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Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Tachi

Mei: Bizen koku Osafune ju Chikakage

with: kuro-roiro (black urushi color) agehacho-mon (swallowtail butterfly design) kanagu uchigatana koshirae

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 5 bu 2 rin (74.3 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 9 rin (2.4 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 7 rin (2.95 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 3 rin (1.9 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 7 bu 8 rin (17.5 cm)

Nakago sori: 7 rin (0.2 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. The blade is wide and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. The blade is thick, and although it is suriage, there is a large koshizori. The point is a chu-kissaki. The jigane shows a well forged itame mixed with mokume hada, and there is some nagare hada. There are abundant ji-nie, some chikei, and midare utsuri with dark jifu areas. The hamon is based on chu-suguha, and contains ko-choji, ko-gunome, and square shaped features. There are frequent ashi, some saka-ashi, some yo, frequent ko-nie, and a slightly worn down nioiguchi. The boshi is almost straight above the yokote, and almost yakizume. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi with kaku-dome. The nakago is suriage and the tip is kiri. The new yasurime on the omote are o-sujichigai, and on the ura the yasurime are kate-sagari. The old yasurime are kate-sagari. There are three mekugi-ana, and one is closed. On the omote around the nakago tip, located slightly toward the mune edge, there is a long kanji signature.

Osafune Chikakage is supposed to be Nagamitsu's student or his son. Today we have existing signatures from Showa 4 (1315) to Jowa

3 (1347) covering a period of more than thirty years. His active period is ten years later than Nagamitsu's son Kagemitsu, and from this it is thought that he might be Kagemitsu's student or a younger brother. Several existing Kagemitsu early blades have a Chikakage daimei, and from this, it is thought that their relationship was close, and some opinions are that the younger brother theory is correct. His mei on long blades such as tachi commonly contain "Bizen koku" or "Bishu Osafune ju Chikakage". His latest dated work is a Jowa 3 dated tachi signed "Bizen koku ju Osafune Chikakage" in which the Osafune kanji is under the ju kanji. This means that Osafune was considered to be a school name.

Chikakage made strong or deep gyaku-tagane or reverse chisel strokes in the "kage" kanji character, and this suggests that he was related to, or a predecessor of later Nanbokucho smiths such as Yoshikage, Norikage, Morokage, and Mitsukage, and this theory is very likely to be correct. Yoshikage actually has a signature similar to the Jowa 3 Chikakage mei, and Norikage has a blade in which the "Osafune" kanji is used as a school name.

Most of Chikakage's work consists of tachi, and he has some naginata (naoshi wakizashi) and wakizashi, but it is interesting that he has very few existing tanto which are seen frequently in Kagemitsu's work. Chikakage's characteristic points are that the jigane has a visible hada often mixed with o-hada; when compared with Kanemitsu's work, there is a less refined jigane; and the ji-utsuri are not clear. He has several different styles of hamon which are similar to Kanemitsu's hamon, and there are relatively prominent nie. His characteristic boshi shapes tend to emphasize the "sansaku boshi", which rises above the yokote, is a shallow notare, and sometimes there is a tsukiage style sharp return, which can be biased toward the hamon side or mune side.

Although it is suriage, this tachi still has a large koshizori, is wide, slightly thick, and has kept its rich niku and healthy shape. The jigane is well forged with itame mixed with mokume, and compared with Chikakage's usual work, there is a refined, carefully forged and visible hada.

The hamon is based on a chu-suguha, and mixed with ko-choji, ko-gunome, and square shaped features. Although it is not a saka ashi hamon, some areas contain saka-ashi, and there are fine even ha-nie from the moto to the tip, and these are Chikakage's characteristic points. The entire tachi is beautiful, and exhibits outstanding workmanship among Chikakage's works, and this should be considered as one of the best of his masterpieces.

The uchigatana koshirae is supposed to be work from the latter half of the Edo period, and is an Owari style koshirae, and the kanagu were made by the Owari okakae smith Ooka Masataka. The habaki

also includes details showing it was made with Owari habaki techniques, and this historical information adds to this tachi's value.

Explanation by Ishii Akira, and photo by Imoto Yuki

Shijo Kantei To No. 780

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 780 Shijo Kantei To is February 5, 2022. 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 February 5, 2022 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: Tachi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 7 bu 5 rin (68.9 cm)

Sori: slightly over 8 bu (2.5 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 5 rin (2.9 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 5 rin (2.25 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 2 bu (3.65 cm)

Nakago length: slightly over 6 sun 9 bu (20.95 cm)

Nakago sori: slightly less 1 bu (0.2 cm)

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with a ihorimune. It is wide, and although it is suriage, there is a large wa-sori, and there is a slightly long chu-kissaki.

The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, and shows the school's unique hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and nie-utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon contains prominent gunome, there are ashi and yo, frequent ko-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. On the omote there are yubashiri, and there is a bright and clear nioiguchi. The nakago is suriage, the tip is kiri and the yasurime are a shallow katte-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana. On the omote, on the nakago tip, along the mune side there is a kanji signature.

Tosogu Kansho

Juyo Tosogu

Botan shishi zu (peony and shishi design) fuchi-kashira Mei: Toshinaga with kao

These shishi have an intense or strong presence. Under the large peony the shishi presents its dignity. In this composition, it looks like his head could leap from the kashira at any moment. This appearance is unique and surprising. The iron ground with the tsuchime (hammer stroke surface) finish on the kashira makes it appear to be an image from a rock cave. On the fuchi the shishi's rugged face has a powerful expression and is looking over its shoulder. The peony petals and the shishi shape were engraved with a strong and smooth taka-nikubori technique, and the graceful gold inlay with delicate kebori at the top provides a feeling of tenseness. In addition, the shishi's teeth peek through his open mouth, and were made with silver inlay. The more you look, this appears as a bold work, and at the same time, a work which exhibits a delicate feeling. Only Toshinaga's work can exhibit this kind of design and skill.

The peony and shishi are used not only in tosogu designs, but also in all kinds of art, and are a familiar combination. The reason why they are used together is that the shishi is the king of beasts and peony is the king of flowers. Sometimes we hear that a "shishi has an insect-like pest annoying him". A shishi is supposed to be invincible, but he is only afraid of insects which can breed under his fur, damage his skin, and try to consume him. However, this insect will die if it is hit by evening dew dripping from a peony. That is why a shishi will rest under a peony flower: this is a peaceful place for a shishi. Looking again the fuchi-kashira with this type of view point, we feel that deep inside, the shishi is enduring an intense and maybe painful feeling.

"What do you rely on ? Where do you have a peaceful place where can you rest with confidence"? This was asked by a monk in Nanzenji Temple's Hojo room with wide engawa (hallways or corridors) and ranma (carved panels over the doorways). The shishi's place is under the peony.

This work was described in the No.4 issue of "Tagane no Hana" (The flower of the Chisel) which is a tosogu catalog series which listed tosogu master works and which was published in the Meiji period.

Shijo Kantei To No. 777 in the October, 2021 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by Hankei.

Hankei's tanto and hirazukuri wakizashi are prominent, just like the Keicho Shinto period's characteristic style. The blades are wide, have a short length for the width, and stubby hocho-like shapes. On the other hand Hankei also has blades which are long for their width.

However, a blade like this is rare for him, with a prominent narrow tip, a poor fukura, and stubby shape, and the hints refer to this.

The jigane is itame mixed with large itame and mokume, and the hada is visible. There are frequent thick black chikei and this is Hankei's unique higiki-hada.

The hamon is based on notare and gunome. There is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi, modeled after Etchu Norishige's style, and these are obviously his characteristic points.

The nakago style is unique and in voting, almost no one missed Hankei's name.

In the last issue I was talking about Kiyomaro's kinsuji. At this time I will talk about the internal structure of some Japanese swords which I have seen in the past.

This is a story from around thirty years ago. One of the museums in the Tokyo area which studied early modern period archeology found Japanese swords among grave goods in an early modern tomb. The museum asked me for an opinion about this sword and I visited them.

I am not a specialist in archeology, so I do not have much knowledge, and could not be expected to provide an expert opinion or observation. However, at that time, I had an opportunity to look at the swords recovered from the tomb.

Usually, Japanese swords are solid appearing, and we can not see into the interior of a sword's structure. At that time when I was able to examine these swords, they had been buried for a long time, and so were extensively rusted, and the condition of the iron in the interior had deteriorated.

Looking at one Japanese sword, its appearance suggested it was composed of dozens of fine wire-like iron strands bundled together. I was asked to look at several swords, and they all had the same kind of structure. I was just looking primarily at the exterior parts of the sword, and I could not see any shingane.

Of course, it is a possibility that the blades were from a very old period and that today's sword making methods are different. From just looking at these several examples, I don't know what kind of Japanese swords would have this kind of structure.

But looking at today's sword making process, the iron material is forged with a shita-kitae stage, and then an age-kitae stage, and then a sunobe is forged, and hizukuri forging produces the final shape, and among the many Japanese swords made, it seems likely that most have this type of structure. Thirty years ago, on the way home, I was thinking that it was likely that in the interior of this type of fine bundled iron wire with a high carbon content, some strands could form kinsuji after yakiire.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

