

The Sakai Kango Toshi (Moat city) Site



What is the Sakai Kango Toshi Site?



Layers of burned ground indicate a big fire

Sakai's golden era ran from the latter half of the Muromachi period to the beginning of the Edo period. The town that prospered as a trading hub and self-governing city 400 years ago still exists beneath today's streets.

The Sakai Kango Toshi Site is very large at 3km from north to south, and 1km east to west. The site is surrounded by the Hanshin Expressway Sakai Line to the east, the Uchikawa River to the west and the Doigawa River to the south. While this site covers the town as it was plotted out by the Edo Shogunate after the big fire of the Osaka Summer Battle in 1615 (Keicho 20), excavations have found that the town there before the fire was slightly smaller.

Many layers of scorched earth can be found beneath the surface. These are evidence of several big fires which occurred in Sakai. The scorched earth shows the rows of the houses and streets of those days. Many relics and ruins have been discovered there which show a level of prosperity in Sakai not reflected in the archives. In Sakai there were many wealthy merchants called *Kaigoshu* (*Egoshu*) or *Nayashu* merchants.

Residences of Wealthy Merchants



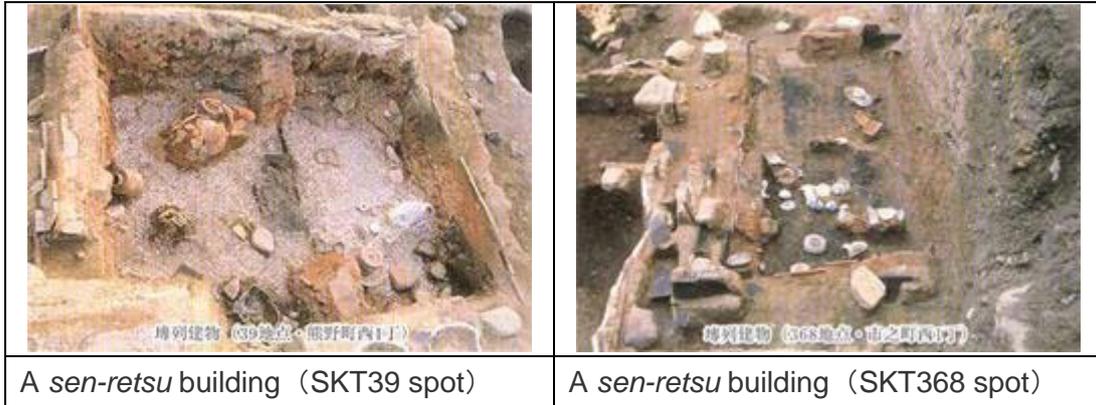
The site of a former large residence

Sakai was ruled by a council made up of powerful merchants known as the *kaigoshu* and the *nayashu*, and these wealthy merchants who contributed to the prosperity of Sakai built large residences in the town. These faced the main street and the largest were more than 330 m² (100 *tsubo*), which is telling of the merchants' financial power.

Inside the residences were generally a main building built on cornerstones called an *omoya* at the front and a storehouse whose lower outer walls were protected with tiles or '*kura*' at the back. It has been found that some residences had inner courtyards between the two buildings and others had gardens which allowed people to walk through from the front to the back of the residence. It has also been found that some of the larger residences had several storehouses and that others had a teahouse or a storehouse for tea ceremony utensils, which is to be expected, Sakai having produced renowned tea masters like Sen no Rikyu. In the bustle of the town, the townspeople of Sakai seem to have enjoyed tea ceremony, calling teahouses '*shichu-no-sankyo*', a phrase which evokes a sense of tranquility amidst the chaos of the city.

Other residences thought to have belonged to less-wealthy merchants or craftsmen have also been discovered. Their frontages are narrow at about two meters, but they go a long way back, meaning the streets may have resembled the townscape we can still see in parts Kyoto nowadays. Sakai at that time seems to have been a metropolis of densely packed houses.

Wealthy Merchants' Storehouses



Excavations in Sakai have uncovered a number of buildings with plate-like roofing tiles, *sen*, stuck to the exterior of the building foundations. These are known as *sen-retsui* style buildings and they symbolized the wealth of merchants in Sakai.

Sen-retsui buildings had elaborately built foundations, were often roofed with tiles, and had *tsumikabe* - thick mud walls, making them the best structure for storehouses. According to surviving folding screen paintings, some had three stories, likely making them prominent buildings in the city.

In many cases, the excavations didn't show what kinds of things were stored inside the storehouses. However, a lot of commodities which were sent via Sakai all over Japan were probably stocked there.

Other storehouses seem to have been for storing tea ceremony utensils, which were considered precious, and large quantities of ceramics have been unearthed from them, as in the photo on the right. Finds like these exemplify the popularity of tea ceremony at that time.

Excavation of the Moat (*Kango*)



The moat surrounding the city

The *kango* (ring moat) which gives the ruins their name used to surround the old town on three sides: the north, south and east; to the west was the sea. Excavations have shown that the moat that protected Sakai before 1615 (Keicho 2) enclosed a smaller area than the moat which was dug in the Edo period.

The moat which protected the town was 10 meters wide, and some parts were doubled. According to records, when feudal warlord Oda Nobunaga put pressure on Sakai, its residents dug the moat deeper, which shows that the moat was primarily defensive in nature. In 1586 (Tensho 14), Toyotomi Hideyoshi, another feudal warlord, ordered the moat to be filled in, though it seems to have been filled in only gradually. After the end of the Summer Campaign of the Siege of Osaka, it was filled in completely and then later, a new moat was dug by the Edo Shogunate.



A channel running through the city

The town contains other channels besides the ring moat. The photo above is one such channel which was constructed with stone walls. It may well have been used as a canal for carrying goods.

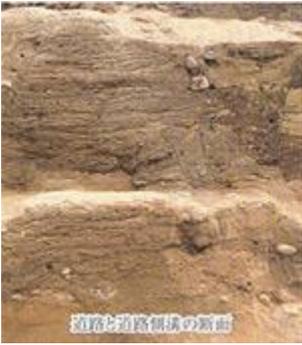
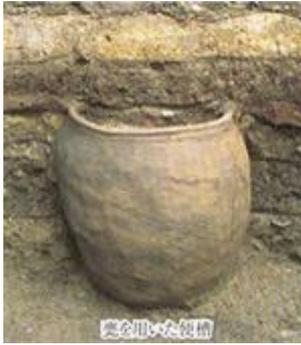
What the City Looked Like

Archeological excavations have shown what the city looked like beside its buildings and moats.

The roads were made of many layers of compacted soil, and ran throughout the city. There were many kinds of roads from main streets that were four to six meters wide to narrow alleys, and some intersections – ‘*yotsutsuji*’ – were also found. Gutters were dug beside the roads for draining rain water.

As the center photo below shows, the insides of wells were lined with special tiles. This style started in the 16th century, and before that, well walls used to be made of earthenware. Since the town was built on a beach, this kind of structure was needed to prevent wells from collapsing.

Toilets were made facing the street, apparently to make the collection of waste (which was then used as fertilizer) easier. Toilet bowls were typically unglazed pots. As you can see in the picture below, the body was buried leaving only the pot's mouth above the ground.

		
A cross-section of a road and its side ditch	A cross-section of a well	An earthenware toilet pot

Various Unearthed Relics



Archeological excavations have unearthed not only ruins, but also large numbers of relics including many ceramics used by the townspeople of Sakai. These were brought from China, the Korean Peninsula, and far-off Southeast Asia. There are also many Japanese products, such as Bizenyaki, Tanbayaki, Seto-Minoyaki, and Karatsuyaki pottery. These were used both in tea ceremony as well as in daily life. Other unearthed relics include iron products such as pots and pans, copper products such as coins, mirrors and scale weights, and wooden products such as chopsticks and buckets. They constitute important historical materials which teach us about life in those days. The picture on the right is of relics unearthed from a storehouse. These gorgeous ceramics show us something of how Sakai's wealthy merchants lived.

Autonomous City Sakai during the Medieval Era

Sakai gained prominence in 1469 (Bunmei 1) when it became a port for *Kenminsen*, the Japanese ships licensed to conduct trade with the Ming Dynasty, China. This brought an international aspect to a Sakai already flourishing as an important domestic trade hub, being a key stop both on Seto Inland Sea and Pacific-bound sea routes and on main overland routes. In trade, Sakai's merchants had the economic foundations they needed to rule themselves. Sakai became a self-ruled metropolis comparable to other significant cities such as Kyoto and Hakata.

It was long thought that later, when Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi put pressure on Sakai in the late 16th century, the autonomy of Sakai was lost, just as the construction of Osaka Castle Town by Hideyoshi was thought to have spelled the city's decline. However, Sakai seems not to have gone into decline. Indeed, archeological excavations have found that buildings were built even more densely following Hideyoshi's interference, and that the quantity and variety of goods such as ceramics and so on actually increased.

It was in 1615 (Keicho 20) when Toyotomi forces set fire to Sakai as a preliminary skirmish of the Summer Campaign of the Siege of Osaka that the city was dealt a particularly crushing blow. Sakai was subsequently put under the direct control of the Edo Shogunate, a state of affairs which lasted until the Meiji period.

Excavations and research are ongoing as we try to build a clearer picture of Sakai during the Medieval era from the remains of old buildings, and relics.

Chronological Table of Sakai

1392	Genchu 9	Ouchi Yoshihiro becomes Guardian of Izuminokuni.
1399	Oei 6	One thousand houses are burned down in the Onin War.
1432	Eikyo 4	Ikkyu Sojun comes to Sakai for the first time.
1469	Bunmei 1	<i>The Kenminsen</i> ship to the Ming Dynasty China (which had sailed from another port) returns to Sakai for the first time.
1476	Bunmei 8	The <i>kenminsen</i> ship to China sails from Sakai for the first time.
1484	Bunmei 16	The term “Kaigoshu” appears in a document for the first time.
1494	Meio 3	The whole area of Minaminosho is burned down.
1508	Eisho 5	More than one thousand houses of Minaminosho are burned down.
1526	Daiei 6	Twenty seven hundred houses are burned down.
1532	Kyoroku 5	Ikkoikki (religiously inspired rebels) attack the warlord Miyoshi Motonaga in Sakai and he commits suicide at Kemponji Temple.
1532	Tenbun 1	Four thousand houses are burned down, including the whole area of Kitanosho and one third of Minaminosho.
1546	Tenbun 15	Miyoshi Nagayoshi enters Sakai but withdraws.
1550	Tenbun 19	Francisco de Xavier, a Jesuit missionary, comes to Sakai.
1553	Tenbun 22	Some two thirds of Sakai is burned down.
1553	Tenbun 22	The rest of Sakai is burned down.
1561	Eiroku 4	Gaspar Vilela, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, comes to Sakai.
1564	Eiroku 7	One thousand houses are burned down.
1568	Eiroku 11	Oda Nobunaga demands war funds of 20,000 <i>kan</i> .
1570	Genki 1	Sakai comes under direct control of Nobunaga.
1575	Tensho 3	A great fire breaks out.
1586	Tensho 14	Konishi Ryusa and Ishida Mitsunari become deputy officials of Sakai. Toyotomi Hideyoshi orders the moat to be filled in.
1591	Tensho 19	Tea master Sen no Rikyu commits suicide upon Hideyoshi’s orders .
1596	Bunroku 5	Sakai was hit by the Keicho-Fushimi Earthquake.
1615	Keicho 20	Twenty thousand houses burn down in the aftermath of the Summer Campaign of the Siege of Osaka. After that, Sakai came under the direct control of the Edo Shogunate.

(translated by D II Group, Sakai Volunteer Interpreters)