



Portrait of Hottō Enmyō Kokushi, 1286–1333

A DAY IN THE LIFE

“What could be finer?”
says the sage, Feng Wei,
turning over a jade *bi*
a hand’s-breadth across.

“My eyes look across
a sleeping river,
light the color of bamboo
flowing over a sandbank.”

“With my fingers,
I feel the river waver
bank to bank, its white
ripples woven into stone.”

“The stone goes on, and on.
A tiger mask sinks its teeth
into the heart of the stone
through the skin of time.”

“Inside the outer edge,
tao-tie circle in pairs, perfect
as the celestial sphere,
the sigh of ordered *zhong*.”

He lays the jade in silk
worn as a priest’s robe.
Makes a point of goat hair
wade through inky slate.

On a yellowing sheet,
the dark comes apart.
Narcissi float into the
bamboo fiber, and a

cricket clicks, its cage
hung where light stirs
at the edge of the room
begging to be let in.

A thread of it floods the
pale swirl of tea the
sage has forgotten till
now nudges him softly.

The sigh that escapes
sings its way into the
pale sheet, the silk of
his kimono barely moves.

—Stuart Silverman