



JAPAN  
CULTURAL  
EXPO 2.0



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令和6年度地域ゆかりの文化資産を活用した展覧会支援事業

AUTUMN SPECIAL EXHIBITION IN 2024

# CHANGES IN ARMOR

— FROM THE YAYOI PERIOD TO THE EDO PERIOD —

## EXHIBITION GUIDE



Left Iron Armor of the middle Kofun Period  
Chasuri-yama Kofun (Asago City) Asago City Education Board  
Right Armor (*Gusoku*) with a Two-Piece Cuirass and Red Lacing  
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of History



## Yayoi period

It is believed that combat between villages in Japan began during the middle of the Yayoi period around 2,400 years ago. As the technology for processing iron was not yet fully developed at the time, armor and helmets were made from easily accessible materials, such as wood, vines, and leather, that were easy to process. Various forms of armor made during this period have been found, including armor made by hollowing out wood or connecting wooden plates.



Wooden armor of the Yayoi period  
Minamikata Site (Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture)  
Okayama City Archaeological Center



A warrior of the Yayoi period wearing armor made by connecting wooden plates (replica)  
National Museum of Japanese History



A warrior of the Yayoi period wearing armor made by hollowing out wood (replica)  
Osaka Prefectural Museum of Yayoi Culture

## Kofun period #1

During the Kofun period (approximately 1,300-1,700 years ago), technological advancements led to the production of iron armor. However, in the early Kofun period, items made of iron were still extremely valuable and could only be possessed by those of particularly high rank.



Iron armor of the early Kofun period  
Kawaradani Mound Tomb No. 1 (Kizugawa City, Kyoto Prefecture)  
Kizugawa City Education Board  
Photo provided by the Kyoto Prefecture Research Center for Archaeological Properties

## Kofun period #2

By the middle of the Kofun period (about 1,600 years ago), the technology for processing iron had advanced further, leading to the production of a large amount of armor. Armor and helmets produced in the areas around Osaka and Nara, which were central to the Yamato polity, were distributed to the leaders of various regions from Tohoku to Kyushu. In Hyogo Prefecture, many pieces of armor have been unearthed at sites such as the Kumobe-Kurumazuka Kofun (Tamba-Sasayama City) and the Chasuri-yama Kofun (Asago City), indicating that Hyogo was an important region for the Yamato polity during the Kofun period.



Iron Armor of the middle Kofun Period  
Chasuri-yama Kofun (Asago City), Asago City Education Board



Iron Helmet of the middle Kofun Period  
Kumobe-Kurumazuka Kofun (Tamba-Sasayama City)  
Department of Archaeology, Kyoto University



## Kofun period #3

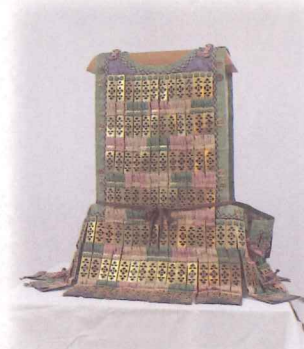
Since the Yayoi period, armor had been produced in the form of vests known as *tankou*. However, around the middle of the Kofun period (about 1,550 years ago), a type of armor called *keikou*, which consisted of small iron plates called *kozane* connected by cords, was introduced from China and Korea. Since the *kozane* were interconnected in a way that allowed for ready movement, *keikou* was more flexible than *tankou*. It was also suitable for riding horses, which had been introduced for cavalry use around the same time. As a result, by the end of the Kofun period (about 1,500 years ago), *keikou* had become the mainstream armor in Japan, replacing *tankou*.



Soldier at the end of the Kofun period (replica)  
Asuka Historical Museum



Small iron plates of *keikou*  
Nara Palace Site (Nara City, Nara Prefecture)  
Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties



*Keikou* for ceremonial purposes (replica)  
Yasukuni Jinja Yushukan Museum



Helmet crest of the Heian Period  
Hojiuji Palace Site  
(Kyoto City, Kyoto Prefecture)  
Kinoshita Museum of Art

## Nara period - Heian period #1

In the Nara period (approximately 1,200-1,300 years ago), the practice of constructing burial mounds ceased, and it became uncommon to bury armor with the dead. Therefore, no complete examples of Nara period armor have survived.

However, small iron plates have been excavated from sites such as former royal palaces, suggesting that *keikou* continued to be in use from the Kofun period.

## Heian period - Muromachi period #1

By the middle of the Heian period (about 1,100 years ago), conflicts had spread in various regions, leading to the emergence of the samurai.

By suppressing rebellions and guarding the aristocracy, the samurai accumulated power and, for about 700 years after the Kamakura period (approximately 850 years ago), became influential figures in Japanese politics.

Specializing in combat, the samurai developed the *keikou* into a uniquely Japanese armor known as *ō-yoroi*. The *ō-yoroi*, made by connecting small iron or leather plates, was designed for use in archery on horseback.

Additionally, the *hoshi-kabuto* (star helmet), which complements the *ō-yoroi*, is thought to be a variant of the *shōkaku-tuki kabuto* used in the Kofun period.

The tradition of armor from the Kofun period thus continued even into the samurai era.



*Ō-yoroi* (replica)  
Yasukuni Jinja Yushukan Museum



*Hoshi-kabuto* Aizumi Town Education Board



## Heian period - Muromachi period #2

Lower-ranking samurai and retainers wore armor known as *haramaki* and *dōmaru*. Like the *ō-yoroi*, these were also made of interconnected small plates. While they were simpler in design and less protective than the *ō-yoroi*, they were lighter and afforded the wearer greater mobility on foot.

During the Nanbokuchō period (approximately 700 years ago), as traditional combat methods involving cavalry and archery declined, even high-ranking samurai began to use the *haramaki* and *dōmaru*, which were more maneuverable and adaptable to various fighting styles than the *ō-yoroi*.



*Haramaki* National Museum of Japanese History



*Dōmaru* Sanshinzan Taisan-ji (Kobe City)  
Photo provided by the Osaka Castle Museum



*Dōmaru* Hasitani Castle Site (Kobe City)  
Kobe Archaeology Center

## The Warring states period - Azuchi-Momoyama period

From the end of the Muromachi period (approximately 550 years ago), conflicts that began in Kyoto spread across Japan. With the increasing number of combatants, there was a greater need for armor than ever before. This spurred the development of a group of armors called the *tōsei gusoku*, which was designed for mass production. The *tōsei gusoku* is characterized

by its ability to cover the body without gaps, thereby enhancing its defensive capabilities in response to the intensified combat.



Armor (*Gusoku*) with a two-piece cuirass and red lacing  
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of History



Armor (*Gusoku*) with a five-piece cuirass and dark blue lacing  
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of History

## Edo period

With the onset of the Edo period, a time of peace arrived, and armor was no longer used in combat. During this era, armor began to serve a symbolic role of representing the tradition and martial prestige of one's family and thus came to be elaborately adorned.

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