

# An Analysis of Some Illustrated Books by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) in the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice

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**Abstract** The collection of Japanese prints, albums and illustrated books (*ehon*) in the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice is the result of the last stop in Japan of a journey to the Far East of Prince Henry Bourbon-Parma, Count of Bardi and his wife Adelgunde of Bragança, during the years 1887-1889. The gathering of more than thirty thousand objects became the core of the present collection. Among these there are about 500 illustrated books of famous *ukiyo*e masters, *surimono*, and colour prints *nishikie*. The creation of catalogue entries in Japanese and Italian and the analysis of each print reveals an amazing quantity of unpublished *ukiyo*e masterpieces and allows a division into different groups according to the subject matter. At the same time, this distinction into different genres shows an interesting tendency in the formation of the collection together with a possible new classification of the prints themselves. This study aims to shed a new light on this particular collection while focusing on a series of illustrated books by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1848). Among these the famous volumes of the Manga, the illustrated books on warriors, an unusual album with some prints from the One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji and a selection from the five volumes dedicated to teach the artisans how to draw all kind of decorations.

**Keywords** Japanese prints. Museum of Oriental Art collection, Venice. Digital database. Hokusai's illustrated books. Painting didactic.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Warriors Album. – 3 One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji. – 4 Manga. – 5 Banshoku zukō. – 6 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

The collection of Japanese prints, albums and illustrated books (*ehon* 絵本)<sup>1</sup> in the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice is the result of the last stop in Japan of a journey to the Far East of Prince Henry Bourbon-Parma, Count of Bardi and his wife Adelgunde of Bragança, during the years 1887-89.<sup>2</sup> The gathering of more than thirty thousand objects became the core of the present collection (Spadavecchia Aliffi 1990). Among these, there are about 500 illustrated books of famous *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 masters, *surimono* 刷物, and colour prints (*nishikie* 錦絵).

A joint project between the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice and the Art Research Center (ARC) of Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto in collaboration with the Department of Asian and North African Studies, University of Venice, allowed the creation of a digital database of all Japanese printed materials owned by the Museum. The final survey shows that there are 727 single sheets *ukiyo-e* prints (for a total 860 images) and 276 illustrated books (for a total of 12,200 images) (Akama 2013).<sup>3</sup>

The creation of catalogue entries of each work - in Japanese and Italian - reveals an amazing quantity of unpublished *ukiyo-e* masterpieces.<sup>4</sup> The most represented artists being Utagawa Kunisada 歌川国貞 (Toyokuni III 三代豊国) (1786-1865), followed by Andō (Utagawa) Hiroshige I 安藤 (歌川) 広重 (1797-1858), Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川国吉 (1798-1861), Utagawa Kunisada II 二代歌川国貞 (1823-1880), Kikukawa Eizan 菊川英山 (1787-1867), Tsukioka Yoshitoshi<sup>5</sup> 月岡芳年 (1839-1892), Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 (1760-1849) and many others.

The aim of this paper is to try to present some of these materials with a special focus on Hokusai's illustrated books.

The analysis of the prints allowed a division into different groups according to their subject matter: *yakushae* 役者絵 (actor prints), *mushae* 武者絵 (warriors prints), *bijin* 美人 (female beauties), *meisho* 名所 (famous places), *kachōe* 花鳥絵 (images of nature) and *Genjje* 源氏絵 (parody of the *Tale of Genji*). This distinction into different genres shows an interesting tendency in the formation of the collection that could lead to a possible new classification of the prints themselves.

1 For a complete study on *ehon* and their relation to Japanese artists see Keyes 2006.

2 About Prince Bourbon-Parma Count of Bardi's travel see Spadavecchia 2000.

3 To better highlight the importance of the international research collaboration in terms of digital database of historical Japanese materials in worldwide collections see ARC digital database: <https://www.arc.ritsumei.ac.jp/en/index.html>.

4 On the close relation between *ehon* and *ukiyo-e* in the publications of Edo period see Suzuki 1979.

5 Also named Taiso Yoshitoshi 大蘇芳年.



**Figure 1** Katsushika Hokusai, *Bijin by the shore using kinuta* to soften a piece of silk, *surimono*, *nishikie*, Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 3782

The preliminary study of this huge graphic group of prints highlights the presence of 55 single sheets by Hokusai (there are 52 images cut off from the *yomihon Shinpen Suikogaden* 読本新編水滸画伝 [The New Illustrated Edition of Suikoden [The Water Margin], from inv. no. 3726 to no. 3777),<sup>6</sup> (Spadavecchia 2013, 85, fn. 24), 2 *ukie* 浮絵 prints (perspective prints), one wonderful *surimono*<sup>7</sup> with two *bijin* who, near the sea-shore, are beating a piece of silk to make it soft (inv. no. 3782)<sup>8</sup> [fig. 1].<sup>9</sup>

This study will focus on a particular group of illustrated books by Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 among which the famous volumes of the

<sup>6</sup> As pointed out by Prof. Akama Ryō 赤間亮 (Director Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University 立命館大学, Kyoto).

<sup>7</sup> The *surimono* is a special kind of print produced in small limited editions in a non-commercial sphere, privately issued but superbly designed, meticulously and luxuriously crafted. The *surimono* combines poetic compositions with specific images commissioned by private literary circles in particular circumstances. For a complete description of this category see Carpenter 2008.

<sup>8</sup> This *surimono* is neither dated nor signed, but from the observation of the subject and style, it can certainly be ascribed to the production of Hokusai between the years 1795-97 when the Master signed his works with the name Sōri 宗理. In this period the female figures are delicate, languid, suffused with a slight sadness and almost ethereal. The body lengthens and the face begins to take on the aspect that is defined as “melon seed” characteristic of the subsequent production.

<sup>9</sup> All images courtesy of ©Museo d'Arte Orientale, Venice. I am grateful to Dott. Daniele Ferrara (Director Polo museale del Veneto) for allowing me the use of the images and to Dott.ssa Marta Boscolo Marchi (Director Museum of Oriental Art, Venice) for letting me study Hokusai's works in the Venetian collection.

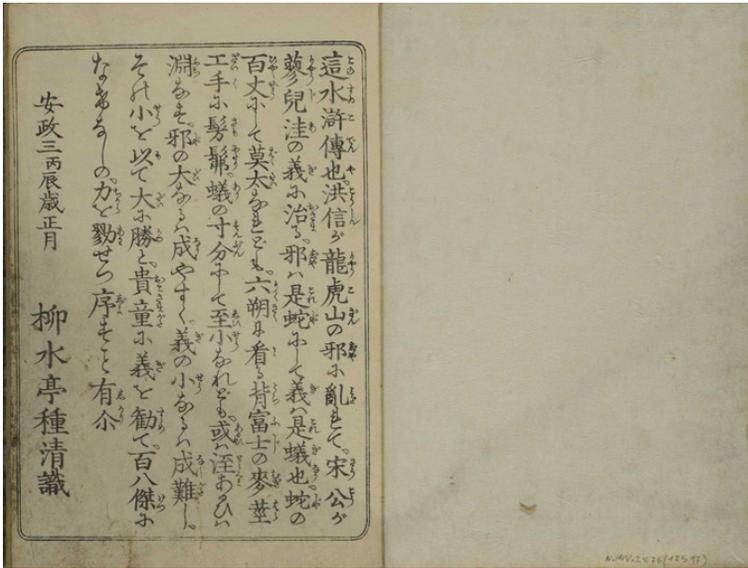


Figure 2 Katsushika Hokusai, *Suikogaden*. 1856. Illustrated book, preface. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 2876-02

*Manga* 漫画, the illustrated books on warriors *Wakan ehon sakigake* 和漢絵本魁 (Warriors Illustrated: China and Japan, inv. no. 2877), *Ehon musashi abumi* 絵本武蔵鑑 (The Stirrups of Musashi Illustrated, inv. no. 2849-2850), a peculiar album with *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* (Fugaku hyakkei 富嶽百景, inv. no. 2709) and finally, another illustrated book called *Banshoku zukō* 萬職圖孝 (One Thousand Crafts Illustrated, vol. I inv. no. 2856, vol. II inv. no. 2857, vol. III inv. no. 2855, vol. IV inv. no. 2854, vol. V inv. no. 2853) inspired by Hokusai's *ehon* probably copied or produced by one of his pupil called Katsushika Taito II (二代葛飾戴斗).<sup>10</sup>

Before entering into some aspects of these specific illustrated books, I will introduce briefly one of the images from the 18 pages that compose the copy of the *Suikogaden* 水滸画伝 (inv. no. 2876) [fig. 2].<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See also Vesco 2013.

<sup>11</sup> The peculiarity of this album is the sequence of the images that is an arbitrary selection from the many books originally illustrated by Hokusai. *The Shinpen suikōgaden* was published with Hokusai's illustrations and Kyokutei Bakin's text for the first part, first section, that is to say, vols. 1-6 in 1805; part I, section II, vols. 7-11 in 1807. The publication continued with Hokusai's illustrations but with Takai Ranzan's text, part III, vols. 22-31; part IV, vols. 32-41; part V, vols. 42-51; part VI, 52-61 in 1835. From volume 62 to volume 91 Hokusai passed the illustration job to his pupil Taito II.

The tale is inspired by a famous story of Chinese legendary twelfth century heroes celebrated in the Ming-Dynasty (1368-1644) Chinese novel *Shui hu zhuan* 水滸伝.<sup>12</sup> The Japanese translation used by Hokusai as an inspiration for his album is due to Kyokutei Bakin 曲亭馬琴 (1767-1848) substituted later by Takai Ranzan (1762-1838) 高井蘭山 and composed of 61 volumes completed later till volume 91, by Hokusai's pupil Hokusai Taito II.<sup>13</sup>

After an introduction with the date of publication: first month (*shōgatsu* 正月), year of the dragon (*hinoe tatsu toshi* 丙辰歳), third year of Ansei era 安政三 (1856), the volume opens with the image of an enormous snake whose body becomes the frame for a picture where a big tiger with an open mouth is frightening a Chinese warrior.<sup>14</sup> To emphasize the dramatic situation, the man – hands on his

**12** The *Shui hu zhuan* (Water Margin), also known in the West as *Outlaws of the Marsh*, *All Men are Brothers* or *The Marshes of Mount Liang*, was based on the adventures of the outlaw Song Jiang 宋江 and his 108 companions (called the 36 “Heavenly Spirits” and the 72 “Earthly Demons”). The group acted in the Huainan 淮南 region and surrendered to the Song 宋 government in 1121. The story was written in XIV century and attributed to Shi Nai’an 施耐庵 (1296-1372). The novel opens with the story of the release of the 108 Spirits that had been imprisoned under an ancient stele-bearing tortoise (*bi xi* 龜跌) and of the liberation of one of the nine sons of the Dragon King who is depicted as a dragon with a shell of a turtle. The episode derives from the Daoist concept that each person's destiny is strictly tied to a “Star of Destiny” (宿命). In the story the 108 Stars of Destiny are representing 108 demonic overlords who were banished by the deity Shangdi 上帝. Since their expulsion, the 108 Stars repented and soon after their accidental release from their place of confinement, they were reborn in this world as 108 heroes whose life was devoted, from that time on, to defend the cause of justice. They are divided into the 36 Heavenly Spirits (天罡三十六星) and 72 Earthly Fiends (地煞七十二星).

In Japan, *Shui hu zhuan* was first translated around 1757, when the first volume of an early *Suikoden* (Water Margin) was printed. As early as 1773, Takebe Ayakari 建部綾足 adapted it in his *Japanese Water Margin* (本朝水滸伝 *Honchō suikoden*) soon followed, in 1783, by *Women's Water Margin* (女水滸伝 *Onna suikoden*) and Santō Kyōden's 山東京伝 1801 *Chūshingura Water Margin* (忠臣蔵水滸伝 *Chūshingura suikoden*). In 1805, Kyokutei Bakin published a Japanese translation of the *Water Margin* that was illustrated by Hokusai. The book, called the *New Illustrated Edition of the Suikoden* (新編水滸画伝 *Shinpen Suikogaden*) had such a great success during the Edo period (1615-1868) that it created a real “Suikoden” vogue. In 1827, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, was commissioned by the publisher Kagaya (Kichiemon) Kichibei 加賀屋吉右衛門・吉兵衛 (ca. 1815-1850) of the Seiseidō 青盛堂 firm, to produce a series of woodblock prints illustrating the 108 heroes. The series called *Tsuzoku Suikoden goketsu hyakuhachinin no hitori* 通俗水滸伝 豪傑百八人之壹人 (108 Heroes of the Water Margin) published between 1827 and 1830 brought Kuniyoshi to fame. Thanks to the positive response of the public and the consequent commercial success of Kuniyoshi's series, other *ukiyo*e artists were commissioned to draw the same subject. Among these, Yoshitoshi designed around 1866-1867 a series of 50 prints in *chūban* size 中判 (medium size print): (25/26 × 17/19 cm), which looked darker than Kuniyoshi's and featuring monsters and strange ghosts.

**13** On Edo period publication see Konta 1974; Nakada 1950.

**14** The episode is told in the first chapter of *Shui hu zhuan* in which Marshal Hong is terrified after the sudden apparition of a giant snake and a big tiger while on his way through the mountain. Hong Xin 洪信 was a Grand Marshal (太尉) sent by Emperor Renzong 宋仁宗 to seek Celestial Master Zhang to help to combat a terrible plague that was affecting the region. Hong Xin successfully completed his mission and before re-



**Figure 3** Katsushika Hokusai, *Suikogaden*. Marshal Hong frightened by a giant Snake and a Tiger. illustrated book. 1856. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 2876-03

head – curves his body in a completely unnatural “C” shape (inv. no. 2876-03) [fig. 3]. The images of this album, differently from the original by Hokusai, are not only printed with black *sumi* 墨, but with brilliant colours like green, yellow, light blue and red.

## 2 Warriors Album

In the collection of the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice there are two volumes dedicated to warriors. They are surprisingly well preserved and of a wonderful print quality.

Around mid-1830s Hokusai produced a trilogy of *mushae* of a very high quality both in the design and in the details of the characters.

turning to the capital he decided to visit the temple near where the Master resided and without been noticed, released the 108 demons that had been trapped in a secret chamber for centuries. The demons spread out throughout the land after their release and are reborn in the so-called “108 Stars of Destiny”. The legend tells that it seemed that Hong Xin’s action was predestined to the point that a stone tablet that stood on the location where the demons were imprisoned had the words “Opens when Hong (Xin) arrives” (遇洪而開) carved on it.

My special thanks to Riccardo Fracasso (Ca’ Foscari University, Venice) for the precious information on some details of the original text of *Shui hu zhuàn*.



**Figura 4** Katsushika Hokusai, *Ehon musashi abumi*. Illustrated book. 1836. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 2850-02

Chinese and Japanese warriors are depicted in different situations, according to legendary storytelling.

Hokusai created what seems to be a group of three books including *Wakan ehon sakigake* 和漢繪本魁 (Warriors Illustrated. China and Japan, 1836, inv. no. 2877),<sup>15</sup> *Ehon musashi abumi* 繪本武藏鑑 (The Stirrups of Musashi Illustrated, 1836, inv. no. 2849) [fig. 4] and *Ehon wakan no homare* 繪本和漢嘗 (Heroes of China and Japan Illustrated, 1836-50) which is not present in the Venetian collection.<sup>16</sup>

Calza (1999) suggests an interesting theory stating that the group of books is not a trilogy but a tetralogy being therefore composed of four volumes, including also *Ehon wakan Katsushikaburi* 画本和漢葛

<sup>15</sup> The cover of the Museum of Oriental Art copy says only *Ehon sakigake zen* 繪本魁全 (Complete volume of *Ehon sakigake*) omitting the reference to *wakan* 和漢 (Japan and China). For a study on *Wakan ehon sakigake* see Fagioli 2010.

<sup>16</sup> *Ehon wakan no homare* according to Hillier (1980) was apparently designed first, but not printed until 1850, the year after Hokusai's death. No copy of the book is known with a colophon date earlier than 1850 and the title page inside the front cover also bears the same date. It is possible that the three books were ready for publication at the same time in 1836, but for different reasons like a falling-off in public demand, or the difficult socio-economic situation, the publication of this volume was postponed. The fact that the block-cutter of *Ehon wakan no homare* was Egawa Sentarō 江川仙太郎 son of the famous Egawa Tomekichi 江川留吉 – the engraver of the other two volumes – further corroborates the hypothesis of 1850 as the publication date.

飾振 (Chinese and Japanese Heroes Illustrated in Katsushika style).

Without entering into the details of this distinction, that is still matter of debate among scholars, let's consider closely the two volumes in the Italian collection. Both are in the classical *ehon* format with a *watoji* 和綴じ (Japanese style) binding, meaning that a printed sheet is folded in two, with the external margins bound together in the internal margin of the book. *Wakan ehon sakigake* measures 22.6 × 15.7 cm<sup>17</sup> and it is a monochrome print signed *nanajūnana sai zen Hokusai aratame gakyō rōjin Manji hitsu* 七十七歳先北斎改画狂老人卅筆 (at the age of seventy-seven Hokusai changed in Manji the old man mad about painting) carved by Egawa Tomekichi 江川留吉,<sup>18</sup> with a "Fuji" seal and published, as specify in the colophon, in Ōsaka 大阪, Nagoya 名古屋 and Edo 江戸 in the eight month of Tenpō 天保 era (1836) [fig. 5].

Worth noticing is that the copy owned by the Venetian Museum of Oriental Art has a peculiar page composition: the preface is taken from the original *Ehon musashi abumi* that was designed by Hokusai. The second page of the Venetian copy (inv. no. 2877-03) has part of the preface of *Ehon musashi abumi*, on the right page and the first image of the same album, on the left. As for the colophon, there is an interesting mixture between the two albums: on the right the original page of *Ehon musashi abumi*, followed by the real colophon of *Wakan ehon sakigake* (inv. no. 2877-33) [fig. 5] with the presentation of the volume itself and the announcement of *Musashi abumi* and *Katsushikaburi*. What contributes to create the complex order of this album is the fact that the final double page of the colophon, at the end of the volume entitled *Ehon sakigake*, is again the collation of two different pages from *Ehon musashi abumi*. The original block cut for the colophon of *Wakan ehon sakigake* shows on the right page Bingo no Saburō Takanori 備後の三郎高德, known for his fidelity to the Emperor Go Daigo 後醍醐天皇, carving on the trunk of a tree the date and Hokusai's signature: *Tenpō roku kinoto hitsuji dōshi shi gatsu* 天保六乙羊年四月 (Tenpō era six *kinoto*, year of the goat) | *yowai shichijūroku zen Hokusai iitsu aratame* 齡七十六前北斎為一改 (at the age of seventy-six before Hokusai changed in iitsu) | *Gakyō rōjin Manji hitsu* 画狂老人卅筆 (painted by the old man mad about painting). The engravers are Sugita Kinsuke 杉田金助 and Egawa Tomekichi 江川留吉.

*Ehon musashi abumi*<sup>19</sup> measures 18.6 × 13.0 cm the technique remains the same (monochrome print) but the publication is only in

<sup>17</sup> The copy owned by the British Museum, printed by Izumiya Ichibei 和泉屋市兵衛 signed *zen Hokusai aratame gakyō rōjin Manji hitsu*, inv. 1939.5-24.026 JIB 224 has slightly different measures, namely 22.5 × 16 cm.

<sup>18</sup> The same block cutter of the famous monochrome series *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*.

<sup>19</sup> The title refers to the village of Musashi that was a famous place for the production of stirrups.

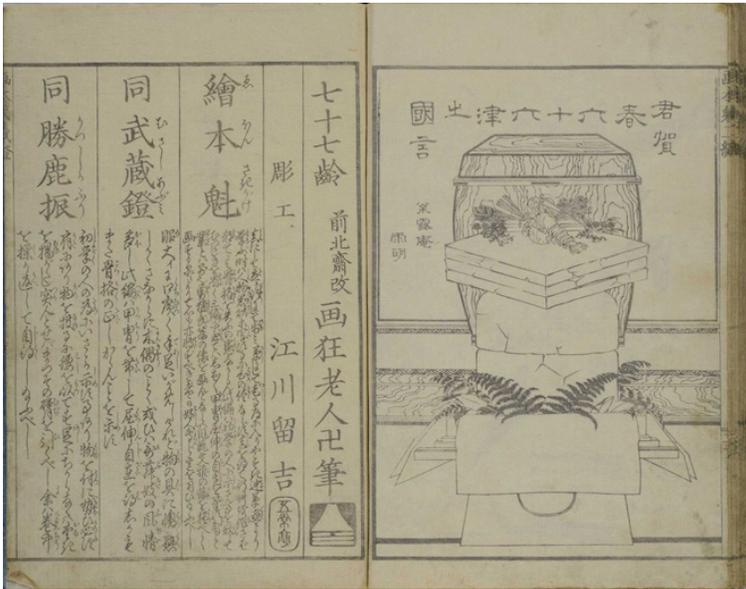
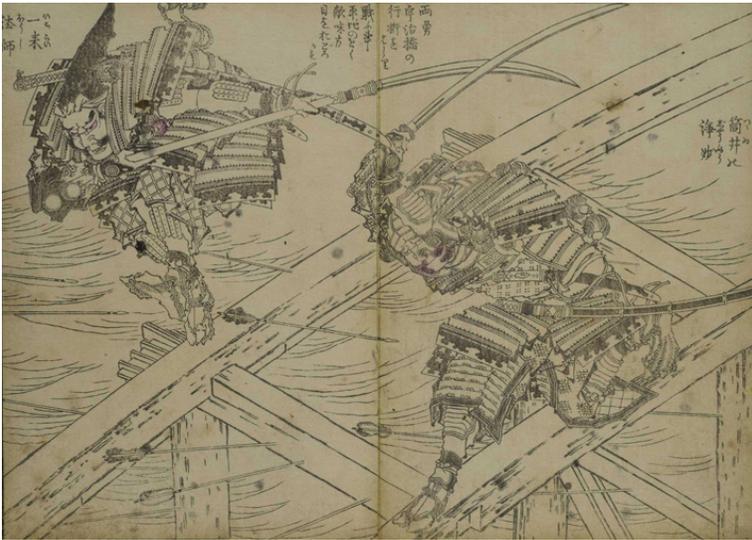


Figure 5 Katsushika Hokusai, *Ehon sakigake*. 1836. Illustrated book. Colophon. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 2877-33

the city of Edo (present Tokyo), seven months later,<sup>20</sup> by the publisher Nishimiya Yahei 西宮彌兵衛 in the seventh year of the Tenpō era and signed *zen Hokusai aratame gakyō rōjin Manji histu* 先北齋改画狂老人巳筆 (previously Hokusai changed in Manji the old man mad about painting).

The Venetian copy of *Ehon musashi abumi* is divided into two volumes and has only the first part of the original preface in a shape similar to a label with a crane flying over the title and the indication of the date; it has no colophon and it ends with the image of Akugenda 悪源太 (Minamoto Yoshihira 源義平) in the form of Raijin 雷神, the God of Thunder, who is typically depicted with fierce and aggressive facial expressions, standing atop a cloud, flying up in the sky, usually holding *taiko* 太鼓 drums that he plays to create the sound of thunder. Raijin holds large hammers in his hands that he uses to play the drums. Sometimes he is depicted with three fingers on each hand which are said to represent the past, the present and the future.

<sup>20</sup> The fact that the volume was published seven months after *Wakan Ehon sakigake* demonstrates that there was a great demand of this kind of works. The rendering of warriors and armours is less detailed than the previous volume.



**Figure 6** Katsushika Hokusai, *Ehon musashi abumi. Ichirai and Tsutsui no Shōmyō Escaping Across the Wrecked Uji Bridge*. 1836. Illustrated book. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 2850-15

It could seem strange that a famous *ukiyo*e artist as Hokusai put so much energy in the production of *mushae* and especially in such a peaceful time like the Tokugawa 徳川 period (1600-1868), but these volumes had such a great success that the market required the publication of two volumes in the very same year.<sup>21</sup>

The request of images of heroes of the past, whose adventures had become legendary, were appealing especially because they referred to very important virtues of the samurai class such as courage, loyalty, moral rectitude and ethical behaviour (Vesco 2019).<sup>22</sup>

Those who appreciated themes connected to the more classical *ukiyo*e production (images of *kabuki* actors, courtesans *bijin*, famous places, *meishoe* and nature *kachō*) were also very fond of stories related to warriors and especially Japanese warriors, because in the comparison with continental warriors (Chinese) their national pride was greatly enhanced.<sup>23</sup>

**21** On the role of the publisher and the publishing market in Edo period see Forrer 1985; Minami 1976.

**22** See for instance the enormous success of the stories of the revenge of the 47 *rōnin*: *Kanadehon Chūshingura* 仮名手本忠臣蔵 (The Syllabic Manual. Treasury of the Loyal Retainers), which referred to the same values.

**23** Smith, Henry D. II 2006; Lane 1989 and Hillier 1980.

In the warriors albums there is a strong attention to the details of the movements of the samurai and it does not matter if they wear very heavy armours or are engaged in difficult fights. Each gesture is fluid and the body moves in a natural way [fig. 6].<sup>24</sup>

Hokusai is able to catch the dramatic moment in the same way he did while depicting the *climax* of the action frozen in what is called *mie* (見え or 見得) of the actors on the stage.<sup>25</sup>

*Ehon musashi abumi* is used also as an excuse to employ in a very particular way the vertical composition on a double page so that the main character is exactly the centre of the image [fig. 7].<sup>26</sup>

The copy owned by the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice is mounted into two volumes (inv. nos. 2849-2850) both formed by 17 double pages. The first volume has 15 images plus two pages with little thin silver inserts [fig. 8], the second, again, with 15 images, but with the title and the date as first page [fig. 4].

In both albums single images are alternated to those on a double page without a clear logic. A close comparison with the work commissioned directly to Hokusai shows that the images in the Italian volumes do not follow the order originally decided by the artist. On top of this, we can notice that some images are taken from *Wakan ehon sakigake* and mixed with those of *Ehon musashi abumi*.

In this volume the threatening facial expressions of the warriors and the mixing of their armours tend to be more stylized, nevertheless, the great dynamism of the heroes with their quick movements to escape the enemies contribute to the strong *pathos* of the story [fig. 9].

Many of the legends that fascinated the public of the period are well depicted in this volume; among these, for instance, the story of General Hōjō Tokimasa 北条時政 (1138-1215) receiving divine inspi-

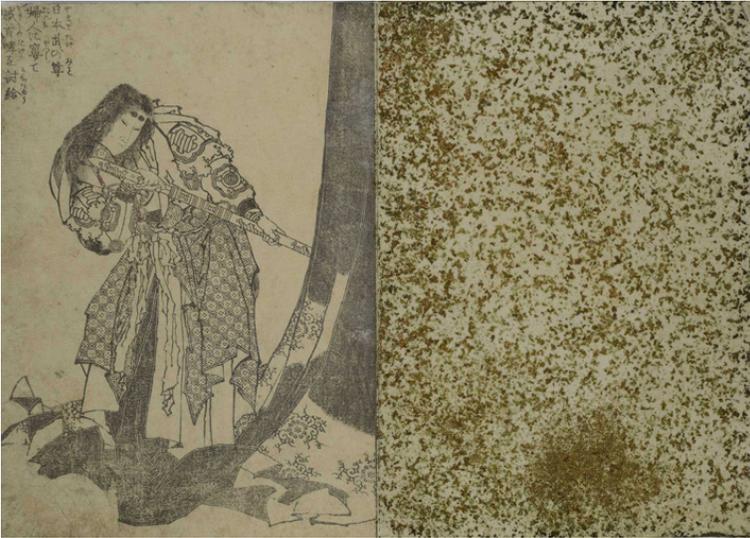
<sup>24</sup> This print shows the priest Ichirai 一来 (died in 1180) and his companion-in-arms Tsutsui Shōmyō 筒井淨妙 fleeing from the Taira 平 forces across the Uji bridge 宇治橋, from which Minamoto Yorimasa 源頼政 had torn up the planking hoping to stop the enemy. Ichirai's jump across the beams is proverbial. Hokusai chases the heroic escape to underline the dynamism of the scene.

<sup>25</sup> *Mie* is a representative position used by *kabuki* actors to express strength and power. They take exaggerated positions, in what is called *aragoto* 荒事 style. The actor literally freezes for a few moments, in order to focus the audience's attention on a particularly important or expressive part of the representation. The term used to indicate these poses in Japanese literally means 'observation'. The purpose of a *mie* is to show the emotions of a character at their peak. While taking the pose, the actor opens his eyes wide and, in case the emotion to represent is anger or fury, conventionally crosses them. See Earle 1956; Gerstle 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Minamoto Yorie 源頼家 was the eldest son of Minamoto Yoritomo 源頼朝 who succeeded his father as shōgun in 1202. Yorie quickly faced competition for power from his mother Hōjō Masako 北条政子 and her father Hōjō Tokimasa 北条時政 - which may explain why it took three years to establish himself as shōgun when his father died in 1199 - and was forced into exile in 1203. A year later Yorie was assassinated, probably on Tokimasa's orders.



**Figure 7** Katsushika Hokusai, *Ehon musashi abumi*, Minamoto Yorie riding a horse. 1836. Illustrated book. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. nr. 2850-14



**Figure 8** Katsushika Hokusai, *Ehon musashi abumi*. 1836. Illustrated book, first page. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 2849-02

ration from the giant serpent.<sup>27</sup> Tokimasa is kneeling with his hands clasped, in front of the enormous reptile. As often noticed in Hokusai's representations of animals, the snake, though fearsome enough, has the unique Hokusai look of human expression and somehow embarrassed gaze (inv. no. 2850-06) [fig. 10].

**27** The legend is connected to the isle of Enoshima 江ノ島 that was considered a very spiritual environment. The proximity to Kamakura 鎌倉 made it an important historical place during the Kamakura period. The Kamakura period (1185-1333) was under the control of two clans: the Minamoto and the Hōjō. Minamoto no Yoritomo, who guided the Minamoto clan to gain the control of large parts of Japan relocated the capital to his home town of Kamakura. At that time, Hōjō Tokimasa who was the father-in-law and the main adviser of Minamoto no Yoritomo, had gone to Enoshima to worship and during his prayer, a heavenly being appeared in front of him telling that he had been a priest in a previous life and that his descendants would become rulers over the country and in fact, his descendants became rulers from 1199 to 1333. The heavenly being disappeared into the sea in the form of a dragon leaving three scales that would become the family crest of the Hōjō. The dragon is often depicted in the shape of a snake and is always connected to Benten 弁天 (Benzaiten 弁財天), one of the goddess of fortune. This is the form in which she is depicted in Hokusai's print.



**Figure 9** Katsushika Hokusai, *Ehon musashi abumi*. 1836. Illustrated book. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, Venice, inv. no. 2850-08

### 3 One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji

*Fugaku Hyakkei* 富嶽百景 (One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji) (inv. no. 2709), was originally composed of three volumes (the first published in 1834),<sup>28</sup> when Hokusai was seventy-five and in the preface of the first volume he also announced the final change of his name in *gakyō rōjin Manji* 画狂老人卍 (Manji the old man mad about painting).<sup>29</sup> The volumes are formed of 27 double pages, except for the third volume, that lacks the final page with the colophon.

The peculiarity of the Venetian copy is that it is a single volume with a strange rigid binding with two single sheets applied on each page [fig. 11].<sup>30</sup> It measures 20.4 × 14.4 cm, compatibly with the measures of the original woodblocks. Like the warriors' album, the prints of *Fugaku Hyakkei* follow a complete arbitrary order in the sequence of the images.<sup>31</sup>

**28** A systematic study on the volumes of *Fugaku Hyakkei* in Suzuki 1986; Clark 2001.

**29** On Hokusai's name changes see for example: Yasuda 1972.

**30** *Sanpaku no Fuji* 山白之不二 (Three Whites Mount Fuji) left; *Muchū no Fuji* 霧中の不二 (Mount Fuji in the Mists) right.

**31** For a detailed description of the sequence see Vesco 2013, 76-7.



**Figure 10** Katsushika Hokusai, *Ehon musashi abumi*. 1836. Illustrated book. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, Venice, inv. n. 2850-6

I have suggested that this can be due to the fact that maybe Prince Henry Bourbon-Parma, Count of Bardi in the gathering of the objects of the collection was not able to buy the complete series of three volumes or the person who was in charge of compiling this volume was not aware of the existence of a third book.<sup>32</sup>

Another important issue is that each image is chosen with the utmost care. Only well identified places with their names written in Hokusai's original prints are put in the particular order of the Venetian volume. Therefore, it is easy for the viewer to understand immediately which is the spot depicted. The result is nonetheless very charming and I think it fulfils the goal Hokusai aimed to: a tribute to the sacred mountain considered from all possible viewpoints.

<sup>32</sup> It must be considered also that from 1907 to 1914 some books of the Bourbon collection were sold by the antiquarian Trau so there is the possibility that a volume could have been sold in that period. See Kumakura, Kreiner 2001; Spadavecchia Aliffi 1990.

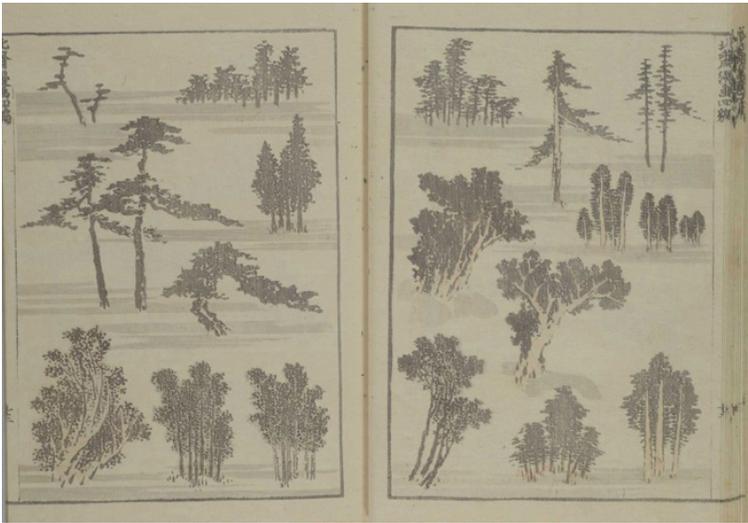


**Figure 11** Katsushika Hokusai, *Fugaku Hyakkei, Sanpaku no Fuji* 山白之不二 (Three Whites Mount Fuji) left, *Muchū no Fuji* 霧中の不二 (Mount Fuji in the Mists) right. 1834. Illustrated book. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, Venice, inv. no. 2709-18

#### 4 Manga

The Museum of Oriental Art in Venice owns nine of the fifteen volumes that compose the complete series of the funny group of random sketches. We know that the publication began in 1814 and continued till 1875-78 after Hokusai's death (Michener 1958). Consequently, the problems connected to the attribution and the real aim of this work are not clear. We wonder whether all images are really by Hokusai and if so, we may ask if the order in which we observe them today is the real order Hokusai wanted (Bouquillard, Marquet 2007). In any case, the result is exactly what is suggested by the title: *man* 漫 (suggested by an idea, casual, unintentional) and *ga* 画 (picture, image). Apparently, there is not a logical classification of the subjects but more a free flow of ideas and sketches and an overwhelming curiosity towards every aspect of the world and of daily life. It is true that sometimes the sketches are grouped clearly according to a specific topic like: trees [fig. 12], leaves, fences, magicians, fat persons, *tengu* 天狗<sup>33</sup> playing games with their long noses [fig. 13], architect-

**33** *Tengu* are fantastic creatures of Japanese popular iconography that can take different forms. They are generally represented as bird-men with a long prominent nose or even a beak. Sometimes benevolent, sometimes evil, they have wings attached to their heads; they live in the mountains and prefer dense pine or cryptomeria forests. See Miyake 2008; Mizuki 2005.



**Figure 12** Katsushika Hokusai, *Manga, Trees*, vol. 4. 1878. Illustrated book. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. nr. 2860-15

tures, waves, rain, birds, fish, and so on, but this seems more an exception than a rule.<sup>34</sup>

Despite this lack of a systematic organisation and practical explanations on how a pupil should paint the subject, the *Manga* had an enormous success and a great diffusion all over the country (Nagata 1986-87). This is further evidence of the fascination of the pictorial image both for the amateur painter and for the general public. The endless hints given by these random sketches are also the reason for the success of the *Manga* in nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe (Breuer 2010; Berndt 2015; Ferretti Bocquillon 2018).

The nine volumes<sup>35</sup> of the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice were published posthumous in 1878 (Meiji 明治 11) in Nagoya by Katano Tōshirō 片野東四郎.

The cover of each volume has a wave-like motif typical of the Nagoya production, very different from the diamond-like pattern used in Edo.

**34** For a very interesting new perspective on the meaning and the role of the random sketches see Steiner 2014.

**35** The measures of each volume are ca. 22.6 × 15.7 cm.

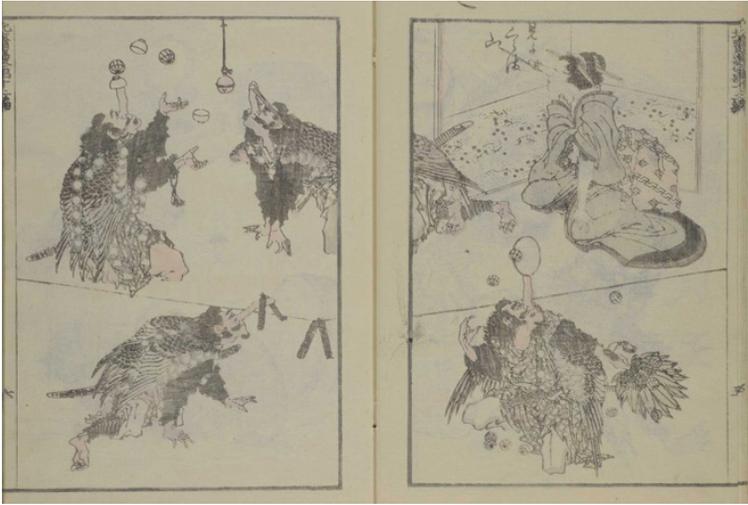


Figure 13 Katsushika Hokusai, *Manga*, vol. 12. 1878. *Tengu* playing games with their long noses. Illustrated book. Museum of Oriental Art, Venice, inv. no. 2866-08

## 5 Banshoku zukō

*Banshoku zukō* 萬職圖孝 (One Thousand Crafts Illustrated) is a group of five books of models for craftsmen. In the enormous didactic painting production by Hokusai the volumes of models are one of his favourite themes.

Each volume of *Banshoku zukō* is formed of 35 pages and a closer look suggests that they can be classified as a new edition of *Iitsumanga* 為一漫画 of 1841, published again in 1850.<sup>36</sup>

The same work was reprinted in 1880 with another title: *Kachō sansui zukushi* 花鳥山水尽 (Flowers, Birds, Landscape Illustrated) and as part of the two series *Saiga zukushi* 細画尽 (Miniatures Illustrated) and *Hokusai zukushi* 北齋尽 (Hokusai Illustrated) in 1860s-1870s.<sup>37</sup>

In the first page of volume one near the title and the signature *Katsushika Taito sensei ga* 葛飾戴斗先生画 (painted by master Katsushika Taito) we can notice the design of a pipe decorated with a peony in full bloom and a roaring Chinese lion seated on his paws [fig. 14].

<sup>36</sup> For a chronological hypothesis see Lane 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Another complete set of five volumes with the title *Banshoku zukō* with four-hole binding (*yotsume toji* 四つ目綴じ), published in Tokyo in 1891 (Meiji 24) by Ōkura Magobei 大倉孫兵衛 (1843-1921) is present in Biblioteca Braidense in Milan. See Menegazzo 2019, 132, cat. 86.



Figure 14 Katsushika Hokusai, *Banshoku zukō*, vol. 1. 1850. First page. Illustrated book. Museum of Oriental Art, Venice, inv. n. 2856-02

This image is very interesting because it shows the interest of a famous artist for the decoration of very common objects. It is the same process Hokusai used in the creation of another manual, in three volumes, addressed to artisans entitled *Imayō setsukin* [*kushi kiseru*] *hinagata* 今様櫛きん雛形 (今様櫛キセル) 雛形 (Models of Modern Combs and Pipes) printed in 1822-3 and signed *zen Hokusai aratame Katsushika Iitsu* 先北齋改葛飾為一, where he suggested all possible decorations for these items.

*Banshoku zukō* is printed in black ink with the addition of a light pink in some pages that becomes a vivid red and a nice green in the third volume to finish with blue in the fifth volume.

The design of different decorations is proposed in many different ways: sometimes on a page divided into eight small squares or much closer to show a specific detail of the image. In some other cases the figure is surrounded by a circular form [fig. 15]. The subjects of the decoration are those Hokusai was very fond of. For instance, flying mythological dragons, tigers, fish, shells are depicted together with squirrels and birds. Cocks and hens, turtles, bamboo sprouts, cherry blossoms and landscapes complete the image of the various manifestations of Nature.

Some pages are dedicated exclusively to Chinese lions (*shishi* 獅子), like in the *Nisshin jōma* 日進妖魔 (Daily Exorcisms), the group of more than 600 sketches (only 220 still extant today) painted daily like a powerful talisman against illness or a kind of prayer for a long



**Figure 15** Katsushika Hokusai, *Banshoku zukō*, vol. 1. 1850. Illustrated book. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, Venice, inv. no. 2856-32

life. This exercise kept Hokusai busy for an entire year from 1842 to 1843 (Izzard 1997).

Particular interest is given in the fourth volume to the decorative motifs to embellish the guard of swords (*tsuba* 鐔 [fig. 16]). Once again this demonstrates how these images were the source of inspiration for the artisans' class and the starting point for the creation of fashionable and up-to-date objects required by a growing and very demanding market and public.

The success was so great that in the colophon of the fifth volume there is the announcement for the forthcoming publication of a sixth volume that, unfortunately, never appeared [fig. 17].

## 6 Conclusion

The preliminary survey of the rich collection of prints and illustrated books in the Museum of Oriental Art in Venice is a challenging opportunity to deepen our knowledge of *ukiyo-e* and, at the same time, a precious chance for further study and research in the fascinating world of Japanese graphic art.

The peculiar focus on what might seem a minor production, namely didactic painting manuals, of such a great artist as Hokusai was proved, instead, to be a stimulating task to give a new interpretation to some of his printed works. Far from being superficial examples of a mechanical 'how to do' method of drawing, Hokusai's albums inspired generations of beginners and expert painters alike.



Figure 16 Katsushika Hokusai, *Banshoku zukō*, vol. 4. 1850. Illustrated book. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 2854-04



Figure 17 Katsushika Hokusai, *Banshoku zukō*, vol. 5. 1850. Illustrated book, colophon. Venice, Museum of Oriental Art, inv. no. 2853-34

Hokusai himself, using a witty eye, was able to transform the reality that surrounded him, pushing everybody towards the search of Beauty. The artist does not use the common painting means - although employing a brush and a sheet of paper; the different aspects of human life and nature are filled with emotion and deep feelings so that through Hokusai's gaze we are led to a new and fascinating appreciation of the world around us. Free from the strict rules that official prints and paintings imposed on him, Hokusai projects his exu-

berant personality in the *Manga*, in the warriors albums and in the didactic manuals addressing an audience that was not necessarily eager to learn to paint, but was maybe, simply attracted by the fact that a famous artist could share some of his knowledge with them.

The enormous success and diffusion of these booklets, not forgetting the numerous attempts to copy them, prove once again that Hokusai's method was appealing and apparently easy to master. Following Hokusai's suggestions - drawing 'in the manner of' gave the certainty that everybody could eventually, without particular efforts, become a painter.

Hokusai has no need to go into deep philosophical explanations on the very nature of the laws of painting, he simply underlined the importance of harmony, of the balance of the composition, of the implicit dynamism of each form. His sketches, quick to draw, sometimes funny or ironic, are enough to strengthen the self-confidence of every potential pupil.

This is what can be called a 'vision beyond': Hokusai teaches that it is fundamental that the fantasy observes the object before the eyes. In this way, the capacity of penetrating the true spirit of things will be easily expressed. The real artist, therefore, through his drawings, is able to filter, interpret, transform reality and eventually, transmit it to whoever is willing to welcome it.

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