

Kurume History Walks

No.10 Ontsuka and Gongenzuka Kofun Ontsuka Gongenzuka Kofun 御塚・権現塚古墳

Kofun is the ancient mounded tomb of people in power, constructed between about the mid-3rd century to the early 7th century (the Kofun period).

The "Ontsuka and Gongenzuka Kofun", which are in fact two separate tombs, was designated a National Historic Site in 1931. The Ontsuka Kofun is a keyhole-shaped mound (*zenpokoefun*), while the Gongenzuka Kofun is a round mound (*enpun*).

We presume those kofuns were the tombs of Minuma no Kimi (a powerful family of Mizuma District during the Kofun period). They were mentioned in an ancient book which was edited in 720.

■ Tombs of chieftains

Those kofuns are located in Daizenji, at a lowland between the Chikugo River and the Hirokawa River. It is said that there used to be over 40 tombs in the neighborhood.

There are still several small round tombs, less than 20 meters across. A certain kofun as large as the Gongenzuka seems to have been demolished to develop new arable lands.

In a wider area, six keyhole-shaped kofuns exist. Considering these scales, we regard them and three above kofuns together as the tombs of Minuma no Kimi.



1 Ontsuka and Gongenzuka Kofun
2 Daizenji Tamatare-gu Shrine

■ Overview

We investigated both kofuns twice at the same time.

The Ontsuka is keyhole-shaped (scallop-like), surrounded with triple moats and embankments, 121 meters in overall length. The main part had been robbed of its buried properties.

The Gongenzuka is round, 152 meters across, surrounded by double moats and embankments, while we suppose it had another peripheral, shallow groove. A lot of properties such as Silla* wares and cylindrical clay figures (*ento haniwa*) were buried in the inner embankment. They were probably set up under a plan.

As for the creation date of the kofun, we estimated, from the excavated articles, that the former was built in the late 5th century and the latter was in the early 6th century.

*Silla was one of three kingdoms on the Korean Peninsula from the 1st century BCE to the 7th century.

■ Minuma no Kimi, a powerful clan

The former Mizuma District, which takes part of Kurume City today, was an important area as the gateway to the Ariake Sea.

Several large kofuns stud along the river. If we consider all as the tombs of Minuma no Kami, recorded in “The Chronicles of Japan (Nihon Shoki)”, it should be them who dominated this important area and the river traffic.

By the way, in the late 5th century, Chikushi no Kimi clan had the biggest power in the northern Kyushu. They had a significant influence on the kofun culture of this province. The clan prospered in the generation of



Excavated clay figures



Silla wares



Major kofuns along the Chikugo River

Iwai. The Iwatoyama Kofun, located in Yame City, is considered as his tomb and as one of the largest kofuns in Kyushu by the early 6th century. And, because there are several kofuns around the Iwatoyama Kofun, it is likely that Chikushi no Kimi clan kept their home ground on the Yame Hills.

Iwai rebelled against the Yamato Kingdom in 527. He lost the battle at the foot of Mt. Kora according to “*Nihon Shoki*”.

The biggest reason why the Yamato Kingdom aimed for conquering Kyushu was to monopolize the negotiation right with China and Korea. From historical materials of the Munakata-taisha Shrine, another powerful clan, Munakata no Kimi clan, controlled a sea route from the Genkai sea to the Korean Peninsula and the continent. There should have been an alternative route from the Ariake Sea, and if it is so, the home ground of Minuma no Kimi along the Chikugo River could have been the contact point with the continent. They had been closely connected to the Yamato Kingdom as early as Munakata no Kimi.

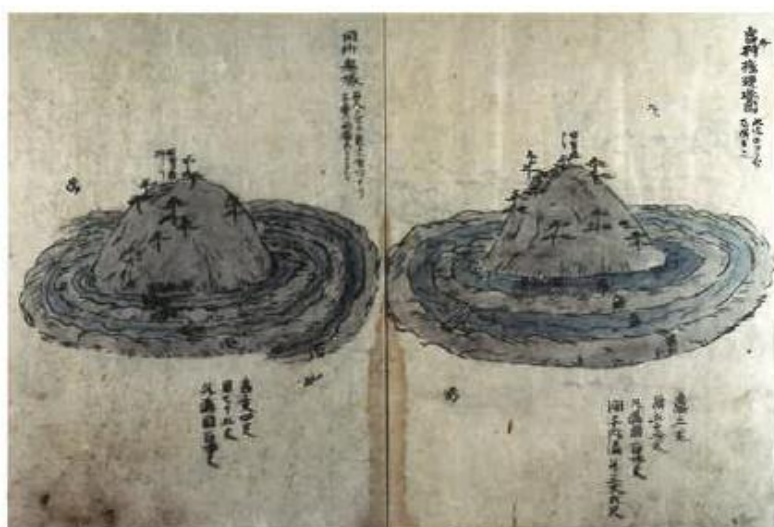
■ **Investigation by a samurai,
Yano Kazusada**

Yano Kazusada, a samurai of Kurume Domain of the end of the Edo period, was born to the Hayakawa family in 1794 at the castle town. At the age of 34, he entered the Yano family in order to succeed the family work as the horse guard of the lord. After that, he held various posts such as teacher of Meizendo domain school, promotor of the study of Japanese classical literature, high-ranking promotor of new growing industries creation. Kazusada had poured energy to research the local culture and wrote a lot of books in various fields. Especially *War History of Generals and Forces of Chikugo Province (Chikugo Shoushi Gundan, 1853)* still has a high use value as a general history book.

In this book, he also wrote about Ontsuka and Gongenzuka Kofun and the survey value by the field research. He depicted those mostly as those are today. And his measured value was very close to the result of our investigation.



The Ontsuka (lower left) and Gongentsuka (upper right) Kofun



Draft of “Chikugo Shoushi Gun Dan”

■ Restoration work

In 1913 and 1917, the field survey of the Ontsuka Kofun was carried out by Kuroiwa Manjiro and Muto Naoharu from the Chikugo history club (*Chikugo Shidankai*), Masuda Ushin, the chief of the Archives and Mausolea section of the Imperial Household Agency and others. They estimated that that was a tomb of Minuma no Kimi.

Fukagawa Tadayoshi, the president of the Okawa Railway Company, thought that it was a shame to keep the kofun with a long history in disrepair. Then, he spent private funds to buy the land of the kofuns and its neighborhood – 30,000 square meters, and requested the restoration to Kajita Sadaichi, who was in charge of the restoration of the Imperial mausoleums across the country. It seems that he had used the survey drawing of Yano Kazusada.



During the restoration work



After the work

The photos on the right show that the restoration was on a large scale. The local volunteers took part of the work. After that, Tadayoshi asked the local people to maintain clean all the land that he bought.

■ Recent circumstances

After the World War II, the land around the kofuns changed into a housing land for repatriates from the continent. They refilled those moats, cut the embankments and flattened it. In 1958, there used to be 25 houses on that land.

In 1970, the city undertook the environmental improvement around the Kofun in earnest in order to use effectively it. It purchased private lands from the citizens for enlarging the preservation zone. In 1979, the area of 50,000 square meters was finally added to the designated site.

Since 1985, the improvement work had carried out. In 1994, the restoration of both kofuns was completed and a public square was opened. The restoration had been done referring to the measured value by Kazusada in 1917. The kofuns might have regained the form at the time of the Edo period.

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Date of revision: March 31st, 2015 / Translated in June 2020