Research on Ancient Castles Ramparts (Part One): Criticism of the Government Office Theory and Outlook

ABE Gihei

Surveys of ancient castles located in strategic outlying regions of eastern and northern Japan have come up with various findings. Many specialist survey organizations have competed with one another to obtain findings from research into castles, spearheaded by surveys of Taga Castle. These findings have been generalized to produce a scholarly conclusion that has revolutionized research on castle ramparts conducted up to that time. This revolutionary conclusion posits the theory that the excavation of castle ramparts shows that the castles were none other than the regional offices of provincial and county governments. This theory is best summarized as the castle rampart government office theory. It is the antithesis of the previous theory, according to which castle ramparts were facilities with a militaristic dimension, with Taga Castle that housed the provincial and local governments as a leading example. I have raised questions about the archeological findings on which the new theory has been based as well as about its general conclusion. I have also criticized the loss and destruction of remains and the erroneous acknowledgment of facts since the beginning of the surveys, as well as the hasty general conclusion and the tendency to adopt an entrenched research perspective. It has been reported that some surveys have been repeated as a response to this criticism. Apart from this, there has been no response as it would appear that this different opinion from an outsider that stands contrary to the united opinion found within an organization has been deliberately ignored. Meanwhile, the new theory continues to be expounded while condemning the old theory. Given that the criticisms are justified, there must be a right to an open reexamination and repeat archeological surveys. Although in defense of the initial misunderstanding, there is probably no internal principle at work here. Nearly 35 years have passed since the new theory was first mooted and today many of the people concerned have left the organization. Excavation has resumed and there have been reports of some new important findings. If this situation continues, these new findings will be treated as those in the past, whereby they will remain unexplained and will ultimately be treated as if they never existed. Consequently, there is a risk that we will lose sight of the historical facts about Taga Castle and the origin of research into castles. This paper reviews the points that have been contended up until now and examines new findings and additional points of evidence. As such, it seeks to find common ground on which research into castles can
move to the next stage, leaving the government office theory behind. It is an introduction to the general theory on castle ramparts, something that the forthcoming government investigation on its own will not be able to do. It also looks ahead to the next challenges.