

A Historical Review of the New Kirishima City Area, where People, Nature and Culture are United

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Roles of the Amori River Course Division Project, which was done during the period from 1662 to 1666, are discussed implying on an illustration how people, nature and culture are united

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2004, a member of the Kokubu Castle Town Illustrations Group drew a picture depicting how the people in the Kokubu Castle Town lived, 400 years ago (Photo 1). Prior to starting this project, our impression of Kokubu's history was primarily filled with images of the lords and samurai who had assembled a powerful army. However, Kagoshima, because of the Kuroshio Current (Japan Current) together with the trade winds, was continuously influenced by foreign cultures throughout its history, and thus the lords and samurai played only one part of its history.

This illustration shows the trade route of the Shimadzu family around that time nearly 400 years ago. The Amori River, which runs a total of 30km from its source, was an important aspect of the town's prosperity and has supported the lives of people along its banks for thousands of years. On the 7th of November 2005, in accordance with the policy set by the Japanese Government, one city and six towns will be incorporated to create a new city called Kirishima. The city and the towns had been connected by the Amori River to foster a single cultural area.

2. ROLES OF AMORI RIVER COURSE DIVISION PROJECT (1662-1666)

The Amori River, during the time depicted in this painting (around in 1600), shows that the Amori branched off, meandering through the center of Kokubu. About 60 years later a major construction project to move the river to higher ground was started. This effort was called the Amori River

Course Diversion Project. As shown in the picture, four river branches were brought together here then rerouted straight to the sea. A canal, 100m wide, 10m deep, and 3000m long, was dug, and became the new course for the Amori River. Such a large-scale-digging project can develop a great deal of left-over soil. Can you imagine how much soil would have to be disposed? For example, a channel 100 meters wide by 10 meters deep by 1 meter long would require about 120 dump trucks with a 10 ton capacity to dispose of the soil. Such large amounts of soil might be disposed of in a big heap because in those days there were no trucks to carry soil to far places. However, there were no soil heaps near the construction areas. Then exactly how was the soil disposed? As you can see in this picture, pits were first dug and were connected at the bottom, creating an underground tunnel. Water was then redirected from the upper reaches of the Amori River through the underground tunnel which allowed soil disposed in the tunnel to be carried out to sea (Fig. 1). This was known as the Satsuma Water Conveyance Method.

The construction began in 1662, and during its 4 years took used a workforce equivalent to five million workers. As a result, the Kokubu flat became a substantial rice field, which produced a harvest that could feed over 5000 people. Prior to the project, the area around the river was subjected to repeated flooding, and was a major source of suffering for those who lived in the area. The aqueduct project was the first major public works project for the Satsuma clan. Prior to the river diversion project, Satsuma was one of the poorest domains in Japan. How then, could they afford such a large-scale project?

In 1642, about 20 years prior to this project, a gold mine was discovered in the uppermost reaches of the Amori River in Yamagano, Yokogawa Town and it was this gold that funded the project (Arikawa, 2006). It is also thought that the mining engineers might have overseen the aqueduct project. In other words, the upper and lower sections of the Amori River were connected by these major projects in Satsuma 340 years ago. Incidentally, the mining engineer who was invited to the Yamagano gold mine was from the former Oita prefecture area where technology was more advanced. It is said that the origin

of this technology was developed in the ancient Persian canals (underground irrigation system for the arid desert climate). In this way, we can say that the Amori River - all the way from the upper stream to the lower stream - is deeply connected with the world's civilizations in a single culture.

Eighty years after the Amori aqueduct project, the Shogun Tokugawa in Edo (Tokyo) ordered Satsuma to send the engineers and laborer to work on the course diversion project of the Kiso River in Gifu prefecture. And even though the task was arduous and there were numerous casualties, after



Photo 1. People and trade routes in Kokubun Castle Town in about 400 years ago. Painted by Ikuko Ono, Kazue Ijichi, Keiko Kuwano, Sumiko Koba, Tomoko Fujisaki, Noriko Takenoshita, Harue Ohara, Hideko Fujisaki, Hiroko Unoki and Machiko Honda.

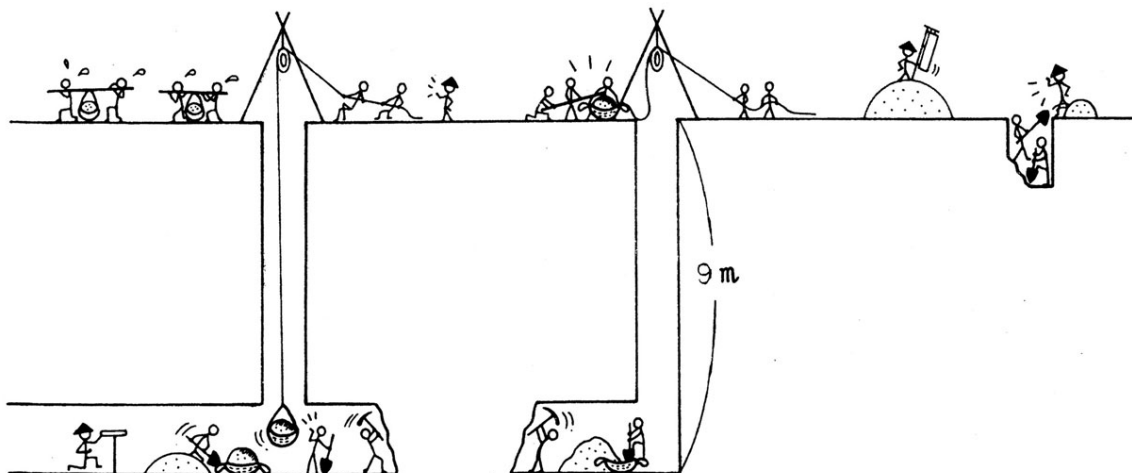


Fig. 1. Satuma Method of constructing river.

completion, the embankment, which was called the Satsuma Embankment, has protected people's lives over the years. The Satsuma Embankment shielded the area from a major typhoon in 1959 and it is said to have saved 100,000 lives in Gifu prefecture. The success of the Kiso river project also stems from the experience and technology learned through the work at the Amori river aqueduct in Kokubu.

3. NEED OF FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

In concluding this article, we would like to continue developing and exchanging information on our local histories, as citizens of the new Kirishima City, and to further share the same identity. It is hoped that our joint historical investigations and interactions between the upper and the lower streams of the river may signify the future of our new city.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When we consider the history and culture of our new city, Kirishima, there is an important aspect to be remembered. We have shown our recognition of the people living in Yamagano, and Yokogawa Town, for their effort in preserving the gold mine. Through the assistance of Kazuhide Arikawa, who, after retirement as the principal of an elementary school, has been influential for education along with the preservation of the mine.

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