The Time before the Establishment of the Medieval City of Kamakura: the Real State of the Eastern Sea Route

HIRAKAWA Minami

Why was the shogunate of the Middle Ages established in Kamakura? We may assume that historically a sea route had been developed which passed through Kamakura. The purpose of this paper is to examine this historical route.

The Nagae-Sakurayama tumulus discovered recently at the base of the Miura Peninsula provides clear evidence of a distribution route from the Miura Peninsula to the Boso Peninsula during the early part of the Kofun Period during the fourth and fifth centuries. Further, earthen ware with ink painted faces suggestive of a strong Taoist influence that date from the eighth and ninth centuries have been found at the Hakozeda archaeological site at the base of the Izu Peninsula and have been found with the widest distribution at the archaeological sites that form the “Katori-no-umi” belt that spans from Sagami Bay through to the Boso Peninsula. They have also been found further north in the area that extends from the Iwaki region of the former province of Matsu to Taga-jo where the provincial capital located. According to documents from the end of the Kofun Period, the sea route from Sagami to Kazusa was also officially recognized when there was an exchange of officials.

This route corresponds to the course taken by Yamato Takeru for his “subjugation of the east” as recorded in the Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters) and the Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan). This is said to be the old Tokaido route.

An examination of the examples mentioned above has revealed that the introduction of politics, military, commerce and culture from Yamato to the east made use of the shortest sea route that went from the Izu Peninsula to the Miura Peninsula to the base of the Boso Peninsula.

Kamakura was an intermediate point on this sea route that facilitated the exchange of people and distribution from west to east. Sited as an intermediate point for this sea route the Kamakura shogunate of the Middle Ages, was highly active in movements toward the west and the east.