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Meito Kansho: Examination of important swords

Kokuho (national treasure)

Type: Tachi

Mei: Yasuie

Owner: Kyoto National Museum

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 5 bu 4 rin (77.4 cm)

Sori: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 6 rin (1.7 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 4 rin (2.55 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 5 rin (21.35 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. It has a standard thickness, is long, and there is funbari, a large koshizori, and a small kissaki. The jigane has ko-itame hada mixed with nagare hada and some mokume hada, and the entire jihada is just visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, and some jifu areas. At the machi, there is mizukage shaped utsuri which is extended to to a very pale utsuri. On the omote, on the lower half, and on the ura in the upper half there are small dark areas which form jifu type utsuri. The hamon is wide and is formed by ko-choji mixed with ko-gunome and togari. Some areas have a suguha style hamon, and in some areas the hamon has high and narrow variations. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, even abundant rough nie, and some kinsuji. The boshi, on both sides, has a wide yakiba. On the omote it is a slight notare, and on the ura it is straight. The point is almost yakizume, and there are hakikake. The nakago is ubu, the tip has a shallow ha-agari style kuri-jiri. There are two mekugi-ana (one is a small hole) and the yasurime are katte-sagari. On the omote, above the mekugi-ana, towards the mune side, there is a large two kanji signature made with a thick tagane (chisel).

The Ko-Hoki group's most prominent smith is Yasutsuna, and there are signed works in existence by smiths such as Sanekage, Sanemori, Sadatsuna, Aritsuna, Kunimune, and Yasuie. According to the "Nihonto Meikan", there are two smiths with the name Yasuie, and their active time is either Eien (987-89) or Heiji (1159), which are mid-Heian and end of the Heian periods. There are a few signed blades, and besides this tachi, there is only one other in existence which is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. This tachi is certainly Ko-Hoki work and is classified as Kokuho.

The signature is similar to Yasutsuna's, but the "ie" kanji is a little bigger than the "Yasu" kanji. Also, the signature's location is above the mekugi-ana along the mune side, the nakago tip is a shallow kurijiri, and there is a somewhat narrow tip, and these are common details seen in Yasutsuna's work.

Concerning the school's characteristic style, Dr. Honma Kunzan used to comment: from the styles, the smith's relationships are thought to be very close, and overall, Yasuie is thought to have had a more direct and strong relationship with Yasutsuna than Sanemori. The Kokuho Yasuie tachi is Ko-Hoki work, and is the closest work identified with Yasutsuna's active period. However, there are two opinions concerning Yasuie's active period, and these are listed in the Kanchiin-hon Mei-zukushi's "Ichijoin Gyou" issue, which covers the mid-Heian period, around the Eien era. Another opinion is that Yasuie was active around the Heiji era. These different opinions are derived from sword books and expert opinions, and so clearly, more studies are needed.

This is the only signed Ko-Hoki Yasuie tachi. There is a large koshizori, a graceful tachi shape, and the point does not "drop down" (that is, the sori remains continuous to the point, in spite of the koshizori being present), the shinogi's width is a little narrow, and the hiraniku is in a reasonable condition. The jigane is not a typical large itame hada, the entire jihada is slightly visible, there are jifu, a slightly dark ji, and the shape and jigane have the main points seen in Hoki's characteristic style. The hamon is not a usual country style, and the height of the hamon and some parts of the hamon resemble Yasutsuna's Juyo Bunkazai (2 shaku 4 sun 7 bu) "Meibutsu Doji-giri" tachi. In addition, the boshi's wide yakiba is similar to the Takamatsu Matsudaira family's heirloom Sanemori blade which is classified as Juyo Bunkazaki, and also similar to the Doji-giri tachi. In addition, the signature's location and style shares common characteristics with Yasutsuna. From these observations, this tachi is considered to be a valuable reference in the study of Ko-Hoki Yasuie's work.

This tachi was found before the war by Dr. Honma among the Kuroda family's collection of blades. In Showa 10 (1935), the owner was the last Fukuoka clan lord Kuroda Nagatomo's son Nagashige. Nagashige was the Sumitsu komon (the emperor's councilor before the war) and a Kizokuin diet member (the equivalent of a congressman or diet member). Dr Honma used to reminisce when thinking about how he found this tachi with a copper habaki among the Kuroda family's miscellaneous blades.

Currently, this tachi is being exhibited at the in Nara's Kasuga Grand Shrine Kokuho Hall from December 28 to March 1st 2020.

Explanation and illust by Ishii Akira

2020 New Year's issue: No.756 Tosogu Kanshou

Owari family Meibutsu collection

Maruki bashi zu (log bridge design) mitokoromono

Mumei: Yujo

This is a mitokoromono set of kodogu which Tokugawa Ieyasu himself owned, and is part of a collection of daimyo's do-gu (swords, armors, tea ceremony sets, and all types of items which they used on appropriate occasions). These items are among the most important items which a daimyo owned and used. This is a Goto Yujo (Eikyo 12-Eisho 9 (1440-1512)) mitokoromono (a set comprising menuki, a kogai and a kozuka). In the Edo period, the samurai who wore kozuka and kogai on their katana were the highest class of samurai. In daimyo and hatamoto families, on sashi-ryo (katana and wakizashi) worn with formal koshae, the kodogu or fittings used had to be made by the Goto family. Among the items owned by the Tokugawa museum, there are 115 mitokoromono, and only 8 sets are machibori (made by town craftsmen), while all of the others were made by the Goto family. Several sets are items which were made by branch Goto families, and about 100 pieces were made by the main Goto family. The items in this collection are just magnificent. Among these, the marukibashi (wood bridge) theme does not involve the use of the Goto family's traditional dragons and shishi, but used specific scenic subjects, and this is an unusual theme for them.

This set is made from just shakudo with one color. As you know, shakudo is an alloy of gold and copper, and another name for this is "udo". Some people say that the metal was Yujo's creation, but we cannot say anything about this, however, it is not important. In the tosogu field, Yujo is supposed to have established the use of shakudo for kanagu.

This set shows strong, rich, and excellent carving work. The menuki have a unique rhythm and are very impressive. The kozuka has an elegant feeling. The shoulder is gentle, the warabite (fern frond) design is humble. The fact that the warabite are not gold understates the elegance of this work.

Again, today I have had the pleasure of examining Sengoku period masterpieces. Many of these masterpieces were made in a turbulent era, and fortunately, people have studied and protected them until today.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 756

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 755 Shijo Kantei To February 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 February 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: Wakizashi

Length: 1 shaku 5 bu (31.82 cm)

Sori: slightly less than 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 4 bu (10.3 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hira-zukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune. The width is almost standard, it is long for the width, and there is a shallow saki-zori. The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and the entire jihada is visible. There are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, and midare utsuri. On the omote side towards the hamon, there is bo-utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are ashi, yo, nioiguchi type ko-nie, and a bright nioiguchi. The horimono, on the omote and the ura are katana-hi with tsure-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, the tip is a wide kuri-jiri and the yasurime are kate-sagari. There is a one mekugi-ana, and on the omote in the center, there is a long kanji signature, and on the ura, there is a date.

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

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is an Awataguchi Kuniyasu tachi.

This tachi is narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori with funbari, and the strength of the sori decreases going towards the point. There is a small kissaki, and from the shape, you can judge this as work from the end of the Heian period to the early Kamakura period.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Kuniyasu, but also for another acceptable answer, Ayanokoji Sadatoshi.

The Kuniyasu tachi has an Awataguchi school characteristic nashiji jihada with a bright beautiful hamon. On the other hand, sometimes he has itame and mokume hada with a large pattern, and the ji is visible work, just like we see here, and the hint refers to this.

Kuniyasu also has suguha style ko-choji midare hamon mixed with komidare, and the top of the hamon has irregular karimata (pheasant leg or thigh) shaped yubashiri. There is a soft nioiguchi, ko-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

In a style similar to what we see in Kuniyasu's work, Hisakuni, one of the six Awataguchi brothers, has work with a refined nashiji-hada and ko-midare style hamon with bright ha-nie.

For the most people, this type of work is supposed to bring to mind the Awataguchi style. But this Kuniyasu tachi is rather similar to Ayanokoji Sadatoshi's style, rather than to Hisakuni's style. So, voting for Sadatoshi could be considered to be a correct or proper viewpoint.

But Sadatoshi's boshi are straight, with a komaru, or are midarekomi, and either style has frequent hakikake which appear to form a flame-like shape. In addition, we sometimes see nie-kuzure. In contrast to this, Kuniyasu's boshi tend to be a gentle komaru style, just like we see on this tachi.

At the same time, Kuniyasu's characteristic mei have the 2nd kanji "yasu" written in a so-sho style (a cursive style) and the hint refers to this. "Sadatoshi" is usually a two kanji Sadatoshi with the "sada" kanji in a so-sho style, and the "toshi" kanji in a smaller sized gyo-sho (semi-cursive) style. These two kanji show a strong character, and this does not match the information in the hints, so please pay attention to this.

At this time, I want to talk about "dozen" judgements in kantei. In a kantei exercise, you think about who is the smith who made a blade, and present an answer to the judge. You will then receive an "Atari" (correct) answer, or a "dozen" (acceptable or proper) answer, or an "iya" (wrong) answer. If you receive an atari or dozen credit, you are done. If you do not receive these credits after providing an answer three more times, you can still continue to submit an answer based on studies of reference material.

A proper table or list is required to find the names of candidate smiths in a school in which the smith must belong to, and also to find smiths whose work is close to, or similar to the work of smiths in a candidate school; to find out which areas the smiths come from in 5 regions and the 7 main roads, and to find out the range or areas where these smiths might have been working.

Obviously, a proper table or list or reference is important, and the lists are made by using information from numerous types of sword books. However, each book is a little different, and all of these books do not necessarily contain the same information or a consistent format.

Of course, in kantei meetings, the judge or organizer is the authority who decides if a smith's name is correct or not, and if there are even slight differences between his opinion and yours, his opinion is the authoritative judgement.

For example, in the case of an NBTHK speaker, he might categorize koto swords as one group, and shinto and shinshinto swords as belonging to other groups, and if you submit an answer for a smith in a kanteito for a different group from the speaker's category, the speaker or judge will answer that your opinion was for a smith in the wrong period. In another group's meeting, the specific smiths placed in these three categories of koto, shinto, and shinshinto might be different.

Also, even NBTHK books show slight differences between those published in Showa 30 (1955) and Showa 50 (1975). Around Showa 60, the first time I was asked to help with the Teirei Kansho Kai judging, the standard was slightly different.

People attending a kansho kai bring many sword books written by different authors in different times, and they are submitting smith's names based on each book's tables, so sometimes there are inconsistencies between the attendee's information and the judge's references or sources.

The current NBTHK's "nyusatsu kantei dozen note" (bidding properly during a kantei) was published 20 years ago. Under Tanobe Michihiro who was a manager of at the time, the NBTHK examined and studied available dozen tables, and compiled the best tables they could make for today's NBTHK kantei meeting dozen tables.

People do not have to feel they are disadvantaged by using their own books, and they may not need to use the NBTHK references, but when an NBTHK lecturer judges a kansho kai, sometimes if you feel that there are differences between a judge's answer and your own knowledge, it would be a good idea to examine the NBTHK reference material.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai