Objectives: This course offers an introduction to the court cultures of ‘early Japan’ of the Nara and Heian periods, roughly from the 8th to 12th centuries, also referred to as ‘classical Japanese culture.’ The goal is to give students a general sense of the diversity of political institutions (emperor systems related to Confucian and Daoist formations), religious practices (varieties of Buddhism, Shintō, onmyōdō), and cultural forms. Cultural forms will include architecture, song, painting, calligraphy, and various forms of written expression (poetry, narrative, diaries). Methodologically speaking, politics and aesthetics have usually been treated separately in this historical context, but this course will focus on more recent approaches that strive to explore the interconnections between aesthetics and politics.

Methodology: What makes early Japan interesting is that many of our modern social distinctions and political assumptions do not hold. Indeed, to borrow Lowenthal’s phrase, this “past is a foreign country.” Yet the bulk of our accounts of early Japanese societies strive to make them appear to be modern, or to anticipate the modern, that is, to serve as sources of identity for the modern Japanese nation. What makes the study of early Japan challenging, then, is that we cannot separate it from the history of its interpretation. Simply put, we must always adopt a ‘dual optic.’ To this end, each unit will begin with discussion of how a particular political and aesthetic formation in early Japan has been framed in the early modern (Tokugawa or Edo) or modern (Meiji) era. We will then turn to primary texts and materials in translation and explore different interpretations of them. In lectures, other aspects of early Japanese societies will be introduced — urban design, architecture, forms of art, and material culture. But students are expected to read the materials prior to class, and to formulate questions about them.

Course Materials: Depending on student numbers and interests, a course packet will be made available, or links to the library sources will be posted on my website.

Evaluation:
Participation: 20%. Note that participation includes attendance.
Quizzes: 20% x 4. Quiz 1 will concern dates, geography, and background information. Quizzes 2 and 3 will be multiple choice and short essay responses. Quiz 4 will be an essay of roughly five pages. Details will be given in class.

McGill requires that the following two statements be included in course outlines:

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).”

“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.”
Reading Schedule

INTRODUCTION

Sept 6  Introduction

        —Gina Barnes, “The Emergence of Political Rulership and the State in Early Japan,” in *Japan Emerging*, 77-88.
        —Bruce Batten, “Early Japan and the Continent,” in *Japan Emerging*, 89-97.

        —Kenneth Dean and Brian Massumi, “The Elimination of Strength,” from *First & Last Emperors*, 1-54 (online version)

KOJIKI: SPEECH ACTS

        Recommended:

QUIZ 1


MAN’YŌŠŪ: THE PROPENSITY OF WORDS

  —Torquil Duthie, “Yamato as Empire in the Sinoscript Sphere,” Man’yōshū and the Imperial Imagination of Japan (Brill, 2014), 15-56.

Oct 4  The Ten Thousand Leaves (Man’yōshū), Book 1, trans. Ian Hideo Levy, 37-78.


KŪKAI AND RITUAL STATES


QUIZ 2


KOKINSHŪ: THE ORDER OF THE SENSES

Oct 27

Nov 1
—“Kana Preface,” trans. Laurel Rasplica Rodd,
—Kokinshū, Books 1: 49-68.

Nov 3
—Kokinshū, Books 11: 183-207

Nov 8

MONOGATARI: DIVAGATIONS OF FORCE

Nov 10

QUIZ 3

Nov 15

Nov 17
—Michele Marra, “A Counterideological Discourse,” from The Aesthetics of Discontent (Hawai‘i 1991), 14-34.
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