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Tatsuyama Stone and the Yamato Polity

Seigo WADA (trans. Edwina Palmer)

The discovery and exploitation of Tatsuyama stone (Early Kofun Period)

The Kako River is a large river that flows from north to south through central Harima. Stone of good quality tuff has been quarried from ancient times in the district from Takasago-shi to Kasai-shi on the right bank of the lower reaches of this river. Locally it is called Tatsuyama stone, Osa stone and Takamuro stone, depending on the place, but in archaeology it is generically called Tatsuyama stone.

An interesting story concerning this stone appears in the Nara Period text *Harima Fudoki*. It is the place name origin tale of Iho Hill (present-day Takasago-shi) in the entry for Ōkuni *Sato*, Inami *Kōri*. King Chūai died in Kyūshū whilst on an expedition to quell the Kumaso,[1] so his remains were elevated to the status of a deity, and Queen-Consort Jingū took Ishitsukuri no Muraji Ōku, the Grand Master of the Stonemasons, and went in search of Hawaka stone in Sanuki Province (Shikoku) in order to build his burial mound. However, there being no stone there of sufficient quality, they crossed the Inland Sea, whereupon Ōku immediately discovered good quality stone. So the place was named after that event.

Regardless of whether this really happened historically, what we learn from this story is that the discovery and exploitation of Tatsuyama stone was closely connected with the royal family (later the imperial family) and the Yamato polity. But was that really so?

What we know is that the earliest example of Tatsuyama stone being processed is in the early fourth century Mesuriyama Kofun, Sakurai-shi, Nara Prefecture. One out of the eight slabs of ceiling stones in its vertical-shaft (*tateana-shiki*) stone burial chamber is of Tatsuyama stone. This dates to a stage just before it started to be used locally, so it means that this slab of Tatsuyama stone was transported a distance of more than a hundred kilometres as the crow flies to the Nara Basin, despite already having been carefully dressed and weighing over a tonne.

The use of huge dressed stone slabs was rare during the Yayoi Period and earlier. That began with the Kofun Period and the start of construction of stone burial chambers and stone sarcophagi. It probably occurred at this period due to the transmission of more sophisticated stone working techniques from Goguryeo on the Korean peninsula that could work even with granite.

What is more, since Mesuriyama Kofun is a large keyhole-shaped mound 250 metres long, located near to the Ōyamato Kofun cluster that were the burial mounds of third and fourth century kings, there can be little doubt that the person interred in it was a pivotally influential man central to Yamato power.

When we take into consideration such circumstances, it is highly likely that the Yamato Court gradually involved itself in local affairs, and developed the quarrying of Tatsuyama stone using the latest techniques to construct new burial mounds and their accoutrements.

As regards Hawaka stone from Sanuki—assuming that Hawaka denotes the vicinity of the former Hayuka *Mura* (present-day Hayuka Kami, Ayauta-chō, Ayauta-gun), Kagawa Prefecture, Shikoku—good quality tuff (Washinoyama stone) was quarried at nearby Mt. Washinoyama (Takamatsu-shi). However, it only started to be used as material for ‘split-bamboo’ shaped coffins a little later than the time of Mesuriyama Kofun.

The development of assembled stone chest coffins (Mid-Kofun Period)

Thereafter, vertical-shaft stone burial chambers were constructed locally that used Tatsuyama stone for the ceiling slabs, such as Minami Ōtsuka Kofun in the Hioka Kofun cluster in Kakogawa-shi, but it was from the middle of the late fourth century that it fully came into use. This is precisely when the burial mounds of the kings shifted to the Mozu and Furuichi Kofun clusters in Ōsaka-fu, which now form a World Heritage Site.

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[1] Translator’s note: the Kumsaso were putatively indigenous residents of southern Kyūshū who held out against encroachment and rule by Yamato chiefs/kings.

It was from this era onward that the use of assembled stone chest (*nagamochigata*) coffins started to predominate. These are so called because they resemble the boxes called *nagamochi* in which clothes and furnishings were stored in ancient times, and which comprised a rectangular base of assembled planks covered by a rectangular curved lid shaped like a cross-section through a cylinder.

This was the most formal and prestigious style of coffin at the time, used by kings, powerful chiefs in the Kinai region, and those connected to them. A distinguishing feature of them was that they were all of Tatsuyama stone, and some—albeit not many—were transported as far as Okayama to the west and Shiga to the east. The importance of this style of coffin is evident from the fact that in regions too far away to transport them, such as Kyūshū and Kantō, masons were sent from Yamato to make assembled stone chest coffins out of local stone. Assembled stone chest coffins were thus symbolic of the confederation of chiefs in the Kinai region led by the king, who together formed the core of the Yamato polity.

So the use of stone chest coffins was widespread in the rural districts of Harima, such as in Tamaoka Kofun in Kasai-shi and Danjōzan Kofun in Himeji-shi. Harima chiefs were in service to the Yamato Court for the quarrying, dressing and transport of the stone, and it is thought that this relationship between them, although changing little by little, continued throughout the Kofun period and into the Asuka period.

House-shaped coffins (Late Kofun Period)

The structure of burial chambers in *kofun* underwent a drastic change in the sixth century: side-entrance passage chambers developed nationwide, and in the region centred on the Kinai, it became the fashion to inter the deceased in a house-shaped stone coffin with a roof-shaped lid within a stone burial chamber. These were predominantly stone coffins made of Tatsuyama stone, and others made of white tuff from Mt. Nijōzan (Nijōzan whitestone), which had more recently started to be quarried on the boundary between Nara and Ōsaka Prefectures. Even so, Tatsuyama stone was still considered superior, as is evidenced from the fact that it was used in the tombs of two of the kings (*ōkimi*).

One of these was Mise Maruyama Kofun, Kashihara-shi, Nara Prefecture: a keyhole-shaped burial mound boasting the longest of its time at 310 metres. Its entrance was once opened and it was reported to be the largest side-passage stone chamber in Japan; but it was designated an Imperial Mausoleum tended by the Imperial Household Agency, so the entrance has long been closed. However, it became a topic of public debate when a part of the entrance collapsed in 1991 and the Asahi Television news channel broadcast colour images of its interior. The Imperial Household Agency later published a survey report of its interior. According to their report, inside was a huge stone chamber as much as 28.4 metres in length. The lower part of the burial chamber including the stone coffins was inundated with about a metre of mud, but it was 8.3 metres long, 3.6 metres wide, 3.5–4.0 metres high, and surpassed even the famous Ishibutai Kofun in Asuka-mura. It contained two hollowed-out house-shaped (*kurinukishiki iegata*) stone coffins of Tatsuyama stone, and to infer from their styles, one dated from the late sixth century and the other from the early seventh. The bodies interred there are assumed to be King Kinmei who died in 571, and his wife Kitashihime, who was re-interred in 612.

The other one is Imashirozuka Kofun in Takatsuki-shi, Ōsaka Prefecture. This is a 190-metre-long keyhole-shaped mound, and it is highly likely to be the tomb where King Kinmei's father, King Keitai, is interred. Excavation of the round mound end found that the horizontal passage entry chamber had already been scraped away, but fragments of three sorts of stone coffins were found nearby, made of Tatsuyama stone, Nijōzan whitestone, and pink welded tuff (Makadoishi) from Mt. Aso in Kyūshū. Currently archaeological opinion is divided as to which stone would have been the king's coffin, but judging by the stone coffins of the kings dated to either side, it was most likely the one of Tatsuyama stone.

As outlined above, house-shaped stone coffins made of Tatsuyama stone were preferred for the coffins of the kings and for those of other preeminent chiefs. It seems that this was especially used for coffins of people with the public recognition of the Yamato Court from the late sixth through to the end of the early seventh centuries. At the height of their popularity many were transported to Yamaguchi Prefecture in the west and Shiga Prefecture in the east, and their form was emulated in various other regions, using local stone. The Kako River valley in Harima was where house-shaped coffins of Tatsuyama stone were used the most of all. With the spread of Pure Land Buddhism in the Middle Ages, these stone coffins were often dug up, and stone statues of Amida Buddha and the bodhisattva Jizō carved from them became fashionable, such that even nowadays they are some of the features that most evoke Harima.

From burial facilities to construction material (Asuka Period)

Although keyhole-shaped mounds themselves ceased to be constructed from the Asuka Period onwards, the side-passage stone chambers and house-shaped stone coffins associated with *kofun* burials continued to be assembled. It was still stone coffins of Tatsuyama stone that were placed in the stone chambers made of dressed granite that are typical of the stone chambers of the first half of the seventh century. But in the Asuka Period, all kinds of stone apart from granite was quarried around the Nara Basin, and items of Tatsuyama stone steadily decreased in the late seventh century. Nevertheless, Tatsuyama stone that had been water polished and finished to the highest level of skill was used for the side walls of the stone chamber of the octagonal Nakaoyama Kofun in Asuka-mura, which is thought to be the tomb of Emperor Monmu dating from the beginning of the eighth century. So the association of the burial of kings and emperors with Tatsuyama stone continued right up to that time.

Perhaps because of that custom, Tatsuyama stone came to be used only for special purposes for temples, such as the pedestal of the Asuka Great Buddha or the devotional stone (*reihaiseki*) for the main hall (*kondō*) of Yamada Temple, and it almost completely ceased to be used as a building material. It started to be used in this way from the late seventh century to the beginning of the eighth century, i.e., at the time of the Fujiwara Palace, and also at the time of the Heijō Palace (Nara) through the eighth century. Tatsuyama stone had occupied an important position as the most prestigious material for burials throughout the reigns of all the kings of Wa/Yamato, but at this point its role for them ceased.

On the other hand, it was still used locally not only for stone coffins but also for stone Buddhist statues, the foundation stones of temples, and so on. Ishi no Hōden is the object of veneration of Ōshiko Shrine in Takasago-shi. It appears in *Harima Fudoki* described as a ‘huge rock’ (*ōishi*) of ‘dressed stone’ (*tsukuri-ishi*). This is a rare archaeological relic that was abandoned part-way through being carved out of the Tatsuyama bedrock for some enormous stone structure. It is noteworthy that it is comparable to similar ones in ancient Egypt and China.