

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

High-ranking samurai, especially elite members of the royal guard in Kyoto, would have used *tachi* longswords like these during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Nearly identical, the swords have gently curved blades, with handles covered in thin silver-plate that has a texture like sharkskin. Their mountings—the scabbard, leather wrappings, and 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 the shrine came to possess the swords and when 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.