

CONSERVATION OF THE BLACK-LACQUERED FLASKS OF THE SŌJA MIKUMARI SHRINE, NARA

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The conservation of two black-lacquer flasks from the Sōja Mikumari Shrine in Utano-chō, Uda-gun, Nara was conducted under the auspices of the Department of Cultural Properties, Nara Prefecture and the direction of Kitamura Shōsai in 1995 and 96.

A description and the dimensions of the objects:

Item No. One: height 33.5 cm. diameter 28 cm.

Item No. Two: height 33.3 cm. diameter 28 cm.

The objects are called *shinsengu*, meaning implements for feeding the god, and were produced during the Nanbokuchō period. They are of lathed zelkova (*keyaki*) wood, and the upper and lower portions of the main body were formed separately and joined at the center. The main body of each item is broad shouldered with a somewhat gathered skirt and a cylindrical spout. Double bands have been drawn about the shoulder and skirt of each flask. The entire surface was first covered in fabric, and after an undercoat of lacquer had been applied, they were finished in black lacquer. The interiors of the flasks are also black lacquer with red lacquer applied from the rim to the interior of the spout and on the bands at the shoulder and main body.

The State of Damage:

In both Item No. 1 and No. 2, worm holes and indentations were visible. Due to abrasion and insect damage the base wood was exposed, particularly at the back of the bottom. The lacquer finish was in relatively good condition, but the entire surface was soiled. A crack ran diagonally across the main body of Item No.1 and an adhesive that had been used to patch the crack was visible. In Item No. 2, there was a hole that penetrated the base of the main body, and indentations were visible on the upper portion.

Conservation Methods:

The items were first cleaned as much as possible with purified water. The areas of greatest loss were supplemented with zelkova inserts, and after they were restored to their original form, black lacquer was applied after an undercoat of lacquer was used to correct the shape. At the back of the base where the original wood was exposed, the shape was restored to the original surface with *kokuso urushi* (wood-shaving lacquer used to supplement damaged areas, which is made by mixing a sawdust like wood paste and hemp fiber with *mugi urushi*, a flour lacquer adhesive made of raw lacquer and wheat flour) and a lacquer undercoat. They were finished by rubbed lacquering (the process in which any excess is rubbed off after the raw lacquer has fully permeated the area.) A box of paulownia wood was created to store the two flasks.

Notes:

Photographs of the conservation process were taken, before, after and during repair of the objects. After conservation was completed in 2000, the flasks were designated Important Cultural Properties by the national government

Prior to the repair of the flasks, the storehouse of the shrine underwent pesticide treatment.