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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, 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

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HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE SWORD

THE SENGOKU or MOMOYAMA PERIOD
Onin 1 (1467) to Bunroku 4 (1595)

The Honami School named this period the Sengoku Period, meaning the Warring States Period, however this term does not seem to have taken a firm hold on students of the Japanese sword.

The previous Muromachi Period saw a short period of peace, however towards the end of the Muromachi Period, the War of Kakitsu (1441-1443) broke out, and then there was the Onin War which lasted for 11 years, and the latter conflict supposedly devastated the capital of Kyoto which burned to ashes.

There was no one left in Kyoto who could forge swords, and the once great sword center that was started by the Sanjo smiths back in the Heian Period was no more.

On the other hand, in Mino Province, there is a new surge forward in forging where smiths from Yamashiro and Yamato came to Mino and increased the number of smiths. At one time, the smiths working in Mino numbered well over a thousand, and the number of swords forged was staggering. This output was so high that a good many of these blades are referred to as “kazu uchimono”, which literally means 'mass-produced'.

This tendency was not only confined to Mino Province, but also occurred in Bizen Province. Not all blades fall under this category, and there were some blades which were very well made,

Since war was being waged constantly, the swords had to be forged to withstand this intensive use, and accordingly the blades which were forged during this time became about 2 sun shorter than those of the previous period. But more than this, blades which had been forged previously and shortened were further shortened to this new style length and this is called “Tensho suriage”.

As mentioned above, the length of the blade became shorter, that is the katana was about 2 shaku 1-2 sun at the most.

The general style and shape of the blade is not too different from before, however it had very little funbari. There is very little sori, it becomes thick, and there is quite a bit of niku on the hira.

The kissaki becomes slightly longer with a straighter or shallower fukura.

Altogether, this produces a blade with a feeling of being very blunt and a very utilitarian blade. In contrast, the kazu uchimono is a little different in that it had a narrow width and a very weak appearance overall. Kazu uchimono were made in Mino Province, Bizen Province and in Ise Province. In Ise Province at Kuwana, where previously Muramasa and his students flourished, the so-called Kuwana Uchi were made. The Kuwana Uchi are mass produced blades made in the Bizen tradition and are actually copies of Bizen blades of that time. They are probably the most poorly made blades of the time, though the Mino and the Bizen kazu uchimono are just as bad.

A number of tanto were made during this period. Of the various styles, the most frequently seen are:

Sunzumari: these can have a sakzori, chukan sori, josun takenokozori, the same as those seen during the previous Muromachi period, However, there are three distinct types made during this period that should not be overlooked.

Style One:
length of about 7 sun; the width at the machi is wide, and it tapers abruptly to a fine sharp point at the kissaki. It is very thick at the machi. This style is called sunzumari takenoko sori.

Style two:
Everything about this style is the same as the first style, but there is a shinogi down the middle of the blade and it has two cutting edges. This type is called morota tsukuri.

Style three:
This is like the type which is takenokozori, and the length is about I shaku and it has a long fukura. This type is called sunnobi takenoko sori.

Of the blades forged by the smiths in Bizen Province, the width of the yakiba becomes somewhat wider, and they have the usual nioi in the Bizen tradition, however there are nie mixed in with the nioi. The one great characteristic of this period is that there is "always" nie kuzure within the hamon.
The koshibiraki midare hamon, that is a midare hamon with wide valleys between two adjacent midare peaks, which was introduced in the previous period, is carried over into this period. However, in the previous period, there were choji midare mixed into the koshibiraki midare hamon, but these choji are no longer seen in this period. Also, the peaks between the valleys appear as “yakikuzure” and at times, this is referred to as "crab claw” choji in the West which is a direct translation from the Japanese term of Kani no Tsume.
The Boshi are mostly yakikuzure or ichimai, and differ greatly from one side to the other. The jitetsu will seem coarse and “hard” and forged in ko-mokume hada, and ji utsuri are rarely seen in this period. The jitetsu will appear “weak” (or poorly forged) in kazu uchimono.
Tanto were made with peculiar shapes as described above, and though the hamon is in nioi, there will be nie. Other details are the same in the katana.

Smiths who worked in Bizen Tradition during the Momoyama Period

Bizen Province	Sukesada	Will have blotchy nie.
	Others	Will have blotchy nie.
Yamato Province	Kanabo smiths	will have hamon in the Mino Tradition
Suruga Province	Shimada smiths	Have a tendency towards nie and will have pointed features mixed in the ha.
Etchu Province	Uda smiths	About the same as the Shimada smiths. The jitetsu is "rough" appearing.

Kaga Province	Fujishima smiths	About the same as the Shimada smiths. The jitetsu is "rough" appearing.
Izumo Province.	Tadasada	Mostly made gunome midare with nie and with a coarse jitetsu.
Bingo Province	Mihara smiths	Made many shobu tsukuri wakizashi.
Suo Province	Nio smiths	Jitetsu is very delicately and fine.
Bungo Province	Takada smiths	Work closely resembles Bizen work.

The one notable trait of Mino Province and the Mino tradition during this period is that they will always have a sharp pointed gunome or similar feature, or box shaped features in the hamon (hako midare), and that the hamon edge or habuchi is very distinct.

Although the hamon border is in nioi, it is very weak, and blotchy nie are seen. There is nothing to be seen or enjoyed in the hamon. Also, since the blade has been tempered at a high temperature, the hamon is very hard and the hamon will appear white.

Some of the Mino blades will have a koshiba. A Mino koshiba's characteristic is that from the rusty nakago edge it starts out in suguha, but then it abruptly becomes an o-midare. No matter what type of hamon the Mino smiths made, somewhere along the pattern there will be an irregularity. This is a "hallmark" characteristic of the Mino smiths. This irregularity in most cases is a togariba.

There are togariba in Bizen blades too, however, it is quite separate and different from the Mino togariba in that in the Bizen togariba, the peaks of the gunome are rounded then the peak area nioi fades and the remaining nioi produces a togari feature. On the other hand, in the Mino togari, the peak itself is a togari patten, and the width of the nioi at the peak and in the valley are even. This is called a yakiba togari, whereas the Bizen type is known as a nioi togari. Other types of hamon seen in Mino blades during this period are; o-midare, sanbon sugi, saka midare and yahazu midare.

The types of hamon which do not have irregular pointed features are notare and gunome choji which is sometime called kembo midare.

The boshi of Mino blades also have their own characteristics. The nioi is firm and has togari, and the kaeri is very long or yoru (dark), and sometimes the kaeri will have an abrupt stop.

The jitetsu will, appear blackish, indicating that poor quality iron was used. The jigane will have a ko-mokume hada with the grain showing very distinctly, and there will be whitish utsuri.

The shinogi always shows masame hada.

In the Sengoku or Momoyama Period, the following smiths worked in the Mino Tradition.

Mino Province	All smiths were from Mino Province.

Yamashiro Province	Kurama smiths, and Heianjo Nagayoshi.
Yamato Province	Late Tegai smiths and Kanabo smiths.
Ise Province	Muramasa and Murashige. Will have Suguha between the midare peaks.
Totomi Province	Takatenjin smiths
Suruga Province	Shimada smiths
Musashi Province	Shitahara smiths
Kaga Province	Fujishima smiths
Etchu Province	Uda smiths
Bingo Province	Mihara smiths
Chikuzen Province	Kongobei smiths
Bungo Province	Takada smiths
Higo Province	Dotanuki smiths

During the Sengoku period, the smiths of Soshu Province decreased in number, so much so, that there were only a few, and their work had degenerated to a low level. Their work was mostly o-midare, hitatsura or notare midare, and the once famous Soshu trait of producing fine nie is no longer seen.

Although hitatsura was made, the nie is not there. (see Yoshino Period, Soshu tradition). Those swords that do have nie have it in name only, and there is no life or luster in the nie.

The boshi pattern is not different from the hamon on the lower portion of the blade. The pattern is a midarekomi with a long long kaeri.

The jitetsu is just as poorly done and gives one the impression of being coarse and hard, and it is lifeless too. The hada is ko-mokume hada.

The smiths who worked in the Soshu tradition during the Sengoku Period are:

Sagami Province.	Masahiro, Hiromasa, Tsunahiro, Yasuharu and Yasukuni; some of the works of these smiths will have very fine and delicate horimmono.
Suruga Province	Shimada smiths.
Musashi Province	Shitahara smiths will have whirpool like effects in the hada.
Mino Province	Certain Seki smiths when they made hitatsura, it is

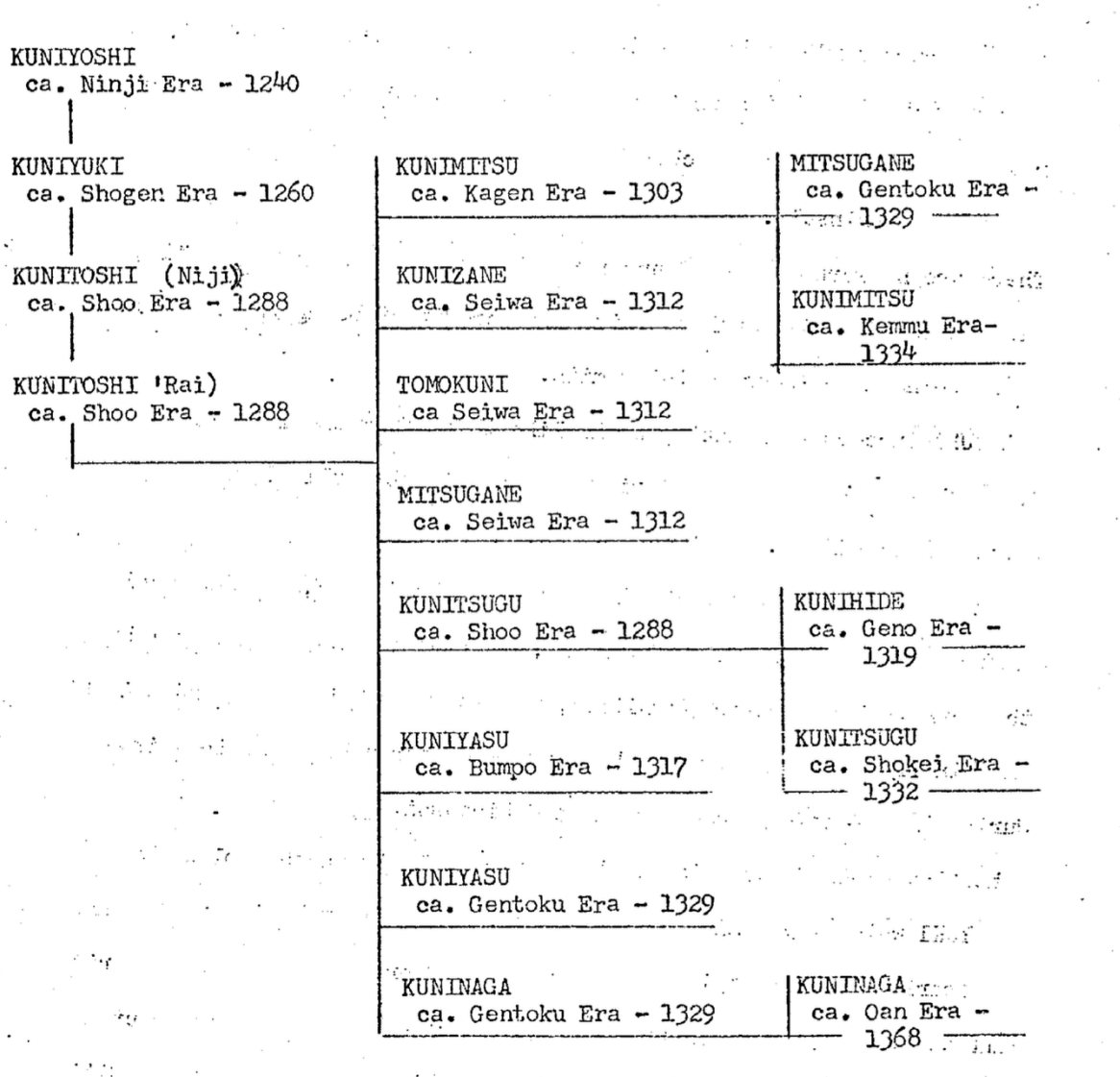
found near the Mune.

Wakasa Province Fuyuhiro.

Hoki Province Koga.

SWORDSMITHS

Yamashiro Province's Rai School



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

Rai KUNITOSHI Rai KUNINAGA Rai KUNITOSHI
Rai KUNIYOSHI Rai YOSHIMUNE Rai MITSUSADA

Rai YUKIMUNE Rai YUKIHIDE Rai KUNIFUSA
Rai KUNIYOSHI

According to old texts such as the Koto Meijin Taizen, the founder of the Rai School, Kuniyoshi, is said to have been an immigrant from Korai (Korea). He is said to have been born on Shoji 1 (1199) and died at age 75 on Kenji 7 (1281). All of the smiths of this school use the character Rai（来）and they are known as the Rai school.

The character Rai means to "come" and perhaps this may have been the reason for the use of the character by the founder since he came from the Korean Peninsula. There are no works of the founder remaining today and consequently, his son Kuniyuki is popularly given the credit of being the founder, since there are works remaining from this smith.

Kuniyuki succeeded in making works like those from the late Heian to the early Kamakura Period, and these contain the full elegance that is seen in the Yamashiro tradition.

Probably the most famous of all the works of Kuniyuki is the tachi that has been known as Fudo Kuniyuki, which was owed at one time by the 14th Ashikaga Shogun Yoshiteru, then went to Matsunaga Danjo Hisahide, and finally to the Tokugawa. The blade went through one of the fires during the Tokugawa Period and is a yakinaoshi (retempered) blade.

Other than this famous blade, there supposedly is another blade by Kuniyuki which Toyotomi Hideyoshi presented to a temple in Kyoto, and which is called the Tsuriganekiri (hanging chain cutter) and presently is owed by a private collector. It has been shortened and is about 2 shaku 2 sun long, and more important than this, the blade is in perfect condition and does not show evidence of ever having been polished. The kissaki, is an ikubi kissaki and in the style of the Kamakura Period and the blade has its full grace and elegance, even in its present shortened length.

There is another blade in a private collection by Kuniyuki, measuring 2 shaku 5 sun 2 bu which has been shortened perhaps by about 3 or 4 inches.

Kunitoshi is regarded as the son of Kuniyuki and he is as skilled as his father, if not more so, and there are many samples of his works remaining today.

He is popularly referred to as Niji Kunitoshi (Niji means two characters) due to the fact that he signed his works in two characters. The other Kunitoshi who signed his works Rai Kunitoshi is regarded as a different swordsmith, although some are of the opinion that these two were the same man making distinctly different styles of swords, and then signed his work differently.

There are differences in the works of these two, Kunitoshi and Rai Kunitoshi. The Niji Kunitoshi is regarded as the earlier smith and there are differences in the work of the two smiths.

The work of Niji Kunitoshi more closely resembles that of Kuniyuki, whereas the work of Rai Kunitoshi is much more hanayaka (exuberant, flamboyant, showy). Probably the most famous of all the blades by Niji Kunitoshi is the Meibutsu called Aizen Kunitoshi, a Tanto which has long been in the Maeda collection. The name of the blade stems from the fact that there is a carving of Aizen Myoo on the nakago. As for Rai Kunitoshi, his work is found much more often than those of the Niji Kunitoshi or Kuniyuki.

We covered the blade called Hotaru Maru in our first issue, and it can be considered as one of the better works by this smith. Currently, there are five blades selected as National Treasures which are all considered as masterpieces, however,

there is one blade by Rai Kunitoshi among these five which is a little doubtful to our eye. That is, the whole or overall appearance of the blade does not suggest it to is the work of this man, also there is the fact that the signature is carved on the hira of the nakago. We have felt, for a long time, that this particular Kunitoshi can be looked upon with a great deal of skepticism.

KUNIYUKI

Shape: Tachi from the early Kamakura Period with torii sori. Also made ikubi kissaki tachi.

Horimono: There are intricate carvings such as those found on the famous Fudo Kuniyuki, and other types carved inside of the hi, though mostly there are bo hi with the tip of the hi carved well up into the ko-shinogi. The hi can end above the nakago in kakudome (with a round end above the machi) or kakinagashi (in the nakago).

Hamon: The hamon is a wide suguha choji in ikubi kissaki tachi, but will lack nie and the color of the ha will seem whitish. The ashi running into the ha towards the cutting edge are very long, and dense and the nie and nioi will cluster together around these ashi. A peculiar shaped choji called "warabide choji" (fern shaped choji) are quite often found in the area around the monouchi. Also, inazuma above the monouchi extending into the yokote area are often seen, and these inazuma will be larger or longer than usual.
On some of Kuniyuki's work the hamon is o-choji midare like those found on the Fukuoka Ichimonji blades.
The blades made in the early Kamakura Period have the hamon a little narrow, in accordance with the trend of the time.
These are chu suguha hotsure in nie with choji midare and the ashi will have nie and nioi clustered together.
There will be many small inazuma and kinsuji as well as nijuba which are seen more in the area above the monouchi. There are works in o-choji midare and if the blade is ubu, some blades will have an o-koshiba.
On some blades, there will be muneyaki which are not quite in the shape or form of a strong yaki but rather like yubashiri. This shows that the muneyaki is not strong, but is soft and like yubashiri, and not as strong as tobiyaki.

Boshi: Komaru, omaru or midarekomi. They are often a yakizume style but will have very little kaeri.

Jitetsu: The hada will be ko-mokume hada with o-hada present in places. Strong ji nie will result in yubashiri and chikei in places.

Nakago: The nakago is long with a sori and will have niku on the hira, and towards the tip, it will taper to a narrow tip ending in kurijiri. Some will have a kiji momo shape. The filemarks will be kiri.
The signature will be written with two large characters around the mekugi-ana.

Comment: In the case of Bizen smiths, when suguha choji or o-choji midare hamon were made, the nioi line in the boshi tended to become thin. However, in the case of Kuniyuki and Niji Kunitoshi, the boshi is very clear and defined.

Comment: The majority of the Rai blades will have some core steel (shingane) showing through the outer layer (kawagane), and the core steel will appear visible. Where the core steel shows through the outer layer near the hamon, it will appear as though it is "stained".
This is called the “Rai jitetsu”.
This characteristic is often seen in Bizen blades as well, however, in the case of Rai blades, this results from the blade having a very thin outer layer of steel, and the core shingane will show as "spots".
Bizen core steel will appear in much larger spots than in the Rai Jitetsu.

NIJI KUNITOSHI

Tachi: Everything about the blade is about the same as Kuniyuki’s, except that they are a little more hanayaka.

An example of one Niji Kunitoshi can be described:

Shape: It is wide, and there is not too much of a difference in the widths at the machi and the yokote. The curvature is a shallow toriisori. The kissaki is a very sturdy ikubi kissaki. There is very little Hiraniku, but a great deal of ha niku.

Horimono: There are bo hi with soe hi, and there is a suken at the base of the blade in addition to the hi.

Hamon: Wide suguha choji midare mixed with o-choji midare. There is a little nie although there are dense nioi ashi.
The peaks of the o-choji midare are very large, so much so, that some of them touch the soe hi.

Boshi: Midarekomi with a small kaeri.

Jitetsu: Mokume hada with o-hada in places, and the ji nie will appear as chikei in places.

Comment: There are many works of the Yamashiro smiths from the early period, such as the Rai blades mentioned earlier in this issue, as well as those from the Sanjo, Gojo and Ayanokoji schools made in the Bizen tradition, and if one is not careful, they can be mistaken for Bizen blades.
The difference is in the jitetsu, that is in the steel, and another important factor that should not be overlooked is that the habuchi, that is the border of the hamon and the Ji, is quite distinct in the case of Yamashiro blades.

Comment: There are hardly any tanto by the above mentioned two smiths and the Aizen Kunitoshi mentioned earlier is a very rare instance.

KYOHO MEIBUTSU CHO

5th Installment

Owner: The Kii clan
Meibutsu: Shuhan Masamune

Signed: Shumei
length: 1 shaku 2 bu
value: 500 Mai

There are hi on both sides. There is sori.
On the omote of the nakago, there is (a shumei) written Genna 2 (1616), under which is inscribed Masamune. On the ura, Kotoku's seal is present in red lacquer. Kii Chujo received this from the Shogunate at the time of his marriage.

Yamanaka Note:
Kii refers to one of the Go Sanke or the Tokugawa of Kii Province.
The Go Sanke are the Tokugawa of Kii Province, of Mito in Hitachi Province, and in Nagoya in Owari Province.
Kotoku refers to the 9th Honami, Kotoku, of the head family, who is regarded as the greatest of all the Honami for his judging ability.
The part where it mentions a marriage, it refers to the marriage of the daughter of the 5th Shogun Tsunayoshi, Princess Tsuru to the Kii Tokugawa and the Princess bought this blade with her as her dowery.
We have been unable to learn of the present whereabouts of this blade.

Owner: The Kii clan
Meibutsu: Maeda Masamune

unsigned
length: 9 sun 5 bu
value: 7,000 Kan

There are Bonji and Gomabashi on the omote.
Owned by Lord Toshitsune. When Lady Tentoku-In was married to Kanazawa, Okubo Sagami no Kami accompanied her on the entourage and for this, Lord Toshinaga gave it to Sagami no Kami.
It has an Orikami dated Shoho 2 (1645) which is by Kotoku.

Ii Kamon no Kami purchased it and presented it to Lord Ietsuna. When Princess Tsuru recovered from her illness, Lady Jokei-In, Lady- Ichii and Lady Ichidai, to celebrate the recovery called on the Kishu
mansion at which time this blade was given to the Kii by the Shogunate.

Yamanaka Note:
Lady Tentoku-In refers to the 3rd daughter of the 2nd Tokugawa Shogun Hidetada who wedded Maeda Toshitsune in September of Keicho 6 (1603). At the time she was only 3 years old! Okubo Sagami no Kami and Aoyama Tadanori accompanied the Shogun's daughter to Kanazawa from Edo, and Okubo is the founder of the Okubo clan of Odawara in Soshu Province.
Ii Kamon no Kami refers to Ii Naotaka and he is supposed to have purchased the blade after Okubo's death and presented the blade to the 4th Shogun Ietsuna.
Tsuru Hime refers to the elder daughter of the 5th Shogun Tsunayoshi, who married into the Kii Tokugawa.
We have not been able to find out who Jokei-In or Ichii were, but Lady Ichidai refers to Lady Keisho- In, the mother of Shogun Tsunayoshi. The blade presently is in a private collection.

Owner: Kato Izumi no Kami
Meibutsu: Fuma Masamune

signed
length: 8 sun 9 bu
value: 300 Mai

There i s a futasuji hi on the omote of the blade and a bonji with bo hi on the ura. The tip of the nakago has been cut off.
A samurai named Fuma Jinjiro of Osaka owed it, and it was purchased by lord Toshitsune. Later, saying that the blade is not what it should be, he told Koho to dispose of it. Kato Shikibu showed a desire to purchase it for 400 Mai and this offer was related to Lord Toshitsune. However, Toshitsune would not agree unless it was 500 Mai and after some negotiations a price of 450 Mai was agreed to by both parties. This was during the Genroku Era.

Imamura Note: The blade was presented to Emperor Meiji by the Kato on Meiji 11 (1878).

Yamanaka Note:
Kato Izumi no Kami refers to Kato Yoshiaki who originally ruled at Aizu in Mutsu Province with a fief of 400,000 Koku, and ruled there until Kanei 20 (1643) when the Kato were moved to Minaguchi in Omi Province and had their fief reduced to 20,000 Koku.
This all came about from an incident where the Kato's chief chamberlain, Hori Mondo had gotten the Kato involved in an intrigue which brought about the removal of the Kato from Aizu to Minaguchi.
The blade is still in the Imperial Collection and it supposedly has an origami from the Honami with a date of Genroku 5 (1692).

Lord Toshitsune, whose name has appeared a number of times in the previous installments of the Meibutsu Cho, refers to Maeda Toshitsune (1592-1658), and was the third Maeda to rule Kaga Province.

Koho refers to Honami Koho who is the fourth in the Koji lineage and who is the grandson of Honami Koetsu.

Although this Masamune is signed, it has not been regarded very highly by the experts. We, having never seen it, are not in a position to give an opinion, however, we are told that the blade is listed separately in the Imperial Collection, meaning that the blade is not very highly regarded.

SWORD TERMINOLOGY

HA-NIE

Nie found in the yakiba is called ha-nie.

HAKO MIDARE

Each midare wave is made in a form resembling a square box. Made by such smiths as Masamune, Chogi of Osafune or Bizen Province, and Muramasa of Ise Province.

HAMON

Refers to the pattern on the cutting edge. It is whiter than the body of the blade. It comes in all kinds of forms or designs which are made according to the swordsmith, his school, and location. Suguha, notare, and gunome are the three basic designs of hamon, and all hamon are variations of these three, or combinations of them.

HIRA

The area from the shinogi to the edge or border of the hamon.

HAMACHI

The border or projection on the blade at the top of the nakago at the beginning of the cutting edge which separates the blade from the nakago or the tang. The edge will extend by about 1 and 1⁄3 bu from the nakago.

This projection will be more pronounced on a newly made blade, whereas on an old blade, it might be very small due to the fact that the blade and cutting edge has been polished many times, thus having worn down much of the steel on the cutting edge.

In certain instances, there will be almost no hamachi, and in other instances the ha might be above the nakago edge due to overpolishing, a condition particularly likely to be seen on tanto from early periods.

HIZUKURI

Secondary shaping of the blade after forging. The steel (a bar in a blank or “sunobe” shape) which has a rough shape from forging, is next worked carefully. The

cutting edge edgeis hammered and formed, and the shinogi, shinogi ji, and point are formed to give it a final shape.

HODO
Bed of burning charcoal in the forge.

HOCHO TETSU
Literally, kitchen knife iron. A form of steel which has a low carbon content. It cannot be used to make a hamon.

HORI DOSAKU
Means that the horimono was made by the smith who made the blade. Often carved on the nakago of a blade to indicate that the sword smith did his own carving on the blade.

HASAKI
The cutting edge. “Ha” refers to the whole area where the tempering was done (i.e. where the hamon was made) to make the blade hard and able to cut. Saki means the tip or edge.

HABAKI
Metal collar at the base of the sword above the hilt (tsuka) and the guard (tsuba).
They are made from all kinds of metal, iron, copper, silver and gold, as well as shakudo, and with combinations of these metals.
The most preferred one is gold (22k – 24k) and made in a style known as the Umetada habaki.
In the old days, that is, in the pre-Momoyama Period, sword smiths made their habaki when they made a sword. However, from about the Momoyama Period and later, this work was dropped by the sword smith and a specialist who made habaki came into being.

HA
The cutting edge, and in a broader sense includes the entire region of the hamon.

HIRAKI
To open, or to flower, from the verb hiraku.

HEIAN PERIOD
806 – 1183. From the 1st year of Daido to the 2nd year of Juei.

HAKI
A term used for the condition of the nie. "Haki ga aru", means the nie has haki and haki is translated as ambitious, aspiring, or with much vigor. However, this translation does not give the exact connotation for its use as "haki ga aru", as it is used in describing the condition of the nie.
We are of the thought that, if a term is to be given for this, or a translation is to be given, the phrase “vigorous’ seems to be about the closest one can come to it.
Nie on a blade having haki refers to those blades, tanto mostly, that

were made during the mid-Kamakura period, especially by smiths like Shintogo, Masamune, and Sadamune. The nie found on the works of these smiths are very much alive and have "vigor".

ITAME HADA

The grain or pattern in the steel surface which resembles the grain seen in wood.

IKUBI KISSAKI

The shape of the kissaki which was made from about 1220 to the end of the Kamakura Period. Ikubi means 'boar's neck' and this is the exact impression one gets from looking at the shape of this type of Kissaki.

The ikubi kissaki tachi were about 3 Shaku long, and the width of the blade is very wide. It has a strong sori which is especially accentuated around the monouchi area. It is also thick in proportion to the length and the width of the blade.
There will be a lot of ha nikku, and the cross section of the blade around the ha is popularly called "hamaguri ba" which is always found on ikubi kissaki tachi.
The shinogi is high and the width of the shinogi ji is a little narrow.

INAZUMA

Inazuma means lightning. This is a cluster of nie which forms a small line like a flash of lightning running along the hamon.

IHORI

This refers to the ridge along the top of the mune.

JI NIKU

Ji niku or hira niku: we have used the phrase "meat" for this term, which is a direct translation of the Japanese word. It seems to be the term which most closely gives the meaning.

A ji having niku means that the steel surface in the area of the ji is rounded or convex, and is and not flat.

JI

The area between the shinogi line and the boundary of the hamon.

KENGYO

The shape of the tip of a nakago which has a sharp tip with an angle of about an 90° at the tip.

KURI JIRI

The shape of the tip of the nakago which resembles the bottom of a chestnut. Kuri means chestnut.

KOTO

Blades made prior to 1595, but after 806.

KINSUJI

The same as inazuma, except that it is found in straighter lines than inazuma. Inazuma will run out from the hamon into the ji and back again into the hamon. Kinsuji is same as inazuma except that it is found only inside of the hamon.

KIKUSUI
Chrysanthemum in water. A peculiar type of design for a hamon made during the Shinto Period by smiths like (Daisagari) Kawachi no Kami Kunisuke and his followers.

KOSHINOGI JI
The small triangular shaped area bordered by the koshinogi and the mune.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NIE AND NIOI

The difference between good and poor nie is much easier to discern than in the case of nioi.

Good nie is always lively and will be bright or brilliant, and have some color whereas poor nie will have a dead and flat appearance and be colorless or gray and flat appearing, and will look like lead.

Much of this difference will be greatly dependent on the blade's polish. If the polish is old and the blade has been poorly maintained or abused, then many of the properties of the nie will remain hidden. Also, a poor polish will not bring out the true character of the nie since the polisher may not know how to control the polishing stones and materials sufficiently well, and in such cases many of the properties and the quality of the nie will remain hidden.

However, even if the polish is old or poor, the nie may be seen to certain extent, and they will be small and pebble-like. If the polish on the blade happens to be good, then the nie pebbles will shiny or bright and appear to be alive. Also, if one looks closely, one will note that the nie pebbles will be round and raised a bit above the surface of the ji, and not be flat as in the case of poor nie.

An example of this can be seen with Soshu blades. Early Soshu smiths such as Shintogo, Masamune and Sadamune all have high quality nie. The nie are bright and appear lively; they are brilliant and they will have some color. Also, the nie can make the blade appear as if it is damp or moist. That is, the overall appearance of the steel will suggest that the blade has just been drawn out after being submerged in water or oil. When the nie of one of the above smiths is compared to those of the later Soshu smiths like Masahiro and Hiromitsu, the color or brightness in the work of the latter will be missing, and the nie will appear to be flat, i.e. the nie particles will be dull.

In still later smiths like Tsunahiro and Fusamune, the nie particles will not appear like nie at all. Having been poorly made, the nie will appear as though they are smudges. A good nie particle is always small, round, and bright or brilliant. Poor nie are exactly the opposite.

An explanation of nioi is a little more difficult, but the simplest explanation can be made with a comparison. A good blade from the early Kamakura Period like a Fukuoka Ichimonji Sukemune can be compared to any other Bizen smiths after the Oei Era in Bizen.

The reader can visualize the difference:
When one takes a blade into his hand and looks at the nioi against a light, the

old Bizen blades will appear to have some depth, whereas the later ones will seem flat.

The early blades have considerable detail in the nioi so that one can look at them for a long time. However, in the later works, even though they may have been made by smiths such as Katsumitsu, Sukemitsu or Sukesada, the nioi appears flat and does not have the depth or glow or projection seen in the old Bizen blades such as Ko-Bizen, Ichimonji, Osafune Mitsutada or Nagamitsu. All of these smiths put many fine details in their work and this can be seen in the blades, and one just cannot put a blade like these down right away, there being so much to see. One will always find something new in any blade of the early period.

In comparison, in looking at Oei blades and later ones, no matter how good they may be, one is ready to put them down after a short time.

During the Heian Period, the Bizen smiths had nie and nioi intermingled, and there is much to be enjoyed, but those of the Ichimonji smiths as well as the early Osafune smiths are in nioi primarily, and as such, there is much to be enjoyed in their nioi.

Honami Koson explained it to us this way: it is

"like looking at the stars through a string of clouds "
"like the cherry blossoms against a clear morning sky "

We have stressed before and we will stress this again, and will keep on stressing of the importance of a good polish, for if a polish is poor then the qualities in the blade remain hidden, so then what good is a blade in such a condition?
It is regrettable that the collectors in the West are at such a handicap in this respect, with there being only one polisher there who is considered as being fair.

HISTORICAL FIGURES IN JAPANESE HISTORY AND THEIR FAMOUS SWORDS

KUSUNOKI MASASHIGE AND KORYU KAGEMITSU

Kusunoki Masashige is well known in Japanese History as the famous loyalist who fought for the Southern Court during the Nambokucho period when there was a struggle between the North Court and South Court during the Yoshino period. Masashige was the descendant of Tachibana Moroe (Tempyo Hou, 757-765), a nobleman who was a descendant of the 30th Emperor Bidatsu. The Kusunoki family had for generations ruled in Kawachi Province and had a fort at the foot of Mt. Kongo.

In 1331, when Hojo Tadatoki (the 4th Hojo) raised his army, Emperor Godaigo established his temporary residence at Mt. Kasagi and requested Kusunoki to aid him.

From then on, Kusunoki Masashige and his clan served the Imperial cause, and finally in May, 1336, he fought his final battle at Minatogawa. It is recorded that he and 70 soldiers from his once large army fought their final battle there. Since then, until this very day, the Kusunoki family has been regarded as the epitome of virtue to the Japanese loyalist cause.

In the National Museum in Tokyo, there is a blade called Koryu Kagemitsu which supposedly belonged to Kusunoki. It has been called "Nozoki Ryu" (peeping dragon) or "Nanko Kagemitsu" (Nanko is another name for Kusunoki) at one time or another. The reason for the name Koryu or Nozoki Ryu is that the blade has been shortened and only a very small part of the dragon carved in the hi is visible above the habaki.

This blade was in the Yamada Family for a long time, and after the Meiji Restoration, the Yamada presented the blade to the Emperor Meiji. The Yamada family were for many generations the official executioners of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Early in the 1800s, the blade was "found" in the possession of a farmer in Kawachi province, and was bought by Amiya, a well known sword dealer. Amiya later
sold the blade to the Yamada.

It is said that the Emperor Meiji was very fond of this Kagemitsu and he had a mounting made for it in a military style, and carried it whenever he wore his military uniform.

It is odd that this blade is not mentioned in the Kyoho Meibutsu Cho, nor in any of the famous books about swords of the Tokugawa Period.

The blade is regarded as one of the best works of Kagemitsu remaining today, if not the best. The blade measures 2 shaku 4 sun 4 bu with a sori of 9 bu 4 ri. The width at the machi, is 9 bu and at the yokote 6 bu 8 ri. The kissaki is a chu-kissaki. The hada is ko-itame hada and very tightly forged. There are midare utsuri clearly visible along the entire length of the blade.

The hamon is suguha with saka choji midare, and the ashi run towards the tip. Saka choji midare hamon were initiated by Kagemitsu and widely used by his followers. Saka choji hamon also became famous among the Mino smiths who made it in their own styles, and also by some of the smiths in Kaga Province such as the Fujishima smiths.

The boshi of the Koryu Kagemitsu is midarekomi and with a komaru.
On the omote and in the hi, there is a kurikara dragon carved, and on the ura, bonji are carved inside the hi.

Koyama Munetsugu in the Shin Shinto Period made two copies of this Kagemitsu, one in the ubu length, and one in the suriage length. The ubu length blade that Munetsugu made or copied, as well as the one made in the suriage length do not nearly compare with Kagemitsu's work, however for Munetsugu, these can be regarded as among his better works. Many smiths made copies of this Kagemitsu after Munetsugu. The Yamada family acted as a sponsor or patron to Munetsugu and this is the reason why Munetsugu made such a close copy of the original work. The Koryu Kagemitsu is a national treasure and is in the custody of the National Museum, and no longer a part of the Imperial Collection.

HISTORY OF SWORD JUDGING

In tracing the origin of sword appraising or judging, it is evident that it is quite old. It was already in practice during the Heian period as told to us in a number of texts from that period. In the Azuma Kagami and in the Gempei Seisuiki,
it says that the art seems to have developed to quite a degree in that period.

That Emperor Gotoba (1179-1239) took a great interest in sword making is well known, however it is not widely known that his interest in sword judging was at an advanced level as is written in the Sokyo Ki.

Professionals engaged in kantei existed during the Shogen Era (1207-1211), written documents and explanations of kantei, as well as nominations of famous swords were in existence during that time.

The actual study of kantei is said to have been originated by Masamune of Soshu Province, who after his many travels throughout the provinces, paying calls on a number of smiths, gained knowledge of other styles and traditions foreign to him. He is said to have written this down for posterity. Akihiro, who followed Masamune, supposedly made additions to the original work as well as making “rubbings" or images of works from over twenty provinces. This work found its way into the hands of one Saito Danjo Tadamasa and later fell into the hands of Utsunomiya Mikawa Nyudo, both famous for their sword appraising skills in the Ashikaga and Tokugawa periods. Utsunomiya was a retainer of the Ashikaga Shogun Yoshimichi (3rd Ashikaga Shogun, 1368-1394), and was well versed in the art of judging, and held the title of Token Bugyo or Sword Magistrate.

The work which Masamune started with later additions by Akihiro also had further notations made by Utsunomiya, and became the first completed book. All the books which later came into being had their base in this book by Masamune.

The Honami family served the Ashikaga Shogun. The Honami were descendants of the once great Sugawara Clan of the Heian Period. Myohon, the first of the Honami, excelled in the art of judging, and his son Honmyo also was well versed in appraisal, and also served the Ashikaga Shogun. This started the long line of the Honami in this profession.

After the fall of the Ashikaga and with the emergence of the warlord-daimyos, the ninth Honami, Kotoku came into the favor of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hideyoshi gave Honami a copper seal with a character "HON', and from then on, this seal was always used on all Kantei Sho (certificates of authenticity) issued by the Honami.

During the Tokugawa reign, the Honami enjoyed high level favors of both Ieyasu, first of the Tokugawa Shoguns, and his son Hidetada, the 2nd Shogun. The Tokugawa government forbade the Honami to increase the number of their households which practiced judging or appraisal. This led to stabilizing of the Honami as well as increasing their prestige and position. There were twelve Honami at the time of the Meiji Restoration and after that, this increased to thirteen.

For this reason, the hardship which the early families endured was fruitful in laying down a stable foundation as a kantei household. The secrets of the trade were only handed down to the immediate family’s descendants, and were never made public. There were few other than the Honami who became famous for their knowledge of swords: Taga Bungo no Kami, Hosokawa Yusai, Matsunaga Hisahide and Miyoshi Jikkyu. It is not clear how these men received their knowledge, and it is not likely that they obtained it from the Honami since the Honami closely guarded their family tradition, but it is evident that some of these men became quite proficient since they did write books on the subject.

Honami Koji who set up the first of the branch families was the son of Taga Bungo no Kami and was adopted into the Honami family.

Oda Nobunaga and his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi were perhaps the most famous of the sword collecting generals in history. Nobunaga is said to have been enraptured by the work of Osafune Mitsutada, and at one time had 25 blades by this

swordsmith in his collection.

As for Hideyoshi, his collecting mania was so intense that he had regular sword hunts and confiscated any blades he and his cohorts thought worthwhile for his collection.

In the early Tokugawa Period, a book called “Kokon Meijin” was published and was made available to the general public, and subsequently it became very popular reading among the warrior class which resulted in few mekiki (experts) and other serious students.

The Honami did not make very many publications, and the few that were made are: “Kuchusai Hidensho”, “Kozan Oshigaga”, “Kotoku Oshigata”, and the “Kosho Koto Meikan”. After the Meiji Restoration, the Honami were released from their service under the Tokugawa, and after the Haito Rei in 1876 (which prohibited the carrying of swords in public) they were on the verge of extinction in so far as sword judging was concerned. However, the few who persisted in carrying on the family tradition became responsible for the revival which led to that what we enjoy today.

From the late Tokugawa period and into the early Meiji period, a sort of revolution took place in the art of sword polishing. The polishing methods which had been practiced previously did not quite show the true and exact qualities of the steel. However, during this time, Honami Heijuro and a few others jointly collaborated in developing a new method and materials which we today call kanahada nugui. Kanahada ugui is the method of finishing a polish by using an iron oxide and oil mixture which brings out minute details of the hamon and of the workmanship in the blade. So, we can understand that whatever the old tales tell us of the old masters, they never enjoyed the true beauty of the hamon we do today.

In the old polishing method, Tsushima nugui (particles suspended in oil) was the last step in finishing. This left the blade with a black sheen and showed nothing of fine details and qualities. In the new method, the jihada is bluish and clear and details stand out very distinctly, and in particular the yakiba is left resembling cloud formations, and should the blade be an early Bizen blade, the shinogi ji looks black in contrast with the whiteness of the yakiba. This is the method used by practically all of the polishers working today.

The sword which had been an instrument of practical use, with the Meiji Restoration suddenly lost its place in society and became a useless piece of metal. After the Haito Rei proclamation, they were carted off to the docks of Yokohama and sold in bundles to the increasing number of Westerners coming to Japan. I recall a story told to me by an old sword merchant. In his early teens, he recalls accompanying his father and grandfather to the Yokohama docks with a cart stacked high with swords, and that these swords were sold at the dockside to visitors on ships, not one by one, but in bundles.

However, this did not last long, because Japan was on the verge of recovery and becoming a militaristic nation and "Bushido" was being revived. Consequently, the role of the sword as a weapon was once again called for.

With the help of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, the role of swords was well established again, and so it remained until the end of WWII, when by the decree of MacArthur of the Allied Forces of Occupation of Japan, all swords in the possession of the Japanese were required to be registered. From about 1910, the last of the great Honami, Honami Koson, was quite active in popularizing kantei or judging among the general public. He published his first book in 1914, explaining many of the so-called secrets of the Honami in judging swords.

There is no one alive today who is a student of Japanese swords that does not owe something to this man for the majority of their sword knowledge.

Honami Ringa, Honami Koson's teacher, to a certain extent made some of the Honami work public, but it was Honami Koson with his numerous writings that helped make swords as popular as they are today.

Not only was Honami Koson a great teacher, but his skill in sword polishing was equally well known, and from his polishing stable, many famous polishers went out on their own to serve the collecting public. It is noteworthy that the polishers who are ranked at the very top for their skills today, all are from Honami Koson's polishing stable.

Honami Kohaku, the son of Honami Koson, is carrying on his father's trade in kantei and is regarded as one of the better appraisers today. Other appraisers we see today are (those worthwhile mentioning) Honami Nisshu, Hirai Matsuba, Nagayama Kokan, Ono Kokei, Yoshikawa Kentaro, Sato Kanichi, Inuzuka Tokutaro, Murakami Kosuke, Homma Junji, and Sugimoto Kokan.

MAKING A KATANA

There are many forging methods which swordsmiths can use to make their blades. All smiths had their respective methods and "secrets" which were handed down from teacher to student. Some of these secrets were handed down only to the best students who took the name of their teacher to carry on the family line. Many of these methods were only handed down verbally, so that there are very few written records describing these methods. However, learned swordsmiths such as Suishinshi Masahide, after considerable research on their part, wrote some of these techniques down for posterity.

Also, there are still a number of swordsmiths active today, and from these swordsmiths, we are able to learn about the different and difficult methods used. Swordsmiths today, however, tend to use the easiest methods.

In the old days, that is in the Heian Period (806-1183), the swordsmith himself went about the countryside gathering satetsu (iron sand), refined it to form iron and steel, and forged the material into swords. However, from about the middle of the Kamakura Period (1184-1333), the iron making process was divorced from the sword smiths and became a separate trade followed by people who specialized in this trade and produced iron and steel for the sword smiths.

Work thus became somewhat easier for the swordsmiths, but that meant that the sword smith might no longer be able to obtain the precise type of iron or steel he wanted the way his predecessors did by making it themselves.

The iron or steel which the smelters made and sold to the swordsmiths is called Tamahagane.

On the end of an iron handle, called a “kanabo”, a plate about 3" x 5", known as a daigane is welded. On top of the daigane, small broken pieces of the afore-mentioned tamahagane are carefully stacked, heated and fused together by hammering. This step serves two purposes: it improves the quality of the steel by

using the best starting pieces, and it removes much of the foreign matter or impurities present in the tama hagane.

To explain the method more in detail: small bits of tamahagane are carefully stacked snugly on top of one another on the daigane, so that there is very little air or space between the small pieces. The daigane and the stacked tama hagane pieces are wrapped in washi paper, and a watery clay mixture, called sutado, which has had all the sand particles removed, is poured over the stack which is then heated to a red to yellow color in a coal bed in a forge called a hodo. When it has been heated to the correct temperature (judging by the color), it is removed from the hodo and with the aid of two assistants (sakite) it is hammered on the anvil.

The two sakite use large hammers or sledge hammers, whereas the swordsmith himself uses a small hand held hammer. The sakite hammer the billet of tama hagane to draw it out into a bar. This continues until the metal cools down. This operation is known as kowakashi.

The heated and hammered metal is then covered with straw ashes and put back into the coal bed. Having reached the right color again, the process is repeated again and again until the steel reaches the desired shape and size and is drawn out into the proper shape and length. This repetition Is called owakashi. The use of the watery clay mixture and the straw ash has several purposes. It improves the quality of the steel, distributes the heat evenly when the tamahagane is put in the coal bed, and prepares it for the next operation.

Having gone through the owakashi operation, the iron is improved in quality. It is then hammered repeatedly until it is longer and a bar shape and then chiseled through, and folded over onto itself.

This process is repeated several times, and is called orikaeshi kitae. During this operation, the sutado and straw-ash are repeatedly used, and the metal slowly turns into a uniform steel. With the repetition of the process, most of the foreign particles are removed and a quality steel is in the making. The whole process up to this point is called shitakitae (primary forging). The smith is careful to never heat the steel to a high enough temperature to melt or partially melt in the forge.

A sword which has been formed by the forgoing method is called marugitae. However, ordinarily a blade will have soft steel as a core. Around this core steel, which has had less forging, and consequently is soft, the well forged steel which we have been discussing is forged around it. The core steel will become the inner steel or shingane, and the outer steel will become the kawagane.

Swords which have been made with this method are known as hongitae or awasegitae. The awasegitae, depending on the school of the swordsmiths, is made using slightly different methods in different schools, although the principles are all the same. And, depending on the school, this awasegitae is known by such names as; makuri kitae, kobuse kitae, orikaeshi sammai kitae, ippon sammai kitae, or shin jyugomai kobuse kitae. Steel which has gone through the hongitae - awasegitae process is then forged into the shape of a sword.

The sword (or a blank) which has thus been formed is called a sunobe. The sunobe is again repeatedly hammered and shaped into a proper katana shape to form the edge, the ji, shinogi, and shinogi ji.

With the aid of a tool called a sen, a double handed chisel-like draw knife, material on the blade can be scraped or shaved off to define the shape of the blade. The blade is then given a rough polish and becomes a complete katana.

The forgoing is a very rough outline of what is done to make a katana. Though it is described here very simply, the actual process is complex enough to be the subject of a comprehensive book were it to be explained in detail.
We expect to go more into details of this process in a later issue.

PUBLICATIONS

Nihonto Taikan, Volume 4

Publisher: Otsuka Kogeisha
Price: 7500 Yen
Expected at the end of July

The long awaited Number 4 volume of the Nihonto Taikan Series, about 8 months late, will be out late this month, or so we are told.
This is a book or series which we strongly recommend for the serious student. It is by far one of the best books on swords out to date. It covers the majority of fine blades in existence.

Nihonto Meikan

By Ishii Masakuni
Publisher: Yuzankaku
price: 3,500 Yen
Expected: End of October

A directory of sword smiths in the same order as in the old Toko Soran published by the late Kawaguchi some years ago. The 10th and the last printing was in 1963.
We have seen only sample pages of this forthcoming sword smith directory, and from that, we see that it gives the names of the sword smith, the different ways that he signed, the dates which he inscribed in his work, as well as some of the books in which the sword smith's name appear.
Our comment on this book is that the book is too cluttered and very difficult to read, and compared with the Kawaguchi book, it is very disorganized. It seems like the publisher or the author was trying to see how much he could put on one page and did not care what the reader would go through in trying to look for the name of a swordsmith. Also, the price is a little high for a book of this nature.

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