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Part I : The Jōmon Era (8000 BCE-300 BCE)

Overview It is not known exactly when the first human migrants reached the islands that now make up contemporary Japan. Excavations of the earliest archaeological sites indicate that some areas of Japan have been inhabited for more than 10,000 years, although there isn't universal agreement among scholars for this time frame. The Jōmon people of Japan were the first identifiable group to settle the islands. They were hunter-gatherers for most of the epoch, but during brief warm periods when living became easier, became a semi-sedentary. Because of their living habits, their archaeological footprint was relatively small, thereby making definitive traces difficult to find. Cross-pollination of culture, technology and innovations in agriculture proceeded from the Asian mainland, and later Southeast Asia, to Japan in much the same way that the Fertile Crescent and ancient Egypt influenced each other. However, Japanese civilization evolved with no influence from the earliest civilizations of Egypt, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers or the Indus River. The archaeological evidence that does exist is suggestive that the appearance of the Jōmon people in Japan roughly corresponds to the earliest stages of developed agriculture on the mainland. This transformation may have set in motion waves of migration of people groups on the periphery of more settled areas of China, Korea, Siberia and the Russian Far East to Japan. Given that Japan is situated on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, innovations were generally slow to arrive and sporadically adopted by very widely dispersed people groups. Some of the same early populations that migrated to Japan are believed to have also made their way into the Western Hemisphere. It is unlikely that the earliest inhabitants of Japan represent the first early, ethnic Japanese because they have been replaced by so many different sets of migrants over the millennia. The Jōmon people were very likely not the ancestors of today's Japanese.

Events

There were several waves of migration to Japan in the Jōmon period. Most scholars hypothesize, based on pottery fragments, DNA evidence and linguistic archaeology, that the Jōmon people of Japan came across the straits between southeastern Korea and northwestern Kyushū (known as the Straits of Korea or Tsushima—depending on one's political persuasion). But this was not the only route. Other groups are believed to have migrated from Siberia southward, first crossing the Tatar Strait to Sakhalin Island (possibly then a land bridge), and then making their way to the islands of Hokkaidō and Honshū. These groups are believed to have been ancestors of Tungusic speaking people groups which today includes Manchu and Evenki. There is also evidence of proto-Mongolian and early Korean influence in the southern areas of Japan. Other migration occurred from Southeast Asia, although that likely occurred very late in the Jōmon period. Many Japanese scholars place the Ainu language in the Tungusic family, though that is not settled scholarship among linguists. However, it is a generally settled narrative among Japanese today that the Ainu represent the remnant of the Jōmon population that originally settled Japan during this period.

Government

The Structure of Government. As hunter-gatherers, the early Jōmon people of Japan lived in small groups that were limited by the supply of food and other resources readily available to them. Settlements could be very small and often temporary because people groups had to move when resources began to dwindle. These settlements were also widely dispersed and though trade goods and marriage partners could be exchanged so as to not intermarry too closely within kinship groups, they were far enough apart to not compete for limited resources. In the brief, warmer periods of the Jōmon era, there is evidence of some settlements being large enough to accommodate several dozen people and even for villages to emerge. But for most of the era, people were grouped in significantly smaller bodies. Government, as we think of it today, therefore didn't exist. There is no evidence of a ruler, a central state, a

bureaucracy, a set of written laws, a specialized military and the like. At most there was someone like a village headman because resources had to be administered. Association was likely based on kinship and was probably somewhat voluntary and potentially fluid. Clan, family or village leaders provided the only security and stability available in the Jōmon period. If one was exiled or became a sole survivor of an attack or epidemic, their future was extremely bleak. Life was tenuous and could be rather Hobbesian: nasty, brutish and short. Evidence for just how difficult life could be can be found in population numbers. According to Shuzo Koyama of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, the population of Jōmon Japan grew very, very slowly increasing from approximately 20,000 in 10,000BCE to 75,000 some 9000 years later. Population is believed to have been seriously affected by even small, periodic changes in climate because residents of Jōmon Japan did not have the ability to store excess food stuffs for very long. During periods of hardship, several poor foraging outings in a row or failed hunting trips could lead to hunger, malnutrition and catastrophe for a small group.

The Military. Specialized military units didn't exist in the Jōmon period. Small groups of hunter gatherers banded together for protection and safety. By definition, however, many members of hunter gatherer groups were proficient in the use of weapons that could take down large game. When threatened, the same skills and weapons used to hunt big game could be employed against enemies. These included spears and clubs, and mechanical devices such as bows and arrows and atlatl, which when used by an expert, could propel spears at significantly greater speeds and distances than the simple throw of a spear. Small groups occasionally fought, likely over dwindling resources, abductions, and other perceived slights, but there is scant evidence of large scale warfare. Settlements and villages were extremely exposed if men were away hunting or fighting. Given the size of the population and the highly dispersed and isolated settlements, fighting was surely sporadic and also probably didn't result in the complete annihilation of an enemy. The taking of slaves and the abduction of women was more advantageous to the victor than the utter destruction of an enemy.

Culture

Early Religion. Organized religion had not yet emerged in Jōmon period Japan, but the Jōmon people were nonetheless very spiritual and sought out answers to some of life's persistent questions. Given that each clan or group existed as a fairly independent unit, customs and rituals varied from place to place and throughout time. They left evidence of many and varied symbols representing spirits associated with hunting, fertility, agriculture, stars and the moon. In particular, bear skulls are known to have been carefully placed in inland pits in areas of spiritual significance. According to Nelly Naumann, one of the foremost scholars in the discipline, large-animal hunting, represented by the most fearsome predator then known in Japan, the bear, is thought to represent this important food source. In coastal areas where fishing provided much of the protein needed for subsistence, dolphin skulls have been found buried in sacred spaces. Other objects such as clay masks have also been found. Finally, among the most pervasive found in sacred pits are objects representing the female form. These objects are associated with fertility deities, the renewal of life and the safe birth of the next generation. Often accompanying the female form are representations of phalluses. For Naumann, the moon was thought to be among the most important deities because of its association with death and rebirth in Jōmon Japan.

The Arts. There is scant evidence of many of the art forms as we know them today. Music, story-telling, painting, drama and the like almost surely existed but have disappeared from the human record. However, one that remains is sculpture in the form of ceramics, pottery and religious artifacts. Indeed, the very long and diverse era known as the Jōmon period is understood to be the same epoch because from beginning to end, cord markings appear as decoration on ceramics. Sculptors shaped objects by hand without the use of wheels. They used clay with small amounts of connective fiber to fashion representations of the female form, of masks representing the sun or stars, animals—some with human faces, and phalluses. Early attempts were rather crude and were clearly created by people with little extra time or talent. These early objects were fired in open pits at relatively low temperatures. During periods of warming, for example, approximately 2500BCE-1500BCE, Jōmon populations lived in larger groups which allowed for some specialization. During this period, figurines and other ceramics were carefully sculpted with great attention to detail and were lavishly decorated with pigment and inlaid with exquisite decoration. A small number of artists used the medium of stone or bone to carve figures and inlay images and some woodworking rose to the level of art, but most artists used fired clay. Motifs, though more detailed and more carefully executed later in the period, remained much the same as in past millennia.

Society

Social Relationships. Given that during the Jōmon period most people lived in small groups, many if not most social relationships were likely based on some level of kinship ties. Fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, in-laws, and other extended family were all a part of any given group. When groups got larger and villages emerged, family ties were still paramount. Daughters were likely married out but sons likely were not. Women were pregnant for many if not most of their childbearing years and often died in childbirth. Men hunted and fought and suffered injury and death from those activities. Though likely, it is not known whether serial monogamy was practiced in mating partners or whether society was based on a patriarchy. Boys learned life skills from older men in the group and girls learned from older women. To the extent possible, families cared for the old and infirm, although few would have survived past the age of forty. The struggle to survive in an age where disease, injury and unexpected death were constant companions even for the young and healthy provides context for social relationships. It indicates that flexibility and utilitarianism must surely have governed most of society. Orphans must have been adopted, widows remarried and wanderers taken in.

Jōmon people lived in extremely close quarters. Early in the era, very small groups lived in caves. Later they began to construct pits with fires in the center around which huts made of wood and straw were constructed. In warm periods, multiple, large pits were sometimes constructed that could accommodate several dozen people, demonstrating the appearance of villages. But there are no known cities. Warmth and security from attack and predation were primary goals as well as the pooling of resources. The collection and production of food was the most important task of all societies. Jōmon people were known to have some storage capacity for food stuffs in ceramic pots, but likely not enough to get through entire seasons and certainly not enough to navigate years of drought or pestilence. As the era progressed, there likely emerged some stratification of society with village headmen and others controlling a disproportionate amount of resources. For most, however, subsistence was tenuous and often difficult.

Funerary. There is ample evidence that Jōmon people placed great value on the rites and ceremonies associated with death. Early in the period, a small number of simple funerary items associated with that person's life were sometimes included in a burial. If a hunter, a weapon might be included. If a woman, a pot or other kitchen item might be in evidence. Later in the period, the number and value of funerary items increased, depending on the status of the individual. In some cases, elaborate and expensive burial shrouds covered the bodies along with jewelry made of shells and other items. Even infants were interred, sometimes in large pots and in other protective coverings. It is very likely that shamans played some role in the ceremonies associated with the internment of the dead.

Economy

Agriculture. Jōmon era people did not engage in agriculture early in the period. They gathered berries, roots, nuts, and other readily available foodstuffs based on the season. Nuts, such as walnuts and chestnuts, have been found in archaeological digs. These and other such items could be stored to help them get through a winter that was longer and colder for most of the period than is the case today. There is some evidence that during the warmer periods of 2500BCE—1500BCE that large villages might have just begun to cultivate some food stuffs because it would have been extremely difficult to forage enough food in the immediate vicinity to sustain a large village. But this was toward the end of the period and did not become a primary food source for the Jōmon people.

Diet. In addition to the nuts, berries, roots and other seasonal bounty readily available to the Jōmon people, hunting provided the protein needed to sustain most of the population. Early in the period, large game such as bear, deer, and wild boar were regular food items for inland people groups. For groups near to the coast and to fresh water sources, fishing was the primary source of protein. Virtually anything aquatic could be prepared and consumed to provide sustenance. Later in the period, smaller game such as squirrels, rabbits, and birds of all varieties were trapped and/or hunted

Readings

1) Koji Mizoguchi, *The Archaeology of Japan: From the Earliest Rice Farming Villages to the Rise of the State*, (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 3-42.

- 2) Keiji Imamura, *Prehistoric Japan: New perspectives on Insular East Asia*, (University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 1-126.
- 3) Junko Habu, *Ancient Jomon of Japan*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 4) Ryusaku Tsunoda, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, (Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 1-33.
- 5) Takeru Akazawa and C. Melvin Aikens, eds., *Prehistoric Hunter-Gatherers in Japan: New Research Methods* (University of Tokyo Press, 1986).
- 6) Edward Kidder, *Prehistoric Japanese Arts: Jōmon Pottery*, (Kodansha International, 1968).

Questions for Discussion

- 1) Japanese Civilization seemed to develop quite late. In some cases, it was more than a millennium behind other cultures in East Asia. Bronze and iron technology was slow to arrive and slow to be adopted. Even wet rice agriculture appeared after the Jōmon period had ended. Why was this? Was it because of Japan's relative geographic isolation? Was it because Jōmon society was largely self-sufficient and content? Was there something about the land which delayed development? Or was there some other reason that Jōmon Japan was late in developing?
- 2) Questions about national origins, migration patterns, ethno-genesis and cultural beginnings have often dominated Japanese historical, archaeological and anthropological scholarly discussions. Why might this be the case? Why do you think that Japanese scholars were so keen to prove where their distant ancestors came from? What difference, if any, does it make to contemporary Japan culture and identity?
- 3) Religion seemed to play a significant role in the life of the Jōmon people. Why do you think this was such an important element in their culture? What does it tell us about the nature of humanity that so many early cultures placed such a strong value on spirituality? To what extent was religion in Jōmon Japan expressed in a similar fashion to other early cultures and to what extent was it different? Finally, what can we really know about religion in Jōmon Japan? Is a lot what we know based on extrapolation and conjecture?

Texts

- 1) From the *Kojiki*, 712 CE, on Japanese cosmology. Translation by Yaichiro Isobe, in the public domain via Creative Commons.

Before the heavens and the earth came into existence, all was a chaos, unimaginably limitless and without definite shape or form. Eon followed eon: then, lo! out of this boundless, shapeless mass something light and transparent rose up and formed the heaven. This was the Plain of High Heaven, in which materialized a deity called Ame-no-Minaka-Nushi-no-Mikoto (the Deity-of-the-August-Center-of-Heaven). Next the heavens gave birth to a deity named Takami-Musubi-no-Mikoto (the High-August-Producing-Wondrous-Deity), followed by a third called Kammi-Musubi-no-Mikoto (the Divine-Producing-Wondrous-Deity). These three divine beings are called the Three Creating Deities.

In the meantime what was heavy and opaque in the void gradually precipitated and became the earth, but it had taken an immeasurably long time before it condensed sufficiently to form solid ground. In its earliest stages, for millions and millions of years, the earth may be said to have resembled oil floating, medusa-like, upon the face of the waters. Suddenly like the sprouting up of a reed, a pair of immortals were born from its bosom. These were the Deity Umashi-Ashi-Kahibi-Hikoji-no-Mikoto (the Pleasant-Reed-Shoot-Prince-Elder-Deity) and the Deity Ame-no-Tokotachi-no-Mikoto (The Heavenly-Eternally-Standing-Deity).

Many gods were thus born in succession, and so they increased in number, but as long as the world remained in a chaotic state, there was nothing for them to do. Whereupon, all the Heavenly deities summoned the two divine beings, Izanagi and Izanami, and bade them descend to the nebulous place, and by helping each other, to consolidate it into terra firma. "We bestow on you," they said, "this precious

treasure, with which to rule the land, the creation of which we command you to perform." So saying they handed them a spear called Ama-no-Nuboko, embellished with costly gems. The divine couple received respectfully and ceremoniously the sacred weapon and then withdrew from the presence of the Deities, ready to perform their august commission. Proceeding forthwith to the Floating Bridge of Heaven, which lay between the heaven and the earth, they stood awhile to gaze on that which lay below. What they beheld was a world not yet condensed, but looking like a sea of filmy fog floating to and fro in the air, exhaling the while an inexpressibly fragrant odor. They were, at first, perplexed just how and where to start, but at length Izanagi suggested to his companion that they should try the effect of stirring up the brine with their spear. So saying he pushed down the jeweled shaft and found that it touched something. Then drawing it up, he examined it and observed that the great drops which fell from it almost immediately coagulated into an island, which is, to this day, the Island of Onokoro. Delighted at the result, the two deities descended forthwith from the Floating Bridge to reach the miraculously created island. In this island they thenceforth dwelt and made it the basis of their subsequent task of creating a country. Then wishing to become espoused, they erected in the center around the island a pillar, the Heavenly August Pillar, and built around it a great palace called the Hall of Eight Fathoms. Thereupon the male Deity turning to the left and the female Deity to the right, each went round the pillar in opposite directions. When they again met each other on the further side of the pillar, Izanami, the female Deity, speaking first, exclaimed: "How delightful it is to meet so handsome a youth!" To which Izanagi, the male Deity, replied: "How delighted I am to have fallen in with such a lovely maiden!" After having spoken thus, the male Deity said that it was not in order that woman should anticipate man in a greeting. Nevertheless, they fell into connubial relationship, having been instructed by two wagtails which flew to the spot. Presently the Goddess bore her divine consort a son, but the baby was weak and boneless as a leech. Disgusted with it, they abandoned it on the waters, putting it in a boat made of reeds. Their second offspring was as disappointing as the first. The two Deities, now sorely disappointed at their failure and full of misgivings, ascended to Heaven to inquire of the Heavenly Deities the causes of their misfortunes. The latter performed the ceremony of divining and said to them: "It is the woman's fault. In turning round the Pillar, it was not right and proper that the female Deity should in speaking have taken precedence of the male. That is the reason." The two Deities saw the truth of this divine suggestion, and made up their minds to rectify the error. So, returning to the earth again, they went once more around the Heavenly Pillar. This time Izanagi spoke first saying: "How delightful to meet so beautiful a maiden!" "How happy I am," responded Izanami, "that I should meet such a handsome youth!" This process was more appropriate and in accordance with the law of nature. After this, all the children born to them left nothing to be desired. First, the island of Awaji was born, next, Shikoku, then, the island of Oki, followed by Kyushu; after that, the island Tsushima came into being, and lastly, Honshu, the main island of Japan. The name of Oyashi- ma-kuni (the Country of the Eight Great Islands) was given to these eight islands. After this, the two Deities became the parents of numerous smaller islands destined to surround the larger ones.

2) From the *Nihongi*, The Age of the Gods, Book 1, translated by William George Aston, in the public domain.

Of old, Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, and the In and Yo not yet divided. They formed a chaotic mass like an egg which was of obscurely defined limits and contained germs.

The purer and clearer part was thinly drawn out, and formed Heaven, while the heavier and grosser element settled down and became Earth.

The finer element easily became a united body, but the consolidation of the heavy and gross element was accomplished with difficulty.

Heaven was therefore formed first, and Earth was established subsequently.

Thereafter divine beings were produced between them.

Hence it is said that when the world began to be created, the soil of which lands were composed floated about in a manner which might be compared to the floating of a fish sporting on the surface of the water.

At this time a certain thing was produced between Heaven and Earth. It was in form like a reed-shoot. Now this became transformed into a God, and was called Kuni-toko-tachi no Mikoto.

Next there was Kuni no sa-tsuchi no Mikoto, and next Toyo-kumu-nu no Mikoto, in all three deities.

These were pure males spontaneously developed by the operation of the principle of Heaven.

In one writing it is said: "When Heaven and Earth began, a thing existed in the midst of the Void. Its shape may not be described. Within it a deity was spontaneously produced, whose name was Kuni-toko-tachi no Mikoto, also called Kuni-soko-tachi no Mikoto. Next there was Kuni no sa-tsuchi no Mikoto, also called Kuni no sa-tachi no Mikoto. Next there was Toyo-kuni-nushi no Mikoto, also called Toyo-kumu-nu no Mikoto, Toyo-ka-fushi-no no Mikoto, Uki-fu-no-toyo-kahi no Mikoto, Toyo-kuni-no no Mikoto, Toyo-kuhi-no no Mikoto, Ha-ko-kuni-no no Mikoto, or Mi-no no Mikoto."

In one writing it is said: "Of old, when the land was Young and the earth young, it floated about, as it were floating oil. At this time a thing was produced within the land, in shape like a reed-shoot when it sprouts forth. From this there was a deity developed, whose name was Umashi-ashi-kabi-hiko-ji no Mikoto. Next there was Kuni no toko-tachi no Mikoto, and next Kuni no sa-tsuchi no Mikoto."

In one writing it is said: "When Heaven and Earth were in a state of chaos, there was first of all a deity, whose name was Umashi-ashi-kabi-hiko-ji no Mikoto. Next there was Kuni-soko-tachi no Mikoto."

In one writing it is said: "When Heaven and Earth began, there were deities produced together, whose names were, first, Kuni-no-toko-tachi no Mikoto, and next Kuni no satsuchi no Mikoto." It is further stated: "The names of the gods which were produced in the Plain of High Heaven were Ama no mi-naka-nushi no Mikoto, next Taka-mi-musubi no Mikoto, next Kami-mi-musubi no Mikoto."

In one writing it is said: "Before Heaven and Earth were produced, there was something which might be compared to a cloud floating over the sea. It had no place of attachment for its root. In the midst of this a thing was generated which resembled a reed-shoot when it is first produced in the mud. This became straightway transformed into human shape and was called Kuni no toko-tachi no Mikoto."

Part II : Japan in the Iron Age (Classical Period)—the Yayoi Age, 300BCE—300CE

Overview.

The shift from the Jōmon era to the Yayoi era in Japan took place over several centuries. Civilization progressed in “fits and starts,” which is to say, in a rather irregular and sporadic fashion. In the realm of technology, some late Jōmon people were still using stone tools and weapons. Others used a blend of bronze and stone tools and weapons. For example, stone axe heads might be used alongside bronze spears and arrow tips. Still other settlements had completely adopted bronze technology. In agriculture, late Jōmon people were slowly transitioning to more sedentary agriculture. This likely first began with nuts and berries. For example, very large examples of nuts and berries have been found in settlement pits, much larger than grew naturally in the wild. This indicates that Jōmon people were likely selecting for size and planting bushes and trees that produced a greater bounty. Alongside innovations in agriculture, late Jōmon era people were also beginning to group into larger settlements and were no longer always moving with the seasons or when resources began to dwindle. This required advances in government, long-term planning, some social cohesion and the careful allocation of food stuffs and other essential items. In short, society was beginning to emerge. What distinguishes the Yayoi era from the Jōmon era, however, was a relatively quick transition to sedentary agriculture. In particular, Yayoi Japanese rather suddenly (in archaeological terms) began to produce rice using patterns of farming we know as “wet rice” agriculture. Rice transformed Japan in fundamental ways and allowed for the creation of Japanese culture. Indeed, rice still plays a central role in Japanese culture and society.

Events

The Yayoi period falls largely into the era of “pre-history.” That means that even though the Yayoi Japanese were modern humans and were using bronze and iron tools and weapons, they had not developed writing. Instead, they used the spoken language to navigate an increasingly complex society. Therefore, though it is possible in many other early societies to know many of the events of the same age, knowledge of the Yayoi people is generally limited to that which others have written about them or that we can glean from archeological evidence and other sources such as DNA evidence and linguistic archaeology.

Wet Rice Agriculture. The development of wet rice agriculture in Japan sometime between 1000BCE and 250BCE is the single most important event in the entire history of Japan. Though it is not clear exactly when it first arrived or what group of migrants first introduced it, rice still permeates virtually every element of contemporary Japanese culture and society. It was (and remains) more than just the single most important staple in the diet of Japanese and is eaten three times a day at breakfast, lunch and dinner. Indeed, there is almost a spiritual link between this grain and people of Japan and is still used in religious rituals and festivals. Wet rice agriculture requires a great deal of water and a relatively warm climate to cultivate. This limits where migrants to Japan during the late Jōmon and early Yayoi periods came from to include Korea, central China or Southeast Asia, since rice farming had long been established in these places. For many decades, it has been generally settled scholarship that most migrants came from Korea during this period, a theory that has yet to be definitively disproven. Recently, however, advances in plant DNA technology have allowed us to determine that Japanese short grain rice is most closely connected to the rice grown in the Yangzi River Valley in China. This indicates that either migrants brought the same strain of rice to Japan and central China at roughly the same time or—and this is more likely—this particular strain of rice originated in central China and made its way to Japan, via Korea, from the source.

Human Migration. Advances in human DNA technology have reinforced the long-standing hypotheses that many Yayoi era Japanese were descendants of people from the Korean Peninsula. Archeological evidence indicates that these migrants spread bronze and iron technology from Kyūshū northward to Honshū. It is assumed that they brought rice with them as well. In addition, some scholars, such as Ann Kumar, have made a compelling argument that migrants from Southeast Asia also made their way to Japan during the Yayoi period. Evidence for this includes distinctive architectural elements in large buildings and the forging of certain kinds of metal objects used in religious ceremonies.

Government

Japan in Chinese Documents. Though Yayoi era Japanese had not yet developed writing, other nearby people groups had. The Chinese, in particular, had been writing for at least a millennium. In addition, the Chinese already had a high-functioning central government complete with an autocratic monarch, stable tax base, massive military, vast land holdings and a mature culture. Virtually all the specifics we know about Yayoi government and culture therefore comes from Chinese sources. In this instance, the short-lived Wei Kingdom (220-265 CE) compiled and finally published a document in 297 CE entitled *Wei Zhi* (The History of the Wei Kingdom) in which mention is first made of a people from the “Land of *Wa*” (Japan).

Pimiko. According to Chinese documents, Japanese society in the middle Yayoi era had evolved to include over one-hundred known groups. Each group had a leader. Sometime during the 2nd century CE, a great, but unnamed, chieftain emerged among the communities and ruled most of them for several decades, followed by a period in which the Chinese understood that there was no great chieftain. In the 3rd century CE, thirty communities banded together and came to be known as the Kingdom of Yamatai. They selected as their ruler a woman named Pimiko, who had as a part of her duties control of the people through supernatural and religious means. It is unknown the extent to which she actually ruled the people of Yamatai, but she appeared to be more than a figurehead. The Chinese conferred upon her the title of “Queen of Wa,” a designation she accepted and used until her death. She is said to have had many hundreds of female attendants and one male attendant. It is instructive that when she was buried, more than a hundred people were sacrificed and placed in her grave. This indicates that she was very powerful and ruled a significant number of people. After a few years of disorder, one of Pimiko’s female relatives, a girl of thirteen years, was placed on the throne. Her name was Iyo, but we know nothing more about her except that her position was subsequently endorsed by the Wei. Though Japan’s first chronicle, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), published in 711CE, mentions other monarchs during the Yayoi period, they are still considered to be mythical. It should be noted that no connection has been made by scholars between Pimiko, a name that means “daughter of the sun” and could refer to one of several high-ranking spiritual leaders or monarchs and Iyo and any of the monarchs named in the *Kojiki*. Japanese archaeologists have not determined exactly where Yamatai was located. Options include Northern Kyūshū and the Yamato Plain (near what is today the city of Nara). Conclusive proof, however, remains elusive.

Culture

Religion. Organized religion had not yet emerged in Japan during the Yayoi period. However, it is known from the Chinese sources, in particular, the *Wei Zhi* (The History of the Wei Kingdom), that the Japanese were spiritual and sought out wisdom through divination. Yayoi period Japanese burned bones and then attempted to interpret them as a way of discerning spiritual direction. This assumes the presence of an interpreter, most likely a shaman or other holy man or woman. Evidence exists in the form of fired clay images of animals, frogs, the moon and the like that Yayoi era Japanese likely followed animistic practices and were also generally superstitious. The Chinese sources indicate that when going on a long voyage, they appointed a fortune keeper, someone whose job it was to act as the spiritual presence on the trip. He was required to abstain from sexual relations, not eat meat and not even to wash for the duration of the trip. If successful, he was showered with gifts upon his return. If ill fortune befell the trip and the holy man was deemed to have not kept his vows, he could be killed. It is very likely that many Japanese, based on the connection to the Han and Wei, were aware of Confucianism and Buddhism, both of which were well-established on the mainland. However, conclusive proof that organized religion had taken hold in Japan has not yet been discovered.

Sculpture. Yayoi period Japanese produced a full range of ceramics—everything from very utilitarian clay pots to highly decorative religious artifacts to a whistle. In part, the Yayoi period is demarcated from the Jōmon period (8000-300 BCE) which preceded it, and Kofun period (250-538 CE) which followed it, by the particular style of pottery produced. Jōmon period pottery was generally very rough and crudely produced. However, Yayoi period pottery is more refined and used processes that are also found in Korea. It is likely that migrants brought this technology with them from Korea and, finding it useful, was adopted by Japanese potters. In particular, Yayoi period potters burnished porous surfaces with slip, which had the effect of smoothing the surface and making it more waterproof. Slip is a form of liquefied clay that has a slightly different composition than what is found in the body of an object and is added before firing. In addition, slip allowed for different forms of decoration and Yayoi pottery is distinguished by red and occasionally black pigment being used in decoration. There is no evidence of Yayoi potters using a wheel or other mechanical aids during production. Therefore, it is likely that potters used the cord stacking method to mold objects, indicating some continuity between Jōmon pottery and Yayoi pottery.

Bronze and Iron. Yayoi artisans had also become adept at casting bronze and iron. This technology, which came to Japan very late in human history, was quickly adopted by Yayoi Japanese. In particular, Yayoi artisans crafted iron weapons—swords, tools, armor, rudimentary jewelry and cast bells and mirrors—for use in religious ceremonies. Motifs in sculpture and decoration on pottery included female figures, celestial objects, birds, wild and domesticated animals and structures.

Society

The Effect of Rice on Society. The primary difference between Jōmon period Japanese and Yayoi period Japanese was rice. However small this distinction may seem today, it marked a fundamental change in the way society was ordered. Instead of moving from time to time when seasons changed or when resources dwindled, Yayoi Japanese lived long-term in settlements and villages, some of which grew quite large. Society was ordered around the cultivation, storage, distribution and protection of this most important food stuff. When successfully implemented, rice cultivation provided a stable, reliable source of excess calories, which in turn allowed for population increases. A larger population required more social structure, the careful control of resources and the development of local government. Villagers had to learn how to get along with those who were not necessarily members of the same family or clan. Standards of normative behavior had to be set, mutually agreed upon and carefully followed.

The rudimentary pit dwellings that characterized the Jōmon period were abandoned and more permanent above ground dwellings began to be built. In general, Yayoi villages were built on new ground and the archaeological evidence indicates few if any Yayoi settlements were built on old Jōmon settlements. This is likely because the physical needs of a hunter-gatherer society were very different than those associated with rice paddy farming. Yayoi period dwellings had to be fairly close to rice paddies, water and irrigation infrastructure, but higher and far enough away from water so as to not be flooded periodically. Village dwellings were also grouped around rice storage buildings so that they could be controlled and protected and food easily distributed.

Specialization in Society. The cultivation of rice allowed for some specialization in society. Because of its high caloric value, successful rice farmers could usually produce more calories than could be consumed by an individual or family. This freed other members of society to engage in pursuits other than agriculture. Some became religious figures, others village headmen, and still others were freed to develop martial skills which could be used to protect the village and farming infrastructure. On a related topic, it is also during the Yayoi period that we see the first evidence of some stratification of society, although its precise contours are not known. For example, prominent men were sometimes buried with multiple wives, which indicates that some men were likely denied the opportunity to find a mate. In short, the cultivation of rice created an environment in which Japanese society could emerge.

Economy

Technology. Like every other element of society during the Yayoi period, the cultivation of rice transformed the economy. In the Jōmon period, most Japanese were hunter-gatherers and it is difficult to speak of an economy of any size or scale. However, the cultivation of rice in the Yayoi period changed that because it required new forms of technology. In general terms, Yayoi period Japanese transitioned from stone to bronze to iron during the period of three or four centuries—likely through the importation of technology from Korea. Bronze, as a metal, was stronger and more utilitarian than stone or wood—media still found in Yayoi period sites. The forging of bronze required special knowledge and intensive quality control. However, the casting of iron did not require intensive specialization and could be carried out by those with little training and access to a rudimentary furnace. It is believed that bronze and iron were produced side-by-side during this period. Among the iron tools discovered in Yayoi period archaeological sites were farming implements such as shovels, hoes, axes, fish hooks, chisels and knives. The natural resources needed to forge these new tools (and weapons) were in short supply and it is believed that those who controlled iron in its raw form were able to charge a premium for it. Indeed, given its importance in agriculture and warfare, a number of anthropologists have argued that gaining access to iron may well have been the impetus for the creation of regional population centers of the Yamato Plain and Northern Kyūshū. The iron trade developed and tied disparate villages together. Those with iron weapons could out compete their less technological advanced neighbors and those with iron tools could produce more food.

Agricultural Advances. In order to cultivate rice, paddies had to be created. Paddies had to be flooded during the transplantation stage of development for a period of several weeks. This required land to be transformed as well

because paddies must be flat and ringed by small dykes, a condition that rarely if ever exists in a state of nature. Shovels, hoes and other earth moving tools were necessary to prepare the land. Canals, ditches and other irrigation infrastructure had to be tied in to rivers and creeks. Finally, sluice gates and a drainage mechanism had to be in place in order to remove water from the paddies at the appropriate time. In short, wet rice agriculture is very labor intensive and was facilitated by technological advances in metallurgy. Labor demands of this magnitude required villages to become larger, well led and more socially sophisticated.

Alongside advancements in agriculture, Yayoi period Japanese continued to forage and hunt. Iron spear tips, arrows and knives made the taking of large game easier. Iron fish hooks made it easier to catch fish and rudimentary iron traps made ensnaring small game possible. Iron therefore became the foundation of the late Yayoi period economy. Those who had a ready supply of raw materials and the technical knowledge of how to forge it came to dominate society and likely emerged as some of the first elites in Yayoi period Japan.

Readings

- 1) Koji Mizoguchi, *The Archaeology of Japan: From the Earliest Rice Farming Villages to the Rise of the State*, (Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 53-213.
- 2) Mark Hudson, *Ruins of Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Japanese Islands*, (University of Hawaii Press, 1999).
- 3) Ann Kumar, *Globalizing the Prehistory of Japan: Language, Genes and Civilization*, (Routledge Press, 2009).
- 4) J. Edward Kidder, Jr., *Himiko and Japan's Elusive Chieftdom of Yamatai: Archaeology, History and Mythology*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2007).
- 5) William Wayne Farris, *Sacred Texts and Buried Treasures: Issues in the Historical Archaeology of Ancient Japan*, (University of Hawaii Press, 1998), pp. 1-54.
- 6) Gina Barnes, *State Formation in Japan: Emergence of a 4th Century Ruling Elite*, (Routledge Press, 2006).

Questions for Discussion

- 1) The lesson has characterized the introduction of wet rice agriculture as being the most important event in the entire history of Japan. Do you agree with this statement or do you think it is an exaggeration? Do you think it understates the importance of rice? If an exaggeration, what other event in the history of Japan does it compare to? To what extent does the food one grows and consumes shape culture and society? Does it have greater effect than the political system? It is more important than religion?
- 2) What was the connection between the introduction of bronze and iron technology and the development of the nascent Yamato state? Did new tools, weapons and implements remake society or allow it become more of what it already was? Were new elites created for society? Or did the existing elites, given their access to resources and wealth, buy and use them and remain in the positions they already enjoyed? What effect did new technology have on the indigenous population? Were they displaced or assimilated?
- 3) Many of the early Japanese chieftains/monarchs wanted validation from various Chinese emperors. Why do you think they were willing to debase themselves and make themselves subservient all for the purposes of having an honorific title conferred upon them by a foreign power? Is this behavior rational? Or was there some other benefit from Chinese recognition? Is it possible to see this sort of behavior in the contemporary world?

Texts

1) From *History of the Kingdom of Wei (Wei zhi, 297 CE)*, found in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. Edited by Ryusaku Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary and Donald Keene, (Columbia University Press, 1958), pp 4-7.

The people of Wa [Japan] dwell in the middle of the ocean on the mountainous islands southeast of [the prefecture of] Daifang. They formerly comprised more than one hundred communities. During the Han dynasty, [Wa] envoys appeared at the court; today, thirty of their communities maintain intercourse with us through envoys and scribes. ...

In their meetings and in their deportment, there is no distinction between father and so or between men and women. They are fond of liquor. In their worship, men of importance simply clap their hands instead of kneeling or bowing. The people live long, some to one hundred and others to eighty or ninety years. Ordinarily, men of importance have four or five wives; the lesser ones, two or three. Women are not loose in morals or jealous. There is no theft, and litigation is infrequent. In case of violations of the law, the light offender loses his wife and children by confiscation; as for the grave offender, the members of his household and also his kinsmen are exterminated. There are class distinctions among the people, and some men are vassals of others. ...

The country formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the people agreed upon a woman for their ruler. Her name was Pimiko. She occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people. Though mature in age, she remained unmarried. She had a younger brother who assisted her in ruling the country. After she became the ruler, there were few who saw her. She had one thousand women as attendants, but only one man. He served her food and drink and acted as a medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockades, with armed guards in a state of constant vigilance. ...

In the sixth month of the second year of Jingchu [238 C.E.], the Queen of Wa sent the grandee Nasonmi and others to visit the prefecture [of Daifang], where they requested permission to proceed to the Emperor's court with tribute. The Governor, Liu Xia, dispatched an officer to accompany the party to the capital. In answer to the Queen of Wa, an edict of the Emperor, issued in the twelfth month of the same year, said as follows:

Herein we address Pimiko, Queen of Wa, whom we now officially call a friend of Wei. The Governor of Daifang, Liu Xia, has sent a messenger to accompany your vassal, Nasonmi, and his lieutenant, Tsushi Gori. They have arrived here with your tribute, consisting of four male slaves and six female slaves, together with two pieces of cloth with designs, each twenty feet in length. You live very far away across the sea; yet you have sent an embassy with tribute. Your loyalty and filial piety we appreciate exceedingly. We confer upon you, therefore, the title "Queen of Wa Friendly to Wei," together with the decoration of the gold seal with purple ribbon. The latter, properly encased, is to be sent to you through the Governor. We expect you, O Queen, to rule your people in peace and to endeavor to be devoted and obedient. ...

When Pimiko passed away, a great mound was raised, more than a hundred paces in diameter. Over a hundred male and female attendants followed her to the grave. Then a king was placed on the throne, but the people would not obey him. Assassination and murder followed; more than one thousand were thus slain.

A relative of Pimiko named Iyo, a girl of thirteen, was [then] made queen and order was restored. Zheng [the Chinese ambassador] issued a proclamation to the effect that Iyo was the ruler. Then Iyo sent a delegation of twenty under the grandee Yazaku, General of the Imperial Guard, to accompany Zheng home [to China]. The delegation visited the capital and presented thirty male and female slaves. It also offered to the court five thousand white gems and two pieces of carved jade, as well as twenty pieces of brocade with variegated designs.

2) From the *Nihongi, 720 CE (The Chronicles of Japan)*, translated by W. G. Aston, 1896, pp. 110-114. An account of a battle to expand the empire in the east that likely took place in the 4th century. In the public domain.

Emperor Jimmu was forty-five years of age when he addressed the assemblage of his brothers and children: "Long ago, this central land of the Reed Plains was bequeathed to our imperial ancestors by the

heavenly deities, Takamimusubi-no-Kami and Amaterasu Omikami. ... However, the remote regions still do not enjoy the benefit of our imperial rule, with each town having its own master and each village its own chief. Each of them sets up his own boundaries and contends for supremacy against other masters and chiefs.

“I have heard from an old deity knowledgeable in the affairs of the land and sea that in the east there is a beautiful land encircled by blue mountains. This must be the land from which our great task of spreading our benevolent rule can begin, for it is indeed the center of the universe. ... Let us go there and make it our capital. ...

In the winter of that year...the Emperor personally led imperial princes and a naval force to embark on his eastern expedition. ...

When Nagasunehiko heard of the expedition, he said, “The children of the heavenly deities are coming to rob me of my country.” He immediately mobilized his troops and intercepted Jimmu’s troops at the hill of Kusaka and engaged in a battle. ... The imperial forces were unable to advance. Concerned with the reversal, the Emperor formulated a new divine plan and said to himself: “I am the descendant of the Sun Goddess, and it is against the way of heaven to face the sun in attacking my enemy. Therefore our forces must retreat to make a show of weakness. After making sacrifice to the deities of heaven and earth, we shall march with the sun on our back. We shall trample down our enemies with the might of the sun. In this way, without staining our swords with blood, our enemies can be conquered.” So he ordered the troops to retreat to the port of Kusaka and regroup there.

[After withdrawing to Kusaka, the imperial forces sailed southward, landed at a port in the present-day Kita peninsula, and again advanced north toward Yamato.]

The precipitous mountains provided such effective barriers that the imperial forces were not able to advance into the interior, and there was no path they could tread. Then one night, Amaterasu Omikami appeared to the Emperor in a dream: “I will send you the Yatagarasu, let it guide you through the land.” The following day, indeed, the Yatagarasu appeared flying down from the great expanse of the sky. The Emperor said: “The coming of this bird signifies the fulfillment of my auspicious dream. How wonderful it is! Our imperial ancestor, Amaterasu Omikami, desires to help us in the founding of our empire.”

3) From the *Nihongi*, 720 CE (The Chronicles of Japan), translated by W. G. Aston, 1896, pp. 202-211. On the Emishi and the Death of a Prince. In the public domain.

In the summer of the 40th year of the Emperor Keikō’s reign [12th emperor], there was a rebellion by eastern barbarians, and the frontier was in the state of siege. ... The Emperor addressed his ministers. “The eastern country is not secure, and numerous rebellious chieftains have sprung up. In the case of the Emishi, the revolt is total, and they frequently steal from our loyal subjects. Whom can I send to suppress this rebellion?” To this inquiry, none of the ministers knew how to answer.

[After another prince had refused to bear arms, concealing himself in the thicket,] Yamatotakeru-no-Mikoto manly proclaimed. “It has not been many years since I subdued the Kumasō. Now the Emishi in the east are reveling against us. If we allow it to continue, there can be no universal peace. Your subject is aware of the difficulties and begs of you to be sent to quell the rebellion.” The Emperor gave a battle axe to Yamatotakeru-no-Mikoto and gave him the following charge: “We hear that the eastern barbarians are men of violent disposition, making crime as their credo. Their villages have no chiefs, and towns have no masters. Each of them covets a territory and plunders one another. Their mountains and fields are inhabited by malicious deities and demented demons, who stop traffic and bar the roads to cause difficulties. Amongst those eastern barbarians, the Emishi are the most powerful. Their men and women live together in promiscuity and they make no differentiation between father in son. In winter they dwell in holes and in summer they live in nests. They use furs as their clothing and drink blood. Brothers are suspicious of one another. ... When they receive a favor, they forget it, but if an injury is done, they repay it with vengeance. ... They plunder our frontier, and steal from our people the hard-earned products in agriculture and sericulture. When attacked, they hide in the grasses and if pursued, they enter into the mountains. From the olden days, they have not been able to receive the influence of our benevolent civilization. ... Heaven has taken pity on my want of intelligence and on the unmanageable conditions of the country, and has sent you to execute the work of heaven so as to perpetuate the existence of our imperial institution. My empire is your empire, and this position I hold is your position. Use your profound judgement and wisdom to guard against iniquity and rebellious movement. Exercise your authority with majesty and pacify people with virtue. Whenever possible subjugate people without

recourse to arms. Use carefully chosen words to teach moderation to rebellious chiefs. If it fails, eradicate those malicious demons by displaying your armed might. ...

When Yamatotakeru-no-Mikoto first reached Suruga, the brigands falsely pledged allegiance. They urged the prince to hunt, claiming that their field was rich in large deer, whose breath was like the morning mist and legs dense woods. Yamatotakeru-no-Mikoto believed their words, and went into the middle of the field to hunt. The brigands, intending to kill the prince, set the field ablaze. Realizing that he had been deceived, the prince brought out his flint and steel and kindled a counter fire. The prince cried out: "I am almost betrayed," and burnt all the brigands and exterminated them. ...

Yamatotakeru-no-Mikoto turned to Owari, and married a daughter of the lord of Owari by the name of Murakumo, and remained there for a month. While there he heard that there was a ferocious deity on Mount Ibuki in Ōmi. He took off his sword and left it in the house of Miyazuhime, and then set out on foot to investigate. When he reached Mount Ibuki, his way was blocked by a great serpent which was the incarnation of the mountain god. Without knowing that the main deity took the shape of a serpent, Yamatotakeru-no-Mikoto reasoned: "This great serpent must be a messenger of the ferocious deity. Unless I can kill the main deity, there no use being bothered by its messenger." So he strode over and went on. The mountain god raised up clouds and made freezing rain to fall. The hills were covered with mist, and the valleys were darkened. The prince could no longer find his way. ... All he could do was to brave the mist and force his way onward. Finally when he succeeded in escaping from the mountain, he was not quite himself, looking like a drunken man. ...

It was at that time that Yamatotakeru-no-Mikoto first became ill. With great difficulty, he made his way to Owari and entered the house of Miyazuhime, and then moved on to Ise and to Ōtsu. ... When he reached the field of Nobo, the pain became almost insufferable. He made arrangements to have the prisoners he obtained in wars against the Emishi sent to the Ise Shrine as part of his thanks offering, and dispatched Kibi-no Takehiko to the Emperor to report. ... The prince died on the field of Nobo at the age of thirty. ... The Emperor ordered his ministers and functionaries to bury the body of the prince in a tomb of the Nobo field in the land of Ise.

Now, Yamatotakeru-no-Mikoto, taking the shape of a white bird, left his tomb (*misasagi*) and flew towards the direction of Yamato. The ministers opened the coffin, only to discover the empty clothing remaining, and there was no corpse. Messengers were sent to follow the trace of the white bird. It stopped on the plain of Kotohiki in Yamato, so another tomb was erected. The white bird flew on again until it reached Kawachi, and remained in the village of Furuichi. Accordingly, the third tomb was erected. Men of those days called these three tombs (*misasagi*), "the white bird *misasagi*." Finally, the white bird soared high above in heaven, and nothing is buried in the *misasagi* except his clothing and official cap. ...