

A sword by Izumi no Kami Kaneshige 和泉守兼重



Introduction:

When one talks about the best Shinto Smith's the names of Yasutsugu, Kotetsu and Hankei are usually high on the list of prominent Edo Smiths. Less often seen is Izumi (no) kami Kaneshige. I think this may be in part because his work is relatively scarce. However a brief examination of those blades available and literature about him soon identify him as one of the major Edo Swordsmiths of the Shinto period. Currently he has fifteen katana and two wakizashis that have been awarded Juyo certification which is no mean feat for a Shinto master. He is perhaps most famously known as the teacher of possibly the most famous Edo master Nagasone Kotetsu.

The origins of Kaneshige are unclear. It has been suggested that he trained originally in Echizen but another theory suggests he was a student of Senjuin Morikuni (千手院盛国) of Edo. Morikuni shared the same title and has a similar working style. Another point of confusion is that for many years it was believed that Izumi (no) kami Kaneshige was the same smith as Kazusa (no) kami Kaneshige (上総介兼重) However the discovery of a dated blade made jointly between 3rd generation Yasutsugu (江戸三代康継) and Kazusa Kaneshige in which Kaneshige inscribes his age as 43 gives him a birth year of 1625. Since there also exists a signed blade by Izumi (no) Kami Kaneshige dated 1625 this clearly proves they were two different smiths. It is now believed that Kazusa was Izumi Kaneshige's son or student working alongside Kotetsu.

Work Style

Sugata: - Kaneshige's working life spanned the Keicho and Kanbun periods and his work style reflects this. His earlier work falls largely in line with the norm of the Keicho period. As his career progresses the sugata exhibits a transition between Keicho and Kanbun, introducing more of a taper over the length and a slightly shortened kissaki but maintaining fairly deep sori. His later work exhibits a more typically Kanbun style similar to that seen in the work of his famous pupil Kotetsu.

Jitetsu: - The jigane is usually a tight ko-itame or ko-mokume mixed with masame. Masame is particularly evident in the shinogi-ji. The jigane is rich in ji-nie and chickei.

Hamon: - Examples of Kaneshige's blades show some considerable variation in hamon. Most commonly they are wide suguha with shallow notare and showing long ashi which create isolated

groups of ko-gunome. The Nioi-guchi is thickly covered in nie creating nie deki and the hamon has a great deal of nie based activity in the form of sunagashi, kinsuji and inazuma.

Boshi: - Ko-maru with a short kaeri is normal although this may vary.

Horimono: - Bo-Hi are occasionally found.

Nakago: - The Nakago tapers sharply to the tip forming a ha-agari kurijiri. The Yasurime are a modest Sujikai. Occasionally the Yasurime may start with a kiri pattern although this does not form a full Kesho pattern as seen on some of his students work. An important kantei feature that distinguishes Izumi Kaneshige from Kazusa is that the mune of his nakago are flat and the ha slightly rounded.

Mei:-

IZUMI (NO) KAMI KANESHIGE 和泉守兼重

IZUMI (NO) DAIJO FUJIWARA KANESHIGE 和泉大掾藤原兼重

IZUMI (NO) KAMI FUJIWARA KANESHIGE 和泉守藤原兼重

BUSHU EDO JYU KANESHIGE 武州江戸住兼重

The Sword:



Description:

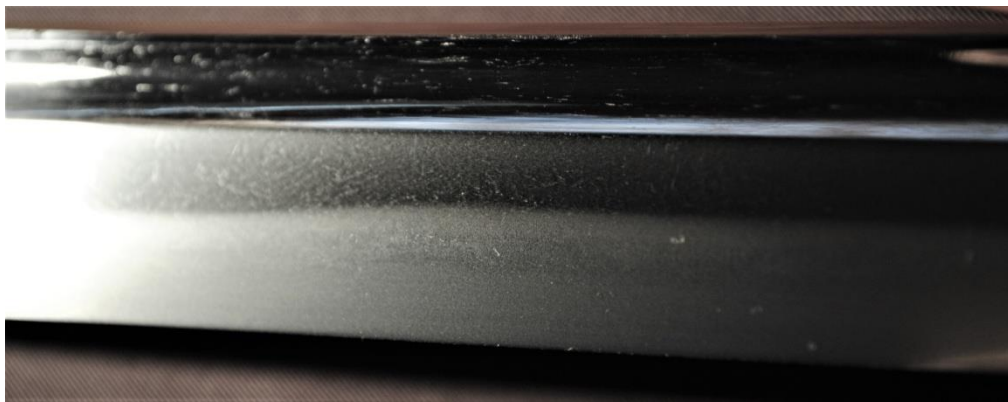
Nagasa: 69.0cm Sori: 1.8cm

Motohaba 3.2cm sakihaba 2.4cm

Kasane 0.7 cm.

The blade is ubu, shinogi-zukuri, lori mune with a moderate zori. The kissaki is chu-kissaki. The blade is wide at the hamachi but tapers towards the kissaki. It has significant sori. With a kasane of 0.7cm it is also relatively thick. The overall impression is of a very powerful and substantial sword. The shape with its deep sori is initially indicative of Keicho Shinto work. However the reduction in width over the length is more suggestive of the later Kanbun style. Kaneshige's working period spans these two styles and this piece appears to be a transitional work bridging his earlier Keicho and later Kanbun period work. The blade has a nagamei.

Jigane:-



The hada is tight itame with areas of ji-nie and chickei. Overall it is tight and subdued. This may be due in part to the polish and an alternative finish might highlight the activity which is visible but not clear at present. The horimono obscure the hada within the shinogi-ji. In the 10cm or so between the mune-machi and the beginning of the hi the hada within the shinogi-ji appears to be a clear masame as one would expect to see in the work of this smith.

Interestingly the lower part of the ji-hada appears coarser than the rest of the blade. This is often quoted as a kantei feature of Kaneshige's student, Kotetsu's work. This may offer further evidence of the relationship between the two smiths.

Hamon:-



As previously mentioned Kaneshige produced many variations within his hamon. In this case the hamon starts with a gently sloping yakidashi before developing in to a broad suguha. Allow basically sugu the hamon does incorporate several dramatic gunome type dips in the monouchi. There is a narrow nioi-guchi which is interspersed with ko-nie in isolated areas. The hamon has a strong hadori finish which tends to obscure a much of the detail within it. However on closer examination it is full of nie based activity such as sunagashi and kinsuji.

The choice of finish in a polish is very much a personal decision and generally based on what the client and polisher feels best suits the sword (Or what might be fashionable at the time) From a purely personal perspective I feel this blade would benefit from a more sympathetic finish that would allow the detail of both hamon and jigane to be seen to full effect.

Boshi:-



Horimono: - The blade has a well cut Bo-hi and ken on the Ura and a half length Bo-hi with a bonji character below it on the omote. Most references state that Kaneshige occasionally carved bo-hi on his blades so this more complex grouping is unusual. It possible that the horimono are later additions, however they are very well cut and in no way detract from the blade.



Nakago:-



The tapering shape, the kurijiri and yasurime all conform to the stated norm for Kaneshige. In addition the flat nakago mune, regarded as a major distinguishing feature of Izumi Kaneshiges work is present.

The mei is well cut and conforms to published examples from NBTHK journals.

The balde has an authentication certificate from Honami Kozon.

Koshirae:-



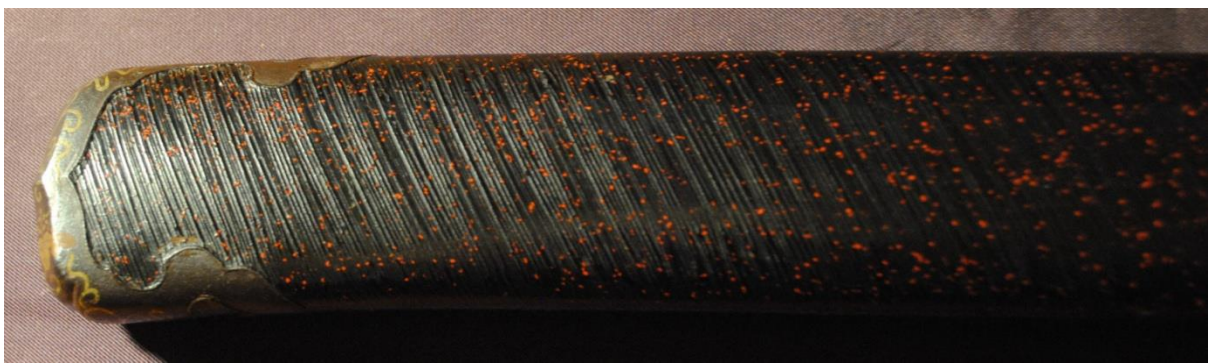
The blade is stored in shirasaya and has a very high quality koshirae. The workmanship is of an exceptionally high standard and well beyond my ability to describe in detail.



The tsuba, fuchi kashira and other metalwork are all ensuite in iron with very finely inlaid vine leaf and arabesque patterns in brass and other alloys.



The Menuki are of demons and are in shakudo and gold. The tsuka is beautifully wrapped in doesskin over good quality same.



The Saya is a tour de force of the artisans skill. The black lacquer foundation is sprinkled with red coral and then a continuous spiral inscribed along its entire length.

Probably made in the late Edo period this koshirae would have been an extremely expensive investment and I think it clearly illustrates how highly valued this sword was by a previous custodian.

Comment:-

Often in the current market one sees blades offered stored in shirasaya and with a koshirae. In the majority of cases the koshirae has been assembled by either a previous owner or the dealer to make it a more saleable and attractive package. It is therefore rare to find a blade such as this one complete in shirasaya with a beautifully crafted gold habaki and high quality custom made koshirae. As said previously when thinking of the top Edo smiths of the Shinto period Kaneshige is not a name that immediately springs to mind, which is unfortunate as he was undoubtedly a man of considerable skill and deserving of greater recognition. I can only assume that this is mainly due to the comparative rarity of his work when compared to his more prolific contemporaries and students. By any measure this is a good quality work. It shows all of the features described in the published examples of the smiths genre but also has one or two features that are perhaps a little less common. It is in very good condition. If I were to be at all critical I think the strong hadori finish on the hamon, something that appears to be becoming increasingly fashionable and popular, masks some of the considerable activity that exists there. However it can be seen and is of excellent quality.

I have made no secret that in recent years I have focussed almost exclusively on Koto works of the Kamakura period. Occasionally a blade is shown to me that reminds me of the very high quality work being produced in other eras. This is such a blade. It is healthy very skillfully made with a great deal to see. It also has an exceptionally fine koshirae.

Reference material:

The Connoisseur's book of Japanese Swords **Kokan Nagayama**

Shinto and Shin-shinto kantei and kantei supplements 1 and 2 **Markus Sesko**

Nihonto Koza Afu Watson translation

NBTHK Journals (various)

www.nihonto.com **Mr Fred Weisberg**

Kaga Yoshiro **Luca Zanichelli**