

The Imperial Guard night watch in 11th century Japan

by SUZUKI Hiroyuki

This article examines the function of the Imperial Guard (Konoefu 近衛府) in 11th century Japan. Under the Ritsuryo 律令 codes enacted in 701, the Imperial Guard (Efu 衛府) was put in charge of security at the imperial palace, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This provision remained in tact even under the *Engishiki* 延喜式 code revisions enacted in 967. The present article focuses on 1) whether the Guard was still assigned to night duty even in the 11th century, and 2) if aristocrats in the 11th century were aware of that function. Although the research to date has argued that Konoefu Imperial Guard no longer functioned in maintaining security at the imperial palace, the author's examination of the night watch advocates a reevaluation of that assertion.

The article begins with an analysis of the regulations regarding the night watch in the *Engishiki* code revisions. Because all six posts within the Imperial Guard were involved in the imperial palace night watch, the author deems it appropriate to examine the night watch system alone as typical of the function and the character of the Konoefu Imperial Guard as a whole. It is also noteworthy that the night watch was a criterion for promotion; and an examination of the primary sources confirms that the night watch was a routine duty.

Furthermore, manuals related to ritual and dairies of aristocrats mentioning the night watch during the 11th century reveal that not only was the night watch routine duty, but also the Imperial Guard was recognized at that time as an organization dedicated to maintaining security.

Finally, the author finds that the Konoefu Imperial Guard was also responsible for extinguishing and preventing fires, just one more piece

of evidence that the imperial court still considered its Imperial Guard effective and that the aristocracy also recognized its functionality.

The author concludes that the Konoefu Imperial Guard was effective in maintaining security during the 11th century, in addition to performing other functions, such as performing rituals and serving the Fujiwara regents.