

# Iconography of Absence: Negoro Lacquers and the Sacred Geography of Their Origin

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## Abstract

This paper reveals prevailing narratives concerning the origins of Negoro lacquers which form part of the eldest lacquer traditions in Japan. In order to untangle historical facts hidden behind the myth of Negoro lacquers, it is necessary to embrace related issues of oral and written dissemination of knowledge, issues of cultural memory as well as religious conceptions of nature and creation. To trace some aspects of the genesis of the Negoro lacquers, this paper focuses on historical conceptions of cinnabar lacquers, in particular of the ninth and tenth centuries. In these periods, the sacred nature of cinnabar-lacquered utensils was significantly defined. As will be shown, the embellishment of Heian-period ritual lacquer objects in red (or black) colour were absorbed and preserved by Negoro objects. And, like their precursors, Negoro lacquers forcefully apply to fundamental representations of nature, culture and religion through colour and material.

## 要旨

本稿が明らかにするのは、日本における最古の塗り物の伝統から生まれた根来塗の起源について流布している物語である。根来塗にまつわる俗説の陰に隠された歴史的事実を解明するためには、口承と書承による知識の伝播に関わる問題と、自然と創造についての宗教的概念だけでなく、文化的記憶の問題も包摂する必要がある。根来塗創生の諸側面を跡付けるために、本稿は特に9世紀と10世紀の辰砂塗の歴史的概念に着目する。この時期に辰砂塗器物の宗教性が決定づけられたのである。平安時代の宗教的塗り物の朱色（もしくは黒色）による装飾は、根来の品々に取り込まれ、保存されたことが示される。それで、平安時代のもと同じく、根来塗は色彩と材質を通して、自然、文化そして信仰の根源的表象と強く結びついているのである。

(訳：竹中悠美)

## 1.

The main objective of this paper is to investigate issues of origin and tradition of the so-called Negoro lacquers. They constitute a distinct category within Japanese lacquer art that flourished across time and space throughout diverse histories and topographies. Lacquer objects in the Negoro manner reveal multifaceted layers of function and meaning according to varied forms of application and changing aesthetic notions in the course of history. They consist of many different types and were originally intended as religious implements and everyday utensils for use in temples and shrines. Negoro lacquers flourished from the early Muromachi period (1392–1573) through the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), although the earliest preserved lacquer objects in the Negoro manner date as far back as the twelfth century. For centuries, Negoro lacquers have been valued in Japan for their technical manufacture, strength of shape, and aesthetic imagery.<sup>1)</sup> In particular, devotees of the Way of Tea, appreciated the combination of functionality and harsh beauty found in Negoro ware. Up to this day, Negoro lacquers are highly sought after art objects charged with a sense of matured beauty (Colour plate).

Simple, unembellished Negoro lacquers exhibit formal and stylistic features of a common visual knowledge. The lacquers display easy-to-use forms combined with a careful selection of wooden materials and an elaborate solidity of manufacture. The visual outcome of a black lacquer undercoating with a final coat of red lacquer evokes a dramatic beauty which directly appeals to sensual perception. As the final lacquer coat of most Negoro lacquers is simply applied without an additional polish, their surfaces reveal traces of processing. Typical for most Negoro lacquers, they eschew the narrative world of pictures, anecdotes and allegories inherent in the elaborated designs of *makie* lacquers. They instead display an aesthetically enriched presence of baldness and a lack of imagery.

## 2.

Negoro ware is said to have originated at the Ichijōsan Daidembōin Negoroji, known as Negoroji, a principal Shingon Buddhist temple in today's Wakayama Prefecture, south of Nara (fig. 1), established in 1140 by the Shingon priest Kakuban (1095–1143). After violent opposition by rivaling monks at Kōyasan and the new subtemple Daidembōin, which he had erected as a centre for the study of Shingon, Kakuban moved to Negoro, a remote region in the Katsuragi mountain range, where he had received several fiefs through imperial donation. At Hirota he used the already existing structure of a mountain-worship hermitage to build a temple complex, which in time came to be known as Negoro Temple. Kakuban's teachings were extended by Rayu (1226–1304), who left Mt. Kōya for Negoroji in 1288, taking with him several monks of the Mt. Kōya Daidembōin. Rayu was the author of the *kajishinsetsu* (kaji-body theory), a new interpretation of the dharma-body (*hosshin*) as conceived by the Shingon school. The *kaji*-body theory is the quintessential

doctrine of that school which later became known as the “School of the New Shingon Dogma” (*Shingi Shingon shū*), with Negoroji as its centre.<sup>2)</sup> The temple complex reached its peak in the late Muromachi period with several hundred buildings as subtemples and living quarters for monks.<sup>3)</sup> In 1585 (Tenshō 13), the huge mountain temple complex was reduced to ashes by the forces of the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98) to gain control over the regions of Kii and Izumi. Only a few principal images and buildings survived the blaze, like the Great Pagoda (Daitō) and the Hall of the Great Master (Daishidō). Surviving monks scattered to Kyoto and further south to Tosa and Iyo Provinces in Shikoku. With the fire, almost all of the treasures were destroyed, as well as historical and religious documents testifying to the former power and cultural splendour of the temple.

### 3.

One particular aspect of fascination regarding Negoro lacquers lies in the rich web of nostalgia that has been woven by scholars and tea devotees since the seventeenth century on issues of their origins. From sporadic references to “Negoro mono” 根来もの in Tokugawa-period scriptures, we know that around 1650 the production of cinnabar lacquers was linked with the Negoro Temple.<sup>4)</sup> An early semantic and historic affiliation of lacquers with the Negoro Temple is codified in the *Kefukigusa* published in 1645 (Shōhō 2).<sup>5)</sup> Chapter four lists numerous famous regional products (*shokoku no meibutsu*) available in the Japanese capital. As examples of well-known products of the Kii and Nankaidō areas it mentions:

“[...] Negoro bowls and trays. In the past, when the temple prospered, they were made as commodities and bought and sold throughout the area 根来碗折敷、昔寺繁昌之時拵タル道具ト云、当時方々ニテ売買之。”<sup>6)</sup>

A passage related to tea utensils in the illustrated book *Banpō zensho* (Complete Writings on Ten Thousand Treasures) (1694, Genroku 7) indicates that in the late seventeenth century historical Negoro lacquers were already being collected and memorised as artifacts in tea gatherings:

“[...] Negoro things, a kind of lacquer, amongst which are incense containers and trays, when paper is dampened for wiping, the lacquer adheres to the paper, [in case of] Shosha lacquer, which is very similar to Negoro, the lacquer does not adhere to the paper 根来物塗物香合折敷あり、紙をしめして、すりてみれば、紙に漆つくなり、書寫ぬりはよく根来に似たれ共、紙につかず。”<sup>7)</sup>

It also offers insight into the emulating tradition of Shosha lacquers (fig. 2), which are thought

to have been invented at the Engyōji in Harima Province in the aftermath of Negoro Temple's decline. Shosha lacquers seem to have been used as a contemporary alternative to the limited stock of old Negoro pieces, as they offered a similar aesthetic appeal.

A main contribution to knowledge and speculation on Negoro lacquer ware was the publication *Kōgei shiryō* (Historical Documents on Crafts) of 1878 (Meiji 11) by the Kokugaku scholar Kurokawa Mayori (1829–1906).<sup>8)</sup> The author solidified the conception of the lacquer's origin, according to which these are credited as having been invented by monks of Negoro Temple.<sup>9)</sup> He must have been aware of sporadic written and visual references to Negoro lacquer ware in earlier documents and publications, such as in the monumental *Wakansansai zue* (Illustrated Sino-Japanese Encyclopedia) or the travelogue *Kiinokuni meisho zue* (Illustrations of Famous Places in Kii Province).<sup>10)</sup>

Based on archaeological excavations carried out at the site of the former Negoro Temple, it is reasonable to assume that a moderate local lacquer production took place. Excavated fragments of dishes, bowls, small plates and square *oshiki*-type trays reveal that although simple in shape, these Negoro lacquer objects had been carefully executed, often worked on a lathe and coated with several layers composed of cinnabar.

In recent years research on Japanese lacquers has offered new methods of approach, which in turn has also had effects on Negoro discourse. In particular the studies of Kitano Nobuhiko on production technologies of pre-modern lacquer shed some light on the organisational structures of the economic networks of woodworkers (*kijishi*) and lacquerers (*nurishi*).<sup>11)</sup> Large temples like the Negoro Temple had distribution and consumption networks based on religious cohesion between head temple and subsidiary temples across provincial borders. They were supplied with daily necessities and temple furnishings by groups of craftsmen organised like guilds in conjunction with merchants. The mobility of those *kijishi* family groups may explain the increased level of nationwide standardisation of the wood bases of cinnabar lacquers since medieval times. Cooperating with local *nurishi* and wholesalers, they supplied their customers, whether these were religious institutions or private consumers.<sup>12)</sup>

#### 4.

What has certainly fostered the perception of Negoroji as the birthplace of cinnabar lacquers in Negoro manner is the fact that since the Heian period (794–1185) the region had been an important area for mining mercury sulfide (Hgs, *ryūka suigin*), the main ingredient of cinnabar (*shinsha*). It is interesting to see how the early mercury sulfide mining sites are situated in Honshū and Shikoku, stretching like a broad ribbon from north to west around the mountain ridges and rivers of the Kii Peninsula. Densely packed along the sites we find ancient shrines dedicated to Niutsuhime, the goddess of mercury; “niu” being another term for “producing cinnabar”. The mining was managed by clans that claimed Niutsuhime as their tutelary clan-god (*ujigami*). The

Kamitsutsuga 上筒香 area at today's Niu Jinja in Kōya, for example, was an ancient mining area known as “Tsutsugawa” 筒川, which can be traced back in historical records as the site “Tsutsugawa” 管川 or “Suikō” 水呑, denoting both a sacred site inhabited by Niutsuhime and a mercury mining area. Eventually, the enshrined deity at the old Niutsuhime Jinja at Kamitsutsuga had been transferred to the main Niutsuhime Shrine in Katsuragi between Mt. Kōya and Negoro, where it is worshipped until today as Niu Myōjin.

Important objects with substantial semantic reference to the Negoroji have been preserved in temples and shrines. They testify to a strong network between associated temples based on both religious and economic channels. The two pairs of ritual wash basins with attached feet (*ashitsuki fusatsudarai*) owned by the Rokujizōji in Ibaraki Prefecture (fig. 3) were very likely donated as offerings by the third abbot of this temple, Ehan (1461–1537). Ehan presumably had visited Negoroji to collect and copy Shingon scriptures.<sup>13</sup> According to the inscriptions on the basins, it becomes clear that they were installed in the Rokujizōji as products of the Negoro Temple.<sup>14</sup> As Ehan was abbot of the Rokujizōji from 1505 (Eishō 2) until his death in 1537 (Tembun 7), the basins most probably were manufactured in a workshop associated with the Negoro Temple during this time period. Ritual wash basins of the *fusatsu*-type (Skr.: *upavasatha*, “to dwell nearby”) were used on specified days of Buddhist repentance and observance.

A cinnabar-lacquered altar table (*maezukue*) in the possession of the Hasedera in Sakurai in Nara Prefecture bears an inscription which informs us that it once belonged to the Myōō'in, a subtemple at Daidenbōin of Negoro Temple (fig. 4).<sup>15</sup> With regard to its Chinese-influenced style and the elaborate inscription executed in sprinkled gold, it may have been manufactured on the occasion of completing the restoration of the Daidenbōin buildings in 1405 (Ōei 12). The valuable altar table may have been transferred to Hasedera around 1600, at a time when this temple had become the head of the evolving Hasedera-Koikebō lineage of the Negoro School within the renewal processes of Shingi Shingon after the sacking of Negoroji, its former centre.<sup>16</sup> A key personage in the transfer of the valuable desk may have been the priest Yūgi 宥義 (1546–1618), who then was appointed Abbot of Koikebō at Hasedera. Before this appointment, he served as the eighth abbot of the Rokujizōji and studied at Negoro Temple shortly before its destruction.

Whoever commissioned the transfer likely conceived the altar table as a materialized embodiment of Negoro Temple's legacy, namely, the religious, sacred bonds between Hasedera and the Kakuban lineage of Shingon Buddhism at Negoroji. As this object was closely linked with the Negoroji, it was tied to specific historical and topographical semantics, thereby creating an aura of nostalgia and sacred provenance that was thought to be ritually effective.

In subsequence, reminiscence of the lost cultural splendour of Negoro Temple culminated in a strong appraisal of the lacquers which were perceived as symbolic repositories charged with mnemonic cultural energy. Material evidence testifying to the importance of the temple had vanished, a circumstance that fostered the attribution of precious cinnabar lacquers to the temple and its topography, as they could fill the gap between memories of grandeur of the temple complex and

contemporary fragmentation of the site. The lacquers fitted perfectly into a historical narrative of transience, inasmuch as they exhibited visual and also haptic traces of both refined brilliance and withered age. As the absence of pictorial iconography had made Negoro lacquers particularly appropriate for a broad spectrum of different uses, they now could help to visualise and represent the physically absent entity of the Negoro Temple in the context of art appraisal. The monochromatic, in many cases fragmented appearance of Negoro lacquers can thus be conceived as an iconography of absence. The materiality of wood and cinnabar-tinted lacquer of the objects lent itself ideally to the construction of metaphors of nature and creation, which was linked to issues of cultural memory and religious imagination in the context of particular sacred geographies.

## 5.

The custom of using red-lacquered utensils in religious environments forms part of the earliest lacquer production traditions on the Japanese archipelago. In the Buddhist context, the existence of a variety of red-lacquered implements produced on a high level of demand is testified by temple inventories as early as the ninth century. The earliest record of this kind, the *Anshōji garan engi shizaichō* (Records of the Founding and Inventory of Property of the Anshōji Temple Compound) of 871 lists “three-hundred eighty-six cinnabar-lacquered items” (*shuurushi sanbyaku hachijūroku kō* 朱漆三百八十六口) as utensils for the embellishment of the sacral interiors of temple halls and as sacrificial implements for ritual offerings.<sup>17)</sup>

Ritual objects utilized in Shingon ceremonies developed during the seventh and eighth centuries and were based on continental Chinese models. A key agent in the transmission of early esoteric teachings, practices, and forms of visual culture to Japan was Kūkai (744–836), who in 806 brought back from his stay in China various scriptures, texts, and ritual objects.

Although we do not know how the early Anshōji cinnabar-lacquered ritual items looked like, it is most likely that their visual appearance mirrored offering objects of the Nara period (710–784). In this period, containers for food were considered the most important oblatory vessels like begging bowls and sets of dishes. Speaking of eighth- and early-ninth-century lacquerware one main feature is the predominance of black lacquer (*kuro urushi*).<sup>18)</sup> These characteristics correspond with archaeological finds on the premises of Anshōji dated to the early Heian period.<sup>19)</sup> Once located in the Yamashina mountain area at the periphery of the capital, the Anshōji was commissioned in 848 (Kashō 1) as one of the earliest esoteric Buddhist temples of the lineage of Kūkai. It received particular support from the imperial line of the Fujiwara family in the ninth century in exchange for conducting prayers and rituals that benefited the prosperity of the emperor, his family and the nation. The existence of an extensive inventory of cinnabar lacquers as mentioned in the ninth-century temple register must be seen in this context of clan-driven government-protected temple sponsorship. For the faithful, lavishly decorated sacred spaces

visualised the manifestation of supernatural powers, that is, the presence of Buddha in a worldly realm of paradise. Exquisitely executed workmanship, artistry and luxurious material were integral parts of the concept of visualised transcendence, for they illustrated sanctification through a wealth of splendor.

Cinnabar was considered a most luxurious material. Since ancient times it was used as vermilion (*shu*) for lacquer varnishing. Mercury cinnabar (HgS; *ryūka suigin* or *suiginshu*) was only available in regions with deposits of mercury layers and whose use would most likely have been limited to urban centres of power only.<sup>20)</sup> Most high-end food utensils in the late eighth century were ceramics; only ten percent was made of lacquer of which the majority was black.<sup>21)</sup> It can be assumed that cinnabar-lacquered utensils were highly effective instruments through which to visualise sacrificial power and splendid ritual sanctification by means of material value.

Evidence informing us on the visual nature of Heian-period vermilion lacquers employed as oblatory and food vessels is provided by another temple inventory which is almost contemporaneous with the Anshōji register. The *Kawachi Kuni Kanshinji kanroku engi shizaichō* (Records of the Founding and Inventory of Property of the Kanshinji Temple in Kawachi Province), dated 883 (Gangyō 7), is the earliest extant record of the Shingon temple and its collections.<sup>22)</sup> Located in a mountainous region in southern Kawachi (modern-day Ōsaka Prefecture) the site, already prior to the founding of the temple around 837, formed an important hub for travellers on their route from the Inland Sea to the governmental centres of the capital region in Yamashiro and Yamato Provinces, as well as mountain pilgrims bound further south to Mt. Kōya in Kii Kuni, where Kūkai founded Kongōbuji, the eminent Shingon temple, in 816.

The entry on ritual implements and vessels stored in a treasure repository lists main types of wooden vessels which were used as containers for oblatory food and flowers as well as purified water for the ritual purgation of the Buddhist deities at the altar:

“One-hundred and twenty-five cinnabar-lacquered items. Nine large bowls with a diameter of six *sun* [ca. 18 cm], one piece broken, ten bowls for soup with a diameter of five *sun* [ca. 15 cm], ten cups for purified water<sup>23)</sup> with a diameter of four *sun*, five *bu* [ca. 13 cm], twenty small trays with a diameter of five *sun* [ca. 15 cm], two pieces broken, ten mid-size trays with a diameter of six *sun* [ca. 18 cm], sixteen trays with attached feet, ten of which with a diameter of six *sun* [ca. 18 cm], six of which with a diameter of five *sun* [ca. 15 cm], forty flower trays without feet with a diameter of seven *sun* [ca. 21 cm], ten flower-shaped trays without feet with a diameter of six *sun* [ca. 18 cm]. 朱漆器百廿五枚大椀九枚（口径六寸破一枚），羹椀十枚（口径五寸），闕伽蓋十枚（口径四寸五分），小盤廿枚（口径五寸破二枚），盤十（枚口径六寸），足付盤十六枚（十枚口径六寸六枚口径五寸），足无花盤四十枚（口径七寸），足无花形盤十枚（口径六寸）。”<sup>24)</sup>

Here, I will only point to trays referred to as *ban* which in the ninth century basically can be

defined as a board on which objects are spread out, or the term designated a dish with rounded edge for carrying food.

In the register, differentiation is made between categories of trays with and without feet. The visual shapes of the listed *ashitsuki ban* (tray with attached feet) very likely resembled those made in Negoro manner, of which the earliest preserved pieces are dated to the Heian period (fig. 5) and said to have been passed down at the Ōtaki Shrine in Fukui Prefecture. They have an almost square, vermilion-tinted board with a rounded, black-lacquered rim that is carried by four dainty protruding legs in black lacquer. Carved in the shape of cats paws, they reveal a Chinese influence. The plainness and thinness of their board with its inverted angles shows a closeness to other early types of cinnabar-lacquered trays such as the *oshiki* and the *rakan ban*, which were used as implements employed for the serving of offerings.<sup>25)</sup> A second type of *ashitsuki ban* in Negoro manner is distinguished by round boards with three attached feet, a form which had begun to develop in the early Muromachi period. Eventually, *ashitsuki ban* were also utilised as set meal trays in temples and shrines. This is indicated by the large quantity of trays listed in the Kanshinji register, which points to a mass production of cinnabar trays for use as offering and serving utensils as early as the ninth century.

The term *hana ban* (flower tray) in the Kanshinji register may simply indicate vessels that were used for placing flowers upon as offerings. The *ashimu hanagata ban* (flower-shaped trays without feet) recorded in the inventory may have resembled Chinese white-and-green ware of the Yuezhou and Yaozhou kilns (fig. 6) which had a pervasive influence on Japanese lacquered food vessel forms during the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>26)</sup> These early shapes certainly linger on in Negoro lobed trays (*rinka bon*, “circular flower tray”) which were also influenced by undecorated Chinese red and black lacquer dishes from the early thirteenth century onwards (fig. 7). Like their Chinese models, the lobed Negoro trays were formed to resemble the petals of flowers and were used for serving sweets, as was the case with the oldest preserved Negoro *rinka bon*, which dates to 1261 (Kōchō 1) (fig. 8). What appears to be of preeminent significance from the Heian period onwards is a preference for lacquers coated with vermilion and used in temples and shrines on ritual and festive occasions.

## 6.

With the introduction of Buddhism and Daoist-inspired thought to Japan in the sixth century, new aesthetics and meanings of colour became apparent. Especially from the early Heian period onwards, colour red became increasingly important in the arts as a symbolic and magical carrier of life-prolonging powers believed to be found in vermilion.<sup>27)</sup> Complementary precautional and beneficial magico-religious practices were undertaken in various religious and political contexts by members of the imperial family, the nobility and Buddhist esoteric clerics. It is important to note that in this period, Shinto-related and Buddhist ritual procedures often contained similar elements



based on the study of celestial bodies, the Five Elements (*gogyō*) and (unusual) phenomena of geological or meteorological nature, which served purposes of celestial divination, calendrical calculation and geomancy. We know that emperor Ninmyō (r. 833–50) engaged in cinnabar rites,<sup>28)</sup> and that Kūkai opened up the Kōyasan area for establishing the later Kongōbuji, also due to the abundance of mercury and cinnabar in the region.<sup>29)</sup> Buddhist monks of the esoteric schools were active in many fields of expertise concerning geological phenomena, mining, the study of ores, as well as concerning pacifying rituals and practices performed in the context of mountain asceticism (*shugendō*). They combined pre-Buddhist folk traditions and local cults like the veneration of sacred mountains (*sangaku shinkō*) with Buddhist and Daoist practices and ideas. Tradition often ascribes the discovery of mercury to Kūkai, which is manifested in the myth of his encounter with Niutsuhime, the protecting Shintō goddess of Kōyasan, who, disguised as a layman, granted Kūkai the permission to enter and cultivate the sacred land.<sup>30)</sup> As mentioned before, “Niu” denominates the extraction of cinnabar. The eldest shrine dedicated to Niu Myōjin is Niu Jinja near Mt. Kōya which is supposed to have been established during Kūkai’s time. The deity is now enshrined at Niutsuhime Jinja in Katsuragi, which is in close proximity of Negoro.

Already in his first work *Sangō shiiki* (Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings) written in 797 (Enryaku 16), in order to compare Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, Kūkai refers to the magical properties of mountain minerals, i.e. cinnabar, as part of the Daoist divine techniques for attaining immortality.<sup>31)</sup> He practiced mountain asceticism in the regions of Kii and Yamato. This also included carrying a bifurcated wooden stick called *kongō zue* (fig. 9), which enabled him to find ores and water when it was thrust into the ground, as this had the effect of stirring up oscillating particles in the earth below.<sup>32)</sup> By absorbing mercury as an alchemical agent, he is said to have reached a state of mummification at the end of his life.<sup>33)</sup>

The ninth century was marked by the introduction of cinnabar for lacquer wares as oblatory and food vessels. There took place a clear shift in colouring from black to cinnabar lacquers. The changes in terms of materiality are so evident in the ninth century that we may speak of a turning point as to aesthetic preferences. Whereas the Nara period was a period characterised by black lacquer in the context of oblatory and food vessels, the Heian period must be considered a period of vermilion lacquers in this regard. This paradigm is traceable in Heian-period Buddhist inventories and Shintō-related courtly texts alike.

We know of the 927 record of official regulations and ceremonies entitled *Engi shiki* (Procedures of the Engi Era)<sup>34)</sup> that sacrificial vessels used in Shintō-based procedures, such as annual sacrifices to the deities, revealed a strict visual and material hierarchy according to the rank of the participating court nobles. As listed in book 17 on the duties of the *Takumizukasa* (Office of the Artisans), the most significant vessels used for imperial banquets were silver plates, followed by red and black lacquers.<sup>35)</sup> In the *Takumizukasa* each category of lacquer vessel is precisely recorded with specifications on the vessel name, form, size, measurements and material data related to the lacquer, pigments, and textile substrate, and even manpower. One listed example in

the category of cinnabar-lacquered vessels reads as follows:

“[...] Flower tray, one piece, diameter nine *sun* [ca. 27 cm]. Material [for production]: Lacquer one *gō*, five *shaku*, two *satsu* [ca. 272 ml], cinnabar one *bu*, four *shu* [ca. 6.6 g], linen nine *sun* [ca. 27 cm], plain woven fabric, each two *sun* [ca. 6 cm], cotton three *sun* [ca. 9 cm], lampblack one *shaku* [ca. 18 ml], oil one *shaku* [ca. 18 ml], [during] the season of long production [it needs the power of] almost one man, [during] the season of middle production [it needs the power of] one man, [during] the season of short production [it needs the power of] two and a quarter men. 花盤一口径九寸。料。漆一合五勺二撮。朱沙一分四銖。贖布九寸。純。布各二寸。綿三寸。掃墨一勺。油一勺。長功一人大半。中功一人。短功二人小半。”<sup>36)</sup>

From entries like this, we can recognise that forms and sizes of lacquer vessels recorded in the *Engishiki* are close to those listed in the *Kanshinji* inventory. What is more, the entries in the *Engishiki* provide information on methods and techniques employed in relation with cinnabar lacquers used in courtly-religious contexts in the Heian period. It is possible to crystallise certain criteria such as time-consuming, elaborate processes of manufacturing, for example of vermilion and black lacquer coatings, and textile substrates, which in turn imply an elaborately worked wooden core. These prerequisites are strikingly similar to those required in the case of Negoro lacquers.

Specifications of the appropriate banquet equipment to be employed by imperial family members and other nobles is listed, among others, in the *Engishiki* books on the duties of the *Daizenshiki* (Office of the Palace Table) (books 32 and 33) and *Ōiryō* (Bureau of the Palace Kitchen) (book 35). The dishes and drinking vessels used in banquets had to follow certain material and representational parameter according to the status of the attending nobles. Silver ware was reserved for the emperor and his consorts, as were vermilion lacquers for the imperial princes and imperial advisers. The requirements for the important harvest festival conducted in the eleventh month of the lunisolar calendar, the Festival of First Fruits (*Niname sai*), indicate that cinnabar-lacquered utensils were designated for use by aristocrats of the Third Rank or higher, whereas black-lacquered (*ushitsu*, “crow lacquer”) utensils and green-glazed ceramics were reserved for nobles of the Fourth and Fifth Rank. Nobles of lower ranks were to use pottery such as the high-fired Sue ware and Haji earthenware. Through their precious materiality, the lacquers thus illustrated and represented wealth, power and authority. The prestigious arrangements of black and cinnabar-red lacquer vessels in these ceremonies not only comprised magico-religious elements but also visualised representative strategies of legitimising worldly powers within the sacred.

## 7.

Negoro lacquers form part of the eldest lacquer traditions in Japan. In order to untangle historical facts hidden behind the myth of Negoro lacquers, it is necessary to embrace related issues of oral and written dissemination of knowledge, issues of cultural memory as well as religious conceptions of nature and creation. My purpose in this essay was to reveal prevailing narratives concerning the origins of Negoro lacquers. In order to trace some aspects of their genesis, I focused on historical conceptions of cinnabar lacquers, in particular of the ninth and tenth centuries. In these periods, the sacred nature of cinnabar-lacquered utensils was significantly defined, since these objects were employed in ritual and representational Buddhist and Shintō contexts as repositories charged with protective, even magical effects. The ever-growing fascination for lacquers in Negoro manner is intrinsically tied to their function as a cultural engram through which traces of memory are inscribed. Not only was the embellishment of Heian-period ritual lacquer objects in red (or black) colour absorbed and preserved by Negoro objects. Like their precursors, Negoro lacquers forcefully apply to fundamental representations of nature, culture and religion through colour and material.

## Notes

- 1) In place of the many existing descriptions of Negoro lacquers, cf. Kawada Sadamu 河田貞: “An Overview of *Negoro*”, in: Negoroten Jikkō Iinkai 根来展実行委員会, ed.: *Tokubetsuten Negoro* 特別展根来, Tokyo: Ōkura Shūkokan, 2010, pp. 227f.
- 2) For more details refer to Matthew D. McMullen: *Rayu and Shingi Shingon Sectarian History*, unpublished master thesis, University of Hawai‘i, 2008, pp. 3ff.
- 3) Cf. Ōkōchi Satoshi 大河内智之: “Negoroji no rekishi to bunka. Kōgyō Daishi Kakuban no hōtō 根来寺の歴史と文化. 興教大師覚鑊の法灯” (History and Culture of Negoro Temple. The Dharma Lamp of Kōgyō Daishi Kakuban), in: Wakayama kenritsu hakubutsukan 和歌山県立博物館, ed.: *Tokubetsuten Negoroji no rekishi to bunka. Kōgyō Daishi Kakuban no hōtō* 根来寺の歴史と文化. 興教大師覚鑊の法灯, Wakayama, 2002, pp. 4f.
- 4) For some details on Tokugawa-period written sources on Negoro lacquers, cf. Takahashi Takahiro 高橋隆博: “Negoro-nuri – aka to kuro no zōkei 根来塗 – 赤と黒の造形” (Negoro-nuri – Shapes of Red and Black), in: *Bijutsu kōgei* 日本美術工芸 442, 1975, pp. 18f. Kawada Sadamu in his comprehensive publication on Negoro lacquers also lists main historical documents on Negoro since the Tokugawa period. See Kawada Sadamu: *Negoro* 根来, Kyoto: Shikōsha, 1985, appendix.
- 5) The *Kefukigusa* is a *haikai* compendium by Matsue Shigeyori (1602–1680) who was a well-known Kyōto-based author of *haikai* anthologies. The *Kefukigusa* comprises of five volumes dealing with rules for writing *haikai* and *renga*.
- 6) Waseda University owns several editions of the *Kefukigusa*, which was reprinted four times between 1653 and 1672. For the relevant part in the 1645 edition, cf. [http://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/bunko18/bunko18\\_00042](http://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/bunko18/bunko18_00042), accessed 12/10/2012; also listed in Kawada 1985, p. 282.
- 7) As cited in Okada Jō 岡田譲/Matsuda Gonroku 松田権六/Arakawa Hirokazu, eds.: *Urushie, Negoro* 漆絵, 根来 (Nihon no shitsugei 日本の漆芸 5), Tokyo: Chūōkoronsha, 1991, p. 100. (In the following referred

- to as *Nihon no shitsugei* 5).
- 8) Annotated reprint Kurokawa Mayori/Maeda Yasuji 前田泰次, eds.: *Zōtei kogei shiryō* 増訂工芸志料 (Tōyō bunko 254), Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1974.
  - 9) *Ibid.*, pp. 362ff.
  - 10) The *Wakansansai zue* was compiled by Terajima Ryōan over a period of thirty years beginning in 1713 (Shōtoku 3). The *Kiinokuni meissho zue* was published in four parts between 1811 (Bunka 8) and 1851 (Kaei 4) by the Obiya Ihei publishing company in Wakayama.
  - 11) Cf. Kitano Nobuhiko: *Kinsei shikki sangyōgijutsu to kōzō* 近世漆器の産業技術と構造, Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 2005.
  - 12) A prominent example is Kuroe, a district in modern Kainan City in Wakayama Prefecture, within 30 kilometres distance of Negoro Temple. The village developed into one of the important lacquer producing places since the early Tokugawa period, trading as far as the capital Edo. Initiated by settled woodworkers since medieval times, Kuroe became famous for its lacquered wooden bowls as part of the Kishu lacquer tradition. Kishu lacquer is thought to have been derived from the Negoro lacquer tradition after the temple's sacking, but Kuroe as a place of lacquer production certainly sustained a tradition that mirrors production alliances that had already been established with the medieval Negoro Temple. On Kuroe as a main location of lacquer production in Tokugawa Japan, see *ibid.*, pp. 96ff.
  - 13) For further information on documents and treasures related to Negoro Temple that were acquired by the Rokujizōji during Ehan's management, see Maeda Tomohisa 前田友久: "Rokujizōji no negoronuri fusatsudarai 六地藏寺の根来塗布薩盥", in: *Bandarai* バンダライ, vol. 9, 2010, pp. 3–22.
  - 14) *Ibid.*, pp. 8ff., and also Kawada 1985, pp. 294f. The inscriptions are reproduced in both.
  - 15) The inscription reads: "Kozan Denbōmyōō'in 根山傳法明王院", which is the Daidembōin at Negoro Temple. Reprinted in *Nihon no shitsugei* 5, 1991, p. 101.
  - 16) The Hasadera-Koikebō lineage founded by the former Negoro Temple priest Senyo 専誉 (1530–1604) later became the Buzan branch of Shingi. On the pre-modern schism of the Shingi Shingon School, see in detail McMullen 2005, pp. 13ff.
  - 17) The document is only extant in a copied version of 1385, now housed at Tōji Temple in Kyōto. Cf. Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三, ed.: *Heian ibun* 平安遺文, vol. 1, Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1974, doc. 164, 1/140 (in the following referred to as *Heian ibun*, vol. 1); also cited in *Nihon no shitsugei* 5, 1991, p. 97.
  - 18) What appears to be black colour can in fact comprise a wide range of shades ranging from dark blacks to lighter browns. This is due to the various types of quality of the employed lacquer coatings and pigments which have been added. Many black lacquers of the Nara period consist of several layers of transparent lacquer (*suki urushi*), which finally gives the impression of a dark brownish-black colouring. Cf. Arakawa Hirokazu: "Tōyō no shikkōgei gaisetsu 東洋の漆工芸概説" (Outline of East Asian Lacquer Craft), in: Tōkyō Hakubutsukan 東京国立博物館, ed.: *Tōyō no Shikkōgei, Tokubetsuten* 東洋の漆工芸, 特別展, Tokyo: Tokyo National Museum, 1977, p. 10.
  - 19) Cf. Ko Jungyong 高正龍: "Anshōji shimodera ato 1 安祥寺下寺跡 1" (Anshōji Shimodera Remains No. 1), in: Kyōto-shi Maizō Bunkazai Kenkyōjo 京都市埋蔵文化財研究所, ed.: *Kyōtoshi Maizō Bunkazai chōsa gaisetsu* 京都市埋蔵文化財調査概要, Kyōto, 1996, pp. 87ff., and colour plate 5.
  - 20) Since the Nara period, the Kamio 神生 and Yamato 大和 mines in the Nara region, as well as the Niu 丹生 mine in the Ise region, contributed considerably to the production of cinnabar ore due to the heightened demand of the material for the embellishment of Buddhist architecture and statues in the ancient capitals of Nara and Kyōto. For example, an increased amount of mercury, of which cinnabar is the common ore, was needed for the production and gilding of the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji (752). As mentioned in historical

- documents, the required mass of mercury amounted to 58.620 ryō (2.2 metric tons). Cf. Yajima Sumisaku 矢嶋澄策: “Nihon suigin kōshō no rekishiteki kōsatsu 日本水銀鉱床の史的考察” (A Historical Study of the Distribution of Mercury Deposits in Japan), in: *Chigaku Zasshi*, vol. 72, no. 4, 1963, pp. 180f.
- 21) Cf. Kaneko Hiroyuki 金子裕之: “8–9 seki no shikki: Mibun hyōji no shokki 8 ~ 9 世紀の漆器: 身分表示の食器” (Lacquerware of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Tableware as Indication of Status, in: *Bunkazai ronsō II: Nara Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo sōritsu 40-shūnen kinen ronbunshū* 文化財論叢 II: 奈良国立文化財研究所創立 40 周年記念論文集, Kyōto: Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1995, p. 347f.
- 22) The register is kept at Kanshinji. Reprinted in *Heian ibun*, vol. 1, doc. 174, 1: 183. For precise details on the early history of the Kanshinji, the inventory and its sacred images, see Cynthia J. Bogel: “Canonizing Kannon: The Ninth-Century Esoteric Buddhist Altar at Kanshinji”, in: *Art Bulletin*, vol. 84, no. 1, 2002, pp. 39ff.
- 23) The Japanese term used here is *akasen*, which denotes small cups or bowls for oblations offered to Buddha. The oblation may consist of flowers, incense, or perfumed water. The term *aka* derives from the Sanskrit *arghya* meaning “something worthy”.
- 24) Cf. *Heian ibun*, vol. 1, doc. 174, 1: 183.
- 25) The oldest dated *oshiki* (of the angled corner type) was donated to the Great Buddha Hall of Tōdaiji by some fellow laymen and carries the date 1262 (Kōchō 2). The oldest preserved *rakan ban* bears an inscription dated 1307 (Tokujō 2) and was used as one of a set of thirty-three in the kitchen of the nunnery Hokkeji in Nara for preparing offerings to the *rakan* (Skr. *arhat*). Both are published in Kawada 1985, p. 316 and p. 56, respectively.
- 26) Cf. Kaneko 1995, p. 354.
- 27) On various magico-religious aspects of mercury and cinnabar in China and Japan of the eighth and ninth centuries, see Charlotte von Verschuer: “Le Japon, contrée du Penglai? - Note sur le mercure”, in: *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, vol. 8, no. 8, 1995, pp. 439–452.
- 28) On *onmyōdō* and alchemical longevity practices modeled after Chinese Daoist beliefs of Emperor Nimmyō and ninth-century imperial circles, see Hillary E. Pedersen, *The Five Great Space Repository Bodhisattvas: Lineage, Protection and Celestial Authority in Ninth-Century Japan*, Ph.D dissertation, University of Kansas, 2010, pp. 165ff., especially p. 169 and p. 230.
- 29) Cf. Toshio Kutsukake: “Kūkai (774–835 A.D.): Founder of the Shingon Sect of Esoteric Buddhism and His Reference to Geology, Mining and Alchemy”, in: *Japanese Association for the History of Geology Newsletter No. 11. Special Issue: History of Geochemistry in Japan*, 2009, p. 8.
- 30) Among other narrative traditions, the legend is mentioned in the *Kongōbuji konryū shugyō engi* (History of the Building and Practice of Kongōbuji, dated to 968 and written by the monk Ningai (951–1046), cf. Shigeru Gorai: “Shugendo Lore”, in: *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2–3, 1989, p. 126.
- 31) Cf. Yoshito S. Hakeda: *Kūkai and His Major Works*, Columbia University Press, 1972, p. 118. As Ryūichi Abé has pointed out, Kūkai in this work relies heavily on the seminal text of religious Daoism, the Chinese *Baopuzi* 抱樸子 (The Master Who Embraces Simplicity) by Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), in which various techniques of medicine, physical training and alchemy for attaining immortality are discussed. See Ryūichi Abé: *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse*, Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 88.
- 32) Cf. Kutsukake 2009, pp. 4f.
- 33) Cf. von Verschuer 1995, p. 452, n. 35.
- 34) The work was commissioned in 905 (Engi 5) by Emperor Daigo (884–930) and was completed in 927 (Enchō 5). The *Engishiki* is a prime source concerning all matters related to Heian-period aristocratic

government due to its extremely detailed specifications. The work consists of 50 scrolls (“books”) and survives in later copies in its almost complete form. It deals with procedures handled by the *Jingikan* (Council of Kami Affairs), in particular the requirements and activities of the annual, extraordinary national religious festivals; the affairs in charge of the *Dajōkan* (Great Council of the State); and other departments. Almost every festival is documented in elaborate protocols specifying oblation materials, like symbolic offerings, food and ceremonial utensils. For an introduction to the first ten books, see Felicia G. Bock: *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era*, 2 vols. (Monumenta Nipponica Monograph). Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970–1972, pp. 37–58. The complete *Engishiki* has been digitised by Waseda University (printed version of 1827 by Matsudaira Naritsune, available online: [http://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/wa03/wa03\\_01594](http://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/wa03/wa03_01594), accessed 2013/09/10).

35) Cf. Kaneko 1995, p. 355.

36) Yotsuyanagi Kashō: *Urushi*, vol. 1 (Mono to ningen no bunkashi ものと人間の文化史, vol. 131, 1), Tōkyō: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppanyoku, 2006, p. 135f.

Iconography of Absence (PAPIST-MATSUO)



Colour plate: Ritual washbasin on three feet (*ashitsuki darai*), Negoro lacquer, red and black lacquer on wood, height 15.4 cm, diameter 35.5 cm, Muromachi period, late fifteenth century, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ident. Nr. 2009-69, photograph by Jürgen Liepe



Fig. 1: Map of southern Kinki region [Kawada 1985, fig. 3, p. 286]



Fig. 2: Set of tray with bowls, red and black lacquer on wood, Tokugawa period, early nineteenth century, Engyōji [photograph by Antje Papist-Matsuo, 2013]



Fig. 3: Ritual washbasin with three feet (*fusatsu darai*), one of four pieces in two pairs, Rokujizōji, height 17.2 cm, diameter 42 cm, Muromachi period, [Kawada Sadamu, *Negoronuri 根来塗*, *Nihon no Bijutsu 日本の美術*, vol. 120, no. 5, 1976, fig. 11, p. 6]



Fig. 4: Altar table (*maezukue*), red and black lacquer on wood, length 111 cm, width 35.3 cm, height 13.5 cm, Muromachi period, Hasedera Temple, [Ishikawaken Wajima Shitsugei Bijutsukan 石川県輪島漆芸美術館, ed: *Tokubetsuten Negoro. Sono katachi to iro 根来. その姿と彩*, Wajima 1998, cat. no. 73, p. 15]



Fig. 5: Pair of trays with legs (*ashitsuki ban*), red and black lacquer on wood, left piece: length 37.5 cm, width 35.8 cm, height 11.8 cm, right piece: length 37.5 cm, width 36 cm, height 12.3 cm, Heian period, private collection [Negoroten Jikkō linkai 2010, cat. no. 8, p. 33]

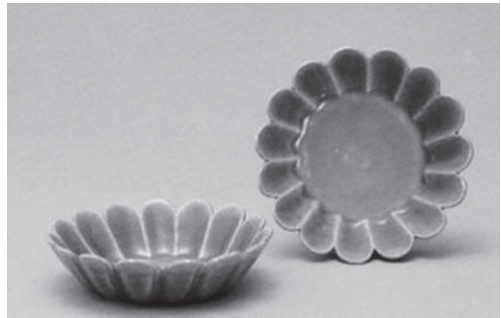


Fig. 6: Celadon dishes with scalloped rim, Yaozhou ware, Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), height 2.9 cm, diameter 10.4 cm [Nishida Hiroku 西田宏子 / Tahira Namiko 多比羅蔡美子, eds.: *Sō Gen no bi: tenrai no shikki wo chūshin 宋元の美: 伝来の漆器を中心*, Tokyo: Nezu Institute of Fine Arts, Tokyo, 2004, cat. no. 12]





Fig. 7: Six-lobed dish (*rinka ban*), red lacquer on wood, height 2.4 cm, diameter 17.5 cm, Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) [ibid., cat. no. 18]

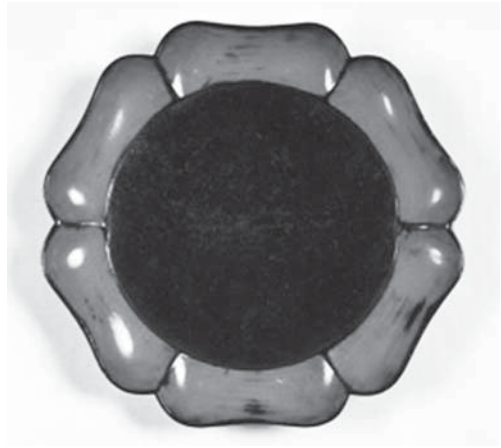


Fig. 8: Lobed tray (*rinka bon*), red and black lacquer on wood, height 2.9 cm, diameter 21 cm, Kamakura period, dated 1261, collection of Kinpusen Eifukuji [Kawada 1976, fig. 18, p. 11]



Fig. 9: Detail of picture scroll *Zegaibō ekotoba*, Nanbokuchō period (1334-1392), dated 1354, Manshu'in, Kyōto, showing wooden stick used by mountain ascetics in Kukai's time [Mochizuki Shinjō 望月信成: "Zegaibō ekotoba ni tsuite 是書坊絵詞について" (Studies on the Scroll Zegaibo Ekotoba), in: *Bijutsu Kenkyū* 美術研究, no. 44, 1935, pl. X]

