Purport of "Earthenware on Which Human Face is Carved with Finely Engraved Lines and the Distribution"

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Characteristic human faces carved on the earthenwares and stone coffins appear during the transition period from the Yayoi period to the Kofun period in Japan. On those human faces, usually arc lines or a group of lines are carved symmetrically between the nose from the forehead to the cheek. In this paper, considerations are given collectively on 32 human faces carved on 21 pieces that have been unearthed from 16 sites.

There are 15 cases for the line carved faces drawn on earthenwares; many of them (10 cases) are carved on the jars. In other cases, they are carved on haniwa, lid of a stone coffin, clay figurine and earth ball. The distribution is: 6 cases at 4 sites in Okayama Prefecture and Kagawa Prefecture; 10 cases at 7 sites in Aichi Prefecture; 1 case at 1 site in Shizuoka Prefecture; 4 cases at 4 sites in the Kanto district, namely, Tōkyō, Gunma Prefecture, Chiba Prefecture and Ibaraki Prefecture. The period goes back to the mid of the later Yayoi period for those unearthed in Kagawa Prefecture; in the early Kofun period for those unearthed in Kantō district. The period of those unearthed in other areas is identified to be in the end of the Yayoi period and the beginning of the Kofun period.

Vessels on which human faces are carved are unearthed from the various places such as ditches, wells, tombs, etc. that are the remains having some kind of religious character. Those that characterize these human faces are the groups of lines carved around their eyes, foreheads and cheeks. Sharp eyes without pupil have resemblance to the evil eyes drawn on dotaku. Line carved from the forehead to the cheek is a tattoo. It seems that a tattoo was thought to have a power to drive away the evils. Therefore, it is thought that the line carved faces were put on the various vessels as having a power to repel the attacks from the evils, and played an important role in the various religious ceremonies including tombs.
From the descriptions about tattoos seen in the Japanese classical literatures, "Kojiki" (the Legendary Stories of Old Japan) and "Nihon Shoki" (Chronicles of Japan), and types of tattooed haniwas and their distribution, it can be assumed that those having tattoos on their faces in the ancient times are the people who lived outside the Kinki district. Especially, there are quite a few descriptions about tattoos in the fishermen's group such as amabe=fishermen's department. Line carved faces depicting tattoos have not been unearthed from the Kinki district. Therefore, it can be assumed that the distribution of the custom of tattooing in the Yayoi period remained unchanged as it was in the ancient times. It can be thought that the line carved faces that show the expressions common to each other even in the remote districts depict the existence of something like guardian gods in the religious ceremonies conducted among those people who are presumed to be the fishermen's groups.