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MEITO KANSHO

APPRECIATION OF IMPORTANT SWORDS

Juyo Bijutsuhin

Tanto

Owner: Nagoya Token Museum

Mei: Yamashiro Koku Nishijin ju nin Umetada Myoju
Keicho 13 nen (1608) 3 gatsu kichijitsu
shoji (owner) Kumagai Seiroku

Length: 8 sun 3 bu 8 rin (25.4 cm)

Sori: 8 rin (0.25 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 bu 2 rin (3.4 cm)

Motokasane: 1 bu 8 rin (0.55 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 9 bu 9 rin (12.1 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

Commentary

On the omote, there is a kiriha tsukuri style. The ura is hiratsukuri. There is a mitsumune. The blade is prominently wide for the length, there is a hocho shape, a standard thickness, and a shallow sori. The jigane is a fine ko-itame hada. In some places the hada is visible, and there are abundant ji-nie and fine chikei. The hamon is a wide notare midare, and on the omote at the koshimoto the hamon contains sharp tipped gunome. There are some ashi and yo, and a tight nioiguchi with ko-nie. The boshi is a slightly shallow notarekomi with a komaru. The ura tip is a yaki-kuzure style, and both sides have a long return. The nakago is ubu, the tip is iriyamagata, and the yasurime are kiri. The horimono on the omote is a kyo-tsui sho-ryu (a dragon running towards the tip), and the ura horimono is a kyu-tsui kou-ryu (a dragon running up the blade). There are two mekugi ana, and on the omote there are two lines of kanji forming a long signature with an address and a date. The owner's name is on the ura.

The Umetada family was active mainly as shirogane-shi (gold and silversmiths) making habaki during the Momoyama to early Edo period. Besides habaki making, they formed a group who did sword related work such as making a blade suriage, making gold inlays, and sword engraving. Among these people, Myoju demonstrated an extraordinary talent for tsuba making besides sword making. He was looked up to as the “Founder of the Shinto school”, and he left bold yet sophisticated works which set him apart from others. In Genna 6 (1618) he has a work saying he was 61 years old. In Kanei 8 (1631) on March 24th there is a signed dated work giving his age as 74 years old. These works confirm that his birth date was Eiroku 1 (1558), and he is supposed to have passed away two months after his last work. His common name was Hikojiro, and his early mei supposed was supposed to be “Muneyoshi”. Among work with the Muneyoshi mei, there is a tanto and a yari dated Keicho 2 (1597), and a wakizashi without a date, for a total of three confirmed works. After he changed his name to “Myoju”, there is a katana signed the following year with “Yamashiro Koku Nishijin ju nin Umetada Myoju Keicho 3 nen (1598) 8 gatsu hi, hoka e kore o watasu bekarazu (never allowed out of the house)” classified as Juyo Bunkazai and owned by a Kyoto museum. This is famous in the Token world as his once-in-a-lifetime katana work. Many of his dated works are from the Keicho and Genna periods, and notably, in Keicho 12 and 13 (1607-8) his works have owner’s names, and among these, there some were signed for persons who are supposed to be Myoju’s grandchildren such as “Hikogoro”, “Hikojiro” and “Hikohachiro” and this is interesting.

Most of his tanto are a large size, and for their lengths, the nakago are long which is different from the previous period’s tanto, and on the omote and ura, they have horimono, including simple horimono. Notably, katakiriha tsukuri tanto display his unique character. They are wide, and at first glance, give the impression of a hocho shape. In addition, many of them on the omote and ura have kyu-tsui sho-ko dragon horimono (a dragon chasing an Orb up on one side and down on the other side). The carvings are shallow, the dragon’s stomachs are along the mune side, the lower jaw has a square shape and underbite, and these details are different from other smith’s carvings. Also, the tip of the tail on the omote side is sharp, just like a sword tip, and on the ura side, the tips of the tails are round, and thus different on each side. The tanto’s hada are either ko-itame hada or a well forged itame hada mixed with some nagare hada, many of the hamon have a tight nioiguchi and a notare hamon, and the shape of the blade and horimono create a visually appealing unique work, and are very striking.

This kind of remarkable work was possible because of Myoju’s innate sensibility and aesthetic sense.

Explanation and oshigata by Ishii Akira

Shijo Kantei To No. 837

Information

Katana

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 8 bu (71.15 cm)

Sori: 8.5 bu (2.5 cm)

Motohaba: 9 bu (2.7 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu (1.85 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu (0.65 cm)

Sakikasane: 1.5 bu (0.45 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu (3.3 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 3 bu (19.1 cm)

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

This is a shinogi tsukuri katana with an ihorimune. There is a standard width, and the difference in the widths at the moto and the saki is slight. There is a standard thickness, the shinogiji is ground down, and there is a strong sori. The tip has sori and there is a chu-kissaki. The jigane has an itame and nagare hada, and the hada is visible. There are strong ji-nie, a dark jigane, and whitish areas. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the oshigata. The hamon has ashi mixed with large yo, and is nie-deki. There are some mura nie, tobiyaki, yubashiri, large frequent muneyaki, frequent sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago mune is square, the narrow nakago tip is kurijiri, and the yasurime are katte-sagari. There is one mekugi ana. On the omote, next to the mekugi ana, and along the mune side there is a three kanji signature.

This smith traveled to several provinces and left some chu-tsuiuchi (work forged while traveling). Also, in the same school another smith with the same name smith moved to another province.

Tokubetsu Jujo Tosogu

Akegarasu zu (design) fuchi-kashira: crow cawing in the morning

Mei: Ganoshoshi Nagatsune with kao

This is an Ichinomiya Nagatsune fuchi kashira. Nagatsune demonstrated outstanding technical skills in the mid-Edo period, and he was praised as one of the three best master smiths among the Kyoto gold smiths, along with Tetsugendo Shoraku and Otsuki Mitsuoki.

The fuchi and kashira have a polished shibuichi ground. The fuchi shows two birds flying towards the sun over a mountain which is shown with a shakudo colored zogan (inlay). The fuchi shows two people catching fish on a boat, which is shown very clearly with Nagatsune's katakiribori and hirazogan. On the fuchi, the depth of the subjects is well expressed with katakiri-bori, and there is a light and exuberant feeling. On the kashira, Nagatsune used hira-zogan gold and silver inlays, and we can see the ridgeline's hazy changing colors in the morning sun, and there is an elegant expression which evokes an early morning scene. Nagatsune studied under Ishiga Yutei who is supposed to have been a Kano school artist, and Nagatsune himself drew his own images and designs. There is a delicate painting-like image made possible by his exceptional aesthetic sensibilities.

Also, this design is shown in Nagatsune's "Horimono sketch book", and Nagatsune listed the materials he used, including tofuran-gold, crow-sudo, and haze-sudo gold, and these are exactly the same materials used on this fuchi-kashira, and his book shows us some details of Nagatsune's meticulous and accurate work. From the sharply carved chiseled mei, we can recognize his abundant energy and spirit.

Explanation by Koiwai Daiki

Teirei Kansho Kai

Date: September 12th (the second Saturday of the month)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan Auditorium

Lecturer: Takeda Kotaro

Kantei To No. 1: Tanto

Mei: Uda Kunifusa

Oei 12 nen (1405) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 9 sun 4 bu

Sori: none

Style: hiratsukuri

Mune: mitsumune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are abundant dense nie and fine chikei; along the hi the jigane has a pale whitish cast.

Hamon: based on chu-suguha; it is mixed with ko-gunome, gunome, and some togariba. There are ashi, yo, frequent ko-nie, yubashiri, sunagashi, some kinsuji, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi with strong hakikake, yubashiri, tobiyaki, and strong nie; on the omote, the tip is komaru, and on the ura, a togari shape; both sides have a long return.

This is an Uda Kunifusa tanto which is Juyo Bijutsuhin. It has an Oei 2 nen (1395) date. The shape is wide, it is slightly long, there is no sori, and the shape suggests it is from the end of the Kamakura to the early Nanbokuchō period. The jigane is different from the usual Uda school hada which is itame mixed with nagare hada, and the hada is visible. The jigane has a dark color. This tanto has a tight ko-itame hada, there are abundant dense ji-nie and a refined jigane. The hamon is based on chu-suguha mixed with ko-gunome, and there is a bright nioiguchi. From the workmanship, in voting, many people voted for Rai school smiths such as Kunimitsu and Kunitsugu. This could be possible, but if it were Rai school work, the jigane would have nie-utsuri, and besides Shiokawa Rai, and Yurakusai Ra work, in the case of midare hamon, usually the tanto boshi returns are either standard or short. This boshi has a long return, and on the ura there is togari shaped point. Also, looking at the details around the upper part of the monouchi area, one can see that there are strong nie. These nie could be considered to be Uda's "tuburana (round, bright) nie". The Uda school is known for a wide range of styles: there are suguha hamon mixed midare hamon, hitatsura hamon, and a great variety of styles. Among these, the Uda school's characteristic point is round bright ha-nie, in which single grains of nie can be inspected. Even the sword book "Honcho Kajiko" said that "Etchu Utsu work, without strong nie present should be considered as not being Uda work".

Without overlooking the points mentioned above, people also knew that Uda Kunifusa and Kunihiya have tight ko-itame hada and refined forging work, and they voted for these two smiths, and that was impressive. Also, the Uda school has four Juyo Bijutsuhin blades including this one, and all of them are Uda Kunifusa's work. We feel that this clearly shows Kunifusa's high level of skill and the high level of appreciation for his work.

Kantei To No. 2: Kotachi

Mei: Fujishima Tomoshige

length: 2 shaku 1 bu

Sori: slightly less than 7 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: there is a tight ko-itame hada; on the ura at the koshimoto there is a visible hada; there are ji-nie, chikei, a dark jigane, and midare utsuri.

Hamon: mainly a sumi yakiba (with square shaped features), mixed with angular shaped features. There are open valley gunome, togariba, ashi, and yo, and the hamon is nie-deki. There are some yubashiri, tobiyaki, muneyaki, and fine sunagashi.

Boshi: there is a wide yakiba which is straight; the tip is komaru with a return.

This is a Fujishima Tomoshige kotachi. The widths at the moto and saki are different, the blade is thick for its width, there is a large koshisori, and the tip has sori, and this is an early Muromachi period kotachi shape. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada with midare utsuri, and there is a slightly dark color. The hamon has angular shaped features mixed with togariba, and a unique sumi yakiba with open valley gunome, and there are sunagashi.

Concerning the Fujishima school's work, the "Honsho Kajiko" lists "various province's styles", and says "it can be hard to decide". Aspects of the style include various elements. Some people, mainly from the togariba, looked at this as Mino work, and other people, mainly from the open valley gunome, looked at this as Bizen work, and in the second vote, people voted for an answer opposite from their first vote. This kotachi has both school's characteristic points, and is a mix of Mino-den and Bizen-den styles. But the angular hamon features on both sides have elements like a demon's tooth called "Fujishima's sumi yakiba" which are visible all over, and this is the highlight and the most decisive point to use to identify this work. In addition to the characteristic hamon, there are abundant ha-nie, some areas with rough nie, and frequent sunagashi, and the boshi has hakikake. These types of hataraki are Hokuriku work and Fujishima Tomoshige's characteristic points, and this kotachi contains many of his typical characteristic elements.

Fujishima work is supposed to span the period from the end of the Kamakura period to the Shinshinto period, and there is a wide range of work, but many of them are from the Muromachi period. Around the Oei period, there was work with tight forging just like this kotachi, but many of them have a visible hada mixed with mokume and nagare hada and a dark color, and some have utsuri like this kotachi. However, a typical sumi-yakiba being present from the koshimoto to the monouchi area is unusual, and from this point, this is an interesting and valuable example.

Kantei To No. 3: Katana

Mei: Muramasa

Kiritsuke mei: Hizen kuni Tadayuki shuyo kore

Length: 2 shaku 2 sun 8 bu

Sori: 7.5 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: there is an itame hada and visible hada; some places have nagare hada; there are frequent ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: the bottom half is gunome mixed with angular shaped features and gunome choji; the midare hamon has groups of features and a hakoba (box-like) style connecting the notare waves; some places have nie kuzuri; the upper half is a shallow notare style and wide suguha style; the omote and ura hamon are the same. There are ashi, yo, nie-deki, frequent muneyaki, some sunagashi, and a worn down noiguchi.

Boshi: there is a wide straight yakiba; the tip is komaru, and there is a slightly long return.

This is a Muramasa katana. There is a standard width and a large sori and the boshi is wide. From this, you can judge this as being work from the latter half of the Muromachi period.

At the koshimoto, gunome and angular shaped features form one group, and a low hamon connects these groups. Some of the valleys in the midare hamon are low. The bottom half is a midare hamon, and the upper half is a suguha hamon with a slight notare pattern. The upper half and bottom half have different hamon patterns and are sometimes seen in late or Sue work. However, this hamon is the same on the omote and ura. At the bottom of the hamon near the machi, the hamon features form one group. There is a worn down nioiguchi which shows one of the Sengo school's smiths such as Muramasa and Masashige's characteristic points.

From the typical style, many people voted for the correct answer. In voting, some people voted for Masashige as well as for Muramasa. Compared with Muramasa, Masashige's work has a visible hada and nie kuzure, and a characteristic point is supposed to be the presence of a rustic feeling. The answer for Masashige was arrived at by looking closely at the bottom half, and we treated that as a good and correct answer at this time. Also, a few people voted for Heianjo Nagayoshi. If it were his work, many of his jigane are tight, and the blades contain some horimono, even simple ones.

Kantei To No. 4: Katana

Mei: Yamato no kami Yasusada

Kinzogan Mei: Kanbun 5 nen (1665) 6 gatsu 7 nichi

Yamano Kaemon 68 sai (years old) Nagahisa

Futatsu (2)-do otoshi, mitsu (3)-do saidan

Length: slightly less than 2 shaku 4 sun 7 bu

Sori: slightly less than 4 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; some places are mixed with mokume hada; there are abundant ji-nie and chikei.

Hamon: gunome mixed with togariba; some midare areas have angular shaped features; there are notare areas; there are ashi, frequent nie, and frequent sunagashi.

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

The widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori, a stick-like shape, and a chu-kissaki. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, and the shinogi-ji has masame hada, and from these details, you can judge this as Kanbun Shinto work, and especially likely to be Edo Shinto work. The hamon is notare mixed with gunome, and there are some angular shapes. There is a prominent stick-like shape and a long length, which shows Yasusada's characteristic points.

Besides the correct answer, many people voted for Kotetsu, Kazusa no suke Kaneshige, and Edo Hojoji work. In case of Kotetsu, there should be a straight yakidashi, small and large gunome fused together into a group called a Hyotanba, and thick ashi. If it were Kazusa no suke and Hojoji work, their hamon are a chu-suguha style, and the top of the hamon does not show much high and low variation. There are continuous gunome in a juzuba style, and different from this sword. Also, from the sunagashi inside of the hamon, some people voted for Terukane. If it were Terukane's work, there would be a more toran-like feeling in the hamon, and under the yokote there would be continuous gunome. There would be tobiyaki with a shape which appears to be like a splash of water, and a yakidashi at a koshimoto.

Also, the nakago yasurime are a large or strong sujichigai, and gradually become deeper going away from the ha edge, but you can't see that here, and this is Yasusada's characteristic point. The gold inlay signature by Yamano Kaemon no-jo Nagahisa which is seen often in this period on work by other Edo Shinto smiths is one of highlights on this work.

Kantei To No. 5: Katana

Mei: Chikushu ju Sa Yukihide
Kaei 3 nen (1850) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 2 shaku 1 sun 3.5 bu

Sori: slightly over 1 bu

Style: shinogi tsukuri (around the koshimoto, the niku has been filed or ground down).

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: chu-suguha, and a shallow notare style with gunome; there are thick long frequent ashi, and yo, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, some tobiyaki and and a bright and clear hamon.

Boshi: the boshi is straight, the tip is round, and there is a long return.

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

This is a Juyo Token blade dated Kaei 3, and a katana by Sa Yukihide. It is wide and thick, and there is a heavy, robust shape, but not much prominent hiraniku. From this, you can judge this as Shinshinto work. In addition, the shinogi ji is slightly narrow, and this is a Shinshinto characteristic shape, which is sometimes seen in Sa Yukihide's work. There is a tight ko-itame hada with abundant nie, and a bright and clear jigane. The hamon is based on a shallow notare style chu-suguha. There is a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Sa Yukihide was good at this type of work, and people looked at it as Shinshinto work and voted for the correct answer in the first vote. Besides the correct answer, some people voted for Suishinshi Masahide and Shinkai. Masahide was supposed to have modeled his work after Shinkai's suguha style work, and in this case, a difference is that his nie form mura-nie. Also, Naotane has some Osaka Shinto utsushi work, but many of them have toranba hamon, and on those we do not often see a Shinkai style suguha. Here, this work is mixed with Shoshu Den style hataraki and nie. Among this type of work, some are looked at as being Shinkai's work, and Yukihide's work would be surely worthy of such a consideration. Nevertheless, if it were Shinkai's work, his style is different and we would see hataraki inside of the hamon such as kinsuji and sunagashi.

The nakago is shown at 98% of the actual size.

Shijo Kantei To No. 835 in the August, 2026 issue

The answer to the August Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Unju Korekazu.

The widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a chu-kissaki, and a standard width, but the blade is thick, and the tip is thick, and this is a heavy blade. The width of the shinogi ji is notable with its narrow shape, and in addition, the jigane is a very tightly forged muji style, and from these details, you can judge this as Shinshinto period work.

Also, the sori is not strong, but there is a slight koshizori, and perhaps the shape was influenced to some extent by a tachi shape. This kind of blade was likely modeled from a tachi shape, and seems to reflect an effort to include elements of a tachi. The Suishinshi school and its smiths worked in the Bizen Den style, and among these, in works with a choji midare hamon, there is a strong tendency to see an influence from older shapes. These blades have a standard or narrow shape for Shinshinto work, the kissaki are not long, and many have lengths of about 2 shaku 5-6 sun, and these details suggest they were supposed to be influenced by a tachi shape.

The jigane are often either a muji style, or a nagare hada mixed with masame hada, just like this one. If there are strong Soshu Den elements, the hamon are mixed with notare and ko-notare with strong hataraki, and there are strong ji-nie and prominent chikei.

The hamon is choji mixed with gunome, and is a gorgeous midare. Because of the long ashi, the choji midare pattern stands out. The ashi are thick, and not worn down from polishing. In some places, the ashi extend to the hamon's edge. The nioiguchi is thick and well defined, and the nie variations are not pronounced. Overall, there is a dense nioiguchi and a bright appearance, and these are Shinshinto characteristic points. In particular, in the Shinshinto period, a choji-midare hamon with nie is Unju Korekazu's major characteristic point.

Korekazu's choji bunches were made from the Koka period to the early Kaei period in his early work, and a few show exactly the Chounsai Tsunatoshi school's style, based on a choji midare hamon with a tight nioiguchi, and the choji bunches or clusters have narrow shapes. After this period, his choji hamon had thick and prominent round top choji or gunome and wide midare hamon, and around this period, we do not see work which appears to look like a repeated pattern with a regular midare hamon and yakidashi. In addition, Korekazu worked mainly with midare hamon mixed with togariba, ko-notare, and vertical variations, and many of these hamon have sunagashi and kinsuji.

In this period, his Bizen Den styles were mixed with Soshu Den styles, and there were many masterpieces produced.

Many of his boshi are midarekomi, and in the case of straight and notare boshi, the points are either komaru or a sharp komaru.

His nakago have a round mune surface, the tips are kurijiri (but many of them are a ha-agari kurijiri, and some of them are a sharp iriyamagata). After the Manen (1860) period many of the nakago tips became narrow, and the yasurime were a large sujichigai with kesho yasuri. The signatures were on the omote, along the mune side, and are parallel to the nakago mune. Around the mid-Ansei (1854-59) period, his signatures are centered on the shinogi line, and in the Bunkyo to Keio period (1861-67), only the dates are inscribed along the mune side. Around the same period, he signed ura side dates with several characters higher up on the omote side, and this katana shows these points.

For another proper answer, some people voted for his biological father Chounsai Tsunatoshi and his senior student Koyama Munetsugu. Both smiths' characteristic hamon patterns show 3-4 sun interval repeats in the hamon shapes, and their choji and gunome hamon are usually more narrow with a tight nioiguchi.

Tsunatoshi's ura side date location starts several kanji above the omote side signature, the same as this one (but after the Koka period, the mei on the omote and ura sides were same height). He signed along the mune side of the nakago, and the mei stayed on the mune side. Many of his hamon have a yakidashi, his nakago tips are a clear ha-agari kurijiri, and his nakago were usually narrower.

Munetsugu's work around the Tenpo period often has a dense nioiguchi and contains large bunches of choji. But if you carefully observe the choji bunched together, and their long ashi and deep valleys, it appears that the tsuchioki (clay coating) was applied in a very even manner over the entire blade. Also, if it were his work, the nakago tip would be iriyamagata.

Takahashi Naganobu is from the same school and is a proper answer. Among his nakago yasurime, there are very few kiri and sujichigai yasurime. He was supposed to be left-handed, and most of his work has a reverse large sujichigai with kesho, and this is an important difference. Many of his early period works are a Tsunatoshi style choji midare. His later period work has an Unju Korekazu style with a dense nioiguchi and strong ko-nie, gunome, and choji. Among these works, some have vertical variations in the hamon, but usually the tops of many of the hamon features are aligned. However, often we see some part of his hamon mixed with low ko-gunome which deliberately show high and low variations, and very round small valleys. Also, he may have been influenced by Aoe saka-choji hamon, and some midare hamon have saka-ashi.

Besides the correct and proper answer, some people voted for Tairyusai Munehiro, Suishinshi Masahide, and Hosokawa Masayoshi.

Munehiro has many mitsumune, and he is good at making repeating small choji midare hamon with utsuri. His nakago mune are square, and the nakago tips are kurijiri.

In Masahide's later years, he often worked in Bizen Den styles, his choji midare form small sized, small bunches, and there are fewer vertical variations, and also, his midare boshi are small. Many of his hamon are soft at the koshimoto, and his nakago tips are ha-agari kurijiri. Many of his signatures are located near or are centered on the shinogi line, and his katana mei start under the mekugi ana, and the dates are located higher, and start around the beginning of the yasurime area.

Masayoshi's choji midare hamon sometimes have angular shapes, and the choji appear as though they are pushing against each other, and can form a fan-shape juka-choji. Because of this, some choji slant over to the left or right, the ashi slope left and right, and some ashi intersect with each other. In addition, the difference in the widths at the moto and saki stands out, there is a large funbari, and also the nakago has a large sori, but the nakago sori is not continuous with the sori of the blade. Because of this, the sori on the blade appears as though it is divided into two styles, and this is a characteristic point. Many of his signatures on the omote and ura are located towards the mune side, and the signatures start around the area where the yasurime start.

Explanation by Ooi Gaku