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Meito Kansho: Examination of important swords

Juyo Bijutsuhin: Important Cultural Property

Type: Katana

Kin-zogan mei: Kunitoshi.

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 1 bu (70.0 cm)

Sori: 9 bu 9rin (3.0 cm)

Motohaba: 1sun 02 rin (3.1 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 1 rin (2.15 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 9 rin (3.3 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 7 bu 8 rin (20.55 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. It is thick, there is funbari, a large sori, a wazori shape, and a chu-kissaki. The jigane has ko-itame hada, mixed with some itame hada, and the entire ji is tightly forged. There are ji-nie and some fine chikei, and under the machi there is mizukage shaped utsuri which continues to form utsuri along the blade. In some places, there are continuous pale utsuri with dark areas. The hamon has choji mixed with ko-gunome and togari, and is a ko-midare style hamon. The vertical variations in the hamon are not prominent, and on the omote there are some saka-ashi. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, slightly uneven ko-nie, frequent mune-yaki, and from the center to the bottom half of the hamon there are kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi on the omote is a small midarekomi and on the ura it is almost straight. Both sides have a komaru and return. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is suriage and shows a great degree of shortening, and the nakago tip is kiri. The yasurime are kiri. There are two mekugi-ana, On the omote, near the first mekugi-ana on the flat part of the ji, there is a slightly small kinzogan (gold inlay) signature.

The Rai school's founder is supposed to be Kuniyuki and the ni-ji (two kanji) Kunitoshi succeeded him. Since historical times, there have been two theories: one is that Kunitoshi is same smith as Rai Kunitoshi, and the other hypothesis is that these are two

different smiths, and there is still no conclusion about this. The ni-ji Kunitoshi has only one date-written blade dated Koan 1 (1278). Other the hand Rai Kunitoshi has a tachi classified as Juyo Bunkazai which is owned by the Tokugawa museum) and dated Showa 4 (1314) stating he was 75 years old. From this, in Koan 1, the ni-ji Kunitoshi was 38 years old, and if they are same smith, from what we know, this is not big discrepancy. Concerning their styles, Rai Kunitoshi has wide blades with gorgeous choji midare hamon. However, the ni-ji Kunitoshi has narrow blades with suguha based hamon and strictly straight suguha hamon. These examples make it look like both smiths might have changed their usual styles, and it is hard to judge clearly if they are different people.

Furthermore, as sword enthusiasts know, the hamon style changed in different periods, and the ni-ji Kunitoshi's active period was mid-Kamakura to the latter half of the Kamakura period when Rai Kunitoshi's dated works are concentrated. In 1274 and 1281, the Mongols invaded Japan twice, in the Bunei and in Ko-an periods, and around that time, the hamon style also changed in Bizen. The Bizen style hamon changed from the Ichimonoji school's gorgeous wide choji midare hamon to the Osafune school's primarily gunome hamon with small vertical variations. Notably, Nagamitsu's work showed the same kind of change, although there were small differences when compared to Kunitoshi's style. Also, until the medieval period, all of the old sword books listed the ni-ji Kunitoshi as being the same smith as Rai Kunitoshi. The two generation theory appears only after the beginning of the Edo period to the present time. Today, the single smith theory is becoming more certain.

This blade is slightly wide with a large wazori curvature, the widths at the moto and saki are not too different, and there is a chu-kissaki. It is healthy and has a dignified shape. The jigane is tight refined ko-itame hada, there are fine ji-nie and pale utsuri. The hamon is based primarily on choji, and a large portion of the hamon shows many variations and hataraki such as kinsuji and sunagashi, and there are many interesting details in the hamon. In addition, Rai's characteristic mune-yaki is prominent, and there are bo-hi which are seen in many of his signed works. This tachi shows the school's characteristic points, and many of Kunitoshi's unique characteristics. Also, the hamon style is similar to that of his blade dated Genkyo 1 (1321) which was owned by the NBTHK and classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin by the NBTHK. Both blades also have prominent saka-ashi on the ura, although we see this is on the omote, and this common feature is hard to miss.

Under the machi there is a mizukage, which continues to form utsuri, and also there are some traces of funbari remaining. From this, you can see that the shape would have been close to the original ubu shape if it had not been suriage and shortened to such an extent. It may have been shortened for some unavoidable reason, for example the nakago might have been too rusty or weakened, or possibly to reshape the nakago.

In Showa 16 (1941) this katana received its Juyo Bijutsuhin classification, and its owner was Mr. Baba Kazue, a member of a Hosokawa retainer family. He worked as an administrator of the Hosokawa family household and was governor of Aomori prefecture.

Explanation and illut by Ishii Akira.

Juyo Tosogu

Kani-zu (Crab design) menuki

Wari-tanzaku Mei: Hoshu 61 sou (61 years of age) Shomin with kao

For many years we have heard the term “transcendental skill” in the art world. In the Meiji period, with the Meiji 9 Haitorei edict, the practical or everyday wearing of the Japanese sword ended. The Meiji emperor supported traditional Japanese craftsmanship and established the Teishitsu Gigei-in system, and this became a title or recognition which provided support for toso-kanagu makers such as Kano Natsuo to continue working. Following Natsuo, this system supported the work of modern gold smiths such as Unno Shomin, Kagawa Katsuhiko, and Tsukada Shukyo. All of these artists produced elaborate gorgeous gold smith work, and were competing with each other. Their workmanship amazed people in the art world, not only in Japan but also outside of Japan.

These menuki were made in Meiji 37 (1904), when Unno Shomin was 61 years old, and produced this set of menuki with a crab design. The menuki on the omote and the ura use a shakudo and solid gold ground. The line of sight is along the crab’s back and stomach, and the design is symmetrical. The crab has a unique texture and lumpy tail surface, and if you touch it, the crab seems to move immediately. His legs do not seem to move vertically, but suggest side way movements. In addition, on the ura side, the star shaped chikaragane (reinforcing pin) exhibits the details and character seen in Shomin’s work.

When talking about excellent crab design work, another Meiji period artist, the potter Miyagawa Kozan comes to mind. His crab designs seem to almost pull you into them, and exhibit transcendental skill too. This item is classified as Juyo Bunkazai, and is a Katsu-yu kani haritsuke daitsuki bachi (ceramic crab design bowl) which is owned by the Tokyo National Museum. These items are so exceptional, that they do not appear to be made by mere humans. These craftsmen tried to create creatures which appeared to breathe.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 762

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No.762 Shijo Kantei To is August 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 August 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: Tanto

Length: slightly less than 7 sun 2 bu (21.8 cm)

Uchi-zori

Motohaba: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 4.5 bu (10.5 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

This is a hira-zukuri tanto with a mitsumune. Both the width and thickness are standard. The blade is a slightly small size with uchi-zori. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, and the hada is visible. Some areas are mixed with a larger pattern mokume hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, bo-utsuri and a clear jihada. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture, and is a ko-gunome hamon. There are ko-ashi, yo, bright clear frequent ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote under the mekugi-ana and on the center, there is a well written two kanji signature made with a fine chisel.

Shijo Kantei To No. 760 in the May, 2020 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Iyonojo Munetsugu.

This is a wide blade and there is almost no difference in the widths at the moto and saki. The blade is thick with a shallow sori and a large kissaki. From the shape, you can judge as this as Keicho shinto period work.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Iyonojo Munetsugu. For an almost correct answer a few people voted for the Shodai Tadayoshi.

The details of the Iyonojo work are as follows. His characteristic jigane has an itame hada pattern larger than the usual Hizen to konuka hada pattern. The ji also contains nagare hada and the hada is visible. There are frequent chikei, jifu, and an impression of strong or fine forging.

The Iyonojo hamon are often a notare mixed with sharp tipped small gunome, togariba, vertical variations, and a sharp appearing midare hamon.

The hamon valleys do not have not many large nie, there are frequent ashi and yo, especially strong ha-nie, as well as tobiyaki, muneyaki, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi. Iyonojo Munetsugu's work was influenced by Soshu Den work and there is a strong individualistic style.

The Shodai Tadayoshi, in his early work, signed his work with a five kanji Tadayoshi mei which included the kanji "ju nin" ("an inhabitant of"), and he produced many styles modeled after classic work. In particular, there are resemblances to what we call Chogi

utsushi (resembling or in the style of) work. The jigane's itame hada is visible, the hamon is notare mixed with gunome and choji, there are strong ha-nie, and the boshi is midarekomi and has hakikake.

However, in Tadayoshi's Chogi utsushi work in the midare hamon, the gunome or peaks are not close each other, and his prominent notare hamon elements have clearer shapes. Usually, in the case of long katana, Tadayoshi signed on the ura side.

At this time, I would like to talk a bit about my history in studying swords.

In the Japanese sword world, around Showa 40 (1965) there was a big boom in interest in swords. This led to an increase in the number of sword collectors, and in this part of the Showa period from around Showa 40, many people started to work professionally in the sword world.

These people were working in areas like research, appraisal, museum activities, buying and selling, sword making, polishing, and mountings or koshirae. They produced many leaders in the sword world and many are still active today.

However, the period when I started to study Japanese swords was later and around Showa 50 (1975), and there were very few young sword enthusiasts active then.

Looking at the Token Bijutsu, we can see a list of the members every year, and the number of members in Japan then was over 8000, and there were about 20 student members, and this did number not increase much after that.

At that time, to study I attended six sword meetings every month in Tokyo. Even at the NBTHK Teirei Kanshokai, except for a few senior college seniors, almost the only young person attending was myself.

I was just studying, and did not feel particularly isolated, and was serious and enthusiastic about nyusatsu kantei. However, in thinking about it recently, I feel that at the time if there had been more people from the same generation as me, it would have been more enjoyable.

Today, the token world has many young women who are sword enthusiasts, and even the number of young men member seems to have increased recently.

Among this younger generation of sword enthusiasts, it should be more enjoyable to study swords with the opportunity to exchange ideas and information with their contemporaries.

Today you can acquire all types of information by using personal computers and smart phones. But to actually appreciate swords, looking at exhibits, hearing stories first hand, reading books, and person to person discussions are just as valuable as in the past.

In the token world, there are people with very extensive knowledge, but they are too senior today, and it is difficult to ask them for lectures or discussions. However, if people would meet more often and exchange ideas and information directly, it would then become easier to ask senior, very knowledgeable people for lectures and discussions.

With more opportunities to interact with friendly acquaintances or contemporaries today, I believe young people should enjoy the sword world to a greater extent.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai