

## A sword attributed to Yamato Tegai



### **Introduction:**

The Yamato tradition is based on five schools, Senjuin, Hosho Taima, Shikkake and Tegai, working in or around the temple complex in Nara.

It is perhaps the least studied and least understood in western groups. This is in part because they are comparatively rare. The majority of those seen are from the Tegai School and of those the most common originate from the Sue Tegai classification. These were made at a time when differences between the Yamato schools and of the other traditions in general, were becoming blurred. Increased demand also meant that quality was on the decline.

The result of this is, I think, that Yamato work is generally underrated. Opinions of those when asked range from the negative “they are boring” to the marginally more enthusiastic “They are workmanlike and functional”. I have rarely heard them described as a thing of beauty. However if you look a little deeper in to the school and beyond the boundaries of sue-Tegai, a different image starts to emerge.

### **The Tegai School:**



### **An O-suriage katana attributed to Shodai Kanenaga 包永**

Fred Weisberg has written an outline of the Tegai School which can be found on his website [www.Nihonto.com](http://www.Nihonto.com). In it he describes in detail the characteristics of the school and the schools origin. I have summarised some of this information below:

The Tegai School name was based on the fact they worked by the gate Tegai-Mon of the Todaji temple in Nara. The first generation Kanenaga working in the late 1200s is regarded as the founder.

The Tegai School worked continuously through the late Kamakura period until the end of the Nambokucho. There then appears to have been a gap in production. Work resumed a little later in the Muromachi period. Swords made in the later Muromachi period became known as Sue-Tegai. These later works had a number of differences from the earlier examples.

The Tegai School is perhaps the one most associated with typical Yamato characteristics (possibly because there is a greater number of Tegai works on which to base that association)

**Sugata:-**

The early Tegai smiths produced tachi, later generations also made tanto. I get the impression they made fewer Naginata than for example, the Shikkake School, but that is an impression rather than known fact. The Tachi were textbook Yamato. They are shinogi-zukuri, and iori mune. The few extant ubu blades exhibit Koshi zori which is quite deep and some show saki zori. The shinogi is high and generally the shinogi-ji is moderate to broad. There is often hira niku. The blades look powerful and robust. Hence the "workman like" label often applied. However at their best and even when O-suriage they look very well proportioned and elegant of form.

**Jitetsu:-**

The early works show a very tight, beautiful ko-itame. In some cases this might be mistaken for Rai work but generally it is not quite as beautiful as the best Yamashiro pieces. The hada has a great deal of bright ji-nie. There is sometimes a hint of masame and this becomes more obvious in later works. Kanenaga in particular is noted for the clarity of his hada.

**Hamon:-**

The majority of Tegai blades exhibit a chu-suguha hamon in nie-deki with uchinoki and nijuba. Some smiths, including the Shodai Kanenaga made other variations including a gentle midare with ko-gunome or ko-notare. There is activity such as inazuma, kinsuji and Yubashiri. The hamon can also be hotsure. They are all nie based and the nie is very clear and bright in some areas it can become ara nie

**Boshi:-**

The classically described Yamato boshi is yakizume and this is the case with the majority of Tegai blades. The boshi is nie based. Some are ko-maru and do have a very short kaeri. Some also exhibit hakikake.

**Nakago:-**

Ubu tachi are very rare. Those that do exist have a long nakago which is kurijiri. Yasurime are takanoha. However the majority of long swords are suriage or O-suriage.

**Mei:-** Because so many pieces were shortened few signed works remain. It has also been suggested that even when ubu Yamato smiths did not regularly sign their work. Those signed pieces that do exist are ni-ji mei. The majority extant signed pieces are by Kanenaga and his Mei generally appears at the bottom of the shortened nakago on the lower edge of the blade.

As mentioned above when the Tegai School started producing again as Sue Tegai their work exhibited many of the more general features associated of the broader Yamato Den, and indeed other schools of the period as they began to blur distinction in an attempt to recreate the much favoured Soshu trends of the day.

**Sue Tegai** smiths continued to produce blades with a high shinogi which was combined with a broad shinogi-ji. Their hada became more ko-mokume combined with masame. It appeared whitish (early

Kanenaga steel was described as dark or blackish). There was little ji-nie. The hamon is narrow and tight with little activity it consists of nioi with a little ko-nie. The most common boshi is ko-maru with a longer kaeri than seen on earlier work. The majority of the blades are o-suriage and mumei.

As seen with the majority of Schools in the muromachi period the quality of workmanship declined as smiths struggled to meet demand in very unsettled times.

### **The Sword:**



Description:

Nagasa: 52.3cm      Sori: 1.2cm

Motohaba 2.9cm    sakihaba 2.3cm

Kasane 0.6 cm.

The blade is shinogi-zukuri, lori mune with a moderate zori. The kissaki is chu-kissaki. It is o- suriage. The shinogi is slightly raised. The blade is wide with little obvious tapering towards the kissaki it is also thick. The overall impression is of a very powerful and substantial sword.

### **Jigane:-**

The jigane comprises of a beautiful and very tightly formed masame. The ji-nie is clear and bright and follows the borders of the masame.





**Hamon:-**



The hamon is a gentle midare with a broad nioi-guchi interspersed with nie which runs throughout its length. There is ha-hada clearly visible but not a great deal of other activity within the hamon. The hamon varies from side to side.

**Boshi:-**



On initial examination the boshi appears to be yakizume with a lot of nie. On closer inspection there it is very slightly ko-maru with a very short kaeri. Overall the boshi is broad and healthy and there is no evidence of alteration or loss of steel.

**Nakago:-**

The blade is o-suriage with the whole of the original being lost. It has been very well reshaped resulting in the blade retaining an excellent overall form. The nakago is in good condition and has an attractive dark brown patination. There is one mekugi ana. There are no yasurimeji visible.

**Comment:-**

When I first saw this blade my first reaction was that it was a work of the Hosho School. However the NBTHK have attributed it to Tegai so in the following I have tried to understand the reason for this attribution.

It reminded me very much of another sword I had seen when walking around the DTI with Darcy Brockbank in 2016. It was labelled as Hosho, we looked at it and had no doubt that this is what it was (as did everyone else who saw it). It was bought and submitted to the NBTHK who attributed it to Tegai. This blade is also papered to Tegai. So my question was why is this Tegai and not Hosho?

We must also remember that Tegai was the most prolific and variable of the five schools.

So why should this blade be considered Tegai and not, as I first thought, Hosho? I think the answer lies in 3 factors:

1. The hada is strongly Masame and covered in ji-nie. However that masame has a quite sinuous appearance and the nie bright and clear.
2. The hamon is a very gentle midare rather than suguha. It is nie deki and again the nie is very clear and bright. As Michael rightly suggest it is nearer to pure nie rather than ko-nie as I originally described it.
3. Finally the boshi is ko-maru albeit with a very small kaeri.

I believe the combination of these factors push the blade towards Tegai and away from Hosho.

So what does this tell us? I think the key take away is that differences between the five schools can be very subtle. Both Senjuin and Tegai show great variation in both quality and features through their history. Also looking at where the five schools worked and their close proximity to each other it would be amazing if there wasn't a broad overlap in their work styles.

### **Conclusion:**

As said above the Tegai School worked continuously through the late Kamakura period until the end of the Nambokucho. After a gap in production work resumed a little later in the Muromachi period. Swords made in the later Muromachi period became known as Sue-Tegai.

We are told that the work of Kanenaga had very little masame and that his ji-hada was full of nie. It is also said that later Tegai work had more masame but lacked ji-nie. Taking these factors in to account it suggest that this blade was made between the late Kamakura period and the end of the Nambokucho.

A recognised weakness of blades with predominantly masame hada is their tendency to develop kizu along the weld lines. This is seen in both Koto and Shinto work. In this case however the masame is perfect showing no trace of the hada opening. Not only is it faultless it is extremely beautiful. It is clearly visible and covered in very bright ji-nie. This pattern continues within the hamon resulting in a great deal of activity in the form of sunagashi and ji-nie. The nioi-guchi is covered in bright nie which greatly enhances the gentle midare hamon.

By any measure this is an excellent work. It clearly demonstrates the quality and diversity of the Yamato Tegai School working in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

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October 2022

### **Reference material:**

A Journey to the Gokaden **Tanobe Michihiro**

The Connoisseur's book of Japanese Swords **Kokan Nagayama**

Koto kantei and kantei supplements 1 and 2 **Markus Sesko**

[www.nihonto.com](http://www.nihonto.com) **Mr Fred Weisberg**



