

UK Sword Register No: 105

Type: Shinto katana

Nagasa: 71.6 cm **Moto-haba:** 3.2 cm **Saki-haba:** 2.6 cm

Sugata: Broad shinogi-zukuri with wide mihaba, very shallow tori-zori and a low iori-mune. O-kissaki.

Jihada: Ko-itame and mokume with some ji-nie and small areas of coarseness.

Hamon: An exuberant gunome-midare in ko-nie deki with many thick ashi predominantly in nioi, some sunagashi. Slight midare on the omote side boshi, the ura being suguha and both sides in ko-maru with kaeri.

Nakago: Ubu with a single mekugi-ana, kate-sagari yasurime, some patches of corrosion evident, kuri-jiri. Signed on the omote ECHIZEN JU HARIMA DAIJO FUJIWARA SHIGETAKA (the first character and the last characters slightly obscured due to corrosion)

This sword has a powerful and robust sugata having a wide mihaba and o-kissaki. The sword has almost no sori and the wide hamon is liberally embellished with both long and shorter thick ashi. Although this sugata might suggest that the sword was made in the Nambokucho period (1336-92) or the later shinshinto period, the almost complete lack of sori is consistent with Kanbun-shinto (1661-73) which is the actual date of manufacture. The ubu nakago appears rather small for this large sword.

The shodai (first generation) Shigetaka from Echizen province, was active around the Kanei era (1634) and made mostly hira-zukuri wakizashi, although he was known to have made swords of a similar sugata to the present example (including at least one, probably for presentation to a shrine, that was an incredible 103.2 cm in length!) His blades often displayed good kenmaki-ryu horimono, which Fujishiro speculates may have been carved by the local Kinai tsuba makers. His style is said to resemble that of Yasutsugu and Higo Daijo Sadakuni.

This sword, however, is by the nidai (2nd generation) Shigetaka, which may be clearly seen by the unique and distinctively formed character SHIGE. Both the shodai and nidai seem to have co-operated with various other swordsmiths in the production of blades and both are recorded as having worked with Nambam-tetsu (foreign iron). This was very fashionable throughout the country (and especially in Echizen province) during the early shinto period. Certainly nidai Shigetaka is recorded as having co-operated with Hoki (no) Kami Hirotaka in sword production on at least one occasion.

Altogether there were eleven generations named Shigetaka, the last one being at the very end of the Edo period. Whilst the shodai and nidai were reasonably prolific swordsmiths, there are no extant examples of the sandai, probably as there was no demand for swords from the Genroku era and none other than shodai and nidai had titles. Interestingly, there is a sword by the yondai (fourth generation) in which he co-operated with two other swordsmiths (Hoki no Kami Fujiwara Hirotaka and

Shimosaka Omi no Kami Tsuguhiro). This unusual phenomenon is called *san-nin gassaku* by Kanzan Sato sensei. Such a long lineage would seem to indicate that these swordsmiths were patronised or retained by a powerful and rich clan, but I have been unable to find evidence of this. Further, the workmanship of the nidai Shigetaka is similar to that of the sandai and yondai Yasutsugu who were retained by the main Tokugawa shogunate family, leading me to wonder if the Shigetaka line were retained by a branch line of the main Tokugawa family.

As previously stated, this present sword by nidai Shigetaka, by virtue of its robust and imposing sugata, including the o-kissaki and wide mihaba, immediately reminds one of the suriage swords of the Nambokucho period. This sugata is quite unusual during the shinto period, other than in Keicho era (1596–1614) when the suriage Nambokucho shape was copied. This would also account for the fact that the nakago appears to be quite small compared to the rest of the blade as the koto examples would not have their original nakago. On shorter swords, such as wakizashi, the eleven character mei is split with “Echizen ju” on the ura and the remaining eight being located on the omote.

I speculate that both shodai and nidai Shigetaka, when producing swords in this sugata (they also made more conventional shaped swords) may have been inspired by Kanemitsu from the Enbun period. It is also said that nidai Shigetada was influenced by Kotetsu when he was in Edo, but I think this is not especially evident in the present example.

Fujishiro rates nidai Shigetaka as Chujosaku and this sword was given Hozon at NBTHK shinsa in Heisei 15th year.

Clive Sinclair
Bexley, March 2010