

THROUGH SAKE, A PORTAL TO THE PAST #2: NARA through HEIAN (794 - 1185 AD)

4/1/26

BONUS: \$5

1 JINYU "100 POEMS" - \$50 (720ml)



We pledged ourselves!
while wringing the tears
from each other's sleeves:
"never will the waves wash over
Suenomatsuyama"
Kiyohara no Motosuke 清原元輔 (908-990)
Hyakunin Isshu, Poem #41
translation by Ad Blankestijn, international
sales for Daishichi Shuzo, Fukushima

Junmai Ginjo, Chiba prefecture
Historical reference: Fujiwara clan, waka poetry, Heian court
Timeline: ~1000-1200

This was a period of dramatic cultural creation in the upper echelons of Japanese society. After hundreds of years drawing from mainland culture, nobles finally looked inward during the Heian period, creating unique forms of art such as waka poetry. The Hyakunin Isshu is an early anthology of 100 authors-- members of the imperial court, from former emperors to ladies in waiting-- compiled by a member of the ruling Fujiwara clan. Shown is a woman in junitoe (lit. twelve layers), layered robes of silk worn by fashionable courtiers at this time. The poem shown refers to Tagajo city (sake 4), where a hill, suenomatsuyama, was spared from a tsunami that otherwise destroyed this northern capital.

3 NIWA NO UGUISU DOBUROKU- \$38 (360ml)



Doburoku: unfiltered,
rustic farmers' sake
Fukuoka prefecture
Historical reference:
women, the original toji
Timeline: ~800-1300 AD

While toji today means master brewer, the person responsible for all aspects of sake production, its etymology originates in the 8th century when toji were female clan chiefs. By the 9th century, toji referred more generally to wealthy matriarchs; as a matriarch in this era, home brewing was part of one's responsibilities. In the book of Buddhist mythology *Nihon Ryoiki* (824), a poor woman prays to Kannon for a wealthy husband. Her prayers are answered and, befitting her new status as toji, she receives "cloth to make clothes and rice to brew sake." In another story, a miserly woman goes to hell for selling watered-down sake. Commercial brewing became a male profession in the 1700s, but before that women were toji, making nutritious doburoku and nigori for home and market.

2 FUKUCHO "MOON ON THE WATER" NAMA - \$44 (720ml)

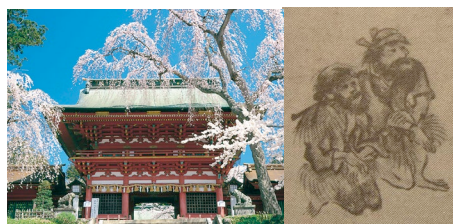


"Even if I depart
and go to Inaba Mountain,
whose peak is covered in pines
if I hear that you pine for me,
I will return straightaway to
you."
Ariwara no Yukihira 在原行平 (818-
893) Hyakunin Isshu, Poem #12

Junmai Ginjo Nama Genshu, Hiroshima prefecture
Historical reference: Courtly life, Noh theater
Timeline: 700s-1300s

Before joining the family brewery as toji, Imada Miho worked in the production of Noh plays in Tokyo. Noh is an ancient Japanese performing art rooted in sangaku, which came from China in the Nara period and took on its own identity in the Heian. The plays are minimally staged, with few actors and a small band/chorus. This sake alludes to Matsukaze 松風 (wind in the pines), a form of mugen Noh: a blurring of reality and fantasy. Matsukaze is the ghost of a salt maker, a rural girl lingering on the desolate seashore of Suma waiting for the return of her lover, who long ago left for Heian-kyo. She and her sister haunt the shores at night, fascinated by the reflection of the moon in their brine-water pails.

4 URAKASUMI HONJOZO GENSU - \$39 (720ml)



Honjozo Genshu
Miyagi prefecture
Historical reference:
Emishi people, Shiohama
Jinja, Tagajo, Northern
Fujiwara Clan
Timeline: ~800-1100 AD

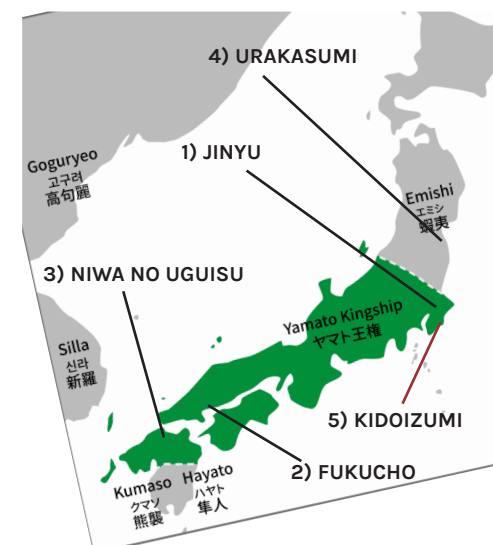
Founded in 1724, Urakasaki has been brewing omiki (sacred sake) for Miyagi's Shiohama Jinja since the 1800s. Shiohama Jinja, at its time the most important and largest Shinto shrine in Tohoku, dates to at least 820 AD when it was constructed to serve the neighboring city of Tagajo, administrative capital of Mutsu province (Tohoku) and the terminus of the northern Tosando road which starts in Heijō-kyō (Nara city capital). 700-1100 AD was a period of Japanese expansionism in the rural north, battling (and intermarrying) the indigenous Emishi people to claim this land for the emperor. But the Northern Fujiwara clan, central to this effort, defected-- ruling Tōhoku from 1094-1104 as their own realm. Urakasaki's Honjozo Genshu is unique: it's not sold outside of Shiohama, and the gold-wrapped version is exclusive to one Japanese restaurant & US buyers, thanks to True Sake (SF) owner Beau's long friendship with the brewery owner.

5 KIDOIZUMI "AFS" - \$45 (500ml)



Ichidan Jikomi Junmai Muroka Nama Genshu, Chiba
Historical reference: Heian-kyō, Engishiki
Timeline: ~900AD, Heian period

In 794, Emperor Kanmu established Heian-kyō (later renamed Kyoto) as the capital of Japan, moving the Imperial Court there and marking the beginning of the Heian period. In keeping with trends of this era, Heian-kyō drew inspiration from the Chinese Tang dynasty: urban planning, tax laws and other regulations were modelled after Chinese capital of Xi'an. The Engishiki, finished in 927 by members of the Fujiwara clan, is a thorough compilation of these records. While it was primarily administrative, the Engishiki does include the earliest de-facto recipes for sake as well as the functions of the Miki no Tsukasa, Kyoto's governmental office responsible for sake production. This bureau oversaw the brewing of sake for imperial ceremonies, religious offerings, and court revelry. The best sake, goshu, was sweet and dense with a high ratio of koji and low ratio of water-- much like AFS.



710-1185

NARA + HEIAN JIDAI

In the year 794, a new imperial capital was established at Heian-kyō (modern Kyoto), marking the beginning of the Heian period, which lasted until 1185. Heian means “peace” in Japanese. The Heian period is considered a golden age of classical Japanese culture. There was great influence from China, including Buddhist religious practices that mixed with native Shinto beliefs, but in the Heian period Japan looked inward and within the court these external influences evolved into something entirely new. Hiragana and katakana, the first sassy romance

novels (Pillow Book! Tale of Genji!) and collections of Japanese waka poetry, Noh performance, the domestication and early commercialization of koji as well as its gradual replacement of other saccharifying methods (such as malting). We have very little visibility of cultural changes among commoners, most were illiterate and nobles could go their entire lives interacting with farmers only at shrines and temples. Nobles viewed commoners as a savage curiosity

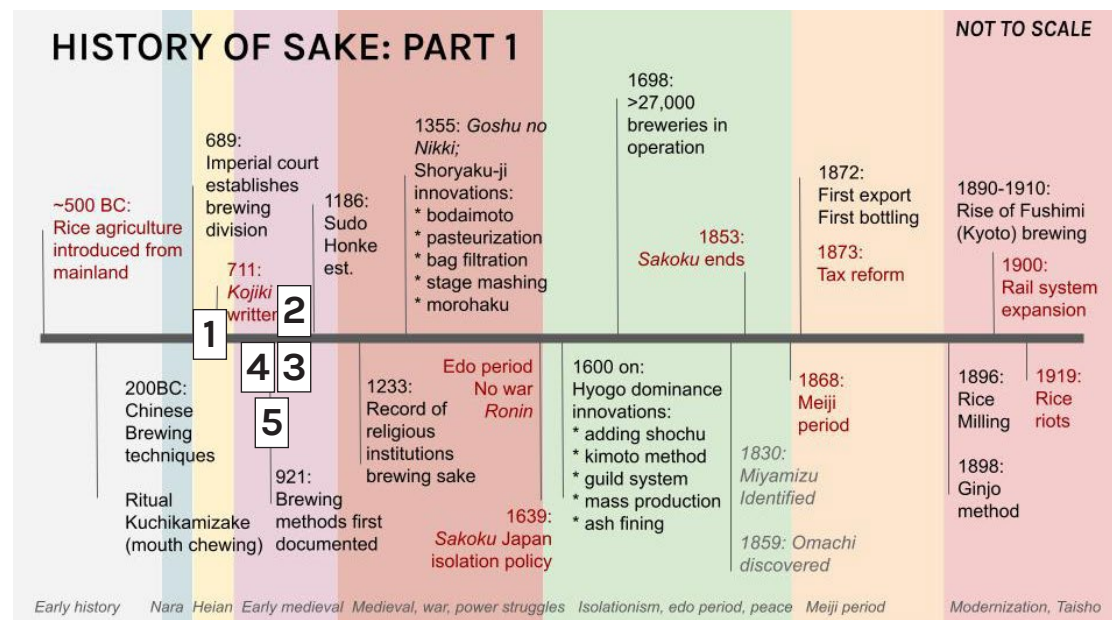
There is a moon in my pail!
Why, into my pail too a moon has crept!
(Looking up at the sky.)
One moon above ...
Two imaged moons below,
So through the night each carries
A moon on her water-truck,
Drowned at the bucket's brim.
Forgotten, in toil on this salt sea-road,
The sadness of this world where souls cling!

Matsukaze (Noh) excerpt

responsible for maintaining the garden of rice they had the luxury of consuming through heavy taxation on tenant farmers. We do know that commoners were taxed heavily by regional clans, which had the long-term result of enriching these clans and weakening Imperial rule. Although the Imperial House of Japan had power on the surface, the real power was in the hands of the Fujiwara clan: a powerful aristocratic family who had intermarried with the imperial family. Over the Heian period we see power of the

emperor and the imperial court decline, passing first to great clans of civilian aristocrats, most notably the Fujiwara, and then to the military clans and their armies of samurai. You'll see the Fujiwara clan mentioned in the flight repeatedly, and where you don't it's only for lack of space. Their shadow control of government, culture and everyday life in Heian Japan cannot be overstated.

Peace, money, time and literacy define the Nara and Heian periods, when sake shifted from a ritual-spiritual function to wealth and leisure. This golden age will soon give way to hundreds of years of feudalism: political instability, military conflict, civilian oppression, and samurai culture.



PORTAL TO THE PAST, EPISODE 2: NARA JIDAI THROUGH HEIAN JIDAI

