

# A Takahashi Nobuhide Dagger and Portrait

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TAKAHASHI NOBUHIDE, who had the art name Seiunshi, or “Clear and Cloudy Child,” set up his forge in Osaka prior to World War I. His date of birth was for a long time unknown, but now, due to the discovery of a dagger with a special inscription in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum’s Arms and Armor Department (Figures 1, 2), his birth year has been established. The inscription on the tang (Figure 3) reads “Osaka[no] ju Takashi Nobuhide nana ju san sai saku,” meaning “Takashi Nobuhide, living in Osaka, made [this] at the age of seventy-three.” On the reverse (Figure 4) the date reads “Taisho roku nen ichi gatsu kichi nichii,” “An auspicious day in the first month of the sixth year of the Taisho era.” This corresponds to the Occidental calendar’s 1917. If Nobuhide was seventy-three in 1917, he was born in 1844.

In his youth Seiunshi studied under Takahashi Naganobu, an excellent smith known for his assimilation of the artistic style of the famous seventeenth-century swordsmith Tsuda Sukehiro.

Later, probably after the death of Naganobu, Nobuhide began to study under the great Gassan Sadakazu in Osaka, and when his research there ended, he chose to remain and set up his own forge.

Bashford Dean, the founder of the Arms and Armor Department at the Metropolitan, made the first of several study trips to Japan in 1900. In 1917 this dagger was purchased directly from the artist through the offices of Dr. Dean for 31 yen, or fifteen dollars and fifty cents. Since the average wage of all Japanese railway workers, including white-collar workers, was then 21.25 yen per month,<sup>1</sup> it is obvious that the cost of art swords was relatively high.

The blade is 6¾ inches long, ⅝ of an inch wide.

1. Computations given me by Dr. Hugh Patrick of the Economic Growth Center, Yale University.

Nobuhide made the dagger in the style of Shizu Saburo Kaneuji, a fourteenth-century master; the jihada, or forging pattern on the side of the blade, shows much evidence of the utilization of mixed steels in an attempt to reproduce the pronounced forging patterns of earlier masterpieces. Near the yakiba, or temper line, *ma-same*, a forging pattern with straight grain, is most evident (Figure 5), but near the middle of the blade there is a mixture of *itame*, the forging pattern resembling elongated wood grain, and *mokume*, the pattern that resembles circular wood grain. The *ni deki*, or temper line formed of troostite, is *ko-notare*, meaning that it undulates slightly, and the *hamon*, or overall pattern of the temper line, ends in a typical Kaneuji-style *komaru boshi*, the temper line in the point having a fairly small amount of roundness. There is very little *kaeri*, or return of the temper line after the point.

An associated Nobuhide item in the collection of the Arms and Armor Department is a painting of the artist at work, dressed in his ceremonial swordsmith’s robe and hat (Figure 6). Seiunshi’s face seems tensed in concentration as he hammers a steel billet in the early stages of producing a gleaming blade. In the background, surmounted by offerings to the deities, is a push-pull-type bellows that he uses to force air through a bed of glowing charcoal. In the foreground are two small tubs, one filled with a sliplike material used to keep the red-hot steel from sticking to the anvil, the other filled with water for quenching. The painting is by Oshima Furo. The inscription reads “Takahashi Nobuhide okina tanren no zu,” “A picture of the elderly gentleman Takahashi Nobuhide forging a sword.” The dating, “Taisho kinoto,” refers to a date in the hare year of the Taisho Era, which equals 1915. Then comes “Furo utsu,” indicating that this is a painting by the artist Furo, or “Long Life,” followed by two seals reading “Oshima Furo”—“Big Island Furo.”

FIGURES 1, 2

Dagger by Takahashi Nobuhide, dated 1917.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund,  
17.218.1

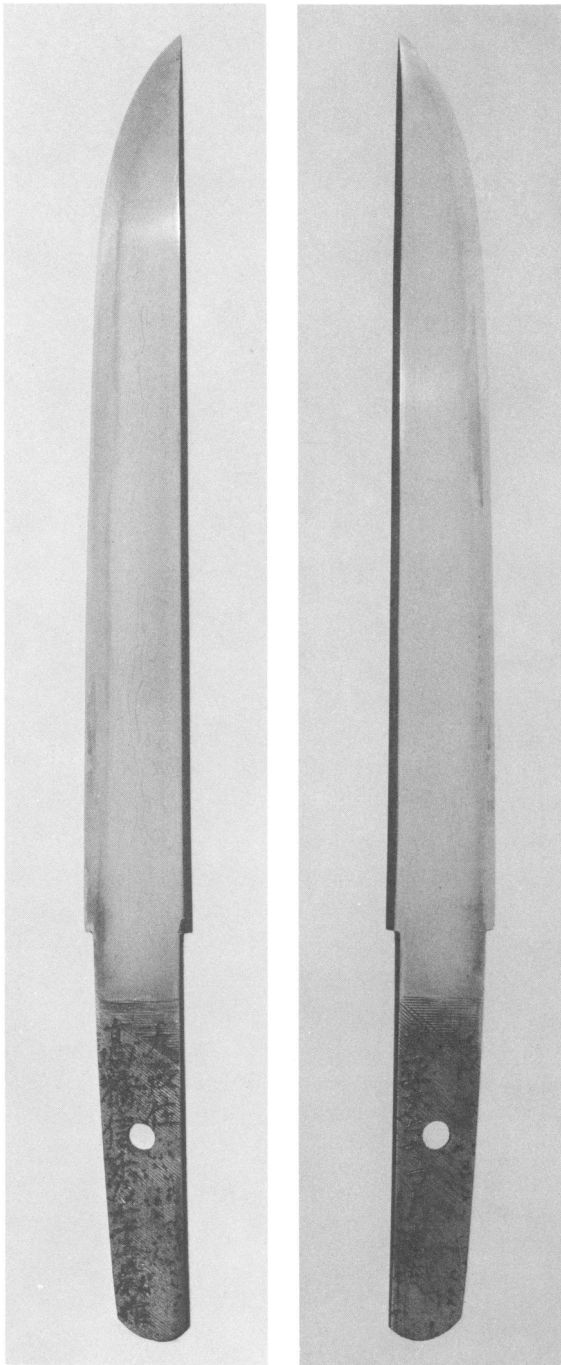


FIGURE 6

Portrait of Takahashi Nobuhide by Oshima Furo,  
dated 1915. The Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
unaccessioned documentary material



FIGURE 3

Drawing of tang, showing Nobuhide's signature



FIGURE 4

Drawing of tang, showing date

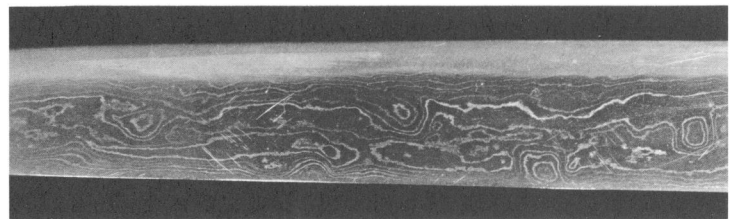


FIGURE 5

Detail of forging pattern, showing masame near  
edge and mixture of itame and mokume along  
center

