

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

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Meito Kansho; Examination of important swords

Tokubetsu Jujo Token

Type: Katana

Mei: Unjo

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7 bu 7 rin (69.0 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 9 rin (2.4 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 7 rin (2.05 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 9 bu 1 rin (17.9 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is a slightly wider than usual for the shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It is slightly thick, there is a strong sori, and a short chu-kissaki. The jigane has ko-itame hada, mixed with small mokume, and the entire hada is very tight. There are fine ji-nie and chikei, and on the omote there are stripe-like pale suji-utsuri which become dan utsuri. On the ura, dark jifu areas transition into midare utsuri. The hamon is a wide suguha mixed with gunome, and there are square shaped gunome and ko-choji. There are some slanted shapes or lines, frequent ashi and yo, and abundant ko-nie. The boshi on the omote is notare-komi, and on the ura is straight; both tips are an o-maru shape. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is suriage, and the tip is kiri (because of the orikaeshi work the shape is slightly changed.) The new yasurime are kiri and the old yasurime style is uncertain. On the omote, in the orikaeshi area, there is a two kanji signature.

In Bizen Province, in the Yoshii river basin there were many sword schools, such as the Osafune school. On the east side along the Asahi river and its tributary Ukai river, there was a sword school called the Ukan school. Ukai's location is around today's Okayama City's Kita-ku, Mitsu Ukai. It is close to its neighbor on the west, Bitchu Province, and is

located near Bitchu's rugged mountainous area. There are swords with confirmed signatures of Unjo, Unji, and Unju. In forming a smith's name, they used the "Un" kanji, and were called "Unrui". Some historical books describe these smiths and their connections over several generations. At this time, we cannot confirm this information.

Their style is unique among the Bizen smiths, but their work does not have many Bizen characteristic points, and their work seems to be based on Bitchu Aoe elements, and they were geographically close to Bitchu Aoe. Their jigane shows a fine visible hada, prominent mokume hada, and jifu. Their hamon are primarily a suguha style, but contain slanted midare and saka-ashi. On their nakago, the hamon side edge or mune (hamune) is thick, their yasurime are o-sujichigai, their signatures are often have gyaku tagane lines, and these are their common characteristic points. On the other hand, they have a wazori shape, with a finely forged ko-itame hada similar to a Kyoto style, and especially similar to characteristic Rai school work. Sometimes there are uneven high jifu-like hataraki, like we seen in the jigane of many Rai swords. Also, the school's unique hamon characteristics are: the upper half of the hamon is simple, and bottom half contains many features, such as midare hamon valleys with sharp valley bottoms, and in-no (reversed) togariba (i.e. togariba which project down towards the edge and not up towards the mune). The school's boshi is an o-maru with a return.

Unjo's signed works are tachi and kodachi, and there are a fair number of blades with confirmed signatures. Among these, there is a tachi which is over 3 shaku in length (classified as important cultural property and owned by the Shiogama Shrine), and others which are over 2 shaku 5 sun long, and many of these have gentle shapes. Unjo's jiba (the ji and ha) are as I described above, but sometimes we see yakiotoshi which is unusual for work from the latter half of the Kamakura period. Most of Unjo's hamon are low with a gentle suguha style. His long signatures are rare, and many of them are above the mekugi-ana and along the mune side. There are two kanji signatures as well. His "Jo" kanji is located on towards the right compared with the "Un" kanji (i.e. the two kanji are not written in a straight vertical line), and this an accepted characteristic point.

This katana is slightly wide and the widths at the moto and saki are not too different. It is wazori and has a dynamic shape. The wide hamon has relatively abundant fine hane, and along the ashi and yo there are nie, and this is a Rai style hamon. Among Unjo's works, there are a few swords which are similar to, or resemble Unji's work. Looking carefully at the tightly refined ko-itame jigane, we see small mokume hada, and it is interesting that the clear utsuri is more visible than on Osafune work, and is different on the omote and the ura sides. The dark jifu areas which help define the utsuri, are described as having a shape which resembles their being "pushed into place by a finger". The omote utsuri resemble the neighboring Bitchu Aoe's characteristic line-like utsuri overlapping dan-utsuri, and this sword shows this characteristic point very well. The yakiba's slanted midare hamon with his characteristic sharp angles dropping down toward the edge and side is called "in-no togariba". The tip of the boshi is large and round, and you can recognize this characteristic.

From the signature's location, we can guess that the original length of this katana was 2 shaku 8 sun, and it was a dignified long tachi. The suriage or shortening was unfortunate, but the excellence of this work still compensates for the suriage, and this is a healthy, well made master work.

Recently this tachi was donated to the NBTHK by Mr. Nihon Hirohide, and we wish to thank him for this.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira

No.751 Tosogu Kanshou

Juyo Tosogu

Awaho (ears of millet) zu (design) daisho menuki

Mei : Dai: tanzaku-mei Issai Tomei

Sho: tanzaku-mei Issai Tomei

(a tanzaku mei is inscribed on a small rectangular metal plate on the inside of the menuki)

In tosogu history, Araki Tomei is considered to be a master smith with unique techniques. In examining the techniques and finished awaho (images or sculptures of ears of millet) work in the past and present, Araki Tomei's name is prominent. At this time, I would like to describe a set of large and small menuki made of solid gold to demonstrate the charm of awaho work.

Tomei studied Japanese painting from Hayashi Ranga, and developed an intense and delicate painting style. He has many awaho focused works, and produced all types of excellent compositions. The best examples of his work are expressed in his awaho themed works, and this is one of them,

The dai and sho menuki design reminds us of real awaho (ears of grain) over a mino and goza background, and the detailed workmanship and painting-like style overwhelms a viewer. We can easily appreciate his high level of skill which is apparent in this work. Tomei received training from the best Bakumatsu period kinko smith Goto Ichijo and Tomei's awaho work even received attention from Ichiho.

Even though just one colored metal is used, each part or detail is clear, and the perfection of the work is magnificent.

This is an exuberant or expressive work which exhibits Araki Tomei's spirit and pride.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 751

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 751 Shijo Kantei To is September 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 September 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: Tachi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu (68.5cm)

Sori: 7 bu (2.12 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 8 rin (0.85 cm)

Sakikasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu 9 rin (3.6 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 5.5 bu (19.85 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a large koshisori, the blade is suriage, the tip has sori, the blade is thick for the width, and there is a chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, and nagare hada, and the hada is just visible. There are ji-nie, kawari-tetsu steel (areas with a distinctive appearing steel), wide chikei, jifu, and pale midare utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The width of the hamon is narrow for the width of the blade or the mihaba. There are ashi, yo, the entire hamon is small or narrow, there are nioiguchi-like ko-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is suriage, the horimono on the omote and the ura are bo-hi. On the omote the hi is finished with marudome, and on the ura the hi are carved through the nakago. The nakago tip was originally kuri jiri. The old yasurime are katte-sagari, and the new yasurime are sujichigai. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote nakago tip toward the mune side, there is a long kanji signature.

The smith's use of gyaku-tagane stokes is not clear in the mei.

Teirei Kanshou Kai for July, 2019

Date: July 13, 2019 (2nd Saturday of July)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Ishii Akira

Kantei To No. 1: katana

Mei: Hizen kuni ju Omi daijo Fujiwara Tadahiro shingitae

Length: 2 shaku 5.05 sun

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are dense fine chikei, and a clear ji.

Hamon: choji midare mixed with square shaped gunome, togariba, yahazu choji, and o-gunome; the entire hamon is small. There are abundant long ashi, yo, abundant ko-nie, and the top of the hamon has small tobiyaki in places.

Boshi: on the omote and the ura, it is almost straight; there are ashi, a komaru and a return.

This is a Hizen Nidai Omi daijo Tadahiro katana. He worked in many types of styles such as the original clean clear Hizen suguha, the Shizu style, and hitatsura. On the omote and the ura there are two different hamon styles or hamon shapes on this blade (it is a konote-gashiwa style which means that one side's hamon is very active and the other side's hamon is relatively quiet). This katana's hamon is what is called a "Hizen long ashi choji" style, which we see sometimes.

The Nidai Tadahiro's long ashi choji midare hamon's characteristic point is usually continuous round topped choji, and they do not show much variation. But this katana's hamon is a little different, and is primarily a choji style hamon, mixed with all types of features such as square shaped gunome, yahazu gunome, and ko-gunome, and so it contains variations. Some places have vertical variations, but overall, the hamon is small. In addition, around the top of the hamon we can see small tobiyaki.

This kind of midare hamon is the Sandai Tadayoshi's speciality, and it is possible this could be a daisaku blade made by the Sandai. The length is 2 shaku 5 sun, and it is wide. Among the first three generations, the Sandai is supposed to have had the most refined ji, and this has a fine ko-itame hada. This katana has many of the Sandai Tadayoshi's characteristic points.

Based on these points, in voting, among the Hizen smiths, the number of votes cast for the sandai was larger than for the nidai, but we considered the sandai to be an almost correct answer.

There were other opinions. Some people considered the refined ko-itame hada to be a muji style, so some people voted for Shinshinto Bizen-den smiths such as Koyama Munetsugu. But if it were him, there would be periodic or repeating midare hamon, a stronger and tighter nioiguchi than we see here, and a regular periodic interval in a rhythmic repeat pattern in the hamon.

Kantei To No. 2: wakizashi

Mumei: Osafune Mitsutada

Length: 1 shaku 7 sun 5.5 bu

Sori: 3.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada, mixed with mokume hada, and the entire ji is well forged. There are ji-nie, chikei, and clear midare-utsuri.

Hamon: choji style hamon mixed with kawazuko-choji, square shaped gunome, and ko-gunome. The omote has a small midare hamon. There are frequent ashi and yo, and a nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi, and there is a round return (this means that there is a small round section at the top of the boshi which extends into the return).

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

At first glance, this wakizashi's original funbari is gone, and it has suffered from a large alteration due being suriage.

From the jiba (ha and ji), there is no new or robust appearance we might see in a Shinto or Shinshinto blade. In addition, there is an obvious midare-utsuri, a primarily choji hamon with a nioiguchi, and from these details, this obviously is a Kamakura period Bizen work. Also, the hamon, especially on the ura side, narrow waisted choji called "Kawazuko choji" are conspicuous, and this clearly suggests work by Osafune Mitsutada, Nagamitsu and Hatakeda Moriie as candidates for the smith.

In voting, Mitsutada was first, and there were many votes for these three smiths. Mitsutada's characteristic jigane is like Kyoto's refined hada, except for utsuri. On the other hand, there is an opinion that in Moriie's jigane, the hada is visible but a little less than in Mitsutada's jigane. But Moriie's jigane is well forged, and not inferior to Mitsutada's jigane, and we treated both as correct answers. Also, Nagmitsu used his father Mitsutada's characteristic Kawazuko choji hamon, but this style hamon was only seen in his early work over his 30 year career. Without any other real confirmation concerning the smith, we wish to look at this as Mitsutada's work.

Other opinions were for Ichimonji school smiths such as Yoshifusa. That school's hamon have prominent choji clusters grouped close together as though they were competing with each other, and an active gorgeous style which is different.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mei: Fujiwara Hirozane

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu

Sori: slightly over 3 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jitetsu: itame hada mixed with mokume, and the entire hada is visible. There are abundant ji-nie and chikei

Hamon: small ko-notare mixed with gunome, large gunome, and togariba. The bottom half of the hamon is narrower, and the upper half has prominent vertical variations in the in the large size midare hamon. There are ashi, abundant uneven nie, and sunagashi;

the bottom half has yubashiri, and the entire hamon has a worn down nioiguchi. There is a pale mizukage under the machi.

Boshi: the omote is almost straight, the ura is a shallow notare; both sides have a komaru and return.

During the Keicho period, swords were modeled after long Nanbokucho tachi with large suriage shapes, and in the period's popular Soshu Den style. As a result, the east of Japan produced master smiths such as Hankei, and Etchizen Yasutsugu. In the west of Japan, there were master smiths such as Horikawa in Kyoto, the Mishina school, Nanki Shigekuni in Kii, the Shodai Kanewaka in Kaga, and Hizen Tadayoshi and Munetsugu.

This blade has funbari at the moto, the width is not excessive, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a shallow sori, a long kissaki, and this is a Keicho period shape. Also, the ji-nie and the ha-nie are prominent, the jigane has itame hada, and in some places the hada is visible. However, it does not show uruoi (or an appearance of moisture) and appears less refined and rough looking. This kind of unique hada is called "Horikawa" hada and is the school's specific style and you must not fail to notice this. Also, the hamon's nioiguchi is a little worn down, there are wide and narrow variations in the width of the nioiguchi, there are large and small ha-nie, strong and weak nie, the nioiguchi is uneven, and these are the school's characteristic points.

This is a Hirozane katana, and he is supposed to have been one of Kunihiro's older students or a close relative. Unfortunately, there are only a small number of his works available, so it is difficult to identify something as the work of Hirozane.

Among the Horikawa school's smiths, one smith who has higher or wider hamon with prominent vertical variations and an exuberant style is Dewa Daijo Kunimichi, and among the votes for Horikawa school smiths, many were for Kunimichi.

Incidentally, among the many Kunihiro school smiths, the Fujiwara kanji written by Hirozane and Osumi Daijo Masahiro are very similar. There is one theory that Hirozane and Masahiro were the same person, and that Hirozane was Masahiro's early mei. This would be an interesting subject for future studies.

Kantei To No. 4: katana

Mumei: Osafune Tomomitsu

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 4 sun 1 bu

Sori: slightly less than 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada mixed with mokume; the entire ji is well forged, and on the omote in some places, the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, some chikei, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: the entire hamon's width is high; it is composed mainly of kaku-gunome (square gunome) mixed with gunome. There is a nioiguchi, ko-nie, and on the omote in some places, there is sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi with an o-maru and return.

This blade has suffered from a large degree of shortening, i.e. from a large degree of suriage, but there is still some koshizori visible. Also, the widths at the moto and saki are almost the same. There is a large kissaki, and from the shape you can judge this as a Nanbokucho period Enbun-Joji shape. Also, there are dark and pale utsuri areas, and in places, the dark utsuri areas remind us of Bizen work. Looking at the hamon, from the moto to the tip it is primarily kaku-gunome, and considering the smith's active period, the names of Kanemitsu, Motomitsu, and Motoshige come to mind, and in the voting we saw many Bizen smiths' names from the period.

For Kanemitsu, with this kind of large sized blade, many of his hamon are based on notare, also this high hamon is not usual for him. If it were Motoshige's work, his characteristic gunome hamon form a straight line, and so it is best to avoid these two smiths' name.

Some people voted for Masamitsu. If it were his work, it could be similar to Kanemitsu's work, but the entire hamon is small, and they appear different.

Therefore, the best candidate for the maker is Motomitsu. This sword has an old saya with an origami which states it had a value of 350 kan, and was judged as Tomomitsu's work. However, most of his hamon are usually based on notare, (and a small number of his hamon have prominent kakugunome). From these details, we can say that the hamon style resembles Motomitsu's work

Kantei To No. 5: katana

Mei: oite Tobu Sa no Yukihide tsukuru kore
Keio 3 nen (1867) 2 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun

Sori: 4.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: ko-itame hada mixed with mokume and nagare hada. There are frequent ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: mainly gunome, but mixed with togari, square shape gunome and notare.

There are frequent long ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant dense nie, sunagashi and kinsuji.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is komaru, there are hakikake, and a long return.

This is 2 shaku 5 sun long, and the widths at the moto saki are not too different. There is a shallow sori, and the blade is thick and heavy in the hand. Also, there is a noticeably narrow shinogi width for the width of the blade, and there are long ashi extending to the edge of the hamon. From these details, it is easy to judge this as Shinshinto period work. This is a Sa Yukihide katana. Usually, most of Yukihide's styles are modeled after Inoue Shinkai or Go, with a suguha style shallow notare hamon. There is a small number of blades with this kind of gunome style, but it is seen intermittently throughout his career, and is considered to be one of his styles.

As might be expected, in the first vote, only a small number of people had the correct name. Many people voted for Soshu Den smiths, especially from the Kiyomaro school, the Naotane school, and Unju Korekazu. In case of Kiyomaro's work, the jitetsu is based on itame, there are very abundant ji-nie, and a strong feeling in the steel. His hamon have choji shapes and slightly large gunome, and somewhat square shaped gunome are prominent. There are large and small uneven abundant nie, and thick kinsuji inside of the hamon, and this sometimes creates the impression of two separate hamon. In the case of Kiyondo, usually many of his hamon have continuous gunome, and in some places there is a tight nioiguchi with a hard looking hamon. On many of his boshi, the return part has unique hakikake. Also, Nobuhide's hamon are mixed with togariba, and are a complex and unnatural hamon. More than anything, the Kiyomaro school's characteristic point is a poor fukura shape, which produces an impression of sharpness. On the other hand, in the case of Soshu Den work by Naotane, the jitetsu is usually itame mixed with a unique mokume called Uzumaki-hada, and his hamon are mainly notare. Furthermore, Korekazu does not have this kind of dynamic work, and would usually have a choji style hamon.

Considering these points, and looking at this sword carefully, the ko-itame hada in some places apparently has nagare hada, and compared with the smiths mentioned above, there is a dense nioiguchi, and the nioiguchi's width is thick, without uneven hanie. The entire jiba (the ji and ha) are bright and clear, and these details follow Yukihide's characteristic points, and finally suggest his name.

Shijo Kantei To No. 749 in the June, 2019 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by Osafune Sukesada dated Eisho 3 nen (1506)

This is short, thick blade with a standard width which is thick for the length. It has a strong uchizori and a poor fukura, and from the shape, you can judge this as work from the latter half of the Muromachi period. Also, the tanto's nakago is long for the to-shin (the polished portion of the blade above the nakago), and this suggests the same period.

In addition, the tanto suddenly becomes thin when going towards the tip. The straight boshi and komaru with a return is wide, especially on the omote, and this tells us that this is not Kamakura period work, but more likely Muromachi period work.

The jigane has a tight itame hada, the hada is visible and is a refined hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and midare utsuri, which looks like main stream Sue-Bizen master smith work.

The situation is the same for Muromachi period suguha tanto, from the Sue-Tegai school. The school's forging shows a mixture of hada types which includes masame hada, the edge of the suguha hamon has nijuba and kuichigaiba, the boshi have hakikake, and in many of them, the jiba have Yamato Den characteristic points. But Sue-Bizen suguha master work does not have these prominent Yamato Den characteristics.

Their suguha borders are relatively neatly arranged or clean, and there are frequent nie and a bright nioguchi.

In case of suguha hamon, the Sue-Bizen boshi is straight and there is a komaru and round return (the return begins after a short round section in the boshi). Often the return is deep (i.e. the return begins low in the tip of the boshi), and there is a long return.

In voting, the majority of people voted for Sue-Bizen smiths such as Sukesada, Katsumitsu, Munemitsu, and Tadamitsu.

All of these smiths have this kind of suguha tanto, and in this case, it is difficult to distinguish between their work, and at this time, votes for these Sue-Bizen smiths are treated as correct answers.

Beside these, a few people voted for the latter half of the Muromachi period's Seki smiths such as Kanesada and Kanesaki.

The Seki work includes copies of Rai suguha tanto, and they have some similarities: the boshi return is deep or long. The Seki Rai tantos are not prominently thick for their width, their utsuri is whitish, and in the later work, the nakago yasuri-me sometimes are katte-sagari, but many of them are higaki.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai