

Dr tokuno *continues*

T: Besides SUGATA as sculpture and JI-GANE as the foundation material that creates the beauty of the Japanese sword, we may see one more, the HAMON, which is in common with abstract pictures. Simple SUGUHA, or OBUSA CHOJI, which has similarity to the cherry-blossoms of YOSHINO, or GUNOME-MIDARE, which is told as produced by SEKI smiths observing the mountains around them. (*ss note*: MINO GUNOME HA has the appearance of mountain ridge lines.) Such are the abstract forms found in HAMON.

Especially in the late MUROMACHI we find a conspicuous expression of abstract form appearing in HAMON. Abstraction, such as TATSUTA-GAWA, grew in development into the middle EDO period. They wrote words by HAMON. It has picturesque beauty rather than a uniform pattern.

We may then judge the beauty of the sword by the composite harmony of these three elements, SUGATA, JI-GANE and HAMON.

ss: By the way, what was the origin of NIHONTO?

T: As a common sense, the HANCHO-TO 半張刀, having a cutting edge on one side of a curved structure with the added feature of a SHINOGI is what is called NIHONTO. Before the time of NARA and until the middle of HEIAN, the only swords in existence were CHOKU-TO 直刀 or straight swords.

ss: The time of SHOTOKU-TAISHI.

T: Yes. The solid institution of NARA/HEIAN CHO-TEI 朝廷 (government). They just accepted the culture which the KENTOSHI embassies brought from China. Finally the charge of the KENTOSHI minister fell to SUGAWARA MICHIZANE who was able to suspend the dispatch, ending Chinese TO dynasty influence. This, of course, was politically and economically very risky. But they tried to assimilate this imported culture, and develop it. Over time it was made ripe and achieved its full flowering as the peculiar



Dr TOKUNO at night

FUJIWARA culture of the middle HEIAN.

This same time also found the corruption and social dissipation by the KUGE bureaucrat class.** By degrees, it became necessary for the BUSHI class to resolve these social problems. For it was the BUSHI's power that was needed to respond to the order of that time. At first, as the governing class, the KUGE tried to use or employ the BUSHI. Indebted of the KUGE in this way, the BUSHI were also given their station in society. They were able to establish a secure position socially and economically in the middle to late HEIAN.

(***ss note*: A letting go of responsible governance by the aristocratic class in favor of social dalliance and the creation and enduring refinements of the true Japanese arts, which define FUJIWARA culture, allowed a rife decline in common social order. Bribery prevailed over law. The KUGE simply hired the BUSHI as keepers of order, which then also elevated the Samurai class as the only real social power.)

Do Takuma

ss: Then, the history of BUSHI began...

T: The BUSHI's "Heart's Desire" was the realization of the KAMAKURA government of MINAMOTO YORITOMO. At this time began the unprecedented dual government by the KUGE and BUSHI.

During the early process of the BUSHI's rise, TAIRA MASAKADO touched off a rebellion among the Samurai. Where before there had been no concept of a soldier's party, one district governor made and formed an armed group. In a word, it was the first appearance of the root of political power for the BUSHI. But we could say he was a kind of hero because he challenged the rotten government of the KUGE. His battle is what is now called a Coup d'etat.

(ss note: MASAKADO's fight was largely among his peers who were marshalers of KUGE order. He killed his uncle and was in turn killed by his cousin. He had called himself "New Emperor" and was certainly challenging the powers that be.)

Earlier, following the move of the MIKADO capitol to HEIAN-KYO, Emperor KAMMU sent his soldiers on several EZO subjugations. During these campaigns, the use of horses proved that the shock of cutting at such speed was much too strong. To mitigate relief, they invested the SORI or curvature to the blade of the sword.

ss: We may say SORI was made at the time of TAIRA MASAKADO.

T: So, - there was SORI that still remains on KOGARASUMARU which was given to MASAKADO for his subjugation of EZO. We could say this time was a junction and origin for NIHONTO.

(ss note: KOGARASUMARU is famous as the first curved sword made by AMAKUNI in TAI-HO 701. There were several such pieces, of which, two or three remain.)

ss: They were changed both historically and in sword style?

T: Yes. Then, ZEN-KU-NEN 前九年 and GO-SANnoEKI 後三年役
(ss: 9 year rebellion of ABE YORITOKI ending in 1057 and the "Later 3 years War" - MUTSU rebellion suppressed by MINAMOTO YOSHIIYE) took place in the late HEIAN. The existence of BUSHI as an armed group had been established and the

basic form of NIHONTO was complete as a familiar style at that time. So, we might say from the time of TAIRA MASAKADO (TEN-KEI Rebellion 940) the Japanese sword began to appear with SORI and by ZEN-KU-NEN / GO-SANnoEKI (1060 to 1090) we see the complete appearance of the NIHONTO form.

ss: BUSHI and Japanese swords were born together.

T: Yes, at the last of the HEIAN, the HEISHI had fallen down to the West country (TAIRA family pushed from the heights of power into the sea of DANnoURA) by MINAMOTO YORITOMO, who made the KAMAKURA government at that time. This is the birth of the real BUSHI's government.

A portrait created at this time is of MINAMOTO YORITOMO. In the portrait, he carries a KENUKI-TACHI.



MINAMOTO YORITOMO

I guess this picture tells that YORITOMO tried to emphasize his status as KUGE because KENUKI-TACHI has already become the sword of the previous time - an affectation of the first stage of NIHONTO.

Dr tokuno

So, at the late HEIAN, this kind of TACHI style had already become a ceremonial sword and beyond practical use. A symbol of authority, it is finished as a practical weapon.

It is the same as the symbol sword of KANAZUCHI TACHI of the time of the ancient tomb.

ss: I see, it seems the KANAZUCHI were not bad swords...

T: I don't know about those made later, but at least the swords made at that time were respectable. They were not for practical use because the smiths and craftsmen produced very polite and attractive pieces. There is no doubt those were first class swords and works of art. Because they were not used, they were not consumed. So, we can also tell they were fine art.

Or, - in the first place, who could present such silly stuff to MINAMOTO YORITOMO? - the guy (would) need many lives...

Don't you think so? (laughter)

ss: By the way, your TOKO-TAIKAN 刀工大鑑 seems really famous as the price book. How do you decide price for individual blades?

T: Well. I consider the actual price of (the) trading (markets). At the same time, I must make an association with that and a consideration of the origins of placing value for NIHONTO, DAITUKE 大付け.

ss: This is called IRETSU 位列, a "list" isn't it?

T: (Yes,) so IRETSU was a valuation method which was created by the HONAMI family at the last of the MUROMACHI period. According to them, things made by humans were just half the value of those things created by Gods. - As five hundred against a thousand. So DAIKINSU GOHYAKUMAI 代金子五百枚 500 leaves, was the most superior sword produced by humans at that time. Afterward, there was a lost (burned) sword with DAIKINSU value of 700 leaves. That was obviously inflation! (smiling)

ss: ...it came under the province of God! (laughter)

T: Maybe so. Considering 500 leaves as the highest, they set the value of a sword against harvest, rarity and JI-DAI. From 500 leaves to 5. Or 3 RYO (両) for poor quality.

At the same time, there is the market price of dealing in Japan. If in this case there is only one sword sold, that price would become the market price. In a sense, it is like an estimate at an auction house. It fluctuates...

You may look at my book and find it says 1000 MAN YEN. But an actual price might be 300 MAN YEN, - or perhaps you can not sell it for 100 MAN YEN, or less...

Instead, you may sell it for 3000 MAN YEN.

No one knows.

So perhaps you can just use it for its value as a reference.

But of course, swords must be SHO-SHIN (absolutely genuine), good polish, good condition, healthy. And a lot of consideration to how much effort the smith paid to the individual sword.

At least this is the standard to which the prices are arranged in the TOKO-TAIKAN. If a piece can not fill those requirements, it does not compete and a price must fall very low.

You must know that.

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The readers may feel free to submit limited questions for Dr TOKUNO, to be forwarded and answered in a following interview. Submit: **sho-shin**, Box 4469, Arcata, CA 95518