

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
Issue Number 704
September, 2015

Meito Kansho
Examination of important swords

Tokubetsu Juyo token

Type: Tachi
Mei: Bizen Osafune Tomomitsu

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 1 bu 2 rin (73.1 cm)
Sori: 8 bu 1 rin (2.45 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 1 rin (2.75 cm)
Sakihaba: 6 bu 8 rin (2.05 cm)
Motokasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)
Sakikasane : 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 4 bu 1 rin (4.25 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 6 bu 2 rin (20.05 cm)
Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It is thin for the width, there is a prominent large koshizori, the tip has sori, and there is a long chu-kissaki. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume hada. Some parts of the hada are barely visible, but the entire jihada is fine and well forged. There are dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and clear midare-utsuri. The hamon is based on gunome mixed with ko-gunome, and is a kataochi style, and there are togariba. The ura side's entire hamon length has saka-ashi mixed with a prominent tsunoba style hamon (tsunoba means a pointed shape like a horn or togari). There are ashi and yo, a niouguchi, and on the bottom half of the hamon, some places show ko-nie, a little bit of sunagashi, and small tobiyaki. The boshi is midarekomi, and the omote tip has hakikake, and the tip is sharp with a return. The ura side tip is komaru with a return. The horimono on the omote and the ura are bo-hi with maru-dome. On the omote side there are bonji and a gyo-style kurikara. On the ura side there are three bonji and suken kasanebori

(kasanebori means there are two different horimono on the sword). The nakago is suriage, the tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are a slightly deep katte-sagari (new), and the old yasurime are katte-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote, toward the mune side on the shinogi-ji, made with fine tagane (chisel) strokes, there are small sized kanji forming a long signature.

Bizen Osafune was a prosperous area for sword making during the Nambokucho period. The mainstream schools produced many great master smiths such as the Kanemitsu school smiths, Chogi, Morikage, and Motoshige. Tomomitsu is supposed to have been Kanemitsu's younger brother or his student. Mainly during the Embun period he produced tachi, tanto, and hirazukuri sun-nobi (over size) wakizashi with signatures, and many of these are a large size, which reflects the period. His masterpiece is in Futarayama Shrine and is a large o-tachi which is over 4 shaku long and is classified as Juyo Bunkazai. From this work, his name is well known in the sword world.

Most of his hamon are based on notare or ko-notare, and sometimes we see square shaped hamon features. A historical sword book says that "Tomomitsu's and Moromitsu's work are similar to Kanemitsu, and in particular, Tomomitsu's work is very similar to Kanemitsu's", and the book also says that Tomomitsu's work follows Kanemitsu's style of work most closely.

Today, none of his works are without horimomo, the same as Kanemitsu's work, and there are some simple horimono. In the case of tachi, there are bo-hi with kurikara and bonji on the bottom half. In the case of hirazukuri small sized blades, there are kasane bori (two different horimono on the same sword), along with katana hi, futasuji hi, bonji, koshi-hi, and gomabashi, which are examples of relatively detailed work. Beside these, there is a unique so type kurikara in which the dragon's round stomach surface has prominent details reminding one of holly leaves, and this type of horimono is not seen except in the work of Kanemitsu and Tomomitsu. From their horimono characteristics, we can recognize that Tomomitsu's work had a very close relationship to Kanemitsu's. This is a rare tachi with his signature, and the original size was over 2 shaku 7 sun. The widths at the moto and saki are not very different, and there is a koshizori. The upper half has sori, a long kissaki, and the tip of the hi is low, but in spite of being suriage, the shape is dynamic which reflects the period. The jihada is very refined, and almost looks like ko-itame, which shows main stream Osafune work. The hamon is based on kaku-gunome (especially on the ura side) which is rare for Tomomitsu. Even with the long length of the hamon, it is not simple, and shows several different types of hamon styles or features, and reminds us of the same school's Motomitsu's active hamon, and this example shows Tomomitsu's high level of skill.

Also, of special note is the gyo type kurikara horimono at the koshimoto. The dragon looks like he is claiming the ken, and this design is very rare. Beside on this tachi, this rare horimono is seen on a Tomomitsu's tachi dated Koan 1 owned by the Kurokawa Kobunka Kenkyujo; a mumei den Kanemitsu katana classified as the 24th Juyo Token; a Nagamitsu signed tachi owned by the Tokyo National Museum; and a mumei o-tachi with the "go" (nick name) name of Senobori no tachi owned

by the Futarayama Shrine and classified as Juyo Bunkazai. From these smith's work with horimono, the mumei Senobori tachi seems very likely to be Bizen work. It is very interesting if this is the same carver's work, and we are looking for more examples of this style of work.

This tachi is being exhibited at the NBTHK's special exhibit "Bizen Token O-koku," and the second era is the Nambokucho and Muromachi period. This exhibit will be from August 25 to November 1. The exhibiton will then travel from November 29 to the Sano museum in Shizuoka, and to the Bizen Osafune Token Museum in Okayama.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Issue No.704 Tosogu Kanshou Juyo Tosogu

**Gengetsu (crescent) mitsuboshi (three stars) sukashi tsuba
Mumei: attributed to Yagyu**

The Owari Yagyu tsuba is known as being designed by a master swordsman, the same as the Higo Musashi tsuba. The kenjutsu master Yagyu family's kenpo (fighting style) followed Kami-izumi Ise no kami Nobutsuna's Shinkage-ryu which was created in the Sengoku period, and it was founded by Yagyu Sekishusai. The family is located in two places : The Edo Yagyu family, which later became the Tokugawa shogun's heiho shinan (military strategy and tactics guide) which was run by the father and son Tajima no kami Munemori, and Ju-bei. The other location was as the Owari Tokkugawa's heiho shinan, run by the Owari Yagyu family. This Yagyu tsuba is supposed to have been created by the Owari Yagyu family's Renya Toshikane. These tsuba are supposed to have been forged by Owari tsuba smiths following Renya's order, and he ordered a unique sukashi design tsuba based on the Yagyu kenpo's philosophy. The tsuba jihada is forged with a moist appearing dark color. The tsuba edge and jihada show tekkotsu (a type of rough surface) similar to what is seen in earlier earlier period work from groups such as Kanayama, Yamakichi and Houan, and these are characteristic points for the Owari tsuba smiths' work.

Also, in a later period, some of the Owari Futagoyama school works are seen as copies of the Yagyu style. The Yagyu tsuba was popular and was famous as it was a swordmaster's design. In Owari, this style tsuba is supposed to have been continously made for long period.

This tsuba has a slightly curved square shape, and a moon and star composition with large sukashi areas. The tsuba is small, and the edge has many visible steel

layers or kitae-me (forging marks), and this is a characteristic Yagyū style. Also, in the sukashi space, the edge looks like it is worn-out, but was shaved which is another characteristic point. Beside the small size, you can feel the swordmaster's distinct spirit, and this is a characteristic Yagyū tsuba.

Explanation by Iida Toshihisa

Shijō Kantei To No. 704

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 705 issue Shijō 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 Shijō Kantei. You can use the Shijō 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: wakizashi

Length: 1 shaku 3 sun 6 bu (41.21 cm)

Sori: 5 bu (1.52 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 rin (3.05 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Nakago length: 4 sun 2 bu 6 rin (12.9 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a shobu-zukuri wakizashi with an ihorimune. There is a wide mihaba, long length, it is slightly thick, and there is a large sori. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, and entire jihada is tight. There are dense ji-nie and fine chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are ko-ashi, a bright nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and some places have muneyaki. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are osuji-chigai. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote side there is a long kanji signature toward the mune edge. Many of this smith's swords have muneyaki.

Shijo Kantei To No 702 (in the 2015 July issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 702 in the July issue is a wakizashi by Nakasone Kotetsu

The wakizashi jihada is a tight itamehada, and there is tekogane type o-hada. The hamon has a long straight yakidashi at the koshimoto, and above this is a continuous hyotan-ba. The boshi above the yokote has one yakikome and above this it is komaru with a return which is called a Kotetsu boshi. Both the jihada and hamon are bright and clear. This is a typical Kotetsu Hanetora period work. Also, the Daikokuten horimono at the koshimoto inside a hitsu (frame), is different from Horikawa Kunihiro and Osumijo Masahiro's work. This is his unique composition.

Kotetsu was active smith in the Kanbun Shinto period. Usually, both his katana and wakizashi have a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a very shallow sori, and a chu-kissaki, and this describes a Kanbun Shinto shape.

However, sometimes there is a prominently wide blade, just like this wakizashi, and the widths at the moto and saki are almost the same, and there is an o-kissaki which looks like a Keicho Shinto shaped wakizashi.

Among these types of work, there is unokubi-zukuri with an o-kissaki, and another blade has one side with a kiriha-zukuri shape. Almost all of these have very detailed horimono, and this detail characterizes his work.

In the Kanbun Shinto period, there are no such examples like this except in the work of Kotetsu. Even for Kotetsu, this kind of work is concentrated in the early half of his career called the "Okisato Kotetsu Nyudo" signature era, or the "Hanetora" signature era.

Among all his work, there is a only one o-kissaki katana which is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin and which is owned by the Tsukamoto Museum in Chiba, and this is also from his Hanetora period work.

After August of Kanbun 4 nen which is his Hakotora era, his hamon are predominantly a changing hyotan-ba to juzu-ba, and at the same time, we almost never see this kind of wakizashi shape.

Kotetsu is known as an expert in making horimono, and there are horimono in all his career, but the Hakotora era seems to show less horimono in his work when compared with the Hanetora era.

You can say this wakizashi was made during a transition in the style of his work. However, in the same period, this kind of wakizashi style is never seen in the work from other smiths. Kotetsu is a master smith who came from Echizen, and this could be a one of his distinctive characteristics.

In this issue, most people voted for the correct answer.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

