

UK Sword Register 88

Type: Shinshinto Jumonji-yari

Nagasa: 13.30cm **Width:** 8.4cm

Sugata: typical jumonji-yari with upward curving horizontal arms resembling the horns of a cow and called gyukaku-ugata.

Jihada: Mostly muji-hada with some visible masame.

Hamon: Suguha in nioi, some coarse spots.

Nakago: Suriage with 2 mekugi-ana (one at the bottom of the nakago). Kiri yasurime with kesho finish. Signed on the omote: MUTSU SHIRAKAWA JU KOYAMA FUJIWARA MUNETOSHI and dated on the ura: ANSEI ROKUNEN HACHI GATSU HI (1859).

This small Jumonji or Magari-yari is an attractive shape and well proportioned. The nakago seems to have been broken off through the lower mekugi-ana, rather than properly shortened. There is a small punch mark (maybe an aborted mekugi that broke the existing nakago) near the jiri and discernable in the rather unclear oshigata. The kesho yasurime are on both omote and ura of the nakago, as well as on the both side sections of the nakago. The inscription is carved in small characters to fit the narrow nakago, but the calligraphy is beautifully executed.

It is said that the swordsmith Munetoshi was the elder brother of Koyama Munetsugu, the master swordsmith working in the Bizen style during the late Edo or Bakamatsu period (see UK Sword Reg No. 44). Usually Munetoshi made large swords that were similar in style to Munetsugu, so this yari is something of a departure from his normal workmanship.

Munetoshi died at the age of 76 in Meiji 3rd year (1870).

I personally, do have a bit of a problem with the dating of Munetoshi's blades, which all seem rather later than one might have expected. The dated examples which I have been able to find (in oshigata form) in the standard references, range from Kaie 7th year (1854) to Keio 3rd year (1867) spanning only 13 years. This means that they were made when he was between 61 and 74 years of age, but I was unable to find anything earlier. This is especially strange since his "younger brother" Munetsugu, was certainly extremely active in the Tempo era (1830's) and later, where no Munetoshi blades seem to be around.

Dated blades signed Munetoshi:

Fujishiro Shinto Jiten	Kaie 7 th year	1854
This yari	Ansei 6 th year	1859
Shinshinto Taikan	Bunkyo Gannen	1861
Kanzan Oshigata	Bunyo 3 rd year	1863
Nihonto Koza	Keio 3 rd year	1867



There was a nidai Munetoshi recorded, who died at the age of 53 in Meiji 21st year (1888). If he were the maker of the above blades, then he would have made them between the ages of 19 and 32. but if they were made by the shodai, he would have been in his 60's and 70's. I was unable to find any reference oshigata by the nidai.

What conclusions may be drawn from the above? A number of theories may be made to fit this rather tenuous evidence, drawn from such a small sample...

- 1) Shodai Munetoshi started making swords very late in life.
- 2) There was only one Munetoshi (who we have called the nidai) who was not Munetsugu's elder brother, but maybe a son or student.
- 3) As the whole Koyama school were making the so-called Kuwana-mono (copies of old Bizen swords, often used as gifts) then maybe the shodai was fully engaged in this and only free to make swords in his own name, at a much later date.
- 4) My sample is too small and actually there are Munetoshi swords which have earlier dates on them, which I simply have not seen. However, Sato Kanzan gives the shodai's working dates as Ansei-Meiji and Fujishiro as Bunkyu (1861).

Apparently none of the above apply. Instead, it seems that, contrary to a number of the standard references, who state that both Munetoshi and Munehira were older brothers of Munetsugu, Munehira, whose mei varied somewhat anyway (he also used a variation on the usual "Hira" character) also signed as Munetoshi using the full mei as shown in this example, (See the Meikan) so none of my possibilities seem to apply.

Fujishiro rates both shodai Munetoshi and Munehira as Chujo-saku.

My thanks to Tom Helm and Harry Watson for helping me unravel this apparent anomaly. I apologise for the poor quality oshigata (I find the lines and angles of Jumonji-yari very difficult) and the childlike calligraphy, but the inscription is very small and hard to reproduce and not helped by rather ancient scanning equipment.

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