

UK Sword Register 81 (19)

Type: Shinshinto katana

Nagasa: 68.0 cm Moto-haba: 2.9 cm Saki-haba: 2.5 cm

- Sugata: Hon-zukuri, shallow tori-zori with saki-zori, iori-mune.
- Jihada: A running itame-mokume mixed with masame and becoming almost pure undulating masame towards the kissaki. Some ji-nie and chikei.
- Hamon: Nie-deki. Mainly choji, many kawakzuko-choji, some gunome and togari-ba. Many ashi, sunagaeshi and kinsuji, some tobiyaki at the top of the choji. Midare-komi boshi, slightly weak, pointed with kaeri and some hakikake.
- Nakago: Ubu, with one mekugi-ana, sujikai yasurime and kuri-jiri. The omote carved with a small dragon above the mei. Inscribed KURIHARA KEJI NOBUHIDE. The ura carved with the names of two princes on either side of the mekugi-ana, YAMATO TAKERU (no) MIKOTO and the other TAKEMIKADZUCHI (no) MIKOTO.
- Horimono: A spectacular and finely carved horimono on the omote, deeply cut in the hi and centered on the shinogi, depicting Yamato Takeru (no) Mikoto wielding the “grass mowing sword” surrounded by flames which are highlighted in gold. On the ura is the hatahoko (banner) of Takemikadazuchi (no) Mikoto (the Thunder God) similarly highlighted in gold.

(Contained in old shira-say with long anonymous saya-gaki)

This sword has many of the characteristics associated with the shinshinto period, including o-kissaki, a wide mi-haba and a heavy feel. However, unlike most swords of the period, the pattern of the jihada is very pronounced and dark in colour. It has been suggested that this has been artificially induced by introducing other metals into the forging process. The hamon displays a number of hataraki including sunagaeshi, kinsuji and ashi. The nie are quite fine but rather “darkish” in colour.

The significance of the small ascending dragon carved on the nakago is unknown and not the result of any machi-okuri. The inscription of the names of the two princes is inscribed faintly on the ura of the nakago.

There can be no doubt that the spectacular horimono are the outstanding features of this sword. They represent excellent carving and especially the main one of Yamato Takeru no Mikoto (a legendary figure from ancient times) is deeply carved. The inclusion of gold highlights in many of the details, adds a spectacular dimension to both horimono, that is rare in Japanese blades.

This sword has no modern certificates of authentication and I personally have certain reservations as to the authenticity of the signature. It is a highly decorative piece. This may not find favour with many sword enthusiasts.

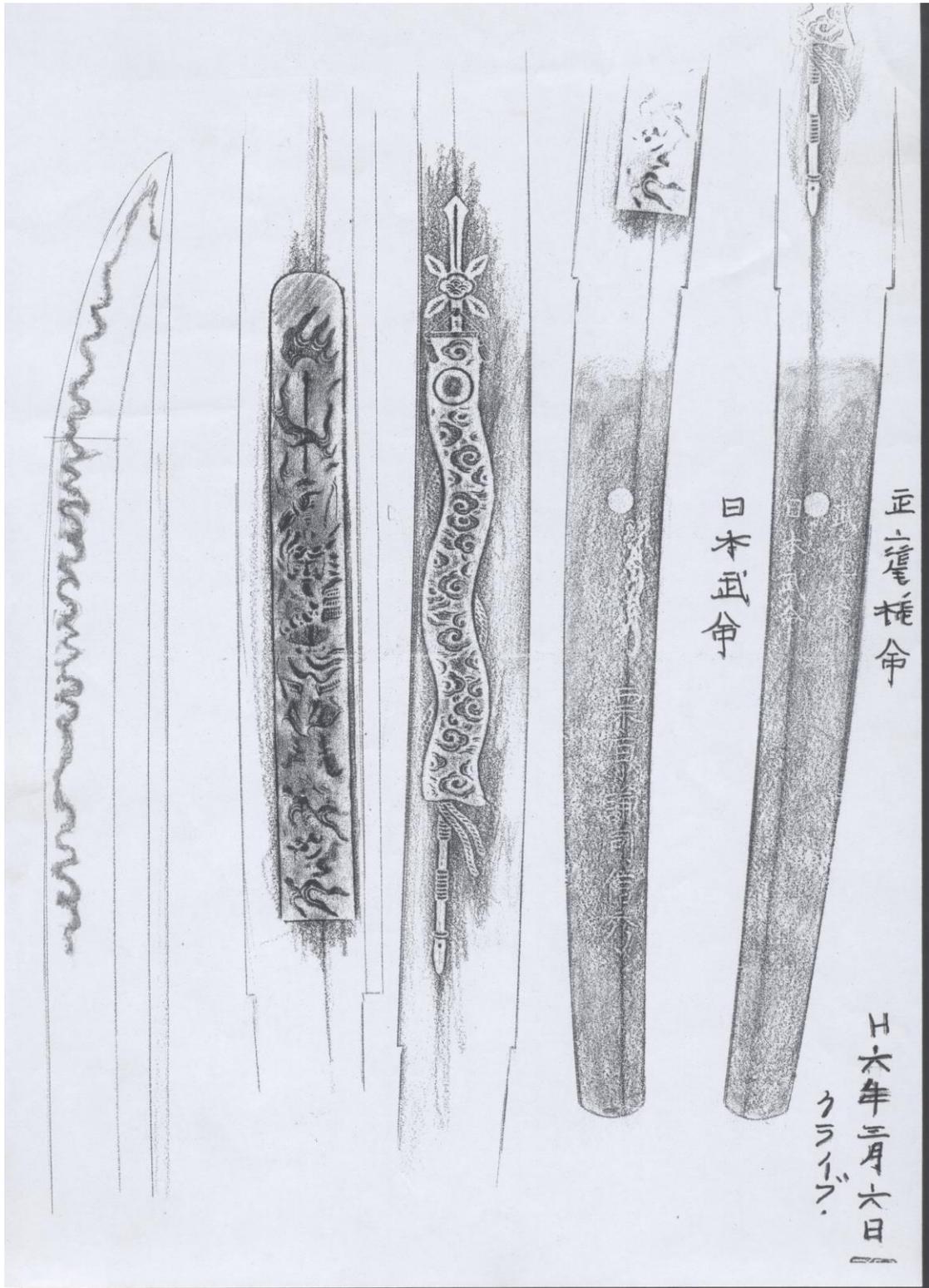
Nobuhide, whose personal names were Kurihara Keiji, was born in Bunka 12th year (1815) and originally hailed from Echigo province and he went to Kyoto where he became a skilled mirror maker.



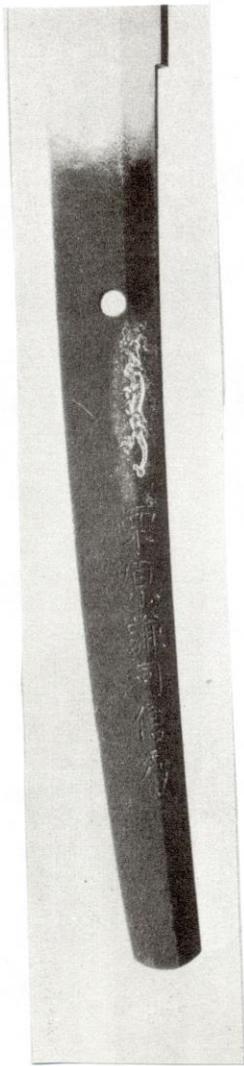
↑ Nobuhide (from a print dated Meiji 7th year)

In the 3rd year of Kaei (1850) at the age of 35, he entered into the school of Kiyomaro where he served a short apprenticeship of only 2 years. He is considered the most skilful of Kiyomaro's students and was especially skilled at carving horimono. In his earlier work he often inscribed "hori do saku" indicating that he made the carving himself, but this is not so common on his later works (indeed it is surprising that the horimono-shi is not acknowledged in the inscription on this sword).

In Keio Gannen (1865) Nobuhide was granted the title of Echizen (no) Kami after which he is known to have forged swords in Osaka and around this time he signed NOBUTAKA. After his teacher, Kiyomaro committed suicide, Nobuhide with his fellow pupil Kiyondo, undertook to discharge Kiyomaro's debts and made many dai-saku and dai-meï and eventually they built a tombstone for Kiyomaro at Koyazan. After the prohibition against wearing swords in 1876 (the Haito-Rei) Nobuhide returned to Echigo province and resumed mirror making. He died in Meiji 14th year (1881) at the age of 66.



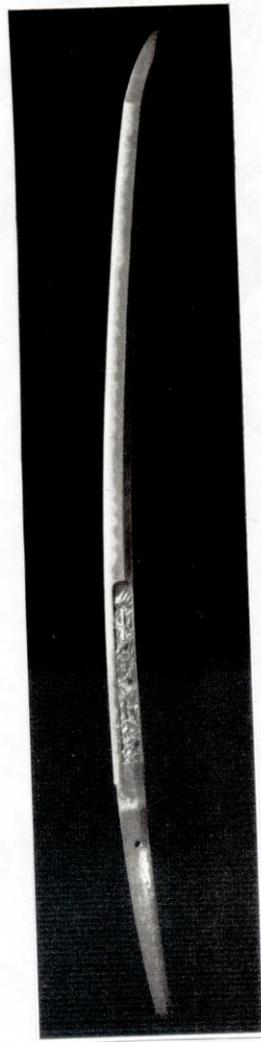
(Reduced size oshigata)



Dragon on the
nakago



Horimono on the
omote



Full length blade

From Ashmolean Museum catalogue and Arts of the Japanese Sword

As previously mentioned the shira-saya has an extensive, but anonymous saya-gaki, This is transcribed below. It suggests that the sword was actually made for the Meiji emperor, but there is no corroborating evidence available that I could find, to support this contention. (my apologies for the crude calligraphy)

The design of the campaign is amazing (*the meaning of this is a little unclear but I believe it refers to the design of the horimono*)
The smith is extremely good at horimono.

The following colour pictures were kindly supplied by Mr A Norman who polished this sword some 13 years ago, at the same time that I made the oshigata.



The above gives a hint of the saya-gaki and the highly ornate main horimono, which is shown in more detail below.



This sword was the property of the late Basil Robinson and was exhibited at the The Art of the Armourer, Victoria & Albert Museum, London in 1963 and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford in the 1968 Token Society Exhibition. It was also loaned to the Society for our Token Taikai '89. Of course, it is illustrated in BW Robinson's *Arts of the Japanese Sword* and is still in the possession of the Robinson family.

This UK sword Register was previously published in printed form in Token Programme No. 165 in November 1994. It is now updated for our website.

Clive Sinclair
Bexley, February 2007