

Ritual Sites in Hyōgo Prefecture: Kofun and Ritsuryō Period Miniature Horse Effigies

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Clay effigies of humans and horses in *Hizen no Kuni Fudoki*

All sorts of forms of magic and ritual appear in the ancient *Fudoki* from various parts of Japan. The following account, in which clay effigies of humans and horses are offered up to a malevolent deity, appears in the entry for Saka *Kōri* in *Hizen Fudoki* as the origin of its name.

There was a malevolent deity in the upper reaches of the Saka River that allowed half of the passers-by to live but killed the other half. Ōarata, ancestor of the *agata-nushi* (local leader), carried out a divination, and learnt thereby that there were two women called Ōyamadame and Sayamadame of the Tsuchigumo people,¹ who said ‘Extract clay from the village of Shimota and fashion effigies of people and horses, and if you offer them to the malevolent deity, it will be appeased.’ When he did as they instructed him, and offered them to the deity, it was indeed placated. Ōarata said, ‘These women are truly wise women (*sakashime*)!’² Therefore it was called *Sakashime Kōri* (now corrupted to Saka *Kōri*). It seems that the clay images really did calm the malevolent deity (a deity who disrupted transportation).

Yoshiyuku TAKIOTO argues that the word *ta* (paddy field) in these personal and place names indicates magic associated with agriculture, but what is important is that they offered effigies of humans and horses (as substitutes for the real things) to placate the offending deity, made with ‘clay from the village of Shimota.’ That is to say, their offerings were to the spirit of that soil. Shigeko KIMURA infers that the two Tsuchigumo practitioners of magic were chieftainesses who thereby ceded to the Yamato kings the rights to their local rituals and governance.

In the section on the eastward expedition of King Jinmu in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, it says that in order to conquer Yamato, Jinmu (i.e., Iwarehiko) follows the vision he sees in a dream, offers earthenware pottery (eighty flat dishes and sacred pots) fashioned from red clay and white clay dug from Ama no Kaguyama (‘the fragrant hill of heaven’) to the heavenly and earthly deities,³ and thereby is able to win the battle.

The usage of clay horses found in archaeological remains

Earthenware miniatures are small replicas of utensils, implements, people and animals, made out of clay. Among sites of such Kofun Period human effigies found in Harima, there is the Kōtaka Kaminoike Site, a ritual site, in Katō-shi (six human effigies, two mirrors, four curved beads, one shield, one suit of armour (*tankō*), one hand-kneaded earthenware pot: second half of the fifth century, see Photograph 1); and there is the Kanbū Site in Kōbe-shi, a settlement site (five human effigies: early sixth century). One miniature horse was found in pit dwellings at the Higashiune Okita Site in Akō-shi and the Taino Site in Miki-shi respectively (late sixth and early seventh centuries). There are many kiln sites in Harima that produced *sue* pottery stoneware, and clay miniatures were found at places such as the Maruyama Kiln Site in Aioi-shi (U-shaped miniature spade tip, late sixth century) and Kanno Ōbayashi Kiln Site in Kakogawa-shi (‘bag-shaped’ miniature iron axe head, *yūtai teppu*, late sixth century).

Of these, the most noteworthy are the human effigies from the Kōtaka Kaminoike Site, which were found together with mirrors, beads, weapons and armour, and hand-kneaded pots, although not with any horses. The clay used in these was the pottery clay used in local *haji* earthenware.

¹ Translator’s note: *tsuchigumo* ‘earth spiders’, was one of the derogatory generic terms in ancient Japan for some outlying local families who were resistant to submitting to Yamato authority.

² Translator’s note: Interestingly, the Japanese here seems to include both meanings of ‘wise woman’ in English, as a ‘clever woman’ and ‘fortune-teller/soothsayer.’

³ Translator’s note: *amatsukami* ‘heavenly deities; *kunitsukami* ‘earthly deities.’

Looking further afield nationally to such items unearthed together, there have been finds of Nara Period miniature humans and horses at dig sites in Kagoshima and Kumamoto Prefectures — such as in association with a cremation at the Okano Site; and in Shizuoka Prefecture what appears to be a human and horse as a set were found at the Nishihataya Site. These too were Nara Period or later. The items found at the Kuzuma and Igamimatsu Sites in Tottori Prefecture are also well known, and are slightly older, being late Kofun Period.

Many people believe that the examples found at the Kōtaka Kaminoike Site are ritual objects dedicated to the Kako River (i.e., to the water deity), on the basis of the site's name. However, given that similar clay miniatures were excavated from the Sakauue Site in Shizuoka Prefecture, I interpret them as objects for dedication to the deity of the boundary, after Masamichi KAMEI, (i.e., deities who obstruct transportation in *Harima Fudoki*), and I believe that clay miniatures were offerings (*nusa*) to the malevolent deities that resided on the Aonogahara Plateau. My evidence for this is that the main road (nowadays Kokudō 372) in this district has linked the largest burial mounds since the Kofun Period, running from Himeji (Danjōzan Kofun) via Kasai (Tamaoka Kofun), to Sasayama (Kumobe Kurumazuka Kofun) (see the following map). Each district had its own particular malevolent deity or deities, such as the one in the entry for Ikuno in Hanioka Sato, Kamusaki Kōri, in *Harima Fudoki*, and clay miniatures can be interpreted as artefacts pertaining to the groups (extended families) who dedicated them as items that they thought would please the deity.

As far as horses are concerned, scholars both of historical documents and folklore studies have linked horses to water deities. Clay horses often turn up at well and ditch sites, and Iwao ŌBA, archaeologist of Shintō, regards them as having been offerings in water deity rituals since antiquity. It cannot be denied that a connection has been established in folklore studies between horses and the mythical Japanese water-dwelling creature called a *kappa*.⁴

However, more recently, archaeologist Masayoshi MIZUNO⁵ has noted that it is rare to find unbroken clay horses. It is related in *Honchō Hokke Genki*⁶ and *Nihon Ryōiki*⁷ that the malevolent deities of epidemics could not ride on horses to fulfil their role of scattering disease when the legs of horses painted on wooden *ema* votive tablets⁸ were 'broken'. On that basis, Mizuno interpreted horses as the vehicles of the deities of sickness, and believed that people deliberately broke miniature horses during rituals in order to prevent the deities' activities. This was a brilliant insight.

The use of clay miniature horses was carried on not only during the Kofun Period, but also into the Nara Period; and those found in walled towns in particular were used in *ōharae* ('great purification') rites, in conjunction with earthenware pots ink-painted with human faces (*jinmen bokusho doki*). On this basis it is reasonable to say that the horse effigies of the Kofun Period were essentially used for 'purification (i.e., prevention of disease)', much as Mizuno argued. Considering that the examples excavated from the Higashiune Okita Site and the Taino Site—especially Taino—turned up in the post holes of pit dwellings, it is plausible that ritual burial of these artefacts took place upon abandoning the building. This was probably not upon the death of an individual, but rather that when a whole family died together in an epidemic or something, a ceremony was conducted using the power of *harae* purification possessed by the clay horse.

⁴ Translator's note: Cf. kelpies, the mythical shape-shifting malevolent aquatic horses of Gaelic folklore.

⁵ Translator's note: 1934–2015.

⁶ Translator's note: A collection of Buddhist tales compiled around 1043.

⁷ Translator's note: Japan's oldest anthology of Buddhist tales, compiled 787–824 CE.

⁸ Translator's note: *Ema* means 'horse picture'. Shintō shrines sell wooden tablets called *ema*, which are usually blank on one side and have something such as a representation of the shrine itself or of the given year's zodiac animal on the other side—in other words, not necessarily a horse nowadays. Supplicants write their own prayer on the blank side and tie them to a designated tree or stand for appropriate disposal by the shrine's priest, in the hope that their prayer will be granted. The above account implies that the reason why such votive tablets are called *ema*, regardless of whether they are associated with horses, is because their origins lie in the offering of miniature wooden horse effigies to ward off disaster that horses were believed to bring from elsewhere.

From Kofun Period water courses to Nara and Heian Period rituals with human effigies

Now, apart from clay artefacts among the ritual objects of the Kofun Period there are stone miniatures—ritual objects of the Yamato Court. A canal for conducting fresh water was discovered at the Makimuku Site (early Kofun Period) in Nara Prefecture. And then there is the large-scale canal at the Nangō Ōhigashi Site (mid-Kofun Period), also in Nara Prefecture. Their ritual was incorporated into the rites of the burial mound, in the form of *haniwa* rituals (cylindrical clay figurines), such as the encircling *haniwa* (*ikei haniwa*) and palisade-shaped *haniwa* (*sakugata haniwa*)⁹ around Gyōjazuka Kofun, Kakogawa-shi. The ritual objects at Okinoshima in Fukuoka Prefecture also included those used in rituals at burial mounds, so it appears that funerals and other rituals were undifferentiated in this period. According to Mitusada INOUE [1917–1983], that differentiation took place around the turn of the sixth to seventh centuries. Later, these water course sites developed into sites of purification (*misogi*) at the Asuka-kyō Enchi (the Garden Pond of Asuka Palace) Site, and it had some connection with the nearby Sakafuneishi (‘Sake Trough’) Stonework. I regard the Makimuku and Nangō Ōhigashi examples as the model sites of *misogi* and *harae* purification rites from an archaeological point of view.

At the start of the Ritsuryō Period (specifically, the reigns of Tenchi, Tenmu and Jitō, i.e. late seventh century), the Daijōkan and Jingikan¹⁰ were established in Japan, and the provision of institutionalised religion was introduced, with Ise Grand Shrine at its apex.

Wooden miniatures in the Nara and Heian Periods

Archaeologist Hiroyuki KANEKO [1945–2008] regarded ritual objects of this period as developments that added Daoist-influenced human effigies to the traditional wooden miniatures of the Kofun Period that had included wooden horses, swords and sacred wands (*igushi*). Moreover, he believed that the respective items were part of the *ōharae* ‘great purifications’, which occupied the most important position within Ritsuryō Period rituals.

Harae is a Shintō ceremony in which breath was blown into human effigies and their bodies stroked, and thereby people’s sins (*tsumi*) and impurities (*kegare*) were transferred into them; those sins and impurities were then got rid of by floating the effigies away down the river (in the water) along with other wooden miniatures. Among such ceremonies, those that took place on the last days of the sixth and twelfth months at sundown were called *ōharae*. The purpose of *ōharae* was to protect the sovereign himself [or herself] and the capital city (i.e., the state) against ritual pollution and to preserve their purity. Kaneko asserts that since this ceremony combined the use of wooden miniatures such as effigies of humans, horses, boats, birds, swords, and sacred wands, it means that the wooden horses and boats were the vehicles carrying the dolls that bore away the ritual pollution; the wooden swords were weapons to protect the place of purification from evil influxes; and the wands were for magically dispersing the results.

Such wooden miniatures have been excavated from official sites (*kanka*, i.e., Provincial Offices, *Kōri* Offices, sites related to *shōen* manors, post stations, and state-run pastures) all over Japan. At the time of writing, the first and second archaeological excavations of the Tajima Provincial Office Site in Hyōgo Prefecture (i.e., the Hakaza and Nyōgamori Sites in Toyooka-shi) have turned up the largest number in Japan. The large quantity is a characteristic of provinces on the Japan Sea Coast, such as at the Kojimanishi Site in Ishikawa Prefecture, and the Aoya Yokogi Site and Daikaku Site in Tottori Prefecture.

Were these sites for purifying horses?

However, some inconsistencies with Kaneko’s theory (i.e., that the role and usage of miniature wooden horses were as vehicles for human effigies to carry away sins and ritual impurities) have been noted among the horse miniatures unearthed from the Koinumaru Site (i.e., Fuse Post Station, Tatsuno-shi) and Shiba Site (Awaga Post Station, Asago-shi), both of which are confirmed as post stations by written evidence. That is to say, only ten horse miniatures (see Photograph 2), a boat and a wand but no human effigies were found around the well during the

⁹ Translator’s note: *Ikei haniwa* refers to clay figures placed around the top of the burial mound, to form an encircling ‘fence’. Within the circle were placed *haniwa* of *ōiya* (shrine buildings) and clay representations of wells and water pipes.

¹⁰ Translator’s note: The Daijōkan, “Grand Council of State,” governed secular administrative affairs, and Jingikan, “Department of Worship,” oversaw all Shintō worship and ritual.

second excavation of the Koinumaru Site. And at the Shiba Site there were nine dolls but nearly double the number of horses, fourteen.

It was Minami HIRAKAWA who resolved this problem, with his deciphering of a *mokkan* (wooden label) excavated from the Shiba Site: ‘*furoku [lacuna=kyū]kyū nyo ritsuryō sahōmon ritsu*’ i.e., ‘[Appendix] despatch urgently according to the law: erect left of the gate’ (Shiba Archaeological Site Excavation Report, 2009). With reference to *Nihon Ryōiki*, Hirakawa interpreted the significance of this *mokkan* as follows: food offerings were made to the *oni* (devil-deity) of epidemics (*gyōyakujin*) in dishes placed at both gate posts of the Awaga Post Station; this *mokkan* would have been the label for the one that was placed on the left-hand side (*sahōmon*) in order to ward off evil influences.

On account of this, I made a reappraisal: that horses were regarded as animals that could easily bring in an *oni* of ritual pollution and disasters from all the other *kōri* and provinces that they went to. If that is so, we should consider the miniature horses excavated at post station sites not as the vehicles for human effigies bearing ritual pollution, but as *katashiro*, or substitute effigies, in order to purify any ritual pollution that was attached to the real horses. Interpreted in this way, it makes eminent sense that miniature horses only (without human effigies) were found at the Koinumaru Site, and that the number of horse miniatures at the Shiba Site exceeded the number of accompanying dolls. A large wooden bird was also found at the Koinumaru Site, which is thought to have decorated the gate to the post station.¹¹

Examples of wooden horse miniatures found at sites in Hyōgo Prefecture

The Fujie Kitamachi Site in Kōbe-shi (i.e., the Ashiya Post Station on the Sanyōdō Road in Settsu Province) also turned up more wooden horse miniatures than human effigies, but we must note that, being a coastal port, there were more miniature boats at this site than dolls too. In Harima Province there was the Kusakami Post Station at Himeji-shi. This was considered to be located at the Imajuku Chōda Site, on the basis of finds there of what Ikuji IMAZATO called ‘Harima Provincial Office-type tiles’. However, miniature horses were found at the nearby Tsujii Site (excavation 1985, prior to construction of the Municipal Road Amuro Bypass), and according to my field notes of the time, more horse miniatures (six) than dolls (two) were found there. This site was doubtless related to the Kusakami Post Station in some way, in addition to being a temple site.

Sue ware pottery was found inscribed with graphs representing Nagara¹² at the Nishihamadani Shimo Konishinotsubo Site, Sasayama-shi (Tanba Province), where only horse miniatures and no dolls were found, so there is a strong possibility that this was the site of the Nagara Post Station on the ancient Sanyōdō. Finally, the Ishimichisaidani and Dōnoato Sites in Kawanishi-shi are thought to have been the ‘Uneno Maki’ (‘Uneno Pasture’, for the Uneno Post Station) mentioned in the entry for the 7th month of Daidō 3 (809 CE) in *Nihon Kōki*.¹³

¹¹ Translator’s note: The sacred gateway to a Shintō shrine is still called a *torii*, literally ‘bird perch’. A wooden bird was also recovered from the gate of the Yayoi Period Yoshinogari Site’s pallisade. The implication here is that the Shiba Site’s gateway to the post station was perhaps similarly considered sacred.

¹² Translator’s note: 氷丙, being variant graphs (*itaiji*) for 長柄.

¹³ Translator’s note: a history completed in 840, covering the years 792–833.