Study on Artisan Groups of the Ōgama Period
at Seto- and Mino-style Kilns

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Recently, studies on the Medieval ceramic industry have progressed favorably. Active approaches from various angles have been tried, including philology and archaeology. In particular, studies on the form of production and administration of the Medieval potteries deserve attention.

A predominant view on the Medieval ceramic industry is that the basic form of production and administration was that of a side job during the agricultural slack season, an image was assumed of semi-agricultural, semi-industrial producers with a low level of specialization in pottery. However, various problems have been pointed out on the interpretation of documents on which this common opinion is based. At present, we cannot unconditionally determine that pottery was the farmers' side job during the agricultural slack season.

This paper inquires into the form of production and administration at the 'Ōgama' (Seto-and Mino-style great kilns), which can be examined from both historical documents and archaeological materials. Firstly, from the historical documents, it has been clarified that 'Kamaya' (potters), who appear in the documents issued from the later 16th to the early 17th Centuries, were granted privileges by their rulers, such as Sengoku Daimyō (lords in the Age of Civil Wars), for example, exemption from various services, like other artisans of the same period. In return, they were burdened with charges unique to the 'Kamaya', such as special orders to supply pottery, the payment of business taxes, etc. It is also clear that the 'Kamaya' existed independently as artisans (a professional group) while having some connections with commercial activities and agricultural production.

Secondly, from the archaeological materials, the following points have been clarified: Through analysis of the distribution of the, 'Ōgama', the expansion of great-kiln production techniques shows that ordinary artisan groups were engaged in production as professional groups, in the same way as the 'Kamaya' seen in the historical documents; kilns had already started to be concentrated in village areas immediately before the establishment of the great kilns, and the character of the artisan groups as professional groups goes back to the latter half of the 15th Century; the group structure of the 'Ōgama' at Seto-Mino area differs substantially before and after the unification of Japan by ODA Nobunaga; and with Nobunaga's unification, the artisan groups at Seto-Mino area were directly incorporated into the distribution system controls, which covered both within and without the territories ruled by the Nobunaga government.