

The Committee for the Protection of Buried Cultural Properties

The Committee

(written by OGASAWARA Nagataka)

Fiscal 2011 has begun as the year of recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake, and there is still a long way to total recovery. Although problems on buried cultural properties are also piled up, progress has been made continuously on protection of damaged cultural properties and handling of archaeological sites due to recovery and reconstruction missions, thanks to persistent efforts from local government staff and researchers. Organization of research system should be promoted as soon as possible in order to ensure such progress is not based on individual sacrifices of staff and researchers.

Activities of the Committee for Protection of Buried Cultural Properties in fiscal 2011 consisted of a national committee meeting (May 27, Kokugakuin University), council meetings (held monthly except August, at the Japanese Archaeological Association office), a study meeting (Nov. 19 and 20, Tokai University's Lake Yamanakako Seminar House), and a conference with the Agency of Cultural Affairs (April 24, Agency of Cultural Affairs) to discuss preservation problems and so on.

The Committee issued preservation requests for Old Negoroji Temple in Iwade City, Wakayama Prefecture, and for Nakamura Castle in Soma City, Fukushima Prefecture. In addition to these sites, there exist several preservation problems and unfortunately some of such problems are yet to be resolved. An especially regrettable example is manipulation of public opinion through questionnaires for residents, in order to justify destruction of extremely important buried cultural properties. There is a concern that the same kind of manipulation will spread and this is an important issue in the future. The lack of synthetic and continuous "community making" viewpoints which include buried cultural properties seem to be the fundamental cause of this problem, and it could happen in any place in the future.

Also the problem of handling excavated artifacts, such as discarding them, continued to

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be seen in this fiscal year. According to a questionnaire conducted annually, a situation exists by which disposal of artifacts may be justified via “handling standards” developed by local governments. It is a reality that classification of artifacts according to “handling standards” is being carried out without enough discussion on “utilization,” and the seriousness of the problem is getting worse every year.

Thus, “utilization” and “disposal” of artifacts is quite inseparable and discussion of this matter is extremely important. Continuation of this discussion must be pursued. As decentralization is being carried out further, not only disposal of excavated artifacts but also careless destruction of buried cultural properties could be expected in areas with less understanding of “utilization.” It is expected of the Japanese Archaeological Association to take a role in promoting discussion of “utilization” on long and wide viewpoints, going back to the principles of archaeology.