



5068 Two iron kahira (whistling) arrows with gilded and black painted flights

Japan 19th century Edo period

Dimensions: L: 95cm (37½")

One arrow has a karimata ("rope cutter"/mackerel tail/swallow tail) head. These arrowheads are sometimes referred to as 'rope cutters' but were most likely not used to cut ropes. They were used for hunting large game such as deer and bear and on the battle field to deliver fatal wounds to horses.

The other is a yanagi-ba (willow leaf) with saw-cut patterns like sakura (cherry blossom) or inome (heart shape or boars eye). These arrowheads are usually signed on the blade below the piercing and above the shoulder. Normally there are characters on both sides of the blade but in many cases the mei (signature) has been almost polished away.

The whistling part of the arrow kabura literally translates as "turnip", so the Japanese term technically

means "turnip-shaped arrows."

The arrows would also be sold at Shintō shrines as good luck charms, particularly around New Year's Day; simply carrying a kabura-ya is meant to serve as a ward against evil spirits.