



ITEM# UJKA380

SOLD, FOR REFERENCE PURPOSES ONLY

## A KO-ICHIMONJI SUKE-YASU TACHI

SIGNED, EARLY-KAMAKURA PERIOD (1184~1222)

<b>Swordsmith:</b>	<i>Suke-yasu (signed 助 Suke with 安 yasu difficult to decipher, suriage nakago)</i>
<b>Measurements:</b>	<b>Length:</b> 69.0cm <b>Curvature:</b> 2.4cm <b>Motohaba:</b> 2.90cm
<b>Jihada:</b>	<i>Itame mixed with mokume, nagare, ji-nie, chikei, and jifu-utsuri</i>
<b>Hamon:</b>	<i>Nie-laden ko-midare-chô, mixed with ko-chôji that widens along the monouchi area, plus ample ko-ashi and yô, kinsuji and sunagashi, and yubashiri that appears parallel to the yakigashira</i>
<b>Bôshi:</b>	<i>Suguha with a short ko-maru-kaeri, the haki-ura side shows nijûba</i>
<b>Certificate:</b>	<b>62nd NBTHK Jûyô Tôken (a sword designated as Profound and Important)</b>
<b>Authentication:</b>	<b>Sayagaki by Tanobe Michihiro (Tanzan-sensei in May 2020)</b>
<b>Included:</b>	Shirasaya, sword bag, stand, kit, description

This extremely precious 800-year-old *tachi* from the *Ko-Ichimonji school* marks the transition point from the workmanship of the *Ko-Bizen school* that began in the Heian period (938~1184) to the more exuberant swords of the *Fukuoka-Ichimonji school* (1184~1293).

Early works of the Fukuoka-Ichimonji School from the start of the Kamakura period (1184~1222) are referred to collectively as *Ko-Ichimonji*. Blades in this classification reflect Ko-Bizen characteristics in terms of shape, body and hamon, but are enriched with novel elements such as *ko-chôji* (small clove blossom buds).

This *tachi* has retained its two-character signature *Sukeyasu* (note: the second character for *yasu* is difficult to read), a seemingly unknown smith who likely worked with *Ko-Ichimonji Sukenari*. The blade has a wide, healthy, masculine shape with a *jifu-utsuri* and *ko-gunome hamon* that together radiate an icy-blue hue. This sword is meant for the connoisseur who will forever appreciate its understated elegance and the rare, historical reference piece that it represents.



Saki-kasane: 3.4mm

Kissaki: 2.50cm

Saki-haba: 1.80cm

Moto-kasane: 5.4mm

Nagasa: 69.0cm

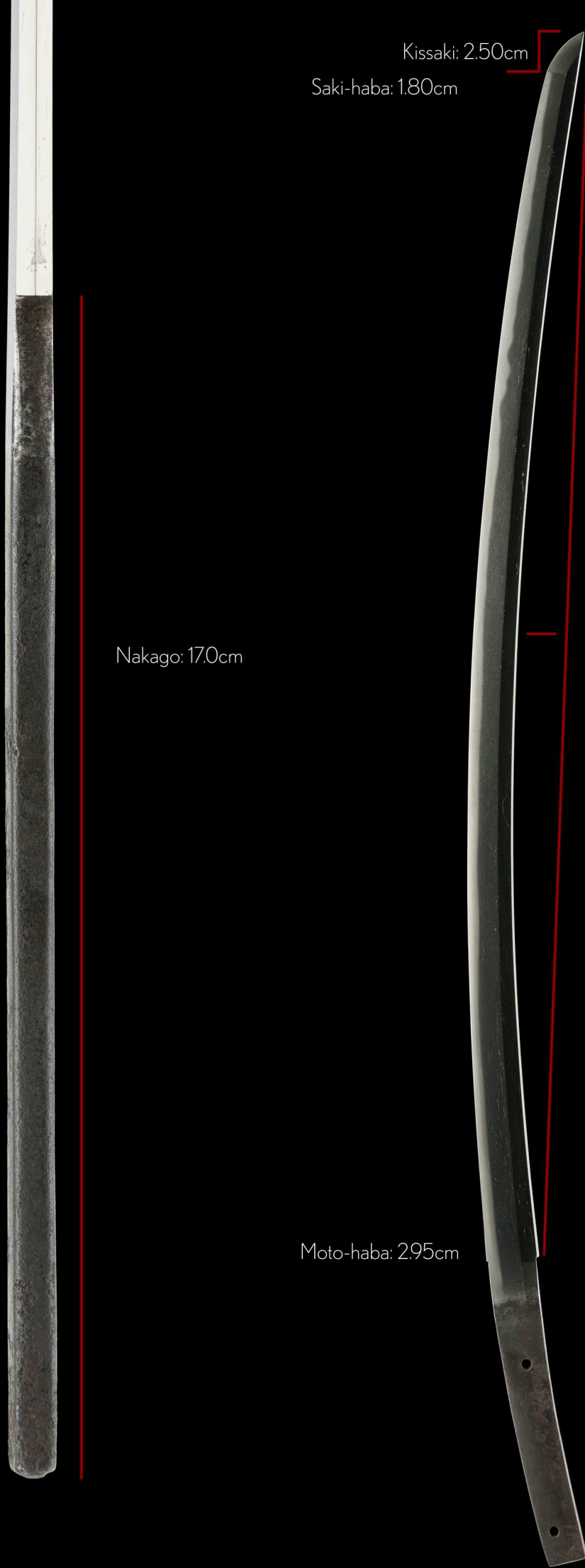
Nakago: 17.0cm

Sori: 2.40cm

Omosa: 635g

Moto-haba: 2.95cm

Mekugi-ana: 2



This tachi is a magnificent example from the *Ko-Ichimonji school*, circa 1184~1222.

Unlike the vast majority of swords from this era that have been greatly shortened (thus losing the signature), this sword has retained its two-character signature *Sukeyasu* (although the second character for *yasu* is difficult to decipher).

There are no documented records of Sukeyasu of the Ko-Ichimonji school, thus this may be the only example of its kind. Given the characteristics of the blade, it is likely he worked closely with *Ko-Ichimonji Sukenari*.

The sword is remarkably healthy, retaining a wide, strong shape and the condition of the *jiba* (body) is outstanding.

## *Koshizori*

(curvature at the waist)

This term is used to describe swords with its deepest point towards the base of the blade, designed to be carried on horseback. It is the iconic shape of swords from the late Heian to mid-Kamakura period.

Note how the curvature flows deeply into the nakago because the sword has only been moderately shortened, retaining the signature of swordsmith, Suke-yasu.



Location: *Bizen province*

School: *Ko-Ichimonji*

Swordsmith: *Suke [yasu]*

*suriage-nakago* (shortened tang)

*katte-sagari*

(right-handed, downward slanting file marks)

This upper hole was created after the sword shortened from a long horse-back ridden tachi to a katana that could be drawn from a standing position. As the signature was retained, this process is called *suriage-nakago*.

The distance between these two holes is about 9cm. Adding this number to the current length of the cutting edge (69cm), we can deduce that this sword originally had a cutting edge of about 78cm. This was a typical length of tachi during the early Kamakura period.

This is very likely the original *mekugi-ana* (hole).

助 (Suke)

[安] (yasu)

~9cm





The first character of the signature is 助 (*Suke*). The second character, although looks likely to be 安 (*yasu*), is more challenging to read thus the NBTHK has left it open to interpretation.



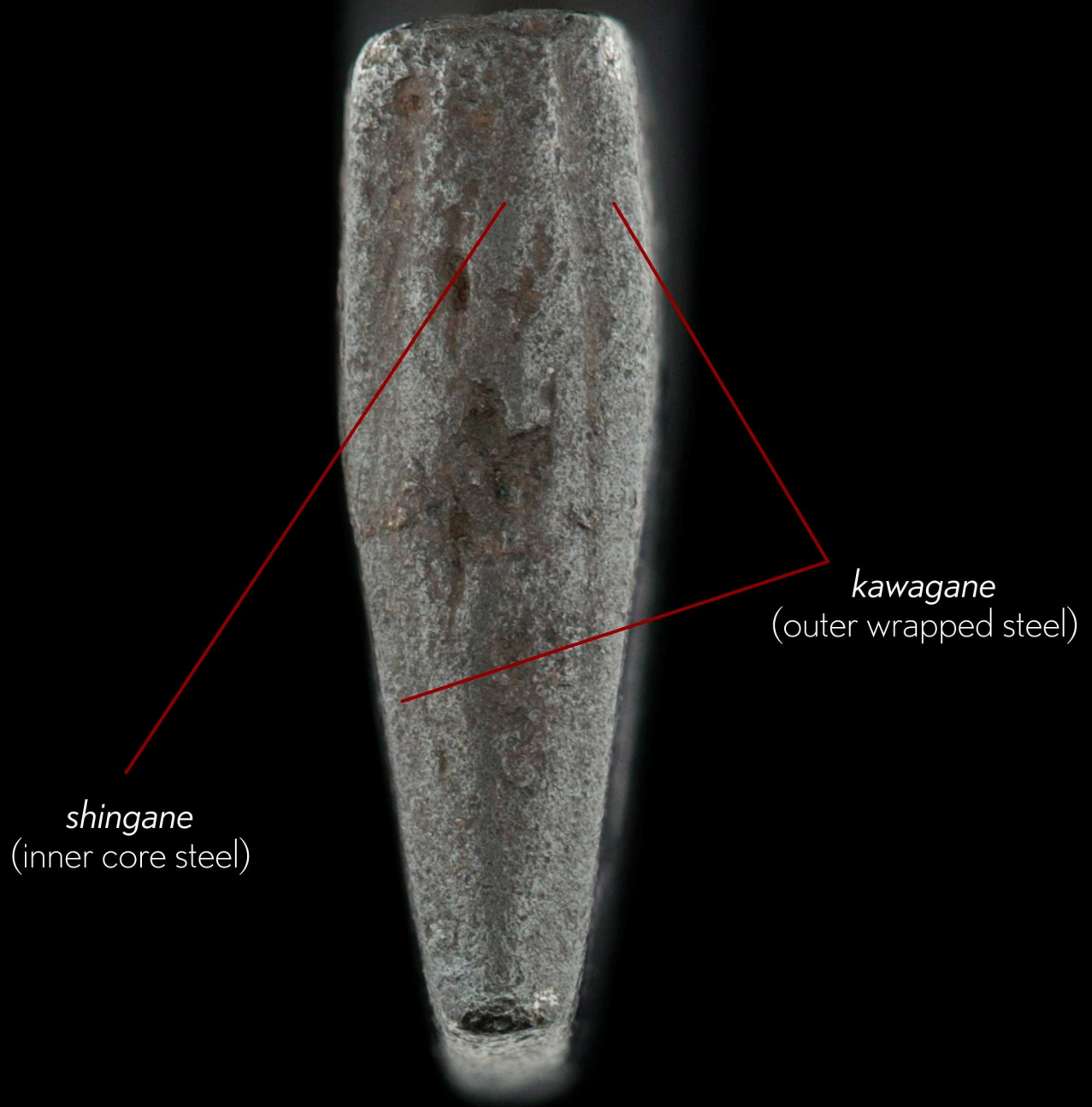
The graceful *koshi-zori* curvature of the sword extends rather dramatically into the stout nakago.

This is an aspect to cherish as most *o-suriage* (greatly shortened) tachi lose their base curvature.

2mm curvature

There is great meatiness to the *nakago*. For a sword that is 800 years old, it's impressively thick, healthy and strong.

(*ura*, reverse)



Cross section of the *nakago*, view from butt end.

20201662

重要第一三九五二號

指定書

一太刀 銘 助□(古一文字)

一口

法量 長さ六九〇程 反り二四程

形状 鎗造庵棟 身幅広め 元先の幅差ミ 反り高め 小鋒

鍛 板目に杵・流れ肌 交じり 地沸ツミ 地景入り 地斑映り 立フ

刃交 小乱れ主調に小丁子交じり 小足・葉入り 沸ツミ

金筋・砂流しかかる

帽子 直ぐに小丸 短く返る

茎 磨上 鑢目勝手 下がり 目釘孔二

右者當協會に於て審査の結果

重要刀劍に指定す

平成二十八年十月十八日

公益財団法人日本美術刀劍保存協會

會長 酒井忠久



大蔵 教育委員会  
第 124424 号  
平成23年10月18日

Jûyô Certificate No. 13952  
Shiteisho (指定書) Certificate of Designation

One Tachi

Mei (signature): Suke □ (助□) (Ko-Ichimonji School 古一文字)

Measurements

nagasa 69.0 cm, sori 2.4 cm

Description

Keijo: *shinogi-zukuri*, *iori-mune*, wide *mihaba*, noticeable taper, deep *sori*, *ko-kissaki*

Kitae: *itame* that is mixed with *mokume* that features plenty of *ji-nie*, much *chikei*, and a *jifu-utsuri*

Hamon: *nie-laden ko-midare-chô* that is mixed with *ko-chôji*, many *ko-ashi*, *yô*, *kinsuji*, *sunagashi*

Bôshi: *sugu* with a short *ko-maru-kaeri*

Nakago: *suriage*, *katte-sagari yasurime*, two *mekugi-ana*

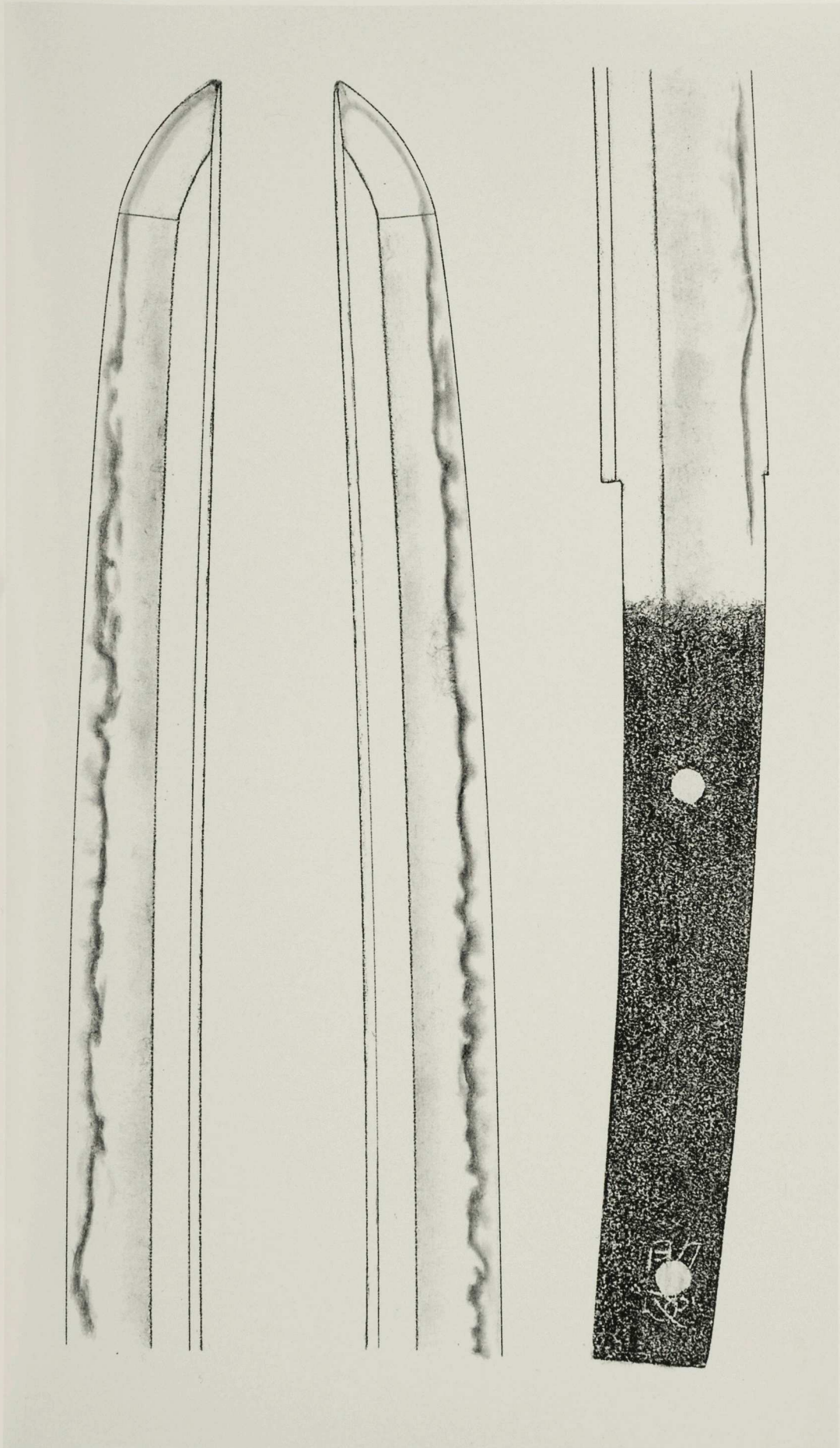
According to the result of the shinsa committee of our society we judged this work as authentic and rate it as *jûyô-tôken*.

October 18, 2016

[Foundation] Nihon Bijutsu Tôken Hozon Kyôkai, NBTHK

[President] Sakai Tadahisa (酒井忠久)

太刀 銘 助□(古一文字)



Designated as *Jūyō-Tōken* (a profound and important sword)  
at the 62nd *jūyō shinsa* held on October 18, 2016

**Tachi, mei: Suke-** 助 (助)  
**Ko-Ichimonji School,** (古一文字)

### Measurements

*nagasa*: 69.0cm

*sori*: 2.4cm

*motohaba*: 2.95cm, *sakihaba*: 1.8cm

*kissaki-nagasa* 2.5cm, *nakago-nagasa* 17.0cm, *nakago-sori* 0.2 cm

### Description

*Keijo*: *shinogi-zukuri*, *iori-mune*, wide *mihaba*, noticeable taper, normal *kasane*, deep *sori*, *ko-kissaki*

*Kitae*: *itame* that is mixed with *mokume* and *nagare* and that features plenty of *ji-nie*, much *chikei*, and a *jifu-utsuri*

*Hamon*: *nie-laden ko-midare-chō* that is mixed with *ko-chōji* and that widens along the *monouchi* area, in addition we see many *ko-ashi* and *yō*, *kinsuji* and *sunagashi*, and *yubashiri* that appear parallel to the *yakigashira*

*Bōshi*: *sugu* with a short *ko-maru-kaeri*, the *haki-ura* side shows *nijūba* that appear parallel to the *fukura*

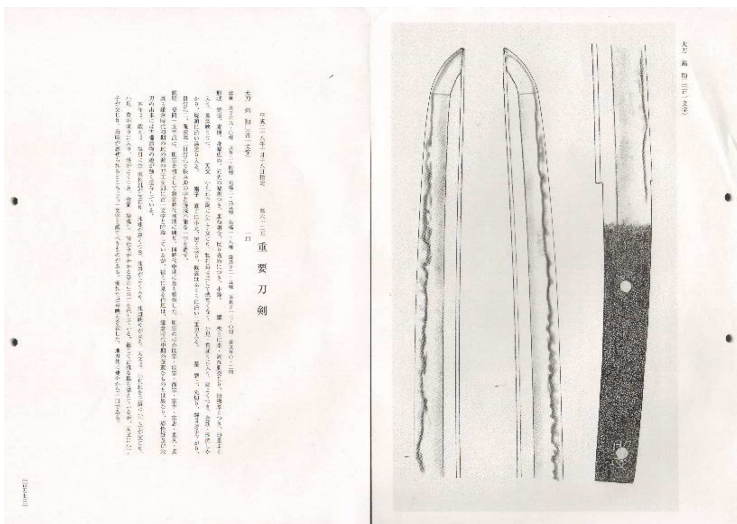
*Nakago*: *suriage*, *kirijiri*, *katte-sagari yasurime*, two *mekugi-ana*, the *haki-omote* side bears in between the *mekugi-ana* the character for *Suke* but the second character is illegible

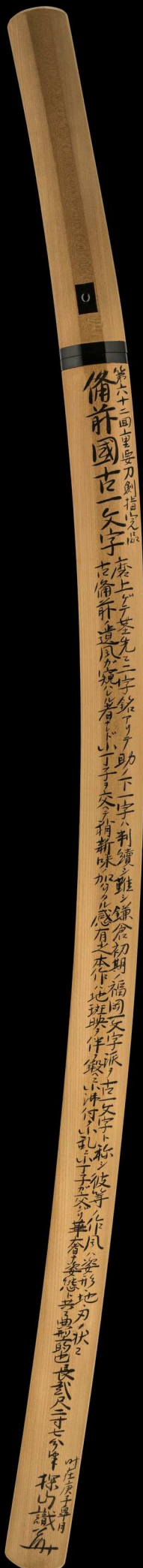
### Remarks

The *Fukuoka-Ichimonji School* was founded by *Norimune* (則宗) in the early Kamakura period and experienced its prime during the mid-Kamakura period. Apart from *Norimune*, other notable early Kamakura period *Ichimonji* smiths were *Sukemune* (助宗), *Narimune* (成宗), *Naomune* (尚宗), *Muneyoshi* (宗吉), *Munetada* (宗忠), *Shigehisa* (重久), and *Sadazane* (貞真), and collectively are referred to as *Ko-Ichimonji*. Their workmanship differs from the more flamboyant mid-Kamakura period *Ichimonji* style and both the blade structure and *jiba* interpretations are by trend noticeably closer to the *Ko-Bizen* style of workmanship.

This blade shows a *kitae* in *itame* that is mixed with *mokume* and *nagare*. It contains plenty of *ji-nie*, considerable amounts of *chikei*, and *jifu-utsuri*. The *hamon* is a *nie-laden ko-midare-chō* that is mixed with *ko-chōji*, numerous *ko-ashi* and *yō* and features *kinsuji*, *sunagashi*, and *yubashiri*. That is, we clearly recognize a classical interpretation [of the *Ko-Bizen* school] but at the same time due to the presence of *ko-chōji*, we recognize an innovative approach whereupon we find ourselves between *Ko-Bizen* and *Ichimonji*. Thus, the attribution must be to the *Ko-Ichimonji school*.

The blade is of an excellent *deki* (workmanship) and has a very healthy *jiba*; *ji* (body) and *yakiba* (hardened area).





第六十二回重要刀剣指定品  
*Dai rokujûni-kai jûyô-tôken shiteihin*  
Designated as jûyô-tôken at the 62nd jûyô-shinsa

備前國古一文字  
*Bizen no Kuni Ko-ichimonji*  
Ko-ichimonji from Bizen province

磨上ゲテ茎ニ二字銘アリテ助ノ下一字ハ判讀シ難シ鎌倉初期ノ福岡一文字派ヲ古一文字ト称シ彼等ノ作風ハ姿形・地・刃ノ状ニ古備前ノ遺風ガ窺ハレル者ナレド小丁子ヲ交ヘテ稍新味ノ加ハリタル感有之本作ハ地斑映ヲ伴フ鍛ヘニ小沸付ク小乱ニ小丁子ガ交ジリ華奢ナ姿態ト共々典型的也

*Suriagete nakago-saki ni niji-mei arite Suke no shita ichiji wa handoku shi gatashi Kamakura shoki no Fukuoka-chimonji ha o Ko-ichimonji to shôshi karera no sakufû wa sugata-katachi, ji, ha no jô ni Ko-Bizen no ifû ga ukagawareru mono naredo ko-chôji o majiete yaya shinmi no kuwawaritaru kan kore ari honsaku wa jifu-utsuri o tomonau kitae ni konie tsuku ko-midare ni ko-chôji ga majiri kyasha na shitai to tomo ni tenkeiteki nari*

This blade is *suriage* (shortened), however, it retains a two-character signature at the tip of its tang, although the second character below that of *Suke* is difficult to decipher. Early works of the *Fukuoka-Ichimonji School* from the early Kamakura period are referred to as *Ko-Ichimonji*. Blades in this classification reflect Ko-Bizen characteristics in terms of *sugata, ji*, and *ha*, but are enriched with novel elements such as *ko-chôji*. The kitae of this blade is accompanied by a *jifu-utsuri*, and shows a *ko-midare* in *ko-nie-deki* that is mixed with *ko-chôji*. It is thus an exquisite example of the *Ko-Ichimonji school*.

長貳尺二寸七分半  
*Nagasa 2-shaku 2-sun 7-bu han*  
Blade length ~ 69.0cm

時在庚子臯月探山識「花押」  
*Jizai kanoe-ne satsuki Tanzan shirusu + kaô*  
Written by Tanzan [Tanobe Michihiro] in May in the Year of the Rat of this era (2020) + monogram





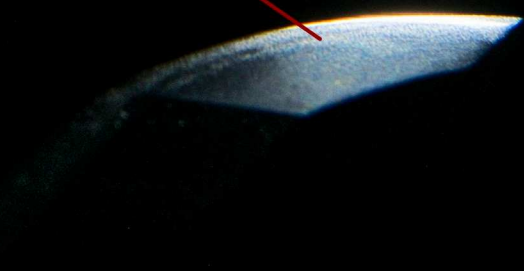
*kissaki* (tip), starts at *yokote* - the dividing line where *kissaki* starts

*fukura*

*nijuba*

On the *haki-omote* side of the blade (the opposite of where this tachi is signed), the *boshi* (temper line in the *kissaki*) displays *nijuba*, a rare treat in which a second line runs parallel not only to the main hamon but also runs parallel to the *fukura* (the curved portion of the *kissaki*).

*nijuba* - a bright *suguha* that curls back in *ko-maru* formation)



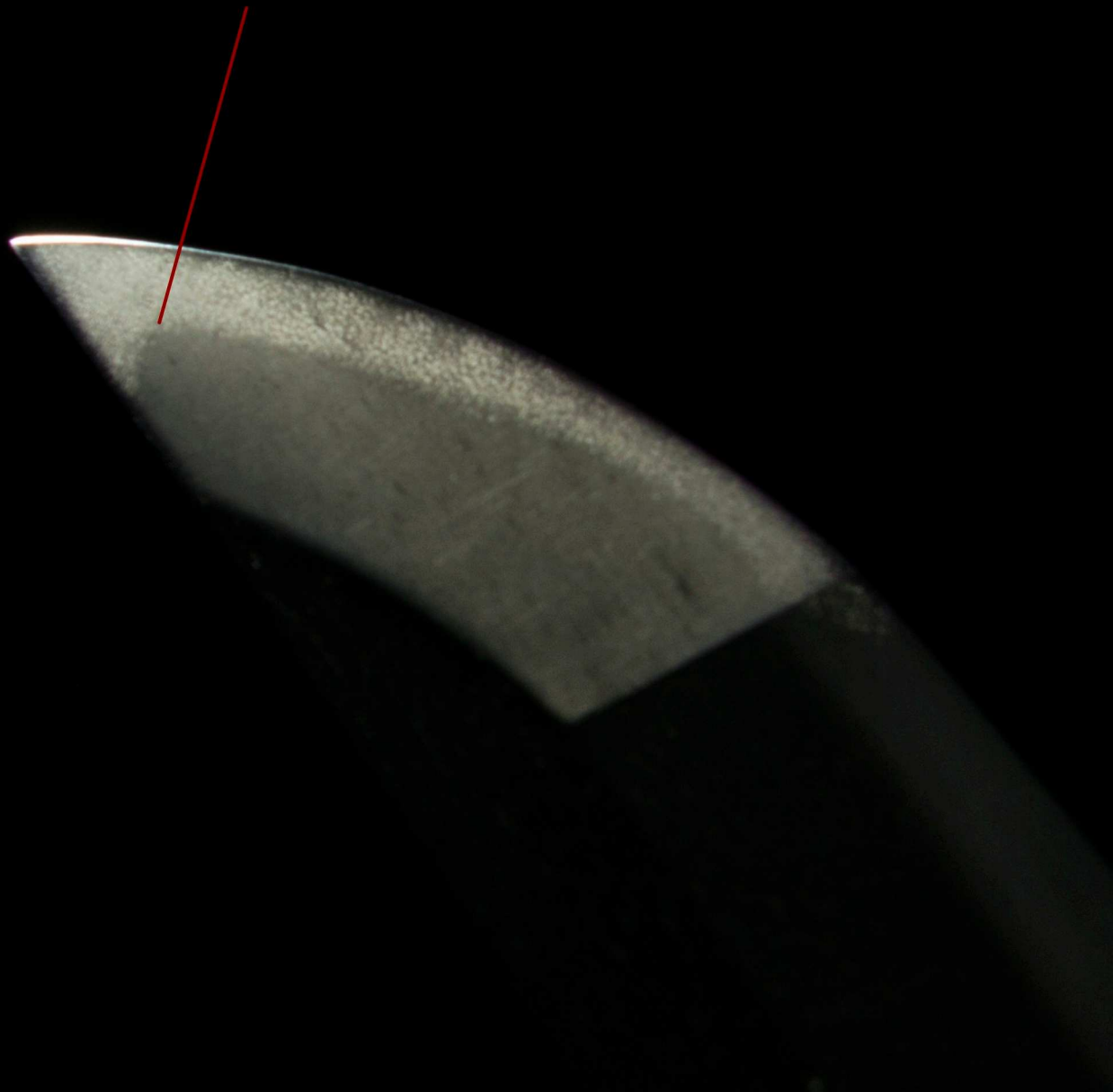
*hamon* line

*nijuba* from a different angle

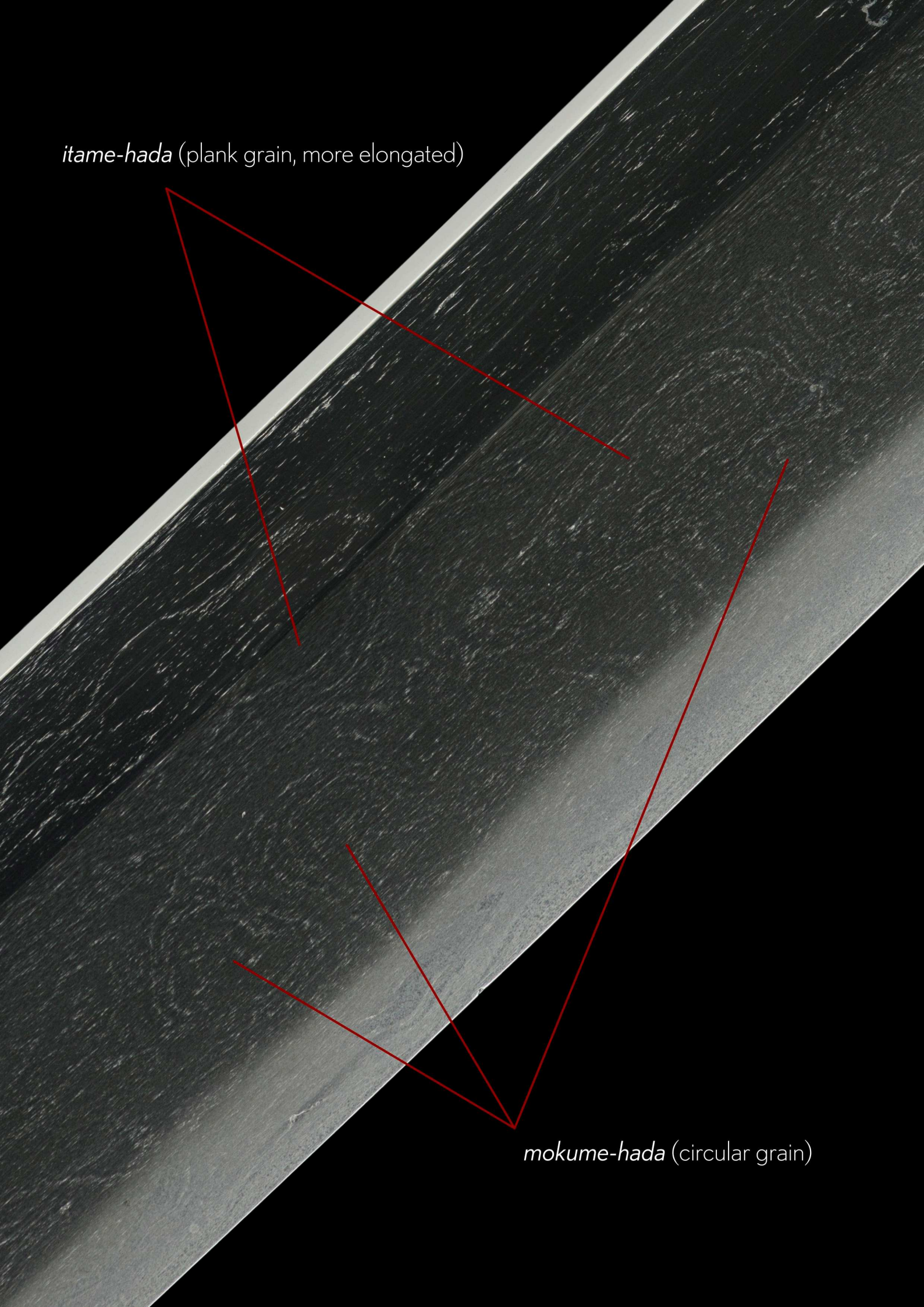
*nijuba*



On the *omote* (signed side of the blade), the *boshi* is *suguha* (straight) with *ko-maru kaeri* (short return/curl back).



*itame-hada* (plank grain, more elongated)

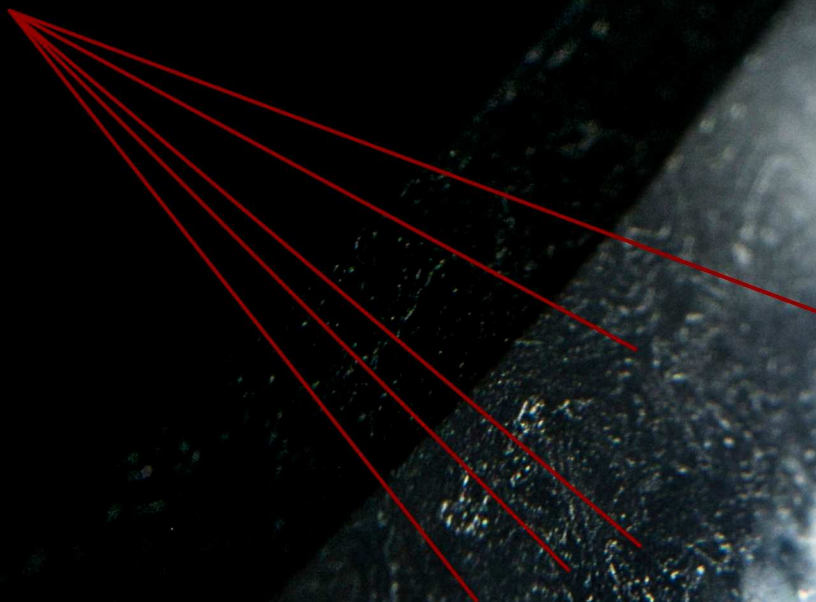


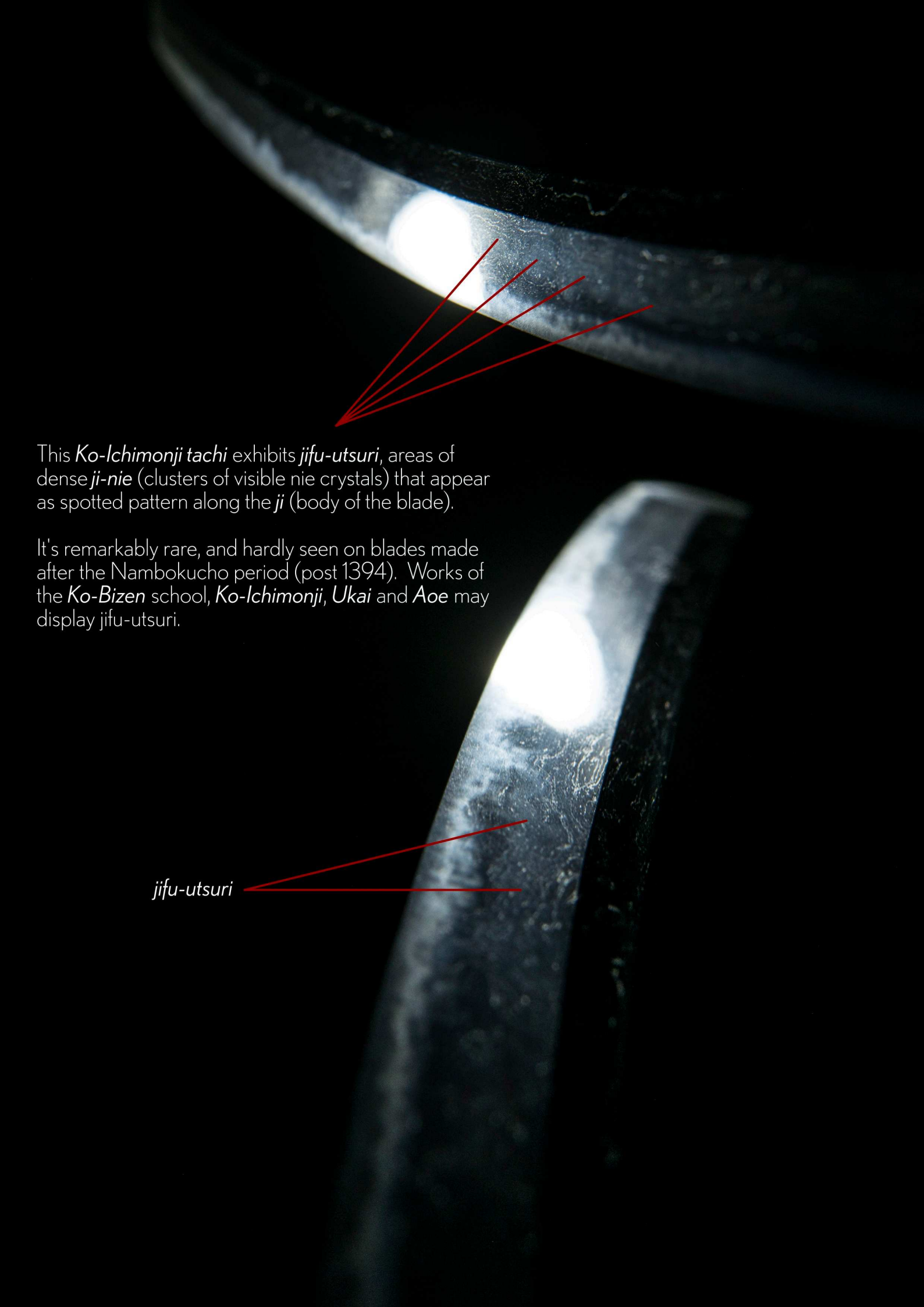
*mokume-hada* (circular grain)

Flowing *nagare-hada*  
(wavy wood grain pattern)

Beautiful rounded burl grain  
*mokume-hada* in the *shinogi-ji*.

Marvellous dark swirling lines of crystallised  
nie known as *chikei* weave effortlessly  
through the body of the sword.



A close-up photograph of a sword blade, showing the curved edge and the textured surface. The blade is dark, with a bright, circular highlight on the upper edge. Red lines point from the text to specific areas on the blade's surface.

This *Ko-Ichimonji tachi* exhibits *jifu-utsuri*, areas of dense *ji-nie* (clusters of visible nie crystals) that appear as spotted pattern along the *ji* (body of the blade).

It's remarkably rare, and hardly seen on blades made after the Nambokucho period (post 1394). Works of the *Ko-Bizen* school, *Ko-Ichimonji*, *Ukai* and *Aoe* may display *jifu-utsuri*.

*jifu-utsuri*



The presence of *jifu-utsuri*, which is deep in colour and has an interesting hardening effect, coupled with the rich blue hues of the *jigane* (surface steel) gives the blade an *icy appearance* as the above magnified image illustrates.

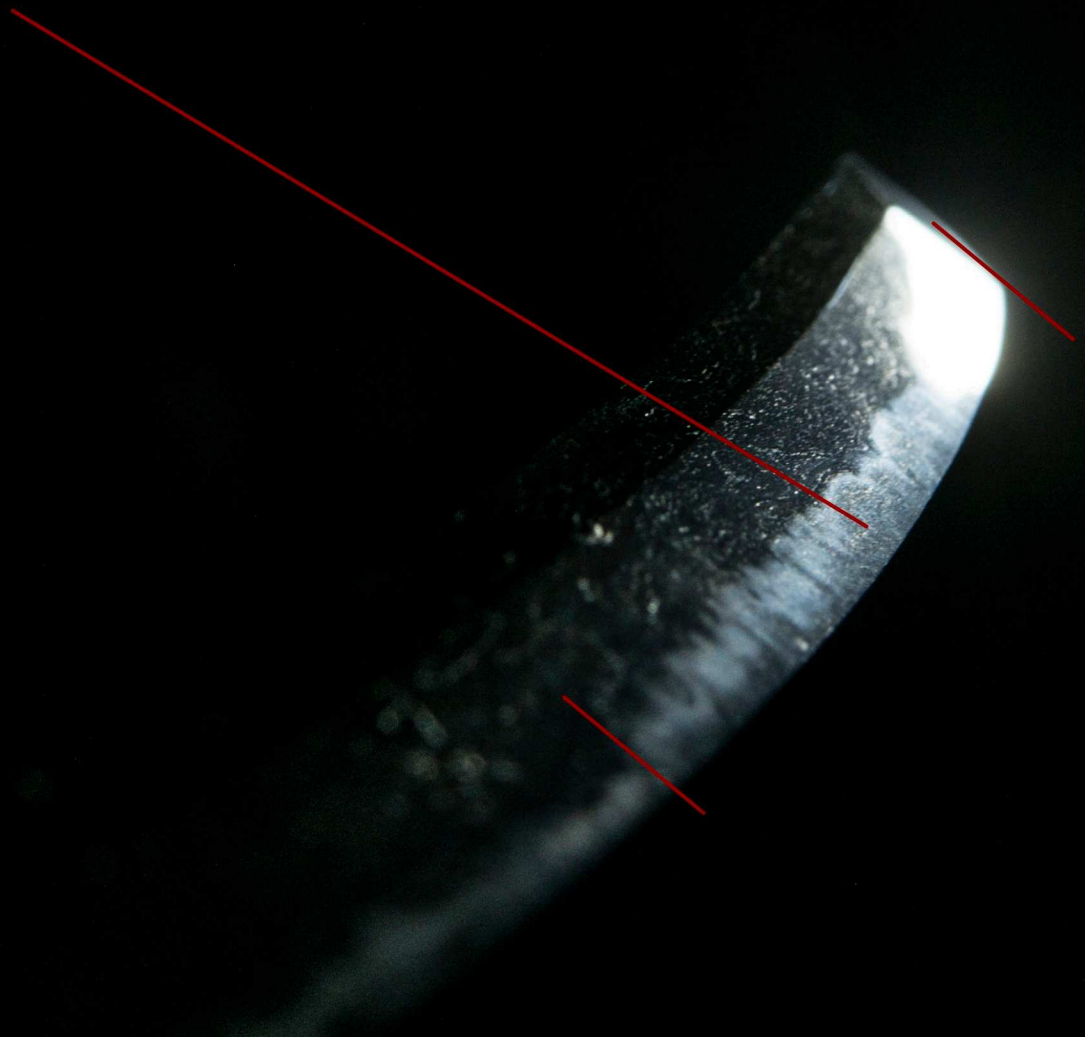


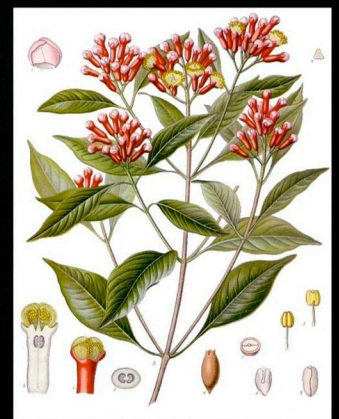
A close-up photograph of a curved metal surface, likely a hamon, showing a dark, textured surface with numerous small, bright, irregular spots. A red line points from the text to a specific area of these spots. A red rectangular box highlights a section of the surface below the text.

A close-up of *jifu*, dense spots of *ji-nie*, which can be seen resting on top of the *hamon*.



In the *monouchi* (the hitting area of the blade), which is about 10-15cm below the *yokote* line, the hamon noticeably widens creating a larger *yakiba* (hardened area of the blade). This hard portion of the blade has a higher density of carbon atoms that allow it to become sharper with a skilled polisher.





clove blossom buds

*ko-choji*

The presence of *ko-choji* (small clove blossom buds) in the hamon marks a subtle yet important transition point from the *Ko-Bizen school* to the *Ichimonji school*, whereby the hamon became more exuberant in nature.

In the Ko-Ichimonji (early Ichimonji) stage, the hamon still shows a degree of restraint in comparison to later Ichimonji works by (for example) the *Hatakeda school*.

This tachi is a wonderful reference piece marking the evolution of the Bizen tradition.

Yo (leaves) are beautiful clusters of nie crystals inside the *yakiba* (hardened area), falling toward the cutting edge.

When these spots are in the *ji* (body) they are referred to as *tobiyaki*.






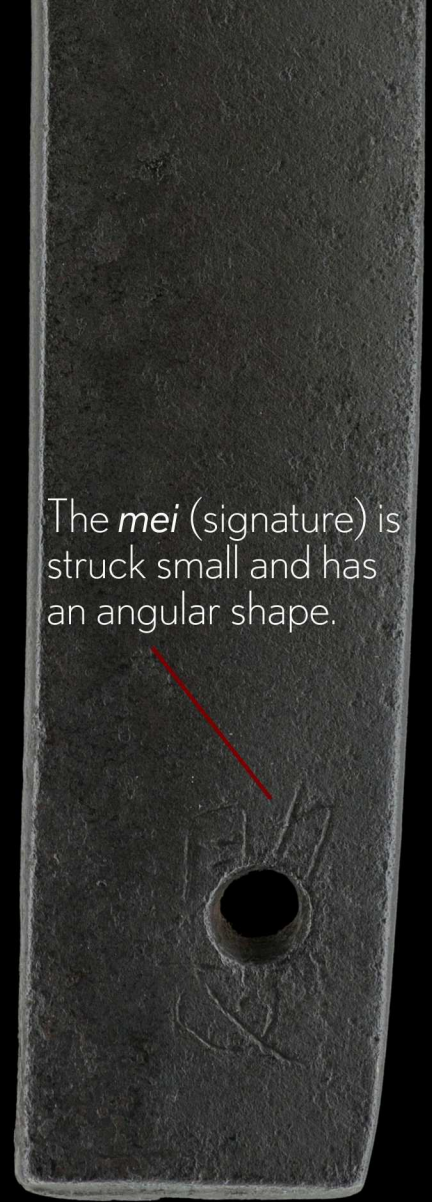
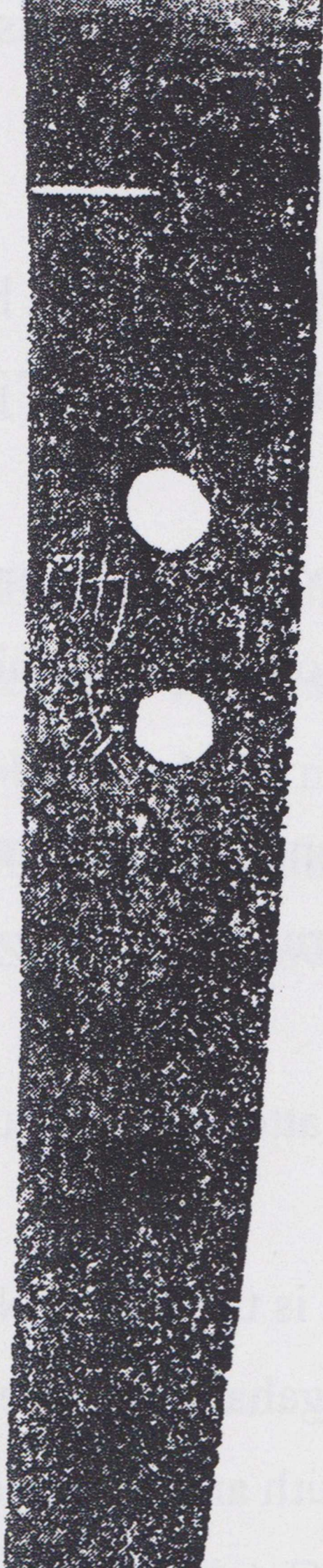
A serrated line of *kinsuji* cracks through the hamon.



A large number of *ko-ashi* (small legs) extend out towards the *ha-saki* (edge of the blade).



These droplets of nie crystals are collectively called *yubashiri*, which literally means '*running hot water*'. They are very similar to *tobiyaki*, however, they have a more transparent look, thus the hot water (*yu*) analogy.

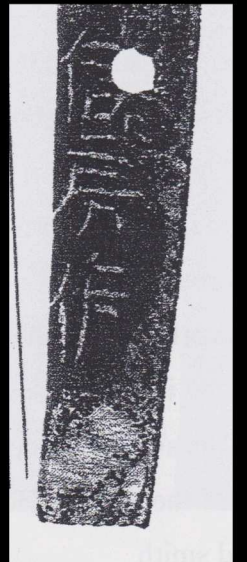


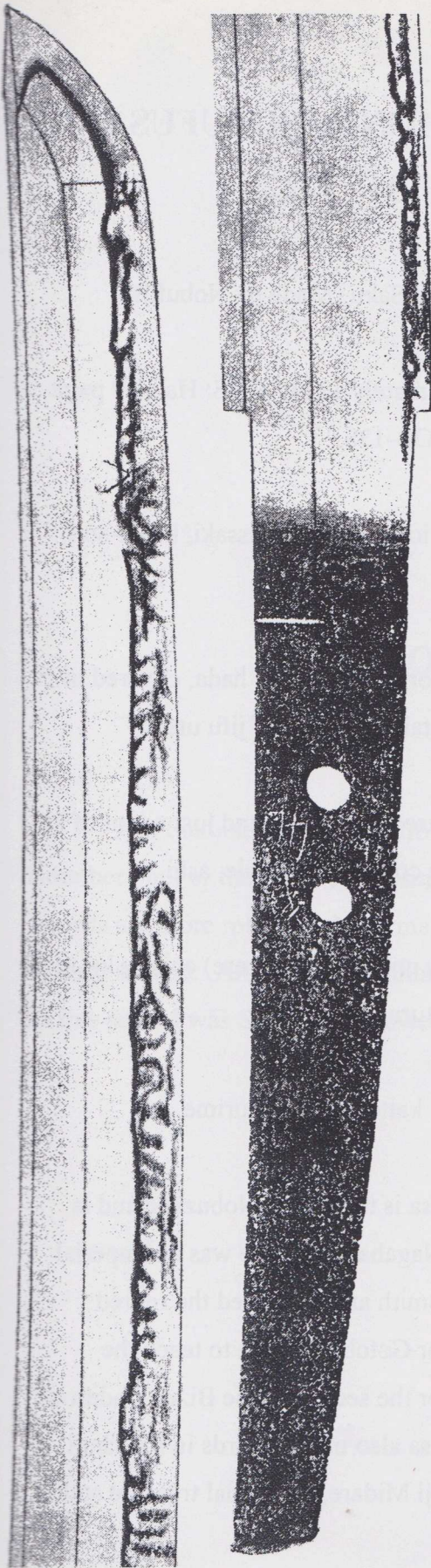
The *mei* (signature) is struck small and has an angular shape.

A close-up of the two signatures of Sukenari and Suke[yasu].

The Ko-Ichimonji group tends to have mei that are struck small (such as these) or struck large. Ko-Ichimonji mei are also more *angular* when compared with works of the Ko-Bizen school.

Example of a large *mei* by *Ko-Ichimonji Nobufusa*. The angular style can also be recognised.



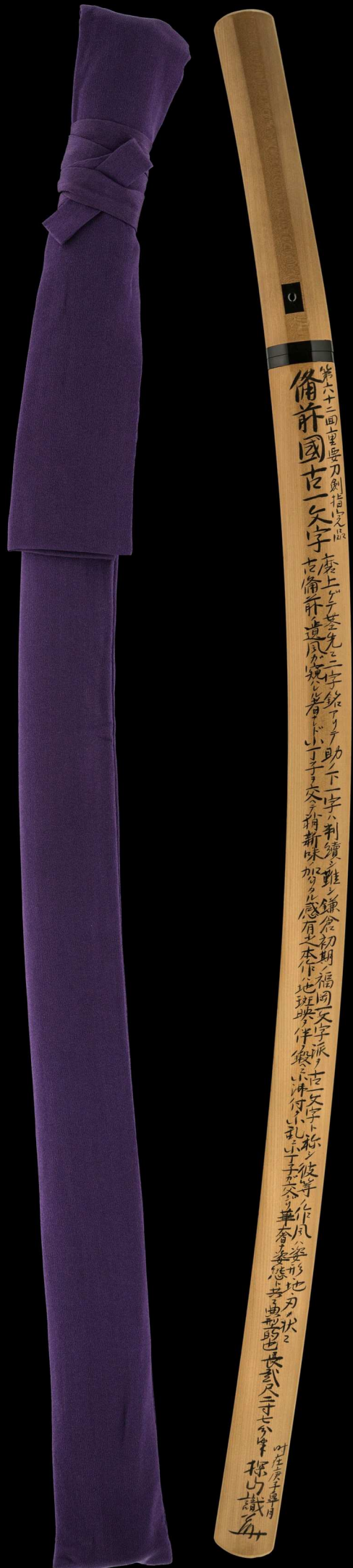


## KO-ICHIMONJI SUKENARI

1184 - 1219

- Tachi Mei: Sukenari
- Date: Approximately 1207. CCE: Hawley page 658 - SUK-1227.
- Length: 76cm iori mune koshi-sori, ko-kissaki.
- Jitetsu: Tightly forged ko-itame hada, covered in jinnie, chikei and contains midare utsuri.
- Hamon: Sugu based ko-choji midare, containing nie, kinsuji sunagashi, yo and nioi ashi.
- Boshi: Sugu ending ko-maru with short return.
- Nakago: Slight suriagi machi-okuri.
- Remarks: Sukenari is the son of Sukeyuki. His original name was Sukeshige. He is a "Bankaji" one who was called to assist and teach the retired Emperor. This slender but shortened sword has a graceful, high koshi-sori that falls off as the curvature moves toward the point. This feature is seen in both Ko-Bizen and Ko-ichimonji work. You will also note the stroke ichi carved into the nakago above the mekugi-ana. The signature is carved on the tachi mei side of the sword. He was also an Imperial Guard smith.

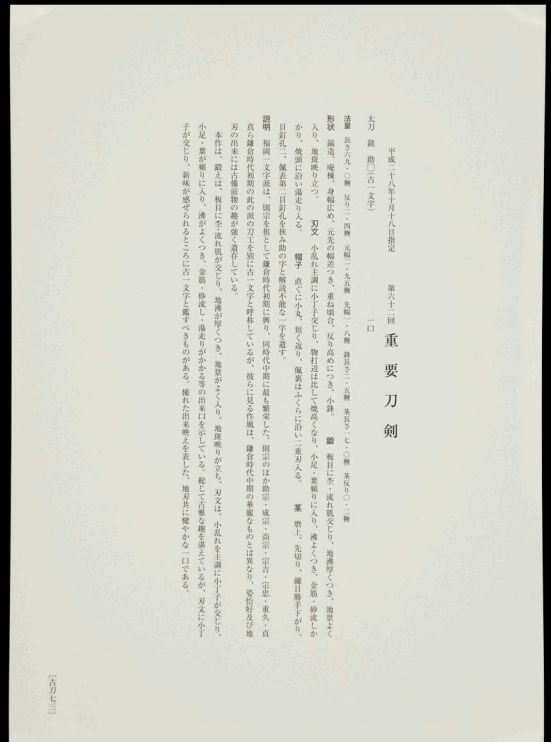
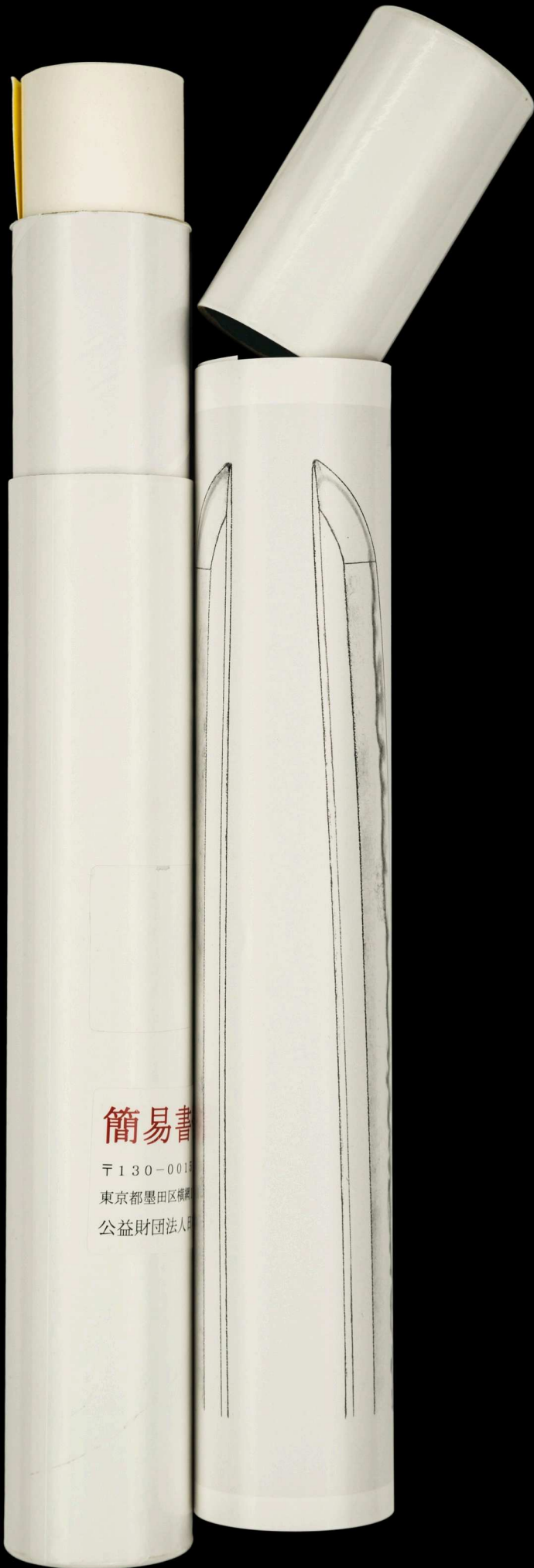




Shirasaya  
(protective scabbard)



gold-wrapped *habaki* with  
straight file marks



62nd NBTHK Juyo Token Certificate  
Traditionally rolled in protective tube.

All information will be precisely translated for the new caretaker. A printed and bound description of the sword from this catalogue will also be included along with a sword stand and a Unique Japan maintenance kit.