

## **Kaneuji 包氏, Kaneuji 兼氏 and Yamato Shizu**

### **Introduction.**

Many years ago one of my first attempts at writing an article and presentation for the Northern Token Society of GB was entitled “I don’t like Mino swords.....(but I should)”. This work is now long lost but as I remember I started to explore the influence of the last of the 5 great Koto traditions on later schools. It was at a time when the idea that Mino Workshops had franchised their technology throughout Japan, sending out representatives to train remote smiths in Mino techniques. As far as I am aware this idea has neither developed nor died. What is true is that Mino workmanship had a fundamental and major impact on sword making. So it seems reasonable to want to understand the origins of Mino Den a little better. The Mino tradition was founded by one of Masamune’s 10 brilliant pupils Kaneuji together with an Echizen smith Kinju (Kaneshige). Kaneuji is regarded by many past scholars as being perhaps the greatest of the 10, but as always with such claims there will be many who would contest this. What is fact is that he was extremely skilled and there are very fine works by Kaneuji in existence today. His works are given a range of attributions including Kaneuji, Yamato Shizu, Shizu and Den Shizu. All mean something slightly different. Hence there is some confusion surrounding this master.

One of the objects of this paper is to attempt to better understand his work, how it relates to the later Mino tradition and the various names used to identify his work.

I confess I have been putting off writing this article. I have gleaned information read and re-read what I have available, contacted members of various Japanese sword preservation groups present and former. In fact I have asked everyone I can for opinions, ideas and what they know to be fact. I feel that I owe it to all those who have responded to my questions to now attempt to put something down on paper. The problem is the more I ask the more confused I become with the answers. The following is an attempt to interpret the information available by focussing on three swords one from the late Kamakura, one Nambokucho blade and one Tensho piece and seeing how they fit within the prescribed nomenclature.

I can make absolutely no claim to its accuracy or otherwise. It is basically opinion formed from reviewing data.

There are three basic aims in writing this; the first is to explore the work of Kaneuji in more detail. As said above some reference works describe him as the best of Masamune’s 10 brilliant pupils. I would argue that he had a far greater influence on the history of sword manufacture than anyone who went before (including his teacher) or after.

The second is to attempt to unravel some of the confusion and contradictions one finds in descriptions of what a “Yamato Shizu” attribution means.

The third is to compare a Yamato Shizu blade with a sword papered to Daido (O Kanemichi) who claimed to be a direct descendant of Kaneuji and whose work is firmly based in the Mino tradition

One of the first high quality swords I saw was a Juyo rated blade from the A.Z. Freeman collection attributed to Yamato Shizu. I tried to buy it but failed. I was however able to assist my friend and teacher to do so. As a result I was able to spend several happy evenings studying it in detail. This sword now resides in the Royal Armouries collection and at the time of writing is on display at the Tower of London.

### **Masamune and His 10 brilliant Students.**

If asked who was the most influential sword smith in history I would suggest most people would nominate Masamune. His work was almost legendary in his own life time. No one has surpassed his ability to forge and harden steel or create such great art in a sword. His work has always been in demand and commanded huge prices. He also appears to have been a gifted teacher; shortly behind him in the recognition stakes are his “10 brilliant students” all of whom have extant work that exhibit great talent and technical ability.

However the Soshu School sat at the top of the league for a relatively short period. Within 100 years of Masamune working with his students, later Soshu work appears to have lost direction. What was handled with supreme artistry by Masamune, Sadamune and others degenerated in to something that became loud and garish (This is I know purely subjective on my part and I am sure that many will not agree with me). As mentioned above, amongst Masamune’s pupils was one man who I believe had a far greater influence on

the history of sword manufacture in Japan. That man was Saburo Kaneuji. Kaneuji is believed to have trained in the Yamato Tegai School. At some point he moved from Yamato to Shizu in Mino province. Either on route or shortly after he moved (depending which source you wish to believe) He spent time with Masamune. His time in Sagami had a considerable influence on his work. It was after working with Masamune that his swords began to combine features of his original Tegai blades with the more exotic and flamboyant Soshu tradition. This combination was ultimately to form the foundation of the last of the Gokaden, The Mino School.

I would suggest that as the Mino style developed and began to be exported throughout the country it has played a far greater part in the development of sword making since the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. There are few Shinto Schools who do not have some Mino influence in their construction, jigane or hamon.

### **Kaneuji**

As mentioned above Kaneuji originated from the Yamato Tegai School.

We are told that while working there he signed Kaneuji 包氏 using the box form of kanji for the Kane character. At some point in the late Kamakura he is said to have moved to Shizu in Mino Province. At that time he changed his name by using the alternative Kane character 兼 which was to become a common feature of later Mino Smiths art names.

No signed works with Kaneuji's original Yamato signature exist. There are a number of old references and oshigata. Equally true is that many of his early Shizu works are o-suriage and have lost their mei. The lack of signed works has lead to some considerable confusion with regard to later attributions and what they actually mean.

It has been suggested that Yamato Shizu was a nickname given to Kaneuji while with Masamune and which stuck with him. However the term Yamato Shizu when used in attributions has a number of possible meanings. The definition of this term varies depending on the source you use. Perhaps the most generally used one is that which was concisely published by Darcy Brockbank on his website [www.nihonto.ca](http://www.nihonto.ca) with his permission I have copied extracts below:

1. *Yamato Shizu*: used to describe the work of Kaneuji, and of his students while working in the Yamato tradition.
2. *Shizu*: used to describe the work of Kaneuji after his trip to Kamakura to learn under Masamune. Afterwards, he settled in the village of Shizu in Mino province and changed the Kane character of his name.
3. *Naoe Shizu*: the students of Kaneuji after his name change and relocation to Mino.
4. *Kaneuji*: usually reserved to describe blades that bear the signature of Kaneuji.

This offers a very straightforward outline of how the terms are used. Regrettably life is never that simple. Shortly after I had purchased a blade papered to Yamato Shizu I contacted Tanobe san before he had retired from the NBTHK. He replied to my questions and explained the range of Yamato Shizu categories as follows (I have copied the text in full to avoid any misunderstanding):

"Yamato Shizu has both precise and looser definitions. In the precise definition it specifically points to the Shodai Shizu Saburo Kaneuji, who originally signed 包氏 and started as a Yamato Tegai sword maker. After he moved to Mino he changed his name to 兼氏.

At about the same time he either directly trained under Masamune or somehow acquired the style of the Soshu tradition (could be through studying the works of Masamune) and established the Yamato Shizu style.

In the looser definition Yamato Shizu includes those who were in the line of Shodai Kaneuji 包氏 in the Yamato Tegai School and remained in Yamato as the successors in Yamato of the one who moved to Mino and became Shizu Saburo Kaneuji.

When it comes to Juyo Token swords attributed to Yamato Shizu, those other than the Shodai are also included. However in the accompanying comment these two types of Yamato Shizu are distinguished by specifying whether or not it is a work of the Shodai. If the description does not include the comment that it is by the Shodai Kaneuji it necessarily means that the attribution is based on the looser definition of Yamato Shizu, i.e. they are the works of the sword makers who were successors of Kaneuji 包氏 remaining in Yamato.”

Although agreeing in part with the former definitions there is a fundamental difference. In the original it claims the term is used to describe the Shodai's work before he moved to Mino and trained under Masamune. In Tanobe san's letter the term is used to describe his work after he moved to Mino and started to introduce Soshu characteristics in to his work. This may simply be an overlap between the original Yamato Shizu and Shizu attributions but Tanobe san is very clear in using the longer term when describing the Shodai's work produced after the move to Mino.

Thinking about the alternatives Tanobe san's definition would appear to be the more credible. One would think that when defining Kaneuji's work prior to him moving it would be more likely to describe it as Yamato Tegai, as at that time there was no association with Shizu or Soshu influence. However that thinking does not explain the second “looser” definition which refers to his successors in the Yamato tradition, again there is no suggestion that these followers adopted his later style at distance from his new location so why are they not simply Yamato Tegai smiths?

In the case of Juyo papered swords and based on Tanobe san's comments it is clear that if the commentary says Shodai Yamato Shizu it means Kaneuji 兼氏. If it just says Yamato Shizu it means the work of his Yamato successors. Unfortunately it isn't clear from his response how one makes this distinction in lower grade papers.

As one can see from the above this is a complex issue and as Tanobe san admits in the opening of his letter “.....this is a subject very complicated and confusing even for most average students in Japan to clearly comprehend”.

It then becomes more complicated.....

### **Work Styles:**

#### **1. Yamato Tegai:**

Jihada- well forged and fine ko-itame with less distinct masame hada than other schools. There more ji-nie than seen in other Yamato schools. Yubashiri is also present.

Hamon- Narrow chu-suguha, hotsure with uchinoke and Nijuba. Also o-midare with abundant nie, kinsuji and inazuma which have differing patterns on each side. In later generations the hamon becomes quieter.

Boshi- Yakitsume, kaen, nie kuzure, midare komi. The kaeri is short.

#### **2. Shizu Saburo Kaneuji**

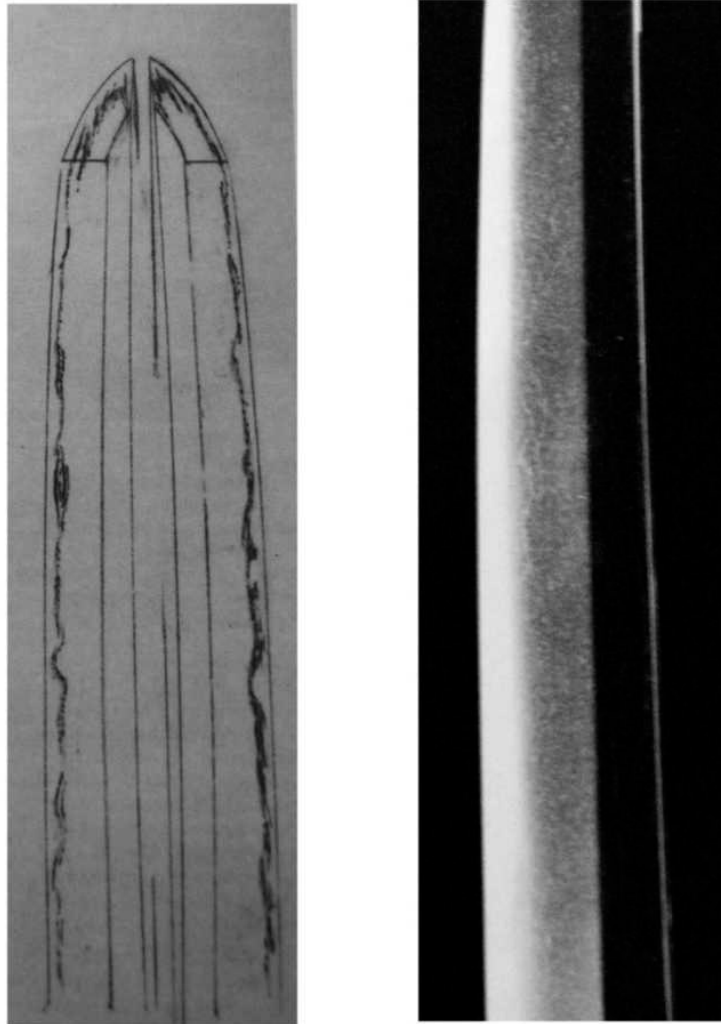
Jihada- O-Itame combined with Masame with chickei and abundant ji-nie. The hada is clear and does not have the whiteness associated with later Mino work

Hamon- Nie deki with plentiful nie and thick nioi guchi. The nie and nioi are bright and clear, ara nie is sometimes seen The hamon pattern varies greatly and includes o-midare, o-gunome, midare, notare midare etc. There is a great deal of activity including sunagashi, kinsuji and inazuma. The hamon has much in common with the Soshu tradition.

Boshi- Midare komi with hakikake proportionate to the hamon. Ko-maru with short kaeri, Yakitsume or tapered.

The remainder of this paper examines five swords, the first the Juyo Yamato Shizu blade mentioned earlier. The Second a Juyo papered Yamato Kaneuji blade, the third is a very different sword awarded Tokubetsu Hozon papers to Yamato Shizu. The fourth a Naoe Shizu sword and finally an O-suriage blade papered to Daido.

**Blade 1. Juyo Token by Yamato Shizu**



This is a beautiful work. I have had the opportunity to study it in some detail both while in the collection of Deryk Ingham and subsequently at the Royal Armouries. The illustration above and description that follows is taken from the Sotheby's sales catalogue for the A.Z. Freeman collection which took place in April 1997.

**Catalogue description:**

Of tori-sori (1.7cm), shinogi-zukuri with chu-kissaki and iori-mune. Itame hada becoming masame near the ha and in the shinogi-ji, covered in ko-nie and showing chickei. Hososugu-ko-gunome hamon in ko-nie with tight nioiguchi swept with fine sunagashi and kinsuji. Yakitsume boshi. O-suriage nakago with two mekugi-ana and kiri yasurime. Mumei. 69.2cm .

This is a rather bland description of a fine blade.

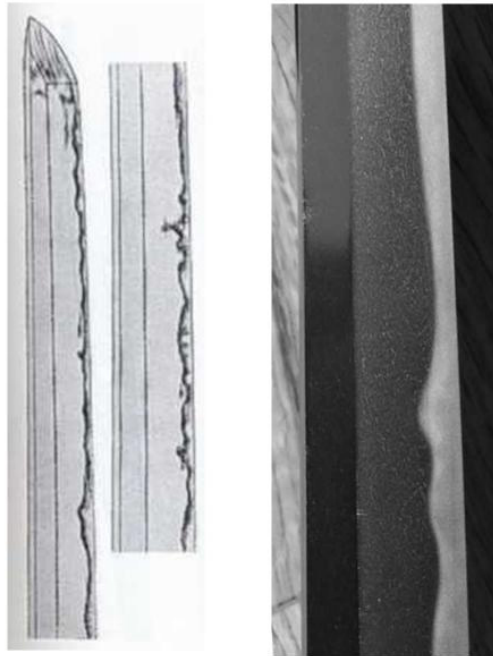


Based on personal observation I would add the following. The jigane is very healthy and beautiful, a clearer description might be ko-itame interlaced with fine nagare becoming masame towards the ha. The ji-nie is small and evenly dispersed. It is difficult to fully explain how well the elements of the hada come together to form something which is exceptional. It has in common with other swords that I have seen and considered to be of high quality, a tightness of pattern, where the weld lines although easily visible are fine and blend to form a pattern that appears to have depth and clarity.

Within the hamon the nie flows evenly through the very clear and bright nioiguchi. There is considerable subtle activity within the hamon with ha-hada visible and a continuation of the tightly formed patterns seen within the ji-hada. Despite being shortened this is an elegant sword retaining the conservative subtle shape of the late Kamakura period.

As said above this sword was awarded Juyo certification which was dated 1983. I have not seen the papers or the Juyo Zufu entry but have been told by the staff of the Armouries that there is no mention of this being the work of the Shodai. One must therefore assume that this piece is considered to be the work of one of Kaneuji's students who remained in Yamato. In comparison with the description of Tegai work above I believe this to be a reasonable assumption. Certainly the sword has many features common within Yamato work and shows little if any of the exuberance associated with Soshu workmanship.

### **Blade 2 Yamato Shizu Kaneuji**



This beautiful sword which was published in the NBTHK journal Nihonto Bijutsu as an example of Yamato Kaneuji 包氏 work has many similarities to the first blade in sugata, hada and boshi. I have copied the entry from the Nihonto Bijutsu below as it describes this beautiful work far better than I can.

No. 3 KATANA

Mei: YAMATO KANEUJI *Ō-suriage* 大和包氏

HON'A (Kaō) KŌSON 本阿 (花押) 光通

Nagasa (ha) : 65.15 cm. Mekugi-ana : three holes

The overall blade width is normal, but the *shinogi* is considerably high. The *kitae* in *ko-itame* is clearly visible on the whole, and the content of *chikei* fairly moderate. The *ji-nie* is outstanding. The *shinogi-ji* is straight grained.

The narrow *hamon* consists of *midare* of different *ko-gunome* variations mixed with some modest *notare*. There are *hotsure*, although not in many parts and also *nijubalike* patterns. The *nie* is strong and includes some coarse and brightly shiny grains.

The *nie* is particularly asserting in the *bōshi*, and forms fire flames consisting of *hakikake*.

The above characteristics, especially of the shape and *hamon*, and most typically exemplified by the *bōshi*, indicate that this blade is undoubtedly a work of the Yamato school. If it had a *suguha*-based *hamon*, it would be identified with Kanenaga (包永) of the same school, but the attribution to Kaneuji must have been reached because of the *gunome* most prominent in this blade.

Among Kaneuji's signed examples, we have never come across any other examples exemplifying this type of workmanship, but theoretically this attribution is quite agreeable. This blade belongs to our American member, Mr. A. Quirt.

Entry from the NBTHK English version of Nihonto Bijutsu.

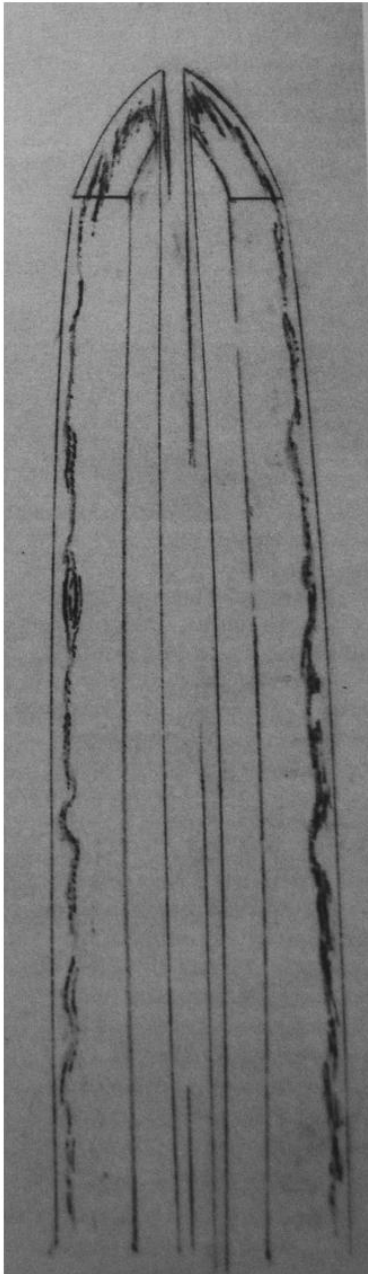


Yamato Kaneuji

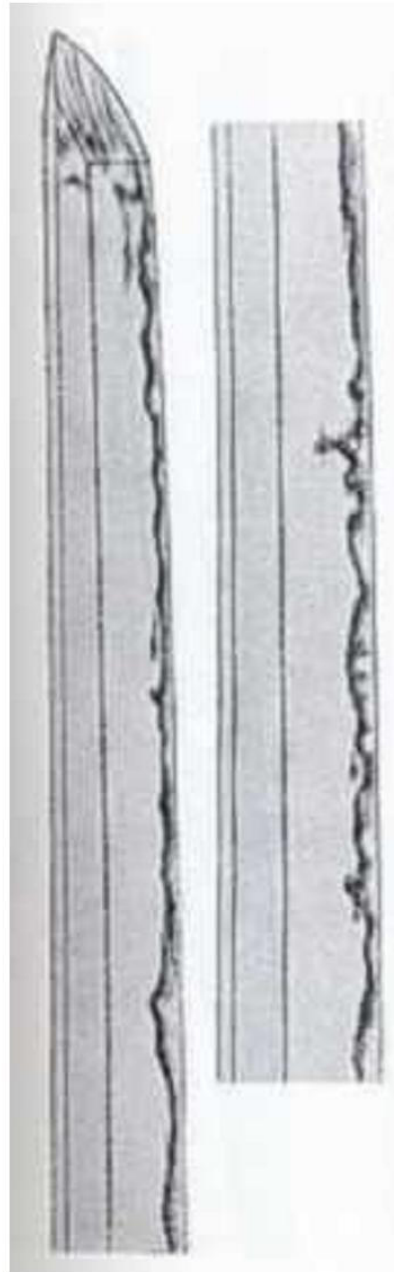


Yamato Shizu

### Comparison of Yamato Shizu and Yamato Kaneuji



Yamato Shizu

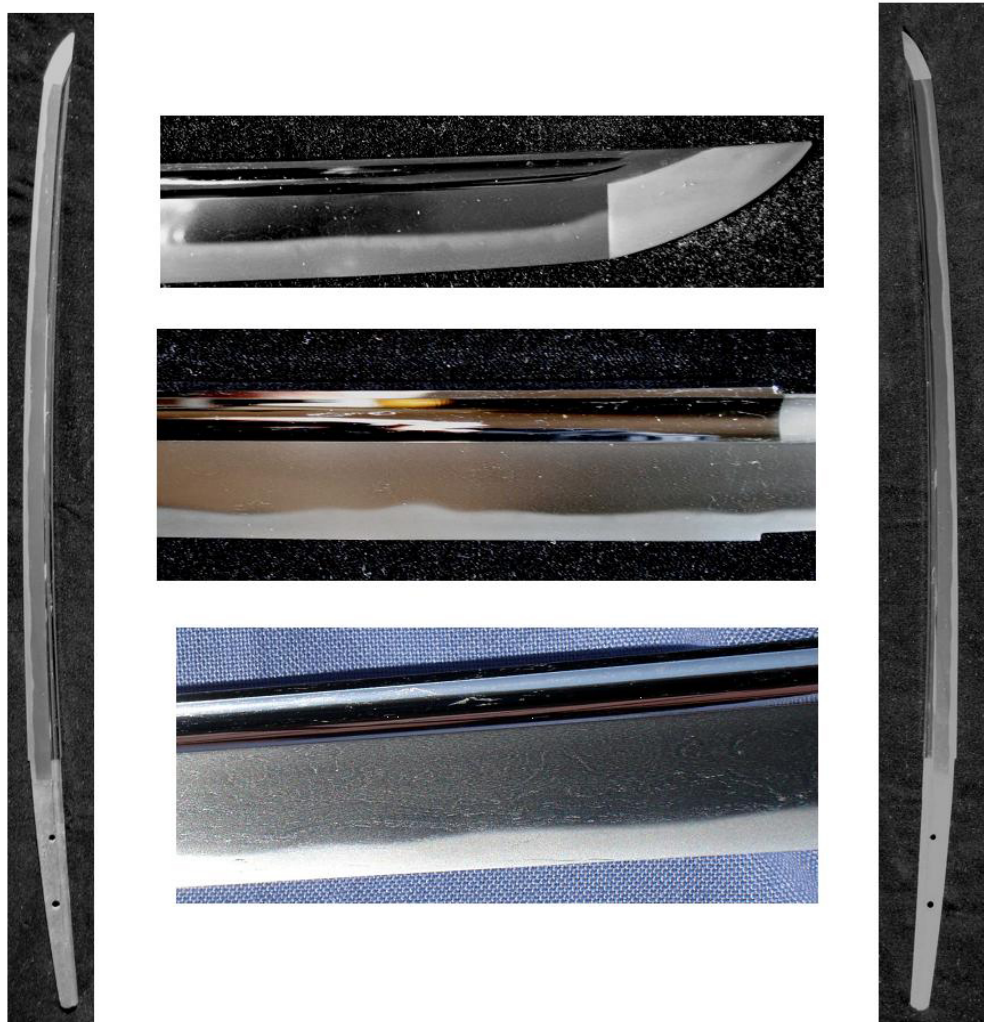


Yamato Kaneuji

As can be seen from the illustrations of both swords there is a great deal of similarity. The boshi and hamon share many common features. The jigane of both exhibit the beautiful tight ko-itame interspersed with ji-nie. When looking at these two blades I believe it confirms the opinion that the original (sword no.1) is a work of Kaneuji's Yamato based students.



### Blade 3. Tokubetsu Hozon Blade by Yamato Shizu



At first sight this is an altogether different proposition to the first two swords. The most obvious difference is size. Where the original was elegant and subtle in appearance this sword is of grand proportion. Despite being O-suriage the blade is 67.87cm long. If one assumes the partial mekugi-ana visible on the nakago jiri is the original, the original nagasa was likely to have been more than 80cm. The blade is shinogi-zukuri iori-mune with and extended chu-kissaki. The hamon is nie deki hotsure, midare gunome with considerable activity including ha nie, sunagashi, kinsuji, hataraki ashi and yo. Unfortunately the Jigane shows some areas of tiredness. Where it is healthy it is covered in ji-nie and is a beautiful combination of ko-itame and nagare. There are patches of plain clear hada which initially I took to be core steel showing through. However on closer examination these appear to exhibit a very tight form of hada which include a great deal of ko-nie. I therefore assume this to be part of the jigane pattern rather than a symptom of tiredness. The hada is proportionally larger in this blade than in the first two but shares many of the originals characteristics. It is as if the pattern of the Kaneuji sword has been magnified to fit the larger proportions of this piece.

A section of the two blades are placed side by side below to illustrate the point:





**Yamato Shizu**



**Yamato Kaneuji**

The larger Yamato Shizu blade does appear to have much greater Soshu influence in the structure of the jigane with the prominent nagare mixed with itame creating an almost “organic” pattern structure within the hada.

Based purely on size the second blade looks to sit firmly in the Nambokucho period. It shows the combination of original Yamato work with the more flamboyant elements of Soshu den. The larger running itame, the amount and size of the nie the considerable activity in the hamon all indicate Soshu influence. The ko-gunome seen towards the monouchi is perhaps early indicators of the more recognisable Mino style to come in later generations.

This then adds to the confusion. The blade is stylistically from the mid Nambokucho period. I would therefore estimate its date of manufacture between 1350 and 1370. This would make it too late to be considered the work of Shodai Kaneuji. Based on the definition supplied by Tanobe san this should then fall under the looser definition and be attributed to the work of his students who remained in Yamato. Although there are similarities with the first two blades in construction of hada (pattern rather than scale) the later blade has, in my opinion, much more in common with Soshu and early Mino work than it does with Yamato Tegai. So it is a blade too late to be by the Shodai but showing characteristics of his post Sagami style combining Tegai and Soshu traits. It would therefore seem reasonable to assume that there were later generations who have come to be included in the Yamato Shizu grouping but who worked in Shizu rather than Yamato. Certainly from these early beginnings one of the most influential schools in sword making history was to evolve. This sword appears to be part of those first tentative steps to the creation of what was to become the last of the 5 great Koto traditions, The Mino School.

### **A brief note on Den Yamato Shizu**

When looking at blades with the attribution to Den Yamato Shizu it has often been considered that this refers to the work of Kaneuji's students. However if you consider the definition of "Den" as described in Bob Bensons excellent paper on the subject, this may not be the case. It can equally mean a work of the master which is a little different, not necessarily better or worse, just slightly different to the normal work that one would expect to see. It is therefore perfectly possible that a sword with this attribution could be by Kaneuji.

### **What does Shizu mean?**

In the original definitions the term Shizu was used to describe blades made by Kaneuji after he had visited Kamakura and worked with Masamune. I believe that Tanobe-san's comments and the evidence of the first three blades suggest that the term "Yamato Shizu" is equally applicable to these works and I am therefore unsure of the differentiation between the two. As a matter of pure speculation I wonder if the term Shizu is used when there is insufficient evidence to tie the work down to a tighter definition (Yamato Shizu, Naoe Shizu). The work is recognised as having originated from that tradition but lacks specific features that would make further attribution secure.

### **Naoe Shizu**

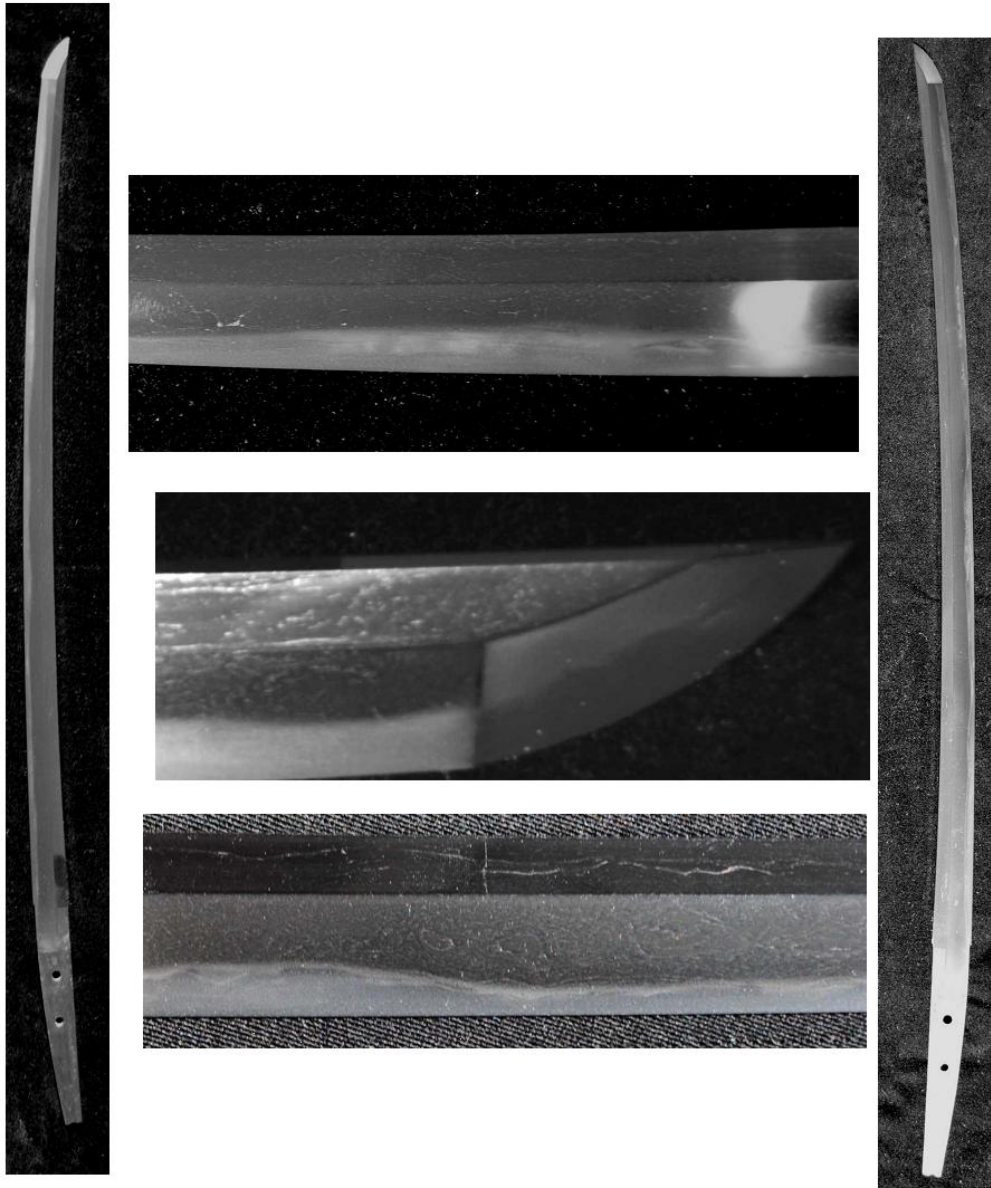
Some time after Kaneuji settled in Shizu a number of his students moved to Naoe, another village within Mino province, and formed what has become known as the Naoe Shizu School. Representative smiths of the Naoe Shizu School were Kaneyuki (son of Kinju) Kanetoshi and Kanetsugu. Their work had much in common with Yamato Shizu the hada combining itame and masame. It was said to be somewhat whiter in appearance (a characteristic which would become increasingly apparent in later Mino work) and appeared harder. The hamon tended to become bolder with sunagashi and togari-ba but generally the level of activity within the hamon decreased in comparison to Yamato Shizu. The boshi was hakikake which is a common feature amongst all the swords illustrated here. Naoe Shizu produced very fine blades and there are many highly rated extant works.

Below I have illustrated the hada and boshi of a blade papered to Naoe Shizu. Once again the similarity with the preceding work can be seen but in addition the clearer presence of masame within the hada is I think indicative of this words attribution. The boshi is also a classic example of this schools work. I am grateful to my good friend Jean Laparra who supplied me with the images.



**Blade 4 Naoe Shizu Hada and Boshi**

### **Blade 5 tokubetsu Kicho blade by Daido**



### **Comparison of Blade 3 and 5**

As a final part to this exercise I wanted to compare the Nambokucho Yamato Shizu blade with one which I have spent many years studying. It is an O-suriage Mumei blade papered to Daido. For those unfamiliar with this smith and his name, his original art name was Kanemichi. Active during the Tensho period he originally lived in Seki in Mino before moving with his sons to Kyoto. He is regarded as the father of the Shinto Mishina tradition, although it was his sons Kinmichi and Yoshimichi who are generally regarded as the creators of the Mishina style. Kanemichi was a smith of excellent reputation there are extant works in which he collaborated with one of the fathers of the Shinto tradition, Kunihiro.

Kanemichi was given permission to use the “O” character meaning great in front of his name by the Emperor Ogimachi in 1570. He was later awarded the title Mutsu no Kami and reduced his art name to Omichi. The alternative Chinese reading of the Kanji for Omichi is Daido and this name has become the normal reference

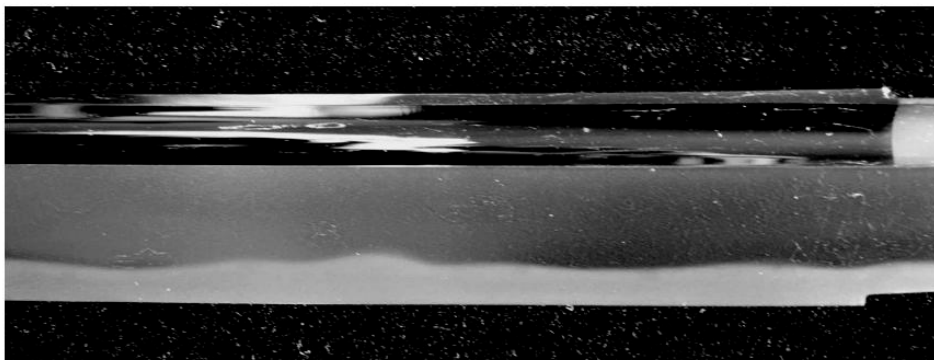
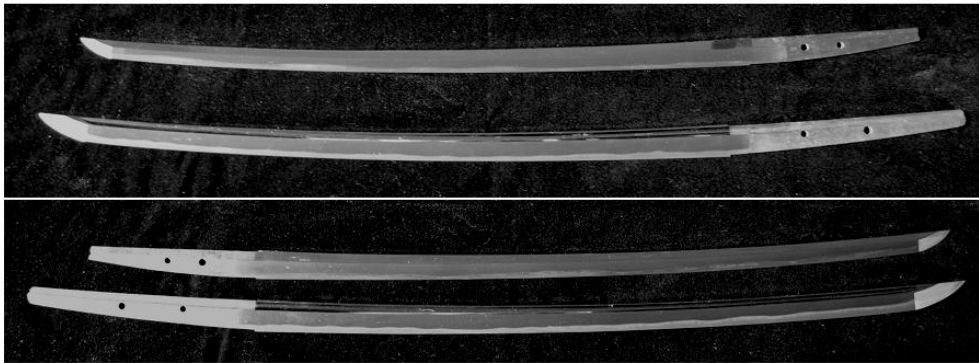


Kanemichi claimed to be the 9<sup>th</sup> generation grandson of Kaneuji. His hada is described as more dense and clearer than other Mino work. His Hamon less smooth, mixed with gunome in the upper and lower areas of the blade.

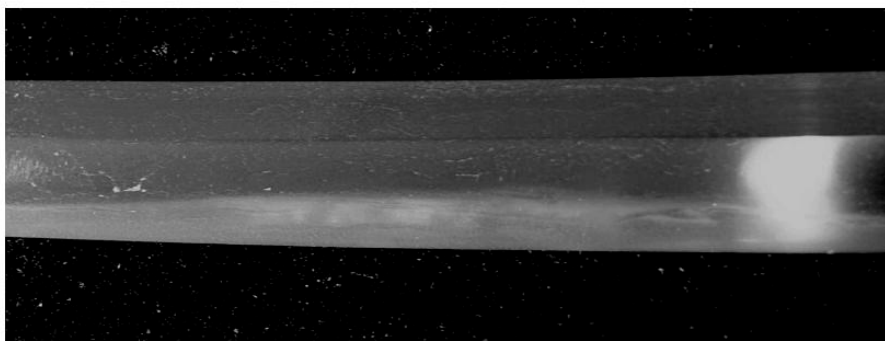
In the following illustrations I have placed images of the Nambokucho Yamato Shizu blade and the Daido alongside one another. When doing so it is not difficult to see similarities. The organic running itame hada interspersed with ji-nie is common to both. More interesting is the shape and pattern of the small gunome in the monouchi of both blades which is very similar. Also the activity within the hamon, the sunagashi, Nijuba and visible ha-hada can be seen clearly in both.

These blades were manufactured 200 years apart. I have little doubt that the raw material that each was made from was very different. However allowing for the differences that such changes in their basic raw materials would create there are sufficient similarities between these blades to support if not Kanemichi's genetic claim of descent from Kaneuji, at least his link with the original Mino tradition.

#### **Comparative illustrations of Yamato Shizu and Daido**

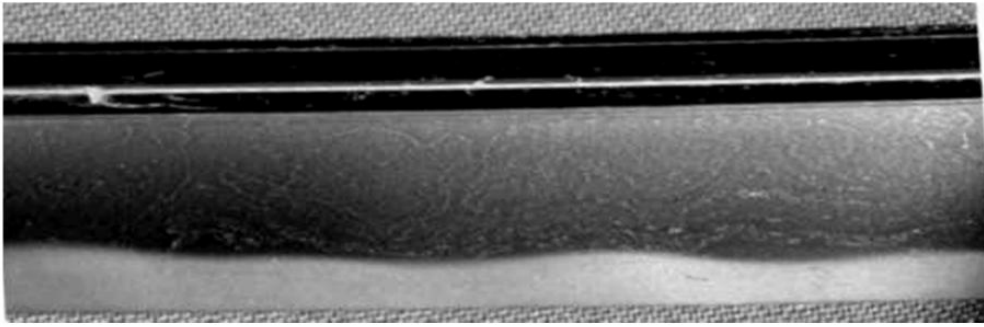


**Yamato Shizu**



**Daido**





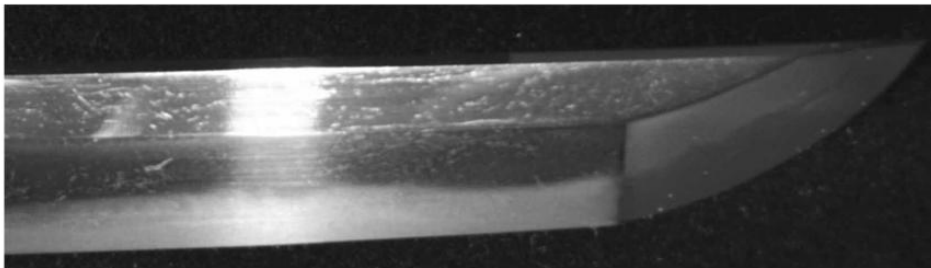
**Yamato Shizu**



**Daido**



**Yamato Shizu**



**Daido**

### **Conclusion:**

I started out hoping I could learn more about this hugely influential smith, to unravel some of the confusion surrounding the different attributions used when papering his work and to see if his influence did truly carry through to the dawn of the Shinto sword period.

I have enjoyed the process, not least because I have had cause to look in detail at some beautiful swords and to revisit notes and correspondence accumulated over many years.

I am not surprised that I have failed to clarify the attribution question; basically I was looking at two relevant swords and illustrations. Far better scholars than I have had access to a greater number of swords but have still not come to a definitive conclusion. As Tanobe san said “.....this is a subject very complicated and confusing even for most average students in Japan to clearly comprehend”.

I do believe however I can draw a number of conclusions from this study without too much fear of contradiction:

1. First and foremost all the swords I have looked at both in hand and in illustration have demonstrated some supremely skilful workmanship. Whether attributed to Kaneuji, Yamato Shizu, Shizu or Naoe Shizu the standard was very high.
2. If an unsigned Juyo blade is described as the work of the Shodai Yamato Shizu it is the work of Kaneuji. If it does not say Shodai it is the work of his students who remained in Yamato.
3. The Sword in the Royal Armouries is not described as the work of the Shodai in the Juyo documentation so must therefore be considered the work of one of Kaneuji's Tegai students. The style, shape and workmanship and comparison with the Yamato Kaneuji blade, do I believe support this theory.
4. The sugata of the third sword would suggest that it is too late in date to have been made by the Shodai. However there are published examples signed Kaneuji which have similar proportions so it may not be totally out of the question. In addition this sword appears to have considerable Soshu influence and therefore made after Kaneuji's time in Sagami.
5. This suggests that this sword is either a very late work of the Shodai (unlikely) or that there was a second generation Kaneuji working in Shizu and whose work carries the Yamato Shizu designation. I believe but cannot prove that the slightly later “Shizu” designation relates to a slight change in style where the Soshu influence becomes greater than the original Yamato characteristics, effectively making it purer Mino. Alternatively it may simply be that there is insufficient detail to tie it a more specific group.
6. The term Den Yamato Shizu can equally apply to the work of Kaneuji. It simply means that the work lacks some feature or incorporates another which is regarded as not typical of his general style.
7. While unable to confirm Kanemichi's claim to be the 9<sup>th</sup> generation grandson of Kaneuji, comparison of the two available blades offers enough evidence to confirm the influence of the formers work in the later smith's blades. The Kaneuji influence continued up until the end of the koto period to Daido and through him in to successful Shinto Schools such as the Mishina School.
8. In looking at these blades I have examined some 300 years of development within the Mino tradition. While by no means comprehensive (Kanesada and Kanemoto deserve their own article alone) I do believe it is possible to see the continuity of detail through out this period while at the same time recognising the evolution from Yamato to what became Mino.

## Bibliography:

In compiling the above notes I am grateful to the following for allowing me to use information published on their respective websites

Mr. Darcy Brockbank [www.nihonto.ca](http://www.nihonto.ca)  
Mr. Andrew Quirt [www.nihonto.us](http://www.nihonto.us)  
Mr. Fred Weissberg [www.nihonto.com](http://www.nihonto.com)

## Other sources:

Nihonto Kosa (Harry Afu Watson translations)  
Connoisseurs book of Japanese swords Nagayama  
NBTHK monthly journals (Various)  
Thanks also to Mr. Jean Laparra for his images and his assistance during the writing of this piece  
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Paul Bowman  
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