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Heisei 29 Shinsaku Meito Ten

Prince Takamatsu memorial prize

Type: Tachi

Mei: Yoshihiro

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 6 bu 4 rin(77.7 cm)

Sori: 6 bu 8 rin (2.08 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 06 rin (3.2 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 3 rin (2.2 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 2 rin (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 7 bu (20.3 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu (0.3 rin)

Commentary

This is a wide shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune and the widths at the moto and saki are not too different. There is a shallow sori, and a short chu-kissaki which resembles an inokubi-kissaki. The jihada is a tight ko-itame, and some places have nagare hada. There are dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and there are some clear jifu type midare utsuri. The hamon's vertical alterations are not prominent, and the hamon is based on choji mixed with gunome, ko-gunome, square gunome, and togari. There are frequent ashi and yo, the hamon has a nioiguchi, and there is a bright and clear nioiguchi. The boshi is straight with a komaru, and the tip has hakikake. The horimono on both the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, and the nakago tip is a shallow ha-agari kiri-jiri. The yasurime are sujichigai and there is one mekugi-ana. On the omote side, on the center there is a large size two kanji signature made with a thick chisel.

The smith, Kubo Yoshihiro, comes from Amami Oshima in Kagoshima prefecture, and is 52 years old. After he graduated from Chiba University's graduate school in Heisei 1 (1989), he became a student of Yoshihara Yoshindo. Under his teacher's influence, he devoted himself to learning sword making, and in Heisei 6, he

received his sword making license. At the same time he left his teacher's shop, and he started working as the only sword smith at the Hitachi Metal Company's Torigami Mokutan Sen (a factory dedicated to using charcoal as a fuel to make pig iron) in Yokota City in Shimane prefecture. In the same year his first exhibit entry received an Excellent Prize and the Shinjin-sho (an award for the best new smith).

From the following year, Heisei 7, to Heisei 13 (1995-2001) Kubo worked for the Murage (the supervisor who oversaw steel making) at the NBTHK Tatara. Kubo studied iron and steel making while thinking about making Japanese swords. Besides making swords, in Heisei 12 (2000) he became a visiting researcher for the Hitachi Metal and Metallurgy Research Laboratory. From his experiences with Japanese steel making studies and metallurgy studies, he was able to present a paper in the Japanese Iron and Steel Association research journal. He is a rare example in the sword world of a scholar who is also a sword smith.

In Heisei 13 (2001), he built shop in Arihara city in Hiroshima prefecture, and officially became an independent sword smith. Every year at the Shinsaku Meito Ten, he received a high ranking prize, in Heisei 19 (2007) he received the top excellent prize, and last year he received the Prince Takamatu Memorial Prize. From these efforts, he has earned a highly respected reputation.

This tachi hamon is based on a nioiguchi, and there are clear utsuri, and Kubo has established his Bizen Den style which shows many clear details in his work. The width of the nioiguchi and the hamon's vertical alterations are different from strictly classical work. The hamon's high and low vertical alterations are not prominent, and there are several different themes in the hamon composition. The style reminds us of the "Go Takase Nagamitsu" sword which is classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin.

The jihada is a very tight and clear ko-itame hada. In the utsuri, light and shadow is emphasized, and we can recognize the improvements in his skill from the last time he was awarded the Prince Takamatsu Prize.

Besides being modeled after classic Ko-Bizen work, the gentle nioiguchi is bright, clear, and fresh looking. This is a well made work, and does not have a flamboyant or flashy feeling, and from these observations, the tachi received a high score. This work is recognized as showing a strong spirit in its approach to Bizen Den master work, and there is a very high level of skill shown here. This is an appropriate work to receive the top prize.

After winning this prize, Kubo was awarded the honor of becoming a Mukansa, and his future work is greatly anticipated. Please look for this sword to be exhibited in the new NBTHK opening exhibit "Shinsaku Meito Ten".

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Shijo Kantei To No. 725

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 725 issue Shijo Kantei To is July 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 July 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: tanto

Length: 7 sun 8 bu (23.63 cm)

Sori: uchi-sori

Motohaba: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 2 bu 7 rin (9.9 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with an ihorimune and standard width. There is a strong uchi-zori and a poor fukura style. The jihada is a tight ko-itame hada. There are fine ji-nie, and whitish utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are some hotsure at the edge of the hamon, a bright nioiguchi, ko-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu and the nakago tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are higaki and there is one mekugi ana. On the omote side, on the center under the mekugi ana, there is a two kanji signature.

This school produces utsushi-mono, and this smith does this sometimes too. Usually, in many of his works, hotsure are not prominent.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For May, 2017

The swords discussed below were shown in the May, 2017, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: May 13, 2017 (2nd Saturday of May)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Iida Hisashi

Kantei To No. 1: tanto

Mei: Yoshimitsu

Length: 7 sun 3 bu

Sori: very shallow uchizori

Style: hira- zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are thick dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, and clear nie utsuri.

Hamon: narrow suguha, mixed with ko-gunome at the koshimoto. There are ko-ashi, kinsuji, frequent ko-nie, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: there are frequent nie; the boshi is straight with a komaru.

Horimono: the omote and ura have gomabashi.

This is an Awataguchi school Toshiro Yoshimitsu tanto. He was called one of “the three best smiths in the world” along with Masamune and Go Yoshihiro, and since his work was desired by Daimyo, he enjoyed a very high level of prestige. This work is narrow with a standard thickness, and long for the width. It is uchizori, which is typical in the latter half of the Kamakura period for tanto shapes. Looking at the jihada and the hamon, the jihada is a very tight ko-itame, and there are thick dense ji-nie and frequent chikei, along with an Awataguchi school characteristic nashi-ji. The hamon is a refined, narrow suguha. There are frequent nie and a bright and clear nioiguchi. Since historical times, Yoshimitsu’s characteristic points were considered to be: continuous ko-gunome hamon which appears like a line of red beans in the yakizashi, and a very narrow width around fukura. This gunome hamon is not a clear typical shape, and there are frequent ashi, and around the monouchi, you can see his characteristic points very well. His characteristic boshi is supposed to have very dense nie, more than in any other place, and from the top of the boshi in the jihada, there are narrow lines of nie extending downwards. This tanto does not have such nie lines, but there are dense nie in the boshi area.

This work has goma-bashi horimono on the omote and ura at the koshimoto. The same horimono on the omote and ura sides is one of the Awataguchi school’s characteristic points. In addition, the horimono is very close to the mune edge, and this is one of Yoshimitsu’s characteristic points.

In voting, people seemed to recognize these characteristic points and the majority of people voted for Yoshimitsu. Some people voted for other smiths from the latter half of the Kamakura period such as Rai Kunitoshi and the Soshu school’s Shintogo Kunimitsu. However, neither of these smiths use Yoshimitsu’s characteristic horimono and the red bean style ko-gunome hamon. Rai Kunitoshi’s works usually have nie in the jihada and hamon, and his chikei are more gentle when compared to Awataguchi work. Shintogo Kunimitsu’s jihada and hamon have more prominent chikei and kinsuji.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Musashi Daijo Fujiwara Korekazu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu

Sori: 7 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: ko-itame hada with strong nagare hada which becomes a masame type jihada. There are frequent ji-nie, chikei and midare utsuri.

Hamon: based on choji mixed with gunome; it is a beautiful active midare hamon. There are ko-ashi, yo, a tight edge defining the hamon, and some ko-nie.

Boshi: the omote is straight and the ura is a shallow notare; both sides have a komaru and return.

This is a katana by the Edo Ishido school's Musashi Daijo Korekazu. The Ishido school is known for its work in reproducing out of fashion classic Ichimonoji type swords with beautiful active double choji hamon. This is almost as good as classic work, with an uplifting feeling and gorgeous midare hamon. The differences from classic examples are: the widths at the moto and saki are different, with a little sori, and a Kanbun Shinto shape. The jihada has utsuri, but the chikei are not prominent when compared with classic work. There is a slightly whitish jihada, and the strong nagare hada becomes masame hada. The shinogi-ji has a Shinto type characteristic masame hada. The hamon has high and low alterations, and there is a gorgeous hamon, but the edge of the hamon is tight, and there is less hataraki in the hamon. The boshi is straight, with a komaru and a neat return, and the entire katana has a less-than-classic look. In voting, people recognized these characteristics, and a majority of people voted for Ishido school smiths.

This katana's striking feature was supposed to be a strong masame type jihada. Among the Ishido school smiths who produced this kind of blade with an entirely masame hada were Edo Ishido Korekazu, Fukuoka Ishido Koretsugu, and Fukuoka Moritsugu. Usually, these three smith's characteristic style include these features: many of Edo Ishido Korekazu's swords have a standard width and shallow sori, which is a typical Kanbun Shinto shape. Fukuoka Ishido swords are usually wider with a larger sori, and Korekazu's hamon are a smaller midare hamon. The Fukuoka Ishido hamon are the opposite of Korakazu's hamon with high and low alterations, many of their hamon extend very high to the shinogi line.

This sword has a large sori and a large gorgeous hamon, and from this, the Fukuoka Ishido name is understandable. But the school's midare hamon are mixed with gunome which are described as the "head of a squid", and the top of hamon has a sharp boundary, and there are some small round triangle shaped unique

choji. Their boshi are also different from Edo Ishido's characteristic straight boshi with a komaru and clear defined return. The Fukuoka Ishido school has many boshi which are a midarekomi and have a long return.

Kantei To No 3: tanto

Mei: Kanesaki

Length: 7 sun 3 bu

Sori: uchizori

Style: hira-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight fine ko-itame hada mixed with nagare hada. There are dense ji-nie, and whitish utsuri.

Hamon: narrow suguha; there is a tight nioiguchi, and some ko-nie.

There are ashi, yo, ko-nie, and the upper half has small tobiyaki.

Boshi: straight, with a komaru and long return

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

This tanto has a fine ko-itame hada, there is utsuri, and a very clear suguha hamon. From these details, the first impression reminds us of a Kamakura period smith's work such as Kunitoshi. But if you look at the shape carefully, compared with those seen in Kamakura period tanto, the uchizori is too strong, the fukura is poor, and when looking at the tip from the mune edge, the tip suddenly becomes thin. This kind of shape is seen in the late Muromachi period, especially in many of the Sue Seki smiths' work.

Besides the different shape, looking at the jihada and hamon carefully, compared with work from the Kamakura period, the jihada is a fine tight ko-itame mixed with nagare hada, chikei are not prominent, there is a weak jihada, and maybe because there is less ji-nie, the utsuri is whitish. This is different from the Kamakura period Rai school's nie utsuri. The hamon edge is too tight and there are less hataraki. The boshi's width in the return (kaeri) is wider than the boshi on the hamon edge, and these characteristics are different from classic work.

This is a Sue-Seki Kanesaki tanto. Among the Sue-Seki smiths, besides being based on gunome and togariba, Seki smiths also made midare hamon. Sometimes the hamon are modeled after Kamakura period Yamashiro and Soshu hamon, and this is one of them.

In this kind of Seki smith work, it is difficult to identify the smith. At this time if you look at this as a Sue Seki smith's work, that is treated as a correct answer.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Izumi no kami Fujiwara Kunisada

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 4 sun 1 bu

Sori: 3.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: the upper part of the shinogi-ji and the ihorimune are filed down at the koshimoto.

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

Hamon: long straight yakidashi at the moto, and above this, the hamon is gunome mixed with choji and ko-notare. There are ko-ashi, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, some muneyaki, and a bright and clear hamon.

Boshi: yakikomi at the yokote; notarekomi, with a komaru and a slightly long return.

Horimono: on the omote and ura on the shinogi-ji there are wide hi; on the hira-ji (the ji) there are narrow hi; both types are finished with maru-dome.

The entire jihada is tight ko-itame hada. The hamon has a yakidashi at the moto, and above this, a dense nioiguchi and a midare hamon with choji mixed with gunome. The upper half of the hamon has muneyaki. From this, the majority of people voted for the Osaka Shinto founder Shin Kunisada and Shin Kunisuke.

From the signature, and the “守” and “國” kanji style, this is supposed to be from around Keian 2 (1649) either just before or after the Nidai Kunisada (Inoue Shinkai) made dai-mei for the Shodai's work. The style follows Shin Kunisada's work, so both the Shodai and the Nidai name are accepted as correct. There is a wide hamon and a dense nioiguchi when compared with Shin Kunisada's work, and we see Shinkai's characteristic bright and clear jihada and hamon. In the same school as Shin Kunisada, and working in a similar style we find Shin Kunisuke, so his name is also a proper answer. If this were work by Shin Kunisuke, the yakidashi's width becomes wider towards the tip, and this is different from this yakidashi where the width does not change. Shin Kunisuke's choji hamon are more prominent than this one, and many boshi are wide. Also, although rare, Shin Kunisuke has produced this kind of bright and clear jihada and hamon.

Kantei To No 5: katana

Mei: Fujiwara Shigekiyo (Takada)

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: uniform tight ko-itame hada mixed with jifu; there are ji-nie and pale utsuri.

Hamon: ko-gunome mixed with togari-ba, ko-choji, and ko-midare. There are ko-ashi, fine yo, and a tight nioiguchi.

Boshi: there is a tight well defined hamon edge which is midare-komi; on the omote there is a komaru; the ura has togari and a return.

This is a thick sword and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It is wide with a long kissaki, and at the the first impression, it looks like a like Keicho Shinto or Shinshinto shape. But there is a high shinogi-ji, and even though it is shallow, there is a sakizori. This kind of shape was seen in the Keicho period, and earlier at the end of the Muromachi period in the Tensho and Bunroku periods (1573-95).

In voting, from the pale utsuri as well as the small hamon, the bright nioiguchi ko-gunome hamon mixed with ko-choji, komidare, and the relatively beautiful midare hamon, many people voted for Sue Bizen smiths such as Katsumitsu and Kiyomitsu. The jihada is tight fine ko-itame, but the jihada is too tight, there is no hada pattern, chikei are not prominent, there is a whitish jihada mixed with a different color jifu type jihada, and compared with Sue Bizen work, the steel jigane is weak. The midare hamon is too small when compared with Sue Bizen work, and also the edge of the hamon is too tight. There are less ashi and yo, the ashi and yo are fine and hard. The jihada is whitish, similar to Sue Bizen but quite different, and from this, a Yamato Kanefusa school answer is understandable. But in Kanefusa's work, it is very rare to see this kind of tight fine jihada. Many of his jihada are visible and contain nagare hada, and a rough jihada. His hamon have more prominent nie when compared with Takada and Sue Bizen work. Sometimes there are uneven nie which appear to be disintegrating or decomposing.

This sword is an end-of-the-Muromachi period Bungo Takada school Shigekiyo katana. At the end of the Muromachi period the Takada school produced many smiths such as Shigemori, Shigenori, Nagamori and Muneyuki. They made both midareba and suguha hamon. Either hamon has its characteristic points such as a tight hamon edge and fine and hard ashi and yo. Muromachi period Takada school work is not often used for Kantei-to and seems to be a difficult subject. But people understand their characteristics and differences from other schools, and many people voted for Takada school smiths.

In the Takada school, the individual smiths do not have strong characteristic points, so if you look at this as end-of-Muromachi period Takada school work, it is a good answer. In the same Takada school, Shigenori and Nagmori are a little earlier in the Muromachi period, around the Eisho period (1504-20). Their shapes are different from this one, the widths and boshi are standard and there is a prominent saki-zori shape.

Shijo Kantei To No. 723 (in the April, 2017 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No. 723 in the April issue is a katana by Higo no kami Yoshitsugu.

This katana is a little wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a slightly large sori and a chu-kissaki. The hamon style is from around the Kanbun and Enpo periods (1673-1703). Edo Shinto work often has a continuous gunome hamon, and from this, most people voted for Yoshitsugu. For another proper answer people voted for Hojoji school smiths such as Masahiro and Sadakuni. Beside these, a few people voted for Nakasone Okimasa.

Yoshitsugu is supposed to belong to either the Hojoji Masahiro school or the Hojoji Kunimasa school. Around the Kanbun period (1661-72) he received the Higo no kami title and was active mainly in the Edo area. Later, he was hired by the Shimazu family and moved to Satsuma. He is supposed to have returned to Edo later, and the date is not certain, but there are Enpo to Genroku period works from there.

The Hojoji school smiths such as Masahiro and Sadakuni's works have a standard width, but have a very shallow bo-sori (straight) shape, chu-suguha with continuous ko-gunome hamon, and there are frequent gunome-like ashi. Their favorite style is based on suguha with a small hamon, and each gunome shape is clear, and their gunome are a small.

Among the school's smiths, Yoshitsugu's shapes with a relatively large sori stand out. His individual gunome are clear and are a large size, just like this example, and these are his characteristic points.

Many of his works have round topped continuous gunome, like Kotetsu's Juzuba style. Besides this, there are some high and low vertical alterations in a notare style hamon mixed with a gunome hamon.

Yoshitsugu's hamon have a dense nioiguchi, dense nie mixed with rough (ara) nie, prominent kinsuji and sunagashi, and imozuru style nie-suji. His hamon have strong ha-nie, and these details are unusual in Edo Shinto work, and such details are more likely to be seen in Satsuma swords, and this is pointed out as one of his characteristic points.

His nakago tips are kurijiri, the yasurime are kate-sagari, and his signatures are on the omote under the mekugiana, made with long kanji and toward the mune edge.

However, besides Yoshitsugu, Edo Hojoji smiths often had saidan-mei. Many of them are written in kinzogan (gold wire inlay), and most of the tester's mei are by

Yamano Kaemon Nagahisa and Kanjuro Hisahide. On Yoshitsugu's swords Hisahide's saidan-mei are rare. Often, saidan-mei by Aida Danshiro, Takao Jindaiyu, Mori Kosuke are seen, as well as by the Yamano family. Also, they are not kinzogan-mei: Yoshitsugu himself seems to have inscribed them.

Okimasa is supposed to have been active at the same time as Yoshitsugu, and naturally many of his blades have a large sori. Also, you can recognize the two continuous grouped gunome hamon like on we see on this katana. Okimasa's hamon has tobiyaki and muneyaki which appear as though clay was scraped off of the ji before yaki ire. Some ha-nie extend into the jihada and become rough looking. In most of his signatures, either the first kanji is started on the mekugiana, or the first kanji starts a little above the mekugiana.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai