

Room Four: Incense Woods and Measuring Instruments

Incense Woods

The smoky scent of burning incense is an integral part of Buddhist ceremonies. Traditionally, incense has been sourced from trees with fragrant resins from the tropical climates of India and Southeast Asia. These trees are not found in Japan, and Buddhists had to import aromatic wood. Hōryū-ji Temple maintained stocks of sandalwood, agarwood, and chinaberry wood. One piece of sandalwood bears a carved inscription in the Pahlavi script of Persia's Sasanian Empire and a branded inscription in Sogdian. It is believed to have been harvested in Southeast Asia and then transported to China by Sogdian and Persian traders before being imported to Japan.

N-112: *Sendankō* (Incense Wood)

N-113: *Byakudankō* (Incense Wood)

N-114: *Jinsuikō* (Incense Wood)

Measuring Instruments

Measuring instruments in the Collection of Hōryū-ji Treasures include a hanging measuring bowl and a ruler from the Nara period (710–794) along with different types of measuring boxes from the Muromachi period (1392–1573).

N-122: Hanging Measuring Bowl

The inscriptions along the rim of this bowl indicate its weight and volume. The surface shows signs of damage and multiple repairs, suggesting that this bowl saw many years of use at Hōryū-ji Temple.

N-123: Large Measuring Box

Holding 9.521 liters (approx. 2.5 gallons), this bowl has five times the volume of the other boxes in the set. Although no inscriptions are visible on its surface, it is thought to date back to the Muromachi period (1392–1573).

N-124–128: Measuring Boxes for One *Shō* (Approx. half a gallon)

These five boxes, each labeled as holding one *shō*, traditionally 1.8 liters (approx. 2 quarts), were used at Hōryū-ji Temple in the Muromachi period (1392–1573). However, the volume of each box is slightly different, suggesting that measurements had not been standardized across temples and estates at that time.

N-83: *Shaku* Ruler, With *bachiru*

This ruler measures one *shaku*, approximately 29.7 cm (11.7 in.). The design on the ruler divides it into two equal halves. The upper half is further divided into five equal lengths for making smaller measurements. *Bachiru* refers to an ivory-carving technique in which the surface of the ivory is dyed different colors, such as red, green, or navy. The artist then carves into the dyed section to create designs by revealing the contrasting white ivory underneath. This ruler was dyed red and then engraved with Mandarin ducks and floral motifs on both sides.