

Minamoto no Kiyomaro

Kiyomaro's real name was Yamaura Kuranosuke Tamaki. He was born in 1813 (the 10th year of the Bunka era) in Akaiwa Village, Shinano Province (present-day Shigeno, Tōmi City, Nagano Prefecture). In 1829 (the 12th year of the Bunsei era), he entered the school of Kawamura Toshitaka, a swordsmith employed by the Ueda Domain in Shinshū, along with his older brother MASAO. At this time, he adopted the smith name "Ikkansai MASAYUKI" (一貫斎正行), and his work from the following year, when he was 17 years old, has been confirmed. In 1834 (the 5th year of the Tenpō era), he used the inscription "HIDETOSHI" (秀寿), which was said to have been given to him by his teacher TOSHITAKA (寿隆), but after that year, he reverted to using the name MASAYUKI.

In 1835 (the 6th year of the Tenpō era), KIYOMARO moved to Edo, where he studied under the renowned Kubota Sugane, a martial artist and prominent samurai. It was here that his extraordinary talent was recognized, and Sugane established a sales system for weapons called *bukikō* (sales channels at three ryō per sword). In 1842 (the 13th year of the Tenpō era), KIYOMARO was invited to Hagi by Murata Seifū, who was implementing domain reforms under the lord of Chōshū, Mōri Takachika, as part of efforts to promote the production of weapons in the domain. He worked in Hagi for about two years, during which he greatly improved his skills. In 1845 (the 2nd year of the Kōka era), he returned to Edo and set up a forge in Yotsuya, where he became known as "Yotsuya Masamune."

In the following year, he changed his smith name to "KIYOMARO" (清磨) from Masayuki. During this time, he created what would become his lifelong masterpiece, made for his benefactor, Kubota Sugane.

KIYOMARO died on November 14, 1854 (the 7th year of the Kaei era), at the age of 42. He ended his life with a blade after his health deteriorated due to years of heavy drinking and his despair over his condition.

KIOMARO's turbulent life as a swordsmith began with his study of the Bizen tradition under TOSHITAKA, focusing on the chōji-midare hamon. Later, he developed his own unique Sōshū tradition, thanks to his natural talent. His style of work was known for its dramatic sword designs, which featured gunome-midare hamon with touches of chōji, displaying a variety of activities such as prominent sunagashi and kinsuji. The hamon would also show areas of strong nie, adding a sense of power and vitality to his works. Crafted with his unique sensibility and aesthetic sense, his swords possess a high level of artistry, unmistakably distinct from those of other swordsmiths. Due to his legendary life and the rarity of his works, which are few because of his relatively short career, his pieces are highly

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valued within the swordsmith community. Even today, the excellence of his craftsmanship continues to captivate those who see his swords.

No.42

Tantō mei Tennenshi Sadatoshi nijū-nana sai kore wo tsukuru

Ikkansai Masayuki jūhassai kore wo tsukuru

Bunsei jūsan nen shi gatsu-jitsu (April in the 13th year of the Bunsei era)

This piece is a collaborative work between Kiyomaro and his older brother, Masao. It is one of Kiyomaro's earliest works, with both of their ages engraved, making it highly valuable from a historical perspective. The craftsmanship reflects the influence of their teacher, Kawamura Toshitaka, who follows the tradition of the Inshū Hamabe school, and it showcases a chōji-midare in **shin-tai** without any flaws. Additionally, it features futasuji-hi (two grooves), a characteristic seen in many of Kiyomaro's later, passionate works. This piece is a monumental creation for the Yamura (Kiyomaro's family name) brothers, encapsulating their strong emotions and marking an important milestone in their careers.

No.44

Tantō Mei Minamoto Hidetoshi

Tenpō go nen Chūtō Tōsai Shujin no tame kore wo tsukuru

(mid-winter in the 5th year of the Tenpō era)

This is a rare example where, for this particular year, the sword is signed "Hideyoshi" (秀寿) instead of the "Masayuki" (正行) signature usually used during this period, and it was made when Kiyomaro was only 22 years old. The hamon features a predominance of ko-notare with a pointed bōshi (tip), and in one theory, it is referred to as a replica of the work of Daiza. Another sword from the same year, in stark contrast, displays an irregular chōji hamon in shin-tai (structured design), with prominent nie, reminiscent of his teacher, Kawamura Toshitaka (from the Inshū Hamabe school). This tantō stands out for its success in achieving a high-level interpretation of the Sōshū tradition.

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No.46

Katana Mei Minamoto Masayuki

Tenpō jūgo nen Hachi gatsu-jitusu (August in the 15th year of the Tenpō era)

A sword signed "Shin Komoro-jō ni oite Minamoto Masayuki tsukuru" (於信小諸城製源正行) from the same year as this piece has been discovered, suggesting that Kiyomaro temporarily returned to his hometown in Shinshū after leaving Chōshū Hagi, where he had been stationed and making swords for about two years until the previous year. These works are referred to as "Komoro-uchi", and approximately six pieces have been confirmed. This particular sword is regarded as one of the finest among them. It features a striking, dynamic appearance, with its long body and extended kissaki (tip).

No.48

Katana Mei Kubota Sugane-kun no tame Yamaura Tamaki Minamoto Kiyomaro tsukuru

Kōka hinoe-uma nen Hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the hinoe-uma year of the Tenpō era)

In the 3rd year (hinoe-uma) of Kōka, Kiyomaro returned from Hagi to Edo and changed his name from "Masayuki" to "Kiyomaro." This marks the birth of the smith-name "Kiyomaro." This particular piece was made for his benefactor, Kubota Sugane, and is renowned as one of the masterpieces of his career. The subdued yet strong presence of nie and nioi, along with the activities of kinsuji, niesuji, and sunagashi, all demonstrate Kiyomaro's unique style, brimming with vitality, and it is impossible to confuse it with the swords of other smiths. Additionally, the inscription "…製" (…tsukuru) appears on only a few pieces, and combined with the futashuji-hi (two parallel grooves), it reflects the meticulous craftsmanship involved.

No.50

Tantō Mei Kiyomaro

Kōka hinoto-hitsuji nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the hinoto-hitsuji year of the Kōka era)

This piece is just under one shaku in length, but it presents a wide blade and a large appearance. Likely made in response to the client's request, the hamon is a suguha, which is rare for Kiyomaro, and the nioiguchi is rather tight, resulting in a pronounced nioi. The surface also shows sugu-utsuri (straight reflection), and there is no trace of the usual roughness. Nevertheless, the hamon is flawless, and the motifs carved into the blade, such as the Kurikara (a dragon coiled around a sword) and gomahashi (two thin grooves) in sō-tai (cursive-style design), and tsume (a simplified design of the three-prongs of a Sankozuka-ken), all contribute to an overall impression of refinement and precision in this sword.

No.52

Dai-shō Mei Minamoto Kiyomaro

Kaei gan-nen Hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 1st year of the Kaei era)

This piece features a sharp appearance with a wide blade and a pointed tip, showcasing the unique characteristics of Kiyomaro's work. The hamon, based on gunome, is bright with prominent nie, along with kinsuji, demonstrating a dynamic presence. It is especially rare to find a matching dai-shō (katana and wakizashi set), making this set highly valuable. The katana is in shinogi-zukuri, while the wakizashi is in hira-zukuri. However, there are extremely few wakizashi made by Kiyomaro in shinogi-zukuri, and even in this set, his dedication to the creation of the wakizashi is evident. The carving of the kakitōshi-hi (a groove carved all the way to the tang) is also quite unique. This dai-shō is believed to have been ordered by a samurai from the Shinshū Matsushiro Domain.

No.54

Katana Mei Minamoto Kiyomaro

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Kaei san nen ni gatsu-jitsu (February in the 3rd year of the Kaei era)

This piece is classified as a sword (katana) since its designation as an Important Sword in Shōwa 56. However, considering the construction and length of the tang, it is also possible that it was originally made as a type of naginata (long-handled polearm). The double-lined hamon in the upper half of the blade vividly displays Kiyomaro's characteristic style, with thick nie, and as expected, the nioiguchi is bright and sharp, fully showcasing his true craftsmanship. It is worth noting that there are only about five confirmed naginata made by Kiyomaro, and each of them features a sharp, precise construction, with no curvature in the tip.

No.57

Naginata Mei Minamoto Kiyomaro

Kaei san nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 3rd year of the Kaei era)

Okada Zempaku-kun no tame kore wo tsukuru

This is a naginata (pole sword) with a distinctive shape and appearance, featuring a straight and sharp tip. It reflects the typical style of Kiyomaro, with an even more prominent presence of rounded gunome in the hamon, displaying a rich variety of patterns and activities. Both the jigane and hamon showcase a bright and sharp appearance. The client, Okada Zempaku, is identified as a hatamoto (a direct samurai of the shogun), based on the inscription on a sasaho-yari (bamboo-leaf-shaped spear) from the first year of Kaei, two years before this piece was made, which reads "Minamoto Kiyomaro / Nishimaru Goshoin ni-ban gumi Okada Zempaku" (源清磨／西丸御書院二番組 岡田善伯).

No.58

Katana Mei Minamoto Kiyomaro

Nakajima Kamatari haitō

This piece is believed to have been made around the 3rd year of the Kaei era, based on the inscription. It features a wide, long blade with a deep curvature and an

extended chū-kissaki (medium-sized tip), presenting a powerful appearance, yet the jigane remains tight, showcasing its excellent quality. The hamon, composed of various forms of gunome, is especially prominent in the upper half, where the nie appears thick and irregular, giving the impression of silver powder having been sprinkled on it. It demonstrates the true craftsmanship of Kiyomaro, exhibiting his natural talent in sword making. The background of Nakajima Kamatari remains unknown.

No.59

Wakizashi Mei Minamoto Kiyomaro

Kaei go nen ni gatsu-jitsu (February in the 5th year of the Kaei era)

This piece, slightly exceeding one shaku in length, is conveniently classified as a wakizashi but can be considered a large tantō. The construction features a sharp tip, clearly demonstrating the craftsmanship, and the itame-hada in the jigane is tighter than usual due to the fine forging. The hamon emphasizes both depth and irregularities, displaying its unique character, while the bright nioiguchi draws attention. With the presence of sunagashi and niesuji, this piece fully reflects Kiyomaro's style, showcasing truly impressive vitality.