Meaning of the Appearance of Pot Storehouse

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The author has examined the uses to which large pots in the pot storehouses (buried pot remains) discovered from Medieval sites in Western Japan were put. The large pots may have been used for indigo, sake, oil, etc., and of these, it seems likely that specific large pots may be identified as oil pots. A black substance adheres to the inside of some large pots excavated from the remains of a storehouse, which has been proven through investigation to have been destroyed by fire. Scientific analysis of this black substance showed that it consists of a mixture of tar and carbide, and soot. Therefore, the author deduces that the large pots to which the black substance adheres contained a flammable liquid, or oil, and that the oil in these large pots burnt up when the pot storehouses were destroyed by fire, and adhered to the inside of the large pots in the form of soot. Thus, these storehouses are judged to have been oil storehouses.

The amount of the oil kept in these pot storehouses was so large that it can be considered that the oil was sold under a specified framework as lighting oil. Storehouses in Kita-Muromachi in Nara city, and Uji city, should be examined within the framework of “Aburaza” (oil guilds); those in the priests' living quarters of Negoroji, within the framework of the Negoroji Temple; those in Doshō-machi and Kōraibashi in Ōsaka, within the framework of oil wholesalers in large cities ; and those of the Asakura Clan at Ichijōdani, within the framework of the castle town of the Asakura Clan. In particular, the prosperity of the Negoroji Temple was based on the sales of lighting oil. It is supposed that, by employing the capital gained from these oil sales, they accumulated huge wealth, armed their monk-soldiers with guns and constructed a fortified forward base in the Sennan Area to defend this fortune. However, the Negoroji Temple was attacked and burnt down in 1585 (the 13th year of Tenshō) by HASHIBA (later TOYOTOMI) Hideyoshi, who aimed at the total domination of Japan. At this time, the Negoroji, which achieved the zenith of its prosperity in the late 16th Century, collapsed.

The key to the prosperity of Negoroji in the Medieval Age was hidden in the large pots in their pot storehouse.