

Itsukushima Shrine: Armor and Martial Equipment

Itsukushima Shrine possesses a vast collection of body armor, helmets, saddles and related horse tack, and other martial equipment. The prevalence of these items is explained by the popularity of the shrine among the warrior class from the twelfth century onward, as powerful samurai often donated battlefield equipment to religious institutions. There were many reasons for doing so, including increasing the efficacy of one's prayers, expressing gratitude for good fortune, and demonstrating the intensity of one's faith. Not all of the items donated had previously been used in battle. Some were purely decorative and made especially for donation, while others were heirlooms acquired by a family long ago and kept mainly for ornamental purposes or as symbols of status before being donated. The latter type of donation became prevalent in the Edo period (1603–1868), when the country was at peace and the practical need for implements of war was greatly reduced.