

6. Spirituality in the Jomon Period

6.1 The Jomon heart put into their earthenware

A cultural characteristic of the Middle Jomon Period was the development of special items not commonly used in daily life. Jomon people, in close coexistence with nature, believed in the spiritual existence of all natural things and they worshiped these spirits. Traces of these beliefs can be observed in earthenware ornamentation, earthen figures (dogu), stone rods (sekibo) and other artifacts. A variety of such artifacts has been excavated from the Nagasawa Site.

The common Jomon earthenware is decorated with abstract repetitive patterning. However, Katsusaka type earthenware of the Middle Jomon Period carries naturalistic expressions in its handles and rims. An example of this is the earthenware with handles bearing a human face motif decoration. This earthenware is thought to be deeply connected with ritual and ceremony. The ornamentation might depict a deity or a priest who executed incantations.



Fig.43 Human face motif handle decoration (Katsusaka type, 2th excavation).



Fig.44 Snake motif handle (Katsusaka type, 6th excavation).



Fig.45 Human face motif ornamentation (Katsusaka type, 9th excavation). This is an important example of early Katsusaka type earthenware before the use of three-dimensional handle ornamentation.

Many earthenware vessels with the snake motif ornamentation have been excavated from sites in the Chubu Central Mountain region and the western Kanto Plain. Numerous snake head ornamented earthenware handles featuring triangular head, gaping mouth and piercing eyes have been excavated. This motif is thought to be the viper (*mamushi*). The viper must have been a significant threat to the Jomon people with its fast acting fatal poison. Therefore, the Jomon people might have sought to appease a perceived vital force. They might have decorated their earthenware with its imagery considering it a deity.

6.2 Special tools

In addition to the earthenware with special decorations, other earthenware vessels with perforated rims, earthenware that seem to have been the base or stand for other objects, and miniature earthenware vessels also have been excavated. Several hypotheses exist for earthenware with perforated rims, such as possible use as fermentation vessels or as musical drums. The earthenware base or stand is thought to have been used as tables for manufacturing or for offerings. These earthenware items are thought to have been used for ritual or prayer but not for daily use.



Fig.46 Earthenware base (Katsusaka type, 8th excavation).



Fig.47 Earthenware base (Katsusaka type, 8th excavation).



Fig.48 Earthenware with perforated rim (Katsusaka type, 8th excavation).

The earthen figures (dogu) and stone rods (sekibo) are especially characteristic items among artifacts used for ritual or prayer. The resemblance of the earthen figures to pregnant women indicates that they probably were used to promote safe pregnancy and, through connection with woman's role in procreation, possibly also to promote general prosperity and fruitfulness. The fact that many earthen figures were excavated in a broken state indicates that they might have been purposefully broken in thanks for successful childbirth or broken in a prayer ritual for successful childbirth.



Fig.49 Miniature earthenware (Katsusaka type, 8th excavation).



Fig.50 Stone rod (excavated from No. 2 Site). This stone rod was unearthed when the Tamagawajosui Aqueduct was dug in the Edo Period. Its length is 105 cm. It was found alone, no other artifacts have been found anywhere nearby.



Fig.51 Earthen figure (9th excavation).



Fig.52 Earthen figure (9th excavation).

The stone rod is polished smooth and appears symbolic of male genitalia. It might have served in wishing rituals or prayers for success in hunting or other masculine activities. These stone rods grew larger at the end of the Middle Jomon Period, and they adorned the exterior of the dwelling. Then they became smaller in the Late Jomon Period and adorned the inside of the dwelling.

In the Jomon Period, people used such special objects to pray for productivity or used them to pray for incarnation or regeneration after death. Earthenware vessels buried in the pit-dwelling's floor near the entrance (*maiyo*) are commonly associated with the Kasori E type earthenware (late Middle Jomon Period). The purpose of the *maiyo* is not yet clear, but it is speculated that infant remains, stillborn babies or placenta were placed there in association with rituals for the deceased. There is likely to have been a belief that the dead child's soul would return to its mother's womb as she straddled the burial place, to give rise to new life. Alternatively, the *maiyo* may have been associated with incantations for the healthy growth of children.



Fig. 53 Body ornaments (8th excavation). Body ornaments have been excavated from dwellings. These two are thought to be broken ear decorations reused as neck decorations.



Fig. 54 Earthenware disks. Earthenware disks associated with all Jomon periods have been excavated from numerous locations. They are rounded in shape and variable in size. It is hypothesized that they were either body ornaments or toys.



Fig. 55 Stamp type earthenware (9th excavation). These small earthenware items have a protuberance resembling a stamp's knob, so they are referred to as stamp-type earthenware. They are assumed to be body ornaments, however, their exact purpose is not yet clear.

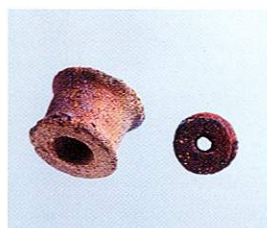


Fig. 56 Earlobe plugs (9th excavation). These are ear decorations shaped like thread spools. They were excavated from dwellings.