

Ōnojō Fortress Ruins

[表のキャプション]

Built in 665, this immense walled fortress once ringed the summit of Mt. Shiōji, north of Dazaifu. Along with a smaller fortification to the south, Ōnojō Fortress is Japan's oldest known mountain fortress. More than 1,350 years after its construction, large sections of the perimeter wall remain intact.

[裏の解説]

Ōnojō Fortress was conceived as one of several fortifications intended to guard the Hakata Bay area. In 663, the remnants of the Korean kingdom of Baekje (? CE–660 CE) and its Japanese allies had been defeated by the combined forces of Tang-dynasty China (618–907) and Silla (? CE–935 CE), another Korean kingdom. The loss spurred the Japanese imperial court, which was fearful of an invasion by rapidly expanding Tang, to order the construction of Mizuki Fortress in 664, then the mountain fortresses Ōnojō and Kijō in 665. Ōnojō Fortress was a vantage point from which to observe enemy ships heading toward Hakata Bay.

Unlike many later castles, Ōnojō Fortress never had a tall central keep or series of moats. At its center was a camp encircled by 8 kilometers of earthen and stone walls. Exiled nobles from Baekje oversaw the construction, patterning Ōnojō Fortress after mountain fortresses on the Korean Peninsula. They introduced construction techniques that allowed for the creation of stone walls up to 8 meters in height. Where Ōnojō's perimeter wall ran along ridgetops, it was built of rammed earth, but sections in the valleys were made of stone. Researchers have discovered the ruins of 9 gates and over 70 buildings, including storehouses and administrative headquarters in the central camp. Ultimately there was no invasion, but Ōnojō Fortress was manned and functional until around the tenth century.

Many sections of both the earthen embankments and the stone walls survive. To see them, visitors can take one of the hiking trails from Ōnojō Sōgō Kōen (Madoka Park) or drive to the Shiōji Kenmin no Mori Center on the mountain and walk from there.