

TOSOGU SPOTLIGHTS

Fine Tosogu from Iyo Shoami and later Edo masters





Dear Collectors,

In this catalog, I would like to present some interesting pieces that I was able to put together and photograph to share with you all. It is my sincere pleasure to present seven nice pieces from the Iyo Shoami school and thus artists of a rare branch of the Shoami that had special popularity and was highly sought after at the beginning of the 20th century. While I find these very charming, but for all that are not only interested in such items, a few other fine pieces have been included, focusing on creative, non-sukashi iron Tsuba and a very special set to share with you by one of my favourite artists. I hope you enjoy the catalogue.

Marco Kristen

Iyo Shoami

The works of Iyo Shoami have been considered to be among the oldest Shoami works. From crude iron tsuba with ko-sukashi to zogan bearing works of increasing complexity and finally resulting in detailed and fine kinko works in the mid edo period. These works stand out from the Shoami Tsuba as being usually signed, thus giving us an overview of the artists behind these works, their origin and a vague lineage.

Early researchers and collectors believed Iyo to be the origin of all Shoami, thus giving special importance to the pieces of Iyo Shoami and the respective masters, clearly identifiable based on their signatures. This theory is likely based on the appearance of Iyo pieces that give a rather spartan, rudimentary impression, especially compared to the more refined works of Kyo-Shoami. However, currently, it is thought that Iyo Shôami emerged in the later part of Muromachi period and are indeed older than Kyo works, though later on both co-existed. Based on the historical belief that Iyo Shoami marks the origin of all Shoami works, several early collections featured Iyo Shoami tsuba which were greatly adored and highly valued. This also includes the great Furukawa collection, one of the earliest published selections of tosogu in the 1910s, strongly influencing the categorization of tosogu makers and schools as we know them today. Of the Iyo Shoami Tsuba displayed in this publication, all except the first kinko one derive from the Furukawa collection.

The oldest type of Iyo-works are thick, done in mukkô gata or nadegaku gata with ko-sukashi and maybe crude kebori. Additionally, pure copper and yamagane Tsuba of this later muromachi period exist, for example zaimei pieces by artists named Shoami Nanibo, a name that can be found as variation nanigashi or nan no nanigashi and means 'someone else/some other', translating in total to 'some other Shoami'. Throughout the edo period, the finesse and detail in craftsmanship increased steadily, with the finest works, often in yamagane, dating from the mid edo period. The very first Tsuba shown in this catalogue is a good example of this very finesse with the six other pieces showing the creativity and variability of different Iyo Shoami masters. Coming from the Furukawa collection, these pieces are also an interesting example of earliest published Tsuba in 'modern' collecting from the beginning 20th century. Finally, it is always astonishing to see many pieces of one artist or school together and while from time to time it is possible to see one Iyo Shoami either online or in hands, seven is a very interesting comparison and set.

A charming throwback to artworks that have been a little bit forgotten.

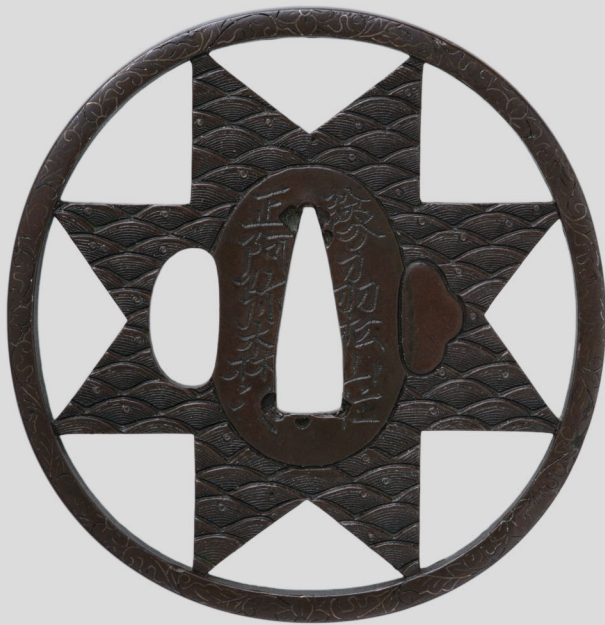
1 | Shoami Moritsugu

Mid Edo (18th century)

mei: Yoshu Ju Shoami Moritsugu, (豫州住正阿弥 森次)

Yamagane with silver

This Tsuba is among the most refined works of the Iyo Shoami and is one of the later pieces, with the maker being active around the second half of the 18th century. Both the waves in the center and the inlay on the rim are of minute detail and it is one example of the excellent kinko Iyo Shoami tsuba from Yamagane. The exact motif, especially considering the shape is rather inconclusive, but a Christian influence may be possible.





2 | Shoami Morikuni

First half of the Edo period

mei: Matsuyama Junin Shoami Morikuni (松山住人 正阿弥盛国)

Iron with silver and gold

This Tsuba is covered in rich zogan depicting peonies in silver and gold. The overall rustic impression may indicate this to be one of the earlier pieces of the Iyo Shoami. Yet, the completeness of the inlay is astounding and the colour nuances of the silver in all shades of it's patination is a beautiful study subject, even more in hands.





3 | Shoami Moritsugu Tsuba

First half of the Edo period

mei: Yoshu Shoami Moritsugu Saku (豫州 正阿弥 森次作)

Iron with silver and gold

This Tsuba is mostly defined by the sukashi and overall shape, rather than rich inlay as found on the previous pieces. The two rings of this tsuba are shaped to be interlocked between each other and the size difference of the hitsu-ana is very pronounced. The difference in preservation of inlay between the two sides of this pieces is interesting, assuming a rather homogenous design in its pristine state. Again the nuances of the silver patination and fragment shapes is interesting to observe.





4 | Yoshihisa Tsuba

First half of the Edo period

mei: Yoshihisa (吉久)

Iron with gold

The overall shape and composition with zogan and sukashi is one that strongly resembles Shoami in a broader perspective. The creation of another rim, a mimi that is not raised but optically achieved by omitting gold zogan in this area, is an interesting approach. This is one of the rare cases in which the artist only signed with his name and no title or location is engraved, yet, based on the design and the fact that it is signed by an artist of this name, it can be clearly attributed to the Iyo Shoami.





5 | Kanehisa Tsuba

First half of the Edo period

mei: Yoshu Ju Kanehisa Saku (豫州住 金久作)

Iron with gold

The most intricate feature of this piece is the very thin, wavy sukashi forming one big butterfly in a classical, schematic representation, as often found in the Edo period. The sukashi is done rather unevenly, varying both in width and angle of the pierced section. Thus the Tsuba, when viewed in hands, gives greatly varying impressions, based on the viewing angle.





6 | Hidenobu Tsuba

First half of the Edo period

mei: Yoshu Ju Shoami Hidenobu (豫州住 正阿弥 秀延)

Iron with gold

The shape of this Tsuba is very strong and the broadness of the rim gives a bold impression, yet elegant with its refined, round shape, contrasted by the square in the middle. This Tsuba stands out in its excellent preservation of inlay, as the missing lines or parts of it are likely intentional, as revealed under close observation with great magnification of the surface. A beautiful Tsuba that plays with angle and shapes to achieve this combination of boldness and elegance.





7 | Nobuhisa Tsuba

First half of the Edo period

mei: Yoshu Matsuyama Ju Shoami Nobuhisa (豫州松山住 正阿弥 信久)

Iron with silver gold and brass

This tsuba omits any sukashi, leaving a millimetre-thin, yet strong iron ground among the raised structures, bearing a great amount of inlay. Also here, the state of preservation is admirable, as well as the numerous colours found on the three different soft metals that have been inlaid.





8 | Jingo Tsuba

Mid Edo (18th century)

mei: Yatsuhiko Jingo Saku, (八代甚吾作)

Iron with copper

The lineage of Yatsuhiko Jingo covers several generations which worked in the distinct jingo style, creating many designs of which the animal depictions are likely the most popular and famous. A wide range of animals can be found, such as the famous eagle or others like owls, ox, cock, many more and also, though rarely, octopus. This rather exotic motif often comes with humorous depictions of the mollusc, as found on this Tsuba as well. On tosogu, octopus are often depicted with only six arms, though in our case eight long arms, executed as very big and massive inlays, are present. The execution is particularly good on the arm running over the mimi, as well as the preservation in general. This Tsuba poses potential for further study, maybe allowing identification of the precise generation of Yatsuhiko Jingo, based on the carving of the 'saku' character.







9 | Ichinomiya Sadanaka (Ichinomiya Tsunenao)

Late Edo (Late 18th century)

mei: Banryūken Sadanaka + kaō, (蟠龍軒 貞中 + kaō)

Iron with silver and gold

The present Tsuba is one of the very creative and unusual works we find in the Ichinomiya school. Famous for its animal depictions, three toads form this Tsuba, assembled around a finely carved, yet massive seppa-dai. The iron is bold with a great texture and carries a very dark, glossy, chocolate tone. The surface treatment is great and the detail on the toads excellent while retaining a soft, glossy appearance - just like a wet toad. The Tsuba is signed with his full signature, with the kaō inlaid in gold, a feature that is very rarely seen on Ichinomiya works. Interestingly, the kaō is very similar to that of Nagatsune.

Beside the gold kaō, the only soft metal parts are the copper Sekigane and the very skillfully done eyes. These are inlaid in silver that show a blueish patina and have a very precisely set gold pupil. This also applies to the third, small toad at the bottom which is portrayed completely different in a non-naturalistic manner. While the two big toads resemble toad anatomy and appearance very well, the lower one is sort of a humorous cartoon, holding its enormous belly and 'shrinking under the weight of the seppa-dai'.

This might be a humorous side note to the story behind this Tsuba, likely a popular folktale about two frogs (or toads) travelling. Briefly summarized, independent from each other, two frogs, one from Kyoto, one from Osaka, plan to go on a trip to visit the respective other city, a place they have never been to. Coincidentally, both meet on a mountain top, right in the middle of their journey, a place both cities are visible from. They get to know each other and their plans, and after a while they decide to support each other by grabbing the others shoulder to stand up on the backfeet, able to see their respective destination.

The frog of Kyoto turned its nose to Osaka, and the frog of Osaka turned its nose to Kyoto, but the foolish creatures forgot that their big eyes were in the back of their heads when they stood up, and that, although their noses pointed to the places they wanted to go, their eyes saw the places they had come from.



“Dear me!” cried the Osaka frog, “Kyoto is exactly like Osaka. It is certainly not worth such a long journey. I shall go home!”

“If I had had any idea that Osaka was only a mere copy of Kyoto I should never have traveled all this way,” exclaimed the frog from Kyoto.

They took a farewell from each other and then turned back to their hometowns, spending the rest of their days in the strict belief that Osaka and Kyoto are just the same. Of note, the cities of Kyoto, the old residential and temple city, and Osaka, a great city of trade and merchants were back then the very opposites of how cities could have looked.



This story is still popular in children songs or books in Japan today, carrying an important lesson: How easily wrong perception and misconceptions may disappoint our expectation and lead us astray. A remark to not be easily disappointed and to always make sure that we are not fooled in our perception. Also, just because another person is sharing your view on the same or a similar subject, this person may also be mislead and shall not be blindly listened to.

10 | Tosanshi Toshihide (Tanaka Toshihide)

Latest Edo (1865)

mei: Keiō kaireki satsuki (慶応改暦皐月) [fifth month of the new Keiō period]

Tōsanshi Toshihide +kaō (東山子寿秀)

Iron with gold, silver and brass

The present Tsuba carries a very appealing and well-designed Zen-Buddhist theme, depicting the Śākyamuni Buddha returning from six years of asceticism in the mountains. The motif holds a significant place in Japanese art and Buddhist iconography. This pivotal moment in the Buddha's life marks his renunciation of extreme ascetic practices and the beginning of his middle path towards enlightenment. This scene is often portrayed with great reverence and

attention to detail. Śākyamuni is typically depicted as an emaciated figure, clothed in simple robes, with a countenance reflecting deep contemplation and inner resolve. This motif stands out as a very human depiction of Śākyamuni, nearly depriving him of his superhumanity. His hands are not visible but hidden under his robe, thus lacking the normally expected 'mudra' gesture, which in this case symbolizes the Zen Buddhist virtue of wordlessness.

The Tsuba is an excellent work of minute detail as shown with the buddha and also great modeling of the groundplate for both the rocks and clouds. There exist very similar works with pronounced Tanaka school features, signed Tosanshi Toshihide or Tanaka Toshihide and dated to 1864 or 1865, strongly indicating this is the same artist as Tanaka Toshihide.





11 | Omori Eiman Mitokoromono

Late Edo

mei: Omori Eiman (Terumitsu) + kaō - 大森英満

Shakudo with gold and copper

Omori Eiman (outside of Japan often Terumitsu) was the fifth son and successor of Omori Eishu (Teruhide), the most important among the Omori masters. His works follow the style of his father and in general the clear genealogy to the Yokoya school is evident. This mitokoromono of Eiman with bats is a work similarly found with his father Eishu and may be a homage to the famous mitokoromono of bats and crescent moon by Yokoya Somin. The execution is excellent, the fur is perfectly worked and gives a silky shimmering on both golden and shakudo bats, with precise details such as nose, tongue, eyes and ears, giving a very lively impression.

This set clearly shows the great skill of Omori Eiman and justifies the high esteem in which he is held to this day.









Notes

