

Shidagusoku: Tokugawa Ieyasu's Iconic Fern Crest Armor

Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) wore this suit of armor during the Battle of Sekigahara (1600) and the Siege of Osaka (1614–1615). These pivotal victories secured his position as ruler of Japan, and successive shoguns copied the armor in the hope of achieving similar success.

This armor takes its name, Shidagusoku (“*shida* armor”), from the gold wreath that is attached to the helmet. The fronds in the wreath are a type of auspicious fern (*shida*), which is often used in New Year's decorations. The animal head on the crest represents a mythical creature. The face seems to be that of a *shikami*, a type of angry lion, but with additional horns and unique ears.

The fern crest was not part of the original armor's design; it was a gift from the armorer. Without the crest, the helmet resembles the cloth hat of the deity Daikokuten in his guise as a peasant farmer. Daikokuten is a deity of wealth and fertility. By copying his garb, Ieyasu wanted to convey that he, as a manifestation of Daikokuten, would ensure an era of abundance.

The helmet, face mask, and solid plates of the sleeves and shin guards are made of iron. The smaller plates that cover the torso and lower body are made of iron and leather. Iron was used to protect the vital organs, while leather was used for less vulnerable areas. The combination of materials reduced the overall weight of the armor while still providing sufficient protection.

Ieyasu's Shidagusoku was originally presented to Kunozan Toshogu Shrine as an offering shortly after his death. In 1647, the third Tokugawa shogun Iemitsu (1604–1651) moved the armor to Edo Castle. It was returned to Kunozan Toshogu in 1882 by Tokugawa Iesato (1863–1940), the first head of the Tokugawa family after the fall of the shogunate.

Important Cultural Property