

Japanese Sword Society of the United States, Inc.



NEWSLETTER

The Official Bi-Monthly Publication of the Society. Membership - \$10.00 Annually

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NEW MEMBERS -

Three new members to welcome this issue:

Mr. Robert Benson

Mr. John A. Frost

Dr. James Hugo

On behalf of the membership, welcome into the club! It should be noted that thanks are due many of the old time members for talking up our society and contributing to the obvious growth of our society. Membership continues to grow which in turn allows the society to look ahead for bigger and better projects.

LETTER FROM OUR NEW CHAIRMAN -

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JSS/US MEMBERSHIP

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation on being elected Chairman of our Society for 1975 and 1976, and to share a few thoughts with you on where I see us going during this period. After you have read this through, please give careful consideration to the alternatives and projects discussed, then take a few minutes to drop me a line and give me your own views on the ideas mentioned. How would they serve your own interests and those of the Society as you see it? In addition, what suggestions do you have to make? Everyone's input is required and appreciated. Your comments will be of great assistance to the officers of the Society, all of whom want this organization to be of real benefit to the membership.

I believe that the Society has made significant progress during the last few years, and that has been through the hard and unselfish work of a number of people who are well known to us all by their contributions to the Newsletter, the Bulletin, the Tanto translation, etc. I fully expect that our bi-monthly Newsletter under the able direction of Ron Hartmann, and the 1975 Bulletin will continue to improve from the strong foundation already exhibited. In addition, the oshigata book, the plans for which were mentioned by Ron in the Jan.-Feb. Newsletter, has every promise of being a fascinating and valuable study and reference document. However I do see two general problem areas, if I may call them that for lack of a better term, that I would like to encourage some progress on during my tenure in office. That can only happen with your interest and co-operation.



LETTER (cont'd)

First, our membership does not have the rather narrow geographic scope that encompasses such large proportions of the membership of such groups as the Japanese Sword Club of Southern California in L.A., the Northern California Japanese Sword Club in San Francisco, the Token Study Group in the Chicago area, or the Token Society of Great Britain in London. We therefore lose the opportunity to meet, talk, study, swap, and generally get together on a regular basis. In the long run, slow changes in the distribution of our membership might minimize this problem, but is there anything specific that can be done? Ought we to try to establish regional branches where there are enough members in a given area? Alternatively or additionally ought we to try for one centralized meeting yearly, at which a regular program of some sort could be put on? If so, would something co-ordinated to the yearly Chicago sword show of the Token Study Group serve that function? A number of our members attend of course in any event, and I understand that the meeting this year has been set by them for Oct. 18-19.

Second, just what service function or functions ought we to allocate our scarce dollars and time to in addition to the Newsletter and Bulletin? It is difficult to know just which projects or targets we ought to have, and if we cannot do everything as obviously is the case, then there is a real danger of failing to pick the most worthwhile. The Tanto translation was excellent, and I think the oshigata book will also be, but what is the next best step or limited number of feasible, constructive, and important steps? We require your feedback. I would like to see the coming months as a period of consolidation and purposeful direction that serves the needs of our membership. Let me suggest some possible lines. Some of these are my ideas and some are the suggestions of several members I have corresponded with in this regard. The following order carries no implication of priority.

1. We could focus on a major translation program in the direction indicated by Tanto. For example, no set of books is better known or more appreciated by students of the sword than Fujishiro's Nihon Toko Jiten. That set is distributed widely and is kept in print, so that just a translation without a reproduction of the photographs ought to be sufficient. Another book which I find an excellent source is Hiroi and Iida's Nihon To no Kantei Nyumon. Perhaps the two tsuba volumes in Nihon To Koza or the first volume of Toso Kodogu Koza could be considered. I think that any translation effort ought to have the proper clearances with the publisher, and perhaps some useful publisher affiliation. It is also possible to explore getting financial support from some non-profit educational foundation, perhaps a Japanese one.

2. Should we do our own thing? There have been many collectors added to our ranks in the last few years who most require something along the lines of a primer before the more sophisticated contents of the above mentioned books can be fully appreciated. We could draw up an outline of such a primer and distribute its sections to those who would be willing and able to write on them. Volunteers? It would not have to be super-technical, and could be an interesting learning experience. Sections could relate to schools, periods, shapes, yakiba, forging, construction, and hada, nakago types, and nakago-true and false, blade care, blade judging, blade evaluation, the making of oshigata, elementary tsuba study, etc.

LETTER (cont'd)

3. Should we consider making a serious effort to secure a Society polisher who can also do shirasaya? This of course was a major undertaking of the past. There are obvious benefits, but speaking as someone who has already looked into this issue a little, there are also very serious obstacles to both getting one and functioning with one. As an alternative we could try to establish a pipeline to a responsible and able Japanese polishing firm, with swords perhaps being most efficiently funnelled through a specific US location.

4. Would the membership be interested in the Society issuing a book of oshigata and commentary on blades of interest that are currently in our own collections? How about a book of tsuba and fittings photographs along with commentary? Alternatively should we sponsor a catalog of a museum-Society collection and/or exhibition? There are several very good and little known museum collections in both the US and Canada.

5. Should we undertake the sponsorship of a shinsa? That might be done in co-operation with some Japanese group, or perhaps we could try it as a joint effort calling on a small group of thoroughly knowledgeable and experienced collectors and students outside of Japan. Again, as in several of the above, we might try to secure foundation support. Short of a shinsa, we might wish to sponsor a serious blade and/or tsuba study clinic. These would be very labor intensive events, and while some might call them pretentious, they may well be viable.

6. In addition of our library service, should we go into the book, journal, and monograph selling business on a non-profit basis? There is an continuing flood of materials, all of which are not carried by any dealer that I know of, and about which many of our members know little.

7. Should we sponsor a widely advertized and centrally or conveniently located sale and auction of Japanese martial equipment? This would be different from and not necessarily in competition with the usual shows. As far as I know this is something that no organization has tried as yet. A professional auctioneer could be used, the commission could be very competitive with the standard auction houses, and commission revenue would go to the treasury of the Society.

8. Finally, should we sponsor a sword study tour of Japan? Perhaps we could co-ordinate a Japanese sword tour of North America. The former is of course being done by other groups, and at the very least we ought to let our membership know of those events.

Let me again urge you to give me your reactions. What would meet your interests, where do you see the Society going, what suggestions do you have? How would you be interested in participating? Whatever is done will be dependent on what you want and on how willing you are to support it. Just drop me a line.

Arnold Frenzel.

CHRISTIAN TSUBA DISCUSSION -

The following article is a follow-up to the request for additional information concerning the Christian Tsuba pictured in the March-April 1975 issue of the NEWSLETTER. Several letters and xerox copies of old Japanese prints were sent in which pretty well explains the puzzle. Special thanks to Paul Couch, Ed Dobrzanski, David Pepper and Arnold Frenzel for their help in this research.

Two additional articles are in-hand pertaining to this Christian Theme subject, but will be saved for use in the next two issues of the paper.

The "box" sticking out from the sides of the ship apparently are beams, primarily used for hoisting on cargo. This was pictured on several ship pictures sent in by Ed and Paul. David Pepper elaborates: "The side projection is a sort of platform, perhaps a single plank and part of the superstructure of the ship. It probably varied in size, but is illustrated on a Momoyama Period screen, appearing to be about 2'x3' in size. It was used, among other things, to facilitate the loading of cargo."

Several types of structures were also pictured on the various ship prints. The most like structure being a "torii gate" built over the rudder of the ship. David again elaborates: "There is no doubt that the ship is a Japanese vessel - everything from sail type to basic construction points this out; but this fact makes the "cross" even more interesting. There is a structure at the stern of some old Japanese ships, a sort of "rail", looking like this:
It may be that the cross is stylized from this structure in order to hide it from the obvious sight - a KAKUSHI or KAKURE-KIRISHITAN adaptation. I think this is a genuine christian design.



The "odd bow" design is simply a bundle of ropes - also shown as such on many old prints of Japanese ships. This probably served as a "bumper or fender" for the ship.

The rope "bumper" and the "torii-type structure" are clearly shown on a print which is illustrated in the June 17, 1975 Sotheby Parke Bernet auction catalogue - item #7. A touched-up copy of this print is shown below.

A particularly good book illustrating an abundance of old fighting scenes was recommended by Paul. It is: JAPAN: A HISTORY IN ART. by Bradley Smith - Doubleday and Co., Inc. This was the source of the material supplied by Paul.



David continued on with some general discussion on the Christian Theme as follows.

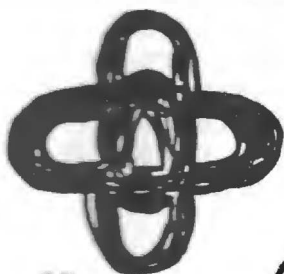
There are some other designs however, which are mistaken for Christian emblems, such as these:



Mon of SHIMAZU FAMILY (actually, from what I understand derived from the character "TA" 田 -rice field).



"Cross" design on stencilled armour leather. This is actually a stylized depiction of the iris plant. The origin goes back centuries before christianity was introduced!



JU-JI
MOKKŌ



KUTSUWA

JU-JI MOKKO and other four-lobed shapes; also the KUTSUWA (horse-bit). These, while vaguely cross-shaped, long predate the arrival of europeans in Japan. It is quite reasonable to assume that Japanese christians made use of such symbols in order to hide their beliefs from official view, but one must be very careful in assigning christian symbolism to all such elements of design. I am even a bit suspicious of the JUJI - the numeral ten itself; as I have seen it used in mon on pieces of armour which are definitely late Edo period - a time when the ban on Christianity was still in full force.

DP

TOKEN BIJUTSU (NBTHK Journal) -

For many years now it has been the wish of most of us to see some of the fine material which is regularly printed in the TOKEN BIJUTSU, presented "in english". To our delight - starting with the April 1975 issue - an english "contents" page plus a complete english text to the "celebrated blade" fold-out (full length oshigata), has been introduced in this fine journal! This addition of english will greatly help the non-japanese speaking collector learn more and will prove a great aid in his future studies of the sword.

It is suggested, to show our appreciation to NBTHK, that everyone write the museum and express your personal thanks for this help. Letters have already been sent to Dr. Homma and Dr. Sato by our Chairman and by the NEWSLETTER, but personal thanks will greatly help in getting the message to the museum that the need for more such help is wanted.

Do your part as a JSS/US member - write: Nippon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai Tokyo, Japan - and say thanks! Membership is most worthwhile since it brings you this fine journal monthly, providing hundreds of oshigata for study each year. Membership is \$30US/annually - do it today!

OSHIGATA - A NEW METHOD

INTRODUCTION -

A revolutionary new concept for producing oshigata has been developed by Mr. Dave Pepin of Grant Park, Illinois. This new concept utilizes a special pressure-sensitive paper which when used properly, reproduces the oshigata with photographic clarity. It is the intent of this article to describe this unique process and to make the needed special paper available for order to the membership.

A few words about the discoverer of this process - Dave is a JSS/US member and an advanced collector/dealer. He is seriously interested in helping the english-speaking collector in advancing sword study through such sharing of knowledge as making this unique method available to all and through several significant translation projects in the near future. We can expect to hear some exciting news along this line in the not too distant future. As for Dave's collecting - he has at present an inventory in excess of 300 blades plus numerous other related items and would welcome inquiries from the membership pertaining to buying-selling-trading action.

THE PAPER -

This method of making oshigata utilizes a unique pressure-sensitive paper which is normally intended for use in industrial recording-type instruments. It is for this reason that the paper supplied is with a "grid" printed on it, but this obviously does not effect the quality of the oshigata. The paper is pressure-sensitive and does "mark" when any pressure is applied to it, thus the basic concept of the process.

TOOLS REQUIRED -

Several methods for making oshigata using this pressure-sensitive process are conceivable. The method used by Dave requires one to have the paper, a clamp-type tweezers, and a small, well-shaped "rubbing stick" made of some hard, smooth material. This "stick" should be approximately 4"-5" long and about pencil diameter. The point or rubbing end is most important. This should be shaped into a tool with a convex, dished bottom and a small rounded (not sharp) tip. The dished bottom surface is used for rubbing the generally flat area of the nakago (or the outline of the sword), whereas the "point" is used for working into the close areas such as around the signature, into the actual depths of the chisel marks, etc., and therefore must be small but well rounded so as not to cut into the paper.

The material for this all-important "stick" can be any hard material such as ivory, bone, horn or wood.

An alternate form of tool used for rubbing has been experimented with and found most satisfactory for deeply carved signatures or when haste is required. This tool is called a "stump" - a rolled-paper stick used by artists which is available in most art stores. The idea here is that this "stick" is soft and works itself into tight spots very well. The disadvantages being such an oshigata made by this process lacks the refined "photographic" qualities obtained by using

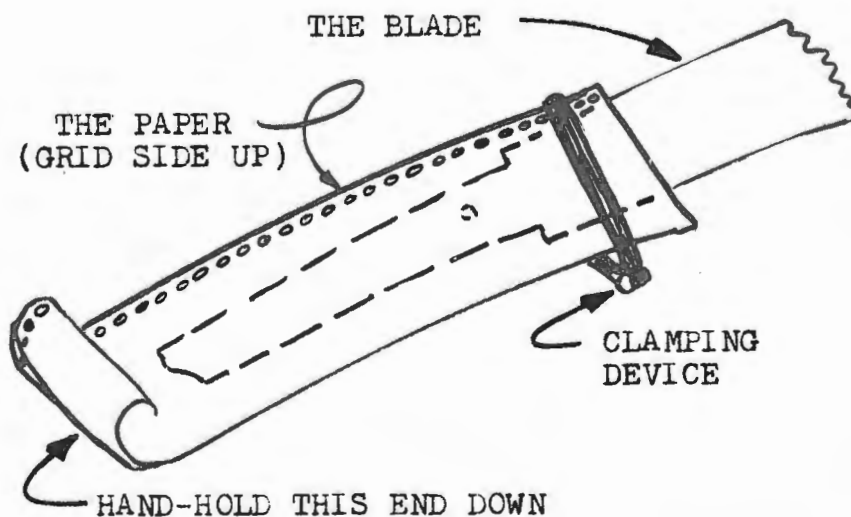
OSHIGATA (cont'd)

a "hard stick", but serves well when a lack of time requires hasty but good clear oshigata.

Again, experimentation will bring about good and bad results and will no doubt dictate the most compatible "tool" to use for your specific needs. As in all oshigata - patience is the key word! The results will speak for themselves.

For holding the paper in place on the nakago, a clamping-type tweezers with rubber tubing over the metal ends, has proven to be most satisfactory. Other methods will also work, such as magnets or weighted sacks of lead bird-shot. Even a clamp-type spring loaded "clothes pin" will work in leau of the formal tweezers. The clamping device works best since it gives a positive non-slip condition by which to work with (keeping in mind not to scratch the blade surface if metal tweezers are used - use the tubing-covered ends!).

PROCEDURE -



Laying the blade onto a large flat surface (keeping in mind not to damage the blades polish), clamp the top end of the paper to the nakago and simply pull the loose end down and hold in place with your free hand. To protect the blade from the working surface, a couple of rubber erasers under the blade works well. Take the rubbing stick and with the dished bottom surface, strike the basic outlines of the nakago. Then proceed to rub the general surface area, picking up the file marks and signiture. A little experimentation will develop the proper pressure and direction of strokes to be used for best results. The signiture is now ready to be done using the small, rounded point of the stick to work the paper around and into the chiseled signiture. Again, a little experimentation will prove ones best teacher.

If the "stump" is used rather than the hard stick, procedure is the same but the resulting oshigata will not be as well-defined.

OSHIGATA (cont'd)

RESULTING OSHIGATA -

It has been determined that the results of this method can be shocking! Signitures impossible to read earlier can be made legable when "picked up" by this method. Very course and deeply burred signitures, difficult to capture by more conventional methods, can be copied with ease! (The stump works well for the deeply burred type signitures). A normal, well made signiture will produce a photographic quality oshigata of crystal-clear clarity.

As is usually the case - PATIENCE - is the key word for true success in making any oshigata, and this method is no exception. Provide yourself with a good working space, good lighting, and the proper tools. Go easy as you proceed, taking a small area of the oshigata at a time and develop it fully before proceeding to the next area - taking care to achieve a true reproduction of what you are trying to capture on paper.

PRESERVATION OF THE FINISHED OSHIGATA -

The only caution required when storing oshigata made by the pressure-sensative paper method is - obviously the paper is pressure sensative - and any pressure applied by folding, creasing, writing over, etc., will permanently mark your oshigata. One method of caring for your finished oshigata is to mount your oshigata (using two-sided tape) to a record sheet and in turn encasing the whole thing inside a clear plastic "sheet protector", available at any office supply store. This method allows full study of the oshigata and record sheet while being reasonably safe under a plastic removable cover.

SUMMARY -

The beauty of using the pressure-sensative paper method is twofold. First, the resulting oshigata is a true reproduction of photographic clarity; second, the ease of making plus the few simple tools required enables one to carry a "kit" in ones pocket - allowing an oshigata to be made quickly and easily even in the most awkward situations such as at a sword or gun show or during a parking lot inspection, etc., when a more conventional oshigata is out of the question.

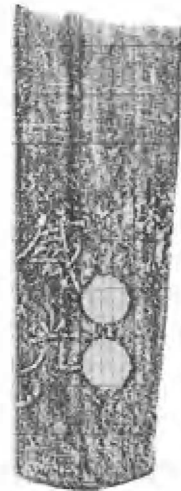
The importance of making a good clear record oshigata (and record sheet) of all significant blades which one sees has been stressed many times before and will continue to be stressed in future articles. In making an oshigata and filling out a descriptive record sheet to accompany it, one will be surprised to find out how much more closely a sword is studied during this process, seeing many details otherwise missed during a hasty study. The one objection expressed by many collectors in reference to making oshigata is that they lack the patience required to refine their oshigata or it is just too awkward to do them in general. Perhaps with the introduction of the pressure-sensative paper method, with it's ease of handling and photographic results, more members will delve into this most important phase of sword study.

OSHIGATA (cont'd)

HOW TO ORDER PAPER -

Pressure-sensitive paper can be purchased directly from Dave Pepin. The paper supplied will be in rolls 2 3/4" x 50 feet long and will have the "grid" printed on them. This will be enough for 60 - 80 / Oshigata. Price is \$7.50 postage paid - check made payable to Dave. Please allow two (2) weeks delivery time. Dave will advise via card if any extended delay is encountered due to any delay in ordering the paper on his end.

EXAMPLES OF OSHIGATA -



MEMBERSHIP WELFARE -

Word had come in that Andy Quirt of Minneapolis area has recently undergone very serious surgery and is presently on the recovery list. Andy is well known to many of us and perhaps a letter or a card would help brighten up those bed-ridden days of recovery. Apparently the situation was very serious but word has it that he is on the up-swing now. Drop him a line - he would no doubt appreciate the thought.

A WORD ABOUT OUR NEW MEMBER -

One of our new members announced in this issue, Mr. Bob Benson, promises to be of much importance to us. Bob is well known by the sword world since he is an accredited polisher - having studied in Japan for years during which time he received many top honors from polishing contests! Bob has offered to supply us with articles from time to time (the first of which is already in-hand), and it is obvious that he will be a true asset to our group.

WANTED ITEMS -

Attractive Japanese MATCHLOCKS wanted. Also seeking a wakizashi-size tsuba of shakudo with wave motif and the NAITO family crest (龍) in gold-tone relief; needed to complete a mounting set. Also am in need of tsuba, kogai, and/or menuki of the KURIKARA DRAGON in gold on a field of nanako shakudo. If any of the above are available, please contact: Alan Feldman

OSHIGATA READING -

Notice: I will be glad to read inscriptions free of charge and send the reading back with all the research material that I am able to find on the smith. No attempt will be made to qualify any signature as fake or genuine. Please make good clear oshigata of the entire tang. Send to: Paul Couch

FROM A LONDON PAPER -

A word of encouragement on values???

**£2,600 paid
for Japanese
sword guard**

**By Our Art Sales
Correspondent**

A MORNING and afternoon sale of the collection of Tsuba, Japanese sword guards, formed by the late Mr William Vincent Bradford, realised £79,962 at Sotheby's yesterday.

Mr Abdel Salam paid £2,600 for a Tsuba decorated with a cock, signed Ishiguro Masatsune, and £1,900 for a Tsuba decorated with the 36 poets.

The Daily Telegraph, Wednesday, May 21, 1975

NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE -

The next issue of the NEWSLETTER is due out around the 1st week of August. Please have any material intended for that issue to the editor no later than the end of July. Thank You.

RON HARTMANN

