



Ink Cake

Date

1900

Primary Maker

Artist Unknown

Medium

ink

Description

Ink is ground into a powder from the solid ink cakes by rubbing them against the smooth flattened surface of the ink stone. Water is applied to the stone, by means of a water dropper or ladled from a water pot, during the grinding process and the ink collects in a cavity to the rear of the stone. Once enough ink has collected in the cavity, the scholar/artist dips the brush, removing the excess on the flat surface before applying the ink to paper. Along with the brush, ink, and paper, the stone was considered one of the Four Treasures of the scholar's studio and were prominently displayed on the scholar's desk. Chinese ink was made of glue obtained by boiling

animal bones and hides and mixing this with soot obtained by burning wood or leaves. Pine soot was considered the best, and consequently, the most expensive admixture. These two basic components were mixed with others; each recipe being a closely guarded family secret. The final mixture was then pressed into molds with different decorative motifs. As in all the arts related to literati activities, there were a number of celebrated ink makers, whose work was the more appreciated and hence more sought after. Although produced in great quantities, it unusual to find a full set of unused ink cakes from the pre-Republican era. Like all the objects used in the scholar's studio, the selection of ink cakes was very personal. The wealthiest literati could patronize the most famous ink cake artists, many of who are recorded. These nine cakes are decorated with famous landscapes on one side and poetic descriptions on the other.

Dimensions

Overall: 2 5/8 x 1 1/2 x 1/2 in. (6.7 x 3.8 x 1.3 cm)