

Swords are the earliest weapons known to man kind, since the discovery of metals, swords have been made in a wide variety of metals like steel, iron and in rare cases from gold. In the days when swords and knives were used, a warrior's sword was like his signature; A warrior's identity was directly linked to the sword he wielded. Perhaps the greatest sword of all is the Excalibur, the mythical sword used by King Arthur in his many adventures. Such was the importance attached to a sword, a warrior's skill with a sword was what defined him as a soldier.

Today the days of the sword are gone, the sword is now used either for ceremonial purposes, or in sports (the Épée being an example of a modern day sword used in fencing). Thousands of people the world over are avid collectors of swords of various countries and regions. Like the development of distinctive arts, cultures and languages. The swords of the world too have developed, and are unique to each individual region, or dynasty. Basic knowledge of the various types of swords available today can help you chose the sword to start your collection or which one to add to your existing collection. Based on the country or region of origin, swords are divided into different categories, some of which are mentioned below:

Oriental Swords or Chinese Swords

Perhaps the most popular Chinese sword is the Dao, the Dao is a broad sword, that was originally meant for slashing and chopping attack, the Dao is special because it was worn by the Royal guard to Chinese rulers for thousands of years, in addition to its rich heritage the Dao is also well know for the lanyard that runs through the handle, adding to the elegance of the sword. The Dao is single edged in nature and is hence more adept for slashing action.

After the Dao the other sword that is synonymous with Chinese culture is the Jian, the Jian like the Dao had a lanyard through the hilt, however the Jian differs from the Dao in being double edged, hence it was not only ideal for slashing movement, but its slender tip meant that it could easily pierce body organs through the ribs of attackers, the Jian like the Dao is a offensive and defensive sword. The Jian is usually worn by elite members of a martial arts clan, or depicted as the weapon of choice for Chinese heroes.

Apart from the two most popular swords the Dao and Jian, there are also some very interesting swords like the butterfly sword, which is actually a set of two daggers that could be concealed under clothes, and were used mostly for defensive purposes. The butterfly sword is single edged, and the name butterfly sword has originated from the fact that both of them were stored in the same scabbard and the hilts appeared similar to look like the wings of a butterfly taking flight or spread out.

Indian Swords

The Indian subcontinent has a history as old as the Egyptians, and some historians believe that the birth place of civilization is the Indus valley. The most notable of swords from this region is the Talwar, which is a type of Scimitar (although purists believe that scimitar is a Middle Eastern sword). The Talwar is typically single edged, and has a long bow like curvature, making it ideal for slashing attacks, as a decorative item the Talwar has beautiful hilts, the hilts are usually decorated with jewels for kings and higher members of the army.

Apart from the Talwar, there are few distinctive daggers that have become synonymous with the Indian subcontinent, the first is the popular Katar, the Katar usually has a dull blade, however it has a sharp pointed edge, and the hilt allows one to hold on to the Katar with the knuckles pointing to the attacker, just like a punch. The Katar is designed for piercing attack, and the broad blade was usually decorated with royal crests. Another sword and dagger set is the Khanda and the Kirpan.

The Khanda is a broad sword used much before the Talwar, and is a part of the religious symbol of Sikhs; the Kirpan on the other hand is a dagger, with a curved end, worn even today by Sikhs as a part of their religious requirements. In fact the religious symbol is a combination of the Khanda and the Kirpan.

Japan

The strongest, and the most effective sword ever developed in the history of mankind, the Katana, is from Japan, the Katana is a weapon that is unique in its design, and use. Developed for both slashing and piercing purpose, the Katana is sword that is unmatched in its prowess. Any serious collector, has to have a Katana in his collection, the Katana was traditionally worn only by the warrior class or the Samurai. The hilt was unique in that it did not have any protection by the means of a cross guard, the hilt was traditionally made of bamboo.

A Katana was never adorned alone, it usually had a smaller sword called a Wakizashi, or by a third and even smaller dagger like Shoto. A set is only complete with all three swords or at least a Katana and Wakizashi or a Katana and Shoto in tandem.

The Katana was a weapon that symbolized stature and rank among Japanese for thousands of years, in fact even during the second world war, only officers and high ranking officials of the Japanese army fought with a Katana by their side, and contrary to popular belief the Katana was not only for ornamental purposes, and instead of the Bayonet, the officers preferred to use the Katana.

The Katana also has a place in Japanese history as a sword that is used in many ceremonies and a Katana sword, made by master craftsmen is worth thousands of dollars even today. The method used for creating the alloy for the blade of the Katana is also unique and was a secret, kept for thousands of years.

European Swords

An interesting observation that can be made, is that compared to oriental and Asian swords, European swords were bigger in size and also heavier. European swords have been used as decorative items for a very long time, and swords like the Claymore in particular are favourites with collectors. The claymore is referred to as a great sword, or a giant sword. The region of origin of the claymore is still unknown; however some claim that it is Celtic in origin. The claymore is unique in having a cross guard that is pointing in the direction of the blade, instead of being perpendicular to it, also like most European swords it has a distinctive pommel.

In addition to the Claymore another popular European sword, is the Falchion. The Falchion is a medieval sword that has a broad blade, and a curve on one side, while the other side is flat, unlike the Claymore the Falchion is a one handed weapon and is designed for slashing attacks.

Swords from the Middle East

One of the most well known swords in history is the scimitar, associated with Saracens during the crusades, the scimitar is a one handed, long curved sword that has the pommel and the cross guard joined by a metal strip, for protecting the soldier's hand, and also making for a very beautiful decorative item. The scimitar is primarily designed for slashing action, and is one handed sword.

Apart from the Scimitar another sword that deserves mention for its unique design is the Kilij. The Kilij is unique that it has curvature only at the end of the blade. The blade is single edged, the sword has a curvature towards the end of the sword and almost one third of the blade is curved.

Today the Kilij is worn by members of the Marine Corps, and British officers and is also popularly known as a Mameluke.

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