

Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Katana
Mumei: Yukimitsu
Owner: NBTHK

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 9 bu 7 rin (69.6 cm)
Sori: 5 bu 1 rin (1.55 cm)
Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)
Sakihaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 Cm)
Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 7 bu 3 rin (20.4 cm)
Nakago sori: slight

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with a mitsumune. This katana has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a standard thickness, a shallow sori, and a chu-kissaki. The jigane is ko-itame mixed with itame hada and nagare hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie and frequent chikei. The hamon is chu-suguha with a slight notare pattern and there are kuichigaiba. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant and even ko-nie, and some fine kinsuji. The boshi is straight with a komaru, and the tip has hakikake. The horimono on the omote and ura are bo-hi carved through into the nakago. The nakago is suriage and has suffered from an extensive amount of shortening. The nakago tip is kiri, and the yasurime are kiri. There are three mekugi-ana and the blade is mumei.

According to many old sword books, Sagami Koku Tosaburo Yukimitsu is supposed to have been Shintogo Kunimitsu's student. He was slightly older than Masamune and a senior smith, His signed works consist of only two blades, and his two masterpieces are imperial treasures. One was presented to the Mino Koku lord Imao Takegoshi Masanobu from Iesasu, and the other is the Maeda family's heirloom blade which has been classified as Kokuho. Both blades have suguha hamon, and their style indicates a teacher-apprentice relationship with Kunimitsu. However, Yukimitsu's mumei works which have been judged to be his show numerous styles and some remind us

of work by Masamune, Norishige, and Rai Kunitsugu. There are notable style midareba, and hitatsura hamon among these. In fact, old judged blades are seen which are similar to this blade, and since the Muromachi period old sword books state that he used many types of styles.

Concerning this detail, Honma Kunzan said “he seems to have too many styles, and we have to reconsider this.” Examining this sword, Honma said that “the workmanship is Soshu Den jo-jo saku (best of best), and if not by Masamune, not by Sadamune, not by Norishige, or not by one of the other 10 jutetsu smiths, it could be Yukimitsu’s work”. He indicated at the time of appraisal, Yukimitsu’s name is the only choice we have left in trying to identify a maker for this blade. Yukimitsu’s common characteristic points are that the jiba (jigane and hamon) have frequent nie, there are many hataraki such as chikei, kinsuji, and yubashiri, the blade is full of nie which give it a charming appearance, and there is no question about it being among Soshu Den’s best master works.

This katana has a standard width, a chu-kissaki, and a well-proportioned shape. The jigane is ko-itame mixed with itame and mokume hada, the entire ji is well forged, there are abundant dense ji-nie, in addition, frequent chikei with a varying thickness and length are prominent, and there is a strong impression made by the steel. The chu-suguha based hamon with a dense nioiguchi has abundant even nie from the moto to the saki, and shows evidence of high quality Soshu Den jo-jo saku master work.

Although, it is mumei, it was judged as being Soshu Den work. However, Yukihiro’s work and Yamato Taima work are similar, and this katana has some nagare hada, and kuichigai-ba. However, if it were Yamato work, the shinogi ji’s width, the shinogi’s height, and the shape of the boshi do not show Yamato characteristics. Yamato work also has more emphasis on nagare hada, and their hamon are supposed to have ashi and yo plus more frequent hataraki such as sunagashi and kinsuji. This katana’s jigane has frequent chikei, the hamon has beautiful bright ha-nie, and from the high level of the workmanship, we wish to confirm the judgement that this is Yukimitsu’s work.

This katana was part of the famous American collection belonging to Dr. Walter Compton. This was the first sword classified as Tokubetsu Juyo Token and it was donated by Dr Compton to the NBTHK.

Explanation by and photo Ishii Akira

Shijo Kantei To No. 783

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 783 Shijo Kantei To is May 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 May 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: Tanto

Length: 9 sun 3 bu (27.85 cm)

Sori: slight uchizori

Motohaba: 8 bu 5 rin (2.5 cm)

Motokasane: slightly over 2 bu (0.65 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 3 bu 5 rin (10.1 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with a mitsumune. It is wide, long, and thick, and there is a slight uchizori. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, there are abundant ji-nie and chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has ko-ashi, a dense nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi. The horimono on the omote is a bonji and a fudo-myo-o relief inside of a frame. The ura has bonji, and below that, it has koshi-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu and the tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are a shallow kate-sagari. There are two mekugi-ana. On the omote, along the mune side there is a kanji signature, and on the nakago center, there is a large sized horimono carver's soe-mei (companion signature).

Juyo Tosogu

Shi-kunshi zu (four plant design) kozuka

Mei: Natsuo

Accompanied by an old box

This kozuka is from the end of the Edo Period to the early Meiji Period, and is work by the master smith Kano Natsuo. The ground is polished shibuichi. On the omote there is a plum blossom and orchid design in takabori with colored inlay. The ura has a bamboo and chrysanthemum design in katakiri kebori and with flat inlay. Natsuo

used different techniques on the omote and the ura and there are large blank spaces. Each area creates a feeling of open air and space, and this is one reason why people describe Natsuo as a master smith.

The shi-kunshi design uses a combination of four plants, and here they are a plum blossom, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum. From their elegance, they can be regarded as noble symbols, and this is also a typical Oriental painting subject. Natsuo himself studied under the Maruyama Shijo school's painter Nakajima Raisho. This work is a painting technique reflected or transferred to metal work, and it allows us to appreciate this work as a pair of paintings.

This was supposed to have been owned by Sir Hasegawa Kikutaro, and at one time in his later years, Natsuo himself appraised this as his own work, and it is accompanied by a box. On the box, it is written "shibuichi iroe usuniku-zogan ke-bori kogatana Kano Natuo Soten no saku (work in the prime of life) Meiji 16 (1883) Mizunoto Hitsuji shushu aki shirusu kore" and this makes this work more interesting.

Explanation by Kugiya Natoko

March Token Teirei Kansho Kai

Date: March 12th (second Saturday of March)
Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium
Lecturer: Hinohara Dai

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: Yasutsuna

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 6 sun 4 bu

Sori: 9.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume and there are some areas with nagare hada; the entire ji has a large pattern and is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, jifu, jifu-utsuri, and a dark colored steel.

Hamon: yakiotoshi at the koshimoto; above this there is a suguha style ko-midare hamon mixed with ko-choji. There are hotsure at the edge, uchinoke, yubashiri, ashi, yo, and a worn down nioioguchi with abundant nie; in some places, a ha-hada is visible. There are kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight with a yakizume style.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi with kaku-dome ends above the nakago (i.e. there are square shaped ends on the hi).

The kantei-to shown at this meeting are intended to help the attendees to learn about current strong trends in sword appreciation. We are showing typical individual smith's or school's work, and examining their typical styles.

The first Yasutsuna sword is the Mori family's tachi, and is known to exhibit Yasutsuna's typical style.

This is long, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshi zori, going forward, the tip falls down (i.e. the sori becomes more shallow going forward), and there is a small kissaki. This style is from the end of the Heian to the early Kamakura period. The jigane has a large visible hada pattern, there is a dark steel color, and jifu utsuri, and this is a very good example of Ko-Hoki characteristic forging.

Yasutsuna's hamon are basically suguha mixed with frequent ko-midare and ko-choji. However, people point out that often his midare hamon are mixed with individual ko-gunome and ko-notare. Among his hamon, ko-gunome and ko-notare elements are relatively prominent. However, there are other examples which show only ko-gunome and ko-notare hamon from the moto to the saki.

On some of Yasutsugu's work which has passed NBTHK shinsa, the hamon does not have prominent ko-gunome, the entire hamon presents an impression of being well controlled, and the signature is small but neat and tidy.

This tachi was donated to the NBTHK nearly 40 years ago, and every time I look at it, I feel that this tachi easily exhibits Yasutsuna's important characteristic points.

Kantei To No. 2: Tanto

Mei: shu-mei (written in red ink): Masamune

Length: 8 sun 1 bu

Sori: none

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume, and the hada is visible; there are abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei.

Hamon: ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome; there are hotsure at the hamon's border, yubashiri, ashi, yo, abundant nie, and some strong bright nie; the hamon is bright and clear; there are frequent kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is a sharp style; there are yubashiri and frequent hakikake.

Horimono: on the omote there is a sanko-tsuka ken; the ura has bonji and gomabashi.

Soshu Masamune has been listed as a master smith since the book "Kanchi-in Hon Meizukushi" was written, and in the Muromachi period, among old token books, textbooks, and in books written for samurai, he is consistently highly rated as a master smith.

However, in Tensho 19 (1591) when the "Shinkan Hiden Sho" was published and provided ratings and valuations for the period, the highest rated smiths were the Kyoto smiths, and the best smith was Munechika. The Tsukushi (Kyushu) style's best smith was Bungo Yukihiro, and both smith's blades were valued at a cost of 100 kan. At the same time, Masamune's work was valued at half that much, or 50 kan.

Masamune's active period was 300 years before the book was published, and Yukihiro's active period was 100 years earlier. Older classic master works were highly rated and supposed to be reasonable.

After that, at the end of the Muromachi period and at the beginning of the Momoyama period, Masamune's swords were found in the collections of Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu, and also used as gift items, and his swords were frequently served as rewards or honors. In many books, it has been pointed out that you can observe the increases in the value of Masamune's work, and in the Edo period, he was considered as one of the three best master smiths, and the best of the best master smith.

The Tokugawa bakufu's extremely high regard and valuation for Masamune's swords resulted in all the daimyo wanting his work, and because his signed work is very rare, a trend developed to recognize and judge work as Masamune's, even though most were unsigned or mumei. Considering the feudal system's authoritarian nature and limited availability of detailed information, if swords were judged to be Masamune's work, it was likely that few, if any, people would openly disagree about such an attribution.

At the beginning of the Meiji period, there were opportunities to compare and study each daimyo family's swords and other swords which were judged as being Masamune swords, and there was a tendency to ignore Masamune's work. Based on this history, and the result of Honma Junji's extensive studies of the literature and actual

swords, he stated that Masamune definitely existed, and was an excellent and highly skilled master smith. In addition, among the existing numerous works judged as Masamune swords, you could identify genuine Masamune swords from their features and workmanship. Consequently, it was possible to carefully examine many presumptive Masamune swords, and to identify the genuine Masamune swords among them. As you know, the NBTHK has inherited this viewpoint.

The No. 2 kanteito today is the Mino Kuni O-gaki clan's Toda family heirloom Masamune tanto, and is known by the nickname "Hachisuka Masamune", and was classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. Honma concluded that the horimono and the jiba (jigane and hamon) are typical of Masamune's work, so it was classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin.

This is from the latter half of the Kamakura Period. It has a standard width and tanto shape. The ji has frequent chikei, the hamon has Soshu Den master work characteristics based on the notare pattern and the gyo (semi-cursive) style midare, and the edge of the hamon and the ji have bright beautiful nie, with dark colored kinsuji.

The typical Masamune evaluation is correct in this case, and I wish you would study this work as a reference for Masamune's work.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mumei: Aoe

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 1.5 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume, and the entire finely forged ji is visible. There are ji-nie and chikei; the utsuri along the mune side is midare shaped, and along the hamon side is suji shaped.

Hamon: chu-suguha; there are frequent ashi and yo, some gyaku (slanted) shapes, a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie, and nie suji inside of the hamon.

Boshi: shallow notarekomi with a komaru.

This is greatly suriage and mumei. It supposed to be early Nanbokucho period Aoe work.

The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, the entire ji is finely forged and visible. The ji has a dark blue color and is clear. There are frequent chikei, and the ji has a chirimen-hada, and there are dan-utsuri.

Usually, Aoe dan utsuri along the hamon side forms fine suji or lines, and becomes a shallow notare; some places inside of the shallow notare show gunome shapes. But this katana's overall bo-utsuri actively changes to a choji-midare shape, and this is unusual.

The suguha hamon has a tight nioiguchi with nioiguchi type nie. The shape is wide, there is a long kissaki, and these are features seen after early to peak Nanbokucho period work.

For the individual smith's name, likely candidates are Tsuguyoshi and Tsugunao. If it were work by Yoshitsugu and Naotsugu, the blade would be slightly narrow with a smaller kissaki, and the hamon would have more frequent nie.

Kantei To No. 4: Katana

Mei: Muramasa

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 5 bu

Sori: 4.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame, and the entire jihada is visible; there are ji-nie and a slightly dark steel color.

Hamon: the bottom half is gunome midare, and three continuous gunome form a sanbon-sugi style. The hamon is also mixed with hako-midare, and the upper half is a chu-suguha style hamon. The omote and the ura are same. There is a worn down nioiguchi with nie.

Boshi: shallow notare with a komaru.

This is around 2 shaku 2 sun and shorter than Muramasa's usual length. The widths at the moto and saki are not different, there is a chu-kissaki, and the upper half has sori. This is from a little after the latter half of the Muromachi Period, and is an uchigatana from the Eisho Period.

Looking at the hamon, the bottom half is a midare hamon, and the upper half is a suguha style. This kind of hamon where the upper and lower halves are different is seen sometimes in the work of Sue Koto smiths such as Heianjo Nagayoshi, and the Sue Bizen and Muramasa schools.

Looking at the bottom half of the midare hamon, three continuous gunome form a sanbon-sugi-like areas and also begin to form slightly box-like shapes, and this is a shallow characteristic hako-midare hamon.

This is different from Heianjo Nagayoshi's tight and bright colored refined forging. The steel color is slightly dark, there is a worn down nioiguchi, and you can see Muramasa's characteristics.

Kantei To No.5: Katana

Mei: ju To-eizan Shinobu-oka atari Nakasone Kotetsu saku
Enpo 2 nen (1674) 6 gatsu kicho-nichi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun

Sori: slightly less than 7 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are ji-nie, chikei, jifu areas in the hada, and a clear ji.

Hamon: short yakidashi at the moto, and above this, there are continuous gunome which form a juzuba type hamon. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and a bright and clear hamon.

Boshi: above the yokote there is one yakikomi, and above this it is komaru.

This is from Nakasone Kotetsu's peak era, in Empo 2, and an example of his Hanetora period work.

This is 2 shaku 3 sun in length, and the sori is less than 7 bu, but for a Kotetsu katana with a usual length, it has a large sori. If we put this up for kanteito, from the typical jiba (jigane and hamon), a majority of people would vote for Kotetsu. Sometimes however, a few people would vote for next generation smith Okimasa.

Looking at the jigane, there is a tight ko-itame hada, the hada is visible, there is strong forging, the jigane is bright and clear, but in some areas there are dark blue colored jifu shapes called teko-tetsu. Sometimes, I have seen token books which stated that Kotetsu's teko-tetsu appears at the koshimoto. However, teko-tetsu can appear in various places, and in some cases, this dark color can appear from the moto to the tip.

This katana's teko-tetsu is a relatively pale color, and the color differences between the teko-tetsu and other areas is not very pronounced.

The hamon has a short yakidashi at the moto, and above this, there are continuous gunome, which is similar to a juzuba hamon.

Kotetsu's work has yakidashi in all the periods in which he worked. In the early half of his career, the Hanetora period, the yakidashi are

relatively long. In the latter half of his career, the Hakotoro period, the yakidashi are shorter.

Kotetsu has several juzuba styles. There are semi-circular gunome which are constant and invariant, and appear like one has cut a string of beads into a string of half beads. There are also many hamon which are notare, and inside of the notare hamon, there are two or three continuous gunome, just like we see here.

This katana has Kotetsu's characteristic frequent thick ashi, dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and a bright and clear hamon.

The boshi has one yakikomi above the yokote and this is a typical Kotetsu boshi.

In general, Okimasa's jiba (jigane and hamon) are not as clear as Kotetsu's, and his hamon are formed by two continuous gunome, there are tobiyaki which are just like they were formed by drop-like windows in the clay, and ha-nie going up into the ji and which are rough looking. In addition, in Okimasa's katana, we do not often see a Kotetsu-style boshi.

The nakago photo and oshigata are 98% of the actual size.

Shijo Kantei To No.781 in the February, 2022 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by Naoe Shizu Kanetomo.

This is a wide, long, and thin blade, and from the shape, you can judge this as Nanbokucho period work.

In voting, the majority of people voted for Naoe Shizu smiths, such as Kanetomo and Kanetsugu, and for an almost correct answer, Shizu Saburo Kaneuji. Beside these, there were votes for Seki smiths such as Kanefusa.

The itame hada along the hamon side has strong nagare hada which transitions to become masame hada. The hamon is notare mixed with large gunome and gunome-choji, there are hotsure at the edge, abundant nie, and frequent sunagashi. This is a Soshu Den style with some Mino Den characteristics.

If this were work by Shizu Saburo Kaneuji, the length would be around 6 or 7 sun which would be small. His hamon are a shallow notare, mixed with ko-gunome, there are hotsure at the edge and kuichigai-ba. Alternatively there could be a notare hamon mixed with slightly larger gunome. There are bright beautiful abundant ha-nie,

kinsuji and sunagashi which is a mixture of Soshu Den and Yamato Den characteristics, and the round boshi would be prominently large and there would be a short return.

If this were Seki work by smiths such as Kanefusa, the upper half would have saki-zori and it would be larger, or it would have a short length with a strong uchizori and poor fukura. The jigane would likely have whitish utsuri, and the hamon would be gunome-choji mixed with gunome and togariba, and the boshi would be a midarekomi jizo style. Many of Kanefusa blades have a clear Mino Den style.

In thinking about its history, Naoe Shizu work is between a Yamato plus Soshu style and the Mino style. It would not be exaggerating to say that Naoe Shizu work was a transitional style, going from a Soshu Den and Yamato Den mixed style to an established Mino Den style.

The individual Naoe Shizu smiths do not have strong individual styles, so in judging individual names, we treated all Naoe Shizu smith names as correct answers.

At this time, I would like to talk about scratches or tool marks seen under habaki on old tachi.

Looking at Heian, Kamakura, and Nanbokucho period nakago on tachi, we sometimes see, below the mune machi on the nakago mune (like in the photo) many lengthwise scratch-like marks which appear to have made with some kind of tool and which follow along the mune of the nakago.

This type of mark is sometimes seen below the ha-machi, on the ha- and mune surfaces, and is seen on the nakago and continues to the upper part of the nakago mune and under the habaki.

To understand what these marks are on these old tachi, we have to refer to old oral traditions. In the period when these old tachi were made, it was said that the sword smith also made the habaki and fitted it on the tachi.

This kind of habaki was not skillfully made when compared with later silver smith work, but the habaki had to fit tightly around the machi. According to tradition, the habaki were made and then fitted tightly around the machi by hammering the habaki up the nakago until it was in the correct position under the machi. I don't know of enough examples, but overall, the this theory is correct.

A long time ago, at an NBTHK shinsa, a large Aoe tachi was submitted. Its length was around 3 shaku, it had an Enbun-Joji shape, the jigane had midare utsuri, there was a tight nioiguchi on the suguha hamon, and it appeared like work by Tsuguyoshi and Tsugunao.

The tachi had an ubu nakago, and the nakago appeared to be Nanbokucho work, and there was a very good patina. There was also an old simple iron ichiju-habaki.

The habaki was supposed to have been made in the same period as the tachi, and under the machi the scratches or work marks remained. I remember thinking about the old oral tradition then and thinking that it was likely correct.

If you look carefully at Kokuho and Juyo Bunkazai blades, this kind of work mark or scratch mark is sometimes seen. In many cases, with decay or rust, or after new habaki were fitted, many of these marks have disappeared, and we have seen in some of these swords that there is newer rust in these areas.

For Explanation by Hinohara Dai