Changes in the Environment of the Hirasakugawa River Lowlands in Yokosuka City and Development in the Middle Ages

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An investigation of aspects of development and background factors has been made of archaeological sites dating from the Middle Ages situated in the lowlands of the Hirasakugawa River in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa, Japan that neighbors the medieval city of Kamakura, using excavated relics, environmental changes and traces of natural disasters. While there are remains dating from around the fifth century on the sandbanks formed as a result of the recession of the former Hirasaku Bay that was formed in the Hirasakugawa lowlands as a result of the Jomon transgression, sandbanks were not used on any sizeable scale as a space in which to conduct everyday life until after the second half of the twelfth century. Remains such as the Hachiman Jinja Shrine sites and the Tadahara-higashi archaeological site have been discovered on the sandbanks, and in general continue up to the fifteenth century. Both sites are considered to have been part of central locations in the central part of the Miura Peninsula which had port-like aspects and are thought to be the remains of a series of places that had a mutually complementary relationship. However, whereas very few remains excavated from the Hachiman Jinja Shrine site have elements related to daily life, many kinds of earthenware and ceramic ware as well as fishing implements such as hooks and anchors have been excavated from the Tadahara-higashi site. With the creation of a shell midden in the fifteenth century and the assumption of the existence of wet rice paddies and fields in neighboring areas, there are striking traces of productive activity, all of which suggest differences in the way in which places on the same sandbanks were used. It is assumed that some of the various kinds of fishing implements obtained from the Tadahara-higashi site were selectively transported outside the area, suggesting that it may have been one area that supplied marine products whose remains have been excavated from medieval sites within Kamakura City. The forest in the region adjacent to the Tadahara-higashi site changed from being mainly a laurel forest during the period of the Jomon transgression to becoming a forest of cedar and sub genus Japanese evergreen oak during the Heian Period, later changing into a forest consisting mainly of diploxylon-type pines during the Middle Ages. Thus, as with marine products, we may conjecture that trees in the regions near the Hirasakugawa River lowlands were felled in large quantities to supply wood, firewood and charcoal to support the medieval city of Kamakura. The Tadahara-higashi site became extinct in a short period of time following earthquake damage in the fifteenth century and remains and relics from the Hachiman Jinja Shrine site dating after this period are also very rare. We may conclude that one reason for this was the effect of environmental changes caused by the felling of trees in the surrounding area.