NIHONTO NEWSLETTER

MARCH, 1969
VOL. 2, NO. 3

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, history, exhibits, appraisal, 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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sword Smiths

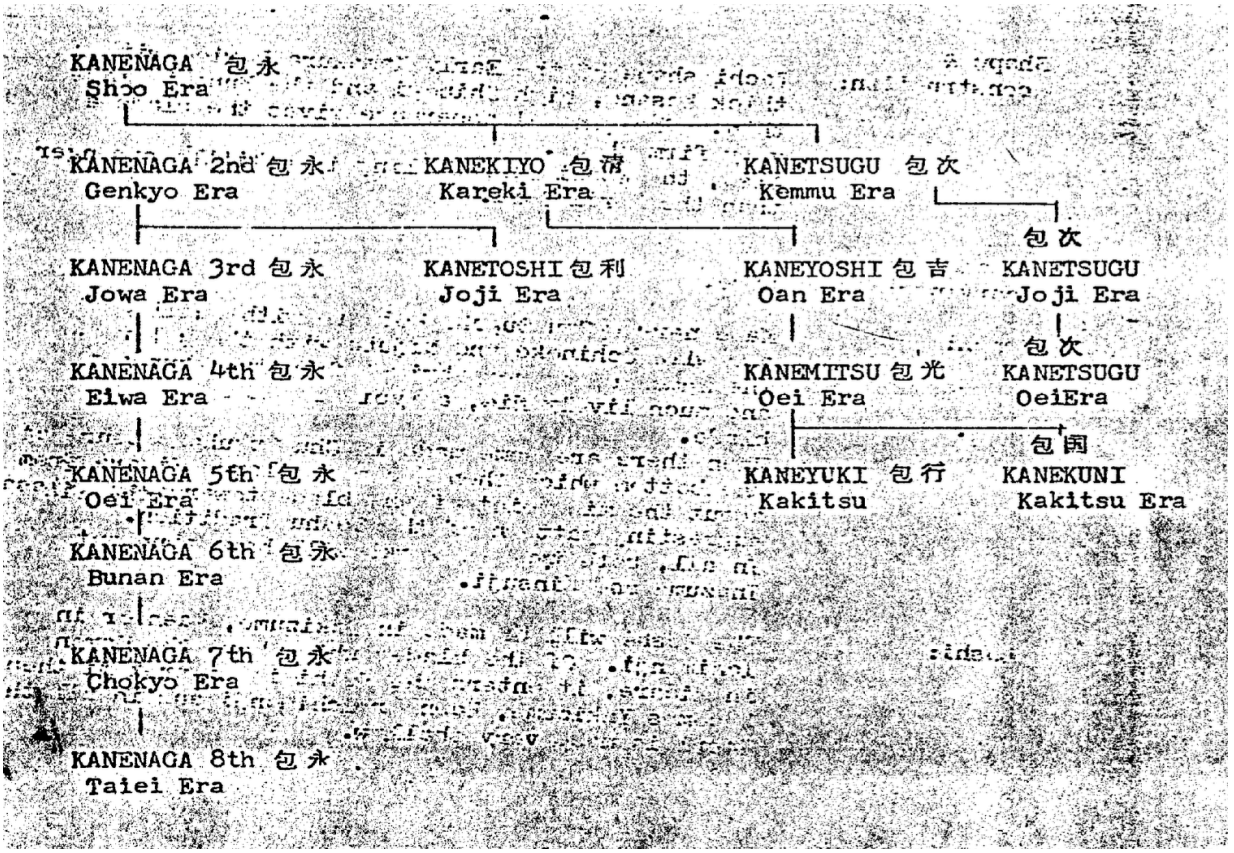
YAMATO PROVINCE
Part II

TEGAI SCHOOL 手抵系

The Tegai sword smiths were said to have worked near Tengai gate of Todaiji Temple in Nara and are said to have been directly associated with that temple.

The founder was Kanenaga who first signed his work Kanetoshi and was active around the Shoo Era (1288-1293). He was succeeded by 8 generations following him, the last of who worked around the Taiei era (1521-1528). There are a great many swordsmiths in this school, though none were of great skill except for the founder Kanenaga.

There is one blade which was in the Mito Tokugawa Collection called the Kotegashi Kanenaga which is said to have been an outstanding work of his. Regretably, this blade was destroyed in the great fire in the 1923 Tokyo earthquake.



The smiths who worked in this school were:

KUNITSUGU国次	Kemmu Era
KANENAGA 包永	Jowa Era
KANENAGA 包永	2nd generation, Eiwa Era
KANEZANE 包真	Koan Era
KANEZANE包真	2nd generation, Oei Era
SUKEUJI 助氏	Oei Era
SUKENAGA 助長	Oei Era
KANEZANE 包真	3rd generation, Oei Era
IENAGA 家 長	Bummel Era.
KANEZANE 包真	4th generation, Eisho Era
KANESHIGE 包重	Oei Era
KANEHISA 包久	Eikyo Era
KANEMASA 包收	Eikyo Era
KANETOSHI 包後	Kyotoku Era
KANEKIYO包清	Meio Era
KANEMITSU 包 光	Eisho Era

KANENAGA 包永

Tachi: Worked in the Yamato and Yamashiro traditions

Shape and Construction:

Took the shape of the early Kamakura Period. The blades are thick, there is a high shinogi, and the mune is thin. The general appearance of the blade gives the impression that there is a very strong shape. Also, the koshi sori impression is stronger than that of the torii sori blades.

Hi and carvings:

Rare.

Hamon:

Narrow chu suguha hotsure with small ashi and with uchinoke and nijuba. The color of the hamon is bright from the abundant and lively nie. These are typical Yamato tradition blades.

Some blades have a chu-suguha hotsure pattern at the bottom which then becomes a large midare pattern from about the mid-point of the blade going towards the kissaki, suggesting a pattern from the Soshu tradition.

Both types of hamon will have abundant inazuma and kinsuji.

Boshi:

The boshi will be yakizume, kaen, or an Ichimonji style. In blades with a

midare hamon, the hamon enters the boshi with a midarekomi pattern, and then becomes yakizume, kaen or an Ichimonji style, and in all styles, the kaeri is very shallow.

Jitetsu and Hada:

Very well forged steel results in ko-mokume hada, and the hada will not be as lively or visible as one might expect.

Masame hada, which is expected in Yamato blades is not seen so much.

Nakago:

Since the majority of these blades has been shortened, most that have any Inscriptions at all have them on the very tip of the nakago, and they consist of the two characters Kanenaga.

Tanto

Two types were made: hiratsukuri takenoko sori tanto with a sunnobi (over 8.5 sun) length, and thick chukan sori (musori) tanto.

There are carvings such as suken, gomabashi, and bonji.

Other details are similar to those mentioned for tachi, except on a much smaller scale.

Although descriptions of Kanenaga's blades are given above, those of the other Tegai sword smiths varied a great deal from period to period.

The work of the early Tegai sword smiths will closely resemble Kanenaga's, but lack somewhat his ability and quality.

A description of the Tegai smiths' work in general is:

Tachi and Katana

Shape and Construction:

Although there are some tachi with the shape of the late Kamakura period, they are rare. The majority of the blades will have a shape with a Muromachi period katana style with a shallow sori, a long kissaki, and a high shinogi, and the blade will taper and become narrow towards the Kissaki.

Hamon:

The width of the hamon will be narrow and the hamon will be in nie, although the nie will lack in quality and quantity. The pattern will be suguha hotsure with uchinoke and nijuba, as well as with kuichigaiba.

Other hamon patterns will be midare or notare midare.

Boshi:

The boshi will be komaru with very little kaeri. Some will have a very long kaeri and the tip will be a togari shape.

Jitetsu and Jihada:

The steel will seem very rough or coarse, and the hada will be mokume hada with masame hada.

Of the many wakizashi made by the Tegai sword smiths in the later perliod, there are two distinct types, one made in the Yamato tradition, and the other in the Soshu tradition.

Yamato Tradition Wakizashi:

Shape and Construction:
Length of about 1 shaku 5-6 sun with a shinogi tsukuri style. The overall appearance of the blade gives a very gentle impression.
The kissaki will be small and the shinogi will be high.

Carvings:
There will be carvings with simple designs.

Hamon:
The hamon are mostly hoso (narrow) suguha and in nie.

Boshi:
The boshi are gentle and with a komaru.

Jitetsu and Hada:
The jitetsu will be very fine and the overall hada pattern will be ko-mokume hada.

Soshu Tradition Wakizashi:

Shape and Construction:
Hiratsukuri with a length of about 1 shaku 2 sun with a little strong tendency to show sakisori. The blade will be wide and thin.

Hi and Carvings:
Kenmaki ryu or so-no-gyo, suken, tokko tsuki, ken, or bonji.

Hamon:
The hamon will be narrow at the yakidashi, and become wider going forward. It will be in nie and there will be a Soshu type o-midare.

Boshi:
The boshi will be midarekomi, and the kaeri will be long.

Jitetsu and Hada:
The jitetsu will be very fine with o-mokume hada and there will be abundant ji-nie.

Tanto:

There are two styles of tanto:

Style one:

Shape and Construction:
Josun (about 8.5 sun) takenoko sori and hiratsukuri.

Hi and carvings:
Suken, gomabashi and bonji are seen.

Hamon:
Although the hamon is in nie, it lacks nie (i.e. there will not be abundant nie). The pattern is chu-suguha or a uniform gunome. At times the gunome will be like that seen in the Mino tradition's Kanemoto gunome togari midare (sanbon sugi).

Style two:

Shape and Construction:
Hiratsukuri takenoko sori tanto with a length of about 1 shaku. It is a little wide, and very thick

Hamon:
Chu-suguha or hiro-suguha. In either case the hamon will be in nie, but lack nie (i.e. there will not be abundant nie).

Boshi;
The kaeri is very long, and some are so long that they will extend about half way down the mune, and, in rare instances, it can extend all the way down to the mune machi.

Other styles of tanto seen are moroha tsukuri, unokubi tsukuri and shobu tsukuri.
The length of the nakago is a little long and the nakago jiri will be kurijiri.
The file marks will be higaki in most cases. The Inscription will be carved near the shinogi.

YAMATO SHIZU SCHOOL

Kaneuji worked around the Ocho era (1311-1312), and is one of the sword smiths belonging to the Tegai School. Kaneuji went to Kamakura in Soshu province to study under Masamune, and is counted as one of the better sword smiths among the Masamune Jittetsu. Later, Kaneuji went to live in Shizu in Mino province and came to be known as Shizu Kaneuji.
Kaneuji is known as Yamato Shizu, and his works are far better known from after he went to Kamakura and then to Mino, therefore the term Yamato Shizu is very contradictory.
There is some controversy whether Kaneuji (包氏) and Kaneuji (兼氏)

are two separate swordsmiths, because Kaneuji
is the name which he used after he went to Mino province.
The fact that there are three distinct separate types of work of Kaneuji gives some basis to this theory: Kaneuji made works in the Mino Tradition, Soshu Tradition, and the Yamato Tradition.

Kanetomo 包友the son of Kaneuji, also went to Mino province and changed his name to Kanetomo兼友 and established himself in Naoe in Mino province, and he and his followers are known as Naoe Shizu 直江志準

Kaneuji 包氏
Worked in the Yamato tradition and in the Mino and Soshu traditions. He worked approximately during the Ocho era (1311-1312). He was from the Tegai school in Yamato, and later worked in the Shizu school in Mino.

Tachi:
Shape and Construction:
Tachi shape is from the early Yoshino period with a slightly shallow torii sori. The width of the blade is a little wide, and hiraniku will be lacking.
The shinogi is high and the width of the shinogi ji is narrow.
The kissaki is a chu kissaki and roundness in the fukura is lacking (i.e. the edge of the point area will be somewhat straight).
The mune is gyo no mune (ihori mune) or shin no mune (mitsumune).
The tip of the hi is low, that is the tip of the hi drops lower near the yokote as it reaches the ko-shinogi line.

Hamon:
The Hamon is in nie with a narrow yakiba, and the pattern will be ko-midare mixed with ko-notare.
The nie will cluster around the nioi forming ashi which are very dense and long, and sometimes reach the edge of the hamon.
There will be abundant inazuma and kinsuji in small patterns all along the blade. There will be sunagashi and uchinoke, as well as hakikake and nijuba along the hamon making the hamon most interesting to look at.
The liveliness or activity of these hataraki occur all along the blade making Kaneuji's hamon outstanding.

Boshi:
The boshi is midarekoni and ends with a slight kaeri. Some will have a komaru.

Jitetsu and Hada:
The jitetsu is very fine with a mixture of ko-mokume hada and o-hada, or with masame hada. From the abundance of ji nie, chikei and yubashiri are seen along the ji.

Nakago:
There are extremely few blades with their original length, and the majority are o-suriage mumei.

Tanto:
Shape and construction:
Josun (about 8.5 sun) hiratsukuri takenoko sori. There are chukan sori (musori) tanto. The blades are thin.

Carvings:
A number of simple designs are seen.

Hamon:
Same as tachi, but on a smaller scale.

Boshi:
Same as tachi.

Jitetsu and Hada:
Same as tachi.

Nakago
The tip of the nakago is kurijiri. The file marks are suji chigai, higaki, and on rare instances, there are takanoha yasurime.
The inscription is very large and bold, and the full width of the nakago and are "Kaneuji" 包氏.

KYOHO MEIBUTSU CHO

Part 15

AIZU MASAMUNE:会津正宗

Owner: gyobutsu

Suriage
Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 6 bu
Value: unknown

There are hi on both sides of the blade.
Gamo Hida no Kami who ruled at Aizu Castle, purchased the blade for 400 Kan and left it to Lord Hideyuki who presented it to Lord Ieyasu, who in turn
Gave it to Owari Dainagon Yoshinao. Yoshinao later presented it to Lord Hideyoshi. As the legacy of Lord Hidetada, it was received again, and on the retirement of Genkeiro, it was presented to the shogunate.

YAMANAKA NOTE:
Gamo Ujisato, originally from Gamo in Omi Province, was the son in law of Oda Nobunaga. He went to Wakamatsu in Ise Province where he ruled a fief with 120,000

koku and then went to Aizu where he had 400,000 koku, and this was in the18th Year of Tensho (1590). Having put down the farmer's uprisings in Osaki in Mutsu Province, as well as in Kyunohe in Nambu, he was given total of 1,000,000 koku.

On the first year of Bunroku (1592), he died at the age of 40. His son Hideyuki had married Tokugawa Ieyasu's daughter, and after the death of his father, he moved to Utsunomiya where he received 180,000 Koku

After the Battle of the Sekigahara, Hideyuki moved back to Aizu where he received 600,000 Koku. He died on Keicho 17 (1612) at the age of 30. The blade was given to Ieyasu who gave it to Owari Tokugawa Yoshinao, and then it was given back to the 2nd shogun Hidetada. Upon Hidetada's death, Yoshinao received it back as a legacy. When Yoshinao retired from active life, the blade was presented to the 3rd shogun Iemitsu. Genkeiro refers to the name which Yoshinao took after he retired.

The blade was purchased by Prince Arisukawa no miya after the Meiji Restoration, and later it was given to the emperor, although it is not known to which emperor, but probably Emperor Meiji.
The blade still is in the imperial collection.
Arisukawa no miya refers to one of the noble families who trace their origin to the 108th Emperor Go Mizunoo (1595-1680).

WAKASA MASAMUME若狭正宗

Owner: Wakasa Shojo Katsuyoshi Nyudo Chosho
Suriage
Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu
Value: 1,000 mai

Owned by Wakasa Shojo Katsuyoshi Nyudo Chosho, the son of Kinoshita Higo no Kami

During the battle of Sekigahara, this was presented to Lord Ieyasu. It was received by Ikeda Sanzaemon who left it to his son Musashi no Kami who then handed it down to his son Shintaro.

On the 9th of June in the 12th Year of Kambun, the year of the Rat, upon his retirement, it was presented to Lord Ietsuna.
The kissaki is small and there are numerous muneyaki.

Yamanaka Note:

In one of the copies of the Meibutsu Cho which the Honami owned, there was a notation to the effect that this Wakasa Masamune was one of Masamune's masterpieces, and that this was the only blade valued at 1,000 mai.
Although the text refers to Kinoshita Katsutoshi presenting the blade to Ieyasu, it is unlikely. Kinoshita Katsutoshi was the son of Hideyoshi's wife Kita no Mandokoro's elder brother Kinoshita Higo no Kami Iesada, and Katsutoshi served Hideyoshi from his boyhood days as a page.
He received an 85,000 koku fief at Kobama in Wakasa Province.

During the battle of Sekigahara, although Katsutoshi did not participate in that battle, nevertheless, his retainers did fight for the Osaka side, and for this deed, after

the battle, his domain was confiscated. Katsutoshi went into retirement in Kyoto and took the name of Chosho and became a poet.

Therefore, there is no way in which the blade could possibly have been given to Ieyasu by Katsutoshi, so it may have been by someone else, and Takeda Sanzaemon refers to Ikeda Terumasa, the Ikeda of Bingo Province.

Tokugawa Ieyasu's daughter married Into the Hojo. However on the death of Hojo Ujinao北条氏直she married Ikeda Terumasa,and bore him two sons, Tadatsugu and Tadakatsu.

Musashi no Kami, Terumasa's son refers to Terumasa's son by his first wife, Musashi no Kami Toshitaka. The elder son of Terumasa, Tadatsugu, therefore was a grandson to Ieyasu, and he was given Bizen Province to rule, however he passed away early, and the province was then ruled by the younger brother Tadakatsu. Musashi no Kami Toshitaka's son Shintaro refers to Mitsumasa who also ruled in Bizen Province (it seems that Bizen Province was split up and given to the many sons of the Ikeda).

KOTEGIRI MASAMUNE 籠手切正宗

Owner: Sano Shuri Daiyu
Suriage:
Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu
Value: Unknown, however, 7000 kan is given
in one version of the Meibutsu Cho

There are carvings of hi with kage hi (soe hi) on both sides of the blade which is unusually wide.

On the nakago omote, there is an inscription: Asakura Kotegiri no tachi nari Tensho 3 nen. On the nakago ura, the inscription is migi bakka osuriage otsu denjuro hairyo. It was owned by Sano Shuri Daiyu from whom Lord Toshitsune obtained it, although details of the purchase are not known.

Yamanaka Note:

Asakura danjo Saemon Ujikage of Echizen Province used this sword during the Battle of Toji in Kyoto, and cut off the armor on the forearm of a samurai of the opposition forces. The Asakura had been led to believe that this blade was the work of Sadamune of Soshu province.

Ujikage's descendant Yoshikage was defeated by Oda Nobunaga at which time Nobunaga took this sword and had it shortened to 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu. When one of Nobunaga's pages, Otsu Denjuro was commissioned to take over the castle at Takatsuki in Settsu Province, he received this blade from Nobunaga.

The inscription on the nakago, "Migi bakka bsuriage otsu denjuro" seems to have been made at this time.

The blade next came into the hands: of Sano Shuri Daiyu Masatsuna of Shimotsuke province.

Masatsuna was the second son of Tomita Sakon Shogen of Tsu castle in

Ise province and was adopted into the Sano family.
On Keicho 19 (1615) when Okubo Sagami no Kami Tadanori was banished to Matsumoto in Shinano province, the Sano Clan was banished too,
and it was at this time that Maeda Toshitsune obtained the blade. When the blade was owned by the Sano, it was appraised as being by Yukimitsu.
The blade was handed down In the Kaga Maeda family until the Meiji period when the Maeda gave this blade along with the famous Hirano Toshiro to Emperor Meiji when the emperor visited the Maeda**.** This was in Meiji 15 (1882).

SHIKIBU MASAMUNE 式部正宗

Owner: Sakakibara Shikibu Taifu
Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7.5 bu
Value: 700 mai

Owned by Sakakibara Yasumasa who gave it to Lord Ieyasu.
It has a chu kissaki. There are hi carved on both sides.
There is a battle scar (kirikomi) from which a crack has started.
On the 8th of Kammon (1668), it was appraised at 7,000 Kan.
During the Genroku Era, it was revalued to the above value.

Yamanaka Note:
Sakakibara Yasumasa was one of the early retainers of Tokugawa Ieyasu who helped Ieyasu succeed in taking control of the country. He died at 59 in his castle at Tatebayashi in Kozuke Province. His descendants for a long time ruled that general area with a value of 150,000 koku until the end of the Tokugawa era in1867 at which time they moved to Takada in Echigo Province.
This blade, for a long time, was considered as one of the masterpieces among all of the Masamune blades. It was in a fire during one of the numerous large bombing raids in Tokyo during WWII when the blade was lost forever.

NATIONAL TREASURE SWORDS

Part V

No. 20: Taema Kuniyuki 当麻国行

Tachi
Length: 27 7/16 inches
Sori: 14/48 inches

Width: 1 3/48 inches

Shape and Construction:
Shinogi tsukuri, with a mitsumune. The shinogi is high and the shinogi ji is wide. The sori is shallow. The kissaki is a chu-kissaki.

Hamon:
The hamon is notare gunome with sunagashi. Around the dense nioi ashi, nie cluster together, and in places there are kinsuji.
There are nijuba on the bottom half of the blade on both sides.

Boshi:
The boshi is komaru and the tip has hakikake. There are abundant nie in the boshi, and kinsuji.

Jitetsu and Hada:
The hada is itame hada and there is masame hada as well.

Nakago:
The blade has been shortened and the nakago jiri is kurijiri.
The remaining original file marks are kiri.
There are four mekugi ana and there is a two character inscription Kuniyuki.

Kuniyuki is regarded as the founder of the Taema school and was active in the late Kamakura Period around the Shoo Era (1288-1292). Signed blades by Kuniyuki are extremely rare, and although this particular blade has been shortened somewhat, nevertheless, the fact that the blade is signed makes it that much more valuable. It has been exceptionally well preserved and retains much of its former splendor.

No. 21: Ryumon Nobuyoshi

Tachi
Length: 28 7/8 inches
Width: 1 3/32 inches
Sori: 1 1/8 inches
..

Shape and Construction:
Shinogi tsukuri with a mitsumune. The shinogi is high. The kissaki is a ko-kissaki.
The sori is a strong torii sori and there is strong fumbari at the machi.

Hamon:
The Hamon is suguha. The hamon on the upper half of the blade is a little wider than on the lower half, and there is a ko-midare pattern as well as ashi. The nioi around the ashi have have nie clustered around them. Also, there are small sunagashi along the hamon edge,

Boshi:

The boshi point is a komaru on the omote and yakizume on the ura.

Jitetsu and Hada:
The jitetsui is extremely fine with a ko-mokume hada with fine ji-nie which forms chikei in places.

Nakago:
The nakago is ubu, although there are two mekugi ana, and the tip is kurijiri. The file marks are suji chigai.
Right below the border of the rust on the nakago, and in the middle of the blade on the shinogi line, there is a two character inscription “Nobuyoshi”.

Nobuyoshi worked in the Late Kamakura period in Yamato province, in a place called Ryumon in Yoshino Gun. The Ryumon school is said to be an off-shoot of the Senjuin School. However, there is not very much Yamato influence in this school's work, as compared to other Yamato Schools.
This Nobuyoshi has an ito maki no tachi koshirae. The metal details on the koshirae are all gold with chrysanthemum and Karakusa designs carved in relief. The saya is gold nashiji with raden (mother of pearl) inlays.
The sword bag is dyed in dark blue and has a chrysanthemum design woven into it.
This blade was once owned by Emperor Go Mizunoo (the 108th Emperor, 1611-1629), and the mounting as well as the bag was made for the blade at that time.
This is a very unusual and rare blade.

No. 22: HOSHO SADAYOSHI貞吉

Tanto
Length: 10 1/8 inches
Width: 1 inch

Shape and Construction:
Hiratsukuri with an ihori mune. The blade is thick and there is no sori.

Hi and Carvings: A suken is carved on the omote and shobu hi on the ura. The carvings are very deep on both sides.

Hamon:
The hamon is notare and there are gunome with hotsure on the botton part of the blade. From about the monouchi area, the hamon becomes wider and livelier, with the nie becoming more profuse and prominent, and kinsuji are seen in this area.

Boshi:
The boshi has hakikake and is yakizume, and there are abundant nie here also.

Jitetsu and Hada:

The steel is very uniform and is masame hada, and there are abundant ji-nie. There are what appear to be “ware" or gaps in the steel which may be due to the fact that the steel has a very strong masame hada.

Nakago:
The nakago is ubu with kiri jiri tip. The file marks are higaki. There are two mekugi ana. The inscription is
“Takaichi gori ju kingo Sadayoshi” and
“Genkyo (two and two) nen kinoe ne 10 gatsu 18 hi”

Quite often, a blade which has a dating on the 4th year of an era, will have the figure 4 made with double 2 (a “2” over a ”2”). This is because the figure 4 in Japanese is read as "shi" at times, and the character for death is also read as "shi" and so it is regarded an an ill-omen to use the number 4 in an inscription on a blade. Therefore instead of the figure 4, a 2 over a two is used.
This blade is the famous Kuwayama Hosho.

Kuwayama Shuri Dayu had two sons, Shigeharu and Motoharu.
The elder brother Shigeharu served Toyotomi Hideyoshi and had performed many meritorious deeds for Hideyoshi for which he was given the Kuwayama Castle in Kato Gun in Owari province. He later was given Wakayama Castle which was accompanied by a 30,000 koku fief. He also had the title of Ho-In.
The second son Motoharu had 16,000 Koku in Kii province and died on Genna 2 (1621) and since he did not have had any offspring, this household ended with him. This blade, for a time, was in the Maeda Collection in Kaga Province. It presently is in a private collection.

No. 23: SOSHU KUNIMITSU 相 州 国 光

Meibutsu: Aizu Shintogo

Tanto
Length: 8 13/16 inches
Width: 23/24 inch

Shape and Construction:
Hiratsukuri takenoko sori in a short sunzumari length (less than 8.5 sun).

Hamon:
The hamon is suguha with very dense, very fine ko nie, and hataraki from the nie are seen inside of the hamon.
The yakidashi is a little narrow and becomes wider going towards the kissaki, but not as wide as a chu suguha.

Boshi:
The boshi is komaru, and a little wide with a small kaeri.

Jitetsu and Hada:
The steel is very fine like those of the Awataguchi blades with a ko mokume hada. The ji-nie are very abundant and produce chikei in places.

Nakago:
The nakago is ubu and the file marks are kiri.
On the omotoe, below the one mekugi ana, and on the center of the nakago, there is a two kanji mei “Kunimitsu”.

This Shintogo is regarded as a masterpiece by this swordsmith, and the blade is in a very good state of preservation, not having experienced too much polishing. For a blade from the Kamakura Period to have been kept in this state of preservation is rare, especially in the case of a tanto.
This Aizu Shintogo belonged to Gamo Hida no Kami Hideyuki who was the son-in-law of Tokugawa Ieyasu. He had a small fief in Moritada of Shimotsuke province, and also had the Aizu district of Wakamatsu, from which the name for this blade was taken.
Shintogo Kunimitsu is regarded as the son of Awataguchi Kunitsuna, who i s one of the founders of the Soshu tradition along with Bizen Kunimune and Bizen Fukuoka Ichimonji Sukesane. As such, the fact that the characteristics in the Shintogo blade reflect those that of Awataguchi is only natural.
Tanto by Shintogo are encountered quite often, although never in this good a state of preservation. They are in almost all cases in a somewhat tired state. Tachi by Shintogo are extremely rare.

Identification of Nihonto through their shapes

Part IV

The Kamakura Period

Bizen Province

Osafune Sanenaga長船真長

Tachi: There is a shallow sori and the blades are narrow. Also, there are no differences in the width going from the machi to the yokote area.

Osafune Chikakage長船近景

Tachi: About the same as Sanenaga, although they are a little wider than Sanenaga’s.

Tanto: Chukanzori (musori).

Other Osafune swordsmiths at this time were:

Sanemitsu: 真光
Nagamoto長 元
Mitsunaga光長
Kageyasu景安
Toshimune俊宗
Nagamune長宗
Iemitsu 家光
Toshimitsu悛光
Kagemasa
Kagehide景秀
Kageyori

All these smiths made swords in shapes similar to Kagemitsu and Sanenaga, although some of these smiths did make ikubi kissaki tachi.

Hatakeda Moriie

Tachi:
Closely resembles those of Osafune Mitsutada, although the general shape is a little more elegant (i.e. slender), and also, they lack the hiraniku.

Hatakeda Sanemori's真 守 work is a poorer version of Moriie's work and the same can be said for the rest of the Hatakeda swordsmiths.

Ukai Unjo霧伺發生

Tachi: The tachi shape is very slender and elegant.

Ukai Unji

Tachi: The tacht shape is very firm or solid, and the sori is accentuated towards the kissaki. This smith also made ikkubi kissaki tachi.

Bitchu Province

Chu-Aoe

Chu-Aoe smiths refers to the smiths who worked from about the Ryakunin era (1238-1239) to about the end of the Kamakura period. They are:

Tsunetsugu
Sadatsugu
Moritsugu
Suketsugu

Tsugutoshi
Tamenori
Yoritsugu
Hirotsugu
Hisatsugu
Yoshitsugu
Naritaka
Yasuie安家
Nariie成家
Tsunenaga
Chikatsugu

There were a number of other smiths in this group as well.
There are slight differences in the shape of the tachi made by these sword smiths in the early work of the Chu-Aoe smiths and the late Chu-Aoe smiths.
On the whole, the general appearance in the shape of the tachi is that they were made to be very robust or strong with no variations in the width from the machi area to the yokote area.
Perhaps the blades did have some variations in their widths in their original shapes, and before they became suriage. However, those that remain today all fit the description given here.
Most of these smiths are known to have made ikubi kissaki tachi too.

Some of these smiths did make tanto in which case they are josun (about 8.5 sun long) takenoko sori tanto which are very narrow and thick.

Katayama Ichimonji 片山一 文 字
The swordsmiths in this school included:

Norifusa
Sanetoshi
Yorizane
Noritsune

Tachi:
The shape of the tachi is from the mid-Kamakura period or have an ikkubi kissaki tachi shape.

Ko-Mihara古三原

Some of the sword smiths in this school were:
Iemasa正家
Masamitsu正光
Masashige 正
Masakiyo正
Masahiro正広
Masanobu 正信

Masahiro正広

These smiths worked from about the Shochu era (1324-1326) around the end of the Kamakura period to the Meitoku Era (1390-1394) in the late Yoshino period.
Of these smiths, possibly Masaie and Masamitsu are the only ones who worked in the Kamakura Period.

Tachi:
The tachi have a torii sori, although they have a slight impression of having koshi sori. The shinogi is high and there is fumbari and a tapering in the width of the blade going towards the kissaki. The shape of the tachi is very elegant and has some resemblance to the tachi made by Kanenaga of the Tegai school in Yamato Province.

Suo Province

Ko-Nio
The Ko-Nio smiths worked from about the Genkyu Era (1204-1206) in the Kamakura period to about the Eitoku Era (1382-1384) in the late Yoshino period. Among those who worked during the Kamakura period were:

Kiyotsuna, Ist, 2nd and 3rd generations
Kiyomitsu
Kiyokage
Kiyonaga

The early blades in this school have the shape of the early Kamakura period with a strong fumbari tapering towards the kissaki in a very graceful manner.
The shinogi is high and the blade is thick.

Tanto are seen on rare occasions, and they are hiratsukuri chukan sori (musori).

Sa

Tachi:
Tachi were made in the style and shape of the late Kamakura period. They are thick and will have hiraniku. The overall appearance of the tachi is graceful, and they exhibit the grace and elegance of work from a very skilled swordsmith.

Tanto
Tanto by Sa have a shape of their own. They have a josun length (8.5 sun) to a slightly sunzumari (less than 8.5 sun) length.
They are narrow and taper going towards the kissaki, and have a little sori near the kissaki.
The thickness is koroai (just right) and roundness in the fukura is lacking.
The overall appearance is graceful and elegant.

Higo Province

KO-ENJU古 延寿
The Ko-Enju smiths worked during t h e Kamakura period, and were associated with the Rai School of Yamashiro Province.
Chu-Enju smiths also worked in the Kamakura period also, but these persisted into the mid-Yoshino Period.
The sword smiths in the ko- and chu-Enju schools included:

KUNIMURA 国村
KUNITOKI 国時
KUNISUKE
KUNIYOSHI国古
KUNIYASU 国泰 Can be classified as being a member of the group that worked during the Kamakura period.

Of these smiths, Kunimura can be said to have worked the earliest, and his blades are made in the style of the mid-Kamakura period, while the others' work is in the style of the late Kamakura period.
The ko-Enju blades, have a strong fumbari and taper to a narrow shape going towards the kissaki. The chu-Enju blades show two types: those that resemble ko-Enju work, and others in which the width of the blade remains about the same going from the machi and towards the kissaki, and the Kissaki is a little long.

KO-NAMINOHIRA 古波平
The Naminohira sword smiths worked from the late Heian period and throughout the Koto period into the Sengoku Period.
The sword smiths in this school that were active during the Kamakura period were:

YUKIYASU行安 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generations,
YASUYUKI 安行
IEYASU家安
YASUTSUNA安網
YASUMITSU 安光

Tachi:
Made in the shape and style of the Kamakura period. There is a strong fumbari tapering towards the kissaki. Those from the late Kamakura period will have a longer kissaki than the earlier period blades.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

We have suggested that our readers send questions to initiate this column in one of last year's issues. It is not that we have not been getting questions to be answered, but all have been with tracings (oshigata) and therefore quite impossible to answer in this column due to the printing and illustration method that we use.

Probably, some readers may have been thinking that our ability to answer questions concerning swords is not sufficient, however, may we assure these readers, that if we are not able to answer a question, we have resources among the best people in Japan who can provide answers. So, we are confident that we can answer questions put before us.

Question: What is the difference between ji-kage and utsuri?

Answer:

By ji-kage, we assume that someone is referring to chikei. Chikei occurs in the ji when the entire ji contains ji-nie, and local nie clusters form a tight string-like group of nie from about 1/4 inch to about one inch long. These strings run along the ji following the hada pattern in the steel, producing an effect which looks as though it was a trail left by a snail.

Such chikei will have a different color and sheen from other ji-nie and stand out in the ji. They will be much brighter and very lively in appearance.

The same type of phenomena is involved with inazuma and kinsuji, except that the chikei is found in the ji, whereas kinsuji is found within the hamon and inazuma is found at the border of the hamon starting within the hamon, running out into the ji and back into the hamon again.

Utsuri is found in many forms, and most commonly on Bizen blades and Bitchu blades, and also on Mino blades at times.

Utsuri is seen and described with the following classifications: choji utsuri, botan utsuri, jifu utsuri, bo utsuri, tsukare utsuri and shirake utsuri.

Choji utsuri and botan utsuri are other terms for Bizen utsuri. Choji is a clover blossom, and botan is peony. The shape of the utsuri will resemble these two flowers and hence the names. The utsuri on Bizen blades is found on blades from the late Heian Period into the Kamakura period when they were very well made. After that the skill of the sword smiths who made them was a little inferior.

The quality of the utsuri is said to be the best on the early Bizen blades, and those by Fukuoka Ichimonji. Norimune and Sukemune are considered to be the ultimate. Others who were skilled at making utsuri were the early Osafune smiths such as Mitsutada and Nagamitsu. Other Fukuoka Ichimonji smiths, Soshu Ichimonji smiths, Yoshioka Ichimonji smiths, and the Hatakeda smiths are all considered to be very good at producing midare utsuri which is another term for botan and choji utsuri.

Later smiths were not as skilled as these smiths in making utsuri. The Osafune smiths still made utsuri, but it occurs as sugu (straight) or bo (straight) utsuri, which are straight lines.

Aoe utsuri are the same as bo utsuri and they are found often on blades made from around the Yoshino period. Shirake utsuri is a little different from the forgoing two types of utsuri. It can appear like utsuri, but again, maybe not. This type is found in the work of many old sword smiths in Kyushu such as Bungo Yukihira, Miike

Mitsuyo, Higo Enju, the Naminohira smiths of Satsuma, the Mihara smiths in Bingo province, most of the Seki works from Mino province, and on some of the works of sword smiths in Kaga province.

Jifu utsuri is utsuri which appears “blackish”. However, commonly seen utsuri Is white. It is seen on Ko-Aoe and Chu-Aoe works. It will appear as though a certain area has been pressed with one's thumb forming a blackish spot on the ji.

Question: What is the explanation for the appearance of utsuri? is it intentional?

Answer:

Utsuri can be described as a second or supplemental hamon, although its function is not like that of the hamon, but it can be considered as an ornamental effect.

The steel in the utsuri area is much harder than the rest of the ji, although not as hard as the hamon. It is a weaker version of a hamon.

There are many thoughts as to how utsuri was made, and some people believe utsuri was made intentionally, while others believe utsuri was made accidentally.

We are of the thought that it was made intentionally. Some time ago, we heard a question regarding utsuri asked of a contemporary sword smith in Western Japan, who has since become fairly well known. The question was 'how does utsuri come to be and what is its purpose”. The reply that this sword smith gave was that, "why do you want utsuri on your blade? Yes, I can make utsuri". However, to date we have yet to see utsuri or anything closely resembling utsuri on this particular sword smith's works. We will not mention this man's name here, since he is ranked as one of the better sword smiths today.

Question: Why is utsuri made today inferior to that made in the past?

Answer:

It can be simply a lack of skill. The art of making utsuri disappeared approximately around the end of the Oei era, and after that, although utsuri are seen, it is very inferior to that seen in the work of the previous eras.

Question: What is the purpose of yasurime?

Answer:

In historical period blades, that is in the pre-Heian Period, the sword nakago did not have file marks, but the nakago were hammered and had 'dents' or hammer marks on them. Hammering was used to shape and form the nakago.

This tendency is seen on rare occasions on later blades. Yasurime or file marks do not have any meaning relative to the functioning of the sword, or in the relation of the nakago to the tsuka. They are like trademarks or hallmarks of the sword smith or school more than anything else.

Some years ago, we asked this of a contemporary sword smith and the answer we received was that he was told to make them by his sensei and that is why he is

making them. All the sword smiths before him have been doing this for hundreds of years and it is one of the traditions that sword smiths follow.

Question: Who makes the original mekugi ana, the sword smith or the saya maker?

Answer:
The sword smith makes the mekugi ana after he has inscribed the mei.

Question: Are isolated nie kuzure along the hamon an indication of a lack of skill?

Answer: Yes. Nie kuzure results from the clay coating during yaki ire having crumbled or degraded. The repeated placing and pushing and pulling of the clay-coated blade in and out of the charcoal bed can wear down the clay if the sword smith is not careful.

Question: What is it that gives the steel a feeling of wetness or uruoi? Is it profuse ji-nie?

Answer:
The apparent “wetness” or wet appearance of the steel is caused by nothing but ji nie, however, it requires a a very fine quality of ji nie. Just because a blade has profuse ji nie, it does not necessarily create an appearance of wetness on the blade.
“Wetness” or uruoi is an effect that results after many things are done successfully by the sword smith:

1. Quality iron (tamahagane) is used.
2. The steel is folded and drawn out the optimal and correct and number of times.
3. There must be a correct and precise execution of yaki ire.
4. There must be a correct and precise quench.

There are many other precise actions which must be performed by the smith. That is, everything must proceed “just perfectly” to result in the steel having uruoi. There are very few sword smiths who accomplished this difficult task.

Question: Are there instances of ato mei wherein the sword smith’s name is correct but the signature is not correct?

Answer:
Perhaps, but we have never come across such a blade, nor have heard of such a blade yet.

Question: Has anyone tried X-ray or carbon dating of nihonto?

Answer:

We know that Dr. Tawara of the Imperial University, before WWII performed extensive studies into the metallurgy of nihonto and that he X-rayed them, not for dating purpose but for metallurgical information.

As for carbon dating, to date we have not heard of anyone experimenting with this. It may or may not be possible, but whether that method will give an exact date is something that remains to be seen.

Blades from the early Heian period should prove to be very interesting, if such a test were available.

It would be very interesting to examine the famous Kogarasu Maru with such a test, since the blade is attributed to Amakuni in the Taiho Era (701-703). We are of the thought that that blade is from a much later period!!

PUBLICATIONS

NIHON TOHAN ZUSEISU
日本刀を 図説

Author: Takezawa Masao

A limited publication (1,000 copies) on tsuba covering about 750 tsuba, the majority of which are from Mr. Takezawa's collection.

Mr. Takezawa is well known as a student of tsuba and has gained fame as a serious scholar on this subject.

All of the tsuba covered are illustrated, and consequently, this publication is interesting reading for students of tsuba.

The tsuba covered range from the pre-historic period into the Kamakura period, Muromachi period, Momoyama period and Tokugawa period. The Kinko tsuba range from Ko-Mino down to very late examples such as Natsuo and other late Tokugawa and early Meiji metal smiths.

Price: $35.00 include packing and shipping charges.
Size: 10¼ X 13 inches
50 pages of text (in Japanese)
200 pages of photos
1 page of color photos

For those students of tsuba, rush your order: there were only 1,000 copies printed.

Subscription Form

NIHONTO Newsletter

CPO Box 967
Tokyo 100-91 Japan
please send me a subscription for one year to NIHONTO
Newsletter.

Enclosed please find US $20.00 (or equivalent).

Name:
Address:
city: State:

Please remit by Bank Cashier's Check, American Express, International Postal Money Order, or by other similar
means.
Please, NO PERSONAL CHECKS