

Refined Craftsmanship and Exquisite Beauty – Goryeo Lacquer Artefacts in Western Collections

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The lacquer objects produced during the Goryeo dynasty (918–1392) are regarded as being amongst the finest artefacts to have been created in that era along with the dynasty's metalwork, celadons and Buddhist paintings. In all only around twenty-five Goryeo lacquer objects decorated with highly intricate mother-of-pearl inlay (*najeon chilgi*) have been preserved in the world today, merely two of which belong to the collection of the National Museum of Korea. The others are preserved either in Japanese collections or have ended up in the United States or Europe by way of Japan.

The small number of extant pieces – almost all related to the practice of Buddhism, like chests for storing sutras, boxes for prayer beads and containers for incense – makes it rather difficult to date the objects and answer questions related to the style and development of the dynasty's lacquer work. The artefacts, however, do have distinctive characteristics in common which will be presented and discussed based on selected examples from Western collections.