

Introduction to the ancient history of the 伊都国 Ito-koku

This note is based on the 伊都国 Wikipedia¹, prepared for the JTW trip to Itoshima.

Ito-koku is one of the provinces of Japan, and is mentioned in the "魏志倭人伝 Wei-Shi-Wa-jin-Den" and other texts. It is said to be located 500 miles southeast of Suerokoku, and many researchers compare it to Ito Agata of the Yamato period, part of Itoshima City in present Fukuoka Prefecture and part of Nishi Ward in Fukuoka City (formerly Yido County).

Outline

"魏志倭人伝 Wei Shi-Wa-jin Den" says,

「東南陸行五百里 至伊都國。官曰爾支 副曰泄謨觚・柄渠觚。

有千余戸 世有王 皆統屬女王國。郡使往来常所駐」

which means that "Go southeastward to Ito-kuni by 500 miles (away from China), then you will reach Ito-koku, where more than thousand households live and is ruled by a king, who are subject to a great queen. The country is often visited by the missionaries from the Taiho County (of the Korean Peninsula)."

一大率 Ichi-dai-sotsu

Ichi-dai-sotsu was an official of the Queen Country. The official name derives from the name of the general who guarded the four sides of a fortress in China. The Wei Shi-Wa-jin Den says,

自女王國以北 特置一大率檢察諸國 諸國畏揮之 常治伊都國 於國中有如刺史".

"The Queen Country has placed a special prosecutor in the north and is particularly strict in its prosecution. The nations admire and fear the Queen. A government office was permanently monitoring the Ito-koku. It seems like that the Wei dynasty rule the local country by settling 刺史(regional governor).

¹ <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E4%BC%8A%E9%83%BD%E5%9B%BD>

Description in Japanese literature

According to the "日本書紀 Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan)," the founder of Ito County was 五十迹手 Itoshi, who obeyed the Yamato dynasty of Japan, when 仲哀天皇 Emperor Chuai made a military expedition to 筑紫 Tsukushi. There is an 伊觀 Ito shrine in Fukuoka City's Nishi Ward.²

According to an anecdote in the 筑前国風土記 Chikuzen-no-kuni-fudoki (Chikuzen Province Chronicle), the Ito shrine was appreciated as being loyal to the emperor, because it welcomed and served the emperor when he went to Tsukushi. The name of the 伊觀 Ito shrine is said to be derived from the story that it was loyal (勤し Itoshi) to the emperor. The name "Itoshi" is said to have been derived from "Isoshi" (勤し). There is another story saying that 五十迹手 Itoshi was an offspring of a god (Amenohiboko) descending from the heaven to a mountain in the South Korea (高麗).

Archaeological Site

According to a major view shared by most historians, the Ito-koku was located in the Itoshima flat land surrounding Itoshima-Mikumo, where many tomb mounds were made to bury the kings, nobles, and military generals. The ruins of ancient mounds are preserved in the 三雲南小路 Mikumo-Minamishoji (三雲井原 Mikumo-Ihara) site and the 平原 Hirahara site.

三雲南小路 Mikumo Minamishoji Site

The Migumo Minamishoji Site was made in the mid-Yayoi period and considered to be a square ditch tomb burying the kings and queens in two jar coffins.

The king was buried in the Coffin 1 with side-accessories including 1 bronze sword, 2 copper spears, 1 copper grenade, 8 or more pieces of glass pièce de résistance, 3 glass slings, 60 or more glass tubular beads, 31 or more copper mirrors, and 8 pieces of gilt-bronze four-leaf zagataginu. In addition, 1 iron arrowhead and 1 small glass bead were excavated.

The coffin 2 is located close to the northwest of the coffin 1. Inside the coffin, a mirror with a design of flowers in the internal line (Nikko mirror) was found in its original position. It is a bronze mirror with the inscription "Sun light will clarify everything under the heavens."

If the No. 1 coffin is the "king," the No. 2 coffin is presumed to be that of the "queen," and

² <https://www.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/nishiku/c-shinko/charm/nisikunotakara/itojinja.html>

Tadanobu Aoyagi notes that it is a mound tomb with a fill of over 1.5 meters. A survey conducted in the Heisei period confirmed that it had a perforated ditch, and it was determined to be a square perforated tomb, and it has been reconstructed as such.

It has been pointed out that the bronze sword with a handle excavated from the tomb is related to the 天叢雲劍 Ama-no-Murakumo Sword, used by Prince Yamato-Takeru, enshrined at Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya.

井原鍵溝 Ihara Yarimizo Site

The Ihara Yarimizo Ruins are located in the vicinity of the Migumo and Ihara Ruins. (According to local legend, the name "Yarimizo" came from the fact that a spear was found in the soil. 21 mirrors were excavated from this site during the Tenmei era (1781 - 1788). Rubbings indicate that all of them are square rectangular mirrors with four divine motifs (with edges including a flowing cloud design, a grass-leaf design, a wave design, and a ninjutsu-style flower design). Most of the mirrors are 6 inches in length in the Later Han scale, and date from the new period of 王莽 Wang Wang and the Later Han dynasty. In addition to these mirrors, three Bomo-shaped bronze vessels, iron swords and iron swords have been found, but no fine-shaped bronze swords, bronze spears, etc. have been found.

The 1974-1975 survey could not confirm the location of this site. However, there is no doubt that it was a jar coffin tomb.

平原 Hirahara Site

The Hirahara Site (National Historic Site), one of the Sone Site Group, is the name given to a group of five peri-ditch tombs from the Late Yayoi Period to the end of the Yayoi Period located on the Sone Terrace on the west side of the Mikumo and Ihara sites.

Tomb No. 1 (Hirahara Yayoi Kofun), the Hirahara Site, contains four large mirrors, the largest in Japan with a diameter of 46.5 cm, 35 bronze mirrors (32 rectangular four-part mirror, 2 four-part mirror with inner row flower design, 1 four-part mirror), 3 glass beads, over 500 round beads, 12 agate tube beads. The burial accessories are collectively designated as national treasures. The relationship with the 八尺鏡 yatakagami, one of the three sacred objects, is under debate.