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Meito Kansho: Examination of important swords

Juyo Bunkazai: Important cultural property

Type: Tachi

Mei: Motoshige

Takamatsu Matsudaira Family Heirloom
Owner: Kagawa Prefectural Museum

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 5 bu 9 rin (74.5 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 4 rin (2.25 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 9 rin (2.1 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 8 bu 4 rin (17.7 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is slightly wide, the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different, and it is thick. There is a strong koshizori type sori, and a short chu-kissaki. The jigane has a ko-itame hada and some itame and mokume hada, and the entire ji is well forged and tight. There are ji-nie, chikei, and pale utsuri. On the omote there are midare style utsuri. The hamon is wide, and is a ko-notare composed of ko-gunome mixed with square gunome, and some suguha areas. There are ko-ashi, yo, some saka-ashi, a tight nioiguchi, and the upper half has some uneven ko-nie. The boshi on the omote is straight, and on the ura is a narrow midarekomi. Both sides have a komaru, and the tip has hakikake. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is suriage, the tip has a slightly shallow kuri-jiri. The new yasurime on the omote are kiri, and on the ura are kate-sagari. The original style yasurime are unknown, and there are two mekugi-ana. On the omote, around the nakago tip, and along the mune side, there is a slightly small two kanji signature.

Osafune Motoshige's confirmed extant signed works range from Showa 5 (1316) to Joji 5 (1363) over a 50 year period. From this, there are theories that there was one smith, and another theory that there were two generations, the shodai and nidai. There is still no conclusion about this. However, a blade from Yamashiro school's Rai Kunitoshi states he is 75 years old, and the Yamato school's Shikkake Norinaga has a blade stating he is 69 years old. Judging from these examples, Motoshige's half century long period of activity might not be an exceptionally long working life. From his early work until his latest work, his hamon are based on an orderly kaku-gunome and there are no large changes from his early work to his later work.

The theory proposing that there were two generations or a shodai and nidai smith, points out that there are large sized and small sized signatures. Another opinion is that during the early Nambokucho period around Koei to Jowa (1338-44) there was a transition period for sword shapes. Until then, the standard tachi shape changed to become wider with a longer kissaki, and the shinogi-ji's width changed to become narrower, and at the same time the signature's size on the shinogi-ji changed, and this was a result of common changes which occurred during that period. In fact, the same province's smiths such as Kanemitsu, Chikakage, and Shigesane who was supposed to be Motoshige's younger brother, also showed the same type of transformation or evolution in their mei. From these observations, at the present, the one smith theory appears to be appropriate.

There is an accepted idea that the line of descent for Motoshige is from Hatakeda Moriie to Morishige to Motoshige. There is a Moriie tanto which has a mainly kaku-gunome hamon mixed with kataochi gunome, and some saka-ashi, and this is supposed to be from around the Koan to Einin (1278-98) periods. Morishige has tanto which are narrow and have slightly extended kaku-gunome hamon and not much kataochi gunome. In addition, the top of these hamon are even, just like Motoshige's tanto. There is a tanto dated Showa 5 (1316), and the signature is similar to Motoshige's with the same date.

The historical sword book "Kanchi-in Hon Meizukuishi" which was published in the same era, has a list from around Morishige's time and lists "Goro Moriie", and lists Motoshige as "Morishige's son". From this, we can acknowledge their continuity.

Motoshige's hamon have strong ha-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi, and frequent hataraki, which emphasizes the Soshu Den style. Most of his hamon, besides those based on kaku-gunome, are suguha hamon mixed with kaku-gunome and saka-ashi, or the entire hamon is a suguha style, mixed with ko-gunome, ko-choji, square shape gunome, and saka-ashi. In other words, his hamon reflect work from the end of the Kamakura period to the early Nambokucho period, and exhibit Bizen's common characteristic style. But his jigane have nagare hada and jifu, his boshi often have many sharp points, and from these details, his work has a reputation of showing Bizen characteristics and those of the neighboring Bichu Aoe school as well.

This tachi is slightly wide, and is thick, and has a koshizori style although it is suriage. It has a dynamic appearance and is in a healthy condition. There are no jifu which we often see in Motoshige's work. The entire ji is well forged and without a visible hada. Also because there is a healthy hamon, there is a tight nioiguchi, ashi and yo, and rich hataraki as I explained above. These details have a similar style to the tachi dated Kano

3 (1353) which was the 18th Tokubetsu Juyo sword. This tachi is an excellent example of a masterpiece and shows the smith's characteristic points.

Because of the mei's condition due to rust and age, it is not clear. But you can recognize that just above the 元(moto)kanji, there are very slight chisel marks still remaining, and they appear to be the left side of the 住(ju) kanji, so we can infer that originally, there was a long kanji signature which said "Bishu Osafune ju".

According to the Takamatsu feudal lords' historical record "Eiko jitsuroku", the Kii lord appreciated Matsudaira Yorishige's mourning over previous Kii lord's death and sent a his Bizen Motoshige sword to Yorishige, i.e. this sword. In Kanbun 11(1671), the Takamatsu Matsudaira shodai feudal lord Yorishige was in mourning over his uncle, the Kii Tokugawa family's shodai lord Yorinobu's death, and he sent a representative to Kii and Edo. After this trip, the deceased Yorinobu's son who was the Nidai lord Mitsusada presented Yorishige his father's family heirlooms. After this period, this tachi belonged to the family for a long period of time. In Taisho 8 (1919), Sir Yorishige received an official rank of Sho-sanmi (senior third rank) after his death. To commemorate this, the following year Matsudaira Yorinaga presented this tachi to the Yashima Shrine where Iyasu and Yorishige are enshrined. Later, in Showa 26 (1951), the shrine returned this tachi to the Matsudaira family. This tachi has an origami written in Shotoku1(1711) by Honnami Mitsutada valuing it at 700 kan.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Awaho-zu (millet grain design) soroi (matching) kanagu

Tsuba mei: Ginshotei Toumei with kao

Kozuka and fuchi mei: Ginshotei Toumei with kao

Menuki wari-tanzaku mei: Ginshotei Toumei

Kurikata mei: Toumei

Ura-kawara mumei: Toumei

This is Toumei's matching set of fittings with an awaho or millet grain design. He is famous in tosogu history, and went to extreme efforts to work on one subject or theme. This is Toumei's awaho design on a set of kanagu or fittings. You can clearly see his strong commitment to this awaho design and appreciate the skill he used in executing this.

Here we see dispersed awaho or millet grains on the iron and shakudo jigane. The awaho grains have a feeling of belonging with or closely complementing the jigane. Other awaho examples have jigane formed from shakudo, iron, copper, and even gold. It does not matter what kind of jigane Toumei used, because he never loses sight of his feelings for awaho, and always produces a perfect masterpiece.

These combinations of metal in his work are similar to his teacher's Goto Ichijo. Ichijo used all types of jigane and themes in his work, and established his own style. Toumei was not only successful in following his teacher's example, but also was obsessed with

the awaho theme. In focusing on awaho designs, he excelled when compared to his teacher Ichijo.

In examining Toumei's work, your eye seems to go and focus on his awaho without a choice. However, Toumei was concerned about not neglecting the atmosphere of his base or foundation material or jigane. His iron jigane are vigorous, his shakudo jigane bring out a feeling of silence, and his gold jigane brings out strong feelings. Toumei was an expert in ensuring that his awaho patterns complemented his jigane which one does not always see in the work of other smiths.

This is a matching set of kanagu or fittings and shows Toumei's excellent level of skill and the unique character we see in his work. Not only are the jigane and awaho in concert, but they form a symphony of sights, and are an example of highly skilled and well designed work. We can think of Toumei as a conductor for his awaho work, and exactly as a conductor, he demonstrates his skill. This is a masterpiece, and you can even feel his thoughts.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 759

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 759 Shijo Kantei To is May 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 May 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 7 sun 4 bu (52.72 cm)

Sori: slightly less than 3 bu (0.9 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 bu 1 rin (3.35 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 9 rin (2.4 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 3 bu 4 rin (4.5 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 3.5 bu (16.21 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a shinogi-zukuri wakizashi with an ihorimune. It is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a shallow sori and a long chu-kissaki. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, there are abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and a unique jihada. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There is a clear wide dense nioiguchi, ko-ashi, abundant nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and the nioiguchi is bright. The nakago is ubu, the tip is iriyamagata. The yasurime are the kate-sagari. There are two mekugi ana, and on the omote along the mune side, there is a long kanji signature.

Many of this smith's nakago yasurime are kiri, and the kate-sagari yasurime we see on this wakizashi is rare. In addition, the wakizashi is wide for this smith.

Shijo Kantei To No. 757 in the February, 2020 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a wakizashi by the Shodai Izumi-no-kami Kunisada.

This is a wide, long, and slightly thick blade. From the sori and shape, you can judge this as Keicho Shinto period work.

From the signature, this is supposed to be from roughly just before or after Kanei 3 (1626), and is Kunisada's early work. This is a very similar to his teacher Echigo-no-kami Kunitomo's work.

The jigane is a tight itame hada, the hamon has a straight yakidashi at the moto, and above the yakidashi, there is a Seki style shallow notare hamon mixed with gunome and togari, and the boshi is a Mishina style.

The wakizashi is very similar to, and not very different from Kunitomo's work. But Kunisada has muneyaki, and this is one of his characteristic points. Kunisada's muneyaki are seen in the early half of his career. This feature is different from Kunitomo's work, and you can see Kunisada's characteristics.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Kunisada, and a few people voted for Kunitomo.

This is very similar to Kunitomo's work, except for the muneyaki as I explained above. It is hard to differentiate between these two smiths work, and at this time, Kunitomo was treated as a correct answer.

In the last issue I talked about the lighting used to look at a sword. At this time, I will talk about fluorescent light.

To examine a Japanese sword's hamon, incandescent light is generally used, and recently, LED lights have become popular. Fluorescent light is used primarily to examine the jigane.

If you look at a hamon with fluorescent light, it is because you do not have an incandescent light or LED light source available, and are using fluorescent light as a substitute. However, a fluorescent light can be used for another purpose.

If part of the original hamon is missing for some reason and later repaired, these recent elaborate repairs are sometimes hard to detect and examine without having a

blade in hand and a magnifying glass to closely examine it. However, if there was an old style technique used to repair the hamon, examining the sword under a fluorescent light can make the repaired parts of the hamon look different from other parts of the hamon in terms of color and in the condition of the nioiguchi. Sometimes a repaired part of the nioiguchi appears like it is floating, and sometime you can recognize this.

In addition, if the nioiguchi's color and condition looks different from other parts of the hamon, this can indicate that there are differences between one part of the hamon and other parts. This might be visible in the appearance or condition of the nie, and also sometimes will depend on the condition of the polish, and I often like to examine these details carefully. However, sometimes these variations are not due to any attempts at a repair.

When looking at nioi-gire or gaps in the nioiguchi, or at an unclear nioiguchi, if you look at this under a fluorescent light, it is sometimes easy to see details, especially inside of a complex midare hamon. It is easier to examine a small area or section of the nioiguchi for nioi-gire with a fluorescent light.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai