

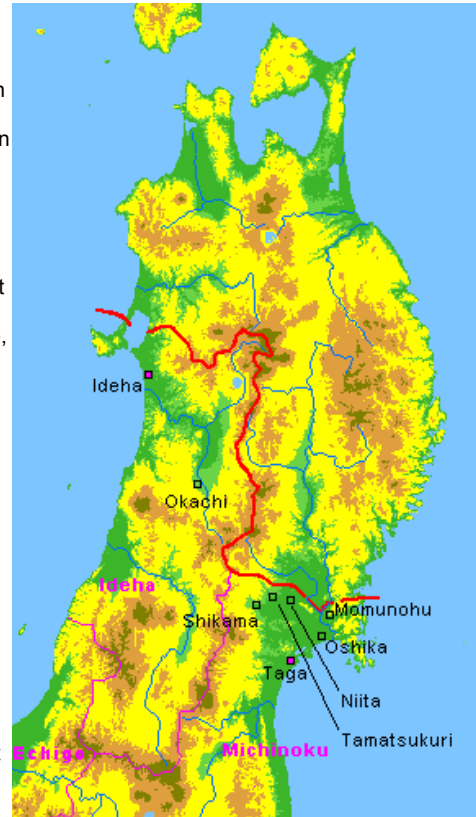
Restart Northward Progress

Tohoku in 759

The relatively long period of stability was broken by Fujiwara no Asakari. He was the fourth son of Fujiwara no Nakamaro (later renamed Emi no Oshikatsu), who was the top power holder. Asakari was appointed to the Governor of Michinoku in Tenpyohoji 1 (757). In Tenpyohoji 2 (758), he began to build Okachi Castle and Momunohu Castle. They were completed in the following year by a labor force of 8,180 men. After the completion of these castles the Emperor praised Asakari and his subordinates:

"The former emperor often made an issue out of making Okachi Castle. It was so difficult to achieve that previous generals who had tried got into trouble. However, the Michinoku Country Supervisory Delegate, General of Peace Guard, lower *shou 5 i*, Fujiwara Emi no Asomi Asakari and others taught the violent barbarian obedience, and completed the building without a battle. Additionally, in Oshika district of Michinoku country, they crossed a large river and overcame a steep mountain, and built Fort Momunohu to strike terror into the rebel's heart. I reflected on this achievement and concluded this [news] is to be prized. They gave Asakari the rank of lower *juu 4 i...*"

Previously, in the last section we learned that Oono no Azumahito failed to build Okachi castle. Asakari succeeded where Azumahito had failed, however, modern scholars disagree about its location. Fort Hotta Ruin is the first and natural candidate because archeologists have never discovered another site in the Yokote Basin so far. However, growth rings on the timbers used for the palisade indicate that the trees were cut in 801 or 802, later than indicated in the sources. Also, Hotta ruin is too far north to be the same site described. Some scholars (including myself) think Hotta was built in 801/802 as the second Okachi Castle. The first one has yet to be excavated.



Momunohu castle was built on a hill across the Kitakami River, the largest river in the Michinoku and Ideha areas. The terrain is not very 'steep', and we know that battles were fought around the castle while it was being built. The Shoku Nihongi did not contain records of these battles, however, in the above article, two soldiers were given special rank promotions:

"...Peace Guard Military Director, upper *juu 6 i*, Ootomo no Masutatsu did not hesitate hardship and entered battle again. Peace Guard Military Director, upper *juu 8 i*, Kara no Entetsu did not hesitate to risk his life, and had bravery to lead at the head [of battle]. Promote each three ranks."

The consequences of the battles were not good for Japan. On May 11 in Tenpyohoji 2 (756), Michinoku country reported that more than 1,690 Emishi men and women immigrated. They were "attached to the emperor's rule or had resentment towards the rebels in [the] battlefield." The Emishi who had allied themselves with Japan were defeated by those Emishi who wanted to preserve their independence.

Excavations of the Momunohu Castle site has turned up a number of interesting facts. Part of outer line defensive wall was made too low and was poorly constructed. Usual defensive lines are made of clay soil, however, at Momunohu many alien substances were mixed into the soil: the bank could not have had the necessary strength. To complicate this situation, and partly to make up for the weakness of the outer line, multiple low banks were constructed.

The Japanese government forced vagrants and criminals to settle in Momunohu. 'Vagrants' in this agricultural country were mainly persons who had escaped from the land of his or her registry (each farmer was registered locally in a particular estate): Momunohu received an unknown number of vagrants from Michinoku in 758 and 1,000 of them in 759. The government also moved 2,000 vagrants from 12 countries to Okachi Castle in 759, and 510 enslaved criminals to Okachi in 760. These criminals were freed on condition that they settle in Okachi. In 762, 100 beggars were forced to settle in Michinoku. The record indicates that while some were forced to move north, retired soldiers, emigrant Emishi and Japanese willingly settled in these territories as well.

After Asakari's death, Korehari Castle was built in Jingokeiun 1 (767). In 769, 2,500 vagrants were forcibly resettled to this new castle.

We don't have sources that address the impact of vagrants, beggars and criminals and their forced settlement, but we do have indirect indication that this northern frontier was never easy or peaceful. In fact, the reputation that follows in the medieval period would speak of the rough and rude nature of the northern and eastern warriors whom the central areas of Japan saw as barely a step above the Emishi barbarians.



Mounted archers formed the backbone of the Emishi army. Here the harness on the horse in the middle is shown, and is taken from the kofun *haniwa* or clay figurines that show the horse equipment in detail. It shows a metal horse bit that connects the headgear of leather which goes up and around the top of the horse's head with a strap above the mouth anchoring the harness, and the bridle is then connected to the front of this metal piece that serves as a bit, and the back connects to the bottom strap connected to the head strap. *Haniwa* figurines rarely show the bridle. Of course we don't have pictures of Emishi horses but extrapolating from *haniwa* figurines is most likely an accurate portrayal of the way horses were harnessed, or at least very close to the Emishi practice since the figurines are from *kofun* graves that were recovered in frontier areas in eastern Japan and southern Tohoku before their period of dominance. In the frontier areas where kofun culture had an influence on local Emishi culture they most likely adopted this practice, and spread further north through cultural diffusion as it enabled the horse rider to control their horses more effectively. The stirrup was also key in mounted warfare as it gave greater control to the rider to free both hands to manipulate the bow, their principal weapon.

[Principal Strategy of Oono no Azumahito](#) | [Destruction of Castles in Michinoku](#)
[Conquest of Emishi](#)

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