

Room Four: Incense Woods and Measuring Instruments

Incense Woods

N-121: Jar with Four Handles

This jar was used to store incense made from cloves. It is classified as a celadon, a type of stoneware with a green or blue glaze made from plant ash. Its round shape and lightweight appearance suggest that it was made in the early Tang Dynasty (618–907). It is the oldest piece of pottery in the world that has been passed down through the generations to present day.

N-115-1: Incense Wood (*Shōmokukō*)

This is the dried root of a plant known as costus, which is native to the Kashmir region of northern India. This root would have been used to make incense or medicine. It is believed to be one of the former possessions of Emperor Shōmu (701–756) that was dedicated to Hōryūji Temple after the emperor's death.

N-115-2: Box

This box was used to store incense wood, which is on display nearby (N-115-1). The box was made by stretching animal hide over a wooden frame and coating the hide with lacquer. Its surface is painted with flowers and other plants in silver pigment, which has since oxidized and darkened.

N-112: Incense Wood (*Sendankō*)

This incense wood is inscribed with Pahlavi, a script used in Sasanian Persia. It also has a branded mark in Sogdian, another script of ancient Iran. Originally from Southeast Asia, this incense wood was likely brought to China by Sogdians or Persians before it was shipped to Japan.

N-113: Incense Wood (*Byakudankō*)

Some trees have wood with an aromatic resin. These trees are found in the tropical and subtropical areas of India and Southeast Asia. Many incense woods were dedicated to temples, since making offerings of incense to deities is an important part of Buddhism.

N-114: Incense Wood (*Jinsuikō*)

Originally from the tropics, this wood was buried in the ground and left to rot. Its aroma intensified as it rotted. Incense woods like this one were presented as offerings to Buddhist deities, a custom that is often depicted in Buddhist paintings.

Measuring Instruments

N-123: Large Measuring Box

This box holds a little more than five *shō* (9.521 liters), which is about five times the volume of the other boxes in this set (N-124–128). Although it has no inscriptions, the box probably dates to the Muromachi period (1392–1573) like the other boxes in this set.

N-124–128: Measuring Boxes for One *Shō*

Each of these boxes has a different volume, varying from 1.472 liters to 1.87 liters. However, they were all used to measure one *shō*, which is about 1.8 liters. Measurements had not been standardized in Japan's Middle Ages.

N-83: *Shaku* Ruler with *Bachiru*

This ruler measures one *shaku*, which is approximately 29.7 cm in Nara-period (710–794) measurements. The design in the upper half seems to create scales with the divisions in five equal lengths. *Bachiru* refers to a technique in which ivory is dyed and then carved with designs to reveal the contrasting white color underneath. This ruler was dyed red and then engraved with mandarin ducks and floral motifs.