



The Japanese Sword (Japanese Arts Library)

By Kanzan Sato

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The Japanese sword combines unbreakability, rigidity, and lethal cutting power, and it is in the resolution of these conflicting practical requirements that it emerges as a triumph of the forger's art. The mystique of the sword lingers on in our age of mechanized combat, but the aesthetic qualities for which swords are most valued by collectors today-the liveliness of the metal "skin," the confidence in every aspect of the design, the scrolling temper-line, the almost buoyant lightness of the hilt when the blade is held in the hand-all derive from what the Japanese sword demanded as a symbol of strength and as a weapon. As an instrument of clear persuasion, no other blade anywhere has ever been its equal.

This volume, containing color and black-and-white plates, has been prepared as an introduction to the history and appreciation of the Japanese sword. Its author, until his death in 1978, was one of Japan's foremost sword experts, and his wide knowledge is here brought to bear on every aspect of sword lore, including forging techniques and problems of appraisal. Looking over the 1,500 years of sword history in Japan, Kanzan Sato notes how the major developments-the shift from the early straight blades to the tachi, which were longer curved blades slung edge downwards at the waist, to the familiar daisho pair of short and long swords worn by samurai until modern times-were the result of both technical innovation and changed fighting techniques. He examines the various fashions in sword mounts and the at times precious, highly decorated work of the smiths who specialized in sword guards, or tsuba, during the Momoyama and Edo periods.

The centerpiece of this book, however, is a detailed examination of over a dozen of Japan's most revered blades, including the Kanehira and the Dojigiri by Yasutsuna, perhaps the two finest swords in Japan and as clear and beautiful today as when they were forged some 900 years ago. The discussion of what makes these blades special and how they have been passed down for generations offers the reader a wealth of insight into the sword in Japan as heirloom and cultural treasure.

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