

Conquest of Emishi by Suzuta Yukinori

This site is a mirror of the Conquest of Emishi site by Suzuta Yukinori. Not everything that appeared on the original site is included here, however, most of the contents of the original site regarding the conquest is included. The present site is an attempt to preserve the original site content since the original site is no longer in active status. Suzuta's maps and content is all original. Syntax corrections in English and minor additions and rewording, and all illustrations are attributable to Kenjiro Hakomori. If any of this content is used in any way please cite the author Suzuta Yukinori. If any illustrations or photos are used please cite Kenjiro Hakomori or link to the page.

As the website has evolved illustrations have become very important. History comes alive through illustrations. In historical illustration re-creation is involved to make that depiction as historically accurate as possible, however, a degree of artistic license is unavoidable. Though it is impossible to know every detail of how these people looked or what they wore we have a fairly accurate picture of their appearance both from ancient remains and from the modern Ainu, representatives of the ancient Jomon who were also ancestral to the Emishi, mixed though they were with Yayoi immigrants. However, many aspects of Emishi clothing and armor are not known with certainty. I have included detailed captions with the illustrations to explain the sources of what is depicted, what is known and what is uncertain or conjecture. I have always wanted a time machine, but in its absence illustration is the only way to breath life into the past before the invention of photography. ¹

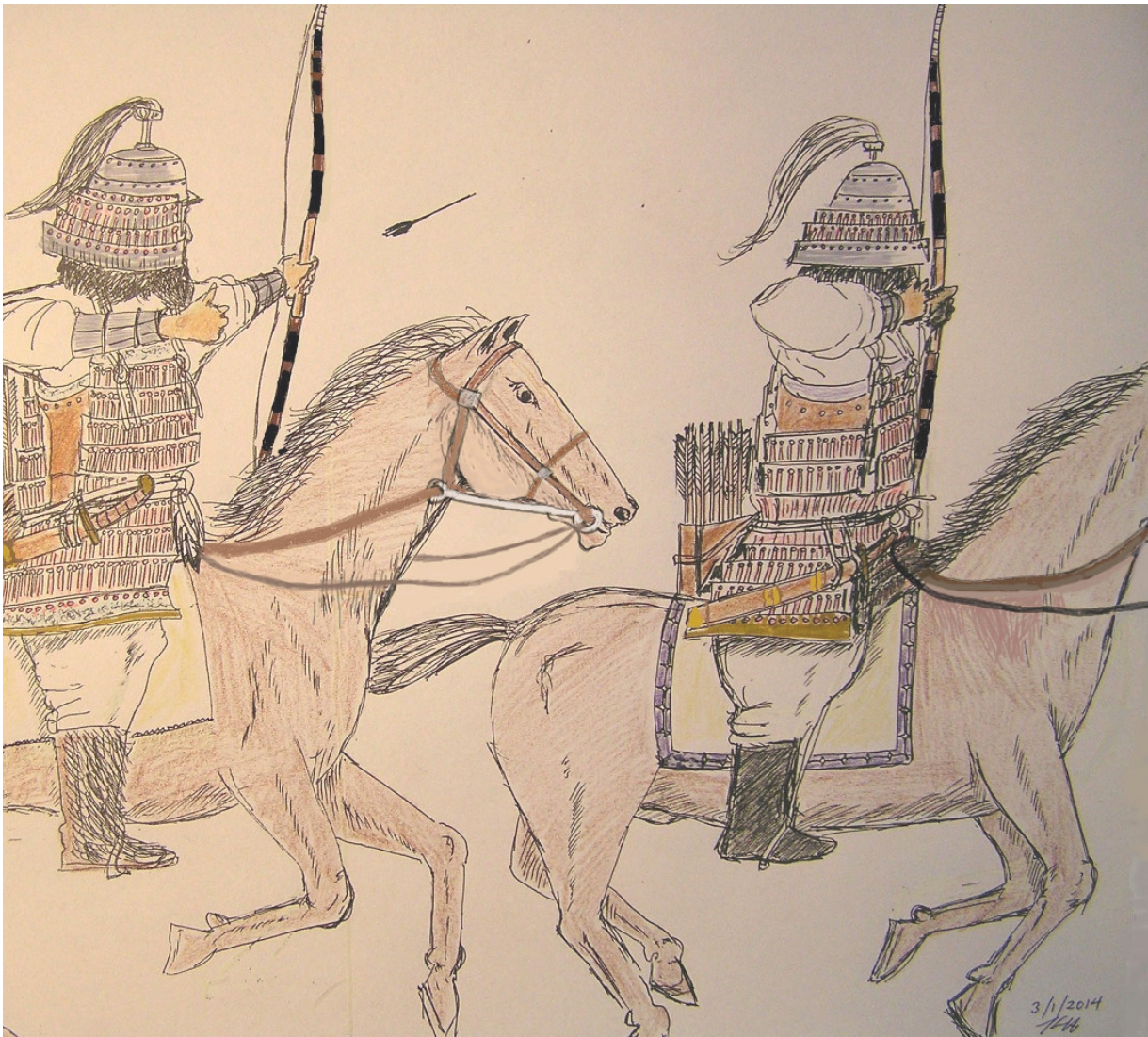
A trip to Japan (Kenjiro 2014) and a visit to the museums where remains of Emishi armor and weapons are displayed, namely *Tohoku rekishi hakubutsukan* (Tohoku History Museum) at Tagajou City in Miyagi prefecture, and at the *Oshu-shi rizo bunka-zai chosa centa-* (Oshu City Center for Cultural Studies) in Mizusawa City in Iwate prefecture, has been invaluable ([see link](#)).

1. [Who were the Emishi?](#) (revised 2015.12.8; illustration revised 2016.5.2) [pdf file](#).
2. [Naval Expedition of Abe No Hirafu](#) (illustration added 2018.11.30) [pdf file](#).
3. [Ideha Foundation](#) ([pdf file](#)).
4. [Building the Fort Line in Michinoku](#) (illustration revised 2017.7.14) [pdf file](#).
5. [Principal Strategy of Oono no Azumahito](#) ([pdf file](#)).
6. [Restart Northward Progress](#) (illustration added 2017.7.11) [pdf file](#).
7. [Destruction of Castles in Michinoku](#) (illustrations revised 2017.7.15) [pdf file](#).
8. [War with Isawa](#) (illustration revised 2017.7.15) [pdf file](#).
9. [Battle of Subuse](#) (map added 2014.12.21; Illustration revised 2016.4.29) [pdf file](#).
10. [Grand General Sakanoue no Tamuramaro](#) (minor revision 2009.1.3; illustration added 2016.4.23) [pdf file](#).
11. [Outbreak of the Revolt of Gan'gyo](#) ([pdf file](#)).



Emishi archer 600AD. The Emishi when first encountered by the Japanese (such as during the naval expedition of Abe no hira-fu) fought using much of the tools used for hunting such as the bow shown here. He is wearing deerskin clothing which was typical before the influence of Kofun culture. In the *Shoku Nihongi* they are described exactly like this when they visited the T'ang Emperor in AD 659. This is the type of hunter warrior encountered by the Yamato state early on, and these type of Emishi were often called *san-I* (mountain barbarian) in contrast to *den-I* (field barbarian, i.e. "barbarian" who cultivated fields). It is thought that the descendants of the *san-I* were the Ainu of Hokkaido.

They were a Jomon people. Their hair is worn in a bun as depicted in Jomon clay figures. He has a small tattoo on the cheek. The bow is lacquered to give it strength. The knife is the exact shape of Ainu types, worn under the belt identical to Kofun warriors depicted in *haniwa*. He is carrying a couple of pouches, and the sleeve and trousers are embroidered with border patterns that are the early form of the elaborate geometrical patterns that emerged during the Satsumon period in Hokkaido. Aside from the depiction of the sleeve patterns, which is speculative, this figure of the Emishi is as close to the way they appeared as they are described and as archeological figures of Jomon depict. What becomes much more difficult is to reconstruct how they appeared as they became horse archers, trading partners and enemies of the Japanese. How much of the Japanese textile culture did they adopt?



Emishi mounted archers of the eighth century (showing Azamaro's forces). By this time, armor known as *keiko* had already been introduced among the Japanese forces in the Nara period, but this type made of lamellar plates laced together was very expensive and tedious to produce. It was light and strong, and very flexible. There is more evidence from tombs of the period that this type of armor saw more widespread use in the eighth century among Emishi warriors who also continued to use *tanko* armor as well. The warriors shown here have *warabite-tou* swords and one wears continental style riding boots common in this period. *Warabite-tou* swords have been found in a number of *ezo-ana kofun* and judging from their shape is thought to have influenced the development of the samurai sword. The stirrup is a simple loop and the textile design incorporates a Jomon pattern. Compare with the illustration at top and also on [Who Were the Emishi](#) page. The difference reflects an important change in Emishi society as the influence of Japanese culture through trade and alliances with local Japanese kofun states made itself felt, and more Japanese armor made its way into the hands of [local Emishi chiefs](#). Much of what they wore for armor is still not clear. For example, there are a number of instances of *tanko* found in Tohoku burial sites into the eighth century, and examples of *keiko* that have been recovered from *yoko-ana bogun* and *ezo-ana kofun* burials in areas where Emishi are thought to have lived, but this is not known with certainty as recent studies have shown (see [Tohoku Kofun population](#)). However, what is clear is that by the second half of the eighth century nearly all of the Emishi of central Tohoku had in some ways been incorporated into the orbit of the Japanese Empire as *fushu*, and pressure towards still independent Emishi living north of Taga Castle increased considerably. This volatile mix was part of what made the long Tohoku War of the eighth century so violent and protracted. The remaining independent Emishi such as Isawa fiercely resisted the encroaching Japanese state. The population in these frontier areas was mixed between Jomon and Yayoi, varying by location. It is thought that further north the Jomon population predominated and inversely towards the south the Yayoi population was more numerous. In central Tohoku the Yayoi population was much larger than the Jomon by this time period. What is still not clear and is debated among scholars is did the Emishi also include predominately Yayoi people (similar to ancient Japanese) from these areas? Or were these simply representatives of Japanese frontier families who lived among the Emishi dominated countryside?

[Appendix B: Taga Castle Stone Monument](#) (2014.4.12)

[Appendix C: Taga Castle Remains](#) (2014.4.16)

References:

1. In my illustrations I have been inspired by two artists since childhood: the French artist Maurice Boutet de Monvel's Joan of Arc (1896), and Tom Lovell's historical paintings that appeared in National Geographic in the sixties and seventies, and like Monvel have made history come to life. Maurice Boutet de Monvel, [Jeanne d'Arc](#) originally published in 1896. English edition published in 1897. The edition I own was edited by Gerald Gottlieb by Viking Press, New York, 1980. Tom Lovell's paintings can be accessed easiest through [The Middle Ages](#) a volume in the Story of Man series by the National Geographic, 1977.

[Evidence of Emishi Arms, Armor and Clothing](#)

[Return to Emishi Site](#)

2007.11.3. by Kenjiro Hakomori (last update 2018.11.30)