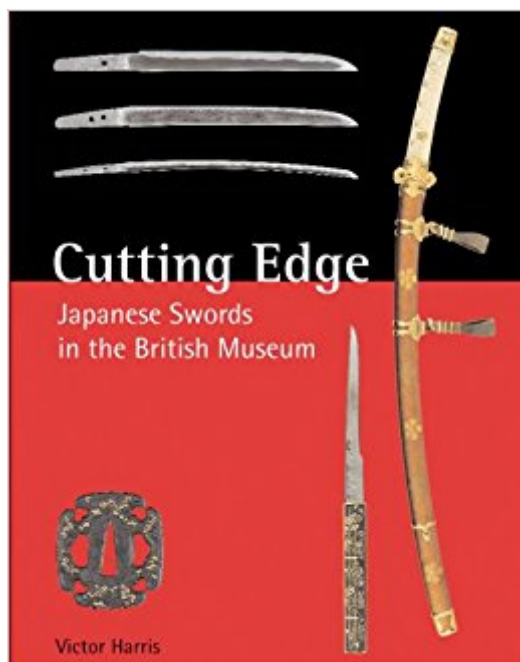


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Cutting Edge: Japanese Swords In The British Museum



Synopsis

The Japanese sword has long been appreciated both as a weapon and as an object of art. No culture, besides the Japanese, has developed the sword to such a level of technological excellence, or raised it to such a position of spiritual importance. As a cutting weapon, the fully developed curved sword of the samurai was uniquely effective. As a cultural object, it offers invaluable insights into the social and spiritual history of the Japanese people. Cutting Edge offers a fascinating introduction to the design, manufacture, and collecting of these Japanese weapons. It covers the development of sword designs, traditional forging methods, regional variations in style, and signature works by legendary craftsmen, and includes hundreds of photos, with 16 pages in full color.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Harris' informed and informative commentary is enhanced with the inclusion of hundreds of photos (and 16 pages in full color) making it an ideal addition to community, college, and university library Japanese Culture collections in general, and Japanese Sword supplemental studies reading lists in particular." — Midwest Book Review --This text refers to an alternate Hardcover edition.

Victor Harris recently retired as Keeper of the Department of Japanese Antiquities in the British Museum. He is a world expert on Japanese swords and is the author of *Shinto: The Sacred Art of Ancient Japan* and *Japanese Imperial Craftsmen* and co-author of *Swords of the Samurai* and

Japanese Art: Masterpieces in the British Museum.

This fine volume documents an exhibit of Japanese swords (nihonto) on display at the British Museum circa 2005 (at least, that's when the book was published) along with some background information on nihonto in general. As the authors note, "this book is intended to be a catalogue for the exhibition... and also a guide to the study of Japanese sword blades based on that exhibition." The book starts with a solid introductory text that covers rough basics about Japanese swords (how they're made, their place in Japanese culture, etc.) and also reviews in reasonable detail a brief history of medieval Japan, along with corresponding changes in sword manufacture over its different eras. This type of information can be found in any of a number of different introductory books elsewhere, but here it has just the right amount of detail on the main epochs of sword making -- Heian, Kamakura, Nambokucho, Muromachi, Momoyama, and Edo. Also included within the intro on a two-page spread is a nice illustration of different characteristics of blades -- kissaki/boshi (tip), hamon ('temper' line), jigane/hada (steel grain), blade cross sections, and nakago (tang) styles. This kind of information can also be found elsewhere, in both more and less detail depending on the book, but it's just about the right amount for the intent of this volume. Even better is a two-pager of representative blades from different eras lined up side-by-side and showing changes in sugata (shape) over time -- unlike other books, they are presented as B&W photos here rather than just line drawings which is very helpful to see defining features. The real meat of the volume consists of the catalogue listing of the 89 blades from the exhibit. The blades (which include tachi, katana, wakizashi, tanto, and the occasional yari and naginata) are arranged chronologically from when they were made and categorized into Koto, Edo, Shinto, and Shin Shinto eras, with brief descriptions of defining regional traditions and schools (e.g. Bizen, Mino, Echigo, etc.) within those eras, followed by a brief but reasonably detailed description of each exhibit blade (discussing the smith, date of manufacture, sugata, hada, hamon, etc.) and their accompanying koshirae (saya, tsuba, and other fittings). The second section then includes stunningly detailed B&W photos of each blade, both up close so that you can see details of hada and hamon as well as full length shots showing the sugata, tang, and mei (note that all of the blades were brought to full polish prior to the exhibit). In addition, an accompanying photo shows each blade's assembled koshirae -- this British Museum collection seems to have included almost all blades with full mounts. These pages comprise the real strength of the book -- the photos are outstanding and document in rich detail each blade. My only complaint is that there are no color photos of the koshirae, which are obviously ornate with exquisite design and detail, so that B&W doesn't do them justice (though there are about

10 pages of color photos of koshirae elsewhere in the book). Likewise, it would have been nice to see some photos of the unsheathed blades fitted to tsuka and tsuba, but all of the photos are of the naked blade with nagako exposed. Oh, and there is the occasional typo in which the swordsmith listed near the photo doesn't match up with the catalogue description in the text. Those minor complaints aside, this is an excellent tome that gives a decent introduction to nihonto, and provides a stellar photo-documentary of an outstanding museum grade collection. Aside from the auction books put out by Christie's of the Walter Compton Collection (which are out-of-print, rare, and expensive), I can think of no other English language book that accomplishes this (for less than \$25 no less). All in all, an wonderful resource for both the novice who just wants to drool at swords as art, or those beginning kantei (study and appreciation of nihonto) in earnest.

very well done book, photos are excellent. A good chance to observe swords in top condition, as they were polished just before photos were taken,

Excellent book. Wonderful photography. Shipped quickly and better than described.

Item was in better shape than expected. Pictures of swords are magnificent, good study for anyone interested in nihonto and other edged weapons.

Very happy with the purchase and the service, thanks

Nice enough

In a very few words, this book is informative to both the newcomer and the more advanced collector. The historical and technical information is authoritative and concise, but the best part of the book are the incredible photos of the blades. These are the best photos I have ever seen, you can actually see the hamons and hadas which are also described in the text. It is extremely difficult to take photos like these, and in many books you can see the blade but not the individual characteristics which actually give the beauty to the blade.

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