

# NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

## ISSUE NUMBER 755

December, 2019

### Meito Kansho: Examination of important swords

#### Juyo Bijutsuhin

Type: Tachi

Mei: Narimune

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 7 bu 5 rin (75.0 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 8 rin (2.35 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 6 rin (1.7 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 1 bu 7 rin (18.7 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

#### Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is some funbari, a large koshizori, the tip drops down going towards the point, and there is a small kissaki. The jigane has ko-itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and the entire ji is well forged and tight. There are abundant fine ji-nie, midare utsuri, and some jifu. The hamon is ko-midare mixed with ko-gunome, and ko-choji. In the center of the ura side, the ko-choji hamon is prominent, and in the center of the omote side and the top of the ura, the is hamon mixed with tobiyaki. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi with even ko-nie, hotsure, uchinoke, kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi has a soft yakiba, and is straight and yakizume. The nakago is ubu, the tip has a ha-agari style kuri-jiri. The yasurime are sujikai and there is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, next to the mekugi-ana, there is a kanji signature made with a thick tagane (chisel).

In the mid-Kamakura period, the Bizen Ichimonji school's work set the standard for active, exuberant hamon, and at the same time, it was a prosperous period. Correctly or not, many historical sword books such as the "Kanchi-in Hon Mei Zukuishi", say that among the retired emperor Gotoba's exclusive twelve smiths who worked with him, seven were selected from the Ichimonji school. The school's most prosperous period

began in the early Kamakura period, and was called the Ko-Ichimonoji school, and produced many master smiths. Their styles are similar to the same period's Ko-Bizen work. But compared with the Ko-Bizen work, many of their swords have somewhat prominent ji-utsuri, and in the ko-midare based hamon, ko-choji are prominent. There are gentle nie, and the hamon are likely to have a nioiguchi.

In the book, Meikan, Narimune is listed as a son of Norimune who was a founder of the Ichimonji school. He was supposed to have been born around the Shogen period (1207-10), and was Sukemune's younger brother, and worked in Kyoto's Rokuhara district. Today his confirmed signed work consists of less than ten pieces. One is in the Tokyo National Museum, three are Juyo Bijutsuhin, and three are Juyo Token. He has very few works left today, and usually his small mei made with a thick tagane are either on the side or a little above the mekugi-ana, and are two kanji signatures. Many of his tachi shapes are narrow and elegant, reflecting work from the period. His hamon are similar to other early Ichimonji school smiths, but many of his jigane are based on a ko-itame hada, and are well forged, and you can recognize his excellent forging work.

This tachi is slightly narrow, there is a large koshizori, and the upper half has a "falling down" shape going towards the point (i.e. the curvature in the forward part of the blade going towards the point is smaller or shallower than the curvature or sori closer to the nakago). With its small kissaki, it exhibits the period's characteristic graceful and elegant tachi shape. There are clear utsuri, and clear dense nie mixed with the ko-midare hamon, and you can recognize the Ko-Bizen school's ko-choji and ko-gunome hamon. You can see the skillful work of the smith, and you can recognize the early Ichimonji school's characteristic points which are different from Ko-Bizen work. The jigane is a refined tight ko-itame hada which deserves special mention, and as might be expected, this shows a mainstream school's smith's high level of skill. In addition, this tachi has one mekugi-ana and an ubu nakago, with the narrow tip of the nakago in good condition, and this is very valuable in helping us to learn what the period's original shapes looked like. The mei is elegantly simple and exhibits good taste. Overall, the tachi shows the smith's high level of skill and deserves praise.

This tachi was classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin in Showa 17 (1942), and the owner was Mr. Seto Yasutaro. He was a major sword collector before WWII and after the war, and was a successful business man. In Osaka, he managed a majority of the advertising business for newspapers, and at one time he is supposed to have owned the "Meibutsu Murakumo Go" sword which was classified as Juyo Bunkazai. According to Kunzan, if a sword he bought was judged as a forgery by an expert, he buried it in his own back yard, because he did not want people to later be deceived by any fake signatures. He was said to be an easygoing and dynamic person.

This tachi is currently being exhibited at the NBTHK exhibition "an Introduction to Japanese swords, part 2: jigane" until December 23.

Explanation and illust by Ishii Akira

## **No.753 Tosogu Kanshou**

## **Take zu (bamboo design) fuchi Gashira Mei: Ishiguro Masatsune with kao**

The Ishiguro school used a diversity of colored metals and splendid and gorgeous takabori techniques. The school established a prominent position in the metalworking world, and left many excellent works. Among Ishiguro's pieces, I would like to introduce an unusual piece of work made from iron.

Ishiguro Masatsune was the Ishiguro school's shodai and first generation, and was a student of Kato Naotsune who was Yanagawa Naomasa's student. Masatsune passed away in Bunsei 11(1828). Masatsune was the teacher of many master smiths such as Masayoshi and Masaaki, and used many colored metals in his work. The work the Ishiguro school left behind shows that the Ishiguro school is not only a machibori school, but also enhanced the craft of making tosogu to a spectacular art and attracted the attention of collectors.

This work was made using iron for the base or jigane, gold inlay iro-e (colored metal) for the fluttering bamboo theme, and clearly exhibits Ishiguro's excellent sense in how he used the sober or severe jigane. Masatsune left an abundance of colored metal work, as we can see in the Ishiguro school's examples. But this work using iron, with a severe or sober jigane, shows Masatsune's sense of beauty, and we feel that this is an exceptional piece of work from this viewpoint.

The fluttering bamboo theme is a very detailed work, and it feels like we can hear the bamboo forest's magnificent sounds. At the same time, there is a strong feeling in the bamboo which is firmly rooted in the earth. The iron background emphasizes the bamboo's toughness.

Masatsune could work well with not only colored metals, but also iron. This is a brilliant piece of work showing what Masatsune could do with his sense of esthetics and high level of skill.

This work is currently on view at the NBTHK's "introduction to the Japanese sword, part 2" exhibition.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 755**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 755 Shijo Kantei To is January 5, 2020. 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, 2020 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 4 sun 4 bu 5 rin (74.1 cm)

Sori: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 1 rin (1.85 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 8 bu (20.6 cm)

Nakago sori: slightly less than 7 rin (0.2 cm)

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. The widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori with funbari. The tip has sori, and the blade has a wazori appearance. The point is a chu-kissaki. The jigane is a tight refined ko-itame hada. There are abundant ji-nie and fine chikei, and in some places we see a unique jifu jihada and nie utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. Some places in the hamon have niju-ba in the same areas where there are yubashiri present. There are ashi, yo, a bright nioiguchi, frequent ko-ine, fine kinsuji and sunagashi, and at the koshimoto there are muneyaki. The nakago is ubu, the tip is kuri-jiri and the yasurime are kiri. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote above the second mekugi-ana (the original ana) along the mune side, there is a three kanji signature.

This smith's tachi are rare, and there are approximately ten existing confirmed examples of his tachi.

## **Teirei Kanshou Kai for November, 2019**

Date: November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of November)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kubo Yasuko

### **Kantei To No. 1: tachi**

Mei: Tomonori (Uda School, around the Meitoku period (1390-93))

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 3 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and some nagare hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, a dark ji, and pale jifu type utsuri.

Hamon: narrow suguha style; it is a very shallow notare, and mixed with ko-gunome. There are frequent nie along the edge of hamon, and frequent hotsure, long kinsuji, sunagashi and yubashiri.

Boshi: straight on the omote, and the tip is sharp; the ura has a komaru shape; both sides have hakikake and a return.

Horimono: on the omote and the ura there are bo-hi carved down to the nakago and finished with marudome.

This is a slightly narrow blade with a large sori and a small kissaki. The hamon is a narrow suguha style mixed with ko-gunome. Possibly from its appearance, in voting, many people voted for work from not later than the early half of the Kamakura period, such as Ko-Bizen, Ko-Ichimonji, and Ko-Hoki work. But the sori's center is clearly ahead of the koshimoto, the blade is thick for its length, and wide, and considering these details, it is necessary rethink the period it is from.

The Etchu Uda school, as you know, is supposed to have moved from Yamato Kuni Uda-gun, around the Bunpo era (1317-18) in the Kamakura period. According to the Meikan, the oldest Tomonori blade is from around the Meitoku era (1390-93) and the name is seen up to the Eisho era (1504-20) covering five generations of smiths. This tachi has a very similar signature to the 38<sup>th</sup> (Heisei 4 or 1992) classified Uda Tomonori, blade, and from the shape and the style, the smith is supposed to have been active around the end of the Nanbokuchō Period from the Meitoku period to the early Muromachi Period's Ōei period (1394-1427).

In voting of course, it is difficult to arrive at the individual name of Tomonori, so all other Uda school smiths' names such as Kunifusa are treated as a correct answer. Actually, it was a very difficult judgement to identify this as work from Uda school.

Some people voted for original Yamato Kuni smiths such as Shikkake Norinaga. In this tachi, some parts of the hamon's edge are mixed with nagare hada, and there are strong long kinsuji. Furthermore, there are hotsure and yubashiri, and the entire ji has frequent vertical hataraki. Also, the hamon has Norinaga's characteristic continuous gunome, so from these observations, this is very reasonable opinion. But if it were Norinaga's work, you should consider the shape. At the end of the Kamakura period, compared to this sword, the width would be wide with a chu-kissaki, and a dynamic shape. From the dark jigane mixed with jifu in the ji, and the boshi's return style, we would consider this as Yamato school work, but the work of a branch school.

## **Kantei To No. 2: tanto**

Mei: Rai Kunimitsu

Length: 8 sun 9.5 bu

Sori: none

Style: shobu-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: tight ko-itame; there are abundant dense ji-nie, and fine chikei.

Hamon: based on chu-suguha with a shallow notare in some places, and mixed with some ko-midare areas inside of the hamon. There are ashi, and a dense nioiguchi. Inside of the hamon there are strong nie, frequent kinsuji, long sunagashi and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight, with a komaru and a long return.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi with marudome.

This is a shobu zukuri tanto which is unusual for Rai Kunimitsu. Also, the mune is an ihorimune, so from this, reaching a quick and simple answer for Rai Kunimitsu may be difficult. As you know, Rai Kunimitsu was active from the end of the Kamakura Period to the early half of the Nanbokucho Period, and his existing dated work extends from the Karyaku period (1326-28) to the Kan-o period (1350-51). Among the Rai school smiths he is a pre-eminent master smith, in terms of both, quality and quantity. Furthermore, his hamon show various styles. Besides traditional true suguha, we see suguha styles mixed with ko-gunome, ko-choji, ko-midare, and notare, and some mixed with gunome and are based on gunome.

This is a chu-suguha style hamon. There are very dense and strong nie with frequent kinsuji, and this is a masterpiece. The boshi is komaru, and there is a beautiful long return which makes a strong impression. The jigane is a tight ko-itame, and there are abundant dense ji-nie and fine chikei. In addition, the ji appears to be moist (uruoi), and the jiba (ji and ha) is bright. The entire tanto shows details exhibiting the Yamashiro school's beautiful work.

The No.3 blade following is a Rai utsushi (copy) from Hizen. Please compare the style, the ko-itame hada, and the suguha hamon. On paper, it is somewhat difficult to explain, and they both have the same ko-itame hada. The Rai Kunimitsu has fine ji-nie everywhere, but the Tadahiro has a somewhat dry appearing jihada. Inside of the Kunimitsu hamon there is an abundance of nie mixed with all kinds of hataraki, and there is an interesting hamon. However, Tadahiro's hamon has a uniform belt-like nioiguchi. The boshi has soft nie and a tightly curved and defined line. We can say each person has his own taste, but at the same time, there are differences between the original and the copy or utsushimono tanto.

### **Kantei To No. 3: tanto**

Mei: Omi-daijo Fujiwara Tadahiro

Length: 8 sun 8 bu

Sori: slightly uchizori

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada, which is fine and visible. There are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and some very pale utsuri.

Hamon: chu-suguha style and a very shallow notare style. There is a dense nioiguchi and frequent ko-nie. On the omote's upper and lower areas, there are kuichigaiba and there is a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru; the tip has hakikake.

This is an Omi-daijo Tadahiro tanto, and at first glance, you can recognize his intention was to produce a copy of Rai work. Naturally, the Nidai Tadahiro's tanto are very rare. Tadahiro's works are of ten, wide, long, and thick large blades are rare. Since this is an exact copy of Rai blade, but this is not a standard shape for Tadahiro. The jigane is ko-itame with a fine visible hada, which we call Hizen's konuka-hada. This is the same as the No.2 tanto's ko-itame hada, but as I explained above, the classic work appears to show, moisture (uruoi), ji-nie, interesting fine chikei, and the nie and kinsuji hataraki inside of the hamon are different, and from these details, we wish to look at this as a Shinto period Hizen to.

Among the Hizen school's first three generations, the Sandai Tadayoshi's tanto are rarer, and his jigane are finer and stronger. In voting, people voted for either the Shodai or the Nidai's work. For the Shodai vote, people understood that this is a copy of classic work, and from this, the answer is understandable. But if the Shodai Tadayoshi's work is compared to the Nidai Omi-daijo Tadahiro, many of his suguha hamon are based on notare, and his nioiguchi tend to be tighter. There are tanto with a belt-like nioiguchi, boshi with a neat komaru return following along the fukura, and this kind of Hizen to characteristic style was established in the Shodai's time, after he began using the Musashi-daijo Tadahiro signature. Also, the Nidai Tadayoshi's suguha are often mixed in places with kuichigaiba and niju-ba. From these characteristic points, it would be very likely that this is a Nidai Tadayoshi tanto.

#### **Kantei To No. 4: katana**

Mei: Hizen Kuni-ju-nin Iyo-no-jo Minamoto Munetsugu

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada; some places are mixed with nagare hada; there are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, and some jifu type jihada.

Hamon: the entire hamon is wide; there are gunome mixed with ko-gunome, choji and togariba. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, sunagashi, tobiyaki, yubashiri, and in the center there are muneyaki.

Boshi: midarekomi, which is almost yaki-kuzure; the point is an o-maru style and there are tobiyaki.

This is a wide blade, and the widths at the moto and saki are not too different. The blade is thick, there is a shallow sori, and a long kissaki, and from these details you can judge this as work from around the Keicho period. In the Keicho Shinto period, among Hizen to, the Shodai Iyo-no-jo Munetsugu is a smith with a very distinctive style. In the

same period, compared with the first, or the Shodai Tadayoshi's work, which we already mentioned above, the Shodai used a five kanji Tadayoshi mei, and in the ju-nin Tadayoshi signature period, he copied all types of old and classic blades, and his suguha hamon did not constantly have a belt-like nioiguchi. After Genna 10 (1624), after the Musashi Daijo Tadayoshi period, he established so-called the Hizento style. His suguha are belt shaped, his hamon are based on round top gunome and choji, the valleys in the hamon have crumbled nie, the boshi have a well defined komaru shape parallel to the fukura, and the jigane becomes a refined konuka-hada.

But the Shodai Munetsugu didn't follow Tadayoshi's changes in style. He produced all types of hamon, wide and narrow, with frequent nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. His jigane is a visible itame with nagare hada, but we see all types of jigane and his jitestu have abundant ji-nie, and consistently show a strong Soshu Den style influence. This kind of style was followed by the Nidai Munetsugu and the Sandai Munetsugu.

However, speaking of the Keicho period and Soshu Den smiths in Kyoto, the Horikawa and Mishina schools come to mind, and in Kii, Nanki Shigekuni's name comes to mind. But these smiths produced high and wide hamon with large and small vertical variations, and with some togariba, as well as small sized or narrow hamon, with prominent ashi and yo, and a wide variation in styles, but this blade is supposed to be by Munetsugu.

Most often, Munetsugu's boshi were midarekomi with hakikake, and sometimes with either nie-kuzure, or a kaen style, and boshi have an active appearance. has more movements style, from this character, This is a katana we certainly wish to look at as Iyo-no-jo Munetsugu's work.

### **Kantei To No. 5: tanto**

Mei: Kanetomo

Length: 9 sun 3 bu

Sori: 5 rin

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada mixed with mokume; along the hamon, there are masame hada, and the entire hada is visible. There are frequent ji-nie and frequent chikei.

Hamon: based on round top gunome and ko-notare; some places have square gunome, and the edge of hamon has fine hotsure. There are frequent nie, and the entire hamon has kinsuji and sunagashi, and there is a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight with a shallow notarekomi; the tip has hakikake, and there is a long return.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are Katana-hi and Tsure-hi carved through the nakago

This tanto by Naoe Shidzu Kanetomo is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. The Naoe Shidzu school is in Mino Kuni Shidzu, and Saburo Kaneuji's students moved to Mino's Naoe-go



area in the Nanbokucho period, and are supposed to have established the school. In the Muromachi period, the school is supposed to have been gradually absorbed in the Seki smiths. This tanto has the period's characteristic style, which is wide, long, and thin, with a shallow sori.

The hamon is a large gunome and notare pattern. The edge of the hamon has fine hotsure, and the entire hamon has kinsuji and sunagashi. This is similar to Shidzu Saburo Kaneuji's work, but Kaneuji's tanto have small sizes around 6 to 7 sun long. Also, in the Soshu Den master smith's work, there are beautiful bright nie, his o-maru boshi are prominent, and these are his characteristic points.

On the other hand, among the hamon, there are round top hamon preceding the Sue Seki Kanefusa style gunome. From this point, I could say this is a valuable material to understand the transition from the end of the Kamakura period to the Nanbokucho and Muromachi periods.

In voting, besides the correct Kanetomo name, some people voted for Naoe Shidzu smiths such as Kanetsugu and Kanenobu, and some just voted for Naoe Shidzu work. At this time all of these answers were treated as correct answers.

Other answers were derived from the observation that the omote and ura hamon are rather uniform, and that the hamon valleys come close to the edge, and many people voted for Muramasa. If it were his work from his active period, the blade would be thick, the nioiguchi would be tight compared to this blade, and many of the fukura have a poor shape.

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 753 in the October, 2019 issue**

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by Komihara Masakiyo dated Oan 1 (1368)

This is a wide, long, and thin tanto with a shallow sori. From the shape, you can judge this as work from the peak of the Nanbokucho period.

The hamon is suguha, but the edge of the hamon has small hotsure and kuichigaiba. The jigane has nagare and masame hada, and from these details, it is possible to look at this as being from Yamato-den.

Among the Yamato-den, the mainstream smiths' jigane does not have a dark color, and white utsuri is rare. Generally, the jigane are bright with refined forging, and the hamon are a suguha style with a bright nioiguchi.

Each of the Yamato school branches has characteristic points. In case of the Komihara school, the jigane has itame mixed with mokume and nagarehada, and the hada is visible. Many of them have shirake or whitish utsuri, and sometimes we see a strong mokume hada.

The school's hamon are suguha mixed with hotsure and nijuba, and with frequent nie. On the other hand, some of hamon are a suguha with a tight nioiguchi, similar to the neighboring province's Aoe, and there are hataraki on the edge of the hamon. This tanto's style belongs to this group.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Masakiyo, and besides him, some voted for other Komihara smiths such as Masaie, and Masahiro.

The Komihara smiths' styles are similar to each other, and it is difficult to recognize an individual smith's work, so all Komihara smiths' names were treated as a correct answer.

Besides the correct answer, a few people voted for Enju work. He belonged to a school which was active in the Nanbokucho period. The jigane has prominent whitish utsuri and there are suguha hamon, so there are common points. But the Enju tanto usually have a standard width and almost standard length, and we see slightly wide, very long blades, and do not really see this kind of the Enbun/Joji shape.

Also, he is a Yamashiro Den smith, and in the suguha hamon, the Yamato Den's unique hamon edge with vertical hataraki are not prominent. His hamon often have a dense nioiguchi, and the tip of the boshi is round and large and there is a short return.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai