

National treasure

***Ōyoro* Armor with Red Thread Lacing and Ornaments of Plum Blossoms and Bush Warblers**

This set of *ōyoro* armor was made as an offering to Kasugataisha Shrine and was never intended to be worn into battle. It is constructed of interlaced strips of lacquered iron and leather joined with silk lacing. The lacing was once crimson, but its dye has gradually faded over the centuries.

This armor's eye-catching helmet is one of its most notable features. The helmet's long, antler-like frontal ornaments (*kuwagata*) protrude from the head of a guardian lion (*shishi*) whose piercing eyes are made from cut crystal. The towering ornaments have been minutely inscribed, and the pattern suggests either the feathers of a bird or the scales of a dragon, possibly matching the dragon motif printed on the left sternum guard. A pair of *fukikaeshi* panels sweep outward on either side of the helmet. In most cases, these would be horizontal, but the *fukikaeshi* of this helmet

stand nearly vertical, highlighting the adorning images of the gods of wind and thunder and the panels' intricately carved gold plum blossoms.

Close examination of the armor's decoration reveals countless tiny details and embellishments. The combination of plum blossoms and bush warblers

is a traditional symbol of early spring, and the motif also carries the association of prosperity arriving after the harshness of winter. Though difficult to spot, high-relief carvings of horseflies, bagworms, spiders, and other tiny creatures can be found hidden among the flowers. The symbolism of this ornamentation is not known, but it is noteworthy that such subjects were considered appropriate decorations for armor in the 1300s.