

## **Lords of Himeji: The Sakakibara Family (1649–1667 & 1704–1741)**

### **Sakakibara Tadatsugu: Wise Government and Economic Development**

Of all of Himeji's rulers, Sakakibara Tadatsugu (1605–1665) is remembered as the most benevolent. A capable administrator, he took his post in 1649 and set about improving the rivers around Himeji, installing dikes to prevent occasional flooding, and developing new rice fields and salt pans in the now-protected hinterland. His initiatives improved the lives of the common people and put the domain on a solid financial footing.

Not all his successors were as prudent. The clan's lordship of Himeji ended with Sakakibara Masamine (1713–1743), whose spending habits angered the shogun. Masamine flouted an austerity order by paying 3,000 gold *ryō*—an enormous sum equivalent to roughly USD 400,000—to a famous geisha in Edo (now Tokyo). Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684–1751) was so angry he stripped Masamine of his lordship and transferred the clan to Niigata.

### **Sakakibara Tadatsugu: A Samurai's Honor**

Like the Honda clan, the Sakakibara clan produced one of the Tokugawa *shitennō*—the four renowned military commanders named after the four Buddhist deities who guard the four cardinal directions. When shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651) offered the lordship of Himeji to Sakakibara Tadatsugu (1605–1665), Tadatsugu initially declined—despite the wealth the position would bring. “Our clan is the spearhead of the Tokugawa clan,” Tadatsugu told the shogun. Himeji, he said, was too far from the capital to rush to the shogunate's aid in an emergency. But when Iemitsu reminded him of Himeji's importance as a military stronghold in western Japan, the proud warrior relented and accepted the post.

### **Reinforcing the Keep**

After accepting the lordship of Himeji, Tadatsugu undertook a major restoration of the castle. He strengthened the keep by replacing the main columns' rotted footings and wrapping one huge wooden column in iron bands. The other central column of the keep is made from a single tree trunk.

Sakakibara Tadatsugu