

## **AN INTRODUCTORY TOUR THROUGH JOMON, YAYOI AND KOFUN PERIODS OF JAPANESE ARCHAEOLOGY**

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This fascinating lecture opened up a whole new world of archaeology but which resonated with much of our own.

Japanese periods break down as follows:

Paleolithic 50,000 -14,000 BC      Jomon 14,000 -1,000 BC

Yayoi 1,000 BC – AD 250      Kofun 250 – 710 AD

**Paleolithic:** Some of the oldest pottery in the world has been discovered in Japan dating from 16,000 BC. It was simple in form, hand built and bonfire fired. We were shown shell, bone and wooden fish hooks as well as familiar flint tools made from obsidian, a naturally occurring volcanic glass which is plentiful because of the amount of volcanic activity in the islands. A wonderful collection of flint and obsidian arrowheads was displayed. Paleolithic settlers were semi-sedentary, living mostly in pit dwellings arranged around central open spaces and obtained their food by gathering, fishing and hunting.

**Jomon:** The majority of Jomon pottery had rounded bottoms and typically were rather small and used for cooking. The name Jomon means "rope patterned". This refers to the patterns created by pressing rope into the clay similar to Beaker pottery. Later Jomon vessels had much more elaborate rims. The pottery was hand built by coiling and bonfire fired. The people were sedentary for longer periods. They lived in square shaped pit houses that were clustered in small villages. They fished and hunted animals such as deer, bear, rabbit and duck and gathered nuts, berries and mushrooms.

**Yayoi:** This is the Iron age in the history of Japan which is distinguished by new pottery styles and the start of intensive rice agriculture in paddy fields. Yayoi lived in the same pit or circular dwelling as that of the Jomon. Their pottery was simply decorated and produced on a potter's wheel. It was fired in a simple updraught kiln. By C1<sup>st</sup> yayoi farmers were using iron agricultural tools and weapons. They wove textiles, lived in permanent farming villages and constructed their buildings of wood and stone. Three main symbols of the yayoi culture are the bronze mirror, the bronze sword and the royal seal stone.

**Kofun** means "old mounds" and refers to the distinctive practice of covering tombs with huge piles of earth. There are about 30,000 scattered throughout Japan, the largest of which is 486 metres long by 305 metres wide and 35 metres high, more than twice the area of the great pyramid of Giza. The most distinctive style is the key hole tomb

of C3<sup>rd</sup> -C6<sup>th</sup>. During this period the clan leaders of Yamato in central Japan became dominant and claimed succession to the imperial line. This brought about much greater contact with China and Korea. The end of the Kofun period marks the transition to a literate society and the introduction of the Chinese writing system and the adoption of Buddhism.

This was a most interesting lecture with many parallels with our own island heritage.