

**NBTHK SWORD JOURNAL**  
**ISSUE NUMBER 810**  
**July, 2024**

**MEITO KANSHO**  
**Appreciation of Important Swords**

**Juyo Bijutsuhin**

**Type:** Tachi

**Mei:** Bizen Osafune Kanemitsu  
Kenmu 2 nen (1336) 5 gatsu hi

**Length:** 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu 6 rin (71.4 cm)

**Sori:** 7 bu 4 rin (2.25 cm)

**Motohaba:** 8 bu 9 rin (2.7 cm)

**Sakihaba:** 6 bu 3 rin (1.9 cm)

**Motokasane:** 2 bu (0.6 cm)

**Sakikasane:** 1 bu 3 rin (0.4 cm)

**Kissaki length:** 9 bu 2 rin (2.8 cm)

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

**Nakago sori:** 5 rin (0.15 cm)

**Commentary**

This is a shinogi zukuri tachi with an ihorimune. There is a standard width, and the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is not prominent. There is a standard thickness, a large koshizori, and a short chu-kissaki. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, and on the omote, on the bottom half of the blade it is

mixed with some itame hada. The entire jigane has jinnie, fine chikei, and pale suji utsuri. The hamon on the omote has mainly square shaped features mixed with ko-gunome and togariba, and the ura has ko-gunome mixed with ko-choji, square gunome, and togariba. On the upper upper part of the blade above the central area, the hamon is based on suguha. On both sides there are ashi and some yo. On the ura, in places, there are saka ashi. On the omote, from the central area to the tip of the hamon, there are prominent suji shaped hataraki and a nioi deki hamon. The boshi is straight, the tip is komaru. and there is a return. The horimono on the omote and ura at the koshimoto are suken. The nakago is suriage, and the tip is ha-agari kurijiri. The original yasurime are unknown, and there are two mekugi ana. On the omote above the second mekugi ana (the original ana) on the shinogi ji, there is a long kanji signature, and on the ura there is a date.

Osafune Kanemitsu is the fourth generation head of the main Osafune school who followed Mitsutada, Nagamitsu, and Kagemitsu. His extant dated work is from the end of the Kamakura period from Genkyo 1(1321) to the mid-Nanbokucho period on Joji 6 (1362), covering about half a century. His early Nanbokucho period work until around the Koei era (1342-44) are tachi and tanto, the shapes are standard, and the hamon are mainly a kataochi style gunome or a suguha style hamon mixed with kataochi gunome, following his father Kagemitsu's style. But from the Nanbokucho period around the Jowa to Kan-o (1345-51) eras, reflecting the period's trend, his shapes became larger, and add new Soshu Den style elements with an emphasis on large notare hamon which were never seen in Bizen work until then.

Notably, around the Bunwa to Enbun (1352-60) eras, we see many examples of this kind of work, and notare style hamon which were never seen in the Osafune school and the Bizen school until then. It is worth mentioning that Kanemitsu is the first smith who created notare hamon in Bizen. It has been pointed out that the appearance of this kind of hamon was not only in pursuit of more functionality as a weapon, but also, that the hamon style is in harmony with a large shape, instead of the gunome or kataochi style gunome seen until then. This is supposed to be the result of Kanemitsu's repeated trials and efforts. This Juyo Bijutsuhin wakizashi dated Jowa 3 (1347) is supposed to be the best example of this style.

However, after the Jowa period, Kanemitsu has square shaped gunome work, and followed his father Kagemitsu's style. Also, Kagemitsu has two confirmed hirazukuri uchigatana which are Juyo Bijutsuhin, and in the style of Awataguchi Kuniyoshi's work (one of these swords has the meibutsu "go naki kitsune"). Beside this, other Bizen smiths such as Morikage and Yoshikage have a few examples of this type of work, and these are unusual examples of Bizen work in this period.

Kanemitsu has many really excellent works, and lived up to his position as the leader of the Osafune mainstream school, which is the biggest sword school in Japanese sword history. He has 13 Juyo Bunkazai, 15 Juyo Bijutsuhin, and 38 Tokubetsu Juyo Token. We can see his very high level of skill, but there are no Kokuho items, which is surprising.

This tachi has a standard width, the difference in the widths at the moto and saki is not very prominent, there is large sori even though it is suriage, and a chu-kissaki, showing the period's dynamic tachi

shape. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, there are fine chikei and well forged steel which shows Kanemitsu's skills as the leader of the Osafune school.

In the early half of Kanemitsu's career, his hamon have characteristic periodic square shaped features, but are mixed with ko-gunome and togariba, so they do not become monotonous, and there are a variety of small and large midare patterns, and subtle wide and narrow variations in the width of the nioiguchi, and this produces interesting aspects in the hamon. There are straight utsuri on the omote and ura, which were seen since Nagamitsu's time, and primarily square shaped hamon elements, a style which Kagemitsu established, and these are strong characteristic points for Kanemitsu. The original length of this tachi is supposed to have been over 2 shaku 5 sun long, with a majestic shape. The boshi remains healthy, and even today it has a distinctive appearance.

This Juyo Bijutsuhin tachi was classified as Juyo Bijutsuhin in Showa 10 (1935), and the owner, Akaboshi Tetsuma was a very successful businessman and sword lover. His father Akaboshi Yanosuke came from Satsuma, and he made a fortune from patent right for cannon which were installed on warships, and he also was a active in finances. Tetsuma invested his father's huge legacy in the first Japanese academic foundation, the "Keimei Kai" and helped researchers such as Yanagida Kunio, and also had strong friendships with Yoshida Shigeru, Kabayama Aisuke, and Iwasaki Koyata. Also, as a sword lover, he owned many important swords, such as a Kunikane tachi which is Kokuho today and owned by the Keikado Bunko, a

Kunimitsu (Shintogo) tachi which is Juyo Bunkazai, and six Juyo Bijutsuhin including this tachi. His father Yanosuke came from Satsuma.

## **Shijo Kantei To No. 810**

The deadline to submit answers for the issue No. 810 Shijo Kantei To is August 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 August 5, 2024 will be accepted. Also, from April, you can submit votes online to <https://www.touken.or.jp/shijokanteinyusatsu.html> (see the April, 2024 issue, page 30). We will accept votes every month from the 10th at 10:00 am to the 5th of the following month at 23:59 pm. 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: Tanto

Length: slightly over 8 sun 9 bu (27.05 cm)

Sori: slightly less than 1 bu (0.2 cm)

Motohaba: 8 bu (2.4 cm)

Motokasane: slightly less than 3 bu (0.85 cm)

Nakago length: 3 sun 3 bu (10.0 cm)

Nakago sori: none

This is a hirazukuri tanto with an ihorimune. There is a standard width, it is notably thick, and going forward towards the tip, the thickness of the blade suddenly decreases. The tip has sori, and the fukura is poor looking. The jigane has an itame hada, there are jinnie, dull chikei, and the jigane is slightly whitish. The hamon has square shaped gunome in places, and is nie-deki. The boshi return forms mune-yaki and is long. The horimono on the omote is a “Hachiman dai bosatsu” kanji carving, and the ura has a goma-bashi. The nakago is ubu, the nakago mune is round, the tip is narrow, and ha-agari kurijiri. The yasurime are kate-sagari, and there is one mekugi ana. On the omote along the mune side, there is a small long signature made with a fine chisel, and the ura has a date.

Sometimes this smith's tanto nakago mune have a date and a part of a long signature.

## **Juyo Tosogu**

### **Chochin zu (lantern design) kozuka**

#### **Mei: Mitsunobu with kao**

The eleventh generation Mitsunobu (Tsujo) was born into the family of Goto Taro-uemon Mitsuharu's third son. According to one theory his birth date was Kanbun 4 (1664). Because the tenth generation Renjo's son Mitsuyoshi passed away early, Kenjo's grandson Mitsunobu married Renjo's daughter, and

inherited the leadership of the Shiro-byoei family. In Genroku 10 nen (1697) he is supposed to have become the head of the Goto family's eleventh generation. The Goto family moved to Edo in Renjo's time. In Edo, Mitsunobu mastered the current trends well, and he brought in fresh ideas which extended beyond the current traditional styles.

This kozuka has a shakudo nanako ground engraved with takabori, using gold and silver iroe (inlay) for the lantern, and the mon on the lantern is shakudo hira zogan (inlay). The swaying lantern is hanging from a bamboo pole, and the lantern's frame is covered with washi (paper) and carefully carved to show a three dimensional effect. There is a bellows like appearance, and we can recognize the solid carving technique and high level of skill of the artist. Also, the jigane's black shakudo color and gold and silver complement each other well, and it is a gorgeous image, and seems like Goto work. On the other hand, the lantern is the main subject, and the entire picture is a diagonal composition and has a new feeling. This is an excellent master work, and we can see Mitsunobu's sophisticated sense and a gorgeous Genroku era feeling.

Explanation by Kugiyama Natsuko

## **May Teirei Kansho kai**

Date: June 8 (the second Saturday of May)

Place: Token Hakubutsukan auditorium

Lecturer: Kugiyama Natsuko

## Kantei To No. 1: Tachi

Mei: Sanekage (Ko-Hoki)

Length: 2 shaku 6 bu 1.5 bu

Sori: 9 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: large itame hada, and some parts have nagare hada; the entire ji is visible, there are abundant ji-nie, and chikei, mixed with jifu style hada; the jigane's color is dark, and there are jifu utsuri.

Hamon: yakiotoshi above the machi; above this the hamon is mainly komidare; some places have ko gunome, and ko-notare. There are slightly small ashi, yo, nie-deki, hotsure entangled with the hada in the ji, and frequent kinsuji and sunagashi.

Boshi: yaki kakedashi (there is a loss of material in the boshi near the edge).

This is a Juyo Bijutsuhin tachi. The width is standard, there is a large koshizori, the sori become smaller going towards the point, and there is an elegant tachi shape. From this, you can judge this as work from the end of Heian period to the early Kamakura period. The jigane has an itame hada and the hada is very visible. There are jifu utsuri extending over the shinogi, and the hamon is mainly komidare, and this is a classic style. There is a very narrow shinogi ji and hiraniku. The hamon is yakiotoshi and begins above the machi. The upper half has independent or separate gunome, and the hataraki are entangled with the hada, and the hada is visible. There is a rustic look, and this shows Ko-Hoki characteristic points



well. According to the historical book the “Meikan”, Sanekage was active in the Sanemori school around the Genryaku period (1185), and his extant signed works are very rare. Therefore, if you look this as Ko-Hoki work, that is a sufficient answer.

Besides the correct or acceptable answer, some people voted for Ko-Bizen work. If it were Ko-Bizen smith’s work, there would not be such a prominent dark jigane color, the jiba (jigane and hamon) would be bright, and there would not be such a prominent visible ha-hada.

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

Mei: Yoshimitsu

Length: 7 sun 2 bu

Sori: uchizori

Style: hirazukuri

Mune: mitsumune

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

Hamon: narrow suguha, mixed with some ko-gunome; around the monouchi, the width is slightly narrow; there are some ko-ashi, ko-nie-deki, and some nijuba.

Boshi: straight; the tip has fine hakikake; the point is komaru and there are nie-suji.

This tanto has a standard width, and also a standard thickness. It is uchizori and has a mid-Kamakura period elegant shape. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, there is refined forging, the hamon is a narrow

suguha with dense ji-nie. From these details, it is a candidate for work by Awataguchi Yoshimitsu, Rai Kunitoshi, or Shintogo Kunimitsu. Looking at the details, the jigane has Yamashiro characteristic bo-utsuri, at the koshimoto the ko-gunome hamon is continuous, the boshi has strong nie, and nie suji have a shape called “kui-sagari”, and from these details, you can narrow this down to work by Awataguchi Yoshimitsu.

Besides the correct answer, some people voted for Rai Kunitoshi. If it were Rai Kunitoshi’s work, we would not have not see the unique Yoshimitsu characteristic points. His boshi become straight and there is Komaru style called a “Mt.Fuji shape boshi”. Also, there are slightly prominent chikei, and with the appearance of the boshi, many people voted for Shintogo Kunimitsu. But if it were Kunimitsu’s work, the ha-nie are stronger, and inside of the hamon, kinsuji and sunagashi would be more prominent.

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

Kinzogan mei: Morikage

Length: 2 shaku 3 sun 5 bu

Sori: 4.5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: itame hada mixed with mokume hada; some areas have nagare hada, and the hada is visible.

There are ji-nie, chikei, mixed with jifu, and pale midare utsuri.

Hamon: based on notare, and mixed with angular shaped features and ko-gunome and ko-choji. There are frequent ashi and yo, a nioiguchi with ko-nie, kinsuji, sunagashi, and a worn down nioiguchi. Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is sharp and there is a return.

This is a large suriage katana. The funbari at the koshimoto is gone, and it is wide and thin. There is a long kissaki, and it appears like Nanbokucho period work. The jigane is itame hada mixed with mokume hada and nagare hada. The hada is visible and there are pale midare utsuri. The hamon is based on notare with nie, the boshi is midarekomi, the tip is sharp, and you can judge this as Soden-Bizen work. When Morikage's hamon are compared with Kanemitsu's, it is pointed out that his notare valleys are shallow, the hamon is high, and mixed with angular shaped features. On this katana, the hamon is not so high, but the notare peaks in places form an angular featured hamon. Also the jigane has nagare hada, jifu, the forging is not refined, the nioiguchi is worn down, and these details show Morikage's characteristic points very well.

In voting, many people voted for Soshu-Bizen smiths, such as Kanemitsu and Chogi. If it were Kanemitsu's work, the jigane would show an Osafune mainstream's characteristic refined forging, the hamon would be a leisurely notare mixed with gunome, and the jiba (jigane and hamon) would be bright and clear. If it were Chogi's work, based on a large notare hamon mixed with all kinds of hamon features, and have an open bottom valley midare hamon, there would be rich hataraki and yo, and the hamon composition would be different.

## Kantei To No. 4: Tanto

Mei: Buzen no kami Kiyohito  
Meiji 4 nen (1871) 2 gatsu hi

Length: 9 sun

Sori: 1 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri osoraku

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are fine ji-nie.

Hamon: gunome mixed with small togari features. There are long ashi, nioi-deki, kinsuji, sunagashi, and a bright nioiguchi.

Boshi: midarekomi; the tip is sharp; there are hakikake.

Horimono: on the omote and ura there are bo-hi and koshi-hi carved into the nakago.

This is a shinogi zukuri tanto, and the shinogi extends over about one half of the blade's length, and this is a unique style, called "osoraku zukuri".

Originally, at the end of the Muromachi period, Shimada Sukemune made this kind of tanto, and it had "osoraku" hiragana carved on the blade. The name of the style is supposed to have come from this. The Umetada Meikan also listed this blade. After this, there are some tanto with the same shape seen in the latter half of the Edo period. Notably, the Kiyomaro school was good at making these, and the school's smiths such as Kiyomaro, Kiyohito and Nobuhide have this kind of work, and in particular, Kiyohito has many.

This osoraku has a tight ko-itame hada, and a muji hada. The hamon has long ashi, and shows Shinshinto characteristic points well. The hamon consists mainly of large size gunome, there are long kinsuji and sunagashi, the hamon is bright, there are frequent nie, and the entire blade has a distinctive appearance. From these details, you can narrow the Tanto's maker to the Kiyomaro school. Kiyohito become Kiyomaro's student in Kaei 5 nen (1852) and around the Kaei period, Kiyomaro made the same kind of tanto, mainly with large gunome hamon, and their styles are similar. Comparing Kiyohito's midare hamon with Kiyomaro's, they are slightly monotonous, and hataraki such as kinsuji and sunagashi are more gentle. Also, if it is his masame hada work, the boshi return has hakikake, and this is a highlight for recognising Kiyohito's work. However, this osoraku does not have this, and is better than his usual work, and so from these considerations, Kiyomaro is treated as a correct answer at this time.

For another answer as good as the correct answer, some people voted for Nobuhide, if it were Nobuhide's work, many of his hamon are complex and have angular features, there are square shaped gunome mixed with ko-choji, ko-togariba, and ko-gunome, and some places have a doubled midare hamon.

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

Mei: Inoue Shinkai with kiku mon

Empo 5 nen (1677) 8 gatsu hi

Length: 1 shaku 6 sun 9 bu

Sori: slightly less than 5 bu

Style: shinogi zukuri

Mune: ihorimune

Jigane: tight ko-itame hada; there are abundant dense ji-nie, frequent fine chikei, and a clear jigane.

Hamon: chu-suguha, and some areas are notare; around the monouchi area the hamon is slightly wide; there is a dense nioiguchi, some muneyaki, and a bright and clear nioiguchi.

Boshi: there is a dense yakiba and it is straight; the tip has hakikake, the point is round, and the kaeri stops suddenly.

This wakizashi is wide, the widths at the moto and saki are different, there is a slight sori, and a long chu-kissaki. This is a transitional shape from the Kanbun period to close to the Genroku period. The jigane is a tight ko-itame hada, there are abundant dense ji-nie, and an Osaka Shinto like refined forging. Also, the hamon is a notare like chu-suguha with slightly prominent chikei, and is bright and clear. There are strong nie. The boshi yakiba is wider than usual and approaches an ichimai style, and from the jiba (jigane and hamon), you can see this as Soshu master smith work, and modeled after Go. This is a work made after Shinkai changed his name from Izumi-no-kami Kunisada to Shinkai, and the width of the nioiguchi and clear nie are his real characteristics. Also, looking at the boshi return, the yakiba does not extend to the mune, but disappears inside of the shinogi ji, and this is also a unique characteristic point for Shinkai's work.

In voting, some people voted for Sukehiro, but if it were Sukehiro's work, his hamon edge hataraki appear to look like the edge of a torn piece of washi

paper (Japanese paper), his suguha hamon are gentle with five notare, and his nie would be more gentle compared with Shinkai. Also, some people voted for Hizento smiths such as Tadahiro. If it were a Hizento, the nioiguchi in the suguha hamon would have a belt-like appearance, the boshi is parallel with the fukura and you can see the differences.

## **Shijo Kantei To No.808 in the May, 2024 issue**

The answer for the Shijo Kantei To is a tachi by Ko-Aoe Tsugueie.

This tachi is narrow, and the widths at the moto and saki are different. There is a large koshizori, the moto has recognizable funbari, going forward towards the tip, the sori becomes more shallow, and there is a small kissaki. From these details, you can imagine that this is a classic tachi made no later than the early Kamakura period.

It has been pointed out that besides this kind of work, Ko-Aoe work in the period followed the current trends. That means that they have a strong koshizori and the tip has sori. This kind of shape is seen sometimes in Ko-Hoki work by smiths such as Yasutsuna, and at a glance, it looks like a mid- to late-Kamakura period shape. So it is important to always carefully observe the entire blade including the jiba (jigane and hamon), and think about all of the details you can observe.

The jigane is itame hada mixed with frequent mokume hada, the hada is fine and visible, and appears like a unique fabric surface, and this is one of the major Ko-Aoe characteristic points, chirimen-hada. In addition, there are jifu utsuri, some places have a unique dark hada which means it is sumi-hada, and from the appearance, you can imagine that this is a namazu (catfish) hada. Notably, Ko-Aoe work often has sumihada, and also a dark jigane color which is supposed to be one its characteristic points.

The hamon is mainly ko-gunome midare with nie, and is a classic style, similar to Ko-Bizen work. Some parts of the midare hamon have saka-ashi, and in addition, a worn down nioiguchi, and these are Ko-Aoe's characteristic points. Many of their boshi are a shallow notare, with a komaru and a elegant return.

The nakago tip is kurijiri, the hamon edge is thick, the yasurime are a large sujichigai, and these match with Ko-Aoe's characteristics.

Usually, many of their signatures have large size kanji made with a thick chisel under the mekugi-ana, and along the center. This signature is signed along the mune side and is made with a slightly fine chisel and this is notable. This kind of signature is seen in many works from Sadatsugu, Tametsugu, Yasutsugu and Tsuguie.

Furthermore, in thinking about the hints, in the "Meizukushi" (the Ryuzoji temple book) and the Kanchi-in book which were supposed to have been written at the end of Kamakura period, Tsuguie is listed as one of the ban-kaji (smiths working for the retired emperor Gotoba at Iki Island). Among the twelve smiths selected from all over Japan and working alternate



months, Bitchu Kuni has four smiths listed: in February, Sadatsugu; in May, Tsunetsugu; in July, Muneyoshi (who may be from Bizen); and in August, Tsuguie.

However, the “Jokyuki”, a popular book published in Genna 4 (1618), was an old style book which listed “gosho-yaki” (which refers to Tsuguie and Tsuginobu making blades, and the emperor himself doing yaki ire on these blades). Tsuguie is also listed in the Meizukushi’s ban-kaji list, indicating the presence of Ko-Aoe smiths among the ban-kaji. Also, the articles about the “ban-kaji” and the “gosho-yaki” story are not official histories. The “Jokyuki” is a military chronicle and there are also many alternative versions. The Jokyuki (the Jiko Ji temple book) which is supposed to have been published in the mid-Kamakura period does not have a “gosho-yaki” article, and a sword smith name listed as “Tsuguie sho”, and to consider this as a historical reference, caution is required.

From the facts listed above, among the Ko-Aoe smiths, from his characteristic signature and being listed as ban-kaji, the Sadatsugu and Tsuguie names are possibilities. Then when mentioning the Jokyuki, Tsuguie's name comes to the fore.

However, there are very few examples of Tsuguie’s work available today. Besides this tachi, another one is at Ise shrine and is Juyo Bunkazai. In this vote, it seems that people were not aware of the Jokyuki article, and more than half voted for Sadatsugu. In addition, Tsuguie’s work is not too different from the other Ko-Aoe smiths, and so all Ko-Aoe names are treated as correct answers at this time.

Besides the Ko-Aoe answer, because of the retired emperor Gotoba's ban-kaji story, some people voted for Awataguchi smiths such as Kuniyasu and Bizen Norimune. However, this blade has many Ko-Aoe characteristic points, and I would like to take this opportunity to remind people to notice any characteristic points they can see on these blades.

Explanation by Ooi Gaku.