Illustrated manuscript - The Treasure of the Garden of Perfect Brightness

Object: Illustrated manuscript

Place of origin: Beijing (made)

Date: 1736-1795 (made)

Artist/Maker: Leng Jian

Materials and Techniques: Red ink on paper

Museum number: 805&A-1896

Public access description

"The Illustrated Regulations for Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Present Dynasty" is an illustrated manuscript commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor (r.1736-1795). The main body of the commission began in 1750 and was completed in 1759. It was a conclusion of the Emperor's decade long efforts to regulate the ritual codes and procedures as a means of ruling since his enthronement, and serves as a record of the Emperor's passion for a rigid ritualised life.

As one of the major imperial commissions the book is of monumental scale and collaborative in nature. As many as twenty-seven court painters and calligraphers were working on the commission under five editors-in-chief, Yilu (1695-1767), Jiang Pu (1708-1761), Wang You dun (1692-1758), Guanbao (?-1776) and He Guozong (?-1766). After editing and further expansion in the ensuing years, the manuscript was printed by the Palace Publications Office in the Wuying Palace in 1766, and it was finally included as part of the Four Treasures imperial library project in 1773. For that purpose seven copies were produced and stored in libraries across the empire. The book consists of six parts - ceremonial vessels, scientific equipments, dress, musical instruments, insignia, and weaponry, containing more than 1300 leaves of illustrations and explanatory texts.

The museum's collection of the manuscript is incomplete. All its leaves, together with those in the British Library, in the National Museums of Scotland and in the National Museum of Ireland, may have been part of the version kept in the Wenyuan Pavilion library in the Yuanming yuan Summer Palace, Beijing, as indicated by the inscription of seal on the current two pages. The inscription reads: "The Treasure of the Garden of Perfect Brightness."

Physical description

Two pages of "The Illustrated Regulations for Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Present Dynasty", an illustrated manuscript commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor (r.1736-1795). The book consists of six parts - ceremonial vessels, scientific equipments, dress, musical instruments, insignia, and weaponry, containing more than 1300 leaves of illustrations and explanatory texts. The seal impression sits across the two pages and bears four Chinese characters in seal script: "Yuanming yuan bao" (The Treasure of the Garden of Perfect Brightness). It measures 12.1x12.1cm.

Dimensions

Height: 42.3 cm, Width: 41.3 cm

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Object history note

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These two pages belong to the first of four groups of leaves from the manuscript acquired by the museum. The museum purchased this group from a certain Walter H. Harris, the son of a builder, a director of Schweppes, in 1895.