



ITEM# UJWA244

A GASSAN SADAKAZU WAKIZASHI

SIGNED & DATED BY IMPERIAL ARTISAN GASSAN SADAKAZU AGED 73
IN THE EIGHT MONTH OF THE 41ST YEAR OF MEIJI ERA (AUGUST 1908)

Swordsmith: *Gassan Sadakazu* (月山貞一)
Commissioned by: *Col. Takagi Renkichi* (高木錬吉)
Measurements: **Length:** 42.7cm (ubu) **Curvature:** 0.9cm **Moto-haba:** 3.68cm
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: **Jojo-saku** (a highly superior smith)
Authentication: **Sayagaki by Gassan Sadatoshi** (great grandson)

Gassan Sadakazu (1837-1918) 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, Sôshû, Yamashiro and Yamato den. Sadakazu became an Imperial Court Artisan in 1906.

This wakizashi was crafted in 1908 when Sadakazu was 73-years-old. It was commissioned by *Colonel Takagi Renkichi*, a sword master and sword connoisseur - a prominent member of the Takagi Daimyo clan related to *Princess Yuriko*. The task was clear to Sadakazu: complete an *utsushi* (recreation) of a wakizashi made by 17th century grandmaster swordsmith *Nanki Shigekuni* with exquisite *horimono* (engraving).

Sadakazu clearly gave everything into this project. Forged in the Sôshû tradition, the *hataraki* illuminates the blade like electricity. The detail in the horimono is sublime, eclipsing the original horimono work of the Shigekuni wakizashi, which was completed by *Gonsuke Ikeda* - one of the top engraving masters in the early Edo period. Sadakazu proudly gave this wakizashi a *Go Mei* (号名) - an esteemed sword name - *Nihon Damashi* (日本魂) meaning *The Soul of Japan*.

His great grandson, *Sadatoshi*, current head of the Gassan family, authenticated this wakizashi in *sayagaki* as being *saikô kessaku nari* - Sadakazu's greatest masterpiece.

Moto-kasane: 6.6mm

Omosa: 410g

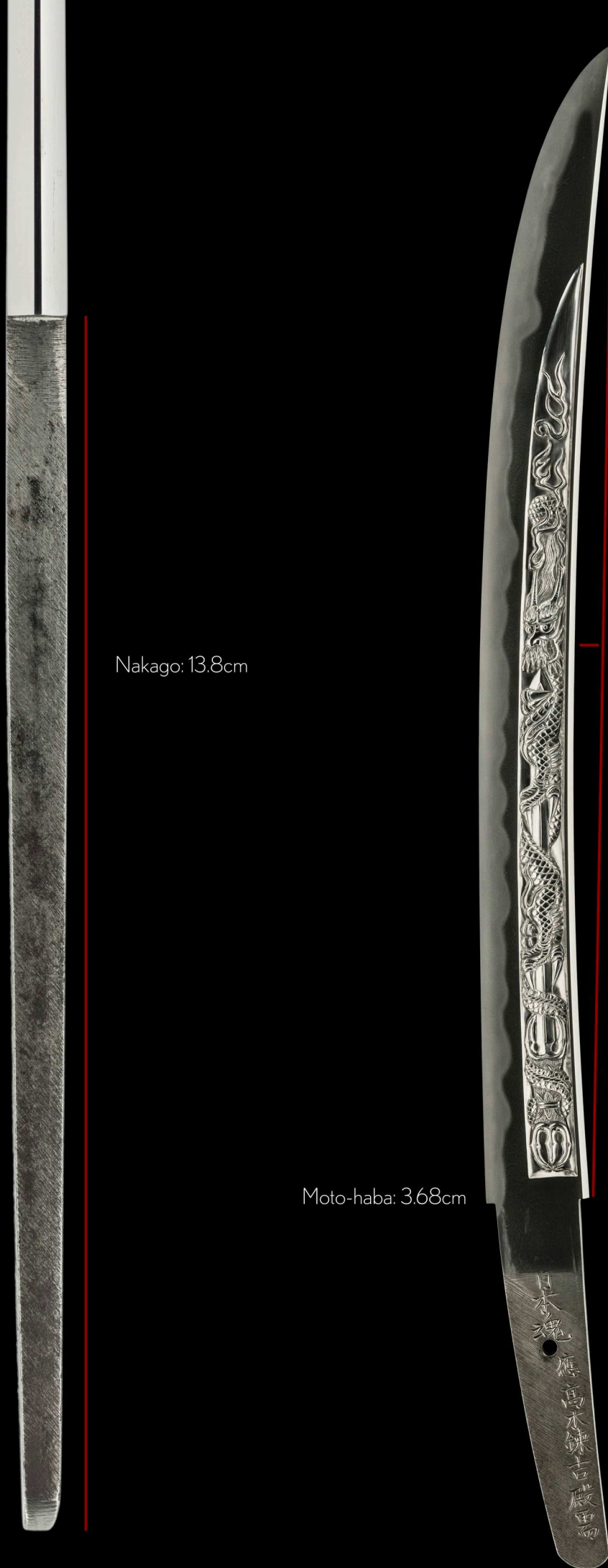
Nakago: 13.8cm

Moto-haba: 3.68cm

Nagasa: 42.7cm

Sori: 0.9cm

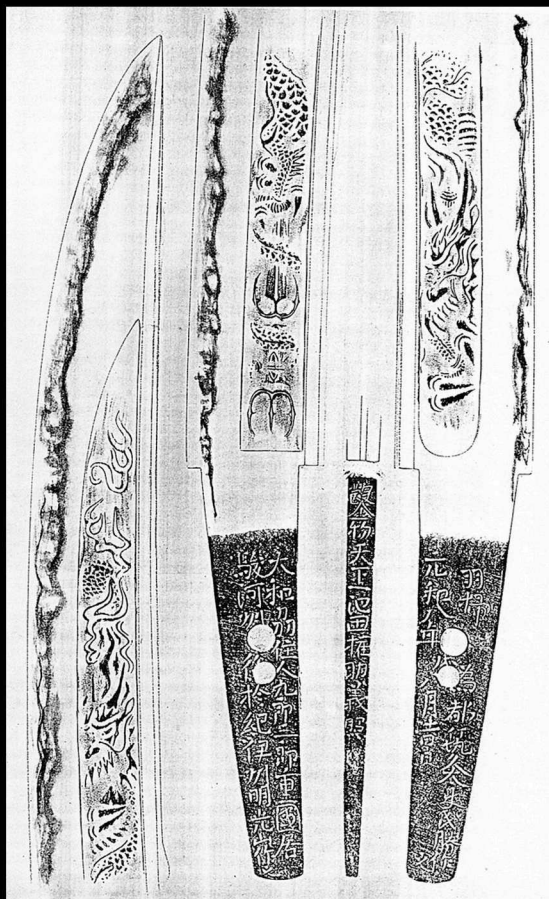
Mekugi-ana: 1



Nanki Shigekuni was a grandmaster swordsmith that worked in Kii province circa 1624. He worked in part for *shôgun Tokugawa Ieyasu*.

Gassan Sadakazu simply outclassed this reference piece by Shigekuni.

Unlike Shigekuni, all *horimono* (engraving) work was created by Sadakazu himself.



oshigata (rubbing) of the Shigekuni wakizashi



(Mei) 明
(ji) 治
(yon) 四
(jû) 十
(ichi) 一
(nen) 年
(hachi) 八
(gatsu) 月
(kichi) 吉
(jitsu) 日



帝 (Tei)
室 (shitsu)
技 (gi)
藝 (gei)
員 (in)
月 (Ga)
山 (ssan)
貞 (Sada)
一 (kazu)
七 (nana)
十 (jû)
三 (san)
歳 (sai)
彫 (hori)
同 (dô)
作 (saku)

*Teishitsu-gigei'in Gassan Sadakazu nanajûsan-sai hori-dôsaku + kaô
Meiji yonjûichi-nen hachigatsu kichijitsu*

Crafted by the Imperial Household Artisan *Gassan Sadakazu* at the age of 73. All *horimono* (engraving work) was created by Gassan Sadakazu along with his stylized Gassan signature.

On a lucky day in August of 41st year of Meiji era (1908).



Col. Takagi Renkichi (高木錬吉), a graduate from the Japanese Imperial Military Academy class of 1891, was a well-known sword master having received the highest honour in a Japanese fencing match in front of Emperor Meiji when he was a young officer.

He was also an avid sword collector and a founding member of a Japanese sword study group based in Gifu Prefecture, which still exists.

As a graduate of the elite *Imperial War College* (the class of 1900), Col. Takagi enjoyed fast tracked promotions during his military career that included a promotion to a regiment colonel in his early 40's.

He took a relatively early retirement from the Imperial Army and dedicated his post-military life to activities promoting the traditional "Japanese spirit".

He was related to the *Takagi Daimyo family*. The Takagi Daimyo family was the ruler of *Tannan county* in the *Kawachi Osaka* area during the Edo period and was created a viscount after the Meiji Restoration.

He was also a distant relative to *Princess Mikasa* (born *Yuriko Takagi* - 高木百合子), the consort of *Prince Mikasa* - the youngest brother of *Emperor Hirohito*.

As of 2019, Princess Yuriko, 96 is the oldest living member of Japan's imperial family, born on the 4th of June, 1923.



Yuriko Takagi - 高木百合子



Nihon-damashii

Takagi Renkichi dono no motome ni ôjite

"The Soul of Japan"

Commissioned by *Col. Takagi Renkichi*

日 (Ni)

本 (hon)

魂 (damashî)

應 (ôjite)

高 (Taka)

木 (gi)

鍊 (Ren)

吉 (kichi)

殿 (dono)

而 (no, motome ni)



日本魂 - Nihon Damashî The Soul of Japan

Signed with three significant characters
Nihon Damashî - sometimes read
Yamato Damashî - translates to *The
Soul of Japan*.

Col. Takagi and Gassan Sadakazu set
out to create more than just a
masterpiece.

This sword embodies the very essence
of the Japanese soul and spirit.

*It is the ongoing pursuit of becoming
the best one can be - a great human
being that is honourable, courageous,
sincere, humble, compassionate, etc.*

All the qualities that makes a life
worthwhile and worthy of respect.

The sword is a symbol of the pursuit of
such greatness.

Create your life's masterpiece.



写南紀重國
Utsushi Nanki Shigekuni
A Nanki Shigekuni recreation

明治四十一年八月吉日
Meiji yonjûichinen hachigatsu kichijitsu
On a lucky day in August of 41st year of Meiji era (1908)

刃長壹尺四寸強
Hachô isshaku yon-sun kyô
Blade length 42.7 cm

平成十四年二月吉日會孫貞利誌「花押」
Heisei jûyonen nigatsu kichijitsu sôson Sadatoshi shirusu + kaô

Appraised by the great grandson *Gassan Sadatoshi* on a
lucky day in February of the 14th year of Heisei era (2002)
+ stylized Gassan signature



日本魂
Nihon Damashii
The Soul of Japan

帝室技藝員月山貞一七十三歳彫同作花押
Teishitsu-giiein Gassan Sadakazu nanajûsan-sai hori-dôroku kaô

Crafted by the Imperial Household Artisan *Gassan Sadakazu* at the age of 73. All *horimono* (engraving work) was created by *Gassan Sadakazu* along with his stylized *Gassan* signature.

最高傑作也
Saikô kessaku nari

His greatest masterpiece.

Gassan Sadakazu was a genius.

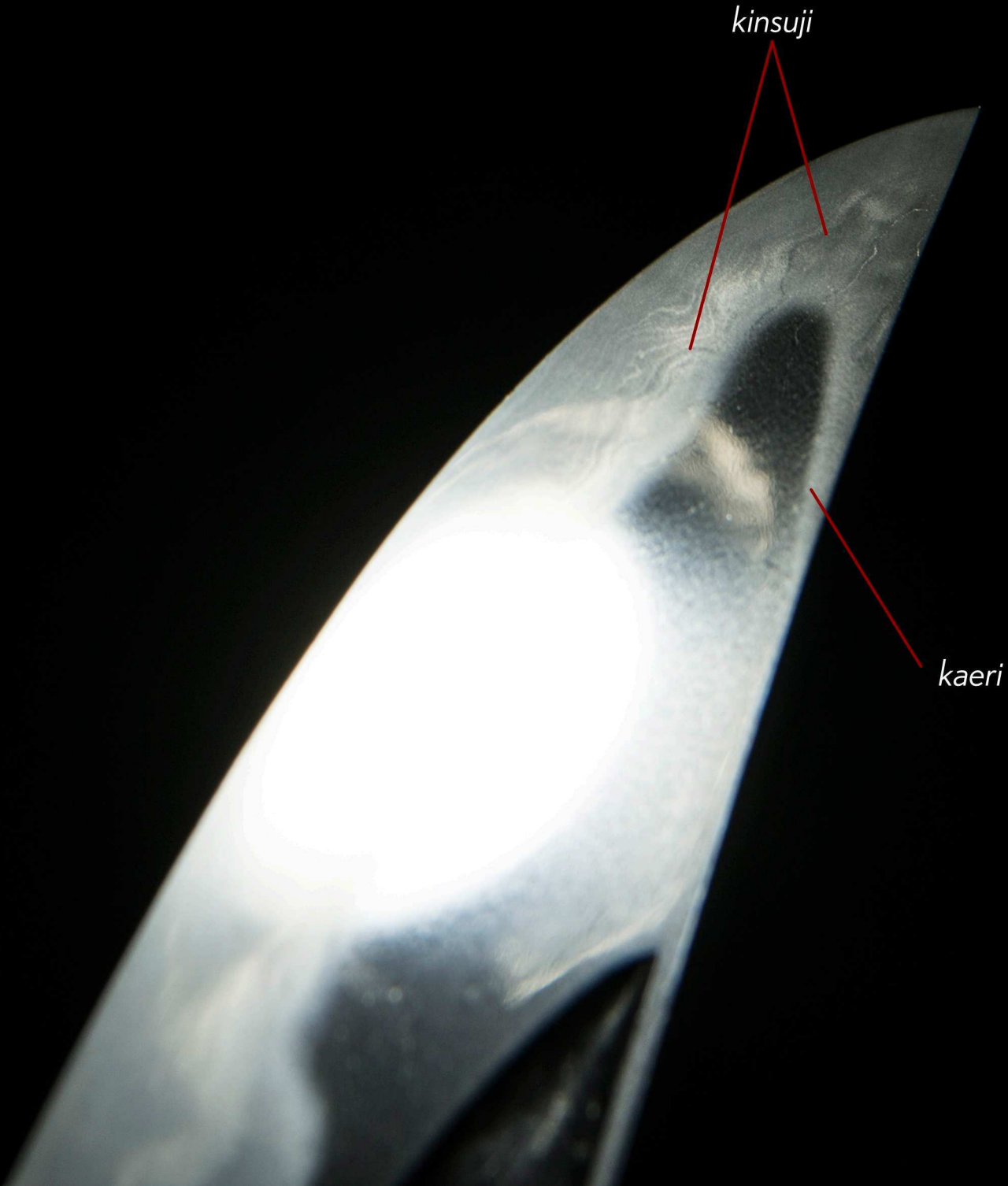
A master of the *Sôshû tradition*, he was able to emulate all the power of the great *Masamune* and *Norishige*.



Gassan Sadakazu



The *boshi* is *midare-komi* with a long *kaeri* (turn-back). Several lines of *kinsuji* stream through to the tip of the sword.



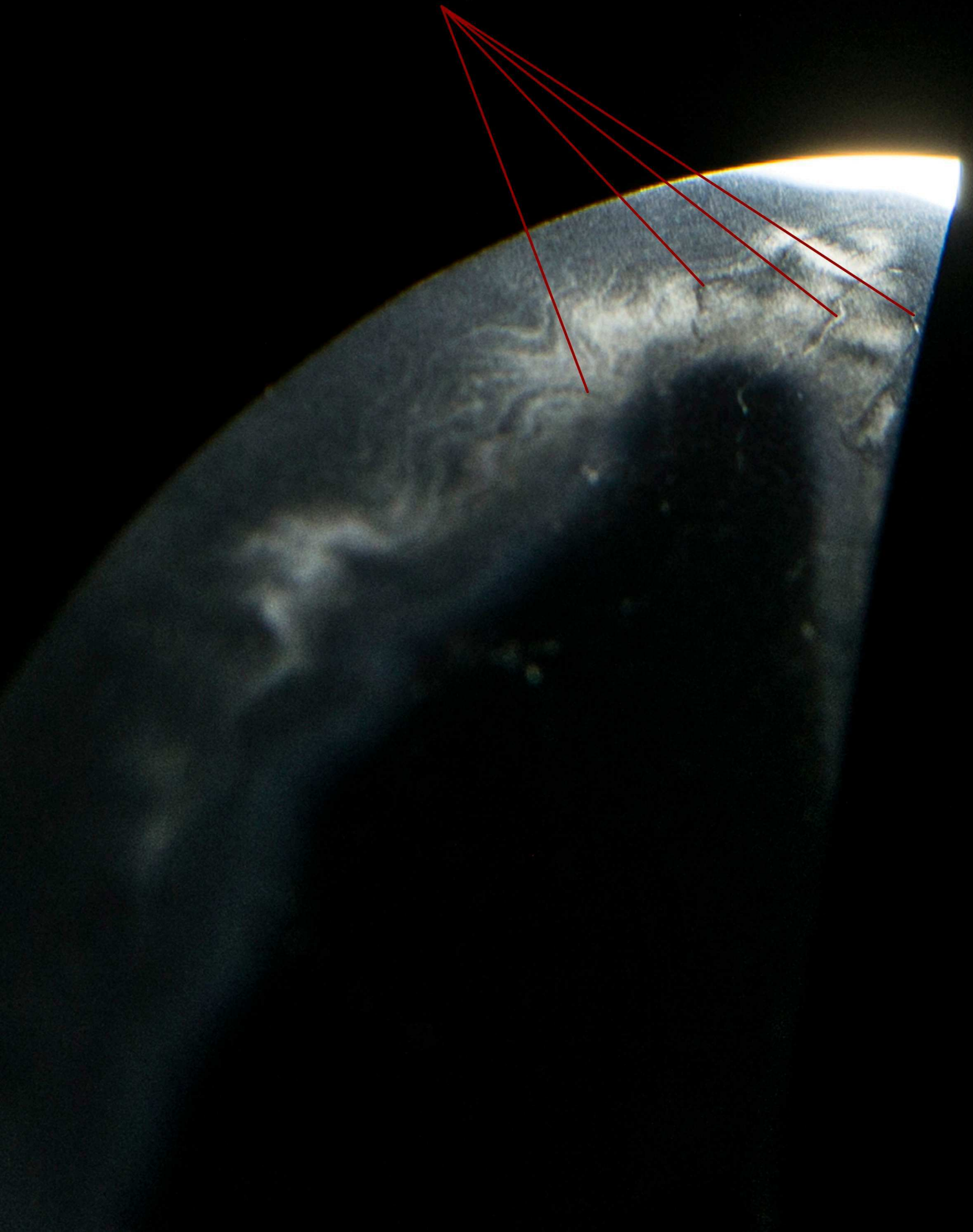
Gorgeous brush strokes of *sunagashi*.



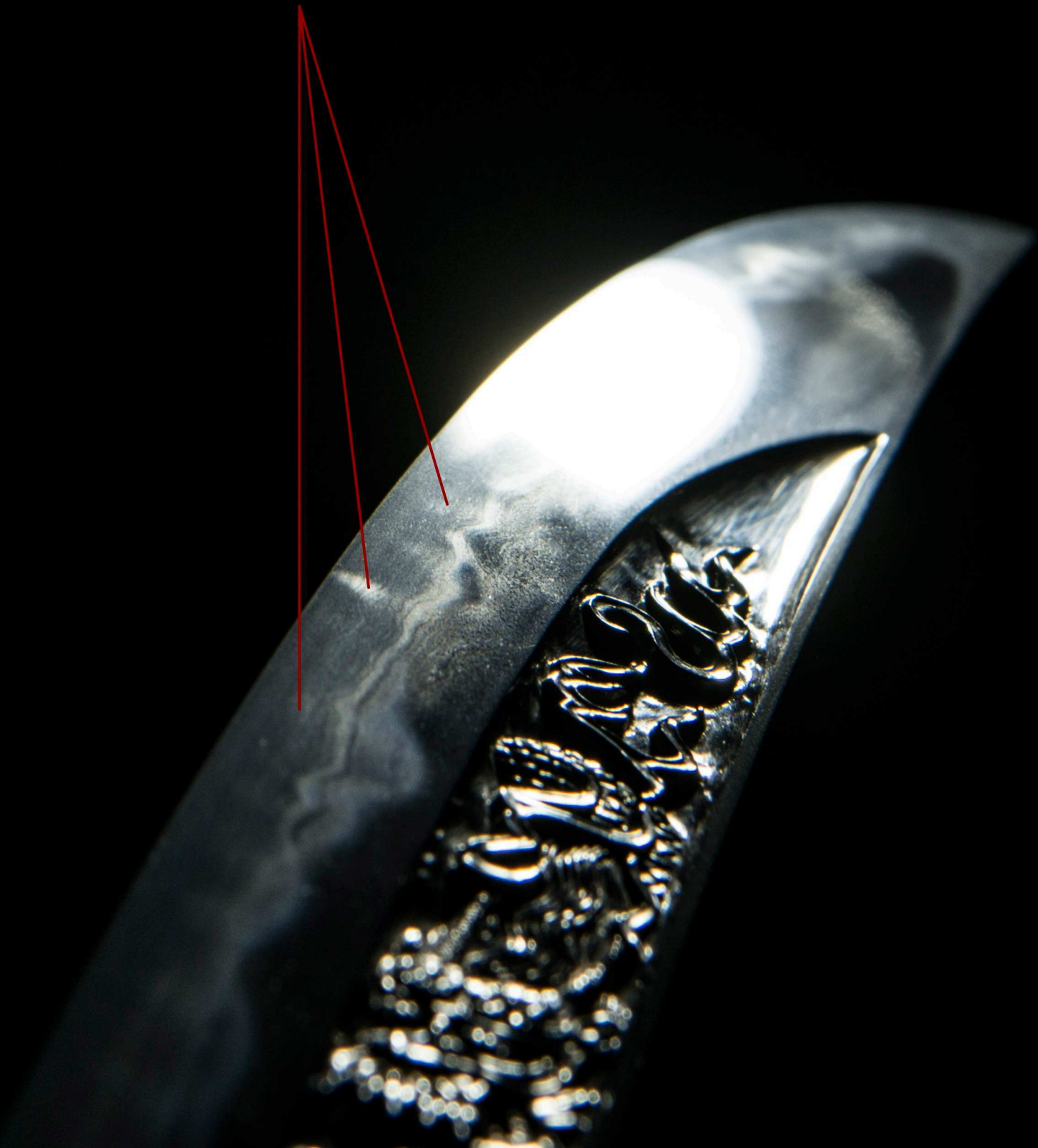
A close-up photograph of the tip of a sword, showing the sunagashi (the curved edge) and the boshi (the tip). The sunagashi is wrapped around the boshi. A red line points from the text to the sunagashi.


The *sunagashi* wraps
wonderfully around the boshi.

kinsuji



Yô (leaves) are clusters of *nie crystals* that fall toward the cutting edge.





ashi (legs)

A vibrant *gunome midare hamon* with long *ashi* reaching for the cutting edge.



sweeping *sunagashi*

Sôshû-den tenacity.

visible nie crystals (*nie deki*)

chikei (dark lines in the jihada)



This beautiful *horimono* is called *kenmaki-ryu*.

It depicts a dragon at first descending (right) and then winding around a sword (left).

According to legend, the guardian deity *Fudo-Myou* once had to fight a deity from another religion, the dragon king *Kurikara*.

He changed himself into a flaming sword but *Kurikara* did the same and the fighting went on without a victor.

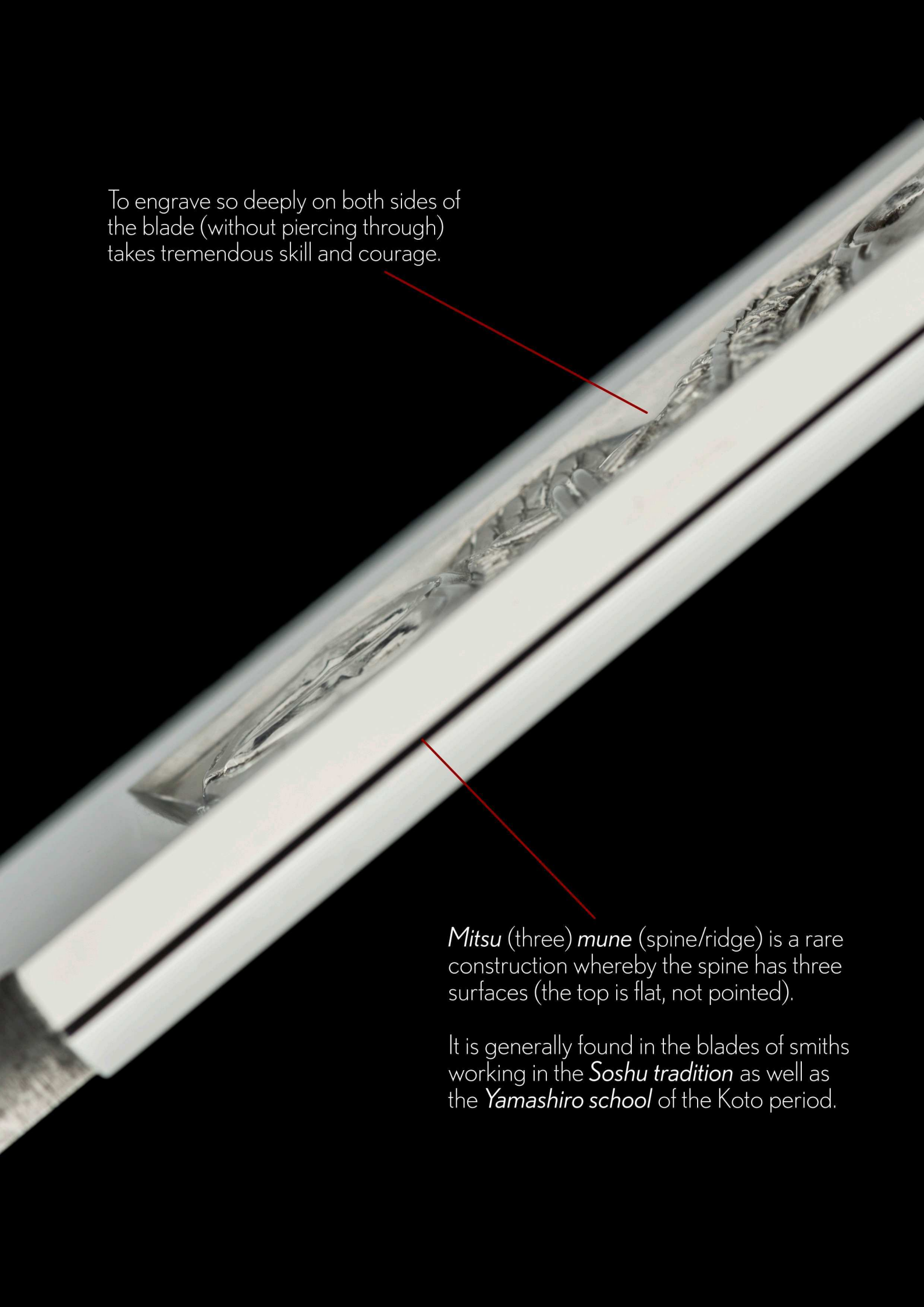
In a manner of ingenuity, *Fudo-Myou* transformed into the dragon *Kurikara*, wound himself around the opponent's sword and devoured him from atop.

Hence, the dragon *Kurikara* wrapped around a sword is, in fact, another representation of *Fudo-Myou*.

Kenmaki-ryu on swords can be found at various levels of skill. This is called *Shin no Kurikara* (realistic) for the attention to detail is extraordinary. The work was chiseled deep inside the groove.

This masterpiece would have taken weeks of effort, all *hand-chiseled* from start to finish.





To engrave so deeply on both sides of the blade (without piercing through) takes tremendous skill and courage.

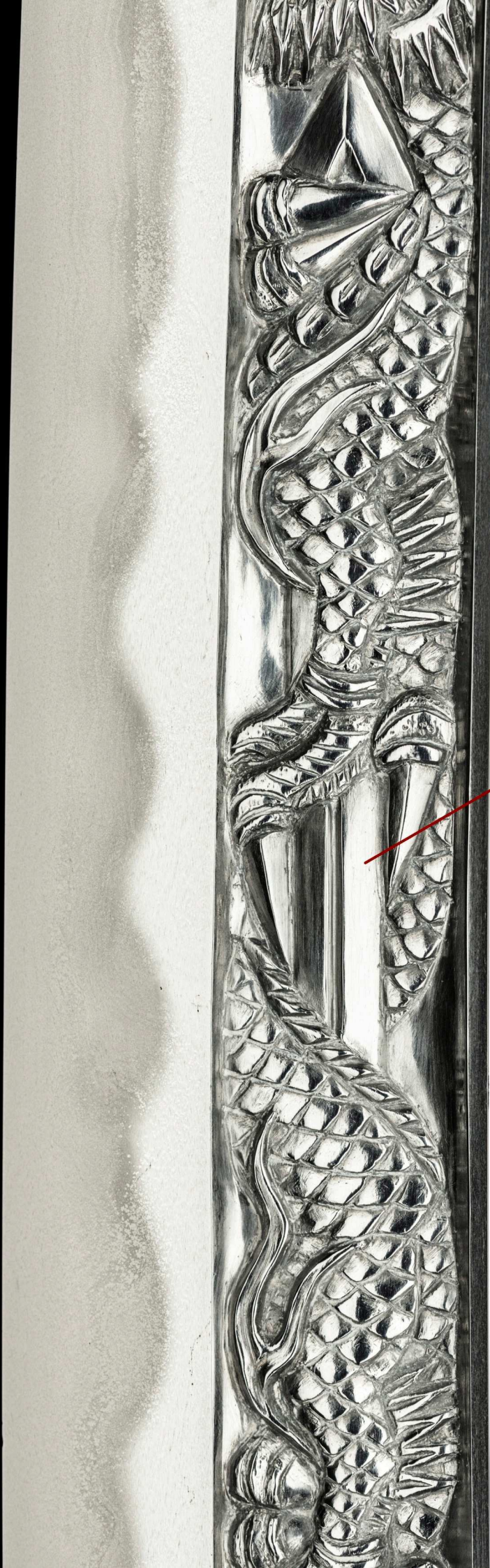
Mitsu (three) *mune* (spine/ridge) is a rare construction whereby the spine has three surfaces (the top is flat, not pointed).

It is generally found in the blades of smiths working in the *Sosho tradition* as well as the *Yamashiro school* of the Koto period.

An aliveness in the eyes.

This is what separates truly
masterful works of *horimono* art.





Ken (sword)



Flames billow.





The magnificence of the
crafted steel rests in perfect
harmony with the exquisite
detail of the dragon horimono.



*Japanese dragons have three claws.
Chinese Dragons have four.*



Vajra is a Sanskrit is a symbolic ritual object that symbolizes both the properties of a *diamond* (indestructibility) and a *thunderbolt* (irresistible force).

The vajra is used symbolically by the Dharma traditions of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism, often to *represent firmness of spirit and spiritual power*.

The eyes follow from all angles...





Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)



gold *habaki* with
a unique rock pattern

A Gassan Sadakazu Wakizashi

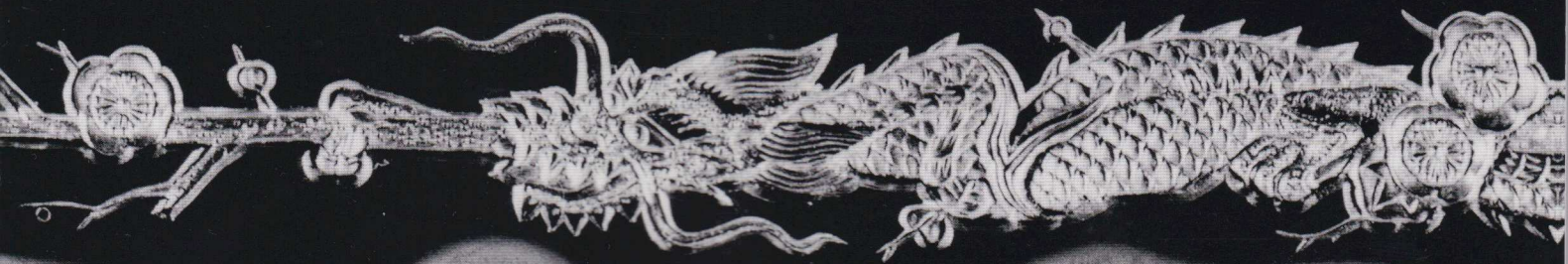
Commissioned by *Col. Takagi Renkichi*
41st year of Meiji era (August 1908)



Japanese Master Swordsmiths:
The Gassan Tradition

月山

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



(around the end of the Muromachi period in the middle of the 16th century).

The last work (Fig. 14) known to us dates from the 4th year of Keiō era (1867), when the maker was 68 years old. In it, Sadayoshi successfully reproduced the classical straight grain, *masame*, combined with the straight temper line named *suguha*, which are both major characteristics of the ancient Hōshō school in the Yamato tradition.

In addition to the above, Sadayoshi was also good at reproducing classical traits representing the Bizen and Yamashiro schools which were prosperous in the *Kotō* or Old-Sword days. He was especially skilled in the Bizen style swordmaking. It is also evident from Plate 2 that carving in the blade was yet another mastered skill.

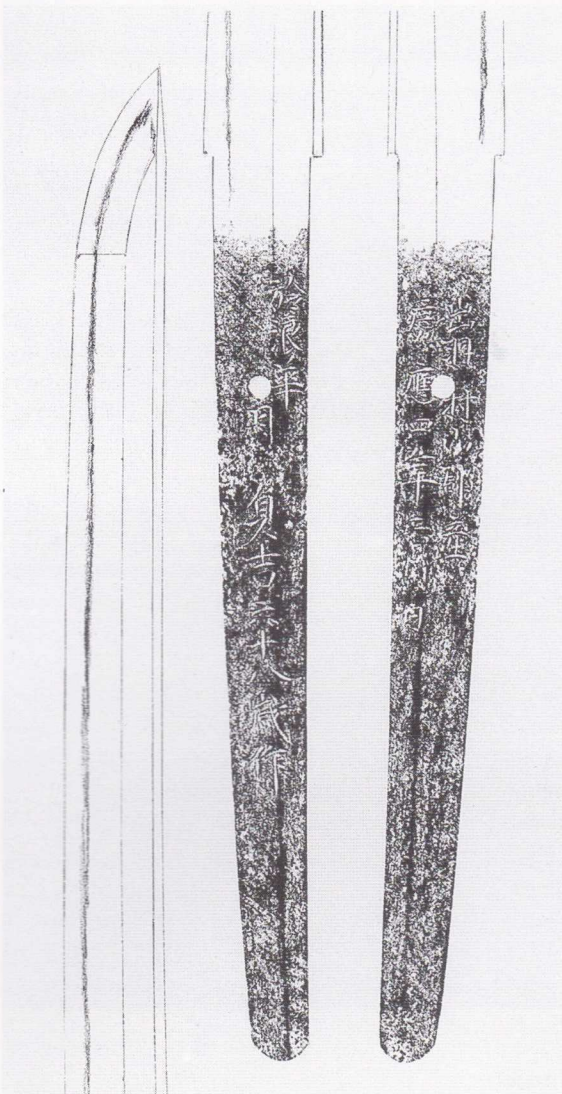


Fig. 14

Gassan Sadakazu

Since the turn of the Meiji era, Japan has been heavily exposed to the powerful influence of Western cultures, and its traditional arts and crafts were in danger of decline. In order to prevent this and to regain popular interest, Emperor Meiji initiated the institution of appointing select artists and artisans to the title of Imperial Arts and Crafts Experts (*Teishitsu Gigei-in*) in 1890. The first seven artists who won the appointment included Painter Hashimoto Gahō. Gassan Sadakazu, together with Hayama Enshin, was included to the elite membership in 1906. Such an honorable accomplishment was partly due to the interest Emperor Meiji held in the Japanese sword. This system lasted until 1945 and the appointments totaled 77.

Gassan Sadakazu, one of the recipients of the appointment, was born in 1836. He was the son of one Tsukamoto Shichirōbei, living in Sugoshi Village, Ōmi Province. When Gassan Sadayoshi's natural heir-to-be died at a young age, Sadakazu's name was transferred to the Gassan family register as an adopted heir.



Gassan Sadakazu

Having been exposed to the swordmaking art from childhood, Sadakazu was only about 11 when he was given his first formal swordmaking lessons. He picked up the art quickly and began the actual making of swords at the age of 14. In 1851, at age 16, he completed a cooperative work in the form of *wakizashi* (medium length blade), which he made with the aid of his legal father and teacher (Fig. 15). The carving executed in the blade is very skillfully done; almost comparable, if not better than, to his master's work. It

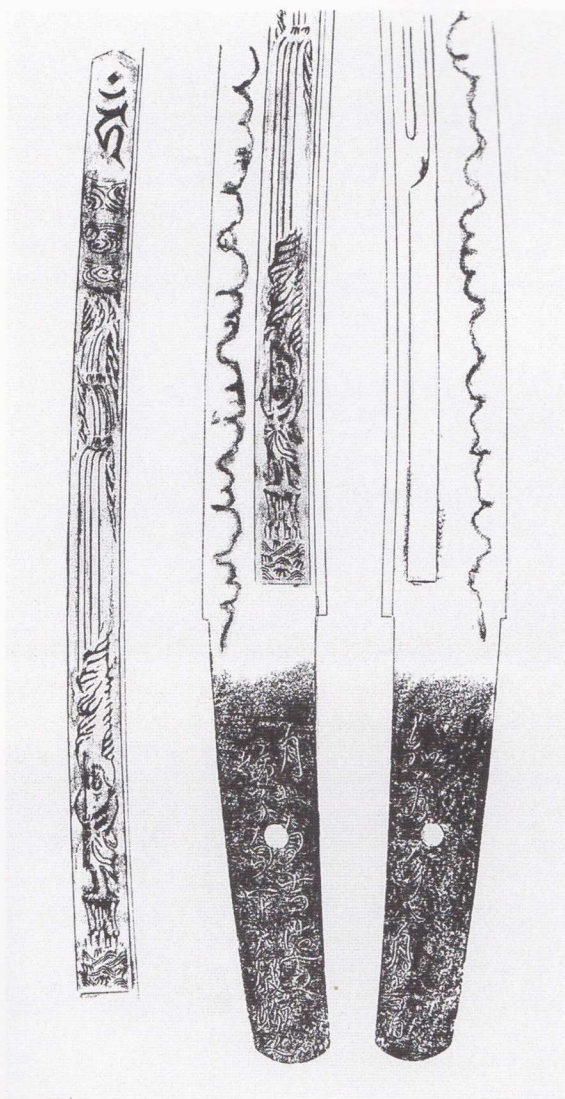


Fig. 15

was indicative of his later achievements in establishing the unique Gassan-bori engraving admired for its elaborate and precise qualities. In the catalogue of tang rubbings entitled "Imamura Oshigata," his work in the *ayasugi*-style workmanship is illustrated with the inscription giving the year 1855, when Sadakazu was 20 years old (Fig. 16). It is evident, therefore, that he had received complete understandings of Gassan's secret traditional technology by that time.

In early 1860s when Sadayoshi passed the age 60, Sadakazu began to assume the "legitimate" role of substitute maker in his father's name (*daisaku*). During this period, he produced a number of fine swords tailored in the Bizen or Yamato style in addition to the main *ayasugi* tradition. His blade structure featured a modest curvature and a pronouncedly large point with an only slightly rounded edge (*fukura-kareru*), which were also characteristic of Sadayoshi's work.

The Meiji edict abolishing the use of the Japanese sword was issued in 1876, in the prime of his career. While most of his contemporaries were forced to give up their traditional trade by the middle of the Meiji

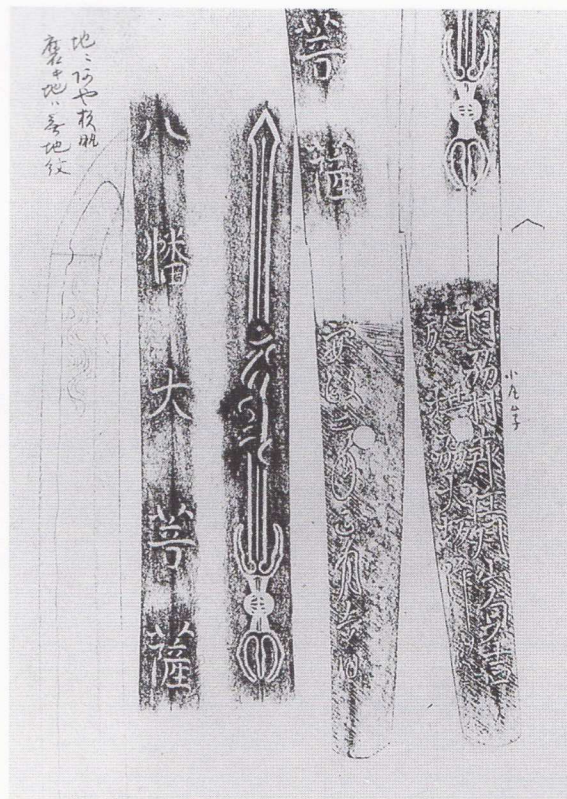


Fig. 16

period, only a few, including Gassan Sadakazu and Hayama Enshin, managed to survive by making replicas of ancient masterful works, which barely helped them maintain the already acquired skill. There is said to have been practically no commissioned work available at that time.

Then Japan went to war with China (Sino-Japanese War, 1894-5) and Russia (Russo-Japanese War, 1904-5), which led to a gradual increase in the demand for Japanese swords. Sadakazu, of whom we have no works from the time of the sword abolition edict, seems to have resumed his productive activity around 1887. There is a work dated with that year known to us. From around that time until the end of the Meiji era, he produced many swords in the *ayasugi* style, as well as works in the Bizen and Sōshū styles. In 1906, he completed a sword to be presented to Emperor Meiji. In 1916, he also made a *tachi* (long sword to be worn hung from the waist sash) to be presented to Emperor Taishō (Fig. 17) at his coronation, commissioned by the Army Department.

He died in 1918 at the age of 84. Four months before his death, he made a Sōshū-style *wakizashi* with the *ayasugi* grain, which he signed and even inscribed his age 83 (Fig. 18). This blade is presently in the N.Y. Metropolitan Museum collection.

Sadakazu is indeed most admirable for his ability to cope with the hardship incurred after the sword abolition edict. He was one of the very last ones to climb to the most distinguished status at the end of the early modern age. He trained pupils such as Takahashi Nobuhide and Morioka Masayoshi, in addition to his oldest son, Sadakatsu.

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.