

Type: Shinshinto Naginata

Nagasa: 59.9cm

Saki-haba: 4.1 cm

Moto-haba: 3.0 cm

Sugata: Naginata-zukuri, saki-zori, mitsu-mune, naginata-hi.

Jihada: Ko-mokume hada with Ji-nie, some chikei.

Hamon: Nioi-deki with some nie, choji-gunome midare, kinsuji in the midare-komi boshi with kaeri, many ashi, some yo.

Nakago: Ubu with one mekugi-ana, sujikai yasuri with kesho finish, the lower part sensui. Signed on the omote KOYAMA BIZEN (no) SUKE MUNETSUGU and dated on the ura, ANSEI GONEN HACHI GATSU NICHI (1858). The nakago is 56.0 cm in length.

This magnificent naginata immediately gives the impression of great strength and power, whilst the long fukura (the cutting edge at the kissaki) looks extremely sharp. Its magnificent and robust sugata could only have been made by a master craftsman, as indeed it was. A close inspection of the jihada reveals a beautiful and homogenous ko-mokume, which is liberally covered with ji-nie. This reminds one of a very calm pond that is suddenly sprinkled with a fine but sharp summer shower of rain; it is a far cry from the normal muji-hada of many shinshinto blades. The hamon, which is mainly made up of nioi, has some nie especially in the tani or valleys of the choji-gunome midare where many short ashi appear. The hamon resembles early Bizen-ichimonji work and is very active but neither too flamboyant nor overstated and perfectly in proportion to the rest of the blade. Made when the smith was 54 or 55 years old it is obvious that considering the difficult shape to this blade, that although the smith may have matured in years, he was still at the peak of his skill. The top class of polish that it enjoys also splendidly enhances the blade and allows full appreciation.

The maker, Koyama Munestugu may be considered to be the best shinshinto swordsmith working in Bizen-den. Born in 1802 or 1803 in Oshu Shirakawa his personal name was Koyama Sobei and he was also variously known as Issensei or Seiryosai. He learned sword making in the Kato Tsunahide school, but appears to have been more influenced by Tsunahide's younger brother, Chounsai Tsunatoshi, judging from his Bizen style workmanship. Masatsugu was employed in the Kuwana Han by Lord Matsudaira and received the title of Bizen (no) Suke in 1843. It may be speculated that this particular title was granted because of his expertise in the Bizen style of swordmaking.

Having worked in both Owari province and Kuwana and frequently travelled back and forth from Edo, Munestugu eventually settled down in the Yotsuya Samon-cho area of Edo. Fujishiro relates an interesting story of Munetsugu when he resided in this district. At the same time, close by in Yotsuya Iga-cho, Kiyomaro started in his own sword business but failed to acknowledge Munetsugu's existence. This greatly angered Munestugu who sent a letter to Kiyomaro issuing some kind of challenge. Fujishiro comments that "this interesting affair reminds us of the disposition of swordsmiths".

It appears that Munetsugu collaborated with Yamada Asaemon Yoshitoshi, a professional sword tester, in the study of cutting efficiency as many of his works are engraved with the

results of these tests. Nagayama sensei also states that he made sword for a number of personalities of the time including Lord Furukawa, a popular wrestler named Inazuma Raigoro, master metal worker Goto Ichijo as well as the aforementioned tester Yamada. This shows that, as with Kiyomaro at the same time, Munetsugu's talent and reputation were well respected and understood even whilst he was alive.

In 1860, Munetsugu changed his yasuri from the sujikai shown in this current example, to kiri. It was thought that this might indicate the work of the second generation, but the existence of a blade showing this feature together with an inscription stating Munetsugu's age as being 66, seems conclusive proof that this was done in Munetsugu's later years. He seems to be rated at least as highly as the other shinshinto "big names" such as Masahide, Naotane, Unju Korekazu and Chounsai Tsunatoshi, if only considering those who worked in Bizen-den. Koyama Munetsugu died in 1872 at the age of 70.

His students and associates included his brothers Munehiro and Munetoshi as well as his son Kenryusai Munetsugu. Also included are Kubota Muneaki and Seishosai Muneari both of who seem also to have been interested in the practical aspects of the Japanese sword in the same manner as Munetsugu.

Fujishiro rates him as JoJoSaku.

This naginata was exhibited in London at To-ken Taikai '99 in November 1999. It is one of only two naginata by Koyama Munetsugu to be awarded Juyo To-ken status by the Nihon Bijutsu To-ken Hozon Kyokai.

NB: The oshigata of the Mei are actual size, the other is reduced to approximately 10% to 15% of its original size

Clive Sinclair, Jan 2000
Bexley, Kent

UK Sword Register No: 45

Type: Copy of sue-Bizen katana

Nagasa: 68.8 cm Moto-haba: 2.9 cm Saki-haba: 1.9 cm

Sugata: Shinogi-zukuri, chu-kissaki, koshi-zori, shallow iori-mune
Horimono: A regular plus a narrow koshi hi on both sides of the blade, end in maru-dome in the habaki-moto. Bonji above the hori on both sides of the blade.
Jihada: Muji-hada
Hamon: Gunome-notare-midare, in nioi-deki having choji inclusions mostly around the centre of the blade, yo and tobiyaki together with many deep ashi.
Nakago: 4 mekugi ana (2 overlapping) with ha-agari kuri-jiri, sujikai yasurime, machi okuri about 1½ inches. Inscribed on the omote: BIZEN OSAFUNE HIKOBEINOJO SUKESADA SAKU and on the ura: MEIO SANNEN HACHI GATSU NICHI (1494)

This sword is of a good length and the tapering towards the kissaki gives it a graceful shape, whilst the relatively shallow koshi-zori imparts a strength to the overall presentation of the blade. The koshi-zori together with the nioi predominant construction

of the hamon, indicates Bizen as the tradition in which the sword was made. There is a distinct blue tinge to the jigane. The nakago is well signed with the zokumei (personal name) of arguably the best of the numerous smiths named Sukesada in the late koto (sue-koto) period and the date is consistent with this swordsmiths activity. The signature has been inscribed in 2 columns on the omote, which is characteristic of one of Hikobeinojo's style of mei.

As most will be well aware, during the Muromachi period, many blades were of low quality and virtually mass-produced to meet the great demand for swords at this time. Such blades are known as Kazu-uichimono and many have the name Sukesada on them. Few swords of note were made at this time and those that have zokumei are invariably of far better quality than the average, often being special orders for high ranking or wealthy patrons. Of the numerous Sukesada smiths recorded, none had the reputation of Hikobeinojo for both quality and practical cutting ability. Fujishiro, who also states that even some his works without zokumei are excellent, rates him as Saijo Saku (top quality) as well as Owazamono (very sharp).

However, closer inspection of this sword gives one some pause for thought. One would not, for instance expect to see muji-hada on a Bizen blade of this age. Muji-hada (no grain apparent in the jihada, rather a plain mirror like finish) although possibly seen in Osaka-shinto and Aoe blades, is usually a feature associated with shinshinto. The patina on the nakago, whilst dark, has little depth to it and the calligraphy of the inscription seems to be too fresh to be over 500 old. Finally, those mekugi-ana also do not ring true. On the ura, each of the holes has a raised tegane-makura (raise metal pillow), indicating that the holes have been made from the omote through to the ura. For all 3 / 4 to have this similar feature, would seem to indicate that they might have all been made at the same time (these makura or "pillows" appear as a white shadow at the edge of the mekugi-ana on the oshigata). Lastly, there is the machi-okuri and its relationship with the horimono. It is obvious by the position in which the hi end in the habaki-moto, that they were cut after the machi was "moved", as otherwise it would have ended in the upper part of the nakago! Another feature of this sword is the blue colour of the jigane, which would be unexpected in sue-Bizen blades.

Amazingly this sword, in spite of its undeniably quality and superficial age, is actually the work done in the shinshinto period by Koyama Munestugu, the swordsmith featured in the last UK Sword Register, as appraised by Mr Iida and Mr Tokuno at the To-ken Society's London shinsa in 1989. Certainly the hamon resembles his work, but the nioi-deki hamon together with the blue colour of the jigane, is considered to be a definitive kantei point and Munetsugu is known to have made copies of old Sukesada blades in this manner.

Consider the implications of this. The sword has been given four mekugi-ana, one of which deliberately obscures one of the kanji, a fair representation of Hikobeinojo's signature has been inscribed and the machi moved to make the entire nakago look far older than it is. Even the bonji horimono have something of a polished-out appearance adding to the impression of age, whilst the hi now seem to be ato-bori (carved later). Apparently, Hikobeinojo Sukesada's fine reputation for both quality and cutting ability, was well appreciated in the shinshinto period and a Sukesada with a zokumei was considered a fine gift between those of rank. However, the demand for such blades far outstripped the limited supply of genuine blades available. This had never been an impediment in Japanese history before and so copies were skilfully manufactured and

distributed. Such a dubious practise, whilst today would probably be considered to be of doubtful ethics at best and downright dishonest at worst, seems to have not been a problem for the more flexible morals of a different culture at a different time in history. Indeed, as Munetsugu was employed by the Matsudaira daimyo, he undoubtedly was required to produce whatever his lord required, regardless of his personal feelings in the matter.

As I had recently spent considerable time in close study of the Koyama Munestsugu naginata featured in the last UK Sword Register, it puzzled me why, the distinct blue colour of the “Sukesada Munetsugu” but was not apparent in the naginata. I enquired in Japan why this was so and the reply was most interesting. Apparently, with a new polish, the uchigamori and jizuya stones may hide the colour of the jigane and that it is only after years of uchiko application that it again becomes apparent. This can be quite a problem with many collectors in Japan although it is not so with a sashikomi polish. The “Sukesada Munetsugu” had an old polish, probably its original Edo period polish, and the colour of the jigane was therefore still visible, whilst the polish of the naginata was recent and one was unable to see this colour.

Another interesting difference between these two blades was the jihada itself. On the naginata a beautiful ko-mokume with ji-nie was clearly visible, whilst that of the “Sukesada Munestugu” appeared as muji-hada. Here the benefit of a modern polish on the naginata is easily demonstrated by revealing the hidden pattern, whilst the fashion of the day and the style of the Edo period polish on the “Sukesada”, dictated the less revealing and less interesting, muji-hada.

Clive Sinclair
Bexley, January 2000

UK Sword Register No. 47
Type: Shinshinto katana

Nagasa: 70 .6 cm Moto-haba: 3.1 cm Saki-haba: 2.3 cm
Sugata: Wide mihaba, strong koshi-zori, low iori-mune, o-kissaki
Horimono: Omote: the lower half with the characters HACHIMAN DAIBOSATSU and lotus with futatsu-hi ending in maru-dome in the top half of the blade.
 Ura: Futatsu-hi also ending in maru-dome and vraja in the habaki moto.
Jihada; Tight ko-mokume hada appearing as Muji-hada overall.
Hamon: Nioi-deki choji-gunome midare, the choji tending to be juka-choji, many ashi. The nioi-guchi is narrow and bright. The pattern continued into the pointed midare komi boshi with kaeri.
Nakago: Ubu-nakago, mekugi-ana slightly distorted possibly meaning one has been made on top of another. O-sujikai yasurime ending in kesho. Signed on the omote KOYAMA MUNESTSUGU KORE (o) SAKU and additionally SOERU YAMADA ASAEMON YOSHIMASA SHI KORE KINOMI. The ura is dated TENPO ROKU? HINOTE TORI DOSHI NIGATSU JITSU (1837, the year of the cockerel). – there is a small amount of corrosion around the mekugi-ana on the ura somewhat obscuring the second character of Tenpo and the Roku character entirely.

I make no apology for bringing yet another blade by Koyama Munetsugu to your attention. The strong shape and large proportions (good length, heavy feel, wide mihaba, long kissaki etc) as well as the muji-hada, do nothing to hide the fact that the sword is shinshinto, but it lacks the clumsy unbalanced feel of the less skillfully made pieces of the period. As we have previously discussed, Koyama Munetsugu was very skilled at making blades in the Bizen tradition, as indicated by the nioi-based hamon and the strong koshi-zori. The variations in the hamon, which show gunome and choji combined are natural and relaxed in appearance although several similar “pairs” may be seen throughout the length of the sword.

The Hachiman Dia Bosatsu (Hachiman Great Buddha) horimono is skillfully cut and dominates the lower half of the omote side of the blade, whilst the futatsu-hi (double hi) on both sides contribute to the lighter and well-balanced feel of the sword.

The inscriptions provide interesting areas of speculation, particularly on the omote side. Here the conventional signature of the swordsmith is found on the lower left hand side of the nakago, whilst the name of Yamada Asaemon Yoshimasa, a famous tester of swords occupies the right hand side of the nakago. These are the characters, which read, “Soeru Yamada Asaemon Yoshimasa Shi Kore Kinomi” which may be translated as “this inscription is added at the request of Yamada Asaemon Yoshimasa” I think this is a very strange thing to have on a sword in this manner, what can the significance possibly be and why should Yamada Asaemon Yoshimasa request for such an unnecessary inscription to be made? Possibly the clue may be found in other blades by Munetsugu made around this time. A good number of Munetsugu’s blades do have the results of tameshigiri tests inscribed on the nakago and they all seem to have been done by members of Yamada Asaemon’s family, of which he was the head tester. (Indeed some swords seem to have been tested more than once and there is even some evidence to suggest that Munetsugu may have conducted tests personally). It may well be that Yamada Asaemon Yoshimasa usually oversaw these tests, whoever actually performed them, and it is known that he had a close relationship with Koyama Munetsugu. If it were planned to test this sword following the completion of its manufacture, then it may be that Munetsugu engraved this line in anticipation, leaving plenty of room on the ura side of the blade, adjacent to the date, for the results of the cutting test and any other details to be inscribed later. I say this as at least one other blade, with exactly the same line or phrase on the omote –“inscribed at the request of Yamada Asaemon Yoshimasa”, carries the complicated and detailed results of a test on the ura of the blade. This was carried out in Tenpo 7th year.

It would seem therefore, that for some reason, although fully anticipating that the sword would be submitted to a cutting test and that the results would be inscribed accordingly, the test was either not carried out, or the results were not inscribed on the nakago. I believe the latter is inconceivable and the former is a distinct possibility. This leaves the question of why did the sword remain untested, especially as it was in the Tenpo era, when Koyama Munetsugu was in his thirties and at the height of his career, that most of the sword testing on his blades was done. I believe that the answer may lie in the

horimono that appears on the blade.

Very few blades bear both cutting test results and any horimono other than maybe a simple hi. This may reflect the fact that a horimono will undoubtedly weaken a blade to some degree and in these circumstances, the stresses and strains caused by violent cutting, might have adverse and detrimental effects on the blade. I suppose that a cutting test might also damage and spoil a delicately cut horimono.

On this sword, yet another reason might be the subject matter of the horimono. Although it pronounces that Hachiman (the god of war) is a great Buddha, it remains a religious proclamation. It may well be that the customer who bought the sword and commissioned the horimono, was a devout Buddhist who respected the Buddhist principles of the sanctity of life and felt uncomfortable about the rather barbaric practice of tameshigiri. I doubt we will ever know for sure if these theories are anything other than speculation on my part and I would be pleased to hear from anyone having thoughts on the subject.

Finally, the sword is dated using the zodiacal cycle in combination with the year period of Tempo. There is some slight corrosion obscuring the second Tempo character and I think that this may followed by the character, “hachi” or eight. This seems to be a common way for Munetsugu to date his works around this time.

Clive Sinclair Bexley Feb 2000

Koyama Munetsugu up-date

Since I wrote the above on this sword a number of things have happened with regard to it. It was sent to Japan for shinsa and gained Tokubetsu Hozon at the NBTHK and I had the blade newly polished. I decided this as, although it had a perfectly fine polish, indeed it passed the shinsa with this polish, I was convinced that there was more to be seen in the jihada and this proved to be the case. Now visible is a fine and compact ko-mokume with ji-nie and some chikei. The polish is excellent and the sword was exhibited at the Japanese Sword Museum in Tokyo in December 2005 as part of the Mukansa polisher's exhibition for that year (see photo below)



Further, it appears that this sword was presented to a certain Major General Sir Harold Reginald Kerr (1894-1974). This gentleman was the Chief Administration Officer Far Eastern Land Forces between 1946 and 1948. His personal diaries are archived at the Imperial War Museum in London and I booked an appointment to go there and research his diaries. It transpires that he travelled widely through India, Burma and Malaya performing his duties but was based, at least until March 1947, in Singapore. This is as far as the references go unfortunately. However, by report, he is supposed to have then gone to Japan (later in 1947?) and was apparently working alongside the American occupation forces, having already spent part of his war between 1941-42 in Washington. Again, by report, it was at this time that he acquired the Koyama Munetsugu which originally had a leather foul-weather cover over its lacquered saya.