



Programme to celebrate our 60th anniversary

20-21 September 2024

Dear all,

We have the pleasure to host two exciting events this year to commemorate our 60th jubilee since the establishment of the Society in 1964. We are thrilled to have been able to collate these exceptional and rare blades, koshirae and tosogu and wish to highlight that this is a unique opportunity for you to enjoy. The calibre of the British Museum antiques to study in hand on the first day, or those we view during the second-day exhibition, is very high and some of these collectibles are extremely rare within Japan and outside. There are two main elements combining the first and second days: Soshu (and Soshu influencers) and Goto.

1. Friday, 20 September: visit to the British Museum (Gt. Russel St, London WC1B 3DG)

Firstly, on Friday afternoon, we shall visit the British Museum, where we shall have the opportunity to study in hand some remarkable swords, koshirae, tsuba and tosogu from their collection, eg:

- the ex-Compton-collection Juyo **Shintogo Kunimitsu** tanto by the founder of the Soshu tradition (an exquisite blade never before taken out for such wider study);
- ex-Compton-collection Juyo **Ko-Bizen Yoshikane** tachi (remarkable ubu zaimai blade);
- various **Ko-Aoe** and **Ko-Bizen** blades as well as **Ichimonji**, **Tametsugu**, **Muramasa**, **Hirokawa Kunihiro** and others
- various **Goto** kodogu and top-level koshirae

In order to make the most of the day, we advise you to refer to the British Museum online collection <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection> as well as their 2004 publication *Cutting Edge: Japanese Swords in the British Museum*. Most, if not all, of the study items are amply illustrated in either source. In an appendix herein we have described some of these swords so that you have an idea of how special they are.

Please examine carefully the Shintogo tanto, one of the greatest blades at the British Museum. He was the teacher of Masamune, Yukimitsu and Norishige and de facto the first actual Soshu smith, who was inspired by the Awataguchi and Bizen progenitors of Soshu den. The Tametsugu (student of Norishige and son of Go Yoshihiro) is also worthwhile observing. The second day of our programme is dedicated to Soshu den and these two smiths are important in that tradition.

Please also study in hand the various Goto tosogu at the Museum, as at Japan House such physical interaction with the exhibits will not be possible. However, on Saturday, we shall have various Goto items displayed in locked cabinets and we shall also hear about the Goto school.

The event will proceed as follows:

- Participants gather at the British Museum visitor desk at 13:45
- 14:00-15:00: First group of 15 attendees goes to the study room and remainder enjoys the BM, eg the Japanese Gallery
- 15:00-16:00: Second group of 15 attendees visits the study room while the first group enjoys the BM
- 16:00-17:00: free time
- 17:00-17:30: we head to the restaurant
- 18:00-21:30: dinner at the restaurant



Please note that we are limited to around 30 attendees and this number has almost been reached. Last-minute sign-ups might or might not be accommodated.

2. Friday, 20 September: dinner at Cocoro

We have planned to start dinner around 18:00 but the restaurant can accommodate arrivals slightly earlier too, from 17:30 onwards. Please note that the restaurant opens at 17:30, so please do not arrive earlier.

The address is: 25 Coptic Street, London WC1A 1NT

The dinner will cost £35 per person, payable upon entry, and will include several courses and oolong tea. Alcohol and drinks will be separate. More about Cocoro here:

<https://cocororestaurant.co.uk/en/restaurants/bloomsbury/>

Information will be provided by Igor, our secretary, additionally in another email.

3. Saturday study day at Japan House (101 Kensington High St, London W8 5SA)

This exhilarating event has a twist! We have prepared an exhibition of exceptional blades and *tosogu* for viewing only, as handling of blades and collectibles is not allowed in Japan House. However, we shall not reveal the 'identity' of the blades until the afternoon.

We encourage you to form your own views, on the basis of the *sugata* and characteristics you can see, as to who has forged them. So, while not quite a fully-fledged *kantei*, we at least can attempt a half-way analysis.

As cryptic clues and also tantaliser for what is in store we can mention the following guidance:

- **One (or possibly two?) of the founders of Soshu den** will be exhibited
- **One of the 'older' founders of another of the Gokaden sword traditions**, who was an inspiration for Masamune and demonstrated the beauty of *nie* in forging
- **Several of the 'core' Soshu smiths**: some peers to Masamune, some students
- Various blades inspired by Soshu den, but coming later in time and forged in that style
- **Juyo rated *tosogu* by various Goto masters**: some of the first masters all the way to some of the last

The day will be packed with interesting talks and exhibited items to study behind glass. However, in the afternoon, attendees can discuss the items with the owners and read more about the items.

Please note that we are not organizing lunch and attendees need to make their own arrangements. These could include lunch at the on-site restaurant (booking is essential) *Akira*, or buying refreshments from the Japanese café *The Stand*, or nearby establishments outside Japan House.

Akira contact details: +44 20 3971 4646 or info@akira-restaurant.co.uk

Finally, for this day, we have a larger capacity than the BM study afternoon, so we look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible.



Japan House 21 September study-day agenda

10:00	Japan House opens to public and To-ken guests proceed to the Hall at lower-ground level
10:00-10:20	Registrations and coffee; our event takes place in the Hall
10:20-10:30	Opening remarks by Michael Spasov
10:30-11:00	<i>“Oni spirits & legends in Tsuba”</i> by John Miles in the Hall
11:00-11:10	Technical (and comfort) break to set up Zoom
11:10-12:00	<i>“The Secret Marks and Features of the Goto School”</i> by Paul Kremers (Zoom)
12:10-12:30	<i>“Collecting Japanese Swords”</i> by Igor Hochmajer in the Hall
12:30-13:30	Lunch. Attendees to make their own arrangements. Hall locked and empty
13:30-14:15	<i>“Introduction to the beauty of Soshu”</i> by Michael Spasov in the Hall
14:15-15:15	Free ‘kantei-like’ discussion about what attendees thought about the exhibited swords’ makers
15:00-16:30	Viewing the exhibition and free discussion
16:30-17:00	Closing remarks and departures from the Hall



APPENDIX

Fig.1 Shintogo Kunimitsu tanto





KAMAKURA PERIOD (CIRCA 1300) TANTO, SIGNED KUNIMITSU

Configuration (sugata): flat (hira-zukuri) with tri-bevelled back (mitsu-mune) and a slight drop of the back towards the tip (uchizori); length (nagasa): 8 sun, 1 bu (24.7 cm.); curvature (sori): mu-zori.

Forging pattern (jihada): ko-mokume with a beautiful display of chikei.

Tempering pattern (hamon): medium width suguha in nioi and some nie, with some lightly scattered kinsiji.

Point (boshi): small flame-brushed tip (ko-hakikake).

Tang (nakago): unaltered (ubu), Shape (keitai): regular with a strong drop (uchizori) of approximately 2.6 degrees; **file marks (yasurime):** kiri-yasurime; **end (nakago-jiri):** rounded (kurijiri); **holes (mekugi-ana):** two; **signature (mei):** Kunimitsu.

Aikuchi-koshirae, the fittings by Goto Ichijo, comprising: a black lacquer saya; a tsuka mounted with a pair of gold, silver gilt and shakudo menuki formed as a basket containing shells and flowering plants, attributed to Goto Ichijo; and a shibuichi kozuka decorated in shibuichi, shakudo, silver and gold with a crane peering at a poetic inscription above it, signed on the reverse '*Goto hokyo mogaru nen shichijunisai Ichijo with kao*' and dated Mannen 2 (1861).

Accompanied by a Juyo Token certificate issued by the NBTHK, dated Showa 46 (1971).

Provenance: Akimoto family

Published:

N.B.T.H.K., Juyo token to zufu, vol. 20.

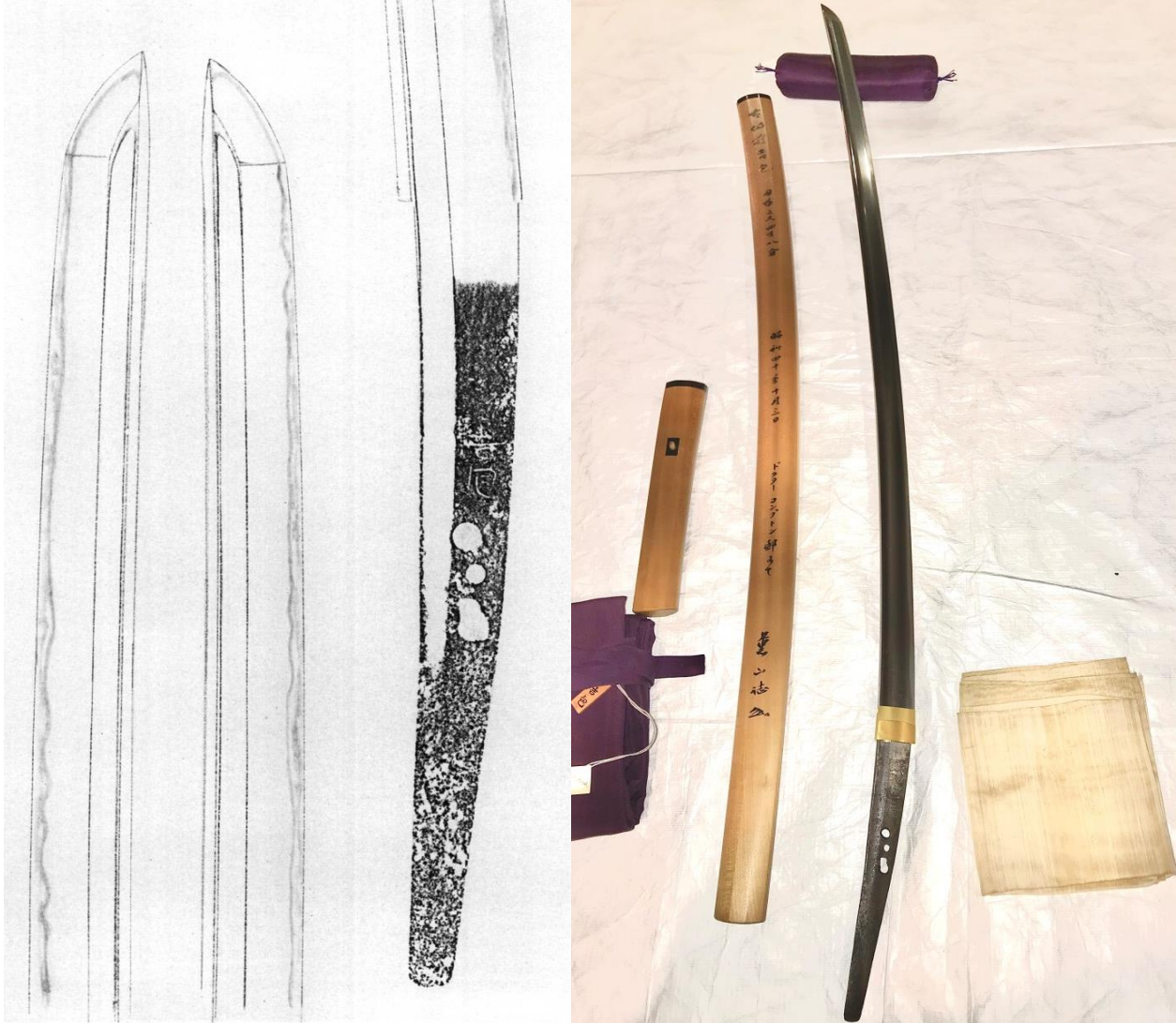
Compton, Homma, Sato and Ogawa (1976), no. IV.

Mino and Robinson (1983), no. 1.

One Hundred Masterpieces (1992), no. 26.



Fig.2 Ko-Bizen Yoshikane



Source: NBTHK, British Museum

Yoshikane is a (line of) Ko-Bizen smith(s), and some of the meikan describe a Bizen Ichimonji smith bearing that name as well. Yoshikane left a comparatively large number of extant works. It is said that Ko-Bizen Yoshikane tempers hamon based on ko-midare, utsuri is not conspicuous, his workmanship looks more classical and his signature consists of two small characters. It is also said that Ko-Ichimonji Yoshikane tempers hamon mixed with distinct choji, midare-utsuri appears on the ji, his workmanship looks more refined and his signature consists of large characters. However, there is furthermore a theory that the former style is representative of the early years and the latter, of the late years, of workmanship of the same smith. The large style signature is sometimes rendered as niji-me (two kanji signature) and sometimes also includes the kanji for saku ('made by'). Yoshikane's jihada is usually clearly visible, but occasionally it could show a tighter kitae (finer hada). His hamon is usually suguha, or ko-midare mixed with ko-gunome, and could be described as an elegant old style, with a tight or dense sugu-nioiguchi mixed with ashi and yo.



Old texts include references to the following smiths, according to research by Markus Sesko in *Swordsmiths of Japan*:

- Yoshikane (吉包), active in the Jōryaku era (1077-1081), was a Ko-Bizen school smith. According to written tradition, he was the grandson of Sukekane (助包), who was supposedly active around the Chōkyū era (1040-1044). Old sword documents date Yoshikane also around Ji'an (1021-1024), Chōryaku (1037-1040), Eishō (1046-1053), or Tengi (1053-1058) era.
- There was a Yoshikane active in the Genryaku era (1184-1185), who signed the same way (吉包) and had the honorary title Sakon Shōgen (左近将監). This Yoshikane's blades have a rather slender sugata with a suguha-chō hamon mixed with some midare in nie-deki. The signature is small and the character for "kane" (包) is rather angular.
- There was a Ko-Bizen Yoshikane active in Antei (安貞, 1227-1229) who, according to tradition, was the son Nagakane (永包). It is likely that it was him who was the grandson of the Genryaku-era (1184-1185) Sukekane (助包) and not the above listed Jōryaku-era Yoshikane. Confusingly, he is also listed as son of the Genryaku-era Yoshikane and as student of Koresuke (是助). Blades from the Antei to the Kenchō era (建長, 1249-1256) are attributed to this Yoshikane. His signature is noticeable bigger, his tachi have a wider mihaba and a kissaki which tends to ikubu, the hamon is a ko-midare mixed with ko-chōji and the jiba is nie-laden.

The British Museum Yoshikane has a mei which is smaller in size, and the workmanship is rendered in ko-nie. Overall, the style resembles the uncontrived approach of the Ko-Bizen founders, as the Christies catalogue of 1992 pertinently describes it: *"There is a general restraint and orderliness that is rare in the works of other Ko-Bizen smiths such as Masatsune and Tomonari, even though the strong o-mokume/ itame hada in this example does resemble the forging patterns of Tomonari. The elegant effect of the tempering pattern with a moderate slant is emphasized by the general feeling of lightness created by the two bo-hi extending deeply into the tang."*

Some other notes on the blade:

This is a zaimai Ko-Bizen Yoshikane tachi, which once belonged to the Mori daimyo family and whose more recent previous custodian had been the renowned Dr Walter Compton. Housed in a shirasaya with sayagaki by the NBTHK founder Dr Honma Junji, also known as Kunzan sensei – NB, Kunzan sayagaki are rare and conferred mostly to high-end items. The tachi was furthermore awarded Juyo designation by the NBTHK in its 23rd shinsa in 1975 and has featured in various books such as the *Tsuchiya Oshigata* and Fujishiro's *Nihon Toko Jiten: Koto Hen*.

The ubu blade of over 75 cm nagasa possesses a deep sori of 2cm, graceful sugata and the typical unconstrained flamboyance of early swords. The koshizori, funbari, straightening monouchi with elegant ko-maru ko-kissaki clearly screamed Heian to earliest Kamakura, while the darker jigane, prominent but not crude itame-mokume hada with some very faint utsuri above the ko-sugumidare nie-interspersed hamon clearly indicated Ko-Bizen. There are abundant fine kinsuji and delicate sunagashi in the blade and the nakago bears a small nijimei. Due to the overall construction and hososuguha-midare hamon with predominantly streaks of niesuji, and lack of ko-choji or ko-gunome, one could ascribe the blade to Ko-Bizen Yoshikane.



Fig.3 Ko-Bizen Tsunemitsu



Source: British Museum



Old texts include references to the following smiths, according to research by Markus Sesko in *Swordsmiths of Japan*:

- TSUNEMITSU (恒光), Jōtoku (承德, 1097-1099), Bizen – “Tsunemitsu” (恒光), Ko-Bizen school, according to tradition the son of Tsuneyasu (常保) who in turn was supposedly the son of the 2nd gen. Masatsune (正恒). This approach assumes that the 1st gen- Masatsune was active around Ei'en (永延, 987-989)
- TSUNEMITSU (恒光), Kōwa (康和, 1099-1104), Bizen – “Tsunemitsu” (恒光), Ko-Bizen school, according to tradition the grandson of Masatsune (正恒). This bases on the traditions which state that the 1st gen. Masatsune was active around Ei'en (永延, 987-989) but it is very likely that Tsunemitsu was active in the early Kamakura period, maybe around Kangi (寛喜, 1229-1232), from this point of view it is possible that he was the grandson of Masatsune, following the approach that Masatsune was actually active around Genryaku (元暦, 1184-1185), his jigane is a somewhat standing-out ko-itame mixed with mokume and ji-nie, the hamon is a suguha-chō with ko-midare and ko-chōji whereas the yakihaba shows ups and downs, some blades show a conspicuous amount of chōji, the more nie-laden blades are attributed to his earlier active period, jōjō-saku ◎
- TSUNEMITSU (恒光), Hōgen (保元, 1156-1159), Bizen – “Tsunemitsu” (恒光), Ko-Bizen school
- TSUNEMITSU (恒光), Shōō (正応, 1288-1293), Bizen – “Tsunemitsu” (恒光), there exists a date signature of the third year of Shōō (正応, 1290), jōjō-saku

Notes on the blade:

Although osuriage, with 67cm nagasa, its nakago still bears the distinctive blocky mei of the Ko-Bizen mastersmith. Unlike the previously described Yoshikane, this blade actually displays a rather different workmanship: the hamon has mostly ko-choji and some gunome, with less kinsuji or sunagashi activity, and the hada is a very fine and dense ko-itame. One could understand how this Tsunemitsu was a descendent of Ko-Bizen Masatsune, as the latter forged a more sophisticated, choji-delineated hamon with finer hada than the other famous Ko-Bizen progenitor, Tomonari, with his free-form ko-midare. Interestingly, this blade is still housed in an old shirasaya possibly once owned by a daimyo family or samurai clan. The sayagaki on it is of the daimyo inventory type, with the name of the smith, the blade length but also the monetary value of the blade, which probably had been estimated by a Honami: dai-kinsu nanajū-mai (代金子七拾枚), “value 70 kinsu”, i.e. 70 gold coins. One kinsu was equivalent to one ōban (大判), which on the other hand was worth one ryō (両, 16,5g gold).



Fig.4 Ko-Aoe Tsunetsugu



Source: British Museum



Old texts include references to the following smiths, according to research by Markus Sesko in *Swordsmiths of Japan*:

- TSUNETSUGU (恒次), Jōgen (承元, 1207-1211), Bitchū–“Tsunetsugu” (恒次), Ko-Aoe school, he was goban-kaji of the fifth month and bore the honorary title Bitchū no Kami (備中守), slender mihaba, deep koshizori, ko-kissaki, funbari, i.e. a tachi-sugata of the early Kamakura period, the jigane is a dense itame with ji-nie all over the blade which appears as chirimen-hada, also sumigane appears, the hamon is a ko-midare mixed with ko-chōji in nie-deki, the bōshi is midare-komi and ends as yakitsume or has a very short kaeri, he signed the character for “tsugu” somewhat smaller than that for “Tsune,” he is considered as maker of the meibutsu Juzumaru-Tsunetsugu (数珠丸恒次)
- TSUNETSUGU (恒次), Tenpuku (天福, 1233-1234), Bitchū–“Tsunetsugu” (恒清), Ko-Aoe school, according to tradition the son of Yasutsugu (康次), ko-itame with ji-nie and jifu, the hamon is a quite nie-laden suguha mixed with ko-midare and/or ko-chōji in ko-nie-deki, the bōshi is sugu and has a very short kaeri, the signature is chiselled on the haki-omote side which is atypical for Ko-Aoe
- TSUNETSUGU (恒次), Kōchō (弘長, 1261-1264), Bitchū–“Tsunetsugu” (恒次), Ko-Aoe school, some say it was him who made the meibutsu Juzumaru-Tsunetsugu (数珠丸恒次)
- TSUNETSUGU (恒次), Bunpō (文保, 1317-1319), Bitchū–“Bitchū no Kuni Aoe-jū Tsunetsugu” (備中国青江住恒次), “Bitchū no Kuni Masu no Shō-jū Sahyōe no Jō Tsunetsugu” (備中国万壽庄住左兵衛尉恒次), “Bitchū-shū Sahyōe no Jō Tsunetsugu saku” (備中州左兵衛尉恒次作), Aoe school, honorary title Sahyōe no Jō (左兵衛尉), according to tradition the son of Yukitsugu (行次), we know blades from the Shōwa (正和, 1312-1317) to the Gentoku era (元徳, 1329-1331), dense itame mixed with ō-hada, fine ji-nie and jifu, the hamon is a suguha-chō to slightly undulating notare in ko-nie-deki with some chōji, ashi and yō, the nioiguchi is rather tight, the bōshi is sugu or some notare-komi and has a ko-maru-kaeri, the signature is executed on the haki-omote side, ō-wazamono, jōjō-saku

Notes on the blade:

The blade shares a common provenance with the Tsunemitsu tachi, both in the daimyo who previously owned it, as one could deduce from the similar sayagaki rendered in the same handwriting, but also being a former R W Lloyd treasured possession. The blade has a deep koshizori and ancient looking ko-nie-covered prominent hada with a very active midare hamon. Approximately 70cm long, it has a long graceful sugata, with an obvious tapering. The yakiba is very Ko-Bizen-like: wild, unconstrained, active in ko-nie.

The inventory sayagaki, written by a scribe for the family who owned it previously, bears the following monetary valuation: dai-kinsu gojū-mai (代金子五拾枚), „value 50 kinsu“, i.e. 50 gold coins. That is interesting, as the appraiser must have thought more highly of the Tsunemitsu previously discussed than this blade made by the Ko-Aoe smith. Notably, the shodai Tsunetsugu was one of the Gobankaji, i.e. one of the sword-forging instructors of emperor Gotoba. He created the meibutsu Juzumaru-Tsunetsugu (数珠丸恒次), which is one of the so-called tenka-goken (天下五剣, the “five finest swords under the heaven”).



Fig.5 Ko-Aoe Sueyuki



Source: NBTHK, British Museum



Old texts include references to the following smiths, according to research by Markus Sesko in *Swordsmiths of Japan*:

- Sueyuki (末行) who worked primarily in the Jōō era (貞応, 1222-1224), in the Aoe Bitchū area. He signed “Sueyuki” (末行) and belonged to the Ko-Aoe school. According to tradition, he is deemed to be the son of the Genryaku-era (元暦, 1184-1185) or the Kenryaku-era (建暦, 1211-1213) smith Yasutsugu (康次)
- Sueyuki (末行), another Bitchū smith who also signed “Sueyuki” (末行) but worked in Bun’ei (文永, 1264-1275) era. Typical characteristics are the graceful sugata, the hada and also chiselling the mei on the opposite side of Heian / Kamakura smiths.

Notes on the blade:

Ubu zaimei Sueyuki tachi which passed the 26th Juyo shinsa in 1979 under the ownership of Randolph B Caldwell, a well-known American stockbroker and sword collector. Acquired by the Museum in 2002 with funds from the Brooke Sewell Bequest and the Art Fund, this is a remarkably imposing and elegant 78cm-long tachi by an extremely rarely encountered Ko-Aoe smith. The deep koshizori, funbari and ko-kissaki point to the period of manufacture, but the hadatachi jigane, patches of large sumihada, ko-midare and hososuguha hamon with kinsuji and ashiiri are ostensible Aoe features. The 23-cm-long nakago, patinated with old age, has a thickly chiselled but smallish mei on the ura side, which is another Aoe characteristic.

The blade has seen combat, as evidenced by the two kirikomi it still proudly bears, and the fact that it has been rather polished down. Nevertheless, it has been reasonably well preserved in its grandiose shape, unaltered length, with intact mei and nakago, and today rests within a shirasaya with Dr Honma sayagaki.