



ITEM# UJKA430

A YOSHIKAGE NAGINATA-NAOSHI KATANA

UNSIGNED, NAMBOKUCHÔ PERIOD (KENMU ERA: 1334~1338)

Swordsmith:	<i>Bishû Osafune Yoshikage (Bizen province)</i>
Measurements:	Length: 69.5cm (<i>ô-suriage</i>) Curvature: 1.5cm Moto-haba: 2.95cm
Jihada:	<i>Standing-out itame mixed with mokume, ji-nie, chikei and midare-utsuri</i>
Hamon:	<i>Gunome in nioi-deki with ko-nie mixed with ko-gunome, chôji, kinsuji, & sunagashi</i>
Certificate #1:	26th NBTHK Tokubetsu Jûyô Tôken (An Especially Important Sword)
Certificate #2-4:	NTHK-NPO Kanteishô (koshirae, fk and tsuba certified as Authentic)
Fujishiro rank:	Jô-saku (ranked as a superior swordsmith)
Sharpness:	Ô-wazamono (maker of extremely sharp swords)
Authentication:	Sayagaki by Tanzan-sensei (Tanobe Michihiro)
Included:	Shirasaya, koshirae, fabric bags, stand, kit, printed description

SOLD

This special sword that has been attributed to *Bizen Osafune* swordsmith *Yoshikage*, master of the *naginata*. It was crafted in the early 1300s and later preserved into a katana, a process known as *naginata-naoshi*. This katana is certified *Tokubetsu Jûyô Tôken*, the highest rank at the NBTHK.

The polearm type of the *naginata* (薙刀) emerged in the late *Heian* period (794~1185) and then later in the *Genpei War* (1180~1185). High-ranking warriors recognized the efficacy of the *naginata* and made it their weapon of choice when fighting on foot. Many famous figures of that time period being recorded as fighting preferably with the *naginata* have become a fixture of Japanese lore, e.g., *Minamoto no Tsunemitsu* (源経光, died 1146), the warrior monk *Benkei* (弁慶, 1155-1189), female

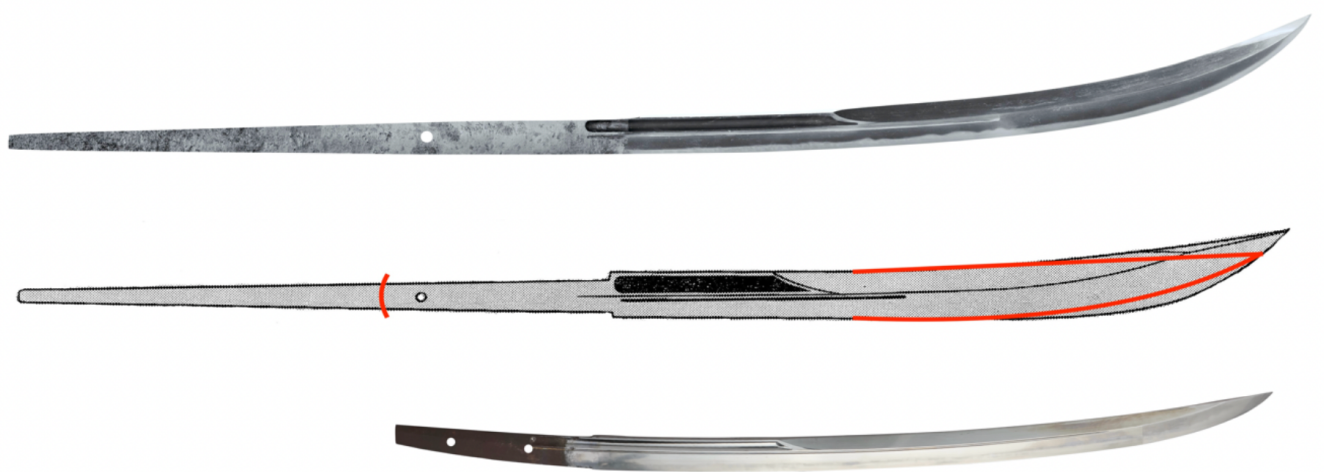
warrior *Tomoe-Gozen* (巴御前, late 12th century). The *naginata* henceforth remained much in use until the *Muromachi* period, when *yari* and firearms became the decisive weapons on the battlefield. By the end of the *Muromachi* period and entering the *Momoyama* period (1574~1600) changes in the way battles were fought and significant changes among the warrior class itself took place. This was the time when *samurai* took over land ownership on a large scale and were no longer more or less armed guardians of someone else's land as they had been in previous periods.

As a result, local *samurai* rulers now also had to administer the lands under their rule, which was of course not done in full armour wearing a *tachi*, but in a "civilian *samurai* attire" so to speak wearing the iconic *daishō* pair of swords consisting of a *katana* and a *wakizashi*. In other words, was the sword worn to the civilian or casual attire earlier mostly for reasons of self-defence, it had now become the *visible symbol of rank and authoritative power*, and eventually the status symbol of the entire warrior class.

The *shōgun*, the *daimyō*, and highest ranking *samurai* were of course seeking to wear the best blades possible. And as the qualitative and aesthetic zenith of Japanese sword making is often considered to have been the Kamakura and early to mid-Nanbokuchō period by connoisseurs and experts alike, this of course means that the body of work to select from was *tachi*, *tantō*, and *naginata*. Thus, reworking a *naginata*, if it was one's best blade, into a *katana* was not considered a sacrilege, but was understood as making it become a part of one's life rather than having it sit in a treasury or storehouse. Presenting and receiving a gift of a blade made by a smith renowned for having produced the finest examples of its type was very much desired. In this sense, *naginata-naoshi* by *Hōjōji Kunimitsu* or *Osafune Yoshikage* were by no means regarded second-rate to *tachi* by these smiths, rather in the contrary, i.e., as superior cutters and more desirable than their *tachi*.

Accordingly, the following saying developed among warriors:

Naginata-naoshi ni namakura nashi (薙刀直しに鈍刀なし)
"No sword made from a *naginata* is dull!"



(process of reshaping a *naginata* into a *katana*)

Yoshikage (義景) is said to be the son or a student of national-treasure swordsmith *Chikakage* (近景) and the son-in-law of *Chôgi* (長義). Thus he belonged to one of the then influential collateral branches of the large *Osafune* (長船) School, which was closely connected to the main line, led at that time by *Kagemitsu* (景光), see genealogy below.



In terms of workmanship, *Yoshikage's* early works tended to be hardened in *suguha* with *ko-ashi*, an approach that bears semblance to the style of *Chikakage*. Later on though, *Yoshikage* adopted elements of the *Sôshû* tradition in the style of *Chôgi*, which had been very much thriving at that time, influencing swordsmiths all across Japan. This mix of the *Sôshû* and *Bizen* traditions is referred to as *Sôden-Bizen*, and having been an early adopter, ***Yoshikage can be regarded as one of the forerunners of this trend.*** Existing dated works of *Yoshikage* range from the second year of *Kenmu* era (建武, 1335) to the third year of *Enbun* era (延文, 1358).

What makes this sword quite remarkable, is that it serves as transition-point in the career of *Yoshikage*. On *ura* (reverse) side of the blade is *Yoshikage's* early works (similar to *Chikakage*) in that it is composed of smaller elements, a more-exacting *midare-ba* and with hardening in *ko-nie-deki*. However, the *omote*-side displays a forging structure in *itame* that is accompanied by a *midare-utsuri* and a flamboyant hardening in a *chôji*-based *midareba*, and plenty of *kinsuji* and *sunagashi* in the *Chôgi* and *Sôden-Bizen* tradition. It is a wonderful sword to study and one where *Yoshikage* pays respect to his previous style while embracing a new chapter in his working life as a smith.

As the NBTHK *Tokubetsu Jûyô Tôken* concludes in their description summary:

The ha is nie-laden and displays plenty of kinsuji and sunagashi and therefore we recognize along the jiba the characteristic features of the Sôden-Bizen style... The blade is of a gallant naginata-naoshi shape and coupled with kinsuji, sunagashi, and other hataraki we have here an outstanding masterwork among all blades known by this smith.





Saki-kasane: 3.7mm

Moto-kasane: 5.3mm

Omosa: 835g

Kissaki: 8.38cm

Saki-haba: 2.48cm

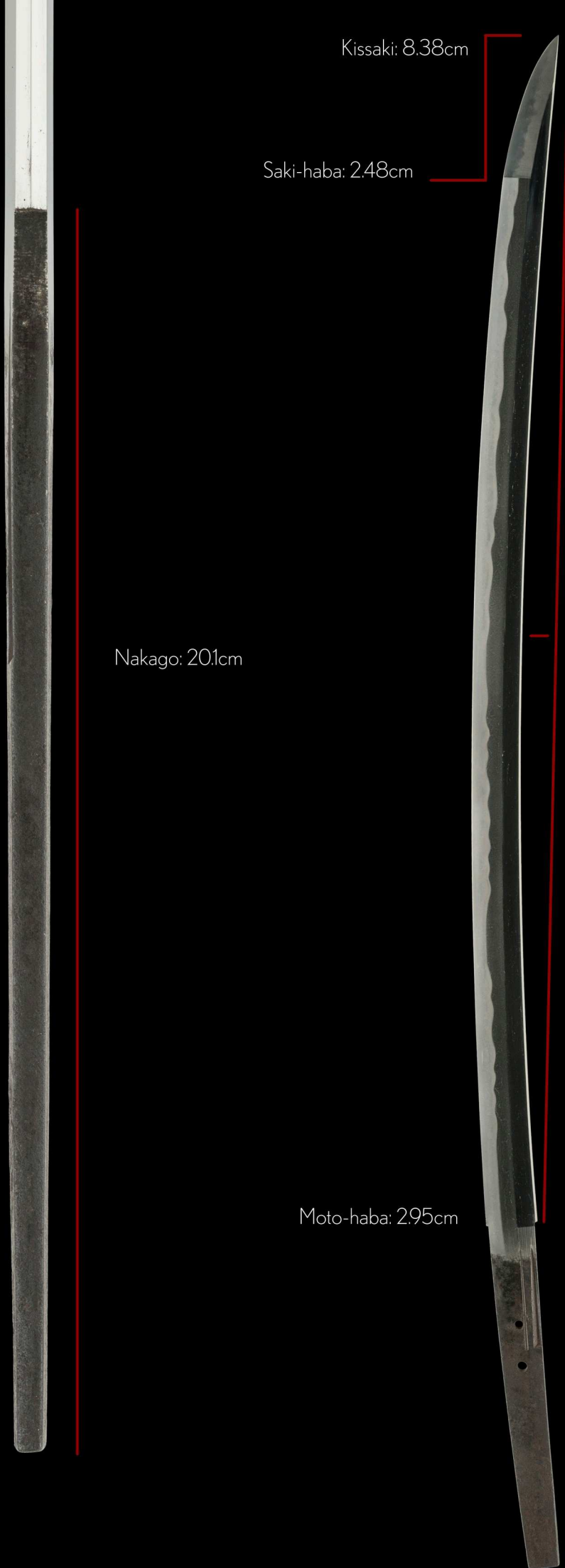
Nakago: 20.1cm

Moto-haba: 2.95cm

Nagasa: 69.5cm

Sori: 1.50cm

Mekugi-ana: 2



The NBTHK Tokubetsu Jûyô Certificate description for this magnificent Yoshikage katana translates as follows:

Several traditions exist regarding *Osafune Yoshikage* - for example, one states that he was a student of *Kanemitsu* and another that he was a student of *Chôgi*.

However, more recent studies suggest that based on similarities in workmanship and a unique signature that makes use of *gyaku-tagane* (certain strokes of the signature being chiseled the opposite way as written by brush), he may have been an *Osafune* side line smith from the groups surrounding *Chikakage* or *Morikage*.

This blade was originally a *naginata* which has been greatly shortened and which had material removed from the *mune* side along the tip section to rework it into a *katana*. The *kitae* is an *itame* that is mixed with much *mokume* and some *nagare* and that features plenty of *ji-nie*, much thick *chikei*, and a *midare-utsuri*. The *ha* is *nie*-laden and displays plenty of *kinsuji* and *sunagashi* and therefore we recognize along the *jiba* the characteristic features of the *Sôden-Bizen* tradition.

The *hamon* is a *gunome* that is mixed with *chôji*, *togariba*, and a variety of other elements, in particular with prominently pointed elements all across the *ha*. All this and the fact that the *midare* sections are relatively densely arranged and small made us conclude that the attribution to *Yoshikage* is appropriate.

The blade is of a *gallant naginata-naoshi* shape and coupled with *kinsuji*, *sunagashi*, and other *hataraki* we have here an outstanding masterwork among all blades known by this smith.





remnants of the original
naginata-hi (groove)

Carefully reshaped and shortened
into a katana-length nakago.

02202026

特重要第一二八〇號

指定書

一薙刀直し刀無銘 義景 一口

法量 長さ六九・六櫃 反り一・六櫃
 形状 薙刀直し造庵棟 身幅広め 元先の幅差やつぎ反り浅く 大鋒
 銀 板目に委を交え 肌立ちころ 地沸き 地景入り 乱れ映り立つ
 刃文 互の目に小互の目・丁子などを交え 匂勝ち小沸つき 全筋・
 砂流しかかる
 帽子 乱れ込み 先焼詰め風
 彫物 表茎上半に 薙刀樋と添樋の痕跡
 茎 大磨上 鑑目勝手下がり 目釘孔二
 備前國長船義景
 南北朝時代

右者當協會に於て審査の結果
特別重要刀剣に指定する

令和二年五月二十八日

公益財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協會

會長 酒井忠久

東京 教育委員会
第 321708 号
令和 2 年 5 月 28 日

Tokubetsu Jûyô Certificate No. 1280
Shiteisho (指定書) Certificate of Designation
Naginata-Naoshi Katana, mumei: Yoshikage (義景)

Measurements
nagasa 69.6 cm, sori 1.6 cm

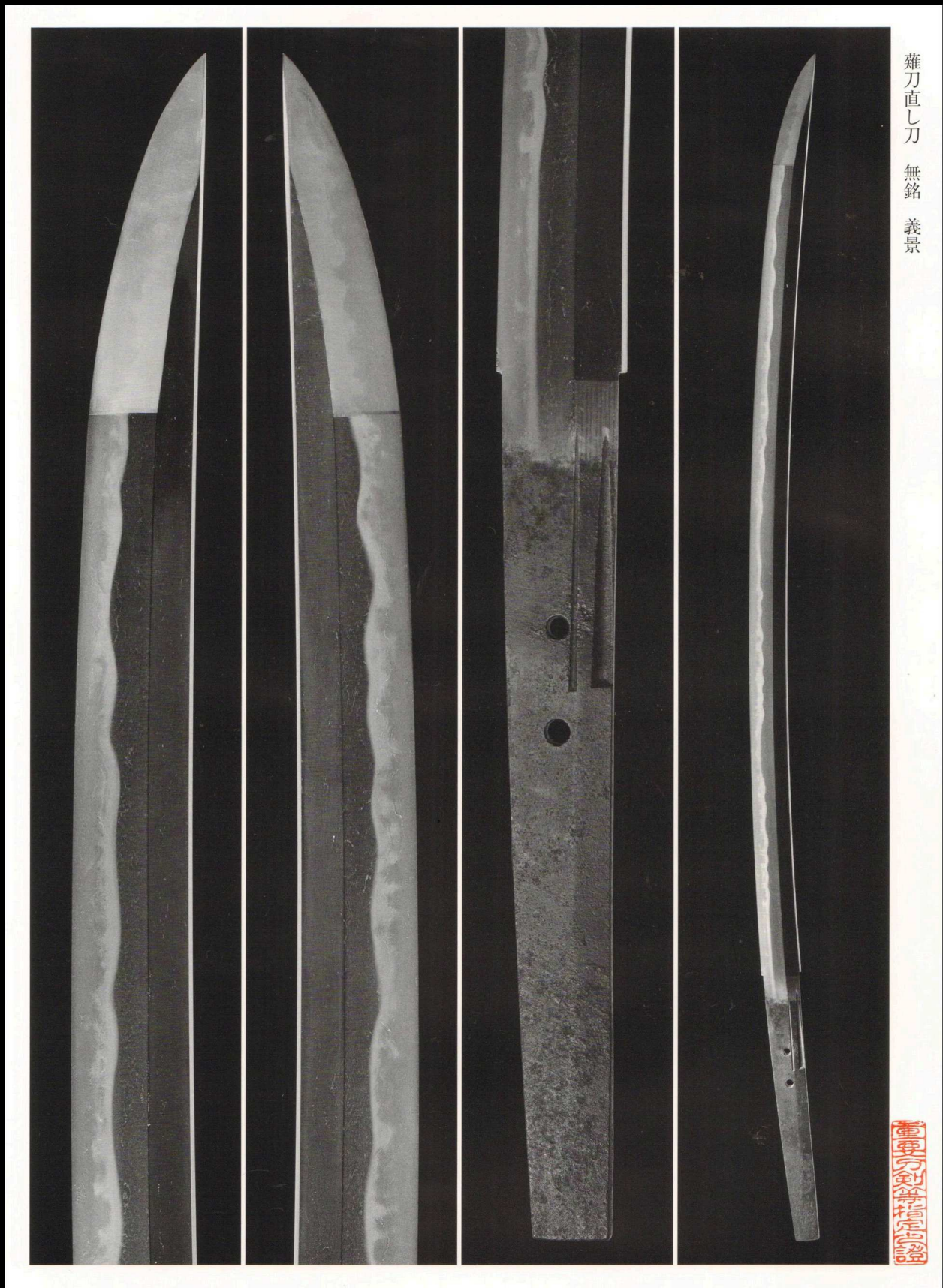
Description

Keijo: naginata-naoshi-zukuri, iori-mune, wide mihaba, noticeable taper, shallow sori, ô-kissaki
Kitae: rather standing-out itame mixed with mokume and features ji-nie, chikei, and midare-utsuri
Hamon: gunome in nioi-deki with ko-nie mixed with ko-gunome, chôji, kinsuji, and sunagashi
Bôshi: midare-komi and running out in yakitsume fashion
Horimono: on the omote side on the upper half of the tang traces of a naginata-hi and soebi
Nakago: ô-suriage, katte-sagari yasurime, two mekugi-ana

Osafune Yoshikage from Bizen province
Nanbokuchô period

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

May 28, 2020
[Foundation] Nihon Bijutsu Tôken Hozon Kyôkai, NBTHK
[President] Yamanaka Sadanori (山中貞則)



薙刀直し刀 無銘 義景

*A Bishû Osafune Yoshikage Naginata Naoshi Katana
Nambokuchô period, Kenmu era (1334~1338)*

A brilliant *Sôden-Bizen* powerhouse described in its NBTHK Tokubetsu Jûyô Tôken certificate as having a gallant *naginata-naoshi* shape with *kinsuji*, *sunagashi*, and other *hataraki* and an outstanding masterwork among all blades known by *Osafune Yoshikage*.

Designated as *Tokubetsu-Jūyō-Tōken* (an especially profound and important sword)
at the 26th *tokubetsu jūyō shinsa* held on May 28, 2020

***naginata-naoshi katana, mumei: Yoshikage* (義景)**

Unique Japan

Measurements

nagasa 69.6 cm

sori 1.6 cm

motohaba 2.95 cm, *sakihaba* 2.5 cm

kissaki-nagasa 8.5 cm, *nakago-nagasa* 20.1 cm, only very little *nakago-sori*

Description

Keijo: *naginata-naoshi-zukuri*, *iori-mune*, wide *mihaba*, noticeable taper, thin *kasane* and *shinogi-ji* drops off noticeably towards *mune*, shallow *sori*, *ō-kissaki*

Kitae: rather standing-out *itame* that is mixed with much *mokume*, some *ō-mokume* in places, and a little bit of *nagare*, and that features plenty of *ji-nie*, much thick *chikei*, and a *midare-utsuri*

Hamon: *gunome* in *nioi-deki* with *ko-nie* and a bright *nioiguchi* that is mixed with plenty of *ko-gunome*, *chōji*, prominent *togariba* along the *monouchi*, many *ashi* and *yō*, and with an abundance of thin *kinsuji* and *sunagashi*

Bōshi: prominently *midare-komi* with some *hakikake* and running out in *yakitsume* fashion

Horimono: on the *omote* side on the upper half of the tang traces of a *naginata-hi* and *soebi*

Nakago: *ō-suriage*, very shallow *kurijiri*, *katte-sagari yasurime*, two *mekugi-ana*, *mumei*

Artisan

Osafune Yoshikage from Bizen province

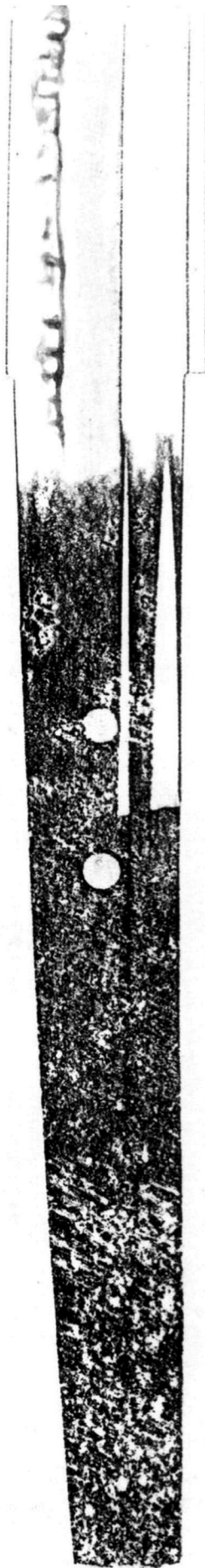
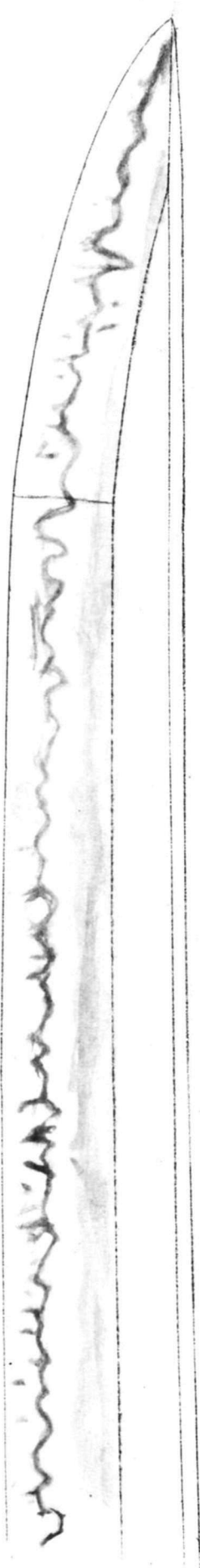
Era

Nanbokuchō period

Remarks

Several traditions exist regarding Osafune Yoshikage, for example, one saying that he was a student of Kanemitsu (兼光) and another that he was a student of Chōgi (長義). However, recent studies rather suggest that on the basis of similarities in workmanship and a unique signature style that makes use of *gyaku-tagane* (certain strokes of the signature being chiseled the opposite way as written with a brush), he may have been an Osafune side line smith from the groups surrounding Chikakage (近景) or Morikage (盛景).

This blade was originally a *naginata* which has been greatly shortened and which had material removed from the *mune* side along the tip section to rework it into a *katana*. The *kitae* is an *itame* that is mixed with much *mokume* and some *nagare* and that features plenty of *ji-nie*, much thick *chikei*, and a *midare-utsuri*. The *ha* is *nie*-laden and displays plenty of *kinsuji* and *sunagashi* and therefore we recognize along the *jiba* the characteristic features of the Sōden-Bizen style. The *hamon* is a *gunome* that is mixed with *chōji*, *togariba*, and a variety of other elements, in particular with prominently pointed elements all across the *ha*. All this and the fact that the *midare* sections are relatively densely arranged and small made us conclude that the attribution to Yoshikage is appropriate. The blade is of a gallant *naginata-naoshi* shape and with the *kinsuji*, *sunagashi*, and other *hataraki* we have here an outstanding masterwork among all blades known by this smith.



第十七回重要刀剣指定品

Dai jûnana-kai jûyô-tôken shitei-hin

Designated as jûyô-tôken at the 17th jûyô-shinsa

備前國長船義景

Bizen no Kuni Osafune Yoshikage

Osafune Yoshikage from Bizen province

大磨上無銘而薙刀直也裏ハ乱映ヲ伴フ板目ノ肌合ニ丁子主調ノ華ヤカナ乱ヲ焼キ一見吉岡一文字風ナレド表ガ乱ノ間詰マリ小模様トナリ小沸付ク點ヤ薙刀直ノ遺例ハ同工ニ多キコトナドヨリ所傳ハ首肯シ得ル者ナラン同工ハ近景ノ流ヲ汲ミ盛景トハ同族也本作ハ同工極中屈指ノ優品哉

Ô-suriage mumei shikamo naginata-naoshi nari. Sashiura wa midare-utsuri o tomonau itame no hada-ai ni chôji-shuchô no hanayaka na midare o yaki ikken Yoshioka-Ichimonji-fû naredo omote ga midare no aida tsumari ko-moyô to nari ko-nie tsuku ten ya naginta-naoshi no irei wa dôkô ni ôki koto nado yori shoden wa shukô-shi eru mono naran. Dôkô wa Chikakage no ryû o kumi Morikage to wa dôzoku nari. Honsaku wa dôkô kiwame-chû kusshi no yûhin kana.

This blade is ô-suriage mumei and is a naginata-naoshi. The sashi-ura side displays a forging structure in itame that is accompanied by a midare-utsuri and a flamboyant hardening in a chôji-based midareba, which bears semblance to the Yoshioka-Ichimonji style at first glance. The midare of the ura side, however, is more densely arranged and composed of smaller elements, and with the hardening in ko-nie-deki, and the fact that many naginata-naoshi exist by Yoshikage, I am in agreement with the attribution to this smith. Yoshikage belonged to the family of Morikage, who came from the lineage of Chikakage, and we have here a particularly outstanding masterwork among all blades with period attributions to this smith.

長式尺二寸九分

Nagasa ni-shaku ni-sun kyû-bu

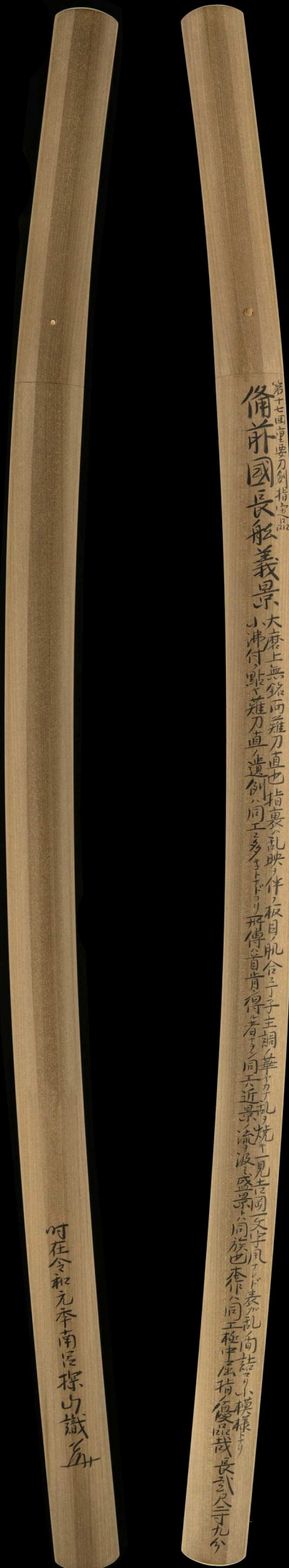
Blade length ~ 69.6 cm

時在令和元年季南呂探山識「花押」

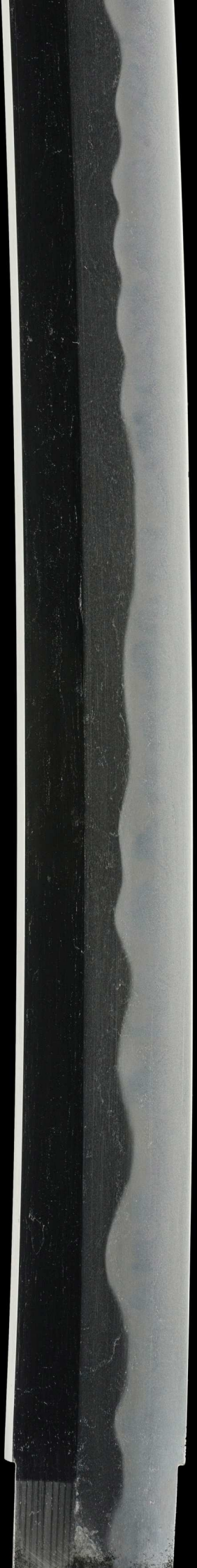
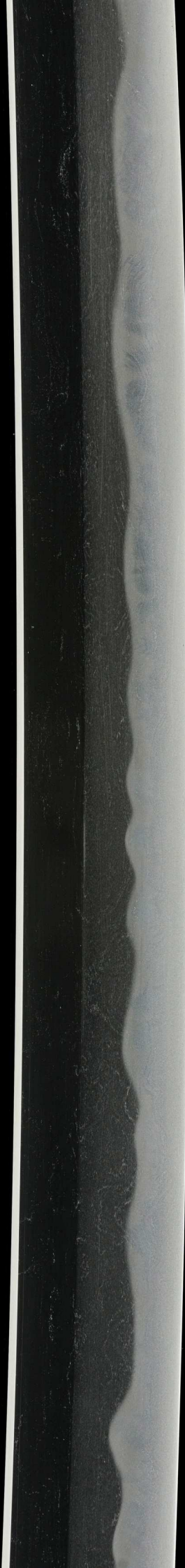
Jizai Reiwa gannen nanryô Tanzan shirusu + kaô

Written by Tanzan [Tanobe Michihiro]

First year of Reiwa era (August 2019) + monogram.









When it comes to quantities of works that hold the highest ranking statuses issued by the NBTHK and designations by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, we have the following numbers for the *Osafune Yoshikage* (as per March 2024):

2 blades have been designated as a *Jûyô-Bunkazai* (Important Intangible Cultural Property)
1 tachi, 1 wakizashi; both signed

2 blades have been designated as a *Jûyô-Bijutsuhin* (Important Art Object)
both are katana and unsigned

3 blades have passed *Tokubetsu-Jûyô* (Especially Important Sword)
2 katana, 1 naginata-naoshi katana)

65 blades have passed *Jûyô* (Important Sword)
5 tachi, 52 katana [of which 17 are naginata-naoshi]
6 wakizashi [of which 2 are naginata-naoshi], and 2 naginata

Of only four blades having been designated by the Agency of Cultural Affairs and of only three blades that passed *Tokubetsu-Jûyo*, the naginata-naoshi in question belongs to an elite group of less than ten objects that represents the greatest masterworks known by *Osafune Yoshikage*.

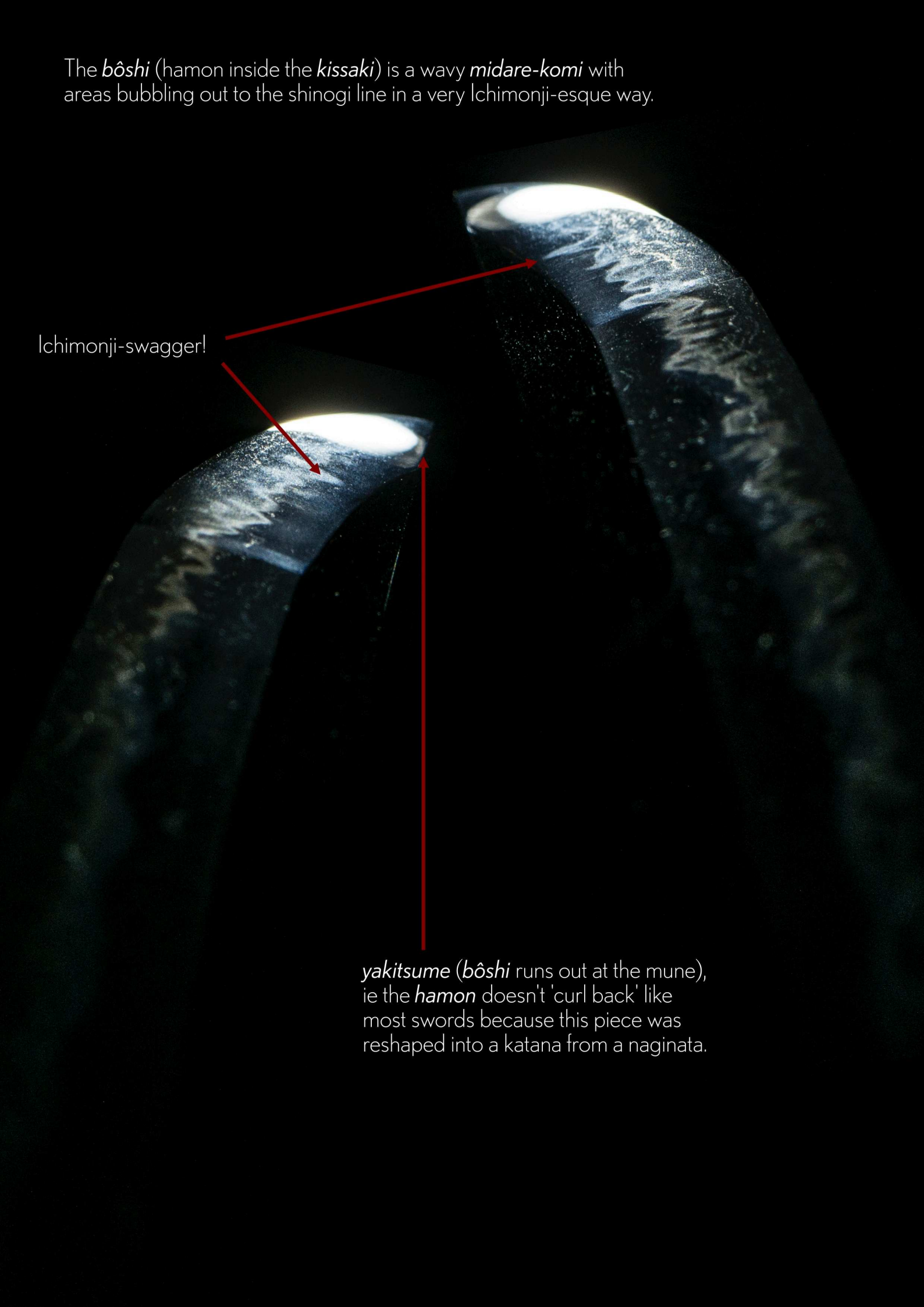
Moreover, this sword is the only *naginata-naoshi* that holds the *Tokubetsu-Jûyô* status, and as no blade of this type by Yoshikage has yet been designated a *Jûyô-Bijutsuhin*, *Jûyô-Bunkazai*, or *Kokuhô* (national treasure), this is arguably the finest *naginata-naoshi* by Yoshikage in existence.

Yoshikage is rated *ô-wazamono* for the supreme sharpness of his swords.
This large *ô-kissaki* tapers to a razor-tip point that clearly means business.



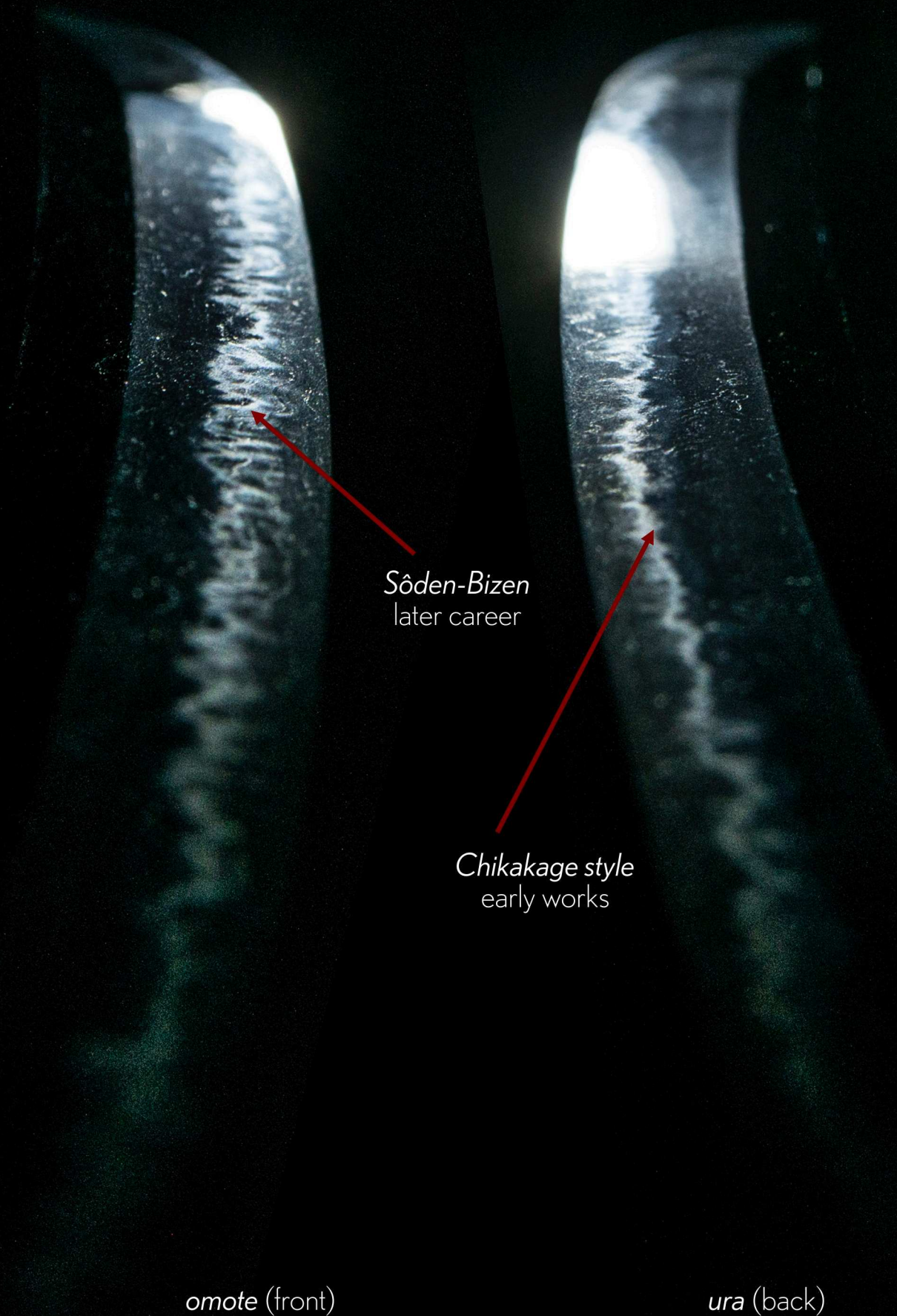
The *bôshi* (hamon inside the *kissaki*) is a wavy *midare-komi* with areas bubbling out to the shinogi line in a very Ichimonji-esque way.

Ichimonji-swagger!

A close-up photograph of a sword's hamon (wavy pattern) against a dark background. The hamon is illuminated, showing a complex, wavy pattern. Three red arrows point to specific features: one points to the upper part of the hamon, another points to a lower section, and a third points to the base of the hamon. The text 'Ichimonji-swagger!' is written to the left of the arrows.

yakitsume (*bôshi* runs out at the mune),
ie the *hamon* doesn't 'curl back' like
most swords because this piece was
reshaped into a katana from a naginata.

What's quite remarkable about this sword is that it personifies the life's work of Yoshikage. Early in his career, Yoshikage under the tutelage of *Osafune Chikakage*, forged a hamon that was more tightly arranged, based on *suguha* with *ko-ashi*, exactly what one sees on the *ura* (back) of this blade. Later on, Yoshikage was inspired by the energy and power of the *sôshu* tradition and hardened a hamon in *gunome-chôji* with plenty of *hataraki*, with *midare-utsuri* all characteristic of the *sôden-bizen* tradition. And this is what is delivered on the *omote* (front) side. In this unique way, Yoshikage connects the dots on a fine career.



Sôden-Bizen
later career

Chikakage style
early works

omote (front)

ura (back)

Literally meaning "reflection", *utsuri* is a beautiful, misty reflection appearing in the *ji* (body of sword) above the *hamon*.

It is much loved and appreciated feature of swords, particular those made in the Bizen tradition in the Koto period (pre 1600).

The type of *utsuri* found on this blade is called *midare-utsuri* - a smokey pattern that billows towards the *shinogi* (ridge line).





togari

The NBTHK certificate mentions the presence *togari* (pointed) areas, which is a feature of Mino tradition crafted swords.

This is a truly fascinating sword for its sheer range of attributes.

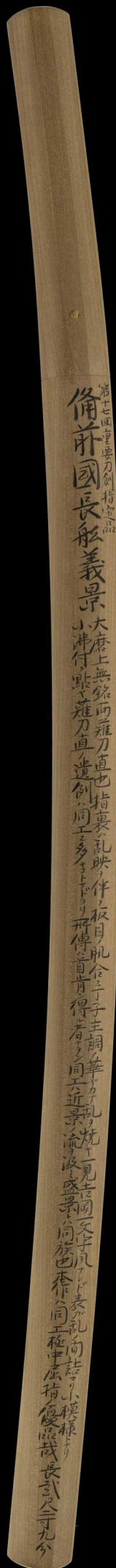
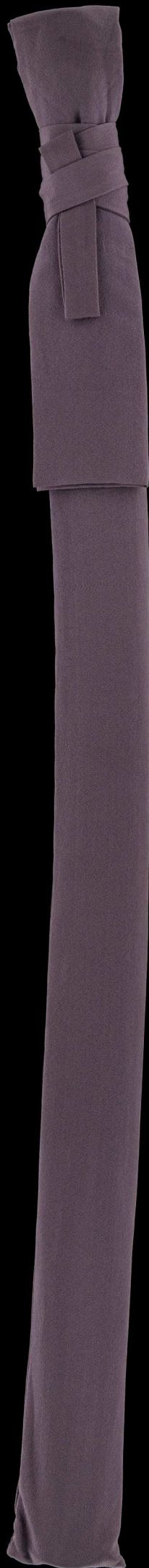
So much *hataraki* to enjoy. Swords like this will reveal something new each time you pick it up.



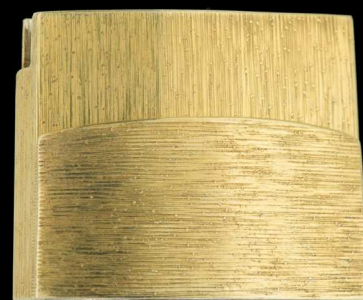
mokume
rounded burl grain

sunagashi (flowing sands)

kinsuji ('golden' lines of *nie*)



Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)

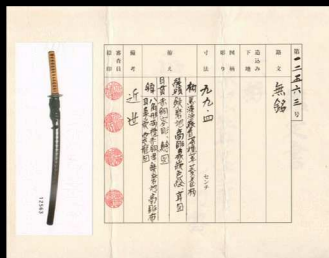


gold *ni-ju habaki* with
crisp file marks

*Shu-kuro botan-mon nuri saya
uchigatana-koshirae*
(朱黒牡丹紋塗鞘打刀拵)

*Uchigatana-koshirae
lacquered in red and black
with peony pattern*

Crafted during modern times



NTHK-NPO Kanteisho
Certificate of Authenticity

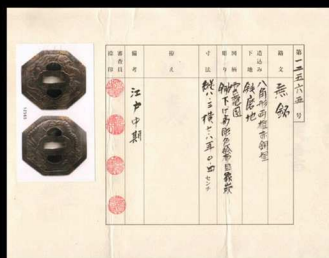


Beautifully lacquered red and black zen-like swirls depicting peonies adorn the *saya*. Note the antique floral pattern on the *kojiri* (cap).





This polished iron tsuba in octagonal shape in a cloud dragon design. It has been attributed to the *Nanban* school from *Nagasaki* and crafted in the middle Edo period, circa 1700s. Eight is a lucky number in Japan, and thus the shape of the tsuba is meant to bring good fortune.

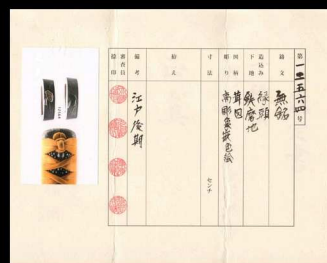


NTHK-NPO Kanteisho
certificate of authenticity



(reverse)





NTHK-NPO Kanteisho
Certificate of Authenticity



Fuchi-kashira
attributed to
Late generation of Shimizu Jingo
(Higo province, Late Edo period)

Motif of mushrooms
Polished iron

Mushrooms hold a special place in Japanese culture, symbolizing prosperity and the changing seasons. They're featured in festivals, art, and literature, reflecting the deep bond between the Japanese people and nature.

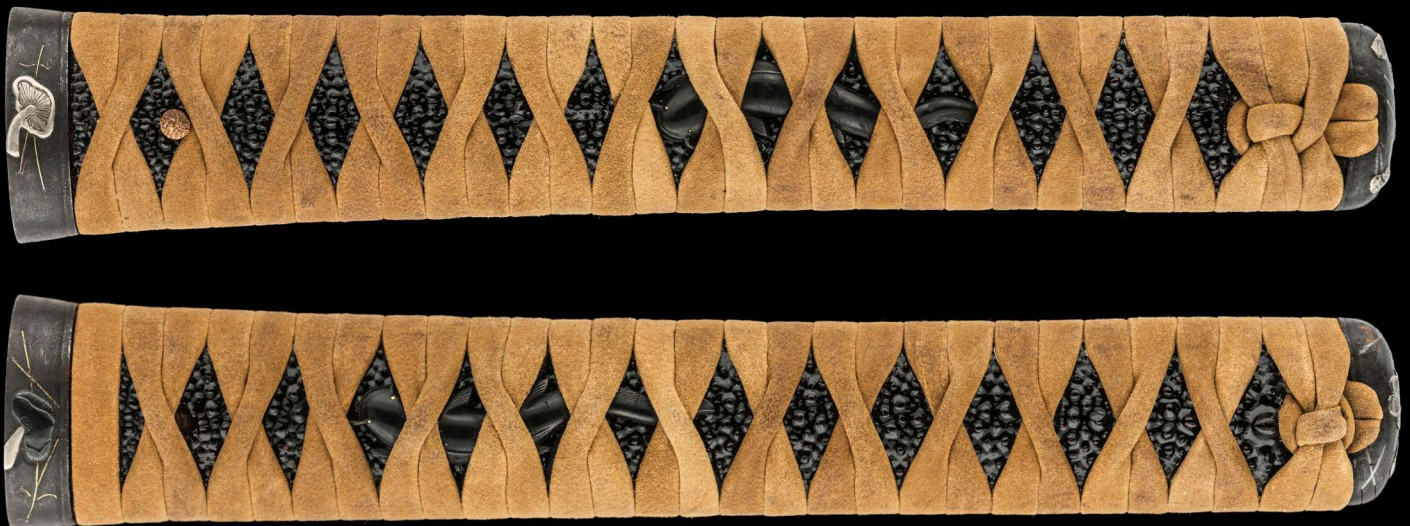


suede-leather wrap



The *menuki* display two impressively large catfish (*namazu*) swimming over the black-lacquered *samekawa* (ray skin). In Japanese mythology, the *Namazu* or *Ōnamazu* is a giant underground catfish that lives under the islands of Japan guarded by the god *Takemikazuchi* enshrined at *Kashima*, and who restrains the catfish with a stone. When the *Kashima-god* lets his guard down, *Namazu* thrashes about, causing violent earthquakes.

Interestingly, prior to the 1855 Edo earthquake, an eel fisherman reportedly spotted unusually active catfish in a river, which he took as a predictor of an earthquake. Later that night, the earthquake struck. The anecdote, recorded in an 1856 chronicle of journalistic reporting on the earthquake, is the earliest known claim that catfish can naturally predict earthquakes.





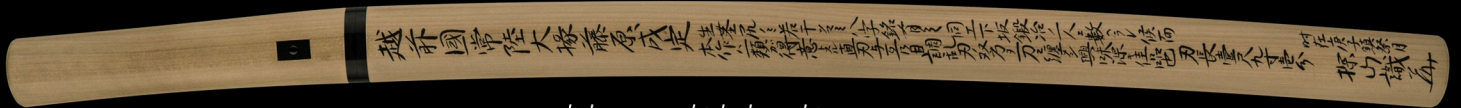
Koshirae bag with floral pattern.

Submit, Repair, Sell & Create!

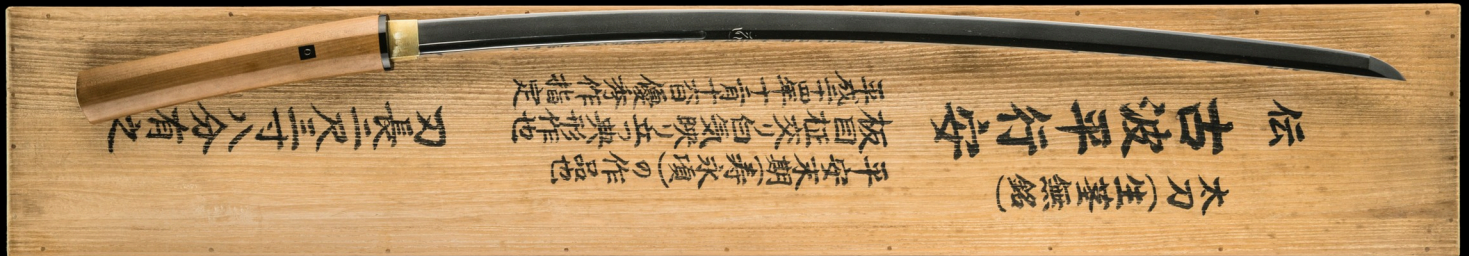
Unique Japan offers a *full-service menu* to assist clients with their Japanese swords and fittings. All services are performed in Japan with top quality craftsmen and women.

Services include (non exhaustive):

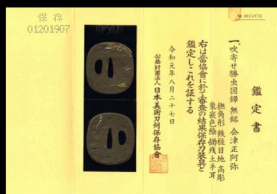
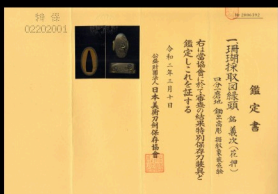
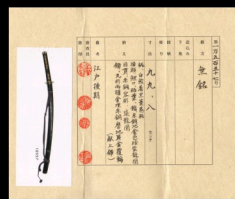
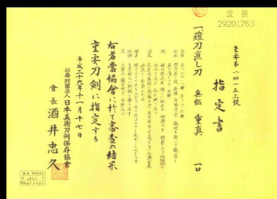
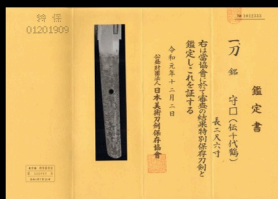
- * NBTHK and NTHK-NPO *shinsa* certification (swords and fittings)
- * polishing for all types of Japanese swords (standard to Jûyô-level quality polish)
- * *shirasaya* making (standard to high quality with horn fittings)
- * *habaki* making (gold, silver, copper in most any design pattern)
- * fix wobbly koshirae, repair cracked scabbards, new lacquer work, etc.
- * *otoshi* presentation boxes for your beautiful *tsuba*, *menuki*, *fuch-kashira*, etc.
- * *tsuka-maki* (re-wrap your hilts in silk or leather in most any colour, weave or braid)
- * *oshigata* (sword/hamon tracing on a scroll with a large choice of background)
- * *sayagaki* services with *Tanobe-sensei* (qualifying conditions apply)
- * sword boxes with *hakogaki* (with humidifying options for dry climates)
- * custom koshirae projects (see separate page)
- * sell your sword(s) on consignment (qualifying conditions apply)



polish, sayagaki, hakogaki



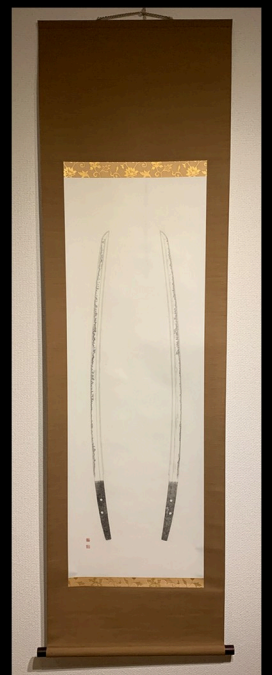
tsuka-maki



habaki creations



otoshi boxes



oshigata scrolls

All NBTHK and NTHK-NPO Shinsa authentication services