

## **What is a *Kofun*?**

*Kofun* are large burial mounds that were built between the third and seventh centuries throughout Japan. The practice of creating mounds in which to bury the deceased with treasures came from the Asian continent. More than 160,000 *kofun* have been found across the Japanese archipelago.

*Kofun* take various forms—square, rectangular, circular, and keyhole-shaped. The keyhole variety is rectangular at the entrance side with a circular burial chamber at the rear. The entire structure resembles a keyhole when viewed from above. Keyhole-shaped *kofun* are the largest type; of these, the largest is located in Osaka Prefecture and covers an area of about 32.3 hectares. It is thought to be the tomb of Emperor Nintoku (257?–399).

The manual labor needed to construct a *kofun* was available only to those with tremendous power and wealth. The bigger the *kofun*, the more power

the person interred inside is thought to have had. After the mound was formed, its slopes were covered with fist-sized stones. Terracotta objects and sculptures were placed around the mound, perhaps to be used during rituals.

The burial chambers in the earliest *kofun* were unadorned, but painted decorations and murals commonly adorn *kofun* in northern Kyushu made during the sixth century and later. The deceased would be interred with funerary objects laid inside and around the coffin. The items discovered

inside *kofun* provide insight into cultural and technological life in ancient Japan and interactions with the rest of Asia. Early *kofun* contain mainly comma-shaped beads, bronze mirrors, and other ritualistic objects, but from the sixth century onward, iron weaponry, armor, and other armaments were also common.

Ōmura has numerous *kofun*, the most prominent of which are the Hagino-  
o, Kugurizuka, and Kurosaki Kanzeonzuka burial mounds. Artifacts

excavated from local *kofun* are on display at the Miike Playing Cards and  
History Material Museum.