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Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Katana

Mei: Iga-no-kami Kinmichi

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 8 bu 5 rin (75.3 cm)

Sori: 5 bu 6 rin (1.7 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 4 bu 5 rin (4.4 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 1 bu 4 rin (18.6 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. The blade is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are almost the same. It is thick, there is a slightly shallow sori, and a long chu kissaki which is almost a large kissaki. The jigane on the omote is ko-itame mixed with mokume, the ura is itame, and the entire ji has nagare hada. Both sides are well forged. There are ji-nie and fine chikei. The hamon is based on notare, mixed with gunome, ko-

gunome, and togariba. There are ashi, uneven nie, tobiyaki, yubashiri, and some kinsuji and sunagashi. Around the center, there are nijuba and pale yubashiri. There are also kinsuji and nie suji. On the omote, the boshi is a shallow notare, and on the ura it is midarekomi. Both sides are a tsukiage style, and the point is sharp with a return. The nakago is ubu and the tip is a shallow hagari kurijiri and the yasurime are kate-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana, and there is a slightly small five kanji signature on the omote under the mekugi-ana along the mune side of the nakago.

The common opinion is that the shodai Iga-no-kami Kinmichi was a son of Kanemichi in Seki (who later changed his name to Daido). In Eiroku 2 (1559), when the kampaku (the emperor's chief advisor) Nijo Haruyoshi returned to Kyoto, he appointed Kanemichi as an imperial court sword smith. Kanemichi proceeded to the capital with his father and probably with his younger brothers Rai Kinmichi, Tanba-no-kami Yoshimichi, and Etchu-no-kami Masatoshi, and established the Mishina school. Another theory is that they went to Kyoto around March of Eiroku 12 (1569) or in April of Eiroku 13. Kanemichi presented a sword to the emperor and received the "Dai" title, and an appointment as "Saemonjo".

Kinmichi's earliest dated work was in Tensho 9 (1581) and was signed "Kinmichi saku". In Bunroku 3 (1594) he received the "Iga-no-kami" title. In March of Keicho 19 (1614) he received an order for one thousand Jin-tachi (tachi in a combat style koshirae) from Tokugawa Ieyasu. Because he successfully completed this order, in June he received a position giving him authority over the country's sword smiths and blacksmiths and responsibility for building castles and military equipment, and permission giving him freedom to travel by land and sea and through barriers and check points. Furthermore, with Ieyasu's recommendation, he received permission to use the title "Nippon kaji sosho" (Japan's master sword smith) from the emperor. He is thought to have passed away in December 11 of Kanei 6 (1629). However, there

is another opinion. There is an “Iga-no-kami Kinmichi” dai-meisai sword (for the shodai) dated Kanei 11 (1634). There is also another sword with the Nidai Kinmichi’s meisai dated Kanei 14 (1637) and these are the Nidai’s first signed works. Consequently, it is thought that the shodai Kinmichi must have passed away between these dates.

Most of Kinmichi’s dated works are katana and wakizashi, and besides these, he has naginata and yari. His styles are roughly divided from before and after he received his titles. Before he received his title in the Tensho period, his jigane show a whitish itame hada mixed with nagare hada, and his hamon show kogunome, togari, gunome and choji. Many of them have a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie, which is a strong Seki characteristic style. After he received his titles, he was influenced by the Soshu Den style, the same as many Keicho period smiths. He has some unusual works, but from his notare hamon with gunome, square shaped gunome, and togari (sharp tipped or pointed gunome), we can recognize his Mino characteristics, which show that he was likely modeling his work after his ancestor, Shizu Saburo Kaneuji.

This katana is wide, and the widths at the moto and the saki are almost the same. There is a large kissaki, and strong Momoyama characteristics showing a dynamic style and healthy condition. The entire jigane is well forged and is itame hada. The omote is relatively fine, and the entire ura shows a nagare hada, and this shows the school’s characteristic point well. Furthermore, the hamon is based on notare mixed with gunome and togari, there are slightly uneven nie, and some kinsuji and sunagashi. This is his Shidzu style, made after he received his titles, and he worked in a classic style. In addition, the jihada has prominent yubashiri and tobiyaki, and there are areas showing a type of striped pattern, which we can see as the beginning of the sudareba hamon. These hataraki are also seen often and help emphasize the Shodai Kinmichi’s bold and dynamic style. In addition, the omote boshi is a shallow notare, and the sharp tip looks like it has been pushed up, and there is a return, resembling a typical

“Sanpin boshi”. The jiba (ji and hamon) shows many of the school’s and Kinmichi’s characteristics and his ability. This is one of the particularly notable swords among his works.

Explanation and illust by Ishii Akira

No.770 Tosogu Kanshou

Juyo Tosogu

Budo zu (grape design) tsuba

Mumei: Ko-Mino

The tsuba has four sides and four boar’s eye symbols, and at first glance it looks like a tachi kanagu shape. But from the hanging or descending grape bunch, stems, kozuka and kogai hitsu ana, this is a clearly an uchigatana koshirae style.

Today, Ko-Mino’s most productive period is supposed to have been from around the mid-Muromachi to the Momoyama period. But the “Ko-Mino” name is unexpectedly new. In the sword book “Soken Kisho” published in Tenmei 1 (1781), items made by Koshin are listed, and because Goto Yujo’s home was Mino, a “Mino Goto” hypothesis was born, hypothesizing that Koshin and Yujo may have had some association with each other. In the Showa period, once again, just from this information, the Ko-Mino term was used again.

Actually, even today, the differences between Ko-kinko, Ko-Mino, and Ko-Goto, and their particular styles are subtle.

However, technically, especially in case of Mino-bori, we recognize that their carving is a vertical straight and deep carving style. On the shakudo nanako ground, there are grape karakusa designs, and the deep carving creates shadows and details, and this technique fully integrates the gold and silver iroe (colored inlay), and at the same time, emphasizes the beauty of shakudo.

The word budo for grape uses the same pronunciation as the word budo which refers to martial arts, and people prefer to use grapes or budo as tosogu subjects, due to its prolific production, and for its use as an omen of good fortune and good luck. Zen monks used to produce suiboku-ga (black ink paintings) and later spread out to encompass all types of crafts and techniques. This type of progress seems to have occurred from the Momoyama to the early Edo period, when grape cultivation started in Japan. Strikingly, the nanako even extend into the mimi (rim) area, and continues with a deep carved takabori technique, and shows excellent technological skills. As you know, signed Mino work began to be seen in the mid-Edo period. This work has no smith's signature, and is a unique Ko-Mino masterpiece.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 771

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 771 Shijo Kantei To is May 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 May 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 7 bu (71.81 cm)

Sori: 4.5 bu (1.36 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 2 bu 2 rin (3.7 cm)
Nakago length: 7 sun 4.5 bu (22.57 cm)
Nakago sori: none

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, and there is a difference in the widths at the moto and saki. There is a very shallow sori and a chu-kissaki. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, there are fine ji-nie and chikei.

The shinogi-ji has a prominent masame hada. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. Some places have two continuous gunome. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, a bright nioiguchi, and sunagashi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are a shallow katte-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote the first kanji is even with the mekugi-ana, and there is long kanji signature almost centered on the shinogi line. The ura has a kinzogan setsudan-mei.

Usually, this smith's work has prominent rough ha-nie.

Teirei Kanshou Kai for April, 2021

Lecturer: Imoto Yuuki.

Kantei To No. 1: Katana

Mei: Muramasa

Kiritsuke mei: Hizen-kuni Tadayuki suriage kore

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 2 sun 8 bu

Sori: 8 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: itame hada; the hada is visible, and there are some areas mixed with nagare hada. There are abundant ji-nie, chikei, and pale shirake utsuri.

Hamon: the bottom half is gunome and gunome-choji, and much of the midare hamon has box shaped features. Between the areas where the notare hamon connects with the midare hamon, the upper part is wide suguha style notare hamon. There are ashi,yo, nie, and the bottom half has some areas with nie kuzure; there are some sunagashi, frequent muneyaki, and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: wide yakiba; suguha style; there is a komaru and return.

Comment:

This blade has a strong saki zori, a high shinogi ji, and a poorly shaped hiraniku. The midare hamon's upper half and bottom half have quite different midare shapes and the boshi has a wide yakiba. The katana clearly exhibits Sue-Koto characteristic points. In particular, the bottom half of the midare hamon shows box shaped features, the hamon valleys connecting midare hamon areas are very narrow, and come close to the hamon edge, and the omote and the ura side hamon shapes are the same. These details thoroughly show Ise no kuni Sengo Muramasa's characteristic points.

The katana is slightly suriage, and on the ura side, the nakago has a mei describing this. Hizen Kuni Tadayuki is supposed to be the 8th generation Hizen Tadayoshi's guardian. He was very close to the Tadayoshi family, and he shortened blades, or made blades suriage, and inscribed a kiritsuke-mei to indicate this. In the Edo period, Muramasa was disliked by the Tokugawa family, and people hesitated to wear Muramasa blades, and as time passed, the idea of a Muramasa blade representing a spirit become a traditional story. However, in spite of this, the Hizen Saga lord Nabeshima Shinano no kami Katsushige is supposed to have owned a Muramasa blade (called Daimoku

Muramasa, classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin), and on the nakago, “Nabeshin” i.e. the initial kanji in his name are inlaid in silver. Also, in the Bakumatsu period (at the end of the Edo period) warriors who were opposed to Tokugawa rule preferred to own and wear Muramasa blades. This means that Muramasa swords had a special role in the time’s political and social background. I am not sure, but among the Saga clan, samurai preferred to own Muramasa blades to make a political statement. I can’t help being interested in this historically interesting story.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Mei: Itsuohabari

A former teacher of Kiyomaro, wanted make a shin-ken for his best friend Masamaro. He worked on the jigane for 20 years, but Kiyomaro could not fulfill his wish and asked me to finish the work before he passed away.

Therefore, I inherited his task, and swear to a great god, that I will make this sword. For the future, god’s spirit will surely be present. Saito Kiyondo.

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 2.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada; some areas along the hamon side are mixed with nagare hada. There are frequent ji-nie, chikei, and a clear jihada.

Hamon: primarily based on a large size gunome mixed with some gunome-choji. There are frequent long ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, sunagashi and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the point is sharp and there are some hakikake.

Comments:

The Kiyomaro school's last student was Saito Kiyondo who made efforts to repay debts accumulated by his teacher after his teacher passed away. With his existing work, he was straight forward and had a gentle personality, and was an attractive person. In Meiji 17 (1884), according to a survey of sword smiths conducted by the imperial household agency, he started to study under Kiyomaro in May of Kaei 4 (1851) and continued to work there until December of Ansei 2 (1855). Kiyomaro passed away in Kaei 7 (1854) (this same year became Ansei 1), and after his teacher passed away, he stayed at Kiyomaro's forge, and he worked to fulfill the last orders on behalf of his teacher. In Ansei 3 (1856), he opened own forge in Ogawa machi.

At the time he began his stay in Kiyomaro's forge, the gold smith Funada Itkin and Saito Masamaro took care of him. According to his notes "a memorandum concerning his training period", Masamaro "was very concerned and took care me just like the teacher". Also, his teacher Kiyomaro acted as a very good friend.

The katana mei states that Kiyomaro decided to make a shin-to for his best friend Masamaro, and forged the iron for 20 years, but he passed away without finishing this work. Kiyondo pledged to inherit and fulfill his teacher's task and completed this, and then inscribed the story on the nakago of the sword. The katana's kissaki is large and long, and there is a poor fukura, but a sharp appearing shape. The hamon faithfully follows Kiyomaro's style from around the Kaei period, and the hamon features primarily large gunome. There are sunagashi, the boshi return has hakikake, and these are Kiyondo's characteristic points. In particular, the jiba (the ji and hamon) is very clear and feels similar to Kiyomaro's work. This is a masterpiece made with selected high quality iron, and with Kiyondo's excellent skill. Also, three people's special relationship contributed to making one katana which is an extraordinary thought.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mei: 81 Oh (years) Minosuke Naotane with kao
Suishinshi Masatsugu with kao
Ansei nen Shogatsu (new year) kichijitsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight masame hada and the hada is visible; there are frequent fine ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: chu-suguha, there are slight ko-ashi, some hotsure, uchinoke, kuichigai-ba, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight with fine hakikake and a komaru tip.

Comments:

Suishinshi Masahide's ideas were adopted by Taikei Naotane. His styles are very extensive, and notably, he has a good reputation for Bizen, Soshu and swords with a mixture of these two styles. On the other hand, he has jihada which are completely masame, and itame which has nagare and masame hada. His hamon are gunome-midare or just suguha, which is based on the Yamato Den style. In the same period, blades which are completely masame are seen from smiths such as Katsumura Tokukatsu, Aizu Kaneyuki, Saito Kiyondo, and Sa Yukihide. In the latter half of the Edo period, people are supposed to have liked Yamato Den's unique robust style.

This sword has masame hada, the visible hada is prominent, and there are frequent chikei. The hamon is suguha and the hamon edge has an abundant hataraki such as hotsure, uchinoke, and kuichigaiba, and this is clearly a Yamato Den work. Because Naotane passed away on May 27 of Ansei 4 (1857), this is his last work, and it is a possibility, that much of the work was done by his collaborator Suishinshi Masatsugu.

Masatsugu was the son of Suishinshi Sadahide (the second generation Masahide), and for Naotane he was an important link with his teacher Suishinshi's family. In Bunsei 8 (1825), when Masatsugu was 12 years old, his grandfather Masahide and his father Sadahide passed away, and Naotane became Masatsugu's guardian. In Tempo 2 (1831) while working in Ise, Naotane accompanied Masatsugu. According to Mr. Fuse Koichi's theory, Masatsugu became Naotane's daughter's husband during mid-Tenpo period, and along with his brother-in-law Naokatsu, collaborated with Naotane and developed his skills. We can imagine that for Naotane, Masatsugu was very important to preserve his teacher Suishinshi's family, and also as a smith who would inherit Naotane's skill. Looking at this katana's workmanship, we can recognize that Masatsugu had an excellent level of skill, and developed as a suitable third generation smith who was able to preserve the Suishinshi's family heritage.

Shijo Kantei To No. 769 in the February, 2021 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a wakizashi by Gassan Chikanori dated Eisho 9 (1512).

This is 1 shaku 9 bu 2 rin in length, and for a wakizashi, this is close to a katana's length. There is a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are almost the same, and there is sakisori.

During the time when this blade was made around the Eisho period, there are many blades about 2 shaku in length, or short uchigatana, and this wakizashi seems to be a slightly short uchigatana.

Also, the mune is marumune, and we can see a characteristic local style of work.

The jigane is itame mixed with prominent nagare hada, some parts of the nagare hada are wave-like, which is the school's

unique hada. Some of the hada is shown on the oshigata, and this means it is the Gassan school's ayasugi-hada.

At the same time, the iron color is dark, there is shirake utsuri, and these are also Oshu characteristic points.

The hamon is Gassan's suguha, and the hamon is a prominent narrow suguha, and this is seen often in local work.

In the Koto period, the Gassan suguha blades often have a worn down nioiguchi, and appear to be moist (uruoi) and there is often irregular ayasugi-hada visible on the hamon edge and this can change the hamon to a notare style.

In the Muromachi period among the Gassan smiths, Chikanori is known as a highly skilled smith. This sword has a tight nioiguchi, ko-nie, the hamon edge has nijuba and yubashiri, there is a bright nioiguchi, and for the school, this is relatively sophisticated work. The hints refer to this.

In voting, a majority voted for Chikanori, and some people voted for other Muromachi period Gassan smith names, and some just wrote the Gassan school name. In general, the Gassan school smiths' styles are very close each other, and it is difficult to pick an individual smith's name. In this situation, if you look at this sword as a Muromachi Gassan smith's work, it is fine. A few people also voted for Muromachi period Naminohira work.

In general, at the NBTHK Shijo Kantei To, for Gassan work, a Naminohira vote is treated as an almost correct answer. And in the comments, if we are talking about typical ayasugi hada, the first thing you should think about is Gassan work. But this wakizashi's jihada has a little ayasugi hada mixed with itame hada, and in Naminohira work, we sometimes see this kind of hada. Other details of the jiba are similar to their work too, and the Naminohira nakago often has katte-sagari yasurime. So, at this time, a vote for Muromachi period Naminohira work was treated as a correct answer.

Incidentally, during the Muromachi period, a majority of Gassan tanto have ayasugi hada with a suguha hamon and a two kanji

“Gassan” signature. Some of the tanto look like Gassan work, and often have a two kanji “Gassan” fake signature.

Also, in Kyoto and Osaka, many of Tanba no kami Yoshimichi’s wakizashi have sudareba hamon, and it appears as though many of his works also have fake signatures. These two schools have many blades with an ubu nakago without a signature still remaining. From this, it seems highly probable, that later, people inscribed fake signatures on these blades.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai