

## Color and Hierarchy in Dazaifu

Color was deeply symbolic in ancient Japan. Government officials wore certain colors based on their occupation and rank. The governor-general wore light purple, similar to the figure seen in the display. Those in other occupations also wore status-specific colors. Rank was also extremely important. It determined the eligibility for specific jobs in the bureaucracy as well as the right to wear designated colors. You can still see signs of this hierarchical system today in shrines across Japan, including at nearby Dazaifu Tenmangu and Kamado Shrine, where priests wear specific colors based on their rank.

Belts were imbued with significance too. The ornate belt seen on the left in the display cabinet would have contrasted with plainer belts worn by lower-ranking officials. Ironically, these belts were worn beneath the clothing and therefore out of sight.

The flat wooden tablets are *mokkan*. These were used for a variety of purposes, such as recording information about taxable goods. *Mokkan* were also eco-friendly. When no longer required, the thin layer of wood with writing on it would be shaved off with a sharp knife and the tablets re-used. This was a valuable feature at a time when paper was expensive and a scarce commodity.

In the middle of the display, you can see an inkstone and a reproduction of an ink stick made from pine soot. The soot was kneaded together with glue and then fashioned into the boat-like shape seen here. It is possible that scribes of the day used writing equipment like this to record some of the poetry found in the *Man'yōshū*—a large and culturally important anthology of poetry from across Japan, including verse composed in Dazaifu.