

## **Lords of Himeji Castle**

Himeji Castle was ruled by a number of different samurai clans during the civil wars of the sixteenth century and the long peace of the Edo period (1603–1867).

## **Kuroda Kanbei and Toyotomi Hideyoshi**

The earliest surviving contemporary reference to a fortress at Himeji occurs in 1561, in records kept at the Buddhist temple Shōmyōji. The fortress was controlled by the Kuroda clan, a samurai family active during the civil wars of the sixteenth century. A Kuroda leader, Kuroda Kanbei (1546–1604), served as a lieutenant to Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), the warlord who brought most of Japan under his rule at the end of the sixteenth century.

Hideyoshi made Himeji his base of operations as he consolidated his hold over the western end of Honshū. He constructed a three-story keep surrounded by stone walls and established a market to encourage development in the surrounding villages. When Hideyoshi later moved his base to Osaka Castle, he appointed close associates to oversee Himeji: his half-brother Hidenaga (1540–1591), followed by his brother-in-law Kinoshita Iesada (1543–1608).

## **The Battle of Sekigahara and the Tokugawa Shogunate**

Hideyoshi's death in 1598 opened the door to renewed conflict. At the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Hideyoshi's would-be successors fought for control of Japan. The winner was Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), founder of the shogunate that would rule the country for the next two and a half centuries.

Ieyasu gave Himeji Castle and the surrounding province of Harima to his son-in-law Ikeda Terumasa (1565–1613). Terumasa immediately ordered a major renovation of the castle and built moats and earthen embankments around the adjoining town. His clan also ruled the nearby provinces of Bizen and Awaji, making the Ikeda clan the most powerful force in western Japan.

Under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868), local lords were often transferred from one province to another. Four years after Terumasa's death in 1613, the Ikeda clan were removed from Himeji. Afterward, the castle was overseen by a succession of families with close ties to the shogunate: the Honda, Matsudaira, Sakakibara, and Sakai clans. The lord of Himeji changed more frequently than those of most domains. In other parts of Japan, child heirs could become provincial lords, but Himeji's military importance meant it could not be left in the hands of a child. When a lord died without an adult heir, his clan was immediately transferred elsewhere.

Kuroda Kanbei

Toyotomi Hideyoshi (then named Hashiba Hideyoshi)

Ikeda Terumasa

Honda Tadamasa

Matsudaira Naonori

Sakakibara Tadatsugu

Sakai Tadazumi