Social Changes during the Shift from the Yayoi Period to the Kofun Period from the Viewpoints of Population and Settlement Dynamics: the southern central region of Kibi and its surrounding areas

MATSUGI Takehiko

Improved accuracy of the AMS (Accelerator Mass Spectrometry) radiocarbon dating method enabled researchers to precisely estimate the duration of archaeological phenomena apprehended based on the typology. One of the works whose validity was enhanced by the AMS technique is simulation of demographic changes based on the estimated amount of remnants of buildings and objects of each ceramic typology.

This article reveals the change process of the number and distribution of the population in the southern central region of Kibi, where the society grew particularly complicated from the Yayoi period to the Kofun period. To this end, this research examined the changes of the number of dugout houses, horitate-pillared buildings (buildings with pillars embedded directly into the ground), and other construction remnants during the related period, based on previously excavated materials. The results discovered that the population from the Yayoi period to the beginning of the Kofun period, especially in the latter half of the Middle Yayoi period and in the Late Yayoi period, increased more than previously assumed.

Moreover, paleoenvironmental reconstruction studies and further examinations on archaeological phenomena during the above-mentioned two periods of population growth revealed the reasons behind these increases. In the latter half of the Middle Yayoi period, the high population growth rate due to the environmental stability raised the number of population and settlements. In the Late Yayoi period, the population growth and its concentration in certain areas as well as phenomena such as the stratification of society, the cultivation of land, and the activation of long distance trade were attributed to social restructuring to deal with environmental destabilization. This article further develops the argument that the social restructuring was the historical essence of the shift toward the Kofun period.

Key words: Population, Settlement pattern, Burial systems, Social stratification, Paleoenvironment