

Honebami (Bone-smasher) Toshiro, the Sword of Toyotomi Hideyoshi

This sword, a prized possession of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), is said to have been made by the famed swordsmith Awataguchi Toshiro Yoshimitsu (dates unclear). The name combines that of its maker (Toshiro) with the claim that the blade could cut through bone, that is, was more destructive than a sword that merely cut through flesh.

The history of the weapon is long and fascinating. Originally forged as a *naginata* (a curved blade attached to a long staff) for Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1198), the first Kamakura shogun, it later became the hereditary possession of the Ashikaga shoguns. During this period, the blade was made into a sword and given the form that it retains today. Eventually, the weapon found its way into the hands of Hideyoshi. But with the destruction of the Toyotomi family at the hands of the Tokugawa in 1615, the sword came into the possession of the new line of shoguns. The head of the Tokugawa family donated the sword to the Toyokuni shrine after the Meiji Restoration, restoring its connection to Hideyoshi.