NIHONTO NEWSLETTER
APRIL, 1968
VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

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, 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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Dear Readers

We have already come to our 4th Issue, and to date we have had a few suggestions such as:

1.make the Newsletter a little smaller than the size of the average magazine so that it will fit in book cases.

2.cover swords of lesser swordsmiths whose works are found in more abundance among the general collectors in the West.

In answer to the firstst query, we realize this now, however having started with this size, we would like to stay with it for at least the first year.

As to the 2nd query, we will cover such blades in the due course of time in future issues, therefore please bear with us.

To this end, we beg for your support of our Newsletter in the form of articles and other pertinent suggestions, and from others who are not yet our readers, in the form of subscriptions.

We have less than 20 subscriptions to date, therefore the more readers we have the more it will help enable us to continue publication of this Newsletter. After this issue, we will be working in the "red" and will be for the rest of the year unless we can find a sponsor.

Consequently, the number of pages might suffer slightly, although we intend to keep the newsletter between 35 to 40 pages.

Rest assured, the materials contained will be of the same caliber as we have had up to now.

Thanking you again for your support, we are

The Editor

HISTORY OF THE JAPANESE SWORD

MID-KAMAKURA PERIOD

Shokyu I (1219) to Kenji 3 (1277)

During this period, the Yamashiro Province smiths became even more active, and the Awataguchi smiths alone had sent six brothers to Emperor Gotoba's villa.
In another part of Kyoto there emerged the Ayanokoji School which was founded by Sadatoshi.

The Rai School was founded by Kuniyuki, who was followed by such greats as the Niji Kunitoshi and Rai Kunitoshi. Kuniyuki reportedly was an expatriate from the Korean Peninsula and brought with him his skills in the art of sword making, and all of these smiths contributed to the glory of the Yamashiro Smiths.

The blades at this time were about 2 Shaku 7 to 8 Sun long, and in general become slightly wider. The blades had much "niku" adding grace to the blades. The swords are thick with the shinogi a little high, and the curvature of the sori was beautifully executed. The blades are tachi style with torii sori and with a great deal of fumbari, and tapering to a very exquisitely shaped kissaki.
If any hi were present, they were carved high into the ko-shinogi.

A few other types of carvings or horimono are found such as Bonji and Suken.
The nakago will be a little long and will have sori, and the nakago jiri will be rounded.
The different styles of hamon made by the Yamashiro smiths are: suguha hotsure; suguha-kochoji; midare with ko-midare and ashi; ko-choji midare; and suguha-choji midare,

There will be an abundance of extremely fine nie which results in inazuma, kinsuji, uchinoke and nijuba.

The boshi, in almost all cases, are shallow or narrow, and the kaeri will be very small or slight.
The boshi point is komaru, and can show nie kuzure, yakizume and kaen.

The steel, having been well forged, in almost all cases will have ko-mokume hada. Since there are ji-nie, chikei is found in abundance, and this is known as Yamashiro yubashiri. The Yamashiro smiths took pride in their nie and it is found all over the blade on the hamon as well as in the ji.

Bizen Province produced many excellent smiths in the previous Heian Period and this was carried over into Early Kamakura and Mid-Kamakura period as well, and especially in this last period, the Bizen smiths seem to suddenly "glow".

The blades which the Bizen smiths made during the Heian Period and the Early Kamakura Period are popularly known as Ko-Bizen, and it is not, in the true sense, the Bizen tradition, but rather has certain characteristics seen in the Yama-

shiro tradition. However, in the Mid-Kamakura Period, it becomes independent of this influence and comes into its own.

Although the Fukuoka Ichimonji School with such masters as Norimune and Sukemune did work in the Early Kamakura period, smiths from the Ichimonji School are not regarded as having worked under a Yamashiro influence. Actually, they can be considered as the beginning of the true Bizen tradition. Both Norimune and Sukemune are known for their great skill in making splendid prominent nioi which is the trademark of the Bizen smiths, and the nioi they developed has not been matched since.

We would venture to say that Norimune and Sukemune are the ultimate in Japanese swordsmiths, and that there has been no equal to them before or since. Other smiths in Bizen Province at this time are Mitsutada, the founder of the Osafune smiths, followed by Nagamitsu, and Moriie of Hatakeda, Unji and Unjo of Ukai to name only a few who all made contributions to the glory of the Biden tradition. Bizen Province has produced so many swordsmiths in its various neighborhoods that it is a little troublesome to clearly pinpoint each of them, but by and large they follow pretty much the common rules of the Bizen tradition. Nevertheless, the characteristics of each school must be clearly established to properly identify each smith.

Roughly there are two distinct types of swords in the Bizen tradition, one is the true Bizen tradition, and the other is the Bizen tradition with influences from other schools. The characteristics of the true Bizen tradition and smiths who worked in this style are described below.

During any period in any part of Japan, a certain amount of political influence is felt, in the manner of living, by the types of martial art seen in warfare, etc. However, in Bizen Province this type of change was never much in evidence. From the pre-Heian Period on, Bizen Province was something akin to the present Osaka, that is, it was one of the centers of commerce, and as such, smiths here made blades that could be appreciated by anyone during that period since the Bizen blades are never overly "stylistic".

The shape never shows too much sori, the width of the blade is never too narrow or wide, it is neither too thick or thin, the width of the yakiba is never too wide or too narrow. In another word everything is “koroai” or "just right".

Characteristics of Bizen blades:
1. the yakiba is in nioi.
2. the jitetsu has a feeling of softness.
3. Blades are heat treated to have utsuri.

However, to break this down:
1. Hamon: choji midare or midare.
2. Boshi: the pattern of the yakiba is midarekomi or a continuation of the hamon.
3. Yakihaba: the width of the yakiba is the same throughout the length of the blade (there will be exceptions in any tradition or school)
4. There are no marked differences in the size and shape of the midare pattern, and the pattern of the yakiba does not differ too creatively from the machi to the point.

To break down the above by smiths:
1. O-choji Midare in the Kamakura Period is seen in the work of

Fukuoka Ichimonji and Junkei Nagamitsu

2. Saka choji midare in the Kamakura Period is seen in the work by
Katayama Ichimonji

3. Choji Midare:
Seen from the Kamakura period into the Yoshino and Muromachi periods.
In the Kamakura period, seen in work from Yoshioka Ichimonii. After
the Muromachi period, in the work of Morimitsu, Yasumitsu, and Norimitsu.

4. Midareba with wide valleys; seen in the Sengoku Period in the work of Sukesada
and other Eisho Bizen smiths.

Bizen Tradition with outside Influences: these are smiths who made
1. Narrow yakiba in the Yamashiro tradition, Ko-Bizen smiths, Nagamitsu,
Kagemitsu, Sanenaga, Soshu Ichimonji, Kunimune, Ukai smiths, Motoshige,
Chikakage, Omiya smiths, Yoshii smiths, Tadamitsu.
2. Width of the yakiba has variations, and there are kawazuko choji:
Ichimonji Sukezane, Mitsutada, Nagamitsu, Kagehide, and Moriie.

These characteristics are seen only in Bizen Province.

The Mid-Kamakura Period tachi style in the true Bizen tradition is described as:
The length of the blade is about 2 Shaku 7-8 Sun, or a little longer. There is a strong koshizori and strong fumbari. The width of the blade becomes a little wider than in the previous early Kamakura and Heian Periods.
There is a strong impression of the blade being very sturdy and strong, and at the same time still retaining the elegance and grace of the previous period. There is a lot of hiraniku. The kissaki becomes more stubby. The hi are carved well up into the koshinogi, but other types of horimono are rare. The nakago is long and with sori, pretty much the same as in the early Kamakura Period. The width of the Yakiba becomes somewhat wider and is in nioi.

Variations in the width of the yakiba are not too noticeable and the size of the midare pattern is uniform. There are dense nioi and they appear “milky white”.
The pattern of the hamon has o-choji midare or saka choji midare with inazuma and kinsuji seen in abundance, especially in the area below the yokote.
The boshi is midarekomi ending in yakizume, or there are small midare patterns with ashi.
The jitetsu is well forged which results in ko-mokume hada with o-hada in places. Chikei and ji-utsuri are seen.

Characteristics of the Bizen Tradition with outside influences are as follows. Sukezane of Fukuoka Ichimonji who later went to Kamakura and came to be known as Kamakura Ichimonji, along with Osafune Mitsutada, Junkei Nagamitsu, Kagehide and Hatakeda Moriie all have variations in the width of the yakiba which have choji midare and kawazuko choji midare.
The so-called Osafune Sansaku is comprised of Sakon Shogen Nagamitsu, Kagemitsu and Sanenaga. At a glance, the work of all three resembles a Yamashiro

blade, and the same can be said for the work of other smiths like Kunimune, Unjo, Motoshige, Chikakage, the Omiya-smiths, Yoshii smiths, and Tadamitsu.
Nagamitsu made Suguha choji midare or ko-midare with pointed peaks on the midare waves. Kagemitsu made suguha choji midare and kataotochi gunome. Sanenaga made narrow suguha choji midare hamon with the edge or border of the hamon having a very distinct line or appearance.

The above three smiths are commonly called the Osafune Sansaku and a characteristic of these three smiths is found in their boshi which are all similar to just above the yokote, and then abruptly become narrow and close to the cutting edge. This is known as the Sansaku Boshi.

In Kunimune's work, the hamon starts out in a ko-choji ko-midare pattern and as it proceeds towards the kissaki it becomes suguha and rather dreary looking.

In the work of the Ukai smiths we see suguha with saka midare.

In the work of Soshu Ichimonji we see ko-choji ko-midare. In the work of the Yoshii smiths, we see a uniform ko-gunome.

The constant struggles between the clans during this time brought forth some changes in sword making. The swords they had been using up till this time were not found to be suitable, and some changes were called for. One of these changes is seen in the ikkubi kissaki. The Ikubi Kissaki can be called a true representative style of the Kamakura Period.

There is saying that "there is no poor blade with an Ikubi kissaki", and certainly this is true, because all of the smiths working during the mid Kamakura Period who made blades with an ikkubi kissaki are all outstanding smiths.
In their original lengths, blades were about 3 shaku long, and some were well over that, but those we encounter today have all been shortened. The blade is wide and there is no marked difference in the width at a glance, that is, there is not much of a difference in the widths at the machi area and the yokote area.

The sori is very pronounced and will seem especially strong around the mono-uchi area.

The blades are thick and there is a great deal of "niku" or "meat" at the hamon boundary. this peculiar "meaty" thickness is known as a "hamaguri ba", where hamaguri means clam, i.e. the blade cross section might remind one of a clam. The shinogi is high and the shinogi ji is narrow. The purpose
of this type of blade was to cut through tough and hard objects such as the type of armor that was developed during that time. Since the armor was developed to a high degree, weapons able to deal with the new type of armor became necessary. The kissaki is very stubby.

The impression that the Samurai of old received from this type of kissaki was that it reminded them of the head of a boar, which resulted in the name ikubi kissaki:
I = boar, kubi = head.

The hi or grooves are carved well up into the ko-shinogi.

SWORDSMITHS

Yamashiro Province: Gojo Kanenaga
ca. Chogen Era, 1208

One of the students under Sanjo Munechika, Arikuni, had a son Kaninaga, who is

the founder of this school. This school lasted for only two generations and there are only about a half a dozen smiths listed.

The founder, Kanenaga, is quite famous for some of the works he left us, although none of his works have been nominated to the national treasure class. There are two blades of Kanenaga which have been classified as Juyo Bunkazai, and both are in private collections.

The Tokugawa shogunate had the Kyoho Meibutsu Cho written to catalog its swords. The Ashikaga had the Higashiyama Gyobutsu, and the Hojos had their own list of famous blades. However, there is no mention of Kanenaga in any of these lists, and by this we can see that Kanenaga must not have been well thought of which still seems to be the case to this day,

As we can see, there is a lack of fine blades by this smith in such groupings as national treasure blades. There are none in temples or shrines which have been famous since ancient times.

Having seen very few blades by this smith, only two in fact, and though this is not enough to form an opinion on any one smith, we list here Kanenaga's characteristics based on what we have seen and what we have been taught in the Honami school.

Kanenaga worked in the Yamashiro Tradition and in the Bizen Tradition

Tachi

Shape: Tachi style from the Heian Period, but the sori is not as large. The kasane is a little thick giving the blade a very graceful appearance.

Carvings: On rare occasions, koshi hi are seen on the shinogi ji above the machi.

Hamon: Made in two distinct styles: narrow and koroai (just right). In both cases, they have nie and suguha choji midare, and ko-choji midare with an abundance of nie. The nie will be clustered around the nioi within the ha to form ashi. The hamon starts out rather narrow at the machi. The hamon border is very distinct and not diffused, which is a result of the nie clustering together to form inazuma and kinsuji.
Swords in the Bizen style have a choji midare pattern and will be in nioi, but nie will be seen, with nioi being the main feature.

Boshi: Komaru with nie kuzure with very little kaeri.
The nie here will be abundant and look like it has overflowed into the ji. The choji midare hamon do not have as much nie.

Jitetsu and hada: The hada is a komokuke hada, and is the result of the steel having been well forged. There are abundant ji nie which results in yubashiri and chikei.

Nakago: signed Kanenaga

FAMOUS SWORDS IN JAPANESE HISTORY

INSTALLMENT NO. 3

Dojikiri Yatsutsuna

Yasutsuna of Ohara in Hoki Province (Shimane Prefecture) is the maker of this blade and it probably is one of the most famous of all swords throughout the entire history of the Japanese sword.

The tale told about this blade and how it came to be called Dojikiri is very interesting. It has been written about in many books, including the Kyoho Meibutsu Cho where it is covered in Book II.

The Kyoho Meibutsu Cho entry is:

Owner: Matsudaira Echigo no Kami
Meibutsu: Dojikiri Yasutsuna
length; 2 Shaku 6 Sun 6 Bu

It has been said that Minamoto Raiko with this blade slew a bandit with supernatural powers in Oeiyama in Tango Province.

It belonged to Lord Hideyoshi. When Lady Takada was wedded into the Echizen family, this blade went with her as her dowery and was given to Lord Tadanao, and then was handed down to his eldest son Mitsunaga.

It is very well made and does not resemble the Yasutsuna blades we usually see. It was compared to the Ishida Masamune, and the Masamune looked somewhat inferior alongside this blade, and this was the opinion expressed by all of the Honami present.

The blade was sent to Saburobei at Hirokoji, and on that morning many foxes were seen going from Sujichigai Bridge along the Taninaka Road towards Uero. This was because the Dojikiri was coming.

Few explanations are necessary to explain what is writen in the Meibutsu Cho. The tale concerning the Doiikiri and Minamoto Raito is as follows:
A band of bandits in Oeiyama in Tamba Province had been harassing the populace in that district, and so the government in Kyoto sent Minamoto Raiko and his lieutenants to subdue them. Raiko is said to have cut off the head of the Shutendoji (bandit chief) with this blade.

Minamoto Raiko was one of the very early Minamoto who supposedly was born in 949 and died in 1021. Minamoto Mitsunaka (died 997) had three sons, Raiko, Yorichika and Yorinobu.

Raiko founded the Tada Genji. Yorinobu founded the Kawachi Genji from which all of the later Minamoto families descended, such as the Kai Genji, Satake, Takeda, Hiraga, Nitta, Ashikaga, and the Yoshiie lineage which later produced the Kamakura Shogunate.

A few old texts list the Dojikiri as having been originally owned by Sakanoue Tamaramaro (died 811) who offered this sword to the Grand Shrine at Ise from which it was taken and given to Raiko for his expedition to fight the bandits.
This story may be the fabrication of a writer in the Tokugawa Period who wrote about this in the Meijin Taizen and the Kantei Kaden.

Much of sword history with these early dates is very doubtful, and may be the result of someone's imagination.

The reason why Hidetada's daughter is called lady Takada is that she married into the Matsudaira of Takada of Echizen Province. The Doiikiri Yasutsuna went with her as her dowery and it was riven to Mitsunaga, and later handed down in the Matsudaira family until shortly after the end of WWII.

Hidetada is the second son of Tokugawa Ieyasu and became the 2nd Tokugawa Shogun.

The part which states "upon the marriage to Echizen Takada", refers to the 3rd daughter of Hidetada who married Matsudaira Tadanao, son of Hideyasu. Hideyasu is a brother of Shogun Hidetada and founded the Echizen Matsudaira, Therefore, it means that first cousins married. This 3rd daughter of Hidetada and wife of Tadanao later moved and lived at Takada in Echizen and hence was called Lady Takada.

Tadanao supposedly became mentally deranged and was banished to Kyushu. Echizen Province, therefore, was given to Tadanao's younger brother Tadamasa. Tadanao's son Mitsunaga was given the smaller Takada district of Echizen. The Matsudaira of Tsuyama of Mimasaka Province is this same family.

"It was seen with the Ishida". This Ishida refers to the Ishida Masamune.

Ishida here refers to Ishida Mitsunari, one of the generals under Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Mitsunari gave this Masamune to Hideyasu.
The rest of the Meibutsucho text is self-explanatory.

This Dojikiri Yasutsuna is one of the most famous blades, historically, and one of the very few blades by Yasutsuna existing intact.
Yasutsuna lived in Ohara hamlet in Hoki Province, which today is Shimane and Tottori Prefectures. It is said that Yasutsuna was born in the 20th Year of Tempyo (748) and died at age 63 in 2nd Year of Konin (811). Yasutsuna is supposed to have been active around the Daido Era, 805-810. But if the date for Yasutsuna having died in 811 is correct, then this seems a little odd. One would think that between 30 to about 45 years old, he would have been in the prime of life in ancient times which then would then mean that he would have been active around 780 to about 790. Be that as it may. There were a few swordsmiths who were supposed to have been active around this early date, however aside from Yasutsuna and his son Sanemori, there are no blades known to exist. A few blades attributed to Amakuni are seen from time to time, as well as from other smiths dated prior to Yasutsuna, but all are of very doubtful origin, and so Yasutsuna and his son are probably the only smiths whose works are known from this early date.

A general description of Yasutsuna's work is:
There is a toriizori, although koshizori work is seen at times.
There will be fumbari. The sori is shallow and the blade is wide.
The shinogi is high and there is very little hiraniku.
The kissaki is a chu-kissaki, but it is long for a blade from this early period. The hamon is in nie and is suguha with ko-choji midare and ko-midare, and will have abundant nioi mixed with the nie.

The nie will cluster around the nioi to form ashi. Hataraki within the hamon is very much in evidence, it being very “hanayaka” (beautiful, georgeous, showy).

On the whole, the blade does not look like one from the early Heian Period.

The width of the hamon is not even, and the hada visible in the ha will show details such as inazuma and kinsuji. The nie are a little rough or coarse. Sunagashi are seen which appear to be niesake (bright black nie).

The description of the Dojikiri Yasutsuna is:
Shinogi tsukuri with ihori mune. There is a small kissaki, and there is a koshizori. The hada is ko-itame and there are chikei. There are ji-nie and midare utsuri.

The hamon is ko-midare with ashi and abundant nie and kinsuji. At the start of the hamon there is a yaki otoshi. The nakago is ubu. The boshi has a komaru with very little kaeri.

It is signed Yasutsuna.

The blade was sold by the Matsudaira shortly after WII and was owned by a private collector for a number of years, however this collector offered the blade for sale and it was bought by the government and is presently owned by the state.

KYOHO MEIBUTSU CHO

4th installment

Owner: Matsudaira Kaga no Kami
Meibutsu: Maeda Toshiro

The blade is signed
Length: 8 Sun 1 Bu
Value: 5000 Kan

This was once owned by Maeda Magoshiro whose son Sanzaemon gave it to Kaga Saisho. Magoshiro is the 2nd son of Lord Toshinaga and is the ancestor of the present day's Maeda Omi no Kami.

Imamura Comment: simply states that he saw it.

Yamanaka Note:

There is some misinformation here.
Maeda Magoshiro was the 2nd son of Maeda Toshiie of Kaga Province. Toshiie is the founder of the Kaga Maeda (1537-99). Magoshiro was the younger brother of Toshinaga and he had another given name of Toshimasa.

He ruled Noto Province (Ishikawa Prefecture) from Nanao where he had his castle. Toyotomi Hideyoshi gave him the surname of Hashiba. During the Battle of Sekigahara, Toshimasa joined forces with Ishida Mitsunari and attacked his elder brother's castle, and for this, after the defeat of the Toyotomi forces, Toshimasa's holdings wore confiscated and he went into hiding by disguising himself as a commoner and lived in Kyoto. He had several sons, one of whom, Sanzaemon Naoyuki, served the main family in Kaga, and had the title of Maeda Omi no Kami. The second son was named Toshiyuki Shurinosuke, and the third son was named Toshimitsu and was adopted by his uncle Toshinaga and was a member of the main family. The 4th son Toshitaka, served the Tokugawa and received 10,000 Koku at

Hichikaichi in Kazusa Province. He was given the title Maeda Yamato no Kami. The 5th son was named Toshisada, and his title was Bizen no Kami. All had many offspring. This blade is still in the Maeda Collection. It has been nominated for Juyo Bunkazai.

Owner: Gyobutsu

Meibutsu: Shumei Toshiro

length: 8 Sun
value: 300 Mai
There are horimono of gomabashi on both sides. On the omote side of the nakago, Toshiro is written as a shumei.

This was once owned by Sakai Uta no Kami from whom the shogunate purchased it. On the 13th of September, the Year of the Dragon in Genroku 13 when the shogun Tsunayoshi visited the Mito Mansion, it was given to Mito Saisho.
In the Year of the Dragon, the 3rd Year of Kyoho, as a legacy of Chunagon Tsunaeda it was given back to the Shogunate.

There are no Inamura Comments.

Yamanaka Note:
Sakai Uta no Kami Tadakiyo served the 4th Shogun Ietsuna as Chief Minister and wielded much power.
At the time when Tsunayoshi became the 5th Shogun, Sakai voiced an objection to his selection, after which Tsunayoshi held a grudge against him. After Tsunayoshi became the 5th shogun, Sakai was forced to give up his position of Minister, and he died shortly thereafter. There are several versions concerning his death: one says that he died a natural death, while another says that he committed suicide.
Mito Saisho referred to here is the 2nd son of Mito Tokugawa Yorifusa or Mitsukuni, is better known as Seizan Komon or Mito Komon. Tsunaeda is the son of Mitsukuni's elder brother Matsudaira Sanuki no Kami Shireyori and was adopted by Mitsukuni. The present whereabouts of this blade is not known to us.

Owner: The Owari clan
Meibutsu: Mumei Toshiro
length: 8 Sun 7 Bu
value: unknown

This blade is unsigned, hence the name.
Long ago, it was appraised as a Rai Kunitoshi and at the time belonged to Ikoma Sanuki no Kami Masatoshi.

Kotoku appraised it as it is listed above.
As the legacy of Masatoshi it was left to Lord Hidetada.
On the lst Year of Genna (1663), on his return from Kyoto, it was given to the Owari of Nagoya.

There are no Imamura comments.

Yamanaka Note:
The Ikoma Sanuki no Kami mentioned here refers to Uta no Kami Chikamasa's son Kazumasa.
During the reign of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Uta no Kami ruled Sanuki Province with 173,000 Koku and was one of the three elder Ministers.
During the Battle of Sekigahara, he sided with Tokugawa Ieyasu after which Ieyasu rewarded him with the entire province of Sanuki.
Kazumasa's other son Masatoshi, sided with Ishida Mitsunari of the Toyotomi, and attacked Hosokawa Yusai at Tanabe in Tango Province (this was before the Hosokawa went to Kyushu, and eventually to Higo Province after the Tokugawa took power). However, Masatoshi was not punished or reprimanded for this deed due to his father's position as well as to his father's meritorious deeds for the Tokugawa. Kazumasa died at the age of 36 in Keicho 15 (1610) and what is mentioned in the text as a legacy of Sanuki no Kami and presented to Hidetada refers to this incident. It was not a legacy of Masatoshi, but of Kazumasa. That Masatoshi died on the 6th of Genna (1620) "after his return from Kyoto on Genna 1" is questionable

because this is the same year in which the Osaka Summer Battle was fought, therefore it may be that "on his return from Osaka, he stopped off in Nagoya".
This blade is still in the Owari Tokugawa Collection in the Reimeikai Foundation.
The Owari Tokugawa records say this blade was a possession of Gongensama. The Founder, Yoshinao, received it from Gongensama in Nagoya in the Year of the Boar, August 24th.
Gongensama refers to Ieyasu. Yoshinao, the founder of the Owari Tokugawa was the 9th offspring of Ieyasu. The Year of the Boar in the Genna Era was 1623. There is a slight error here also. Ieyasu died in 1616 or in Genna 2, therefore this must refer to the 2nd Tokugawa Shogun Hidetada. Or it may be that the year stated may have been different and Yoshinao very well could have gotten it from Gongensama.
The detailed description of this blade is as follows:
Length: 8 sun " 7 bu, or 10 3/8 inches long.
The sori is uchizori
The width at the Machi is 8 Bu and the kasane at the machi is 3 Bu.
The length of the Nakago is 3 Sun 9 Bu.
Made in Hiratzukuri style with a shin no mune (mitsumune). It is uchizori and a little thick. The hada is ko-itame and very tightly forged with an abundance of ji-nie. The hamon is suguha and there is some komidare mixed in. Around the fukura the komidare becomes nie kuzure.
The blade, as a whole, has nie with very dense nioi.
The boshi is komaru and the tip has hakikake which ends in kaen. The nakago is ubu and the tip kurijiri. The file marks (yasurime) are sagari.
The mune is flat and there are two mekugi ana and no signature. Along with the

Atsushi Toshiro, covered in the first installment, this blade is one of the very thick blades made by Yoshimitsu.

NIHONTO: DEFINITIONS AND NOMENCLATURE

In looking at a sword, it goes without saying that the shape is very important. However, the feature that catches the observer's eye first is usually the hamon. The hamon comes in various forms and shapes, but it boils down to two things which are the basis of the hamon in Japanese swords. That is, it is made in nie and nioi. The metallurgical terms used to describe this are ferrite, pearlite, sorbite, troostite, martensite, austenite and cementite, which are the terms used to describe the different types of steel crystal structures present in steel.

In the study of the Japanese sword, these features are divided into the two terms “nie” and “nioi”. Nie crystal are formed when the blade is tempered at a high temperature, and nioi forms at a slightly lower heat.

Basically, the use of nie and nioi in the Japanese sword is described as follows: nie is used by smiths who followed the Yamashiro tradition, Yamato tradition, Soshu tradition, Mino tradition, and Bizen tradition.

Nioi is seen in the work of smiths in the Mino tradition and Bizen tradition.

By “tradition”, we mean the smiths who followed these traditions or methods or styles, so that aside from the above mentioned five traditions or provinces, smiths from other places can be traced to or associated with these five traditions.

It is essential for one to recognize the different types or appearances of nie, how they occur, and its qualities, poor or good. The differentiation of nie, and whether it is good or bad, directly tells us whether a blade is good or bad.

We list here the names of the various types of nie and how they occur.

Suguha nie is seen in blades by smiths who tempered the hamon of their blade to be suguha. The nie on suguha blades is rougher or larger inside of the hamon and as one looks towards the habuchi, that is the edge or border of the hamon with the ji, the nie gradually become smaller and finer and more delicate, and the overall appearance becomes refined (this is not true on all suguha blades.) This is a rule for smiths who made suguha hamon.

With a blade with suguha, and with nie, the first thing or the first smiths who come to one's mind are the smiths of the Yamashiro tradition, that is the smiths of Yamashiro Province led by the oldest, Sanjo Munechika during the Heian Period. Then there are the Awataguchi, Rai Kunitoshi and Ryokai, although Ryokai's blades do not have as much nie as Kunitoshi’s.

Of the Awataguchi smiths, Kuniyoshi was very skilled at making this type of hamon although other Awataguchi smiths also made them. However, Kuniyoshi was the one who most faithfully followed this style.

Kuniyoshi's suguha is the most gentle of all the Awataguchi smith's suguha. In the Shinto Period, there is Tadayoshi of Hizen Province who was the greatest of the smiths in that period as far as suguha is concerned.

Of course, there are a great many others during the Koto period as well as in the Shinto period who made their blades in suguha, but those we listed above made their blades with suguha in nie as just discussed.

Midare Nie

Midare nie is found on blades in which the hamon is midare, and it is exactly the opposite from nie found on suguha blades

That is, the nie within the hamon are very small, gentle and delicate, and the nie at the habuchi or the border of the hamon become rough and large, and this rough nie extends into the Ji and forms ji-nie in many cases.

For this reason, the habuchi or the hamon boundary on the blade is very “hanayaka”, that is very gay, exuberant, and splendid.

The sword polisher, in one of the last stages of the polish will rub "nugui" (finely ground iron oxide in choji oil) on the blade. After the nugui application the ji will become much darker. However, since the hamon is in midare, the polisher cannot control the entire area of the ji and some areas of the ji will
extend down into the hamon. As a result, the polisher then uses hazuya to make the hamon appear white, and depending on the polisher, the width of the Hamon will vary: that is, an able polisher will give the hamon the proper width, whereas an incompetent polisher cannot give the hamon the proper finish that it should have since he does not know how to properly apply the nugui he is using.
With midare nie, this finishing step becomes quite difficult for the polisher, that is, since polishing the edge or the border of the hamon and the ji with hazuya stones, use of the hazuya must be completely controlled to highlight or emphasize the real hamon, and a skilled polisher will be able to do this, in which case the very important nie at the habuchi will be visible and apparent. However, an incompetent polisher will make the nie unclear or murky where it is most important.
Therefore, in looking at a newly polished blade, if one looks carefully, this difference is very much in evidence: the dark and the light or white areas of the new polish could be intermingled (i.e. the areas of the ha and ji might not be distinct).

POLISHING

One often encounters blades with a polish so poor that we are taken aback. The work of an incompetent polisher could render a blade worthless. On the other hand, a good polisher will make the blade look good, although not necessarily better.
The sorry state of affairs is that there are very few good polishers working today, but there are more than enough polishers who could ruin a good blade. Just like with anything else, one always gets good work when one pays the price (providing that one knows something about it), but this is not always the case. Polishers are known to charge exorbitant prices --- and we could name a few!

What then constitutes a good polish and what is a poor polish?

1) An incompetent polisher will ruin the shape of the sword.
(once the shape of the blade is lost, then that blade is gone, period).
And no matter who subsequently tries to restore it, this will be a lost cause. If the "niku" of the blade is removed from an early Kamakura blade, one can just imagine how bad that blade will look.

2) One often encounters a blade whose ha has been polished down to above the level of the nakago edge. A good polisher will never do this, he does not have to, and no matter how hard he tries, his polishing will never result in this extreme alteration of the shape. It is the result of very poor planning in polishing. When the polisher is first given a blade, there will be some instructions from the owner of the blade as to how the polishing is to be done. But also, the polisher must look very carefully at the blade and make a plan as to what he must do with that blade; where to be careful; where not to take off too much steel; if a rust spot is excessively large in a certain area, he must plan to take that rust off, but not remove too much steel so that the finished product will not look poor or defective at that particular spot.

3) We have seen a blade with two (2) shinogi Lines (!!), and when we first saw this blade, we could not believe our eyes. We thought we were imagining something, but that blade did indeed have two shinogi lines. This is an example of poor polishing at its worst. Probably in the entire history of sword polishing, past, present, and future, I do not think there will be anyone capable of repeating this feat.

4) On the above mentioned blade, the polisher had added two yokote lines on the blade to boot, adding insult to injury to the owner of the blade as well as to the blade.
5) One also encounters when looking at the nioi line, a hamon and ji with a very distinct border. Sometimes, there is a large extension into the ji area up from the hamon. Since the steel in the hamon is much harder than that in the ji, a blade in the hands of a poor polisher will have the softer steel of the ji area removed much faster than the harder steel in the hamon when this section is polished, and in the hands of an incompetent polisher, this feat is very easy. One of the fine points of good polish is to keep this dividing area (the nioiguchi) even and uniform.

6) A poor polisher uses excess water, and when this is done, the result is evident in the finished blade, for it soon begins to rust. Having used too much water, the water seeps in between the layers of steel, and later this will produce rust. No matter how often one changes the oil after the fresh polish, rust will form and there will be no cure for this because the water is underneath the oil. If the polishing was done during the wet season. then this will be a lost cause. During the dry season one has a better chance of saving the blade.

7) In looking at a blade while holding it at an angle to a light source, the hasaki (the cutting edge of the sword) might be wavy, and this is another example of a poor polish.

8) If looking at a blade aimed at a light source, the haniku (i.e. niku) is uneven, this is another sign of a poor polish.

However, one of the things which one looks for in a blade is the quality of the steel, in both the ha and ji.

An incompetent polisher, since he does not know how to properly use jizuya and/or hazuya, will produce a finished product that will be vastly different from what it should look like.

This polishing stage is one of the most tedious and time consuming, and a lazy polisher (i.e., a poor polisher) often skips this process, and where he should spend

many hours at it, he will spend only a few hours. If the jizuya and hazuya have not been used properly then the quality and details within the steel remain hidden. One of the main objects in looking at a Japanese sword is the enjoyment one gets out of examining at the steel, and of seeing the many changes in the surface from the very beginning at the machi to the very tip of the kissaki, and if the quality or properties of the steel have not been brought out and are visible, then it remains just another blade.

The inability of a polisher to use stones, and use the correct ones at each stage of polishing, starts from the very beginning. In each stage of using the stones, the grinding marks (“toishi-me”) made by the previous stone must be removed completely by the next succeeding stone, and if even a tiny toishi-me or scratch is left and the polisher proceeds to the next stone, then that mark or scratche will be left there up to the very last step of the polishing process.

The use of stones in polishing is basically making a series of scratches on the steel, and removing these scratches made by one stone with the succeeding stone, and repeatedly going from one stone to the next, which continues for about 12 or 13 steps.

Consequently, if a scratch from a stone is not removed entirely at each stage, that scratch will be difficult to remove later, and this is what happens in the hands of an incompetent polisher.

A good polisher does exactly the opposite of all the points listed above. A blade in the hands of a competent polisher, if that blade is to be weighed before the polish and afterwards, one will notice that there is hardly any difference in the weight.

On the other hand, a blade weighed before going to a poor polisher and weighed afterwards will show a great difference in weight, meaning that the polisher has taken off much more steel than necessary.

So, the conclusion is, it pays to have a good polish done by a top polisher. It will be expensive but then what isn’t expensive these days, especially when one expects top quality work from a top craftsman. A polisher often expects the owner of the sword to tell them how that sword is to be polished (of course it takes time for a student of swords to reach the point where he has gained enough knowledge of swords to be able to instruct a polisher), but this is one of the things that helps improve the abilities of the polisher, for if that polisher is not told what the owner would like, or no demands are made of him, his skill remains at a certain level and he never improves.

Of the great number of sword polishers working today, there is only one person we feel, to whom one can safely entrust a sword, say of a national treasure caliber. That polisher in Ono Kokei. Ono was employed by the Education Ministry to polish the many blades that the government owns. Today he has relinquished that position and has his own polishing shop where he has four students along with his son who has become quite good in the recent years.

Ono was one of the best of the many students Honami Koson had. Those that will follow Ono with the skills to deal with top quality blades are probably Nagayama and Hirai. Other than the above, one finds good and indifferent craftsmen, but no artists.

HISTORICAL FIGURES IN JAPANESE HISTORY

AND THEIR FAMOUS SWORDS

MIYAMOTO MUSASHI

Musashi’s prowess and the many battles and duels fought by this famous swordsman are well known to the many who have read about him or who have seen the movies made about him. However, his other feats in the art world, such as his tsuba making ability, his carvings of Buddhist figures, his fuchi-kashira, his paintings, and his calligraphy, as well as his writings, as diverse and as extensive as they are, are less well known, especially among Westerners.

A number of examples of his art work still exist today. His most famous painting is that of a kingfisher on a dead branch, in a hanging scroll. This painting is often reproduced in books on Japanese painting. Two other works, relatively unknown to Westerners, are two screens; one with geese and the other with a Bodhidarma. All of his paintings were made under his art name of Niten. Musashi is best known for his many duels, of which he is supposed to have fought over 60 during his lifetime. Musashi is said to have devoted his life to polishing his swordmanship. He was born Shinmen Musashi in Tensho 12 (1584) in Miyamoto village in Yoshino Gun, Mimasaka Province (in Okayama Prefecture). His father was Shinmen Munisai. He learned swordsmanship from his father and developed the art of the Nito Ryu (fighting with the daisho) later. He is said to have fought his first duel at 13 years of age against an expert swordsman named Arima Kihei of Harima Province (in Hyogo Prefecture) and defeated him. When he was 16, he fought another famous swordsman called Akiyama of Tajima Province (in Hyogo Prefecture) and defeated him.

During the battle of Sekigahara, he sided with the Ukita on the Toyotomi side. Later he served the Kuroda of Chikuzen Province. When he was 21 years old, he left the Kuroda and went to Kyoto and fought a duel with Yoshioka Seijuro. The Yoshioka were the fencing instructors to the Ashikaga Shogunate and were a famous fencing family. In this duel, Musashi is said to have fought with a wooden sword against Yoshioka's steel sword and cut him down on the first stroke.

Musashi also fought the younger brother Denishichiro who was trying to avenge his elder brother Seijuro, and Musashi killed him too. Seijuro's son Matashichiro thereupon challenged Musashi after being urged to do so by many of the Yoshioka students, and fought with a large force at Ichijoii (a little north of Kyoto). Musashi killed Matashichiro and a number of the Yoshioka students as well.

On April of Keicho 17 (1612) he fought Sasaki Kojiro, who had been serving Hosokawa Tadaoki as a fencing instructor at Ogura in Buzen Province (in Fukuoka Prefecture). The popular belief that this duel was to avenge his father's death is an error.

In this duel, he fought Sasaki with a wooden sword he shaped out of an oar in the small boat which a fisherman had used to take him to the dueling site at Funajima. Sasaki is said to have fought with a tachi by Osafune Nagamitsu which was well over three shaku long. Some versions say the Sasaki blade was made by Mino’s Seki Magoroku Kanemoto. Musashi won this duel too.

On the 9th Year of Kanei (1632) Hosokawa Tadaoki moved from Kokura in Fukuoka to Kumamoto in Higo Province, and on Kanei 11 (1634) Musashi, along with his adopted son Iyori, became guests of the Hosokawa. On the 14th Year of Kanei (1631) Musashi fought for the Hosokawa forces in the Battle of Shimabara (the Christian uprising).

After the death of Hosokawa Tadaoki, he gave up everything of a worldly nature except for his fencing instructor position to the Hosokawa, and engaged himself in writing poems, drawing, and producing metal work. He died in 1645 at 62. Musashi is said to have been over 6 feet tall, which was very tall for a Japanese at the time. During his lifetime, he is said to have never taken a bath or combed his hair and his hair was supposed to have been hanging down to his shoulders constantly. He left many writings, and the most famous are the 35 Articles of Swordsmanship and the Go Rin-no-sho.

Of his many artistic feats, he was very adept with a carving knife. On his way to the small island of Funashima where he fought Sasaki Kojiro, he carved or whittled a sword out of a boat oar with his tanto in the short time it took to get from the shore to the island.

This wooden sword (bokuto) has a very interesting history.
Sometime back, one of the T.V. stations in Tokyo did some research on Musashi for a TV show. The research staff went all over Japan and found 6 of these wooden swords, and all the owners believed theirs was the one which Musashi used to fight Sasaki. We know of two persons who have these bokuto, and both seriously believe that they have the real item!

In a Kendo Dojo in Kumamoto, a supposedly direct descendant of the original Musashi Dojo, there is a carving of a Fudo by Musashi which has been judged as being authentic.

Musashi's ability to work with metal is famous among kodogu collectors. In the Higo Kinko Roku, it states: Musashi's work, whether it be of iron or soft metal in fuchi-kashira, all have a hard jitetsu and seem to be made out of hard tempered hagane. For this reason, the metal looks very hard and will at times seem young.

The tsuba are small and are worked in the Namako Sukashi style (Namako is a sea slug, and sukashi means open work). The fuchi-kashira are a little out of the ordinary and many have odd shapes.

In the Kyoho Meibutsu Cho, there is a reference to a Musashi Masamune and it says; Gyobutsu; Meibutsu: Musashi Masamune; Suriage: length: 2 Shaku 4 Sun 41 Bu; value: 5,000 Kan

In the “Kosa Meibutsu Ki”, it states: this sword is in the possession of Kii Chunagon. This was during the time when Lord Aseiko was still known as Komon.

There is no explanation for the name of the sword.

It is not too clear, but the sword is said to have been owned by Miyamoto Musashi. Kosatsu has said that it was given to him by lord Ieyasu.
Also, Kosatsu has said that the reason that the name “Musashi” was given to this blade is that the blade came from the Kii Chunagon to Edo. It is made with a chu kissaki and the shape has been altered. As is evident from the Meibutsucho, the name of the blade is not very clear, and the version given by Kosatsu may be true.

In many of the writings left by Musashi, there is no mention of this blade. After the Meiji Restoration, this blade was given to Yamaoka Tesshu by an ex-Shogunate official, and Yamaoka later gave it to Iwakura Tomomi. In 1913 when the Iwakura sold many of their belongings at an auction, this blade was also sold.
In 1937, it was selected for Juyo Bijutsu, and after WWI, it was made Juyo Bunkazai, and presently is owned by a private collector.

Here are some of the swords which Musashi was supposed to have used. He is said to have used a Hoki Yasutsuna which measured 3 Shaku 8 Sun against

Yoshioka Matahichiro. This blade he gave to one of his students Sawamura Tomoyoshi.

He is said to have had a blade made by Izumi no Kami Kaneshige of Musashi Province who worked during the Kanei Era.

There is quite a bit of difference between a blade by Hoki Yasutsuna and Bushu Kaneshige, but then in the eyes of a man like Miyamoto Musashi, there may have been some reason for this.

While Musashi was in Settsu (Osaka) at one time, he tested a blade by Kawachi no Kami Nagakuni and spoke very highly of his work, and told Nagakuni of the many things which a swordsman requires in a blade. Thereupon Nagakuni is said to have become a student of Musashi, and went with him to Higo Province and eventually Nagakuni became a swordsmith for the Hosokawa. The descendants of Nagakuni served the Hosokawas for many generations thereafter.

Nagakuni, originally from Echizen Province, went to Edo and made swords in the style of Seki in Mino Province and the hamon were gunome togari.

PUBLICATIONS

Umetada Meikan

This series of oshigata was compiled by Umetada Myoju, Myosin and Jusai, as well as by other members of this family. It was said to have been started around the Tensho Era (1573-92) and published in 1629.

In recent years, it was republished in 1917 and reprinted again in 1932. Along with the Kozan Oshigata, recently published by Yuzankaku, this Umetada Meikan, is a very fine authoritative text which presents fine old blades.

The Umetada family has been famous as swordsmiths, tsuba smiths, carvers, engravers, zogan artists, shirogane smiths (habaki makers) as well as sword merchants.

Whenever one sees a blade with a zogan mei by the Honami, that zogan mei was, in most cases, done by the Umetada.

Concerning their tsuba, we all know of their great skill from the many fine examples we see today, of which Myoju's work is the best known, followed by Mitsutada and a few others.

As for their carving abilities, the few remaining blades we see with Myoju's intricate horimono have been the prizes of the collections they are found in. It is not popularly known, but the ability of the Umetada as “shirogane shi” or habaki makers is probably among the best, and there has been no one since them to match their ability. Of the vast number of blades that were in Hideyoshi’s collection which later went to the Owari Tokugawa, many had Umetada habaki, and there is something about their habaki, difficult to explain, which pulls one's attention to them. We have heard that many shirogane shi since then have tried their best to copy or duplicate the work of the Umetada, but to date, no one has been able to come even remotely close to their work.

The Umetada, being in such a position, and with many fine blades having been sent to them for various types of work, naturally had the opportunity to inspect these

blades very closely, and it was their practice, like the Honami, to make tracings of these blades, which were then compiled to become the Umetada Meikan.

We feel that this book is a "MUST" for all serious sword students' library. It is expected to be out around the latter part of March,1968. And the price is 8,000 Yen.

It is bound in a traditional Japanese binding and printed on Echizen washi paper. The explanations in the book were written by Honami Kohaku, and there is a number of color plates.

This is another book which we recommend highly.

Publisher: Yuzankaku Publishing Co., Ltd.

NAKAGO ALTERATIONS ON KOTO BLADES

Dr. Keith Evans
Dallas, Texas

There are many conditions which affect the shape and size of the nakago. More often than not, an altered nakago is present on blades of all types and sizes. Only rarely does the collector find an ubu nakego on a koto blade. Although the primary reason for altering the nakago may have been a general shortening and reshaping to conform to a new koshirae style, we must be aware that many blades which did not merit mention in reference works of famous swords were still highly prized by families for historical and sentimental reasons. To preserve these blades which were chipped, broken, tsukare, or othewise less than perfect, alterations to these blades, especially the nakago, were necessary.

In the first example (#l), the nakago is O-suriage and the blade is very tired from polishing. However, it still exhibits a recognizable gunome notare hamon, has midare utsuri, itame hada and a koshi sori, all of which place the blade in the late Yoshino period in Bizen Osafune.

Although the reason for the present length is open to speculation, the final location of the hamachi has been dictated by the need for the habaki to cover an area of shigane exposed by polishing. The next example shows a typical area with chipping at the hamachi (#2). The cure for this damage is to move the hamachi up, thus lengthening the nakago. This (#3) has been done to the tanto made by Bishu Osafune Tsuneiye, and the procedure threw the overall proportions of the blade badly out of balance. Even so, the owners prized the tanto enough so that, over 500 years later, it is here for us to study and enjoy.

On the next blade (# 4), signed Soshu Tsunahiro, there is the additional statement that the blade has been shortened and the mei re-signed. The blade length is still 2 shaku 2.5 sun. We must assume that this was a very long blade and either shortened because of breakage at the habaki or to fit an uchigatana koshirae at a later date in its lifetime. Again, the collector can be thankful for the alteration which insured the survival of the blade.

The final example (#5) of an alteration concerns a defacing of the signature by adding 2 mekugi ana through the first character of the mei. This has made it very difficult to read the mei, and it may have been done intentionally to add mystery as to who was the maker of the blade, or merely to refit it for a new tsuka at a later time. In

any case, the alteration makes it a challenge for the present-day collector to properly indentify the maker.

However, we must remember that honest alterations were not done with the present-day collector in mind, but rather to preserve a blade that otherwise would have been discarded. So, we must appreciate that some previous owner centuries ago made it possible for us to see the sword today.

NOTE: There are 5 photos for the 5 figures listed in this article, however, in the mimeographed copy of the Newsletter I have, no details of the nakago are visible at all (everything is a gray cloud), so the figures are not shown here. However, the points being made are clear.