

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

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Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Kokuho **National Treasure**

Type: Tanto
Mumei: Masamune (Meibutsu Hocho Masamune)
Owner: Eisei Bunko Foundation

Length: 7 sun 1 bu 8 rin (21.75 cm)
Sori: 5 rin (0.15 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)
Motokasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)
Nakago length: 2 sun 7 bu 4 rin (8.3 cm)
Nakago sori: slight

Commentary

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune. It is wide, slightly short, thin, and has a slight sori. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume, and the entire ji is well forged. There are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent chikei, and straight utsuri. The hamon is notare mixed with somewhat square gunome. There are small ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant even fine nie, some sunagashi, kinsuji, tobiyaki, and yubashiri. The boshi is notarekomi, and the point is a komaru with a return. The horimono on the omote is a suken with bonji, and the horimono on the ura is bonji. The nakago is ubu and the tip is a shallow ha-agari type kurijiri. The yasurime are worn but a slightly visible sugichigai. There is one mekugi-ana.

Sagami Province's Goro Nyudo Masamune is a great master smith in the history of the Japanese sword. He is well known, not only in the sword world, but also because he inherited Soshu Den's nie style and elevated sword making into an art. In the Edo period, he was counted as one of the three best master smiths, and is listed in the historical sword book "Kyoho Meibutsu cho". This book lists 235 swords, and among these, 59 pieces are attributed to Masamune.

He is thought to have passed away in the early Nanbokucho period on Koei 2 (1343). Also, in the great fire of the Meireki period, his

famous work, the “Edo Chomei Masamune” dated Showa 3 (1343), was lost. From the information we have, it appears certain that he was active around the end of the Kamakura period.

His existing signed works consist of the “Meibutsu Fudo Masamune” classified as Juyo Bunkazai, two gyobutsu (imperial household properties) named “Kyogoku” and “Daikoku” and another four tanto, including the Honjo, and these tanto are famous. The rest of his many blades are mumei due to being greatly suriage. His katana have a standard width with a chu-kissaki, or are wide blades with a long chu-kissaki. His jigane appear to have moisture (uruoi), and a unique appearance. There are abundant ji-nie, and many chikei are present due to forging soft and hard steels together, but his jigane are different from later period’s jigane; Masamune’s jigane appear natural looking. If Bizen school hamon shapes are clear and solid, Masamune’s hamon shapes are abstract. His hamon have all kinds of shapes, and quoting Dr. Honma, “his style described in one word is “crazy””. His style is free or relaxed and dynamic, but still shows a high level of sophistication. Quoting Dr Honma, we can say that “his work or style exhibits his true talent, and that is why Masamune is Masamune”.

Masamune’s nie style hamon have small and large nie, as well as strong and weak nie, nie kuzure, nie suji, yubashiri, and tobiyaki, and there is no question his work is charming and pleasing. His nie come together in the nioiguchi, and the nioiguchi shows variations of light and dark areas, and narrow and wide areas. These variations show movement and change, and form a kind of scenery, and display ever changing aspects. These properties in the hamon can be appreciated just like a sumi-e or an ink painting. In Masamune’s dynamic hamon, we can recognize his most attractive points, and we can recognize his high artistic ability which we do not observe in other smiths.

This tanto is described in the Kyoho Meibutsu Cho and is famous in the sword world as the “Meibutsu Hocho Masamune” and is one of three similar tanto. This blade is wide for its length, and literally has a hocho shape. Masamune created this shape and its uniqueness is worthy of a special mention. Also, it is well forged item hada and appears uruoi or moist. There are chikei everywhere, and the forging is of high quality. With the thick nakago, the thin blade stands out, but there is no rough or crude impression made by the shape and nakago. This is supposed to be completely original work from Masamune, and there are straight utsuri which is unusual for Masamune, and this is a notable feature.

The hamon has subtle changes or variations in the nioiguchi, with abundant fine even nie. Hataraki such as the midare pattern, tobiyaki, are yubashiri are bold, but are restrained, and show a high level of skill unique to Masamune.

The sophistication of this tanto is original and intact, and this is a unique master work, different from other Soshu Den smiths.

According to the “Kansei Jushu Shoka Fu”, on the page for Okudaira Nobumasa, it says that after the Sekigahara battle in September of Keicho 5 (1600), Nobumasa was appointed as the Kyoto Shoshidai, and his vassal Torii Shouemon Nobuaki defeated and captured Ankokuji Ehei who was hiding in Honganji temple. At that time Nobuaki seized the Hocho Masamune tanto from Ekei, and presented it to his lord Nobumasa. Nobumasa then presented it to Ieyasu, but Ieyasu gave it to Nobumasa as a reward. After this, it passed on to Nobumasa’s fourth son Matsudaira Tadaaki. At the time the “Kyoho Meibutsucho” was written, the tanto's owner was Tadaaki’s great grandson who was Ise Province’s Kuwana clan lord Matsudaira Tadamasa. Later in the Bakumatsu period, the Okuhira Matsudaira family joined Musashi Province’s Shinobu clan. In the Meiji period, the tanto belonged to Earl Ito Miyoji, and in Showa 11(1936), Duke Hosokawa Moritatsu who was the NBTHK’s first chairman obtained it. After the war, Sir Moritatsu established the Eisei Bunko foundation, and among the sword related items in the foundation’s collection, this became one of the most prominent works.

This tanto will be exhibited in the Eisei Bunko exhibition “View of Hosokawa’s Meito” in the Eisei Bunko collection’s Kokuho from January 14 to May 7, 2023.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira

Shijo Kantei To No. 790

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 790 Shijo Kantei To is December 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 December 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: 2 shaku 2 sun 5 bu (68.2 cm)
Sori: 6.5 bu (1.97 cm)
Motohaba: 1 sun 7 rin (3.25 cm)
Sakihaba: 7 bu 4 rin (2.25 cm)
Motokasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.6 cm)
Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)
Kissaki length: 1 sun 3 bu 4 rin (4.05 cm)
Nakago length: 5 sun 3 bu (16.06 cm)
Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and the saki are not too different. There is a poor hiraniku, the tip has sori and there is a long chu-kissaki. The jigane has itame hada mixed with nagare and masame hada, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei and whitish (shirake) utsuri. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. In some places in the hamon, the ashi extend to the edge of the hamon. There is a tight nioiguchi and ko-nie. The nakago is ubu, and the tip is iriyamagata. The yasurime are taka-no-ha. There is one mekugi-ana. On the omote, between the mekugi-ana and the edge along the mune side there is a two kanji signature.

Many of this smith's boshi are midare-komi.

Juyo Tosogu

Kame-zu (turtle design) menuki

Mumei: Misumi

Misumi is listed in the "Higo Kinko-roku" (Nagaya Jumei, Meiji 35 nen (1902)) and is recognized as a Higo kinko. This book listed other smiths' names too, such as Kouji, Masaharu, and Harunobu. However, their actual signed works or attributed mumei works are few, and their locations, and active periods are not clear. There is one report that says during the lord Sansai's period, the 8th generation of the school was active. However, to learn more details about his origin and his relationship to other smiths, we will have to wait until additional materials are found.

Since historical times, the school's unique characteristic point is their menuki style which is unusual for a Higo kinko. One of their characteristic points is the shape of the pin (or "root") going from the menuki into the tsuka. A previous book said that the "menuki pins have a triangular cross section instead of the usual square or rectangular cross section, and if we see this, it is surely work by

Misumi'. The back of a menuki with the pin having a triangular cross section is Misumi's major characteristic point. Misumi's menuki style is unique. Usually, many smiths produce a shape from the front and back using "uchidashi", or by hammering in or pressing to shape the metal used for the menuki, and then add or solder on the pin. But in Misumi's work, he carved out the pin's material when forming the menuki and carved or filed a pin with a triangular cross section.

This turtle's shape is carved from shakudo, and gold is used only for the eyes. The turtle's hard shell, skin, legs, neck, and tail were carved using different chisels, and we can see the differences in the textures in the various parts of the turtle. The turtle's stomach, legs and claws appear to be gripping the ground. At first glance it looks realistic, and if you look closely, Misumi's chisel lines overlap, but the effect is a calm appearing turtle, formed with deep chisel work. A turtle is an old design, and we have seen this design on many menuki. But this menuki captures a turtle's slow movement, and it looks like the turtle is about to start moving, and this effect is unique to Misumi's work. On the ura side, we see the triangular pin, and the base of the pin was carved out using a sukibori technique.

The menuki's omote side engraving as well as the depressed or low areas have strong characteristics. We can say this makes his work distinguishable from other smiths, and is a unique feature of Misumi's work .

Explanation by Kugiya Natoko

October Token Teirei Kansho kai

Date: October 8 (second Saturday of October)

Location: The Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Takeda Kotaro

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: Nagamitsu

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 1 sun

Sori: slightly less than 1 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada; some parts are mixed with a large hada, there are dense ji-nie and clear midare utsuri.

Hamon: narrow suguha; some parts are a ko-notare style; some areas have spot, and there is a tight bright clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: shallow notare; the tip is komaru and there is a short return.

Horimono; on the omote and the ura there are bo-hi with a square finish.

Commentary

This is a Juyo Token classified Nagamitsu tachi. The narrow width, even though it is suriage and missing funbari, still has a large sori, and the tip has sori. From the shape you can judge this as a tachi from the latter half of the Kamakura Period. The jigane has clear midare-utsuri, and the hamon is a simple narrow suguha, but there is a nioiguchi, and from this you can judge this as Bizen work.

In that period's Bizen work, the smiths who were good at producing clear midare-utsuri, narrow suguha hamon with a tight nioiguchi, and with a sansaku boshi which is shallow notare with a tip that has a komaru and return are Nagamitsu and Sanenaga. Nagamitsu produced gorgeous choji hamon work, and in his later work, he made narrow shapes with suguha hamon, and these were somewhat sober works. This is an example of that work. It has a gentle hamon with prominent utsuri. It seems to be Nagamitsu's effort to teach us that besides a gorgeous elaborate hamon, one can make a plain, simple or minimal hamon with another kind of beauty.

In voting, a majority of people observed the characteristic points and voted for Nagamitsu or Sanenaga. This is similar to Sanenaga's work and the answer is reasonable. A few people voted for Unrui, and this seems to come from the utsuri and the gentle suguha style hamon. If it were Unrui work, the hamon would be a ko-nie style which is an important point.

Kantei To No. 2: Katana

Mumei: Naoe Shizu

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 2.5 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume; along the hamon side, there is a strong nagare hada which becomes a masame style hada; there are ji-nie, frequent chikei, and pale utsuri.

Hamon: ko-notare mixed with togariba and gunome; the entire hamon width is low and the hamon is a midare style. There are ashi, thick slightly uneven nie, some niesuji, kinsuji, sunagashi, yubashiri and tobiyaki.

Boshi: straight; on the omote the point is round, and on the ura the point is a komaru. On both sides, the tip has hakikake, and there is a long return.

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

Commentary

This is a Juyo Token blade judged as being a Naoe Shizu katana. From the missing habaki-moto funbari, this is a suriage shape. This is wide, the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, there is a shallow sori for the length, and there is a long kissaki. From the shape, this appears to be a Nanbokucho period suriage katana.

The jigane is mainly itame mixed with mokume, and along the hamon side there is a strong nagare hada and prominent masame hada. This characteristic shows the smith was strongly influenced by the Yamato school. Looking at the hamon, there are ko-gunome mixed with togariba which looks like a Mino style. It seems to be Nanbokucho period Mino work with Yamato characteristics. From this, possible candidates are Shizu smiths, and the names of Kaneshige and Kaneyuki come to mind.

Many hamon by Kaneshige and Kaneyuki are not too high, and the heights and widths of the gunome and ko-notare seem to have a different appearance from this one, so it appears to be appropriate to look at this as Shizu work.

This is work by either Yamato Kaneuji, or by Shizu school smiths who kept forging in Yamato and are called Yamato-Shizu. If it is Kaneuji's work, the boshi would be large and round, there would be prominent kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki, and the hamon would have a small midare style. If it were Shizu work, the boshi would be the same as above, and there would be more frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and thick nie, which appear to show a stronger Soshu Den influence. Here, ko-gunome and gunome are the main hamon elements, so looking at this as a Naoe Shizu work would be reasonable. This has a large degree of suriage, and was judged after it was suriage, and was judged as Shizu work, which is treated as a correct answer at this time.

Kantei To No. 3: Tanto

Mei: Yasuyoshi

Length: 9 sun 2.5 bu

Sori: 1 bu

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: ko-notare mixed with gunome and togari; there are ashi, a nioiguchi, and some yubashiri.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is sharp, and shifted down towards the hamon edge.

Commentary

This is a Juyo Token Yasuyoshi tanto. The shape is wide, it is long, thin, and there is a slightly shallow sori, and so you can judge this as Nanbokucho Period work from around the Enbun-Joji period. The jigane is itame mixed with nagare hada, there is a slightly visible hada, and shirake utsuri. The hamon is ko-notare mixed with togari, and with a nioiguchi. The boshi tip is sharp, and leans towards toward the hamon side of the kissaki. This is a unique shape and shows Yasuyoshi's characteristics very well. A majority of people observed these characteristic points and voted for Yasuyoshi. A few people voted for either Dai Sa or Sa school smiths. The jigane and the hamon shapes are similar, but the frequency of the nie is different.

Yasuyoshi's hamon have a nioiguchi, which reminds us of a Bizen style hamon. In voting, this would be a strong characteristic point to judge this work as Yasuyoshi's.

Dai Sa began working in the classic Kyushu style, and he developed a new dynamic style with a hamon having frequent nie, a clear jiba (jigane and hamon), and a sharp tipped boshi, and established the Sa school. Yasuyoshi observed him carefully, and developed his original style, which was a Bizen style which had a sharp tipped boshi leaning down towards the hamon edge. Possibly he tried to differentiate himself from the other Sa school smiths.

Kantei To No. 4: Katana

Mei: Tsuda Echizen-no-kami Sukehiro

Enpo 9 nen (1681) 8 gatsu hi

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 5 sun 2 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are abundant large ji-nie, fine chikei and a bright and clear jigane.

Hamon: short straight yakidashi at the moto; above this there are gunome and choji, and this becomes a toran midare hamon; there are box shaped features, thick ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: there is a dense straight yakiba, the tip is komaru and there is a return with a well defined stop.

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

Commentary

This is a wide and long katana, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori with a long chu-kissaki, and this is a so-called long length Kanbun Shinto shape. Sukehiro sometimes made this kind of shape and many of them are well made. From these details, it is possible that this was made for a special order.

The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, and there is refined forging. The toran midare hamon has a dense nioiguchi, a bright and clear jiba (jigane and hamon), and no imperfections in its long length, and it appears to be meticulous work. There is a short yakidashi, tobiyaki which appears like a splash from a wave, and no prominent sunagashi. People observed these characteristic points and many voted for Sukehiro. Some people voted for Terukane. This katana has a high ihori mune, and below the yokote there is a continuous gunome hamon, and from this, the Terukane name is understandable. But if it were work by Terukane, his shapes have a poor hiraniku, the jigane is mixed with nagare hada, the hamon has katayama shaped toran mixed with yahazu choji, and there are frequent sunagashi, so please observe these characteristic points.

Some people voted for Sukehiro's student Sukenao. They are a teacher and student and work with the same kind of styles. Today, Sukenao's last known confirmed work is from Genroku 6 (1693). Compared with this kind of Kanbun Shinto shape, many of his sori are slightly large, and his hamon are based on a large gunome toran, and his midare hamon have prominent sunagashi, and these are supposed to be his characteristic points.

The photo of the nakago is 87% of the actual size.

Kantei To No. 5: Katana

Mei: Shume-no-kami Ichinohara Yasuyo with Ichiyo Aoe mon

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 9 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: ko-itame mixed with ko-mokume, and the entire ji appears slightly cloudy or obscured; there are abundant ji-nie, frequent chikei, and a slightly dark jigane.

Hamon: suguha style shallow notare, mixed with ko-gunome; there are ko-ashi, a dense wide nioiguchi, abundant nie, prominent rough nie, fine kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: dense straight yakiba; the point is komaru, and there is a long return.

Commentary

This is a Juyo Token Ichinohara Yasuyo katana. There is a dynamic Satsuma shape; the blade is wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a slightly high shinogi, and a slightly large sori. The blade is heavy, and there is a large hiraniku.

Typically, Satsuma blades' characteristic points include a large or rich hiraniku, and notably, many of Yasuyo's works have a rich or large hiraniku. The Shinto Naminohira school's influence, show in his wide shapes and high shinogi.

His jigane have a slightly muddy cast or appearance, his hamon have a dense nioiguchi, there is a suguha style with a shallow notare pattern, and in some places there are rough nie.

From the signature's kami (“馬”) kanji, this is considered to be daimei work signed by Yasuyo's son Yasuma. Compared with Yasuyo's usual work, this katana has less hataraki and appears to be more gentle work. Because of this, there are no so-called “Satsuma Imozuru”, and a number of people voted for Shinkai. This blade has Shinkai's style of hamon which has a dense nioiguchi and a midare hamon. But if were Shinkai's work the shape would be different, and as I mentioned above, and his jiba (jigane and hamon) would be clearer. Some people voted for Nanki Shigekuni. If it were Nanki's work, his jigane have a masame style, there are hataraki at the edge of the hamon, the boshi has hakikake, and these are Nanki's characteristic points.

Shijo Kantei To No. 788 in the September issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by Awataguchi Yoshimitsu.

Some of Yoshimitsu's jitetsu are called nashiji. However, we often see itame and mokume hada which are slightly large, and the hada is visible.

The hamon shows Yoshimitsu's excellent suguha style, the nioiguchi has frequent ko-nie, and the jiba (jigane and hamon) is bright and clear.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Yoshimitsu. Besides Yoshimitsu, a few people voted for Shintogo Kunimitsu.

Both of these smiths worked in the mid-Kamakura period and were masters at making tanto, and some of their work is similar. A reason to vote for Kunimitsu is a type of nie which appears to drop down towards the edge around the fukura area, and this effect is called his "old man's beard". But here, there is a continuous ko-gunome hamon at the koshimoto and around the fukura, the boshi becomes narrow, and also there is a smooth signature made with a fine chisel, so seeing these details, one should vote for Yoshimitsu.

I wish to discuss another subject now. In Japan, uchigatana, and do-maru and haramaki for armor were used by lower class soldiers, and old uchigatana blades may have been over polished or worn down. As a result almost none of these items were passed on to succeeding generations from the lower class soldiers.

In the early Muromachi period, long uchigatana, domaru, and haramaki with long sleeves were used by higher class soldiers, and many were produced. There was probably an effort at that time to improve arms and armor during this period.

In Japan, around the Genpei war period (1180-1185), tanto supposedly were used as koshi-katana. There are very few old signed tanto with signatures by Awataguchi Hisakuni, Bungo Yukihiro, or Awataguchi Kuniyoshi.

Yoshimitsu's active period was around the Koan and Shoo periods (1278-82), and from around this period, we have many tanto examples made by master smiths.

Beside Yoshimitsu, tanto master smiths are Rai Kunitoshi, the Yamato Toma school, the Yamato Hosho school, Shikkake Norinaga,

Shintogo Kunimitsu and Osafune Kagemitsu. We are not sure why these master smiths appeared then, but conceivably it was related to the Mongol invasion and a desire to design better weapons.

For Explanation by Hinohara Dai