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Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Tanto

Mumei: Yukimitsu

Owner: Foundation for Japanese Sword Research

Length: 7 sun 7 bu 6 rin (23.5 cm)

Sori: almost none

Motohaba: 9 bu 1 rin (2.75 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Nakago length: 2 sun 7 bu 1 rin (8.2 cm)

Nakago sori: 3 rin (0.1 cm)

Commentary

This is a hirazukuri tanto with a mitsumune. It is wide, slightly short for the width, and there is a standard thickness. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, there is some nagare-hada, and the hada is slightly visible in places. There are abundant dense ji-nie, chikei, and slightly pale nie utsuri. The entire hamon is narrow, and it is ko-notare mixed with ko-gunome. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant even nie, some hotsure, yubashiri and frequent kinsuji. The boshi is notarekomi with a round return, and there is hakikake on both sides. The horimono on the omote is a koshi-hi carved through the nakago, and the inside of the hi has a suken horimono. Above this there is a shobu-hi and tsure-hi carved through the nakago. On the ura there is a goma-bashi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, the tip is a shallow kurijiri, and the yasurime are slightly katte sagari. There are three mekugi-ana, and on the omote on the bottom half of the nakago there is a two kanji signature located slightly towards the mune edge.

According to many historical sword books, Sagami Koku's Toshiro Yukimitsu is supposed to have been a student of Shintogo Kunimitsu. He was slightly older than Masamune, and was the senior student. His signed work consists of only a few tanto, and his representative works are gyobutsu (imperial treasures). One was given to the Mino

Koku's Imao lord Takekoshi Masanobu by Ieyasu. There is also the Omaeda family's ancestral tanto which is classified as Kokuho. Both tanto are small with suguha hamon, which confirms a teacher and apprentice relationship with Kunimitsu.

However, among the mumei works which have been confirmed as being made by Yukimitsu, there is a wide range of styles. They remind us of work by Masamune, Norishige, and Rai Kunitsugu. There are notare style midare hamon, and among these there is a hitatsura hamon. Actually, from old appraisals of his work, these styles are included in work judged to be by Yukimitsu. Since the Muromachi period, in historical sword books, Kunimitsu's work shows a wide range of styles.

In thinking about this range of styles, Dr. Honma Kunzan used to say Yukimitsu has too many styles of work attributed to him, and we should re-think this situation. Honma said that if the style is Soshu jojo-saku work (best work), but not by Masamune, Sadamune, Norishige, and the other jutetsu smiths, you should think of Yukimitsu. Honma thought that the old judgements attributing work to Yukimitsu means that the Yukimitsu name was like a viable attribution or last alternative to use for a difficult appraisal.

Since historical times work which was judged as being by Yukimitsu had common characteristic points: the jiba (jigane and hamon) has frequent nie, and abundant hataraki such as chikei, kinsuji, and yubashiri, and there was no question that these features and the nie indicated that this was Soshu Den jo-saku (high level work) work.

This is one of a very few signed Yukimitsu tanto and is a very valuable reference material since it helps us to identify his style and signature. The shape is wide, it has a short length for the width, and a hocho-like (kitchen knife) shape. The same period's smith Awataguchi Toshiro Yoshimitsu has the same kind of tanto shape, but in the work from Sagami Koku, this work commands attention as a pioneer shape for the three "Hocho Masamune".

The jigane has a well forged itame hada with a fine textured small pattern hada, there are dense ji-nie and fine chikei. Also the low narrow hamon has frequent and varied kinsuji in the jiba (jigane and hamon), and there are ha-nie seen from the moto to the saki. In addition, the yubashiri hataraki at the top of the hamon introduces an interesting feature.

The hamon edge has a clear nioiguchi shown by bright beautiful nie, and dynamic kinsuji. This tanto exhibits excellent workmanship and is a Soshu Den masterpiece. The midare hamon is not wide, and this is the same characteristic point used to judge something as Yukimitsu's mumei work. This is supposed to have been one of the standard judgement criteria for an appraisal by the Honnami family. Overall, Yukimitsu's style is quiet or understated but robust, and signed works

by Yukimitsu are valuable as references for his work. In the Edo period, this tanto was a family heirloom of the Hitoyoshi clan's Sagara family.

Explanation Ishii Akira and photo by Imoto Yuki.

Shijo Kantei To No. 787

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 787 Shijo Kantei To is September 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 September 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: Katana

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 3 sun (69.8 cm)

Sori: 6 bu 5 rin (2.0 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 5 rin (3.15 cm)

Sakihaba: slightly less than 8 bu (2.4 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: slightly less than 1 sun 7 bu (5.1 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun (18.2 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with a mitsumune. It is wide, and the difference in widths at the moto and saki is small. The katana is slightly thinner than usual, and has a slightly large sori, and a long chu-kissaki. The jigane has itame mixed with mokume, there is a visible hada, and a unique hada. There are frequent ji-nie and chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The entire hamon has frequent nie, fine kinsuji, sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi. The horimono on the omote and ura are futasuji-hi carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, and the tip is ha-agari kurijiri. The

yasurime are a large sujichigai. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, under the mekugi-ana there is a large signature.

Juyo Tosogu

Hiten zu (heavenly nymph design) menuki

Mumei : Joshin

This is supposed to be work by Goto Joshin. Joshin (1512-1562) was the Goto family's third generation gold smith, and worked for two Muromachi shoguns, the 12th generation Ashikaga Yoshiharu and the 13th generation Yoshiteru. Reportedly he had a dynamic personality, and his work is known for its clear and strong style.

The hiten (nymphs) admired Budha, and would fly and play music. Their shapes are large and bold, and there is a somber mood or feeling in this work.

The omote side menuki shows a hiten playing a tsuzumi (drum), and the ura side hiten is playing a flute. This work shows Joshin's style which was described as showing "high mountains and deep valleys", and he used a rich nikudori style (which shows a high volume in the subjects). Here, he used silver for the skin, while the decorative areas and costume patterns were highlighted using gold iroe and inlay, and we see delicate details everywhere. The hiten's facial expressions show merciful and gentle features. They are dressed elegantly with high quality gold and silver over a jet black shakudo ground.

The omote side shows volume and shapes, and on the ura side the yin and yang root is majestic. The design on the omote and ura are well coordinated. This is truly a Joshin set of menuki and their quality will convince experts that they are work by Joshin.

Explanation by Kugiya Natoko

April Token Teirei Kansho Kai

Date: July 11 (second Saturday of July)

Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Ooi Takeshi

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Juyo Bijutsuhin

Mei: Bishu ju (the nakago is suriage below this, but was originally signed Masaie)

Oan 5 (1372) (suriage below this)

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 2.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume, and some areas are nagare hada; the hada is visible; there are ji-nie, chikei, and shirake utsuri.

Hamon: chu-suguha, there are some ko-ashi at the koshimoto; there are ashi, yo, a tight nioiguchi, ko-nie, some fine hotsure and a slightly worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight; the tip is komaru, and there are fine hakikake.

Horimono; on the omote and ura there are bo-hi with marudome. On the omote under the bo-hi there is a Hachiman dai-bosatsu; the ura has a Kasuga daimyojin.

commentary

This is a suriage tachi and part of the mei has been lost. The signature is similar to the 27th Juyo token which is a wakizashi and is dated Joji 3 (1364), and also similar to a wakizashi which is the 34th Juyo Token and is dated Joji 2, and we can definitely recognize this as Ko-Mihara work.

The shape clearly shows a characteristic peak Nanbokucho period tachi shape. Although it is suriage, it is long and wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is not prominent. The sori in the center of the blade is slightly large, and there is a large kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume hada, there is a relatively large hada pattern, the entire hada is visible, and there is a whitish color. The hamon is a tight chu-suguha with ko-nie, there is a worn down nioiguchi, and the hataraki inside of the hamon is gentle. The boshi is straight and there is a return and these details are characteristic of, and are similar to the neighboring province's Aoe work, and which are seen sometimes in Mihara work.

Because the hada pattern is large, in some places the itame hada becomes nagare hada, the fine sugaha has hotsure, the boshi tip has hakikake, and these characteristics are originally from Yamato Den.

Many people voted for Aoe, and looked at this as having a chirimen hada. But that school's jigane has a hada pattern which is smaller, and a fine visible hada. If this were Nambokucho period work, many of their jigane would be a tight ko-itame hada. Also, they have many

hataraki such as midare utsuri, suji utsuri, dan utsuri, jifu, and saka-ashi, and nioi-deki with a clear nioiguchi.

Kantei To No. 2: Wakizashi

Mei: motte Naban-tetsu oite Bushu Edo Echizen Yasutsugu
with Aoi mon
Honda Hida-no-kami shojinai (owner)
Masse tsurugi kare nari (Aoi mon)

Length: slightly over 1 shaku 7 sun 6 bu

Sori: slightly less than 5 bu

Style: shinogizukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: a slightly tight itame hada; there are dense ji-nie, fine dark chikei, and a dark jigane.

Hamon: large round choji mixed with square shaped large gunome and yakikuzure; there is a large midare pattern; in the bottom half, the areas between the midare hamon are connected by a suguha hamon. There are ashi, prominent yo, frequent nie, rough nie, and some areas have a rough nie kuzure; there are tobiyaki, yubashiri, sunagashi, nie suji around the monouchi which forms a stripe-like pattern; there is a slightly worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: large gunome, and above this, it is straight; the tip has a slightly sharp komaru and a long return.

Commentary

On the bottom half of this blade, there are prominent large round choji shapes, which appear like dumplings, and this is a characteristic hamon. It is well known and described in many books. This unique hamon is the Shodai Yasutsugu's, and a majority of people voted for the correct answer. However, there are not many opportunities to examine this feature in a real blade in hand. People who have been studying from books recently appeared to not recognize this hamon. I hope people looking at this sword will see and remember what they observe here. Also, many of these midare hamon and Hasebe style hitatsura hamon work have "Honda Hida no kami shoji nai" (the owner's name) in the mei. This likely indicates Honda Harishige's preferences in a sword.

However, this blade is wide for the length, the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, and there is a large kissaki, which shows Keicho shinto characteristic points. Also, in this period sometimes the tip of a wakizashi has sori. Yasutsugu is known for a

visible Hokoku (Northern Japan) hada mixed with mokume, but on the other hand he has some swords with tight forging and with chikei in the jigane just like this one. The common point is that the jigane has a dark color, and that is one of Hokoku's characteristic points. The jigane has frequent nie, some parts are rough, there are stripe like kinsuji and sunagashi, and a slightly worn down nioiguchi. The boshi is straight, the tip is sharp and there is a long return to the yokote area. These characteristics are seen in his usual work and we should not overlook these points.

However, if this were Soshu Tsunahiro's work, there are very few wakizashi with a large kissaki, almost every thing is hirazukuri, the hamon is not a large midare suguha, but are more often ko-notare and gunome; there are frequent muneyaki, and this can form a hitatsura style work. If it were Shitahara work, there can be a clear mokume hada called nyorin-moku, mixed with ayasugi hada and which can have a whitish appearance, and can form a hamon with horseshoe-like shapes or with a crescent shaped features in a large midare hamon.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mei: Hizen kuni ju Omi Daijo Fujiwara Tadahiro

Length: 1 shaku 4 sun 1 bu

Sori: slightly less than 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada, there are dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and a bright jigane.

Hamon: primarily a gunome midare hamon; some areas are mixed with ko-choji, yahazu style choji, square shape gunome, and a ko-notare style hamon. There are ashi, yo, a slightly wide nioiguchi, ko-nie, and the midare hamon valleys have a nie-kori (clumped) appearance; some areas have thick ashi, and there are yubashiri, small tobiyaki and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight with a komaru.

Commentary

From the signature this is supposed to be from around the Kanbun era and likely from Kanbun 10 or later. The shape is not a typical Shinto shape, the difference in the widths at the moto and saki are not prominent. There is a slightly large sori, the kissaki is long, and

these features are seen in Hizen's characteristic well proportioned tachi shapes. The forging is a tight ko-itame hada, and there are dense ji-nie which form a komenuka hada. The hamon has a bright nioiguchi and ko-nie and is a midare hamon, with prominent round top choji, and gunome. There are snake eye shaped yo, the hamon valleys have abundant nie, there is a dense nioiguchi, and some thick ashi. This is mixed with a ko-gunome hamon with a dense nioiguchi which has a sharp boundary going into the ji and ha. The boshi follows the fukura closely, there is a komaru and return, and a belt-like nioiguchi. From these characteristic points, we would like to judge this as a Hizen To.

Among Hizen To, this hamon's midare valleys are narrow, and different from branch Hizen work in which the areas between the midare peaks have a narrow and low hamon connecting them, and there is a not too dense nioiguchi, and no prominent sunagashi. Also, the jigane is not dark, there is no visible hada, and there is refined forging. From this you should think about the first three generations. In addition, there are some ashi which are angled towards the kissaki direction and towards the nakago direction, and this is seen sometimes in work by Omi daijo Fujiwara Tadahiro.

Tadahiro was active for a long period from when he was 19 years old to 80 years old. From this history, his styles show many details of the school's characteristic work. This wakizashi has fine chikei, the jigane looks stronger than usual, the midare hamon is a slightly small size and there are many kinds of details in the hamon; the top of the hamon has slight vertical variations, there are yubashiri and small tobiyaki, and the area where the boshi ends looks hard, and these are the sandai Tadayoshi's characteristic points.

If this were work by Shin Kunisada and Shin Kunisuke, it would be necessary to consider their yakidashi, muneyaki, and komaru boshi characteristic points. If it were Fujiwara Takada work you have to consider the high shinogi ji, whitish color and utsuri.

The nakago is shown at 93% of the actual size.

Kantei To No. 4: Katana

Mei: Oku Yamato kami Taira Ason Motohira
83 sai (83 years old)
Bunsei 9 (1826) Tsuchinoe haru (spring)

Length: 2 shaku 6.5 bu
Sori: 6 bu
Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada; there are abundant dense ji-nie and some areas where ji-nie are prominent, and chikei.

Hamon: gunome midare hamon mixed with togari shapes, and ko-notare. There is a dense nioiguchi, strong nie, some rough nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, somewhat thick imozuru, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi; there are hakikake; the tip is round and there is a somewhat short return.

Commentary

This is a wide blade with a large kissaki, and a dynamic shape. Differences in the widths at the moto and saki are not prominent. The blade is thick and heavy, and from this you can judge this as Shinshinto period work. The high shinogi and rich ha-niku, are seen often as Satsuma's characteristic points.

Among the Satsuma Shinshinto smiths, Motohira is known to have the most refined forging. This katana has frequent ji-nie, some places have ara-nie (rough nie), and there are chikei, which are Satsuma characteristic points. The forging is tight and the ji appears moist (uruoi).

The hamon is a midare hamon with ara-nie mixed with sharp hamon features. There are nie, and thick kinsuji which appear as imozuru, which shows Satsuma characteristic points very well. In particular, this has vertical variations in the midare hamon, from the moto to the saki and is a somewhat uniform midare hamon, and the entire hamon has a dense nioiguchi. The nioiguchi is not as tight at the koshimoto, and these are Motohira's characteristic points.

If this were work by the same period's smith, Hoki no kami Masayuki, around the monouchi area, there would often be a slightly thin and long kissaki shape. Masayuki's forging sometimes shows white lines in the ji, and many of his midare hamon have relatively gentle variations, and around the monouchi area the hamon width is low and the midare pattern becomes gentle.

Many people voted for Mondo no sho Masakiyo. If it were his work, the nioiguchi and nie are different from Satsuma's, and there would be wide and narrow and strong and weak variations in the nie. Masakiyo's hamon have many different styles, small and large variations, and the boshi have more hakikake and a kaen style.

Kantei To No. 5: Tachi

Mei: Nagamitsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 8 bu

Sori: 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada; there are thick fine ji-nie, clear midare utsuri, and bo-utsuri at the koshimoto.

Hamon: choji mixed with gunome; there are ashi, yo, a nioiguchi, ko-nie and kinsuji at the koshimoto.

Boshi: slightly shallow notare. The tip is komaru and there is a short return.

Commentary

This tachi has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori, funbari, the tip has sori, and there is a chu-kissaki. These details show work from the latter half of the Kamakura period with the tachi shape and characteristic points.

The jigane is a well forged tight itame hada. There are abundant fine ji-nie and clear midare utsuri. The hamon is bright with nioguchi type choji mixed with prominent gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, and from these details it is possible narrow the period down to the latter half of the Kamakura period, and as being Bizen Den master work.

Furthermore, in looking at details at the koshimoto and around the monouchi area, the hamon width is low and somewhat gentle, which is an Osafune characteristic point. Other areas of the hamon have a consistent height, and vertical variations are restrained, and this is a later period Nagamitsu characteristic feature. In addition, the boshi is a shallow notare, the komaru return is called a Sansaku-boshi, and this shows Nagamitsu's characteristics everywhere. A majority of people voted for him.

Besides Nagamitsu, some people voted for the Fukuoka Ichimonji smith Yoshifusa. This was likely because the center of the choji midare hamon stands out, but if it were the school's work, the midare hamon's height and size variations would be obvious, and the entire hamon would have prominent vertical variations. The same kind of variations would be seen at the koshimoto and around the monouchi. Furthermore, if it Yoshifusa's work, we would see a prominent fukuro choji hamon. If it were Ko-Ichimonji work, the sori becomes more shallow going towards the point, and the hamon would be mixed with a ko-midare pattern, and there would be a Ko-Bizen influence in the classic hamon. Also, if it were Chikakage's work, the hada would be visible, and a midare saka-ashi hamon with ha-nie would be seen.

Shijo Kantei To No. 785 In the June issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a wakizashi by Hasebe Kunishige.

This wakizashi is wide, long, and thin, and there is a shallow sori. From the shape, you can judge this as work from the peak of the Nanbokucho period.

For the long length of the blade, the nakago is conspicuously short, and we can say that this is a characteristic point for the period's tanto and wakizashi.

Hasebe Kunishige was good at producing hitatsura hamon, but sometimes we see suguha style work. At a glance, it looks like work from Nobukuni in Yamashiro who worked in the same province. However, Kunishige's characteristic points conform with the Enbun Joji period's hirazukuri wakizashi. His blades are conspicuously very thin, his wakizashi and tanto have visible hada, and the jigane along the hamon and mune areas show masame hada. It is not obvious here, but many of his boshi are round and large, and have a discontinuous long return.

Nobukuni's work has simple but neat horimono, and so the answer is reasonable. However, his wakizashi are not this thin, his forging along the mune's edge very rarely shows any masame or nagare hada, and we do not often see this kind of long return.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Kunishige, and a few people voted for Kuninobu.

At this time, it is hard to identify clear differences between Kunishige's and Kuninobu's characteristic points, so we treated Kuninobu as a correct answer here.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai

