

The History And Mystique Of The Japanese Samurai Sword

The gun is the chosen weapon of modern times. Technologically advanced and deadly accurate, the weapon does its job. Despite its effectiveness, the gun lacks the mystique that accompanies a Japanese sword, or any sword of ancient tradition for that matter. Individual works of art, the swords of Japan have a rich and enduring history.

What makes Japanese swords so alluring? Perhaps it's their rich history, or maybe it's the incredible craftsmanship and artistic touches that went into many a sword. Even still, it could be that these swords were often considered an extension of the people who wielded them. More than just an object, they were a constant and unyielding companion in a world very different from our own. It's that symbolism, perhaps, that makes these swords so interesting.

The history of the Japanese sword is rich and long. It is believed the first swords came on the scene in the in the mid 200s A.D. Using rough iron, as steel had yet to be invented yet, the forerunner of the swords of today was a rough prototype, subject to breaking.

The advent of steel, which involves a process of heating and cooling iron to create a superior product, came to Japan sometime in the 5th century. With this came a single-edged blade known as the chokuto. This creation of steel, with its deadly beauty and ability, opened the door for artisans to begin creating better and better swords.

Early swords were made of iron, but the lesser-processed material was brittle. In Europe, for example, swords made of bog iron were extremely brittle and often would break on the field of battle after a blow or two. The advantage of the steel sword was the fact it was more flexible. Its elasticity was slight, but just enough to prove the worked metal stronger, and more reliable. It just got better through time and advanced processing, too.

It is believed the straight sword was the norm through the 8th century or so, when tachi, or long, curved swords made their appearance. It wasn't until the late 1200s, however, that sword making had evolved into the form more closely representative of the Japanese samurai sword we identify with today. As the samurai became the power in Japan, the swords became greater, more detailed, individual works of art.

In the late 1300 and 1400s, the katana with its shorter, easier to wield blade came into favor and crafting abilities advanced as well. By the late 1500s, refining processes became more advanced and raw materials were more accessible and the tradition of making swords marched forward.

As it was in Europe with medieval knights, the birth of the Japanese sword grew up around a class of warriors, the samurai. This country's version of a knight, a samurai, however, is more of a mystery to the West, making the weapons these men wielded more intriguing perhaps. The samurai were known as relentless warriors who lived and died by a code of honor. Their weapons were extensions of themselves.

The Japanese sword had many forms through the ages. As crafting processes became more complex, the end product was noted for its durability and beauty combined.

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About the Author

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