Jar Burials in Kyushu

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"Kamekan" or jar burial is a super large jar type earthenware developed particularly for burial in the northern part of Kyushu in the Yayoi period (4 C. B. C.–3 C. A. D.). Burial with ceramic coffins existed already in the Jomon period. Such coffins have been discovered all over Japan. But these coffins are in fact earthenwares used in daily life and sometimes diverted as coffins on the occasion of funeral service. While the jar burials were intended only for burial ceremony, and are widely different from the earthenware used in daily life, both quantitatively and in form. These burials are distributed concentratedly in a limited time in the Yayoi period, and this in the northern part of Kyushu.

The jar burials first attracted archaeologist’s attention when they found that Chinese and Korean imported bronze implements had been used as burial rituals whose real dates had been made clear to a certain extent.

Furthermore, the correspondence between chronological sequence of earthenware in the Yayoi period and absolute dates can be identified.

As a consequence of the foregoing, the jar burials were considered, from olden times as useful subjects of study for restoring the society in the northern Kyushu to its original state.

Since the jar burials are the earthenware which developed specifically in size and form, it has been inferred the existence of specialized craftsmen who made them. At present they are roughly divided into 7 patterns by such surface finishing as brush-mark finishing and paddle marks or form and by difference in color tone deriving from existence or non-existence of fillers, and further each pattern has been associated with each small district having, as their unit, an open field in the northern part of Kyushu. "Local types" have thus been established. Such local patterns once defined, with the existence of specialized craftsmen in their background, useful data can be furnished for clarifying the characters of the buried persons and the relationship between a region, producer
of the jar burials and another where the persons were buried and whereinto
the jars had been transported, if we investigate how they were buried in the
cemetery with the jar burials transported from the producing region.

This paper is intended to prepare a distribution map of jar burials, to be
taken as a basic work to establish local types of jar burials which can be
regarded as useful element to know what was the society in Kyushu in Yayoi
period.

We roughly divided into five the period during which the jar burials existed,
by such factors as: manufacturing techniques, line, diffusion into regions other
than northern Kyushu and period of decline, type of burial rituals and form of
possession. We then put in order the distribution range by period and evolutive
quantitative change of the jar burials.

As a result of these investigations and studies, we could become clear the
following fact. That the burial with jar burials was not performed long in such
areas as Fukuoka, Kasuga and Itoshima where are distributed the Suku-Okamoto
and Mikumo vestiges in Fukuoka Prefecture, where gorgeous burial rituals have
been found in great quantity, but that the burial with jar burials were per-
formed in a great number and for a long time in the regions along the shore
of the Ariake Bay, such as Saga and Kanzaki.