Study on Tamamaki no Tachi

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The buildings of the Ise Shrine are rebuilt every 20 years. At this periodical renewal of the shrine, not only the buildings, but also costumes, considered the costumes of the gods, and treasures, the belongings of the gods, are also remade. Among the sacred treasures of the Naikū 内宮, which is devoted to the Amateras 天照大神, there is a long sword called the Tamamaki no Tachi 玉鬘太刀 (Gem-Covered Sword). The Tamamaki no Tachi that have been dedicated to the shrine in recent years are of the T’ang 唐 style of the after second half of the 10th century. In the preceding style, which can be known from the “Engi Shiki” 『延喜式』 (code established in the Engi era), the sword seems to have had a hilt with reversed-trapezoidal, plate-type pommel with a ring, a band to protect the back of the hand, and a sheath, probably with skew latticed pattern, glass beads and golden fish ornaments.

On the other hand, every sword-shaped haniwa 墟輪 excavated from burial mounds of the 6th century in the Kanto District has a hilt with a reverse-trapezoidal, plate-type pommel, a band with Mitwadama 三輪玉 (gem with three round bulges) to protect the back of hand, and a sheath thicker towards the end. Gōrō Moriichi has pointed out that this sword-shaped haniwa had many features in common with the Tamamaki no Tachi depicted in the “Engi Shiki”. Since there are very few real materials to show the ornamentation of this type of sword, the sword-shaped haniwa were supposed to have been a formalization of a Kabutsuchi-no-Tachi 頭槌大刀 (sword with bulbous pommel).

Among the five swords discovered in the stone coffin of the Fujinoki Kofun 藤ノ木古墳, Nara Prefecture, in 1988. Swords No.1 and No.5 attract our attention as they represent definitely the style of the Tamamaki no Tachi imagined from the sword-shaped haniwa, etc. These swords had reversed-trapezoidal, plate-type pommels with twisted rings, bands to protect the back of hand, with gilt-bronze Mitwadama on their hilts. Their thick wooden sheaths were wrapped in gilt-bronze plates of fine skew-latticed-pattern openwork, ornamented with glass beads on the intersecting points of the latticed pattern. They had furthermore twin fish-shaped ornaments in gilt bronze. They were Wa 倭 style swords, the basic style of which was the same as that of the sword-shaped haniwa, and they can be considered the prototypes of the Tamamaki no Tachi.

A number of these swords with trapezoidal pommels and other Wa-style swords of a close line are adorned with the gilt-bronze twin-fish ornaments. Two Wa-style swords with twin-fish ornaments were excavated from the Minegazuka Kofun 峯ヶ塚古墳, in Osaka, considered the grave of one of a rank equivalent to that of an Daiō 大王 of the early 6th century. In the 6th century, swords from the Korean Peninsular and others bearing their influence, for example, Kanto no Tachi 環頭大刀 (ring-pommeled sword) and Entō no Tachi 円頭大刀 (sword with rounded pommels) were most popular. However,
for the *kofun* of the highest ruling class in the *Kinki* Region, importance was placed on the *Wa*-style of sword and all the sword-shaped *huniwa* placed on the *kofun* were of the *Wa*-style. The very fact that the *Tamamaki no Tachi*, a sacred treasure of the *Ise* Shrine which is dedicated to the ancestral goddess of the *Daiō*, is of this traditional *Wa* style, is an interesting fact showing that the ruling class of *Wa* from the 6th to 7th centuries tried to maintain their traditional values, while at the same time positively accepting foreign culture and skills.