Domestication of Pigs in the Jomon Period

NISHIMOTO, Toyohiro

Until now, it has been said that in general during the Jomon period dogs were the only domesticated animals and that other animals such as pigs had not been domesticated. However, examples of earthen articles shaped like boars, the burial of boars, and the excavation of boars on outlying islands have aroused debate on the domestication of boars during the Jomon period. The biggest point of contention concerning claims of boar domestication has been the absence of the detection of domestication-related effects in boar bones dating from the Jomon period. However, we now know of one example where it is suspected that domestication-related effects exist among boar bones dating from the Jomon period. Given the fact that examples of boars being buried together with people and dogs have also come to light, it has become necessary to debate the points that boars have in common with people and dogs once again.

It is in this context that this paper introduces materials excavated from the Shimooda shell mound in Mobara City, Chiba Prefecture, and also re-examines earthen boar-shaped articles, boar burials, boars on outlying islands, and domestication-related effects in boar bones. As a result, when viewed in terms of cultural elements, we can be virtually certain that pigs were domesticated from around the Middle Jomon period. Furthermore, when viewed from the culturally significant fact that they were taken to outlying islands and from the standpoint of the discovery of domestication-related effects in their skeletons, we learn that there is a strong possibility that pigs were already being domesticated in the Early Jomon period. However, because of little skeletal change in pigs from the Jomon period, it is believed that they were raised in a rather rough manner whereby this somewhat slipshod manner of raising pigs allowed for cross breeding between wild boars and domesticated pigs. The implication of the virtual certainty of the existence of pigs is that the Jomon period was not a time when there was a simple hunting, gathering and fishing economy, but that it was a New Stone Age culture in which dogs and pigs were raised and cultivation of vegetation was used to some degree.