Issues Concerning Omi Otsu no Miya

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Omi Otsu no Miya of the Emperor Tenchi was a short-lived imperial capital, which was relocated from Nochi no Asuka no Okamoto no Miya in 667, and a little over 5 years later, abandoned due to the Jinshin War in 672. From among all the imperial capitals of the 7th century, the only capitals relocated to other locations than the Yamato Province were the Early Naniwa no Miya and Otsu no Miya. Archaeological research has placed Otsu no Miya on the southwestern shore of Lake Biwa, in the current district of Nishikori, Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture.

To understand the historical character of Otsu no Miya, its location and structure, the actual conditions of Hakuho Temple, and the spatial structure of the surrounding area was studied by reexaming the primary materials, mainly the ancient foundations and artifacts excavated by earlier digs, along with some newer excavated materials. As a result, several special characteristics of Otsu no Miya were found. Namely, to promote the establishment of a base for both diplomatic relations with Koguryo and military purposes, priority was given to the development of land and lake transportation, and the establishment of Otsu no Miya was promoted for only a short period of time.

Up to right before the relocation of the capital to Otsu no Miya, in the area at the eastern foot of Mt. Hiei, Chinese and Korean clan settlements consisting of large walled buildings and dug-standing pillar buildings existed along with such Buddhist temples as the Ano Temple (abandoned) and Minami-Shiga Temple (abandoned) built by these clans; it can be inferred that in the surrounding areas the early stages of port facilities existed. Otsu no Miya was relocated to such an area in which to a certain extent an environment suitable for the relocation of the capital was being developed. In the year following the relocation, Sofukuji Temple was newly built at Shigasato, lying northwest of the Imperial Palace in Nishikori; the temple had a fine view and the site was the highest among the surrounding temples; at nearly the same time, in contrast, Otsu Temple (abandoned) was built in the lowest position of all the temples, southeastward from the Miya, on the shores of Lake Biwa in the current Hamaotsu. Since the Sofukuji Temple site and the Otsu Temple (abandoned) both used round-shaped roof tiles produced from the same tile mold as used at Kawara-dera Temple, a close relation with Otsu no Miya can be considered. The Sofukuji Temple was fortified to some extent, and the Otsu Temple (abandoned) was constructed with a focus on mobility for the transport of people and goods, and its nearby port facilities.
had a relation with Komadera Temple at Kizu River like “Sagaraka no Murotsumi” (guest house). As if inspired by such construction work, the clans in the surrounding areas carried out their own redevelopment as shown by the rebuilding of Ano Temple (abandoned). As mentioned above, the Palace area of Otsu no Miya and Buddhist temples apart from Otsu Temple (abandoned) were located on the higher and dry sites and arranged along a north and south line, whereas the settlement sites of the Minami-Shiga site, from which mokkan (a narrow strip of wood on which an official message is written) were excavated, were laid out on low-lying land and buildings constructed with no attention to a north/south axis. It is probable that the Palace area, Hakuho Temple, and each institution with an allocated function, were arranged in accordance with a deliberate and ordered plan, and the layout of its surrounding settlements was affected by the topography; these two different approaches coexisted in one spatial structure.

In the author’s view, the Palace of the Omi Imperial Court, temples and related facilities were newly established over a short period of time, and as the physical infrastructure was improving, the landscape of Chinese and Korean clan settlements was changing to a space with no settlements and a focus on developing transportation links for Otsu no Miya.

Key words: Omi Otsu no Miya, Sofukuji Temple site, Otsu Temple (abandoned), port facilities, important place of land and lake transportation