

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL
ISSUE NUMBER 777

Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Uchigatana

Mei: Yoshimitsu

Length: 1 shaku 9 sun 2 bu 1 rin (58.2 cm)

Sori: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 3 rin (2.0 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.45 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.3 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 2 rin (15.2cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri uchigatana with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, the Kasane or thickness is just right, there is a large sori with a wa-zori style, and a short chu-kissaki. The jigane shows a well forged refined itame-hada. There are abundant ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and the entire hada shows uruoi or has a moist appearance, and is very clear. The hamon is suguha mixed with kogunome. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, bright frequent ko-nie, some sunagashi and kinsuji. The center and upper part of the hamon has nijuba-style yubashiri. The boshi is a very shallow notare style, the tip is round and there is a small return. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi with tsure-hi. The hi on the omote is finished over the nakago and the ura hi is carved through the nakago. The nakago is almost ubu, the tip is slightly shortened, there is a very shallow kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There is one

mekugi-ana, and on the omote nakago tip on the center, there is a large two kanji signature.

Toshiro Yoshimitsu is famous as the last master smith in the Awataguchi school which was active in Kyoto for about a century during the Kamakura Period. He supposed to have been Kuniyoshi's son or student, and from old oshigata, he has swords dated during the Kenji and Koan periods (1275- 88). From this information, the idea that Yoshimitsu's active period was around the Shoo period (1288- 93) appears to be a reasonable. Also, he is considered to be a master smith for tanto along with Shintogo Kunimitsu, and he has left us many master works. Beside tanto, he made ken, the kanmuri-otoshi "Namazuo Toshiro", and the katana named "Ichigo hitofuri Toshiro" which is an imperial household treasure and is especially famous. In the Edo period, his work was prized as one of "the three best master smiths" along with Masamune and Go. In the "Kyoho Meibutsu cho" 34 of his blades are listed, including some lost in fires, along with 59 Masamune blades. This clearly shows how high his reputation was.

He made several different tanto shapes which were wide and narrow, and long and short, and this exhibits his common points shared with Kuniyoshi, and from this you can recognize a close relationship between the two of them. He has two types of jigane: one type is a ko-itame hada in a very refined nashi-ji hada style, and the other style is an itame hada with a slightly visible hada. Both styles have hamon with abundant dense ji-nie, and notably, with the nashi-ji style, the entire ji has a moist (uruoi) appearance, but his work produces a stronger impression than the Rai school jigane, and the ji has a very clear appearance. Many of his hamon are a clean defined suguha, but sometimes there are ko-gunome midare hamon. In the case of suguha, around the yakidashi area there are characteristic continuous ko-gunome, and in the narrow suguha style hamon, in the area around the fukura, the hamon becomes narrower and these are his stylistic traits. Also, his boshi have very strong nie, and some of the nie appear to drip into the ji, and this is called "nie kuisagari" and is hard to miss. Furthermore, there are several different styles of signatures, and they are not uniform. They appear as if they were written using the tip of a brush with a flowing style, and Yoshimitsu has reputation as having the best signature style in the sword world. In appreciating his work, this is an important characteristic point.

For many years, except for tanto, his only existing long sword was in the Taiko Hideyoshi's collection which is saiha (re-tempered) today, and was called the "Meibutsu Ichigo Hitofuri Toshiro". This was confirmed in Hesei 4 (1992) as his work, which was supposed to be made when the uchigatana shape began to be used. The bright and clear itame hada has a moist appearance(uruoi), it is well forged, and there are chikei and bright nie on the hamon edge. The hamon is a nijuba in an elegant suguha style, which shows the Awatguchi work's characteristic charm, value, and excellent workmanship.

Also, the large size signature is carved below the mekugi ana in the flat area, and the "mitsu" kanji is located next to the end or bottom of the bo-hi, and this is exactly the same as other ubu nakago work which is listed in old oshigata sources such as "Kotoku Katana Illustrations". The fluent brush stroke signature is admirable, and the entire signature is elegant and has a dignified feeling.

In the Edo period, this sword was owned by the Owari Tokugawa clan's Naruse family, is listed in "Kozan Oshigata" and the valuation is undetermined as it is the only known example of a Toshiro Yoshimitsu uchigatana.

This sword will be exhibited at the NBTHK until December in the "Tokubetsu Juyo Classification's 50th anniversary: Masterworks of Japanese swords" in the second part of the exhibit from October 26 to November 21, 2021.

Explanation by Ishii Akira, and photo by Imoto Yuki

Shijo Kantei To No. 777

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 777 Shijo Kantei To is November 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 November 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: 7 sun 6 bu (23.0 cm)

Sori: slightly uchizori

Motohaba: 6 bu 5 rin (2.10 cm)

Motokasane: 3 bu 5 rin (1.1 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 7 bu (11.2 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, the kasane is very thick, there is a poor fukura, and there is a slight uchizori. The jigane has itame hada mixed with mokume hada. There are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are long ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie mixed with rough (ara) nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, mune yaki, and a bright and clear nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, the tip is a ha-agari style kurijiri. The yasurime are o-sujichigai with kesho (the o-sujichigai yasurime start slightly under the kesho yasurime). There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote, along the mune side there is a unique style large three kanji signature made with a thick chisel. The ura has the owner's name and a date inscribed in two lines.

This tanto is early work by this smith.

Tosogu Kansho

Juyo Tosogu

Kujaku zu (peacock design) Tsuba

Mei: Takase Toura

Furyuken Eiju with kao

In the world of gold smiths, the Mito gold smiths comprised one of the major schools, and their school produced many master smiths. Some of these master smiths were Yatabe Michihisa, Akagiken Genfu, Ichyanagi Yuzen and Ogiya Katsupei. Takase Eiju was a student of Genfu, and used the names Furyuken and Toura on his artwork.

Eiju left a large number of diverse works. For his jigane, he used metals such as silver, shakudo, shibuichi, and iron. In his work he used a variety of colors, such as many kinds of iro-gane (colored metals), and he sometimes used hira-zogan (inlay) on an entire surface. And he depicted all kinds of subjects, such as folk stories from inside and outside of Japan, and all kinds of plants and animals.

On this tsuba, he designed the peacock to fill in the entire surface or field, and the wings are carefully carved using a sukedashi-bori technique and gold inlay extends to the mimi or rim of the tsuba. This tsuba produces a powerful impression, and it is as if the peacock has fully spread its wings, and will jump out from the small tsuba.

Many of Takase Eiju's tsuba works are on relatively large tsuba, with a subject which fills in the entire surface, and this tsuba shows this characteristic point very well. The tsuba is one of Eiju's master works, and should be preserved for posterity.

Explanation by Kurotaki Tetsuya

September Token Teirei Kansho kai

Date: September 11th (second Saturday of September)

Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kubo Yasuko

Kantei To No. 1: Wakizashi

Mei: Soshu ju Fusamune saku

Length: 1 shaku 8 sun 3.5 bu

Sori: 7 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame hada changing into nagare hada; the hada is visible; there are frequent ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: there is a wide hamon; the pattern is gunome mixed with choji, togariba, and yahazu. There are ashi, yo, fine kinsuji and sunagashi, yubashiri, and tobiyaki; there are muneyaki and the resulting blade is hitotsura; there is a dense nioguchi and frequent ko-nie.

Boshi: midarekomi with a wide yakiba; the tip is sharp; there are tobiyaki; there is a long return which continues to form muneyaki.

Horimono: on the omote and the ura at the koshimoto there are horimono. On the omote inside of a frame, there is a shin-no-kurikara relief; the ura has engraved kanji for “hachiman dai-bosatsu” and a renga (lotus flower).

This is a wakizashi with an impressive hitatsura hamon and fine detailed horimono. The shinogi-ji's width is narrow for the blade's width. There is a sharp angle at the shinogi, a high shinogi-ji, and a strong saki sori. The horimono are confined tightly at the koshimoto, and there is hitatsura, and from these details you can imagine that this is work from the Muromachi period, and likely Soshu smith work. In the Nanbokucho period, Hiromitsu and Akihiro created a hitatsura hamon, and even in the Muromachi period it gained popularity. In the early half of the Muromachi period, Masahiro and Hiromitsu worked with hitotsura hamon, and at the end of the Muromachi period, Tsunahiro and Odawara Soshu smiths such as Yasuharu and Fusamune produced this style of hamon.

However, in the Muromachi period, if you compared both styles of hitatsura hamon, you can find some differences in the basic midare hamon. The tendency is for Masahiro and Hiromitsu hamon to contain more mixed ko-choji hamon. The later period Sue-Soshu hitatsura hamon are more likely to contain gunome rather than choji.

Also, concerning horimono on a sword, in the early half of the Muromachi period there are more horimono around the center of the shinogi line. Moreover the horimono are long and a little high location above koshimoto. Compared with this, at the end of the Muromachi period, horimono were more often seen at the koshimoto, and notably the Odawara Soshu smiths produced richly detailed carvings. Among these, Fusamune's horimono are, in the case of a shinogi zukuri blade like this one, carved with very detailed fine relief inside of a frame on the shinogi-ji, and this is one of his characteristic points.

Furthermore, on the ura side the renga design under the ‘hachiman dai-bosatsu’ kanji is a unique style. Sometimes Fusamune also carved original kongosho designs.

Kantei To No. 2: Tachi

Mei: Bizen Kuni Kageyasu

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 6 bu

Sori: slightly less than 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume and nagare-hada, the hada is slightly visible. There are dense ji-nei, fine chikei, and pale jifu utsuri.

Hamon: suguha style mixed with komidare and ko-gunome; on the ura side, the bottom half is mixed with square shaped gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, abundant ko-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight, round, with a short return.

Horimono: the omote and ura have bo-hi carved through the nakago.

Kageyasu is a Bizen smith, and historical sword books listed him as being a Fukuoka Ichimonji or Osafune school smith.

His existing blades have a more classic style, and today he is recognized as a Ko-Bizen smith. His signatures have two styles; a five kanji mei with “Bizen Kuni” and a two kanji “Kageyasu” mei.

When comparing them, the five kanji signatures appear to be on older works.

This tachi is long and narrow, there is funbari at the koshimoto, a large koshizori, the tip falls down going forward (i.e. the sori becomes more shallow going forward), and there is a small kissaki. These details appear to clearly show characteristic points from the end of Heian Period to the early Kamakura Period. The jigane is well forged with pale jifu utsuri. The hamon is a suguha style mixed with komidare and ko-gunome, and there are frequent ashi and yo, and abundant ko-nie, and this precisely shows Ko-Bizen characteristic points.

Among the Ko-Bizen smiths, many people voted inevitably for famous smiths such as Tomonari and Masatsune. Some people

noticed the square shape hamon in the lower half, and narrowed their choice of smith to Kageyasu, which was a great observation and judgement. Kageyasu's hamon are sometimes mixed with square shaped hamon features, and one part of the hamon will be low or have a narrow width. Between the hamon peaks there are dot-like tobiyaki and yubashiri, and these are some of his characteristic points.

Besides voting for Ko-Bizen work, some people voted for Ko-Aoe work. If it were Ko-Aoe work, the jigane would be mixed with more mokume hada, and there would be a fine visible hada, the so-called "chirimen hada" with dark jifu style sumi-hada. Also compared with this sword, many of the Ko-Aoe hamon are smaller, and have a worn down nioiguchi.

Kantei To No. 3: Tachi

Mei: Bizen kuni Osafune ju Chikakage
Karyaku 2 nen (1327) 5 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: choji mixed with gunome and square shaped gunome. There are small ashi, saka-ashi, and frequent yo; above the monouchi area the hamon is based on a narrow suguha with a small midare, and a dense nioiguchi; there are frequent ko-nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, some small tobiyaki, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: on the omote and the ura the boshi is wide and straight; the point is round and there is a short return.

This blade has a slightly narrow shape, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a koshizori although the blade is suriage; the tip has a continuous sori, and there is a chu-kissaki. From this, you can judge this as work from around the end of the Kamakura Period. The jigane has clear midare utsuri, the hamon is choji mixed

with tight ko-choji, gunome, and square shaped features. There are ko-ashi and saka-ashi. From this, among the same period's Osafune school smiths, it would be possible narrow down the smith to Kagemitsu and Chikakage.

According to common opinions, Chikakage is supposed to be Nagamitsu's student, and slightly junior to Kagemitsu, and there are similarities in their styles. Usually, from the jigane, ha-nie appearance, and boshi, we can detect differences. For example, not only Kagemitsu, but also the same period's Osafune mainstream smiths such as Nagamitsu and Kanemitsu have a jigane that is a tight itame hada with a bright steel color and refined forging along with brilliant midare utsuri. In particular, Kagemitsu is praised as having the most refined jigane. Compared with these smiths, Chikakage's jigane are sometimes mixed with large hada, are not smooth appearing, and many of his utsuri examples are pale.

But this tachi has a beautiful jigane compared with Chikakage's usual work and the midare utsuri is clear. Also the hamon has some saka-ashi, but it is not too obvious. There are also some round top choji, and so many people voted for Nagamitsu. Actually this tachi's workmanship is very close to his teacher Nagamitsu's work. We must say that this is Chikakage's work and focus on the boshi, which is straight from the yokote going forward, and wish to emphasize this as his characteristic point.

Kantei To No.4: Wakizashi

Mei: Mutsu Daijo Miyoshi Nagamichi

Length: 1 shaku 7 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 2 bu

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume; the bottom half is nagare; there are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei.

Hamon: short yakidashi at the moto; above this the hamon is based on notare, and mixed with gunome and togari. There are some thick yubashiri at the top of the hamon, nie kuzure, square shaped features, ashi, nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, tobiyaki and muneyaki.

Boshi: straight with a komaru and a long return.

This is a wakizashi, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. The sori is very shallow with a short chu-kissaki, which is a typical Kanbun Shinto shape. The hamon is based on a relatively loose notare mixed with gunome, and in addition has areas which are wide and narrow. In the Kanbun Shinto period, when we see this kind of characteristic hamon, the name Kotetsu comes up. Others that also come to mind are Yamato no kami Yasusada and this smith, Miyoshi Nagamichi.

However, the jigane of both, Kotetsu and Yasusada, do not show much nagare hada. If this was from Kotetsu's so-called Hanetora period, the hamon would have a longer yakidashi at the moto when compared to this sword, and would be mixed with prominent large and small gunome fused together, or Hyotan-ba.

On the other hand, Yasusada's hamon are based on a gentle notare, and the top and valley parts of the hamon are more square appearing, box-shaped hamon features are prominent, and many of his nioiguchi are slightly worn down. Also, Yasusada's blade shapes often have a sharp or pronounced mune angle.

In Nagamichi's work, the boshi return is long, and sometimes is interrupted on the mune. The return then becomes narrow and long along the mune. Sometimes it stops and continues again to form pale muneyaki. On the hamon, Nagamichi's nie are often uneven, and appear to be connecting the tops of the high parts of the hamon. There are thick yubashiri and sunagashi, and this can appear to be like nie-kuzure and this is a unique characteristic and is his characteristic point.

Kantei To No.5: Wakizashi

Mei: Ishido Unju Korekazu saku

Kaei 6 nen (1853) 8 gatsu hi, Kimura Sada
Toramaru Minamoto Kuniteru shoji (owner)

Length: 1 shaku 6 sun 1.5 bu

Sori: 3 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume, there is nagare hada and the hada is visible; there are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei.
Hamon: choji mixed with gunome and togariba, and these features are grouped close together. There are long ashi, frequent nie, some rough nie, frequent nie suji, kinsuji, sunagashi, yubashiri and tobiyaki.
Boshi: there is a wide yakiba which has a slightly notare pattern; there is a round point and return.

This hamon is a choji hamon mixed with gunome and togariba, and all the features are placed tightly together. It is a gorgeous hamon, and at the first impression, it looks like a classic Bizen work. But there is no utsuri on the ji, and the boshi yaki is too wide.

The shape is very wide with a chu-kissaki, and furthermore, looking at the shape carefully, you can see that the shinogi ji is narrow, and there is poor hiraniku. This is a Shinshinto period wakizashi, and looking at the hamon, you can see there are many areas where the ashi extend down to the edge of the hamon.

This is an Unju Korekazu work. Unju Korekazu is Chounsai Tsunatoshi's nephew, and succeeded as the Ishido family's 7th generation. He inherited the family's traditional Bizen Den's gorgeous choji midare hamon, but his most characteristic hamon is choji midare with nie. Furthermore, his hamon in many place have strong hataraki, such as kinsuji, sunagashi, yubashiri, and tobiyaki, and this is also his unique characteristic point.

This wakizashi's jigane is not a Shinshinto characteristic muji jigane, but is itame mixed with mokume hada and nagare hada.

I think, in voting, many people were confused about this. But Korekazu's work sometimes has nagare hada and prominent chikei, besides his muji style jigane. Please keep this in mind.

In voting, many people voted for Naotane work. Naotane's hamon have frequent ha-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi, and a Bizen Den and Soshu Den mixed style, and so the answer is understandable. But if his ko-itame hada are a muji style, there are midare utsuri, and in the case of itame hada with prominent chikei, many of them contain a unique uzumaki (swirled) hada someplace.

Shijo Kantei To No. 775 in the August, 2021 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Nagasone Kotetsu.

This is a Kotetsu work from the early half of his career, or Hanetora period work. The blade is slightly wide, the width at the saki is narrow for the width at the moto, and there is a shallow sori with a chu-kissaki. From the shape, you can judge this as Kanbun Shinto period work.

The jigane is a tight ko-itame, the shinogi ji's masame hada is prominent, and this seems to be an Edo Shinto period characteristic.

The jigane above the habaki is mixed with a large hada and that means this is Kotetsu's characteristic teko-tetsu.

Many Kotetsu works had a yakidashi throughout his career, and the early half Hanetora period has yakidashi which are relatively long, just like this example, and the latter half Hakotora period yakidashi are relatively short.

During the Hanetora period Kotetsu's characteristic hamon were composed of smaller gunome and larger gunome linked or fused together, which is the so-called hyotan-ba.

On this katana, above the yakidashi, the hyotan-ba extend continuously to just under the yokote. Many of his boshi are yakikomi, and above the yokote, are straight, with a komaru and return. This is the Kotetsu boshi. Sometimes we see a notare hamon mixed with gunome, or a Mino style hamon mixed with hyotan-ba, like this example.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Kotetsu.

In the last month's issue, I interrupted my discussion about oil on Japanese swords. In this issue, I will talk about this again.

After you put oil on a sword, if you see a sword's flat area under a light, sometimes, the transparent oil film looks like it is rising over the

flat area. In this situation, it is possible there is too much oil on the sword.

In this case, as I explained before, use another dry flannel cloth and not the oil cloth, and wipe the surface of the sword to remove the excess oil. If there is too much oil on a sword, and you wipe the sword with the flannel cloth, sometimes unexpectedly you cannot remove the oil completely.

In this case, I use a piece of soft tissue paper so you do not need to worry about producing any scratches on the sword's surface. You can carefully use several layers of tissue paper to remove oil without cutting your fingers. This way you can remove oil relatively effectively.

In any case, if you think there is too much oil on a sword, it is important not to neglect removing the excess oil and leave a thin film of oil on the sword.

Also, initially, even if you felt you put oil on a sword properly, it is good idea to wait a few days, and then check the sword again.

After you pull a sword out of a saya, if oil is forming streaks on a sword, almost as if it is a person sweating, or if the oil has concentrated into round drops in places on the blade, there is too much oil on the sword. In such a situation, it is a good idea to use a flannel cloth to remove the excess oil.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai