

③ The Oshu Soma Clan: From Warring States Daimyos to Nakamura Feudal Lords

~The rule of the Oshu Soma clan, according to our cultural heritage~

■ The Oshu Soma Clan's Rise into Power

An offshoot of the Chiba clan, the rise of the Oshu Soma clan began with Minamoto no Yoritomo's victory over the Oshu Fujiwara clan of Hiraizumi. The Soma clan was awarded territory within that district and ruled there for around 680 years, from 1189 until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. There are very few clans throughout all of Japan who have continuously controlled an area for such a long time without power ever changing hands.

This reign was solidified toward the end of the Kamakura period (1185-1333), when Soma Shigetane moved to the Namekata District in Mutsu Province. The Soma clan got into a number of disputes during the Northern and Southern Courts period (1336-1392) and the Warring States period (1467-1568), when the land was rife with battles. They had several clashes with the Date clan, and also caused the destruction of the Iwamatsu clan in Kashima, a branch of the Ashikaga clan. Overcoming countless such dangers, the Soma clan secured a position of Warring States daimyos.

■ The Nakamura District in the Edo Period

The Soma clan continued its rule over this area as Oshu Nakamura feudal lords in the Edo period (1603-1868). The territory was broken up into townships matching today's administrative wards, and beside the feudal retainers living in the castle towns, many retainers known as *zaigo kyunin* were deployed to live in farming communities. More attention was turned to the villages

within the district under this management system as the district government aimed for stabilization in the area.

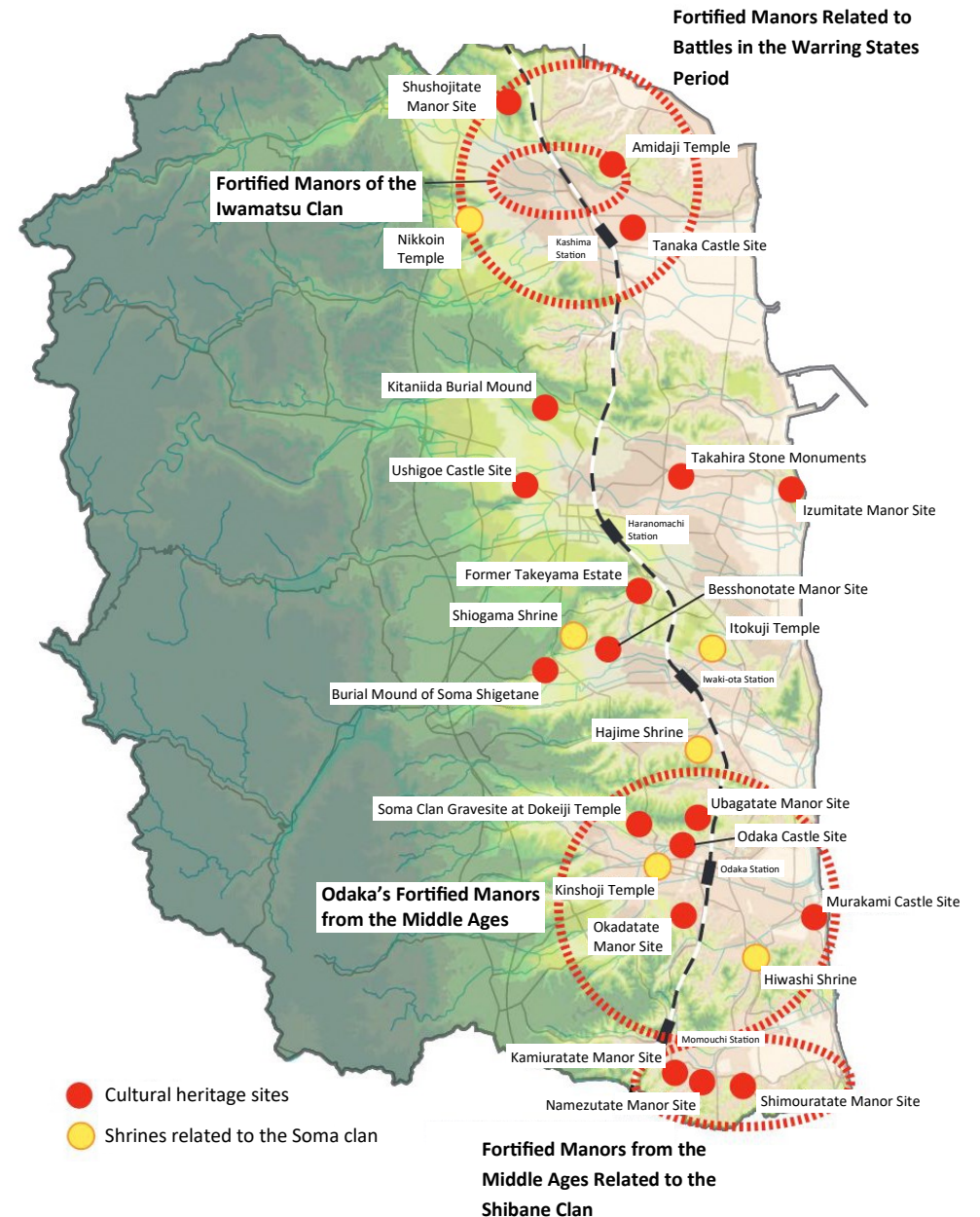
■ The History of the Soma Clan, According to Our Cultural Heritage

We can learn about all this history and development through the cultural heritage that has survived within our city. Around 80 sites of fortified manors from the Middle Ages have been confirmed, most notably Odaka Castle and Ushigoe Castle, the Soma clan's main seats of government and military affairs. These fortified manors were arranged at important positions within the domain and attest to the steady advancement of control over the territory.

Gravestones, tombs, and *gorinto* (five-part Buddhist gravestones) have amassed in the Soma gravesite at Dokeiji Temple, with each head of the Soma clan being buried there along with their spouses beginning with the 16th head Yoshitane. These gravestones convey the majesty of the Soma clan as daimyos. Also, we can learn through the former Takeyama family estate about the humble lifestyle of the *zaigo kyunin* who guarded their social status as retainers even when deployed to villages.

From the Soma clan leaders' development from Warring Period daimyos to their unusual continued rule as feudal lords, the history of the clan is deeply interwoven into the land through our cultural heritage.

The Development of the Soma Clan as Told Through Our Cultural Heritage



O Odaka Castle Site

Castle of the Oshu Soma clan during the Middle Ages, constructed by Soma Shigetane's son Mitsutane in 1336. The castle was surrendered over after an attack from the Southern Court but was later recovered. It then became a base for politics and military affairs during the 280 years when the Soma clan moved to Nakamura Castle (Soma City). The site is now the Soma Odaka Shrine, where Soma Nomaio's wild horse capturing event *nomakake* takes place.



H Ushigoe Castle Site



Castle site located on a hill on the western side of Haramachi Ward. The Soma clan resided here for a short period around the time of the Battle of Sekigahara (1600). They later returned to Odaka Castle and subsequently moved to Nakamura Castle. Around that time, when Nomaio was taking place in front of this castle, news came of the House of Tokugawa's displeasure with the Soma clan due to their absence from the Battle of Sekigahara.

H Takahira Stone Monuments

A number of stone slabs used in a Middle-Age stupa are gathered together in Shimotakahira, Haramachi Ward, and are thought to mark a significant location. Among them is a tablet bearing the inscription of the year Kagen 2 (1304), well before Soma Shigetane left the capital and moved to this area. This may indicate that besides Shigetane, a portion of the Soma clan related to Aritane or Tanehira moved to the Takahira area.



SHimotakahira Kawara stone monument

O Soma Clan Gravesite at Dokeiji Temple

The graves of the Soma clan family members from the Edo period were constructed at Dokeiji Temple, from the 16th family head Yoshitane to the 27th head Masutane. The 16th head Yoshitane battled against Date Masamune, and it is said that he was buried facing the Date clan castle to the north. The 18th head Yoshitane was known as a wise ruler but died young. He was given an especially respectful burial.



Grave of Soma Yoshitane (16th head)



Grave of Soma Yoshitane (18th head)



Graves of successive generations of the Soma clan

The line of *gorinto* gravestones at Dokeiji Temple display the majesty of this early modern period daimyo family. The fact that the Soma family continued to be buried here even after moving to Nakamura shows their regard for Odaka. Furthermore, they are a valuable resource for understanding changes to the burial rites of the daimyo family over time.

O Daimyo Wedding Set

In Dokeiji Temple are the various items used in the wedding ceremony of the Soma clan's feudal lord of Nakamura. Each item is of high quality, made with magnificent designs and splendid technique specially for the daimyo family.



H Kitaniida Burial Mound of Soma Shigetane

A group of graves belonging to Soma family members from the Middle Ages remains in Kitaniida, Haramachi Ward. These graves are said to belong to Soma Akitane, Moritane, and Takatane. Shinshoji Temple was once located to the south of the graves but is now in Motomachi, Haramachi Ward.

The burial mounds at Ganokuji Temple are also an important source of information on samurai families' burial practices during the Middle Ages. There you can find the grave not of Shigetane who moved to the Soma area, but of a different Shigetane who lived in the middle of the Muromachi period (1333-1573). It was built on top of an ancient burial mound from the early Kofun period (250-538 CE).

Burial mound of Soma Shigetane



Kitaniida burial mound

O,K,H Shrine Group Related to the Soma Clan

When the Soma clan moved north from Shimousa, they brought the three shrines of Myoken, Shiogama (now Shiogama Shrine), and Washinomiya (now Hiwashi Shrine) with them, along with seven temples including Nikkoin Temple (now Nikkoji Temple). Myoken was worshipped at various shrines such as the Odaka Shrine and the Ota Shrine during the Edo period, and currently Kinshoji Temple and Itokuji Temple have taken on that role.



(O) Hiwashi Shrine

Also known as Washinomiya the holy water here was once used in Nomaai's wild horse capturing ceremony.



(H) Shiogama Shrine

Once located in Masuda, it is said to have been moved to its current position in Kamiota after a flood.



(K) Nikkoji Temple

Main leader of Haguro mountain asceticism. Moved from the Nakamura castle town to its original position in Koyamada.



(H) Itokuji Temple



(O) Kinshoji Temple

Myoken was removed from shrines and moved to temples due to the Ordinance Distinguishing Shinto and Buddhism issued in 1868 at the start of the Meiji period. Ota Shrine's Myoken was moved to Itokuji Temple, and Odaka Shrine's Myoken was moved to Kinshoji Temple.

O,K,H Sites of Fortified Manors from the Middle Ages

Fortified manors from the Middle Ages remain in every area of Minamisoma. Along with being used in times of war, they were also bases from which the region was controlled. They are a valuable group of sites that display the history of the Middle Ages, from which primary sources are scarce.

Besshonotate Manor is now the site of Soma Ota Shrine, and stories claim it the first residence of the Soma clan upon their move here from Shimousa. Other stories claim the Soma clan moved directly to Odaka, but regardless it was without a doubt a seat of power during the Middle Ages.

The site of Murakami Castle is located on the seaward side of Odaka Ward. The Soma clan had planned to move there from Odaka Castle, but it is said those plans were abandoned due to a fire.

Tanaka Castle was once the home of the Koori clan, the Soma clan's retainers, but the 16th head Soma Shigetane's younger brother Satotane became the castle's chamberlain toward the end of the Warring States period. Many attacks and defenses took place around this castle during the Warring States period. Ishida Mitsunari, the commander of the Western army in the Battle of Sekigahara, stayed here at the time of the suppression of the Kasai Osaki uprising in Date territory.



(H) Besshonotate Manor Site (currently Ota Shrine)



(O) Murakami Castle Site



(K) Tanaka Castle Site



(O) Ubagatate Manor Site

Manor of the Sue clan, which was called one of the Soma Four. Located between Haramachi and Odaka.



(O) Okadatate Manor Site

Manor of the Odaka clan, the Soma clan's chief vassals. Currently the location of Hajime Shrine (Okada).



(H) Shushojitate Manor Site

Located in the mountains east of Kashima Ward's Karakami Reservoir, with an excellent view of the area. The manor became a war site during the Warring States period.

K Amidaji Temple

Part of Kashima Ward was ruled by the Iwamatsu clan, who came to the Namekata area from Kamakura during the Muromachi period (1333-1573), separate from the Soma clan. Amidaji Temple is a Jodo Buddhism temple associated with the Iwamatsu clan, constructed at the site of the Iwamatsu clan estate.



K Cultural Properties in Amidaji Temple

A large number of cultural artifacts have survived in Amidaji Temple, including the hanging embroidery of Namu Amida Buddha, which was nationally designated an important cultural property.

Namu Amida Buddha Hanging Embroidery

The Japanese characters of "Namu Amida Buddha" rest on a lotus seat under a beautifully embroidered canopy. A delicate engraving was applied to the scroll as well.



Woodcut Block of the Holy Priest Honen

A woodcut on which is drawn the holy priest Honen, the founder of Jodo Buddhism. The original is from the Chion Temple in Kyoto, and it includes a carving of old steps of Buddhism, making it a valuable resource for understanding religious proselytization of the time.



Hanging Embroidery of Amida Buddha Triad

A hanging scroll on which is an embroidery of the coming of the Amida Buddha triad to welcome the spirits of the dead. This is a top-quality piece of which few exist, with the characteristic depiction of Gautama Buddha and Yakushi Buddha in the upper portion.

K Maple Tree of Hozoji Temple

Hozoji Temple was erected during the Heian period and became the prayer hall of Soma Satotane toward the end of the Warring States period. The garden's fall colors are stunningly beautiful, and records remain from the Edo period naming it as a famous site.



H Former Takeyama Estate



This was the home of a zaikyo kyujin (samurai deployed to live in agricultural communities), built in the latter half of the 18th century toward the end of the Edo period. This farming home is furnished with a writing alcove, shelves, and a tokonoma (an alcove where art of flowers are displayed). Although these furnishings signify the social status of a samurai, they are simple in design, conveying the lifestyle of zaikyo kyujin at that time.

All that remains now is the main building, but at one time there was a traditional earthen storehouse, a stable, a retirement home, and a lavatory.



Field trip to the estate

H The Sudaji Forest of Hajime Shrine



The remaining Hajime shrines in each area originally worshipped Myoken, but now worship *Ame-no-Minakanushi-no-Mikoto* as an incarnation of Myoken due to the Meiji period's Ordinance Distinguishing Shinto and Buddhism. Within the grounds of the Hajime Shrine in Enei, Haramachi Ward, stands a grove of mainly sudaji trees, which are found in large numbers in the subtropics. This symbolic forest represents the temperate climate of the Soma area.