



ITEM# UJKA304

A KUNITSUNA 'LIVE CUTTING TEST' KATANA

SIGNED WITH GOLD INLAY, EARLY EDO PERIOD (KEIAN ERA, 1648~1652)

Swordsmith:	<i>Echizen Ju Sagami no Kami Fujiwara Kunitsuna (1st gen., Fujishiro: chu-sakū)</i>
Type of Steel:	<i>Jigane oroshi kore o utsu</i>
Gold inlay (test):	<i>Tameshiba fukui keijin-giri tachi-kesa oyobi waki(ge) fukan Sen'a</i>
Measurements:	Length: 76.2cm (ubu) Curvature: 1.97cm Moto-haba: 3.0cm
Jihada:	<i>Dark jigane with a mix of itame-hada with masame-hada and shirake utsuri</i>
Hamon:	<i>Notare and ko-gunome based on suguha with teeth-like ashi</i>
Certificate #1:	NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon (a sword Especially Worthy of Conservation)
Certificates #2-4:	NTHK-NPO Kanteisho (tsuba, fuchi-kashira and koshirae designated Authentic)
Included:	Shirasaya, Edo koshirae, bags, stand, kit, DVD, printed description

SOLD

This is a long and most intense katana that was crafted by *Kunitsuna* in the burgeoning castle town of *Echizen* during the mid-1600s. An extremely rare *tameshigiri tachi-kesa* cutting test was performed with this sword slicing diagonally through the standing body of a *live convicted criminal*. It later severed the same body across the chest in one stroke by way of the *wakige* cut.

The raw steel of this sword was harvested by *Kunitsuna* himself, a process called *oroshigane*. The *saya* is lacquered in a beautiful *tsugaru* technique with a powerful tiger and dragon *tsuba* that echoes the intensity of this piece. This is one seriously rare and collectible samurai sword.

Saki-kasane: 4.4mm [^]

Moto-kasane: 6.9mm

Kissaki: 3.1cm

Saki-haba: 1.8cm

Nagasa: 76.2cm

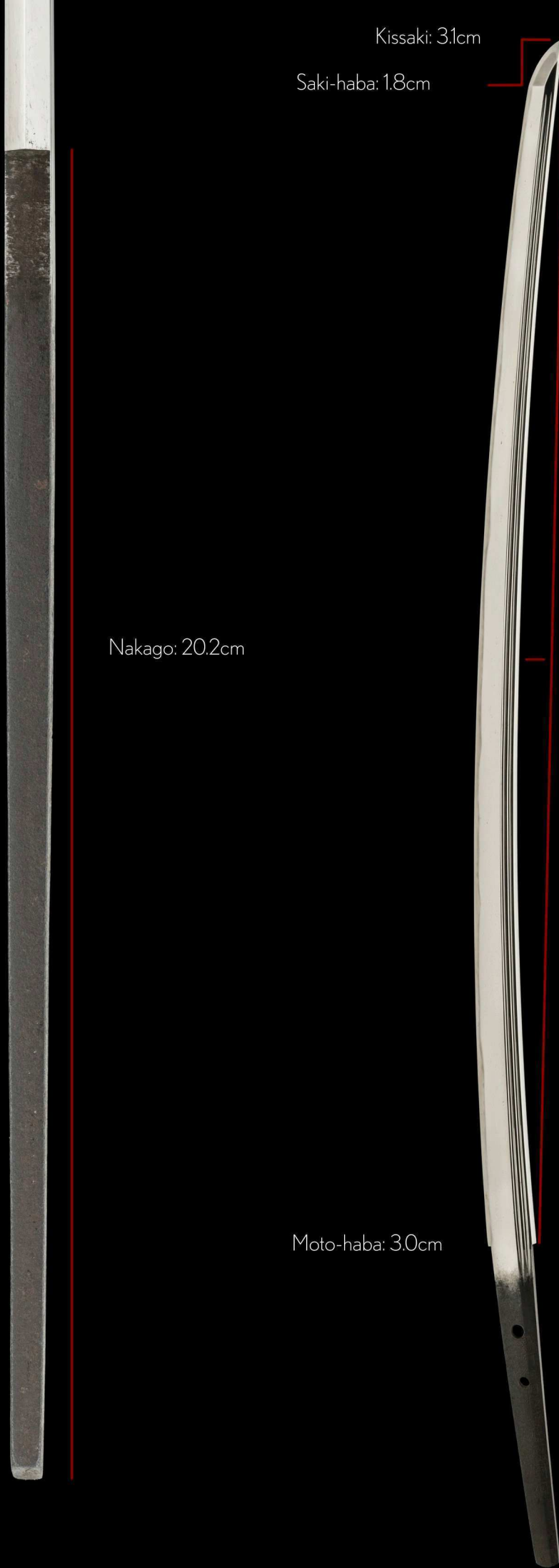
Nakago: 20.2cm

Sori: 1.97cm

Omosa: 770g

Moto-haba: 3.0cm

Mekugi-ana: 2



First generation *Kunitsuna* of the *Echizen-Shimosaka school* produced his best work during the *Keian era* (1648~1652).

The overall curviness of this sword speaks to this time frame. Most swords made later during the *Kanbun era* (1661~1673) would show less curvature.



Location: *Echizen province*

Title: *Sagami no Kami* (Lord of Sagami province)

Clan: *Fujiwara*

Swordsmith: *Kunitsuna* (first generation)

This katana was forged by first generation *Kunitsuna* of the *Fujiwara* clan with title of *Sagami no Kami* while living in Echizen province.



Echi

zen

Ju

Saga

mi (no)

Kami

Fuji

wara

Kuni

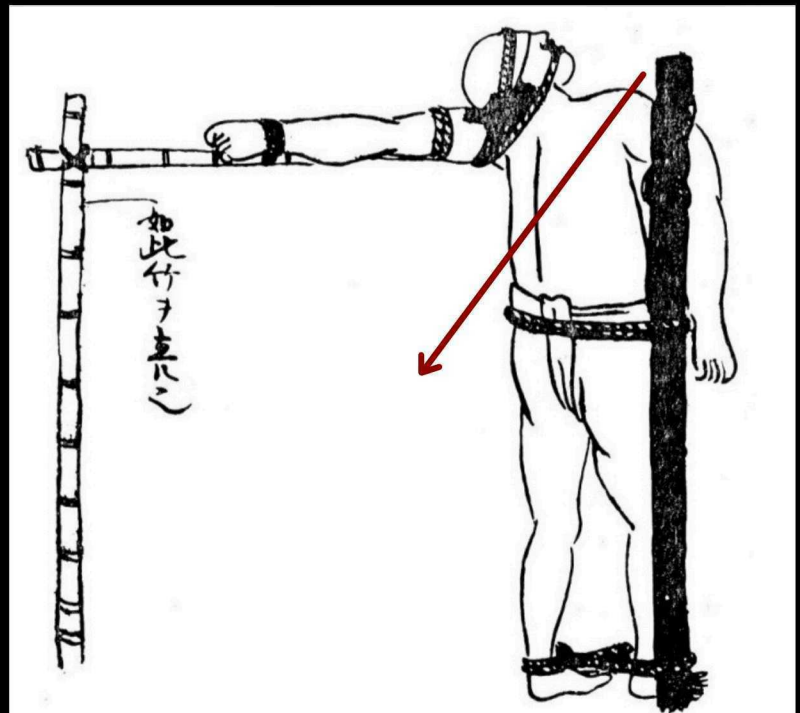
tsuna

Kinzogan-mei (gold inlay) reads:

越前住相模守藤原国綱・地鉄下打之
*Tameshiba fuki keijin-giri tachi-kesa
oyobi waki(ge) fukan Sen'a*

Translation:

Sen'a tested this blade on a live criminal and severed through his body via the standing *kesa* (diagonal across the body) and then *waki(ge)* (horizontally across the chest) in single strokes.



tachi-kesa (standing kesa"): *Kesa* cut on a living felon. The picture above shows a *tachi-kesa* fixation for an *o-kesa* cut going from the right shoulder diagonally down to the left side of the body as presented in the *Yamano-ryu ryodan no maki*.

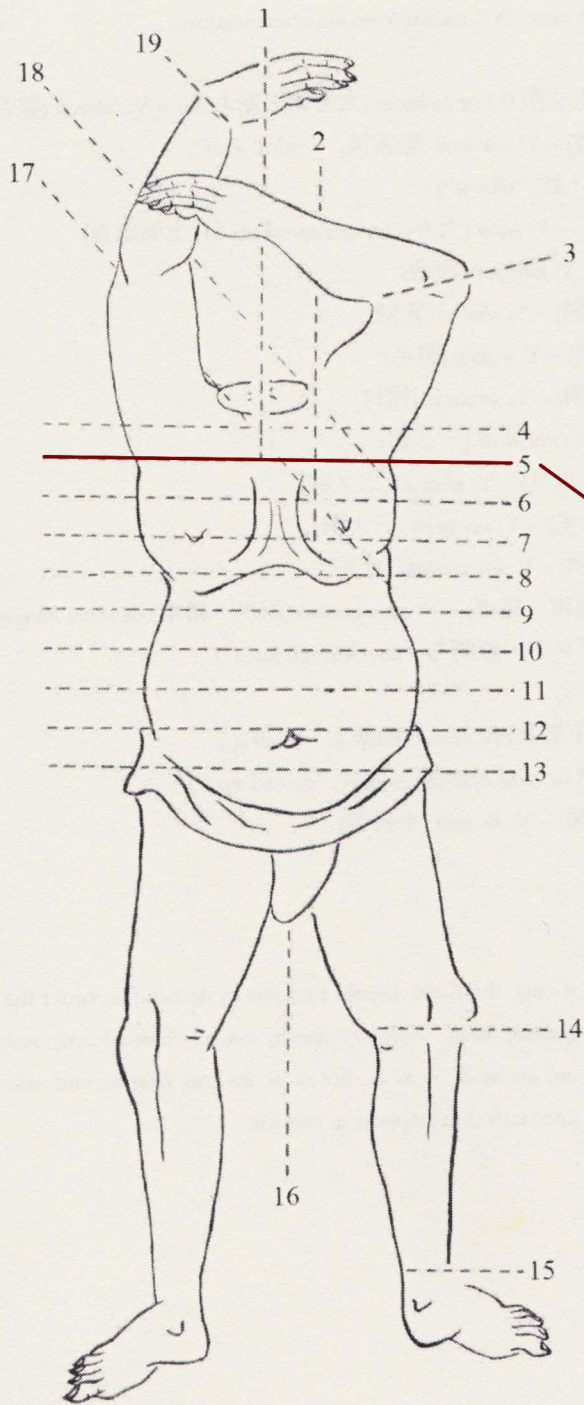
Here the body is tightly tied to a thick pole with the left hand stretched out and tied to another pole. In addition, the head is tied to the left shoulder so that it does not interfere with the cut.

We also know records which describe a variant with the felon's left foot buried in the ground well above

TAMESHIGIRI

The History and Development of
Japanese Sword Testing by Markus Sesko

試刃刑人斬立架装及脛呀不減泉阿



After the *tachi-kesa* was completed, the body would have been untied and placed on a *dotan* (earth mound) raising it off the ground (as pictured below).

A further *tameshigiri* test cut known as *wakige* was then performed on the deceased criminal as documented in the gold inlay.

Wakige translates to 'armpit hair' as the cut severed the body horizontally in one clean stroke at number 5 upper-torso position on this diagram.

The test cutter is *Sen'a* which, according to Markus Sesko, has no records. Interestingly, one strong lead is the swordsmith *Moritoshi*, younger brother of the famous shinshinto smith *Kurihara Nobuhide* who signed swords using the *Sen'a* name. *Moritoshi* was active from 1865-1868.

Furthermore, the gold inlay rounded *reisho* type cleric script written on the *nakago* is a match for the time period that *Moritoshi* was alive.



An official *shinnin-tameshi* (standard cutting test) being performed.

Images from Markus Sesko's book 'TAMESHIGIRI', The History and Development of Japanese Sword Testing.



Jigane

oroshi

kore o

utsu

Translation:

This katana was forged using *oroshigane* steel.

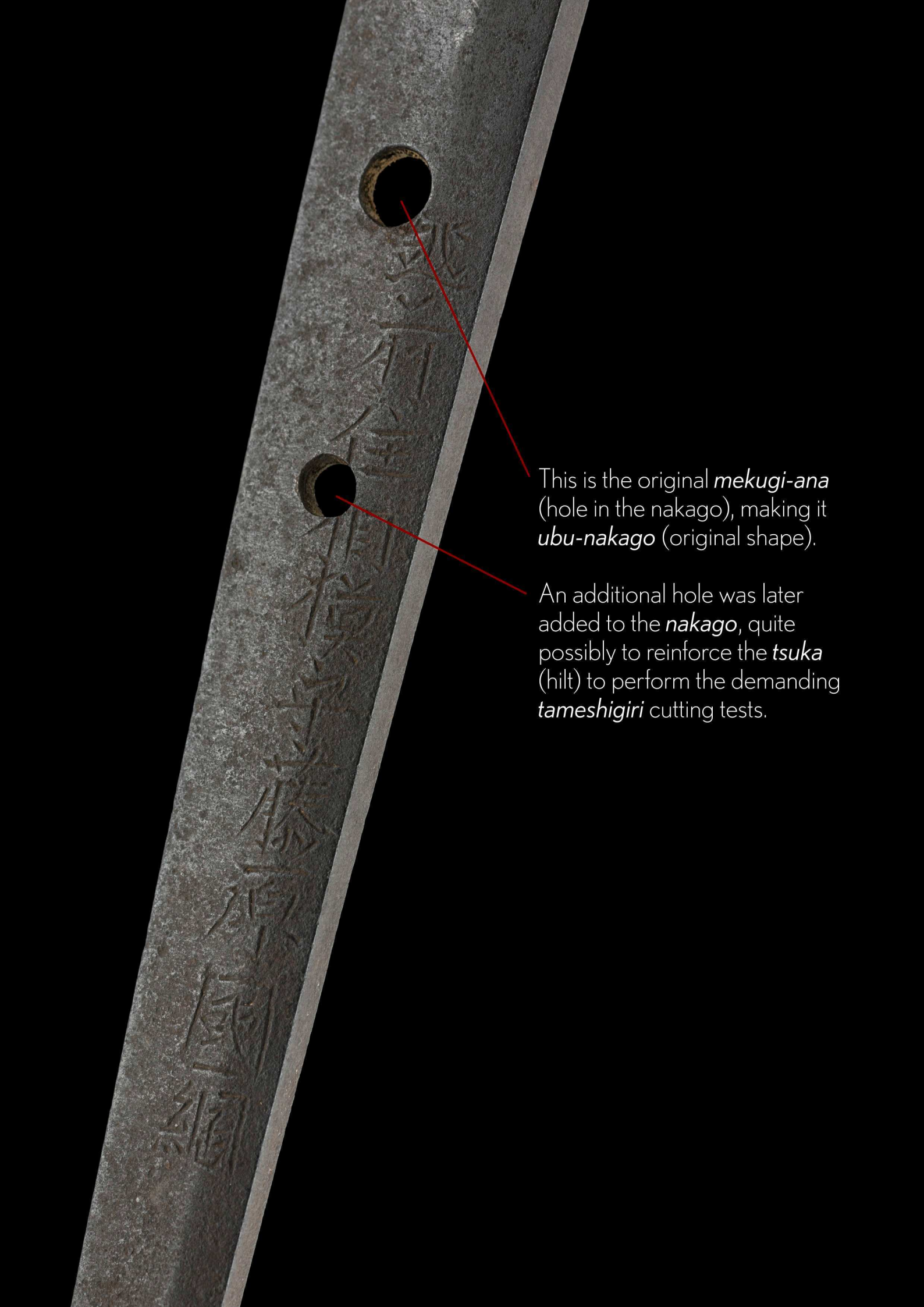
About *oroshigane*:

Tamahagane is the raw steel that a swordsmith uses to craft a Japanese sword. It is traditionally made from *satetsu* (iron sand) and carefully cooked in a furnace called a *tatara*.

Oroshigane is a special variation of *tamahagane* that is produced by the swordsmith himself.

Small pieces of tamahagane and other steels, such as steel from old nails or sword blades, are heated in a small-scale *tatara* outside of the forge. This way the smith controls the purity and carbon content to get exactly the steel he wants.

Kunitsuna would have been proud of this accomplishment. He thus chiseled the *nakago* with the characters of this rare forging process.

A close-up photograph of a sword's nakago (tang) against a black background. The metal is dark and shows signs of age. Two circular holes are visible, one above the other. Red lines point from the text to these holes. The surface is covered in raised Japanese characters. The top hole is the original mekugi-ana, and the bottom hole is a later addition.

This is the original *mekugi-ana* (hole in the nakago), making it *ubu-nakago* (original shape).

An additional hole was later added to the *nakago*, quite possibly to reinforce the *tsuka* (hilt) to perform the demanding *tameshigiri* cutting tests.

30201803

No 1008635



試刃吹刑人斬立装袋及腰咄不滅泉阿

公益財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協会



平成三十年六月十三日

右は當協會に於て審査の結果特別保存刀剣と鑑定しこれを証する

一刀銘

越前住相模守藤原国綱
地鉄下打之

(金象嵌)試刃吹刑人斬立装袋及脇口不滅泉阿

長二尺五寸一分半

鑑定書

東京都教育委員会
第 22282 号
昭和26年 3 月 31日

NBTHK Tokubetsu Hozon Certificate of Designation

A sword designated as *Especially Worthy of Conservation* by the Society for the Preservation of the Japan Art Sword

Issued in the 30th year of Heisei (2018), June 13th

One, Katana

Echizen-Ju Sagami no Kami Fujiwara Kunitsuna

Jigare orishige kore o utsu

(Kinzogan-mei) Tameshiba fuki keijin-giri tachi-kesa oyobi waki [] fukan Sen'a

Nagasa (length)

2-shaku 5-sun 1-bu han (76.2cm)

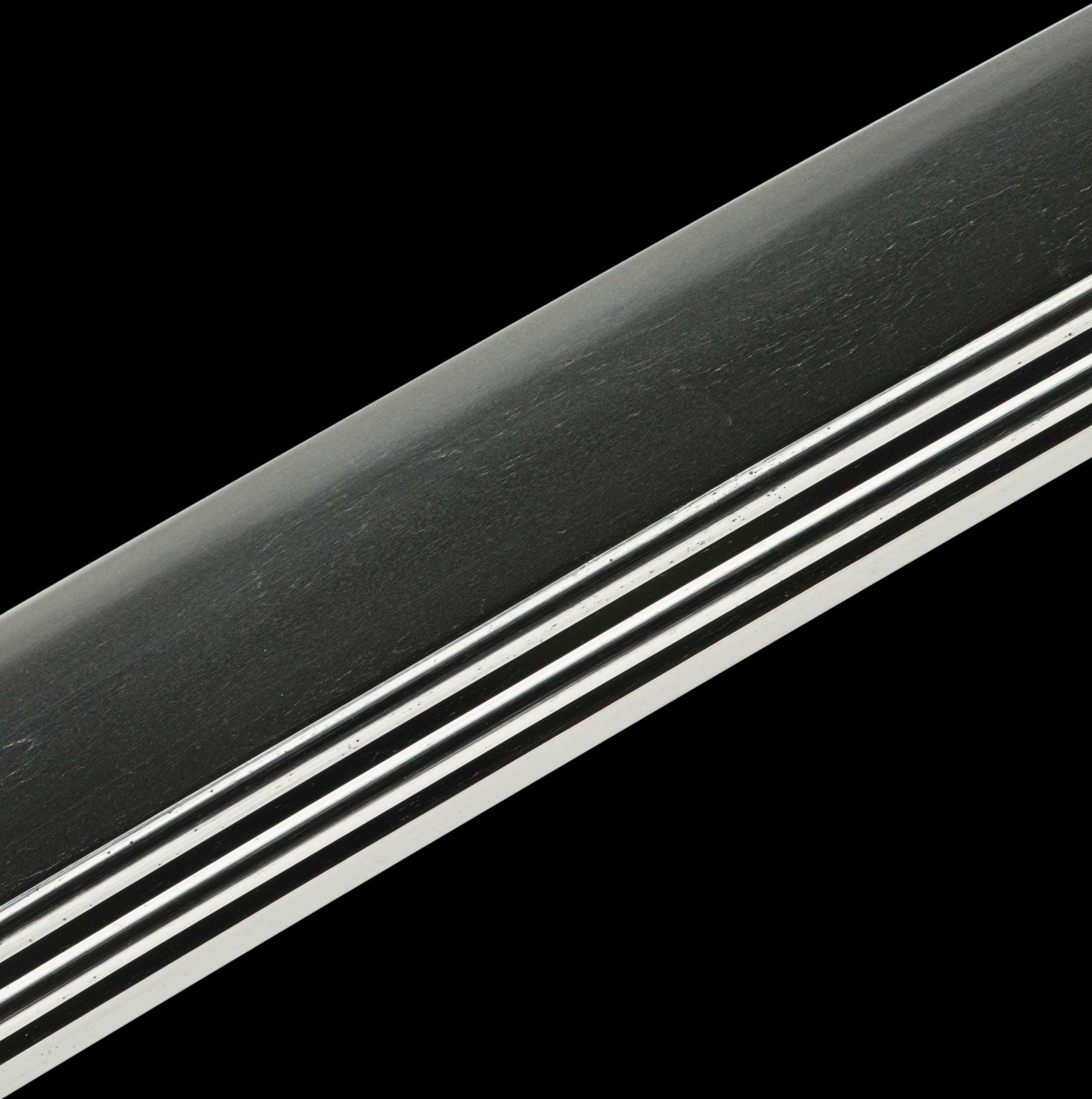
Nihon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai
(NBTHK)



Two beautifully carved full-length parallel grooves known as *futatsuji-bi* gives this samurai sword a distinctive flair. Grooves help lighten the blade, useful for a long curvy katana.


The *jigane* (surface steel) exudes a dark, rather mysterious hue. This is characteristic of swords made in the Echizen region.

The *jihada* (steel skin) pattern is a mix of *masame-hada* (straight grain) and *itame-hada* (wood grain).



A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a curved blade, likely a Japanese sword, set against a black background. The blade is illuminated from the side, highlighting its metallic texture and the hamon (temper line) along its edge. The hamon is a dark, wavy line that runs along the blade's length. From this hamon, numerous small, sharp protrusions called ashi (legs) extend outwards, resembling the teeth of a saw. The blade is curved, and the lighting creates a bright highlight along the edge, emphasizing its sharpness and the intricate details of the hamon and ashi.

Numerous *ashi* (legs) extend from *hamon* like the teeth of a saw.

A close-up, low-angle shot of a sword blade, likely a katana, set against a dark background. The blade is illuminated from the right, highlighting its curved edge and the intricate patterns of the hamon (the edge of the blade). A red line points from the text 'shirake utsuri' to a specific area on the blade's surface. The blade's surface shows a mix of dark, polished metal and lighter, textured areas, characteristic of traditional Japanese sword-making techniques.

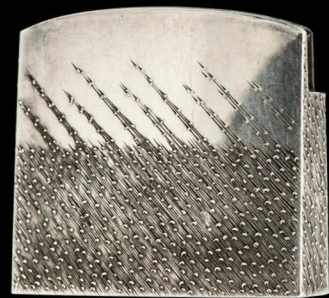
shirake utsuri

The *hamon* is based on *suguha* with parts that feature a weaving *notare*. *Shirake utsuri* (shadow hamon) appears in areas of the blade.

There is a very raw intensity pulsing through this sword.



Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)

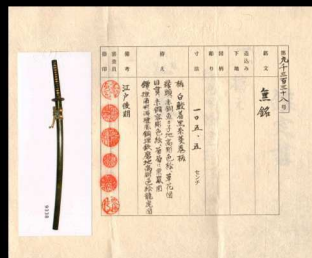


a beautiful silver *yujo-habaki*
with strong slanted file marks.

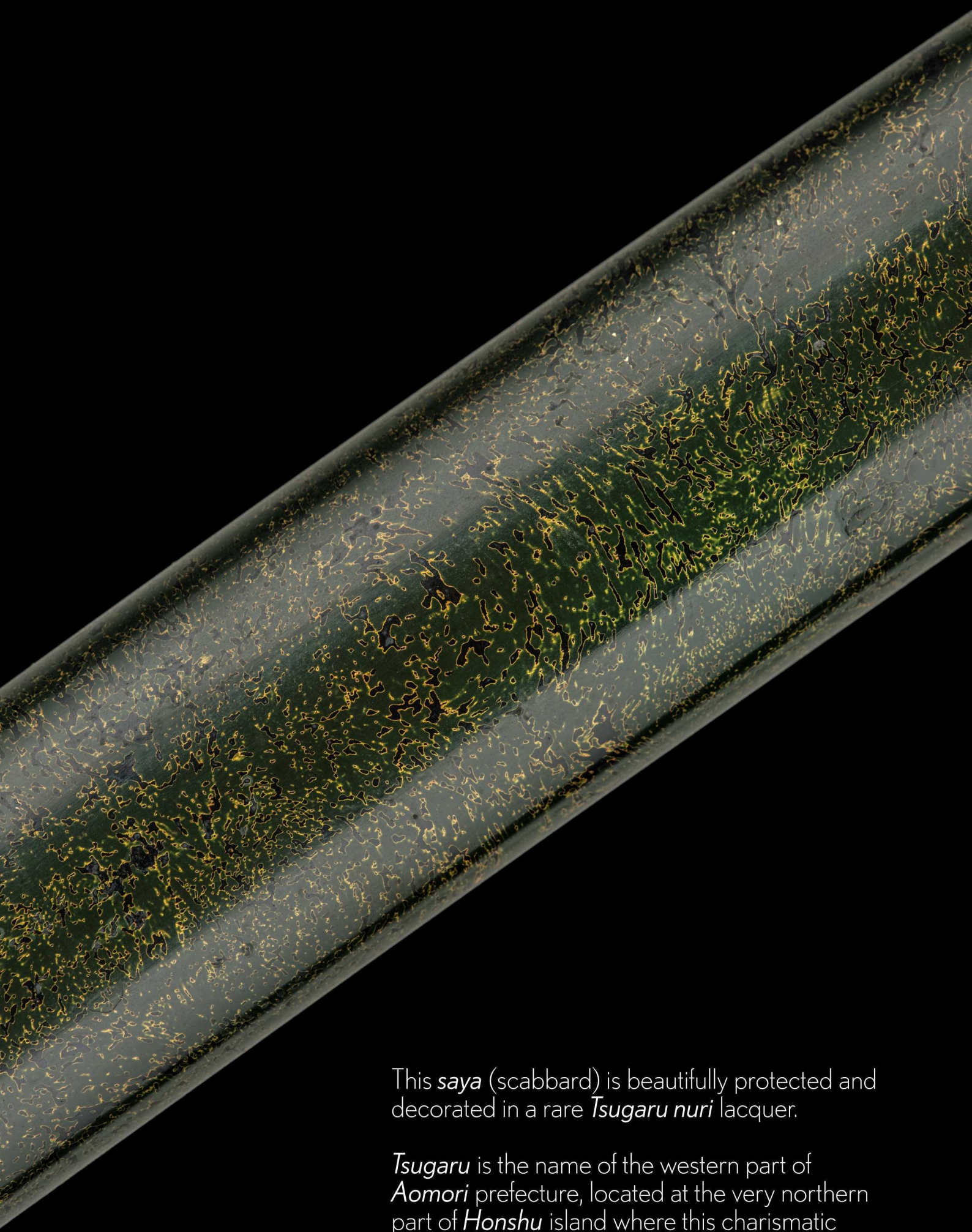
*Midori-iro Tsugaru-nuri-saya
uchigatana-koshirae*
(綠色津輕塗鞘打刀拵え)

*Uchigatana-koshirae with saya
in green Tsugaru lacquer*

Crafted during the
Late Edo period
(1780~1868)



*NTHK-NPO Kanteisho
Certificate of Authenticity*



This *saya* (scabbard) is beautifully protected and decorated in a rare *Tsugaru nuri* lacquer.

Tsugaru is the name of the western part of *Aomori* prefecture, located at the very northern part of *Honshu* island where this charismatic lacquer technique originates in the 17th century.



An absolutely awesome iron tsuba depicting a motif of a roaring tiger and a snarling dragon. This guard has been attributed to *Edo Tsuchiya Masachika* who worked in the late Edo period. NTHK-NPO Kanteisho certification.





(reverse side)

Note the powerful curling waves claw deeply into the iron. This artwork is reminiscent of the famous *ukiyo-e* print *Great Wave off Kanagawa* by *Hokusai*.





An elegant motif of paulownia flowers is depicted on the *fuchi-kashira*.

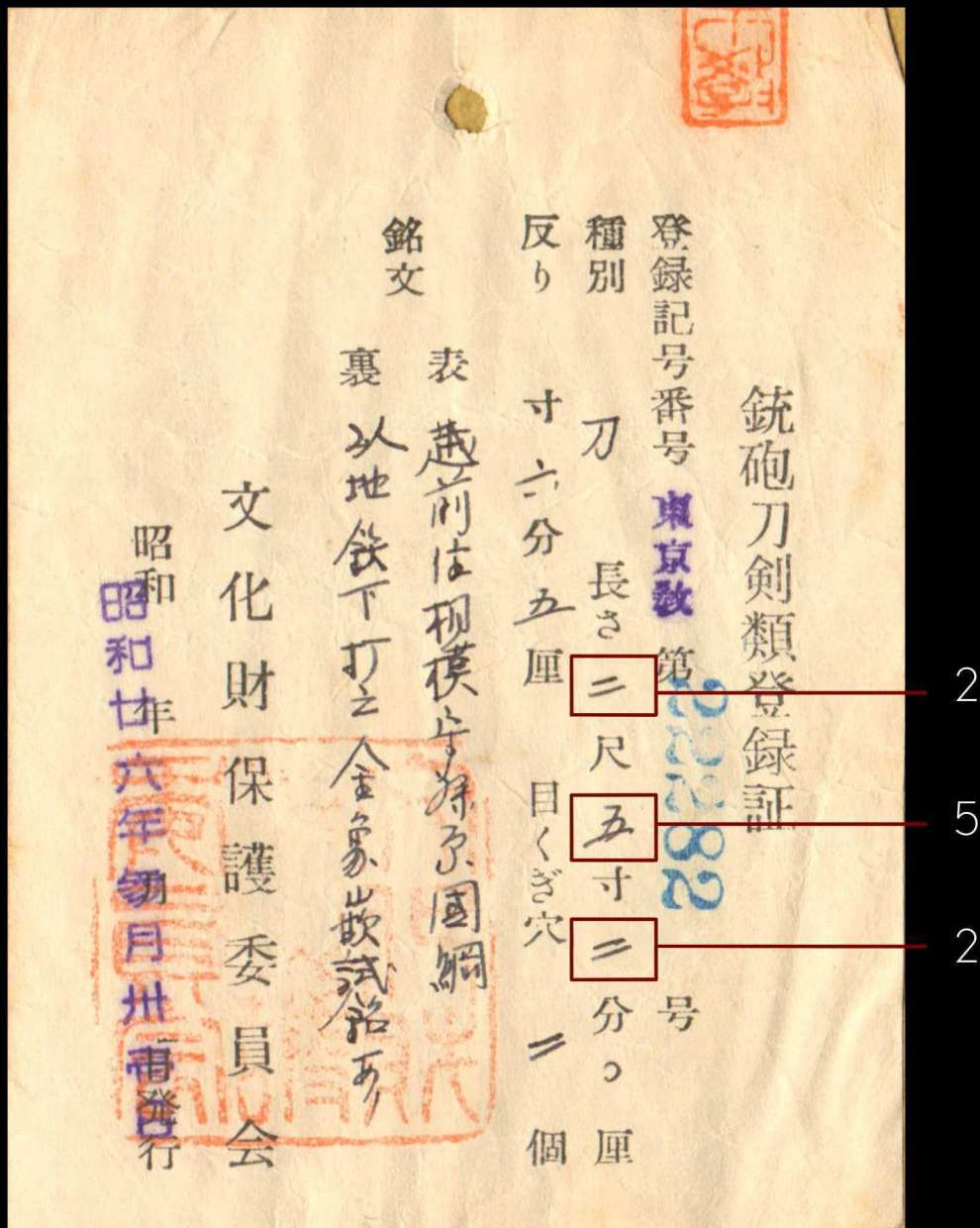
The paulownia flower has been seen on samurai art for centuries. Today it is the crest of the office of prime minister and also serves as the emblem of the cabinet and the government.





These fantastically unique menuki depict a theme of "squirrels amongst grapes". Originally seen on paintings in China, its meaning can be metaphorically translated as "abundance in fortune and offspring".





This is the original *torokusho* (registration card) for the Kunitsuna katana. The card was registered in the 26th year of Showa (March 31, 1951) in Tokyo.

This is significant as 1951 was the very first year that swords were formally registered in Japan. Many former Daimyo families were invited to submit their collections suggesting this blade was once held by a prominent family.

Note that the traditional Japanese length measurements of *shaku*, *sun* and *bu* are handwritten for the units. One *shaku* is ~30.3cm, a *sun* is ~3.03cm and a *bu* is ~0.30cm.

This sword measures 2-*shaku* (2 x 30.3cm) + 5-*bu* (5 x 3.03cm) + 2-*bu* (2 x 0.30cm)

Adding together: 60.6cm + 15.15cm + 0.6cm = ~76.35cm

