Preface to the poem 5.793

本文・Original text

大宰帥大伴卿報凶問歌一首

One poem by High Noble Opotömö-nō TaNpîtö, the Governor-General of NtaNsaipu (Dazaifu), responding to the announcements of misfortune.

不幸の事象が重なる。災害の報が集まり続ける。我の心が痛む。一人で、我れの腸を切る涙を流す。唯二君の大助を仰ぐため、我れの残年が少しでも続く。筆に言葉を尽くすことはできない。それは過去と現在で嘆かれたことである。

Translation

Unfortunate events pile up, and announcements of misfortune continue to appear [lit. gather]. The grief that [I] harbor breaks [my] heart, and being [all] alone, [I] shed tears that tear my entrails apart. But [since I] rely on the great help of [my] two lords, [my] declining life continues just for a while. A brush cannot express all the words – this [fact] was lamented in the past and the present.

Commentary

On Dazaifu and Governor-General of Dazaifu see the commentary to 15.3668.

Opotömö-nō sukune TaNpîtö (大伴宿禰旅人) is a prominent Man’yōshū poet, almost of the same great caliber as his son Opotömö-nō Yakamōti, Kakinōmōtō-nō Pītōmarō, Yamanōpē-nō Okura, and YamaNpē-nō Akapītō. There are altogether seventy-six poems by him in the anthology (one chōka and seventy-five tanka). The following are the major highlights from his biography.

He is the son of Opotömö-nō Yasumarō (大伴安麿), and was born in 664 AD. In 710 AD he had Senior Fifth Rank, Upper Grade, and was the General of the Left. In 711 AD he was promoted to the Lower Fourth Rank, Lower Grade. In 718 AD he was made Middle Councilor and promoted to Senior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade. In 718 AD he was made Middle Councilor and promoted to Senior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade. In 721 AD he was promoted to Junior Third Rank, and in 724 AD to Senior Third Rank. Opotömö-nō TaNpîtō was appointed Governor-General (Dalai-no soshi, 太宰帥) of the NtaNsaipu (Dazaifu) in the middle of Jinki era, most likely in the late fourth year of Jinki (727 AD; on Jinki see the commentary to the postscript of 5.793 below), and he came there accompanied by Opotömö-nō Iratumē and his son Opotömö-nō Yakamōti (born from a different wife). This appointment is strange, as the Governor-General of Dazaifu needed to have only Junior Third Rank. Itō speculates that it was a part of the plot of PuNdipara (藤原) house to weaken the political position of the prince NaNkaya (長屋王), with whom Opotömö-nō
TaNpîtö was close (1996: 23). He returned to Nara in 730 AD, and was promoted to the Junior Second Rank in 731 AD. He died in the same year.

This preface and the following poem certainly refer to the death of Opotömö-nö Iratumë (大伴女郎), Opotömö-nö TaNpîtö’s wife, and possibly to either the death of Opotömö-nö Sukunamarö (大伴宿奈麻呂), the husband of Opotömö-nö TaNpîtö’s younger sister, Opotömö-nö Sakanöupë Iratumë (大伴坂上女郎) (Itō 1996: 23), or the death of Opotömö-nö TaNpîtö’s baby (Omodaka 1977.5: 8). He was sixty-three years old and had Senior Third Rank at this time. Opotömö-nö Iratumë passed away in the beginning of the fourth lunar month of the fifth year of Jinki (728 AD), and Opotömö-nö Sukunamarö in the late fifth or early sixth month of the same year (Itō 1996: 23).

There is certain amount of controversy over how to explain the expression 凶問 (Omodaka 1977.5: 7-8). The old commentary tradition going back to Keichū treats it as ‘expressions of condolences’, but a newer commentary tradition takes it as ‘announcements of misfortune.’ Given the strong textual support for the second interpretation from Chinese texts, such as 魏書 (魏書), it seems that the second explanation is more likely. Almost all modern commentators treat 凶問 as ‘announcements of misfortune’ (Takagi et al. 1957: 54, 424), (Omodaka 1977.5: 8), (Nakanishi 1978: 359), (Imura 1983: 7), (Kojima et al. 1972: 47), (Itō 1996: 25); or as ‘announcement of death’ (Satake et al. 1999: 442). Only Kubota follows the traditional ‘expressions of condolences’ (1965: 20).

‘unfortunate events’ is an allusion to 司馬相如 (司馬相如)’s composition 上書楝獵 (上書楝獵) included in the 文選 (文選), vol. 39. The 文選 (文選) is an anthology of Chinese prose and poetry spanning more than one thousand years from 周 (周) to 梁 (梁) dynasties. It was compiled by 梁 Crown prince Xiao Tong (萧統) in collaboration with 梁’s literati in the first half of the sixth century AD. Altogether there are sixty volumes in the extant copy of the 文選 (文選), and the material is arranged by genre/style and chronologically.

to tear entrails’ is a famous Chinese metaphor for grief, found in many literary works, so it is difficult to determine the source from which TaNpîtö borrowed it.

Itō and Imura think that ‘two lords’ might be Opatōmō-nō TaNpîtö’s younger brother (from a different mother) Inakîmî (稲公) and nephew Kômarö (胡麻呂) (Imura 1983: 8), (Itō 1996: 25). The evidence provided by Imura is only circumstantial, so other Japanese philologists treat them as unknown (Takagi et al. 1957: 54), (Kubota 1965: 21), (Kojima et al. 1972: 47), (Omodaka 1977.5: 10), (Nakanishi 1978: 359), (Satake et al. 1999: 442).

‘a brush cannot express all the words’ looks like a paraphrase from 周易 (周易): 書不盡言言不盡意 ‘writing cannot express all the words, all the words cannot express all the thoughts’ (Omodaka 1977.5: 10), (Takagi et al. 1957: 54).

---

3 魏書 (魏書) is a history of Northern Wei, compiled by 魏収 (魏收) in 554 AD.
4 司馬相如 (司馬相如, 179-117 BC) is a poet and writer from the former Han dynasty.