The Existence of Ancient Folkloric Techniques and Their Significance: the “Amu” and “Kumu” Techniques of Braiding

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People in the Jomon Period adopted the two different types of techniques called “kumu” and “amu” (roughly translated as forms of “braiding”) for making containers and other articles using fibrous plant materials. However, the details of the techniques represented by the terms “kumu” and “amu” are generally confused. Thus, in line with the author’s belief that the terms “kumu” and “amu” should reflect the differences of two exact methods, this paper first brings to light the differences between the two techniques. I introduce the different “kumu” techniques such as “yotsuse-kumi”, “ishidatami-kumi”, “gosame(zarume)-kumi”, “tobigozame-kumi”, “kimegozame-kumi”, “mutsume-kumi” and “ajiro-kumi” that can be observed from relics dating from the Jomon Period, and the “amu” techniques of “nawame-ami” and “neko-ami”. I also present examples of relics made using each of these techniques. I also explain that when making containers using these braiding techniques, the bottom part was invariably made first, followed by the sides, and then the opening. I introduce the different techniques for making the bottom part, such as the “ajiro-soko”, “kiku-soko” and “nawameami-soko” techniques and the “tate-shinzai-omoteura-kogo-orikomi”, “nawamekaishi-heri”, “makiheri” and “kaeshimaki-heri” techniques for making the openings. I also provide examples of relics corresponding to each of these techniques.

I then proceed to a discussion on how most of these various Jomon Period techniques using plant materials are found to exist in exactly the same form in examples dating from the Early Modern and Modern Periods and I present examples of folk crafts made using the various techniques. The identical elements found in examples of folk crafts and relics dating from the Jomon Period are no coincidence, but are due to the passing down of each of the techniques over several hundred generations. This is underpinned by the needs of the people over the centuries for containers and other equipment for the collection, transportation, storage and preservation of different types of natural products, including foodstuffs, from the Jomon Period through to the present time, which saw the continuation of the use of natural materials as materials used in their fabrication.