

## **The Port Area Centuries Ago: Akita Fort, the Northern Outpost of Yamato Rule**

Over one thousand years ago, a government fortress known as Akita Fort stood roughly 2 kilometers southeast of Port Tower Selion. Akita Fort was an important hub of diplomacy and trade from the eighth to the tenth century. It was the northernmost outpost of the powerful Yamato kingdom, which would become the Japanese state. The Yamato emperor and his court were based in what is now Nara Prefecture, over 800 kilometers south. Akita Fort was built in 733 to strengthen Yamato control in northern Honshu, which was populated by people they called “Emishi.”

Emishi were indigenous people living outside Yamato control on Northern Honshu. Officials at the fort were in charge of managing relations with the Emishi, and as these relations changed, so did the appearance and function of Akita Fort.

Today, the site includes a museum and reconstructions of parts of the fort. Excavations at the site are ongoing, and each new discovery reveals more about the Emishi and life on the fringes of the Yamato state.

## **Akita Fort as Strategic and Trading Center**

Yamato officials stationed at the fort collected taxes, conducted censuses, and surveyed the surrounding area. The information and revenue they gathered were crucial for increasing the political and economic power of the Yamato. Officials mediated disputes between Emishi and those living at the fort. Many residents at the fort had been relocated by the Yamato government to settle and develop this northern frontier.

The government also sent warriors to Akita Fort to respond when tensions with Emishi escalated into violence. After a major uprising in 878, the fort's outer walls were reinforced and equipped with larger watchtowers to deter future attacks.

Akita Fort was strategically located for trade with peoples living in what is now Aomori and Hokkaido Prefectures. In exchange for rice, iron, pottery, and textiles, the fort received horses, kelp, hawk feathers, and furs and skins from animals such as sea otter, bear, and seal. Many of these rare goods were then shipped to the Yamato capital in Nara, creating a network

of exchange that stretched across the archipelago.