

UK Sword Register No.72

Type: Gendaito

Nagasa: 59.6 cm **Moto-haba:** 2.5 cm **Saki-haba:** 1.7 cm

Sugata: Hon-zukuri, shallow tori-zori, ko-kissaki, iori-mune, futatsu-bi on both sides.

Jihada: A compact ko-mokume hada with ji-nie.

Hamon: A complex mixture of saki-gunome-choji midare with togariba in ko-nie and nioi, saki-ashi with sunagashi. Hakikake boshi, slightly midare-komi with short kaeri.

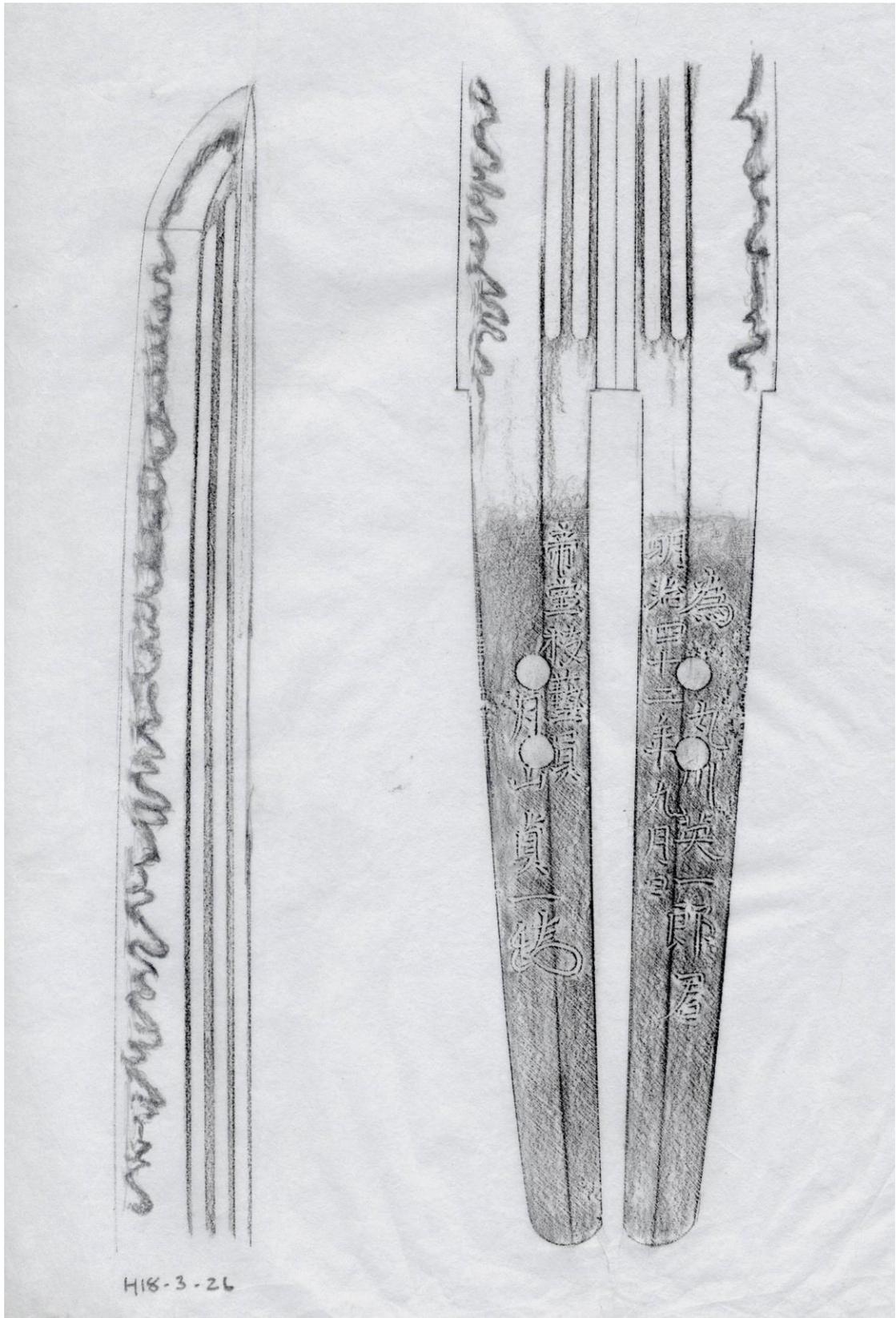
Nakago: Ubu but with 2 mekugi-ana, kesho yasuri and kuri-jiri. Signed on the sashi-omote: GASSAN SADAKAZU with Kao and TESHITSU GIGEI-IN. On the ura it is dated MEIJI JONJUNI NEN KUGATSU NICHI (1909) and in addition TAME NI MARUKAWA EICHIROE KUN

This attractive blade, with its narrow mihaba has the appearance of a smallish tachi. In fact I have seen a number of swords of 20th century manufacture, which have a similar sugata and all of these have been accompanied by superior tachi koshirae such as gensuito or similar. As this was specially made, according to the inscription, for a certain Marukawa Eichiroe, I speculate that he was a high ranking officer in the armed forces or diplomatic corps who had such a koshirae. I have so far been unable to trace him in my limited reference material. (for a similar sword see the Ikkansai Shigetoshi, UK Sword Register No. 69)

The blade itself is in Bizen-den which it is said is the style in which some of the best workmanship of Gassan Sadakazu may be found. Although the complicated hamon is predominantly in ko-nie, the sloping nature of the choji, gunome and ashi, somewhat suggests to me, Bitchu Aoe work or maybe even Ichimonji.

Born in 1836, the son of Tsukamoto Shichirobei in the village of Sugoshi in Omi province, Gassan Sadakazu was adopted by Gassan Sadayoshi whose natural young son and heir died in infancy (see UK Sword Register 71). His personal name was Yagoro and he used the "art name" of Unryushi which can often be seen in his mei. He seemed to have been a quick learner and by the time he was 14 he was making swords. He also became highly skilled at carving intricate and detailed horimono which became known as Gassan-bori. The edict banning the wearing of swords which made many swordsmiths redundant in 1876 came when Sadakazu was at the peak of his abilities.

Sadakazu is given great credit for preserving the art of swordmaking through the difficult times of the early Meiji period when there was little demand for his talents. It is said that with the few other stalwarts, a living was eked out by making copies and fakes of old swords by famous makers which were all that the collectors of the day were interested in. However, with the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) interest in Japanese swords increased and work was



H18-3-26

commissioned. It was at this time (1906) that the Meiji Emperor, himself a collector of swords, awarded Sadakazu, together with another swordsmith, Hayama Enshin (see UK Sword Reg 51), the title of Teshitsu Gegei-in (Artisan of the Imperial Household). This was in recognition of their skill and dedication in preserving the traditional Japanese arts in the face of increasing Westernisation of the country. Sadakazu was 73 years of age at this time. This title is recorded on the omote of the sword being discussed here and it was made some 3 years after the title was conferred on him, making him 76 at the time of this sword's manufacture.



Sadakazu continued to preserve the classic Gassan tradition of *ayasugi hada* that Sadayoshi had revived. During his career he made swords for 2 emperors, the Meiji emperor in 1906 and for the coronation of the Taisho emperor in 1916. It is known that Sadakazu substituted for his teacher Sadayoshi in his advanced years (*daisaku* and *daimei*) and in his turn, many of Sadakazu's later works are *daisaku* by his pupil and heir, Gassan Sadakatsu, as may be the case with this sword. Sadakazu died in 1918 at the age of 84.

Gassan Sadakazu is rated as *Jojo Saku* by Fujishiro and this sword has been given *Tokubetsu Hozon* by the NBTHK.

Clive Sinclair
Bexley, March 2006