

***Tachi* Swords With *Ikakeji* Gold Lacquer, Inlaid With Mother-of-Pearl Decorations of Apricot Leaves**

High-ranking samurai, especially elite members of the imperial guard in Kyoto, would have used *tachi* longswords like these during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The swords are nearly identical, and have gently curved blades with handles covered in thin silver-plate that has a texture like sharkskin. Their mountings—the scabbard, leather wrappings, and various other accessories that hold a sword and are used to attach it to the wearer’s belt—are highly ornate, decorated with mother-of-pearl inlays (*raden*) in an apricot-leaf pattern on a ground of lacquer densely sprinkled with gold powder (*ikakeji*).

Why and when they came into the possession of the shrine is not clear, but they are among its most valued artifacts and are designated National Treasures. The craftsmanship of the swords and the association with the imperial guard have led to speculation that they were worn by Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), the founder of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu and the first Kamakura shogun. The theory is plausible, since the Minamoto clan had a close relationship with the court until they were banished from the capital by the rival Taira clan, and Yoritomo lived in Kyoto in his early years.