

## **Armor and Helmets of the Tokugawa Shoguns**

### **The Collection**

Kunozan Toshogu Shrine has the only collection of suits of armor from all 15 Tokugawa shoguns. The collection includes the iconic Shidagusoku armor worn by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), founder of the Tokugawa shogunate, during the Battle of Sekigahara (1600), which paved the way for Ieyasu to become shogun. The collection also includes two gilded suits of armor he wore in his youth.

Each shogun's armor reflects the times in which he lived. There are significant differences in the armor's design based on whether it was made in a period of peace or war, and the health of the shogunate's treasury along with fashion trends at the time.

The armor created for earlier shoguns was designed to be used in combat. The civil wars of the Warring States period (1467–1615) ended 12 years after the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, and by the middle of the seventeenth century, armor was used solely for ceremonial occasions. The turbulence, however, of the waning days of the shogunate in the mid-nineteenth century again created a need for practical armor.

Differences in the suits of armor over time also reflect the changing finances of the Tokugawa shogunate. The armor of earlier shoguns was more frugal, characterized by minimal ornamentation and robust construction. In contrast, the shoguns who lived during the middle of the Edo period (1603–1867) wore armor that was elaborate and costly. Finally, the armor of later shoguns, while still decorated, often reflected cost-cutting measures in both materials and design.

The armor of the Tokugawa shoguns was stored at Edo Castle until the fall of the shogunate in 1867. The items in the collection of Kunozan Toshogu were presented to the shrine in 1882 by Tokugawa Iesato (1863–1940), the first head of the Tokugawa family after the fall of the shogunate.

### **Japanese Armor**

Throughout human history, armor has always been designed with both functional and aesthetic considerations. Japanese armor is no different, blending decorative and protective elements into a single whole.

Japanese helmets are particularly striking, especially those with a large crest above the visor. The crest identified the wearer during battle or from a distance, as their face would usually have been completely covered. In addition, the design of the crest conveyed a message or symbolized an attribute that the wearer hoped to possess. For example, antlers represented the strength of a stag. The fierce expression and bristling mustache of a faceplate were intended to show the wearer's ferocity and vigor.

Each suit of armor consists of a neck guard, a cuirass covering the torso, detachable sleeves, a "skirt" to protect the lower torso and thighs, and leg guards for the shins and knees. The armor is easy to move in, especially because the sections protecting the lower torso and thighs hang freely from the waist. Most sections of a suit of armor are

made from many small plates of iron or leather, usually covered with lacquer and bound together with fabric cords.