

Zen'ichida Burial Mounds

[表のキャプション]

These *kofun*, or ancient burial mounds, date to the latter sixth through seventh centuries. The tombs were built for local ironworkers, whose profession made them high-ranking members of local society. Pottery from the Korean Peninsula was found in the tombs, indicating active trade and cultural exchange a century before Dazaifu's construction.

[裏の解説]

The Zen'ichida Burial Mounds were built in the latter sixth and seventh centuries—relatively late in the Kofun period (third to seventh century). Beginning in the mid-third century, burial mounds were constructed by the ruling elite of various regions across Japan as a display of wealth and power. By the time the Zen'ichida *kofun* were built, the practice had spread to lesser local elites. Researchers believe the oldest and largest mound at Zen'ichida (No. 18) belonged to a local chieftain.

The nine tombs preserved at Zen'ichida have a round, domed shape, which was common for *kofun* at this time. The innermost burial chambers have walls and ceilings that were made with stones, often massive ones weighing several tons. Because of the region's acidic soil, no bones or other remains have survived. However, the deceased were buried with their belongings, and many of these have been found. They include a number of iron objects—rare in Japan at the time—such as tools, swords, and horse tack (stirrups and bridle components). These discoveries give archaeologists glimpses into the lives of people at the time.

The technologies of ironworking and horseback riding had arrived through exchange with the Korean Peninsula. Clay vessels from the kingdom of Silla (? CE–935 CE) and even glass beads from what is now Iraq have been found, indicating extensive trade networks linking this society to continental Asia.

A total of 30 mounds have been found in this *kofun* group, two of which have never been excavated. The construction of *kofun* in the Dazaifu area (and across the country) is thought to have died out as society moved toward a centralized legal system and local rulers were under less pressure to display their authority.