

## **Princess Sen: Early Years Marked by War**

### **Childhood Marriage to a Family Rival**

Princess Sen (1597–1666) was born near Kyoto in 1597, at the end of an era marked by constant violence. For more than a century, Japan had been in a state of civil war, with no functioning central government and local warlords battling for control of the islands. This long, bloody contest would soon end, however, and Princess Sen's clan would emerge as the winners.

Princess Sen's grandfather was Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). When Princess Sen was still a baby, she was engaged to the son of Ieyasu's lord, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598). At the time, Hideyoshi was the most powerful man in Japan, but his health was ailing, and he worried that Ieyasu—his most important supporter—would turn against his son after he died. By uniting the families through marriage, Hideyoshi hoped to keep Ieyasu loyal. But the plan failed: Ieyasu seized power anyway, just as Hideyoshi had feared. Nonetheless, the marriage went ahead in 1603, the same year Ieyasu became shogun. Princess Sen was six years old and her new husband, Toyotomi Hideyori (1593–1615), was ten.

### **Tragedy and Remarriage**

Tokugawa Ieyasu now controlled the whole of Japan, but one threat to his rule remained: Princess Sen's husband, Hideyori. The Toyotomi clan still had a few supporters, and it retained one last stronghold in Osaka. Ieyasu made his final move against them in 1615, attacking Osaka Castle and burning it to the ground. His forces retrieved Princess Sen during the battle. She is said to have begged Ieyasu to spare her husband's life, but her grandfather forced Hideyori to commit suicide.

A year later, Princess Sen was married to Honda Tadatoki (1596–1626), heir to a clan of staunch Tokugawa allies. She relocated to Himeji when her new husband's father was made its lord in 1617. The castle was expanded to accommodate its new occupants, and a special residence for the princess, Musashino Goten, was constructed in the Third Bailey near the main gate (Ōtemon Gate).

### **Family Tree of Princess Sen**

Section of an illustrated plan of Himeji Castle, showing the Ōtemon Gate and the Musashino Goten residence.