



7483 A red lacquer Kamakura-bori dai-kogo (large incense box), the cover decorated with hōsōge (stylised flower and foliage), the sides with a key-fret design, all on a gilt ground, the base and interior in black lacquer

The base inscribed in red lacquer: Ryusoin, Kohan dai (at the time of the priest Kohan), shuho (repair), nushi Toda Katsuzo (lacquerer).

Japan 15th/16th century Muromachi/Momoyama period

Dimensions: H. 6.5cm x Diam. 21.5cm (2¾" x 8½")

Provenance: Ryusoin temple, Shizuoka prefecture, Japan

In the 13th century carved lacquer boxes and dishes were brought by monks from China for use in Zen temples. This lacquerware was formed from many layers which was then carved with a design. Inspired by these pieces the famed sculptor Kōun (act. early 13th century) along with other Japanese artisans, started to produce Buddhist objects in imitation of this newly acquired lacquerware. This came to be known as kamakura-bori, a style of lacquerware where the design is carved into a wood base and then coated with lacquer, normally black as a primer and then red. The name derives from the city where it was first produced.

Many temples including Nanzen-ji, Chion-ji and Konren-ji in Kyoto still have dai-kogo along with other pieces produced in the late Kamakura (1185-1333) to Muromachi period (1336-1573) in their collections. Not only for religious use, kamakura-bori became popular for aristocrats and also for tea masters from the Muromachi period onwards.

Ryusoin temple was founded in 1485 by the Zen master Taiso Shojun. From the style of this dai-kogo, it would be reasonable to assume that it was made at the time of its foundation or soon after where it remained in use as one of the temple treasures for many generations.

The base of the box bears the name of the 23rd abbot of the temple, Dohan Kohan (d. 1803) who acceded as head priest in the winter of 1792. Boxes of this type are known to have been selected for use in such ceremonies and it is possible that this piece was re-lacquered to restore it to its former glory for this special occasion.

A similar Kamakura-bori dai-kogo (large incense box) from the Muromachi period is housed in the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History.



