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Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Juyo Bijutsuhin

Type: Tanto

Shu-mei (mei written in red ink): Masamune (meibutsu: Go-Hachisuka Masamune)
Owner: NBTHK

Length: 8 sun 1 bu 1rin (24.55 cm)
Sori: none
Motohaba: 7 bu 7 rin (2.35 cm)
Motokasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)
Nakago length: 3 sun 9 rin (9.35 cm)
Nakago sori: none

Commentary

This is a hirazukuri tanto with a mitsumune with a wide flat central ridge). It is a little wide for the length and mu-sori (i.e. there is no sori). The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume hada and is well forged. On the ura side in some places the hada is visible. There are abundant dense ji-nie and frequent chikei, and the lower half of the blade has nie-utsuri. The hamon is ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome and the entire hamon is narrow. There are frequent ashi and yo, and mainly on the upper half of the blade, there are abundant small uneven nie, frequent kinsuji, sunagashi, and yubashiri. The boshi is straight and the tip is an o-maru style, but the entire boshi is formed in a yaki-kuzure style and there are frequent hakikake. The horimono on the omote is a sanko-tsukiken, and on the ura there are long bonji with goma-bashi. The nakago is ubu, and the nakago tip is a very shallow ha-agari style kurijiri. The yasurime are not visible, and there are two mekugi-ana. On the omote, under the second mekugiana along the center, there is a two kanji shu-mei signature written in red ink.

Sagami Kuni's Goro Nyudo Masamune is a great master smith in Japanese sword history. He made nie-based style Shoshu Den works following the work of Kunimitsu and Yukimitsu work, and established his work as a art form. He was known as an excellent master smith, not only in the sword world, but also in other

areas. In the Edo period, he was listed as one of the “three Superior smiths” along with Awataguchi Toshiro Yoshimitsu and Go Yoshihiro. In the Edo period sword book “Kyoho Meibutsu-cho” which listed the 235 best blades in Japan (and which included damaged blades) there are 59 items made by Masamune.

According to historical stories, Masamune is supposed to have passed away in the early Nanbokucho period in Koei 2 (1343). The Edo period book “Edo Cho-mei (long signature) Masamune” which was lost in the big Meireki fire, says there was supposed to have been a Masamune’s work dated Showa 3 (1314) 11 gatsu hi”. From this, the accepted opinion is that Masamune’s active period was around the end of the Kamakura period.

Today, he has four signed tanto: the “Meibutsu Fudo Masamune” classified as Juyo Bunkazai; two imperial treasures “Kyogoku” and “Daikoku”; and “Honjo”. Many of other his blades are o-suriage mumei. In the case of katana, his shapes have a standard width with a chu-kissaki, or are wide with a long chu-kissaki. His jigane appear to be moist, and have a unique appearance, and there are abundant ji-nie. From the fact that he mixed hard and soft steels in his work, there are many chikei. But his jitetsu are not ostentatious or pretentious with too many details, as is seen in some later period works, and appear to be very natural. Regarding the Hamon’s shape, if you consider Bizen’s choji midare hamon to show a defined shape or style, Masamune’s hamon show an abstract beauty. His hamon exhibit all kinds of shapes, and you could almost say they are free, dynamic and show almost no control, but have a high degree of sophistication. My former teacher Dr. Honma used to say his style expressed his uniqueness or individuality. This is an important value and the reason why Masamune’s work belongs to Masamune and to no one else.

His hamon show extraordinary work with nie. There are large and small nie, strong and weak nie, interesting nie-kuzure, nie-suji, yubashiri, and tobiyaki. Not only this, there is a nioiguchi which integrates well with the nie. Also the nioiguchi shows color, wide and narrow widths, and motion and variation.These effects suggest all kinds of scenery, and present innumerable details. Conventionally, people said that these forms in Masamune’s work were like a sumie (charcoal ink) painting. With his dynamic hamon, we can say that his work is unique, and we recognized his artistry which no other smith can match.

This tanto’s hamon does not have very many wide and shallow variations as is normal for Masamune, and definitely is not too dynamic. But the jigane has a natural feeling with its itame hada and there are many chikei. It is noteworthy for the well forged steel, and the delicate variations in the nioiguchi are mixed with bright nie, and these details are not seen other high ranking Soshu Den smiths’ work. There are frequent kinsuji, nie-suji, and a dynamic boshi with a powerful movement, but still, the overall sophistication of this work does not suffer. It has a quiet feeling but there is still an exuberant feeling. This is the perfection of Soshu Den work and is judged as Masamune’s work.

The tanto was a gift to the Shodai Ujikane who was from the Mino Kuni’s Ogaki clan lord’s Toda family. It was presented by the third generation Shogun Iemitsu.

Ujikane worked for Ieyasu, and in Keicho 5 (1600) he entered in battle and fought Uesugi Kagekatsu, and later was also in the Sekigahara battle. At the Osaka Winter and Summer battle, he defended his own castle, the Omi Kuni Zeze castle. In Kanei 12 (1635), he received an additonal 10 million koku, and transferred to the Ogaki clan where he established the foundation for his family. Two years afterward in Kanei 14 (1637), at the Shimabara revolt, he was at the front with 3000 soldiers along with Matsudaira Nobutsuna. He commanded other clan's soldiers as well, and is known as one of commanders who suppressed the Shimabara revolt.

The story about this tanto is listed in the "Tokugawa Jikki (diary) in an entry for "Sir Taiyuin" (Iemitsu) in the 38th volume in Kanei 15 (1638), 10 gatsu, on page 27. It states that when Toda Saemon Ujikane visited Iemitsu in preparation for moving to his new fief, Iemitsu gave him a Masamune wakizashi". However in the "Kansei Ju-fuku Shoka" issue 914 of the Toda family chronicle, it says that "In Kanei 15, February he followed the order to move immediately, and after that he returned to his home town on October 27 and visited Iemitsu when he received the Masamune tanto". You can see that after Ujikane received the order to move, he carried it out immediately, and then received permission to return to his former home a short time later, where he received a reward for his achievements at Shimabara. The origin of the "Hachisuka Masamune" meibutsu or name is unknown. However, the Hachisuka family's ancestral tanto was supposed to have been given to the Shogun.

This tanto will be exhibited at the "Journey Through the Provinces", an exhibit which will display Japanese swords and koshirae from the Go Kaden schools from various provinces. It will be at the NBTHK from October 13 to December 24, 2018. Please visit this exhibit.

Recently, this tanto was donated by the Toda family to the NBTHK, and the NBTHK greatly appreciates this.

Explanation Ishii Akira and illust by Imoto Yuki.

No.740 Tosogu Kanshou

Juyo Bijutsuhin
Tagoto-tsuki-zu (a picture of the moon reflected on rice fields) tsuba
Mei: Nishigaki Nagahisa 70 sai (70 years old) saku kore
Owner: Eisei Bunko

The Shinshu Kamuriki-yama (Obasute-yama) has been known as a famous place to appreciate the moon since the Heian period. The scenery has been described in many poems including the Kokin-wakashu. Specifically, the moon reflected in

each one of multiple local rice fields is called a “tagoto no tsuki” view in the Kyogen (No play) book “Tokusa” written in Tensho 6 (1573), and was sung or chanted at the beginning of some performances.“ These songs or chants mention the names of several villages such as Sarashina Village and Obasute-Yama and also include the “tagoto no tsuki” phrase. It is possible that these places were known for this type of view. In the Edo period, cultured people were interested in tagoto no tsuki views in many areas, including Kamuriki-Yama.

The tsuba’s omote shows the tagoto no tsuki image, and the ura shows an image of tokusa (horsetail reeds). This was made by the very famous maker, the Nidai Kanshiro at the age of 70 years in Hoei 5 (1708). This is a fascinating irogane work (work with colored metals) and very impressive. The book “Higo kinko roku” written in Meiji 35 (1902) lists this tsuba and shows the omote side.

According that book the irogane (colored metal) used is called “tsuki mina-kin” which means “the moon is gold”. Each rice field is divided from the others by ridges made from shakudo, nikurome, copper and shibuichi. Nikurome is a dark copper yamagane pot metal, and the copper used in the image is supposed to be pure copper. The ura side’s moon is shibuichi (a silvered copper alloy) and the tokusa and aoi plants are constructed from several different colored metals or irogane. The tsuba ground is brass and has an aori shape, soft or gentle nikuoki or contours, and a small distorted sukashi (piercing) at the bottom which brings to mind an image of dripping water.

This is the first tsuba I felt a strong connection to, and I felt a bond with its strong artistry. Since I have seen this, I have seen many tosogu, but I have never seen the artist’s ideas executed with such exquisite work. Even after many years, I keep thinking about this tsuba which is an original Japanese landscape which connects with the Japanese people, and is also a masterwork tsuba which represents Japanese ideas.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 740

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 740 Shijo Kantei To is October 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 October 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 2 sun 9.5 bu (69.5 cm)
Sori: 6 bu (1.8 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)
Sakihaba: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu 2 rin (3.4 cm)
Nakago length: 7 sun 2 bu (21.8 cm)
Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki different, and there is a short chu-kissaki. The jigane is a tight ko-itame, there are fine ji-nie, chikei, and midare-utsuri, and the shinogi-ji has masame hada. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has tobiyaki, ashi, yo, a tight nioiguchi, nioiguchi-like ko-nie and a bright and clear nioiguchi. There are some kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote side toward the mune edge, there is a long signature. The ura side has a soe-mei which comments on the steel.

Shijo Kantei To No. 738 in the July, 2018 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Kurihara Nobuhide dated Bunkyu 2 (1862).

This katana is wide with a large kissaki and a poorly shaped fukura. The hamon is a prominent gunome, there are abundant ha-nie, and some places have bright rough nie. There are frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi is midarekomi, and the tip is sharp. From this characteristic work, very few people missed the Kiyomaro school’s smith’s name. The majority of people voted for Nobuhide, and as an also correct answer, a few people voted for Kiyomaro and Masao.

These smiths are from the same school and have many common points, and so those answers are understandable. Nobuhide’s characteristic points are mentioned in many places in the kantei-to description, such as large square shaped gunome in the hamon mixed with ko-gunome and ko-choji, and the mention that hamon has some complex midare areas.

The hamon is unique and complex and rough , and the hints mentioned this.

Kiyomaro and Masao do not have many swords with this kind of complex and unsmooth or rough hamon outline. Kiyomaro's hamon primarily have more round top gunome and choji mixed with togariba, and form a midare hamon.
Minamoto Masao's hamon often have round top low continuous gunome and are relatively simple looking.
The Kantei-To described at this time is a typical Bakumatsu period Shinshinto shaped katana.

In the last issue, I explained that when you look at a tachi from the end of the Heian to the early Kamakura period, they have a fusari shape, and if you do not hold the nakago vertically straight up, it is difficult to understand this well.
When you look at a katana's shape, holding the nakago vertically straight up is important. If a nakago is slanted to the left or right, you cannot judge the shape well and this can create a problem.
Shinshinto period blades have almost no nakago sori, and usually have a straight shape. In this case, it is not very difficult to hold the nakago vertically straight up. If you are holding a shirasaya tsuka, because there are not many tsuka which have a curvature, it is fine to hold the tsuka vertically straight up.
In contrast to this, old Koto period tachi sometimes have a large sori, not only in the blade (the to-shin or body) but also in the nakago. In this case sometimes people tell me that it is difficult to hold the nakago properly and to judge the shape.
In this type of situation, just like in the left side of the figure, you should imagine a straight line running from the mune machi down to the bottom tip or corner of the mune on the nakago. If you can imagine this line from the nakago mune machi to the nakago mune's tip you can hold this line up vertically and perpendicular to the floor. If you do this, you can examine the shape of the sori well, even on tachi with a large sori. In addition this will make it easier to examine the overall shape of the sword.
In a case where a shira-saya has a large sori, you can practice doing this.
This may seem difficult, but once you are used to doing this, it is not difficult. This is a convenient way to examine the shape, so if you have not tried this, please do. I will talk more about this in the next issue.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai