

Yamato Kanabo gun from Nara, signed 'Nanto Ju Fujiwara Shigetsugu Saku'

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A gun I bought on a whim at auction against the advice of a friend who thought I was off my rocker. The Mei inscription is not at first glance anything unusual, perhaps?

Except that the Kanabo (some say 'Kinbo') school (tail of Tegai?) were Yamato swordsmiths forging in the So-Shu/Bizen tradition. Their blades had a reputation among the Bushi for being sharp and functional, if not so elegant in shape. These Kanabo smiths were also known for their Naginata and Yari, including Jumonji-Yari, quite famous in their time. The sound 'Kanabo' recalls an ogre's iron club, pronounced the same way but with different characters, and maybe their blades did have an element of that. They are not recorded as far as I can ascertain for making guns, and I have found *no source so far remarking on any such possibility. And conversely, when we think of Tanegashima gunsmithing regions in Japan, we would never imagine Nara. So, I did a little digging to see what connection there might be, if any.

First, what can we learn from the letters "Nanto-Ju Fujiwara Shigetsugu Saku", my brain idly wondered. 南都 Nanto (The Southern Capital) is the old name for Nara, where the Hei-Jo Kyo was located. The Fujiwara family find their ancestral roots in the ancient capital there. An immediate conclusion could be that in the later Edo period a smith or two of this swordsmith line turned their hand to making teppo from iron. For reference, we know from the records that Bizen smiths were eventually divided up into four groups/communities towards the end of the Edo Period, tasked with either continuing the sword tradition, making guns, doing both, or making cannon.

Two examples of Iyo no Kuni (Shikoku) style Tanegashima matchlocks. Shigetsugu, top.



Since the gun in question is in the Iyo style (NW Shikoku), an area ruled over at the time by the

Uwajima Han **Date** lords, we must wonder why it was not made in **Sakai** where their orders were usually placed. Had there been a large order, perhaps, necessitating manufacturing help from Nara in Yamato, about 10 Ri, or 40 km away? (1 Ri is about 4 km, almost 2.5 miles.) Incidentally, most Iyo long guns that I have seen are 'hosozutsu', of narrow bore, (see lower gun) but this upper one is a rarer, rather more solid military gun, in that it takes a larger ball. (1.7 cm bore, or around 6 Monme.)

The last 2 characters 次-tsugu and 作 Saku squashed together.



In the list of the few recorded Yamato area gunsmiths, besides this Nanto-Ju Fujiwara Shigetsugu,

there is one more, a 金房政次, Kanabo Masatsugu, but sadly nothing extra is noted, no date, and no place. Is there not some indication of smith tradition crossover here?

日本の鉄砲鍛冶 占部日出明 *Nihon no Teppo Kaji*, by Urabe Hideaki. Heisei 20, private publication.

*There is a comment about Buddhist priest warriors and blacksmith weapons activity traditionally found in the proximity of temples such as Fujiwara tutelary 興福寺 Kofukuji in Nara (Nanto), which does mention 鉄砲鍛冶 teppo kaji 'gunsmiths'. See below.

<https://kotobank.jp/word/%E9%8D%9B%E5%86%B6-44236>

Quote:

古くから社寺の創建や、修復に携わり、釘、鋳(かすがい)などを製作した。興福寺、春日社、東大寺には、鎌倉初期にすでに鍛冶寄人が活動し、諸国にも給田を保証されたものが散在し、一三世紀初めには後鳥羽院自身が自らに直属する刀鍛冶を組織していたといわれる。

(2)一五世紀後半頃の「高松宮本東北院職人歌合五番本」の鍛冶像には、鑪とともに向槌を振る弟子が描かれている（二人像）。近世に入ると刀鍛冶だけでなく、鉄砲鍛冶や庖丁鍛冶、鋏などを作る野鍛冶の活動も盛んになった。

Kofukuji Temple is proud of its ancestry going back to Fujiwara Kamatari, 614-669 AD.

There is also a very early mention (marked in red) of the Daimyo 筒井順啓 Tsutsui Junkei in Tensho 8 (1580) ordering that temple bells throughout Yamato be melted down for guns. I wonder what kind of guns those were at such an early period? Iron? 砲金 Hokin bronze?

https://www.naranet.co.jp/2019/rekisi_11.html

時代	西暦/年号	事項
安土桃山時代	1576 (天正 4)	織田信長、筒井順慶に大和を管領させる。
	1580 (天正 8)	筒井順慶、大和国中諸寺の梵鐘を徴発して鉄砲をつくる。 織田信長、大和の国に検地を行う。

I did find some swordsmiths using the character Shige or Tsugu, but nothing to tie things down directly. The gun by Kanabo Masatsugu mentioned above, for example, sounds very interesting but there is no suggestion there as to what became of it.

Regarding 梵鐘 'Bonsho' bells melted down by Tsutsui Junkei in 1580, there is some background

here:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonshō>

This paragraph below from there seems to be quoting from an original 1580 manuscript diary 多聞院日記 'Tamon-in Nikki' regarding the casting of these teppo. It is in very old Japanese and a struggle to decipher.

Tsuri ツリ鐘 indicates a hanging type of bell, and 'Tetsu-hau' テツハウ for example refers to teppo, (first introduced into Japan some years earlier in 1543).

この会ヶ峰村の丘陵地に、筒井順慶が鉄砲の鑄造工場を設け、国中の寺から釣鐘を没収して鉄砲の材料にしたといわれる。『多聞院日記』天正8年（1580）3月17日の条に「ナラ（奈良）中ツリ（釣）鐘從筒井被取了、大門ニモニツ在之、今日取了、國中諸寺同前云々、クワイ（会）ヶ峯ニテタタラヲ立、テツハウ（鉄砲）ヲイ（鑄）サスルト云々」とある。また同日3月18日の条に「郡山城ヲ破テ多聞山へ引クト云、クワイ（会）ヶ峯と云、二説ト云々」とあり、これは豊臣秀保の時代に、郡山城を多聞山か会ヶ峰に移そうとしている、という風説があったことを示している。

https://www.city.yamatokoriyama.lg.jp/section/rekisi/src/history_data/h_029.html

Note. None of this is directly related to the Iyo teppo itself, but simply to show that there had once been a background of teppo manufacture within the Yamato area, tied to metalworking in proximity to old temples. To some degree guns were also manufactured north of there in Yamashiro, according to Urabe's list of gunsmiths mentioned above.

If the Tsutsui Junkei information is historically accurate, and it looks right, they would have to have been bronze cannon or bronze hand guns, would they not? (Gun bronze examples are quite rare in Japan.) What happened to them? Did they mostly explode? None survive today I should think. There was known to be a casting workshop in the vicinity of Kōfukuji Temple, originally set up centuries before, foundry workers having been brought over from Korea to make the Buddhist statues and bells. As an aside, Nara Park used to be part of the grounds of Kōfukuji, I recall reading somewhere.

The stock bears a brushwork name inside, 善通寺久左衛門 Zentsuji Hisazaemon.

"Ah, Zentsuji, yes, that fits! It's a famous place in Shikoku!" I thought triumphantly. But no, I then discovered that there was a house of stockmakers living in Sakai, making wooden gunstocks for Shikoku orders. We can imagine them proudly carrying the name of their origins back in Shikoku.

Final note. The barrel was blocked and the large Bisen breech screw was rusted shut. I couldn't get to the problem from either end. This is the second Iyo long gun that I've owned having a

blocked barrel. (Both guns illustrated above.) At least we know that many of these old matchlocks must have ended their working lives like this, with a jammed load down the barrel. Whereas the red one had some kind of shotgun pellets and straw stuck in its barrel, the present one was wedged with washi paper cartridges of gunpowder and small stones. No lead available for pellets...?

I did ask the dealer if the Bisen breech screw was loose enough to remove; he had fibbingly told me, "Oh, nothing that a little oil won't fix..." It was not so simple, and needed the attention of specialist equipment, and because there is some zōgan inlay at the breech end of the barrel, heat could not unfortunately be applied as part of that process.

One old gunsmith of my acquaintance told me that out of caution he would stand any blocked barrel in a bucket of water for 24 hours. In light of this I have added the following.

Below is my live NMB website monologue from the days I was playing with the little pile of rusty gunpowder residue handed to me as a keepsake.

"This lot smells like blackpowder. A magnet on it today picked up countless specks of red rust. I expect it will spark and fizzle tomorrow when I set light to (some of) it!"

Next day

"No joy. Repeated process with three burning matches, but in this configuration I could not get a spark out of the stuff, despite the familiar blackpowder smell. Similar-looking stuff to what I found down one barrel of an old Chinese/Korean three-barrelled hand gonne. Probably not very high-quality gunpowder originally, centuries later it is now mixed with quantities of rust particles. I might give it another go with a lighter, the jet after-burner type."

Update.

"With all the cheering in the distance, I tried the turbo lighter on it, choosing the darkest chunk to focus on... and.....Ah! POOF !

The flash burn on my thumb is almost imperceptible, but I do have curly eyebrows.

NB **Not recommended** without certain safeguards in place! Luckily I was wearing glasses."

For videos of the attempts to light some of the old gunpowder, please see original thread at: <https://www.militaria.co.za/nmb/topic/39539-yamato-nanto-ju-fujiwara-kanabo-teppo/>

Perhaps the chief moderator Brian of the NMB can have the final word, quoted here just as he

wrote: "Ah yes....black powder is dangerous stuff.

And if one thing comes out of this, it is the fact that old matchlocks CAN and often ARE still loaded and can go off after 100+ years.

Oil soak for a long time, down the flash hole and the muzzle, and even then act as though it can go off.

Thanks Piers"

So, a non-descript gun brought alive some of the forgotten history of both sword and gun smithing in the Yamato area, the ancient heart of Japan.

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