

UK Sword Register 68

Type: Shinto katana

Nagasa: 67.2 cm **Moto-haba:** 3.1 cm **Saki-haba:** 2.1 cm

Sugata: Shinogi-zukuri, shallow tori-zori, iori-mune, slightly small chu-kissaki

Hamon: Nioi-deki, based on notare-midare with gunome and choji inclusions.
The boshi is ko-maru with kaeri.

Jihada: A dense and compact ko-mokume.

Nakago: Suriage with 2 mekugi-ana, some machi-okuri, yoko-yasurime, kiri-jiri, signed on the omote: BUNGO TAKADA JU FUJIWARA YUKIMITSU.

This sword gives the impression of being quite straight with a pronounced taper towards the smallish kissaki. In fact my first impression was inclined towards a Kambun shinto sugata. As a matter of fact, the sword was made around this time but it is the typical sugata of the Bungo Takada school in the shinto period. They seemed to have worked in several traditions but this example, in nioi and with some choji and gunome, seems to be more like Bizen-den than anything else. The Bungo Takada school are not considered to have very many artistic properties but were highly regarded for their practical cutting abilities. It may be argued that in less sensitive times than now, that this was a prime consideration.

The school was quite prolific and during koto times boasted such smiths as Bungo Yukihira, but there are no “great names” in the shinto period. During this time, the old clan name of Fujiwara is nearly always included in the mei of Bungo Takada swordsmiths and a mumei blade may be attributed to “Fujiwara Takada”. Further, virtually all shinto swordsmiths included the character YUKI in their professional names and so, as a provincial group, they seem to have been quite conservative. Having said that, the hamon on this sword looks rather flamboyant, almost reaching the Shinogi in several places.

The smith name of Yukimitsu was taken by one, Nakama Kazaemon and he worked around the Enpo period (1673). It is stated by Fujishiro that Yukimitsu had a similar style to Takada Teruyuki who worked at the same time and probably alongside Yukimitsu. It is also stated that at some stage, Yukimitsu worked in Kumamoto in neighbouring Higo province.

It seems that when Yukimitsu and other Bungo Takada swordsmiths made swords with suguha hamon, these appear very similar and may be confused with blades by Tadayoshi of nearby Hizen province. This might also suggest that the Takada swordsmiths were at least competent in Yamashiro den.

Whilst today, for obvious reasons we appreciate and study Japanese swords from a historical and artistic perspective, it is important to remember that they were made as very efficient weapons. A sword, such as the one under discussion would easily fulfil this requirement and may be described as an “honest” and “reliable” sword for the

ordinary samurai with few pretensions of being a great art object. Nevertheless, the Bungo Takada school fills an important niche in the history of Japanese swords and as such, this sword is a worthy example of this often maligned group. Indeed, this sword was considered good enough by somebody of at least the rank of Major, to take onto the World War 2 battlefields of Burma or Malaya. Actually, until very recently, it had spent the last 60 years in a cupboard in West London, fortunately untouched and in good condition. The removal of the leather foul weather covers from the saya and the tsuka revealed a full han-dachi koshirae in only slightly distressed condition.

Fujishiro rates this Yukimitsu as Chujosaku.

Clive Sinclair
Bexley, June 2005

