

Site of the Biwadono Residence

The regent Fujiwara no Mototsune (836–891) lived here during the early Heian Period. The Biwadono residence was passed down to his third son, Nakahira (875–945), and was later occupied by generations of noblemen and women related to the imperial family. Illustrious literary figures, such as Fujiwara no Atsutada (906–943), also resided here.

The composition of Japanese *waka* poetry played a central role in the cultural life of the nobles who lived in and around the palace. While little remains of the residences in which they lived, the poems they wrote open an enduring window onto their elegant world. The *Hyakunin Isshu* (dating to the second half of the 13th century) is the most famous collection of poetry in Japanese literary history. The following well-known poem by Atsutada is included in this compilation. It shows the capacity for intense emotion and deep love that was typical of Japanese classical poets:

When I compare my heart

From before we met

to after we made love,

I know I had not yet grasped

the pain of loving you.

(aimite no / nochi no kokoro ni / kurabureba / mukashi wa mono o / omowa-zarikeri)

In 1002, the building was refurbished for Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028) and his second daughter Kenshi (994-1027). After a fire destroyed the Imperial Palace, Emperor Ichijo (980-1011) resided here from 1009 along with such literary giants as Murasaki Shikibu (early 11th century), author of one of the most famous Japanese novels, *The Tale of Genji* (early 11th century), and Sei Shonagon (ca.966-1025), author of the renowned diary, *The Pillow Book* (early 11th century). Both were in the service of the court.