

刀装具

Tosogu.de

Catalogue No. 1

October 2023





Dear fellow collectors,

I welcome you to the first newsletter of this novel format. The very goal of this series is to present interesting quality pieces of *Tosogu* (and sometimes *Nihonto*) in large scale images and with accompanying information as a potential substitute to in-hand study.

Some items will be highlighted with more pictures, longer texts and thus more detail, while others might only be shown on a few photographs for your entertainment. If you are interested in more information, have questions regarding pieces, or want to give me feedback, please feel free to inquire at any times using the contact below.

For this catalogue I chose five pieces of *Tosogu* which you can see on the right side. Though carrying different values, aesthetics and also quite different price tags, each of these pieces has something very charming to my eye. In my opinion, *Tosogu* can have numerous attractive features, starting with a charming and lovely motif, excellent craftsmanship with magnificent details, or an overall artistic interpretation and visualization that is very appealing. These are points that I see as important among many 'gaijin-collectors' and this is of course well understandable. However, especially the last of those points can be quite hard to evaluate without sufficient material to study. This is an important point in this series, delivering imagery with outstanding detail to substitute in-hand study as much as possible.

In addition to the criteria stated above, there are things I would consider more 'Japanese' when evaluating and studying *Tosogu*. Pieces embracing *wabi-sabi* (侘寂) aesthetics are often overlooked as crude or unrefined and the gentle wear on older pieces, such as the *Ko Mino* in this catalogue, is often judged as damage instead of the dignifying wear by preowners, adding to the history and appreciation of the piece. Finally, deeper values are nearly always connected with the meaning of motifs or a contextual study of the piece, its maker and the time around those. This should be addressed as well in my work.

I hope that you will enjoy this catalogue and I want to ask for your honest feedback and suggestions to allow for further improvement.

Yours sincerely,
Marco

Published via www.tosogu.de 2023

The document and all photography within was created by Dr. Marco Kristen.
I want to thoroughly thank George Miller, the Nihonto Message Board, Markus Sesko and especially many of my collector friends from around the world for helpful advice and information which I occasionally use or cite.

Please contact me with any issues *via* www.tosogu.de



Index

Preface	3
<i>Ko Mino fuchigashira</i> – Sparrows in the bamboo forest	7
<i>Toyokawa Mitsunaga Menuki</i> – 'Wild' boars	15
<i>Furukawa Jochin Kozuka</i> – Jurōjin with his deer and crane	19
<i>Bungo Taro Motoyuki Menuki</i> – Nakago 'Suimoken'	21
<i>Ishiguro Masatsune II fuchigashira</i> – Pheasant and Sakura	23
Appendix	28



Actual size (at DIN A4)



Ko Mino Fuchigashira

NBTHK Hozon kanteisho
Private collection

Mei: Mumei, Likely late muromachi
Material: Shakudo base with solid silver inlay and two types of gilding
Motif: Sparrows flying through a bamboo forest after a rainshower (Take-ni-Suzume)

32mm (Kashira), 38mm (Fuchi)

The present work is done in deep undercutting and therefore easily attributed to Ko Mino work. We thus face a rather old piece in terms of tosoгу with over 400 years of age, showing the gentle wear expected and sought after in such a piece with still most of the gilding perfectly intact. The motif is sparrows flying through a bamboo forest after a rainshower, with water still sitting on the leaves (here in silver inlaid drops). This motif of sparrows is called 'Take-ni-Suzume' and became widely popular in the 15th and 16th century, likely after wide spread of copies that emulate a painting of sparrows on bamboo in the rain by famous Chinese painter Muqi Fachang (Jap. Mokkei). Pieces by (or attributed to) him were highly significant and famed parts of the Ashikaga Shogunate collection. The deeper values of this motif are carried by the pairs of sparrows, symbolizing family and prosperity, as well as the bamboo, symbolizing upright growth, strength and flexibility.

These fuchigashira harbour elegance in simplicity, yet offer great richness of detail and intense play with light and dark due to the mixed metals and the deep, shadow-casting carving. It is delightful to see the different gildings occurring on the sparrows on both the fuchi and kashira, likely representing male and female birds.

Thinking about the making and possible commissioning of these, while we can only speculate, the thought of a wealthy samurai ordering these to feel and represent his sophistication seems quite interesting and amusing. Maybe he saw a painting or copy by a Muqi painting and felt inspired by the deep Zen-values carried by Muqi Fachang's philosophy as a monk and painter. Furthermore, with the deeper meaning of this motif, these fuchigashira would be interesting to someone who wants their family line to grow and their offspring to be strong, honorable and prosperous. On the other hand, if not commissioned, this might be an example of a tosoгу artist taking on a popular subject, adopting it to make appealing pieces for the contemporary taste.

In addition, this motif is used as a Kamon for the Masamune Date Clan (and others). The 'Take-ni-Suzume' was used since the days of Harumune, the fifteenth shogun of the Date Family. It is known as one of the Date Family's family crests, however, it was originally the main crest of the Fujiwara Kanshuji Family before it was given to the Kamisugi family who controlled the Kanto Region in the Muromachi period. It became the Date family crest in 1542 when Tanemune, the fourteenth leader of the family, received it as a present from the Kamisugi family for sending Sanemoto, Tanemune's third son, for an adoption. It replaced 'Mibikiryo' and became the main family crest of the Date family.











Comparing motif elements

A total of eight sparrows is depicted with three present on the Kashira and five on the Fuchi. One of these sparrows on the Kashira and two on the Fuchi are depicted in a lighter gilding (*LG*) than the other birds in yellowish gilding (*YG*). This could be seen as a sign of restoration where the craftsman used a different alloy. However, this is unlikely as we see similar signs of wear on *LG*-sparrow II compared to III and also for IV compared to its neighbouring V. Furthermore, the borders of remnant gilding on the shakudo surroundings and Nanako base seen at the left wing of sparrow II match the precision and looks of the *YG*-sparrows.

At this point it seems noteworthy that the overall wear of the gilding is far more prominent on the Kashira. This seems logical as it is exposed to physical influences by its mounting position, as well as facing much more abrasion by resting or laid-on hands. This is also underlined by the wear appearing mostly on the top right (hand palm) and bottom left (fingers).

Besides that, the design of the sparrows is very interesting due to their high heterogeneity. We see three pairs appearing, each of them being one *LG* and *YG* sparrow. This indicates pairs of male and female, which can be confirmed when looking at Japanese sparrows where the males are darker-brownish and the females pale beige. Five birds are depicted with their flying posture from the back (I,II,V,VII,VIII), two from the front (III,IV) and one in an individual pose (VI). This sparrow VI can be interpreted as a sparrow picking some prey on or in the bamboo, or maybe even feeding his offspring sitting in a hole (the beak not chiseled as it is meant to be inside the bamboo).

Taking a closer look at the execution of the birds, we find a lot of individual differences in terms of chisel direction, stroke width, length, number of strokes and overall presence of figurative elements.

All birds show one larger and one smaller wing, the number of major strokes on these ranges from 7 up to 11. Also the triangular chisels on the back vary greatly in their number and carving depth. This contrasts far later edo works of schools like Ishiguro and Iwamoto that often had a certain number of feathers or feather rows on bird types, allowing to count the number of strokes and figurative elements to be matching among all birds on a piece, or even between pieces by the same maker.

Finally, this piece is a good example of pre-*edo* metalworks attributable to the Ko Mino school. The gilding is in good condition and especially the two gilding types (*LG* & *YG*) are a charming part of this piece. The overall framing of the scenery using bamboo stems underlines the 'painting-like' scenery from which this motif emerged into the art of *tosogu*.



IV.

V.



VI.

VIII.



VII.



'Wild' Boar Menuki

NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon kanteisho
Private collection

Mei: *Toyokawa Mitsunaga*, Meiji period
Material: Likely Shibuchi base with solid gold and shakudo inlay
Motif: A pair of wild mountain boars

33mm length, both

Actual size (at DIN A4)



Toyokawa Mitsunaga (豊川光長) was born on January 11 1850 or 1851 as Saitō Yūkichi to the Matsudaira-retainer Saitō Kisaburō. He first worked for his father's lord but was then sent for an apprenticeship with shodai Toyokawa Mitsunaga. He was then adopted by the shodai, continued as the second master of the Toyokawa school and was said to surpass his master. He died in the great Kantō earthquake in 1923.

The boar motif of this menuki is one seen less frequently amongst tosogu and one that can be interpreted ambiguously. They were cherished by some samurai for their ferocious headlong attack. However, this was also the reason they were associated with impetuosity. Nevertheless, the zodiac sign related traits of fertility and prosperity are important attributes in Japanese art and literature. It is said that in certain regions of Japan people kept lumps of boar hair in their wallets, thus filling the emptiness and promising coming wealth.

Both boars are worked in dark metal, giving a first impression of shakudo with some dust on it. However, tiny silver sparks, especially visible on the yasurime on the back, strongly suggest a shibuichi base patinated to a darker color. The great canines are done in massive silver and the eyes are worked in solid gold and shakudo. The craftsmanship on these is highly interesting as it seems to be a normal inlay with gold base and a shakudo dot filled in on the right (wild or charging) boar, but for the left (laying) boar it is a solid 'roll' of gold filled with a long bar of shakudo, kind of like a *maki* sushi roll. Beside that, the posts on the back are done in solid gold, one of them with red colouring (but gold is visible underneath), an indication of a high class, commissioned work.

The excellent quality of these pieces would go without saying, the pictures on these sites will show everything you need to see, please keep in mind how tiny they actually are. The whiskers are elegantly shown with strokes of varying depth, the fine hair is done excellently and with thousands of strokes. The overall shape is perfectly executed and so are all details, especially the ears, the snouts and the eye sockets.

These boar menuki are really outstanding and deserve loving appreciation as they are little masterpieces for themselves. The motif of these two contrasting boars, showing the two different sides associated with this interesting animal, the lovely, lazy, laying and friendly looking left boar *versus* the resolute look and posture, the proudly raised snout and the ready-to-charge depiction of the right boar.



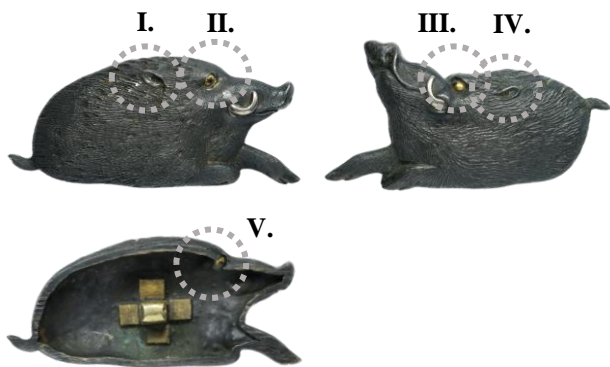
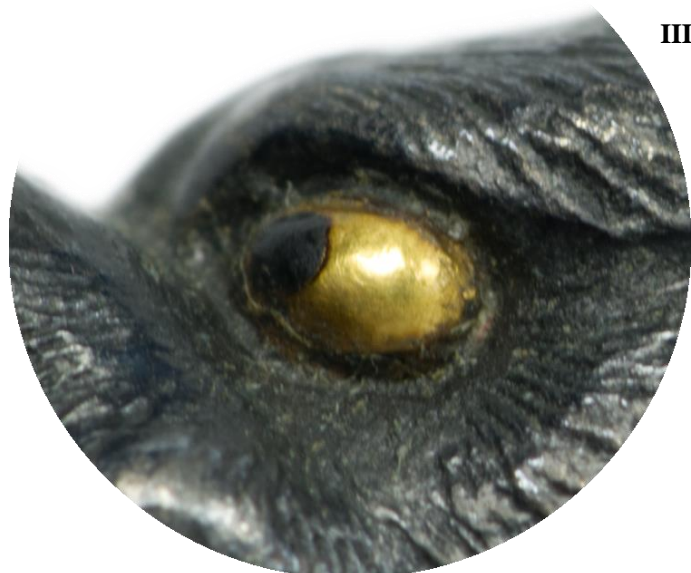
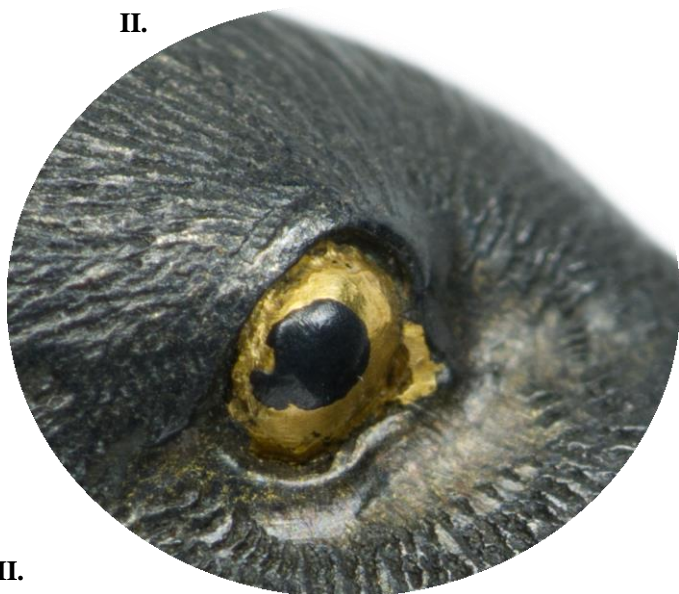


光長
Mitsunaga



白山子
Hakusanshi







Actual size (at DIN A4)

Jurōjin Kozuka

NBTHK Hozon kanteisho
Private collection

Mei: *Furukawa Jōchin & kao*, mid-Edo period
Material: Shibuchi
Motif: Jurōjin with his deer and crane

97mm length

Furukawa Jōchin (古川常珍) was the son of Furukawa Genchin (古川元珍) and the second master of the Furukawa school. The founder, Genchin, was a student of the great Yokoya Sōmin and the techniques, designs and skills inherited from these studies are evident in works of both Furukawa Genchin and Jōchin. Especially the works in *katakiri-bori* show their high level of skill and their origin in the Yokoya school.

On this shibuichi Kozuka, Jurōjin, one of the seven lucky gods (shichifukujin, 七福神), is depicted with his holy deer and crane. It is said that Jurōjin is one of the deities that originated from Chinese Taoism into Japanese culture and folklore. He is the god of the elderly and strongly connected to longevity and thus he is normally displayed as an old man with long beard riding on a holy deer and accompanied by a crane that is said to be 1500 years old. In his hands he holds a cane to which often a book or scroll is attached, said to contain the wisdom of the whole world, as well as the birth and death dates of all living beings.

We see the above features well displayed in this piece, with Jurōjin sitting on his deer in a long coat, his long beard visible as he looks up to the sky, deeply connected with the ancient crane sailing the sky above him. The scroll of wisdom is tightly wrapped to the bamboo-cane he holds in his right hand. The execution is solely done in *katakiri-bori* with differing weight of strokes. We see the most prominent ones defining the heavy traveling coat hanging loosely on him, with his lighter clothing underneath hanging out in the front and thus being visible between the deer's legs. While the whole face of Jurōjin is excellently carved with fine strokes and shows an emotional depth in the eyes rather than the generic face often found on lesser works. The heavy presence given by the thick coat and the intention to follow the deity's look above, tempts one to oversee the minute and gentle work used to model the deer head, eyes, antlers and the overall fur. Fine details punched into the antlers give a good indication of the details that should be found on quality works of this type. They may not 'jump-out' at the observer, but they are subconsciously absorbed, adding greatly to the appreciation of the work. Imagining this kozuka without these details would show clearly how they contribute to the naturalistic appearance of the antlers and thus the whole piece. The crane is carved with precise, straight and circular strokes, creating a slightly fluffy and feathery appearance. With the great distance from one end of the piece to another, the artist virtuously uses the empty space on this piece to create a contrast of earth (bottom border of the kozuka which the deer stands on) and the sky above, in which the crane is flying high up. The view of the ancient crane to Jurōjin and back creates a tension that is, in my opinion, filled with a cheerful, yet a bit wistful look at life and aging.





Actual size (at DIN A4)

Bungo Taro Motoyuki Menuki

Private collection

Mei: *Bungo Taro Motoyuki hachijusan Suimoken, Kyoho ju ku Chushujitsu oite Naru taki niragu kore*, mid-Edo period, *chu-jo saku*

Material: Iron with gold and silver inlay

Motif: Nakago of a Daito

61mm length, both

Shodai Bungo Taro Motoyuki (豊後太郎本行) was a swordsmith active in the second half of the 17th and first half of the 18th century in Hizen and Bungo province. His exact life dates are unknown, but we can calculate the year of his birth from some signed pieces and these menuki as well. He assigned himself 83 years of age on this piece and we first need to assume this is true, albeit it wasn't too rare that some smiths denoted higher ages than they actually were in the year of making a piece. With the piece dating to 1734, we can calculate back his birth to 1652 by the Japanese way of counting. This is an enormous life span in these times and other Hizen swordsmiths reaching such age, like shodai Tadahiro, were highly respected, not only for their great works, but also for their longevity.

However, in case of a swordsmith, menuki are rather rare to find. Tsuba occur more frequently, from most famous hands like Umetada Myoju, whose Nihonto and Tosogu are both held in highest regard, up to several modern swordsmiths making simple fittings or Tsuba for their own Nihonto. The execution hereby is, not counting masters like Myoju and many early masters, often a bit sloppy or less dignified to the trained eye. In this case, the execution of the gold inlayed letters is a tad shaky and though some minor parts of the inlay are missing, the overall appearance is a bit rough. This might be due to the advanced age at which this piece was made, making it harder to work with shaky or maybe even arthritic hands. Looking at the yasurime on the menuki, we see a very nice execution and finest parallel lines, suggesting the use of a file instead of a chisel, maybe even the file used for the nakago of his swords. Finally, the silver pin inlayed to the nakago-ana has a good, round shape and looks a little like it has been poured in from liquid metal with splashes around it.

Coming to the inscription of this piece, we have the name and age of 83 years denoted (*Bungo Taro Motoyuki hachijusan*), followed by *Suimoken*. This is a famous sword, said to cut a hair that is blown onto the edge, as well as one's earthly desires and attachments. The other side states the year 1734 and *Narutaki*, a place with several important waterfalls near Karatsu city in former Hizen province. In spring of the same year 1734 a Katana by Motoyuki is inscribed to be made with the water Narutaki at an age of 83, it is the last dated sword from him, and probably his last Nihonto.

All of this allows for interesting speculation. Maybe these menuki were done after he quit making Nihonto in respect of his advanced age and focused on a spiritual life until his death. This would also make these menuki his detachment from the world of swordsmithing and his casual life, the *Suimoken* they are inscribed as.



豊後太郎本行八十三吹毛劍
Bungo Taro Moto yuki hachijusan Suimoken



享保十九仲秋日於成滝淬之
Kyoho ju ku Chushujitsu oite Naru taki niragu kore

Ishiguro Masatsune II Fuchigashira

NBTHK Hozon kanteisho
Private collection

Mei: *Ishiguro Masamori*, Edo period (1772~85)
Material: Shakudo with gold, silver, copper and shakudo inlay
Motif: Pheasant under a Sakura tree

37mm Fuchi, 32mm Kashira



Actual size (at DIN A4)

Nidai Ishiguro Masatsune (石黒政常) was the successor of the founder of the Ishiguro school. Before he became head of the family, he signed with the name Ishiguro Masamori (石黒政守), the signature found on this piece. Therefore, these fuchigashira were made some time between 1772 and approximately 1785, giving an early example of his work.

The foundation of these pieces is done in shakudo and copper, with the inlays comprising gold, silver, shibuichi, copper and shakudo. We thus see a high quality piece mixing five different alloys to reach a great range of colors. This matches with the motif of a pheasant, a very colorful bird with magnificent feathers, both in size and structure. Thus we can see plenty of different feather structures on the Kashira, with each feather being finely executed, bearing an exact number of chisel strokes. The different chisel patterns on all feather types and also the excellently worked inlays within the feathers in gold or shakudo, show the true mastery of this craftsman. The subtle shakudo stripes in the great feather are only visible under certain light conditions and angles, but are important for the overall naturalistic accuracy of this piece, which is, limited by the color palette of alloys, evident.

The Kashira comprises a sakura tree in peak flowering, with single petals falling off and being carried away by a water stream. The Sakura's typical bark is finely structured by precisely set carving and punches in various sizes. The branches carry big silver sakura blossoms, topped with a golden stamp in the middle and garnished with golden foliage. Again, the execution is very naturalistic and uniform across the piece.

These fuchigashira are a lively and magnificent depiction of Japanese spring and life itself. Japanese pheasants, also called green pheasants, are especially active and noticeable by their loud mating calls, a traditional sign that spring has arrived, recognized in all regions of Japan. The flowering sakura tree is as Japanese as it gets and represents birth, life, the flourishing of it, but also admonishes the inevitable ending. The falling sakura petals running down the stream are a more pronounced hint for this.

These fuchigashira are a very fine Ishiguro work, combining extravagant inlays and a motif with a blank, non-nanako bearing free space, highlighting the first. The skill found on these pieces gives justice to why Ishiguro Masamori became Nidai Masatune and took lead of the Ishiguro school. A very Japanese composition with the appropriate extravagant touch expected in Ishiguro works.









Appendix

On the following pages you will see an additional, uncommented collection of the previous images in their full perspective or scaled to the maximum resolution possible in this format. These are intended for your independent research and investigation.

If you have question or need further details, feel free to contact me. If you have similar pieces you want to share or relevant information you may consider interesting, I will most happily discuss this with you.

I hope you enjoyed the first catalogue,
Marco























言子保十九仲叔曰旅成漢萍之

中登後漢即求行八十三功毛叙











A small preview of potential Tosogu
for the next catalogue





