

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

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Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Large tachi

Mei: Masa(ie)

Owner: Yasukuni Shrine Yushukan

Length: 3 shaku 3 sun 5 bu 6 rin (101.7 cm)

Sori: 1 sun 4 rin (3.15 cm)

Motohaba: 1sun 1 bu 9 rin (3.6 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 6 rin (2.3 cm)

Motokasane: 3 bu (0.9 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Kissaki length: 2 sun 3 rin (6.15 cm)

Nakago length: 9 sun 8 bu 7 rin (29.9 cm)

Nakago sori: none

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune . It is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. It is thick, notably long, there is funbari, a large sori, and a large kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume and nagare hada, and the entire hada is slightly visible. There are ji-nie, chikei and jifu utsuri. The hamon is chu-suguha, and mixed with a komidare style hamon at the koshi-moto area, and there is a tight or dense nioiguchi. There are ashi, yo, the nioiguchi has uneven nie, and there are some kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi is straight, the tip is round, there are hakikake, and there is a long return, The horimono on the omote and the ura are futasuji-hi finished with marudome. The nakago is ubu, the bottom half of the nakago along the mune side is slightly filed, the tip is ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte sagari. There are four mekugi-ana, and on the omote under the first mekugi-ana (the original mekugi ana), on the center, there is a small two kanji signature.

According to a legal document from the early half of the Heian period, the “Engishiki”, in Bingo, as payment for tribute or taxes, the Bingo governor decided to accept hoes and iron, along with white silk, thread, and salt. Later, in the eight county area in Bingo, another governor accepted payment in the form of hoes and iron instead of silk and thread. From this, one realizes that in historical times, Bingo produced an abundant amount of iron, which is similar to the other Chugoku areas. Also, geographically, Bingo was east of and adjacent to Bitchu, and north of Hoki where conditions were optimal for the production of swords.

Bingo Koku’s Mihara school of sword making began at the end of the Kamakura Period and was prosperous until the end of the Muromachi Period. Work from the Mihara school up to the Nanbokucho period is called “Ko-Mihara”. The school’s characteristic points were strongly influenced by the Yamato school. In Bingo there is a large central shrine and temple estates such as Toji and Rengao-in. They were supposed to have had communications or associations with the central government in the Kinai area.

In general, the school’s jiba (jigane and hamon) nie are weak when compared to Yamato work. Sometimes, their itame hada is mixed with a prominent mokume hada, and there is a slightly visible hada and shirake utsuri. The hamon have a tight nioiguchi and the boshi have a gentle round form, and these are their characteristic points. On the other hand, we sometimes see Aoe style work, and there was supposed to have been technical exchanges or influence from smiths from the neighboring province Bitchu Koku. In the Nanbokucho period which was when they produced their best work, we do not have many confirmed works compared with schools such as Osafune and Aoe. It is thought that the demand for Mihara work came from temples and shrines.

Masaie is one of Ko-Mihara’s two best master smiths along with Masahiro. There are not many signed works, and he signed “Masaie (saku)”, “Bishu Masaie saku”, “Bingo Koku ju Uemon-jo Masaie saku”, and “Bishu ju Saemon-jo Masaie saku”. We have confirmed dates on his work from Bunwa 2 (1353), Embun 4 (1359) and Joji 2 (1368). He signed many of his blades along the center of the nakago on an almost flat area, and this could be a characteristic, not only of Masaie, but also of the school. When looking at shapes, Masahiro produced many standard chu-kissaki, but sometimes made dynamic large kissaki, and this detail or characteristic is an indication of his active period.

This is a signed Ko-Mihara Masaie’s tachi with an ubu nakago. It is wide, the difference in widths at the moto and saki is almost inconspicuous, and the large kissaki and shape are from the Nanbokucho Period’s Enbun-Joji era, and there is a very dynamic

tachi shape. The blade is wide, thick, and very heavy, and there is no damage or any defects in its healthy shape. The jigane with its itame mixed with mokume hada shows no variation or defects in its uniform hada pattern, in spite of the long length, and we can recognize the highly skilled forging work present in this blade. The chu-suguha hamon has some kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki along with ashi and yo. The hamon is mixed with a komidare style hamon at the koshimoto. This blade does not have a flashy appearance, but has a sound and dignified appearance. The Yamato characteristics are not very prominent: the mokume hada jigane stands out, the boshi return is straight, long, and conspicuous. It reminds us of a waterfall, and is called a “waterfall drop”, and shows one of Mihara’s characteristic points very well. On the nakago, the bottom half of the mune edge is slightly filed and the signature has deteriorated somewhat, but the preservation of the upper part of the nakago is perfect, and it shows excellent work.

This type of large ubu tachi is very interesting and informative, and it has not suffered from any degree of shortening or suriage. For a Nanbokucho ubu tachi, it has a very high historical value.

Yasukuni Shrine’s records show that this large tachi was given to the shrine in on October 27 of Meiji 42 (1909) by Oda Naotaro, a volunteer at the shrine, and that the sword was owned previously by Hirayama Kozo.

Explanation Ishii Akira and photo by Imoto Yuki.

Shijo Kantei To No. 786

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 786 Shijo Kantei To is August 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 August 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 4 sun 1 bu 5 rin (73.2 cm)

Sori: 6 bu 5 rin (1.9 cm)

Motohaba: slightly less than 1 sun (3.0 cm)
Sakihaba: 7 bu (2.1 cm)
Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)
Sakikasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.55 cm)
Kissaki length: slightly less than 1 sun 2 bu (3.55 cm)
Nakago length: 6 sun 5 bu (19.65 cm)
Nakago sori: very slight

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. It is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. There is a large sori and a chu-kissaki. The jigane has itame hada mixed with mokume hada and a large itame hada, and the hada is visible. There are fine ji-nie mixed with chikei, a dark jigane, and straight utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon contains various elements such as ko-gunome, konotare, togariba, and choji, and overall the entire hamon is a small midare hamon. There are small ashi, yo, nioiguchi type ko-nie, and fine sunagashi. The horimono on the omote and the ura are bo-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is suriage, and the tip is kiri. The original yasurime are sujichigai. There are three mekugi-ana. On the omote, at the nakago's tip, almost on the center, there is long kanji signature, and the ura has a date.

Juyo Tosogu

Fugaku Matsubara zu (Mt.Fuji and pine grove design) Tsuba

**Mei : Yoshu Matsuyama ju-nin Shoami Morikuni saku with kao
Genbun 3 (1738) Tsuchinoe Uma toshi
Oborotsuki Kichijo-nichi (an auspicious day)**

The Shoami school expanded all over Japan. In Shikoku, the school prospered in the Awa and Iyo areas. Because the Awa Shoami school is geographically and culturally close to Kyoto and Osaka, many of the smiths used gold, and produced exuberant and elaborate work. Compared to the Awa area, many Iyo Shoami smiths used all kinds of metal, such as iron, shakudo, and copper, and this affected their composition and shapes. The Awa Tokushima clan earned a huge amount of money from the production of indigo, and Iyo had the largest copper mine in Japan, and possibly this affected their art work. The Iyo Shoami included a gold smith group, and individual names began with a "mori" kanji ("盛" and "森"), and among these

workers, Morikuni produced excellent compositions, and he is representative of the Iyo Shoami gold smiths.

“The best mountain is Fuji, the best ocean is Setouchi (the ocean around Shikoku), and the best onsen (hot spring baths) are in Beppu” was a catchphrase, and the Beppu onsen made it famous, and the phrase was promoted by Aburaya Kumahachi. For the Japanese people, “mountain” referred to nothing except Fuji. From their work, we can perceive something of the people’s respect for Mt. Fuji at that time and it is very interesting. Below the sacred peak of Mt. Fuji, and at the foot of the mountain, the Miho pine forest grows, and this is a stereotype or standard composition containing Mt. Fuji, Miho Matsubara (forest), and Seiken Ji (temple) which was established after medieval times. This tsuba shows a zuiun (an auspicious cloud) instead of Seiken Ji, and presents Mt. Fuji as a mountain containing a holy spirit. Also, the top of the mountain has a “three peaks” shape, and each of the three peak’s is a home for a god, and these were Yakushi, Amida, and Dainichi-nyorai.

At that time, in the the Kanto area, for the purpose of worshipping Mt. Fuji, trips were organized for people who were enthusiastic about Mt. Fuji and its deities, and who wished to worship at the mountain.

The popularity of Fuji is indicated by images or sanmou-mandala. This is a common type of image and supports the worship and respect for Mt Fuji, and shows the respect and appreciation of Mt. Fuji by average people. This type of image is a sanmou-mandala or representative of Fuji in the Tsuba world.

Explanation by Takeda Kotaro

April Token Teirei Kansho Kai

Date: June 11 (second Saturday of June)

Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Imoto Yuki

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: Narimune

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 4 sun 7 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada; there are frequent ji-nie, jifu utsuri, and a bright jigane.

Hamon: suguha style hamon mixed with komidare, ko-choji, and kogunome; there are some ashi, the hamon is nie-deki, there are fine kinsuji, nie-suji, sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight; the tip is a yakizume style; there is a komaru and return.

Commentary:

This tachi is classified as Juyo Bijutsu-hin.

The blade has some remaining funbari, and is a narrow tachi with a large koshizori, and the sori decreases going toward the tip. The ji has clear jifu-utsuri, and the dark areas extend up to near the shinogi ji, and from these details, you can judge this as work from no later than the Kamakura Period. Also, the tight itame hada has frequent ji-nie, there is a refined jigane, and a suguha style hamon with frequent nie, and the jiba (jigane and hamon) is bright. From these details, you can think of this as Bizen work.

At that time, work in the Bizen area reminds us of Ko-Bizen work. On the other hand, some smiths belonged to the Fukuoka Ichimonji group, and their active period was in the early Kamakura Period when they were called "Ko-Ichimonji", and they are considered to be separate from Ko-Bizen.

The Ko-Ichimonji smiths were in a transitional period between Ko-Bizen and the Fukuoka Ichimonji group. Their style was closer to Ko-Bizen's classic style. Their komidare hamon contained prominent kochoji and it was supposed to be a more modern style at the time.

Considering these points and looking at this tachi, you can observe that the middle to the upper part has large groups of kochoji in the hamon, and many people voted for Ko-Ichimonji which was impressive.

On the other hand, many people voted for Ko-Bizen. Both groups have very similar existing work, and it is difficult to identify a maker, and at this time, a Ko-Bizen answer was treated as a correct answer.

Kantei To No. 2: Katana

Mei: Nakasone Okimasa saku

Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 1 bu

Sori: slightly less than 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: the moto has a short yakidashi; above this the hamon is ko-notare mixed with gunome; in some areas, there are two continuous or fused gunome. The entire hamon is wide and there is a midare hamon. There are abundant ashi, some yo, a dense nioguchi, and abundant nie. On the omote's upper half, the hamon is rough, and there are some yubashiri and a bright nioguchi.

Boshi: straight; the tip is komaru, and there is a return with a slightly hard stop.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi with marudome.

Commentary

This is a Nakasone Okimasa katana. It is slightly wide, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a shallow sori, and a long kissaki, and from the shape, you can judge this as Kanbun-Shinto work. Examining the jiba (jigane and hamon), we see that the jigane has abundant ji-nie, there is strong forging, and the entire hamon is wide. The hamon is ko-notare mixed with gunome, there are abundant nie, and the top of the hamon is a uniform midare hamon. The thick shape produces a rough impression, and this shows Edo Shinto's characteristic points in a city where many samurai were living. Notably, there are some areas with continuous round gunome, and this style of hamon is called a "juzu-ba" (string of beads) style midare hamon. When you see this, you can imagine it is work from smiths associated with Kotetsu.

There is a short yakidashi at the moto, and there are frequent nie and thick ashi, and from these details, many voted for Kotetsu. However, you do not see a gunome loop crossing the yokote, which is called a "Kotetsu boshi". Also, the clarity of the jiba (jigane and hamon) is not as clear as Kotetsu's, and so the Kotetsu answer should be reconsidered. Also, if you look at the hamon's construction carefully, some areas have two continuous identically sized gunome. Particularly, on the ura side we see Okimasa's characteristic hamon everywhere. Also, on the omote hamon, in some places there are yubashiri, the upper half of the hamon edge looks like it is collapsing (nie-kuzure), ha-nie extend over the ji, the hamon is rough looking, and compared with Kotetsu's work, you can see Okimasa's characteristic bold style.

Beside the correct answer, some people voted for Kazusa-no-suke Kaneshige. If it were his work, you would recognize, a pattern of one-two-one-two repeated continued gunome in some areas.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mei: tame Murakami Shige kun Ishido Unju Korekazu seitan
tsukuru kore
Kaei 7 nen (1854) Kinoe Tora toshi 2 gatsu hi

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: 7 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame mixed with some nagare hada; the entire ji is muji; there are ji-nie.

Hamon: choji mixed with gunome, gunome-choji, togariba, and ko-notare areas. There are frequent long ashi, abundant nie, some mura (clumps of nie), kinsuji, sunagashi, and a bright and dense nioiguchi.

Boshi: notare-komi and the tip is komaru.

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

Commentary:

This katana has a standard width and shape, but is thick for the width and heavy. There is a narrow shinogi-ji and poor hiraniku. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, but its appearance shows a muji style. The midare hamon has long ashi. This tachi shows the Shinshinto period's characteristic points very well.

Unju Korekazu became the 7th generation head of the Ishido family. Compared to the same period's Tokugawa okakae smiths (smiths who worked for the shogunate or daimyo), he has an unusually large number of existing works. He is supposed to have studied sword making under his relative Chounsai Tsunatoshi. From his early work in the Tenpo era to around the Koka period, we can confirm that the choji midare hamon with a tight nioiguchi looks like Tsunatoshi's work. Other the hand, he also made Kogarasumaru utsushi and shortened old blades or made them suriage, and we can confirm that he had many talented smiths available to work with him. According to his student Chiyotsuru Korehide's comments, "He outgrew his master Tsunatoshi's forging techniques, and studied ancient and modern smiths' strong points", and as a result, he is supposed to have improved his techniques.

Due to the nature of his personality, early in his career, he moved away from Tsunatoshi's style. He worked to develop his own original style and studied "Bizen Den choji midare hamon with nie". On this sword, the hamon's bottom half is ko-notare and mixed with togariba. The upper half of the hamon contains large and small choji with round tops and gunome and is a midare hamon. The entire hamon has a dense nioiguchi and abundant nie, which reminds us of Unju Korekazu's unique style. Also, some areas contain a mix of kinsuji and sunagashi, and this is one of his characteristic points. Usually his boshi are notarekomi, or midarekomi, the tip is komaru and there is a return.

In voting, some people voted for Shinshinto Satsuma smiths such as Hoki-no-kami Masayuki and Oku Motohira. This was because the bottom half of the hamon has togariba with nie. But if it were Masayuki's or Motohira's work, there would be more strong nie mixed with ara-nie, the togari in the hamon would be more prominent, and the blade would be wider and there would be a large hiraniku.

Note: the nakago photo is 93% of the actual size.

Kantei To No. 4: Katana

Mei: Bizen kuni ju Osafune Goro Saemon-jo Kiyomitsu
Tenmon 24 nen (1555) 8 gatsu kichijitsu

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 6.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume and nagare. The hada is visible.

There are ji-nie, frequent chikei, pale utsuri and a slightly dark jigane.

Hamon: open valley gunome mixed with choji and gunome; in some places there double gunome; there is some yaki-kuzure and an intricate midare hamon. There are ashi, frequent yo, nie deki, frequent tobiyaki and mune yaki, and many kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: There is a wide midarekomi yakiba; on the omote the tip is komaru with hakikake; the ura tip has a togari shape; both sides have a long return which continue to form muneyaki.

Commentary:

In Tenmon 22-24 (1554-56) Goro Saemon-jo Kiyomitsu was invited by Harima Kuni's Tatsuno castle lord Akamatsu Masahide to work in Tatsuno, and he then began working in the Tatsuno area. There are about ten existing blades which were made in Tatsuno. Kiyomitsu was good at producing suguha hamon, but most of his work has hitatsura hamon. These hitatsura swords are gassaku (made in collaboration) with Akamatsu Masahide, or are signed "tame (for) Masahide". It is thought that the reason, he made so many hitatsura works at that time was that hitatsura swords were preferred by Akamatsu Masahide.

This has no soe-mei, but is a sword forged at Tatsuno. It is slightly short, wide and thick, the tip has sori, and there is a long chu-kissaki, and these features show the period's characteristic points. From the itame hada with utsuri, the hitatsura mixed with an open valley hamon, and the double gunome seen in the gunome hamon, some people voted for Sue Bizen smiths such as Yosozaemon Sukesada. Sue Bizen smiths do have hitatsura work, and on this sword, the upper half has a prominent open valley double gunome hamon, so the Sukesada answer is understandable. However, if it were Sukesada's work, many of his jigane are a bright and tight itame hada, and there are only a few of his midare hamon with this much collapsed or crumpled hamon (nie kuzure).

There are two famous Kiyomitsu smiths, Goro saemon-jo and Mago uemon-jo. Both smiths' jigane are itame mixed with frequent mokume, there is a visible hada, and a slightly dark color. Compared with the Sukesada swords, Kiyomitsu's work is somewhat less refined. Also, many of Kiyomitsu's hamon have more strong ha-nie, and there are nie-kuzure regardless of what kind of hamon we see. In addition to these characteristic points, Kiyomitsu has unique yo which appear like a stain in the hamon, and are called "Kiyomitsu's drool" and this one of his major characteristic points, and on this katana it is obvious in the area below the yokote.

Kantei To No.5: Katana

Mei: Yonezawa shin oite To-to Kato Tsunahide tsukuru kore
Bunka 8 nen (1811) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 5 bu
Sori: slightly over 7 bu
Style: shinogi zukuri
Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are fine ji-nie, and a bright jigane.
Hamon: there is a diagonal yakidashi; the hamon is notare mixed with gunome which form a toran shape. There are frequent ashi, nie deki, some tobiyaki, a few kinsuji, and a bright nioiguchi.
Boshi: straight; the tip is komaru and there is a long return.

Commentary:

This katana has a standard width, the jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, the hamon is a toranba, and many people voted for Kanbun Shinto smiths, such as Echizen-no-kami Sukehiro and Itakura Gen-no-shin Terukane. But the shinogi-ji is narrow, there is a poor hiraniku, the ji-nie are poor, and there is a muji style jigane, which are Shinshinto characteristics.

Kato Tsunahide was an active smith in the Bunka (1804-17) period. His work shows a standard width, and early Shinshinto period shapes, and a large koshizori is one of his characteristic points. This katana's sori is too large for a Kanbun Shinto work.

The hamon has a diagonal yakidashi, and a midare pattern from the bottom to the top, and the waves are sometimes close to each other and appear to be near to colliding with each other. The midare hamon valleys become narrower going towards the tip, and the bottom of the valleys are round, and this is his characteristic hamon. Also, groups of three continuous gunome are mixed in the midare hamon, and many of them are accompanied by somewhat hard round tobuyaki, and this is a characteristic point along with the especially tight nioiguchi, and one shouldn't miss this characteristic point.

This katana shows the above characteristic points very well, and many people voted for Tsunahide or Chounsai Tsunatoshi. We see the same style of work from Tsunahide's younger brother Tsunatoshi, and because of this we treated Tsunatoshi as a correct answer. But most of Tsunatoshi's existing work has a tight nioiguchi, and a Bizen Den choji midare hamon with toran work is very rare, so you should be aware of these details.

In addition, some people voted for Ozaki Suketaka. If it were his work, the midare hamon valleys would be square, and the nioiguchi would be denser.

An interesting theory is that Tsunahide became mentally deranged in Bunka 13 (1816) and we can not identify any existing work made after Bunka 13. Because his active period was short, he left few examples to study. The same school's Koyama Munetsugu is thought to have been Tsunatoshi's actual teacher, and this is the reason why we can speculate that Tsunahide was not in a situation where he could train his students or successors.

Shijo Kantei To No. 784 in the May issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To 784 is a tanto by Osafune Motoshige dated Showa 5 (1316).

This tanto has an almost standard length, the width and the thickness are standard, and there is a standard tanto shape with uchizori. From this, you can judge this as work from the mid- to late Kamakura Period.

The jigane is itame mixed with nagare-hada, the entire ji is visible, and there are jifu and midare utsuri. This is Bizen work, but is from a branch school from its obvious characteristic points.

Motoshige's hamon are composed of vertically extended square gunome, the valleys have a togari shape, and there is a characteristic midare hamon. He has several examples where this type of hamon pattern extends from the moto to the tip. Sometimes there are ko-choji mixed with ko-gunome, kataochi gunome, and sometimes different elements are mixed together in this style of hamon.

In addition, we see nioiguchi type hamon with ko-nie, strong ha-nie, and prominent kinsuji and sunagashi, so there can be a strong Soshu Den influence in the hamon.

Many of Motoshige's boshi are midarekome with a sharp tip, and the hint refers to this.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Motoshige, and in addition to the correct answer, some people voted for Kagemitsu.

Kagemitsu is known to have a very refined jigane, especially among the refined forging work seen in the Osafune smiths' work. His jigane have a very tight ko-itame hada and are very well forged, there are abundant dense ji-nie, a clear jigane and clear midare utsuri.

Also, Motoshige's hamon have square gunome, and the tops of the gunome form a line which is parallel to the edge of the blade, and the valleys can form tusk shaped togariba. However, Kagemitsu's tanto hamon are based on kataochi gunome.

The kataochi gunome shape appears as though the tops of the gunome were scraped off or cut off. Because of this, the top of the

hamon border does not extend up into the ji and is not parallel with the sword's edge.

For Explanation by Hinohara Dai