

Samurai: A life of art and war



Horses, saddles and stirrups

Horses were of prime importance for the samurai in military engagement, travel and ceremonial parades. As we can see from this seventeenth century folding screen depicting energetic horses in spacious and spotlessly clean stables, such majestic animals of high spirits and a well formed physique must have been symbols of great prestige and sought after among members of the warrior classes.

Japanese saddles and stirrups took on a distinctive style that is very different from those used in Europe. Coated in ornate lacquer designs of auspicious, authoritative or literary association they were a further extension of the samurai's noble image and personality. On this particular saddle and stirrups we see plum blossoms over a cascading waterfall representing spring and rebirth with large red-crowned cranes, the symbol of longevity.

JAPANESE

Horse stable (Umayazu byōbu
厩図屏風) (early 17th century)
six panel screen: ink, pigment
and gold paint on paper, lacquer
on wood, silk, paper, metal
150.2 x 238.0 cm (image and sheet)
164.7 x 61.9 x 9.6 cm (closed)
164.7 x 370.2 x 1.6 cm (open)
Purchased, Allan and Maria Myers
Fund for the Acquisition of Asian Art,
2008 (2008.4)

JAPANESE

Saddle and stirrups
(Kura to abumi 鞍と鐙) 1665 Japan
metallic paint, gilt, pigments,
lacquer on wood,
28.2 x 41.0 x 39.0 cm (saddle)
25.6 x 12.5 x 29.0 cm (each stirrup)
Acquired, 1899 (460-D2)