

Archery practice, by Shibayama Hirotoyo (1673–1723). Japan. Edo period (1615–1868). Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk. *The Avery Brundage Collection*, B65D2.



What is happening in this picture?

Under a cherry tree in full bloom, a mounted archer takes aim at a round paper target held by a running servant. One of several forms of archery practice formalized as early as the Kamakura period (1185–1333), this activity trained warriors to shoot accurately at moving targets while riding at a full gallop. The red fence beneath the cherry tree suggests that the event takes place on the grounds of a Shinto shrine, the usual setting for yabusame, a form of religious exercise or sport performed in a shrine precinct by mounted warriors.

Why is the mounted figure not dressed as a warrior?

Instead of armor, the archer wears the soft silk tunic, or hunting robe, over a red silk underrobe and loose-fitting pants. On his head he wears a tall, lacquered cap. These elements identify him as a member of the imperial guard, lower-ranking noblemen of the Heian period (894–1185) whose largely ceremonial function was to protect the emperor and his family. A precursor to medieval samurai, the imperial guard's training in archery and other military skills provided a basis for later practices developed under the leadership of the first shogun Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–1199) and others in the early Kamakura period (1185–1333).

What is the writing at the right side of the picture?

Written at the far right is a four-line verse in the style of classical court poetry, or waka, which celebrates the skill of the mounted archer. By including a poem in this way, the artist points to the balance of *bu* and *bun*—the military and cultural arts—that was expected of every Japanese warrior.



Yabusame demonstration, Camp Fuji Martial Arts Expo 2008, Photo by pict_u_re, 2008.