

Naegi Castle Site: The Legend of the Red-Walled Castle

Many castle keeps during the Edo period (1603–1867) had walls coated with white plaster for aesthetic reasons and to serve as a fire retardant. Naegi Castle, however, was known as the “red-walled castle” (Akakabejo) from the color of the exposed clay used to cover its walls. None of those walls have been preserved today to recall its former image.

The name comes with a legend. As the story goes, the red clay walls of the castle were originally coated with white plaster. One night, a violent storm blew in and raged all night long. The next morning, the occupants of the castle woke to find the white plaster of the walls had been stripped away, revealing the red clay beneath. After that, the walls were plastered over again, even more thickly, making it a white-walled castle once more. However, black clouds returned, and rain beat the castle while thunder crashed. A dragon emerged from the Kiso River at the foot of the castle and wrapped itself around the fortress, scraping off the white plaster with its talons. After the dragon withdrew, it was decided that the red clay walls would be left as they were.

In reality, this story may have been made up to hide the fact that the Toyama family could not afford to plaster the walls due to tight finances.