



ITEM# UJTA056

A KO-GASSAN TANTÔ

SIGNED, MIDDLE MUROMACHI PERIOD (EARLY 1500s)

Swordsmith: *Gassan school (ubu-nakago)*
Measurements: **Length:** 22.1cm **Curvature:** 0cm **Moto-haba:** 1.95cm **Weight:** 125g
Jihada: *Spectacular ayasugi-hada, ô-hada and plentiful chikei*
Hamon: *Crisp chû-suguha mixed with uchinoke and nezumi-ashi*
Certificate #1-2: **NBTHK Hozon** (sword and koshirae designated as Worthy of Preservation)
Certificate #3: **NBTHK Tokubetsu Kicho** (sword designated as Especially Precious)
Certificate #4: **NTHK Kanteisho** (aikuchi koshirae designated as Authentic)
Included: Shirasaya, Edo aikuchi koshirae, fabric bags, stand, kit, booklet, description

SOLD

The *Gassan school* is one of the most prestigious and successful lines of sword-forging in Japan and enjoys a close relationship with the imperial family. This marvelous *tantô* dates back to approximately 1500, during the middle *Muromachi period*. A straight, shining *suguha hamon* serves as a riverbank as the streams of its vibrant and iconic *ayasugi-hada* cascade down the blade. An exquisite *aikuchi-koshirae* pays tribute, in part, to the *Yamabushi* (mountain monks) that live in the three sacred mountains known as *Sanzan* of *Dewa* province. The *saya* (scabbard) is formed of a base layer of rare *kinkarakawa* decorated leather - a crafting technique that originated with the *Medici* family in Italy, circa 1400s. It is further decorated with the *Chiba* family *kamon* that features a moon and star, a wooden *kôzuka* with a pair of star-laden *Watanabe* clan *kamon* and mantra scrolls as *menuki*. This *tantô* exudes a spiritual energy that was most certainly treasured by a former samurai. It deserves a home that will honour it immensely.



Moto-kasane: 6.7mm

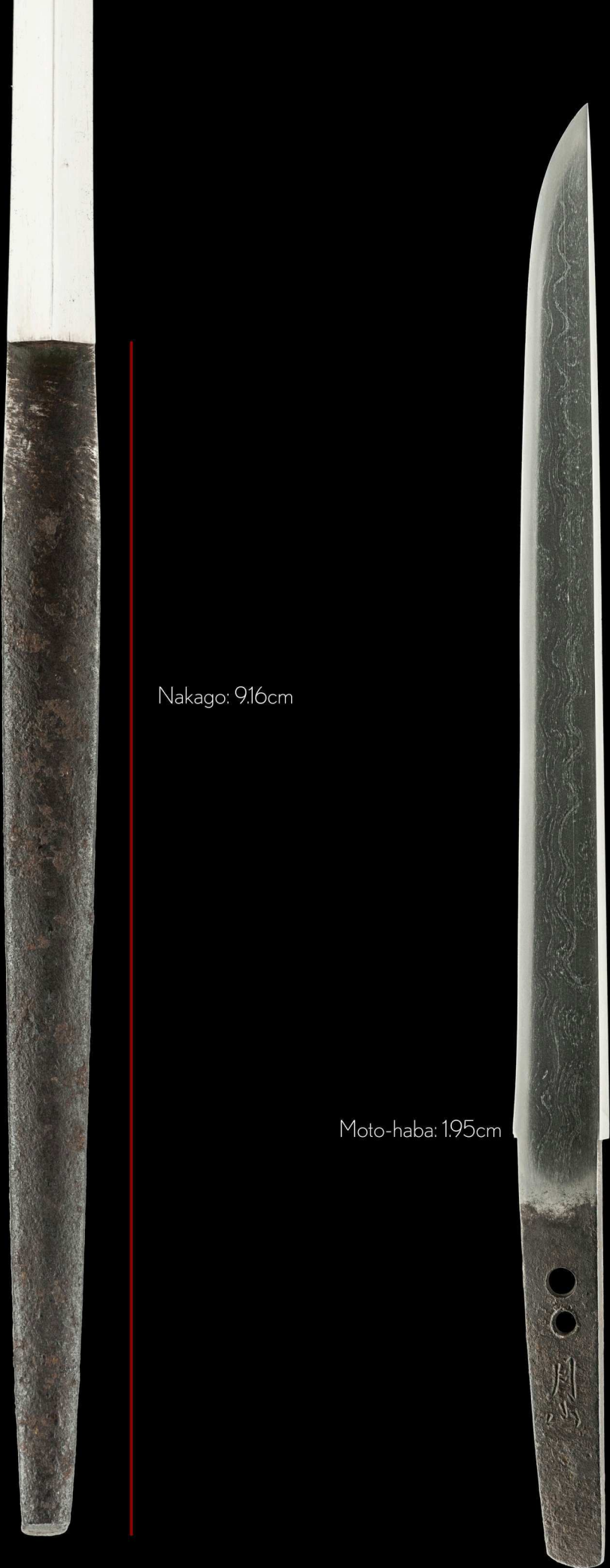
Omosa: 125g

Nakago: 9.16cm

Moto-haba: 1.95cm

Nagasa: 22.1cm

Mekugi-ana: 2



The *Gassan school* is one of the most prestigious and successful lines of sword-forging in Japan and enjoys a close relationship with the imperial family. Their iconic *ayasugi-hada* continues to this very day by current *Gassan* head a *Gassan Sadatoshi*.

This marvelous *tantô* dates back to approximately 1500, during the middle *Muromachi* period. As it was made prior to the Edo period, it is referred to as *Ko* (ancient) *Gassan*. Its vibrant and iconic *ayasugi-hada*, resembling a pulsing sound wave, immediately catches the eye. A straight *suguha* hamon knits its way neatly through the *ayasugi* forming a gentle wavy braid.

An exquisite *aikuchi-koshirae* pays tribute, in part, to the *Yamabushi* (mountain monks) that live in the three sacred mountains of *Dewa* province known as *Sanzan*. The *saya* (scabbard) is formed of a base layer of rare *kinkarakawa* decorated leather - a crafting technique that originated with the *Medici* family in Italy, circa 1400s. It is further decorated with the *Chiba* family *kamon* that features a moon and star, a wooden *kôzuka* with a pair of *Watanabe* clan *kamon* and mantra scrolls as *menuki*.

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Location: *Dewa* province (Yamagata)

Family name: *Gassan*

ubu-nakago (original, unaltered tang)

katte-sagari yasurime (sloping file marks)

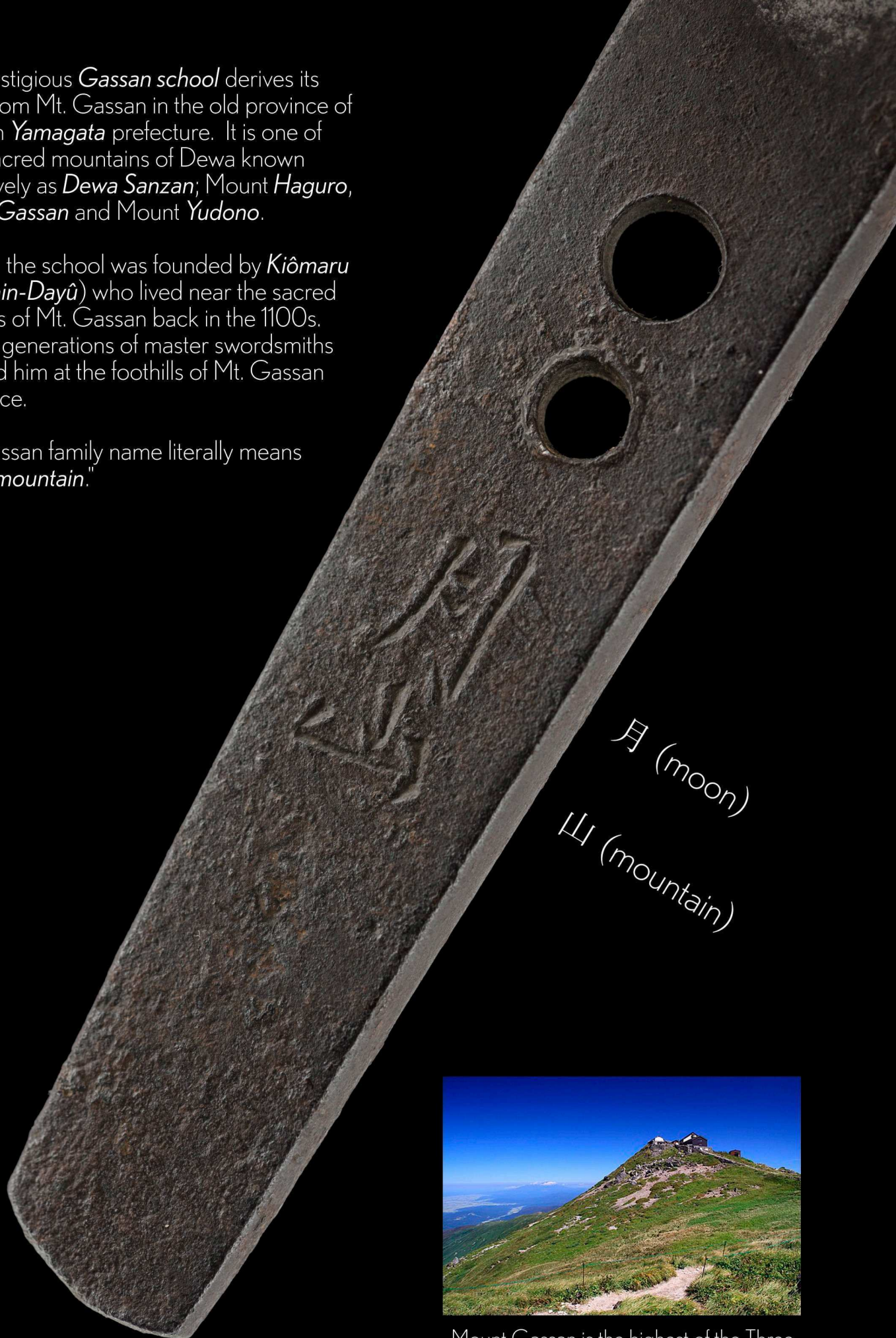
月 (Ga)

山 (ssan)

The prestigious *Gassan school* derives its name from Mt. Gassan in the old province of *Dewa* in *Yamagata* prefecture. It is one of three sacred mountains of Dewa known collectively as *Dewa Sanzan*; Mount *Haguro*, Mount *Gassan* and Mount *Yudono*.

It is said the school was founded by *Kiômaru* (or *Kishin-Dayû*) who lived near the sacred grounds of Mt. Gassan back in the 1100s. Several generations of master swordsmiths followed him at the foothills of Mt. Gassan ever since.

The Gassan family name literally means "*moon mountain*."



Mount Gassan is the highest of the Three Mountains of Dewa. The Gassan Shrine stands at the mountain's summit at 1,984 metres above sea level.



katte-sagari gentle sloping file marks

(*ura*, reverse)

01201909

No 3022673



鑑定書

一、短刀 銘 月山

右は當協會に於て審査の結果保存刀劍と
鑑定しこれを証する

長七寸三分強

令和元年十二月二日

公益財団法人日本美術刀劍保存協會



東京都教育委員会
第 68304 号
昭和30年4月12日

昭和三〇. 4. 12.

NBTHK Hozon Certificate of Designation

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

Issued in the 1st year of Reiwa (2019), December 2nd

One, Tantô

Mei (signature)
Gassan

Nagasa (length)
7-sun 3-bu kyô (22.1cm)

Nihon Bijutsu Tôken Hozon Kyôkai
(NBTHK)

認定書

一 短刀 銘月山 長七寸三分五厘弱

右は當協會に於て審査の結果特別貴重

刀劍として認定す

昭和四十六年十一月二十七日

財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協會

殿



NBTHK Tokubetsu Kicho Certificate of Designation

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

Issued in the 46th year of Showa (1971), November 27th

One, Tantô

Mei (signature)
Gassan

Nagasa (length)
7-sun 3-bu 5-rin jaku (22.1cm)

Nihon Bijutsu Tôken Hozon Kyôkai
(NBTHK)

Gassan nanasun nibu
(月山七寸二分)
Gassan 22.1cm

Jidai Ôei-goro
(時代應永頃)
Around Oei Period
(1394-1428)

This *tsunagi* (wooden blade) holds the koshirae together when the sword is in the shirasaya.

A previous owner wrote that this Gassan tantô was crafted around the Ôei era, however, this is probably a bit ambitious.

The sword was likely crafted about 500 years ago, around the year 1500.



(Ga) 月
(ssan) 山
(nana) 七
(sun) 寸
(ni) 二
(bu) 分

時 (Ji)
代 (dai)
應 (Ô)
永 (ei)
頃 (goro)

月 (Ga)
山 (ssan)
七 (nana)
寸 (sun)
二 (ni)
分 (bu)





This unique wavy grain pattern in the steel is called *ayasugi-hada*. Also known as *Gassan-hada* (月山肌), this forging structure has remained the trademark of this iconic school for centuries.

Interestingly, this pattern is named after the special wavy carving pattern on certain *koto* or *shamisen* music instruments which enhances its resonance.



Koto
traditional Japanese musical instrument

A stream of *ayasugi-hada* courses its way
alongside a riverbank of *chû-suguha hamon*.



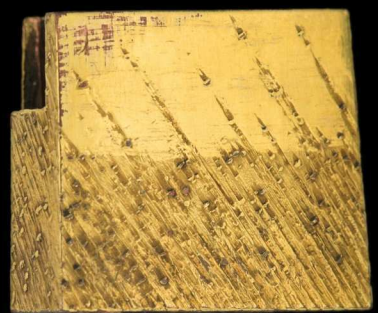


月
山





Shirasaya
(protective scabbard)



gold-wrapped *habaki* with
diagonal file marks

01201910



No 4016479



鑑定書

一金唐革包月星紋散鞘合口短刀拵

目貫巻物二巻図
小柄渡辺星紋二双図無銘
柄根岸色蛇腹糸片手千段巻

右は當協會に於て審査の結果保存刀装具と
鑑定しこれを証する

令和元年十一月二十六日

公益財団法人日本美術刀剣保存協會



NBTHK Hozon
Certificate of Designation

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

Issued in the 1st year of Reiwa (2019), November 26th

One,

*Aikuchi style tantô-koshirae wrapped with
kinkarakawa decorated leather with gessei crests*

Nihon Bijutsu Tôken Hozon Kyôkai
(NBTHK)

Yamabushi are the mountain dwellers of Japan, practitioners of the ancient belief of *Shugendo*, the way (do) of attaining divine natural powers (gen) through ascetic practices (shu).

Mountains, or nature in general, is believed to be covered in knowledge incomprehensible to humans through written or spoken means, and spending time in the mountains is seen as a way to absorb this knowledge. Buddhist mantras are believed to be projected onto mountains, and some places on the mountains are named after specific places seen in mantras. Thereby walking on the mountains is akin to walking through these mantras and again to absorb the knowledge.

It was *Prince Hachiko*, the son of Emperor *Sushun*, who first made the *Dewa Sanzan* mountains a religious site back in 593.

Over the years, these mountains have become a popular pilgrimage site and the famous monk *Kobo Daishi* (also known as *Kukai*), the founder of *Shingon Buddhism*, visited them.

The pilgrimage begins on *Mount Haguro* which represents the present or birth. Then comes the ascent of *Mount Gassan* which represents the past or death. It ends at *Mount Yudono* which represents the future or rebirth.



colour match

A 600-year-old cedar tree guards the majestic 5-storey pagoda, built in 1372, on Mount Haguro, classified as a national treasure since 1966. The colour of the silk appears to have been inspired by the mossy landscape.



Yamabushi with trumpet shell used to communicate over distant mountain tops.

Sources:

<https://www.sugoi-japan.com/yamabushi-dewa-sanzan-yamagata>
<https://timbunting.com/home/yamabushi/>

The Chiba clan (*Chiba-shi*) was a Japanese *samurai* family descending from the *Taira* clan. The clan was founded by *Chiba Tsunetane*, the son of *Taira no Tadatsune*.

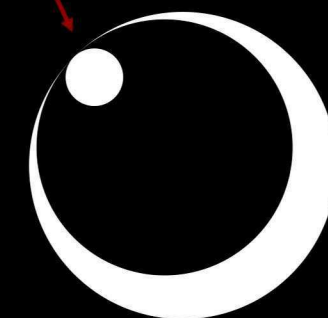
During the *Genpei War* (1180~1185) the Chiba clan, as well as the *Hôjô*, *Miura*, and *Doi* clans, opposed the greater 'core' Taira clan and supported *Minamoto no Yoritomo*. Chiba Tsunetane won Yoritomo's trust and helped establish the *Kamakura* shogunate.

It's evident that the *moon*, which is seen in both the *kanji* of the *Gassan* family name and within the *kamon* of the *Chiba* family crest served as heavenly inspiration for this spiritual *koshirae*.



star

moon



Gessei (moon and star)
kamon of the *Chiba* clan



Kinkarakawa is a type of leather prepared according to a method first developed by the *Medici* family in Italy. This technique was later learned by the Japanese from the Dutch in the 17th century. Essentially, *cow hide is impressed with floral patterns and a thin gold sheet*. By 1668, such items had become so popular in Japan that the emperor placed a ban on further imports, which lasted until the *Meiji* period (~1912). Nowadays, kinkarakawa is rarely found, especially in such excellent condition. The kinkarakawa has been lacquered for posterity in this exquisite *aikuchi koshirae*.



Japanese late Edo period Kinkarakawa purse with kabuto (helmet) metal detail.

Source:

<https://www.maitreyaantiques.com/blog/2018/5/26/kinkarakawa>





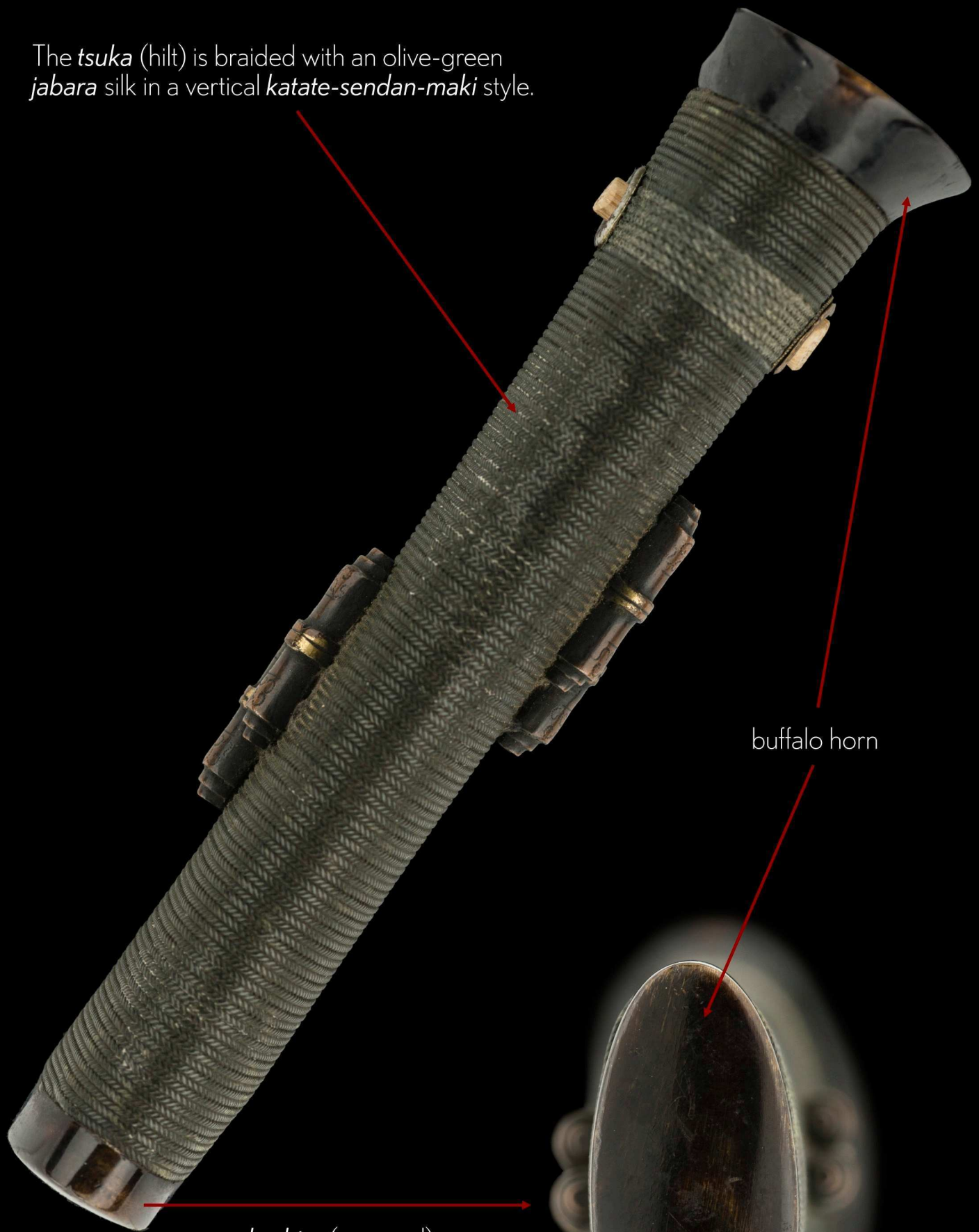
Thoughtfully selected *menuki* depict two *makimono* (scrolls) that symbolize the Buddhist mantras that the *yamabushi* (mountain monks) would carry and recite over mountains.



antique *makimono*



The *tsuka* (hilt) is braided with an olive-green *jabara* silk in a vertical *katate-sendan-maki* style.



buffalo horn

kashira (pommel)



This unique *kôzuka* (utility knife) features two family crests of the *Watanabe* clan, a branch of the *Minamoto* clan that descended from the *Emperor Saga* (786~842), Japan's 52nd emperor. The name's origination refers to a location called '*Watanabe no tsu*' which was settled by the *Watanabe* clan in the medieval period near the mouth of the *Yodogawa* River in *Settsu* Province, in present-day city of *Ôsaka*.



The *Watanabe kamon* features *three stars over a straight line* known as *Mitsuboshi ni ichimonji*.





Mount *Ayasugi*



Koshirae bag