Kokufu in the Beginning of the Medieval Period

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This paper is a study of the provincial capitals, kokufu, which played a central role in local administration. The study of cities during the beginning of the medieval period has lagged behind other areas of study. This paper mainly studies the Hitachi Kokufu, due to the abundance of historical sources, examining its structural characteristics and historical changes by studying its spatial order.

In the first chapter, the region is studied briefly and it is shown that two places close to the present Ishioka city in Ibaraki Pref. were the sites where the kokufu was constructed successively during the medieval period.

In chapter two, an analysis of the spatial composition of the two sites is conducted. At both Ibaraki and Ishioka, kokuchō, rusudokoro and the residence of officers were built in the central area of the kokufu (which was the kokufu in a narrow sense). In the periphery were situated, sōsha (major local Shinto shrine), kokubunji (government sponsored temple), and zaichōmyō (residential areas). Symbolically, the former constructions were found at the center, a dominant area, whereas the latter were found at the periphery, a subordinate area. It is maintained that the center was an exclusive space whereas the periphery was a mixture that included non-capital elements (e.g., peasants). Furthermore, the periphery functioned as a bridge between villages and the capital, which had no surrounding wall.

The third chapter discusses how the kokufu changed when the Ibaraki Kokufu of the latter Heian period moved to Ishioka during the Kamakura period. Kokuchō and rusudokoro disappeared; the head of the government offices dominated other officers. Both districts where governmental offices were built and residential areas developed. These changes were all influenced by the increase both in the importance of the role of the capital in Hitachi and feudalistic relations.

In chapter four, common aspects seen in both periods are discussed, such as important places of local administration, continuity between villages and the capital, possession of land by governmental offices and urban areas, and a decrease in the working hours of government officers, which resulted in the transfer of the capital. All of these common aspects were influenced by the busy life of the Japanese, insularism, and lack of public spirit in local districts during the medieval times.

Chapter five discusses the fact that these features were also common to other districts, and that in Hitachi the role and the scale of the kokufu was particularly large. This reflects the characteristics of Hitachi as a regional district in which rule was left to the Shinnoh.