

Sakakibara Family Graves

This site memorializes two heads of the Sakakibara family, who served as lords of Himeji Castle during the Edo period (1603–1867). The stone tower and stele on the left honor Sakakibara Masafusa (1641–1667), who was lord of the Himeji domain for the last two years of his life. The stele is inscribed with his formal rank and title: “Former Deputy Minister of Justice, Junior Fourth Rank (lower), Lord Minamoto.” The inclusion of the name “Minamoto” shows Masafusa’s genealogical ties to the Tokugawa house, which itself claimed descent from Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), Japan’s first great warrior leader. The grave to the right memorializes Sakakibara Masasuke (1705–1732).

Both monuments sit atop mythical turtles (*kifu*), which symbolize effort and industriousness. The stone pagodas behind each stele are inscribed with characters representing the five elements of Buddhist cosmology written in Siddham script. From the top, they read “sky,” “wind,” “fire,” “water,” and “earth.”

This pair of monuments were created by another lord of the Himeji domain, Sakakibara Masamine (1715–1743), around the year 1734. Masamine was known for his extravagance, and he was quickly transferred to a smaller domain after spending a tremendous sum on the contract of a famous Yoshiwara courtesan. As lord of Himeji, Masamine started a summer *yukata* festival that is still held every June. Descendants of the Sakakibara family take part in the festivities, after which they visit these graves. The many lanterns that adorn the area in front of the grave site were donated during these visits, or by descendants of the families who were once retainers of the Sakakibara family.