

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
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Meito Kansho
Examination of important swords

Juyo Bijutsuhin
Important Art Object

Type: Tachi

Mei: Nagamitsu

Owner: Sano Bijutsukan (Sano Art museum) Public Finance Foundation

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7 bu (68.8 cm)

Sori: 8 bu 7 rin (2.62 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 4 rin (1.95 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane : 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 3 bu 8 rin (19.35 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Commentary

This is a slightly wide shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It has a standard thickness, and although it is suriage, there is a prominent large koshizori with funbari and a chu-kissaki. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, and some parts of the hada are slightly visible, but the entire jihada is well forged. There are ji-nie, chikei, and midare-utsuri. The hamon is kawazuko-choji mixed with choji, fukuro-choji, gunome, ko-gunome and togariba. Notably, the ura side has a more prominent midare hamon, and the omote and ura are different. There are frequent ashi and yo, a nioiguchi, a little uneven ko-nie, and some kinsuji and sunagashi along the hamon, and the omote side has tobiyaki. The boshi is midarekomi with a sharp tip, and with a yubashiri style. The horimono on the omote and the ura are bo-hi with maru-dome. The nakago is suriage, the tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are sujichigai (new) and the

old yasurime style is unknown. There are three mekugi-ana, and on the omote under the third mekugi-ana, there is a small two kanji signature.

Nagamitsu is a representative of the Osafune school. He succeeded his father Mitsutada, and along side the Ichimonji school, he helped to establish the foundation of the Osafune school, and his reputation is very high. He has many signed blades, more than any other smith from the Kamakura period. Most of signed blades are tachi, but there are all kinds of work, such as kotachi, naginata, tanto, and ken with signatures. There is an early signature in Bunei 11 (1274), (some people question this date, but this seems to be an honest tsuimei (signed later after the blade was made according to historical records) made in Kagen 2 (1304), or about 30 years after the blade was made. During this period, his shapes and styles changed. In his early work, his hamon remind us of his father Mitsutada's with choji mixed with kawazuko-choji, a high yakiba and a gorgeous active hamon. His mid-career hamon are well balanced with a good width, and are based on gunome and choji, and are Nagamitsu's characteristic hamon. His later period hamon are lower or narrower and are well controlled suguha based hamon mixed with small midare and can be based on ko-choji or suguha. Followed his work over time, we can see his style changed from a classic active and gorgeous style to an elegant style. Followed along with the change of the hamon, his tachi shapes changed from a wide blades with an inokubi style kissaki with a dynamic shape to a standard narrower elegant shape. This transition time began after the Mongolian invasion around the Sho-o period (1288-93).

Of special note, there are four tanto dated in Koan 8 (1285), Einin 2, and Einin 3 (1294, 1295) and others without dates. These tanto have hamon like the next generation Kagemitsu's kataochi type gunome hamon. These tanto are important examples, which tell us that Nagamitsu had already originated this kind of hamon style.

This tachi is suriage, and there is a large koshizori, the tip has sori, and there is a chu-kissaki, which shows a strong mid-Kamakura period shape, and you can imagine the original dynamic ubu shape. The itame hada is refined, which is inherited from Mitsutada, and because of refined midare utsuri is clear. The hamon's kawazuko choji are prominent in places, and especially on the ura side where they are more frequent. As Mitsutada's successor, you can feel Nagamitsu's strong spirit. Also, the omote and ura hamon are different: this is a Konotegashiwa style where the omote and ura hamon are different styles, and that makes this sword interesting. There are also frequent kinsuji in places following the itamehada. Along with the shape, this is a gorgeous work, and at the same time it exhibits a strong spirited feeling. This fully shows Nagamitsu's spirit with his high level of skill, and in his early period, this is his master work. This is a Tokugawa shogun family tachi.

This tachi is currently being shown in the NBTHK as part of the special exhibit "Bizen token o-koku (kingdom)". The first period, Heian to Kamakura times in on display until August 23rd. The exhibit will travel on November 29 to the Sano museum in Shizuoka, and then to the Bizen Osafune Token Museum in Okayama.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

No.703 Tosogu kanshou Juyo tosogu

**Kani zu (crab design) tsuba
Mei: Mito ju Michitoshi saku**

This is a mid-summer theme with a mountain stream and crab motif. The tsuba shape is round and thick, with full volume, and the ground is shakudo-nanako with high nikubori (high relief), and suffused with a rich and refreshing feeling. This is an ura-mei, and at first, from the omote style, I thought this was either a Yasuchika or Denbei work. When I turned the tsuba over and saw Michitoshi's distinctive signature, I remember I was very impressed with such an unexpected and great work.

Yatabe Michitoshi was born in Genroku 10 (1698) and passed way in Meiwa 5 at the age of 72. According to the tosogu book "So-ken Kisho", for the Mito-bori world, Michitoshi created an original style. In the same period, among the kinko smiths, there were many active master smiths who are well known today such as Toshinaga, Jo-i, Yasuchika, Masayuki, and Naomasa.

However, in the Keicho period, daimyo Satake family (who were on the losing side at Sekigahara) moved from Mito to Akita, and the Shoami school kinko smiths

followed the family. Later, Denbei Shigeyoshi became famous and was

succeeded by Dennai Shigetaka and Denshichi Shigetsune, and established Akita Shoami school. During the Denbei and Denshichi period in Mito, Yasuchika worked for Matsudaira Yorisada, and established his original artistic style, and became prominent. In Genbun 5 (1741), Denshichi became Yasuchika's student. In Mito, Yasuchika's position was solid, and Michitoshi was supposed to learn skills from him, such as making the Daigaku shape (an original design by Yasuchika) fuchi and kashira. There are important materials which document communication between the Mito kinko smiths.

The tsuba design is large and shows crabs in a current of moving water, and there is a strong feeling with rocks, and with the mountain stream crabs playing together. There is a detailed shakudo-nanako ground, and takabori iroe (high relief in color), and the basic technique is goke-bori (for something made for a shogun or daimyo), but it displays unusually powerful work. This is a charming work from a transition period, when the machi-bori (craftsmen working for average people) works are just appearing, and this shows Michitoshi's great ability.

Usually an impression produces a theme or image, so this not a usual Michitoshi work, and is different from normal Mitobori work. But as time passed and the work was verified, one becomes satisfied with the changed recognition or appraisal. I appreciated our senior Mito kinko specialist for bringing attention this work. I will discuss more details in the magazine.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 703

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 703 issue Shijo Kantei To is September 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 September 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: katana

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 6 bu (74.54 cm)

Sori: 5 bu (1.52 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)

Sakihaba: 8 bu 1 rin (2.45 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Kissaki length: 2 sun 3 bu 8 rin (7.2 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 2 bu 3 rin (21.9 cm)

Nakago sori: 5 rin (0.15 cm)

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune, a wide shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are almost the same. There is a shallow sori, the tip has sori and large kissaki. The hiraniku is poor, there is a poor fukura, a sharp and high shinogi. The jihada is itame and the hada is visible, and there is a bit of nagarehada. There are dense ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has long ashi, frequent ko-nie, some places have strong bright large nie, and the hamon is bright and clear with frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are sujichigai, and there

is one mekugi ana. On the omote side, between the mekugi-ana along the mune side there is a long signature, and on the ura side there is a date.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For July

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

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

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Ooi Takeshi

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: Kunitsuna (Ko-Bizen)

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame hada mixed with mokume hada and there is a little nagare hada; and hada is barely visible. There are ji-nie, dull chikei, a slightly dark jihada, and jifu-utsuri.

Hamon: ko-midare mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi, and yo, and a dense nioiguchi; some places have nie, kinsuji, and sunagshi; there is a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru.

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin Kunitsuna tachi owned by a lord of the Tsuchiura clan's Tsuchiya family. It is a little narrow and the widths at the moto and saki are different. Although it is suriage, there is still funbari left, there is a large koshizori, and the tip is slightly uchizori. From the shape, you can judge this as work from no later than the early half of the Kamakura period. The itame jihada is visible with jifu-

utsuri to help judge the period. At the first impression, the choji and gunome hamonis prominent, and from this, a majority of people voted for Nagamitsu. However, this shape and utsuri do not show typical mid-Kamakura period characteristic points. The jihada is visible, you can see a slightly dark jihada, a worn down nioiguchi, a slightly rough classic feeling, and these are different from mainstream Osafune's refined bright jigane. Looking at the hamon carefully, clear choji and gunome hamon are only seen for a stretch around the monouchi area. Most of the hamon is ko-choji and ko-gunome, and there is a continuous midare hamon. There are unclear frequent yo and ashi, the nioiguchi is uneven, and it looks like there are large ko-gunome which are not clearly shaped, and the hamon has a repeating pattern. The entire hamon has a high yakiba, but if it were Nagamitsu's work, the yakiba around the monouchi would be lower and gentle appearing.

Because the entire hamon's width was high, people thought this is a later period work. It is not necessarily true that all old swords have a low or narrow yakiba: among Ko-Bizen works, some blades have a high or wide yakiba such as work by Masatsune, Yoshikane and Sukekane.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Tsuda Echizen-no-kami Sukehiro
Kanbun 7 nen 8 gatsu bi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itamehada; there are dense ji-nie, some fine chikei, and a clear jihada.

Hamon: the moto has an angled yakidashi, there are five waves in the notare

hamon: there is a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: wide straight yakiba with a komaru and long return.

This katana's widths at the moto and saki display a large difference and there is a shallow sori, and these are characteristic points. Compared with many Edo Shinto blades with short kissaki, Osaka Shinto are a contrast with their long kissaki, and this blade shows this.

The jihada is tight ko-itame, there are dense ji-nie, and a clear jihada. The hamon has an angled yakidashi at the moto, and above this, and a gentle and calm repeating notare hamon with five repeats of the pattern. This characteristic hamon derives from a shallow notare or suguha type hamon and looks like a gentle notare hamon. There is a dense bright nioiguchi, with fine floating nie which look a like

torn piece of ho-sho (a torn piece of thick traditional Japanese paper or washi). The hamon below the yokote is straight, and becomes wider going up towards the boshi. Also, the boshi is straight with a komaru and return. These are often seen characteristic points for all Osaka shinto.

It is rare to see a Sukehiro with a high yakiba extending almost over the shinogi ji, like on this katana.

Around the Kanbun period, many of Sukehiro's hamon are suguha or a wide suguha, with a shallow notare. In the Enpo period (1673-80), many of his hamon are a hosonari (narrow) suguha. Also, the katana has strong nie, more than are usually seen on Sukehiro's hamon, and a fair number of people voted for Inoue Shinkai. If it were Shinkai's work, frequent chikei, kinsuji and sunagashi are prominent in the hamon which is a strong Soshu Den style. Also, we do not often see a hamon with five repeats of a pattern.

Considering this is Kanbun 7 work, we can note that Sukehiro he started using kesho-yasuri, signed his last name and date and his kanji characters changed to the so-sho style or "grass style". After the Shodai Sukehiro passed away, from Kanbun 3 to 6, he signed with a "sou" kanji which means a 2nd generation. He stopped this in Kanbun 7, and this means he was strongly self confident at this time. Possibly this resulted from the Osaka castle jodai (when a lord is absent, a vassal or jodai takes care of the castle) Aoyama Munetoshi hiring him. This is Sukehiro's work when he was around 30 years old, when he became highly motivated.

Kantei To No 3: katana

Mumei: den Chogi

Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: based on calm notare hamon, mixed with frequent choji, gunome, and kogunome; some places have open valleys in the midare hamon. There are frequent ashi and yo, a soft nioiguchi, nioiguchi type ko-nie, frequent sunagashi, some kinsuji, some small yubashiri, and a worn down nioiguchi.

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

Horimono: the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The omote side nakago has traces of soe-hi.

The katana is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. It is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different; there is a shallow sori with a large kissaki, and the funbari at the koshimoto is gone. This thought to be a large suriage tachi from the Nambokucho period.

There is an itame hada which is visible, and there are chikei and midare-utsuri. The hamon is based on a calm notare, and there are frequent choj and gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, and kinsuji, and the hamon has prominent hataraki. Some parts of the vertical alterations in the hamon are prominent, such as the open valleys and worn down nioiguchi. The boshi is a strong midarekomi, there are hakikake, a sharp tip and a strong boshi. The entire tachi is powerful and full of personality, and from these characteristics, many people voted for the correct answer.

The jihada and hamon nie are strong, and there are prominent hamon hataraki such as yubashiri and kinsuji, which is like Soden-Bizen style work which is more dynamic than usual. The utsuri is clear, and the sword is a nioiguchi type, belonging to the Bizen mainstream. I had supposed people would vote for many different smith's names, but was wrong.

If it were Kanemitsu's work, the jihada would be tight and more refined, it would be based on a notare hamon with some places having gunome, and a gentle quiet hamon with a clearer nioiguchi.

If it were Morikage's Chogi style work, the notare hamon waves are close to each other, and vertical variations are prominent, and there would be an active hamon with some places showing togari type and square features.

Kantei To No 4: wakizashi

Mei: Hoki-no-kami Taira Ason Masayuki

Kansei 4 nen Ne 8 gatsu (August, Kansei 4, year of the rat)

Length: 1 shaku 7 sun 9 bu

Sori: 4.5 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame hada, and a barely visible hada. There are dense ji-nie, and some places have ara-nie and fine chikei.

Hamon: midare hamon with gunome and togariba; there is some ko-notare. There are dense ashi, and in the center a large midare hamon, and a dense nioiguchi; ara-nie extend over into the jihada; there is a little bit of fine hotsure; the upper half has yubashiri, kinsuji, sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight and the tip has hakikake; the omote has a large round point and return; the ura has a round point and long return.

This wakizashi has a narrow shinogi ji for the mihaba, is thick, has a high shinogi, rich hiraniku, and in particular, the ha-niku stands out, and it is a heavy blade.

These characteristics are often seen among Satsuma Shinshinto work.

Among Satsuma Shinshinto work, this is wide, but around the monouchi to the kissaki area it has a thin saki-sori style and a long kissaki, and these characteristics are often seen Masayuki's work.

You can imagine that the poor hiraniku tip shape is supposed to help produce an acute angle to cut well.

Also, around the monouchi to the yokote area, the hamon is lower than in other areas, and this characteristic construction could be intended to help protect the hamon from violent shocks when cutting.

There are ara-nie, and the top of the gunome hamon has ara-nie which is mixed with the sharp shaped hamon, and there is a prominent rich (thick) ha-niku. From these details it is easy to judge this as a Satsuma-to. But there is not much prominent chikei type kawarigane or the thick kinsuji and nie-suji called Imozuru. Also there is no characteristic long whitish forging juncture line, so from this, it could be confusing and judged as a Motohira. But many of Motohira's mihaba are either standard or a little wide with a long chu-kissaki. His hamon, from the moto to tip, have a uniform high, and a slightly monotonous feeling. His nioiguchi above the machi are tight. Motohira's nioiguchi are also brighter than Masayoshi's.

Kantei To No. 5: wakizashi

Mei: Kanefusa

Length: 1 shaku 0.6 bu

Sori: slightly over 1 bu

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame hada; at the koshimoto on the hamon side there are some nagarehada and the hada is barely visible. There are dull chikei, and the mune side of the ji is whitish.

Hamon: gunome-choji midare; some places have square shaped features and the omote and ura are almost same. There are some ashi, the hamon is nioi deki; on the ura in the center there is a tama (ball) yakiba (tobiyaki); there is a somewhat tight and worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi which is a little tsukiage; the tips are sharp and there is a long return.

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

This is a wide long hira-zukuri wakizashi. There is a shallow sori, it is thin, and at first impression it looks like an Enbun-Joji period shape. But the wakizashi's sori at the koshimoto is not prominent, there is a saki-sori, a poor fukura, and from these

characteristics, you can judge this as work from around the Eiroku and Tensho (1558-1591) eras from the end of the Muromachi period.

The jihada is a prominent itame hada with whitish appearing hada, but there is very little of Mino's characteristic nagarehada, and from this, some people may have been confused. At this period, in the case of thin and wide hira-zukuri wakizashi, we often see strong forging, and no nagare-hada, and this is a point to remember.

The hamon is called Kanefusa midare, and is based on a characteristic continuous gunome-choji hamon without prominent ashi and yo. The hamon is nioi-deki, there is a worn down tight nioiguchi, and the katana-hi are close to the mune edge. The boshi is midarekomi, the tips lean toward the hamon or edge side, and there is a long return called a Jizo-boshi, which looks like a profile of a Jizo figure (a stone god statue for children). These details show features of Seki smiths' work from this period, and these characteristic points are good examples of their typical work.

Beside Seki smiths' name, some people voted for Muramasa. The vertical variations in the midare hamon, the fact that the omote and ura sides are almost exactly the same, there are some places in the hamon with square shaped gunome and which are continuous and which look like a hakoba type hamon, and from this, the Muramasa vote is understandable. If it were Muramasa's work, we do not see much strong whitish jihada, and he has many blades with a mitsumune shape, and these features are different from Kanefusa.

Also, around the Eisho and Taiei periods (1504-1527) Seki smiths' styles, instead of having wide blades, used more standard widths, and a size around 8 sun smaller, just like copies of Rai school work.

Shijo Kantei To No 701 (in the June, 2015 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 701 in the June issue is a tanto by Komihara Masakiyo dated Oan gannen (1368).

This is a wide, long blade. It is thin, has a shallow sori, and from the shape, you can judge this as peak Nanbokucho period work.

People who have studied Japanese swords for a reasonable amount of time, know the Koto period's basic styles for the Go-kaden (the 5 traditional schools).

In some areas, there are mixed styles, and no clear traditional school style. Basically, you judge which traditional school something belongs to, and next look at the jihada, which either belongs to a mainstream Go Kaden school with a refined jihada, or is country side (not mainstream) work.

From each school's characteristic points, you judge a blade as traditional work, or country side work.

This tanto's jihada is a mix of nagare and masame hada, the hamon is a suguha style, and is mixed with small hotsure and kuichigaiba. There are nie, and this looks like some type of Yamato-den style. But this does not have the tight itame and bright, main stream Yamato Den jihada. Itame and mokume are visible over the entire jihada, along with whitish utsuri. From this, you can judge as this being a Yamato Den work, but branch school work or non-mainstream work.

Among the Yamato Den branch schools, a possibility is the Uda school, whose jihada are dark colored and whitish, and the hamon has frequent strong bright small nie. If it were the Nio school, the jihada color is clearer and whitish, and the hamon has very fine nie, and is soft appearing.

Also, jihada are either a bright color, and have a fine moist appearing soft look, or the entire jihada has nagare and masame hada with a dark color, and is whitish. Hamon mixed with soft hamon areas are possibly as Naminohara school work.

The tanto suguha styles are only slightly different from each other, and there is a tight nioiguchi and this characteristic point is seen often in Mihara school work.

From the shape, among Mihara works, this seems to be from around the peak of the Nanbokucho period, and to be Ko-Mihara work. Ko-Mihara has two styles: the jihada are an itame mixed with mokume, and there is a nagare masame hada, and the hada is visible; the hamon are suguha, and there are frequent nie; the habuchi has hotsure, nijuba, and kuichigaiba. Other styles have a tight nioiguchi, a suguha hamon similar to the next prefecture's Aoe, and the habuchi has the same kind of hataraki, and the tanto belongs to this style.

Ko-Mihara smiths' works are similar to each other, and it is difficult to judge individual smith's names, and so Ko-Mihara smiths' name are treated as correct answers.

Beside this, a fair number of people voted for Nobukuni.

The peak of the Nanbokucho period Nobukuni suguha works contain some similarities: the shape, the itame jihada mixed with nagare masame hada, and the suguha nioiguchi is tighter.

But Nobukuni is a mainstream Yamashiro smith, and many of his jihada are bright and refined, and we never seen whitish utsuri.

At the same time, Nobukuni's suguha are a Yamashiro Den style, and have Yamato Den characteristic habuchi hataraki such as hotsure, kuichigaiba are not often seen, and his nioiguchi are bright.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai