

The Tenth Lord of Katsuren

Lord Amawari (d. 1458) was the tenth and final ruler of Katsuren Castle. His life is celebrated in legend but also shrouded in mystery. An ambitious and skillful leader, he ushered in the period of greatest prosperity for Katsuren and the surrounding region, with improved agriculture and extensive overseas trade, as well as local conquest. Though confirmed historical accounts are scarce, many stories have been handed down about Amawari. He was born to a peasant family and said to be of such frail health that even at age 10 he could barely walk. His family abandoned him in the mountains, expecting him to die. But he survived on his wits and powers of observation, and eventually grew into a strong young man. Legend says that he devised the first fishing nets in the region by observing spiders at work. He went to Katsuren Castle, which was ruled at the time by a dissolute and abusive drunkard named Mochizuki.

Amawari was initially put in charge of the castle's horses, but gradually rose in rank and responsibility, all the while gaining the love and respect of the townspeople. Convinced that Mochizuki was leading the kingdom to ruin, and seeing no legitimate heir, he deposed him in the early sixteenth century (exact year unknown). Legend has it that one night, Amawari told the townspeople to take lit torches and slowly approach the castle from downhill while he spoke with Mochizuki, who was in a drunken rage. He told Mochizuki that the castle was under attack, and that he could see the torches of the attacking army for himself. Mochizuki panicked, the story goes, and when he climbed to the highest wall to get a good view, Amawari hurled him to his death.

Amawari quickly consolidated his power, and entered an arranged marriage with Momoto Fumiagari, the daughter of King Sho Taikyū of the Ryūkyū Kingdom, who feared Amawari's ambition. After defeating his rival Gosamaru, Amawari was accused of plotting to overthrow the Ryūkyū Kingdom, and was defeated in 1458. Although it is almost certain that Amawari died during this final battle, according to one legendary account he escaped through the sacred Ushinujigama cave inside the castle and made his way to Yomitanzanmagiri, where he lived out his life incognito, weaving fishing nets.