

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

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Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Tokubetsu Juyo Token **Important Cultural Property**

Type: Tanto (Meibutsu Nabeshima Toshiro)
Stored in an old saya

Length: 7 sun 6 bu 6 rin (23.2 cm)

Sori: uchizori

Motohaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (slightly less than 0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.3 cm)

Nakago sori: none

Commentary

This is a hira zukuri tanto with a mitsumune. It has a slightly small size, is thick, and has an uchisori. The jigane shows a tight ko-itame mixed with a large pattern hada in some places. There are abundant fine ji-nie and chikei, the bottom half has clear bo-utsuri, and the entire jigane is clear. The hamon under the machi is yakikomi, and above this, it is based on suguha mixed with ko-gunome. There are ashi, frequent uniform ko-nie, hotsure, uchinoke, nijuba, and a bright and clear nioiguchi. The boshi is straight, there is a komaru, line-like nie, hakikake, and a long return. The nakago is almost ubu, the tip is slightly shortened and is kiri. The yasurime are a very shallow katte-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote under the mekugi ana, there is a two kanji signature made with a fine tagane (chisel).

Toshiro Yoshimitsu is famous as being 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 kanmuriotoshi "Namazuo Toshiro", and the katana named "Ichigo hitofuri Toshiro" which is an imperial household treasure and is especially famous. The Owari Koku Inuyama clan's Naruse family owned another Yoshimitsu uchigatana which is classified as Tokubetsu Juyo Token and was the 12th sword to receive that classification. year after that classi 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 which have been 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 these details exhibit common points he shared with Kuniyoshi, and from this you can recognize that there was 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.

This tanto is small when examining his tanto works. The balance between the width and the length is almost perfect. The fukura is in good condition with a good volume, and has an exquisite curve and well proportioned shape. The blade is thick and in a healthy condition. The jigane is mixed with a large pattern hada, but the ko-itame hada is very tight, and there are abundant dense fine ji-nie. This is the school's characteristic "nashiji-hada". The hada has a delicate appearance reminding one of pure silk, and makes a strong impression. The hamon yakidashi has a ko-gunome style pattern, the hamon width becomes narrower around the fukura, and these are Yoshimitsu's unique characteristic points. Furthermore in the boshi,

the fine lines of nie extending into the ji are called “nie kuisagari” and these details prominently exhibit Yoshimitsu’s characteristic points. Also, his flowing brush stroke-like signature is worth admiration, and exhibits elegance and dignity in itself.

The story concerning the origin of the nickname or Meibutsu is that originally the Saga clan’s Nabeshima Naoshige (1538-1618) owned it, and later handed it down to the Tottori clan’s Ikeda Mitsunaka, and in Genroku 13 (1700) on July 1st, Mitsunaka’s son Ikeda Tsunakyo presented the tanto to the Shogun on his retirement. Since then, it has been handed down in the Tokugawa Shogun family.

However, according to Shogun family’s “Okoshimono Daicho (sword list)” and the “Tokugawa Jikki (diary)”, after the tanto became the property of the Shogun family, when a son’s genpuku (ceremony of attaining manhood) took place, it became a custom to present this tanto to the next generation. On the old tanto saya, it is written that on Bunsei 11 (1828), April 4th, when the 13th Shogun Iesada had his genpuku ceremony, his father, the 12th Shogun Ieyoshi presented this tanto to him to celebrate the event. This is a highly valuable item, not only for the quality of the object itself, but also for its historical relevance.

This tanto will be exhibited at the NBTHK museum’s exhibit “The 50th Anniversary of the Tokubetsu Juyo Classification: Japanese Sword Masterpieces” in the third part of the exhibit from November 23 to December 22, 2021.

Explanation by Ishii Akira, and photo by Imoto Yuki

Shijo Kantei To No. 778

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 778 Shijo Kantei To is December 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 December 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: 9 sun 9 bu 5 rin (30.15 cm)

Sori: slight

Motohaba: slightly over 8 bu (2.5 cm)

Motokasane: slightly over 2 bu (0.7 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 3 bu 5 rin (10.15 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a hirazukuri tanto with a mitsumune. The mune angle is very steep, and the tanto is thick. It is wide at the moto, long, and has a narrow tip. There is a poor fukura, and a sharp needle-like shape.

The jigane has an itame hada mixed with large itame, mokume, and nagare hada, and the hada is visible. There are abundant ji-nie and frequent thick, black chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, the ha-machi and mune-machi are wide, and the tip has the smith's unique shape. The yasurime on the omote are o-sujichigai, and the ura is gyaku o-sujichigai. There are two mekugi-ana, and one is closed. On the omote, under the original mekugi-ana along the center, the smith's signature is written in a unique style kanji signature.

This tanto style is unusual for the smith's work.

Tosogu Kansho

Juyo Tosogu

Kuruma (wheel design) sukashi tsuba

Mei: Nobuie

This is a typical example of Nobuie's hanare mei (a hanare mei has a space between the two kanji). The wheel sukashi pattern tsuba has twelve spokes. Work before the end of the Muromachi period and the beginning of the Momoyama period is called ko-tsuba (old). From that time, new styles of tsuba appeared and reflected artist's original ideas, and this innovation is by Nobuie. It is also thought that Nobuie is one of artists who established the custom of signing their tsuba.

Compared with same period's other master smith, Kaneie, Nobuie's work has a solid feeling, and his tsuba are thick, and the central areas are depressed. There is a large volume going from the seppa-dai to the mimi (rim) and these are his characteristic points.

Sometimes, people praise Nobuie's tsuba saying that they provide the character and most important element of the koshirae. In his early work he used two types of signatures called a hanare mei and futoji (thick) mei, and this is supposed to be familiar to tosogu lovers. Concerning his active period, researcher's opinions are varied, but there was little research done before the early modern Showa period. Looking at the "Geishu ju Nobuie" tsuba and the signature, the hanare-mei signature work seems to appear first, and then futoji signature. The change from the futoji style to the signature style on the "Geishu ju Nobuie" signature style is supposed to be a natural evolution, and this is a recent opinion.

This tsuba has a full and round shape, and a feeling of having an abundant amount of iron. The wheel spokes never come near the center or hub with the seppa dai, and the sukashi carving is gentle and dynamic. The karakusa ke-bori work is relaxed and presents a feeling of lively motion.

This tsuba is listed in an li family historical document, "Katana Tsuba Oshigata" (Showa 8 (1933) by Yamakoshi Tomisaburo), with the entry describing it: "iron wheel shape, sukitori, uchikaeshi-mimi, katahitsu (hitsu on one side) closed with lead, made around the Taiei period (1521-1527), meibutsu-tsuba". This is owned by the li family".

Explanation by Kubo Yasuko

October Token Teirei Kansho kai

Date: October 9th (second Saturday of October)

Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Imoto Yuki

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi Juyo Bijutsuhin

Mei: Masatsune

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7.5 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada mixed with itame hada at the koshimoto, and there is a slightly visible hada; there are frequent fine ji-nie, clear jifu utsuri, and a bright steel color.

Hamon: chu-suguha style mixed with ko-choji, ko-midare, gunome, and square shaped features; there are frequent ashi and yo, frequent ko-nie, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight suguha style, and the tip is yakizume.

This is a Ko-Bizen Masasune tachi classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. There is clear funbari visible in the ubu tachi, and the entire sori is shallow. There is a narrow shape with a koshizori, and going toward the tip, the sori becomes smaller, and from the shape you can judge this as work from no later than the early Kamakura period.

The tachi's hamon is a wide suguha style. On the ura side, the upper half is mixed with large choji and square gunome, and this is mixed with sections which appear like a newer hamon, and from these details, some people voted for Fukuoka Ichimonji, Osafune Nagamitsu and Motoshige. But if this were their work, the hamon on the ura side would be more prominent, there would be sori at the tip, the shape would be different, and if it were Ichimonji work, the hamon would be wider with a high gorgeous midare hamon. In any of these cases, there would be clear midare utsuri.

However, looking at the tachi's jigane, there are clear jifu-utsuri and you can see that the dark areas come up nearly to the shinogi-ji. If you consider the utsuri's appearance and the shape together, it could be from no later than the Kamakura Period. Also, if you pay attention to the omote side hamon, there is a suguha style mixed with ko-midare and with nie. From this it is possible to think that this might be a Ko-Bizen style.

In voting, beside these opinions, there were some votes for Ko-Ichimonji. The school is connected to the Ko-Bizen and Fukuoka Ichimonji schools, and had a transient existence. Sometimes their work is similar to the Ko-Bizen style and is difficult to judge. This tachi hamon is mixed with a youthful appearing hamon, and at this time, the Ko-Ichimonji school name is treated as a correct answer.

Kantei To No. 2: Katana Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Mei: Tanba no kami Yoshimichi

tame (for) Naito Kurouemon daidai (from generation to generation)

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun 7 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada, and some areas are mixed with a strong nagare hada; there are abundant ji-nie and fine chikei.

Hamon: straight long yakidashi at the koshimoto; above this there is a wide hamon in a notare style mixed with gunome and ko-gunome.

There are frequent ashi and yo mixed with shimaba and a dense nioiguchi; there are abundant nie mixed with rough nie; some areas of the hamon have a crumbled uneven shape; there are frequent tobiyaki and yubashiri; there are some stripe-like midare areas; there are frequent kinsuji, sunagshi, and thick nie-suji.

Boshi: there is a wide yakiba in a suguha style; there are hakikake, the tip is sharp, and there is a return with a sharp stop.

This is Tokubetsu Juyo Token katana by the Shodai Tanba no kami Yoshimichi. It is wide, the kissaki is long, the blade is thick, and the majority of people recognized it as Keicho Shinto period work.

Yoshimichi was the son of Mino Koku Kanemichi and one of four brothers (the Mishina school) who moved to Yamashiro with their father. The shinogi-ji masame hada is clear, and the forging is mixed with a strong nagare hada, and you can't miss these characteristic points of the school. The hamon has a straight yakidashi at the moto, and above this, it is a high midare. There are abundant nie and some large crumbled areas in the strong hamon. If you examine it carefully, there are tobiyaki and yubashiri mixed together, and this produces a stripe-like appearance. Inside of the hamon there are long sunagashi and niesuji and many hataraki, and we can see signs of a sudareba hamon which will be a style for the next generation.

Yoshimichi is supposed to be the originator of the sudareba hamon, and a historical sword book lists a "sudareba crumbled" style (Aremi Mei-zukushi Kosho), and says "clear or obvious sudareba are very rarely seen" (Shinto Bengi)". As they describe it, inside of the gyosho (flowing) style midare hamon, some areas are mixed with a sudareba shaped hamon, and this is his characteristic point. This katana shows this characteristic very well, and a majority of the people saw this point, and this was impressive.

This tachi will be exhibited at the NBTHK Museum's exhibit "The 50th Anniversary of the Tokubetsu Juyo Classification: Japanese Sword Masterpieces". This sword will be shown in the third part of the

exhibit from November 23 - December 22. Please enjoy viewing this sword at the exhibit.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mei: Suishinshi Masahide

daseba sensen kobo unohana no gotoshi

futa-koshi ryo-wan ichiwari waka-uri no gotoshi (this is a saidan mei)

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 9 bu

Sori: slightly over 4 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: straight yakidashi at the moto and above this it is a notare mixed with large gunome. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and some areas are mixed with rough nie; there are frequent sunagashi and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight with an o-maru point.

This is the Shinshinto founder Suishinshi Masahide's work. His active period was from the Anei to Bunsei eras (1772-1829) or about 50 years. He also changed his style of work during his career. Early in his career, around the Tenmei to Kansei (1781-1800) periods, his work was modeled after Osaka-Shinto work, and he energetically produced works in Tsuda Sukehiro's toran-ba style. This history was described in Ansei 8 (1779) when Kamata Gyosho wrote in "Shinto Bengi" that "Sukehiro is the best master smith in the present generation and toranba became very popular again at that time". Masahide also wrote in his "Token Bengi", "looking at his past work, he was influenced by fashion" when he made this kind of style.

This is a representative example of Masahide's toranba work. It is likely early Shinshinto work, when Kanbun Shinto swords had a gentle shape, poor hiraniku, and a narrow shinogi-ji. There is a tight ko-itame hada, there is a straight yakidashi at the moto, there are abundant nie, and the toranba notare hamon is mixed with large gunome.

In early and late Edo period, the popular toran midare hamon fell into two different classifications. One type was primarily an o-gunome hamon which formed toran shapes, and was an o-gunome style, just like this katana. The other style followed the shapes on the top of the waves (ha-to or wave shape) and had a faithful ha-to style. The toranba style's originator Sukehiro made swords with the ha-to style.

His hamon had a dense nioiguchi, fine ha-nie, the jiba (jigane and hamon) were clear, and we do not see many yakidashi.

Examining the katana nie carefully, we see that the ha-nie extends into the ji, and form black hadaka-nie (single-nie), and this is one of Masahide's strong characteristics, and many people observed this and voted for him. Besides Masahide, some people voted for other smiths who made o-gunome hamon such as Omi no kami Sukenao. If it were Sukenao's work, there would be an Osaka yakidashi and the midare valley widths would be wide and there would be a midare hamon.

Note: the nakago is shown at 90% of the actual size.

This katana is being exhibited at the NBTHK Museum's exhibit "The 50th Anniversary of the Tokubetsu Juyo Classification: Japanese Sword Masterpieces".

Kantei To No. 4: Katana Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Mumei: den Rai Kuniyuki

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4.5 bu

Sori: 5.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume; some areas show nagare-hada, and the hada is slightly visible. There are frequent ji-nie, chikei, very pale bo-utsuri, and a bright jigane.

Hamon: based on chu-suguha, and mixed with ko-choji, gunome, and ko-midare. There are frequent ashi and yo, frequent ko-nie, some hotsure, some areas at the top of the hamon have small yubashiri; there are frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, nie-suji and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight with hakikake; the tip is komaru.

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

This sword has a Honami Kochu origami, and is judged as Rai Kuniyuki's work and is classified as Tokubetsu Juyo token. The funbari at the koshimoto is not prominent. The original shape was wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not different, there is a

koshi-sori, the tip has sori, and there is a wa-zori shape with a chu-kissaki. It has a mid-Kamakura period dynamic shape.

On the omote and ura there are bo-hi carved through the nakago. Kuniyuki has two styles: an “in” or quiet style, and a “yo” or more expressive and outgoing or cheerful style. This sword is an example of his “yo” style, and is well preserved and healthy. It is thick and heavy, and because of this, some people voted for Shinshinto work. However, if it were shinshinto work, other elements should be apparent such as a poor hiraniku and a narrow shinogi-ji width.

This katana has a well forged itame hada, a bright jigane, and towards the shinogi there are pale bo-utsuri. The hamon is based on a chu-suguha pattern and mixed with ko-choji and gunome, and there are abundant hataraki including ashi and yo, and frequent nie inside of the hamon. These hataraki along with the shape show the Rai school’s characteristic points very well. In addition, the hamon is mixed with a komidare style hamon and a complex midare pattern, and the edge of the hamon has very small kijimata style yubashiri, and from these details, you can judge this as work by Kuniyuki.

From among the Rai school smiths, many people voted for Rai Kunimitsu. However, if it were his work, in the midare hamon, we would see a clear gunome and a prominent ko-notare hamon. Besides this almost correct answer, some voted for Yamato work. If it were Yamato work, the shinogi would be high and the shinogi-ji would be wide, and the jigane would be mixed with strong nagare-masame hada.

Kantei To No.5: Katana

Mei: Kurihara Nobuhide
Meiji 3 nen (1870) 12 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 2.05 sun

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada; there are frequent ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: gunome mixed with choji and square shaped gunome; the hamon contains small togariba and small gunome. There are long ashi, shimaba, yo, abundant nie, and slightly uneven crumbling or crumbled nie. In the center there are thick and long kinsuji and sunagashi and there is a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi with hakikake. The omote point has a togari shape, and the ura has a round shape; there is a return.

This is a Kurihara Nobuhide katana dated Meiji 3. It is wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is almost inconspicuous. The shinogi-ji is narrow, there is poor hiraniku, and the long kissaki shape and the midare hamon's long ashi look like they extend to the edge, and these are sufficient Shinshinto characteristic points. From the slightly prominent sakizori, some people thought this was Muromachi period work, but from the shape, hamon, and overall appearance this cannot be correct.

In the latter half of the Edo period, the school's work showed saki zori, very poor hiraniku, a poor fukura, and a very sharp appearing shape that is characteristic of the Kiyomaro school. Among the Kiyomaro school smiths, Nobuhide was very good at carving hormono, and his work produced a strong impression. He inherited his teacher Kiyomaro's mainly gunome midare style hamon, but after the Ansei to Manen period his characteristic hamon are mixed with large square shaped gunome, small togariba, and gunome, and evolved into a type of square shaped midare hamon. This katana's upper half shows these characteristics very well. In addition, inside of the hamon, there are round areas (shimaba) which look like there is no hardened steel present, and you cannot miss these.

In voting, besides the correct answer, some people voted for Takei Naotane, and Unju Korekazu. Naotane is good with Bizen Den style work and Soshu Den style work, but if were his Soshu Den work, the hamon would be a notare style midare hamon, and the jigane would appear to be uzumaki hada. Also, if it were Unju Korekazu's work, these used to be described as having a "Bizen Den choji hamon with nie", and the entire hamon would be choji midare.

Shijo Kantei To No. 776 in the September, 2021 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tachi by Osafune Motoshige, dated Kenmu 1 (1334).

This tachi is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not different. Although the tachi is suriage, there is koshizori. The tip has sori and there is a chu-kissaki, and from the shape, you can judge this as work from the end of the Kamakura Period to the early Nanbokucho Period. The hamon is a suguha style mixed with ko-choji, ko-gunome, square shape ko-gunome, and togariba. There are hataraki such as ashi and yo, and the entire hamon has a saka

influence. Besides Motoshige, this kind of hamon is very similar to Osafune mainstream smiths, such as Kagemitsu.

However, the jigane is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, the entire hada is visible, and there are jifu, and these are Bizen branch school characteristic points. Or in other words, we can say this is just Motoshige's own characteristic jigane. On the omote the square gunome extend about 4 sun above the top of the hamon. In the valleys of the hamon there are togariba, and this is Motoshige's unique characteristic hamon. The boshi is midarekomi, and the sharp tip is also one of his characteristic points.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Motoshige, and besides this correct answer, some people voted for Chikakage.

Chikakage has several similar hamon in his swords, and the jigane is relatively similar, and from these details, the answer is understandable. However, Chikakage used many gyaku-tagane strokes in his signature, and this is a major characteristic point. This point differs from the hints, so please pay attention to these details.

This tachi is being shown at the NBTHK Museum's exhibit "The 50th Anniversary of the Tokubetsu Juyo Classification: Japanese Sword Masterpieces" during the second phase of the exhibit from October 26-November 21.

At this time, I would like to talk about how to use oil on the nakago.

Looking at some Japanese sword introductory books discussing nakago maintenance, there are statements that if you use a cloth with oil to maintain the blade, the oil remaining on your fingers, will be sufficient to rub on the nakago. At the same time, some books state that too much oil on the nakago could have adverse effects.

Of course, I did not have to experiment to be sure about this. In the past, I have often seen too much oil left on a nakago which changed the rust color from an old, calm black rust to a red rust. Still, I think some oil on a nakago is a good idea.

Even aged, rusted nakago during a national convention, or in a small convention, are handled by dozens or hundreds of people, so besides putting oil on the blade, it would be a good idea to use an oil saturated flannel cloth, and apply oil to the nakago surface. In this case, as above, not too much oil should be put on the nakago.

In the case of gendaito, where the nakago are a new and an unruined color, it would be a good idea after handling them to carefully use an oil cloth.

In the past sometimes I have seen and heard that some people lend gendaito to be examined for kanteito, and after many people handle the sword, people put it away without any maintenance. Then at a later time, when the blade is examined again, many areas on the nakago which have been heavily handled can become rusty and discolored.

I wish people would pay attention to the maintenance and condition of the sword's nakago as well as of the sword.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai