

## **Fujioka Historical Museum**

### **Jomon Period (10,000 BCE–300 BCE)**

The Jomon period (10,000 BCE–300 BCE) is characterized by the beginning of clay pottery making in Japan. The period is named after the “cord marking” (*jomon*) pressed into clay pots for decoration before firing.

Some scholars argue that pottery making was started by the Stone Age peoples while others maintain that pottery production signaled the shift from the Stone Age to the Jomon period. There are similar disagreements over whether the humans of the two periods were separate groups of people. It seems likely the Jomon period began with an influx of migrants (possibly bringing pottery technology) who interbred with and/or absorbed the indigenous Stone Age people.

Pottery technology advanced significantly during the thousands of years of the Jomon period. At first, pottery was fired in pits. Later, kiln technology was developed and refined. Even the shapes and decorations used evolved over time, leading archaeologists to subdivide Jomon into Early, Middle, and Late phases to help them track the developments.

The display includes a number of pots and other items reconstructed using sherds from various sites around Gunma Prefecture. Some have elaborate rims, handles, and decorations. Scholars believe the pots were used to store both food and water, and possibly even to cook.

Clay pots are unlikely to have been used as storage by people wandering from place to place, since they could easily break in transit. Their widespread use by Jomon people contributes to the theory that they were semi-settled, often remaining in the same encampment for an extended period. This was possible because of the natural abundance of inland Japan, especially as woodlands and grasslands flourished in response to the warming of the planet at that time.

#### *Lifestyle*

As the Jomon period continued, people increasingly lived in permanent or semi-permanent settlements comprised of small pit dwellings. Being settled allowed them to develop a fairly organized society, as suggested by the specified places where waste was deposited in such settlements. The remnants of these middens have provided archaeologists with substantial information about the diet of the Jomon people.

Unlike many early peoples, the Jomon appear to have had a diverse plant diet that included roots, berries, beans, and various kinds of nuts. They were even known to have ground starchy ingredients to make something similar to bread.

Fish were caught and eaten and animals hunted for their meat, including larger animals like deer, bear, and boar. In the display cases are examples of stone arrowheads, spearheads, axe-heads, and stone blades, which are noticeably more sophisticated than those of the Stone Age. Obsidian, a glass-like volcanic stone, was a popular choice for arrowheads because it could be chipped to a sharp edge; the exhibit contains several other types of stone with similar properties that were leveraged for arrowheads. Polished stone axes were used for cutting wood, while a stone axe with chipped bevels had multiple purposes, including digging. Such axes were prevalent until the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE).

The Jomon people made rope out of hemp and wove fabric using plant fibers such as

ramie (a perennial in the nettle family), hemp (*Artemisia cina*; a perennial in the daisy family that is also known as wormseed), and cherry bark. They also wore jewelry. In Early Jomon, cuff-like earrings and round stone earrings with a slit to slide onto the ear lobe were common. Later, spool-like, fired-clay earrings that could be inserted into pierced and enlarged ear lobes came into use. There is evidence that these were sometimes painted or lacquered. Beads and pendants were fashioned from stone, clay, shell, antler, and horn.

### *Dogu*

One distinguishing item of late Jomon is *dogu* clay figurines. Usually between 10 and 30 centimeters in size, *dogu* are highly stylized human or animal shapes. Female figurines seem to have been particularly popular and are often depicted with full breasts or swollen bellies.

Scholars are uncertain about the significance and use of *dogu*. Most *dogu* have been found buried near the back wall of pit houses in two or more pieces. They appear to have been deliberately broken. Some scholars theorize that cleansing or healing rituals involved transferring an illness or evil spirit to a *dogu*, which was then destroyed to eliminate the threat. In the case of the female figurines, theories include that they represent goddesses, are fertility symbols, or are amulets for a safe pregnancy.

Like other Jomon pottery, *dogu* became increasingly elaborate and detailed over time but even the oldest, simplest human figurines had distinctive or expressive faces. Late Jomon *dogu* frequently have detailed patterns etched into their arms and legs, which has led scholars to suggest that Jomon people may have elaborately tattooed themselves. Clothing and accessories depicted on these *dogu* have also helped scholars learn more about the uses of some artifacts found at burial sites and elsewhere.

*Dogu* appear to be strictly a Jomon phenomenon that was not continued by later peoples.