The Social Positioning of Technologies Seen in the Procurement of Timber for the Temples and Shrines of the Ruling Elite Focusing on the Early Middle Ages

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This paper discusses the changes to the system for procuring timber for the construction of temples and shrines for the ruling elite in the early part of the Middle Ages, as well as the social positioning of their underlying technologies. The study is based on the findings of previous research on the production, distribution and consumption of construction timber in the latter part of the Middle Ages.

This study shows that at around the second half of the 13th century the system for the procurement of construction timber changed accompanying growth in commodities distributed over a wide area and growth in the trading of timber around the Kinki region during the period spanning the end of the Ancient period through the beginning of the Middle Ages. This occurred against a backdrop of changes in the social functions of central distribution centers whose functions went beyond the accumulation, stockpiling and trading of goods. In this context, this paper also addresses issues concerning the development of technologies associated with the sawing and processing of timber in its broader sense and the people who provided such technologies, as well as the relationship that existed between these people and other occupations that also used timber.

The same perspective may also be applied to mountain forests and construction sites in urban centers. Although in the Middle Ages vague channels for the production, distribution and consumption of timber between urban and rural communities existed, these functions were combined in timberland areas, central distribution centers and construction sites, though the ratios of each function at each site varied. In this sense, we cannot overlook the fact that even though in medieval society technologies for the “sawing of timber” and “transportation” were underpinned by specific spaces and people, it would seem that they were not completely separate socially.

The next step, therefore, is to examine the specific practices and continuation of technologies for each of the aspects of production, distribution and consumption of timber that were combined in the Middle Ages and integrated magical practices, including a thorough analysis of historical materials referred to for this study.

Key words: Middle Ages, timber, technologies, temples and shrines, occupations