Funerals and Incantations
—— Before Laying in the Coffin ——

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Various charms and spells are used regarding the two events that every human being goes through without exception, birth and death. In the Ancient and Middle Ages in Japan, the concept of death as a source of "impurity caused by the death," and the desire to send the dead person to a happy paradise, produced a world of charms and spells, that showed a complicated mixture of actions. In order to avoid the occurrence of impurity by death, to protect the sacredness of the throne, and to restrict the impurity to another place, a sick Emperor on his deathbed was moved to another place together with his tatami mat. On the other hand, people of the manor of the Ise Jingū shrine treated the dead as if the person were living, in order to avoid the impurity of death. These actions regarding the impurity of death deserve attention. The confirmation of death is expressed by the action of placing the body with "the head to the north and the face to the west". The "head to the north" can be considered to mean that the dead has already left for the other dark world. The "face to the west" can be regarded as an expression of the intention to send off the dead person to the paradise in the west. According to the etiquette called "Mokuyoku Shidai", the dead person is then subjected to bathing, nailtrimming, hair-shaving, and ordainment to the priesthood, to give a more complete appearance as one dead. Then, the dead person is placed into the coffin in accordance with the etiquette called "Nyūkan Shidai". Recently, this etiquette is becoming known to the smallest details from the "Nyūkan Sahō" in the possession of the Gangōji Temple, Gokurakubō, which has been much talked about, as well as diaries and records of various periods, and etiquette of various Buddhist sects. The author wishes to mainly reconstruct the bathing ritual, structure of the coffin, and Hikiooi-mandara (shroud), and to examine in detail the spells and charms that were brought to work at each scene.