

The Sakai Family and Development of the Obama Domain

Overview

The powerful and well-connected Sakai family was the second to rule as daimyo of the Obama domain. Sakai Tadakatsu (1587–1662), the first Sakai lord of the domain, completed the construction of Obama Castle and introduced various measures to further develop the port town of Obama. The Sakai family financed Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, promoted local crafts such as Wakasa lacquerware, and oversaw the lucrative maritime trade through the Obama port for over two hundred years.

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The Rule of Sakai Tadakatsu

In 1634, Sakai Tadakatsu became the ruler of the Obama domain. He was a long-time retainer of the Tokugawa family and held several prominent positions in the Tokugawa shogunate, including *roju* (“elder”) and *tairo* (“great elder,” a position second only to the shogun). He spent most of his time in Edo (now Tokyo), the seat of the shogunate, and governed Obama from afar, frequently corresponding by letter with those left in charge of the domain.

Tadakatsu had previously been the lord of the Kawagoe domain (present-day Saitama Prefecture), and when he moved to Obama, he brought in performing artists and styles of entertainment popular in eastern Japan. One of these, the Unpin Jishi lion dance, is still performed in one of Obama’s wards.

Completion of Obama Castle

Under Sakai rule, the construction of Obama Castle started by the first domain lord Kyogoku Takatsugu (1563–1609) was finally completed in 1641, after more than thirty years of work. Obama soon became a flourishing castle town and a bustling port with a thriving entertainment district. The Sakai family was also known for supporting Wakasa artisans making lacquerware and other traditional crafts.

The Final Years of Sakai Rule

The Sakai governed Obama until the domain system was abolished in 1871. The 14th and last Sakai daimyo of the domain, Sakai Tadaaki (1813–1873), also served as the representative of the Tokugawa shogunate in Kyoto. During the tumultuous political events surrounding the downfall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the restoration of

imperial rule in 1868, Tadaaki was nearly labeled an enemy of the newly enthroned Emperor Meiji (1852–1912). However, the skillful political tactics of Obama domain retainers allowed him to pledge allegiance to the emperor and helped the domain avoid war.

Exhibition Items

The suit of armor belonged to the last daimyo of the Obama domain, Sakai Tadaaki. Most of the armor was made in the Edo period (1603–1867), but the helmet is much older and was made sometime between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Decorative metal fittings on the armor bear the Sakai family crest. Other items on display include Sakai family genealogies, a copy of a letter sent to Sakai Tadakatsu by the trade representative of the Joseon kingdom on the Korean Peninsula, and a hanging scroll with a replica of a portrait of Tadakatsu from 1660 that depicts him in court attire. A four-tiered lacquered box made using modern Wakasa lacquerware techniques and a recreation of a traditional lacquered box for storing valuable items serve as examples of a regional craft promoted by the Sakai lords during their rule.