

## REVIEWS:

IAIDO: A HANDBOOK (1997), By Malcolm E. Cox.

Review by Antony Karasulas, AOYAMA KORYU BUJUTSUKAN

Australia Malcolm Cox is a PhD in geology and teaches at the Queensland University of Technology. With this academic background in mind it comes as no surprise that his work on Iaido is very well researched. Though he admits to not being a highly-ranked exponent (un-ranked actually) and not a teacher of the art these facts have not made his work any less informative and entertaining. The first thing one notices is the sheer volume of material included, and just how wide ranging his parameters. I happen to know that this work has taken many years to finalize, time clearly well spent in research and discussion. Materials covered are the usual chapters on 'Historical Perspective', placing the art in the feudal Japanese context of it's origins, 'What is Iai?', discussing the concept of Iai and talking about 'do' and 'jutsu'. Also there is a section on several famous swordsmen of the past, such as Tsukahara Bokuden, the Yagyu Kenshi and so on. The lineage of Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu is outlined in the next chapter, showing the various branches and their interrelationship. Many sections follow, covering 'Different Ryu', 'Contemporary Situation', post-Edo swordsmanship, Tameshigiri and Kaishaku. The next group of chapters deal with the sword types and the sword in Iai training. Section Three discusses Zen Ken Ren, Iaido basics, Tameshigiri in Iaido, Competitions, Training Outfits, Etiquette, Kamae and the main cuts, to name a few. the final section gives details of the Zen Ken Ren kata in use and covers, less deeply, Eishin Ryu. The book is finished off with a set of appendices 12 items long, including Japanese counting and language, sageo knotting, Kendo Iaijutsu kata, Muso Iaido lineages, Shinkage Ryu lineages and more.

The book is, as you can see, full of relevant material. It is very thoroughly illustrated throughout with photos, drawings, calligraphy, copies of wood block prints and detailed technique diagrams. The picture quality is not always great, being a simple publication and not expensive and glossy, however this does not detract from the book as a whole at all. I found little in the information that was either clearly inaccurate or deliberately insular in view. Clearly Malcolm Cox has taken a wide view, excluded no reasonable material and has taken responsibility for not always being entirely sure of some of the facts (welcome to the club Malcolm). Finally, I am very happy to recommend this book for any Iaidoka's book shelf (yes, and you Iaijutsuka, Kendoka, Battodoka, Battojutsuka.....). It is honestly written, a treasure trove of details and very easy and pleasurable reading. Any minor discrepancies, the sometimes average quality art work and the slightly jumbled feel to the overall layout and chapter organization are points that make it all the more endearing and worthwhile. This is the considerable effort of a true aficionado and a trained scholar, and I think Malcolm Cox has achieved his aim of producing a worthwhile addition to the few good quality books currently available.

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IAIDO: A HANDBOOK, By Malcolm E. Cox.

Reviewed by Kim Taylor

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This is truly a handbook, in the pure sense of that word. There is a great variety of information presented, not only on iai, but on the sword, it's furniture, the history of Japan, and even a few illustrations of old Japanese money just for fun. It is rather hard to decide how to approach a review of the book since it covers such a wide range of topics. Here is an outline of the book just to give you a feel for the diversity.

SECTION ONE: THE BACKGROUND Historical perspective What is iai? Some swordsmen of note. Details of masters of muso jikiden eishin ryu. Different ryu. Contemporary situation. Other aspects of sword use and tradition.

SECTION TWO: THE SWORD Main sword types. The sword and iai. SECTION THREE: THE METHOD Seitei gata form of iai (zen ken ren). Basic components of iaido. Training outfit. Basics of iaido training and etiquette. General points.

SECTION FOUR: THE TECHNIQUES Zen ken ren kata (seitei gata). Eishin ryu kata (jikiden eishin ryu). As well as a set of references and several well organized appendices. There are over 100 figures, pictures and photos, in addition to the kata figures. As can be expected from a book that tackles this many subjects in 160 pages, there is a general lack of depth. For instance, the section on Japanese history is very brief and should be supplemented with other readings. This is no great problem since a handbook is meant to give a framework for further study. In "What is iai?" the author gives several definitions which I would urge readers to consider carefully. In his notes on other sword schools, Cox does not differentiate between iai and ken schools which could confuse some but may be more accurate historically. I found the several comments by Nakakura Kiyoshi sensei to be very interesting indeed, while beginners might better appreciate the information on how to wear and fold the training outfit. The technical part deals with Zen Ken Ren Iai. Dr. Cox is a sword collector as well as a student of iai, and his many comments on that field, mostly from a collector's viewpoint, will be of great use to the average iai student. Overall a worthwhile purchase for the beginner.

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