

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The years 824 through 941

### *Principal Characters*

Chang Pogo, Korean merchant prince

Yi Chung, lieutenant to Chang Pogo

Fujiwara Sumitomo, courtier turned pirate

Taira Masakado, warrior become rebel

Misake Yasuyaki, priest of Michizane's memorial

In the 170 years or so from Tabito's time to Michizane's, Dazaifu became a very different place. Tabito was charged with keeping a lid on Kyushu and receiving foreign diplomats (though none appeared to enliven his stay). By Michizane's era Kyushu was relatively docile and foreign relations had diminished to the exchanges with Parhae, whose delegations almost never came to Dazaifu, although the court repeatedly asked them to. Dazaifu's business was no longer diplomacy, it was trade. The handsome reception center on Hakata's shore housed merchants, storehouses bulged with imported goods, and Dazaifu's officials grew wealthy, sometimes legally, sometimes not. It had begun in 824, when a Korean named Chang Pogo appeared at Hakata.

No one has been able to trace Chang Pogo's ancestry. He was still a youth when he left Silla Korea, went to China, and became a mercenary. (Military service was not popular with the Chinese; they could always use a few good men.) A skilled, tough, warrior, he was soon an officer in the Chinese forces stationed along the southern coast of the Shantung peninsula, just across the Yellow Sea from Korea.

Each of the ports along this coast had its large and prosperous colony of Koreans. Self-governing because the Chinese didn't like to bother with foreigners, they provided complete service to Korean shippers: they were agents and brokers and the monks in their Korean Buddhist temples prayed for the safety of ships and sailors.

Using his position and the cumshaw that flowed his way, Chang Pogo acquired his own fleet and soon dominated those ports. He returned to Korea a wealthy man. He was also an angry man. He was incensed that pirates were kidnaping Korean peasants and selling them as slaves in China, crimes that the Silla government seemed helpless to prevent. He established his headquarters on an island called Wando, off the southwest tip of Korea and astride the route from China to Silla's capital; then he petitioned the Silla king to grant him the means to

wipe out the slave trade. He was given a force of ten thousand men; he made them into his personal army. He quickly eliminated the slavers and, as the new master of the Yellow Sea, took almost total control of the China-Korea trade.

He had looked ahead. Wando island was ideally situated for traffic to Japan; he turned his attention in that direction. He could not expect a warm welcome. Dazaifu had been confronted by a disquieting number of Koreans in recent years. Silla rule was disintegrating in dynastic turbulence and, as disorder erupted, sizable groups of immigrants crossed to Kyushu looking for a quieter place to live.

Other arrivals were less peaceable. Korean pirates attacked Tsushima in 811, and two years later struck at the Ojima islands off Kyushu's west coast; more than a hundred inhabitants were killed or wounded, but all of the pirates were killed or captured. The court sent additional troops and Dazaifu was ordered to resume instruction in the use of the longbow.

In these circumstances Chang Pogo had to be both daring and persuasive. Dazaifu officials would not see him but he was allowed to meet with the governor of Chikuzen, whose province included the port of Hakata. The talks must have gone well. Shortly thereafter one of Chang Pogo's merchants sailed into the harbor.

It had been a long time since Hakata had seen so rich a cargo. Dazaifu officials pondered how to take advantage of it, given the government's deep-seated aversion to private trade; if reluctantly permitted it must be in an official market with controlled prices. A step in that direction would be to put the goods in a government building and, since there was little chance of a diplomat's showing up, the Koreans and their wares were housed in the elaborate reception area near the port.

Word was sped to the capital. The emperor, the council of state, and their friends happily shopped from the list of goods and sent back their orders. The trouble was that Hakata had seen such a frenzy of buying that the choice items were gone. Dazaifu officials had made a gesture toward control but had themselves bought feverishly. In a lame explanation to the court they found it convenient to blame their favorite scapegoats, the wealthy local gentry, who, they wrote, had squandered their fortunes in wild buying.

The court did not accept that. "This results from a failure to make arrests," the council replied, placing the blame squarely on Dazaifu; henceforth, "when merchants arrive, their freight is to be examined from top to bottom, and everything of use to the court shall be sent up by mounted messenger." Having

preempted the best, the council permitted the rest to be sold “under the supervision of Dazaifu officials.”

Trade flourished for several years. In 840 a grateful Chang Pogo sent his lieutenant Yi Chung with a gift of saddles for the court. This, the council decided, was going too far. Only foreign rulers could present “tribute”; it was presumptuous of the mere subject of a foreign land to try to do so. Dazaifu was instructed to return the saddles, “courteously,” and to send Yi Chung home, but not until he had sold his goods (the saddles must have brought premium prices).

When Yi Chung sailed from Hakata his cargo included silk consigned in a private deal of the forbidden kind that was making some officials on Kyushu rich. The governor of Chikuzen was sending silk pongee which Yi Chung was to trade for Chinese goods that would bring the governor a

handsome profit.

When Yi Chung reached Wando he found that Chang Pogo had been murdered. His power and wealth had made him a player in the factional turmoil that raised up and brought down Silla kings in fast time, but he had overreached. In 839 his forces stormed the capital and put his candidate on the throne. Being obligated, the new king agreed to marry Chang Pogo’s daughter, but he did not live long enough to go through with the wedding. Still wanting his daughter to live royally, Chang Pogo tried to get the deceased king’s son and successor to fulfill the promise, but this time the nobility refused to marry their king to a merchant’s daughter and, to settle the argument, sent an assassin who terminated Chang Pogo.

Fearful that the same fate awaited him, Yi Ching dashed back to the safety of Hakata. Cohorts of the assassin soon showed up to accuse Yi Chung of rebellion and demand that he be turned over to them. The

Japanese smelled treachery, sent the pursuers on their way, and assured Yi Chung that he could tarry in Hakata as long as he wished, since forcing him back to Korea would be like “casting a wild beast to a starving tiger.”

Meanwhile, Chikuzen’s governor, indignant that his pongee had not been sold for the profit he expected, had seized all of Yi Chung’s cargo as reparation. When the council heard of this, they rapped the governor’s knuckles and ordered Dazaifu to return Yi Chung’s merchandise to him. It was not, they said, “the Way of the Ruler” to deprive a merchant of his goods. But the whole chain of events had roused the old bias against Koreans; any further Korean immigration was banned and Korean merchants were denied the use of the reception center.

It really didn’t matter. Korean merchants no longer appeared, for Chang Pogo’s death ended his trade empire. It also ended his suppression of piracy. As the Silla dynasty lurched toward extinction, Korean pirates became bolder and meaner. In the summer of 869, as Dazaifu was preparing to dispatch a convoy of tax goods to the capital, two Korean pirate ships sailed brazenly into Hakata bay, picked off a boat whose crew had foolishly decided to set out ahead of the others, and plundered the entire annual shipment of silk and silk floss from Buzen province. It was a serious loss and a humiliation. Dazaifu was berated for letting it happen.

There was a quiet interval, but 893, 894, and 895 brought a series of bloody, damaging attacks that surely influenced the court’s decision to abandon the embassy to China that Michizane was to have led in 894; the seas were dangerous. After each attack the court sent another detachment of soldiers to Dazaifu, but there was no way of knowing where pirates would hit, and Japan could not go to sea against them. Its ships were slow and clumsy compared with the Koreans’ and it had no commander like Chang Pogo to lead the fight.

The disappearance of Korean traders had not ended foreign trade. Almost as if on cue, Chinese merchants sailed into Hakata bay. The court regarded the Chinese as a distinct improvement over Koreans. In the Japanese vocabulary, the Chinese were “equals,” the Koreans were “vassals.” Furthermore the Chinese brought more of the Chinese goods that the Japanese coveted: medicines, fabrics,

books, toiletries (such as lipstick), jewelry (such as combs and hairpins), and, most desirable of all, celadon pottery with its lustrous, translucent green glaze. Gray green or willow green or sea green, the Japanese craved it (as did peoples as far away as Morocco). Once it had gone only to the privileged; now anyone of means could eat from it.

For the Chinese, Hakata's reception center was reopened; they were given free lodging for as long as they stayed. And their stay was long, because the court chose to deal with them directly. To make certain that the government and the nobility of the capital got first choice, Dazaifu was cut out of the picture. When a ship arrived, officials were dispatched from the capital to examine the cargo and carry back all that they chose. Payment was then sent back to Hakata.

This took at least a couple of months, and although the choicest items may have been skimmed, there was plenty left and plenty of time for trading in Hakata. Deals were struck openly and furtively. Dazaifu and Chikuzen officials, in their position as hosts, had opportunities to apply the art of the squeeze, which came as no shock to the Chinese. Long experience had taught them to figure in such miscellaneous expenses when they set their prices, and the unexpected boon of free room and board gave them an extra margin of profit. Storehouses at Dazaifu and elsewhere on Kyushu filled with goods both licit and illicit, and everybody knew tales about the wealth carried back to the capital by returning officials. (We may note that Dazaifu's warehouses held quantities of prized Chinese medicines when Michizane was a prisoner, but although he was ill none was offered to him; his wife had to send medicines to him from the capital.)

Despite the profits, it became increasingly clear that foreign trade had drawbacks. For one thing, the foreigners in their midst gave disgruntled Japanese new horizons for their scheming. In 866 Dazaifu discovered that a senior official in Hizen province, one of the local gentry, was plotting to cross over to Silla, enlist a band of Koreans, and lead them in taking Tsushima. Four years later a tip from Silla uncovered treason at Dazaifu itself: the Junior Assistant Governor General--a Fujiwara occupying the same position that Fujiwara Hirotsugu had--and some other key officials had been conspiring with the king of Silla.

The flow of Chinese imports became a problem in itself. The treasury ran out of gold to pay for the government's purchases, and was reduced to paying in silk from Dazaifu's warehouses. The council of state tried to cut back by ordering the Chinese to come less often. The Chinese paid no attention, and whenever they appeared, the same men who had ordered the cutback rushed to buy.

This was made clear in a caustic directive issued by Michizane's former rival, Fujiwara Tokihira, just five months after Michizane's death. When a Chinese ship arrived, he wrote sternly, the men sent by the government were no longer getting first choice. Not only were Kyushu's gentry, who "love exotic items," driving up prices, but, "In recent years, members of the imperial family and the nobility send messengers to bid before the authorities can get there."

The culprits seem obvious. They certainly included Tokihira's own family, if not himself. But he censured Dazaifu for letting unauthorized persons get to the port. He did not explain how Dazaifu was to stop representatives of the emperor and the country's highest nobility. "Let another order be sent," he decreed. "There will be no leniency."

Tokihira's harangue was merely foolish, but it highlighted a peril. By putting self-interest first, the nobility were undermining the government they ran.

The shortage of gold was a symptom: the government was starved for revenue. The biggest reason was the swift growth of huge, private, tax-exempt estates in the hands of noble families, Buddhist temples, and Shinto shrines. It had begun innocently. To increase farmland, the government offered entrepreneurs lifetime tax-exemption on reclaimed land. "Lifetime" stretched until it became perpetual. Great families and religious institutions contrived to make not just their reclaimed tracts but all of their lands tax-exempt. As the central government's control of the provinces weakened and lawlessness grew, small landholders found it wise to commend their lands to the estate holders: the estates asked less in dues than the government had in taxes, and the estates' fighting men gave protection that the government could not. Great manors mushroomed all across the country. Their noble and religious owners grew rich while the loss of taxes crippled the government.

Even the little mausoleum at Michizane's grave acquired land. The offerings of prudent courtiers assigned to Dazaifu were creating a budding temple. Then in 919, ten years after Tokihira's early death, the Fujiwara family directed one of his younger brothers to sponsor construction of a larger, more permanent memorial. Whatever mixture of sympathy, guilt, and dread of a malignant spirit moved them to do this, it brought joy to Michizane's faithful attendant, Misake Yasuyuki, who still presided there as Buddhist priest. In the same year, not by coincidence, the temple was given its first estate, the land and peasants of a village about six miles away. From then on, that village's output went not to the government but to Michizane's memorial. Yasuyuki sent one of his most resourceful disciples to oversee the village, and reinforced him with another follower whose chief talent

was swordsmanship; together they would insure that no neighbor encroached on the village borders, and, if opportunity presented, they might acquire a field here and there.

The government's problems seemed endless: Korean pirates, disloyal officials, loss of revenue, disorder in the provinces. The court could not control its own members, much less keep order in the country. It even had home-grown pirates in the Inland Sea; for more than a century had been issuing order after order, all toothless, to quell them.

The people in question resented being called pirates. They called themselves *suigun*, meaning "naval forces." They pointed out that they and seamen like them up and down the Inland Sea and along the coast of Kyushu had served as the country's navy when it needed one. They had manned the ships that carried envoys to China, and suffered losses in that effort. Drawing on older memories, they ruminated on the 663 debacle off Korea when their fleet carrying an army sent to rescue the already extinct kingdom of Paekche was all but wiped out by the Chinese navy.

They were members of a proud and ancient clan (they ranked their mythic ancestors with those of the imperial family), a clan that dominated the province of Iyo (today's Ehime prefecture). Besides their islands, Iyo took in the mountains and fertile valleys of the whole northeast corner of Shikoka, but the "naval forces" spurned any home but the islands.

What the court called piracy was to them only natural. When ships navigated the narrow passages through their islands they should expect to pay a toll, just as travelers on land did at customs gates thrown across roads by local powers. The islanders admitted that they could be harsh if a crew was hostile, and if an occasional cargo of, say, imports from China, was too tempting, they might take it all. They knew how to fight and they had good weapons, including prized swords that had been offered out of respect, or fear. They did not play favorites. They took a share of both government cargo destined for the court and the private shipments of officials grown rich in the provinces.

They were not rich. They fished and gathered the savory greens of the ocean. Some had a bit of land; their women clawed its rocky patches to grow vegetables. The many families without land spent their lives on their boats, which were much less grand than imagined by a chronicler a couple of centuries later: "huge rafts . . . permanent habitations covered with earth, planted with trees, and dotted with rice fields."

They were little better off than peasants but in wit and spirit they held themselves above bovine farmers. They ate better. Peasants could not eat the rice they grew, but boats bearing that rice to the capital gave up enough to fill the stomachs of the seamen's families.

Then around 935 they acquired a leader, and he was bent on serious piracy. His name: Fujiwara Sumitomo. There is argument about Sumitomo's beginnings. Some say he was the third son of Fujiwara Yoshinori, a courtier of middling rank from a line of only modest achievement within that prolific family. However, it seems quite certain that Yoshinori adopted this son while he was serving as governor of Iyo. While he was there Yoshinori was obliged to work closely with the local power that controlled the province. It is believed that a branch of that family ceded some newly developed land to Yoshinori, and that in return he adopted one of their sons, making him a Fujiwara and naming him Sumitomo. By birth, then, Sumitomo belonged to the same clan as the seamen of the islands.

Separated from his own parents when he was very young, Sumitomo grew up in the capital at a time when the court was bedeviled by the vengeful spirit of Michizane. Ostensibly he was a member of the most powerful family in the country, but he was a minor member. He also bore the stigma of being a country boy, the butt of scorn because he was born in the provinces. His foster father Yoshinori went from Iyo to a responsible position at Dazaifu, but he died young and was not around to support Sumitomo in the competition for appointment to a good position (there were never enough to go around). As he approached the age of forty Sumitomo held only Sixth Rank, still not entitled to enter the palace and be received by the emperor.

It was probably early in 931, when he was thirty-eight, that he was appointed to be secretary in Iyo, answerable to the governor and lieutenant governor. The position required only Seventh Rank, so he was overqualified, but he must have been glad to have the salary and perks that went with the office. By this time provincial governors usually stayed in the capital so that Sumitomo was number two man on the scene. He probably sought the job. It brought him back to his own people and he came as a celebrity, a courtier and a Fujiwara. He left a nervous capital: it was plagued with banditry; the palace guards were under orders to patrol the streets nightly. His wife, possibly glad to be rid of him, stayed at home as wives usually did, but he brought a young son.

One of his duties as secretary was to escort Iyo's shipments of rice and other tax goods to that capital. Each occasion involved negotiation with his distant kinsmen who controlled passage through the islands. In parleying over what part of the cargo had to be surrendered to let the rest go through, he was not overly

forceful; he and the seamen developed a cozy relationship. Another of his responsibilities as an official was to suppress piracy; he gave that duty lip service. All the while, the court continued to issue orders against piracy, continued to send officers to eliminate pirates, and continued to request prayers against pirates at shrines and temples both in the capital district and in the pirates' strongholds. Nothing changed.

When Sumitomo's term as secretary expired he did not return to the capital. He knew he had no future at the court. He foresaw better things in Iyo; he stayed. This was not unusual. Even imperial princes became fortune hunters. In 842 Dazaifu complained to the court about a certain Prince Nakai. Although he was a member of the imperial family, he, like Sumitomo, held only Sixth Rank; he had been sent to Kyushu as lieutenant governor of Bungo province. When his term was up he stayed on, a princely bully grabbing land illegally, becoming wealthy and obnoxious. The court ordered him to return home but we don't know that he paid any attention; he was living high on Kyushu.

There was an oversupply of princes. With so many women at hand, a vigorous emperor could sire an embarrassment of sons. It was a drain on the treasury to support them as royalty and each was a possible focus of intrigue. The solution was to shed them. It was simple. By giving them surnames-the imperial family had none-they were placed in the ranks of the court nobility and cut off from the imperial line. Then most were dispatched to the provinces to make their own way.

The family names most often affixed to excess princes were Minamoto and Taira. Out in the provinces men with those names founded powerful families who dominated great areas. There was no higher authority to restrain them. Only armed might counted, and they found warriors in the provinces waiting to be mobilized. They were the ancient landed gentry, local powers like the clan that dominated Iyo. When the court created its centralized system two centuries earlier, the local chiefs had been intentionally bypassed to reduce their power, but they had never yielded their authority over the countryside--as Michizane learned when he was governor of Sanuki--and many had maintained their prowess as fighting men. The court uneasily disparaged them as "the idle rich," but its own forces were a shambles and so it sometimes deputized them to maintain law and order. The great manors embraced them as troops to ward off bandits and predatory neighbors. To opportunists named Minamoto or Taira, they were natural allies, eager to pledge themselves to a strong leader for the promise of rich rewards.

Sumitomo was not a Taira or a Minamoto but he saw the potential in the seamen of his clan. He would weld their scattered groups into one formidable force.

With them he would rule the Inland Sea. He would flout the court, laugh at its weakness.

While still in office he began with a move calculated to make him a hero. In bleak midwinter he pressured a susceptible district chief into opening the district's government storehouse, liberating about fifteen thousand bushels of rice which he distributed to riotously happy peasants and seamen. His bridges burned, he announced to the seamen that he was one of them; he would lead them in campaigns of plunder that would make them all rich. The court called them pirates: they would be pirates.

Before he could get started he was frustrated by the appointment of an unexpectedly intelligent new governor for Iyo. Forgoing the usual futile military action, he offered clemency. Seamen who surrendered were given clothing, food, fields to cultivate, and seeds to plant. More than thirty leaders and 2500 men turned themselves in.

Thwarted, Sumitomo took time out. He established a headquarters on Hiburi, an island in the channel between Shikoku and Kyushu. From ancient times Hiburi's signal fires and flags had guided navigators; clan leaders sometimes retired there in old age. Sumitomo saw it as a lair: a scraggle of an island with a twisted spine of mountains and spurs that concealed bays deep enough to hide hundreds of ships.

From Hiburi he reached out to the rugged seamen and sometime marauders of Kyushu's Inland Sea coast. Many centuries earlier, the ancestors of his clan had migrated from Kyushu to Iyo, but not all of them crossed; some stayed and prospered on Kyushu's shore. Those old ties were not forgotten, and Sumitomo played on them to build a firm alliance.

Three years passed. The governor's clemency had lost its appeal; seamen abandoned their fields and returned to their boats. Sumitomo issued a call. In midwinter, as 939 gave way to 940, he assembled a fleet and moved up the Inland Sea. From Iyo the governor sent an emergency message to alert the court.

Provincial capitals were the likeliest places to find riches. More than halfway toward the capital district, Sumitomo struck at the capital of Bizen province. But they were no longer a surprise. Alarm had swept up the coast and they found little worth taking. The ranking official, lieutenant governor Fujiwara Sanetaka, had fled toward the capital with his family, a few guards, and as much treasure as they could carry. Sumitomo ordered a manhunt.

Along the way Sanetaka was joined by the chief official of Harima province. They were within a day's journey of the capital when Sumitomo waylaid them. Bound and helpless, the two officials saw their children killed and their wives raped and carried off. Finally, jeering at them, Sumitomo sliced off each man's nose and ears. The victims' attempt to flee to the capital does not seem reason enough for this outrage. Was it revenge? Had Sanetaka been ruthless in attacking pirates? Had Sumitomo nursed hatred of Sanetaka from the days when they were growing up as Fujiwara cousins, one city-bred, one yokel?

News of the savagery reached the capital the same day. Panic swept the streets. Fires raged through the most populous districts; rumors said they were a prelude to attack. On top of that, came word that in the north a Taira named Masakado was in revolt. It was a bad week for the court.

Taira Masakado's base was about as far from the capital as Sumitomo's, but in the opposite direction; his field of action was the fertile, flat land of the great Kanto plain, stretching out from the head of the bay where the city of Tokyo would one day rise. On this plain the mounted warrior came into his own in the fighting for power and territory. The forces were not large--a few dozen to a few hundred--but the battles were fierce. There were foot soldiers too, marshaled from peasants; sometimes they were sent ahead to blunt the first blow, but what counted most was the warrior on horseback.

Masakado's grandfather--an imperial prince who was the great-grandson of an emperor--had left the imperial family, taken the name of Taira, and traveled north to settle on those broad lands and found a powerful family. His several sons (seven according to one genealogy, ten according to another) gained land and power by reclaiming marshlands and marrying the daughters of local chiefs. By Masakado's generation, his father, uncles, and cousins held large manors spread over three provinces.

When Masakado was a young man, his father sent him to the capital for a few years to acquire polish and cultivate connections with the rich and powerful. He could not have aimed higher: he served as a guard in the household of Fujiwara Tadahira, prime minister and regent for the current boy emperor. Tadahira had succeeded his brother Tokihira, Michizane's nemesis.

In 931, the same year that Sumitomo went to Iyo as secretary, Masakado received word that his father had died, and he left for home, disappointed that Tadahira had not given him rank or position. At home he found that his uncles

were hungry to carve up the estates his father had left to him. He set about to defend his lands.

It was a truculent family, as ready to fight each other as outsiders. Masakado added to the ill will by eloping with the daughter of one of his uncles, incensing her father, who wanted a more advantageous match--links by marriage were often valued more than blood ties. One after another, singly and in combination, his uncles and their sons tried to destroy him. In 935 he broke the law by pursuing one of them across a province border, and, they lodged a complaint with the court. Masakado was summoned to the capital to answer the charge, but Tadahira intervened, his offense was judged not serious, and he was pardoned in a general amnesty declared to celebrate the child emperor's coming of age.

As he was returning home in the summer of 937 with only a small body of men, his uncles twice attacked and overwhelmed them: his first defeats, made more bitter because his father-in-law seized his wife and children. Her brothers helped her escape and return to him, but Masakado, infuriated, attacked that uncle and destroyed him.

Before that, Masakado had been more attacked than attacker. Now, long-standing animosities came to a boil, not only with his Taira relatives but also with government-appointed provincial officials. He went on the offensive. Incited by questionable supporters in a neighboring province, he invaded that province, scattered its officials, and replaced them with his

own men. It had been so easy that he took over three more provinces. Conquest went to his head: he laid claim to the entire Kanto.

At this point, according to the chronicle of his life, a camp follower and prostitute who doubled as a shaman received an oracle from Hachiman, regarded as a protector of warriors; the oracle transmitted a proclamation, allegedly composed by Michizane, naming Masakado a new emperor. With divine sanction for something he had already decided to do, he proclaimed himself “New Emperor,” master of the Kanto, and held an investiture service to confirm his imperial dignity.

He announced this in a personal letter to his former lord, Tadahira. He professed his loyalty, asserted that his actions had been provoked by his enemies, and appealed for understanding: “While it had not been my original intention, in the end I conquered the province of Hitachi. This was no small crime, I realized, as taking over one province was surely as grave a crime as taking over a hundred. So I went on to seize the others.”

He proudly referred to his imperial lineage: “Were I to gain control of over half the land permanently, it would surely be admitted that this was my due fortune.”

He boasted of his prowess as a warrior: “Who among my peers can compare with me?”

He was not attempting to overthrow the emperor, but he was asserting that the entire Kanto region was his to govern as he chose. This was rebellion. In the tense capital it was rumored that some time earlier Masakado and Sumitomo had met in the Buddhist cloisters of Saicho’s Mount Hiei and, overlooking the city, had schemed how to divide the country between them.

The court was distraught. Rank and position were promised to whoever would kill Masakado. A general was given the rank of shogun and sent against him; he was expected to raise his army in the Kanto, so he would go with only a few aides and officers. Even so, it was three weeks before he left the capital.

Sumitomo was a criminal but Masakado was a rebel of imperial descent. The Minister of the Left went to his brother Tadahira, the regent, with an urgent recommendation: to buy time while they concentrated on Masakado, they should appease Sumitomo by promoting him. So while Sumitomo with several hundred pirates were terrorizing the coast of the capital district, the court raised him from

Sixth Rank to Fifth. Now he was qualified to be formally received by the emperor. A messenger was dispatched to deliver the good news but the puzzled man had no idea where to go.

Meanwhile, leaders in the Kanto took matters into their own hands. Some of the most powerful had so far held off from the fray, waiting until they could be certain of backing the winner. One who had been leaning toward Masakado decided to visit his camp for a face-to-face assessment. When he arrived, Masakado was in his tent having his hair dressed, but he was so elated when he heard who had come that he rushed out, his hair disheveled, to greet his supposed new ally. This behavior made a very bad impression on his caller. He decided that Masakado lacked imperial bearing, and he promptly allied himself with Masakado's enemy cousin. Together they attacked. Masakado's force was outnumbered but at first he pushed them back in confusion. Then, says the chronicle, the gods turned against him. His sword became heavy and "his horse failed to fly like the wind." He was struck by an arrow, and on the fourteenth day of the second month, 940, the New Emperor fell in battle. His head was sent to the capital where it was displayed on a stake. The court's shogun-general had got nowhere near the Kanto. He turned around and went home.

Word of Masakado's fall took the heart out of Sumitomo and his men. They had raided Awaji island, which almost bridges the sea between Honshu and Shiroku, and had plundered its stockpile of weapons, but the news spoiled their celebration. In wintry weather they sailed back to their

home waters. In the still panicky capital, the court commissioned an officer of the guard as a general specifically charged to destroy Sumitomo.

After six months of quiet the pirates erupted again in the autumn of 940. With four hundred ships Sumitomo scourged the ports along the east coast of Iyo and, again thrusting within range of the capital, he attacked the province of Sanuki and the headquarters where Michizane had governed. The reports submitted by the acting governor and his officer of the guards asserted that the defenders fought bravely but were overwhelmed and forced to flee southward through mountains to the next province. After the pirates, tired of pursuit they leisurely plundered and then reembarked to strike at the opposite coast of Honshu. In its harbors they caught and burned more than a hundred government warships and, near the western tip of Honshu they hit a rich target, the government mint. They burned it to the ground and made off with its stock of coins.

This time they did not get away scot free. The court's general caught up with them while they were still ashore and inflicted a bloody drubbing before they

escaped to their boat. This was Sumitomo's first reversal and, with the realization that he could be defeated, some of his leaders and their men began to drift away from him. Others may have been alienated by his cruelty and his arrogance. He could no longer boast that he could muster 1500 ships. The most damaging defector was one of his staff officers, a man who knew his strategies and his hiding places. In the early spring of 941, that man led government forces in an attack that broke Sumitomo's hold on Iyo.

Sumitomo fled to his island stronghold on Hiburi and rallied those loyal to him. Many of the Iyo seamen responded and the Kyushu men came in force. A couple of months later, he led more than eight hundred ships through the straits between Honshu and Kyushu and into Hakata bay. Their target was Dazaifu.

Dazaifu had warning. Its defenders met the pirates at the water-gate. They did not close its conduits to create the great moat that its engineers had planned, and they were swept aside. Those able to escape to the fortified mountain behind them struggled up its cliffs to join the officials and clerks and townsfolk who had taken refuge on its height. Sumitomo had no interest in pursuing them. From the earthworks they watched helplessly as the pirates roared through the headquarters, stripping its glories, vandalizing its offices, ripping open its storehouses and exulting over the riches that poured forth--the Chinese celadons and brocades and bangles and medicines. They moved on to the town, emptying its houses and shops, swilling the liquor of its gay quarters in boozy bacchanal.

Night fell, and the watchers on the mountain saw fires, small at first, then through a pall of smoke, flaring, leaping, raging. Many wept to see the great buildings engulfed, the city consumed. At Kanzeonji desperate monks and servitors lugged buckets of water to douse sparks blown their way. They saved their buildings, but the pirates had desecrated their altars, destroyed their images, plundered their treasures.

At last the pirates wearied. With everything worth taking, they headed back to the port. Sumitomo celebrated on his ship. Hakata was in his hands, yielding still more treasure. His pirates forayed up and down the coast.

The government's general was Ono Yoshifuru. He had about two hundred ships, hardly a match for Sumitomo's eight hundred, but he sent them to Hakata, while he landed his army on Kyushu's Inland Sea coast and marched them to Hakata. There were days of skirmishing on land and on the bay. One historian describes the final encounter this way:

The day dawned with a gale that whipped up the bay, howling past the government ships toward the pirates. The bay was so rough that Sumitomo judged action impossible. He retired to his cabin to drink; the pirates and their families battened down to wait out the wind. But a government commander saw an opportunity. He collected more than a hundred small boats, packed them with dry straw, and shepherded them toward the pirates. At close range the straw was set afire and the blazing boats were cut loose. The wind drove them into Sumitomo's fleet. Flames raced from ship to ship in a sea of fire as the government ships bore in. Men, women, and children jumped screaming into the sea and drowned. Nearly all of the pirates' eight hundred ships burned and sank. A few were captured.

Sumitomo and his fourteen-year-old son somehow escaped and made their way back to Iyo. They took refuge on a wooded hill but were quickly surrounded. Both went down fighting. Their heads were sent to the capital to be mounted on stakes. Like Masakado's, they drew a gaping crowd. General Ono Yoshifuru returned to the city in triumph and was rewarded. The same shogun general who had not made it in time to fight Masakado arrived after Sumitomo end. He was indignant when he was not rewarded.

Michizane's mausoleum was far enough from Dazaifu to escape. Or perhaps Sumitomo and his pirates had no wish to antagonize so powerful a spirit.

But what had been Japan's second city was charred earth. Its officials and clerks made their way to their homes. Merchants, shopkeepers, and the women of the entertainment district picked through the rubble for something worth saving.