

## Kato Kiyomasa

On the site of Maruoka Castle is a monument to Kato Kiyomasa (1562–1611), a distinguished warlord general who was known as one of the “Seven Spears of Shizugatake” (*Shizugatake no shichi-hon-yari*), who were mounted bodyguards of the powerful hegemon Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) at the battle of Shizugatake in 1583.

In 1588, Kiyomasa was granted half of the prestigious Higo domain (modern-day Kumamoto Prefecture) and given Kumamoto Castle as his domain residence. Later he became one of three senior commanders in the Imjin War (1592–1598) on the Korean peninsula. After the death of Hideyoshi in 1598, personal conflicts led Kiyomasa to align with Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), who became the first shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate. Kiyomasa joined Ieyasu in 1600 in the decisive Battle of Sekigahara against the forces of Hideyoshi’s successor.

After Ieyasu emerged victorious at Sekigahara, he awarded Kiyomasa the other half of Higo, thereby raising the value of Kiyomasa’s domains to 540,000 *koku* (one *koku* equals five bushels of annual rice production; one *koku* of rice was considered sufficient to feed one person for one year).

Later, Kiyomasa served as mediator between Ieyasu and Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s son Hideyori (1593–1615). On his return to Kumamoto after one such meeting, Kiyomasa became ill and died. It was reported that he was buried at the city’s Honmyoji Temple. Kiyomasa’s 11-year-old son, Tadahiro, became daimyo. In 1632, the Edo shogunate confiscated his domain (Kumamoto). Tadahiro was exiled to Dewa province (in the Tsuruoka area of modern-day Yamagata Prefecture).

After relocating to Maruoka Castle, Tadahiro had a monument for his father built to negate the need for Kiyomasa’s remains to be transported to the shogunate as per the custom of the day for high-ranking officials. In 1918, a research team from Kumamoto Prefecture discovered that the stones used for the monument, located at Tentakuji Temple, were from Kumamoto.

In 1949, Kiyomasa’s remains and battle armor were discovered at Tentakuji Temple adjacent to the site of Maruoka Castle. The armor was fully restored in 2016 in Nagoya, Kiyomasa’s birthplace, and is now on display at the Maruoka Castle ruins. The discovery of Kiyomasa’s remains in Yamagata indicates the efforts undertaken by Tadahiro and his family to conceal their true location.

To this day, people pay their respects to Kiyomasa in Yamagata as well as Kumamoto and Tokyo. Kiyomasa’s spirit is enshrined in many Shinto shrines throughout the country, including Kato Jinja Shrine in Kumamoto, according to the Shinto belief that extraordinary people become *kami* (deities) on their death.