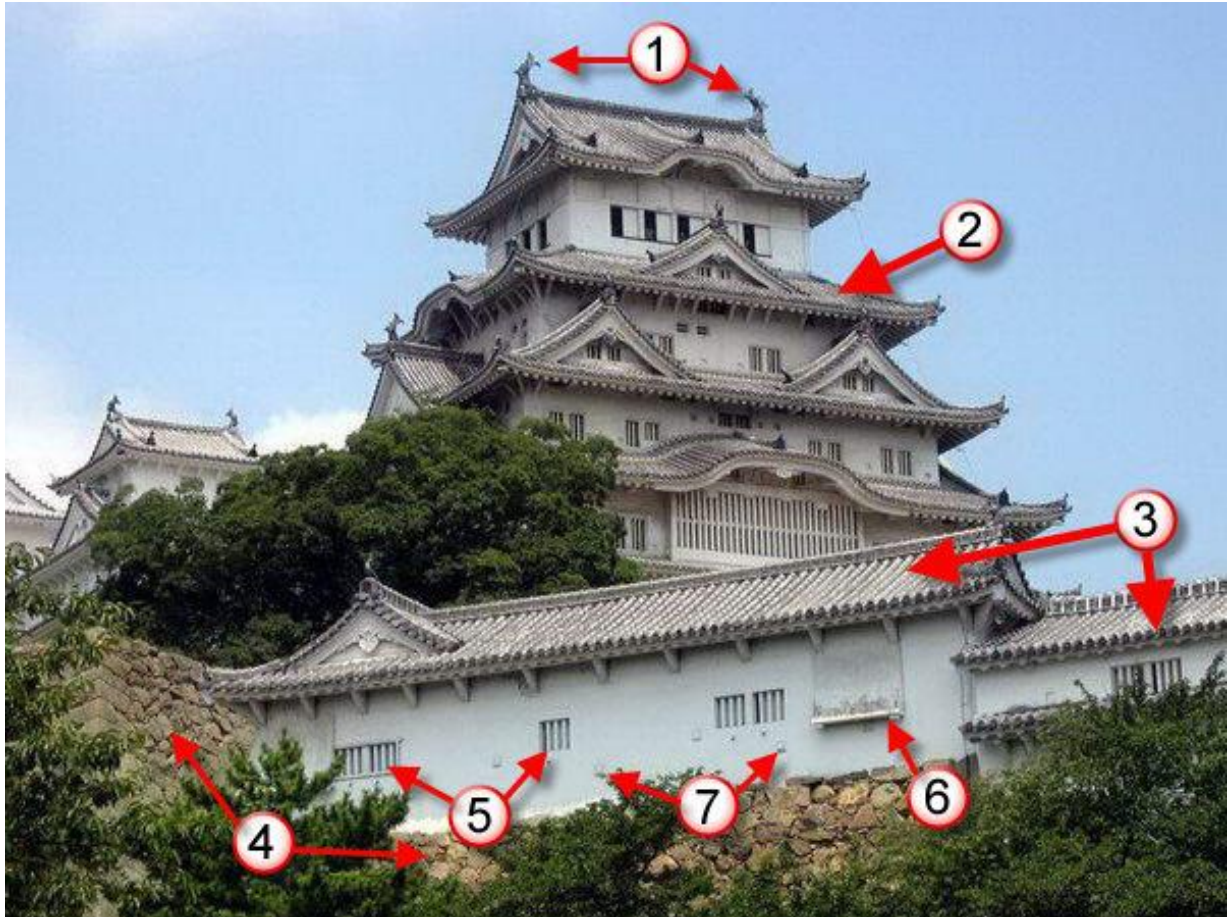


# FACT SHEET #5: Shiro (Castle) Defences

This picture is of part of a wall and the *tenshukaku* (donjon or keep) of *Himejijō* (Himeji Castle), sometimes known as *Shirasagijō* (White Heron Castle) because of its white colour.

The current *tenshukaku* dates from 1601 CE.



## 1. Shachi Statues

As well as being decorative, *shachi* are a type of good luck charm. They are stylised statues of the killer whale (*shachi*), a powerful water creature, thought to help bring protection from fire. The buildings of a castle, other than the stone faced walls (*ishigaki*) forming the base, were made of timber. These timber walls were usually covered with plaster on the outside but unlined inside and fire was a big risk. Many castle buildings have been destroyed by fire, sometimes as a result of an attack but more usually by human accident, earthquake, or lightning.

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## 2. *Tenshukaku* (donjon or keep)

The *tenshukaku* (donjon or keep) was the main building of the castle and the last line of defence. The *tenshukaku* was placed at a higher level than the other buildings, using a natural rise in the ground, a man made one, or a combination of these. Some, like the one at *Himejijō* (Himeji Castle), could be seen from far away and the samurai defenders could also see approaching armies.

However, the *tenshukaku* could not be seen from the base of the outside walls. This made attacking it more difficult. In the larger castles, the lord of the castle did not actually live in the *tenshukaku*. Their house or palace was located elsewhere in the castle grounds. The *tenshukaku* was used for meetings and other administrative tasks and as the final place of defence if the castle was attacked.

## 3. *Yagura* (towers)

*Yagura* can be divided into two main categories:

- *sumi yagura* (corner towers) that were situated at corners or at other vulnerable places. They were generally from one to three stories high
- *tamon yagura* (many listen tower) that were long, narrow, roofed structures situated along the tops of walls and may link to *sumi yagura*. They were usually only one story high.

## 4. *Ishigaki* (stone walls)

*Ishigaki* were usually made of from an earthen embankment covered with large stones. Smaller stones were placed into the gaps. This type of construction uses no mortar and is known as “dry stone”. These walls formed the base of many of the other structures in the castle such as the *tenshukaku* and *yagura*.

Often, as with those of *Himejijō*, the walls had a concave curve, bulging out at the base and becoming increasingly steep towards the top. This provided great strength, was resistant to earthquakes, and was difficult to climb, especially with arrows, rocks, and other items raining down from the samurai defenders above.



## 5. Windows

*Tategoshi* (vertical grill window) or *tetsugōshi* (iron-barred window) were frequently used in castles. They allowed light and air in and helped keep attackers out. They also provided some defence against bullets and arrows.

## 6. *Ishi-otoshi* (rock chutes)

*Ishi-otoshi* are often seen on the corners of buildings and several places along their walls. These are not merely decorative but were open at the bottom allowing the defenders inside to drop rocks, hot sand, boiling water, or similar items onto attackers below. They allowed the defenders to do this while remaining well protected

## 7. *Sama* (space, hole)

These were holes placed through walls and were used by the defenders inside to shoot out arrows. Rectangular or square ones, such as these, were used by archers. Round or triangle ones were more commonly used for shooting bullets through. However, firearms tended not to be used from inside buildings because the type of firearms used in Japan from the mid 1500's to the late 1800's.

These were a type of matchlock firearm. A matchlock requires a constantly burning cord, the match, to ignite the gunpowder to fire a shot. They generate a lot of smoke, which is not good in an enclosed room, and the need for gunpowder and the burning match created a serious risk of fire.

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