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Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Juyo Bunkazai

Type: Katana

Mumei: Nakasone Okisato nyudo Kotetsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu (71.2 cm)

Sori: 4 bu 6 rin (1.4 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 6 rin (2.0 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 9 rin (3.3 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 8 bu (20.6 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. There is a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, it is thick, there is a slightly shallow sori, and a chu-kissai. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada. At the koshimoto, the itame hada is mixed with a large mokume and nagare hada. The entire ji has dense ji-nie, there are fine chikei and a very clear jigane. The hamon has a straight yakidashi at the moto, and above this, the entire hamon is a wide notare type hamon mixed with gunome, and there are vertical variations in the monouchi area. There are frequent ashi and some are thick. There are yo, a dense nioiguchi, frequent ko-nie, some niesuji and sunagashi, and the entire hamon has a bright and clear nioiguchi. The boshi on the omote is straight, and on the ura the boshi is a shallow notare and yakikomi at the yokote, and there is a long return. The nakago is ubu, the tip is a shallow ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte sagari. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote along the mune side on the shinogi ji, there is a long kanji signature made with a fine chisel.

Nakasone Kotetsu was originally an armor maker in Echizen. After the Shimabara incident in Kanei 14-15 (1637-8), there were almost no wars, and the demand for armor was extremely low. As a result, Kotetsu moved to Edo around the Shoo period (1652-55) and turned to sword making. His earliest dated swords are from Meireki 2 (1656). Before this period however, he has the same style of signature on tsuba, kote (armor sleeves), and kabuto. His earliest sword is supposed to be dated before Meireki 2, and his last dated work is Enpo 5 (1677), so this indicates that his active sword making career extended over 20 years.

Kotetsu's age when he moved to Edo, was written as "reaching a half of 100 years, when I moved to Edo in Bushu...". Judging from this, he seems to have been about 50 years old, but recently people think of him as having moved to Edo when he was middle aged.

Over his career, his signature changed, and originally he always signed "Okisato". However, after becoming a monk he used the name Kotetsu, and initially he signed Kotetsu using the kanji for "old iron" (古鉄). From Manji 4 or Kanbun 1 (1660-61) (these two nengo are in the same year) he used "虎徹" or Kotetsu which included the kanji for tiger (or "Ko"). After August of Kanbun 4 (1664), he used the kanji "虎徹" for Kotetsu. However, even during the later 虎徹 or Kotetsu period, we can see a "虎入道" or "Toranyudo" signature, and the kanji are written in a sosho or flowing style.

As people know, Kotetsu's early period "hanetora" style used large and small gunome in the hamon which were grouped together and called "hyotanba". His later period or "hakotora" style work has continuous round top gunome, vertical variations, and a variety of continuous close round genome which is called "juzuba" which is a string of beads. His later period work was not flashy like Osaka Shinto work, but rather simple. His jigane is refined and well or strongly forged, and the jiba (jigane and hamon) is bright and clear, and these are his characteristic points.

Also, during his not extensively long career, he produced many masterpieces. Since he was an armor maker, it is easy to imagine that he was a skilled iron worker, and we can see this in his early period horimono when he made many detailed horimono on swords. He carved simple items, such as hi, bonji, suken, kensaku, sanko-fuken, and also detailed horimono such as kurikara, fudou myoo, nio, fujin-raijinn, mosou (a design usually called urashima), ren-raizan, and daikokuten, and he even produced sukashibori.

This katana is supposed to have been made around Enpo 2 judging from the signature which is a "hakotora" style. The widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a shallow sori with a chu-kissai, and this is a typical Kanbun Shinto shape, and in the Edo period, a

serious style intended for combat. The jigane is very refined and strong, and shows very well refined forging work. It is wide, the hamon has a dense nioiguchi, there are evenly distributed ko-nie, the jiba (hamon and jigane) is bright and clear, and there is a very sophisticated appearance. There is a short yakidashi at the moto, and on the ura, in the yokote area, the boshi is finished with a yakikomi, and some areas have continuous gunome or juzuba with thick ashi. We see Kotetsu's characteristic points, highlights, and excellent workmanship everywhere, and this is a real masterpiece. Also, his juzuba can form a large midare hamon, and sometimes appears as a notare hamon and this is such an example.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira.

Shijo Kantei To No. 785

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 785 Shijo Kantei To is July 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 July 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: Wakizashi

Length: 1 shaku 7 bu 5 rin (32.6 cm)

Sori: slightly less than 1 bu (0.2 cm)

Motohaba: slightly over 1 sun (3.15 cm)

Motokasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.5 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 2 bu (9.65 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a hirazukuri wakizashi with a mitsumune. It is wide, long, very thin, and there is a shallow sori.

The jigane has a visible itame hada, and along the hamon and the mune side there is a masame type nagare hada. There are large abundant ji-nie and fine chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in

the picture. The hamon has frequent ko-nie, hotsure at the hamon edge, uchinoke, sunagashi, fine kinsuji, and some small yubashiri. The horimono on the omote is a suken, and on the ura, the horimono is a goma-bashi. The hi on both sides are kaki-nagashi or carved into the nakago. The nakago is ubu and short for the width. The nakago tip is kuri jiri. The yasurime are a shallow katte-sagari. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, under the mekugi-ana, almost on the center, there is a long kanji signature.

Juyo Tosogu

Hachi zu (bee design) kogai
Mumei: Sojo

Accompanied by an origami dated Meireki 2 nen (1656) and stating the daikin (cost) is 1 mai 2 ryo. This is a Koryo origami.

This is the main Goto family's second generation Sojo's bee design kogai. Sojo was the Shodai Yujo's second son, and he became the head of the family after Yujo, and worked for the Ashikaga Shogun. When he was 40 years old he became a monk, and was named Sojo, and a year later, he received title of Hogen (a mid-rank monk).

The kogai's ground has a mokko (ellipse-like) shaped area extending to the base of the ear-pick area, and even the sides have nanako. The kogai is decorated with gold inlay bracken (fern fronds). We do not see many examples of this kind of work, however the Maeda family's heirloom Yujo kogai has this same style. This kogai has an origami (certificate) written by the tenth generation Renjo Koryo. In the origami, it says that the nanako style is "hirugaesu", and knowing the name of this style is interesting and useful information.

The ground or surface treatment insures that the overall appearance will not be monotonous. There is a wide panel, and there is nanako over the surface, and an exquisite carving of a single bee using takabori. A bee produces a type of sound called "ho", and is one of the symbols used to ask for "ho-roku fukuju"(fortune, happiness and prosperity). Such images using auspicious designs were made with other animals too, such as monkeys, bats and deer. The bee's nikudori (volume) exhibits a classic elegance, and shows the second generation Gojo's unique personality.

Explanation by Kugiya Natoko

April Token Teirei Kansho kai

Date: May 14 (second Saturday of May)
Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium
Lecturer: Kurotaki Tetsuya

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: Muneyoshi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 9.5 bu

Sori: 8.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: ko-itame mixed with ko-mokume; the hada is visible; there are abundant ji-nie, fine chikei, and clear jifu utsuri.

Hamon: gunome ko-midare hamon mixed with ko-choji; there are frequent ashi and yo, abundant ko-nie, and fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru; the tip has a slight return.

Commentary

The retired emperor Gotoba was famous after the Jokyu war (1221). In sword history, he is famous because he had the best sword smiths visit him and make swords for him, and these were the Gotoba-in sword smiths. Today, we are displaying the work of one of these sword smiths, Ko-Ichimonji Muneyoshi, as the No.1 kanteito. This work was classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin on April 4 of Showa 16 (1941). From the shape, you can recognize this as being work from the end of the Heian period to the beginning of the Kamakura period. This tachi is narrow, has a small kissaki, and a large koshizori. On the jigane you should focus on the clear jifu utsuri. The utsuri extends from the ji into the shinogi ji, and this is a characteristic feature. The hamon shows an elegant style, and is composed of small ko-choji, and is komidare, and the complex hamon brings out its classic elegance.

From these details, some people voted for Ko-Bizen work, but this is a Ko-Ichimonji work. However, this classic style is very similar to Ko-Bizen work, so we also treated Ko-Bizen as a proper answer.

Some people voted for Unjo. If it were Unjo's work, his dark jifu utsuri are only seen under the shinogi. It is different from the dark areas or jifu utsuri here which extend over much of the shinogi ji.

Ko-Ichimonji Muneyoshi has four tachi, including this one, which are classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin. Among these four, this tachi is considered to best display a classic appearance and elegance.

Kantei To No. 2: Katana

Mei: Fujiwara Hiromitsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume; the entire jihada is visible; there are abundant ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: the entire hamon is narrow; it is a shallow notare mixed with gunome, and there are some tobiyaki. There are ashi, yo, abundant nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and mizukage at the machi.

Boshi: slight notare; on the omote the point is a togari (pointed) shape; on the ura the point is komaru; there is a return.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi finished with marudome just above the machi.

Comments:

This is a Juyo Token Fujiwara Hiromitsu katana.

Looking at the shape, this is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not different. There is a shallow sori with a chu-kissaki, and it is not as thick as a Shinshinto. From these details, one can think of work from the Keicho Shinto period and from the earlier Nanbokucho period.

However, there are several important points which should be noted. The bo-hi have marudome above the machi, the koshimoto has funbari, and there is a faint mizukage above the habaki. From these details, you can judge that this is not suriage, but is an ubu shape. Therefore, you can judge this as a Keicho Shinto period katana.

Next, we wish to examine the jigane. The jigane has an itame hada, the entire hada is visible, and is what is called a zanguri hada (rough hada). The notare style hamon has a worn down nioiguchi, you can see that the nie are strong in places and weak in places. From these characteristics, it is possible to judge this as Horikawa school work.

Hiromitsu's existing work is rare. Among the Horikawa school students, his work is very close to the style of his teacher Kunihiro.

Although it is hard to recognize the work of an individual such as Hiromitsu, if you voted for the master smith Kunihiro, or a smith with a similar style, that is acceptable.

Kantei To No. 3: Tachi

Mumei: Yasutsuna

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 8.5 bu

Sori: slightly less than 9 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome; the upper half is a prominent ko-midare style hamon; there are hotsure at the edge, yubashiri, a worn down nioiguchi with abundant nie, kinsuji, and sunagashi; above the machi there is yakiotoshi.

Boshi: there is a narrow yakiba; the boshi is straight and yakizume.

Comments

This is a Ko-Hoki Yasutsuna tachi. This has funbari at the habaki moto, and an ubu tachi shape. The blade is narrow, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a large koshizori, the tip falls down going forward (the sori becomes more shallow going towards the point), and there is a small kissaki. From these details, you can judge this as work from the end of the Heian period to the beginning of the Kamakura period.

At this time, the main schools were Ko-Kyoto, Yamato Senjuin, Ko-Bizen, Ko-Hoki, and Kyushu's classic work. This tachi has an itame and mokume hada which is strongly visible, the hamon nioiguchi is worn down, there is a yakidashi at the koshimoto, and from these details you can judge this as Ko-Hoki work. Also, the shinogi-ji is narrow, and there is a rich hiraniku, and these details are often seen in Ko-Hoki work.

Yasutsuna's hamon are based on komidare, and in the hamon we sometimes see individual gunome and some areas with a ko-notare pattern.

Among Yasutsuna's work, this tachi's characteristic points are the prominent ko-gunome and ko-notare hamon. This tachi is classified as Juyo Token.

Kantei To No. 4: Wakizashi

Mei: Bizen no suke Munetsugu saku kore
Koka 3 nen (1846) 8 gatsu hi
okuru (presented to) Ichijo Hokyo

Length: 1 shaku 3 bu

Sori: slightly less than 1 bu

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: based on a gunome-choji hamon; the tops of the choji and gunome form a line; there are frequent ashi, abundant nie, sunagashi, and a bright and clear nioioguchi.

Boshi: straight, with a shallow notare; the tip is komaru and there is a return.

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

Comments

This is a Juyo Token Koyama Munetsugu wakizashi. The blade is wide, long, and thick. There is a shallow sori and a strong shape, and you can judge this as Shinshinto period work. Also, in the midare hamon, the ashi are long and extend almost to the edge.

This is a Bizen Den work based on a gunome-choji and choji hamon. Other smiths in the same period are Taikei Naotane, Koyama Munetsugu, Kato Tsunatoshi. The jigane is a tight ko-itame in a muji style. The hamon has equally spaced repeating units, and these are this wakizashi's characteristic points. From these details, you can judge this as work by Koyama Munetsugu. If it were work by Naotane, square gunome and togariba would be prominent. If it was work by Tsunatoshi, there often would be a short yakidashi at the moto.

From the soe-mei, you can see that this was a gift from Munetsugu to Goto Ichijo. This has an "ohi (cherry bark) fuemaki-nuri saya koshikatana koshirae" with kanagu made by Ichijo. The koshirae's kozuka has scattered kuyo-mon, and the tsuka is wrapped with white same. There are gosan no kiri mon menuki and a beautiful tsuka. There is a

existing photo which shows Ichijo wearing this koshirae. This wakizashi and the koshirae was made in Koka 3 (1846), and Ichijo produced little work after this period, so this koshirae provides us with interesting information about Ichijo's work at this time, and about the friendship between Ichijo and Munetsugu.

This wakizashi and the No. 2 katana described above are from the past NBTHK chairman Suzuki Kajo's collection.

Kantei To No.5: Tanto

Mei: Uda Kunifusa

Oei 12 nen (1404) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 9 sun 4 bu

Sori: none

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: tight ko-itame; there are abundant ji-nie, chikei, shirake utsuri, and a bright jigane.

Hamon: wide suguha and a shallow notare; there are ko-gunome, ashi, yo, large nie, kinsuji and fine sunagashi; the hamon is bright and clear.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip has hakikake; there is a long return; there are prominent round nie.

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

Comments

I will now talk about the last of the Juyo Bijutsuhin works we have here today. This tanto was classified as Juyo Token on May 28 in Showa 24 (1949), and this is an Oei 12 nen dated Uda Kunifusa tanto.

The Uda school was prosperous in the Koto period in Etchu, and among the school's smiths, Kunifusa is considered to have been the most skillful smith. The Uda school has four Juyo Bijutsuhin works, and all of them are by Kunifusa. From this, you can see the degree of excellence found in Kunifusa's work.

This tanto is excellent work, even among Kunifusa's work, and we can see that he learned a lot from Rai Kumitsu and Rai Kunitsugu's masterpieces, and incorporated this information into his sword making efforts. In voting, instead of Kunifusa's name, we sometimes

see votes for Rai Kunimitsu, and this is evidence of Kunifusa's high level of skill.

At a glance, the shape suggests that this is work from the end of the Kamakura period to the early Nambokucho period. Also from the refined forging work, we would like to look at this as Rai Kunimitsu's work. But looking closely at this tanto, we can see that although there is refined forging work, there is no sign of a Rai characteristic hada or bo-utsuri.

Even the hamon is a Rai style hamon at first glance, but the hamon edge has some nie kuzuri, and this style of hamon is not seen in Rai school work, and the boshi's long return is different. However, the bright round ha-nie in the hamon and boshi are the Uda school's characteristic points and this is a major feature in judging this tanto as Uda school work. Among the Uda school smiths, the smith who was good at producing a bright and clear jiba (jigane and hamon) is Kunifusa. From these technical details, we can say that Kunifusa is an appropriate attribution for this tanto.

This could be a somewhat difficult work to judge. But, if you can appreciate Kunifusa's skillful techniques, his approach to Rai school work, and his jiba, we would be satisfied.

Shijo Kantei To Number 783 in the April, 2022 issue

The answer for the Number 783 Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by the Shodai Tadayoshi with horimono by Munenaga.

The forging for this tanto is a tight ko-itame, there are abundant ji-nie and chikei. The hamon is based on ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome, and the valleys in the hamon have clumps of nie, and from these details, you can judge this as a Hizen To.

Also, the hada is not visible, the forging is refined, and the color of the ji is not dark. From these details, we can see that this is not branch Hizen work, but is mainstream Hizen work.

Among the mainstream Hizen smiths, the third generation Tadayoshi has almost no tanto work.

This blade has horimono, and on the omote's fudo-myoo relief carved in a hitsu (frame) there are obvious Umetada-bori (carving) characteristics.

The Umetada school has a relatively large number of fudo horimono, and the most skillful horimono carver was Myoju who learned most of his techniques from Munenaga.

When Myoju and Munenaga carved fudo myo-o, they usually carved inside of a frame, and many of these horimono have bonji above the fudo horimono and inside of the frame.

During the Shodai Tadayoshi's Tadayoshi signature period, his horimono were made by Munenaga. During the Shodai's Musashi daijo Tadahiro period and the Nidai Tadahiro period, the horimono artist was Yoshinaga. Yoshinaga did not carve inside of a frame, but directly on the blade surface.

The Umetada school's fudo composition has some characteristic points. The fudo's face, eyes, and eyebrows are lifted up, only the right elbow is extended to the side, and above the fudo, the flame extends up from the left side.

The jiba (jigane and hamon) appearance, Munenaga's horimono, the fact that the nakakago tip is kurijiri, and that the yasurime are a shallow kate-sagari, mean that you can judge this as a Shodai Tadayoshi work.

For another acceptable answer, a few people voted for Myoju. Since Myoju has many ko-notare style hamon, and has Umetada-style hori, that is understandable. But Myoju's notare hamon often have a tighter nioiguchi, we do not see clumped nie in the hamon valleys, and the nakakago tip is iriyamagata.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai