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Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Jujo Bijutsuhin

Type: Katana

Mei: Bizen koku ju Osafune Yosozaemon-no-jo Sukesada saku
Tenmon 4nen 2gatsu Kichijitsu

Owner: NBTHK

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 1 bu 7 rin (70.2 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 9 rin (2.4 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 3 rin (2.2 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 2 bu 2 rin (3.7 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 5 bu 9 rin (16.95 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune, thick kasane, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not too different. The blade has a strong funbari at the moto, prominent sakizori, and a long chu-kissaki. The jigane shows a ko-itame hada and the entire hada is tight. There are ji-nie and midare utsuri. The entire yakiba is high, and is primarily an open valley gunome mixed with togari, gunome, square shaped gunome, and choji, and some places have a more active midare hamon. On the omote there is a complex midare hamon. On the omote and ura at the koshimoto, there is a small midare hamon. There are ashi, yo, the hamon is almost a nioiguchi type, and there are some ko-nie and small tobiyaki. The boshi has a wide yakiba which is midarekomi and the tip is o-maru. The nakago is ubu and the machi has been moved upwards slightly (there is small machi okuri). The nakago tip is a square shaped shallow ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are katte-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, on the shinogi-ji, there is a long signature made with a slightly thick tagane (chisel), and the ura has a date.

After the latter half of the Muromachi period, many Sue-Bizen smiths appeared, and many named Sukesada. In addition, there are many Sukesada works extant with many common or personal names. Among these smiths, this smith has produced many

master works, and the first name on the list of master smiths is the Shodai Yosozaemon-no-jo Sukesada. He was the son of Hikobei-no-jo Sukesada, and his last name was Nakagawa. He has a tanto dated Tenmon 6 (1537) stating that he made this at the age of 71. The mei says: "age 71 years saku". From this mei we can conclude that he was born in Ounin 1 (1467).

His earliest period when he used his personal name of Yosozaemon-no-jo was in the Bunki era (1501-04), and the last signature with this name was around Tenmon 10 (1541) when he was 75 years old. Including works which do not include his Yosozaemon-no-jo name, he appears to have been making swords for half a century, and we can say, for that period, he was a very long lived sword smith.

His hamon show many styles and variations. His representative style is an open valley double gunome pattern, based on suguha and notare, where the bottom half is a midare style and the upper half of the hamon is a suguha style, or the opposite pattern with a midare hamon at the koshimoto and from around the monouchi and the center, the hamon is a suguha. There is a doubled gunome pattern only around the koshimoto which appears like a koshiba. The hamon pattern is irregular and we can see hitatsura. Either style is very well made and we can recognize his high level of skill. His characteristic mune shapes, besides being an ihorimune, can be mitsumune or marumune. He often has hi, and many of these swords include tsure-hi or companion hi (this is true not only for him, but also for other Sue -Bizen smiths). In addition, he often made thick yoroi-doshi style tanto.

This katana was carefully made and stands out among the Sue-Bizen swords. This sword has a standard length which is seen often in this kind of work, the saki-zori is more noticeable than the koshi-zori, the nakago is short, and is a typical uchigatana style from the period. The jigane with utsuri is refined, and the tight ko-itame hada is well forged. The wide hamon is primarily a typical open valley gunome (especially on the ura side), and at the top of the hamon there are doubled or tripled fused gunome in the midare hamon. There is considerable variation in the hamon, the entire nioiguchi is bright, and this is a work by a highly ranked master smith.

In Bizen, after the mid-Muromachi period, the characteristic Bizen nioiguchi hamon, and ji-utsuri is less frequently seen. Usually the jiba (the jihada and hamon) changed to a small nie style, and the utsuri was not as prominent. This katana does not have prominent nie but does have clear utsuri, and this is a one of the best characteristic master works from the Bizen Den.

Also, from his signed work, we can recognize that this was made when the smith was 69 years old. Considering his long sword making history and many signed blades, either he was unusually active, or in his later years, he had excellent students and ran his forge as a "Sukesada studio" and was one of the top sword smiths in his area. In any case, his work reminds us of his excellent skill and his highly appreciated work.

This katana is listed in the sword book "Kanto nichichi sho: shoku" (from Showa 48, on the March 9 page). The former teacher Dr. Kunzan said there are many Sukesada works, but this is one of his master works. After the war, this was a one of 41 Kokuho and Juyo Bijutsuhin blades confiscated by the American military forces. Recently it was returned and donated by an American owner. During the period it was confiscated, there was a person in charge at the Culture Department, and when this sword

unexpectedly returned after a long period, the former official said it was a great pleasure to see it again.

Currently, this sword is being exhibited at the NBTHK exhibit which shows koshirae and Japanese swords from around Japan and from the Go Kaden or five schools. This exhibit will be shown until December 24th. Please be sure to visit the exhibit.

In addition, when this sword was classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, the owner was Mr. Ochiai Tamenobu. He was teaching at Kumamoto University, the former Dai Go Kotogakkou along with the famous Natsume Soseki. After this he moved to the Imperial household agency and worked for the Taisho Emperor as a chamberlain. During the Meiji to Showa periods, he was highly respected as a foremost Chinese poet (his poetry name was Tokuwaku).

This was given to the NBTHK by the grandson of Mr. Ochiai Tamenobu, Mr. Ochiai Tamekazu, and we greatly appreciate his kindness.

Explanation by Ishii Akira and illust by Imoto Yuki

No.742 Tosogu Kanshou

Hana (flower) sukashi tsuba

Mei: Yamakichibei

Iron is a fascinating metal, and iron tsuba are very interesting. For example, Owari-tsuba express a strong bushi-do feeling. If a tsuba is Kaneie's work, there is a feeling of sophistication and significance, and the strong characteristic jigane produces an impression. If it is Nobuie's work, it is dynamic, and we feel the strength of the iron, and each tsuba has a strong personality.

Among Owari tsuba, Yamakichibei's work shows a strong personality. His jigane produces a strong feeling of strength, the tekkotsu (jihada lines in the iron) are visible, and you can feel strongly the metal's diversity and variety.

This is a Nidai Yamakichibei's master work. The iron and yasuri work combine to produce a strong charming work. The double Amida (a style of filing) yasuri file pattern is exquisite, with an uchi-kaeshi mimi (a rim drawn over onto the surface of the tsuba) with tekkotsu, and the plain and elegant simple flower is impressive when viewed on the tsuba.

As time passes and people handle this tsuba, the tsuba's significance becomes stronger. This is a work where you can build a feeling for the iron tsuba and become one with the object.

Iron tsuba can express the bushi or warrior's unaffected and sincere nature. Among the iron tsuba works, Yamakichibei's tsuba the iron has an excellent appearance and is assertive. Yamakichibei's work is different from Nobuie's and Kaneie's work, but this tsuba shows Yamakichibei's art, and expresses the iron's characteristic charm.

This is an iron tsuba we feel can sufficiently express iron's personality and is a significant work.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 743

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 743 Shijo Kantei To is January 5, 2019. 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 January 5, 2019 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: 8 sun 8 bu (28.66 cm)

Uchizori

Motohaba: 8 bu 3 rin (2.5 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 6 bu (10.91 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with an ihorimune. It has an almost standard width, is slightly thick and has uchizori. The jigane is a tight ko-itame, there are abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and a unique jitetsu. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. In the hamon, there are kuichigai-ba, ko-ashi, a dense and bright nioiguchi, abundant nie, and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is iriyama-gata, and the yasurime are kiri. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote side along the mune edge there is a long kanji signature.

Shijo Kantei To No. 741 in the October, 2018 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Magoroku Kanemoto.

This blade is slightly wide and the widths at the the moto and saki are not very different. There is a saki sori and a long chu-kissaki, and from the shape you can judge this as a late Muromachi period blade.

The jitetsu is itame mixed with nagare-hada, the hada is visible and there is whitish utsuri. The hamon is a gyosho style (a type of kanji style) sanbon-sugi, and from this, a

majority of people voted for Magoroku. For an almost correct answer, a few people voted for the Shodai Kanemoto.

The Shodai Kanemoto does not make an exact sanbonsugi shape, and his hamon are gunome mixed with choji and gunome-choji, and are an irregular midare hamon. On the edge of the hamon, mixed with uchinoke and yubashiri, there are rough ha-nie and sunagashi. Many of his signatures are “Noshu Akasaka Kanemoto”, which is a long kanji signature.

Incidentally, today the majority of Kanemoto’s signed katana from the latter half of the Muromachi period to the early part of the Edo period have an uchigatana shape, with a sanbonsugi hamon. The nakago have taka-no-ha yasurime with the two kanji “Kanemoto” signature, and they are all very similar looking.

Old sword books such as the “Nihonto Meikan” listed many sword smiths with the name Kanemoto. But it seems that the authors of the meikan (a sword signature encyclopedia) were not able to examine all the Kanemoto blades, although they provided examples of each smith’s work.

From the style and the signature, you can judge precisely if a sword is work by the Shodai Kanemoto or Magoroku Kanemoto. Today, it is difficult to judge and identify the precise individual or maker responsible for many of the Kanemoto swords. We believe that this is a subject for future studies.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai