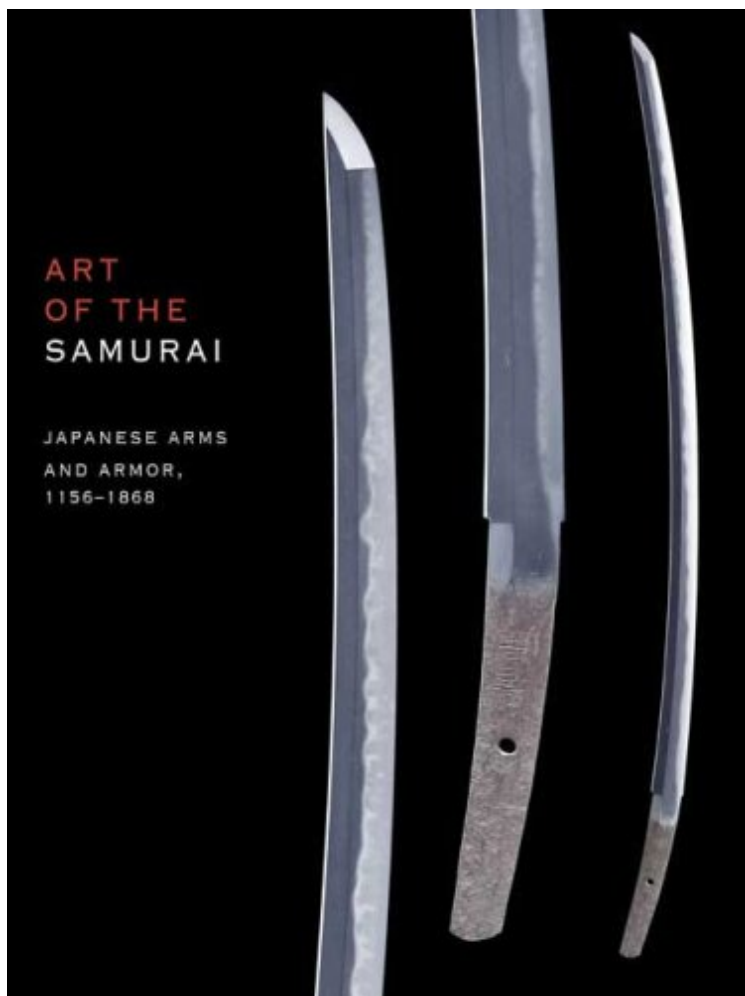


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## **Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)**

**From Metropolitan Museum of Art : Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868 (Metropolitan Museum of Art)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868 (Metropolitan Museum of Art):

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Samurai at the MetBy Joe Pierre"Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868" is the catalog from a seemingly unprecedented exhibit of samurai armor, swords (nihonto), sword fittings (koshirae), and war accoutrements displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2009, in partnership with the Tokyo National Museum and the Agency for Culture Affairs of Japan. The exhibit featured over 200 pieces of samurai art, including 34 National Treasures and 64 Important Cultural Properties, on loan

from some 60 different museums in Japan as well as from private collections. This book, compiled to commemorate the exhibit, is quite a production as well with over 350 pages including extensive, scholarly text covering the history of metallurgy in Japan, the political developments of the samurai era, and the evolution of samurai art in these two contexts. The photographic representation of the collection is impressive to say the least, with about 75 pages of armor, 75 pages of nihonto, 50 pages of koshirae, and 40 pages of clothing, saddlery, and artwork. Although the exhibit includes nihonto from the years spanning 1156-1868, a good deal of it is from the earlier part of that epoch, with a few good examples of early chokuto from the 5th to 8th Centuries, and then one noteworthy tachi or katana after another from the Muromachi through Kamakura eras including National Treasures by Kanehira, Nobufusa, Sukezane, Yoshimitsu, Rai Kunitoshi, Rai Kunimitsu, and Masamune to name a few. The text accompanying each piece includes measurements of nakago and sori, full translations (in both kanji and English) of the mei (tang signature), and a fairly detailed discussion of the significance of each piece. As another reviewer here says, the matte photographs do lack the kind of detail you'd really like so that you could see the hada (steel grain) and hatariki ("activities" of the tempered steel) of each blade, but they are by convention black and white and overall they're pretty good. There is certainly no other book in English that features such a noteworthy collection of mostly older blades from the warring eras, the periods when the quality of Japanese swordmaking is often considered to have been at its peak, so this is simply a must-have for any student or aficionado of nihonto. Like similar volumes from other exhibits, the catalog features koshirae that in contrast are mostly newer, with some wonderfully ornate Edo and Meiji period fittings made in the post-war era in which such artistic work flourished. I own several of these museum catalogs from exhibits that have taken place here in the U.S. in the past few years, and this is clearly the largest and most impressive collection. The overall production quality of the book is very fine, the pictures are quite good, and the level of detail in the text written by Japanese scholars is unparalleled. These kinds of books often don't stay in print forever, so I would highly recommend the purchase while it's still available for the paltry sum of \$40. Easily worth it for such a compendium.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Amazing history and cultural reference  
By R. Mutt  
This book is more than just about weapons and armor, it is also a very thorough examination of Japanese culture and its martial history. I learned more about Japan from this book than from books specifically dedicated to Japanese history. As for the actual topic of the book, I was mainly pleased with the explanations of how weapons and armor evolved due to changes in combat methods over time - swords used for horse-mounted combat were cut down for on-foot battles, and armor construction evolved as firearms became a sudden, prominent, and permanent aspect of war. There may be better books on Japanese sword typologies but in my opinion this is the ground-floor for anyone wanting to study the topic. Another sadly out-of-print book that nicely compliments this is Classical Weaponry of Japan by Serge Mol, which focuses on pretty much every hand-to-hand weapon type except for the sword. This is a big, gorgeous book that was well thought-out and leaves zero room for improvement. I only wish I could have seen all this stuff first hand at the Met.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It is a very good book and there is an excellent selection of pieces ...  
By Kirill A. Rivkin  
It is a very good book and there is an excellent selection of pieces demonstrating a wide variety of Samurai arms and armor. However, the text itself is mostly identical to the one which is found in every introductory book on the subject, from Honami's Nihonto to Sato Kanzan's volume etc. It is not always consistent with the material presented in the book, and over-emphasizes swords over armor and fittings.

Samurai arms and equipment are widely recognized as masterpieces in steel, silk, and lacquer. This extensively illustrated volume is published in conjunction with the first comprehensive exhibition devoted to the arts of the samurai. It includes the finest examples of swordsmanship as well as sword mountings and fittings, armor and helmets, saddles, banners, and paintings. The objects in the catalogue, drawn entirely from public and private collections in Japan, feature more than 100 officially designated national treasures and important cultural properties. Dating from the 5th to the 19th century, these majestic works offer a complete picture of samurai culture and its unique blend of the martial and the refined. Many of the greatest Japanese blade makers are represented in this volume, from the earliest koto ("old sword") masters such as Yasuie (12th century) and Tomomitsu (14th century) to the Edo-period smiths Nagasone Kotetsu and Kiyomaro. These blades, cherished as much for their beauty as for their cutting effectiveness, were equipped with elaborate hilts and scabbards prized for their exquisite craftsmanship and materials, including silk, rayskin, gold, lacquer, and alloys unique to Japan, such as shakudo and shibuichi. Japanese armor is also fully surveyed, from the rarest iron armor of the Kofun period (5th century) to the inventive ceremonial helmets made toward the end of the age of the samurai.

About the Author  
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