

Warrior

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# Japanese Warrior Monks AD 949–1603



Stephen Turnbull • Illustrated by Wayne Reynolds



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## Author's dedication

To our young friends Jon and Kate Sharratt, on the happy occasion of their wedding on April 5th 2003.

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## Author's acknowledgements

I would like to thank the present-day institutions of Todaiji, Kofukuji, Enryakuji, Miidera, Negoroji, Ganshoji and several other smaller temples for their kind co-operation during my research. I also thank my wife for her constant help and support in all my books. She accompanied me to most of the shrines and temples depicted here and appears on the picture of Kiyomizudera on p.18. Sadly, this book proved to be the last one she was able to help me with before she died in November 2002, so it will serve as a memorial to her and to our work together.

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## Artist's note

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## Editor's note

All pictures are from the author's collection.

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# JAPANESE WARRIOR MONKS AD 949–1603

## INTRODUCTION

**B**uddhism is popularly regarded in the West as being a very peaceful religion, but this was by no means the image presented by the famous warrior monks of medieval Japan. From the 10th century onwards the great monastic foundations of Nara and Mount Hiei maintained private armies that terrified the courtiers and citizens of the capital with their religious and military power. Armed with long *naginata* (glaives) in addition to bows and swords, they became involved in numerous conflicts from the 10th to the 14th centuries, cursing emperors and fighting samurai with equal enthusiasm.

The Sengoku Period (the Age of Warring States) of the 15th and 16th centuries was to see several developments in Japanese monk warfare. The most important trend was the reduction in influence of the old monk armies of Nara and Mount Hiei, and their replacement by new populist sects of Buddhism such as Nichiren-shu and Shinshu. The latter became so powerful that their armies even overthrew samurai *daimyo* (warlords) and set up independent 'principalities' of their own. Their 'fortified cathedrals' at Nagashima and Ishiyama Honganji rivalled any samurai castle, and Ishiyama Honganji withstood the longest siege in Japanese history. They were also at the forefront of technological development, and the monks of Negoroji were renowned for their skills with firearms.

## THE FIRST WARRIOR MONKS, AD 949–1185

### Who were the warrior monks?

Before describing the origins and development of the Japanese warrior monks it is necessary to examine the nomenclature. The word that is usually translated as 'warrior monk' is *sohei*, which consists of a two-character compound. The first character *so* means a Buddhist priest or monk, and the second, *hei*, means soldier or warrior. 'Warrior monks' can therefore be correctly read as 'priest soldiers'. Another expression that is frequently encountered in the diaries of frightened courtiers is *akuso* or 'evil monks', which speaks for itself. It is important, however, at this stage to rule out the use of the word *yamabushi* for a warrior monk; this term refers specifically to the adherents of the sect of Shugendō, whose preferred spiritual exercise was the mountain pilgrimage and who were never

The Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall) of Todaiji in Nara, the world's largest wooden building under one roof. The present construction dates from 1709, and is only 40 per cent of the size of the original.



organised as armies. The character *yama* means mountain, and as many of the monastic encounters in Kyoto originated from 'the mountain', i.e. the monastery complex on Mount Hiei to the north of the capital, the depredations of 'the monks of the mountain', lamented in many a court diary, refers to the sohei of Mount Hiei, not the yamabushi.

As for the translation of *so* as either 'priest' or 'monk', we may note that in the Christian faith a distinction is made between a priest who has been ordained into holy orders and a monk who belongs to a particular religious community but who may not necessarily have been ordained. The Teutonic Knights of medieval Prussia, for example, were German 'warrior monks' who lived together in fortified monasteries, but very few of them (the 'priest brothers') were ordained. All their 'lay brothers', however, were subject to the same monastic rule of poverty, chastity and obedience.

The situation in Japan was very similar. The focus of warrior monk organisation and activity was never some small, isolated Buddhist temple with one or two resident priests, but always a particular monastery (in almost every case a large foundation) to which thousands of monks were attached. The term 'monk' is therefore the best term to use. In another analogy with the Teutonic Order, there were hundreds of 'lay brothers' who were attracted to the monastic armies. The later and more populist sects of the Sengoku Period were almost entirely lay organisations under religious control. Nevertheless, the term 'warrior monk' will be used throughout this book as a convenient term to describe the fighting forces attached to Japanese Buddhist institutions between the 10th and 16th centuries.

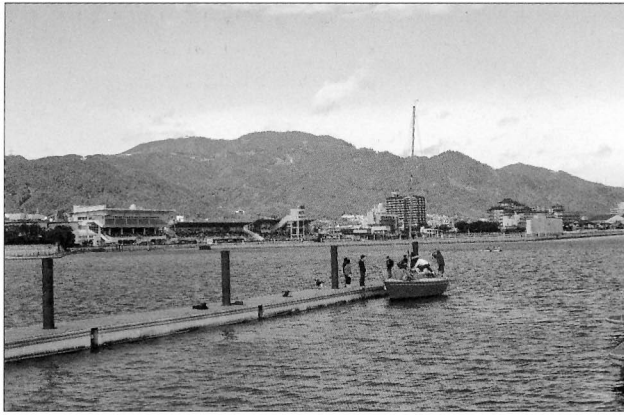
### **Enryakuji: The protector of the state**

The phenomenon of the Japanese warrior monk has its origins in the introduction of Buddhism to Japan. Buddhism came from China, and when it reached Japan it complemented, rather than threatened, Japan's native religious beliefs now known as Shinto (the way of the gods). Shinto involved the worship of thousands of *kami* (deities), who were regarded by Buddhists as being manifestations of Buddha himself, so the two creeds co-existed very happily. The imperial family, who were regarded as *kami* themselves, were closely involved with the spread of Buddhism from very early on, and when Nara became Japan's first capital in 710 the great Buddhist temples of Nara such as Todaiji and Kofukuji grew to exert considerable political influence. At this stage in history, however, such influence was never exercised through military means.

An important development occurred in 794 when the imperial capital was moved to Kyoto, a position it was to occupy until being supplanted by modern Tokyo in 1868. Before the new site was selected careful investigations had been undertaken to ensure that the location was suitable according to the principles of feng shui. Feng shui included the belief that evil could attack a city from a north-easterly direction,

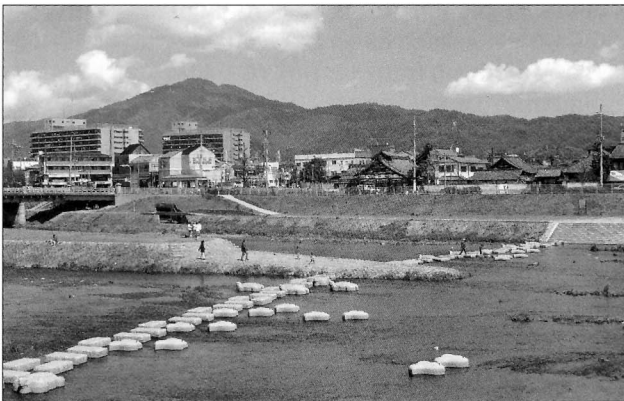


**This model inside Todaiji shows how much bigger the original building of the Daibutsuden was before being burned down by samurai of the Taira when they attacked the warrior monks in 1180.**



**A distant view of Mount Hiei from the south-east, looking from the shore of Lake Biwa at Otsu. The temples lie among the peaks along the ridge.**

**The role of Mount Hiei as the spiritual protector of the capital is illustrated in this view of Mount Hiei from the other side. We are looking up from the Kamo River that flows through the middle of Kyoto.**



where lay the 'demon gate'. Now to the north-east of Kyoto was a mountain called Mount Hiei, where there had long been a shrine to a Shinto kami known as Sanno, 'the king of the mountain'. This was most encouraging, but on top of Mount Hiei there was also a new Buddhist temple called Enryakuji, which had been founded only six years earlier. Its founder was the monk Saicho, known to posterity by the posthumous name of Dengyo Daishi.

Saicho had been born in 767 and had left the unsettling politics of Nara behind him to find spiritual peace on a mountain, so when

the capital was transferred to Kyoto a Buddhist temple was already waiting to protect the city from its most dangerous quarter. Enryakuji soon became involved in the performance of numerous sacred rituals connected with the imperial court, and it was not long before it achieved recognition as *chingo kokka no dojo* (the temple for the pacification and protection of the state).

Enryakuji therefore became one of Japan's most privileged foundations, and Saicho and his disciples received aristocratic support to establish their own Tendai sect of Buddhism. The new sect was intended to operate outside the influence of the Office of Monastic Affairs, which was dominated at the time by Nara. Enryakuji also catered for the personal needs of the Kyoto nobility, who showered wealth upon it. The administration of these assets and the organisation of Enryakuji itself were entirely the private domain of its leaders, and by the 11th century the monastery complex on Mount Hiei consisted of about 3,000 buildings. Enryakuji owned much property elsewhere in Japan, making it a very wealthy place indeed.

Although the imperial government had no direct control over Enryakuji, there were two ways in which the monastery might be influenced. First, the emperor retained the right to appoint the *zasu* (head abbot), although this was not a privilege that he could exercise in an arbitrary fashion. As we shall see, most of the inter-temple battles and armed demonstrations by warrior monks in the streets of Kyoto concerned appointments of which they did not approve. Secondly, abbots born to the most prominent courtly families usually headed the branches of Enryakuji, known as the *monzeki* (noble cloisters).

### **The first temple feuds**

There was no reason why political disagreements over the affairs of an important religious institution should necessarily lead to armed conflict, but by the middle of the 10th century bitter disputes over imperial control of senior appointments led to brawling between rival monks and eventually to the use of weapons. These inter-temple or inter-faction disputes were not 'religious wars' as we know them in

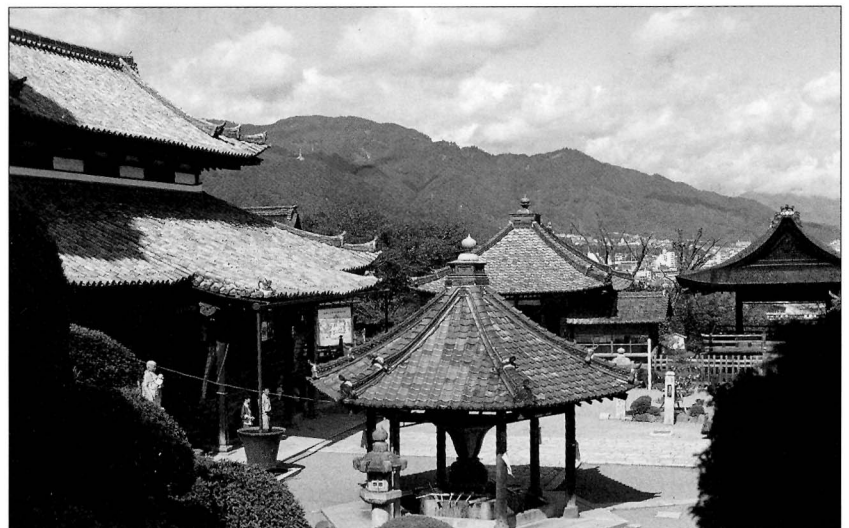


the West. They did not involve points of doctrine or dogma, just politics, and the campaigns and battles of the warrior monks that occurred from the 10th to the 14th centuries were almost exclusively concerned with rivalries between and within the temples of Nara and Mount Hiei. The monastic involvement in the 12th-century civil wars was a very different situation, because at that time samurai leaders, eager to recruit as many fighting men as possible to their banners, enlisted the support of the sohei armies that had learned their trade by fighting each other.

The first major incident involving violence by monks against monks occurred in 949, when 56 monks from Nara's Todaiji gathered at the residence of an official in Kyoto to protest against an appointment that had displeased them. At this stage the small band can hardly be called an army of warrior monks, but a brawl ensued during which some of the participants were killed. In 968 several demonstrations were targeted against members of the Fujiwara family, but here the weapon was intimidation tinged with religious fear rather than actual violence. The protagonists in this case were the monks of Kofukuji in Nara, the temple that controlled the nearby Kasuga shrine, the clan shrine of the Fujiwara family.

However, in 969 a dispute over conflicting claims to temple lands resulted in the death of several Kofukuji monks at the hands of monks from Todaiji. It is almost certain that weapons were used in the fight, so the days of the warrior monk may be said to have arrived. It was also around this time, probably during 970, that we read of Enryakuji being involved in a dispute with the Gion shrine in Kyoto and using force to settle the matter. Subsequently Ryogen, the chief abbot of Enryakuji, made the decision to maintain a permanent fighting force at Mount Hiei. This was the first of the warrior monk armies.

Strange to relate, this dramatic decision was contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the pronouncements Ryogen had previously made regarding monastic discipline, because in 970 he had issued a code of 26 articles that were intended to curb widespread abuses by the clergy of Mount Hiei. This included rules that monks should not leave Mount Hiei during their 12-year period of training and that they should



**The temple of Onjoji or Miidera, looking up towards its great rival on Mount Hiei. It was founded in 774 as a branch of Enryakuji, and many were the disputes between the two foundations. Today only 60 of the former 859 buildings of this temple remain.**

not cover their faces. But it also forbade monks from carrying weapons, inflicting corporal punishment or violently disrupting religious services. This is a curious contradiction, which may indicate that Ryogen's army was an entirely separate entity from the actual monks. The newcomers may simply have been mercenaries, and not monks at all – the sources are by no means clear on this point. We may therefore possibly regard Ryogen's initial recruitment of warriors as a 10th-century version of an institution hiring a specialist firm of security guards.

### **Enryakuji and Miidera**

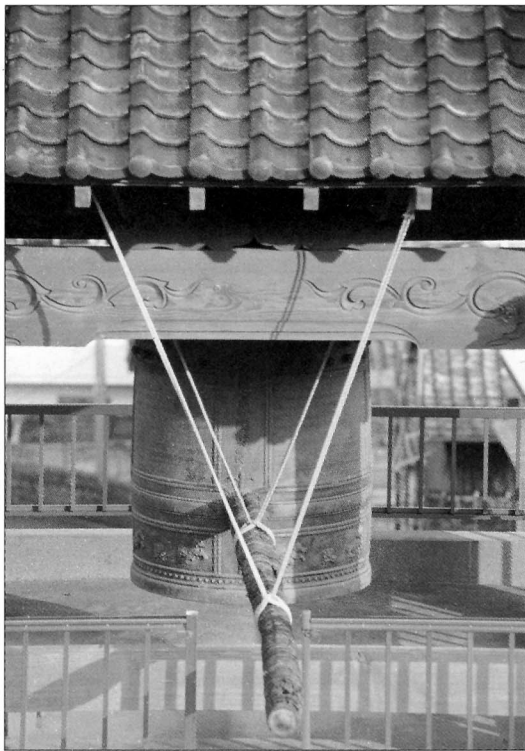
If the first warrior monks were little more than paid security men, the situation did not stay like that for long. Ryogen's yearning for security soon developed an aggressive edge, and some of the earliest armed disputes occurred on and around Mount Hiei itself, and were fought between armed men who were certainly monks themselves.

One of the earliest and most serious political divisions lay within the Tendai sect itself. The rivalry had its origins in a succession dispute between Saicho's disciples, and by 868 the Tendai sect had become split into two rival groups named after prominent abbots. The first was associated with Enryakuji and was known as the Sammonha (temple gate branch) or Ennin faction. The other was associated with its daughter temple, Onjoji, popularly known as Miidera (the temple of the three wells), which lies beneath Mount Hiei near the shore of Lake Biwa. This was the Jimonha (temple branch) or Enchin faction.

In 966 the influential Ryogen of the Ennin faction became abbot of Enryakuji. We noted above that he recruited Enryakuji's first monk army, but he also made a great contribution to Mount Hiei both through encouraging learning and by tightening up on monastic discipline. He was also responsible for a major rebuilding programme following a serious fire. But when Ryogen failed to invite a representative from the Enchin faction to attend the re-dedication of the newly rebuilt Kompon Chudo (main hall) the Enchin monks protested to the imperial court. The emperor ordered Ryogen to include Yokei, head of the Enchin faction, who was also abbot of Miidera, and Ryogen felt obliged to comply.

The first violent confrontation between Ennin and Enchin occurred in 981 when Yokei was named as the imperial choice for abbot of the temple of Hosshoji. The Ennin faction protested that all previous abbots of that temple had been chosen from their faction. When the court refused to reconsider the appointment, more than 200 monks belonging to the Ennin faction carried out a violent demonstration in Kyoto at the residence of Fujiwara Yoritada. On returning to the holy mountain the Ennin monks so intimidated their Enchin rivals that most of the latter fled from Mount Hiei and sought refuge elsewhere. A stalwart band of 300 Enchin monks, however, refused to budge and barricaded themselves inside the temple of Senjuin. Rumours grew that Ryogen was about to order an armed assault on

**The modern temple bell of Miidera. The historic one associated with Benkei is kept inside one of the halls.**



Senjuin, and calm was only restored when Yokei resigned from the position of abbot of Hosshoji.

Eight years later strife broke out again when Ryogen died and the astonishing news reached the Ennin faction that Yokei of Miidera was to be the new abbot of Enryakuji. The mountain exploded with anger, the Ennin faction threatening that they would blockade every path up Mount Hiei rather than accept Yokei, and this was in fact the scene that met the eyes of an imperial messenger when he arrived with the official proclamation. After he had been driven away, a second courtier arrived with the order but had the imperial document torn from his hands. A third attempt was made three weeks later when Fujiwara Arikuni arrived on Mount Hiei with armed support in the form of samurai. The court order and an indictment of the monks' behaviour were read aloud and summarily enforced, but when Yokei took up his appointment he found that none of the Enryakuji monks would perform any services under his direction. Faced with such opposition Yokei resigned after only three months.

In 993 the followers of Yokei took revenge on the Ennin faction by assembling a group of monks and marching on Mount Hiei, where they burned a temple in which Ennin himself had once lived. The Ennin faction retaliated by burning more than 40 places on the mountain that were historically associated with Enchin. This attack was so serious that more than 1,000 Enchin monks fled permanently to Miidera, and it is from this incident that we may date the permanent split between the Temple Branch and the Mountain Branch.

### **The rivalry continues**

Over 40 years passed before any further serious strife occurred between Enryakuji and Miidera and, just as in the case of Yokei in the previous century, the conflict of 1039 started when the incumbent abbot of Miidera was named zasu of Enryakuji. Three thousand enraged monks from Mount Hiei poured into Kyoto and descended on the residence of Fujiwara Yorimichi. When he refused to alter his decision his gates were kicked in, so the terrified official summoned samurai to restore order and a bloody fight began. The end result was a victory for violence and intimidation, because Yorimichi gave in and named the Mount Hiei candidate as abbot instead. This man died nine years later in 1047, and again Yorimichi tried to enforce a Miidera candidate, but pressure from Enryakuji ensured that the unfortunate man's term of office lasted only three days. In fact, during the 12th century there were seven attempts to promote abbots from Miidera to Enryakuji, and none succeeded because of intimidation.

Another matter that provoked serious confrontation between Enryakuji and Miidera was the question of Miidera's right to ordain its own monks. The 1039 incident, when the abbot of Miidera was denied



**The temple of Enryakuji on Mount Hiei, founded by the monk Saicho, a key player in the history of the warrior monks. We are looking down on to the Kompon Chudo (the fundamental central hall) which is the heart of Enryakuji. The original Kompon Chudo was built by Saicho himself to house an image of Yakushi Nyorai (the healing Buddha). The present reconstruction dates from 1642.**



**The mountain gate torii of the Hiyoshi shrine at the foot of Mount Hiei, which enshrines Sanno, the king of the mountain. The monastic protest marches to Kyoto invariably passed through this gateway. The particular style of torii with the gabled top is peculiar to this one shrine.**

the abbotship of Enryakuji, led to the initial request being made to the imperial court. There were clearly practical reasons for this, because novices from Miidera were understandably reluctant to surmount the hostility between the two institutions in order to be ordained. Enryakuji protested for reasons that were both religious and political, while the temples of Nara supported Miidera for their own selfish ends.

In 1074 the ordination question led to a violent attack on Miidera by an army from Mount Hiei, and the subsequent atmosphere was so tense that a minor altercation at a shrine festival culminated in another raid on Miidera in 1081. In 1121 and again in 1141 Miidera was attacked and its buildings set on fire, so Miidera's leaders henceforth arranged for their novices to be ordained at Todaiji in Nara. When Enryakuji protested at this break from tradition, it was pointed out by Kofukuji that Saicho, the founder of Enryakuji, had been ordained in Nara. This truthful comment so infuriated Mount Hiei that its warrior monks descended on Miidera and burned it to the ground for the fourth time in a century.

Yet in spite of their intense rivalries and frequent conflicts, there were occasions when Enryakuji and Miidera were willing to join forces to attack a third party. Thus we hear of them united against Nara's Kofukuji in 1081. During this incident, Kofukuji burned Miidera and carried off much loot, but later that same year the alliance seems to have been forgotten when Enryakuji burned Miidera following the shrine festival incident noted above. In 1113 Enryakuji burned the Kiyomizudera in Kyoto over a rival appointment of an abbot. Enryakuji and Miidera united against Nara again in 1117 in an incident described in *Heike Monogatari*, the great epic of the 12th-century wars, which quotes the sad words of the ex-emperor Go Shirakawa-In: 'There are three things that are beyond my control: the rapids on the Kamo river, the dice at gambling, and the monks of the mountain.'

### **The warrior monks in the Gempei War**

From about 1180 onwards the activities of the warrior monks became submerged in the Gempei civil war, which was fought between the rival samurai clans of Taira and Minamoto. Both sides courted the monastic armies to augment their own military forces, and there was considerable warrior monk involvement in one of the first major conflicts of the war, the battle of Uji.

The leader of the Taira clan was Kiyomori. His rivals from the Minamoto clan had acquired the services of a pretender to the throne, a certain Prince Mochihito, who raised a rebellion against the Taira in 1180. The reaction was swift, and Prince Mochihito fled from Kyoto to the temple of Miidera, pursued by Taira samurai. Miidera sent out



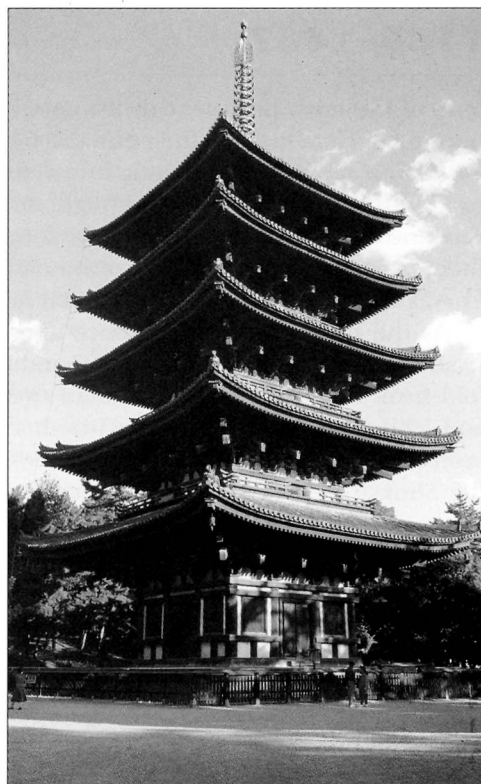
**LEFT** The five-storey pagoda of the temple of Kofukuji in Nara, looking across from the pool of Sarusawa. The pool of Sarusawa appears in several accounts of warrior monk battles in Nara.

**BELOW** The five-storey pagoda of Kofukuji in Nara. The original was built in 725, and this one dates from 1426. It is the second tallest pagoda in Japan.

appeals for help to Enryakuji and the temples of Nara, but Enryakuji responded in a haughty and negative tone to Miidera's comparison of the two temples as 'the two wings of a bird' – the old rivalries had certainly not been forgotten. The matter was not helped by the fact that Taira Kiyomori was now actively bribing Enryakuji with generous gifts of bales of rice and bolts of silk. The Kofukuji of Nara wrote back more positively that 'we will await your signal to advance. Consider our letter and do not doubt us,' but Nara was a long distance away, so Miidera was left alone to face the immediate threat from the Taira army.

The confusion in the rebel camp soon became apparent when a bold plan to make a night attack on the Taira headquarters was thwarted by a monk with Taira sympathies. He cleverly managed to arrange things so that the Miidera army arrived too late. But part of the delay was caused by the fact that when Prince Mochihito had entered Miidera they had built such a secure barricade round it that they now had to demolish part of the defences in order to leave at all. The disappointed army returned to Miidera, and held a council of war. With the abandonment of their plans for an attack, the hapless Minamoto/Miidera alliance decided that their best course of action was to head south and join up with the Nara monks. The following morning saw the battle of Uji (described below in the section about the monks' experience of battle). But in spite of the bravery shown by both monks and samurai the rebellion failed.

After the battle Taira Kiyomori decided that the warrior monks of Miidera should not be allowed to forget their unfortunate alliance. Tomomori, one of Kiyomori's sons, led an attack that was highly destructive, but much worse was in store for the temples of Nara. They



may not have had time to go to war in support of the rebellion, but neither had they opposed it. At first Kiyomori behaved with caution, and sent a force of 500 men with orders to use no violence unless absolutely necessary. The monks attacked the deputation. Sixty samurai were killed and had their heads displayed around the pool of Sarusawa opposite the southern gate of Kofukuji. Furious at this reaction, Kiyomori immediately sent his son Shigehira with orders to subdue the whole city of Nara. The subsequent burning of Nara sent a chill through Mount Hiei. Enryakuji was now the only warrior monk institution that had not been burned down, and when in 1183 the Minamoto leader Kiso Yoshinaka entered Enryakuji the monks sheltered him for a while, but they did not dare take an active part in his military campaigns.



**The Tokondo or Eastern Golden Hall of Kofukuji in Nara. The original structure was built in 726 and was burned during the Gempei War. The present building was erected in 1415.**

## **THE WARRIOR MONKS IN TRANSITION, 1185-1467**

One of the most persistent myths about the warrior monks is that the burning of Nara marked their end as a fighting force. It is true that there was almost no further monastic involvement in the major battles of the rest of the Gempei War, although an armed contingent from the Kumano shrine are believed to have fought at Dan no Ura in 1185, but their influence and militancy eventually recovered. The prestige of Enryakuji was too great to be subdued for long.

As the monasteries' confidence and strength returned, so did the rivalries, and we read of familiar sounding disagreements between the 'old firm' of Enryakuji and Miidera over appointments in 1239, 1264 and 1291. It is not exactly clear whether these running disputes led to armed conflict, but the monks of Nara carried out some fighting during the Shokyu War of 1221. The Minamoto, who were the victors in the Gempei War and had set up their clan as hereditary military dictators, had rebuilt their city. Based in distant Kamakura and known by the famous title of shogun, they supplanted the imperial power and reduced the emperor of Japan to a mere figurehead.

The new Nara, with a magnificent (though smaller) Todaiji housing another Great Buddha and a beautiful new Kofukuji, was never again to feel the clash of battle. Instead, the following incident from the *Azuma Kagami* account of the Shokyu War shows how far the monks of Nara had retreated from the days of sohei armies. The Nara monks had supported the rebels, and now faced retribution:

Tokifusa and Yasutoki mustered several thousand warriors from the capital and adjacent provinces ... and sent them off towards Nara. News of this caused great consternation among the priests. ... If warriors enter Nara, the result will be the same as when the Taira burned down the great temples. Moved by their frantic pleas, the warriors returned to the capital.



The Kasuga shrine in Nara was closely associated with Kofukuji. As it was the tutelary shrine of the Fujiwara, the Kofukuji monks were able to exert considerable political and religious influence through Kasuga.

Nara was therefore spared, and the Shokyu War proved to be the only major conflict to affect Japan during the 13th century apart from the famous Mongol invasions. It may be that the strong religious element involved in the resistance to the Mongol invaders, including the direct intervention from the gods in the form of the *kami kaze*, the 'divine tempest' that sank the Mongol fleet, accounts for the absence of internal religious strife during this time. But Enryakuji was involved in the daily life of the citizens of Kyoto in ways other than religious. By the 1280s the Enryakuji complex and its branches controlled 80 per cent of the sake brewers and moneylenders (which often coexisted in the same premises) in Kyoto. As well as enjoying a source of income the temple provided protection to the owners and was willing to put pressure on reluctant debtors.

In 1308 we read of Enryakuji behaving more like the old days when it registered its opposition to a decision made by the Kamakura shogunate concerning an appointment. The grievance may have been similar to the conflicts with the imperial court of long ago, but the manner of expressing the protest was very different. This time Enryakuji closed down its temples on Mount Hiei and set fire to the Hiyoshi shrine. Four years later, however, a more conventional protest was held when the Enryakuji monks marched through Kyoto and intimidated the imperial court. This turned the argument in their favour, but the real rulers of Japan in Kamakura no longer regarded Mount Hiei as the protector of the state. To these military men the Zen sect was the main focus of attention, and many samurai saw Mount Hiei as nothing more than a sanctuary for absconding criminals. All temples were required to extradite such villains, but few complied, and government officials were still so terrified of the warrior monk tradition that they would not dare ascend Mount Hiei without the monks' permission.

### **The Prince of the Great Pagoda**

Mount Hiei had remained quiet during the Shokyu War, but during the Nanbokucho Wars of the 14th century it provided a refuge for the son of Emperor Go-Daigo. Go-Daigo attempted to restore the old imperial

power that the shogun had supplanted. His son is known to history as the 'Prince of the Great Pagoda', and the warrior monks were his first allies. Accounts of his operations show that monk armies were as well armed and confident as their predecessors, and almost as unsuccessful. There was some brief but savage fighting (see below) before Go-Daigo's rebellion was crushed. The war went on for many years more, led by loyalist samurai from the Kusunoki clan, but they appear to have made little or no use of warrior monk armies.

### **Enryakuji versus Zen**

The ultimate result of the Nanbokuchō Wars was the establishment of a new shogunate from the Ashikaga family. The seat of the shogun was moved back to Kyoto, where the new rulers were clearly seen to be favouring the Zen sect over other Buddhist institutions. This naturally led to protests from the Enryakuji hierarchy, who were particularly concerned about plans to convert an imperial palace in western Kyoto into a Zen monastery. The new temple, named Tenryūji, was completed in 1344. Having secured support from Todaiji and Kōfukuji, Enryakuji planned a protest march on Kyoto for 1345. But the shogun was not to be intimidated as emperors once had been, and threatened to depose Enryakuji's most prominent abbots and to confiscate possessions if the demonstration went ahead. Enryakuji backed down.

Twenty years later in 1367 a far more serious incident occurred when a novice from Miidera was killed as he tried to force his way past a toll barrier in Omi Province erected by the Zen temple of Nanzenji. Armed monks from Miidera then proceeded to tear down the barrier, which had been built with official permission as a way of raising funds to finance the reconstruction of Nanzenji's main gate. This was by no means uncommon, and in fact Enryakuji controlled seven toll gates near Sakamoto at the foot of Mount Hiei. Several monks from each side were killed, and when the shogun sent troops against Miidera in retaliation they found that Enryakuji and Kōfukuji warrior monks were now supporting them. This time the shogun backed down.

In 1368 the abbot of Nanzenji most unwisely wrote a polemic in which he called the Tendai monks 'monkeys and toads'. This eventually led to him being exiled on the shogun's orders, but this was not enough for Enryakuji, who demanded that Nanzenji's new gate be demolished. To drive home their protest the monks appeared on Kyoto's streets with their sacred mikoshi, a sight that had not been seen for centuries. There they fought a bloody battle against the shogun's samurai, but the results were most satisfying. Nanzenji's gate was torn down in 1369 and the shogunate also agreed to pay for the repair of the shrines that were damaged during the street fighting.

## **THE WARRIOR MONKS IN THE SENGOKU PERIOD, 1467-1602**

For the next 100 years the warrior monks of Mount Hiei continued to play at politics until a major convulsion in Japanese society changed the situation forever. At first the Onin War, which began in 1467, looked no different from any other conflict arising out of rivalry between two



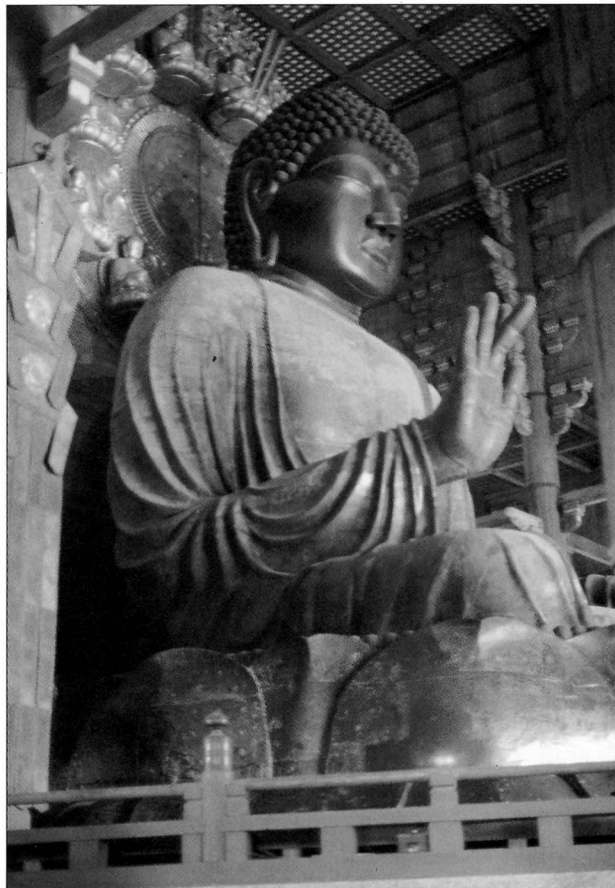
samurai families. But the Onin War had two important features. First, it was initially fought in Kyoto itself, resulting in widespread destruction and disruption of the means of government. Second, the fighting spread to the provinces, where the shogun's influence was soon perceived to be declining rapidly. Local strong men called *daimyo* (great names) therefore took advantage of the lawlessness of the times to create petty kingdoms of their own, and Japan dissolved into a century and a half of war that is known as the Sengoku Period or 'The Age of Warring States'.

### **The rise of the Ikko-ikki**

At first the old warrior monk institutions of Mount Hiei stood aloof from the conflicts around them, but they soon came to realise that one result of the chaos in the provinces was that new warrior monk armies were being formed and were proving to be highly successful. Most of these movements had nothing to do with the old Buddhist sects of Tendai or Shingon, but drew their support from the Buddhism of the mass-movement populist sects, who recruited chiefly among the peasantry. Further details of their beliefs are given below, but for now we may note that instead of scholars they produced fanatics: religious fundamentalists who were willing to die for their beliefs. These faith-based communities of priests, farmers, families and children had no need to recruit mercenaries as Enryakuji had once done. To be a believer was to be a warrior, so although the vast majority of their armies were not monks in any conventional sense, their meticulously observed ritual behaviour, their enthusiastic military training and their devotion to the cause made them Japan's new holy warriors.

Many of the new-style warrior monks belonged to the Shinshu sect and formed communities known as Ikko-ikki. The second term in the name, *ikki*, strictly means a league, but it has also come to mean a riot, and it was as rioting mobs that the Ikko-ikki first became known to their samurai betters. The other word, *Ikko*, provides a clue to their religious affiliation. It means 'single-minded' or 'devoted', and the *monto* (disciples or adherents of the Shinshu sect) were completely single-minded in their devotion and determination.

Their leader, Rennyo, had fled north to Kaga Province to escape the influence of Mount Hiei. Here he re-established his headquarters, and very soon his followers became enmeshed in the struggle for supremacy that was going on in Kaga Province between various samurai clans in the confusion following the Onin War. In 1488 Rennyo's Ikko-ikki revolted against samurai rule, and after a series of fierce skirmishes the control of Kaga passed into their hands. For the first time in Japanese history, a group that were neither courtiers nor samurai ruled a province. These



**The wonderful Great Buddha of Nara inside the Daibutsuden of Todaiji. The original dated from 745-749, and was recast twice after the first one was destroyed during the battle in 1180. It was destroyed again in a fire in 1567. The dimensions are: height: 25m (82 feet); face: 5m (16 feet); thumb: 1.5m (5 feet); weight: 551 tons. It is made from an alloy of bronze, mercury and fine gold.**



LEFT The Nandaimon (southern great gate) of Todaiji in Nara. This reconstruction dates from 1195 and is part of the Minamoto work that restored the damage done by the Taira attack on Nara. The Nandaimon is the only building in the complex that still retains its original size, and it is easy to imagine warrior monks marching through it.

BELOW The blade of a naginata, the traditional weapon of the warrior monks. This is the shorter-bladed variety.

were heady days for the Ikko-ikki, and as the 15th century drew to a close the sect spread out from Kaga and established itself in a series of key locations including Nagashima and Ishiyama Honganji. The latter provided the overall organisation for a fanatical army that was to occupy the time and stretch the resources of many samurai generals for the next 100 years.

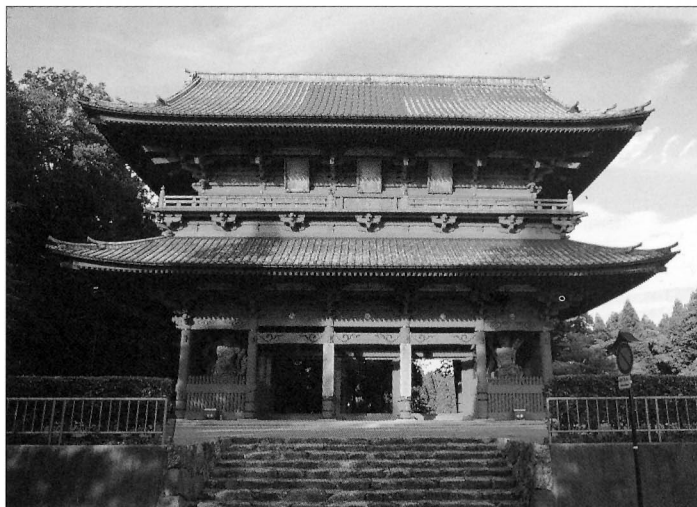
### **The Ikko-ikki of Mikawa**

Another important centre of Ikko-ikki activity was Mikawa Province. Several temples, including three in Okazaki: Shomanji, Joguji and Honsoji, possessed Ikko-ikki armies. Their temple lands impinged upon the territory of the future shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, and it was through his successful campaigns against the Mikawa monto that Ieyasu learnt the military skills that were to stand him in such good stead in the years to come.

Tokugawa Ieyasu's fear was that the Mikawa monto would try to do in his province what Rennyō's men had done in Kaga, and soon the young Ieyasu was engaged with the monk armies at the battle of Azukizaka in 1564. It was to Ieyasu's great advantage that among the Ikko-ikki supporters were samurai who happened to belong to the Shinshu sect but who had considerably divided loyalties. Some were also vassals of Ieyasu, and at first their religious inclinations had made them choose the Ikko-ikki side in the battle. But as time wore on the traditional samurai loyalty to the lord proved the stronger force, and many who changed sides, such as Ishikawa Ienari, were to become Ieyasu's most trusted companions. Needless to say, such loyalty did not extend down to the peasants who comprised the bulk of the Ikko-ikki armies. To them all samurai were ultimately enemies, eventually to be swept from power in the province.



Ieyasu also benefited from the support given to him by his own particular sect of Buddhism, the Jodo-shu, the original Amidist sect from which Shinshu had sprung. Daijuji, the temple where Ieyasu's ancestors were buried, represented Jodo in Okazaki. In 1564 the Daijuji sent a contingent of Jodo warrior monks to fight for Ieyasu, and with their help the Ikko-ikki of Mikawa were finally crushed. A subsequent peace conference established that Ieyasu would restore their temples to their original state. This he did with vigour, by burning each one to the ground, arguing that a green-field site was the original state.



**The great gate of Koyasan, the temple of exile founded by Kobo Daishi.**

### **Oda Nobunaga and the Ikko-ikki**

The reunification of Japan began with the campaigns of Oda Nobunaga, who shot to prominence following his victory at Okehazama in 1560. The years between 1570 and 1581 were marked by Oda Nobunaga's greatest achievements – the battles of Anegawa and Nagashino, the invasion of Ise and Iga provinces, and the building of Azuchi castle. Yet all these campaigns and historic advances were carried out against a background of a continuous threat from, and sporadic war with, the Ikko-ikki.

With the pacification of the Ikko-ikki of Mikawa the focus of Ikko-ikki activity moved westwards to the great foundations of Nagashima and Ishiyama Honganji. Compared to the isolated temples of Mikawa, these positions were very strong indeed. Both consisted of a complex series of stockade fortresses built around a castle and set within a river delta. Nagashima's location controlled the route from Owari Province into Ise, and with it the main lines of communication south of Lake Biwa between Nobunaga's secure territories and the capital. Ishiyama Honganji was built where Osaka castle now stands, at the mouth of the Kisogawa at its point of entry to the Inland Sea.

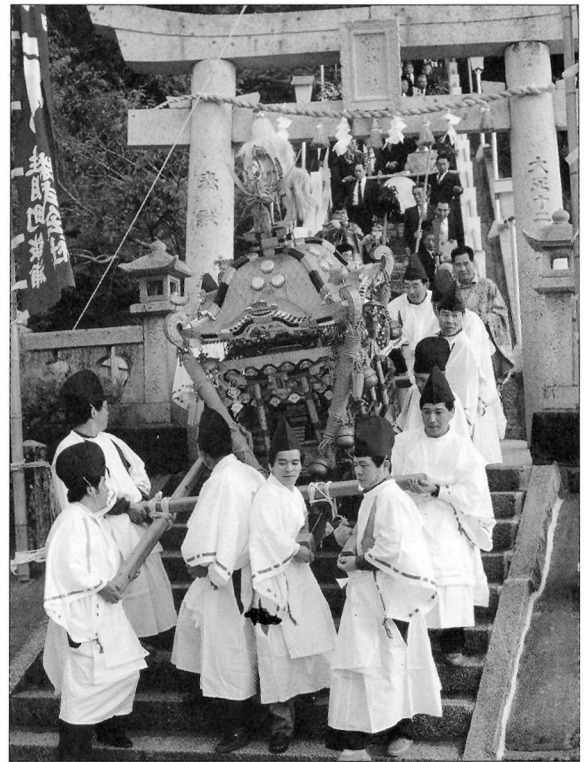
### **The Lotus warriors**

Before describing how Nobunaga tackled the warrior monks of the Ikko-ikki it will be necessary to discuss two other manifestations of the warrior monk genre: one new, and one that was very old.

We noted earlier how Enryakuji had reacted angrily to the growth in influence of the Zen sect of Buddhism in Kyoto, but by the year 1500 Enryakuji found its traditional pre-eminence threatened by the emergence of another populist Buddhist sect, the Nichiren-shu, otherwise known as the Hokke-shu or Lotus sect. The Hokke-shu had been particularly successful in Kyoto, where its teachings found favour among the craftsmen and merchants, but as this was the Sengoku Period the 21 Nichiren temples in Kyoto were surrounded by moats and earthen ramparts for protection. Attached to each were the adherents of Nichiren, who had formed their own self-governing, self-defending organisations analogous to the Ikko-ikki communities.



ABOVE LEFT **Kiyomizudera**, the 'temple on stilts' loved by the people of Kyoto. Kiyomizudera was burned during one of the warrior monk raids on Kyoto.



ABOVE RIGHT **Kannushi** (Shinto priests) carrying a mikoshi. The mikoshi is a portable shrine. The warrior monks carried them into Kyoto as a way of reinforcing their protests by the presence of the kami. This photograph was taken at a shrine festival on the island of Ikitsuki.

It is tempting to see the townsmen's Lotus sect in Kyoto and the Ikko-ikki of the provinces as two sides of a 'town' versus 'country' divide, identified along sectarian lines. There is indeed some truth in this, and that would certainly have been the impression given when an army of the Ikko-ikki marched on Kyoto in 1528. But what was their motivation? Was it a peasants' revolt, because the Hokke-shu certainly had the support of samurai within Kyoto, or was it just a raid for plunder? There were still rich pickings to be had in Japan's capital, and the Ikko-ikki's advance so alarmed the shogun, Ashikaga Yoshiharu, that he fled the city. By contrast, the townsmen armies of the Lotus sect, unconcerned at the reasons why they were being attacked, armed themselves and paraded through the streets under the Nichiren banner, chanting verses from the Lotus Sutra. When the Ikko-ikki moved in they were successfully driven off.

Five years later the Lotus warriors joined forces with local strong man Hosokawa Harumoto to hit back at the Ikko-ikki. Their target was Ishiyama Honganji, a place impossible to conquer by assault, but a simple demonstration of power was all that was presently needed. Just as the Lotus warriors had planned, the Ikko-ikki left Kyoto alone after that, so the shogun returned to his palace in 1534 secure in the support of his citizens.

But although the Ikko-ikki had been persuaded to back off from Kyoto, the Lotus sect's aggressive religious fundamentalism and their fierce assertion of property rights caused great concern to a religious institution that was much nearer to home. The monks of Enryakuji felt that these upstarts had supplanted them in the very heart of power. So, just as their predecessors had taken direct action against courtiers five

centuries earlier, the warrior monks of Mount Hiei descended on Kyoto once again. No longer were they content to parade the mikoshi in front of terrified courtiers. Instead, in true Sengoku fashion, this latest manifestation of mountain power made a surprise attack and burned down all 21 Nichiren temples in Kyoto. The self-governing structure of the townsmen was not totally destroyed, but was so weakened that it collapsed when Oda Nobunaga entered the capital in triumph in 1568.

### **The destruction of Mount Hiei**

Having rediscovered their long-dormant military strength, the newly reinvigorated warrior monks of Mount Hiei sought allies among prominent local daimyo. Their location, to the north-east of Kyoto, put them in closest proximity with the territories of the Asai and Asakura families, who were Nobunaga's main rivals to the north of the capital and threatened his communications past Lake Biwa.

During 1570 Oda Nobunaga defeated the Asai and Asakura at the battle of Anegawa. Their destruction was far from complete, and later that same year they took advantage of Nobunaga's temporary absence from the scene to swoop down from the north in revenge. Nobunaga's finest general, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, met them in battle near Sakamoto and drove them back into the snow-covered mountains, where they would probably all have been slaughtered had not the warrior monks of Mount Hiei come to their aid.

By 1571 the Asai and Asakura had recovered from their beating and looked towards Mount Hiei for a formal alliance that would take on Oda Nobunaga once again. The threat was a very real one, so Nobunaga sent messages warning Enryakuji of dire retribution if it decided to help his enemies any further. But, faced with monastic intransigence, Nobunaga decided to make the first move. Unlike the swamps and walls of the Ikko-ikki headquarters, Mount Hiei was virtually undefended except by its warrior monks. The attack had the prospect of being a pushover, but the ruthlessness with which it was pursued sent shock waves through Japan.

Oda Nobunaga's stated aim was to burn down the entire Enryakuji temple complex as a precaution and as a warning to any other warrior monk communities that might be watching. The assault began on 29 September 1571. Nobunaga first burned the town of Sakamoto at the foot of Mount Hiei, but most of the townspeople had already taken refuge on the mountain. Next he took particular care to destroy the Hiyoshi shrine of the mountain king, and then his 30,000 men were deployed in a vast ring around the mountain. At a signal from a conch trumpet they began to move steadily up the paths, burning and shooting all that stood in their way. By nightfall the main temple buildings of Enryakuji had gone up in flames. Many monks were unable to resist, but faced the situation with the detached frame of mind that their Buddhist training had cultivated:

'Let us concentrate our attention on the Moon of Perfect Enlightenment, and chastise our hearts in the water that flows from the hillside of Shimei. Scalding water and charcoal fire are no worse than the cooling breeze.' So saying they threw themselves into the raging flames, and not a few were thus consumed by the flames. The roar of the burning monastery,



magnified by the cries of countless numbers of the old and the young, sounded and resounded to the ends of heaven and earth.

**A woodblock print depicting the fight for the broken bridge during the battle of Uji in 1180. We are looking from the northern bank, and see the Taira samurai making an attack. In the upper left-hand corner may be seen the naginata of the warrior monks of Miidera.**

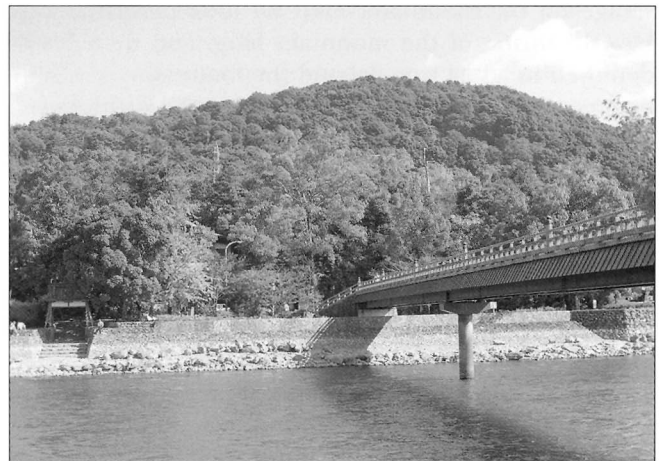
Next day Nobunaga sent his gunners out on a hunt for any who had escaped, and the final casualty list probably topped 20,000. It was the most notorious act of Oda Nobunaga's violent career, and marked the end of the long history of the warrior monks of Enryakuji. In time the trees would grow again and the monks would rebuild, but never again would they reappear as warrior monk armies.

### **The Nagashima campaign**

The shock of the destruction of Mount Hiei made the Asai and Asakura hesitate, and this gave Nobunaga the opportunity to return to his unfinished business with the Ikko-ikki of Nagashima and Ishiyama Honganji. For several years both operations ran concurrently, but for simplicity I will describe each one separately, beginning with the river delta of Nagashima.

The name Nagashima is believed to derive from 'Nana shima', or 'the seven islands', which, with a host of smaller islands, reedplains and swamps, filled the delta. It lay on the border between Owari and Ise provinces to the south-east of the present-day city of Nagoya. Three rivers, the Kisogawa, the Nagaragawa and the Ibigawa, enter Ise bay. Their direction has continually shifted throughout history, but even today the long, flat island of Nagashima, set among broad rivers and waving reeds, can easily conjure up the appearance it must have presented to the Ikko-ikki who garrisoned it during the Sengoku Period.

**The modern Uji bridge, built on the site of the one that was the focus of the battle of Uji. We are looking north.**



There were effectively two key areas of Nagashima's defences: Nagashima castle, and the fortified monastery of Ganshoji. The castle had been built in 1555 by Ito Shigeharu, who lost it to the Ikko-ikki when he was swept from power in a manner that was becoming only too familiar to daimyo who had this particular variety of rival on their doorstep. As Owari was Oda Nobunaga's home province his family felt the presence of the Nagashima ikki very acutely, and certain members of the Oda clan engaged them in battle at the northern edge of the Nagashima delta at Ogie castle in November 1569. The Ikko-ikki were completely victorious, and killed Nobunaga's brother, Nobuoki. The loss of his brother added a personal dimension to Nobunaga's strategic need to overcome Nagashima.

Nobunaga appointed his trusted generals Sakuma Nobumori and Shibata Katsue as commanders. The Ikko-ikki made suitable preparations, strengthening their outposts and setting up various defensive measures. Nobunaga's army made camp on 16 May 1571 at Tsushima to the north-east of Nagashima, which was divided from the complex by a particularly shallow yet broad river. An attack was planned on the area immediately to the west of Tsushima against the series of *waju* (island communities protected by dykes against flooding), from where an attack could be launched on the Ganshoji, but this first operation against Nagashima was an unqualified disaster. Shibata Katsue was severely wounded, and no impression was made on the defences. As the Oda army withdrew they burned several villages on the outskirts, which probably had no effect other than inclining the sympathies of the local population more towards the cause of their fanatical neighbours.

The burning of Mount Hiei took place shortly after the disaster at Nagashima, so it was with renewed confidence that Nobunaga moved against Nagashima once more. He first reduced a minor Ikko-ikki outpost within Owari Province by leading the defenders out on the basis of a spurious peace treaty and then massacring them where they stood. The attempt at intimidation was clear, but the defenders of Nagashima were discouraged neither by the attack on Mount Hiei nor by the fate of their fellow holy warriors in Owari. The new campaign began in July 1573, and this time Nobunaga took personal charge of the operations. The numbers of his army

**A modern woodblock print showing the classic image of the warrior monk of the Heian Period. Note his suit of armour poking out from under his robes, his headcowl, and of course his vicious-looking naginata.**





The most famous warrior monk of all was Benkei, shown here with his 'seven weapons'. He is depicted in a scene from a Kabuki play that deals with his wanderings with Yoshitsune.

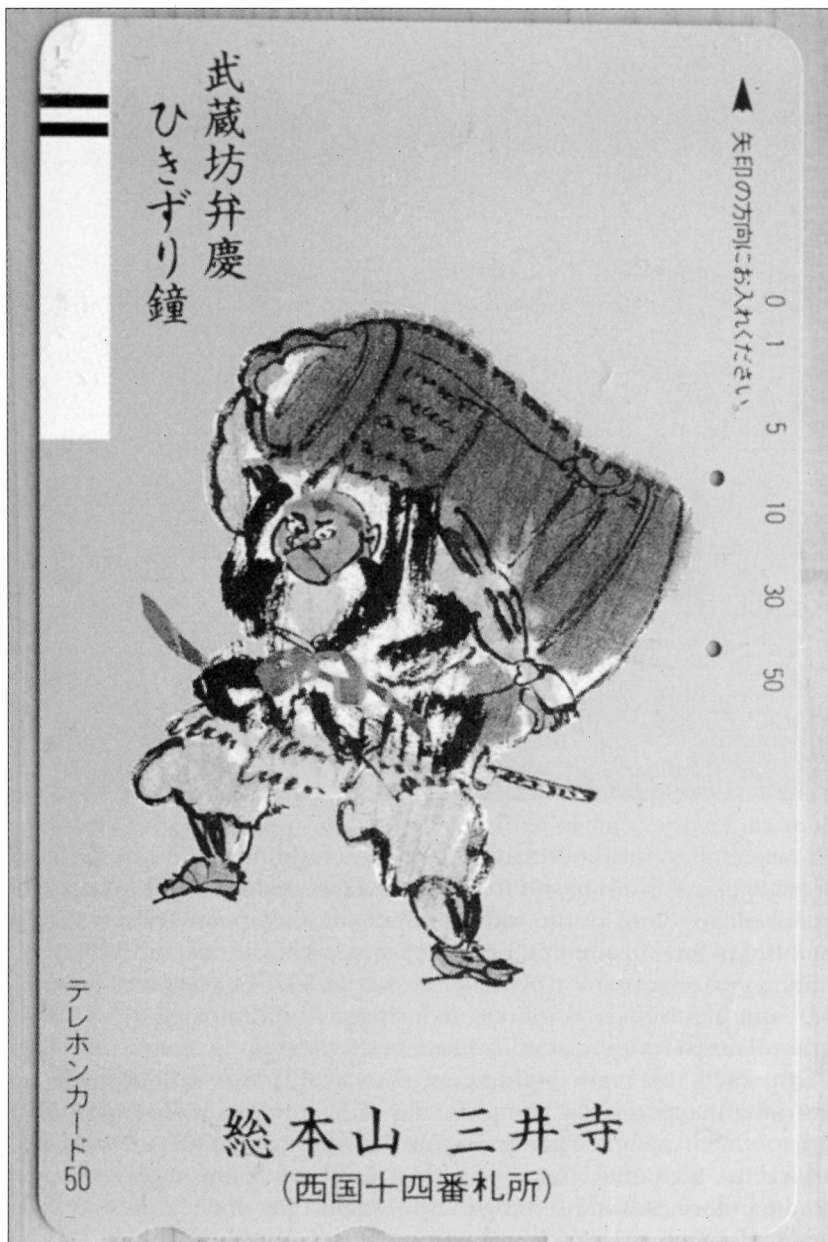
are not recorded, but contained a well-drilled arquebus corps. Nevertheless, for the second time in two years the Oda army was forced to withdraw.

Nobunaga returned to the fray for a third time in 1574, but he was now much better armed. His conquest of Ise Province had brought to his side an unusual naval talent in the person of Kuki Yoshitaka (1542–1600), a man who, like many of the Japanese sea captains of his day, had once been a successful pirate. Nobunaga recruited Kuki and his fleet to take the fight close to the Ikko-ikki fortifications in a way that had never proved possible before. Kuki kept up a rolling bombardment of the Nagashima defences from close range with cannonballs and fire arrows, concentrating on the wooden watchtowers.

The presence of the ships served to cut off the garrison from supplies and from any possible relieving force. It also enabled Nobunaga's land-based troops to take most of the Ikko-ikki's outlying forts. Two in particular, Nakae and Yanagashima, allowed Nobunaga to control access from the western side for the first time. Supported by Kuki, a land-based army carried out a three-pronged attack from the north. The defenders were gradually forced back, though with enormous resistance, and were squeezed into the small area of the island on which stood the fortified Ganshoji and Nagashima castle. There was little else in the way of territory and almost no hope of relief. By the end of August 1574 they were slowly starving to death and ready to talk peace, but their overtures fell on deaf ears. Mindful of the death of his brother, and his own humiliation at their hands, Nobunaga resolved to destroy the islands of Nagashima as thoroughly as he had destroyed Mount Hiei.

Instead of accepting surrender, Nobunaga began building a very tall wooden palisade anchored on the forts of Nakae and Yanagashima, and which physically isolated the Ikko-ikki from the gaze of the outside world. Approximately 20,000 people were now crammed into the inner fortifications. Unseen by them, Nobunaga began to pile a mountain of dry brushwood against the palisade. He waited for the strong winds that



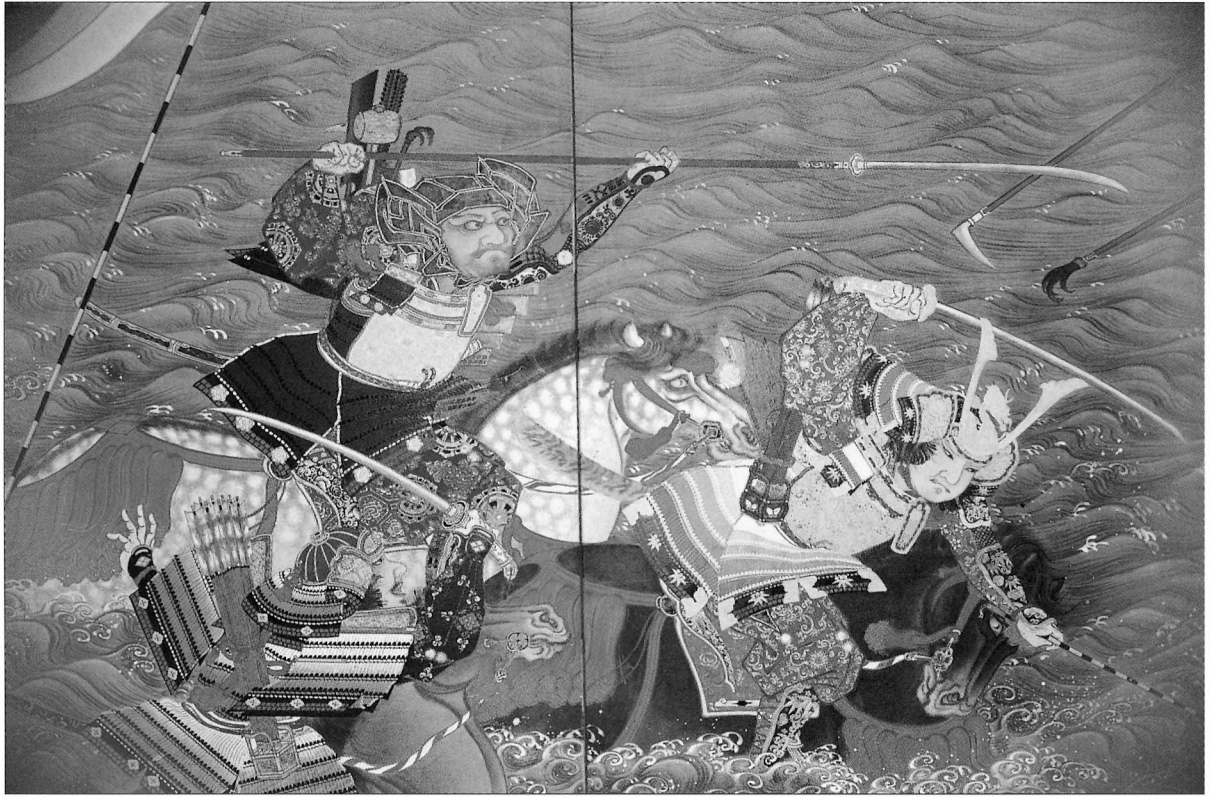


Benkei's most celebrated exploit was the carrying away of the temple bell of Miidera, shown here on a souvenir telephone card.

heralded the approach of the September typhoons (to which Ise Bay is prone) and set light to the massive pyre. Burning brands jumped the small gaps of water, and soon the whole of the Nagashima complex was ablaze. As at Mount Hiei, no mercy was shown, but at Nagashima none was asked for, because the flatlands provided no resistance to the fierce fires, and all 20,000 inhabitants of the Ikko-ikki fortress were burned to death before any could escape to be cut down.

### The fall of Ishiyama Honganji

Nobunaga's first move against Ishiyama Honganji had been launched in August 1570. He left Gifu castle at the head of 30,000 troops, and ordered the building of a series of forts around the perimeter. On



**In this painted screen from the Watanabe Museum in Tottori we see Benkei in action using a naginata at the battle of Yashima in 1184.**

12 September the bells rang out at midnight from within Ishiyama Honganji, and Nobunaga's fortresses at Kawaguchi and Takadono were attacked, resulting in the withdrawal of the Oda main body, leaving a handful of forts to attempt the task of monitoring, if not controlling, the mighty fortress. It was a process that would take 11 years and much of Nobunaga's military resources in a long-term campaign that sucked other daimyo into the conflict like a black hole.

By 1576 the main building of Ishiyama Honganji had grown to become the centre of a complex ring of 51 outposts well supported by organised arquebus squads. In April Nobunaga made a land-based attack on Ishiyama Honganji with a force of 3,000 men under the command of Araki Muneshige and Akechi Mitsuhide. This may have been more of an exercise in testing the defenders' mettle, because 15,000 were pitted against Nobunaga and he was forced to withdraw.

The ferocity of the defence forced Nobunaga to revise his tactics, and he changed his immediate aim to that of reducing the outposts of the Ishiyama Honganji's supporters, thus isolating the centre. He attacked the Ikko-ikki outpost of Saiga in Kii Province to the south and sent Toyotomi Hideyoshi against the other nest of warrior monks at Negoroji. Negoroji was not defeated in this attack but was sufficiently contained so as not to present much of a threat to Nobunaga's immediate plans.

With outside forces reduced to a minimum, Nobunaga tried to starve out the defenders of Ishiyama Honganji, but the fortress island opened on to the narrow Inland Sea. This area was largely controlled by the fleet of Nobunaga's deadly enemies, the Mori clan, who kept Ishiyama



**Monks of the Ikko-ikki in Mikawa Province as depicted in a model in the Okazaki Historical Museum. They are defending their temples against Ieyasu's troops.**

Honganji well supplied, so Nobunaga once again enlisted the services of Kuki Yoshitaka to enforce a blockade. The plans did not work, and in August 1576 Mori demonstrated his naval superiority by breaking Nobunaga's fleet at the first battle of Kizugawaguchi.

Yet in spite of Mori's gun-running and food supplies, it soon became clear to the defenders that there were very few Ikko sympathisers left to come and join them anyway. The evident loss of this support alarmed the Ishiyama Honganji commanders, so Abbot Kosa sent desperate requests for help throughout the country. Many Ikko-ikki branches were already represented within the castle, and no others came to join them, so by 1578 the tide of the siege was beginning to move Nobunaga's way.

At the second battle of Kizugawaguchi in 1578 Nobunaga's huge newly built battleships cut Mori's supply line for good. The fanatics of the Ishiyama Honganji prepared to face Nobunaga's final assault, but astonishingly the siege still had two years left to run. The garrison was under the spirited command of a certain Shimotsuma Nakayuki (1551–1616). In more confident days it had been the intention of Ishiyama Honganji to march on the capital and make Shimotsuma the new shogun, but it had now become clear that support was now coming only from within their own sectarian ranks. No samurai clan had responded to their call to arms, and Uesugi Kenshin, who had threatened Nobunaga from the north and supported the Honganji, died in 1578. The Mori clan were also unwilling to engage in a full-scale struggle with Nobunaga once they had lost their strategic castle of Miki in 1580. This deprived them of their most convenient base, so the fortress cathedral became completely isolated, just as Nobunaga had planned.

Dressed in a sombre suit of armour, and under a red banner with an enormous golden sun's disc, Shimotsuma directed his operations as Nobunaga's armies whittled away at the outer lines of his defences. Every day the attacks continued, using up the cathedral's precious ammunition supply. Very soon Shimotsuma's food supplies also began to dry up, and Mori's fleet could not move from port to aid them. A conference was held between the Abbot Kosa and his colleagues, and in April 1580 an imperial

messenger was sent with a letter from no less a person than the emperor of Japan, suggesting an honourable surrender. Oda Nobunaga had of course prompted the letter, but it did the trick, and the fortress surrendered a few weeks later. The actual surrender terms were bloodless, and 11 years of bitter fighting eventually came to an end in August 1580. In spite of the precedents he had set on Mount Hiei and at Nagashima, Nobunaga acted with uncharacteristic generosity towards the sect that had caused him so much trouble. The castle complex was burned down, but Shimotsuma Nakayuki, who had signed a written oath in his own blood, was spared his life, and in a remarkable gesture was presented by his colleagues with a small statue of Amida Buddha in recognition of his services.

### The last warrior monks

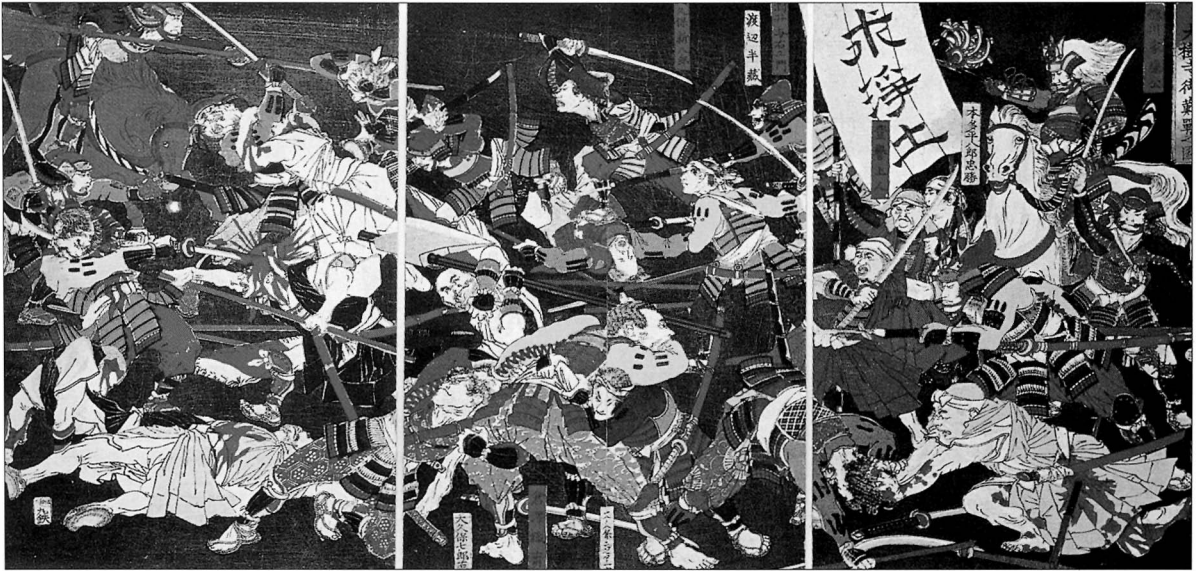
The long story of the warrior monks was almost over. Following Nobunaga's death in 1582 Kosa, the former abbot of Ishiyama Honganji, actively courted the new ruler, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and sent some of his few remaining Ikko-ikki warriors to harass Shibata Katsue's rear during Hideyoshi's Shizugatake campaign in 1583. This endeared him to Hideyoshi and rewards were eventually forthcoming, in contrast to the subsequent experience of the warrior monks of Negoroji, who supported Hideyoshi's rival, Tokugawa Ieyasu, during the Komaki campaign of 1584.

This folly brought terrible retribution upon them in 1585 when Hideyoshi attacked Negoroji and the neighbouring temples that also maintained warrior monk armies. One was Kokawadera, a branch temple of Mount Hiei, and therefore the home of the last Tendai warrior monks in Japan, while across the Kii river where Wakayama castle now stands was Ota castle, headquarters of the Shinshu Saiga-ikki.

Hideyoshi's army of 6,000 men first crushed four minor outposts, and then approached Negoroji from two separate directions. At that time the military strength of the Negoroji was believed to be between 30,000 and 50,000 men, and their skills with firearms were still considerable, but many had already crossed the river and sought shelter in Ota. Beginning with the priests' residences, the investing army systematically set fire to the Negoroji complex and cut down the warrior monks as they escaped from the flames. Several acts of single combat occurred between Hideyoshi's samurai and the Negoroji defenders.



A warrior monk of Negoroji, circa 1580. The Negoroji monks held out against Hideyoshi until being overcome in 1585. This character is wielding a club as well as a naginata.



The warrior monks of the Jodo sect from Daijuji in Okazaki help Tokugawa Ieyasu against the Ikko-ikki. To the rear may be noted the Jodo flag carried by Tokugawa Ieyasu in all his battles.

Whereas fire had succeeded at Negoroji, Toyotomi Hideyoshi chose to reduce Ota by flooding it from a dam built along the north, west and south sides of the castle. On the eastern side the dyke was left open to allow the waters in. Heavy rain helped the process along, isolating the garrison more completely from outside help. The defenders were encouraged at one point by the partial collapse of a section of Hideyoshi's dyke, which caused the deaths of several besiegers as water poured out. Yet soon hunger began to take its toll and the garrison surrendered, led by 50 leading warrior monks, who committed a defiant act of hara kiri. The remaining soldiers, peasants, women and children who were found in the castle were disarmed of all swords and guns. Those found to be from samurai families were beheaded, while the peasants were set free.

### Rebuilding a tradition

The Saiga-ikki of Ota represented the last of the warrior monks, and when Kosa petitioned Toyotomi Hideyoshi for support to restore the cathedral of the sect, it was only to rebuild it as the religious headquarters of Shinshu, and not as an Ikko-ikki fortress. Hideyoshi made a parcel of land available in Kyoto in 1589, and Nishi Honganji was built in 1591 as a splendid, but completely undefended, Shinshu temple.

Any visitor to Kyoto today may see the final settlement of the Ikko-ikki problem. On leaving the station one is struck by the fact that there are two Shinshu temples: the Nishi Honganji and the Higashi Honganji, both of which appear to be the headquarters of the same organisation and which are built almost next to each other. The explanation is that in 1602 Tokugawa Ieyasu, who had himself suffered at the hands of the Mikawa monto, took advantage of a succession dispute among the Shinshu and founded an alternative head temple to rival the existing one built by Hideyoshi in 1591. This weakened the political power of the sect, leaving it as a strong religious organisation, but never again capable of being revived as the warrior monk army of the Ikko-ikki.

Ieyasu also revived Kofukuji as a purely religious foundation, so when he became shogun in 1603 there were no warrior monks left in Japan, although he did have some ex-warrior monks in his service. These were the survivors of his old allies from Negoroji, who were particularly skilled with firearms. Ieyasu took 16 into his service in 1585, and nine more in 1586, placing them under the command of Naruse Masashige. The Negoro-gumi formed the basis for the Tokugawa firearm squads of the early Edo Period.

Thanks to the generous Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Enryakuji had also come back to life. For over a decade there had been no Enryakuji, just the charred head of Mount Hiei, a black reminder to those who would not obey the rule of Oda Nobunaga. For once it seemed that Miidera, whose monks had supported Nobunaga, had gained the upper hand, but Hideyoshi favoured the reconstruction of Enryakuji, and new buildings began to arise. A wary Hideyoshi limited the number of buildings to 125, not the 3,000 of earlier times, and this is about the number of religious buildings found on its summit today.

Yet Toyotomi Hideyoshi had already given the greatest compliment to the warrior monks that any samurai leader was to pay. He had recognised that the site of the Ikko-ikki's Ishiyama Honganji was a superb strategic and defensive location. Recalling how it had frustrated his master for so long, he chose it in 1586 as the site for his main castle that was to become the centre of today's great city of Osaka.

## THE WARRIOR MONKS' APPEARANCE AND EQUIPMENT

### Costume

There is a remarkable consistency among contemporary descriptions and illustrations of the Japanese warrior monks of the pre-Sengoku times. This enables us to reconstruct the appearance of a sohei from Enryakuji or Nara with some accuracy. The basis of their costume was the monastic robe, a garment that has hardly changed in style over 12 centuries, so that the Buddhist monks that one encounters today on Mount Hiei or in Nara do not look very different from their predecessors. The *kimono* (robe) shares with many other items of traditional Japanese costume a simple style and a long tradition. Over a *fundoshi* or loincloth the warrior monk would wear a succession of kimono, which look like long wide-sleeved dressing gowns. The undergarments would be white, with the outer robe being white, tan or saffron. Over the outer kimono would be worn a jacket, usually black,



Inei of the Hozo-In, the most renowned of the monk martial arts specialists. He is shown at the moment of realisation when he sees the reflection of the crescent moon against the shaft of his spear. The artist Yoshitoshi has shown the moon in the sky behind him.

and often of a stiff gauzy 'see-through' material that may be noted on monastic costume today. Footwear consisted of *waraji* (straw sandals) worn over white *tabi* (socks) and often long *kiahan* (gaiters). *Geta* (wooden clogs) are often depicted being worn by warrior monks. Each geta was carved out of one piece of wood to produce a raised platform for the foot. Although clumsy-looking to the Western eye, the Japanese always look very nimble in them.

A warrior monk made the following additions to this priestly garb. Firstly the white headcowl was folded and tied around the head to leave only the face exposed. By contrast, some illustrations show warrior monks without a cowl and with a white *hachimaki* (headband) tied round their foreheads over their shaven pates.

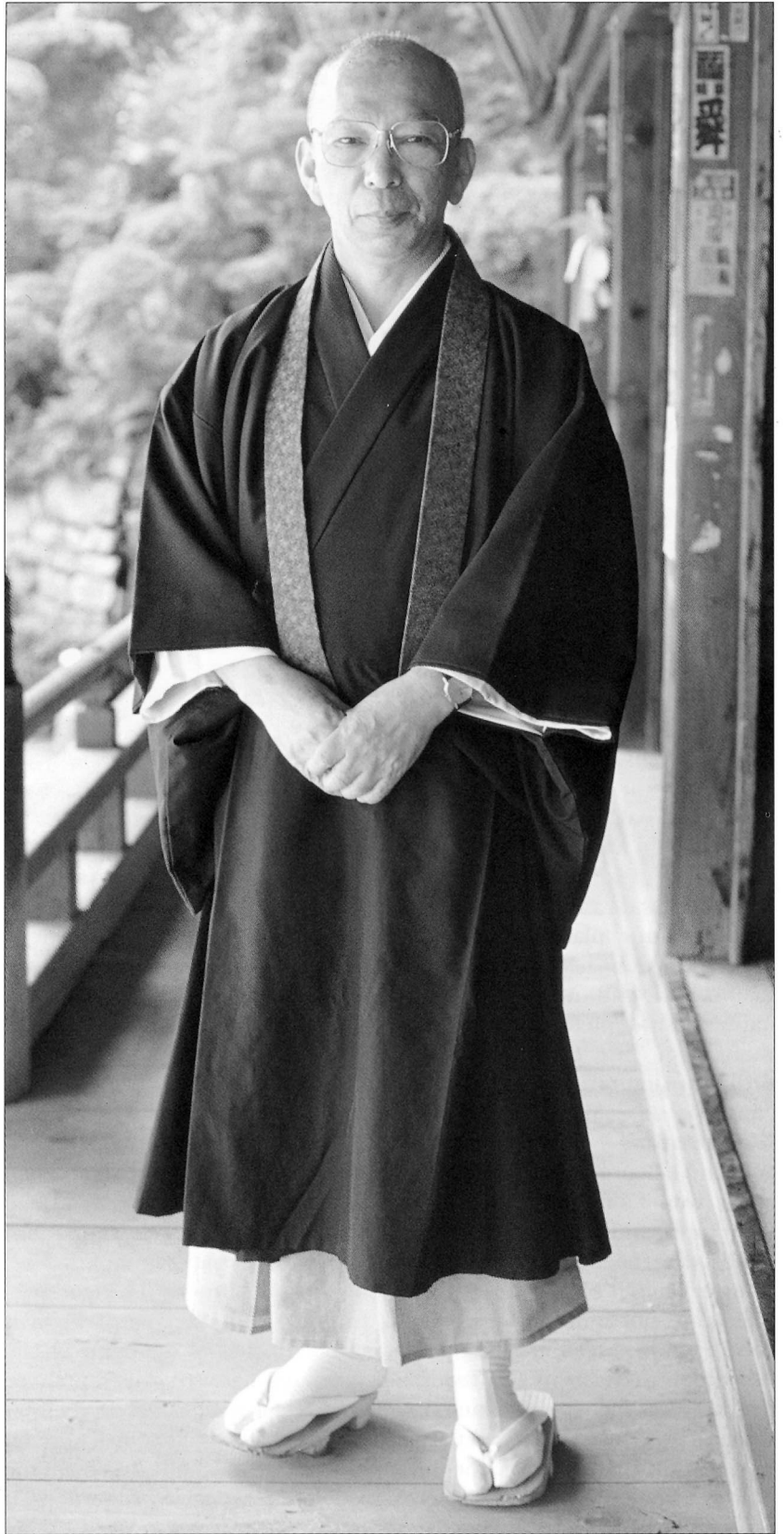
The warrior monk would also wear a suit of armour. Judging from scroll paintings this was usually a simple wrap-around *do-maru* worn just under the outer robe, rather like a flak jacket. The *do-maru* was a typical suit of Japanese armour, being made from a series of lacquered metal or leather scales laced together in overlapping rows. A series of these rows would be joined by silk cords to make an armour plate. Otherwise the more elaborate *yoroi* style with a breastplate was worn, but the *yoroi*'s heavy shoulder guards would not have fitted easily around a monk's robe. In many cases we also see *kote* (armour sleeves) under the wide robe sleeves. A *kote* consisted of a cloth tube to which small armour plates were sewn at vulnerable places. Fuller head protection would of course necessitate the wearing of a helmet instead of the cowl, and in the battle between warrior monks of Nara and the Taira family depicted in the Kasuga Gongen scroll, we see many warrior monks who are fully armoured and almost indistinguishable from ordinary samurai.

### Weapons

A strong belt around the waist augmented the usual kimono belt and had slung from it a typical Japanese sword. At this time the sword would be of *tachi* form, and was carried with the cutting edge downwards, so that two hands were needed to draw it. In common with most samurai, a *tanto* (dagger) might have been thrust through the belt under the right arm. *Tanto* are not much in evidence in paintings, but the use of them is confirmed in the famous account reproduced below of the battle of Uji. Bows and arrows were also used, and many monks were skilled archers. The bow was the typical Japanese longbow. To limit the stress on the bow when drawn, the weapon had to be long, and because of its primary use on horseback it was fired from one-third of the way up its length. To obtain the power needed while retaining a cross section of reasonable proportions, it was necessary to adopt a lamellar structure, so the bows in the Gempei



**A monk of the Shingon sect at Ikoma near Nara wearing a purple robe.**



A monk at Miidera, one of the most important former bases of the warrior monks. The monks' robes of the Heian Period would not have looked very different.



Wars were of deciduous wood backed with bamboo on the side furthest from the archer. The rattan binding reinforced the poor adhesive qualities of the glue used to fasten the sections together, but as the glue could also be weakened by damp, the whole bow was weatherproofed with lacquer.

The arrows were of bamboo. The nock was cut just above a node for strength, and three feathers were fitted. Bowstrings were of plant fibre, usually hemp or ramie, coated with wax to give a hard smooth surface, and in some cases the longbow needed more than

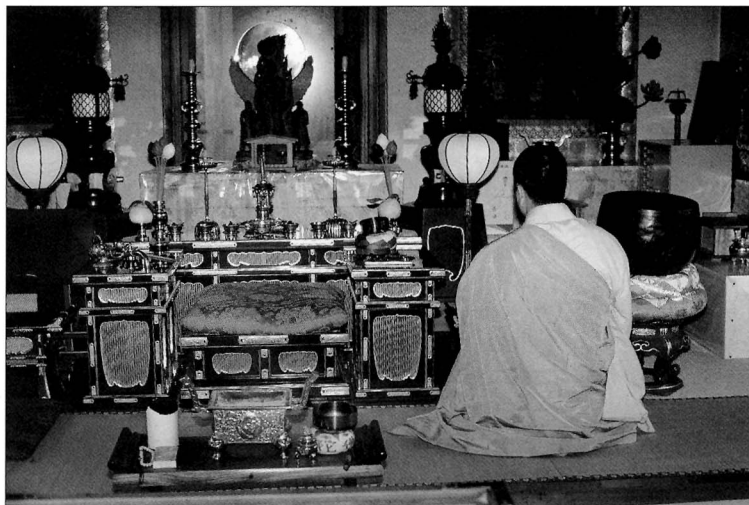
one person to string it. Traditionally the bow was fired from the back of a horse: the archer held the bow above his head to clear the horse, and then moved his hands apart as the bow was brought down, to end with the left arm straight and the right hand near the right ear. A high level of accuracy resulted from hours of practice on ranges where the arrows were discharged at small wooden targets while the horse was galloping along. This became the traditional art of *yabusame*, still performed at festivals.

The monk's traditional weapon was a fierce-looking cutting weapon called a *naginata*, which was a form of glaive. The blade was set inside a stout wooden shaft of oval cross section for ease of handling. The pommel was of iron and helped to balance the blade. It could also be used as a weapon in its own right. A *naginata* blade was similar to a sword blade and forged to an equally high standard, but there were many variations in shape. Some were much wider than swordblades and resembled Chinese halberds. In the 11th and 12th centuries the form called the *shobuzukuri naginata* was preferred, which had a long blade that almost equalled the comparatively shorter shaft. Later models of *naginata* had a shorter blade and a longer shaft.

The warrior monks therefore provided an intimidating sight with their veiled faces, their sharp *naginata* and their unmistakable priestly garb that proclaimed them as holy warriors. Those represented in scroll paintings or later woodblock-printed books always look very rough and confident characters, and *Heike Monogatari* tells of the warrior monks of Miidera that they were, 'all stout men at arms carrying bows and arrows, sword and *naginata*, every one of them worth a thousand ordinary men, caring not whether they met god or devil'.

Warrior monks on demonstrations are usually represented dressed in full monastic robes and armour, but the headcowl is frequently absent. Their shaven heads bear a few days' growth of bristles, and headbands are tied across their sweaty foreheads, while in their hands they carry prayer beads. Another fascinating description of the redoubtable warrior monk comes from *Heike Monogatari's* account of the battle of Nara in 1180:

Now there was among the retiring priests a warrior monk named Saka no shiro Yogaku, who for strength and valour was equal to all



**A Buddhist priest at prayer in the Fudoji near Kurikara. This gives a good idea of the interior of a typical Buddhist temple in Japan.**

the temples of Nara put together. He wore two suits of armour one over the other, a black body armour over another suit with lacings of light green silk, and two helmets likewise, one of five plates over a steel cap, while he brandished a white-handled naginata, curved like a reed in one hand and a huge tachi [long sword] with black mounts in the other. Gathering some ten of his comrades of the same temple round him, he held the enemy at the Tengai gate for some time and slew very many, but as fast as they fell others came on.

**The costume and weapons of the Ikko-ikki**

The warrior monks of the 16th century displayed far less uniformity in their appearance than their equivalents of the 12th century. Some are shown in similar cowls and robes, while a diorama on display in Okazaki shows Ikko-ikki in full clerical robes with shaven heads, but with some body armour, emerging from the gate of their temple to attack Ieyasu's samurai army. Other illustrations show the Ikko-ikki looking less like conventional warrior monks and more like a motley crew, with the bulk of their forces clearly peasants. In the pictures reproduced here, their commander, on horseback, is dressed in complete samurai armour. The equipment of the foot soldiers ranges from a full Buddhist monk's robes and a shaven head, through to a peasant's straw rain cloak and foot soldiers' *jingasa* (war hat), and finally a mixture of samurai armour and helmets. Many items of military equipment could be obtained very cheaply in the aftermath of a battle.



ABOVE An itinerant monk begging in Nara. His costume is not very different from what might have been seen in the days of the warrior monks. He is carrying a shakujo (rattle) in his right hand.



LEFT Ganshoji, seat of the Ikko-ikki of Nagashima, the fortified monastery from where Oda Nobunaga was defied for so long. Ganshoji has since been rebuilt, but still retains a fortress-like appearance.

A sohei (warrior monk) of Mount Hiei or Nara, circa 1100



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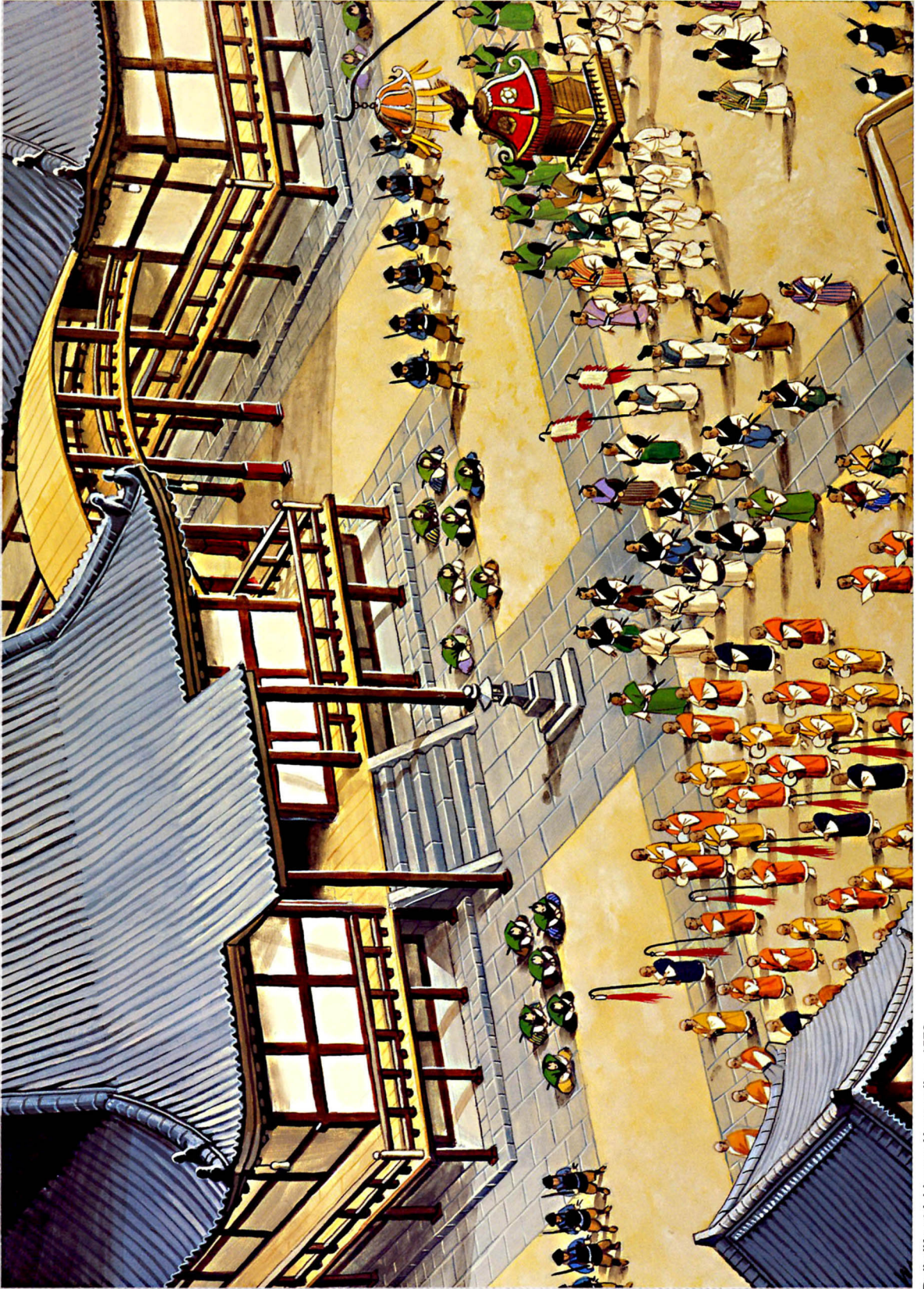
The burning of Nara, 1180



The warrior monks of Negoroji in training, c. 1570



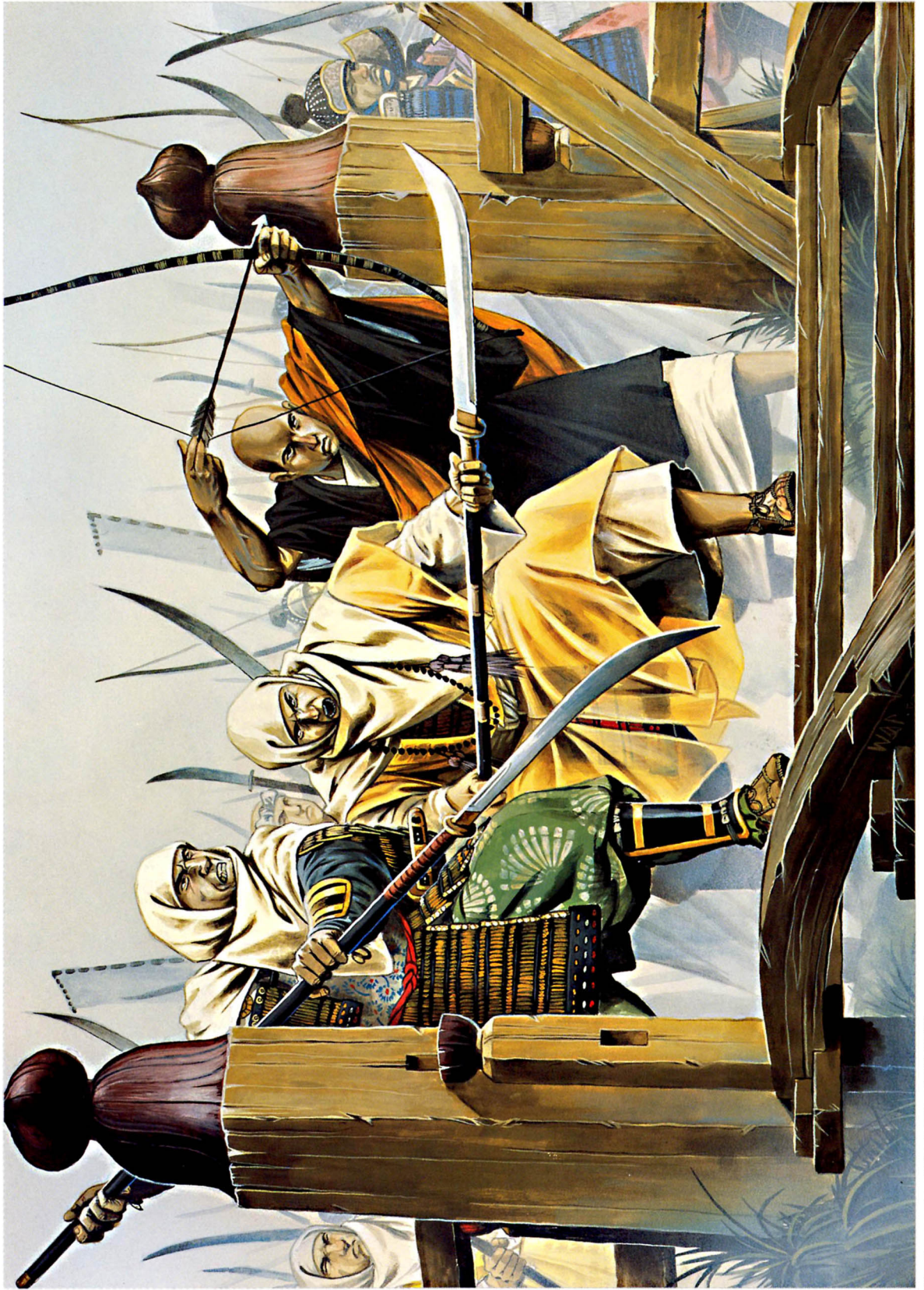
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Daily life at Ishiyama Honganji, c. 1570

The warrior monks of Mount Hiei parade their mikoshi through the streets of Kyoto, 1146





Warrior monks at the battle of Uji, 1180



The defence of Kyoto by the warrior monks of the Hokke-shu against attack by the Ikko-ikki, 1528



A warrior monk of the Ikko-ikki of Nagashima, c. 1574



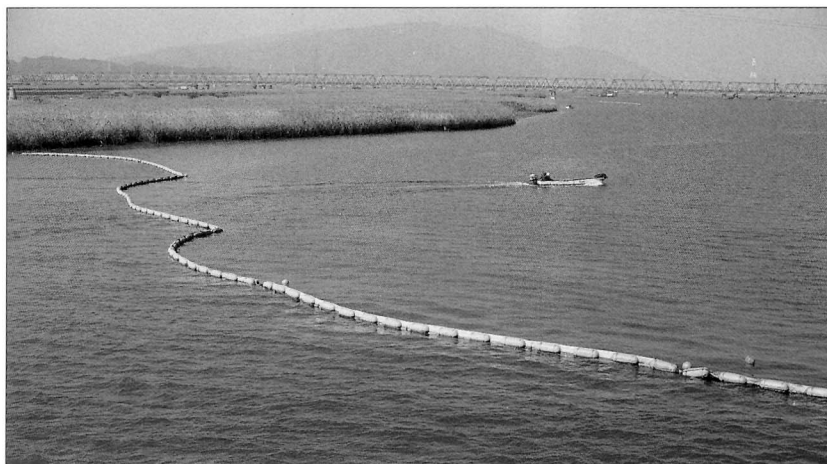
The armour of the 16th century had developed from the earlier do-maru. Lacing was now spaced into pairs, and smaller shoulder plates were worn. Many suits of armour had solid breastplates, some of which were proudly advertised as being bullet proof. The older style of do-maru were still worn, particularly by those samurai who were less well off. The *okegawa-do*, the simple smooth breast-plated armour worn by *ashigaru* (foot soldiers), was quite cheap to produce, so we may imagine hundreds of these suits being available for the Ikko-ikki armies.

As to weapons, swords and daggers were plentiful, while some still carried naginata. Straight spears (introduced during the 14th century) would also have been much in evidence, and all the 'holy warriors' of the 16th century made very good use of arquebuses. The arquebus was a simple matchlock musket fired by dropping a lighted match on to the pan, and was introduced to Japan by the Portuguese in 1543. The Shinshu temples were among the best customers for the newly established gunsmiths – good evidence of how these monk armies were no peasant rabble but an organised force at the forefront of military technology.

A prominent feature of the Ikko-ikki armies was the carrying of flags with Buddhist slogans written on them. Most of these were the long vertical nobori-type banners, held on a pole and stiffened by a cross pole at the top. The Ikko-ikki flags often bore the prayer used by all the Amidist Buddhist sects: 'Namu Amida Butsu' (Hail to the Buddha Amida). Another banner stated the conviction that 'He who advances is sure of salvation, but he who retreats will go to hell'. The Lotus warriors of the Nichiren-shu used flags bearing the Nichiren motto 'Namu Myoho Renge Kyo' (Hail to the Lotus of the Divine Law). Other Buddhist motifs such as the *sotoba* (a series of shapes indicating the relationship between man and heaven) are also noted. Another contingent that supported Ishiyama Honganji used a flag with a crane design.



ABOVE The monument to the Ikko-ikki in the courtyard of Ganshoji in Nagashima.



LEFT The coastal scenery around Nagashima, with wide reedbeds and open water. In misty conditions the atmosphere is very redolent of images of the Ikko-ikki.

## BELIEF AND BELONGING

### From tolerance to trouble-making

The religion that underpinned the warrior monks was Buddhism. There is no space here to explore in detail the teachings of the Buddha or the forms that Buddhism took when it came to Japan, suffice to say that the brand of Buddhism espoused by the first warrior monks was that taught by the great temples of Nara and Mount Hiei, whose attitudes and opinions dominated the religious scene. The disputes between them were never about points of doctrine, nor was there any disagreement with Shinto. Kukai (774–835), known posthumously as Kobo Daishi and the founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism, is one of the holiest and most revered figures in Japanese religion, yet even he revered Shinto so much that he put his new foundation under the protection of Shinto kami. Saicho did the same at Mount Hiei with his devotion to Sanno the king of the mountain. Among those carrying Sanno's mikoshi into Kyoto during demonstrations would be the *kannushi* (Shinto priests) of the Hiyoshi shrine, while the *kannushi* of the Kasuga shrine would have been intimately involved with the politics of Kofukuji.

The big difference in sectarian attitude occurred centuries later with the development of the populist sects. We now see some genuine differences in belief, but how far this was responsible for the violence between the sects is hard to say. One constant factor throughout was the enmity felt by Enryakuji against any new foundation that threatened its traditional predominance in Kyoto. Such was Enryakuji's influence that nearly all the sects described in these pages had founders who had studied on Mount Hiei at some time, but Enryakuji showed no tolerance to anyone who deviated from their teaching and who went on to found his own sect. For example, the Jodo-shu, founded by the priest Honen Shonin, came in for particularly severe treatment at the hands of Enryakuji. By burning both new editions and printing blocks, Enryakuji's monks suppressed several editions of *Senchakushu*, a major work by Honen, over a period of about 300 years.

The attacks by the Ikko-ikki and Enryakuji on the Nichiren temples of Kyoto probably had as much to do with politics as with sectarianism. Nevertheless, the destruction was so thorough that the Nichiren sect was for a long time absent from Kyoto and is hardly present in any significant numbers today. By contrast, we noted the firm alliance between Tendai, Shingon and Shinshu warrior monks when Hideyoshi attacked Negoroji in 1585. Perhaps by this time a bigger enemy had been recognised? The destruction of Mount Hiei by Nobunaga had certainly sent out strong messages to all the sects.

### The religious world of the Ikko-ikki

The fanatical Ikko-ikki movement derived from a later offshoot of the Jodo sect, the Shinshu or Jodo

The armour worn by Shimotsuma Nakayuki, leader of the Ikko-ikki armies during the siege of Ishiyama Honganji.



Shinshu (True Pure Land Sect) founded by Shinran Shonin (1174–1268). It is now Japan's largest Buddhist denomination. We refer to it here as Shinshu to avoid confusion. The head of Shinshu in the 15th century was Rennyo (1415–99), who achieved such fame as a preacher that the warrior monks of Mount Hiei burned his home and forced him to flee to Kaga.

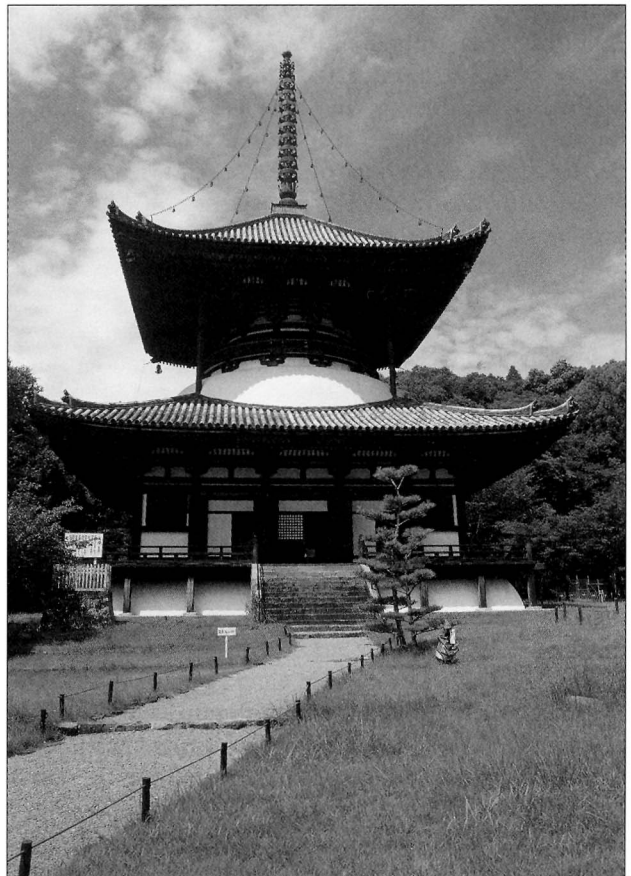
Although poles apart from Enryakuji in its religious, social and political beliefs, the 'single-minded' league of the Ikko-ikki showed a remarkably similar lack of religious toleration. The basis of the beliefs of both Jodo and Jodo-Shinshu was a purposeful devotion to the worship of Amida, the Supreme Buddha of the Jodo (Pure Land) in the West, who will welcome all his followers into the paradise of the Pure Land on their death. This teaching contrasted sharply with the insistence on the attainment of enlightenment through study, work or asceticism stressed by the older sects. To Enryakuji, this was an illusory short-cut to salvation.

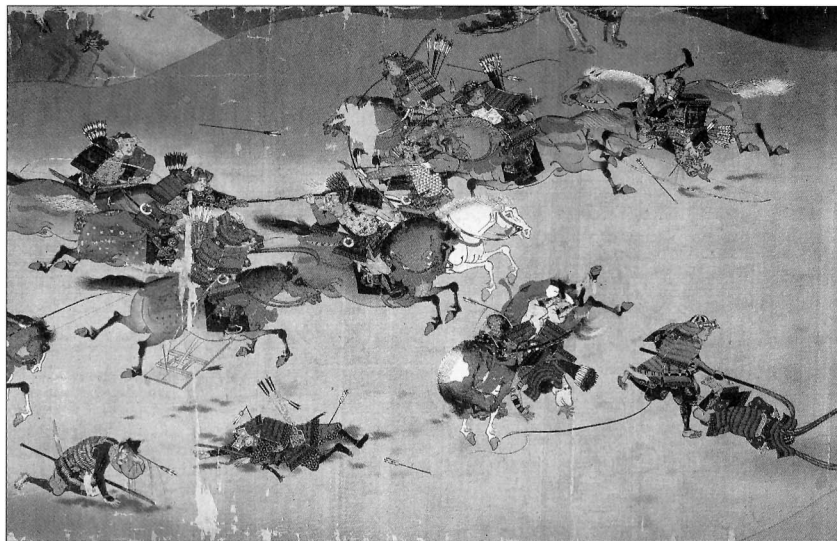
Shinshu promised an even more immediate route to heaven than did Jodo. 'Call on the name of Amida and you will be saved – now!' was the cry of the sect's founder; hence the practice of *nembutsu* or 'Buddha calling', the prayer sequence noted even on battlefields. This prayer, which could be repeated up to 60,000 times a day by devotees, became the motto of the Ikko-ikki armies. Shinshu welcomed all into its fold, and did not insist upon meditation or any intellectual path to salvation. As its clergy were not required to be celibate or to withdraw from the world, they were able to evangelise among the peasantry much more freely, and its influence grew rapidly among the common people.

There is no doubting the strong influence that religion had on all aspects of the lives of the members of the Ikko-ikki, who were Japan's 'holy warriors' *par excellence*. Its *monto* welcomed fighting because their faith promised that paradise was the immediate reward for death in battle, and nothing daunted them. Oaths were signed on a paper that bore the image of Amida Buddha, and the names were arranged in a circle so that no one took precedence over another. On some occasions these documents were burned, the ashes dissolved in water, and the resulting brew drunk by the confederates as a solemn and binding pledge.

The wide social-class inclusiveness of the Ikko-ikki communities was a particular irritation to samurai. Prior to the battle of Azukizaka, Ieyasu's retainer, Sakai Tadatsugu, wrote to the Ikko-ikki temples of Mikawa Province urging them to reflect on the fact that 'shaving the head and wearing priestly robes is only to put on the outward signs of sanctity, like a bat that pretends to be a bird'. Ieyasu clearly did not regard the populist masses of the *monto* as 'real monks'.

**The pagoda of Negoroji is all that survives of the buildings that were standing before the attack by Hideyoshi in 1585.**





**LEFT** The warrior monks of Nara engage with the samurai of the Taira in the defence of their temples, from the *Kasuga Gongen Reikenki*. Only one monk, on the extreme left, is dressed in a headcowl.

Without wishing to stretch the analogy too far, it might be helpful to draw a comparison with Christianity: Jodo might be understood as 'Protestant' and Tendai as 'Catholic', while Shinshu represents a Japanese form of 'militant Protestant fundamentalism' akin to Calvinism.

Nichiren-shu was another fundamentalist Buddhist sect with similar social views. It was named after its founder, the monk Nichiren, who was martyred during the 13th century and was famous for having prophesied the Mongol invasions. The sect was otherwise known as the Hokke-shu (Lotus sect), from the importance attached by its believers to the Lotus Sutra, expressed through the motto and battle-cry 'Namu myoho renge kyo' (Hail to the Lotus of the Divine Law).

Zen never produced any warrior monks. This was no doubt partly due to its having no dogma as such. As one wag put it, having described the details that differentiated Tendai from Shingon and Jodo, 'Zen has neither rhyme nor reason'. We noted earlier the disputes between the Zen temples of Kyoto and Enryakuji, but there seems to have been no actual fighting between them apart from the Omi barrier incident. Other conflicts were resolved through third parties, and Zen had some very powerful samurai patrons who were willing to take a stand on its behalf. Zen is now the most prominent Buddhist sect in Kyoto.

As a footnote to the discussion of religious belief, we may note that during the 16th century Japan acquired another sect to add to its religious milieu. This was Christianity, which appeared on the scene in 1549, and although many of its adherents fought with a devotion otherwise noted among the Ikko-ikki, there were no Christian warrior monks. The closest parallel is probably the community that led the Shimabara Rebellion in 1638. Their defence of Hara castle against the shogun's troops is remarkably similar to the story of the defence of Nagashima. Yet there was certainly no fellow feeling across this religious divide, and one of the few

**BELOW** The temple of Nishi Honganji in Kyoto, symbolic of the solution to the warrior monk problem. It is one of two Jodo Shinshu headquarters in Kyoto.



comments by a European concerning the Japanese warrior monks is a very caustic one. It comes from the Jesuit missionary Father Luis Frois, who described the destruction of Mount Hiei in less than sympathetic terms. Relating how Nobunaga made 'horrible slaughter of these false priests', he concludes, 'Thus God punished these enemies of his glory on Saint Michael's Day in the year 1571.'

## WARRIOR MONK RECRUITMENT AND SERVICE

Although most of the warrior monks of the earlier period must have had some genuine loyalty to the religious ideals set out above, it is quite clear that the armies of Mount Hiei included more than devout monks within their number. We suggested earlier that Ryogen's original recruits may have been no more than mercenaries, but there was another category of warrior monk: those who joined the communities for some personal reason, such as poverty, glory or the desire to escape from criminal prosecution. This was the stereotype of the *akuso* (evil monks) cherished by all their opponents, but the category also covered some celebrated individuals who possessed a rare military talent.

### Benkei

The archetype of the individual warrior monk is of course the legendary Benkei. According to the popular stories about him, Benkei was originally a member of the Enryakuji community but was expelled for bad behaviour. Finding an abandoned shrine somewhere on Mount Hiei, Benkei adopted it as his home and proposed turning it into a one-man monastery. His new temple lacked a bell, so Benkei, who was of large stature and huge physical strength, marched down to Miidera and stole the bell from their courtyard. He carried it back up the hill on his shoulders, but when he tried to ring it the bell would only give out a plaintive moan that indicated that it wanted to go home. So Benkei gave the bell a good kick, which sent it rolling back down the hill into Miidera. The angry monks then made him replace it in the bell tower.

Benkei's most famous exploits concern his relationship with the great samurai general Minamoto Yoshitsune. They first met on the Goto bridge in Kyoto, where Benkei was currently engaged in stealing valuable swords from passing samurai. He tried the same trick with Yoshitsune, who defeated him in a single combat reminiscent of the legendary one between Robin Hood and Little John. From that day onwards Benkei became Yoshitsune's

**A warrior monk in his full robes and equipment posed for a late 19th-century photograph. The details are very accurate. Note the headcowl, which is patterned, and the typical priest's robe, out of which protrude the skirts of his suit of armour. He is wearing armoured sleeves and carries the traditional naginata.**





A warrior monk with headcowl, riding a horse. He appears to have pulled a rival warrior monk off the ground and is striking him with his fist.

### The monk martial artist

During the 16th century we read of another remarkable individual warrior monk. His name was Inei, and he was the chief priest of the Hozo-In, a sub-temple of Kofukuji. We hear almost nothing of warrior monk armies from Kofukuji during the Sengoku Period, so Inei's interest in the martial arts is unique.

Inei was a skilled devotee of spear fighting with the *yari*, the straight-bladed spear that had almost replaced the naginata. One night he was practising with his spear by the pool of Sarusawa. The neck of the spear blade where it joined the shaft was reflected in the waters of the pond and merged with the reflection of the crescent moon. This gave Inei the inspiration to fit a crescent-shaped cross blade to his spear. This weapon became known as the *kamayari* of the Hozo-In. Inei's pupil Shuji fought a famous single combat against the wandering swordsman Miyamoto Musashi, and even though Musashi was victorious the duel gave him quite a respect for the fighting monks.

### The samurai monks

As a final example of the individual warrior monk, we must mention the numerous samurai who were also ordained Buddhist priests. Some of the greatest names among the Sengoku daimyo had taken holy orders, and evidence of their status is noticeable from contemporary paintings. Thus Uesugi Kenshin is usually shown wearing a monk's cowl on his head.

loyal companion. He fought beside him at Ichi no tani, Yashima and Dan no Ura, and accompanied him on his wanderings when he fled from the wrath of his jealous brother, Minamoto Yoritomo. These exploits, travelling Japan in disguise, have provided the plots for several classic plays of the Japanese theatre.

Benkei and Yoshitsune met their deaths at the battle of Koromogawa in 1189. The chronicle *Gikeiki* provides us with an unforgettable image of warrior monk valour when it describes how Benkei, naginata in hand, held the enemy at bay while his master performed hara kiri. There he stood, covered in blood and looking like a porcupine from the scores of arrows that had pierced him. One samurai suggested that Benkei was wearing a *horo* back to front. A *horo* was a form of cloak, but what the man saw was the flow of Benkei's blood. He stood as immovable as the great god Fudo, until the slipstream from a passing horse made him topple over, and everyone realised that he had been dead for some time, but had died standing at his post.



Several pictures of Takeda Shingen in armour show him with a *kesa* (ceremonial scarf) across his breastplate. Otherwise there may be small additions to their costume that simply show Buddhist devotion. Honda Tadakatsu, for example, is often depicted with a huge wooden 'rosary', and many used flags with Buddhist motifs. Needless to say, the armies in which these men served, or even led, were not 'warrior monk' armies, but their religious motivation was often a factor in their behaviour.

Many daimyo who were not monks cherished their Buddhist faith. For example, following the defeat of the Imagawa family, of which he was then a vassal, in 1560, Tokugawa Ieyasu went to his ancestral temple of Daijuji in Okazaki with the intention of committing hara kiri in front of the tombs of his ancestors. Toyo, the chief priest, managed to dissuade him from this course of action, and presented Ieyasu with a white banner on which was written 'Renounce this filthy world, attain the Pure Land', a flag that Ieyasu was to carry with him in all subsequent battles, including ones against the Ikko-ikki.

## DAILY LIFE AND TRAINING

### Daily life at Negoroji

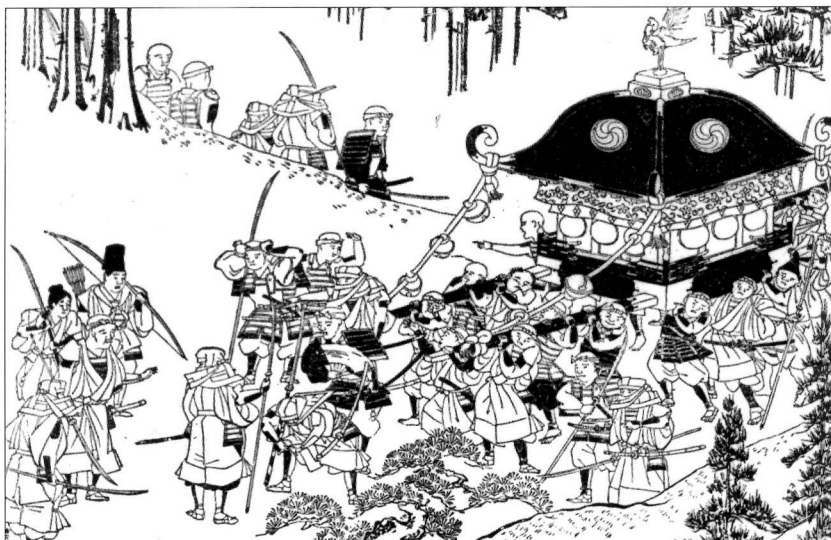
Sources are lacking for any authentic account of how a warrior monk of Nara or Mount Hiei might divide his day between military training and the monastic life of prayer, study and meditation. By contrast a vivid impression of daily life among the warrior monks of the Sengoku Period comes from a report written by the Jesuit missionary Father Caspar Vilela. He visited the monastery of Negoroji, whose warrior monks belonged to the Shingi sect. Shingi, which literally means 'new meaning' was a branch of Kobo Daishi's Shingon sect. The monk Kakuhan (Kokyo Daishi) founded the branch in the 12th century. The Negoroji monks are particularly interesting because they were renowned for their use of firearms and supplied a contingent of arquebusiers to Ishiyama Honganji.

Vilela described the appearance of the Negoroji warriors as akin to the Knights of Rhodes. This was a perceptive comment, and Vilela clearly had in mind the ferocity of the defence of Rhodes against the Ottomans in 1522. Like the Knights of St John, the Negoroji warrior monks were devoted to their religion and prepared to fight for it. Vilela, however, surmised that most of those he saw had taken no monastic vows, because they wore their hair long, and were devoted to the practice of arms, their monastic rule laying less emphasis on prayer than on military preparation.

Warrior monks in action. The fellow at the rear has the famous naginata and wears priestly robes and a headcowl.



The warrior monks of Mount Hiei descend on Kyoto with their sacred mikoshi. This interesting illustration provides many important points of detail of the sohei's appearance. Some have no headcowl, but naginata are much in evidence.



He also gives a good idea of the training of the warrior monks. Each member was required to make five or seven arrows per day, and to practise competitively with bow and arquebus once a week. Their helmets, armour and spears were of astonishing strength, and, to quote Vilela, 'their sharp swords could slice through a man in armour as easily as a butcher carves a tender rump steak!' Their practice combat with each other was fierce, and the death of one of their number in training was accepted without emotion. Fearless on the battlefield, they enjoyed life off it with none of the restrictions normally associated with the ascetic life, indulging freely in wine, women and song.

### **The warrior monk's diet**

It is unlikely that the average warrior monk laid any more stress on the Buddhist prohibition against eating meat than he did on the strictures on the taking of human life. His usual diet would be sparse and simple, although highly nutritious. It consisted mainly of rice, fish, vegetables, seaweed, salt and fruit, augmented occasionally by venison, wild boar and game birds. Rice was boiled in a pan, mixed with vegetables or seaweed, steamed or made into *o-nigiri* (rice balls). *Mochi* (rice cakes) were made from rice flour or a mixture of rice and wheat flour. Husked rice could also be made into soup to which was added burdock, aubergines, cucumbers, mushrooms and other vegetables. If the monastery was near the sea, fish, shellfish and seaweed could be added to the diet. Fish was eaten raw (*sashimi*), grilled, fried or preserved by drying or smoking it. Green tea and sake (rice wine) were a warrior monk's usual drink.

## **THE WARRIOR MONK ON CAMPAIGN**

As noted above, the warrior monks would usually go on campaign on their own behalf, but they would sometimes ally themselves to samurai armies. On the occasions when a leader of samurai wished to recruit the services of the warrior monks, delicate discussions would take place, but a dramatic example of how things could go wrong occurred in Nara in

1180. Taira Kiyomori had sent envoys to negotiate an alliance, but the monks most unwisely assaulted the messengers and forcibly shaved their heads, then added insult to injury by making a wooden head, which they called the head of Kiyomori, and kicking it around the temple courtyard!

### **The monastic protest march**

For the imperial court the greatest threat from the warrior monks occurred whenever they took their grievances into the streets of Kyoto and even to the gates of the imperial palace itself. These monastic 'protest marches' were turbulent affairs, and the monks would reinforce their own intimidating presence by carrying down into Kyoto the sacred *mikoshi* (portable shrines). *Heike Monogatari* describes several such incidents, one of which resulted from the murder of a Mount Hiei monk by a courtier.

For the imperial family, who otherwise led sheltered and privileged lives, the descent of the warrior monks on Kyoto in a demonstration was as terrifying as any military campaign, because the unseen weapon that the warrior monks carried was the fear of the gods they represented. By the end of the 11th century the warrior monks had this routine down to a fine art. If the intended victim was a member of the Fujiwara family (a category that included nearly everyone in the imperial court) the monks would march into Kyoto carrying branches of the sakaki tree specially consecrated by the kannushi of the Kasuga shrine, the tutelary shrine of the Fujiwara. To really drive home a point the monks might denounce an offender at the Kasuga shrine – a fate worse than death.

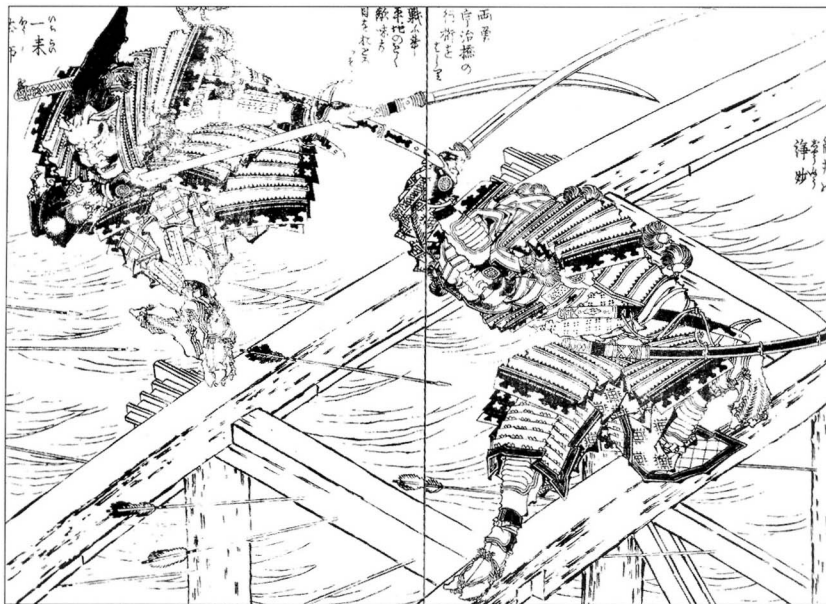
For the Mount Hiei monks the carrying of the mikoshi of Sanno the mountain king was the most dramatic gesture that could be made. Mikoshi may be seen today whenever there is a shrine festival in Japan. They are associated with the Shinto religion rather than Buddhism, but in the time of the warrior monks Shinto and Buddhism were closely related. Sanno's shrine was the Hiyoshi Shrine at the foot of Mount Hiei, and when the monks headed for the capital they would call in and collect the mikoshi, into which the kannushi would ritually transfer the *mitama* (spirit) of Sanno.

About 20 monks carried the mikoshi on poles, exactly as festival shrines are transported nowadays, and any assault on the mikoshi was regarded as an offence to the kami Sanno himself. Every monk also carried Buddhist prayer beads and would readily pronounce a curse upon anyone who offended him. On one occasion the monks chanted the 600 chapters of the *Dai Hannya Kyo* (a Buddhist sutra) as a curse.



**Tajima the arrow-cutter, the warrior monk hero of the battle of Uji, from a carved ivory statuette.**

The monk hero Ichirai Hoshi vaults over his companion, Tsutsui Jomyo, to engage the enemy on the broken bridge of Uji during the battle of 1180.



Sometimes the mikoshi would be left in the streets while the monks returned to the mountain. There it would remain, to the dread of all the citizens, until the monks' desires were satisfied. This subtle form of blackmail was first used in 1082.

### Street fighting

The imperial court were particularly vulnerable to such treatment, as their lives were conducted according to strict religious and astrological rules, and Mount Hiei was of course their spiritual guardian. But by the 12th century the newly powerful samurai clans were less easily intimidated, and in 1146 a young samurai called Taira Kiyomori had his first dramatic clash with warrior monks. On the day of the Gion Festival in Kyoto one of Kiyomori's attendants quarrelled with a priest from the Gion shrine. Vowing revenge, Kiyomori led an attack on the Gion shrine while its mikoshi was being paraded. With a haughty samurai disregard for religious scruples Kiyomori deliberately shot an arrow at the mikoshi. It struck the gong on the front and proclaimed the act of sacrilege far and near. Kiyomori had certainly taken a risk. Regardless of the feelings of the offended kannushi, it was widely believed that anyone who assaulted a mikoshi would be struck dead on the spot. But Kiyomori survived, and found that he had stirred up a hornets' nest.

Enraged at the offence to a mikoshi, 7,000 warrior monks from Mount Hiei suddenly descended on the capital, baying for Kiyomori's blood. They expected that he would be banished, but times had changed. The imperial court had become dependent upon samurai armies such as those of Kiyomori's Taira clan for defending them against all incursions, including monastic ones. Kiyomori's continued support was therefore more important than placating the monks, and the court exonerated Kiyomori on payment of a nominal fine.

Few incidents illustrate the rise of samurai power in the land better than Kiyomori's personal defiance. With one arrow a samurai leader had burst the bubble of monastic pretensions. Through this act the power of

the Taira family grew, and the influence of the monks began to decline, until both were swallowed up in the devastation of the Gempei War.

*Heike Monogatari* also tells of another occasion when the defiant sohei advanced on the capital carrying the mikoshi of the mountain king: 'as they entered Ichijo (a street in Kyoto) from the eastern side, people wondered if the sun and moon had not fallen from heaven.' They marched through the city to the imperial palace, where they found an armed guard of samurai and foot soldiers barring their way at the northern gate. The samurai were under the command of Minamoto Yorimasa, who was later to fight shoulder to shoulder with the warrior monks at the battle of Uji. He showed great respect for the sacred mikoshi: 'Then Yorimasa quickly leapt from his horse, and taking off his helmet and rinsing his mouth with water, made humble obeisance before the sacred emblem, all his three hundred retainers likewise following his example.'

The monks hesitated in their attack, noting the presence of the respected (and respectful) Yorimasa, and his comparatively small army, and decided to attack another gate instead. Here no diplomatic general was waiting for them, but a hail of arrows from mounted samurai:

A struggle ensued, for the samurai drew their bows and shot at them so that many arrows struck the sacred mikoshi of Juzenji and some of the priests were killed. Many of their followers were wounded, the noise of the shouts and groaning even ascending to the heights of the Bonten paradise, while Kenro-Chijin, the mighty Earth-deity, was struck with consternation. Then the priestly bands, leaving their mikoshi at the gate, fled back lamenting to their temples.

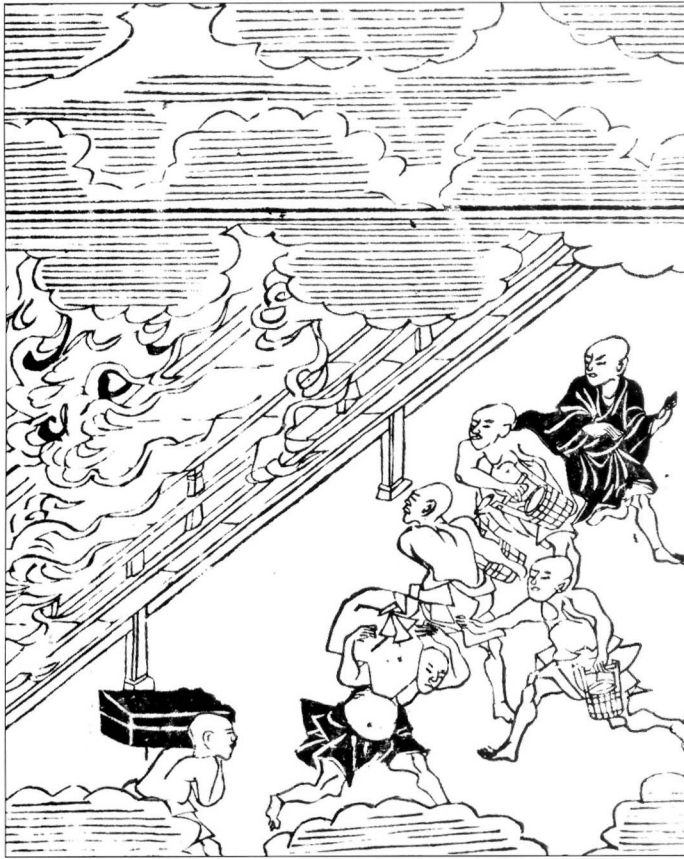


The warrior monks of Nara rush to defend their temple against the attack by Taira Shigehira in 1180.

## THE WARRIOR MONKS IN BATTLE

### Individual weapon skills

The traditional warrior monk weapon, the naginata, had its own style of combat. Slashing strokes were the usual way of fighting, and could produce very nasty wounds. A quick upward stroke towards the unprotected groin was a favourite manoeuvre, and a monk on horseback would stand up in his stirrups and whirl the naginata about him. On foot the blade would be switched from one side to another with practised rapidity, or whirled like a waterwheel.



The monks of Nara try in vain to quench the flames that are destroying the Todaiji. Shigehira's burning of Nara sent shock waves through the warrior monk communities, and virtually ended their involvement in the Gempei War.

There is a famous account in *Heike Monogatari* of the fighting of three individual warrior monks during the first battle of Uji in 1180. It has often been quoted, but still repays careful analysis as the most complete account in all the Japanese chronicles of how the naginata and other monk weapons were actually used. As noted above, the warrior monks of Miidera and the Minamoto samurai under Minamoto Yorimasa had marched south to join the monks of Kofukuji, but the night was almost spent by the time they reached the Uji river, which acts as a natural moat to the south of Kyoto. Realising that the Taira were following them, they tore up the planking on the Uji bridge, and rested for the night in the Byodo-In temple on the southern bank. The story of the warrior monks' involvement begins with the tale of a nimble sohei who climbed on to the beams of the bridge and, whirling his naginata like a propeller, deflected the arrows that were fired at him:

Then Gochin no Tajima, throwing away the sheath of his long naginata, strode forth alone on to the bridge, whereupon the Heike straightaway shot at him fast and furious. Tajima, not at all perturbed, ducking to avoid the higher ones and leaping up over those that flew low, cut through those that flew straight with his whirring naginata, so that even the enemy looked on in admiration. Thus it was that he was dubbed 'Tajima the arrow-cutter'.

Later in the same account Tajima is replaced on the bridge by his comrade Tsutsui Jomyo Meishu, who illustrates the individual fighting skills of the warrior monk in no uncertain fashion. Jomyo first leapt on to the beams where they protruded from the riverbank and challenged the Taira to fight him:

And loosing off his twenty-four arrows like lightning flashes he slew twelve of the Heike soldiers and wounded eleven more. One arrow yet remained in his quiver, but flinging away his bow he stripped off his quiver and threw that after it, cast off his footwear and springing barefoot on to the beams of the bridge, he strode across.

From bow and arrow he moved on to his naginata, sword and dagger:

With his naginata he mows down five of the enemy, but with the sixth the naginata snaps asunder in the midst, and flinging

it away he draws his tachi, wielding it in the zig-zag style, the interlacing, cross, reversed dragonfly, waterwheel and eight-sides-at-once styles of swordfighting, thus cutting down eight men; but as he brought down the ninth with an exceedingly mighty blow on the helmet the blade snapped at the hilt and fell with a splash into the water beneath. Then, seizing his tanto, which was the only weapon he had left, he plied it as one in a death fury.

*Heike Monogatari* tells us that when Jomyo eventually retired from the fight he counted 63 arrows sticking out of his armour, which is not unlikely, as other chronicles attest. A direct arrow strike between the eyes that avoided the peak of a samurai helmet would of course be instantly fatal, but it was more common for samurai to die after sustaining multiple arrow hits. This was largely because of the stopping power of their armour, and the popular image from both woodblock prints and modern movies of the dying samurai crawling along with hundreds of arrows protruding from him is not too much of an exaggeration. The example of Benkei was noted above, and a certain Imagawa Yorikuni, who fought during the Nanbokucho Wars, needed 20 arrows to kill him, so Jomyo did well to survive. But at first Jomyo was not to be moved from his post:

Now a retainer ... Ichirai Hoshi by name, was fighting behind Jomyo, but as the beams were so narrow he could not come alongside him, so placing a hand on the neckpiece of his helmet he shouted, 'Pardon me, Jomyo, this is no good', and springing over his shoulder to the front fought mightily until he fell.

**The warrior monk army in battle**

There was of course more to winning battles than fighting heroic single combats, and the sources are equally rich for the more co-operative aspects of warrior monk warfare. For example, during the Taira attack on Miidera after the battle of Uji:

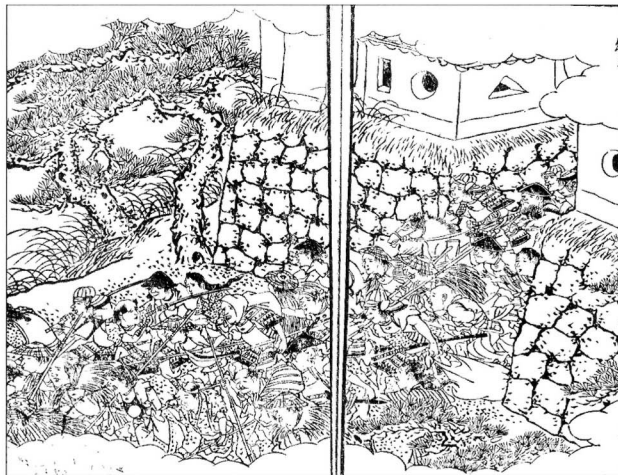
At the monastery about a thousand warrior monks, arming themselves, made a shield barrier, threw up a barricade of felled trees, and awaited them. At the Hour of the Hare they began to draw their bows, and the battle continued the whole day, until when evening came three hundred of the monks and their men had fallen. Then the fight went on in the darkness, and the imperial army forced its way into the monastery and set it on fire.

The *Heike Monogatari* account of the defence of Nara in the same year of 1180 is very similar:

Akamatsu Enshin, a samurai leader of the 14th century, showing the headcowl worn by samurai who were also monks. It is essentially a simplified version of the monks' headcowl.



At Nara about seven thousand monks, young and old without distinction, put on their armour and took up their position at Narasaka and Hannyajji, digging ditches across the road and making breastworks and palisades. ... The monks fought on foot while the imperial army fought on horseback, and as they kept riding up for the attack, the ranks of Nara were thinned and they began to give ground, so that by nightfall, after fighting from early morning, both of their positions were broken through.



Taira Shigehira's mounted samurai bowmen were therefore held off until dark by the determined monks. There were none of the usual niceties of samurai combat because the monkish rabble were thought unworthy of a challenge, but no cavalry charge could break through, so the fateful order was given to use that most deadly of weapons in the samurai armoury: fire. It is probable that Shigehira only intended to burn down a few isolated buildings to break the monks' defensive line, as rival temples had done to each other for two centuries, but a particularly strong wind was blowing. The Kofukuji temple was reduced to ashes, in spite of all the monks' attempts to save it. The flames then spread to the great Todaiji, whose Daibutsuden (Great Buddha Hall) housed the enormous statue of Buddha.

**Warriors of the Ikko-ikki leaving a castle. They are a motley crew, dressed in a mixture of farmers' clothes and samurai armour. They have swords, spears and naginata. Some are wearing monks' robes.**

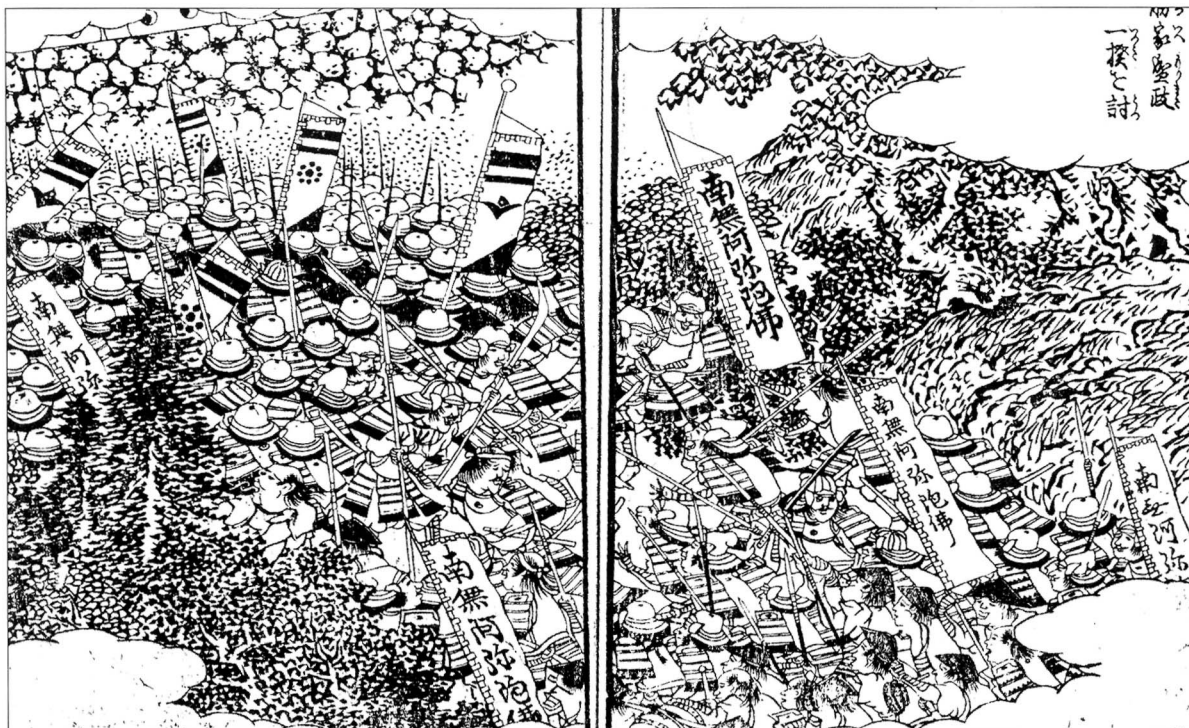
By this time all the warrior monks who had scorned surrender because of fear of dishonour had fallen fighting at Narasaka and Hannyajji, and those who remained fled towards Yoshino and Totsugawa. Those who were too old to flee, and the unattached laymen, children and girls, thinking to save themselves, went up into the upper storey of the Daibutsudan or fled into the interior of Yamashinadera in their panic. About a thousand of them crowded into the Daibutsudan and pulled up the ladders behind them so that the enemy could not follow, but the flames reached them first, and such a great crying arose that could not be surpassed even by the sinners amid the flames of Tapanā, Pratāpanā and Avitchi, the fiercest of the Eight Hot Hells.

The author also laments the destruction of Kofukuji and Todaiji, and most of all the loss of the great statue of Buddha:

The colossal statue of Vairochana Buddha of copper and gold, whose domed head towered up into the clouds, from which gleamed the sacred jewel of his lofty forehead, fused with the heat, so that its full moon features fell to the pavement below, while its body melted into a shapeless mass.

In all 3,500 people died in the burning of Nara, and of the original buildings only the imperial repository of the Shoso-In remains to this day. The heads of 1,000 monks were displayed in Nara or carried back to Kyoto.





### Warrior monk tactics in the 14th century

The accounts in *Taiheiki*, which deals with the wars of the 14th century, show that warrior monk fighting has changed not at all. There is a vivid account of a single combat between a monk armed with a naginata and a mounted samurai during the Mount Hiei attack on Kyoto. Once again we see the image of a naginata being spun like a waterwheel, just as in the case of 'Tajima the arrow-cutter':

Just then a monk kicked over the shield in front of him and sprang forward, whirling his naginata like a water wheel. It was Kajitsu of Harima. Kaito received him with his right arm, meaning to cut down into his helmet bowl, but the glancing sword struck down lightly from Kajitsu's shoulder-plate to the cross stitching at the bottom of his armour. Again Kaito struck forcefully, but his left foot broke through its stirrup, and he was likely to fall from his horse. As he straightened his body, Kajitsu thrust up his naginata, and two or three times drove its point quickly into his helmet. Kaito fell off his horse, pierced cleanly through the throat. Swiftly Kajitsu put down his foot on Kaito's armour, seized his side hair, and cut off his head, that he might fix it to his naginata. Rejoicing, he mocked the enemy.

Battles involving warrior monks were, however, few and far between during the Nanbokucho Wars. During an incursion into Kyoto by the monks of Mount Hiei, the samurai defenders used their skills as mounted archers to harass the monks, most of whom were on foot. Arrows were fired as horsemen galloped up and retired, until the resolve of the sohei was worn away:

**Ikko-ikki soldiers with their characteristic Buddhist flags proclaiming 'Namu Amida Butsu' (Hail to Amida Buddha). These men are much better supplied with armour than their compatriots in the previous picture.**

The monks went out before the west gate of the temple, a mere thousand men, unsheathing their weapons and battling against the enemy drawing near. But these pulled back their horses and retreated nimbly when the monks attacked, and galloped round to the rear when the monks stood in their places, as it was planned from the beginning. Thus they galloped and harassed them six or seven times, until at length the bodies of the monks grew weary, by reason that they fought on foot and wore heavy armour. Seizing the advantage, the warriors sent forward archers to shoot them mercilessly.

As the samurai closed in on them the naginata finally came into their own for a last-ditch struggle.

So they spoke, whirling their great four shaku-long naginata like water wheels. Again and again they leaped and attacked with flying sparks of fire. Many were the warriors whose horses' legs were cut when they sought to smite these two. Many were those who fell to the ground and perished with smashed helmets!

The warrior monks had more success when their enemies attacked Mount Hiei and the sohei were 'playing at home':

Being well acquainted with the land, the monks gathered together in suitable places, from where to let fly arrows in very great numbers. Nor might the warriors retreat easily, but being strangers to the land they galloped into ditches and over cliffs, and fell down together with their horses.

### **The Ikko-ikki in battle**

The accounts from the Sengoku Period of the Ikko-ikki in battle are very different from the isolated heroics emphasised by *Heike Monogatari* and *Taiheiki*. Instead there is far more stress laid on the common endeavours of these mass-movement armies. One notable feature, particularly in the accounts of the Ikko-ikki's wars against their hated enemy Oda Nobunaga, is the use of mass *nembutsu* chanting as a means of raising their own fighting spirits and intimidating 'the enemies of Buddha'. Thus in 1571 we read of Nobunaga's samurai at Nagashima hearing on the wind the sound of a mass chanting of 'Namu Amida Butsu' as the



A warrior monk army showing their wooden shields with 'bonji' inscriptions painted upon them in Sanskrit.

Ikko-ikki gave thanks for their latest salvation from the 'Devil Nobunaga'. In May 1576 Nobunaga carried out an attack on Ishiyama Honganji known as the battle of Mitsuji, a fierce skirmish provoked by the mass chanting from the defenders.

The Ikko-ikki army at Nagashima was also brilliant at defensive tactics, and there is a fascinating parallel between them and the contemporary Dutch defenders of their republic against imperial Spain. Any of the citizens of Leiden in 1574, where dykes and ramparts shielded a community sharing a passionate religious conviction, would have felt very much at home at Nagashima that same year!

The first attack by Nobunaga on the island community was a disaster. His mounted samurai began to ford towards the first *waju* (dyked area), only to find that the river bottom was a deep sea of mud. The horses' legs quickly mired, and as the animals struggled many threw off their heavily armoured riders, who were met by a hail of arrows and bullets, causing severe casualties. As the survivors dragged themselves to the nearest dry land, the *waju* of Nagasuji-guchi, they encountered ropes stretched between stakes which further hindered their progress towards safety. The shoreline was covered by tall, dense reeds, which acted as a magnet to the desperate and demoralised samurai. As they crawled into the reedbeds they discovered them to be swarming with more Ikko-ikki arquebusiers and archers, who cut them down like flies. The shores of the reedbeds were booby-trapped with old pots and vases, buried up to the necks in the sand, providing a trap for ankles, and further slowing down the samurai withdrawal into a sitting target. As night fell the defenders realised that the sole survivors of the Oda army were confined within the next *waju* of Ota-guchi, so the dyke was cut, rapidly flooding the low-lying land, catching the remaining samurai in an inrush of muddy water.

### **The warrior monks and firearms**

As noted earlier, the warrior monks were among the first armies to develop the use of the arquebus. The organised and cohesive nature of the Shinshu communities also enabled them to develop firearms production in a way that left most daimyo standing. Tokugawa Ieyasu's battles against the Mikawa monto provide an early example. On one occasion Ieyasu felt a bullet strike his armour, but thinking that it had not penetrated he fought on. It was only when he got back to Okazaki castle when the fighting was over that he realised how near he had come to being killed, because when his servant stripped off his body armour two bullets fell out of his shirt.



**A flag of the Ikko-ikki bearing the slogan 'Namu Fukashigi Sen Nyorai' (Hail to the mysterious Buddha of the Future).**



LEFT An army under Hideyoshi defeats a warrior monk army on the shores of Lake Biwa in 1571.

BELOW The monks of Mount Hiei feed the troops of Asakura Yoshikage after their defeat by Hideyoshi, an unwise move that led to their destruction.

A few years later Oda Nobunaga had his first experience of the force of warrior monk gunfire. During his attempt on Ishiyama Honganji in 1570 Nobunaga's army was stunned both by the ferocity of the surprise attack launched against it and also by the use of controlled volley firing from 3,000 arquebusiers. In the chronicle *Shinchokoki* we read that 'the enemy gunfire echoed between heaven and earth'.

By the time of the second attack on Nagashima in 1573 Nobunaga had created his own form of mass firearm tactics. Covered by an advance from the west under Sakuma Nobumori and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Nobunaga sent his gunners on ahead along the main roads into Nagashima, hoping that the volley fire would blast a way through for him. Unfortunately, as soon as his men were ready to fire, a fierce downpour soaked the matches and the pans, rendering nine out of every ten arquebuses temporarily out of action. The Ikko-ikki took this as a sign from heaven of divine favour, and launched an immediate counter-attack for which Nobunaga's army was ill prepared. They began to fall back, and as the Ikko-ikki pressed forward they received a further sign from heaven as the clouds parted and the rain stopped, enabling them to employ their own arquebuses, because their pans had been closed and the fuses had been in dry bags. The defenders advanced perilously close to Nobunaga himself, who was in the thick of the fighting astride a horse. One bullet narrowly missed his ear, and another felled one of his retainers through the armpit.

In a further action against the Ikko-ikki in 1576 Nobunaga received a bullet wound in his leg, and it is interesting to note that this incident occurred one year after his great victory at Nagashino. That was the battle where Nobunaga won renown for using tactics very similar to those he had experienced at the hands of Japan's most fanatical fighters: the warrior monks.



## MUSEUM COLLECTIONS AND PLACES TO VISIT

In view of the large number of military and historical museums that have been established in Japan over the past three decades, it is surprising that no one has ever opened a museum dedicated to the warrior monks. This is, however, compensated for by the fact that the places from which they operated are all still flourishing as Buddhist temples and monasteries, and almost all are open to the public.

The Todaiji and the Kofukuji, the two great temples of Nara, remain among Japan's finest tourist attractions, and although most of their wooden buildings have been rebuilt and restored over the years, it is easy to conjure up images of sohei marching through their courtyards. Nearly all of the Todaiji/Kofukuji/Kasuga area is virtually traffic free, and much of it is parkland. The same Buddhist statues and images that inspired the sohei are still there in the dimly lit temple halls, and the great gates and the pool of Sarusawa cannot have looked very different. The only problem the visitor has is avoiding the inquisitive deer.

Mount Hiei, which dominates the city of Kyoto from the north-east, still presents the same duality of security and menace that met the eyes of the imperial courtiers. It is easily reached by public transport, and it is possible to make a complete circuit of the Enryakuji complex beginning at Sakamoto near Lake Biwa, where the Hiyoshi shrine of Sanno the mountain king still exists, and descending into Kyoto. The Hiyoshi shrine displays the latest equivalent of the sacred mikoshi that were carried into Kyoto. A cable car from Sakamoto whisks you up to Enryakuji in a few minutes, where there is much to see and the view is magnificent. Onjoji (Miidera) is nearby and also worth a visit. You can see Benkei's famous bell, and also the cauldron used to make the bean soup that he demanded as compensation.

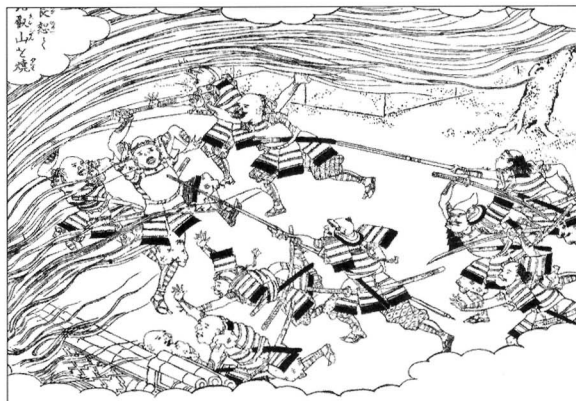
In Kyoto the Nishi Honganji and Higashi Honganji are open to the public, as are Kyoto's famous Zen temples, many of which have wonderful gardens. Nanzenji, whose gate caused such problems for the warrior monks, is an exceptionally interesting building. The battlefield of Uji is not far away. The Uji riverside is well preserved and very evocative, and the Byodo-In is one of Japan's finest temples.

Kobo Daishi's foundation of Koya-san is another monastic complex well worth a visit. It is famous for the mausoleums of famous samurai, and at least one temple takes in guests. It is a wonderful opportunity for a visitor to share in a little of the monastic life.

As for the Ikko-ikki, the topography of Nagashima has changed much over the centuries, but retains an atmosphere of sea and reedbeds that still has the power to evoke impressions of the 16th century. The land is flat, and not unlike Holland

**BELOW TOP The destruction of Enryakuji by the troops of Oda Nobunaga in 1571. This was the blackest deed associated with the name of the great general.**

**BELOW BOTTOM A fierce battle during the siege of Ishiyama Honganji by Oda Nobunaga.**





**A battle with the warrior monks of Negoroji, destroyed by Hideyoshi in 1585.**

in appearance, because much of it has been reclaimed, and the ricefields are bordered by reedbeds as they reach the shore. One gate and part of the moat is all that remains of Nagashima castle. Its keep survived until 1959, when it was struck by lightning. The Ganshoji lost its original location to the sea and has been rebuilt further inland, but it still boasts a stone wall that gives it the appearance of a fortified place. Within its courtyard is the most interesting feature of all: a stone stupa erected recently as a memorial to the martyrs of the Ikko-ikki.

At the Negoroji in Wakayama Prefecture is the Daito (great pagoda), the only building that survived Hideyoshi's attack. It was built in 1496,

and bullet holes from the 1585 attack can still be seen. The rest of the complex is also very interesting, and there are some fine gardens. Wakayama castle, built on the site of the Saiga-ikki's Ota castle, is nearby.

Osaka castle holds few traces of the former Ishiyama Honganji, but an idea of its impregnability may be gained by the view from the top of the castle tower. There is also a memorial stone to the Ikko-ikki, and the excellent museum inside Osaka castle's keep contains several interesting items relating to the Ikko-ikki. There are flags and a suit of armour associated with Shimotsuna Nakayuki.

Apart from Osaka, it is rare to find arms and armour in Japan specifically linked to warrior monks. Nearer to home, the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds has some naginata on display, along with do-maru types of armour, arquebuses and swords.

## **SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY AND FURTHER READING**

For those skilled in the Japanese language the standard history of the early warrior monks is *Sohei* by Katsuno Ryushin (Tokyo, 1955), and for the Jodo-Shinshu armies it is *Ikko-ikki no kenkyu* by Kasahara Kaguo (Tokyo, 1982). The works of Sasama Yoshihiko, such as *Buke Senjin Saho Shusei* (Tokyo, 1969), also have sections on the warrior monks.

The most complete account in English of the development of Buddhist monasticism in Japan, and particularly the political context that led to the warrior monks, may be found in volume two of *The Cambridge History of Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 1984). *The Organisation of Japan's Medieval World*, edited by Mass (1990) contains an interesting chapter on 13th- and 14th-century developments. The growth of the Honganji is covered in Michael Solomon's article 'The Dilemma of Religious Power', in *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol 32, pp. 51-65.

The warrior monks of Nara and Kyoto are discussed in the context of the 12th-century civil wars in my book *The Samurai: A Military History* (Japan Library, 1996), and in their relation to Oda Nobunaga in my *Samurai Warfare* (Cassells, 1996). For several illustrations of heraldry and

flags involving Buddhist emblems see my *Samurai Heraldry* (Osprey Elite Series, 2002). The related but little-known phenomenon of Korean warrior monks is discussed in my *Samurai Invasion: Japan's Korean War 1592–98* (Cassells, 2002).

## GLOSSARY

<b>akuso</b>	'evil monk', a pejorative term for sohei
<b>ashigaru</b>	foot soldier
<b>do-maru</b>	a simple suit of armour
<b>Heike</b>	the Taira clan
<b>ikki</b>	league or organisation
<b>jinja</b>	Shinto shrine
<b>kamayari</b>	a spear with a crescent-shaped crossblade
<b>kami</b>	a Shinto deity
<b>kannushi</b>	Shinto priest
<b>katana</b>	the standard fighting sword
<b>kesa</b>	the ceremonial scarf worn by Buddhist monks
<b>mitama</b>	the spirit of a Shinto kami
<b>monzeki</b>	noble cloisters
<b>monto</b>	adherent of Ikko-ikki
<b>naginata</b>	glaive or curve-bladed spear
<b>nembutsu</b>	literally 'Buddha-calling', a prayer sequence
<b>okegawa-do</b>	a foot soldier's armour
<b>samurai</b>	Japanese knight
<b>shaku</b>	a length of about one foot
<b>shu</b>	sect of Japanese Buddhism
<b>sohei</b>	warrior monk or priest
<b>tachi</b>	a long sword
<b>tanto</b>	a dagger
<b>tera</b>	Buddhist temple
<b>yamabushi</b>	adherent of Shugendo
<b>yari</b>	a straight-bladed spear
<b>yoroi</b>	a heavy suit of armour
<b>zasu</b>	head abbot

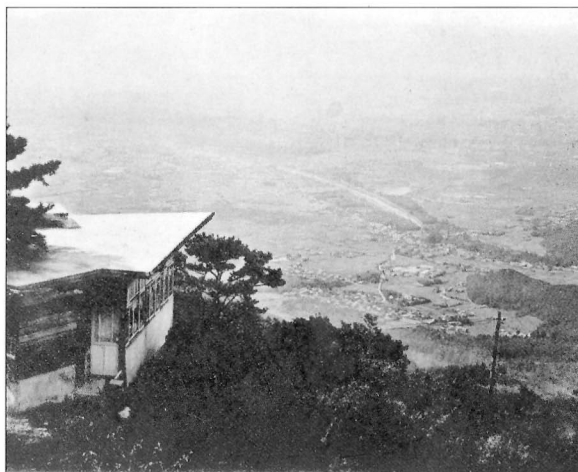
## COLOUR PLATE COMMENTARY

### A: A SOHEI (WARRIOR MONK) OF MOUNT HIEI OR NARA, C.1100

Here we see a typical warrior monk of Nara or Mount Hiei in about 1100. He is wearing a succession of kimono, which look like long wide-sleeved dressing gowns, and a pair of trousers. The undergarments would be white, with the outer robe being white, tan or saffron. A jacket would be worn over the outer kimono, usually black, and often of a stiff gauzy 'see-through' material. The example here has no sleeves. Footwear consisted of *waraji* (straw sandals) worn over white *tabi* (socks) and often long *kiahana* (gaiters). Parts of the warrior monk's armour are just visible under his robes. We see the *kote* (sleeves) and the *kusazuri* (skirt pieces). He carries the traditional *naginata*. His other weapon is a *tachi* (long sword).

1. Another view of the white headcowl. This one is tied in a different way, having been folded and tied around the head to cover the mouth and leave only the upper part of the face exposed.

The view of Kyoto looking down from Mount Hiei as it was before modern development. This is a postcard from the early 20th century.



2. A warrior monk without a cowl and with a white hachimaki (headband) tied round his forehead and showing his shaven head.

3. Buddhist prayer beads. These were of wood, and could be of very different sizes.

4. A pair of geta (wooden 'clogs'), which are often depicted being worn by warrior monks. Each geta was carved out of one piece of wood to produce a raised platform for the foot. They could be lacquered or were left as bare wood.

5. A sword of tachi form, carried with the cutting edge pointing down. It is slung from the belt using the attachments shown.

6. Different types of naginata. From left to right: (I) a wide bladed one, very Chinese in appearance; (II) a shobuzuri naginata with blade and shaft of almost equal length, favoured during the 12th century; (III) a short-bladed variety with a heavy iron butt end. This is the more modern version seen during the Sengoku Period

### **B: THE BURNING OF NARA, 1180**

Here we see the last desperate charge of the warrior monks of Nara during the attack on their city by samurai of the Taira clan following the battle of Uji. Wielding their traditional naginata, the sohei charge out of the courtyard of the burning Todaiji through the Nandaimon (great southern gate). The monks are shown here in full 'battle dress'. They wear an assortment of simple do-maru and yoroi armours and have heavy suneate (shinguards).



**A mounted samurai warrior with naginata. This is the long-bladed version favoured by the warrior monks.**

### **C: THE WARRIOR MONKS OF NEGOROJI IN TRAINING, C. 1570**

This plate is based on the eye-witness description by Father Caspar Vilela of the warrior monks of Negoroji. In the background we see traditional temple buildings based on those that remain at Negoroji today. On the left some monks are practising target shooting with arquebuses. In the foreground two monks are practising with wooden practice spears. They have wooden spheres at the end to minimise accidents. The 'safety ends' were sometimes covered in leather. Behind them two others practise with bokken (wooden swords), the ancestors of the bamboo swords now used in kendo. The monks are wearing only their simplest robes. Like samurai in civilian dress, they have tied their sleeves back with a tasuki (sash), and hitched up the legs of their trousers through their belts to give freedom of movement.

### **D: DAILY LIFE AT ISHIYAMA HONGANJI, C. 1570**

This bird's eye view is an attempt to show the Ishiyama Honganji complex in its role as a 'fortified cathedral'. The buildings are a faithful reproduction of modern reconstructions of Ishiyama Honganji. The Jodo-Shinshu monks are shown taking part in a Buddhist funeral procession for an Abbot. All are dressed in full monastic garb except for the arquebus squads who maintain guard on either side of the cortege. The Ishiyama Honganji was famous for its early adoption of firearms.

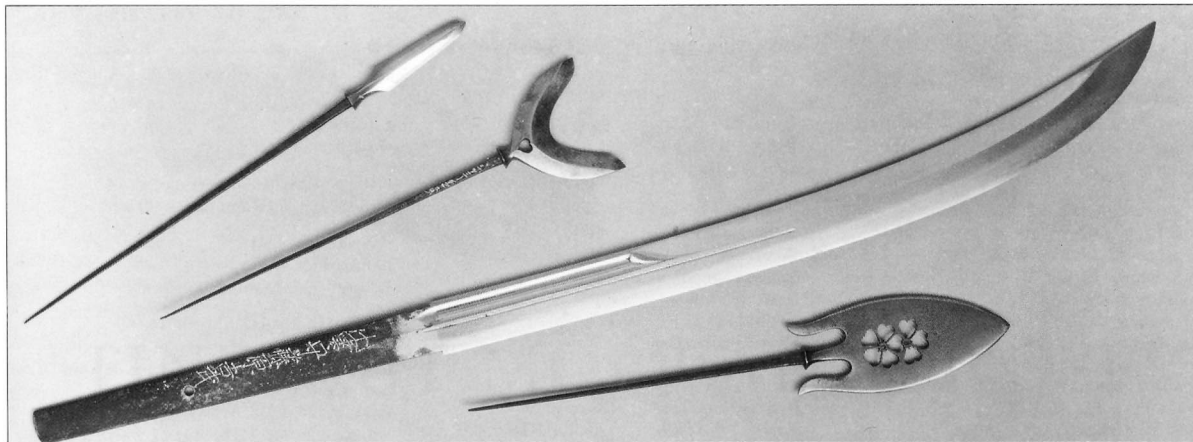
### **E: THE WARRIOR MONKS OF MOUNT HIEI PARADE THEIR MIKOSHI THROUGH THE STREETS OF KYOTO, 1146**

For the warrior monks of Enryakuji the carrying of the mikoshi (portable shrines) of Sanno the mountain king was the most dramatic gesture that could be made. The mikoshi was carried on poles by about 20 men, and any assault on the mikoshi was regarded as an offence to the kami Sanno himself. Every monk also carried Buddhist prayer beads and would readily pronounce a curse upon anyone who offended him. In this plate the mikoshi is carried in front of the cowed citizens by the kannushi (Shinto priests) from the Hiyoshi shrine of Sanno, the Mountain King. This is their prerogative as the spiritual guardians of the shrine. In front of them march the angry and confident sohei of Enryakuji. One presumptuous fellow receives a smack across the buttocks from the pommel end of a monk's naginata. Another monk pronounces a solemn curse using his prayer beads, but his naginata promises a swifter retribution. The monk leader waves his naginata on high. As all they have to fear are the terrified courtiers and citizens the monks are shown wearing the minimum of armour. They have geta on their feet. Note the gauzy 'see-through' outer robes and the variety of colours.

### **F: WARRIOR MONKS AT THE BATTLE OF UJI, 1180**

This plate is based on the account in Heike Monogatari of the activities of the celebrated trio of Gochin Tajima, Tsutsui Jomyo and Ichirai Hoshi at the battle of Uji in 1180. The need to show the range of equipment and costume





**A naginata blade, framed by types of arrowhead.**

used by sohei has placed a representative threesome side by side, rather than showing accurately the succession of actions described in the text. The scene shows how the warrior monks of Miidera and the Minamoto samurai under Minamoto Yorimasa have retreated across the Uji river and torn up the planking of the bridge as a defence. They face the Taira to a background of early morning fog. On the right a figure representing Tsutsui Jomyo Meishsu, shown only in monastic robes is loosing an arrow from a longbow. It is fired from one third of the way up its length. In the centre stands a monk wearing loose robes and armed with a fierce-looking naginata. The character on the left wears a full suit of yoroi armour, except for a helmet.

**G: THE DEFENCE OF KYOTO BY THE WARRIOR MONKS OF THE HOKKE-SHU AGAINST AN ATTACK BY THE IKKO-IKKI, 1528**

When the Ikko-ikki moved against Kyoto in 1528 the townsmen armies of the Hokke-shu (Lotus Sect, otherwise the Nichiren-shu after its founder) armed themselves and paraded through the streets under the Nichiren banner, chanting verses from the Lotus Sutra. The Ikko-ikki troops attacked but were successfully driven off by an alliance of samurai, monks and townsmen. In this plate we see the Hokke-shu warriors defending from behind a barricade of straw rice bales, accompanied by the sympathetic samurai general Hosokawa Harumoto. Behind them in the courtyard we see a statue of Nichiren, the founder of the sect. The Nichiren flags with 'Namu Myoho Renge Kyo' (Hail to the Lotus of the Divine Law) are much in evidence. The Hokke-shu troops are wearing armour typical of the early sixteenth century prior to the introduction of firearms. To show the often confusing pattern of alliances at the time we have included some warrior monks from Mount Hiei behind the barricades, but in a few years time they would return to attack the Lotus Sect warriors in Kyoto. The Ikko-ikki warriors attacking the line are dressed very similarly to samurai. Details of their equipment appear in Plate H.

**H: A WARRIOR MONK OF THE IKKO-IKKI OF NAGASHIMA C. 1574**

Here we see an adherent of the fanatical Ikko-ikki of Nagashima, the island complex that defied Oda Nobunaga for four years. The Ishiyama Honganji troops would have looked very similar. This peasant warrior looks very different from the warrior monks of Mount Hiei. We note his shaven head with a growth of bristles and his simple trousers and bare feet. He is however wearing a well designed modern suit of armour with strong horizontal plates. He carries an arquebus as well as a sword, and his ration bags of rice are tied round his body.

1. An arquebus with its accessories: (1a); a priming powder flask, (1b); a fuse reel, (1c); a bullet pouch and (1d); a muzzle powder flask.
2. The head of a warrior monk of the Mikawa Ikko-ikki, who fought Tokugawa Ieyasu in his younger days. He bears in his helmet a tablet with the slogan, 'he who advances is sure of heaven, but he who retreats will go to hell'.
3. An Ikko-ikki flag bearing the same 'heaven or hell' slogan.
4. The red and gold sotoba flag of the Ikko-ikki from the Zempukuji, carried during Oda Nobunaga's siege of Ishiyama Honganji.
5. The two cranes flag, carried during Oda Nobunaga's siege of Ishiyama Honganji by a contingent of Ikko-ikki from the Senkoji in Kaga province, one of the Ikko-ikki heartlands.
6. At the opposite extreme on the social scale we find the daimyo who were also Buddhist monks. They wore certain items to show their affiliations. Here Uesugi Kenshin (1530-78) is wearing a modified form of the monk's cowl, as shown in nearly all pictures of him.
7. Kenshin's rival Takeda Shingen (1521-73), was another 'samurai monk'. In place of a cowl he has an elaborate helmet with Chinese-style fukigayeshi (turnbacks) and with a horse hair plume. His Buddhist item is the kesa, a sort of scarf, worn over his armour.
8. A katana-type sword, shown with tachi-like suspensory mounts fitted on the reverse side so that the sword is carried with the cutting edge uppermost. Normally the katana would be simply thrust through the belt, but in battle extra support would be needed and it was tied securely to the body.

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