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Meito Kansho
Examination of important swords

Classification: Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Tanto

Mei: Rai Kunitsugu

note: this tanto has an old saya

Length: 8 sun 6 bu 1 rin (26.15 cm)

Sori: almost none

Motohaba: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane : 1 bu 9 rin (0.55 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 6 bu 8 rin (11.15 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with a mitsumune, a slightly wide mihaba, is long and thick, and has almost no sori. The The jihada is a tight ko-itame, and in some places there is itame and mokume hada. There are thick dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and clear bright bo-utsuri. The hamon has a large yakikomi at the machi, and is ko-notare mixed with square ko-gunome. On the omote side there are prominent up and down vertical alterations. There a dense wide nioiguchi, thick even ko-nie, a bright and clear nioiguchi, and small yubashiri. The boshi is a midarekomi, with a komaru and return. The nakago is ubu, the tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are kiri. There is a one mekugi-ana. On the omote side under the mekugi-ana, along the center, there is a large size three kanji signature.

Rai Kunitsugu's active period was obviously at the end of the Kamakura period judging from his work, such as a ken dated Kareki 2 or 1327 (the 49th blade classified as Juyo Token), a tanto with a " Rai Minamoto Kunitsugu" signature dated Shokei 1 (1332), and in the "Kozan Oshigata", there is a tanto dated Gentoku 1 (1330). He is supposed to have succeeded Kunitoshi, and is considered slightly junior to Kunimitsu.

Most of his works are tanto or sunnobi (long size) hira-zukuri wakizashi, and there are very few tachi. His tachi have either a narrow mihaba, a usual mihaba, and a slightly wide mihaba with a long kissaki. Most of his tanto and wakizashi are not smaller sized, and many of them have a wide mihaba with a long length (8-9 sun), or a very wide mihaba, with a long length and which are over 1 shaku. These have a slight sori, and this is a characteristic of this period's large size blades, and this is also one of his major characteristic points. Kunitsugu's style is called "Kamakura Rai" in the old sword books, and is compared with other Rai school works, especially those by Kunimitsu. His jihada have more ji-nie and chikei, and abundant hataraki. Any style of his hamon shows a wide hamon, and there are dense nie. Among the school's works, his style has a strong Soshu Den influence, and are outstanding or notable. The historic sword book " Kyoho Meibutsu-cho"("Famous Swords in the Kyoho Period" (1716-1735)) listed five of his tanto, which shows that his reputation was very high. This tanto has thick dense ji-nie, and the entire jihada has fine chikei. The hamon is not as wide as is usual in his work, but has wide and narrow alterations, and there are even thick nie, and the hamon is not a Rai school style at all. This shows more emphasis on a Soshu Den dynamic style, and this is an important tanto to study in order to understand his work. This tanto has a wide nioiguchi and the clarity in the jihada and hamon is excellent. Also, there is bright bo-utsuri which looks like it hanging down from the mune edge which is sometimes seen in Rai school work. This is an excellent example of Kunitsugu's work, which has some of the Rai school's characteristics. According to the old paper which accompanies the old saya, this originally belonged to the Yamanouchi daimyo family in Tosa, and the cost is listed as 100 mai. In Kyoho 5, on June 6th, when the sixth generation lord Yamanouchi Toyataka passed away, this was presented to the Shogun's family.

Explanation and the photo by Ishii Akira.

The photo of the old saya is reprinted from the No 16 Tokubetsu Jujo Token volume photos.

Juyo Tosogu

Oimatsu ni sanbiki uma zu tsuba:

Tsuba with a picture of an Oimatsu(old pine tree) with sanbiki uma (three horses)

Mei : To-u

To-u, (his other name was Yasuchika) was born in Kanbu 10, the son of the Shonai (Yamagata prefecture) feudal retainer Tsuchiya Chuzaemon. He studied gold smithing under his father-in-law Chinkyu. His working styles began with the Shoami style, and later he added the Nara school style to his repertoire. Also, when he worked under Matsudaira Daigaku, he created many original works. But at this time, I will not present any details about his work when he used the signature Yasushika.

He became a monk and changed his name to To-u. There is a letter stating that he handed over his workshop to his son Yagohachi, and that time is supposed to have been around 61 years old. Looking through work with his To-u signature, it seems that this was the time he was developing his own style. It was not like he was deliberately changing his style, but it was more like he was trying to create something new. During his To-u period, Yasuchika appears to produce work with a peaceful feeling, rather than something which was full of tension.

In his To-u period, he used to make many iron tsuba. He had an excellent technique for using both, tuchime (using a hammer to finish or produce the surface texture) and a tagane-ishime (using a chisel or tagane to make the surface of his work) to form his jihada (surface texture), which reminds us of highly detailed sand. The design is a simplified pattern, but very impressive. The movement of the design expands from the center on both the omote and ura sides, and in particular, the composition is dynamic. There are several tsuba similar to this one, and the horses and pine tree are carved with the same technique, but this tsuba's moving water design is very refreshing. The kinzogan (gold inlay) work for the stone in the water, moss, weeds, and pine trees show Yasuchika's original work. He continued to work with the Nara school style and used precision. When Natsuo was a professor in an Art school, he told students about Yasushika. He said that "things look simple, but if you don't have ability and a good eye, it is impossible to learn." He told students that they have to be careful to copy Yasuchika's work. People used to say that Natsuo wanted to learn from Yasushika and to consider Yasuchika as his own teacher. From now on, during the summer season, if you arrive at the Shonai (Yamagata) airport, the air smells of Dadacha-mane (soybeans). This is just the edamame (soybean) family, but the Dadacha-mane's rich flavor and smell are excellent. I'm afraid that I feel the same rich atmosphere in Yasuchika's work. Is this just my imagination? Or, could this be from the Shonai area's air.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko.

Shijo Kantei To No. 678

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 678 issue Shijo Kantei To is August 5, 2013. 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, 2013 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: katana

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 6.5 bu (71.66 cm)

Sori: 6 bu

Motohaba: 1 sun 4 rin (3.15 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 3 rin (2.2 cm)

Motokasana: 2 bu 6 rin (0.8 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 5 bu 2 rin (4.6 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 6 rin (21.4 cm)

Nakago sori: almost none

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. The blade is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not much different. There is a somewhat large sori and a long chu-kissaki. This has a large hiraniku and is a heavy katana. The jihada is a tight ko-itame hada. There are dense ji-nie, chikei, and some places show a change to a darker color. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, frequent bright and clear ara-nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and some places have a darker color and bright kinsuji. The nakago is ubu, and the nakago tip is kengyo. The yasurime are sujichigai, and there is a one mekugi-ana. On the omote side, the nakago has a long kanji signature and the smith's age is written near the mune edge. The ura side has a date a little above the omote signature and towards the mune edge.

For this smith, this is a wide blade and the kissaki is large.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For June

The swords discussed below were shown in the June 2013, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: June 6, 2013 (2nd Saturday of June)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium
Lecturer: Ishii Akira

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 January 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.

Kantei To No. 1: tanto

Mei: Yoshimitsu

Length: slightly over 7 sun 1 bu

Sori: uchizori

Style: hira zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: tight ko-itame hada; there are jinie and pale utsuri.

Hamon: narrow suguha; above the machi area it is mixed with ko-gunome; around the monouchi the hamon is narrow, and the around fukura there is a nijuba type yubashiri.

Boshi: straight with komaru.

Horimono: the omote has a suken.

This is a small tanto, but the length, mihaba, and kasane are in good balance. There is an uchizori and a standard tanto shape, and from this you can judge this as being a late Kamakura period tanto.

The jihada is a refine ko-itame hada, and from this, it is not difficult to think of this as Yamashiro school work. The hamon is a neat suguha, but the yakidashi above the machi is mixed with ko-gunome, and at the monouchi, the hamon width becomes narrow. The boshi is straight, with a komaru and return, and from the boshi to jihada, there are nie which look like thsy are falling down. The suken horimono is close to the mune edge. All of these details strongly show Toshiro Yoshimitsu's characteristic points and most people voted for him. Another opinion is that this is Toshiro Yoshimitsu's work because of the nie which looks like it is falling down from the boshi to the jihada; this is called an old man's beard. If this were his work, there would be more hataraki and ji-nie and chikei, and the jihada would be stronger. The hamon would also have frequent nie, and these details are diffrent from Yoshimitsu's work. Yoshimitsu has all types of tanto shapes: wide,

narrow, long and short. This is a one of his smallest tanto, and is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Nakasone Okisato nyudo Kotetsu

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 4 sun

Sori: slightly less than 5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame hada. There are fine chikei and thick dense ji-nie.

Hamon: there is a small yakidashi at the moto; above this there are gunome mixed with ko-gunome and togari. There are frequent ashi, a wide nioiguchi, thick even ko-nie, and some places have niesuji and sunagashi. On the omote side, in the middle of the blade, there are yubashiri.

Boshi: yakikomi yakiba (almost no yakiba) at the yokote; boshi is straight and round.

The katana's widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori, short chu-kissaki, and strong shape. The shinogi-ji has a fine and strong masame hada. From these characteristics, you can judge this as Kanbun period work, and particularly as an Edo Shinto katana.

The jihada is a tight ko-itame, there are abundant dense ji-nie, and a very refined hada. The hamon has a short yakidashi at the moto, and above it a gunome hamon with little vertical variation. There are thick ashi everywhere, a wide nioiguchi, and both the jihada and hamon are bright and clear. Also, the boshi around the yokote has yakikomi, and from these characteristics, you can judge this as a Hakutora period Kotetsu work without hesitation. In the first half of his career, his Hanetora period work, the yakidashi will be long, and the hamon will have large and small gunome fused together, which is called "Hyotan-ba". In addition, vertical variations in the hamon are prominent. This katana shows his characteristics very well. From this, most people voted for the correct answer in the first vote. From the signature, this katana was made around Kanbun 11 to 12.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mei: Muneyoshi (Ko-Ichimonji)

Length: 7 sun 2.5 bu 5

Sori: uchizori; slightly over 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame hada mixed with mokume hada; some places are mixed with nagare hada; the entire jihada is well forged. There are ji-nie, chikei, and clear jifu-utsuri with prominent distinctive dark areas.

Hamon: mainly ko-midare mixed with ko-gunome and ko-choji; vertical variations are not prominent. There are frequent ashi, yo, and ko-nie.

Boshi: straight; the omote side is yakizume and the ura side is maru (round).

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin classified Ko-Ichimoji Muneyoshi tachi. The upper half's sori does not show much uchizori, but there is a sophisticated narrow shape with a small kissaki. There is clear jifu utsuri with dark areas extending over the shinogi-ji. These are characteristic points for work from the end of the Heian to early Kamakura times (and even later through the early half of the Kamakura period) and are important in judging the period. Muneyoshi has several signed works. This tachi is a classic style, and the hamon is primarily komidare without up and down (vertical) alterations, and from this, a Ko-Bizen answer is understandable, so that is treated as an almost correct answer. But usually, very few Ko-Bizen works have this much clear utsuri. This sword comes from the period from the beginning through the early half of the Kamakura period, the same period as Ko-Bizen work, but the style is a little different, and an early Ichimonoji work is a more correct answer. Another point is seen from the oshigata: on the ura side, the boshi is a "Sansaku boshi" style. From this evidence, some people voted for the latter half of the Kamakura period, for smiths from the same area, such as Nagamitsu. If it were work from this period, there are not many examples of clear jifu-utsuri, and dark areas of utsuri, which helps utsuri do not extend over the shinogi-ji, but just reach the shinogi-ji. In addition, the shape of the utsuri was different.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Hojoji Tajima no kami Tachibana Kunimasa

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame and abundant dense ji-nie.

Hamon: based on ko-itame mixed with gunome; the entire hamon is a continuous midare hamon, and vertical variations in the hamon are not prominent. There are frequent ashi, a wide nioiguchi, frequent nie, some places have a nijuba type yubashiri.

Boshi: straight with a komaru and long return.

The katana's kissaki is not too short, and the sori is the same as the No.2 kantei to Kotetsu katana. The hamon is mainly gunome, and there is not much vertical variation in the hamon. From these characteristics, you should look at this as Kambun period Edo Shinto work, and begin to focus on specific candidates. among the famous smiths, if this were by Kotetsu, his Hanetora period and Hakotora period styles were different, as I explained in the No.2 kanteito. If this were Okimasa's work, his midare hamon are larger, and have two continuous fused gunome, and some parts of his nioiguchi have noticeably rough nie.

If this were by Kazusa no suke Kaneshige, some parts of his hamon have one or two continuous gunome in the pattern. If it were work by Yasusada, his hamon are wider, have prominent vertical alterations, and are mixed with square shape hakoba style gunome. Also, his boshi are a shallow notare. Besides these smiths, the rest are from the Hojoji school. The school's hamon do not contain large gunome, the ko-gunome are continuous, there is little vertical variation, and many of the hamon have nijuba type yubashiri in places. In the first vote, some people voted for the smiths who are listed above. But in the second vote, many people corrected themselves for a Hojoji school smith. The school's smiths do not have distinctive individuality except for Yoshitugu, and his shapes show some sori, his gunome are a little bigger, and there are more nie. From these considerations, any Hojoji smith's name, such as Masahiro, are treated as a correct answer. Other votes were for Shin Kunisada, and Sa Yukihide. If it were work by Shin Kunisada, there is long yakidashi at the moto, parallel with the ha, and the hamon contains mainly round top choji, and vertical alterations are more prominent. A

Sa Yukihide answer seems to come from the long size, heavy weight, and mainly gunome hamon. But if it were Yukihide's work, the hamon would be wider than this, and there are Shinshinto's unique characteristic, long ashi, extending nearly to the edge of the ha, and a good nioiguchi. The jihada is the same ko-itame hada, but there would be more nagarehada.

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Kantei To No. 5: tanto

Mei: Ryosai

Length: 7 sun 7 bu

Sori: uchizori

Design: kanmuri-otoshi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume hada, the entire jihada is a strong nagare hada, some parts are masame hada, and the entire jihada is visible. There are ji-nie, and a little bit of whitish utsuri.

Hamon: the hamon is yakiotoshi at the moto, and above this it is based on a narrow suguha mixed with a shallow notare; in the the middle of the ura side, the hamon width is wide, there are frequent ko-nie, fine sunagashi, and the edge of the hamon has a little bit of nijuba type yubashiri.

Boshi: straight with a komaru and return; the tip has fine hakikake.

Horimono: both the omote and ura sides have naginata-hi carved through the nakago

The first impression of this tanto is of the large yakiotoshi area above the machi. A yakiotoshi hamon is seen in Ko-Hoki school smith's work such Yasutsuna, and in Ko-Naminohira, Kyushu kosaku (old or early work), such as Bungo Yukihiro, and sometimes in Ko-Aoe, or Unrui work. The jihada are dark, appear moist, the hada is itame with nagare hada and contain masame type hada, which reminds us of the Yamato style. Also, the nioiguchi are weak and soft. Considering these characteristics, Ko-Kyushu work comes to mind. This is a Ryosai tanto, a founder of the Chikuzen smiths which includes Sa. Because this is his only signed tanto, it is considered as an important reference material, and about half of the people voted for him. As I listed above, this work is similar to Ko-Naminohira and Bungo, so if you look at this as Ko-Kyushu work it would be fine. Beside these, because of the jihada pattern and thick kasane, some people voted for the Hosho school. From the masame type jihada, this answer is understandable. But if were Hosho work, the jihada would be a more regular masame hada, and often masame hada which appear as ohada or ware, maybe from insufficient forging. Also, at the habakimoto, the jihada forms waves toward the hamon, and around the kissaki, it forms waves towards the mune edge. The hamon would not have a yakiotoshi, but would have yakikomi and they are usually yakikome at the machi. Because of the Kanmuri-otoshi shape, and the weak looking jihada and hamon, another opinion was Ryokai. If it were his work, the jihada would not have this much strong nagarehada, and even with the nagarehada, some parts of the jihada would be mixed with a masame type jihada; also, his work is based on Rai school work.

Shijo Kantei To No 676 (in the May, 2013 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 676 in the May issue is a tanto by Osafune Motoshige dated Showa 5 nen (1316)

This tanto is a standard length, the mihaba and kasane are in good balance, and there is uchizori. From this tanto shape, you can judge this as mid- to late-Kamakura period work. Motoshige's jihada are itame mixed with nagare hada, and the entire jihada is visible.

There are ji-nie, chikei, jifu and midare utsuri, which shows characteristic Bizen branch school work. One of Motoshige's characteristic points is that in the hamon, the top of the hamon has long square gunome, and the valleys of the hamon have togariba, and this is a characteristic midare hamon. Some of his works have a continuous hamon with this nature from the moto to saki, and others show this kind of hamon mixed with ko-gunome, ko-choji, and kataochi gunome in places. There is a strong nioiguchi with ko-nie, or sometimes distinctive strong ha-nie, with prominent kinsuji and sunagashi, which emphasizes the Soshu Den style. Many of his boshi are midarekomi and the tips are sharp, and the hint pointed out this feature. The nakogo tips are kurijiri, and the yasurime are kattesagari (sometimes sujichigai is seen). In case of his tanto, often on the omote side Motoshige has a long signature, and on the ura side, a date. This tanto has an early date for his work, and is dated Showa 5 nen. It shows his typical style and this is an important piece for the study of Motoshige's work. Motoshige's father Morishige has a tanto similar to this tanto, and at the top of the hamon there are long kaku-gunome (square gunome) and it is dated Showa 5. Also, Moriie who is supposed to be Morishige's father (and Motoshige's grandfather) has a tanto with a midare hamon similar to these with kaku-gunome mixed with kataochi-gunome and gunome. There is an old theory that Morishige's father Moriie was the Hatakeyama family's second generation. But either the Moriie name was used for name 2 generations, or a single smith changed his style, and it was thought that 2 generations of smiths worked under this name. This issue requires more study yet.

Moriie has a tachi dated Bunei 9 nen. This tanto is supposed to be later than this period judging from the signature. Osafune Nagamitsu has tanto dated Koan 8 nen and Einin 3 nen, and Moriie is thought to be a smith from the same period. Nagamitsu has tanto with what were later to become the main Osafune school hamon: that is kataochi gunome's earlier kaku-gunome shape. The next generation Kagemitsu has many kataochi-gunome tanto.

There are not many examples to study, but it is possible to think that the same general style changed with each period going from Moriie to Morishige to Motoshige. In Japan, the oldest existing tanto are by Hisakuni and Yukihiro and there are some tanto examples from the mid-Kamakura period. In Bizen, tanto production increased in the late Kamakura period, and we have examples from smiths such as Yoshifusa, Norifusa, sukezane, and early Moriie work. Mitsutada has almost no tanto and Moriie and Nagamitsu are supposed to have made tanto in Bizen. Either the main Osafune school or the Hatakeda school, when they made tanto, instead of using the standard popular Bizen choji hamon, used a kakugunome style midare hamon. It is possible to guess, that in later periods, each school created its own style and then produced many of them.

Most people voted for Motoshige. Besides the correct answer, a few people voted for Kagemitsu and Kanemitsu. These main line Osafune smiths' jihada are often a tight itame hada, which is bright and refined. Their hamon are usually kataochi gunome and different from this hamon which uses long kaku-gunome, and this feature should be noted.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai