

UK Sword Register No.93

Type: Shinto tachi.

Nagasa: 72.3 cm **Moto-haba:** 3.0 cm **Saki-haba:** 2.0 cm

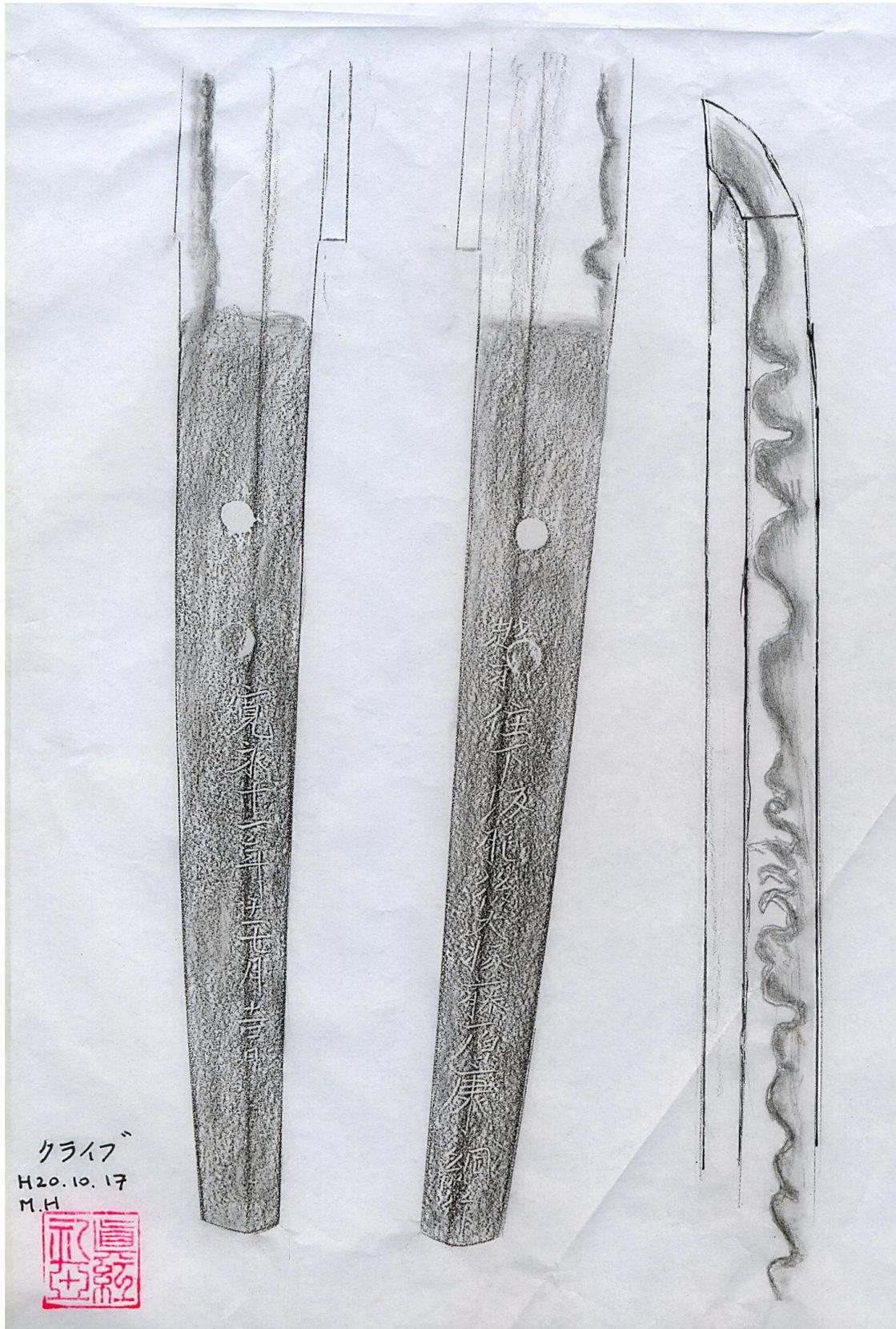
Sugata: Shinogi-zukuri with shallow tori-zori, iori-mune and small chu-kissaki. Noticeable fumbari.

Jihada: Itame-hada with ji-nie.

Hamon: An irregular large gunome-midare in nie-deki. Many long sunagaeshi sweeping the inside of the hamon throughout. The boshi is quite full with kaeri and hakikake.

Nakago: Machi-okuri with 2 mekugi-ana (the lower one filled). Signed on the hakki-omote ECHIZEN JU SHIMOSAKA HIGO DAIJO FUJIWARA YASUTSUNA SAKU and dated on the hakki-ura KANEI JUICHINEN NANAGATSU KICHINICHI (equivalent to 1633)

The sugata of this blade, showing a noticeable “swelling” in the area nearer the moto-haba, together with the comparatively small kissaki, indicate that this is a tachi rather than a katana which would have been more normal at this time. This is confirmed by the signature being on the hakki-omote or as tachi-mei. The prominence of nie in the construction of the hamon, together with the many hakikake or activities, point towards the strong influence of Soshuden.



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During the Momoyama period, it was Toyotomi Hideyoshi who sent Tokugawa Ieyasu's son Hidetada, to govern Echizen province. It is sometime seen as a banishment rather than any

kind of reward, the main object of which was to dilute or fragment the ever-growing power and influence of the Tokugawa.

However, it was this branch of the family, called the Matsudaira, which attracted many swordsmiths and tsuba makers. As the country settled down after the Senogoku-jidai and swordsmiths sought patronage, many moved to the great martial provinces. Principally, swordsmiths going to Echizen were from Seki in Mino province who became known as the Echizen-Seki school and the Kinai were skilled tsuba makers and carvers of horimono. A well established family of swordsmith, headed by a certain Hironaga, hailed from Sakatagun, Shimosaka in Omi province and they relocated to Echizen at this time. Initially, the leading swordsmith signed as “Higo Daijo Shimosaka” and later as Yasutsugu.

Through his highly placed patrons, Yasutsugu was able to set up a forge at Hitanosho and around Keicho 12th year, he became swordsmith to the Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu, a position that was held by his descendants for eleven generations.

During the early days of the shinto period, the Shimosaka swordsmiths seem to have emulated the style of Masamune and Sadamune, producing work in Soshu-den as well as Shinto Tokuden. It seems that Yasutsuna, a member of the extended Shimosaka family and the maker of the sword shown here, also worked in Soshu-den, as evidenced by the sword under discussion. It also seems that Yasutsuna might have been somewhat eclipsed by the many great swordsmiths working at the time or slightly earlier, as modern English language references on him are hard to find. However he is highly rated by Homma and listed in Hawley’s Japanese Swordsmiths. It is interesting also to note that several of the Echizen smiths of this time enjoyed the title of “Higo Daijo”. Whilst I am unclear as to the significance of this shared title, it may indicate that there was co-operation between these smiths as much excellent work was produced in Echizen during the early shinto period. This blade has been designated as Tokubetsu Hozon by the Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai at the June 2000 shinsa.

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