

## CHAPTER TWO

The years: 527 and 528 and the 660s

### *Principal characters*

Iwai, powerful chieftain of northern Kyushu

His son

Arakabi, general of the Mononobe clan, leading the army of the Yamato coalition

On a ridge about twenty miles south of Dazaifu there is a tomb, an ancient pile of earth whose rounded head and angular base give it the shape of a huge old-fashioned keyhole. The same shape is found elsewhere in Japan: prodigious mounds, memorials to rulers of the fifth and sixth centuries.

This one dates from the early sixth century, and my friend the archeologist Kamei Meitoku has brought me to see it. For nearly fifteen centuries the elements have worn away at it but its tree-covered slopes still rise sixty feet above us. The base of the keyhole is a hundred yards wide, the overall length is almost a hundred and fifty yards, the round is sixty-five yards in diameter; a football field would rattle around inside.

Walking the perimeter, we are kept from encroaching by a moat, dry today but wide and deep. Beyond the moat is a ledge, several feet deep; it is empty but Kamei says that once it held ranks of figures standing guard against double danger: malicious spirits and natural erosion. Some of those figures were the lively clay images around two feet tall called *haniwa*: warriors in armor, horses with saddles and trappings, mounted warriors; farmers with hoes, singing women, houses, granaries; chickens and dogs and monkeys. They stood firm, their hollow bases sunk into the ground. That was their origin: tiles embedded to slow the earth's washing away; but the craftsmen making them grew bored with such simple objects and began to sculpture the tops.

An eighth century chronicle gives a fanciful explanation for haniwa. It says that in the distant past when a great personage was buried his personal attendants were assembled and, to insure that they would be present to serve their lord in the next world, were all buried alive in the precincts of the tomb, upright, with only their heads above ground. "For several days they died not, but wept and wailed day and night. At last they died and rotted. Dogs and crows gathered and ate them." Finally a merciful emperor decreed that thereafter men of clay should be substituted for living men. . . . This is a good story, but there is no evidence that such a thing ever happened in Japan; the tale was lifted from Chinese chronicles.

Clay haniwa were installed at tombs all through Japan, but only in this area did they alternate with figures of stone; Kamei tells me. that were carved from the local volcanic rock.”

We reach a feature that makes this tomb unique. Jutting out from the round toward the northeast (toward the rising sun?) is a spacious terrace, forty- seven yards wide and almost as deep. Here we are confronted by a row of fourteen stone figures, ponderous, hulking.

Kamei recalls the old description of this scene. Early in the eighth century the central government ordered each of the sixty provinces to submit a report on natural resources, geographic characteristics, and oral traditions. A fragment of the report from this province still exists. It concerns this tomb and in part it says: “A stone man stands in judgement before a naked figure prostrate on the ground who is called 'the thief.' At his side are four stone boards which he stole. There are also three stone horses, three stone houses, and two stone warehouses.”

“There are many uncertainties here,” says Kamei. “No other tomb in Japan has a terrace like this, and we can't be sure what it was used for. That eighth- century report calls it 'a place of government' but we don't know that these figures stand where they stood originally or that they represent what the report says they do. A few years ago an exploratory excavation--an X-shaped ditch-- uncovered so many haniwa and stone figures that it seems clear that this was a place for some kind of ritual, and that it was occupied by many more than fourteen figures.”

He gives them a critical glance. “These are reproductions, rather poor reproductions. The originals are in museums, some in the collection across the road, one as far away as the national museum in Tokyo.”

Rarely can scholars assert with confidence for whom one of these gigantic tombs was constructed, but here they know. It was built for a powerful chieftain named Iwai. He built it himself, for, like other mighty leaders of the time, he believed that was the only way he could be sure of getting what he wanted. He wanted a tomb exceeding all others on Kyushu because he exceeded all other chiefs. He achieved his goal. Iwai's tomb is the biggest on Kyushu, but it is empty.

\*

He turned his horse and raised himself in his saddle to survey his army. Mounted swordsmen in front, swordsmen on foot behind them--all tough men with keen blades--and in the rear stout bowmen to fire over the heads of the swordsmen into the ranks of the enemy. He had no fear of the outcome: these men would be

fighting for their homelands. He nodded to his captains ranged before him, lesser chiefs allegiant to him. They had agreed on the plan of battle, no need for more talk. Their flags whipping in the winter breeze, they cantered back to their positions, each in front of his own men.

His son remained at his side. This would be his first battle and he prayed not to disgrace himself--he knew he lacked his father's fire. He found his father looking into his eyes, expressing more faith in him than he felt in himself. He tried to look fearless.

The father turned again to face the enemy. He was Iwai, chief of the powerful clan that held this fertile plain, biggest and richest on Kyushu. These fruitful lands watered by the Chikugo River were his base, the source of his wealth and power, but he and his liegemen controlled a vaster territory, the northern two-thirds of Kyushu. And the clans that held southern Kyushu, the rough and untamed part of the island, were his allies. They were the Hayato; when he issued his call to arms they had made quick response; Hayato fighting men were massed alongside his.

As warriors the Hayato were formidable, but they brought something more to the battlefield: an aura of supernatural power. With them was a shaman, a priestess of wizardry, who was now dancing fiercely to put their enemies under a spell. It is written that primal ancestor of the Hayato was given the gift of sorcery by his mother, the goddess of the sea, and because they were a remote and untouched people (some called them barbaric) they had not lost that gift. Many of their warriors wore a crimson scarf over their shoulders, a magic symbol. Seeing those, their enemies were afraid.

Iwai was aware that the Hayato also had a reputation for uncertain loyalty. It did not worry him. They had been steadfast allies in the past and, like his own men, they would be fighting against an intruder.

This battle had been a long time coming. The army confronting Iwai belonged to the clans of Yamato, a plain far to the east, in central Honshu, where eventually the cities of Nara and Osaka and Kyoto would rise. They were many days' march from their homes.

The clans of Yamato had pretensions. They called their chief "king," claimed that he was the ruler of all the islands. Iwai scoffed. Their former "king," a notoriously vicious and dissolute character, had died without fathering a child, so womanly a man was he. Their first choice to succeed him had been so terrified when he sighted the escort they sent to conduct him with dignity to their

headquarters that he fled into the hills and hadn't been heard of since. Their second choice and current holder of the title had been plucked from the countryside where he controlled far less territory with far less power than Iwai.

Like his father and grandfather before him, Iwai considered himself peer to the Yamato chief. He would be an ally when alliance was profitable but he was not an underling, not a subject. He would oblige their reasonable requests for assistance but he did not take orders from them. And in recent years they had gone too far.

They should know they were too far away to rule this region, nor did they have the necessary wisdom. And they totally misjudged the situation in the land across the strait. In the chronic warfare over there they persisted in bloody involvement to support the inevitable loser. That was the road to disaster, and he had told them so.

Relations across the strait were close and involved and always had been. A long time ago--twelve or perhaps eighteen thousand years ago--there had been no strait and the Japanese islands were not islands. They and the Korean peninsula were a long peninsular appendage to the Asian continent. The first human beings to set foot on what became Japan walked in.

That was during the Ice Age, when so much of the oceans' water was frozen in massive icecaps at the poles that the rest was far shallower than it is today; much that is now ocean bottom then lay high and dry. Eventually the earth's climate warmed, glacial ice melted, and the oceans rose. The mounting waters washed over lowlands to carve the peninsula into islands. The bridge to the continent disappeared.

That did not stop the people. They crossed in boats, impelled by the ancient urge to find a better place to live. Many came seeking refuge from the wars that swept the continent as nascent empires fought to survive.

The first comers roamed the forests with their weapons of stone, hunting game and gathering berries, nuts, and roots. Confronted by the ocean, they quickly developed an appetite for seafood and left great piles of shells that today are obvious clues to their seaside camps.

Centuries passed. New waves of immigrants brought new ways: tools and weapons of iron and bronze and the techniques of growing rice. Farming forced tribes to settle down in villages but not in peace. Tribes coalesed into clans, clans into little kingdoms that savagely warred on each other. The earliest Chinese who

ventured into this barbaric fringe of their empire counted more than a hundred kingdoms, with “conflict raging on all sides.” By the third century, fighting had narrowed the kingdoms to about thirty. The long process of unification had begun.

The same thing had been happening faster on the Korean peninsula: the strong conquering the weak to form vigorous realms. In the north was a state called Koguryo, strong enough to hold off China in almost constant fighting. The south was divided between Paekche in the west and Silla in the east. These three kingdoms existed in a shifting pattern of alliance and betrayal, at war with each other or plotting war. Wedged between Silla and Paekche along the southern coast was a group of walled towns, small kingdoms in a loose confederation called Kaya. To maintain their precarious independence in the midst of conflict, they played Paekche and Silla against each other, and for leverage against them both they looked across the strait.

Kaya was the home of shipowners and merchants who traded across that channel. On the Kyushu side their counterparts lived in harbor towns along the northern coast. There were intimate ties between the two sides, old relationships, knit by blood and business. The iron ore of the Korean peninsula supplied Japanese forges, and some speculate that the Japanese paid for it by sending mercenary soldiers to bolster Kaya defenses. The Kyushu towns and their seafaring merchants were mostly in Iwai's territory or in the hands of his followers. The traffic made him richer and he aimed to keep it healthy.

Yamato, too, profited, and it assumed a proprietary interest in Kaya, although it was never able to convert claims into possessions. Yamato sent armies that sometimes won battles but mostly lost them; they could not take and hold territory.

For three centuries, ever since its beginnings, Paekche--menaced in the east by Silla, in the north by Koguryo, in the west by China--had cultivated Yamato as an ally. Paekche had much to offer. Like the other Korean kingdoms, it simultaneously feared China and sought its culture but, more than the others, Paekche had soaked up Chinese civilization.

And so Paekche was able to send to Japan envoys bearing gifts of fine art and splendid craftsmanship. It had sent whole communities of sculptors, painters, metal casters, even seamstresses, to teach their arts. The transplanted scholars of Paekche could read and write, skills new to the Japanese; they set up systems to keep track of incoming taxes and what they were spent for. (Iwai granted that this bookkeeping was worthwhile.) They sent men learned in Confucian principles and Chinese ways of government, and Yamato eagerly set about to transform itself on

that model. Now they were transmitting the glories of Buddhism, with assurances that “This doctrine is amongst all doctrines the most excellent. . . . [It] can create religious merit without bounds. . . . Every prayer is answered and naught is wanting.”

Paekche was Japan's primary source of Chinese culture, far easier to deal with than China itself. China was farther away and haughty: it demanded deference that irked the Japanese. But Paekche, eager to have Japan's warriors on its side, was willing to bow to Yamato as it also bowed to China. Its gifts were labeled tribute and it even sent royal princes as hostages. This was an attitude vastly pleasing to Yamato's leaders, who concocted notions of Japan as an equal of China, as an empire with its own satellites; they had satellite Paekche as proof.

Over the centuries Yamato had again and again gone to the aid of Paekche. To Iwai this was blind folly. It was the seafaring men of Kaya and Silla that he respected. He was convinced that in the inevitable showdown between Silla and Paekche the victor would be Silla.

For all its bloody involvement in support of Paekche, Yamato had little to show for it but bruises

Yamato to send troops to help. Silla had called on Koguryo, and Koguryo had sent a force that crushed the warriors from Japan. Yamato seemed to have forgotten, but Iwai's tribal memory was longer: most of the slain men had come from Kyushu.

More recently, in 512, Paekche, pleading that Koguryo had attacked it and taken a large piece of its territory, begged Yamato to ease the pain by “giving” it four of the Kaya towns. “These four border on Paekche,” their envoy argued. “Morning and evening they exchange communications; their fowls and dogs cannot be kept apart.”

He was asking Yamato to acquiesce in Paekche's taking the towns by force, for despite Yamato's pretensions they were not its to give. And in a deal that Iwai was certain smelled of bribery, Yamato had agreed. As a result, the rest of the Kaya towns now distrusted Yamato and looked to Silla for protection. Iwai fumed that Yamato had made it certain that Silla would take over all of Kaya.

To Iwai, Yamato's bungling was their own business--until they involved him. In that same year, 512, he had been asked to send forty-four fine horses to Paekche “as a gift from Yamato.” It was a continuing pattern: Yamato would promise Paekche rice or swords or fighting men and then ask Iwai to supply them. Iwai suspected that Yamato meant to weaken him.

No more. Last year--527--Yamato grandly announced that they would send an army of 60,000 to aid Paekche against Silla, but as usual dispatched only a cadre to Kyushu, led by one of its generals. He was to raise his army in Kyushu and transport it across the strait in Kyushu boats. Even though the figure of 60,000 certainly exaggerated the number they actually hoped to send, Iwai would have none of it. He sent out the word. No men--not one, and no ships--not one.

The Yamato general was left like a beached whale. When he called for warriors, Iwai and the other chiefs replied with strange unanimity that all their men were incapacitated. When he ordered ships, the owners without exception answered that the hulls of all their vessels were, alas, too worm-eaten to make it across the strait. The general could see heavily laden boats entering and leaving port, but the owners asserted that they were making only short coastal runs and even those at grave risk.

The general threatened and he pleaded and he tried to cash in on old friendships, but he got nowhere. After months of futility he was obliged to return to Yamato and confess failure. Moreover, he had to report that shipments of gifts from Paekche were being

intercepted on Iwai's orders, and that luxuries intended for the men of Yamato were being distributed among the chiefs of Kyushu.

The chiefs of Yamato were indignant. They gathered in council. "Iwai has rebelled and has occupied the western wilds," they declared, heedless that he had been there all along and that his realm had been civilized earlier and was surely as advanced as any part of Yamato. "Whom shall We make general?" There were two great military clans, the Otomo and the Mononobe, but the chief of the Otomo was the head of the federation; he was the Great Minister who had let Paekche take the four Kaya towns. It would have been imprudent of him to absent himself from the capital to lead an army to Kyushu, so the honor fell to the chief of the Mononobe, who was named Arakabi. The king took up the battle-ax and handed it to Arakabi, "This Iwai will not obey Us. Do thou go and chastise him."

Now on this day late in the year 527 the two men and their armies faced each other across a field of withered stubble left after harvest: Arakabi of Yamato and Iwai of Kyushu.

Their forces glowered at each other, taking each other's measure. Then, as if at a signal understood but unseen and unheard, the two generals detached

themselves from their troops and on horses stepping smartly rode to face each other at midpoint.

“Iwai of Kyushu,” Arakabi shouted. “Why do you raise an army in rebellion against your sovereign? Arakabi of the Mononobe clan bears a sacred charge to smite you in punishment. Lay down your arms! Save yourself and your men from destruction!”

“Arakabi of the Mononobe clan, who has invaded our land from distant Yamato!” thundered Iwai. “Your king is not sovereign here. We rally to protect what is our own--our lives and our lands. Sheathe your swords and return to Yamato. Cease unjust demands on us! Then we shall live in peace!”

“You stir up disorder in the realm! Rely not on the steepness of your mountains to save you!”

“We shall attack like the rising of a storm! We shall sweep you away like a river at flood!”

They posed, glaring each at the other, then turned, galloped back to their own troops. With his sword upraised, Iwai roared a great battle cry. From across the field Arakabi's bellow echoed.

Drums rolled. From each side showers of arrows soared into the air, ripped into the enemy: men died before the armies joined. Flags flying, the two armies advanced. Their dust mingled. They fell on each other, man against man, each seeking someone he could destroy. Seasoned and practical and tough, these warriors aimed to stay alive and rack up kills. The field was a tumult of individual battles. Blood soaked into the dry earth.

When the light of the short winter day began to fade, the weary armies disengaged and withdrew to campsites readied by their menials. They counted their dead, dressed their wounds, warmed themselves at their fires, ate, and rested. The fighting had seesawed across fields but in the end the line of battle had scarcely shifted.

Dawn brought more fighting. In the morning Iwai's men beat back the enemy but they did not break. In the afternoon Iwai found his troops forced back but they held. When the day ended neither side could claim an advantage.

That night Iwai and his chiefs held council. When dawn broke Arakabi's army faced an empty field. The few old men tending deceptive campfires scattered and disappeared.

Arakabi cut short his troops' celebration. "This is no victory," he told his captains grimly. "The enemy have concealed themselves in the mountains they know so well. They will attack when it suits them, from whatever direction gives them an advantage. We must spy them out and pursue them."

And so it went, month after weary month. Iwai's force would suddenly appear, strike, melt away. They killed but they lost men too.

Arakabi never left off pursuit. Fighting crisscrossed the plain and ranged into the mountains all around. Spring came, the peasants planted their crops and saw them trampled by horsemen. Arakabi began to punish villages he suspected of aiding Iwai. He executed elders and then, his fury mounting, he burned whole villages and slaughtered the people. There was meager harvest in the autumn.

Another winter. Arakabi received reinforcements from Yamato. Iwai's forces dwindled; it was hard to replace the dead, hard to maintain spirit among the living. Some of his captains lost their taste for battle and, taking their men, went home. A few sought advantage by going over to the enemy; they were the most dangerous--they revealed his places of refuge. The Hayato warriors, their magic unavailing, melted away to the south.

Iwai had to face bitter truths. He called his son, who had not disgraced himself. "Save yourself and our family. I will not surrender but you must. Give Arakabi what he demands so that he can return to Yamato in triumph, and he will spare you."

"But you . . . ?" asked his son.

"Do not concern yourself about me. I will disappear. I will ride away with my old comrade in arms. You will not see me again."

"Let me come with you, whatever your destination."

"You must remain to continue our family."

His shaken son bowed in reluctant acquiescence and farewell. He watched his father and one staunch retainer ride into the mountains and he choked back a sob. Then he prepared to go and meet Arakabi.

Riding into the forested heights, Iwai let his mind drift through the past. He had achieved much and he had lost it. Perhaps Yamato was irresistible. Perhaps they would rule all the islands. But he was certain they faced disaster in the land across the strait. Would they survive that?

He would not be taken alive and he was determined that they would never find his bones. He would not be buried in the great tomb he had built for himself. His spirit would not be venerated there as he had venerated his father's spirit before his tomb.

Year after year, during the slack farming periods of winter and midsummer he had drafted hundreds of men, women, and children. Groaning their work songs, they had dragged huge slabs of granite to form the floor, walls, and ceiling of the vault that enclosed the massive coffin elaborately carved from a single block. They built a room high enough for men to stand in, spacious enough to hold all the auspicious goods that would be placed there with his body: dozens of swords to vaunt his military might, polished bronze mirrors and jeweled adornments to demonstrate his wealth, useful wares and implements so that his followers could serve him in the next world.

Then he called in the artists. The walls and ceilings of his vault, the antechamber, and the long entrance passageway were carved with auspicious designs, painted with colorful symbols of his power and images of voyage from this existence to the next.

Finally those people of his had hauled endless baskets of soil, covering the vault, building a mound that towered above them. When his foremen had supervised the planting of grass and seedlings to bind the surface, when the construction was complete, he had held a great party for the workers: all they could eat and drink, and how they had roistered! He had walked among them feeling lordly, accepting their thanks, complimenting their elders, laughing at the lewd songs and bawdy dances of the old women, smiling as couples disappeared into the bushes. (How many virgins had been deflowered, how many babes conceived?) It was an all-day all-night bash and a few hardy ones were still at it next morning (he had ordered that the liquor should flow until they could drink no more). His tomb was finished and he was satisfied. . . .

In the shadow of the forest he and his companion pushed deep into the mountains where not even hunters had penetrated. When they reached a place that Iwai thought would never be discovered he

produced the saké he had been carrying for this moment. They shared it and shared memories of drinking together in happier times.

“You have been my friend and companion since I was a child,” Iwai said. “You have never failed me. I ask of you now one last service. Dig a grave in this earth and bury my bones so that no man can ever find them, so that Iwai will disappear utterly.”

Kneeling in the fallen leaves he composed himself and then bowed low. His friend bowed and summoning all his strength slashed off his master's head.

Sobbing he dug a grave, deep, as Iwai had asked. He lowered the body and the head and covered them, taking pains to conceal the fresh earth with branches and leaves. Then he dug another grave, sat beside it, plunged his sword into his heart, and toppled in. Soon the ground collapsed to mantle him. The earth absorbed their bodies and the forest offered no hint that they lay there.

Iwai's son surrendered as his father had ordered. To save himself from the execution Arakabi had so earnestly wished to inflict on his father he expressed contrition for all the trouble Yamato had been put to and he turned over to Arakabi the Iwai stronghold on the Bay of Hakata. It had been Iwai's base for his relations with Kaya and Silla. Its skilled seafarers and their vessels were given up. The Iwai territory was cut off from the continent.

Iwai's son speedily found that a defeated leader commands little respect. Lesser landholders whose fealty to his father and grandfather was unshakable now asserted their independence. He lived to see his lands shrink to insignificance and the name Iwai become irrelevant.

He tried to console his father's spirit, which he knew roamed bitter and unfulfilled. Obsessed by the monumental empty tomb and the stone figures beheaded by Arakabi's raging soldiers, he built a shrine where the mound would have been opened to receive his father's body and he spent his days there, offering saké to his father's presence and drinking more of it himself. His own grave has not been identified. It was small.

\*

In retrospect Iwai was right about what would happen on the continent but fatally mistaken about events at home.

He could not resist unification and he could not stand alone against Yamato. The Yamato clans were on the move, determined to take control of all Japan. The struggle with Iwai was the last great campaign they had to fight. There were other chieftains like Iwai, with strong bases of power in other regions. Had they combined they could have overthrown the Yamato coalition and then Japan would have had a different ruling elite. But they did not combine. Separately they gave way, some to the threat of force, some to persuasion and concession, and like Iwai they faded from history.

But in the sphere of foreign policy, Iwai was wiser than Yamato. Within thirty-five years after his death, Silla was dominant on the Korean peninsula: it had defeated once-mighty Koguryo, and it had battered Paekche, wresting ports on the Yellow Sea that afforded easy traffic with China.

All this dismayed Yamato, but things got worse. Both Paekche and Koguryo, unstable after defeat, were rocked by bloody coups that sent immigrants fleeing to Japan with horror stories. China, revitalized under the new Tang dynasty, began to move against Korea. Yamato was now unquestionably the government, of Japan, but it was having its own problems. In 645 a coup that began with an assassination in the palace before the eyes of the startled empress brought a new group to power around the throne. Unsure of themselves at first, they were aware that a foreign crisis is usually useful in rallying support at home. They cited events in Korea and began a military buildup.

In 660 Japanese fears were justified. A Chinese amphibious force and a Silla army jointly attacked and overwhelmed Paekche. Pockets of resistance fought on and an anguished appeal for help was speeded to Yamato. The Paekche king had been captured and to replace him the Japanese sent home the Paekche prince they held as hostage, along with a force of five thousand men to insure his safety. Having promised that a large army would follow, the empress and her son, crown prince, moved to Kyushu in 661 to be near the port of embarkation. Then the empress fell ill and died at the temporary palace and mobilization halted while the son--now emperor--escorted her body back to Yamato and performed the essential rites of mourning.

At last in the autumn of 663, almost three years after Paekche had fallen, half a dozen generals with an army of 27,000 set sail from northern Kyushu for the Korean port today called Kunsan, close to what had been Paekche's capital. Approaching the port, the Japanese sailed into a pincers between the T'ang Chinese fleet and the Silla army. Routed the first day, the Japanese ships regrouped to face the Chinese fleet again. "But," reports a Japanese chronicle, "T'ang closed upon their vessels from right and left, and engaged them from all sides. In a short space

of time the imperial force was defeated, and many fell into the water and were drowned. The ships were unable to maneuver either astern or ahead.” The Japanese were all but annihilated, and that ended Japanese thrusts overseas for more than nine centuries.

When the survivors limped home with the dismal news Yamato was gripped by fear. China and Silla had a score to settle and Japan was a tempting target. Hastily organizing to repel an invasion, they turned to military engineers who had fled from Paekche.

To guard the capital, the Paekche engineers supervised the construction of a fort in Yamato and another that commanded the Inland Sea at one of its narrowest points.

In the strait between Korea and Kyushu guards were posted on the islands of Tsushima and Iki to warn by signal fires if an enemy fleet approached.

And in northern Kyushu, which would almost certainly be hit first, they built formidable defenses. An enemy landing along the shore would face mountainous terrain except at one point, where there is a valley through the mountains carved by a river that empties into Hakata Bay. The valley opens south to Iwai's old territory, the rich plain that would give an enemy a strategic base. To protect the plain, that valley had to be defended.

Deep in the valley the Paekche engineers set up a headquarters. In hastily raised wooden buildings resting on cedar poles sunk into the earth, they made their plans. They chose two mountains flanking the valley and climbed them to lay out fortifications exactly like those that had guarded their Paekche capital. They supervised the thousands of peasants drafted to throw up almost four miles of earthworks enclosing 440 acres on the summit of one, two and a half miles miles of earthworks around 158 acres on top of the other. Inside both ramparts were springs of good water. Dozens of storehouses were built for rice and weapons. (Their foundation stones still exist, there being not much temptation to dig these up and lug them down a mountain trail. In one place a visitor who scratches in the ground can find carbonized grains of rice from a fire that long ago destroyed a granary.) On both mountains a defending force could hold out for months.

That was not all. From one valley wall to the other, straight across the river, they built a dam nearly a mile long. The conduits that they devised carried the river's waters under the dam, but in time of danger the conduits could be closed to flood the valley with a deep moat sixty yards wide. Today their “water gate” has been cut by railroads and highways but it still stretches across the valley and its

artful design makes men marvel. It and the dams of the same kind that they threw across tributary rivers could have turned the valley into a cul-de-sac.

None of these great constructions was put to the test, for it turned out that China and Silla had no interest in invading Japan. Instead they moved to establish friendly relations and trade.

Now the Japanese were faced with a different problem. They knew very well the pomp and ceremony with which their envoys had been received by the Chinese. Confronted by the necessity to greet foreign delegations with no less dignity, they scrapped their makeshift military headquarters and on the same site they raised red-pillared halls.

In front of the imposing headquarters grew its city: the offices where hundreds of officials and clerks conducted business, the homes for those people, the shops of merchants who moved in to supply the swelling population, and, to make it complete, a pleasure quarter for after-hours diversion. All this was laid out not higgledy-piggledy as Japanese towns usually grew but formally the way the Chinese built their capital, in a checkerboard pattern of streets and avenues

bisected by a wide tree-lined boulevard. Here at Dazaifu that boulevard ran from the great gate through the city and straight on to an indulgence provided by nature: a salubrious hot spring. (The capital cities of Nara and, later, Kyoto, were also laid out on a checkerboard plan but they lacked a hot spring.)

This was the Distant Capital Dazaifu, the headquarters of the Governor General who controlled Kyushu and stood at the forefront in Japan's relations with the continent. But because this place was deep in the valley, a reception center, equally lavish, was built on the shore of Hakata Bay. There Dazaifu officials greeted and entertained foreign embassies. Some of eminence were conducted up the valley to be formally received by the Governor General. A few were important enough to be escorted all the way to the capital for an imperial audience.

It was a time of enormous energy in Japan. The chieftains of Yamato, firmly in control now, were transforming themselves into a cultured nobility at the same time that they strove to create a strong centralized government. China was the model, the fountain of knowledge. Dazaifu not only received envoys from the continent, it sent off delegation after delegation of officials, scholars, and Buddhist priests whose mission was to study the model, absorb its secrets, and bring them home. There was much to be done and a great will to do it.