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Examination of Important Swords

Classification:
Juyo Bijutsu Hin
Important Art Object

Type: Katana
Mei: oite Osaka Izumi no kami Kunisada

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu 4 rin (71.35 cm)
Sori: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)
Sakihaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu 6 rin (3.5 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 4 bu (19.4 cm)
Nakago sori: very slight

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune, and which is slightly thick with a standard width. The bottom half's sori is a little pronounced and there is a chu-kissaki. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, there are thick dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and the entire jihada leaves a strong impression. The hamon is based on ko-gunome mixed with gunome, togariba, small notare, and the entire yakiba is a shallow midare hamon. The hamon variations in width are not prominent. There are frequent ashi, a thick nioiguchi, and even dense nie. In the middle, there are niesuji, kinsuji and fine sunagashi. On the omote side around the monouchi on the shinogi there are yubashiri, and the bottom half has muneyaki. The boshi is almost straight with a komaru, and on the omote there is a little hakikake. The nakago is ubu, the tip is ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are osuji-chigai. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, along the mune edge, there is a long kanji signature made with small sized kanji.

The Shodai Kunisada (Shin Kunisada) was one of the founders of the Osaka Shinto tradition, along with the Shodai Kunisuke who was discussed in the last issue. To study Kunisada's ancestry, documents from Saikyoji Temple in Miyazaki City are the most detailed, and many experts have studied these since before WWII. Kunisada was born in Tensho 17 (1589) and was the son of Hyuga no kuni Inoue Yoshimitsu (who later become a monk and changed his name to Dogen). He is supposed to have lost his mother at an early age, and after growing up, he went to Kyoto to become a student of the Horikawa Kunihiro school because the great master Kunihiro came from the same prefecture's Obi-han (clan). But at that time, Kunihiro was already old. If Kunisada was 18 years old, Kunihiro was 77 years old, and if you count backwards, Kunihiro is supposed to have passed away in Keicho 19 at 84 years of age. From his early work, signatures, and characteristic styles, he definitely studied under the school's senior student Kunitoshi, and also historical sword books list Kunitoshi as his teacher.

About the time Kunisada moved to Osaka, there is a sword signed "Seshu Osaka ju Fujiwara Kunisada," and from this, he is supposed to have moved to Osaka a couple of years earlier. In Genwa 9 nen September 15th, he received the "Izumi no kami" title. Later his native Obi-han (clan) San-dai (third generation) lord, Ito Sukehisa employed him as an okakae smith (okakae craftsmen worked for their daimyo), and in Kanei 7 (1630) at the age of 41, the Nidai Kunisada (Shinkai) was born. His last signature is from Kanei 21 (1644) at the age of 55 years, and is "Shokoku (birth place) Hyuga-ju Inoue Izumi no kami Fujiwara Kunisada", and he had never listed birth place before. The reason is not known, but at that time, after this work, he may have decided to have daimei (signatures inscribed by his heir or successor) made by the Nidai Kunisada, and this must have been a formal act. From the following year Shoho 2 (1645), his works were signed as daimei by the Nidai Kunisada and there are some opinions that there are daimei by other students as well as the Nidai. At that time, the signature's kanji style became a sosho style (Dowa mei), and in Keian 2 (1649) age at 60 years old, the daimei became a kaisho style. Kunisada passed away 3 years later in Keian 5 nen May 5th, at the age of 63. This sword has a different signature from his usual signatures "Izumi no kami Fujiwara Kunisada". The signature's top has "oite Osaka" (at Osaka) and omits the Fujiwara name. This kind of signature is seen mainly around the mid-Kanei period, and Kunisada was about 40 then at the peak of his career. This katana is supposed to have been made at that time. Usually, many of his works have hamon which are similar to the Shodai Kunisuke's hamon which are primarily a choji style hamon with a high yakiba. But this has a low yakiba, mainly with kogunome and gunome. We can guess that this is a rare work made when he admired the Naoe-Shidzu or Shidzu style. This belonged to a Tosa-han (Tosa Fief) military officer Tani Senjo who was active from the Bakumatsu period to the Meiji period. This sword is currently being exhibited at the NBTHK exhibition "Token in Osaka" (July 15 to October 26, 2014).

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Take sukashi tsuba

Mumei: Matashichi

Hayashi Matashichi was born in Keicho 18 (1613) in the Kumamoto area. He was active as the Shodai Higo Kinko Hayashi school master smith. Because his father was a famous gunsmith under Kiyomasa, his work shows a unique type of iron work, and he was careful with the iron itself. In the "Higo kinko roku" (smith's list), he said that the iron's color was very special, and that iron could be worked to gain a moist appearance just like yokan (Japanese bean cakes), and his work was admired by many people. This is a master's work which shows the full extent of Hayashi Matashichi's high level of skill. The motif is bamboo (take), and the entire tsuba shows a flexibility and strength and softness. You can almost hear the bamboo's sounds, and it is so well made that it does not feel like iron work. Where did Matashichi learn the techniques to make such delicate iron work? Not only was he a gunsmith, but it also seems likely that he experimented, researched and studied iron, otherwise he may not have produced so much great iron work. Because of this, people were talking about his relationship with some swordsmith. But without Matashichi's original techniques, it would be difficult to produce iron which contains so much feeling or such a patina. This certainly has a great jihada, and a deep feeling for iron work, and you can definitely recognize his excellent level of skill. However, not only the Hayashi school, but also the Higo kinko group mastered this difficult skill and produced many outstanding works. There are no other goldsmith groups like the Higo gold smiths, and they studied the nature of iron which is the "king of metals". In particular, Matashichi's work shows respect and understanding of the iron itself, and he used this material in many ways, and you can recognize the sophistication of his style and the spirit of his work.

Shijo Kantei To No. 692

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 692 issue Shijo Kantei To is October 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 October 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 was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

Information:

Type: Katana

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 2 bu (73.33 cm)

Sori: slightly over 4 bu (1.23 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 7 rin (2.95 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 6 rin (0.8 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 2 bu 9 rin (3.9 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 5 bu (19.8 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with a mitsumune. The mihaba is a little wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a shallow sori, with a chu-kissaki and the angle of the mune is noticeably sharp. The jihada is itame mixed with o-itame, mokume, and nagarehada and the entire jihada is visible. There are dense ji-nie, and frequent black thick chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture, and the midare hamon has saka-ashi. There is a dense nioguchi, dense ji-nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, with a deep hamachi and munemachi, and the nakago tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are the smith's original style, and there are two mekugi-ana. On the omote side of the nakago, under the first mekugi-ana, on the center, there is the smith's unique signature.

Shijo Kantei To No. 690 (in the July, 2014 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 690 in the July issue is a tanto by Osafune Morimitsu dated Oei 30 nen ki.

This tanto is 8 sun 8.5 bu, close to a standard length, and with uchizori. But this is not a standard width, which is narrow for the length: or in other words, this is long for the width, and this is a point in judging this as an early Muromachi period tanto.

The Oei Bizen jihada is itame mixed with mokume, and often there is nagare hada, and the entire jihada is visible. There are ji-nie and frequent chikei, and two types of usturi: midare utsuri and bo-utsuri. In case of hirazukuri tanto like this one, and wakizashi with suguha hamon, many have bo-utsuri, but sometimes there is midare-utsuri towards the mune side, just like on this tanto. Oei Bizen hamon are based on open bottom gunome and choji mixed with togariba and ko-gunome, and vertical alterations in active midare hamon. There is a nioiguchi type with ko-nie, and whose boshi are described as a "center of the candle" shape. Other types are just like this tanto with a suguha style hamon a tight nioiguchi, nioiguchi type ko-nie, and a boshi which is straight and with a komaru. Among this type of suguha work, there are often classic styles which remind us of Aoe work. In particular, there are narrow tachi shapes with a suguha hamon with a tight nioiguchi mixed with saka-ashi, and such examples are sophisticated work, and this reminds us of work from the end of the Kamakura period from Osafune, such as Kagemitsu and Chikakage. Morimitsu's nakago have a square tip kurijiri, the yasurime are katte-sagari, and his signatures, mainly in tanto and wakizashi, are on the omote side under the mekugiana, or start with the first kanji on the mekugiana. There are long signatures along the center and the ura side has a date. In voting, most people voted for both Morimitsu and Yasumitsu. Besides these, a few people voted for other Oei Bizen smiths such as Iesuke and Noriie. Many people also voted for Yasumitsu who was one of Oei Bizen's major master smiths along with Morimitsu. Yasumitsu's skill was at the same level as Morimitsu, but he has more suguha work than Morimitsu, so this answer is understandable. Other Oei Bizen smiths such as Iesuke and Noriie have suguha work which are similar to this tanto, so at this time all other Oei Bizen smiths are treated as a correct answer. However, Iesuke and Noriie do not have much suguha work, and compared with Morimitsu and Yasumitsu's work, their itame and mokume jihada are not smooth, the jihada is less refined, and their skills are different. Beside correct and almost correct answers, a fair number of people voted for Kagemitsu. Kagemitsu has standard length tanto with suguha hamon, and the shape is balanced between the length with a standard width, and is different from this tanto's shape. Kagemitsu's jihada are a tight ko-itame, there are thick dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and among the Osafune main stream smiths who worked at the end of the Kamakura period, who are known for their refined jihada, his jihada are among the best. Also, his suguha hamon have a slightly wider nioiguchi.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

