

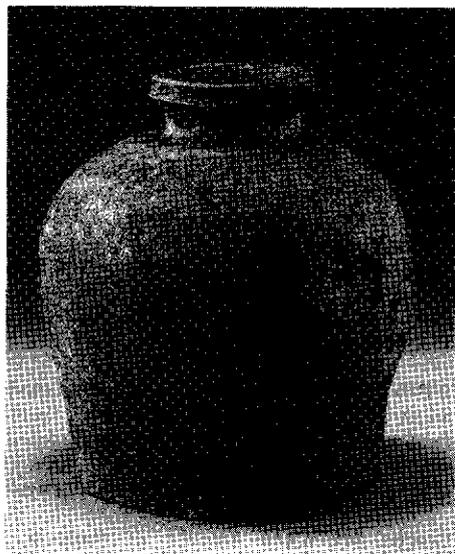
Explanation of the Cover

The photograph on the cover is a close-up detail of a jar made in Shigaraki in the 14th century. Shigaraki is located in the southern part of Shiga prefecture, which is in the center of Japan. Still famous as a pottery center, ceramics were being made there as early as the 14 century. This example dates to the earliest period of Shigaraki ceramics.

Initially Shigaraki wares were mainly domestic utensils such as jars and mortars. However, when the tea ceremony became popular among Kyoto's upper class in the latter half of the 16th century, tea masters noted the simple beauty of Shigaraki wares and began to use them in the tea ceremony. For example, this small jar was used to store tea leaves, differing from its original function. Tea people gave it the name "Uzukumaru" (to squat down) because its shape resembles a crouching person. Embodying the Japanese aesthetic sensibility known as *wabi*, this kind of simple, everyday ware used by farmers and townspeople has been especially prized in the Japanese tea ceremony.

Because of the interest in Shigaraki ware by tea masters, tea utensils such as tea bowls, water jars, and flower vases came to be made from the late 16th century on. What tea people were attracted to were the simple shapes and the subtle natural textures, and therefore fundamentally there was no change in Shigaraki shapes or firing methods. Characteristic of the Shigaraki vessels are the white lumps of feldspar (abundant in Shigaraki clay) that rise to the surface during firing. Another feature is the red color of the clay, due to its shortage of iron (iron rich clays turn dark when fired).

The photograph on the cover shows the slightly scorched red surface with lumps of white feldspar and the natural glazing that occurred when ashes from the burning wood fell on the surface during firing and fused with the clay. Other notable features of Shigaraki ware are the droplet-like accumulations of glaze called "dragonfly eyes" and the fissures created when the gravelly clay burst open under intense heat. Such vessels appear to be products of nature rather than human hands.



Shigaraki Jar Called "Uzukumaru"

Kamakura period (14th century)

Height: 14.5 cm.

Photograph by Maki Naomi