

What Nakijin Castle Excavations Tell Us about Its History

Panel 1:

Due to the lack of historical records, much of the early history of the Ryukyu Islands, especially the centuries before about 1600, remains shrouded in mystery. Some of what we know about the politics, culture, and lifestyles of those eras comes from accounts written by foreign visitors and in official Chinese, Korean, or Japanese records. Other aspects can be deduced from cultural artifacts, buildings, and other items that have been preserved despite the tremendous damage from war and other disruptions the region has suffered.

Ultimately, however, many questions about early Ryukyu history can be answered through careful archaeological excavations. This has been the case at Nakijin. The stone walls of the castle have survived fairly intact into the twenty-first century, but much has been lost, particularly the many wooden buildings that once stood on the site. Excavation has yielded insights into the construction and expansion of Nakijin Castle and its relative prosperity during different periods. Dating excavated coins and pottery shards has provided important insight into foreign trade.

Extensive excavations centering on the uppermost level of the castle, the Main Ward, were carried out at Nakijin between 1982 and 1985. Analysis of earth strata, building remains, and pottery revealed that the history of Nakijin Castle's construction can be roughly divided into four phases, beginning in the late thirteenth century during the Gusuku period, and ending in the second half of the seventeenth century.