

大伴家持

Otomo no Yakamochi

Ōtomo no Yakamochi was a nobleman and waka poet in the Nara period. He was born to Ōtomo no Tabito, a Japanese military leader and waka poet. When he was a boy, he was educated by his aunt Sakanoue no Iratsume who was a leading waka poet. As a result, he wrote many outstanding wakas throughout his life.

Yakamochi is said to be a Manyō poet with a checkered career, his life following a cycle of promotions and demotions. Yakamochi, as well as his grandfather Yasumaro, and his father Tabito, left his mark on history as a senior official of the Japanese government under the ritsuryō codes (System that was based on criminal law and administrative law). As chief of the Ōtomo Family, Yakamochi served as Governor of several provinces, including Echū, Inaba, Satsuma, Sagami, and Ise. He also became a council member, following which he was given the position of Jusanmi (upper class noble).

The Fujiwara clan entered the main political stage in the Nara period and Yakamochi, being the head of a prestigious clan, was often involved in anti-Fujiwara movements. He was repeatedly demoted to lower regional bureaucratic positions only to be returned to the central bureaucracy.

Yakamochi died at the age of 68 in 785, a year after he took charge of the campaign to defeat Ezo (Hokkaido).

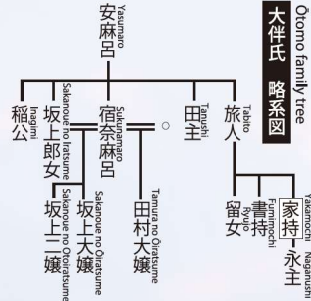
There were also significant changes connected to him following his death. For example, the Emperor's favorite retainer, Fujiwara no Tanetsugu, was assassinated in September of the same year and Yakamochi was alleged to have been one of the plot's masterminds. He was posthumously deprived of all his honors, including his official rank, and his son Naganushi was exiled to the island of Oki. Later, a number of misfortunes befell Emperor Kanmu, and he feared that the troubles were due to the curse of Prince Sawara, who died of resentment related to the incident of Fujiwara no Tanetsugu. About 20 years later, amnesty was given on the day of the Emperor's demise in 806 (25th year of Enryaku), and Yakamochi was posthumously returned to his rank of honor.

In 758, Yakamochi was assigned as Kokushu (governor or director in charge of general government administration) of Inaba Province (presently the eastern part of Tottori Prefecture). It snowed on New Year's Day of the following lunar year which was considered to be the sign of a good harvest. Furthermore, New Year's Day overlapped with the first day of spring, which only occurs once every 19 years; this was also considered very auspicious. The Manyōshū ends with the following poem written by Yakamochi at the Inaba Government Office on that day, and no newer poems have been found: *Aratashiki toshinohajimeno hatsuharuno kyofuruyukino iyashikeyogoto (Like the snow that is falling on the first day of the new year in the early spring, may there be ever more promising things to come.)* Approximately 10% of the Manyōshū is comprised of poetry and includes about 470 long and short poems. Many believe that Yakamochi was involved in the compilation of the Manyōshū.

It is said that Yamanoue no Okura, an older poet and cultural figure, strongly influenced Yakamochi. A dominant theory is that Yakamochi accompanied his father, Tabito, when he was transferred to Dazaifu. However, he was still a boy at that time and is not included in the list of 32 poets who attended Tabito's poetic gathering. Yakamochi, as a boy, may have been watching Okura and his father who authored poems at the feast.

Yakamochi composed many poems that expressed his feelings through descriptions of his natural surroundings. The three poems below are called Yakamochi's three superb seasonal poems and are most representative of his work. They include the poem he wrote in Inaba Province that appears at the end of the Manyōshū.

- *Harumononi kasumitanabiki uraganashi konoyukageni uguisunakumo (I see the haze falling in the spring field, and my heart sinks in sadness; in the light of this dusk, a nightingale is singing)*
- *Wagayadono isasamuratake fukukazeno otonokasokeki konoyubekamo (I can hear the faint sound of the wind blowing through the little bamboo swarms of our house, and I feel the loneliness of this evening)*
- *Uraurani tereruharuhini hibariagari kokorokanashimo hitorishiomoeba (When I muse alone, I feel the sadness in the song of a lark that soars into the mildly shining sunlight of a springtime day)*



Aerial photo of Inaba Kokucho Ruins (Photo: Courtesy of Tottori City Board of Education)



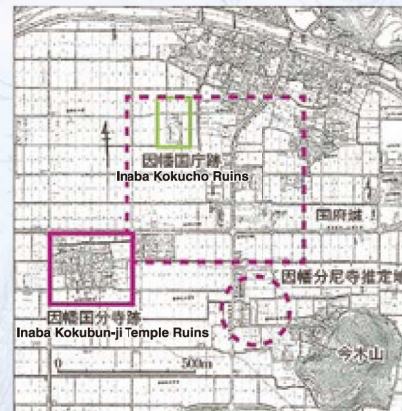
Inaba Kokucho ruins and Mt. Omokage

① Inaba Kokucho Ruins (National Historic Site)

The Inaba Kokucho ruins are what remains of the provincial office from which Inaba was governed from the Heiar period to the Kamakura period (end of the 8th century through the middle of the 14th century). Ōtomo no Yakamochi was assigned as Governor of Inaba during this period. Three mountains collectively called Inaba Sanzan can be seen from the site. They are respectively called Mt. Koshiki (East), Mt. Omokage (West), and Mt. Imaki (South). It is estimated that Kokufu area, including the provincial government office, was about 654m². Kokubun-ji Temple and Kokubunni-ji Temple are located on the south side.

In 1977, traces of a building with remaining foundations were discovered at a depth of only 20 centimeters the site was subsequently designated as a National Historic Site.

- 📍 Chugo, Kokufu Town, Tottori City
- 🚌 Take the Nakagawara Line from Bus Stop #3 at JR Tottori Station. Get off at Miyanoshita Bus Stop and walk for 15 minutes.



Imaginary map of Inaba Kokufu area (Reproduced from Volume 6 of Traditional Archeology in Tottori Prefecture (2013))



General restoration image of Inaba Kokucho

② Cornerstones of (Inaba) Kokubun-ji Temple (Protected Cultural Property of Tottori City)

Kokubun-ji Temple was founded in 741 by the order of Emperor Shomu. This temple was located 500 meters southwest of the Inaba Kokufu. The pagoda, south gate, roofed perimeter mud wall, and building pillars were found through an excavation survey.

The excavated cornerstones have been preserved.

- 📍 Kokubun-ji, Kokufu Town, Tottori City
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Cornerstones of (Inaba) Kokubun-ji Temple