

UK Sword Register: 108

Type: Sue-koto katana

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

- Sugata:** A slender shinogi-zukuri katana with iori-mune and tori-zori.
Jihada: A rather loose itame-mokume hada with some tsukare-hada.
Hamon: Ko-notare-midare with occasional choji-like inclusions, in nie and nioi. The boshi is suguha and ko-maru with a short kaeri.
Nakago: Ubu with three mekugi-ana, possibly slightly machi-okuri, kuri-jiri and slightly ha-agari. Shallow sujikai yasuri-mei and signed on the omote (katana-me) MUNESHIGE.

The overall shape of this sue-koto sword is both slim and graceful and with the ko-kissaki it might be thought that it is older than it actually is. It has been said that, at the end of the koto period (late 16th century) there was something of a revival (albeit limited) in the shape of the slim Heian period tachi and this blade may reflect this, although with its certain “awkwardness” it could not be mistaken for earlier workmanship.

The nie in the hamon are rather untidy and the jihada, with its partial looseness and sporadic patches of tsukare or tiredness, may be the result of several polishes in the past. Interestingly, a kiri-komi or sword cut may be found on the ura side mune, and is shown on the oshigata, 24.6 cm down from the kissaki. This is seen as evidence that the sword was used in combat and, as an honourable scar, is preserved and so has not been removed during polishing.

Three generations named Muneshige are recorded in Hawley's as working in the koto period in Geishu or Aki province (present day Hiroshima-ken). All three are shown as working in a place named Oyama in their inscriptions and I wonder if this might be the Oyama shrine on Miyajima island (Itsukushima)..

Also accompanying this sword is an early NBTHK origami or Kantei-sho (popularly called a white paper) dated Showa 37/12/20 (December 20, 1962). This paper confirms that the sword is the Muneshige of *the latter part of Muromachi Era (16th century)* which coincides with the sandai or 3rd generation in Hawley's. Further, Fujishiro only records the sandai and states that his personal name was Hikosaburo and that during Eiroku and Tenso eras, this Muneshige's hamon was in gunome-midare and he rates him as chu-saku.

I think that this sword is not a top-quality masterpiece but has seen plenty of action during in excess of four hundred years of existence, as evidenced by several polishes and the kiri-komi. If for no other reasons it deserves preservation. It is well mounted and has been in my collection in excess of 30 years.

Ex Bill Tilley collection

Clive Sinclair

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