

### 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, Tomi 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" (一貫齋正行), 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

後期

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

No.43

Tantō Mei Yamaura Kuranosuke Minamoto Hidetoshi

Tenpō go nen Chūtō Hodo Ryū-shi no tame kore wo tsukuru

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

This is a tantō with the inscription “Hidetoshi” (秀寿), a signature used before using Kiyomaro. It is dated to the same year as the sword in the Tōken Hakubutsukan (Sword Museum) collection (No. 44). While the sword in the museum follows the Sōshū tradition, this piece has a distinctly different appearance, with the continuous gunome pattern neatly aligned. It's intriguing to consider whether, at this time, Kiyomaro was experimenting with and refining his ideal sword style through trial and error, or if the design of each sword was influenced by the clients' wishes, as indicated by the inscriptions on both pieces. Regardless, both works demonstrate flawless craftsmanship, showcasing the extraordinary skill and uniqueness of Kiyomaro.

No.45

Dai-shō

Katana Mei Chō Suketarō Muneharu no tame Yamaura Tamaki Masayuki kore wo tsukuru

Tenpō jūni nen hachi gatsu Kichijitu (An auspicious day in August of the 12th year of the Tenpō era)

Wakizashi Mei Chō Suketarō Muneharu no tame Yamaura Tamaki Masayuki kore wo tsukuru

Tenpō jūni nen hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 12th year of the Tempō era)

The client, "Chō Suketarō" (張助太郎), was the nephew of Murata Seifū, a samurai from the Chōshū Domain who had invited Kiyomaro to Hagi. Suketarō traveled to Edo with Seifū that year, and a receipt for the payment from that time still exists.

後期

Additionally, this dai-shō (katana and wakizashi set) comes with its original, well-preserved black-lacquered scabbards and mountings (kuroroiro-saya dai-shō koshirae), making them complete and highly valuable pieces. The hamon features chōji with some gunome mixed in, displaying thick nie and frequent activities of kinsuji and sunagashi, showcasing the full range of Kiyomaro's skill and characteristics.

No.47

Katana Mei Minamoto Masayuki

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

This sword is also considered to be a “Komorou-uchi” based on the inscription of the year of manufacture. The jigane combines itame with nagare-hada (flowing grain pattern), while the hamon consists mainly of gunome-chōji with thick nie unevenly displayed. As is typical, the presence of kinsuji, niesuji, and sunagashi is particularly prominent, fully showcasing the characteristics of Kiyomaro’s work. This piece demonstrates his remarkable skill and presents a powerful appearance. Additionally, many swords from the same year typically have the third stroke of the character “行” engraved upwards, but with this piece, it is reversed, making it historically valuable.

No.49

Tantō Mei Minamoto Kiyomaro

Kōka hinoto-hitsuji nen ni gatsu-jitsu (February in the hinoto-hitsuji year of the Kōka era)

Torii Masaoki no yoshimi ni yori kore wo tsukuru

The construction of this tantō was pioneered by Shimada Sukemune of Suruga during the Muromachi period, and it is referred to as "Osoraku-zukuri" because the inscription "osoraku" was engraved on the blades of his works. This particular piece features a sharp shape, frequent sunagashi, and the presence of kinsuji, all of which work together to create an even sharper and more striking appearance. While the details of the client, "Torii Masaoki," are unclear, one theory suggests that he was a

後期

retainer of the Tokugawa shogunate, and the construction was likely made according to his preferences.

No.51

Wakizashi Mei Kiyomaro

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

The wakizashi features a sharp shōbu-zukuri construction with a pointed tip, displaying rough nie in patches, along with niesuji on the hamon. Additionally, the presence of yubashiri on the jigane further highlights the distinctive characteristics of Kiyomaro's work. The inscription on this wakizashi, "萬山不重君恩重" and "一髮不輕我命輕" ("Among all the mountains, the kind favor of my lord is the heaviest, and before him, my life is lighter than a single hair"), is said to be a phrase engraved by Ōishi Kuranosuke on a handguard he made himself. It reflects the spirit of a loyal samurai, fully dedicated to his lord.

No.53

Katana Minamoto Kiyomaro

Kaei ni nen Hachi gatsu-jitsu (August in the 2nd year of the Kaei era)

This sword shows a gradual increase in width of the hamon toward the tip, with abundant variations in the nie. In some places, the hamon is divided by niesuji, giving it a double-lined appearance. It is full of dynamic movement, characteristic of Kiyomaro's style. While there are not many examples with futasuji-hi (two parallel grooves), those that do exist are typically of a vigorous, overflowing quality, and tend to rank among Kiyomaro's finest works. This piece is no exception, and its meticulous craftsmanship is evident, making it one of the finer examples.

No.55

Wakizashi Mei Minamoto Kiyomaro

後期

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

This wakizashi is rare for Kiyomaro due to its hira-zukuri construction (a flat blade without any ridgelines) and extended length. It features a gunome hamon mixed with choji-like and squarish patterns, prominent long ashi, and thick nie in patches, some of which are partially frayed. Along with kinsuji and sunagashi in some areas, it is crafted in a style that is unmistakably characteristic of Kiyomaro. Utilizing the advantages of the hira-zukuri blade, the carvings of sankozuka-ken (the three-pronged sword) on the front and the Sanskrit characters, gomahashi (two thin grooves), and lotus pedestal on the back further enhance the piece, giving it a spirit-filled presence.

No.56

Katana Mei Minamoto Kiyomaro

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

Yamamoto Shigeatsu no tame

Exceeding two shaku eight sun in length, this large sword features a wide blade and a dignified shape, while maintaining a flawless hamon from the base to the tip. It clearly demonstrates the high level of craftsmanship of Kiyomaro. The sharp itame-hada, combined with a gunome-midare hamon that displays abundant nie, kinsuji, and sunagashi, creates a striking effect, while the nioiguchi is bright. This remarkable piece fully showcases his true skill. As for the background of Yamamoto Shigeatsu, it remains unknown.

No.60

Tantō Mei Kiyomaro

This tantō, though lacking a production year, is believed to have been made around the 6th to 7th year of the Kaei era, during Kiyomaro's later years, based on the inscribed name. As is typical of Kiyomaro, it features the distinctive construction with a sharp tip, along with a well-forged itame-hada that displays a strong texture of

後期

iron. The hamon, mixed with various patterns, shows thick nie that appears in patches, with prominent kinsuji, sunagashi, and yūbashiri, clearly reflecting the unique characteristics of his work. The accompanying black lacquered mounting, a kuroroiro tazuna-kizami-saya aikuchi tantō koshirae, from the same period, further adds to the value of this tantō.