



7159 A bamboo tea scoop and outer box

Tomobako (original box) inscribed:

Lid paper cover: Oboro zuki, Rengestu ni kinroku (The Hazy Moon, made and inscribed by the nun Rengetsu)

Lid: Chashaku (Tea scoop)

Lid interior:

Yado kasa nu

No place at the inn;

Hito no tsurasa wo

human beings have a

Nasake ni te

hard time in life I feel

Oborozukiyo no

but sleeping beneath the blossoms

Hana no shitabushi

and the hazy moon consoles me.

Rengetsu

Bamboo case: Oboro zuki Rakuto Rengetsu (The Hazy Moon, Rengetsu of Rakuto)

Japan 19th century Edo/Meiji period

Dimensions: H. 7¼" x W. 0½" (18cm x 1cm)

Bamboo cover: H. 8½" x W. 1" (21.3cm x 2.5cm)

Otagaki Rengetsu (1791-1875). Rengetsu was in her lifetime a Buddhist nun, poet, calligrapher, potter and painter. Shortly after her birth in Kyoto to a samurai family with the surname Todo, she was adopted by Otagaki Mitsuhsa who worked at Chion'in, an important Jōdo (Pure Land) sect temple in Kyoto, and was given the name Nobu.

In 1798, having lost her mother and brother, she was sent to serve as a lady-in-waiting at Kameoka Castle in Tanba, where she studied poetry, calligraphy and martial arts, returning home at the age of 16 to marry a young samurai named Mochihisa. They had three children, all of whom died shortly after birth; in 1815 Mochihisa also died.

In 1819 Nobu remarried, but her second husband died in 1823. After enduring the tragic loss of two husbands and all her children, Nobu, only 33 years old, shaved her head and became a nun, at which time she adopted the name Rengetsu (Lotus Moon). She lived with her stepfather, who had also taken vows, near Chion'in. After his death in 1832 Rengetsu began to make pottery, which she then inscribed with her own waka (31-syllable classical poetry) and sold to support herself.

In 1875, having led a long and exceptional life, Rengetsu died in the simple Jinkōin tearoom in Kyoto where she had lived and worked for ten years. Jinkōin Temple is a Shingon School temple (Esoteric Buddhism); Rengetsu was ordained as a nun in the Pure Land School (Jōdo Shū) but she also studied and practiced Zen and Esoteric Buddhism.

The delicate hand-built tea utensils that Rengetsu inscribed with hauntingly beautiful poems are unique combinations of poetry, calligraphy and pottery; they were as highly prized in her own lifetime as they are now. Rengetsu is also known to have inscribed her poems on utensils made by other Kyoto potters. In addition to ceramics, she also produced numerous gassaku (jointly created artworks) in the form of paintings, hanging scrolls, and calligraphic works with fellow literati artists and writers.

For two similar examples exhibited at the Nomura Art Museum, Kyoto in 2014 see: Ōtagaki Rengetsu

(1791-1875) Poetry and Artwork from a Rustic Hut, p. 56, 104.

Works by Rengetsu can be found in the collections of: The Tokyo National Museum and the Michigan Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Australia