NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL ISSUE NUMBER 823 AUGUST, 2025

Meito Kansho: Appreciation of Important Swords

Juyo Bijutsuhin

Type: Katana

Mei: Oshu Sendai ju Yamashiro Daijo Fujiwara Kunikane

Kanbun 4 nen (1664) 3 gatsu 25 nichi

Kinzogan mei: Yamano Kaemon 67 years old

nite (by) Nagahisa with kao

Mitsu do saidan

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 1 bu (70.0 cm)

Sori: 4 bu 4 rin (1.33 cm) Motohaba: 9 bu 9 rin (3.0 cm) Sakihaba: 7 bu 1 rin (2.15 cm) Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm) Sakikasane: 1 bu 5 rin (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 2 bu 4 rin (3.75 cm) Nakago length: 6 sun 3 bu (22.4 cm)

Nakago sori: none

Commentary

This is a shinogi tsukuri sword with an ihorimune. It is thick and wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki are slight. There is a wide shinogi ji, a high shinogi line, a standard thickness, a shallow sori, and a chu-kissaki. The jigane has masame hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie and frequent chikei along the hada pattern, and they are notable on the ura side. The hamon is a wide suguha style, mixed with ko-notare, and kuichigaiba. There is a dense nioiguchi, frequent large nie, and some hotsure. There are nijuba and yubashiri in the center area, and some sunagashi. The boshi is a wide straight yakiba, and yakizume. The entire boshi has hakikake. The nakago is ubu (but is slightly machi okuri). The tip is ha-agari kurijiri, and the yasurime are a large sujichigai. There is one mekugi ana. On the omote under the mekugi ana along the mune side there is a long signature, and the ura has a three line gold inlay saidan-mei.

The Shodai Sendai Kunikane's lineage is supposed to have originated with a Hongo black smith, who was a vassal of a Fudai daimyo who owned land in Mutsu Koku's

Miyagi Gun Kokubu Go since the early Kamakura period. Kunikane's early name was Genzo, and later became Kichinojo. He is supposed to be Yamato Hosho Goro's last student. However, according to the book "Honai Shinto Meikan" published in 1794 by a Sendai clan polisher, this theory is incorrect. Today we cannot find specific materials concerning this, so the issue remains to be resolved. Kunikane was born in Bunroku 1 (1592) in Oshu's Miyagi Gun Kokubu Wakabayashi (today's Sendai City). Then later, in Keicho 19 (1614), he became Date Masamune's okakae sword smith. The same year, following his lord's order, he went to Edo and studied under the Mishina school's Etchu no Kami Masatoshi. Also, according to one theory, in preparation for the Osaka Castle battle, he is supposed to have made twenty yari. In Kanei 4 (1627), he received the "Yamashiro Daijo" title. In the period around Kanei 13 (1636) Masamune passed away, and two years later, in Kanei 15, Kunikane is supposed to have studied under the Kumoi Zen master at Matsushima Zuiganji, became a monk, and received a Buddhist name, "Ninsawa Yokei". In Shoho 2 (1645), at the age of 54, he handed over the leadership of the family forge to his son, the Nidai Kunikane (Kichiemon). Even after his retirement, upon request, he continued working, and used the signature "Yokei Kunikane". In Kanbun 4 (1664) on December 3, he passed away at the age of 73.

His work is consistently modelled after the Yamato Hosho style, with a high shinogi, masame hada, and a suguha style hamon. There are uchinoke, hotsure, sunagashi, and frequent nie in his work. The boshi are a yakizume style. His shapes, jiba (jigane and hamon), and characteristic points are obvious. Notably, he revived completely masame hada forging which had stopped during the Muromachi period. He had high standards for the Shinto period. After him, his style of forging became the standard for the Sendai Kunikane family's succeeding generations, and became the school's traditional style, and he also influenced smiths in other provinces as well as Gendaito smiths which is worthy of special mention.

This katana is slightly wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is slight. There is a shallow sori and an uchigatana shape. There is a standard thickness, and a high shinogi line, and it feels heavy, but this sword has been preserved in a healthy condition and was well maintained. In the jigane, his characteristic masame hada is obvious, there are frequent chikei which with the masame hada, especially on the ura side, forms lines or stripes, and we can recognize the unique jigane's notable hataraki. Furthermore, an eye-catching feature is the hamon. Usually, his midare hamon's wide and shallow variations are not prominent, but on this hamon, the midare variations are emphasized more than usual. Around the monouchi area, the hamon is wider, and it conforms with the wide yakiba in the boshi. Also, in the center of the omote, the ura has nijuba and yubashiri, and especially on the omote, there are several lines or tiers in the hamon, just like a sudare-ba, and it adds impact. It is reminiscent of Kunikane's teacher Etchu no kami Masatoshi's older brother, the Shodai Tanba no kami Yoshimichi's work, and you can see some influence from Yoshimichi. Also, from the signature, this would have been made around Kanei 6 (when Kunikane was 38 years old), and in addition, a gold inlay saidan mei is very rare for his work.

This fully exhibits the Shodai Kunikane's high level of skill, is a great example of his work, and at the same time, it shows a combination of very skilful forging, a hamon which shows notable aesthetic properties, and is an excellent work. It reminds us of Soshu Den work, and is one of Kunikane's powerful and energetic works.

Shijo Kantei To No.823

Information

Type: Tachi

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 4 sun 5 bu (74.15 cm)

Sori: 9.5 bu (2.85 cm) Motohaba: 9.5 bu (2.85

Motohaba: 9.5 bu (2.85 cm) Sakihaba: 6 bu (1.8 cm) Motokasane: 2 bu (0.6 cm)

Sakikasane: slightly over 1 bu (0.35 cm)

Kissaki length: 8 bu (2.4 cm)

Nakago length: slightly over 6 sun 7 bu (20.35 cm)

Nakago sori: slight less than 1 bu (0.2 cm)

This is a shinogi tsukuri tachi with an ihorimune. There is an almost standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a standard thickness, a high shinogi ji, a large sori, and a wa-zori style. There is some fumbari even though the blade is suriage. There is a chu-kissaki. The jigane is itame mixed with mokume hada, and the hada is slightly visible. There are ji-nie, fine chikei, and a slightly dark jigane. There are dark jifu utsuri which have a shape that looks like they were formed by a fingertip being pushed onto the blade surface. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the oshigata. The hamon width is slightly wide for the width of the blade. There are ashi, saka-ashi, prominent yo, a tight nioiguchi, frequent nie, some sunagashi, and a slightly worn down nioiguchi. The nakago is suriage, the nakago tip is a shallow kurijiri, and the yasurime are not visible (the original yasurime were a large sujichigai). There are three mekugi ana. On the omote, under the original mekugi-ana, almost on the center there is a two kanji signature.

2025 Gendai Toshoku Ten Engraving Section

The Kunzan Award

Sakura Kuyo-mon sukashi karakusa gold inlay tsuba

Mei: Fuyuteru

This is a work inspired by Hayashi Matashichi's masterpiece "Go-mon sukashi" tsuba. This is an inyo (shadow and deep carving strokes) sukashi work with the Higo Hosokawa family crest Kuyo-mon and a sakura flower. The ji has a karakusa mon (arabesque design) formed in gold inlay, and the Kuyo-mon is everwhere in this work. Among the Higo tsuba, this supposed to be one of very best tsuba. Working is this style is a very difficult process. The fine sukashi, the detailed double karakusa

lines and shape are very critical, and if just one aspect of the work changes, it would not faithfully follow the original work's appeal. This type of work can be completed only with a large amount of effort. This has continuous lines everywhere, with attention to each inlayed and carved line. The area around the mon has a slight nikuoki, and it contributes to the appearance of the work we see here.

The artist Kuwano Fuyuteru first exhibited his work in the Gendai Toshoku Ten in 2020. At that time, he exhibited two Genji firefly menuki, and received an excellent work prize. In that work, I was impressed with the skilful use of the jigane's color, and the fireflies appeared like living things, and there was an excellent carving technique exhibited. But there was no question about the impact of this work. In this contest, we could see work at the forefront of the modern gold smith's abilities. When I picked up the tsuba, I felt, that in the past, before the Haitorei edict, the sophisticated techniques used by master smiths exited the sword world and moved to the field of decorative art, but today, it felt like the craftsmen are returning again to the world of sword mountings or kodogu. If this is a preview of future work, the future for the sword world's engraving work is bright. In next year's exhibit, I am looking forward to seeing more advances in this smith's work.

Commentary by Takeda Kotaro

June Teirei Kansho Kai

Date: July 12 (the second Saturday in June)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan Auditorium

Lecturer: Ishii Akira

Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: Hoshu Takada ju Fujiwara Munekage

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5.5 bu

Sori: 5.5 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are ji-nie and whitish utsuri.

Hamon: wide suguha; there are small ashi, yo, a nioideki, and a tight nioiguchi. Boshi: on the omote the boshi is a shallow notare; the ura is a small notare; both

sides are yakizume.

The yakidashi has slanted utsuri going towards the hamachi, and from this, you can see this blade is ubu. The blade is slightly wide, and the widths the moto and saki

are not very different. In addition, the sori on the upper half is slightly large, and there is some saki-zori. Also, from the large kissaki, you can view this as work from the end of the Muromachi period from Eiroku to Bunroku (1558-95) which is the boundary between Shinto and Koto work. The hamon is a wide suguha, there is a tight nioiguchi, small ashi, and in places, small yo. The start of the yo are described as looking like they originate from a point "pierced by a needle", and it is a unique look, and from this, you can judge this as Bungo Takada work.

In voting, by the second vote, the correct answer was provided by less than half of the people. Besides Munekage, some people voted for Magouemon jo Kiyomitsu. Surely, Kiyomitsu's hamon fit the description of this hamon. If it were Kiyomitsu's work, he has few examples of this style of a tight nioiguchi, he has more gentle hataraki, ashi and yo, and a nioiguchi. Sometimes, we call this style a "Kiyomitsu yodare (drip)", which means that the yo hataraki appear to drip down from the nioiguchi. Also, Munekage worked at the boundary between the Shinto and Koto periods, and his only confirmed dated signature date is Bunroku 4 (1595). In almost the same period, active smiths in the same area such as Muneyuki and Yukinaga have dated Keicho period work. From this, the NBTHK considers Munekage to be a Shinto period smith, and please remember this as a reference for future appraisals.

Kantei To No. 2: Tachi

Mei: Bizen koku Osafune ju Chikakage Karyaku 2 nen (1327) 5 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 4.5 bu

Sori: 4.5 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: ko-itame mixed with itame hada; the entire ji is well forged; there are ji-nie

and midare utsuri.

Hamon: choji style hamon mixed with ko-gunome, and angular shaped features; around the monouchi area it is suguha; at the koshimoto there are saka ashi. The entire hamon has frequent ashi and yo, is nioi-deki, there are some ko-nie and some kinsuii.

Boshi: straight, with a round tip and a short return.

This is an Osafune Chikakage tachi. Since the fumbari is not prominent, you can recognize that it is suriage. The upper half of the blade is narrow, there is a shallow sori, a small kissaki, and just from the shape, you want to look at this as work form an early period such as the end of the Heian Period to the early Kamakura Period. However, looking at the jiba (jigane and hamon), you can see that the jigane is a well forged refined ko-itame hada with clear utsuri, and at a glance you can recognize this as Bizen work. The hamon, in some places, is not too wide, and there are plump topped choji. Around the monouchi area, there is a gentle hamon.

In addition, the boshi is straight, round, and has a return, and is a Sansaku boshi. From these details, a relatively large number of people voted for Nagamitsu. However, **C**hikakage's forging is not as refined, his hada patterns show slightly irregular trends, such as sometimes being mixed with large pattern hada. His hamon

are a suguha style mixed with small gunome and angular shaped features, and the entire hamon has a saka ashi trend. There are also prominent nie. However, in this case, we treated Nagamitsu as a correct answer.

Besides Nagamitsu, from the shape, some people voted for Ko-Bizen work. In those swords, the entire hamon is mainly a komidare pattern, and more classic looking. In the case of Ko-Bizen utsuri, many of them usually have finger-print shaped dark areas and are jifu utsuri. Your priority should be to examine the appearance of the jiba (jigane and hamon).

This is unusual work for Chikakage, and there is a Nagamitsu style date. It is a valuable work and is a Tokubetsu Juyo Token.

The nakago photo is 94% of the actual size.

Kantei To 3: Katana

Mumei: Yoshioka Ichimonji

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 9 bu

Sori: 6 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume hada; the entire ji is well forged; there are ji-nie,

and midare utsuri.

Hamon: choji style hamon mixed with ko-choji and ko-gunome; the ura is a small

midare compared with the omote. There are ashi, nioideki, and kinsuji.

Boshi: on the omote, the boshi is a small midarekomi; on the ura, the boshi is a

shallow notare; both sides have a komaru and return.

Examing the jiba (jigane and hamon), there is itame forging with clear midare utsuri, and the high, wide choji stand out (especially on the omote). At a first glance, we can judge this as Bizen work. However, when examining the shape, almost no fumbari stands out just like the No. 2 katana, and you can recognize this as being suriage. The upper half has sori which does not change going towards the point, and from this, you can judge this as being Kamakura period work. Also, the evidence for end of Kamakura or late Kamakura period work is a long chu-kissaki for the standard width. On the other hand, in this period there are narrow and small size katana just like the Kantei To No. 2 example.

From these details, you can narrow this work down from the prominent choji hamon to being Ichimonji work. This is a less gorgeous hamon than from Fukuoka Ichimonji, and each choji shape is very close to the others. Also, this is not a small hamon, like we see on Katayama Ichimonji work. However, Sakonshokan Sukemitsu has a dated Genkyo 2 (1322) work, and also has signed work with relatively prominent gunome hamon, as well as some saka-ashi. Considering the period, votes for Fukuoka Ichimonji came out, and there were votes for work from the end of the Kamakura period.

From the middle of the hamon, there are kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki, and some people looked at this as Soshu Den work. But the midare utsuri is a very important

characteristic point which cannot be ignored when judging the school. This blade has a paper, and was judged as being Yoshioka Ichimonji work by Honnami Kochu and dated Houei 6 (1709).

Kantei To No. 4: Katana

Mei: Oite Nanki Shigekuni tsukuru kore

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 3 sun 4 bu

Sori: 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: there is ko-itame hada on the omote, and the ura has itame hada, nagare hada and mokume hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei and a clear jigane.

Hamon: notare style yakidashi at the moto; above this there are gunome mixed with ko-gunome, ko-notare, and togari. There are ashi, yo, a dense nioiguchi, frequent large nie, kinsuji, and sunagashi. On the upper part of the omote there are tobiyaki, and the entire hamon has a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: there is a yakikomi around the yokote area, and then the boshi is straight; on the omote it is round. The ura is an Ichimonji style; both sides have a small return and are a yakuzume style.

The shape of this blade shows no excess sori, it is wide, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is not notable. There is a long chu-kissaki, the blade is thick, and there are no notable characteristics which are seen in Shinshinto work, and from these observations, you can judge this as Keicho Shinto work. The jiba (jigane and hamon) has frequent ji-nie, ha-nie, kinsuji and sunagashi hataraki, and in this period, many popular smiths experimented with Soshu Den style work, and the jigane and hamon are bright and clear, and this is excellent work. However, in looking at these details, the jigane on the omote is a tight ko-itame hada, and on the ura is mixed with nagare hada. The boshi on the omote and ura are a yakzume style, and this is based on a Soshu Den style, but some Yamato Den characteristics are present.

This is a Nanki Shigekuni katana. He has two styles of work, one is Soshu Den just like this katana, and the other is a suguha style reminiscent of work from Yamato Den. In the former case, as I mentioned above, the shape and jiba are mixed with Yamato Den characteristics. Shigekuni's early period shapes or Suruga-uchi work (working at Suruga) have a large kissaki, and indeed, are an apparently Keicho Shinto style. Besides this, most of his Keicho Shinto work has a gentle shape just like this work. Furthermore, in the Keicho period, the jigane on the ura appears to have a stretched or extended pattern. Sometimes his boshi on the omote and ura have different shapes, just like we see on this example, and these details can help us focus on Shigekuni's characteristic points. From the yakidashi, some people voted for Kotetsu or Shin-Kunisada. If it were Kotetsu's work, large and small gunome fuse together in one unit, and become hyotanba, or there are continuous

gunome forming a juzuba hamon. His characteristic boshi have yakikomi in the yokote area. Shin Kunisada's work mainly has a choji style hamon, and his hamon composition is different.

Kantei To No. 5:

Kinzogan mei: Shikkake Norinaga suriage kore

Honnami (kao) Koshitsu

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 2 bu

Sori: 9 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with some nagare hada; the hada is visible in places; there are abundant dense ji-nie, and frequent chikei.

Hamon: chu-suguha mixed with ko-gunome, and ko-notare. There are frequent ashi and yo, a dense nioioguchi, large abundant nie, kinsuji, niesuji, and sunagashi; some parts of the hamon border have hotsure; there are yubashiri and a ni-juba style hamon.

Boshi: the entire boshi is nie-kuzure with hakikake; it is yakizume.

From the beginning we mentioned that this is a suriage blade, and no one voted for Shinto and Shinshinto. However, the main points are: the blade is wide, the shinogi, line is slightly high, it is thick, there is some nagare hada in places, there are hotsure and nijuba hataraki, and a yakizume boshi. Considering these elements, we can say Yamato work is a suitable opinion. From this, votes for Yamato was a majority opinion.

Next, to narrow this down among the five Yamato schools, there is no entirely masame forging from the Hosho school and the classic Senjuin school. Also, if it were Tegai school work, this much strong ha-nie should not be seen in mumei work. The jigane is very clear for Yamato school work and this is a more sophisticated work.

This has kinzogan mei by Honnami Koshitsu, and Shikkake Norinaga's work. From the rough nie, Toma School work was a possibility, but some parts of the continuous ko-gunome hamon stand out, and the nie and the hamon composition are similar to confirmed signed Norinaga work (a Juyo Bunkazai tachi signed Yamato Norinaga saku, and owned by the Kurolawa Kobunka Research Institute), and the Norinaga opinion was logical. Therefore, from the "suriage kore" sentence, instead of this is "Honnami Koshitsu's appraisal for mumei work", it is a sufficient possibility that a Norinaga signed tachi had become suriage, and Honnami wrote this. This has a Honnami Kojo origami dated Tenna 2 nen (1682) and was the first Tokubetsu Token to be named.

Shijo Kantei To No.821 in the June, 2025 Issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Wakasa no kami Ujifusa.

This is wide blade and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is not prominent. There is a shallow sori, a long chu-kissaki, and a saki sori, and from this you can judge as a katana from the end of Muromachi period. Also, there are frequent muneyaki, and this was widely seen in this period.

The jigane is itame mixed nagare hada, and there is a whitish ji which is often seen in work by Seki smiths in this period.

The hamon has a slightly worn down nioiguchi and a is a midare hamon with prominent round top gunome, togariba, and yahazu elements. This shows Seki smiths' characteristic points well. Also, the midare hamon's vertical variations are clear, and in the midare valleys we do not see many ashi, the boshi is a strong midarekomi, the tip is komaru or a togari style just like we see here, and the boshi falls slightly towards the edge and could be called a "jizo boshi" which means that the shape of the boshi resembles a jizo with a slightly bowed head as seen from a profile view.

Notably, the wide, high round top gunome have a slight waist and resemble narrow choji. In some places, the midare valleys appear like inverted choji, and the pattern is repeated. This was a hint about the unique hamon made before the smith changed his name, and the hamon pattern is called a "Kenbo midare". The smith's tanto and wakizashi often have this kind of midare hamon composition from the moto to the saki.

The midare hamon is called a "Kanefusa midare", and it is not only seen in work by Kanefusa, but also often generally seen other Seki smiths' work. Perhaps, at the end of the Muromachi period, the head of the Seki smiths, Kanefusa, produced more work than others, and many still remain, and people have more chances look at this work, and it naturally is supposed to be named after him.

However, the Seki Yoshisada family had multiple smiths named Kanefusa, and in his early career, Wakasa no kami Ujifusa used the Kanefusa name which had been used by his father and grandfather. Later he took over the leadership of the Seki smith's family from his older brother Ishimi no kami Kunifusa in Kouji 2 (1556). After Kunifusa passed away in Eiroku 3 (1560), he did not assume the Kunifusa name, and continued using the Kanefusa name. In Eiroku 13 (1570) on April 19, when he received the Saemonshojo title, and he changed his name from Kanefusa to Ujifusa. In the same year on April 22, he received the Wakasa no Kami title, and one more title. This is noted in the hints, and among the many Seki smiths it is a major point, helping to focus on his name.

The nakago mune is square, the tip is a sharp kurijiri, and the yasurime are a strong katte sagari. Under the mekugi ana there is a signature with a title, and the ura has a date signed along the mune side, and this matches his usual nakago style.

Also, at this time, some people just wrote Kanefusa, his previous signature, and it is not a mistake. But if it were made in the Wakasa no kami Ujifusa's Kanefusa signature period, his katana yasurime are takanoha (tanto and hiratsukuri wakizashi have higaki yasurime), and above all, in that period he had not yet received his title, and this is different from the hint about mei with the title, and you have to be careful about this type of detail.

Besides the Wakasa no kami Ujifusa answer, some people voted for Ishimi no Kami Kunifusa. He followed the Kanefusa family's style, and changed his name from Kanefusa to Kunifusa, and we treated his name as a correct answer. But he has very few existing works, we can't say the name was well known, and without focussing on the specific hints before bidding, you need to think about these details carefully. Also, his father Kanefusa (whose given first name was Zensai) passed away in Taiei 2 (1522), and Kunifusa's active period was around Kyoroku to Tenmon (1528-54). If it were his work, the overall shape and nakago would be shorter.

Beside these, some people voted for Mutsu no kami Daido. From the hints saying that he had a "unique hamon style and name before he changed his name" there should have been some doubts. He changed his name from Kanemichi to Daido, but the nakago characteristics are the same, and it is difficult to see any differences in the nakago style, but the Daido name was treated as a correct answer at this time.

For other proper answers, some people voted for his son Hida no Kami Ujifusa, Izumi no kami Kanesada, and the Tensho period smith Shodai Iga no kami Kinmichi. Hida no kami Ujifusa received an appointment in Tensho 12 (1592) on May 5, and there are few works left from that period, but he has more work left from the Keicho period. In the case of katana, there are very few prominent saki-zori shapes and we almost never see Kanefusa midare hamon. Rather, he preferred to use many of Wakasa no Kami Kanefusa's notare midare hamon, which Wakasa no Kami made more often than Kanefusa's midare hamon, and he made hamon mixed with large gunome. These hamon have a dense nioiguchi, more pronounced ha-nie, often mura-nie, and abundant hataraki inside of the hamon.

Often, Izumi no kami Kanesada's forging is tight, and he has some swords with hamon which are similar to this hamon, but usually have slightly quiet togariba and yahazu style hamon, and the entire hamon is a gentle notare and gunome. The jiba (jigane and hamon) are bright. In his later years around the Taiei period, his yasurime were katte-sagari, but before that period he had many takanoha yasurime works. His nakago mune are either round or with a small volume. His active period was a little earlier than Ujifusa, many of his works have a shorter length, and his katana nakago are 15-17 cm long.

The Shodai Iga no Kami Kinmichi's Tensho period work has some short length work, but almost no katana can be found, he has few dated works, and very few from the Shinto period. The few examples of katana dated Tensho 9 (1581) have no title, and also on the ura side, the date starts above the mekugi-ana, and this is different from the hints.

Commentary by Ooi Gaku