Kanesada Tsuba (金定鐔)

Introduction

In this short article I would like to introduce and discuss the details of a fine Japanese sword handguard (tsuba 鐔) from my collection, which is both interesting and controversial with differing appraisal results. I will present Japanese names, places, and terms, first in italics, followed by the (kanji 漢字) or (kana 名) in brackets to aid the reader in understanding Japanese texts and notes. Reference to the same term later in the text will only be italicized. The following is a listing of basic information about the tsuba as well as images of the front and back. Color images of the tsuba can be found on my website at the following URL: (https://www.tsubaotaku.com/tsuba-gallery-5?lightbox=dataItem-iifyb2s1).

Basic Information

Material: Iron tetsu (鉄)
Age: Early Edo Period, (Edo jidai shōki 江戶時代初期)
Size: 7.5 cm X 7.8 cm, 3.0 mm at rim
Signature: Kanesada saku (金定作)
Shape: elongated round, (nagamaru-gata 長丸形)
Surface Finish: hammer marks, (tsuchime-ji 捻目地)

The tsuba (鐔) in Figure 1 displays a wonderful deep rich blackish-brown patina sabi (寂) and a very finely hammered surface (tsuchime-ji 捻目地) along with a very characteristic surface pattern consisting of fine pinpoints (ji-mon 地紋) found on many old iron tsuba. This complex surface
treatment adds greatly to the overall aesthetic sense of the tsuba and emphasizes quiet simplicity, impermanence, and subdued refinement (wabi-sabi 侘び寂び). The design consists of two separate small openwork (ko-sukashi 小透) elements. The large and elongated small accessory knife hole (kozuka hitsu-ana 小柄) is a characteristic of Japanese sword fittings popular from the Azuchi-Momoyama Period to the beginning of the Edo Period.

Analysis of the Design

The first openwork design, in the upper left as you face the front of the tsuba, is the full moon (mangetsu 満月). The second, in the lower right, is of an open letterbox (chigai-bako 違箱).

According to Robert E. Haynes, as relayed via personal communication, these two elements together tell a story from the famous Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari 源氏物語) written by Murasaki Shikibu and published in 1008 CE. This early novel the first in all of human history was a popular source of different types of fine art produced at the beginning of the Edo Period. The Tale of Genji specifically makes reference to reading love letters by the light of a full moon. This tsuba's openwork design likely illustrates this scene from the novel in negative silhouetted openwork (in-sukashi 陰透).

Discussion

The tsuba is signed simply with three characters (Kanesada saku 金定作) on the front (omote 表) side. The middle character being a bit harder to read then the first and last character of the signature. A detailed view of the signature can be viewed below.

Kanesada was likely a student or an assistant to Meijin Shodai Kaneie (名人初代金家) and was located in Fushimi (伏見) just outside of the old capital city of Kyōto (京都) in Yamashiro Province (山城國). This was the location of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's grand castle Momoyama-jo (桃山城), which was destroyed in 1600 CE. The signature is in a somewhat different form from what is found in the English reference Signatures of Japanese Sword Fittings Artists by Markus Sesko, page 120. The only signature example given includes the location information of Yamashiro Province as well as the honorific title of Fujiwara (藤原). Markus gives the working period for this artist as 1570-1621 CE. A reference to the artist is found also in The Index of Japanese Sword Fittings and Associated Artists by Robert Haynes (ID# H02526.0) which gives the date of the artist's working period to be circa 1600 CE. The artist was known to make tsuba of an early sword smith (tōshō 刀匠) or armor smith (katchūshi 甲冑師) designs. This is quite different from what Meijin Shodai Kaneie normally produced; he often employed soft metal inlays and designs carved in high relief (taka-bori 高彫).
The overall design of Kaneie work is reminiscent of the Chinese School of painting first imported into Japan during the T’ang Dynasty (618–907 CE). According to Robert E. Haynes (via personal communication) this artist was active a generation later than Meijin Shodai Kaneie. This would put his active period around the time of the (Keicho 慶長) Era (1596-1615). No records of the birth or death dates remain for this artist; only an approximate working period can be determined. It was said also that the artist forged the iron plates used by Meijin Shodai Kaneie for his tsuba. The first character of this artist name: (kane 金) was likely taken from the first character of Kaneie (金家). This first character differs from what was used by the many generations of sword smiths using the art name Kanesada (兼定).

**Appraisal Results**

In May 10, 2012 this *tsuba* was issued an Aoi-Art appraisal stating “Kane ? Saku (金? 作)” due to the condition which made the signature more then a bit hard to read. The age of the *tsuba* was listed vaguely as the *Edo* Period. No details other than size and a comment about the overall shape and color of the patina were provided on the appraisal document.

In February of 2016 the *tsuba* failed (Nihon Bijutsu Tōken Hozon Kyo-kai 日本美術刀剣保存協会) NBTHK [Society for the Preservation of the Japanese Art Sword] (*shinsa* 審查) at the Japanese Sword Museum in Tokyo. The explanation given for its failure was that the *tsuba* has a false signature (*gimei* 偽銘) of Kaneie (金家).
The *tsuba* was later submitted to (*Nihon Tōken Hozon Kai* 日本刀剣保存会) NTHK-NPO [Society for the Preservation of the Japanese Sword (a registered non-profit organization)] *shinsa* on June 12, 2016. It passed with a direct attribution to the artist Kanesada (金定) of *Jōshu* Province (城州) after the area of the signature was lightly cleaned. The *tsuba* was dated to the beginning of the Edo Period by the NTHK-NPO. The point score at the *shinsa* was 79 and it was issued a written appraisal (*kanteisho* 鑑定書), confirming the *tsuba*'s quality and authenticity. This is equivalent to the (*Tokubetsu Hozon Tōsōgu Kanteisho* 特別保存刀装具鑑定書) papers issued by the NBTHK at the Japanese Sword Museum in Tokyo. *Jōshu* is an older but commonly used alias for *Yamashiro*. 
Conclusion

The discussion of this fine and controversial *tsuba* has been interesting and entertaining. I would like to personally thank Robert E. Haynes for identifying the meaning of the openwork design elements of this *tsuba* and their connection to a classic work of Japanese literature.

References