

Discussion of a *Ko-Shōami Tsuba* (古正阿弥鐔)

Basic Information:

Japanese Title: 三又文繫囟鐔 (*mitsutama mon tsunagi zu tsuba*)

Material: iron (*tetsu* 鉄)

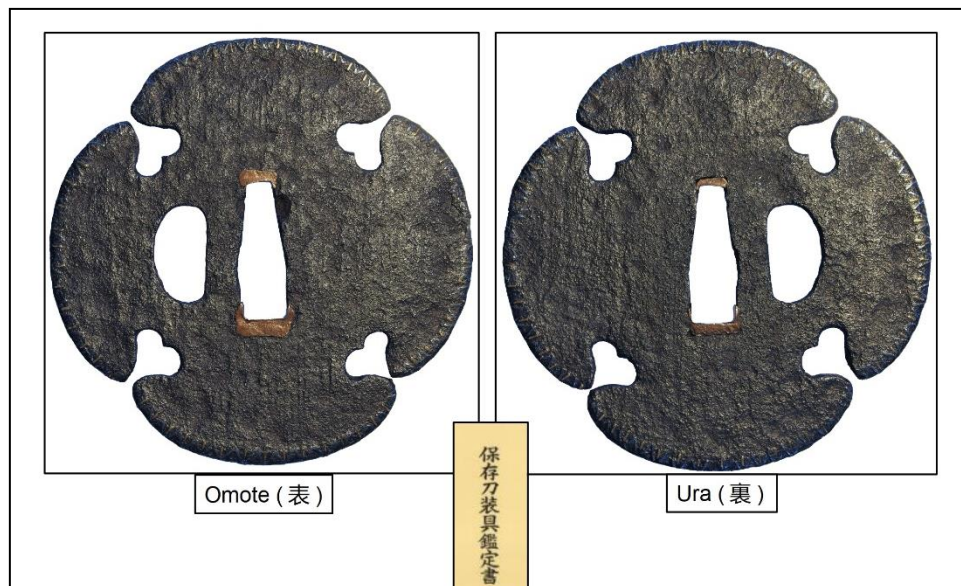
Age: Middle *Muromachi* Period (室町時代中期)

Size: 8.0 cm X 8.0 cm, 2.4 mm at center, 3.0 mm at rim

Signature: *mumei* (無銘)

Shape: *kurikomi-mokkō-gata* (剗込木瓜形)

Surface Finish: *tsuchime-ji* (槌目地)



Introduction:

An early Japanese sword hand guard (*tsuba* 鐔) made of forged iron (*tetsu* 鉄). It was made during the middle *Muromachi* Period likely sometime around rule of the 8th *Ashikaga Shōgun* (足利将軍) *Yoshimasa* (義政) (r. 1449–1473 CE). The basic shape of the *tsuba* is like that of the cross section of the fruit of the Japanese quince. It is notched at the four corners with a small openwork design made to represent boar eyes (*inome* 猪目). This overall shape incorporating the small openwork designs is collectively referred to as (*kurikomi-mokkō-gata* 剗込木瓜形) and is a classic shape used on hand guards of early long sword worn edge down (*tachi* 太刀) and was carried over to shorter swords typically worn edge up (*uchigatana* 打刀). Both sides of the *tsuba* are decorated by thin vertical file marks (*shino-yasurime* 篠鑿目) mixed with a finely hammer surface texture (*tsuchime-ji* 槌目地).

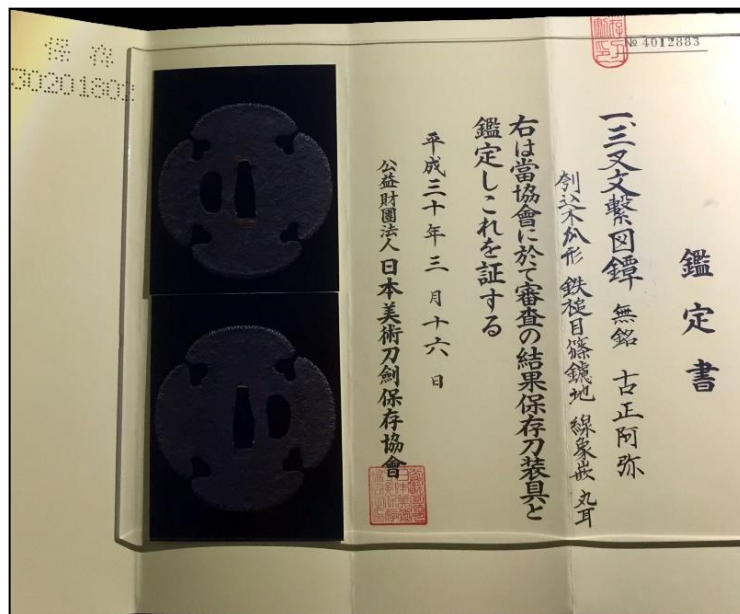
Discussion:

Connected three-pronged elements (三又文繫 *mitsutama mon tsunagi*) made up of line inlays (*sen-zōgan* 線象嵌) of imported Chinese brass (*sentoku* 宣德) (ca. 1429 CE) and locally mined silver (*gin* 銀) are neatly inlaid along the rounded rim (*maru-mimi* 丸耳) of this *tsuba*.⁽¹⁾ This inlaid pattern is applied to both sides and might have been added later when an original soft metal rim cover (*fukurin* 覆輪) was damaged and was removed. If the inlays along the rim are original to the *tsuba* then they are

an important bit of evidence. This early *tsuba* might be an important transition piece linking the origin of the early professional sword fittings artisans (*Ko-Shōami* 古正阿弥) that worked in the old capital of *Kyōto* (京都) with the early armor smith artisans (*Ko-Katchūshi* 古甲冑師) and the silver sword fittings makers (*shirogane-shi* 白銀師) during the mid *Muromachi* Period. ^(2,3)

The utility knife accessory hole (*kozuka hitsu-ana* 小柄櫃穴) might be original to the *tsuba* or not and displays the typical cross section shape of *kozuka* used on sword mounts during the mid *Muromachi* Period.

This *tsuba* was published in the KTK (*Kokusai Tōsōgu Kai* 国際刀装具会) 5th International Convention & Exhibition Book, page 49. ⁽⁴⁾ The tentative attribution provided in the KTK article is that the *tsuba* is the work of *Ko-Katchūshi* group or that it might have been even older, circa the *Kamakura* Period (鎌倉時代) and mounted on a long sword worn edge down (*tachi* 太刀). This *tsuba* was submitted to the *Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai* 日本美術刀剣保存協會 (NBTHK) [Society of the Preservation of the Japanese Art Sword] for formal appraisal (*shinsa* 審査) in February 2018 and was attributed to the *Ko-Shōami* group. The NBTHK designated the *tsuba* to be of good quality, authentic, and worthy of historical preservation. The direct attribution to *Ko-Shōami* indicates also that the NBTHK was thinking the *tsuba* dates from the mid *Muromachi* Period and not earlier.



References:

1. Personal Communication with Markus Sesko on reading and meaning of Kanji.
2. Tsuba An Aesthetic Study by Kazutaro Torigoye and Robert E. Haynes, pages 97-98.
3. Tosogu Classroom Volume 1 by Fukushi Shigeo, pages 116-120.
4. KTK (Kokusai Tōsōgu Kai 国際刀装具会) 5th International Convention & Exhibition Book, page 49.