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ALBERT YAMANAKA'S NIHONTO NEWSLETTER

Albert Yamanaka's Nihonto Newsletter was published monthly from January, 1968 to July of 1973. It was a mimeographed newsletter consisting of articles written on all aspects of Japanese swords: swords, schools, smiths, exhibits, comments on collecting, etc.

Albert Yamanaka lived in Japan after the war and became a student of Honami Koson, the most prominent sword expert at the time and a descendant of the Honami appraisers and polishers.

Since this newsletter has been out of print since 1973, and there is a considerable amount of original and unique material presented in it, the Yamanaka family (which has the copyright to this material) supported this effort to make the Nihonto Newsletter available again in an online easily accessible version. We hope old and new collectors will enjoy reading it, and reading material that is often not available in English, even today.

Leon Kapp

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HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE SWORD

MUROMACHI PERIOD

Oei 1 (1394) to Bunsho I (1466)

From the late Yoshino Period, a new method of carrying swords was introduced. Specifically, the tachi, which had been suspended by two cords at the waist was discarded, and the sword was thrust into the obi or cord worn around the waist with the edge up. When this new style was used, the tachi was found to be too long, and

accordingly swords were shortened following the preference of the individuals carrying them.

When the swords were shortened, they were shortened by removing the end of the nakago, since shortening a blade from the tip or point would render the sword worthless from the standpoint of use, as well as of esthetics. The kissaki of a katana is the life of the sword, and any tampering with that would be unforgivable. Having to shorten the sword at the hilt created a problem though.
When a previously long blade was shortened, the part of the blade where the signature was inscribed was cut off, so consequently an unsigned blade was born. Many blades, or the majority of blades from the Heian Period to the Yoshino Period met this fate of being shortened or being made suriage.

Another change we see in the new type of sword is in the location of the signature on the nakago. On the tachi, the signature is inscribed on the surface which faces away from the wearer when the blade is worn and the cutting edge faces down. With the new style, this custom was retained, however since the blade was now worn thrust through the obi or waist sash with the cutting edge facing up, the signature was now inscribed on the reverse side from that of the tachi. This new style or position for the signature or mei is called a katana mei.

When the new blade was thrust into the waist sash, it also brought forth yet another change, that is the carrying of another second blade slightly shorter than the katana called a wakizashi.

The changes we see are the following;

1. Change in style from a tachi to katana
2. Change of the surface on which the signature was inscribed.
3. Birth of the shorter blade carried with the katana called a wakizashi.

Of course, these changes did not occur overnight, and they had been developing for some time from the late Yoshino period, but in the Muromachi period, with the birth of the wakizashi, the change was completed.

One factor which brought about these changes was, so far as the swordsmiths were concerned, was that it was much easier to forge shorter blades, i.e. blades not as long as a tachi. Another factor was that the constant wars being fought brought about a change in the method of warfare, and it was found that a shorter sword thrust into a sash at the waist was much more readily used than the much longer tachi suspended at the waist. Also, it must have been very distracting to have an empty tachi scabbard bobbing about one's waist when the blade drawn, or even when the blade was in the scabbard.

This period was relatively short and did not see many important smiths in any part of the country except for a few in Bizen Province. The descendants of the Osafune School led by Morimitsu, Tadamitsu, Yasumitsu and Moromitsu are noteworthy. A few smiths in other areas are worth mentioning: Masahiro of Soshu Province and Nobukuni of Yamashiro Province.

The characteristics of the blades in this period are:

1. The length of the blade is shorter, and about 2 shaku 3-4 sun, and the shape of the blade resembles that of the Heian period, although they greatly lack the elegance, skill and just about everything else seen in the earlier period. On the other hand, the sword now being capable of being held in one's hand, gives a feeling of being well balanced.
2. Wakizashi were made in the length of about I shaku 7-8 sun, and on a smaller

scale than that of a katana.

When the blades from the earlier period were shortened to meet the demands of the new style, the problem of properly identifying the maker became apparent. Here an important aspect of the art of kantei came into being, and the Honami house was established.

The characteristics of the blades of the Yamashiro tradition during this period are that the skill of the swordsmith takes a sudden turn for the worse, and nothing whatsoever is seen or remains left to be seen of the one great skill displayed by their predecessors.

The blades lack nie, which means that there will be no hataraki in nie, such as kinsuji, inazuma, chikei or yubashiri. The boshi is komaru and has a long kaeri. The jitetsu, although being fairly well forged, nevertheless, does not show anything, with the hada being ko-mokume hada, and there being no ji-nie at all.

The Yamato Tradition is not very different from the Yamashiro tradition except that due to variations in the forging method, steel with features such as masame hada, hataraki, uchinoke and nijuba are still seen, although the details are very poorly executed.

The boshi has a very long kaeri. On occasion, hakikake is seen. The jitetsu, although it has masame hada, the hada is not as pronounced as that seen in the periods preceding this period.

Accordingly, it becomes a little difficult to differentiate between the blades of Yamato and Yamashiro. Some of the smiths made their swords with characteristics from both traditions, and this seems to have been the general tendency throughout the country, and this trend is carried over into the next period.

The following is a list of swordsmiths who made blades combining the two traditions of Yamashiro and Yamato during the Muromachi and the next Momoyama or Sengoku Period.

Yamato Province	Tegai and Shikkake smiths
Yamashiro Province	Nobukuni, Sanjo Yoshinori
Izumi Province	Kaga Shiro
Suruga Province	Shimada Yoshisuke
Mino Province	Zenjo Kaneyoshi
Dewa Province	Gassan
Wakasa Province	Fuyuhiro
Etchu Province	Uda smiths
Kaga Province	Fujishima Yukimitsu

Bizen Province	Yasumitsu, Morimitsu, Tadamitsu, Norimitsu
Bitchu Province	Late Aoe smiths
Bingo Province	Mihara smiths
Suo Province	Nio smiths
Chikuzen Province	Kongobei
Bungo Province	late Ryokai and Takada smiths
Higo Province	Late Enju smiths
Satsuma Province	Late Naminohira Smiths

Bizen province is the only province in which the smiths showed any skill in their work. Their characteristics are that the width of the hamon is neither too wide nor too narrow, but it is koroai, or in other words, just right.

The hamon is in nioi and the koshibiraki midare hamon which first appeared in Bizen blades in the previous Yoshino Period has now become a hallmark of the Bizen smiths.

Characteristics of the Oei Bizen blades

The boshi is a continuation of the hamon on the lower part of the blade, and the pattern will differ from one side to the other.

The jitetsu will appear soft, will be in mokume hada and in a large pattern. Bo utsuri will be found on most blades.

Smiths who worked in the Muromachi Period are:

Bizen Province:	Yasumitsu	Peaks of the midare hamon are pointed. Will have komidare mixed with suguha.
	Morimitsu	Peaks of the Midare will be rounded.
	Moromitsu	Peaks of the Midare will be rounded.
	Iesuke	Resembles Yasumitsu, although he mostly worked in suguha with komidare.
	Tsuneie	Worked mostly in sugha with komidare.
	Yoshii smiths	Uniform gunome.
	Omiya smiths	Gunome midare.
Yamashiro Province	Hasebe, Nobukuni, Yoshinori. All worked in nie.	

Sagami Province Hiromasa and Masahiro
Masahiro worked in nie.

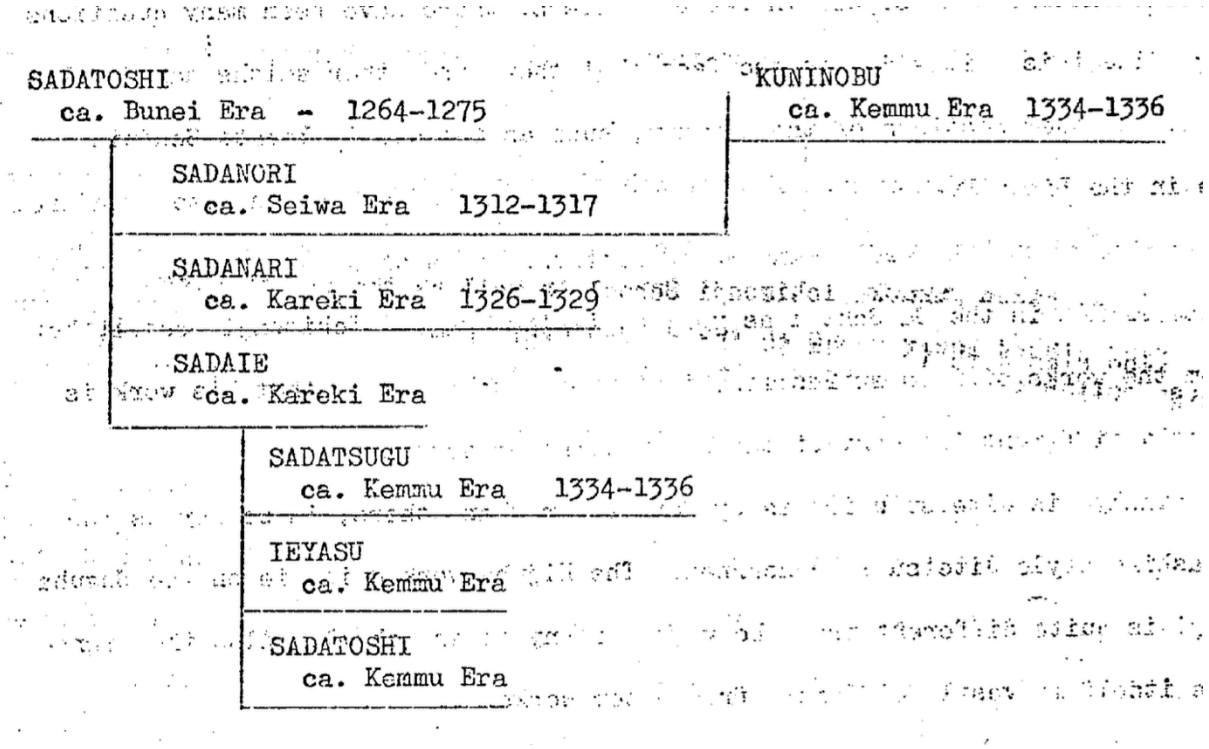
Ishimi Province Naotsuna and his students worked in nie.

There are no marked differences in the works of the Soshu smiths from those of the Yoshino Period who worked in o-midare and hitatsura. However, the nie quality becomes much poorer, consequently, fine examples of workmanship showing kinsuji and inazuma are no longer to be found. The hamon made by the Bizen smiths seems to have been the "style", and the Soshu smiths soon seem to have copied this.

The Mino tradition showed no change, and they seem to have stood still during this short period.

SWORDSMITHS

Yamashiro Province's Ayanokoji School



Other than the above, there are a few other smiths listed in this school And they are:

TADAIE	ca. Embun Era	1356 - 1361
SUKESADA	ca. Bunei Era	1356 - 1361
SADAKAGE	ca. Shoo Era	1288 - 1293
SADAYOSHI	ca. Kareki Era	1326 - 1329
SADAYASU	ca. Koo Era	1389 - 1390

SADAHIRO ca. Hoji Era 1247 – 1249

The founder of this school, Sadatoshi, is said to have established a sword smithy in the Ayanokoji district of Shijo in Kyoto around the Bunei Era. Sadatoshi is regarded as one of the masters of the mid-Kamakura Period and currently there are a few examples of his work remaining, of which only a few are in a fairly good state of preservation. However, aside from the few works of Sadatoshi, there are hardly any extant works of other smiths in this school.

Since Sadatoshi only signed with two characters, there have been many questions regarding this smith due to the fact that there are other smiths named Sadatoshi in other sections of the country, such as the one in Yamato Senjuin, one in the Bizen Fukuoka Ichimonji School, and one in Bizen Osafune, who also signed their works in two characters. Some of the old texts list these smiths in the Sa school as well as in the Fukuoka Ichimonji school, but from the works of this swordsmith, it is very much evident that his work is greatly different from any of the other works or schools. In particular, his jitetsu is far better than the others in so far as a comparison with the Yamashiro style jitetsu is concerned. His nijuba in nie in his suguha choji hamon is quite different from the works of any other school. Also, the signature itself is vastly different from other works.

The characteristics of Sadatoshi's works are:

Shape: Tachi style of the early Kamakura period as well as those of the mid-Kamakura period were made. They have torizori, and the shape itself is a little strong, though still retaining the full elegance of the early Yamashiro type swords. Kodachi are found on rare occasions.

Horimono: If found at all, they are hi and made with kakudome (a round end) or are kakinagashi (they run into the nakago).

Hamon: The width of the hamon is koroai, that is not too wide nor too narrow for the size and length of the blade. There are nie, and the nie will be a little rough. The hamon are ko-choji midare. The peaks of the midare hamon will be rounded and the size of the midare waves will not vary. They will be about even throughout the length of the blade. The nie will cluster around the nioi to form ashi, also small inazuma and chikei will be seen. The texture or hada of the steel in the hamon will be visible.

Boshi: The boshi is formed in nie kuzure, with kaen or a komaru.

Jitetsu and Hada:
The steel is very well forged and is very fine and will have uruoi (a moist or wet appearance). There is an abundance of ji-nie and where the ji-nie are strong they will form chikei and yubashiri. The hada is mokume hada and in certain works, the hada will be prominent.

Nakago: The nakago is long and narrow, ending in kurijiri, or the shape of the

nakago will be kijimomo. The yasurime or file marks will be o-sujichigai, although kiri will be seen sometimes. The mei will have two characters.

Other than Sadatoshi's's work, the swords that are found from this school will have the following description:

Shape: In the style of the late Kamakura period with a tachi shape and a deep or strong toriizori. The sori will seem as though it is a little pronounced towards the tip. The blades are thick and there will be hiraniku. The width of the shinogi ji will be a little narrow.

Horimono:
Mostly bo hi ending in marudome. The tip of the hi at the top of the blade near the point will be slightly low.

Hamon: The width of the yakiba will be a little wide compared to Sadatoshi, although still in nie with the hamon in choji midare, and the nioiguchi will be nie kuzure (crumbled) in places. Nijuba will be seen in places.

Boshi: Midarekomi with a small kaeri.

Jitetsu and Hada:
Very well forged steel showing mokume hada with o-hada showing in places. An abundance of ji-nie forms yubashiri and chikei.

Nakago: will be a little short with niku, and the tip will be kurijiri. File marks will be kiri.

KYOHO MEITBUTSU CHO

7th Installment

Book 1 or Part 1 of the Meibutsu Cho covers 16 blades by Awataguchi Toshiro Yoshimitsu, as mentioned in the very first installment of this series.
We will next cover the 4l blades by Masamune listed in Book I of the Kyoho Meibutsu Cho.

Owner: Matsudaira Kaga no Kami
Meibutsu: Komatsu Masamune

unsigned
length: 9 sun 7 bu 5 ri
value: 700 Mai

Komatsu Chunagon Toshitsune purchased the blade because it was a Masamune. He immediately showed it to Koho (Honami) and Koho said that he was of the same opinion. Later the blade was sent for reappraisal and it was appraised as Enju Kunisuke.

It is in an aburasaya (another name for shirasaya) and has a notation by Kobori Enshu that it is mumei and written in gold lacquer

Later it was then again appraised as Yukimitsu.
On the third appraisal it was appraised as shown above.

Imamura Note: states he 'saw it'.

Yamanaka Note:

When I was studying with Koson Sensei shortly after the war, I was given this blade one day to judge. My answer was Samonji which was in agreement with Koson Sensei. After the judging, Koson sensei told me that this was the Meibutsu Komatsu Masamune.

The fact that the blade has been appraised as Masamune, Enju Kunisuke and So-shu Yukimitsu, and again as Masamune is evidence of the fact that the blade will "look" like something else other than Masamune. Masamune is that difficult to recognize. If one has seen enough Masamune swords, then he will not have too many problems, however, just having heard or read about this sword smith is not enough to form an opinion.

Also, the fact that this blade is controversial shows that even though it may not have been the work of Masamune, it still is the work of someone very skilled, and to our eyes, it looked like the work of Sa which was in agreement with Koson sensei. We heard later, that shortly after our viewing, "experts" had mulled over the blade and agreed that it was not a Masamune, and 'probably' was a Sa.

Komatsu Chunagon Toshitsune refers to Maeda Toshitsune. Komatsu is a place name in Kaga Province. Chunagon is a title.

Koho refers to the 4th Honami of the Koji lineage and the grandson of the famous Koetsu.

Kobori Enshu was a famous tea ceremony expert in Hideyoshi's time. He was also famous for flower arrangement and founded the Enshu style of flower arrangement as well as the Enshu Tea Ceremony Style. Enshu also was an expert in sword judging! He was an expert calligrapher as well.

Owner: Matsudaira Aki no Kami
Wakayama or Sagimori Masamune

Signed with shumei
length: 9 Sun 4 Bu
Value: unknown

There are hi with kagebi (shadow hi or small companion hi along main hi) on both sides. There is a shumei attibution with a kakihan. It seems that a man named Sagimori Jimbei owned this blade when Asano Tajima no Kami was at his post in Wakayama in Kishu Province, and presented this blade to Tajima no Kami.

When Lady Seitai-in wedded Lord Toshitsune, it was given to Lord Toshitsune. The name of the swordsmith is not known.

Lord Toshitsune presented the Samidare Go and Yahata Masamune in return. Later when Lady Jisho-In wedded Matsudaira Kii no Kami, it was given as a wedding present.

On the 9th Year of Kanei (1632), it came for appraisal and evaluation. It was compared with the Okamoto Masamune and the Soma Masamune, and the opinion was that this blade was about at the same level, and a value of 300 Mai was given.

The Okamoto Masamune was valued at 500 Mai during the Genroku Era. The Soma Masamune was valued at 7,000 Kan during the latter part of the Genroku Era. However, the appraised value being a little high, it was reset to the previous value because of the fact that it is unsigned. Nevertheless, the blade is not as good as it is claimed to be.

Yamanaka Note:

One of the different versions of the Meibutsu Cho gives the value for this blade at 300 Mai.

Asano Tajima no Kami served as one of the vassals to Toyotomi Hideyori. Toshitsune refers to Maeda Toshitsune and the youngest son of Maeda Toshiie. Lady Seitai-In refers to the 2nd daughter of the 2nd Tokugawa Shogun Hidetada, Hata Hime.

Matsudaira Kii no Kami refers to the Matsudaira of Katahara who had a fief of 50,000 Koku at Kameyama in Tamba Province.

Jisho-In in the text seems to be referred to as the daughter of Maeda Toshitsune. She is the 4th daughter of Maeda Toshitsune and wedded Matsudaira Shigetada of Nomi.

Okamoto Masamune is mentioned in this installment. Soma Masamune will be covered in the August installment.

Owner: Matsudaira Chikuzen no Kami
Meibutsu: Okamoto Masamune

unsigned
length: 8 sun 6 bu
value: 500 Mai

It was formerly in the possession of a merchant of Sakai in Settsu Province named Okamoto Doi.

Lord Toshitsune purchased it and presented it to Lord Ieyasu. Lord Hidetada gave it to Kuroda Nagamasa.

Imamura Note

states he 'saw it'.

Yamanaka Note

Matsudaira Chikuzen no Kami refers to the Kuroda of Fukuoka in Chikuzen Province. Kuroda Nagamasa was the first of the Kuroda to rule in Kyushu after the Tokugawa assumed rule.

Lord Toshitsune refers to Maeda Toshitsune of Kaga Province. We have never had an opportunity to see this blade, however from what we have heard from those who have seen it, it is not regarded as a very good one.

SWORD TERMINOLOGY

Utsuri

Utsuri is an area in the ji where an area with a boundary line and which is independent from the habuchi or border defining the hamon.

This line or border in the ji is not as strong as the habuchi or border of the hamon, and to see it clearly, one must hold the blade against a light source. The condition or feature is best described as appearing as though one has breathed upon the steel.

Utsuri comes in many forms and shapes: choji utsuri, botan utsuri,jifu utsuri, bo utsuri, tsukare utsuri, and shirake utsuri.

Choji utsuri is found on blades whose hamon have been formed with choji, and the utsuri along the ji has the same shape or design, and will appear as a shadow-like image of the hamon.

Botan utsuri is the same as the above choji utsuri, except that the utsuri is seen in the form of a botan or peony. Both of these, choji and botan utsuri, are seen in early work in Bizen province during the Kamakura period, from the Fukuoka Ichimonji, early Osafune, and the Hatakeda smiths.

Utsuri in most cases appears whitish, whereas in the case of the jifu utsuri, it will seem almost black, and look as though the utsuri pattern has been pressed into its position on the ji with one's thumb. This is often found in the work of Ko-Aoe and Chu-Aoe smiths. This type of utsuri is seen in some of the work of Shinshinto smiths such as Suishinshi and his students.

Bo utsuri forms a straight line, regardless of what pattern the hamon may be, such as suguha or choji or midare. Bo utsuri is found on many blades from Osafune after the Oei Era. It is also seen on Sue-Aoe work.

Tsukare utsuri can be seen on blades which have suffered from extensive polishing. There has been enough polishing so that the core steel or shingane will become visible. This type of utsuri will show in the area around the visible core steel.
It will be found quite often in work from Rai in Yamashiro province and Unju in Kyushu who are known to have used a very thin outer layer of steel (the kawagane) which can have been have worn down or worn away in places from years of wear and tear and polishing.

Shirake utsuri is a form of utsuri which appears near the the shinogi and will be very clear, and will not resemble any other type of utsuri, and it will be whitish in appearance. This type of utsuri itself is not clearly defined since its border lines are sort of 'fuzzy'. It is found on most of the Koto Kyushu smiths such as Naminohira,

Enju, Miike and others, and also on work from Mihara in Bingo Province, from most Kaga smiths, and on many of the works of the Seki smiths in Mino Province.

Ayasugi Hada

Ayasugi hada refers to a type of jihada pattern in the the steel resembling waves. It is found on blades from the Koto period in the work of smiths from Satsuma province, Dewa province, Yamato province, Echigo province, in work of the Naminohira smiths and Gassan smiths, the late Shikkake smiths, and the Momokawa smiths.

In the Shinshinto Period, it is seen in work from Settsu province and the Gassan smiths.

Chukan sori

A type of blade which has no sori.
The back ridge or mune is straight and it is mostly seen in tanto and on rare occasions ko-wakizashi.

Chokoku

Chokoku means carving. Of the many types of carvings found on Japanese swords, the most commonly seen are: bonji or Sanscrit characters, koshibi, gomabashi, suken, dokko tsuki ken, tsume tsuki ken, renge, hoko, shin no kurikara, harami ryu, ukibori in hitsu, gyo no kurikara, so no kurikara, yoraku, kensaku. There are the names of various gods and dieties in Shinto and Buddhism.

Dragons being the most common subject, they are carved in many shapes and forms such as nobori ryu, sagari ryu, hai ryu, etc.

Chu wakizashi

A wakizashi whose length is about 1 shaku 5-6 sun.

Chikei

This is exactly the same as inazuma, but is found in the ji. This is a cluster of fine nie which forms a string or line, and will be more brilliant than other parts of the ji.

Chu kissaki

A medium size kissaki or point. The kissaki or point is formed with an upward angle of about 45 to 50 degrees upward from the cutting edge.

Daigane

An anvil,

Dokko

This is sometimes read as “tokko”. It is the form of a baton which the Buddhist god Fudo has in his hand.

Edo Period

Period from 1596 – 1868, or from the first year of Keicho to the last year of Keiou (1865-1867. Also referred to as the Tokugawa Period.

Fuji

Sometimes called Fujimi Saigyo. This refers to a design in the hamon border or nioiguchi which is said to resemble Mt. Fuji. that is the peaks of the midare pattern form a mountain with a peak. Mostly made by mid-Tokugawa period smiths in Settsu province such as Kawachi no Kami Kunisuke. On rare occasion, it is seen in the work of Tensho Bizen smiths.

Futatsuji Hi

A type of groove or hi, where two hi of equal width are carved on the shinogi ji for the full length of the shinogi ji.

Fumbari

Refers to the shape of the sword, and the width at the machi.
This is a blade where width at the machi is wide, and then the width tapers down rapidly so that the angle or profile of the blade around the machi resembles a man standing erect with outstretched legs.

This is found on blades from the Kamakura period as well as from the very late Heian period.

Furisode nakago

Sometimes referred to simply as furisode. The shape of the nakago tapers up and away from the cutting edge, and the nakago jiri or tip extends upward the mune line.

Fukura

Refers to the part of the kissaki where the cutting edge forms an arc going up to the tip of the point. The phrase "fukura ga aru" is often used for a blade in which the fukura is notably rounded. “fukura ga kareru" is used to describe a blade which has a small or a shallow fukure. Kareru means to wither.

Gendai

Swords made post 1868, that is after the end of the Tokugawa reign when the new government took control from the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1868. Any blades made after 1868 are popularly referred to as “Gendai To”.

Go Kaden

Refers to the five sword making traditions of the Koto Period. The five traditions of the Koto Period are Yamashiro, Yamato, Soshu, Mino, and Bizen.

These five traditions developed the basic rules or styles in which swords were made during the Koto period. All other provinces other than the five provinces connected with or were associated with the five traditions and are referred to as gaiden, wakimono and at times as Inaka smiths. Although all of the wakimono can be traced to one of the five traditions, some will have become so corrupted or altered that they hardly resemble the original forms.

Gunome Togari

In gunome togari, the peaks of the gunome waves are pointed or sharp.
In the case of sambon sugi (sugi means cedar) originated by Kanemoto of Seki in Mino Provinice, every third peak is larger than the other two.

The pointed peaks are a characteristic or almost a hallmark of the Mino Province Seki smiths.

Gunome Choji

The peaks of the gunome are in the shape of a cross section of a choji (clover) blossom. These were made by Izumi no Kami Kanesada of Mino province in the Koto period and his followers in the Shinto period as well as by Jumyo, also of Mino in the Shinto period.

A variation of the gunome choji is called Kengyo Choji or Kobushi Choji in which the peaks of the choji are shaped to look like a clenched fist was made by Kawachi no Kami Kunisuke of Settsu during the Shinto period. They were also made by Yokoyama Sukekane.

Gunome choji are sometimes called kembo midare, and were made by Kanefusa in the late Koto period. Here, the individual choji look like the kawazuko choji of Osafune Mitsutada, but are much larger and formed independently of the next neighoring Choji.

Gunome Midare

Here, gunome or the individual gunome waves or peaks are not uniform, but are irregular.

Gin Zogan Mei

Silver inlay attribution of the swordsmith inscribed in the nakago by the appraiser.

Sometimes the appraiser will not sign his name, however if it was done by any of the Honami, then they are invariably signed and also have a Kakihan or Oka.

Silver inlay attributions are very rare, although not necessarily fine or good.

Gunome

Gunome are seen in many shapes and forms. A gunome hamon forms a series of uniform or variable peaks formed out of gunome waves. Variations of gunome hamon are suguha gunome, notare gunome, gunome midare, kataochi gunome, gunome choji, o-gunome, ko-gunome,and togari gunome.

Ha Niku

Niku means meat, and refers to the rounded steel surface at the cutting edge. The shape of the surface around the cutting edge is sometimes called hamaguri ba, (hamaguri means clam) and the cross section of the steel at the cutting edge resembles a clam. This rounded shape of the steel near the cutting edge is most often found on blades by smiths in the mid-Kamakura period, who made Ikubi Kissaki tachi, although it is found on many blades during the Kamakura Period.

Higaki

Higaki refers to a type of file marks on the nakago which are made in a crosshatch pattern.

Hiratsukuri

Hiratsukuri is a blade which is flat and has no shinogi. Found mostly on tanto, ko-wakizashi or wakizashi, although it will be found in Katana on rare occasions.

Hi

A hi is a groove carved in the shinogi ji.

Hitatsura

A fully hardened blade where hamon areas can cover almost the entire blade up to the mune. The hamon areas will be straight, in blotches or spots, and other irregular shapes along with the hamon along the cutting edge.

Hakkake

Hakkake is also called hakikake. It is mostly seen on blades with suguha hamon and with masame hada. The border of the hamon will have streaks as though marks were left by broom strokes. This also refers to a boshi which ends in a brush-like pattern.

MASAMUNE AND THE JITTETSU

In recent years, there has been some controversy as to whether there actually were such students as the Masamune Jittetsu. The existence of Masamune has also long been a subject of controversy, and started during the Meiji era, but the actual existence of the Masamune Jittetsu has been questioned by many in recent years.

This is only natural, for in the recent years, especially since the end of World War II, the study of Japanese Swords has advanced and it has become possible for many students of Japanese Swords to be able to see many fine swords from famous old collections which until quite recently were only accessible to a few exclusive students in select circles. This is largely due to the fact that the old collections were dispersed after the termination of WWII for one reason or another.

It is only natural that when one is able to see these swords at first hand and observe the details in the swords, that many will wonder about some of the points that have been written about. In viewing the works of the Jittetsu, they (those who deny the existence of the Jittetsu) contend that these ten students could not possibly have studied under Masamune, for there is nothing in the works of some of these smiths to suggest any Soshu tradition influence, particularly influence from Masamune.

This is true to a certain extent when one has to pin-point the individual characteristics of the Jittetsu smiths. However, one must always take into consideration the fact that if any of these smiths were apprenticed to Masamune in their early years, they would have been in their teens as most apprentices were at that time, so they certainly would have had all, or most, of the characteristics of Masamune’s work present in their work, as is seen in the works of Sadamune.

We are not saying that Sadamune was apprenticed to Masamune in his early teens, but there is ample evidence to point to the fact that Sadamune did study under Masamune and followed his master's teachings faithfully from the many works of Sadamune we see today. However, if one were to take into consideration that these smiths went to Masamune in their later years, having already been established as swordsmiths, then they might have absorbed some of the finer points of

Masamune's forging methods which will not be too evident in some of the finished products at a glance.

So then let us examine these Jittetsu members one by one, and see whether there are any traces of a Soshu influence or any influence from Masamune, and whether they could possibly have studied or worked under the great teacher-sword smith of the Kamakura Period.

The quality of the sword and the ability of the sword smith, whether he is good or poor, starts at the very beginning, that is from the selection of the iron ingot and how the sword smith worked with that iron and turned it into fine steel. If the swordsmith was able to turn the iron into fine steel, then a good hamon comes naturally to the blade,

Masamune in his ability to turn iron into fine steel can be ranked at the very top among all the sword smiths in the entire history of the Japanese sword from the time of the legendary Amakuni the early 700s throughout a long history down to the present day.

The ability to understand the steel forming a sword is one of the most important, if not the most important element in making a sword. But at the same time, it is the most difficult step to understand. This understanding comes only after years of studying actual swords with a good teacher. If one is able to see many good blades, then he will be able to understand them that much faster (providing he knows what he is looking at – and that is why a good teacher is important). Students of the sword in the West have a little drawback so far as this is concerned since there are very few quality blades to study. Therefore, we will examine the Jittetsu along with their jitetsu and hamon, and compare their works to see if any of these smiths could have worked with Masamune. Other aspects of the sword's structure, though they are equally important, we will leave for another day, and only take up the above mentioned two very important points.

Many of Masamune's works are controversial, and are tachi and katana as well as tanto. However, the tachi and katana are more controversial than the tanto. There are a great number of tanto judged as genuine works of Masamune, as are many of the blades listed in the Kyoho Meibutsu Cho, but very few long blades. Such being the case, we will compare Masamune's tanto with the tanto of the Jittetsu, and in cases where there are relatively few tanto by a member of the Jittetsu we will compare their long blades.

Rai Kunitsugu of Yamashiro Province

Kunitsugu is sometimes referred to as Kamakura Rai. This name probably was given to Kunitsugu sometime during the Tokugawa period, however it points to the fact that there are many characteristics in Kunitsugu's work to show ample evidence of Soshu Tradition influences.

There are many works by Kunitsugu left to us, and from these we are able to learn the characteristics of his work.

Kunitsugu made two distinct types of tanto. One was made in the takenoko sori style of the Kamakura period, and the other is in the Embun-Joii era style sunnobi hiratsukuri tanto of the Yoshino Period. Those with takenoko sori have the following characteristics.

Jitetsu

There are abundant uruoi and the hada of the steel is ko-mokume hada which is very tightly knit with chikei and yubashiri resulting from an abundance of ji-nie.

Hamon
The hamon is a trifle wider in notare and in suguha choji midare with an abundance of nie. The nie and nioi cluster together within the hamon, and where the nie is strong, it forms into inazuma and kinsuji, and all of these combine to form the complexity and appearance of the hamon in a way which is seen only among the works of master sword smiths.

Uruoi
Uruoi mears to be moist appearing, but not in the sense of the word being used as "me ga uruou" which means "eyes filled with tears". The feeling of the steel having uruoi is very difficult to put into words and I think that this must be experienced rather than explained.

This peculiarity of steel having uruoi is seen only rarely, and only among the works of very skilled smiths, such as Masamune, Sadamune, Shintogo, Yoshimitsu of Awataguchi, and Sa to name a few. It is not evident in the work any of Kunitsugu's predecessors of the Rai School such as Kunimitsu, Niji Kunitoshi, Rai Kunitoshi, nor on Kuniyuki's works.
The ability that Masamune shows in working with steel has been approached by very few smiths such as those mentioned above, and although there are a few others who are very skilled in working with steel, their work is far inferior when compared to that of Masamune.
The refinement of the Japanese sword is in the steel. The steel having these exquisite properties, the hamon develops on them quite naturally, and such workings or hataraki as kinsuji and inazuma will be present in the hamon, and chikei and yubashiri in the ji. On the other hand, if the steel has not been properly forged, then kinsuji, inazuma, etc., will never be found, and no matter how hard a sword smith may try, he will not see these features. These features are never made by accident. Everything reverts back to the original forging of the steel.
In Soshu, and very possibly under Masamune, the type of hamon which we see in Kunitsugu’s work, as well as his steel, is not what we see in Yamashiro province at the time, nor by any of the smiths in the Rai School, prior to Kunitsugu.

Hasebe Kunishige of Yamashiro Province
There are many versions concerning the origin of this swordsmith, although none is is very explicit.
Kunishige's tanto are generally long, about 1 shaku, and with sakizori, in the style of the Yoshino period. Since there is very clearly visible masame hada, some people believe that he may originally have had some connection with the Tegai school of Yamato. There are a few tachi by Kunishige, such as the famous Meibutsu Heshikiri Hasebe, although the majority of his works that we have seen are all tanto.

Jitetsu:
The steel having been well forged, has mokume hada with itame and o-hada in places, and the masame hada will be very much in evidence near the mune.

Hamon

The hamon has variations in the width. It starts out rather narrow and in a small pattern and then is it proceeds towards the tip it becomes wider and the pattern becomes larger. In some works, there are hitotsura and the nie will be rough and there be will be nie kuzure from the o-midare or gunome midare pattern of the hamon. The habuchi is exceptionally hanayaka (flamboyant, showy, exuberant) with such hataraki as sunagashi, inazuma and kinsuji. There will be nie saki within the hamon in places. Within the tobiyaki there will be masame hada.

This description at a glance does not resemble Masamune, but is more like Sadamune, and if the finer points were examined in Kunishige's work, then we can say that there is evidence to indicate that he could have studied under someone in Soshu.

A very good example of this can be seen in the work of Awataguchi Yoshimitsu's famous blade known as Ichigo Hitofuri in the Imperial Collection.
This blade was in the Owari Tokugawa Collection where it was placed by Ieyasu. Ieyasu received it from the Toyotomi when the Toyotomi were defeated in their final battle in the Osaka Summer Battle of 1615. During this battle, when fire swept through Osaka Castle, this blade along with a great part of Hideyoshi's collection went through the fire. Ieyasu later had the blade retempered by the shodai Echizen Yasutsusu. Hideyoshi Is supposed to have gotten it from Mori at the time when Mori was still at Takamatsu in Bitchu province on Tensho 18 (1590). The blade originally had a midare hamon, as recorded in old texts. However, Yasutsugu retempered it with a suguha hamon. It is originally is said to have been. 2 shaku 8 sun 3 bu, but presently is 2 shaku 2 sun.

Yasutsugu never was considered a first class swordsmith, even during his time, although he had the good patronage of Tokugawa Ieyesu. This fact is very much in evidence from the many examples of Yasutsugu's work we see today. However, the hamon which Yasutusugu put on the Ichigo Hitofuri certainly is outstanding, and if a person did not know the history of the sword, he would never believe that it was retempered by Yasutsugu. This is the result of the fine steel which Yoshimitsu made. Certainly, much of the quality of the sword may have been lost in the fire, but it still retained enough of the original qualities to acquire a fine hamon even after retempering. Such a fine hamon will follow it naturally during retempering if the steel has been forged correctly.

We described the above as an example of fine steel and what results from it. From what we have covered, there is more than ample evidence to suggest that Kunishige did study under someone: possibly under Masamune in his later years or under Sadamune.

His works can be compared to both Masamune and Sadamune, although the steel showing masame hada in places is quite foreign to the Soshu tradition, and this can be attributed to his connection or association with other traditions before his pilgrimage to Kamakura.

The hamon and the splendor it shows at the habuchi is exactly what is seen in the work of the better Soshu smiths.

Go Yoshihiro of Etchu Province

The fact that Yoshihiro along with his teacher Masamune and with Yoshimitsu of Awataguchi in Yamashiro is regarded as one of the Nihon Sansaku tells us of this

sword smith’s ability. There are many blades of Yoshihiro listed in the Meibutsu Cho of which the Inaba Go is the most outstanding, followed by the Tomita Go.

All of the remaining works of Yoshihiro are tachi which have been shortened into katana length, and one tanto called Hasegawa Go which is the only known tanto. It is said that Yoshihiro died very early and this is the reason why there are so few of his works remaining today. Whatever the reason, it is certainly true that his works are extremely rare.

There is a saying in Japan: “one never sees a ghost or a Go", this means though we often read and hear about a ghost, we never see one, and the same can said for Yoshihiro’s blades as well. They are that rare.

There is another saying: "out of every ten blades, eleven are fake" which shows how many forgeries of Yoshihiro are running around. This is often said of Yoshihiro, Masamune, and Kotetsu’s work. Although there are more works of the latter two, it certainly is true in the case of Yoshihiro.

In ancient Japan, when all of the famous blades were in the major Daimyo collections, the populace never did get to see those blades, but heard much about them, and the above saying came into being.

Jitetsu

The jitetsu is fine and delicate like that of the Yamashiro blades, especially those seen in Awataguchi blades. The steel having been well forged, the hada is ko-mokume hada, and o-hada is found in places. Due to the abundant ji-nie, yubashiri and chikei are found in places.

The very abundant nie at the habuchi runs into the ji which is one of the finer points of Yoshihiro's nie which can be enjoyed.

There are muneyaki on some blades, but this is not muneyaki as we understand it in the common use of the term. The yaki is not exactly muneyaki but only a strong version of yubashiri, therefore the nie in the tobiyaki are not as strong or rough and large as usual.

This description can certainly be compared to that of Masamune, and to some of the works of Masamune, especially the tachi called Kizuki Izumi no Kami. which is considered the most important of the Masamune tachi.

The description of the Inaba Go previously mentioned is:

Jitetsu

The jitetsu has a ko-itame hada and is very tightly forged. There are also abundant uruoi. Ji-nie covers the entirety of the ji and small chikei are seen in places.

Hamon

The hamon is slightly wide. The area right above the monouchi notably becomes hanayaka with abundant nioi and abundant ko-nie and the complexity and combination of the two makes the hamon a delight to see.

This description fits the other famous Go blades such as the Tomita Go as well The Kuwana Go and Samidare Go.

Also, from the above descriptions, we can assume that Yoshihiro could have studied with Masamune. Yoshihiro is said to have died in his twenties explaining the lack of his works previously mentioned, and therefore, if he did study under

Masamune, then the teaching he received from Masamune could have formed the basis for his work, and shows that he followed the teachings of Masamune pretty faithfully.

Norishige of Etchu Province

Norishige is counted as one of the better of the Jittetsu, and Norishige is also regarded as a very able smith. There are many works of Norishige left to us.

Jittetsu

The jitetsu is very fine with o-hada showing in places, and with an abundance of ji-nie. Within the o-hada, chikei will be seen, and this effect resembles the bark of a pine tree, and therefore it is called matsukawa hada.

Hamon

The hamon is made in nie with the noi being very prominent, and the color and brightness of the nie is very pronounced. The hamon are notare and suguha choji, or gunome midare with nie kuzure in places, and with also ashi. The nie and nioi cluster together forming ashi and sunagashi in places.
The steel's texture within the hamon is prominent.
Inazuma is seen profusely within the hamon and run up into the ji to become Chikei. This is especially notable around the monouchi area and into the kissaki and it is found almost on all blades by Norishige in the area around the Fukura.

The above description, at a glance, is not quite that of Masamune blades, However, if one were to look into the finer aspects and the individual characteristics, then there is one thing which one cannot overlook, and that is the steel.
As we have said before, if the steel is not properly forged or tempered, then the result will not be seen in the hamon. In the case of Norishige, the steel having been well forged, the result is very much in evidence in the hamon as well as in the ji with various hataraki resulting from the nie such as chikei, inazuma, and kinsuji. So, it is very possible that Norishige could have studied under Masamune. Certainly, he did not receive his tutelage from anyone in Yamashiro or Yamato or in Etchu Province for there was no one in those areas during Norishige's time who could possibly have been his teacher.

Shizu Kaneuji of Mino Province

Kaneuji originally is from Yamato Province. He is popularly called Yamato Shizu for the work he made while he was still in Yamato. Later, having moved to Mino province he was called Shizu Saburo Kaneuji. It is not too clear as to what time he went to Soshu, but there are definite differences in his work as Yamato Shizu and Shizu Saburo. The latter are much better than the former, so it can be assumed that he could have gone to Soshu in the period between when he used the two mei. Kaneuji is placed very high on the list of the Jittetsu for his ability. There are a few of his works left to us of which the Meibutsu Wakebe Shizu, once owned by Tokugawa Ieyasu, and later by the Kishu Tokugawa is said to be outstanding. Of the tanto by Kaneuji, the Meibutsu Inaba Shizu is also outstanding.
Kaneuji's steel is very fine which results in a ko-mokume hada.

Jitetsu:
the steel is well forged, and this is evident in the jigane which has ko-mokume hada with masame hada in places, and an abundance of ji nie results in yubashiri and chikei in places. The masame hada is especially noticeable in the shinogi ji.

Hamon
Hamon are seen in various styles, although this can be summed up by saying they are made in two categories, wide and narrow. Those which are wide are primarily in nie and the pattern is o-midare, o-gunome midare or notare midare, and the nie forms nie kuzure in places. Within the hamon, in places, there will be togari.
The narrow hamon will have a variable width, and will be in notare midare and also will have togari. Where the hamon is narrow, it will be very close to the hasaki (cutting edge), and in these areas, the ashi from the midare will run down to the cutting edge.
The nie are well formed, that is the nie are especially fine, inazuma and kinsuji will be found, and sunagashi will be seen,

The general description of the hamon and the jittetsu is about the same as those found on Masamune's blades and it can be assumed that Kaneuji did study under Masamune.

Kinju of Mino Province
Although he is not too widely known, there not being too many of his works left to us, the description of Kinju is about the same as that of Kaneuji. Kinju is usually hidden in the shadow of Kaneuji, because Kaneuji's work is so outstanding, and also because Kinju's works are so rare.
In comparison to Kaneuji, everything about Kinju's work is much more gentle and does not have the feeling of being hanayaka or gorgeous and exuberant. Not ever having ever seen enough of this sword smith's work, we do not feel qualified to make any comments on his work, however as mentioned above, it can be summed up as a lesser version of Kaneuji's work.

Kanemitsu of Osafune in Bizen Province
Kanemitsu blades have been famous from ancient times for having a very keen cutting edge, and for this reason many of the old warlords and generals carried Kanemitsu's blades, such as the famous Takenaka Kanemitsu of Uesugi Kenshin, Namioyogi Kanemitsu of Tachibana Muneshige, the Ikkoku Kanemitsu of Yamanouchi, and the Fukushima Kanemitsu of Fukushima Masanori to name only a few.

Jitetsu
The steel has the feeling of being soft, although it has been well forged. The utsuri of Kanemitsu is called namazu iro (namazu = catfish, iro = color), the color of the utsuri is grayish, and within the utsuri there will be chikei in places. The hada is o-mokume hada. The utsuri are found in the shape of the hamon, that is the midare peaks in the hamon will be at the foot of the utsuri which will follow the hamon habuchi everywhere.

Hamon

The hamon is narrow and like that of Kagemitsu. He made kataochi gunome, although compared to Kagemitsu's, the pattern of Kanemitsu's hamon are slightly larger. Other hamon are o-midare with abundant nie, and these will have the kataochi gunome pattern present in the midare. Others are notare midare. Those in notare midare are narrow and will have small patterns of kinsuji and inazuma. Those in kataochi gunome do not have as much hataraki in the hamon when compared to his other works, although they have color and depth in the nioi. In all work, inazuma and kinsuji will be found.

The above description is certainly foreign to the work of Masmune. But the quality of the steel which is the all important point to be on the lookout for, shows it has been well forged. The fact that his steel has the ”feeling” of being soft, which is the general feeling of Bizen blades, and especially those of the Osafune smiths, could result from the fact that the steel was “over worked” or “over forged”.

The forging of the steel by the swordsmith is the most important part in the long operation of sword making. The folding of the steel must be perfect. It must not have been excessively forged, and it must not be insufficiently forged, and this perfection was attained by only a very few in the very long history of the Japanese sword. From the time of Amakuni until today, there are only a very few sword smiths that have been really successful in forging and making their steel. These we can count on one hand, and they would be Masamune, Sadamune, Shintogo, Yoshihiro, and Sa with possibly a few others.

Others have made good steel, however in comparison to the above mentioned, they are inferior. The fact that the steel has uruoi means that the steel was worked to perfection. Of course, there are a great number of other contributing factors in this process, such as the selection of the iron, the correct temperature in heating the steel, the correct temperature in tempering, and the correct temperature of the water, etc., and with all these factors involved, the ultimate results were achieved by these smiths.

Kanemitsu cannot be included in this category since his steel is not that good, but nevertheless, the fact that he was able to develop the skills that he had indicates that his ability was not developed by himself alone.

The steel of the Osafune smiths prior to Kanemitsu, that is Kagemitsu and Nagamitsu and Mitsutada are all different, and this fact alone attests to the fact that Kanemitsu must have studied under someone, and very possibly under Masa-mune.

The works of Kanemitsu are popularly called Soden Bizen, that is a combination Of the Soshu and Bizen traditions. The fact that Soshu influences are seen in addition to the Bizen tradition in the work of Kanemitsu and his students, is evidence of the fact that there was some intercourse between Soshu and Bizen Province during Masamune and Kanemitsu's time.

Chogi of Osafune in Bizen Province

Chogi probably comes next in standing after Kanemitsu among the Jittetsu, although Chogi’s work is also surpassed by the greater works of Kanemitsu, like Kinju’s works are surpassed by those of Kaneuji. Nevertheless, there are some excellent works by Chogi remaining today which attest to his great ability.

Jitetsu
The jitetsu is similar to that of Kanemitsu.

Hamon
The hamon is wide, and very hanayaka (georgeous, exuberant, active) and in nioi which is much stronger than the nie. The hamon are gunome midare with o-hada within the hamon. Nie sake will be seen inside of the hamon in places.
There are sunagashi seen in some of his works, like those of the Soshu smiths. Also, the gunome have a slight indentation in the peaks which makes the gunome resemble the shape an ear lobe. This is called Chogi's mimigata midare. Nie shimi will be found within the hamon sometimes.

This description, no matter how favorably one looks at it, does not have any resemblance to the Soshu tradition, to Masamune, or to anyone else around that time, but can be compared, in part, to some of the works of such later Soshu smiths such as Hiromitsu. However, from the standpoint of the time in which Chogi was active, that is around the Kemmu Era (1334-1336), this is a little before the time Hiromitsu is said to have been active, and around the mid-1300s.
Therefore, it is possible that there could have been some connection with some of the later Soshu smiths, though not Masamune, and maybe possibly under Sadamune.

Naotsuna of Ishimi Province
The least known smith of the Jittetsu, Naotsuna, has been regarded as one of the Jittetsu and was declared so by the Honami during the early Tokugawa Period, though there are ample reasons to doubt this today,
However, from Naotsuna's work, there is evidence to support the fact that he could have studied under someone in Soshu, though certainly not under Masamune.

Jitetsu
Though it has been well worked, the steel gives one the feeling a that it is very 'hard'. The hada is mokume hada with masame hada in places.

Hamon
There are variations in the width. O-gunome are uniform and
will have rough nie and abundant sunagashi. Some are in o-midare and mixed with gunome midare, and there are nie kuzure in places.

This work gives one an impression of Bizen province work (from Chogi's influence?). Certainly, there is nothing in Naotsuna's work to suggest that he could have studied under Masamune.

Sa of Chikuzen Province
Sa is listed at the very top of the Jittetsu and there is no one who can doubt this, as it is very well supported by the many works of Sa that we see today.

Jitetsu

The jigane has been extremely well forged which results in ko-mokume hada with ohada showing in places, and with chikei as well.
There will be no yaki within the ji as is usually found on Soshu blades, although in certain areas within the ko-mokume hada there will be whirlpool like effects which is considered as one of Sa's characteristics.
There will be an abundance of ji-nie which appear very delicate and fine. The steel has uruoi.

Hamon

The hamon are made in two distinct styles, one in a wide pattern, and one in a narrow pattern. Generally, most hamon are made in a notare style with ashi which run into the hamon, and then run parallel along the blade's cutting edge, sort of like a saka ashi, and this may appear like kuichigaiba. In the Soshu tradition, the yakidashi is made in a small pattern which becomes larger going towards the tip. In the case of Sa's work, there is one large midare wave at the start, and the hamon then transitions to the usual small pattern, which gradually becomes larger towards the kissaki. This midare at the machi is known as the Samonji koshiba.

Overall, the nie on the blade is extremely fine and delicately executed, and at the habuchi the nie is especially soft appearing along with abundant nioi.

The complexity and appearance of the ha is exceptional due to the combination of the nie and nioi. There are no sunagashi or nie sake as found in some of the Soshu work, but an abundance of inazuma and kinsuji will be seen on the blade.

This description certainly fits the description of Masamune work in every detail. Many of the finer mumei tanto by Sa have been passed off as Masamune tanto in the past.

An example of this is the case of the famous Meibutsu Komatsu Masamune. Back in 1947, Koson sensei gave me this blade for kantei, and after a little deliberation, we came up with the answer of Sa. Koson sensei said that it was only natural that our observation would result in that answer as everything about the tanto pointed to Sa rather than Masamune. This particular blade had been judged as Masamune, Yukimitsu, and Enju Yukimitsu at one time or another, and since about 1948, it has been judged as Sa.

The famous national treasure Chikuzen Sa (shown in "Masamune and His School", Page 186-187) is the best preserved and the best of all Sa's remaining work today. The hada on this particular blade is ko-itame hada, very tightly forged, and with an abundance of tobiyaki and chikei. The details (hataraki) and complexity of the steel is very exceptional and there is very strong uruoi present, as though the blade has just been drawn after being immersed in oil or water. The hamon is notare gunome with ashi and with abundant nioi and an abundance of ko-nie. From the description made above, there is no reason to doubt that Sa was a student of Masamune.

As for the rest of the Jittetsu, there is absolutely no reason to doubt that they studied under Masamune or someone in Soshu during that particular time. Perhaps someone will prove us wrong someday!

Masamune	ca. the Shoo Era (1288-1292) to the Kareki Era (1326-1328).	
The Jittetsu.	Rai Kunitsugu	ca. Shoo Era, 1288-1292

Hasebe Kunishige	ca. Kemmu era, 1334-1337
Go Yoshihiro	ca. Geno Era, 1319-1320
Norishige	ca. Kareki Era (1326-1328).
Shizu Kaneuji	ca. Geno Era, 1319-1320
Kinju	ca. Geno Era, 1319-1320
Osafune Kanemitsu	ca. Embun Era, 1356-160
Osafune Chogi	ca. Kemmu Era, 1334-1337
Naotsuna	ca. Kemmu Era, 1334-1337
Sa	ca. Geno Era, 1319 -1320

THE BEGINNING COLLECTOR:
A SUGGESTED METHOD OF PROCEDURE

For the purposes of this limited article, we must assume that the reader has already convinced himself that the study and appreciation of the Japanese sword and its related arts is a desirable and fascinating pursuit. Granted this basic premise, what is the best way to pursue our chosen hobby? The mastery of any art form is difficult enough in our own language, but the introduction of a new form of communication places the student in a double bind. To anyone willing to study and inquire, their curiosity will be greatly rewarded in many areas of personal gratification.

One of the first of many mistakes I made upon becoming enthralled with the world of the Japanese sword was making the assumption that the learning of Japanese terms, letters, and names would be circumvented by the use of English equivalents. The more quickly one gives up this fallacy the better off he will be. True, there are some adequate books on the subject in English but these are, at best, only the first stepping stone on our journey of mastery. So, your first assignment is to buy your text books. This won't be too traumatic financially and I assure you it will be the smallest expenditure you will ever make in the sword business. Available books are:

1) The Samurai Sword, a Handbook; by John Yumoto, Tuttle
2) The Arts of the Japanese Sword; by B.W. Robinson; Tuttle
3) Japanese Swordsmiths; W.M. Hawley, Vols. I and II

4) The Sword and Same; Joly and Hogitaro; Tuttle
5) The Japanese Sword; Inami Hakusui, Japan Sword Co. (a reprint)
6) The Japanese Sword Blade; A. Dobre; Paragon
7) A primer of Japanese Sword Blades; B.W. Robinson; Paragon
(a handy condensation of book #2)

If you wish to break this down into steps, numbers 1, 2 and 3 are the first ones to read and re-read most often. These books will form the backbone of your reference material in English. Hawley's books are rapidly becoming the accepted method of reference for English speaking collectors, and both volumes contain a wealth of information. You now have 90% of the available books in print in English. About the third time through these books, you'll begin to want more.

While you are omnivorously devouring your text books, you should also be looking at swords, swords in museums, in other collections, shows, etc., and swords in any shape, condition or location. You can read all you want to, but there is no substitute for actual visual and tactile experiences. So, your next "must" is to communicate. Talk, write or shout to as many people interested in swords as you possibly can.

There are four active groups that maintain regular publications in English for their members. Join as many of them as convenient and correspond with their members and contribute to their efforts. These organizations are:

1) The Japanese sword Society of the United States. P.0. Box 5092
Berkley, California 94715
2) Japanese Sword Club of Southern California. 8200 Gould Avenue,
Hollywood, California
3) The Token Society of Great Britain: 16 Brightswells
Clancarty Rd, S.W. 6, London
4). Nihonto, CPO Box 967, Tokyo, Japan

All of these organizations have current publications and activities, but most important: people. We humans are gregarious animals and like to share our triumphs and air our disappointments with others of the species. What good does it do to discover a "National Treasure" if the only creature you can share it with is your neighbor's dog? In many large cities, such as New York, London, Chicago; Minneapolis, Dallas, San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, etc., there are active groups and live individuals that you can communicate your enthusiasm with. Seek them out and share with them.

In Japanese there is a word "sensei, 'literally it means teacher; but like many Japanese words it implies a whole concept. A sensei is not only undertakes the education of his pupil, but is responsible for much more of the student’s development than merely providing information. He is a teacher, friend and counselor. There is an old Zen saying "When the student is ready, the Master will appear." May you find your sensei! Ideally you should have books for information, swords for examples, fellow collectors to share ideas with, and a teacher for guidance. Few of us have access to all these elements, but we can strive for as many of them as possible.

The next step is a big one. So far, a beginning collector is a dilettante. The one thing that separates the men from the boys is their command of the Japanese language. It is a cold experience to expertly whip off a tsuka, and

with a sinking feeling, realize that you can't read that signature. It happens to a lot of us, and we constantly strive to reduce the frequency. You don't have to learn the whole language, just the most frequently used sword terms and names.
This is the way I went about it and the method may help you.

The first books to buy that are solely in Japanese are Fujishiro's "Nippon Toko Jiten", the Koto and Shinto volumes. They are in print and readily available. The important thing about them is that they contain more examples of swords we are likely to encounter in this country, and are well organized and presented. When you get your two copies, flip the Koto volume open to the beginning which is in the back of Japanese books) to the table of contents. Now you are going to learn how to count in Japanese from one to ten, and from this read the page numbers. Above the page numbers at the top of the dotted lines are the first characters of the sword smith's names. Start to memorize these from right to left, using the fold-out page of Japanese characters in your Robinson book to translate. With just a few minutes each day you will be surprised how fast you can be reading full nakago. Next start memorizing the names of the provinces and already you are an expert. One day you will wake up and want to learn the terms used to describe the technical details in Fugishiro. You don't need me any more!

So much for the blood, sweat and tears of study: how about putting it into practice? I know a man who set about to learn how to play poker. He read every book in the library on poker. He could recite every detail of the history of the game, he could quote rules and odds by the hour. As long as money was not involved he could play a bang up game of poker. But let the media of exchange enter the game and he went to pieces. I know a collector who can walk through a display of swords and generally identify most blades clear across the room. He is hell-on-wheels in a kantei session, but he has a lousy collection. His amazing store of knowledge has gotten him into much trouble chasing the big names and ignoring his good taste and intuition. He can always be persuaded to sell his good mumei blade for cash to pay for a big name sword of doubtful quality

When I began to collect just six years ago, I could still find a Japanese sword or "Harry-Carry-Knife" in most pawn shops or gun shops in small towns. These could be bought for ten to thirty dollars, and some very good ones could be lucked into. But those days are gone. The floating supply has been under accumulation and going into strong hands. The mark-up period has begun (as we say in the stock business). Everybody has their "judgement limit" which is constantly changing. At first, mine was $50, then $75, then $100, $200. I would rely on my own taste to buy a blade or reject it. Now my comfort limit is about six or seven hundred collars. Past that,I need all my books and someone else's opinion that I value. It hurts too much to make a bust!
Today any decent hand-forged and tempered blade in passable condition is worth $100 "if you like it". If someone thinks enough of it to have a first-class polish and shirasaya, you have a piece worth a minimum of two to three hundred dollars. I estimate that I must refuse five blades to get one "keeper" now, so my base price of $100 for an acceptable blade may be low. Too many of the old collectors are geared to the $25 to $50 syndrome. This is one area where a new collector coming in at a higher price level has an advantage of sorts.

A young collector of my acquaintance approached me last year during a show and asked if I would sell him any swords. I had several blades to trade and offered him his pick. He chose a mumei blade, flawless, newly polished and in shirasaya. He liked the blade and wanted to buy it. I offered it to him for what I had in it, or $200. He wanted to borrow the blade and went to see the "experts" present. Four people gave him four different opinions. By this time our young friend was so confused that he bought a lesser sword that had a signature on it. Later my blade brought much more in a trade with someone who could appreciate its qualities.

At another show a young man was offered two good swords at a price that I am convinced was below the present cost of polish and shirasaya. Again, he consulted the delegation of "experts", and by the time the votes were all in, the blades had sold at a higher price to another collector who relied on his own judgement. The point I am trying to make is that these young men will have to learn to act on their own good taste and intuition. If the price had been two or three times the minimum price they should have asked for help. In any given economic situation, some risk must be assumed if one is to be successful. Personal judgement dictates the assumption of that risk. One of the first big purchases I ever made was three gunto from a local gun shop at $75 each. Two turned out to be junkers for which I realized $35. The third turned out to be a first generation Tadayoshi, and was the first good blade I ever owned. I've nearly forgotten all about the other two! We all make mistakes but we also make good decisions that make collecting a worthwhile experience.

The area of Japanese swords and related art forms is the only field I have been interested in that does not pall. Each year, the intensity of my participation increases. Twenty years from now I suspect it will be the same story. This is truly an almost unlimited field with new horizons to explore at each turn. May every beginning collector find the same excitement and satisfaction.

R.B. CALDWELL