

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
ISSUE NUMBER 701
June, 2015

Heisei 27 Shinsaku Meito Ten
Sakuto Section (tachi, tatana, wakizashi, naginata, yari)

Takamatsu no Miya Kinen Sho (Prince Takamatsu
Memorial Prize)

Type: Tachi
Mei: Kubo Yoshihiro

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 9 bu 2 rin (75.5 cm)
Sori: 8 bu 7 rin (2.63 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)
Sakihaba: 7 bu 3 rin (2.2 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 2 rin (0.65 cm)
Sakikasane : 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu 2 rin (3.4 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 6 bu 8 rin (20.25 cm)
Nakago sori: 1 bu 2 rin

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, slightly wide, and thick. The widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a large koshizori, and a short chu-kissaki which is almost an ikubi ("boar's neck") style. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, and some places have nagare hada. There are dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and clear midare utsuri. The hamon is based on gunome mixed with ko-gunome, ko-choji, and square gunome. The hamon is widest around the center of the sword. There are frequent ashi and yo, and a nioiguchi. The boshi is straight, the tip is komaru and there is a return. The horimono on the omote and the ura are bo-hi with marudome. The nakago tip is a slightly shallow ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are sujichigai. There is a one mekugi-ana. On the omote under the mekugi-ana, there is a two kanji signature along the center made with a large and thick chisel.

Kubo Yoshihiro is from Amami O-shima (Amami Island) in Kagoshima prefecture and is 50 years old. In Heisei 1 (1988) he graduated from Chiba University and

became a student of Yoshihara Yoshindo. In Yoshindo's shop, Kubo worked hard, and in Heisei 6 (1994), he received his sword smith's license. After receiving his license, he left Yoshindo's shop and began working as a sword smith for the Torikami Mokutan Kojo (the Tataru Smelter) which is part of the Hitachi-Kinzoku Co (the Hitachi Steel Company). In that same year, he entered a sword for the first time in the Shinsaku Meito Ten, and he received an excellence prize and a new smith prize.

From Heisei 7 to 13 (1995-2001), he worked at the NBTHK tataru as a Murage trainee to learn how to operate the tataru and how to make tama hagane. He wanted to study the iron and steel historically used in Japanese sword making. In Heisei 12 (2000), besides being a sword smith, he became a visiting researcher at the Hitachi Kinzoku Jikin Kenkyujo (Steel and Metallurgy Research Center). As a result of his studies in Japanese steel making and metallurgy he published several research papers in the Japan Steel Association's journal. In the Japanese sword world, he is a rare example of someone with an active academic background who is also a sword smith. In Heisei 13 (2001), he became an independent sword smith and built his tanren-jo (forge) in Shobara city in Hiroshima prefecture. Every year since then, in the Shinsaku Mei To Ten, he has received a high level prize, and in Heisei 19 (2007), he received a first prize (Toku Sho) and his work has been received very well since then.

The tachi is his first entry in the Shin Saku Mei To Ten competition in eight years. The dynamic shape reminds us of a Kamakura period tachi. The hamon is based on gunome, the hamon's width in the middle of the blade is the widest point, and around the monouchi the hamon becomes a gentle suguha. The boshi above the yokote to tip becomes straight, which is a "Sansaku boshi" style. It is clear he modeled this after Osafune Nagamitsu's later work. The jihada is not whitish, and there is a clear midare utsuri with a dark and soft contrasting color. This is a fresh approach for a gendaito, and at the same time it clearly has a Bizen Den style, and in particular, follows Nagamitsu's style. This is an accomplishment which shows a high standard of work. This is not a spectacular work, but these important characteristic points were noted, and Kubo tried to approach the work of the great Osafune master smiths. This kind of spirit and high level of skill was recognized, and this is a suitable work for the highest prize, the "Takamatsu-no-Miya Kinen Sho" which has just been revived and awarded after an absence of nine years.

Explanation and the photo by Ishii Akira.

Heisei 27 Shinsaku Meito ten – chokin section (carving) NBTHK chairman's Prize

Bukan sukashi zogan tsuba

Mei: Hidefumi

Heisei 27 nen

The last year, Mr. Yamashita Hidefumi received the NBTHK Chairman's Prize, and this year he again received the same prize. This time, his work was an excellent kinzogan work. Hidefumi's skill has advanced and we are looking forward to seeing his efforts for next year. Yamashita is 40 years old this year. In Heisei 13 (2001), he became a student of a master smith in the same prefecture and began his career.

In Heisei 15 (2003), the first time he entered his work in the contest, he received the winning prize. Since then, up to Heisei 19 (2007) he kept receiving prizes and his skill has progressed. In Heisei 20 (2008) he received the his first prize for diligence and effort, and in Heisei 21 and 23 he received the same prize. Last year he finally received the Chairman's Prize, and this year again he received the Chairman's prize.

This time, he worked in the Bukan-sukashi style, and tried to develop his own techniques. The tsuba's composition, workmanship, and fine details exhibit painstaking work. He inherited his teacher's value of "do not pursue wealth and fame". In the future we hope he will produce more excellent and exemplary work.

Explanation by Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 701

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 701 issue Shijo Kantei To is July 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 July 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: slightly over 9 sun 4 bu (28.6 cm)

Sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 4 rin (2.85 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)
Nakago length: 3 sun (9.1 cm)
Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune, wide, long, and thin. There is a shallow sori. The jihada is itame mixed with prominent mokume. The entire jihada is visible, and there is also some nagare-masame hada. There are ji-nie, chikei, and whitish utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon habuchi has small hotsure and kuichigaiba. There are tight nioiguchi-like nie, and they are worn down. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is wide, and there is a ha-agari type kurijiri. The yasurime are a very shallow kattesagari and there is one mekugi ana. On the ura side, under the mekugi ana, the nakago has a kanji signature on the mune side and the ura side has a date.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For April

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

Meeting Date: May 9, 2015 (2nd Saturday of May) at 1:00pm.

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kubo Yasuko

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

Orikaeshi mei: Bichu kuni ju Tsugunao saku

Length: 2 shaku 9 sun

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume; fine visible chirimen jihada; there are jifu, frequent ji-nie, fine chikei, and midare utsuri; towards the hamon edge there are thin suji shaped utsuri, and this becomes dan-utsuri.

Hamon: suguha type shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome : there are ko-ashi, saka-ashi, yo, nioiguchi type konie, a tight nioiguchi, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: gunome type midarekomi, sharp and with a return.

Horimono: on the omote, from the machi to the nakago area, a Hachiman-Daibosatsu kanji.

This is a Nambokucho period Bichu Aoe school Tsugunao's tachi. The mihaba is not too wide, but there is a koshizoshi, the tip has sori, and there is a long chu-kissaki. The shape reminds us of the early peak of the Nambokucho period's Enbun-Joji shape. The jihada is itame mixed well with mokume, there is a fine visible jihada, and the jihada is a chirimen (crepe-like) hada. There are jifu and midare utsuri. The hamon side's jihada has thin suji (line-like) utsuri, and some places have some parallel utsuri lines which are dan-utsuri. This is a characteristic Aoe school jihada.

The hamon is suguha with a very shallow notare wave, and mixed with ko-gunome, ko-ashi, saka-ashi, and yo. There is a tight nioiguchi, a bright and clear hamon, and these characteristics are seen often seen in this period in Aoe school work. The boshi tip is sharp and has a return, and this is a notable Aoe school characteristic point.

In voting, people recognized these characteristic points well, and many people voted for Nambokucho period smiths such as Tsugunao, Tsuguyoshi, and Moritsugu. Some people voted for earlier Kamakura period smiths, such as Yoshitsugu and Naotsugu. This is definitely not a typical Nambokucho period dynamic shape. If it were from a Kamakura period smith such as Yoshitsugu and Naotsugu, their kissaki are not long, and are more likely to be short, and their hamon have more nie. Some people voted for same area, but different country smiths such as Unji and Unju, or Ko-Mihara. Both of these have suguha hamon. Unji and Unju have jifu type jihada, and the Ko-Mihara boshi are similar, and from these characteristics the answers are understandable. But this sword's dan-utsuri is an important Aoe school characteristic point.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Kawachi no kami Fujiwara Kunisuke
Kanei 19 nen 2 gatsu kichijitsu

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 4 bu

Sori: 7 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itamehada; there are thick dense ji-nie and frequent fine chikei.

Hamon: straight yakidashi; above this there is a wide yakiba based on choji mixed with gunome, ko-gunome, some juka choji and ko-bushi (fist) shaped choji. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi with frequent ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagshi, small tama-yaki and mune-yaki.

Boshi: slightly wide, straight and with a komaru.

This katana is classified as Juyo-Bijutsuhin. This is the Shodai Kunisuke's late work and he passed away 5 years after this was made. There is a tight ko-itame hada, a primarily choji hamon, and a high spectacular midare hamon. In the hamon, there are signs of ju-ka choji and kobushi shaped choji. You cannot overlook the long yakidashi from the machi. Considering the jihada and the hamon characteristics, this is either the Shodai Kunisuke or Shin Kunisada. In voting, many people voted for both smith's names.

Comparing the two smiths work, the Shodai Kunisuke's yakidashi become wider going towards the upper part, and the entire hamon is wide when compared with Shin Kunisada's. Some of the hamon details also extend over the shinogi ji, just like on this katana. Kunisuke's hamon have more prominent choji, and the boshi are wider. Shin Kunisada's many yakidashi are uniformly the same width, even in the upper part, and often his jihada show tobiyaki and muneyaki from the monouchi to kissaki.

For an almost correct answer, some people voted for the Nidai Kunisuke (Nakakawachi). This answer arises because in his hamon, we see similar fist shaped choji. If it were his katana, the shape will have less sori, and would be a typical Kambun-Shinto shape. The katana's widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a fair amount of sori, and the moto has funbari, which is a Kanei shape. You should pay attention to the details of the shape.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mumei: Nagamitsu

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 9 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume, nagarehada is also visible; there are fine ji-nie, frequent chikei, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: mainly a choji hamon mixed with gunome, ko-choji, and kawazuko choji; between the hamon waves, there is a tight midare hamon: there is a dense nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, ashi and yo, kinsuji, sunagashi and yubashiri.

Boshi: slightly midarekomi; tips are yakizume style, and there is a small return.

This tachi is wide, there is a large sori, it is koshizori, the tip has sori, and there is a chu-kissaki. From the shape, this is from around the mid-Kamakura period. Also, the hamon is mainly choji, the jihada has midare-utsuri, and from this, you can judge this as being from the Bizen school.

Possibly because the center of the hamon has a high yakiba and gorgeous choji, many people voted for Fukuoka Ichimonji work. The jihada is visible, both the jihada and hamon have frequent nie, and prominent hataraki including kinsuji and sunagashi, so some people voted for Saburo Kunimune. Some people considered the kawazuko choji hamon, and voted for Hatakeda Moriie and Mitsutada. Either of these are understandable judgements.

However, the tachi hamon's width around the monouchi and koshimoto are low, there are continuous gunome, no saka-ashi, straight ashi, and on the ura side center and under the yokote, there are unique gunome, and from these characteristics, the Nagamitsu name would come to mind.

Many of Nagamitsu's works are signed. His style can show a wide shape with a gorgeous hamon with kawazuko choji and large choji, or a narrow width with a gentle suguha hamon with a tight nioguchi. He is one of the important master smiths. In particular, a hamon mixed with large and small choji and gunome are comprise about 50% of his works available today. This tachi has strong nie, both in the jihada and hamon when compared with his usual work, and a classic tight midare hamon which reminds one of the Ko-Bizen school work and Ichimonji school work, and in voting we see these names. But this kind of style is seen not only from Nagamitsu, but also from his father Mitsutada, and the same school's Sanenaga, and we remember, this is a classic style of work. Usually, Nagamitsu's boshi, in case of a suguha, ko-gunome and ko-choji hamon, is a sankaku boshi. In case there is a variable midare hamon like this tachi, it is rare to see a sansaku boshi, and many of the boshi are midarekomi.

Kantei To No 4: tachi

Mei: Bishu Osafune Yukisada
Eiwa 2 nen 10 gatsu bi

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 1 bu

Sori: 9 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame mixed with mokume; on the omote side there is a tight jihada; on the ura side the hada is visible; there are dense ji-nie, chikei like kawarigane (a area where the steel appears different) and midare utsuri.

Hamon: ko-gunome mixed with ko-choji and togari; the entire hamon is small, and some places have saka-ashi; there are ko-ashi, yo, nioiguchi type ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi and yubashiri.

Boshi: wide yakiba with midarekomi; there are hakikake, a ko-maru and a return.

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

Yukisada is a Kosori school smith. The Kosori school smiths are found in the latter half of the Nambokucho period in the Osafune area, except for Kagemitsu, Chogi, Motoshige, and Morishige. At the peak of the Nambokucho period, the Enbun-Joji period, many blades are wide, the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, and there is an o-kissaki, and this is a dynamic shape. After the Eiwa period, this kind of large shape is not seen often. The shapes changed to a standard width and kissaki, or to a slightly narrow shape, and an increased thickness at the point become characteristic. The jihada are not very refined compared with the main Osafune smiths such as Kanemitsu. Often the jihada has chikei type kawarigane, and sometimes a jifu type jihada. Many of the hamon are mixed with all kinds of features, and entire hamon is smaller or narrower.

This blade has a large width and thickness and volume for Kosori work.

The small size hamon is not too pronounced, and there is a variable midare hamon.

From these characteristics, people voted for all kinds Kamakura period smiths. But as explained, the jihada is different from Ichimonji and mainstream Osafune work.

So, in the second and third votes, people correctly voted for Kosori school smiths such as Moromitsu and Hidemitsu, or some people just wrote this was Kosori work.

Some other votes were for Oei Bizen smiths, such as Morimitsu. If this were usual Oei Bizen work, the hamon would be mixed with choji, the hamon width would vary varied, and open valleys in the hamon would be notable. But Morimitsu has a few signed Oei period works, and some of them have a Kosori style, and we considered this as an acceptable vote.

Kantei To No. 5: tanto

Mei: Kaneobi

Length: 9 sun 2 bu

Sori: slight uchizori

Design: hira-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame: there are dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and whitsh utsuri mixed with jifu.

Hamon: hoso-suguha; there are nioiguchi-like ko-nie; in the habuchi there are small hotsure, uchinoke, and kinsuji.

Boshi: straight, with a komaru, and a long return.

This is a narrow slightly uchizori tanto. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, and there are dense ji-nie. The hamon is a bright narrow suguha, and in the habuchi there are hataraki such as small hotsure, uchinoke, and kinsuji. From this many people voted for in Kamakura period smiths who were famous for tanto with suguha hamon such as Yoshimitsu, Shintogo Kunimitsu, and Rai Kunitoshi. In particular, from the boshi's komaru and neat return, many people voted for Kunitoshi.

But looking at it carefully, the length is too long for the width, it is thick, the tip is thin, the mune is an ihorimune instead of a mitsumune, and the entire shape is different from Kamakura period tanto. The hamon has hataraki, but the nioiguchi is tight, the boshi's return is long, and these characteristics are a little different from Kamakura period work. The utsuri is different from Kamakura period tanto's bright nie utsuri. The tanto's mizukage type utsuri starts at the machi, and from the hamon to the mune there is soft wide utsuri, and inside the utsuri we see a jifu type jihada.

According to sword books, Kaneobi is a Seki smith and his active period was around Eisho (1504-1520). He supposed to be one of the Sue-Seki smiths, such as Kanehiro, Kanetsune, Kanesaki, and Kanemoto. Among these, the most skillful smith is Kanehiro, and from this beautiful tanto work, his name is understandable. In this case, it is difficult to find individual smith characteristics. So if you judge this as Sue-Seki Rai utsushi work, that would be acceptable.

Shijo Kantei To No 699 (in the April, 2015 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 699 in the April issue is a katana by Tatara Nagayuki

This katana has a tight ko-itame jihada with midare utsuri. The hamon has large clusters of choji mixed with togariba and ko-choji with a midare hamon. Some places have open valleys in the midare hamon. There is a tight bright and clear nioiguchi. The boshi is midarekomi, and the tip is sharp. From these characteristics, most people voted for Nagayuki. Besides him, a few people voted for the Edo Ishido school smith Tsushima no kami Tsunemitsu, and Fukuoka Ishido smiths such as Koretsugu, and Moritsugu.

Tsunemitsu's many works have a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori and a chu-kissaki which is a typical Kanbun Shinto Edo shape. In his choji midare hamon, the open valleys are notable. His boshi are straight, with a komaru or a shallow notarekomi. The tip has a small size komaru, or if midarekomi, the tip is a sharp shaped komaru. His nakogo tips are a shallow kurijiri.

Tsunemitsu and Mitsuhira's jihada do not have much clear masame hada as some Edo Ishido smiths like Sakon Korekazu. But if you look under a good light, there is

a tight itame hada with midare utsuri, and we often seen a fine masame hada, and we could say this is a one of their characteristic points.

Fukuoka Ishido school smiths like Koretsugu and Moritsugu have material written in a soe-me (companion mei), for example, something like “motte Nanbantetsu tsukuru kore” (this was made using foreign iron), and from this, the answer is understandable.

But many of their jihada are a strong flowing itame with masame. Their hamon are called “squid heads” which have a sharp tip, prominent saka-ashi, and the unique saka-choji hamon are prominent and are often mixed with ball shaped hamon features. Their boshi are often midarekomi with a long return.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai