

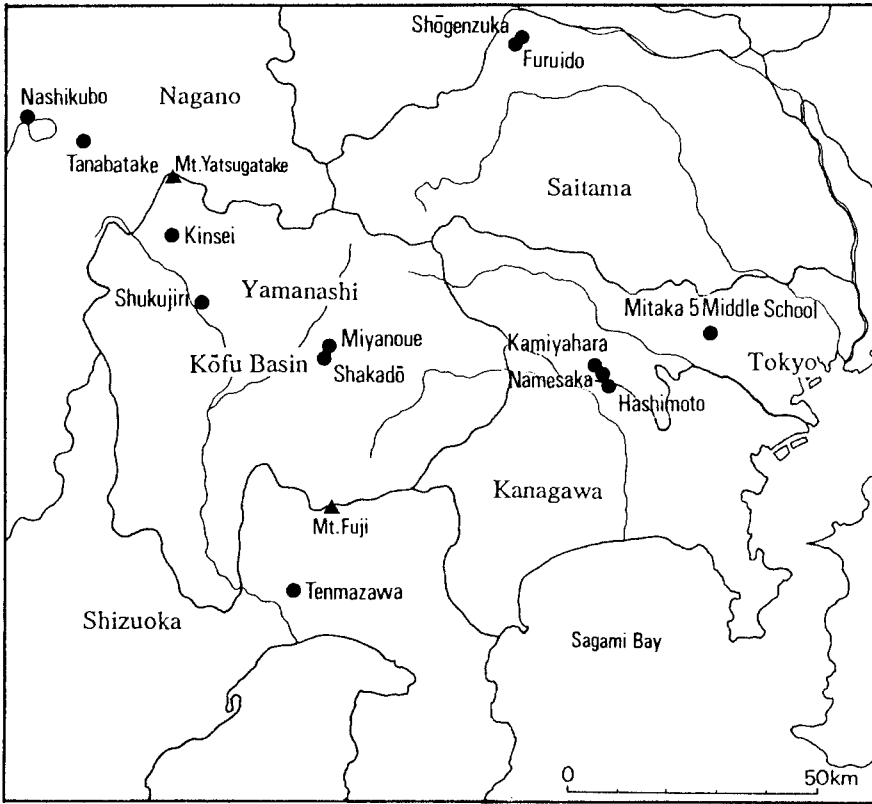
The Shakadō Figurines and Middle Jōmon Ritual in the Kōfu Basin

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Clay figurines played an important role in the religious ceremonies of the Jōmon people. Though it will probably never be possible to fully reconstruct the rituals performed with these objects, we can nevertheless obtain a certain amount of information from archaeological analysis of their stylistic features, fabrication process, and excavational context. In recent years a great deal of such research has been conducted with significant results (cf. NAGAMINE 1986). In this paper I will summarize work on the archaeological reconstruction of ritual practices at the Shakadō 釈迦堂 site where an epoch-making discovery of 1,116 clay figurines was made in the early 1980s. While a few sites had previously produced several tens or even hundreds of figurines, the excavation of Shakadō completely changed our perception of the scale of Jōmon figurine production and use.

The Shakadō site is comprised of five sub-sites located on a terrace at the eastern edge of the Kōfu Basin in Yamanashi Prefecture, central Japan (see map on next page). These sub-sites are named Tsukakoshi-kita 塚越北 A and B, Shakadō, Sankōjindaira 三口神平, and Noronohara 野呂原. These are all separated by small valleys or ridges, but are believed to have been closely connected in the Jōmon. From 1980 to 1981 some 26,000 m² of the site were excavated in advance of the construction of the Shakadō Parking Area on the Chūō Expressway (ONO 1986, 1987; NAGASAWA 1987). Remains from the Initial, Early, Middle, and Late Jōmon were found, but most belonged to the Middle phase. Middle Jōmon pit-buildings numbered 160 at Sankōjindaira, 20 at Noronohara, and 9 and 7 at Tsukakoshi-kita A and B respectively. The houses at Sankōjindaira formed a semicircle around a central plaza. This type of village layout was very common in large Middle Jōmon communities.

The Middle phase was without doubt the most prosperous of the Jōmon periods, equalled only by the Final Jōmon Kamegaoka tradition.



Map of Archaeological Sites

Cultural florescence was particularly remarkable in the Chūbu and Kantō regions, where sites are not only extremely numerous but also yield great quantities of features and artifacts. Ceramics became highly decorative, and certain vessels can be described as artistic masterpieces. The production of large pieces over 50 cm tall was another characteristic of this phase. Such archaeological phenomena suggest the existence of a stable society and economy supporting population growth in these regions. With its 200 or so houses, Shakadō is a typical example of a large Chūbu Middle Jōmon settlement. Only about ten houses were in use at any one time, but the site was continuously occupied and yields figurines produced during the thousand-year-span of the Middle phase.

The Shakadō figurines are all recognizably human with well-defined body and facial features. Some depict intricate hairdos and clothing. They are free-standing and range between 10 and 30 cm high. It is my belief that all Jōmon figurines, including the Shakadō examples, are female, though of course this is difficult to prove. NAGAMINE (1986, p. 255)

argues that many figurines are asexual renderings of the human form, noting that “there are no figurines that manifest concrete male characteristics.” KOBAYASHI (1990) suggests that the breasts and large abdomens of some figurines may not have been specifically female representations. In addition to such obvious sexual characteristics, however, many figurines have body proportions which are unmistakably female. Such female features are particularly noticeable on the figurines from the Shakadō and other Middle Jōmon sites.

The Shakadō figurines were made in a wide variety of styles. Within the Middle Jōmon, there were differences between those of the early Goryōgadai 五領ヶ台, middle Katsusaka 勝坂, and late Sori 曾利 sub-phases. Apart from this purely chronological variation, however, there were also noticeable synchronic differences within each pottery stage. Katsusaka figurines, for example, are divided by ONO (1987, pp. 269–77) into several types, including the following:

1. Sakai 坂井 type – both arms outstretched
2. Kamiyohara 神谷原 type – arms bent downwards
3. Hirohata 広畑 type – giving birth in a sitting position
4. Togariishi 尖石 type – holding a jar under one arm
5. Narahara 櫛原 type – hollow figurines containing clay balls like a rattle.

This variety of forms may imply the existence of various sorts of figurine ritual.

Figurine Breakage and Dispersal

All of the 1,116 pieces of the Shakadō figurine collection are broken fragments – nevertheless it has been designated an Important Cultural Property. Not a single complete figurine was discovered. The figurines were found dispersed across the whole site, not only in houses, pits, and the so-called “pottery disposal areas,” but also in places away from actual features.¹ While similar distribution patterns had already been recognized at other sites, the sheer number of figurine fragments at Shakadō made the process of breakage and dispersal particularly noteworthy. Ono Masafumi, the director of the Shakadō excavations and a figurine specialist, suggested that the figurines were fabricated in a way which made them easy to break. Through careful examination of the fragments, ONO (1984) was able to reconstruct the way in which the figurines

¹ The “pottery disposal areas” are three areas surrounding Sankōjindaira where artifacts were particularly concentrated. Although pottery was especially common, other artifacts were also uncovered there.

were produced (fig. 1). Lumps of clay were shaped into the head, torso, arms and legs, and attached to each other, often with small wooden pegs. A thin layer of clay was then applied over this basic structure before firing. This type of construction made the figurine very weak at the joints between the clay lumps, and most excavated fragments are broken at those points. These observations support Ono's theory that the figurines were made to be broken.

Out of over 1,000 fragments at Shakadō, only 30 pieces could be refitted and, as already mentioned, none of these formed a complete figurine. Amongst the rejoined fragments, legs from the same figurine were found in separate areas of the site, some 230 m apart. These areas were divided by a low ridge and probably comprised distinct villages. Parts of the same figurine were thus shared between the two settlements. This could explain why so few fragments could be rejoined, since the remaining parts may be buried at other sites.

Although such practices had been posited previously, Shakadō provided the first direct evidence.

A number of scholars, including FUJIMORI (1970) and MIZUNO (1974), have discussed the breakage and disposal of Jōmon figurines. Fujimori suggested a link with the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* myths of Opo-gē-tu-pime and Ukē-mōti-nō-kamī, an idea which was taken a step further by the comparative mythologist YOSHIDA Atsuhiko (1986). Chapter 18 of Book One of the *Kojiki* contains the following story:

[Susa-nō-wo-nō-mikōtō] asked food of OPO-GĒ-TU-PIME-NŌ-KAMĪ [who] took various viands out of her nose, her mouth, and her rectum, . . . and presented them to him. Thereupon PAYA-SUSA-NŌ-WO-NŌ-MIKŌTŌ . . . thought she was polluting the

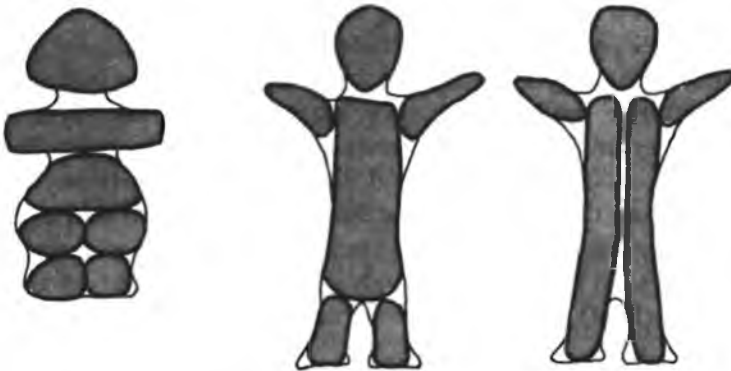


Fig. 1: Fabrication process of typical Shakadō clay figurines.
From ONO (1984).



Plate 1: Clay Figurines from Shakadō

food before offering it to him and killed OPO-GĪ-TU-PIME-NŌ-KAMĪ. In the corpse of the slain deity there grew [various] things: in her head there grew silk-worms; in her two eyes there grew rice seeds; in her two ears there grew millet; in her nose there grew red beans; in her genitals there grew wheat; and in her rectum there grew soy beans. (PHILIPPI 1968, p. 87)

A related myth can be found in the story of Ukē-mōti in the *Nihon shoki* (cf. ASTON 1965: I, pp. 32-33; PHILIPPI 1968, pp. 404-406). The birth of crops from the corpse of a dismembered goddess falls into what JENSEN (1966) called the Hainuwele-mythmotif. This type of myth is widely distributed in Indonesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia (cf. OBAYASHI 1977, pp. 7-12). Yoshida noted similarities with the disposal process of the Shakadō figurines reconstructed by Ono, suggesting that ritual ceremonies linked with the Hainuwele myth may have been present in Middle Jōmon Japan, together with the cultivation of taro or other root crops.

In his comparison of Jōmon figurine ritual and the Hainuwele mythmotif, Yoshida sets aside all spatial and temporal considerations. It is difficult to believe that there could have been any real historical connection, but his ideas do retain a certain fascination, since the concept of rebirth from the dismembered female body may have been common to both ritual structures. The destruction of female fertility symbolized by the broken figurines can be seen as a type of sacrifice (ISOMAE 1990), from which it was hoped life (perhaps including plants and animals for food) would be reborn in abundance.

Shakadō and Surrounding Sites

The large quantity of figurines from Shakadō does not necessarily mean it was a unique ritual center, since other sites in the Kōfu Basin have also produced many such artifacts. In 1989 I participated in the excavation of the Miyanoue 宮之上 site, which is a mere 2.5 km from Shakadō, and which, like Shakadō, is a large Middle Jōmon settlement with many overlapping houses (MUROBUSHI 1990). Although the area of excavation was only 1850 m², at least 59 figurines were found. In Nirasaki at the western edge of the basin, the Sakai 坂井 and Shukujiri 宿尻 sites both produced a large quantity of figurines similar to those from Shakadō. Sakai, dug on a small scale by an amateur archaeologist in the early 1960s, yielded 44 Middle-phase figurines (SHIMURA 1965). Shukujiri produced 14 examples in excavations in 1991, but again the area of investigation was very small.² Although the hard data currently available is thus somewhat limited, I nevertheless believe there is a strong

² The Shukujiri and Miyanoue site reports are currently under preparation.

Site	Location	Excavation area (m ²)	Stage(s) of Middle Jōmon	Number of Houses	Figurine Fragments
Shakadō	Katsunuma & Ichinomiya – YAM	26,000	all	196	1,116
Nashikubo 梨久保	Okaya – NAG	4000	all	81	9
Tanabatake 棚畑	Chino – NAG	9000	all	146	43
Tenmazawa 天間沢	Fuji – SHIZ	12,000	all	19	1
Kamiyahara 神谷原	Hachiōji – TOK	70,000	first half	50	53
Namesaka 滑坂	Hachiōji – TOK	24,500	second half	80	5
Hashimoto 橋本	Sagamihara – KAN	road width only	second half	65	35
Mitaka #5 Middle School 三鷹第五中学校	Mitaka – TOK	?	all	73	2
Furuido 古井戸	Kodama – SAI	50,000	all	154	0
Shōgenzuka 将監塚	Honjō – SAI	165,000	all	114	0

Table 1. Number of clay figurines from major Middle Jōmon sites in the Kantō and Chūbu regions. Key: YAM = Yamanashi, NAG = Nagano, SHIZ = Shizuoka, TOK = Tokyo, KAN = Kanagawa, SAI = Saitama. Of the 43 figurines from Tanabatake, 17 are listed as period unknown, but other figurine finds only comprised two Late phase examples so a Middle Jōmon date is likely. Figurines from this site include the so-called “Venus of Tanabatake,” a 27.7 cm-high complete specimen found in a shallow pit.

possibility that Shakadō was not unique within the Kōfu Basin in respect to its large quantity of figurines. As table 1 clearly shows, however, there was a big difference with sites outside of the basin, where figurines were much rarer.

In the mid-Middle Jōmon, the Chūbu and Kantō regions were both part of the same Katsusaka pottery zone. Both areas had similar affluent cultures, and large settlement sites like Shakadō with houses in a circle or semicircle around central plazas were common. Figurine ritual, however, was particularly developed in the Kōfu Basin, and these artifacts were much less numerous outside Yamanashi. In the late Middle phase, the Katsusaka ceramic zone split into three spheres: the Sori type in the Kōfu Basin and east Shizuoka, the arabesque-design type (*karakusamon* 唐草文) around Lake Suwa, and the Kasori 加曾利 E type in east Kanagawa, Tokyo, and Saitama. The Yatsugatake foothills formed the border between Sori and arabesque pottery, while the western parts of Kanagawa, Tokyo, and Saitama comprised the boundary between Sori and Kasori E. Within these three spheres there were also changes in figurine styles, and each ceramic zone had its own corresponding type of figurine. Despite this increased regionalism, the Kōfu Basin continued to produce the most figurines and seems to have retained its position as a ritual center. Table 1 lists well-known Middle Jōmon sites which were excavated on a large scale and which have many house remains. The table clearly shows that there is no relationship between the number of houses in a settlement and the quantity of figurines. It also demonstrates the exceptional nature of Shakadō and, by implication, of the other Middle phase sites in the Kōfu Basin mentioned above (i.e., Miyanoue, Sakai and Shukujiri). Though these latter sites were dug on a much smaller scale than those in Table 1, they produced as many if not more figurines than the huge open-area excavations conducted in Tokyo and neighboring prefectures.

Conclusions

Bringing together the information discussed above, we can draw some tentative conclusions on the nature of Jōmon figurine ritual as evidenced at Shakadō.

- 1) The fabrication process of the figurines suggests they were made to be easily broken. In other words, destruction of the figurine was probably part of the associated ritual.
- 2) Fragments of the same figurine are found from a variety of contexts within a site and even from neighboring settlements. After breakage they were thus consciously dispersed over a wide area. Their discovery at different sites implies that figurine rituals may

have been conducted communally by a number of regional groups.

- 3) The wide variation in figurine forms suggests they were used in ceremonies that had a variety of objectives and meanings.
- 4) Jōmon figurine production reached a peak in the Middle phase culture of the Chūbu and Kantō. Within that area, however, this development was particularly remarkable in the Kōfu Basin.

Most archaeologists believe figurine rituals were directed towards reproduction—either human, animal, or plant—symbolized by the sacrificial death of a woman as a mother. Fujimori, Yoshida, and others have suggested that these ceremonies may have been linked with plant cultivation, and that some sort of primitive agriculture may have played a part in the cultural florescence of the Chūbu and Kantō Middle Jōmon. The major remaining problem here is to try to explain why the Kōfu Basin was such an important focus of figurine production and use. This region was one of the main cultural centers of the Middle Jōmon and is marked by large, decorative ceramic vessels of considerable aesthetic power, implying much time and care spent in their production. The Kōfu Basin's role as a major ceramic and figurine center may have been due to its geographical position as a route between the Kantō and western Honshū. If we accept that figurine rituals involved communal gatherings (cf. NAGAMINE 1986, p. 262), then places like Shakadō were probably convenient locations for such activities. Though this idea remains unproved, it would help to explain the high level of regional interaction at a time when settlement is supposed to have been quite sedentary. If figurine fragments from Shakadō could be connected with those from Kantō or Chūbu sites, then this theory would look more secure, providing us with a fuller picture of Jōmon religious behavior.

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