

# Technological Originality Seen in the Construction of Himeji Castle

## Maze-like Complicated "Plot Plan"

In 1601, right after the Tokugawa brought down the Toyotomi government, the construction of Himeji Castle was started amidst public unrest.

Ieyasu Tokugawa continuously had maneuvered to suppress Toyotomi's influence, and ultimately succeeded in establishing a feudalistic shogunate administration throughout Japan.

Thereupon, Terumasa Ikeda of the Tokugawa side appointed Takahige Igi in the position of "Sobugyo" (general magistrate) for the construction of Himeji Castle. A devoted chief retainer of Terumasa Ikeda, with abundant combat experience, he was also well-known as a strategist and a man of military science.

Igi organized such staffs as "Fushin bugyo" (manager of engineering works), "Sakuji bugyo" (manager of construction works), "Kanjo bugyo" (manager of accounting and finance), "Ometsuke" (guarding superintendent), "Yuhitsu" (secretary) and "Shobugyo" (manager of personnel affairs, procurement of materials). And he lost no time in undertaking "Nawabari" (plot plan), a vital point of castle construction.

The decision of "Nawabari" was carried out by a council system with the presence of the lord of

the castle, Terumasa Ikeda. Particularly, the chief of a group of free technicians called "Chikujoshi" (fortifier) joined it.

The principal object of "Nawabari" was to make the most of geographical features including the surrounding flatland, centering on Mt. Hime 45 meters above sea level. Namely, the point of this plot plan was to embrace Mt. Hime as an axis with threefold "Kuruwa" in an anticlockwise spiral.



A view of "Seika-ji Yagura" ("Spirit Tower")



West side of "Daitenshobu" from path to "Da-no-Mura" ("Ha" gate)

The first round called "Uchi kuruwa" is divided into "Honmaru" (donjon), "Ni-no-maru" (the outworks of a castle), "San-no-maru" (second outworks of a castle) and "Nishi-no-maru" (western outworks of a castle). The administration office and residence mansion of the castle lord were there. The second round was called "Naka kuruwa," which was the residential quarters for high-ranking warriors. Along the third round called "Soto kuruwa," row houses for middle- or low-class warriors, and also temples were built. Threefold moats were encircled around each kuruwa.

The plot plan of Himeji Castle constructed after a spiral shape is just like a maze. There has been no such precedent in the world for its complexity. Only in Edo Castle, the design of a slightly simplified threefold spiral may be discerned.



An inside view of "Sakurai yagura"



An inside view of "Wafuri yagura" ("Wafuri" turret) in "Nishi no Maru"

### Unique Castle Stone Wall of Japan

The five-storied pagoda of Horyuji Temple built in the seventh century and the three-storied pagoda of Yakushiji Temple built in the eighth century are said to be the masterpieces of wooden buildings of Japan and radiant with sublime beauty. In contrast, the building of Himeji Castle, which offers a comprehensive survey of studies on modern castle technology, gives full play to the traditional Japanese aesthetic sense in its structural scheme arranged around "Tenshukaku" (castle tower) and all-embracing formative beauty is freely and holdly made the best of.

One of the keys to unravel the beauty of Himeji Castle is the stone wall.

This wall has a deep, arc-shaped warp, while curves of earlier castle stone walls are shallow. Amidst the rush and hurry of castle construction on the battlefield, the constructors had no spiritual composure and were pressed for time in building the more elaborate stone walls which required much time and labor. It cannot be denied that a sense of formative beauty as a "show castle" began to work, since the role of a castle as a mere fortress showed a gradual decline and there were signs of bringing awesome pressure to bear upon the people even in time of peace.

It goes without saying that the construction method of Himeji Castle, which was built in the final stages of the age of civil wars, is truly the highest masterpiece, as the stone wall looms over one's head so that one cannot see the sky.



Stone Wall