

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

ISSUE NUMBER 770

March, 2021

Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Tokubetsu Jujo Token

Type: Wakizashi

Mei: Minamoto Saemon jo Nobukuni

Oei 20 nen (1413) 8 gatsu hi

Accompanied by an old koshirae

Length: 1 shaku 3 sun 2 bu 8 rin (40.25 cm)

Sori: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 rin (3.05 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Nakago length: 3 bu 9 bu 3 rin (11.9 cm)

Nakago sori: None

Commentary

This is a hirazukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune (the center surface of the mitsumune is wide). The blade is wide and thick, is long for the width, and has a shallow sori. The jigane has itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and along the mune side there is some nagare hada. On the ura side's upper half, there is a large pattern hada, and the entire hada is visible. There are ji-nie, and chikei. The hamon is a wide suguha, with a slightly shallow notare style, and mixed with ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, yo, and a tight nioiguchi with thick slightly uneven nie. Some areas have small hotsure at the edge of the hamon. On the omote around the boshi, and on the ura around the center, there are nijuba style pale yubashiri. There are also kinsuji, and nie suji. On the omote, the boshi is straight, and is komaru. The ura boshi is yaki-kuzure with strong hakikake, and both sides have a long return. The horimono on the omote in the hitsu (a groove-like frame) under the long bonji is a so-style Kurikara relief. On the ura there are bonji, shiketsu and rendai kasanebori. The nakago is ubu and the tip is a pronounced kurijiri. The yasurime are kate-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and there is a slightly large signature made with a thick chisel on the omote: the "Minamoto Saemonjo" kanji are written in two lines, and under this we see the "Nobukuni" kanji. The ura has a date positioned slightly towards the mune side.

Nobukuni belonged to a prestigious Kyoto sword smith family. The shodai is supposed to be the grandson of Ryokyu Nobu who was Ryokai's son, and from the Nanbokucho to the Muromachi period this name was used by successive generations. Notably, from the Oei period, Saemon-jo Nobukuni and Shikibu-jo Nobukuni are famous, and they are called "Oei Nobukuni" and their work is highly appreciated.

The Shodai Nobukuni has two styles: Kyoto's traditional suguha style and a Sadamune style. At the end of the Nanbokucho period, Nobukuni and the Oei Nobokuni have fewer notare hamon, and instead, we sometimes see their hamon resembling previous generations and a different school's Hasebe Kunishige style with a continuous double gunome pattern which can resemble a yahazu style hamon. The double gunome are connected by a ko-notare hamon and the pattern is repeated.

The Nobukuni school excelled at working in the Daishinbo school horimono style, with relatively deep chisel work and with highly detailed horimono work (a style called Soshu bori, from generation to generation. Generally, the Shodai's horimono are simple, but many of two Oei Nobukuni's horimono show more detailed carving.

Saemon-jo Nobukuni's early work is seen in an Oei 8 (1401) tachi owned by Ise Shrine's Kaiko Museum, and in hirazukuri wakizashi. His latest work was a kotachi dated Oei 34 (1427) which is classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, so from these swords his active period is clear. His signed works are seen more frequently than Shikibu-jo's. The Juyo Bijutsuhin kotachi has a horimono on the omote at the koshimoto with a gyo style Kurikara relief in a hitsu (a frame-like groove) which is reminiscent of a Bungo Yukihiro horimono. The same kind of horimono is seen on a wakizashi dated Oei 21 (1414) which is the 47th sword to be classified as Juyo Token.

In addition, a dated wakizashi which was the 32nd sword to be classified as Juyo Token has a horimono with bo-hi in which the ends are formed in an unusual shape, and in Bungo Yukihiro's work, a few examples of this style are seen. Consequently, it is thought to be possible that some of Nobukuni's horimono were influenced by Yukihiro's style. Concerning Nobukuni's signatures, the inside left and right strokes in the "kuni" kanji are in the reverse order of the usual style, and are called "left kanji".

This wakizashi is a thick for its width, but is long and has a characteristic Oei style. Also, the jigane is a clear itame hada, and there are hataraki such as ji-nie, and chikei, and this is mixed with the Ryokai school's characteristic nagare hada. Furthermore, the wide suguha hamon is clear and graceful, with kinsuji and bo-suji. The boshi has strong hakikake and shows a kaen style, and these characteristics produce a dynamic feeling. This work shows the Yamashiro school's characteristics, and at the same time adds Soshu's characteristic dynamic style and excellent workmanship.

Also, there is another horimono on the omote which looks like a worn-down sosho style Kurikara relief, and only one other similar example exists which is on the kotachi the 48th classified as Juyo Token. There is only one more shiketsu style horimono in existence today, so the rarity increases the value of such work.

This is the major Shimazu family's heirloom wakizashi. Along with the accompanying old saya, there are papers listing the cost as gold 15 pieces. This indicates that in Enkyo 4 (1747), on December 28th, the 6th generation lord of the Shimazu family, Munenobu, had the paper written for some type of ceremony or documentation. In addition, the Edo period daimyo and hatamoto diary and reference, the "Kansei Choshu Shoka Fu" on the Shimazu family's Munenobu page for December 28 also states

that earlier that year, on April 19 of “Enkyo 4, Munenobu received this Nobukuni blade, and visited the Shogun for a farewell greeting before leaving Edo for his first official visit to his home province. The Tokugawa diary the “Tokugawa Jikki” also describes the same event. From this, it is possible, that when Munenobu was to become the head of the Shimazu family and leave Edo officially for the first time to return to his territory of Satsuma and become the 6th generation lord, the Shogun Ieshige presented him with this wakizashi.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira

No.770 Tosogu Kanshou

Juyo Tosogu

Noh-gaku zu (Noh Play design) soroi (completely matched) kanagu set

Tsuba mei: Koseikyo Nobuyoshi with kao

Fushi-kashira mei: Nobuyoshi with kao

Menuki waki kibata mei: Nobuyoshi

Kurikata mei: Nobuyoshi,

Urakawara saguri is mumei: Nobuyoshi

The Noh play was born during the Muromachi period, and in its early period, was developed by Kannami and Zeami who were a father and son. From then on, it grew as a traditional performing art and included Kyogen plays. Based on teachings left from Zeami, we can respect its subtle and profound beauty, and Noh became established as a profound and eternal performing art.

Iwama Nobuyoshi was a gold smith born in Kyowa 3 (1803) in the To-tomi area, and in Meiji 11 (1878) he was supposed to be alive at the age of 76 years. He became Iwama Masayoshi's student, and also studied under Nobuyori, He used (i.e., he signed with) many “go” (art names other than his own name), such as Yu-fuken, Yokodo, Ichitansha, Shun-o, and Kouseikyo, and also received monk ranks such as Hokyo and Hogan-i. He used all types of colored metals, and his work shows his skillful takabori technique, and this tosogu set demonstrates the level of his ability.

This set of tosogu was designed around Noh performances such as Sanbaso and Hashi-Benkei scenes, and I would say that this is a collaborative work showing influences from Noh-gaku (the Noh theater) and Nobuyoshi's skill. Nobuyoshi thought about Zeami's philosophy of the Noh play and elevated it to visual art, and he must have examined Zeami's work very seriously. The work has skillfully constructed spaces, depth and composition, and uses a variety of colors with Nobuyoshi's own iroe technique, and each kanagu item creates its own respective world. Finally, by assembling all of these items together, I would say that this work expresses Noh-gaku's profound feelings.

This set produces a sense of the presence of Noh-gaku history, and in this work, Nobuyoshi's carving techniques are superbly demonstrated.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 770

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 770 Shijo Kantei To is April 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 April 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: Katana

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4.5 bu (71.05 cm)

Sori: slightly over 6 bu (1.85 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 8 rin (2.85 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: slightly over 1 sun 6 bu 7 rin (5.05 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 6 bu (20.0 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is wide, and there is almost no difference in the widths at the moto and saki. Overall, there is a slightly large sori and large kissaki. The jigane has 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 are nijuba and kuichigai-ba at the hamon's edge; there are ko-ashi, a bright nioiguchi, ko-nie, and fine kinsuji and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are kate-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote along the mune, there is a long kanji signature.

Teirei Kanshou Kai for March, 2021

Lecturer: Kubo Yasuko

The exhibition “Umetada, the Momoyama Sword World’s Master Smith” was held this year from January 9th to February 21st. We appreciated the opportunity to examine three Tokugawa family Masamune blades in the exhibition, and discuss them for this month’s Kanshokai.

Kantei To No. 1: Kokuho, katana

Kinzogan mei: Masamune, Honnami with kao
Honda Nakatsukasa Shoji (owner)
Meibutsu Nakatsukasa

Owner: Agency for Cultural affairs

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun

Sori: 6.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume; the ji is tightly forged. There are abundant ji-nie and fine chikei.

Hamon: notare style hamon mixed with gunome and komidare. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi with frequent ko-nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and there are yubashiri at the hamon edge.

Boshi: notare-komi, with hakikake, and a komaru and short return.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi carved through the nakago.

Origin:

When Honda Nakatsukasa Tadakatsu (Heihachiro) was the Kuwana castle lord, he bought this sword through Honnami Kotoku who commissioned the zogan inlay work from Jusai (this sword is listed in the “Kyoho Meibutsu Cho”). The castle’s name was sometimes called Kuwana Masamune. Tadakatsu presented this sword to Iyasu. In the Shogun’s family, during the Kanbun period, Mito Mitsukuni owned this sword and later gave it back to the Shogun’s family in Enpo 8 (1680) on June 27th when he gave it to the Shogun Ietsuna. Kofu Tsunatoyo (who later became the 6th Shogun Ienobu) received this sword, and the katana returned Edo castle, and since then, has been handed down in the Shogun’s family.

The reference volume, “Umetada Tofu” lists this sword in February of Keicho 11 (1606) as being without suriage, so in order to preserve the original shape, he inscribed the nakago with an inlay or zogan signature.

Kantei To No. 2: Juyo Bunkazai, katana

Kinzogan mei: Masamune suriage
Honnami with kao,
Meibutsu Ikeda Masamune

Owner: Tokugawa Museum

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 2 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: there is a tight itame hada, and at the koshimoto it is mixed with a large pattern hada. There are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and some utsuri.

Hamon: mainly based on a notare hamon; the bottom half is composed of gentle mountain-like shapes, while the central area is mixed mixed with choji and togari. There are frequent ko-nie, frequent kinsuji, inazuma, sunagashi, yubashiri, and tobiyaki.

Boshi: midarekomi with hakikake, the point is midare-like and there is a return.

Origin:

This katana was given by Date Masamune to Ikeda Nagayoshi, and it was later given to Tokugawa Hidetada. In Keian 3 (1650), the Owari Tokugawa Shodai Yoshinao owned it, and it was then handed it down in that family (it is listed in the “Kyoho Meibutsu Cho”). However, the Owari Tokugawa family record from Genna 7 (1621) to Kanei 15 (1638) in the “Year of the Tiger sword payment record” says something different. It says that in “September of Kanei 13 nen (1636), a Masamune blade that was purchased from a noble family cost 150 mai”.

According to the “Umetada Tofu” the kinzogan kao shown is Honnami Kotoku’s kao. This was written in the “Umetada Tofu” in Keicho 12 (1607), when the work was commissioned by Kotoku, and Jusai made the zogan or inlay mei for Ikeda Nagayoshi.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mumei: den Masamune

Meibutsu: Wakasa Masamune

Owner: Imperial Household Agency San-no-maru Shozo Kan (Historical Museum)

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6 bu

Sori: 8 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and on the bottom half of the sword the hada is just visible. There are abundant ji-nie, and frequent fine chikei.

Hamon: shallow notare style hamon mixed with gunome, togari, and choji. There are frequent ashi, a dense nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, and the inside of the hamon has kinsuji and sunagashi, tobiyaki, and there are muneyaki.

Boshi: there is a dense yakiba and the boshi is midarekomi. There are hakikake. The omote point is togari, while the ura point is komaru with kinsuji. There is a short return.

Horimono: on the omote and the ura there are bo-hi carved through the nakago.

Origin:

This katana was owned by Kinoshita Katsutoshi who worked for Hideyoshi, and the meibutsu name comes from the fact that his territory was Wakasa Kohama, and he called himself Wakasa-no-kami. After the Sekigahara battle, Katsutoshi presented this sword to Tokugawa Ieyasu.

In Keicho 17 (1612), on September 4th at Sunpu castle this sword was given to Ikeda Terumasa and recorded in the "Daikokuin Jikki", the 2nd Shogun Hidetada's diary of events. Then later, in September of Kanbun 12 (1672), Ikeda Mitsumasa presented this sword to Tokugawa Ietsuna. Since then it has been handed down in the Tokugawa Shogun family, and in Meiji 20 (1879) the Tokugawa family presented this sword to the Meiji emperor. Until the Showa period, it belonged to the emperor's family and was an imperial treasure.

In the "Umetada Tofu", it says that on August 15 of Keicho 20 (1615), the kanagu (kodogu) was ordered from Jusai. The accompanying habaki is an Umetada habaki, and there are three clear fucho (symbols) carved on the bottom of the habaki.

We would now like to provide some background information about the Tokugawa family and Masamune's work.

In past exhibitions there have been discussions about Masamune: (1) "Masamune - a genius Japanese sword smith and his genealogy" (2002) and (2) "Meibutsu Token: Treasured Japanese swords" (2011). From these exhibitions, Mr. Sato Toyozo who has intensively studied this subject in the Tokugawa museum, and is also an authority in the Japanese sword world, made some very interesting statements, and I will list them in chronological order below:

1. Among the Toyotomi family's best masterpieces listed in the "Toyotomi Family Sword Record" (Keicho 19 or 1614), there are four Masamune blades listed.
2. Tokugawa Ieyasu's collection of swords in the "Sunpu Sword Record" (Genna 2 or 1616), there are 18 Masamune blades listed. Among these, the "Meibutsu Nakasukasa" and the "Meibutsu Ikeda Masamune" are included. But at that time, they did not have their Meibutsu or names.
3. Compared with the Toyotomi family's 4 blades, Ieyasu's Masamune collection stands out. Also, under Ieyasu's administration, important Daimyo presented many Masamune blades to Ieyasu. Possibly, during Ieyasu's time, the trend of giving Masamune blades to the shogunate began.
4. Looking at the "Tokugawa Jikki" (diary), for entries concerning "Toshogu" (i.e. Ieyasu), the Jikki lists only two comments about Masamune. However, the "Daitoku-in (Hidetada) Jikki" lists many Masamune comments or entries. One example is on September 4th of Keicho 17 (1612) when he invited Ikeda Terumasa for a tea ceremony, and gave him the Wakasa Masamune blade.
5. Meibutsu names and ranks were established by the book, the "Kyoho Meibutsu-Cho" according to one theory in Kyoho 4 (1719). In this book, Masamune swords comprised an outstanding number of entries. The Wakasa Masamune which was listed there had cost 1000 kan, an exceptionally high price.

After Nobunaga, there are examples of Masamune blades being given to the shogunate, and from Keicho 8 (1603) around the time the Tokugawa Bakufu was established, there are many examples of Masamune swords being presented as gifts. The word "Masamune" itself suggests an indication of a "lineage through the eldest son", or a "real lineage", or "affairs are as they should be". When daimyo or nobility visited the shogun, they often presented a Masamune blade to the shogun as a present or gift, and the smith's name suggested that "affairs were as they should be". In this situation, many daimyo families made efforts to acquire Masamune's work, and at the same time these efforts led to a further increase in the value of Masamune's work. As a result, a synonym which could be used to refer to the Japanese sword was the name "Masamune": "Masamune" became a word that actually referred to swords.

The three Masamune blades introduced today have been very carefully stored and protected. Due to this exhibit, I was fortunate to be able to handle and examine them, and the experience was impressive. I would like to talk about my impression of these three Masamune swords.

The jigane are all excellent, strong, bright, and appear to have moisture (uruoi). The hamon are not too wild, and are a variety of midare. Around the monouchi the hamon is wide and strong, and the major activity in the hamon stops at the boshi. The hataraki in the hamon are not excessive and show excellent taste, and their appearance changes with changes in the lighting. The nie hataraki behaves in the same way. Overall, the entire blade produces a dignified impression.

These are Masamune swords and Japanese swords, and no other elements are present.

Shijo Kantei To No. 768 in the January, 2021 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tachi by Osafune Nagamitsu

The tachi's width is slightly narrow, and the widths at the moto and the saki are different. Although the blade is suriage, there is a large koshizori. The tip has sori and there is a chu-kissaki. From the shape you can judge this as Kamakura period work.

The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, there are fine ji-nie, clear midare utsuri, and a clear jigane, and these are Osafune's refined mainstream jigane characteristics.

The hamon is a suguha style, there is a shallow notare, there are ko-ashi, a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie, and the boshi is a sankaku style. These are characteristic points seen in the latter half of Nagamitsu's career.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Nagamitsu, and some voted for Sanenaga. Sanenaga's suguha style work is very similar to Nagamitsu's, and difficult to judge differences. For this reason, a Sanenaga vote is treated as a correct answer at this time. Incidentally, Sanenaga's work in this style often has a prominent tight nioiguchi and a continuous shallow ko-notare hamon.

For an almost proper answer, a few people voted for Kagamitsu.

Kagemitsu has refined forging in his jigane with midare utsuri, a suguha style hamon, and a sansaku boshi, so there are definitely some common points. But Kagamitsu is the generation following Nagamitsu's, the same as Chikakage. Their hamon are a suguha style mixed with ko-gunome, ko-choji, and kataochi gunome, and there are more saka-ashi.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai