

UK Sword Reg No: 98

Type: Shinshinto Hizen-to.

Nagasa: 69.4 cm **Moto-haba:** 2.9 cm **Saki-haba:** 1.9 cm

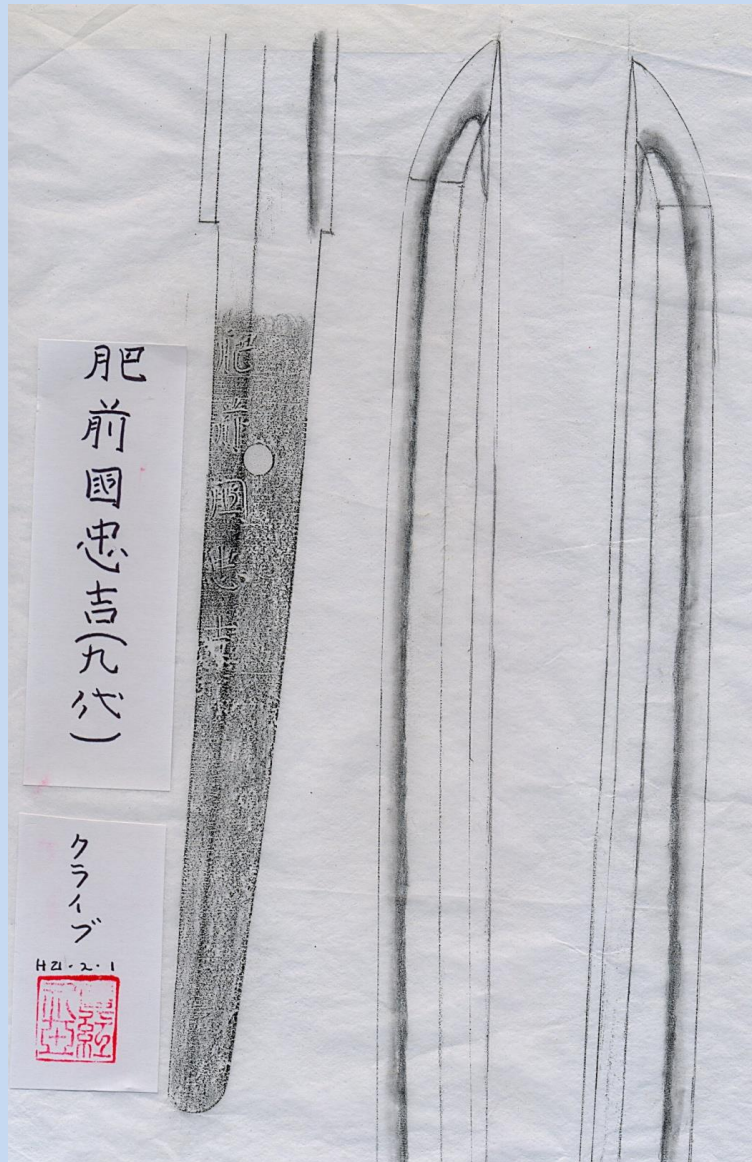
Sugata: A graceful and slender shinogi-zukuri tachi sugata. Tori-zori and iori-mune, chu-kissaki.

Jihada: A tight and homogenous ko-itame-mokume-hada with abundant ji-nie.

Hamon: Suguha in ko-nie deki, wide nioi-guchi c, continuing into the boshi which is ko-maru with kaeri.

Nakago: Ubu with one mekugi-ana, kuri-jiri and yoko-yasurime, signed tachi-meï HIZEN KUNI TADAYOSHI.

This sword has a most graceful curvature and the slender sugata and chu-kissaki are all in the proportions of a tachi rather than a katana which might be broader and have less zori. As with most Hizen-to, it is signed on the hakki-omote and has been attributed to the ku-dai (9th generation) Tadayoshi at NBTHK shinsa. It benefits from being in excellent condition with a top Japanese polish and the wide suguha gives an impression of a clean and efficient blade. This is somewhat different to many of the swords made in the Bakamatsu (end of the shogunate) time which may be heavy, broad and somewhat clumsy.



The jihada is an attractive and tight ko-itame/mokume with many ji-nie that give it a frost-like sparkle and is popularly known as *konuka-hada* on Hizen blades. In the suguha hamon, the fine nie and the wide nioi-guchi are also characteristics of classic Hizen swords made in the Yamashiro tradition of the Rai school.

I had always believed this to be the work of the hachi-dai (8th generation) mainline Tadayoshi of the Hashimoto family. Principally, the widely spaced characters of the goji-me (5 character signature) had led me to this conclusion, but the more cursive strokes are apparently indicative of the ku-dai, although both mei are quite similar.

The ku-dai Tadayoshi was born in 1832 and was the natural heir of the hachi-dai. His personal name was Hyakutaro until he inherited the head of the family on the death of his father (26th May 1859) when he adopted the Tadayoshi name and changed his personal name to Shunpei. He was 28 years of age at this time. The majority of his swords, as with the case in point, are signed with the Tadayoshi goji-me of Hizen (no) Kuni Tadayoshi. As a young man, there is evidence that he made swords with his father who is generally rated inferior only to the first and third mainline Tadayoshi generations.

It is interesting that Yokoyama Manabu, well known expert in Hizen-to, suggests that the ku-dai Tadayoshi, made many more exceptional swords than his father ever did and that his work is often confused with that of his father. Further, he suggests, that ku-dai Tadayoshi's high quality work may have been attributed to the hachi-dai until quite recently, contributing mistakenly to the latter's reputation and fame.

The 9th Tadayoshi gave up making swords in Meiji 4th year (1871). Many circumstances and events at this time of great upheaval, may have contributed to this, including the death of the Nabeshima daimyo, the tense political situation, anti-sword legislation and personal illness. He died at the young age of 49, on 27th December, Meiji 13th year (1880). This particular sword clearly demonstrates that the later mainline generations of Hizen swordsmiths, maintained the fine workmanship and high reputation of those who came earlier.

The sword was given Hozon papers by the NBTHK shinsa in Heisei 17th year.

Incidentally, this blade is accompanied by a koshirae, which I believe may be a style of handachi koshirae peculiar to Hizen province. This comprises of a broad lacquered saya with a single saya mount of a kojiri, a mokko-gata tsuba. The kojiri, fuchi and kashira (of kabuto-gane style) are often en-suite and often plain shakudo-nanako or shibuichi ishime, and without any other surface decoration. I have seen a number of similar koshirae and they have always contained blades from Hizen province. Handachi were a popular koshirae amongst those supporting the Imperial cause against the shogunate in the Bakamatsu period. The daimyo of Hizen were so-called *tozama* or outer daimyo who were antagonistic to the Tokugawa shogunate.

References: Eguchi Shoshin: Hizen-to Hikkei (translation by G Robson)
Roger Robertshaw: Hizen Tadayoshi

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Bexley,
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