The Development of Kamakura as Seen through Excavated Remains: with a Focus on the First Half of the Kamakura Period

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In the early part of the Middle Ages in Kamakura there were large marshlands at the mouth of the Namekawa River and there were sand dunes that reached heights of 8·9 meters above sea level at Yuigahama and Zaimokuza. The foot of the sand dunes extended to an area near the JR Kamakura Station, and there were many undulations in the topography.

It is said that the development of Kamakura took place after Minamoto-no-Yoritomo decided to make his home there in 1180. According to another theory, it was the turning of the once bustling Kamakura into a desolate landscape that prompted Yoritomo to become active in constructing Kamakura. Whatever the case, it is virtually impossible to gain a clearer understanding of what occurred than what we currently know from documents and materials dating from that time.

In contrast, it is possible to obtain factual information from sites and objects (relics) excavated from archaeological surveys. Many pieces of Kawarake ware that have been excavated from most sites and the evident changes in their shape and the distribution of excavation enable us to take a look at the changes in development. Kawarake ware from the first half of the Kamakura Period may be broadly classified into the following four periods: 1st period: pre-Yoritomo; 2nd period: around the time of Yoritomo’s residence; 3rd period: Kamakura under Minamoto rule; and 4th period: Kamakura under Hojo rule. A look at distribution shows that Kawarake ware from the 1st period have been excavated from only the area surrounding the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine. Remains from the 2nd period have been excavated from a gradually expanding region that starts with the region around Kamakura Station and extends to the region around the north side of the Wakamiya-oju Ninotorii and the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine to Ookura region. Remains from the 3rd period have been excavated from all regions except for the sand dunes of Yuigahama and the Sakonoshita region. The area expands further for the 4th period, with remains excavated from all regions in the city, nearly all of which are enveloped by hills. It is clear that the extent of the distribution of the Kawarake ware increased with the residence of Yoritomo, and we find that remains dating from around the time of the Hojo clan have been excavated from all regions in the city, including the sand dunes.

What we know of remains related to disasters are the burnt remains from fires and sand boils and faults caused by earthquakes. No large-scale disaster remains have been confirmed from the excavation surveys. The failure of remains to turn up such evidence can also be said to represent the "regenerative strength of cities."