OSPREY MILITARY

WARRIOR SERIES 7

SAMURAI

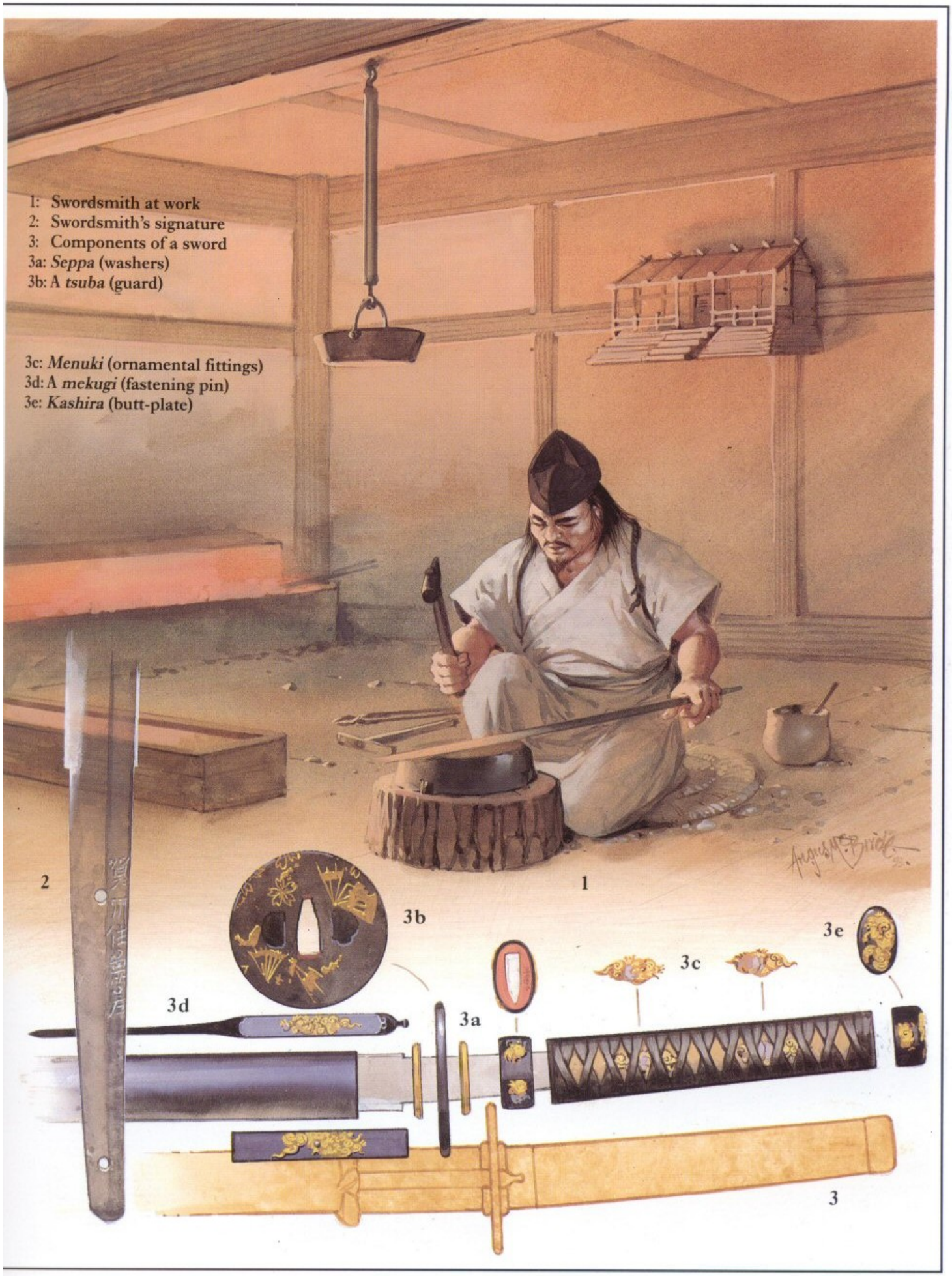
1550–1600

WEAPONS ▪ ARMOUR ▪ TACTICS

ANTHONY J BRYANT ANGUS McBRIDE

1: *Samurai* in foul weather gear, *c.*1550
2: Armour fastenings
3a: Two mounts for *tachi* (sword worn edge down)
3b: *Katana* (sword worn edge up)
3c: *Wakizashi* (the companion sword)
3d: *Aikuchi*
4: *Waraji* (straw sandals)

1: *Samurai* in marching order
2a: Cloth rations bag
2b: Leather shot pouch
2c: Bamboo canteen
2d: The contents of a *uchikoshi-bukuro*
3: A section of brigandine armour
4: The fitting for a *sashimono*


1: Swordsmith at work
2: Swordsmith's signature
3: Components of a sword
3a: *Seppa* (washers)
3b: A *tsuba* (guard)
3c: *Menuki* (ornamental fittings)
3d: A *mekugi* (fastening pin)
3e: *Kashira* (butt-plate)
1
2
3
3a
3b
3c
3d
3e

C

Training with swords
1: *Sensei* (master)
2: *Deshi* (disciple)

1: *Samurai* armouring up c.1574
2: Mail-faced, brigandine and plate *wakibiki*
3: *Nodowa* (gorgets)

1
2
3

The barricades at Nagashino, 1575
1: The *teppô taishô* (commander of the musketeers)
2: The Oda arquebusiers
3: Arquebusier support crew

After the battle, c.1574
1: Injured *samurai*
2: Physician
3: Physician's attendant

Armourers at work
1: Lacing the braid on a *sode*
2: Armourer works on a *kabuto*
3: Armourer's tools

Samurai relaxing
1: *Samurai* in a formal *kamishimo*
2: *Samurai* in a day-to-day *kamishimo*
3: Lower rank *samurai* in a *han-bakama*

The Battle of Mikata-ga-Hara, 1572
1: Sakai Tadatsugu
2: *Samurai* drummer
3: Tadatsugu's aide

The siege of Nagashino Castle, 1575

A 16-plate ribbed helmet (16-ken tsuji kabuto). Sixteen was a common number of plates for the multi-plate helmets of the late 17th century. (Courtesy Yoroi no Kôzan-dô)

THE PLATES

Plate A: Samurai on the march, foul weather gear, c. 1550

A1. In the decade that began in 1550, at what is considered the start of the Age of Battles, the *Môgami dô* was a popular style of armour. It appears to have been the first of what came to be called *go-mai dô*, or five-plate cuirasses. This name comes from the four sets of hinges that produce five sets of plates to wrap around the body. This armour retained the older lame-count of two breast plates and four plates around the abdomen. The *tsutsu-gote* that enclose the forearms in a solid tube are very protective. He wears *shino* (splint) *suneate*, and a *haidate* of broad scales laced together on a padded backing to protect his thighs. His helmet is a simple multiplate variety. The armour is worn over a linen *kimono* and *hakama*, and the feet are bare save straw sandals called *waraji* (at this point, *tabi* were only worn by the upper classes). To stay dry, he wears a straw rain cape. A pair of matching woven straw boots, loose-fitting and high-topped, serve in winter as snowboots. Such capes and boots are still used in rural Japan in the winter. (Source: a cuirass in a private collection, Kanagawa Pref.)

A2. Many of the fastenings on Japanese armour were toggles and loops – frogs – called *takahimo*.

A3. Swords thrust through the sash and worn edge up were *katana*. Swords worn suspended at the hip from a sash or belt were called *tachi*. Short swords were also often worn; by the 1570s they were both considered the badge of the *samurai*. They had become what we now recognise today as the *daishô* (literally, 'great [and] small') swords. Top to bottom are two different mounts for *tachi*, a *katana* and *wakizashi* (Source: a *daishô* once owned by Hideyoshi), and an *aikuchi*.

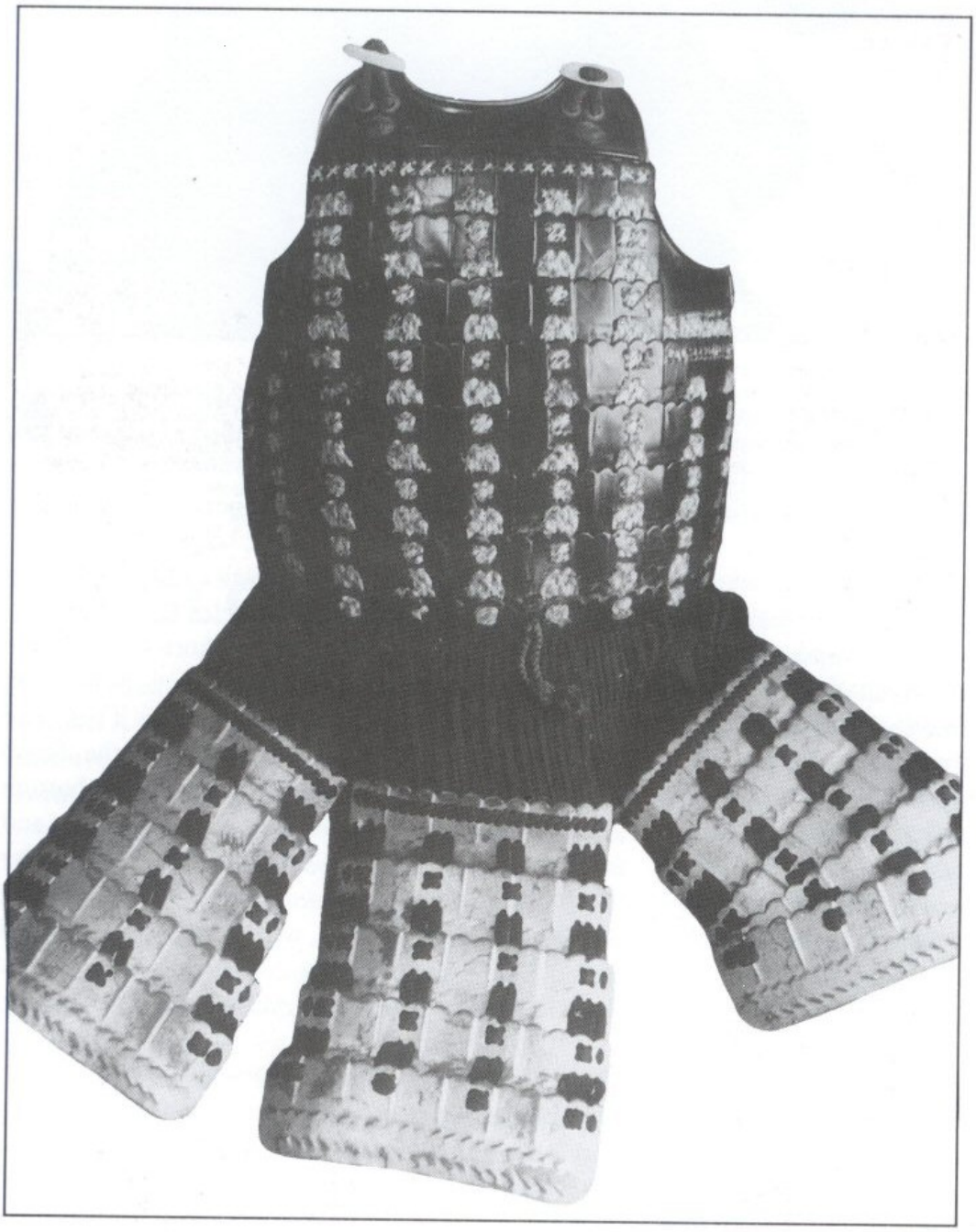
A4. *Waraji*, straw sandals, were common through all ranks. There was no single correct way to tie them. Even in muddy conditions, everyone wore them.

Plate B: Samurai on the march, c. 1600

B1. The *okegawa dô* came into being around 1550, and is the quintessential *tôsei gusoku*, or 'modern suit of armour'. By 1600, it was arguably the most universal style, being worn by everyone from the low-

born *ashigaru* to the mightiest *daimyô*. The splint arms, called *shino-gote*, are of a typical pattern, as are the *en suite* greaves, *shino* (splint) *suneate*. The *sode* were made smaller in the late 1500s, and were often discarded. The helmet is of a style called *momo-nari* (peach-shaped) *kabuto*. Many warriors at this stage eschewed thigh armour, though this man has kept his simple, large-plated *haidate*. Worn at the waist is a pouch for shot, and a bamboo canteen. A powder flask is hung from the fastening on his *dô*. Over his shoulders he wears a long tube of cloth containing a day's rations of rice tied into individual sections. The roll at his shoulder is a mat, this he uses to cover himself while sleeping. Changes of clothing and anything else that he may need is carried in the bag worn at his waist. The banner at his back identifies him as a retainer of the Honda clan, vassals to Tokugawa Ieyasu. (Source: a suit of armour in a private collection, Kanagawa Pref.)

B2. On the march small personal items and extra clothing were carried in an *uchikoshi-bukuro*, and rations were carried in the *heiryô-bukuro*. For both, the loose ends are tied together and secured to the body. The *uchikoshi-bukuro* is worn on the hip, the rations bag around both shoulders. The *takezutsu* is a natural canteen made of a segment of giant bamboo



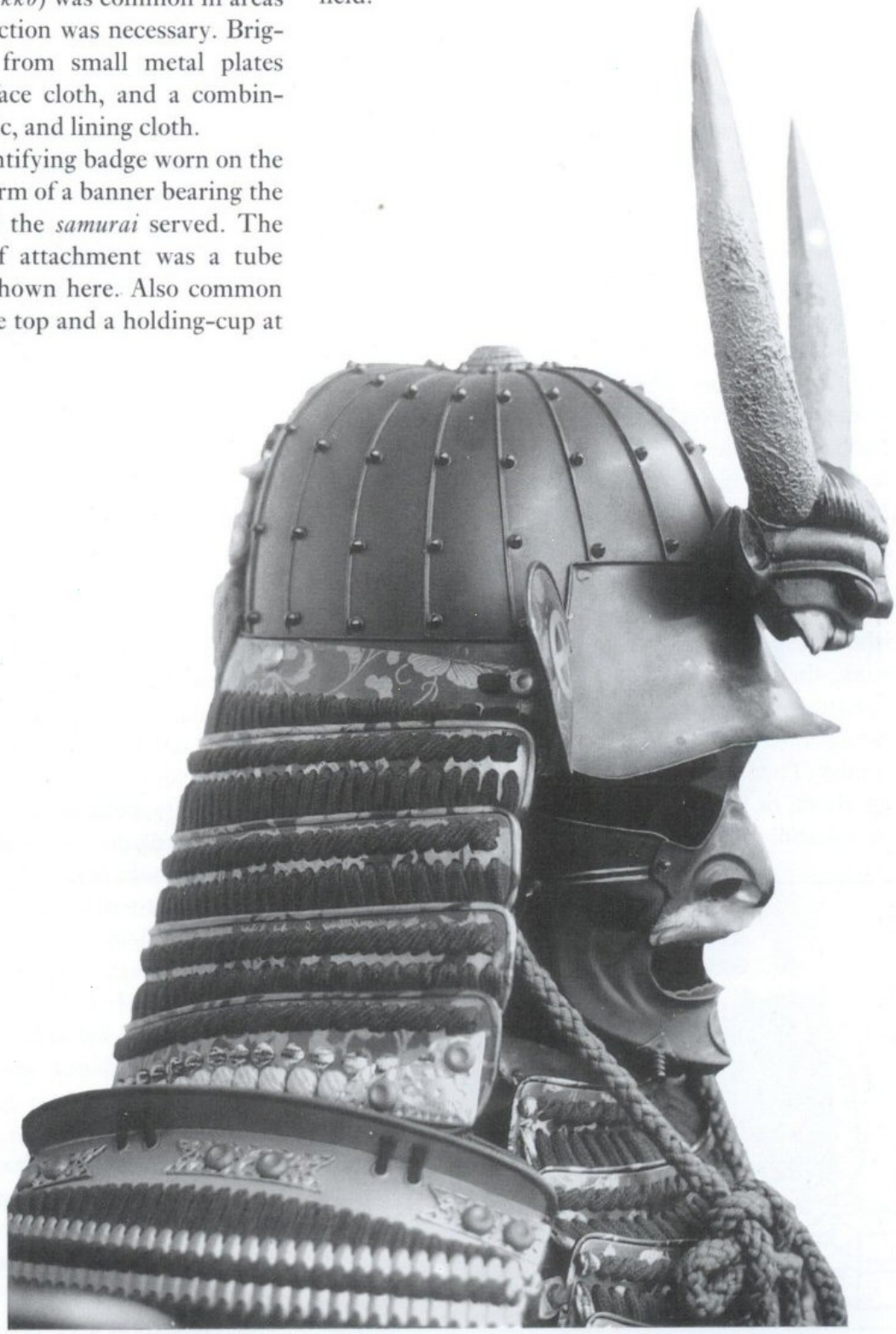
The nuinobe dô *was popular in the late 1500s. This typical example has a brown body, laced in light-patterned braid, and has gold tassets. (Author's collection)*

cut above and beneath a set of nodes. Some canteens were also made of hollowed-out gourds. Other items often carried in the *uchikoshi-bukuro* were a small towel, a bowl, a compact brush and ink set, grooming supplies, paper, chopsticks, medicine, fire-starting pouches, and a small lunchbox.

B3. Brigandine armour (*kikkô*) was common in areas where light, flexible protection was necessary. Brigandine was constructed from small metal plates sandwiched between surface cloth, and a combination of paper, coarse fabric, and lining cloth.

B4. The *sashimono*, an identifying badge worn on the back, generally took the form of a banner bearing the *mon*, or crest, of the lord the *samurai* served. The most common method of attachment was a tube attached to the back, as shown here. Also common was a simple bracket at the top and a holding-cup at the base of the spine.

The Japanese matchlock was a very well-made weapon, and some spectacularly ornate models were made using gold and silver inlay. The lock mechanism is of brass, while the barrel is made of a long band of steel forge-welded into a tube. The example shown here is a typical model as issued to the troops in the field.



A 12-plate* kabuto, *typical of the high-sided shot-proof helmets of the 16th century. (Courtesy Yoroi no Kôzan-dô)

Plate C: Swordsmith at work

There were many weapons available to the *samurai*, but none was more important than his sword. Among the styles of swords used were the long *katana* and *tachi*, the shorter *wakizashi*, the dirk-like *tantô* and *aikuchi*. The manufacture of a blade was a time-consuming, arduous task.

C1. The smith here wears a *kimono* and *hakama* in white, symbolising purity, and a *samurai*'s cap. Not all wore white. Regardless of whether he is working on something he considers a masterpiece, or 'just another sword blade', he prepares himself for work by observing time-honoured rituals. Before work each day, he prays at the altar, seen in the background, and washes, pouring buckets of cold water over himself to purify his body and spirit. He then binds his sleeves back with a cord and sets to work. Except for a few legendary cases, smiths usually didn't work alone, nor did they produce finished swords themselves. The smith only forged the blade. He had a simple white wood scabbard and hilt made to protect the blade, and then sent the finished sword blank to a polisher for polishing, and a sharpener who put the edge on it. From there, the sword may have been sent for cutting tests, where the subject of the test was often a condemned criminal. When polishers, testers, and edgers were all finished with their work, they returned the blade to the smith for his signature on the tang. The signatures sometimes incorporated details of the cutting tests and the results. Then and only then did the smith send it to his client, or to a sword furniture maker to be fitted for a scabbard, hilt, guard, etc.

Sword polishers at work. From a contemporary woodcut.

C2. This is a typical signature on a blade. It reads '*Kashû [no] jû Kanewaka*', or 'Kanewaka, living in Ka[ga] Province'. Other things that may appear on a blade include the date of manufacture (often an infuriatingly imprecise date such as 'on a lucky day . . .'), the name of the person it was made for, and the result of any testing of the blade's strength and cutting ability. Ironically, many master smiths never signed their swords, and many third-rate ones signed the names of great masters to their products in order to increase their value. (There is an anecdote about two neighbouring swordsmiths that suggest this practice went on: one smith had finished work for the day, and sat down for a cup of tea. He listened as the neighbour put the finishing touches on a blade – the signature – tapping away with a chisel. Suddenly he stood up and ran next door, and grabbed the other smith. 'Why were you signing my name?' he demanded. The other smith admitted he was, and asked how his neighbour could have known. 'My name has more strokes,' was the reply. 'Your name would not have taken so long.')

Although the blades for *katana* and *tachi* are virtually identical, the location of a signature (if there *is* one) is the only way to tell what type of blade the smith was making. There is a convention that places the inscription on the tang on the outside as it is worn, so if a sword is held in the hand, blade edge down, a *tachi* would have the inscription on the right side of the tang, while a *katana* would have it on the left.

C3. The components in a typical sword hilt include the *habaki* (a metal collar that insures a tight fit inside the scabbard), one or more *seppa* (washers, to tighten the hilt), a *tsuba* (guard), the *fuchi* (a metal sleeve for the grip), the *tsuka* (grip), *menuki* (ornamental metal fittings placed under the hilt wrapping to improve the grip), a *mekugi* (fastening pin), and the *kashira* (butt-plate). The *fuchi* and *kashira* (and often the *menuki*) were made as a set usually by the same artist, and masterfully produced sets are prized by collectors today.

Plate D: Training with swords

Training was long, difficult, and often painful. In contrast to modern martial arts such as *kendô*, neither helmets nor heavy padding were used for training

sessions; students simply wore their own clothes. Broken bones and sprains were not uncommon. The one consolation was that the weapons used were usually only heavy wooden practice models. However, real weapons were used to practise cutting techniques. Such techniques required supreme control of the blade in order that killing cuts could be made with a single blow. The targets for these exercises were piles of thick *tatami* matting, wrapped straw mats, and staves of growing green bamboo.

The *sensei*, or master, has seen his share of campaigning, and through practice and experience he has developed his art. He wears his normal clothing, a *hakama* and *kimono*, with his kimono sleeves drawn back and tied with a cord. The weapon he wields is a hardwood ersatz sword capable of delivering a devastating blow to unprotected flesh.

The *deshi*, or disciples, of the *sensei* are also in everyday clothes. Several students of varying levels all study together; as there were no individual lessons for the rank and file. In addition to individual sparring with the master, students had to pair off and spar with each other, to perfect their individual skills. Whether lancers, archers, or even arquebusiers, all *samurai* were expected to be proficient in the use of the sword. Although part of a body of soldiers, the individual's fighting ability was of primary importance. It was up to each man to see to it that his training was as good as it could be. His life – and his lord's success in the field – would depend on it.

Plate E: Samurai armouring up. c. 1574

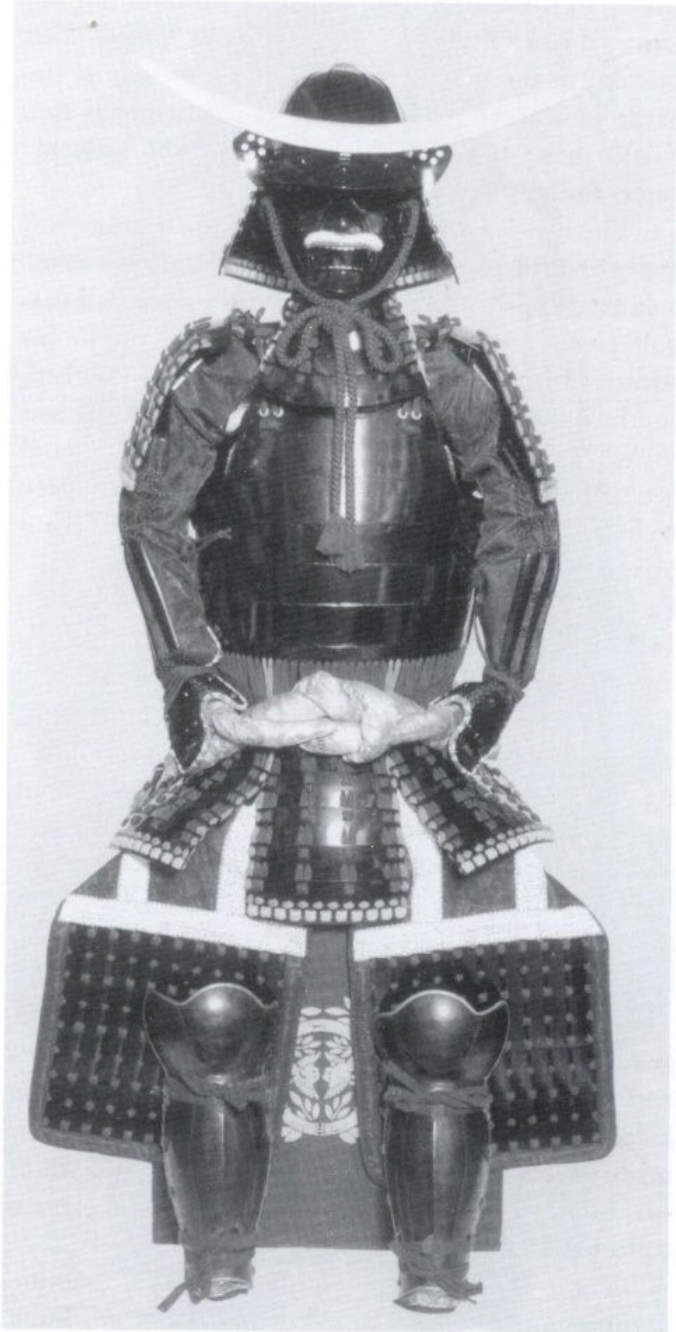
E1. *Samurai* took turns helping each other put their armour on, although certain shortcuts could make armouring up a one-man job. This *samurai* has only his cuirass left to put on. He wears an accessory not universally used: the *manjûwa*, an armoured and padded armpit protector worn under the *dô*. The *tôsei gusoku* worn on the hip offered little or no protection to the armpits. An alternative to protect the armpit was the *wakibiki*, which took many forms. Note how the *haidate* is supported in front with the cord worn around the neck and torso (like a baldric worn off-kilter) to keep it from slipping down. *Samurai* usually undid their topknots and wore their hair loose when in armour.

E2. Different types of *wakibiki* include mail-faced models, brigandine models, and plate models.

E3. Another item of armour rarely worn was the *nodowa*, a form of gorget. It was worn under the breast plate (occasionally over it) to protect the throat. The *eriwa* also protected the neck.

Plate F: The barricades at Nagashino, 1575

The Battle of Nagashino marked the beginning of the end for the once mighty Takeda clan. Takeda



This functional suit of armour has a plain* okegawa-dô. *The lacing is* murasaki *(purple) and the edge lacing is pale green. (Courtesy Yoroi no Kôzan-dô)

Katsuyori, Shingen's son, led the forces against a combined Oda/Tokugawa army. There were many engagements in the battle, but the most famous is the Takeda charge on the enemy arquebusier position. Nobunaga had arranged three ranks of arquebusiers to fire in turns from behind a sturdy wooden barricade. Between the barricades were narrow gaps to allow the Oda lancers and cavalry to make sorties from behind their defences. The Takeda forces, practitioners of traditional warfare, made several attempts at frontal infantry and cavalry charges across an open plain, in order to cross the small stream in front of the arquebusiers' position. In any terms, it was a massacre. Ten thousand Takeda died that day at the field of Shitarabara. A history of the battle indicates that Katsuyori had anticipated rain would make the matchlocks useless, but unfortunately for him the weather was sunny.

F1. The *teppô taishô* (commander of the musketeers) maintains the rate of fire, calling out rotation commands to retire and reload, make ready, and fire. He is unlikely to have been a crack shot; more usually his knowledge of the gun was confined to how it worked, and how it could be used. That was more important to the Oda army than placing a good shot in command of a regiment. His armour is an *okegawa dô* with some stylistic variations. (Source: a suit of armour in a private collection, Kanagawa Pref.)

F2. The Oda arquebusiers in this unit are armed with swords in addition to their *teppô*. If the Takeda broke through their lines, the swords would be needed. They wear folding armours, although other units may have dressed differently.

F3. The support crew prepares to deliver more shot and fresh flasks of powder to the line, while others are refilling prepared cartridges. As the arquebusiers rotate to the third line, they are given fresh supplies if needed. When armoured, they wear folding armours, since they are low on the list of priorities for armour.

Yamagata Masakage was one of the Takeda generals. Despite personal doubts, he followed orders and led a charge on an enemy position, and he was killed in the assault. He wore an old-style *dô-maru*, made of scales and tightly laced with blue and white silk braid. (Source: A suit of armour in a private collection, Kanagawa Pref.)

The Takeda clan spearmen wore simple munitions-grade *okegawa dô* called *okashi dô*. Such armours were very cheap, and were made by the hundred.

Plate G: After the battle, c. 1574

Death, and serious, debilitating wounds were only natural products of the bloody vocation of the *samurai*. This wounded man is comparatively lucky: he will only lose an eye. He should be able to continue

as a warrior in future years. His wound may even afford him a certain amount of respect, and tales of his injury and bravery in the face of it will provide the meat for many campfire tale-telling sessions. The most feared arrow wound was one in the face or throat, not only for the potentially fatal outcome, but for the painful 'treatment'.

The warrior's head was secured to a tree to keep him still, and the arrow was removed by a physician (or a comrade, if none was available) who would resort to pliers if the arrowhead was barbed. Physicians, though often not from the *samurai* class, still held a respected position in society. In fact, many took to wearing swords that were, in fact, bladeless. The swords gave the aura of class, but as the non-*samurai* physician couldn't really use a sword, the scabbard was hollow and contained things like medicines, brushes, ink, etc. He wears upper-class day wear, a *hitatare*, while his attendant is less well dressed.

Plate H: Armourer at work

Armourers, like swordsmiths, did not do all the work themselves. Apprentices did much of the work, while the master oversaw the process or concentrated on the armour of special, important clients. Even then, the man who did the metalwork seldom – if ever – did the lacquering. He may not have even done the lacing, and he certainly didn't make the decorative metal fittings.

H1. The armourer is at work lacing up the suspensory braid on a *sode*. No matter what piece of armour was being laced up, it was suspended in this fashion. This method ensured the lacing stayed even, and that the armourer could work it easily, switching between the front and back, or the inside and outside, without causing the plates or lacing to go into disarray. A few pieces of place-holding cord (the armouring equivalent of basting stitches) were put through it to start, one on either end and one in the middle, and then the real suspensory lacing begins. For close lacing with leather, the cords are long enough to make a single pass down and back up; about six inches. Silk braid was often long enough for several passes. If the armourer were lacing a piece in sparse-point, he would use one length of cord folded over for each pair of cords.

H2. An armourer rivets the *hachi* (helmet bowl) of a simple multi-plate *kabuto*. The *Hachi* of this helmet is of an inexpensive design, with no more than 12 plates, however some master armourers produced

Left: Japanese armourers made copies of Nanban gusoku *(European converted armours) with varying degrees of success. (Courtesy Yoroi no Kôzan-dô)*

Right: The tatami-dô gusoku, *or folding armour, was cheap and easy to make. As a result it was made in great numbers for* ashigaru. *(Courtesy Koka Ninja Mura.)*

ornate ribbed examples with up to 120 plates. Once the *hachi* has been constructed the *ushihari* (lining) would need to be added, this was usually made from heavy hemp cloth. Most *samurai* helmets incorporated a *shikoro*, lamellar nape guard, these were attached to the rim of the *hachi* and were designed to match the wearer's *sode*. *Shikoro* varied in size and in some cases they were large enough to cover the *samurai's* shoulders. The *shikoro* for the helmet in this plate is on the floor beside the armourer.

H3. A small selection of the tools of the trade: a mallet, a set of files, a hard chisel (for cutting leather scales and making holes), a chisel-edged stylus (for separating scales to insert lacing), a tree-stump 'form' for cutting and piercing scales, punches and a saw.

Left: A warrior wearing a haramaki-dô *(a rear-opening cuirass) could protect himself with a* sei-ita *(backplate). These were also called coward's plates, as only a coward would show his back to the enemy. (Courtesy Yoroi no Kôzan-dô)*

Below: This Japanese version of a Spanish cabasset helmet owes little to the model it is based on and much to Japanese styling – note the 'eyebrows' over the visor. (Courtesy Yoroi no Kôzan-dô)

Plate I: Samurai relaxing

The Chinese game of *gô* and the game of *shogi* were the standard strategy games of the Japanese, holding the same position in Japan that chess did in medieval Europe. In addition to being tools for learning strategy these games were also pleasurable pastimes for many. Some even took to betting on the outcome of a game in much the same way as modern backgammon players. For this reason, some clans forbade the playing of these games; others allowed them but outlawed the placing of bets. In practice these regulations were largely ignored.

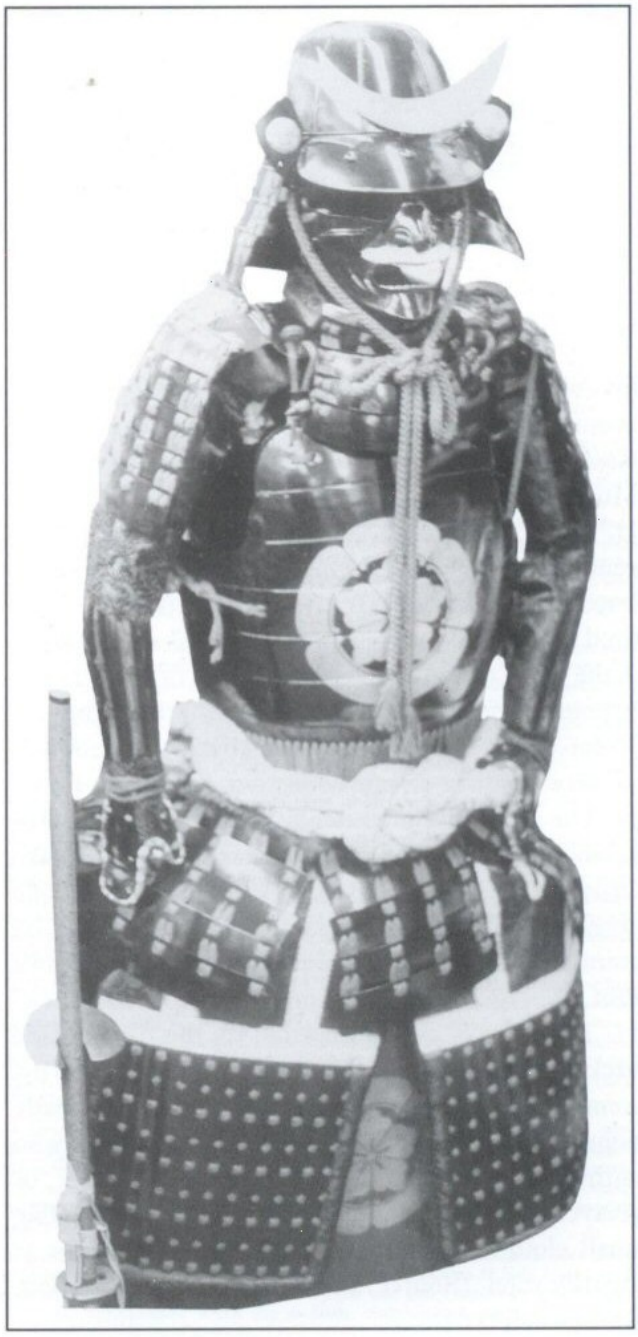
I1: The outfit worn by the off-duty guard here is called a *kamishimo*, and was typical everyday garb for the *samurai*. It consisted of a *hakama* (a pleated divided skirt) and a *kataginu*, (sideless vest), worn over a common *kimono*. It could be a formal garment, as here, in which case, the *hakama* and *kataginu* were of matching fabrics and patterns. When formal, the pattern and colour was more subdued than the normal daywear version. A comparison can be found with modern suits and sports jackets: like the daywear *kamishimo*, the top and bottom need not be the same colour; but in business suits, like the formal *kamishimo*, not only do they match, their colour and pattern tends to be more subdued. He wears a stiff, lacquered cloth cap called an *eboshi*, which is one of the badges of the *samurai*. The bottom of the *hakama* are caught up in gaiters called *kyahan*. On his feet he wears *tabi*, split-toed socks.

I2. This man wears a *kamishimo* of the more relaxed, day-to-day variety. The use of heraldic designs, bright colours, and contrasting hues and patterns was common. Beside him is a tobacco user's *hibachi*, its drawers holding smoking implements.

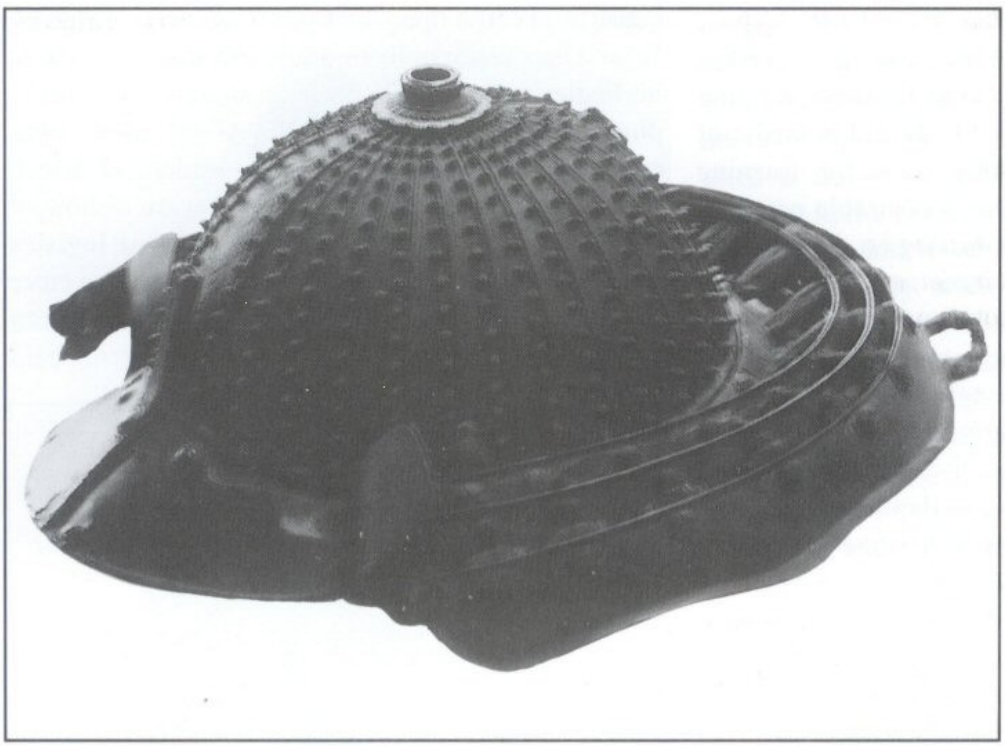
I3. The short *han-bakama* worn here were common for the lower classes. This man is a *samurai*, but he is lower-ranked than the other two, and is serving them.

Plate J: Sakai Tadatsugu at Mikata-ga-Hara, 1572

The Battle of Mikata-ga-Hara was going poorly for Tokugawa Ieyasu, who was forced to retreat to his fortress at Hamamatsu. Takeda Shingen's army was close on his heels. Rather than attempt to secure the gates, he ordered them left open to allow stragglers in. Ieyasu had bonfires lit to guide the way, and one of his lieutenants, Sakai Tadatsugu, went to the tower to pound the great signal drum. All of these signs confused the Takeda army, the leaders of which assumed wrongly the meaning of Ieyasu's show of bravado. Convinced it was a trap, and that Ieyasu's numbers were greater, the enemy never tried to enter the stronghold. Had they done so, it would have been certain defeat for Ieyasu. Once again, blustering paid



A simple* okegawa dô *with splint arms. Armour of this kind would have been worn by a retainer of the Oda clan.



A 32-plate rivetted helmet by Myôchin Muneyoshi. Note the rounded silhouette. (Private collection, Soma)

off. As Tadatsugu beats away, the Takeda forces mill about outside in confusion. This plate is based on a famous scroll painting now in the Hamamatsu City Museum.

J1. Sakai Tadatsugu, one of Ieyasu's four great generals, commanded the eastern wing of the Mikawa forces at Mikata-ga-Hara. Here Tadatsugu has retired to the castle at Hamamatsu and taken a position in the drum tower, replacing the usual drummer, and is pounding on the great drum with all his might. Tadatsugu wears a simple but striking *nuinobe dô*. (Source: suit in a private collection, Kanagawa Pref.)

J2. The usual drummer is a low-ranking *samurai*. He is bewildered that an army commander should take charge of the signalling drum. He wears only a simple *okegawa dô* over his loincloth. (Source: based on cuirass from a suit in a private collection, Kanagawa Pref.)

J3. Tadatsugu's aide, exhausted by the furious ride back to the castle, lacks the energy to keep up with his commander. He wears a so-called *Sendai dô*, made popular by Date Masamune, lord of Sendai, who outfitted his entire army with them. His *suneate*, or greaves, are ridged, and so are very unusual. The small cloth badge hanging from his *sode* serves as identification. (Source: a suit in a private collection, Kanagawa Pref.)

Plate K: The Siege of Nagashino Castle, 1575

The Nagashino campaign began with Takeda Katsuyori's siege of the Oda garrison at Nagashino Castle. During the siege Torii Suneemon managed to slip through Takeda lines and notify Nobunaga that help was needed. If Torii had failed, Katsuyori may have been in a position to win the battle.

In this plate the brave Torii's body still hangs on the cross, as another attempt is made to take the castle. Lancers are trying to ford the moat and climb the castle walls and the arquebusiers are ready for action, following a much needed rest during a lull in the battle. The unit commander wears a simple *hotoke dô*. All the *sashimono* bear the crest of Baba Nobuharu, one of the Takeda generals.

FURTHER READING

Not surprisingly most of the books on this subject are in Japanese. Only a few of the better ones will be listed here. In English, the works of Stephen R. Turnbull are an invaluable source.

Bryant, Anthony J., *The Samurai*, Osprey (London, 1988).