

## Suzuka no Seki & Ko-Dai-San-Gen

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鈴鹿関と古代三関

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〈摘要〉

白鳳時代（西暦 646～710 年）から奈良時代（西暦 710～794 年）にかけての約 150 年は、日本における国の形成において非常に重要な時期と認識されている。それまでの日本は、村ごとに独立しており、国と呼べるものではなかったが、畿内（大和国）に国を統制する中核組織を設置し、国の仕組みが作られた。本稿は、この時期における三大関所（三関）を含む大規模な関所の開発が、古代の日本国家の発展のための極めて重要な役割を提供したことを説明する。そして、そこには、どのような防御システムがあったのか、そしてそれはどのように機能していたのか、またその防御システムの主な目的は何だったのか？本稿では、それらの間について調査するため、鈴鹿関の西暦 7～8 世紀の遺跡の発見、研究、採掘に直接携わってきた 2 人の主要人物、嶋村明彦氏と森川幸雄氏にインタビューした。また彼らとのディスカッションにより、鈴鹿関とこの時代の歴史的背景についての情報も得た。さらに、関所が本州の東部と東北地域全体に渡り、大和国の支配を拡大することに大きな役割を果たしたこともわかった。

キーワード：鈴鹿関、古代三関、古代日本、東海道五十三次の関宿、三重県指定文化財

### 1. Introduction

In ancient Japan, incorporated into the law codes originally drafted in the Hakuho era (A.D. 646-710) culminating in the Nara era (A.D. 710-794), there were laws for the development of an early military force in addition to establishing a series of checkpoints, or *Seki-sho* 関所 and three main fortified barrier stations, or *San-Gen* 三関 to be manned by these forces (see picture 1). Concentrated in the central Yamato domain called the Kinai, a total of nineteen checkpoints, including the three major fortified barrier stations were under operation. Strategically positioned along the extreme eastern edge of the central Kinai domain, the three main fortified barrier stations were: Suzuka no Seki of the Ise province or *Ise-Kuni Suzuka no Seki* 伊勢国鈴鹿関 located at the base of the Suzuka Mountain range in the present-day town of Seki in Mie prefecture. Fuwa no Seki of the Mino province or *Mino-Kuni*

*Fuwa no Seki* 美濃国不破関 located at the base of the Ibuki Mountains in the present-day town of Sekigahara in Gifu prefecture. And Arachi no Seki of the Echizen province or *Echizen-Kuni Arachi no Seki* 越前国愛発関 believed to have been located in the Nosaka Mountains in the Hikida area 疋田 in present-day Fukui prefecture.

Only with the archaeological discoveries of remnants of the Fuwa no Seki fortifications in the 1970's (1974-1977) and most recently the eight-year (2006-2014) excavation of the Suzuka no Seki earthen walls, has the ancient documentation been substantiated to some degree. Although, as of this writing, the third main barrier station of Arachi no Seki, despite field surveys conducted over several years (1996-1999) has yet to be confirmed by any physical evidence. However, it seems clearer today that there had been a well-designed checkpoint and fortified barrier system, but for what specific purpose (s) did it serve? Was it used to simply control persons and passage, to collect fees? Or did it also take on a more strategic aspect such as in times of major conflict? In his book titled *Antiquity and Anachronism in Japanese History* (1992), Dr. Jeffrey Mass's analysis of the major foreign research on early Japan brings into question the belief that early Japan developed organically, in a more or less peaceful and harmonious state. On the somewhat extreme end, he writes, considering the series of power grabs, the development of the early Japanese state may have been closer in reality to "a tale of invasion and warfare" (pg. 11). It was the Jinshin War of A.D. 672, and not the imperial palace coup in A.D. 645, which deserves our attention in understanding the beginning of the great transformations of the Taika Reform era. In response to the effects of this civil war in the summer of A.D. 672, a formal military force, a new checkpoint and fortified barrier system with roads connected by horse-relay was prioritized in the central Yamato domain.

## 2. T'ang China Law Codes & Early Japan

Long before the Yamato kingdom of early Japan attempted its own variation on the fortification design, the ruling powers in ancient China had formulated an extensive system of defensive walls, including heavily guarded checkpoints with gates, observation towers and adjoining military facilities. Additionally, vast networks of roads connected by way of horse-relay allowed for movements of travelers, goods, military personnel and information as never before. Professor of ancient Japanese history, Tateno Kazumi (2016) states that the ancient law codes, which included the checkpoint system with fortified barrier stations as

well the horse-relay system were adopted from T'ang era China.

According to Professor Richard J. Miller (1979, pg. 37), the T'ang law codes of 7<sup>th</sup> century China were an invaluable template in the crafting of Japan's own law code in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries albeit with its own Yamato era distinctions. As written in the *Chronicles of Japan* 日本書紀 (Aston. 1972), beginning in the New Year A.D. 646, newly ascended Emperor Kōtoku promulgated a series of imperial edicts, the second proclamation reads, “The capital is for the first time to be regulated, and Governors appointed for the Home provinces and districts. Let barriers, outposts, guards, and post-horses, both special and ordinary, be provided, bell-tokens made, and mountains and rivers regulated” (Book XXV, pg. 206, paragraph 14).

Consisting mainly of administrative statutes, the very first law codes developed in concert with the reform edicts of Emperor Kōtoku, where for the first time, the land and the people were brought under centralized control and in addition to the total reorganization of government, a military force, barrier system with checkpoints and a horse-relay network were devised. The initial version of the law code was enacted circa A.D. 668 and came to be known as the *Ōmi-Ryō*, or *Ōmi-Code*, so called as at this time the seat of the ruling family was located near to lake Biwa in the province of Ōmi (Miller, 1979, pg. 22) The *Ōmi Code*, consisting of some twenty-two volumes, was introduced during the reign of Emperor Tenji (A.D. 661-672), who had been crown prince during the seminal transformation of power in A.D. 645 (Miller, 1979, pg. 23) According to Japan historian James Murdoch (1910, pg. 189) and Miller (1979, pg. 23) those tasked with the development of the codes borrowed extensively from the Yung-Hui-Lu-Ling law code of the Yung-Hui period (A.D. 650-5) of China's T'ang Dynasty era.

Following the death of Emperor Tenji, under subsequent rulers, Emperor Temmu, who reigned from A.D. 673-686, and Empress Jitō (A.D. 687-697), the administrative law code was revised and updated in what is known as the *Asuka-Kiyomigahara-Ryō*, or *Asuka-Kiyomigahara Administrative Code* (Miller, 1979, pg. 29). Again, time and place had to do with the naming of the new law code as at this time the seat of the ruling family had moved from the Ōmi province to that of Kiyomigahara in the Asuka region in the south of Yamato province. The *Ōmi Code* and the *Asuka-Kiyomigahara Code* were revised and introduced in A.D. 701 as the *Taihō Ritsu-Ryō*, or the criminal (*ritsu*) and administrative (*ryō*) codes of *Taihō* (Miller, 1979, pg. 22). The *Taihō Ritsu-Ryō*, itself based on China law doctrine, was

a central force of influence on the life and times of the Nara era.

While the original Taihō Ritsu-Ryō is no longer extant, a further revision of the law code completed in A.D. 718 and called the *Yōrō-Ryō*, or *Yōrō Code*, remains preserved nearly in its entirety in a commentary on the codes known as *Ryō-No-Gige* (Miller, 1979, pg. 33). In the latter half of the Nara era, the original *Yōrō* codes were given an update and officially annotated in “Notes on the Code” or *Ryō-No-Gige* which was published in A.D. 833 (Miller, 1979, Pg. 38). Contained within the *Yōrō Code* (養老令全 30 編), are the laws that specifically cover the military, known as the *Gunbō-Ryō*, or *Military Code*, found in Volume 5, Section 17 (Miller, 1979, pg. 35), and that of *Gen-Shi-Ryō*, or *Barriers and Markets Code*, found in Volume 9, Section 27 (Miller, 1979, pg. 35). The *Military Code* includes 76 Articles (軍防令全 76 条) describing the rules and regulations governing the conscription and use of a military. The *Barriers and Markets Code* includes 20 Articles (関市令全 20 条) describing the specific operation and the rules and regulations of the main barrier stations and the market places located adjacent to or within the barriers themselves (“*Yōrō Code*”, 2017). As documented in the “Notes on the Code”, there were three main fortified barrier stations, one established in Ise province, *Ise-Kuni no Suzuka Seki*, another in the Mino province, *Mino-Kuni no Fuwa Seki*, and one in Echizen province, called *Echizen-Kuni no Arachi Seki* (Miller, 1979, pgs. 239, 240).

### 3. Further Research: Personal Interviews / Site Visit

For the following historical research, in-depth interviewing of two key individuals, including a site visit together with one of the participants, was conducted in order to further investigate the topic and collect related information. The two participants, Mr. Shimamura Akihiko, and Mr. Morikawa Yukio, have extensive experience in both Japanese historical studies and archaeology and are considered experts on the topic of the ancient barrier system. All discussions were conducted in Japanese and while somewhat informal in style a list of questions was prepared to not only organize, but also help in comparing and contrasting information regarding the topic.

The first participant, Mr. Shimamura Akihiko, was until December 2018, the director of the Historic Cultural Properties Division of Kameyama City, Mie prefecture, Japan. His major responsibilities included overseeing the conservation and restoration of *Seki-Juku 東海道五十三次の関宿* an Edo era (A.D. 1603-1868) post-station town registered as an

important traditional building conservation area by the Japanese government. For eight years from 2006-2014, he was directly involved in the excavations of the Suzuka no Seki earthen wall fortifications. Mr. Shimamura was the central figure in the city's effort to have the archaeological ruins of Suzuka no Seki designated a national historic property, although, as of this writing the site has yet to receive such classification. Our discussions took place over three sessions at his office in the Kameyama City Hall and totaled around eight hours. The dates were February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

The second participant, Mr. Morikawa Yukio, preceded Mr. Shimamura as head of the Historic Cultural Properties Division of Kameyama City, and prior to this work was a research team member for seventeen years at Mie Prefecture's Cultural Properties Research Center. Among his many research activities, he was personally involved in the excavations of the Jōmon era site in Matsuzaka city known as Ten Paku Iseki 天白遺跡 dating from the Koki era of Japan's prehistorical antiquity (c. 2000 – 1000 B.C.), which in turn received formal designation as a national historic property. It was Mr. Morikawa who made the initial discovery of the earthen wall remains of Suzuka no Seki in 2005. And from 2005 to 2007 he directed the initial excavations of the Suzuka no Seki site. Our first discussion took place on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018. A follow-up discussion including a site visit together to the remains of the Suzuka no Seki took place on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Our discussions and site visit totaled around ten hours.

**Question One:** *How were the ancient earthen walls of Suzuka no Seki first discovered?*

Mr. Shimamura recalled that in 2005, Mr. Morikawa Yukio, who was at that time the director of the Cultural Properties Division of Kameyama city, found what appeared to be pieces of ancient roof tiles in a wooded area at the southwestern edge of Kannon Mountain 観音山 located in the town of Seki (see pictures 2, 3). After the tiles were confirmed to be from the ancient time period, principle excavations were begun in 2006 in coordination with Kameyama city, Seki town and a team from the prefectural university, Mie University. The initial excavations eventually revealed three clearly defined layers, or sub-sections of the ancient wall, that in its entirety formed a section of the wall shaped like an “L”. This “L” section was the elbow curve of the northern portion of the wall and incorporated the naturally elevated base of the mountain as its deepest and subsequently largest sub-section. Situated ten meters above this “L” section sits a large natural boulder outcrop extending just out over the tree line creating an advantageous lookout point over the valley below.

**Question Two:** *Could you describe how you first discovered the ancient walls of Suzuka no Seki?*

Mr. Morikawa began with the point that he had known about the ancient barrier station Suzuka no Seki because of people, most notably, Professor Hachiga Susumu (1999), who had spent time researching and trying to locate its remains. However, it wasn't until Mr. Morikawa had moved from the Mie Prefectural Cultural Properties Research Center to the Cultural Properties Division of Kameyama city in 2005, that he had taken a direct interest in the subject. Although he was born and raised in the town of Seki, not far from the proposed area of the ancient walls, it was not until all these years later that he would try to search for the remains. He set out in and around the hills and wooded mountain areas where the walls were thought to have been located searching for clues to its whereabouts. One of his major discoveries prior to his finding ancient tile fragments indicating segments of a wall, was a forest pathway confirmed to be that of the original Tōkaidō pathway that once ran from the capital of ancient Nara to Suzuka no Seki during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. After exiting the forest and crossing over the Suzuka River, the original Tōkaidō pathway lead travelers up to the west gate entrance at Suzuka no Seki.

According to Mr. Morikawa, based on personal research and information from historical chronicles of the time period, Professor Hachiga (1999) had concluded that the ancient barrier station of Suzuka no Seki, was not only the largest of the three ancient barriers but that it had actually been divided into an eastern half 東城 and a western half 西城. Furthermore, as Professor Hachiga surmised, upon entering the barrier station from the west, the original Tōkaidō soon forked either continuing east-northeastwards toward the Ise Provincial Government Headquarters 伊勢国府 (Ise no Kuni Kokufu) or southwards along an old river bisecting with the Suzuka River at the site of the ancient horse-post stop called *Furumaya* 古馬屋. It was here that a connecting road, the Ise Pilgrimage Road 伊勢街道 took a turn south to Saigu 齋宮 and onto the Ise Shrine region.

As Mr. Morikawa explained, in fact, there was an old river known as *Otoro-gawa* that had run directly through the barrier station, essentially cutting the area into two halves. Today, this river having been reduced to more or less a stream, does not provide a clear answer, but according to Mr. Morikawa, two pieces of information helped confirmed Professor Hachiga's conclusion. First of all, in the early Edo era (beginning of the 17 century A.D.) when the Tokugawa Shogunate 徳川幕府 (Tokugawa *bakufu*) revised the ancient horse-post system, the settlement of Seki, having long ago been the ancient barrier station of Suzuka no Seki,

was remade into a post town for the new Tōkaidō thoroughfare linking Edo (present-day capital Tokyo) with the then capital city of Kyoto. The problem was that the Otoro River intersected with the proposed road. So, and according to documentation of that time period, the Tokugawa Shogunate landfilled that section of the Otoro River to extend the road through the settlement thus connecting the two halves. Another crucial find was one that Mr. Morikawa personally oversaw. In this same area where the river had been landfilled some four hundred years prior, an old home was being torn down in order to build a new one. Obtaining permission to make an archaeological dig to search for any sign of the ancient period prior to the landfill in the early Edo age, Mr. Morikawa's archaeological hunch uncovered some positively historical clues. Reaching some 1.5 meters down, ash and fragments of pottery confirmed to be from the Muromachi era (A.D. 1336-1573) were found. The earthen formations also confirmed the existence of a large river bed that was indeed the remnants of the old Otoro River that had once flowed directly through this area.

These two major finds helped Mr. Morikawa understand in more conclusive detail that the site of the ancient barrier station of Suzuka no Seki was quite different in geographical relation to its present self, the old Edo era post town of Seki. From the Edo era and the establishment of the Tōkaidō thoroughfare, the post town of Seki has consisted of three main neighborhoods, that of *Shinjo* 新所, *Naka-machi* 中町 and *Kozaki* 木崎. Prior to the Edo era, the main central area of Naka-machi did not exist, only the western half (Shinjo) and the eastern half (Kozaki). In essence, the old river provided a separation between these two areas thus confirming the ideas of Professor Hachiga that the ancient barrier station of Suzuka no Seki was in two halves. More importantly for Mr. Morikawa, this revelation gave him the idea to take a much closer look at the stream and its formations that was once the central Otoro River. He began by following the stream as it winds itself up into the northwestern hills to its origin at the base of Kannon Mountain. The old river bed led him to what appeared to be a series of unnatural earthen formations in the heavily forested area at the base of Kannon Mountain. Soon searching and sifting around these land formations he came across various small fragments of very old tiles that confirmed something ancient had once existed there. The tiles were then properly examined and confirmed to be of the ancient *nunomegawara* style, a style of tile making common in the ancient Nara and Heian time periods.

**Question Three:** *How did you know that these tiles were from the seventh or eighth century A.D.?*

Mr. Morikawa explained that in the ancient period, the flat roof 平瓦 *hiragawara* and rounded roof 丸瓦 *marugawara* tiles were made by using wet cloth, in a technique called *nunomegawara* 布目瓦 or wet-cloth tile style (see picture 4). When this technique was applied, the tiles always had lines running on the surface indicating the grooves that the wet cloth created during the wet and dry processing. Furthermore, the temperature that was obtained to bake the clay was not as high as in later times, so the middle section of the tile would retain its gray-like color while the inner and outer sides of the tile would be earth toned, beige-like in coloration. Mr. Morikawa further noted that a fragment of tile from this time period in comparison with a stone of similar size would be far lighter. It was this fact that made it easier for him in detecting possible tile fragments when sifting through the dirt.

The *nunomegawara* style indicates an ancient period style of tile processing that continued at least into the Heian period (A.D. 794-1185). Mr. Morikawa explained that it wasn't until a circular symbol tile representing the imperial mark of Emperor Shōmu 重圈文軒丸瓦 was unearthed from the aforementioned "L" section, that the various roof tile fragments could be authenticated as Nara era tiles, indicating an A.D. 724-749 time frame. Mr. Morikawa noted that the ancient Ise Provincial Government Headquarters 伊勢国府 (Ise no Kuni Kokufu) located a short distance from the Suzuka no Seki Barrier Station also had these Emperor Shōmu symbol tiles. Records indicate that the Ise Provincial Government Headquarters was constructed in approximately A.D. 742.

According to the information from Suzuka City's Archaeological Museum (2018), following the establishment of the first set of provinces in the middle seventh century A.D., the creation of provincial government headquarters provided for a localized political center of activity that included branches for the judiciary, military and religious rights. The ancient Ise Provincial Government Headquarters is believed to have been erected between the years A.D. 741-744. In the year A.D. 789, it was recorded that a great famine struck Ise province. No further major activities are listed for the government headquarters from this year after.

In 1957, a team led by Kyoto University Professor Fujioka Kenjirō begun the first survey of the area based on historical geographic information. At this time, the research team uncovered a number of roof tiles believed to have been from the military barracks that were a part of the structure used to house the army corps. It was not until 1992 though, that principle excavations were begun under the supervision of the Suzuka City Board of



Education. And in 2002, the site was officially designated a national historic site of Japanese antiquity. In total, three major area sites have been excavated covering a total of 7.4 hectares or 18.3 acres.

Amongst the several important discoveries, including the circular symbol tiles designating the era of Shōmu's reign, the central facility of the government headquarters was found to have been enclosed by a fence that had a central gate located in the south and covered an area running 80 meters east to west and 110 meters north to south. Inside there was a rectangular main gallery hall with oblong sub halls on either side. A rectangular main shrine was located just behind the main gallery. All the buildings featured tiled roofs with post beam construction. Confirming the initial 1957 survey, a great number of roof tiles dating from the middle Nara era (A.D. 729-741) were uncovered in 1997. The vast number of roof tiles found indicated an unusually large building structure that most likely was the military barracks. It is theorized that due to the condition and placement of the remains that perhaps a major natural disaster destroyed the complex.

Mr. Morikawa senses the strong possibility that at the time of the Suzuka no Seki fortified barrier station, the military corps were actually stationed nearby at the Ise Provincial Government Headquarters. Mr. Shimamura commented that operational staff may have also been stationed at the Ise Provincial Government Headquarters and thus manned the Suzuka no Seki barrier station during regular operational hours. During an emergency situation, most likely the barrier station was staffed and fortified with soldiers on a full-time basis, while remaining closed to travelers and market activities.

**Question Four:** *What about the size of the Suzuka no Seki barrier fortifications?*

According to Mr. Shimamura, excavations have revealed piles of roof tiles lying some 3 ½ meters across wall sections from other piles of roof tiles. Considering that the top section had long disintegrated and left the remains of tiles on either side of the base wall, the remains of the base wall itself suggest an immense structure. It is highly probable that in some areas the walls may have risen to ten meters.

Mr. Shimamura stated that current excavations of the Suzuka no Seki barrier fortifications indicate a wall stretching some 600 meters from the base of Kannonyama (Kannon Mountain) across the valley and ending near to the elbow curve of the Suzuka River. He explained that only remnants of walls that appear to have run as one long wall have been unearthed. Remnants of *Fuwa no Seki* found in the 1970s (1974-1977) in the town of

present-day Sekigahara in Gifu prefecture revealed earthen fortifications measuring 460 meters for the northern wall, 432 meters for the eastern wall and 112 meters for the southern wall. In this location, the Fujiko River provided a natural embankment which most likely created the western half of the fortifications. As Mr. Shimamura detailed, the Fuwa no Seki fortification design resembled more of a large enclosure than what is believed to have existed at Suzuka no Seki. Mr. Morikawa explained that the Suzuka no Seki barrier fortifications most likely included this one large (600 meters long wall) as the natural characteristics of the area including Kannon Mountain 漢音山 providing a northern barrier and Shiro Mountain 城山 a southern barrier. In other words, according to Mr. Morikawa, it appears likely that Suzuka no Seki did not have additional walls nor was it designed as an enclosure similar to that of Fuwa no Seki.

**Question Five:** *Events from the Jinshin War of A.D. 672 made first mention of the barrier at Suzuka. What was the Jinshin War and what, if any role, did the Suzuka no Seki barrier have in this conflict?*

As Mr. Shimamura explained, at this time in early Japan, the reigning emperor by the name of Tenji had fallen ill and his son, the prince Ōtomo, was set to take his place on the throne. It so happened that the ailing Emperor Tenji had a younger brother by the name of prince Ōama. It is known that the younger brother had actually refused to ascend the throne preferring to become a Buddhist monk in the area of Yoshino in the far southern part of Yamato province, present-day Nara prefecture. In fact, as it turned out, the younger brother, Ōama, had misled his older brother, the ailing Emperor Tenji, while carefully concocting plans for his own power grab. Upon the passing of his father, the Emperor Tenji in January of A.D. 672, son Ōtomo became the new emperor with a new name, Kōbun. His reign would last an ill-fated eight short months.

While under disguise and living the life of a hermit monk in Yoshino, the former crown prince Ōama began to maneuver for the throne currently occupied by his half-nephew, the new crowned Emperor Kōbun. In a journey documented in the *Chronicles of Japan* 日本書紀 (Aston. 1972), prince Ōama traveled with a small gathering of loyalists up and through southern Yamato province and through to Iga province. Along the way he managed in gathering an assortment of followers dedicated to his mission of securing the throne for himself. According to Mr. Shimamura at the time of his arrival at the Suzuka barrier in Ise province, he was met by a certain number of members of the imperial court who secretly supported his ideas. At this point, it is mentioned in the historical chronicle that some five

hundred supporters had joined him.

With his group of loyalists, the dutiful brother prince-turned Buddhist monk-turned imperial throne seeker set his sights toward the province of Mino situated several days journey north of the Suzuka barrier (situated on the border of Iga & Ise provinces). Arriving at Mino province, prince Ōama had now assembled a force of at least three thousand and would for the first time, engage in combat with the forces of his adversary the Emperor Kōbun. As the historical chronicle notes, a series of battles were waged during the late summer months of A.D 672. In a major battle in Mino province fought in the area of what is the present-day town of Sekigahara, the historic chronicles describe the successful blockage of the road to Fuwa. Mr. Shimamura commented that although the Fuwa no Seki barrier is not specifically mentioned, the fact that the Fuwa Road was a key strategic site gives some notion that the barrier station of Fuwa no Seki may have been in existence at this time.

Mr. Morikawa pointed out though that since the historical chronicles were written nearly fifty years after events of the Jinshin War, it cannot be known for certain that the great barrier fortified stations actually existed at the time of the Jinshin War. In his assessment of the events of the Jinshin War, while the former prince Ōama did reach Ise province with his group of loyalists, the Suzuka no Seki barrier was not yet in existence. More probable, as Mr. Morikawa explained, is that he and his men went about constructing a crude barrier to help aid in securing the Iga province/Ise province border areas. His summation referenced the natural landscapes of the area that provided excellent lookouts over the valley and the natural mountain passes. In other words, the area provided a base of operation for prince Ōama's forces and from there, the former prince sought to shore up his support in the Mino province where, according to Mr. Morikawa, he was held in great esteem quickly gathering a large force of supporters.

Sighting the archaeological record to further support his theory, Mr. Morikawa explained that the archaeological remains of the Suzuka no Seki's earthen wall fortifications point strongly towards the probability that they were redesigned and built up significantly in preparation for the visit of Emperor Shōmu during the month of November in the year A.D. 740. Until this time, according to Mr. Morikawa, the barrier walls of Suzuka no Seki were probably no more than reinforced earthen molds atop natural landforms (see pictures 5, 6).

Unlike a typical wall of the period that would encircle a temple for example, the walls of Suzuka no Seki were not constructed from wooden molds but at first the natural landform

itself was fixed with pounded earth to form a base called *dorui* 土塁 . The second layer included working with the natural base using a mixed earth and rock method or *dobei* 土塀. Mr. Morikawa pointed out that up until the proposed visit of Emperor Shōmu the barrier fortifications were most likely in this state of condition.

Therefore, in preparation for the royal visit, Mr. Morikawa theorizes that the earthen wall fortifications were significantly improved and furthermore that a top wall section was added giving added height and an air of regal authority. As Mr. Morikawa explained, this top section was in the *tsuji-bei* style 築地塀 typical of the grand fences that encircled the most important properties of antiquity (see picture 7). Two discoveries point to this probability. First of all, the aforementioned Emperor Shōmu circular symbol tile that would have been affixed to the tile roof section was uncovered in the ruins. Another important point is that while nothing of the top section remains, the fragmented roof tiles were found lying mostly along the top left and right sides of the second layer of earthen wall. Morikawa explained that over time, the thinner top wall section with its tiled roof would have eroded and the tiles would therefore have fallen to either side.

According to information from the Yokkaichi City Board of Education Social Education Section (2018), when Emperor Shōmu embarked on his royal tour “east of the Seki barriers” [暫く関東に住かん] in A.D. 740, it was, in fact, being carried out during a period of great uncertainty. Some five years prior, in A.D. 735, a smallpox epidemic ravaged the populations in the far western territories and by A.D. 737 had spread up into the central region of the Kinai domain. Estimates range from a quarter to a third of all people died as a result of the highly infectious disease. In response, the devout Buddhist leader Emperor Shōmu ordered even more construction of religious images, temples to house them and any number of ceremonies to be performed. Not only were human resources exploited by this effort, but so to that of extensive natural resources needed for these grand religious projects. Suzuka City’s Archaeological Museum points out that a host of natural calamities, including a major earthquake in A.D. 734, and devastating famines due to significant crop failures, were recurrent themes throughout the era.

While Emperor Shōmu survived the plague, several leading figures within the imperial government did not, including top court officials from the adversarial but highly influential Fujiwara clan. At this time, an important member of the Fujiwara clan, Fujiwara no Hirotsuga, who was governor of the central Yamato province, was removed from his position

and sent to the far western province of Chikuzen, present-day Fukuoka prefecture. It was here in A.D. 740, on the border areas separating Chikuzen province and Buzen province, that Hirotsuga was to initiate an ultimately unsuccessful war with imperial forces- known as the Fujiwara no Hirotsuga War.

Mr. Morikawa explained that while disease and conflicts raged, Emperor Shōmu was in effect making a tour in A.D. 740, to reassure the populace and shore up political support in the central domain. As it turned out, the royal tour was just the beginning of what became an extended hiatus from the capital, as Emperor Shōmu remained away from the capital at Nara for some five years until returning for good in A.D. 745. During this time period he established a satellite capital just north of Nara called Kuni-kyo 恭仁京, another later at Shigaraki in Omi province 紫香楽宮, and finally settled for a time at the former capital of Naniwa 難波宮 in A.D. 744.

**Question Six:** *In A.D. 789, the operation of the three main fortified barrier stations, or San Gen (三関) was effectively ended. What was the reason (s) for this? What was the situation like at this time?*

When the three main barrier stations were in regular operation it was known as *kai-gen* 開関. In the event of the emperor or empress's illness, or in the case of his or her death, the three main barrier stations were closed indefinitely in a period known as *ko-gen* 固関. While natural disasters also initiated temporary closure, it was especially during the times of imperial succession that brought about the urgent need for closing and securing the main barrier stations. This early form of martial law within the Yamato domain was increasingly necessary as the probability was high that a coups d'état or a civil war could break out when the most powerful leadership positions were in flux. Mr. Shimamura and Mr. Morikawa both commented that while the historical record indicated that the main fortified barrier station system was ended in A.D. 789, it is unclear as to the specific reason (s) why, and also, if the barriers were completely abandoned. It is known, however, that the barriers remained closed, under the status of *ko-gen* 固関, until at least the first half of the Heian period (A.D. 794-1185). No further records exist, if they ever did, of the operation and/or decommissioning of the San-Gen system from this time forward.

Furthermore, as Mr. Shimamura explained, that amongst the various theories, it seems likely that as stability took hold within the central Kinai domain and with the subsequent drive for expansion into the eastern and far eastern territories, that the San-Gen system lost

its primary purpose. Mr. Morikawa cautioned though that the expansion into the eastern frontier was not in a retaliatory sense, in other words, the situation at that time was not entirely hostile. Furthermore, he believes, the development of the eastern and far-eastern frontiers was not a series of battles, or anything, like a great civil war. His opinion sites the archaeological evidence that at both barrier stations, Fuwa no Seki and Suzuka no Seki, the barrier walls and station of operations lay opposite (to the east) the major rivers (the Fujiko-gawa & the Suzuka-gawa) and away from the mountain range. As is the case of Suzuka no Seki, the Ise Provincial Government Headquarters (Ise Kokufu) was located further east of the barriers. While both Mr. Shimamura and Mr. Morikawa support the theory that the main fortified barrier stations were established and designed to defend against resistance originating from within the Kinai domain, Mr. Morikawa cautions against its use as a deterrence against threats, if any, coming directly from the eastern or far-eastern frontier plains. In other words, in his assessment, had specific threats originated from the east or far east, Suzuka no Seki barrier station would have been located either on the western side of the Suzuka River or at least the barrier station walls would have been on the eastern side. It is interesting to note though, that in the case of the Fuwa no Seki, while the barrier station was also located east of its major river at the base of the Ibuki Mountain range, its main 432 meters long wall was located on its eastern side.

Mr. Shimamura expressed that by this time, the near eastern lands closest to the main barrier stations did not pose any immediate threat, rather, the major problems lay in the pacification of the indigenous populations scattered throughout the far eastern lands of Dewa and Mutsu (present-day Tōhoku) and beyond into Ezo island. The island known as Ezo, or Ezochi (present-day Hokkaido), was not considered under the Japanese sphere of influence in these times and would remain mostly under indigenous Ainu control up until the Meiji era (A.D. 1868-1912). According to Mr. Shimamura, in the late 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., indigenous peoples of the northeast, most notably the Ainu populations, clashed with Japanese forces over many years specifically in the lands of Dewa and Mutsu. Mr. Shimamura concluded by adding that it was not difficult to imagine what it was like in these ancient times: with the Sea of Japan protecting its northern and western side, and the Pacific its southern, the main fortified barrier system was the Yamato kingdom's eastern barrier. And by A.D. 789, with the central Kinai domain experiencing a time of relative calm under the rule of Emperor Kammu (A.D. 781-806), the extent of the resistance, however great or

small, was concentrated beyond the Kantō in the far eastern frontier. Thus, the San-Gen system gradually lost its main function as a control mechanism for suppressing an internal revolt turned major civil war much like that of the Jinshin War, some time ago, during the summer months of A.D. 672.

#### 4. Conclusion

The three main fortified barrier stations known as the San-Gen, were individually as well as collectively a border-defense built and maintained to protect the central Kinai domain of the Yamato kingdom. In its initial phase, according to Mr. Morikawa, the locations of Suzuka no Seki and Fuwa no Seki, were little more than a meeting point rather than a strategic base for military-like operations. Later on, these locations were significantly built up and fortified as garrisoned barrier stations with a provincial government headquarters located near to the barrier as at Suzuka no Seki. In this capacity, as both Mr. Morikawa and Mr. Shimamura have commented, in its inception, the San-Gen was devised in order to discourage any adversary of the imperial court from moving outside the Kinai domain in an attempt to gather subjects to mount a strategic counter attack.

As Professor Tateno (2016) writes, in times of relative peace, the barriers played a more nuanced day-to-day role as a buttress against the flow of illegitimate persons from in and outside the border regions. During this time of the Ritsu-Ryō era, the checkpoints and the main barriers were also vital in helping to regulate the citizenry, discourage tax evasion and the misuse of government allocated farm land, amongst other internal controls. The San-Gen barrier stations eventually included not only large earthen wall fortifications, gates and heavily armed soldiers, but a marketplace area where goods, and even slaves, could be bartered and sold. And in times of greatest uncertainty, the barriers were closed indefinitely. What is not clear is whether the San-Gen, considering its strategic location along the historical East/West divide, did in fact, act as a defense against specific threats originating from the eastern and far-eastern regions of Honshu. While neither historical documentation or current archaeological evidence has been found to establish this theory at the San-Gen, what is evidently clear, is that the fortified barrier system of the San-Gen was replicated in critical areas throughout the eastern and far northeastern regions of Honshu. As history notes, the Yamato kingdom had begun to infiltrate these lands establishing a military fortress at Taga (A.D. 724) and later a secondary fortress further north at Isawa (A.D. 802). And

around this same time, the far eastern border line with the barriers of Shirakawa, Nakoso and Nezu was soon established. In other words, while indigenous peoples, most notably the Ainu, may or may not have specifically threatened the central Kinai domain, contrary to this, the early Japanese took the fight to them in the late 8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. with increasingly favorable results.

Until further archaeological evidence is uncovered with the possibility of some remnant of the third fortified barrier, that of Arachi no Seki, finally revealed, the full understanding of the San-Gen history will remain somewhat incomplete. Today, however, we can realize with even greater perspective that the three main fortified barrier stations, collectively called the San-Gen, had a profound impact on the development of the greater Japanese state, helping to stabilize the interior while expanding its borders to eventually include the entire expanse of the eastern half of the main island of Honshu.

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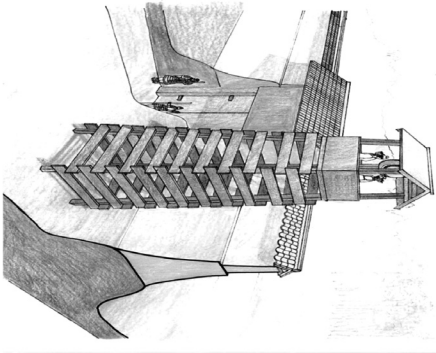
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**Picture 1:** Fortifications of Ise-Kuni Suzuka no Seki circa 740 s A.D. Original Sketch by Moe Matsunaga.



**Picture 2:** Suzuka no Seki earthen remains. Original location of discovery. Photo by Brian J. Mahoney.

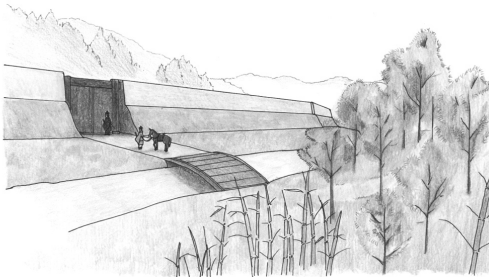


**Picture 3:** Large fragment of Suzuka no Seki tile. Photo by Brian J. Mahoney.

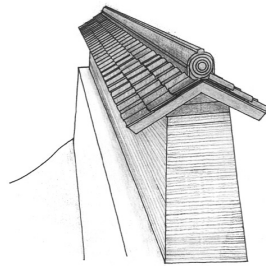


**Picture 4:** Notice indentations from the ancient wet-cloth tile making style. Photo by Brian J. Mahoney.

**Picture 5:** The main section of the 600 meters wall of Suzuka no Seki before A.D.740. Drawing by Moe Matsunaga.



**Picture 6:** The main section of the 600 meters wall after A.D. 740. Notice the additions to upper wall and gate. Drawing by Moe Matsunaga.



**Picture 7:** Upper fence-like portion added to top of Suzuka no Seki's walls from after A.D. 740. Notice the Emperor's circular symbol tile. Drawing by Moe Matsunaga.