

Interview with Sam Moledzki, 7<sup>th</sup> Dan WSKF (World Shito-ryu Karate-do Federation)  
by Brian Jarvis for Traditional Karate Magazine, UK.



Portrait of sensei Sam Moledzki by Alf McCabe

BJ: Sensei Moledzki, thank you for agreeing to this interview.

SM: Oh, it's my pleasure, sensei Jarvis. Thank you, for considering me for an interview again this year, for Britain's best martial arts magazine!

BJ: Last year you were in Tokyo for the 5<sup>th</sup> WSKF (World Shito-Ryu Karate-do Federation) world championships and during the festival you successfully passed your 7<sup>th</sup> Dan exam. Can you tell us a little about that experience?

SM: Sure, I guess I could, but then, I'd have to kill you, as the saying goes!  
No really, all joking aside, to be accorded the honour of grading for a 7<sup>th</sup> Dan level at the World Shito-kai Headquarter dojo in Japan, was indeed, something very unique and quite memorable.

I believe the main thing which made this an unforgettable experience, was the special privilege of being tested by some of the very most senior members of the WSKF. For example, the grading panel included the WSKF president, 9<sup>th</sup> Dan, Hisatomi Tokio sensei, and two more 9<sup>th</sup> Dan as well as, two 8<sup>th</sup> Dan. Overseeing everything was Mabuni Kenei Soke and Iwata Genzo sensei, the chief instructor at the honbu dojo.



(l-r) Alexei Repin, Russia Shito-kai and Sam Moledzki, dan testing candidates.



Sam Moledzki with WSKF President, Hisatomi Tokio sensei.



(Standing; Iwata Genzo sensei & Mabuni Kenei sensei on his right.)  
(Lower right corner, Murayama sensei)

Another memorable part of this unique experience was, taking my test in front of my most senior student, and, my own teacher Murayama Kunio sensei (now, WSKF, 8<sup>th</sup> Dan) and, watching them both, pass their grade. I really wanted to ensure I performed a good grading, to both encourage my student and of course, not to embarrass my sensei.

BJ: You are back in the UK, this time to teach kobudo. The last time you were here we spoke primarily about your forty year career in karate, did your kobudo practice commence around the same time or some time later?

SM: Firstly, please, let me again thank the Shito-kai Murayama U.K. Shushinkai Association for inviting me back to share a little of my martial art knowledge with you!



(l-r) Brian Jarvis, sensei Moledzki, Phillip Powell and Steve Bolland

This year, with over 100 enthusiastic kobudo participants at the seminar from the Shushinkai membership, and other invited groups from Wado Ryu and Genbukai, I am most grateful for the tremendous showing of support. You know, with such excellent instructors like Sensei Phillip Powell (Shushinkai Karate School Midlands) at <http://www.shushinkai-mids.com> Steve Bolland (Shushinkai North West) at <http://www.snwkarate.co.uk>; and yourself Brian san (Samurai Martial Arts) at <http://www.samurai-martialarts.co.uk>, it is indeed, a great pleasure to return to the U.K. and teach your group. I truly hope they enjoyed the seminar covering the weapons of the Bo, Tonfa and Nunchaku (Scheduled 3 hrs. was extended to 5 hrs.)

Now, to better answer the question, I always had a keen fascination with the Samurai sword at a very early stage of learning karate and, around 1968, my first sensei Kei Tsumura, introduced me to some basics of handling the Japanese sword. Then, when I was a blue belt I believe, he introduced some fundamentals of the Sai.



Sam Moledzki, Iaido.



Sam Moledzki at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre 1968, with Sai.

**BJ:** What weapons were you introduced to first and do you have a favourite discipline?

**SM:** My good friend Bill 'Pinky' Pinkerton and I used to put on demonstrations of karate and practical self-defence against an armed attacker, breaking boards, bricks etc., when we were just orange belts. We would incorporate some samurai sword techniques including defence against the samurai sword, that Tsumura sensei had shown us. Later, we began to include the weapons of kobudo.



Sam Moledzki breaking concrete slabs!

I, more or less, began showing a little more interest in the weapons and, Tsumura sensei would show me a few things when he had the time.

When Tsumura sensei returned from Japan as a 5<sup>th</sup> Dan in Shito Ryu Itosu Kai Karate and, 5<sup>th</sup> Dan in Ryukyu kobudo, certified by Grandmaster Ryusho Sakagami sensei, he officially began to teach kobudo to some of his more dedicated students in Canada, beginning in 1970.

He mainly taught the Bo, Sai, Tonfa, Nunchaku and Kama. I learned to basically appreciate all the weapons and, don't really have a favourite.

**BJ:** I understand you practice both Okinawan and Japanese kobudo. Can you name the various weapons you practice and the fundamental differing principles and philosophy between the two?

**SM:** Actually, the kobudo method I practice is that taught to Sakagami sensei by his first teacher, Moden Yabiku sensei, Mabuni Kenwa sensei, and later, his friend, and fellow martial artist, Taira Shinken sensei who was also a student of Yabiku sensei.



*Taira Shinken, Master of Okinawan Weaponry.*



(l-r) Taira Shinken & Moden Yabiku sensei.



(Grandmaster Ryusho Sakagami sensei)

I really learned most of my kobudo directly from Tsumura sensei and, later directly from Sakagami sensei while in training in Japan, and from a few other visiting Japanese instructors knowledgeable in various kobudo weapons. Also, over the years I've participated in many seminars including with senior sensei from the Kokusai Budoin such, Kai Kuniyuki sensei and Yamaguchi Katsuo sensei and others. Among the most famous kobudo experts, was Demura Fumio sensei, Yamazaki Kyoshi sensei and Patrick McCarthy Sensei to mention just a few. The main weapons I practice include the Bo, Sai, Tonfa, Nunchaku, and Kama.



**Kai sensei & Sam Moledzki.**



**(l-r) Yamaguchi Katsuo Sensei, Sam Moledzki**



**(l-r) Fumio Demura sensei and Sam Moledzki.**



Demura sensei sitting with Sai Sam Moledzki behind his right shoulder.

BJ: There are many karate schools that incorporate kobudo, particularly the Okinawan Kobudo and many schools that don't. What do you think are the advantages to practicing kobudo along side 'empty hand' disciplines?

SM: Personally, I feel kobudo weapons add a great deal to my traditional karate techniques. The advantages are as many as there are particular weapons. I'll try to just mention a few if you don't mind.

For example, the Bo, could help you understand more about the need to develop a clearer understanding of the use of longer distance while the Sai, may help you to apply the correct angle and direction of a technique at a closer range, the Tonfa, for instance, may possibly help in understanding about how to generate better hip torque, from the tanden or lower stomach, through the back, chest, shoulder, arm, and wrist action. The Nunchaku, can also help you to gain maximum power and speed by the use of proper hip rotation and the understanding of how to possibly overcome distance to an advantage, over your opponent. The Kama, I believe is able to help you develop a more controlled and secure hooking and scooping action.

Practicing with kobudo weapons assists in your shifting into and control of various offensive and defensive distances, to become a better martial artist.

Finally, I feel all the previous mentioned kobudo weapons help in developing a firmer grip strength and better wrist control. As well, they aid in developing & expanding the correct breathing methods, during a given encounter and help improves one's physical strength, balance and coordination.

BJ: You have trained with some legendary masters over the years. Who has influenced you most in kobudo terms?

SM: Without a doubt it would have to be Tsumura sensei and Sakagami sensei. Tsumura sensei taught me the basics and Sakagami sensei refined my understanding of them.

BJ: Can you share some of your experiences with these people?

SM: Sure, O.K. I clearly remember being taught various kobudo weapons techniques by Tsumura sensei and later, applying the techniques in a self defence format. Maybe like using live Kama blades for example. During one of these particular live practices, I managed to unfortunately, stick the end of a Kama blade into the top of my right knee trying to avoid a Bo

strike that was supposed to be aimed at my foot but, was applied too far up my leg. Tsumura sensei reminded me to be more careful next time and move my leg out of the way sooner.

I also remember practicing nunchaku techniques under the supervision of Sakagami sensei in Japan and watching in amazement as sensei manipulate them smoothly and decisively. He would then ask me to follow his directions and I inevitably would end up whacking myself in the head or elbows while sensei chuckled at my apparent ineptitude. By the way, I was eventually able to overcome my nervousness with a lot of encouragement from Sakagami sensei.



Sakagami Sensei.

BJ: I recently saw some old photographs of you performing kobudo, were you often asked to do demonstrations and can you tell us about any performances that stand out in your memory?

SM: Yes actually, as a matter of fact, I've been asked to demonstrate kobudo many times over the years. My original training partner, Bill Pinkerton and I, were the first to openly demonstrate techniques of the Sai, Tonfa, Bo, Kama and Nunchaku of kobudo to the Canadian general public at the 2nd Canadian National Black belt Championships in Moncton, New Brunswick, in 1975. I think this can be classified as something really special to remember.



(l-r) Sam Moledzki and Bill 'Pinky' Pinkerton.



(l-r) Sam Moledzki and Bill 'Pinky' Pinkerton.

By the way, the following year, we again demonstrated, at the 1976 Nationals in Oshawa, Ontario. We also demonstrated at a few other venues as well, throughout the remainder of the '70s.

At the 1986 Canadian National Karate Championships held in Toronto, my newest kobudo partner, Eric Pick and I demonstrated a full range of kobudo weapons on the Saturday and then, the next day I demonstrate the art of Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido with the help of my private Iaido student, Mr, Rob Brushett. (Oh, by the way, for your information, Rob had been studying Muay Thai boxing in Thailand for a while and, in exchange for teaching him the Iaido, he taught me a little about Muay Thai over a 2 ½ years period)



Sam Moledzki & Eric Pick



Sam Moledzki & Eric Pick, 1986 Nationals

That particular demonstration was very memorable because it was performed in front of a very special guest from Japan, sensei Toshiro I think was his name, who just happened to be an 8<sup>th</sup> Dan karate and kobudo, as well as 8<sup>th</sup> Dan in Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido.

During the '90s, I gave kobudo seminars for different groups including the YKKF Federation headed by sensei Ron Yamanaka and for various provincial associations.

I was very privileged to demonstrate kobudo in Monterrey, Mexico with my son Michael, in 1993. That was really a very memorable, special treat for me as it was at Murayama sensei's 10th Anniversary Copa Murayama Championships, and his special guest was Iwata Genzo sensei from Japan.

I still enjoy teaching kobudo at seminars for a few groups and associations across the country and overseas, such as your Shushinkai association here in the U.K



Sam Moledzki & Michael Moledzki.



(l-r) Bo applications with host, sensei Phillip Powell & Sam Moledzki in Leominster, England

BJ: You recently retired from your job as draughtsmen with the Toronto Metro System and also moved house. Your life has cleared changed a great deal lately. What do you plan to do with your 'extra' time?

SM: Yes, I finally did retire from the Toronto Transit Commission after 32 plus years

of service and, thank you for mentioning that. I can now, finally dedicate the rest of my time specifically to my Shito-kai Murayama Canada Karate group and future WSKF business, as I was appointed a director, at the 5<sup>th</sup> WSKF World congress in Japan. Plus, now I'll have more time to further practice and develop the other martial arts of Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu Iaido, Ryukyu Kobudo, Shindo Muso Ryu Jodo, and Japanese Kendo, that I've received instruction in.

Please allow me to conclude this interview by thanking you again, very much Brian san, for giving me this opportunity to share some of my personal Martial Arts experiences with you.

*The above interview was conducted during Moledzki Sensei's UK Summer Kobudo Course . The course attracted approximately 100 students from several schools, all eager to begin their kobudo journey with Sensei Moledzki for reasons apparent from reading the above interview. Moledzki Sensei has an engaging manner, traditional in many ways yet he manages to maintain a friendly and relaxed feel to his teaching. There was a great deal to pack into the three hours as Sensei was asked to introduce Bo, Tonfa and Nunchaku. Perhaps a tall order considering the time constraints and Moledzki Sensei is not one to skimp on the basics! However, having secured another hour or two in the venue, we managed to cover a number of basic ippon kumite drills using the Bo, a Nunchaku kihon kata and Tonfa kihon kata. It was, on reflection, an 'information over-load to say the least' but with Sensei's expert teaching skills everyone was able to take away something from the seminars regardless of their rank or age. In closing, I must thank Sensei Phillip Powell for organising and coordinating the whole event, and to Moledzki Sensei for his time and knowledge.*