Facts and Changes Regarding Defensive Weapons
Found in Castles of the Early Modern Age

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Recently, ruins of castles are being progressively investigated in various areas of Japan, to reveal the structure and the nature of the ruins of buildings and sites. Sometimes, from these sites, are excavated fragments of defensive weapons, e.g. fuse clips, triggers and bullets from firearms, breastplates ornamental trimmings, iron plates, blades and decorative accessories for swords, such as tsuka (sword guards), kōgai (metal rod attached to a sword sheath), kozuka (knife attached to a sword sheath), and habaki. Since castles were military facilities, it is natural that these items be excavated, however, no studies seem to have been so far made on defensive weapons belonging to castles.

It is estimated that almost total absence of study results comes from the scarcellness of historical documents. As far as the author is aware, there remain only four historical documents anterior to the 17th century; an assignment letter of Bekki Dōsetsu, castellan of Tachibana Castle in Chikuzen Province, dated May 28 of the 3rd year of Tenshō (1575); a memorandum on Gongenyama Castle, an outlying castle of Hōjō Ujikuni, estimated to be dated the 16th year of Tensho (1588); and two red-sealed letters issued by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, recording the defensive weapons of a Japanese castle at the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula, dated July, in the 2nd year of Bunroku (1593).

From the 17th century on, the number of historical documents on defensive weapons belonging to castles increases a little, but not much. Documents remaining include “List for Delivery of Guns and Defensive Weapons to the Castle” of the Kamei Clan in Tsuruoka, Izumi Province, dated August 22 of the 3rd year of Genna (1617), “List for Delivery of Defensive Weapons in Tsuruoka Castle” of the Sakai Clan, Shōnai, Dewa Province, dated October 7 of the 8th year of Genna (1622), and “List for Delivery of Defensive Weapons Belonging to Aizu-Wakamatsu Castle” of the Hoshina Clan, of Aizu, dated August 2 of the 20th year of Kanei (1643).

The Tokugawa Shogunate determined policy for the treatment of defensive weapons belonging to castles at the time of attainders of clans as follows: “1. Bows, guns, bullets, spears, and other defensive weapons shall be left in the castle.” As a result, defensive weapons belonging to castles were delivered to new castellans under the supervision of legates dispatched from the Shogunate. The above-mentioned list by the Kamei Clan of the sie of Tsuruoka, and the subsequent lists, were documents relating to just such a delivery of defensive weapons, prepared on such occasions. This is why we can see historical documents on defensive weapons belonging to castles dating from the 17th century and later. The purpose of this paper is; to describe historical documents on defensive weapons belonging to castles of the early Modern Age, to discuss the facts and changes regarding defensive weapons of this period through examination of the contents of each document; and to touch a little on the military power of feudal lords.