The Date of the Establishment of Taga Castle

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Taga Castle was the center of politics and culture in the Tōhoku District in ancient Japan. The date of its establishment is not recorded in historical documents. However, examination of historical documents on contemporary matters shows that Taga Castle was perhaps established between the Yōrō and Shinki eras (717 to 729).

The results of recent archaeological studies allow us to narrow down the date of its establishment to the period when an administrative section system called Gorisei was in force (715 to 740). Based on recent research, there is no reason not to consider the Taga Castle Monument genuine, though there has been superior opinion that it was a fake. On this monument, the inscription clearly shows that Taga Castle was established in the first year of Shinki (724). However, it is not clear if this indicates the completion of the castle or the start of its construction.

Detailed examination of wooden tablets excavated from backfilling earth of the stonework culvert on the remains of the front road, which connected the government house, which was the center of Taga Castle, with the South Gate of the outer wall, has made it clear that the date of the construction of Taga Castle can be pinpointed, though these tablets are undated. First, the “Kikuta County” on wooden tablet No. 2 was established in the 2nd year of Yōrō (718), and the style of description of listed names on wooden tablet No. 1 shows the characteristics of the period before the register of the 5th year of Yōrō (721). These wooden tablets can be considered historical materials which pose important questions regarding research of the ancient register system. If was suppose that Taga Castle was established between the 2nd and the 6th year of Yōrō (718 and 722), “Shuten 1” and “Jōshi 4” on Tablets No. 18 and 19 may be those who accompanied the expeditionary force against the “Emishi” dispatched at the occasion of the assassination of the superintendent in September of the 4th year of Yōrō (720). In that case, the period can be further narrowed down to between September of the 4th year of Yōrō (720), and April of the 5th year of Yōrō (721), when the commander-in-chief returned. On the other hand, “Ryokushi” on a wooden tablet which was excavated from the filling earth of the culvert, can be judged to be the name of an age group after the establishment of the register of the 5th year of Yōrō (721), which corroborates the accuracy of the above estimate of the period.

In conclusion, the road connecting the government house with South Gate of the outer wall was constructed soon after the 5th year of Yōrō (721), and such an important road can probably be attributed to the early stages of the construction. Supposing that Taga Castle was completed several years later, “the first year of Shinki” inscribed on the Taga Castle Monument can be judged to indicate the time of the completion of the castle. The wooden tablets can be said to be historical materials which reinforce the credibility of the Taga Castle Monument.