

*Gaki zōshi*

# Gaki zōshi

## Overview

### I.

The two extant examples of the *Gaki zōshi* (Scroll of Hungry Ghosts) are the Kōmoto family version and the Sōgenji temple version. The Kōmoto family scroll has been transferred to the Tokyo National Museum, while the Sōgenji version is on deposit in the Kyōto National Museum. The one from which extracts are shown here is the Kōmoto family version.

The Kōmoto family version lacks a textual portion. Apart from one scene, the scroll depicts some of the thirty-six types of *gaki*, or “hungry ghosts”, that appear in the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthana* or Sutra of Right Mindfulness. The artist is unknown, and the dating of this handscroll is also uncertain, though it may date from the late Fujiwara period (late twelfth century). *Rokudōe*, scrolls depicting the Buddhist concept of the six realms of rebirth, including the *Yamai zōshi* (Diseases and Deformities) and the *Jigoku zōshi* (Hell scroll), were created in considerable numbers at that time.

The six realms in *Rokudōe* are hell, *gaki*, animals, *ashura*, humans, and heavenly beings. Illustrations that also include the four realms for enlightened beings (*arhats*, *pratyeka buddhas*, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas) are known as paintings of the ten realms (*Jikkaizu*).

Japanese texts referring to *gaki* include the *Man'yōshū*, the earliest extant Japanese poetry anthology, which dates from the eighth century. The verse “Loving you, who loves me not, is like going to a great temple to bow in devotion behind the back of a *gaki*” (Volume 4, No.608) is one example. Similarly, “The female *gaki* at temples throughout the land yearn only to have the male *gaki* of *Ōmiwa* and bear his offspring” (Volume 16, No.3840). Those very old examples suggest that the concepts of hell and *gaki* may have entered Japan with the transmission of Buddhism and that representations of them, as paintings or wooden carvings, were placed in temples. The *Nihon ryōiki* (Account of Japanese Supernatural and Strange Stories) describes a painting of the *Rokudō* or six realms and its installation in a temple, telling us that *Rokudōe* were being produced that early. The Buddhist faithful probably had, therefore, some awareness of the concept of *gaki*, but widespread adoption of the idea among ordinary people would wait until the Buddhist priest Genshin (942-1017) wrote the *Ōjōyōshū* (Essentials about Birth in the Pure Land) in easy-to-understand Japanese in 985. That work taught the efficacy of the *nembutsu* (chanting the vow, “I put my faith in Amida Buddha”) and stimulated the growth of *nembutsu*-based sects. Another effect of his writing was a surge in the painting of *Rokudōe*. The *Gaki zōshi* presented here is one product of that time.

The Sōgenji version is thought to date from approximately the same period, but is by a different hand. It also has a textual portion. Thus, we can infer that “hungry ghosts” scrolls were produced in several variants.

### II

The *Rokudōe* include some, such as the *Yamai zōshi*, that depict a variety of forms of human disease and suffering and thus are important materials for learning about the illnesses that were of concern at the time. Others, such as the *Jigoku zōshi*, fall into the category of *karae*, paintings that reference Chinese painting, depicting a horde of demons in a manner that suggests Chinese mores. The Kōmoto family version of the *Gaki zōshi*, however, is particularly interesting because it shows, along with the grotesque *gaki*, how the Japanese of the time lived.

The first section shows aristocrats having a female dancer dressed as a man (*shirabyōshi*) in attendance as they play musical instruments (*biwa*, *koto*, drums, wooden clappers) and enjoy a banquet. It is an excellent source for learning about parties at that time. The second shows a birthing room and depicts a woman giving birth. The third shows people relieving themselves on the street. From that we learn that one purpose for wearing tall *geta* was to keep excrement from landing on clothing while defecating. We also learn that, apart from paper, a wooden stick was used for wiping. The fourth and fifth sections show cemeteries and are valuable sources of information on burial customs.

The Sōgenji version of the *Gaki zōshi* also includes one scene showing contemporary customs.



- |                                      |                                    |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ① man finishing defecation           | 13 feces                           |
| 2 <i>nae-eboshi</i>                  | 14 <i>sutegi</i>                   |
| 3 <i>kosode</i>                      | 15 paper                           |
| 4 walking stick (two-pronged)        | 16 <i>kinukazuki</i>               |
| ⑤ baring one's bottom                | ⑰ naked child defecating           |
| 6 <i>ashida</i>                      | 18 wearing one's hair down         |
| ⑦ woman defecating                   | ⑱ old woman defecating             |
| 8 wearing one's hair down            | 20 <i>zukin</i>                    |
| 9 covering one's mouth with a sleeve | 21 walking stick (T-shaped handle) |
| 10 <i>uchigi</i>                     | 22 wickerwork wall                 |
| ⑪ squatting for defecation           | 23 pillar                          |
| 12 <i>taka-ashida</i>                |                                    |

## 93 Defecation

Here defecation is illustrated. The *Gaki zōshi* and *Yamai zōshi* are precious sources with regard to this kind of illustration of daily behavior. The *Wamyō ruijūshō* refers to excrement as *kuso*, and the *Ishinbō* refers to defecation as *hiri-kuso*. In the *Kojiki*, Susano-o was punished for *kuso-mari-chirasu* (scattering his feces) in the sacred hall for the offering of the first fruits of the harvest. Reference to his defecation as *kuso-he* also appears in the list of “heavenly sins” (*amatsu-tsumi*) in a *norito* (prayer) recorded in the *Engishiki*. Feces were considered unclean, and scattering them around would be regarded as polluting the place. Thus there seems to have existed rules regarding where and when to defecate to avoid such pollution.

There is an amusing story titled “The Story of Ordering a *Kana* Calendar” in the *Uji shūi monogatari*: “Once there was an inexperienced lady-in-waiting at a certain house. She asked for some paper and said to a young priest who happened to be there, ‘please write a *kana* calendar.’ The priest assured her that ‘it is an easy task’ and started writing. At first he wrote properly such as ‘good for praying to the gods and buddhas,’ ‘*kan-nichi*’ (an unlucky day), or ‘*kue-nichi*’ (another type of unlucky day), but towards the end, he began to write such as ‘a day not to eat anything,’ or ‘for such-and-such reason, a day to eat heartily’ . . . In an entry for another



day he had written in ‘do not do *hako*.’ Though she wondered how that could be, she told herself that there should be a reason for it and spent the day suppressing herself. But then the priest had written repeatedly ‘do not do *hako*,’ ‘do not do *hako*’ for many days in a row, for a long period of *kue-nichi*. After two or three days, however she tried to suppress herself, it became hardly bearable and it is told that, holding her bottom with both hands, she wriggled and jiggled, saying ‘what shall I do, what shall I do,’ almost passing out.” *Hako* means *kuso*; in the Inland Sea region people still use this term.

Ordinary people did not have a toilet and apparently evacuated in the open air. It is clear from these pictures that a pair of high *ashida* was a necessity for such defecation. Aged people held on to sticks as an aid while defecating. For wiping one's bottom, paper and *sutegi*, a piece of wood for this purpose, were used.

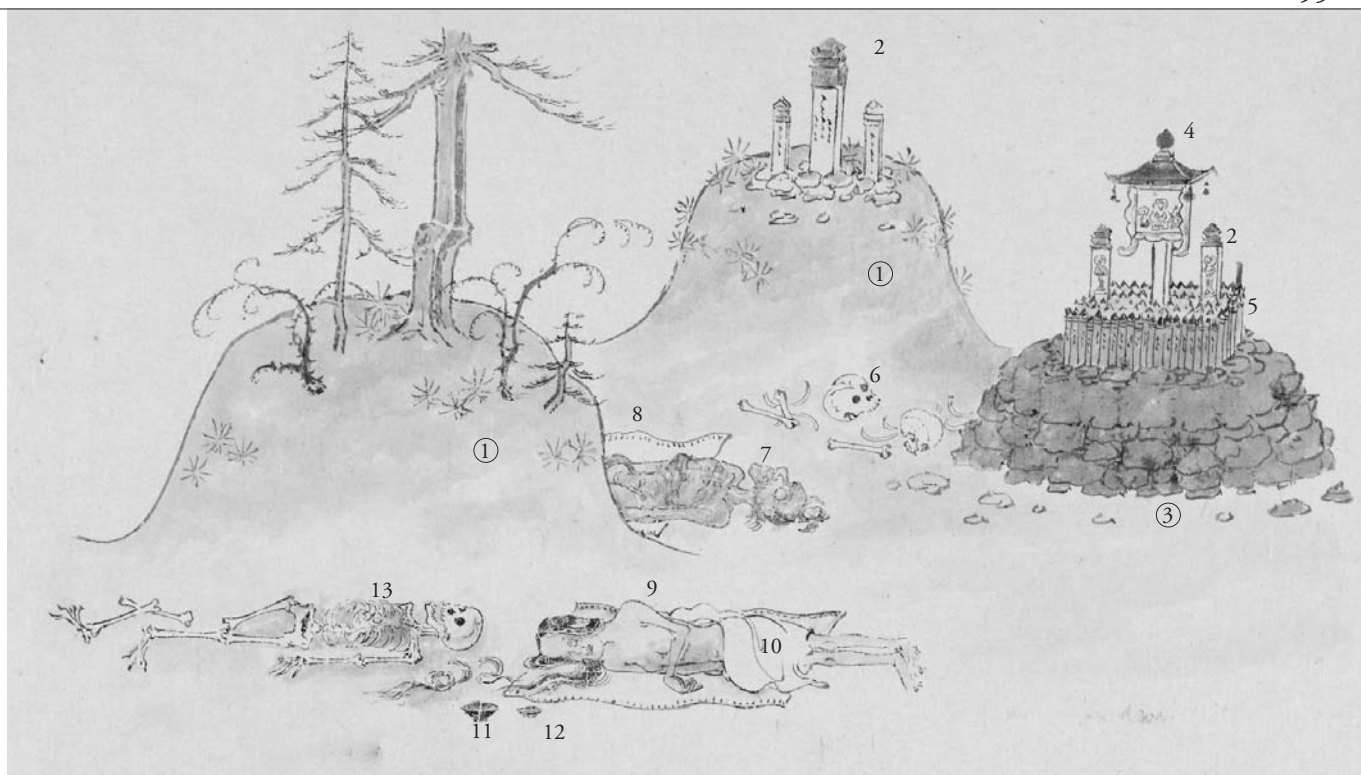


- |                           |                                      |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ① woman giving birth      | 14 wooden floor                      |
| 2 wearing one's hair down | 15 wooden container                  |
| 3 cord for tying the hair | (used as both chamber pot and stool) |
| ④ baby                    | 16 lid of wooden container           |
| 5 mat                     | 17 threshold                         |
| ⑥ <i>gaki</i>             | 18 <i>tatami</i>                     |
| 7 <i>uchigi</i>           | 19 sliding door                      |
| 8 <i>tate-eboshi</i>      | 20 curtain                           |
| 9 <i>kariginu</i>         | 21 pillar                            |
| 10 bow                    | 22 wall                              |
| 11 ?                      | 23 <i>mairado</i>                    |
| 12 stool                  | 24 lintel                            |
| 13 <i>zokin</i>           |                                      |

## 94 Childbirth

Scenes of childbirth can be found in several medieval *setsu-wa-ga* (narrative picture) works, and this is one of those illustrations. While in the illustrations of the *Kitano Tenjin engi* or the *Jikkaizu* the midwife holds the woman in labor from the front, in this picture, remarkably, the baby's delivery is clearly depicted. The midwife is cutting the umbilical cord with a sort of bamboo blade. In Japan, childbirth was always done in a sitting position. The site was in general a place different from the usual residence, and special furnishings were prepared. The *tatami* on which the mother sat had to have white edgings and the *kichō* screens were also white. It is also said that *oshioke* for making an offering to the gods had to be pre-

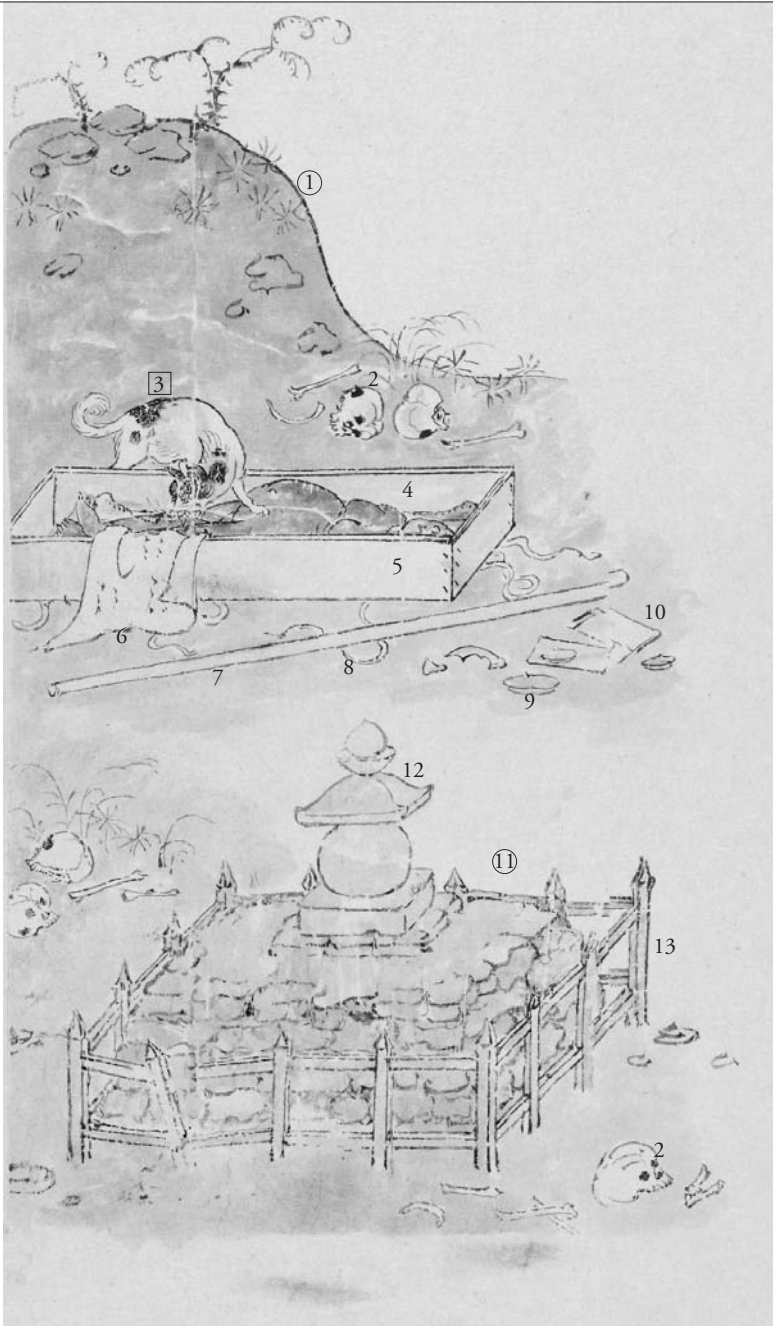
pared. Yet it seems that the scene in this picture does not necessarily follow such standard manners of the time. The bucket on the wooden floor does not appear to be an *oshioke*, but rather seems to be a chamber pot. Though it is a round wooden bucket, presumably it is a kind of *shinohako* (chamber pot), deriving from the word *hako* meaning excrement. The paper scattered around the bucket appears to have been used for wiping the bottom. A *sutegi* does not seem to be used here. Since stools were used in childbirth, one of these buckets may have been used as a stool. At the left there is a sliding *mairado* door, and a man with *tate-eboshi* stands. What he holds in his hands must be a *hikime* arrow and bow for the *meigen* rite, twanging the bow string to chase evil spirits away.



- ① mound tomb
- 2 *sotoba*
- ③ tomb built of stone
- 4 memorial
- 5 small *sotoba* (fence)
- 6 skull
- 7 corpse (male)
- 8 straw matting
- 9 corpse (female)
- 10 cloth
- 11 bowl
- 12 dish
- 13 skeleton

## 95 Tombs

In this picture, two mound tombs, one tomb built of stone, three bodies, and two skulls are depicted. It is known from many records and archeological sites that from early times nobles were buried in huge mound tombs after their death. It is widely argued that such a custom ended after the court ordered in the Nara period that funerals should be kept modest, but the truth is that it continued until much later periods, though on a reduced scale. The tombs in this picture are examples of this. Cremation also started from the reign of Empress Jitō (686-97). It is told that a priest of the Gangōji Temple named Dōshō was cremated. However, cremation did not take root easily, and was only used in certain cases. For example, when there was death from disease among soldiers on a military campaign, the body was disposed of by cremation. Or else, according to the *Ryōnogige*, when someone died while on a trip for official purposes, people were supposed to let the family at home know and to bury the body temporarily by the road, marking the site with a monument. If no one appeared to pick up the body, it was supposed to be cremated. Therefore burial and cremation continued to be practiced in parallel, and the mound tomb in the picture is presumably a burial site. Apart from burial and cremation, there were cases in which the corpse was just abandoned at the burial site.

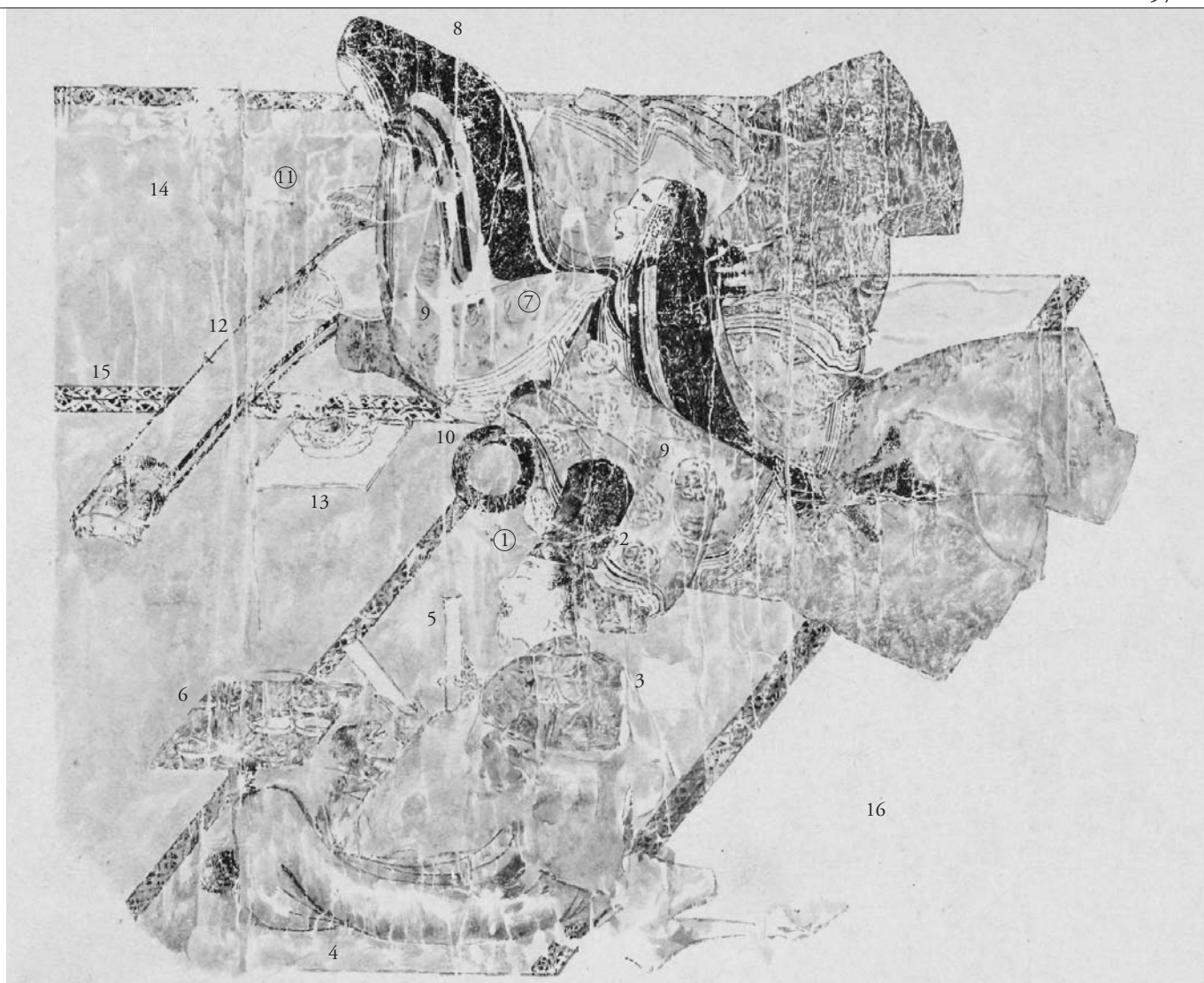


- ① mound tomb
- 2 skull
- ③ eating a corpse
- 4 corpse
- 5 wooden coffin
- 6 cloth
- 7 balancing pole
- 8 rope
- 9 dish
- 10 paper
- ⑪ tomb built of stone
- 12 *gorintō*
- 13 fence

## 96 Tomb

Initially people did not erect grave memorials on mound tombs, so tombs built of stone presumably were used after cremation or as a reburial site. When the corpse was buried in a wooden coffin, the coffin decayed underground and eventually could not support the soil above it, with the result that the ground sunk. It thus was not usual to erect a tomb memorial right after the burial. Therefore, except for cases of cremation, tombs were often constructed for reburial. Occasionally, grave memorials were erected at the site of cremation or reburial. The memorial could be a *sotoba* like what we see at the center of picture 95, small stone pagodas called *gorintō* like that shown in this picture, a plank monument, or natural stone. The marker at the right of picture 95 is something like an image of Amitabha Buddha and two Bosatsu drawn on a plank with a little roof, with *sotoba* at both sides, and the whole memorial is surrounded by a fence-like row of small *sotoba*. In picture 96, the tomb made of layers of stone

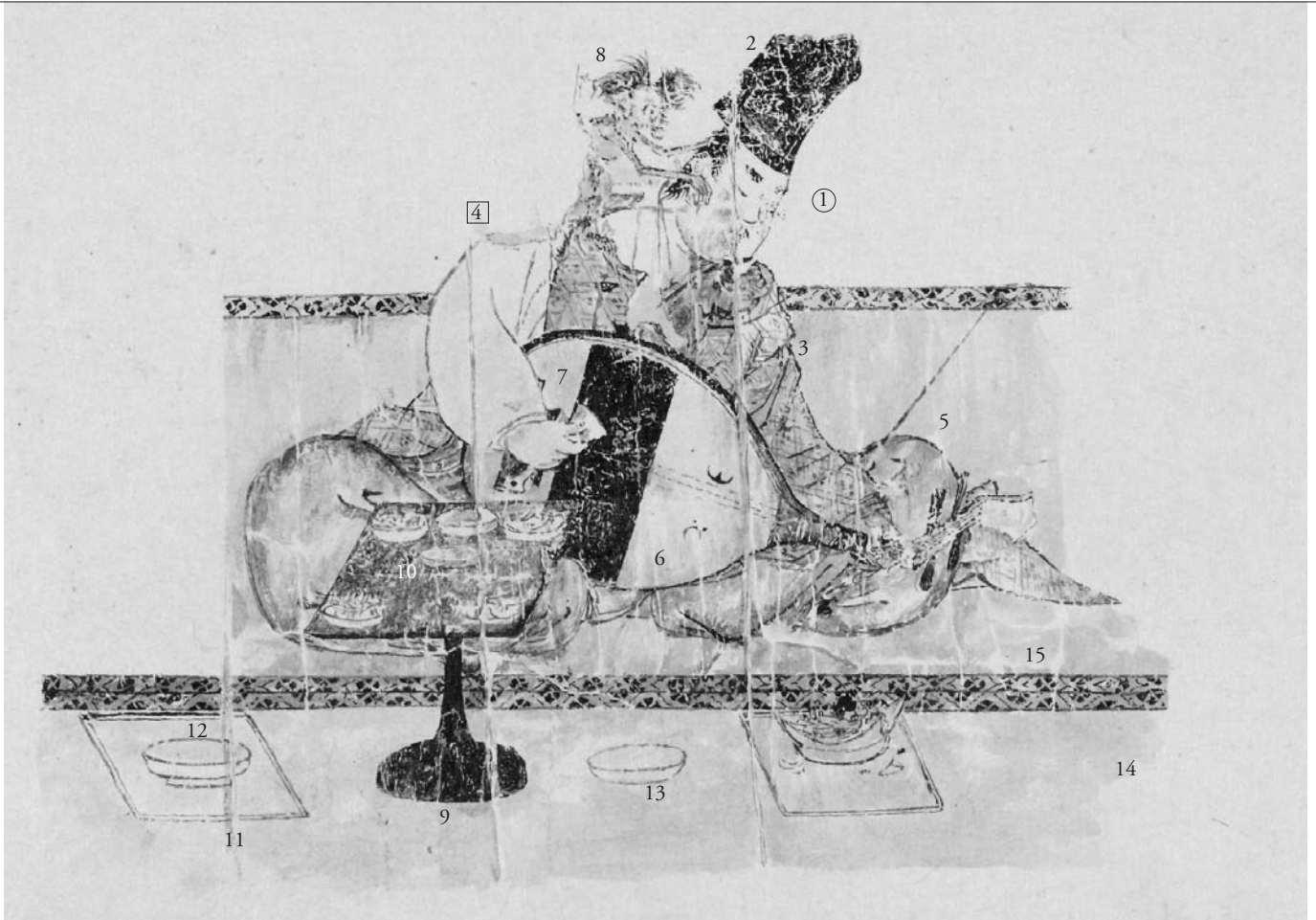
is surrounded by a fence. It seems that even among the upper class, cremation and burial existed in parallel at the time. With the lower classes, where the corpse was abandoned at the burial site, some were left on a straw matting, some were not even covered with a matting, as we can see in picture 95, and some were left in a wooden coffin, which is the case in this picture. Such corpses were devoured by dogs, picked at by crows, weathered, turned into a skeleton, and dispersed in the due passage of time. In the Heian period, nobles apparently owned their own cemetery; the cemetery of the Fujiwara lineage was in Hino, in the southern outskirts of Kyōto. For ordinary people there were common cemeteries, but people also abandoned corpses in open spaces, such as the riverside of the Kamo River in Kyōto. The reason the idea of the pollution of death was strong among ordinary people must lie in the fact that they daily saw such a reality; the miserable state of human beings after death must have evoked a strong sense of impermanence.



- ① man striking clappers
- 2 *tate-eboshi*
- 3 collar
- 4 *noshi*
- 5 clappers
- 6 stemmed dish
- ⑦ woman playing hand drum
- 8 wearing one's hair down
- 9 *uchigi*
- 10 hand drum
- ⑪ woman playing *koto*
- 12 *koto*
- 13 tray
- 14 *tatami*
- 15 *kōrai* pattern cloth edging
- 16 wooden floor

## 97 Feast

This picture continues to 98 and illustrates the scene of a feast. In particular, this is a casual feast called *onza*. According to the *Gōshidaishō*, *onza* was not a formal and stately occasion, and the members casually exchanged conversation; thus people relaxed and enjoyed music. In this picture, too, the man sits in front of a *takatsuki* piled with food and sings while keeping time with wooden clappers, and one of the women also sings while playing a drum. The other woman plays a *koto*. They are sitting on *tatami* with *kōrai* pattern cloth edging, laid on a wooden floor. According to the diary of Fujiwara no Yorinaga (*Taiki*), "The twenty-second day of the twelfth month of the first year of Kyūju (1154) . . . When someone during a month to spend in seclusion holds a *taikyō* ceremony (a large feast sponsored by ministers or imperial consorts during the first month), there should be no music by the royal musicians, but private music at *onza* is still performed." Therefore *onza* was held after the formal feast. This *onza* appears to have been very popular; the saying *onza no hatsumono* (the first fruits of the season served at the *onza*), meaning the tasty stuff comes out later, seems to suggest how much people cherished *onza* in the past.



- ① man playing *biwa*
- 2 *tate-eboshi*
- 3 *kariginu*
- ④ baring one shoulder
- 5 *bakama*
- 6 *biwa*
- 7 plectrum
- 8 *gaki*
- 9 stemmed dish
- 10 small dish
- 11 tray
- 12 dish (*sake cup?*)
- 13 dish
- 14 *tatami*
- 15 *kōrai* pattern cloth edging

## 98 *Biwa*

This picture is part of the same scene as 97, in which a feast is illustrated. A man has removed one sleeve of his *suikan* and is playing a *biwa*. *Biwa* were brought to Japan from China early on and are included in the collection of the Shōsōin treasury. A *biwa* in the Shōsōin is famous for its illustration of a camel under the strings. It seems that this instrument was associated with exoticism from early in its history. The *Taigenshō* reads, “Always draw a *kara-e* (Chinese style painting) under the strings and write the characters of *tenchi-jin* (heaven-earth-man). Moon, haze, and birds in the heaven, a foreigner as the man, and stone, water, grass, and trees on the earth.” *Biwa* were valued highly, and instruments with good sound and excellent workmanship were

long celebrated. The instrument in this picture is carried horizontally, and the man uses a narrow plectrum. It is an ancient style. In front of the man small dishes of food are laid out on a *takatsuki* together with trays, at both sides of the *takatsuki*, and dishes. The dish without a bottom rim seems to be a *sake cup*. Drinking *sake*, people enjoyed playing the *biwa*, *koto*, and so on, and singing. Some stories related to *biwa* appear in *setsuwa* anthologies such as the *Kokon chomonjū* and the *Konjaku monogatari*, which proves the depth of people’s love for this instrument. *Biwa* played like this gradually became popular among ordinary people from around the end of the Heian period, and later the tradition developed of telling stories accompanied by *biwa*, as exemplified by the chanters of the *Heike monogatari* (*Tale of the Heike*).