

Diplomacy from the Grave: Interactions between Western Japan and the East Asian Continent from a Burial Point of View¹

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Introduction

From the beginning of the Yayoi 弥生 period (c. 800 BCE–250 CE) and through all protohistory, the signs of interactions between the Japanese archipelago and the East Asian continent are clearly visible, especially in burial features in the form of structures, practices or grave goods from a continental origin.² The establishment of agricultural communities in the northern part of Kyūshū 九州 at the beginning of the Yayoi period led to the development of extended farming communities during the Middle Yayoi phase with the establishment of very large settlements associated with extensive burial areas. These large sites worked as regional centres for the production and exchange of goods, people, technology or information and played a role in the acquisition of prestige goods from the continent (the Southern Korean peninsula and then China after the establishment of the Lelang 樂浪 commandery in BCE 108) or the Ryūkyū 琉球 Islands. Thus, the existence of elites is visible through these prestige goods that have been deposited in their tombs. This is also the period when, for the first time, these farming communities of northern Kyūshū are mentioned in the Chinese chronicles in the form of diplomatic contacts, gifts exchanges and descriptions of the societies called (Jap.) “Wa” 倭 by the Chinese chroniclers.

For the period considered here, frequent references are made to the Chinese chronicles to analyse and discuss these relationships in terms of politics, diplo-

1 This article was originally presented as a paper in the panel “Trade and Interaction in North-east Asia, Part II: The Yellow Sea Interaction Sphere – Moving Beyond the Texts”, at the Society for East Asian Archaeology (SEAA) Sixth Worldwide Conference held in June 6–10, 2014 in Ulan Bataar, Mongolia.

2 I have made an overview of such a question for the Yayoi period and the beginning of the Kofun period (c. 250–700 CE) in western Japan in my PhD thesis (Gilaizeau 2010).

macy, war or exchanges. Yet, these texts, taken as the main reference, are clearly not enough (or too much) to show the complexity and the variability of these interactions and their multiple expressions. For the Yayoi period, the first Chinese chronicle about the Japanese archipelago is the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han), compiled in the first century CE, which contains a very small reference about the Wa people, the inhabitants of the western part of the archipelago. Then, the *Weizhi* 魏志 (Record of Wei) written in the third century CE, which corresponds to the transition between Yayoi and Kofun 古墳 periods, is the most comprehensive source of information we have about the Wa people and their society, and finally The *Hou-Han shu* 後漢書 (Book of Later Han, compiled in the fifth century CE), which includes many elements of the *Weizhi* and thus is less reliable. There is also the famous golden seal bearing the mention of a “king of (Jap.) Na” 奴, found in 1784 in current Fukuoka and mentioned in the *Hou-Han shu*.³ These texts were all written during the Late Yayoi period or after, and it is difficult to say in how far they can be used as a source of information also for the Middle Yayoi period.

Scholars are divided on the extent of the exploitation of these written sources, some rejecting them absolutely and others utilizing them broadly. My opinion is that whereas these sources must not be ignored, they should not be overemphasized either. Interpreting the archaeological remains for the Middle Yayoi period in northern Kyūshū through the Chinese chronicles could prevent scholars from exploring other ways of interpretation and give a biased vision of the period, a period for which we are not really sure of the accuracy of the information given in these texts. That is, interpreting the archaeological data in terms of “countries”, “kings”, “tomb of kings”, and hence inferring that these societies were strongly hierarchized, does not necessarily reflect the archaeological data. There is indeed a tendency by some scholars to use these terms improperly when referring to the richest tombs found in northern Kyūshū, or, for example, to identify some important archaeological remains from the Middle Yayoi period with the different “countries” mentioned in the *Weizhi*⁴ (which describes a situation accurate for the third century CE), a situation that leads to some confusion.⁵

3 Fogel 2011.

4 See Zadora-Rio 2001 on the problem of using toponymy in archaeology.

5 For example cf. Hirata 1999; Kasugashi kyōikuiinkai 2003; Nakajima 1995; Oda and Tamura 1994; Okabe 1999; Okazaki 1977; Soejima and Shōbayashi 1995; Terasawa 2000; Yanagida 1995.

In this essay it is attempted to explore the distributions of grave goods in northern Kyūshū tombs of the Middle Yayoi phase and understand, in a long-term perspective, how this distribution has evolved through this phase and how these results could be interpreted in terms of goods' acquisition and redistribution in a given territory, and so in terms of structuration and organization of the leaders of northern Kyūshū, who controlled these prestige goods. Specific concentrations of tombs containing burial goods in some special areas would be a clue for the existence of a leader and his or her kin, family circle or people involved in a client relationship.

The inventory of tombs containing grave goods published by Terasawa Kaoru 寺沢薫 in 2004 was used as a database here.⁶ Terasawa's impressive work provides much useful data, except that there is no mention of the ratio "tombs with burial goods" to "tombs without burial goods", so – on this particular point, it is difficult to judge the relative importance of tombs with burial goods in each area and period.

Burial Structures and Goods during the Middle Yayoi Period in Northern Kyūshū

The geographical range of the present study comprises the area of northern Kyūshū, covering Fukuoka, Saga and Nagasaki prefectures, including the islands of Tsushima 対馬 and Iki 壱岐, which are part of Nagasaki prefecture.

Chronology of the Middle Yayoi Phase

The relative chronology of the Yayoi period is based on the pottery typochronology and is composed of five phases. Phase I corresponds to Early Yayoi, phases II, III and IV to Middle Yayoi, and phase V to Late Yayoi.

The absolute chronology of the Yayoi period was originally based on the datable Chinese artefacts found in archaeological context. Accordingly, the absolute chronology from the first century BCE onward is quite reliable. The Middle Yayoi phase is traditionally dated to the first century BCE to first century CE, but recent AMS and dendrochronological dating suggest that the beginning of Middle Yayoi would rather correspond to the third century BCE.⁷

6 Terasawa 2004a.

7 For a discussion concerning the question of the beginning of the Middle Yayoi phase see Gilaizeau 2010, 60-68; for dendrochronology in Middle Yayoi dating see Mitsutani 2004.

The jar coffin for primary adult burial, *kamekanbo* 甕棺墓,⁸ constitutes the main burial feature for this period in northern Kyūshū. These jar coffins provide us with a reliable and precise relative chronology based on pottery. In this study, the Hashiguchi 橋口 chronology (Table 1)⁹ is applied for the dating of most of the Middle Yayoi jar burials, corresponding to the phases KIc to KIIIc, as is also reflected in the Terasawa database.

Table 1 *Kamekan* chronology for Middle Yayoi (after Hashiguchi).

Chronology	<i>Kamekan</i> chronology	Yayoi phases
Early Yayoi 2nd 1/2	K I a	I
Early Yayoi end	K I b	
Middle Yayoi beginning	K I c	II
Middle Yayoi 1st 1/2	K II a	
	K II b	
Middle Yayoi 1/2	K II c	III
	K III a	
Middle Yayoi 2nd 1/2	K III b	IV
Middle Yayoi end	K III c	
Late Yayoi beginning	K IV a	V
Late Yayoi 1st 1/2	K IV b	
	K IV c	
	K IV c	

Source: Yanagida (2002), after Kasugashi kyōiku iinkai (2003), 119.

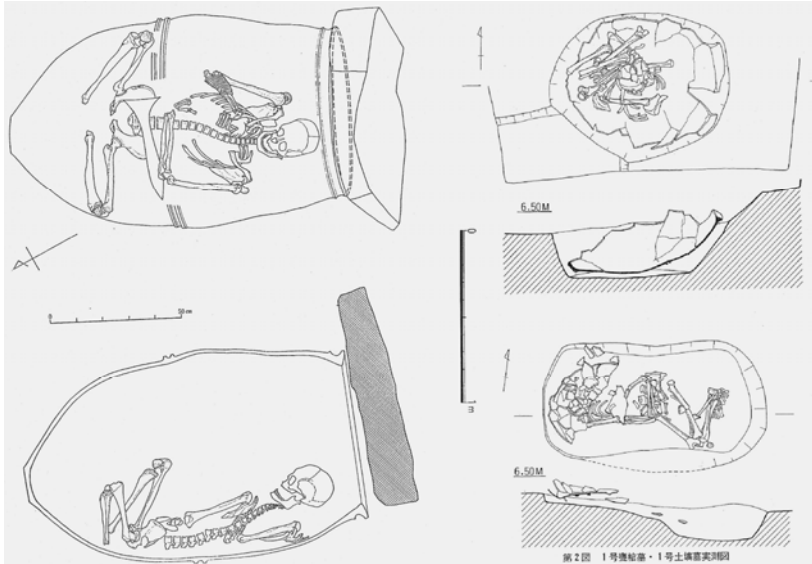
Tombs and Burial Goods

The typical jar burial for adult deceased in northern Kyūshū consists of a pottery jar, large enough to include an adult flexed body. Jar coffins are generally composed of two parts: a large jar which contains the corpse and a cover to close the coffin. There are different kinds of covers. In some cases a second jar of approximately the same size is placed mouth-to-mouth with the main jar. This type is called *awaseguchi kamekan* 合口甕棺 (lit. mouth-to-mouth jar coffin). The cover can also be a smaller pottery such as a plate, a pot, a cup or a pitcher. Sometimes, the main jar is sealed by a large flat stone. Jar coffins are placed on

8 During the Middle Yayoi phase, other type of coffins such as wooden (*mokkan* 木棺) or stone coffins (*sekkon* 石棺), which were the current type of coffins during the Initial and Early Yayoi phases, almost disappear from northern Kyūshū, with the exception of Tsushima island, where deceased were rarely buried in jar coffins. These features reappear during the Late Yayoi phase (Gilaizeau 2010, 111-169).

9 Kasuga-shi kyōiku iinkai 2003, 119.

the bottom of large pits, in a horizontal or tilted position. The pit is often composed of two parts: a vertical pit and a sloping one dug in the side of the former. The jar coffin is placed in this second pit (Fig. 1).



Tomb n° 34, Tateiwa site (from Okazaki (1977,77))

Tomb n° 1 (top), Ukikunden site (from Fujio 1987,6)

Fig. 1: Examples of *kamekan* burials

These tombs are grouped in burial areas of various extend, depending on the hamlet or village or even the regional centre the cemeteries are attached to. The number of tombs per site can vary from around ten to several thousands. The Middle Yayoi cemeteries are organized in two main patterns, a linear and a grouped one,¹⁰ and in some sites, a group of special tombs is separated from the others by an enclosing ditch or a mound, or both. Generally, the tombs inside these special structures contain grave goods, but tombs with grave goods can also be found among other tombs in the communal cemetery. For the Middle Yayoi phase, there are few different categories of grave goods: mirrors, weapons, tools, ornaments and other objects.

The bronze mirrors came from the Korean peninsula at the beginning of the period (linear pattern bronze mirrors) or are of Chinese origin (Han dynas-

10 For a study of the organization and meaning of these different cemeteries' organizations cf. Gilaizeau 2010, 120-124, 324-339; Mizoguchi 2013, 104-182.

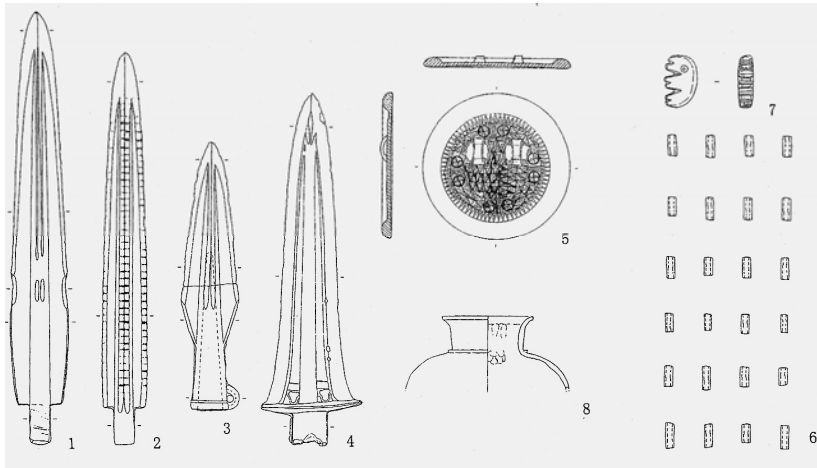
ty), from the founding of the Lelang commandery in BCE 108 onwards. Mirrors are placed at the side of the deceased or – if the tomb contains several examples – around him, or her. Weapons comprise bronze swords or halberds, and – at the end of the phase, iron swords or halberds. Iron tools include knife blades, *yariganna* 鉋 blades and tweeters. Ornaments are shell or bronze bracelets and beads and, finally, other objects like glass discs from Chinese origin, stone swords and small ceramic jars. The burial goods' assembly changed through the Middle Yayoi phase from Korean mirrors, bronze weapons, ceramics and beads at the beginning, to Chinese mirrors, bronze and iron weapons, iron tools and beads at the end (Fig. 2).¹¹

The burial goods have been broadly studied by Japanese scholars and classified in order to reveal the hierarchies between these tombs and to establish regional organization ranking from “kings” to “local chiefs”.¹² It is assumed that there was a ranking reflected by how many prestige good each leader possessed and which kind of prestige goods were extant (for example, Chinese bronze mirrors were considered more valuable than bronze or iron weapons). This led to establishing a pyramidal vision of the Middle Yayoi society, and so to a vision of an extremely hierarchized society, which the Chinese chronicles indeed infer.

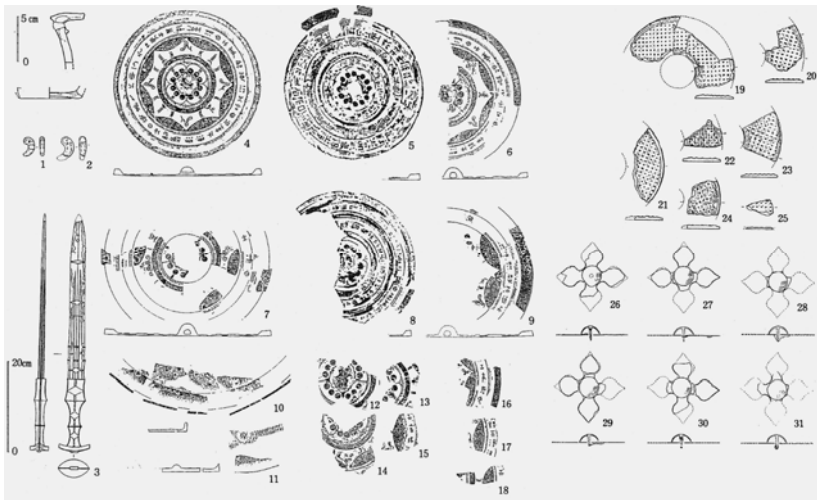
One of the problems here is that there is no reflection of such hierarchies in the settlement organization of the main sites known for this period. Indeed, very large settlement sites (which are regional centres) arise at the beginning of the Middle Yayoi phase and flourished during this phase, but there are no signs of “elite residences” among these large regional centres. A second problem is that these hierarchies are present throughout the Middle Yayoi phase, as if this phase was uniform in its settlement, funeral or social organization. From a burial point of view, the situation is more complex and there is a constant evolution through time. Not all the tombs containing burial goods were constructed at the same time, and there are few tombs containing burial goods in each *kamekan* phase. As Middle Yayoi is about two hundred years long (or more, as we supposed above), it seems unlikely that only one pattern of hierarchy developed, as several generations of people were involved.

11 Naturally, not all the types of grave goods are present in each tomb containing material. For a synthesis of Yayoi burial goods' assemblies and their continental origin see Gilazeau 2010, 146-161, 166-167, 281-305.

12 See for example Takaki 2003; Terasawa 2000, 2004b.



1-2: bronze sword; 3: bronze halberd; 4: ge bronze halberd; 5: Korean bronze mirror; 6: *kudarata*; 7: *magatama*; 8: *tsubo*



1-2: glass *magatama*; 3: bronze sword; 4-18: Chinese bronze mirror; 19-25: glass discs; 26-31: gilt bronze objects

Fig. 2 Example of burial goods from the beginning of the Middle Yayoi period (top: Yoshitake-takagi 吉武高木 *mokkan* tomb no. 3, from Nakazono 2004, 289) and the second part of the Middle Yayoi period (below: Mikumo-minami-shōji 三雲南小路 *kamekan* tomb no. 1, from Nakazono (2004), 326).

Data

The database built by Terasawa Kaoru constitutes an inventory of all the tombs containing burial goods in the territory of Japan from the beginning of the Yayoi period to the Early Kofun period. It includes the site and tomb

name, the geographical situation (city and prefecture), the tomb dating, an inventory of the burial goods inside the tomb, and the classification Terasawa applies on each tomb with regard to the rank of the burial goods, the tomb, and the deceased.¹³ In order to study the evolution of burial structures and practices in western Japan from Middle Yayoi to the beginning of the Kofun period, all data for western Japan were transferred in a separate database for the purpose of cross-dating.¹⁴

From a chronological and spatial point of view, and including only the tombs with a secure dating, the database lists a total of 135 tombs with at least one grave good for the Middle Yayoi phase. Most of the tombs are dated after the *kamekan* typo-chronology of Hashiguchi (see Table 1), as the *kamekanbo* is the main burial type of this period, with a few exceptions. Indefinite dating such as “second half of Middle Yayoi” or just “Middle Yayoi” occur; some tombs are even undated. Here, I attributed the tombs dated to the “beginning of Middle Yayoi” to the KIIc phase, the tombs dated to the “second half of Middle Yayoi” to the KIIIb phase and the “end of Middle Yayoi” tombs to the KIIIc phase (Table 1), that is a total of 17 tombs. Eleven tombs, too broadly dated “Middle Yayoi”, have not been included in this study. Thus, the total number of tombs consulted for this study, containing burial goods from the Middle Yayoi period in northern Kyūshū, is 124. As mentioned above, the number of such tombs appears very low. As pointed out, there is no overall counting of the total number of burials for this period, but considering the large number of archaeological discoveries and the huge burial grounds uncovered in the area, the number certainly exceeds several thousands. Thus, 135 tombs containing burial goods over a period of two centuries (possibly three, if we consider the dating problems for the beginning of the Middle Yayoi period) constitute a rather small sample.

Results

The presented data was analysed with view to the quantity of tombs containing grave goods, such as bronze mirrors and weapons. Bronze mirrors and weapons are the most numerous find. Only 10 tombs yielded neither mirrors nor weapons at all. The number of mirrors uncovered for each phase and the average of grave goods (i. e. mirrors and weapons) per tomb was also analysed, resulting in

13 Terasawa 2004a, 2004b.

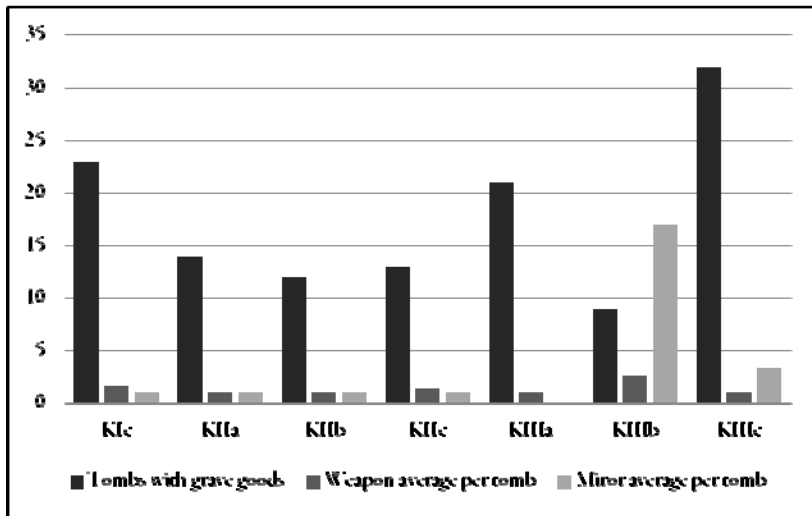
14 Gilazeau 2010; the database here has been translated to French.

a specific chronological and geographical pattern of tombs containing grave goods.

Number of tombs containing grave goods and bronze mirrors for each phase

The number of tombs containing grave goods is variable through time. There are three different phases (Table 2): the beginning of Middle Yayoi with a fair number of tombs (KIc), a second phase in which the number of tombs containing grave goods diminished (KIIa-b-c), and a third phase with an increasing number of such tombs (KIIIa-b-c). Truly, KIIIb is a distinctive phase as there are only a few tombs containing goods. Their number per tomb, however, is important. KIIIb is part of phase 3, a period in which more and more prestige goods were imported to northern Kyūshū. The special features of phase KIIIb will be discussed below.

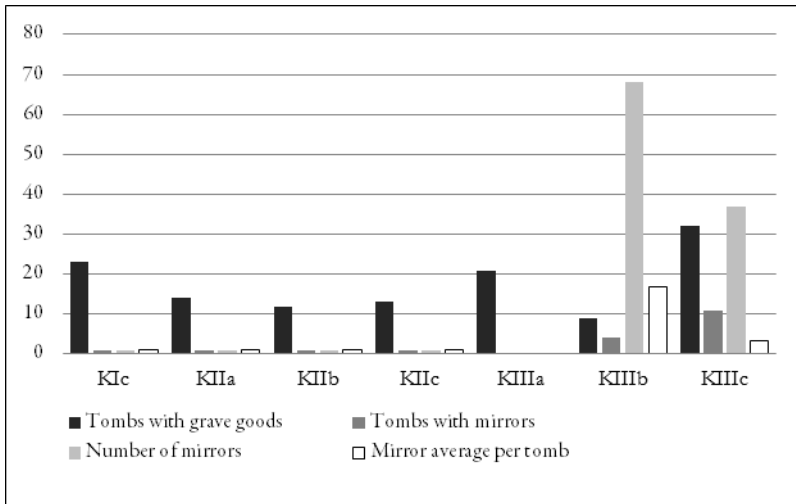
Table 2 Number of tombs containing burial goods for the Middle Yayoi period in northern Kyūshū and the average number of weapons (bronze and iron) and mirrors per tomb for each period.



It is apparent that acquiring burial goods was not an easy task, and that the availability of such goods and the capacity of leaders to control exchange networks were not stable. There is a clear variation between the phases that shows the volatility of the available goods and the way to acquire them. Moreover, the amount of burial goods per tomb is variable throughout the period. For the weapons (bronze and iron swords or halberds), the average per tomb ranges

from 1.05 items (KIIIa) to 2.67 (KIIIb) items. Typically, therefore, there are less than two weapons per tomb throughout the period, except for the KIIIb phase. The number of tombs containing grave goods varies significantly during the Middle Yayoi period. Generally it seems the mortuary practice comprised only a few weapons per burial. The situation is almost similar for the bronze mirrors. There is an average of one mirror per tomb for the first four phases. In the two last phases more mirrors appeared per tomb, respectively 3.36 items per tomb in KIIIc and 17 in the KIIIb phase. In phase KIIIa there are no mirrors at all, while in phase KIIIb the average of mirrors per tomb is outstanding. KIIIb is in this regard a very remarkable phase, as the weapon average more than doubles in comparison to the other phases, while the number of tombs containing grave goods is by far the smallest of the whole period (Table 3).

Table 3 Comparison for each phase of the Middle Yayoi period of the number of tombs containing grave goods, the number of tombs containing mirrors, the total number of mirrors uncovered and the average of mirrors per tomb.



The deposit pattern of bronze mirrors (from Korean and Chinese origin) is interesting, as there is a clear gap before and after the KIIIa phase, when no tomb contained any mirror. Before the KIIIa gap, the mirrors uncovered are all of Korean origin, and after that phase, they are all of Chinese origin. Moreover, the weapon average per tomb is the lowest in this phase too. Interestingly, the two richest Middle Yayoi tombs ever discovered (the tombs of Mikumominami-shōji, Itoshima) are from the KIIIb period, just after the “gap” in mir-

rors, which is also the period, when the first Chinese bronze mirrors appear in Japan. More interestingly, in the KIIIb period, the tombs with burial goods are few (only 9 firmly dated in our database), and the two richest tombs contain almost all the grave good types known for this period, reflecting a remarkable monopoly. In contrast, during the KIIIc period, there are far more tombs containing burial goods, but fewer items per tomb. Moreover, there are almost half as much mirrors in the KIIIc period (37) than in the KIIIb one (68). This clearly shows a difference in the capability to acquire Chinese mirrors between these two phases, and also a different pattern in the acquisition and redistribution of these prestige goods. We will discuss this particular point below.

Spatial and Chronological Study

The distribution of tombs containing burial goods for each *kamekan* phase of the Middle Yayoi period shows an important inconsistency in time (Fig. 3a-b). The locations near the sea coast, geographically the closest to the Asian continent, are not always those that received the majority of burial goods, especially with regard to bronze mirrors (as in KIIa and KIIb phases). Similarly, in Tsushima and Iki islands very few tombs with burial goods date to this period, and none yielded bronze mirrors, whereas mirrors are far more numerous during the following Late Yayoi period.¹⁵ The two islands are known for being stepping stones between the southern Korean peninsula and northern Kyūshū. Important archaeological remains were found there dating from the entire Yayoi period.¹⁶ The deposit of numerous burial goods, however, seems to be limited to the Late Yayoi period onward. The ownership of Korean bronze mirrors (phases KIc to KIIc) seems to shift from area to area depending on the chronology. This situation is not related to the geographical distribution centres of tombs containing burial goods as such.

There are, however, some examples of chronological stability. At the Ukikunden 宇木汲田 site in Karatsu 唐津 City tombs with burial goods (and some with bronze mirrors) date to the KIc to KIIIa phases. Interestingly, there are no burial goods at all in the KIIIb phase, when the two richest tombs of the region, the Mikumo-minami-shōji tombs 1 and 2 in Itoshima, monopolise almost all the grave goods. There was, at this point, clearly a shift of influence between the Karatsu and Itoshima areas.

15 Gilazeau 2010, 168-170; Terasawa 2004a.

16 Miyamoto 2008; Seyock 2003; Tawara 2008.

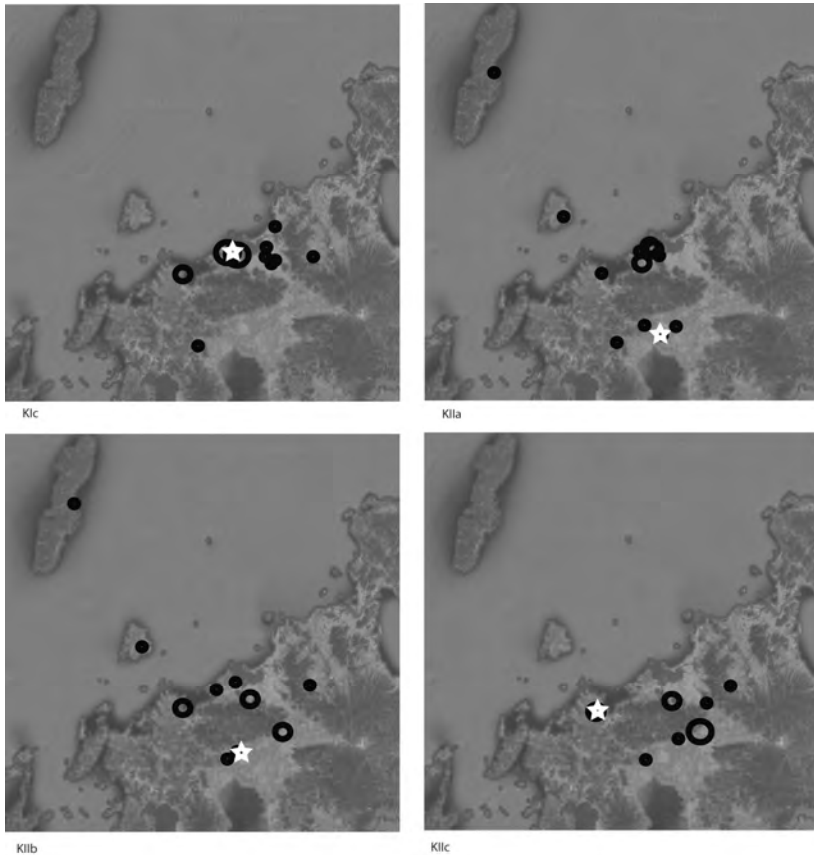


Fig. 3a Distribution of grave goods through the *kamekan* phases of northern Kyūshū during the Middle Yayoi period [for the symbols cf. Fig. 3b]

A second example comes from the Yoshitake 吉武 site group in Fukuoka City (Takagi 高木, Ōishi 大石 and Hiwatari 樋渡), which contain burial goods over the whole period. But, except in the K1c and K1a phases, there are few burials containing goods. Moreover, these goods are not widely distributed in the surrounding areas, whether the number of tombs with burial goods in the main site is large or not. This situation is only true for the K1c phase, when tombs containing burial goods are evidently distributed in the surrounding area. Also, the number of tombs containing burial goods in these sites is highly variable through time.

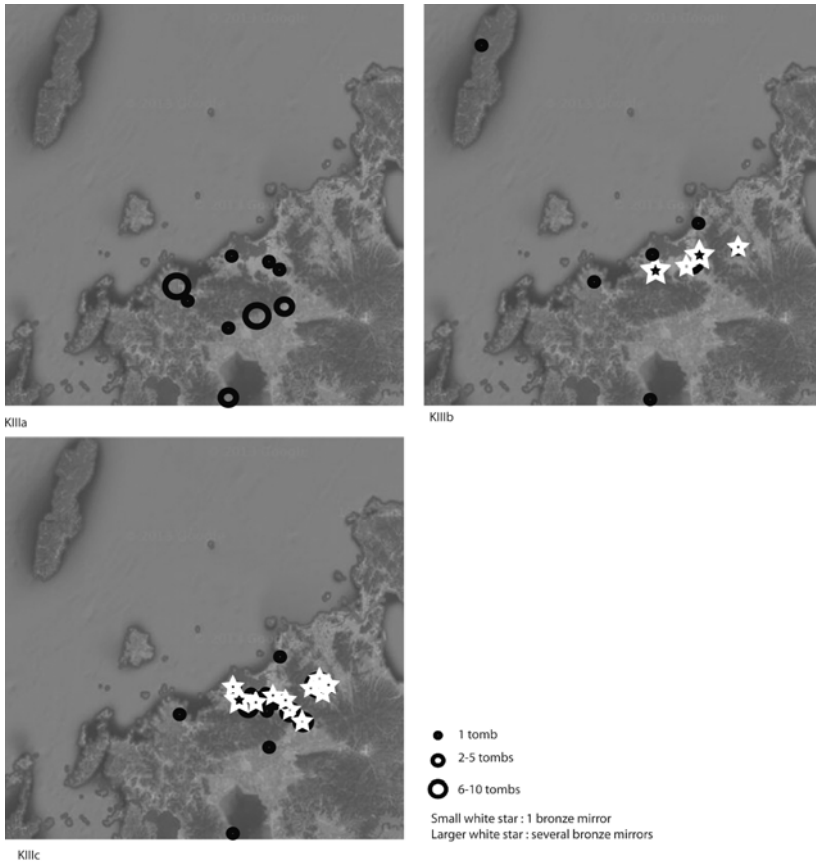


Fig. 3b Distribution of grave goods through the *kamekan* phases of northern Kyūshū during the Middle Yayoi period.

It is also remarkable that there are generally only two areas with clusters of tombs containing burial goods for each *kamekan* period. Sometimes, on the other hand, there are none at all, which put things into perspective regarding the classical image of “countries” or “kingdoms” with “kings” being in control. Except for the KIIc phase, and the KIIc and KIIa phases on a lesser scale, there is no widespread distribution of burial goods around a site with a tomb containing one or more bronze mirrors. Except for these two phases, there does not seem to be an evidence of a wide and elaborated system for redistributing prestige goods, which would be a good sign of a well-developed pyramidal organization between several sites.

Even when a burial location has tombs with burial goods during several *kamekan* phases (Ukikunden, Yoshitake-hiwatari for example), there is almost

no distribution of grave goods in locations surrounding the area, which would infer that the leaders here were not involved in the distribution of prestige goods as a mean to weave links of clientelism and extend their authority over other communities. This situation is clearly visible only in the KIc, KIIa and KIIIc phases, at two different scales. However, this situation is not continuing as the following phase does not show the same pattern. The tombs of the KIc and KIIa phases seem to reflect a two-stage organization: a large burial area containing several rich tombs, of which one contains a mirror, as well as several surrounding sites, each containing only one tomb with grave goods, but no mirror at all.

In the KIIIc phase, the organization seem to be a three-stage one: one immensely rich tomb with more than twenty Chinese bronze mirrors, several very rich tombs containing one to six Chinese bronze mirrors, and additionally, rich tombs with grave goods such as weapons. Interestingly, the KIIIb phase shows a three-stage organization, similar to the KIIIc phase, but only with nine tombs. The second level (tombs with mirrors and weapons), however, includes tombs containing only one Chinese mirror each. Compared to the two immensely rich tombs, there is a clear difference.

Discussion

With this long-term evolution study, it was intended to learn how the distribution of prestige goods has evolved during the Middle Yayoi period in northern Kyūshū. Owing to the very detailed ceramic relative chronology based on the *kamekan* and the database compiled by Terasawa Kaoru, it has been possible to observe these evolutions minutely over a long period.

This chronological study suggests an almost general volatility of the leaders in the northern Kyūshū area during the Middle Yayoi period. Even if some sites are quite constant in terms of tombs containing burial goods, the possession of bronze mirrors (Korean or Chinese), which are considered by previous researchers to be the most precious of prestige goods of these period, seems not self-evident. If we consider the ownership of bronze mirrors a sign of power over other individuals whose tombs are less rich, this power seems to shift from area to area, according to where and when a local leader was able to gain more control over trade routes or prestige goods than other leaders in other areas.

Moreover, the Korean bronze mirrors of the four first phases of the period are not all situated in the coastal areas, where the relations with the Asian continent would seem easier to maintain. If we consider the presence of prestige goods independently of their nature, there is a two-part distribution from phase

KIc to KIIIa that links to the geographical features of northern Kyūshū: the sites with many tombs containing goods are either in the coastal areas or in the Tsukushi 筑紫 plain. The trade routes must have been either from Hakata 博多 Bay through the large plains to the south, or from Karatsu Bay through the Matsuura 松浦 River valley into the Tsukushi plain.

This situation corresponds to the rise of regional centres during the Middle Yayoi period and most of these tombs containing burial goods are related to these large settlement sites such as Hie 比恵, Naka 那珂, Sugu 須玖, Mikumo 三雲 or Yoshinogari 吉野ヶ里. These large groupings of settlement and funeral areas were centres of exchange, technology and meetings for social and ritual/religious purpose. But interestingly no trace of hierarchy has been discovered in the settlements. The large buildings of these sites are thought to have served a common purpose and not to be elite residences. There is no trace of palisades or ditch enclosing a special residence, as suggested by the variances of wealth observed in the tombs. It seems that for the leaders of this period, even if they had access to prestige goods and used them to show their special position, this was not the only way to assert their power.

Therefore, these leaders could possess a kind of particular status, visible in death but not in every aspect of life. This would correspond to what Pierre Clastres has defined as “chiefs without power”, when he described ethnological examples of societies where chiefs have a symbolic and moral authority over their community, but no coercive power. Only during war times they would become temporary war leaders.¹⁷ This question related to Japan has been broadly discussed by Mizoguchi Kōji and Laurent Nespoulous.¹⁸ Indeed, the standardization of these prestige goods, at least for phases KIc to KIIIa, suggests that these goods were deposited as symbols of a function more than as symbols of wealth. This seems different for the KIIIb and KIIIc periods when exceptionally rich tombs appear. If these tombs contain mirrors, weapons and beads as before, the large number of mirrors (which are not Korean mirrors anymore) and the presence of other objects like glass discs or gilded bronze objects allude to a display of wealth more than a simple deposit of objects symbolizing a social or religious function. Thus, we should infer that there are at least two phases in the development of elite strategies during the Middle Yayoi period as described above, three if we consider the special pattern of the KIIIb phase, a transitional phase, with this accumulation of goods in few tombs (Fig. 4).

17 Clastres 1986 [1974].

18 Mizoguchi 2013, Nespoulous 2007, 196-200.

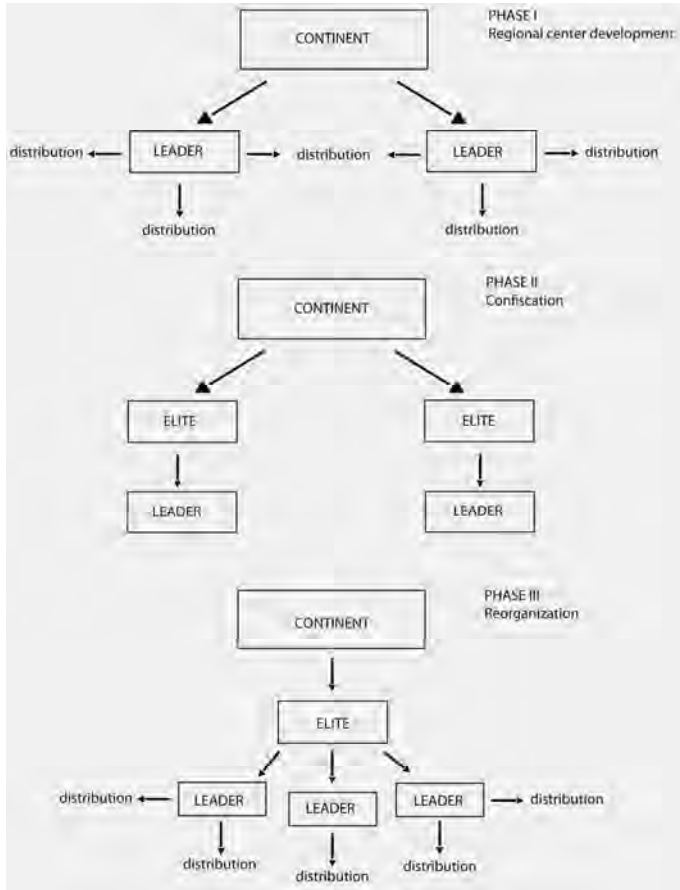


Fig. 4 Evolution of the prestige goods system distribution in northern Kyūshū during the Middle Yayoi period.

But, even if the KIIIb and KIIIc period pattern (with only three individuals monopolizing so many prestige goods) seems to show the beginning of a process toward more prestige good control and more social or political hierarchy, it is not stable in the long term. Indeed, the beginning of the Late Yayoi period sees the collapse of this system with important changes in settlement and burial structures. For burials, the *kamekan* tradition rapidly disappears and leads to a return to other type of coffins (*mokkan* and *sekkan*) that were largely used before the Middle Yayoi period. The number of grave goods and tombs containing them eventually decreases to 5-7 tombs per *kamekan* phases (KIVa-b-c) and so there seem to be a return to the deposit of prestige goods that symbolize more a social or a religious function than individual wealth.

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