

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
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Meito Kansho
Examination of Important Swords

Juyo Bunkazai
Important Art Object

Type: Tachi
Mei: Aritsuna
Owned by the Tokyo Fuji Museum

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu 3 rin (71.3 cm)
Sori: 9 bu 1 rin (2.75 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)
Sakihaba: 6 bu 7 rin (2.05 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)
Nakago length: 7 sun 7 bu 2 rin (23.4 cm)
Nakago sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are a little different. There is large sori, the tip has sori, and there is a short chu-kissaki. The jihada is itame mixed with abundant mokume, and the hada is visible in places. The bottom half has jifu type jihada. There are ji-nie, frequent chikei, and mizukage below the machi. The entire hamon is low, and is primarily komidare mixed with ko-gunome. There are ashi, thick uneven rough nie, kinsuji, niesuji, sunagashi, and in some places, nijuba type yubashiri and tobiyaki. The boshi is straight, and the omote has togariba with a komaru and return; the ura is straight mixed with kuichigaiba, and the tip is yakizume. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, the tip is slightly ha-agari with a shallow kurijiri, and the yasurime are o-suji-chigai. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the ura under the first mekugi-ana which is the original mekugi-ana, there is a deep two kanji signature made with a thick chisel.

Among Ko-Hoki works, Yasutsuna is first on a list of master smiths, and there are several blades with signatures such as Sanekage, Sanemori, Sadatsuna, Yasuie, and Kunimune, and Aritsuna is one of these smiths. According to the sword book "Nihonto Meikan", there are five primary smiths, and their active periods were Tentoku (957-61), Yowa (1181-82), Shogen (1207-11), Tempuku (1233-34) and Shougen (1259-60) which is at the end of the Heian period to around the mid-Kamakura period which is a long interval. Aritsuna's signed blades are very rare, and besides this one, there is a tachi classified as Juyo Bunkazai owned by the Oyamazumi shrine, one Juyo Token classified blade, and two others.

Aritsuna's "Ari" kanji shapes are all similar, but the "Tsun" kanji has two different shapes (examples① and ②). This could be because there is either one smith who signed differently in different periods, or another smith began to sign this name after the original Aritsuna stopped working, and this point requires further study.

Except for one blade signed on the omote side, all others are signed on the ura side with strong and thick chisel marks, using many gyaku-tagane strokes (inscribed in the reverse direction from the usual written direction), and the yasurime are osuji-chigai. From these characteristics, Dr. Honma Kunzan used to say "this is just like Ko-Aoe work, it is classified as Juyo Bunkazai and listed as Hoki work, but the jihada and hamon, rather than being like Yasutsuna's work, are more like Ko-Aoe work". Other Ko-Hoki smiths only signed on the omote side.

Even if Aritsuna was a Ko-Hoki smith, his work was a little different from the main line of the school, and there seems to be a possibility that there was some relationship with its southern neighbors, the Bichu Aoe smiths.

This tachi's jihada is itame mixed with a relatively large number of mokume, and the entire jihada is a fine and visible hada. At the koshimoto some places have a jifu type muji jihada and this is characteristic of Ko-Aoe jihada. Also, the yasurime and mei show Ko-Aoe characteristic points, and Dr. Honma's opinion is naturally understandable. The kissaki is short, the boshi's yakiba is narrow, but there is a standard width koshizori and sori at the tip, and this is an original dynamic tachi shape. The komidare type hamon is natural, and there are hataraki, such as kinsuji, niesuji, and sunagashi. This produces an interesting appearance with a rustic beauty, with a natural appearance, and is a really well executed work.

Recently, one of Aritsuna's two other blades was found by the Kyoto National Museum's Mr. Inada Kazuhiko, and the Kyoto museum is studying it.

Also, this tachi is being exhibited at the "1000 years of Token (sword) Work and Beauty" exhibition at the Tokyo Fuji museum in Tokyo's Hachioji city (March 29 to July 3).

Commentary and photo by Ishii Akira.

The mei in photos ① and ② are from the "Nihon-toko jiten" by Fujishiro Yoshio and Fujishiro Matsuo.

No.711 Juyo Tososhingu

Mizutama (dots) sukashi tsuba

Mei: Nobuie

There are very few tsuba in which the iron itself is recognized and beautiful. The charm of iron tsuba is quite simple, and involves the feeling and appearance of the iron, as well as a good shape and good balance. Among the many iron tsuba we have, it is very rare to find one which has an amazing degree of dignity, and I feel this is one of them. Certainly this is a Nobuie work.

Nobuie is a well known master smith from the Muromachi period, and at the end of the Edo period, many smiths copied his style, but somehow these copies were not quite right. It may depend on the basic characteristics of the iron, how the iron was treated, the delicate shape, and the curve of the nikuoki (the cross section shape of the tsuba).

Nobuie produced many Japanese quince shaped tsuba. Each tsuba is different, not only in size, but also in shape, and in the angle or contour of the surface curvature or shape. Nobuie seemed to design each tsuba and carefully carve the surface shape and volume (nikuoki) in the space between the seppa-dai and mimi or rim. For some artists this seemed to be natural or routine, but Nobuie skillfully established this proportion or shape as an extremely important element. That's why people admire a Nobuie tsuba in a koshirae, where it looks even better than it does as a bare tsuba.

This is a dynamic work with a Japanese quince blossom's dynamic shape, and the ground has a unique yasurime, and the iron itself is an element of the art work. Without a hitsu-ana it is fine, and that is that why the small sukashi design looks fresh. On the seppa dai there is a thick two kanji signature made with Nobuie's usual distinctive chisel marks. Looking at the essence of this iron tsuba, I am completely satisfied that this is a Nobuie.

Commentary by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 711

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 711 issue Shijo Kantei To is May 5, 2016. 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 May 5, 2016 will be accepted. If there are sword smiths with the same name in different schools, please write the school or prefecture, and if the sword smith was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

Information:

Type: wakizashi

Length: 1 shaku 3 sun 7 bu (41.5 cm)

Sori: 3 bu 3 rin (1.0 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 bu 6 rin (3.5 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)

Sakikasane: 3 bu 1 rin (0.95 cm)

Nakago length: 4 sun 2 bu (12.7 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a wide hira-zukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune, a large sunnobi shape, thick, with a slightly large sori, and the saki-zori is prominent. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, and the jihada is visible. There are thick jinie and frequent chikei and a clear jihada. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The habuchi has hotsure mixed with kuichigaiba. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and a bright and clear hamon. The horimono on the omote side is a shin-no-kurikara, and on the ura side is a kudari-ryu and both are in high relief. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is a shallow kurijiri. The yasurime are katte-sagari, and there are two mekugi ana and one is large. On the omote side, a two line, long signature describes his career. The ura side has a date and the owner's name, and the nakago mune has a to-shin bori carver's (horimono artist) name. The smith does not have many examples with horimono.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For New Year

The swords discussed below were shown in the March, 2016 meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: March 12, 2016 (2nd Saturday of March)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Imoto Yuuki

Kantei To No. 1: katana

Mumei: den Chogi

Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 6.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: gunome mixed with choji, ko-gunome, togariba, and some open valleys. There are frequent ashi and yo, a nioiguchi type habuchi, some kinsuji, and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip has a little bit of hakikake; on the omote there are kinsuji and togari; the ura has small togari.

Horimono: both the omote and ura have bo-hi carved through the nakago; the omote has a trace of soe-hi.

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin classified den Chogi katana. The large mihaba with the thin blade with a long kissaki, led most people to judge this as Nanbokucho period work from the shape, and many people voted for Chogi immediately. The other common opinion was Osafune Kanemitsu.

As people used to say “among the Bizen smiths, Chogi is the most distant from the Bizen tradition”. His jihada and hamon have strong nie, and show a characteristic Soshu-Den style. Besides this, he has more gentle nie in the jihada and hamon, and a more characteristic Bizen style, and this is a one of them. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, the hamon is mainly nioiguchi with ko-nie, and entire katana has a gentle look.

The midare hamon does not show very much high and low variation compared with Chogi's usual hamon, and it is a slightly small sized hamon. But there are a lot of ashi and yo hataraki, which shows Chogi's characteristic points very well and the midarekomi and sharp boshi is strong.

From historical times, people compared Chogi and Kanemitsu's characteristics: for example Chogi is compared to cherry blossoms and Kanemitsu is compared to plum blossoms. This katana does not have a not large hamon, but has a lot of rich hataraki and a strong boshi which is flamboyant looking. In comparison, the plum blossom Kanemitsu's work shows a bright and refined jihada with a gentle and easygoing notare hamon.

Kantei To No. 2: wakizashi

Mei: Kazusa-no-suke Fujiwara Kaneshige

Length: 1 shaku 6 sun 1.5 bu

Sori: 3 bu

Design: the omote is kiriha-zukuri with a yokote: the ura is shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: ko-itame hada with a fine visible hada. There are dense ji-nie, chikei and a bright jihada.

Hamon: gunome mixed with togari; some places show a continuous uniform hamon pattern which looks like a juzuba style hamon (string of beads).

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip has hakikake and is round, and there is a return.

Horimono: on the omote there is a wide hi; the ura has koshi-hi with soe-hi; on both sides, the hi are carved through the nakago.

This wakizashi's omote style is kiriha-zukuri, and the ura's style is shinogi-zukuri, and it is hard to judge the period from the shape. Because of this, people voted for different periods, and quite a few people voted for the Shinshinto period. There is a dynamic shape with an o-kissaki, but if it were a Shinshinto wakizashi, it would be thicker and the hiraniku will be more poorer or flatter. So, in the case of a hard to judge period from the shape, it is important to look at the jihada and hamon.

The wakizashi's jihada is ko-itame and there is a visible hada, and the shinogi-ji has a prominent masame-hada. The hamon is gunome-midare with nie, the top of the hamon's elements are all the same height, and some parts of the gunome hamon are continuous and form a juzu-ba style which is a characteristic Edo Shinto style in the Kambun period. This kind of work is seen typically from Kotetsu, Okimasa and Kazusa-no-suke Kaneshige.

Because the yokote has yakikomi, and looks like a Kotetsu boshi, many people voted for Kotetsu. But if it were by Kotetsu, the jihada and hamon would be clearer, the moto would have a yakidashi, even if it were short, and this sword has no such characteristics.

Kazusa-no-suke Kaneshige is supposed to have started using juzu-ba before Kotetsu, and he skillfully worked with juzu-ba, just like Okimasa and Kotetsu. His hamon are known to contain a one gunome, two gunome, one gunome, two gunome regular rhythm with gunome. This is an important point to judge his work, and this wakizashi has these features.

Other opinions were for Okimasa and Echizen Yasutsugu. If it were Okimasa's work, many of them contain a continuous two grouped gunome midare hamon, and the habuchi are rough and there is a bold hamon. Yasutsugu does have kiriha-zukuri works among his utsushimono, but his hamon are based on his original shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome and his jihada are darker.

Also, this kind of shape is seen in the work of Kotetsu and Kazusa-no-suke Kaneshige, and besides them, in the work of Yamato-no-kami Yasusada and the Edo Hojoji school smiths.

Among these, a Yamato-no-kami Yasusada blade which is in the Date Masamune mausoleum's Zuiho-den, and is signed "Yamano Kaemon-jo Sadanori kore monyou", and it is known that the Yamano tameshigiri family is supposed to have been involved in sword making. This suggests that maybe this kind of unusual shape was related to tameshigiri efforts.

Kantei To No 3: katana

Mei: Kurihara Nobuhide
Meiji 3 nen 12 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight itame, there are frequent ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: gunome mixed with gunome-choji and square shaped gunome; some parts at the top of the hamon are mixed with small togariba and ko-gunome. There are frequent long ashi mixed with shimaba and yo, thick nie, and small rough mura (similar to nie); in the center there are thick long kinsuji and sunagashi, and there is a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi with hakikake; on the omote it has togari; on the ura there is a round shape and return.

This katana is by the Kiyomaro school's most prominent student Kurihara Nobuhide. The shape is wide, the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, and midare hamon's ashi are long, and extend almost to the edge of the hamon, and from these characteristic points, very few people missed the period. In this period, the school's style, very poor hiraniku, poor fukura, and sharp looking shape, and a hamon combined with ball-like (tobiyaki like) shapes called shimaba, is from the Kiyomaro school.

Among the Kiyomaro school smiths, Nobuhide is excellent in making horimono, and he has strong characteristics, and his style followed from Kiyomaro's based on the gunome midare hamon. But after the Ansei and Man-en periods, his hamon have large sized square shape gunome mixed at the top of the hamon with togariba and ko-gunome, which is a rough midare hamon. This characteristic hamon is clear in this katana.

In voting, besides the correct answer, some people voted for his teacher Kiyomaro and for Taikei Naotane, This katana has some parts showing nie kuzure, and very

bold parts. But if it were Kiyomaro's work, the jihada and hamon would be clearer, and it would be a midare hamon mixed with more round top gunome and choji. If it were Soshu Den style Naotane work, there would be a ko-notare hamon mixed with gunome, and the jihada would have his characteristic uzumaki-hada. However, this katana is listed in the sword book "A Kurihara Nobuhide study" and it says that "The katana was delivered to someone in the royal family". There is another sword with the same date which the Meiji emperor donated to the Minatogawa shrine. They are different in style, but both of them are a little shorter than the standard size, signed with an unusual tachi mei, and you can speculate that these were supposed to have been made for the special order from the royal family.

Kantei To No 4: tanto

Mei: Yasuyoshi

Length: slightly less than 9 sun 3 bu

Sori: very slight

Design: hira-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with nagare-hada; some parts of the hada are visible. There are dense ji-nie, frequent chikei and whitish utsuri.

Hamon: ko-notare mixed with togariba and gunome. There are ashi, ko-nie, and the upper half has a more pronounced nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is sharp, and the boshi leans strongly to the hamon or edge side.

This is legendary Chikuzen-no-kuni Samonji's son Sa Yasuyoshi's tanto. He has a blade dated during the Shohei period, and his active period was supposed to have been the Embun-Joji period which was the peak of the Nambokucho period. This is wide, long, and thin, with a slight sori, which shows the period's characteristic shape well. Also, the boshi is tsukiage (the boshi rises towards the mune as it goes to the tip), with a sharp tip, and strong looking, and from these characteristics many people looked at this as Sa school work.

Chikuzen Samonji seems to have departed from the classic Kyushu style and changed to a sophisticated style with a clear jihada and hamon. His style was continued by his students, and is like the Yukihiro blade dated Kano 1 and classified as Kokuho. Among his students, Yasuyoshi shows somewhat stronger characteristics, and the historical sword book "Kaifunki" says "Yasuyoshi's works all have a nioiguchi, and are a little more gentle than his father's work". His jihada have itame and nagare hada, his hamon have a nioiguchi, there are bo-utsuri

towards the hamon side which is mixed with Bizen style elements, and this is Yasuyoshi's characteristic style.

This tanto has itame mixed with nagare hada, with strong whitish utsuri. This is one of the examples where his hamon have some nie, but on the omote's upper half the midare hamon has a nioiguchi, which shows his characteristic points. Also, the sharp tipped boshi leans strongly to the hamon side, and there is a short return, and this is a strong characteristic point.

People voted for the Sa school, and they recognized these characteristic points, and many voted for Yasuyoshi. Other opinions were for Samonji and Yukihiro. If it were Samonji, the jihada and hamon would be brighter, and it would be more sophisticated, with frequent nie, a tsukiage boshi, and sharp tip, and usually a long return. In this school, most similar works are Yukihiro's.

Kantei To No. 5: wakizashi

Mei: Dewa-daijo Fujiwara Kunimichi

Length: slightly over 1 shaku 2 sun 6 bu

Sori: slightly over 2 bu

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume; upper half is mixed with nagare hada, and the hada is visible. There are frequent ji-nie, chikei and zanguri (a rough surface)

Hamon: gunome mixed with gunome-choji, and the entire hamon has a large midare pattern, and some places have some saka-ashi. There are frequent ashi, yo, some shimaba, a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, frequent sunagashi, kinsuji and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: the omote is notarekomi, the ura is midarekomi, both tips are sharp; there are hakikake and a return.

Horimono: on the omote side there are bonji; inside of the the frame are a suken relief and tsume; on the ura side there are long bonji, a koshi-hi and soe-hi with marudome.

This is a Dewa daijo Kunimichi wakizashi, and he was the best skilled smith in the Horikawa Kunihiro school. This is wide, long, and thick with sori, and the shape shows Momoyama period characteristic points very well.

In this period, the school made a characteristic jihada which was itame mixed with mokume, and a visible hada called a zangi hada is seen in Kunihiro school work. Among the school's smiths, Kunihiro's jihada is mixed in places with nagare hada, and the boshi is a shallow notarekomi with togari in the return which is called a Sanpin style. Kunihiro's active period started in Keicho 13 (1608) and extended to Kanbun 2 (1662), which is a long career. He is known to have made a wide variety

of styles. In particular, his favorite style is based on a gunome hamon, with a high yakiba, with a very large midare hamon, and there are dense frequent nie. We do not see many of his wakizashi, where his midare hamon have saka-ashi, and this is one of his major characteristic points.

This wakizashi shows Kunimichi's characteristic points well and many people voted for the correct answer. At the same time many people voted for Etchu Masatoshi. According to recent studies, Kunimichi originally came from the Mishina school, and later he joined Horikawa school and established his style. He is supposed to have had a strong relationship with the Mishina school. Among the Mishina school works, Kunimichi's work seems to similar to Etchu-no-kami Masatoshi's. The wakizashi's midare hamon has some places which show intricate details, and a typical Sanpin boshi. Also we see Masatoshi's characteristic ball-like tobiyaki which are called shimaba, and from these characteristics, we treated the Masatoshi name as a correct answer.

These two smiths are not only similar in style, but also their horimono is similar (see the NBTHK No. 498 issue's Shijo Kanteito). In the latter half of the Edo period, the sword book "Shinto sho tagane yoroku" discussed Masatoshi and said "he is also very skillful with horimono". It is very interesting, and we can speculate that their similar horimono developed independently, or were made by a horimono specialist.

Answer for the Shijo Kantei To No 709

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 709 in the February, 2016 issue is a tanto by Osafune Kagemitsu dated Enbun 5.

This is 8 sun 2.5 bu a standard length. The width is almost that of a standard tanto. But it is thin and has a shallow sori, and these are characteristic Nambokucho period details.

There is midare utsuri towards the mune side, and bo utsuri toward the hamon. The hamon is based on kataochi-gunome and kaku-gunome, and there are ashi and yo, and the entire hamon has saka-ashi and nioiguchi type konie, and from these characteristics, a Bizen candidate comes to mind.

In the Bizen school, because the itame hada is mixed with mokume, and the entire jihada is tight and refined, Osafune main line work comes to mind. In the Nambokucho period, kataochi gunome hamon are typical of Bizen mainstream work, and a majority of people voted for Kanemitsu. Beside Kanemitsu, a few people voted for his father Kagemitsu. Other votes were for smiths such as Yoshimitsu, Motomitsu, Tomomitsu, and Masamitsu.

These smiths often work in a manner similar to this, and all of their names are treated as correct answers at this time.

Kagamitsu's jihada is very tight, and heavily forged, and there are thick dense jinnie, and fine chikei. Among the Osafune school smiths, Kagamitsu's jihada are the most refined, and this is his characteristic point. Also, because his active period was Kagen to Kenbu, and earlier than Kanemitsu, many of his tanto shapes have a standard width and length with uchizori. Among these, there are longer tanto with small sori but there are comparatively few of these.

Motomitsu, Tomomitsu, and Masamitsu tanto are longer than this one, and are notably wider, and have mainly Embun Joji shapes. Many of Motomitsu's jihada are visible. Tomomitsu's work with notare style hamon are notable. Masamitsu does not have many kataochi gunome type hamon on tanto, and his main works are Kosori type tachi with narrow hamon.

Besides these, a few people voted for Motoshige. If it were Motoshige's work, his midare hamon usually have some places mixed with tusk-like togari in the hamon valleys. Also, Motoshige's jihada are itame mixed with nagare hada, and have a different color jifu in the iron, and the hada is visible. Among the Bizen smiths, his jihada look like a branch school's characteristic jihada, which is an important point.

Commentary by Hinohara Dai