

Pottery for Daily Life (17th through 19th Centuries)

Mino ware from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries is most strongly associated with teaware and other luxury items, but Mino kilns produced ceramics for the common people as well. On display here are simple plates, bowls, teacups, graters, oil lamps, and other everyday goods that were made in Mino between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

Kaolin clay, an essential component of porcelain, was discovered in Saga Prefecture at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Ceramics centers in Kyushu began making porcelain soon after, and the demand for high-end Mino pottery dwindled. In search of new markets, Mino potters shifted away from high-end ceramics to focus on daily-use items. Each district of the region came to specialize in a particular product, such as teacups or sake flasks. In this way, each district could engage in mass production and economies of scale, producing high-quality items at relatively low prices to sell in large population centers, such as Edo (now Tokyo).

For example, the district of Takata-chō in Tajimi specialized in ash-glazed *tokkuri* sake flasks, several examples of which are displayed below. At the time, sake was sold by volume in units called *gō*, equivalent to about 180 milliliters. Sake distributors would issue their own *tokkuri*, labeled with the shop name and location, which they lent to customers when selling small quantities of sake. It was therefore in the interests of both distributors and customers to know the exact volume of each *tokkuri* that was used. Because clay contracts when fired, producing bottles of a specific inner volume requires exceptional skill. *Tokkuri* from Takata-chō were prized for their accuracy.