

Japanese Sword Society of the United States, Inc.



NEWSLETTER

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This issue of the Newsletter contains a variety of worthwhile information, thanks to the response of the membership. My plea for oshigata has started to be answered as is evident by the two very interesting oshigata included in this issue.

More examples are needed so send in your favorite sword's oshigata and it will be used in a future issue of the Newsletter.

It is my intention to print three classes of oshigata: 1) first class smiths, 2) noteworthy 'average' smiths, 3) noteworthy modern smiths. Unusual types of inscriptions and datings, etc., will also be printed if they are made available. As a suggestion, characteristics which are 'typical' of a particular school or era, should be specifically pointed out on the oshigata since this will help 'teach' us something specific to look for in the future.

On behalf of the JSS/US, I would like to extend a most hearty welcome to these new members. The society resume' has been sent to these gentlemen, explaining our functions and goals.

Mr. Phebus is supervisor of the Smithsonian Institute's Processing Laboratory, of which the responsibility of the institute's collection of Japanese weapons comes under. A word about this collection is located towards the end of this issue of the Newsletter.

MASAZANE Tachi

Oshigata provided by Dean Hartley

SHAPE AND CONSTRUCTION - Shinogi-zukuri tachi. Bizen zori measuring 1 sun 1 bu 4 rin (34.5mm) at the deepest part. Blade is 2 shaku 6 sun $\frac{1}{2}$ bu (79cm). Nakago is 7 sun 6 bu (23.1 cm). Ko-kissaki. Very strong fumbari - mihaba at machi is 1 sun 3 rin (32mm), at yokote only $\frac{1}{2}$ sun (15mm). Ihore-mune, about medium.

HAMON - Hamon is classical ko-Bizen/Heian. Begins with very pronounced O-koshiba at machi, with gradual narrowing to quite small ko-choji midare near yokote. General pattern appears to be choji-midare with ashi and togare-ba in nioi and some very few ko-nie. Has utsure near shinogi. There are yo in O-koshiba with the togari mostly in monouchi.

BOSHI - Boshi is narrow, small ko-maru, slight kaeri.

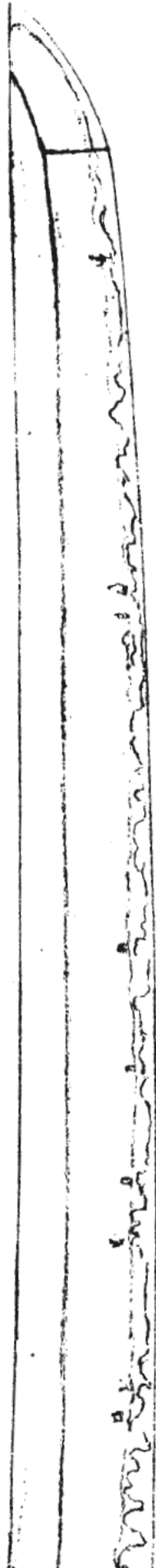
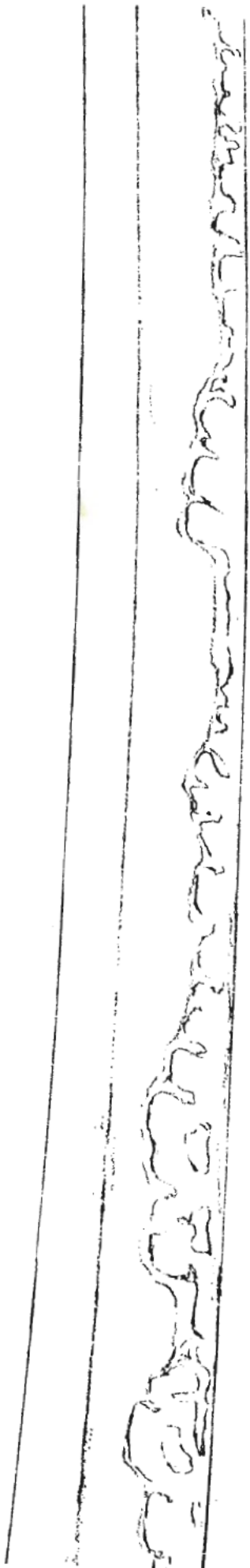
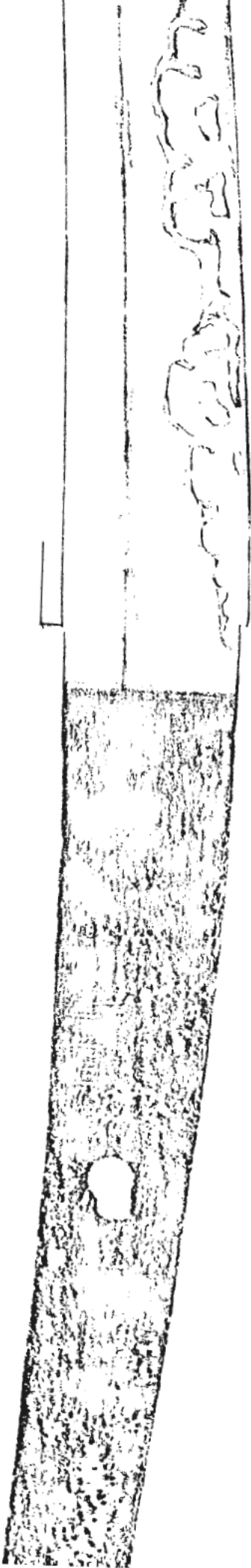
JITETSU AND HADA - Closely forged mokume hada, slightly running to itame in spots. Very few indications of being tsukare (tired) despite great age. Some loss of definition in hamon near kissaki from this age/polishing, but still completely sound.

NAKAGO - Nakago is ubu, with only one mekugi-ana. The only change is that the hole has been shaped to a "key-hole" configuration (a flattened slot extended from the bottom, toward the end of nakago). It is even possible that this shape hole may have been original, a not uncommon occurrence in blades of this period. No file marks are visible - all worn away. The two-character signature is tachi-mei MASAZANE on the shinogi-ji just above the mekugi-ana. Tip is slightly rounded kiri.

REMARKS - This blade is rated Tokubetsu Kicho, and has in addition a long sayagaki by Dr. Homma to the owner, by "special order". It is polished (by an Okayama polisher - near the village of Osafune) and in a magnificent "tiger-striped" shirasaya, with gold habaki. This smith is listed in "Honcho Tanya Fiko" as "Successor to the line" during period of Imperial Reigns Kannin (beginning 1017) through Kohei (ending 1064). He is listed as the son of MASATSUGU, who in turn is listed as the second son of MASATSUNE (987 - 1011). This MASATSUNE is further listed as "possibly" the son of KANEHIRA.

Editor's note: I have asked Dean about this smith in reference to Hawley's list. He informed me that Hawley spells this smith MASASANE (MA-433) in his list of smiths. Dean also added that this blade is the only known example to exist out of three known blades. It is probably going to be sent to Japan for Juyo shinsa in the near future.

RCH



FUJIWARA SANEYUKI Wakizashi

Oshigata provided by Richard Mantegani

TYPE AND STYLE - Shinogi-zukure Wakizashi

BLADE LENGTH: 20 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches NAKAGO: 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches TOTAL LENGTH: 26 inches

CURVATURE: Bizen-sori

KISSAKI: Curved edge (Fukura-tsuku)

GRAIN: (Jitetsu and hada) Tight mokume, with some open grain on omote side of ji $\frac{1}{4}$ inch above machi.

HAMON: Gonome-midare very nicely done in nie, some areas in dense nie (somewhat coarse). Yakidashi evident commencing $\frac{3}{4}$ inch above the machi. It is more pronounced on the ura side.

BOSHI: Omote and ura somewhat o-maru with a straight turn-back (kaeri-tsuyoshi).

NAKAGO: Typical, slight taper, chestnut tip (kurijiri), horizontal finely done file marks (yokoyasuri). Tang condition is excellent (ubu). Signed in small but bold characters on the shinogi-ji, both sides. One mekugi-ana.

SIGNED: Omote - BUNGO NO JU FUJIWARA SANEYUKI (cira 1626 - Kanei period).

Ura - SHIN KITAE TSUKURU KORE

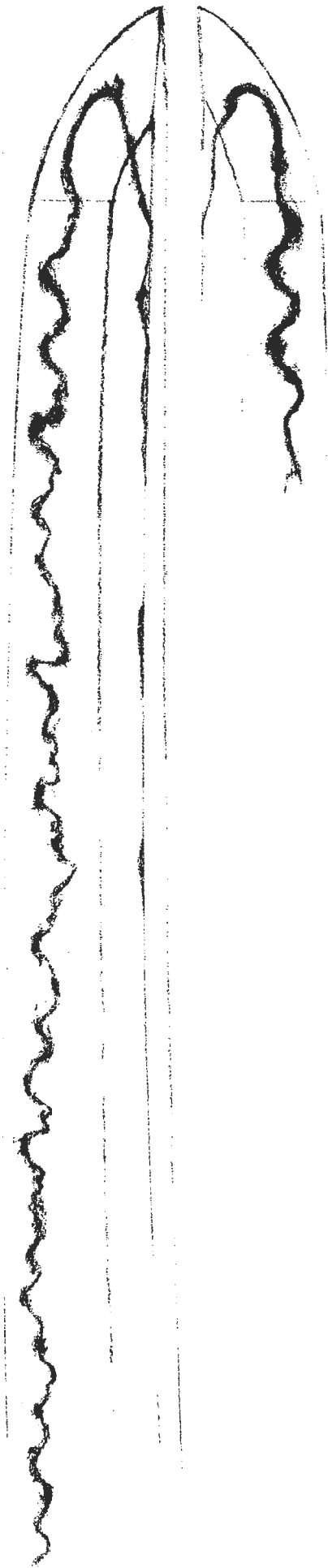
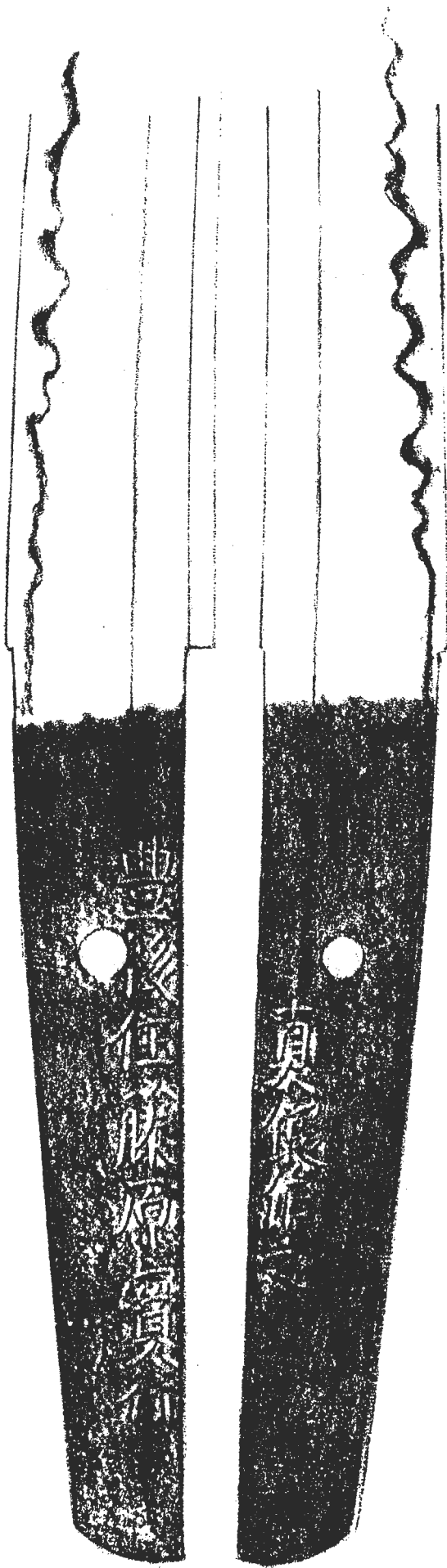
REMARKS:

The inscription on the ura side implies that this blade was forged in the orthodox manner as prescribed by the best smiths of the day. He (the smith) did not deviate from those techniques which were the proper steps to take in forging a perfect sword.

Although this blade is rated rather low, it has many of the elements a classic named blade has; with it's beautiful curvature, shape, weight, intact tang and yakiba of a classic shinto style. The blade appears to have had very few polishes.

Editor's note: Rich has expressed a deep interest in the printing of oshigata not only of the best smiths, but also of the little known and lesser smiths such as the above. With this in mind, I will attempt to print three types of oshigata: 1st class smiths, good works of 2nd class smiths, and notable works of modern smiths. This will pretty well cover the field of interest for all.

RCH



INFORMATION POOL -

Members are encouraged to submit their questions and findings to the Newsletter for printing in this column, for the benefit of the membership. The following answers were kindly supplied by Mr. Albert Yamanaka, who deserves a word of THANKS for his unselfish contributions towards helping our society through such answers.

QUESTION: In the Nihonto Newsletter, you often refer to a blade as being SUNZUMARI length. Can you define this for me?

RCH

ANSWER: The word means 'short of length'. SUN as in 1 sun or 2 sun. ZUMARI or TSUMARI or TSUMARU means length is short. This means that in the case of a Wakizashi, the ideal length is under 2 Shaku, therefore if a Wakizashi is only 1 Shaku 2 Sun, then this would be regarded as SUNZUMARI. In the case of a Katana, the ideal length is 2 Shaku 3 Sun 5 Bu, so if you have one that is only 2 Shaku 1 Sun long, then this would be considered as SUNZUMARI KATANA.

AY

QUESTION: In olden days when presenting swords as gifts, reference is made "...a tachi with a CATALOGUE.". What is this CATALOGUE?

RCH

ANSWER: The actual term used in Japanese is a little different but CATALOGUE is about the closest that I could come to it, so I used that. When a blade was presented to the Shogunate and the blades in the mounting was nothing much to 'brag about', in most such cases, the KOSHIRAE was very elaborate, and you will note that these are most often TACHI, therefore in such a gist, the listing of the blade and a very detailed description of the blade and mountings was given, especially the latter...mountings...giving details of the metal works, the designs, the metal itself, then the lacquer work and even details as to the cords and the colors.

AY

QUESTION: I have noticed that many hand forged good quality Showa era blades that I have examined, do not have the "Showa stamp". This leads me to believe that perhaps just 'factory made' blades required this stamping and that 'special order blades' did not need this sort of identification. Can I be safe in assuming this?

RCH

ANSWER: The blades with the 'stamping' were those that were made during 1940 - 1945 and they were made from slabs of steel, shaped into swords, then tempered. The ones which you refer to as being well made, I think you are referring to those that were made in the traditional methods, so they could possibly have been made prior to 1940. Of course even during the war, there were some that were made in the traditional manner, but the majority were made on 'production line'. There were great many of these sword making factories throughout Japan and there were some even made in the prisons. Most of these will have stampings on them and so you will know that any such with these stampings are production line swords.

AY

ED. NOTE - I have had some collectors say that ALL Showa-to were required BY LAW to have these stampings. Obviously this is wrong and only factory blades received the stamp.

QUESTION: I have seen several examples of habaki which are made in two pieces which slip together. This style is very beautiful and must be very difficult to make. Is there a formal name for this style?

RCH

ANSWER: These are called NIJU HABAKI. I think there are four (4) different types of NIJU HABAKI. They are called: OWARI HABAKI; HIGO HABAKI; plain NIJU HABAKI; and one that is called DAI TSUKI HABAKI which is used only in Tanto. This one has the base added to it. The NIJU HABAKI is difficult to make and you may about double the usual cost of the habaki. Also, today most habaki maker only make these out of solid gold and they will not make them out of any other kind of metal such as silver or copper.

AY

QUESTION: How does a polisher decide on 'his' specific marking which he will use (lines on the mune, under habaki, etc.)?

RCH

ANSWER: So far as I know, there are no distinguishing marks by which one can identify a polish, although polishers do make the marks as you say. This is usually on the SHINOBI JI under the habaki. Those elsewhere as you describe, that is on the mune back of the kissaki and on the hira underneath the habaki, are not the same marks. The marks behind the kissaki usually are burnished to cover the kaeri of the boshi.

AY

QUESTION: When swords are displayed in Japan - museum display or department store display, etc. - how are the swords displayed; bare blades, shirasaya, fully mounted? I have noticed that at the stateside shows which I have seen, most blades are shown 'fully mounted' - and of course the nakago is then hidden and most often the mountings outshine the blade. It seems like so much is lost when a blade is shown in this manner.

RCH

ANSWER: Bare blades at exhibitions are always so, as this is the only way one can get a good look at the blade. Of course the blade can not be displayed on both sides so they are always displayed with the inscription facing the outside and the other side where the date is inscribed is hidden. If you have a good mounting with the blade, then the mounting is displayed along side, but separate from the bare blade.

AY

Ed. Note: I think everyone should take particular note of this answer. I think that if the various sword exhibits around the country would start displaying swords in this manner (at least the noteworthy blades), we could all increase our appreciation and learning greatly. Note only does a fully mounted blade hide the 'whole' of the blade, if one wishes to fully examine a blade (and this could happen many times at a show), the wear and tear on the mountings is not to be appreciated by the owner. It is something to think about.

QUESTION: (asked of Mr. Roy Hashioka) Is there a good listing of top quality gendai smiths and modern smiths available?

RCH

ANSWER: This is covered very well in the SHISHINTO TAIKAN - especially those with circles over their names. The GENDAI TAKO MEIKAN covers all the living smiths from top to bottom. (Ed. Note: I have just received a translation of this list - Shinshinto Taikan - from Mel Oka and will be offering it in the very near future.)

The following questions have been submitted by Mr. Roy Hashioka for 'kicking about' by the membership. If you have an opinion on any of these, send them to the Newsletter.

QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the function of the yasuri-me?
 - a) When did it first appear? (first reference).
 - b) Does it have a foreign origin?
- 2) Is yaki kuzure intentional or a defect in tempering?
- 3) What is the function of a mune yaki?
- 4) Why is there no reference made to mekugi anas which overlap?
- 5) There being so many fake blades - was forgery a punishable crime (in olden times)?

These are some worthwhile and interesting questions, so lets see what answers we come up with.

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION COLLECTION:

The Smithsonian Samurai collection is located in the Department of Anthropology, National Museum of Natural History. This collection contains a substantial number of arms and armor. It is the desire of the Smithsonian to expand it's collection and to improve the present state of materials, and also to serve as a public center for the study of Samurai arts.

Recently, they added a good quality daisho: Katana signed - IYO DAIJO TACHIBANA KATSUKUNI and wakizashi signed - KASHU JU FUJIWARA KIYOHIRA. Currently they have 17 blades in Japan for polishing and papers. Of this group are blades signed - OMI (no) KAMI HISAMICHI, SUYEMITSU, SOSHU JU HIROTSUGU, TEGARAYAMA MASASHIGE, HIZEN YOSHIFUSA, HIZEN TADAHIRO, ECHIGO (no) KAMI KANESADA and SHIMADA YOSHISUKE. Several dozen blades were recently polished here by Mr. Terutoyo Kujimoto of Japan.

NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE - The next issue of the NL will be sent out about the 1st of June. All articles, etc., intended for this issue should be in my hands no later than May 26th. Ron Hartmann - Editor
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