Obigane-shiki Armor and Mirrors as Grave Goods

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Grave goods buried in tumuli have two different aspects. On the one hand, they were distributed by the royal government, while on the other they were buried in local tumuli. Through an awareness of the different aspects of grave goods as both distributed and buried, it is possible to evaluate Kofun Period society from the different points of view of the royal government and the locality. In this study I focus on the phenomenon of the co-occurrence (burial at the same time) of armor and mirrors, and evaluate the regional trends in the middle Kofun Period, corresponding roughly to the fifth century.

First, I set down the chronological phase of the armor and mirrors, and also their combinational relationships within the tumuli. I point out that at the phase where obigane kawatoji-shiki (leather-laced laminar) armor was treated as grave goods, there were simultaneous trends where retained mirrors (mirrors that had been retained for a fixed period of time locally) were treated as burial goods. I examined the background of this phenomenon from the point of view of the relationship with sankaku-buchi shinjū kyō (三角縁神戯鏡) mirrors and the construction of local tumuli. I also discuss aspects of the middle Kofun Period and concurrent diverse regional trends.

The phenomenon of the new armor appearing with the old mirrors as set out in this study is symbolic of one facet of the first half of the middle Kofun Period. On the other hand, the relative universality of this phenomenon re-emphasizes the point that not only were these grave goods distributed by the royal government, but they were also retained locally. Studying tumuli grave goods brought up the importance of an awareness of the differences of viewpoints represented by royal government and the locality.

Keywords: obigane shiki armor (帶金式甲冑), Chinese mirrors, Japanese mirrors, sankaku-buchi shinjū kyō (三角縁神戯鏡), retained mirrors, local society