

In the footsteps of the Japanese warriors...



Dear visitors,

Until February 12, 2017 the Royal Museums for Art and History present the exhibition Ukiyo-e. The finest Japanese prints. This prestigious event takes place in the framework of the celebration of 150 years of Belgian-Japanese relations.

In its collections the Royal Military Museum also safeguards numerous objects from the Land of the Rising Sun. Especially for the occasion, the educational service has drawn up a short visitors' circuit. Discover our "Japan special" without further ado!

The selected objects are to be found in following galleries: "Arms and Armour", "Historic Gallery", "1919-1945", "1914-1918" and "Russian Gallery". They are highlighted by this symbol.



Arms and Armour Gallery

Tsuba, counterguard for a Japanese sword in chiselled iron fretwork with bronze inlay

The tsuba is a metal element protecting the warrior's hand when he uses his sword (katanas, wakizashi, tantos). The tsuba prevents the hand from slipping onto the blade, protects against the enemy's blade and balances the sword. The tsuba is made by specialist artisans (kodogu and tosogu), independently from the blade. In times of war the tsuba is functional, but in times of peace it becomes a true work of art, testifying to its owner's wealth. Today, the best pieces are highly sought after by collectors.



Historic Gallery

Plaque of the Order of the Rising Sun, presented to military auditor general Tempels

The Order of the Rising Sun is the first Japanese order and was founded on April 10, 1875. Up till 2003 the Order of the Rising Sun was reserved to men. It is the highest Japanese distinction, after the Order of the Chrysanthemum.



Details of the box containing the Order of the Rising Sun



Interwar Gallery

The Supreme Order of the Chrysanthemum, presented to King Albert I

The Order of the Chrysanthemum is a dynastic order of the Japanese imperial household founded in 1876. The great order is the highest Japanese distinction. The jewel of the Order of the Chrysanthemum is based on that of the Order of the Rising Sun.

The Order of the Chrysanthemum owes its prestige to the limited number of presentations.

The Order of the Chrysanthemum is made up of a single class, but can be presented as either a great sash or great necklace since 1888. The great sash can be presented during the recipient's life or posthumously.

On November 19, 1900, J. Motono, minister of the Mikado, presented the future King Albert I with the great sash of the Supreme Order of the Chrysanthemum on the occasion of the latter's wedding with Elisabeth.

The great necklace is reserved to the emperor and to foreign sovereigns, but can also be granted posthumously to Japanese citizens.

Shortly before the Armistice an exceptional delegation led by Admiral and Prince Yori-Hito met King Albert I at Loppem castle. The Belgian sovereign received the great necklace of the Supreme Order of the Chrysanthemum as an expression of the Mikado's admiration.

In 1958 H.M. Queen Elisabeth presented the RMM with these honorary distinctions.



14-18 Gallery

The objects in this showcase were presented to the RMM by the Japanese government after the First World War. All pieces were new and had not been used during the Great War and the events described below. They are very rare in Western Europe and therefore constitute major elements in the RMM 14-18 collection.

The mannequin on the left is wearing the **winter uniform of a first master elite torpedo launcher (ITTO HEISO SUIRAI)** with the Japanese imperial Navy (note the 4 bars for good conduct on the sleeve).

The middle mannequin wears the uniform of a **sergeant with the 2nd infantry regiment of the Japanese imperial Army**, identical to the uniforms worn during the taking of Tsing Tao (November 1914).

The mannequin on the right wears the **uniform of a 1st sailor elite gunner (UNYO HO) with the Japanese imperial Navy**. Note the characteristic leather apron, the bar for good conduct on the sleeve and the cherry blossom, the Japanese insignia rewarding exceptional conduct in a military function.



Badge with cherry blossom for a sailor

The Japanese Navy was trained by Royal Navy instructors and inspired by British cuts for its uniforms (just like those presented in the showcase). The fleet was composed of ships equipped with guns and aiming devices bought in Great Britain (brand Elswick).

In the middle of the gallery: a *Japanese 37 mm landing gun, M 1894*, used during the battle of Tsing Tao, presented to the Museum by the Japanese government in 1923. The small gun was very flexible. The barrel is inscribed in Japanese: SOGENIKŌ (gun with adjusted aiming), TAISHŌ SHICHINEN SEI (made in the year 7 of the Taishō era, which corresponds with the year 1918), ŌSAKA HŌHEIKŌSHŌ (Osaka arsenal).



Japan during the First World War

With regard to the financial burden and the human losses Japan probably is the major beneficiary of the Great War. The Japanese wished to extend their territory at low cost and quickly realized they would be able to take German colonies in China and Micronesia with the blessings of the Entente powers. They had been British allies since 1902 and hostile feelings existed towards the German empire, as the Germans had supported Russia during the Russian-Japanese war of 1905.

In order to neutralize the enemy it was crucial to gain control over the naval base of Tsing Tao, a stronghold reputed for its fortifications manned by some 4,800 soldiers. On August 15, 1914 the Japanese fleet positioned itself in front of the city and eight days later Japan declared war on Germany. With 1.5 million mobilized soldiers Japan had to call on a large infantry division (the 18th division, composed of 3 brigades with artillery, military engineering and aviation) in order to achieve its goal. Tsing Tao surrendered on November 7, 1914. All German colonies in the Pacific (Marshall, Marianne, Caroline and Palau islands) were quickly and almost effortlessly taken. The League of Nations granted Japan mandate over these territories. Naval escort operations in the Mediterranean were pretexted to maintain contact with the Allies. The Japanese benefitted from the Russian withdrawal in 1918, as they sought to gain control over the trans-Siberian railway line along Manchuria. Japan lost fifteen officers and 427 soldiers, with a further 2,000 injured men.

Russian Treasures Gallery

Silver platter and goblet with Eastern inspired embellishments (unknown goldsmith, about 1905). These objects are souvenirs from the Russian-Japanese war of 1904-1905, presented to the Cossacks of the Guard of His Majesty the Emperor. This beautiful 84 zolotniki (= 875/1000 fine silver) silver platter displays the 4th class cross of the Order of Saint George, the most widely-spread order in Russia.



The Russian-Japanese war

Russia was present in the Far East since the end of the 19th century and wished to both occupy Manchuria and extend its influence over Korea, where Russian and Japanese interests were conflicting. In 1903 negotiations came to a standstill and a conflict broke out. On February 8, 1904 Japan destroyed the Russian fleet at Port Arthur. The more modern Japanese fleet easily had the upper hand over the Russian army: the Russian defeats at Vladivostok in August 1904, at Mukden in March 1905 and at Tsushima in May 1905 (with the destruction of the Russian Baltic fleet deployed in support) led to the Portsmouth treaty in September 1905. Russia gave Japan part of Sakhaline Island, its settlements in Manchuria, Port Arthur and the Liao-Tung peninsula. It also recognized the Japanese protectorate over Korea.





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