

## **The Higashiyama Area**

### **Early to Mid-Heian Period, Ninth to Eleventh Centuries**

When Kyoto was established in 794, it was meant to be a capital in the purest sense of the word: the seat of the statutory government, home and ritual seat of the emperor and the civil aristocracy, and the location of the offices that facilitated imperial pageantry, bureaucratic administration, and diplomacy. Buddhist temples and shrines were excluded, and the presence of warriors in the city was, in principle, taboo. Due to their polluting effects, killing and burial were also formally proscribed. It was because of these vaunted—albeit unrealistic—ideals that Kyoto came to be surrounded by clusters of development outside the city from as early as the ninth century. Within these enclaves, temple communities and residents alike were not circumscribed by the capital's strict rules of status-specific comportment and pageantry.

The earliest and most dynamic of these communities formed in the area east of the city, between the Kamo River and hills of Higashiyama. There, the broad, gently sloping topography was high and dry from the frequent flooding of the river. The area also had easy access to the Tokaido road, which connected the capital to the eastern provinces. As mentioned in the literary classic, *The Tale of Genji*, the city's elite liked to cremate their dead along the "eastern hills" (Higashiyama), particularly in a place called Toribeno. They also devoted their wealth to the creation of temples which, over the next three centuries, multiplied and flourished. Today, Higashiyama boasts one of the highest concentrations of Buddhist temples in the world.