

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
ISSUE NUMBER 715
August, 2016

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Examination of Important Swords

Type: Katana

Mei: Noshu ju Kanesada saku (“go” or sword nickname: Kasen Kanesada)

Koshirae: Koshi-kizami kuro urushi togidashi uchigatana koshirae (the Kasen koshirae)

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku (60.5 cm)

Sori: 4 bu 3 rin (1.3 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 3 rin (1.9 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 09 rin (3.3 cm)

Nakago length: 4 sun 7 bu 2 rin (14.3 cm)

Nakago sori: 5 rin (0.15 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are a little different. It is thick, short, and there is a shallow sori with a chu kissaki. The jihada is ko-itame with some places showing itame, mokume, and nagare hada, and the hada is visible in some places. There are ji-nie, chikei, mizukage under the machi, and some whitish utsuri mainly located at the koshimoto near the shinogi. The hamon has a small yakidashi, and at the koshimoto (at the start of the hamon near the machi) there is a koshiba area showing ko-gunome, ko-notare, togariba, and tamaba (tobi-yaki-like round spots of hamon-like steel in the ji above the hamon. There are ashi and yo, and above this area the hamon is chu-suguha mixed with kuichigai-ba and some small notare. The entire hamon has a nioiguchi, and there are dense nie and some nijuba type yubashiri. The boshi is straight with a ko-maru. The ura side has small hakikake, and both sides have a long return. The nakago is almost ubu, and the tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote side there is a long kanji signatute made with a slightly thick tagane (chisel) towards the mune edge.

In the Muromachi period, Mino was one of the two biggest sword producers, and Bizen was the other. In the late second half of the Muromachi era, Seki produced many sword smiths, and among these were two master smiths: Kanemoto and this Nidai Kanesada (or Nosada). Kanesada's active period was from Meio 2 (1493) to Taiei 6 (1526) and was more than 30 years. From recent studies, there is now a theory that his earliest signatures were from Bunmei 4 (1472), or Bunmei 14 (1482). From August in Meio 9 (1500) he signed his work as Kanesada, and his early signature with his title is from Eisei 7 (1510). During the Eisho period, he worked along a different road in a neighboring country, Ise no kuni Yamada. This suggests that it is likely he had some relationship with the Senju school, and this is thought to be very likely. In Mino he has gassaku (joint or collaborative) mei with influential people such as Fujiwara Hirochika. He seems to have worked as an apprentice to obtain his raw materials and sales contacts.

His mei is listed in the sword book "Shinkan Hiden Shou" which says his "rough or un-smooth mei are real or genuine". His kanji shapes are irregular and childish, and this is an interesting aspect to his work. Besides the Kanesada signature, we see Noshu Seki ju Kanesada (saku), "Izumi no kami (Fujiwara) Kanesada (saku)" as rare valuable signatures along with "Noshu Seki ju Kichizaemonjo Kanesada saku" and some signatures with his real (non-sword-professional) name.

His works consist mainly of katana, wakizashi and tanto, and very rare naginata and tachi. Among his tanto, many are called "Rai utsushi" with a clean suguha hamon, and these are excellent. His styles are primarily the same as what is seen in standard Seki work with high gunome, and also there are a remarkable number of suguha hamon. Other work is modeled after Echigo no kami Kunitoshi's notare hamon. In general, Kanesada's works are uniformly well done, and among the Seki works, many of them are high quality examples.

This katana is around 2 shaku long, reflecting his active period and its prevalent katate-uchi length. The hamon has a koshiba at the moto and above it is a suguha style. In this period, this kind of irregular hamon is seen not only in Kanesada's work, but also from other smiths too, and this is a good example.

This katana's owner was Hosokawa Tadaoki (Sansai) who was responsible for the renaissance of the Hosokawa family. His first battle was at the age 15, and from that time, he experienced about 50 battles, including the Komaki/Nagakute battle, the invasion of Korea, the Sekigahara battle, and the Osaka castle battles. Also, he received his education from his father Yusai, and his education included areas such as No plays, poetry, and tea ceremony. Through this, he acquired knowledge of culture and politics, and with his keen political sense, he made few mistakes during this turbulent period. As a commander, a politician, and a culturally educated person, he was supposed to have had unusually excellent abilities in all areas.

This katana's nickname or "go" is "kasen" (great poets), and is supposed to have come from the book "Higo toso roku". Sansai wrote about the Kumamoto castle lord who was his third son Tadatoshi. Tadatoshi had unfaithful vassals, and Sansai wrote to his son and said to "bring these vassal to the castle and execute them".

The number of unfaithful vassals was 36, and following the 36 kasen (poets), Sansai made this the name or “go” of this sword. The number of poets or unfaithful vassals isn’t clear, but several historical books describe or quote Sansai’s drastic words, and the “go” or nickname of the sword is supposed to be derived from this event. However, sometimes there are 6 kasen or poets as well as 36, so it appears Sansai might have been exaggerating the number of unfaithful vassals.

This katana has a “koshi-kizami koro urushi togidashi uchigatana koshirae (the “Kasen koshirae”) which was made no later than the early Edo period. Among the many Higo koshirae, this is a high quality original in which the tsuka is black urushi lacquered same, the tsukamaki was made from smoked leather, the tsuba is a simple iron tsuba, and the saya is covered with polished black lacquered same. This was created by Sansai, and was designed from his experiences in battle. It is not gaudy or colorful and is very practical, and at the same time has a simple but sophisticated look. Sansai was one of “Sen Rikyu’s elite group of 7”, and this work shows elegance from his tea ceremony experiences, and a high level of esthetics.

This is being shown at the the Eikei Bunko “Kasen Kanesada To-jo” exhibit through October 2nd.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

No. 715 Tosogu Kanshou Juyo Tosogu

Shiki ha-to zu (four season’s surging waves design) tsuba, kozuka
Tsuba mei: Togakushi Ishiguro Masatsune with kao
Kozuka mei: Ishigurosai Jumyo Masatsune with kao

This work shows Masatsune’s surging waves. The Ishiguro school is known to use flowers and birds as subjects, and created a gorgeous and elaborate style, and was one of the biggest Edo kinko schools, and was very prominent during the period. However, this entire set of tosogu shows only black surging waves in its design. Besides the tsuba and kozuka, there is a matching kogai, menuki, and a fuchi-kashira. Today, among Masatsune’s work or the Ishiguro school’s work, there is no other complete matching set of kanagu using only surging waves in the design. Possibly this was ordered by someone, but we have never seen another example like this.

The Ishiguro school’s work dates from the latter half of the Edo period to the Bakumatsu period. They used primarily flowers and birds in their designs, and made good use of all kinds of colored metals. We could say, they changed tosogu

from being strictly for military use, and converted them into artistic objects, and in the history of kinko work, this was a major step. Their portrayal is not only that they directly draw a subject, but also that their compositions looked like a painting. Possibly they were influenced by To period Chinese paintings, but the school established a unique style in the tosogu world.

In the Bakamatsu period, the school had many students and was very prosperous. When I talk about the Shodai's work, I can imagine Masasune's passion for his carving, and a strong wish to pave the way for his school's future. The Ishiguro school's power and technique of using continuous chisel strokes in their carvings are seen in birds' threatening strong eyes, their beaks, their claws, and dense elegant feathers. The theme of the ocean's large and powerful waves expresses the idea of hard work or diligence and perseverance.

This is Masatsune's work at age 61 from the kozuka's signature of Myoju. The go or names in the signatures of Togokushi and Ishigurosai are valuable, and the kanji and the steady signature lines made with a fine chisel are impressive.

Shijo Kantei To No. 715

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 715 issue Shijo Kantei To is September 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 September 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: katana

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun 9 bu 8 rin (84.8 cm)

Sori: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 9 rin (3.3 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 8 rin (0.85 cm)

Sakikasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 3 bu 2 rin (4.0 cm)

Nakago length: 8 sun 2 rin (24.3 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is long and wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are a little different. It is thick, and there is a shallow sori with a chu kissaki. The jihada is tight ko-itame mixed with a little bit of nagare hada. There are fine ji-nie, chikei, midare-utsuri and the shinogi ji has masame hada. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are ashi, yo, a tight nioiguchi, nioiguchi type ko-nie, and fine sunagashi. Both the jihada and hamon are bright and clear. The horimono on the omote is a koshi-hi, on the ura there is a goma-bashi, and both end with marudome. The nakago is ubu, and the nakago tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are katte-sagari, and there is one mekugi ana. On the omote side, towards the mune edge, there is a long kanji signature.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For New Year

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

Meeting Date: July 9, 2016 (2nd Saturday of July)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Iida Toshihisa

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Kanenaga

Kinzogan mei: Honda Heihachiro Tadatame shoji kore (owns this)

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: The entire itame hada in the ji is tight, and some places have nagare hada. There are frequent ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: suguha; it is a slightly shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome; in some places the habuchi is a fine hotsure which becomes nijuba. There are frequent ko-nie, nie, some rough nie, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight, the point is round and there is a shallow return.

There is a high shinogi, and wide shinogi ji. The entire jihada is a tight ko-itame mixed with nagare hada. The hamon is suguha with fine hotsure and nijuba, and from these characteristics, you can judge this as Yamato Den work. Besides these features, there are thick ji-nie and ha-nie, and the jihada and hamon are bright and clear. On the habuchi there are large strong bright rough uneven nie, and from these details, among the mainstream Yamato schools it is possible narrow this work down to the Teigai school.

Teigai Kanenaga's jihada and hamon are the brightest and clearest among the Yamato smiths, and you can see the individual large nie, and these are his characteristic points. Usually his suguha hamon are a shallow notare, and many of his hamon can be somewhat wide in some places and also narrow in some places, and this tachi show these characteristics. Kanenaga has two types of jihada, one is Yamato's characteristic masame hada and the hada is visible; the other is just like Yamashiro's characteristic tight jihada. Many of his good works have the Yamashiro-like jihada.

This has a kinzogan mei "Honda Heihachiro Tadatame shoji kore". Tadatame was the grandson of one of Tokugawa's four Tenno (counselors) like Honda Tadakatsu. He is also known as being Toyotomi Hideyori's wife Senhime's second husband after the fall of Osaka castle.

Kantei To No. 2: tanto

Mei: Hankei

Length: 9 sun 7 bu

Sori; slight

Design: hira zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: itame mixed with large itame hada, mokumehada, and the large pattern hada is visible. There are thick strong ji-nie, and frequent chikei.

Hamon: based on ko-notare. There is a dense nioiguchi, thick strong nie, hotsure, uchinoke going into the jihada, yubashiri, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: the omote is straight and the ura is a small midare; both sides have an o-maru and nie kuzure; the tips have hakikake and there is a return.

This is a tanto by Noda Hankei who is a well-skilled smith who worked in the Keicho period. In the Keicho period, Soshu Den swords become popular and many

smiths tried to work in that style. Among these was Hankei who was very good at working in this style.

Hankei is supposed to have used classic Norishige work as his model. His characteristic jihada is a large itame hada which is visible. There are thick frequent chikei called "hijiki hada". His hamon are based on notare and gunome, and there is a worn down nioiguchi, thick nie mixed with rough uneven nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and the border between the ji and hamon is not clear, and his work had very strong characteristics. This tanto shows these characteristic points very well. Also, please pay attention to the shape of the mitsumune. Hankei's mitsumune angle is very steep, and never seen in the work of other Shinto Soshu Den smiths, and this is another one of his characteristic points. His jihada often shows jiware (gaps or lines in the jihada), and small kizu, and that is seen in this tanto.

In addition, Hankei has only a small number of extant tanto compared with his katana. Many of his styles are wide and the lengths are short, which produces a stubby appearing shape.

Kantei To No 3: katana

Mei: Bitchu no kami Tachibana Tomiichi Yasuhiro

Meireki 3 nen (1657) 8 gatsu bi

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight fine ko-itame hada; there are ji-nie and pale utsuri.

Hamon: yakidashi at the moto; the hamon is wider above this, and there is a gorgeous choji midare, a high yakiba, and in some places, the hamon extends over the shinogi line. There are ko-ashi, yo, a tight nioiguchi and a little bit of ko-nie.

Boshi: a wide yakiba; midarekomi; there is a sharp tip and a return.

This work has a gorgeous choji midare hamon, the ji has utsuri, and from this, the first impression reminds us of Bizen work. But the shape has a little bit of sori, the widths at the moto and saki are different, and there is a chu-kissaki, and this is a typical Kanbun Shinto shape. The shinogi ji has a strong masame hada, and this is a Shinto characteristic point. Beside the gorgeous choji midare hamon, compared with classic Ichimonji work, the entire hamon nioiguchi line is hard, and there are fewer ashi and yo hataraki. Besides the fact that the jihada has utsuri, the ko-itame hada is not uneven, but tight and fine, and this is a typical Shinto characteristic jihada.

This is a Kishu Ishido school Yasuhiro katana. In the Kanbun Shinto period, the Ishido school was good at making choji midare hamon. The Ishido school followed

this style for a long time, but eventually the Ichimonji style choji midare hamon faded away. The school was prosperous and had branches around Japan in Kyoto, Edo, Kishu, Osaka and Fukuoka. Each Ishido school worked with choji midare hamon but they have slightly different characteristics. The Kishu Ishido hamon's characteristic points are that they have a yakidashi just like this katana, the hamon is wide, but the choji and gunome midare's high and low variations (or vertical alterations) are small, and there are small-patterned narrow hamon. In voting, people understood these characteristic points well, and voted for Yasuhiro and Tameyasu. At this time, if you judge this as Kishu Ishido work, it would be fine.

The other Ishido schools never have a yakidashi. If this were work from the Edo smiths Mitsuhiro and Tsunemitsu or the Osaka Ishido smith Nagayuki, their hamon would have more vertical alterations, and show more gorgeous midare hamon, and their level of skill seems to be higher. If it were work from Korekazu, the Fukuoka Ishido smiths Koretsugu or Moritsugu's work, their jihada would be mixed with prominent masame hada, and the hamon would have saka ashi.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Etchu no kami Masatoshi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 3 bu

Sori: 7 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame hada mixed with mokume and nagare hada; the hada is visible.

There are dense ji-nie and frequent chikei.

Hamon: gunome mixed with square gunome, ko-gunome, and togariba. There are ashi, thick nie, hotsure, nijuba, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, tobiyaki and yubashiri.

Boshi: the omote is a small midare, the ura is shallow notare; both sides have a sharp point and long return, and the tips have hakikake.

The Shodai Etchu no kami Masatoshi was the Mino smith Kanemichi's fourth son. His older brothers are Iga no kami Kinmichi, Rai Kinmichi, and Tanba no kami Yoshimichi and he was one of the Mishina school's smiths.

He moved from Mino to Edo with his brothers and was been active from the Keicho period to around the Kanei period. His shapes are typical Shinto shapes which are wide and thick with large kissaki. Many of his wakizashi and tanto are wide, and his katana are not too common today. His hamon are gunome mixed with ko-notare which is a Shidzu style, and supposed to have been modeled from work by Seki Magoroku which is a Sue- Seki style, and also from other suguha

styles. Among the school, he had the widest range of styles and he was a skillful smith.

This supposed to be one of his best styles, and is supposed to be modeled from Shidzu work. The Mishina school smiths originally came from Seki, and we see some Mino influence in their work. Many of his boshi are a unique Sanpin boshi style. This katana shows several of his characteristic points: the jihada mixed with nagare hada, and the midare hamon mixed with togariba. Also, the boshi has a little bit of nie-kuzure, but is a shallow notare and tsukiage. There is a sharp tip and this is a Sanpin style boshi. In this katana's midare hamon, features at the top of the hamon are close to each other, and inside of the hamon in places, there are small round areas like yo, and this is often seen his characteristic point.

On this katana, both the jihada and hamon have frequent nie, the midare hamon is mixed with many kinds of features, shows a lot of variety, and there are frequent hataraki, kinsuji and sunagashi. At first impression, it looks like a classic style, and in voting, people recognized these characteristics, and many people voted for Masatoshi.

Kantei To No. 5: tanto

Mei: Kuniyasu (Enju school)

Length: 8 sun 5 bu

Sori: slight

Design: hira-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: tight fine ko-itame; towards the hamon there is some nagare hada. There are frequent dense ji-nie, and pale whitish utsuri.

Hamon: suguha with a shallow notare mixed with a little bit ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, a dense bright and clear nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, some strong nie, and fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru and return.

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

This is an Enju Kuniyasu tanto. The Enju school is descended from Rai Kuniyuki in Kyoto. They produced many master smiths who used the "kuni" kanji like the Rai school, and among these smiths are Kunimura, Kunitoki, Kunitoshi, Kuniyasu, and Kuninobu. The school was prosperous in Kyushu's Higo area from the end of the Kamakura to the Nambokucho period. Some of the school's work reflects Rai school influence. Their jihada are mixed with masame, and the utsuri are whitish. Their hamon have worn down nioiguchi, and the overall impression is that the work is just below the level of Rai school work.

This a hira-zukuri tanto, which is slightly wide, long, and without sori, and from the shape, you can judge this tanto as work from the end of the Kamakura to the early

Nambokucho period. The jihada is well forged and refined. There are ko-nie and a dense bright and clear nioiguchi. The hamon is suguha with a shallow notare. From these details, in voting, the majority of people voted for Kunimitsu from the original Rai school. The tanto's Enju school characteristic whitish utsuri is not prominent, the jihada has dense ji-nie, and the hamon nioiguchi is bright and clear. Among the Enju school, this is among the better works, and voting for a higher level smith is understandable.

However, Enju characteristic points are seen along the hamon in the jihada mixed with a little bit of nagare hada, and there is no sign of the Rai school's unique bright bo-utsuri, and instead there is a pale whitish utsuri. Besides this, the tanto has a fine nijuba, and many Enju smiths produced nijuba, and this is a one of the school's characteristic points.

In the Enju school, many of Kuniyasu's works have strong nie, and Kunimura's tachi are narrow, long, and have small kissaki, and the other smiths do not have outstanding and prominent characteristics. For this tanto, if you look at it as an Enju school master work, it would be fine.

Shijo Kantei To No 713 (in the June, 2016 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 713 in the June issue is a katana by Mondo-no-sho Masakiyo.

This is a wide blade and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It is thick, there is a long chu-kissaki, rich hiraniku, and it is a heavy katana, and these details are seen often in characteristic Satsuma Shinto and Shinshinto shapes.

The hints say that under the habaki there is a mon, and in voting, most people voted for Masakiyo.

In the case of Satsuma Shinto and Shinshinto, for kantei or the shijo kantei-to, lecturers usually pick one of four smiths, unless they have very extensive knowledge of Satsuma swords. The four smiths usually selected are Mondo-no-sho Masakiyo, Ippei Yasuyo, Okuyamoto no kami Motohira, and Hoki no kami Masayuki.

Among these, Yasuyo studied under his father Ippei Yasusada and the Shinto Naminohira school, and he was strongly influenced by them. His shapes have the school's uniquely large width and wide shinogi ji, and his jihada are ko-itame with a slightly soft look. His hamon have a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and the hamon are usually either suguha with a shallow notare, or a suguha with continuous but distantly spaced gunome.

The other three smiths' hamon are midare based on gunome and togariba, and there is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, rough nie, and kinsuji which is a Soshu Den style. Their styles show small differences between Masakiyo, Motohira, and Masayuki.

Motohira and Masayuki's jihada are a tight ko-itame mixed with dark bluish kawari-tetsu (steel) which forms wide belt-like shapes like somewhat like chikei. From my experience, Masayuki's work seems to have more kawari-tetsu mixed in.

This kind of kawari-tetsu is often seen in Motohira school smiths' work, such as Mototake, and Motohiro, and in the work of Masayuki school smiths such as Matsumura, Masanao, and Otsuki Kiyoteru. We could say this is a one of these schools characteristic points.

Masakiyo's jihada are a tight ko-itame, sometimes mixed with nagare hada, and there are ji-nie and frequent chikei, but with a darker bluish kawari-tetsu in some very rare cases.

Masakiyo's hamon are a notare style mixed with small and large gunome, and has vertical variations. The top of the hamon has uneven yubashiri which can form groups of two or three yubashiri. The nioiguchi has vertical variations with dense and compact areas.

There are bright and clear dense ha-nie, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. Masayoshi's boshi frequently have hakikake and form a kaen (flame-like) shape.

Also, in Motohira and Masayuki's hamon we can see notare styles mixed with gunome and togariba. There are dense nie, and kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki, but there is not much prominent hataraki in the habuchi area. From the hamon's movement and activity, Masakiyo seems to be the better smith.

In the past, we have put Yasuyo blades on this page, and I wrote that Yasuyo and Masakiyo blades are not seen often when compared with Motohira and Masayuki. The reason is that their active period was in the mid-Edo period, and there was not a large demand for swords at that time. Another reason is that both smiths received permission to use the Ichiyo Aoi mon from the shogun, but both passed away not too long after receiving that permission.

My consultant from Kagoshima who read this article told me that is partly true, but even today if you go to their home town in Kagoshima, you can see many of their works. It has been long time since then, and I am wondering about the situation today. If I have a chance, I would like to visit there and see more of these swords.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

