

UK Sword Register No. 127

Type: Late Shinshinto Tachi

Nagasa: 63.5 cm Moto-haba: 2.7 cm Saki-haba: 1.8 cm

- Sugata: Slender tachi sugata with iori-mune and chu-kissaki, tori-zori.
Ji-hada: Large and prominent mokume-itame hada with some ji-nie and chikei, visible on the shinogi-ji in places.
Hamon: Totally nioi-deki with ko-midare based on suguha. Boshi is quite narrow and ko-maru with a short kaeri.
Nakago: Ubu, with one mekugi-ana, kuri-jiri and very finely cut yoko-yasurime. Signed on the sashi-omote (tachi-mei) TEISHITSU GIGEIN SUGAWARA KANENORI HACHI-JU-NI SAI SAKU (line 3 on the oshigata).. On the hai-ura (line 1) OZU NISHITANE KUN KOMOE and on line 2 it is dated MEIJI YON-JU-YON NEN KICHI NICHI.

This sword is by a well known swordsmith of the late shinshinto period, i.e. in the late Meiji period from the early part of the 20th century. Known as Miyamoto Kanenori (1831-1926), this long-lived swordsmith, early in his career, was awarded the title of Noto (no) Kami, which he only held for a short period of time. At an early age he became a pupil of Sukekane of the Bizen Yokoyama school. His work spanned 60 years and he died aged 97 in 1926.

It was known that the Meiji emperor was very conscious of the hardships experienced by many native craftsmen, as Japan became influenced by the more advanced Western countries. It is also known that he was something of a collector of Japanese swords and began what is now known as the Imperial Collection and at this time, there were only about ten active swordsmiths in Japan. With all this in mind, in 1907 he created the honourable position of Teishitsu Gigein – “Imperial Household Artisan” which might be considered to be similar to today’s Ningen Kokuho or Living National Treasure. In the field of sword making, this award was granted to the two swordsmiths, Gassan Sadakazu and Miyamoto Kanenori, but I think that it is fair to say that Gassan Sadakazu was arguably the more skilful of the two. This status is noted in the mei of most, if not all of Kanenori’s blades from this time onwards.

This particular sword is distinctively of a graceful tachi sugata and Fujishiro states that Kanenori made swords “*centred on gunto*” which may refer to this. Notwithstanding this, there are two distinctive features in the present sword. that is often associated with Kanenori’s workmanship. The first of these is that the hamon is 100% formed in nioi, which I would suggest is unusual in swords from this time.

Especially distinctive, however, is the jihada, which may be referred to as “hadatachi”. “*This is where the grain of the jihada, stands out, looking like the raised grain on a piece of wood, but it is not actually raised*”. Such swords are also known as Hadamono – *The opposite of mujitetsu, in that the pattern in the hada is ostentatiously outstanding. It is also called yukumo-gitai, or “clustered clouds”, since the term hadamono has a negative connotation. Was used by some smiths in forgeries of Soshu works*” - this quote is from Harry Watson’s glossary in his translation of Nihon-to Kozan, where he states that he previously sourced the definition from Token Bijutsu. It should be stated that the present sword under discussion, is obviously

not a Soshu forgery, as this sword is in nioi-deki whilst Soshu-den is predominately nie-deki.

As is often the case, there is a considerable amount of interesting information to be found on the ubu nakago. It will be noticed that all of the main part of the inscription, in lines 2 and 3, are engraved in very small characters that are confined to the shinogiji part of the nakago.

Line 1: Here there is the name Ozu Nishitane inscribed on the hai-ura followed by a familiar term “Kun” who requested the inscription. This appears in a different style of engraving, being larger than the rest of the kanji inscribed on the nakago. I speculate that it may be that this was engraved later when the sword was due to be delivered to the customer. Actually the sword comes in its shin-gunto mounting which includes a cross-feathers silver mon on the kabuto-gane which, again I speculate, may be of the same family.

Line 2: This is the date of Meiji *Yon-Ju-Yon, Ju-Ichi Gatsu. Kichi-nichi* or the 44th year of the Meiji era, 11th month, a lucky day (1911). It may be noticed that the two characters for Yon (4) are written differently, the first in the conventional manner whilst the second is simply four short cuts. As the regular character for the number 4 may also be read as SHI which may also be interpreted as meaning “death. This is sometimes deemed an unlucky thing to have on a sword inscription. To negate this, the four simple strokes are carved instead and I guess the “Kichi-nichi” re-enforces the good vibrations!.

Line 3: This line gives Kanenori’s personal details and begins by stating that he is *Teijitsu Gijeiin*, followed by his family name of *Sugawara* and *Kanenori*. The *Kane* character is written in the Yamato style rather than the Mino *Kane*. There is no character for “Miyamoto” in this mei. The final part of the inscription states that Kanenori was 82 years old when he made the sword. Kanenori frequently engraved his age onto his swords in his later years.

It may be of interest to know that both the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, have examples of Kanenori’s work in their collections. The BM sword is quite different from the one under discussion here although it was made in 1910 and was owned by the museum’s donor family since 1911. The example in the V&A, dated 1907, was quenched in the presence of the British Ambassador and according to the curator, possibly, also even the Emperor.

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September 2013