

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

ISSUE NUMBER 735

April, 2018

Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Kokuho

Type: Tanto

Mei: Yoshimitsu (Meibutsu: Goto Toshiro)
Owner: Tokugawa Museum

Length: 9 sun 1.5 bu (27.7cm)
Sori: Uchizori
Motohaba: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)
Nakago length: slightly less 3 sun 8 bu (11.5 cm)
Nakago sori: none

Commentary

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with a mitsumune. It is slightly wide and thick, and the tip is uchizori. The kitae is a well forged and tight ko-itame hada. There are abundant ji-nie, nie-utsuri, and the omote and ura around the fukura have jifu. The hamon is a wide suguha style shallow notare mixed with ko-gunome and ko-choji. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant ko-nie, some sunagashi, and a pale nijuba. There is a bright and clear nioiguchi. The boshi around the fukura is nie-kuzure. Noticeably, on the omote side there are frequent yubashiri, and on both sides, the tip has strong hakikake which produces a kaen or a flame-like appearance.

The nakago is ubu (it is very slightly machi okuri), and the nakago tip is a kuri-jiri. The yasurime are a shallow kate-sagari. There are four mekugi-ana. On the omote side along the center, there is large size two kanji signature.

Toshiro Yoshimitsu is famous as the last master smith from the Awataguchi school which was successful for a century during the Kamakura period in the Kyoto area. He is thought to be Kuniyoshi's son or student. Kuniyoshi has a blade dated

in the Kenji to Koan period (1275-88) in an old oshigata, and from this evidence, the Meikan lists his active period as being around the Sho-o period (1288-93). Yoshimitsu is honored as being a master smith for tanto, and along with Shintogo Kunimitsu produced many master works. Besides tanto, he has some ken, and a kanmuri-otoshi zukuri blade (which some people point out could be a naginata naoshi). He also made the Namazuo Toshiro, an imperial treasure katana called "Ichigo Hitofuri Toshiro", and the Owari Koku Inuyama clan Naruse family's hereditary wakizashi which was classified as Tokubetsu Juyo Token in recent years. In the Edo period people valued his work and called him one of the "three great master smiths" along with Masamune and Go Yoshihiro. The sword book "Kyoho Meibutsu Cho" lists 34 of Yoshimitsu's works including lost works. This is followed by Masamune's 59 works. This indicates how highly regarded Yoshimitsu's work was.

He has several tanto shapes which are wide and narrow, long and short, and there are a variety of shapes. This is a characteristic he shares with Kuniyoshi, and there was a close association between them. There are two types of jigane: one is a ko-itame hada which is extremely refined and has a nashi-ji; the other style is itame and the hada is a slightly visible. Both have abundant ji-nie, and the nashi-ji type hada generally has a moist appearance, but there is definitely a clear strong character when compared with the Rai school's jigane. Many hamon are a clear well defined suguha, but there are some ko-gunome style midare hamon. In the case of suguha hamon, around the yakidashi area there are continuous ko-gunome. Also, around the fukura area, the hamon's width becomes narrow, and often this characteristic narrow boshi is seen in many hoso (narrow) suguha blades. Furthermore the nie in Yoshimitsu's boshi are much more prominent, and some of the nie seem to extend into the ji are called "nie kuisagari" (or "overpowering nie") and this characteristic is hard to miss. His signatures are not uniform and there are several different styles, and they appear as though he wrote them with the tip of a brush. They appear carefree, but at the same time, have a fluent and elegant style, and are said to be the best signatures in sword history, and this is an important point in his workmanship.

Even when compared with the many Yoshimitsu tanto, the hamon on this tanto is wide and has an emphasized midare shape. There are ashi and yo, abundant hataraki, the nioiguchi is soft, there is a small amount of ha-nie, and the hamon is very bright. The boshi's prominent nie-kuzure is unusual for Yoshimitsu's work, and besides its sophistication, this is a powerful and noteworthy work. The nashiji type hada is fine and appears moist, and with the wonderful yakiba, all the details appear clearly visible. In addition, the length is shorter than the "Meibutsu Hirano Toshiro" (an Imperial treasure) which is 9 sun 9.5 bu long. Among the different shapes seen in Yoshimitsu's work, this tanto is wide, long, and thick, and has a very healthy shape which makes it very valuable.

The tanto's name comes from the owner of the tanto, the Shodai Gokin-aratame-yaku who was the head of the Kinza (gold guild) whose name was Goto Shozaburo Mitsutsugu. there is a theory that he was either Goto Kojo's or Tokujo's adopted

son. Because of Mitsutsugu's ability, he was trusted by Ieyasu, was appointed to oversee important works, and established the Ginza (i.e. the silver guild), and so he controlled the gold and silver coinage. In the Edo Bakufu's financial and diplomatic affairs, he was involved in many important roles. Also according to the Meibutsucho, he was a member of the Honnami family council for determining sword prices. The omote tip of the hamon is not perfect and so Koshitsu put a lower price or value on this blade. However, Kotoku who was Koshitsu's father praised the sword. After that, Kotoku's judgement was considered, and the tanto received a valuation of three hundred gold pieces. Later the tanto was owned by Roju Doi Oi no kami Toshikatsu. In Kanei 6 (1628), August 28th, the Shogun Iemitsu visited the Doi family, presenting them a gift of the Kanamori Masamune, and Toshikatsu then presented Iemitsu with this tanto. Toshikatsu also presented Iemitsu with a Nagamitsu tachi and a Samonji katana. Later in Kanei 16 (1639) September 28th, when Iemitsu's daughter, princess Chiyo married the Owari Tokugawa Family's Nidai Mitsutomo, Iemitsu presented Chiyo with the tanto "Samidare Go" and this tanto. Since then, this tanto has been the Owari Tokugawa family's heirloom. According to the "Omu Rou Chuki" (the Owari Tokugawa vassal Asahi Shigeaki's daily record), in the years after Chiyo was married, a Bakufu Roju ordered Owari Tokugawa family to present lumber from Kiso and the tanto to Bakufu as a sign of appreciation. But the Karo (an official) Naruse Inaba no kami Masayuki was worried about princess Chiyo's feelings because she had received the tanto from the shogun, and he refused to give away this tanto. There is also a story that Masayuki's father Hayato no kami Masachika was relieved that Chiyo's feelings were respected, so that when he was ill, he was then prepared to go the other world.

In any case, this tanto is suited to be a part of this type of story, and the stories impel people look at this tanto and other excellent master works. This is known as one of the best Yoshimitsu tantos along with Hirano Toshiro and Atsu Toshiro and shows his talent and ability.

Explanation and picture by Ishii Akira.

Issue No. 735 Tosogu Kanshou

Juyo Tosogu

Botan Shishi zu (peony and lion design) futa dokoro mono (two item set)

Kozuka mei: Somin with kao

Menuki: mumei Somin

If one looks at Somin's sketches, there is no question about his originality and his being the founder of the "Machibori" ("town engraving") school when compared to the Goto family's "lebori" school (shogun and daimyo work). Somin's sketch book itself was assembled through the efforts of important experts such as Sato Kanzan and Noda Kiyoshige. In the early Showa period, there were studies of Somin's work by experts such as Kuwabara Yojiro and Ogura Souemon, and since that time, Somin's work has been at the heart of tosogu appreciation. Somin might have been a genius, but in Natsuo's lecture (at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts which is Tokyo Art University today), he said that "Even Somin himself, in the beginning, studied the Goto style, and tried to understand its spirit". This is an important observation and I feel this is at the essence of Somin's work. The Yokoya family were craftsmen who worked for the Shogunate, and Somin's grandfather Muneoki did some work for the Goto family, and some people think he was a student of the Injo group. In any case, without the Goto family's work as a foundation, there would have been no Somin. Somin's origin and the politics and cultural situation in his time were described in a book published in Heisei 4 (1992) entitled "Yokoya Somin's Art". There are many details presented in the book, and I have never seen such a focused and intense study of Somin.

Genius is a gift from the heaven, but this does not suddenly come out of nowhere, and I feel that success evolves from some kind of pathway or effort. This work shows Goto's shishi (lions) and botan (peonys). The theme is shown through the lebori tradition, but the shishi's curly hair and the tips of the peony's petals have a more sophisticated and refined elegance. Somin's technique is to define the image by using a tagane or chisel, and this is a difficult technique and these items exhibit his excellent work.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 735

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 735 issue Shijo Kantei To is May 5, 2018. 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, 2018 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: slightly less than 2 shaku 2 sun 8 bu (69.0 cm)

Sori: 7.5 bu (2.27cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 7 rin (2.65 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 3 rin (1.9 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 09 rin (3.3 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 5.5 bu (16.82 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are a little different. The upper half has sakizori and there is a chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame mixed with nagare and masame hada, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, whitish areas, and a dark iron color. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. Some parts of the yakiba in the valleys seem to extend towards the edge of the blade. The midare hamon variations are prominent and the omote and ura are the same. There is a worn down nioiguchi, nie, and sunagashi. The nakago is a little suriage, and originally the tip had a narrow unique shape. The nakago tip is iriyamagata, and the nakago top is kakumune and the nakago hamon side edge is round. The yasurime are kate-sagari, and there are two mekugi-ana. On the omote side, under the original mekugi ana and along the mune, there is a two kanji signature. On the ura side under the habaki and along the mune side, there is a signature of the smith who made the blade suriage.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For the March, 2018

The swords discussed below were shown in the March, 2018, meeting at the NBTHK headquarters building. This discussion presents answers concerning the makers of these blades.

Meeting Date: March 10, 2018 (2nd Saturday of March)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Ooi Takeshi

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Kunimune

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 9 bu

Sori: slightly less than 6 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame hada, and the hada is slightly visible; there are abundant ji-nie, chikei and midare utsuri.

Hamon: gunome mixed with choji, ko-choji, ko-gunome, and some square shaped gunome. There are open valleys in the hamon. There are ashi, yo, a soft nioiguchi, nie-deki, kinsuji, sunagashi, and some whitish areas.

Boshi: there is a slight midarekomi, hakikake, and it is yakizume.

The tachi's hamon shows choji and there are midare utsuri. The mihaba is standard, the widths at the moto and saki are different; there is a large koshizori, the tip has sori, and there is a chu-kissaki. From the shape, in voting, people concentrated on Bizen work from the Kamakura period.

A relatively large number of people look at this as being Ko-Bizen or Ko-Ichimonji work, but both groups worked no later than the early half of the Kamakura period. If it was their work, at the point, the blade would be narrower with a small kissaki; the sori toward the tip would be prominent, the hamon would be based on ko-midare, the dark utsuri areas would be wider, and some areas over the shinogi would show jifu utsuri.

Bizen Saburo Kunimune's style can often be described as being wide, having a prominent choji hamon which reminds one of Ichimonji work and of Mitsutada's gorgeous work, a standard or slightly narrow shape, a suguha style hamon mixed with ko-gunome, ko-choji, and saka-ashi, which is similar to Kagemitsu's style and Chikakage's high and low hamon variations. This is the same type of style we see in the Osafune school's work during the transition in style during the latter half of the Kamakura period.

However, compared with Osafune work, Kunimune's kitae hada is visible, there are prominent chikei, and we often see kinsuji. His prominent midare hamon contain open valleys, and sometimes we see irregularly shaped strange hamon, and not a monotonic variation of a one hamon pattern. In the area around the ha, where the polish is not strong, there are spots in the hamon called "Bizen Saburo's white spots" and this is a characteristic point. This is a komidare hamon work, and at first impression, it looks like an old tachi, but please pay attention to these characteristic points.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Katana Mei: 68 Oh (age is 68 years old) Suishinshi Masahide saijin (yakiba) with kao (stamp)

Suikanshi Sadahide kitae kore

Bunka 14 nen (1817) 8 gatsu bi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: slightly less than 7 sun

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame which becomes muji in places; there are abundant ji-nie, pale utsuri at the koshimoto, and a bright jigane.

Hamon: choji midare; generally the choji form a small pattern and clusters; there are some saka-ashi. There are frequent ashi, and some places have yo; there is a tight nioiguchi, nie deki, and small nie around the monouchi; the nioiguchi is very soft at the koshimoto; there is a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: shallow midarekomi; the tip has a komaru and return.

Horimono: on the omote and the ura there are bo-hi and soe-hi with marudome; There is futo-hi(wide hi) with kakudome. inside the futo-hi on the omote there are two dragons (hairyu), and on the ura there is a sanko-ken.

There is a Suishinshi Masahide and Suikanshi Sadahide father and son gassaku dai-sho and this is the katana for the dai-sho. From the signature, we can recognize that the son Sadahide forged this blade and his father Masahide made the yakiba. The kanji reading is "saijin" and the kun reading is "yakiba" and also "ha-o-niragu", and sometimes different kanji are used for "sai".

This katana is a little narrow, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a large sori, and the curvature is described as nakazori or torii-sori. There is funbari at the koshimoto, and a nioideki choji midare hamon with utsuri, which strongly emphasizes old style Bizen Den work. But for the mihaba (width), it is very thick and heavy. The kitae or forging is a muji hada style, and the jiba (ji and ha) appear like new and exhibit a Shinshinto look. From these details, without doubt, we can look at this as being a Shinshinto work, and there is the Suishinshi school's characteristic softness at the koshimoto. Moreover Masahide himself made the horimono which reminds us of Yoshitane's detailed horimono, so besides Masahide, many people voted for Yoshitane and Masayoshi.

Masahide made this kind of tight nioiguchi, and small sized saka-ashi based choji midare hamon more frequently for a short time around the Bunka period, and his latest works are mostly of this type. At that time, Naotane was already independent, and maybe because of this, it is very rare to see this kind of hamon instead of a hamon with prominent kataochi gunome. Except for Masayoshi's very early his work, his speciality was square top choji mixed with fan shaped juka-choji with ashi right and left side the unique hamon features.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mei: Bizen kuni Osa? ju Kagemitsu

(?) Nen (2) gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7 bu

Sori: slightly less than 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight itame hada, and there are abundant fine ji-nie and clear midare utsuri.

Hamon: mainly ko-gunome mixed with ko-choji, gunome, some saka-ashi, and generally the top of the features in the hamon are the same height. There are frequent ashi and yo; on the omote's central area the hamon is a wide suguha mixed with saka-ashi; there is a nioiguchi, small kinsuji, sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: on the omote it is a shallow notare and the tip is komaru with a very small return. The ura is straight and yakizume.

Since this sword is narrow with a small kissaki, and going towards the tip the blade becomes more narrow and straight, and does not have sori on the tip, the shape is not common in a latter half of the Kamakura period. From this we predicted votes for an earlier period, but many people voted for work around Kagemitsu's time.

Certainly, this has a tight itame hada, there are abundant ji-nie, a refined kitae, and clear midare utsuri. The hamon is a nioiguchi type, and the features at the top of the hamon are same height, there are some saka-ashi influenced ko-gunome inside of the hamon. The boshi is a shallow notare with a komaru and return, and is a type we call a sankaku-boshi. There is a bright nioiguchi, and the jiba (ji and ha) shows Kagemitsu's characteristic points very well.

An almost correct vote was for Nagamitsu's rare saka-ashi type hamon. If the blade were by Chikakage, the kitae's hada would be visible, and the hamon would have nie and appear worn down.

Another vote was for Unjo. He has itame mixed with mokume and the hada is visible like Aoe style work, and also like Yamashiro's tight jigane, and some dark utsuri over the shinogi, and maybe the votes derived from these features. But if it were Unrui's work, the shape would be wazori, the utsuri would be uneven, and many of the dark areas would have a shape which looks like it was made by pushing a finger onto the blade surface. The hamon would be a nie type, and generally there are prominent yo, the upper part of the midare pattern would be based on suguha and appear a bit plain. The boshi would be large and round.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: Yasutsugu Nanban tetsu o motte Bushu Edo ni oite kore o tsukuru

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu

Sori: 6.5 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume; the hada is slightly visible; there are ji-nie, frequent chikei, some small jifu, and a dark color jigane.

Hamon: based on a shallow notare and suguha mixed with frequent ko-gunome. There are ashi, nie, and some rough areas; the edge is hotsure, and there are sunagashi and kinsuji; large areas of the hamon extend up to the shinogi; there is a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: the tip is sharp, and there is a long return.

Horimono: the omote has a koshi-hi with a plum and bamboo horimono. The ura has a kurikara.

The shodai and nidai Yasutsugu's jiba share many common features, and so it is difficult to judge differences. Fortunately, the katana widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a small koshizori with funbari, and there is a chu-kissaki, which is a Kanbun Shinto shape. The Shodai passed away in Genna 7 and we do not see this type of shape in the Shodai's work. The form of the midare hamon and the variation inside the hamon led some people to narrow this sword down to being the Nidai Yasutugu's work.

The jigane is itame mixed well with mokume, and the hada is visible. There are chikei, jifu, and a dark color called Hokkoku gane (a jigane from the Northern part of Japan). The shinogi-ji is masame and the hada is visible. The hamon is based on a gentle notare and suguha, and contains well integrated ko-gunome. There are rough uneven nie, hotsure in the habuchi, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, some kinsuji extend up to the shinogi, and there is a slightly worn down nioiguchi. The boshi is notare-komi, and sometimes midare-komi based on notare, like we see here on this katana. The tip is sharp, and there is a long return which extends to the yokote area, and these are common characteristic points for both smiths, but sometimes the Shodai has muneyaki which is rare for the Nidai.

Both smiths used many of the Kinai school's horimono, and the areas carved inside of the horimono have a steep slope and are deep. The appearance is strong but at the same time, a little rough, and different from traditional decorative designs. The katana's kurikara ryu touches the tip of the ken, and possibly this design is derived from the plum and bamboo horimono seen in Sadamune's work. The katana and plum and bamboo horimono is original and interesting.

Kantei To No 5:

Mei: Tsuda Omi no kami Sukenao
Jokyo 3 (1686) sai 8 gatsu bi

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 1 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itamehada; there are abundant ji-nie, and a bright jigane.

Hamon: the moto has an angled and long yakidashi. The hamon is notare mixed with o-gunome and transforms into a small toranba style. There is a very dense heavy nioiguchi, abundant nie, and around the monouchi area there are nie in the ji. The midare hamon valleys have sunagashi; there are kinsuji and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: wide straight yakiba and a komaru.

The Nidai Sukehiro was Sukenao's teacher and his brother in law who was active around the Kanbun and Empo periods, and passed away in Tenna 2. With this history, we can expect that many of his katana sori are shallow. Compared to Sukehiro, Sukenao was still making swords till around Genroku 6. Because of this, he has many swords with a large sori and long kissaki just like we see on this katana.

Comparing their hamon, Sukenao's Osaka yakidashi extend from the machi, and the upper part becomes wider and longer when compared with Sukehiro's work. Many of his midare hamon valleys have sunagashi which is rare for Sukenao. Instead of describing them simply as toran midare, many of his midare hamon are mixed with large gunome, and there is a dense nioiguchi which becomes a little soft, just like the one on this katana. There are strong nie and some of his work is rough.

In addition, we sometimes see a gunome hamon with a very dense nioiguchi, and in this case, the nioiguchi has a quite different shape on the hamon side and jigane side, and many parts of the nioiguchi in the valleys are quite thick.

In voting, many people voted for Inoue Shinkai. If this were his work, there would be a strong Soshu Den character, the jiba nie would be stronger, and there would be prominent chikei and kinsuji. If this were Sakakura Gonnoshin Terukane work, the ihorimune would be high and there would be a low hiraniku. Under the yokote there would be three continuous gunome, and there would be a mix of elements with katayama gata (shaped) and yahazu gata (shaped) gunome in the large midare hamon. In addition, sunagashi extend from the top of the hamon into the valleys along the entire hamon

Shijo Kantei No. 733 (in the February, 2018 issue)

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To in the February issue is a wakizashi by Osafune Yasumitsu dated Oei 31.

This blade has a standard width and is a large or sunnobi size for the width. The upper half has sori, and from the shape, you can judge this as early Muromachi work from around the Oei period.

The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, and the hada is barely visible. There are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and midare utsuri, and these are conspicuous Oei Bizen characteristics.

The hamon is based on an open valley midare pattern, and is mixed with ko-gunome, ko-choji, and ko-togari. There is a bright nioiguchi and nioiguchi type ko-nie. The boshi is midarekomi, and the center of the togari resembles a candle's shape, which shows the school's characteristic points very well.

In voting, the majority of people voted for Yasumitsu, and besides him, Oei Bizen smiths, such as Morimitsu, Iesuke and Tsuneie.

The Oei Bizen works are often similar to each other, and often are very similar to this work, so these smiths were treated as correct answers at this time.

A general difference between Morimitsu and Yasumitsu are that many of Morimitsu's hamon are based on open valleys and round top choji, and display a gorgeous midare hamon. Yasumitsu's hamon tend to have small size midare patterns mixed with togariba just like this wakizashi.

Iesuke and Tsuneie are also Oei Bizen master smiths and their hamon are smaller, and there is more space between the hamon elements when compared with Morimitsu and Yasumitsu, and their work is less complex technically.

Besides the correct answer, a few people voted for Kozori work.

This wakizashi's midare hamon is a little small, and there are togari in the hamon which is similar to Kozori work. The Kozori jigane is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, and the entire hada is visible. There are chikei, thick kawari-tetsu, and areas with different colored jifu, and the individual elements seem to be slightly unmatched or not completely consistent. Also the utsuri is a little pale.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

