

UK Sword Register 72

Type: Shinshinto tanto

Nagasa: 24.4 cm

Moto-haba: 2.9 cm

Saki-haba: 2.1 cm

- Sugata: Shobu zukuri, wide mihaba and thick kasane, low iori-mune.
Hamon: Choji-gunome in nie-deki, ashi and some sunagashi, some ara-nie at the top of the gunome and in the ji in places. Midare komi boshi with kaeri and muneyaki.
Jihada: A compact and tight ko-mokume, some ara-nie in the ji, ji-nie overall.
Nakago: Ubu with one mekugi-ana and ha-agari kiri-jiri. O-sujikai yasurime with kesho finish. Signed on the omote; GASSAN SADAYOSHI TSUKURU and dated on the ura: KEIO NINEN NI GATSU JITSU

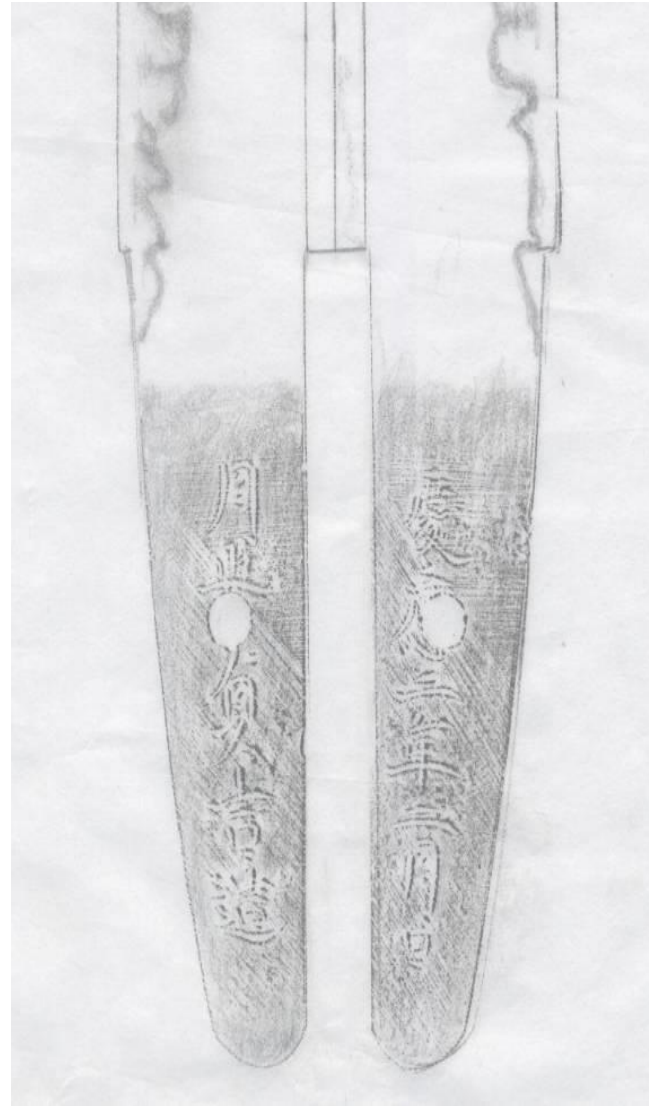
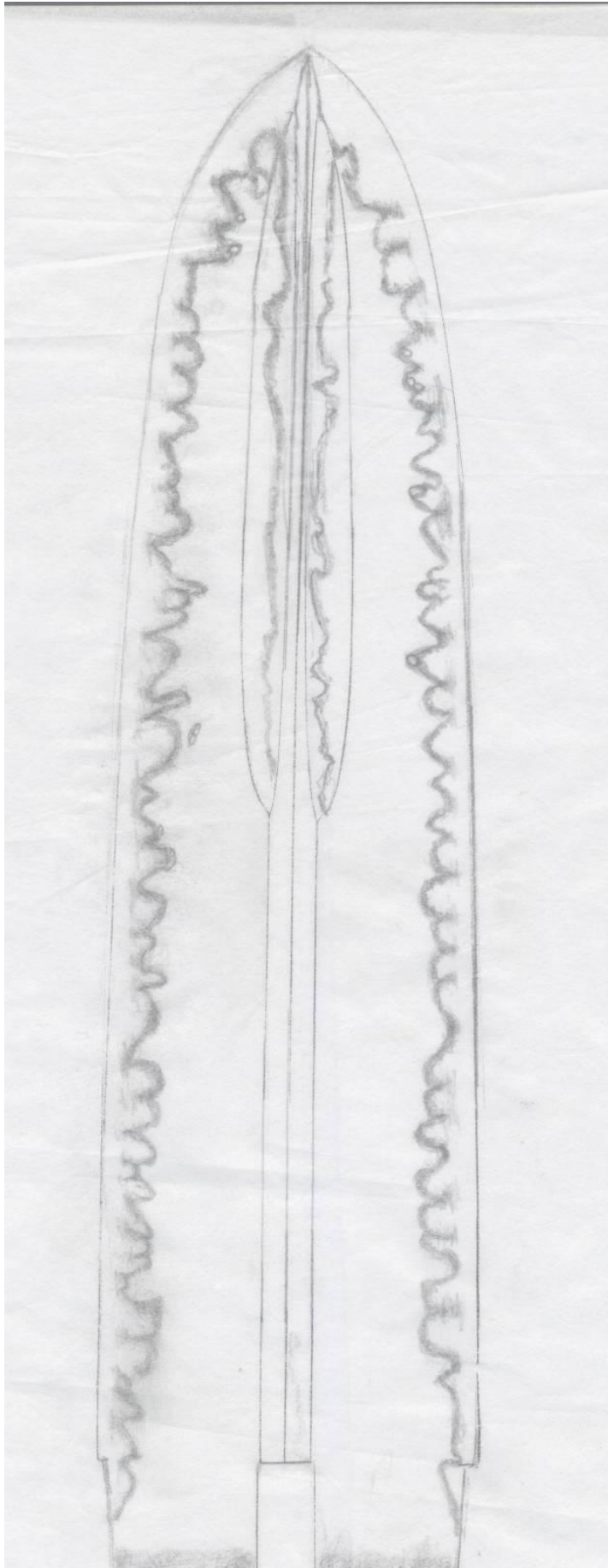
This tanto is immediately recognisable as shinshinto workmanship by its thick kasane and wide mihaba which give the impression of it being a sturdy piece. The full fukura is another indication. The hamon is Bizen in character and the mei is strongly and boldly carved on the nakago.

The so-called Ko Gassan school seemed to have disappeared at the end of the koto period but was restored by Gassan Sadayoshi in shinshinto times. Sadayoshi, whose personal name was Yahachiro, moved from Dewa province where he was born and after studying under Suishinshi Masahide in Edo, eventually moved to Osaka where he revived the old ayasugi style of swords. The Osaka Gassan school has continued there right through to the present day representative Sadatoshi.

There is an interesting kakemono in the family's archives that has a portrait of Sadayoshi (see below) and the calligraphy, written by his pupil Horii Taneyoshi, gives the following biographical details:-



“ Gassan Sadayoshi was born in Dewa Sasagawa in 1800 as the eldest son of Gassan Yasaburo Sadachika. Around 1820 he went to Edo and entered the school of Suishinshi Masahide, then an already highly reputed master artisan, representing the shinshinto period. When the teacher and the teacher's heir died in 1825, Sadayoshi left Edo, travelled to, and stayed in many provinces until he settled in Osaka around 1830. He gradually gained a very high reputation there as a skilled swordsmith. He lost a son in infancy and adopted Sadakazu, the heir-to-be, from the Tsukamoto, residing in the adjacent Omi province. He trained many pupils including his adopted son. Other well known pupils in his school included Kusano Yoshitake, Sugimoto Sadahide and Horii Taneyoshi. Sadayoshi died at the age of 71 (70 according to the occidental way of counting age) in the 3rd year of Meiji (1870)”.



Omote: Gassan Sadayoshi
Tsukuru

Ura: Keio Ninen Ni Gatsu
Jitsu

The earliest known work by Sadayoshi is a katana with ayasugi-hada that is dated Tempo 3rd year when he was 33 years of age and the latest dates from the 4th year of Keio (1867, one year after this tanto under discussion. He was 68 years old at this time.

In addition to the traditional style of the Gassan school, Sadayoshi mastered the styles of both Bizen-den and Yamashiro-den. It was certainly the case that at this time, the swords of Bizen from the Muromachi period were greatly in favour and many were given as gifts by wealthy daimyo. It is known also, that many were counterfeited to meet this demand, especially the so-called Kuwana-mono from Koyama Munetsugu and his pupils. An unknown number of swords in this style by Sadayoshi are considered to have had their mei removed and have been re-signed with older and more prestigious signatures from the Oei and later Muromachi period. Certainly the style of this particular tanto is in the Sue-Bizen and looks like the moroha-zukuri (double edged) tanto made by smiths such as Sukesada, Katsumitsu and Harumitsu from the 16th century, in spite of the fact that it is actually in shobu-zukuri. Actually, after Sadayoshi passed the age of 60, his son Sadakazu made an increasing number of swords in his father's name and his swords in both Bizen-den and Yamashiro-den are especially noteworthy. It is thought, therefore, that although this tanto has NBTHK Tokubetsu-hozon papers to Sadayoshi, it is distinctly possible that it is daisaku by Sadakazu.

Subsequent generations were especially skilled at very detailed horimono known as Gassan-bori.

Fujishiro rates Gassan Sadayoshi as Josaku.

Clive Sinclair
Bexley March 2006

References:
The Gassan Tradition
Shinshinto Taikan
Fujishiro Shinto Jiten