

ITEM# UJKA364

CURRENTLY OFF MARKET

A GASSAN SADAKAZU KATANA

SIGNED & DATED BY IMPERIAL ARTISAN GASSAN SADAKAZU AGED 80
IN THE FIRST MONTH OF THE 4TH YEAR OF TAISHÔ ERA (JANUARY 1915)

Swordsmith: *Gassan Sadakazu* (月山貞一)
Commissioned by: *Rokurô Ishihara* (石原六郎)
Measurements: **Length:** 69.6cm (ubu) **Curvature:** 1.6cm **Moto-haba:** 2.6cm
Jihada: *Ko-itame with ji-nie, abundant chikei*
Hamon: *Exuberant gunome-midare with plentiful kinsuji, ashi, sunagashi in nie-deki*
Horimono: *Kurikara kenmaki-ryu & sankozuka*
Fujishiro rank: *Jôjô-saku* (a highly superior smith)
Authentication: *Sayagaki by Gassan Sadatoshi* (great grandson)

Please inquire

Gassan Sadakazu (1836-1918) was the finest swordsmith of the *Meiji era*. Adopted by *Gassan Sadayoshi*, his illustrious career saw him become a master of all major sword-making traditions; *Bizen, Soshû, Yamashiro* and *Yamato den*. Sadakazu became an Imperial Court Artisan in 1906. This katana is dated to January 1915 when Sadakazu was an impressive 80-years-old, making it one of the last swords crafted by the maestro and particularly valuable as a reference piece. It was commissioned by *Ishihara Rokurô* - a prominent businessman in Tokushima province on the island of *Shikoku*. In this sword, Sadakazu emulates the masterful skills of grandmaster sword smith *Gorô Masamune* with exquisite *horimono* (engraving) of *taki-fudô* and a *suken*. As the sword is forged at the highest level of the *Sôshû* tradition, the *hataraki* is simply awe-inspiring. Boundless swirls of dark *chikei* is especially impressive weaving the fabric of the well forged *itame-hada*. The *gunome-midare hamon* features plentiful *kinsuji* and brushed *sunagashi*. This katana was donated to *Jôrokuji* - the most famous *zen* temple in *Tokushima* - and amongst all the vitality of this katana rests a calm, inner confidence that resonates through the blade. Sadakazu's great grandson, *Sadatoshi*, current head of the Gassan family, authenticated this katana in *sayagaki* as being *shôshin yûsaku nari* - a genuine masterpiece by the hand of Sadakazu.



Saki-kasane: 4.3mm

Moto-kasane: 5.9mm

Omosa: 560g

Kissaki: 2.94cm

Saki-haba: 1.74cm

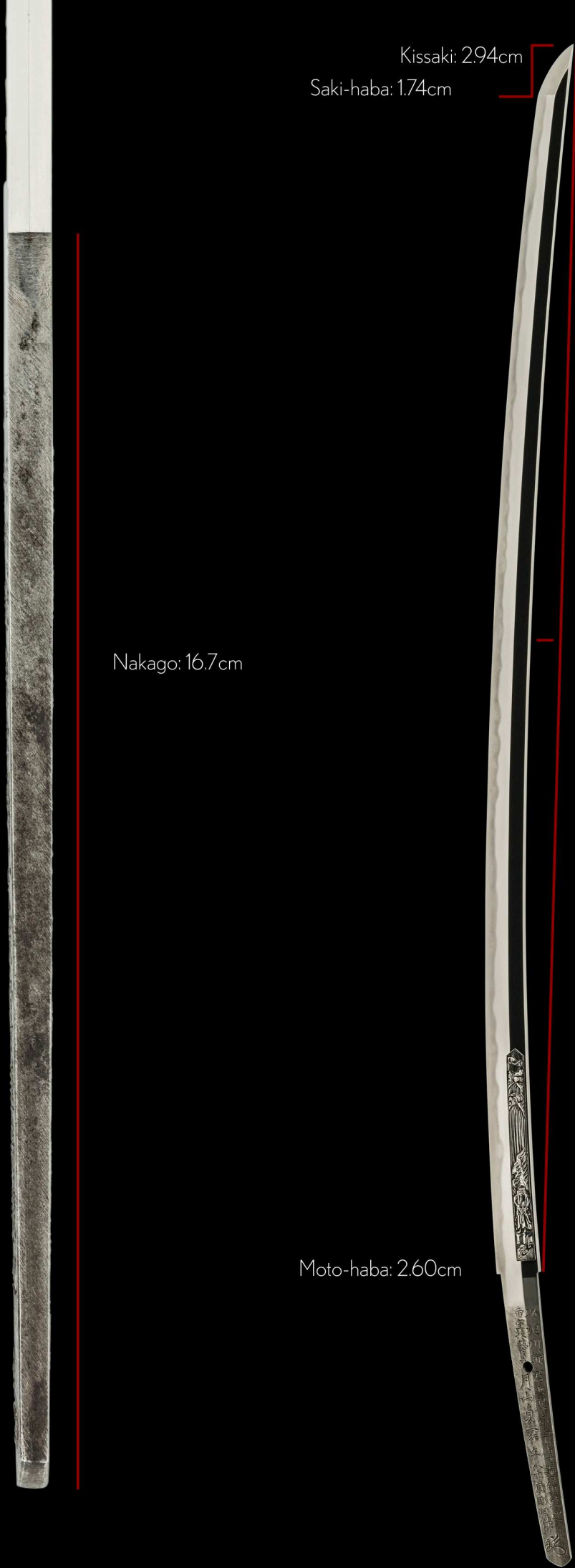
Nakago: 16.7cm

Moto-haba: 2.60cm

Nagasa: 69.6cm

Sori: 1.6cm

Mekugi-ana: 1



Gassan Sadakazu (1836-1918) had an illustrious career with many of his most exceptional swords crafted in the *Soshû tradition*.

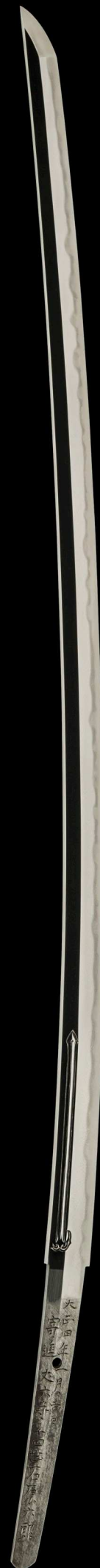
Sadakazu was able to emulate all the power of the great *Masamune* and *Norishige*.

This remarkable katana that is dated to *January 1915* was crafted when Sadakazu was 80-years-old.

It was one of the last swords this sword-smithing genius ever made.



Gassan Sadakazu





Title: *Teishitsu-gigei'in* (Imperial Household Artisan)
 Family name: *Gassan*
 Swordsmith: *Sadakazu* (first generation)
 Horimono (engraving): by *Sadakazu* himself (*hori dôsaku*)
 Age: 80 (*hachijû sai*)

Respectfully forged in the tradition of *Soshû Kamakura Gorô Masamune Den*.

(Tei) 帝
 (shitsu) 室
 (gi) 技
 (gei) 藝
 (in) 員

 (Ga) 月
 (ssan) 山
 (Sada) 貞
 (kazu) 一
 (gyô) 行
 (nen) 年
 (hachi) 八
 (jû) 十
 (sai) 歲
 (hori) 彫
 (dô) 同
 (saku) 作

以 (motte)
 相 (Sô)
 州 (shû)
 鎌 (Kama)
 倉 (kura)
 五 (Go)
 郎 (rô)
 正 (Masa)
 宗 (mune)
 傳 (den)
 謹 (tsutsushinde)
 精 (sei)
 鍊 (ren)
 之 (kore)



Portrait of Gorô Masamune



Maestro *Gassan Sadakazu* succeeded in creating an *utsushimono* (a respectful tribute) of Japan's most iconic swordsmith - *Gorô Masamune* - from the late Kamakura period.

Masamune pioneered the highly influential *Soshû tradition* of Japanese sword-making.

Taishô yonen ichigatsu kichijitsu
Kishin Jôroku-ji jûyon-sei Ishihara Rokurô
Crafted on a lucky day in January 1915.

Commission by *Ishihara Rokurô*, the 14th
chief of the Ishihara clan, and donated to
the *Jôrokuji zen* temple)

(Ki) 寄
(shin) 進
(Jô) 丈
(roku) 六
(ji) 寺
(jû) 十
(yon) 四
(sei) 世
(Ishi) 石
(hara) 原
(roku) 六
(rô) 郎



大 (Tai)
正 (shô)
四 (yo)
年 (mem)
一 (ichi)
月 (gatsu)
吉 (kichi)
日 (jitsu)

This katana was privately commissioned in 1915 by *Mr. Rokuro Ishihara* (1873-1932), one of the most successful businessmen as well as one of the biggest philanthropists of his generation in *Tokushima Prefecture* on the island of *Shikoku*.

Mr. Ishihara was the *14th chief* of the *Ishihara* clan - one of the largest landed gentry families among the non-samurai class during the Edo period. Its origins trace back to the *Iio Daimyô Clan* from the 11th century.

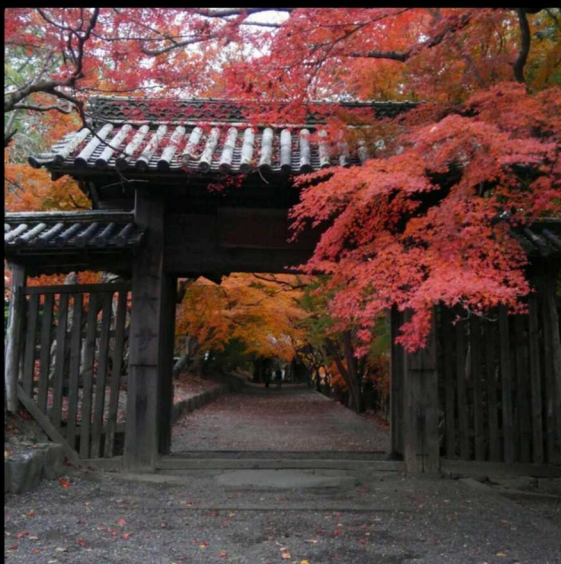


Emperor Taisho (1879~1926)

This sword was crafted in commemoration of the enthronement of *Emperor Taishô* (the father of *Emperor Hirohito* and the great grandfather of the current *Emperor Naruhito*) and donated to *Jôrokuji Temple* in prayer for "happiness, prosperity, and peace."

Emperor Taishô, born August 31, 1879 was the 123rd Emperor of Japan, according to the traditional order of succession. He reigned as the Emperor of the Empire of Japan from 30 July 1912 until his death on 25 December 1926.

The Emperor's personal name was *Yoshihito*. According to Japanese custom, during the reign the Emperor is called "the Emperor". After death, he is known by a posthumous name, which is the name of the era coinciding with his reign. Having ruled during the Taishô period, he is known as the '*Emperor Taishô*'.



Jôrokuji Temple in autumn

Jôrokuji Temple is the oldest temple in *Tokushima*, originally founded in 650AD, and regarded as the most prestigious Zen temple in the region.

Throughout the Edo period, the temple was under the protection of the *Hachisuka Daimyô family* (ruler of the *Awa* province). A significant number of high ranking samurai of the *Hachisuka Feudal Fiefdom* (*Tokushima Han*) are buried in the temple graveyard.

The temple was engulfed by war and remnants of the war still remain inside the temple. It is now a famous place for viewing seasonal foliage.



正真優作也
Shôshin yûsaku nari

Authentic masterpiece

帝室技藝員月山貞一
行年八十歳彫同作花押
*Teishitsu-gigeiin Gassan Sadakazu gyônen
hachijû-sai hori-dôsaku kaô*

Crafted by the Imperial Household Artisan
Gassan Sadakazu at the age of 80.

All *horimono* (engraving work) was created by
Gassan Sadakazu along with his stylized
Gassan signature.

大正三年一月吉日
Taishô yonen ichigatsu kichijitsu

Signed on a lucky day of January 1915



以相州鎌倉五郎正宗傳謹精鍊之
*Sôshû Kamakura Gorô Masamune den o motte
tsutsushinde kore o seiren-su*

Respectfully forged in the tradition of *Soshû Kamakura
Gorô Masamune Den*

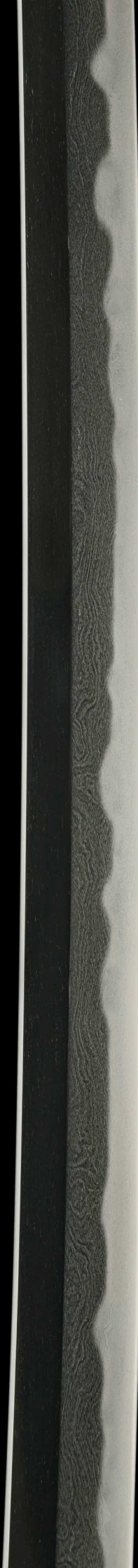
刃長貳尺三寸有之
Hachô ni-shaku san-sun kore ari

Blade length 69.6cm

平成寿年六月吉日
曾孫貞利誌「花押」
*Heisei junen rokugatsu kichijitsu
Sôson Sadatoshi kore o shirusu + kaô*

Appraised by the great grandson *Gassan Sadatoshi* on
a lucky day in June 1998 + stylised Gassan signature.





There is a group of five Buddhist deities known as the *Vidyârâja* (Wisdom Kings), or *Myô-ô* (Light Kings) in Japanese.

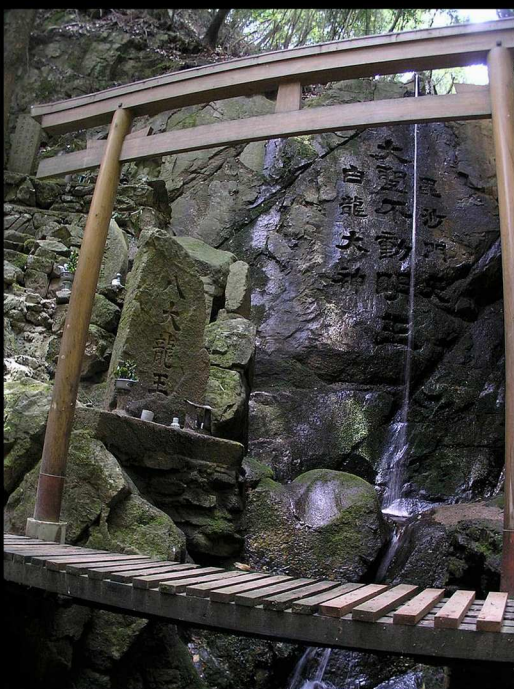
Of those five, *Fudô* - also known as *Acala* (immovable) is the most powerful.

Fudô channels wrath into compassion, having pledged to serve all beings in their pursuit of truth. *Fudô Myô-ô*'s unyielding spirit makes him a common horimono theme.

Taki (waterfalls), as depicted in the background, are sacred locations or sanctuaries where monks practice chants in order to purify their spirits in a process known as *takigyo*.

This horimono is thus referred to as *Taki-Fudô*.

Master engraver Sadakazu has depicted *Taki-Fudô* on several of his master works.



Ryujuin Shugen Falls (Kobe, Japan)



Fudô Myô-ô has blueish skin, a furious visage, crooked brow, and lopsided fangs. In his left hand he holds a *kensaku* (lariat) of five mystical colours, used to bring wanderers back to the true path or bind their regressive emotions.

Wreathed in *kaen* (flames) he burns away material desires.

In his right hand, he holds the *sankoken* (trident *vajra* sword). If the *kensaku* should fail to restrain men's harmful passions, Fudô can cut their earthly attachments using this sword. Thus the *ken* is a means by which Fudô pierces through delusions and subdues evil.

For this reason, this sword is also called the *chiken* - sword of wisdom.



Source: *Ken & Related Horimono*
Terminology & religious significance
by Gabriel L. Lebec



The lifelike detail of *Fudô-Myô-ô* is both captivating and awe-inspiring as *Sadakazu* was 80 years old when he created it entirely by hand.



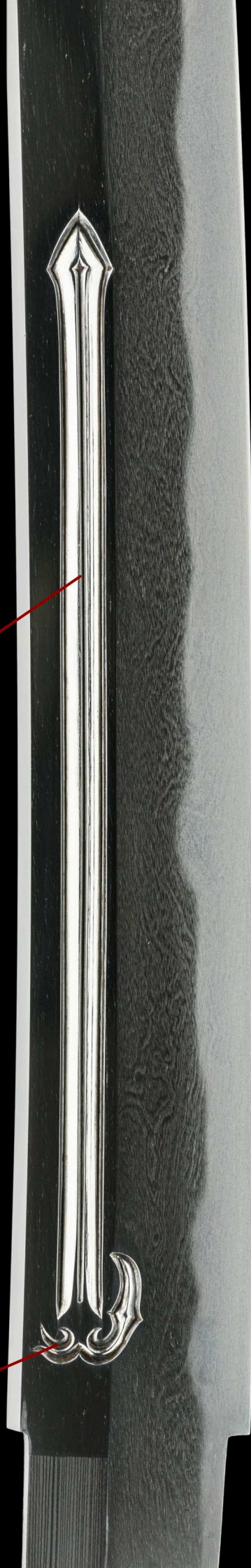
sanko-tsuka
(trident *vajra* hilt)



On the reverse side is the guardian *suken* (sword) with *tsume* (claw of a dragon).

This *horimono* serves to reinforce the power of *Fudô-Myô-ô*.

tsume (claw)

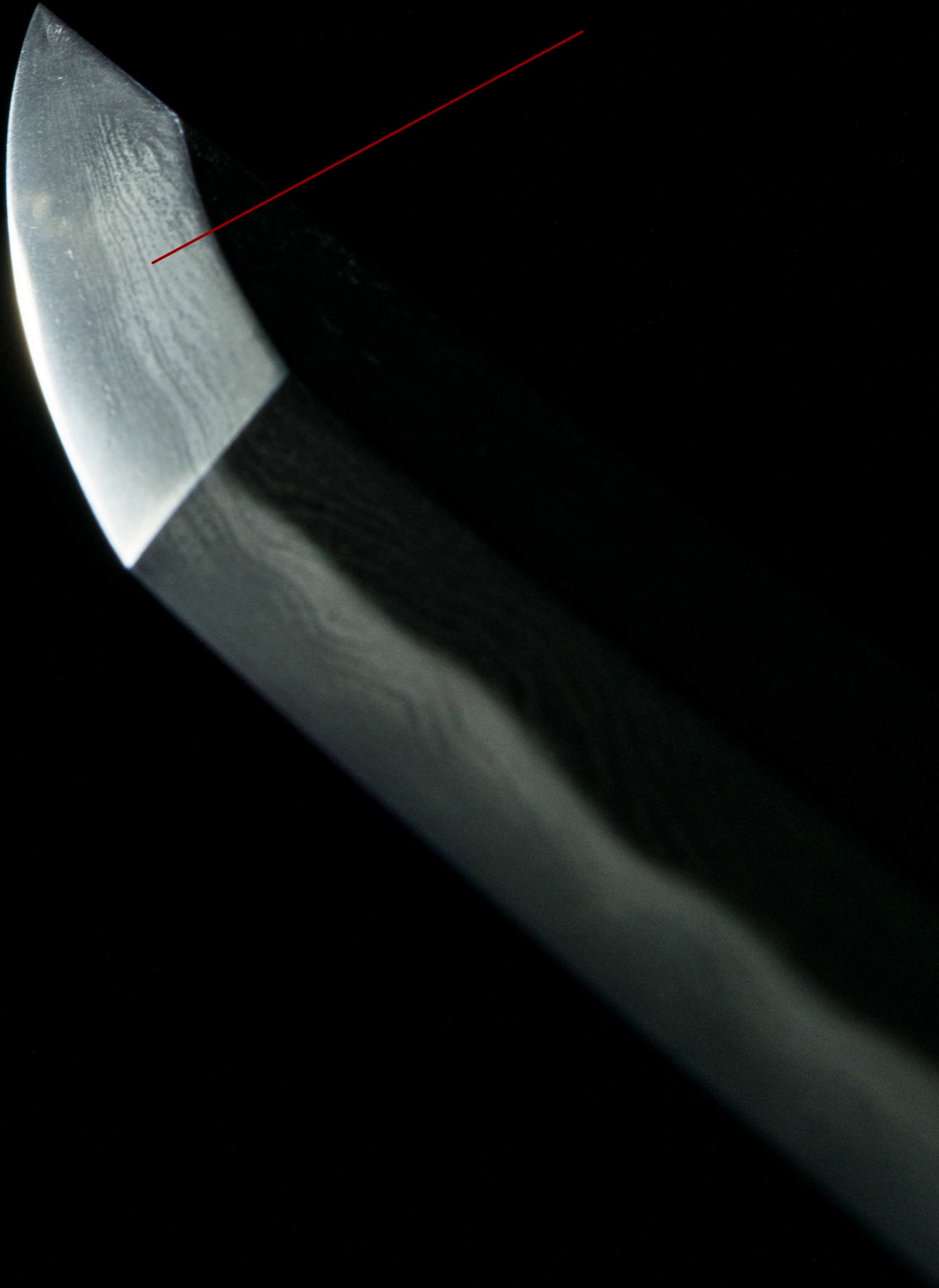


The exacting lines of *suken*
run through the *shinogi-ji*.



The *hamon* in the tip of the sword is called the *boshi*.
It takes great skill by the swordsmith.

The boshi on this sword is *hakikake*, literally 'sweeping'.



The *chikei* flows magnificently from the *ji* into the *yakiba*
(hardened edge) turning into *kinsuji* (dark golden lines).

A sword-smithing masterclass.



Gorgeous swirling patterns of *chikei*
(dark lines of *nie* crystals) are beautifully
interwoven within the *ji* (body).

chikei





A spectacular *gunome-midare hamon* pulses brightly under the light.

A close-up, vertical view of a sword blade against a black background. The blade is illuminated from the right, creating a bright, glowing edge. A distinct, wavy line of kinsuji is visible, running parallel to the hamon. A red line points from the text to this kinsuji line.

A long, impressive line of *kinsuji* hugs close to the *hamon*.



Fiery Soshû-den



brushed *sunagashi* up close.

horimono harmony





Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)



gold *habaki* with
horizontal file marks

NOTE

A Study of the Works of Gassan Sadakazu in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

BENJAMIN VINCENT

Clawson Mills Fellow, Department of Arms and Armor, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

GASSAN SADAKAZU (1837–1919), the most brilliant Japanese swordsmith of the Meiji era, came from a nonswordmaking family named Tsukamoto, whose home was in Omi province. At a very early age, the young Tsukamoto was adopted by Gassan Sadayoshi, a fairly well-known swordsmith residing in Osaka, and given at first the name Yagoro and later Sadakazu.¹ Yagoro proved to be a very precocious student with an amazing talent for making swords and began producing them at the age of fourteen.² Undoubtedly he deserves to be called a genius; even the unusually staid *Nihonto Koza* enthuses that Sadakazu was “born into this world for the purpose of making swords.”³ Great ability at carving decorative designs paralleled Gassan’s expertness with forging techniques, and a close study of the blades of earlier masters enabled him to produce excellent works in the Yamato, Yamashiro, Bizen, and Soshu styles, a feat unequaled by any other artist. Additionally, the Osaka marvel perfected the technique of forging rippling *ayasugi jihada*⁴ and executed calligraphies and paintings of high merit.

Sadakazu’s swordmaking career seems to have fallen into an unusual cycle. The blades he made during his earliest years were often signed by his foster father. Then, around the beginning of the Meiji era, Sadakazu began forging swords in the Yamato and Yamashiro styles. During his middle years, however, counterfeiting the costly works of prominent swordsmiths occupied his energies for reasons that are not completely under-

stood.⁵ As Sadakazu himself became increasingly well known, lesser smiths made forgeries of his work in turn, and in later years he inscribed his name on blades made by his son, Sadakatsu.

In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum’s Arms and Armor Department, there are six blades that bear the noted Gassan inscription, five of which are authentic. A fine early one is a tanto in the style of the first-generation Tadayoshi (Figures 1–3). Of *katakiriba* shape, it is 10.6 inches long and 1.2 inches wide, with *horimono* of a descending dragon grasping a ken on the omote and a *bobi* with *tsurebi* on the ura. In keeping with the Tadayoshi tradition, the *hamon* is a *nie deki suguha* with a touch of *notare* in places and the *boshi* is *komaru* with the *kaeri yoru*, while the *jihada* is a somewhat flat *Hizen-style itame*. On the omote the signature reads, “Naniwa Gassan Sadakazu, hori mono do saku,” which indicates that Gassan Sadakazu of Osaka, for which *Naniwa* is an ancient name, made the blade and also executed the carvings.⁶ Near the tip of

1. *Sadakazu* can also be read *Teiichi*.

2. Mitsuo Shibata, *Shin-shinto Nyumon* (Tokyo, 1969) p. 156.

3. Kunzan Homma and Kanzan Sato, eds., *Shinpan Nihonto Koza*, V (Tokyo, 1967) p. 321.

4. For many of the technical terms used to describe Japanese swords, no equivalents exist in English. In order to make this note on Gassan Sadakazu more intelligible, a glossary has been included at the end.

5. Sho Kawaguchi, *Shinto Koto Taikan*, II (Tokyo, 1930) p. 158.

6. Intricate carvings were often done by specialists rather than by the makers of the blades themselves.