

NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

ISSUE 192

JANUARY, 2023

Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Kokuho

Tachi

Mei: Bungo Koku Kuniyuki saku (Kokon Denju no tachi)

Owner: Eisei Bunko Foundation

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 4 bu 7 rin (89.2 cm)

Sori: 9 bu 4 rin (2.85 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 7 rin (2.65 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 6 rin (1.7 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 4 rin (2.85 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 8 bu 1 rin (17.6 cm)

Nakago sori: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is slightly narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. The blade is thick, there is a large koshizori with funbari, and the tip falls down going forward (i.e. the sori becomes more shallow going towards the tip), and there is a small kissaki. The entire jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, and is mixed with large hada in some places, and there are ji-nie and shirake utsuri. The hamon at the moto has a large yaki-otoshi, and above this, it becomes a narrow suguha. It shows a prominent uruoi appearance (abundant fine ji-nie are present which creates a moist appearing surface), and in some places, there are hotsure. From the moto to the tip there are prominent uneven pale yubashiri, some kinsuji, and a worn down nioiguchi. The boshi is straight and the tip is yakizume. The horimono on the omote and ura at the koshimoto are hi (grooves), and inside of the hi, on the omote there is a gyo style kurikara. The ura has a unique relief figure inside of the hi. The nakago is ubu with a kijimata shape, the tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are suji-chigai. There are two mekugi-ana and one is closed. On the ura inside of the hi (which are carved through the nakago), there is a slightly small size six kanji signature.

Bungo Koku Yukihiro is highly valued in Kyushu's classic school, and we see a relatively large number of his existing works. He was called "Kishin Taiu" and reportedly was either a Hisosan monk, or Sadahide's student or teacher. He has a Juyo Bijutsuhin tachi dated Genkyu 2 (1205) and so his active period is clearly established. Usually, his work is narrow, has a large koshizori, the upper half is slightly falling down going forward (the sori becomes more shallow going towards the tip), the widths at the moto and saki are different, and there is a small kissaki, and these details, along with this elegant and graceful tachi shape reflect the period's characteristic points. Kuniyuki's forging produces a soft appearance with uruoi (a moist appearing ji), and there appears to be some kind of patina. Kuniyuki's hamon are either suguha or a suguha style with ko-midare. In both cases the nioiguchi has abundant nie, and above the machi there is a yakiotoshi, and there is a classic feeling which is seen in other old Kyushu work. Sometimes Kuniyuki has gyo (semi-cursive or semi-flowing) and so (curved or more flowing) style kurikara reliefs at the koshimoto. Beside these, we see jizo-bosatsu, bonji, matsukui-tsuru (cranes feeding on plants), and sakura flowers in relief, and in this period, these types of horimono are never seen in the work of other smiths. Consequently, we can say that he was a horimono expert, and this is noted as one of his characteristic points. Usually his mei are "Bungo Koku Yukihiro saku" signed on the ura side, and rarely we see a two kanji signature. Most of his signed works have an ubu nakago, and since historical times, his blades were supposed to be treated as treasured swords.

As I explained above, this tachi shows not only Yukihiro's characteristics, but also old Kyushu characteristics and features, and Kyushu's typical workmanship. However there are pale yubashiri at the top of the hamon too, and with the state of preservation of this blade, it is in a very healthy condition. The very simple horimono shows deep chisel work. According to one theory, Yukihiro was supposed to have been an ascetic, and we can witness his faith in the horimono work on his blades. Also, usually there are relief carvings inside of a frame, but on this sword, the horimono is inside of the hi, and both the omote and ura have a large amount of horimono work which is unusual. Judging from the bonji, some people think that the figure on the ura side is supposed to be Bishamonten who was held in high esteem. The identity of the carving as Bishamonten derives from the fact that in the hi on the side opposite of the mei, there are kanji which are thought to read "Bishamonten". Also, this blade is the only example where the mei is carved inside of the hi. This tachi was the 18th sword classified as Juyo token. In any case, this work has a dignified and classic appearance. With its significance, this tachi is not only among his

best work, but also shows the elegant charm of the Japanese sword. The origin of this tachi's Kokon Denju meibutsu is derived from the following story.

Hosokawa Fujitaka (Yusai) (1534-1610) was a military commander at the end of the Muromachi period and at the beginning of the Azuchi Momoyama period. He survived the period's wars, and worked for Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu, and he restored the Hosokawa family's position. He studied not only the martial arts, but also Noh plays, tea ceremony, poetry, and customs and traditions in ancient court and military households. He was also especially interested in waka (Japanese poetry), and studied Japan's oldest waka anthology the "Kokin Waka Shu" which is difficult to understand. He also studied the reserved or restricted version of the "Kokin Denju" (preserved as an oral account) which had been preserved since the Heian period. He learned this version from Sanjo Nishisane Ki who was a major cultural figure in that period.

At the battle of Sekigahara, Yusai belonged to the eastern troops and besieged Tanobe castle in Tango. He detained about 15,000 western troops for about two months. However, the prince Hachijo no Miya Tomohito was worried that Yusai could die in a battle since he was surrounded by western troops. Tomohito sent an imperial messenger Karasumaru Mitsuhiro to Yusai. Furthermore, the prince's father, the Goyosei emperor had been worried that the Kokin-shu oral tradition might disappear, and through an imperial order, had made efforts to preserve the tradition. When the fighting ended, Yusai received an imperial messenger, Karasumaru Mitsuhiro. Yusai then utilized the "Kokin Denju" to communicate with Karasumaru, and then presented Karasumaru with this tachi. Since then this tachi has been called the "Kokon Denju no tachi". It was handed down in the Karasumaru family, and in Meiji 27 (1894) given to their relative, Count Nakayama Takamaro. Later, when the Nakayama family put this tachi up for sale, the Hosokawa family's 16th generation Count Moritatsu (the NBTHK's first chairman) failed to acquire it. Around the early Showa period, this tachi was offered for sale again, and Count Moritatsu was able to obtain it and later commented that 40 years after he first heard about the Yukihiro tachi, he was finally able to acquire it. He said that after finally acquiring this tachi, he was very happy to have acquired it since it had belonged to one of his ancestors.

After the war, Count Moritatsu established the Eisei Bunko Foundation, and this is one of the masterpieces in their collection, and as historical material, this is also a valuable item.

This tachi will be exhibited in the "Famous Swords of the Hosokawa family: Eisei Bunko Kokuho Exhibit" from January 14 - May 7, 2023.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira

Shijo Kantei To No. 792

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 792 Shijo Kantei To is February 5, 2023. 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 February 5, 2023 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 3 sun 4.5 bu (71.1 cm)

Sori: slightly over 5 bu (1.6 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 6 rin (3.2 cm)

Sakihaba: 7 bu 8 rin (2.35 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 3 bu 5 rin (4.1 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 1.5 bu (21.66 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. The width is almost standard, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a large sori and a chu-kissaki. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie, chikei, and a dark steel color. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are some tobiyaki, ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, kinsuji and sunagashi. The horimono on the omote is a bo-hi with chiri on both sides (i.e. there is space between the edge of the groove and the edge of the shinogi ji on both sides of the groove). On the ura side there are futasuji-hi, and both hi are carved through the nakago. The nakago is ubu, and the tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are suji-chigai. There is one mekugi-ana. On the ura, along the mune side there is a long kanji signature.

Tokubetsu Juyo Tosogu

Rihaku kanbaku zu (image of Rihaku viewing a waterfall) tsuba

Mei: Yasuchika

Rihaku was representative of poets in the Tou period in China and his style is supposed to have been creative and dynamic. Rihaku is viewing Rozan's waterfall, and the poem's title is "Rozan kanbaku wo nozomu" (Viewing Rozan's Waterfall). The poem is:

The sun shines on Koro cape, and a purple colored fog is present

Looking into the distance, the waterfall is streaming down, like a long river in the sky

The waterfall appears to be 3000 feet long, and is actively tumbling as it descends

This waterfall could be falling from the stars above.

Based on this poem, Rihaku is viewing a waterfall which is supposed to be the "Rihaku kanbaku zu", and is a subject or theme used often in paintings.

The tsuba maker Tsuchiya Yasuchika is one of the master smiths called the "Nara Sansaku" along with Nara Toshikazu and Sugiura Joi. He was born in Kanbun 10 (1671), and was a Shonai feudal retainer. He studied with Shoami Chinkyu and Nara Tatsumasa. Around the Shotoku period (1711-15), he worked for the Oshu Moriyama clan's lord Matsudaira Daigaku, and he produced many masterworks during his career.

This tsuba uses an iron with a variable appearance (tetsu tsuime-ji) for the ground, and has exquisite deep and shallow carving work. Yasuchika expresses Rozan's poem and feelings by engraving rocks, pine trees, and mist on this tsuba. Rihaku and a child are standing still and observing a distant view of the waterfall, and this adds depth to the design. Rihaku looks up at the waterfall and silver drops glitter in the air. Rihaku's facial expression is interesting, and his eyes are focused directly at the waterfall. Possibly right now, he is creating a poem, and feels the sensation of being pulled into the world in front of his eyes.

Rihaku expressed thoughts about a waterfall 3000 feet high, and of the starry sky above, and this tsuba splendidly expresses this

moment. The tsuba's carving poetically expresses a majestic landscape and person, and this is the master smith Yasuchika's masterpiece.

Explanation by Kugiya Natoko

Shijo Kantei To No. 790

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To 190 in the November issue is is a katana by Magoroku Kanemoto.

This is a wide katana, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. The tip has sori and there is a slightly long chu-kissaki. From the shape, you can judge this as work from the latter half of the Muromachi period.

The jigane is itame mixed with nagare and masame hada, and the hada is visible. There are ji-nie and shirake utsuri which are clearly Seki characteristics.

The sanbon-sugi hamon is supposed to be this smith's creation which is different from later generations' togariba, which were orderly and continuous with large and small sizes. Usually, Kanemoto's hamon have all kinds of continuous togariba, and a gyo-sho (square featured) style hamon.

Also, compared with later generations, Kanemoto's hamon are often slightly narrow.

Many of his boshi are either midarekomi with a togari shape, or a jizo style. This katana's boshi is straight and has a komaru which is rare, and the hint refers to this.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Magoroku, and for another acceptable answer, some voted for the Shodai Kanesada from around the Meio (1492-1500) period.

The Shodai Kanemoto's work rarely has a sanbon sugi style hamon. His hamon are gunome mixed with features such as choji and choji-gunome, and are an irregular midare hamon. There are fine uchinoke, yubashiri at the border of the hamon, rough nie and sunagashi.

Also, Kanemoto has some two kanji signatures, but sometimes he signed “Noshu Akasaka ju Kanemoto” which is a long signature, and notably added a Meio period date.

A few people voted for Kanesada. He produced excellent hamon which contained a mixture of round top gunome, togariba, and gunome-choji, as well as a variety of midare hamon, but his sanbonsugi hamon are rarely seen.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai.