

## UK Sword Register 79

**Type:** Hizen-to (Shinto)

Nagasa: 75.4 cm      Moto-haba: 3.2 cm      Saki-haba: 2.0 cm

**Sugata:** A comparatively slender shinogi-zukuri with tori-zori and iori-mune, with fumbari and a small chu-kissaki. Futatsu-bi on both sides located in the shinogi-ji.

**Jihada:** A fine ko-mokume (konuka-hada) with ji-nie and chikei

**Hamon:** Nie-deki but with some nioi, wide gunome-choji-midare based on notare-midare. Many ashi and ko-ashi, yo, sunagaeshi and kinsuji mainly in or near the habouchi. Boshi is suguha and ko-maru with kaeri.

**Nakago:** Ubu with one mekugi-ana, sujikai yasurime, yamagata-jiri, there is a possibility of about 1cm machi-okuri, signed on the sashi-ura HIZEN KUNI KAWACHI DAIJO FUJIWARA MASAHIRO.

The sugata of this sword is rather distinctive and unlike that normally associated with the Hizen province swords of the early shinto period. Mostly, such swords seem to be quite wide in the mihaba with little tapering and the kissaki is often described as “elongated” or “thrusting” chu-kissaki. This sword, however, is quite long, narrow and slender, having a graceful elegance together with a rather small chu-kissaki. I consider that this difference demonstrates a tachi sugata rather than the more usual katana-sugata of the time.

Further, the hamon is also rather uncharacteristic. Although it includes some gunome and choji, this is based on a wide notare-midare that comes close to the shinogi in places. It is overwhelmingly nie dominated with many of the hataraki associated with nie, such as sunagaeshi, kinsuji, yo etc. In my personal opinion, these features represent strong influence from Soshu-den.

It is the beautiful, compact jihada, embellished with nie and chikei that should help us to Hizen-to (where it is known as konuka-hada) but I confess that I would not be easily able to attribute it to this school in a kantei session.

We appear, therefore, to have a Soshu-den tachi that was made in Hizen province by the shodai (first generation) Masahiro who was born in 1607 in the Hizen capital of Saga. His given name was Sadenjiro and later he was known as Yashichibei. His father, also a swordsmith, was Yoshinobu, the son-in-law of shodai Tadayoshi. Shodai Masahiro was Tadayoshi's grandson (on his mother's side of the family) as well as his pupil. Additionally he was adopted by Tadayoshi as his son. In the complicated relationships that existed in this group of swordsmiths, he was both the son and grandson of Tadayoshi (it is thought that the adoption was made to provide Tadayoshi with an heir, although this was rendered unnecessary by the birth of a natural heir, who was later to become Omi Daijo Tadahiro).

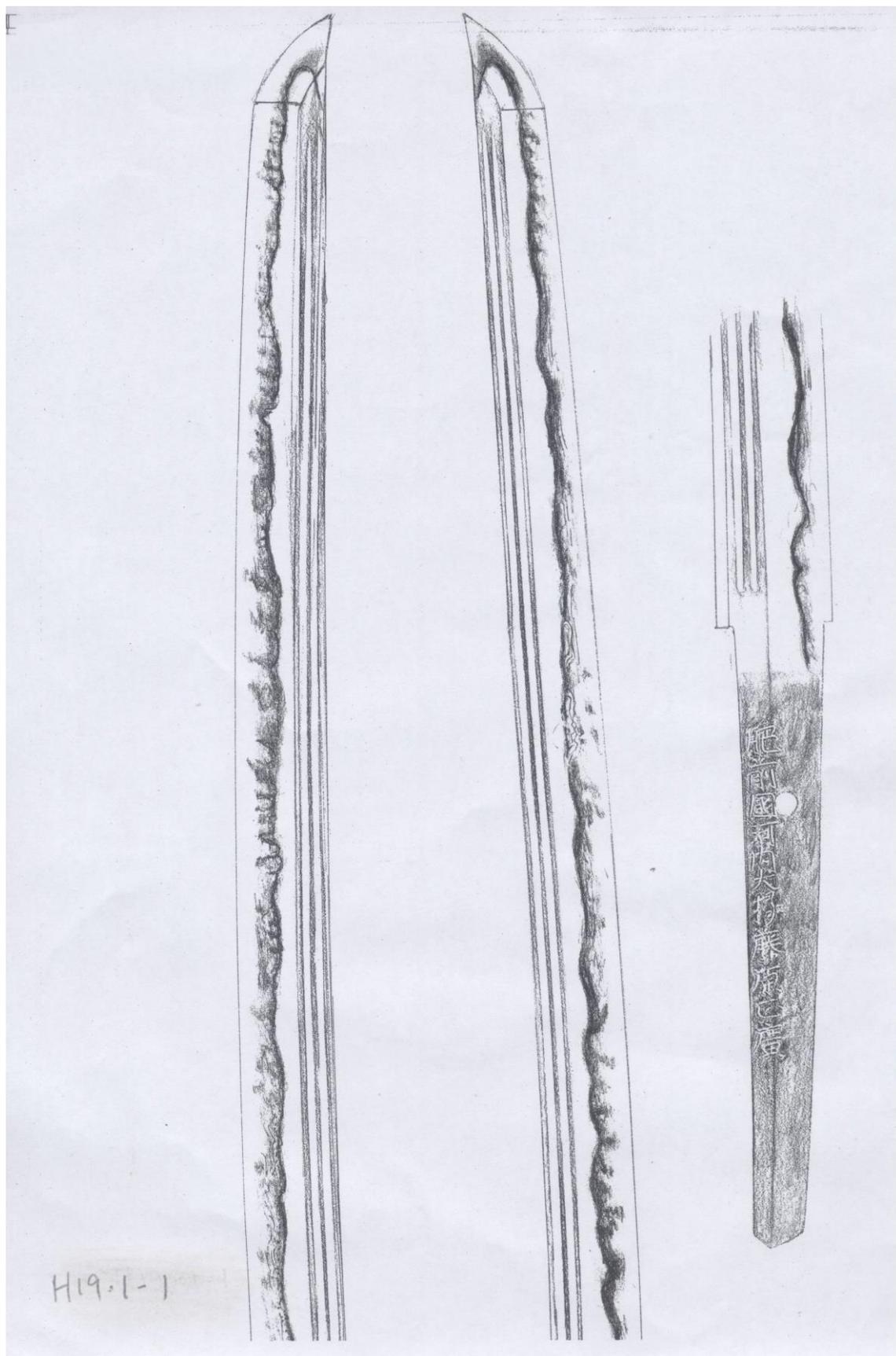
The name Masanaga is said to have been the first swordsmith's name of Masahiro. This name was certainly used by subsequent generations before they took over the

lineage and the Masahiro name, but there seems to be only one example attributed to shodai Masahiro, and there is even some doubt about this.



In 1623, when the young Masahiro was 16 years old and was studying sword making under both his father, Yoshinobu, and his grandfather Tadayoshi, he made a tachi (maybe assisted by his teachers) which was presented to the clan leader, Lord Nabeshima. The Lord was obviously very impressed with the young swordsmith's work, which was a Soshu style tachi. He said, "*This is very well made. It is exactly like a Soshu Masahiro blade. It would be better to use the Masahiro signature from this point onward*". And so in 11<sup>th</sup> month of Kanei 2<sup>nd</sup> year (1625) he is said to have changed his signature to Masahiro. At this time he was also given a rice stipend as part of the on-going patronage of the Hashimoto family of swordsmiths by the powerful Nabeshima daimyo of Hizen province. It seems that the Soshu style tachi represents Masahiro's best workmanship.

There are confusing circumstances surrounding the award and use of the Kawachi Daijo title. Some sources and the weight of opinion, say that the title was awarded by the Nabeshima daimyo in 1628, but there are no examples of it being used until 1641 or 1644. Before this time, Masahiro's mei read *Hizen Kuni Saga ju Masahiro*. It is possible that for some reason the Han authorities prevented the use of the title by one of their retained smiths, or more probably, it was actually awarded at the later date. As may be seen in the current example, when using the "Kawachi Daijo" title, the characters for "Fujiwara" are also included in the mei. Also the characters become smaller than those of previous signatures and a broader chisel is employed for the mei-kiri. He followed the custom of most Hizen smiths by signing long swords on the sashi-ura, so called tachi-mei.



Hizen Kuni Kawachi Daijo Fujiwara Masahiro  
(Oshigata reduced to 68% of original)

The swordsmiths of Hizen were known for co-operating with each other because of their close family ties and in the early Shinto period, it appears that shodai Masahiro was pivotal in the prosperity of both the Hashimoto family and the Nabeshima Han's prosperous sword business. After shodai Tadayoshi was awarded the Musashi Daijo title in 1624, he changed his name to Tadahiro (the shodai Tadahiro) but did not enjoy good health until his death in 1632. During this later part of his life, it is understood that Masahiro substituted for him in the production of a number of swords, both dai-mei and dai-saku. At the same time, he was very involved in the education and teaching of the nidai Tadahiro who was too young to effectively take over and inherit the school on the death of shodai Tadahiro. It would seem that nidai Masahiro (son of shodai) performed a similar function between nidai Tadahiro and the sandai Tadayoshi (Mutsu no Kami). Masahiro was, therefore, not only a highly skilled swordsmith, but important in the overall context of Hizen-to.

Horimono, even hi, on Masahiro blades are quite rare and it is thought that most were done by the horimono-shi Munenaga who also carved for Tadayoshi on occasions and had been a pupil of Umetada Myoju in Kyoto with shodai Tadayoshi.

The Masahiro lineage carried on to the 11<sup>th</sup> generation who died in Meiji 35<sup>th</sup> year (1902). Shodai Masahiro died at the age of 59 on Kanbun 5<sup>th</sup> year (1665) 2<sup>nd</sup> month, 5<sup>th</sup> day. Fujishiro rates him as Jo-saku and wazamono. This sword was given Tokubetsu Hozon status by the N.B.T.H.K.

Clive Sinclair

Bexley, January 2007

References: Shinto Jiten, Fujishiro  
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