

Site of the Sakuramachi Residence

Amongst the greatest of the *waka* poets, Ki no Tsurayuki (872–945) is said to have lived in this area in the mid-Heian period. The grounds here were noted for an abundance of cherry trees and a delightful garden that later became known as the Sakuramachi residence (cherry tree district).

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. In the following exquisite poem, Ki no Tsurayuki compares the scattering of blossoms to a snow fall:

The wind that is blowing
beneath the cherry blossom tree
is not cold at all,
and the blossoms that fall—
A snow that has never known a cloud.

(Sakura chiru / kono shita kaze wa / samukara de / sora ni shirare nu / yuki zo furi keru)

(From the collection of poems *Shui-shu* (ca.1006) No. 64)

The Nakagawa River flowed nearby. This river appears several times in Japan's most famous novel, *The Tale of Genji* (early 11th century), in particular in the chapter "The Lady at the Villa of Scattering Orange Blossoms."

(Hanachirusato) Genji recites this poem:

The cuckoo, pining for the fragrance
of orange blossoms,
which fill his heart

with nostalgia for the past

visits the village where the blossoms fall.

(Tachibana no / ka o natsukashi mi / hototogisu / hana chiru sato o / tazunete zo tou)