

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
ISSUE NUMBER 700
May, 2015

Meito Kansho
Appreciation of important swords

Type: Wakizashi
Mumei: den Masamune

Length: 1 shaku 8 sun 9 bu 8 rin (57.5 cm)
Sori: 3 bu 4 rin (1.05 cm)
Motohaba: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)
Sakihaba: 7 bu 1 rin (2.15 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)
Sakikasane : 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 4 bu 9 rin (4.5 cm)
Nakago length: 5 sun 9 bu 7 rin (18.1 cm)
Nakago sori: very slight

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. The blade is thick, there is a slightly shallow sori and a long chu-kissaki. The jihada is a well forged itame, and some parts of the jihada are visible. There are thick dense ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon is ko-notare mixed with gunome, ko-gunome, and ko-choji. The overall hamon appearance is a low midare hamon. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, thick uneven small and large nie, and some places have nie-kuzure. There are frequent kinsuji, nie-suji, sunagashi, yubashiri, and tobiyaki. The boshi is midarekomi, and the entire boshi is nie-kuzure, especially on the ura side. The tips have hakikake, and there are nie-suji mixed with yubashiri. The horimono on the omote and the ura are futasuji-hi carved through the nakago.

Sagami-no-kuni Goro Nyudo Masamune is known as a great master smith in the Japanese sword history. He carried on Kunimitsu's and Yukimitsu's nie style, and raised the SoshuDen style to an art. He is known, not only in the sword world, but also among the general population. In the Edo period, he was one of "the best three master smiths" along with Toshiro Yoshimitsu and Go Yoshihiro. In the sword book "Kyoho Meibutsu cho" (written in the Kyoho era from 1716-1735), 235 blades are listed which included one burned and damaged in a fire, and Masamune had

59 blades in this listing. According to a historical sword book, he passed away in the early Nambokucho period on Koei 2 (1314). Also, his meibutsu sword, the “Edo cho-mei Masamune” which was lost during the catastrophic fire in the Meireki period in 1657, was supposed to have had a date of “Showa 3 (1314) 11gatsu bi”. From this evidence, his active time was around end of the Kamakura period, which is the general consensus and appears to be accurate.

There are four famous tanto with signatures: the “Meibutsu fudo Masamune” classified as Juyo Bunkazai; two gyobutsu (items which belonged to an emperor) called “Kyogoku” and “Daikoku”; and the “Honjo” (owned by Tokugawa Ieyasu). The rest of Masamune’s blades are mostly o-suriage mumei. In case of his katana, the width is usually standard and there is a chu-kissaki, but some of them are wide with a long chu-kissaki. His jihada are moist appearing, and appear as a unique tough jihada, and there are large ji-nie. As a result of mixing hard and soft steels in his work, we often see chikei. But differently from later periods’ visible hada, Masamune’s jihada is not rough, and is very natural appearing.

Masamune’s hamon are variable. If there is a Bizen choji midare hamon as a standard, people used to say that Masamune’s hamon display an abstract beauty. He used all kinds of hamon shape elements deliberately, which Dr. Honma Kunzan described with the kanji “kyo” which meant eccentric or unusual. The hamon are free moving, bold, and openhearted or light, but still display a high degree of elegance. These characteristics are his real values, and Masamune is valued as no one else.

There is no question that his nie style is the best. There are not only nie hataraki such as strong and soft nie alterations, appearance of nie-kuzure, nie-suji, yubashiri, and tobiyaki, but there are also, nie and a nioiguchi mixed together, a moist dark and pale appearing nioiguchi, a wide and narrow nioiguchi, a variety of movement or dynamism, and all kinds of elements, and dynamic variability. In describing his style, people used to say that it looked like sumie (a black ink landscape painting), invariably with a dynamic wild hamon. These characteristics are unique, and display his high artistic sensibility which no other sword smith exhibits.

This wakizashi, especially on the omote side hamon, has active and quiet alterations, and the jihada and hamon have rich nie and nioi hataraki. The similar shapes seen in the meibutsu “Taro Masamune” classified as Kokuho, and in the meibutsu “Ikeda Masamune” classified as Juyo Bunkazai. These futasuji-hi, are the same as those seen in the “Oogaki Masamune” which is classified as Tokubetsu Juyo. From these observations, this wakizashi being judged as “Masamune” is incorrect and appropriate.

In the early Edo period, this was supposedly owned by shogunate’s ship commissioner or bugyo Mukai Tadakatsu who was a general in the bakufu’s navy and also was a commander in the naval patrols.

Explanation and the photo by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Sansui zu (landscape design) tsuba

Mei: Yomeya Tomonobu (with gold inlay signature “Fuku”)

Someya Tomonobu is an artist, who displayed his own style and unique personality in the limited space of a tsuba. He is supposed to have studied painting under Tani Buncho and later showed the full extent of his artistic abilities in his work.

This is his favorite composition using people and nature. The scene, on the lower right side, inside of a house shows people enjoying a conversation, and on the lower left side, there is a person pulling a horse. On the ura side, in front of the magariya (L shaped house, which accommodated both, a resident and a horse), there is a person standing straight with a mino-kasa (straw hat). Viewing the people in the conversation, there is a feeling that you can almost hear their conversation. With the person pulling a horse, you can see his breath, and the scene is full of energy. From the ura side person, you can feel his independence, loneliness, and integrity.

In the background, the houses and trees, are laid out effectively. The scene of the drawing and the very skilled techniques go together, and result in a very unique work.

Using zogan (inlay) with gold, silver, and scarlet copper everywhere, the whole scene appears just like an Impressionist work. Not only is there realism, but also an impression is there, and this is Tomonobu's style. It shows that he studied painting under Tani Buncho. This is a master work which shows Tomonobu's own unique style.

Explanation by Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 700

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 700 issue Shijo Kantei To is June 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 June 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: wakizashi

Length: slightly over 1 shaku 3 sun 1 bu (39.7 cm)

Sori: 3 bu (0.91 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 4 rin (3.15 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 6 rin (0.8 cm)

Nakago length: 4 sun 4 bu 2 rin (13.4 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a hirazukuri wakizashi with an ihorimune, wide, long, and thick. There is a large sori. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, and the entire jihada is visible, with a unique jihada. There are nagare and masame hada. There are thick dense ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has high and low alterations, and some parts of the midare hamon have saka-ashi. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, and the nakago tip is kurijiri and round. The yasurime are osuji-chigai, with kesho type yasuri. There are two mekugi ana. On the omote side, the nakago has a long irregularly shaped kanji signature along the center.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For April

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

Meeting Date: April 11, 2015 (2nd Saturday of April) at 1:00 pm.

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kurotaki Tetsuya

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: tachi

Mei: Bizen kuni Kageyasu

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 6 sun 6 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume and nagare-hada, and the hada is visible; there are ji-nie, fine chikei, and the bottom half has pale jifu utsuri.

Hamon: based on chu-suguha, mixed with gunome and ko-gunome; on the ura side, the lower half is mixed with square shaped gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, thick rough nie, and some places have kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight and with a komaru.

Horimono: on the omote and the ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago.

First, we should correctly recognize the tachi shape. This is long, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a strong koshizori with funbari, the tip is uchizori, there is a small kissaki, and the overall shape is that of an elegant tachi. From the shape, we can imagine that this a tachi made no later than the early Kamakura period. From the shape, jihada, and hamon, you can imagine this is Ko-Hoki or Ko-Bizen work from smiths like Yasutsuna and Sanekage, or Ko-Kyoto work such as Awataguchi, or and Kyushu work.

In considering these smiths' names, note that the jihada is itame mixed with mokume, the strong hada is visible, there are chikei, and pale jifu type utsuri. The hamon is based on suguha, mixed with a small midare pattern, and there are frequent nie. From these characteristics, you can imagine this is Ko-Bizen work at first. Among the Ko-Bizen smiths, Kageyasu's characteristic work is known: the hamon are ko-midare mixed with continuous square ko-gunome, and there are fine yubashiri between the gunome hamon's valleys. The tachi does not have too much of these characteristics compared with Kageyasu's usual work. But on the ura side's bottom half, you can recognize square shaped gunome and from this you can recognize his usual style.

Some people voted for Ko-Aoe work. It is close, and this is an understandable answer. If it were Ko-Aoe work, the jhada would be visible and also a chirimen type hada mixed with jifu called sumi-tetsu, and often this kind of detail would be clear.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Bizen kuni ju Osafune Yosozaemonjo Sukesada

Tenbun 3 nen 2 gatsu kichijitsu

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 1 sun 2 bu

Sori: slightly over 7 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: open valleys between gunome peaks; there are gunome and choji with ashi ,yo, frequent ko-nie, a bright and clear nioiguchi, kinsuji and fine sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; tips are a togari type and there is a long return.

Horimono: On the omote and the ura, high up, there are bonji.

This katana is around 2 shaku 1 sun, which is a short length. It is a little wide and the widths at the moto and saki are not much different. The upper half has saki-zori, and there is a chu-kissaki. This is a typical late Muromachi period uchigatana shape. In this period, we do not see the long tachi shape and shorter length uchigatana with a large saki-zori became very popular. The jihada is a tight itame, the steel color is bright and there are dense thick ji-nie, and this is a characteristic Sue-Bizen josaku (high rank) work. The hamon has open valleys and gunome mixed with choji and frequent ko-nie, and these characteristics show a typical Sue-Bizen style.

Looking at the hamon, the tops of the midare hamon show a mixture of ko-gunome, small togariba, and fukushiki gunome (double). This kind of fukushiki gunome hamon is seen in the work of Sue-Bizen smiths. There is a well forged jihada, a well done fukushiki gunome hamon, and from this, the Yosozaemon-no-jo Sukesada name will come to mind.

In the hamon of other Sue-Bizen smiths, for example Katsumitsu, many are midare mixed with prominent choji. In case of Kiyomitsu, his hamon are based primarily on suguha.

Kantei To No 3: tanto

Mumei: Masakiyo

Oan gan 12 8

(1368, December 8)

Note: this date is written in an unusual format and exactly as shown above

Length: 9 sun 4.5 bu

Sori: 1.5 bu

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume and nagarehada; at the koshimoto close to the hamon side it is masame and the entire hada is visible; there are dense jinie and whitish utsuri.

Hamon: hoso-suguha, with a very shallow notare pattern; there are some hotsure and kuichigaiba; there is a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie.

Boshi: the omote is straight, the tip is togari (sharply pointed) and there is a komaru; the ura side is komaru, and both sides have fine hakikake.

In Nambokucho period's Enbun-Joji eras, the tanto shapes were wide and long, they were thin with a shallow sori, and had a unique shape, This is a dated Oan period, typical Enbun-Joji work.

The jihada is itame mixed with mokume and nagarehada, and there are utsuri. The hamon is based on suguha with a tight nioiguchi, the boshi is togari, and these characteristics remind us of work from the neighboring province's Aoe school.

This blade has itame hada mixed with nagarehada, and instead of the often seen Aoe work dan-utsuri, there are prominent whitish utsuri. At first impression this is an Aoe style suguha, but the habuchi shows Yamato's characteristic small hotsure and kuichigaiga. The clarity of the jihada and the hamon are not as good as Aoe work.

Usually, Ko-Mihara work shows a strong influence of the Yamato style. But often we see characteristics from the neighboring Bichu Aoe's style mixed with Yamato style work, and this is an example.

Masakiyo has very few works left today. It is difficult to judge an individual smith's name, so if you voted for the Ko-Mihara smiths such as Masaie or Masahiro, it is a good effort.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Yamato no kami Yasusada

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 8 bu

Sori: 2.5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are thick dense jinie and fine chikei.

Hamon: notare type hamon mixed with gunome; some parts of the midare hamon become box shaped, and the entire hamon is high; there are ashi, a bright nioiguchi, and dense nie.

Boshi: on the omote and ura the boshi is straight and round and there is a return; the omote side is nie kuzure.

Horimono: on the omote there is "Hachiman Daibosatsu" kanji carving; on the ura side are bonji, and under this a suken.

There is a standard width, and the width at the saki is small compared with the width at the moto. There is a very shallow sori and a chu-kissaki. The shape is Kanbun Shinto, and this is often seen in Edo work. The shinogiji is masame hada, and this also a characteristic of Edo work. Looking at the hamon, the yakiba is wide, and a notare mixed with gunome. Some parts of the midare hamon have a square shape, and the hamon shows Yasusada's characteristic points well.

The mune angle is relatively sharp, there is a very shallow sori and a straight pole-like shape, and this is Yasusada's characteristic feature.

Some people voted for Kotetsu. If it were Kotetsu's work, there will be a yakidashi; his early period hamon are hyotan-ba, and late period hamon are juzuba with thick ashi. His jihada and hamon are also more clear.

If it were Kazusa-no-suke Kaneshige, the gunome hamon have a one-two, one-two, continuous rhythm. If it were Izumi-no-kami Kaneshige, the hamon are a Shinkai style suguha with a wide nioiguchi.

This has a unique straight pole-like shape, and also a characteristic hamon. That is why we used this for a kantei-to.

The Hachiman daibosatsu kanji, the bonji, and the suken carving are shown at 98% of the actual size.

Kantei To No. 5: tanto

Mei: Kuniyoshi (Awataguchi)

Length: 9 sun 1 bu

Sori: uchizori

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: ko-itame; some parts are mixed with mokume, and the entire jihada is tight but visible; there are thick dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, nie utsuri and a clear jihada.

Hamon: based on suguha; there are ko-gunome; there is a dense nioiguchi, thick nie, a bright and clear nioiguchi, and fine kinsuji.

Boshi: very shallow notarekomi, round and with a return.

Horimono: on the omote and the ura are katana-hi with soe-hi carved through the nakago.

This tanto has an uchizori, is longer, and wide like a hocho, and has a characteristic shape. Looking at the jihada and hamon, the jihada is a tight ko-itame, there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and bo-utsuri. The hamon is an elegant suguha, and there are ko-nie, a bright and clear nioiguchi, and from these characteristics, you can judge this as Awataguchi work.

The Awataguchi school's tanto shapes are different from the Rai school's, and do not have the standard lengths and shapes. They have all kinds of shapes and lengths. For example, a wide short hocho shape; a standard width but long; wide and long and with a large size; and also standard sizes. This has a wide hocho-like shape, and the horimono are very close to the mune side and these are characteristic points for Awataguchi school work.

In voting, people recognized these characteristic points, and voted for Awataguchi Kuniyoshi or Yoshimitsu, Rai Kunimitsu, and Shintogo Kunimitsu.

But if it were by Yoshimitsu, there would be a yakidashi and a continuous ko-gunome hamon, and jihada are often seen with a somewhat larger pattern. The Rai school, such as Rai Kunimitsu, usually does not produce such a large hocho-like

shape like this tanto. If it were Shintogo's work, the shape would be different, and his jihada and hamon have more prominent chikei and kinsuji. This has an excellent clear jihada and hamon, and at the same time, a beautiful suguha hamon, and because of this, we used this for the kanteito. According to the old saya which accompanies this tanto, this is listed in the "Tokugawa jikki" (Tokugawa's official record): In Horeki 4 nen 7 gatsu 18 nichi (1754), Todo Takachika gave this tanto and a Bizen Kunimune katana to Tokugawa Ienobu's son Iechiyō on his ochichiya celebration (a celebration held 7 days after the baby's birth).

Shijo Kantei To No 698 (in the March, 2015 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 698 in the March issue is a tanto by Ryosai.

This is a small size tanto, with a standard width, and uchizori, and from the shape, you can judge this as mid- to late-Kamakura period work.

The jihada is a strong itame, and there are nagarehada and masame hada, and the entire jihada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, a dark colored jihada, and some whitish areas, from these details, this is a conspicuous Koto period Kyushu work. The hamon is yakiotoshi at the koshimoto, and above this, it is suguha with notare. There is a worn down nioguchi, ko-nie, a soft hamon, kinsuji, and fine sunagashi. Also, the hamon clearly shows Kyushu characteristic points, and with the shape, it is possible to look at this as mid- to late-Kamakura period classic Kyushu work. From these points, most people voted for Ryosai. As a almost correct answer, people also voted for Chikuzen smiths from the same school as Ryosai, such as Seiren and Jitsua. Besides this, a few people voted for Bungo Yukihira. These smiths often have common characteristic points such as this tanto's classic Kyushu work: the jihada, the soft hamon, and sometimes yakiotoshi. Also, there are few of these tanto left today.

Although these smiths do not have much extant work, and not more than a few pieces with a signature, this is different from the hints.

Ryosai is supposed to be the founder of the Chikuzen smiths. Today, this characteristic kanmuri-otoshi shaped tanto is the only one to be recognized as his work. Considering this, it is possible to consider this as a Ryosai tanto.

I wrote it is a characteristic kanmuri-otoshi tsukuri (shape) if you compared the tanto shape to work by Kamakura period master smiths such as Rai Kunimitsu and Shintogo Kunimitsu. The Ryosai tanto is different from other smiths: the naginata-hi are a little long for the length, the mune side angle is a little sharp, and there is a poor fukura, and this is an example of his characteristic shape.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

