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Heisei 26 Shinsaku Meito Ten

Tachi, katana, wakizashi, naginata, and yari section:

NBTHK Chairman's prize

Type: Tachi

Mei: Nishu Kunimasa saku

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun 2 rin (82.8 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 3 rin (2.7 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 bu 2 rin (3.4 cm)

Sakihaba: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 6 rin (0.8 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 9 rin (0.55 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 5 bu 8 rin (4.8 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 8 bu 2 rin (23.7 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a thick kasane, a slightly large sori, and a large kissaki. The jihada is ko-itame and in some places is mixed with itame hada. There are thick dense ji-nie and frequent fine chikei. The hamon is mainly choji mixed with ko-gunome, square shaped gunome, and togari. The hamon has high and low variations, there are frequent ashi and yo, a little shimaba, a nioiguchi, there are nie in places, and there are some small tobiyaki. The boshi is midarekomi; on the omote the tip is sharp; on the ura tip has a little hakikake; it is komaru, and both sides have a long return. The horimono on both the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The top of the hi is low and below the shinogi. The nakago is ubu, the tip is ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are sujichigai. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote under the mekugiana, on the shinogiji, there is a large size kanji signature made with a thick chisel (tagane), and the side ura has a date.

Matsuba Kunimasa was born on Showa 34 (1959). In Showa 58 (1983), he became a student of the smith Kobayashi Yasuhiro who passed away at an early age, and subsequently Matsuba become a student of Yasuhiro's senior student Ando Yukio. In Heisei 1(1998), he received his sword smith's license and from the following year, he entered the Shinsaku Meito Ten every year. Since then, he has received many prizes such as the NBTHK chairman's prize, the Kunzan prize, and the Kanzan prize. He has been producing original work with feelings of spirit. He is active not only inside of Japan, but also in Europe and America. He is active in demonstrating his favorite hobbies Aikido and Kenjutsu, and giving lectures and seminars, which are activities beyond a sword smith's work.

This tachi is in his ideal Bizen Osafune Chogi style of work. With his highly established technique, he has received the First prize for four years now. This tachi is 2 shaku 7 sun long, wide, and has a large kissaki, and a strong dynamic shape. The strong jihada matches the style, and is koitame mixed with itame, and there are dense thick ji-nie and fine chikei. The vertical variations in the hamon's shape are not monotonous, and show a wide range of variation. Also, there are soft gentle ashi and yo. The nie are worn down, and the nioiguchi has no weak places. From these details, the tachi does show and exaggerated features or details which are sometimes seen in this kind of work. This shows Matsuba's high level of skill as a smith very well, and is one of the excellent works he has produced. With this NBTHK chairman's prize, this is his 10th Special prize, so now Matsuba is certified as a Mukansa. We are looking forward to his work in the future.

Explanation by Ishii Akira; photo by Imoto Yuuki.

Heisei 26, Shinsaku Meito Ten

Masamune prize

Type: Tachi

Mei: Kawachi no Kami Kunisuke Kunihira (stamp or Mukai)

Shungyo (spring) Heisei 26 Kinoe Uma-doshi (year of horse)

Kichijitsu Seisaku kore

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 4bu 1 rin (77.0 cm)

Sori: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 7 rin (2.2 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 3 rin (2.7 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 4 rin (0.75 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu 1 rin (3.35 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 5 bu 2 rin (19.75 cm)
Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with a mitsumune; a slightly large width; and the widths at the moto and saki are not much different; there is a short chu-kissaki. The jihada is ko-itame mixed with itamehada; there are ji-nie, chikei; and many places show dark jifujigane; from the moto to saki there is midare-utsuri. The hamon is mainly a choji type hamon, mixed with ko-gunome, square gunome and togari and there is not much variation in the hamon height. There are frequent ashi and yo, a nioi-deki hamon, and some places have small tobiyaki. The boshi is midarekomi, the tip is a small komaru, and there is a return. The nakago tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are sujichigai. There are two mekugi-ana and one is closed. On the omote above the first mekugiana, on the mune edge, there is long signature made with a slightly thick tagane, and under the signature, there is a stamp. The ura has a date.

Kawachi Kunihira was born in Showa 16 (1941) in Osaka, the second son of the 14th generation Kawachi no kami Kunisuke. While he was in Kansai University, he studied under the archeologist Dr. Suematsu Masao (who received a Culture award), and after he graduated, he became a student of Miyairi Shohei (a living National Treasure). He learned to work in the Soshu Den style and at the same time he was trained in important craftsmanship techniques. Afterwards, he became independent and has received many prizes such as the Prince Takamatsu prize. Kunihira has an inquiring mind, and after 12 years of independent work he wanted to learn to work in the Bizen Den style. He already had sufficiently high skills and had received many special prizes and was very close to receiving the Mukansa title. He asked permission from Sumitani Seiho (a living National Treasure) to become his student and he established himself in two different school styles. In Showa 62 (1987), his Bizen Den work received the Culture Department's Chairman's prize, and in the same year he received the Mukansa title. Because of his obligation to Dr. Suematsu for his education he gives lectures and also makes reproductions (utsushimono) of ancient blades such as the "Ishi no kami Jingu(shrine) Shichishi-to" and the "Inariyama kofun (ancient tomb) shutsudo tetsuken" and the "Fujinoki kofun shutsudo tachi". He also gives occasional lectures at the Tokyo Art University and at his alma mater, the Kansai University as a part time professor. Kunihira has visited the Baltic country Lithuania and given forging demonstrations there. His activities are now expanding every year, and he is always training successor smiths, and has already trained six students who became independent sword smiths. These accomplishments were recognized when he received the Nara Mukei Bunkazai title, and the Excellent Skill prize from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Kunihira has also written a book about swords and a novel has been written based on him, so his reputation is growing every year.

At this time, he received the highest prize, the “Masamune prize” and this is the first time this prize has been awarded in the last four years.

This tachi is well balanced, has a dynamic shape, and the choji hamon appears like an old style hamon and is clearly different from today’s gendai (modern) choji, and the utsuri is excellent. For many sword smiths, who are working in the Bizen Den style, the critical elements are not only the hamon and jihada, but also the midare utsuri. This tachi has many jifu type dark areas in the ji, and because of this, the midare utsuri is clear, and makes this effort successful in having an appearance and feeling very similar to an old style tachi. This work is a step forward in understanding utsuri and how to produce it. This is an innovative accomplished work, and the prize was awarded for this.

The material used to make this sword was only “Nittoho (NBTHK) tatara” tamahagane, and this will give encouragement to the Murage and people working at the tatera.

This year is 48 years, since Kunihiro has started working as a sword smith, and the tachi is a great result of his constant hard work for half a century.

Explanation by Ishii Akira; photo by Imoto Yuuki.

Shijo Kantei To No. 689

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 689 issue Shijo Kantei To is June 5, 2014. 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 June 5, 2014 will be accepted. If there are swordsmiths with the same name in different schools, please write the school or prefecture, and if the swordsmith name was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

Information:

Type: Katana

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7.5 bu (68.93 cm)

Sori: slightly over 5 bu (1.55 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 1 rin (1.85 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 6 rin (0.8 cm)

Sakikasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Kissaki length: slightly over 1 sun (3.05 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 3 bu 7 rin (19.3 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an iorimune. There is a slightly wide mihaba, and the widths at the moto and saki are not much different. There is a rich nikuoki, Hamaguri-ba shape, the nakago is suriage but there is koshi-sori, the tip has sori, and there is an Inokubi type chu-kissaki. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, there are thick ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, pale midare utsure, and the jihada is clear. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture, and the choji hamon clusters are close to each other, and very tight, and there are no gaps between the clusters. There is a midare hamon, no prominent gunome, and little up and down vertical variation in the hamon. There are fine ashi and yo, the entire hamon has saka-ashi and ko-nie. The hamon is bright and clear. The nakago is o-suriage. The nakago tip is kuri-jiri, the old yasurime are unclear, and the new yasurime are kiri. There are four mekugi-ana, and one is closed. On the omote side of the nakago, towards the mune side, there is a two kanji orikaeshi-mei signature. Usually, this smith's work have prominently wide mihaba and inokubi-kissaki, and those features are usually more prominent than they are on this katana. The smith's choji midare hamon are higher, sometimes with an active beautiful midare hamon which extends to the monouchi area. Among his works, this katana has a hamon with a low height.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For May

The swords discussed below were shown in the May 10, 2014, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: May 10, 2014 (2nd Saturday of May) at 1:00 pm.

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Iida Toshihisa

Kantei To No. 1: tanto

Mumei: Sa

Chikushu ju

Length: 7 sun 4 bu

Sori: slight

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

Hamon: the bottom half is a suguha style with a shallow notare; the upper half is konotare mixed with gunome. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, fine sunagashi, and it is bright and clear.

Boshi: on the omote side it is midarekomi, tsukiage, and the tip is sharp; on the ura side it is straight with a komaru. Both sides have a long return and the tip has hakikake.

This is a different shape from the Enbun-Joji period's tanto with wide mihaba. For the small size, the mihaba is wide, the kasane small, the sori slight, and from the shape, this is supposed to be a Nambokucho tanto. Among the Nambokucho period smiths, who are known to have made smaller size tanto are Shizu Saburo Kaneuji, Osafune Chogi, Dai-sa in Kyushu, and Akihiro in Soshu. Among them, this has a poor fukura, a unique sharp shape, and this kind of tanto is often seen in Dai-sa work. The jihada has frequent chikei, thick dense ji-nie, and is strong and clear. The hamon is a notare mixed with gunome, a dense nioiguchi, strong nie which is same as on the jihada, and is bright and clear.

From these characteristics, this is the work of a highly skilled Soshu Den smith. There is a poor fukura, a unique shape, and we can see major characteristic Dai-sa features. On the omote side the boshi is tsukiage, the tip is sharp and there is a long return. The boshi return's yakiba has a tight nioiguchi along with a wide nioiguchi hamon, and from these characteristics, you can judge this as Dai-sa or a Samonji tanto. Also, on the the tanto, it is not obvious, but the yakikomi under the machi is a characteristic point.

Dai-sa told the son of the Chikuzen smith Jitsua that his signature "Sa" is supposed to be an abbreviation of Saemon Saburo. He didn't use the old Kyushu style which has a visible hada, a worn down nioiguchi and is based on suguha. He established his style based on a notare hamon, the jihada and hamon are bright, and there is a sophisticated style. This is a typical Dai-sa work, and most people voted for the correct answer.

Kantei To No. 2: tachi

Mei: Bizen Osafune Morimitsu

Oei 12 nen 8 gatsu bi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7 bu

Sori: 8.5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: choji hamon mixed with gunome, and midare hamon with open bottom choji. There are ashi, yo, a tight nioiguchi, and ko-nie.

Boshi: midarekomi; on the omote side there is a komaru and long return; the ura side is narrow, a little sharp and there is a return.

This is a long tachi with a large sori and tachi shape. The jihada has midare utsuri, the hamon is mainly choji, there are vertical alterations and a gorgeous midare hamon, and from these characteristics, this is obviously a Bizen tachi. At the first inspection, this reminds us of early Osafune work in the Kamakura period, such as Ichimonji, Mitsutada and Nagamitsu. But looking carefully, there is a prominent sakizori compared with Kamakura work, and a thick kasane for the mihaba. The jihada are itame mixed with a prominent mokume and the hada is visible. The hamon nioiguchi is a little tight compared with older work, and the habuchi (the border of hamon) is not smooth. The bottoms of the choji and gunome midare hamon are open, and this is different from old Bizen work. This is a Oei-Bizen Morimitsu tachi. In the early Muromachi to Oei periods, there are Bizen Osafune school smiths such as Yasumitsu, Iesuke and Noriie. They produced a strong revival of the Kamakura style, and they are called Oei Bizen works. They reproduced old classic styles very well, and left many elegant works, just like this tachi. But the differences are as I explained above.

The Oei-Bizen boshi style is called the “center of the candle”, and are often midarekomi and have a sharp tip. On this tachi, on the ura side there are similar characteristics.

This has no horimono, but Oei Bizen’s other characteristic point is bo-hi with marudome above the habaki. In voting, many people voted for Oei Bizen work, especially for Morimitsu. Among the Oei bizen smiths, Morimitsu’s hamon are mostly of large size, and many of them have round features. This tachi’s midare hamon is quiet and large, and from this detail, the Morimitsu name seem to be the most appropriate.

Kantei To No 3: wakizashi

Mei: oite Nanki Shigekuni kore o tsukuru

Length: slightly less than 1 shaku 3 sun 5 bu

Sori: slightly over 2 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: chu-suguha; there are small ko-ashi on the omote, and on the ura they are mixed with kuichigaiba; there is a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, and it is bright and clear.

Boshi: straight; on the omote it is a togari type, and on the ura a komaru with a shallow return; on both sides the tips have hakikake.

This is the Keicho Shinto work by the highly skilled smith Nanki Shigekuni. He has a couple of different styles: a Yamato Teigai school type (where he came from) with suguha, and a style which mixes the two where the jihada and hamon have nie with a lot of hataraki, and there is a strong Go style midare hamon. This has a high shinogi, and the hamon is just chu-suguha with some kuichigai-ba. The boshi has a shallow return, and the tips have hakikake, and these are characteristic Yamato Den details. This wakizashi is based on Yamato Den, but mixed with some Soshu Den characteristics, such as the jihada being a mix of itame and mokume, and in particular, the mokume hada is prominent, there are thick ji-nie, and frequent chikei. As I explained above, you can see Nanki's characteristic points well. Also, for a Keicho shinto work, the mihaba is not too wide, but standard or a little wide. The kissaki is not an o-kissaki, but this is a slightly long chu-kissaki, and these are Shigekuni's characteristic shape details. From these characteristics, many people voted for Nanki Shigekuni.

Some people voted for the Keicho Shinto smith Tadayoshi, because his favorite hamon is a bright suguha, the same as Nanki's. If it were Tadayoshi's work, the shinoji would be a standard height, the jihada are often Hizen's characteristic tight ko-itame, and there would be komenuka hada. There would not be many Yamato characteristic points, such a hamon with kuichigaiba, or a boshi tip with hakikake.

Kantei To No 4: wakizashi

Mei: Soshu ju Hiromasa

Hotoku 3 nen 2 gatsu bi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7 bu

Sori: 4.5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume hada; there are frequent chikei, and dense ji-nie.

Hamon: ko-gunome mixed with ko-choji; there are frequent ashi and yo, yubashiri, tobiyaki, a hitatsura type hamon with muneyaki, kinsuji and frequent sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi, narrow, the tip is shap; there is a return which continues to become muneyaki.

Horimono: the omote has a Sankotsuka-ken; the ura has the bonji for Hachiman Daibosatsu, and Rendai kasane-bori (horimono with more than two different subjects).

This has a yakiba on the edge and mune, and the hamon contain tobiyaki, and this is a gorgeous hitatsura wakizashi. In the past, signs of hitatsura type hamon are seen in Norishige and Sadamune's work. In the Nambokucho period, Soshu smiths such as Hiromitsu and Akihiro and the Kyoto Hasebe school smiths such as Kunishige and Kuninobu established the style. After them, in the Muromachi to

Shinshinto periods, the Sue-Soshu smiths and some other school's smiths continued with this type of yakiba, and all of them produced notable work. This is from the early Muromachi period, and is dated in the Hotoku era and is Soshu Hiromasa's wakizashi. In this period, the Soshu smiths specialty was a notable active hitatsura. Also, many of them have Soshu-bori, which is adynamic kasane style horimono with deep chisel marks. This wakizashi's jihada has abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon has small ko-gunome mixed with choji, and there are tobiyaki, muneyaki, and it becomes hitatsura. The omote has bonji with a Sankotsuka-ken; the ura has bonji, well done kasanebori, and Hachiman-daibosatsu and rendai. These characteristics are typical Soshu Den work in this period. In the Muromachi period, Shoshu smith's hitatsura are little different from each other. In the early half of the Muromachi period, around the Bunan and Hotoku periods, representative smiths are Hiromasa and Masahiro; in the late half of the Muromachi period, representatives are the Kamakura Soshu smiths such as Tsunahiro and the Odawara Soshu smiths such as Fusamune and Yasukuni. In the early period work the choji hamon are prominent and the entire hamon are smaller, and there are slightly strong nie. In many of Hiromasa's later works the choji hamon are not prominent and the hamon are primarily gunome, and there is more nioideki.

People recognized these characteristics, and many people voted for the Soshu smiths Hiromasa and Masahiro. Masahiro has a blade with a wide mihaba from the Nambokucho period dated in the Joji period. But his Muromachi period works are similar to Hiromasa's and it is difficult to find a difference between them. So, either smith's name is fine at this time. Some people voted for Nambokucho period Soshu smiths such as Hiromitsu and Akihiro. If it were Nambokucho work, it would be very rare to see an example like this wakizashi which has a shinogi-zukuri shape with a standard width and with a prominent sakizori. Usually, they are wide tanto or wakizashi, and have more abundant strong nie than Muromachi work, and more abundant hataraki in the hamon.

Kantei To No. 5: wakizashi

Mei: Nishu Furuya ju Kunihiro saku
Tensho 15 nen 2 gatsu pi

Length: 1 shaku 2 sun 5 bu

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: notare mixed with gunome, togariba, yahazu type choji, tobiyaki, muneyaki and it becomes hitatsura. There are ashi and yo, ko-nie, and is bright and clear.

Boshi: midare-komi; the tips are komaru with a return, and after that, a continuous muneyaki.

Horimono: at the koshimoto on the omote there are bonji; the ura has a Daikokuten.

Kunihiro 's active period was from the Sue-koto to early Shinto period. His early works are call "Tensho uchi" and "Furuya uchi" while his later works are called "Horikawa uchi" and they are quite different. His Tensho-uchi blade features are a jihada of itame mixed with mokume, and the hada is visible. The hamon are based on gunome mixed with togariba and choji, with tobiyaki, and are midare. The boshi have a long return, and the styles are similar to other Sue-koto smiths work. But his Keicho-uchi style becomes quite different. His ideal work looks like a Soshu master smith's: the hamon are a shallow notare mixed with gunome; there are abundant hataraki with features such as a wide nioiguchi, frequent nie, kinsuji, and sunagashi. At the first examination, the wakizashi looks like that of either the Sue-Soshu smith Fuyuhiko or one of Uda school smith's hitatsura work, but please pay attention to the horimono at the koshimoto. This has a Daikokuten carving. This kind of well done carving is Kunihiro's work, and many of them are seen from his Tensho-uchi period work and this is a one of the important characteristics in judging his work. Also, under the habaki, you can only see a part of Kunihiro's major characteristic point: mizukage from the machi. Looking at the hamon and jihada carefully, the hamon has a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie, the itame hada is mixed with mokume hada, there are thick dense ji-nie, prominent chikei, a refined jihada, and the jihada and hamon are bright, clear and sophisticated. These characteristics are different from other end-of-Koto (Sue-koto) period smiths.

Shijo Kantei To No 686 (in the April, 2014 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 687 in the April issue is a katana by Senshi Muramasa

This katana has a standard width and the widths at the moto and saki are a little different. The upper half has sakizori, and there is a chu-kissaki. From the shape, you can judge this as a Muromachi period katana. Muramasa's jihada are itame hada and a slightly visible hada, a dark color, and often there are utsuri which are not quite, but a pale whitish color. The hamon in the upper part is suguha, and bottom half is a midare hamon. Just like on this katana, in the middle of the blade, the hamon is changing it's pattern between the upper part and bottom part: for example the upper half is suguha, and the bottom half is midareba, or the upper half is midareba, and the bottom half is suguha, and this is seen often in Muromachi period work. A famous example with an upper half midare hamon and bottom half suguha blade is the Juyo Bunkazai classified Yoso-zae-mon Sukesada katana (made for Kuriyama Yokuro and dated Eisho 18).

This katana's bottom half midare hamon is a notare mixed with gunome, togariba, and some box shaped gunome, with prominent vertical alterations in the midare hamon. Some parts of the valleys in the hamon come close to the edge. Both the omote and ura both have a worn down nioiguchi and these are clearly Muramasa's characteristic points.

Muramasa's nakago tips are narrow, with a unique shape (a tanagohara or stomach shape), the tips of the nakago are iriyamagata (but sometimes kuri-jiri, and haagari-kiuri-jiri), the yasurime are katte-sagari, and usually the signatures are on the omote close to the mune edge.

In voting, most people voted for Muramasa. This katana was shortened (i.e. it is suriage) by the Shinshinto smith Hizen Tadayuki and has a kirituske mei. Usually, in the Edo period, people hesitated to own or wear a Muramasa sword, and it is exceptional to have this kind of mei. The Hizen Nabeshima family ordered swords often from their okakae smith, the Shodai Tadayoshi, to have a koshiba style hamon at the moto, and an upper half with a shallow notare hamon, which looks like a copy of Muramasa work. Also, there is a sword, a Nabeshima family owned Juyo Bijutsuhin blade classified as a Muramasa sword, with a "Nabeshin" kanji signature with silver zogan on the nakago. This could be the Nabeshima family lord Shinano no kami Katsushige's name. From this, Nabeshima family would have been a tozama daimyo, and they did not hesitate to own and wear Muramasa blades. It is highly possible that the Tadayuki suriage mei was done under the Nabeshima family's supervision.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai