for the divine sovereign. The following year, he staged the Juvenile Sumo Competition for Ichijō, as discussed previously, creating a distinct difference between the two. Ichijō was emperor, but he was a child that warranted juvenile sumo; Regent Kaneie, on the other hand, assumed the powers of adult emperors in staging an Extraordinary Sumo Competition with the tributary wrestlers from the provinces. Clearly, Kaneie knew how to use annual events to his advantage, and the spectatorial physical competitions were of particular use to him. The grand horse racing competition he staged the very next year, as discussed in Chapter 4, proves his commitment to these displays of power. He most certainly would have continued to stage more grandiose displays if not for his death in 990.

Two of Kaneie's sons, Michitaka and Michikane, would follow suit after their father's death. Regent Michitaka organized a competition at his mansion following the playoffs of 994, just as his father did, though no details of the event remain.<sup>254</sup> The more influential private competition, however, was held by the younger Michikane at his residence in 993 while he was Minister of the Center.<sup>255</sup> This event was important because it marked the first time the Minister of the Center performed the inspection of the wrestlers, an act that had previously been the prerogative of the emperor. The overlap of this duty with the Minister of the Center's role as

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<sup>254</sup> The *Chūyūki* list of extraordinary sumo events does not include Regent Michitaka's competition while it does include Regent Kaneie's. This possibly suggests that Michitaka's event was not as grand as typical extraordinary sumo events.

<sup>255</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Eien 1 (984)/8/9; *Hokuzanshō*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/22; *Nihon kiryaku*, Shōryaku 5 (994)/8/7.

Master of Ceremonies (内弁) during the annual tournament made this a logical progression, but it is noteworthy that a duty of the emperor was given to a courtier. Further, the Minister of the Center did not relinquish this role back to the emperor. The next Minister of the Center, Fujiwara no Kinsue (957–1029), for example, performed the same inspection in 1000 and 1007.<sup>256</sup>

The most interesting sumo event of 1007, however, took place at the temporary palace of Emperor Ichijō.<sup>257</sup> This sumo competition followed the same protocol as the Extraordinary Sumo Competition of 1000 discussed earlier, but the motivation behind the 1007 competition was far different. While this tournament was held at the behest of Emperor Ichijō, it differed from typical Extraordinary Sumo Competitions in that it was openly held for the benefit of Michinaga rather than the emperor. Michinaga had missed the annual tournament of 1007 because he had fallen ill, so Ichijō organized a special competition at his estate nearly a full month after the annual tournament for Michinaga to watch sumo. As it was customary for the full contingent of courtiers present at annual tournaments to be present at Extraordinary Sumo Competitions, this unique situation gave a competition held for Michinaga's benefit an audience size to rival the competitions held at his estate at his expense. It is for this reason that this competition should be seen as a private event that shows the personal influence Michinaga had even though he was not serving as regent at the time. It also raises the distinct possibility that the Extraordinary Sumo Competition of 1000 was also at the behest of Michinaga.

Beyond the political implications of an event of this magnitude being held in honor of a courtier, the competition itself was an entertaining affair. Nine of the ten competitors for the 1007 competition were present at the 1000 competition, including both Champions and Contenders. Unfortunately, the Champions and Contenders excused themselves from wrestling when they successfully submitted injury exemptions. The wrestler representing the Right in the third match, the former Contender of the Right, tried to submit an exemption as well, but he was denied. The record stated that he fought admirably despite his injury without disclosing the victor. Spurred on

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<sup>256</sup> *Hokuzanshō*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/22; *Gonki*, Chōhō 2 (1000)/7/26.

<sup>257</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 4 (1007)/8/20.

by their fellow wrestler's gutsy performance, the Right won the final two matches.<sup>258</sup> Michinaga said he was beyond grateful that Ichijō organized this event so that he could see sumo. That sentiment, which speaks to Michinaga's enjoyment of sumo, was consistent with comments by Michinaga at other sumo events such as the 1006 juvenile competition discussed previously and his disappointment in 1010 when torrential rains ruined the annual tournament and playoffs.<sup>259</sup>

Smaller competitions put even more emphasis on entertainment. As the wrestlers were in the capital for over a month at a time, there were many opportunities for courtiers to request that the wrestlers entertain them. Records of these events are rare in the diaries of Michinaga, Sanesuke, and Yukinari, but that is to be expected as Michinaga would host a grander display, Sanesuke showed little interest in watching any physical competition, and Yukinari would visit Michinaga when he wanted to see a competition.<sup>260</sup> Nevertheless, smaller private events were held. One famous example involving Michinaga's rival, Korechika, became the basis for a story in *Notable Tales Old and New*. In the twelfth month of 994, former Champion of the Left Kisaichi no Munehira visited Minister of the Center Korechika while the former Champion of the Right visited Korechika's younger brother.<sup>261</sup> The brother suggested that the Right Champion challenge Munehira to a match, and the two wrestlers accepted. The bout was held at Korechika's residence where Munehira deftly defeated his opponent. As a reward for his victory, Korechika offered Munehira an undisclosed gift. The dejected Right Champion broke a wooden gate in frustration with a single strike before fleeing to his home province never to return.<sup>262</sup>

Smaller private matches increased in frequency in the eleventh century. Yorimichi consistently invited wrestlers over the years to compete in front of him privately before feeding

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<sup>258</sup> *Chūyūki*, Kankō 4 (1007)/8/20.

<sup>259</sup> Michinaga began a list of terrible things that had recently happened by lamenting how constant rain dampened the festivities. *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 7 (1010)/8/29.

<sup>260</sup> For example, *Gonki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/9/3, Chōhō 2 (1000)/3/6, Chōhō 3 (1001)/10/24.

<sup>261</sup> Korechika and his brother were exiled to *Dazaifu* in 996 following an incident where Korechika shot an arrow at Retired Emperor Kazan (968–1008, r. 984–986) because he mistakenly thought he and the retired emperor were courting the same woman.

<sup>262</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 5 (994)/12/12 and *Kokon chomonjū*, 15.3.



them and bestowing gifts. He began this practice in his teenage years, inviting wrestlers of the Right when he was Third Guard of the Right before inviting wrestlers from both sides when he was regent until at least 1033.<sup>263</sup> But enthusiasm for sumo was not exclusive to the highest members of court. Sanesuke made a surprising appearance at the residence of his adopted son, Sukehira, to watch sumo matches with him in 1024 when Sukehira was only an Advisor.<sup>264</sup> In 1027, Sanesuke's nephew, Fujiwara no Tsunemichi (982–1051), who worked in the Office of the Imperial Police (検非違使, *kebiishi*), wrestled a Second Councilor in front of a crowd.<sup>265</sup>

Sanesuke's rebuke of his nephew was scathing. He said that he had never heard or read of such a thing in recorded history. His comments were likely geared towards conduct deemed inappropriate for an Officer of the Imperial Police, but a similar situation had happened three years prior. One evening in 1024, a mere week before the start of the annual tournament, two mid-ranked courtiers engaged in a sumo match in front of the Southern Hall. The match became violent as both men pulled the other's hair. Four days later, one of the combatants searched for his opponent and battered him while his subordinates wrecked the battered courtier's home. Sanesuke remarked that he would need to investigate the bizarre event, but no punishments or further remonstrations were recorded.<sup>266</sup>

As seen with these examples, private matches varied because sumo was a ubiquitous form of entertainment in the Heian period. The provincial wrestlers must have been busy during their long stay in the capital if courtiers like Sukehira could cajole them into wrestling for private courtier entertainment. They could be called upon outside the confines of the tournament season as well, as seen with the bout between Champions in the twelfth month at Korechika's estate. For the wrestlers who became low-ranking members of the Guard serving their corvée at court, they

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<sup>263</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Chōgen 6 (1033)/8/6. As stated in the introduction, there is a dearth of sources from the end of *Shōyūki* in 1032 until *Go nijō moromichi ki* in 1084 and *Chūyūki* in 1088.

<sup>264</sup> Yorimichi held one of his sumo banquets the very next day. *Shōyūki*, Manju 1 (1024)/7/26–27.

<sup>265</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 4 (1027)/8/23.

<sup>266</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 1 (1024)/7/21.

may have entertained courtiers with matches throughout the year.<sup>267</sup> From these many interactions bore a familiarity between courtier and wrestler that explains why nobles showed interest in men of considerably lower station from the provinces. Within this context, it is easy to understand why courtiers fraternized with wrestlers and why many stories of wrestlers appear in court literature for the next few centuries.

That interest also stemmed from a shared fascination with sumo wrestling. It should not be overlooked that sumo was the most violent and adversarial of the physical competitions. While horse racing and archery required the same skills that were needed for warfare, the competitions themselves were less viscerally violent than two barely clad men throwing each other into the ground. To borrow briefly from modern sensibilities, sumo wrestling is considered a combat sport because it is a full-contact grappling sport and the initial charge (立会い, *tachiai*) is a violent collision. Archery, on the other hand, is a non-contact sport while horse racing only has incidental contact. As the examples in this section have shown, Heian courtiers willfully engaged in their own bouts of violent wrestling well into adulthood, contrary to the common literary view of courtier conduct. Adding that to the excitement that courtiers had for the annual tournament and other ancillary sumo events, it becomes impossible to describe the typical male Heian courtier without including these violent and masculine interests.

### **Sumo and the Provinces**

Governors had to place a high importance on the maintenance of the wrestlers representing their province because the wrestlers were part of the annual tribute by which the court would determine the governor's likelihood of keeping his job. His tasks would entail finding a suitable wrestler, sending him to the court with large quantities of other tributary items, receiving the wrestler upon his return, and coordinating any demands from the court in relation to said wrestler. Without extant diaries from any provincial governors, we must rely on the records of the

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<sup>267</sup> This is discussed in Chapter 6. For more on corvée practices of the Guard, see Karl F. Friday, *Hired Swords*, 27–30.

court's dealings with the wardens of the periphery to understand the logistics of sumo outside the center.

The most important message that the court received from a governor was a request to be excused from sending a wrestler to the capital that year. As stated before, the court often canceled the summons for wrestlers throughout the realm when the provinces were hit with a devastating drought or epidemic. If a similar disaster was localized to a smaller area, however, a governor would have to apply to be excused from sending a wrestler. The head of *Dazaifu* did so in 994 when an epidemic swept through the island, killing many.<sup>268</sup> There is no record of the court's reply, but the absence of criticism from Sanesuke suggests clemency as he rarely missed an opportunity to criticize tardiness and negligence.

The cancelation of the Annual Sumo Tournament due to famine or epidemic also served as a form of tax relief for the provinces. This is why the 994 letter from *Dazaifu* explicitly asks that they be exempt. The cost to the provinces was high, though specific numbers are not disclosed in any records, as they had to fund the wrestler's stay in the capital. Canceling the tournament meant the provinces did not have to procure goods for the wrestler's lengthy stay nor take their biggest and strongest men away from working the fields. Wrestlers were also prominent men in their home provinces, whether they were born into the provincial elite or used their rewards from tournaments to increase their land capital and influence. The cancelation, therefore, kept some provincial elites at home to help manage local problems.

In years without calamity, governors had to handle any orders that were sent to their offices regarding wrestlers returning home. For the wrestlers who performed meritorious sumo services, the court granted them tax-exempt land that the governors would have to facilitate. For the wrestlers who committed an offense, such as tardiness or rowdiness, the provincial authorities had to detain the wrestlers for the length of time demanded by the court. This was the case in 997 when First Guard of the Right Michitsuna ordered the Izumo governor to incarcerate a tardy Izumo

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<sup>268</sup> *Honchōseiki*, Shōryaku 5 (994)/5/10.

wrestler who had evaded capture in the capital.<sup>269</sup> The wrestler's sentence was cut short, however, as he was released a week later due to falling ill while in prison.<sup>270</sup>

Governors also had to receive the sumo envoys each year, which did not always go smoothly, and perform damage control when one of those envoys did not do his job properly. In 1026 for example, Iyo Governor Fujiwara no Nariie (dates unknown) found himself trying to mitigate a major gaffe committed by Sanesuke's envoy, Masakata. Nariie had been a career governor who had conducted himself well as governor of Suruga, Mutsu, and Bitchu before becoming governor of Iyo.<sup>271</sup> He had ingratiated himself with Michinaga by bringing horse to the capital on multiple occasions as gifts.<sup>272</sup> There were no recorded complaints regarding his involvement with sumo as well. Nevertheless, in 1026, Masakata made a series of mistakes that resulted in a defiled wrestler going to court while the other requested wrestler did not travel to the capital.<sup>273</sup> When the envoy was questioned, he said that the second wrestler lived too far away to reach, and that he was sure that Governor Nariie would take care of the situation.<sup>274</sup> First Guard of the Right Sanesuke was livid, denying Masakata his rewards and forcing him to write an apology.<sup>275</sup> While Masakata was never sent to Shikoku again, Nariie made sure that the wrestlers from Iyo were the first Sanesuke saw the following year.<sup>276</sup>

Not all government officials handled their duties with wrestlers as adeptly as Nariie. Hitachi vice-governor Taira no Korehira (dates unknown) had a long history of incompetence and

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<sup>269</sup> The wrestler was also a member of the Guard.

<sup>270</sup> *Gonki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/8/28, 9/5.

<sup>271</sup> Records show him as governor of Suruga in 999, Mutsu in 1010, Bitchū in 1021, and Iyo from 1025. *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/9/5, Kankō 6 (1010)/8/23; *Shōyūki*, Jian 1 (1021)/11/29, Manju 2 (1025)/9/26.

<sup>272</sup> Horses used as bribes for Michinaga is discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>273</sup> The wrestler was considered unclean because he had touched his recently deceased uncle.

<sup>274</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 3 (1026)/7/30.

<sup>275</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 3 (1026)/8/7.

<sup>276</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 4 (1027)/7/19.

aggression before his nature turned murderous in 1024.<sup>277</sup> For undisclosed reasons, Korehira killed Hitachi wrestler Kimiko no Aritsune and tried to frame Aritsune's uncle, fellow wrestler Kimiko no Tsuneki.<sup>278</sup> Regent Yorimichi and Sanesuke launched an investigation after they received a report that Korehira and Tsuneki were blaming one another for the murder in the third month of 1025.<sup>279</sup> Sanesuke's response, delivered via sumo envoy, ordered Governor Fujiwara no Nobumichi (dates unknown) to find the truth and report back.<sup>280</sup> Yorimichi and Sanesuke received the report a few months later after Nobumichi concluded that Korehira had not only killed Aritsune, but he had forced Aritsune's widow to falsely testify that Tsuneki was the culprit.<sup>281</sup> With the truth recorded, no punishment was meted out. That leniency may have been related to Sanesuke's account later that year that said Korehira was being uncharacteristically charitable by bringing Sanesuke ten rolls of silk, a bushel of gardenias, and four *hakama*.<sup>282</sup>

Because men like Nariie and Korehira filled the positions of provincial governor in seemingly equal measure, prominent cultivators (百姓, *hyakusei*) of a province occasionally used sumo wrestlers as negotiation tools to petition the court to extend or revoke an official's tenure. In 987, a group of several hundred cultivators (百姓数百人, *hyakusei sūhyakunin*) from Mino Province entered the Greater Imperial Palace (大内裏, *daidairi*) requesting an extension of the office of Governor Minamoto no Toosuke (dates unknown). Among the cultivators were three large men who joined in the exhibition matches being held that day. The record does not state

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<sup>277</sup> Sanesuke accused him of incompetence in 998 and negligence in 1013. Michinaga's relationship with him will be discussed in Chapter 4. *Shōyūki*, Chōtoku 4 (998)/12/26, Chōwa 2 (1013)/1/24.

<sup>278</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 1 (1024)/8/6.

<sup>279</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 2 (1025)/3/26.

<sup>280</sup> Sanesuke also mentioned that the sumo envoy would leave the capital and sojourn in Ōmi province to receive the report.

<sup>281</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 2 (1025)/7/21.

<sup>282</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 2 (1025)/11/10. Korehira and his violent escorts caused more trouble on multiple occasions before and after this event.

whether the cultivators or a court official instigated the drafting of the three men into the sumo ranks, but their arrival on the twenty sixth for the exhibition matches was by design.<sup>283</sup>

Tanba cultivators in 1019 petitioned the court for the opposite reason.<sup>284</sup> Tanba Governor Fujiwara no Yoritō (?–1030) responded to the cultivators who came to a government building to protest his leadership by chasing them down and arresting them. His brash action drew condemnation from Michinaga and Regent Yorimichi.<sup>285</sup> The wrestlers arrived in the capital the following month accusing Yoritō of poor management. Michinaga, Yorimichi, and Sanesuke took the accusation seriously, and only after Yoritō showed genuine contrition was it decided that he would be sent to Tanba to right what had been done.<sup>286</sup> But Sanesuke had a more pressing problem as First Guard of the Right. Two of the three wrestlers Tanba sent to the capital were unfit to wrestle. In a somewhat coy letter, Sanesuke told the office to release the two infirm men from wrestling so that they may tend to their fields full time. The adept wrestler was also sent back to his fields with Sanesuke saying that he would call upon him if needed.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> The record does not state whether they were successful. This is the only extant record of Minamoto no Toosuke. The next record of a governor of Mino, excluding the central equivalents (兼守), was Fujiwara no Tadanobu (933–994) as the former governor in 993. As there were no fixed terms for governors, it is possible that the cultivators succeeded; but if they did, it was not for long. *Nihon Kiryaku*, Eien 1 (987)/7/26, *Shōryaku* 4 (993)/12/10.

<sup>284</sup> Both events are briefly discussed in Sakamoto Shōzō, *Nihon kokka taiseiron* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1972), 210–212, 221.

<sup>285</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/6/21.

<sup>286</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/7/9–11.

<sup>287</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/7/14. Yoritō either changed his ways or orchestrated a clever public relations stunt because some cultivators once again came to a government building to declare an evaluation of Yoritō's leadership. This time they praised him. Sanesuke did not know what to think about the sudden change. *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/9/24.

The system by which wrestlers were demanded each year from every corner of the realm no doubt fueled many more fascinating situations that were lost to time.<sup>288</sup> The wrestlers from Tanba were likely not the only representatives of a province to convey an opinion of fellow cultivators to members of the court, nor were Aritsune and Tsuneki the only wrestlers to get embroiled in a scandal with provincial elites. Organizing an annual tournament with so many fluid components was a daunting task that demanded year-round preparation and two large guardhouses to oversee. To split the workload further, provinces consistently supplied wrestlers to either the Left or Right.<sup>289</sup> This explains why wrestlers never switched sides as well as why long-serving First Guards like Sanesuke had enduring relationships with wrestlers and governors.

### **Emperor Sanjō and the Annual Tournament of 1013**

The simplified view of the premodern Japanese conceptualization of government is that the Japanese emperor was the embodiment of the government rather than its top agent. This idea extended to the provinces over which he ruled not in a personal manner but as the state. Following this rationalization of authority, the Annual Sumo Tournament was undoubtedly a tournament held in honor of his position rather than his person. Nevertheless, the emperor wielded more power over sumo wrestling than he did any other physical competition. He could use the philosophy behind the tournament to influence it in personal ways such as ordering the Extraordinary Sumo Competitions discussed in this chapter or by casting imperial vetoes. To fully understand the profound relationship between the annual tournament and the emperor,

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<sup>288</sup> Contained in the records used in this study, exactly fifty-four provinces sent a wrestler to the capital by Sanesuke's completion of *Shōyūki* (1032).

<sup>289</sup> Although this is never explicitly stated, the diary entries support this theory by the eleventh century. Sanesuke recorded meeting with wrestlers from the provinces of Shikoku, Kyushu, and *San'indō* as well as provinces like Harima on an annual basis while there are no concurrent records of any wrestlers from those provinces wrestling for the Left. Conversely, provinces like Hitachi, Suruga, Ise, and Izu only have records of wrestling for the Left. There may have been some geographic considerations, like how all the provinces west of Kinai represented the Right. If so, it was not as simple as west against east because Etchū wrestlers represented the Right and many of the provinces around the capital fought for the Left.

however, special attention must be given to the events surrounding the annual tournament of 1013 in context as its exemplar.

Emperor Sanjō ascended the throne in 1011 at the age of thirty-six after the death of Emperor Ichijō. Unlike his predecessor and successor, Sanjō did not have a strong familial bond with the living members of the regental line nor was he a child when he became emperor.<sup>290</sup> These factors allowed him to challenge Michinaga's grip on Heian politics as he felt little loyalty towards the preeminent courtier. He found his strongest, albeit conflicted, ally and confidant in the head of the second most prominent line of the northern Fujiwara branch—Sanesuke.

The relationship between Sanesuke and Sanjō began in 989 when Advisor Sanesuke was given permission to enter the imperial quarters of the adolescent crown prince. From then on, the crown prince would look to Sanesuke for guidance on political matters and personal grievances for the rest of his life.<sup>291</sup> Once Sanjō became the heavenly sovereign, his correspondences with Sanesuke had to be kept secret because Michinaga forbade any other courtier from openly advising the emperor on matters of state—a tactic that Yorimichi copied when he became regent. Interestingly, Sanesuke continued to covertly correspond with subsequent emperors following Sanjō's abdication even though his relationship with those emperors was not as intimate. Sanesuke's correspondence with later emperors shows that he never wanted to use secret communication with Sanjō during his reign to oppose the regental line. Instead, it should be viewed as Sanesuke outwardly upholding the policy that only Michinaga or Yorimichi could advise an emperor while simultaneously advising emperors in secret to the benefit of everyone involved.

At first, Sanjō asked Sanesuke to visit him secretly, but those secret meetings ended quickly when they were discovered by Michinaga and others at court.<sup>292</sup> From then on, Sanjō and Sanesuke communicated via court ladies or Sanesuke's adopted son, Sukehira. Sanjō was also close to Sukehira, as well as Sukehira's biological father, Kanehira (953–1017), who was Sanesuke's

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<sup>290</sup> His maternal grandfather was Kaneie.

<sup>291</sup> *Shōyūki*, Eiso 1 (989)/5/8.

<sup>292</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kankō 8 (1011)/9/2. Kuramoto Kazuhiro, *Sanjō tenno: kokoro ni mo ara de ukiyo ni nagaraeba* (Kyoto: Minerva Shobō, 2010), 103.



elder brother. Despite the advantages afforded a line so closely linked to the emperor, there is no evidence that they tried to exert more control within the court due to this affiliation. In fact, Sanesuke tried to temper rather than stoke Sanjō's fire towards Michinaga. Sanesuke seemed content to field Sanjō's many questions and ideas without offering any advice that would put Sanesuke or Sanjō at odds with Michinaga.<sup>293</sup>

The enmity between Sanjō and Michinaga grew over a marriage dispute in 1012. Michinaga wanted to raise his second daughter, Kenshi (994–1027), to the status where her sons would be considered potential crown princes, but Sanjō wanted to promote his first consort, Fujiwara no Seishi (972–1025), to the same position. An emperor having two consorts who held a station that granted their sons the ability to become crown prince was not an unprecedented situation. When this occurred, the first consort used the title *kōgō* (皇后) while the junior consort was called *chūgū* (中宮). Despite the seniority of the first consort, the second consort often held more power. Michinaga had used this tactic with Emperor Ichijō when his eldest daughter, Shōshi (988–1074), was raised to junior consort even though Ichijō already had a primary consort, Teishi.<sup>294</sup> No doubt aware of the political irony, Sanjō wanted to use the same tactic to stop Michinaga from controlling both lines of imperial succession. Sanjō already had six children with Seishi, including three sons. More importantly, Seishi's father, First Councilor (大納言, *dainagon*) and First Guard of the Right Naritoki, had died many years before, so Sanjō did not have to worry about familial competition. Sanjō's plan, therefore, was for his son to follow in his footsteps and rule without a regent.

Michinaga could not openly refuse the emperor's wishes to elevate Seishi nor could Sanjō ignore Michinaga's request to elevate Kenshi, leading to further conflict. Prior to the ceremony to make Seishi the primary consort that was planned for the end of the fourth month, Sanjō

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<sup>293</sup> This bolsters the argument made in Chapter 1 that the *Ononomiya* line had little interest in rivaling the regental line.

<sup>294</sup> Teishi was the consort that Sei Shōnagon, author of *The Pillow Book*, served. For more on Shōshi, see Fukutō Sanae with Takeshi Watanabe, "From Female Sovereign to Mother of the Nation: Women and Government in the Heian Period," in *Heian Japan, Centers and Peripheries*, 30–32.

complained to Sanesuke that Michinaga's disrespect bothered him so much that he had not slept or ate properly for days. Sanesuke sent a neutral reply before Sanjō responded by telling Sanesuke that he felt that he should be able to command those under him to advise him without hesitation.<sup>295</sup> Sanjō's situation would get worse, however, when the ceremony for Seishi did not go as planned. Only a handful of the summoned top courtiers attended the event, and because the Ministers of the Left, Right, and Center did not show, First Councilor Sanesuke had to perform the necessary duties to complete the ceremony. Sanesuke saw the conspicuous absences for what they were—a demonstration of power by Michinaga—and remarked, "just as the sky does not have two suns, the earth does not have two rulers."<sup>296</sup> If there was any doubt as to which sun he thought was shining upon the realms of men, he later added that the events of Seishi's promotion made it clear that the power of the emperor was inferior to the power of the minister.<sup>297</sup>

Sanjō was undeterred. He wrote to Sanesuke saying how happy it made him that Sanesuke had answered the summons and performed the duties. He added that he was crown prince for a long time, but now that he was emperor he wanted to govern directly, and he would continue to look to Sanesuke for guidance on many matters of governance.<sup>298</sup> Sanjō's fortunes temporarily turned for the better when Michinaga became gravely ill, as he did periodically. It was serious enough that Michinaga suspended his positions of Minister of the Left and Inspector of Imperial Documents and then nominated the five Fujiwara men he thought should lead in his stead until Yorimichi came to an appropriate age: Michitsuna, Sanesuke, Takaie, Kanehira, and Michitō (974–1039).<sup>299</sup> Unfortunately for Sanjō, Michinaga's health scare ended in a full recovery.

Their feud continued into 1013 as Michinaga was pushing for Sanjō to abdicate in favor of Ichijō's son. Sanjō resisted the pressure, privately telling Sanesuke that he would remain emperor

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<sup>295</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 1 (1012)/4/16.

<sup>296</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 1 (1012)/4/27.

<sup>297</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 1 (1012)/4/28.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> There is a strong parallel here to when Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) created the Council of Five Elders (五大老) in the final year of his life to run the country until his son came of age.

as long as he could. That was becoming increasingly more difficult for the beleaguered emperor as health complications began to plague him. The most pressing concern was that his eyesight was beginning to fade. He knew that overcoming Michinaga was a formidable task at full strength, but it would be nigh impossible with a hampered ability to read and write. The situation became dire enough that Sanjō went on a pilgrimage to Ise Grand Shrine to pray to his ancestors prior to the Annual Sumo Tournament that year.

Leading up to the tournament, First Guard of the Right Sanesuke was dealing with his Champion, Ochi no Tsuneyo, who was wanting to withdraw from all matches that year due to injuring his hand after falling off his horse on the way to the capital.<sup>300</sup> Sanesuke refused to exempt him from any official matches but allowed him to forego his exhibition match with Contender Katsuoka. Sanesuke added in his diary how old and feeble the once mighty wrestler now looked.<sup>301</sup> The annual tournament came and went in a familiar fashion to recent tournaments with the Left winning five matches, the Right seven, and two imperial vetoes changing the total victories for both sides to six. Repeating familiar criticisms, Sanesuke complained that the Right won the tournament regardless of the decision at the end. He especially took issue with an accepted exemption of a Left wrestler he thought should have been denied.<sup>302</sup> Sanesuke and Michinaga were both shocked at the conclusion of the tournament when Sanjō declared the Left the winner of the tournament despite both teams securing six wins.

Regardless, the playoffs were held the following day and the old Champion of the Right lost after trying to wrestle with an injured hand.<sup>303</sup> With the playoffs completed, there was no reason to think that the 1013 tournament differed from any other in recent memory aside from Sanjō's surprise veto until Sanjō told Kanehira early in the eighth month:

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<sup>300</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/25.

<sup>301</sup> Tsuneyo had been wrestling for at least twenty-five years by 1013. His life and those of other prominent wrestlers are discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>302</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/29.

<sup>303</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/8/1.

On the day of the sumo tournament, I prayed at Ise Grand Shrine that if my position [as emperor] was unassailable, the Left would win the first three matches, and then I would know.<sup>304</sup>

The Left had won the first three matches of the tournament. Further, Sanjō did not cast an imperial veto during those matches that would have muddled the divine message he believed he had received. This realization was taken seriously by Sanjō and Sanesuke, with the First Guard of the Right pointing out that the wrestlers that fought for the Right in the first three matches, especially Agata no Takahira, were strong wrestlers. He recorded one of his patented criticisms for Sanjō's recklessness because the outcomes of the matches were far from certain. The next day, the wrestler Takahira was told about the situation and replied:

[I thought] I was defeated because of my disgraceful performance, [but] it was the work of supernatural forces (厭術, *enjutsu*). Now that I have been told about the situation, I am glad. I am not thinking about the loss [anymore], only that I am delighted the emperor will reign for a long time.<sup>305</sup>

This divine attestation of Sanjō's continued rule was not an empty coincidence.<sup>306</sup> His newfound confidence, bolstered by the support of the gods, emboldened him to order Yukinari to preside over the purification ritual by the virgin priestess of Ise (齋宮卿禊, *saigū kyōmisogi*) in the eighth month.<sup>307</sup> Michinaga blocked his attempts, leading Sanjō to tell Sanesuke in the ninth month about a dream he had after Michinaga continued to upset him, but Sanesuke dared not write the details of the dream.<sup>308</sup> Sanjō decided to visit Michinaga at his estate later that same month, perhaps to show that he was not intimidated. Sanesuke criticized the visit, though neither

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<sup>304</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/8/4.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>306</sup> Kuramoto Kazuhiro and Tsuchida Naoshige agree that Sanjō truly felt emboldened by the result of the tournament. See, Kuramoto, *Sanjō tenno*, 148–149. Tsuchida Naoshige, *Nihon no rekishi 5: ōchō no kizoku* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2004), 294–296.

<sup>307</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/8/18.

<sup>308</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/5.

Sanjō nor Michinaga showed any concern.<sup>309</sup> Instead of a heated exchange between the two, Michinaga treated Sanjō to some horse races as the courtier often did for his many guests.<sup>310</sup>

Whatever machinations Sanjō had envisioned, his rapidly declining health thwarted his plans. By the beginning of 1014, he was blind in his left eye and deaf in one ear. To make matters worse, a fire ravaged multiple palatial buildings and displaced the ailing emperor, sparking the first of eight such moves in a two-year span.<sup>311</sup> No longer able to compete with Michinaga, he held on as long as he could until he abdicated in 1016. Michinaga became regent for one year following the ascension of Go-Ichijō (1008–1036, r. 1016–1036) before relinquishing the title to Yorimichi who held the regency for five decades. Sanjō died in 1017 after years fighting both his failing faculties and the most ferocious Fujiwara courtier. His arduous life rivaled many of the heralded heroes of Japanese history who tried to fight insurmountable odds only to fail in spectacular fashion.<sup>312</sup>

His actions in relation to the 1013 annual tournament, however, cannot be overlooked as it was the only appropriate event from which the emperor could infer divine favor. More so than any other competition, the Annual Sumo Tournament was a competition that repeatedly legitimized imperial rule. Moreover, since at least the reign of Emperor Uda, the wrestlers of the Left had represented the emperor. The days of the Left winning most of the matches under powerful emperors, however, had given way to a full century of legitimate competition where wrestlers of the Right regularly won matches. In fact, the Right had won the most recent tournament in 1010 and the following two tournaments in 1011 and 1012 had been canceled, so there was reason for Sanjō's concern in his tenuous position. The Annual Sumo Tournament of

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<sup>309</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/16.

<sup>310</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/16.

<sup>311</sup> Two of those moves were due to conflagration as well. Murai Yasuhiko, *Heian kizoku no sekai* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1968), 212.

<sup>312</sup> He ironically failed to get included in Ivan Morris, *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan* (Georges Borchardt, Inc., 1975).

1013 offered a unique opportunity for Sanjō to assuage his anxieties for two reasons. The first was that this was the first tournament held during his reign. The second speaks to the most fundamental difference between physical competitions and other ritual events in the calendar year, namely that the results of matches were not predetermined. It was only in the uncertainty of competition that Sanjō could convince himself that he had divine favor over his formidable opponent. Moreover, the sumo tournament combined imperial legitimacy, competition, unpredictability, and violence in a way that no other activity could. Sanjō was going to let three sumo matches determine his fate like the fabled match that saw Seiwa take the throne over a century prior. Unlike Seiwa, however, Sanjō determined the parameters for his prayer because he was the fighter. He fought against the most powerful man of his age as his body failed him until he was inevitably defeated. It seems a shame that Sanjō's story ended the way it did, but for one moment in 1013, when tensions were high, but all hope was not yet lost, the desperate Emperor Sanjō prayed to the divine to deliver a sign. He wagered his place within the world on three sumo matches. And he won.

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The sumo tournament was the biggest event of the year, requiring months of preparation and countless individuals from the center and the provinces to run effectively. The event commanded the importance that it did because it was an annual reminder that the provinces were subservient to the capital, consequently reinforcing the governmental paradigm. The sumo tournament was most closely related to the emperor because he was the embodiment of that system. Moreover, as stated in Chapter 1, his legitimacy was derived from his religious guarantee of agricultural production effected through celebration and harvest rituals. When the provinces were not ravaged by famine or epidemic, they sent their tributary reminders to the court that they accepted their role because they had the resources to do so. This was a more profound capitulation to the emperor and the system than the Ritual Archery Demonstration or the horse races because those two events, as described in their respective chapters, only saw individuals of the court reaffirming their allegiance to the emperor. That was no small thing, but the sumo

tournament represented every province doing the same, effectively showing that all within the realm were flourishing under the emperor's authority.

To deepen the association of the sumo tournament and the emperor, Uda created the imperial veto that was more freely and consistently used during the sumo tournament than all other events combined. The imperial veto was used most often on the first match because a tournament in celebration of the emperor's authority over the realm could not begin with the emperor's representative Left losing. Although the Left represented the emperor in every competition, the results of a sumo match meant more than that of any other competition or contest. This is why Sanjō used the results of sumo matches to determine if the gods favored his rule.

To manage this annual acceptance of central authority, the court moved away from a collection of courtiers in the Sumo Committee so that the First Guard and his subordinates could oversee it directly. Unlike the committee that could spread the blame when something went wrong, the First Guard was personally accountable for the successful acquisition of wrestlers from the provinces. That acquisition included appraisals of the wrestler's strength and wrestling ability that stemmed from three distinct desires. The first and most important desire was that the wrestlers needed to be the strongest and most robust offerings to show that the province still respected the court's authority. The provinces could not simply send anyone to the capital to go through the motions because sumo was not merely a ritual; it was a competition where the wrestlers needed to be the best. Because of that, the First Guard's second desire was to protect his reputation, because a poor showing by his wrestlers would reflect poorly on him. The final desire was to submit wrestlers that would entertain the crowd because sumo was a magnificent spectacle that was enjoyed by the court. For these reasons, the First Guard made sure his wrestlers were on time, physically fit, and talented.

Those three desires were managed to varying effect by the many First Guards through the tenth and eleventh centuries. The effect of their personal agency was already explored in Chapter 2, but another important consideration was their interaction with the provinces. The standard view in older twentieth-century historiography was that the Heian court went from a strong, centralized state to one that abandoned interest in the provinces to pursue frivolous activities.

Most recent scholarship has flipped that view, saying that the court maintained a more direct control with the provinces through relationships that became increasingly more private as the Heian period progressed. The move from the ineffective Sumo Committee to the oftentimes talented First Guard is an excellent example of the latter view. Using Sanesuke as the prime example, he maintained personal contact with the various governors in the provinces for four decades, overseeing the lengthy careers of governors and wrestlers alike, thus creating a personal network between him and the leaders of the provinces. Further, his refusal of the Tanba wrestlers, his investigation into the murder of the Hitachi wrestler, as well as governor Nariie making sure his wrestlers arrived first the year after Masakata's blunders, definitively show that Sanesuke was incredibly active in what was happening in the provinces.

Beyond the First Guard who used the competitive capital gained from the annual tournament to bolster his reputation at court, retired emperors and elite courtiers used the influence of unofficial sumo competitions as a cultural weapon to reinforce their positions. Uda, Kaneie, Michinaga, and Shirakawa effectively hosted competitions that not only defined their position but strengthened it. From the late tenth century through the eleventh, there was a rapid and pervasive privatization of all physical competitions, including sumo. As seen with the many examples in this chapter, however, the imperial line was able to maintain more direct control of sumo than of horse racing and archery. This was due once again to sumo's association with the imperial line and the state as whole.

The connection between the emperor and sumo was why Shirakawa prioritized holding Extraordinary Sumo Competitions, like his father had, before taking it one step further and taking control of the tournament as a retired emperor. The sumo tournament was the first physical competition the imperial line took back because it was the most important and the most appropriate one given its association. The disturbances in the provinces in the twelfth century eventually halted centuries of annual tournaments, with the death of Shirakawa putting the tournament on indefinite hiatus. Although the events of the twelfth century are largely outside the scope of this study, the political importance of Emperor Go-Shirakawa reviving the tournament in 1158, decades after the last one, should not be ignored. Similarly, the tournaments he held as



retired emperor in 1168 and 1174 deserve the same attention because they were momentous political acts by an active agent of his time.

#### Chapter 4: Horse Racing

Prominent Players		
Northern Fujiwara Branch	Emperors and Courtiers	Competitors
Kaneie	Emperor Ninmyō	Harima no Yasunobu (racing)
Michitsuna	Emperor Uda	Ō no Takefumi (racing)
Sanesuke	Emperor Sanjō	Shimotsuke no Kintoki (racing)
Michinaga	Taira no Korehira	
Yukinari	Fujiwara no Nariie	

Horse racing differed from sumo and archery in that the most important horse races of the year were not the ones tied to the calendar. More than any other physical competition, the best horse races were invariably held by courtiers at their large private estates. The stark contrast between the annual horse races held in the Greater Imperial Palace and those that were staged at great venues like *Tsuchimikado* and *Higashi sanjōin* from the tenth century was due to multiple factors. The first was that horse racing played only a minor role in the annual 5/5 Festival for centuries. In fact, horse racing was dwarfed not only by the non-physical activities of the 5/5 Festival, but also by an equestrian archery event that served its main physical entertainment. Consequently, the annual horse races at the 5/5 Festival did not appear to hold any significant connection to the emperor, unlike the equestrian archery of the 5/5 festival, the Annual Sumo Tournament, or the Ritual Archery Demonstration from which Prize Archery evolved. This is why the 728 decree that required governors to send proficient wrestlers and equestrian archers to the capital each year did not include a call for racers despite its inclusion in the 5/5 festival from no later than 701.<sup>313</sup>

Elite courtiers, and retired emperors to a lesser degree, took advantage of the muted symbolic importance of horse racing by hosting grand horse races at their private estates far earlier and more regularly than any other physical competition. The most frequent hosts of horse races,

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<sup>313</sup> *Shoku Nihongi*, Taihō 1 (701)/5/5. Prize Archery was not included because the decree predates the creation of the competition by almost a century.

the Fujiwara, used these elaborate horse racing events to display their considerable personal wealth and power. The privatization of physical competitions, therefore, is most evident in horse racing. This chapter will investigate the evolution of horse racing from an afterthought in the annual calendar to the Fujiwara's signature competition. This chapter will also address to what extent one man's obsession with a physical competition affected the social, political, and economic landscape in the center and periphery.

### Annual Races at the 5/5 Festival

The competitive elements of horse racing in the Greater Imperial Palace took longer to develop than sumo wrestling and archery because the races remained chained to the more significant festival in which they first appeared for decades beyond the other physical competitions. This was due in no small part to the festival being one of the biggest events of the year. The 5/5 Festival, also known as the Iris Festival (菖蒲の節句, *Ayame no sekku*), took place on the fifth day of the fifth month and was one of the Five Festivals (五節句, *Gosechi*) that were observed on odd-numbered months, except the eleventh.<sup>314</sup> It was a festival filled with aesthetic and physical spectacle to delight those in attendance as vibrantly colored irises hung from the rafters of buildings to ward off evil spirits and add some captivating color. Not to be outdone by a building, court ladies adorned their hair with irises while the noblemen similarly decorated their caps. Some courtiers bathed in baths filled with iris petals, and many drank an alcohol made from the roots and leaves of the flower.<sup>315</sup>

Physical competition, nominally speaking, was as interwoven with the festival as the titular plant. The Taihō Code listed horse racing as one of the forms of entertainment for the festival as early as 701.<sup>316</sup> It was not the primary competitive spectacle performed for the flowery attendees,

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<sup>314</sup> The 5/5 Festival was later known as Boy's Festival before becoming Children's Day as it is celebrated today.

<sup>315</sup> For more on the 5/5 Festival, see Yamanaka Yutaka, *Heianchō no nenchū gyōji*, 196–207.

<sup>316</sup> Nishimoto Masahiro, *Nihon kodai no ōkyū to girei*, 215.

however, as that honor fell to the Equestrian Archery Competition between the Left and Right contingents of the four guardhouses—the Guard, Watch, Sentry, and Stables. The spectators, which included the emperor and the nobles, were brought to the grounds in front of the Hall of Martial Virtues (武徳殿, *Butokuden*) (see figure 2) to see the men on horseback fly by while trying to hit targets. After the points were scored and victors determined, racehorses were presented to the emperor as tribute by the princes and courtiers at or above the fifth rank that were in attendance. Those horses were used the following day for races as well as other feats of horsemanship (馬芸, *bagei*) and polo.<sup>317</sup>

Those racehorses were raised in the provinces and then sent to the capital as a form of annual tribute. The high-ranking courtiers may have presented the horses at the 5/5 Festival along with properly decorated saddles, but the animal underneath the leather harness was inevitably from the periphery.<sup>318</sup> The cancelation of the races and equestrian archery in 889 due to the lack of horses sent to the capital the year prior proves this point.<sup>319</sup> Further, this cancelation suggests that the tributary horses could only be used for one 5/5 Festival as there were horse races from 882–887.<sup>320</sup> Cancelations were also caused by epidemics and droughts that forced the court to postpone equestrian festivities for the same logistical reasons as the sumo tournament. Such was the case throughout the reign of Emperor Montoku when there was only one competition during his eight years as emperor. One record specified that the massive death toll of horses that year was the reason the equestrian activities were canceled, showing that the calamity affected livestock as well as people.<sup>321</sup>

In more pleasant times, the horses that were presented on the fifth day were used on the sixth for racing. The horses were tasked with galloping on a simple horse track composed of one straight line on the grounds of the Hall of Martial Values. Prior to the start of the races, the Stables

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<sup>317</sup> For some examples, see *Shoku Nihon kōki*, Jōwa 1 (834)/5/5; *Sandai jitsuroku*, Gangyō 7 (883)/5/5.

<sup>318</sup> *Shoku Nihon kōki*, Jōwa 9 (842)/5/2.

<sup>319</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Ninwa 5 (889)/5/5.

<sup>320</sup> *Sandai jitsuroku*, Gangyō 6–8 (882–884)/5/6, Ninwa 1–3 (885–887)/5/6.

<sup>321</sup> *Montoku jitsuroku*, Saikō 2 (855)/5/5.

of the Left and Right brought out their respective horses and paired them with riders who were from the same guardhouses as the Equestrian Archery Competition. Like most competitions in the Heian period, the races were a head-to-head affair between one representative of the Left and one of the Right. In the ninth century, the number of races was not fixed, but there were enough races for all four guardhouses to attempt at least one race. As the day also included other forms of horsemanship, including more equestrian archery, it is unlikely they exceeded the customary ten matches seen in races in the tenth century.<sup>322</sup> It should be noted that there was enough time in one day to hold this many forms of entertainment because the rituals involved with these activities were far simpler than those in sumo.

While the number of races was not fixed in the ninth century, the results were. There is no extant explanation for why the Left was always given the victory, but the Left won every race until the turn of the tenth century. This policy is especially striking because the other physical competitions, including equestrian archery, were under no such restriction as early as the reign of Emperor Ninmyō in the mid-ninth century.<sup>323</sup> The most egregious extant example of this outdated policy was a bizarre race in 890 under Emperor Uda. The rider for the Left fell off his horse, but the horse continued to run until it completed the race a full three lengths (丈, *jō*) ahead of the rider of the Right who was still on his horse. The situation sparked a debate among the courtiers on who to award the victory, but Uda ultimately gave it to the Left as he did in many other competitions. The account of this story comes from the record of an astonished Sanesuke who critiques Uda. Sanesuke went on to explain the ridiculousness of a riderless horse beating a rider still seated in the saddle before juxtaposing that mentality with the fairer judgements of races in his time.<sup>324</sup> Uda's actions, while unthinkable to Sanesuke, was in harmony with the rigged competitions of the time, as evidenced by the loser's banquet.

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<sup>322</sup> For example, see *Saikyūki*, Tenryaku 9 (955)/5/6.

<sup>323</sup> *Shoku Nihon kōki*, Jōwa 3 (836)/5/5.

<sup>324</sup> *Ononomiya nenchū gyōji*, Kanpyō 2 (890)/5/6.

### The Loser's Banquet

The loser's banquet did not have an official title, but late in the tenth month of a year in which there were races in the fifth month, there was a grand banquet held by the emperor in the Southern Hall for the losers of those horse races. There are twelve such extant cases, beginning in 827 and ending in 886, all of which have the four guardhouses of the Right as the guests of honor. The first point of order during the banquet was to distribute consolation prizes (輸物, *yumono*) to the riders as compensation for their rigged losses. Following this, however, the Left performed their victory dances. This paints a conflicting picture regarding the nature of the event because those dances would no doubt anger the men who were forced to lose. Irrespective of whether the event served to further revel in the Left's victory or to compensate the Right, or both, there were other reasons for attending the banquet. Like many other events throughout the year, the loser's banquet served as an annual excuse to invite the princes and courtiers, Left and Right, to a feast filled with drinking, dancing, and gifts. The loser's banquet had been big enough that they even gave gifts to attendants like they did at the conclusion of sumo events.<sup>325</sup>

There is little doubt that a loser's banquet was held in the tenth month of 890 after the riderless victory for the Left that year despite a lack of evidence, but the loser's banquet ceased to exist soon thereafter. Following 890, the next extant entry on horse racing comes from the races held in 908 under Emperor Daigo.<sup>326</sup> The loser's banquet had disappeared by then and was replaced with a set of horse races held in front of the retired emperor at his estate in the tenth month. The first record of this was in 908 when Retired Emperor Uda watched some races that were held for him at Nin'na-ji located west of Kyoto.<sup>327</sup> Races were once again held for Uda in 924, this time at *Suzakuin*.<sup>328</sup> While gifts were still given to the courtiers in attendance on these occasions, no consolation prizes were given to the riders. In fact, there are no records of

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<sup>325</sup> For some examples of loser's banquets, see *Nihon kiryaku*, Tenchō 4 (827)/10/19; *Montoku jitsuroku*, Ten'an 1 (857)/10/21; *Sandai jitsuroku*, Jōgan 6 (864)/10/21, Ninwa 2 (886)/10/25.

<sup>326</sup> *Shingishiki* (新儀式), Engi 8 (908)/5/28.

<sup>327</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Engi 8 (908)/10/21.

<sup>328</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Enchō 2 (924)/10/21.

consolation prizes being given at any competitions beyond 914.<sup>329</sup> The same circumstances occurred when Emperor Murakami traveled to *Suzakuin* in 965 to watch horse races in the tenth month with the notable exception that there was no living retired emperor at the time.<sup>330</sup>

Those changes in format paralleled the slow evolution of competitive racing with the first recorded instance of a blemished result for the Left in 927.<sup>331</sup> There are no records of the horse races during Tadahira's short stint as First Guard of the Right a couple decades earlier, but it seems likely that the races became competitive once he took the position. By Murakami's reign in the mid-tenth century, members of the Guard had replaced the other guardhouses in racing and equestrian archery due to the Guard being the best riders and archers.<sup>332</sup> With the 5/5 races now a competitive affair, the central thrust of the event in the tenth month went from a celebration of a lack of competition to one where they enjoyed watching more races. The cessation of the loser's banquet in the tenth month, therefore, was the natural result of the growing competitiveness within physical competitions and the court as a whole.

The next extant case of horse races in the tenth month was in 999 by Michinaga at his *Higashi sanjōin* estate.<sup>333</sup> The circumstances surrounding these races, however, were less like the races held by retired emperor Uda and more like the races that Michinaga held at his estate throughout the year. These races undoubtedly show that the loser's banquet was no longer relevant to contemporary court culture. Further evidence is found in Sanesuke's account of the races where he focused on a special appearance by the ailing Senior Grand Imperial Dowager (太皇太后, *taikōtaigō*) Shōshi (950–999) than discussing protocol related to any precedent. As the many other examples throughout this dissertation show, Sanesuke would have made a comment about protocol and precedent if there had been any need for it. There was none because these

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<sup>329</sup> *Teishinkōki*, Engi 14 (914)/8/19.

<sup>330</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Kōhō 2 (965)/10/23.

<sup>331</sup> The entry does not state that the Right won the race, but that the Left only won nine. The other race could have been a draw or a win for the Right. *Teishinkōki*, Enchō 5 (927)/5/6.

<sup>332</sup> Yamanaka Yutaka, *Heianchō no nenchū gyōji*, 198.

<sup>333</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/10/20.

horse races were not trying to emulate previous events. Clearly, the vestiges of a by-gone glorification of predictability had been shed to instead celebrate entertaining competition.

### A Day at the Races

Perhaps the most important horse race of the Heian period was ironically a ruse devised by Regent Fujiwara no Mototsune (836–891) to entice the violent Emperor Yōzei to leave the imperial palace.<sup>334</sup> By 884, Yōzei had committed a litany of cruel offenses unbecoming of an emperor.<sup>335</sup> One such cruel act was when Yōzei had men climb a tree only to have other men hold spears under the branches of the tree so that when the men fell they would be impaled. Later that same year he was involved in the fatal battering of a high-ranking courtier. The entry in the official history on the matter is discreet, giving little detail except that they kept the circumstances secret; but future records add that Yōzei was intimately involved in the beating, if not the perpetrator.<sup>336</sup> Mototsune tried multiple tactics to curb Yōzei's darker tendencies, but when those failed, he devised a plan to force Yōzei's abdication. To lure the emperor out of the imperial palace, Mototsune told Yōzei that he had arranged some horse races for his enjoyment. Elated, the emperor left for the fabricated races a couple days later only to be forced to abdicate after leaving the palace. In his forced retirement, Yōzei's wish to see horse racing was fulfilled many times over the next six decades he spent terrorizing the court as a retired emperor. One such event was organized especially for him in 949, over a half-century after the deceptive deposition.<sup>337</sup>

This potentially cautionary tale did not stop future sovereigns from leaving the imperial palace to watch horse racing. For example, races outside the annual calendar were held for the emperor in the Garden of the Divine Spring (神泉苑, *shinsen'en*, see figure 1) throughout the tenth

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<sup>334</sup> *Uda jitsuroku* (宇多天皇実録), Kanpyō 3 (891)/1/13.

<sup>335</sup> McCullough, "The Heian Court, 794–1070," 51–53.

<sup>336</sup> *Gyokuyō* (玉葉), Jian 2 (1172)/11/20.

<sup>337</sup> For some examples, see *Nihon kiryaku*, Tengyō 2 (939)/5/7, Tenryaku 3 (949)/4/15.



century.<sup>338</sup> The emperor would also sometimes travel to the residences of retired emperors to watch one of the many races staged by the abdicated sovereigns. Some examples include when Retired Emperor Uda invited his son, Daigo, to some races at *Suzakuin* in 916 and when Retired Emperor En'yū and Emperor Kazan (968–1008, r. 984–986) saw some races from Uda's former residence at Nin'na-ji in 985 and 986.<sup>339</sup>

The first definitive instance of a non-imperial courtier holding races was in 989. The host of said competition was unsurprisingly Regent Kaneie when he held a grand horse racing competition at his *Nijō* estate just south of the Greater Imperial Palace. While there was no contemporary term differentiating grand horse racing competitions from smaller events, I use the terms here to distinguish between races in front of a handful of courtiers and large events staged by courtiers with most of the court, and often many royals, in attendance. The emperor was not in attendance in 989, but the rest of the court saw the Left narrowly triumph over the Right by one victory before returning two days later to watch the same sides compete in equestrian archery to an unspecified result.<sup>340</sup> Successive Emperors Ichijō, Sanjō, and Go-Ichijō attended horse races at Michinaga's *Tsuchimikado* mansion in 1006, 1013, and 1018, respectively.<sup>341</sup>

Sanesuke noted in his entry on that final date that they did not follow the precedent set when Murakami went to *Suzakuin* to see races in the fifth month of 965. His comments mean that since 965 there had been protocols put in place for when an emperor attended horse races staged by a courtier. The potential political ramifications of Sanesuke's record require a close examination of Murakami's visits to *Suzakuin* to see horse races. There are three extant cases of this, one in 963 and two in 965.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> *Gōkeshidai*, Engi 8 (908)/5/28, Engi 18 (918)/2/20; *Shingishiki*, Ōwa 3 (963)/?/?.

<sup>339</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Engi 16 (916)/9/28; *Shōyūki*, Kan'na 1 (985)/5/19; *Nihon kiryaku*, Kan'na 2 (986)/6/6. The 986 races were mere weeks before Kazan's abdication to Ichijō.

<sup>340</sup> *Shōyūki*, Eiso 1 (989)/4/25–28.

<sup>341</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/9/22, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/16. *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 2 (1018)/10/7.

<sup>342</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Ōwa 3 (963)/5/14, Kōhō 2 (965)/5/24, 10/23.

Unfortunately, records of the residence are scarce after the death of Retired Emperor Suzaku in 952, but the occupant of the estate after Suzaku was Murakami's junior consort, Fujiwara no Anshi (927–964), who was mother to the next two emperors—Reizei (950–1011, r. 967–969) and En'yū. While Murakami never accepted a Fujiwara regent, Anshi was closely tied to her younger brother Koretada, who would become regent when En'yū took the throne. This connection can be seen when Anshi temporarily left *Suzakuin* to live with Koretada as she was preparing for the birth of En'yū in 959.<sup>343</sup> This strong connection tied to Koretada's political ambitions suggests that he orchestrated the races in 963 and 965 when Murakami came to visit. This is important not only because those races predate Kaneie's by twenty-five years, but it is likely that Koretada laid the groundwork for other physical competitions as well. Kaneie was the first courtier with indisputable records of hosting sumo, horse racing, equestrian archery, and archery, but the link that Sanesuke referenced in his 1018 entry means that the ideas and protocols behind powerful Fujiwara courtiers organizing those types of events were put in place decades earlier by Kaneie's older brother.

The importance of this revelation goes beyond simply redating the genesis of the concept of courtiers hosting events. It shows there was a conscious understanding by the most powerful Fujiwara that organizing events, such as the horse races, was a new idea that had massive political ramifications. Precedents would not have been set in 965 simply because the emperor was coming to watch horse racing at *Suzakuin* because he had done so in 924. New precedents were set in 965 because of *who* was inviting the emperor to *Suzakuin*. Hosting horse races at *Suzakuin* would not be less of a departure from the norm because the emperor visiting *Suzakuin* to see horse races had established precedent. From those humbler beginnings, the idea evolved into hosting competitions at Fujiwara-owned residences for the next century and a half as seen with Kaneie, Michikane, Michitaka, Michinaga, Yorimichi, and even the Fujiwara regents after Yorimichi. Koretada's involvement proves that generations of Fujiwara were deliberate in using physical spectacle to social and political advantage by starting with modest changes to preexisting ideas and then building upon them. As their influence grew, so too did the boldness of their displays of power.

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<sup>343</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Tentoku 3 (959)/1/25.

Horse racing was the optimal physical competition to display their wealth because horse-related events required a larger dedicated space than did sumo wrestling or Prize Archery. An estate that had the space to hold such events, therefore, had to be an impressive establishment. While smaller events like sumo and archery were held in less formidable residences, horse racing was only staged at the grandest locations regardless of audience size.<sup>344</sup> Another necessity of staging horse races was stocked personal stables. Horses were of course kept by the Left and Right Stables within the Greater Imperial Palace, but records do not mention horses being brought from those stables to the far away private estates for horse racing, which suggests that the courtiers used their own.<sup>345</sup> Filled stables would also explain how courtiers were able to give and receive many horses as personal gifts. Kaneie, for example, once gifted thirty horses at the banquet celebrating the completion of his new *Nijō* estate in 988.<sup>346</sup> Only a select few had the power, resources, and space required to facilitate horse racing, and they used staged horse races to flaunt this fact to the rest of the court.

The races Yorimichi held in the ninth month of 1024 at his resplendent *Kayanoin* (高陽院, see figure 1) is the superlative example of the principles discussed above. The momentous occasion was even deemed worthy of an entire chapter in *The Tale of Flowering Fortunes*. On the magnificence of Yorimichi's estate, the author wrote, "People think of the Reizeiin and the Tsuchimikado Mansion as the grandest residences of the age, but the *Kayanoin* seemed to belong to another realm—to be quite equal, in fact, to the Ocean Dragon King's dwelling, where one can see a different season in each of the four directions."<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> For sumo at Sukehira's abode, see *Shōyūki*, Manju 1 (1024)/7/26. For archery at the dwelling of Mother of Michitsuna, see Sonja Arntzen, *The Kagerō Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth-Century Japan* (Ann Arbor: the Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1997), 171.

<sup>345</sup> For example, *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/13.

<sup>346</sup> McCullough, *The Great Mirror*, 350.

<sup>347</sup> Translation from McCullough and McCullough, *Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, 631.

As for the factual circumstances surrounding the races, Sanesuke gave a detailed and colorful account.<sup>348</sup> The guestlist was headlined by Emperor Go-Ichijō, the crown prince, multiple other princes, the Grand Imperial Dowager, and the “retired” Michinaga who all sat in their own designated areas. The rest of the courtiers in attendance were separated into their respective Left and Right teams. Yorimichi presented ten horses to the emperor with the five best going to the Left Stables and the other five going to the Right Stables before the races began.

As Sanesuke predicted in the first race, the rider for the Right did not leave his waiting area, effectively forfeiting. In the second race, the rider for the Left kept falling off his horse. The crowd grew angry with the inept rider, so the drum was sounded to give the Right the victory and move on. Sanesuke said he would not record the rest of the race results, save for one that he truly relished. The fifth race was an exciting affair with the two riders crossing the finish line at almost the same time. A clear victor could not be determined, so it was decided that the emperor would make the decision. In a shocking move, the imperial envoy stated that the Right horse crossed the finish line by a head—a declaration met with widespread disapproval from the Left. In actuality, the Right rider had won the race, but the Left thought that the race was close enough that if they asked for an imperial verdict, then the emperor would strip the victory from the Right and declare it a draw. Sanesuke snidely noted that if the courtiers did not want to follow the correct verdict given by the emperor, then they should not have asked. He took great delight, it would seem, in seeing the Left’s disappointment, no doubt stemming from the decades of frustration he had felt after so many victories for his competitors on the Right had been overturned by imperial veto.

At the conclusion of the races, neither side could definitively say they won. Regent Yorimichi, who was also Minister of the Left, was not certain the emperor would bestow his side the victory, so he quickly proclaimed that the Left won the competition and then ordered the Left dancers to perform their victorious number. Three rounds of equestrian archery followed the dances until well into the night. The revelry did not stop there, however, as many courtiers returned the next day to receive bespoke gifts, recite commemorative poems, and drain Yorimichi’s liquor stores. Yorimichi had mastered the art of entertainment and gift giving through decades of

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<sup>348</sup> The remaining information on the races in 1024 came from *Shōyūki*, Manju 1 (1024)/9/19.

hosting competitions, games, and banquets, and those talents were on full display in 1024. Even the more veteran courtiers could not remember a spectacle quite as spectacular as the races at *Kayanoin*, and the memories must have stayed in the collective minds of every participant for the rest of their lives.<sup>349</sup>

Although Yorimichi never again hosted an event quite like 1024, he still held horse races at *Kayanoin* with emperors in attendance until at least 1042.<sup>350</sup> Decades later, Regent Moromichi held races at *Kayanoin* in 1084, continuing the tradition of Fujiwara patriarchs hosting horse races.<sup>351</sup> The primary reason for the gap between records is due to a lack of sources rather than a decline in the interest in horse racing, as *Gonki*, *Midō kanpaku ki*, and *Shōyūki* do not go past 1032. Moromichi's diary begins in 1083, which means he held a race within one year of the start of his diary. Moreover, Moromichi held races consistently throughout the rest of his life, including a grand horse racing competition the year he became regent in 1096, suggesting that courtiers organizing horse races was a common occurrence throughout the mid-eleventh century.<sup>352</sup> The practice persisted into the twelfth century as Moromichi's son, Regent Tadazane, used *Kayanoin* and *Tsuchimikado* as venues for races.<sup>353</sup> When Tadazane was hosting his first races in 1101 at *Tsuchimikado*, he looked for a reference in a diary entry written over a century prior for guidance.<sup>354</sup> In spite of the age of the record, or the countless other races held after it was written upon which to draw, there was never a reason to look past what Michinaga had to say when it came to horse racing.

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<sup>349</sup> The details of these fun activities, particularly the poems composed, are the bulk of the chapter in *Eiga monogatari*. See McCullough and McCullough, *Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, 631–643.

<sup>350</sup> *Sankaiki* (山槐記), Chōkyū 3 (1042)/9/21.

<sup>351</sup> *Go nijō moromichi ki*, Ōtoku 1 (1084)/4/28.

<sup>352</sup> *Chūyūki*, Eichō 1 (1096)/4/27.

<sup>353</sup> *Denryaku*, Ten'nin 2 (1109)/9/26.

<sup>354</sup> *Denryaku*, Kōwa 3 (1101)/12/30; *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/2/25.

### The Greatest Horse Racing Patron: Fujiwara no Michinaga

Physical spectacle was never constrained to one event or powerful figure, as evidenced by the thousands of records pertaining to physical competitions in the Heian period and the many entertaining stories of those competitions in Japanese literature for centuries thereafter, but the political, cultural, and economic impact of Michinaga's love of horse racing exceeds any singular comparison. Of all the "frivolous interests" that Michinaga enjoyed—including sumo, archery, equestrian archery, and ordering promotions while drunk—there were none that he approached with the same fanaticism that he did horse racing.<sup>355</sup> When the rest of the court was concerned that the realm was falling into disrepair, and they visited the then-retired regent to discuss these matters of grave importance, he instead chose to talk about horse racing.<sup>356</sup> It seems horse racing was never far from his mind, and he must have had a keen interest in horses from a young age. He was a good rider, and he was always around horses throughout his political career.<sup>357</sup> The first extant entries from his diary, *Midō kanpaku ki*, come from the year 995 when he was promoted to First Guard of the Left and then Minister of the Right; and one of those entries describes how he received at least one horse at the tributary horse allotment ceremony (駒牽, *komabiki*) that he brought back to his private office (直廬, *chokuro*) in the imperial palace.<sup>358</sup>

It is unlikely that 995 was the first time Michinaga received a tributary horse, but from that point until his death in 1027, the number of horses being brought into the capital ballooned to unprecedented levels. Over three hundred horses were given to Michinaga in the extant entries of his diary, though the true number was certainly far greater.<sup>359</sup> In the tenth and eleventh months of

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<sup>355</sup> One of those inebriated promotions was for a guard who was receiving that promotion solely because he had been the best equestrian archer for years. *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/2/11.

<sup>356</sup> Of course, Sanesuke was the one to level criticism at Michinaga. *Shōyūki*, Jian 1 (1021)/3/19.

<sup>357</sup> McCullough, *The Great Mirror*, 47.

<sup>358</sup> These offices were given to members of the royal family and the highest members of the court. While they were often used for leisure, state business was conducted from them as well. *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōtoku 1 (995)/8/16.

<sup>359</sup> This total is from Murai Yasuhiko, *Heian kizoku no sekai*, 337.

1016 alone, he received at least sixty-nine horses, and this total does not include the undisclosed number of horses he received at the tributary horse allotment ceremony just two months prior.<sup>360</sup> While horses served the same social functions then as they did before and after Michinaga, namely as social lubricants, gifts, bribes, or tributary items, the only plausible reason for the marked increase of horses as a transactional item in the early eleventh century was Michinaga's love of horse racing.

Moreover, this phenomenon seems to have grown organically rather than through policy. There is no evidence that Michinaga ordered the provinces to increase horse breeding nor was there a change to any precedents in ceremonies or competitions to require more horses. Nevertheless, horses were brought to him in staggering numbers by those looking to curry his favor. One in need of such favor was the thuggish Vice-Governor Korehira, the same man who murdered the sumo wrestler in the previous chapter, after he had committed one of his many offenses near the turn of the century. In 998, a feud between Korehira and Taira no Muneyori (?–1011) led to armed conflict in the provinces.<sup>361</sup> When the matter was brought to the court, neither man was arrested for the incident.<sup>362</sup> A decade later, Sanesuke criticized Michinaga's decision to not punish the two men in 998 after Michinaga ordered that the son of a *Dazaifu* envoy who shot and killed another man in a dispute in 1007 be incarcerated for a year.<sup>363</sup> Sanesuke's criticized the inconsistency in punishment, but he did not record any speculation on Michinaga's motivations.<sup>364</sup>

The few remaining records pertaining to Korehira and Muneyori show their relationship with Michinaga and help to explain why he was more lenient with them in 998. The next two extant records of Korehira show him bringing twenty-one horses as personal gifts to Michinaga

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<sup>360</sup> The two month's total can be found in G. Cameron Hurst III, "*Kugyō and Zuryō: Center and Periphery in the Era of Fujiwara no Michinaga*" in *Heian Japan, Centers and Peripheries*, 89. For the ceremony, see *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 5 (1016)/8/20.

<sup>361</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōtoku 4 (998)/12/26.

<sup>362</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/5/5; *Shōyūki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/7/22.

<sup>363</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Kankō 4 (1007)/7/11.

<sup>364</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kankō 5 (1008)/11/16.

across the two visits.<sup>365</sup> Those horses may have been tied to some other transgression he committed, though it is more likely that they were part of a longer history of good relations between Korehira and Michinaga. As both Taira in the 998 skirmish were officials in horse-rich provinces, they could steadily supply equine gifts throughout the years. Thankfully, Korehira's penchant for bribing high-ranking courtiers as often as he committed crimes provides evidence that horses were specifically for Michinaga rather than a court universal at the time. After the sumo incident of 1024, for example, Korehira brought Sanesuke ten rolls of silk, a box of gardenias, four *hakama*, and, most notably, no horses.<sup>366</sup>

There were many government officials looking for Michinaga's favor other than provincial criminals like Korehira. That can be seen in the days leading up to Emperor Sanjō's imperial succession ceremony (大嘗会, *Daijōe*) in the tenth month of 1012. In the month leading up to the ceremony, Michinaga received horses on five separate days from men coming to participate. The first of whom was the governor of the distant province of Mutsu who brought him two horses. A few days later, he received six horses from the son of one of his Escorts. The following day, the governor of Kōzuke brought him ten horses, three of which Michinaga regifted immediately. On the twenty-first, he received two horses from the General of the Pacification and Defense of the North (鎮守府將軍, *Chinjufu shōgun*). And finally on the twenty-third, he was given six horses by the governor of Dewa and ten horses by the former governor of Hitachi. The number of horses he received in that twelve-day period totaled thirty-six. The only other gifts recorded were ten head of cattle from a *Dazaifu* official and an eagle feather that the general presented to Michinaga along with his horses.<sup>367</sup>

Clearly, those who were stationed in the provinces knew that horses were the best gifts for the most powerful man at court, compelling them to bring him horses on so many occasions. One

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<sup>365</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 7 (1009)/11/25, Kankō 8 (1010)/4/13.

<sup>366</sup> Sanesuke was Minister of the Right and First Guard of the Right by this time. *Shōyūki*, Manju 2 (1025)/11/10.

<sup>367</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 1 (1012)/閏 10/12–23.



such example was governor Nariie, the Iyo governor from the sumo chapter, who initiated the cavalcade of horses Michinaga received in the tenth month of 1012 when Nariie was governor of Mutsu. Records of the career governor place him at the head of Suruga, Mutsu, and Iyo provinces between 999 and 1027. Most of the extant entries about Nariie across those three decades concern him giving horses to Michinaga, with the notable exception of 1027 when he repaid a debt to Sanesuke.<sup>368</sup> Nariie's personal relationship with Sanesuke and Michinaga seemingly revolved around the governor periodically bringing them gifts. Between 999 and 1017, Nariie gifted Michinaga a staggering fifty-one horses across six occasions. The real number of horses that Nariie gave Michinaga, however, was certainly far higher than the records show because there are sizable gaps in the records from 1000 to 1009 and 1017 to 1027. Some years saw Nariie only bring a handful of horses, and then there were years like 1010 when he gave Michinaga twenty horses, or 1015 when he gave twenty mares.<sup>369</sup> Further, these horses were personal gifts by Nariie that he gave on top of the ones he submitted for the tributary horse allotment ceremonies.<sup>370</sup>

While Michinaga's love of horses demonstrably altered the social, political, and economic system between the provinces and the central court that he dominated, the question remains to what extent horse racing affected his desire for more horses. It is true that he enjoyed riding them in a non-competitive atmosphere, though that was not the typical mode of transportation for courtiers of his rank. For example, the monks of Enryakuji complained about the disturbance caused by the many horses he and his entourage rode to the complex on Mt. Hiei in northeastern Kyoto in 1012.<sup>371</sup> Historians have also pointed to him regifting horses to other courtiers, relegating the importance of horses to simply another medium of exchange between nobles. This was certainly the case in many instances, but some of those gifted horses came with a fascinating caveat—he would sometimes tell the courtiers to bring the horses back to one of his estates for races. While that situation was far rarer than Michinaga inviting courtiers to his mansions and

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<sup>368</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 4 (1027)/4/28.

<sup>369</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 7 (1010)/11/28, Chōwa 4 (1015)/7/15.

<sup>370</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 1 (1012)/8/3, 閏 10/12.

<sup>371</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 1 (1012)/6/3.

using his own horses, that stipulation shows that he prioritized racing with the horses that were given to him.

This opens another line of inquiry into how he measured the value of his horses. I have not found any extant records of him, or any other courtier, disparaging the lackluster physical capabilities of a horse in the same way they would sumo wrestlers; nor was any individual horse described in a manner befitting the Heian equivalent of legendary horses like Red Hare or Bucephalus.<sup>372</sup> There is evidence that they did inspections and practice runs to evaluate the racing capabilities of horses, though no conclusions were ever recorded.<sup>373</sup> This suggests that the differences between horses at the time were minor, though some would be better than others for racing and other equine events. Consequently, it is impossible to know whether Michinaga considered such parameters when bestowing a gift. When he received the ten horses from the governor of Kōzuke and immediately gifted three, for instance, there may have been an evaluation of their capabilities before the three were chosen. Races were held between the five horses Nariie gave Michinaga in 1013, for example.<sup>374</sup> Michinaga was described, both by contemporaries and later chroniclers, as being generous with his unimaginable wealth, so it seems likely that he gave horses of superior stock to high-ranking officials, family members, and the emperor. Nevertheless, he must have kept many of the best stallions for himself, otherwise his races would have been a dull affair.

The capacity to hold horse races was also a requirement of all his residences. One of his final renovations at his inherited *Tsuchimikado* estate was a racetrack in 999.<sup>375</sup> Many members of the court attended the celebratory races he held there five days later, perhaps not knowing how often they would return for the same reason over the next three decades.<sup>376</sup> The new estates he had built in the future always included a horse track in the original design, and his son followed in

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<sup>372</sup> There is a line in *The Great Mirror* that says Michinaga rode a famous high-spirited horse, but the author has forgotten its name. McCullough, *The Great Mirror*, 196.

<sup>373</sup> For example, *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/13, 17.

<sup>374</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/12/28–29.

<sup>375</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/2/20.

<sup>376</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/2/25.

his footsteps with the track at *Kayanoin*. While the first recorded horse race Michinaga organized was in 997 at the track near the Right Stables, over the course of the next decade, he held twenty-three extant races at his private residences across the three contemporary diaries of Michinaga, Sanesuke, and Yukinari.<sup>377</sup> That number excludes the 5/5 races and other races held in the imperial palace that Michinaga must have also influenced. Michinaga's races fell into two categories: smaller events with only a handful of courtiers and little necessary preparation and grand horse racing competitions that required weeks of preparation. Sanesuke's diary was unsurprisingly filled with entries on the deliberations and preparations prior to grand races, including multiple days of practice races before the event. The smaller events were primarily for entertainment purposes unlike the grand horse racing competitions that blended entertainment, political posturing, and extravagant displays of capital, both social and economic.

The smaller events are best understood through Yukinari's diary as his entries on horse racing differ from those of Michinaga and Sanesuke. Of the fifteen records describing Yukinari travelling to one of Michinaga's residences for horse racing, only five were also mentioned in the diaries of the other two. All five records were of grand horse racing competitions where Michinaga wrote that many courtiers came.<sup>378</sup> The number of attendees is emphasized in most of Michinaga's horse racing entries, revealing his conscious understanding of the political and social power those races simultaneously showed and enhanced.<sup>379</sup> The ten remaining entries in *Gonki*, however, were short entries rarely longer than a line saying that Yukinari visited Michinaga and watched some horse racing.<sup>380</sup> This was a common form of entertainment when someone visited Michinaga, as evidenced by Yukinari's reports, Sanjō's visit in 1013 or that time in 1021 when Michinaga wanted to talk horse races rather than the concerns of the realm with his distraught guests.<sup>381</sup> He may have even invited courtiers as a pretense to hold races because many of the Yukinari entries do not

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<sup>377</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/5/15.

<sup>378</sup> For example, *Gonki*, Kankō 1 (1004)/5/27; *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 1 (1004)/5/27.

<sup>379</sup> He never gave a precise number of attendees beyond royalty. He would simply say that many courtiers came (上達部多来).

<sup>380</sup> For example, *Gonki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/9/3, Chōhō 2 (1000)/3/6, Chōhō 3 (1001)/10/24.

<sup>381</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/16; *Shōyūki*, Jian 1 (1021)/3/19.

discuss other motivations for his visit. Further, the disparity between the entries in the *Gonki* and *Midō kanpaku ki* suggests that Michinaga held races considerably more often than the records show because there were many other courtiers who did not keep an extant diary that would have visited Michinaga for various reasons.

Yukinari's entries also provide context as to why the records of horse racing rapidly diminish after 1006. As stated before, there were twenty-three extant races from 997 to 1006, but only five more races were recorded until 1022 when Yorimichi became the organizer of horse races. Those five races were all grand horse racing competitions with royalty and swathes of nobility in attendance. There are no remaining cases of smaller events at Michinaga residences past 1004, save for the 1013 visits by Sanjō and Nariie. That coincides with the last time Yukinari's diary included an entry about watching horse racing with Michinaga that was not also included in *Midō kanpaku ki*.<sup>382</sup> Therefore, the sudden drop in records of Michinaga holding smaller races was due to no one writing them down in extant diaries rather than him being no longer interested in or capable of holding the races. Consequently, the thirty-one extant races Michinaga hosted must be a mere fraction of the true number.

It is also likely that holding races would entice Michinaga to visit, or he may have requested them upon his arrival. That would explain why Michinaga went to the imperial palace to watch races with Emperor Sanjō in the ninth month of 1012.<sup>383</sup> There were no other spectators on that day other than the emperor and courtier, save for his daughter, Shōshi.<sup>384</sup> Michinaga's record of the day is short, stating only that he watched the races, left promptly after their completion, and that it had rained. Further evidence that the races held for Michinaga at the imperial palace was not an important political event is that First Guard of the Right Sanesuke does not mention the races. As he had responsibilities pertaining to physical competitions, and opinions on the comings and goings of other members of the court, the absence of any record suggests that he either did

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<sup>382</sup> *Gonki*, Kankō 1 (1004)/4/15.

<sup>383</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 1 (1012)/9/12.

<sup>384</sup> She was the junior consort of Emperor Ichijō and should not be confused with the other Fujiwara no Shōshi discussed earlier in the chapter.

not know about them or he did not think them worthy of note.<sup>385</sup> The latter case is far more likely and provides further evidence that the races held that day were common and expected. A similar situation happened in 1005 when an irate Michinaga had to cancel races at the imperial palace for Retired Emperor Kazan and himself due to rain. Sukehira, who was to be one of the competitors, told Sanesuke that Michinaga threw a banquet and then ordered races in the evening, presumably when the rain had stopped.<sup>386</sup> This record by Sanesuke can be directly compared to Michinaga's account of the day where he merely stated that he entered the imperial palace and that he stayed overnight with no mention of the canceled races.<sup>387</sup>

The importance of these seemingly insignificant races in front of only a handful of courtiers is only apparent when you combine Yukinari's many experiences with watching horse racing at Michinaga's estates with horse races often being held for Michinaga when he traveled to the imperial palace, namely that socializing with the *de facto* head of the court was going to involve horse racing. Courtiers enjoying some form of entertainment together when one came to visit was not unique to Michinaga, but hosting horse races was the provenance of a select few. That was why there were no horse races held at any private residences except for retired emperors and those of the regental line of the Fujiwara, as stated previously. This gave Michinaga a monopoly on the activity that he enjoyed the most, and as everyone but the emperor would be compelled to visit him if they desired to talk with him, he could hold races as often as he saw fit. These numerous smaller races also add context to Michinaga receiving so many horses from the provinces because fresh sets of horses could reinvigorate interest in the smaller races.

Michinaga's lack of records on these smaller events is further insight into how Michinaga viewed them. The courtier diaries were primarily used to record the actions performed by courtiers to instruct and establish precedent. Any events of political or social importance were therefore recorded in these diaries. Michinaga had many lengthy entries about the grand horse

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<sup>385</sup> Sanesuke has entries on the following days around the twelfth: sixth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, seventeenth, and eighteenth. *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 1 (1012)/9/6–18.

<sup>386</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/4/22.

<sup>387</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/4/22. He complained about rain halting the matches of the Annual Sumo Tournament in 1010 as well. *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 7 (1010)/8/29.

racing competitions he held because he understood their impact politically and socially. He was acutely aware of how they represented his influence, with most entries using borderline boastful language. Conversely, he did not see the smaller horse races that he hosted as being politically significant, so there was no need to keep a record. Consequently, Michinaga did not hold horse races simply because of their political and social impact, though that was an added benefit, he hosted horse races because he genuinely loved to watch them. He used his position and wealth to stage one of his favorite pastimes for entertainment purposes first, and then considered the political benefit of hosting grand horse racing competitions every few years.

The timing of those grand horse racing competitions was politically motivated as these races were one of the starkest reminders of Michinaga's place atop the court. The grand races in 1004, for example, followed Yorimichi's coming-of-age ceremony and his inclusion in major ceremonial events that earmarked him as future successor to Michinaga.<sup>388</sup> The best example, however, was the grand horse racing competition of 1013 held mere weeks after the Annual Sumo Tournament that gave Sanjō the confidence to challenge Michinaga's grip on the government. As stated in the previous chapter, an emboldened Sanjō followed the tournament with directives that Michinaga had to continually block, and a lavish spectacle orchestrated by Michinaga was the perfect excuse to reign in the reinvigorated leader. Earlier in the year, Michinaga ordered multiple high-ranking ministers to abstain from participating in the ceremony for Sanjō's primary consort to prove that even though the emperor was divine, Michinaga was the ruler. If absence at an event was proof of a lack of power, then the attendance of the whole court, not to mention the embattled emperor, was evidence to the contrary as Michinaga reinforced his position with the event he monopolized. Not only was the whole court compelled to come to Michinaga's massive estate and indulge in the entertainment and refreshments he would so graciously provide, but they would also have to watch his favorite form of competition.

Preparations for the races began at the start of the month with the construction of a special gate from which the horses would emerge onto the *Tsuchimikado* track.<sup>389</sup> A few days later,

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<sup>388</sup> *Gonki*, Chōhō 5 (1003)/2/20; *Shōyūki*, Kankō 1 (1004)/2/5; *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 1 (1004)/5/27.

<sup>389</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/4.

there were discussions between the top members of the Right Guard about which dance was best suited for the area provided at *Tsuchimikado* because it was too narrow.<sup>390</sup> On the next day, Sanesuke watched some trial races before deciding which Guards would assist the riders.<sup>391</sup> The trial races went on for a few more days until Michinaga learned that there were races happening without his knowledge. He ordered Sanesuke and the riders to his estate to compete in trial races soon thereafter.<sup>392</sup>

The first race was between two great riders, Fourth Guard of the Left Ō no Takefumi and Ninth Guard of the Right Shimotsuke no Kintoki.<sup>393</sup> The two men were neck and neck as they raced around the track many times. The lower-ranked Kintoki finally won the thrilling race by a head. The victory led to some unnamed nobles making disparaging comments, and Michinaga joined in the mockery of Takefumi by promptly summoning him and questioning him on how he could have lost. Takefumi tried to save face by replying that he got a bad start.

The next race was won by the best rider of his time, Fourth Guard of the Right Harima no Yasunobu, who had bested Takefumi in the grand horse racing competition of 1004. After the second race, the horses from Michinaga's personal stables were returned, and tributary horses, perhaps the ones that Michinaga planned to offer to the emperor at the competition, were tested. Sanesuke took that opportunity to leave, but he heard from one of his Guards the following day that more races were held, including a tie between Kintoki and Yasunobu. His messenger continued his report by asking whether they should arrest the two riders who did not show. Sanesuke ordered the Guards incarcerated, citing negligence when they were to represent the Right at an event the emperor would attend. The final preparations for the races came on the eve

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<sup>390</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/9.

<sup>391</sup> No doubt the Left Stables were also doing these activities. *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/10.

<sup>392</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/13.

<sup>393</sup> For more information on the Guard below seventh, see Nishiyama Shirō, "*Konoefu kakyū kanjin funin kō*," *Bukkyō daigaku daigakuin kiyō. Bungaku kenkyūka hen*, 49 (March, 2021): 117–134.

of the competition when they constructed the fences that served as the boundaries for the racetrack and put the many ceremonial items (室礼, *shitsurai*) Michinaga owned on display.<sup>394</sup>

The emperor and the nobles funneled into their seats at *Tsuchimikado* in a similar fashion to the grand horse racing competition at *Kayanoin* in 1024 that was described in the previous section.<sup>395</sup> Michinaga presented ten horses to the emperor that were then divided between the Left and Right Stables. The first race was between Left's Takefumi and Right's Yasunobu. There were many false starts that angered the crowd before the Right struck first with Yasunobu beating Takefumi by a head. The victory was clear to Sanesuke and Michinaga, but the messenger to the emperor reported that the result of the race was a tie. Sanesuke seethed at the Left courtiers who were celebrating and laughing at the news, and it was no doubt this instance that made the Right's confirmation of victory by imperial messenger in 1024 such a satisfactory result for Sanesuke. Neither rider was on the track to enjoy the celebration because Takefumi, knowing he had lost the race, had returned to his waiting room, and Yasunobu had done the same after the result was overturned. The second race went to the Left, the third to the Right, but when the Right won the fourth contest, the emperor changed the result to a victory for the Left—an even more egregious slight in the mind of Sanesuke.

Sanjō was uncharacteristically flexing his imperial veto to showcase some power at the event that was an extravagant reminder of his place beneath Michinaga. As Minister of the Left, Michinaga benefited from the vetoes and seemed content to not interfere, but his diary entry made his true feelings known. He said that the Right winning the first race was disappointing, but that was only because he was rooting for the Left. He did not mention the first imperial veto in his diary, nor did he acknowledge the overturned victory for the Right later in the competition. After the conclusion of six races, the competition ended as the sun set, and the Left was declared the victors of the competition by one race. Despite this, when Michinaga heard a Guard of the Right ask Sanesuke if the Right could perform their victory dance because they were the true winners,

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<sup>394</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/15.

<sup>395</sup> The following descriptions of the 1013 races are a combination of Michinaga's and Sanesuke's account. *Midō kanpaku ki* and *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/16.



the Minister of the Left laughed heartily before answering in the affirmative—as long as they performed their victory dance after the Left performed theirs. It is here that one can see the nuance of Michinaga's perspective. He did not acknowledge the authority of the emperor even when it benefited him, highlighting his competitive mentality. His insistence that the Right perform their dance was not solely for the sake of competition, however, because he knew that the emperor would be watching the dances. When the Right performed their victorious dance, it signaled to Sanjō that it was not only Michinaga who did not respect his authority. The days of the automatic acceptance of the emperor's veto were long gone and the Right wished to revel in victory as fervently as the Left did, if not more so. The emperor retired not long after the completion of the dances, and the rest of the evening was spent eating, drinking, doling out gifts to numerous people at all levels, and most interestingly, conferring promotions in rank to nearly twenty mid-to-high-ranking courtiers. The night could not have gone any more perfectly for Michinaga. In a stroke of political genius, Michinaga had turned the emperor's only viable tactic to his advantage, cementing the power disparity between the two without compromising his genuine love of competition.

A comparison of Michinaga and the 1013 grand races with Yorimichi and the 1024 grand races highlights some of the differences between the two men and offers one example to explain why historians join Yorimichi's contemporaries in seeing him as inferior to his father. While Yorimichi's races may have been the most spectacular event the courtiers remember attending, which in turn fed his social capital, his actions show that he lacked Michinaga's political savvy. When handling a similar challenge concerning the imperial veto, Michinaga used the emperor's own tools against him, while Yorimichi stepped in when he feared the emperor would not fall in line. This seemingly minor difference is a microcosm of the much larger reality that Michinaga was a competitor and Yorimichi was not. Yorimichi excelled at throwing fantastic banquets, gifting lavishly, and sharing with others as long as they knew he was on top. Although he gained those traits from watching Michinaga, he had not earned the power from which they derived like his father had. Michinaga earned his power through his deft navigation of courtier politics, private relationships, and opportunistic catastrophe, showing that his personal agency was the largest factor in him gaining the respect he had rather than his title.

Yorimichi had escaped the intense infighting that the three previous generations endured because Michinaga had laid the groundwork for Yorimichi to succeed. Instead of battling older brothers or cousins like Michinaga, Kaneie, and Morosuke had, Yorimichi enjoyed uncontested success while he ruled as regent for three successive emperors. The irony when assessing the political ineffectiveness of the longest-tenured regent in Japanese history becomes apparent when analyzing the source of this power before juxtaposing it with how he could not sustain it. The three emperors to whom Yorimichi was regent were born from his sisters who Michinaga had installed in imperial chambers. These political maneuvers greatly influenced the court in favor of the regental line for decades, but when it came time for Yorimichi to perpetuate the status quo, he was incapable of doing so because the daughters he installed in the imperial chambers failed to produce suitable male heirs. Further, he wilted when challenged by the aptly named Emperor Go-Sanjō, allowing emperors and retired emperors to exert more power. He seemingly had fallen into the same trap as some emperors before him in thinking that his power came from some uncontested source rather than realizing how contentious power at court had been for centuries.

Just like that absurd race in 890 when the Left was considered the victor even though the horse crossed the finish line without a rider, Yorimichi believed his victory was simply a matter of course. Perhaps he should have taken heed when Sanesuke pointed out that such ideas were preposterous in their time. Better yet, the regent should have taken lessons from his father and his love of competitive horse racing. Yorimichi, like the generations of competitive men before him, should have been like a rider who deftly steered his mount across the finish line before all others, not like the man in 890 who fell to the ground, stayed there, and let the horse do the work.

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The regental line of the Fujiwara took their first foray into the private hosting of physical competitions with the horse races that Koretada held at *Suzakuin* in 963 and 965 because many precedents shielded the races from being considered too jarring a departure from tradition. The imaginary horse races devised by Mototsune to lure Yōzei out of the Greater Imperial Palace in 884 show that the emperor leaving the premises to see horse racing was perhaps unprecedented, but

not revolutionary. Perhaps due to Yōzei's cruel nature, future emperors did not see the ploy as a tactic that the Fujiwara would commit a second time, so they periodically visited places outside the Greater Imperial Palace to watch races hosted by courtiers. This is significant because there are no records of the emperor leaving imperial grounds to see sumo matches or archery unless hosted by a retired emperor, and yet there are many records of emperors seeing horse races at private residences.<sup>396</sup>

The Fujiwara were able to grab horse racing because the races of the 5/5 festival were about entertainment rather than having a deeper symbolic meaning on par with other physical competitions. This also explains why there were fewer activities between horse races than there were in sumo. There is a superficial contradiction, however, to how I have portrayed the relationship between competition and entertainment thus far if horse racing was the physical competition with the least symbolic meaning but was the last to become competitive. Why was it the last when it should have been the first? This was because horse racing was less important as an event, so it took longer for the court to consider adding competitive elements to it. There was also the matter of the loser's banquet, a banquet unique to horse racing, being a festive affair that likely postponed the competitiveness of horse racing.

According to Guttman and Thompson, one of the primary demarcations between premodern sports and modern sports is the rate at which rules change, with the process being far slower in premodern times.<sup>397</sup> That seems to have been the case with horse racing as it was the last competition to be made competitive decades after the other physical competitions. Heian courtiers may not have noticed their desire for competitive horse racing until the bizarre race of 890 forced them to confront what they wanted to see in a horse race. That would explain why races were competitive in the next extant record of horse racing following 890 and why Sanesuke chose that account to comment on over a century later.

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<sup>396</sup> Emperors technically saw equestrian archery as well, but that was because equestrian archery became tied to horse races as discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>397</sup> Guttman and Thompson, *Japanese Sports*, 2–4.

Private horse races became the staple Fujiwara spectacle after Regent Kaneie held the first grand horse racing competition at his estate in 989. Horse racing was the superlative activity to show off Fujiwara wealth and power because it required immense wealth to run. The most powerful Fujiwara were the only ones, aside from retired emperors, who were wealthy enough to afford the installation of large racetracks and stocked stables on their personal properties. Some of their horses were tributes from the two horse allotment ceremonies held each year, but most were personal gifts from provincial governors and elites to curry favor and maintain relationships with the *de facto* decision-makers of their future employment. From Koretada and Kanei in the latter half of the tenth century until Tadazane in the twelfth century, the Fujiwara periodically held grand horse races that drew the entire court to their residences for entertainment, refreshments, gifts, and even promotions. It was the one event the Fujiwara could consistently use to command the largest audience to reinforce their position atop the social and political hierarchy.

Of course, Michinaga was the one who used the power inherent in hosting horse races to its fullest extent for the three decades he was the preeminent power at court. That power was so pervasive as to affect central politics like the grand horse races of 1013 while also changing the medium of exchange between the provincial governors and the center for decades. There is an irony, however, to how impactful his relationship with horse racing was to the social, political, and economic landscape of the Heian court when considering why he held horse races. The Machiavellian reasoning behind Kaneie, Yorimichi, or other Fujiwara hosting horse races cannot be attributed to Michinaga even though the political influence of horse races reached its peak during his time. That is because Michinaga truly loved horse racing, as evidenced by the many small horse races cited in this chapter. Further, that love did not come from the political impact horse racing could have; instead, Michinaga used his position and personal power to elevate his favorite pastime, and it was in trying to please the most powerful man of his age with that pastime that horse racing had such a profound impact on Heian society.

His love for racing is most evident in two of the cases discussed in this chapter. The first is when he became irate that Sanesuke was having trial races without his knowledge, so he ordered Sanesuke and the riders from the Left and Right to his estate the following day. He did this not because he thought Sanesuke was slighting him politically by having secret races, but because

Michinaga could not stand the idea that there were horse races happening that he was not watching. He was after all, to use the modern term, horse racing's biggest fan.

The second example effectively divorces Michinaga's love of horse racing from any analysis that his passion derived primarily from its social and political impact. When some courtiers came to visit the retired Michinaga in 1021 to discuss the crises that the real was suffering, Michinaga instead talked about horse racing. This record makes it clear that Michinaga, and of course Sanesuke who criticized Michinaga over the incident, knew that horse racing had nothing to do with greater political landscape. That is because horse racing did not hold much value beyond entertainment, unlike the Annual Sumo Tournament. In an amusing, albeit incidental, parallel, it was the entertainment value horse racing had to Michinaga that gave it all its power during his lifetime.

## Chapter 5: Archery

Prominent Players		
Northern Fujiwara Branch	Emperors and Courtiers	Competitors
Kaneie	Emperor Ninmyō (archery)	Harima no Yasunobu (racing)
Michitsuna	Emperor Sanjō	Ō no Takefumi (racing)
Sanesuke	Emperor Shirakawa	Sumiyoshi no Tsunanushi (archery)
Michinaga (archery)		Sakanoue no Kiyono (archery)
Korechika (archery)		
Yorimichi		

Proficiency in hitting a target with a bow and arrow was one of the most coveted martial skills throughout premodern Japanese history due to the weapon's ubiquity in hunting and warfare. From this utilitarian necessity for competent marksmanship in a variety of situations grew the desire to hold numerous public demonstrations with divergent rules and purposes. Archery demonstrations, therefore, is an umbrella term for multiple events at the Heian court, not all of which were competitive. It is here that archery differed from the far more narrowly defined sets of conditions in sumo wrestling and horse racing. While the latter competitions grew more competitive over time, the non-competitive archery events remained as such even as new competitive forms of archery grew in popularity and importance. For this reason, it is imperative to discuss each archery demonstration to differentiate between the competitive and non-competitive elements, and to show why equestrian archery and Prize Archery were the two forms of archery that were grouped with sumo wrestling and horse racing in the Heian period. The chapter will also address how the martial qualities of archery were the reason behind why it persisted far longer than sumo and horse racing did.

### Equestrian Archery

As noted in the previous chapter, equestrian archery was the primary form of entertainment for the 5/5 Festival and, by extension, the tributary horse allotment ceremony late

in the fourth month. From at least the eighth century, the various branches of the guardhouses, mounted the tributary horses, spurred them to a gallop, and then loosed arrows at stationary targets as they went by. From the ninth century, the custom was for the Left and Right contingents of the four guardhouses—Guard, Sentry, Watch, and Stables—to showcase their skills in front of the emperor and higher-ranked nobles in the courtyard of the Hall of Martial Virtues. Striking the target was both a point for the archer and for the team he represented. Once the rounds were completed, the points were tallied, and rewards were given.

The same imperial decree from 728 that charged provincial governors to find and employ skilled sumo wrestlers also demanded the governors find men proficient in equestrian archery. Those skills were put to the test at the 5/5 Festival for another century before the first recorded instance of tracking winners and losers in 836 during the reign of Emperor Ninmyō. This occurred around the same time similar evolutions in sumo wrestling were happening and Prize Archery was becoming the predominant event for standing archery.<sup>398</sup> Equestrian archery remained ahead of horse racing, both in competitiveness and importance, for the remainder of the ninth century, but the comparative importance of the two events began to invert in the tenth century. There is a surprising dearth of extant evidence of equestrian archery being performed outside the parameters of the 5/5 Festival until the competition became the ancillary entertainment for the commonly held horse races in Michinaga's time. Equestrian archery as a competition, therefore, never grew to the heights of the other physical competitions because it never benefited from a fervent patron like Michinaga nor did the courtiers of the mid-Heian period consider equestrian archery competitions worthy of their own event. This may be why some academics have erroneously claimed that equestrian archery disappeared at the turn of the eleventh century before reemerging a century later in a different format.<sup>399</sup>

The obvious line of inquiry is why equestrian archery did not develop into an independent spectacle until long after the other competitions. Certainly from the perspective of subjective entertainment, which this dissertation has shown to have been integral to competitions for

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<sup>398</sup> *Shoku Nihon kōki*, Jōwa 3 (836)/5/5.

<sup>399</sup> The claim was made in Guttman and Thompson, *Japanese Sports: A History*, 46–47.

centuries, there was no obvious reason why equestrian archery should have received less attention. The most likely conclusion, therefore, comes from analyzing the unique factors of each competition that made them more attractive to the mid-Heian courtier. Sumo was the biggest physical competition for many of the reasons explained in Chapter 3, but the important juxtaposition with equestrian archery was that sumo could be performed at any mid-to-high-ranking courtier's residence. This familiarity is one of the reasons why courtiers would have a more vested interest in the outcome of wrestling matches. Horse racing was held in higher regard than equestrian archery because the regental line of the Fujiwara family, and Michinaga in particular, used races as the primary entertainment for lavish banquets at their estates. Further, Michinaga always chose horse racing for his personal entertainment. If Michinaga had been keener on equestrian archery than horse racing, the two events would have maintained their relative positions from the 5/5 Festival in private competitions as well. Finally, the advantage standing archery had over equestrian archery will be discussed in the next section.

The important distinction to make is that even though equestrian archery was not as significant as the other competitions, it affected court life in similar, albeit more muted, ways. Proficient equestrian archers received promotions well into the eleventh century, just like the other competitions. Many records that listed the names of the riders and results of the horse races held by courtiers included the results of equestrian archery competitions as well. First Guards, like Sanesuke, had to arrange for rewards to be brought to both 5/5 competitions, and those concerned with bringing the rewards to private competitions at courtier estates had to consider both sets of participants.<sup>400</sup> Most importantly, equestrian archery was consistently performed for an audience despite its status as an ancillary event while other equine spectacles, such as polo, were performed far less regularly, and if they were scheduled, it was always after the completion of equestrian archery.

The events of the Equestrian Archery Competition that accompanied the horse races at *Tsuchimikado* in the fifth month of 1014 illustrate these points, but the politics surrounding the competitions must be addressed first. Throughout the tenth century, equestrian archery and horse

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<sup>400</sup> For example, *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 3 (1014)/4/23.



racing competitions were held at the estates of retired emperors in the fifth month, mirroring similar evolutions to the loser's banquet that was discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, the same year that the loser's banquet vanished was also the first record of equestrian archery and racing being held in the fifth month outside the confines of the 5/5 Festival and the imperial palace.<sup>401</sup> Unlike the loser's banquet, however, this did not mark a permanent shift in courtly practices related to the physical competitions of the 5/5 Festival. Some years, like in 965, equestrian archery and races were held at the Hall of Martial Values, as was customary, and then an extra day of equestrian archery and horse racing was scheduled at the retired emperor's residence later in the month.<sup>402</sup> This differed from years like 963 when neither event was held on the customary dates, but both were performed at *Suzakuin* on the fourteenth.<sup>403</sup> In other years, such as 947, equestrian archery was held twice, once on the customary day and again along with the first set of horse races performed later in the month.<sup>404</sup> While the lack of consistent scheduling persisted throughout the eleventh century as well, what is evident from the remaining evidence is that the extra competitions at private estates were more important than the customary events at the Hall of Martial Values by the mid-tenth century. 955 was the last year that both physical competitions were held at the 5/5 Festival without there being extra equestrian archery competitions or races scheduled for later in the month until 1047.<sup>405</sup> Conversely, there are many examples of equestrian archery and horse racing being held at non-imperial estates during that span without reference to the traditional date or location.<sup>406</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Fujiwara took hosting duties for the extra equestrian archery competitions and horse races in the fifth month after the death of Retired Emperor Uda. The first one to do so was Regent Michitaka who held the equine events on the twelfth of the fifth month at

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<sup>401</sup> Polo was also performed on this occasion. *Gōkeshidai*, Engi 8 (908)/5/28.

<sup>402</sup> *Hokuzanshō*, Kōhō 2 (965)/5/6; *Nihon Kiryaku*, Kōhō 2 (965)/5/24.

<sup>403</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Ōwa 3 (963)/4/21, 5/14.

<sup>404</sup> *Gōkeshidai*, Tenryaku 1 (947)/5/5; *Nihon Kiryaku*, Tenryaku 1 (947)/5/9.

<sup>405</sup> *Saikyūki*, Tenryaku 9 (955)/5/5–6; *Nenchū gyōji hishō* (年中行事秘抄), Eishō 2 (1047)/5/5.

<sup>406</sup> For example, *Shōyūki*, Kan'na 1 (985)/5/19; *Nihon kiryaku*, Kan'na 2 (986)/6/6.

the track of the Right Guard in 993.<sup>407</sup> In 997, two years before Michinaga completed his new horse track at *Tsuchimikado*, he hosted both equestrian archery and horse racing on the fifteenth at the track of the Left Guard. Future equestrian archery competitions and horse races in the fifth month were routinely held at *Tsuchimikado* for the next two decades in lieu of performances at the Hall of Martial Values.<sup>408</sup> 1016 was an outlier in that equestrian archery was performed on the fifth but not held later in the month by Michinaga.<sup>409</sup> This was due to him suddenly falling ill on the same day that he and Sanesuke watched some practice rounds of equestrian archery together at *Tsuchimikado*.<sup>410</sup> The practice matches were no doubt for an upcoming demonstration Michinaga was going to organize, but his persistent illness halted any such plans. His situation was grave enough that it stirred visions of his imminent demise, although this would turn out to be one of many health scares Michinaga overcame.<sup>411</sup>

Health was not a concern for the powerful courtier in 1014 when he hosted one of his grand horse racing and equestrian archery competitions exactly eight months from the one discussed in the previous chapter. Emperor Sanjō was going to join the festivities despite his declining faculties along with the rest of the court on the sixteenth of the fifth month. The two weeks prior to the event were filled with preparations and competitive practices in equestrian archery and horse racing. On the fifth there was a lengthy discussion on how they could not hold the 5/5 Festival on its normal date due to the sexagenary cycle. Sanesuke performed two invaluable duties that day, the first of which was to spearhead the deliberations on when to reschedule the event. This was no easy task, as they dug into precedents as far back as 798, with Sanesuke having to correct multiple others who had miscalculated. Sanesuke's other duty as First Guard of the Right was to manage the equestrian archery practice matches for the Right Guard that day. Practice matches were performed the next few days, but Sanesuke could not go to the imperial palace on the tenth because he had to observe abstinence for four days after one of his

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<sup>407</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/5/12.

<sup>408</sup> For example, *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/5/14, Kankō 5 (1008)/5/10.

<sup>409</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 5 (1016)/5/5.

<sup>410</sup> *Shōyūki* and *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 5 (1016)/5/7.

<sup>411</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 5 (1016)/5/18.

bovines died the night before. This did not stop the request for him to give his input into which type of palanquin was appropriate for the emperor's transportation to the competition, nor his opinion on which costumes to bring for the dances. On the eve of the grand competitions, the card was determined with a marquee race between Fourth Guard of the Right Yasunobu and his Left equivalent, Takefumi, to open the competitions.<sup>412</sup>

The Heian nobility filed into *Tsuchimikado* in typical fashion, though some protocols set by the races at *Suzakuin* in 965 were not followed.<sup>413</sup> Yasunobu made his way to the track for the main event, but Takefumi would not bring his horse to the starting line despite multiple orders from Michinaga. The rider was so troubled that he shied away from the starting line even after many of the courtiers ridiculed him for being a coward who was afraid to lose to Yasunobu. If true, Takefumi had reason to fear Yasunobu because the Right Guard had bested him in all their previous matchups. Eventually, the frightened rider forfeited, and the whole crowd jeered as he finally rode away. Afterwards, when First Guard of the Left Kinsue took off an article of clothing and presented it to Takefumi, as was customary after a completed race, Minister of the Left Michinaga criticized the First Guard publicly while Sanesuke, and no doubt many of the courtiers in attendance, criticized him privately. In the second race, Fourth Guard of the Left Manda no Shigekata came from behind to snatch victory from defeat. The thrilling outcome led to many courtiers on the Left giving him rewards, and even Sanesuke praised him in his diary. The next six races were decided by the Left as there were three victories by the Left and three forfeitures conceding the victory to the Right. Only in the final race did the Left racer lose to the Right with both men racing. Despite the Left and Right splitting the results, Sanesuke outshined his counterpart on the Left by having all ten of his racers willing to take the stage.

The Equestrian Archery Competition that followed had two teams of seven archers from Fourth Guard to those without rank. Six archers for each team completed the competition, but both teams were marred by the actions of one of their archers that led to him being ordered off

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<sup>412</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 3 (1014)/5/4–15.

<sup>413</sup> The rest of the events come from Sanesuke because Michinaga's entry on the day is sadly missing. *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 3 (1014)/5/16.

the track. Fourth Guard of the Left Shigekata, the hero with the come-from-behind victory in the second horse race, embarrassed himself when he fell face-first from his horse as he was entering the track. Some Guards gathered to try to return him to his saddle, but Michinaga ordered them to escort him from the premises rather than force him up. Sanesuke's description did not convey Michinaga's intentions, but the order may have been given with some concern for the Guard's wellbeing because Michinaga treated him favorably in situations before and after this episode.<sup>414</sup> Later during the Right's rounds, Sanesuke's unranked Guard Escort, Araki no Takeharu, inexplicably emerged from his waiting area unarmed. He galloped down the track empty handed before being stopped and forced to retire by order of Michinaga. Sanesuke was surprisingly quiet on the situation, but mishaps such as these must have contributed to Takeharu having to wait twelve years to reach Seventh Guard and another eight after that to reach Sixth.<sup>415</sup> Sanesuke omitted the results of the successful marksman, so the final tally is unknown. It is important to note that Sanjō did not cast an imperial veto throughout the day as that would have been documented by Sanesuke. The emperor must have learned his lesson in 1013 because he did not cast an imperial veto for the rest of his short reign.

After the Equestrian Archery Competition, there was an attempt to have some races between higher-ranked nobles, but chaos ensued, and results could not be tallied. As the sun set at the conclusion of yet another debacle, it was deemed too late in the evening for dancing. Sanesuke overheard the courtiers quietly airing multiple grievances about the disappointing day, including the canceled dances and the cold weather. The night was salvaged when nothing went wrong with the courtiers lining up for their gifts and enjoying their food and drink. The gifts were as lavish as ever, but the poor proceedings prior must have left the courtiers underwhelmed. It is little wonder that the author of *The Tale of Flowering Fortunes* chose the 1024 races and equestrian archery at *Kayanoin* rather than the ones in 1014.

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<sup>414</sup> The very next year, for example, Michinaga ordered Sukehira to release Shigekata's son from detention without any discussion on the merits of his arrest after Shigekata asked Michinaga for assistance. *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 4 (1015)/7/4.

<sup>415</sup> Sanesuke complained about the poor showing of all the equestrian archers, including Takeharu, two years later during 5/5. *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 5 (1016)/5/5, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/8/28, Manju 4 (1027)/4/21.

Equestrian archery continued in its ancillary position to horse racing and as a physical competition associated with the 5/5 Festival for the rest of the eleventh century and beyond. In 1096, members of the Guard competed in grand horse races and equestrian archery at *Kayanoin* as had been done many times before.<sup>416</sup> Two days later, Retired Emperor Shirakawa watched a revolutionary new form of equestrian archery at his estate. Most facets of the competition maintained their centuries-old formats with the riders still being tasked with galloping down the track and hitting three targets. The two major changes that came to differentiate traditional equestrian archery from the new horse-borne archery were the dissolution of the Left and Right teams and the posts held by the riders. The riders in the new form were not members of the Guard, or any other court guardhouse, but rather warriors (武者/武士, *bushi*) who served in the provinces.<sup>417</sup> While some of the warriors who competed held posts in the provincial contingents of the guardhouses, they were not members of the central guardhouses. This is the most likely reason why the format changed from the two-team format to one where each rider represented himself.

The paucity of horse-borne archery sources in the twelfth century belies its likely popularity outside Kyoto. There are only three instances in the twelfth century of court nobility enjoying horse-borne archery: when it was held at Jōnangū Shrine in 1143 and 1146 and then at Imahie Shrine in 1182.<sup>418</sup> Shrines and temples were the common location for horse-borne archery competitions after its inception as the next two extant cases were at Tsurugaoka Hachimangū Shrine in Kamakura in 1187 and 1190.<sup>419</sup> Horse-borne archery continued to be a form of entertainment at shrines and temples well into the thirteenth century, such as the competition held at Tōdaiji in Nara in 1212.<sup>420</sup> It was also performed on multiple occasions for the Wakanomiyā Festival (若宮祭) at Kasuga Shrine, as seen with the following missive. Although a letter from a

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<sup>416</sup> *Chūyūki*, Eichō 1 (1096)/4/27.

<sup>417</sup> *Chūyūki*, Eichō 1 (1096)/4/29.

<sup>418</sup> *Kikki* (吉記), Kōji 2 (1143)/9/19, Kyūan 2 (1146)/9/22, Juei 1 (1182)/3/15.

<sup>419</sup> *Azuma kagami* (吾妻鏡), Bunji 3 (1187)/8/15, Kenkyū 1 (1190)/8/15.

<sup>420</sup> Adolphson, *The Teeth and Claws of the Buddha*, 79.

thirteenth-century warrior is beyond the purview of this study, it shows the importance of competitions like horse-borne archery long after they were no longer performed at court.<sup>421</sup>

...Once again regarding the order I received that I must come [to the capital] in a couple of days: because my young son was nominated to do horse-borne archery at Kasuga Shrine, I am focusing solely on those preparations. For what reason am I being summoned? I will come when I receive the details. The messenger will relay the same state of affairs. Please convey my circumstance via the appropriate channels.

### Ritual Archery Demonstration

The first recorded demonstration of an archer's skill with his feet planted firmly on the ground was during the reign of Emperor Seinei (444–484, r. 480–484). The brief entry from the ninth month of 483 stated that the emperor went to the Archery Hall (射殿, *idono*) where he saw foreign envoys and officials participate in archery before undisclosed rewards of varying value were given.<sup>422</sup> This demonstration was certainly more earnest than the fake female sumo match ordered by Seinei's father, Emperor Yūryaku, fourteen years prior, but it took nearly two centuries and a date shift before non-combative displays of archery were performed once again.<sup>423</sup> On the fifteenth day of the first month of 647, envoys from Goguryeo and Silla paid tribute to Emperor Kōtoku (597–654, r. 645–654) by participating in an archery demonstration. Following the next extant case on the seventeenth of the first month of 670, archery demonstrations in the first month were performed with staggering regularity. In fact, from 670 until 830, after which each competition in this study was held regularly, the eighty-seven instances of standing archery outnumber sumo, equestrian archery, and horse racing combined. Those competitions were undoubtedly performed far more often than records indicate during that span, but the plethora of

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<sup>421</sup> For the original text, see Nagashima Fukutarō, “*Kōfukuji kyūzō shōmotsu no shihai bunsho Kamakura jidai no senshoku kawashi sanuki no kuni kanzakishō tōtō no shiryō*,” *Jinbun ronkyū* 21, no. 3 (1970): 72–73.

<sup>422</sup> *Nihon shoki*, Emperor Seinei 4 (483)/9/?.

<sup>423</sup> *Nihon shoki*, Emperor Yūryaku 13 (469)/9/?.

standing archery entries compared to the others indicates that standing archery displays were the most significant at the time.

A massive contributing factor to this was the necessity for skilled archers for potential military encounters. That was the impetus for the imperial decree handed down by Empress Jitō in 689 for the creation of a Left and Right office with the sole mission of creating facilities for archery training within the capital and the provinces.<sup>424</sup> At a special banquet held in 758, toxophilites were included in a list of people to receive rewards that also included other meritorious members of the court such as scholars, musicians, and cosmologists.<sup>425</sup> Moreover, the extent to which the court valued its marksmen in the eighth and ninth centuries is evident in many of the eulogies written during those two centuries. The eulogy of Third Guard Sumiyoshi no Tsunanushi (728–805) began by stating his proficiency with the bow before listing his other redeemable traits of being diligent, having an affinity for hawks and dogs, and being loved by many fellow soldiers (士卒, *shisotsu*).<sup>426</sup> A few decades later, the eulogy of First Watchman of the Right Sakanoue no Kiyono (788–850) lauded his unparalleled martial prowess (武芸, *bugei*) before listing some of his more impressive feats in archery and equestrian archery.<sup>427</sup> Even the eulogy for Emperor Ninmyō in the same year emphasized the emperor's capabilities as an archer and stressed that he frequently attended the archery grounds.<sup>428</sup> For warriors Tsunanushi and Kiyono, their skills were tested in ways beyond archery demonstrations in the first and fifth month, but both would have performed at those events and left their counterparts in awe. Ninmyō must have garnered even stronger reactions from his subjects when he opened every archery demonstration on the seventeenth of the first month with his deft accuracy because exceptional marksmanship was a valued trait at every level until at least the mid-ninth century.

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<sup>424</sup> *Nihon shoki*, Empress Jitō 3 (689)/7/15.

<sup>425</sup> *Shoku Nihongi*, Tenpyō-Hōji 2 (758)/11/26.

<sup>426</sup> *Nihon kōki*, Enryaku 24 (805)/2/10.

<sup>427</sup> *Nihon kōki*, Kashō 3 (850)/8/4.

<sup>428</sup> *Nihon kōki*, Kashō 3 (850)/3/25.

While such displays would have led to intriguing spectacle, I join Obinata Katsumi in assessing that the archery demonstration in the first month, which would later be called the Ritual Archery Demonstration, was primarily an annual ritual to show subservience to the emperor's authority. Crown princes, courtiers of every rank, and envoys were summoned to the archery grounds every year and made to shoot at targets in the presence of the emperor. The emperor was always the first to shoot, and many of his subjects shooting after him was as a public show of deference to the divine embodiment of the state. At these demonstrations, hitting the target was an afterthought, though it was preferable to not doing so. Despite that preference, there is no evidence to suggest that competition factored into the proceedings. The higher the archer's rank, the larger his handicap for hitting the target as progressively smaller targets were placed further away as the demonstration worked its way down the ranks. The rewards at the banquet following the demonstration were based solely on the rank of the person who shot, and whether they hit the target was never mentioned nor did the reward list include prizes for hitting the target like it did in other events.<sup>429</sup>

Before diving into the Ritual Archery Demonstration during the Heian period, a deeper analysis of terminology is necessary to accurately define the evolutions of the demonstration and the Prize Archery Competition that is discussed in the following section. The term for the Ritual Archery Demonstration first appeared in 811; prior to this, all standing archery displays simply used the term for archery (射, *ikui*).<sup>430</sup> Regardless, close inspection of the dates and details of those events shows that the majority were Ritual Archery Demonstrations. One important caveat was that prior to the mid-ninth century, archery displays held on the eighteenth were an extension of the Ritual Archery Demonstration on the seventeenth and not a precedent for the Prize Archery Competition. The demonstration on the seventeenth, sometimes referred to as *naisha* (内射), was reserved for the royals, courtiers at or above the fifth rank, and envoys. The following day, known

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<sup>429</sup> The list was established in 706. *Shoku Nihongi*, Keiun 3 (706)/1/17.

<sup>430</sup> 811 was the first time that it was used for the event in the first month. There are two instances in 807 and 809 where the term was used for an event in the ninth month that was never repeated. *Ruijū kokushi* (類聚国史), Daidō 2 (807)/9/9, Daidō 4 (809)/9/9; *Nihon kōki*, Kōnin 2 (811)/1/17.



as *taisha* (大射), was reserved for those of the sixth rank and lower. As the Ritual Archery Demonstration lost importance, it was eventually consolidated into a single event on the seventeenth. The eighteenth was thereafter reserved for Prize Archery.

Prior to the Heian period, symbolic capitulation by those most capable of overthrowing the status quo was the predominant motivation for the Ritual Archery Demonstration, which was why that interaction held special importance to the emperor. The significance of the event to the courtiers, however, waxed and waned with the shifts in political power. In 825, Emperor Jun'na (786–840, r. 823–833) became the first extant emperor to purposely exempt himself from the Ritual Archery Demonstration before he handed down a proclamation decrying the courtiers' negligence towards a ritual with such grave importance to the state. In an attempt to incentivize his subjects, Jun'na included in his decree that bonus prizes would henceforth be administered for hitting the target.<sup>431</sup> The courtiers must have redoubled their efforts following the imperial rebuke, if only temporarily, because Jun'na returned the next year for the demonstration.<sup>432</sup> The subsequent emperor, Ninmyō, was even more fervent in competent displays of archery. He was present at each Ritual Archery Demonstration during his reign, as well as all other recorded archery events, until his abrupt absence from 848 until his death in 850.<sup>433</sup> His first absence was especially conspicuous because he appeared the following day for Prize Archery. More concerning for court politics, however, was that in lieu of the emperor's presence, the newly appointed Minister of the Right, Yoshifusa, ordered all eligible courtiers to attend the Ritual Archery Demonstration with him as the highest observer—a command he repeated in 849 and 850.<sup>434</sup> Clearly, Yoshifusa was using the ritual to symbolically reinforce his position atop the political ladder.

The emperor rarely made an appearance even after Yoshifusa moved the demonstration to the southern gate of the imperial palace, Kenrei Gate (建礼門, *Kenreimon*, see figure 2), in 865

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<sup>431</sup> *Ruijū kokushi*, Tenchō 2 (825)/1/17.

<sup>432</sup> *Ruijū kokushi*, Tenchō 5 (828)/1/17.

<sup>433</sup> *Shoku Nihon kōki*, Jōwa 15 (848)/1/17, Kashō 2 (849)/1/17, Kashō 3 (850)/1/17.

<sup>434</sup> He gained the post of Minister of the Right only one week prior. *Shoku Nihon kōki*, Jōwa 15 (848)/1/10.

from its customary location further away at the Palace of Abundant Pleasures (豊楽院, *Burakuin*)(see figure 2). At his inaugural Ritual Archery Demonstration in 852, Emperor Montoku set the future trend of emperors appearing at the first demonstration of their reign, but rarely attending thereafter. Prior to Ninmyō's absence in 848, emperors had been absent from the demonstration only five times since its inception. From 848 to 884, however, emperors did not attend twenty-four of the thirty-three demonstrations performed. Emperor Kōkō (830–887, r. 884–887), who helped revive many rituals and court practices, briefly reset the trend by attending every Ritual Archery Demonstration during his short reign.<sup>435</sup> There is no record that Uda ever attended the demonstration, however, and Daigo rarely appeared.<sup>436</sup>

During Daigo's reign, the demonstration returned to the Palace of Abundant Pleasures, but its traditional importance did not return with its relocation to the traditional site. From the mid-tenth century, the demonstration bounced between the two locations until well into the twelfth century, but the presence of royals, both emperors and princes, at the demonstrations continued to dwindle. Further, courtiers rarely recorded anything more than the tersest notes on the event, including Sanesuke, who was far more concerned with Prize Archery the following day.<sup>437</sup> Most entries in his diary that have more than one pithy line on the day of the demonstration were concerning his preparations for Prize Archery, proving that the demonstration had lost any real influence long ago.<sup>438</sup> Later, Shirakawa showed little interest in the demonstration despite his interest in other rituals and competitions because there was little reason to revive an outdated custom that had been overtaken by a far more popular, entertaining, and competitive archery display.

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<sup>435</sup> There is a convenient chart showing where the demonstration was held and whether the emperor attended the event from 647–887 in Obinata, *Kodai kokka to nenchū gyōji*, 21–23.

<sup>436</sup> Such as in 907 and 908. *Saikyūki*, Engi 7 (907)/1/17; *Teishinkōki*, Engi 8 (908)/1/17.

<sup>437</sup> For example, *Teishinkōki*, Enchō 2 (924)/1/17; *Kyūreki*, Tentoku 1 (957)/3/13; *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 4 (1021)/1/17; *Chūyūki*, Kashō 1 (1106)/1/17.

<sup>438</sup> For example, *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/1/17–18.

### Prize Archery Competition

The first case of Prize Archery was in 684, when Left and Right attendants shot, presumably for the amusement of the court.<sup>439</sup> It was not until 816, however, that the Prize Archery Competition truly began. Emperor Saga (786–842, r. 809–823) and all the high-ranking courtiers enjoyed a full day of eating and drinking while they watched the Left and Right Guards shoot for their entertainment. Rewards were given to the spectators as well as the competitors with bonus prizes for those that hit the target.<sup>440</sup> Saga held the same event two weeks later, though he never held the competition again during his reign. In Jun'na's first year as emperor, he moved the special event to the eighteenth of the first month, replacing the second day of the Ritual Archery Demonstration, and the event became known as the Prize Archery Competition.

The Prize Archery Competition was split into two phases whereby ten members of the Left and Right Guard would compete against one another before seven members of the Left and Right Watch did the same. The competition was played across three rounds with each archer shooting once for his side per round. The results of each round were tallied with which side had the most arrows hitting the target and by how many. At the conclusion of three rounds, the side that won the most rounds won the competition. The First Guard of the victorious side was supposed to ply the courtiers and competitors of the losing side with punitive spirits before the customary dances were performed. Ties were possible, though they caused complications on more than one occasion. In 943, for example, the Left won the first round by two, the Right won the second by three, and the third round was a tie. Both sides gave their victory shout and the event caused great confusion. The competition of 1005 was even closer when the Right won the first round by one, the Left won the second by one, and the third round ended in a tie. On that occasion, Emperor Ichijō declared the Left the winners with his veto, prompting Sanesuke to consult the 943 example for precedent.<sup>441</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> *Nihon shoki*, Emperor Tenmu 13 (684)/1/23.

<sup>440</sup> *Ruijū kokushi*, Kōnin 7 (816)/3/27, 4/6.

<sup>441</sup> 943 and 1005 are found in *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/1/18.

Sanesuke was right to question the precedent of the emperor casting his veto in 1005 because the Prize Archery Competition had been the fairest competition to date. At the first Prize Archery Competition in 824, the Right Guard and Right Watch prevailed over their Left counterparts, which was also the first recorded instance of the Right winning any competition.<sup>442</sup> Further, there is no evidence to suggest that the competition lost that parity as the Right won three of the first five competitions with a definitive result.<sup>443</sup> There had been many more competitions between those years, but those entries do not include which side won, though they often reiterate that they gave rewards to winners.<sup>444</sup> As seen in previous chapters, competitions became competitive, meaning that the Left or Right could win a match, if not the whole competition, at varied times throughout the ninth century, but Prize Archery was consistently competitive for longer than any other competition.

Like horse racing, the emphasis of Prize Archery was on entertainment rather than any connection to symbolic gestures or traditional events. Prize Archery, however, was the first physical competition to become competitive while horse racing was last. There are a few reasons for this. The first is that archery was a necessary military skill that the higher nobility and royalty also practiced, while horse racing did not have any direct martial parallels. There was also Prize Archery's connection to the Ritual Archery Demonstration held the day before. Because the demonstration fulfilled the necessary symbolic gesture affirming the emperor's power, the Prize Archery Competition had less symbolic weight. Moreover, the Prize Archery Competition was not affiliated with any larger festivals like those from which equestrian archery, horse racing, and sumo grew. The Prize Archery Competition, therefore, was purely for amusement, and it was more amusing to watch a genuine competition between skilled performers than it was to see inept shooting at the Ritual Archery Demonstration. This is why after watching the first Prize Archery Competition, Jun'na demanded that his courtiers take the Ritual Archery Demonstration more seriously the following year.

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<sup>442</sup> *Ruijū kokushi*, Tenchō 1 (824)/1/18.

<sup>443</sup> *Teishinkōki*, Engi 12 (912)/1/18, Engi 13 (913)/1/18, Tengyō 2 (939)/1/18; *Saikyūki*, Jōhei 2 (932)/1/19.

<sup>444</sup> For example, *Montoku jitsuroku*, Ninju 2 (852)/1/18.

With entertainment at the forefront, the Prize Archery Competition delighted courtiers and royalty alike. Starting with the reign of Ninmyō, emperors and courtiers placed higher importance on the Prize Archery Competition than they did the Ritual Archery Demonstration. From his reign until the mid-eleventh century, emperors consistently attended the Prize Archery Competition a full two centuries after they had stopped going to the Ritual Archery Demonstration. Emperor Go-Ichijō was the last emperor to go to many Prize Archery Competitions during his reign.<sup>445</sup> The records on Prize Archery after Go-Ichijō's death until the late eleventh century are scant, but the entries in *Chūyūki* show that the emperor was no longer a common participant from at least the 1080's even though Prize Archery was held regularly until 1107.<sup>446</sup> By that point, the competition had gone through many of the same changes seen in horse racing and equestrian archery. What began as a competition inside the Greater Imperial Palace, usually on the archery grounds or in the Palace of Abundant Pleasures, had moved to grand courtier estates of the age. *Higashi sanjōin* was a frequent locale for the competition throughout the eleventh century whether with Regent Yorimichi in 1026 or Regent Morozane (1042–1101) in 1092.<sup>447</sup>

### Courtiers and Their Arrows

There were two other forms of Prize Archery that kept the same emphasis on competition and entertainment but differed from the Prize Archery Competition in the first month in important ways. The first competition, known as the Courtier Prize Archery Competition (殿上賭射, *tenjō no noriyumi*), was held in the third month. In this version, higher-ranked courtiers, and even princes, could be the archers. To further distance the event from the one in the first month, the Courtier Prize Archery Competition separated the archers into Front and Back teams rather than Left and Right ones. This allowed courtiers serving on the Left or Right to be on the same side as those they always opposed in other spectator competitions. The second event, the Archery Commencement Ceremony, was like the Courtier Prize Archery Competition except it was held in the tenth month

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<sup>445</sup> For example, *Shōyūki*, Jian 3 (1023)/1/18; *Nihon kiryaku*, Chōgen 6 (1033)/1/19.

<sup>446</sup> It was held seven times in the decade leading up to 1107. *Chūyūki*, Kashō 2 (1107)/1/18.

<sup>447</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 3 (1026)/1/17; *Chūyūki*, Kanji 6 (1092)/1/18.

and, as the name suggests, was the competition and subsequent banquet held to commemorate the beginning of a new season of archery starting from the tenth month and concluding in the fourth month. Both were large events with the emperor and all the top-ranked courtiers in attendance. As stated previously, toxophilites were valued at all levels of Heian society, and though the prevalence of marksmanship among the elite diminished throughout the period, the competitive capital gained from displays of one's skill at one of these competitions was significant. This was because, unlike the other competitions in this study, courtiers were competing against one another directly.<sup>448</sup>

Kaneie's consort, the author of *Kagerō nikki*, detailed multiple instances in which the reputations of Kaneie and their son, Michitsuna, benefited from Michitsuna's excellent marksmanship. Her first reference to archery was in 969 when Kaneie brought his escorts to her residence to practice for the upcoming Courtier Prize Archery Competition. The archers split into Front and Back teams and competed in trial competitions over several days. The men took the competition seriously, asking the ladies in attendance to supply gifts for the victorious team. One lady responded with a poem that prompted an exchange of poems between the archers and the ladies. That exchange was the only reward those archers received that year, however, as the Anna incident caused the cancellation of the competition.<sup>449</sup>

While Kaneie enjoyed the political consequences of that incident far more than he would have a simple archery competition, the competition's return the following year led to further boons for the ambitious courtier. Michitsuna had been chosen to compete for the first time, joining the Back team. His mother commented that the days in preparation for the competition were lively as the confident Michitsuna split his time between bringing home rewards for winning trial competitions and practicing for the dance of victory. Kaneie remarked to his consort that he did not expect the Back team to win this year based on the rosters. To make matters worse,

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<sup>448</sup> Obinata, 45–46.

<sup>449</sup> The Anna incident of 969 saw many rivals to the Fujiwara exiled including the Minister of the Left Minamoto no Taka'akira who was accused of treason and exiled to *Dazaifu* as Michizane was in 901. For a translation of the diary entry, see Sonja Arntzen, *The Kagerō Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth-Century Japan*, 171.

Michitsuna was pitted against an unnamed Second Guard of the Right who, in theory, would be a crack shot. During the competition, attendants came to Michitsuna's mother to announce that her son had hit his mark multiple times, defeating the favored Second Guard. Furthermore, it was Michitsuna's steady aim that propelled the Back team from a predictable loss to a commendable tie with the superior Front side. Due to the draw, both sides were allowed to do their victory dances. Michitsuna performed his with the utmost grace, bringing the courtiers in attendance to tears and impressing the emperor enough to give the young man a robe in appreciation. Kaneie triumphantly returned with his son and repeatedly told the boy's mother about the successful night. Kaneie then summoned Michitsuna's archery instructor and bestowed upon him many gifts. In the following days, friends, acquaintances, and even priests came to congratulate them on Michitsuna's performance.<sup>450</sup> Clearly, the competitions were deemed important or exciting enough news that the results of such competitions spread to those that were not in attendance.

In 973, Michitsuna helped his team win the competition, maintaining his brilliance even when Kaneie noted that his son had not been training as seriously as of late.<sup>451</sup> Michitsuna must have been born with a keen knack for the discipline or he redoubled his efforts after his father's subtle rebuke because he continued to compete for years beyond the end of *Kagerō nikki*. In 988, when he was a Second Guard, he received rewards for hitting the target during the Archery Commencement Ceremony.<sup>452</sup> In 993, he participated twice in archery competitions with other higher-ranked courtiers, first in an unofficial capacity on the sixth day of the second month, and then again at the Courtier Prize Archery Competition on the twenty ninth of the third month.<sup>453</sup> In the latter instance, he was joined by two other high-profile marksmen in his half-brother, Michinaga, and their cousin, Korechika.<sup>454</sup> In 999, as First Guard of the Right, Michitsuna attended

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<sup>450</sup> Sonja Arntzen, *The Kagerō Diary*, 191–193.

<sup>451</sup> Arntzen, 321.

<sup>452</sup> *Shōyūki*, Eien 2 (988)/10/5.

<sup>453</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/2/6.

<sup>454</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/3/29.

to the Crown Prince's archery.<sup>455</sup> At that point, nearly thirty years had passed since he first competed in archery and yet his career was still framed around the bow and arrow.

While Michitsuna's genealogy granted him rapid promotion, it was his skill in archery and his camaraderie with Michinaga, no doubt fueled by their shared love of archery and horses, that steered Michitsuna's career. There is little evidence to suggest Michitsuna had much political savvy, and Sanesuke accused him of being virtually illiterate.<sup>456</sup> Despite this, Michitsuna was promoted over Sanesuke when both were eligible for First Councilor in 997.<sup>457</sup> This was notable because Sanesuke was older and had been a Second Councilor for longer, but Michinaga chose his half-brother. Michitsuna also held the post of First Guard of the Right before Sanesuke did. There was no reason given as to why he was chosen for the post, but his proficiency in archery and dance must have had a considerable impact. Perhaps there had been a belief that he could transfer those skills to the men underneath him so that the Guards would perform well at the various competitions. That was the case with his management of sumo as the Right wrestlers battled during his tenure, including twice making Emperor Ichijō cast his veto to change the first match.<sup>458</sup> Time and time again, Michitsuna proved that his best asset was not etiquette, poetry, or politics, but rather his competitive capital.

Michitsuna's career may have been defined by archery, but it was his two fellow competitors in 993, Michinaga and Korechika, who had the most famous, if apocryphal, archery competition between courtiers. In *The Great Mirror*, Michinaga appeared at the residence of his elder brother, Regent Michitaka, who was watching an archery competition organized by his son, Korechika. Michitaka invited Michinaga to duel Korechika and gave him the opportunity to shoot first despite Michinaga's inferior political post. Korechika lost the round by two shots. Michitaka then extended the competition another two rounds to allow Korechika to draw with Michinaga. Michinaga was annoyed by the extension, so he said that if his next arrow hit the mark then future emperors and imperial consorts would be his progeny before he loosed his arrow and hit the

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<sup>455</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōhō 1 (999)/2/9

<sup>456</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/6/15.

<sup>457</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/7/5.

<sup>458</sup> *Gonki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/7/30, 8/1, Chōhō 2 (1000)/7/27, 28, 8/12.



target. Korechika tried to counter, but his shot went wide. Then Michinaga said that if his next arrow flew true, he would become regent, and the arrow found its mark. Angered by both Michinaga's abilities and his proclamations, Michitaka halted the competition before Korechika could attempt his final shot.<sup>459</sup>

Whether it was lifelong mastery, like in the case of Michitsuna, or skilled shots serving as grand portents of things to come, archery remained an important discipline and a means by which courtiers of many ranks could increase their social and political standing with direct competitive capital. As there were three Prize Archery events in the year, courtiers and guard alike would have been incentivized to continually practice. Further, *Kagerō nikki* informs us that there were many trial competitions leading up to the larger events; and *The Great Mirror* proves that there were many unofficial competitions between courtiers, likely as a common form of entertainment. It is little wonder, then, how Prize Archery supplanted the Ritual Archery Demonstration when Prize Archery was so reflective of the competitive nature of the Heian court.

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Organized displays of archery were performed for far longer than sumo or horse racing due to archery's connection to the martial imperatives of the time and its practice by every level of courtier. The Ritual Archery Demonstration annually made the most important members of the court shoot after the emperor, showing their fealty by using the tools of war. For centuries, nobles and royalty alike honed their skills as archers despite many of them never using those skills at any point for battle. Ninmyō may have been the last emperor to be described as a prolific marksman, but Michitsuna's tutorship of future Emperor Sanjō in 999 proves that the skill was still valued by the upper echelon long thereafter. It is also evident with the many events, both factual and literary, of an elite courtier shooting an arrow to great political effect. The most obvious was the apocryphal story in *The Great Mirror*, but Korechika's actual fate was sealed by archery as well. He was exiled to *Dazaifu* after he shot upon the retired emperor over a lover's quarrel.

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<sup>459</sup> Translation of the story can be found in McCullough, *The Great Mirror*, 171.

Michitsuna's career was defined by archery, using that skill to gain competitive capital among his peers, retain close relations with his half-brother Michinaga, and climb the ranks to First Guard of the Right. Michitsuna's career despite his ceremonial, and potentially literal, illiteracy could be seen as an exemplar of Heian nepotism, but his promotions and posts being intrinsically tied to martial capabilities that he possessed demands a more nuanced view of his career. His archery prowess contradicts an assessment that Michitsuna was an incompetent man whose only merit was that he was fortunate enough to have had a father that became regent. No doubt his ties to Kaneie and Michinaga were the primary reason for the heights to which his career would climb, but his many appearances at archery competitions and his placement in posts related to archery defined his career trajectory. Moreover, there were other sons of Kaneie who were not as successful as Michitsuna even though Michitsuna's mother was not Kaneie's primary consort.

His archery ability must have also factored into why he was promoted ahead of Sanesuke to both First Councilor and First Guard of the Right. Nepotism cannot be the sole reason for this because Michitsuna was eventually replaced by the man that he leapfrogged. The reason for Michitsuna's departure from First Guard of the Right is unclear, though it seems likely that it was due to his inability or disinterest in the many logistical aspects of being First Guard. Unlike many courtiers who left the First Guard of the Right to either become First Guard of the Left or to take one of the top ministerial positions, Michitsuna never took those positions despite living another twenty years. He continued to serve in other capacities, but he never took a position with as much authority as First Guard of the Right again. His career should be seen, therefore, as a combination of fortunate genealogy and superlative archery skills—a prime example of competitive capital used at even the highest levels of the court.

As seen through the many examples in this chapter, the upper echelon had a strong preference for practicing standing archery over equestrian. Even Michinaga never combined his love of archery and horse riding—or if he did, it is not in any extant records. Equestrian archery, therefore, became the provenance of provincial elites. Naturally, horse-borne archery was a common spectacle at temples and shrines outside Kyoto where it survived for centuries beyond the annual competitions of the Heian court. It remained popular with the growing warrior class because it was a display of the skills that warriors honed.

That is another example of how physical competitions were connected to the political and social realities of the time. Because archery displays were consistently held for centuries before, during, and after the Heian period, they are the most telling barometers for institutional changes. There are three important conclusions to draw from the many forms of archery discussed in this chapter.

The first is that courtiers of every level practiced and enjoyed archery, showing that there were martial aspects to courtiers, and not just warriors and monks. This is consistent with courtier interest in viewing and participating in sumo matches, as discussed in Chapter 3. From this, the martial interests of courtiers, including those of the highest rank, cannot be ignored if one is trying to understand Heian courtier life.

The second is that equestrian archery changed and then grew in popularity and importance due to the changes in the warrior class. This was not only because the provincial warriors were the best archers, but because the new format and participants represented the changes in privatization at court. As the need for more frequent displays of martial prowess rose with the privatization of warriors in the periphery, events like horse-borne archery would become welcome displays for the participant, the audience, and potential employers. That connection with provincial warriors is the reason why horse-borne archery lasted longer than any of the other court competitions and why it was more popular outside the court than within.

The third, and perhaps most important to this study, is that after centuries of being the most important martial display, the Ritual Archery Demonstration was supplanted in every meaningful way by the Prize Archery Competition. Not only is this representative of the changes in competition at court, but it is also a reminder of why these physical competitions must be viewed with their spectatorial and competitive elements at the forefront. Although every event in the annual calendar had strong ceremonial motivations to its observance, physical competitions occupied a different sphere than the other annual events. This is most evident when the Ritual Archery Demonstration, an event steeped in the reaffirmation of imperial authority, became irrelevant, while Prize Archery only grew. Whether it was the annual competition on the eighteenth of the first month, high-ranking courtiers having some fun, or competing against one another in the more official Courtier Prize Archery Competition in the third month, the focus here

was more on entertainment and the joy of showing off one's own martial prowess than on the symbolic significance of the event.

## Chapter 6: The Competitors

Prominent Players		
Northern Fujiwara Branch	Emperors and Courtiers	Competitors
Kaneie	Emperor Ninmyō	Takakura no Fukushin (sumo)
Sanesuke	Ki no Masakata	Kisaichi no Munehira (sumo)
Michinaga		Ochi no Tsuneyo (sumo)
Korechika		Magami no Katsuoka (sumo)
Yorimichi		Agata no Takahira (sumo)
		Harima no Yasunobu (racing)
		Ō no Takefumi (racing)
		Shimotsuke no Kintoki (racing)
		Sumiyoshi no Tsunanushi (archery)
		Sakanoue no Kiyono (archery)

The previous chapters have focused on the hosts and spectators of physical competitions, relegating the competitors themselves to tertiary actors in political games played by those above their station. But the games played between the competitors, though more straightforward than those of emperors and ministers, irrevocably defined careers, livelihoods, and legacies. Because of the inextricable relationship between proper competition and entertainment for the spectators, the court handsomely rewarded those who could consistently compete at a high level. There were the immediate rewards they received at afterparties as well as some more impactful ones like promotions.

This chapter investigates the many ways that competitors enjoyed their successes, once again proving that physical competitions were competitive affairs. The latter half of the chapter looks at the competitive capital gained by the period's best competitors, showing the heights that competitive capital could take those that the court would not otherwise consider.

## Rewards

As seen in the previous three chapters, competitors at every physical competition discussed in this dissertation were given rewards by the mid-ninth century. Those older records unfortunately do not divulge the details of the rewards except for occasionally distinguishing between rewards for the winners and the losers. By the tenth century, detailed accounts became increasingly common, until the comprehensive lists in the diaries of Sanesuke and Michinaga showed the logic behind the reward system: shortly after the completion of a competition, the people involved in the event, whether spectator, facilitator, or competitor, received a reward based upon factors such as rank, duty, performance, and outcome. These rewards would often come from the Palace Storehouse Bureau (内蔵寮, *kuraryō*, see figure 2) following an annual competition, but the courtiers would also sometimes give personal gifts publicly or privately. Rank was the most important determinant of what gifts one would receive during competitive contests, but good performances were often met with extra boons. When the gifts came from the Palace Storehouse Bureau, their distribution followed precedent and was organized by the First Guard. Precedent had less impact on personal gifts, however, which were given on special occasions by the most powerful and wealthy members of the court.

The Extraordinary Sumo Competition of 907 is the first competition to list the rewards, setting the precedent for sumo competitions for the next century. Before the wrestlers arrived, confectionery and food were provided to the audience by the Palace Storehouse Bureau. Following the matches and some rounds of tug-of-war, each wrestler was given one roll (疋, *hiki*) of silk. The winners were given a bonus piece of cloth while the losers had to drink punitive spirits.<sup>460</sup> The following four Extraordinary Sumo Competitions in 950, 956, 1000, and 1002 followed the same format except they had to account for the growing prominence of Champions, so the Champions received an additional two rolls of crimson cloth and the cloth used in the tug-of-war bouts.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> *Saikyūki*, Engi 7 (907)/8/9.

<sup>461</sup> Tenryaku 4 (950)/8/10; *Kyūreki*, Tenryaku 10 (956)/8/18; *Gonki*, Chōhō 2 (1000)/8/12; Chōhō 4 (1002)/8/12.

The Extraordinary Sumo Competition held for Michinaga in 1007 set a new precedent in sumo that would continue through the eleventh century by giving different rewards to the Left and Right Champions. On this special day after all the wrestlers were treated to a meal, the Champion of the Left received two rolls of silk and twenty large animal hides while the Champion of the Right received two rolls of silk and a bow. The Contender of the Left and the Contender of the Right received one roll of silk and fifteen large hides each. The remaining wrestlers who competed received one roll of silk, ten large hides, and one bow. Finally, the wrestlers in attendance who did not participate, likely because there were only five matches that day, received one roll of silk for showing up.<sup>462</sup> The rewards given after the Annual Sumo Tournament of 1095 show that even the Annual Sumo Tournament followed a similar distribution to the athletes after the precedent set here in 1007.<sup>463</sup>

Annual competitions where the competitors were Guards, such as the Prize Archery Competition in the first month and third month, as well as the equine events of the 5/5 Festival, had a mostly standardized system of reward bequeathment. Every competitor gained a participatory reward plus a bonus reward for stellar play, though the size of the automatic reward was based on court rank. The detailed account of the Courtier Prize Archery Competition in the third month of 993, for example, saw the well-to-do archers split some silks from the Palace Storehouse Bureau with a bonus piece of women's clothing going to those who hit their mark. Third Guard of the Right Michitō received special commendation and extra gifts because he was the only one to hit the target with all three of his arrows.<sup>464</sup> Similarly, the Equestrian Archery Competition of 1016 gave each Third Guard and above a large article of clothing while the other participating archers shared six rolls of silk. Afterwards, eighty-five rolls of cloth were distributed to others involved in the event.<sup>465</sup>

As seen in these many examples, rolls of silk and cloth were the standard gifts for any physical competition. Gifts for the spectators were given on the day of the competition while the

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<sup>462</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 4 (1007)/8/20–21.

<sup>463</sup> *Chūyūki*, Kahō 2 (1095)/8/10.

<sup>464</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/3/29.

<sup>465</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 5 (1016)/5/6.

participants and facilitators waited until the afterparty with the notable exception of the Extraordinary Sumo Competitions which were often held after the afterparties. Despite the standardization, however, extenuating circumstances could alter what award was given. The rewards given at the afterparty following the 1013 Annual Sumo Tournament, for example, once again showed the nuance between a loss and victory overturned by veto. First, each victor on the Right received three rolls of cloth. Then, each wrestler who had his victory changed to a draw by veto, or who did not wrestle, received two rolls. Finally, each loser received one roll. Champion of the Right Tsuneyo did not receive his rewards for that tournament, however, because he fled back to Shikoku after his disastrous bout, thus forfeiting the one roll of silk he would have received for participating and the one roll of cloth he would have received because he lost. The forfeiture of his rewards was likely not a large financial blow to the man because he came from a prominent family in his home province and had been Champion for decades. It seems likely that his shame over his defeat outweighed the gifts he would receive.<sup>466</sup>

His actions do highlight that absence, whether forced or of one's own volition, disqualified a person from receiving rewards. The same thing happened to Masakata when he made those series of mistakes involving the defiled wrestler from Iyo province in 1026. At the afterparty following the Annual Sumo Tournament that year, Sanesuke awarded those under him with customary gifts. Fourth Guards received two rolls of silk and every Sixth Guard one roll of white silk. The Champion of the Right received one roll of red silk, and the three other wrestlers who were in attendance received three rolls of cloth for their victories. He then gave five rolls of cloth to the sumo attendants and gave four or two rolls to the remaining members of the Guard. Sanesuke made sure to write in his diary that Masakata was commanded to leave the afterparty without reward because he had yet to deliver a written apology for his neglect of his emissarial duties in the previous month.<sup>467</sup>

Personal gifts followed a looser set of guidelines to the official deployments of rewards from the Palace Storehouse Bureau, but Michinaga and Yorimichi blurred the line between the

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<sup>466</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/8/9.

<sup>467</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 3 (1026)/7/30, 8/7.



public and the personal. Their insistence on giving each spectator, facilitator, and competitor a gift conjured advantageous comparisons of their immense wealth and generosity to the stores that supplied the rewards for the large annual events they were imitating. For Michinaga, look no further than 1004 when Retired Emperor Kazan, the crown prince, all the members of the court, and even some monks accompanying the tonsured ex-emperor, traveled to *Tsuchimikado* to enjoy horse racing, equestrian archery, and lavish gifts.<sup>468</sup> In 1006, he once again held a similar grand horse race except this time the ex-emperor and his accompanying monks were replaced with Emperor Ichijō and his court ladies. Michinaga presented ten horses to the emperor to mark the occasion, as well as various articles of clothing to the officials, Guards, Watchmen, court ladies, Councilors, and Advisors present. The horses were symbolically the most powerful gifts of the evening because the horses he offered from his personal stables mimicked the tributary horses given to the emperor by top courtiers and governors collectively.<sup>469</sup> Not to be outdone, this was one area in which Yorimichi surpassed even his father. Not only did he improve upon his father's gifts at grand horse racing competitions with his own in 1024, he also prioritized throwing banquets with lavish gifts for sumo wrestlers. He even went as far as giving a horse to the Champion and Contender of the Right in 1005.<sup>470</sup>

Most courtiers were not wealthy enough to organize large physical competitions as the regental line of the Fujiwara could, but they still gave gifts to phenomenal competitors. The most common gift was an article of clothing. Sumo wrestlers could be buried under the amount of clothing awarded to them for spectacular throws like in the *Tales of Times now Past* tale when Tsuneyo died defeating Narimura or when the Champion of Left in 946 won a rare Championship bout fought during the annual tournament.<sup>471</sup> Personal rewards were also given in horse racing and archery. As discussed in Chapter 5, Michinaga and Sanesuke ridiculed First Guard of the Left Kinsue for giving an article of clothing to cowardly rider Takefumi at the grand horse racing competition of

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<sup>468</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 1 (1004)/5/27.

<sup>469</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/9/22.

<sup>470</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/8/10.

<sup>471</sup> *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 23.25; *Hokuzanshō*, Tengyō 9 (946)/7/28.

1014.<sup>472</sup> The source of their ridicule was not that a First Guard gave a gift to a rider, for that was common, but they believed Takefumi did not deserve a reward after his display. A few decades earlier, Kaneie gave gifts to the archery instructor after his son's performance at the Courtier Prize Archery Competition of 970.<sup>473</sup> Kaneie almost certainly gave rewards to his competitors for the sumo wrestling and horse racing competitions he held at his private estate as well, but no record disclosing that information remains.<sup>474</sup> Courtiers also gave gifts for the smallest competitions held for their entertainment, such as when Korechika arranged a private viewing of a bout between Champions in 994 and then gave the victorious Champion of the Left a gift, as discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>475</sup>

At all three levels—the annual competitions, the grand competitions held at courtier estates, and more intimate duels in front of a handful of courtiers—rewards were given based on a competitor's rank and the quality of his performance. This was yet another undeniable boon reaped from competitive capital. Further, the eventual dissolution of the concept of consolation prizes, as discussed in Chapter 4, proves that the court preferred proper competition and those that excelled in those competitions. Even as the consolation prizes became obsolete, losers still received inferior goods and were forced to drink the punitive spirits, showing once again that the results of the competition mattered to the participants and the audience members. Because of these humiliating situations, some competitors who did not want to endure the multiple levels of shame associated with losing tried to have their match end in a tie by submitting a petition for injury exemption.

### Exemptions

The Heian Court understood, much like modern sports teams do, that injuries can affect performance and sully the spectacle of competition in any physical or martial activity. In the

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<sup>472</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 3 (1014)/5/16.

<sup>473</sup> Sonja Arntzen, *The Kagero Diary*, 191–193.

<sup>474</sup> *Nihon kiryaku*, Eien 1 (987)/8/9; *Shōyūki*, Eiso 1 (889)/4/25–28.

<sup>475</sup> *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 5 (994)/12/12; *Kokon chomonjū*, 15.3.

modern world, it is common for athletes to not participate in a game if they have suffered a serious injury, to make sure it is not aggravated further. Although the Heian court did not share this modern sensibility concerning the potential lifelong impairment of a competitor, they would allow the performer to petition to be exempt from participating in his scheduled match due to an ailment. Once a petition for exemption was sent by the competitor, the courtiers in the audience would deliberate, sometimes for hours, and either accept or refuse the appeal. Acceptance, whether automatic or after a lengthy deliberation, disproportionately favored competitors for the Left. Like the imperial veto, these exemptions could be used to alter the outcome of a match or an entire competition, but the rarity with which they were used shows once again that the participants in physical competitions were far more likely to legitimately compete within the context of their society. With the rewards, both immediate and gradual, that a participant got for winning, it is of little surprise that most elected to win their respective competition rather than sit out the match.

Tracking these exemptions can be difficult because the terminology was not consistent across the different physical competitions. Most examples, particularly sumo, will have it stated clearly that there was a petition for exemption (申故障, *moshikoshō*) and whether it was accepted or denied, but that was not always the case. Further, the phrase translated here as petition for exemption was commonly used by courtiers to excuse themselves from some activity that had no relation to physical competition or injury. Still, the context in which these exemptions were made in the following examples is clear regardless of whether there was a rigid adherence to terminology. The petition was an attempt for a competitor to excuse themselves from a competition, and the petition was either automatically accepted or debated by the nobles in attendance.

When the exemption was accepted in a sumo or horse racing match, the bout was deemed a draw and they moved on to the next round. Prize Archery differed in that both sides retired an archer if a petition for exemption was granted. When the petition was refused in any physical competition, the competitor had to participate or forfeit his match. Sometimes the competitor petitioned again after his first attempt was rejected to mixed results. During the playoff matches of 1007, the Champion of the Left and the Contender of the Left had to petition three times each

before being granted an exemption.<sup>476</sup> During the horse races of 1096, however, the repeated pleas to be excused due to fatigue made by the rider representing the Left in the first race were rebuffed in equal measure.<sup>477</sup> The most stubborn stalemate between a reticent competitor and an uncaring audience was in 1088 when a wrestler for the Right had his petition denied fifteen times.<sup>478</sup>

Although the decisions made on these petitions for exemptions did not follow a strict code, there were biases that influenced the outcome like many of the other aspects of physical competitions in the Heian period. As is to be expected, there was far more leniency for Left participants than those on the Right. Using the known injury exemptions from all the sumo competitions from 987 to 1031, for example, the Left wrestlers successfully petitioned five out of six times whereas the petitioners on the Right failed more often than they succeeded.<sup>479</sup> Unlike the imperial veto, however, the Left could be denied, or the Right sanctioned, after a discussion.

The few remaining sources shed light onto the rationale behind the courtiers' decisions, showing that context played an important role, and that decisions were far from unanimous. During the long second match of the Annual Sumo Tournament in 993, for example, Wrestler of the Left Fumitoki bit the finger of Wrestler of the Right Okanobu and blood began to pour. Okanobu promptly tried to excuse himself from the match with a petition for exemption due to the injury. Sanesuke, then the First Watchman of the **Left**, stated that the basis for the petition by the Right Wrestler was clear because sumo requires the use of one's hands.<sup>480</sup> Rival First Councilor Korechika disagreed, stating that he saw in a previous diary that such a thing did not warrant an exemption. A large debate ensued, and they eventually accepted Okanobu's exemption, rendering the match a draw. The decision likely angered the hot-headed Korechika, but he may not have

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<sup>476</sup> *Chūyūki*, Kankō 4 (1007)/8/18.

<sup>477</sup> *Chūyūki*, Eichō 1 (1096)/4/27.

<sup>478</sup> *Chūyūki*, Kanji 2 (1088)/8/7.

<sup>479</sup> The years correspond the tournaments during the detailed years of *Shōyūki*.

<sup>480</sup> This is the most compelling entry to show that Sanesuke was always trying to be fair rather than simply complaining in later years because decisions like these and imperial vetoes affected the competitors under him.

been the only notable dissenter. Yukinari, who was Second Watchman of the Left in 993, wrote in his diary, perhaps in defiance of the decision, that the Left won eleven matches when Sanesuke reported that the Left won ten.<sup>481</sup> Sanesuke found himself on the losing end of a deliberation two decades later when a wrestler representing the Left got his exemption ratified in the 1013 tournament. There is no mention as to why he disputed the exemption, but his stance that the victory should have gone to the Right wrestler is clear.<sup>482</sup>

The severity of the injury likely determined the probability of the courtiers accepting a competitor's competition, but its effect was not absolute. When faced with a denial, some chose to forfeit. That was what one Right wrestler who suffered a groin injury in the exhibition matches chose to do after his petition was denied.<sup>483</sup> But not every participant who had his petition denied tolerated the automatic defeat, as some competitors persevered and participated in their match although injured. A Former Contender of the Right, for example, chose to fight when he was denied his exemption during the playoff matches of 1007 even though the Champion and Contender of the Left had theirs accepted in the first two bouts. The record of that day added that the Right Wrestler fought admirably.<sup>484</sup> He may have been inspired by the current Contender of the Right Magami no Katsuoka's impressive victory in the playoff matches of 1005 when he was forced to wrestle with an injury after two failed petitions.<sup>485</sup> More likely, he knew he needed to draw or win to keep pace with Katsuoka who had previously taken the title of Contender of the Right from him. The former Contender took his spot back when Katsuoka was promoted to Champion of the

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<sup>481</sup> Compare *Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/27 with *Gonki*, Shōryaku (993)/7/27. As the *Gonki* entry has very little information, it is impossible to tell why there was a discrepancy in total victories for the Left in the two diaries. It could be a simple clerical error, but the Annual Sumo Tournament of 993 is the only instance of conflicting results between diaries.

<sup>482</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/29.

<sup>483</sup> *Hokuzanshō*, Jōhei 6 (936)/7/28.

<sup>484</sup> *Chūyūki*, Kankō 4 (1007)/8/18.

<sup>485</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/7/29

Right, but Katsuoka successfully petitioned for an exemption from fighting the Contender in the exhibition matches of 1019.<sup>486</sup>

Exemptions were used often by many Champions and Contenders, and it may have been a tactical ploy to ensure they would not lose their title with a loss. Even though the petitions could be met with varied results, there was no penalty for making the petition, and the higher-ranked wrestlers would be permitted not to wrestle far more often than wrestlers without the ranks were. Some of the Champions and Contenders would push for exemptions during successive tournaments, and it seems this was tolerated to a point. One such example was the long-serving Champion of the Right Ochi no Tsuneyo who held the position before Katsuoka. A decade into his career atop the wrestlers for the Right, Tsuneyo was allowed to not participate in the playoff matches of 1006 because he was mourning the death of his mother. During an Extraordinary Sumo Competition in 1007, he was again released from fighting after petitioning five times.<sup>487</sup>

In 1013, however, he complained to First Guard of the Right Sanesuke that he was an old man now and he had injured his hand after falling off his horse on his way to the capital, trying to excuse himself once again from competing. He was met with little sympathy from Sanesuke and Michinaga, both of whom wrote in their diaries that Tsuneyo looked old and weak. Michinaga disparaged the man further by saying that the once-powerful wrestler had a balding, white head. The Champion's multiple petitions for exemption during the playoffs were denied, he was soundly defeated, and Katsuoka gained his title.<sup>488</sup> While Champions and Contenders employing this technique may not follow modern ideas of sportsmanship, it demonstrates the importance of winning to these wrestlers, or more specifically, to what lengths some went to not lose. It should

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<sup>486</sup> For the 1019 exhibition matches, see Sakai, 57. The primary source I found does not definitively say which wrestler asked for the exemption.

<sup>487</sup> His prospective opponent in that match, Champion of the Left Mitsuharu Tokimasa, had successfully called off their playoff fight almost a week prior after three petitions. See *Chūyūki*, Kankō 4 (1007)/8/18; Kankō 4/8/23.

<sup>488</sup> *Gonki*, Kankō 3 (1006)/8/1; *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/25–Chōwa 2/8/1; *Midō kanpaku ki*, Chōwa 2/8/1.

be noted that similar tactics are still employed today by many title holders in combat sports, including modern sumo and boxing.

In competitions in which the competitors were Guards, rank was likely the most important factor in the acceptance of vetoes. Unlike in sumo, all the participants in the races and archery contests were members of the Guard or Watch with accompanying ranks and titles. The rider who was rejected in 1096, for example, was a lowly Sixth Guard of the Left. This low status worked against him even though he was representing the Left that received far more leniency than the Right, while the highest ranked Guards had their petitions accepted every time, Left or Right. In Prize Archery, for example, the emperor nominally decided whether to accept the petition, but there are no records of the emperor denying the petition. This seems to have been because the petitions were discussed prior to the competition. In two such cases, 1005 and 1121, the Left and Right petitioned simultaneously, which also suggests that the other side had to retire an archer to keep the teams even.<sup>489</sup>

One caveat to the automatic system was that the competitor still needed to file the petition for exemption even if there was no need for courtier deliberation or imperial approval. For example, a Second Guard of the Left was excused without justification from the Equestrian Archery Competition that followed the horse races in 944 with no incident.<sup>490</sup> Conversely in 1102, a Fourth Guard of the Left was harshly criticized by Munetada for not participating in the Equestrian Archery Competition without having first sent in a petition. Munetada went on to critique the entire Left team after their mediocre display, but singled out that Fourth Guard who did not prepare his petition. Like many of the other cases of courtier impropriety in this study, there is sadly no record of whether the Guard was punished for the indiscretion.<sup>491</sup> Whatever the case, it seems unlikely that Fourth Guard was promoted for his martial skills. That was not the case for many Guards before him, however.

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<sup>489</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kankō 2 (1005)/1/18; *Noriyumi burui ki* (賭射部類記), Hōan 2 (1121)/3/22.

<sup>490</sup> *Kyūreki*, Tengyō 7 (944)/5/5–6.

<sup>491</sup> *Chūyūki*, Kōwa 4 (1102)/閏 5/25.

## Guard Promotions

As seen through previous chapters, multiple men with exceptional martial talents were rapidly promoted as early as the eighth century. While their status was not purely defined by their performance in physical competitions, it was one of, if not the, largest contributing factors to their station and to their memory. The first line in the eulogy for Sumiyoshi no Tsunanushi remarked on his archery. The eulogy of wrestling prodigy Takakura no Fukushin stated the emperor personally ordered him to receive a post in the Guard after hearing of his victory in street sumo. In both of those cases, the men were also granted the right to change their family name to a more prestigious one as they climbed the ranks. The eulogy of Sakanoue no Kiyono, already from a prestigious family, read:<sup>492</sup>

Kashō 3 (850)/8/4, (sr. 4<sup>th</sup> higher) First Watchman of the Right Sakanoue no Kiyono died. He was the fourth son of (sr. 2<sup>nd</sup>) First Councilor Sakanoue no Tamuramaro [758–811].<sup>493</sup> As was family tradition, he was unparalleled in martial prowess. When [deceased] Retired Emperor Saga became crown prince [806], an eighteen-year-old [Kiyono] served as Fourth Steward of the Crown Prince Office. At that time, the emperor [Heizei] went to the Hall of Martial Virtues for a special examination (特簡, *tokukan*) of the twenty best equestrian archers in the realm.<sup>494</sup> After observing his genius, Kiyono alone was selected for Fourth Steward of the Crown Prince Office. Then, it was ordered that standing archers Sami no Koshikamaro, Iitaka no Tsune'imaro, and Kiyono were to compete. Of the three, Kiyono was the best, and he gained the emperor's favor...<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> *Nihon kōki*, Kashō 3 (850)/8/4.

<sup>493</sup> Tamuramaro was a famous warrior who led the final large expedition to quell the Emishi forces in northeastern Honshu. See Friday, *Hired Swords*, 47–49.

<sup>494</sup> If successful, the recipient could gain a post that was above what his rank typically allowed.

<sup>495</sup> The rest of the eulogy detailed his various promotions in an illustrious career, including taking his father's old post of General of the Pacification and Defense of the North.



Although the necessity for these skills abated during the relatively peaceful Heian period, martial practices endured as an integral aspect of Heian life in no small part because of the entertainment provided by spectatorial competition. Many Guards continued to be promoted based largely on their competitive prowess rather than their competency with performing the ever-expanding list of non-martial duties that were assigned to some of their fellow Guardsman such as Masakata.

Michinaga was particularly fond of promoting Guards for horse racing and both forms of competitive archery. He promoted Fifth Guard of the Right Ō no Takefumi to Fourth Guard of the Left in 1006 purely on the basis of his horse racing.<sup>496</sup> The promotion had the added bonus of moving Takefumi from representing the Right to representing Michinaga's Left. That fact must have fueled Michinaga's rancor with Takefumi's shameful display at the grand horse racing competition in 1013, as described in Chapter 4. On the same day in 1006, he promoted another rider to Fifth Guard for the same reason. In 1018, while drunk, Michinaga ordered the promotion of a Seventh Guard to Sixth Guard because of his many years of excellence at equestrian archery. The order had annoyed Sanesuke because there were no vacant spots in the Sixth Guard, and once one had opened, the Guard was serving in Iyo. The order finally went through in 1019, and the Guard was promoted to Sixth Guard.<sup>497</sup>

Guards could also receive a special title called a Sumo Guard (相撲近衛, *sumai no konoe*). These Sumo Guards differed from ordinary Guards who performed sumo wrestling in unofficial capacities such as when Emperor Shirakawa ordered the *Takiguchi* Guard to do so in 1098. Sumo Guards regularly performed in the Annual Sumo Tournament and kept the title through years of service.<sup>498</sup> This title likely stemmed from the 728 decree for governors to employ sumo wrestlers, but the first record of a Sumo Guard was during the reign of Ninmyō. That record was also the oldest to use the title of Champion, as there was a match between a named Champion of Left and

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<sup>496</sup> *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kankō 2 (1006)/9/14.

<sup>497</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 3 (1019)/2/11.

<sup>498</sup> *Chūyūki*, Jōtoku 2 (1098)/8/3.

Champion of the Right.<sup>499</sup> The next entry for Sumo Guards came in 918 when many were jailed for being tardy to the tournament.<sup>500</sup> In 997, First Guard of the Right Michitsuna jailed a Sumo Guard for a similar reason when that Guard temporarily escaped custody after arriving late.<sup>501</sup> Sanesuke spoke often of two Sumo Guards: the wrestler who commented on his loss in Sanjō's 1013 tournament, Takahira, and another Sumo Guard named Fujii no Shigeyori. Shigeyori wrestled for the Right for many years, including the 1000 tournament when the imperial veto ripped away his victory and the same 1013 tournament where Shigeyori was allowed to keep his victory.<sup>502</sup> Like Takahira, Shigeyori no doubt competed in the tournaments between those two dates and beyond. He is listed as a wrestler for *Dazaifu* in 1025 and again in 1027 when he is replaced because of his death.<sup>503</sup>

By Sanesuke's time, Sumo Guards existed outside the typical structure of ranked wrestlers. This was most evident in references to afterparties where they received rewards that differed from the ones the other wrestlers received, such as when Shigeyori was the only wrestler to receive horses in 1013 for being a Sumo Guard who won his match.<sup>504</sup> Despite this, there is no evidence that they performed any guard duties other than sumo wrestling. There are over twenty references to Takahira and Shigeyori in Sanesuke's diary, for example, all of which pertain to sumo. Sanesuke had a closer relationship with Takahira than any other wrestler in his diary, so it is possible that Sumo Guards held special roles as liaisons or managers of the wrestlers while they were in the capital.

The careers of Shigeyori and Takahira differed from other wrestlers. They were prominent wrestlers whose post within the Guard was tied solely to their sumo ability. Despite their abilities, they never attained the title of Contender or Champion, suggesting their place in the wrestling

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<sup>499</sup> The exact year was not included, but Ninmyō's reign was from 833–850. *Sandai jitsuroku*, Ninwa 2 (886)/5/28.

<sup>500</sup> *Ononomiya nenchū gyōji*, Engi 18 (918)/5/16.

<sup>501</sup> *Gonki*, Chōtoku 3 (997)/8/28.

<sup>502</sup> *Gonki*, Chōhō 2 (1000)/7/27; *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/7/29.

<sup>503</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 2 (1025)/7/25, Manju 4 (1027)/7/22.

<sup>504</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/8/9.

hierarchy was due to a combination of natural talent and being from a privileged family in the provinces. To understand their place within the sumo hierarchy, however, a further inspection of that complex system is required.

### **Sumo Promotions**

The names of wrestlers were prefaced by one of four titles: wrestler (相撲人, *sumai bito*), Sumo Guard, Contender, or Champion. The difference between a wrestler and a Sumo Guard was never explicitly explained, but the nuance seems to have been that all wrestlers were part of the Guard, perhaps among the hundreds of unranked attendants, while Sumo Guards held the highest positions within that group. The evidence suggests that becoming a Sumo Guard took a combination of wrestling proficiency and a family background with influence in the provincial hierarchy. That would explain why they were often described as great wrestlers without necessarily holding the title of Contender or Champion, and why there is no record of any wrestlers being promoted to Sumo Guard.

Contenders were the principal rivals of Champions because only they could challenge the Champion for his position. If a Contender defeated the Champion, and the Champion did not retire, the two men swapped titles for the next tournament. The title of Contender was difficult to maintain because they were not afforded the same leniency in injury exemptions as the Champions were. One benefit the Contenders had over other wrestlers was that they would return after a loss as competitors for the following tournament far more often than the rank-and-file wrestlers did. Contenders also received more rewards than normal wrestlers at the afterparty, but fewer than the Champions. Some Contenders, like Katsuoka, endured long careers trying to surpass the Champion before finally breaking through. Most Contenders were not as prolific as Katsuoka, however, and there was rapid turnover at the position. Naturally, the competitive capital of Contenders was more muted than that of the Champions because the only Contenders who were remembered favorably in contemporary diaries or subsequent literature became Champions at some point.

Champion was the superlative title a wrestler could achieve in terms of prestige, reward, and leniency towards injury exemptions. The first record that used the terminology for Champions was during Ninmyō's reign, but it is unclear whether it was being used as a title at the time, or was simply a descriptor, because the direct translation of the term used for Champion is "best hand" (最手, *hote*). The first definitive Champion came a few decades later when Mononobe no Munenari received a Champion Directive (最手官符, *hote kanpu*) in 896.<sup>505</sup> He kept his title until 912, with one confirmed victory in 907, though he certainly participated in the other seven tournaments between 896 and 912.<sup>506</sup> In 912, he was awarded one of the few spots in the Seventh Guard, setting the precedent for future long-tenured Champions to be promoted to that position. Champion Mibu no Yasuo followed a similar career path, gaining the title of Champion in 921 before receiving the Champion Directive in 927 and then rising to Seventh Guard in 933.<sup>507</sup>

To complicate matters further, if a wrestler was in the top spot for only one tournament season, he was called a Champion during that tournament, but he did not have his name join the lists of Champions. If he successfully defended his title at the following tournament, he was then considered a Champion. He could still lose the title quite easily, though his name was forever remembered among the greatest wrestlers of his time. If a Champion had continued success, then he was granted the Champion Directive. One Champion, Satsuma no Toshio, potentially had the quickest turnaround, as he was first called Champion in 936 before receiving his directive and his promotion to Seventh Guard following the 937 tournament.<sup>508</sup> He most likely had been Champion for longer, but there are no records of the more recent tournaments prior to 936. Every other Champion who was awarded the directive maintained multiple years at the top spot. Eleventh-century Champion of the Right Tsuneyo, for example, was Champion first in 993 before losing it in 994. He regained it by 997, receiving his directive in 1003.<sup>509</sup> His successor, Champion of the Right

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<sup>505</sup> *Saikyūki*, Kanpyō 8 (896)/8/20.

<sup>506</sup> *Chūyūki*, Engi 7 (907)/8/9.

<sup>507</sup> *Ononomiya nenchū gyōji*, Engi 21 (921)/8/7, Enchō 5 (927)/9/28, Jōhei (933)/9/6.

<sup>508</sup> *Saikyūki*, Jōhei 6 (936)/7/28; *Ononomiya nenchū gyōji*, Jōhei 7 (937)/7/28.

<sup>509</sup> *Gonki*, Shōryaku 4 (993)/7/28; *Shōyūki*, Chōhō 5 (1003)/8/10.

Katsuoka, received his directive five years after becoming Champion following many years as Contender of the Right.<sup>510</sup>

The directive served three functions. The first was as a necessary step for the Champion to be promoted to Seventh Guard as every Champion who was promoted to Seventh Guard received the directive. The second was that it made the Champion's position safer. He may have been immune to losing his position with anything other than an outright loss in an exhibition match, allowing him to lose to the other Champion in the playoff without being asked to give up his title. The third was that the bearer could use the injury exemption more freely. Consequently, the directive afforded prominent wrestlers more control and stability, but that path to the directive was not a foregone conclusion in such a competitive landscape where one loss could upend a Champion's trajectory.

Keeping the top position was a precarious proposition for Champions who had not received the directive. Champion of the Right Tsuneyo's ability to stave off Contender of the Right Katsuoka's ascension for a decade was partly rooted in Tsuneyo claiming the Champion Directive in 1003. The rivalry between the best wrestlers on the Left during the same period was far more contentious because no one maintained the top positions for long. During the decades that Tsuneyo or Katsuoka were at least Contender of the Right (987–1031), the Left went through a series of wrestlers clamoring for the top two spots. The timeline of those few decades in sumo is hard to follow with so many names, but the data is crucial to understanding how competitive the sumo tournament was. The chart below shows every tournament record that listed the Champions and Contenders that year from 987 when Tsuneyo first appeared as a Contender to 1018 when Katsuoka received the directive.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> *Shōyūki*, Kan'nin 2 (1018)/8/6.

<sup>511</sup> There were eight other tournaments during this period with scant information.

Champions and Contenders 897–1018				
Year	Left Champion	Left Contender	Right Champion	Right Contender
897	Kisaichi no Munehira	Tomo no Setayo	Ki no Toyohide	Ochi no Tsuneyo
993	Munehira	[unknown]	Tsuneyo	Hata no Tsunemasa
994	Kimikobe no Tsunetoki	[unknown]	Miyake no Tokihiro	[unknown]
997	Wanibe no Hisamitsu	Tsunetoki	Tsuneyo	Tsunemasa
1000	Ōkake no Fumitoki	Miharu no Tokimasa	Tsuneyo	Tsunemasa
1003	Hisamitsu	Mimana no Shigeki	Tsuneyo	Tsunemasa
1004	Tsunetoki	Tokimasa	Tsuneyo* <sup>512</sup>	[unknown]
1005	Tokimasa	Tsunetoki	Tsuneyo*	[unknown]
1006	Tokimasa*	Shigeki	Tsuneyo	Magami no Katsuoka
1007	Tokimasa	Tsunetoki	Tsuneyo	Katsuoka
1013	Tokimasa	Tsunetoki	Tsuneyo	Katsuoka
1018	Tsunetoki	Minaga no Tadayori	katsuoka	Tsunemasa

For the sake of brevity, I will forego a year-by-year retelling of each tournament, as a close inspection of the turnover in this chart will definitively show that the Annual Sumo Tournament was deeply competitive. Unlike the Guards who filled the ranks in horse racing and archery, most wrestlers did not have a rank that could buoy them after a disappointing loss. Wrestlers were rewarded solely for their ability to defeat their opponents, and as the late tenth and early eleventh-century standings prove, that was no easy feat. Moreover, there is no evidence to question the competitiveness of sumo wrestlers themselves from the middle of the ninth century despite the use of imperial vetoes. There is evidence, however, affirming that the same level of competition remained until at least the early twelfth century. *Chūyūki* has a list of every Champion, Left and Right, from the beginning of Ichijō's reign in 987 to 1111 in chronological order.<sup>513</sup> During that span, there were sixteen Champions of the Left and fourteen Champions of the Right.

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<sup>512</sup> The asterisk denotes that the wrestler was not listed in the record, but they are likely in that spot due to the records before and after that year.

<sup>513</sup> *Chūyūkiburui* (中右記部類) 7.

It is from this list that I extrapolate some of the nuances of the Champion title. For example, the list does not include Hisamitsu even though he was the top wrestler on the Left at two tournaments because they were not consecutive. This rule also explains why Tsunetoki was listed after Tokimasa despite Tsunetoki being Champion of the Left once before Tokimasa. Adding this long list of wrestlers to the many men who could not hold their position as Champion, like Hisamitsu, bolsters the argument for sumo wrestling's competitiveness over more than two centuries. No wonder those who dominated the contentious courtyard of the Southern Hall received so many gifts from courtiers in the audience and inspired numerous tales of their feats of strength and skill for centuries thereafter.

### Competitive Capital

As previously discussed, victorious competitors enjoyed many benefits during the Heian period, including gifts, reputation, and promotions, but there were two other boons reserved for those with continued success—land and memory. There was, of course, the land benefits Guards received when they rose in rank due to competition; two examples were wrestler Fukushin and archer Kiyono whose holdings would have expanded exponentially during their long careers. Champions, Contenders, and some other prominent wrestlers were also given tax-exempt land (免田, *menden*) in their home provinces by the court. The first record of this was following an Extraordinary Sumo Competition in 907 when Minister of the Left Fujiwara no Tokihira ordered that a rice field be given to a destitute wrestler.<sup>514</sup> Future grants of land had less to do with the wrestler's finances and more to do with his wrestling. In 1027, Champion Katsuoka and Sumo Guard Takahira joined three wrestlers of the Left in receiving untaxed land.<sup>515</sup> In 1031, Katsuoka's successor received the same deal.<sup>516</sup> These untaxed lands could be added to the provincial influence many wrestlers already had.

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<sup>514</sup> *Saikyūki*, Engi 7 (907)/8/12.

<sup>515</sup> *Shōyūki*, Manju 4 (1027)/7/29–8/1.

<sup>516</sup> *Shōyūki*, Chōgen 4 (1031)/8/10.

While there is little quantifiable data concerning influence in the provinces, the reputation of a proficient competitor at court is undeniable. That sterling reputation turned into memory, and for a select few, legacy. On the list of notable people during the reign of Ichijō, there is a section devoted to those with unparalleled strength.<sup>517</sup> Each name under that heading is a Champion or Contender on the chart in the previous section. Notably, the wrestlers are not listed in chronological order, but rather in order of ability. The first name on the list was rightfully undefeated Munehira, whose name was still being invoked over two hundred years after his final match when a powerful wrestler is said to have been as strong as him in 1219.<sup>518</sup>

Munehira is also the protagonist of his own fantastic tale in *Tales of Times now Past*. One day in his home province of Suruga, he and some hunters fell a deer across the bay, so he swims to the deer, picks it up, and starts swimming back towards the hunters. As he is swimming, a massive shark appears and tries to take Munehira and the deer. The wrestler baits the shark by letting the predator take smaller portions of the deer while he continues to swim until he and the shark are near the coast. Once at the coast, Munehira stands in the shallow water and waits for the shark to attack once more. The shark obliges and Munehira uses that opportunity to slide his hands under the shark's gills and throw the creature onto land. The story concludes with the Champion explaining to the stunned hunters that it was his strength and his understanding of the predator's habits that kept him alive.<sup>519</sup>

That story began by describing Munehira's unbeaten record and how he overtook another powerful Champion to claim his title. That Champion, Tomo no Setayo, was the third name on the list of men of unparalleled strength. The fourth name on that list was Tsuneyo who was also at the center of many tales. In one of them, he squeezes the head of Hisamitsu so hard that the lesser wrestler falls unconscious. Once awake, Hisamitsu is ordered to resume the match with Tsuneyo, but Hisamitsu refuses even after the First Guard of the Left threatens to imprison him. A whole chapter could be written on the many sumo stories across the didactic tales of the twelfth and

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<sup>517</sup> *Zoku honcho ōjō den*, Kankō 8 (1011)/6/22.

<sup>518</sup> *Zoku kojidan* (続古事談), 4.21.

<sup>519</sup> *Konjaku monogatari shū* 23.23.



thirteenth centuries as there are fourteen distinct tales in just two collections: *Tales of Times now Past* and *Notable Tales Old and New*.<sup>520</sup> The author of *Notable Tales Old and New* devotes a chapter to sumo wrestlers, and he prefaces the stories with this passage.<sup>521</sup>

Even though all the sumo Champions and Contenders on the Left and Right were powerful, there were many obstacles for Champions. Long ago, the tournament was held in the imperial palace, [and they] requested powerful men from the provinces. It [the tournament] ended before the Angen era (1175–1177), so I can regrettably only say what I have heard.

The next group on the list of notable people during Ichijō's reign were Guards. The first guard listed is Fourth Guard Shimotsuke no Shigeyuki who excelled at racing and archery towards the end of the tenth century.<sup>522</sup> The next name was Fourth Guard Owari no Kanetoki who was such a good racer that Regent Kaneie saw fit to reward him handsomely not once, but twice, including giving Kanetoki the clothes off his back.<sup>523</sup> The third and fourth names were Fourth Guards Yasunobu and Takefumi who have already been discussed extensively. All four of those Guards were first recorded in diaries as Fifth Guards before they won some competitions and were promoted to Fourth Guard. The final two Guards mentioned on the list were the low-ranking but talented riders Seventh Guard Owari no Kaneko and Ninth Guard Shimotsuke no Kintoki.<sup>524</sup> Clearly, what made these Guards exceptional was their abilities in competitions rather than their ranks. That is why a Seventh Guard and a Ninth Guard would be considered exemplary Guards worthy of record instead of the many men who served the Guard at higher posts during the three decades of Ichijō's reign.

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<sup>520</sup> For example, *Konjaku monogatari shū* 23.21–25.

<sup>521</sup> *Kokon chomonjū*, 15.1.

<sup>522</sup> *Shōyūki*, Eiso 1 (989)/4/28, *Shōryaku* 4 (993)/3/29.

<sup>523</sup> *Shōyūki*, Eien 2 (988)/11/7, Eiso 1 (989)/9/19.

<sup>524</sup> Kintoki was the rider who bested Takefumi and raced Yasunobu to a draw in Chapter 4. *Shōyūki*, Chōwa 2 (1013)/9/13.

Like the wrestlers, many of those Guards inspired dashing moments of equine excellence in tales told centuries later. Kintoki amazes Michinaga with his speed in a story in *Kojidan* that also sees Sanesuke give the Ninth Guard a valuable gift for winning Michinaga's challenge.<sup>525</sup> The first two riders mentioned on the list, Shigeyuki and Kanetoki, were tied to one another in three different stories. One comical story from *Tales of Times now Past* sees the two men in the provinces as tax collectors. Stories of their prowess cause some awe and fear among the locals, but the men must make a hasty retreat after drinking alcohol that the governor laces with a laxative.<sup>526</sup> There are also two records of them racing one another. In one story, Shigeyuki is described as having been a deft hand with trained and wild horses while Kanetoki is masterful with trained horses but could not handle wild ones. Kanetoki courageously rides a famous wild horse that he cannot fully control when he races Shigeyuki and loses. As this is the first time Kanetoki has lost a race, he does not know the proper procedure.<sup>527</sup> In a similar story in *Notable Tales Old and New*, the two men race each other when Regent Michitaka holds some races in 991.<sup>528</sup> Unfortunately for Kanetoki, his horse loses his bit when Kanetoki pulls on the reins, affording Shigeyuki the easy win. In the aftermath of the race, however, the courtier's attention is on Kanetoki, as the perennial victor asks, "where do you go when you lose?" The courtiers are moved, and they give him gifts even though he lost.

Guards, like wrestlers, had their careers and their legacies defined by their performances at competitions. The positions that wrestlers and Guards occupied on the list of notable people during Ichijō's reign further exemplifies the cultural capital physical competitors garnered. The list ran in descending order of importance with the following categories: crown princes, senior ministers, nobility, courtiers, musicians, writers, poets, (one) painter, dancers, men of unparalleled strength, Guards, diviners, Gensō monks, Shingon monks, teachers, scholars, doctors, lawyers, Confucian scholars, and finally warriors. From this, it is easy to see just how valuable competitors were to the court. Royalty and nobility obviously lead the list, followed by the musicians, poets,

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<sup>525</sup> *Kojidan* (古事談) 6.68.

<sup>526</sup> *Konjaku monogatari* 28.5.

<sup>527</sup> *Konjaku monogatari* 23.26.

<sup>528</sup> *Kokon chomonjū*, 14.1.

and dancers that conform to most historiographical images of the Heian period. After them, but before most other members of the literati or religious spheres, are two groups of men known for their physical prowess in the spectatorial competitions that entertained and thrilled the court for centuries.

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There was an intricate set of rules and precedents to which competitors and the other courtiers had to adhere. The multifaceted systems for rewards and exemptions show years of thought put into how to properly conduct physical spectacles at court. In both systems, the competitor's rank determined the size of his rewards for participating and the leniency he was granted to not perform. When this fact is couple with the court's insistence that the Left receive better treatment than the Right, it is easy to see why most scholars have deemed physical competitions in the Heian period to be non-competitive activities that served solely ceremonial and ritualistic purposes. A deeper analysis of both rewards and exemptions, however, proves that winning and losing was a pivotal component of the annual physical competitions. The court gave extra rewards for hitting the target or defeating an opponent in the closest estimation to fair play that they had, thus incentivizing competitors to perform well. This desire led to specialization, as discussed in previous chapters.

Conversely, performing poorly could have disastrous effects on a competitor's position, both within the competition hierarchy and at court, so competitors were given the option to excuse themselves from the chance of losing. Notably, the higher-ranked Guards of Prize Archery and horse racing had their petitions accepted at a far higher rate than lower-ranked Guards regardless of skill—a clear example of elitist favoritism. That was not the case in sumo, however, where those who held the title of Champion or Contender were the ones who would most often have their exemptions accepted. Those titles were only achieved when a wrestler consistently performed well in tournaments, as one loss could unseat him. This leniency, therefore, was tied to consistent performance rather than court rank outside competition, making it another form of competitive capital accrued fairly.

Winning led to an improved position, including more rewards, benefits, and recognition at court that was converted into promotions, reputation, and legacy. Those last two, reputation and legacy, can be the hardest to define, but texts like the list of notable people during the reign of Ichijō and the many tales told centuries later help to qualify the important place competitors held within the court. The only common attribute between the six men listed as the best Guards during Ichijō's reign, for example, was that they were the best competitors of their age. It was clearly not rank, as seventh and Ninth Guards are included when there were over forty men in the positions above them at any one time. It was clearly not their ability to perform rituals or logistics because Yasunobu, who is on the list, was not a model Guard outside horse racing while Masakata, the most referenced Guard in Sanesuke's diary, is not included. This contradicts the common conclusion that the Guard lost its martial focus as the Heian period progressed. In reality, ceremonial and logistic concerns were added to the Guard, but they never lost their connection to martial practices. The story of the courtiers being moved by a rider not knowing the proper protocol for when a rider loses definitively shows that the competitive spirit outweighed the otherwise imposing ceremonial one.

That story and others are recorded in collections of tales written hundreds of years after these men died. That means that the stories of these competitor's exploits, however embellished, persisted, whether with written records or oral storytelling, for writers to chronicle later. One of the more interesting facts of these stories of Guards and wrestlers is that most of them involve competitors who competed prior to the mid-eleventh century. In *Tales of Times Now Past*, for example, every story about sumo involves a wrestler before the mid-eleventh century. *Notable Tales Old and New* is more balanced, with half of the stories about wrestlers before the mid-eleventh and the other half taking place as late as a wrestling match between two warriors under Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199).

Being remembered hundreds of years later is a particularly impressive achievement for wrestlers. They were provincial elites that, according to many characterizations of the Heian court, the courtiers should have looked down upon and disregarded as nothing but a tributary item or a body used to perform some ritualistic function. Instead, stories of the wrestlers' feats of strength and skill were written down by the enthralled courtiers that enjoyed watching these men from the

provinces wrestle. The court not only handsomely rewarded these great wrestlers, but they immortalized them in the stories they told one another about a group of people that were far removed from the central elite. Other than Fukushin in the eighth century, there are no records of wrestlers advancing beyond the Seventh Guard after achieving the Sumo Directive, and yet many were remembered. Munehira remained the standard for superhuman strength for centuries. In the fourteenth-century tale *Taiheiki*, a contemporary warrior is said to be the descendant of another great tenth-century sumo wrestler because the warrior is so strong and good at wrestling that he can defeat his opponents with one hand.<sup>529</sup> That is a four-hundred-year-old reference made to impress upon the reader the skills of a contemporary warrior. Clearly, wrestlers enjoyed a level of celebrity otherwise unheard of from men of their status in the provinces. The sole determinant of that celebrity was their ability to compete. The same is true of the Guards with their feats of archery and horsemanship as competition defined their lives, their status, and their memory. Men whose status in life would have otherwise compelled contemporary authors to disregard them, for future chroniclers to have never heard of them, and for modern historians to have no evidence from which to learn about them are instead immortalized in writing solely because they were the best competitors of their age.

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<sup>529</sup> Helen Craig McCullough, *The Taiheiki: A Chronicle of Medieval Japan* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1959), 227.

## Conclusion

Organized physical competitions at court were one of the few continuous threads that ran across the Heian period, as they were a staple of courtier life from at least the seventh century until 1174.<sup>530</sup> Akin to the power of the courtiers in attendance, physical competitions evolved over the course of centuries in waves rather than sharp points. And yet, the aggregate of those minor changes culminated in major departures from previous iterations, with many of these shifts coinciding with changes in the greater court culture. That is not to say that the evolutions within physical spectacle ushered in new court policies, but rather that physical competitions were so interwoven into the large cultural tapestry that made up the court that any change to the tapestry invariably altered its most tenacious strands. In this way, physical competitions become a measure by which one can qualify many of the propositions made in institutional and cultural histories of the period.

Despite the breadth of primary sources describing these physical competitions from which historians could draw, physical competitions have received surprisingly little academic attention to date. To rectify that gap in academic scholarship, this study has analyzed the many ways that physical competitions affected the political, social, and economic positions of men at the Heian court, both as individuals and as members of their social group. Prior to this study, academic considerations of physical competitions in the Heian period have been brief and fall within two limited conceptualizations.

The first is part of a larger history of a particular physical competition throughout Japanese history. The best examples of this are the multiple histories of sumo wrestling through time, like the work of Wakamori Tarō, Nitta Ichirō, or P.L. Cuyler. While their books include sections on sumo during the Heian period, the segments are written with limited context and are used to merely set the stage for the later developments in the sport.<sup>531</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> 1174 is the final year in which the Annual Sumo Tournament was held.

<sup>531</sup> See Wakamori Tarō, *Sumo ima mukashi*, 15–31; Nitta Ichirō, *Sumo: sono rekishi to gihō*, 26–49; P.L. Cuyler, *Sumo*, 21–32.

The second is historians who have described the physical competitions in the context of the many annual events and rituals that legitimized and reinforced the theatre state of the Heian era. These academics, most notably Obinata Katsumi, rightfully stress the religious and ritualistic aspects of physical competitions as they relate to the socio-political relationship between the emperor, the court, and those over whom those two entities rule.<sup>532</sup> It is true that martial acts that represent capitulation to organized authority, such as the Ritual Archery Demonstration and the Annual Sumo Tournament, were intrinsically tied to the many other annual events that served a similar function; but this categorization strips physical competitions of the unique attributes that differentiate them from other annual events, while also perpetuating the view that courtiers were concerned with nothing beyond the ritual.

I will briefly reiterate how the activities I have called physical competitions—sumo wrestling, horse racing, and archery—differed from activities that played similar roles at court. First, they required physical attributes and skills, such as riding a horse or shooting an arrow, that other popular competitions, such as poetry contests and dialectic debates, did not require. As stated in the introduction, these non-martial competitions shared important similarities with physical competitions in both format and in the emphasis of public displays of ability in a competitive atmosphere. This is why Hagitani Boku and Taniyama Shigeru compared poetry contests to sumo, horse racing, and archery on over a dozen points in the introduction to their seminal work on poetry contests.<sup>533</sup>

I have largely omitted non-martial competitions from this study not because there are no comparisons, but because of word constraints and the amount of academic literature that has already been written on the subjects. One crucial way that physical competitions differed from the non-physical ones, however, was that the physical competitions were both annual events built into the court's calendar of rituals *and* private events held outside those parameters, while poetry contests and dialectic debates never became ritual events in the calendar.

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<sup>532</sup> Obinata, *Kodai kokka*, 10–13.

<sup>533</sup> Hagitani and Taniyama, *Utaawase*, 11–18.

The status that physical competitions held as annual events cannot be overstated. It is for this reason that many Japanese historians of annual events often include physical competitions, but those commentaries rarely discuss the added elements within physical competition that are not found in other annual events.

The most obvious of these is that the most entertaining aspect of a competition was that the result of a match was not known. For all other annual events, there was a prescribed set of rituals and actions that, if done correctly, led to a known outcome. Of course, courtiers most certainly enjoyed participating in non-competitive annual events as well; the 5/5 festival is evidence of that. There is a different dynamic at play with competitions, however, that the courtier records clearly show excited the audience. There were defined winners and losers, a winning team and a losing team, and a set of socially acceptable activities that the winners did to bask in their victory. It is the obvious marriage between competition and entertainment that made physical competitions some of the biggest annual events of the year and some of the best-attended social gatherings of the upper class outside the calendar of annual events.

From the onset, I have emphasized the value of competition and entertainment inherent in physical competitions as not only a necessary addition to the ritualistic and religious realms to which sumo wrestling, horse racing, and archery are routinely relegated in historiography, but the primary lens through which they should be viewed. With those aspects at the forefront, I examined the four groups involved in physical competitions—competitors, spectators, organizers, and hosts—to show how they were affected by physical competitions in a manner unique to those competitions. While each group had a separate function, there were competitive elements that distinguished winners from losers. I used the term competitive capital, which was inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, to measure the benefits gained by the winners in each group at a physical competition.

The gains acquired from competitive capital are most obvious in the case of the men who wrestled, shot, or raced in the competitions themselves. If competitors in physical competitions won their matches, they received rewards otherwise above and beyond their stations. If they routinely won their matches, they received lifechanging rewards like promotions, land, and legacy.



The best competitors gained a level of celebrity that separated them from their peers based solely on their ability to perform martial feats for the enjoyment of the courtiers in attendance.

Furthermore, the benefits reaped from superior ability in one of these martial skills were enjoyed by competitors at every level. Provincial strongmen went from disregarded cultivators to celebrated athletes simply by consistently throwing their opponents onto the ground. Similarly, Michitsuna, the adolescent son of future Regent Kaneie, was the talk of the town after he bested his favored foe at the Courtier Prize Archery Competition in 970. For decades thereafter, Michitsuna gained positions at court related to his abilities in archery, such as when he became the archery instructor for the crown prince in 999. The plethora of other examples throughout this study have definitively shown that these men were celebrated, rewarded, and remembered by their peers because they won competitions.

Those who watched these competitions also had a vested interest in the results of each match and the overall competitions. The spectators were split between Left and Right based upon their government posts, and the many actions performed by the spectators in this study clearly show that the division between Left and Right was more than a neutral organizational tool. Courtiers ridiculed a poor performance by a competitor that represented their side as often as they celebrated an excellent one. The responses by the audience members to these performances—which served little ritualistic importance—are clear indicators of the entertainment value inherent in competitive displays.

Winning came with enjoyable benefits for the spectators as well as the competitors. The winning side performed celebratory dances and forced their losing peers to drink punitive spirits, two actions rife with socio-political posturing. The desire to have their team succeed was powerful enough that audience members would sometimes try to change the results that went against their team. While this could be seen as a contradiction to fair play, it should be noted that team favoritism is a fundamental part of competitive spectacle regardless of time or culture.

Behind the scenes were the organizers who were charged with the many logistical concerns of running a successful competition. For many of these organizers, particularly the members of the Guard, the tasks required to stage the competitions were the most important

tasks they performed. Lower-ranked Guards, like Fifth Guard Masakata, delivered summons to provincial governors and escorted wrestlers to the capital for the Annual Sumo Tournament. Second and Third Guards served as the referees that determined if the Left or Right won each match. At the conclusion of the competition, the referees on the winning side would shout in victory; if the result was close, both sides shouted. The First Guard was an elite courtier who supervised the many Guards underneath him as they performed these varying tasks.

Many of the greatest statesman of the mid-Heian period served as First Guard, including Tadahira, Morosuke, Saneyori, Michinaga, and especially Sanesuke. The First Guard is rarely mentioned among the more prominent courtier positions, but Sanesuke's diary that details his decades-long stint as First Guard of the Right is filled with hundreds of entries that show the complex web of logistical concerns that the First Guard was required to navigate to field a competitive team at a competition. This in turn led to a successful and satisfying competition that served as entertainment and as a necessary component of the annual calendar.

At the highest level were the hosts—emperors, retired emperors, and the elite Fujiwara—who used their wealth and power to influence physical competitions that in turn reinforced or enhanced their status vis-à-vis their rivals and the rank and file below them. On the grandest scale, it was the imperial system that was the most consistent benefactor of competitive capital because the physical competitions that were part of the annual calendar were created to reinforce the political paradigm. The Annual Sumo Tournament, in particular, was tied to the relationship between the emperor and his subjects. Until the mid-ninth century, the emperor, both as an institution and as a person, held a monopoly on hosting physical competitions as they were always held on the prescribed date and within the Greater Imperial Palace. Some emperors, such as Ninmyō, actively participated in competitions as individuals, but their involvement waned as the Heian period progressed. At the turn of the tenth century, the powerful retired emperor Uda hosted events at his private residences while his son was emperor. The elite Fujiwara followed suit by hosting large private events at their residences from the tenth century until well into the twelfth century.

Regardless of which group to which these men belonged, personal agency was a necessary component to the accumulation of cultural capital. My examples throughout this study

have shown that personal agency was a powerful determinant of one's status even though there were many institutional obstacles. Some obstacles, such as the advantages afforded the Left over the Right in competition, have led academics to deem physical competitions as nothing but rigged ritual.<sup>534</sup> The reality is more nuanced as men of superior ability were able to overcome the obstacles before them. For example, the competitors under the supervision of First Guard of the Right Sanesuke consistently won competitions for decades; and yet the competitors were allowed to keep most of their victories. Furthermore, Sanesuke was never asked to become First Guard of the favored Left nor was he ever punished for supervising talented competitors despite his success. Competition, therefore, was the prime battleground to showcase one's personal agency and superior ability above and beyond one's peers.

The combination of personal agency and competition naturally led to specialization, which occurred on three levels. The first was that competitors consistently competed for years, thus requiring years of consistent training. Excellent wrestlers from the provinces were invited back every year to compete in the Annual Sumo Tournament, and they were excused from performing any of their tax obligations in the provinces while in the capital. Further, because wrestlers who did not wrestle well rarely returned to future tournaments, only the best wrestlers returned year after year. Consequently, the men who held either of the two premiere titles in sumo, Champion and Contender, were able to do so due to a combination of genetics, training, nutrition, and other activities. Similarly, Guards were allowed to consistently train in the martial skills required for competitions to the neglect of their other duties. This could only have been acceptable if the competitor and his superiors preferred that he hone his martial talents above all else. It also explains why a list of the most prominent Guards during the long reign of Emperor Ichijō only included the best racers and archers of their age irrespective of their rank within the Guard.

The second level can be seen in the evolution within equestrian archery. In the beginning, the archers came from a combination of the four guardhouses. As the competition became more competitive in the tenth century, however, the archers were drawn solely from the Guard because

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<sup>534</sup> For example, Obinata, *Kodai kokka*, 12.

Guards were the best archers and riders at the time. This format remained until the late eleventh century when a new form of mounted archery appeared due to changes within Japanese society. The members of the Guard were no longer the best mounted archers of their day, so they were replaced as competitors by provincial warriors with superior abilities. Along with the change in competitor came a change in format. The warriors shot only for themselves rather than as a member of a Left or Right team—a stark change from the team-based play of centuries past. For centuries thereafter, these provincial warriors monopolized multiple forms of competitive mounted archery, which they held at temples and shrines outside the capital, because that was reflective of political and social reality of late Heian onwards.

The Third level was when the court went from having a large Sumo Committee overseeing the logistics of the Annual Sumo Tournament to placing the burden on the First Guard. It is clear from Sanesuke's diary that the most important—and time consuming—duty of the First Guard was facilitating the successful organization of annual physical competitions. The First Guard was also charged with overseeing his representatives at private events held outside the calendar. The performances of competitors, therefore, reflected the capabilities of their First Guard because their team's performances were a direct consequence of the First Guard's dedication to his post. This in turn allows us to objectively evaluate those that held the position, so that the sterling records of men like Tadahira and Sanesuke can be highlighted as products of their singular abilities.

The office of First Guard must be highlighted for one other reason, namely that it is the strongest evidence of the indelible connection between the three competitions. There are other links, of course, such as a shared format and the decree in 728 demanding wrestlers and archers from the provinces, but the First Guard being charged with overseeing the three physical competitions for centuries negates any argument that may try to minimize their connection. Further, it proves that the three competitions were consciously grouped together by the members of the Heian court. The First Guard's involvement in both annual events and private events also shows that Heian courtiers linked the two kinds of events by the activity being performed rather than by the activity's inherent ritualistic importance. This is why competition and entertainment must be emphasized when discussing Heian physical competitions. It is important to keep these

connective threads in mind as each competition had unique attributes that differentiated it from the others. Because I devoted entire chapters to each competition, I will only briefly outline here some of the important distinctions in each competition as both an annual and private event.

The Annual Sumo Tournament was the competition most closely tied to the emperor. It, more than any other annual event, represented the capitulation of the provinces to central authority. Strong men were sent from their home provinces to the capital each year to compete in front of the rest of the court. The preparations for the tournament were extensive and required a working relationship between the court, specifically the First Guard, and provincial governors to procure suitable wrestlers. Failure to do so could result in governors being replaced. Unlike the Guards who competed in archery or horse racing, wrestlers always represented the Left or Right throughout their careers. The Left was associated with the emperor, and because of the emperor's relationship to sumo, he held more personal power over the events of the competition. This close association is also why the desperate Emperor Sanjō prayed that the Left would win the first three matches of the Annual Sumo Tournament of 1013; and when they did so, Sanjō considered it to be a sign of divine favor.

Sumo was also the only physical competition that the emperor hosted as a large private event outside the normal confines of the annual calendar. These Extraordinary Sumo Competitions were held at one of the emperor's residences following the conclusion of the tournament season. Retired emperors could also host sumo competitions at their private residences outside the Greater Imperial Palace. Unsurprisingly, the emperors and retired emperors who held these large events were the same ones who tried to exert more personal power during their lifetimes, such as Uda, Sanjō, Shirakawa, and Go-Shirakawa. Moreover, one of the starkest examples of Shirakawa assuming more control as a retired emperor was when he made his office responsible for calling the wrestlers to the annual tournament. In 1158, Go-Shirakawa—then the reigning emperor—wrested that power back when he held the first Annual Sumo Tournament in decades mere weeks before he abdicated. He then ordered the final Annual Sumo Tournament in 1174 as a retired emperor, showing that the tournament was the prerogative of the most powerful member of the royal family.

Courtiers did not host grand sumo competitions as often as they did the other two competitions. They did, however, host a small number of wrestlers at more intimate events with as few as two courtiers in attendance. The more affluent courtiers treated wrestlers to banquets following official events where they wined and dined the wrestlers and bestowed them with gifts. The best wrestlers were awarded the title of Champion or Contender and gained special privileges while attending the court for the tournament as well as receiving untaxed land in their home provinces. For upstart wrestlers who had not earned one of those titles, a single loss often resulted in them never returning to the capital to wrestle again. The one common exception was when a wrestler representing the Right had his victory changed to a defeat by an imperial veto. I will discuss the imperial veto in more detail later, but it must be noted that the emperor used this unique power more often during the Annual Sumo Tournament than all other competitions combined, once again showing the strong association between the emperor and the tournament.

Conversely, horse racing had the weakest association with the emperor and the annual calendar despite being implemented no later than the Taiho Code of 701 like the other two competitions. It was first tied to the 5/5 Festival as a secondary physical spectacle following the more important Equestrian Archery Competition where it remained a tertiary form of entertainment for centuries. Horse racing was the last physical competition to have competitive results, with baffling scenarios like riderless horses winning races for the Left as late as 890.

One reason why horse racing took longer to become competitive was that competitive results would have interfered with the annual loser's banquet held in the tenth month. Precedent dictated that the riders who represented the Right were the "guests of honor" at this banquet, with no records of the Left ever taking the unwelcome position from the Right. The loser's banquet, however, disappeared just before the turn of the tenth century, and thereafter the Right was allowed to win races.

The riders of the Right keeping their victories during the 5/5 Festival coincided with their private use by powerful Fujiwara courtiers. Regent Mototsune lured the deranged Emperor Yōzei out of the imperial palace by staging a fake horse race in 884. In the 950's, Regent Koretada invited Emperor Murakami to see some horse races at his temporary residence of *Suzakuin* on two occasions. The true boom of grand horse races hosted by the Fujiwara began with Kaneie. He and

future Fujiwara invited the whole court to visit their private estates and share in their fabulous wealth. His grandson, Yorimichi, held many splendid races at his residence of *kayanoin*, with the races of 1024 becoming the subject of an entire chapter in *The Tale of Flowering Fortunes*. Future Fujiwara regents continued to use horse racing as one of their primary ways of showing off their influence and wealth well into the twelfth century. For centuries, these private races were undeniably more important than the official races of the 5/5 Festival, reaching their peak while Michinaga was the *de facto* ruler of the court.

Michinaga was obsessed with horse racing. Each of his palatial estates, whether inherited or commissioned by him, had a horse track where he found every excuse to hold races. He held races when courtiers came to visit even if they were the only courtiers in attendance. Races were often held on the same days that Michinaga visited the imperial palace. He held many grand horse races with large audiences that included royals, courtiers, ladies-in-waiting, and monks. Prior to those larger races, he would watch the trial races held by the Guards of the Left and Right as they prepared for the competition. He even ignored the desperate pleas of his fellow courtiers seeking his advice amidst a devastating famine one year to instead talk about horse racing.

His love of horse racing also caused one of the most peculiar shifts in Heian socio-political dynamics. For the decades that Michinaga was in power, he received countless numbers of horses from any who wished to curry his favor. His donors ranged from provincial governors maintaining good relations with the man who most impacted their employment to violent warriors who desired favorable rulings in legal and criminal matters. Interestingly, there is no evidence that the explosion of horses as gifts was due to any court edict or official policies but was rather due to the private desire to ingratiate oneself with the most powerful man at court. This can be seen in the gift-giving practices of one of those violent warriors, Taira no Korehira. Korehira brought Michinaga horses exclusively as gifts on multiple occasions, while he brought other expensive gifts to Sanesuke, showing that he knew which gifts to give which courtier. Michinaga received so many horses over his lifetime that there were still over one hundred horses in his stables when he died in 1027. Following his death, however, the use of horses as gifts declined sharply. The evidence presented in Chapter 4 shows that horse racing is the only logical conclusion as to why he needed

so many horses. Likewise, his need for so many horses is the only explanation for the marked rise in gift horses while he was in power.

In Chapter 5, I outlined the many kinds of archery competitions performed during the Heian period. The primary change in equestrian archery was described earlier in the conclusion with warriors overtaking Guards as the primary competitors towards the end of the eleventh century. Standing archery, however, requires more unpacking. Prior to the 830's, emperors and courtiers attended the Ritual Archery Demonstration in the first month more often than all other recorded physical competitions combined. This demonstration, along with the Annual Sumo Tournament, was performed to show subservience to the emperor. In the case of the Ritual Archery Demonstration, it was the courtiers who were submitting to imperial authority by shooting after the emperor. Unlike the case of sumo, however, there were no competitive elements to the proceedings, as there were no incentives to hit the target. The unintentional consequence of this was that courtiers consistently began to perform poorly, which led to one emperor's harsh rebuke of the noble archers in the mid-ninth century. There was a short-lived resurgence of courtier participation after incentives were added, but the purely ritualistic display soon lost its luster. That brief resurgence is, however, another reminder of how competitive capital was a powerful motivator beyond the inherent ritualistic importance of an event.

While the court was losing interest in the Ritual Archery Demonstration, the competitive event held the following day—Prize Archery—was gaining importance. A new precedent was set in 958 when Emperor Ninmyō did not attend the Ritual Archery Demonstration, but he attended Prize Archery the next day. While this signaled the end of the importance of the Ritual Archery Demonstration, Prize Archery only continued to grow throughout the rest of the ninth and tenth centuries. Prize Archery is also notable for being the first competition with competitive results. In fact, the Right won the first Prize Archery Competition ever recorded in 816. Sumo and equestrian archery became competitive soon thereafter during the reign of Ninmyō.

Courtier Prize Archery was later developed to allow the higher-ranking courtiers to compete against one another for competitive capital. This form of archery is the only physical competition in which high-ranking courtiers would publicly compete against one another, though many practiced sumo or other physical activities more privately. Archery was a reputable skill



regardless of status, which is why emperors, like Ninmyō, and powerful Fujiwara honed their skills despite never seeing the battlefield. Courtier diaries and literary works alike are filled with the stories of elite courtiers whose arrows had a profound political effect. Michitsuna's career was defined as such, but the court records show that Michinaga and Korechika also competed against one another in Courtier Prize Archery competitions. These events likely inspired the apocryphal scene in *The Great Mirror* where Michinaga bests Korechika. There is also the factual incident when Korechika irreparably damages his reputation by shooting at the retired emperor over a lover's quarrel.

While it is clear from these many examples that each competition appealed to its clients and competitors in ways that were different, the competitions were inextricably linked by their physical natures, positions as annual and private events, connections to the Guard, emphasis on competition and entertainment, and how they represented power, whether that power was institutional or personal. Perhaps the most important shared attribute of Heian physical competitions for understanding Heian Japan, however, is the parallel evolutions in competition and privatization that occurred at the same time as similar changes within the greater court culture.

I took a bottom-up approach to the question of privatization by focusing on the extent to which personal agency and private relationships could impact one's career and social standing within a mostly rigid hierarchal structure. That amount was qualified by the impact that competitive capital had on the lives of men within multiple social and political tiers. Most of those qualifiers were shared among the three competitions to the exclusion of any other comparable event or phenomenon. More importantly, because the three competitions shared those qualifiers, one cannot brush aside the conclusions I have made by arguing that the parallels between the changes in physical competitions and the changes to the greater court culture were merely coincidental.

I outlined in Chapter 1 the complications with the historiographical term of *ōchō kokka* and the *kenmon* theory. As stated there, some historians see the beginning of Fujiwara dominance, and therefore the emergence of courtier supremacy, as early as Yoshifusa in the mid-ninth century. While Yoshifusa was gaining power, every competition, with the notable exception

of horse racing, was becoming a competitive affair. Prior to the introduction of competition, the Left, the side that ostensibly represented the Emperor, was always the victor. By the mid-ninth century, however, the Right was allowed to win. Although the Right never represented the courtiers in opposition to the emperor, the emergence of competition mirroring the rise in influence of non-imperial forces was not happenstance. Of course, those competitive changes continued to evolve for decades along with the privatized aspects of competition until they reached their peak beginning in the late tenth century.

This evolution was in tandem with what many historians see as the more appropriate beginning of peak courtier dominance. Those arguments often revolve around the increased privatization of land ownership and the increased importance of personal relationships from the mid-tenth century. I have offered numerous examples in this study of how a man's relationship with powerful men like Michinaga and Sanesuke or his ability to delight his superiors with his competitive prowess affected his position at court and his livelihood. Furthermore, the boom of hosting grand competitions occurred while the Fujiwara were amassing incredible wealth and personal power. Perhaps the most telling example of how the changes in competition reflected the increased privatization of the court is that by the early eleventh century courtiers with less power were routinely hosting sumo and archery competitions at their less impressive estates. What was once the sole purview of the emperor evolved until courtiers could fund their private entertainment without imperial rebuke or concern for the personal financial cost.

Those smaller events paled in comparison to the much larger grand competitions that men like Kaneie, Michinaga, and Yorimichi held. One important facet of *kenmon* theory is that the different blocs of power had their own "headquarters" from which they were able to exert control and conduct policy. I argue that powerful Fujiwara requiring all the upper nobility, including emperors who had to travel from the imperial palace, to come to their personal estate on a date of their choosing to watch an event they organized is nothing short of profound socio-political posturing, or in other words, exerting control. The nobility, however, did not seem to mind that they had to attend these events. The competitions were so lavish and entertaining that they left the many attendees in awe of their hosts, enhancing the host's influence further. That influence should not be underestimated. These competitions were more than low-brow entertainment; they

were reflections of the Heian hierarchy where men cooperated vertically and competed horizontally along the axes.

In summary, the changes in physical competition throughout the Heian period mirrored the changes happening in the court. With this model, a more nuanced account of Heian power dynamics emerges, one that emphasizes competition and personal agency within the rigid hierarchy. By emphasizing competition and personal agency, oft-maligned political players like the emperor can be cast in a new light. While it is true that the Fujiwara consistently won more political battles than they lost over the first two centuries their house held the regency, they were periodically challenged by emperors trying to exert their own control. That fierce competition is lost when topically describing the mid-Heian period as the period of courtier dominance. It implies that rival forces, such as the emperor, were unable or unwilling to oppose Fujiwara rule, but that is only true when focusing purely on who won each battle.

This study has shown that while winning was certainly one measure of domination over one's opponent, competition could still thrive. Kōkō and Uda fought the Fujiwara with poetry contests.<sup>535</sup> Uda used physical competitions to the same effect as a sitting and retired emperor. Daigo never took a regent, and listened to the advice of Michizane over the Fujiwara. Sanjō opposed Michinaga until the emperor's failing health forced him to acquiesce. The aptly named Go-Sanjō ended Yorimichi's regency, signaling the end of peak Fujiwara power. Emperor Shirakawa drew inspiration from his powerful predecessors when fashioning his policies to oust the Fujiwara by combining the prestige of his station with the political tactics the Fujiwara had been using for over a century. To put it simply, for every two emperors who were merely symbolic figureheads following the wishes of Fujiwara regents there was one emperor who posed a significant challenge to the preeminent courtiers.

One of the more remarkable tools in the emperor's arsenal was the imperial veto. This power was not only unique to the emperor; it was unique among the emperor's powers because it allowed the emperor to act according to his own wishes without courtier approval. In fact, courtier

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<sup>535</sup> Hagitani and Taniyama, *Utawaseshū*, 8.

records consistently show that courtiers opposed the veto, but they could not or would not stop the emperor from employing it.

The act of casting a veto made the emperor something he rarely was in other facets of Heian politics—an active agent. Unlike his nominal place within political discussions in the Council of State, for example, the emperor used vetoes to force his will without courtier recourse. Those powers extended to private competitions, making the veto the sole oppositional act the emperor could employ during events meant to glorify the Fujiwara.

The case of the imperial veto also challenges the perceived view of privatization in the Heian context. Privatization is often measured as the shifting balance of power between the “public” and the “private”, with the emperor embodying the “public.” Consequently, privatization rose as imperial power diminished—a view supported by the many “puppet emperors” of the era who did not challenge courtier supremacy. The veto, however, adds a new wrinkle to this view. While the authority to use the veto certainly came from the emperor’s public office, its use was purely personal. Uda was the first on record to use the imperial veto, but many after him used them when they saw fit without limitation or need for precedent. The veto, therefore, should be considered a private power at the emperor’s disposal. Ironically, he was using this private power even after he lost much of his public power.

The challenge that the veto poses is only one of the many reasons this study has shown that the study of Heian physical competitions deserves the same academic consideration that other cultural phenomena of the period have received to this point. This is a case study that highlights how a culture’s sports, to use the modern term, reflect the cultural zeitgeist. Reflections are, of course, reciprocal in nature, so to understand one you must understand the other. To use a modern example, it is impossible to understand the legacy of Jackie Robinson playing baseball without understanding twentieth-century race relations in the United States. I would argue that it is equally impossible to understand those same race relations without telling the story of Jackie Robinson. This is as true about Heian Japan as it is about twentieth-century America. Despite the many consonant depictions of effete Heian aristocrats that litter literary and historical studies alike, one cannot truly understand those men without knowing about sumo wrestling, horse racing, and archery.

## Appendix

### Maps

These otherwise blank maps highlight the locations of physical competitions. Figure 1 is a map of the city with the residences of retired emperors and courtiers where grand physical competitions were held. Figure 2 is a map of the Greater Imperial Palace. Figure 3 is of the imperial palace.

**Figure 1: Heian-kyō (Kyoto)**

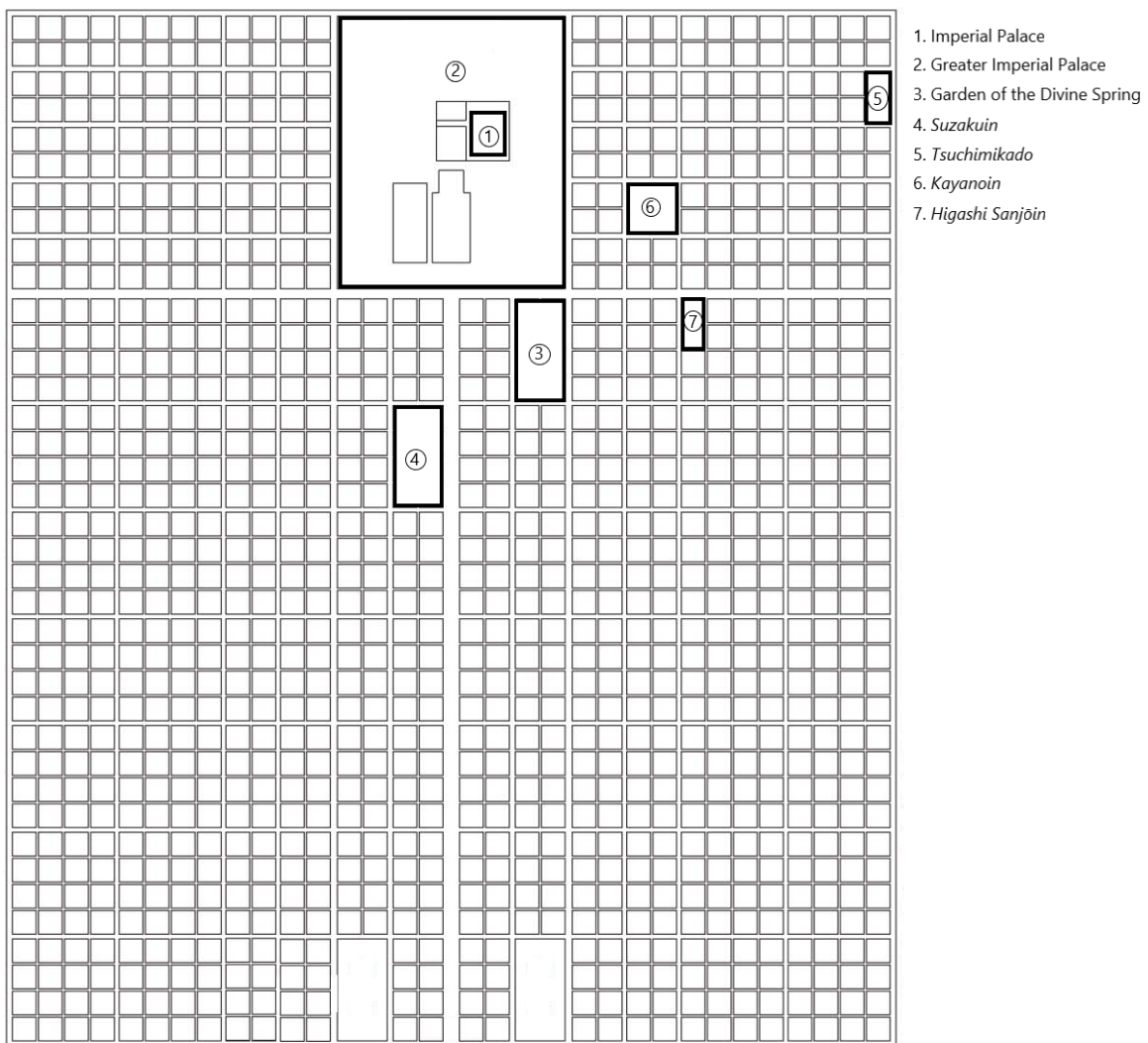
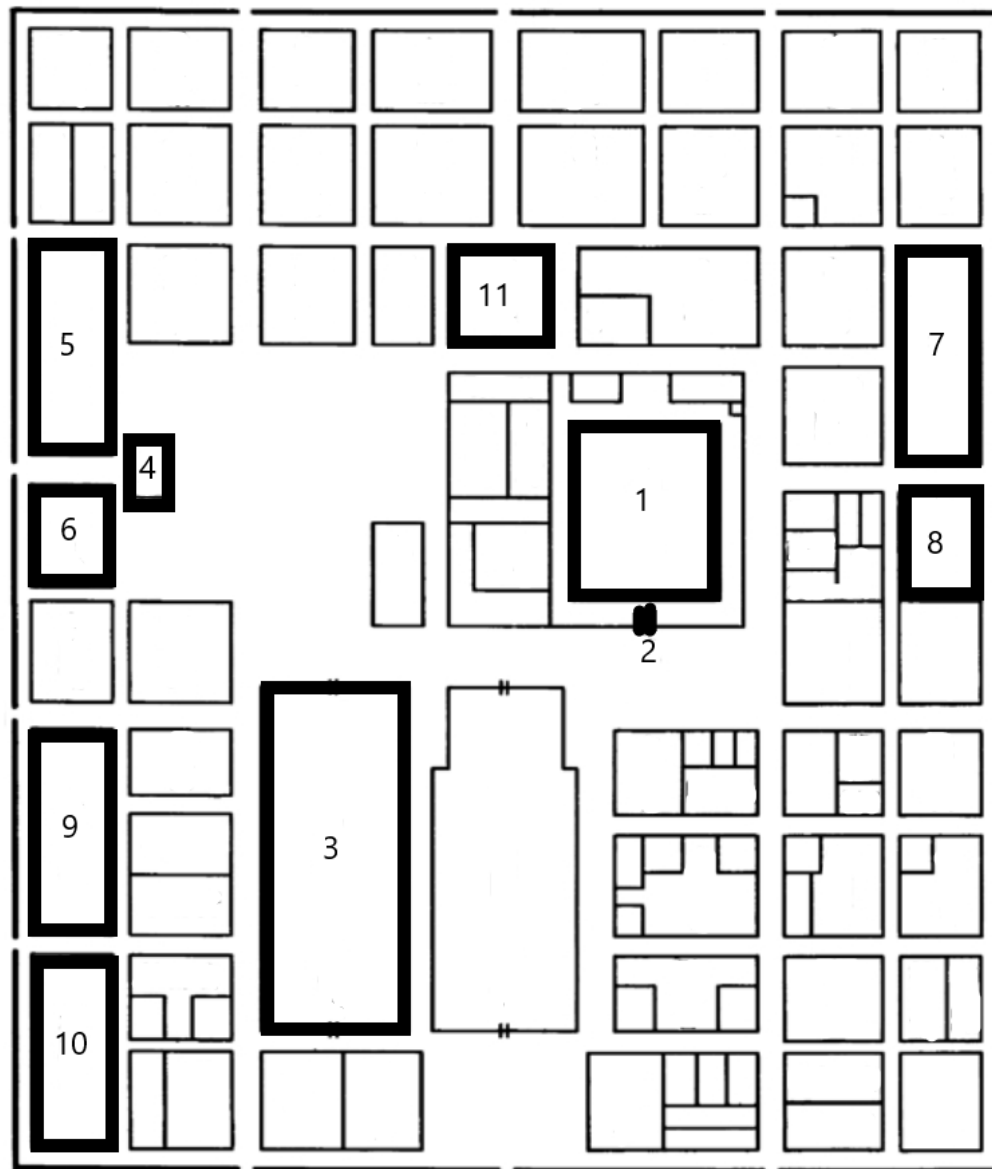
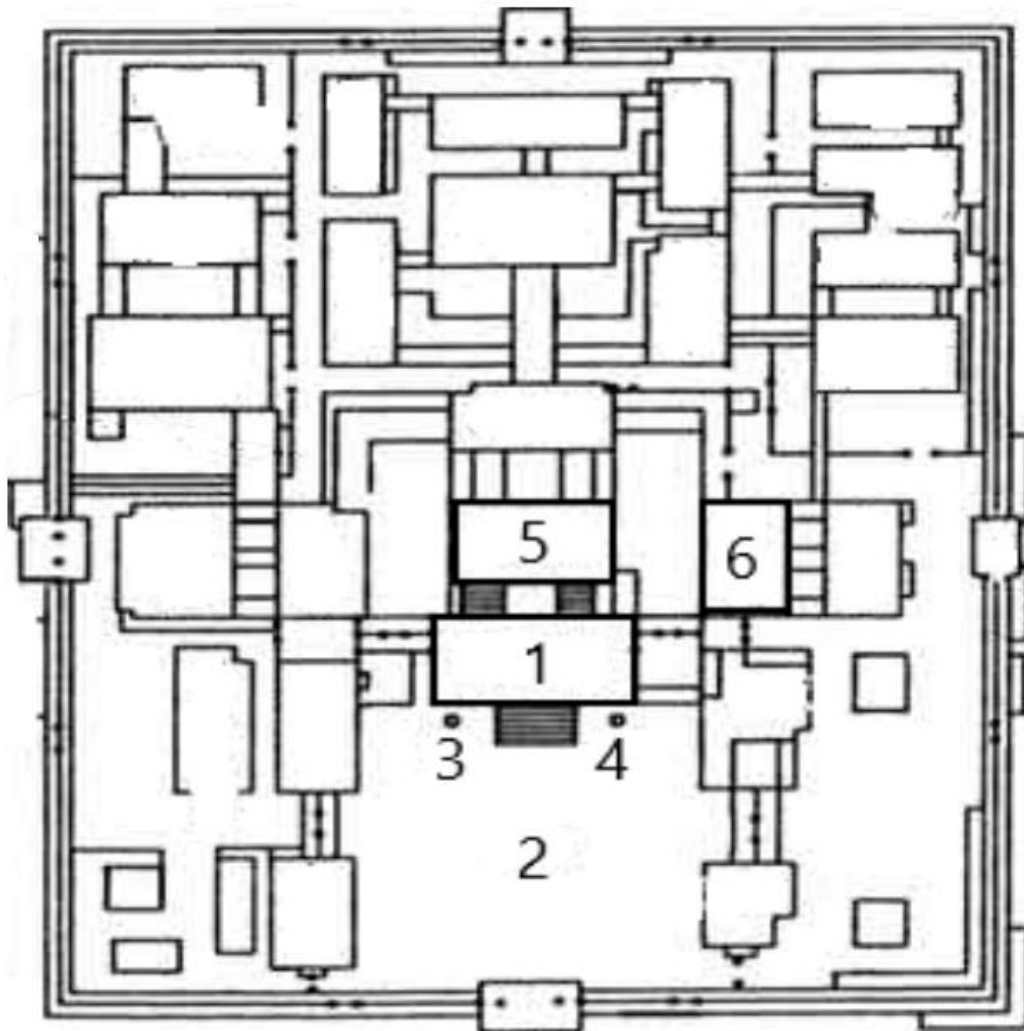


Figure 2: Greater Imperial Palace



- |                                 |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Imperial Palace              | 7. Left Guard         |
| 2. Kenrei Gate                  | 8. Left Watch         |
| 3. Palace of Abundant Pleasures | 9. Left Stables       |
| 4. Hall of Martial Virtues      | 10. Right Stables     |
| 5. Right Guard                  | 11. Palace Storehouse |
| 6. Right Watch                  |                       |

Figure 3: Imperial Palace



1. Southern Hall
2. Southern Hall Courtyard
3. Mandarin Orange Tree of the Right
4. Cherry Tree of the Left
5. *Jijūden*
6. *Ryōkiden*

## Name Glossary

The name glossary is split into Northern Fujiwara Branch, emperors and other courtiers, and competitors, as it was through the text. Unlike in the text, the names in the glossary are in alphabetical order.

### Northern Fujiwara Branch

**Fujiwara no Kaneie 藤原兼家 (929–990):** Powerful tenth-century regent whose regency is often considered the beginning of peak Fujiwara power. He was the first courtier to definitively hold sumo and horse racing competitions at his private estate.

**Fujiwara no Kintō 藤原公任 (966–1041):** First Councilor and famed poet. He questioned the validity of imperial vetoes and criticized Emperor Uda for his implementation of them. Author of *Hokuzanshō*.

**Fujiwara no Korechika 藤原伊周 (974–1010):** Minister of the Center and main rival to Michinaga before being exiled to *Dazaifu*. In *The Great Mirror*, Korechika lost to Michinaga in an archery competition.

**Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1027):** Arguably the most powerful courtier of the Heian period. He was the preeminent courtier for three decades even though he was regent for only one year. He had a fanatical love of horse racing and was skilled in archery and horsemanship. Author of *Midō kanpaku ki*.

**Fujiwara no Michitsuna 藤原道綱 (955–1020):** Half-brother to Michinaga and First Guard of the Right before Sanesuke. He was a skilled archer among the elite courtiers. His mother was the author of the *Kagerō Diary*.

**Fujiwara no Morosuke 藤原師輔 (909–960):** Minister of the Right who outshined his elder brother and primary political rival, Saneyori. He sired many sons and married his



daughters to emperors so that his line would become the predominant line for the regency. Died before ascending to the regency himself. Author of *Kyūreki* and *Kyūjō nenchū gyōji*.

**Fujiwara no Sanesuke 藤原実資 (957–1046):** The most accomplished First Guard who held the position for the Right for four decades. He was a fastidious man who took his duties as First Guard seriously despite having little personal interest in competitions. Was a strong opponent of the imperial veto, criticizing its use every time he mentioned it in his diary. He was the author of *Shōyūki* and *Ononomiya nenchū gyōji*.

**Fujiwara no Saneyori 藤原実頼 (900–970):** Although Saneyori rose to the regency, his tenure was short and he described his own position as nominal because the children of his younger brother, Morosuke, were far more numerous and active in politics than his own progeny. He adopted his grandson, Sanesuke, at a young age to take over his line.

**Fujiwara no Yorimichi 藤原頼通 (992–1074):** Son of Michinaga and longest serving regent of the Fujiwara regency. Despite this, he did not live up to his father's legacy. Was generous with his gifts and hosted some of the grandest physical competitions of the period.

**Fujiwara no Yukinari 藤原行成 (972–1027):** First Councilor and renowned calligrapher. He often visited Michinaga and watched horse races with him. Author of *Gonki*.

## Emperors and Other Courtiers

**Emperor Daigo 醍醐天皇 (885–930, r. 897–930):** Son of Uda. He favored his maternal grandfather, Fujiwara no Takafuji, but after Takafuji's death, Daigo resisted other Fujiwara claimants to the regency.

**Emperor Ninmyō 仁明天皇 (808–850, r. 833–850):** His reign was the first to definitively have competitive competitions in sumo and both forms of archery. Ninmyō was the first

emperor to forgo the Ritual Archery Demonstration for the Prize Archery Competition. His eulogy highlighted his interest and talent in archery.

**Emperor Sanjō 三条天皇 (976–1017, r. 1011–1016):** Challenged Michinaga's rule during his short reign, but his failing health precluded him from succeeding. Considered Sanesuke to be his confidant. To assuage his anxieties about his position as emperor in 1013, he prayed at Ise Grand Shrine to send a sign confirming his position by letting the Left win the first three matches of the upcoming tournament.

**Emperor Shirakawa 白河天皇 (1053–1129, r. 1072–1086):** Powerful political figure who asserted more control as a retired emperor than he did during his time on the throne. Looked to powerful emperors in the past, especially Uda, for reference to combat the Fujiwara. Made the Annual Sumo Tournament the purview of the retired emperor during his son's reign.

**Emperor Uda 宇多天皇 (866–931, r. 887–897):** First emperor on record to use the imperial veto. He used physical competitions and poetry contests to combat Fujiwara rule during his reign and the reign of his son, Daigo.

**Fujiwara no Nariie 藤原済家 (dates unknown):** Governor of multiple provinces in the eleventh century. He gifted many horses to Michinaga over the years. He was the governor of Iyo province when Fifth Guard of the Right Masakata made a series of blunders regarding the sumo wrestlers coming from Nariie's province. The following year Nariie sent his wrestlers to the capital before any other wrestlers had arrived.

**Ki no Masakata 紀正方 (dates unknown):** Fifth Guard of the Right who served Sanesuke for over two decades. Was the primary messenger between Sanesuke and other departments for competition-related matters. Served as a sumo envoy.

**Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道真 (845–903):** Minister of the Right and the only non-Fujiwara or non-Minamoto to hold a top ministerial position in the mid-Heian period. Uda told Daigo to trust Michizane over the Fujiwara. Exiled to *Dazaifu* due to a Fujiwara plot.

**Taira no Korehira 平伊平 (dates unknown):** Provincial warrior who periodically caused acts of violence. Killed a sumo wrestler in 1024 for unknown reasons. Consummate briber who brought many horses to Michinaga and was never severely punished for his many crimes.

### Competitors

**Agata no Takahira 縣高平 (sumo):** Sumo Guard of the Right during the early eleventh century.

Was one of the three wrestlers of the Right to lose their match in the 1013 tournament upon which Emperor Sanjō prayed. Wrestled for the Right for many years and was eventually granted land in his home province for his service.

**Harima no Yasunobu 播磨保信 (racing):** Fourth Guard of the Right and one of the best racers in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. His horse racing abilities got him promoted.

**Kisaichi no Munehira 私市宗平 (sumo):** Champion of the Left in the late tenth century.

Undefeated and often cited as the strongest wrestler of his age. Is the protagonist of a tale from *Tales of Times Now Past (Konjaku monogatari shū)*.

**Magami no Katsuoka 真上勝岡 (sumo):** Champion of the Right in the eleventh century. He served as Contender of the Right for many years behind Tsuneyo. Awarded land in his home province for his services to sumo.

**Ō no Takefumi 多武文 (racing):** Fourth Guard of the Left and one of the better riders of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries who often lost to Yasunobu. Was promoted and switched to the Left due to his racing abilities.

**Ochi no Tsuneyo 越智常世 (sumo):** Long-serving Champion of the Right in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Is the subject of multiple stories in *Tales of Times Now Past* and *Notable Tales Old and New* (*kokon chomonjū*).

**Sakanoue no Kiyono 坂上浄野 (788–850) (archery):** First Watchmen of the Right known for his unparalleled prowess in both equestrian archery and standing archery. Son of a prominent warrior.

**Shimotsuke no Kintoki 下毛野公時 (racing):** Lowly Ninth Guard of the Right who nevertheless was one of the best riders of the early eleventh century. Bested racers ranked much higher than him and was the subject of a story in *Kojidan*.

**Sumiyoshi no Tsunanushi 住吉綱主 (728–805) (archery):** Third Guard with unparalleled archery prowess before Kiyono. Rose through the ranks and was allowed to change his family name to one with more prestige due to his service and archery skill.

**Takakura no Fukushin 高倉福信 (709–789) (sumo):** Was brought to the emperor's attention after he soundly defeated some other boys in street sumo while a juvenile. Rose from a provincial elite to a central elite and was allowed to change his name from one of Goguryeo ancestry to one of Japanese ancestry for his service.

## Term Glossary

**5/5 Festival (端午の節句, *tango no sekku*):** A festival held on the fifth day of the fifth month. Also known as the Iris Festival. There was an Equestrian Archery Competition on the day followed by horse races the following day.

**Afterparty (還饗, *Kaeri aruji*):** A banquet hosted by the First Guard following a Prize Archery competition or sumo tournament. The guests were the competitors as well as the subordinate Guards who facilitated the competition.

**Annual Events (年中行事, *nenchū gyōji*):** A series of courtly events that happened on or near the same day annually. These events included physical competitions, large banquets, religious rituals, etc.

**Annual Sumo Tournament (相撲節, *sumaisetsu*):** The largest and most important sumo competition, traditionally held on the 27<sup>th</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> of the seventh month.

**Archery Commencement Competition (弓場始, *yuba Hajime*):** A competition held in the tenth month to signal the beginning of archery season that lasted until the fourth month of the following year. Elite courtiers and princes often shot at this competition.

**Box Seats (出居, *idei*):** Special seats brought out for physical competitions. The members of the Guard who served as referees sat in those seats. There was a special attendant in charge of distributing the seats at each competition.

**Horse-Borne Archery (流鏑馬, *yabusame*):** Another form of equestrian archery where the competitors were provincial warriors competing for themselves rather than on Left and Right teams. Started in the late eleventh century and became more popular during the Kamakura shogunate.

**Champion (最手, *hote*):** The highest title a sumo wrestler could receive. Champions kept the title until they were defeated in exhibition matches or they were absent from the tournament. They were afforded the highest prizes, courtier leniency, and prestige of any wrestler.

**Champion Directive (最手官符, *hote kanpu*):** A directive given to Champions who kept the title for several consecutive years. The directive gave the Champions more security against losing their title in future tournaments.

**Contender (脇, *waki*):** The second highest title a sumo wrestler could receive. Contenders were the only wrestlers who could challenge the Champion for his position during exhibition matches. Like Champions, Contenders kept their title from year to year, but it was much easier for them to lose their title in the informal matches held before the exhibition matches.

**Courtier Prize Archery Competition (殿上賭射, *tenjō no noriyumi*):** An archery competition where princes and elite nobles competed against one another. Held in the third month.

**Equestrian Archery (騎射, *kisha*):** A competition where mounted archers galloped by and shot at stationary targets. Held during the 5/5 Festival or following horse races at courtier residences.

**Escorts (隨身, *zuishin*):** Men serving under elite courtiers who would sometimes participate in physical competitions.

**Exemptions (故障, *koshō*):** Competitors would petition for exemptions from participating in their upcoming match due to injury. The petition was accepted or rejected by the elite courtiers in the audience.

**Exhibition Matches (内取, *uchitori*):** Matches between wrestlers of the same side prior to the tournament. If the Contender defeated the Champion, they swapped titles.

**Extraordinary Sumo Competition (臨時相撲, *rinji sumai*):** A special competition hosted by the emperor that was outside the normal sumo season. Held in the eighth month following all official events.

**Grand Horse Racing Competition (n/a):** A large horse racing competition held at a courtier's residence with most of the court in attendance.

**Imperial Veto (天判/勅判, *tenban/chokuban*):** The emperor could cast his imperial vetoes at any physical competition to change the outcome of a match or the overall tournament results. The veto always benefited the Left, either by stripping the Right of their victory, or declaring the Left the victors in the case of a tie.

**Juvenile Sumo (童相撲, *warawa zumai*):** A sumo competition where the competitors were boys.

**Loser's Banquet (n/a):** A ninth-century banquet held in the tenth month to give consolation prizes (輸物, *yumono*) to the side that lost the horse races in the fifth month. Every surviving record has the Right receiving the consolation prize. The banquet disappeared by the tenth century.

**Playoffs (拔出/追相撲, *nukide/oisumai*):** A series of matches held the day after the sumo tournament. The first two matches were between the Left and Right Champions and then the Left and Right Contenders.

**Prize Archery Competition (賭射, *noriyumi*):** A competition between the Left and Right contingents of the Guard and Watch on the eighteenth of the first month.

**Punitive Spirits (罰酒, *basshu*):** An alcohol that the winning side forced the losing side to drink during physical competitions.

**Ritual Archery Demonstration (射礼, *jarai*):** A demonstration held on the seventeenth of the first month where elite courtiers showed their fealty to the emperor. Competition was not a

factor, but rewards for hitting the target were implemented in the ninth century. The demonstration lost most of its importance by the mid-ninth century.

**Sumo Committee (相撲司, *sumai no tsukasa*):** A group of elite courtiers who oversaw the preparations for the tournament. While the committee persisted until the late eleventh century, it served little logistical purpose by the tenth century when the First Guard assumed most of their responsibilities.

**Sumo Envoy (相撲使, *sumai no tsukai*):** Members of the Guard sent to the provinces to procure wrestlers for the upcoming tournament.

**Sumo Guard (相撲近衛, *sumai konoe*):** In the ninth century, every wrestler was a member of the Sumo Guard. From the tenth century, Sumo Guards were members of the Guard whose primary form of corvée labor was participating in tournaments. They enjoyed more privileges than standard wrestlers, though less than Champions and Contenders.

**Tug-of-war (布引, *nunobiki*):** An evening entertainment following the playoffs where two wrestlers from competing sides pulled on a large piece of cloth to wrest it from their opponent's hands.

**Victory Shout (乱声, *ranjō*):** At the conclusion of a physical competition, the spectators affiliated with the winning side shouted in victory. In the event of a close competition, both sides would shout. If the emperor was present, he would make the final decision, invariably favoring the Left.



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