

Kibi-no Makibi Biography

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Biography

Kibi-no Makibi (693-775) was a Japanese courtier who became minister of the right. He was a rare example of men of exceptional ability who rose to higher status than that to which their birth entitled them.

Kibi-no Makibi, also called Kibi-no Mabi, was born in the region of Kibi, and his father became a minor official in the central government. In 717 Makibi accompanied a Japanese embassy to China as a student and returned to Japan in 735 with the next embassy. During his stay in T'ang China he studied not only Confucianism but also astronomy, military affairs, and folk arts. He was well known in the Chinese court circles for his practical wisdom, courage, and sharp wit.

Makibi became a favorite of the Japanese emperor Shomu (reigned 724-749) and was called the Togu Gakushi, or the Scholar of the Eastern Palace. He lectured on Confucian classics and managed to introduce some aspects of the mature T'ang culture to Japan. He is credited with contributing to the formation of the so-called Taihei (great peace) culture.

When Fujiwara Nakamaro, also known as Emi-no Oshikatsu, became powerful in the court, Makibi was banished to a remote area. He was sent again to T'ang China at the imperial command and returned to Japan in 754. When Fujiwara Nakamaro fell from power, Makibi was once again in the service of the court. It is said that the empress regnant Koken had the Ido Castle erected at Chikuzen (Fukuoka Prefecture) upon his advice.

Makibi was appointed minister of the right and helped in revising the laws of the land and contributed much toward governmental reforms. He was affectionately referred to as "Minister Kibi." After the death of Emperor Shotoku (Koken Tenno) in 770, there arose a succession controversy in which the Buddhist priest and favorite of Empress Koken attempted to usurp the power of the throne. After this was averted, Makibi's recommendations were rejected by the Fujiwaras, and Emperor Konin ascended the throne. Minister Kibi resigned from all official posts in 771 and died 4 years later.