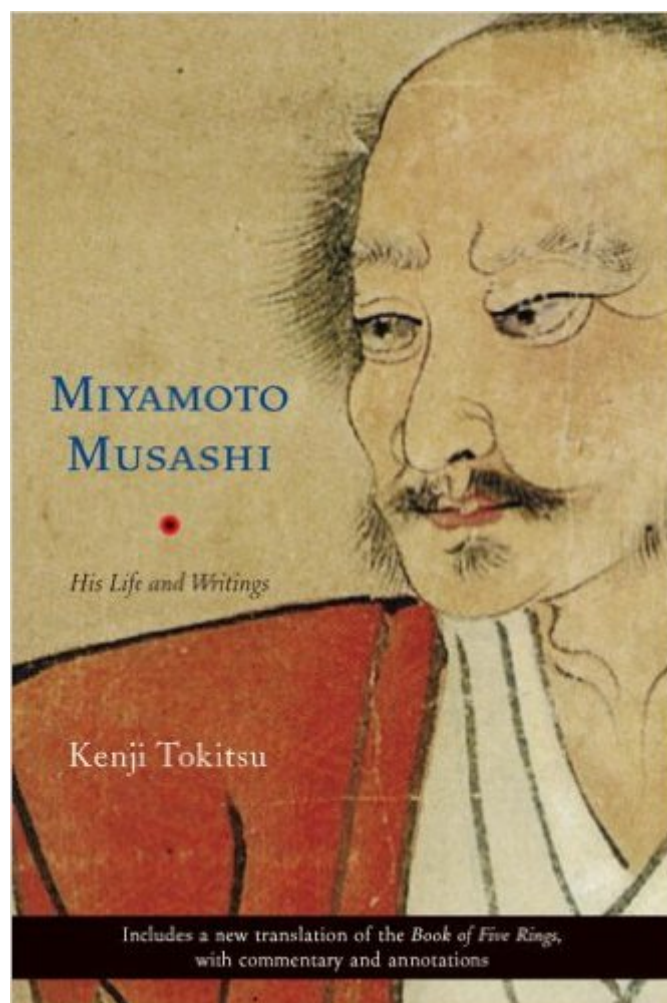


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Miyamoto Musashi: His Life And Writings



Synopsis

Miyamoto Musashi, who lived in Japan in the fifteenth century, was a renowned samurai warrior. He has become a martial arts icon, known not just as an undefeated dueler, but also as a master of battlefield strategy. Kenji Tokitsu turns a critical eye on Musashi's life and writings, separating fact from fiction, and giving a clear picture of the man behind the myth. Musashi's best-known work, *The Book of Five Rings*, provides timeless insight into the nature of conflict. Tokitsu translates and provides extensive commentary on that popular work, as well as three other short texts on strategy that were written before it, and a longer, later work entitled "The Way to Be Followed Alone." Tokitsu is a thoughtful and informed guide, putting the historical and philosophical aspects of the text into context, and illuminating the etymological nuances of particular Japanese words and phrases. As a modern martial artist and a scholar, Tokitsu provides a view of Musashi's life and ideas that is accessible and relevant to today's readers and martial arts students.

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Customer Reviews

This is the most exhaustive and detailed study I've seen on Musashi yet. At 488 pages, with almost 150 pages of appendices, notes, a glossary, and an extensive bibliography, there is a wealth of material here on the legendary swordsman. Although a translation from the Japanese and intended to be a thorough, well-researched, scholarly work on Musashi, I thought it was pretty readable, well-written, interesting, and not nearly as dry and forbidding as it could have been for an academic study. If you have some previous knowledge of Japanese history or martial arts you shouldn't have

any trouble with it. But be forewarned that it does require a little more patience than the more popular accounts of his life and times. There are chapters on Musashi's childhood and training, his duels and battles, his mature years, three chapters on his writings, and seven chapters covering Musashi's martial arts concepts and style of swordfighting, which includes chapters on training, budo, Musashi's school of swordsmanship today, and finally two chapters entitled "The Relationship Between Adversaries," and "One Life, One Art." There are many aspects of Musashi's life and ideas that get discussed in the book, but I thought I'd write a bit about what I learned about his personal philosophy. Many of you are probably knowledgeable about the specifics of his fencing concepts from having read his Book of Five Rings, so I thought I'd mention something about that instead, since it was something I didn't know as much about myself until I read this book, being more familiar with his ideas about the True Way of the Sword from having read his The Book of Five Rings previously.

"Miyamoto Musashi: His Life and Writings" is an extensive book, to put it mildly. Written by Kenji Tokitsu, a noted martial artist, it takes a view of Musashi as only a martial artist can. In this sense, it adds something more that books by historians and scholars can sometimes miss. The book itself covers various aspects of Musashi, including a section on his life, a translation of "Gorin No Sho", Musashi's major written work, and other writings that have come down to us from Musashi's pen. This might sound strange, but reading Eiji Yoshikawa's novel Musashi: An Epic Novel of the Samurai Era would be a good starting point before hitting this book. The novel is really an image of Musashi in popular imagination in Japan, and Tokitsu makes some reference to it in the biographical section. In other aspects of Musashi, Tokitsu takes a very balanced view of the sources, (many of which conflict in major ways), and comes away with a very real Musashi with faults and issues. This stands in contrast to the almost frothing praise that other books have heaped on Musashi. Tokitsu quotes at length from a variety of primary sources, and also presents differing opinions to his own. The translations of Musashi's writings are well executed, and easily read. There are some terms that are quite difficult to get the correct meaning in English, and Tokitsu has included very large appendices on that and other issues that come up. These appendices go a long way to clearing up some of the issues that the book raises.

An amazing work on many levels: Tokitsu is a true scholar and provides a comprehensive summary of the works of Musashi, his disciples, the lineages that sprang from him, and all of those who have told his story and tried to emulate his martial path over the last five hundred years; he provides new

translations of Musashi's "Book of Five Rings" as well as less well known works; he provides images and commentary on some of the vibrant and amazing artwork of Musashi; he situates Musashi contextually within the vast rich history of the samurai and ties them to the transformations of the Tokugawa era, the Meiji Restoration, and the upheavals of the twentieth century. And most interestingly, Tokitsu writes as an established martial artist who has competed and exerted himself in training in Karate and Kendo, and looks at Musashi's writings from a practical standpoint--how would what Musashi wrote of five hundred years ago work in the real world? When Musashi was facing his opponents in his 60 death matches before he was 30? In comparison to contemporary martial arts training and competition? I would advise any martial artist or anyone who loves Japanese history to read this work. And do NOT skip the footnotes. There are many treasures there. Here is section so powerful I had to write it down today: Musashi uses the expression cho tan seki ren several times in his work, which literally means "morning" (cho), "to build" (tan), "evening" (seki), "to train" (ren). This expression is often translated "I trained morning and night," but I have translated it "I have continued to train and to seek from morning till evening."

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