

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

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Meito Kansho

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Tachi

Mei: Yukihide

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 6 bu 9 rin (71.8 cm)

Sori: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 7 bu 7 rin (20.5 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu (0.3 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. The blade is wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is relatively small. The blade is thick, there is a large koshizori with funbari, even the tip has sori, and there is a chu-kissaki. The jigane shows itame hada mixed with mokume hada, and the entire ji is well forged, and there is a fine visible hada. There are ji-nie, fine chikei, and jifu utsuri. The hamon is komidare mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome, the upper part has a suguha style hamon mixed with konotare. There are ashi and yo, and on the omote side saka-ashi are prominent. The entire hamon has a dense nioiguchi, with some ko-nie. Above the center, the upper

part has frequent tobiyaki and yubashiri, and around the monouchi area there are nijiba. The boshi is a shallow notare with a komaru and return. The horimono on both the omote and the ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu (but is slightly machi okuri), the tip is kiri, and the yasurime are suji-chigai. There are three mekugi-ana, and on the omote above the second mekugi-ana (the original mekugi-ana) along the mune side, there is a two kanji signature.

Among the Ko-Bizen smiths, the names that usually come to mind are Tomonari and Masatune. However, many confirmed signed works by Yukihide are listed in the “Meikan” and Yukihide is one of the prominent Ko-Bizen smiths. He has signed blades which are classified: one Juyo Bunkazai; four Juyo Bijutsu Hin; eight Juyo Token (of which two are Tokubetsu Juyo Token); and several more confirmed signed works. His basic hamon styles are mainly a komidare and a suguha style mixed with komidare or kogunome which is common in other Ko-Bizen works. However, many of his hamon contain a midare saka-ashi style and saka-ashi, and so we could say that he is a unique smith among the Ko-Bizen smiths, and conventionally this is supposed to be a major characteristic point.

Yukihide’s signatures are seen above the mekugi-ana and are only two kanji, so we have no long kanji signatures. However, the locations of the signatures are different, there are large and small sized signatures, and he used different width chisels to inscribe them. However, from this evidence, expert opinions are divided: are Yukihide’s signatures all from the same school, or by smiths with the same name in different schools, or by different smiths, or by the same smith at different times.

The Meikan lists four smiths with this name in the Kamakura period and from the Ko-Bizen school around Tempuku (1233-34), from the Ko-Bizen ryu around Bunei (1264-75) and Shoan (1299-1302), and from the Ko-Bizen-sue-ryu around Kanbu (1334-36). There is a naginata from the Ko-Bizen ryu (around the Shoan

period), which looks like it is a Ko-Bizen-style work and is signed “Bizen koku Higasaso ju nin Yukihide. In addition, a reference work, the “Kozan Oshigata”, shows a signed work “Bizen koku Higasa ju Shin” (after this it is suriage). The missing portion of the signature is thought to be Shinshi Yukihide) dated Shoan 22 (1320) and said to be an “old work” with a komidare hamon. From this evidence, there is room for additional investigations of his work, and of his various signatures.

This tachi has an ubu nakago with a two kanji signature, is wide, has a large koshizori with funbari, a chu-kissaki, and a stately shape. It is thick at the moto and tip, still feels heavy, and appears healthy. In addition, the jigane has itame mixed with mokume hada, and the entire blade is well forged. The wide hamon and dense noiguchi produce a gentle feeling, and his characteristic saka-ashi hamon is especially prominent on the upper part of the omote. However, attention should be paid to the upper half’s prominent nijuba and tobiyaki. In Ko-Bizen work, we see these features to a variable extent. We see niyu-ba with hataraki by Yukihide and other smiths. However here, part of the nijuba forms tobiyaki, which is very unusual. Furthermore, some parts of the tobiyaki appear from saka-ashi extending above the hamon, which is interesting, and there is not too much hataraki otherwise. From the details and quality of the work we see here, this is a prized work.

This type of tachi shape is sometimes seen in Ko-Bizen work, with its strong powerful and distinctive shape, and this sword compares favorably with Yukihide’s Juyo Bunkazai work. In the Edo period, this tachi was an heirloom sword in the Tokugawa shogun family.

This tachi will be exhibited in the “Fifty Year Commemoration of Tokubetsu Juyo Token and the Classification System for Exceptional Japanese Swords” from September 25 to November 22, 2021 at the NBTHK.

Explanation by Ishii Akira and photo by Imoto Yuki

Shijo Kantei To No. 775

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 775 Shijo Kantei To is September 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 September 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 bu (70.95 cm)

Sori: 4 bu (1.2 cm)

Motohaba: slightly over 1 sun (3.15 cm)

Sakihaba: slightly over 4 bu (1.2 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.8 cm)

Sakikasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.55 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu 5 rin (3.5 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 5 bu (22.7 cm)

Nakago sori: almost none

This is a shinogi-zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is slightly wide, and the width at the saki is narrow compared to the width at the moto. There is a shallow sori and a chu-kissaki. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, and on the ura above the habaki, it is mixed with a large pattern hada. There are abundant ji-nie and fine chikei, and on the shinogi-ji the masame hada is prominent. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are ashi,

sunagashi, a dense nioiguchi, and abundant nie with rough nie in some areas. The jiba (jigane and hamon) is bright and clear. The nakago is ubu, the tip is slightly reduced or shortened and is kiri. Originally the nakago jiri was a pronounced iriyamagata with a sharp tip. The yasurime are sujichigai, and there are some light kesho yasurime. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote, under the mekugi ana, there is a long kanji signature along the mune side. The ura has a kinzogan saidan mei.

Tosogu Kansho

Ropo daen (ellipse shaped) karigane (wild goose) sukashi tsuba

Mei: Yamakichibei

There is a charm in iron tsuba. We have shown all kinds of iron tsuba on this page with commentaries. All of these tsuba have shown a characteristic personality and established their own identity or nature. However, Yamakichibei is distinct from other iron tsuba makers. His work has unique iron characteristics, and he established his own strong style in the world of iron tsuba.

Yamakichibei is supposed to have started his career as an armor maker for the Oda family. From the Momoyama Period to the latter half of the Edo period, generations continued to use the same style and techniques. Among these generations, the shodai and nidai are famous as master smiths.

The iron's characteristics in the tsuba made by the Shodai Yamakichibei have been described as appearing like the smith has "just poured lapis lazuli and jade into the black iron surface". There is a unique impression or feeling. In other words, this description seems to imply that this is iron, but it is not the normal or usual iron we see. Yamakichibei's iron ground consists of only

iron, and only of a single metal. However, it has an incredibly attractive rustic appearance, and exhibits a feeling of wabi (sober refinement). Viewing this work, I felt as though there was present an emotion or feeling similar to listening to a concert.

The sukashi work complements the tsuba shape, and for an Owari school tsuba it still exhibits a feeling of ruggedness and energy. A skilled smith working with iron has produced a tsuba that brings out the full charm and beauty of iron. I would be happy, if you can understand iron's charm from viewing this work.

Explanation by Kurotaki Tetsuya

Token Teirei Kansho Kai for July, 2021

Date: July 10 (the second Saturday of July)

Location: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kurotaki Tetsuya

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: Kunitsuna

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume, and the entire hada is visible.

There are abundant ji-nie, chikei, and jifu utsuri.

Hamon: the hamon is wide, and has slightly large groups of choji mixed with a komidare hamon. There are ashi, yo, abundant ji-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru.

Comments:

This is a Ko-Bizen Kunitsuna tachi which is classified as Juyo Bijutsu Hin. It was owned by the Tsuchiura clan's Tsuchiya family and has a sayagaki for the viscount Tsuchiya Inao.

First, please pay attention to the elegant shape. The tachi has a small amount of funbari at the habaki-moto, and from this, we can recognize that it is suriage. It has a narrow shape, the widths at the moto and saki are different, and it originally had a strong koshizori shape. From these details, you can judge this as work from the early half of the Kamakura period.

Examining the jigane, on the omote around the monouchi area, we can recognize a dark area of black jifu utsuri, and the dark area extends over the shinogi line. From this, we can judge this as being work from not later than the early Kamakura Period. The hamon has prominent large groups of choji for Ko-Bizen work. Consequently, it is possible to look at this as being slighter later work, and probably closer to mid-Kamakura Period work.

In voting, many people voted for Nagamitsu. Nagamitsu has relatively few works with so much strong nie, and his utsuri are midare utsuri and straight shaped utsuri.

In the beginning, I explained that this was in the Tsuchiya family's collection. Recently, a study came out of the Tsuchiura Tsuchiya family's sword collection, and I want to describe this briefly.

Mr. Nishiguchi Masataka analyzed sword or token management during the Bakumatsu and early Meiji period, and discussed the Tsuchiya family's koshimono-cho (sword or catalog list). In this document, it was clear that there were three reasons to remove swords from the collection: (1) to present a sword as a gift; (2) to present a sword to a new son-in-law marrying into the family; and 3) when a family member or relative moves or relocates to another location and takes a sword with him. This example was from the early modern period Daimyo family records showing how swords were managed and records were kept. The Hitachi no

Kuni Tsuchiura clan's Tsuchiya family provided this example. It was from the Koku Bungaku (Provincial Culture) Archive Study, Volume 17, 2021.

Prior to this, Mr. Nakazawa Tatsuya discussed this. The quality and quantity of the Tsuchiya family's swords were not below those belonging to other famous daimyo families, such as the Owari Tokugawa and the Maeda family (see the "Tsuchiya Family's Sword Background" and in "The Tsuchiura City Museum Memories, Volume 24, 2014")

This Kunitsuna tachi is not only well made and classified as Juyo Bujutsu Hin, but is also recognized as an important sword reference material.

Kantei To No. 2: tanto

Mei: Bizen Osafune Motoshige
Showa 5 nen (1316) 6 gatsu hi

Length: slightly less than 8 sun 3 bu

Sori: uchizori

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada; the hada is visible; the entire ji has a strong nagare masame style. There are ji-nie and jifu midare utsuri.

Hamon: mainly square gunome mixed with gunome and kataochi style gunome. There are ashi, the entire hamon has saka-ashi, and there is a nioiguchi with ko-nie.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is komaru; there is a long return.

Comments:

This is an Osafune Motoshige tanto. Among Motoshige's existing works, this tanto has the oldest date of any of his works.

This tanto shows Motoshige's characteristic points in many places, and fully exemplifies his highlights. First the shape has an almost standard length, a standard width and is uchizori. This is a typical tanto shape from the latter half of the Kamakura Period. The Showa 5 date is when the Nanbokucho period riots were beginning, and when the Kamakura Bakufu entered a crisis.

Many of Motoshige's jigane are an itame nagare which can become masame and the jigane contains different colored jifu areas. This trend is sometimes seen in Bizen branch school smiths' work. We also see this kind of jigane in Morikage's work.

The hamon top is has long square gunome with valleys mixed with tusk shaped togariba, and the top of the hamon forms a completely straight line, and this is a notable characteristic point for Motoshige's work.

In voting, some people voted for Kanemitsu. If it were by Kanemitsu, the hamon would be based on kataochi-gunome, and with a midare hamon and it would be different from Motoshige's square shaped gunome hamon. Kanemitsu's forging usually shows mainstream Osafune's refined jigane.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mei: Bizen Kuni ju Osafune Yosozaemonjo Sukesada
Tenmon 3 nen (1534) 2 gatsu kichijitsu

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 1 sun 2 bu

Sori: slightly over 7 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: open valley gunome mixed with gunome and choji style hamon. There are ashi, yo, frequent ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is sharp and there is a long return.
Horimono: there are bonji on the omote and ura at the koshimoto in a relatively high location.

Comments:

This is an Osafune Yosozaemonjo Sukesada katana dated Tenmon 3. In examining the shape, it is 2 shaku 1sun which is a short length, and it is slightly wide. The widths at the moto and saki are not too different, the upper half has saki-zori, and there is a chu-kissaki. This shape is seen many blades in the latter half of the Muromachi period, around the Eisho (1504-20) and Taiei (1521-27) eras, and are a typical katate-uchi uchi-gatana shape.

The jigane is a tight itame. There is a bright steel color with midare-utsuri along with refined forging, and these are Sue-Bizen jo-saku (masterpiece) characteristic points.

The hamon is primarily composed of open valley gunome mixed with gunome and choji. There are frequent ko-nie, and these are typical Sue-Bizen fukushiki-gunome (double gunome) characteristics.

In the Sue-Bizen period, there are many smiths who produced fukushiki-gunome, but in this sword, the pattern is uniform and consistent from the moto to the tip, and there are no irregularities, and it almost appears like the hamon, a perfect fukushiki-gunome pattern, was painted on. From these observations, we would wish to vote for Yosozaemonjo Sukesada.

We can consider other Sue-Bizen smiths. If this were work by Katsumitsu, many of his hamon contain open valley gunome mixed with choji, and these are gorgeous hamon. If it were by Kiyomitsu, in the interiors of the open valleys, the ashi and yo appear be stained or colored and long.

Kantei To No. 4: Tanto

Mei: Rai Kunitsugu

Length: slightly over 8 sun 4 bu

Sori: almost none

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, mixed with jifu and nie utsuri.

Hamon: konotare, mixed with gunome; there are ashi, yo, frequent ko-nie, and it is bright and clear; there are kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight; on the omote it is yakizume; the ura tip is slightly sharp and there is a return.

Comments:

This is a Rai Kunitsugu tanto. This has a standard length, but is wide for the length. It is thick and almost mu-zori. From this, you can judge this as work from the end of the Kamakura Period to the early Nanbokucho Period.

The jigane is a well forged tight ko-itame hada. There is refined forging, abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and jifu nie utsuri. From these details, it is possible to think of Rai school work. The hamon is ko-notare mixed with gunome, and there are abundant nie, which are bright and clear. There are kinsuji and sunagashi. From these characteristics in the Rai school, Kunimitsu's name comes to mind.

Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu's notare style work is very similar. But in the jiba (jigane and hamon), the nie are more pronounced, and a wide shape is more often seen in Kunitsugu's work. If you choose one of these, I would say Kunitsugu is a more reasonable guess. If this were Kunimitsu's work, the hamon would be slightly narrow, and the nie would appear to be somewhat more gentle.

Kantei To No. 5: wakizashi

Mei: Itakura Gonnoshin Terukane
Empo 8 nen (1680) 2 gatsu kichijitsu

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 7 bu

Sori: 3.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: there is a straight yakidashi at the moto, and above this there is a toranba midare hamon mixed with konotare and yahazu choji; under the yokote there are three continuous gunome. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi with abundant nie, some kinsuji, and a bright and clear hamon.

Boshi: straight with a komaru.

Comments:

This is from the Suzuki Kajo collection, and is a Itakura Gonnoshin Terukane katana.

On this katana, the width at the saki is narrow compared to the width at the moto. There is a shallow sori with chu-kissaki, and from these characteristics, we can judge this as Kanbun Shinto period work.

The Kanbun period is meaningful as a unique period in the history of the Edo period. There were famines in the Kanbun period, farmers had serious problems, and the country's production of food declined significantly. The Tokugawa shogunate took many measures to help distressed farmers and food production recovered. This occurred during the Kanbun (1661-1672) and Enpo periods (1673-1680) when the independence and importance of small farmers was recognized. The resulting improvement in food production led to economic

prosperity, and all merchants were able to benefit as well (see Sasaki Junnosuke in “Edo Period Discussions”, 2005, published by Yoshikawa Kobun Kan, and Watanabe Naoshi in “Modern Farmers Inherent Strength”, 2013 published by Keibunsha).

In considering the period’s background when this katana was made, we can understand some of Terukane’s characteristic points. At first glance, you can see that the mune angle is steep, and there is no hiraniku.

This katana has a unique toran midare hamon, and in some places, we can see a yahazu style hamon. Under the yokote there are three continuous gunome, and the entire blade has prominent sunagashi. We can say that this is a typical Terukane sword.

Besides Terukane, other smiths who made toran-midare hamon are Sukehiro, Sukenao, and Masahide. If it were Sukehiro’s work, the midare hamon would contain some square shaped gunome. If it were work by Sukenao, and not a toran hamon, it would be a toran style large gunome midare hamon.

If it were by Masahide with a toran style large gunome midare hamon, there would be black ha-nie in the ji and this is one of his characteristic points.

Shijo Kantei To No. 773 in the June, 2021 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by nidai Echigo-no-kami Kanesada.

This sword has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori with a chu-kissaki, and from the shape you can judge this as a Kanbun Shinto period katana.

The jigane is a tight ko-itame, the hamon has a yakidashi at the moto, and above this there is a type of a toran midare hamon.

Inside of the toran hamon, mixed with a yahazu shaped midare hamon, there are three continuous gunome under the

yokote. Inside of the hamon there are prominent sunagashi. The mune angle is steep. From these characteristics, you can judge this as the nidai Kanesada's work.

In voting, a majority of people voted for the nidai Kanesada. For dozen (an almost correct answer), a few people voted for the shodai Kanesada. Many of the shodai Kanesada's hamon above the yakidashi have larger gunome and notare, mixed with choji, and there are nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. His toran midare hamon are not frequently seen, and in yahazu type hamon, under the yokote, three continuous gunome are not often seen.

At this time, continuing with the same subject I discussed last time, I will talk about putting oil on a sword.

To put oil on a blade properly, it is important to have a good oil cloth in good condition. An oil cloth in good condition means the oil permeates the entire cloth, and moreover, there is not too much oil on the cloth.

For use as an oil cloth to apply oil to a blade, people use cotton flannel or cotton gauze, and I will talk about the relatively popular cotton flannel.

First, one must make sure that the oil permeates the entire new flannel fabric before putting oil on a sword. A piece of new flannel is dry, the fiber has many gaps, and the cloth absorbs a lot of oil. Putting oil on a sword with a cloth in this condition is difficult, and it is easy to miss spots on the sword.

After putting oil on a sword, you can examine the sword under a fluorescent light, and often you can see a film of oil from the moto to the kissaki, and sometimes a series of fine straight lines.

I would like to describe this appearance as being like a Hoshio sword's clear and uniform masame hada, and hope this makes sense.

These visible lines indicate areas that have oil on them, and areas between these lines may have no oil on the surface. This means there are oil covered surfaces and areas uncoated with oil, but gradually the entire surface of the sword will be completely coated with oil.

Therefore, you add more oil to the oil cloth, and apply oil again to the sword's surface. If you apply too much oil, you use another dry flannel cloth or tissue paper to wipe off the excess oil. Also, when applying oil to another sword, one continues to use the same oil cloth, and the oil will eventually completely permeate the entire cloth. Under these conditions, there will not be an excess of oil on the cloth

If you use this kind of oil cloth, you can put oil on an entire blade and produce a uniformly even oil surface. Using the cloth this way means the surface will likely not be pure white, but that there will be some color on the cloth.

If you use an oil cloth on a rusty blade, you can often see a reddish brown color on the cloth from the rust on the blade. Even on a newly polished clean sword, if you use a cloth several times, some color might become visible on the cloth, possibly from the last finishing stage in polishing which utilizes nugu which is iron oxide, so traces of nugu might still be on the sword.

If you use a dirty cloth to apply oil to a blade, it could result in scratches or "hike" appearing on a blade, and this is not good for the blade or its appearance. Actually, for an oil cloth, a colored cloth might be best to use.

While I was working part time at the NBTHK, one of the senior members showed me an oil cloth in this kind of condition, and explained to me that cloth in this condition is good to use for an oil cloth. I hope you will be attentive the condition of your oil cloth, and to the process of putting oil on a blade in a careful and effective manner.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai