Earthenware in Medieval City of Nara: the Perception and Appraisal of Earthenware as Shown in the Daijoin-jishazojiki

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This paper examines from a number of perspectives the perception of “earthenware” held by Jinson, the head of Daijoin temple, who lived in Nara and played a key role in the distribution and production of commodities. The study is based on an analysis of the Daijoin-jishazojiki (Records of the Daijoin Temple), which serve as most fundamental and important historical materials for research into the medieval city of Nara. In addition to these records, materials derived from actual excavations have also been used for this study of earthenware production and the system adopted for their control. The findings of this research reveal that the guild (za) which controlled the production of earthenware during the Middle Ages was not simply an organization involved in the production of earthenware, but that it also participated in the supply of many other kinds of dishes. Furthermore, though the mechanism for controlling the guild existed inside the medieval city of Nara, the study also showed that the production of the earthenware itself took place in Nishinokyo, an area located in the western part of the city.

In other words, when undertaking research into the production and distribution of earthenware during the Middle Ages, in addition to looking at the simple relationship between areas of production and areas of consumption (only in cases in which a city plays a role), it is also necessary to adopt a wider perspective that also encompasses mechanisms for their control. One trend in interdisciplinary research involving archeology in recent years has been the importance attached to the study of “territory” exclusively in its geographical sense, which is certainly an effective method for the discussion of former mechanisms and systems. However, for “cities” that should be investigated through physical materials such as relics, the concept of a city’s territory should not be restricted in its narrow sense so that it stops at a city’s moat and surrounding facilities. Rather, such investigations should be characterized by the addition of a multi-dimensional approach that includes a broader concept of “territory” that takes in neighboring areas.