

# NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL

## ISSUE 794

### MARCH, 2023

## Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

### Kokuho

Type: Tanto

Mei: Norishige

(a former owner's name for this tanto was Nihon 1 Norishige)

Owner: Eisei Bunko

Length: 8 sun 1 bu 2 rin (24.6 cm)

Sori: uchizori

Motohaba: 6 bu 5 rin (1.97 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.53 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

Nakago length: 5 sun 5 bu 7 rin (7.8 cm)

Nakago sori: 5 rin (0.15 cm)

### Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tanto with an ihorimune (and the mune angle is sharp). The width and thickness are standard, and it is slightly small. There is a poor fukura, and there is an uchi sori which creates a takenoko sori. The jigane is itame mixed with large itame and mokume, the entire ji appears well forged and tight, and the hada is visible. There are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent thick chikei, some areas have jifu, there is a dark colored ji, and pale nie utsuri. The entire hamon is a wide midare mixed with ko-midare and ko-choji. On the ura there are prominent gunome and ko-choji. There are ashi on the omote at the koshimoto mixed with shimaba, and abundant nie inside of the hamon. The hamon edge is rough, and in places, some nie extend over the top of the hamon into the ji. The boundary between the ji and hamon is not clear, and in places forms a complex midare. There are some yubashiri, pale muneyaki, frequent kinsuji, and sunagashi. The boshi is midarekomi with strong hakikake, and forms a flame-like shape. The nakago is almost ubu with a furisode shape, and the Nakago tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are largely kiri.

There are three mekugi-ana, and on the center of the nakago there is a large two kanji signature made with a thick chisel.

Norishige was thought to be one of Masamune's students, and during the Edo period, in sword books over a long period he was described as one of Masamune jutetsu or one of Masamune's ten best students. However, today, he has several confirmed signed blade, with dates such as Showa 3 (1314), Geno 1 (1319), Geno 2 (1320), Shochu 2 (1325), and Karyaku (1326-1328) (the exact year was removed due to this blade becoming suriage). Also, his existing four tachi (two are Juyo Bunkazai and two are Tokubetsu Juyo token), and his tanto have standard shapes from the end of the Kamakura period. From examinations of these items in recent years, some studies concluded that Norishige was a student in the same school as Masamune and Shintogo Kunimitsu, and the theory that he was a slightly senior student relative to Masamune is considered to be settled. Norishige is supposed to have lived in Etchu Kuni, Fuku gun, Gofuku Aka, Saeki, and it was pointed out that he has two blades signed "Saeki Norishige" dated Geno 1 and 2 (1319-20). Moreover at the 68th Juyo Token shins, it was pointed out that he has another tanto signed "Etchu Kuni Saeki Norishige" and dated in the Karyaku period (1326-28), and this has become an important material in the study and evolution of his work.

Norishige's existing works are largely tanto, and many of them have a standard width and are small. They have a poor fukura with a unique uchizori shape called "takenoko sori". In addition, in the old sword books listing his characteristic tanto shapes, there are comments that "the ihori mune is just like a hill", indicating that the mune angle is sharp. It is pointed out his jiba (jihada and hamon) is modeled after Ko-Bizen and Ko-Hoki work, but his forging shows more large patterned hada, the hada is visible, and the entire jihada shows a unique pattern called matsukawa hada. His mixed komidare hamon have prominent strong and weak nie, the boundary between the ji and hamon is not clear, the prominent hamon has features which interweave into the ji, and the kinsuji and sunagashi vary or change dynamically. In addition, his jihada have thick chikei which are interweaved with yubashiri and tobiyaki, and this leads to a hitatsura pattern. This kind of extremely variable or changeable hataraki form his characteristic highlights. These characteristics are not seen in either Yukimitsu's and Masamune's work, so are a part of Norishige's unique style, and this is Norishige's original interpretation of Soshu Den work.

This tanto is one of Norishige's masterpieces, and the matsukawa-hada is well forged, and there is not much prominent visible hada. The entire hamon is wide, and has abundant nie, kinsuji and sunagashi, along with ever-changing hataraki, and the upper half has

prominent lively yabashiri hataraki entangled with chikei. The jigane's changes are more gentle than usual, and prominent gunome and kochoji are not seen as is usual. This is an important work in helping us to understand Norishige's styles. Along the center of the furisode shaped nakago there is a large dignified two kanji signature which is a good example of his Mei. This, along with the rest of this tanto is praised as an example of his excellent work.

In Showa 7 (1932) the tanto was purchased by Mr. Hosokawa Moritatsu who was the NBTHK's first chairman. Hosokawa purchased the tanto from the previous owner Naya. Before that, it was owned by Sugiyama Shigemaru, who kept an attached wooden tag on it on which was written "Nihon Ichi" (number one in Japan), and he was supposed to have been very proud when showing it to others.

This tanto is being shown in the Hosokawa Meito Eisei Bunko Kokuho exhibit from January 14 to May 7, 2023.

Explanation and photo by Imoto Yuki

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 794**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 794 Shijo Kantei To is April 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 April 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: slightly over 2 shaku 6 sun 8 bu (81.25 cm)

Sori: 7.5 bu (2.23 cm)

Motohaba: slightly less than 1 sun (3.0 cm)

Sakihaba: 6.5 bu (2.1 cm)

Motokasane: slightly over 2 bu (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1.5 bu (0.44 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 3.5 bu (4.1 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 3,5 bu (22.3 cm)

Nakago sori: slightly less than 1 bu (0.15 cm)

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It is long, has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. The shinogi width is narrow, there is a standard thickness, and no prominent hiraniku. There is a slightly large sori, a long chu-kissaki, and a poor fukura. The jigane has itame hada and some nagare hada. There are abundant ji-nie, frequent strong chikei, and a clear jigane. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. The hamon is based on gunome-midare and mixed with choji. There are long ashi, and in places, the ashi extend down to the hamon's edge. There is a dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, some rough nie, and uneven prominent long kinsuji and sunagashi. In places, the midare hamon forms a double line (nidan), and there is a bright and clear nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, and the tip is kurijiri. The yasurime are o-sujichigai. There is one mekugi-ana. On the ura, under the mekugi-ana and slightly towards the mune side, there is a two kanji signature. On the omote, there is a space about the size of two kanji above the mekugi ana and along the mune side there is a date.

## Tosogu Kansho

### Juyo Tosogu

#### **Shiro zu (“one of Koshi’s 10 philosophers” theme) tsuba**

Mei: Yamashiro Kuni Fushimi ju Kaneie

Shiro's family name is Naka and first name is Yu. He was one of the Ko school's ten philosophers during the Shunju Sengoku period (770-221 BC) in China. He admired acts of bravery, and he was a student of Koshi and devotedly studied under him. He is known as a dutiful son, and is sometimes mentioned as an exemplar of one of the twenty four filial pieties.

Shiro's family was very poor, and to afford a living, had to eat Akaza (quinoa) and the shells or husks. To help his parents, Shiro traveled long distances to buy rice, and carried the rice back home. After his parents passed away, when he became a high ranking official, he might be accompanied by one hundred carriages, and travelled while sitting on sitting on cushions, and had sumptuous meals. He lamented, he wanted to carry rice for parents but he could not since they were no longer here. In response, Koshi is supposed to have said “Shiro did his best for his parents when they were alive, and after they passed away, he thoughts about them still served them”.

This tsuba has a picture of Shiro carrying rice for his parents. The tsuba maker Kaneie is famous as a founder of this style of making tsuba which contained pictures or images, and is representative of Momoyama period tsuba smiths. His iron forging is incomparable, and the tsuchime (hammer work) on the ground exhibits elegance. On the tsuba's omote, on the right side, we see Shiro. On the ura side, there is a moon over a mountain, and from the composition, we see a perspective which does not look like the surface of a tsuba. The carving on the tsuba shows Shiro with a strong takabori technique, while the trees and flowers around him melt into the ground. The river and waves are made with a kebori technique. Kaneie used exquisite carving techniques to produce his images, and gold and silver were used minimally and very effectively.

This is a strong image produced by Kaneie, and before him, such tsuba had never been made. Kaneie used unique carving techniques and an original method of expression, and this tsuba poetically expresses an image of Shiro carrying rice and thinking about his parents. This is a masterpiece tsuba which expresses an classic idea.

Explanation by Kugiya Natoko

## **February Token Teirei Kansho kai**

Date: February 11 (second Saturday of February)

Location: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Commentary by Imoto Yuki

### **Kantei To No. 1: Tachi**

Mei: Kunimura

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun 2 bu

Sori: slightly over 9 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; some areas are mixed with nagare hada; the hada is visible; there are ji-nie, jifu, a dark colored ji, and shirake utsuri.

Hamon: chu-suguha; there is a slight notare pattern; there are ko-gunome at the koshimoto; there are some ashi; the hamon is nie deki; there are some uneven nijuba, some sunagashi and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight; the tip is round and there is a small return.

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin Enju Kunimura tachi. He is supposed to be Yamashiro Kuni's Rai Kuniyuki's grandson. Later he led the school and moved to Higo Kuni and is supposed to have prospered in that area. This is a long tachi with a ko-itame hada and ji-nie. The hamon is in ko-nie and is suguha with a slight notare. The boshi is straight and there is a round return, and from these details you can recognize the Rai school's style. However, the jitetsu has prominent nagare hada and jifu with shirake utsuri. Compared with Rai school work, it makes a weak impression. The hamon's ashi and yo hataraki are poor, the nioiguchi is worn down, and you can think about this as being work from the Rai's branch school Enju. Also, the prominent uneven nijuba (especially on the omote) can be pointed out as being the school's characteristic point.

The Enju school shows minimal individual details in its work, and it is difficult to identify individual smith's names. Kunimura has a prominently narrow hamon with minimal hataraki, and there is a sober feeling in his work. Also, his major characteristic point is a tachi shape. Usually the widths at the moto and saki show large differences along with a small kissaki, and this is Kunimura's unique shape among the Enju smiths. In addition, most of his works show this shape plus a long length, and among the school's smiths we would say he has a strong personality or style. For these reasons, I am impressed people knew the above characteristics and voted for Kunimura.

In Genroku 6 nen (1693) on September 9th, Ueno Kuni's Nanokaichi lord Maeda Rekei become the 4th generation lord, and presented this tachi to the Tokugawa family in memory of his father Toshihiro. Since then this tachi has remained in the main Tokugawa family.

(the nakago is reduced to 89% of it's actual size).

## **Kantei To No. 2: Katana**

Mei: Musashi Daijo Fujiwara Korekazu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4.5 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight itame hada; the entire ji has a strong nagare hada and masame hada; there are dense ji-nie, some chikei, and pale utsuri.

Hamon: mainly choji mixed with gunome and square shaped features; there are sharp choji, some areas are midare with saka-ashi, and the entire hamon is wide. There are ashi, yo, a nioioguchi with some nie, and kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: straight; the tip is komaru.

Ishido Sakon Korekazu (Musashi Daijo) has dated blades in the Manji, Kanbun, and Enpo periods (1658-80), and was active mainly during the Kanbun era. Later generations became Tokugawa family okakae sword smiths (smiths who worked for the shogunate), and continued to be okakae smiths until the Meiji period. They are supposed to have established the main Edo Ishido school.

This katana is slightly wide, and the widths at the the moto and saki are different. There is a slightly large sori with a chu-kissaki. From the shape we can think about Kanbun Shinto period work. There is utsuri, a mainly choji hamon, and in the Shinto period, the school's ideal Ichimonoji choji reminds us of the Ishido school's work.

Looking at the jigane carefully, it is itame with strong nagare hada, and the entire ji shows a characteristic masame style. The hamon is mixed with slightly large choji groups for this smith. There is also a prominent midare hamon with saka-ashi, and in some areas there is a small sized midare hamon. The boshi is a shallow notare, and there is a round return, and these are Korekazu's characteristic points.

Besides the correct answer, there were votes for other Edo Ishido school smiths such as Mitsuhiro and Tsunemitsu, and the Fukuoka Ishido smiths such as Koretsugu and Moritsugu. Mitsuhiro's choji hamon groups are large and gorgeous, Tsunemitsu's midare hamon are small, and they have some common features with Korekazu. But both of these smith's jigane do not have such prominent masame hada, and their midare hamon almost never have saka-ashi. Also, the Fukuoka Ishido answer is a clever opinion. However, if it were Fukuoka Ishido work, there would be a prominent unique feature in the hamon called "squid's head" choji, and the hamon width would be very high and could almost extend over the shinogi, and the midare hamon's high and low variations would be emphasized.

### **Kantei To No. 3: Katana**

Mei: Kuniyasu (Horikawa)

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 4.5 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume, and the entire jihada is visible and rough; there are ji-nie, chikei, and a dark jigane.

Hamon: shallow notare, mixed with gunome and square shaped features; there are yo, a dense nioiguchi, and abundant nie; in some places, the tight nioiguchi has wide and narrow areas; some areas are rough, and there are some tobiyaki; there are frequent kinsuji and sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: straight; the omote tip is komaru, and the ura tip has hakikake and is round.

This is a Kuniyasu katana, and the smith is supposed to be Horikawa Kunihiro's brother. This katana is wide and long, and there is a long kissaki. The hamon is primarily a shallow notare, and there are frequent nie, kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki, and we can understand that this is modelled after Soshu master smith's work such as Sadamune and Shizu. From these details, some people voted for older smith's work. However, if you examine the jigane carefully, there is itame mixed with mokume, the hada is visible, there is rough forging, and you can see that this is different from older well forging moist appearing steel, and that this is unique forging. Also, the hamon is a shallow notare mixed with gunome, the nioiguchi's width varies and there are narrow and wide areas, and the nioiguchi is worn down. These characteristic points are seen in the Horikawa school Kunihiro's work.

Kunihiro, Osumi-jo Masahiro and Hirozane have the type of style described above, and generally their hamon are calm, with less hataraki, and are gentle. On the other hand, among the Horikawa smiths, it has been pointed out that the senior smith Kuniyasu has many jiigane with strong visible hada, his hamon are a shallow notare mixed with square shaped features, and there are frequent hataraki such as sunagashi. This katana shows the forging characteristics, the hamon contains very wide hakoba (square shaped gunome), some parts have tobiyaki, and there is a slightly large patterned midare hamon (on the ura side these details are prominent). Also, from the moto to the saki, there are frequent sunagashi hataraki mixed with kinsuji and there is a dynamic style. The jiba (jigane and hamon) have a rustic style of beauty and show Kuniyasu's characteristic points.

In voting, some people voted for the Shodai Kanewaka. He does not have such a strong visible hada. If this were his large sized Keicho Shinto work, many of his hamon would be a shallow notare mixed with togariba and gunome. His midare hamon with hakoba shapes appear around the Genna to Kaei period (1615-43) and at the same time his shapes are changing.

## Kantei To No. 4: Katana

Mei: Suishinshi Masahide saikore with kao (seal)  
Suikanshi kitae kore Bunka 13 nen 2 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 2 bu

Sori: slightly less than 6 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada which is close to being muji; there are jienie, and pale utsuri.

Hamon: composed primarily of narrow grouped choji; some areas have square gunome and kataochi gunome; the hamon is midare with saka-ashi. There are frequent long ashi and a nioiguchi; the upper half has somewhat uneven nie; on the omote at the koshimoto the hamon has a soft appearance.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is round and there is a long return.

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

This is a father and son gassaku (made cooperatively) katana made by Suishinshi Masahide when he was 68 years old, and by Suikanshi Sadahide when he was 38 years old. Sadahide's existing work is supposed to be 90% gassaku (cooperatively made) with his father Masahide, and from Bunka 13 (1816) the amount of gassaku work we see increased.

Sadahide worked on the forging of the steel and Masahide worked on the hamon. As some people pointed out, this means that Masahide may have had a limited degree of physical strength at this time.

This katana is wide, and the difference in widths at the moto and saki is slight. The blade is thick and there is a long kissaki. There is a narrow shinogi ji for the size of this katana, and a poor hiraniku. The tight ko-itame hada, appears to be almost muji with the tightly forged jigane. The midare hamon has ashi which extend to the edge of the hamon. From the shape, jigane, and hamon we can find Shinshinto characteristic points. There are pale utsuri on the ji. In the hamon, each group of choji is composed of narrow choji which helps to form the midare hamon. This Bizen den style conforms with Masahide's proposal to revert to swords which were called "practical swords" or an effort to revert back to the style of older swords. Also, although this is not a standard detail, on the omote at the koshimoto, the hamon top (or nioiguchi) is soft, and this is Suishinshi's characteristic habit. Many of Sadahide's swords are similar to his father's Bizen

Den swords and it is a possibility that he was a daisaku smith for his father.

In voting, some people voted for Taikei Naotane and Tairyusai Munehiro. Possibly the attribution for Naotane came from the square gunome and kataochi gunome work he has. If it were Naotane's Bizen Den work, there are "yaki utsuri" at the top of the hamon and extending into the jigane, and there would be many very wide square gunome. If it were Munehiro's work, the sword would be larger and have a mitsumune. In addition, the ji would have a unique type of utsuri called a "washing board".

(the nakago is shown at 88% of its actual size)

## **Kantei To No.5: Tachi**

Mei: Bizen Osafune ju (Yoshi)kiyo  
Eiwa 5 nen(1379) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 2.5 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada; some of the hada is visible; there are ji-nie mixed with jifu type hada, and there are pale utsuri.

Hamon: the entire hamon is narrow; it is ko-notare, mixed with gunome, ko-gunome, and sharp features; the upper half is a small midare hamon, and there are small ashi, a nioiguchi, some ko-nie, and a worn down nioiguchi.

Boshi: On the omote the boshi is suguha and the tip is yakizume; on the ura the boshi is midarekomi, the tip is sharp, and there is a slight return.

Osafune Yoshikiyo has dated blades from Joji 1, 4, 6, and 7 nen, and Eiwa 5 nen, and from this we know his active period. In the Meikan, he is listed as Osafune Yoshimitsu's student, but his school lineage is not definite, and he is classified as a Kosori smith.

Generally, the definition of the Kosori school or smiths is that these smiths were active during the Nanbokucho period, and a Bizen Osafune smith who does not belong to schools with mainstream master smiths such as Kanemitsu, Motoshige, Chogi, and Morikage, are grouped together and considered to be Kosori smiths.

This is a wide blade, and the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different. There is a large koshizori, prominent sori at the tip, a

narrow shinogi ji, and a slightly long chu-kissaki. These characteristics describe Kosori's active Nanbokucho shape. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume and nagare hada, there are jifu in the jigane, and there are pale blurred utsuri. The hamon is ko-notare mixed with many kinds of features such as gunome, ko-gunome, and other sharp features. The upper half has a slightly small midare hamon and the entire hamon is narrow for the Tachi's width. The boshi is midare, the tip is sharp, and these are Kosori's characteristic points.

The Kosori style has a lack of individuality, and all of them have the same type of style, so it is difficult to judge individual names. So, if you look at this as being Kosori work, we treated that as a correct answer.

However, this Tachi's signature is written in a prominent saka style (in reverse of the usual direction) chisel marks, similar to Osafune Chogi, and it is a possibility that Yoshikage was one of the smiths who was associated with the Morikage school. Also, if he usually used the "Yoshi" kanji, it is a possibility that he was close to Osafune Yoshikage. Conventionally, for unknown smiths we group them together as Kosori school smiths, but we should examine and study their work.

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 792 in the New Years 2023 issue**

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To 792 is a katana by the Shodai Dewa no kami Yukihiro.

This is a Hizen branch school katana. The hamon is choji mixed with gunome, and there is a notare and midare hamon. In my case, if I see this kind of katana at a meeting for study and appraisals, when I see a Shinto blade like this with a dense nioiguchi and frequent nie, I can see that it has a Hizen To feeling.

Therefore, I examine each part: the inside of the gunome hamon has characteristic yo, called Abu no me (snake eyes), the hamon valleys have prominent dense nie, the boshi is parallel to the fukura and there is a komaru and return, the widths at the moto and saki are not very different, the chu kissaki is long, and the sori is large. The tight ko-itame forging seems to show a komenuka hada. I gradually begin to see the characteristic points, and finally my thoughts come together and I can recognize a maker, and this is a my usual pattern in the study of swords.

This kind of choji mixed with gunome, and notare and midare hamon is seen in the work of the Shodai Tadahiro and Nidai Tadahiro who were Hizen mainstream smiths. But many of their hamon have choji and gunome which are closely spaced and continuous from the moto to the saki. On this sword, choji and gunome are continuous and frequent, and form groups or clusters. If you look at the narrow notare hamon, then besides Yukihiro, this kind of hamon is seen in Hizen branch smiths' work such as Kawachi Daijo Masahiro, and Harima Daijo Tadakuni.

In voting, an overwhelming majority of people voted for Yukimitsu. Beside Yukimitsu, some people voted for Masahiro and Tadakuni. Generally, a gorgeous midare hamon with abundant nie, prominent kinsuji and sunagashi is a characteristic of Masahiro's work. Tadakuni's characteristics include prominent kinsuji and sunagashi in a hamon, and Yukihiro's midare hamon sometimes has strange shapes in the hamon, and it has been pointed out that many of his works are not at the same level as the other two smiths.

This katana's hamon is wide and there is a gorgeous midare hamon, so at first glance, it looks like Masahiro's work, and there are no clear differing points with Tadakuni's work. So, at this time, the main Hizen branch smiths who have a nakago with sujichigai yasurime, or o-sujichigai yasurime are treated as correct answers.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai