Reburial Grave with Funeral Urn in the Yayoi Period

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The funeral method called "reburial" is the deliberate and repeated handling of dead bodies, and the repeated holding of funeral ceremonies. In one part of eastern Japan, reburial graves mainly using jar-shaped pottery as cinerary urns developed in an early agricultural society from the end of the Final Jōmon period to the Yayoi period III (B.C.2C–A.D. 1C). A characteristic grave was a multi-coffin urn reburial grave, containing more than one pottery urn in a pit.

It has been verified that a larger amount of severely worn or repaired pottery is excavated from multi-coffin reburial graves than from ordinary settlement sites, and that several pottery urns were reburied together. In some cases, the pottery is of different styles, which makes us suppose that considerable time passed before their burial, but this is rare. Therefore, cinerary urns in multi-coffin reburial graves were collectively buried after a certain period of accumulation. Although the period of accumulation was sometimes long enough to see a change in the style of pottery, in most cases, it does not seem to have been so very long. The number of bodies buried in a pit was mostly between two and four, although a few pits contained seven bodies. Men's and women's ashes were buried together, and sometimes, ashes of different generations, that is, adults' and children's ashes, were buried together.

In the early reburial graves, an arc-shaped cemetery was divided into several groups, and both new and old grave pits were found in each group. These groups seem to be similar to the small burial groups of the Jōmon period. The small burial groups of the Jōmon period are considered to be the accumulated grave group of a family, composed of a kin group with blood relationship, and a non-kin group of those who joined the family by marriage. If we presume that the multi-coffin reburial was one type of multiple burial, and that the principles of the multiple burials of the Jōmon period still survived, it may be reasonable to consider that people with some blood relationship were buried together in these early multi-coffin reburial graves which followed the cemetery structure of the Jōmon period. It is also considered that the small burial group, which was an assembly of these graves, indicated the grave group of one family, and that the whole cemetery was the graveyard of a single settlement.