

ITEM# UJKA455

A KENCHÔ KATANA

UNSIGNED WITH KINZÔGAN-MEI, NAMBOKUCHÔ (JÔJI ERA: 1362~1368)

Swordsmith:	<i>Bizen Osafune Kenchô (Kanenaga, first generation)</i>
Measurements:	Length: 71.0cm (<i>ô-suriage</i>) Sori: 1.5cm Moto-haba: 2.96cm Weight: 770g
Jihada:	<i>Beautiful itame mixed with nagare with sparkling ji-nie and a faint midare-utsuri</i>
Hamon:	<i>Wavy notare in ko-nie-deki, wide, clear nioiguchi mixed with gunome, chôji, larger dimensioned midare elements, many ko-ashi and yô, and with sunagashi</i>
Certificate:	7th NBTHK Tokubetsu Jûyô (An Especially Precious and Important sword)
Fujishiro rank:	Jô-saku (ranked as a superior swordsmith)
Sharpness:	Ô-Wazamono (maker of extremely sharp swords)
Provenance:	<i>Sword was gifted by the ninth shogun Tokugawa Ieshige to Lord Masatsune in 1753</i>
Authentication:	Origami by Hon'ami Kôyû (dated to 1753)
Authentication:	Sayagaki by Tanobe-sensei (Tanobe Michihiro)
Included:	Shirasaya, fabric bag, stand, kit, printed description, origami & antique box

SOLD

This exceptional katana from the warring *Nambokuchô* period is attributed to *Kenchô* (also known as *Kanenaga*), the celebrated pupil of *Chôgi*. The blade represents a masterful blend of *Bizen* and *Sôshû* traditions, exemplifying the rare and coveted *Sôden Bizen* style of workmanship. The *nakago* features a gold-inlaid *kinzôgan-mei* signature and comes with *origami* from *Hon'ami Kôyû* dated 1753, assessing its value at 15 gold coins. That same year, the ninth *shogun Tokugawa Ieshige* presented this actual katana as a gift to *Lord Asano Munetsune* upon his succession as head of the *Asano* clan. This is a precious sword worthy of a place amongst the most prestigious *nihontô* collections.



Saki-kasane: 5.0mm

Moto-kasane: 6.3mm

Omosa: 770g

Kissaki: 4.33cm

Saki-haba: 2.17cm

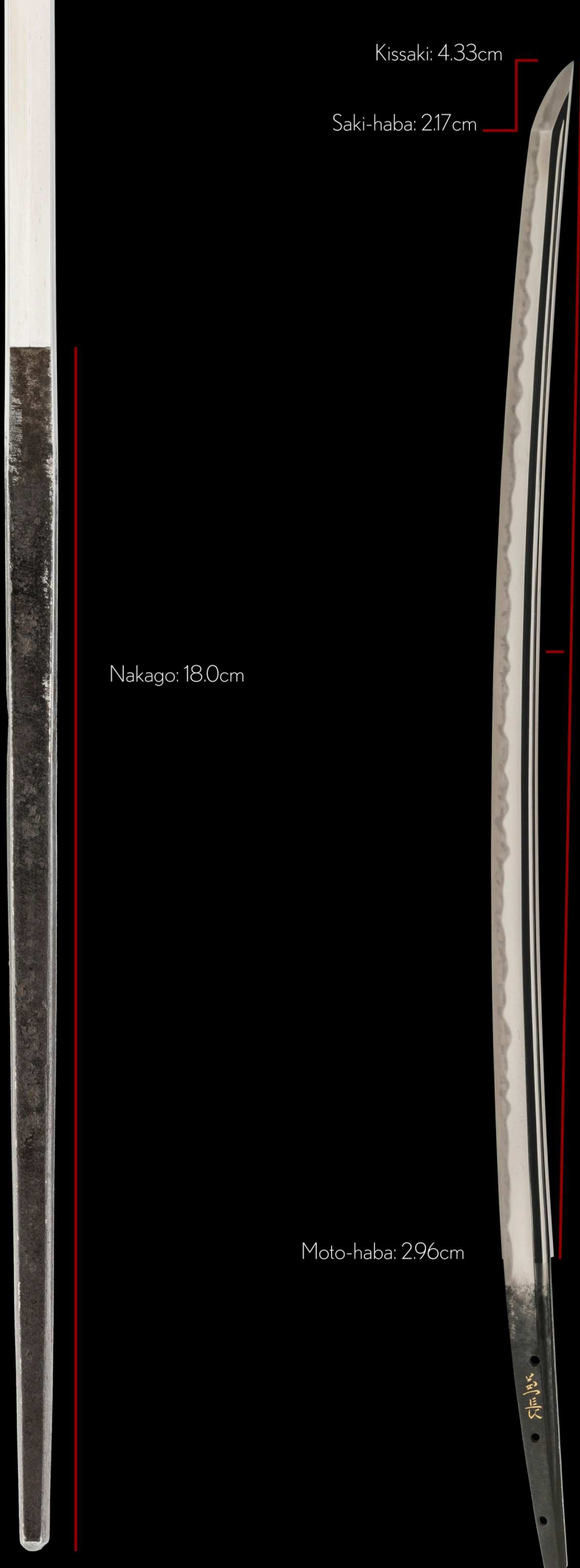
Nakago: 18.0cm

Moto-haba: 2.96cm

Nagasa: 71.0cm

Sori: 1.50cm

Mekugi-ana: 3



The following text is a summation of *Kenchô*'s historical background and synopsis of its very early 7th NBTHK Tokubetsu Jûyô Tôken certificate issued in 1980 that highlights the virtues of this prestigious katana.

Tradition has it that *Kanenaga*, whose name can also be read *Kenchô*, was the son of *Nagashige*, who is said to have either been the father, or the older brother of *Chôgi*. Another tradition sees him as son of *Kaneshige*, who is believed to have been the younger brother of *Chôgi*. Kanenaga became a student of *Chôgi*, and it is safe to assume that all these smiths worked closely together, with *Chôgi* as head of the forge.

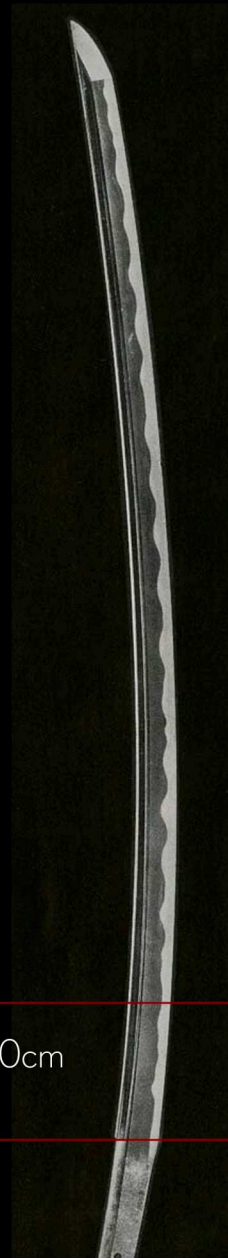
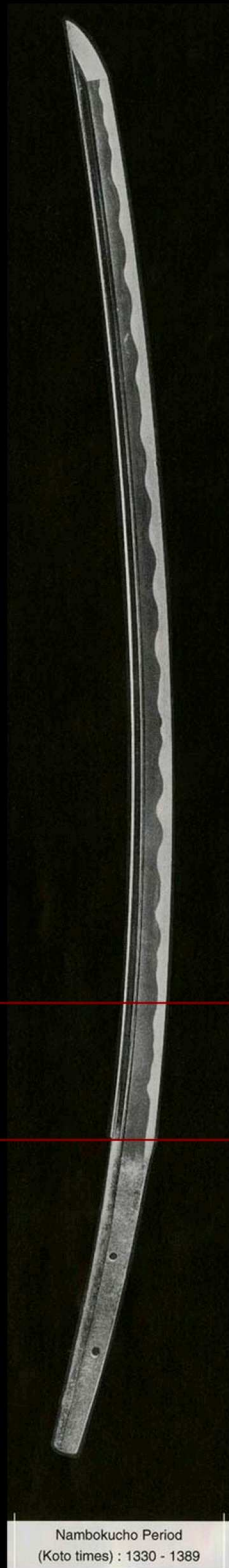
Existing signed works of Kanenaga are extremely rare, but there is a wakizashi dated *Jôji* five (1366), which is designated as a *Jûyô-Bijutsuhin*, one *tantô* that passed *Jûyô* that is dated *Shitoku* four (1387), and one *tantô* that passed *Tokubetsu-Jûyô* which is dated *Kakyô* two (1388). Accordingly, we can narrow down Kanenaga's active period to mid to late *Nanbokuchô* period.

The style of Kanenaga was very close to *Chôgi*, meaning a workmanship that is based on the Bizen tradition, but also prominently enriched with elements from the *Sôshû* tradition, an approach that is traditionally referred to as *Sôden-Bizen*. Some of his blades emphasize *nie* even more than *Chôgi*.

This blade bears the *kinzôgan-mei* (gold inlaid signature) "*Kanenaga*" and is accompanied by an origami issued by *Hon'ami Kôyû* (1704~1770) in *Hôreki* three (1753), in which he evaluates the blade with 15 gold coins. Furthermore, it can be definitively stated that this sword was gifted in 1753 by the ninth shogun Lord *Tokugawa Ieshige* to Lord *Asano Munetsune* on the occasion of succeeding as head of the *Asano* family and entering for the first time his domain plus receiving the rank of Chamberlain and Fourth Court Rank Second Class.

This sword's majestic shape with a wide *mihaba* and prominently elongated *kissaki* is typical for the *Nanbokuchô* period. With Kencho's unique flamboyant interpretation of the *jiba*, we have here a particularly excellent work of all blades attributed to *Kanenaga*. According to the NBTHK, this blade appears to have been once an *ôdachi* with a *nagasa* of more than three *shaku* (90.9cm).





original
signature

~20cm

o-suriage nakago
(greatly shortened)

*Kanenaga
Tokuju katana*

Nambokucho Period
(Koto times) : 1330 - 1389

This katana was crafted during the tumultuous *Nambokucho period*, circa 1362~1368. The original cutting edge would have been about 90cm and called an *ôdachi*.

Very few of these long and imposing blades have survived in their original length. Later generations of samurai had them shortened (*o-suriage nakago*) to a convenient size for everyday wear thus losing any signature in the process.

Above is an example of a sword from the Nambokucho period. Note how through the shortening process it has attained its current powerful shape.



Location: *Bizen province*

Village: *Osafune*

Swordsmith: *Kenchô*

Kinzôgan mei, gold inscription by *Ho'nami Kôyû*)

ô-suriage-nakago (greatly shortened tang)

sujikai-yasurime (diagonal file marks)

兼 (Ken)

長 (chô)

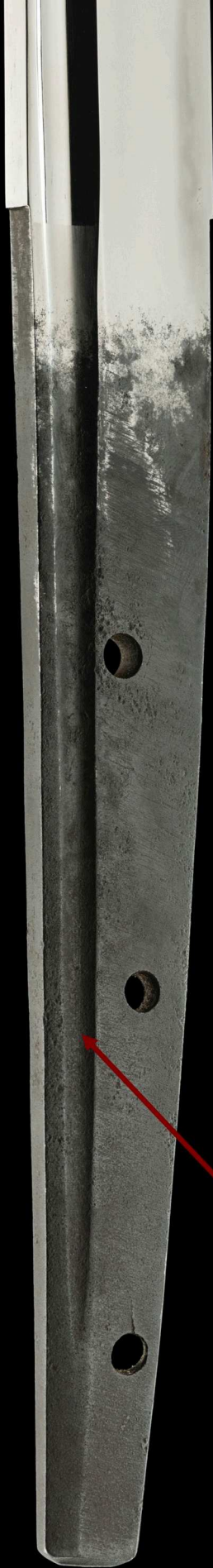
The *Hon'ami* family were the official sword appraisers and polishers of the shogunate. They also issued origami appraisals for blades.

This katana has origami appraised by *Hon'ami Kôyû* dated to 1753.

A close-up, diagonal view of a dark, textured katana blade. Two circular holes are visible on the blade's surface. In the center, there is a vertical inscription of Japanese calligraphy in gold. The characters are written in a cursive style, likely representing the name of the appraiser and the date.

宗道
五三

The 14th generation of the *Hon'ami* mainline was held by *Kôchû*'s son *Kôyû* who was born in the first year of *Hôei* era (1704) and died on December 23, 1770 in the tenth year of *Hôreki* era at the age of 57.



The nakago features *kaki-nagashi* - grooves that extend to the middle of the butt end of the tang.

(*ura*, reverse)



特重要第六〇號

指定書

一、刀 金象嵌銘兼長 一口

(附)宝曆三年本阿弥光勇折紙
長子モ、〇糶、又、五糶、元幅三九糶、先幅二五糶

形状鑄造、庵棟、中鋒延びる。

鍛 板目肌流丸肌、辛、ころに地滞つき、淡々亂映り立つ。

刃文のたれに互の目、丁子を交じえ、小足、葉末頻りに、

匂い深く小沸つき、冴える。

帽子乱れ込み、みやや突き上、床ぎみに先小丸に返る。

彫物表裏に棒樋を掻き流す。

茎 大磨上、鈔目筋違、目釘孔三。

右者當協會に於て審査の結果

特別重要刀剣 に指定する

昭和五十五年十一月二十日

財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協會

會長 本間順治



Tokubetsu-Jûyô Certificate No. 280
Shiteisho (指定書) Certificate of Designation
Katana, kinzôgan-mei: Kanenaga (兼長)

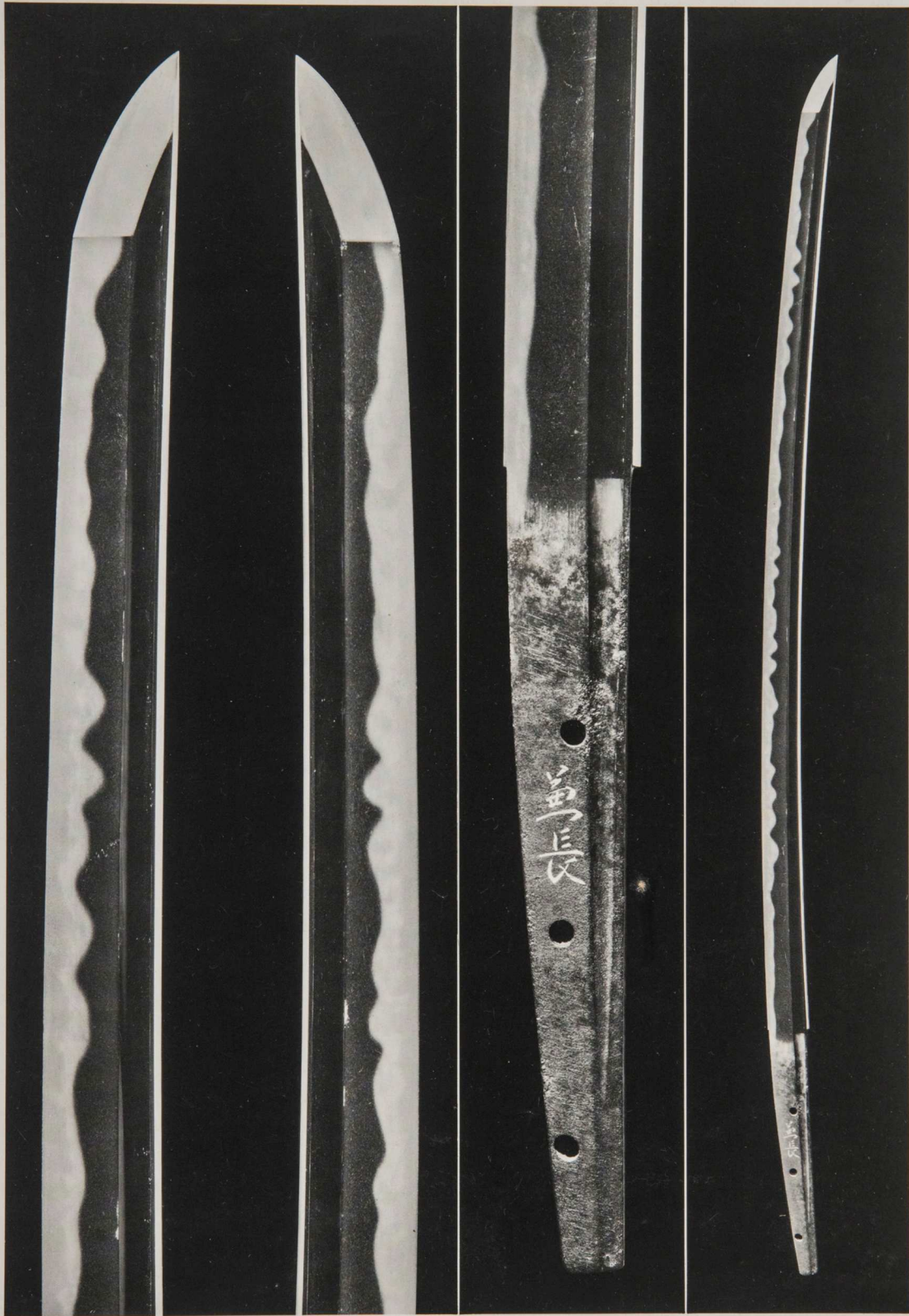
Accompanying
Origami written by Hon'ami Kôyû in the third year of Hôreki era (1753)

Measurements
nagasa 71.0 cm, sori 1.5 cm, motohaba 2.9 cm, sakihaba 2.15 cm

Description
Keijô: *shinogi-zukuri*, *iori-mune*, elongated *chû-kissaki*
Kitae: rather standing-out *itame* that is mixed with *nagare* and that features *ji-nie* and a faint *midare-utsuri*
Hamon: *notare* in *ko-nie-deki* with a wide and clear *nioiguchi* that is mixed with *gunome*, *chôji*, and with many *ko-ashi* and *yô*
Bôshi: *midare-komi* and has a rather late starting *ko-maru-kaeri*
Horimono: on both sides a *bôhi* that runs as *kaki-nagashi* into the tang
Nakago: *ô-suriage*, *sujikai-yasurime*, three *mekugi-ana*

According to the result of the *shinsa* committee of our society we judge this work as authentic and rank it as Tokubetsu-Jûyô Tôken.

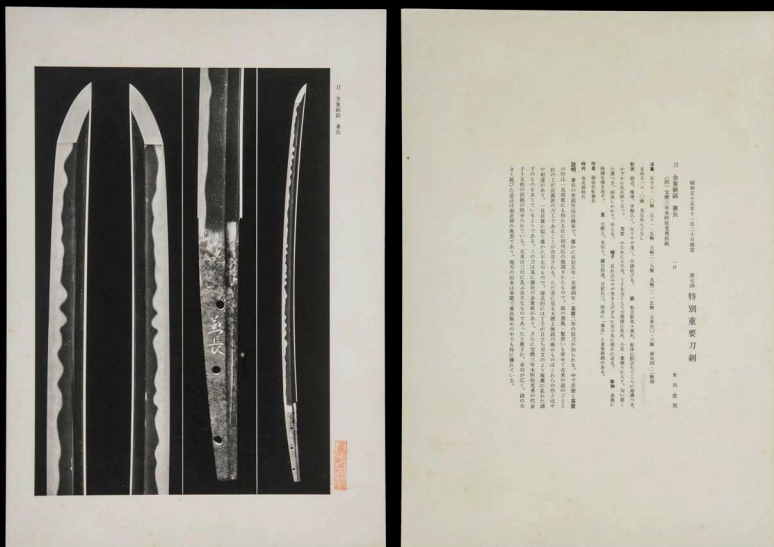
November 20, 1980
[Foundation] Nihon Bijutsu Tôken Hozon Kyôkai, NBTHK
[President] Honma Junji (本間順治)



刀 金象嵌銘 兼長



Tokubetsu Jûyô Tôken
Kinzôgan mei: Kanenaga/Kenchô



Translation of the reverse side of the white paper

Tokubetsu-Jūyō Certificate at the 7th Tokubetsu-Jūyō Shinsa held on November 20, 1980

Katana, kinzōgan-mei: Kanenaga (兼長)
with Hon'ami Kōyū origami in the third year of Hōreki era (1753)

Measurements

nagasa 71.0cm, sori 1.5cm, motohaba 2.9cm, sakihaba 2.15cm, moto-kasane 0.6cm,
kissaki-nagasa 4.2 cm, nakago-nagasa 18.0 cm, almost no nakago-sori

Description

Keijō: *shinogi-zukuri*, *iori-mune*, wide *mihaba*, relatively shall *sori*, elongated *chū-kissaki*

Kitae: standing-out *itame* that is mixed with some *nagare* in places featuring *ji-nie* and a faint *midare-utsuri*

Hamon: *notare* in *ko-nie-deki* with a wide and clear *nioiguchi* that is mixed with *gunome*, *chōji*, larger dimensioned *midare* elements, many *ko-ashi* and *yō* with *sunagashi*

Bōshi: *midare-komi* and has a brief and rather late starting *ko-maru-kaeri*

Horimono: on both sides a *bōhi* that runs as *kaki-nagashi* into the tang

Nakago: *ō-suriage*, *sujikai-yasurime*, three *mekugi-ana*, *sashi-omote* side bears the above *kinzōgan-mei*

Artisan

Osafune Kanenaga from Bizen province

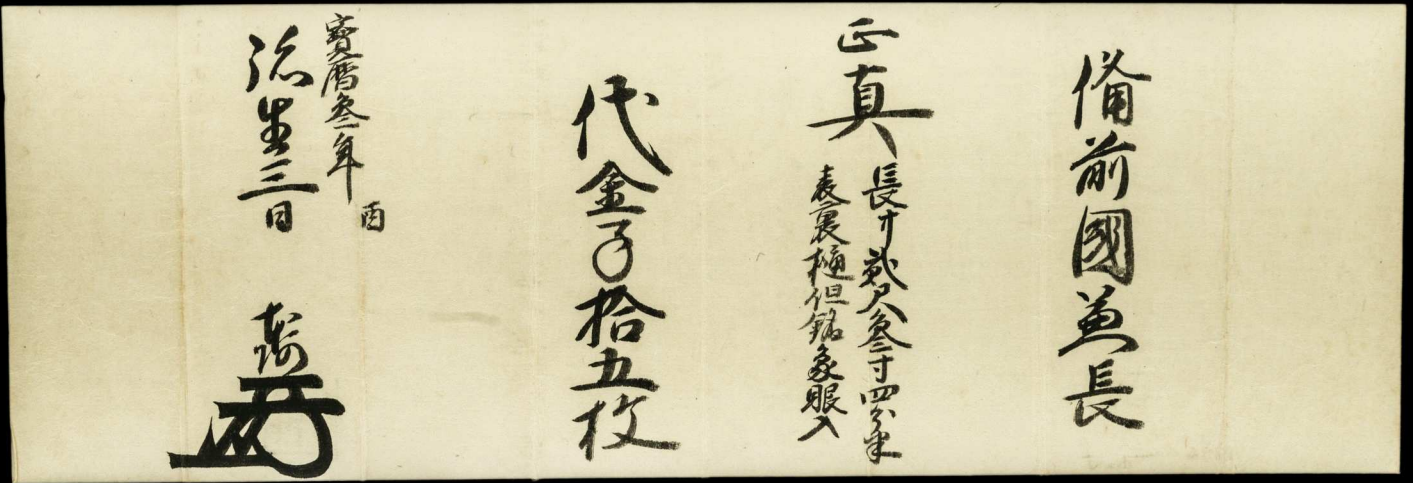
Era

Nambokuchō period

Summary

Signed works of Kanenaga (兼長), whose name can also be read as "Kenchō" are rare, but we do know of a few *tantō* that are dated Jōji five (1366), *Shitoku* four (1387), and *Kakyō* two (1388). The latter two blades place a noticeable emphasis on the *Sōshū* tradition and can be confused with works of *Norishige* (則重) at first glance, but in terms of overall signature style and the way the *mei* is chiselled, the old tradition that the smith belonged to the school of *Chōgi* (長義) appears to be correct. The *ō-suriage mumei* blades attributed to Kanenaga that are commonly seen differ from signed works and are similar to *Chōgi*, although slightly inferior in make, and rather than featuring a hamon with a prominent amount of *chōji*, the hardening is based on a more complex *midare*.

This blade bears the *kinzōgan-mei* "Kanenaga" and is accompanied by an origami issued by *Honami Kōyū* (本阿弥光勇, 1704~1770) in *Hōreki* three (宝曆, 1753), in which he evaluates the blade with 15 gold coins. It appears that this blade was once an *ōdachi* with a *nagasa* of more than three *shaku* (90.9 cm). Its shape with a wide *mihaba* and prominently elongated *kissaki* is typical for the *Nambokuchō* period. With the flamboyant interpretation of the *jiba*, we have here a particularly excellent work of all blades attributed to *Kanenaga*.



備前國兼長
Bizen no Kuni Kanenaga/Kenchō
 Kanenaga/Kenchō from Bizen Province

正真 (Shōshin, Authentic)

長サ貳尺參寸四分余
Nagasa ni-shaku san-sun yon-bu yo
 Blade length ~ 71.0 cm

表裏樋但銘象嵌入
Hyōri hi tadashi mei zōgan hairi
 Hi on both sides and name of maker inlaid in gold

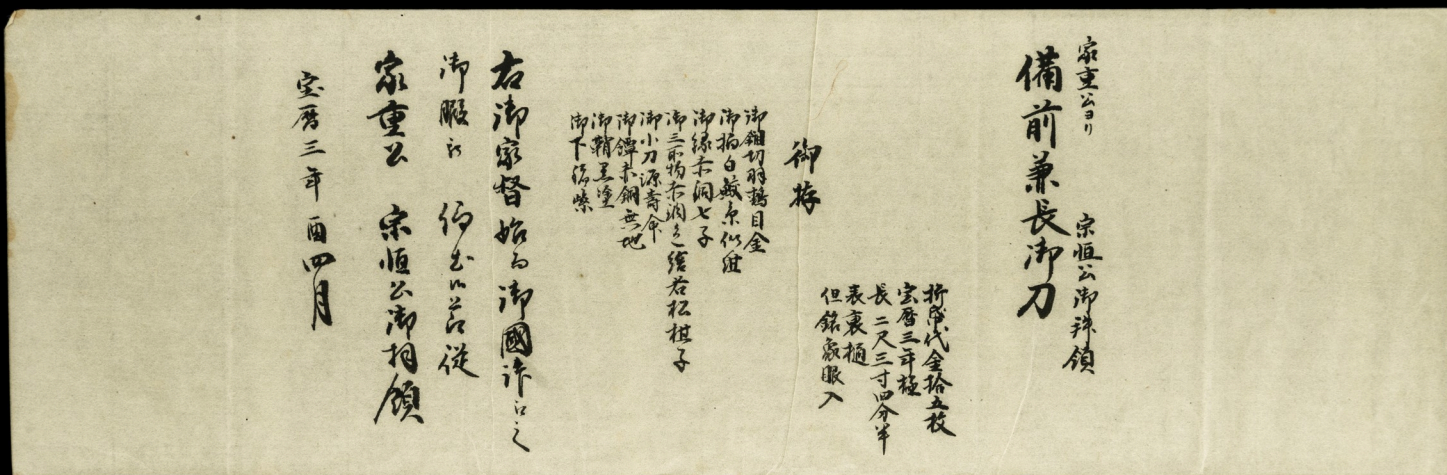
代金子拾五枚
Dai-kinsu jūgo-mai
 Value 15 gold pieces

宝曆参年酉弥生三日本阿「花押」
Hōreki sannen tori Yayoi mikka Hon'a + kaō
 Hōreki three (1753), Year of the Rooster
 Third month, third day
Hon'a + monogram




Fukushima
daimyō
kamon

Origami certificates are safely stored in an antique lacquered box with the *Fukushima daimyō* family crest.



Formal Gift Certification Origami

On the occasion of succeeding as head of the *Asano* family and entering for the first time his domain, and also receiving the rank of Chamberlain and Fourth Court Rank Second Class, this sword was presented to *Lord Asano Munetsune* by *Lord Tokugawa Ieshige*.

Dated fourth month in the third year of *Hôreki* era (April 1753), Year of the Rooster.

家重公ヨリ宗恒公御拝領
Ieshige-kô yori Munetsune kô gohairyô
 Given by Lord [Tokugawa] *Ieshige* to Lord [Asano] *Munetsune*

備前兼長御刀
Bizen Kanenaga ontô
 Katana by Bizen Kanenaga/Kenchô

折紙代金拾五枚
 宝曆三年極
 長二尺三寸四分半
 表裏樋
 但象嵌眼入

Origami daikin jûgomai
Hôreki sannen kiwame
Nagasa 2-shaku 3-sun 4-bu han
Hyôri hi, tadashi zôganmei iri

With origami from the third year of *Hôreki* era (1753)
 With a value of 15 gold coins
Nagasa ~71.0cm
Hi (groove) on both sides
 Name of maker inlaid in gold
 Third month, third day - *Hon'a* + monogram

御拵
 御鑷切羽鷓目金
 御柄白鮫糸色紺
 御縁赤銅七子
 御三所物赤銅色絵若松柑子
 御小刀源寿命
 御鐔赤銅無地
 御鞘黒塗
 御下緒紫

Koshirae (with the following honourable fittings)
Habaki seppa hatome kin
Tsuka shirozame ito ito kon
Fuchi shakudô nanako
Mitokoromono shakudô iroe wakamatsu kôji
Kogatana Minamoto Jumyô
Tsuba shakudô muji
Saya kuronuri
Sageo murasaki

Accompanied *koshirae*
Habaki, seppa, and *shitodome* of gold
 Hilt covered with white *samekawa* (ray skin) and wrapped in navy blue silk
Fuchi of *shakudô* with *nanako* ground
Mitokoromono of *shakudô* with *iroe*, depicting young pines and *kôji* oranges
Kogatana (knife) signed by *Minamoto Jumyô*
Tsuba of *shakudô* and unsigned
Saya lacquered black gloss
Sageo purple



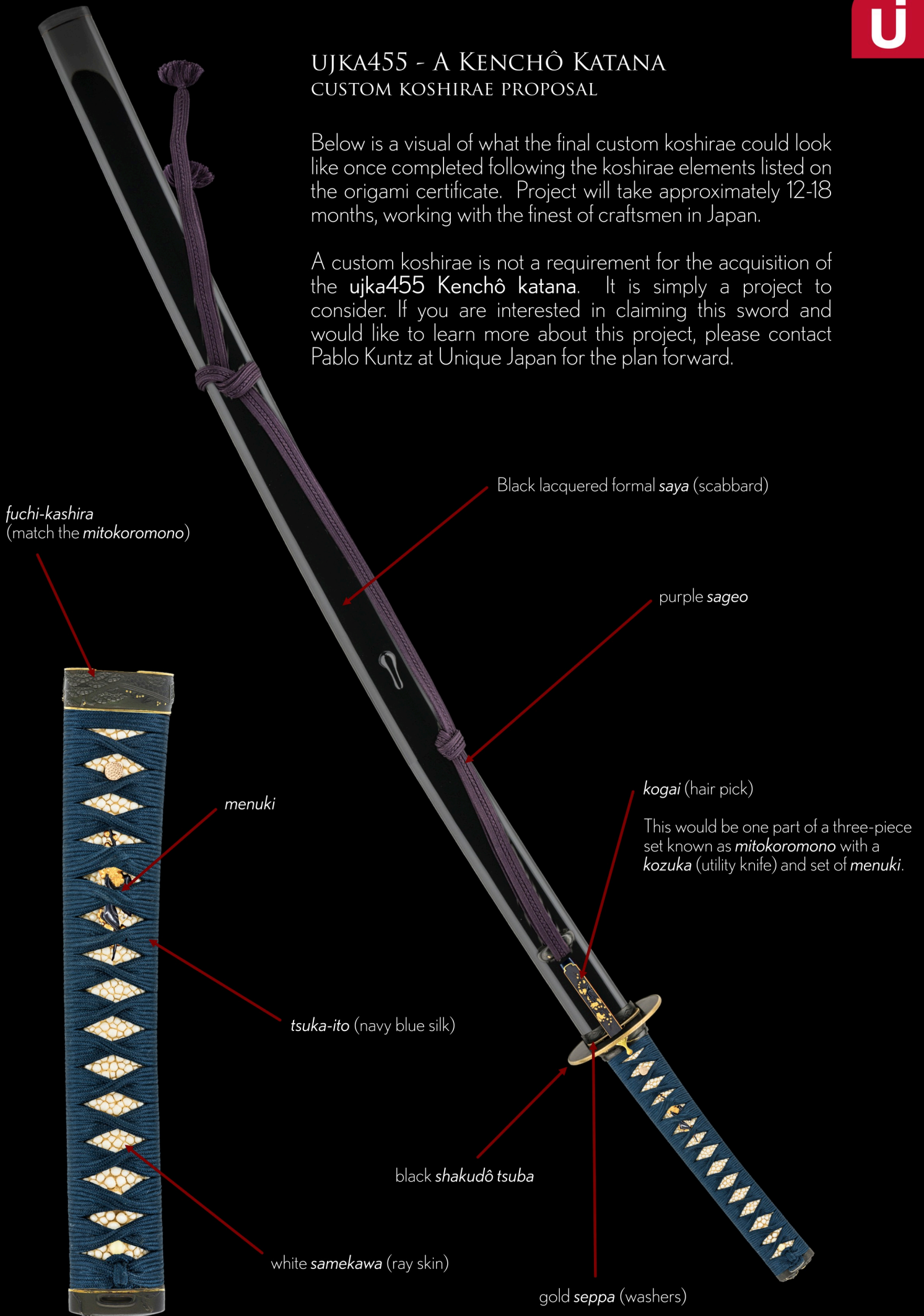
Origami envelope from 1753
 Traditional washi paper

A set of *koshirae* originally accompanied this *Kenchô* katana when it was presented to *Lord Masatsune*. For the next owner, Unique Japan can commission a custom set of *koshirae* using period fittings, crafted to closely replicate the original *koshirae*. See next page for details.

UJKA455 - A KENCHÔ KATANA CUSTOM KOSHIRAE PROPOSAL

Below is a visual of what the final custom koshirae could look like once completed following the koshirae elements listed on the origami certificate. Project will take approximately 12-18 months, working with the finest of craftsmen in Japan.

A custom koshirae is not a requirement for the acquisition of the *ujka455* Kenchô katana. It is simply a project to consider. If you are interested in claiming this sword and would like to learn more about this project, please contact Pablo Kuntz at Unique Japan for the plan forward.



Sword researcher Markus Sesko discovered evidence of this precious gift from the Tokugawa Chronicles.

年四月 六百二十八

立山 重賢をはじめ參觀廿四人。(日記)○十六日勘定吟味役神尾忠藏幸之が子伊右衛門道器父の蔭により。大番より兩番にうつる。松平加賀守重熙卒去しければ。奏者番松平紀伊守信岑昂慰の御使して。其養子松平上總介利見に銀五十枚たまはり。香火の奠とせらる。(日記)○十七日紅葉山に。大納言殿と共に御詣あり。宿老。少老例のごとく豫參して。阿部能登守正敏。小堀和泉守政峯等の五位三十人行列し。先導は酒井雅樂頭忠恭。御簾は松平右近將監武元。御太刀前田信濃守長泰。御刀は赤井安藝守忠島。御沓は平塚伊賀守爲政役し。大納言殿御簾は秋元但馬守涼明。御太刀は堀川兵部大輔廣益。御刀は松平主計頭乘季。御沓は奥田山城守忠祇役し。紀伊宰相宗將卿。尾張中將宗睦卿陪拜せらる。(日記)○十八日臨時の朝會あり。藤堂和泉守高豊を始め就封三十八人。松平伊豫守宗政。松平安藝守宗恒。南宮信濃守利雄。相良志摩守賴峯は初てなり。伊豫守宗政には城州國行の御刀たまひ。安藝守宗恒には備前兼長の御刀をたまふ。佐渡奉行脇坂主計安繁赴任のいとたまはる。けふ奈瓦奉行石黒日向守易慎田安家老となり。目付神尾市左衛門元壽奈瓦奉行となり。使番岡部久太郎元良目付となる。きのふ右衛門督宗武卿第四子乙菊世を早ふせしにより。三家本城に使して御氣色伺はる。(日記)○廿日東叡山 大猷院殿靈廟に詣させたまふ。堀田相摸守正亮。本多伯耆守正珍。松平右近

Hi Pablo,

Wow, actually did find the reference in the *Tokugawa Chronicles* (*Tokugawa Jikki*). As highlighted in [red] in the attached pic, the *Shōgun Ieshige* gifted *Aki no Kami Munetsune* on the 18th day of the fourth month of *Hōreki* three (April 18, 1753) with a katana by *Bizen Kanenaga/Kenchō*."

Nice provenance!

Best regards,
Markus



Tokugawa Ieshige (Jan 28, 1712 - July 13, 1761)
Ninth shōgun of the Tokugawa shogunate

第七回特別重要刀劍指定

Dai nana-kai Tokubetsu-Jûyô Tôken shitei

Tokubetsu-Jûyô Tôken at the 7th Tokubetsu-Jûyô Shinsa

備州長船住兼長

Bishû Osafune-jû Kenchô

Kenchô, resident of Osafune in Bizen Province

大磨上無銘ノ莖ニ二字ノ金象嵌銘ヲ有シ寶曆三年本阿弥光勇折紙ヲ附帶セリ幅廣デ鋒ノ延ビル延文・貞治型ノ形態ナリテ板目ガ肌立心ニ地沸ヲ微塵ニ敷キ幽カニ乱映ノ立ツ肌合ニ小湾・互乃目・丁子ガ草ニ乱レ指表ハ高低起伏アル山形ノ乱ガ目立チ變化ニ富ミ沸厚ク突上気味ノ帽子ニ結ブナド長義一類ノ同工ノ古極ハメハ妥當ナル優品哉

Ô-suriage mumei no nakago ni niji no kinzôgan o ari-shi, Hôreki sannen Hon'ami Kôyû origami ga futaiseri. Haba-hiro de kissaki no nobiru Enbun-Jôji-kei no keitai narite itame ga hadadachi-gokoro ni jienie o mijin ni shiki kasuka ni midare-utsuri no tatsu hada-ai ni ko-notare, gunome, chôji ga sô no midare sashiomote wa kôtei kifuku aru yamagata no midare ga medachi henka ni tomi nie atsuku tsukiagegimi no bôshi ni musubu nado Chôgi ichirui no dôkô no ko-kiwame wa datô naru yûhin kana

This blade is *ô-suriage mumei*, bears a two-character gold inlaid attribution on its tang, and is accompanied by an origami issued by *Hon'ami Kôyû* (本阿弥光勇, 1704-1770) in *Hôreki* three (1753). The blade has a wide *mihaba* and an elongated *kissaki* and is thus of what is referred to as an *Enbun-Jôji* shape. It displays a forging structure in a standing-out *itame* that features fine *ji-nie* and a faint *midare-utsuri*, and the *hamon* is a *nie-laden* mix of *ko-notare*, *gunome*, and *chôji*, that appears overall as a *sô no midare* ["freely interpreted midare"]. The *sashi-omote* side displays a prominent amount of undulating mountain-shaped *midare* elements and the *ha* is thus rich in variety, and with the rather late starting *kaeri* of the *bôshi*, the attribution of this masterwork to *Kenchô*, whose name is also read *Kanenaga*, within the *Chôgi* group is appropriate.

刃長貳尺參寸四分有之

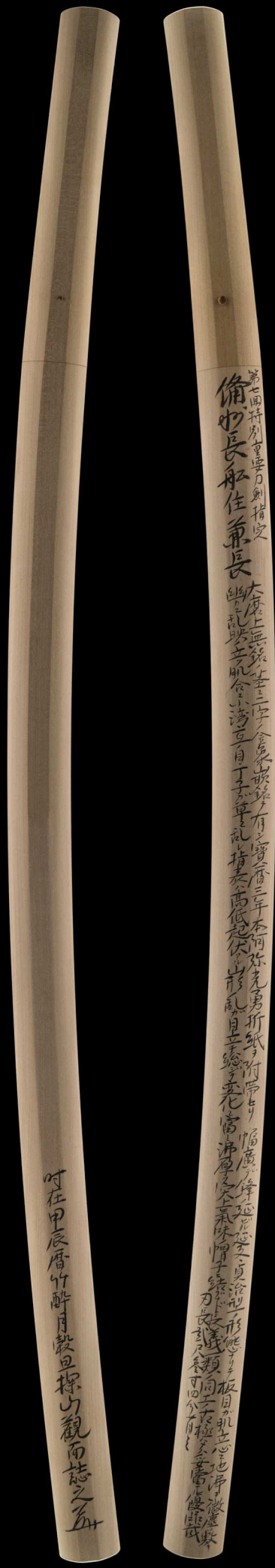
Hachô ni-shaku san-sun yon-bu kore ari

Blade length ~ 71.0 cm

時在甲辰曆竹醉月穀旦探山觀而識之「花押」

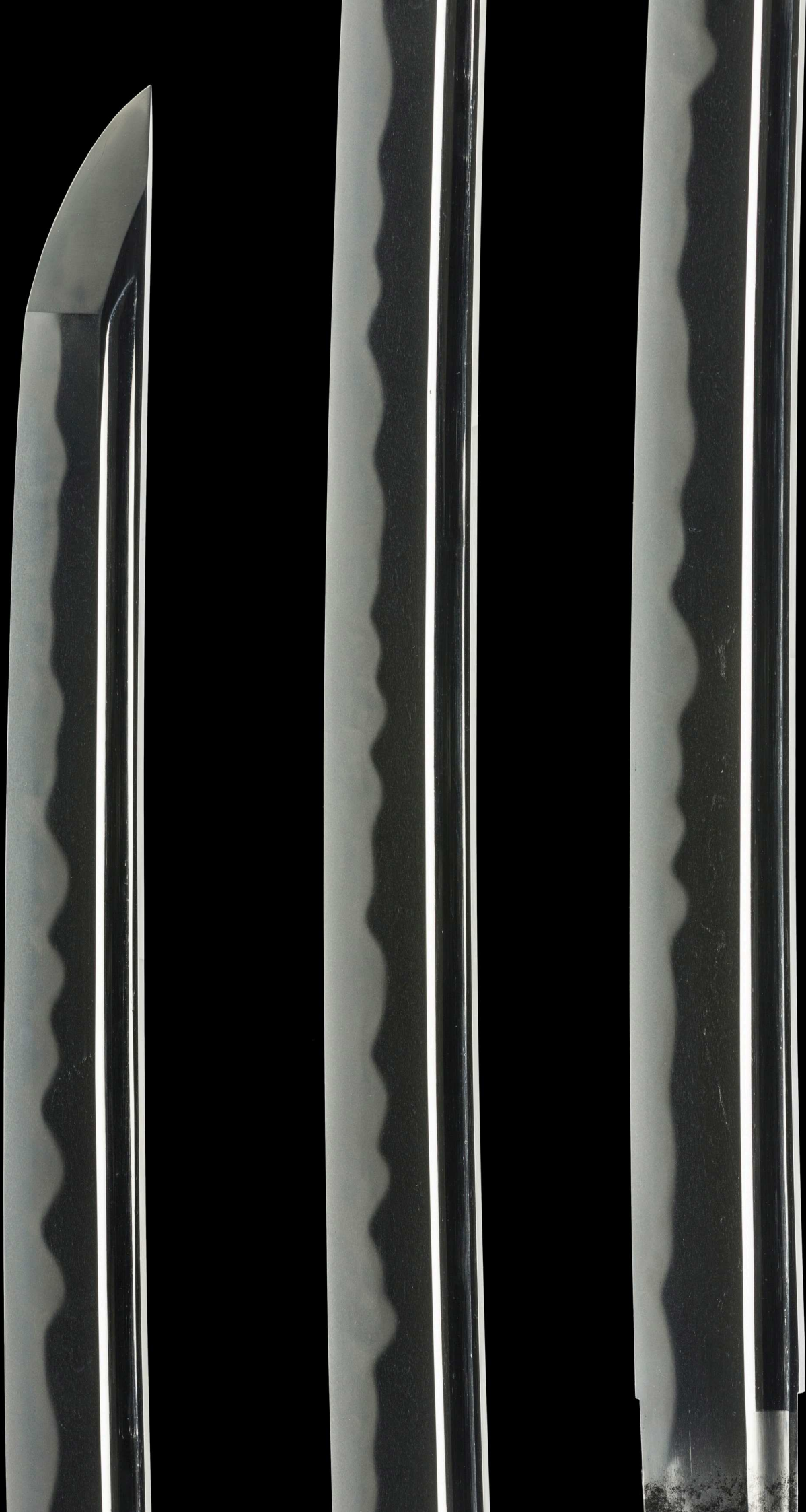
Jizai kinoe-tatsudoshi chikusui-zuki kokutan Tanzan kore o mite narabi ni shirushite + kaô

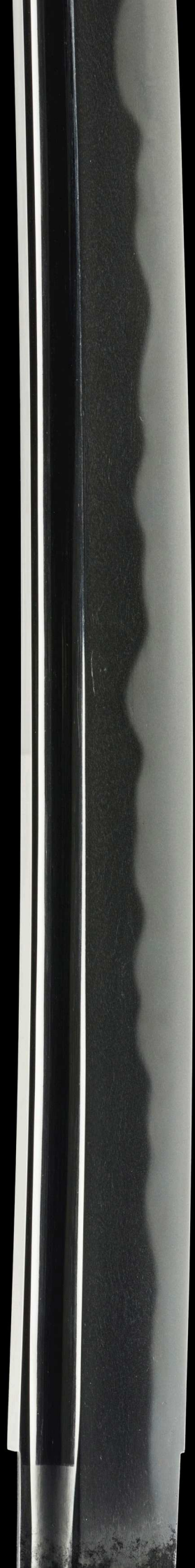
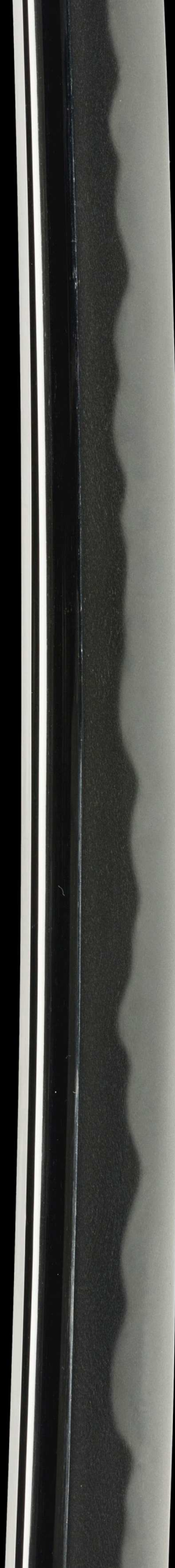
Examined and written by Tanzan [Tanobe Michihiro] on a lucky day in September in the Year of the Dragon of this era (2024) + monogram.



時在甲辰曆竹醉月穀旦探山觀而識之

第七回特別重要刀劍指定
備州長船住兼長
大磨上無銘ノ莖ニ二字ノ金象嵌銘ヲ有シ寶曆三年本阿弥光勇折紙ヲ附帶セリ幅廣デ鋒ノ延ビル延文・貞治型ノ形態ナリテ板目ガ肌立心ニ地沸ヲ微塵ニ敷キ幽カニ乱映ノ立ツ肌合ニ小湾・互乃目・丁子ガ草ニ乱レ指表ハ高低起伏アル山形ノ乱ガ目立チ變化ニ富ミ沸厚ク突上気味ノ帽子ニ結ブナド長義一類ノ同工ノ古極ハメハ妥當ナル優品哉





A close-up photograph of the tip of a sword, showing the blade's edge and the point. A red arrow points from the text label to the tip of the blade.

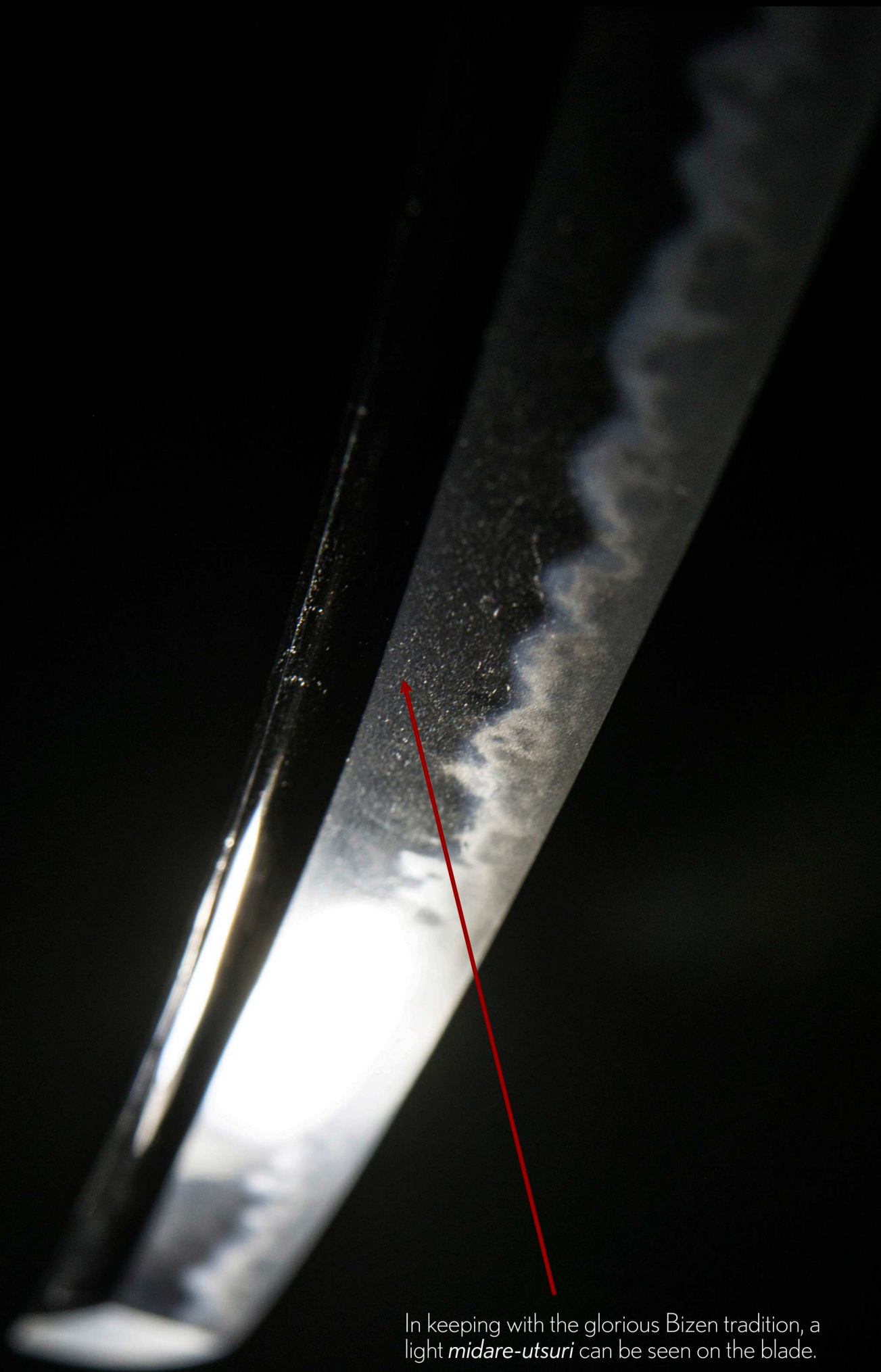
ko-maru kaeri

A powerful elongated *chû-kissaki* with a *bôshi* displaying a wavy *midare-komi* and late starting *ko-maru kaeri*.

A close-up photograph of the tip of a sword, showing the blade's edge and the point. A red arrow points from the text label to the tip of the blade.



A cluster of beautiful 'standing out' *itame-hada*.



In keeping with the glorious Bizen tradition, a light *midare-utsuri* can be seen on the blade.



Gorgeous *nagare-hada* that streams along.

A close-up photograph of a sword blade, focusing on the hamon (temper line). The blade is dark, and the hamon is a lighter, wavy line. Two red arrows point to specific features: one to a cluster of small, dark spots labeled 'chôji' and another to a wavy section labeled 'whips of midare'. The background is black, making the blade stand out.

chôji

whips of *midare*

Good view of the mixture of *chôji* (clove buds) and a freely interpreted *midare* (wavy) *hamon*.

A Nambokuchō masterclass.

ko-nie deki

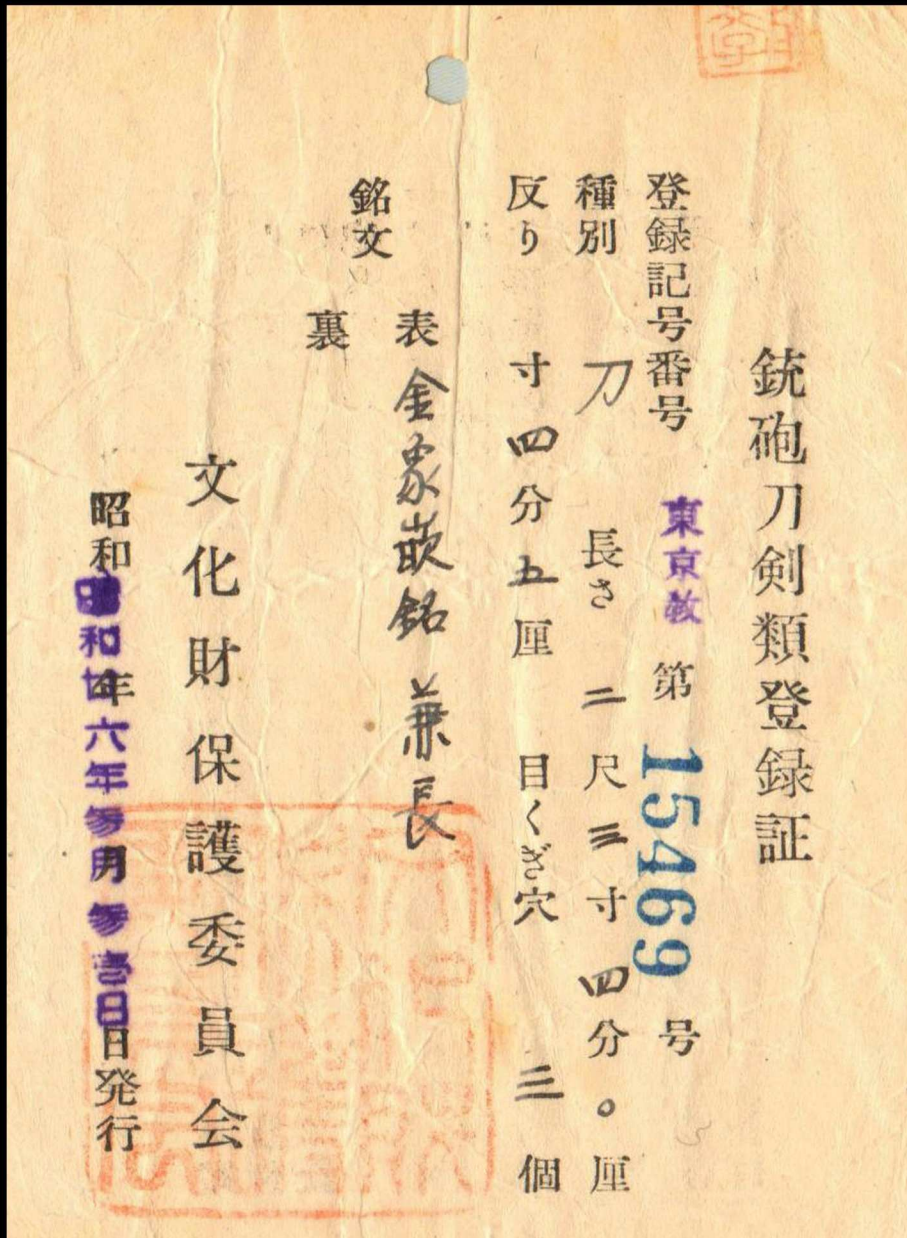
A wide, beaming *notare*-based *hamon* in *ko-nie deki* where a universe of tiny crystals shine brightly under the light.

yō (leaves)

tobiyaki (tempered spots)



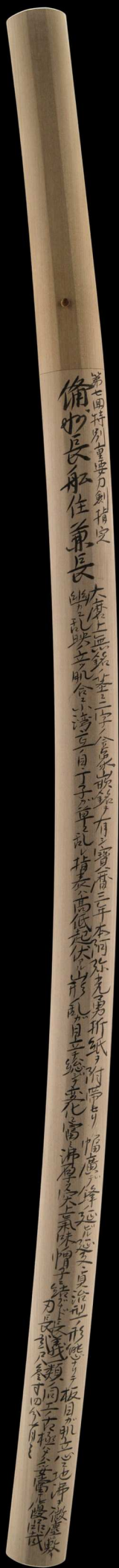
The sheer intensity of a top-class *Sôden-Bizen* hamon combining all the energy of the *Sôshû* tradition with the elegance of *Bizen*.



This is the original *torokusho* (registration card) for the *Kenchô/Kanenaga katana*. The card was registered in the 26th year of Showa (1951) in Tokyo, formally known as Edo, the capital of the country.

This is significant as 1951 was the very first year that swords were formally registered in Japan. Many former *daimyô* (great) families were invited to submit their collections suggesting this blade was once held by a prominent family.

The serial number is 15469, one of the very first swords registered in Japan.



Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)



gold *habaki* with
file marks

Feel the history.



A complimentary sword maintenance kit with *mekugi-nuki* and a bottle of *Fujishiro* sword oil (trusted by the Japanese sword museum) is included with all sword purchases.



safe, extra large cloth for adding oil to the blade