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Meito Kansho
Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Tachi

Mei: Takatsuna (Bitchu)

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 1 bu (70.0 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 3 rin (2.2 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 6 rin (2.6 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 1 rin (1.85 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)

Sakikasane : 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 8 bu (3.25 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 9 bu 7 rin (18.1 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, a standard mihaba, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It is slightly thin, there is a large sori, and a chu-kissaki. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume hada, and the entire jihada is fine, well forged, and visible. There are dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and on the omote side on the bottom half of the ura side at the koshimoto there is jifu utsuri. The hamon is primarily a ko-midare with ko-choji and ko-gunome, and the entire hamon forms an intricate midare pattern. There are frequent ashi and yo, slightly uneven thick nie, and some places have rough nie. There are frequent kinsuji, nie-suji, and sunagashi, and some places have a nijuba which continues on to form yubashiri. The boshi is straight, the omote has a sharp tip, and the ura has a komaru. Both sides have a small return (kaeri). The nakago is suriage, and the tip is saki-kiri. The yasurime on the omote are a slight kate-sagari (new yasurime) and the ura is osujichigai (old yasurime). There are two mekugi-ana. On the ura above the second mekugiana, there is a "taka" kanji toward the mune edge, and a "tsuna" kanji leaning toward the ha side of the nakago. The mei consists of two large kanji made with a thick tagane (chisel).

The early Heian period book, the Engishiki, discusses law and customs from the period. Bitchu province produced iron and tools such as hoes (farming tools), and salt. From this, it appears that Bitchu was known as a source of iron since very early times, along with other Chugoku area provinces. Examining the geography of the region, Bitchu was on the east side of Bizen, and to the north was Hoki, and these were good areas for sword making, since they provide a good environment and resources. From the Heian to Kamakura periods, from the number of signed blades from the area, we can imagine that there must have been many sword smiths working there. In the Meikan, Takatsuna's name is listed as a Ko-Bizen smith and also as working in other provinces, but not in Bitchu. This tachi's nakago is o-sujichigai, the signature is on the ura side, the mei was made with a gyakutagane style in many places, the kanji are a large size made with a thick tagane, and there are strong chisel marks, and these characters are obviously Ko-Aoe work. The jitetsu is itame hada and there is a fine visible hada, and a chirimen type hada, which is an Aoe characteristic. The jihada almost looks like a ko-itame hada: it is a well forged, refined jihada which shows the smith's high level of skill. The hamon is mainly ko-midare, but it is an intricate midare hamon, shows an interesting variation compared with most Ko-Aoe work. At first sight, there is a soft nioiguchi, but looking carefully, there are abundant hataraki, ashi and yo towards the tip of the hamon, and thick dense nie. This is a great classic tachi. Also, there are frequent kinsuji, niesuji, sunagshi, and a rustic look, which reminds us of Ko-Hoki work. Another point of interest is the continuous tobiyaki and yubashiri which reminds us of Ayanokoji school work, but there are not many examples to be seen. Some times these details are seen in Ko-Aoe work such as the NBTHK Meito Kansho No.513, which has a Yasutsugu mei and is classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin. There are uneven dark areas and jifu utsuri extends over the shinogi ji, and there is a pleasing hamon. From the characteristics, this is definitely an early Kamakura period tachi, and this is a very important reference material to help correct errors or misrepresentations in the Meikan.

Explanation and the photo by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Daruma zu tsuba (tsuba with a picture of a daruma)
Mei : Yamashiro kuni Fushimi ju Kaneie

Daruma supposed to be a founder of the Zen sect. According to folklore, he lost arms and legs after a round of intensive Zen meditation training. His distinctive look

shows in many places: the eyes are open very wide and the mouth is closed and straight. In particular, his earring is symbolic. The master smith Kaneie is no question one of the best smiths who worked with iron tsuba. According to Dr. Katsuya Shunichi, his active period was about the time Hideyoshi was building his castle. There may be some small discrepancies with this date, but today, half a century later, to some extent we still honor his opinion. This tsuba has a round shape with little tension, it fits in the hand, its well balanced hammer marks and mimi (rim) are excellent. He designed the theme from the slanting back side of the Daruma, and its feeling is felt strongly. Kaneie's Sansui (landscape) themes are impressive, and in many of these, a person is part of the landscape. But in the case of the Daruma, the figure is the center of attention. Today, there are 7 or 8 tsuba with the same kind of design, and there are several facial expressions. Usually his techniques include gold inlay for objects, gold for eyes, and silver for teeth. By the way, he designed the Daruma with a tree and a mountain in the background. This is a my personal opinion, I would like to look at these as a dead tree and rock. "Koboku kangen" (dead tree and cold rock) refers to the feeling of the Zen sect Buddhist enlightenment. Kaneie's hammer marks are similar to Ko-kachushi (old armor maker). Among the Momoyama san saku (the three best smiths in the Momoyama period) compared with Nobuie and Myoju's sophistication, Kaneie has a more classic feeling. The feelings in his themes are calm, but this is not a Momoyama period feeling, but more likely a feeling of a war-time era sense of tension. Holding the Daruma tsuba, honestly, I feel this is a more old time work. One well informed person told me that if you study and chase Kaneie's work, more and more you will be disappointed. It is not good enough just thinking about this work, but if this is true, maybe one should start a disappointing journey for the appreciation of Kaneie's work.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

NOTE: currently, this tsuba is on exhibit in the NBTHK museum special exhibition.

Shijo Kantei To No. 681

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 681 issue Shijo Kantei To is November 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 November 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: tachi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7 bu (71.81 cm)

Sori: 6 bu (1.82 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 7 rin (2.95 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 3 rin (1.9 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 8 rin (0.85 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 3 bu 6 rin (22.3 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, and a standard mihaba, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori, and the blade is suriage. There is a saki-sori, the blade is thick for the mihaba, and there is a chu-kissaki. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume and nagarehada, and the hada is barely visible. There are ji-nie and the school's original utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are hotsure, uchinoke, ko-ashi, a bright nioiguchi, frequent nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is suriage, and the nakago tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are kattesagari (old), and kiri (new), and there are two mekugi-ana. On the omote side, the nakago has a two kanji signature toward the mune edge. On the ura side there is a date, a little above the mei on the omote side. Many of the school's hamon are a nioiguchi type in this period.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For September

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

Meeting Date: September 14, 2013 (2nd Saturday of September)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Hinohara Dai

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 sword smith's name.

Kantei To No. 1: tanto

Mei: Uda Kunifusa

Oei 12 nen 8 gatsu hi

Length: 9 sun 4 bu

Sori: none

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: tight ko-itame hada; there are thick dense jinie, and a bright jihada.

Hamon: wide suguha type, with a shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome; there are yubashiri at the habuchi, ashi, yo, dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. The hamon is bright and clear.

Boshi: notarekomi; komaru; the tip has hakikake; there is a long return, and small nie are prominent.

Horimono: on the omote and ura are katanahi carved through the nakago.

Kantei To No. 2: tanto

Mei: Rai Kunimitsu

Length: slightly less 9 sun 4 bu

Sori: none (the tip is a little uchizori)

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: tight ko-itame hada. There are thick dense ji-nie, and nie-utsuri.

Hamon: suguha type hamon with shallow notarekomi, mixed with ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, frequent ko-nie, the hamon is bright and clear, and there are sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is sharp; and there is a kaeri or return.

The No 1. Kantei To is an Uda Kunifusa tanto classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin. The shape reminds one of the style from the end of the Kamakura to the early Nambokucho periods. The jihada is a tight ko-itame with dense ji-nie. The shallow notare type hamon is mixed with ko-gunome, and both the jihada and hamon are bright and clear. At first sight, this work is similar to that of the Yamashiro smiths Rai Kunimitsu and Rai Kunitugu. It is a well known story that Kunifusa is supposed to have studied their work intensively and that this is the result. We could say that

among the Uda school smiths, this is one of the best smiths. The reason we put his tanto next the Juyo Bijitsu Hin classified Rai Kunimitsu tanto is not only to display and identify, but because this is a good opportunity to compare their work. This is Kunifusa's best tanto work and this mainstream smith's work. Some people understood this, and they voted for the correct answer for both tanto. Some people were not familiar enough with Kunifusa, and many of these voted for Rai Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu.

Comparing their work, Rai Kunimitsu's work shows typical end of the Kamakura to early Nambokucho shapes. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, with dense ji-nie, a Kyoto style refined jihada, a dark blue shade Rai jihada, and clear bo-utsuri. His hamon are a shallow notare type mixed with ko-gunome, and there are beautiful bright frequent ha-nie, and the hamon is bright and clear. The boshi are midarekomi, there are sharp tips, a return, and they show his typical midareba style. However, Kunifusa's shapes are an end of Kamakura to early Nambokucho period style at first sight. His jihada are refined which reminds one of Kyoto jihada, and this is different from most of the Uda school, but we never see a Rai hada and bo-utsuri. His hamon shows the Rai style very well, and is bright and clear. But examine his work carefully, and you see his notare hamon are in places mixed with gunome, which is different from Uda mainstream hamon. His boshi tips are slightly large and round, and the return (kaeri) shapes are a little different from the Rai style. Also, along the fukura and boshi, there are bright round nie grains and individual nie grains can be counted by eye, and these are prominent and show the Uda school character. This evaluation could be a criticism for Kunifusa. But this work is different from Uda mainstream work and is some one reproducing another style. From the signature, Rai Kunimitsu's tanto is supposed to have been made around the Kareki era, and there is 80 years between these two tanto. Beyond the period, Kunifusa's work is very close to the original mainstream Rai work. He is highly skilled, and it is understandable, among sword people, that he has a reputation as the most skilled master smith in the Uda school. In the case of old blades, usually the shapes are reduced or changed by polishing, but this Kunifusa tanto does not show this: there is almost no change to the original shape. It has a magnificent shape and excellent forging, and from this, we can agree on the Juyo Bijutsu Hin classification.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mei: Nagamitsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 8.5bu

Sori: 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight itame hada; there are ji-nie, and clear midare utsuri.

Hamon: round top choji mixed with gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, a bright nioiguchi, a nioiguchi type ko-nie, kinsuji and fine sunagashi.
Boshi: both omote and ura are a shallow notarekome with a komaru.

More than twenty year ago, a “Nagamitsu Exhibition” was held at the Sano museum. At that time, they displayed about 160 Nagamitsu blades. According to the report, today 10% have anomidare hamon mixed with big choji and kawazuko choji; 45% have a choji and gunome hamon; 20% have a smaller hamon such as ko-choji and ko-gunome; 25% are suguha or have a suguha type hamon. I don't know how these blades were examined, but this is a valuable report about Nagamitsu who has left us many signed blades and a wide range of work. There is no question that this is great information to help understand Nagamitsu's style. The first 10% of the examples are Kokuho blades such as Daihanniya Nagamitsu, and Tsuda Totomi Nagamitsu. The second 45% of the examples are supposed to be similar to this tachi, and we often see this kind of work. The shape has a standard mihaba; the widths at the moto and saki are different; there is a large koshizori; the tip has sori; and there is a shape from the latter half of the Kamakura period. The jihada is a refined tight itame hada with clear midare utsuri, and from these characteristics, this could be recognized as mainstream Osafune work. In this kind of work, people used to say there is a “round top full shaped choji mixed with gunome”. This is a well recognized, typical Nagamitsu masterwork, and we have more opportunities to see them. The boshi is a typical Sansaku-boshi, but in the case of this kind of Nagamitsu work, the boshi are a prominent midarekomi and have a sharp tip. The hamon are often low around the monouchi and have a gentle yakiba when compared to the bottom half of the hamon. This is typical Nagamitsu work, and many people voted for the correct answer in the first vote. Besides the correct name, some people voted for Yoshioka Ichimonji and other work from around the latter half of the Kamakura period, and mainstream Osafune school smiths, such as Mitsutada. Nagamitsu's jihada are a tight itame, and bright and refined while the Yoshioka Ichimonji jihada are a little more little visible. This boshi is a typical Sansaku boshi, and from these characteristics, the Nagamitsu answer is the proper answer.

Kantei To No 4: tachi

Mei: Yasumasa

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 2 bu

Sori: 9. 5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokumehada, and some parts are nagarehada; the hada is slightly visible. There are ji-nie, jifu type hada, and clear midare utsuri.

Hamon: based on round topped choji and gunome; it has slightly low and high areas; the upper area around the monouchi becomes suguha. There are ashi, yo, nioiguchi type ko-nie and sunagashi.

Boshi: both omote and ura have bo-hi with marudome.

Yasuhiro does not have too many signed blades. There are some signed blades such as the Juyo Bijutsuhin classified tachi signed “Bizen kuni Osafune ju Ukon-no-shogen Yasuhiro tsukuru Tokuji 2 nen 10 gatsu” and “Bizen Kuni Osafune (after this is an orikaeshi mei) ju-nin Sahyoe-no-jo Yasuhiro tsukuru”. From these suguha tachi, we recognize this Osafune smith, and his active period was around the later half of the Kamakura period. This tachi has an ubu shape the same as the No.3 kantei To. The jihada is itame with clear midare utsuri, and from this you can confirm that this is Bizen work. The hamon is not as clear as Nagamitsu’s. The hamon is based on round gunome and choji, small up and down variations, a nioiguchi type midare hamon, and the upper part around the monouchi becomes suguha. The boshi is komaru, and somewhat similar to the Sansaku-boshi.

At the first sight, it gives an impression of being a slightly gentle work compared to the No.3 Nagamitsu tachi, or to Sanenaga’s flashy type tachi, and from this, many people voted for those names.

It is difficult narrow down the individual Yasuhiro name. But looking at the jihada, compared with No.3 Nagamitsu’s Osafune mainstream characteristic refined jihada, the jihada is slightly visible, and somewhat less bright. This kind of characteristic is crucial in judging this as branch work, and not mainstream work such as Nagamitsu and Kagamitsu. Also, you can tell from the two kanji signature on the nakago. This is a little different from Nagamitsu and Kagamitsu’s refined signatures. Many people voted for Chikakage and Motoshige and it is understandable from this. However, many of their hamon are midare mixed with square shapes and have saka-ashi features. Please pay attention to this.

Kantei To No. 5: katana

Mumei: den Kanemitsu

Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 1.5 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume hada; hada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: based on square gunome and kataochi gunome, and mixed with togariba. There are saka (slanted) ashi and yo, nioiguchi type ko-nie, and sunagashi.

Boshi: mitarekomi and the tips are sharp.

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

This is an o-suriage mumei katana, confirmed as den Kanemitsu, and classified as Juyo Token. The shape does not have much funbari at the habakimoto, and it is a suriage katana with a wide mihaba. The widths at the moto and saki are almost the same, and there is an okissaki. Originally this had a large high koshizori, and the tip has sori, so this is a peak Nambokucho period work from the Enbun-Joji era with an o-suriage shape. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume hada with midare utsuri. The hamon is based on kaku (square) gunome and kataochi-gunome midare, and the entire hamon is a saka or slanted type. The boshi is midarekomi with a sharp tip. From these characteristics, it is not difficult to judge this as a peak Nambokucho period work. In the first vote, very few people voted for Kanemitsu, and many people voted for Motoshige. The reason might be that there is a slightly visible jihada, and a long high hamon, and the valleys in the hamon are mixed with sharp shaped togariba which is similar to Motoshige's hamon. This was investigated thoroughly and is considered den Kanemitsu. This means it is not typical Kanemitsu work, and it is hard to deny the appearance of Motoshige's work. In the NBTHK, we usually consider the mainstream Osafune jihada to be a tight itame hada and a bright and refined hada. But tight itame hada are not always the same. Kanemitsu and Sanenaga's usual jihada with suguha blades are really fine, tight, and refined. But at the peak of the Nambokucho period Kanemitsu and Tomomitsu's work show an Embu and Joji shape with large sized hamon. Their itame and mokume jihada patterns become bigger than on this katana. The mihaba and hamon also are often large, and often the hada are more visible. Also, Motoshige's togariba are sharp tipped, but in this hamon the tips are more round. Motoshige's kaku-gunome are parallel toward to the edge of the hamon. Many of this sword's gunome are slanted from the nakago to kissaki side, and with the shapes of the valleys, this is a characteristic point for mainstream Osafune smith hamon such as Kagemitsu and Kanemitsu's kataochi-gunome. From these points, it is possible to come out with Kanemitsu's name. Motoshige's name is understandable as I mentioned before. But with all these characteristics, and the lack of nagaehada and jifu type jihada, I hope you can conclude with the Kanemitsu name in the third vote.

Shijo Kantei To No 679 (in the 2013 August issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 679 in the August issue is a katana by Tairyusai Soukan (dated Keio 3 nen)

This katana is a little wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not much different. It is a little thick, there is a shallow sori, a long chu-kissaki, poor hiraniku, and it is heavy. From these characteristics, you can judge this as a Shinshinto period work. Soukan always worked in the Bizen style, but most of his mune are

mitsumune, and this is one of his characteristic points. Most of his jihada are a tight ko-itame mu-ji type, and he has a unique pale utsuri. His utsuri are as seen in the oshigata. There are areas with utsuri and areas without utsuri and these areas almost form a regular pattern and appear like a narrow belt, and this is another of his characteristic points. Compared with Naotane's utsuri (another Shinshinto smith), Soukan's utsuri are pale, and sometimes without looking carefully, you can't recognize this pale utsuri. This is Soukan's later work, and around this time, most of his hamon have round top ko-gunome, or are a continuous ko-gunome and choji from the moto to saki. There are long ashi, a bright tight nioiguchi, and nioiguchi type ko-nie. At the same time, Soukan has round topped choji which form narrow clusters in the gunome choji hamon, and the entire hamon is slanted. However, in his saka-choji hamon there is not much vertical variation, and the hamon are gentle appearing. This kind of work is seen often in the Keio period. Most of Soukan's boshi are midarekomi with a komaru and return. Soukan is known as a well skilled to-shin bori artist (i.e. he made horimono) and he has blades with horimono, such as Fudo myo-o, Shin-no-Kurikara, and So-no-Kurikara. Today, among his existing blades, there are not many blades with horimono. His nakago tips are ha-agari kurijiri, the yasurime are sujichigai with kesho. The yasurime on the top have kiri kesho with small number of filed lines, and under this the sujichigai yasurime start, which is his unique style. The signature kanji style changed. From Kaei to the early Ansei period we see a regularly shaped Kaisho (square) style, and he often used long shaped kanji. From Ansei 4 nen August, he started his original Reisho (old Chinese) style, as seen on this katana. From that time he used this style, and the hints suggested this. Usually, master smiths works are well made, including both the blade and the nakago. Soukan is not a very top master smith, but his jihada are well forged, his hamon show no failures or weak points from the moto to saki, and his nakago are well finished. If you look at his work more and more, you recognize how carefully everything was done, and you can imagine his style involves serious work. In voting, most people voted for Soukan. Besides him, a few people voted for Taikei Naotane. Naotane's jihada are a mu-ji type, and his hamon are a little slanted which is similar to Soukan. In case he made a slanted hamon, like a Kagemitsu or Kanemitsu utsushi, the shapes are often a tachi style with a large sori. In the case of a shinogi zukuri katana, most of signatures are on ura side except for his early work around the Kyowa and early Bunka periods.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai