

The Kyogoku Family and the Obama Domain

Overview

When the Tokugawa shogunate formalized a system of domains ruled by daimyo lords in the early seventeenth century, Wakasa Province was assigned to Kyogoku Takatsugu (1563–1609) as the Obama domain in 1600. As the first ruler of the new domain, Takatsugu soon began construction of Obama Castle, as well as various improvements around the town and the port, but died in 1609 before the transformation of Obama was complete. His son Tadataka (1593–1637) ruled the Obama domain and continued the projects until 1634, when he was transferred to the Matsue domain.

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Kyogoku Takatsugu

The power of the Kyogoku family waned considerably after the Onin War (1467–1477), but the 17th head Kyogoku Takatsugu (1563–1609) managed to restore the family's fortunes. He changed allegiances several times in his younger years and distinguished himself in military campaigns under Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), the de facto leader of Japan at the time. In recognition, Takatsugu received the rank of daimyo and became lord of Otsu Castle in Omi Province (present-day Shiga Prefecture). In 1587, he married Ohatsu (1570–1633), a woman of noble birth whose family connections would prove invaluable to the Kyogoku family.

Takatsugu became an ally of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), a powerful daimyo who aimed to take control of the country after Hideyoshi's death. As Ieyasu gathered his forces in the eastern part of the country, Takatsugu managed to delay some of his enemies at Otsu Castle, contributing to Ieyasu's victory in the decisive Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. In recognition, Takatsugu was appointed the first lord of the newly formed Obama domain in the same year.

As domain lord, Takatsugu sought to improve the defenses of the Wakasa region by starting construction of Obama Castle to replace the smaller Nochiseyama Castle. He also oversaw changes in the town of Obama itself, supporting the growth of merchant businesses in the busy port town and building a district for samurai residences around the castle.

Ohatsu (Jokoin)

Ohatsu was one of three daughters born to the daimyo Azai Nagamasa (1545–1573) and his wife Oichi (1547–1583), a sister of the powerful warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582). Ohatsu married Kyogoku Takatsugu in 1587 and became the mistress of Otsu Castle. Despite her inability to bear children, she was considered a beautiful and intelligent wife who served as her husband's trusted advisor. Her family connections were a valuable addition to the marriage, as her elder sister was a favored consort of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and her younger sister was the wife of Tokugawa Hidetada (1579–1632), the second Tokugawa shogun. This positioned Ohatsu to serve as an intermediary between two of the most powerful families in that period of Japan's history.

In 1600, Ohatsu assisted her husband in defending Otsu Castle against enemies of the Tokugawa, and when Takatsugu was rewarded with lordship of the Obama domain, they both moved to Wakasa. After Takatsugu died in 1609, Ohatsu followed the tradition of noblewomen at the time and became a nun at Jokoji Temple in Obama under the name Jokoin. Though nuns were meant to withdraw from the world, Ohatsu was using her family connections to broker peace between the Toyotomi and the Tokugawa families, who were at odds for years. When the conflict came to a head in 1615, Ohatsu was in the Toyotomi-controlled Osaka Castle, still attempting to negotiate with her elder sister, and had to be evacuated by her retainers before the castle was burned down by Tokugawa forces.

Ohatsu passed away in 1633 and was laid to rest at Jokoji Temple in accordance with her final wishes.

Exhibition Items

Two hanging scrolls showcase replicas of Edo-period (1603–1867) portraits of Kyogoku Takatsugu in court attire and his wife Ohatsu (Jokoin) in the clothing typical of a noblewoman who has become a nun. Other items on display include a replica of the Kyogoku family genealogy and an illustrated copy of *Okiku monogatari* (The Tale of Kiku), open to the pages that depict the dramatic evacuation of Ohatsu from Osaka Castle.