

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
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Meito Kanshou
Appreciation of Important Swords

Classification: Juyo Bunkazai

Type: Tachi

Mei: Nobufusa saku

Accompanied by an origami: Genroku 16 nen daikinshi 50 mai Honnami Mitsutada

Owner: NBTHK

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 1 bu 5 rin (76.2 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 6 rin (2.2 cm)

Motohaba: slightly less than 9 bu (2.72 cm)

Sakihaba: slightly over 5 bu 7 rin (1.74 cm)

Motokasane: slightly over 1 bu 8 rin (0.54 cm)

Sakikasane: slightly over 1 bu 2 rin (0.38 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 2.5 rin (2.5 cm)

Nakago length: 4 sun 8 bu 8 rin (14.8 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary:

This is a shobu zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, a narrow mihaba, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. It is suriage, but there is some funbari still remaining. It is koshizori with a large sori, a small kissaki, and an elegant tachi shape. The jihada is ko-itame mixed with mokume hada. There are frequent fine chikei, and the entire hada is visible. There are jifu utsuri, and in some places, the utsuri reaches the shinogi ji. The hamon is a shallow notare mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome, and entire hamon is narrow. There are frequent ko-ashi and yo, and in some places there are sunagashi and kinsuji, and dense ko-nie. The boshi on the omote side is notarekomi with a nijuba style hamon, and the tip is yakizume. On the ura side, the boshi is a notare type hamon with a slightly wide yakiba and there is very little return. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is saki-kiri, the yasurimeji are a shallow katte-sagari, and there are two mekugi-ana. Above the first mekugi-ana, towards the mune edge there is a large size three kanji signature made with slightly thick tagane (chisel).

The Nobufusa name is known among smiths working in the Ko-Bizen and Ko-chimonji groups since very early times. According to the historical book "Kokon

Meizukushi Taizen”, the two kanji signature “Nobufusa” is from the Ko-Bizen school, and the three kanji mei Nobufusa saku is from the Ko-Ichimonji school. There are references listing these signatures: example No.1 is a Gyobutsu (an Imperial treasure); No. 2 is a Kokuho; No. 3, and No. 4 (this tachi) are Juyo Bunkazai. There are four Juyo Bunkazai swords in total, and one Juyo Bijutsuhin, and No. 5 is classified Juyo Token. Of those signed with the three kanji “Nobufusa saku” mei (and not with the two kanji Nobufusa mei) the hamon have stronger nie than early Ichimonji works, and an old elegant look. From this, we have treated the three kanji signature blades as Ko-Bizen works. But there are two tachi with a two kanji signature “Nobufusa” (described in June of Showa 46, as the 22nd Juyo Token classified sword) and in Showa 55, describing the 5th Tokubetsu Juyo classified sword) and their styles appear older looking than works with the three kanji signature Nobufusa. Because of this, we are currently not sure about the validity of the historical opinion that the three kanji signatures are Ko-Ichimonji works, and today we still do not have a conclusion about this. From this tachi’s signature, jihada and hamon, it is difficult to judge as being either Ko-Bizen or Ko-Ichimonji work.

Another example of this situation are swords signed “Motochika tsukuru”: it is difficult to decide what these are and there are two opinions that these are either Ko-Bizen or Fukuoka-Ichimonji work. The signatures are similar, and a Juyo-Bijutsuhin blade is in a Ko-Bizen style, and the Juyo Bunkazai blade has a gorgeous prominent choji hamon which is in the Fukuoka-Ichimonji style. From this fact, it is difficult to decide if these are either Ko-Bizen work or Ko-Ichimonji work. We need more research in the future concerning this.

This Nobufusa tachi was a donation from Ms. Ozu Hisako.

Reference for signatures: 1. Gyobutsu; 2. Kokuho; 3. Juyo-Bunkazai; 4. Juyo Bunkazai (this tachi); 5. Juyo Token; 6. Tokubetsu Juyo

(Explanation and oshigata by Hiyama Masanori)

Meitan kansho

Appreciation of fine tsuba & kodogu

Juyo tosogu
Nagegiri (Paulonia) sukashi tsuba
Mumei: Nishigaki Kanshiro

Paulownia flowers are known for the beauty of their purple color since historical times, and these were very much admired by people. In the Heian period novel “Makura no Soushi” paulownia flowers are described: the purple colored flowers

are interesting and the wide leaves are different from other trees, and people have admired the beauty of these trees for a long time. Beside this, the paulownia was used as the Imperial house's crest, the same as the chrysanthemum. Hideyoshi used the Paulonia as his mon, and today, people respect it is used as a crest for the Japanese Diet. This tsuba's "nagegiri" theme represents throwing a paulownia flower. This is the Higo's master smith Nishigaki Kanshiro's favorite subject. There are four major Higo kinko (gold smith) schools: Hirata, Hayashi, Nishigaki, and Shimizu. Each school's smiths worked under the lord Hosokawa Sansai's excellent instructions, and they produced many fine pieces of tsuba and kodogu. Nishigaki Kanshiro had a special passion for iron which looks like a simple and everyday material. With his deep understanding of iron and his techniques, he utilized the beauty of this material, and his tsuba receive high evaluations. If Matashichi's tsuba display the highest level of elegance, and Nishigaki's tsuba display sophistication and elegance. This tsuba displays Kanshiro's strong passion for iron. The excellent rusty iron colored jitetsu is called a yokan (bean cake) color, and the large featured dynamic sukashi pattern, with delicate leaves engraved with a kebori technique, produces a very rich and elegant feeling. The realistic feeling, like the Paulownia flower's purple color are apparent, and you can appreciate the high level of his skill.

(Explanation by Kurotaki Tetsuya)

Shijo Kantei To No. 666

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 666 issue Shijo Kantei To is August, 5 2012. Each person may submit one vote. Submissions should contain your name and address and be sent to the NBTHK Shijo Kantei. You can use the Shijo Kantei card which is attached in this magazine. Votes postmarked on or before August 5, 2012 will be accepted. If there are swordsmiths with the same name in different schools, please write the school or prefecture, and if the swordsmith was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

Information:

Type: tanto

Length: 6 sun 9.5 bu (21.06cm)

Motohaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun (9.09 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune, a slightly narrow mihaba, and a short length. There is a strong uchizori, and the fukura is poor. The jihada is itame hada and shows nagare-hada and masame type hada. There are ji-nie, chikei, and a dark iron color. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The habuchi is mixed with frequent hotsure and kuichigaiba and some places show yubashiri. There are ko-ashi, bright small unique nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, and the nakago jiri is a square shaped kurijiri, and the nakago mune is round. The yasurime are a very shallow katte sagari, and there is one mekugi-ana. On the omote side, the nakago has a long four kanji signature located along the center.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For June

The swords discussed below were shown in the June, 2012 meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

During these meetings, five swords are displayed for examination. The blades can be examined, but the nakago are covered and cannot be seen (they are left in the shira-saya tsuka). After examining the 5 swords, the meeting attendees must decide who they think made the 5 swords which were available for examination, and submit a paper ballot with these names. The 5 swords seen in the October meeting are described below, and the correct names of the makers are presented, along with an explanation of important details which should lead a person to pick the correct swordsmith's name. This lecture and the explanations were given by Ooi Gaku.

Kantei To No. 1: tanto

Mei: Sa

Length: 7 sun 6 bu

Sori: very small

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: tight ko-itame hada mixed with mokume hada; there are dense thick ji-nie, fine frequent chikei, and nie utsuri.

Hamon: suguha mixed with shallow small notare and ko-gunome; there are ko-ashi, frequent ko-nie, hotsure, yubashiri, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: suguha style; the omote has yubashiri, nie-kuzure, the tip is sharp, there are frequent hakikake and kinsuji; the ura is komaru, the tip has fine hakikake, and both sides have a long return.

Samonji used to be called Dai-Sa, and he is known as Seiren's grandson, and Jitsua's son. It is documented that Kyushu's classic old style was changed to new style by Samonji. The transition time is supposed to have been approximately after Ryakuo 2 and before Kano 2 (at the Heisei 22 New Year's Teirei Kanshokai, we displayed a suguha style Samonji blade which was made around Ryakuo 2). From the style, this appears to be a transitional work, made just before he established his new style. Compared with the dated Ryakuo 2 work which still has a country (non-mainstream) appearance, and the suguha blade around Ryakuo 2, this jihada is more refined, the hamon shows a shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome, and is much brighter; the yubashiri, and sunagashi hataraki are interesting; and this shows a new style of Samonji work. But the unique boshi, which is tsukiage, with a sharp tip and long return, is not developed yet. Because of this, this is a very interesting work, and I think this is a work made just before he fully established his new style. In voting, because of the small size tanto shape, there were different opinions. In Nanbokucho times, a wide mihaba and long size were popular in tanto. But three smiths, Kaneuji, Chogi, and Samonji made smaller sized tanto with sori. In particular, Samonji tanto have a small kasane (they are thin), and the fukura are poor, and this is characteristic of his style. And please think about different from Kamakura period shapes, such as the Shintogo and Awataguchi schools. From historical times, people thought that Samonji was Masamune's student, but recently, there are other opinions: his works are similar to Rai Kunimitsu's work. The NBTHK has a Sa tanto, and the shape is different, but the jihada, hamon, and hataraki are very similar to this and we displayed this as a kanteito. This is my opinion: possibly Samonji studied Rai Kunimitsu's work, and he learned to make hataraki such as nie, sunagashi, and kinsuji, and a strong boshi style from the Shoshu master smiths.

Kantei To No. 2: tachi

Mei: Kuniyuki (Rai)

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun 3 bu

Sori: 1 sun

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: ko-itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada; there are dense fine ji-nie, frequent chikei, some jifu type hada, and bo-utsuri.

Hamon: chu-suguha style, mixed with ko-midare, ko-choji, and square shape gunome; there are ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, dense ko-nie, uchinoke, fine hotsure, sunagashi, and kinsuji.

Boshi: both sides are a shallow nortare, the tip has fine hakikake, there is a komaru and return.

This tachi has an ubu nakago with a signature, and is a Rai Kuniyuki tachi. Kuniyuki does not have dated blades. However, Kunitoshi who is supposed to be his son, has a two kanji mei dated Koan 1, and from this, Kuniyuki's active period is supposed to have been around the Shogen to Buno eras, as stated in a historical book. He has narrow to wide mihaba, and a dynamic shaped tachi style. This is a long, narrow, very elegant shape tachi. But the kissaki is prominent inokubi style, and this tells its era. Looking at deeply curved sori, this is an original Rai school wazori shape. Also, the jihada and hamon are refined, and from these characteristics, it is not difficult to identify this work as being from the Rai school. Among the Rai school work, the shape are similar to Rai Kunitoshi. This hamon is chu-suguha, mixed with ko-midare, ko-choji and square shaped gunome, and there is an intricate midare hamon. Around the habuchi there are fine beautiful hataraki; the ashi are wide, and this is a classic elegant style. From the jihada and hamon, the two kanji Kunitoshi answer is understandable. But if this were his work, the midare hamon would have a larger pattern, and the boshi would be midarekomi, and, in particular, the overall shape would be larger. Rai Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu very rarely make such elegant shaped tachi, and their midare hamon have more prominent gunome hamon. In particular, Kunitsugu hamon have more strong or pronounced nie. Many people voted for Ayanokoji Sadatoshi's name. It is an understandable answer. But if this were his work, the hamon would be narrower when compared with Kuniyuki; also there would be vertical alterations in the hamon's width, and the top of the hamon would have tobiyaki which become soft and be mixed with ko-gunome. In particular, many of his boshi have frequent hakikake. Some people voted for early Kamakura Awataguchi school work. But if it were, the shape would be a strong koshizori, and tip would appear uchizori, which is a classic style.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mei: Moriie

Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 4. 5 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Design: shobu zukuri

Mune: Ihorimune

Jihada: ko-itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada: there are frequent dense ji-nie, chikei, jifu type hada, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: ko-choji mixed with ko-gunome and kawazoko-choji; there is a clear midare hamon; there are frequent ashi and yo; around the nioiguchi are konie and sunagashi.

Boshi: the omote and ura both are midarekomi, with a komaru, and return.

Bizen Hatakeyama Moriie has a blade dated during the Bunei era (during the Kamakura period). Later in the Nanbokuchō period, the same name is seen on a blade dated during the Kentoku era. The Moriie name is supposed to have been used for generations, and from the style, this blade is thought to have made during the early to mid-Kamakura period. Because of somewhat narrow shape, some people voted for an earlier era, but please pay attention to the gentle koshizori curvature which is continuous up to the kissaki. Among the people who voted for the correct era, from considering the dense nioiguchi with a choji hamon, and the jihada which has midare utsuri, many people voted for the Ichimonji school. Looking at this, the midare hamon includes many gunome which are mixed with unique choji, and the entire hamon does not have large up and down variations. In particular, around the monouchi, the hamon is gentle, and you have to pay attention these characteristics. Carefully look at the hamon, and in the fine midare hamon, there are round topped, narrow bottom unique choji called kawazuko choji. Also, the kawazuko choji stop abruptly, and the tops form round tobiyaki. From these characteristics, Mitsutada and the Hatakeyama school's smiths such as Moriie and Sanemori can become strong candidates. This sword does not have much visible jihada, and there are not many kawazuko choji, so from this, the Mitsutada answer is understandable. But his jihada are usually more refined and have fine ji-nie, and his boshi are often sharp tipped. In voting, some people voted for Nagamitsu. Indeed, some of his early work includes some kawazuko choji. But his choji hamon do not have prominent narrow bottomed, round topped plump choji, and in his characteristic choji hamon, gunome and togariba are more prominent. Some people voted for Kunimune, but if this were his work, the jihada would be more visible than Moriie's, and in his choji hamon more square shapes are seen.

Kantei To No. 4: wakizashi

Mei: Hankei

Length: 1 shaku 5 sun 1 bu

Sori: 3 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: itame hada mixed with oitame, ko-mokume, and nagare hada; the entire hada is visible: there are frequent ji-nie, and frequent thick black chikei.

Hamon: the moto has a yakidashi; the hamon is based on a shallow notare hamon, and mixed with gunome; the habuchi has hotsure, uchinoke; there is a dense nioiguchi, and frequent dense nie; the ji and ha boundary is unclear with a worn down nioiguchi; there are frequent long kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight; on the omote it is mixed with kuichigai-ba; both sides have a komaru tip; there are frequent hakikake and a short return.

Hankei is a sword smith with strong characteristics, but his name has never come up in a kanteito in the past, and maybe some people are disappointed about this. Some of his works are in a typical Keicho-Shinto style, with a wide mihaba, and the widths at the moto and saki are not much different; and there is a long kissaki. But in this era, his shinogi zukuri blades do not show many wide mihaba, and the kissaki are not too long, which is a standard shape, just like this wakizashi.

Because of the shape, some people may have been a bit confused about the period. Thus, you have to pay attention to the shape, which has very sharp mitsumune angles, and this is a very important characteristic for judging Hankei's work. This jihada is itame mixed with oitame, mokume, and nagarehada, and the entire hada is visible. There are black thick frequent chikei, call Hijikihada. The hamon is based on a shallow notare, mixed with gunome. There is a dense wide, but worn down nioiguchi, dense frequent nie, and the boundary between the ji and ha can be unclear. There are frequent long kinsuji, and sunagashi. The boshi has frequent strong hakikake, and this jihada and hamon characteristics are enough to positively identify Hankei's work. Because of this, in voting, more than half of the people had the correct answer in the first vote. Some people voted for Norishige, who was admired by Hankei's. Maybe the wakizashi at the habuchi has more hataraki than usual, and a classic look for Hankei. Thus, Hankei might be happy to see his work identified as Norishige. But you should look at this jihada which is Hijikihada.

Among the Shinto smiths, some people voted for Yatsutsugu and Satsuma school smiths. Yasutsugu has very few blades which have this much strong hataraki. If it were a Satsuma blade, the jihada would be different.

Kantei To No. 5: tachi

Mei: Nobuyoshi

Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 4 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume, the entire hada appears like nagare hada; the monouchi area is a masame type jihada and the entire hada is visible: there are jienie, fine chikei, some jifu type hada, and pale bo-utsuri.

Hamon: suguha; there is a dense nioiguchi, and ko-nie.

Boshi: straight and with a komaru.

Horimono: the omote and ura have bo-hi with kaku-dome; on the omote at the koshimoto and nakago, there is a trace of a suken.

Nobuyoshi is known as a Senjuin school smith, and he used to live in Yoshino gun Ryumon sho, which is between the Yoshino and Uda areas. From this, he was called Ryumon Nobuyoshi. In the main, he has two styles of blades: one is suguha without utsuri, which have a strong Yamato style gentle appearance. The other style has a gorgeous midare hamon or suguha mixed with choji and ashi, and with utsuri. Also, he has two types of signatures. In looking at the Nobu kanji, “延” the radical on the right side can be written in two ways. One is with the radical “氏” and other one uses the radical “正”. Concerning his signature, there are several opinions prevalent since historical times, about whether the signatures represent one person or different persons. Mr. Ogasawara Nobuo compared this sword with old published records of both signatures, and thinks they are both Yamato school blades (Museum Journal number 475). Mr. Tanobe Michihiro compared the work and signatures, and he thinks there is another signature in comparing this and a tachi owned by Seikado-Bunko (a museum in Tokyo) (described in the magazine “Me no me”, Heisei 21, December issue). This signature is between the “氏” kanji signature and Seikado-Bunko tachi signature. Also, the style is a Yamato style mixed with Bizen type work, which is a transitional style. The first look reminds us of the Aoe school or Ko-Mihara school work and many people voted for these schools. Especially, the Ko-Mihara answer is quite understandable. But Ko-Mihara nagarehada are mixed with prominent mokume hada, and the boshi are sharp with a return. If this were Aoe work, the boshi would be sharp, the jihada a tight mokume and there would be unique dan-utsuri. Some people voted for Rai Kunitoshi, and Enju. Both are reasonable opinions, but if it were Rai Kunitoshi, there would be more hataraki in the habuchi, and if Enju, the boshi would be different from Yamato boshi. Usually, Nobuyoshi never appears in a kanteito. But among the Yamato school, which has very few signatures, Nobuyoshi has a high standard of work left today, including the NBTHK owned Kokuho tachi. We might need to study his work more in the future. This is a difficult subject, but this is the year of the Ryu (dragon). We have to go through a difficult gate, a Ryu-mon. From this idea, we included this tachi here as a kanteito.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei No 664 (in the May, 2012 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 664 in the May issue is a tanto by Omi daijo Tadahiro.

Among the Nidai Tadahiro's short blades, there are hira-wakizashi and tanto, and there are a reasonable number of hirawakizashi left today. In general, they are wide, are long, have a large kasane (they are thick), and have a small sori. However, there are a very few tanto left today, like this one. They often have a standard mihaba or are slightly wider than usual, are thick (have a large kasane), and are uchizori. This is a long tanto among his works. The hint for the jihada describes the Hizen original kokenuka-hada. This is a refined kokenuka-hada, and the hamon is a belt type suguha with a fine and clear belt shaped nioiguchi. In places there are kuichigai-ba, and the boshi is parallel with the fukura and is straight. There is a komaru and return, and there is a Hizen original form of a kurikara horimono. From this, most people voted for the Nidai Tadayoshi or the Shodai Tadahiro (Shodai Tadayoshi). In Hizen, the time this type of style was established and produced in large numbers was around the Shodai Tadayoshi's Musashi Daijo Tadahiro period and the style was continued by the Nidai Tadahiro and Sandai Tadayoshi. The Nidai Tadahiro and Shodai Tadahiro works are very similar. The Nidai's nakago tip is iriyamagata, and the yasurime are kiri, the same as the Shodai Tadahiro. So the Shodai Tadahiro answer is treated as an almost correct answer at this time. But during the Shodai Tadahiro's five kanji "junin Tadayoshi" era, copies of Soshu Den master smiths' work were very popular all over Japan. During the Tadayoshi era, we do not see this kokenuka-hada with a belt type suguha. We see all kinds of suguha copied from old classic works. The Tadayoshi era nakago tip is kurijiri, and most of the yasurime are either shallow katte kagari, or katte sagari. Besides the correct answer and almost correct answer, a few people voted for Umetada Myoju. Maybe the answer came from the fact that the jihada and hamon are bright Shinto work, with a fine dragon horimono. The nakago tip is iriyamagata, and the yasurime are kiri. But Myoju tanto have a wide mihaba and Keicho Shinto shape, and for the mihaba, the lengths are short, give an impression of a hocho shape, and most of them are a katakiriha style. His hamon are usually a shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome, and usually we never seen nioiguchi with a belt-like appearance. Also, Myoju's dragon horimono are Tamaoi-ryu, Jo-ge-ryu, and Hai-ryu, and we never see a Kurikara horimono. We see often, that his dragon's jaws are noticeably square shaped and the lower jaw is prominently larger than the upper jaw, and the entire face appears like it is laughing._

Explanation by Hinohara Dai.

