

Large-Bore Guns and Cavalry Weapons

***Ōzutsu*: Big Matchlocks**

Ōtomo Sōrin (1530–1587), a daimyo lord and Christian convert from Kyushu, is credited with introducing high-caliber firearms to Japan. In 1576, Ōtomo sought help from the Portuguese in fighting his regional rivals, and the heavy guns he obtained through trade came to be known as *ōzutsu* (literally, “large bores”). Knowledge of these guns spread, and by the end of the sixteenth century, domestic gunsmiths were producing their own *ōzutsu*.

Although designed much like muskets, *ōzutsu* were closer to cannons in their destructive power. Even the smallest of these big guns fired a ball that was 26 millimeters in diameter. They had a range of around 500 meters and were used for attacking castles and other fortifications.

Ōzutsu played an important role in the Siege of Osaka (1614–1615), one of the last large-scale battles fought between the supporters and opponents of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). It is said that the defenders of Osaka Castle were demoralized by days of round-the-clock bombardment with 30-millimeter *ōzutsu*.

Japanese gunsmiths improved on the basic *ōzutsu* design throughout the 1600s and 1700s, eventually producing guns in calibers as large as 100 millimeters. In Europe, field cannons of similar caliber were used extensively in the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815).

***Kakae-Ōzutsu*: Firing a Heavy Matchlock**

Matchlock *ōzutsu* that could be held and fired were called *kakae-ōzutsu*, or “handheld *ōzutsu*.” Handling a heavy *ōzutsu* was no easy task; the guns’ heft and recoil made them difficult to aim and fire. Western-style firearms have a shoulder stock, but Japanese matchlocks do not. Instead, gunners developed a method for firing the powerful guns without bracing them against anything. *Kakae-ōzutsu* were fired from a standing posture, or instead while kneeling with the left elbow placed on the raised left knee for support. When firing, the gunner jerked his right arm back, directing the recoil upward rather than backward.

Samurai commanders liked *ōzutsu* for their combination of portability and firepower. The guns packed a punch, but they could still be carried through narrow streets or up twisting mountain roads that would have been impassable for carriage-mounted cannons.

***Bajō-Zutsu*: Cavalry Guns**

Japanese gunsmiths developed short-barreled carbines called *bajō-zutsu* for use by mounted samurai. What these weapons lacked in long-range accuracy they made up for with ease of use.

Katō Kiyomasa (1562–1611), a daimyo lord from central Japan who fought in campaigns on the Korean Peninsula (1592–1598), was the best-known practitioner of horse-mounted gunnery. At a time when custom weapons were reserved for samurai of high social status, Katō equipped all members of his cavalry with specialized *bajō-zutsu*. The mounted warriors would fire as they charged to break up the enemy ranks, then follow in with their spears.