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Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Juyo Bijutsuhin

Type: Tachi

Mei: Kuniyasu
Owner: NBTHK

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu 6 rin (71.4 cm)

Sori: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 5 rin (2.55 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 2 rin (1.55 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)

Saki kasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 4 bu 6 rin (1.4 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 3 bu 7 rin (19.3 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is a little narrow and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a standard thickness and a large koshizori, some funbari, and a small kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with large itame hada, mokume, and some nagarehada. The entire hada is clearly visible. There are ji-nie, frequent chikei, slightly pale utsuri, and a slightly dark colored jigane. The hamon is ko-midare mixed with ko-gunome and ko-choji. The top of the hamon in some places has yubashiri and ni-juba. There are ashi, yo, ko-nie, sunagashi, and kinsuji. The upper half of the hamon has a soft nioiguchi. The boshi on the omote side is yakikomi, on both sides, the boshi is straight with a komaru style return, and the tip has hakikake. The horimono on the omote and ura are futatsuji-hi with marudome. The nakago is ubu with a kijimomo shape, and is slightly machi okuri. The nakago tip is almost kiri. The original yasurime are unknown, and there is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, above the mekugi-ana towards the mune edge, there is a mei made with a somewhat fine tagane (chisel) and which has a two kanji signature.

In the early Kamakura period, in Yamashiro Kuni, there was a sword smith group in Awataguchi (today the address is Awataguchi, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto), who made Kyoto's swords famous instead of the Sanjo and Gojo smith groups. Awataguchi was a gate on a main road into Kyoto, and one of the seven entrances into Kyoto. This road ran to all the Eastern provinces and forts and was important for military affairs, transportation and communication. The Awataguchi school produced many master smiths for one century, such as Kunitomo, the oldest son with six brothers, and last, Toshiro Yoshimitsu in the latter half of the Kamakura period.

Among these smiths, Kuniyasu was Kuniie's third son, and was named Tosaburo. Whether the story is correct or not is unknown, but he was known as a famous master smith who was selected as one of the retired emperor Gotoba's sword smiths.

Kuniyasu's signed blades are relatively easy to confirm among the six brothers. There are three Juyo Bunkazai blades, four Juyo Bijutsuhin blades, three Juyo Token and one unclassified blade owned by the Tokyo National Museum. Kuniyasu has two styles, one has a narrow width and elegant shape, and the other is a wide style blade with a dynamic feeling.

Kuniyasu's jigane shows the school's characteristic nashiji-hada, but on the other hand, many of his blades show itame hada mixed with a large pattern hada, and the hada is slightly visible. His hamon are primarily ko-midare mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome, and have a small midare hamon. Furthermore his characteristic points are that the top of the yakiba has kari-mata style yubashiri, which continues with the next generation's Rai Kuniyuki and Ayanokoji Sadatoshi. In addition, his nioiguchi are soft, and there are relatively prominent kinsuji and sunagashi. Many of his horimono are bo-hi carved deeply into the nakago, and we could say that this pattern was followed by Rai Kuniyuki. Kuniyasu's mei seem to have been carved by himself. Notably, the "Yasu" kanji are written in a sosho style with a graceful feeling, like we see on this tachi.

This tachi fully shows Kuniyasu's characteristic points. Dr. Kunzan, commented that on the omote side around the monouchi, there is some umegane (which indicates some repair was done), and without this, the tachi would have been classified as Juyo Bunkazai. Also, Dr Kunzan commented that such a prominent o-hada and chikei are very rare, not only for Kuniyasu, but also in Awataguchi work, so this blade is very interesting and important. Besides the hamon's appearance which can depend on the polisher, the condition of the visible hada, the hataraki in the jiba (jihada and hamon) such as kinsuji and sunagashi are classic looking and resemble Ko-Hoki work, and this blade has many interesting points, and is highly appreciated and evaluated.

In the Edo period, this tachi was handed down in the Mimasaka Koku Tsuyama clan's Matsudaira family. The family owned admirable masterpieces such as the "Dojigiri Yasutsuna classified as Kokuho", the "Inabago blade classified as Kokuho", the "Ishida Masamune blade classified as Juyo Bunkazai", and this tachi as well.

According to the “Tokugawa Jikki” (the Tokugawa diary or chronicle), in the Bunshoin No.10 issue” (in Ienobu’s time), in Hoei 6 (1709) on November 13th, “Matsudaira Echigo-no-kamo Norihide (the Tsuyama Matsudaira family’s first lord) received his name from the shogun and changed his name to Nobutomi”. In appreciation, he presented to the shogun a Bizen Sukemitsu tachi, 100 cotton bundles, and gold, and he received this Awataguchi Kuniyasu tachi. From the entry we see that Matsudaira Nobutomi received this tachi from Shogun Ienobu. Later, in Bunka 9, the 7th generation Matsudaira lord Naritaka ordered his minister Murayama Heigaku Masayasu to examine all of the family’s blades. Today, the historical material resulting from this study is in the “Tsuyama Matsudaira clan report (Aizan bunko)” together with four books owned by the Tsuyama local museum. In the volume titled “Treasure blades, items presented from the shogun, venerable items, and wearable blades“, a page lists the family’s treasure blades, blades presented by the shogun, and twenty venerable masterpiece swords. The book entry concerning this tachi says “Gensenin (Nobutomi) presented this tachi in Hoei 6 Tsuchinoto Ushi November 13th”. Details are listed such as the length, mounting, and origami (papers), and this information supports the family’s story.

In Showa 23 (1948), at the time the NBTHK applied to be a public foundation, this tachi was donated to the NBTHK by Shinohara Michiro, one of the founders and the president of the Tokyu Railroad Co. Since then this tachi has been carefully protected as an important art property.

Explanation and illust by Ishii Akira.

No.738 Tosogu Kanshou

Juyo Tosogu

Kiri-mon chirashi-zu tsuba

Mimi mei: Tokujo saku Mitsutaka (kao)

Since the Heian period, the kiri (Paulonia tree) design was used mainly by the royal family. Later, the Emperor Godaigo presented the kiri-mon (family crest) to Ashikaga Takauji. In the Muromachi period, the Ashikaga family presented the kiri-mon to prominent military commanders. Nobunaga, and Hideyoshi followed that custom, and in the Momoyama period, the power represented by the kiri mon was immense.

The Goto family is a oie bori craftsman family (they worked for the Shogun’s family) and the family line has been continuous since the first generation or the Shodai Yujo. Even in a turbulent world, the Goto family was treated as an important family by every politician, and the family kept its social status and inherited its traditions. They are not only work on tosogu (metal fittings for sword

mountings), but also during Nobunaga's time, Tokujo and his father Kojo worked on casting o-ban (large gold coins). In the Edo period, the Goto family worked in important positions in the "O-ban za" (official gold coin casting office). They stamped the kiri-mon on large gold coins.

Therefore the kiri crest has a deep history with the Goto family. In particular, Hideyoshi used to favor the five-three kiri-mon design. Tokujo worked for Hideyoshi, so his kiri-crest is called the Taiko-kiri or Tokujo-kiri and this is a very unique work. Tokujo-kiri were made with a wheat grain shaped tagane or chisel. There are clear groups of flowers, the three leaves are connected to the stem, and the leaves and stem touch in a total of ten places. In any case, in the Tokujo kiri-mon each crest is well defined, clear, and very rich appearing.

This work has a moderately balanced tsuba shape, with accurately distributed nanako. On the omote and the ura there are 8 individual mon, with an exquisite kiri-mon composition, and a firm or solid feeling. This work was made on a shakudo ground with bright and clear gold inlay, precisely distributed details, and with a high level of perfection. This attractive vision has survived well beyond the era in which it was made.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 738

The deadline to submit answers for the No. 738 issue Shijo Kantei To is August 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 August 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: 2 shaku 8 sun (84.84 cm)

Sori: slightly over 5 bu (1.53 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 9 rin (3.3 cm)

Sakihaba: 8 bu 1 rin (2.45 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 6 rin (0.8 cm)

Sakikasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Kissaki length: 2 sun 1 rin (6.1 cm)

Nakago length: 9 sun 7 bu (29.4 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is long and wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not too different. There is a shallow sori, the tip has a little sori, and there is a large kissaki. There is a poor hiraniku, poor fukura, and it is thick. The jigane has a slightly visible itame hada mixed with nagare hada. There are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are tobiyaki, the entire hamon has long ashi, the midare hamon is not smooth, there is a slightly dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and some places have especially strong bright rough (ara) nie mixed with the nie. The hamon is bright and clear, and there are abundant kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote side above the first mekugi ana (the original mekugi-ana), there are two lines forming a long signature and date. On the ura side between the mekugi ana towards the mune side, there is a owner's name.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For June, 2018

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

Meeting date: June, 9, 2018 (2nd Saturday of June)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kurotaki Tetsuya

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Muneyoshi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 9.5 bu

Sori: 8.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: ko-itame mixed with ko-mokume and the hada is barely visible. There are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and jifu utsuri.

Hamon: suguha mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, abundant ko-nie, and fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru. The tip has a very small return.

The tachi is narrow and has a small kissaki, strong koshizori, and the shape indicates that this is work from the end of the Heian period to the early Kamakura period. Consider the period and look at the jigane: there are bright jifu utsuri reaching from the ji to the shinogi ji. The ko-choji and ko-gunome in the hamon have a rich and graceful look and show classic elegance.

This tachi's smith Muneyoshi, is one of the Gotoba-in ban-kaji smiths (the smiths who worked in a rotation with the emperor Gotoba in his exile), and is the Ko-Ichimonji smith Muneyoshi. This blade is classified as Juyo-Bijutsuhin. There is not a clear difference between Ko-Bizen work and Ko-Ichimonji, so at this time a vote for Ko-Bizen work is treated as an almost correct answer.

The jifu utsuri extend over the shinogi ji, the dark utsuri is clear, and this kind of utsuri shape is clearly different from later periods' utsuri. The latter half of the Kamakura period's Unjo's jifu utsuri never resemble this type of high dark utsuri.

There are four signed Ko-Ichimonji Muneyoshi blades which are classified as Juyo-Bijutsuhin and this is known as one of the most classic looking examples.

In the work of the later period smith Nagamitsu, we would never see utsuri extend up to reach the shinogi ji.

Kantei To No. 2: tachi

Mei: Nagamitsu

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 9 bu

Design: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume; there is some nagarehada; the hada is barely visible. There are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: based on choji mixed with gunome and kawazuko style choji. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant ko-nie, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is yakizume.

This blade has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different, and has a chu-kissaki from these points, you can recognize work from the latter half of the Kamakura Period.

Based on the period, I would like to examine the jigane. From the clear midare utsuri, Bizen work comes to mind. The hamon is a midare hamon based on round topped choji and gunome. From this, Nagamitsu's name would come to mind.

Nagamitsu is known for his various style in the Osafune school. He has many signed swords, and they can be wide with kawazuko choji and large choji and a beautiful active hamon, or they can have a narrow shape with a gentle suguha hamon. There are a variety in the styles of his work.

The tachi's hamon is based on choji and gunome which is his characteristic style. For Nagamitsu, this jigane and its visible hada is prominent and there are strong hane.

Because of these details, some people voted for Ko-Bizen and Fukuoka-Ichimonji smiths. If this were Ko-Bizen work, in the tip area, the mune would lean towards the tip, and the hamon would be a classic midare hamon. If it were Fukuoka-Ichimonji work, the gunome hamon would not be prominent in the choji hamon and it would be a very gorgeous hamon with high and low variations.

Kantei To No 3: tachi

Mei: □ □ Osafune Kanemitsu

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun

Sori: 7 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: itame mixed with mokume, and the entire ji is tight. there are abundant jiane and clear midare utsuri.

Hamon: kataochi-gunome mixed with ko-gunome and square gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, and some areas of the kataochi-gunome are continuous for long distances; there are nioiguchi type ko-nie.

Boshi: small and midarekomi; the tip is komaru and there is a return.

There is a small degree of funbari at the habaki moto, and besides being suriage, the width is almost standard. The widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a strong koshizori, and the tip has sori. From the shape you can recognize work from the latter half of the Kamakura period to the early Nambokucho period.

There are clear midare utsuri, the midare hamon is based on ko-gunome, square gunome, and kataochi-gunome. From these characteristics, you can imagine this is work by Kagemitsu, Chikakage or Kanemitsu.

Among the Osafune smiths, kataochi gunome, which are a type of square gunome, was started by Nagamitsu initially, and some examples are seen in his tanto and naginata. His son Kagemitsu's hamon have regular kataochi-gunome. Kagemitsu's kataochi-gunome hamon extend continuously from the moto to saki and are only seen in tanto. His tachi hamon consists of almost only ko-choji and ko-gunome mixed with kataochi gunome, and this is his primary style.

Kagemitsu's son Kanemitsu's kataochi-gunome are seen in some tachi, and are orderly and continuous over the entire hamon, or only in some parts of the tachi hamon. This tachi has this kind of hamon, and we wish to narrow down the maker's name to Kanemitsu.

In voting, some people voted for Yoshii school smiths and Motoshige.

If it were Yoshii school work, keep in mind that they made few swords at the end of the Kamakura period. Moreover, their hamon have strong nie, and are classic hamon. If it were Motoshige's work, we would see nagare-hada in the kitae, and his individual square shape gunome are long.

Kantei To No 4: katana

Mei: ju Higashi-Eizan Shinobu-ga-oka atari Nakasone Okisato
Empo 2 nen 6 gatsu kisho-jitsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun

Sori: slightly over 6 bu

Design: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jihada: tight ko-itame; there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and a clear jigane.

Hamon: there is a small yakidashi at the moto, and above this a continuous gunome resembling juzuba. There are abundant ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and it is bright and clear.

Boshi: above the yokote the boshi is straight and yakikomi.

This katana's jigane is a tight ko-itame; there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei and it is bright and clear. The moto has a small yakidashi, and above this, the entire hamon is a continuous gunome with abundant ashi, and the hamon resembles juzuba or a string of beads. The hamon is bright and clear, and from this, Kotetsu's name comes to mind.

Looking at the boshi, we see there is a yakikomi style boshi at the yokote which is a Kotetsu style boshi, and his name would come to mind more strongly.

This is a typical Kotetsu work, and the jiba (jihada and hamon) are bright and clear, and among his swords, this is a very good work and among his best examples.

In voting, some people voted for Okimasa. Among Kotetsu's large number of katana, this one has a prominently large sori, and the Okimasa answer reflects this. But if it were Okimasa's work, the clarity of the jiba is never as good as Kotetsu's, but also his hamon in some places would be mixed with two continuous gunome, there are ha-nie extending into the jigane, and the jigane is rough.

Kantei To No 5: wakizashi

Mei: Awataguchi Omi-no-kami Tadatsuna
Horimono mei: Osaka ju Fujita Michioki

Length: 1 shaku 5 sun 3.5 bu

Sori: slight

Design: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jihada: ko-itame mixed with mokume, and the entire jihada is tight. There are abundant ji-nie and fine chikei.

Hamon: wide suguha mixed with ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi, abundant ko-nie, and pale sunagashi in the hamon; on the omote around the monouchi there are fine kinsuji and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru; the tip has hakikake, and there is a long return.

Horimono: jo-ge dragon (the dragons face up and down on the opposite sides of the blade) relief inside of the hi.

This is an Ikkanshi Tadatsuna wakizashi with his horimono teacher Fujita Michioki's dragons.

The wakizashi is wide, long, and thick, with a large shape, and is obviously Shinto period work. The jigane is ko-itame mixed with mokume, there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and an Osaka Shinto very refined hada.

Looking at the hamon, it is a wide suguha with abundant ko-nie. The suguha style is a characteristic point to focus the maker's name to Ikkanshi. On the omote around the monouchi there are fine kinsuji. Also, on the ura, in the same place, we can see a suguha with faint kinsuji. This kind of pale long kinsuji between the jihada and hamon is a strong characteristic point for Tadatsuna.

Furthermore we have to talk about Fujita Mitsuoki's horimono for this wakizashi. Ikkanshi was an expert horimono engraver too, but Michioki's horimono shows his excellent level of skill. Not only do the dragons have powerful facial expressions, but each of the scales look like they are standing up. The position and carving of the well defined nails, tails, and each scale is precisely calculated and arranged. We can fully appreciate his excellent level of skill. This is a wide hirazukuri wakizashi, a form in which we usually do not see Ikkashi's work. We can imagine that the shape and form of the horimono came from Michioki.

This excellent wakizashi with Michioki's horimono results in a very impressive work. This is a valuable work, not only because of the excellent workmanship, but also for the study of toshin-chokoku (sword engraving).

Shijo Kantei To No. 736 in the May, 2018 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tachi by Osafune Motoshige

This tachi is narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. Although it is suriagae, there is a koshizori, sori at the tip, and there is a chu-kissaki. From the shape you can judge this as work from the latter half of the Kamakura period.

The jigane is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, the hada is slightly visible, and there are jifu and midare-utsuri. This tachi shows Bizen branch school characteristic points. This has Motoshige's own characteristic jigane.

The hamon is suguha mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. There are ashi and yo, and the entire hamon has saka-ashi which is seen often in Bizen work in this period. But in the midare hamon, the long square gunome have tusk shaped togariba in the valleys. The boshi is midarekomi and the tip is sharp. From these characteristics, you can judge this as Motoshige's work.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Motoshige. Besides the correct answer, a few people voted for Chikakage.

Chikakage worked in almost the same period in Osafune as Motoshige. Compared with mainstream Osafune smiths such as Nagamitsu and Kagemitsu, Chikakage is a branch school smith. For this reason, his jigane's itame-hada is slightly rough and his hamon have ko-nie, and these are similar to the characteristics we see in Motoshige's work.

However, Chikakage is supposed to have been Nagamitsu's student. His jiba (jihada and hamon) does not have the prominent branch school characteristic points as strongly as Motoshige's work. He does not have many examples of a jitetsu mixed with jifu. Also, looking at the characteristic square shaped gunome, the Motoshige answer seems to be reasonable.

This kanteito was a tachi with a shape from the latter half of the Kamakura period.

In the last issue I talked about Japanese sword shapes. At this time, I'd like to discuss a subject which is difficult if one does not have much exposure to swords: I would like to talk about sakizori in the tachi's shape.

Often people talk about tachi shapes in the latter half of the Kamakura period, and note that these tachi have koshi sori and also the tip has sori. In the early Muromachi period, the tachi shape has koshi sori, and also the tip has saki-zori.

These expressions seem to be almost the same, but are slightly different. This means both period's tachi shapes are very similar, but the early Muromachi tachi shapes have a slightly larger sori at the tip.

However, this difference is very slight. A while ago, we examined two blades, one from the latter half of the Kamakura period was an ubu tachi, and other was from the early Muromachi period around the Oei period and was also an ubu tachi. Both

blades were around 2 shaku 4 sun in length, and almost the same width, and we compared the sori from the moto to the saki.

The result was that the tachi from the latter half of the Kamakura period and the early Muromachi period were both around 2 shaku 4 sun in length, but the difference in the saki-sori between the two was only around 2mm.

The difference could be dependent on the tachi's width, with different widths at the moto and saki. But someone experienced at looking at swords would conclude that "this is a slightly large saki-zori, and it may be early Muromachi period work".

This seems to a difficult thing to judge. A possible way to study this is that every time you examine a sword, simply hold out the blade vertically, and look at the shape carefully, and continue with this habit.

Of course in the case of a professional appraiser and sword dealer who sees an enormous number of blades at one time, they may omit examining the shape, and just look at the jigane and hamon.

But even in this type of situation, one sometimes wonders "is this tachi Kamakura or Muromachi period work?" People often wonder how a professional appraiser could judge the period and style from a quick first look. From my own experience, after examining 100,000 to 200,000 blades, it is reasonable to think about this. However, if you go back to the basics, look at the shape carefully, and then reconsider the jiba (jihada and hamon), and many times you will find that your point of view is correct.

I will discuss this more in the next issue.

In the last couple of issues, I have been talking about how to look at a sword and the shape. I would like to emphasize that these are my own personal viewpoints and not an official NBTHK curator's point of view.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai