

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

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Meito Kansho

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Katana

Mei: Iga-no-kami Fujiwara Kinmichi

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

Sori: 5 bu 4 rin (1.6 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 bu (3.35 cm)

Sakihaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.85 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 2 sun 1 rin (6.1 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 1 rin (18.2 cm)

Nakago sori: 5 rin (0.15 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is wide, and the widths at the moto and the saki are not very different. The blade is thick, there is a shallow sori, and there is a large kissaki. The jigane shows ko-itame hada mixed with some areas with nagarehada. There are ji-nie, chikei, and mizukage at the machi. The entire hamon is high, and composed of gunome and choji, mixed with togariba, ko-gunome, and yahazu choji. There are frequent ashi and yo, a tight nioiguchi, and slightly uneven ko-nie on the nioiguchi. There are some tobiyaki, and from the center to the upper part of the blade there are muneyaki. The boshi is a wide midarekomi, the tip is a sharp komaru, and there is a long return. The nakago is ubu, the tip is ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are sujichigai and there is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, next to the mekugi-ana, along the mune side, there is a long kanji signature.

It is thought that the Shodai Iga-no-kami Kinmichi was the son of Kanemichi (who later changed his name to Daido). In Eiroku 2 (1559), the kanpaku (the emperor's chief advisor) Nijo Haruyoshi, when he was on the way to back to Kyoto, appointed Kinmichi as a "Kinri-goyo-kaji" (a sword smith who worked for the emperor). Consequently, Kinmichi moved to Kyoto with his father, his brother Rai Kinmichi, Tanba-no-kami Yoshimichi and Etchu-no-kami Masatoshi, and established the Mishina school's

foundation. However, there is another alternative story that when they moved to Kyoto, Kanemichi presented a sword, either in March of Eiroku 12 (1569) or in April of 1570, and received the “Dai” title, and was appointed as “saemon-no-jo”. His earliest dated work is dated Tensho 9 (1581), with the Kinmichi saku signature. After this he received “Iga-no-kami” title in Bunroku 3 (1594), and in March of Keicho 19 (1614) he received an order for one thousand jin-dachi (formal tachi) from Ieyasu for the Tokugawa army. As he completed this order in June, he received a social title, and all Japanese sword smiths worked under the direction of Kinmichi. He received a license of manufacturing equipment used for castle and trench construction, and the freedom to travel through sekisho (check stations and barriers) on land and in the sea. Furthermore, with Ieyasu’s recommendation, he is supposed to have received a title as the “Nihon Kaji Soshu (master of all Japanese sword smiths)” from the emperor. He is supposed to have passed away on December 11, of Kanei 6 (1629). Another theory is that he passed away sometime between Kanei 11 (1634) when the Nidai Kinmichi’s daimeiri work was dated, and before the Nidai’s earliest individually signed work dated in Kanei 14 (1637).

Most of Kinmichi’s signed work consists of katana or hirazukuri wakizashi, but there are some naginata and yari. He has two general styles. We see one style before he received his title in the Tensho period. At that time, his jigane had a whitish itame hada mixed with nagare-hada. His hamon were ko-gunome, togariba, and gunome and choji. Many of these blades had a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie, and a strong characteristic Seki style. After he received the title, his work was influenced by Soshu Den work, just like many other Keicho period smiths. Sometimes, he has a dynamic Soshu style, but you can recognize Mino’s characteristic style hamon with a notare, gunome, and togari hamon. Kinmichi took Seki style downer Shizu Saburo Kaneuji, for his model.

This katana is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a large kissaki, a Momoyama period characteristic dynamic shape, and a very healthy condition. The entire jigane is tight and refined. There are fine ji-nie and chikei hataraki, and a good iron appearance. Furthermore, the hamon is high and primarily composed of gunome and choji mixed with many other features. The hamon, has prominent vertical variations, and this is a characteristic hamon of the latter half of the Muromachi period from Seki, and we can see Kinmichi’s pride as a smith who originated in Seki.

Furthermore, most of Kinmichi’s signatures after he received his title include “Iga-no-Kami Kinmichi” which is a five kanji signature. There are only three blades, including this one in which his signature includes “Fujiwara”. These longer signatures indicate there was very diligent and meticulous work invested in the sword, so, from this, this blade is considered to be a valuable reference work.

Incidentally, this is one of Tani Kanjo’s beloved katana. He was known as a sword enthusiast, and he was the chief of the Kumamoto Prefecture garrison, and he desperately defended Kumamoto castle from Saigo’s Satsuma army’s attack.

Explanation by Ishii Akira, and illustrated by Imoto Yuki

No.753 Tosogu Kanshou

Juyo Tosogu

Tsuru kame zu (crane and turtle design) dai sho fuchi kashira

Dai (large) mei: Rakuhoku kyo Hakuou saku. Dekoboko sanjin

Sho (small) mei: Kiju ou Hakuou saku

Note: there is also a box which was made for these tsuba.

Goto Ichijo is famous as the Goto family's last master smith. Needless to say, he was one of three best master smiths in the Bakumatsu period. He changed his name several times during his life, and used the names Kouka, Kougyo, and Koudai. In Bunsei 7 (1824), at the age of 34 years, he signed his work as Koudai Nyudo, and he has left us many masterpieces.

Ichijo used many techniques. For example, he used colored metals and also very elaborate and detailed work without using many colored metals. His use of metal itself lent character to his work, and there is a magnificent and elegant feeling in his work. Even using just one colored metal, shakudo, he could produce a rich feeling of color in his work.

In his later years, he called himself 'Hakuou'. Possibly that name change resulted from his development of a new style. After he started using the Hakuou name, his range of styles became wider, and he used abundant iron and a gold powder inlay technique, and his work exhibited a different type of beauty.

This is one of these later works. On the iron ground, with takabori carving and a gold powder inlay technique, his use of a turtle and crane expresses a wish for prosperity for the world. His excellent technique emphasizes this theme's wish for prosperity.

At the age 77 years, Ichijo's was still creative, and his inquiring mind and confidence are apparent. This masterpiece exhibits Ichijo's high level of skill, and deserves respect. In this work, we can see and appreciate Ichijo's ability.

Incidentally, the work is accompanied by a box to hold these tsuba which Goto Hokyo Ichijo signed.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 753

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 753 Shijo Kantei To is November 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 November 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: slightly over 9 sun 4 bu (28.6 cm)

Sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 4 rin (2.85 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun (9.1 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune. It is a wide and long, but is thin, and there is a shallow sori. The jigane is itame with mokume hada and is mixed with nagare and masame hada. There are ji-nie, chikei and whitish utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon border (the habuchi) has small hotsure and is a kuichigai-ba style hamon. There is a tight nioiguchi with nie and toned down in hamon. The nakago is ubu, the tip is wide, and there is a ha-agari type kurijiri. The yasurime are a very shallow katte-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the the ura under the mekugi-ana along the mune side there is a kanji signature, and the omote side has a date.

It is rare for this smith or other smiths in his school to have a signature on ura side, on a tanto.

Teirei Kanshou Kai September 2019

Date: September 14th 2019 (2nd Saturday of September)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Hinohara Dai

Kantei To No. 1: katana

Orikaeshi mei: Unsho

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 8 bu

Sori: 8 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: ko-itame mixed with mokume, and the entire jigane is tight. There are fine ji-nie and chikei. On the omote there are dan-utsuri, and the ura has jifu utsuri.

Hamon: slightly wide suguha style hamon mixed with square gunome, ko-gunome, and ko-choji. There are frequent ashi and yo, and the entire hamon are slanted. There are ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: shallow notarekomi; there is a round tip and a long return.

The other day Mito lord's tanto was donated to the NBTHK by Mr. Nakano Akio who lives in Hyogo Prefecture.

As you know, it was a rare event for the Mito lord Tokugawa Nariakira to forge a blade himself. We decided to take this opportunity to display this tanto and allow people to examine it.

We wish to thank Mr. Nakano on this occasion. At this meeting, we also are exhibiting other tanto with suguha and suguha based hamon for the kansho-to and kantei-to.

In addition to this Rekko Tanto, there are mumei katana judged to be from Taima, Aoe, and den Ryokai, and a signed Fuyuhiko katana. In this kantei-to, people can look at suguha work from different periods

The No.1 kantei-to is an Unsho orikaeshi-mei katana which is classified as Tokubetsu Juyo-token.

The Unrui group are Bizen smiths, and their jiba (ji and ha) characteristics are fused with characteristics from the Yamashiro Rai school and the neighboring province's Aoe style.

Although this is a suriage blade, we clearly see the wa-zori shape which is a Rai characteristic point, and on the omote, the dan-utsuri is an Aoe characteristic.

This katana has jifu utsuri on one side and dan utsuri on the other side, and we usually never seen this kind of difference between the omote and ura utsuri styles. I remember at the time the NBTHK started conducting kantei-to in Showa 60 (1985) at the All Japan Osaka meeting, people voted for very different names for the maker of this blade.

At first glance, it is a difficult item to place, and this type of utsuri is difficult to identify, but on the other hand, we can say this is a key major point in judging this as a Sanyo Road (Sanyodo) area work. We see the same identification with the hamon based on suguha, and mixed with kaku (square) gunome, ko-gunome, and ko-choji. There are ashi and yo, and the entire hamon are slanted.

The width is almost standard, the width differences at the moto and the saki are not very large, and with the chu-kissaki and the shape, you can see that this is work from the latter half of the Kamakura Period to the early Nanbokucho Period. From these details, candidates for the smith would be Osafune mainline smiths, such as Kagemitsu, Chikakage, Unrui, and Motoshige, and Aoe smiths from the latter half of the Kamakura Period to the early half of the Nanbokucho Period.

Considering the wazori shape, the large rounded boshi tip, and on one side, the characteristic jifu utsuri, the Unrui name would come to mind.

Among the Unrui, Unju is a later period smith, and his boshi were wide and there is a large kissaki, more frequent nie, and prominent kinsuji and sunagashi.

Unsho has two different styles, one is slightly narrow, and the moto and saki are different widths, and there is a gentle shape. The hamon at the koshimoto has ko-choji and ko-gunome with hataraki, but the upper half has a simple suguha style hamon. The hamon widths are generally low, the boshi tips are large and round, and there is a return, and this is an example of his unique sophisticated work. His other style has a slightly wide hamon, just like this one, and is based on suguha with the entire hamon mixed with kaku-gunome, ko-gunome, and ko-choji, and there are frequent ashi and yo, and prominent kinsuji and sunagashi.

There are several types of styles seen often in Unji's work and his name is also considered a correct answer.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mumei: Yukimitsu

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 9.5 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: tight ko-itame mixed with a slightly large pattern hada and nagarehada. There are abundant ji-nie, and frequent chikei.

Hamon: suguha style mixed with ko-gunome and ko-choji, and the hamon border has kuichigai-ba. There are frequent ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and some kinsuji and sunagashi. The jiba is bright and clear.

Boshi: straight with a komaru and hakikake.

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

This sword belonged to the famous American collector Dr. Walter Compton and was judged to be by Soshu Yukimitsu. Dr. Compton donated this sword to the NBTHK, and it was the first blade classified as Tokubetsu Juyo Token.

From the habaki-moto, the funbari appears small, so this could be a suriage katana. The width is almost standard, the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different, there is a shallow sori at the koshimoto, and the upper half has sori. From these details, you can judge this as work from the latter half of the Kamakura period.

Although this was judged as Yukimitsu's work, there are less kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki than one might expect, and a calm feeling or impression. From these details, one can come up with different answers, and many people looked at this as work from the Rai school smiths, or from Yamato smiths from schools such as Tegai and Taima.

This is not a typical work, and not all people voted for Yukimitsu in the first vote, and it is understandable that opinions are divided. If it were Rai school work, you would find some characteristic points, such as the wazori shape, clear nie-utsuri, and the Kyo-saka-ashi style hamon. If it were Yamato school work, we would see a high shinogi and wide shinogi-ji, a masame hada jigane, hotsure at the hamon boundary (habuchi), uchinoke, niju-ba, and other prominent hataraki.

From these characteristic points, you can eliminate Yamato and Rai school smiths' names. Details seen in many blades by Yukimitsu are the wide shape, frequent hataraki, abundant ji-nie and chikei, and a sophisticated suguha hamon with abundant bright beautiful ha-nie. If you arrive at Yukimitsu's name by the 3rd vote, that would be fine.

Kantei To No. 3: tanto

Mei: Ryosai

Length: 7 sun 2 bu 6 rin

Sori: slightly uchizori

Style: kanmuri-otoshi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: large itame hada with nagare and masame hada, and the entire ji is visible.

There are ji-nie, chikei, a dark steel color, and some areas of the ji have a whitish color.

Hamon: suguha; the hamon is a shallow notare in the center, mixed with slightly large notare, and the boundary of the hamon has some hotsure. There is a worn down nioiguchi, abundant nie and soft looking, fine kinsuji and sunagashi. The hamon is yaki-otoshi at the koshimoto.

Boshi: on the omote and the ura, the tip has a togari style point and there is a komaru.

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

This tanto is supposed to have been made by the Chikuzen school's founder Ryosai. Today this is the only work with his signature, and a very important reference material, and is classified as Tokubetsu Juyo-token. This is slightly small sized tanto with a standard width, and some uchizori, and from the shape, you can judge this as work from the mid- to latter half of the Kamakura period.

In the Koto period, the general characteristics seen in the Kyushu style are: the entire jigane shows a strong nagare and masame hada; the steel color is dark and has whitish utsuri; the hamon is often yaki-otoshi, and above this, the hamon's width is very low for the width of the blade; and the hamon is a suguha style with a soft nioiguchi.

This kind of characteristic work is seen in swords from Ko-Naminohira, Ryosai, Jitsua, Ko-Kongo Hyoe, Chikushi Ryokai, Kongo Hyoe, and Muromachi period Naminohira work.

There is not a lot of the prominent whitish ji, and there is strong forging. Compared with Muromachi period work, the hamon boundary has fine hotsure, there are abundant ko-nie, and fine kinsuji and sunagashi. This is an excellent work, and from the shape, you can recognize this as Kamakura period work.

This is a suguha tanto, and we consider this to be a Kamakura period Kyushu masterpiece.

Kantei To No. 4: katana

Mei: Hizen Kuni Tadayoshi

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 4.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame, abundant ji-nie, and fine chikei.

Hamon: chu-suguha style hamon in a notare style, mixed with ko-gunome; the border (habuchi) of the hamon has nijuba and kuichigai-ba. There are ko-ashi, yo and ko-nie.

Boshi: the omote is a shallow notarekomi, and the ura is a slight midarekomi; both sides are komaru, and on the omote, the upper half of the boshi is niju-ba.

From the signature, this supposed to have been made around Keicho 15 (1610), a time shortly before or after a Shodai Tadayoshi katana was dated around 1610.

In speaking of the Hizen To suguha style, many of the jigane are a refined komenuka-hada, the hamon width is uniform, and there is an even, wide belt-like nioi-guchi. The boshi are straight and parallel to the fukura. As we often mention, this kind of style was established and produced in large numbers after the Shodai Tadayoshi's Musashi Daijo Tadahiro period. Before that period, during the five kanji signature Tadayoshi and the junin Tadayoshi period, he produced many suguha and midareba hamon blades which are supposed to have been modeled after classic examples.

Around this period, Tadayoshi's classic style work cannot be ignored. For example, we sometimes see his mumei work modeled after classic Kamakura and Nanbokucho period blades, and some have been judged as old classic works, although they seem to be Tadayoshi's work.

This katana's hamon style is seen often in this period's Tadayoshi work. The suguha hamon's shallow notare style is mixed with ko-gunome, the edge of the hamon has nuju-ba and kuichigai-ba, the nioiguchi is not belt shaped, but has rather wide and narrow width variations. In this situation, many of his boshi are not straight and komaru, but instead are a slight midarekomi style.

This blade has a wide shinogi-ji, a high shinogi, and the suguha hamon has niju-ba and kuichigai-ba, and from these details, some people thought it looked like Nanki Shigekuni's work.

From these characteristic points, it is understandable. But if it were Shigekuni's work, the jigane would be mixed with masame hada and the boshi would have strong hakikake, which is a clear Yamato characteristic style. Shigekuni's hamon also have more abundant nie, and prominent kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki.

Kantei To No. 5: katana

Mei: Taira Shizunori

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun

Sori: 8 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada, and the hada is visible. There are frequent ji-nie, fine chikei, some areas with small jifu style hada, and a bright jigane.

Hamon: suguha style ko-choji hamon mixed with ko-gunome and komidare. On the border (habuchi) of the hamon there are small yubashiri, and around the monouchi area it is suguha mixed with ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, a bright nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, and fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight, and the tip forms a large sharp angle; there is a return and hakikake.

This katana is the Taira Takada school Shigenori's katana. The Takada school has many extant blades today. There are various styles and it is hard to explain about them in a simple manner. Basically, in case of katana, their uchigatana shapes in the latter half of the Muromachi period have a prominent saki-zori. The jigane is Itame with whitish utsuri. Their hamon are a suguha style hamon mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome, there are open bottom valleys in the gunome midare hamon, and other styles. There are many blades with a tight nioiguchi, and small, sharp yo which look like needle tips.

In contrast, this blade has a length of 2 shaku 7 sun which is notably long, and it is koshizori. From the first impression made by the shape, this tachi seems to be from no later than the Kamakura Period.

The hamon is based on a ko-choji midare mixed with ko-gunome and ko-midare. There are small yubashiri on the hamon border, frequent ashi, yo, a bright nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi. From this, at first it reminds us of old Kyoto smiths such as Rai Kuniyuki, and Ayanokoji Sadatoshi, and it has a classic feeling.

This is just a guess, but with the long tachi style, Shigenori seems to have made a katana modeled after Kamakura period classic masterpieces.

In voting, many people voted for Rai Kuniyuki, Ayanokoji Sadatoshi and Rai Kunitoshi, and many people could not deduce that it was work from the late Muromachi period by the 3rd vote.

Unquestionably, we wish to see work by old masters, and these opinions are understandable. But look carefully at all the details: the straight boshi and square shaped tip are usually never seen in Kamakura Period work. That there is no clear utsuri on the jigane is another point of concern.

Also, there is a koshizori at the first impression, but the koshizori is small. There is a large sori at the tip and these would be characteristic points to look for in Muromachi Period work. And in the upper half's tight nioiguchi, and in the ko-ashi and yo hataraki, you can see Takada school characteristics.

This is a Shigenori masterpiece modeled after a Kamakura Period old master's work. (The nakago in the No.5 katana photo is 80% of the actual size)

Shijo Kantei To No. 750 in the August, 2019 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tachi by Osafune Tsuguyuki

Tsuguyuki is a one of the Kozori school smiths who is supposed to have been active around the end of the Nanbokucho period.

Of course, we are not selecting a Kantei to deliberately produce a confusing vote, but if we put a Bizen blade up for the Shijo Kantei To, usually many opinions of the smith's identity are expressed when compared to most other schools.

One reason is that many of the smiths worked in similar styles, and so it is hard to identify an individual smith's name. But besides this, there is another major important reason. Bizen Kuni (province) was always prosperous in the Koto period, from the end of the Heian Period, through the early Kamakura Period, and to the end of the Muromachi Period. In each period, there were many master smiths, and many of the blades are signed.

At the same time, there were different schools and smiths, and they had individual styles and were competing with each other.

In the different periods, each school naturally had different styles, but even in the same period, there are many different schools and different styles.

In addition, from the latter half of the Kamakura Period from around Shoo 2 (1289), you can see many works signed with date. Looking at these, you can recognize changes in styles through the periods, with actual dated examples.

You usually learn to recognize swords by learning about differences between swords by identifying swords by the period, by the school, and by the smith. Besides this, many Bizen school nakago tips are kurijiri and the yasurime are kate-sagari. Their nakago styles consequently do not help in judging an individual smith's name, and this might be another reason why people vote for many different Bizen names.

However, for this Kantei To, the Tsuguyuki tachi's characteristic points are the standard width, the widths between the moto and the saki are different, there is a large koshizori, the tip has sori, and there is a chu-kissaki. From these details, his active period could be from either around the latter half of the Kamakura Period, or the latter half of the Nanbokucho Period to the early Muromachi Period.

This blade is thick for the width, and this kind of shape seen in many swords from the end of the Nanbokucho Period to the early Muromachi Period.

Looking at the jigane, there are midare utsuri. From this, at first, you can think about candidate smiths from Bizen. But the jigane is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, the hada is visible, and there are thick kawari-tetsu type chikei and jifu. This kind of forging is different from Bizen mainline smiths such as Kanemitsu with his refined jigane. This is a Bizen work, but a branch school work.

The candidates then are Omiya, Motoshige, and Kozori smiths. But the chikei are thick and a kawari-tetsu type.

Usually chikei are fine lines, and can look dark blue. Compared with most or the usual examples, this chikei is formed of thick lines, and are slightly less dark blue in color, and have a bright or reflective surface, and resembles a series of stripes.

This kind of kawari-tetsu type chikei is seen in other Bizen branch school work, but is more likely to be seen clearly in Kozori work.

The hamon are kaku-gunome mixed with ko-choji, ko-gunome, ko-togariba, and yahazu choji (the yahazu choji here have a dip or drop in the center along the top), there is a very narrow hamon width for the blade's width, and the entire hamon is small, and these are characteristic Kozori points.

Also, the bottom half of the hamon has kinsuji and sunagashi, which look like visible hada. Actually, looking at these features, they appear to be similar to kawari-tetsu type chikei in the jigane, and this is an obvious branch school characteristic point.

In voting, the majority of people voted for Tsuguyuki. Beside him, some people voted for other Kozori smiths such as Moromitsu, Iemori, and Tsunehiro.

The Kozori school's smiths' styles are similar to each other, and it is difficult to judge a specific individual smith's name. Consequently, all Kozori smiths and the very similar work of Osafune Masamitsu are treated as correct answers at this time.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai