

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
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Meito Kansho
Examination of Important Swords

Juyo Bijutsu Hin
Important Art Object

Type: Tachi
Mei: Motochika tsukuru
Owner: Mori Kinen (memorial) Shusui Museum

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 1 bu 7 rin (70.2 cm)
Sori: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)
Motohaba: 8 bu 3 rin (2.5 cm)
Sakihaba: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)
Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Kissaki length: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 3 bu 4 rin (19.2 cm)
Nakago sori: 5 rin (0.15 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, a narrow width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It has a standard thickness, there is a slightly shallow sori, and a short chu-kissaki. The jihada is itame mixed with mokume, some places show nagare hada, and some areas have a prominent hada. There are ji-nie, chikei, pale utsuri, and the upper half has jifu type utsuri. The hamon is based on ko-midare and mixed with ko-choji. There are frequent kinsuji, nie-suji, prominent sunagashi, and there are some small yubashiri. The boshi on the omote side is almost straight, and the ura is midarekomi. Both sides have round tip and a return. The nakago is suriage, the tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime, both old and new, are a slightly shallow sujichigai. There are four mekugi-ana, and one is closed. Above the the third mekugi ana, there is a slightly large three kanji mei written in a gyo-sho (a print-like) style, and placed toward the mune edge.

The Ko-Bizen smith Motochika has only five signed blades. There is one Juyo Bunkazai, two Juyo Bijutsuhin, one owned by the Tokyo national museum which was previously owned by the Tanzan shrine and presented to the Meiji emperor, and another fifth blade. Motochika produced a small number of blades. His hamon are based on a ko-midare pattern, and have a classic appearance. Among the many Ko-Bizen smiths' work, Motochika's jihada and hamon have thick dense nie, and sometimes frequent kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki.

Motochika's Juyo-Bunkazai work (formerly owned by Sir Ito Myoji) is quite different. The hamon is wide and is a gorgeous large choji midare, and is obviously in the Ichimonji style, and is supposed to have been made around the mid-Kamakura period.

In the "Meikan", Motochika is listed as a Ko-Bizen smith working around the Gennin (1224-5) and Kencho (1249-56) periods, and as a Fukuoka Ichimonji smith around the Shogen (1259-60) period.

From seeing these two different styles, there are two different theories. One theory says that there were two different smiths, and other theory says that from the similar signatures, Motochika's works were made by one smith. This means that his early work is in the Ko-Bizen style, and his later work is in the Ichimonji style. If we accept the one smith theory, from his gorgeous style he is a Ko-Bizen smith, but some of his work is considered Sue or late Ko-Bizen, from around the mid-Kamakura period. This is similar to Junkei's work which was shown in issue No. 717's Meito Kansho in the October Heisei 28 (2016) issue.

This Motochika tachi's hamon is based on ko-midare, is a complex and natural appearing midare, and is pleasing. There are a slightly uneven dense nie, which is one of Motochika's characteristic points. Also, with the prominent kinsuji, nie-suji, and sunagashi, inside of and on the and edge of the hamon, this simple tachi gains a dynamic feeling. According to some opinions, Soshu Den master smiths such as Masamune and Norishige are supposed to have admired Ko-Bizen work and Ko-Hoki work, and carefully studied them. When we look at this tachi, we can see this possibility.

However, this tachi's style and abundance of hataraki shows Motochika's distinctive character and features, his classic elegance, and is a masterpiece.

The mei is written in a reisho-like (old Chinese kanji) style gyosho and says "Motochika tsukuru" with three kanji. Most other Ko-Bizen smiths' mei are written with two kanji. It appears that Motochika added the third "tsukuru" kanji which is unusual, and we believe he was a unique smith.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

No.719 Tosogu Kanshou Tokubetsu Jujo Tosogu

**Kikka (chrysanthemum) kikkou (tortoise shell) zuicho (blissful bird)
en-somon (circle) zu (design) tsuba**

Mumei kokyo-shi (ancient mirror maker)

The tsuba reminds me of “hare” and “ke” in life. Hare and ke mean and “extraordinary” and “ordinary”, and in Western countries is translated to “devine” and “common”. A marriage is supposed to be hare or devine, and I appreciate following traditional customs with my family.

My mother-in-law respects and carefully follows hare customs. She sends special food to my family, starting with New Years’ fine foods, including a “nanakusa-garu” (a special vegetable gruel for January 7), roasted soybeans for setsubu (the day before the beginning of spring), and excellent inarizushi for hatsu-uma (festival for the last day of winter). On girls day’s (March 3) she sends hishi-mochi which is pink-colored fried senbei, and on boys day (May 5) she sends us kashiwa-mochi and iris leaves. On higan (the week of the equinox) she sends ohagi (bean cake) which is a child’s favorite food, and adults look forward to ebisu-ko (the autumn festival’s) sekihan (red bean rice) and kenchin (soup). Since the day I married, she has never missed these gifts for a period of over twenty years now.

At hare day, when I go out, I try to wear a kimono as much as I can. My mother prepared several kimono for me. Among them these, there is an egg shell colored obi with a tortoise shell design. This is my favorite obi, if a kimono’s color matches it. A solid color kimono looks fine with this obi and I enjoy wearing it.

Some people live calmly from day to day. However, I am emotional and struggle from day to day. I feel that I still barely have a controlled life, and depend on my mother and mother-in-law’s hare customs.

The tsuba is a gentle round shape, and the omote and ura have different designs with a kishomon and a circle. The shape of tortoise shell is not uniform, and more natural which is preferable. The chrysanthemum and bird composition shows humility but is full of life. The omote is bright cheerfully design, but the ura circle design is quite steady and quiet and the surface shows many layers of urushi on the shakudo which shows age. The tsuba style is elevated above simple ancient mirror craft work. The tsuba tries to engage a person’s feeling, and is produced by a human hand. The tsuba shows affection as it engages a person’s hand. At the same time, the tsuba has a lively appearance from hare and ke, and the cycle of life.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 719

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 719 issue Shijo Kantei To is January 5, 2017. 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 January 5, 2017 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 2 sun 8.5 bu (38.94 cm)

Sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 4 rin (2.85 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 7 bu (11.3 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a hira-zukuri wakizashi with an ihorimune. It is wide, long, and thick, and has a shallow sori. The jihada is masame hada, the entire hada is nagare hada, and is well forged and tight. There are thick dense ji-nie and frequent fine chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are fine hotsure at the edge of the hamon, kuichigai-ba, yubashiri, muneyaki, ko-ashi, a dense nioiguchi, dense nie, kinsuji, sunagashi and a bright nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kuri-jiri. The yasurime are osuji-chigai and there is one mekugi ana. On the omote side, towards the mune edge, there is a long kanji signature with a title, and the ura has a date.

This smith's work often has mizukage at the machi.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For November 2016

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

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

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium
Lecturer: Kubo Yasuko

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Un□ (den Unji)
Bizen □ 5 nen 6 gatsu pi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu

Sori: 8 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are thick dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, a slightly dark jihada, and pale utsuri.

Hamon: sugaha hamon with very shallow notare, and with gunome. There are ko-ashi, yo, and frequent ko-nie; some places show crumbled ara-nie and sunagashi, and the upper part has yubashiri; there are uneven nie uchinoke on the edge of the hamon, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight, with an o-maru, and the tip has hakikake.

The tachi is a little narrow, with a large wa-zori. This is a Bizen Kuni Unrui ubu tachi with a signature. The hamon is based on suguha, and from the shape, many people voted for the Yamashiro Kuni Rai school. Among the smiths from the Rai school, from the narrow gentle shape, many votes were for Rai Kunitoshi or Ryokai. But if were their work, many of their jihada would be nagare-hada.

The hamon is based on suguha with nie. There are sunagashi, uchinoke, and the hataraki at the edge of hamon are prominent. The shinogi is high, and from this characteristic, many voted for Yamato work, and that is understandable. But differences are seen in the shape which is a clear wazori, the tight jihada, and the o-maru boshi.

Also, some votes were for Bizen work such as Osafune Nagamitsu and Sanenaga. From the jihada and hamon style, this is understandable. But as I mentioned the shape is wa-zori, the jihada is dark, the hamon has frequent nie, and most important, the boshi is o-maru with a return. If you consider these characteristic points, the answer could be narrowed down to the Unrui smiths.

Among the Unrui school, from the shape, a peak Nambokucho Unrui name should present itself, and if you look at this as either Unjo or Unji work, it is a good answer. I will repeat again, that the hamon's edge hataraki is abundant, mainly ko-nie, but some parts show a tight nioiguchi and frequent nie, and some parts show nie extending over into the jihada. The NBTHK's Unji Juyo Bunkazai blade dated Showa 4 (1315) has strong nie, and from this characteristic, an Unji answer would be one a good choice.

In this tachi's signature, one kanji and the date are difficult to read. But part of the date can be read as "5 nen", if this is an Unji work, the date would be Showa, and if it were older, from the Einin period. It is possibly Unjo's work, and in either case, this is an interesting tachi.

Kantei To No. 2: tachi

Mei: Kagehide (Osafune)

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun

Sori: 6 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada. There are thick dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and pale midare utsuri.

Hamon: mainly choji and mixed with gunome and togariba; notably, on the omote there is a tight midare. There are frequent ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, ko-nie, long sunagashi, kinsuji and some areas at the top of the hamon have yubashiri.

Boshi: straight, very shallow notare, and a short return

This tachi has a mid-Kamakura period large koshizori shape. In the past, Kagehide was thought to be Osafune Mitsutada's younger brother. It is very rare to see something with his signature, and this sword is even ubu. The jihada has pale utsuri, the hamon is choji mixed with gunome, on the omote and the ura around the monouchi, the hamon is low. At the first impression this looks like Mitsutada and Nagamitsu's work. In voting, a majority of people voted for an Osafune smith associated with Mitsutada and Nagamitsu.

Looking at Kagehide's best work, the famous Juyo Bunkazai sword with the meibutsu "Kuronbo kiri", his hamon are a gorgeous choji midare, the same as Mitsutada's. The hamon is wide and almost reaches the shinogi. The entire hamon is tight, mixed with togariba and some areas produce a sharp feeling. Looking at the Juyo Token, these seem to be his characteristic points. Compared with direct line family smiths such as Mitsutada and Nagamitsu, Kagehide's utsuri seems to be a little pale. This tachi has pale midare utsuri, a high hamon, and a tight midare midare hamon mixed with togariba.

In voting, some people voted for Ichimonji smiths. The middle of the hamon is wide, especially on the ura side. If it were Ichimonji work, the entire hamon would have had high and low vertical alterations, more prominent choji, and the utsuri would be brighter when compared with this tachi.

Kantei To No 3: tanto

Mei: Yasuyoshi

Length: 8 sun 6 .5 bu

Sori: slight

Style: hira-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada; the hada is visible. There are fine chikei, and the entire jihada is whitish. There is bo-utsuri at the machi.

Hamon: ko-notare mixed with gunome; there are ashi, a nioiguchi, fine sunagashi, and yubashiri around the fukura.

Boshi: gunome midare; the tip is tsukiage and sharp, and there is a long return.

The tanto's shape is hira-zukuri, and it is wide, long, and has a slight sori.

The jihada is mokume with nagare hada, and the hada is visible. The entire jihada is whitish which is a Nambokucho period Kyushu characteristic. But among the Dai-Sa school, this is a unique tanto.

This means that this Yasuyoshi tanto is different from his teacher's work which shows a dense nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, and a bright nioiguchi. Yasuyoshi's hamon usually have a nioiguchi, and the utsuri are bo-utsuri at the machi or moto and along the hamon, while around the upper part of the hamon, the utsuri spreads into the ji. The boshi tip is tsukiage and sharp, the same as the school's, but the boshi often falls down to the hamon edge or up towards the mune edge. But this Tanto's boshi tip does not fall or drop.

In voting, many people admirably understood these characteristic points, and they voted for the correct answer in the first vote. Some people voted for Dai-Sa and Yukihiro as almost correct answers. But as I explained, their styles are a little different. Many voted for the same period's Bizen smiths such as Kanemitsu and Tomomitsu. From the style of hamon and nioiguchi type hamon, the sharp tip boshi, and straight utsuri which is seen sometimes in these smiths's work, those answers are understandable, But if were work by Kanemitsu and Tomomitsu, their jihada are usually not mixed with nagare hada, and are never whitish. Their hamon are wide, and mainly either notare or gunome. Most of their notare hamon have open valleys and gentle shapes. If it were gunome, it would be mixed with square shape gunome and kataochi gunome.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Fujiwara Hirozane

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame hada mixed with mokume, and the hada is visible. There are dense ji-nie, frequent chikei and mizukage below the machi.

Hamon: low narrow hamon; a shallow notare mixed with ko-notare and gunome. There are ashi, frequent nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, some yubashiri, tobiyaki and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight and slightly notare-komi; the omote has togari; the ura has a komaru and return.

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

This is a wide sword, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a long chu-kissaki and a shallow sori. This shape is seen during the Nambokucho period, and later during the Keicho-Shinto and Shinshinto periods. The katana's jihada and hamon both have frequent nie, and there are abundant hataraki such as kinsuji, sunagashi, yubashiri, and tobiyaki. From this, some people looked at this as a Nambokucho Shidzu school work.

But the katana has funbari at the koshimoto, there is mizukage at the machi, and the bo-hi has marudome above the machi. From these details, you can tell that this is obviously an ubu shape.

The jihada is itame mixed with mokume and the hada is visible. The hada is called zanguri or a rough hada. The entire hamon has a worn down nioiguchi, there is a dense and tight nioiguchi with large and small nie. The nioiguchi has alterations or variability and uneven areas. This kind of jihada and hamon are Keicho period Horikawa school characteristics. Also, mizukage at machi is seen often, and this is the school's characteristic point.

This is the Horikawa school master smith Hirozane's katana. In the past, some opinions were that Hirozane was the same person as Kunihiro. Today's theory is that Hirozane worked very closely with his teacher Kunihiro, and maybe made many of Kunihiro's dai-saku blades (blades made by someone other than Kunihiro and signed by Kunihiro).

Kantei To No. 5: tanto

Mei: Hizen kuni Tadayoshi
Kurimono Munenaga

Length: 9 sun 2 bu

Sori: slightly uchizori

Design: hira-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: tight ko-itame and some nagare hada. There are thick dense ji-nie and fine chikei.

Hamon: based on notare, mixed with ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, a dense nioiguchi with ko-nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and the nioiguchi is bright and clear.

Boshi: shallow notarekomi; there are hakikake, the tip is togari (sharp), and there is a komaru.

Horimono: on the omote is in a framed bonji and a Fudo myo-o ukibori (relief); on the ura there are bonji with katana-hi and a hoso-hi (narrow groove) carved through the nakago.

This blade is wide, thick, and long, which is a Keicho Shinto period tanto shape. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, the hamon is based on notare, there is a bright and clear nioiguchi, and a Fudo myo-o horimono. From these details, it is possible to judge this as work by Umetada Myoju and one of his students, the Shodai Tadayoshi or Harima no kami Teruhiro.

As you know, the Hizen Nabeshima family ordered the Shodai Tadayoshi to study with the Myoju school along with Munenaga. Tadayoshi studied sword making and Munenaga learned to-shin cho-koku (making horimono or carving on a sword) and they established the prosperous Hizen-to school. Because of this, his teacher's name Myoju is an almost correct answer. But when compared, Myoju's notare hamon have more large vertical alterations, and the nioiguchi is tighter. In this tanto, the notare hamon valleys have clumped or tightly grouped nie, and this is a characteristic of Hizen-to. Also, many of Teruhiro's horimono are simple, and he does not have such detailed horimono. Considering these facts, the Shodai Tadayoshi name is most reasonable.

Because of the tanto's excellent horimono, some people voted for Kunihiro and Yasutsugu. But these smiths' jihada are itame mixed with mokume, the hada is visible, and their hamon nioiguchi are worn down.

Hizen-to Fudo myo-o horimono on a sword are very characteristic. Myo-o's right elbow (on the left side) is always stretched, the hip is curved or angled away from a vertical line with the shoulders, and the eyes and eyebrows are lifted up.

Munenaga's successor Yoshinaga has the same style, but Yoshinaga never carved inside of a frame, but carved directly on the sword's flat surface.

From the Tadayoshi signature, this is supposed to be from around Genna 4 (1618). Munenaga's active period is supposed to be Keicho 15-16 (1610-11) to Genna 7-8 (1621-22) or over ten years. Because of this, after the Shodai Tadayoshi changed his name to Musashi daijo Tadayoshi in Genna 10 (1624), Munenaga's horimono are no longer seen on Tadayoshi's blades.

Shijo Kantei To No 717 (in the, 2016 October issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 717 in the October

issue is a tachi by Osafune Tsuguyuki (Kosori).

This tachi has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. Although it is suriage, it has a large koshizori, the tip has sori, it is thick for the width, and there is a chu kissaki. From this you can judge this as work from the end of the Nambokucho period to the early Muromachi period.

The Kosori school's characteristic jihada is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, and the hada is visible. There are chikei, some thick kawari-tetsu shaped chikei, jifu, a slightly uneven hada, and slightly pale utsuri.

The school's characteristic hamon are: 1) a mix of different hamon elements, such as ko-gunome, ko-choji, ko-togariba, square shaped gunome, kataochi gunome, and intricate and irregular midare hamon, just like on this tachi; (2) based on ko-notare and ko-gunome; and (3) round top continuous ko-gunome hamon. All styles of hamon have a low height for the width of the blade, and usually are small or narrow. Many of the boshi are midarekomi and the tips are togari (pointed or sharp).

In voting, many people voted for Tsuguyuki. Beside Tsuguyuki, people voted for other Kosori smiths such as Moromitsu, Hidemitsu and Tsunehiro, and some people voted for Masamitsu.

The Kosori smiths' works are similar, and it is difficult to judge an exact smith's name. Because of this, any Kosori smith's name was treated as a correct answer.

Many of Masamitsu's works are similar to Kosori work, so his name is also treated as a correct answer.

Besides these correct and nearly correct answers, a few people voted for Motoshige.

Among the Kosori school swords, tachi hamon have somewhat prominent kaku (square)-gunome, small saka-ashi, and are similar in style to Motoshige. Because of this, the Motoshige answer is understandable.

However, Motoshige's active period is recognized today as being from the Jowa (?) to Jo-ji period, and his active time coincided with the peak of the Nambokucho period. Because of this, he would never have made this kind of tachi shape, which is prominently thick for its standard width, and is a shape seen from the end of the Nambokucho to the early Muromachi period.

Among Motoshige works, besides square gunome and regularly continuous hamon, there are some hamon mixed with square gunome, ko-choji, and ko-gunome which is somewhat similar to this tachi.

We tried to compare a Motoshige hamon (oshigata 1) to this tachi's hamon (oshigata 2). At the top of Motoshige's hamon, the square gunome, ko-choji, and ko-gunome are the same height, although there is a mix of several types of elements (gunome, choji, etc). However, one still has the impression of a well-defined and shaped midare hamon. Tsuguyuki's hamon are a mixture of more different kinds of elements or features, and look intricate and irregular. Also, the top of the hamon has small variations or alterations, and many hamon features are

small and sharp. The habuchi for Motoshige do not have such sharp and well defined features, and this is a major difference between them. From these details, you should be able to decide which the period the sword was made in, and the location where the sword was made.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai