History

Strongholds of the Samurai: Japanese Castles, 250-1877
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The samurai—the ancient warriors of Japan—were renowned for their battlefield skills of horsemanship archery and sword fighting. Yet they often waged war from or against fortified positions in anything from basic wooden stockades to the wondrously elaborate castles which are now tourist attractions.

The long history of Japan and its centuries of bitter warfare provide the backdrop for this elaborate and exhaustively researched book. From the very first fortifications of CE 250 to the birth of modern Japan in the late nineteenth century strongholds were a critically important part of Japanese life. They provided protection for the *daimyo* ("great names" or feudal lords) and their samurai armies along with communities of farmers small landowners and peasants. The author describes in vivid detail the many different types of fortresses used over the centuries and in the varied regions of Japan and along the way the reader appreciates a good deal of the country's rich military history.

The author is one of the world's pre-eminent military historians and he is particularly well qualified to pen this highly technical book. He has traveled throughout the Far East and has vast experience with Japanese culture. His expertise and crisp writing style has rewarded him with the Canon Prize of the British Association for Japanese Studies and a Japan Festival Literary Award. He is able to skillfully describe ancient happenings to create empathy for those long dead as when he depicts a horrific scene in 1572 when attackers set fire to castle buildings and women and children flung themselves to their deaths from the mountain crags rather than be taken alive: "The castle burned to ashes so that even now when the site is dug baked rice may be found."

The many photographs and illustrations help make sense of the detailed descriptions. The cover itself is eye-popping evoking visions of armies engaged in an epic battle at a sprawling mountain fortress. Also of great assistance is the glossary of Japanese terms and the

author’s adeptness at smoothly entwining English definitions to the necessary Japanese words he uses in his writing. This book will appeal most to the reader who has a solid background in Japanese though it can be enjoyed at a more peripheral level by those with a casual interest in pre-modern Japan.