

**NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL**  
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**Meito Kansho: Examination of important swords**

**Kokuho, National Treasure**

Type: Tanto

Mumei: Masamune (meibutsu: Kuki Masamune)

Owner: Hayashibara Museum

Length: 8 sun 1 bu 8 rin (24.8 cm)

Sori: slightly uchizori

Motohaba: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3 cm)

Motokasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 2 bu 7 rin (9.9 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

**Commentary**

This is a hirazukuri tanto with a mitsumune. The width is standard, it is thick, and it has a slight uchizori. The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume hada, with some areas showing a large pattern, and some hada is visible. The entire ji is well forged. There are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, and mizukage shaped utsuri at the machi. The hamon is yakikomi at the machi, and above this, it is ko-notare with ko-gunome. Below the fukura the blade is wide and the blade is large. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, frequent small and large nie, small yubashiri, and frequent nie-suji, kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi on the omote is a small midarekomi with a komaru; the ura is straight and the tip is yaki-kuzure. Both sides have kaen, and there are strong hakikake. The return is long and continues on to form muneyaki.

Sagami Koku's Goro Nyudo Masamune is known as a great master smith in Japanese sword history. He was a master smith who inherited the nie-deki or nie based Soshu Den school style from Kuniyuki and Yukimitsu, and elevated his work into art. This is known not only among the sword world's people, but also the general population is aware of this. In the Edo period, Masamune was known as one of "the three greatest smiths", along with Awataguchi Toshiro Yoshimitsu and Go Yoshihiro. In the book "Kyoho Meibutsucho" which lists 235 blades (including some fire-damaged blades), there are 59 blades by Masamune.

According to an old story, Masamune is supposed to have passed way in the early Nambokucho period on Koei 2 (1343). According to the "Edo Chomei Masamune",

Masanune had a blade dated Showa 3 (1314) 11 gatsu which was lost in the great Meireki fire, so accepting the theory that his active period was around the end of the Kamakura period is reasonable.

Today, Masamune's signed work consists of four tantos, the "Meibutsu Fudo Masamune" classified as Juyo Bunkazai, the "Kyogoku" and "Daikoku" blades which are both imperial treasures, and the Honjo. There are others, but many of them are suriage and have no signature. In case of katana, Masamune's blades have a standard width with a chu-kissaki, or sometimes are wide with a long chu-kissaki. The jigane appear to be moist (uruoi), and have abundant nie, which results from hard and soft steels mixed together. There are abundant chikei, and they do not appear to be flashy or garish as is seen in later period work, and they appear to be relaxed or "natural". We describe the Bizen school's choji midare hamon as "Figurative beauty", but we describe Masamune's hamon as displaying "Abstract beauty". His hamon show all kinds of shapes, and are described as free, wild, and open hearted, but never lose their high degree of sophistication. Dr. Honma Kunzan said the hamon's nature is expressed by the kanji for "eccentric", and that this expresses his real essence and is the reason that Masamune is Masamune.

We also see the presence of nie hataraki: large and small nie, strong and weak nie, nie-kuzure, nie-suji, yubashiri, and tobiyaki. These nie combine harmoniously with the nioiguchi, and the nioiguchi shows light and shadow, wide and narrow variations, and creates images we liken to scenery, and are extremely variable. Conventionally, these hamon details are considered to be, or are compared to, an ink landscape scroll, with no unbalanced areas and a dynamic hamon. We could say That this is the unique and most attractive point in his work, and we can recognize the high level of his artistry which no other smith can match.

This tanto is listed in the "Kyoho Meibutsu-cho" as the Kuki Masamune tanto. The jigane is well forged, it shows itame hada, and there are abundant chikei. The quality of the forging is exceptional, there are subtle variations in the nioiguchi which contains abundant bright nie with variations in their density, and this kind of work is not seen in swords from other smiths. There are frequent kinsuji, nie-suji, and sunagashi, and a powerful kaen-shaped boshi, where nie and the nioiguchi are mixed. The entire tanto is dignified. Also, the hamon's width and variations from the moto to the boshi is called "kisho-tenketsu" which means there is a quick start, a building up, a climax, and an ending. The bottom half and upper half of the hamon have subtle variations, and a feeling of quiet motion. This is a master work from the Soshu Den, and it has a style and quality which is to be expected from a work by Masamune.

The tanto's origin is listed in the "Buko Zakki" where the Hirato clan's fourth generation lord Matsura Shigenobu wrote about the experiences of warlords who fought from Tensho until Genna period. According to this book, Kuki Osumi's son Gorohachi (the younger brother of Kuki Moritaka) showed Noh performances in Fushimi, and he received this Masamune tanto from Chikuzen Chunagon Kobayakawa Takakage, and the blade then belonged to the Kuki family. However, at the battle of Sekigahara, family members fought on both sides of the battle: in the Western army the father Yoshitaka and a brother Gorohachi fought. Moritaka (1573-1632), was in the Eastern army and this blade ended up with Moritaka who was on the winning side. The Toba lord Moritaka who already had 30,000 koku, then received an additional 26,000 koku, and he

presented this blade to Ieyasu. Later, Ieyasu's 10<sup>th</sup> son the Kishu Tokugawa family founder Yorinobu owned it, and then it passed to Yorinobu's second son, the Iyo-Saijo Matsudaira family's founder Yorizumi, and since then, until recently, this blade has belonged to this family.

In addition, the special solid gold nijū (two piece) habaki is an Umetada habaki, and the bottom surface of the upper part has an engraved signature "Umetada Jusai Hikoichi nyū", and this habaki is listed in the "Umetada Meikan".

This habaki and blade will be exhibited at the "Umetada Momoyama Japanese Sword World" exhibition at the Osaka Historical Museum in Reiwa 2 from October 31 to December 14, and then at the NBTHK Museum in Reiwa 3 from January 9 to February 21.

Explanation and illust by Ishii Akira.

## Tosogu Kansho

### Tokubetsu Juyo Tosogu

#### **Shiki hana-zu (four season flower design) dai-sho tsuba Dai-sho mei: Heian Natsuo**

The signature is a distinctive signature since in the "Natsu" kanji, the last stroke jumps to the inside of the kanji. The two kanji for "Heian" are short, and the two kanji for "Natsuo" are long. This work is dated Kaei 6 to 7 (1853-4) when Natsuo was 25 years old, and just before he moved to Edo.

This is a takabori work with and gold and silver iroe on a shakudo nanako base. This style is based on ie-bori (work for the shogun and daimyo) techniques. Natsuo's sketching and painting abilities were already very advanced in his mid-twenties.

We have never seen any other Natsuo dai-sho tsuba except this one. The dai-sho tsuba show twelve branches and flowers on the omote and ura, and represents flowers from four seasons. But it is hard to say if they are separated by season, i.e. by summer, fall, winter and spring. I am just guessing, but at the time of their production, it seems possible that these tsuba belonged to a dai-sho koshirae, and each item of kanagu in the koshirae would have contained depictions of Natsuo's flowers. I can just imagine how spectacular that would have appeared.

Natsuo's talents were well developed in Kyoto, and he was already a first class craftsman, and in the Edo his talents continued to improve. Many schools and many gold smiths work with a shakudo-nanako base or ground with takabori-iroe flowers. But Natsuo's jigane with its relaxed gentle undulations is extraordinary. It is very rare for a gold smith to create this kind of warm feeling. Judging from historical documents, everybody recognized that Natsuo was a careful and relentlessly hard worker.

Commentary by Kubo Yasuko

## Shijo Kantei To No. 765

The deadline to submit answers for the No.765 Shijo Kantei To is November 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 November 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: tachi

Length: 3 shaku 1 sun 6 bu 8 rin (96.0 cm)

Sori: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 9 rin (3.3 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 8 rin (0.85 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 9 rin (3.3 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 7 bu (20.3 cm)

Nakago sori: 8 rin (0.25 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is long and wide, and the widths at the moto and the saki are different. It has koshisori and a large funbari. The tip “falls down going forward” (i.e. the degree of curvature becomes more shallow or smaller going towards the point), and there is a chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame-hada mixed with mokume-hada, and the jihada is visible. There are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, a slightly dark steel color, and jifu utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture, and the edge of the hamon has fine hotsure and uchinoke. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, a worn down nioiguchi, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and the entire hamon is graceful. The nakago is a ubu, the tip is ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There is a one mekugi ana. On the omote along the mune side there is a three kanji signature.

The school that this smith belongs to does not produce many works with a dark colored jigane. This smith's tachi are usually around 2 shaku 6 sun long, and are usually narrow with a small kissaki, and there are blades with a long kanji signature.

## No.765 Shijo Token Kansho- kai October, 2020

Because of the Corona virus pandemic and other circumstances, the NBTHK has canceled the “Token Teirei Kansho Kai” meetings since March of this year. As a result, our members and readers currently have no chances to examine meito. In light of this situation, starting with this issue, in place of the “Shijo Kantei To” we are presenting three blades with commentaries by Oi Gaku.

### Kansho To No.1

Type: Wakizashi

Mei: Bishu Osafune Norimitsu  
Kakitsu 3 nen (1443) 8 gatsu hi

Length: slightly less than 1 shaku 5 sun 3 bu

Sori: slightly less than 3 bu

Shape: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: itame hada, and the hada is visible. There are abundant ji-nie, bo-utsuri at the koshimoto, and above this, midare-utsuri.

Hamon: based on a low narrow open bottom gunome hamon mixed with ko-gunome, ko-gunome, and choji; some areas of the hamon have square shaped gunome, and in some areas, the midare hamon has large spaces between the gunome. There are ashi, some yo, nioiguchi type ko-nie, and the bottom half has fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Around the Muromachi period, although they were rare, shinogi-zukuri short swords were sometimes seen. Many of them are 1 shaku 5 sun - 1 shaku 7 sun in length, and these were developed for upper class samurai to wear instead of tachi, and for lower class samurai to use instead of hirazukuri uchigatana. People must have felt that such a size was convenient and useful. Later, instead of a tachi, shinogi-zukuri katana with lengths of over 2 shaku became a mainstream style from the early or late Kansho (1460-65) period. Among these items, we can say, from both the quality and quantity of such items, an outstanding smith is Osafune Norimitsu. His excellent work was recognized and he was admired and called “Kansho Norimitsu”.

Around the Tensho period (1573-91) samurai began to wear a dai-sho consisting of two uchi-gatana. In the early half of the Muromachi period, many of these short uchi-gatana seem to have used as wakizashi as one of a pair of swords. In order to be fitted into koshirae to accompany another blade, many of these short uchigatana acquired another mekugi-ana. An ubu nakago, which have an original hamachi and only one meikugi-ana are unexpectedly rare. This wakizashi’s original mekugi-ana is at the bottom.

Norimitsu has a tanto dated in the Kagen period, and he is supposed to have worked intermittently until the end of the Muromachi period. The historical sword book “Meikan”

lists early Muromachi period Norimitsu blades classified as work by several generations. However, he has a sword dated in Bunmei 9 (1477), where he signed he was “72 years old”, so his birth date is known to be around Oei 13 (1406). From this it is possible to judge him as being one smith who was active from the end of the Oei period to the Bunmei period.

With this information, this blade is thought to be work by “Goro Saemon-no-jo Norimitsu” when he was 38 years old. This is a short shinogi-zukuri blade which is slightly narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. The tip has sori, and the small gentle shape is characteristic of the early half of the Muromachi period. The clear itame forging has utsuri, a nioiguchi type open bottom gunome midare hamon, and just above the machi, the hamon fades out. This is a style similar to what is seen mainly after the Bunmei period by smiths such as Katsumitsu and Sukesada. But compared with them, this has a smaller hamon, prominent square shaped features in the hamon, few ashi and yo, and the boshi is not too wide.

The midare hamon’s width is low, the entire hamon area is narrow, the midare hamon has clear spaces between its elements and vertical variations, and this is a gentle and elegant midare hamon. This is a highly rated Norimitsu work with clear characteristic points.

## **Kansho-to: No2**

Type: tanto

Mei: Hankei

Length: 9 sun 9.5 bu

Sori: slight

Shape: hira-zukuri

Mune: mitsu-mune

Jigane: itame hada mixed with large itame hada; there is some mokume and nagare hada, and the hada is clearly visible. There are abundant ji-nie, and wide dull chikei.

Hamon: notare hamon mixed with gunome, and togari. There is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and in some places the strong nie become mura (tight groups of nie); there is some nie-kuzure, tobiyaki, yubashiri, sunagashi, and kinsuji; wide nie-suji appear like stripes; there is a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight; the omote tip is yakizume and the ura is hakikake with a komaru; there is a return.

Noda Zenshiro Ono Hankei was a gun smith initially and was called Kiyotaka. There are gun barrels signed in February of Keicho 15 (1610), to March of Keicho 20 (1615). There are also some swords signed Kiyotaka. It is unknown when he began to use the Hankei name for swords, and the dates of his birth and death are not certain.

Usually signed Hankei works have no date, but a document related to the Hinomisaki Shrine gun dedication is dated in the spring of Genna 5 (1619) and accompanies a signed Kiyotaka blade. There is a Hankei signature on a Koya Mountain Kongo Sanmai

In (shrine) dedication sword document dated August 21 of Kaei 1 (1624). From these documents, it is thought that Hankei changed his name between these two dates.

In the Momoyama period, there was a strong movement or trend to copy Soshu Den master smith works, such as works by Masamune, Sadamune, Go, Shizu and O Sa. However, Hankei has more works modeled after Norishige, and among top class sword smiths in the same period, he was unique and different from others in this respect.

This tanto's shape is striking, and Hankei is supposed to have improved on Norishige's poor fukura shapes and takenoko-zori shapes. Also, there is a sharp angle on the mitsumune.

This jihada is called "Hiziki-hada" which is a strongly visible large pattern itame hada. There are dull chikei, and he copied Norishige's "Matsukawa hada". It is easy to develop forging cracks and small scratches when making this type of hada, but in this case there is an interesting appearance. The hamon is notare mixed with gunome, and shows a relaxed pattern. There is a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, strong hataraki on the hamon edge and inside of hamon, and the boundary of the hamon is not clear. There is a slightly worn down nioiguchi, and these characteristic points are supposed to modeled after Norishige's work.

Hankei has a strong preference for his nakago shapes. The hamachi and munemachi are wide, and consequently there is a narrow nakago with a large mekugi-ana. The signature was made in a hori-me (engraved) style and there are no tagane makura (the ridge or line of raised metal formed when the metal is pushed out of the body of the nakago by the chisel used to form the kanji in the mei). The yasurime on the omote are osuji-kai, and on the ura the yasurime are gyaku-osuji-kai. The yasurime on the nakago-mune are higaki which is unique. The nakago tip is kurijiri, but the mune side of the nakago jiri is a diagonal sharp straight line, and this shape resembles a Japanese mortar called a yagen (a chemical maker's mortar). It is interesting to think this nakago shape comes from a hinawaju's (matchlock) wooden gun stock shape, suggesting Hankei's origin as a gun maker.

Hankei's signature is seen in two different styles. Looking at the "han" kanji's right side, one style appears to be like the katakana "ru". The other style looks like the katakana "ro". Many of his hirazukuri nakago mune are kakumune. His shinogi-zukuri swords and wakizashi have maru-mune or a small amount of niku on the mune, and these are seen when we see the katakana "ru" shaped kanji signature. His hira-zukuri wakizashi are rare and there are only few examples available.

### **Kansho-to: No3**

Tye: katana

Mei: Tsutsui Etchu no kami Fujiwara Terukuni Nyudo Kiju

Kyoho 8 nen (1723) 2 gatsu kichijitsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 6 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Shape: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame hada mixed with some nagare hada, and the hada is barely visible. There are ji-nie, and fine chikei.

Hamon: straight yakidashi at the moto, and above this the hamon is based on large gunome and toranba mixed with gunome and choji, and the entire hamon is wide. There are thick ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant ko-nie, yubashiri, and kinsuji. The entire hamon on the omote has fine and pale sunagashi, and on the ura there are frequent sunagashi.

Boshi: the omote is a notare type midare, and the ura is a shallow notare; both sides have frequent hakikake; the tip is komaru, and there is a return.

Tsutsui Kiju is supposed to be a Yamato smith. However, according to the historical book "Kyoho Shokoku Kaji Oaratame" he came from Kawachi Kuni and he made some swords in Settsu.

His father, Etchu no kami Kanekuni's is from the Yamato Monju school, and he then become a student of Tanba no Kami Yoshimichi, and moved from Yamato to Settsu. Due to this situation, Kiju was able to migrate in and out of this area and make swords. He was active from the Genroku to Enkyo periods, and his first mei was Terukuni, and later he was called Kiju. In his father's later years, Kiju made daisaku and signed daimei with his father, and he was active from an early age. However, many of his works are seen in his mid-50s around Kyoho 6 (1721), and this was supposedly the result of the Shogun Yoshimune's incentives. Kiju may have been from the same family as Nara Koriyama, a Kokujinshu (a large provincial land holder). Since the Tsutsui were a prestigious family, many of his signatures may include the Tsutsui name to exhibit his connection to the Tsutsui family.

His father used his teacher Yoshimichi's sudare-ba style hamon, but we do not see it in Kiju's work. Many of his hamon are a toran style with large gunome midare, and have a yakidashi. Besides this style, he has suguha hamon with a dense nioiguchi. His yasurime styles included ko-tsutsumi kesho yasurime, and his signature has a characteristic flowing script. From these details, we can imagine, he was influenced by the work of Tsuda Sukehiro and Sukenao. His shapes have a long chu-kissaki, and many of them have a slightly large sori, and sometime they have sakizori. His jigane are itame hada mixed with nagare hada, and his toran style hamon are more like a large gunome-midare, and there are prominent sunagashi, which is similar to Sukenao's style. Some boshi have hakikake, and are notare with a komaru and return. There are also a number of blades with bo-hi.

Compared with Sukenao's work, Kiju's work is less dignified, but have a large hamon, and inside of the edge of the hamon there are frequent exuberant kinsuji and sunagashi, showing Kiju's unique points very well. Since we can see many of his characteristic points here, this is a good example of his typical work.

**Shijo Kantei To No. 763 in the August, 2020 issue**

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Echu no Kami Takahira (the same smith as the Shodai Kanewaka) dated Genna 8 nen (1622).

In voting, a majority of people voted for Takahira. Besides him, few people voted for the nidai and sandai Kanewaka and Dewa no Kami Takahira.

The shodai Kanewaka is a Keicho Shinto smith. Today his dated swords are seen from the mid-Keicho to Kanei periods. Around the Keicho period, in the early half of his career, there are some prominently wide blades with a large kissaki, and a typical Keicho Shinto shape. In the following period from Genna to Kanei, there is a transition to the Takahira signature, and his shapes changed to have a standard width, with the widths at the moto and saki being different. There were chu-kissaki and a slightly larger sori than this blade.

Many of the Takahira period jigane are a tight itame hada, and are sometimes mixed with nagare hada.

In this period many of his hamon are notare mixed with gunome, and his characteristic hako-midare hamon become prominent. But his hako-midare hamon do not necessarily have precise box shaped features, and sometimes there are dense nie mixed with nie-kuzure. But the hamon style continued, and after the Nidai Kanewaka, and Kashu (south of Ishikawa prefecture) Shinto smiths, we see clear box shaped hako-midare hamon.

Speaking about the Nidai and Sandai Kanewaka and Dewa no Kami Takahira votes, these smiths have hako-midare mixed hamon. However, outside their area, detailed analysis of Kashu Shinto smiths' styles are not often seen, so for this reason, we treated their names as correct answers.

I would now like to talk about yakidashi at the base of a hamon. Previously, I mentioned that this part of the hamon is as important to examine as the boshi.

A suguha section of a hamon at the koshimoto or beginning of a hamon is called a yakidashi, and this is seen very often in Shinto blades and many yaki-otoshi hamon are seen in Koto period Kyushu work and Ko-Hoki work. There is a lot of information we can learn from yakidashi.

We should pay attention to hamon yakidashi in the machi area. This is important for sword appraisal and appreciation if a hamon starts in this area.

For example, here the katana is wide with a large kissaki, and at first impression, looks like a Nambokucho period blade which is greatly suriage. The jigane is itame, the entire hada is visible, and there is shirake utsuri. The hamon is suguha with hotsure, and there are frequent nie, and the boshi suggests a Mount Fuji shape with a komaru and return.

At the first impression, this looks like a Nanbokucho period Bingo Ko-Mihara katana with a yakidashi. The yakidashi started at the machi area, and the ubu (original) mekugi-ana location is a three finger-width distance below the machi. If the ubu nakago mekugi-ana location is three fingers-widths under the machi, that means that this katana is not very suriage, and is probably an ubu uchigatana. So, in this case, the katana is not a Nanbokucho period suriage sword.

Therefore, we must carefully examine details of the shape and jiba (jigane and hamon). For example, at first impression this appears to be an old sword, so is this a Muromachi period uchigatana, or a very rare Nanbokucho period uchigatana with an ubu nakago? Was the nakago actually welded on later and is it associated with various other elements of the sword?

Sometimes, a Japanese sword has mizukage at the machi. Mizukage is one of the things to look for to conclude a katana hamon is sai-ha (the blade has a new hamon and not an original hamon). Sometimes a hamon yakidashi also has mizukage, but this means only that the hamon begins there, and from only this evidence, you cannot conclude the blade is sai-ha or retempered.

For example, there are some smiths in the Shinto period such as Horikawa Kunihiro and Musashi Taro Yasukuni with a characteristic mizukage at the machi's edge.

The problem that concerns us is a katana nakago: when nakago are filed or altered or shortened, and there are many mekugi-ana, it would appear to be a greatly suriage katana. However, if it has mizukage at the current machi's edge, this cannot be the original origin or starting location of the hamon.

So, if we see a katana with a greatly suriage nakago, and the katana underwent yakiire after it became suriage, the presence of mizukage or a yakidashi means it is likely to be a sai-ha (retempered) katana.

On the other hand, there are many examples of a katana with an ubu nakago which have been filed and have had additional mekugi ana added in an attempt to make the blade look like a large suriage old katana.

Therefore, if a sword has mizukage in above the examples, you have to examine the sword carefully and be suspicious of the condition of the nakago.

At this time, I described two examples or situations. I hope you can understand the reason why a hamon yakidashi, which is not visible at first glance is important, and hopefully this will help you in your appraisals.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai