An Archaeological View of the Dual System of Religious and Secular Chieftainship

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An especially large number of examples of bracelet-shaped stone articles have been found among burial sites situated inside tombs dating over a period of about four centuries from the Early Kofun (Tumulus) period through to its early Middle period. Each of the three types of bracelet-shaped stone articles -- made from stone used for hoes, bracelets and wheels (kuwagataishi鉾形石・ishikushiro石釧・sharinseki車輪石)-- can be traced back to the shell bracelets made of shells from the South Seas during the Yayoi period. They are regarded as artifacts that symbolize priests whose occupation was to worship Japanese gods (kami). Accordingly, people who were buried with an especially large quantity of bracelet-shaped stone articles are understood to have been chieftains with a magical and religious character. This paper examines examples of large quantities of bracelet-shaped stone articles excavated from one burial site inside tombs, and investigates the positions of such burial sites inside the same tomb, and examines the relationship between political-military chieftainship and magical-religious chieftainship that existed at a certain time in the history of chieftainship.

First, an examination of examples of a large quantity of bracelet-shaped stone articles from single burial sites reveals that they fall into two distinct categories: those that are accompanied by virtually no weapons or armor (Type A), and those that are accompanied by large quantities of weapons and armor (Type B). It goes without saying that the former are chieftains with a magical-religious role, while the later are chieftains who played a political-military role combined with some magical-religious elements. Of those that fall into the first category, there is an extremely high possibility that the people who were buried were women, as exemplified by the clay coffin from the front section of the Shimanoyama tomb in Kawanishi-cho, Nara Prefecture. Next, an examination of the positional relationship where both types are located inside the same tomb shows that where there is one centrally positioned burial site inside the tombs, some articles belong to Type B and some belong to Type A, in one tomb there are Type A and Type B burial sites, one where both are virtually equal, and one where Type B clearly has a dominant position. When synthesizing this information we find that during this period a dual religious-secular
system of chieftainship comprising a combination of political-military chieftainship and magical-religious chieftainship was not a special phenomenon at all. What is more, in instances where one person held the chieftainship, that chief possessed both large quantities of weapons and armor together with many bracelet-shaped stone articles, indicating that the chief possessed a priest-like power as well.