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MEITO KANSHO

Tokubetsu Juyo Token

Type: Tachi

Mei: Kunimitsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu 7 rin (70.5 cm)

Sori: 7 bu 1 rin (2.15 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

Sakihaba: 5 bu 8 rin (1.75 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 2 rin (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 7 bu 9 rin (2.4 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 4 rin (18.3 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. The width is slightly narrow, the widths at the moto and saki are slightly different, there is a standard thickness, a large koshi sori and a short chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame hada mixed with nagare hada, and the entire jigane is well forged. There are abundant ji-nie, frequent chikei, and very pale suji utsuri in the monouchi area. The hamon is a narrow suguha ko-midare style. There are frequent fine nie,

small tobiyaki which become yubashiri, kinsuji and nie-suji. The boshi is straight, with a komaru and slight return. The nakago is ubu and the tip is a very shallow kurijiri. The yasurime are katte-sagari and there is one mekugi ana. On the omote along the mune side, there is small size two kanji signature.

Among Kamakura pioneer sword smiths, a historical sword book lists three master smiths: Awataguchi Kunitsuna, Ichimonji Sukezane and Bizen Saburo Kunimune. But the actual founder of the school is supposed to be Shintogo Kunimitsu. His “Kamakura junin” signed works were signed showing his residence and dates such as Einin 1 and 6 (1293 and 1298), Enkyo 2 (1309), Showa 4 (1315), Geno 2 (1320) and Genko 2 (1322). From this, his active period is obvious. Also, he produced three master smith students, Yukimitsu, Masamune, and Norishige. His reputation is very high in sword history, for he established the foundation of the Soshu Den tradition.

His style was based on the Awataguchi Den which is supposed to be where he was from. Furthermore, he focused on hataraki such as abundant nie in the jiba (jigane and hamon), chikei, and kinsuji. Also, he is a known tanto master smith along with Toshiro Yoshimitsu. The tanto are mostly suguha, but there is a variety of hamon styles from a narrow suguha to a wide suguha. In the case of tanto, his characteristic point is a yakikomi at the machi, and many of them are only seen on one side. In addition, since historical times, his major characteristic point is hataraki called an “old man’s beard”. This consists of abundant nie around the boshi, which extends into the ji and forms lines of kinsuji inside of the hamon. His signature’s “Kuni” kanji is left handed, or in other words, mirrors the character, “Mitsu” and looks like a “Kita” (i.e.

north) kanji, and because this, is called a “left handed kanji, with the top of the kita kanji”. Also, his tachi are very rare, and only six confirmed tachi are known to exist.

This tachi is a rare signed tachi, especially with its ubu nakago, and is a highly valuable work. This has a slightly narrow shape, a large koshizori with funbari, and is a sophisticated tachi shape. The entire jigane is well forged with itame hada, abundant ji-nie and frequent chikei. Also, the narrow suguha hamon with frequent nie is mixed with ko-midare, and this produces a classic feeling. In addition, there is an abundance of hataraki such as kinsuji and nie-suji. Also, there are very pale line shaped utsuri around the monouchi, and this characteristic is seen sometimes in Kunimitsu saku work.

However, this sword is reminiscent of Soshu Den’s arrival on the scene, with excellent workmanship, and with his typical signature, and there is no question that it is a masterpiece.

This tachi will be in the exhibit “The Masamune Jutetsu: The Master Smith Masamune and His Students” at the Fukuyama museum from February 18 to March 27, 2024.

Explanation and the photo by Ishi Akira.

Shijo Kantei To No. 805

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 805 Shijo Kantei To is March 5, 2024. 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 March 5, 2024 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 5 sun 8.5 bu (78.4 cm)

Sori: slightly over 4 bu (1.3 cm)

Motohaba: slightly over 1 sun (3.1 cm)

Sakihaba: 7.5 bu (2.25 cm)

Motokasane: 2.5 bu (0.75 cm)

Sakikasane: slightly less than 2 bu (0.55 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 3.5 bu (4.1cm)

Nakago length: slightly less than 8 sun 6 bu (26.0 cm)

Nakago sori: very slight (0.1 cm)

This is a shinogi-zukuri tachi with an ihori-mune. It is long and wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki are not prominent. There is a slightly narrow shinogi-ji for the width, and it is very heavy. The hiraniku is not prominent, there is a shallow sori, and a long chu-kissaki.

The jigane is tight ko-itame hada, mixed with nagare and masame hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie, fine chikei, and a bright jigane. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. In the hamon, there are ashi, yo, a very dense nioiguchi, frequent nie, kinsuji,

sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu. The tip is a narrow ha-agari style kurijiri. The yasurime are suji-chigai with kesho. There is one mekugi ana. On the omote, slightly towards the mune side, centered on the shinogi line, there is a long kanji signature, and the ura, along the mune side, has a date.

Juyo Tosogu

Suzume kaichu hamaguri zu (sparrow diving into the ocean and becoming a clam) kozuka

Mei: Natsuo with koi stamp

The title “A sparrow diving into the ocean and becoming a clam” means things are changeable. As an example, in the summer we see many sparrows, but when weather becomes cold, they disappear from sight. In old times, the Chinese people recognized the sparrow and clams as having similar shapes, and they thought that in the summer, there were sparrows, but in late autumn the sparrows dove into the ocean and changed to clams. This is to express the idea that things change. Another similar example is a mole changing into a quail, and both examples are seasonal ideas in haiku.

This kozuka has a shibuichi polished ground and iron inlay. On the omote there are waves with a clam design in sukidashi takabori, and on the ura there is a sparrow engraved with katakiri kebori inlay. On the

surface or ground, there is shibuichi and iron which show Natsuo's good jigane. The sparrow is ready to hide in the ocean depicted with a pale torafu (horizontal stripe) shibuichi ground. Natsuo used a chisel and slight hira-zogan for the sparrow, and the unique texture in the polished iron ground makes me think about the bottomless ocean. The sparrow-clam is in the iron ground of the ocean. The clam is in the midst of changing from a sparrow, and the top of the clam still has traces of the sparrow's eye and beak. His shape is like a winter time sparrow, with a plump and cute round shape. The subject is a sparrow-clam, but the main highlight on the kozuka is the carved waves. If you look at the clam, naturally the waves come into view. Over waves, the sukidashi takabori is well done and has a soft feeling, making one forget that this is an iron surface. The waves are excellently carved, as is the sparrow-clam, and for Natsuo, the use of iron shows off his skill. Using the same kind of iron, he has a kozuka with a horse design seen from behind, and this has the same kind of feeling as Natsuo's viewpoint using iron. As expected, Natsuo was the last machibori master smith.

The gold trim matches well with the iron ground, looks like picture frame, and makes an excellent image. In the limited space, he made the best use of his materials, and this is a masterpiece showing Natsuo's true ability.

New Year's Teirei Kansho Kai

Date: January 13 (second Saturday of January)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Takada Kotaro

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: Masatsune

Length: 2 shaku 5 sun

Sori: 7.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: itame hada; the entire ji is tight and well forged; there are frequent ji-nie, chikei, and pale jifu utsuri.

Hamon: suguha style mixed with ko-midare and ko-gunome; there are frequent small ashi, yo, and abundant nie inside of the hamon; there is some hotsure, kinsuji, sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi.

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

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin Ko-Bizen Masatsune tachi. The tachi has funbari, an ubu nakago, and is narrow with a koshi-zori. The tip falls down going forward (the sori becomes more shallow going towards the point), and there is a small kissaki. The shape is from the end of the Heian Period and early Kamakura period. There is a well forged itame hada, and compared with his usual work, the utsuri is pale. But looking at the details, at the koshimoto there are dark colored jifu style utsuri, and even though it is pale, we can see jifu utsuri in places. The hamon is a suguha style mixed with ko-midare, there are abundant nie inside of the hamon, and in the jiba (jigane and hamon) we see characteristic Ko-Bizen elements. The boshi is straight and the tip is round with a return. The

sophisticated boshi and bright hamon show Masatsune's high level of skill.

In voting, many people recognized the characteristic points, and voted for Masatsune and associated Ko-Bizen smiths. This blade has a classic kijimata shaped nakago, an elegant tachi shape, a komidare hamon with abundant nie, and there are many highlights.

Kantei To No. 2: Tanto

Mei: Bizen Osafune ju Motoshige
Enbun 2 nen (1357) 12 gatsu hi

Length: 9 sun 1 bu

Sori: slight

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: suguha style mixed with ko-gunome and kaku gunome; there are ashi, yo, saka-ashi at the koshimoto, nioi deki, muneyaki, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: midarekomi; on the omote, the tip is round; the ura tip has a somewhat togari-like shape, and both sides have a long return.

This is an Osafune Motoshige tanto dated Enbun 2. It is slightly wide and long, and thin for the width. There is a shallow sori, and you can recognize the Nanbokucho period Enbun-Joji shape. The visible itame hada has utsuri and jifu. The jigane appearance

is uneven, and you can see the forging is in Bizen style, and notably branch school work. The hamon is suguha mixed with ko-gunome, and around the monouchi area there are kaku-gunome. The same period's smiths, who made kaku-gunome, were conceivably working around Osafune's mainstream Kanemitsu. But as I mentioned above, in thinking about the branch schools, you can arrive at the answer of Motoshige. Therefore, in looking at the hamon details, the monouchi area kaku-gunome are slightly extended, with a different appearance from that of the Osafune main stream smiths such as Kagemitsu and Kanemitsu. Also, the ura side boshi is slightly sharp, and this shows a Motoshige characteristic point very well.

In voting, some people noted the above characteristic points and voted for Motoshige, while some voted for Kagemitsu and Kanemitsu. Those votes are supposed to have come from observing the kaku-gunome hamon, but still, from the tanto's uneven jigane above the hamon, we wish to look at this as not being mainstream Osafune work, but branch school work. This is different from Kagemitsu's often seen tight forging with a refined jigane. Also, some people voted for Yoshii work. If it were Yoshii work, it should have utsuri following the hamon's shape. In addition, Motoshige has suguha hamon just like this one mixed with kaku-gunome and with saka-ashi, and also continuous kaku-gunome hamon in which vertical variations are not prominent, and there is a strong Soshu Den style with strong ha-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mei: Nakasone Okisato Kotetsu nyudo
Manji 4 nen (1661) u-tsuki (April) 19 nichi
Uamono Kanjuro Narihisa with kao
mitsu-do saidan

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: 4 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada, and on the omote above the habaki it is mixed with a large pattern hada. The shinogiji has masame hada. There are frequent ji-nie and fine chikei.

Hamon: straight long yakidashi, then gunome mixed with large gunome and togariba, and a ko-notare pattern. There are ashi, yo, frequent nie, some areas are mixed with rough and slightly uneven nie. There is sunagashi, and the jiba (jigane and hamon) is bright and clear.

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

This is a Kotetsu katana which has a saidan mei by Yamano Kanjuro Nagihisa dated Manji 4. It is wide and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori, a chu-kissaki, and a typical Kanbun-Shinto shape. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, there is fine forging, and the shinogi ji has masame hada. From these details, you can narrow this down to Edo Shinto work. The hamon at the moto has straight long yakidashi, and the hamon is ko-notare mixed with gunome, and in some places, the small and large gunome form a pattern that looks like

a continuous pattern called hyotanba. The boshi looks a bit like a jizo style, but by the yokote there is a yakikomi, and this is called a Kotetsu boshi. The jiba is bright and clear, which shows a high level of skill, and shows Kotetsu's characteristic points very well.

From these details, in voting, a majority of people voted for Kotetsu. But among these, some people wrote different Kotetsu kanji. The Kotetsu Hanetora (tiger kanji) period's work has a sharp mune angle, a long yakidashi, and hyotanba style hamon. But his Hako-tora period works have a short yakidashi, the mune angle becomes standard, the hamon has no high and low variations, and is based on suguha mixed with gunome and is called a juzuba style. Because the two styles are quite different looking, in voting, please carefully write the correct kanji.

Kantei To No. 4: Katana

Mei: Hojoji Tachibana Sadakiyo saku

Length: 2 shaku 2.05 sun

Sori: 5.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: chu-suguha mixed with gunome, some part continuous gunome. There are frequent ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, some nijuba, yubashiri, kinsuji, sunagashi and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

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

The Hojoji school was a large sword smith group, and they were very active in Edo, mainly during the Kanbun and Enpo periods (1661-80). They produced many sword smiths, such as Masahiro and Sadakuni.

The style was common or consistent throughout the school. Many of their swords have a suguha style hamon mixed with gunome with frequent nie.

This is a Hojoji Sadakiyo katana. There is a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, and there is a slightly long chu kissaki with sori. From this, you can judge this as work from around the Jokyo and Genroku (1688-1710) periods.

The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, the shinogi ji has masame hada, and these are Edo Shinto characteristic points. The hamon is a chu suguha style, the hamon shows little high and low variation, and there is a continuous gunome-juzu-ba style hamon. Because the No.3 kantei-to was by Kotetsu (with the tiger kanji), many people looked at this as a Kotetsu (late work). This sword has a slight sori, but the hamon is based on suguha mixed with gunome and is similar to Kotetsu's work. Also there is a bright and clear nioiguchi. There is a story that sometimes people remove the Hojoji mei and often inscribe a Kotetsu gi-mei. In this case, that would be a reasonable opinion.

But the boshi is straight, the tip has a round return and is different from Kotetsu's boshi shape which is a midare hamon across or spanning the yokote, then becoming straight and with a round return. Also, this has a Hojoji school characteristic hamon with some nijuba and this would be a hint in judging this as Hojoji work. In the case where there is a one time bid, it is necessary to judge carefully.

In this meeting, some people observed the above characteristics and voted for Hojoji.

Other votes were for Okimasa and Kazusa-no-suke Kaneshige. From the style, Okimasa and Kaneshige are reasonable answers. But if it were Okimasa's work, there would be two gunome fused together together in a continuous characteristic hamon, and there would be a rough nioiguchi in nie. If it were Kaneshige's work, there would be a one-two, one-two, continuous gunome hamon pattern.

Kantei To No. 5 : Tanto

Mei: Hizen ju Harima daijo Fujiwara Tadakuni

Length: 2 shaku 4 sun 9.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 8 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada with nagare hada, and the hada is just visible. There are frequent ji-nie, and a slightly dark jigane.

Hamon: short yakidashi at the moto, and very wide; choji mixed with gunome; there are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioiguchi, and abundant nie. The midare hamon valleys have clumped nie; there are some yubashiri, kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: the midare hamon crosses the yokote, and on the omote is straight; the ura is midarekomi; on both sides the tip is round and there is a return.

This blade is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are not very different. There is a strong sori with a long chu-kissaki. This is a well made and well

balanced Hizento. The jigane is not a tight ko-itame hada with abundant ji-nie. There is nagare hada, the hada is visible, and there is a dark colored jigane. Considering these characteristics, you can judge this as a branch Hizen work. The hamon is high and choji midare. The entire hamon has a dense nioiguchi with abundant nie. The valleys of the midare hamon have more abundant nie, and some snake eye-like yo. In some places the choji groups are connected by a suguha hamon. This katana clearly shows Hizento characteristic points and the school's characteristic midare hamon.

In voting, there was no vote for Tadakuni, but some people voted for branch Hizen smiths, such as Masahiro and Yukihiro. Tadahiro's hamon often have a strong midare shape among the Hizento, and prominent kinsuji and sunagashi. His work shows boldness and a dynamic feeling. In his midare hamon work, sometimes the boshi is also midarekomi, with hakikake, a komaru and a return. This is different from Tadayoshi's style, branch Hizen Masahiro and Yukihiro whose boshi follow the fukura and have a komaru and return. The katana's ura boshi is a shallow midarekomi, but on the omote along the fukura the boshi is straight. Also, there are sunagashi inside of the hamon, but it is difficult to identify an individual name, and at this time, people's votes for branch Hizen smith names were treated as correct answers.

Shijo Kantei To No.803 in the December, 2023 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tanto by Samonji (O-sa).

The hints said that the tanto currently is 8 sun 1 bu, and “is suriage, so the original length was a large size for this smith”. From this, you can decide that many of his tanto are usually small. This one’s original size was slightly over 8 sun 5 bu, and is a standard length for other smiths.

Many of Samonji’s tanto are around 7 sun which is a small size, and we have never seen a long wakizashi. At one time, people recognized the fact that if this tanto is restored, this would be Samonji’s longest tanto. After that, people saw the 50th Juyo Token tanto which is 9 sun 4 rin long. Among the blades classified as Kokuho, Juyo Bunkazai, Juyo Bijutsuhin, Tokubetsu Juyo Token, and Juyo Token, Samonji’s shortest tanto is 6 sun 9 bu in length, and is Juyo Bijutsuhin, and belongs to the Kuroda family.

Besides these, the longest tanto I have seen is 9 sun 2 bu, and the shortest tanto is 6 sun 1 bu. In the future, there may be some new developments, but majority of Samonji’s tanto are around 7 sun in length.

In the Nanbokucho period, besides Samonji, famous smiths who made thin tanto with a shallow sori, and notably short length are Shizu Saburo Kaneshige, Osafune Chogi, Hasebe Kuninobu, and Soshu Akihiro. Many of these smiths’ tanto are wide for their length, and appear as a reduction in the size of the Enbun-Joji shape, which was long, wide, and had a

large size. It has been pointed out that compared with these, many Samonji tanto have a standard width for their length, and this is a point in judging his work.

Samonji tanto did not become wide as we can see in work dated Kenmu 5 (1338), Ryakuo 2 (1339), and Kano 1 (1350) when his student Sa Yukihiro's work appears. It is thought that the reason we see these shapes in Samonji's work is that his active period was in the early half of the Nanbokucho period. His two signed tachi are wide, and do not have a large kissaki, but a long chu-kissaki, and appear like a transition to the Enbun-Joji shape.

Furthermore, in looking at a Samonji tanto's shape, the poor fukura is a major characteristic point and many of the tanto have a mitsumune. He has some ihorimune, and on the exceptional tachi Kosetsu Samonji there is a marumune.

During Samonji's active period he was in the Northern Kyushu area near the central east coast, and samurai traffic was frequent there, and inevitably people who were traveling had a chance to look at work from other areas. This made it possible for the smiths to change their styles from the traditional Kyushu classic style. Recently, there is an opinion that at that time, there was a strong influence from the Rai school, and not only from Soshu Den. Many Samonji works are fine, and sometimes there are nie utsuri. The hamon shows a gyosho style midare which is not very strong, the nioiguchi line does not collapse and is more even, we see fine sunagashi and kinsuji, and many sophisticated styles.

In the neighboring province, Higo, the Rai school influenced the Enju school which was prosperous,

and they left a strong Yamashiro influence on that school.

On the other hand, this tanto, and a tachi signed Chikushu (which is suriage below this, and which became the 24th Tokubetsu Juyo Token) has a slightly visible hada; nie in the jiba (jigane and hamon) are emphasized; and inside of the hamon and at the edge of the hamon, the hataraki are influenced by the Soshu Den style. In Rai school work, many nakago tips are conspicuously narrow going toward the mune side, there is a boat shape, and a poor tanto fukura, similar to Soshu Yukimitsu's style, and there is clearly a strong Soshu Den influence.

The jigane has a slightly visible hada, mainly ko-itame. There are abundant fine ji-nie, frequent chikei, and bo-utsuri, and this matches Samonji's usual examples.

The notare hamon is narrow, and there are gunome with a ko-notare and gentle midare. There is a dense nioiguchi, it is nioideki, there are kinsuji, sunagshi, yubashiri, and abundant hataraki here in his peak period work. The jiba is bright and clear, and this is a major characteristic point. This is a little bit suriage, and it is difficult to confirm, but one of his characteristic points is that under the machi, the hamon has a yakikomi.

Samonji's boshi are a major characteristic point, and are notare or midare tsukiage, the tip is sharp and there is a long return. In the return, the nioiguchi is clear, and obviously tight or dense compared to the hamon side nioiguchi.

On many of his nakago, there is a shallow sori, the tip is narrow going towards the mune side, and is kurijiri or ha-agari-kurijiri. The yasurime are sujichigai or a large-sujichigai.

Samonji's signatures are flowing and elegant and made with fine chisels. The old book of signatures, the "Kokon Meizukushi" comments that there is an excellent Yoshimitsu brush-like style reminding one of the master calligrapher smith Awataguchi Yoshimitsu. Also his mei's configuration is unique. He signed under the mekugi ana. On the omote along the nakago center he signed one kanji "Sa". On the ura and slightly toward the mune side he signed "Tsukushu ju". Many of these nakago on the omote and ura have different styles of carving, which we can say is unique, and this tanto is that way. In other signatures, there are a small number with "Sa" and are only one kanji. We also see "Chikushu ju Sa", and one line signatures with the entire mei on one side on the Kosetsu Samonji tachi, and on a Kokuho tanto, and there are very few of these.

At this time, many people recognised the above characteristic points, and voted for the correct answer.

For another proper answer, some people voted for Yasuyoshi. He does have a few small size tanto, but many of them are around 1 shaku long which is a large size, and the shape does not match the shape of this tanto. Also, his forging produces a is whitish jigane and there are bo-utsuri along the hamon. Many of his hamon are nie-deki, there are a little ko-nie, and they are mainly gunome mixed with ko-notare. His boshi tips are sharp, the tip drops down towards the

hamon, and the return or keris is not as long as in Samonji's work.

Also, one historical sword book promotes a theory, that in his later years, Samonji called himself Yasuyoshi. But today there are no confirmations of such work. We can continue to consider this idea, but O-sa and Yasuyoshi are considered different smiths today.

Besides the correct and the proper answer, from the notare hamon and the boshi, some people voted for Osafune Kanemitsu, Osafune Chogi and Soshu Akihiro. These smiths had wider blades, and a poor fukura was not one of their characteristics, and the nakago and signatures are different. Also Rai Kunimitsu's work does not match, and his boshi return is standard or short except on the meibutsu Shiokawa, Yuraku, and Ikeda Rai. Also, many of the tanto midare hamon returns (kaeri) are either standard or short.

Commentary by Ooi Gaku.