

Japanese Sword Society of the United States, Inc.



NEWSLETTER

VOLUME IV NO. 5

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1972

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING -

A meeting of the society board members will be called by Jim Mitchell in Dallas, Texas, during the Token Kenkyu Kai event. It appears that at least eight board members will be in attendance for this meeting. Any board member unable to attend should mail his views, ideas, proxy, etc., to someone who will be there. This will be a great chance for all of us to meet one another and hopefully to resolve some of our ills. A complete report of this meeting will be included in the next issue of the Newsletter.

TOKEN KENKYU KAI -

One final word prior to the fulfillment of this tremendous undertaking. It is planned that aside from this being a most rewarding and educational event for all in attendance, enough pictures, comments, interviews, oshigata, etc., can be gathered to comprise a Newsletter devoted primarily as a report on this show. Such a complete report coupled with the book of lectures planned by the TTK staff, would be a worthwhile supplement for any collector who was unable to attend the show in person.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE -

Swordsmith SADAICHI TSUKIYAMA is featured in the September 1972 issue of National Geographic Magazine in an article entitled HUMAN TREASURES OF JAPAN. The article explains the importance of Japan's living national treasures in the preservation of such ancient and endangered skills as weaving, pottery making, dying, puppetry, pantomime, metalworking, lacquerwork, and of course SWORDSMITHING.

This brief article pictures the swordsmith at his forge as he fashions a tachi. A very beautiful wakizashi by this man is also pictured in the article.

The significance of this article is the ever increasing awareness of the public and of art-orientated organizations towards recognizing the artistic nature of the sword. Perhaps a letter of thanks and a few positive comments mailed to the magazine would stimulate more articles featuring the sword and related arts. An article on the NBTHK would be a real treat for all. Anyone interested should write to: National Geographic Magazine 17th and M Streets, N.W., Washington D.C. 20036. Attention: Mr. William Graves - Senior Editorial Staff.



MEMBERSHIP COMMENTARY -

The interpretation of the Sukesada/Kiyomitsu wakizashi (NL Vol. IV No. 3) has brought about still more comments intended towards clarification of the differences in reading this blades inscription. Mr. Ogawa explained these differences to the Newsletter as differences in the language just as we have such differences in various parts of the states. The following comments are a lesson in short, and seem to cover the subject quite thoroughly.

Mr. A. Yamanaka comments:

"...there are two types of this Romanized Japanese reading. One is called the HEPBURN and the other is called the JAPANESE. The Hepburn reading is the one which is commonly accepted and it is....Genbei no Jo Sukesada Saku, this is the Hepburn reading. The other, which is....Genbei no Jiyo Sukesada is the Japanese reading. " (Mr. Yamanaka goes on with this, but the following comments cover it so thoroughly that I will continue with it. RH).

Mr. Benjamin Hazard, Ph.D. comments:

"Since the rubbing is not clear I cannot be certain of the characters. I will venture some opinions. The basic problem between the two renderings is what system of romanization is used. NL Vol.IV No.3 used the modified Hepburn system with the exception of "ZIU". NL No.4 used the Nippon siki system with the exception of "KIYOMITSU" which to be consistent would be "KIYOMITU".

The Nippon siki or Nippon shiki system has been adapted from time to time by the Japanese government. It has not been in general use since the war. It is a system orthography that is internally consistent with the arrangement of Japanese phonetic elements, that is, for example the "T" column would be TA, TU, TE, TO. However these syllables are not all pronounced by a Japanese as they would be by a native speaker of English. They are pronounced TA, CHI, TSU, TE, TO, likewise: SA, SI, SU, SE, SO pronounced SA, SHI, SU, SE, SO; DA, DI, DU, DE, DO, pronounced DA, JI, ZU, DE, DO; and ZA, ZI, ZU, ZE, ZO pronounced ZA, JI, ZU, ZE, ZO. It presents no problem to the Japanese who automatically corrects to his native pronunciation (except for the natives of Kochi prefecture who preserve an archaic speech and do pronounce them TA, TI, TU, TE, TO. For the English speaker it is confusing, for he can distinguish between TI and CHI, TU and TSU, as well as the other trouble makers, SI and SHI, HU and FU, this latter is ambiguous for pronunciation lies between HU and FU and there are some dialects where it is clearly HU. Problems also arise with such paired syllables as ZIYO, JO; ZIYU, JU, and an older form TEFU, CHŌ.

Scholarly western literature, other than the field of linguistics, has adapted the modified Hepburn system. I refer for example to the Journal of Asian Studies which stipulates that romanizations of Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary, 1949 edition be used and not those of later editions, which while not entirely of Nippon siki system depart from the modified Hepburn norm.

The matter is compounded in that inscriptions on sword tangs are written in kambun, that is Chinese grammatical order or syntax, thus they may be read in Chinese order or rearranged when read aloud into Japanese syntax which is quite different, moreover, one has the option of reading certain words in Sino-Japanese (on-yomi) or native Japanese (kun-yomi). All of this is very confusing to the neophyte. Let me hasten to add as one who began his Japanese in 1939 and holds a degree in Oriental Languages, that learned native speakers are at odds on what is the correct reading of an obscure passage.

Holding to the belief that in as much as the bulk of our sword literature is in the modified Hepburn system--parenthetically I must admit that some of our British colleagues still employ the nineteenth century orthography retaining such obsolete pronunciations as KWA for KA and DZU for ZU, now only heard in the speech of the over 80 and certain dialects such as that of Kōchi--I move that the Society adopt the modified Hepburn system in that it most closely represents the sounds of Japanese for a native speaker of English.

Going back to my original statement that I do not have a clear copy of the text before me, and with due apologies to Mr. Ogawa, I would like to reconstruct the romanization from the two examples into the modified Hepburn system:

GENBEI (no) JŌ SUKESADA SAKU

BIZEN (no) KUNI [BIZEN-KOKU] JŪ OSAFUNE KIYOMITSU SAKU

TENSHŌ YO-NEN (1576) HATCHI-GATSU (8th month) NI

KAMAYAMA TAIZŌ JŪ DAI SAKU SHI [KORE (o) TSUKURU]

Parenthesis indicate words not appearing in the text, but would be added if read in Japanese context, also equivalent dates. Brackets indicate acceptable alternates. KORE (o) TSUKURU is an inversion to Japanese syntax from the Chinese syntax of SAKU SHI. This is an assumption, since this usual reading of KORE (this) of the several possible characters for KORE. I could not determine from the rubbing which one it was.

I trust I have contributed a little light and not too much heat.

Editor's comment: Thanks to both Albert Yamanaka and Benjamin Hazard for bringing this to our attention. The above is of utmost importance to any student of the sword if he is to learn a proper and accepted manner of reading the inscriptions found on his swords. Obviously, only serious study will give the student an command of the language, but all of us should take note and accept the advice of Mr. Hazard as he outlined above.

RH

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INFORMATION POOL -

Members are encouraged to submit their questions and findings to the Newsletter for inclusion in this column, for the benefit of the membership.

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Question: In the available papers on swords such as the Nihonto Newsletter, the signing of a blade of a particular smith is almost always signed long and with dates. My question is, what relationship exists between sword periods, quality of work, etc., and the type of signiture. Did the famous smiths who signed long sometimes sign in short too, or what? For example, does a two character signiture hint that a blade is late period?

R. Hartmann

Comment: Good blades are not necessarily signed long. This depends on the period, but even in the later period like shinshinto, you will find good blades signed in two characters, for example KIYOMARO who is tops in shinshinto smiths, then there is HORIKAWA KUNIHIRO, one of the top shinto smiths who also signed in two characters, though both of these smiths signed long interchangably with short signatures. Swordsmiths in the olden days were, in almost all cases, illiterate. It is said that these illeterate smiths had the signature written on pieces of paper by a temple priest nearby and this was pasted on the nakago and carved or inscribed through the paper. A good case of this is the OSAFUNE SUKESADA and other late OSAFUNE smiths...you will note that all signatures are much the same, which backs up this idea. Another is the Shinto HIZEN smiths (TADAYOSHI school). Later in the shinto and shinshinto periods, there are great numbers of sword-smiths who were literate, therefore they signed in all manner and styles.....this is true to a very small degree during the koto period.

Question: A rather basic question, in finding a blade with no signiture (mumei), is it proper to declare this as o-suriage or must one identify between blades simply not signed and blades which have lost their signiture?

Comment: Whether a blade in mumei is o-suriage or not.....the only way to determine this is to look at the blade and it is quite easy to see if the blade is ubu or has been cut short. However, this will take some study and that is the only solution to this...there is no simple way to this.

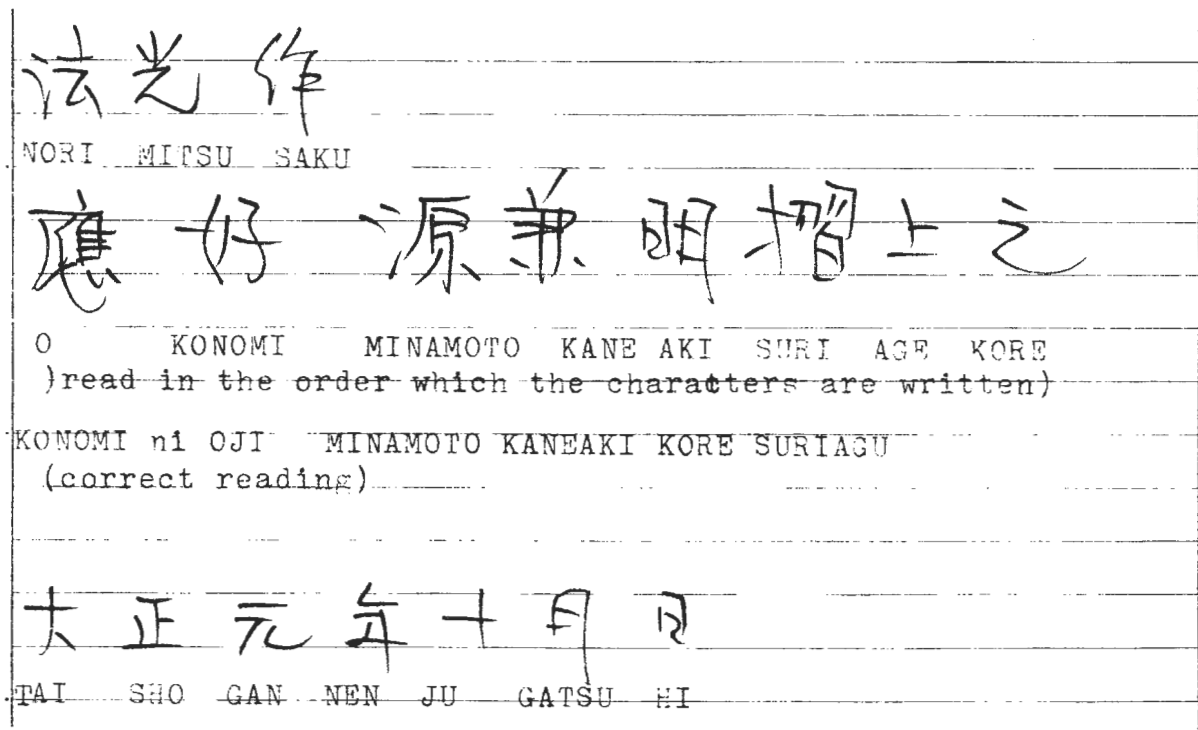
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Two blades have turned up in the St. Louis area which were signed in a confusing manner...at least in a manner different than any I have found to date. I asked A.Y about these and he has explained the inscriptions to me, clearly writing the characters for our information. In this way they might be recongnized more easily the next time they are found by any of us.

The first blade was a very nice wakizashi with a beautiful hamon of top quality....presently owned by an ex-GI who will not let go of it....a common story. The inscription reads:

NORIMITSU SAKU
 KONOMI NI OJI MINAMOTO KANEAKI KORE SURIAGU
 TAISHO GANNEN JU GATSU HI

MINAMOTO KANEAKI cut this blade short, at the request of a certain person (konomi ni oji) which means 'according to the wishes'...so Kaneaki cut this blade short at the request of the owner on October 1912.



The second blade is a Showa-to with an unfamiliar manner of dating. Albert explains: The inscription reads:

KANEMICHI SAKU
 KIGEN NI SEN ROPPYAKU ICHI NEN....

Kigen _____ or Koki Nisen Ropyaku Ichi Nen (2601) is the same as the western 1941 A.D. The Japanese historians dated the beginning of the Japanese eras as 660 B.C., which supposedly is the date when the 1st Japanese Emperor Jimmu took office??? This was believed to be so during the pre-war days, however today no one believes this anymore as it was the big imagination of the historians who created this sort of thing to fool the public into believing the emperor worship. So, there is no foundation to this....probably it is the same as the western A.D. on exactly where and who the A.D. or B.C. Lots of arguments can be had on both of these and we will not go into this here, but that is what the Kigen or Koki is supposed to be.

cont'd.

兼道作
紀元 = 460 - 年
KI GEN NI SEN ROP PYAKU ICHI NEN
KIGEN NISEN ROPPYAKU ICHI NEN

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SALE - TRADE - WANTED ITEMS:

Wanted: Katana tsuba with Rabbit design
Katana tsuba with Dragon design (Tetsugendo school)
Wakizashi tsuba with Koi (carp) design
...will pay cash or trade fittings or inro.
write: Andres Rodriguez

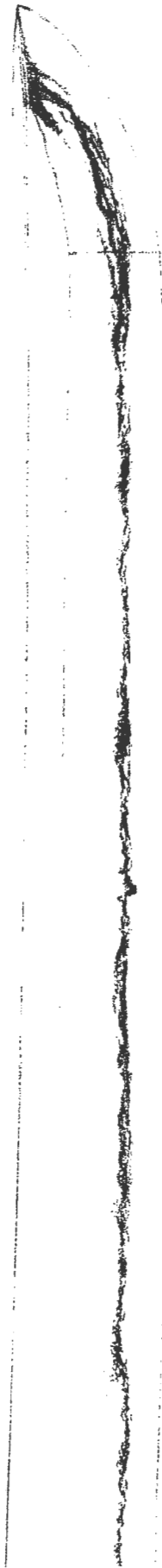
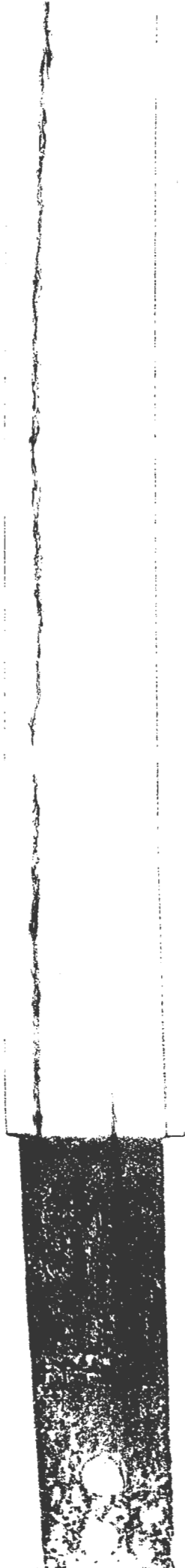
Wanted: SHOKI or ONI menuki and tsuba. Preferably
Nara school. Will also consider iron.
write: Mel Oka

Wanted: Fuchi in flower design, of pattern like
Robinson's plate 49c.

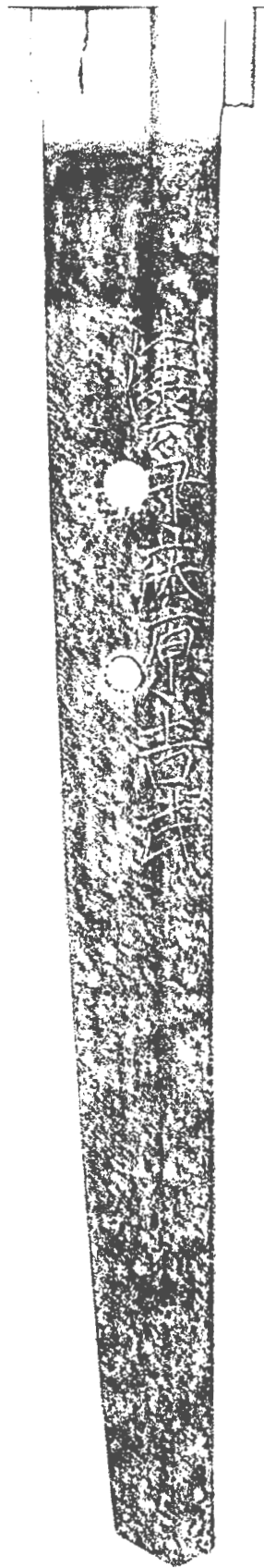
Kashira of dragon design on small, good
nanako work...or plain nanako of good work.

Kodzuka or Kogai, single or pair in either
of the above designs.
write: Newsletter editor.

Wanted: Any armor or armor parts, particularly
a good helmet, is requested by a local
collector. Anyone having any such items
for sale or trade should contact the
Newsletter editor.



Katana: TAIRA MASUMORI



Katana: IZUMO (no) KAMI FUJIWARA YOSHITAKE

TAIRA MASUMORI KATANA

Oshigata presented by Richard Mantegani

- TYPE AND STYLE: Katana of shinogi-zukuri form.
- BLADE LENGTH: 26 3/4 inches NAKAGO: 6 7/8 inches
Total length: 33 5/8 inches.
- CURVATURE: Torii sori (somewhat shallow).
- KISSAKI: Curved edge (Fukura-tsuku)
- GRAIN: Suguba of both nioi and nie. Ji-nie present in areas. Nie is generally fine running on both sides of the nioi line. Some coarse nie present in clusters. Sunagashi evident at the 'striking point'. Utsuri running along shinogi line.
- BOSHI: Kaen (flame boshi) of sweeping nie with sunagashi.
- NAKAGO: Slight taper, shortened though not greatly, with kiri tip. Four mekugi-ana, two positioned 2 1/4 and 2 3/4 inches from machi. The other two 3 1/2 and 4 3/4 inches down the nakago. (Both of these are plugged with lead).
- SIGNATURE: TAIRA MASUMORI (three characters)
- REMARKS: This is a Bungo blade, Koto circa 1504. It is a beautiful work. I would rate it as one of the man's best. It is not tired nor flawed. No kizu of any kind exist. The yakiba is even and unbroken, but the nakago is sadly not up to par with the blade's superb condition and polish. It is deeply pitted which obliterates the character TAIRA. The characters MASUMORI are distinct. File marks also are lost due to the nakagos poor condition. This smith is Hawley MA-898 and is rated low at twelve points, but this slim yet stout blade can in no way be rated as a low quality work.

RM

This smith is of the TAKADA SCHOOL of Bungo Province, which was discussed in the Nihonto Newsletter Vol.IV No.3 (Koto) and in Vol.V No. 1 (Shinto). In part..."The works of the smiths of this school, prior to the Oei era, are very rare, and those of the early periods are said to be non-existent. However, from the post Oei era, the smiths connected with this school are found in great numbers and consequently, so are their works. They are usually in Bizen tradition of the shape and style of both Muromachi and the Sengoku periods, which is very utilitarian. They are usually signed in two characters or XXX XXX SAKU or TAIRA XXX XXX."

RH

YOSHITAKA KATANA

Oshigata presented by Dean Hartley

The following is a very fine blade presently owned by Dean Hartley. He has supplied the very clear rubbing and the following description.

SIGNED: IZUMO (no) KAMI FUJIWARA YOSHITAKE

HADA: Tight mokume

HAMON: Hiro-suguha with choji-midare first third above habaki of nioi with small ko-nie.

BOSHI: Ichi-mai boshi

REMARKS: This is one of the good Horikawa school men of Musashi province. Hawley lists him as Kyoto Horikawa Group, Shodai period (circa 1681). He is rated 35 points KC. This is Hawley YO-557 and is in Fujishiro S80. If more info on this smith is located, it will be included in a future issue of the Newsletter.

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It should be noted that both of these oshigata have been kindly supplied by the same two men who have supplied earlier oshigata...and they deserve a word of thanks for their contributions. The Newsletter is still in need of more such oshigata, particularly from some of the little heard of members....lets all contribute a little effort, okay?

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS -

Mr. Peter Bleed has notified the NL of his new address, and perhaps some of the members would also like to have it. It is as follows:

Mr. Peter Bleed

NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE -

Next issue will come out about the 1st of December. All articles, etc., for this issue should be in my hands no later than the last week of November. Ron Hartmann, Editor.