

Kaga Domain Workshop (Osaikusho)

The Kaga Domain Workshop (Osaikusho) was a crafts workshop established in the late sixteenth century in Kaga domain (now Ishikawa and Toyama Prefectures). Patronized by the region's powerful Maeda family, the workshop contributed extensively to the development of highly skilled artisans, crafts, and decorative arts until it was closed in 1868.

The workshop's original purpose—like that of similar workshops in other domains—was to manage and repair weapons and armor during the decades of countrywide warfare that preceded the Edo period (1603–1867). After the turmoil had subsided, there was no longer great need for the traditional services of the workshop. However, a degree of political instability lingered, so Maeda Toshiie (ca. 1539–1599), the first lord of Kaga domain, ordered the workshop to continue operations, lest conflict break out once more. As time went on, the risk of conflict diminished, and members of the workshop turned to more artistic pursuits.

Maeda Toshitsune (1594–1658), the third lord of Kaga domain, actively encouraged the development of decorative arts and crafts at the workshop. Under Toshitsune's influence, the workshop was formally established as the Osaikusho, and skilled artisans of every type were employed. Numerous craft techniques flourished, such as *zōgan* inlay and Kaga *maki-e*, and artisans from all over Japan were drawn to the growing Kanazawa castle town.

More than their own initiative brought artisans to the area—the Maeda family actively invited many to live and work there. In addition to Toshitsune, Maeda Tsunanori (1643–1724), the fifth lord of the Kaga domain, is largely credited with the development of craft techniques in Kaga during the 1600s. Raised by his grandfather Toshitsune, Tsunanori was enthusiastic about the arts. He created an extensive collection of craft samples and items, known as the Hyakkō Hishō, to study and catalogue superior crafting techniques. Tsunanori encouraged the development of crafts by having the artisans live together near the workshop. He also rewarded those who produced particularly high-quality items.

The Kaga Domain Workshop broke new ground in another respect. Previously, craft

techniques had been developed by families who transmitted knowledge of the techniques only to their own descendants. However, at the Kaga Domain Workshop craftsmen of all disciplines—lacquerware, painting, metalwork, and many others—gathered and worked side by side. Their combined efforts enabled the advancement of many craft disciplines and the creation of superb pieces.

One of the most impressive items created at the Kaga Domain Workshop is a ceremonial palanquin from the late Edo period. By the 1800s, there were over 70 artisans working at the workshop, and they combined their knowledge and skills to create this elaborate work. The design features a pattern of vines decorated with flowers and the plum-blossom-shaped Maeda family crest, all rendered in gold *maki-e* lacquer, *raden* shell inlay, and gold inlay on a black lacquer background. The metal fittings are also intricately designed. The inside is decorated, as well, with *maki-e* lacquer and colorful paintings on a gold background.

The Kaga Domain Workshop closed permanently in 1868 after more than 250 years of continuous activity. Its closure resulted from the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1867 and the beginning of the Meiji era (1868–1912), when the country's political organization was significantly restructured. Domain lords were stripped of their lands and authority, and domains were reorganized into prefectures; part of Kaga domain became Ishikawa Prefecture in 1872.