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Meito Kansho: Examination of important swords

Juyo Bijutsuhin: Important Cultural property

Type: Tachi

Mei: Motozane

Owner: NBTHK

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7 bu 2 rin (72.0 cm)

Sori: 5 bu 8 rin (1.75 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 3 rin (2.5 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 6 rin (1.7 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 7 bu 8 rin (2.35 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 7 bu 6 rin (23.5 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is narrow, the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, and it is slightly thin. There is a large koshizori and a short small kissaki. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada. There are ji-nie, and along the shinogi-ji there are pale utsuri with slight variations in color and intensity. Below the shinogi, and along the hamon there are suji shaped utsuri. The hamon is a wide suguha, there are frequent ashi and yo, a tight nioiguchi, and some nioiguchi-like nie. The boshi is straight, the omote tip is a large round style, and the ura tip is round with a return. The horimono on the omote are koshi-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is suriage, and the tip is kuri-jiri. The yasurime, both new and old, are kate-sagari. There are three mekugi-ana, and on the omote, around the third mekugi-ana, along the mune side, there is a slightly small two kanji signature made with a thick tagane (chisel).

This tachi's maker Motozane is a "Ko-Motoshige" school smith, or possibly his younger brother. The Ko-Motoshige school's extant work consists of only six blades. There is a dated work from Kagen 2 (1304) which is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, so from this, their active period is obvious. However, there are two different theories about Motozane. One derives from many works which are classic looking when compared with Osafune

Motoshige's work, so Motozane could possibly be a different earlier period smith. Another theory is that this work was among his earliest works.

The signatures on four of the six Ko-Motoshige blades are signed on the ura side, and the yasurime are o-sujikai, and on these four blades, there are resemblances to Aoe work, and some of these blades could be incorrectly identified as Aoe work. From these observations, some people pointed out that there seems to be a relationship with Aoe smiths, and these blades should be studied more. Also, the unique signature along the mune side in gyosho style kanji made with a thick tagane is always a two kanji signature.

At this time, when I examined this Motozane work, I observed that the utsuri along the hamon forms narrow lines of utsuri which is similar to Aoe's dan-utsuri. This reinforces the theory that there is a relationship between Aoe and Motozane. In addition, the signature was formed using many gyaku-tagane strokes, there are thick chisel marks like we see in Aoe work, and the kanji style is similar to theirs. From these observations, in accordance with conventional opinions, we can judge that there is a relationship with Ko-Motoshige, and both Motozane's and Ko-Motoshige's work appear to have a relationship to Aoe.

Concerning the tachi's style, the characteristic jiba (ji and ha) and the prominence of the boshi's roundness, Dr.Kunzan expressed "at first impression this looks like Unsho's master work". He concluded that the tachi must be from the end of the Kamakura period and was Bizen work from almost the same era as Osafune Motoshige.

Although the blade is suriage, there are traces of a koshizori style, and the width is slightly narrow, and there is a small kissaki. These features are seen around the end of the Kamakura period, and show the period's characteristic points. Also, the jigane from the bottom to the tip is a tight koitame-hada, the forging is refined, and with the suguha hamon and the shape, there is an elegant feeling. The hamon has frequent ashi, and yo, and is a gentle hamon. But under the hamon border, there are some places with pale line-like hataraki, and this is sometimes a characteristic point in all provinces and schools in this period.

This is a valuable reference material, not only as a signed Motozane tachi, but because it also shows his high level of skill and his relationship to Ko-Motoshige.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Shachi-zu (imaginary fish design) mitokoro-mono

Kozuka and kogai mei: Etsujo with kao

Menuki: mumei Etsujo

Etsujo Mitsukuni was the second son of the Goto family's ninth generation Teijo and was born in Kanei 19 (1642) in Kyoto.

He was employed by the Kaga Maeda family and received 150 koku. He rotated his position in Kaga with the Kanbei family's Enjo, so he moved from Kyoto to Kaga every other year, and this contributed to the Kaga kinko school's growth. He passed away in Hoei 5 (1708), at the age of 67, and had established the Rihei family.

This mumei work is in Goto's oie-bori style work (work for shoguns and daimyo), and if not a typical design, has a sophisticated and exuberant feeling, and a judgement would be that it is Kaga Goto work. In other words, this work is related to, or associated with Kaga, or shows a Kaga style. These Kaga works are very well executed, and many times are judged as work by Etsujo. This is a signed Goto Etsujo mitokoro-mono.

The design is somewhat different from oie-bori okitemono work (works made using standard themes or subjects) in which we see dragons and shishi. The subject here is a shachi, or more precisely a shachi-hoko. The shachi is a dragon-like fish with large fins in place of legs and a large fish-like tail.

The ground has a shakudo ripple-like pattern, with a gold mon and a hokin finish on the ura (a decorative finish: the ura is covered with thin gold foil decorated with yasurime). The technique is precisely that of the Goto style, but the shachi, and the large and deeply carved mon is a novelty. The shachi is dancing and jumping, and looks like he has just awakened. The shachi has a tail extending into the air above and over him, and fins with claws on the end. He lives in the ocean, and is an imaginary animal. His shape is that of a fish, and his face is like a tiger. To provide protection from fires, he sits on the peak of a castle's roof.

The chisel marks are very detailed and precise in every section of the mon, and the gold work is dazzling. It is very rare to see a signed Etsujo work which was signed by Etsujo himself and is classified as Juyo Tosogu. I would say that this is one of Etsujo's finest mitokoromono sets.

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 760

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 760 Shijo Kantei To is June 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 June 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: Katana

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4.5 bu (71.05 cm)
Sori: 4 bu (1.21 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)
Sakihaba: 7 bu 9 rin (2.4 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 5 bu (4.55 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 3.5 bu (19.24 cm)
Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki not very different. It is thick, and there is a shallow sori and a large kissaki. The jigane is itame-hada mixed with nagare-hada, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, frequent chikei and jifu. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are tobiyaki, muneyaki, frequent ashi and yo, notably strong nie, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the tip is narrow and has a unique shape. There is a ha-agari style kurijiri. There is one mekugi ana and the yasurime are kiri. On the omote along the mune side, there is a long kanji signature.

Shijo Kantei To No. 758 in the March, 2020 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by Sue-Tegai Kanemitsu.

This tanto has an almost standard width, and for its width, it is relatively long. It is thick and has uchizori, and from the shape, you can judge this as work from the early half of the Muromachi period.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Sue-Tegai school smiths such as Kanemitsu, Kanezane, and Kanesada.

The Sue-Tegai smiths' styles are similar to each other, and it is difficult to judge between them, so at this time, we treated all Sue-Tegai smiths' names as a correct answer.

Besides the correct answer, some people voted for Sue-Seki smiths such as Kanesada. As we hinted, "the school's unique yasurime" means the Sue-Tegai school's higaki yasurime.

Some people seemed to view this as Sue-Seki higaki yasurime. Also, some voters thought that the upper part of the blade resembled Sue-Seki Rai utsushi work.

Sue-Tegai and Sue-Seki suguha works have a tight itame-hada, the jihada has a whitish cast, the boshi fall towards the edge or fukura, and there are many common characteristic points. But this tanto's jihada shows masame hada, the hamon edge has nie hotsure and kuichigaiba, and these are the Yamato school's characteristic points. If you notice these points, Sue-Tegai work would be the most appropriate opinion.

In Sue-Seki Rai utsushi work, many boshi are straight with a komaru and return, or fall towards the edge. This characteristic is the same as Tegai's. But if the boshi is straight, there is a komaru, the tip is sharp, and the return is conspicuously long, like we see on this tanto, we should be aware that these details are often seen in Sue-Tegai work, and you should remember these characteristic points.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai