

A Military Group in the Ichi River Basin: the family of Harima Saeki no Atae

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Two historical sources on the Saekibe

The section on Kamusaki *Kōri* in *Harima Fudoki* records that a group or family called the Saekibe were present in this district in ancient times. The entry for Tada Sato relates that its place name originated when ‘Aganoko, the founding father of the Saekibe’, went there in the service of King Homuda, and he petitioned the king in person (*tada ni*, directly) to be granted this land: and so it was called Tada.

Another source is *Shinsen Shōjiroku*, a kind of digest of prominent families compiled in the Heian Period,¹ in which the Saeki family of Harima appears under the heading of families descended from the imperial family and registered in the East Capital (*sakyō kōbetsu*).² It claims that the founder of the Saeki no Atae of Harima was Inase Irihiko no mikoto, a son of King Keikō; and that his son Mimoro Wake no mikoto was awarded Harima and granted the title of ‘Harima Wake’ during the reign of King Seimu. The title of ‘wake’ is thought to indicate being an offshoot (*wakare*) from the king and royalty. Mimoro Wake’s son was Ikoji Wake. When King Ōjin and his entourage approached the top of the hill to the east of Kawara *Mura* in Kamusaki *Kōri* in Harima Province, Ikoji Wake saw green vegetables floating down the Okabe River, and deduced that there were people living upstream. It was said that the descendants of Emishi had settled there, and that they themselves were the descendants of defeated captives, whom Yamato Takeru had relocated to Harima, Aki, Awa, Sanuki, and Iyo Provinces. On account of this realisation, Ikoji Wake became the *kimi*, or overseer, who controlled the Saekibe groups that were comprised of the descendants of Emishi pacified by Yamato Takeru. Thereby he was appointed ‘Harima Wake Saekibe no Atae’, one of the *tomo no miyatsuko* who controlled *bemin* (service groups). The name Ikoji Wake appears as the founder of the Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko in *Kokuzō Hongi*,³ which records the genealogies and appointments of families to the position of *kuni no miyatsuko* in the seventh and eighth centuries.

The families of Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko and Harima no Saekibe no Atae

Kokuzō Hongi records the founder of the position of Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko as Ikoji Wake, son of Inase Irihiko no mikoto, the son of King Seimu, which is genealogically coherent. In other words, the family of the Harima no Saekibe no Atae was a *tomo no miyatsuko*⁴ family under the authority of the Yamato kings, and they made their base at first at Kamusaki *Kōri* in the Ichi River basin. It seems that in due course they encroached into Shikama *Kōri* in the lower reaches of the Ichi River and took on the title of Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko.

On the other hand, names such as ‘Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko,’ ‘Harima no Atae,’ ‘Yama no Atae,’ and ‘Saeki no Atae’ appear in *Daichido Ron*⁵ copied out by local powerful men at Kitadera in Kamo *Kōri* in Tenpyō 6 (734 CE). From this we can assume the presence of

¹ Translation’s note: *New Selection and Record of Hereditary Titles and Family Names* (815 CE).

² Translator’s note: ancient Japanese capitals were divided into two halves. The East (left half facing south from the palace) was called *sakyō*, and the West (i.e., right) was *ukyō*.

³ Translator’s note: also known as *Kuni no Miyatsuko Hongi*.

⁴ Translator’s note: *tomo no miyatsuko* were essentially mid- and lower level noblemen close to the Yamato Court who were appointed as hereditary overseers of *shinabe* (guild-like service groups that provided specific items to the Court) prior to the Taika Reforms.

⁵ Translator’s note: *Daichido Ron*: the *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sāstra* (*Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom*), 2nd century CE.

groups tied to the province and referred to as Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko and Harima no Atae. If residents of Kamo *Kōri* were the centre of such Buddhist devotions, it could be that they were the Harima no Kamo no Kuni no Miyatsuko mentioned in *Kokuzō Hongi*. One possibility is that it was the family of the 'Harima Wake' for whom Harima was 'divided in half' and 'granted', and they became the Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko (later the Harima no Atae); while the Saeki no Atae was a branch of the Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko.

This question is bound up with our understanding of the *kuni no miyatsuko* and *tomo no miyatsuko* systems. It depends on whether or not we assume that upon the establishment of *be* (service groups) and the installation of local people responsible for overseeing them (i.e., local *tomo no miyatsuko*), the local *tomo no miyatsuko* branched off from the family of the *kuni no miyatsuko*, whereas the *kuni no miyatsuko* governed their whole territory. The Saekibe in Kamusaki *Kōri* is a good example that allows us to observe in practice the beginnings of local powerful groups and the system of local government from the time of the earliest appearance of such families and *be* groups in the district, through using ancient local records known as *fudoki*.

The activities of Harima no Saekibe no Atae Aganoko

The name of Aganoko who appears in *Harima Fudoki* is also recorded as Harima no Saeki no Atae Aganoko in the entry for the second month of Nintoku 40 in *Nihon Shoki*. In this, Kibi no Homujibe no Ofuna and Harima no Saeki no Atae Aganoko pursue Prince Hayabusa Wake and Princess Meteorinohime to Uda, and assassinate them on Komoshiro Moor in Ise Province. Ofuna and Aganoko steal and hide the jewels the princess was wearing, but the pair are later exposed, and as punishment Aganoko's 'Tamate' land is confiscated. This passage may be a tale of punishment, but it is clear that the Kibi no Homujibe and Harima no Saeki no Atae are both military groups. There is a Tamate in Yamato Province too, but given that Harima no Saekibe no Aganoko was early on encroaching into Kamusaki *Kōri* in the mid-reaches of the Ichi River (as noted above), we can take it that he was resident in Harima. There is a place called Tamate in Himeji-shi, which is referred to in *Harima Fudoki* as being located at Iwa Sato, Shikama *Kōri*, and it was a pivotal point for Shikama *Miyake* (rice estate). When we lift the veil on this tale of confiscation involving the submission of land at 'Tamate', it seems that the Harima no Saekibe no Atae had been dispatched to Harima as a military detachment by the Yamato Court; they encroached outwards from Kamusaki *Kōri* to Shikama *Kōri* along the Ichi River; and they were styled Harima no Kuni no Miyatsuko on account of managing the Shikama *Miyake*. If Shikama *Miyake* was established in the sixth century, we can surmise that the Harima no Saekibe no Atae group settled in this area earlier, in the fifth to sixth centuries.

The Harima no Saekibe no Atae family and Tada Sato, Kamusaki *Kōri*.

Where exactly was the 'hill to the east of Kawara *Mura*', which was said to have been associated with the reason why Ikoji Wake, founder of the Harima no Saekibe no Atae, gained the Saekibe under his control? One possibility is Kabuto Hill in Kageyama Sato, Kamusaki *Kōri*, (present-day Mikage, Toyotomi-chō, Himeji-shi), which was to the south of Tada Sato in Kamusaki *Kōri* (present-day Tada, Yamada-chō, Himeji-shi). When seen from high points in Kamusaki *Kōri*, Kabuto Hill is a landmark between Kamusaki *Kōri* and Shikama *Kōri* along the Ichi River (see photograph). Kabuto Hill presented a symbolic panoramic vista on the boundary between both *kōri*, as is indicated in the *Harima Fudoki* entry for Asagu Sato in Shikama *Kōri*, in which King Homuda must have entered Shikama *Kōri* from Kamusaki *Kōri* along the Ichi River, having passed 'Kageyama no Saki' (the Kageyama Bluff), when he was on a royal progress from Tajima.

There are several *kofun* (burial mounds) all along the river terrace on the left bank of the Ichi River around Tada Sato. The Yokoyama Kofun cluster that comprises seven round mounds at Mikage, Toyotomi-chō, includes Yokoyama No. 7-*fun*, which is the oldest fourth century keyhole-shaped mound in this district. The Kiyomori Kofun straddles Tada and Kitayamada in Yamada-chō, and is noted for being a fifth century keyhole-shaped mound with a vertical-passage stone burial chamber, a shield-shaped perimeter moat, and a rectangular construction from the left side of its waist. In Kitayamada there is Odaishiyama Kofun, which has a mid-sixth century horizontal-passage stone chamber. And in Tada, Yamada-chō, there is Suwa no Iwaana Kofun, which also has a horizontal-passage stone chamber. These Kitayamada and Tada Kofun clusters in Yamada-chō are scattered along the top of the river terrace on the left bank of the Ichi River, particularly along the Hirata River, which is a tributary of the Ichi. If the expression 'Okabe River' is taken to mean the present-day Okabe River, then it seems to be too far away. If it is taken to mean the

present-day Hirata River, then it flows nowadays into the Ichi River near to Kabuto Hill. It is possible that these fifth–sixth century burial mounds include the remains of men like Saekibe Aganoko, who were sent by the Yamato Court to Kamusaki *Kōri* to be put in charge of Ezo and other conscript labourers.