

WAZAMONO

This is a term which was often heard in the olden days in reference to the cutting ability of the Nihonto (Japanese sword).

Today, we often hear reference to the Nihonto as an "art sword" and this is quite correct since the sword has lost its primary function.

The Japanese sword was made to cut one's opponent and kill him, that was its primary function, and that alone.

During the Tokugawa Period (1603–1867), the Samurai, not having much opportunity to use these swords in combat, started calling the sword "Soul of the Samurai", (part of their dress) however, the primary function of the sword should not be forgotten. We are certain that no swordsmith made or forged swords with the intention of turning out a great work of "art", though he certainly tried his best to turn out a very "keen" blade. Such being the case, the cutting ability of the sword was a quality very much sought after.

In reference to wazamono, families like the Yamada, the official executioner for the Tokugawa government, came into being and Yamada Asauemon during the Bunka Era (1804-1817) wrote a book entitled Kaiho Kenjaku in which he relates the cutting abilities of various swords that he and his forbears used to execute people with and make cutting tests with. The classification of the sword according to its cutting ability has been divided into the following by Yamada:

Saijo O Wazamono

O Wazamono

Yoki Wazamono

Wazamono

plus, about 70 swordsmiths listed in a separate list which is a combination of,

O-Wazamono, Yoki Wazamono and Nazamono.

It is to be noted that, among the swordsmiths listed in these groups, there are very few swordsmiths from the pre—Sengoku: (Momoyama) Period (1467 to 1615) and this is understandable, for blades of the Koto Period were very well taken care of (highly valued) during the Shinto Period and they must have been considered too dear for cutting tests.

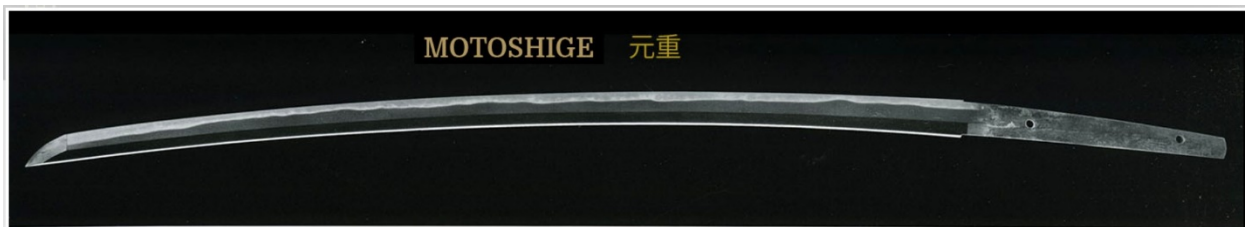


Image from Fred Weisberg's site: <https://www.nihonto.com/>

The oldest such blade, ~1360, we note from the list - pictured above -, is that of the smith Bizen Osafune MOTOSHIGE. Osafune Motoshige of the Bizen school of sword making.

For a sword of MOTOSHIGE's caliber to have been used in a cutting test, we are of the opinion that there must have been something wrong with the blade, perhaps an excessively big fault - no Boshi or an extremely large Kizu, etc. = faults rendering the blade not worth keeping.

Saijo O Wazamono refers to blades which are considered to have the keenest cutting edge.

O Wazamono, the next in standing, then...

Yoki Wazamono and finally

Wazamono.

It was not uncommon for a samurai with a new sword or newly sharpened (polished) sword to test it on the first disrespectful(s) he came across, this could be a single person or an entire family, regardless of age and sex.

The end of the Tokugawa Period (1603–1867) was the end of open carry of swords.

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