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Meito Kansho

Type: Tachi

Mei: Bizen kuni ju nin Unji

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 9 bu 7 rin (78.7 cm)

Sori: 9 bu 1 rin (2.75 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane : 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 5 rin (2.55 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 9 bu 5 rin (24.1 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, a slightly narrow width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a standard thickness, and it is long with a large sori, and a short chu-kissaki. The jihada is itame, mixed with prominent mokume, and the entire jihada is a fine visible hada. There are jifu, ji-nie, pale midare utsuri, and some places have straight utsuri. The hamon is chu-suguha, and the upper half is a very shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome and ko-choji. At the koshimoto the hamon is mixed with a ko-midare type hamon. There are ko-ashi, yo, a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie, and the koshimoto has fine kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi is straight, with an o-maru and a short return. The nakago is almost ubu, as the sword is slightly machi okuri (the hamachi has been moved up). The tip of the nakago is a very shallow kurijiri and the yasurime are o-sujichigai. There are two mekugi ana, and on the omote side, under the second mekugi ana (the original ana or hole) there is a long kanji signature shifted slightly toward the mune side, and the ura side has a date.

In Bizen kuni, around the Yoshii river basin, there were many sword smith schools such as the Osafune school. On the west side around the Asahi River and the branch Ukai River, the small Ukai school was located. The Ukai area today is Okayama City's Kita-ku, Mitsu Ukai district, and this is close to the west side's, Bitchu kuni, and is located in a relatively mountainous district. In their signed work,

one sees Unjo, Unji, and Unju in the signatures, and in the smith's names, these smiths used the "Un" kanji, so people called them "Unrui". Historical sword books list their pedigree relationships for each generation, but today, we can't confirm these details.

As Bizen smiths, their works are unique, and there is almost no Bizen influence, so it is more likely their work is based on the Bitchu Aoe style, which is close by. Their mutual characteristics are: the jihada is a fine visible jihada, and is mixed with prominent mokume hada, and there are jifu. The hamon are a saka-ashi type with midare and saka-ashi. The nakago's hamon edge is thick; the yasurime are o-sujichigai, and they often used gyaku tagane strokes (writing in the reverse direction to engrave a signature). Other styles we see are a wazori shape, and often a refined ko-itame hada, which is a Kyoto style influence (particularly from the Rai school). Sometimes uneven jifu utsuri style hataraki are seen more often than in the Rai school jihada.

Also, the school's unique characteristic points in the hamon are: the upper half of the suguha hamon are simple, but the lower half may be mixed with a midare hamon (this tachi shows this on the ura side); the valleys in the midare hamon are sharp and call "in-no togariba". Their boshi are o-maru, and round and with a return, and these characteristics are conventional.

Unji who is supposed to have been Unjo's son has very few signed blades, and today beside this tachi, there are blades dated Bunpo 2 (1318), (classified in the 30's as JuyoToken), and Kenbu 2 (1335) classified as Juyo Bunkazai, so the dates of his active period are definite. Most of his signatures contain either "Bizen kuni ju Unji" or two kanji, and are located under the mekugi ana, and either on the center, or a little towards the mune side. Usually Unjo's signatures are above the mekugi ana and on the mune side of the nakago. Most of Unji's works are tachi, and there are ko-tachi, tanto and naginata. His hamon are either suguha or a suguha type. In this case, hamon are a low gentle Unjo style, and there are Unji's original style which is a wide and dynamic shape, a saka-ashi based hamon with prominent hataraki, dense ha-nie, frequent sunagshi and hotsure.

This tachi does not have a saka-ashi hamon, but the jihada is mixed with abundant mokume hada and there is a fine visible hada with jifu, which is an Aoe characteristic jihada called a chirimen (crepe-like) hada. The nakago has some of the school's characteristic yakiotoshi section (about 8 bu long), but the other parts are ubu, and there is an original shape, which shows not only Unji's work but also the school's characteristic points. Also, there is a wazori shape which is a beautifully balanced shape. Around the monouchi to the kissaki, the hamon becomes narrower, but the original shape with the widths at the moto and saki are not very different from what we see today, so we can imagine the healthy dynamic shape, and an almost 2 shaku 6 sun length for this large tachi. This is a rare tachi with a signature, and a highly valuable reference material, and this is supposed to have been Date Masamune's tachi, when he established the Sendai clan's 620,000 koku fief.

Explanation and the photo by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Okina yasuri (round or circle design) shippo zogan (enamel inlay) tsuba Mumei: attributed to Hikoza

This is a tsuba which I was looking forward to seeing. Since I have seen Hikoza's chrysanthemum shaped shippo tsuba, I strongly wanted to see another of his okina yasuri shippo zogan tsuba from the sword related gold smith's book "Higo Kinko Taikan". I wrote about the chrysanthemum shaped tsuba in Heisei 22 (NBTHK Sword Journal No. 644). Since then I wanted to investigate the relationship between Hikoza and shippo (enamel inlay). I have tried to obtain information from his tsuba work and also from a shippo expert and artist. But I still do not have a complete understanding of his work. As you see, this is on a suaka (pure copper) ground, with a round shape engraved groove, and is called an okina yasuri design. Both the omote and ura have shippo inlay in the circle carving or groove. Hikoza often has tsuba with circle design elements. This has a rich feeling, and is well done with strong nikuoki (a large volume of the surface). Actually, a circle carved out of the tsuba with a wheel and chisel technique with continuous tense tagane (chisel) work might require a very high level of skill. Hikoza's circle carvings are deep and elegant, and especially very rich. It is a very simple design, but keep on examining it for a long time and you will see Hikoza's skill. According the book "Higo Kinko Roku," he was above the world" and this tsuba seems to show his personality.

On this tsuba the omote and ura shippo colors are a little different, but are well positioned and well balanced. and the clear enamel inlay makes the tsuba very attractive. Possibly over time, some of the inlay may continuously wear out, but this gives the tsuba a deep and natural looking appearance. The relationship between Hikoza and shippo is very interesting, but at the same time difficult to decipher. Hikoza used to use "Umsun-karuta" (a card game in early Edo times, which was originally from Portugal) as a theme, which means he had a chance to obtain some exposure to overseas culture. In the same period, for example, the tea master Enshu's tea ceremony tools had many shippo details. Shippo work was popular during the Momoyama to early Edo periods, but such influences were eliminated in Japan. If this is related to Hosokawa Sansai and Tadaoki (Christian daimyos), it would become even more interesting for me. Hikoza passed away in 1628 and worked in the Higo school and for the Hosokawa daimyo.

This is a subject I hope to research more in the near future.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 698

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 698 issue Shijo Kantei To is April 5, 2015. 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 April 5, 2015 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: tanto

Length: 7 sun 2 bu (22.0 cm)

Sori: slight uchizori

Motohaba: 5 bu 6 rin (1.7 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 4 rin (9.2 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a kanmuri otoshi-zukuri tanto with an ihorimune, a standard width, uchizori, and a poor fukura. The jihada is itame with strong nagarehada, and shows masame, and entire hada is visible. There are dense ji-nie, chikei, a dark jihada and whitish areas. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon show a little hotsure, a worn down nioiguchi, dense ko-nie, and is soft looking. There are fine kinsuji and sunagashi, and it is yakiotoshi at the koshimoto. The horimono on the omote and ura are naginata hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu and the nakago tip is saki-kiri. The yasurime are katte sagari and there are two mekugi ana. On the omote side, the nakago has a large two kanji signature on the lower half of the nakago along the center, and it was made with a thick tagane (chisel).

This is the only recognized work by this smith today.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For New Year

The swords discussed below were shown in the February 2015, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: February 14, 2015 (2nd Saturday of January)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Iida Toshihisa

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: wakizashi

Mei: Chikuzen kuni Fukuoka ju Moritsugu

Motte Nanbantetsu tsukuru kore

Length: 1 shaku 7 sun 8.5 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Style: shinogizukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame mixed with strong nagare hada; there are ji-nie and midare utsuri.

Hamon: choji mixed with gunome; a spectacular and beautiful midare hamon, and the entire hamon has saka-ashi; there is a tight nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi, komaru, and with return.

This wakizashi has a standard width and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a chu-kissaki, a shallow sori, and the shinogi-ji has a masame hada. From this, we wish to judge this as Kanbun-shinto. The jihada has midare utsuri, the hamon is based on choji, and is a very active and beautiful hamon. From these details, this is obviously a Bizen Den work. In the Kanbun period, smiths working in the the Bizen tradition, especially in the old style Ichimonji style choji-midare hamon work are in the Ishido school in Edo and Osaka, the Fukuoka smiths, and the Chikuzen Nobukuni school included smiths such as Nobukuni and Yoshimasa.

This wakizashi is Fukuoka Ishido Moritsugu's work. Looking at the jihada, there is strong forging apparent in the masame hada. Among the Ishido school, smiths who did this type of work are Edo Ishido Korekazu and his students, the Fukuoka Ishido smiths Koretsugu and Moritsugu. It is rare for the other Ishido smiths to produce such a strong masame hada work. This entire choji hamon is saka-ashi, and this is a characteristic point for Korekazu, Koretsugu and Moritsugu.

Usually, the two Fukuoka Ishido smiths, Koretsugu and Moritsugu, produced work which was wider and with a large sori when compared to Korekazu. Because this is a wakizashi, it does not have this kind of character. These two smiths' hamon are often mixed with a unique togariba call "ika no atama" (squid head), and the hamon curves toward the mune direction, and we can see this characteristic hamon in this wakizashi.

Also, in the midare hamon, the narrow bottom choji tops are close each other, and in some places, they look like they are rising out of the hamon, and this is one of these two Fukuoka Ishido smiths' characteristic points.

In voting, people recognized these characteristic points, and many people voted for Koretsugu and Moritsugu. Because we cannot find big differences in the work of these two smiths, either name would be acceptable.

Another answer was for the Sue Bizen smith Katsumitsu, and other Ishido school smiths, and Chikuzen Nobukuni. If it were Katsumitsu, his shapes have sakizori, and the shinogiji never has masame hada. If it were Edo Ishido Mitsuhiro, Tsunehira, or Osaka Ishido Nagayuki, their midare hamon have more vertical variations and are more active and beautiful more, and their level of skill seems to be higher. If it were Kishu Ishido work, there are usually yakidashi, and their hamon are smaller. Also, Chikuzen Nobukuni's midare hamon were smaller.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Oshu Shirakawa shin Tegarayama Masashige
Kansei 9 nen 8 gatsu bi
Oite Buyoshun dai saku kore

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 9.5 bu

Sori: 4.5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: fine tight ko-itamehada; there are ji-nie.

Hamon: yakidashi at the moto, and above this is an o-gunome hamon. There are thick ashi, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight, with a komaru and return.

The katana has a yakidashi at the moto, and above it a gorgeous toran style ogunome hamon, and the jihada and hamon are bright and clear. From this, at first

impression, it looks like Osaka Shinto work, such as Sukehiro or Echizen no kami Kanesada. But this is a wide and thick blade, which is heavy, and there is a narrow shinogi-ji width for the blade's width. There is a long chu-kissaki, and the jihada is too tight for Osaka Shinto. From this, we wish to judge this as Shinshinto work. In that period, work modeled after Sukehiro's hamon, a toran style o-midare hamon was popular. The smiths known for this kind of midare hamon work are Suishinshi Masahide, Tegarayama Masashige, Ichige Tokurin, Ozaki Suketaka, Kato Tsunahide, and Tsunatoshi.

This is Tegarayama Masashige's work. Masashige's work has very few typical toran ba work which are like Ozaki Suketaka, Kato Tsunahide, and Tsunatoshi's hamon. Their wave shapes have a strong inclination or slant, and the valleys between the midare waves are square shaped. Many of Masashige's hamon have round top o-gunome with vertical variations, and have more gentle looking midare hamon. Also, in many of his toran style midare hamon, the tops and valleys have a sharper shape and this is a one of his characteristic points.

Also, based on the same type of o-gunome hamon as Masashige, Suishinshi Masahide's name is understandable. But many of Masahide's works have rough nie all over the jihada and hamon and some areas have mura-nie which are uneven, and his yakidashi are same width from the base to the upper part and straight. These are characteristic Masahide features.

Kantei To No 3: wakizashi

Mei: Sagami kuni ju nin Hiromitsu
Bunwa 5 nen 2 gatsu bi

Length: 1 shaku 1 sun 3 bu

Sori: slightly over 1bu

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

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

Hamon: based on a choji hamon mixed with gunome. There are yubashiri, tobiyaki, muneyaki, and it becomes hitatsura. There are dense nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is a little sharp, and there is a long return.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are katana hi carved through the nakago.

This is wide and long, but has a shallow sori, and is thin, and is a hirazukuri wakizashi. It has a typical Nambokucho Enbun Joji period, sunnobi tanto shape. The hamon has frequent tobiyaki, and the entire wakizashi has a yakiba, or in other word it is hitatsura. In the Nanbokucho period, smiths who produced this kind of hitatsura were: in Soshu, Hiromitsu and Akihiro, and in Kyoto, Hasebe school

smiths such as Kunishige and Kuninobu. Both Shoshu and Kyoto hitatsura are active and spectacular.

Soshu work is based on a choji hamon, and towards the upper part, the hamon becomes wider, the boshi are tsukiage and sharp, tobiyaki are mainly concentrated in the upper part of the blade and there is a midare hamon. The Kyoto Hasebe school's work is not as thin as Soshu work, and the jihada on the ha and mune sides are masame. Their hamon is based on notare compared with Hiromitsu and Akihiro's hitatsura which is based on choji, and shows less vertical alteration and an even width hamon. Their boshi are o-maru style, and many of them have a long return to the habakimoto.

This is a characteristic Sohu Den Hiromitsu wakizashi. Because of the typical style, most people voted for either Hiromitsu or Akihiro. Hiromitsu and Akihiro's styles are similar and difficult to judge. But larger sizes, over 1 shaku, just like seen in this example, are seen more Hiromitsu's work. Also, this type of hamon, with large size round choji called "dango choji" are often seen Hiromitsu's work. From the shape and hamon, Hiromitsu's name is appropriate.

Some people voted for later period Muromachi, Sue Bizen smiths, and other country hitatsura smiths. These have less nie when compared with Nambokucho period work, and there are more nioiguchi types, and the jihada and hamon have less hataraki, they are less skilled, and the shapes are different.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Echizen no kami Fujiwara Kunitoshi

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 1 sun 7 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are dense nie and chikei.

Hamon: straight yakidashi at the moto, and above this a wide notare hamon mixed with ogunome. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, and a bright and clear hamon.

Boshi: wide yakiba, shallow notare, with a komaru and long return.

This is a wide katana, which is slightly short. There is a large sakizori, with a long chu-kissaki. The hamon is a wide gentle notare and gunome, and from these characteristics many people voted for work from the latter half of the Muromachi period, and for Sue Seki smiths such as Kanesada, Ujifusa, and Daido. Definitely, the first impression is a popular uchigatana shape to accommodate Katateuchi (one hand) use in that period, and at the same time from the hamon shape, these smiths names are understandable.

But looking at the jihada and hamon carefully, the jihada is fine and tight, there are thick ji-nie, fine chikei, and refined jihada. The hamon has a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, and is bright and very clear. The entire work is more sophisticated than Sue Seki smiths' work, and Shinto style characteristics can be seen. This is a Horikawa Kunihiro school Echizen no kami Kunitoshi katana. Many of Horikawa's works are modeled after old Soshu Den master smiths' work, such as Shizu and Sadamune. Among the Horikawa school, the Kunitoshi hamon are a Sue Seki style notare mixed with togariba, and in particular, like Kanetsada style midare hamon, which have a yakidashi at the moto. Kunitoshi's work shows his individuality. However, his jihada do not have Sue Seki characteristic nagarehada and a whitish jihada. Sometimes he makes a typical Horokawa school rough jihada, but usually his jihada are fine, tight and refined. In voting, beside Sue Seki smiths' name, there was Muramasa's name, maybe because on this particular sword, the omote and ura hamon are almost exactly the same. Some people voted for Iga no kami Kinmichi because it is like his which are notarekome with a return. If it were Muramasa, the vertical variations in the midare hamon alteration would be prominent, and the jihada may not be as refined as this. If it were Kinmichi, many of his jihada are mixed with nagarehada, the shape would have no sakizori, and would be a more typical Keicho Shinto shape.

Kantei To No. 5: kotachi

Mei: Ichi

Kiritsuke mei: Sakakibara Masatoshi shoji (owns this)

Kokoro shizuka nareba mi onozukara yasushi (if your mind is peaceful
your body will be in good condition)

Length: slightly over 1 shaku 7 sun 9 bu

Sori: slightly over 3 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are ji-nie, chikei, and bright midare utsuri.

Hamon: a slightly wide hamon; suguha type choji midare in which the midare waves are close to each other. There are frequent ashi and yo, and the entire hamon has saka-ashi; there are frequent nie, a bright and clear nioiguchi, kinsuji and fine sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi in nie kuzure, and it becomes a yakizume style.

This kotachi is signed “—” for Ichimonji. This is a kotachi which is a little suriage, and from the shape it was a little difficult to judge the period. But the jihada has bright midare utsuri, the hamon has frequent nie, there is abundant hataraki such as ashi, yo, sunagashi, and an active beautiful choji midare hamon, and from these

characteristics, we wish to judge this as something no later than the Kamakura period and as Bizen work.

In the hamon there are places where the spaces between the midare waves are close to each other and they are prominent, but this is different from work from Bizen from the latter half of the Kamakura period. The midare hamon is mixed with gunome, or is a Ko-Bizen and Ko-Ichimonji characteristic midare hamon based on ko-midare and ko-choji. The hamon is a clear continuous choji hamon, and this is a mid-Kamakura period Ichimonji work characteristic point.

In voting, people this characteristic point, and many people voted for Ichimonji work, especially Norifusa. Among the Ichimonji smiths, Norifusa's hamon have fine hataraki such as ashi and yo, and both the jihada and hamon are bright and clear. Indeed this has the same characteristics as Norifusa's work, and the answer is understandable.

Shijo Kantei To No 696 (in the 2015 New Year's issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 696 in the January issue is a tachi by Aoe Tsuguyoshi

This is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are almost the same, It is suriage with a koshizori, the tip has sori, and there is a long chu-kissaki. From the shape, you can judge this as coming from around the early half of the Nanbokucho period.

The jihada is itame mixed with mokume hada, and the entire jihada is a fine visible hada called chirimen-hada, and there is dan-utsuri. The hamon is suguha based and mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. There are ashi and yo, and the entire hamon has saka-ashi. There is a tight nioiguchi, nioiguchi type ko-nie, and a bright and clear hamon. From these characteristics work, in voting, the majority of people voted for end of Kamakura to Nambokucho period Aoe smiths, such as Tsuguyoshi, Tsugunao, Yoshitsugu, Sadatsugu, and Moritsugu.

If this were a Tsuguyoshi work, many people pictured an Enbun Joji type tachi with a prominent wide shape with an o-kissaki, and a large thin hira-wakizashi with a shallow sori. But Tsuguyoshi's active period was from the end of the Kamakura to early Nambokucho to the peak of the Nambokucho period. His tachi dated in Ryakuo and Jowa are instead of typical Enbun Joji styles, and more like Osafune Kanemitsu type work, which is narrow and with a long chu-kissaki.

People voted for each of the Aoe smiths' names, but all these smiths worked in a manner similar to each other, and it is difficult to judge individual names. Also, the tachi has a shape from close to the end of the Kamakura period. So at this time, latter half of the Kamakura period to mid Nambokucho period Aoe smiths' names were all treated as correct answers.

Besides the correct answer, there were few Ko-Aoe, and late Kamakura period Osafune smiths such as Kagemitsu and Chikakage.

If it were Ko-Aoe work, many of shapes are narrow, there is a large koshizori with funbari, the tip is uchizori and there is a small kissaki. The jihada are chirimen-hada, but the utsuri is a dark colored jifu-utsuri. The hamon are suguha mixed with ko-midare and ko-choji, and there is a worn down nioiguchi, nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Kagemitsu and Chikakage's shapes and hamon are similar to this. But if were their work, their utsuri is not dan-utsuri, and much of their utsuri are midare-utsuri or straight bo-utsuri towards the hamon side. Their hamon are mainly prominent kataochi-gunome or kakugunome.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai