

Date: **April 18, 2017**

Presenter: Nancy Naishtat

Artwork title: **Samurai Sword**

Year Created: **1325**

Artist: **Ichimonji School**

Gallery Location: Japan

A. These are the 5 most essential aspects of this work of art: (List 1-5)

1. The sword was the Samurai warrior's most valuable object. It was treated with extreme care. Sometimes the sword was even buried with the warrior, but often it was passed on to someone the Samurai deemed worthy of such a treasure.

The Japanese sword was always seen as both weapon and as an object of artistic beauty. Sword makers were thought to be spiritually inspired participants in a sacred art. In fact, in preparation of the forging of steel from the sand ore, the swordsmith's ritual included taking a cleansing bath and offering prayers for inspiration. Every aspect of the multi- step production process was executed with utmost attention and intention.

2. This sword was created by the Ichimonji School, located in the Bizen Province, an area known for its great swordsmiths. The school was founded at the beginning of the Kamakura period (1192-1336) which saw the rise of the Shogun and a feudal system in Japan accompanied by the increased importance of the Samurai and the warrior class. The school lasted thru the Nanbokucho period (1336-1392). The swords produced by this school were known for both their elegance and magnificent workmanship.

3. Swords used in Japan prior to 900, the Ancient Sword Period, were likely imported from China or Korea, though sword making was developing at this time in Japan. The Japanese-made *Ancient* swords often copied the Chinese style, and the blades were straight (*chokuto*).

The Old Sword Period (900-1530) emerged with the rise of the Samurai class. During this period, sword making flourished as swords were the Samurais' weapon of choice. The straight blade of the Ancient sword useful for stabbing was replaced with a longer, curved blade suited for cutting. These swords were notable for their tempered edge, carefully crafted point, and the grain of the steel. A groove along the blade was added at this time to reduce the weight of the longer sword and add strength.

4. Tachi swords were the early version of the classic Samurai sword with a cutting edge ranging from 28-31 inches. The long blade made it very effective when fighting on horseback. Tachi swords were worn with the cutting edge of the blade down and were attached to the belt through hangers made of cording.



By Utagawa Kuniyoshi - private collections,

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However this length made it awkward to use when on foot, and thus the Katana sword emerged, especially as warfare began to involve more infantry than cavalry during the Muromachi period (1337 to 1573). The Katana blades were a bit shorter ranging from 23 to almost 28 inches. They were usually worn with the scabbard slipped through the obi sash with the cutting edge of the blade up, enabling the warrior to draw his sword and strike the enemy in one smooth movement.

Today it is difficult to differentiate between the Tachi and Katana swords as many Tachi were later modified to be Katana swords. Clues to identification would include how they were worn, their fittings or mountings, and the location of the signatures (mei) and other inscriptions on the tangs. The date of this sword suggests it is a Tachi sword. However, the development of the Katana sword was an evolutionary process and while the Katana swords are attributed to the Muromachi period which began just over a decade later, this could be an early Katana sword.

5. Fittings and Mountings: Key sword fittings include the hilt (*tsuka*), guard (*tsuba*), (and its spacers, or *seppa*), and the scabbard (*saya*). None of these are available to us to view for this sword. The wooden hilt seen on this sword is a part of protective storage case (Shira-saya) and there would be a matching protective wooden scabbard for storing the blade. (See image below) This case may have even been made in the modern era to protect the sword if the original fittings had been damaged or lost. The brass-like collar (*habaki*) visible on this sword was designed to assure the blade fit snugly in its scabbard and prevented the blade from rattling around within it. Although not available to us, we do know that the original mountings for this sword would have been of the Jandachi-zukuri mounting type with two rings on the scabbard (*saya*) to suspend the sword from the wearer's belt. Note that the fittings on display below this sword are from a later time, likely from the *Shinto (New) or Shinshinto (New, New) Sword Period* (spanning 1597 -1876).

B. These are the questions I would use when speaking with visitors about this object: (List 1-5)

What do you see here?

What do you notice about this object?

What else can you find?

What was used to create this object? How do you think this object was made?

How does this object make you feel? How would you feel if you encountered a person wearing this on his/her belt? What makes you say that?

C. With which tour(s) would you use this object?

Exploring Asia

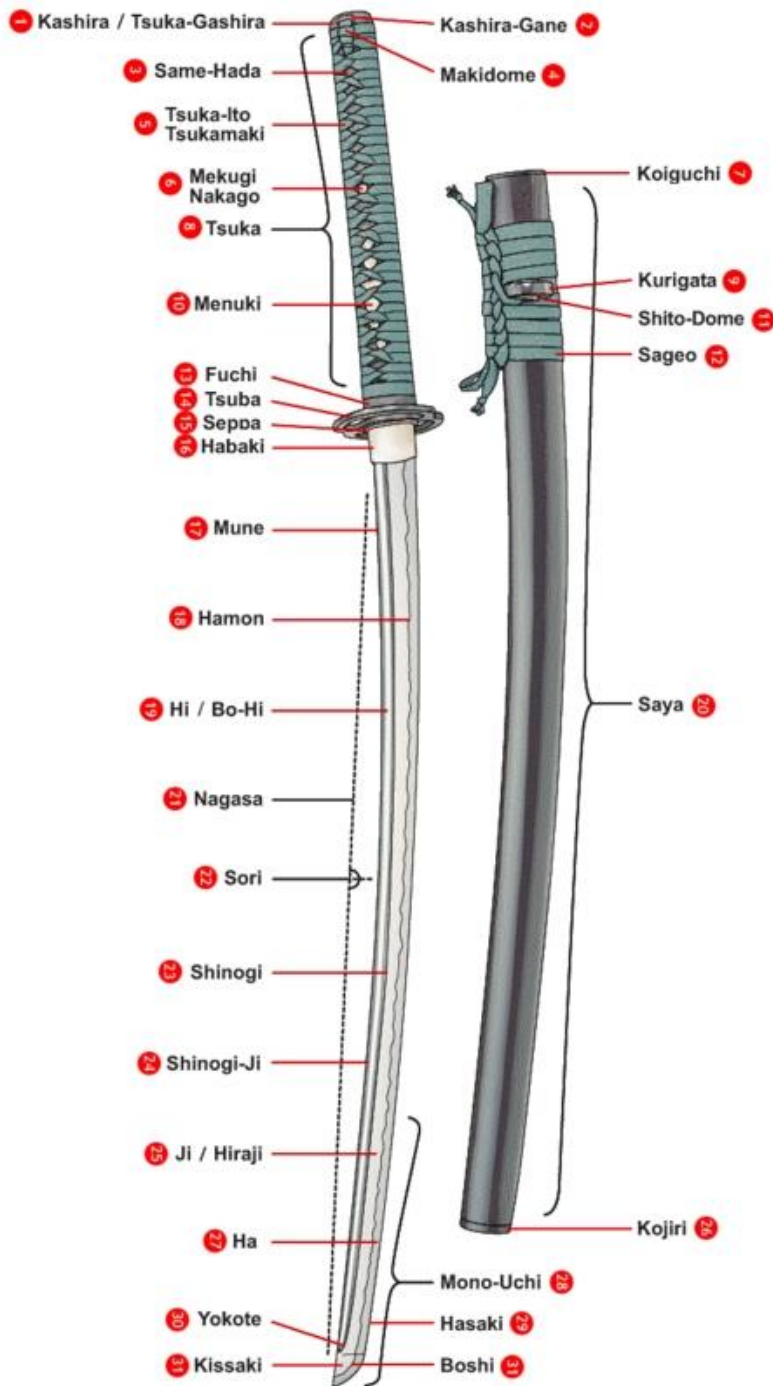
People and Places (in combination with images of Samurai or armor)

D. Additional Images and References:

Shira-saya for a Tachi or Katana sword and a **Wakizashi sword:



Mountings for a Katana sword:

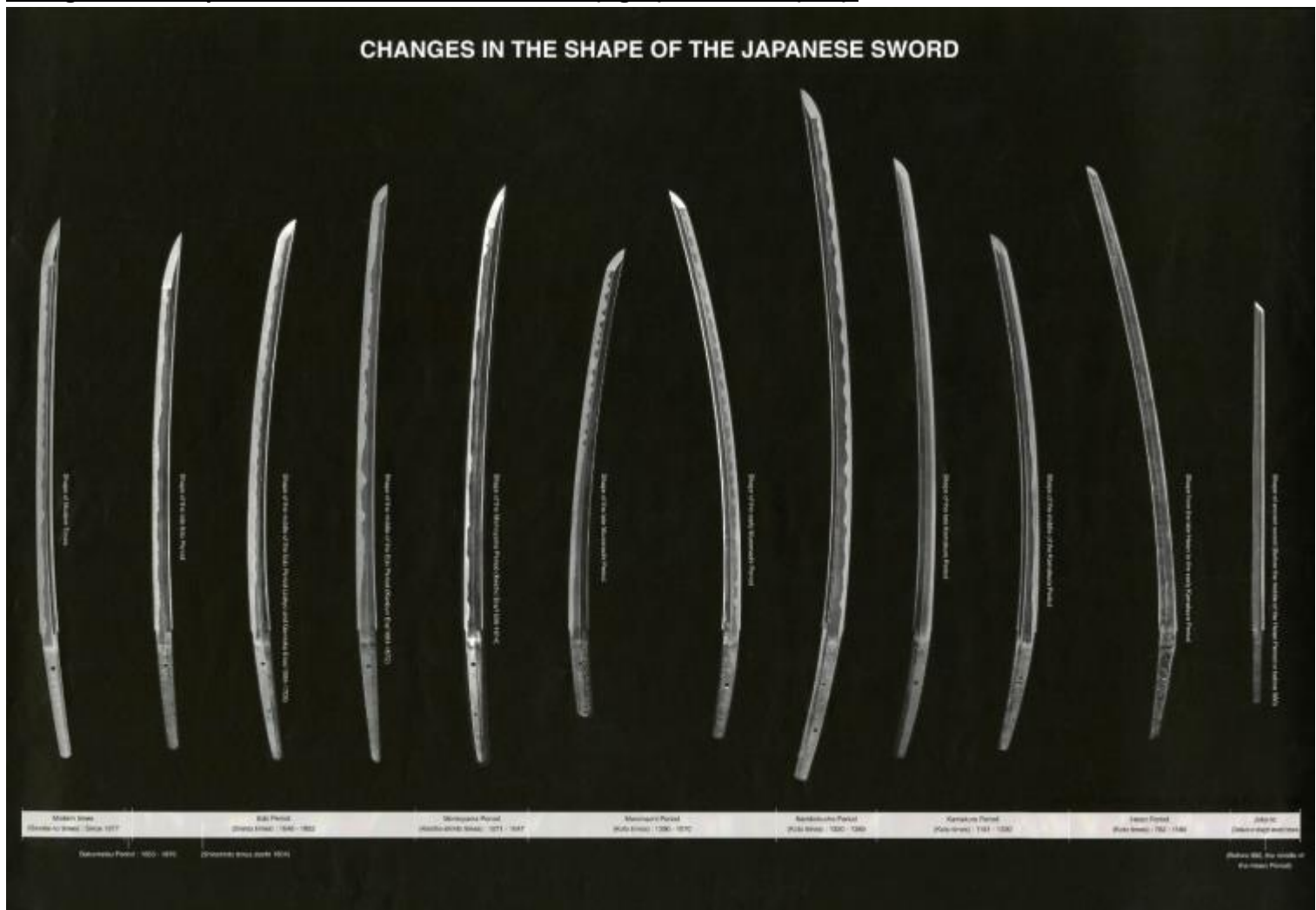


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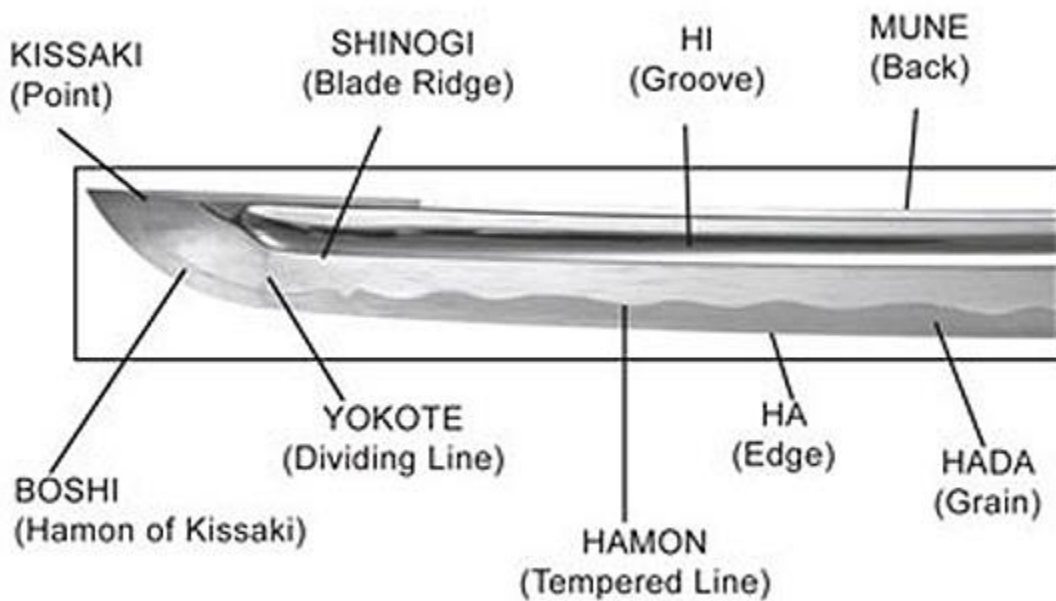
- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Kashira: Pommel on top | 14. Tsuba: Guard |
| 6. Mekugi: Rivet hole | 15. Seppa: Spacers |
| 8. Tsuka: Hilt | 16. Habaki: Collar |
| 10. Menuki: Hilt ornament | 20. Saya: Scabbard |
| 13. Fuchi: Pommel at base | |

See image below for more information regarding blade.

Changes in the Japanese Sword Blade, from oldest (right) to newest (left):



Parts of the Sword Blade:



References:

The Samurai Sword: A Handbook, Yumoto, John M., 1958, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc.*

Samurai: The Code of the Warrior, Louis, Thomas & Ito, Tommy, 2006, Sterling Publishing Company, Inc.*

<http://getasword.com/blog/125-japanese-sword-types-katana-tachi-wakizashi-nodachi/>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tachi>

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Kamakura_period

<http://arscives.com/historysteel/japaneseintroduction.htm>

<http://www.nihonto.com/abtartfukuokaichimonji.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_sword_mountings#Jintachi

**Available in EI Library*

******Wakizashi was a shorter, companion sword that was also called the “honor sword”. It was worn at all times and kept near the Samurai when he slept. Used for fighting up close, it was also used for honor suicides when necessary.