



ITEM# UJTA054

## A SHODAI NOBUKUNI TANTÔ TACHI

SIGNED, NAMBOKUCHÔ PERIOD (CIRCA ENBUN~JÔJI ERAS 1356~1368)

- Swordsmith:** *Nobukuni* (shodai, first generation, almost ubu nakago)  
**Location:** *Yamashiro* (Kyôto)  
**Measurements:** **Length:** 28.7cm    **Curvature:** 0.2cm    **Moto-haba:** 2.75cm  
**Jihada:** *Itame mixed with mokume, standing-out nagare-hada, ji-nie, chikei, and nie-utsuri*  
**Hamon:** *Ko-nie-laden and gently undulating notare-chô with a wide, bright, and clear nioiguchi that is mixed with some gunome, ko-ashi, many kinsuji and sunagashi, with hotsure in places*  
**Certificate 1:** **55th NBTHK Jûyô Tôken** (a sword designated as *Profound and Important*)  
**Certificate 2-4:** **NTHK-NPO Kanteisho** (*koshirae, kozuka and menuki designated as Authentic*)  
**Fujishiro:** **Jôjô-saku** (ranked as a highly superior swordsmith)  
**Included:** Shirasaya, Edo-period *aikuchi koshirae*, fabric bags, stand, kit, description

**SOLD**

Unique Japan is pleased to introduce a museum-worthy *tantô* by *shodai* (first generation) *Nobukuni*, one of the preeminent swordsmiths of the *Nambokuchô* period (mid-1300s) who led to the establishment of the *Sôshû* tradition within *Kyôto*. This *tantô* is an important reference piece that unifies the *Nambokuchô* period in terms of its wide commanding shape and *horimono*, *Ryôkai* lineage via its *nagare-hada* within the *Rai* school and eye-catching *Sôshû* qualities with *kinsuji* and *sunagashi* by way of his *sensei Sadamune*. The sword comes with a beautiful *aikuchi-koshirae* from the late Edo period that features *menuki* depicting *nezumi* (mouse/rat) symbolizing intelligence, creativity and effective leadership. This is true samurai history in your hands.

Moto-kasane: 5.4mm

Omosa: 170g

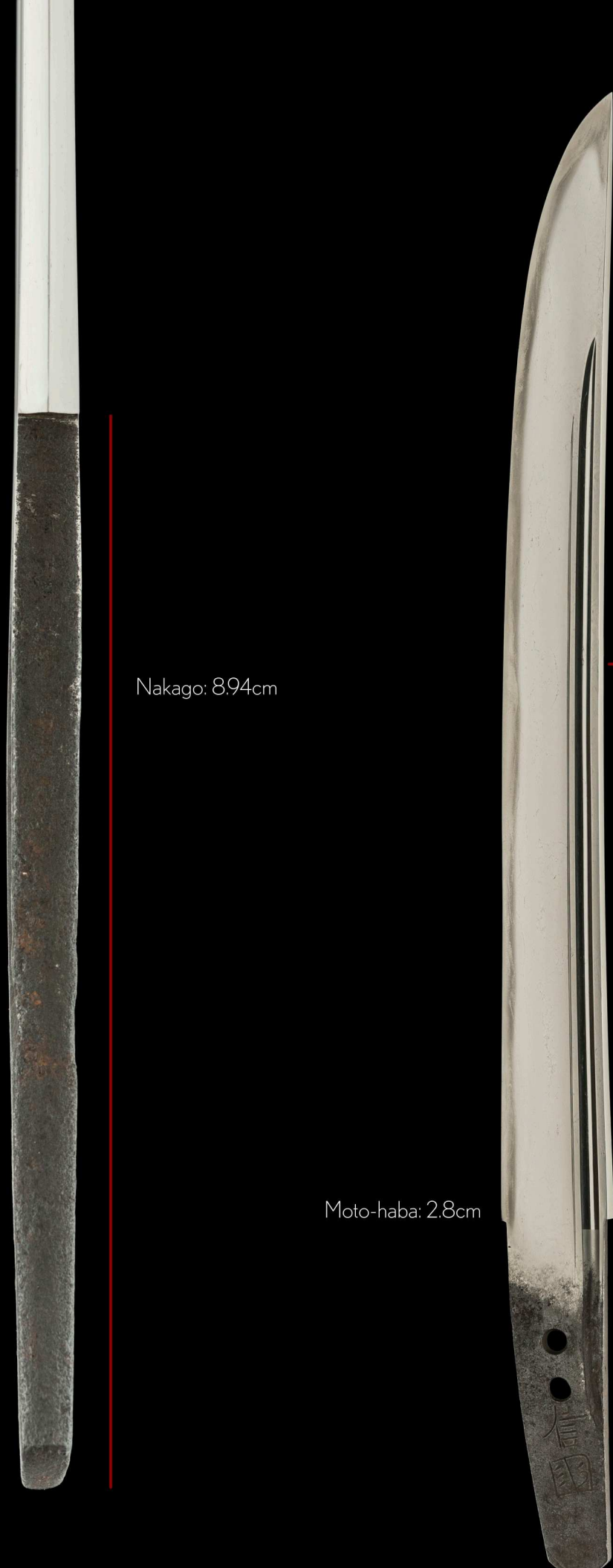
Nakago: 8.94cm

Moto-haba: 2.8cm

Nagasa: 28.7cm

Sori: 0.20cm

Mekugi-ana: 2



According to period sword texts, the *shodai* (first generation) *Nobukuni* was either the son, grandson or even great-grandson of *Ryôkai* of the prestigious *Rai* school. Dated works include the third year of *Enbun* era (1358), the first year of *Kôan* era (1361), and the fifth year of *Jôji* (1366).

Nobukuni is listed as one of the “*Three Students of Sadamune*,” a national treasure swordsmith who was the student and adopted son of the great *Masamune*.

Nobukuni is rated *jôjô-saku*, a highly superior swordsmith and master engraver (*horimono*) whose works have been certified *Juyô Bunkazai* - an Important Cultural property of Japan - only one level away from *kokuhô* (National Treasure).

As written on the NBTHK white paper for this sword:

Regardless of being hardened in *suguha* or *midareba*, the *kitae* (forging) always shows some *nagare* (running grain). Thus, from a stylistic point of view, we can accept the tradition that *Nobukuni* descended from the *Ryôkai* lineage...and that his works display a direct stylistic connection to *Sadamune*.

This is a signed *tantô* by the first generation Nobukuni that displays the typical large *Enbun-Jôji* shape - *hira-zukuri*, *iorimune*, wide *mihaba*, *sunnobi*, thin *kasane*, shallow *sori*. The *kitae* is an *itame* that is mixed with *mokume*, that tends to a rather standing-out *nagare* along the *ha*, and that features plenty of fine *ji-nie*, *chikei*, and a *nie-utsuri*.

The *hamon* is a *ko-nie*-laden and gently undulating *notare-chô* with a wide, bright, and clear *nioiguchi* that is mixed with some *gunome*, *ko-ashi*, several *kinsuji* and *sunagashi*, and with *hotsure* in places. The *ha* shows an abundance of *hataraki* (activity) and is rich in variety and *horimono* (engraving) that is typical of Nobukuni.

Thus, we have here a masterwork that truly reflects all the stylistic highlights of the first generation Nobukuni.



Location: *Yamashiro* (resident of Kyôto)  
Swordsmith: *Nobukuni* (first generation)

*ubu-nakago* (near original shaped tang)  
*katte-sagari-yasurime* (sloping file marks)

original *mekugi-ana* (hole)

信 (Nobu)

国 (kuni)

The characters of *Nobu* and *Kuni*,  
translate to "trust in country."



信 (*Nobu*, trust)

國 (*Kuni*, country)



(*ura*, reverse)

21200955

重要第一三八八號

指定書


一 短刀銘 信国(初代) 一口

法量 長さ三八・七種 反り〇三種  
 形状 平造 庵棟 身幅広く寸延か 重ね薄め 反り浅くつく  
 鍛 板目に交互じり刃寄り流れて肌立ちこころとなり地沸細かに  
 よくつき地景へ沸映り立つ  
 刃文 浅いたれを基調に交互目こころ交じり小足入り句深く小沸よく  
 つき金筋・砂流しかり処々ほつれ句口明るく冴える  
 帽子 表は直ぐ裏は乱れこころ共にさかん掃きかけ先小丸に返る  
 彫物 表は刀樋に漆樋を掻き流し裏は刀樋の下半は細く  
 菅蒲樋風となり掻き流す  
 茎 殆ど生ぶ鏡身勝手下かり目釘孔三

右者當協會に於て審査の結果  
 重要刀劍に指定する

平成三年十月廿日

財団法人日本美術刀劍保存協會  
 會長 佐々淳行



Jûyô Certificate No. 12988  
 Shiteisho (指定書) Certificate of Designation  
 Tantô mumei: Nobukuni (信国) Shodai (初代)

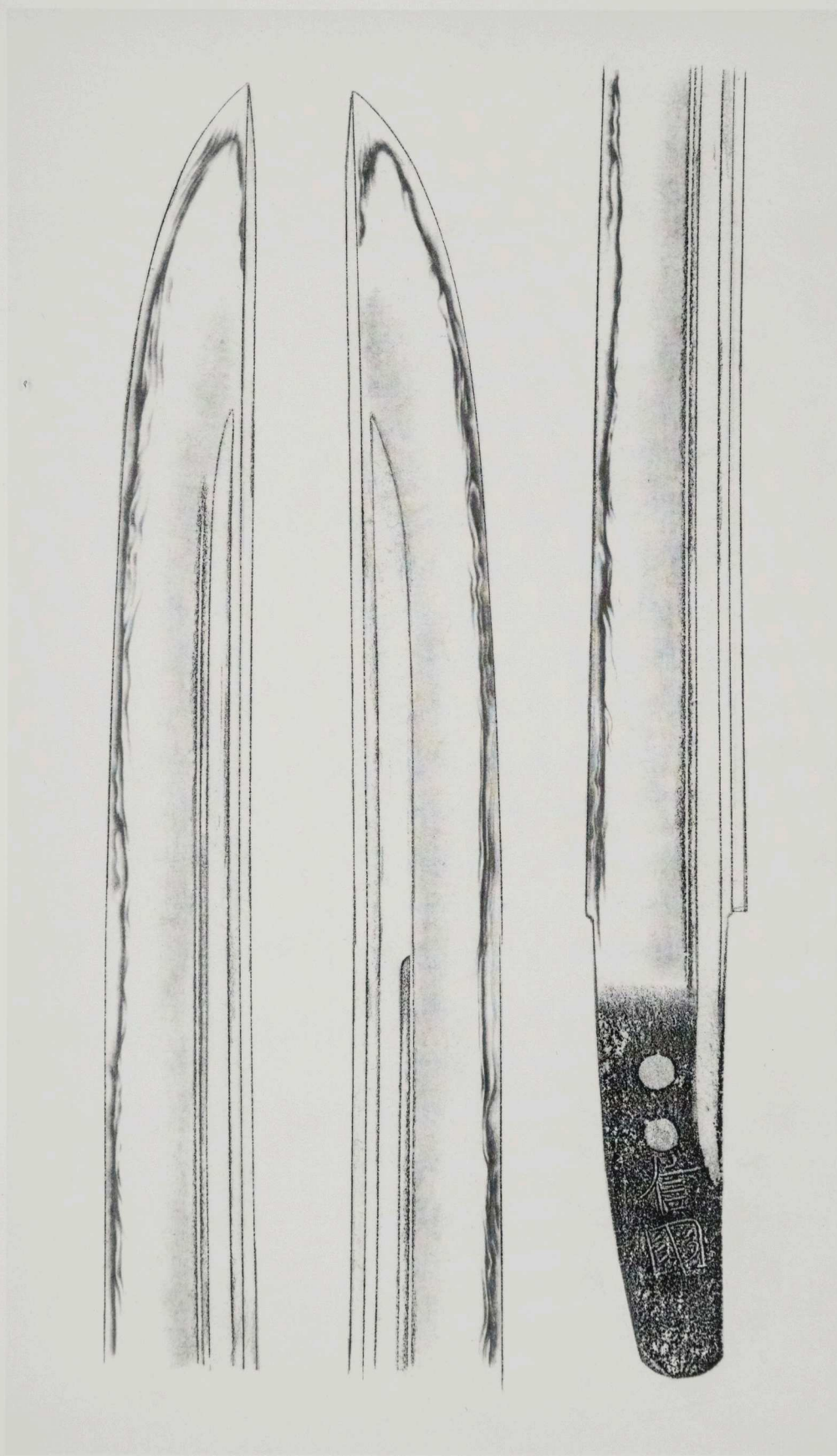
Measurements  
 nagasa 28.7 cm, sori 0.2 cm

**Description**  
**Keijo:** hira-zukuri, iori-mune, wide mihaba, sunnobi, thin kasane, shallow sori  
**Kitae:** itame that is mixed with mokume, that tends to a rather standing-out nagare along the ha, and that features plenty of fine ji-nie, chikei, and a nie-utsuri  
**Hamon:** ko-nie-laden and gently undulating notare-chô with a wide, bright, and clear nioiguchi that is mixed with some gunome, ko-ashi, many kinsuji and sunagashi, and with hotsure in places  
**Bôshi:** on the omote side sugu, on the ura side with some midare, both sides feature much hakikake and a ko-maru-kaeri  
**Horimono:** on the omote side a katana-hi with soebi that runs as kaki-nagashi into the tang, on the ura side a katana-hi that features along its bottom half a shôbu-hi-like element and that runs as kaki-nagashi into the tang as well  
**Nakago:** almost ubu, katte-sagari yasurime, two mekugi-ana

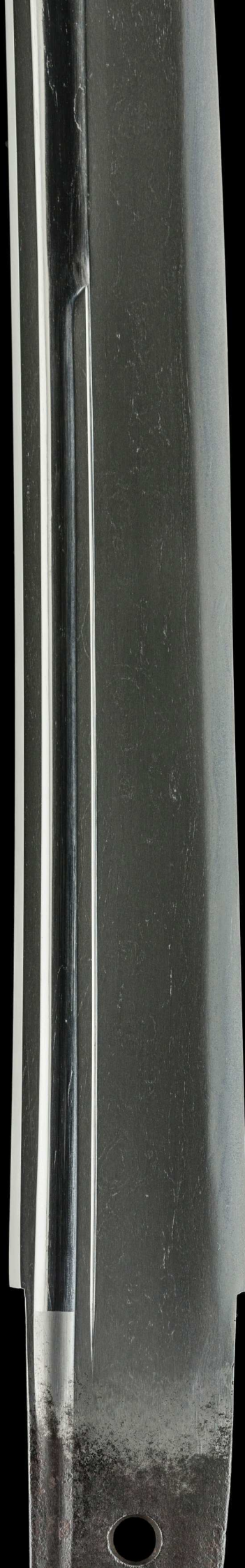
According to the result of the shinsa committee of our society we judged this work as authentic and rate it as jûyô-tôken.

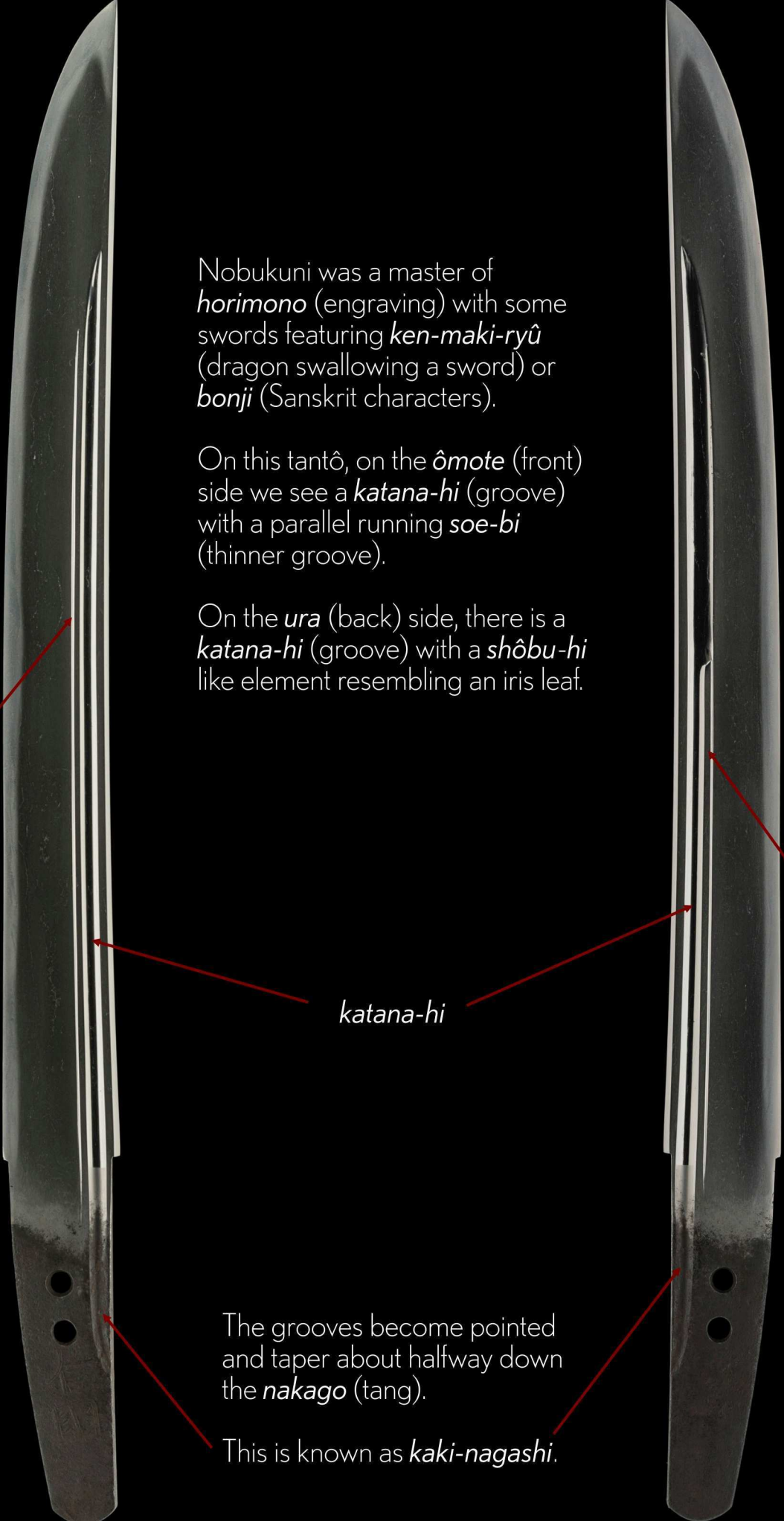
October 16, 2009  
 [Foundation] Nihon Bijutsu Tôken Hozon Kyôkai, NBTHK

短刀 銘 信国(初代)









Nobukuni was a master of *horimono* (engraving) with some swords featuring *ken-maki-ryû* (dragon swallowing a sword) or *bonji* (Sanskrit characters).

On this tantô, on the *ômete* (front) side we see a *katana-hi* (groove) with a parallel running *soe-bi* (thinner groove).

On the *ura* (back) side, there is a *katana-hi* (groove) with a *shôbu-hi* like element resembling an iris leaf.

*soe-bi*

*katana-hi*

*shobu-hi*

The grooves become pointed and taper about halfway down the *nakago* (tang).

This is known as *kaki-nagashi*.



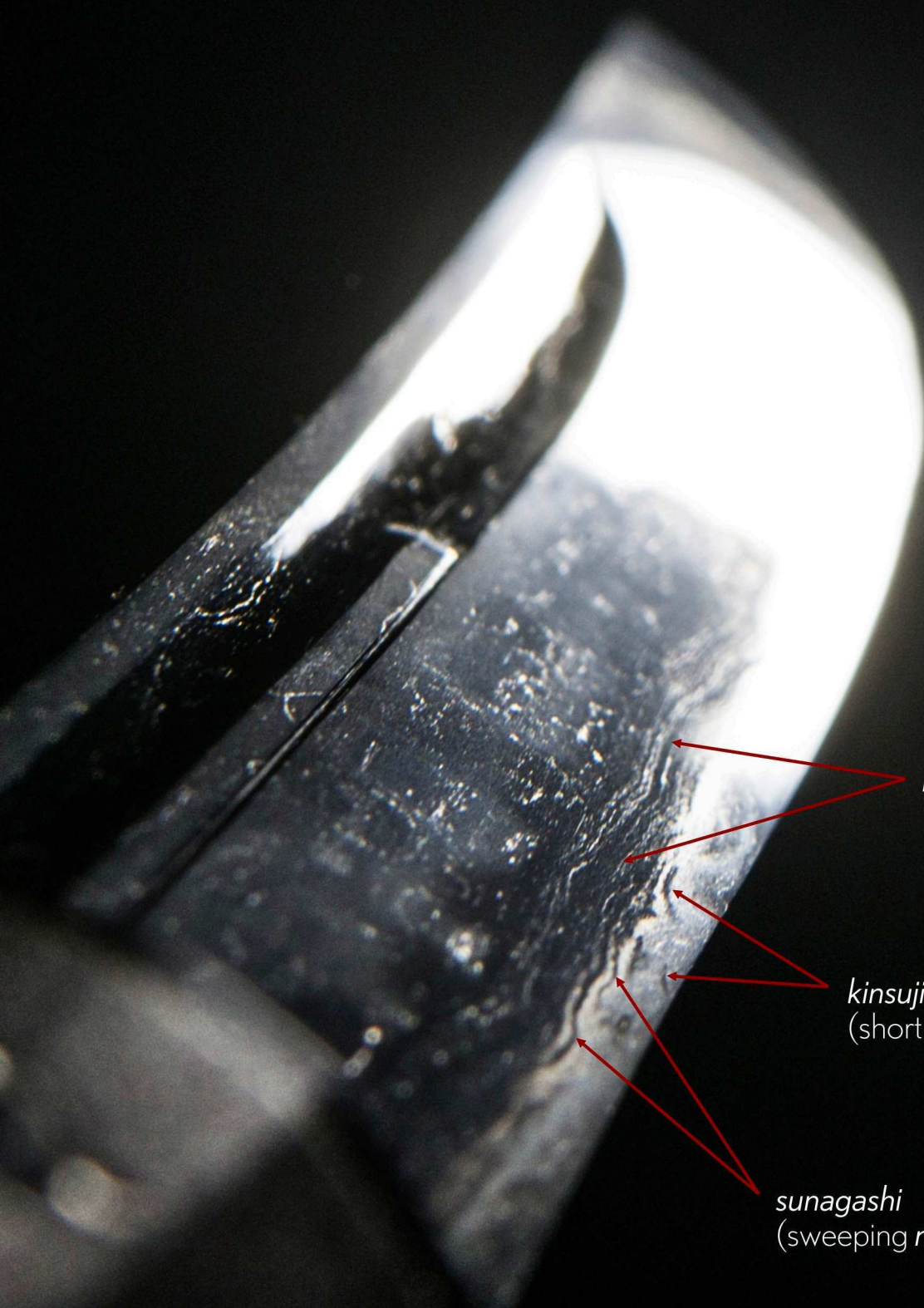
Bright and bold *suguha hamon*

Nobukuni is listed as one of the “*Three Students of Sadamune*,” a national treasure swordsmith who was the student and adopted son of the great *Masamune*.

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Feel the history...

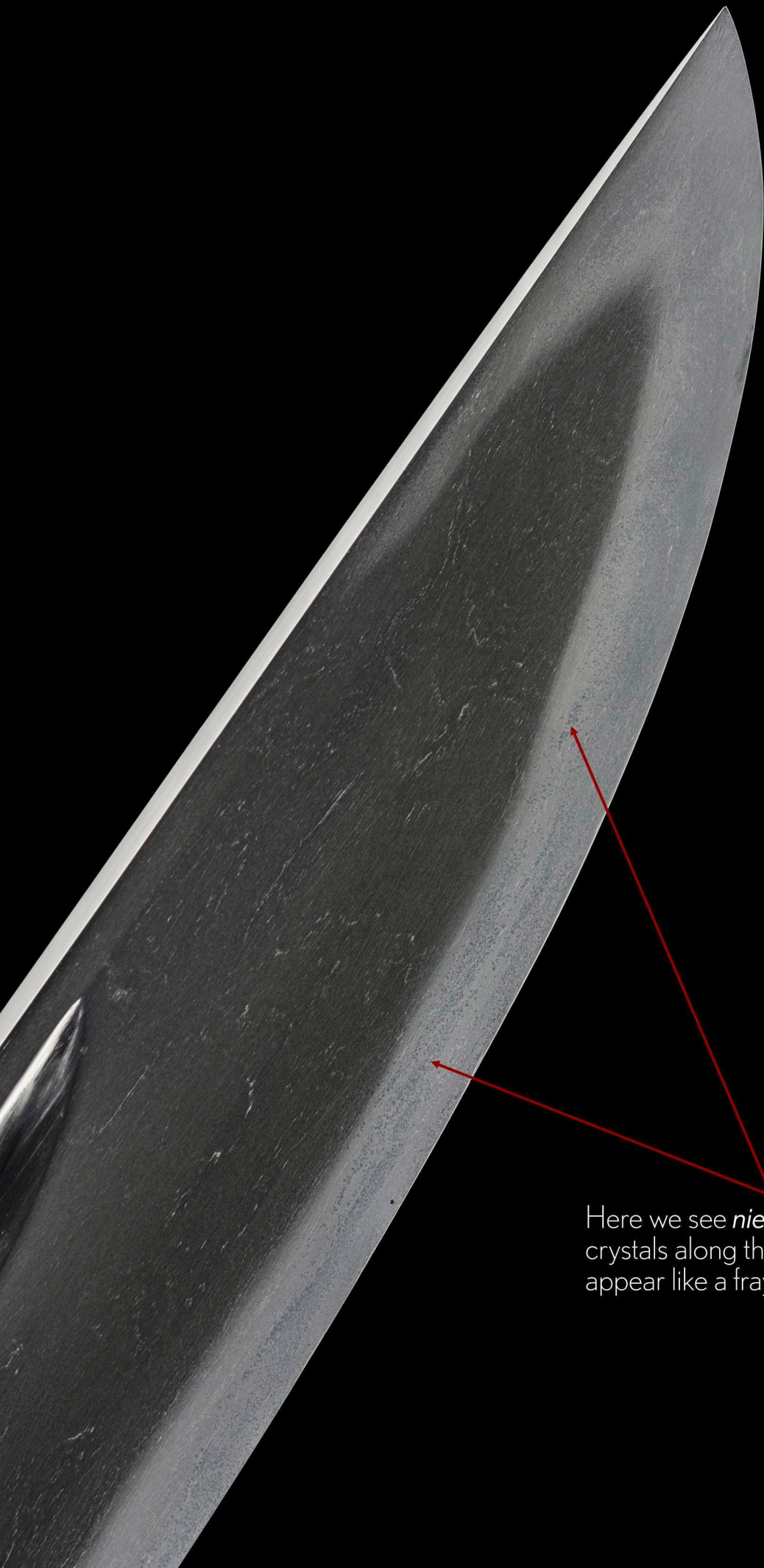




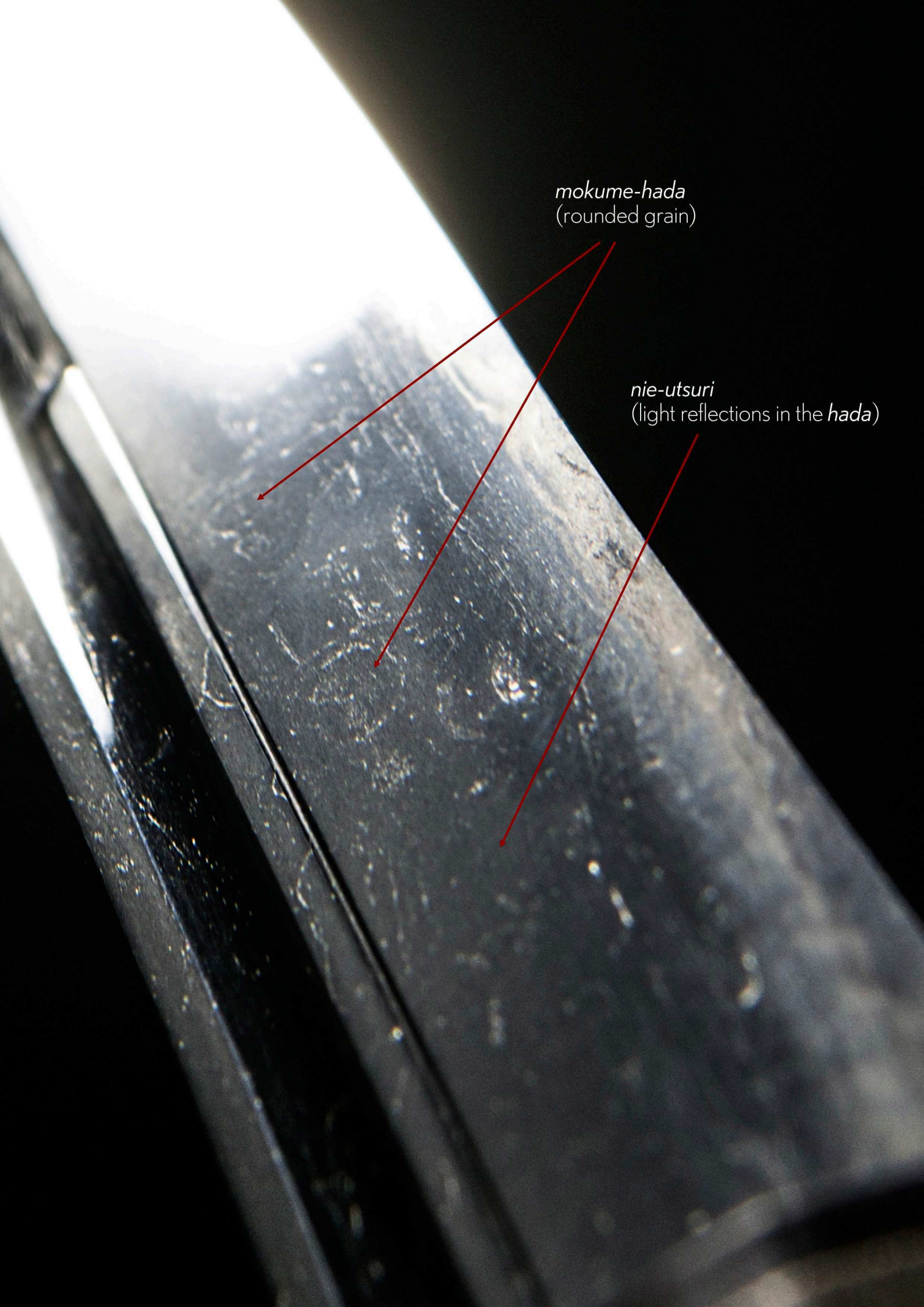
*nagare-hada*  
(flowing hada)

*kinsuji*  
(short dark lines of *nie* crystals)

*sunagashi*  
(sweeping *nie* crystals)



Here we see *nie-hotsure* - a section of nie crystals along the hamon line that together appear like a frayed piece of cloth.

A close-up photograph of a metal blade, likely a katana, showing two distinct patterns: mokume-hada (rounded grain) and nie-utsuri (light reflections in the hada). The blade is dark and textured, with a bright light source creating a strong highlight along the top edge. Three red arrows point from the text labels to the corresponding features on the blade's surface.

*mokume-hada*  
(rounded grain)

*nie-utsuri*  
(light reflections in the *hada*)



*Shirasaya*  
(protective scabbard)



gold and shakudo  
*habaki* with connected  
*sayagata* decor





The *menuki* feature depictions of mice made of pure silver that were crafted during the late Edo period (early 1800s). *Nezumi* (mouse/rat) is the *first* of the twelve animals in the Japanese zodiac calendar - just as *shôdai Nobukuni* was the first generation of the *Nobukuni* school. It is likely that this commonality was the reason why the mouse *menuki* had been selected for the *tsuka* (hilt).

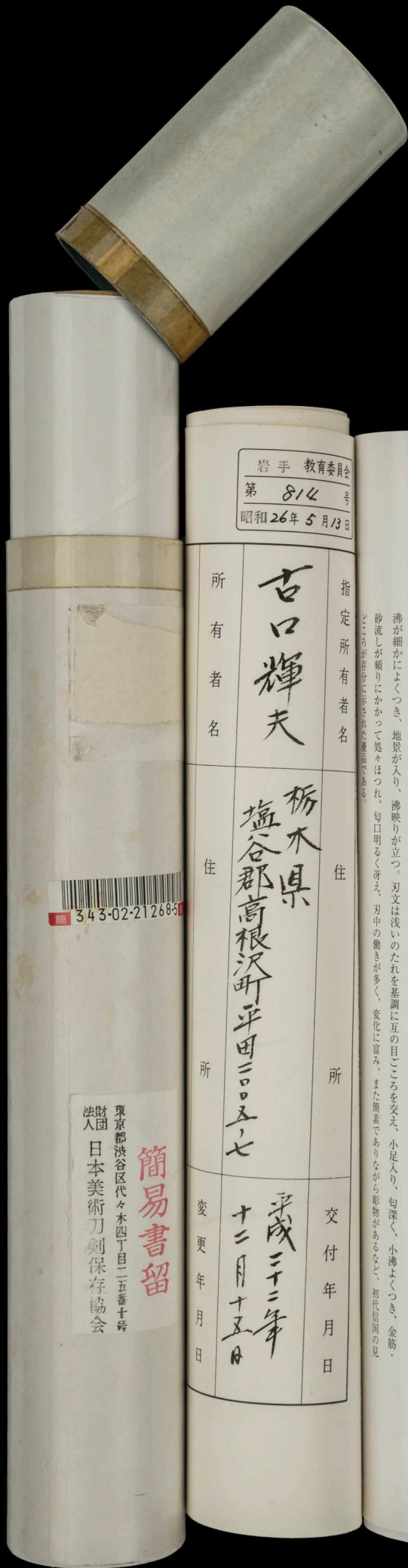
People born in the Year of Nezumi are said to be intelligent, passionate and persuasive - making them creative and effective leaders.



Top-quality *samekawa* (ray skin). Note the huge *oya-tsubu* (parent nodule).







岩手 教育委員会  
第 814 号  
昭和 26年 5月 13日

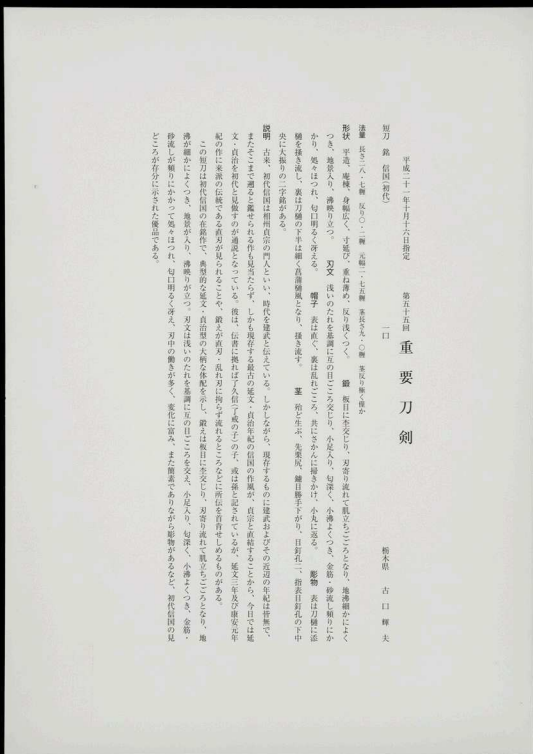
所有者名	古口輝夫	指定所有者名	古口輝夫
住	栃木県 塩谷郡高根沢町平田三〇五七	住	栃木県 古口輝夫
所		所	
変更年月日	平成三十三年 三月十五日	交付年月日	

343-02-21268-3

東京都渋谷区代々木四丁目二五番十号  
財団法人 日本美術刀剣保存協会  
簡易書留

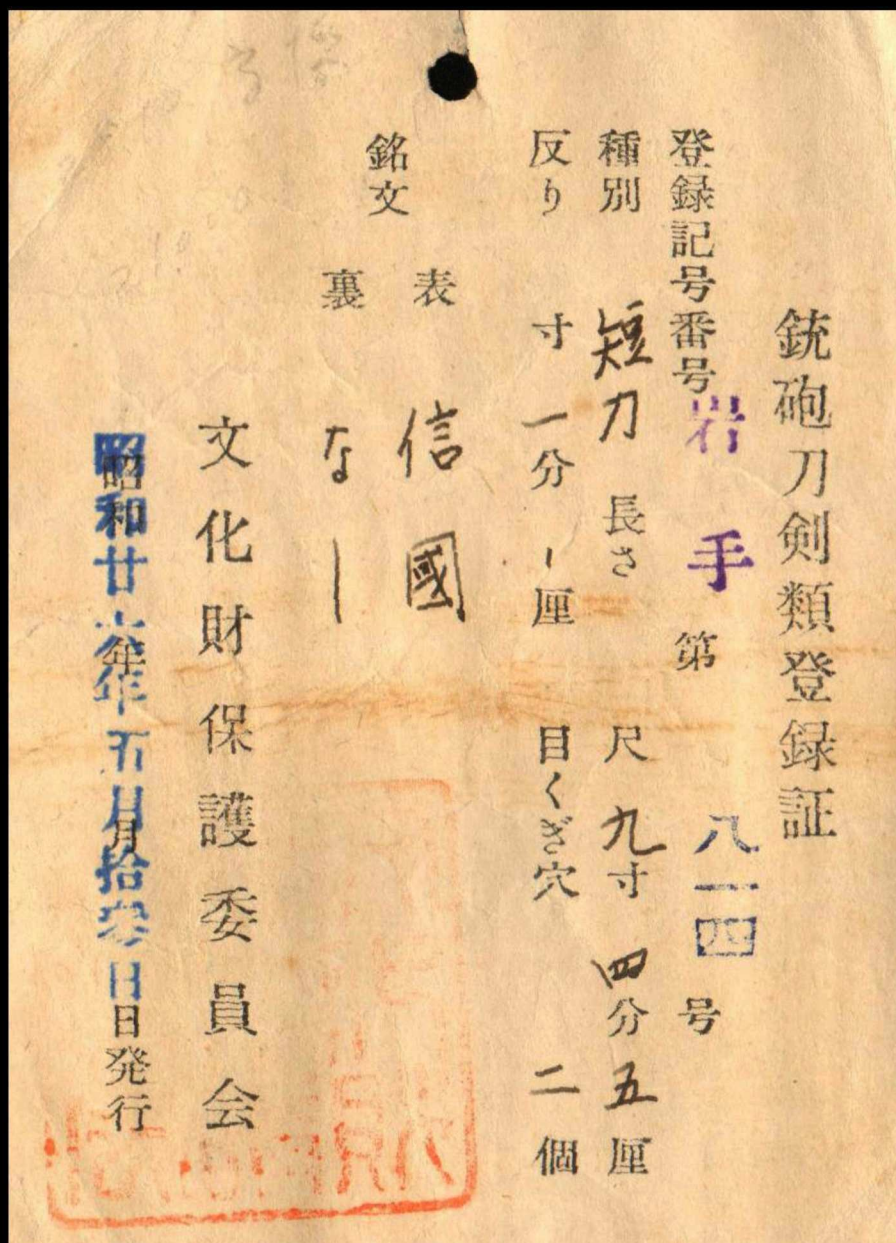
説明 古刀 初代信国は備前出雲の門人といひ、時代を建武と伝へてゐる。しかしながら、現存するものに建武およびその近辺の年紀は皆無で、またそのまで遡ると難せられる作も見当たらす。しかも現存する最古の延文・貞治年紀の信国の作風が、貞宗と直結することから、今日では延文・貞治を初代と見做すのが通説となつてゐる。彼は、伝書に拠れば了久信（了戒の子）の子、或は孫と記されているが、延文三年及び康安元年の作に來派の伝統である直刃が見られることや、鍛えが直刃・乱れ刃に拘らず流れることなどに所伝を首肯せしめるものがある。

この短刀は初代信国の在銘作で、典型的な延文・貞治型の大柄な体配を示し、鍛えは板目に本交じり、刃寄り流れて肌立ちころとなり、地沸が細かによくつき、地景が入り、沸映りが立つ。刃文は浅いのを基調に互の目ころを交え、小足入り、匂深く、小沸よくつき、金筋、砂流しが頼りにかかつて廻々ほつれ、匂口明るく済え、刃中の動きが多く、変化に富み、また體素でありながら彫物があるなど、初代信国の見どころが十分に示されてゐる。



55th NBTHK Juyo Token Certificate Traditionally rolled in protective tube.

All information will be precisely translated for the new caretaker. A printed and bound description of the sword from this catalogue will also be included along with a sword stand and a Unique Japan maintenance kit.



This is the original *torokusho* (registration card) for the *Nobukuni tantô*.  
The card was registered in the 26th year of Showa (1951).

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.

The serial number is just 814, one of the very first swords registered in Japan.

The spirit of *nihonto*.



Photo:  
*Eric Bossick* for Unique Japan