

UK Sword Register No. 80 (19)

Type: Shinto wakizashi

Nagasa: 44.1 cm **Moto-haba:** 2.7 cm **Saki-haba:** 2.2 cm

Sugata: Shobu-zukuri, Iori-mune, strong saki-zori

Jihada: Ko-mokume with ji-nie

Hamon: Nie-deki, chu-suguha with slight midare in the monouchi area.
Sunagaeshi, yakisume-boshi with hakikake.

Horimono: A long dragon horimono on each side of the blade, now almost completely polished away.

Nakago: Ubu, with one mekugi-ana, kiri-yasurime, kuri-jiri, signed on the omote MUSASHI DAIJO FUJIWARA TADAHIRO.

This blade was made in the early shinto period, between 1624 and 1631. It is a Hizen province sword made by the first generation of the mainline Tadayoshi family and is an example of his later signature after he received the “Musashi Daijo” title and changed his name from Tadayoshi to Tadahiro. He is, therefore, also known as the shodai Tadahiro. It is something of an unusual shape for Tadayoshi, but such unusual shapes, including even katakiri-ba are not unknown in the early shinto period. I think this sword may be inspired by Yamato-den as evidenced, amongst other things, by the yakisume boshi.

The nie-deki hamon has a slight midare in the monouchi area and one large sunagaeshi seems to almost for nijuba, another Yamato-den characteristic. The jihada, however, is more like that associated with Hizen-to but is tsukare (tired) in places. This is not uncommon with Hizen-to as the kawagane (surface steel) tends to be rather thin and therefore prone to wearing after repeated polishing.

Further evidence of repeated polishing is that the horimono on both sides of the blade is much worn and really, only traces of what would have been spectacular carvings remain. The nakago shows the typical features of the shodai Tadahiro and the mei is strongly cut on the omote.

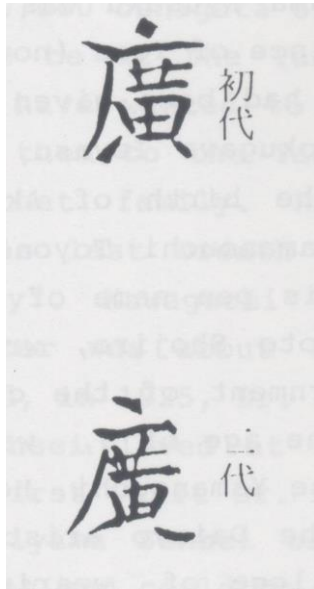
In 1584, when he was a youth of 13, the young Hashimoto Shinsaemon (Tadayoshi's personal name) was orphaned when his grandfather, a Hizen samurai and his guardian (both parents had already died through illness) was killed in battle. According to Suiken Fukunaga, the young Tadayoshi then went to neighbouring Higo province to learn swordmaking under the then very popular Dotanuki school, which was under the patronage of the famous general, Kato Kiyomasa. This may be connected with the invasion of Korea where both Kiyomasa and the Nabeshima were involved and the Dotanuki made very practical swords for this event and some smiths even accompanied Kiyomasa to Korea. After completing his apprenticeship, he returned to his native town of Nagase (Takase Mura today) and set up a forge. However, it is also postulated that he originally studied under Iyo (no) Jo Munetsugu and became his best pupil. This seems very likely.

Eventually, the powerful Nabeshima clan who ruled over most of Hizen province employed him and he moved to work in the castle town of Saga. In Keicho gannen (1596) he was sent up to Kyoto to study under the redoubtable Umetada Mioju. On his return to Saga, he established, with many of his pupils, the popularity of Hizen-to. Tadayoshi and his pupils produced swords that were exported all over Japan, making sword-exporting one of the Nabeshima-han's important sources of revenue.

On many of his blades, beautiful and elaborate horimono may often be found. Indeed, his teacher Umetada Mioju, is said to have carved some himself and there are blades signed "*Kono Tadayoshi Umetada Mioju Deshi* (Tadayoshi a student of Umetada Mioju). Munenaga, also an Umetada student, was a specialist horimono-shi who carved many horimono for Tadayoshi and this was sometimes acknowledged on the nakago inscription. Others included Akimoto and, in Tadayoshi's later days, Toshinaga.

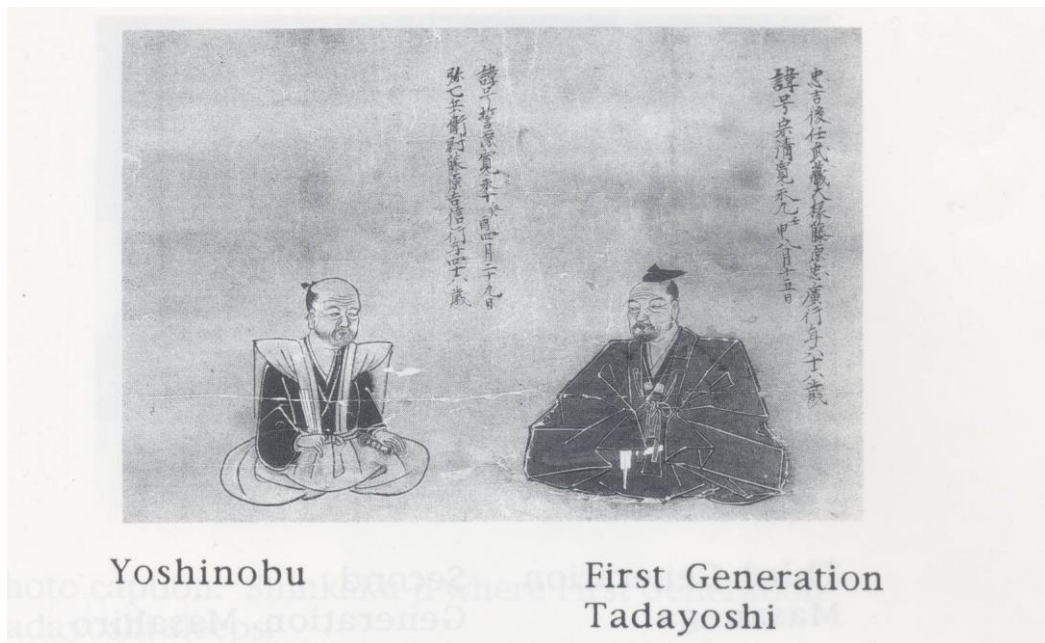
In his early days, Tadayoshi often copied Shizu blades but he came to admire and replicate Rai school blades, particularly those of Rai Kunimitsu. This Yamashiro style had arguably the greatest influence on the production of blades by this school. Shodai Tadayoshi developed the jihada, that is popularly known as Konuka-hada (lit. rice bran grain) which is essentially ko-mokume with ji-nie. However, this became fully developed and perfected later by the nidai Tadahiro (Omi Daijo).

In 1624, at the age of 53, Tadayoshi was awarded the title of "Musashi Daijo" at which time he changed his name to Tadahiro. This may have been something to do with the inheritance of the name of Tadayoshi. However, occasionally in his Musashi Daijo days, he is known to have worked in the Yamato (as in the piece under discussion) and Mino traditions, possibly as some sort of revival of his earlier Shizu workmanship. After protracted illness, he died on 28th September 1631 at the age of 61. His legacy was a long direct line of swordsmiths as well as several branch lines of the family that were producing fine swords for many generations up to the Meiji period in some cases. During his protracted illness many swords by other family members, including the shodai Masahiro (see Sword Reg 79), Yukihiro, Yoshinobu, possibly Tosa (no) Kami Tadayoshi and the nidai Tadahiro, were dai-me and dai-saku demonstrating the high degree of co-operation between the extended members of the Hashimoto family.



Top is shodai HIRO and the bottom is nidai HIRO

As well as the above, both the shodai Tadahiro (Musashi Daijo) and the nidai Tadahiro (Omi Daijo) used the same form of signature, that is to say Hizen Kuni Fujiwara Tadahiro. The top stroke of the character HIRO is a readily distinguishable feature, that of the shodai being a diamond shape punch whilst that of the nidai being a longer stroke altogether



Yoshinobu

First Generation Tadayoshi

Fujishiro rates Shodai Tadayoshi as Saijo-saku. In addition, his swords were also admired for their cutting ability, as evidenced by the famous tester Yamada Asaemon, who rated Tadayoshi's blades as Saijo-o wazamono. Because of their popularity, there are many forgeries of the Tadayoshi school. In fact, I have heard that in the later Tokugawa period, swords produced in Hizen were often inscribed with the names of prestigious earlier swordsmiths of the school. This means that there is the possibility of a genuine Hizen blade, with all the correct characteristics,

may still be gimei. Especially with shodai Tadayoshi, there are many variations in his genuine mei, as well as all the dai-mei previously mentioned, which can make the appraisal of this school's mei, very difficult. To a certain extent, this is also true of later generations of the school, especially nidai Tadahiro. Finally, I am told that even today, very good and credible forgeries are still being made, some so good that they have deceived shinsa panels.

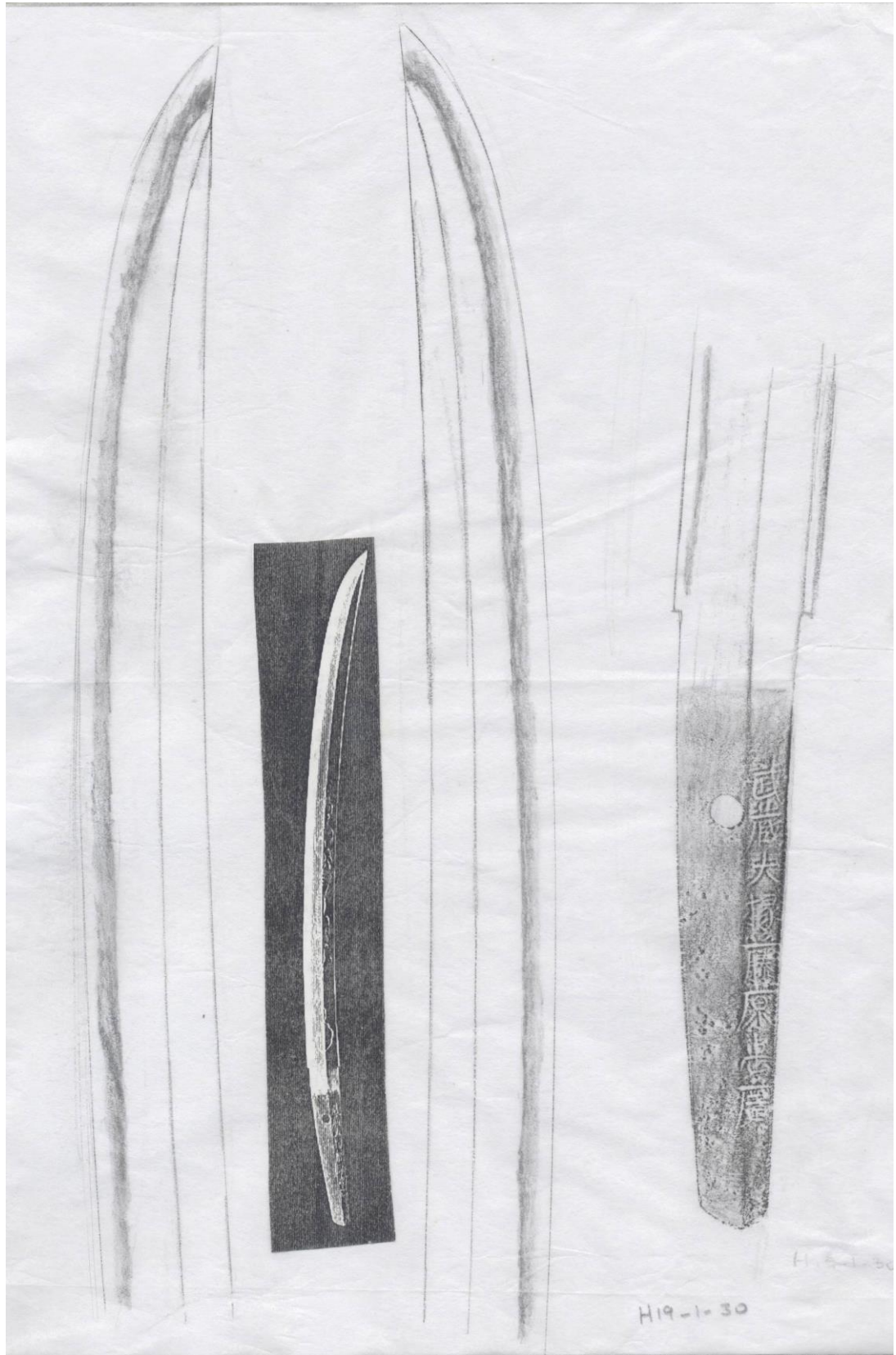


The grave of shodai Tadayoshi at the Shinkaku-ji temple in Saga

The wakizashi discussed above has old Tokubetsu Kicho papers from the December 1974 NBTHK shinsa, as does its accompanying koshirae. This sword was UK Sword Register 19, which featured in printed form only in Programme 166 published in April 1995 and is now updated for our website.

Clive Sinclair
Bexley, January 2007

Ref: Hizen Hekiki - Eguchi
Shinto Jiten – Fujishiro
Hizen-to Taikan



H19-1-30

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