**Miyamoto Musashi**

The details of the life of master swordsman Miyamoto Musashi (1584–1645) are vague. Born in Harima Province in Hyogo Prefecture, he claimed to have fought and won 60 duels by the age of 29—his first being at the tender age of 13 against Arima Kihei, a master swordsman of the Shinto school. This set the pattern of Musashi’s life, which consisted of wandering around Japan on a “warrior pilgrimage,” honing his original two-sword fighting technique, and challenging other swordsmen to prove his superiority. Musashi may have helped Toyotomi Hideyori (1593–1615) against the Tokugawa shogunate in the 1614–1615 siege of Osaka Castle, and he may have helped the Tokugawa shogunate suppress the Shimabara Rebellion in 1637, but historians cannot be sure.

*Musashi’s Last Years*

Musashi’s connection with Kumamoto began in 1640, when Hosokawa Tadatoshi, the first-generation Hosokawa lord of Higo Province, invited him to Kumamoto, possibly to teach swordsmanship. Musashi, who was already in his late 50s by that time, spent much of his time meditating, painting (he was a distinguished ink painter and calligrapher), and writing. Aware that he did not have long to live, he shut himself away in the Reigando Cave in the foothills of Mt. Kinpo where he wrote *The Book of Five Rings*, a work that set forth his philosophy of swordsmanship and life in five chapters entitled “Earth,” “Water,” “Fire,” “Wind,” and “Void.” He finished the book in 1645 and gave the manuscript to Terao Magonojo, one of his disciples, before he died, later that year. According to legend, he was buried standing upright in full armor on one of the roads leading into Kumamoto so that he could watch over his lord even in death.