Technology and Magic as Seen in the “Teppo no Daiji” and “Nanban School Book of Secrets” from the Period of Transition in the Middle of the Early Modern Period

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This paper introduces a new historical document called the “Teppo no Daiji” (“Gun Manual”) newly discovered in a collection at Morita Shrine in Nagano City together with historical documents entitled “Nanban–ryu Hiden Ichiryu” (“Nanban School Book of Secrets”). It also investigates the correlation between techniques and magic during the Middle Ages.

First, “Teppo no Daiji” is a collection of a total of 15 documents dating from 1591, 1594, 1596, 1605 and 1615. It dates from virtually the same period as material on blending gunpowder dating from the late 1550s through to the early 1590s that had until now been considered the oldest of its kind. As materials that show the changes that occurred during the time leading up to the period of transition at the beginning of the Edo period (from mid 1590s to early 1620s) they are indeed rare materials. What is more, as historical materials that are older than a book of secrets on the art of guns written by a gunsmith who was contracted to a feudal lord that had been known about earlier, they are the oldest and first writings on the art of guns by practitioners who bequeathed them to a temple or shrine situated on private land.

Second, “Nanban–ryu Hiden Ichiryu” was bequeathed with “Teppo no Daiji” as a set, and instead of being a record of the art of guns according to the Nanban school, it contains details of methods for treating soldiers injured in battle. It turns out that writings on gun techniques and medicine were handed down and disseminated as a set. Stitching techniques and surgical methods are given as methods for treating injuries. In addition to details of Portuguese medicine, there are strong elements of the method for treating wounds caused by swords that was developed independently in Japan during the Muromachi period, suggesting a mixing of these two types of medicine.

Third, the transmission of technical and chemical knowledge on such things as blending gunpowder and making ointment from the “Teppo no Daiji” and “Nanban–ryu Hiden Ichiryu” is mysticized and ritualized by the use of magic and ritual so that it also possesses a magical dimension. There is an abundance of technical elements in the materials dating from the Tensho and Bunroku periods of the mid 1570s through the mid 1590s that are closer in time to the Sengoku period when practical fighting methods were adopted. They also reveal a reverse phenomenon in that in the documents dating from the Keicho and Genna periods at the end of the 16th century and beginning
of the 17th century when early modern society was developing in Japan, there is a stronger magical element.