Large Wood Scroll Pot

樹根大畫斗

Height: 28.2 cm. (11 1/8 in.)
Maximum width: 38.1 cm. (15 in.)
Late Ming-early Qing dynasty
17th century

高**28.2**厘米
寬（最寬處）**38.1**厘米
明晚期•清

The hollowed-out tree trunk is gnarled, the surface further contorted and accentuated with knotholes, an open crevice on one side, and a natural hollow opening below the rim. One side resembles an elephant's foot where it curves into the crevice. The scroll pot is quite thick and has a heavy base, the interior not as deep as it appears from the outside. A clear lacquer covers the wood to enhance the color and preserve the surface. The top is applied with a finely finished and polished form-fitting rim of five pieces of *hongmu* ("red wood") with carved rounded edges.

The description of a similar wood vessel of comparable size in the Mengdiexuan Collection captures in a few well-chosen words the essence of these intriguing vessels and is worth quoting here: "This gigantic scroll-pot conveys a sense of grandeur similar to that of flowing clouds, shifting winds, rolling waves and flowing currents. It contains the literary and artistic worlds of its owner, which also serves as a source of inspiration" (fig. 1).[1]

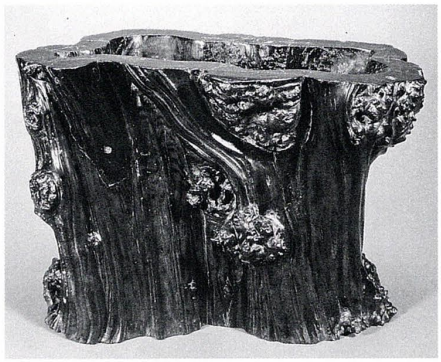

Fig. 1: Tree-root scroll pot, Ming dynasty, Mengdiexuan Collection, Hong Kong, after *Enlightening Pursuits: Scholar's Objects from the Mengdiexuan Collection*, University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong, no. 57, p. 163.

It appears, based on evidence from painting, that scholars' furniture made from tree roots came suddenly into fashion during the late Ming era particularly within the Jiangnan area of Jiangsu province.[2] This corresponded to an enthusiasm for bamboo carving as well as brush and scroll pot creation associated with the burgeoning middle class which aspired to scholarly status through participating in scholarly activities and possessing appropriate accoutrement. The present wood scroll pot thus combines two preoccupations of the scholarly elite in late Ming times, and is likely a product of that time.

1. See *Enlightening Pursuits: Scholar's Objects from the Mengdiexuan Collection*, University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong, 2006, p. 162.
2. Matte Siggstedt, "Chinese Root Furniture," *Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Bulletin*, No. 63, 1991.