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Examination of Important Swords

Juyo Bunkazai
Important Art Object

Type: Tachi
Mei: Bitchu no kuni ju Yoshitsugu
Shochu 3 nen 3 gatsu pi
Owner: Fujishima shrine

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 1 bu 3 rin (76.15 cm)
Sori: 8 bu 4 rin (2.55 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)
Sakihaba: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)
Motokasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Kissaki length: 8 bu 6 rin (2.6 cm)
Nakago length: 7 sun 4 bu 6 rin (22.6 cm)
Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary

This is a narrow shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. It has a standard thickness, there is a large sori, and a short chu-kissaki. The jihada is a tight ko-itame and on the bottom half of the blade it is mixed with ohada. There are ji-nie, some small chikei, and at the koshimoto there is a pale mizukage. The entire jihada has fine stripe-like dan utsuri. The hamon is a wide suguha, and at the koshimoto, and around the monouchi the hamon is mixed with ko-notare and ko-gunome. There are ashi, ko-ashi, yo, and on the ura side's bottom half there are some saka-ash. In the center of the blade, there is a medium width suguha with a tight nioiguchi. The entire hamon is a nioiguchi type with ko-nie. The boshi is straight with a round tip and some hakikake and yubashiri. The nakago is ubu, the tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are o-suji chigai. There are two

mekugi-ana . Above the the first original mekugi ana on the omote side in the center, there is a slightly large long kanji mei, and the ura has a date.

At the NBTHK, in discussing the Bitchu Aoe school, we classified work before the mid-Kamakura period as “Ko-Aoe”, and work made after this period as “ Aoe”. After the latter half of the Kamakura period, Aoe school styles were not uniform, so it is difficult to separate early period and late period Aoe work. Roughly, the characteristic jihada becomes finer and tighter, and we often see sumihada (i.e. samehada). The utsuri are different with the early period utsuri being uneven jifu-utsuri, and dan-utsuri start to be seen from around this period. The suguha hamon do not change, but the later hamon have saka-ashi, a tight suguha with saka-ashi, and during the Nanbokuchō period the hamon styles change and become elaborate with patterns such as gorgeous choji hamon as people know. Possibly because a nioiguchi is associated with a refined jihada, many of the later jihada are brighter than Ko-Aoe work, and the jihada and hamon are clear. The mei location gradually changes from the ura to the omote, and by the the Showa period (1312-17) at the end of the Kamakura period, they show more information besides a date and location (Masu, Koi, Aoe) and a title (Sabyoejo, Uemonjo, Kyobu, ect). But the location of their mei are in the center of the nakaago and formed with large kanji which is reminiscent of the Ko-Aoe style.

Uemonjo Yoshitsugu is one of the representatives of the Aoe school’s master smiths in the late Kamakura period, and there are a couple of signed blades available today. There is a tachi classified as Juyo Bunkazai owned by Hie Shrine signed “ Bishu Masu ju Uemonjo Yoshitsugu saku”, and there another blade signed on the ura side which is supposed to his early work. Today, his earliest signed date is on this tachi dated Shochu 3 (1326). But the Umetada meikan lists a date of Genkyo 2 (1322) on a signed Bichu kuni Aoe ju Uemonjo Yoshitsugu”. After dates from the Kareki to Gentoku periods (1326-31), Yoshitsugu signed without adding a title. Besides this tachi, he has tanto, and they have suguha hamon in the earlier period’s style, and many of them have a tight nioiguchi and clear hamon.

This tachi has a large koshizori and the original ubu tachi shape, is slightly narrow, and there is a small kissaki, and this is a typical shape from the end of the Kamakura period. At the koshimoto, the jihada is mixed with o-hada, but otherwise is a tight ko-itame hada, and the hada is fine and visible, and is a chirimen hada style. From the moto to saki, there are fine lines of utsuri, which are double, and in some places triple lines, and this shows the school’s characteristic points very well. The ura side’s bottom half has a suguha hamon with saka-ashi, and is a wide hamon, and in some places, covers half of the ji. The boshi has a wide yakiba, and is healthy and shows it’s original form, and this is very special.

In the Fujishima shrine (in Fukui city), the owner of this tachi, the main diety is the emperor’s famous general Nitta Yoshisada. The shrine was founded in Banji 3 by the Fukui clan’s fourth generation lord Matsudaira Mitsumichi. The location is a historic site at Tomyo Temple on Nawate Nitta hill where Yoshisada passed way in Engen 3 or 1338 (or Ryakureki 1), where there was an iron kabuto with silver inlay

which is classified as Juyo Bunkazai, and which is supposed to have been used by Yoshisada. A stone monument in the location commemorates this.

The tachi was donated to the shrine by the 16th generation of the Tokugawa Shogun family Iesato who was a nephew of the 16th generation Fukui clan lord Matsudaira Yoshinaga (Shungaku) in Meiji 10.

However, this is Yoshisugu's oldest dated tachi which we can clearly identify today. It is an important reference material which allows us to examine and study the school's style and changes.

No.720

Tosogu Kanshou
Tokubetsu Juyo Tosogu

Enko Hogetsu (monkey and moon) zu (theme) tsuba.

Mei : Yamashiro kuni Fushimi ju Kaneie

From historical times, Kaneie along with Nobuie were celebrated iron tsuba makers. Kaneie tsuba are thin and have a unique moist appearance in the iron. The Enko Hogetsu theme shown here is a legend about a monkey holding a branch which he used to try to catch the moon which was reflected on water. However, he could not reach the moon and fell into the water and died. This story means that if you try to do more than you are capable of, you will likely fail.

The tsuba shows a sly monkey stretching his long arm to catch the moon, and in a moment he might almost reach the moon. But soon, he will disappear into the pond. The tsuba shows a breathtaking moment and contains the entire story.

This theme is Kaneie's favorite subject, and beside this tsuba there are a few more showing the same subject. Even among this group of tsuba, this one has good well colored iron and an excellent atmosphere, and exhibits the theme very well.

Kaneie is supposed to have moved suiboku-ga (black and white ink painting) themes to tosogu or sword fittings. He was able to exhibit the iron's characteristic charm and created unlimited depth in a small tsuba. He is a master smith who established a very rare high level of technique, and this tsuba fully shows his ability.

Explanation by Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 720

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 720 issue Shijo Kantei To is February 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 February 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 1 sun 4.5 bu (34.69 cm)

Sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 4 rin (2.85 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 1 bu 7 rin (9.6 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a hira-zukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune. It is wide, long, thin for the width and has a shallow sori. The jihada is itame mixed with masame hada, the jihada is visible. There are thick dense ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The slightly large round top unique choji hamon stands out. There are tobiyaki, yubashiri, muneyaki, ashi, yo, a bright nioiguchi, thick nie, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. The horimono on the omote and ura are katana-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu and the nakago tip is kuri-jiri. The yasurime are kate-sagari and there are two mekugi ana. On the omote side, under the mekugi ana, almost on the center, there is a two kanji signature.

This smith's work often has a long signature, and many of his swords have dates.

Shijo Kantei To No. 718 (in the November, 2016 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 718 in the November issue is a katana by the ni-dai Kawachi no kami Kunisuke (naka Kawachi) .

This katana has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori and a short chu-kissaki. From these details, you can judge this as work from the Kanbun Shinto period.

The nidai Kunisuke does not have many dated swords. There are dated blades in the Shoho, Keian, Banji, Kanbun, and Genroku eras.

His active period spanned the Kanei, Shoho, Kanbun, Jikyo, and Genroku eras. Due to this, his shapes reflect the Shoho period Shinto shape, and the Genroku period Shinto shape. In particular, many of his swords have a Kanbun Shinto shape, just like this katana. Sometimes these katana are over 2 shaku 5 sun long and have this shape.

His jihada are mainly a tight ko-itame with dense ji-nie and fine chikei, which is a typical refined Osaka Shinto style.

The nidai Kunisuke's early period work around the Shoho and Keian (1644-1651) eras show typical Shinto shapes for the period. Around the Kanei to Shoho period (1624-1654), his hamon have a long yakidashi at the moto, choji mixed with gunome, and are rather wide, and have slightly high and low width midare hamon, and these details are very similar to the Shodai Kunisuke's work.

Around this period, his signature has 7 kanji: "Kawachi no kami Fujiwara Kunisuke" and the kanji style is similar to the shodai's. Because of this, some people feel that this is not the nidai's work, but is the shodai's late work.

The nidai's primary characteristic hamon show his original fist-shape choji. Besides this, we sometimes see notare hamon mixed with choji and gunome, or a suguha hamon.

The fist-shape choji hamon are made by fusing several continuous choji into one group or cluster. Since this cluster is then a single group or wave, the overall shape or impression looks like a square shaped fist. Often, the fist-shape clusters are mixed with the usual choji, and there are slight vertical variations in the midare hamon.

Between his midare waves, there are often tobiyaki, frequent ashi where the tips of the ashi are round, and a nioiguchi with prominent ko-nie. Sometimes we see abundant nie.

On this katana, the hamon details are not obvious or easy to observe. Notice the valleys between the fist-shaped choji groups or clusters. These valleys have round bottoms, and sometimes they have a pinched waist above the valley bottoms.

The majority of Kunisuke's boshi are straight with a round tip.

His nakago tips or jiri are a narrow ha-agari kurijiri, his yasurime are o-sujichigai, and often we see kesho-yasuri (decorative file work).

His signatures sometimes have 7 kanji: "Kawachi no kami Fujiwara Kunisuke". However, they usually have 5 kanji: "Kawachi no kami Kunisuke", and are signed on the omote towards the mune edge.

This is a typical nidai Kunisuke work, and the majority of the people voted for the correct answer.

As an almost correct answer, a few people voted for the shodai Kunisuke.

Many of the shodai Kunisuke's works are just like I explained above. Besides this, there are Keicho Shinto shaped swords with notare hamon mixed with gunome and togariaba, which is Echigo no kami Kunitoshi's style, but we never seen this kind of fist shape choji hamon in his work.

Also, the fist-shaped choji hamon's originator is the nidai Kunisuke, not the shodai, and this is an important point

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.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai