Original Drawings on Dotaku Bronze Bells and Their Replicas

Harunari Hideji

Up to now, some 450 dotaku bronze bells, that were used for the rice harvest ritual in the Yayoi period, have been discovered, among which there are 54 that have drawings. Those dotaku having drawings on them were made in the period between c. 100 B.C. and 200 A.D. and the main themes of the drawings were deer/hunter/crane. This motif persisted more or less throughout that period, and the composition of the drawings also remained very much the same. This fact suggests that the motifs of the drawings were handed down from generation to generation through the replicating and copying of the originals from time past. It suggests the existence of a myth symbolizing the deer as the spirit of the land and the crane, as that of the rice-plants, in the background.

By comparing the original dotaku drawing with the later replicas, it is easily seen that the ancient craftsmen did not reproduce the replica by sketching the original, putting the materials side by side, but out of their remembrance of dotaku drawings they had seen sometime before. However, there are no few examples, as is seen in the case of the drawing of the Hunter of “Sakuragaoka No.5 Dotaku the dotaku from Kagawa Prefecture, who turned out to be “a Fisher with an I-shaped hand-tool” and another of a wild boar of Sakuragaoka No. 4 Dotaku that turned out to be an “unidentified animal”, that had become undiscernible. And that was due to the fact that the original, in the first place, was obscure, and the craftsmen’s observation of the original was not sufficient or their memory, uncertain. So that the picture had been degenerated from the original one.

That these craftsmen had to keep on drawing at times, pictures whose meaning was lost themselves, was that they received a restriction of having to draw pictures in succession of traditional pictures from the tribe they belonged to. If they knew well the details of the myth, they would not have drawn these incorrect pictures. If so, there should have been probably a separate personage that succeeded the myth. And it was probably that personage who was the high-priest who executed the ritual using the dotaku. The dotaku craftsmen of the Yayoi Period had no liberty of choosing their own theme for drawing their art, and of creating their art arranging
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