

Interlude

Chigami and Yakamori

MYS 15, the next to last chapter of the original compilation, consists of two groups of poems, each associated with a journey: the first, MYS 3578-3722, with an unsuccessful embassy to the Korean kingdom of Silla in 736, and the second, MYS 3723-3785, with the exile of Nakatomo no Yakamori. The two journeys are not thematically similar; most likely the second one was put here simply to find a place for it, as work on the anthology wound down.

Probably both series were then expanded by adding poems involving other sea voyages, or other separations; again, to accommodate things with no other obvious home. In the second group, it seems possible to detect, among the poems of separation, some which seem likely to be by Yakamori and his wife, Sanu no Chigami. Nothing is known of them beyond these poems. It has been said that Yakamori was exiled because of his marriage to Chigami (this being for some reason forbidden). But a poem plausibly hers accuses him of some official misstep, which has brought about a separation of which she is innocent. He seems to accept blame for the exile. I think we should trust the poems.

From the probably genuine poems, here are twelve, covering five months. They reflect the pain of first departure, and the ache of continuing separation.

1

This is one of the poems which Chigami wrote, soon after Yakamori's departure, before he had arrived and had an opportunity to reply.

15/146
3723

*The foot-wearying
mountain path which you, my lord,
had set out to cross –
holding you within my heart,
I have no moment of calm.*

– Sanu no Chigami

2-4

He later replies with several of his own, these three describing the journey itself. The first calls himself worthless (thus not protesting his exile), the more so for causing her sorrow. The second contrasts the hardships of travel to the easier past life in the capital. The third, in expressing awe for his destination, to which he has been sent by a higher authority, accepts his own banishment, but notes the pain of separation which she must be feeling.

15/150 *Like to dust and dirt,*
3727 *of no account whatever;*
 all because of me
 you will be having such thoughts –
 The sadness of my sister!

16/151 *With its reds and greens,*
3728 *The avenues of Nara*
 are easy to walk,
 but the present mountain path
 is proving hard to travel

16/153 *Full of reverence,*
3730 *I have not spoken a word;*
 but now, on the crest
 of the road into Koshi,
 I call the name of my wife.

– Nakatomo no Yakamori

5-6

She, answering, first tells him not to worry about her; then with a note of asperity, remarks that since he has not done as, in duty, he should have done (the image is of tending a field), she is left in this condition of uncertainty.

15/168 *If there should be life,*
3745 *then we'll likely meet again;*
 and so, for my sake,
 you need spend no thought on me.
 If only there should be life!

15/169 *Since you did not plant*
3746 *your fields the way others do,*
 now it comes to it
 that you have left your country.
 And I, what am I to do?

– Sanu no Chigami

7-8

He responds with a long group of poems, including these two. Neither here not elsewhere does he exactly respond to her accusation. Instead, he puts on the poetic record his wish, one way or another, to be near to her.

15/177 *Needing no pathway,*
3754 *for you are no barriers,*
 O you cuckoo-bird!
 Had I a body like yours,
 ceaselessly I then would go

15/187 *Mountains and rivers*
3764 *standing there between us two,*
 distant though they be,
 let our hearts at least be near
 in our thoughts, my beloved!

– Nakatomo no Yakamori

9-11

Back in Nara, she passes the time as she can: an illusory meeting in dream, then a momentary wish that she could have accompanied him into his exile; finally, something like a mood of resignation to the ongoing separation.

Of the two, hers is the stronger spirit, and the clearer eye.

15/192 *Black as nuba-fruit,*
3769 *the night when I saw my lord;*
 but when morning dawned,
 was no meeting between us.
 Now, how sad is everything!

15/196 *Along with my lord*
3773 *I might have made the journey –*
 but it's all the same.
 Instead, I am left behind,
 with no good to say of it.

15/202 *Here by my dwelling,*
3779 *the flowering orange-trees*
 blossom all in vain.
 Will they fall and be scattered
 with no one here to see them?

– Sanu no Chigami

12

The MYS compilers chose to end this sequence, and this Book, with seven poems of Yakamori on the hototogisu, the cuckoo whose song, conventionally, is one of the delights of early summer. For Yakamori, now in the fifth month of his exile, and having thus arrived at early summer, the cuckoo is instead an intensifier of his sorrow. Here is the sixth of those poems.

15/207 *Without all feeling –*
 3784 *such a thing you have become,*
 O you cuckoo-bird!
 When I am already sad,
 must you still keep on crying?

– Nakatomo no Yakamori

A modern reader may be curious about these people; or at least Yakamori. Was he ever allowed to return, to Nara of the reds and greens?

We do not know. Before passing on to Yakamochi of the Diary, let us pause one more moment, to look at a much-desired exit from the present world.