The Lineage of Line-Engraved Iron Arrowheads

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Iron arrowheads (yajīri) with line engravings (line-engraved iron arrowheads) are found in the Marozuka Tomb. The purpose of this study is to investigate the places of manufacture of the line-engraved iron arrowheads and their significance as grave goods. I collected Kofun Period line-engraved iron arrowheads, organized them into form-based categories, and examined their distribution, and transitions in that distribution.

The line engravings on the iron arrowheads can be broadly divided into two types: a line engraving consisting of only a single straight line, and circular patterns arranged in or around the central area. Both types of line-engraved iron arrowheads are related by being highly ceremonial, but arrowheads thought to be of the parent pattern are different, and there are differences in the periods of their manufacture and in their distribution.

Line-engraved iron arrowheads with the straight line pattern originate from the pierced iron arrowheads found in northern Kyushu from the late Yayoi period, and in the mid-Kofun Period are concentrated in the area of Miyazaki Prefecture (southern Kyushu). The single straight engraved line is conjectured to be (interpreted as) a regressed form of the earlier piercing. Iron arrowheads with the straight line engraving are mostly limited to the specific keitō (jade gui-tablet) style shaped arrowheads, and the range of distribution is also limited. The line-engraved iron arrowheads are treated as a local custom related to the specific grave style of underground yokoana (horizontal) graves, and are considered to have been produced locally and used locally.

On the other hand, even though examples of line-engraved iron arrowheads with circular patterns are common from the mid-Kofun Period, they had already appeared by the beginning of the early Kofun Period. There is a possibility that they are related to the late Yayoi Period iron arrowheads with small holes, but since the circular patterns tend to be applied to iron arrowheads that are highly ceremonial, the circular pattern is conjectured to be (interpreted as) as workmanship undertaken to emphasize that distinctiveness. Among preserved line-engraved iron arrowheads are circular patterns with a variety of shapes, including the keitō type, jōyokaku (chisel-pointed) type, yanagiba (willow leaf-shaped) type, nidan-kaeri (double barbed) type, and others. No central point of distribution can be discerned, and they are widely distributed, including on the Korean peninsula. The circular pattern
suggests that the iron arrowheads are closely related to the central royal government of Wa, but with strong manifestations, too, of local characteristics. I point out that the techniques and significance of applying the circular pattern were not limited to the royal Wa government, but may have been distributed throughout many localities.

Through the existence of the Marozuka Tomb line-engraved iron arrowheads, it was learned that the distribution of line-engraved iron arrowheads with the straight line pattern was not limited to Miyazaki Prefecture but also extended to the Kumamoto area. It is possible to detect local ties through the use of line-engraved iron arrowheads with the straight line pattern. This means that the burial goods of powerful headmen in the Kumamoto area included ceremonial items that demonstrated a relationship with the Miyazaki area. It is worth noting that this reveals one aspect of the personality of the person buried in the Marozuka Tomb.

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