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Meito Kansho: Examination of Important Swords

Classification: Juyo Bunkazai; Important Cultural property

Type: Tachi

Mei: Rai Kunimitsu

Owner: Shiogama Shrine

Length: 2 shaku 7 sun 6 bu 59 rin (83.29 cm)

Sori: 1sun 1 bu 7 rin (3.55 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 1 rin (3.05 cm)

Sakihaba: 6 bu 1 rin (1.85 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 5 rin (0.75 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

Nakago length: 6 sun 7 bu 5 rin (20.45 cm)

Nakago sori: 8 rin (0.25 cm)

Commentary

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. The blade is slightly wide, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. It is thick, there is a large sori with funbari, it has a wa-zori shape and there is a short chu-kissaki. The jigane has a tight itame hada and some places are mixed with ko-itame hada. There are abundant dense ji-nie, chikei, nie utsuri at the center of bottom half of the blade, and the omote has some small dark areas. The

hamon is a chu-suguha style mixed with ko-gunome, a ko-midare style hamon, and square shaped gunome. There are frequent ashi and yo, abundant even ko-nie, some parts of the hamon have hotsure, and some areas at the top of the hamon have small tobiyaki. Around the monouchi area there are small muneyaki, and some areas have kinsuji and sunagashi. The boshi is straight, and the omote is yakizume with nie suji. The ura is komaru with a short return, and there are kinsuji. The nakago is ubu and the tip is a shallow kurijiri. The original style of the yasurime is not visible. There are two mekugi-ana, and on the omote above the first mekugi-ana (the original mekugi-ana) there is a small size three kanji signature made with fine carving.

Rai Kunimitsu is listed as Rai Kunitoshi's son in many old sword books. He is well known as continuing the next generation along with Kunitsugu. Among his existing work, the earliest work is from the end of the Kamakura period in Kayaku¹(1326), and the latest work is from the early half of the Hokucho period in Kano 2 (1351). Judging from this, his active period covered about 25 years. Among the Rai school smiths, he has many outstanding masterpieces, just like Kunitoshi. Just among his signed works, there are three which are classified as Kokuho, seventeen classified as Juyo-Bunkazai, and fourteen classified as Juyo-Bijutsuhin. From the number of highly classified and certified works, we can recognize his surprisingly high level of skill. His style does not depend on the type of blade, whether long or short, his widths are varied, and are either narrow, standard, or wide. His hamon are simple suguha, suguha with ashi, hamon based on suguha, and hamon mixed with small gunome and choji. The hamon seen mainly on tanto and less often on tachi are based on gunome or ko-notare, and there are large midare hamon, and his work often included wide blades. However, his large midare hamon have abundant strong nie, are full of movement, and made in the Yamashiro Den style, but are rather close to Bizen Den styles. Concerning, his signatures, on tachi, he signed on the

shinoji-ji with small sized kanji , and on tanto, he signed on the center with large sized kanji.

This tachi is over 2 shaku 7 sun in length with a dynamic shape, and is slightly wide, thick, and heavy, and has been well preserved in a healthy condition. The jigane has some areas mixed with itame hada, but overall, the jihada is a tight ko-itame hada, and is the Rai school smiths' characteristic refined hada. On the bottom half of the blade, the jigane area has nie utsuri, and on the omote side's center, there are clear dark areas, and this type of jigane is rare for Kunimitsu, so this is interesting.

Also, along the hamon from the moto to saki there are uniform gentle ha-nie without any irregularities, and the vertical variations in the hamon are small, and there is an emphasis on a midare hamon. Inside of the hamon there is an abundance of hataraki such as ashi, yo, kinsuji, sunagashi, and frequent variations of these. At a glance, this has a classic appearance seen in work before Kunimitsu's active period, but there are muneyaki around the monouchi area which is a Rai school characteristic. Also, the boshi shapes on the omote and ura are different, and this characteristic is seen sometimes in work classified as Juyo Token, and this characteristic is hard to miss.

In looking at the signature, the style has a soft appearance, and the kuni kanji has a pronounced vertical shape, and this is similar to work from the middle of his career around the Karyaku and Gentoku (1326-31) period signatures. Consequently, from this observation, we can guess at the date that this blade was made. Furthermore, in the "mitsu" kanji, the second and third strokes are almost parallel with the fourth stroke. There are several Juyo Token classified blades which have the same kind of signature, so this is of strong interest. This tachi has a distinctive feeling, a classic appearance, and makes a strong impression, so we would say that this is one of his best masterpieces.

This tachi is owned by Shiogama Shrine, at which people prayed for protection during wars and to its guardian diety. It is located in Tokoku Chingo, Mutsu Kuni Ichinomiya. It was founded in Enpo 3

(1675) on November 10th by the Sendai Date family's fourth lord Tsunamura (Tsunamoto) after he received his position. During his first shrine visit, he donated this sword and prayed for his country's peace. This tachi was the Date family's clan lord Ho-no-to (a ho-no-to is a sword donated to a shrine). The lord Tsunamura supported the Shiogama shrine, supported the shrine's growth, and organized its administrative systems. He implemented measures to protect the shrine's location in Shiogama Machi, and was an excellent lord or daimyo.

Also, this tachi has a koshirae: an itomaki no tachi koshirae with a gold nashi-ji chrysanthemum, bamboo, and sparrow mon on a makie-saya in a black urushi tachi box. Also in the box is a document written with a shinto ritual prayer. All of these features have been preserved till today, and this is one of the best shrine treasures among swords.

Explanation and photo by Ishii Akira

No.773 Tosogu Kanshou

Tokubetsu Juyo Tosogu

Kanzan Jittoku zu (legendary poet and monk design) tsuba Mei: Hoshu Unno Shomin with gold seal; after the seal there are kanji for "koikintai"

This tsuba is stored in a box. The inside of the box cover says "Kanzan Jittoku shibuichi tsuba, Meiji 36 nen (1903) 3 gatsu hi Teishitsu gigei-in Unno Shomin (with hanko)". This is one of the special items ordered by the Ryuji-do Komra Toshimo. Meiji 36 was a year in which many tosogu masterpieces were listed in the book "Tagane no Hana" published when Shomin was sixty years old.

Shomin was born in Mito in Tenpo 15 (1844) during the Bakumatsu period. He studied under his uncle, the Shodai Unno Bisei, and later he studied under the same province's best smith

Ogiya Katsuhei. In the Meiji period, he went to Tokyo, and became an apprentice of Natsuo.

This tsuba's background or surface is rogin ishime ji. On the omote we see Kanzan and Jutoku (monks) carved in sukidashi-usu-niku-bori and shishi-aibori (relief techniques). On the ura their teacher Hosen, a Zen monk, is represented with a rusu-moyo design and image (rusu-moyo means a design or image which does not include an actual person). Shomin just carved a tiger to represent Hosen using an excellent katakiri-bori technique. The tiger's expression is gentle, and the tiger lived with Hosen. Hosen is a Tendai-shu Kokusei-ji's (temple) virtuous monk, and Jutoku along with the tiger were rescued and saved by Hosen. Kanzan is supposed to have been living around Hosen and the tiger and Jutoku and eating their leftover food.

According one story, Kanzan was Monji's (a deity) incarnation, and Jutoku was Fuken's (a deity) incarnation. They were both eccentric. Kanzan has a scroll, and Jutoku has a broom in his hand, and both presented some kind of strange appearance, and they seem to enjoy each other's company and laugh at each other. The tsuba still retains some strangeness, but never feels childish. The entire scene exhibits noble artistry. This likely comes from the artist Shomin's personality and his high level of skill. I can understand the great patron Komura ordering as many works as he did from Shomin.

Explanation Kubo Yasuko

Shijo Kantei To No. 773

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 773 Shijo Kantei To is July 5, 2021. 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 July 5, 2021 will be accepted. If there are sword smiths with the same name in different schools, please write the school or prefecture, and if the sword smith was active for more than one generation, please indicate a specific generation.

Information:

Type: Katana

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 1.5 bu (70.14 cm)

Sori: slightly over 5 bu (1.6 cm)

Motohaba: 1 sun 2 rin (3.1 cm)

Motokasane: 2 bu 3 rin (0.7 cm)

Sakikasane: 1 bu 7 rin (0.5 cm)

Kissaki length: 1 sun 1 bu 9 rin (3.6 cm)

Nakago length: 7 sun 3 bu 6 rin (22.3 cm)

Nakago sori: slight

This is a shinogi zukuri katana with an ihorimune. It has a standard width, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a shallow sori, a chu-kissaki, and the ihorimune' back ridge has a prominent sharp angle. The jigane has a tight ko-itame hada, there are abundant dense ji-nie, and fine chikei. The hamon and boshi are as seen in the picture. There are ashi, a dense nioiguchi, abundant nie, a bright and clear appearance and prominent sunagashi and kinsuji. The nakago is ubu, the nakago tip is a shallow iriyama-gata, and the yasurime are sujichigai with kesho yasurime. There is one mekugi-ana, and on the omote, below the mekugi-ana, there is a long kanji signature along the mune side.

Many of this smith's jigane are mixed with fine nagare and masame-hada along the hamon side.

The Shijo Token Kansho Kai for June, 2021

Lecturer: Ishii Akira

Kansho To No. 1: Katana

Mei: Yamato no Kami Yasusada

Length: slightly over 2 shaku 8 bu

Sori: 2.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihori-mune

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

Hamon: notare mixed with gunome; in some places, there are square shaped features: the entire hamon is a high midare hamon. There are ashi, frequent nie, in some places the nioiguchi is rough; on the ura around the monouchi there are yubashiri.

Boshi: the entire omote is yaki-kuzure; the boshi is straight with a komaru; the tip has hakikake. The ura boshi and tip are straight and round.

Horimono: on the omote there is a “Hachiman dai bosatsu” kanji carving, and the ura below the bonji, there is a suken kasane-bori.

Comments:

Conventionally, it has been thought that Yamato no Kami Yasusada's home town was Echizen. However, according to the book “Shinto Bengi” by Kamata Gyosho, in the first edition dated Anei 6 (1777) it says that “he lives Bushu, Edo, and signs with the Tomita name, and belongs to the Ishido school”. In the same book on a different page the entry says: “Yasusada, Kishu”. Yasusada has a gassaku blade signed “Kishu Wakayama ju Yasuhiro tsukuru, Yamato-no-kami Yasusada saku”. Judging from this, Yasusada appears to have come from the Kishu Ishido school. Also, his last name was Tomita, which we sometimes see

in his work. We also see this for other Kishu Ishido smiths such as Tameyasu and Yasuhiro who also used Tomita as a last name. These observations, reinforce our thoughts that Yasusada is from the Kishu Ishido school. Concerning his birth date, in a dated work in Kanbun 10 (1670) he included the fact that he was 53 years old, confirming his birth date of Genna 4 (1618). When Yasusada went to Edo in Keian 1 (1648), on a blade with a Yamano Nagahisa kinzogan-saidan mei sword, he signed “Bushu no ju”, and this was the year, he was around 31 years old. Concerning his teacher, Izumi-no-kami Kaneshige, there are some similarities in his style, the nakago style, and with the Yamano family’s saidan mei, so there is support for the idea that Izumi-no-kami Kaneshige was his teacher. He has primarily two styles, one is a notare hamon mixed with gunome, and the notare pattern shows some square shaped features. The other style is mainly a gunome and midare hamon, but we see the first style more.

This katana has a shallow sori and a very dignified feeling. In the shinogi-ji, the masamehada is prominent, and fine and tight, and shows Kanbun period Edo Shinto characteristic points. The hamon is high, and there are some square shaped waves in the notare hamon mixed with gunome. This is similar but essentially different from the Hanetora period Kotetsu hamon. Also, the mune angle is relatively sharp, the sori is very shallow with an almost stick-like appearance, and along with the shape, this shows Yasusada’s characteristic points.

In addition, this is over 2 shaku long, and is classified as a katana. But Yasusada has some long wakizashi, so one of his characteristic points could be that he made blades about this size.

This katana was shown in the sword book “Shinto Shokan Yoroku” published in Tenmei 2 (1782), which listed Shinto period genealogies, oshigatas, and styles.

Kansho To No. 2: tachi

Mei: Yasuhiro

Length: 2 shaku 6 sun 3 bu

Sori: 9.5 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame mixed with mokume; there are jifu in the ji; some areas have nagare hada, and the hada is slightly visible. There are fine ji-nie and clear jifu type midare utsuri.

Hamon: mainly gunome, and mixed with ko-choji; there are togari, square shaped gunome, and a suguha style around the monouchi. Over the entire hamon, vertical variations are inconspicuous. There are ashi and yo, and the hamon is almost nioi deki.

Boshi: straight, with a large round point, and a small return.

Comments:

This tachi is from the latter half of the Kamakura Period by a Bizen Koku smith, Yasuhiro. Today, Yasuhiro has three Juyo Token blades and two Juyo Bijutsuhin blades. One of the Juyo Bijutsuhin blades is signed “Bizen Koku Osafune ju Ukon Shokan Yasuhiro tsukuru Tokuji 2 nen (1307) 10 gatsu bi”. Another blade is signed “ Bizen Koku (after this there is an orikaeshi mei) junin Sabeijo Yasuhiro tsukuru”, and from these mei, it is obvious that he was an Osafune smith. Besides these blades, the sword book “ Meikan” lists other Shokan, Kagen, and Enkyo period blades. In this time, he was active during the latter half of Nagamitsu’s, Kagemitsu’s, and Sanenaga’s time. Most of his styles are suguha hamon with some nie, except for this tachi. His signatures are different from mainstream Osafune smiths, and the kanji have a more relaxed feeling or style, and this shows his different background. Even his ancestry is different from the mainline Osafune smiths, but he has a title. From this we can imagine that

he had an appropriate position earned from his work. Since the number of his works are very small, it is possible that he collaborated with the mainstream Osafune smiths, or possibly he had a short career as a smith.

The tachi has a large koshizori, and even at the tip, the sori does not decrease, and there is a long tachi shape. The hamon is mainly gunome, and some parts have choji. Around the center of the blade, the hamon's width is greater, on the monouchi the hamon is lower or narrower, and there is a gentle suguha style. In addition, on the omote side boshi, from the start to the tip it is a straight line which is a "sansaku boshi", and his style is strongly influenced by Nagamitsu's work. The tachi is not only Yasuhiro's only midare type hamon, but we can also recognize his relationship with the main Osafune smiths. This tachi has maintained its shape from the latter half of the Kamakura Period and has an ubu tachi shape, and we can see that in the nakago shape as well. Because of these details, this tachi is valuable.

This tachi has an origami by Honnami dated Kyoho 2 (1717) and the value is listed as 1000 kan.

Kansho To No. 3: Wakizashi

Mei: motte Nanban-tetsu oite Bushu Edo Echizen Yasutsugu (ni-dai) with Aoi mon.

Length: 1 shaku 4 sun 7 bu

Sori: slightly less than 4 bu

Style: shinogi-zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

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

Hamon: based on a wide notare hamon mixed with ko-gunome, and togari. There are ashi, thick slightly uneven nie, some kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: shallow notare, with a komaru and return.

Horimono: on the omote there is kurikara, and on the ura there is a nyorai figure.

Comments:

The Nidai Yasutsugu was the Shodai Yasutsugu's son, and his common name was Ichi-no-jo. In Kanei 13 -14 (1636-37) he became a monk, and one theory says he was named "Yasuetsu", and he passed away in Shoho 3 nen (1646) 2 gatsu, on the 25th day.

According to past scholarship, he received a mansion in Edo's Kanda Konya-cho district from the second shogun Hidetada. Also, in Echizen, his allowance was increased from the first generation Yasutsugu's 40 koku to 200 koku by the Fukui clan's lord Matsudaira Tadamasa. For traveling between his home province of Echizen and Edo, he received a "shuin-jo" which is permission to use a horse for free. We can easily see that he received an extensive degree of special treatment.

His confirmed earliest work is the year Shodai passed away in Genna 7(1621), and the number of his works is not as large as the Shodai's, and he made utsushi-mono such as the "Ataki Sadamune" and the "Shishi Sadamune". Also, in the same manner as the shodai, he made a relatively large number of detailed Kinai-bori horimono, mainly on hirazukuri blades. His jigane has two styles: one is itame mixed with mokume, the entire hada is slightly visible, and the ji has a dark color called "Echizen tetsu". The other style has a refined ko-itame hada. His hamon are based mainly on a notare hamon, and he inherited his styles from the shodai, and he was a highly skilled and excellent smith.

This wakizashi is wide with a large kissaki, and has the Momoyama Period's dignified feeling and powerful look. The jigane shows his active period, and is not a characteristic Echizen work with a visible and dark hada. Instead, we see a well forged hada, and there are relatively prominent chikei, and these are characteristic points. Also, the hamon based on notare and mixed with ko-gunome is as good as the Shodai's, and not inferior, so the nidai can show pride in his work and his high level of skill. In addition, the horimono is not the usual or typical kinai-bori. On the ura side, the budha, which is often seen in kinai-bori work, and the relatively deeply carved kurikara show strength, and make the blade stand out, and this is an excellent example of his work.

Shijo Kantei To No. 771 in the April, 2021 issue

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a katana by Nakasone Okimasa.

This katana has a standard width, the widths at the moto and saki are different, and there is a chu-kissaki. From the shape you can judge it as Kanbun Shinto period work.

In voting, a majority of people voted for Okimasa, and for an almost correct answer, a few people voted for Kotetsu.

From the Kanbun to Enpo periods (1661-80), among Edo Shinto swords, most of the hamon are similar to Kotetsu's juzuba style, with a continuous gunome hamon, and Kotetsu's student Okimasa made hamon very similar to his teacher's. But as you saw in the sentence: the midare hamon contains two continuous gunome, in some places the ha-nie looks rough, sometimes there are tobiyaki which appear to result from holes in the clay coating during yakikire, and these are Okimasa's characteristic points. If

you recognized these points and voted for Okimasa that is very good.

Last month, I was talking about coating oil on a sword, and many beginners asked about the “hamon basa-keru” expression which is hard to understand, so I will explain a bit about this.

A hamon basa-keru description means that in some places, the hamon’s nie are thicker than in other places, and because of this, the noiguchi is wider in some places than it is in other places. In addition, the hamon shape appears to collapse a bit in places. Are you familiar with this expression ?

Some people say that the “hazakai (border between the ji and hamon), is not tight enough”. This can be interpreted to resemble a type of nie-kuzure. At the NBTHK, we do not use this expression, except when we describe Echizen Yasutsugu’s and Nakasone Okimasa’s midareba. The reference oshigata shows Okimasa’s hamon, and the arrow points to the basake (basa-keru) hamon.

Also, in last month’s issue, I repeated the Bizen Ikeda family’s story as told by the local people. When they preserve swords, they put rapeseed oil in a Bizen jar, and then put the swords in the jar. However, concerning the story that they used to use rapeseed oil, a while ago some local people offered the opinion that usually rapeseed oil was used for food preparation, and was unsuitable for the preservation of swords.

However, there are some examples concerning choji oil which is conventionally used to protect Japanese swords. The main ingredient is camellia oil, and for an aroma, some people put a little bit of choji oil into the camellia oil, but called it choji oil.

Please understand that I am just introducing or explaining old legends and stories.

Explanation by Hinohara Dai