Aspects of Tumuli in the Final Kofun Period
in the North-western Part of Kazusa

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The north-western part of the ancient Kazusa Province was the seat of the local government of Kazusa. Its specific location has not yet been verified, but the fact that it existed on the north shore of the lower reaches of the Yōrō River, which runs into Tokyo Bay, has been known from historical documents of “Wamyōshū” and names of places such as “Furukō” (=ancient local government). Also, the Kokubunji (state-established provincial nunnery) of Kazusa, of which almost all the detailed structure is known as a result of excavation, had buildings of a scale and layout coinciding to those of the Hokkeji Temple in Yamato. It is also clear that the state established provincial temple had a scale and substance corresponding to this nunnery. However, in the basin of the Yōrō River, there were no large tumuli representing Kazusa Province from the later to the final stages of the Tumulus Period. Rather, representative keyhole-shaped or large square tumuli distributed in the Sanbu area, on the Pacific Ocean side, as well as in the basins of the Obitsu and Koito Rivers in the south. What conditions can be considered to be behind the fact that this area became the political and cultural center of Kazusa Province during the period of the formation of the Ritsuryo (statute) nation? If we look at the movements of tumuli in the north-western part of Kazusa with this question in mind, several features can be found, as follows:

1. Through the whole Tumulus Period, this area showed progressive movement in negotiations with the central power in the Kinai district, habitually accepted new ideas by means of marine traffic, and adapted itself to the new regime.

2. The traditional chief class, which grew backed by the development of communities, formed several medium-scale tumuli groups in each river basin, and maintained groups with a certain extent of independence through the early to the final stages of the Tumulus Period.

3. In the final stage, small- and medium-sized tumuli and new tumuli groups from after the later stage, accepted “square shape and corridor-style stone chambers”, but the conventional major tumuli adopted the double square-shape, which was not commonly used at that time. There were also groups of large tumuli which do not use corridor-style stone chambers at all.

4. After the final stage of the Tumulus Period, “square tumuli groups” which had underground burial facilities including underground tunnel-type tombs, remained, showing a unique development. The construction of these tumuli more or less overlapped chronologically with that of early ancient temples.

Judging from the points described above, we can consider that the background allowing the lower reaches of the Yōrō River to become the central area of Kazusa Province, was the existence of a local power which rid itself of the old world of haniwa and

385
ornamented swords, and supported the construction of early ancient temples, while maintaining an advanced condition under the direct control, adapting itself to the new regime.