

Kurume History Walks

No.26 Visit the Kofuns of the Mino Mountains 1

みのうさんろく
耳納山麓の古墳を訪ねて(1)

Kofun is a collective term to refer to an ancient mounded tomb of people in power, constructed between about the mid-3rd to the early 7th century (the Kofun period). At the foot of the Mino Mountains, four hundred kofuns were verified. That can be said to be precious cultural properties that show local features.

This issue introduces the distinctive kofuns in Tanushimaru Town. The first four were together designated a National Historic Site as a group of Tanushimaru Kofuns which we estimate to have been built in the late 6th century.

➤ **Tanushimaru-Otsuka-kofun at Ishigaki, Tanushimaru Town**

It is a large keyhole-shaped kofun (*zenpo koenfun*), one hundred three meters long, and sixty meters across (circular part). Since long ago, it has been respectfully treated by local communities.

It had been believed that it had been a circular kofun because of the topographical change (agricultural land development, etc.), after its establishment. But we revealed that it had been keyhole-shaped as a result of the investigation which we have carried out since 1993. The dry moat of 10 meters wide surrounded the eastern side of the mound. The vestibule was discovered at the western side, and its sidewall was four meters high. Stones covered the outer moat of its circular part and were buried in the rammed earth for height adjustment and reinforcement.



田主丸大塚古墳全景



耳納山麓自然と歴史の森公園
(大塚古墳歴史公園)

The present-day Tanushimaru Otsuka Kofun (above)

The Otsuka Kofun History Park (below)

Judging from the burial goods, we presumed it to have been constructed in the late 6th century.

We suppose that “the rebellion of Tsukushinokimi Iwai” in 528 CE was still a memorable event for the local people of that time. (Iwai was a chief of a powerful family in northern Kyushu. He fought against the Yamato Court, and he was killed in the war.) On the other hand, the construction of the keyhole-shaped kofun waned almost throughout the country.

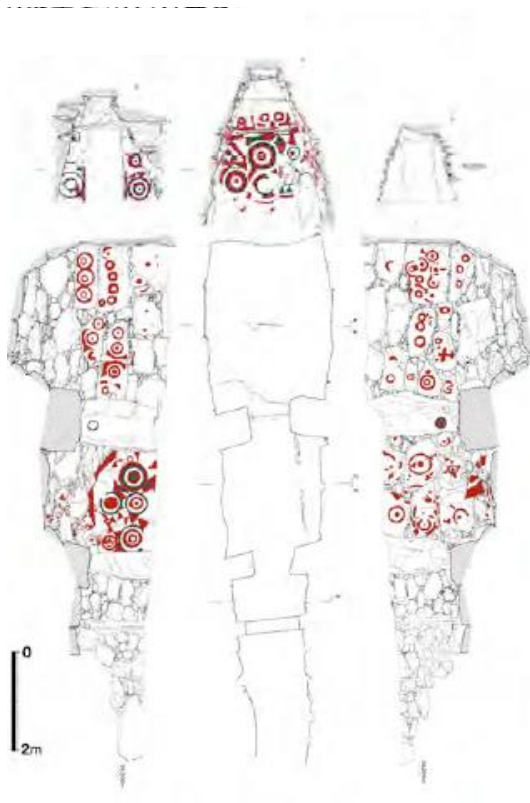
Then, we wonder why such a large kofun was built at that time. It can be a very important key for examining the political situation between the royal court and other regions.

At present, this Otsuka Kofun was restored and regained the original form. And the Otsuka Kofun History Park was opened at the adjoining land.

➤ **Jitoku-kofun at Masuoda, Tanushimaru Town**

It is a circular kofun of eighteen meters across, located near a road running along the Mino Mountains. The mound changed its form a lot because of the land reclamation. And also, it is one of the decorated kofuns, which are ornamented with painted or carved decoration. About one hundred and sixty thousand kofuns were found through the country, while only six hundred decorated kofuns are known.

We confirmed stones covered the surface of the mound as a result of the excavation. The entrance of the stone chamber faces the west. The chamber is horizontal and has some compartments (a passage, a front chamber, and a burial chamber). On the walls of the chamber, the following characteristic patterns were drawn with red (two types) and green pigments: concentric circle (*doshin'en mon*), triangle (*sankaku mon*), shield (*tate*), boat (*fune*), etc. Some comma-shaped beads (*magatama*), cylindrical beads, horse gears, and unglazed vessels were excavated.



Measured drawing of the chambers



Drawings on the inner wall



Inner wall



Wall on the left side of the front chamber

➤ **Nakabaru-Kitsunezuka-kofun at Jitoku, Tanushimaru Town**

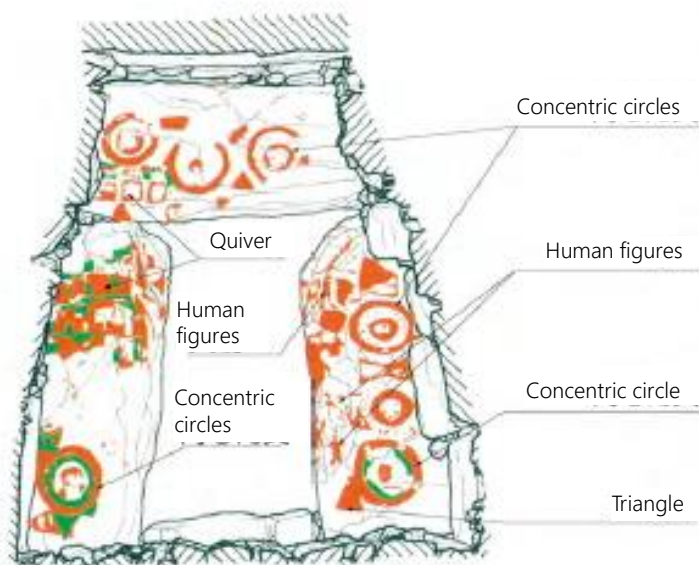
The surrounding area was reclaimed into farms, and most of the mound was lost. We estimated this kofun originally had had a circular form 19 meters across with covering stones. The stone chamber was divided into some compartments. The total length is 11.5 meters.

The ornamental paintings with red, green, and blue pigments depict the designs such as concentric circles, triangles, boat, quivers (*yugi*), human figures, etc. We consider its elaborate paintings to be superior to the others.

Some arrowheads, horse gears, and ornaments of the sword were excavated.



Measured drawing of the chambers



Paintings on the entrance of the burial chamber



Entrance of the burial chamber

➤ **Nishinotate-kofun at Masuoda, Tanushimaru Town**

It is an oval kofun 10.4 meters wide in the shortest length, with two tiers of which the upper was covered by the stones. The ceiling stone of the front chamber was lost for the grave thieves. The true entrance was closed by soil and gravel.

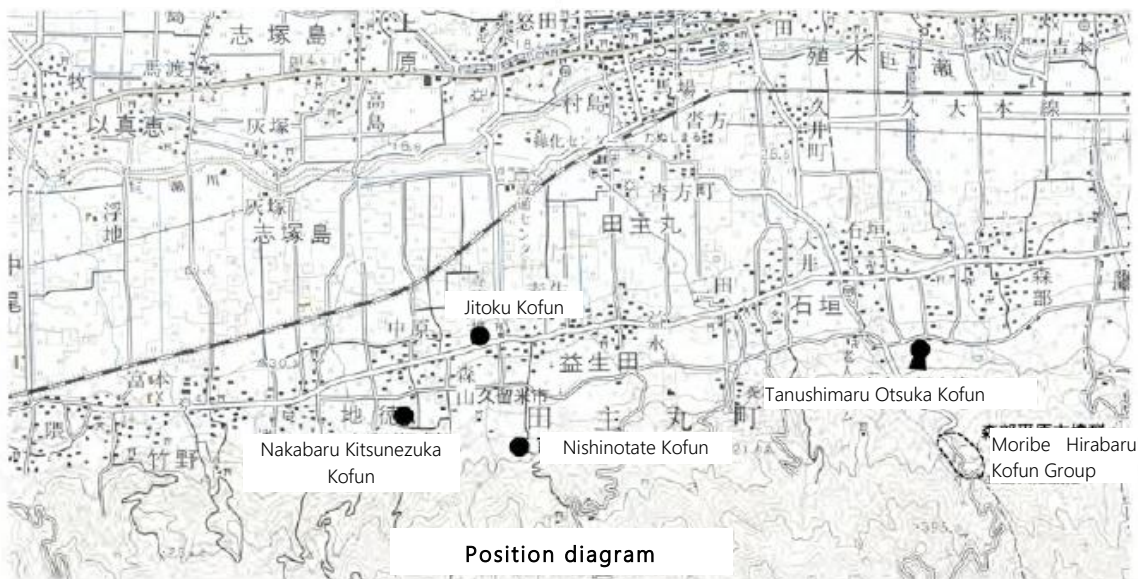
The ornamental paintings with red and blue pigments depict the designs such as concentric circles, triangles, a boat, and a human figure. We regard the triangle patterns under the boat as the wave.



Inner wall



Drawings on the inner wall



Position diagram

➤ **Moribe Hirabaru Kofun Group at Moribe, Tanushimaru Town**

There are about seventy small kofuns halfway up the mountain. These are some ten meters across. Some have a single chamber, others have multiple chambers. Its surrounding area is the Hirabaru Kofun Park, designated a Prefectural Historic Site.

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