

The Gokaden-The five traditions of Koto swords.

Introduction:

The Gokaden is translated as “The Five Traditions” or “Five Schools”. Based on the characteristics and historical origin it places schools of the koto period in to one of these five traditions. The five are: Yamato, Yamashiro, Bizen, Soshu (Sagami) and Mino.

For many of us the use of the Gokaden designation has become an integral part of sword appreciation and appraisal. From when I started collecting in the 1980’s it has always been there and referred to by those who taught me as the concrete foundation for sword appraisal. It has become one of the key and unquestioned references in study, so much so that its origins and the original intent behind its development seem to have been lost in time.

When asking when did the Gokaden appear and who introduced the idea? There seems to be considerable divergence in opinion. Mr. Nagayama in “The connoisseur’s book of Japanese swords” suggests it existed during the koto period, The NBTHK, I believe; regard it as first appearing in the Edo period.

Mr. N. Nakahara in “Facts and Fundamentals of Japanese swords” states it is a much later invention, conceived during the Taisho period by Honami Ringo and Honami Kozon and refined after the Second World War by Honami Kozon to its current form. Their aim was to produce a simplified approach to sword appraisal to enable a wider audience to gain a more rapid and simpler understanding of swords and to allow less specialist viewers to develop the ability to identify quality and features in a sword.

I was recently sent a translated copy of a book first published in 1793 entitled “complete manual of the old sword”. This fascinating document offers an excellent insight into the teaching of sword appraisal during the 18th century. It is both amazing and reassuring to see how much it has in common with our approach today. Within this text one can find the clear foundation of the Gokaden. While not totally in line with what we understand today it has clearly separated the different traditions. In all there are some 9 or 10 different categories. However the five key traditions of Yamato, Kiyo (Yamashiro) Bizen, Soshu and Mino are identified. The remainder could be sub-divisions within these groups. For example Awataguchi appears separately from Yamashiro and Taima, Shikkake Senjuin and Tegai form one group following Yamato which includes the ancient Yamato work. Whether this listing and separation were intentional in the original or an example of simplified translation (It was translated in the first decade of the 20th century) I don’t know but even with this form of sub-division I think it is clear that the foundation of the Gokaden existed long before the Taisho period and rather than inventing it as Mr. Nakahara suggests, Honami Ringo and Honami Kozon modified it to the form we understand today.

Who originated the concept remains unknown but I think the generally held view is that if not a member of the Honami family it was someone closely aligned to them and their way of thinking.

So why is the Gokaden so important in the assessment of koto swords? Mr. Nakahara states that the original methodology incorporated by the early Honami generations was extremely complicated and

secretive. It required an in depth knowledge of the styles and techniques of individual smiths and took a lifetime to learn. By creating a “first cut” assessment into a tradition helps the observer narrow down the possibilities and forms a logical progression from tradition to school to Smith. Each step refines the search and reduces the possible answers.

However when one starts to look in detail at the history of those schools grouped in to the 5 traditions and the differences in working styles it is apparent that in its truest form the concept of the Gokaden has a very short period of application and I would question whether it remained relevant for swords produced after the end of the Nambokucho era. This being the case it really details a period from the mid Kamakura to the Oei a period of approximately 220 year.

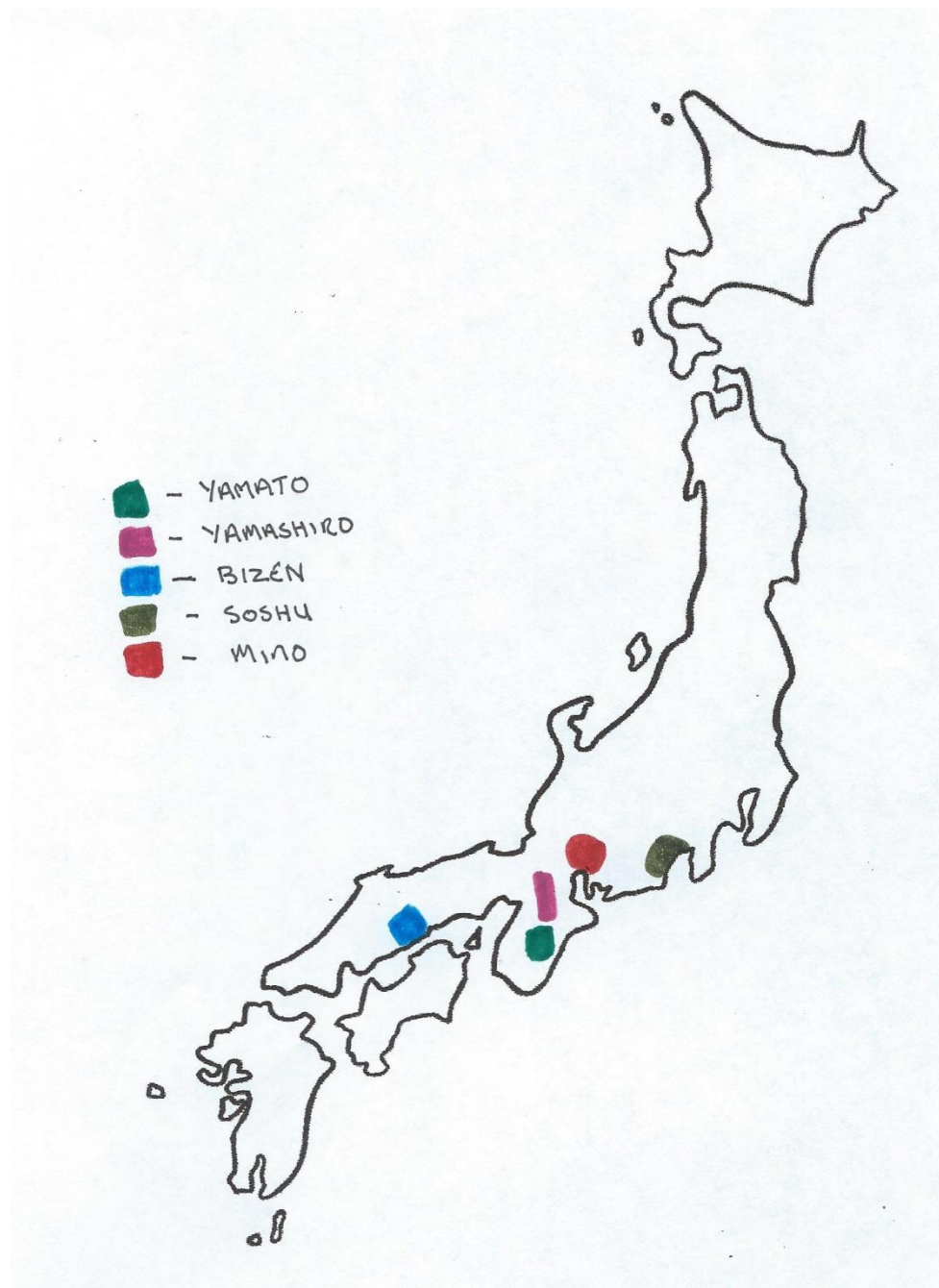


Fig 1. Location of the Gokaden

In the beginning:

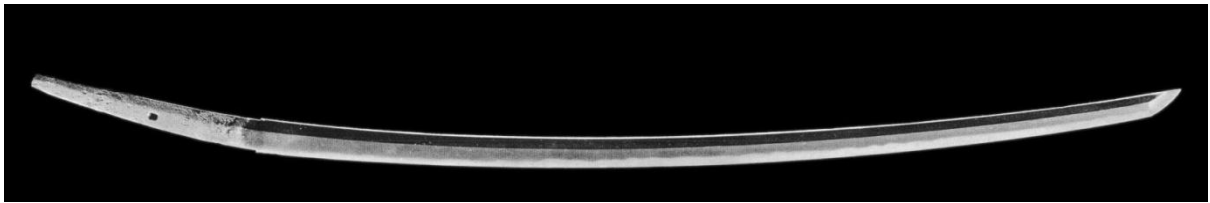


Fig 2. Hokki Yasatsuna "Dojigiri"



Fig 3. Ko-Bizen Tomonari

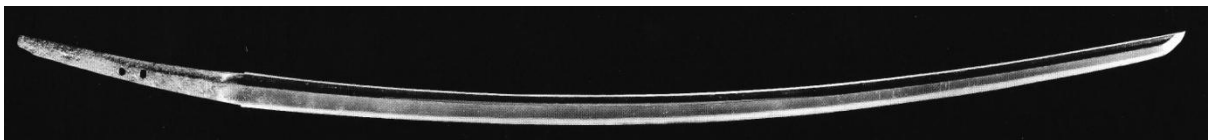


Fig 4. Sanjo

Looking at early swords from the Heian and early Kamakura period there is great similarity in style and workmanship of a number of schools. The exception to this being Yamato where the early smiths were predominantly making weapons for the temples. There are some outstanding works from early Yamato smiths but the vast majority (which is still not many) were utilitarian very conservative and unsigned blades. The Hoki School were active, Ko-Bizen and Ko-Aoe were working and well regarded. In Yamashiro the Sanjo School and first generation of the Awataguchi were making blades for the nobility.

Examples of this early work do not demonstrate great individuality. Ko-Bizen and Ko-Aoe exhibit subtle differences, there are common features between early Yamashiro, Hoki and ko-Bizen work. While it is possible to list the features which distinguish the individual craftsmanship those features can be extremely subtle and difficult to distinguish. This has become even more difficult when assessing blades some 800 or more years after it was made. There are many documented cases of attributions passing between these groups based on very subtle detail. It might be argued that such differences as are seen are a result of differences in the raw materials available to each school rather than differences in technique employed.

So by the mid Kamakura there were a number of established and productive schools working in the regions of Yamato, Kyushu, Yamashiro and Bizen.

The Emperor Go-Toba

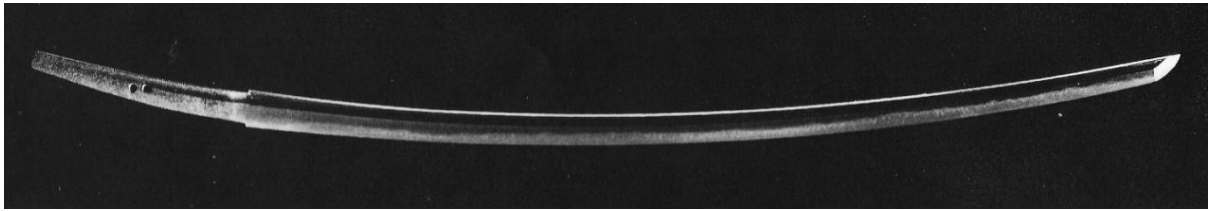


Fig 5. Go-Toba Tachi

One of the most interesting characters of the Kamakura period was the Emperor Go-Toba. While it can be said he was less than successful as an Emperor and a leader of revolt, he was a very sophisticated man versed in various arts including poetry and literature. He also had a passionate interest in sword making. As a result he summoned the very best smiths of his day to spend time with him on a monthly rota and to teach him to make swords.

I believe it was this activity that laid the true foundation of what we have come to identify as the Gokaden.

Depending which reference you read the composition of the Gobankaji varies. While the numbers from each school varies their origins remain constant. Smiths were called from Bizen, The Aoe School of Bitchu and the Awataguchi School.

During this period the work of the Awataguchi School further developed its signature style of manufacture. It is said that the use of the single “ichi” character by Fukuoka Smiths was granted by Go-Toba identifying them as “The first under heaven” and cementing the foundations of the Ichimonji schools within the Bizen tradition. I think also there can be little doubt that while working for the Emperor these top rated smiths also had the opportunity to learn from each other, or at least each other’s work. I think this is evident when looking at slightly later Aoe work which I have previously described as a combination of Bizen material and Yamashiro manufacturing technique.

After the Emperors’ final failed insurrection and he was banished to live on Oki Island he continued to study sword making and a second generation of smiths continued to support him. Amongst these were the Awataguchi Smiths Kuniyasu, one of the younger of the 6 brothers and Norikuni the son of Kunitomo and the grandfather of perhaps the greatest maker of tanto Yoshimitsu.

So as this period came to an end we have the Bizen Smiths building a very strong and individual style which we now recognise as the Ichimonji schools. The Awataguchi smiths continued to make their very quiet and conservative blades for the nobility of Kyoto, The Aoe smiths combining Yamashiro forging and Bizen steel made works for their local Daimyo and the Yamato smiths, largely undisturbed, continued to arm the monks.

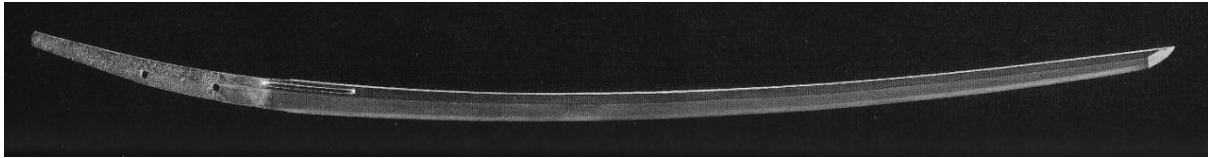


Fig 6. Awataguchi Kunitomo

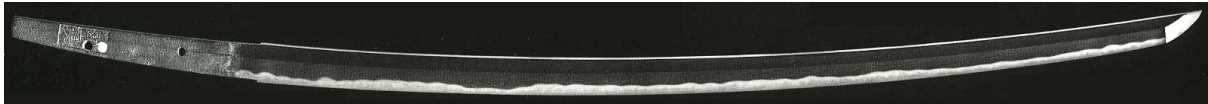


Fig 7. Fukuoka Ichimonji Sukezane.

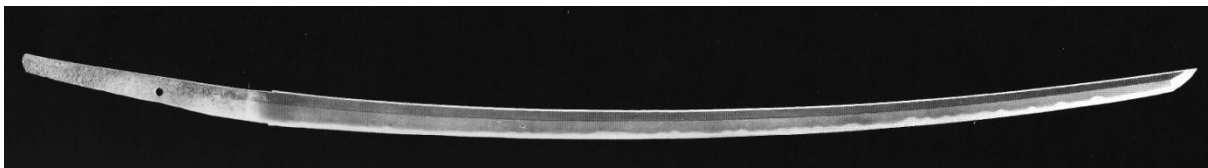


Fig 8. Yamato Kanenaga.

The formation of the Sagami (Soshu) School

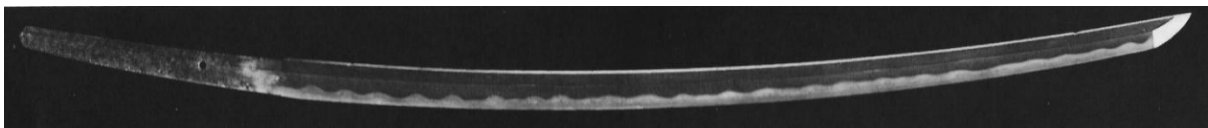


Fig 9. Masamune

The formation of the Bakufu in Kamakura caused the next major development in the creation of the Gokaden. As a military centre Kamakura lacked its own sword manufacturing capability. As a result the incumbent Shogun summoned three smiths Kunitsuna of the Awataguchi School, Sukezane and Kunimune of Bizen to go to Kamakura and make swords for him. These smiths are credited with the formation of the Sagami, or as it have become more generally known, the Soshu tradition.

Shintogo Kunimitsu is regarded as the first true exponent of the Soshu style. It has to be said that with one recorded exception known as “midare Shintogo” the majority of his work appears to have much more in common with his Yamashiro Awataguchi background than with later Soshu examples. However the following generation of students and family had a dramatic effect on sword making and produced many of the most famous names in the history of sword manufacture.

If one considers the fame the Soshu tradition enjoys in Sword making history it is a little surprising that it was so short lived. Rising to the height of fame and popularity in the Nambokucho period by the muromachi it had been largely eclipsed by Mino and the resurgent Bizen traditions that were producing functional weapons in large quantities. For a time one saw a Sue-Soshu style emerge but this had little impact and didn't prevent the demise of the school. The school's fate was ultimately

determined when the shogunate left Kamakura and relocated their headquarters in Kyoto in the Muromachi period.

While all this was going on Yamato continued in its own world although there is evidence that some Yamato smiths were travelling to and between other schools and as a result a number of more rural schools based on Yamato techniques, or at least combining Yamato techniques with others start to appear.

Mino.



Fig 10 Yamato Shizu

Mino was the Last of the 5 traditions to appear. One could argue that it had far greater influence on later sword making than any other. A talented Yamato Tegai smith, Kaneuji, travelled from Yamato to Shizu in Mino Province. Either en-route or shortly after he went he spent time studying Soshu workmanship. Many references list him as one of Masamune's 10 famous students. Whether he studied under the master directly is open to question (suggested dates don't quite fit) but it is certain he studied the work and was greatly influenced by what he learned.

The result was the formation of the early Mino tradition. Alongside the co-founder Kaneshige (Kinju) who moved from Echizen, Kaneuji started in Shizu. His work was identified as Yamato-Shizu. There is much confusion when this attribution appears on papers and it is a subject worthy of its own paper. However as a basic guide: If a Juyo paper refers to Shodai Yamato Shizu it indicates Kaneuji. If it just says Yamato Shizu it indicates a pupil. However I have heard many alternative versions with additions of further variations.

Some students then moved to Naoe and formed the Naoe Shizu School and others then moved on to centres such as Seki in later times. At the end of the Koto period Mino smiths travelled throughout the country teaching their methodology. As a result the vast majority of Shinto work exhibit Mino characteristics.

The end of the Gokaden

Every generation tends to believe it is original and has a unique perspective on style. New concepts, fashions and fads always seem to be a product of the here and now. In reality those living countless generations before us shared many of these foibles. It was as important to the Samurai about town in the Muromachi era to be in vogue and following the trends of the day. As a result of their superb quality, some important patronage and to be fair some strong marketing, Soshu was very much the designer label of its day. The must have accessory for the fighting man of any sophistication.

Needless to say demand outstripped supply and in order to take advantage of this fad other schools studied with Soshu masters and started to incorporate Soshu features in to their own work.

Something else happening around this time was that communications were improving and the production of raw materials for many industries centralised. Thus some of the individuality created by incorporating locally manufactured tamahagane would eventually disappear.

As schools attempted to follow the demand for Soshu style work a number of hybrid styles appeared. So we see the establishment of Soden-Bizen, Sue-Tegai, Sue-Aoe and Sue-Seki. As we progress towards the end of the koto period the output of these schools comes closer in line and it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between them.

Alongside the merging of styles in what I can best describe as the “sue” movement other social and political factors were to have an impact on the Gokaden. By the beginning of the Tensho period and thanks largely to the efforts of Nobunaga the powers of the temples had been much diminished. Temples were no longer able to employ standing armies of warrior monks and as a result the production of pure Yamato swords around Nara was greatly curtailed. The Aristocracy, the traditional market of the Yamashiro tradition, continued to lose influence and wealth resulting in that market losing custom. With their core markets in decline both of these traditions either ceased manufacture or more typically attempted to produce the type of sword in current demand (Sue-Tegai, Sue Aoe etc).

Although these markets declined the demand for weapons amongst the warring provinces remained high. The introduction of more efficient manufacturing methods resulted in what might be termed a form of mass production in Bizen and in Mino (Seki). As a result many very efficient weapons were produced but few of great artistic merit. As said previously the features seen tend to merge in to a bland standardised form making accurate appraisal very difficult.

By the beginning of the Edo period I would suggest the usefulness of the Gokaden nomenclature has almost disappeared.

The Features and legacy of the Gokaden:

A brief comment before going further. When studying this subject using the many excellent reference books available it is easy to become confused and to some extent misled. To emphasise a point features are often exaggerated. Also descriptions tend to be given in absolute terms i.e. “Enju always exhibit O-maru boshi” In reality nothing is that black and white there are always exceptions and what is often being described is what might be classed the norm.

Another point is the way different authors describe features can vary dramatically. For example according to most authorities (NBTHK, NTHK etc) the jihada of most schools is described in terms of combinations of itame, mokume and masame. However Nagayama believes the only school exhibiting itame was the Soshu School and he describes everything else as mokume.

In the following I have tried to use what I believe to be the majority view.

Yamato:



Fig 11. Yamato Shikkake

There are 5 main schools:

Senjuin, Taima, Hosho, Shikkake, Tegai

Sugata:- Powerful one might almost say utilitarian, but at the same time elegant. Blades exhibit a high shinogi and hira niku

Jigane: The hada will include some masame. In the case of Hosho this will be almost exclusively but in others it will be in combination with itame, nagare, or mokume. At its best Yamato jigane can be extremely beautiful, rich in ji nie and other activity. Examples of ko-Senjuin and Taima blades can be stunning.

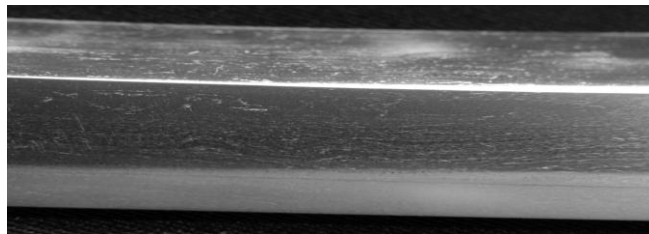


Fig 12. Yamato Shikkake hada

Hamon: predominantly suguha in various forms ko-nie deki.

Yamato swords were generally not signed; those that were were generally of a higher standard and for an important client (generalisation and open to abuse).

Yamato swords are uncommon. The majority of extant examples are from the Tegai School.

Yamato smiths travelled to temples beyond their base in Nara and took their methodology with them. As a result there are a number of rural or schools outside of the Yamato district that exhibit Yamato influence. Some of these include:

Kanabo, Mihara, Nio, Kongobei and Naminohira.

Yamashiro:



Fig.13 Awataguchi Norikuni

The Schools include:

Sanjo, Awataguchi, Ayanoki, Rai.

Sugata: Elegant slim blades of standard form of the time (i.e. becoming larger as they progressed through the Kamakura period). A number of Yamashiro smiths excelled at making Tanto and they include some of the best exponents of that art.

Jigane: There are many (me included) that believe the jigane produced by the Yamashiro smiths is the best ever made. Reaching its peak with the Awataguchi smiths the hada comprised of a very tight and fine ko-itame which is covered in bright and beautiful ji-nie and chickei. Described as Nashiji (pear skin hada) it is stunningly beautiful and unique to the Awataguchi School. At their best Rai, Enju and Hizen hada come close but do not quite reach the same level of refinement. Some examples also combined nagare and mokume to this tight ko-itame base. In the case of Rai and Enju dark areas of plain steel known as Rai-hada or Enju hada respectively can also be seen.



Fig 14. Awataguchi "Nashiji" hada

Hamon: variations of suguha in ko-nie which is bright and clear. There is a great deal of activity within the hamon with inazuma, kinsuji and sunagashi all appearing but on a very fine scale.

The later generation Rai smiths (Kunitsugu and Kunimitsu) were increasingly influenced by Soshu workmanship and late in the Kamakura period Yamashiro work (Rai) becomes more flamboyant in hamon design and hada so that many of the unique Yamashiro features diminish.

Alongside the schools mentioned above there are a number that have been linked to the Yamashiro tradition either via family links or technical exchange. These include:

Enju, Ukai, Aoe, Echizen Rai and Chikuzen Rai

Bizen:

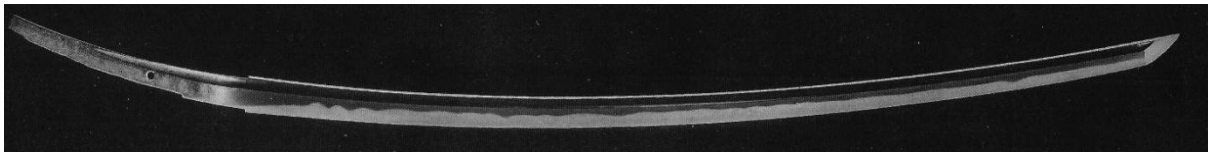


Fig 15. Ichimonji

Long before the involvement of Go-Toba there was well established sword manufacturing in the Kibi region of Japan. Bizen and neighbouring Bitchu were recognised as iron and steel working centres. They were richly supplied with raw material in the form of sand iron being washed from the Chugoku Highlands down the three rivers which dissected the region. The Aoe School of Bitchu sat alongside the Takahashi and what was to become the Fukuoka Ichimonji School the Asahi.

As mentioned earlier the Ko-Bizen and Ko-Aoe schools were active and producing work much in line with the typical style of the times. Post Go-Toba one starts to see a blossoming of individuality and the relatively quiet ko-Ichimonji work transforms in to something altogether more flamboyant and eye catching.

The demand and popularity of Bizen swords continued to grow, so much so that the majority of extant koto blades seen today are of Bizen Origin. In the latter part of the 20th century the renowned Scholar Han Bing Siong calculated that of 10,000 Juyo swords more than 40% were Bizen.

The Bizen tradition include many schools and sub-schools. To truly do them justice would require a much longer time than available today. So I would ask the many Bizen enthusiasts who might be looking at this to forgive me if I only mention what I consider the "Major Players".

The first recognised and documented swords that I am aware of are attributed to ko-Bizen. Shortly after this we see Ko-Ichimonji. Post Go-Toba the Ichimonji School blossomed, initially in Fukuoka and then in three other Ichimonji schools. Overlapping the Ichimonji School and continuing beyond their period of activity the Osafune School was established on the third river in the region, the Yoshii. As we progress through the Nambokucho the Oei School develops and moving in to the Muromachi the Soden Bizen appeared.

There were very many other schools or groups of schools manufacturing within Bizen at this time.

It is generally accepted that production ceased during the Tensho period when the Yoshii River experienced a catastrophic flood.

Sugata- Changed over the extensive life of the school and either originated or followed many of the trends of the time. However many translated references refer to both Koshi-zori and Uchi-zori as being specifically Bizen features. It has to be said that neither of these are unique to Bizen and certainly early Yamashiro work exhibits both forms of sori.

Jigane- Is a combination of itame and Mokume. In the majority of Bizen jigane there is a marked absence of ji-nie. However one key feature regarded as a Bizen indicator is the presence of Utsuri. Appearing as a pale shadow between hamon and shinogi, utsuri can take many forms. In most Bizen work it is classified as either bo or midare utsuri and its presence and form can be a great help in

kantei. While present in the work of other schools it is by far most frequently seen in the work of Bizen Schools. Early Bizen steel is often described as looking “soft”.

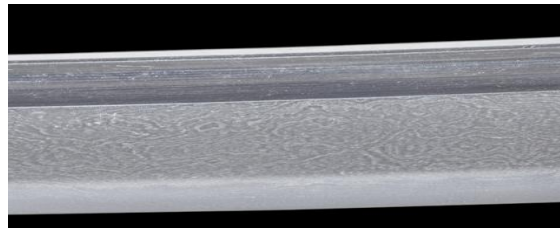


Fig 16. Bizen Hada

Hamon- There was a wide range of Hamon styles produced by Bizen smiths. They are perhaps best known for the flamboyant Ichimonji style choji-midare which boils up towards the shinogi but there are many variations of this both in terms of scale and activity. One consistent feature is that the hamon is created almost exclusively of nioi. While it is true that some Osafune smiths produced ko-nie in their work its frequency and brightness does not compare to that seen in Yamashiro, Yamato and Soshu work.

Alongside Seki in Mino Bizen started to employ different production methods in to the Sengoku period. The Kazu-uchi mono blades were in the majority, although a number of smiths were making good quality special order blades as well.

As mentioned above production came to end in the Tensho period when the area was devastated by a flood.

The popularity of Bizen work was such that a number of Shinto swords worked continuously to try and recreate the features which made Bizen so popular. Prominent amongst these were the Ishido smiths who copied the Ichimonji style hamon. Creating utsuri was a major challenge and achieved with only partial success in later schools.

Soshu:-



Fig. 17 Go-Yoshihiro

If I may I will start with a confession. I have not seen many Soshu blades and have not studied them in as much detail as I would like. Of those I have seen two stand out as possibly two of the most beautiful swords I have ever had the privilege of holding. Both were tanto and early works, the first a Shintogo Kunimitsu tanto the second Mumei but with a Shu-mei and Tokubetsu Juyo paper to Yukimitsu. These were unbelievably beautiful. However once you progress beyond the early Soshu period, by which I mean after Masamune, Sadamune, Norishige and Go blades, works become much more “blousy” They seem to attempt to incorporate every feature known to man and invent a few more. The result is something course and unbalanced.

I believe it is generally accepted that a large factor in determining the Soshu characteristics as exemplified by the work of Masamune, regarded by many as the greatest sword smith of all time, is that he worked steel at and quenched it from much higher temperatures enabling him to develop a huge amount of activity in the form of very bright nie both in Ji-and hamon. To be able to do this without destroying a blade required exceptional forging skill.

Sugata: Originally Soshu blades fell in line with the sugata of the late Kamakura period. As they progressed in to the Nambokucho blades became larger, thinner and the kissaki lengthened.

Tanto produced by Kunimitsu, Yukimitsu and Norishige were relatively small and similar to the work of other schools. Masamune produced a number of unique tanto in a “kitchen knife” form. Progressing in to the nambokucho tanto became longer and included sori.

Jigane- In the early period Soshu jigane resembled the tight ko-itame of Yamashiro work. As they progressed you start to see nagare in combination with the ko-itame and an increasing amount of activity in the form of larger ji-nie Chickei Yo etc. As you progress through the Nambokucho and enter in to the mid Soshu period the hada becomes larger itame and looks much rougher (I would argue courser) and the nie increases in size and forms clumps. In the work of Akihiro and Hiromitsu this increase in activity illustrates itself in the form large groupings of ji-nie, Yubashiri and Tobiyaki. In later Soshu work much of the distinctive features of Soshu begin to disappear and the hada becomes a tight Itame.

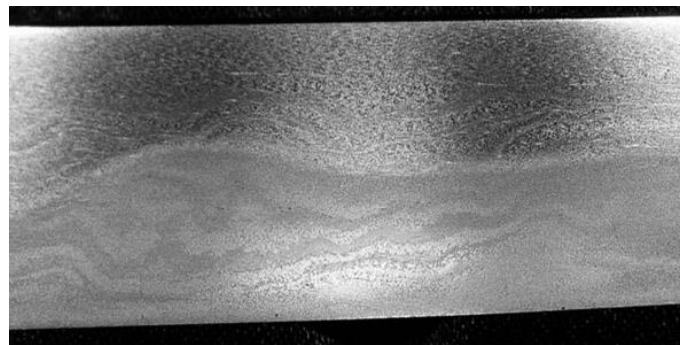


Fig 18. Norishige hada

Hamon- Midare loose with a great deal of larger nie and other activity. It has a natural uncontrived appearance. Later work introduced Hitatsura.

I would like to add a word of caution and a further confession from my side. I admit to having a strong preference for the very conservative and quiet work of early Yamashiro smiths. So I tend to shy away from pieces that are hugely more active such as Ichimonji and some Soshu pieces. Having said earlier two of the finest blades I have ever seen are early Soshu works these were both much quieter than what has increasingly become recognised as Soshu tradition. Later work is altogether more contrived and in my limited judgement it appears crude. The balance which demonstrates itself so clearly in much top Kamakura period work is lost. I am also cautious when reading comments such as “ *The broken appearance of the hamon which might in other work appear a fault in this smiths swords is transformed to something of high art and beauty*” No if it is a fault in one it is

in another. Some of these descriptions begin to sound like a story relating to “The Emperor’s new clothes”.

At its best Soshu work is unsurpassable but there is also a lot of much lesser Soshu work which enjoys a reputation based more on marketing and hype than the work itself.

Related Schools include- **Hasebe, Nobukuni, Samonji and Sengo.**

Mino:

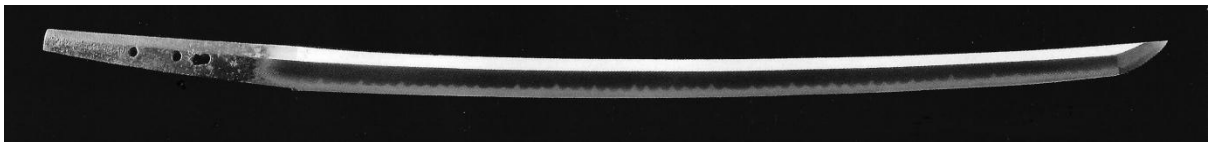


Fig 19. Kanemoto

The last of the five traditions appeared towards the end of the Kamakura period. As previously mentioned the founders of The Mino Den were Kaneuji who came from the Yamato Tegai School and Kinju (Kaneshige) who originated in Echizen. First noted as working in Shizu legend says that Kaneuji was nicknamed Yamato Shizu when studying the Soshu methodology in Kamakura.

Early Mino work demonstrated its origins very clearly combining the features of Yamato and Soshu.

Sugata- Shape was very much standard for the times. In the late Kamakura the mihaba was not exceptionally wide and the kissaki no more than an extended Chu-Kissaki. As one progresses in to the Nambokucho O-kissaki appear on much larger swords.

Jigane- In Yamato Shizu works the hada combines itame and masame (nagare) in a beautifully sinuous and naturalistic form. It is rich in ji nie and chickei the overall appearance is of a “liveliness” and uncontrived elegance.

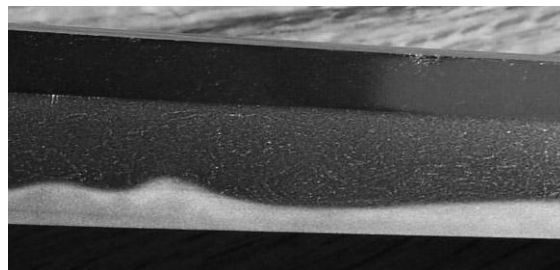


Fig 20. Mino Jigane (Yamato Shizu)

Hamon- The hamon is formed of nie running in a thick nioi-guchi. There is a great deal of activity in the form of inazuma, kinsuji and sunagashi. It interacts beautifully with the jigane creating an almost casual and relaxed appearance while maintaining a very powerful impression.

Following the initial period students of Kaneuji moved to Naoe and founded the Naoe-Shizu school. As one might expect the workmanship had much in common with Yamato-Shizu. However the hamon becomes a noticeably more controlled and orderly O-midare or gunome-midare. The level of activity also diminishes to some extent although sunagashi and togari-ba are both seen.

Later production focussed around the town of Seki and we move in to the broad group already defined as “Sue-Seki” Some of the best known smiths appear at this time. Early generations of the Kanemoto and Kanesada lines were highly respected. Kanemoto blades were regarded as especially sharp. In works of the Shodai the first signs of the famous sanbansugi hamon start to appear. This was taken further by later generations to what became a much more formulaic and contrived pattern which is so instantly recognisable. At this time one increasingly sees the jigane of Mino work described as showing “whiteness” and containing shirrake utsuri. Within the many generations of Kanemoto and Kanesada one begins to see the development of mass production and large numbers of bundle swords were produced under those signatures.

I mentioned earlier that Mino had perhaps the greatest influence of all schools on later sword production. There are two main reasons for this assertion. Firstly it is suggested by a number of authorities that the two piece “Kabuse” construction method originated in Mino (although it appeared in Bizen at much the same time). This was the starting point of the improved production method that enabled both of these schools to mass produce constant and serviceable swords.

Secondly the technology developed in Mino was taken throughout the country and taught to many local schools. I would argue that with only a few exceptions the majority of Shinto schools have their foundation in the Mino tradition.

Conclusion:-

As mentioned previously by the end of the muromachi the differences between the traditions have started to merge and by the time we enter the Edo period they become almost meaningless.

Although relevant to only a short period of sword history the invention of the Gokaden whenever and by whomever it was conceived offers students a very useful tool. It offers an extremely useful filter enabling us to narrow down a field of research in to more manageable bites of information and hopefully arrive more rapidly to an accurate conclusion.

A question most of us ask when starting out is which of the five traditions is best? I can guarantee that if you were to ask the question here you would have as many different answers as there are people. Each of the five traditions produced some exceptional smiths and each tradition could be regarded the best in certain aspects.

In pure numbers The Bizen tradition was the most successful and it could be argued that this was because they produced a good product that the market wanted.

The schools of Yamashiro in their own time and ever since have been regarded as supremely skilful and makers of the finest steel.

Yamato made consistently good blades and at their best were comparable to any of the other schools. Much of their technology formed the foundation of later work

Soshu possibly the most innovative of the schools and like many brilliant movements very short lived. In its short life it produced some of the most famous and highly skilled smiths of all time. It greatly influenced later koto production in all other traditions.

Mino- as said above innovative and influential. Some truly fine smiths developed their skills within the Mino tradition.

So determination of which is best is at least for me impossible. There is too much subjectivity and personal taste and prejudice involved in such a decision.

We return to the basic rule that often as collectors we forget.

First and foremost buy a sword because you like it.

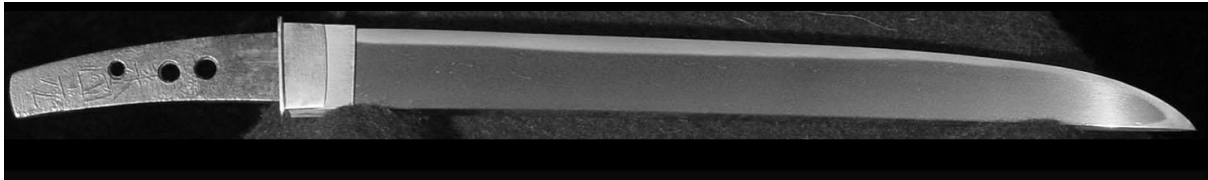


Fig 21. Rai Kunimitsu tanto

Bibliography and references:

As always when compiling an introduction of this nature I attempt to cross refer several references and follow what appears to be the majority view. I have listed these works below. However any errors appear in the above text are purely my own.

I am also grateful to a number of people who allowed me to use their images to illustrate this work and again I have listed those sources below:

Reference material:

A Journey to the Gokaden **Tanobe Michihiro**

The Connoisseur's book of Japanese Swords **Kokan Nagayama**

Facts and Fundamentals of Japanese swords **Nobuo Nakahara**

Nihonto Koza (various volumes) **Drs. Homma and Sato (Harry Afu Watson translation)**

Swords of the Samurai **Victor Harris and Nobuo Ogasawara**

1976 Special exhibition catalogue **Tokyo National Museum**

Japanese collection catalogue **Stibbert Museum**

Additional Images:

Mr. Darcy Brockbank www.Nihonto.ca

Mr Fred Weisberg www.nihonto.com

Mr. Andrew Quirt www.nihonto.us

Mr. Ian Chapman www.nihonto.org.uk

Mr. Mike Hickman-Smith