

Relics in Ancient Korea

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During the three kingdoms period Korea, the special earthenware objects popular in Silla and Kaya during the fifth and sixth century are special symbols of religious worship in ancient Korea. The paper studies shaped vessels, vessels with applied figurines, and figurines. There were a variety of shaped vessels: bird-shaped vessels, horse-shaped ceremonial vessels, vessels in the form of men on horseback, boat-shaped vessels, cart-shaped vessels, dragon-shaped vessels, ceremonial vessels in the shape of a granary.

After a presentation of the historical material, the religious aspects of the special shaped vessels as well as the distribution are studied.

Kim Wong Yong and Yi Un Jan have studied the characteristics and significance of these special shaped vessels. According to these interpretations, duck-shaped ceremonial vessels, vessels in the form of men on horseback, boat shaped vessels and cart-shaped vessels were used in funerals and expressed the cosmology of death. Vessels with applied figurines were symbols in imitative rituals performed for rebirth, the harvest and reproduction.

There is a distinct difference in the distribution of these types of vessels. The distribution of the vessels shows that the various types correspond to specific regions in Silla and Kaya and there is a noted pattern in the distribution.

Dragon-shaped vessels, vessels in the form of men on horseback, and square earthen bowls are mainly distributed along Kyongju River; bird-shaped vessels, ceremonial vessels in the shape of a granary are distributed along Nak Tongan. Vessels with applied figurines and figurines appear at Kyongju. This evidence shows that there was a profound cosmology of death symbolized by men on horseback, horses, boats and carts in the Silla and Kaya area.