Reanimated twice

A sword-blade, ca. 1320-1380, from northern Italy

(presentation given at the Conference „Swords of Lions and Eagles“, Belluno, September 18th 2021)

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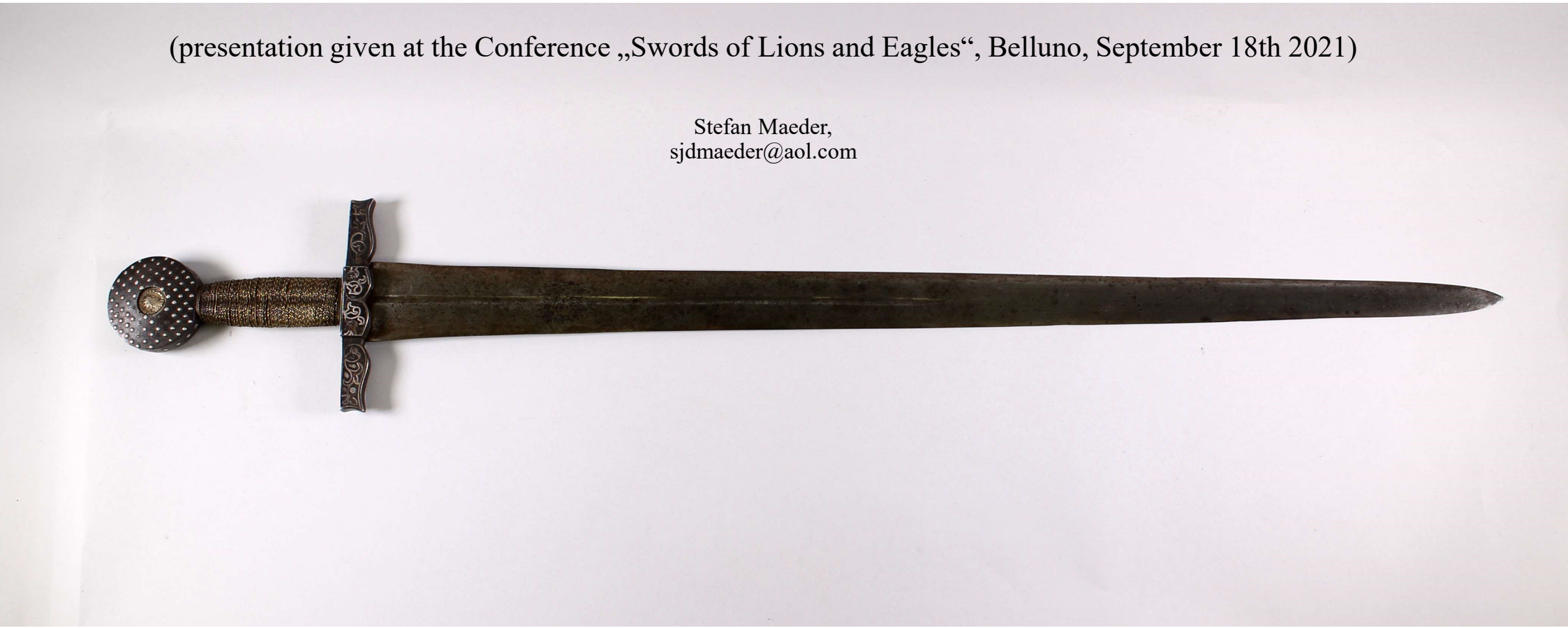
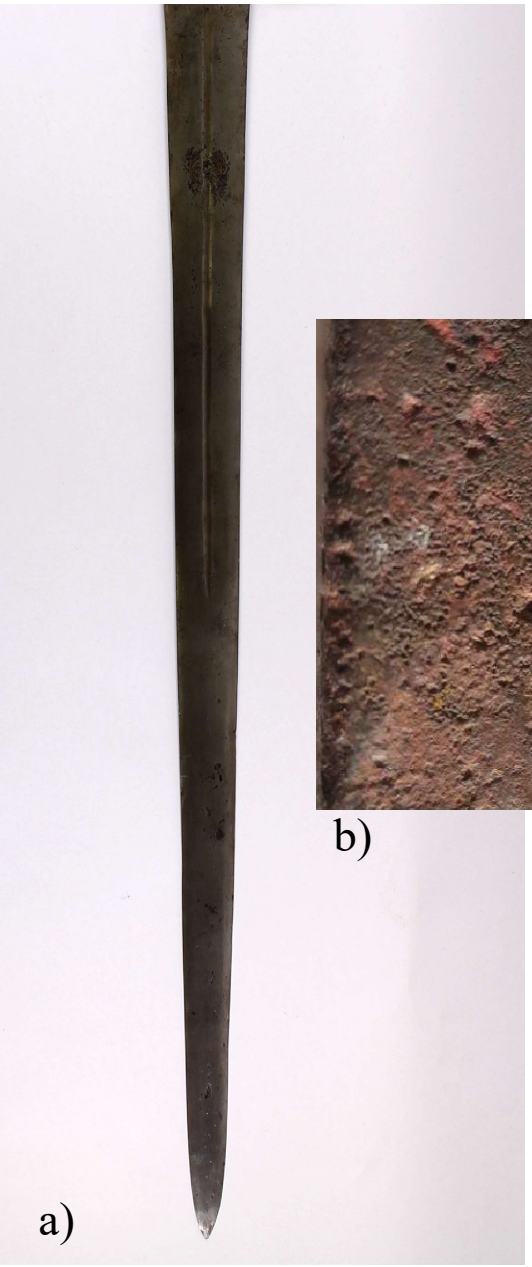


Provenance: San Giorgio Aste, Genova, summer 2015; described as „French, 19th century“

a) Blade of Oakeshott Type XIV (ca. 1275 – 1325), perhaps a little later…
Length: 1015/828 mm **width:** 60 mm **weight:** 615 g **pop:** 580 mm
b) Remains of original punchmark on tang.
c) Gold inlaid half-circular bars, central circle and six stars.
d) Faint remains of a roughly „A“ or „V“ shaped inlay at the end of both fullers.



a)

b)

Condition before applying Japanese polishing process.

c1)

c2)

d)

First obvious reanimation during the era of historicism: probably second half of the 19th century. Refurbished with pommel and cross in Renaissance-“freestyle“. The grip, wire-binding and narrow copper-ferrules appear to be an improvisation.

歴史主義の時代に初めて明らかに蘇った。おそらく19世紀後半に行われたものと思われる。鞍部と十字架はルネッサンス風に改装されている。グリップ、ワイヤーバインディング、銅製のフェルールは、自由なスタイルで即興的に作られたものと思われる。

A corroded, but to all appearances not groundfound medieval blade was „restored“ by the same means and standards still prevalent among dealers and collectors today. At least until the 1970s these hurried „cleanings“ remained common practice amongst more or less trained museum personnel/conservators also.

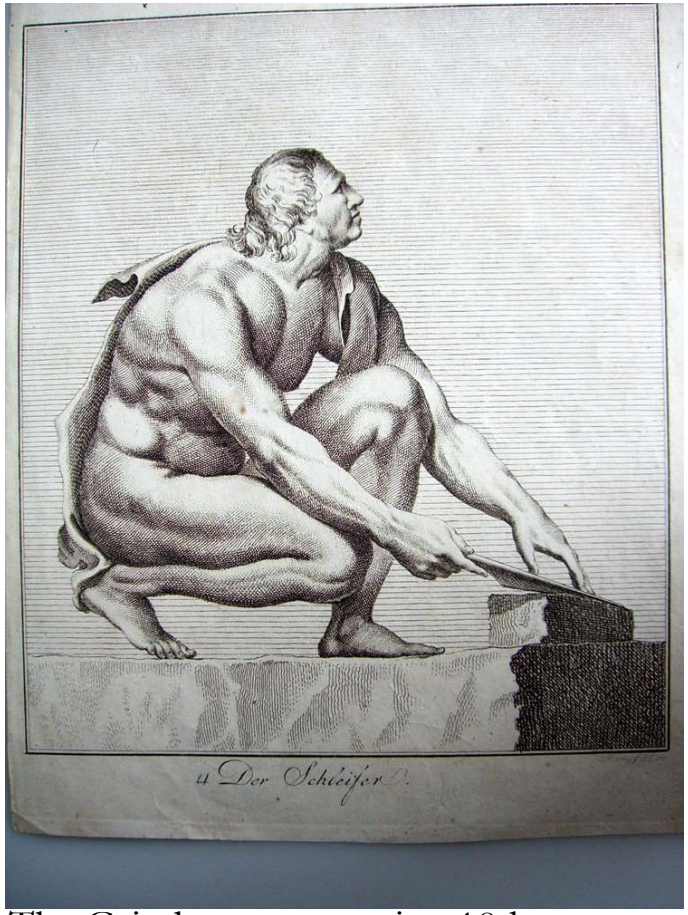
腐食しているが、見た目には研磨されていない中世の刃は、今日でもディーラーやコレクターの間で普及しているのと同じ手段と基準で「修復」された。少なくとも1970年代までは、これらの急いで行われた「クリーニング」は、多かれ少なかれ訓練を受けた博物館の職員や保存修復師の間で一般的に行われていました。

The deeper pits of corrosion, which were preserved during the present attempt at reanimation, indicate that the blade was roughly cleaned and lost some substance probably in the course of the 19th century. Note the scratches of the presumably first step of „restoration“ going perpendicular to the blade´s length.

深い腐食の穴は、今回の再生の試みで保存されたもので、19世紀の間に刃が粗く洗浄され、ある程度の物質が失われたことを示している。修復の最初の段階と思われる傷は、刃の長さに対して垂直についている。

Sword-polishing in Japan and in Europe
日本と古代ヨーロッパの研磨方法

Sword-polisher, Kamakura-period (1185 – 1333)/**研ぎ師、鎌倉時代。**



The Grinder, copper-print, 18th cent.

Original sculpture ca. 300 B.C. **研ぎ師、銅版画　18世紀,本物300**B.C..

Working positions before the advent of the rotating grindstone.
回転砥石が登場する前の作業風景。

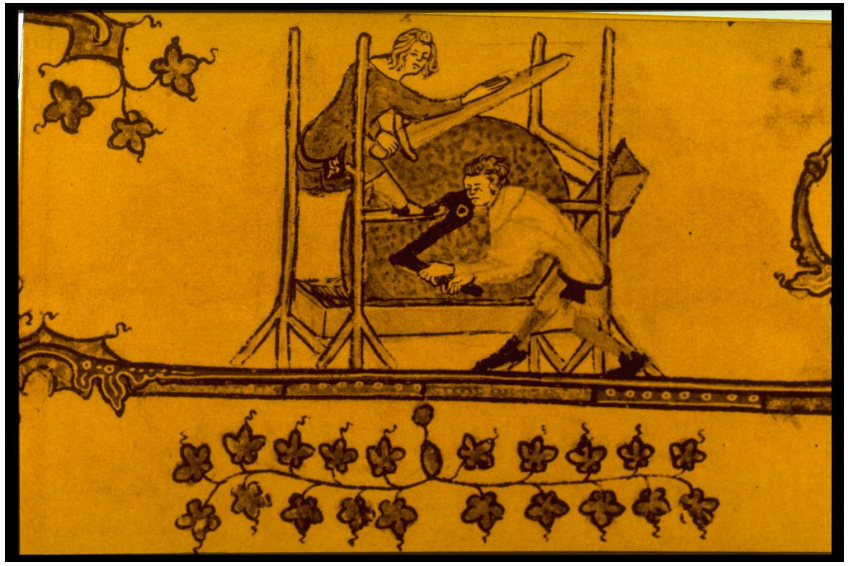
The still largely overlooked tradition of grinding and polishing of sword-blades.

From the Utrecht Psalter (ca. 820-835).

From the Canterbury Psalter, 12th century.

The art-sword-polisher SASAKI Takushi with a 6th century seax-blade from Bad Krozingen, Germany (photo: Kenichi Nakajima for „National Geographic Japan“).

Rough grinding



Romance of Alexander, 14th century

Solingen, 19th century, 19世紀

Grindstone from Baden, Austria, 13th century.

Polishing before and after the introduction of extensive use of water-power.

Finish-polishing, 14th century

Finish-polishing 17th century
(Christoph Weigel)

Two further examples

Maintenance of arms and armour, woodcut 1517 (Hans Schäuflein: Hymelwag und Helwag)

Wooden polishing-wheel with rim made of small leather strips to accomodate polishing paste. 木材でできている仕上げのデイスク。

Cleaning,resp. Oiling a sword-blade/刀身の手入れ。

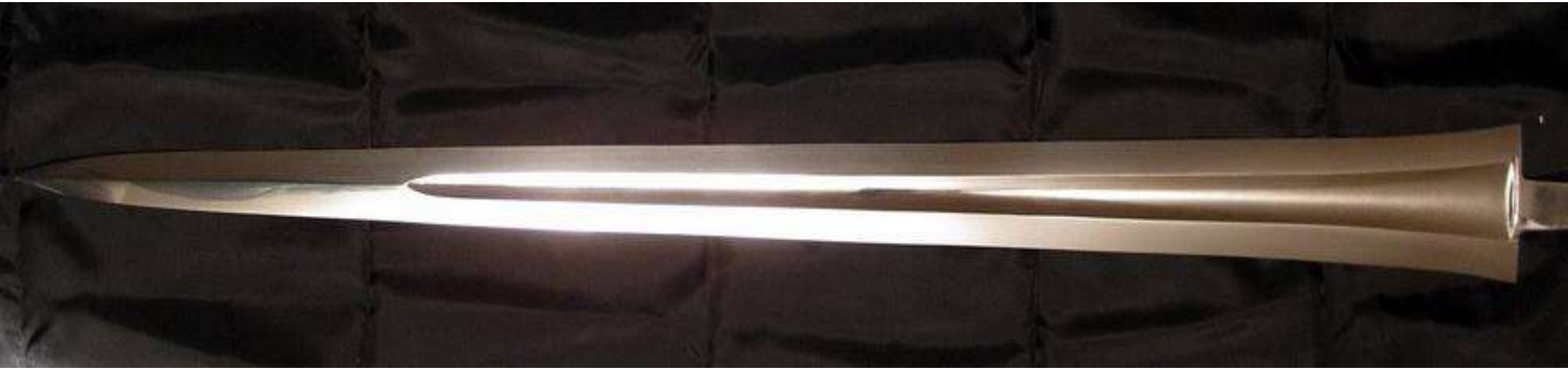
State of preservation of an early 19th century executioner´s sword with a 13./14.th cent. blade. Deutsches Klingenmuseum Solingen. Inv. Nr.: DKM 43.43

Before

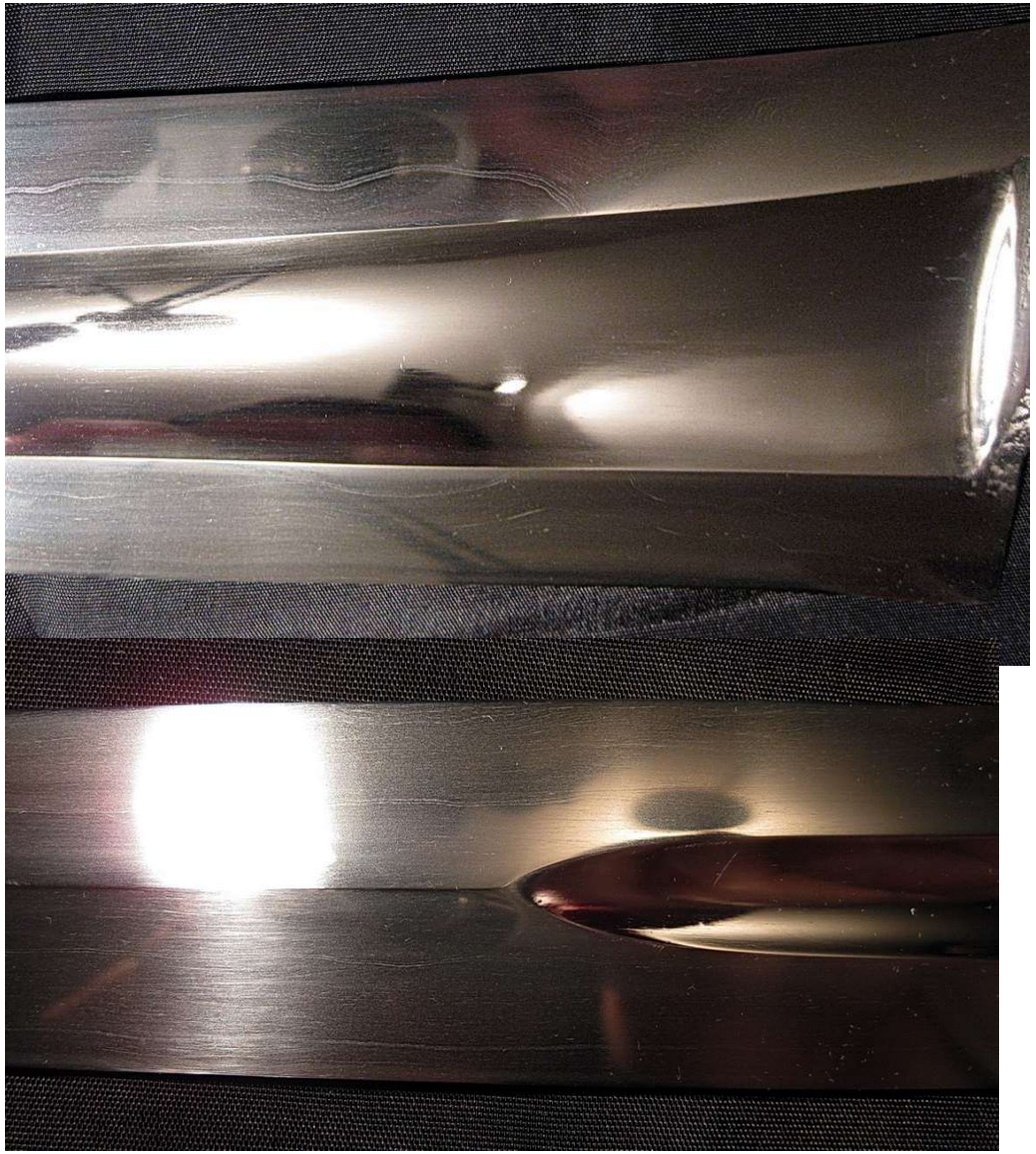
The forging-texture after the Japanese polishing-process attempted by the author.

After

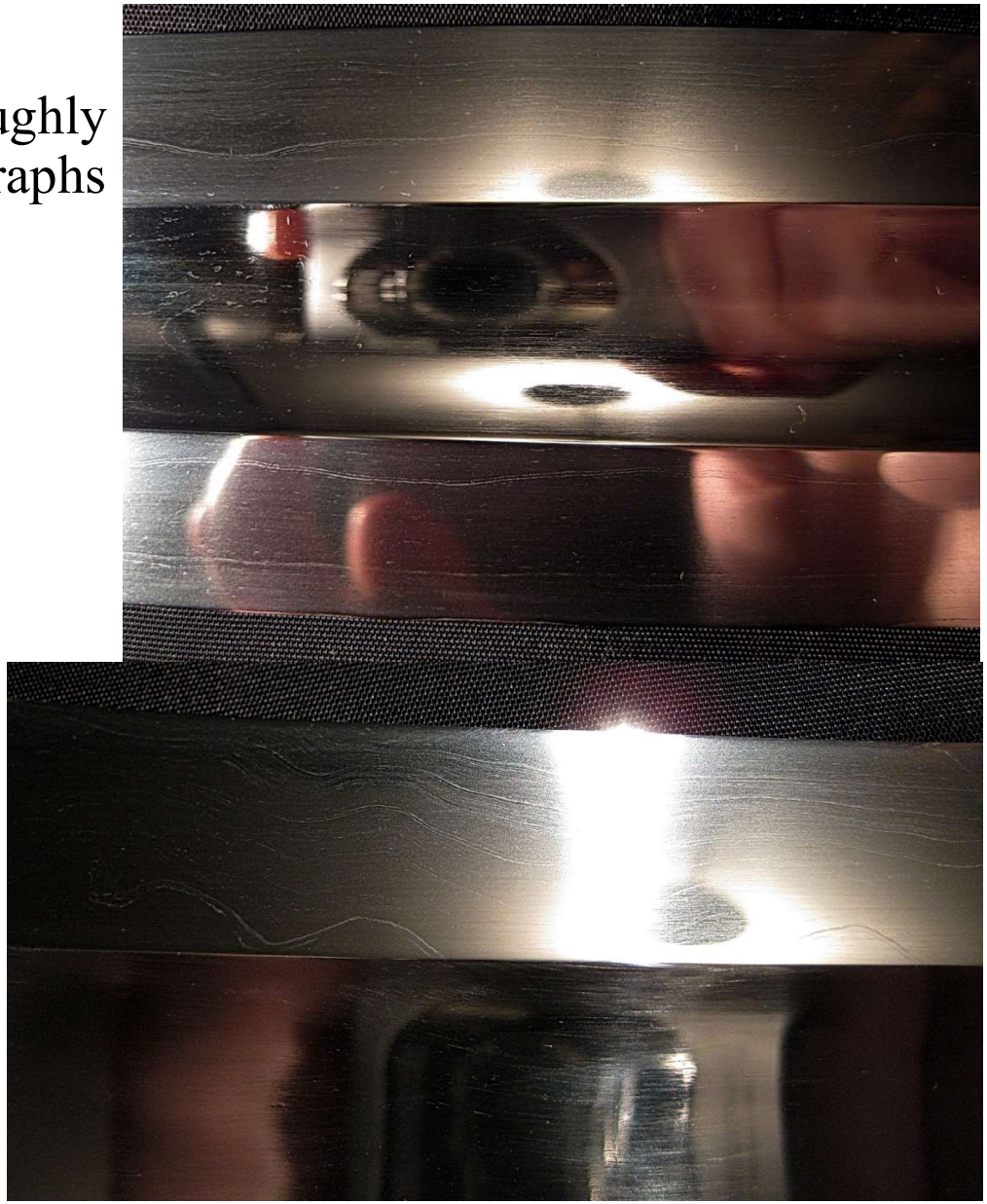
Sword-blade made of modern refined steel,
ca. 10.000 Layers, forged by Arno Eckhardt,
die Traumschmiede, Pliezhausen, Germany.
Polished by present author.



The forging-texture after the polishing-process.

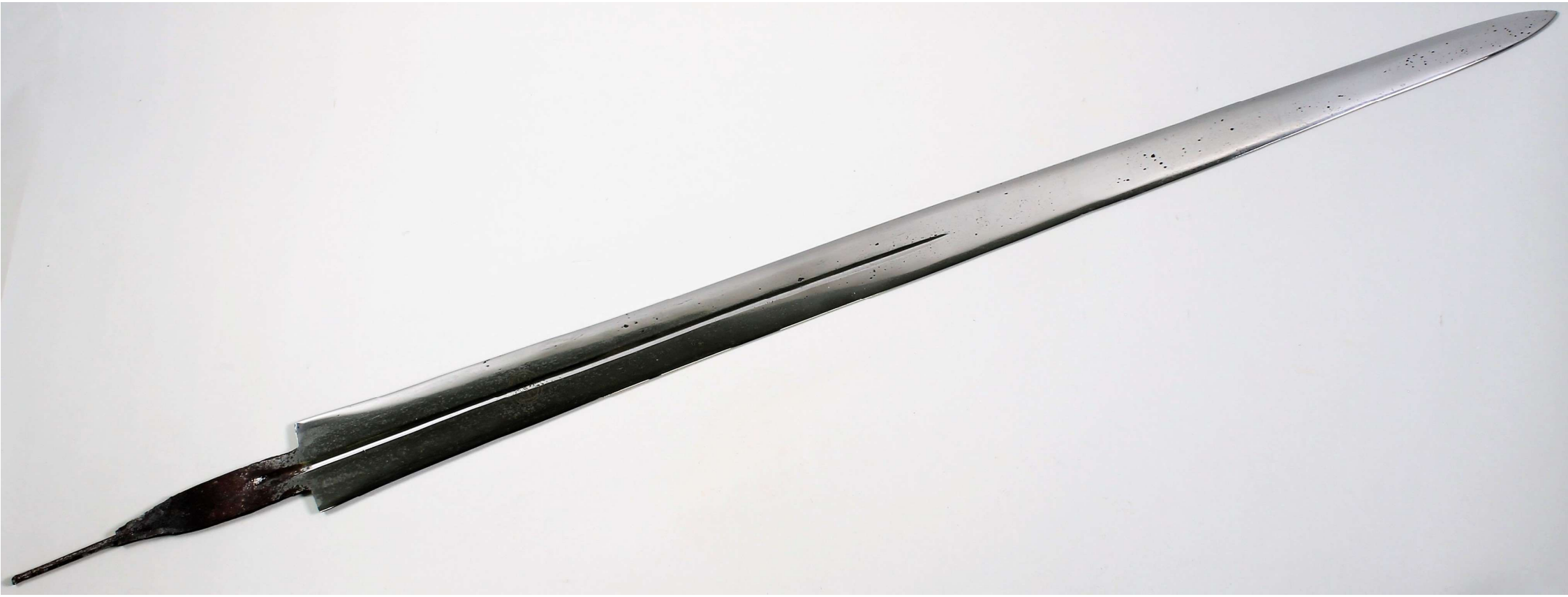


I apologise for the thoroughly non-professional photographs 😖.

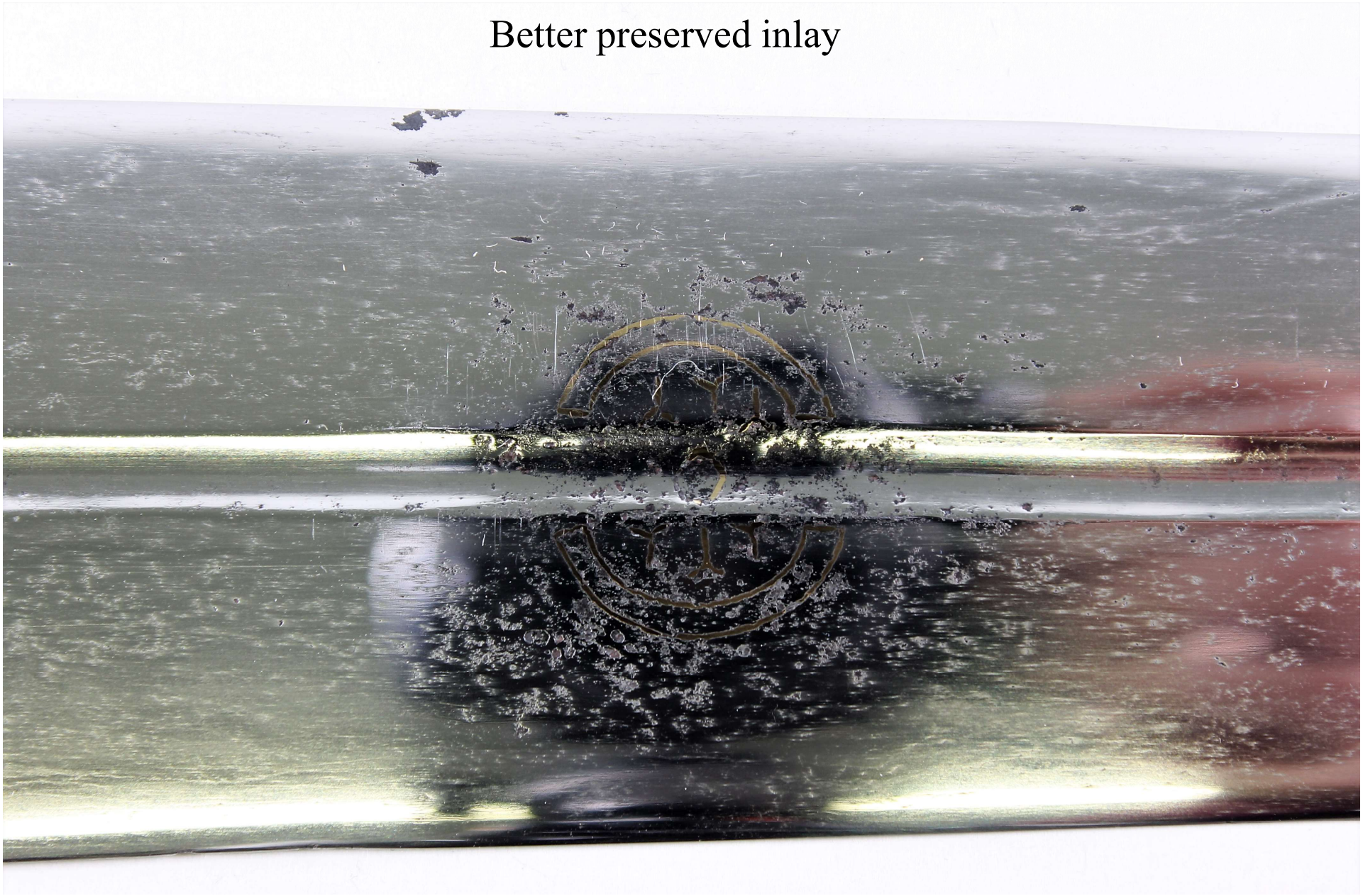


Back to the Italian specimen:
Second attempt at reanimation:
The finished blade with inlays
and deeper rust-pits preserved.

The colour and shine of the treated surface are significantly different from machine-buffing which basically closes any visible surface-structure.

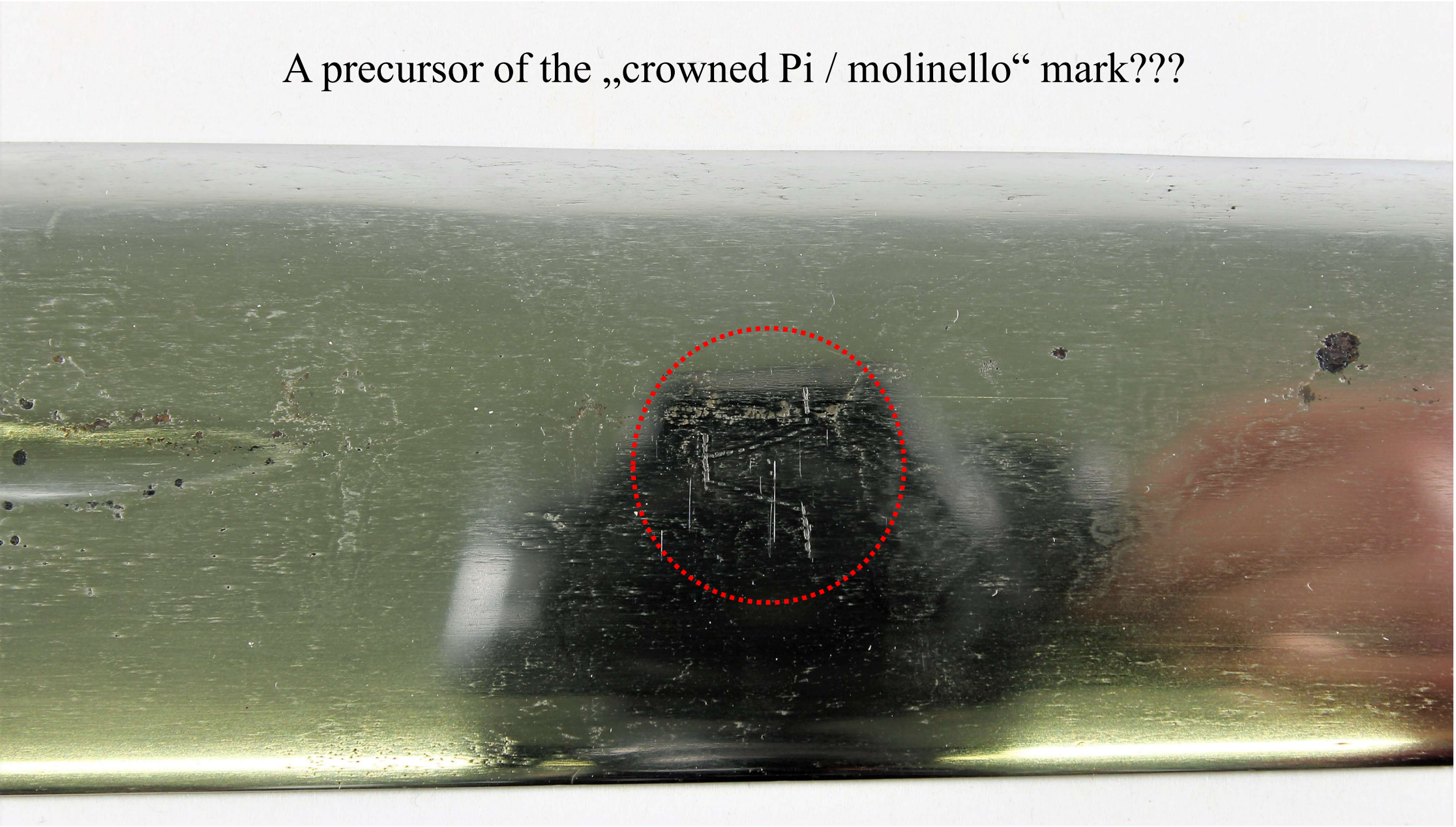


Better preserved inlay

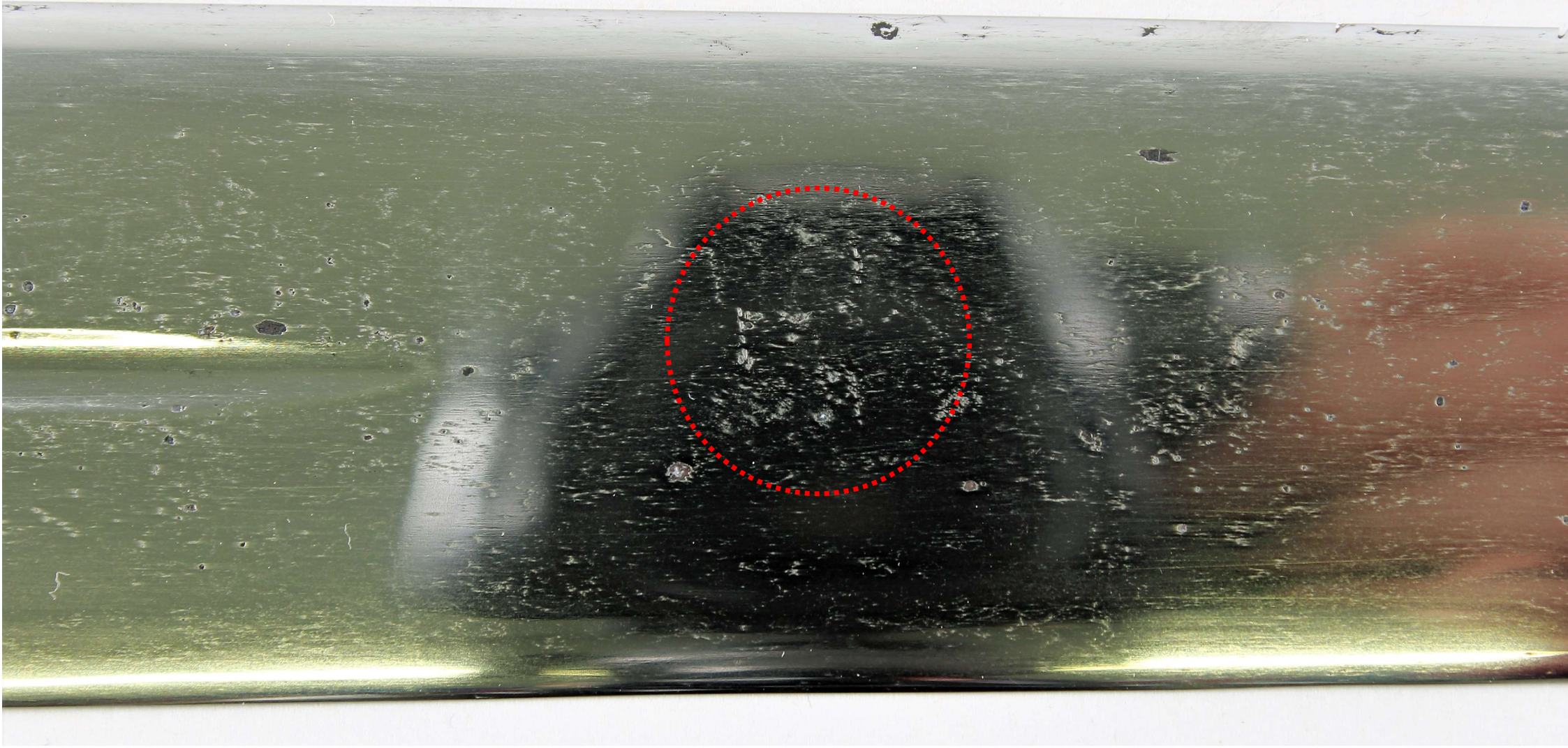


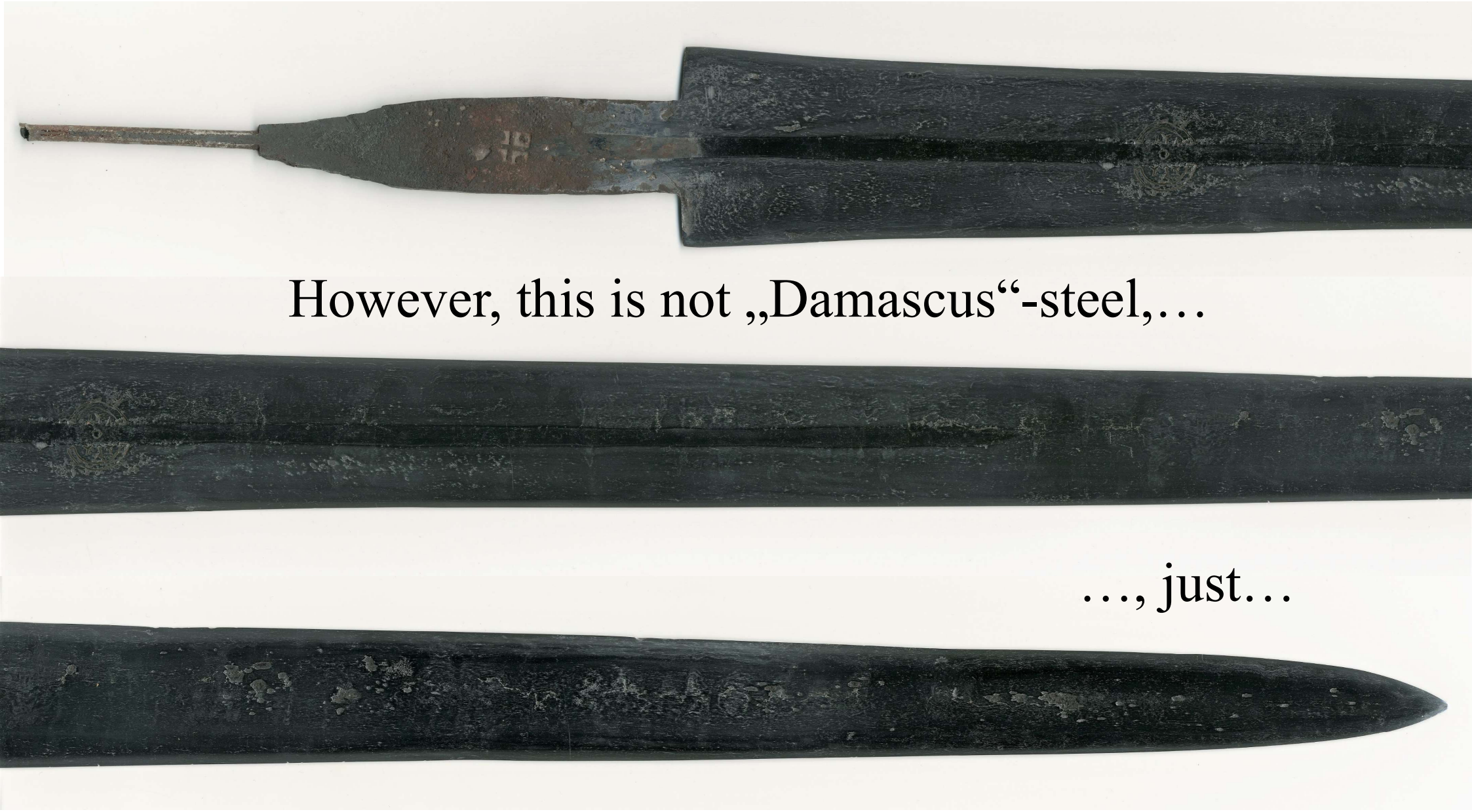
Less completely preserved inlay.

A precursor of the „crowned Pi / molinello“ mark???



The hardly visible symbol on the other flat is faintly, but clearly visible now.





However, this is not „Damascus“-steel,…

…, just…

…expertly refined and heat-treated medieval Italian blade-steel…

…necessarily showing the same visual traits of forging…

…extant in Japanese swords.

A few perspectives for research and museal presentation:

1. Iron weapons in any culture were meant to be reground / repolished after a certain amount of use, respectively neglect.
2. The amount of details emerging over the length of the sword allow for a more accurate appreciation than metallographic sections, which destroy the structural coherence of any weapon.
3. An ideal combination to isolate areas of origin, resp. different workshops would be non-destructive element analysis and visual analysis of properly treated surfaces.
4. The Japanese/European way of grinding and polishing is not primarily a means of preservation/restoration, but a means to further the research and understanding of crucial aspects of the sword.
5. The visual impact of a blade in a condition closer to the original one than the overwhelming majority of Museum exhibits speaks for itself as a means of mediating the level of ancient craftsmanship to present and future generations.
6. The potential for intercultural exchange with cultures, where the sword is still held in high esteem deserves a more thorough assessment, than has hitherto been the case.
7. Any museum seriously concerned with the presentation of historical arms and armour should present at least one blade in a condition approaching its original splendour.

Two caveats:

1. **Please, don´t try this at home!** The properly controlled process takes about 40 monotonous hours and a significantly more time-consuming amount of study and practice.
2. As with cutting hair, the principle **„what´s gone is gone“** applies to any attempt to restore historical weapons (unfortunately the latter normally do not tend to regrow).

Thank you very much for your attention!