

The Adoption of Horse-Riding in Kofun Japan

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Horses were not native to Japan. Not only did horses have to be imported from the Korean peninsula, but equestrian specialists also had to be invited in order to raise and reproduce horses in Japan. In this paper, the author presents regionally distinctive cases of the introduction of horses to the central highlands of Japan in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. While it is highly likely that the central polity took the initiative to adopt the practice of horse-riding in Japan, the author argues that it was entirely up to local polities how to invite equestrian specialists and import horses from the Korean peninsula in the fifth century. Furthermore, the author suggests the possibility that the central polity in the fifth century was not so powerful to monopolize the diplomatic right that local polities remained so autonomous to maintain their own diplomatic relationships with local polities in the southern Korean peninsula.

A. History of Research

1. EGAMI Namio's 江上波男 proposal of horse-riders theory in 1948
2. To refute EGAMI's hypothesis, researches into horse-trappings progressed since then
3. Researches into horse-trappings skewed toward horse-trappings because bone preservation at archaeological sites in Japan very poor
4. New data, especially horse bones, accumulated since the 1990's

B. Archaeological Discoveries in Shijōnawate 四條畷 City, Osaka

1. Located at the eastern end of the Inland Sea where horses transported from the Korean Peninsula
2. Located near the presumed location of the central polity in the early fifth century
3. At the Shitomiya-Kita 薮屋北 site, horse burial, wooden stirrup, wooden saddle, iron bit, pottery used for salt production (horses fed with sodium), and large quantities of ceramics made with Korean techniques
4. Horse Burial in Moat Enclosing the Kiyotaki 清滝 No. 2 Mound Tomb
5. Horse Burial in by the Moat Enclosing the Saraokayama 更岡山 Mound Tomb

C. Archaeological Discoveries in Iida 飯田 City, Southern Nagano

1. Six horse burials in moats enclosing mound tombs of and one burial in a pit in the Araibara-Takaoka 新井原・高岡 Mound Group (late fifth century)
 2. Four horse burials in pits in and two horse burials in moats enclosing mound tombs of low burial mounds of the Miyagaito 宮垣外 site (late fifth century) (located by a keyhole-shaped mound tomb where iron armor was discovered)
 3. Seven horse burials in moats enclosing a mound tomb and three in pits in the Chagarayama 茶柄山 Mound Tomb Group
 4. Horses buried in moats enclosing or pits by small circular mound tombs or low burial mounds (none associated with keyhole-shaped mound tombs)
 5. Horses not belonged to particular elite individuals but to group of people who were buried in mound tomb group; the group likely to have been equestrian groups invited from the Korean peninsula
 6. Fifth century horse trappings all practical, no prestige goods
- D. Archaeological Discoveries at the Ōmuro 大室 Cairn and Earthen Mound Cluster, Northern Nagano
1. Ceramic horse figurine discovered at the Tomb No. 168 (third quarter of the fifth century); a cairn with very rare vaulted burial chamber
 2. Horse teeth (no other body parts) discovered at the foot of the Tomb No. 186 (end of the sixth century); Possible horse sacrifice by cutting the head off, offered to a mound
 3. Attitude toward horses at Ōmuro very distinctive from those of Shijōnawate and Iida
 4. Possibility of inviting equestrian specialists from the Korean peninsula, independently from the central polity
- E. Implication of the Different Patterns of the Adoption of Horses
1. Early evidence for Korean interaction in northern Nagano
 - a. Characteristic iron sword discovered at Nezuka 根塚(several iron swords of the same type discovered in the Pusan area), dated to the second century, A.D.
 - b. Horse-shaped bronze buckle discovered at Asakawabata 浅川端, dated to the third century
 2. Possibility of the central polity in the fifth and early sixth century not monopolizing diplomatic rights yet
 3. Historically, Iwai, the Lord of Tsukushi 筑紫君磐井, in the early sixth century attempted to establish the diplomatic relationship with Silla