

Samurai: History and Legend

ケンブリッジ大学図書館の展覧会: サムライ ~歴史と伝説~

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SAMURAI
MILSTEIN EXHIBITION CENTRE · FREE ADMISSION
HISTORY & LEGEND
22 JAN - 28 MAY

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Exhibition at Cambridge University Library

22 January to 28 May 2022

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Photo credit: Steve Bond

Samurai are a well-known image of Japan, but they are as much legend as history. This exhibition explores the literary concept of the samurai and the changing nature of Japanese warrior culture from the 12th to the 19th centuries.



The great warriors of Japan's medieval period (roughly the 13th to 16th centuries) gradually gave way to a more well-defined and self-conscious warrior class that ruled over a long period of relative peace, from the 17th to the mid-19th century. Today's familiar images of the samurai began to take shape in the histories and vibrant popular culture of that peaceful time. During this period, records and reinterpretations of an older Japanese warrior culture helped construct the histories and myths of the samurai that today hold sway in Japan and beyond.

SAMURAI

HISTORY & LEGEND



Samurai: a word with many meanings

The word 'samurai' usually suggests higher ranking Japanese warriors from around the 12th to 16th century or members of the military ruling class from the 17th to 19th centuries. The word 'samurai' comes from 'saburau', meaning 'to serve'. 'Samurai' evolved to refer to those who served the nobility in positions of authority, such as those commanding household guards or administering regional estates. By the 12th century, some of these 'servants' had gained enough power to challenge the authority of the nobility, and they played an important role in ruling the country until samurai status – which over time had developed into a formal designation – was abolished in the late 19th century. In English, we tend to use the word 'samurai' broadly to refer to Japanese historical warriors in general, but in Japanese, the word 'bushi' is the more general term.

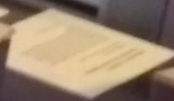




● **Honchō gunkiō shūko zueitō**
本邦軍器考案古図説
Investigations into the military implements of
our country, a compilation of antiques, illustrated
our country, 1780
Woodblock printed book, 1780
This is the father of the single horn Mitsunobu no Yashikune
in the 1780s. You can find out more about him later in the
exhibition. His helmet is presented at Kizumadera, a Buddhist
temple in the mountains north of Kyoto.
U.S.A. Asian Collection, N. 81.27

● **Hurai udeshige no sedokoto** 図威毛地形
Patterns of shoulder armour laces
Compiled in 1768 by Ota Tsunokiyo 大田 綱清
and his students 大田 綱清 1768-1810. Copper unknown.
Manuscript, circa 1768 century
This manuscript illustrates armour shoulder pieces, emphasizing
their design and colour. The right shows a style of armour
described as *tsukushi* 突刺. Patterns are being dyed
scarlet. The text around the image notes particular aspects of
the design, such as the gold wire. The text on the left describes
the image on the following page.
U.S.A. Asian Collection, N. 81.28

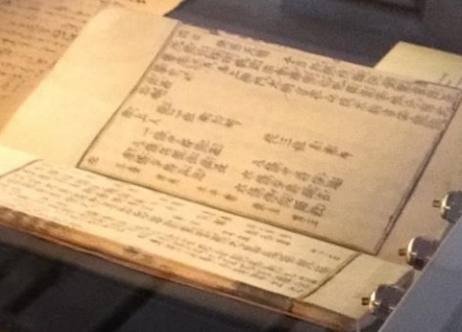
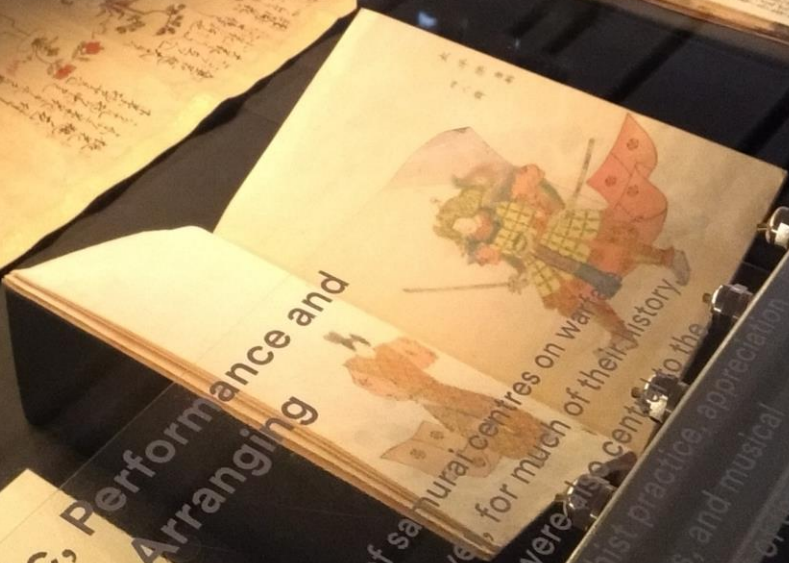
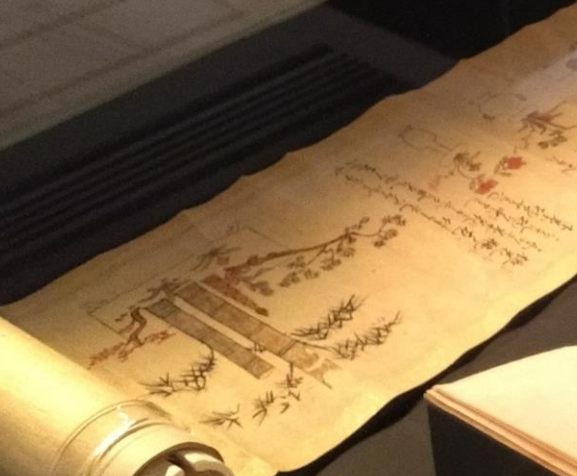
● **Jinkōshi no zu** 陣羽織図
Pictures of tabards
Compiled by Ota Tsunokiyo 大田 綱清
Copper by Tsukushi Tsunokiyo 大田 綱清
Manuscript, 1840
This manuscript is a collection of designs for cloth tabards
(*tsukushi* 突刺). To go over armour. At the end of the book,
Senri claims that the designs are historically accurate as he
visited the contents from an old sword that he borrowed from
the *Mitsunobu* clan (大田 綱清). Each page shows two different
designs. The one in the upper right displays a butterfly family
crest, which was formerly associated with the Tera clan.
U.S.A. Asian Collection, N. 81.29

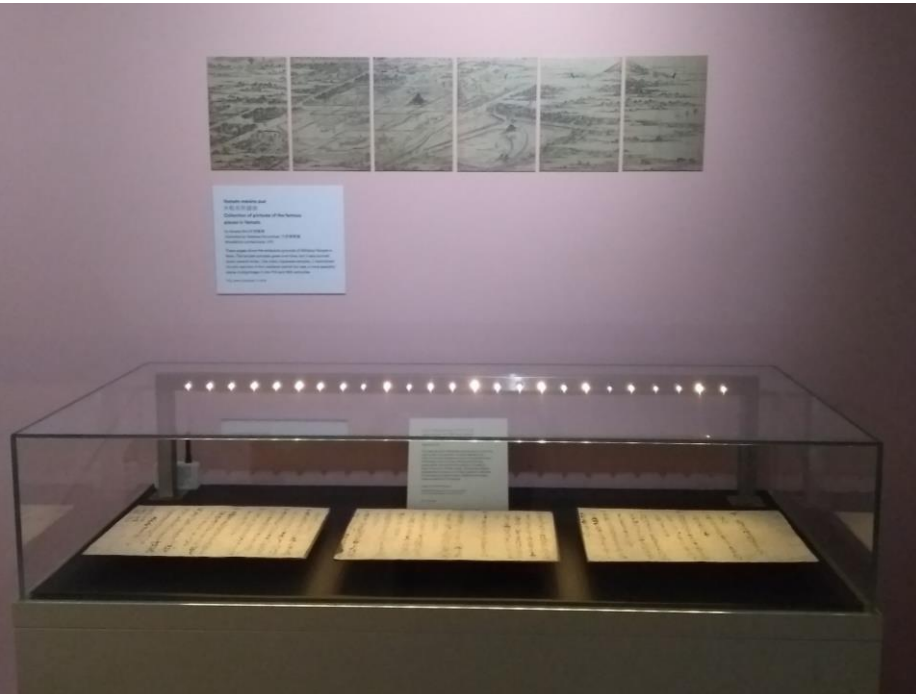
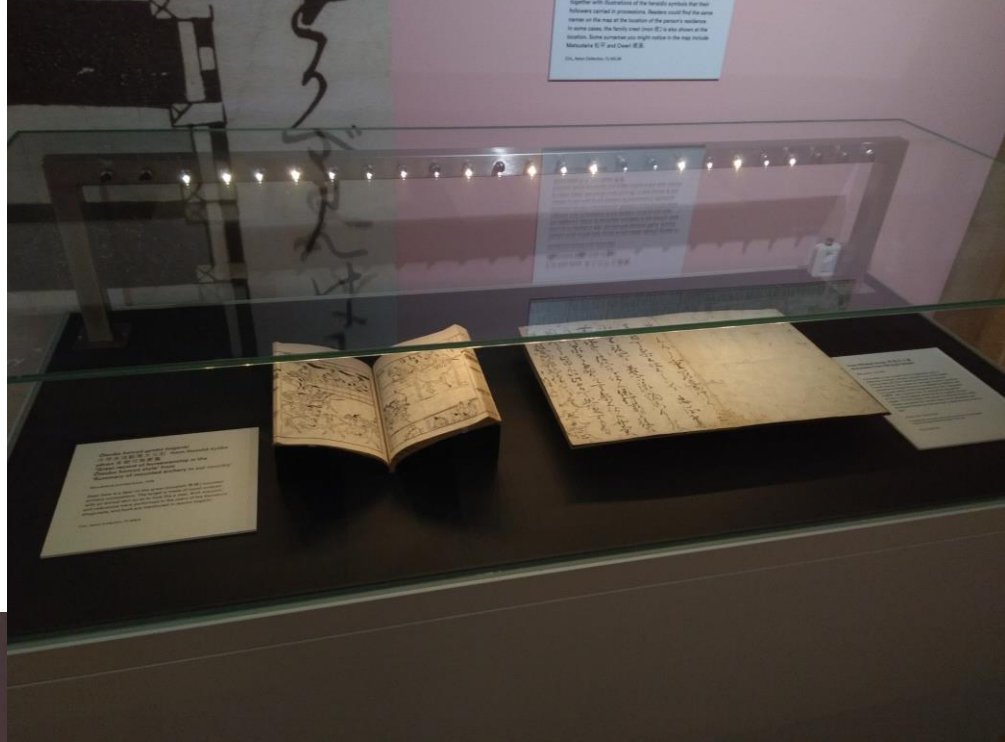


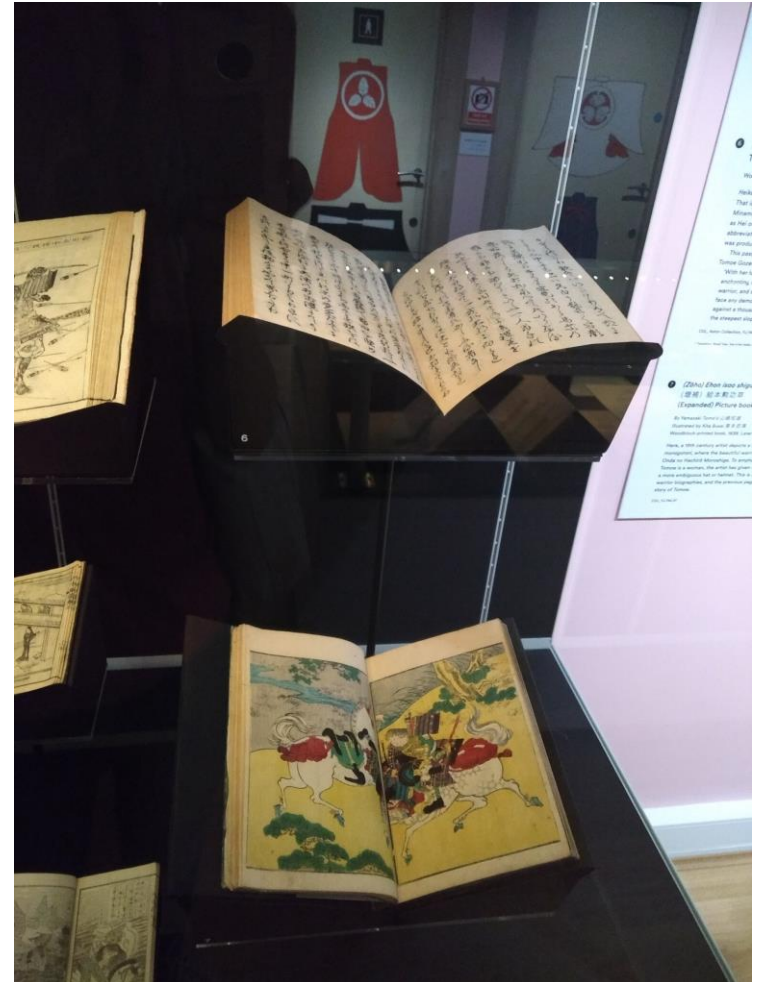
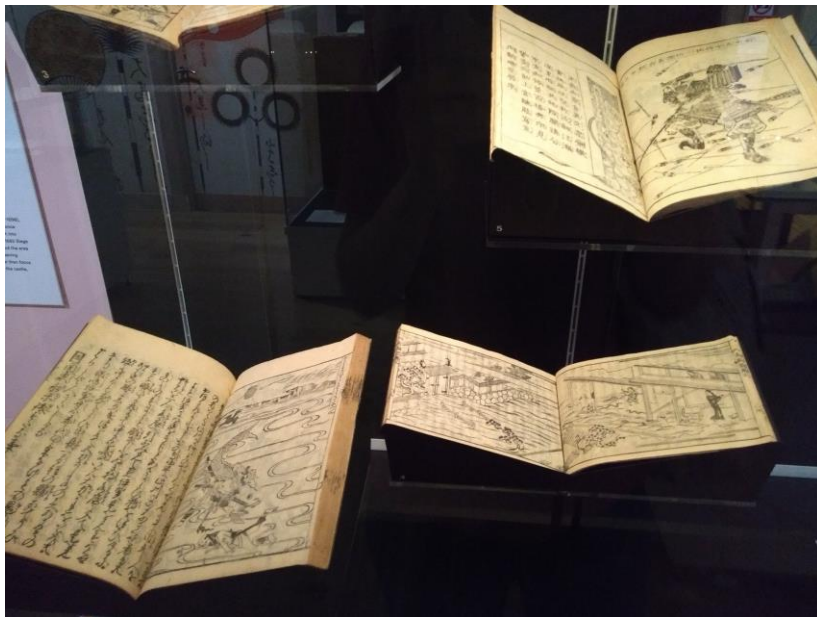
Music, Performance and Flower Arranging

of Bugaku
printed book, 1898
illustrates the costumes of dancers
in a form of
Bugaku piece
at originally
to act with
Koppei (right) also documents
elements of Bugaku music and
theater forms of Japanese theatre,
which is
tegyōkoku

popular idea of samurai centres on warfare
and culture were also central to the
of life. Buddhist practice, appreciation
performances, and musical
were all part of the life of samurai.







Long Delayed Exhibition

- Planned for May 2020
- Opened in January 2022
- Total of 16,005 in-person visitors recorded on number tracker
 - Lower attendance than for pre-pandemic exhibitions
 - Higher attendance than expected given Covid restrictions still in place at opening (no opening event)
- Some benefits of the delay:
 - New or upgraded electronic cataloguing for many items in exhibition done remotely during lockdown
 - More conservation work done on exhibition items than initially planned
 - PhD students studied manuscripts and contributed captions

Exhibition Events

- 22 events:
 - Tours
 - Talks (2 online and 1 in person)
 - Workshops (calligraphy and manga workshops)
- Activity papers for child visitors
- Google Arts & Cultures site:
<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/samurai-history-and-legend-cambridge-university-library/nAXhgIO2RCpkMg?hl=en>
- Shop on site with souvenirs based on exhibition items and selected gifts and books related to Japan

Japanese woodblock printing

Many of the paper items in this exhibition are examples of Japanese woodblock printing. An artist or calligrapher prepared a final draft of the words and pictures on paper. A carver attached that paper to a block of hard wood, such as cherry, and cut around the lines so that the areas to be printed were higher than the rest of the block. The finished block would have a mirror image of the lines to be printed. Then a printer inked the block and applied paper to it by hand, rubbing the back of the paper to transfer the ink evenly from the wood to the paper. Once the papers were dry, they were sewn into books or attached together to make large sheets for maps or board games. If the blocks were stored carefully, they could last for decades and produce hundreds or thousands of prints.



Woodblock printing workshop
17th century
Woodblock City of Printed Textures
Copyrighted by the British Library





Links for Resources and Information

- Overview of exhibition: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/Samurai>
- Animated trailer for exhibition: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLA6vPty678>
- Google Arts & Cultures page: <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/samurai-history-and-legend-cambridge-university-library/nAXhgIO2RCpkMg?hl=en>
- “Japanese Books in 17th-Century England” talk by Professor Peter Kornicki
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8rWucceD54>
- “Art and Commerce at Play: The Illustrated Books in Early Modern Japan” talk by Dr Ellis Tinios https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMD_ICjuOxk
- “Playing with Samurai” talk by Dr Laura Moretti was only live and in person.
- “Sounds of the Samurai” blog post <https://specialcollections-blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?p=22838>
- “Conservation for a Legendary Exhibition” blog post <https://specialcollections-blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?p=22986>

Finding Japanese Rare Books at CUL

Catalogues:

- Eric Ceadel: Classified catalogue of modern Japanese books in Cambridge University Library (1961)
- Nozomu Hayashi and Peter Kornicki: Early Japanese books in Cambridge University Library (1991 and 2012 print-on-demand)
- Union Catalogue of Early Japanese Books in Europe 欧州所在日本古書総合目録 <http://base1.nijl.ac.jp/~oushu/>
- iDiscover (main library search) <https://idiscover.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

Also see the Digital Library:

<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/japanese/1>

Using Japanese Rare Books at CUL

Reader Registration for Cambridge University Library:

<https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/using-library/your-library-membership> Any adult is welcome to register. There may be fees to register for longer than one week (£5 for one month, £30 for one year, etc.).



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