

The Stone Monuments at Ōtano-shō

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This paper is a research report on the stone monuments distributed in Ōtano-shō in the province of Bingo during the Middle Ages (12-16th century). Ōtano-shō is an estate (shōen) belonging to Kōyasan-kongoubu temple. It is situated in Sera-chō, Kouzan-chō, Sera-gun, Hiroshima prefecture.

This report is part of a joint research project entitled "Investigation of the Middle Ages shōen remains and record conservation methods." The research was made for the purpose of finding out what should be considered for research and how field research on the study of the past should be recorded, with special reference to shōen under the circumstances of rapidly changing rural landscapes.

It is expected that various objects will be investigated. These include the manner of operation of things used in common, such as reservoir and land use, the social structure of the village, human relationships and customs, etc. Historical information such as old documents and stone monuments will naturally also be included. Fortunately, in Ōtano-shō there are a large number of stone monuments which were made in the Middle Ages, such as Gorintō, Hōkyō-intō, Sōtō and stone Buddhas. How should research on these be conducted? What will be identified through this research? These were our main areas of concern.

Various steps must be taken in conducting research in the stone monuments existing in the field. First is the investigation of the distribution of the existing stone monuments; second is the investigation of the kinds of stone monuments, the number of the objects, and the period of construction; third is the taking of photographs and the making of rubbings from the inscriptions, as well as the making of precise drawings, etc. In the present research, the main focus of the investigation was the distribution of the stone monuments. The following things were identified as a result of this research.

(1) The distribution of the stone monuments covers 375 locations. This fact indicates that people lived in those places, i. e., that the neighbourhood was already being cultivated.

(2) The distribution of the Stone monuments and "Myō" (an agricultural unit for exacting land tax in the Middle Ages) known from literature and folklore, overlap. It can be understood from this that the Myō unit was maintained for some time after this period. It is possible that the places where the stone

monuments were found used to be organized by Myō.

(3) It is considered that the differences in the kind of stone monument, such as Hōkyō-intō, and Gorintō, the size differences of the individual monuments, and the differences in quantity per location, depend on the builder's social position in the village. That is, relatively large stone monuments were probably built by upper class people, and smaller ones by lower class people.

If our detailed study is continued we may at least be able to find out by what time the area had been cultivated, and to clarify the social structure, or village hierarchy. This research confirmed that research in stone monuments is one of the most effective methods of studying shōen by field research.

More advanced research is required for the next phase of this research, which will be concerned with developing objective reporting methods for better understanding three dimensional monuments, rather than relying plotting them on two dimensional report paper.