

Princess Sen: Peace and Happiness at Himeji

The Princess and the Sea Captain

After the fall of Osaka Castle and the death of her first husband, Princess Sen (1597–1666) briefly returned to Edo (Tokyo), the capital of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). She made part of the journey by ship, in a convoy commanded by a handsome young captain named Honda Tadatoki (1596–1626). It was on that voyage, the story goes, that she first met the man who would become her second husband.

Princess Sen's love life has been subject to much embellishment. Another thread in the story: the samurai who rescued her from Osaka Castle, Sakazaki Naomori (?–1616), was promised her hand in marriage as a reward, but Princess Sen rejected him—allegedly because he was disfigured by a burn sustained during the rescue. The humiliated Sakazaki decided to kidnap the princess on the day of her wedding to Tadatoki, but his plot was discovered by the shogunate, which sent soldiers to surround his estate. Sakazaki died, either by suicide or betrayal by his own men, depending on the version of this (possibly fictional) tale.

Marriage and Motherhood

By all accounts, Princess Sen and Tadatoki were a happy couple. Princess Sen soon gave birth to two children: a daughter, Katsu (1618–1678), and a son, Kōchiyo (1619–1621). A poem celebrating Kōchiyo's birth in 1619 alludes to Princess Sen and Tadatoki's first meeting—by using nautical terms—and tells of the Honda clan's delight at having an heir. For Princess Sen, these years at Himeji were a happy interval in a life marked by misfortune.

Folding screen with portrait of Honda Tadatoki (also called Honda Heihachiro; 1596–1626)

A seventeenth-century screen believed to depict Princess Sen meeting Tadatoki

Portrait of Princess Sen

A set of linked poems (*renga*) on the theme “ships,” composed for a poetry reading in the year of Kōchiyo's birth.