

8. Vicissitudes of ancient Japan

8.1 Kofun Construction Period

Kofun were mound tombs of soil and sometimes covered with stone. The burials were either in the top of the mound or chambers entered from the side. Funerary items such as mirrors were buried with the dead. It was a respectful burial method for the deceased. Occupants of the kofun are thought to be regional rulers, and the kofun is thought to have been used as a symbol of the ruler's power. Therefore, the emergence of the kofun indicates the appearance of a ruling class and the coming of a political society. This period is called the Kofun Period to distinguish it from the previous Yayoi Period.

Japanese tumuli, kofun mound tombs were constructed between the 3rd and 7th centuries, and they are distributed from southern Kyushu to central Tohoku. Various types of kofun exist, including round, square, keyhole-shaped (*zenpo-koen*), octagonal and other types. The Kofun Period is divided into three periods, Early, Middle and Late, according to kofun size and burial items. Furthermore, a Nascent Period before the Early Kofun Period and Terminal Period beyond the Late Kofun Period are also recognized.



Fig.61 Inariyama Kofun viewed from Maruhakayama Kofun, Sakitama Kofun Group (Gyoda City, Saitama Prefecture). This kofun is representative of the kofun in the northern Musashi Province (Saitama Prefecture) region. In contrast to the southern Musashi Province (Tokyo and Kanagawa prefectures) region, large scale kofun were constructed only in the northern Musashi region between the 5th and 7th centuries .



Fig.62 Nogeotsuka Kofun (Setagaya-ku, Tokyo). This is a scallop-shaped kofun, 84 m long, and constructed in the early 5th century. From the 6th century, no other such large scale kofun was constructed in the southern Musashi region, and the scale of the kofun diminished steadily.

The Early Kofun Period was mainly the 4th century. Ritual items such as mirrors, jewels and swords were buried in the tombs, indicating that the buried person had some kind of priestly status. The Middle Kofun Period was mainly the 5th century. Tumulus dimensions increased and their distribution widened. Militaristic items such as harnesses and arms were common burial items. The Late Kofun Period roughly spanned the 6th and 7th centuries. Groups of tumuli (*kofun-gun*) with small dimensions are characteristic of this period. The appearance of the tumuli groups indicates that tumulus construction spread to not only entomb rulers but also the wealthy of the region, such as benefactors and prosperous farmers.

8.2 Power conflicts in ancient Musashi Province

The tumuli (*kofun*) of Musashi Province are distributed around two centers: the southern Musashi tumuli, mainly in the lower Tama River basin, such as the Komae Kofun Group, and the northern Musashi tumuli, mainly in the Ara River basin, such as the Sakitama Kofun Group in Gyoda City, Saitama Prefecture. The relationship between these southern and northern kofun groups and the Yamato Government can be viewed as an important element of the

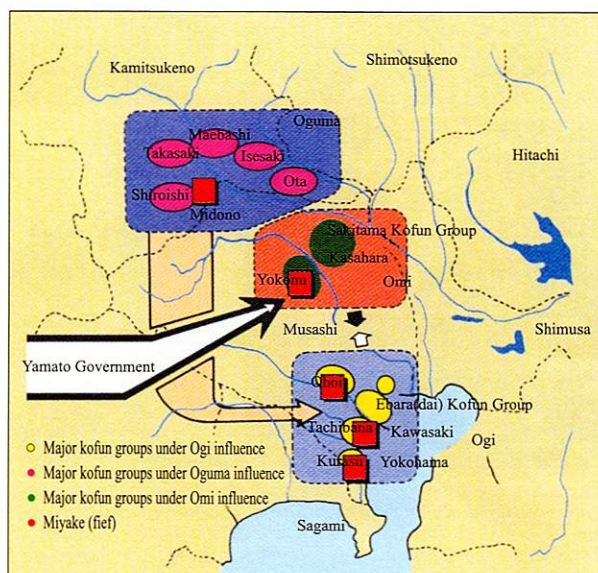


Fig. 63 Figure showing the zones of influence during the *Musashinokuninomiya-suko-no-ran* insurrection (Reference: *Story of Excavations Tokyo Education Committee*). The "*Nihon Shoki*" can be interpreted as describing relationships of kofun groups in the Kanto region. However, these relationships are not clearly explained.

Musashiokuninomiya-suko-no-ran insurrection.

According to the “Nihonshoki,” Musashiokuninomiya-suko Kasahara-no-atai Omi and the Ogi of the same clan came into conflict in A.D. 534 (the first year of Emperor Ankan) because they were aiming for the position of Provincial Miyatsuko (a government post in charge of rituals). The Ogi had disobeyed the Yamato Government by leaguering with the Kamitsukeno-no-kimi Oguma, a baronial family of Kamitsukeno Province (present day Gunma Prefecture) to attack the Omi. In response, the Omi appealed to the Yamato Government for help. This conflict developed into a war between the Kamitsukeno-no-kimi Oguma, a powerful eastern family, and the Yamato Government.

As a result of the rebellion, the Ogi collapsed and the Omi assumed the position of Provincial Miyatsuko. In return for the Yamato Government cooperation, the Omi presented the miyake (fiefs) of Yokonu (near Higashimatsuyama City, Saitama Prefecture), Tachibana (near Kawasaki City, Kanagawa Prefecture), Kurasu (near Yokohama City), and Ohoi to the Yamato Government, putting these fiefs under central government direct control. The present kanji (Chinese characters) for “Tama” are thought to be a corruption of “Ohoi;” therefore, the location of Ohoi is assumed to be the present Tama region. This insurrection reveals something of the relationships between powerful regional families and the Yamato Government.

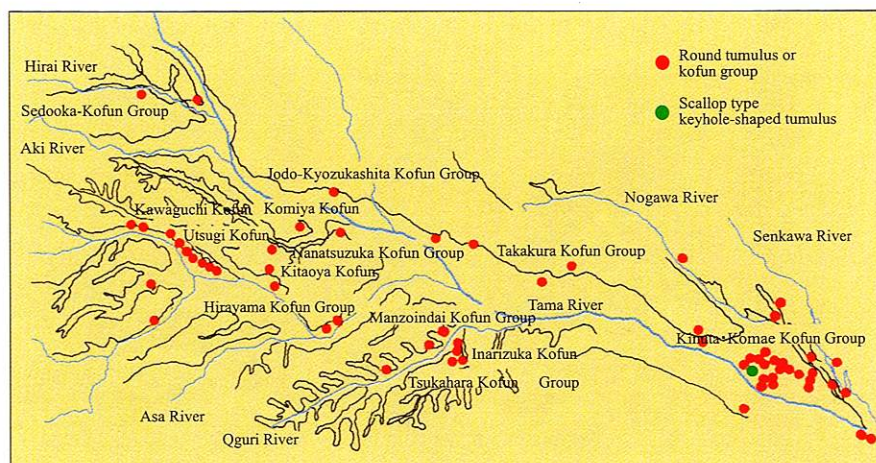


Fig. 64 Kofun tumulus distribution in the Tama River basin (Reference: Setagaya Museum of Local History Book of Illustrations). Tumulus groups were constructed in present day Hino and Fuchu cities in the Tama River basin in the 6th century. Many of them were abandoned after the 7th century. However, some tumulus groups such as the Sedooka Kofun Group of Akiruno City were constructed after that.

Three of the four fiefs given to the central government were in Ogi-dominated southern Musashi Province. The Omi-dominated territories are roughly synonymous with northern Musashi Province. After the 6th century, no large tumuli were constructed in southern Musashi Province, but many tumuli continued to be built in northern Musashi Province, mainly the Sakitama Kofun Group. This suggests that the power of southern Musashi Province integrated with that of northern Musashi Province.

8.3 Mound tombs and daily life in the Tama region

Some large keyhole-shaped (zenpo-koen) kofun tumuli constructed in the 4th and 5th centuries have been found in the lower Tama River basin. On the other hand, smaller and newer kofun tumuli are distributed in the middle and upper Tama River basin. However, no tumuli have been found on the left bank of the Tama River upstream from the Akishima City and Fussa City area. This indicates that no family powerful enough to construct kofun existed in this area.

The large keyhole-shaped (zenpo-koen) kofun tumuli constructed in the lower Tama River basin near Tokyo Bay (but not in the upper Tama River basin) suggest that the force behind the development of agricultural production from the Yayoi Period on came from the Yamato Government via a sea route. The tumuli in this region are likely the tombs of tribal leaders who dominated the lower Tama River basin. However, after the 5th century no large scale keyhole-shaped tumuli were constructed in the lower Tama River basin, and elsewhere



Fig.65 Earthenware excavated from pit-dwelling No. 4 at the Miyagayato Site(Akiruno City). The large quantity of earthenware in the photograph was excavated from the Miyagayato dwelling No. 4. The earthenware pots (kame) and steamers (koshiki) were used for cooking and/or storage, and the plates (tsuki) were used for serving.

tumuli scale declined. In contrast, large scale keyhole-shaped tumuli arose in northern Musashi Province.

Life in the Kofun Period can be presumed from the excavated evidence. Iron sickles, plows and axes were excavated from the Yamanokami Site in Akishima City (on the boundary of Fussa and Akishima cities) and from the many Kofun Period sites in Hachioji City. Clearly, iron products had become part of life. Furthermore, nutrition greatly improved due to the introduction of the cooking stove (*kamado*) and the steam cooking method using earthenware steamers (*koshiki*). Cereals such as wheat and millet, and soybeans, in addition to rice, pulses and vegetables, were consumed. Wild food gathering and fishing continued through from the Jomon Period to meet demand for nutritional variety.



Fig. 66 Dwelling No. 4 excavated at the Miyagayato Site (Akiruno City). The Miyagayato Site is a Kofun Period village. At the neighboring Amema Site, a further 14 large dwellings have been excavated. This dwelling belongs to the Late Kofun Period.