

Official seal of Iwasaki

Archaeologists excavated this copper seal of the village of Iwasaki from the inside of a well that dates back to the twelfth century. The seal was wrapped in cloth along with some porcelain items. The pieces may have been ritual offerings in a ceremony for wells that would no longer be used, but this has not been confirmed. It was discovered in the Yanaginogosho area, which was the political and administrative center of Hiraizumi under the rule of the Northern Fujiwara clan.

The seal bears the name “Iwasaki Village Seal.” An alternate reading of the characters suggests the name of the village could also be “Iwagasaki.” Though the exact location of the village is unknown, it was likely to the north of Hiraizumi. The Northern Fujiwara granted such seals to local village leaders under their domain in recognition and approval of their authority. It is unlikely that the seal was used to stamp official documents since most villagers were illiterate at the time and leaders issued commands orally. While much information is still unconfirmed, the seal offers a rare glimpse into the political landscape of the time and the developing municipal system.