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Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Juyo Bijutsu Hin

Type: Katana

Mei: Sanekage

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 1 bu 5 rin (79.2 cm)

Sori: 9 bu 5 rin (2.8 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 4 rin (1.65 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (slightly over 0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu (slightly less than 0.3 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 7 bu (20.3 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. The blade is slightly narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are quite different. It has a narrow shinogi ji, a standard thickness, and it is long with a large koshizori and with funbari. The sori in the upper part is described as falling slightly down going forward (i.e., the sori becomes more shallow going towards the point), and there is a long chu-kissaki. The jigane has a large itame hada mixed with nagare hada and mokume hada, and the entire hada is clearly visible. There are some areas that have jifu. There are abundant ji-nie, chikei, a dark jigane, and pale jifu utsuri. The hamon above the machi has a yakiotoshi, and above this, it is mainly a komidare hamon. Around the monouchi area there are ko-gunome, ashi, and large frequent nie. Especially notable is that on the bottom half of the blade, and entirely inside of the hamon there are strong ha-nie, and a soft looking appearance. The edge of the hamon has hotsure which is intertwined with the hamon and hada. There are prominent kinsuji and sunagashi and the boshi is kakedasu. The nakago is ubu and the tip is a shallow kurijiri and the yasurime are suji-chigai. There is one mekugi-ana, and above the mekugi-ana there is a large size two kanji signature along the mune side of the nakago.

In Ko-Hoki work, Yasutsugu is a leading smith, and there are signed works recognized as being by smiths such as Sanemori, Sadatsuna, Yasuie, and Kunimune. Sanekage was one of one of these famous smiths. Sanekage is listed in the "Nihonto Meikan" as

Ohara Sanemori's student, and he was active at the end of the Heian period around the Genryaku (1184-5) period, and has very few signed works today. Only five signed blades are available, and two are classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin and Tokubetsu Juyo Token and belong to the Hisamatsu Matsudaira family. There are two other Juyo Token swords, and one more blade, and two of those are ko-tachi, which is unusual in that period. In Sanekage's signatures the "kage" kanji has a prominent vertical shape when compared to the "sane" kanji, and this is supposed to be a characteristic highlight. Also, judging from this classic work, there is another opinion that Sanekage's active period was before Sanemori's time, and rather close to Yasutsuna's time. His active period was after the mid-Heian period when the wan-to (curved sword) style was established, but we have to wait for further studies concerning this point.

A description of the general style of Ko-Hoki work includes the following: the itame hada pattern is a large pattern; the entire hada is strongly visible; there are prominent jifu and chikei; there is a dark ji; a visible hada is apparent inside of the hamon; and ha-hada is visible. The hamon are mainly an elaborate komidare hamon, and some areas have a gunome style hamon or a ko-notare style hamon. This tachi shows these characteristics on the omote around the monouchi area, and this is the Ko-Hoki characteristic style. Their hamon have abundant nie, and in addition, kinsuji and sunagashi appear to be entangled with the ha-hada, and there are hotsure. At a glance it looks like Ko-Bizen work, but has a more classic rustic feeling, with a natural beauty. One of the characteristic points is that there is a yakidashi at the moto, which is very rare in Ko-Bizen work.

This tachi has all of the expected characteristic points. The shape is not Ko-Hoki since the sori in the upper half does not prominently "fall down going forward" (i.e., the sori becomes more shallow going towards the point). However, this reflects the period, even without there being a "kissaki falling down going forward" tachi shape. The shinogi ji's width is slightly narrow, and for the period in which it was made, there is a rich hira-niku, and a typical Ko-Hoki style. Due to being polished frequently over a long period, the condition of the area from around the yokote and kissaki is worn, but we can still be reminded of its past majestic tachi shape. This is one of Sanekage's representative works, and the ubu nakago's signature is valuable and helps compensate for the condition of the boshi. However, judging from Sanekage's other itame hada works, sometimes a visible hada is not prominent, so this sword is more likely to be relatively well forged, and we see the same thing in the work of Yasutsuna since he has both types of jigane. This feature is supposed to depend on the tamahagane used, the forging method used, and number of times the steel was folded.

In Showa 17(1942), this tachi was classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin. The owner was Mr. Saito Morichiro, a businessman who was active from before WWII to after the war, and was known as a sword collector who owned 22 blades listed in the "Nihonto Juyo Bijutsu Hin collection". Everything in his collection was classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin. Also, after the war when Japanese swords and the Token world had survived its crisis, he suggested we should accept advice from Colonel Cadwell from the allied forces, and said that it was necessary to establish some organization to protect swords as soon as possible. Saito worked towards this goal and become one of the founders of the NBTHK. In Showa 52 (1977), from the Ozu Shinnosuke collection, 38 blades were

donated to the NBTHK by his bereaved family and Mrs. Ozu Hisako, and this tachi is one of them.

This tachi is presently being exhibited at the NBTHK “Japanese Sword Viewpoints, Part 3: Hamon”. This exhibit will continue until July 11, 2021.

Explanation by Ishii Akira and photo by Imoto Yuuki

No.772 Tosogu Kanshou

Juyo Tosogu

Hama chidori zu (sea shore plover design) fuchi-kashira

Mei: Natsuo with kao

From the Bakumatsu period (the end of the Edo period) to the Meiji period, Kano Natsuo was at the pinnacle of the gold smith's world and produced many master pieces and became very famous.

Natsuo's style uses “the delicacy of space” to effectively express his work. Using his own excellent carving techniques, he makes full use of his theme's characteristic points.

In this work, he uses carving or engraving in shakudo to create waves, and above the waves, there are plovers flying in the sky, and we seem to hear the bird's songs and flapping wings. In a tiny space, he creates just enough of a detailed composition, so we can almost hear the birds singing and flapping their wings, and also the sound of the waves.

In addition, his use of gold to decorate a small fuchi, provides a tension with the shakudo ground, and effectively enlivens the entire composition. Natsuo's precision and execution of precise details, along with his designs and concepts, are very hard to describe. Natsuo used all types of metal and iroe (colored inlays), and a variety of ever-changing impressive carving techniques and colors. Literally, Natsuo's creative ability is unbounded in the small world of a fuchi-kashira, and does not easily allow others to follow his examples.

The common features found in his work are based his high level of skill, and at the same time he created dynamic and static images, which were well integrated in his work.

This is a master work, which fully exhibits Natsuo's true talent.

Explanation Kurotaki Tetsuya

Shijo Kantei To No. 772

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 772 Shijo Kantei To is June 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 June 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: Tanto

Length: 8 sun 8 bu (26.66 cm)

Uchizori

Motohaba: 8 bu 3 rin (2.5 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 6 bu (10.91 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune. It has an almost standard width, and for its width, it is slightly thick, and it is uchizori. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, there are abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and a unique hada. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. On the hamon's edge mixed with kuichigai-ba, there is a characteristic dense nioiguchi, with ko-ashi, abundant nie, sunagashi, and the nioiguchi is bright. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is iriyama-gata, and the yasurime are kiri. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote, there is a long kanji signature along the mune side. This smith has made few tanto.

Token Teirei Kansho Kai for April

Date: April 10 (the second Saturday of April)

Location: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Ooi Takeshi.

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi Juyo Bijutsu Hin

Mei: Kuniyasu (Awataguchi)

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu

Sori: slightly less than 9 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, and the hada is visible. There are abundant fine ji-nie, and the jigane is dark; there are nie utsuri.

Hamon: primarily a komidare hamon, mixed with some continuous ko-gunome. There are ko-ashi, yo, a wide slightly soft nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, small tobiyaki, yubashiri, frequent uchinoke, and some areas with continuous nie dots form niyu-ba; there are sunagashi, kinsuji and a bright nioiguchi.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are futasuji hi with maru-dome.

Boshi: straight with slight hakikake, and the tip is komaru.

Comment:

Awataguchi Kuniyasu was the third son among the six Awataguchi brothers, and was one of the retired emperor Gotoba's sword smiths. His active period is supposed to have been around the Shokyu period (1213-18).

This tachi's widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a large koshizori, the tip falls down going forward (i.e. the sori becomes more shallow going towards the point), the blade is narrow, and there is a small kissaki. The tachi has a classic elegant shape which shows the period's characteristic shape, and is a dignified ubu tachi.

Kuniyasu's forging results in a tight ko-itame hada, with abundant fine ji-nie and with nie utsuri. There is a moist appearing (uruoi) Awataguchi characteristic nashi ji. The itame hada is just slightly visible, there are prominent ji-nie and chikei, Kuniyasu is known for two styles. With his other style, the visible hada has a large hada pattern, and there is a slightly dark jigane. If one just looks at the jigane, it is difficult to recognize his work.

The hamon is mainly ko-midare, which is a classic appearance, and between the ko-gunome the pattern is midare. There are abundant fine ko-nie, a moist appearing bright nioiguchi, and the top of the hamon has small tobiyaki and yubashiri. In some areas, there is a thick niyu-ba. There are frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and abundant hataraki on the hamon's edge. The boshi has a slightly dense nioiguchi, is straight, and with a komaru and return. Overall, there is a strong and dignified feeling.

In voting for Awataguchi, many did not vote for Yoshimitsu, and many of the votes were for Kuniyasu.

This tachi has many features which are close to Ayanokoji Sadatoshi's characteristic points, but Sadatoshi's forging appears soft, and many of his boshi have hakikake.

Kantei To No. 2: tachi Juyo Bijutsu Hin

Mei: Ohara Sanemori

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 3 bu

Sori: 7 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada; there are large itame and large mokume patterns and nagare hada, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, dull chikei, a dark jigane, jifu, and clear jifu utsuri.

Hamon: the moto has yaki-otoshi, and above this, the bottom half has ko-gunome mixed with ko-midare and ko-notare; there are ko-ashi and yo. The upper half is based on suguha mixed with ko-midare, ko-choji, and ko-gunome; there are frequent ashi, yo, the entire hamon has strong nie, and in places, there are some fine ha-hada entangled with hotsure; there are nie-suji, sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: notare; there is some hakikake, and it is yakizume.

Comments:

The tachi seems to have no funbari and is suriage, but still has a large koshizori. There is a narrow shape, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. The tip falls down going forward and there is a small kissaki, so this is from no later than the early half of the Kamakura period with its classic shape. Also, there is a narrow shinogi-ji, a rich hiraniku, and prominent hamon-niku, and these characteristic points are sometimes seen in Ko-Hoki work.

The visible itame hada is a mix of a large itame hada, a large mokume hada, and nagare hada, indicating that there is less forging and consequently a rough jigane. Moreover because of the dark colored ji, the frequent chikei have a dull appearance, and dark areas along the edge of the hamon have clear jifu-utsuri, and there is a rustic feeling everywhere.

The hamon has a yakiotoshi which is rare for similar Ko-Bizen and Ko-Ichimonoji work, and the hamon is komidare, and there are ko-notare areas. There are ko-ashi, yo, and frequent nie. The nioiguchi is slightly dull, and there is a rustic classic midare hamon. But the ko-gunome and ko-notare hamon areas are separate from the ko-midare hamon. The hamon hada is visible, and these characteristics are one of reasons to judge this as Ko-Hoki work.

Notably, Sanemori's hamon have a smaller midare pattern than Yasutsuna's, and this is apparent on this tachi. The tachi's upper half is based on suguha, and there are fewer vertical variations in the midare hamon, there are frequent ashi and yo, and the hamon produces a feeling of being new. Some people recognized this, and narrowed their votes to Sanemori who was one generation younger than Yasutsuna.

The nakago photo is 95% of the actual size.

Kantei To No. 3: Tachi Juyo Bijutsuhin

Mei: Motozane (Ko-Motoshige school)

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: slightly less than 6 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada: there are abundant dense ji-nie; some places have jifu, and utsuri; towards the hamon there are pale suji utsuri which become dan-utsuri.

Hamon: wide suguha; there are frequent ashi and yo, some places have saka-ashi and Kyo-saka-ashi; there is a slightly tight nioiguchi, ko-nie, pale narrow niyu-ba, and a bright nioigichi.

Boshi: straight; there is round return and the tip has a slightly sharp shape.

Comments:

This Motoshige has the same name but is a different smith from Osafune Motoshige. He supposed to be Ko-Motoshige's younger brother, and besides this tachi, we almost exhibited another one of his swords.

Among Ko-Motoshige's works there is tachi dated Kagen 2 (1304). Another smith, who is supposed to be Osafune Motoshige's father Morishige, has work dated from Kagen to Showa (1303-1312), so from this information, the idea that Morishige and Ko-Motoshige have a father and son relationship is not realistic. Also, Ko-Motoshige's jiba (jigane and hamon) are similar to Aoe work. In particular, his nakago yasuri mei are o-sujichigai, and his large sized kanji and thick chisel strokes stand out along with his gyaku (inscribed in a reverse direction) chisel marks in his signature. These are more Aoe characteristic points, and looking at Morishige and Osafune Motoshige, there appears to be no relationship.

From this, judging this tachi's maker a very difficult. Similar to Ko-Motoshige, Aoe work and Unrui work have similar characteristics, so at this time, Ko-Motoshige, and late Kamakura period Aoe, Unjo and Unji works are treated as correct answers.

This tachi has suffered a large degree of shortening and is greatly suriage, and is narrow with a small kissaki, but you can recognize the sori in the center, and you can judge this as late Kamakura period work. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, mixed with jifu and dan-utsuri. The hamon has ko-nie, a bright nioiguchi, and is a tight suguha mixed with saka-ashi. Inside of the hamon there is a long visible line. This is similar to work from the latter half of the Kamakura period to the early Nanbokucho period from Aoe smiths such as Aoe Yoshitsugu and Sukesada, in the period when tachi mei changed to katana mei.

There are prominent ashi and yo, the hataraki in the upper half is poor, the entire round boshi is strong, and from this the Unrui answer is understandable. However, many of those swords have only jifu utsuri. This sword has some Kyo-saka-ashi in the hamon. If it were Rai work, there would be bo-utsuri and the nioiguchi would be slightly thicker. If it were Enju work, many have a whitish jigane, and the amount of hataraki in the hamon would be smaller and plain looking.

The nakago is shown at 90% of its actual size.

**Kantei To No. 4: Katana
Juyo Bijutsu Hin**

Mei: Bizen Osafune ju Yosozaemon Sukesada saku
Tenmon 22 nen (1553) 2 gatsu kichijitsu

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: slightly less than 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: Ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with ko-itame, and some mokume; there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: the entire hamon is wide, and it is composed mainly of open valley gunome; there are some togariba and a midare pattern. There are ashi, yo, ko-nie, some small tobiyaki, some sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: there is a wide midarekomi yakiba. The omote tip is round, and the ura tip is a togari style komaru. There is a slightly long return on both sides.

Comments:

This hamon is composed mainly of open valleys between the double gunome, and is a characteristic midare hamon, so from from this, you can judge this as Sue-bizen work, which is different from the Bunmei to Eisho periods (1469-1520) when there were many short katate-uchi style swords. Apparently, the length and the kissaki are long, the entire blade is well made, and so many people voted for latter Sue-Bizen work by the best smith, Yosouzaemon Sukesada.

Beside Sukesada, some people voted for smiths who made similar large open bottom midare hamon, such as Chogi and Nagamitsu. But if it were by Chogi, there would be a Bizen characteristic of a prominent mountain range-like shaped hamon, and if it were this length, it would likely have to be greatly suriage. This blade is wide, and the difference in widths at the moto and saki are not prominent, there is no funbari, and a large kissaki. The shape is quite different, and the hamon is composed of a large pattern and has complex variations.

If this were work by Morimitsu, the tip's sori would be prominent, and because there would be a tachi shape, the koshizori would be large. On this blade, from the nakago to above the koshimoto there is no prominent sori, and this is different from a saki-zori katana shape. Also, after the Bunmei period, many Sue-Bizen hamon are wide. This midare hamon's valleys extend almost to the edge of the hamon, and the hamon is wide. This is a large hamon, and we wish to focus on this.

This is quite different from Morimitsu's midare hamon valleys which come close to the edge of the hamon, and the top of the hamon goes close to the shinogi. The range between the high and low areas is large. If you compare both, inevitably the vertical Sue-Bizen's hamon vertical range contains narrow valleys, the midare hamon becomes smaller, and naturally the boshi becomes wide.

Tatara Nagayuki produced skillful Sue-Bizen utsushi work. His jigane is a tight ko-itame, it is nioi-deki, there is a clear tight nioiguchi, and his boshi tip is sharp.

Kantei To No. 5: Katana Juyo Bijutsu Hin

Mei: Kawachi no kami Fujiwara Kunisuke
Kanei 19 nen (1642) 2 gatsu kichijitsu

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 4 sun 4 bu

Sori: slightly **less than 7 bu**

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

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

Hamon: diagonal yakidashi at the moto, and above this, the entire hamon is wide. The hamon is composed of gunome mixed with gunome-choji, and some places have groups of gunome-choji, there are vertical variations and some togariba. There is yakikuzure in some areas, thick ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, some muneyaki, a small-like ball tobiyaki, shimaba and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: there is a wide yakiba; the boshi is straight with a komaru and return.

Comments:

This blade has **large** sori, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is funbari and a short chu-kissaki. This clearly has a Shinto shape. This blade is long and heavy, and the jiba(jigane and hamon) are fresh looking. From these features, some people looked at this as a Shin-shinto. If it were a Shin-shinto, it would frequently have longer kissaki, and this type of long katana would be rather heavy.

There is an Osaka Shinto characteristic tight ko-itame hada, and fine forging. The hamon has a yakidashi, a dense nioiguchi, there are vertical variations in a midare hamon mixed with gunome and choji. There are ashi, yo, and an active vigorous hamon. There are abundant nie, a bright hamon, muneyaki, and a komaru boshi. This is the Shodai Kunisuke and Shin Kunisada's typical style, and in voting people concentrated on both smiths.

Both smiths are supposed to have studied under the Kunihiro school smith Echigo no kami Kunitoshi, and many of their hamon have a Kunitoshi style hamon with prominent notare. Some of their hamon show the Kunihiro school's characteristic hakoba (box shaped gunome) style hamon. The individual gunome are slightly separated, and there are high and low variations in the hamon width. This kind of style may not have been popular after the Kanei period, because they were moving away from past patterns, and many new innovative styles were created, like this one.

Shin Kunisuke has a straight yakidashi, and his midare hamon become wider in the upper half around the monouchi compared to the bottom half of the hamon. The shodai Kunisuke's hamon shows an Osaka yakidashi influence, and from the bottom half of the hamon to the boshi, the entire hamon is wide, and there are prominent choji.

Also, on this katana, some places show an early appearance of the Naka-Kawachi fist shape choji hamon, and including the signature, this is an interesting katana.

Shijo Kantei To No. 770 in the March, 2021 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Hizen-kuni Tadayoshi (Shodai). This is a wide blade, and the widths at the moto and saki are almost the same, and there is a large kissaki. This type of shape is seen often in the Keicho Shinto period, and in this period, we often see thicker blades than this. The jigane is tight ko-itame, there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and the Hizen-To unique komenuka hada, and the hints refer to this.

During the Shodai Tadayoshi's five kanji Tadayoshi mei period, and during the ju-nin Tadayoshi period, we do not really see the belt-like suguha hamon. During his Musashi Daijo Tadahiro period mass produced Hizento with a characteristic belt shape suguha hamon began to be seen. Instead of being modeled after classic work, all kinds of suguha were seen and this is one of them. In voting, most people voted for the correct answer.

At this time, I will talk a bit about using oil to protect Japanese swords.

As people know, the purpose of coating oil on a sword's surface is to protect it from air. Blocking air from reaching the sword's surface will protect the sword from oxidation or rusting

Off course, usually we coat oil on a sword and then put it into a shirasaya. I heard a story from a polisher who used to work for a daimyo family. In the past, daimyo families and shrines and temples owned a lot of swords, and these swords were not used on a daily basis, so transparent urushi was used to coat the blades instead of oil. Once the urushi dried, it preserved the swords.

I actually saw one of the daimyo family collections, and the clan okakae smiths made roughly polished yari and naginata which were coated with transparent urushi and preserved.

After the transparent urushi dried, this formed a coating which acted in the same way as an oil coating, and this type of coating did not have to be changed often.

Another example was the Bizen Ikeda family which used to have something called katana-kame which were large Bizen-pottery jars or containers.

I heard the story from local people who said that the Ikeda family used to put a cord through each sword's mekugi ana, and then let the swords hang down into the kame (jar or container) which was filled with rapeseed oil to preserve them. If a sword is put

into a shirasaya, sometimes, the blade can rub strongly against a part of the saya's interior (this event was called a saya-atari), and this could lead to rust. Using a kame or jar was supposed to avoid this kind of problem.

Also, before the war, another method credited to Honnami Koson was to suspend an oiled sword inside of a wood box. A wooden stick or dowel was placed through the mekugi ana, and then used to hold the sword suspended inside of the box. This avoided contact between the wood surface and the sword and protected the sword from saya-atari.

About thirty years ago, for NBTHK shinsa, some swords were submitted inside of this type of box. However, recently, we have not seen this type of thing.

Off course this type of example does not describe general practices. These practices were used sometimes, but Japanese swords have been around for a long time, and unusual methods may have been used to protect swords.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai