Archeological Break: Event or Process

THE LATE TOMB CULTURE

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The Tomb Period in the Japanese islands has traditionally been divided into the Early (c.300-375), the Middle (c.375-475), and the Late (c.475-650 or 700). Egami (1962, 1964) has reduced the traditional three-part division into a two-part division by combining the middle phase with the late because, while the cultures of the middle and late tomb periods are essentially similar, the culture of the early period differs markedly from the others. According to Egami, the only substantial division occurs at the end of the early tomb period.

The transition from the culture of the Early Tomb Period to that of the Late Tomb Period (circa 375-675) was abrupt and sudden. The most important fact may be the sudden appearance of horse bones and various artifacts related to horses. The Dongyi-zhuan of Wei-shu, compiled in the late third century, states that there were no horses on the Japanese islands. Indeed, horse bones or any artifacts related to horses are never found in the early period tombs. In the Korean peninsula, on the other hand, King Kwanggaro’s stele that was erected in 414 records fifty thousand foot and mounted soldiers being mobilized and dispatched in 407. Nihongi records the official arrival of horses from Paekche in the fifteenth year of Oujin [404].

According to Egami, the culture of the Late Tomb Period
reveals the worldly tastes of a warlike ruling class, suggesting the practical, militant and aristocratic character of the North Asian equestrian people. The weapons ceased to be precious or shamanistic objects, and those used in daily life came to be buried with the deceased. Their graves contain a large amount of equestrian goods, including iron bridle-bits, wood or iron stirrups, saddles, bronze bells attached to trappings, horse helmets, and remains of horse armor. Their graves also contain a large amount of iron weapons (swords, spearheads, armor, arrowheads, or helmets), crowns, grey sueki pottery, gold earrings (with dangling chains), refined gold jewelry (crowns, belt buckles, pendants, shoes), pieces of gold leaf or other small gold objects, jade earrings, bronze mirrors, beads and other personal ornaments, eating vessels, and various other objects thought necessary to the dead in the next world. They also put iron farming tools and clay haniwa in the shape of quivers, saddled horses, boats, warriors, beasts, men and women, garments and head-coverings, inside or around the tombs.5

Egami (1964: 52) contends that the change was too sudden and too unnatural to have been an indigenous development of a rice-cultivating society. There could have been no reason for the Yayoi society to have deliberately “imported” an alien culture on such a scale as to fundamentally transform the basic character of its own traditional culture. The transformation must reflect the subjugation of the Japanese islands by the people from the continent.

The late tomb culture (c. 375-675) was brought about by the Yamato kingdom. I postulate that the conquest of the Japanese islands by the Paekche people occurred some time during 370-390, Oujin acceded to the throne as the founder of the Yamato Kingdom in 390, and there may be some time lag between the commencement of conquest and the burial of the conquerors in gigantic tombs with horse trappings.

The beginning phase of the late tomb period is symbolized by the gigantic tombs of Oujin and his son Nintoku. Employing a large labor force to pile up earth, they constructed a gigantic burial mound, either in a keyhole shape or round shape, on a level plain and surrounded the tomb with a moat and embankment. Barnes (1993: 227) states that “the
horizontal chamber tomb was introduced into the Japanese islands by Paekche elite in the early fifth century.”

According to Kidder (1985: 121), “all [horse] trappings prior to the middle of the 5th century were foreign-made,” i.e., made in the Korean peninsula. Farris (1998: 78-79) also notes that: “The earliest examples [of horse paraphernalia] are simple, two-piece bits and stirrups of iron and wood, both of which were recovered in northern Kyūshū, a sure sign of Korean import. Along with a few saddle parts, these primitive trappings predominated in the first half of the fifth century; many were probably peninsular products.”

According to Mizuno, the appearance of such gigantic tombs [in the Late Period] implies the unification of numerous traditional communities under one mighty ruler, and suggests that the new ruling group constructed such spectacular tombs in order to inspire awe in the minds of people, winning thereby their obedience to the absolute ruler of the new nation. Barnes (1988: 16) states that: “The replacement of ritualistic items, such as bracelets and bronze mirrors, by more utilitarian tools and weapons reflects a basic shift in the source of status and power for the fifth-century elite.”

The number of iron objects, iron ingots, and blacksmiths’ tools as well as evidence of new metal-working techniques such as the use of hinges and riveting and the ability to forge difficult shapes, increased dramatically with the beginning of the fifth century. According to Barnes, the Ariyama tomb (a subsidiary tomb of the Oujin Mausoleum) alone held over 3,000 iron swords and tools.

Sue pottery (stoneware) represents the Late Tomb Period, just like the cord-marked pottery and Yayoi pottery represents the previous periods. Kidder (1985: 103-4) notes that the sue pottery was a Korean product initially and coincided in the Japanese islands with the appearance of horse-trappings in the tombs. He further notes that the oldest sue pottery was discovered from Fukuoka prefecture in Kyūshū together with a nearby kiln site that was dated to the late fourth or early fifth century. According to Barnes, sueki was known as Chosun (Korean) pottery until the 1950s, when the word sue (derived from a reference to the vessels in the 8th-century anthology Manyōshū) was adopted. It seems to have been an
unbearable burden for the contemporary Japanese to keep calling the representative artifact marking the 300-year Late Tomb Period “Korean pottery.” 9

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For those Japanese scholars who hate the Egami’s Theory of Horseriding People, an article written by Edwards (1983) seems to constitute sufficient evidence to discredit the entire study of both Egami and such a distinguished archeologist as Kidder. Edwards has contended that the archeological evidence for horse trappings actually occurs in the “late fifth” century rather than the “late fourth or early fifth.” He has further posited that the changes were all gradual, and never abrupt, accusing Egami of having created a false sense of discontinuity between Early and Late Tomb materials. His argument has been all too uncritically seized and enthusiastically echoed ever since, witness for example the work of Farris (1998: 78-9), who claims: the horse “trappings appeared too late to have been associated with an invasion in the mid- or late fourth century; moreover, their spread across Japan was too gradual.” 10

Edwards (1983) presents the archeological data of 137 tombs in order to refute Egami’s thesis, but somehow the data as staged by Edwards himself look more consistent with Egami’s two-fold division of the Tomb Period. Edwards tries to refute Egami by insisting that the traditional Middle Period tombs have to be analyzed in combination with the Early tombs, and that the strong political power the huge middle-period tombs represent cannot be understood to derive from the “event” of a conquest by horseriders.

Although the archeological data prepared by Edwards himself show the appearance of a few tombs that contain continental materials at around the “beginning of the fifth century,” Edwards insists that the content of burials became distinctly continental only “after the middle decades of the fifth century;” and therefore, he claims, the tombs of Oujin and Nintoku cannot be classified as those of the horseriders. Edwards admits the possibility that the continental influx he places in the mid-fifth century may actually belong to the fourth, which would relate it to historical contexts of the fourth century. But he insists that the traditional Middle Period horserider theory by Walter Edwards and Gina Barnes.”


12 雄略…伯孫女者…産兒 往賀壻家 而月夜還 於…譽田陵下 還覓誉田陵乃見驄馬 在於土馬之間 (NI: 485)

13 Gina L. Barnes (1983: 6, 8)

14 According to Kidder (1985: 100), the saddles with gilt-bronze bows fitted over a decorated wooden frame are “similar to Korean products and came from the same workshops.”

Edwards (1983: 275, 295) tabulates the date and contents of the Maruyama tomb, placing it “at the end of the fourth century,” as the one that contains almost nothing conspicuously continental. Although a saddle with gold decoration was found in the tomb, he insists that a subsidiary mound should not be considered contemporary with the main mound, and that “this tomb could not have been constructed earlier than the middle of the fifth century,” negating his own tabulation. (See also footnote 7.)
tombs, including the tombs of Oujin and Nintoku, still precede
the continental influx, and hence these tombs could not
contain any equestrian paraphernalia or anything conspicuously
continental.11

There are, however, clear evidences of equestrianism for
the traditional Middle Period (ca. 375-475) Tombs, and
continuity between Early (ca. 300-375) and Late (ca. 375-
675) Tomb materials. I take my evidence from Nihongi, Barnes,
Kidder and Farris.

First, in Nihongi, a story of the time of Yuriaku refers to
haniwa horses on the tomb of Oujin. That is, a person called
Hiakuson rode past Oujin’s tomb one night on his return from
visiting his daughter who had given birth to a child; a red
courser dashed alongside his piebald horse and its rider offered
an exchange of horses. Hiakuson greatly rejoiced at obtaining
such a steed; he put this courser in the stable when he arrived
home and went to sleep. The next morning, to his surprise, he
found that the red courser had changed into a
haniwa horse.

Retracing his route, he found his own piebald horse standing
among the
haniwa horses on the tomb of Oujin.12

Second, Barnes (1983: vol.6; 8) notes that, in 1872, part of
the front mound of the Nintoku Mausoleum collapsed in a
small landslide, exposing a pit-style stone burial chamber. She
further notes that some iron armor and weapons, gilt-bronze
ornaments, a mirror, a ring-pommeled sword, and a horse bell
that were recorded as having been recovered from the tomb of
Nintoku are preserved in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.13

Kidder (1985: 102-3) thinks their preservation is indeed a
fortuitous occurrence, considering the strict prohibition of
evacuating any imperial tomb. According to Kidder, the small
bronze bells and a
haniwa horse head that are said to come
from the tomb of Nintoku constitute the archeological
evidence for equestrianism.

Third, Kidder (1985: 102-3) lists a specific collection of
archeological evidence for equestrianism from tombs believed
to be connected with the “early fifth century” Oujin-Nintoku
stage of the Yamato kingdom: a saddle with gilt-bronze bows
from the Maruyama tomb (a satellite tomb of Oujin
Mausoleum), a bronze horse bell and a
haniwa horse head from
Nintoku tomb, two wooden (front and back) saddle bows and a
dumpy *haniwa* horse from the Ryōnan site, and remains of a saddle, bit, stirrups and bronze ring from a satellite tomb of Richiu Mausoleum.¹⁴ Gold was not discovered on the Japanese islands until the eighth century, and Japan had very much depended on Korea as the source of raw iron also.

**IRON WAS NEVER PRODUCED IN THE JAPANESE ISLANDS UNTIL THE LATE SIXTH CENTURY**

Farris (1998: 71-73) notes that the quantity of iron from sites of all types in Japan grew dramatically in the early fifth century and also that the source for almost all of this iron must have been Korea, at least until iron sand was discovered in the sixth century. Iron was never produced in the Japanese islands before iron sand was discovered in the late sixth century. Iron ingots were imported from the Kaya states and Paekche.¹⁵ Farris states that: “the implications of early Japan’s near-total reliance on the southern Korean states for iron, iron tools and weapons, and iron workers are profound.”

Edwards himself quotes Kobayashi (1955), who has argued that the huge middle tombs could not have been built without the advanced methods of surveying and construction learned from the continent, and also quotes Mori (1965), who has pointed out the dramatically increased number of iron objects in the Middle Period tombs.¹⁶ Surprisingly, however, Edwards ends up quoting Inoue (1960), implying that the emerging indigenous force in the Kinai region first invaded southern Korea, acquired iron there, and then, using the weapons and armor made from the iron, unified Japan.¹⁷

Egami (1964: 51) has pointed out that “the idea that these people of the early tomb-mounds period (that lack the military element required in carrying out subjugation activities) should have landed in south Korea, the inhabitants of which were better armed, should have succeeded in subjugatory activities and should have returned home after fostering their horseriders’ culture is clearly contrary to the universal laws of history.”

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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¹⁵ 神功 攝政五十二年 秋九月 久氐等...仍啓曰 臣國以西有水源出自谷那鐵山…便取是山鐵以永奉聖朝 (NI: 359)

Copper was not produced either until the copper ore was discovered in 698 (or in 708) in the Japanese islands. Japan does not have a “Bronze Age.”

¹⁶ Edwards (1983: 289) notes that the dimension of the tombs corresponds to rational multiples of the linear units used in Korea. According to Kidder (1985: 95), the tombs of both the Early and Late Period had applied the ancient Koguryeo unit of measurement (komajaku, 35-36 cm) for their design and construction.
