Japan Academy Prize to:

Yumi Narasawa Professor, Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies, Josai University

for Les autels chrétiens du Sud de la Gaule $(V^e - XII^e)$ siècles)



Outline of the work:

It is certain that the most important factor that led to the formation of culture and society in the medieval world, which was the result of the Roman Empire's collapse, was Christianity. At the beginning of the 4th century, the Empire tolerated the Christian faith; a Christian altar that symbolized Christ and at which the Eucharist was given became an indispensable apparatus for the Christian church. Prof. Yumi Narasawa's book *"Les autels chrétiens du Sud de la Gaule (V^e - XII^e siècles)"* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015) has given the academic world the first complete and scientific account about the Christian altars produced between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages in Mediterranean Southern Gaul.

In the mid-19th century, L. T. Dassy launched into a study of older altars that were still prevalent in the Marseilles region. Even though successive generations of scholars with more sophisticated methods have conducted many later studies, they limited their findings to small and narrow geographic areas. Prof. Narasawa's achievement is worthy of special mention considering that she conducted her research in an area encompassing Provence to Languedoc through the Rhône-Alpes extending over 11 departments in France. This area was extremely extensive and showed that her conclusions were valid as being a general feature of southern Gaul. For the first time, the overall historical development and typology of the Christian altars in a precise geographical area could be described from a remarkably solid body of data. In a quote from the international journal, *Medieval Archaeology* (vol. 60–1, 2016), a reviewer appreciated her book as "a great departure point for other regional studies."

The book consists of the following three sections: 1) introductory observation, 2) catalog of altars, 3) synthesis and conclusion.

In the first section, Prof. Narasawa develops a historical observation on the materials of which altars have been made, as well as on the varying attitudes of the Church concerning the altar reflected in the Canon Law, and on the definition of the geographical frame of the research field, among other related aspects.

The following section is the largest part of the book, cataloging precisely 454 entries and their attached objects. Every altar has comprehensive raw data such as form, material (nature of stones), sizes of dimensions, ornamentation, design, extant previous studies, and related references. Each entry is accompanied by photos, measured drawings, an account of the author's observation, copies of inscribed letters, if any, and drawings of designs, among other aspects. The contents of the section are extremely detailed and exhaustive. The detailed elaboration seems to reflect the author's idea that sensory perception or the intuitive apprehension through effective observations, of each different altar as a "thing," must foster an ability of comprehending the object. That sort of thinking should be a constituent element for the archaeologist as a practician of empirical science.

On the other hand, there is an impasse inherent to the study of altars. In other words, despite the great

number of entries in the catalog, no one can be certain if the above-mentioned number represents all the altars that have ever been made in the given area and the given time frame. When, in the preface of the book, Prof. Michel Fixot, the director of Prof. Narasawa's research project, alludes to "improbable exhaustiveness," he should place emphasis on this improbability. However, the context of the allusion provided by Prof. Fixot should not be misunderstood because he clearly supports the author's strong intention toward the exhaustiveness of her cataloging. For protecting the cultural heritage from the viewpoint of international cooperation, this catalog will fulfill the role of being a great scientific achievement.

The third section, which is the last, presents an analysis of the given information from the catalog of 454 altars and other data. It is regarding this part of the book that the author proves her merit as an art archaeologist.

In the first place, the author classifies the altars into four different categories, according to the ornamentations worked on them. They are as follows: 1) Provençal-type decorated altars, 2) antique tombstone altars, 3) altar tables with lobed borders and other decorated tables in Mediterranean Languedoc and 4) altars with an *Antipendium*.

The first category corresponds to the altars whose style dates back to Paleochristian ages, having motifs such as Chrismons, doves, sheep, vine branches, among other aspects. They were produced in workshops around Marseilles, and their style expanded over the whole of Provence and was adopted up to the early Romanesque era. However, it is significant to note that between the 7th and the 10th centuries, this style was absent.

The second category, antique tombstone altars, belongs to the group which exploited the antique gravestones or antique milestones. In numbers, the antique tombstone altars produced in Provence far exceed other areas; but, in Languedoc too, the tombstone altar began to be produced in the 8th and 9th centuries. They generally have a *loculus* in the top for relics and their surface is decorated with a Greek cross. The author supposes that the altars produced with this style in Languedoc have been considerably influenced by Visigothic art because Narbonne has been the center of production for those types of altars.

The third category, namely altars with lobed borders, was identified with production in Languedoc and Catalonia in the 10th and 11th centuries. As to the production that has been difficult to identify in a chronological manner, some scholars are in favor of the Paleochristian while others support the Romanesque time period.

The last category represents altars whose frontal surfaces were oriented toward the audience and richly embellished with embroidery, gold thread, or gemstones, among other things. They are found from the 12th century onward in Provence, Languedoc, and the Rhône-Alpes regions.

Following reflections on the typology and chronology of altars are questions about the altar table and its support provided with a *loculus*, among other aspects. The table had two types: a raised edging style and a flat one. The former descends in its style from the antique dining table represented by the classic altar at the monastery of Saint-Victor in Marseilles. The author confirmed such a style with 15 examples from the 5th to the 7th centuries in Provence. While such a style became popular in Languedoc in the pre-Romanesque era, it was hardly successful in Provence.

As for the flat table, Prof. Narasawa inventoried 80 examples and found that they served more often at the village church and monastery. They are rather smaller as well as inexpensive. Only three altars were made from marble and the rest were made from limestone or sandstone. In this part of the book, she extends her discussion into the "*spolia*" of ancient artifacts and diner tables. The writer's vivid description may have resulted from her experiences not only in France but also in Italy and Tunisia.

The author pursues reasoning similar to the logic of art-archaeology and avoids extrapolating easy historical considerations. The region of Provence was governed by the Ostrogothic dynasty from Ravenna

until the time when King Theodahad abandoned it in favor of the Frankish kingdom, and the Languedoc region was dominated by the Visigothic government from Toledo until the 8th century. The author, similar to others in her discipline, supports the suggestion made by the eminent historian Fernand Braudel who said that we should notice not only the contrasting features between the northern and southern parts of France but also the opposition between the eastern and western parts of France, and makes clear that the dividing line between the two consists of the Rhône Valley.

Even though a thought occurs that the author should further seek the history of the altar-style or the iconography of the Cross to ensure that the book is perfect and impeccable in terms of its depth, it might be an inordinate wish. It is fair now to congratulate Prof. Narasawa wholeheartedly for her scientific achievements and success that, through a liturgical instrument like a table altar, sheds such a strong light on the historical and cultural traditions behind it.