



MURAMASA

how to distinguish the generations

鑓鐔手練銀の名刃

MURAMASA: how to distinguish the generations

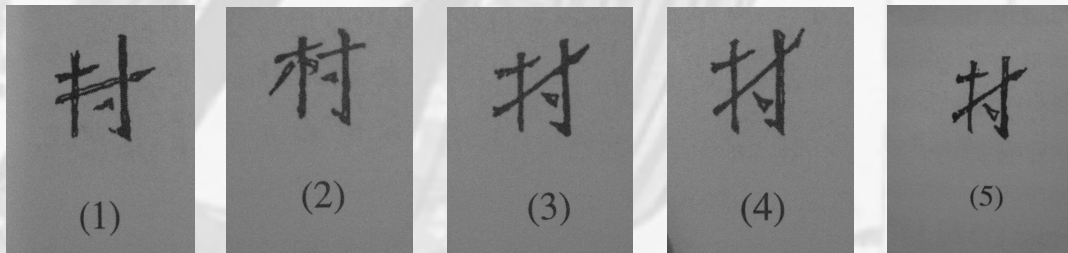
'MURA'-characters

1 & 2 are found in the first year of Bunki, 1501

3 & 4 are mostly found dated blades from Eishô (1504-1521)

3 & 5 are found on dated blades in Tenshō (1573-1592)

Character 3 is found in every period, especially in Eishō and later. This Character is found on almost all gimei Muramasa blades.



'MASA'-characters

1 is found on works in the Bunki period (1501-1504)

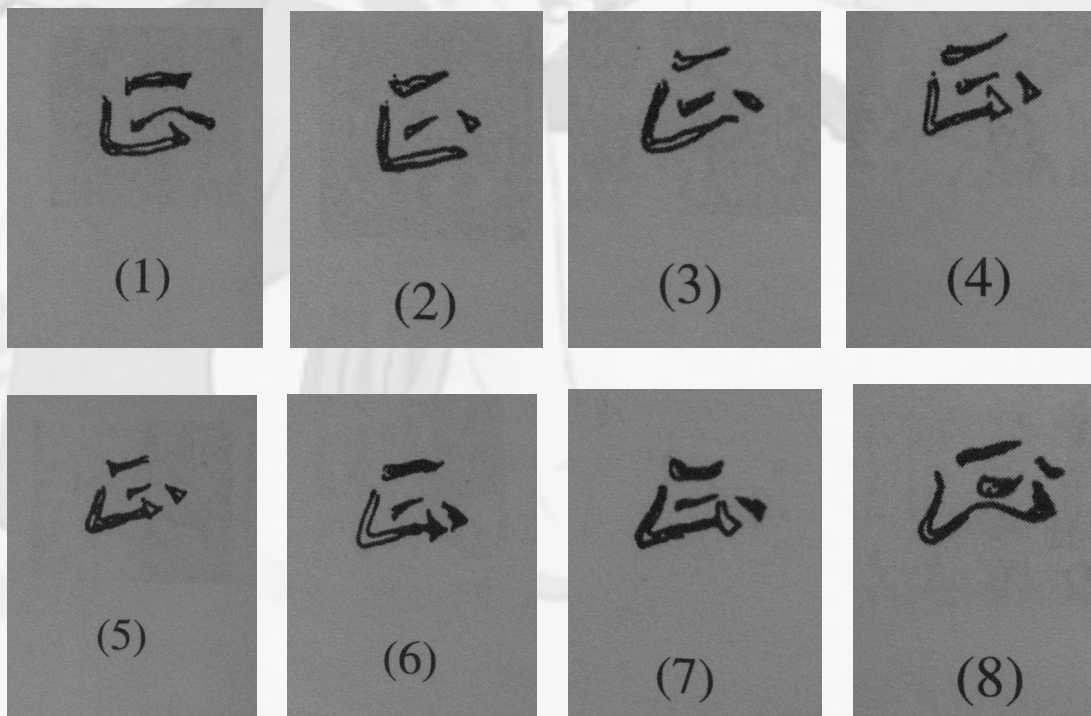
(Satô Kanzan mentioned that it is this same character that can be found on Masashige and Masazane dated blades in this same period)

2 & 3 & 4 & 5 are found on dated blades in Eishō (1504-1521) and Daiei (1521-1528)

5 & 6 are found in Tenbun (1573-1592)

7 is found on the Tensho (1573-1592) dated works

8 is unclear but probably in Genki (1570-1573) and Tensho (1573-1592)



GENEALOGY

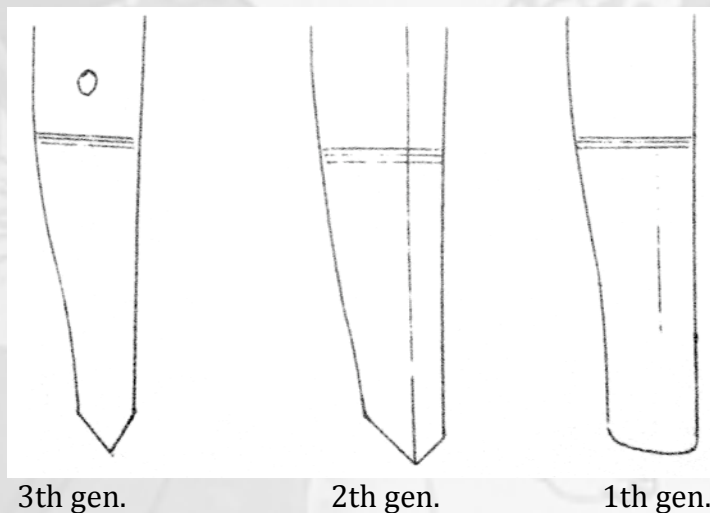
Although there are many theories about the active periods of the Muramasa generations, this should be the most acceptable one:

- 1th gen. Muramasa (Uemonnojô), Myôdai (f: Seki Kanemura) (active 1501-)
- 2th gen. Muramasa (Fujiwara Ason) (1521-1555)
- 3th gen. Muramasa (1558-1592)
- 4th gen. Muramasa (1596-1615) changed his name to Masashige

NAKAGO-JIRI

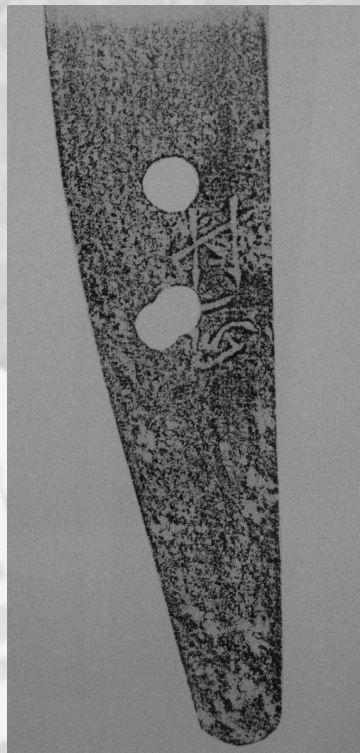
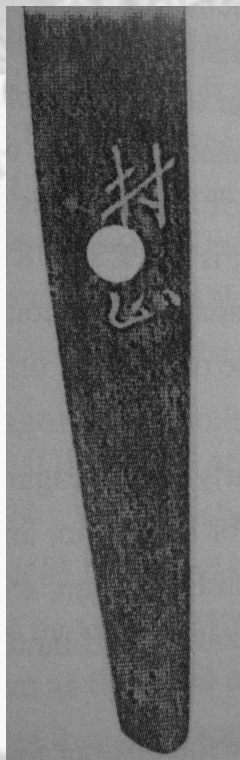
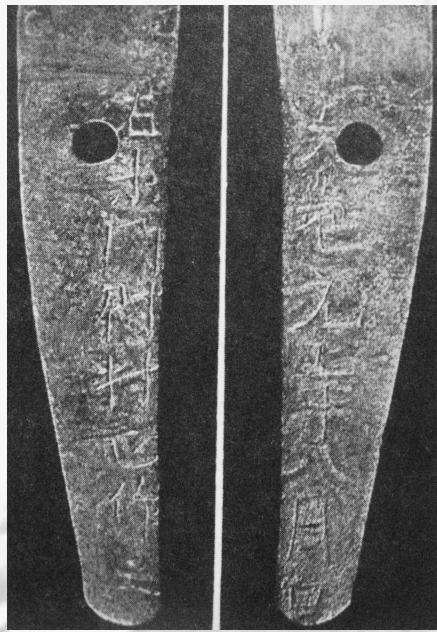
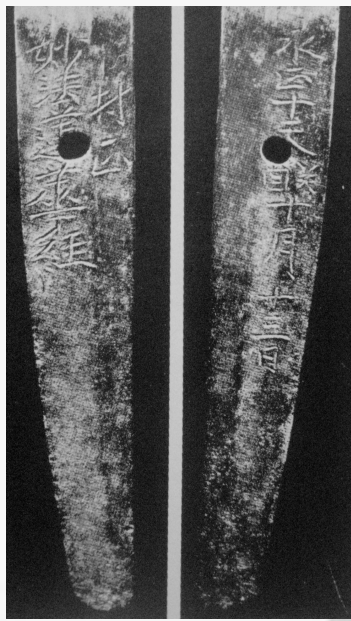
Another method to distinguish the generations is to look at the form of the nakago-jiri. Of course one must expect variations and like always there are exceptions.

(According to Mr. Kataoka Ginsaku (article on 'Sengo Muramasa') 1th nakago-jiri belongs to the first generation and 3th nakago-jiri belongs to 3th generation. I do not agree with this.)

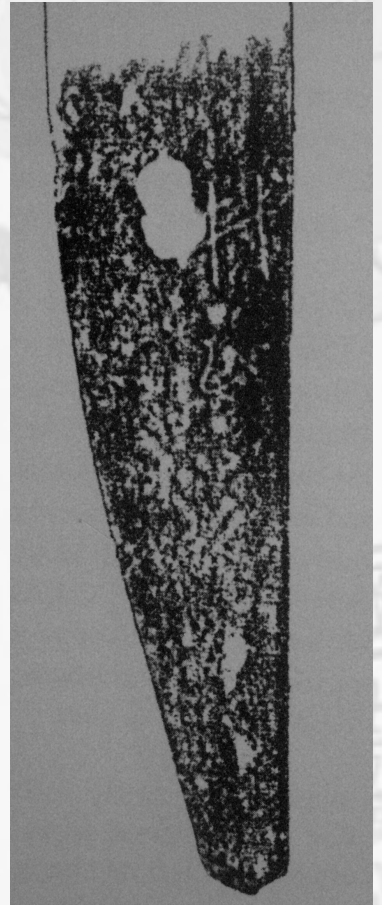
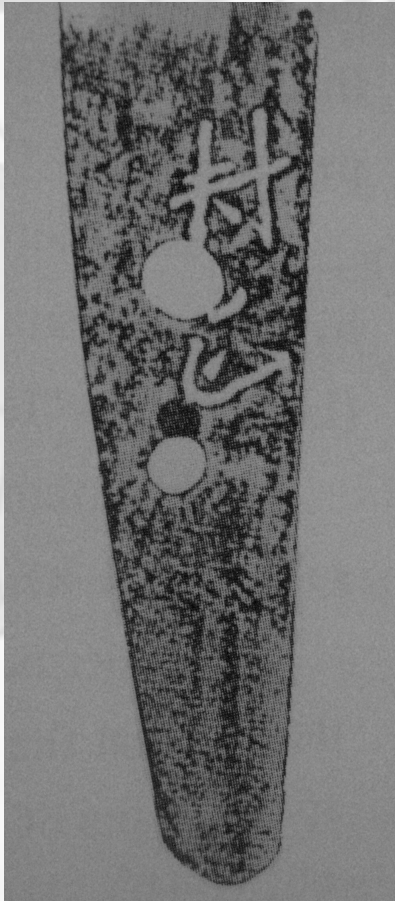
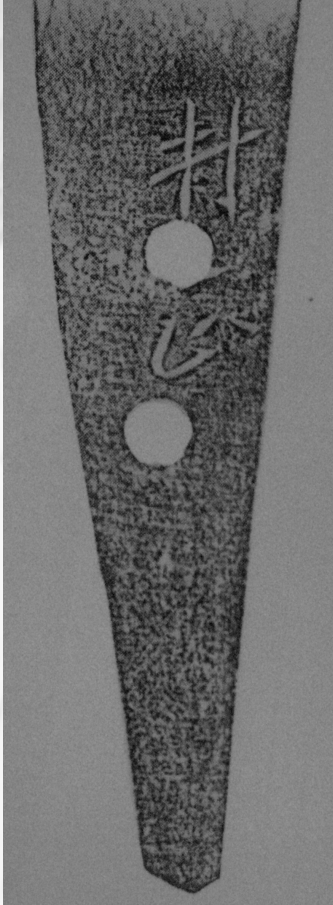
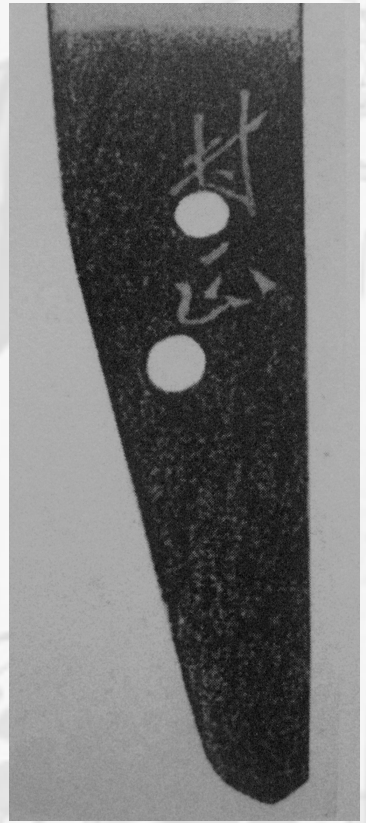
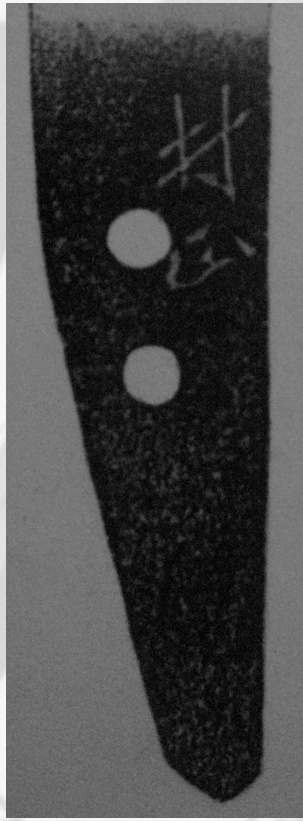
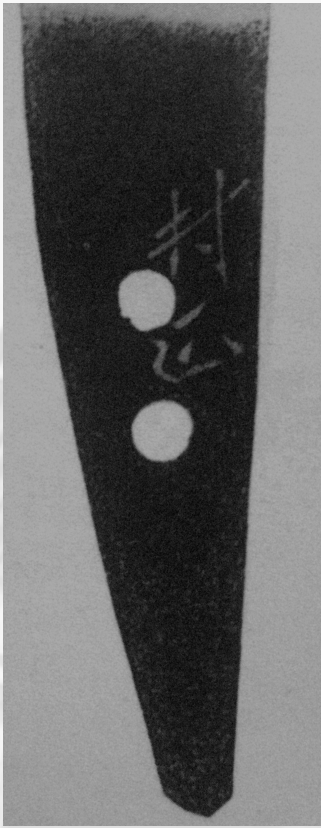


NAKAGO

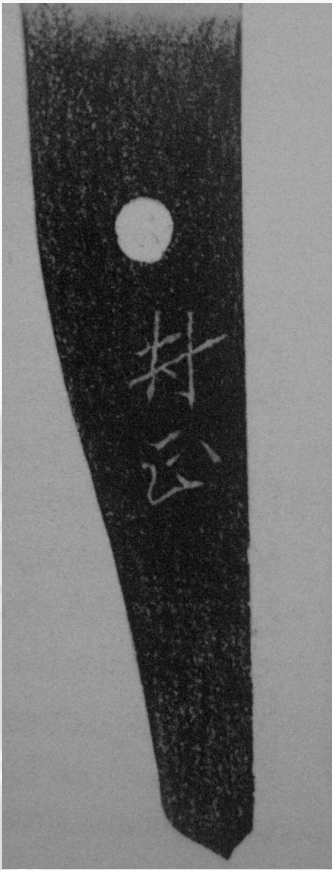
SHODAI MURAMASA



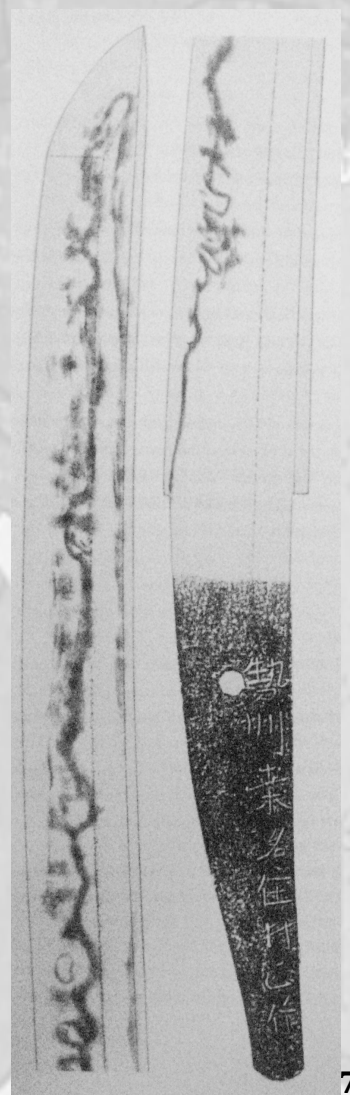
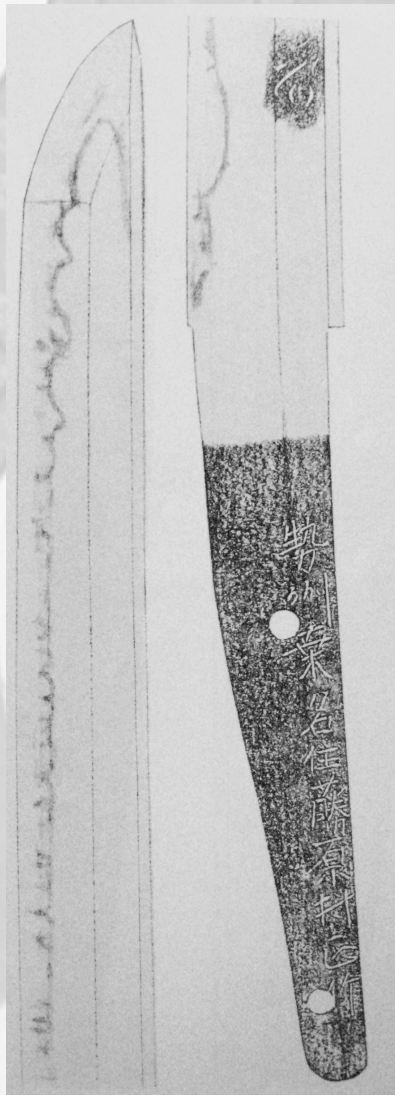
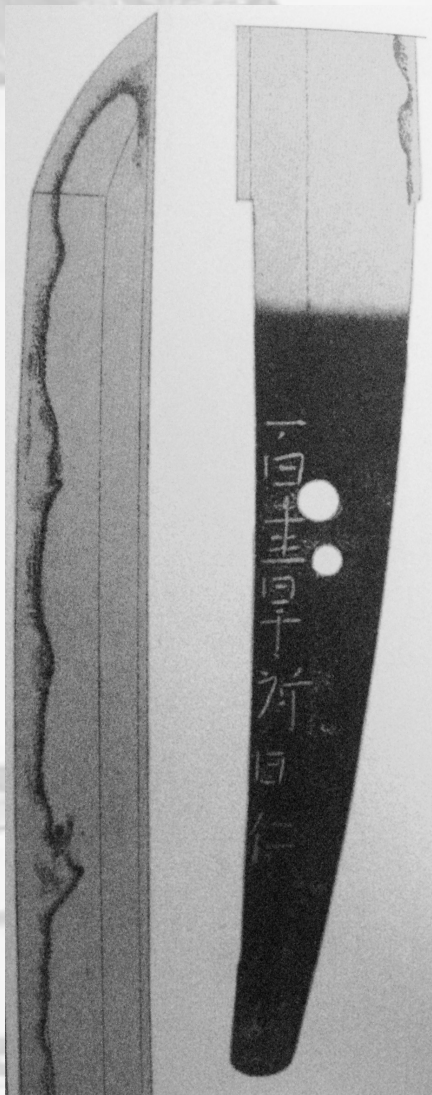
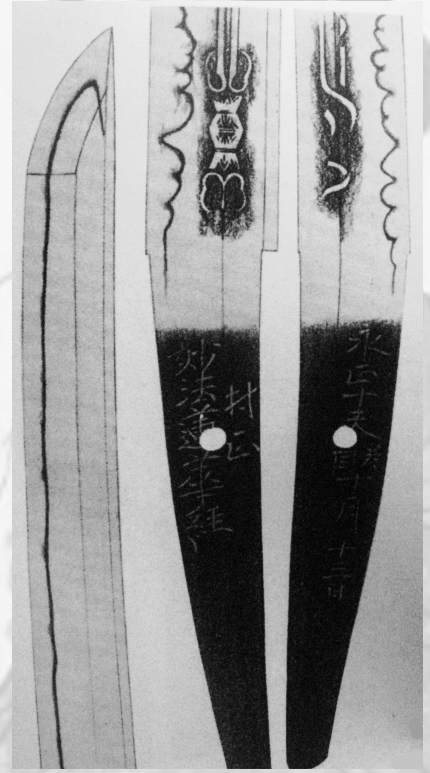
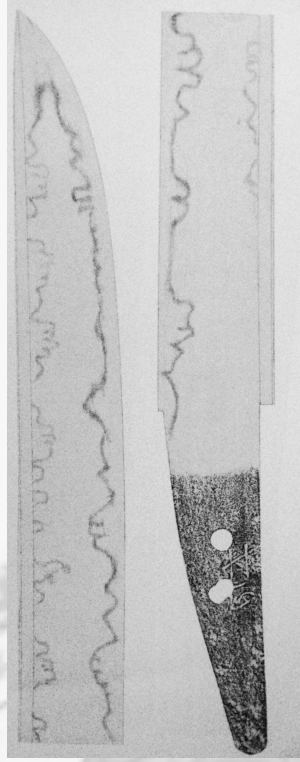
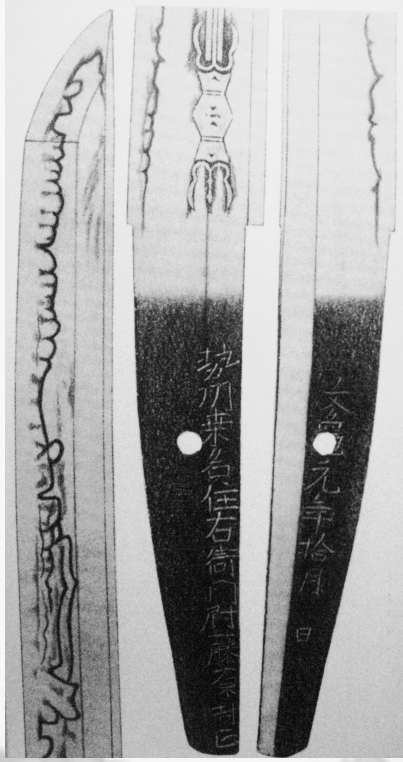
NIDAI MURAMASA



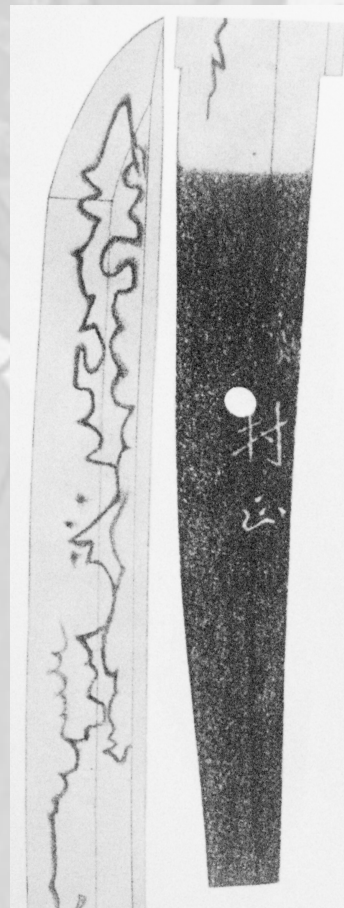
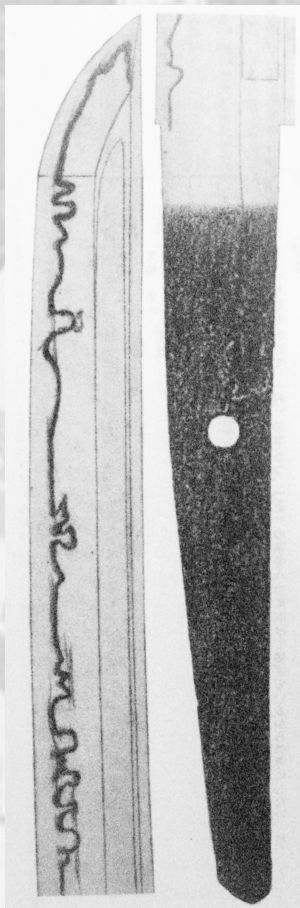
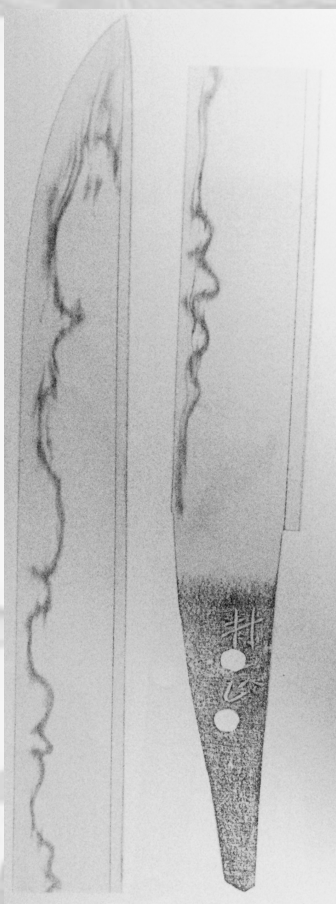
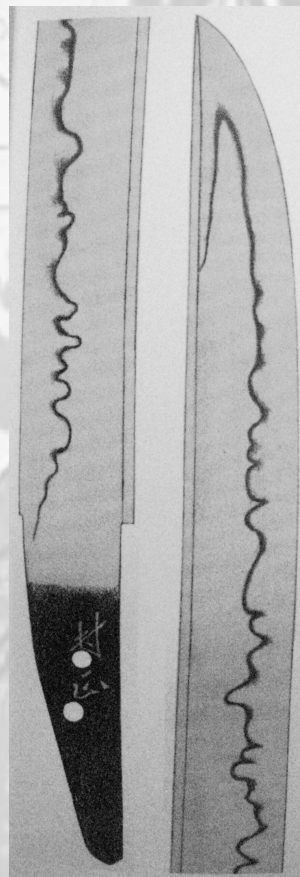
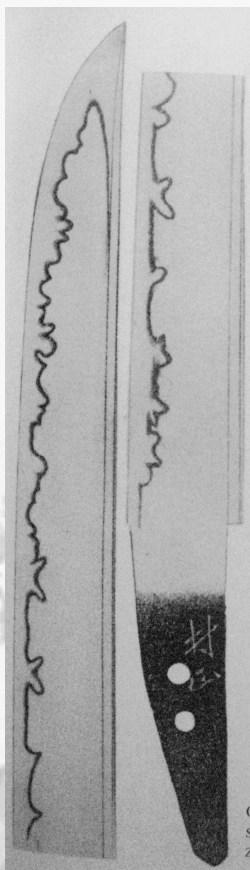
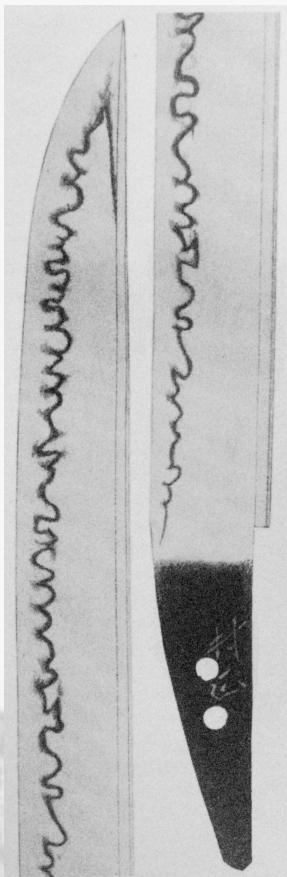
SANDAI MURAMASA

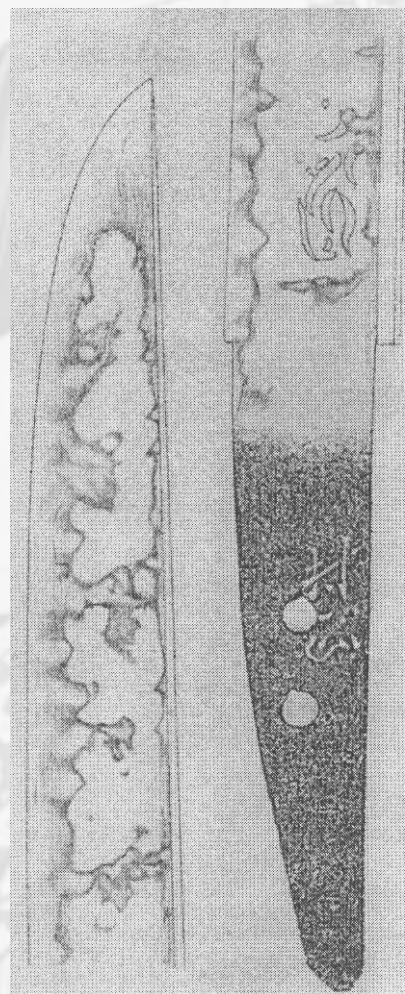
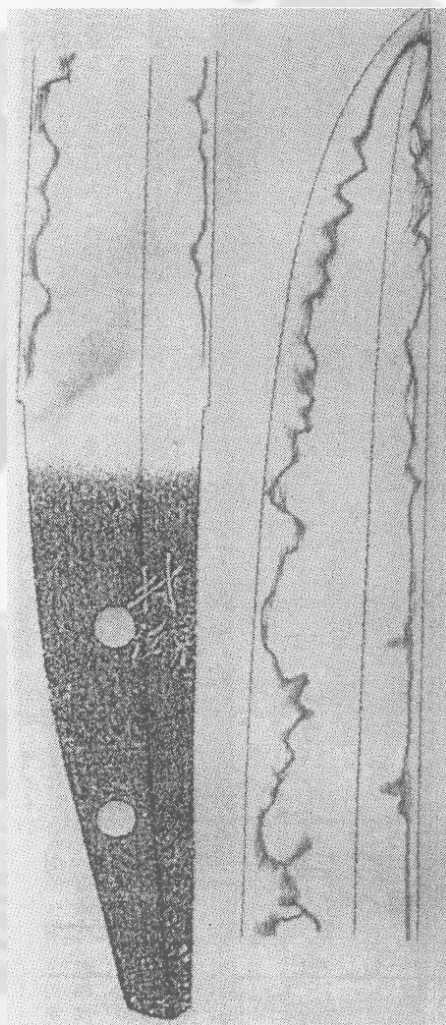
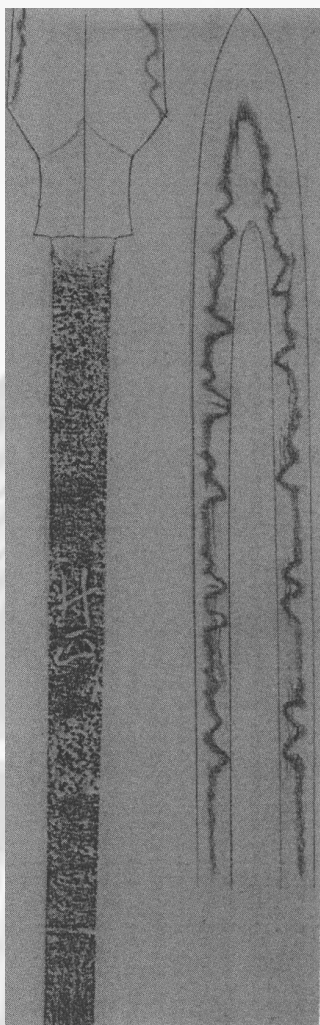


Shodai Muramasa

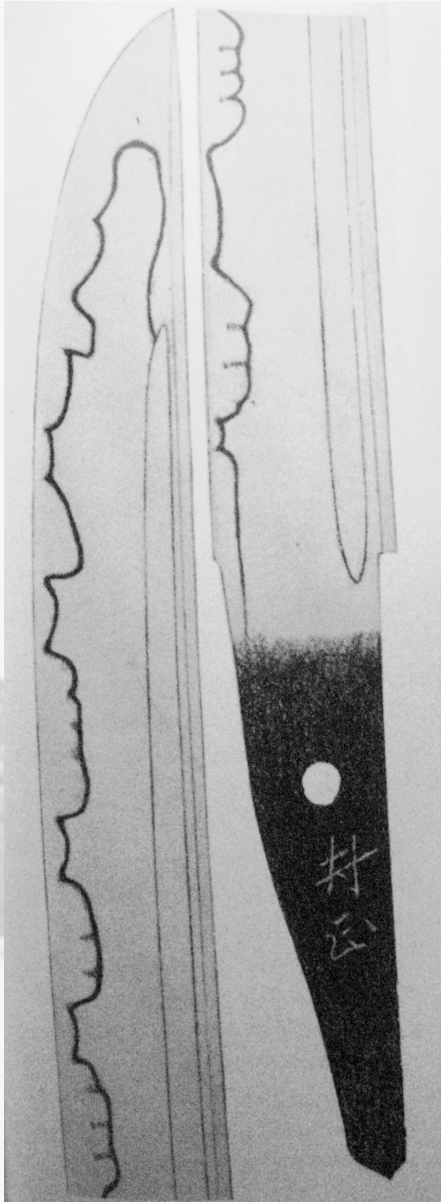


Nidai Muramasa



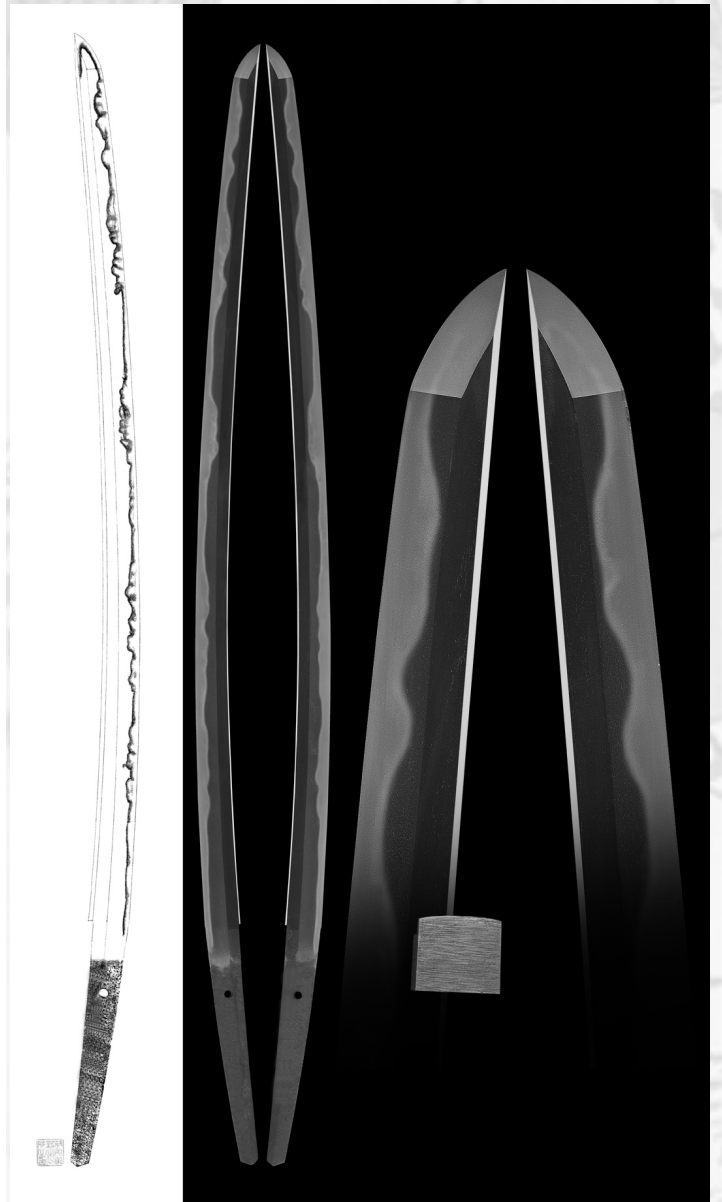
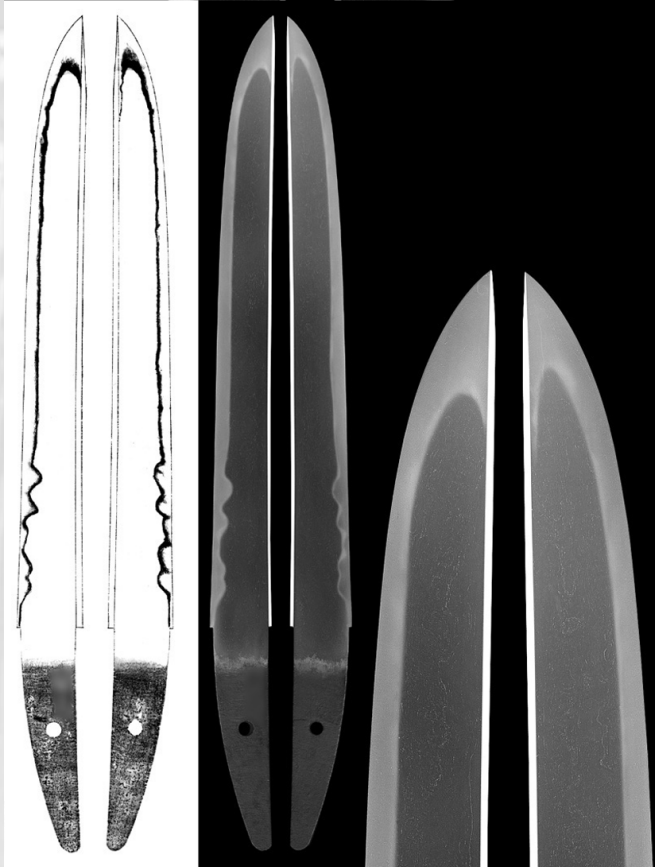
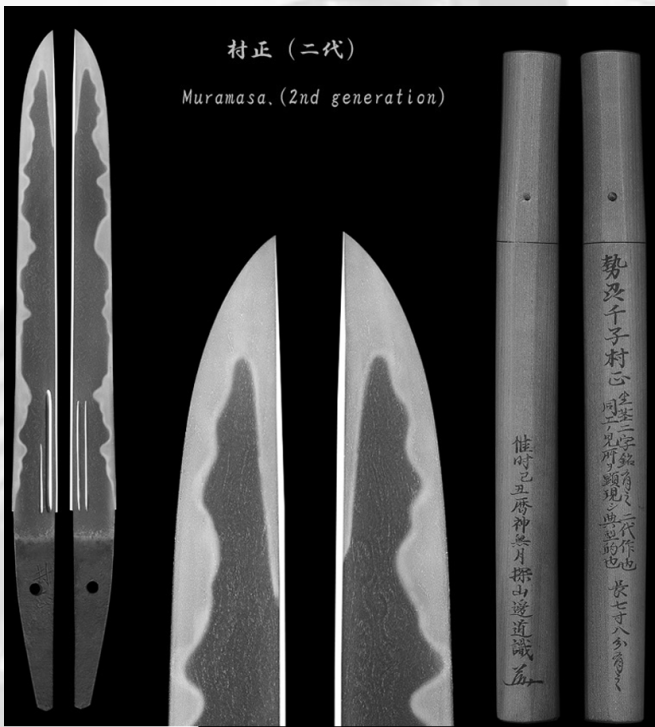


Sandai Muramasa



PICTURES of Nidai Muramasa

These blades are sold by Mr. Tsuruta (www.aoi-art.com).



Muramasa: cursed or witch hunting

Sengo Muramasa (千子 村正), founder of the Muramasa school, lived in the 16th century (Muromachi period). He's famous for his 'evil swords' but in first place he's a high class smith who made blades with extraordinary sharpness. The blades of the Muramasa school were admired by many warlords at that time.

The earliest work of the Muramasa school of Ise province is dated at 1501. It's believed that Sengo Muramasa was a student of Heianjo Nagayoshi.

Muramasa's swords fell out of favor with the Japanese government when Tokugawa Ieyasu became shogun, in 1603.

The reason for this began with the death of Ieyasu's eldest son Nobuyasu. It was said that Nobuyasu had a relationship with the Takeda clan (an opponent clan of the Tokugawa family). Therefore Oda Nobunaga ordered him to commit seppuku (1579). This seppuku was committed with a Muramasa wakizashi.

Ieyasu, who regretted the death of his son, remembered that his grandfather, lord Kiyoyasu, was hurt by a Muramasa katana (1535), and that when Ieyasu was young he had cut himself by a ko-gatana. In 1545 Ieyasu's father, Hirofusa, was attacked with a Muramasa wakizashi by an insane hereditary vassal. Later during the Sekigahara campaign Oda Yūrakusai brought Ieyasu the head of an enemy general. Ieyasu cut himself with the yari. Again it was a work made by Muramasa.

From this time (the death of his son), Ieyasu forbade his samurai, his vassals and all those who had sympathy with the Tokugawa clan to wear blades made by Muramasa and ordered to throw them away. Due to this order many signatures were removed or changed (Masamune, Muratada,...).

On the otherhand Muramasa also became famous in a good way. Opponents of the Tokugawa family admired Muramasa's work and trying to acquire one to bring good luck. This fact led to many forgeries. Even after Ieyasu's death, the Tokugawa family punished possession of a Muramasa blade by seppuku (story of lord Shigeyoshi with his 24 Muramasa blades in 1634). This Shigeyoshi collected this Muramasa blades because he thought the price would increase after the collapse of the Tokugawa clan. After this punishment owners of Muramasa blades became nervous and presented their blade to a Shinto shrine or removed the signature. A third option was selling it to an opponent of the Tokugawa clan but this was dangerous.

From this time many literary and Noh plays added an 'evil' Muramasa blade in their story. This led in the late 17th century to a superstition amongst the ordinary people. They started to think that a Muramasa sword could cause good or bad luck, domestic happiness or death (depending on the hataraki that was found in the blade or the form of the hamon). These ideas increased in the Edo period. Muramasa showed up more and more in kabuki plays, novels and artwork. You can compare it with our western witch hunting at that same period.

Legends were told about the swords. There's a legend that says that once you drawn a Muramasa blade it has to have blood, even if it's the owners blood. And there's also the legend about the leaves that swirled around the Masamune blade and that are cut by the Muramasa blade.

Even today Muramasa' name is used by many (Manga series, games, Marvel comics, swords in movies,...).

Nowadays it's up to you to answer the question if Muramasa's work is cursed or not.



DESCRIPTION

There are not many difference between the few generation if it concerns sugata, jitetsu or hamon. This is the only 'conservative' feature of the Muramasa school. Therefore I will describe them together. To distinguish the generations you have to focus on the nakago and the mei as described above.

SUGATA

Katana's are mostly around 69,7cm (2 shaku 3 sun) with shallow sori (sometimes saki-sori) and chu-kissaki. Wakizashi's are mostly around 42,2cm (1 shaku 4sun) and tanto 27,3cm (9 sun). Muramasa made his blades with a high shinogi. A wide mihaba with a thin kasane is the most common.

Although we see most blades with mitsu mune, there are many with iori mune.

We also find some yari blades. No matter if it's a katana, wakizashi, tanto or yari, all of them have a very sharp impression.

HORIMONO

Bohi and futasuji hi are find in katana, some of them have bonji or ken. Many tanto have all kind of horimono. They are also slightly larger than usual and are placed fairly high.

JITETSU

Kitae is a tight ko-itame or itame mostly with flowing masame and covered with ji-nie. It has a feeling of hardness and looks like Mino jitetsu of that same time.

HAMON

The hamon is nioi based with a tight nioguchi covered with ko-nie. We find many blades were the hamon splendidly uniforms on both sides but although this is a kantei point it is not always a must. Hamon can be notare, notare-midare, o-midare, choji-midare, gunome, gunome togari, sanbonsugi, hako midare and hitatsuri. Mostly the hamon is exorbitant. If the hamon is more quiet, we often find koshiba at the start.

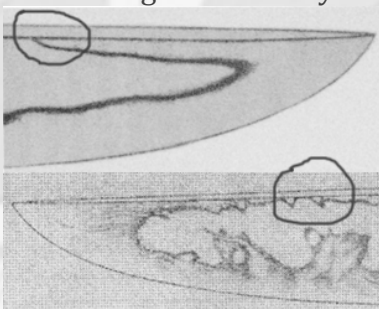
Kakedashi (hamon that runs off the blade) is a specific characteristic for Muramasa. We often see that the tani between the midare are suguha or notare and reaches (or runs of) the ha. The interior of the ha is mostly vivid, we'll find ashi, choji, yo, and streaks of sunagashi.

BOSHI

Midare or notare boshi is common. We also find Jizo style boshi. Many have a pointed tip (togari) and although we find this in every generation, the second generation boshi is almost always pointed.

Because of the fact that every generation made boshi with togari, we can't used it as a kantei point to distinguish the generations.

Kaeri can be medium or long. Many kaeri are midare, notare or even have severe togari in it. When the boshi is suguha it mostly sweeps up to the mune at the end.



NAKAGO

Even if it's not always obvious the nakago is tanagobara, soshu style. Nakagojiri is different for each generation and is an important kantei point to distinguish the generations (see before).

MEI

There are many that have been made mumei or have been altered to another name (see before). Originally there are nijimei (two characters) and there are also nagamei (long signature). Some are dated. The kanji Mura and Masa are also important to distinguish the different generations.

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