

What is a *kofun*?

Kofun are large, tiered burial mounds built between the third and seventh centuries. The mounds were formed by piling up earth, creating a moat in the process. The sloping sides of the mounds were often covered with fist-sized stones, and the flat tiers were decorated with large terracotta figures called *haniwa*. *Kofun* were made in a variety of shapes: square, rectangular, circular, scalloped, or keyhole-shaped. The largest *kofun* are all keyhole-shaped mounds, the largest of which covers an area of about 32.3 hectares.

The mounds' size indicates that the tombs themselves were status symbols. Archaeological examinations of some of the mounds in Japan have revealed many artifacts from outside Japan, not only China and Korea, but also items made in the Persian and Roman empires. Discoveries from the many *kofun* that dot the southern Osaka Plain show evidence of Japanese cultural and technological exchange with the rest of Asia and provide important insights about life in ancient Japan. The *kofun* are evidence that, even without writing, the ancient inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago had a highly sophisticated culture.

The *kofun* in Fujiidera date from the fourth to the sixth century. In 2019, 26 *kofun* from Furuichi and 23 from Sakai were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site as the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group.