

# THE TO-KEN SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

for the Study and Preservation of Japanese Swords and Fittings



Hon. President: B. W. ROBINSON, M.A., B.LITT.

Secretary: H. M. HUTCHINSON, 141 Nork Way, Banstead, Surrey

Editor: Clive Sinclair  
61 Norfolk Crescent  
SIDCUP, Kent.  
DA15 8HW

FEBRUARY - MARCH 1977

## PROGRAMME 95

Remember the meetings are now at the Mason's Arms in Maddox Street, London W1. every first Monday of the month at 7.30 p.m. To get there from Oxford Circus proceed down Regent Street towards Piccadilly Circus and Maddox Street is about 500 yards on the right.

### FORTHCOMING MEETINGS:

Monday April 4th

A talk by John Anderson on the various types of mempo.

Monday May 2nd

Bring along 'strange' or unusual items and talk about them. This will then be followed by an auction so this may be an opportunity to weed-out, or add to your collection.

April 15th - 16th

The Arms Fair at the Royal Lancaster Hotel will have a Society stand. We would like 'minders' and items.

### Editorial

Having now moved back to the Mason's Arms, a distinct change for the better seems to have come over our meetings. We have seen several old friends whose opinions and contributions to discussions are greatly valued.

Our first meeting at the new venue featured Mike Mortimer's comparison of feudal Scotland with feudal Japan. I must confess that it was not a subject that I have ever given much thought to, but Mike's chat gave rise to a discussion that made me think. Is it possible that roving Scots ever reached the Japanese homeland, after all Will Adams made it? I hope to publish the transcript of the talk in our next programme.

Dave Parker gave his talk on Polearms at the March meeting. We were very pleased to have Mr. Mike German as Dave's guest. The talk is reported fully in this Programme.

Next, I must apologise to members who have ordered the Californian Token Taikai book and have not yet received it. It has finally arrived from U.S.A. and is on its way to you. Will the Australian member who wrote enquiring after the price, please write again as I have mislaid both name and address -- sorry.

#### Annual Subscriptions:

May we remind you that subscriptions are due this month. The Secretary would be glad to receive them as soon as possible so that the new circulation list can be completed. Details of the various rates were given in the previous issue of the Programme.

#### POLEARMS

The March meeting was on the subject of Japanese polearms with a talk, followed by a discussion led by Mr. Dave Parker, of Token polishing fame. The meeting was both well attended and of great interest and the following is a synopsis of Dave's talk and the discussion:-

"  
It is well understood by most members that nobody has ever produced a cutting weapon as fine as the Japanese sword. The Japanese polearm runs a very close rival and has a wider application than the sword, including such things as Naginata, long and short blades, 3-sided blades, two pronged, L-shaped, cruciform etc. etc.

The earliest example we come across is the Naginata, which first appeared in Heian times, as early as the first year of Daido (806 AD) to second year of Duei (1183). It may really be described as a ridged blade with deep sori and no yokote, and although often to be found with grooves this is not an absolute necessity, as they were only put on for decoration (unlike European weapons where they were functional). Tempering depended on the Smith's personal preferences, as in swords, so there is a wide variety of hamon to be found.

It is known that the early Naginata were mounted outside the poles (not with a tang). They probably started life as farmers tools as did many weapons, and one of the rarest of such is called Chukushi Naginata, and another, Naginata no saki.

The early Naginata were very long and it is often said that both the Naginata and Nagimaki were exclusively monks weapons, perhaps this view arose from the habit of monastic armies and the yamabushi to favour these weapons, especially during the 15th and 16th centuries. The Naginata vied with the sword as the most popular weapon and many notable warriors armed themselves with it. One such was ~~Chin~~ Chin no Tajima, who used his Naginata to such effect at the battle of the Uji bridge that the Heike named him Tajima the Arrowcutter. Probably the most famous man who owned a Naginata, was of course Saito Musashi Bo Benkai. In his request to the swordsmith, Kokaji Munenobu (a direct descendant of Munechika) he asked for a blade of 4 shaku in length (4'8") and the shaft of the weapon had to be 6 shaku 5 san (7' 6"). So it may be imagined that it was indeed a formidable weapon.

Naginata may be signed on either side of the nakago. I asked the Japanese why some were signed Tachi-mei and others Katana-mei and they told me all Naginata are signed Tachi-mei, however I have had them signed on both sides! Later in Tokugawa times, Naginata were used for parades and the poles were covered with vines, soft metals and anything that took their fancy. There were also smaller ones that were used by ladies to great effect in the Satsuma rebellion and right up to World War II, and even now for practice. Mr. Knutsen's wife is expert with Naginata and she has been compared in action with an advancing propellor.

The Yari was considered to be the weapon of the gentleman, and not as in Europe, for the lower orders. When Kyoto was founded in 793 AD an academy of military science was created by the Emperor Kwammu, to be attended by the sons of prominent men. The use of the sword and the spear was taught, besides tactics and the classical Chinese works on war. The spear was one of the principal weapons of the civil war period. Rai Sanyo, the Japanese historian, writing of the sixteenth century says that 'at this date the musket and the long spear were the chief weapons relied on'. Many of the greatest warriors favoured the spear rather than the sword.

Yari have an immense range of shapes and sizes and I beg forgiveness for any omissions, the following, however, are the most commonly found:-

#### Magari Yari

This shape of blade is of cruciform shape and is often called by the Japanese 'Jumonji Yari' as the cross forms the character 'Ju' (ten). Examples earlier than the Momoyama period are rare, but these earlier examples have well proportioned blades and are not thick in section. As would be expected, blades from the Tokugawa period show a tendency to more eccentric, less practical forms. At the time, as with most polearms, the weapon progressed from a utilitarian fighting arm to become an elegant processional polearm.

The illustration shows more clearly the shape of the blade although the angle of the arms may vary considerably. One present at the meeting was about 18" long with large arms drooping down. Most average 7" - 9" from top of the tang to the point. The Magari-yari continued in popularity right up to the end of the feudal period.

#### Hoko

The best examples of Hoko are to be found in the Imperial Repository at the Shoso-in. They always appear to be socketted and often have a single straight blade with a hook at the side, similar to a 'one-armed' Magari-yari.

### Su-yari

These are probably the largest single group of yari.

The basic definition of a su-yari is that blades of normal straight form, over 9" in length. They are alternatively known as oma-yari or omi-yari. Notwithstanding the foregoing, blades with parallel sides, regardless of how many 'faces' it has, under 9" in length are also called su-yari. They may or may not have grooves and often have three sides (sankaku-yari). Those with two sides and a shinogi line are most common and called ryo-shinogi-yari. (See illustrations of sections for groove and shape variations). Unlike Naginata the grooves in Su-yari are more functional.

### Makwa-yari

This may be of any form, and as the name Makwa (pillow) implies, is for putting by the bed. They are mounted on a small pole and kept handy by the bed. It is very easy to get into a Japanese house, and obviously protection was required at all times.

### Nage yari

These were in the main very short yari heads with tapered poles about 18" or 2ft. long and used for throwing. It was only used in hunting as Japanese warriors never threw their spears.

### Yami-yari

This is a yari which is fitted onto the end of a bow, an example is to be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art as part of the George Stone Collection. It has shoulders on it that stop any obstruction when the bow is being strung. The heads are usually four sided.

### Shakajo-yari

This is a staff with a case on the top with three chains on, and these were used by Samurai or assassins on special missions. With the many wandering pilgrims along the roads who normally carried staffs, it was easy to mix in and become unobtrusive. The head would come off with the chains on, and the yari would be inside.

There are several other types of yari, but mainly they are variations in shape of blade. Some of these are Kana-yari (sickle-spear), Bishamon-yari (trident shaped spear), Inoshishi-no-yari (leaf shaped spear), Uchi-ne (throwing dart).

Various weapons that also come under the heading of 'polearms' include police restraining weapons and one or two strange ones:-

### Otsuchi

Favoured by the yama-bushi was the war mallet. This was used throughout the feudal period.

### Ono

The yama-bushi appeared to have had many strange weapons, including the Ono or war axe. The shaft was often over 6ft. in length with a heavy head and curved cutting edge.

### Police Weapons

Found in racks along the barriers between provinces and in cities, were the restraining implements of the "feudal fuzz". Known as Mojiri and Sodegarami; they were furnished with a mass of hooks and barbs and used to entangle the loose fitting clothes of villans.

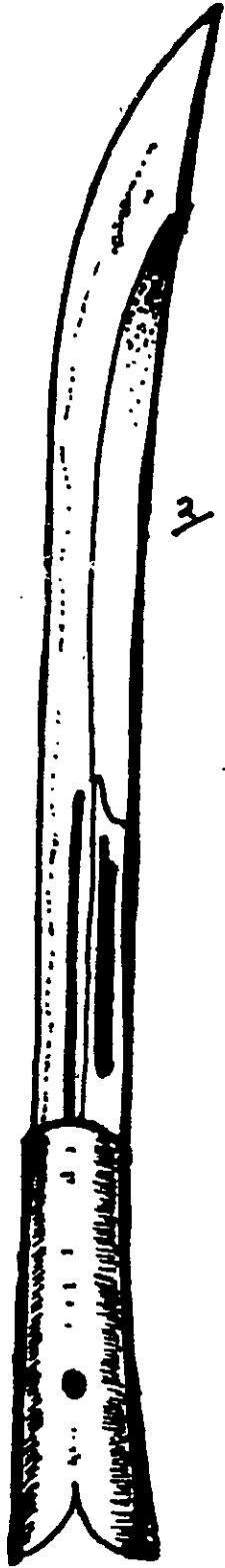
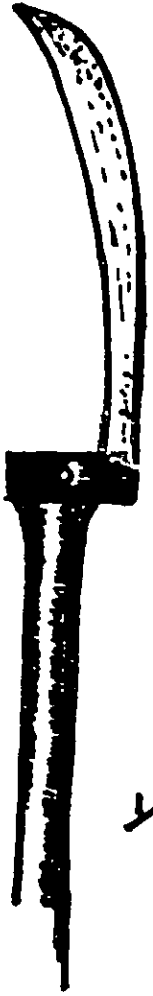
### Take Hoko

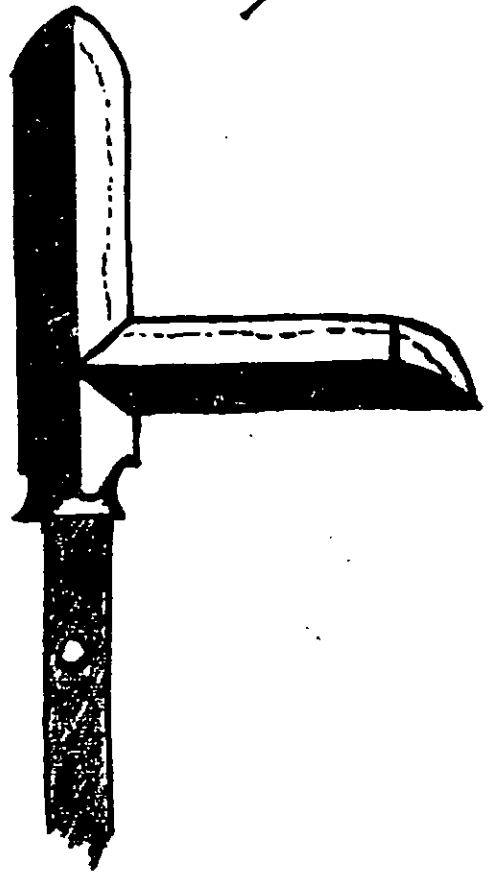
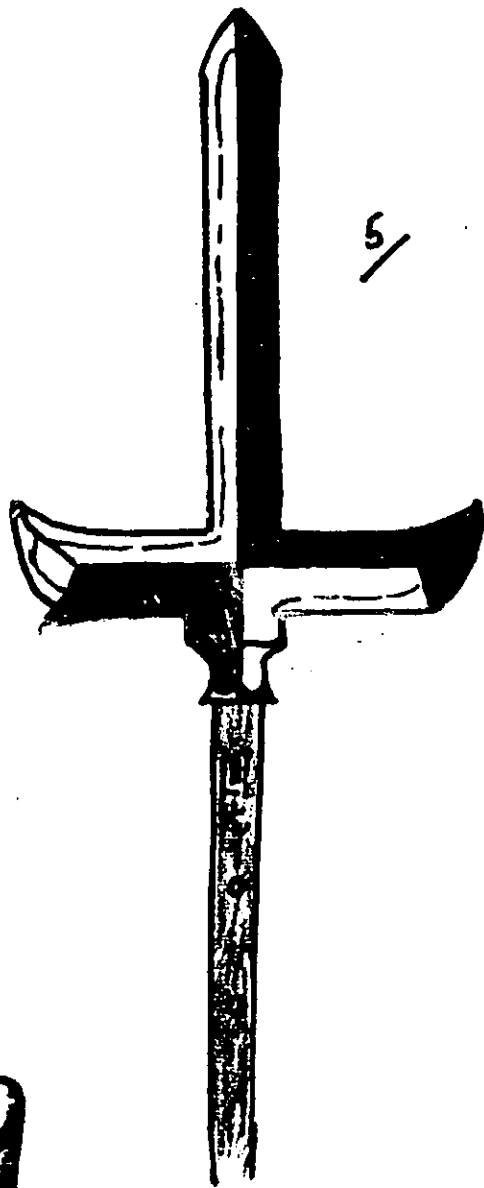
Used by peasants and 'down on their luck' Samuri is the Take Hoko. This was simply a bamboo pole with the end cut across, making a very sharp point. It inflicts a very nasty wound, and it is said that such a wound never properly heals.

Some of the principal swordsmiths, who also made yari or Naginata are as follows:-

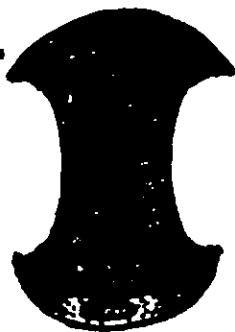
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|-------------|--|--|
| Kanefusa IV | (Later Seki)                           | Late 16th century                                  |
| Kanetsane   | (Later Seki)                           | Early 16th century                                 |
| Kiyomaro    |  | First half of 19th century                         |
| Kiyomitsu   | (Later Bizen)                          | Mid 16th century                                   |
| Kanimitsu   | (Hojoji) of Sadumune san-tetsu fame,   | late 14th century                                  |
| Kanimune I  | (Uda)                                  | Middle 14th century                                |
| Masatsuro I | (Owari Seki)                           | Late 16th, early 17th century<br>+ three others.   |
| Motohira I  | (Late Satsuma)                         | Late 18th, early 19th century.                     |
| Muramasa I  | (Sengo)                                | Pupil of Masamune, 14th century<br>+ three others. |
| Naotane     | (Suishinshi)                           | 1st Half of 19th century.                          |
| Nobukani    | (Kyote) Another Sadumune pupil working | 2nd half of 14th century.                          |
| Tadayoshi I | (Hizen)                                | Early 17th century.                                |
| Yasutsugu   | (Aoi Shimosaka)                        | Also known as Shimosaka,<br>early 17th century.    |
| Shinkai     | (Inouye)                               | Late 17th century.                                 |

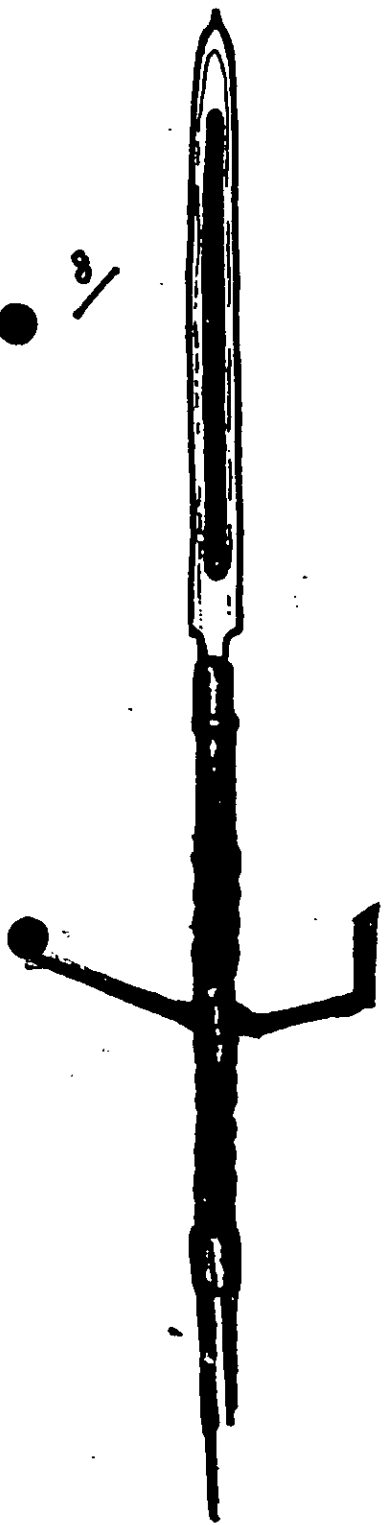
Having dealt with the blades, we now move onto the poles. The shafts of yari are made of Kashi, white or red wood of the Japanese evergreen oak. It is very straight grained, has no knots and a certain amount of spring, as is required in a yari. Now fitting the blade to the pole - if it is socketed the end of the pole is simply shaved and the socket placed over it.





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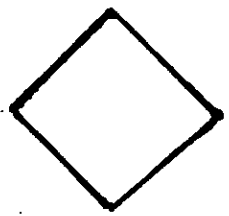


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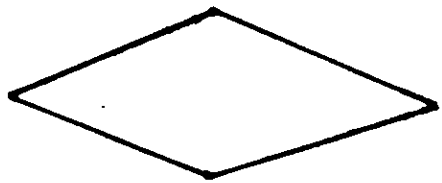
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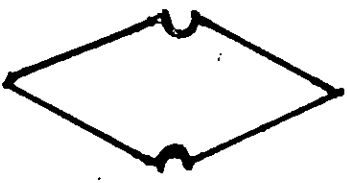
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## ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Early Naginata called Tsukushi naginata. This is the earliest socketed naginata known, probably early 10th century. First used in North-west Kyshu from which it derives its name (ancient name of Kyshu - Tsukushi).
2. Very rare socketed Naginata called Naginata-no-Saki. Used mainly in 15th and 16th century.
3. Another early socketed Naginata. Probably from the late Heian period.
4. Conventional naginata from 18th century. Small proportions indicate it was probably made for a woman.
5. Magari-yari of 'normal' proportions, about 1700.
6. Hoko, similar to magari-yari except only one 'arm'.
7. Various saya for yari and naginata.
8. Fully mounted Su-yari with large groove showing pole mounts and with hadome.
9. Sections of yari blades:
  - (a) Normal Sankaku (3 sided) yari showing single groove.
  - (b) Horseman's yari.
  - (c) Normal ryo-shinogi (ridged) yari.
  - (d) Sankaku-yari with grooves on all three sides.
  - (e) Ryo-shinogi-yari with grooves.
10. Hiramaki from woman's naginata and signed with maker's name.

Where a tang had to fit into the pole - the pole was not drilled but a section cut out to accept the tang. This piece was then shaved to fit and then laid back in, and is so skillfully done, that it is quite a tight fit. This is then lacquered over or covered with shark-skin, ray-skin, leather or mother of pearl. Sometimes it is bound and then lacquered. The holding bands would then be put on and were made of copper, silver or whatever was required. Often the length of the decoration is an indication of the length of the tang. To finish off, a small knot - a hand stop - thick in the middle and tapering on both sides, is skillfully made.

Another feature on the pole is the Hadome. This fitment is a parrying bar and translated hadome means brake. These bars are found on all types of polearms, including Naginata. They are usually of steel and usually plain, although sometimes they have a blunt, but serrated edge, and were possibly used as sword-breakers. The hadome is mounted as a collar on the portion of the shaft containing the tang, and is secured from twisting by a mekugi passing right through it, into the shaft. It is also suggested that on very long hadome, lanterns might have been hung.

Next we come to the base of the pole. Here is found a heavy ornament known as a hiramaki, or alternatively ishi-zuki. Once again they come in all shapes and sizes. Some are pointed, some blunt, and yet others hammer-shaped. Presumably if you missed with the blade, the hiramaki could be used to bayonet or bludgeon the enemy. Some are very well made and even signed by the maker.

Lastly we will look at saya. These are almost as varied as the polearms themselves and present many decorative forms. They are often flamboyant and show the great creative flair of the artists. Cylindrical, round, square, ribbed and conical are common to all types of spears other than naginata.

Saya are usually made, as with sword saya, of magnolia wood and often given a crinkly surface of ishime lacquer. Most common are black or brown, often decorated with the owner's mon, horse or bear hair and fur. It was usual for finely lacquered saya to have silk or cotton covers.

It was also usual for the daimyo processions to be proceeded by the spear bearer and this was a much sought after and honoured position.

Most yari, being the gentleman's weapon, were used from horse back... Cuts known as the figure of eight cuts, butterfly cuts and wheels on either side of the horse were executed often standing in the stirrups. There is a portion of the armour, the tassets, which were designed to guard against the blow of a naginata. The larger yari were used more for cutting than stabbing. The shorter ones used for punching through armour like a lance.

It may be seen (I hope) from the above, that polearms were, in the same way as swords, considered to be very effective weapons from the earliest of times and respected as such, right through to the restoration and opening of the country, a short 100 years ago. "

D. Parker

For further reading: "Japanese Polearms" by Ronald Knutsen (Published by Holland Press)

At the meeting were several examples including the large Magari-yari already mentioned, a smaller one with a mother of pearl pole, a su-yari, another mounted in ken-koshirae, an old, almost straight Naginata and a Makura-yari.

N.B. Drawings are not in proportion to each other - Ed.

THE SAMURAI - A MILITARY HISTORY  
by Stephen Turnbull

Stephen Turnbull, one of our members in the Northern Token and contributor to this programme, has written a book on the Samurai, a work on the military history of Japan. I quote -

" The legendary Samurai of old Japan have always been something of a mystery in the west; their complexity of organisation and richness of tradition have been difficult to penetrate. In this lavishly illustrated book Stephen Turnbull - a serious young historian - describes the evolution of the Samurai from heroes of mythology to a body of men, who provided military service to land-owners, their degradation to paid mercenaries, and finally their disappearance as a class in the mid-nineteenth century.

The author tells the story of the Samurai against the background of Japan's social and political history. The civil wars of the twelfth century provided the impetus for their emergence as a faction with special identity; the attempted Mongol invasions united the Samurai against the common foe; the Onin war of 1467 and the civil wars of the fourteenth century led to the regrouping of the Samurai class. The development of armour and weaponry in the invasion of Korea in 1592, and the last great battles of Sekigahara in 1600 and the seige of Osaka Castle in 1615, caused significant changes, not only in the Samurai's military tactics but in their social status.

This is the most authoritative account of Samurai life and warfare published outside Japan. Pictures are collected from many sources, but principally Japanese - most of the 120 black and white pictures, and all but one of the 27 colour, have not previously been published outside that country. All the important battles and campaigns are illustrated with maps; a wealth of photographs illustrate Samurai costume, equipment, weapons and armour; and there are several magnificent colour plates of scrolls and painted screens. Five genealogies of the greatest Samurai families appear at the end of the book, with a chronological list of the Shogans, and an extensive bibliography and index."

H. Paul Varley, Professor of Japanese History at the University of Columbia contributes a forward.

The illustration of many of the armours are from the collections of Token members - Ian Bottomley and John Anderson. The book, I am sure, will become part of every members library, putting the meat on the bones of familiar names such as Ichi-no-Tani, Sekigahara and the like.

An old man once said to me that, in his opinion, one could be termed an "expert" in their subject, if they published an authoritative book on it. I think this very attractive and exceedingly informative book gives great credit to Stephen, and my old friend would say, he was indeed an "expert".

Publication Date: April 14th 1977

Published by: Osprey Publishing Ltd. 12-14 Long Acre, London WC2E 9LP.  
PRICE: £8.00 (U.K. only) Available through booksellers.

Reviewed by Clive Sinclair

## NOTES ON THE BIZEN SCHOOL

Clive Sinclair

You may remember a couple of programmes ago, we examined the development and main styles of the Soshu-den, one of the famous old Gokaden of the Kote period. In this issue there are a few notes on the Bizen school, that I hope may be helpful.

The school began to develop its characteristics in the Heian period, around 1000 AD in the Christian calendar and Bizen blades from this date, up to 1180 AD are known as Ko-Bizen or Old Bizen. These blades were extremely graceful in appearance being rather narrow and noticeably narrower towards the kissaki. They have deep koshi-zori which means that the curve starts about 5 or 6 inches above the mune-machi (the average length of the blades being about 33 inches) and are altogether very similar to the Yamashiro blades of the same period.

All swords made by the Ko-Bizen school were tachi, and have finely forged mokume grain with dense fine nie all over them. The colour of the metal is blue and clear and very attractive, and the temper lines are ko-midare or small choji mixed in sugaha, that is to say at first glance they may appear to be straight, but are often choji or midare. The boshi is usually straight with only a small turn back. There are few horimono and the only carvings on the blades appear to be grooves.

The Nakago are usually long and of normal Bizen shaped or Kijimata (pheasant thigh shaped). When signed they are mostly 2 or 3 character signatures, and representative smiths are:-

Tomonari

Masatsune

Kanehira

Nobufusa

After Ko-Bizen we see the first of the Ichimonji schools appear, the Fukuoka Ichimonji. They first became known in the Genryaku period (1184) and thrived for the next 100 years, finally fading out in the late Kamakura period. Whereas Ko-Bizen only made tachi, Fukuoka Ichimonji also made Kodachi or small tachi. The blade shape became a little wider with more or less an even width from base to point, losing much of the Umbari (tapering) of the earlier blades. Although the same dignified curvature was retained, the blades looked more solid and strong as the surface of the blade was fuller. The temper lines are large choji or double choji of nioi in a formation, to quote a Japanese source "that looks like cherry blossoms under the morning sun". Also in the hamon the presence of Kinsuji and inazuna will be detected. Carvings on the blades were once again mainly restricted to grooves and the nakago were the same as Ko-Bizen.

Signatures were usually two character, proceed by the Chinese character for One - a single horizontal line, in Japanese this is read as Ichi from which the school derives its name - the first.

Representative smiths are:-

Norimune

Sukemune

Yoshifusa

The grandson of the above mentioned Sukemune, named Sukeyoshi, founded the next Ichimonji school to come along - the Yoshioka Ichimonji school, so called as they worked in the town of Yoshioka from 1288 - 1346.

As may be expected their work is similar to that of the Fukuoka group except they also made tanto as well as tachi, with a slightly longer curve that continued right up to the point. The temper lines were mainly large choji mixed with midare and "ears", and the boshi line is irregular with a short turn-back. Although the signatures tended to become longer and some were also dated, they still retained the character Ichi.

Representative smiths are:-

Sukeyoshi

Sukemitsu

Sukeshige

In the Shochu period, the last Ichimonji group started, the Shochu Ichimonji school. They, once again, concentrated on tachi and this time the blades tended to be wide and thin, with a shallow curve and more elongated point than hitherto. Surface grain is large wood and burl mixed and tempering is of small choji or sugaha mixed with small choji, Boshi are Ko-midare. Once again we have the Ichi and a long signature.

Representative smiths are:-

Yoshiuji

Yoshimori

Undoubtably the most well known of the Bizen schools was that working from the village of Osafune, where it would seem, virtually the entire population were engaged in sword making. All together the Osafune group were producing blades from 1238 - 1575 with the 'early' Osafune group working from 1238 - 1335.

They made a variety of blades including tachi, kodachi, tanto and some naginata. They made two types of tachi, one wide and solid with a stout point and the other narrower with umbari (tapering towards the point) but both with koshi-zori. The tanto, which are up to 9" in length have a straight mune.

All are well forged with a surface grain of small and large burl and of a blueish colour. Temper lines are choji, komidare and gonome and boshi lines are irregular. The carvings are more adventurous than the other groups so far mentioned, including grooves, double grooves, dragons, Bonji etc. Most smiths signed Bizen Osafune - - and many dated their blades. Best known smiths are:-

Mitsutada

Nagamitsu

Kagemitsu

Kagehide

After the Mongol invasion, when the demand for the new Soshu school blades came into fashion in the late Kamakure period, and inspired by Masamune and his school, many Osafune smiths started making the Soshu blade shape. These were called Soden Bizen and worked from 1335 - 1390.

They made tachi, Tanto and some naginata. The tachi were wide and with a thin body and long kissaki, and some reached the length of 4 feet or even longer! The surface grain was mokume burl and itame wood grain and temper lines are notare or wavy mixed with gonome-midare. Once again there were many different sorts of carvings on the blades and once again there were long signatures and dates. Best known smiths are:-

Kanemitsu

Chogi

Motoshige

After many years of war, with two Emperors, one in the North and one in the South, peace came to Japan in 1392 and the Muromachi Shogunate was established. As in all times of peace the sword changed considerably in Japan and so it did in the Oei period. Smiths tried to recapture the characteristics of the Kamakura style blades and they were called the Oei Bizen group. They made Katana, shinogi-tsukuri wakizashi, hira-zukuri wakizashi, tanto naginata and some tachi.

The Katana were of medium width with graceful tapering to the point, of moderate thickness with a small/medium kissaki, and koshi-zori. The shinogi-tsukuri wakizashi were the same, but of course, shorter, whilst the hira-tsukuri wakizashi had a straight mune. Mostly of large mokume surface grain and with straight utsuri. The temper lines are gonome mixed with choji or sugaha mixed with komidare. Many of the hira-tsukuri wakizashi are carved with Bonji or with grooves that have rounded ends at the base and taper at the top end.

The nakago are often short with wide ends and are usually well signed and dated. Prominent smiths of Oei Bizen are:-

Yasumitsu

Morimitsu

Moromitsu

Norimitsu

Tsuneie

Iyesuke

After this Japan soon got back to war and in the Muromachi period we come across the Sue Bizen, or late Bizen group. They worked from about 1466 - 1590, right up to the end of the koto period. They made katana, shinogi-tsukuri wakizashi, tanto and unusually double-edged tanto. Their katana shape is similar to Oei Bizen style except they tend to have shallower curve and thicker body. The double edged tanto was fairly short, being about 7" on average, and all blades have small mokume surface grain. Temper lines are double gunome midare (large gunome line of which each tip has a small irregular pattern) or large wavey, full temper and others.

Boshi lines are irregular, small round and sometimes the whole point is tempered (ichimai-boshi). Many blades have detailed carvings, that are both cut deeply and finely. Most nakago are signed with long signatures and dated. Well known smiths are:-

Sukesada

Katsumitsu

Munemitsu

Tadamitsu

Kiyomitsu

And that's about it! It should of course be remembered, that those characteristics are very general and only the mass groups. There are exceptions to all these, for instance practically all schools and all smiths used suguha tempering at some time or another.

An interesting footnote to the Bizen school, according to legend, happened in 1590. The river Yoshii flooded its banks, washing out many towns where swordsmiths worked, including Katekeda, Yoshii and Osafune, and killing all smiths except one Sukesada and thus ending all the great Bizen groups. Only the Sukesada line continued into the Shinto period of swordmaking.

FROM BASHŌ

THE NARROW ROAD TO THE DEEP NORTH

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Towards the end of the seventeenth century the poet Bashō wrote an account of a journey he made around northern Japan from Edo to Ōgaki. The following passage on his descent from Mount Gassan in Dewa Province will be of some particular interest to members:

"When, on the following morning the sun rose again and dispersed the clouds, I went down towards Mount Yudono.

As I was still descending, I saw an old smithy built right on a trickling stream. According to my guide, this is where Gassan, a local swordsmith, used to make his swords, tempering them in the crystal clear water of the stream. He made his swords with such skill and devotion that they became famous throughout the world. He must have chosen this particular spot for his smithy probably because he knew of a certain mysterious power latent in the water, just as indeed a similar power is known to have existed in the water of the Ryōsen Spring in China. Nor is the story of Kangho and Bakuya out of place here, for it also teaches us that no matter where your interest lies, you will not be able to accomplish anything unless you bring your deepest devotion to it."

Bashō was thinking of the most famous Gassan who was active round about 1190. The school continued in Dewa Province until the sixteenth century, but I have no knowledge whether it remained at the original site. It is indeed quite likely that this was the forge of the first Gassan, built 500 years before. The Japanese remember the associations of places for a very long time. Bashō liked to dwell on these things and he makes many such references and reflections.