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Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Jujo Bunkazai

Type: Tachi

Mei: Bizen kuni Osafune ju Chikakage
Owner: Shinmei Shrine

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 6 bu 8 rin (71.75 cm)
Sori: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)
Sakihaba: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 01 rin (3.05 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 4 bu 4 rin (19.5 cm)
Nakago sori: 5 rin (0.1 5cm)

Commentary

This is a slightly wide shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, and the widths at the moto and saki are not too different. The blade is slightly thick, there is a large sori and a short chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume hada and some nagare hada, and in some areas the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, and relatively dark areas with low utsuri. The entire hamon or yakiba is low, and is composed of ko-gunome mixed with square shaped gunome and togari, and there are some saka-ashi. There are ashi, yo, some saka-ashi, a nioi-guchi, some uneven ko-nie, and some kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi above the yokote is almost straight with a very shallow notare. There is a small sharp point and a return. The nakago is suriage, and the nakago tip is a shallow kurijiri. The new yasuri-me are kate-sagari, and there are some original old yasuri-me which are slightly visible and are suji-chigai. There are two mekugi-ana. On the omote, along the mune side, there is a long signature written with small sized kanji.

Osafune Chikakage is supposed to have been Nagamitsu's student or son. Today we can confirm he has dated works from Showa 4 (1315) to Jowa 3 (1347) over a 30 year period. Because the mainstream smith Kagemitsu's active period is about ten years earlier than Chikakage's, Chikakage was probably a student who was junior to Kagemitsu, or possibly his younger brother. In some of Kagemitsu's early work, it appears possible that there are Chikakage daisaku blades (made for his teacher) and

Chikakage daimei (blades signed for his teacher). From this observation, the relationship between Kagemitsu and Chikakage appears to have been close, and the theory that Chikakage is Kagemitsu's younger brother is well founded.

Chikakage's mei on most of his long blades such as tachi have "Bizen kuni" or "Bishu Osafune ju Chikakage". But only his last tachi dated Jowa 3 (1347) is signed "Bizen kuni ju Osafune Chikakage" where the Osafune name appears after "ju" (residence). This seems to indicate that Osafune at that point, was the name of the school. Also, from the fact that he inscribed many gyaku-tagane mei, i.e. a mei with some lines carved in a direction the opposite of the usual direction, and used the "kage" kanji at the end of his name, it is thought that he was a founder of the Nanbokucho period group of smiths who used the "kage" kanji such as Yoshikage, Morikage, Morokage, and Mitsukage. Yoshikage actually has signatures similar to Chikakage's in his Jowa 3 work. Also, in some of Morikage's mei, he used "Osafune" as a name of the school.

Most of Chikakage's work consists of tachi, and there are some naginata naoshi wakizashi and kanmuri-otoshi wakizashi. But he has very few tanto compared to Kagemitsu who has many tanto, and this is interesting. In Chikakage's characteristic jigane the hada is visible, and sometimes mixed with o-hada. Compared with Kagemitsu's work, the ji is less refined, and the ji-utsuri are not as clear. Several of his hamon are similar to Kagemitsu's but have relatively prominent nie. His boshi are an emphasized "Sansaku boshi" style, and they are almost straight above the yokote, with a shallow notare, and sometimes with a tsukiage (sharp or pointed) tip and return. It is pointed out that sometimes his boshi can fall towards the edge side or the mune side.

This tachi's itame hada is somewhat visible, and less refined. The hamon in some places shows saka-ashi, and there is a nioi-guchi with ko-nie. In addition, it is not clear if the boshi above the yokote is straight or is a shallow notare, but the tip is sharp. These details show precisely his characteristic style. But compared to his usual work, the dark areas in the ji-utsuri are low and clear, and it is hard to miss this characteristic point. This tachi is slightly wide and slightly thick, the nikuoki (cross section of the blade) is not worn or over-polished and this blade has been maintained in a healthy condition. This tachi shows Chikakage's personality, and many of his characteristic points, and this is one of his excellent masterworks.

This tachi was donated in September of Anei 3 (1774) to the Shinmei shrine in Nakatsugawa City in Gifu prefecture by the Mino Kuni's Naegi clan's 9th lord Toyama Tomokiyo. It is in the same state as when it was donated, and since then, this tachi has become one of the shrine's treasures, and has been well maintained since it was donated.

The year before the donation, in November of Anei 2, the neighboring state, Hida Kuni, experienced a large farmer's riot called the "Anei rebellion". The state daikan (officer) asked for aid from Tomokiyo who sent about 350 soldiers. Thus Tomokiyo used his own soldiers to quell a riot in another clan. This tachi's donation was made in the next year to the shrine's god to commemorate the safe end of the riot.

Explanation and illust by Ishii Akira

No.744 Tosogu Kanshou

**Enko sokugetsu-zu (“monkey trying to catch the moon” design) mitokoromono
Kozuka & Kogai mei: Goto Kenjo (kao)
Menuki: mumei and attributed to Kenjo**

Kenjo was praised by the Goto family’s restorer and master smith. This precious mitokoromono is signed by Kenjo. The design’s motif is “enko-sokugetu” (a monkey trying to catch the moon) which is a popular theme, not only for tosogu, but also in the art world. A monkey stretching his long arm relies on a willow branch to catch a moon reflected on the water’s surface. However, the branch breaks and the monkey falls into the water. This is an old tale from the “Makaso-gi-ritsu” (a scroll). This provides a warning that ambitions too large for one’s own status could lead one to destroy himself.

Concerning the monkey’s motive, I personally like to think that this is a story of a sad event showing the monkey’s lack of wisdom. I could understand the monkey’s wish to catch the moon because it is beautiful! However, he should have considered if the moon was real or a fake, and then thought about a strategy. The problem is whether he had this kind of wisdom or not.

Commenting on this work we see that the theme is a full moon and a crescent moon, and all of the monkey’s family are stretching their arms out to the moon, and they seem to a little curious. The monkey’s facial expression shows a somewhat warm feeling, and this is Kenjo’s unique presentation and generates a feeling of hesitation and of wisdom. Of course his carving technique is first class. The nanako neatly extend right to the edge without a frame. Notably the monkey’s shape formed with taka-bori and katachi-bori is excellent. Furthermore, the balance of gold and silver on the jet black shakudo ground is excellent, strong, and clear. This has the beauty and status expected for the Goto family’s oie-bori work (work for the shogun). Among the mainstream Goto family, Kenjo’s work is excellent.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 744

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 744 Shijo Kantei To is February 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 February 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: Katana

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4.5 bu (71.1 cm)
Sori: slightly over 5 bu (1.6 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)
Sakihaba: 7 bu 8 rin (2.35 cm)
Moto-kasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)
Saki-kasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 3 bu 5 rin (4.1 cm)
Nakago length: 7 sun 1.5 bu (21.66 cm)
Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It has an almost standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not too different. There is a wa-zori, and a chu-kissaki. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie and chikei, and the steel's color is slightly dark. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. In the hamon, there are some tobiyaki, ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. The horimono on the omote is bo-hi with a ryo-chiri, and the ura has futasuji-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are sujichigai.

There is one mekugi-ana, and on the ura side towards the mune edge, there is a long kanji signature.

Shijo Kantei To No. 742 in the November, 2018 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by Shintogo Kunimitsu dated Kagen 4 (1306)

This is a small tanto, but both, the mihaba (width) and Kasane (thickness) are standard. The tanto has uchizori and an elegant shape. From these details you can judge this as work from the latter half of the Kamakura period.

In voting, the majority of people voted for Shintogo Kunimitsu.

When first seeing this tanto, it reminds us of a Yamashiro school suguha hamon. However, there are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and nie-utsuri.

The suguha hamon has frequent strong bright nie, kinsuji and sunagashi, and the entire hamon is a Soshu Den style. Kunimitsu's hamon are reputedly "based on an Awataguchi Den jiba (jitestu and hamon) and strongly emphasize nie, along with frequent chikei and kinsuji", and this tanto shows Shintogo's characteristic points. Also, his signature's characteristic "hidari-ji kita-kanmuri" (the kuni kanji's interior left and right sides have the opposite of the usual composition), and the "mitsu" kanji is similar to the 北 (kita) kanji, and the hints refer to this.

Shintogo Kunimitsu has two different styles. One is similar to this tanto, but the hamon's width is relatively wide, and in the jiba, nie are more frequent than nioi, the chikei and kinsuji hataraki are intense, and there is a strong Shoshu Den style. The

other style is just like this tanto, with a slightly little low hamon width, more gentle chikei and kinsuji, and a quiet appearance.

Similarly, Kunimitsu has two styles of his suguha hamon. Today we recognize several different signatures for him, and the theory that Kunimitsu mei could have be carved by several different people is based on this observation.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai