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Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Type: Tachi

Mei: Aoi-mon Yasutsugu Nyudo Nanban-tetsu wo motte Bushu Edo ni oite kore wo tsukuru

Hinomisaki Sengu (shrine transfer) hono on-tachi Kanei 17 (1640) 8 gatsu jitsu

Owner: Hinomisaki shrine

Izumo City Bunka-densho Kan (Museum of Cultural Traditions), Kitaku Hokan
(Long term deposited item)

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun (81.8 cm)

Sori: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 4 rin (3.15 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 8 rin (2.05 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Nakago length: 8 sun 3 bu 8 rin (25.4 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and the saki are different. It is thick and long, and has a large sori, is koshizori and there is a chu-kissaki. The jigane shows itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and the entire ji is well forged, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, and chikei. The hamon is primarily ko-gunome, and vertical variations in the hamon are not prominent.

Some areas of the hamon are a suguha style. There are frequent ashi, nioiguchi type ko-nie, around the monouchi area of the hamon there are some hotsure, and the entire nioiguchi is somewhat worn down. The boshi on the omote is straight and the tip is komaru. On the ura, the boshi is midarekomi, round and with a return, and the tip has hakikake. Both sides have a long return. The nakago is ubu, and the tip is iriyamagata. The yasurime are katte-sagari and there is no mekugi-ana. On the omote there is an Aoi-mon and a large sized long kanji signature. The ura has the hono (donation) mei and the date.

The Nidai Yasutsugu was the Shodai Yasutsugu's son, his common name was Ichinojo, and he became a monk in Kanei 13-14 (1636-37). It is thought that his

Buddhist name was “Koetsu”, and he passed away on February 25 of Shoho 3 (1646). It is thought that he received a mansion from the second shogun Hidetada in Edo’s Kanda Konya Cho (a section of Edo). In Echizen, the Fukui daimyo Matsudaira Tadamasa gave the Shodai 40 koku and then increased this by an additional 200 koku more for the nidai. Also, the nidai received a Shuin-jo (a certificate or permission) to use free post horses for transportation between his own province of Echizen to Edo, so we can see how well treated and respected he was.

The nidai’s earliest work which we can confirm is dated Genna 7 (1621), which was the year the shodai passed away. He produced fewer blades than the Shodai, but he made utsushi-mono (copies) of works such as the “Ataki Sadamune” and the “Shishi Sadamune”. Also, in a manner similar to the Shodai he made a relatively large number of detailed Kinai-bori horimono, mainly on hirazukuri blades. In his work we see two types of jigane. One style is itame mixed with mokume, the entire hada is slightly visible, the color of the steel is dark, and this is called “Echizen-tetsu”. The other style is a refined ko-itame hada. His hamon are based primarily on a notare hamon, his style follows the Shodai’s style and he is a highly skilled master smith.

As you see from the signature, this tachi was dedicated to Hinomisaki Shrine (in Shimane Prefecture) on Kanei 17 (1640). It was made to be dedicated to a shrine since there is no menuki-ana, and it is valuable as a historical reference. Similarly, the Shodai Yasutsugu donated a hirazukuri wakizashi to the Atsuta Shrine. According to shrine’s historical books and previous research, in Kanei 12 (1635) the third Shogun Iemitsu ordered the Matsue domain’s Shodai lord Matsudaira Naomasa to construct a shrine, and it was completed in Kanei 20 (1643). From this, it was deduced, that during the construction period, Iemitsu dedicated the tachi to the shrine. Also, a dai-sho pair consisting of a tachi along with a Shodai Yasutsugu wakizashi, which is supposed to have been owned by the second Shogun Hidetada was donated. In addition, both blades have “gold nashi-ji, kiku, kiri, aoi, and three kashiwa-tomoe mon on a chirashi kanagu kenuki-gata tachi koshirae” which were made during the dedication period.

This tachi is 2 shaku 7 sun long, and among the nidai’s work, this is very long and powerful, although the width becomes moderately narrower towards the tip, and this provides a good balance for the long tachi. The jigane is as I explained above, typical Echizen-tetsu, the entire ji is dark, and as expected, the ji pattern from the moto to the tip shows no variation, and is carefully forged. The hamon is not the nidai’s usual style, and is mainly ko-gunome, and there are almost no prominent vertical variations in the hamon’s width, and this a rare hamon among the nidai’s swords. This is supposed to be a specific style which was ordered by the Shogun.

Hinomisaki shrine is listed in the historical book “Izumo Koku fu-doki” and was called “Misagi shrine”, and is supposed to have been founded in the Nara period. The shrine has two separate shrine buildings, and the one for the main god Susano-o-no-mikoto is Kami-no-miya, and the building dedicated to the primary god Amaterasu-omi-kami is the Hishizumi-no-miya, and the shrine has an unusual design. Since its founding, although there were prosperous and difficult periods, the shrine received support and respect from the emperor, the shogun, and daimyo. In the Meiji period, the shrine’s lands were enlarged so that they were next in extent to that of Izumo-Taisha. At the end of every year, the shrine holds an event called “Shinken hoten shinji”. According to the historical book “Hinomisaki-jinja onyuisho ryaku-ki”, at the time that Susano-o-no-mikoto killed

the Yamata-no-orocho (a large dragon) and retrieved Ameno-murakumo-no-tsurugi (the Kusanagi-no-tsurugi tachi), then he ordered Amenofukine-no-mikoto who is an ancestor of Ono family to dedicate this tsurugi to the Amaterasu-omi-kami. This story comes from an old legend, and this position is supposed to have been handed down in the Ono family along with their continuous ceremony. On midnight of the last day of the year, the family's main shinto priest climbs alone to the top of Amakazu Yama, the mountain in front of the shrine, and performs the ceremony. The family has never missed performing this ceremony since the shrine's founding. During the evening of the ceremony, the ceremony is performed regardless of the weather (even if there is heavy rain or snow), and as soon as the ceremony commences, the weather becomes clear, and the priest never even becomes wet in his ceremonial clothes.

Besides this tachi, the shrine has a donated (i.e. a "hono") gun made by Hankei dated Keicho 17(1612) (donated at the order of the second shogun Hidetada), a katana classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin and described in the NBTHK magazine's issue No.731 meito-kansho section, and a Shiro-ito-odoshi armor, (donated at the order of Minamoto Yoritomo) classified as Kokuho. This shrine is a very suitable place to preserve meito with its original ceremony and deep connection to swords.

Explanation and illust by Ishii Akira

No.754 Tosogu Kanshou

Eda Botan zu (peony branch design) mitokoro-mono
Kozuka, kogai mei: Eiho with kao
Menuki wari-tanzaku-mei Eiho with kao

This work is almost at the same level as Somin's work, and is Katsura (Matsuura) Eiho's eda-botan design work. Eiho, from his last name's kanji style, is supposed to have been Katsura Eiju's student, living in Chikugo, Kurume. In Kurume he joined the school and received permission to use the Katsura last name. He worked for the Arima family as a provincial craftsman, and he received the social status at the level of a bushi or samurai, and is supposed to have passed way on March 11 of Tenpo 11 (1840). His teacher Eiju is supposed to have worked for the head of the Yokoya family as a foundation carver, and we often see exact copies of Somin and Sokyō's work. Notably, there is a Somin style "Eda botan no zu" just like this example, and his work is neat and skillful. The book "Soken kisho" praised Eiju who was Eisei's student and a master smith. Eisei is of course Yokoya Eisei.

Many examples of Eisei and Eiju's teachers' and students' work are skilled takabori work with very sharp carving, excellent iro (color) composition, and with sophisticated workmanship and design. However, we do not often see Somin's katakiri-bori style work. Both Eisei and Eiju worked for the Arima family, and they received an appropriate social status as gold smiths. As I mentioned earlier, Eiho also worked for the Arima family, but he does not have much existing work today, and very few of his works are known.

However, this example is a very vivid eda-botan mitokoromono. In the branch and leaves, every corner shows tension in the carving, and the petals appear to be fluttering very freely in the wind. The dynamic gold and silver colors bring vitality to the botan. The master smith's work shows no gaps or voids and is full of tension. The mei and kao carving style was learned from Eiju, and displays a crisp powerful kaisho style. The entire work demonstrates the same ability we see in Somin's work to remain at a level above all other goldsmith's work and is a first class example of machibori, showing the Yokoya school's tradition, and this is a one of Katsura Eiho's best examples.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

Note: This is being exhibited at the Osaka History Museum in the "the Katsuya collection: items which were recognized as Tokubetsu Tosogu kansho nyumon" by December 1st.

Shijo Kantei To No. 754

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 754 Shijo Kantei To is December 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 December 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 3 sun 5.5 bu (71.36 cm)

Sori: 9 bu (2.73 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 3 rin (2.5 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 3 rin (1.6 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 3 rin (2.5 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 4 bu (19.39 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori with funbari, and curvature toward the tip is described as falling down (or being more shallow) going forward towards the tip of the sword. There is a small kissaki. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada. The entire hada has a large pattern, and the hada is visible. There are abundant ji-nie, frequent chikei and pale nie-utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The top of the hamon has uneven karimata shaped yubashiri and

niju-ba. There are ashi, yo, and ko-nie. Some parts of the nioiguchi are soft, and there are fine kinsuji and sunagashi. The horimono on the omote and the ura are futasuji-hi with maru-dome. The nakago is almost ubu (it is slightly machi okuri), and has a kijimomo shape. The tip is kurijiri and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and one is closed (one is a yahazu-shaped ana). On the omote, above the original mekugi-ana along the mune side, there is a two kanji signature, and notably, the second kanji's shape shows the smith's characteristic style.

The smith's jigane has two styles: one is tight ko-itame hada with abundant dense ji-nie and a refined hada. The other style jigane is exactly what we see on this tachi.

Shijo Kantei To No. 754 in the September, 2019 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To No.752 is a katana by Tsuda Sukenao dated Genroku 2 (1689)

This katana has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. There is a pronounced sori and a chu-kissaki. From the shape, you can judge as work from around Jokyo to Genroku (1684-1703).

The jigane is a tight ko-itame-hada, there are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, refined forging, and a type of toran-midare hamon. From this, in voting, the majority of people voted for Sukenao, and for an almost correct answer, some people voted for Echizen no kami Sukehiro.

Some of Sukenao's early period work, around Kanbun to Empo (1661-80) sometimes shows a Keicho Shinto shape. In his later work, from around the Jokyo to Genroku periods, his shapes tend to become a more prominent Shinto style.

His toran midare hamon has two styles, one is just like a real breaking wave, or a wave based toran hamon. The other style is a large continuous gunome hamon, which looks like a toran shape. In Sukenao's work, his hamon with large gunome stands out.

In his toran midare hamon the distance from the top of the gunome to the valley bottoms, is not prominent. The width of the midare hamon valleys is wide and the hints referred to this.

There is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and the jiba is bright and clear. There are many prominent kinsuji and sunagashi inside of the hamon. Many of Sukenao's boshi are straight with a komaru.

Sometimes, Sukenao has a suguha hamon with a dense nioiguchi. His hamon do not necessarily have five continuous notare waves like Sukehiro. Also, we often see a wider hamon than in Sukehiro's work.

Sukenao often has a hamon based on a shallow notare or suguha hamon, with round top large gunome which are continuous from the machi to the tip, which reminds us of Edo Shinto juzuba hamon.

Sukenao's nakago tips are iriyamagata, the yasurime are o-sujichigai, and many of them have kesho-migaki work with a koutsutsumi style, the same as Sukehiro.

In Sukehiro's early period work, from Manji to Kanbun (1658-72), his shapes are a bo-sori (no sori) Kanbun Shinto shape. In the latter half of the Kanbun to Enpo and Tenna (1673-80) eras, instead of a typical Shinto shape, the change in the widths between the moto and saki are slightly less, his kissaki are slightly longer, there is a larger sori, and we see this kind of shape around the Jokyo to Genroku eras very rarely.

Note that Sukehiro's toran-midare hamon have wave style toran, the midare hamon is mixed with square shape gunome, and the midare hamon's width has prominent high and low variations.