

Wakasa and Tsuruga Regions in the Yayoi Period

Overview

The Yayoi period (400 BCE–300 CE) was marked by a shift from a hunter-gatherer society to an agricultural society. During that time, paddy-field rice cultivation methods and bronze and iron metalworking were introduced from mainland Asia to the northern part of the island of Kyushu, from which they spread to the rest of Kyushu and throughout the islands of Honshu and Shikoku. Several important archaeological sites dating to the Yayoi period have been discovered on the Obama and Tsuruga Plains, giving valuable insight into the societal, technological, and cultural developments that occurred in the area, including the gradual emergence of a class society. Some of the items from excavated settlements provide evidence of connections with other regions.

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Yayoi Pottery

Compared to examples from the Jomon period (13,000 BCE–400 BCE), Yayoi ware was generally less decorative, with clean, functional shapes. The pottery-making process remained much the same, coiling long rolls of clay in a circle and stacking them one on top of another to form the desired object. The surfaces of vessels were then smoothed, and sharp tools were used to incise simple patterns on the outside. However, the variety of pottery types increased, reflecting more diverse purposes, and included cooking pots, storage jars, bowls, footed trays, and more.

Iron and Bronze Items from Mainland Asia and the Development of Metalworking

Various iron and bronze objects were introduced to the Japanese archipelago during this period, including weapons and ritual implements, such as bronze mirrors and bells. Yayoi craftsmen subsequently developed metalworking techniques to make their own weapons, tools, ritual implements, and other objects from imported raw materials. At that level of technology, bronze proved more durable than iron and was considered more valuable. It is believed that the use of bronze items both as weapons and as symbols of status contributed to the development of social stratification.

Dotaku Bronze Bells and Other Ritual Implements

Among the most distinctive cast bronze items created in the Yayoi period were ritual bells called *dotaku*. Their surfaces had various patterns, some of which represented animals and people. Evidence demonstrates that some of the *dotaku* were indeed used as

bells, but others were not. Little is confirmed about the exact purpose of the *dotaku* bells, but it is surmised that they were used in ceremonies to pray for bountiful harvests. Other items assumed to have been used for ritual purposes are weapon-shaped stone artifacts, which were made by grinding the stone into shapes similar to bronze and iron swords and dagger-axe blades imported from the Korean Peninsula.

Yoshiko Site in Tsuruga

The Yoshiko site, established sometime in the mid-Yayoi period, is located on the southeastern edge of the Tsuruga Plain. The northern part of the site was residential, evidenced by remains of pit dwellings, as well as flat-land and raised-floor buildings constructed using wooden pillars that were dug into the ground. The southern part was a cemetery that contained simple grave pits and large, rectangular burial sites enclosed by ditches, which were supposedly used to inter members of influential families. The latter burial style is characteristic of the Yayoi period. Artifacts excavated at the site include pottery, ground-stone tools, ritual implements, tubular beads at various stages of completion, and bead-making tools.

Fuchu-Ishida Site in Obama

Many significant archaeological discoveries were made at the Fuchu-Ishida site, which was excavated in 2005–2008. These include the first ditch-enclosed rectangular burial site found in the Wakasa area and the first wooden coffins discovered in the Hokuriku region. About 120 wooden pillars from 69 structures were excavated at the site, providing valuable information about the architecture of Yayoi-period pillar-based buildings. Wells with a basic water purification system at the bottom were found in the southern part of the settlement. In addition, the Fuchu-Ishida site was the first location in Fukui Prefecture that contained comma-shaped bronze ornaments similar to those typical for Yayoi sites in the Kansai region, as well as hourglass-shaped clay tablets found predominantly in the Chugoku region in the west of Honshu and in Shikoku.

Exhibition Items

This section displays Yayoi artifacts excavated in the Wakasa and Tsuruga regions, reflecting the emergence of new tools, technologies, and pottery items. A wooden coffin from the Fuchu-Ishida site dates to approximately 300–200 BCE and is made from large planks of Japanese cedar. The bottom plank has a square-shaped hole thought to serve as a handle for bearing the coffin. The two sets of pots, jars, footed trays, and other earthenware excavated from the Fuchu-Ishida site and the Yoshiko site show differences

in pottery forms that reflect influences from different regions on two Yayoi settlements that were located relatively close to each other.

The stone short swords discovered at the Yoshiko site were created based on metal swords brought from the Korean Peninsula. Various arrowheads on display represent the gradual development of production methods and materials. The leaf-shaped and triangular stone arrowheads made by chipping off parts of the stone illustrate an older technique. The triangular arrowheads shaped by grinding show a new method that emerged during the Yayoi period. Finally, the bronze arrowhead is an example of metalworking, the newest technology at the time. The steps in the process of making jasper tubular beads are demonstrated using artifacts from the Yoshiko site. The discovered tools and numerous beads at various stages of completion suggest that bead-making was the trade of some of the site dwellers. The fragment of a bird figurine is another notable item from the Yoshiko site.