

Jūyō-tōken at the 48th *jūyō shinsa* held on October 11, 2002

tantō, mei: Bitchū no Kuni Masu no Honjō-jū Toshitsugu saku - Enbun shinen nigatsu hi (備中国万寿本庄住俊次作・延文二二年二月日) - “Made by Toshitsugu, resident of the Masu main manor of Bitchū province, on a day in the second month of Enbun four (1359)”

Measurements

nagasa 27.2 cm, just a hint of *sori*, *motohaba* 2.3 cm, *nakago-nagasa* 9.2 cm, *nakago-sori* 0.1 cm

Description

Keijō: *hira-zukuri*, *iori-mune*, wide *mihaba*, *sun nobi*, normal *kasane*, just a hint of *sori*

Kitae: finely standing-out *ko-itame* that is mixed with *ko-mokume* and that features plenty of *ji-nie*, fine *chikei*, and a *sugu-utsuri* that starts at the *machi* and runs then parallel to the *ha*

Hamon: *suguha-chō* in *ko-nie-deki* with a tight, bright, and clear *nioiguchi* that is mixed with *ko-gunome*, *ko-notare*, and a few *hotsure*

Bōshi: *sugu* with an *ō-maru*-style *kaeri*

Nakago: *ubu*, *kurijiri*, *ō-sujikai yasurime*, two *mekugi-ana*, the *sashi-omote* side bears centrally a *naga-mei* that runs over the *mekugi-ana* and the *ura* side an identically positioned date whose character for “En” got lost due to the adding of the second *mekugi-ana*

Explanation

The Masu (万寿) and the Koi (子位) manors of Bitchū province were famous productions sites of Aoe smiths, with the main, the eastern, and the western Masu manors already being mentioned in the *In no chō kudashibumi* (院序下文) from the first year of Yōwa (養和, 1181), namely in the context of them being under the control of the Imakuma Shrine (新熊野神社) in Kyōto. The exact historic boundaries of and connections between these manors however are still researched. In any case, there are for example late Kamakura period blades by the local smiths Nobutsugu (延次), Uemon no Jō Yoshitsugu (右衛門尉吉次), and Sahyōe no Jō Tsunetsugu (左兵衛尉恒次) extant, which are signed with references like “Masu no Honjō-jū” (万寿本庄住), “Masu no Shō-jū” (万寿庄住), and “Masu-jū” (万寿住).

This mid-Nanbokuchō period *tantō* is a work of Aoe Toshitsugu which is dated with the fourth year of Enbun. The *kitae* is a finely standing-out *ko-itame* that is mixed with *ko-mokume* and that fractures a *sugu-utsuri* that appears parallel to the *ha*. The *hamon* is a *suguha-chō* with a tight, bright, and clear *nioiguchi* that is mixed with *ko-gunome*, and *ko-notare* and therefore we clearly recognize the characteristic features of the Aoe School from that time. The abundance of *ji-nie* and fine *chikei* interwoven into the forging structure and the *suguha* with its tight, bright, and clear *nioiguchi* testify to the great skill of Toshitsugu and the date as well as the reference to the production site makes this *tantō* a very important reference for studies on the smith and on the Aoe School in general.