

Lords of Himeji: The Sakai clan (1749–1871)

Himeji's Last Feudal Rulers

The Sakai clan became the lords of Himeji in 1749 and held the position until the Meiji Restoration in 1868, which ended feudalism in Japan. Although Himeji was a wealthy domain, by the early nineteenth century its finances were under strain. As daimyo of Himeji at the time, Sakai Tadahiro (1777–1837) ordered reforms. To halt the outflow of gold from the domain's treasury, he stipulated that cotton, a local specialty, be bought and sold only with domain-issued paper currency. This and other initiatives succeeded in stabilizing the domain's finances. The Sakai clan then assumed new responsibilities by deploying soldiers beyond the domain's borders for coastal defense and the suppression of peasant revolts.

Himeji and the Meiji Restoration

In 1868, a group of domains opposed to Tokugawa rule overturned samurai rule of Japan, forcing the shogun to resign and returning political control of Japan to Emperor Meiji (1852–1912).

Himeji and its rulers were closely associated with the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). Sakai Tadashige (1827–1895) was a senior advisor to the shogun, and the domain's forces were in charge of defending Edo (Tokyo) Bay and Kyoto. During the Boshin War (1868–1869), which pitted supporters of the ousted Tokugawa against the new Meiji government, soldiers from Himeji protected the fifteenth and last shogun, Yoshinobu (1837–1913), at Osaka Castle. Pro-Meiji soldiers from the nearby domain of Bizen stormed Himeji, overcoming the domain's forces and forcing them to surrender the castle.

Artistic Lords

Many lords of Himeji Castle excelled at painting and calligraphy. Sakai Tadazane (1756–1790) and his younger brother Hoitsu (1761–1829) were particularly skilled painters whose works are highly prized.

View of Mount Fuji, Sakai Tadazane

Sparrow Chick, Sakai Hoitsu

Sakai Tadazane