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Meito Kansho: Examination of important swords

Kokuho

Type: Tachi

Mei: Sanemitsu

Owner: Chido Museum

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 4 bu 8 rin (77.2 cm)

Sori: 9 bu 1 rin (2.75 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 4 rin (1.95 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 8 rin (0.85 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 1 bu 6 rin (21.7 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. It is a thick and long blade. There is funbari, a large koshizori, the tip has sori, and there is a short chu-kissaki. The jigane has itame hada mixed with mokume hada. The entire ji is well forged and tight, and we can see some ko-itame hada. There are abundant large ji-nie, fine chikei, mizukage shaped utsuri at the machi, and continuous midare utsuri. The entire hamon is narrow, and is a ko-choji style hamon mixed with ko-gunome and togariba. There are ashi, yo, a nioiguchi, and some kinsuji. The boshi's omote has a small midarekomi, and the ura is straight. Both sides have abundant kinsuji and the tips are yakizume. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi. On the omote, the hi are carved through the nakago, but on the ura, the hi are carved through the nakago to around the nakago tip and are not carved through the entire nakago. The nakago is ubu, the tip has a shallow ha-agari style kuri-jiri. The yasurime are sujichigai and there are three mekugi-ana. On the omote, over the first mekugi-ana and along the center, there is a two kanji signature made with a slightly thick tagane (chisel).

It is commonly thought that Sanemitsu was one of Osafune Nagamitsu's students. In the Meikan, for the Kamakura period, there are two smiths listed with this name, one in the Koan period (1278-88) and the other in the Shokyo period (1332-34). The signatures are "Sanemitsu (tsukuru)", and "Bizen Koku Osafune ju-nin Sanemitsu", and "Bizen Koku Osafune-ju Sakon-shogen Taira-no Sanemitsu". There are only two classified blades with this signature: this tachi and another in the Kyoto Museum signed Bizen Koku Osafune-ju-nin Sanemitsu which is classified as Juyo Bunkazai. Even if we include other works which we can confirm, this smith has few signed blades.

Concerning this tachi, many sword books have compared this sword with work by Nagamitsu, and this tachi has a classic Osafune school style, and is magnificent. Dr. Kunzan noted that there is a problem for these two classified blades: "Between the Kokuko classified Shonai Sakai family's two kanji mei tachi and the Juyo Bunkazai Uesugi family's ancestral long mei tachi which is owned by the Kyoto Museum, the signature styles and the jiba (the ji and ha) are different, and it is questionable that they are both works by the same smith. The Shonai Sakai family's tachi is a classic style, and the Uesugi family's tachi is consistent with being a work by a student of Nagamitsu".

The tachi in the Kyoto museum has its mei inscribed towards the mune edge, and appears to be written in the style of a Nagamitsu signature. The hamon is choji mixed with gunome, and around the monouchi the hamon is narrow which is an Osafune school style. On one side of the nakago, this tachi has a two kanji signature along the center which moves it away from the hi (a location which is seen only a few times for Nagamitsu, Sanenaga, Kagemasa, and Sukekane), and the kanji style is a little different. Notably, the "Mitsu" kanji's second and third strokes are almost horizontal around the center, and this is rather similar to Mitsutada's kanji style. Also, the hamon is narrow and consists primarily of a ko-choji style, and at first impression, looks like a Ko-Ichimonji style. From this, there are some opinions that the smith may not be Nagamitsu's student, but rather someone else from the same period or possibly an earlier period smith, and we need to examine this tachi more carefully and compare it with more earlier swords.

This tachi is over 2 shaku 5 sun in length, and has a dignified ubu tachi shape. It has funbari, a thick shape, and especially on the ura side does not even have any togi-damari (wear or changes from polishing). The entire blade has strong hiraniku, and has a heavy and extremely healthy shape. Also, noteworthy, the jigane is a well forged itame-hada, with a soft looking refined ji. Some areas of the ji are tight and look almost like ko-itame hada. This well forged ji is seen from the moto to the tip without any variation. The hamon is a nioiguchi style with a classic appearance as we explained above. It is hard to miss an area on the ura around the yakidashi area which has a large midare hamon similar to a koshiba. This has a unconscious technically perfect feeling when compared with Osafune work.

The nakago's tanago shape is similar to Nagamitsu's and other smiths around the same era, and from this you can guess the smith's active period. In any case, this is sophisticated and dignified a masterpiece comparable to Nagamitsu's work. The tachi has a very rare koshirae described as "kin nashi-ji go-san no kiri mon chirashi kanagu

itomaki tchi koshirae” which supposed to have been a gift from Oda Nobunaga in the Momoyama period.

This tachi was a gift to Sakai Tadatsugu from Oda Nobunaga. Sakai Tadatsugu is one of the oldest retainers among the fudai-daymyo group and was one of Tokugawa’s Shitenno (four generals) along with Ii, Sakakibara, and Honda. He fought in many of Ieyasu’s battles such as Anegawa, Mikatagahara, Nagashino, and Komaki-nagakute. Each time he developed effective and appropriate strategies, and possessed excellent political skills along with his ability to command military forces.

In Tensho 10 (1582), the Oda and Tokugawa allied forces destroyed Takeda Katsuyori’s army. On the way back from the battle in March, Nobunaga stopped at Yoshida castle in Mikawa whose lord was Tadatsugu, and was entertained with an excellent feast. Nobunaga presented 200 gold ryo and this tachi to Tadatsugu. In the “Kansei ju-shu shoka fu No. 65” book, The Sakai family’s Tadatsugu page says that “Ufu (Nobunaga) left Hamamatsu and went to Yoshida. Tadatsugu, Yoshida’s lord, presided over an elaborate and beautiful event to entertain Nobunaga. Ufu presented him with this Sanemitsu tachi and 200 gold ryo.” Since then, for more than 400 years, this tachi has been handed down as one of the Shonai Sakai family’s important treasures.

This is a valuable tachi not only for Sanemitsu’s rare signature, but also for its historical value.

Explanation and illustration by Ishii Akira

No.757 Tosogu Kanshou

Mei: Ishiguro Masatsune with kao

Juyo Tosogu

Take zu (bamboo design) fuchi kashira

Mei: Ryuko-do Mitsuoki with kao

Before the Christian era, China was in the midst of civil wars, and this period was called the Shunju Sengoku jidai (era). During this period of unrest, many philosophers appeared who were collectively called the “Shoshi-hyakka (or “shoshi-100”)”, and this group included people such as Koshi, Moshi, and Sonshi, and they had a strong influence on people. One of these philosophers, Roshi, established his “Doka” (philosophy) composed of thoughts or ideas in this confusing period, and he wrote the “Roshi” philosophy in two volumes. He was tired of the long period of continuous wars, and when he left his home country of Shu, he asked some officials to protect and preserve his literary works. This tsuba’s theme comes from this meeting.

One of the Kyoto master smiths, Otsuki Mitsuoki, seems to have sympathized with Roshi’s feelings when he was leaving the border of his home country, and he illustrated

Roshi's meeting on this small tsuba. Roshi was resigned and disappointed when thinking about his home and society.

Mitsuoki tried to express Roshi's philosophy in his carving. On the ura side, Roshi's resignation next to a large pine tree is shown with excellent katakiri-bori work, and it seems that Roshi's thoughts can be discerned there.

Mitsuoki also created many light, free and witty works. Among Mitsuoki's work this example shows Mitsuoki's skillful takabori suemon-zogan technique, and this permits a difficult subject to be shown. The workmanship here shows the wide range of subjects he could depict as well as his high level of skill. This is an excellent master work which uses iron for the jigane, and Mitsuoki was able to harmoniously depict a landscape and feelings.

Incidentally, after Roshi left the border of his home area, his whereabouts remained unknown.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 757

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 757 Shijo Kantei To is March 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 March 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 3 sun 6 bu (41.2 cm)

Sori: 5 bu (1.52 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 rin (3.05 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Nakago length: 4 sun 2 bu 6 rin (12.9 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a shobu-zukuri wakizashi with an ihorimune. It is wide, long, slightly thick, and there is a large sori. The jigane is itame-hada mixed with mokume-hada, and the entire ji is tightly forged. There are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has ko-ashi, a bright nioiguchi, abundant nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and some muneyaki. The nakago is ubu, the tip is kuri-jiri and the yasurime are o-suji-chigai. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the the omote side towards the mune edge, there is a long kanji signature.

Mune yaki is seen in many of the works by this smith. Also, this wakizashi style is seen in many of his blades during the early half of his career.

Teirei Kanshou Kai for January, 2020

Date: January 11, 2020 (2nd Saturday of January)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kurotaki Tetsuya

In Reiwa 2 nen, the New Year Token Kanshokai was held in the Token Hakubutsukan 1st floor auditorium. Members and 88 other people attended.

As is customary, there was a single vote, and the following people received prizes, and after the kantei-to lecture, they were presented with their awards from the lecturer.

Prizes:

Ten-i; Maki Akitomo (Okayama prefecture)

Chi-i; Hirata Yasuo (Tokyo prefecture)

Jin-i; Nakamura Kazuhito (Shizuoka prefecture)

Kantei To No. 1: tachi

Mei: Muramasa

Length: 2 shaku 5.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: ko-itame-hada and the hada is visible. There ara ji-nie, chikei, and a pale white appearance.

Hamon: there is a yakidashi at the moto, and above this there are gunome, ko-gunome, togariba, and yahazu. There is a worn down nioiguchi, nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi with a komaru style return; there are frequent hakikake, and intermittent muneyaki.

This is a Muramasa katana in Ise. The katana is supposed to have been among the Arisugawa royal family's Taruhito's belongings. Shikihito was the East governor-general during the Boshin-war (1868-9) in Japan. The Arisugawa Royal family's successor was the Takamatsu royal family. This katana was donated to the NBTHK by the Takamatsu royal family.

This is about 2 shaku in length which is short, and the widths at the moto and the saki are not very different. The upper half has sori, which is a katateuchi or uchigatna shape.

Therefore, from these details, you can guess this is from around the latter half of the Muromachi period, or the Eisho-Taiei (1504-27) period.

The jigane is ko-itame, and there is a slightly whitish appearance. It is supposed to be in the style of Muramasa's teacher, Heianjo Nagayoshi, whose jigane is bright and shows refined forging. However, many of Muramasa's jigane have a dark steel color and have a country (non-mainstream) feeling when compared with his teacher's work.

The hamon on the omote and the ura are the same. There are togariba and square shaped gunome which fit well together, and from the moto to saki, the hamon pattern is repeated. Also, in some places, we see square shaped gunome, and these details clearly illustrate Muramasa's characteristic points.

Kantei To No. 2: tanto

Mei: Uda Kunifusa

Oei 12 nen (1405) 8 gatsu bi

Length: 9 sun 4 bu

Sori: none

Style: hira-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: tight ko-itame, and the hada is visible. There are abundant dense ji-nie, chikei, a bright ji, and shirake (cloud-like or fog-like) utsuri.

Hamon: based on a wide suguha; there is a shallow notare, mixed with ko-gunome and gunome. There are ashi, yo, abundant ko-nie, some yubashiri, fine kinsuji and sunagashi; there is a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi, with a togari (pointed) style komaru and return. There is a long return and large nie.

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

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin Uda Kunifusa tanto.

Kunifusa is known as a highly skilled master smith among the Uda school smiths. The Uda school has four Juyo Bijutsuhin blades, and all four of them are by Kunifusa. Their style followed Yamashiro Den's Rai Kunimitsu and Rai Kunitsugu's work. You can recognize this in Kunifusa's work.

The tanto is from the end of the Kamakura to the early Nanbokucho period judging from the shape during the first impression. From the refined forging and bright nioiguchi suguha style hamon, you can think of candidate smiths working in Rai Kunimitsu's style. But you have to pay attention to the fact that you cannot see characteristic Rai-hada, or nie-utsuri.

On the other hand, the hamon has prominent round nie, and the boshi has prominent large nie grains. This type of nie is an important Uda school characteristic point. Also, the boshi tip is a togari style, and this kind of boshi is seen many Uda school blades. Furthermore, from the boshi's return style, you can recognize early Muromachi period work, and different types of details from the Rai school. From these characteristic points, you can judge this as Uda school work, and among the school's smiths, you might wish to vote for the highly skilled smith Kunifusa.

Around the Oei period (1394-1427) the Uda school sometimes produced this kind of shape and style. For example, Kunihisa and Kuniyoshi have this kind of work, but among these smiths, we would look at this Juyo Bijutsuhi tanto as exceptional work.

Kantei To No. 3: wakizashi

Mei: Ushu ju-nin Gassan Chikanori
Eisho 9 nen (1512) 2 gatu kichijitsu

Length: 1 shaku 9 sun 2.5 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: marumune

Jigane: itame hada, and the entire hada is visible; there is some ayasugi hada present.

There are ji-nie, chikei, a slightly dark steel color, and shirake (cloud-like or fog-like) utsuri.

Hamon: narrow suguha mixed with some ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, ko-nie, some nijuba, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru. The center of the boshi has nijuba.

This is from the collection of Mr. Suzuki Kajo, and is a work by Gassan Chikanori. In the Oshu area, representative smiths are Gassan and Hoju, and both schools have characteristic jihada. Most notably, many works from the Gassan school have a unique ayasugi-hada.

The Gassan school is supposed to have been active since the Heian period. Today, their oldest known work is a famous Juyo Bijutsuhin tachi, owned by the Dewa Sanzan Shrine. Many of the school's works have prominent ayasugi-hada forging with a suguha style hamon, there are hataraki in the hamon, and the jiba (jigane and hamon) are worn down.

According to one theory, Chikanori is supposed to be Hikobei-no-jo Sukesada's student. He modeled his work after Sue-Bizen work with a bright jihada and hamon.

This blade has a marumune and dark steel color with shirake (cloud or fog-like) utsuri, and from this you can judge this blade as being a country (non-mainstream) style work. From the ayasugi hada forging, you can think of candidates from the Gassan school. Usually their hamon are soft, but this blade has a bright nioiguchi, nijuba with strong nie, and a more sophisticated appearance than we usually see in the school's work. From this, Chikanori's high level of skill comes to mind.

From the Gassan school, some smiths moved to Hyuga and Satsuma. From experience and study, one can learn to recognize the school's network of associated or sister schools, and that is important in order to study this school.

Kantei To No. 4:

Mei: Kunimura

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: slightly less than 1 sun 1 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada, with some nagare-hada. There are ji-nie, chikei, and whitish (shirake) utsuri.

Hamon: chu-suguha, mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, some saka-ashi, abundant ko-ine, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight; on the omote point is a maru shape (round); the ura has a large round point, and both the omote and ura have a short return.

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

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin Enju Kunimura tachi.

Kunimura is said to be the Higo Kuni Enju school's founder. He is the son of Rai Kuniyuki's son-in-law, the Yamato Senju-in school's smith Hiromura. Or in other words, he is said to be Rai Kuniyuki's grandson.

Kunimura established a workshop, factory, in Higo Kuni's Kikuchi County at the end of the Kamakura period or beginning of the Nambokucho period, and the school was very active and was called the Enju school. This sword is a tachi by Kunimura.

Looking at the whole tachi, the jiba (jigane and hamon) are bright, the hamon is mixed with Kyo-saka-ashi, and some nijuba. This jiba description usually reminds us of the Rai school's work. But if you examine it carefully, the utsuri is not nie-utsuri, and there is light, weak shirake (cloud-like or fog-like) utsuri. Also, the boshi tip's round shape is large and the short return should be noted.

Kunimura's characteristic tachi shapes have clear notable differences in the widths at the moto and saki, there is a small kissaki, and this tachi has these characteristic points. From this, one can consider voting for Kunimura.

Kantei To No. 5: tachi

Mei: Sanenori (Ko-Ichimonji)

Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 8. 5 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: suguha style ko-midare hamon, and around the monouchi it is a suguha style. There are ashi, yo, ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru.

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin Ko-Ichimonji Sanenori tachi.

At first, it is important to recognize the narrow elegant shape. At first glance, the tachi's funbari at the koshimoto is gone, and you can imagine this is either a suriage or o-suriage shape.

The original shape is supposed to have had a large koshizori, the tip falls down going forward (i.e. the sori in the upper part of the blade is shallower than the sori close to the moto), and there is a small kissaki. From these details, you can judge this as work from the end of the Heian period to the early Kamakura period.

The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, there is refined forging, and there are high dark jifu-utsuri extending up to the shinogi-ji. From these details, it appears likely that this is Bizen work from the end of the Heian period to the early Kamakura period.

In that period's Bizen work, "Ko-Bizen" and "Ko-Ichimonji work seems possible. From these two schools, one can see hamon just like we see on this tachi. This means prominent modern ko-choji, a tight nioiguchi, and small high and low width variations in the hamon which suggests that this is a Ko-Ichimonji work.

On the other hand, if it were Ko-Bizen work, the hamon would be more classic, and there would be more nie. Many people recognized these different characteristics, and voted for Ko-Ichimonji.

Kansho-Kai activities:

We would like to mention that the following are the 4 Juyo Bijutsuhin blades which were available for examination during the Kansho-Kai. A lecture was given about these blades entitled "The Juyo Bijutsuhin world, Part 2: a history of cultural properties and their protection".

Tachi: Mei Kuniyasu (Awataguchi)

Tachi: Mei Masatsune

Katana: Mumei Meibutsu Masamune

Tachi: Mei Koryaku 1(1379) 8 gatsu pi Kaneyoshi

Shijo Kantei To No. 755 in the December, 2019 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tachi by Rai Kunitsugu.

This tachi has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori, the tip has sori and there is a chu-kissaki, From the shape you can judge this as work from the latter half of the Kamakura Period to the early Nanbokucho Period.

The sword has a wa-zori tachi shape, the jigane is a tight ko-itame. There is bo-utsuri, refined forging, and in some places there are jifu with a unique hada, and this is a characteristic Rai hada. The hamon is a suguha style mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome, and there is a bright nioiguchi with ko-nie, and muneyaki at the koshimoto. Every element shows Rai's characteristic points very well. In voting, an overwhelming

majority of people voted for Rai Kunitsugu. Besides Kunitsugu, some people voted for Rai Kunimitsu and Rai Kunitoshi.

As we pointed out in the hints, there are only about 10 signed Rai Kunitsugu blades. However, he has several different styles: besides the Rai school's traditional suguha work, there are strong Shoshu Den characteristic notare hamon mixed with ko-gunome, and a prominent Yamato style suguha hamon mixed with a small midare hamon with prominent sunagashi. Among his small number of existing swords, we have the impression that he produced a wide range of styles in his work.

This tachi is narrow, and at first impression, it reminds us of Rai Kunitoshi's work. Usually at the NBTHK Shijo Kantei To, if the correct answer is Rai Kunitsugu, an answer of Rai Kunitoshi is not treated as correct answer. But from the style of this sword, at this time, for this tachi, Rai Kunitoshi is treated as correct answer.

Incidentally, forty years ago when I began to attend Token Kanshokai meetings in the Teirei Kanshokai meetings in the NBTHK building, I heard that a sword's shape can have two styles, one is wide and is called "Yo" tsukurikomi. The other style has a narrow width and is called "In" tsukurikomi. In the Rai school, Kuniyuki has examples of Yo and In styles, but the two kanji Kunitoshi has only the Yo style, Rai Kunitoshi has only the In style, and Rai Kunimitsu has both, the Yo and In styles.

Later, the NBTHK curator, Mr. Tanobe Michihiro, wrote a paper in the NBTHK Token Bijutsu Magazine's "Meito Kansho" page. He concluded that the two kanji Kunitoshi and Rai Kunitoshi are the same smith, and that the difference in styles was due to the change in periods: the period changed, and his style changed too. Recently Mr Tanobe published a series of books, "The Japanese sword and the Gokaden (5 schools)". In the Yamashiro Den volume he wrote about these shapes and styles in detail and provided examples.

Mr. Tanobe showed that the two kanji Kunitoshi has examples of the In style, and Rai Kunitoshi has examples of the Yo style. In the future, the NBTHK kanteito commentaries might be changed to say " Rai Kuniyuki, Kunitoshi, and Rai Kunimitsu have both Yo and In styles".

Explanation by Hinohara Dai