

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
ISSUE NUMBER 694
November, 2014

Meito Kansho
Examination of Important Swords

Type: Wakizashi

Mei: shumei Yukimitsu (meibutsu Oshima Yukimitsu)
Hon-Na with kao (Honami Koshitsu)

Accompanied by an origami dated Hoei Gan-nen (1704) by Honnami Mitsutada

Length: 1 shaku 9 bu 9 rin (33.35 cm)

Sori: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.45 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 1 bu 7 rin (9.6 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

Commentary

This is a hirazukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune, a wide blade, slightly thick, long and with a shallow sori. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, and some areas have a visible itame hada and nagare hada. There are thick dense ji-nie, and frequent fine chikei. The hamon is based on a shallow quiet notare hamon mixed with ko-gunome and togariba. There are ko-ashi, yo, thick frequent nie, the bottom half has niesuji, and fine sunagashi, and in places at the top of the hamon has yubashiri. The boshi on the omote is straight, the tip is yaki-kuzure, and there is an omaru. The ura boshi is a small notarekomi, the tip along the mune is sharp and there is a return. Both sides have strong hakikake and a long return. The horimono on the omote is a hata-hoko but the hata or banner/flag part is well worn and there is very little trace left of it. On the ura there is a futasuji-hi carved through the nakago. Slightly below the center there are bonji. The nakago is ubu, the tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There are four mekugi-ana. On the omote, under the fourth mekugi ana on the center, and on the ura under the second mekugi-ana, both sides have a shumei (an attribution in red ink), and in some places, some of the shumei ink has disappeared or worn out.

According to many old sword books, Sagami no kuni Tozaburo Yukimitsu is supposed to have been a student of Shintogo Kunimitsu, and a slightly senior student than Masamune. His existing signed blades consist of just a few tanto,

and of his two masterpieces, one is owned by the emperor and was formerly owned by the Mino no kuni Imao (the area's) lord Takegoshi Masanobu, and which was given to him by Tokugawa Iyasu. The other tanto belongs to a descendant of the Oomae family and is classified as Kokuho. Both tanto have a small shape with a suguha hamon, and their style shows a relationship to Kunimitsu as a teacher and student. However, Yukimitsu's mumei blades which were identified later, represent a wide range of works, and are related to Masamune, Norimune, and Rai Kunitsugu's style of work, with notare or midare hamon, and also hitatsura hamon. Actually, after the old Yukimitsu attributions, this type of work was noticed, and after the Muromachi period, old sword books listed a wide and varied number of Yukimitsu's swords.

However, concerning these attributions to Yukimitsu, Dr. Honma Kunzan used to say that Yukimitsu's range of styles is somewhat too wide, and these attributions should be reconsidered. Honma said that some of the Soshu Den Jojo-saku work which is not Masamune's, not Sadamune's nor Norishige's, and of course was not from other Ju-tetsu smiths, should be considered as being by Yukimitsu. He said the Yukimitsu name literally means a "sheltered port", but he meant this also in the sense that difficult attributions could be made to Yukimitsu. Either way, the old judgements of Yukimitsu's work have mutually characteristic points: the jihada and hamon have frequent nie; frequent hataraki such as chikei, kinsuji, and yubashiri; have an abundance of interesting nie work; and these were definitely Soshu Den Jojo-saku or excellent work.

This wakizashi was judged as Yukimitsu's work by Honnami Koshitsu and has a shu-mei or red ink inscription and is listed in the "Kyoho Meibutsu Cho" as "Meibutsu Ooshima Yukimitsu". The length of this wakizashi is about 1 shaku and there is a shallow sori. From sword history, usually this style is considered a Nambokucho period shape. Yukimitsu has a tanto with signatures and without sori, but with a wide mihaba and fat shape, which is the next generation's shape, and from this, there seems to be no problem in judging this as Yukimitsu's work. Koshitsu seems to have omitted other Soshu Den smiths' names, and to have judged this work strictly, and to have considered Yukimitsu's wide range of work which is listed in old sword books, and finally decided that this was his work. This is a good example of the varied styles of Yukimitsu's work without a mei. This is ko-itame hada, with thick dense ji-nie, fine chikei, even ha-nie from the moto to saki. Beside this, the top of the hamon has yubashiri hataraki, and this makes it more interesting. The boshi is similar to the "Meibutsu fudo Masamune (owned by the Tokugawa museum, referenced in the NBTHK Journal no 494 issue in the Meito Kansho section). In that sword, the omote and the ura have different style boshi as seen on this wakizashi: one side is o-maru, and the other side has a sharp tip near the mune, and this is an interesting observation.

Concerning the sword's name, according to "Meibutsu Cho", the original owner was Ooshima Mitsumasa who worked with general Niwa Nagahide in the Azuchi Momoyama period, and later become Toyotomi Hideyoshi's vassal. At the time the "Meibutsu cho" name was published, this wakizashi was worn by the Omi-no-kuni

Minaguchi-han lord Koto Izumi-no-kami Yoshinori. Also, this is listed in the “Umetada Meikan” and has a origami dated Hoei Gan-nen by Honnami Mitsudada with a value of 100 kinsu.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Correction:

In the October issue (issue No. 693), on the Meito Kansho page, the text about “Soboro” listed “正応 or Sho-o 3 (1290) work” was an error, and correct date is “承応お or Sho-o 3 (1654)”, and we apologize for this error.

Juyo Tosogu

Tokei zu (cockfighting design) menuki

Wari tanzaku mei : Shunkan

Among the Otsuki school smiths, there are excellent smiths, and among them were Kawasaki Kagashun and Aoki Shunkan. Both Kagashun and Shunkan were gifted craftsmen, but they passed away at an early age, just like a shooting star. This work is Shunkan’s menuki.

In Bunka 2, Shunkan was born and was a son of the kozuka smith Yamashiroya Jinsuke. According to the historical book “Tagane no Hana” he was a genius and had no regular teacher, but some people said he was a student of Kawasaki Kagashun, although the details are uncertain. Other sources said he was consultant or advisor to master smiths such as Uesugi Kajukan and Goto Ichijo.” Considering his birth, he naturally learned from his father and continued with his father’s tradition, but after that, his history is uncertain. He was Kagashun’s age, and they were close each other, so it is hard to think about them as a teacher and student. Also, Kagashun has very few works left today, and it is hard to judge from their work if there was a teacher and student relationship. Concerning Ichijo, there is no clear evidence of any association between them. So, there is no evidence to support the idea that there was someone who was a formal teacher to him.

Looking at Shunkan’s work today, there is no question that he was a genius. In particular, his designs, selective eye, expressive techniques, and his human figures are amazing. Looking at his work, of which not many were produced, he choose subjects such as God, Buddha, Chinese legends, the Genpei battles, No theater, and Japanese traditonal Tokei events like that seen on these menuki, (tokei were

imperial court events held in March, and the tradition began in the Heian period). He chose subjects from his cultural background, and expressed them very well. His human expressions show smooth muscular movements in the forehead, cheek, or even the ears, and nervous expressions, not only in the face, but also in the hands and feet. There are elegant movements in clothing, soft shapes in the eboshi (men's formal hats). Also, in the cocks flowing feathers and tail, he used very delicate chiseled marks, abundant irogane (inlays) such as okigane (inlay), and hirazogan (high relief), and this kind of work tells us he was not an ordinarily skilled smith. This entire work has an elegant feeling. On the back, the menuki workmanship is perfect. There is a large chikara-gane (reinforcement), the bottom is firm, the tanzaku (plate for mei) is neat, the kanji signature begins and ends with strong dots with Shunkan's original character and was very carefully done. I feel, this is an exemplary and the best work, and I could enjoy a glimpse of Shunkan's world. At the same time, from this work, we can recognize again the Kyoto kinko smiths' great and skillful ability.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 694

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 694 issue Shijo Kantei To is December 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 December 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: tachi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 1 bu (66.96 cm)

Sori: 6 bu (1.82 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 7 bu (18.4 cm)

Nakago sori: 8 rin (0.25 cm)

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. The widths at the moto and saki are a little different. The sword is suriage, and is wa-sori and has a chu-kissaki. The jihada is a tight itame, and entire jihada is visible, and is mixed with nagare hada. There are thick dense ji-nie, fine chikei, jifu type jihada, and a whitish jigane. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are ko-ashi, a worn down nioiguchi, ko-nie, kinsuji and fine sunagashi. The nakago is suriage, and the nakago tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are kiri, and there are three mekugi-ana. On the omote side of the nakago, under the bottom half, on the center, there is a two kanji signature and the first kanji shape is a characteristic one.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For October

The swords discussed below were shown in the October 11, 2014 meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: October 11, 2014 (2nd Saturday of October) at 1:00pm

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Imoto Yuuki

Kantei To No. 1: katana

Kinzogan mei: Bitchu kuni Manju ju Yoshitsugu
Genna 5 nen 8 gatsu bi suriage kore
Futatsudo shidan 5 sun kiru kore

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 1 bu

Sori: slightly over 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: ko-itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada; the entire fiine jihada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, frequent jifu and jifu utsuri.

Hamon: chu-suguha hamon mixed a little gunome and square shaped gunome. There are ashi, ko-ashi, frequent yo, tight nioiguchi-like nie, and there are kinsuji, niesuji, sunagashi and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: a little above the yokote it is straight, the tip is komaru with a return, and there is a little hakikake.

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

This is an o-suriage mumei katana and was judged as Aoe Yoshitsugu's work. Uemonjo Yoshitsugu is one of representative Aoe school smiths working at the end of the Kamakura period. He has signed blades dated during the Showa, Kareki and Gentoku eras.

This blade is has a standard mihaba, a large koshizori, is suriage, and the tip has sori, and there is a chu-kissaki. Because the hamon is a tight nioiguchi suguha type hamon, many people voted for end of Kamakura period Bizen smiths, and especially concentrated on Chikakage and Unjo.

The vote for Chikakage came because the boshi above the yokote becomes straight. But if it were his work, the saka-ashi hamon would be more prominent, and there would be stronger nie. Many of his boshi are an exaggerated Sansaku-boshi. Many of the Unrui works are similar to Aoe. Their shapes have a Rai style wazori, and the jihada has jifu utsuri with shapes that appear like someone pushed their finger on the dark areas. Also, some places show togariba, and boshi usually have a round tip and return.

However, the most notable point is the jihada on this katana. The jihada is ko-itame mixed with mokume hada, and the entire fine jihada is visible. Or in other words, this is Aoe's chirimen-hada. In many places it is mixed with a unique jihada and there are dark blue jifu (called either sumi hada or same hada). Concerning this characteristic jihada, the Edo period kantei book "Kuchusai Hiden-sho", said that "even if something is judged as Bizen work, if there are sumi hada, should be Aoe work" and this is a major characteristic point for Aoe. Because of this, people voted for Bizen work in the first vote, and changed to Aoe in the second vote, and I would say this was a reasonable opinion.

In the Tsuchiya oshigata, the katana is listed. During the Amakusa (Shimabara) riots, the Hizen kojo han lord Nabeshima Kii no kami Motoshige wore this katana and led his troops into the castle.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Minamoto Masayuki
Koka 2 nen 2 gatsu bi

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 2 bu

Sori: 6.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight itame, some parts are mixed with nagare hada. There are thick dense ji-nie, frequent chikei and a bright jihada.

Hamon: choji style hamon mixed with gunome, and square gunome. There are frequent ashi, some yo, shimaba, a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, sunagashi, frequent long kinsuji, and a bright clear hamon.

Boshi: midarekomi with hakikake, a sharp tip and a return.

Minamoto Kiyomaro studied sword making for two years in Choshu's Hagi, and returned to Edo in Tenpo 15 (in the same year on December 2, the era changed to Koka), and established a shop in a house in Yotsuya Kita-iga-cho. This is where Yotsuya Masamune was born.

This is Masayuki's signature on this katana, dated on Koka 2 nen 2 gatsu bi, around the time he returned from Shoshu. This is a wide blade, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is poor hiraniku with an o-kissaki. From the shape, very few people made a mistake, and most judged this as a Shinshinto period katana. In this period, the Kiyomaro school's characteristic points are that the kissaki fukura is more poor and sharp, and the jihada is not a typical Shinshinto mujihada, but a clear strong itame hada.

Except for Kiyomaro's Hamabe style early work, he primarily uses two styles. Around the Tenpo and Koka periods, the distance between the midare hamon waves or peaks are close to each other, and gunome are mixed with choji, and this is a variable hamon. We also see his frequent thick long kinsuji and sunagashi, and many of them have a strong spirit or appearance.

Around the Kaei period, in his midare hamon, the choji are not prominent, and the entire hamon is based on a gunome midare hamon, and the kinsuji and sunagashi become more gentle. From the style, this work appears to be from around the Tenpo and Koka periods, and are typical of his work when he used the Masayuki signature or mei. This hamon has a variable mixture of abundant choji, and between the peaks there are long ashi, a dense nioiguchi, thick nie, some places have strong bright nie, there are thick long kinsuji and frequent sunagashi, which is Kiyomaro's original interpretation of Soshu Den work.

As an almost correct answer, some people voted for other smiths from the same school such as Kurihara Nobuhide and Saito Kiyondo. Nobuhide's speciality is horimono and among the Kiyomaro school, he has a strong personality. His hamon contain large square shaped gunome, in which the tips are mixed with ko-choji, ko-togariba, ko-gunome, and there is a very intricate unsmooth midare hamon.

Kiyondo succeeded around the Kaei period in working with Kiyomaro's style. His hamon are a large gunome midare hamon, his boshi return is described as being "run through by a comb", because there are thick bright glossy strong hakikake.

Kantei To No. 3: katana

Mumei: Chogi

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: 3.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: based on notare, mixed with ko-gunome, ko-choji, and vertical variations. There are frequent ashi and yo, nioiguchi type ko-nie, some places have tobiyaki, kinsuji, sunagashi, and there is a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: miderekomi; tip is sharp and there is a return.

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

This is a o-suriage katana judged as Chogi's work. In the Nanbokucho period, smiths made Soshu Den influenced blades all over Japan. Even, work based on nioiguchi type Bizen blades were not an exception. Blades were made in styles containing Bizen Den plus Soshu Den characteristics and are called "Soden-Bizen".

In the Nanbokucho period, representatives of Soden-Bizen smiths are the Osafune mainstream smith Kanemitsu and the branch smith Chogi. In particular, it was said Chogi was more distant from the true Bizen style than any Bizen smith. In his characteristic work the jihada and hamon have frequent nie, which is a strong Soshu Den detail. But there is a strong Bizen Den style tachi, which is the Noshu Takasu Matsudaira family's tachi classified as Juyo Bunkazai.

This blade has a Nanbokucho o-suriage katana shape without funbari. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, and the hada is visible but not too strong, and there are clear midare utsuri. The hamon has gentle nie, but more like a nioiguchi type, which is a strong Bizen characteristic. The jihada and hamon have gentle nie, the hamon is large, there are vertical variations in a midare hamon, and there are frequent rhythmical ashi and yo. From the shape, jihada, and hamon, you can recognize Chogi's outstanding characteristics. Because of this, people voted for Chogi in the first vote, and this is very good. Beside Chogi's name, some people voted for Kanemitsu. If it were Kanemitsu's work, usually the jihada is not as visible as Chogi's. His hamon are also based on regular square gunome or a smooth midare style.

Kantei To No. 4: katana

Mei: Hizen ju Harima Daijo Fujiwara Tadakuni

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu

Sori: slightly over 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame, some parts of the jihada are visible. There are frequent ji-nie, fine chikei, and a dark color jihada.

Hamon: chu-suguha, and slightly notare. There are ko-ashi, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, and the entire nioiguchi has a belt-like appearance; there are fine sunagashi, kinsuji and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: on the omote and ura it is straight and the tip is komaru.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi with marudome.

This is work by a branch Hizen school or a Bo-Hizen smith. This is a katana is by the Shodai Harima Daijo Tadakuni. This is a little over 2 sun suriage, and a little bit of the funbari is gone, and from the shape, it is difficult to judge the period.

But you cannot miss the katana's characteristic jihada and hamon. The jihada is a tight ko-itame hada, there are frequent ji-nie, fine chikei, and what is called a komenuka type jihada. The hamon is suguha, there are frequent nie, a bright nioiguchi, and belt shaped nie are seen clearly and continuously from the moto to the saki. In some places there are ko-ashi extending from the belt-like nioiguchi. The boshi is straight along the fukura and has a komaru and return. These details show Hizen characteristic points.

Beside the jihada and hamon, the shape is a little wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not different, and there is a chu-kissaki. Originally this was a long katana, but the sori is over 5 bu, and the middle part has sori, which should be considered, and this feature belongs to the unique Hizen shape. Many people voted for Hizen mainstream first to third generation smiths. The Shodai Tadayoshi has many Keicho-Shinto shape blades, and Hizen blades with the unique shape and belt-like nioiguchi blades. The shodai Tadayoshi produced many of these after he began using the Musashi Daijo Tadahiro signature. From the shape this is not a prominently wide blade. If you look at mainstream Sandai Tadayoshi work, this is closest to the Nidai Tadayoshi's shape. The Sandai Tadayoshi's shapes have a prominent width, a dynamic shape, and many of his jihada are tighter, as though they were forged very hard.

Among the Bo-Hizen schools' work, there are many as good as the mainstream school's suguha work, and we could say this is an example. But if you look at this carefully, there are some differences between this and the mainstream work, such as some parts of the hada are visible, and there is a dark colored jihada. Some people recognized this work from the characteristic points, and looked at this as the branch smith Masahiro's work, and this is very good.

Kantei To No. 5: kotachi

Mei: Kuniyuki (Rai)

Length: 1 shaku 9 sun 8 bu

Sori: 6.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: Ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume; some parts of the hada are visible. There are dense fine ji-nie, bo-utsuri and a bright jihada.

Hamon: wide suguha style mixed with ko-choji, gunome, this is a ko-midare type hamon. There are square shaped gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo mixed with saka-ashi, frequent ko-nie; at the koshimoto the hamon edge has yubashiri; the ura side's upper part has muneyaki, kinsuji and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: on the omote and ura, it is straight and yakizume.

This is a Rai Kuniyuki kotachi. The Rai school does not have many kotachi, and from the shape, many people were confused, and voted for all kinds of Bizen work from Ko-Bizen to Sue-Bizen. Because the kotachi has a conspicuous funbari at the koshimoto, this looks like it is either ubu or is very slightly suriage and close to ubu. Considering the sori, there is a maximum sori in the center, so this is torii sori, and this is different from Bizen work. The jihada is a well forged itame hada, and the jihada is bright. On the mune side there are pale bo-utsuri. The hamon is based on a wide suguha mixed with ko-choji and gunome. There are frequent nie, and on the center of the omote side, there are saka-ashi, and this is different from standard work. In the midare hamon, the tops of the waves slant forward toward the kissaki, and the ashi are slanted from the top of the hamon back toward the nakago, and this is called Kyo-saka-ashi. Also, even though this sword does not show large midare vertical variations, there are muneyaki, and these details show the Rai school's characteristic work very well.

Also, there is a komidare type hamon at the koshimoto, and frequent kijimata shaped yubashiri at the edge of the hamon, and if you recognize these characteristics, among the Rai smiths, you can judge this as being Kuniyuki's work. Among the people who voted for Rai school work, many voted for two smiths, either Rai Kunitoshi or Rai Kunimitsu. Rai Kunimitsu's work has a narrow gentle shape, and many of them are a suguha style with a tight nioiguchi and we do not often see a komidare hamon and kijimata shaped yubashiri. If this were Kunimitsu's work, clear gunome and ko-notare would stand out in the midare hamon.

Among the Rai school's work, kotachi examples are in the Tokugawa Museum's Torikai Kunitoshi classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, and the Futa-arayama Shrine's Rai Kunitoshi which is classified as Kokuho.

Shijo Kantei To No. 692 (in the September, 2014 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 692 in the September issue is a katana by Hankei.

Hankei is a Keicho shinto smith. He has typical Keicho-shinto shaped work with a wide mihaba, differences in the widths at the moto and saki are small, and there is a very long chu-kissaki. But with another style, there is a slightly wide shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are the same with slightly long chu-kissaki, just like this katana. He often makes a standard width blade with a long chu-kissaki. He also has many blades with almost standard shapes too. Many of his mune are mitsumune, and the mune angles are sharp, and this is one of his characteristic points. His jihada are itame mixed with o-itame, mokume, and nagrehada, and the entire jihada is visible. There are frequent black thick chikei, which forms his unique "Hijiki hada", and sometimes the entire jihada is masame.

Hankei's hamon are a notare style hamon mixed with gunome, and sometimes there are o-midare hamon, with a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, and the boundary between the jihada and hamon may not be clear. There is a worn down nioiguchi, long kinsuji, and frequent sunagashi. This kind of strong characteristic style may have been modeled after the work of Etchu Norishige.

With this kind of hamon, Hankei's boshi are midarekomi, notarekomi or yakizume, and many of them have frequent hakikake, and sometimes nie-kuzure, and they are strong and have varied styles.

This is a typical Hankei work, and most of people voted for him.

Hankei's styles are supposed to be modeled from Norishige, and between Hankei's Hijiki-hada and Norishige's Matsukawa-hada there are common characteristic points.

But Hankei's Hijiki-hada chikei part are characteristic, and we are unsure of the metallurgy details. However, with a visual inspection, the chikei are a little wide and have a clear shape which is usual in Japanese swords. If you look at his jihada under an incandescent light, usually the chikei do not rise above the ji.

With Norishige's matsukawa-hada's thick chikei, if you look with magnifying glass, they are strong glossy thick ji-nie when compared with other ji-nie, and this is not called chikei, more likely is closer to yubashiri. So look under an incandescent light, his thick chikei appear to rise above the ji, just like yubashiri and tobiyaki, and this is a different from Hankei's.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

