

Summary of Research

This research was implemented as one contribution to the medieval section of the National Museum of Japanese History's special project, Cultural Exchange in Northern Japan. The two sites discussed, Fukushima Castle and Tosa-Minato Port, are located in Shiura Village, in northwestern Aomori Prefecture.

I Fukushima Castle Site

The Fukushima Castle Site is located in Shiura Village, on high ground along the northern shore of Juu-san Lake. The site is divided into an inner zone and an outer zone. The outer zone consists of great earthworks and moats, and is shaped like an inverted triangle about 1km in size, while the inner zone is a 200 m rectangle.

Partial excavation of this site was implemented in 1955 by Tokyo University, and dwellings dating to the late Heian Period were discovered. The castle itself, however, has been said to have been a stronghold of the Andō Clan, a local nobility, and as such is thought to be medieval.

This research began with a survey of the entire site, and several test trenches were excavated in the inner zone, which had not yet been researched. Remains of an earthwork structure, moat, earthen bridge and gate were confirmed. From associated artifacts, these structural remains were dated to the later half of the 10th century. The structure of the castle shows some similarities with the stockades built during the ancient period, and as such is an important link between these and later medieval castles.

II Tosa-Minato Site

The Tosa-Minato Site is located in Shiura Village, along the western shore of Juu-san Lake. Tosa-Minato, built on a sand spit about 2 km long and 500 m wide, was an important center for trade along the Sea of Japan during the Medieval Period. No research to date, however, has attempted to understand the site in its entirety from the viewpoint of an urban settlement, and there remain many unanswered questions about the site's overall structure and history.

This research is designed to shed light on the overall structure of the urban settlement, as well as changes over time. Research methodology includes survey mapping of the entire site, detailed mapping of artifacts, research on old pictorial and land ownership maps, analyses of aerial photographs, and some limited excavation. Results show features that indicate large-scale urban planning, including a large earthwork structure

and main center street. Changes in the settlement over time will be also clarified.

(1) Changes over time

Based on the above results, the history of the settlement can be divided into the following stages :

Stage 1 From the second half of the 12th century. Some artifacts were unearthed from the area north of the earthwork (built at a later date), but the structure of the settlement is not clear. This stage coincides with the Ōshū Fujiwara Clan.

Stage 2a From the second half of the 14th century. A well-planned urban area, with residence of ruler and harbor facilities, was confirmed in the area north of the earthwork.

Stage 2b From the end of the 14th century. An earthwork structure and moat divided the sand spit into two sections, with residences and shops along a central street in the area south of the earthwork. This stage represents the maximum development of the settlement, when both sides of the earthwork were included under the urban plan.

Stage 2c From the third quarter of the 15th century. Buildings appeared which ignored the previous plan. This stage marks the end of the medieval period city.

Stage 3 From the first half of the 17th century. The port developed under the feudal system, and assumed its present form.

(2) Structural Remains

Major structural remains are as follows :

Earthwork construction began towards the end of the 14th century, but the structure was strengthened and expanded in the early 15th century. A moat was dug along the south side. This structure divided the city into two parts, and also served to protect the northern part.

Northern Zone : Research revealed the presence of a moat, enclosing an area of about 100 sq. m., which is thought to represent the residence of the local ruler. Remains of numerous streets, large wells, and semi-subterranean pit dwellings were detected outside the residence. This indicates that the area north of the earthwork served as residence for the ruler, his court and also artisans.

Southern Zone : A main street started at the earthwork, and ran in a south-north direction through the center of the sand spit. The area along the street was divided into plots by fences, with evidence of a well and small dwelling in each plot. The buildings have yet to be excavated, but most likely represent homes and shops built during the zenith of the site. In addition, the remains of a graveyard, which was part of as

temple that predates the earthwork, were also discovered in this area.

(3) Artifacts

Pottery from the later half of the 12th century, used for ritual purposes, was excavated, indicating that a substantial settlement had appeared by this time.

The number of artifacts recovered increased sharply from the later half of the 14th century, with pottery styles from both the Sea of Japan and Pacific Coast, as well as items imported from China, appearing mostly north of the earthworks. This shows that the port was connected to extensive domestic and international trade networks.

The number of artifacts increased even more in the early 15th century, and distribution expanded to include the southern zone as well. From the later half of the 15th century, however, artifacts decreased rapidly, and very few were found from then until the 17th century.

(4) Conclusions

The above data clearly show that Tosa-Minato was a major international trading port during the medieval period, and was constructed according to a large-scale urban plan. This conclusion became apparent when the overall structure of the site was analyzed from the standpoint of an urban settlement, with research on historical documents and maps, folklore and natural science added to data from the archaeological excavations.

Shiura Village and Aomori Prefecture are continuing research at this site, and additional results can be expected in the near future.