

# NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

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### Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

#### Juyo Bunkazai, Important Cultural Property

Type: Tachi

Mei: Sukekane

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 1 bu 2 rin (73.1 cm)

Sori: 8 bu 3 rin (2.5 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 9 rin (1.8 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu 3 rin (6.55 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 8 bu 6 rin (20.8 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

#### Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. It is thick, there is a large naka-zori (the maximum sori is at the center of the blade), the tip has sori, and there is a short chu-kissaki. The jigane has itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and overall, the hada is well forged, and the fine hada is slightly visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, and mizukage shaped utsuri at the edge of machi which continues up to form jifu utsuri. There are also dark suji shape utsuri. The hamon is a wide suguha style hamon, with ko-gunome, square shaped gunome, and a ko-notare style. There are ashi and yo, and on the omote around the monouchi there are Kyo-saka-ashi. Around the nioiguchi there are slightly uneven nie, and some kinsuji. The boshi is a shallow notare, the omote is an kuichigaiba style, and the tip is yakizume. The ura is komaru and there is a short return. The horimono on the omote and the ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, the tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are sujikai. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote, above the mekugi-ana, on the center, there is a large sized two kanji signature made with a with a thick chisel, and the ura has slight traces of lacquer.

Bizen Koku Sukekane's name is listed and there are several Ko-Bizen and Ichimonji smiths in the Meikan or book listing signatures with this name. His existing signatures

are seen in a small size and in a large size, and the majority are a large size, but there is a small sized signature with long mei saying "Bizen Koku Sukekane saku".

The general opinion is that the small size mei is Ko-Bizen, and large size mei is Ichimonji. But among the works with the small size signature, there is a blade classified as Kokuho which looks like Ichimonji work. It is not always easy to define or classify a blade from a signature's style. Naturally, the origin or provenance of a blade includes the blade's workmanship, depends on entries in historical sword books, and sometimes people reach different conclusions about a blade, and can argue if it is either a Ko-Bizen or early Ichimonji work. That means that we need to make additional detailed studies of some blades. However, after Dr. Honma examined most of Sukekane's blades, he concluded that Sukekane had five different signatures. Among these, looking at a large size signature just like this one, he said "in historical times, the first of his large signature blades had a komidare hamon with nie, and was judged as Ko-Bizen work. But later, we see two blades with the same style signature and with gorgeous large choji midare hamon". From this conclusion Dr Honma thought Sukekane's work was from the mid-Kamakura period and from Ko-Bizen."

Today, there are large sized Sukekane signatures on three Juyo Bunkazai blades including this blade, one Juyo Token, and another one. As Dr. Honma mentioned, Sukekane's styles showed a wide range, and from this we can guess that he was an active smith in the early Kamakura period Ko-Ichimonji school to around the mid-Kamakura period which was a peak period for the Ichimonji school, and his style changed during this period. The Meikan lists his work from around the Joei (1232-3) period. However, concerning the small sized signature Sukekane blade classified as Kokuho and which is classified as Ichimonji work, and which was handed down in the Inshu Ikeda family, Dr. Honma commented "This is a gorgeous choji midare hamon, but not as dynamic as swords with the large size signature, and is mixed with a small number of gunome. This is supposed to be the same Ichimonji school's work, but more likely is from a later period than the large size signature blades." He didn't comment on whether both swords were made by different smiths or the same smith. There are different opinions in different sword books, and we are looking for new material to illustrate or settle this point.

This is one of the few large sized signature Sukekane tachi with an ubu nakago. The widths at the moto and saki are slightly different, there is a standard width, the blade is thick, the hiraniku is reasonably healthy, and it is a really healthy blade. The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and overall, it is well forged, and shows its character in the forged hada.

The hamon is a wide suguha style hamon, mixed with other different hamon motifs and shows the high level of skill of the smith. In addition, the notable utsuri is a clear suji utsuri along with dark areas, and this is Bitchu Aoe's unique "dan utsuri" style, and this is very unusual in Bizen work. Also, the jigane has no irregularities anywhere, and there is a fine textured jihada. The fine hada is slightly visible everywhere, and could be described as a chirimen-hada. The nakago's ha-mune is thick, and the signature is a common Ko-Aoe style seen until around the mid-Kamakura period, and made with a strong thick chisel. Therefore, from previous studies, there are no questions about the large size signature Sukekane being a Bizen smith. However, this tachi does suggest

that there is a possible relationship with Bitchu Aoe smiths. This is a very valuable reference sword for Sukekane and Bizen work.

During the Edo period, this tachi was handed down in the Buzen Kokura clan's Ogasawara family, and in Showa 6 nen (1931) during the previous Kokuho classification system, the owner was the last clan lord Ogasawara Tadanobu's son, Ogasawara Nagayoshi. This has a gold nashiji itomaki no tachi koshirae and a habaki with the Ogasawara family Sankaibishi mon and is listed in the "Kozan Oshigata".

Explanation and illustration by Ishii Akira

## **Issue No.769 Tosogu Kanshou**

**Hakuju mon (oak tree design) zogan tsuba  
Mei: Umetada Myoju**

A kashiwagi (oak tree) puts out new sprouts in the spring time, when there are no falling leaves, and under the new shoot, the god (Mitsuke-gami) controls conditions and the leaves remain in place, and the hakuju is considered an auspicious tree.

Among tosogu makers, there were three master smiths in the Momoyama period. Nobuie's work is simple and strong, Kaneie's work reflects nature, and Myoju's designs often used plants. These three workers were creative, and it is not an exaggeration to say that apparently Myoju created his designs under the influence of the Rinpa school.

Honnami Koetsu and Kotoku were cousins and close in age, and in Myoju's time, the Honnami family collaborated with Myoju. The Umetada family contracted for many works using polished gold inlay. The Honnami and Umetada families lived inside of Kyoto and close to each other, and looking at the current sword world exhibition, and the Takagamine Art Village in Kyoto, we can recognize that the relationship between Honnami and Umetada was very strong.

The tsuba's black yin and yang (the cosmic dual forces) areas were colored separately, using a unique flat shakudo inlay, and even the blank spaces are part of the design. There is a dynamic composition which uses fine silver inlay for water drops falling on the leaves. The brass ground jimura (fine textured surface) is an expert Myoju technique.

Myoju's tsuba incorporated the Momoyama period's feeling. This is supposed to be work from his later years. His work was executed beautifully and became art. Even today, this work reflects the Momoyama culture and fascinates viewers.

**This tsuba is on display in the exhibition called "Umetada, the Momoyama Sword World's Master Smith" until February 21, 2021.**

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 769**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 769 Shijo Kantei To is March 5, 2021. 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, 2021 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 9 sun 2.5 bu (58.33 cm)

Sori: 5 bu (1.52 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 2 sun 4 bu (7.4 cm)

Nakago length: 4 sun 7 bu (14.24 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

This is a shinogi zukuri wakizashi with a marumune. It has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. The shinogi is sharpened, the blade is slightly thin, the tip has sori, and there is a large kissaki. The jigane is itame mixed with a large pattern nagare hada, and in some areas the nagare hada shows waves or is undulating, and this sword shows the school's unique hada. The hada is slightly visible. There are ji-nie and chikei. The steel's color is dark, and there is shirake utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon width is conspicuously low for the width. There are nijuba, yubashiri, ko-nie, and a bright nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, and the nakago tip has a ha-agari style kuri-jiri, and the yasurime are katte sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote under the mekugi-ana, and along the mune side of the nakago, there is a long kanji signature. The ura has a date. In the school this smith belongs to, many of the hamon have a soft nioiguchi.

## **Shijo Token Kansho Kai for February, 2021**

Lecturer: Kurotaki Tetsuya

**Kansho To No. 1: tachi**

Mei: Rai Kunimitsu

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 8.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada mixed in places with a large pattern jihada. There are abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, jifu, and nie utsuri.

Hamon: suguha based hamon mixed with ko-gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, and abundant ji-nie; the top of the hamon has uneven yubashiri, kinsuji, sunagashi, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight on the omote with a komaru; the ura has a togari shaped point and both sides have hakikake.

This is a Rai Kunimitsu tachi. He worked in various styles and left many master works. I would like to mention that this not only exhibits a high quality of workmanship, but also has an interesting history.

The shape has some funbari at the habaki-moto, so from this you can judge that this blade is suriage. Even in its current condition, it has a large sori and a wazori shape, and from this, it is possible judge this as later Kamakura period work. At the same time you can consider this as a candidate for Rai school work. The jigane is based on a ko-itame hada and has bo-utsuri, and we can see Rai's unique hada. The hamon is ko-choji mixed with ko-gunome, and has "Kyo-saka-ashi", and from these details, an opinion that this is Rai school work receives more support.

The Rai school had many smiths. However, the hamon is mixed with round top gunome and there is a long chu-kissaki, so it would be reasonable look at this as a Rai Kunimitsu tachi. This is well made and shows Rai Kunimitsu's high level of skill.

The tachi is mentioned in Genroku 12 (1699), December 3<sup>rd</sup>, as belonging to the head of the Shogun's council of elders Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu. In Dewa no kami Yasuaki's time, the 5<sup>th</sup> Shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi presented this sword to him.

Considering historical materials, this sword has an interesting history.

The Edo Bakufu's famous official record, the "Tokugawa Jikki", in the Jokenindono Onjikki volume 40 says "The mansion had a visitor the day... the Shogun summoned Yasusada (Yoshisato), awarded him the title of Ju-yoni-no-ge, and personally handed him an Ichimonji blade. Also the shogun handed a Rai-kunimitsu katana to Yasuaki.

A similar record is seen in the Edo Bakufu records called "Kansei Jushu Shoka Fu". It says that "Yoshiyasu (Yasuaki) on December 3<sup>rd</sup> received a Rai Kunimitsu blade when the Shogun visited him". It also says that on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, "Yoshisato (Yasusada) was appointed as Ju-yoni-no-ge and Echizen-no-kami". From this information, and looking at the sayagaki. It says "Rai Kunimitsu has a 1000 kan origami dated Genroku 12 Tsuchinoto U toshi. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Echizen no kami received the Jushi appointment, and this sword from the lord". These details are almost same as above. From these records, the tachi's ownership record is clear, and this sword has a strong historical record.

## Kansho To No. 2: katana

Mei: Nagayuki oite Settsu kuni saku kore  
Motte Banshu Kankuri (Shiso)ko-tetsu saku kore

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 2 sun 9 bu

Sori: slightly over 6 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are fine ji-nie and midare utsuri.

Hamon: the entire hamon is high; the hamon is choji midare mixed with togariba and an open valley midare hamon. There are ashi and yo, the gorgeous midare hamon has a clear nioiguchi, and there is a tight clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is sharp and there is a return.

This is a Tataru Nagayuki sword with a unique mei. Nagayuki is supposed to have been Kawachi no kami Yasunaga's student. He has swords dated in the Tenna and Jokyo (1681-87) period.

The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada with prominent midare-utsuri. The midare hamon is based on choji. There is a bright, clear and tight nioiguchi. His jiba (ji and hamon) has obvious Ishido school characteristics.

Among the Ishido school smiths, Nagayoshi's characteristic points are that there is an open bottom choji midare hamon, his midarekomi boshi tip is sharply pointed, and these are major points which suggest his name.

Tataru Nagayuki had a strong commitment to the quality of his steel, and in the past we mentioned that he used to include the location where his steel came from in his mei. Nagayuki also has a famous sword signed "Seshu Osaka ju Nagayoshi Jokyo 3 (1686) Hinoe Tora 8 gatsu hi motte Harima kuni Shiso ko-tetsu saku kore" owned by the Osaka Castle Museum. This mei mentions that steel (ko-tetsu) from Shiso was used in this sword.

Today, we would like to think once more about Shiso's characteristic location, and its iron production history, and try to understand Nagayuki's thoughts again.

The Shiso name goes back to ancient times. The first historical mention is in the "Nihon shoki" in the third year of the reign of the emperor Suinin.

According to a story, Amenohiboko (the Korean crown prince) came to Harima by ship with 1000 crew members and stayed in Shiso (some manuscripts use different kanji for Shiso). A later story was written in the "Harima no Kuni Fudoki" which describes someone staying in "Shiso Gun (county)", and after establishing or founding the country, became Iwa-no-okami (a god). In the "Amenohiboko theory", he was supposed to have arrived from Shiragi (Korea), and the location of the place where he arrived is very interesting. This makes you think that the beginning of iron and steel production probably began with someone from outside of Japan and from the continent.

Furthermore, another sword mei is dated Shochu 2 (1325) and is a gassaku effort by Bizen Kagemitsu and Kagemasa. This tachi's mei includes "Harima Kuni Shiso Gun Sanpo nishi" (Harima Province, Shiso County, west Sanpo) and this is a famous mei.

I would now like to introduce another document. Because along with the Shiso place name, a famous military commander's name comes to mind. A historical document was written in Tensho 12 (1584) called the "Kuroda document" and "Dai-Nippon historical material".

The document is titled:

Date: Tensho 12, July 18. To: Kuroda Kanbei From Hideyoshi with his seal

Contents: to award Kanbei the Banshu Shiso Gun territory.

The article says that Hashiba Hideyoshi is awarding the Banshu Shiso Gun area to the historically famous military strategist Kuroda Kanbei Tadataka. The year before in Tensho 11, Hideyoshi defeated Shibata Katsuyori, and then in Tensho 13, he was appointed Kanpaku or regent by the emperor. Precisely at this the time he is becoming the most powerful person in Japan. Even so, he cannot stop securing and pacifying the country. In this situation, he is relying on a military strategist Kuroda Kanbei in Shiso, and this could be part of Hideyoshi's strategy to secure the country.

From this document and its important location, Shiso appears to have drawn a high degree of attention as an area which can produce steel. For a Sengoku period warrior, Banshu Shiso Gun was now an important area for strategic and tactical reasons. A series of documents and the Shiso area's historical background can tell us about this.

Later, in the early modern period, the Shiso kanji (穴栗) gradually changed to be written with different kanji pronounced "Shiso" (完栗). As a result, Nagayuki and other smiths used the "Shiso" 完栗 kanji. Nagayuki considered the historical background, and "Shiso steel" provided a major contribution to his sword making. Possibly for this reason, he inscribed the Shiso place name in the mei on his blades. However, we can say that "Harima Kuni Shiso" contains a considerable amount of hidden historic information.

To learn about the role of politics and steel in history, Nagayuki's mei have left us with things to study and consider.

### **Kansho To No. 3: Katana**

Mei: Shoji Chikuzen Daijo Taikei Fuji Naotane with kao  
Bunsei 4 nen (1821) 5 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 3.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 8 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are frequent ji-nie, fine chikei, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: based on square shaped gunome mixed with togariba, and kataochi gunome. There are frequent ashi, many saka-ashi, and a nioiguchi with ko-nie.

Boshi: on the omote and the ura the boshi is midarekomi; the tip is sharp and there is a return.

This a Taikei Naotane Bizen-Den katana dated Bunsei 4 (1821). Like Rai Kunimitsu whose sword was shown in Kantei To number 1 above, Naotane worked in all kinds of styles and left many master works. Naotane considered Suishinshi Masahide as his teacher or example, and he believed in Masahide's theory that there should be a revival of koto style swords. This is a Kanemitsu utsushi work. Beside this, he worked in different schools' styles and was a highly skilled smith.

Actually, when we exhibited this Kanemitsu utsushi work for a kantei vote, many people voted for Kanemitsu, and we then began to appreciate Naotane's skill. However, there are differences in the shape: the shinogi-ji's width is narrow for the sword's width, and there is a poor hiraniku. In considering the hamon, compared with Kanemitsu's hamon, there is a square, rough midare hamon, and the ashi extend to the hamon's edge. Naotane's Bizen Den works are generally in one of three styles. One is a wide blade with a long kissaki, and the hamon has large kaku (square) gunome like the Kanemitsu utsushi sword. A second style has an almost standard width, a large sori, and a slightly small kaku-gunome hamon like a Kagemitsu utsushi. The third style is an open valley hamon Oei Bizen utsushimono. Many of these different Naotane Bizen Den swords made from the end of the Bunka period to the end of the Bunsei period are present today.

It is well known that Naotane traveled all over Japan to practice sword making. In Bizen Niimi, there was a businessman working for a tatara which produced steel, and his name was Ota Tatsugoro. He supplied good quality steel to Naotane, and there is a story that Naotane used to use that iron during the Bunkei period (this is from a chapter in Ota Tadahisa's book "Ota Tatsugoro's biography")

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 767 in the December, 2020 issue**

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tachi by Izumo Doei Masanori dated Oei 3□ nen

This tachi has a standard length, a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. Originally there was a strong koshizori, the tip has sori, it is thick for its width, and there is a chu-kissaki. From this, you can judge this as work from the end of the Nanbokucho period to the early Muromachi period.

Doei is a Bizen Yoshii branch school which moved to Izumo Kuni, and worked in the style of the Yoshii school.

Yoshii characteristics and the Doei school's major characteristic point is the continuous ko-gunome hamon, and also the jihada has hamon-shaped utsuri.

In the work from the Yoshii school, before the Nanbokucho period, the hamon have frequent nie, as well as prominent kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki. In the Muromachi period, the hamon show a more prominent nioiguchi and less prominent kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki.

This tachi is early Muromachi period work, but the style is closer to the Nanbokucho period work and the hints refer to this.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Muromachi period Yoshii smiths, such as Kiyonori and Naganori.



As I explained above, the Doei school's work and the Yoshii school's work are very similar, and also the Yoshii school smiths' work and styles were similar to each other, so it is difficult to identify an individual smith's name. Because of this, at this time, the Izumo Doei smiths and Muromachi period Yoshii school smiths' names were all treated as correct answers.

At this time, I want to change the subject and talk about lighting sources.

Today, it does not matter if one is in a Japanese style or Western style room, because there are always fluorescent ceiling lights. In looking at a sword's shape and jigane, many people use this type of lighting.

On the other hand, when looking at a hamon, we usually use an incandescent light source or LTD lighting positioned in front of a viewer.

The area around us can affect what we see with incandescent light.

It is likely that many people have had such an experience, but if you examine a sword in a different location from the usual Kansho-kai meeting room, details in the sword may not look as clear as usual.

Of course, different swords have different appearances, but I would like to discuss the effect of an incandescent light and a surrounding wall's color.

If one uses an incandescent light, and the surrounding walls are white or there are white shoji and fusuma, a white color produces a diffuse reflection on a sword's surface.

Next, if you look at the hamon under an incandescent light, the entire a sword appears white.

In these conditions, you can't judge whether a hamon nioiguchi is either bright or dark, and utsuri on the ji cannot be seen very well.

Also, if an incandescent light has parasol-like reflector, and the inside of the reflector is either white or light grey, this white or grey reflection on the sword means that you may not be able to see details on a sword clearly.

In this situation, the white or grey reflector should be removed, or you can use a bare light bulb to examine the hamon. Under these conditions, the hamon should appear clear.

If the surroundings and walls are white, you can put a black cloth behind an incandescent bulb, and get a much clearer view of the hamon and nioiguchi.

For some Kansho Kai photographs, people cover the walls with black cloth, and place several incandescent lights in front of the black covered walls. With this arrangement, you can see details on a sword very well.

Some time ago, I brought some kantei-to to the Kansho-kai, and there were bare light bulbs in front of white fusuma, and we could not see details on the swords very well. However, I had a large dark brown cloth (or furoshiki) which I used to wrap and carry the kantei to swords, and I suggested that we use this behind the incandescent light bulbs.

This worked very well, people were able to appreciate the swords and examine details much better. The next time I visited there, they hung black cloths behind the light bulb.

If you have a sword you like, I suggest that you should look at it under good lighting and background conditions.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

