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Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Tachi

Mumei: den Norishige

Owner: NBTHK

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 7 rin (79.0 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 4 rin (2.25 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 6 rin (2.9 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 8 rin (1.17 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 1 rin (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 1 rin (2.75 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 2 bu 4 rin (18.9 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with a mitsumune. This has a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, it is thick, there is a large koshizori and a chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, some areas have a ko-itame hada, and in places the hada is visible. There are abundant ji-nie and chikei. The Hamon's bottom half is primarily a ko-choji style hamon and ko-midare. The upper half of the hamon is a suguha style, and the entire hamon has frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, and frequent nie. Some areas are rough, and there are kinsuji, nie-suji and sunagashi. The boshi is straight, there is a round point and return and there are fine hakikake. The nakago is ubu, and the tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are kiri. There is one mekugi-ana and the blade is mumei.

Norishige came from Etchu Koku's Gofuku go Saiki, and in the Edo period, historical books, including the "Kokon Meizukushi", listed him as one of Masamune's jutetsu or ten best students, but Norishige has some work dated in Showa 3 (1314), Geno1 (1319), and also another with a "kinoe saru" sixty year cycle date which places his work in Geno 2 (1329). His work is shown in old oshigata with dates such as Enkyo 3 (1308) and Karyaku 3 (1328). Also, in earlier studies, the historical book "Kiami Hon Meizukushi" shows old oshigata dated

Karyaku 3 (1328), and says “Norishige, called Gorojiro, was a student of Kamakura’s Shintogo nyudo Koshin” and this has been confirmed, so today, we consider Norishige to have been a student of Shintogo Kunimitsu. Many of his signed works are tanto, and he has only four tachi, two classified as Juyo Bunkazai, and two classified as Tokubetsu Juyo. His tanto are uchizori and are small. His tachi are wide and the kissaki are standard. From this evidence, today Norishige is considered to be slightly older and a contemporary of Masamune. In examining his mei, besides two kanji mei, we see “Saiki Norishige saku” and “Katsu Norishige”. His kanji are written in a straight style but we also see a slightly curved style, and his mei are not uniform. His jigane show all kinds of hada with a large itame, itame, and ko-itame with abundant nie. But his unmistakable characteristic jigane is made from two different soft and hard steels forged together forming an itame hada with thick chikei called “Matsukawa hada”. His unique jihada pattern shows the steel’s charm and the “Kiami Hon Meizukushi” states there is “well forged steel work, and the hada is not constant”. Among his hamon styles, besides suguha, we see many styles mixed with notare and komidare, and both styles have strong nie. In the case of itame hada, sunagashi and kinsuji are everywhere over the ji and hamon, forming complex hataraki, the ji has yubashiri, and there are tobiyaki along the hamon, which almost looks like a hitatsura style. There is a lot of variety in his work, and this is a major characteristic point, and many of his works have more frequent variations in their nie than Masamune’s work.

This a mumei tachi, but is judged to be Norishige’s work. The jigane is modeled after his teacher Shintogo Kunimitsu’s work, so the hada is not so prominent, and there is a relatively tight hada. This is also a gentle hamon for Norishige, and at first impression, it looks like a Ko-Bizen style. But some of his signed work shows similar styles, and in addition, a “falling down going forward” shape (where the sori becomes more shallow going towards the point) is not prominent here, there are more strong ha-nie, and abundant kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki. Considering these details the judgement that this is Norishige’s work is thought to be correct. Knowledge of the Honami family’s judgment that this blade is by Norishige is useful and of interest, and the blade with its history is valuable. However, in old judgements or kantei of Norishige’s long swords, we do see a rich hiraniku just like in this one. In addition, the tachi has almost no togi-damari (polished area at the top of the nakago above the rusted area on the nakago), the kasane does decrease much going toward the tip, and it is heavy, healthy and excellent work. This is the Bizen Ikeda family’s heirloom tachi. According to the “Tokugawa Jikki (diary)”, the entry for Iemitsu in volume 20, says that in Kanei 10

(1633) on the page for 5 gatsu 20 nichi (May 20) "it is now the new generation's prince Tenjuin period. Matsudaira Shintaro Mitsumasa came to meet the shogun, and received Norishige's katana". When the third generation shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu visited the second generation shogun Tokugawa Hidetada's oldest daughter Tenjuin (Senhime) in her new home, he gave this tachi to the Bizen Okayama lord Ikeda Mitsumasa who accompanied him. Since then, it has been handed down in the family. In Showa 12, when it was certified as Juyo Bijutsuhin, the owner was the 15th generation lord Ikeda Norimasa. This blade is also accompanied by an origami, by Honami Kochu which says that in Shotoku 5 (1715), it had a value of 1500 kan.

Explanation by Ishii Akira and photo by Imoto Yuki

Shijo Kantei To No. 784

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 784 Shijo Kantei To is June 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 June 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: 8 sun 1 bu 5 rin (24.8 cm)

Sori: uchizori

Motohaba: 6 bu 5 rin (2.0 cm)

Motokasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Nakago length: slightly less than 3 sun 5 bu (10.5 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune. The width, length, and thickness are standard, it is uchisori, and there is a standard shape. The jigane has itame hada mixed with nagare hada which becomes masame hada, and the entire hada is visible. There are fine ji-nie, jifu

and midare utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon has ashi, some square shaped slightly extended gunome, a nioiguchi with ko-nie, sunagashi and kinsuji. The nakago is ubu, the tip is cut slightly and is kiri. The yasurime are kate-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, on the center, there is a six kanji signature, on the ura there is a date.

The smith's usual work has many sharp or pointed boshi.

Juyo Tosogu

Zuiun ni Kirin zu (auspicious clouds with kirin design) kozuka Mei: Muneoki with kao

Muneoki was born in Genroku 13 (1700) in Edo and was Yokoya Munetoshi's second son, and Muneoki's brother is Hideyoshi. Consequently, he grew up as a member of a gold smith family. Later he became a student of Yokoya Somin who is the founder of the machi-bori gold smith style. Muneoki was talented and exhibited a high level of talent in his work and was expected to become Somin's adopted son. He was a master smith who left many masterpieces which exhibit an excellent level of competence and dignity appropriate for the fourth generation of the machi-bori mainstream Yokoya family.

This is called a bo-kozuka style (the design stretches to the edge of the kozuka and can extend over the edge to the sides of the kozuka) with takabori. The kirin breaks through the clouds and is running up into heaven. The kirin's front legs are angled up, his eyes are staring straight up at heaven, and this give us a feeling of the kirin's power. The kirin appears as though it is ready to jump out at any moment from the kozuka. This is a masterpiece by Muneoki which fully demonstrates his skill, and was handed down in the Hirosaki clan's Tsugaru family during the Edo period.

In 2020 in the NHK Taika drama (year long historical drama), the story's main character was Akechi Mitsuhide and the title was "the Kirin is coming". According to the book "Raiki", the kirin is supposed to be have spiritual powers and have an ancestry associated with dragons and ho-o (phoenix). He is a spiritual creature and benevolent, and he supposed to not eat meat or even plants, and even when he is walking, he is not supposed to step on sprouting grass or insects crawling on the ground. The kirin is supposed to bring Tenka-taihei (peace and calm) to the land, and an era of

virtuous governments, and many statesmen were waiting for its appearance. But one day an incident occurred and people were alerted and heard about the event. Some people had captured a weird animal, and it appeared to be a kirin. People were afraid of the kirin and had captured him which meant the coming end of human society and the beginning of a world of war. Today, war is breaking out all over the world. Possibly the kirin appeared in the Reiwa period and was captured, or possibly it had already been captured somewhere.

Explanation by Takeda Kotaro

April Token Teirei Kansho kai

Date: April 9th (second Saturday of April)

Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Takeda Kotaro

Kantei To No. 1: Tanto

Mei: Bizen Osafune Kanemitsu

Enbun 5 nen (1360) 3 gatsu hi

Length: 8 sun 2.5 bu

Sori: slightly less than 1 bu

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with masame; the entire ji is tight, there are abundant ji-nie, and along the mune side there are pale midare utsuri; along the ha side there are bo-shaped utsuri.

Hamon: based on kataochi-gunome mixed with square gunome, and ko-gunome; there are some saka-ashi. There are ashi, yo, a nioiguchi with ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi, and a bright and clear nioioguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is a komaru style.

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

Commentary

This is a Juyo Token Kanemitsu tanto. The width is standard, it is thin, there is a shallow sori, and from the shape, you can judge this as Nanbokcho Period work. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, there is a bright steel color and refined forging with midare utsuri. The

hamon is based on kataochi gunome and square gunome, and from these details you can judge this as being from Osafune in Bizen around Kanemitsu's time.

In voting, a majority of people recognized these characteristic points, and voted for Kagemitsu and Kanemitsu.

If this were Kagemitsu's work, his characteristic ko-itame jigane is tight, and among the Osafune school smiths, he has the most refined forging. Also, he is one generation senior to Kanemitsu, and has many works with shapes which have standard lengths and widths and are uchizori.

A few people voted for Motoshige. This likely is because the bottom half of the hamon has square gunome. If it were Motoshige's work, the top of the hamon is similar, and there would be in-togariba which appear like a wedge extending down into the hamon, and many of his boshi have a sharp tip. Also, his forging shows itame mixed with nagare hada, the hada is visible, and is mixed with jifu shapes, which is a Bizen branch family characteristic jigane.

Kantei To No. 2: katana

Kinzogan mei: Enju Kunitoki, futatsu-do saidan (cutting test)

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 6 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame, with some nagare; there are ji-nie and fine chikei.

Hamon: chu-suguha style with ko-gunome; there are ashi, yo, frequent ko-nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: slight notare-komi; on the omote there is an omaru; the ura is ko-maru; both sides have a short return.

Horimono: on the omote and the ura, there are bo-hi carved through the nakago and soe-hi which stop above the nakago.

Commentary

This is classified as Juyo Token, has been judged as an Enju Kunitoki katana, and has a kinzogan mei with the smith's name. From the habaki moto, the funbari is small, so there is a possibility that it is suriage. The shape is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and

saki are not very different. The original shape had a sori centered in the middle of the blade, and there is a chu-kissaki.

The jigane is a tight ko-itame, with some nagare-hada, and there are fine chikei. The hamon is suguha with frequent ko-nie, and mixed with ko-gunome. There are ashi, yo, fine kinsuji and sunagashi, and a bright and clear nioiguchi. From these characteristics and the wa-zori shape, you can judge this as work from the latter half of the Kamakura period, and as Rai school or Enju school work.

From these characteristic points, in voting, many people voted for Rai Kunimitsu, Enju Kunitoki and other Enju school smiths. This is judged as Enju work, and there are many ashi and yo hataraki inside of the hamon, and the school's usual characteristic shirake utsuri is not seen here. Also, the nioiguchi is bright and clear, and is excellent work, and from this, some people voted for Rai school work. This katana has Enju's characteristic points: on the omote, the jigane has what looks like a loose nagare hada, and the boshi's tip is o-maru (large and round) with a short return. Also, we do not see the Rai school's unique bo-utsuri.

At this time, we can see it is greatly suriage, and can judge this as Enju work, but either school's name is treated as a correct answer. Also, the Enju school smiths' work was very similar, so all Enju school names are treated as a correct answer.

A few people voted for Unrui, and their style does have some similarities. If it were Unrui work, usually there would be prominent dark colored jifu utsuri, and the jiffy areas have a shape which appears as though a finger was pushed onto the blade.

Kantei To No. 3: Tachi

Mumei: Masanori

Oei 30 nen

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 7 bu

Sori: slightly over 4 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada; the hada is slightly visible; there are ji-nie and midare utsuri.

Hamon: continuous ko-gunome with ko-ashi; there are frequent nie, hotsure, uchinoke, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the point on the omote is togari; the ura point is komaru; both sides have a return.

Commentary

This is a Juyo Token Unshu Doei Masanori tachi. In the early Muromachi period, the school was branch of the Bizen Yoshii school which is supposed to have moved to Izumo, and was called the Unshu Doei school. There are several different legends or theories about this school, and many unverified stories about Doei swords. This tachi has an Oei 30 nen date, and this is very important information. The Unjo Doei school has almost the same style as the main Yoshii school. Their characteristic style shows a regular continuous ko-gunome hamon and school's unique utsuri, which follows the exact ko-gunome hamon's shape on the ji.

This has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. It has a koshizori, the tip has sori, it is thick for the width, and from the shape you can judge this as work from the early half of the Muromachi period. The hamon is a continuous ko-gunome pattern, and we see the Yoshii school's unique utsuri. From this, even if you cannot judge this as Unshu Doei work, it is possible to judge this as Yoshii school work.

In voting, many people voted for the Yoshii school, Ko-Yoshii, and Shikkake Norinaga. Work from the Yoshii school from no later than the Nanbokucho period is called Ko(old)-Yoshii, and in the Muromachi Period it was called Yoshii. Their continuous ko-gunome hamon are the same, but the Yoshii period has more nioiguchi work, while Ko-Yoshii work has frequent ha-nie, and prominent kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki. This is an early Muromochi period work, it has more frequent nie than is usual for Yoshii work, and there are prominent kinsuji, sunagashi, so it would more likely be Ko-Yoshii work. If you need to find a difference, Ko-Yoshii work usually is not this thick.

The reason why people voted for Norinaga seems to be from the continuous ko-gunome hamon. If it were his work, the forging would show a prominent masame hada, and the hamon edge would have hataraki such as nijuba and kuichigaiba, and we usually would not see this kind utsuri, and the blade would not be this thick.

The nakago photo is 93% of the actual size.

Kantei To No. 4: Wakizashi

Mei: Bizen kuni ju Osafune Jiro Saemon-jo
Fujiwara Katsumitsu saku
Eisho 6 nen (1509) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 1 shaku 7 sun 9.5 bu

Sori: slightly less than 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume; the entire ji is tight, and there are ji-nie and pale midare utsuri.

Hamon: there is a high and wide hamon composed of choji mixed with gunome-choji and togari; some areas of the hamon have open bottom valleys. There are frequent ashi and yo, nie-deki, kinsuji, sunagashi, and some tobiyaki.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is round, and there is a long return.

Horimono: on the omote there is a gyo-style kurikara; on the ura there is a kanji inscribed.

Commentary

This is less than 2 shaku in length, has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. The kissaki is slightly long, and from the shape, you can judge this as a late Muromachi period katate-uchi uchigatana.

The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, there is a bright steel color, it is well forged, there are midare-utsuri, and the hamon is composed mainly of high and wide choji. These details show Sue Bizen characteristic points very well.

In voting, people concentrated on Sue Bizen smiths such as Katsumitsu and Sukesada. Either one is a good choice, but, if the hamon is composed of gorgeous choji, a vote for Katsumitsu is appropriate, just like we see here, and if there were more open bottom valleys in the hamon there would be a strong case for voting for Sukesada.

Beside these smiths, some people voted for Morimitsu and Soshu Munefusa. Morimitsu has choji and open bottom valleys in the hamon, and so that answer is understandable, but his active period was in the Oei period. Many his tachi shapes are seen from around the Oei period, and they are longer with a large koshisori, and the tips have sori too. Concerning Fusamune, people seemed to have voted for him because of the gunome-midare hamon mixed with gunome-choji, and because there were some areas mixed with open bottom valley hamon and also because of the horimono. But on the horimono we see here, the dragon's face is turned to the side, and he holds the tip of the sword from right above. However, this horimono is a unique Sue Bizen composition and a different design from Sue Soshu kuirikara horimono, and people should be aware of this.

Kantei To No.5: Katana

Mei: Tsuda Omi-no-kami Sukenao
Genroku 2 nen (1689) 2 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 5.5 bu

Sori: 5.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: There is a long yakidashi at the moto, and continuous large gunome which resembles a toran style. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, fine sunagashi and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: there is a wide straight yakiba; the tip is komaru and there is a return.

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

Commentary

This is a Juyo Token katana by Sukenao. It is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. There is a large sori and a long chu-kissaki, and these features are seen in swords from the Jokyo to Genroku periods (1684-1703). The jigane is a very tight ko-itame hada, there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and refined forging. The hamon is a large gunome style hato (waves), and from these details, in voting, the majority of people voted for Sukenao and Sukehiro.

Because his teacher, the Nidai Sukehiro, was active around the Kanbun to Enpo periods (1661-80), many of his shapes have a shallow sori and a Kanbun Shinto shape. Today, Sukenao's confirmed latest work is from Genroku 6 (1693), and he has many blades with a large sori, and a slightly long kissaki. Sukenao's characteristic hamon, instead of a style which resembles breaking waves, are then based on large gunome, and midare with prominent sunagashi.

Beside these smiths, some people voted for Itakura Gonnoshin Terukane. If it were work by Terukane, the shape would have a high or steep ihorimune and poor hiraniku. His hamon have katayama shaped waves mixed with yahazu choji, and under the yokote there would be three continuous gunome.

Shijo Kantei To No.782 in the March, 2022 Issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Senji Muramasa.

This katana is 2 shaku 5 bu long, which is a short length, but there is a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a chu-kissaki and saki sori, and from the shape, you can judge as work from just before or after the Eisho to Taiei period (1504-27).

Looking at the hamon, the first noticeable characteristic is that on the omote and ura, the hamon are the same.

In the latter half of the Muromachi period, smiths who made the same hamon on the omote and ura are Heianjo Nagayoshi, Sue Seki smiths, and Senji school smiths such as Muramasa, Masashige, and Masazane.

However, among these smiths, vertical variations in the midare hamon are notable, there is an angular hamon (features are angled rather than perpendicular to the edge), there is a yakidashi at the moto, a worn down nioiguchi, and the jigane does not have a lot of shirake. From considering these characteristic points, you can begin looking at this as Muramasa's work.

Heianjo Nagayoshi is supposed to have been Muramasa's teacher, and their shapes and hamon are very similar. But in Nagayoshi's work, the jiba (jigane and hamon) are bright, we see Kyoto's characteristic sophisticated work, and many of his swords have horimono with simple to detailed work.

At this time, I would like to talk a little bit about looking at highly ranked katana such as Kokuho and Juyo Bunkazai.

Kokuho and Juyo Bunkazai swords represent the best of all swords. They have exceptional styles, excellent workmanship, and an overwhelming presence when actually looking at them. They also have interesting origins and important past owners and stories, and they are very special among the many Japanese swords we have. The opportunity to appreciate some of these blades is a dream for sword lovers.

After the war, we had more chances to look at these masterpieces. From Showa 20 to 50 (1945-1975) at the NBTHK Teirei Kansho Kai

meetings held in the NBTHK building, at each branch kansho kai meeting, and at national conventions, many of these highly ranked swords were shown.

Besides the NBTHK, other sword groups seem to have done the same kind of thing. When I was about 40 years old, I used to have many opportunities to examine highly ranked blades. If I think about this, it was easy to do that, and was a good time to readily find opportunities to examine such blades.

However, after about Showa 60 (1985), due to concerns about the protection of important cultural properties, classified blades were no longer made available for appreciation or study meetings, and that continues to this day.

Today, looking at highly ranked blades is only possible when looking through glass panels at museums or in an art gallery sword exhibition. Many people likely feel strongly that "I wish I could handle this sword". I cannot deny that looking at blades in their glass walled cases is convenient for the owners of these swords, and relatively easy to permit when compared to the difficulties of allowing people to actually handle these swords. However, I think the opportunities to examine these swords in their glass walled cases can still be very beneficial.

I would like to offer another thought about this in the next month's issue.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai