

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
ISSUE NUMBER 742
November, 2018

Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Jujo Bunkazai

Type: Tachi

Mei: Kageyori tsukuru
Owner: Inaba Shrine

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 5 bu (77.25 cm)
Sori: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)
Sakihaba: 4 bu 8 rin (1.45 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)
Kissaki length: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 8 bu 3 rin (20.7 cm)
Nakago sori: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Commentary

This is a narrow shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. The blade is slightly thick, there is a large koshizori with funbari and a short kissaki. The jitetsu has itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and in some areas, the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, and mizukage-like utsuri at the machi which continues into the ji and becomes jifu utsuri. Around the monouchi area the utsuri resembles fine lines, and becomes dan-utsuri. The hamon is a chu-suguha style mixed with ko-gunome, and some areas have a slight ko-notare style. There are ashi, uneven ko-nie over the nioiguchi, and some parts of the hamon have hotsure. The boshi is straight, and on the omote it is yakizume style. The ura boshi is an o-maru with a small return. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu and the nakago tip is ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are katte-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana and one is closed. On the omote, above the first mekugi-ana (the original) on the flat area, there is a large three kanji signature made with a slightly thick tagine or chisel.

Bizen Kuni Kageyori is listed in the historical sword reference "Meikan" as working in the Kamakura period, and there are two Ko-Bizen smiths listed. One is a Ko-Bizen school Nittasho area smith, and other is the founder of the Osafune Yoshii school. The mei are "Kageyori tsukuru", "Bizen Kuni ju nin Sakon Shogen Kageyori tsukuru" and

“Bishu Osafune Kageyori”. Some opinions in the historical books note that the signatures’ chisel marks are different (made with chisels with a different thickness), but that the large sized kanji on the nakago’s flat central area in the “Kageyori (tsukuru)” signature is Ko-Bizen work. There is a similar two kanji signed work in Wakayama prefecture’s Toshogu Shrine classified as Juyo Bunkazai and signed “Sakon Shogen Kageyori” and dated Shoo 2 (1289). Also, the tanago-bara shaped nakago on a Tokyo National Museum sword with a two kanji signature classified as Juyo Bunkazai is similar to a work from Nagamitsu, Kagemitsu, Sanemitsu, and Yasuhiro. From this, it appears reasonable, that Kageyori is from the Ko-Bizen school from the latter half of the Kamakura period. Another example of a Ko-Bizen school smith with similar work is Tsunemitsu, with work dated Shoan 3 (1301).

The Kozan oshigata also shows a signature similar to a work in the Wakayama Toshogu Shrine dated in the Shoo period. The mei is “Sakon Shogen” written in large sized kanji and dated Einin 6 (1298). Only two years later, another sword dated Shoan 2 (1300) has a “Sakon Shogen” signature and is the 24th blade to be classified as Juyo token. This signature has a similar “yori” kanji written in a smaller size towards the mune edge. There are also signed blades by Chikayori and Ujiyori which are similar. Also, from the jiba (jigane and hamon) style, there is a strong possibility that this is a Nittasho smith work. From this evidence, we cannot deny a theory that the large size signature on this tachi dated in the Shoo period could be the Nittasho smith’s work. From now on, we will be looking for new examples which could provide more material to allow us to study that school.

The kanji style in this tachi’s signature is quite different from the mei “Bishu Osafune Kageyori” from the No.51 Juyo Token, but is similar to Nagamitsu’s and Kagemitsu’s. From this observation, it is reasonable to think that he could be a different smith, or that he joined the Osafune school.

Kageyori’s hamon style shows mostly low or narrow suguha style hamon, and in the case of clear or distinct suguha hamon, the jigane is primarily ko-itame hada. The hamon are sometimes mixed with a midare hamon, and the jgane is itame hada. We can see that this tachi has Kageyori’s characteristic points. There are several blades where the bottom half has midare utsuri, and the upper half has fine suji-utsuri and it is possible, that this is another characteristic point for this smith.

The tachi’s ubu nakago is one of its most valuable features. As I described above, there is a good hamon with a proper jigane and with utsuri. This is an understated work but not a simple unsophisticated work. The hamon in some areas has hotsure and fine hataraki, and the entire tachi exhibits a sense of taste or elegance and is a highly praised work. On the habaki moto along the mune, there is a scar from a deep sharp cut, and this tells us today that this blade was used in combat.

The Inaba shrine in Gifu prefecture has a history of more than 1900 years, and started as the home of the Suinin emperor’s crown prince Inishiki Irihiko no mikoto’s main diety. In Tenbun 8, when Saito Dozan built a castle in Inaba-yama, the shrine was moved to today’s location. Since then, the shrine has been a home for Inaba castle’s guardian diety, and it is supposed to have received respect from the Oda and Toyotomi families. In addition, according to the “Kojiki” and “Nihonshoki”, the crown prince received a bow and arrows from his father, the Suinin emperor, and he practiced martial arts. The

crown prince also donated 1000 blades to the Iso-no-kami shrine that has a famous ancient blade called the “Shichi-shito” for emergency use.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira

No.742 Tosogu Kanshou

Tokubetsu Juyo tosogu

Nami and Un-ji (wave and cloud ground) Shippo (cloisonné) dai-sho tsuba

Dai-sho mei: Hirata Harunari (with kao)

Hirata Harunari was the 8th generation of the Hirata family which was an Edo bakufu okakae smith (a smith who worked for the shogunate) who passed way in Tenpo 11 (1840). The family had a tradition that one son maintained their work and style, but in the latter half of the Edo period, Harunari adopted another school's techniques, and pioneered the family's new style. He had no problem working with any type of technique, and was a proficient and skillful smith.

These tsuba have a pronounced cross shape, the jigane is iron, the mimi (rim) provides a frame, and the flat ground area shows a refined sukidashi-bori work. On the large tsuba, the omote is covered with clouds and the ura is covered with waves. On the small tsuba, the pattern is the opposite with the omote covered with waves and the ura with clouds. On both tsuba, the carving is sophisticated. Around the mimi (rim) area, the design shows a Kitsho komon (pattern) and the patterns are carved precisely. The work is full of color, and the fine gold cloisonné zogan (inlaid) lines shine brightly. The tsubas' pattern display the essence of Japanese design, but the entire work is somehow exotic. The two tsuba exhibit the use many different techniques, but these are works of art which are above and beyond being simply tsuba. We could say these tsuba are one of Harunari's elaborate masterpieces.

By the way, I have always been impressed with Harunari's signatures. Hirata Harunari is written with four kanji and with a kao. In all of his work, the signature's kanji style, tagane (chisel) lines, tagane strokes, and finish work is uniform and consistent. Hopefully the skill involved in this kind of consistency and quality will revive interest in his work and in the unique characteristics of his work.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

(in the photos, both the dai and sho tsubas are shown at 88% of their actual size)

Shijo Kantei To No. 742

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 742 Shijo Kantei To is December 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 December 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: Tanto

Length: slightly less than 7 sun 1 bu (21.4 cm)

Uchizori

Motohaba: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Nakago length: 2 sun 7 bu (8.2 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with a mitsumune. It has a standard width and thickness and is uchizori. The middle section of the mitsumune is wide. The size of this tanto is slightly small and there is a sophisticated tanto shape. The jiane is a tight ko-itame, there are abundant ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and nie-utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. In the hamon, there are bright strong frequent nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. The koshi-hi is curved through on the omote side. The nakago is almost ubu (the tip has been shortened a little bit), the nakago tip has the original kurijiri shape, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote side under the original mekugi-ana, along the center, there is a two kanji signature, and the ura side has a date. On the omote side, the upper kanji, and the lower kanji's upper half show the smith's characteristic style.

Teirei Kanshou Kai For October, 2018

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

Meeting date: October 13, 2018 (2nd Saturday of October)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Ooi Takeshi

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Rai Kunitsugu

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 4 sun 4 bu

Sori: 1.05 sun

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada; there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and some areas have o-hada; there are pale nie-utsuri and a clear jigane.

Hamon: based on suguha mixed with gunome, ko-gunome, ko-choji and some areas are notare. There are frequent ashi, yo, ko-nie, some kinsuji and sunagashi, muneyaki at the koshi-moto, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight; the tip is a small komaru.

Among the Rai school smiths, Rai Kunitsugu is notable because of the strong influence of Soshu Den on his work, but compared with Rai Kunitoshi and Rai Kunimitsu, there are few of his works available today. But many of his existing blades are excellent, and from this, we can imagine during the early half of his career, he worked as a Rai Kunitoshi collaborator, and he has work very similar to Rai Kunitoshi's, just like this tachi. Also, among Rai Kunitoshi's works, a few of the signatures appear to have have Rai Kunitsugu's characteristic points.

There are ten of Kunitsugu's tachi in existence today, and there are only four tachi, including this tachi, with ubu nakago. Kunitsugu has tachi dated from Karyaku to Gentoku (1326-31), and some of his tachi's shapes are from the end of the Kamakura period to the early Nambokucho period, and have relatively wide shapes. But this tachi has an even sori from the the koshimoto to the kissaki which is called "wa-zori", and a narrow shape. We could say that this tachi's shape is like Rai Kunitoshi's shapes and this is an important piece to help identify Rai Kunitsugu's actual working period.

The jigane is a tight itame, there are abundant ji-nie and a bit of the soft jigane called Rai-hada, and nie utsuri. The hamon is based on suguha with a bright nioiguchi and ko-nie, and often the tips of the ashi are like thick choji ashi made of dense nie. In some areas the ashi tips extend or are slanted toward the nakago, and these are called Kyo-saka-ashi. There are also muneyaki, and these are obvious Rai school characteristic points. At this time, we treated Rai Kunitoshi, Kunimitsu and Ryokai as correct answers. A Kunitsugu characteristic point is that his hamon are a midare mixed with a notare style.

Beside the Rai school answers, many people voted for the Un-rui school. But we cannot see their characteristic togariba and o-maru boshi, and the clarity of their jiba (jitetsu and hamon) do not match this tachi's.

Kantei To No. 2: tanto

Mumei: Masashige

Length: 9 sun 3 bu

Sori: slightly less than 1 bu

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: large itame hada; there is a strong visible hada, and some areas have a strong nagare hada. There are frequent ji-nie, chikei, and a dark colored jitetsu.

Hamon: straight yakidashi at the moto, and above this there are gunome, gunome-choji, and togari; there is a small box shape notare type hamon, with prominent high and low variations in the height of the midare hamon. On the omote and ura, the hamon are the same. There are ashi, a tight nioiguchi, nie-deki, and in places the nie are strong; there is some sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip has a little hakikake, and there is a komaru and a return.

This tanto has a yakidashi, the hamon is a gunome midare with large hakoba (box-like gunome). There is a small space between the hamon features, and the valleys of the midare hamon are very low and close to the edge of the tanto which makes the high and low areas prominent. The omote and the ura have the same hamon, and these are obviously characteristic Sengo school features. From this, the votes focused on the school associated with Muramasa.

In Sengo Masashige's work many of his jigane have a strong visible hada when compared with Muramasa's work. His hamon have strong ha-nie, the midare hamon has some crumbled areas, and these are his characteristic points. This tanto has no crumbled nie in the hamon, and one has the impression that it was carefully made. From these details, a Muramasa vote is valid, and we treated this as a correct answer.

Sengo Masazane has very few works compared to Masashige and Muramasa. The majority of his hamon are suguha, and sometimes, at the koshimoto and the lower half of the hamon there is hakoba-midare hamon, and above this there is a suguha hamon or alternately a hamon with togari style gunome and ko-notare which results in an uninteresting hamon.

Beside the Sengo school, some people voted for Sue-Seki and Shimada school smiths. Among Sue-Seki work, some are similar to the Senshi school's work. Many of their jigane are whitish, and if the visible hada is this strong, we can see a strong whitish utsuri.

Also, the Shimada school has a whitish jigane, their hakoba hamon lines descending into the valleys are almost vertical, and the valleys are very flat and have a square shape, and they do not appear to resemble Sengo style work, although people do say that.

Kantei To No. 3: katana

Mei: Bitchu Kuni Mizuta ju O-Yogoro Kunishige saku

Ryodo-setsudan no tame kore wo tsukuru aruji (ower) Yamamoto Iyo-no kami

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 9 bu

Sori: 3.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada with some mokume hada, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, dull chikei, and the jitetsu color is a bit dark.

Hamon: based on a gentle notare midare hamon; the top of the notare hamon is mixed with gunome and hakoba, and some areas have strange crumbled shapes. There is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and some areas are uneven; the upper half has pronounced nie and yubashiri, and the entire katana has uneven muneyaki.

Boshi: dense yakiba; it is straight with frequent hakikake; the tip is komaru with a long return which continues to the muneyaki.

In the Shinto period, among the Soshu Den smiths, the Mizuta school has distinctive characteristics. The boshi return continues to the mune-machi; the mune and shinogi-ji areas have uneven strong yakiba.

People were aware of this school's style, and some voted for Kunishige in the first vote without any difficulty. At the NBTHK kanshokai meetings, it has been a long time since we saw this katana. People have studied and recently voted for typical Shinto period Soshu Den smiths, Satsuma Shinto smiths, Hankei, and Nanki Shigekuni but were not even close to a correct answer for Kunishige. Now that the people have examined an actual Kunishige sword, we expect that from now on that it will become easier to recognize these.

O-Yogo (O-tsuki Yogoro) Kunishige was active around the Genna to Kanei periods (1615-43). He broke away from the school's older styles which were similar to Sue-Bizen and from the Haku-shu Koga styles, and participated in the Soshu Den revival which was popular in that period. At that time, he established his own style as people know well. He was praised as the most skillful smith in the school.

His jigane are a tight itame hada with strong chikei, and the hada is visible and has a distinctive appearance. Another style we see has a visible itame hada with a dark colored jigane, with dull and worn down chikei, and a natural appearance like we see on this katana.

His hamon are a gentle notare or a wide hamon with open valleys and large gunome. Sometimes his midare hamon are crumbled. There is a very dense nioiguchi, strong uneven nie and a worn down nioiguchi. His boshi have a dense yakiba, strong hakikake, strong mune yaki and shinogi-ji yaki, and sometimes the entire blade produces an undisciplined impression.

Another smith with a style similar to the Mizuta school's work is Suzuki Soei, and many of his blades have mitsumune (Token-Bijutsu issue Number 676).

Kantei To No. 4: wakizashi

Mei: Nobukuni (Saemon-no-jo)

Length: slightly over 1 shaku 1 bu

Sori: slight

Style: hira-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame hada with some mokume hada; on the ura side the jitetsu has some nagare hada; there are abundant fine ji-nie.

Hamon: wide hamon, with a shallow ko-notare and with square shaped large gunome and hakoba. Between the hakoba (square gunome) there is a shallow or konotare hamon. In some areas there are two continuous or fused gunome in the midare hamon. There are ashi, yo, frequent and uneven nie, some yubashiri, tobiyaki, muneyaki, kinsuji, sunagashi and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi and tsukiage; the tip has some hakikae and is sharp with a long return.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are katana-hi with marudome; in the hi there are two bonji and under the hi there is a kaen (flame) bonji. The omote has an additional rendai horimono.

This hirazukuri wakizashi is long for its width and is thick, and the sori is not pronounced. This is clearly a characteristic shape from around the Oei period. In addition, there is a mitsumune, kasanebori (two horimono together), a midare hamon with a repeated two continuous fused gunome pattern. Between the midare hamon elements we see a low ko-notare hamon, and the entire wakizashi clearly shows Oei Nobukuni's characteristic points. Many people voted for correct answer at the first vote.

On the other hand, not a few people just wrote "Nobukuni". In that case, one should note if this were a peak Nambokucho period Shodai Nobukuni work, and should provide an almost correct answer. From now on, in the kantei votes, please pay attention to these details before writing a name.

Many people also voted for Heianjo Nagayoshi. On this wakizashi the omote and the ura hamon patterns are clearly misaligned, but the hamon shapes are similar, and if you look at this, this is similar to work from Muramasa and Nagayoshi. In particular, Nagayoshi's jiba (jihada and hamon) are bright and the same as Oei Nobukuni's, and the rich horimono are his characteristic point, so from this, the answer is understandable. But Nagayoshi has almost no typical Oei shapes. If he made a wakizashi in this size, Nagayoshi's mihaba would be wider, it would be a little thin, and have a clear sakisori. Also, his thick blades, would be short for their width and many of them have a shortened appearance. In addition, his horimono's location would be at the koshimoto and these are differences in their work.

Kantei To No. 5: katana

Mei: oite Efu Chounsai Tsunatoshi
Yamada Gosaburo sama kore
Tenpo 10 nen (1839) 2 gatsu kichijitsu
Donen 6 gatsu 3 nichi oite Denma-cho Daidai dodanbutsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun

Sori: 7 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame similar to a muji style; there are abundant ji-nie.

Hamon: diagonal and long yakidashi; above this there is a hamon based on choji and ko-choji mixed with ko-gunome and togari. There are ashi, some yo, nioi-deki, some small tobiyaki, kinsuji and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the omote tip is komaru, and the ura is togari (pointed).

Horimono: on the omote and the ura there are bo-hi with marudome, and soe-hi carved through the nakago.

This katana's jigane is muji-like, and the jiba (jihada and hamon) are bright and new looking. There is a slightly wide shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. The blade is thick up to the kissaki, there is a slightly large koshi-sori, and a prominent long chu-kissaki. These characteristics are not seen often in Koto and Shinto work. In addition, the shinogi-ji's width is narrow for the blade's width, from this you can judge this as Shinshinto period work.

The midare hamon is primarily based nioi-deki choji and ko-choji mixed with gunome and ko-gunome. The pattern in the hamon repeats with uniform intervals. Every 3 sun 3 bu we see this repeat unit. The boshi is midare-komi. These are the Chounsai Tsunatoshi school's common characteristic points. From these details, many people voted for Koyama Munetsugu, but Tsunatoshi's yakidashi from the moto to the hamon is a diagonal yakidashi called an Osaka-yakidashi. Munetsugu rarely has a yakidashi.

From the Koka to Kaei periods, Tsunatoshi's boshi became straighter with a komaru and return. From February, Ansei 2, there are father and son gassaku swords made with Koretoshi, and after this period many of his boshi are straight, and it is easy to observe differences from Munetsugu's work.

Yokoyama Sukenaga's works sometimes share the same shape hamon, but never have the regularly spaced repeat patterns. Sukenaga's yakidashi are an Edo yakidashi, and there is a straight boshi. Hamabe Toshinori and Toshimitsu have not have regular repeats in their hamon, and are more likely to have small fist shaped choji, and many of their boshi are straight. However, Toshiyuki has many midare boshi.

Shijo Kantei To Number 740 in the September, 2018 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Tatara Nagayoshi.

This katana has a tight ko-itame hada with midare-utsuri. The midare hamon has large choji clusters mixed with togariba and ko-choji. Some areas have open bottom valleys in the midare hamon. There is a bright and clear tight nioiguchi, and the boshi is midarekomi and the tip is sharp. From this, a majority of people voted for Nagayuki. Beside Nagayuki, a few people voted for the Edo Ishido school smith Tsushima no kami Tsunemitsu, and Fukuoka Ishido smiths such as Koretsugu and Moritsugu.

Nagayuki's early period works included copies of Sue-Bizen Sukesada's work. Possibly because of this influence, with choji hamon like we see on this katana, he used

open valleys in his midare hamon and this is a major characteristic point. Among the Ishido schools in the Shinshinto period, this characteristic is seen only in Nagayuki's work.

Tsunemitsu's suguha hamon have a shallow notarekomi, and a small kissaki with a komaru boshi, similar to what we see on this katana's boshi. But we do not see this kind of open valley midare hamon. His nakago tips are a shallow kurijiri.

Koretsugu and Moritsugu's jigane are entirely itame hada have strong nagare elements, and resemble a masame style hada. His hamon are described as having elements "just like a squid's head", which are prominent sharp tipped unique saka-choji, and often are mixed with ball shaped gunome, and appear like they were made without clay. His boshi are often midarekomi with a long return.

This katana's nakago has comments about the iron used: it is "motte Ban-syu Kanguri ko-tetsu saku kore" ("steel from Banshu was used"). Besides on this katana, Nagayuki has other examples which describe the iron used as "motte Chigusa tetsu kitae kore" ("Chigusa steel was used"), "motte Nanban-tetsu kitae kore" ("foreign steel was used") and "motte furu-kuwa saku kore" ("steel from old hoes or farm tools was used").

Incidentally, this is a Kanbun Shinto style work at the first glance, but it has a slightly large sori.

Nagayuki has dated blades from Tenna to Jokyo (1681-87) which is a little after the Kanbun Shinto period. Consequently, besides typical Kanbun Shinto shapes, he has blades with a slightly larger sori which remind us of the Jokyo to Genroku transition period's Shinto shapes.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai