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Source: *Monumenta Nipponica*, Spring, 1999, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 75-110

Published by: Sophia University

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2668274>

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Mirrors on Ancient Yamato

The Kurozuka Kofun Discovery and the Question of Yamatai

WALTER EDWARDS

AT A PRESS conference held on 9 January 1998, archaeologists announced the discovery of a large cache of bronze mirrors at Kurozuka kofun 黒塚古墳, an early keyhole-shaped tomb located in the southeast portion of the Nara basin. The 128-meter mound had been under excavation by the prefectural Kashihara Archaeological Institute 橿原考古学研究所 since August of the previous year; by late October its stone burial chamber yielded the first of what proved to be thirty-four mirrors.¹ Not only were these mirrors, brought to light after more than sixteen centuries, the largest cache to be recovered in recent memory, all but one were examples of the controversial triangular-rimmed style, *sankaku-buchi shinjūkyō* 三角縁神獸鏡, central to much of the debate in recent decades over the location of Yamatai 邪馬台.² As the magnitude of the discovery became clear over the ensuing weeks, word of the find began to circulate among archaeologists and other specialists in the study of ancient Japan, and by year's end some five hundred researchers had come to visit the site. Fearing that more widespread attention would invite looting before the mirrors could be properly excavated, photographed, and mapped *in situ*, the Kashihara Institute informed the various news media of the story in mid-November, and implored them to withhold pub-

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¹ At the time of the initial announcement, only thirty-three mirrors had been found. An additional item, hidden under a layer of rusted weapons, was discovered in early February, bringing the total for the tomb to thirty-four.

² I address the controversy surrounding these mirrors below, building upon my recent treatment of the archaeological dimensions of the Yamatai debate. See Edwards 1996, especially pp. 61–68, for the significance of triangular-rimmed mirrors; for broader treatments of the Yamatai issue, see Farris 1998, chapter 1; and Piggott 1997, chapter 1. It should be noted that I continue here to include under the term “triangular-rimmed mirror” only those items regarded by most Japanese archaeologists as Chinese imports; similar mirrors that were clearly made in Japan are referred to as “domestic imitations.” See Edwards 1996, notes 25–26, for discussions of nomenclature.

lication until formal announcement was made early the following year.³ Having thus learned well in advance of the discovery, the press had ample time to prepare its coverage.

When the story finally broke, it came forth in a flood. Just hours after the mid-day press conference, television networks featured the announcement as the top item on their evening news broadcasts, while major newspapers gave the story front-page coverage the following day. The lead article of the *Asahi shinbun* highlighted the significance of the find as the first discovery of triangular-rimmed mirrors in the birthplace of the Yamato kingdom; it quoted archaeologist Ōtsuka Hatsushige 大塚初重 as declaring that a close link had now been proven between this style of mirror and the ancient Yamato polity.⁴ A feature article took up the possibility that the one hundred mirrors presented Himiko 卑弥呼 by the Wei court in A.D. 238 were of this style.⁵ Posing the question of how the discovery might affect debate over the location of Yamatai, it briefly reported the reactions of scholars supporting the two major candidates, Kinai (archaeologist Kanaseki Hiroshi 金関恕 and historian Naoki Kōjirō 直木孝次郎) and Kyushu (archaeologists Okuno Masao 奥野正男 and Mori Kōichi 森浩一).⁶ A third article introduced the field director of the excavation team, Kawakami Kunihiro 河上邦彦, who five years previously had persuaded officials of Nara prefecture to fund a program of research in the area that led to the current discovery.⁷

The *Yomiuri shinbun* ran a similar series of articles. The *Yomiuri* articles included a two-page presentation of a round-table discussion previously recorded between historian Yamao Yukihisa 山尾幸久 and archaeologists Nishitani Tadashi 西谷正 and Hirose Kazuo 広瀬和雄 that took up the implications of the discovery for understanding not only the location of Yamatai, but also the emergence of

³ The excavators began a series of weekly sessions providing the media with explanations of the progress of the excavation. At these reporters were allowed to view (but not photograph) the site. In addition to their concern for the safety of the finds, the researchers also wanted to avoid having the news media run stories based on rumor or partial information, inviting premature or even groundless conclusions about the significance of the discovery.

⁴ *Asahi shinbun* 1998a.

⁵ In the version presently known, *Wei zhi* 魏志 records that Himiko dispatched envoys in the 6th month of 238. These arrived first at the Chinese outpost of Daifang 帶方 in Korea, then journeyed on to the Chinese capital where they were officially greeted, in the 12th month, with a proclamation announcing the gift of mirrors to Himiko. The earliest Japanese chronicle, *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, excerpting an earlier version of *Wei zhi*, quotes it as saying that the envoys were sent in 239. Many Japanese historians take the 238 date as a mistake and use 239 as the date for the gift to Himiko. See, for example, Yamao 1972, p. 57; and Yasumoto 1987, pp. 35–37.

⁶ *Asahi shinbun* 1998b.

⁷ *Asahi shinbun* 1998c. In addition to these three articles, carried nationwide, the Osaka edition of the *Asahi* ran several other stories. These included an essay previously solicited from the director of the Kashihara Institute, Higuchi Takayasu 樋口隆康, a review of the debate from the Edo period over the location of Yamatai, a survey of the tombs in the area surrounding Kurozuka and their archaeological significance, an article giving the reaction of local residents to the discovery, and an item conveying the speculations of specialists as to the historical identity of the tomb's occupant.

the ancient Japanese state within the wider context of East Asian history.⁸ Another article discussed the possible identity of the tomb's occupant. From the size of the tomb it speculated that he was perhaps "an official of the next-to-highest rank" in the early Yamato hierarchy; it also estimated the likelihood of his connections to one or another personage mentioned in *Wei zhi* 魏志 or *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀.⁹ Weekly magazines also covered the discovery extensively, with the *Sandē mainichi* producing a special issue devoted to articles such as the above, plus photographs of the site and the objects excavated from it.¹⁰

Extensive as it was, the media's coverage did not lack an appreciative audience. Indeed, the strength of public interest in ancient history, particularly in connection with the Yamatai issue, had been integral to the excavation from the start. Kawakami's success in obtaining research funds from the prefecture had been based on the argument that the project would help make "the romance of ancient history" accessible to citizens. He also explained the decision to leave the mirrors *in situ* for public viewing, rather than remove them to the safety of the lab one by one as they emerged, as a return to the taxpayers for the monies spent on research.¹¹ While this move prolonged the period of precaution for the safety of the mirrors, it paid off in terms of public response. The schedule for the viewing, set for the weekend of 17–18 January 1998, was announced along with initial reports of the find in nationwide television and newspaper stories, and a total of 10,000 visitors were anticipated over the two-day period. The excavators prepared the site for the onslaught, erecting a platform around three sides of the 8.3 meter-long stone chamber from which visitors could look down upon the finds as they walked past. Japan Railways announced a temporary increase in service to the nearby station of Yanagimoto 柳本 for the weekend.

The turnout far exceeded expectations. Although a torrential rainstorm forced cancellation of the event at noon on Sunday, on the previous day visitors had begun to arrive at the site as early as 6:30 A.M., and by 10:30 they formed a line that reportedly stretched more than a kilometer through the old village of Yanagimoto. Those who finally reached the viewing area by 1:30 that afternoon had waited in line more than three hours, only to move past the burial chamber in a matter of minutes. When viewing ended at 6:30 on Saturday, over 16,000 visitors had signed the register sheets set out by the excavation team. Fortunately, local residents had been given a chance to see the finds the day before, and the 5,600 who showed up on Friday brought the two-day total to more than 21,000. It was easily the biggest event in the town's modern history.¹²

⁸ *Yomiuri shinbun* 1998a.

⁹ *Yomiuri shinbun* 1998b. Based on the presence of armor and weaponry, and the absence of jewelry, it was concluded early on that the occupant was a man.

¹⁰ This supplementary issue, dated 4 March 1998, was titled "Himiko no kagami sankakubuchi shinjūkyō: Nara, Kurozuka kofun ga izanau Yamataikoku" 卑弥呼の鏡三角縁神獸鏡: 奈良・黒塚古墳がいざなう邪馬台国.

¹¹ *Asahi shinbun* 1998c.

¹² *Asahi shinbun* 1998i. In the interest of turning archaeological research to the service of public

It goes without saying that the discovery was also a big event in the study of early Japan, with implications for understanding the emergence of the ancient Yamato state and its relation to the elusive polity of Yamatai. These issues have recently been the focus of considerable archaeological activity in the southeastern portion of the Nara basin. The purpose of this article is to set the Kurozuka find into the context of these investigations, and to attempt from this perspective a preliminary assessment of its meaning for research on ancient Japan.

Background: The Geographic and Archaeological Contexts

Now serving as the nucleus of a small municipal park, in normal times Kurozuka occupies a quiet setting in the rural community of Yanagimoto, which was incorporated into the modern city of Tenri upon the latter's creation in 1954. During the Edo period, the tomb and its moats formed part of the headquarters of Yanagimoto han, a minor fief of 10,000 koku awarded in 1600 to Oda Nobunaga's younger brother Nagamasu 長益 for meritorious service at Sekigahara. This was ceded in 1615 to the latter's son Naonaga 尚長, in whose line it remained until the Meiji Restoration. The area's historic roots run far deeper, however. In medieval times Yanagimoto formed part of a manor held by Kōfukuji 興福寺, dating at least back to the late eleventh century, and the surrounding area reflects the even earlier impact on the landscape of the ritsuryō order. The main road through the village still follows the path of the Kamitsumichi 上ツ道, the easternmost of the three roads that by the late seventh century had been built in parallel down the length of the Nara basin. Integral to the plans of the Fujiwara 藤原 (694–710) and Heijō 平城 (710–784) capitals (figure 1, inset), these roads also served as a framework for the *jōri* 条理 field system, whose traces remain visible in the area.¹³

Prior even to this time, an earlier Yamato polity—often written Yamato *seiken*

education, sites are frequently opened to viewing. Newspapers regularly announce such viewings, known as *genchi setsumeikai* 現地説明会, when they run articles covering a local excavation. The viewing may be held on one day or two. The entire excavation team, often with the help of university students hired just for the day, takes on the tasks of registering the visitors, providing them with photocopied materials on the site, and escorting them safely around the excavation area. “Gen-setsu,” as they are commonly referred to by archaeologists, are normally held toward the end of the excavation period, when the results of the excavation are basically known and its significance can be readily summed up for the visitors, the bulk of whom are typically senior citizens.

The total of over 21,000 for two days for the Kurozuka site exceeds the pace set by the previous archaeological “happening”—the “fever” generated by the Yayoi site of Yoshinogari in 1989, which received 1.7 million visitors in the space of six months (see Hudson and Barnes 1991, p. 52). It is doubtful that Kurozuka would have continued to draw crowds at the same rate had it been open for a longer period. But the difference in scale between the two sites nevertheless underscores the extraordinary level of interest in the find: whereas Yoshinogari spreads over twenty-five hectares, the 21,000 who saw the burial chamber at Kurozuka in just two days paraded through a viewing area smaller than a tennis court.

¹³ *Tenri-shi shi*, pp. 27–28, 75–78, 182–201. These roads appear in *Nihon shoki*'s account of the Jinshin War of 672, and thus were presumably built by that time, in conjunction with the institution of the *jōri* field system in the region.

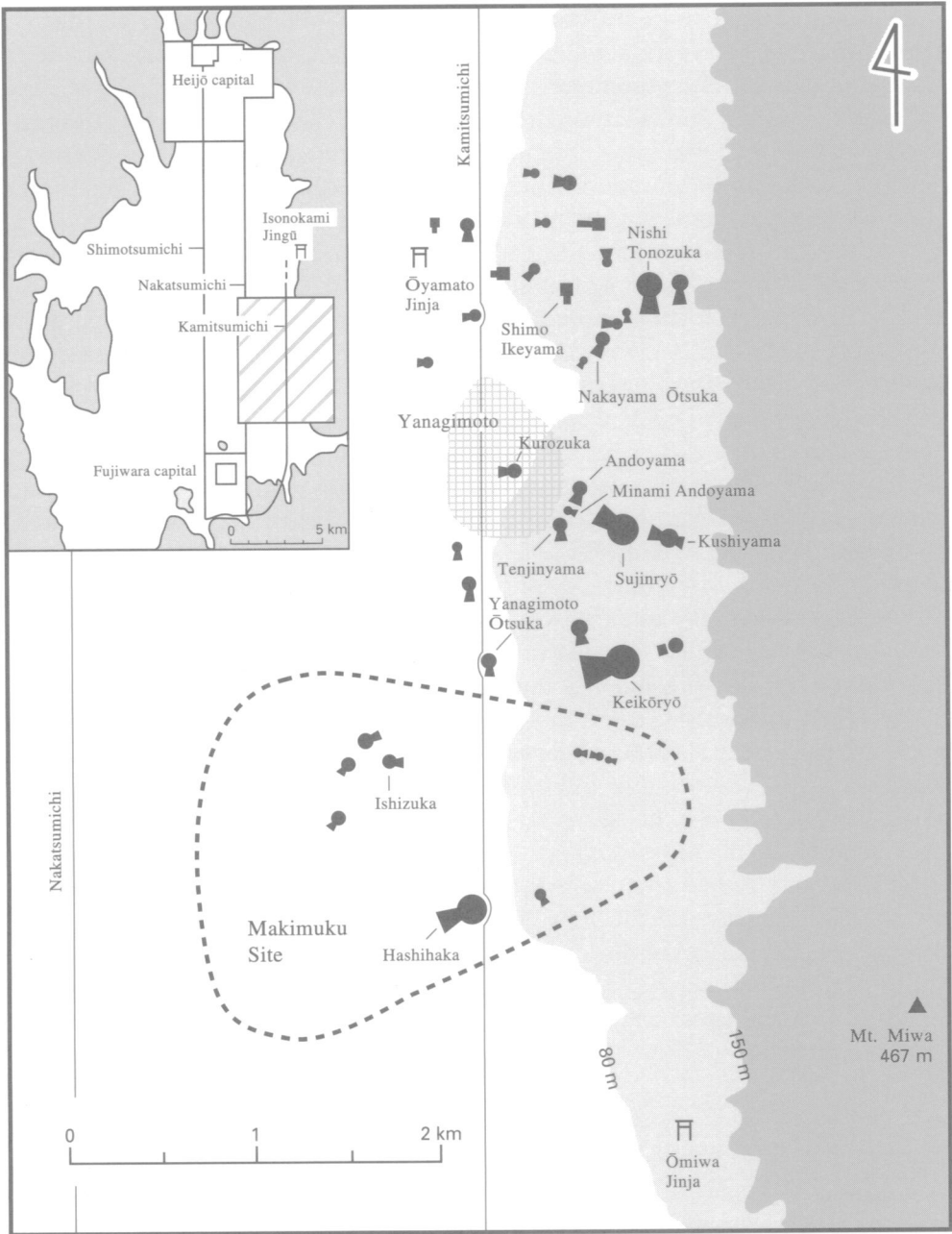


Figure 1. Southeast portion of the Nara basin.

ヤマト政権 to differentiate it from the Yamato court (Yamato *chōtei* 大和朝廷) of the ritsuryō order—emerged in the region lying between the southern half of the Kamitsumichi and the mountains on the basin's eastern rim (figure 1). Here an older road, the Yamanobe no michi 山辺の道, linked the important early religious centers of Ōmiwa Jinja 大神神社 to the south and Isonokami Jingū 石上神宮 to the north; in between lie the more than forty keyhole tombs of the Ōyamato 大和 tomb group,¹⁴ including four with colossal mounds over 200 m in length and an additional eighteen with mounds exceeding 100 meters. The majority of these tombs date from the Early Kofun period, making this the most important concentration of early keyhole mounds anywhere in Japan. Among these, Sujinryō 崇神陵 kofun (242 m long) is designated as the grave of the tenth emperor and Keikōryō 景行陵 kofun (300 m) as that of the twelfth, both said in *Nihon shoki* to have been buried in mausolea lying on the Yamanobe no michi.¹⁵ To the south of these two lies the 280-meter Hashihaka 箸墓 kofun, considered on the basis of its shape and the style of pottery found in association with it to be the earliest of the colossal tombs. According to *Nihon shoki*, this is the grave of Yamatototohimomoso Hime no Mikoto 倭迹迹日百襲姫命, a great-aunt of Sujin who is said in myth to have married the deity of Mt. Miwa, Ōmononushi no Kami 大物主神. This is one of the many links between the reign of Sujin and Mt. Miwa recorded in the early texts. They have led modern scholars to assign the name of Miwa court to the dynasty presumably founded by this sovereign, traces of which are evidenced by the many early tombs concentrated in the area.

The vicinity near Hashihaka has also received attention in recent decades for archaeological evidence that may shed light on the emergence of this polity. The 90-meter Ishizuka 石塚 kofun, lying less than a kilometer northwest of Hashihaka, is possibly the oldest tomb in Yamato. Three adjacent mounds are similar to Ishizuka in size and share with it a shape in which the rectangular portion of the mound is greatly foreshortened. It is thought that they may represent a transitional stage in the evolution of the keyhole structure from earlier mounded tombs of the Yayoi period.¹⁶ Stretching north from Hashihaka is the Makimuku 纏向 site, covering an extensive area more than two kilometers across. Although there is no evidence of an earlier major Yayoi community in the vicinity, pot-

¹⁴ The name of this group is taken from Ōyamato Jinja 大和神社, located to the north of Yanagimoto, the founding of which is described in the annals for Emperor Sujin 崇神 in *Nihon shoki*. At times these tombs are treated as three separate groups, with Ōyamato used narrowly to refer only to the northernmost. I follow Kawakami's suggestion, however, that it be used in the wider sense to include all the tombs in this area. See *Shimo Ikeyama, Nakayama Ōtsuka gaihō*, p. 35.

¹⁵ The current designations of these two tombs were made in 1865. Prior to that time, the bakufu had treated these mounds in precisely the opposite fashion, with Sujinryō being regarded as Keikō's tomb and Keikōryō as Sujin's. See Ōmi 1993, p. 90. Because so many of the designations for imperial tombs are questionable, many Japanese archaeologists prefer terms incorporating local place names, such as Andonyama 行燈山 kofun for Sujinryō, and Shibutani Mukaiyama 渋谷向山 kofun for Keikōryō.

¹⁶ See Terasawa and Chiga 1990, pp. 89–95; Piggott 1997, pp. 29–30.

tery recovered during excavations conducted in the 1970s indicates extensive settlement from the third through the sixth centuries. A high proportion, more than 15 percent, of the pottery, moreover, has been identified as originating from outside the local region, a phenomenon as yet unknown for any other site from the first part of the Kofun period. The imported pottery, which consists mostly of cooking pots, came from as far as southern Kanto and the western end of the Setouchi region; it is suggested that these items were brought by workers assembled to help build the early large keyhole tombs. The site's sudden appearance in the area, similar in this regard to the Fujiwara and Heijō capitals, has fostered suggestions that Makimuku functioned as an administrative center for the Miwa court.¹⁷

Kurozuka is part of a cluster of six large keyhole mounds, all from the Early Kofun period, centering on Sujinryō. The easternmost of this group, Kushiyama 櫛山 kofun (150 m), presents an unusual shape in which rectangular platforms jut out from opposite sides of a central round portion. Excavated early in the postwar period, it is judged to be the newest in this group, dating perhaps to the late fourth century.¹⁸ Sujinryō, which remains unexcavated owing to its designation as an imperial tomb,¹⁹ is regarded as dating from the first part of the fourth century, based on its shape and pottery recovered from the surface of the mound. Andoyama アンド山 kofun (120 m) and Minami Andoyama 南アンド山 kofun (66 m), lying northwest and west of Sujinryō, are designated as *baizuka* 陪塚, or subsidiary tombs, of the latter. They accordingly are under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Household Agency and remain unexcavated.

Tenjinyama 天神山 kofun (113 m), located just west and slightly south of Sujinryō, was excavated in 1960 when part of the mound was destroyed during construction of a roadway, exposing a stone chamber in the round portion of the keyhole. Investigators discovered the remains of a rectangular wooden box, approximately 1.4 m long, containing 41 kg of cinnabar. Twenty bronze mirrors lay neatly arranged around the perimeter of the box, and three more were placed just outside this group. No evidence was found of a human burial associated with these objects, raising the possibility that the stone chamber, and perhaps the mound itself, had been built to house a cache of precious goods. Examples are

¹⁷ Ishino 1990; Terasawa and Chiga 1990, pp. 82–89. For a description of this site in English, see Barnes 1988, pp. 12–14, 136–68, 426–28.

¹⁸ Although the burial chamber had been badly disturbed, several pieces of a composite *nagamochigata* 長持型 stone coffin were found (*Kushiyama kofun*, p. 104). Stone coffins began to appear in the latter part of the Early Kofun period, and are a newer development than the type of long wooden coffin, made of a single log split in half, used at Kurozuka, Nakayama Ōtsuka 中山大塚, and Shimo Ikeyama 下池山.

¹⁹ It is misleading to state that no excavations at all are conducted on tombs designated as imperial mausolea. The Imperial Household Agency excavates in areas where repairs are undertaken, usually limited to the moats and embankments of the mounds. In response to repeated requests from the Japanese Archaeological Association and other academic organizations, since 1979 the Agency has regularly informed scholars in advance of these investigations, and has allowed limited inspections of the sites.

known elsewhere of subsidiary mounds that served as repositories for grave goods only. For this reason Tenjinyama was regarded by its excavators as a *baizuka* of Sujinryō that, unlike Andoyama and Minami Andoyama, had escaped designation as such.²⁰

The twenty-three mirrors recovered from Tenjinyama are noted for the high proportion of imported mirrors of two Late Han period styles, *hōkaku kikukyō* 方格規矩鏡, or “TLV” mirrors (six examples), and *naikō kamonkyō* 内行花文鏡 (four examples). The former are named for the central square (*hōkaku*) of the design, around which are placed geometric figures likened to a draftsman’s ruler and compass (tools collectively referred to as *kiku*), with the ruler assuming the shape of a “T” and the compass that of a “V” or an “L,” depending on the orientation. *Naikō kamonkyō* bear a star-shaped pattern formed by a series of inward-facing arcs transecting the perimeter of a circle (see figure 6 for a domestically produced mirror carrying this design). The tomb also contained imported *gamontai shinjūkyō* 画文帶神獸鏡 (four examples) and *gazōkyō* 画像鏡 (two examples), produced from the end of the Late Han and into the Wei period. The former, belonging to the broader class of deity-and-beast mirrors (*shinjūkyō*) discussed below, are distinguished by a wide band near the perimeter, featuring small representations of animals, deities, or abstract designs, and referred to as the *gamontai* (image band). *Gazōkyō* share many of the images of the *shinjūkyō* group, but these designs are presented in flat relief, and thereby resemble the stone murals (*gazōseki* 画像石) known from Late Han tombs and mortuary temples.

The sixteen imported mirrors, forming the core of a cache of twenty-three, were a remarkable find in themselves. But the most striking aspect of the Tenjinyama discovery was the lack of triangular-rimmed mirrors,²¹ a style generally prominent among the grave goods of early keyhole tombs. At the time of the Tenjinyama investigation, more than two hundred had been found from Kyushu to Kanto, with Kinki having the largest share at nearly 60 percent of the total.²² But the forty-seven triangular-rimmed mirrors then known for Kyoto out-

²⁰ *Tenjinyama kofun*, pp. 11–12, 40–41, 69–74.

²¹ The Tenjinyama find did include two mirrors regarded at the time of the discovery as variant forms (変形) of the triangular-rimmed style (*Tenjinyama kofun*, pp. 18, 28). Both are small (17.2 and 17.4 centimeters in diameter), with highly abbreviated images of deity and beast figures. Recent inventories include them as domestic imitations of the triangular-rimmed style (*Rekihaku dai 56 shū*, pp. 370–73) or, taking them as too divergent, do not list them as triangular-rimmed mirrors at all (Maizō Bunkazai Kenkyūkai 1994).

²² Of 215 imported mirrors of this type recovered prior to 1960, 57.7 percent were found in Kinki, versus only 13.5 percent for Kyushu, 1.4 for Shikoku, 14.0 for Chūgoku, 8.8 for Chūbu, and 4.7 for Kanto. Data are from Maizō Bunkazai Kenkyūkai 1994 and *Rekihaku dai 56 shū*.

In 1994, when both of the above inventories were published, the total number of mirrors of all styles recovered from Kofun-period contexts was listed as 3,675 (*Rekihaku dai 56 shū*, p. 2). At 348 items, imported triangular-rimmed mirrors accounted for nearly one-tenth of this total. These included 329 mirrors that were either whole, or complete enough for a detailed description of the pattern, plus an additional 19 fragments identifiable only as of the triangular-rimmed style. Domes-

numbered the thirty-four from Nara; moreover, none of the latter had been found in the sector lying between Mt. Miwa and Isonokami Jingū. The Tenjinyama find strengthened the impression that triangular-rimmed mirrors, whose distribution has served as basis for pro-Yamato arguments in much of the postwar debate over the location of Yamatai, ironically were not to be found in the birthplace of the ancient Yamato polity itself.

Sankakubuchi Shinjūkyō and the Yamatai Debate

It will be helpful at this point to take a closer look at triangular-rimmed mirrors and their role in recent debate over the location of Yamatai. Specifically, I will briefly review the distributional argument developed by Kyoto University archaeologist Kobayashi Yukio 小林行雄 and mention some of the criticisms made in response to it, including the tangential claim that the mirrors might not be of Chinese manufacture as commonly assumed.²³ In an attempt to explain why most Japanese archaeologists find the criticisms unconvincing, I will then describe in some detail this category of mirrors and the typological studies that have been made of them.

Triangular-rimmed mirrors are distinguished from other imported styles first by the distinctive triangular cross section of the rim (figure 2b, circle), and second by their large and highly uniform size, averaging 22.3 cm in diameter, with more than 90 percent of known examples falling between 21.0 and 25.0 cm (figure 3).²⁴ Another remarkable characteristic of these mirrors, less frequent in other styles, is the manufacture of sets of duplicates from a single mold, or with molds made from a single model. Members of a single set, currently known to number as many as nine items, are commonly found in different tombs, often in widely separated regions.

The distributions of these mirrors, Kobayashi argued, cannot be explained through random factors alone.²⁵ In certain tombs triangular-rimmed mirrors constitute an extremely high proportion of the total assemblage of mirrors found as grave goods: at Tsubai Ōtsukayama 椿井大塚山 kofun, just outside the Nara basin in southern Kyoto, all but four of thirty-six mirrors were triangular-rimmed items.²⁶ This tomb, moreover, shares multiple duplicate sets with other tombs:

tic imitations numbered 118 items identifiable to the level of specific pattern, plus fragments of two others.

Adding the Kurozuka finds to the 1994 data, and counting only the 344 mirrors (excluding fragments) whose prefectural provenance is known, the current breakdown by region is: 12.5 percent for Kyushu, 2.9 for Shikoku, 10.8 for Chūgoku, 56.7 for Kinki, 12.8 for Chūbu, and 4.4 for Kanto. Nara now has the most items, at 75, followed by Kyoto with 54, and Hyōgo with 36.

²³ The following summarizes the arguments presented in Edwards 1996, pp. 61–68.

²⁴ Data are from Maizō Bunkazai Kenkyūkai 1994 and *Rekihaku dai 56 shū*.

²⁵ Kobayashi 1961. An annotated and slightly abridged translation of this work appears as Edwards 1995.

²⁶ Kyōdai Kōkōgaku Kenkyūshitsu 1992. For a brief English account of the find, see Tanaka 1992.

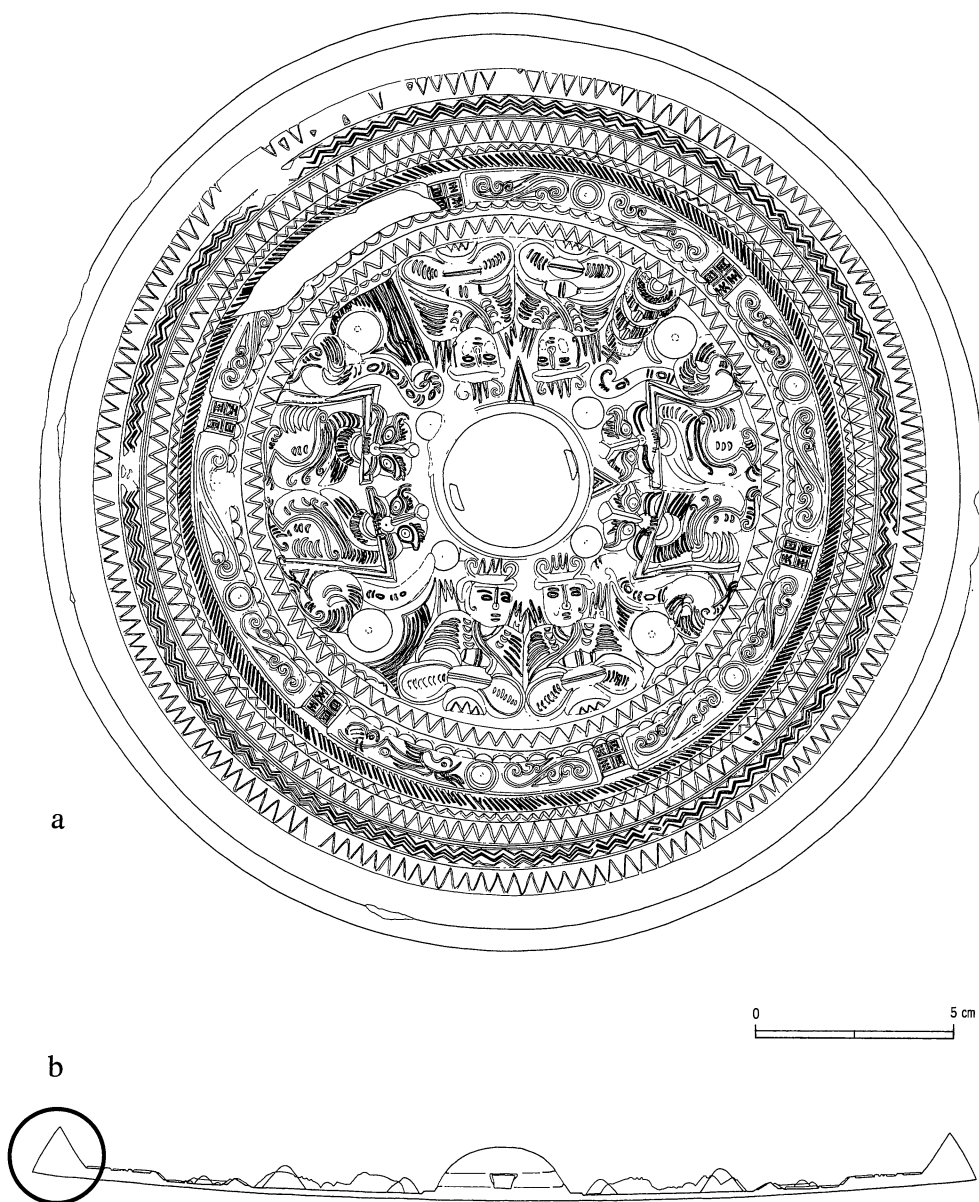


Figure 2. Triangular-rimmed mirror: (a) decoration on back, (b) cross-section.
Source: *Yukinoyama kofun*, p. 99.

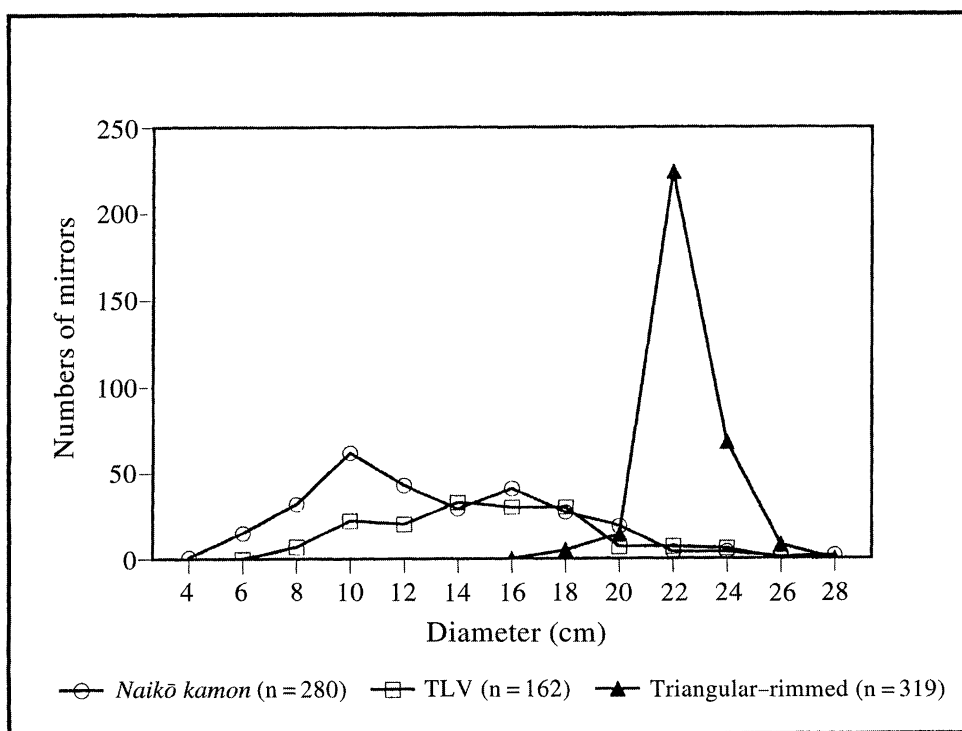


Figure 3. Diameters of imported mirrors.

two different sets in six cases and three different sets in three cases (figure 4).²⁷ If the sharing by two tombs of mirrors from a single set was taken to be a chance occurrence, Kobayashi argued, the sharing of multiple sets could be explained only by assuming repeated occurrences of the same random coincidence. Rejecting this as implausible, he sought to explain the mirrors' distribution as reflecting social relations. He started from the premise that these mirrors were obtained by Yamatai through the diplomatic exchanges with Wei begun in the late 230s, and included not only the initial hundred mirrors recorded as the Wei court's gift to Himiko, but additional numbers secured through envoys sent subsequently by Himiko and her successor. The central polity conferred the several hundred mirrors thus obtained on regional chiefs as part of a process of alliance building that led to the initial Yamato-centered confederation, or the early Yamato polity. The concentration of triangular-rimmed mirrors in the Kinai region was consequently

²⁷ Tsubai Ōtsukayama is seen in figure 4 to share sets 9, 16, and 56 with Bizen Kurumazuka 備前車塚; 16, 21, and 26 with Gongenyama 権現山 No. 51; 25, 35, and 37 with Nishi Motomezuka 西求女塚. Set numbers are those used in the triangular-rimmed mirror inventories listed in Kyōdai Kōkōgaku Kenkyūshitsu 1992 and Maizō Bunkazai Kenkyūkai 1994.

evidence that Yamatai was none other than Yamato; the chief buried in the Tsubai Ōtsukayama tomb was doubtless a key figure in this process, hence the high proportion of triangular-rimmed mirrors recovered there.

Critics of this line of argument have questioned whether the hundred mirrors given Himiko shortly after the end of the Han dynasty were actually of the triangular-rimmed style. Although the oldest examples of this type of mirror indeed bear Wei dynasty dates of 239 and 240, Mori Kōichi, for one, has asserted it is more reasonable to assume that Late Han styles were still predominant at the Wei court at the time of Himiko's embassy, just twenty years after the fall of the Han dynasty. Whereas Yamato may lead in the numbers of triangular-rimmed mirrors recovered archaeologically, mirrors of Late Han styles such as *naikō kamon* and *hōkaku kiku* are more numerous in Late Yayoi sites of northern Kyushu. More importantly, while the triangular-rimmed mirrors are widely regarded as Wei products, it is also commonly recognized that no examples have been recovered in China. Focusing on this point, and arguing from his own readings of the inscriptions found on some mirrors excavated in Japan, Chinese archaeologist Wang Zhongshu 王仲殊 has argued that the mirrors were made in Japan by itinerant Chinese artisans, and thus not connected with the Wei dynasty at all.

Even if such assertions have merit, and the so-called "imported" triangular-rimmed mirrors were indeed produced domestically, their Yamato-centered distribution would still point to the preeminence of that region at the time these items were acquired by the chiefs in whose keyhole-shaped tombs they were buried. Those tombs themselves are symbols of authority whose diffusion outward from the Yamato region is beyond doubt. Accordingly, the locus of the mirrors' production is arguably a false issue. If the age of the keyhole tombs can be placed back to the mid-third century, as some now suggest, they point to Yamato's dominance at the time of the diplomatic exchanges with Wei and further strengthen claims that it was indeed the location of Yamatai. Most pro-Yamato archaeologists, moreover, are hardly ready to cede the issue of the mirrors' production to those who claim they could not have been manufactured in China. An understanding of their position requires more detailed examination of the stylistic features of the mirrors themselves, and of studies made regarding their evolution.

As previously noted, triangular-rimmed mirrors can be differentiated from other imported styles by a number of characteristics, namely, the shape of the rim, the standardization in size, and the high incidence of same-mold duplicates. At the same time, they belong to the broader class of *shinjūkyō*, or deity-and-beast mirrors, and as such share with other styles of this class a set of images, used to decorate the non-reflecting side of the mirror, drawn from Chinese philosophical tradition. These include the parental yin-yang deities Dongwangfu (Jp. Tōōfu 東王父, King Father of the East) and Xiwangmu (Jp. Seiōbo 西王母, Queen Mother of the West), the mythic Lute Player, Boya (Jp. Hakuga 伯牙), and beasts associated with the spirit realm, especially the dragon-and-tiger pair, *longhu* (Jp.

ryūko 龍虎). Nishida Morio 西田守夫 has argued that the central theme of deity-and-beast mirrors is the harmonization of yin and yang through Boya's lute-playing, a theme he traces back to examples found in China that bear dates from the second century A.D.²⁸ In these early mirrors, the parental yin-yang deities are often clearly labeled with inscriptions and differentiated by their styles of head-dress. Attempts to distinguish the two are seen only in early examples of the triangular-rimmed style, however, and differences in the dragon/tiger pair also tend to dissolve over time, leaving only a single type of image for depicting a "deity," and similarly, only one for "beast."²⁹

Considerable variation is observed, on the other hand, in the arrangements of these and other images on the back of triangular-rimmed mirrors. As seen in figure 2a, inside the triangular rim lie several concentric bands of sawtooth, wavy-line, and slanted comb-tooth decorations; adjacent to these is the "design" band (*moyōtai* 模様帯 or *mon'yōtai* 文様帯), containing in this case a series of arabesque patterns, a narrow sawtooth band, and an inner sector bearing the deity-and-beast design. Four knob-like projections, called *nyū* 乳 ("breasts"), are located in equidistant fashion near the outside perimeter of this sector, dividing it into quadrants; each quadrant contains a pair of figures, alternately deities or beasts, yielding the basic "four-deity/four-beast" *shishin shijū* 四神四獸 pattern.

Deity figures are nearly always depicted as seen here, seated and facing forward, while the beasts are shown with their bodies in profile. In this particular arrangement, the one most commonly encountered, each pair of beast images sits face-to-face. In another four-deity/four-beast arrangement, one of the beast pairs is depicted sitting back-to-back. Still other four/four arrangements were achieved by placing one deity and one beast in each of the four quadrants, and by varying the order in which the two sit (deity always on the left, deity always on the right, deity alternately on the left and right) or the directions faced by the beasts (all facing right, or facing alternately left and right). Substituting a beast for a deity in the basic four/four composition yielded a three-deity/five-beast arrangement, while increasing or decreasing the numbers of deities and/or beasts in any given sector produced five-deity/four-beast, four-deity/two-beast, three-deity/two-beast, and other combinations. Further variation resulted from increasing the number of *nyū* to six, and alternating single deity and beast figures in the subsequent sectors to give a number of three-deity/three-beast arrangements, with differences produced by varying the directional orientation of the beasts.

Kobayashi Yukio systematically classified these deity-and-beast arrangements, numbering twenty-four in all, and attempted to correlate their variation with differences in the decoration band.³⁰ Sometimes sawtooth or wavy-line decorations were substituted for the arabesque pattern seen in figure 2a, or sometimes it was

²⁸ Nishida 1968. The mirrors Nishida points to are of the *kanjōnyū shinjūkyō* 環状乳神獸鏡 style, considered to be the oldest among the various types of *shinjūkyō*.

²⁹ Kishimoto 1989, p. 6.

³⁰ Kobayashi 1976.

supplanted by a series of small figures of animals and/or imaginary beasts. In other instances, artisans filled part or all of this band with an inscription.³¹ Kobayashi had but limited success in formulating a coherent typology of the mirrors' development that combined such differences with the variation observed in the deity-and-beast arrangements. Building on his pioneering efforts, however, Kishimoto Naofumi 岸本直文 added a focus on stylistic characteristics of the deity and beast figures. Kishimoto argued that these traits were more durable: an artisan or workshop might have switched from one deity-and-beast arrangement to another as fashions changed, but still have employed the same artistic conventions in their portrayal of the figures. Based on his identification and analysis of over a dozen different artistic styles (three examples of which are depicted in figure 5, a–c), Kishimoto concluded that 80 percent of the imported triangular-rimmed mirrors were made by three groups of artisans. Coexisting and mutually influencing each other, these had started from the basic four-deity/four-beast pattern, derived from older deity-and-beast styles (*gamontai shinjūkyō* and *gazōkyō*), and had developed the variety of arrangements discussed above.³² In extending this analysis to domestic imitations of the triangular-rimmed style, Kishimoto significantly notes a decline in the level of skill of the portrayals of deities and beasts in these items (figure 5d) compared to the imported mirrors from which these motifs were derived. If the so-called “imported” mirrors were actually made in Japan by itinerant Chinese artisans, as has been suggested, it must be explained why their expertise was not passed on to the indigenous artisans who carried on the tradition of making triangular-rimmed mirrors.

In a recent treatment of the question where triangular-rimmed mirrors were produced, Okamura Hidenori 岡村秀典 addresses the strongest basis for arguments that they could not have been made in northern China—namely, that no examples of these mirrors have been discovered there.³³ Okamura points to a type of deity-and-beast mirror having a rim rising less prominently than in true triangular-rimmed examples, and thus often called *shaen* 斜縁 (slant-rimmed) *shinjūkyō*. These mirrors are found in the region known in Han and Wei times as Xuzhou 徐州, extending from southern Shangdong 山東 to northern Jiangsu 江蘇 provinces. One example from Shangdong strongly resembles a mirror excavated from Tōnomiya 東之宮 kofun in Aichi prefecture that bears an early deity-

³¹ It has long been common, accordingly, to indicate the contents of the decoration band, along with the number of deities and beasts, when referring to any particular mirror. The mirror in figure 2 is described as a *karakusa montai shishin shijūkyō* 唐草文帶四神四獸鏡 (“arabesque decoration band four-deity/four-beast mirror”). When the decoration band is filled with an inscription, typically beginning with an identification of the mirror’s maker, it is customary to include the first two or three characters of the inscription: *Chōshi saku sanshin gojūkyō* 張氏作三神五獸鏡 (“three-deity/five-beast mirror, made by Chō” [Ch. Zhang]). Opinion divides as to whether this should be interpreted as the name of the artisan or the patron who ordered the mirror. See Kobayashi 1976, pp. 332–24.

³² Kishimoto 1989, pp. 30–33.

³³ Okamura 1998.

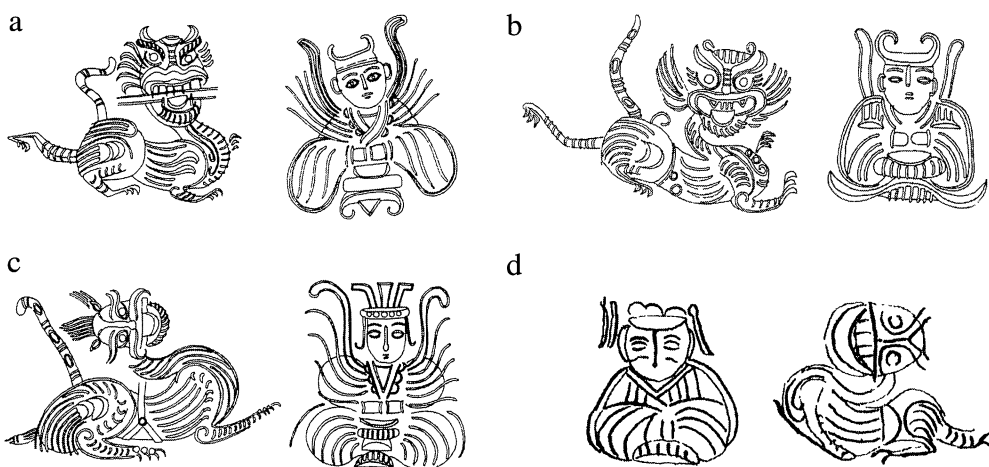


Figure 5. Stylistic variation in deity and beast images on triangular-rimmed mirrors: (a-c) imported mirrors, (d) domestic imitations. Sources: a-c, Kishimoto 1989, pp. 8-9; d, Ichinose 1995, p. 95.

and-beast configuration,³⁴ and also differentiates the parental yin-yang deities and the dragon and tiger figures. Clearly an early instance in the evolution of the triangular-rimmed design, the Tōnomiya mirror is classed as *sankakubuchi shinjūkyō* in various inventories of mirrors published in Japan.³⁵ If this is a triangular-rimmed mirror, Okamura asserts, then so is the Shangdong example, which was surely made by the same artisan or workshop. Okamura prefers to class both as “slant-rimmed” mirrors, thus avoiding the apparent contradiction with the standard claim that no triangular-rimmed finds are known from China.

Regardless of the label employed, the Shangdong mirror is significant corroborating evidence for a northern Chinese derivation of the triangular-rimmed style. Compared to the earliest, or perhaps transitional, stage represented by these slant-rimmed examples, the later development of this style, Okamura holds, was marked by a degeneration in which the philosophical element of *shinjūkyō* was diluted. While the deity and beast figures retained their identity as products of an earlier Chinese worldview, the overall composition was lost: the deities became replicas of each other, as did the beasts, and the basic four/four composition devolved into a plethora of improvisations. Whereas critics such as Wang Zhongshu have argued that the *sankakubuchi* mirrors were made (in Japan) by

³⁴ This is a *jūretsushiki* 重列式 arrangement, in which the figures are placed in several rows drawn horizontally across the mirror’s surface. This arrangement precedes the development of the centripetal one seen in figure 2a, in which the images are all oriented with their heads pointed towards the mirror’s center.

³⁵ Okamura cites a compilation by Higuchi Takayasu; the mirror is also listed as of the triangular-rimmed style in *Rekihaku dai 56 shū*, and is included in the triangular-rimmed mirror inventory, Maizō Bunkazai Kenkyūkai 1994.

artisans from the southern Wu 吳 kingdom, where the *shinjūkyō* tradition was stronger than in the north,³⁶ Okamura asserts they are too shoddy to be the work of true professionals. Rather, they are best regarded as second-rate goods fabricated in response to the need to make large numbers of mirrors in a relatively short span of time.³⁷ Okamura sees production as starting in the year 239, spurred by the Wei court's promise to have one hundred mirrors—the number recorded in the *Wei zhi* as given to Himiko's envoys, but only a fraction of the total eventually made—ready for a presentation ceremony held in the 12th month of that year.³⁸

Whereas mass production may well help explain the mirrors' standardization in size and their manufacture in sets of multiples from a single mold or model, it does not cover one obvious weakness in Kobayashi's argument regarding the significance of the mirrors' distribution. Namely, if these items, produced in large numbers, were indeed used by Yamato in its domestic program of alliance building, why was their distribution entrusted to a chief in the outlying Yamashiro region, rather than a figure located more centrally in the emerging Yamato polity? To put the matter in different terms, if triangular-rimmed mirrors were so significant to the process of extending Yamato's influence, why have so few been recovered from Yamato itself, and none in the sector most important archaeologically to understanding the rise of the early Yamato state? The absence of triangular-rimmed mirrors in the assemblage discovered in 1960 at Tenjinyama only underscored this weakness. But this excavation, a sacrifice made in the interests of development, proved to be the last major investigation of an early keyhole tomb in the Yamato heartland for more than thirty years.

Recent Program of Excavations: Nakayama Ōtsuka, Shimo Ikeyama, Kurozuka
In the summer of 1993, the Kashihara Archaeological Institute began its current program of research in the Ōyamato tomb group with an investigation of the 120-meter mound of Nakayama Ōtsuka 中山大塚 kofun, ending a hiatus of more than three decades in the excavation of early keyhole tombs in the southeast Nara basin. Reasons for the long period of inactivity are not hard to fathom. Recognition of the historic value of the area had helped halt the destruction of the tombs. Generally speaking, in the view of many archaeologists, sites not threatened by development are best left undisturbed, as excavations alter forever the conditions under study, and can never be repeated. Moreover, given continual advancements in the techniques of excavation, a future investigation can be expected to yield far more information than one conducted at present. In explaining the decision

³⁶ See Edwards 1996, pp. 66–68.

³⁷ In due respect to the Wei artisans, however, Okamura notes the triangular-rimmed mirrors are not just imitations, but show new elements such as the incorporation of Buddhist figures into a matrix derived from a close study of Han-period mirrors.

³⁸ Okamura shares the position of many Japanese scholars that the date of 238 in *Wei zhi* is a mistake; he holds that Himiko's envoys reached the Wei capital in 239, and were ceremoniously received in the 12th month. See discussion in note 5, above.

to renew investigations, Kawakami Kunihiko stressed the importance of the area in question to a better understanding of ancient history.³⁹ Of all the major groups of tombs located in the ancient provinces of Yamato and Kawachi, Ōyamato is the oldest and most critical to elucidating the emergence of Kofun-period culture and the establishment of the first Yamato polity. But only Kushiyama and Tenjinyama had been excavated, and the results of these investigations were hardly sufficient, by contemporary academic standards, for discussing the nature of the group as a whole. Recognizing a compelling need for newer data on the center of early Yamato culture, the Kashihara Institute drew up a plan to excavate three or four major tombs in the area over a ten-year period.

Lying less than a kilometer to the northeast of Kurozuka, Nakayama Ōtsuka, believed to be one of oldest tombs in the Ōyamato group, was selected as the first to be investigated. The choice was further based on considerations of its shape and on the 1985 discovery near its base of sherds of an early form of funerary ceramic known as *tokushu kidaigata haniwa* 特殊器台形埴輪.⁴⁰ It was thus with high hopes that work began in July 1993 on the round portion of the key-hole, where excavators soon uncovered a vertical stone chamber measuring approximately 7.5 m long and 1.4 m wide. Easily one of the largest examples of its type known nationwide, the chamber was made by piling lens-shaped stones in rough layers, forming massive walls up to one-and-a-half meters thick. The lowermost tiers of the chamber rose vertically for about 50 cm, and were then corbeled sharply inward, leaving a narrow opening at the top to be covered with ceiling stones, some two meters above the chamber floor. Although the wooden coffin had totally disintegrated, judging from traces left on the clay floor it was large in size, and clearly must have been put in place early in the construction process, most likely when the vertical sections of the walls were finished; the upper portion of the chamber had then been built over it.

The source of the andesite stone used for the chamber was identified as Mt. Kasuga 春日, located some eighteen kilometers away in the range of hills rimming the western side of the basin and separating Nara and Osaka prefectures. This finding elicited comparisons to the description in *Nihon shoki* of the building of Hashihaka, said to have been made with stones passed hand-to-hand by a line of people stretching from Mt. Ōsaka 大坂 to the tomb's location at the foot

³⁹ *Shimo Ikeyama, Nakayama Ōtsuka gaihō*, p. 68.

⁴⁰ Material on the Nakayama Ōtsuka mound is drawn from the preliminary site report, published together with that for Shimo Ikeyama (*Shimo Ikeyama, Nakayama Ōtsuka gaihō*).

A squarish shape at the top of the round portion of this mound was thought to be the remains of a rectangular platform, a feature seen at the nearby Nishi Tonozuka 西殿塚 (219 meters), regarded as the earliest of the colossal tombs after Hashihaka, and at other very early tombs. Excavation showed, however, that the mound was reshaped during its use as a fortress in medieval times, and none of the original surface of the round portion remains (*Shimo Ikeyama, Nakayama Ōtsuka gaihō*, p. 68–69). Also, many regarded the rectangular portion of the mound as exhibiting a slight flare, a shape known as *bachigata* 撥型, seen at the earliest colossal tomb, Hashihaka. See Edwards 1996, pp. 72–73, for further discussion of the *bachigata* shape, and note 59 therein for discussion and references related to *tokushu kidaigata haniwa*.

of Mt. Miwa. Regardless of its relation to this myth, procuring the materials for the massive chamber at Nakayama Ōtsuka required a significant expenditure of labor. So did the construction of the mound itself. Whereas it has often been said that the earliest tombs were built by altering a natural hill into the desired key-hole shape,⁴¹ excavators confirmed that the top half of the 11 m high mound was built up with layers of dirt brought from the outside. Moreover, the slopes of the tomb were found to have been paved with a layer of cobbles that at places was up to 90 cm thick.

If these structural features of the tomb proved impressive, other aspects of the investigation were disappointing. The mound's uppermost sector was found to have been considerably modified by medieval warriors, who converted the tomb into a miniature fortress and destroyed thereby any evidence for the original placement of *haniwa*, sherds of which were recovered, nevertheless, in large numbers. More frustrating was the extent of damage wrought by grave robbers. Early on in the work investigators encountered signs of extensive looting: robbers had entered the chamber at least four times, leaving large pits filled with a mix of soil and chamber stones tossed aside as they worked their way down. But it was not until the archaeologists reached the chamber floor that they realized just how badly the tomb had been hit—looters had even scraped down the clay bed that had supported the coffin. The list of items that escaped the thieves' attention is short: two mirror fragments, the tip of an iron spear and some arrowheads, miscellaneous scraps of iron that were once part of swords and other weapons.⁴²

After two seasons of work at Nakayama Ōtsuka, the Kashihara Institute moved on in 1995 to its next project, the 120 m Shimo Ikeyama 下池山 kofun located 300 m to the north and west.⁴³ Here, too, a vertical chamber was found, 6.8 m long by 1.3 m at the northern end and 0.9 m at the southern, with walls first rising vertically, then corbeled inward to a ceiling approximately 1.8 m high. The stone was also andesite, taken from the vicinity of Shibayama in Kashiwara, Osaka prefecture, not far from the source used for Nakayama Ōtsuka. In this case, however, the stones were shaped into slabs, better suited to building the chamber walls. Much care had been taken in sealing the chamber. The stone structure was encased in a dome-like covering, comprised of alternate layers of clay and sandy soil, and including a single layer of hemp cloth, dyed in bands of

⁴¹ See, for example, Saitō 1978, p. 125.

⁴² One of the mirror fragments, just 2.5 cm across, retains enough of the design to identify its style tentatively as a *jūtaikyō* 獸帶鏡, a variant of the deity-and-beast family. *Shimo Ikeyama, Nakayama Ōtsuka gaihō*, pp. 55–56.

⁴³ Material on the Shimo Ikeyama excavation is taken primarily from the preliminary site report, *Shimo Ikeyama, Nakayama Ōtsuka gaihō*. This tomb is described as a *zenpōkōhōfun* 前方後方墳, a variant of the keyhole style in which the round portion of the mound is replaced by a square, sometimes rendered in English as “square keyhole.” The chamber was located in the square portion, and thus in a position analogous with that of the chambers of Tenjinyama and Nakayama Ōtsuka. For these examples and all others in the southeast portion of the basin for which the orientation of the chamber is known, the long axis runs north-south, regardless of the orientation of the tomb itself.

red and black. This casing failed to prevent grave robbers from entering the tomb, however, and only a handful of beads, a jasper bracelet, and some iron weapons were found within. But perhaps for reasons of good drainage, portions of the coffin remained.⁴⁴ Hewn from a single log of *Kōya-maki* 高野槇 (Japanese umbrella pine, *Sciadopitys verticillata*), it is estimated to have extended originally for over 6 m; the bottom survived to a length of 5.24 m, while 1.54 m of the lid was still intact.

The most remarkable aspect of the tomb came to light only after work on the burial chamber was completed. In February 1996, a subsidiary chamber was uncovered just to the northwest of the main chamber. It measured but 50 cm square and contained a single bronze mirror of the *naikō kamon* style (figure 6). Still clinging to its surface were the remnants of the cloth in which it had been wrapped. Woven from fur and floss silk, and bearing a striped pattern, the cloth is thought to be an indigenous product, perhaps the same kind of item mentioned in *Wei zhi* as presented by Himiko's envoys to the Wei court. The mirror and its cover had been placed in a box made with the *kyōcho* 夾紵 technique, in which cloth layers are glued with lacquer one atop another over a wooden core. The top layer was a piece of *ra* 羅, a fine silk gauze, over which the final coat of lacquer had been applied. Both the gauze and the box represent imported Chinese technology, and at the time of discovery were the oldest examples of their kind known in Japan.⁴⁵

The mirror itself was clearly a domestic product; it measured 37.6 cm in diameter, far greater than the 23 cm typical for triangular-rimmed mirrors, themselves considered oversized by standards normal for imported items. The discovery brought to mind a similar find, made by a farmer in the Taishō period, at the nearby mound of Yanagimoto Ōtsuka 柳本大塚 kofun. In both cases, the mirrors had been placed in special chambers; in both cases they were large-scale domestic items bearing the star-shaped *naikō kamon* design,⁴⁶ the same design reportedly found on a bronze plaque (approximately 55 × 70 cm) uncovered during repairs made to Sujinryō in 1862.⁴⁷ The Shimo Ikeyama discovery accordingly fueled speculation that the *naikō kamon* mirror, with its star-shaped design, was the symbol of the early Yamato polity—rather than the triangular-rimmed style found everywhere but in the southeast corner of the Nara basin.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Concern for drainage on the part of the tomb's builders was evident. A ditch 50 to 75 cm wide led away from one end of the chamber, extending south onto the long rectangular portion of the keyhole, where it turned 90 degrees to the main axis of the tomb and descended toward its eastern base. The ditch had been packed with gravel, then covered over by the upper strata of the mound as it was built up, leaving a subterranean passageway for water to drain from the chamber down to the tomb's lower reaches. *Shimo Ikeyama, Nakayama Ōtsuka gaihō*, pp. 38–40.

⁴⁵ An older example of *ra* was subsequently found in a Late Yayoi context; it had been preserved in cinnabar applied to a mirror. *Asahi shinbun* 1998k.

⁴⁶ The Yanagimoto Ōtsuka mirror measures 39.7 cm in diameter. Its discovery is reported in Umehara and Morimoto 1923.

⁴⁷ Ōmi 1993, pp. 92–93.

⁴⁸ Okita Masaaki 置田雅昭 of Tenri University was quoted as taking this position on 27 February



Figure 6. *Naikō kamon* mirror unearthed at Shimo Ikeyama kofun. Courtesy Kashihara Archaeological Institute.

All such speculation was laid to rest just twenty-three months later, when the Kurozuka chamber and its contents were put on public view.⁴⁹ The chamber measured 8.3 m long by 1.3 m at its northern and 0.9 m at its southern ends, and was estimated to have been 1.7 m high. Like the examples at Nakayama Ōtsuka and Shimo Ikeyama, the walls rose vertically from the chamber floor to a height of

1996, just after announcement of the find (*Yomiuri shinbun* 1996). Yamaguchi University's Kondō Takaichi 近藤喬一 was quoted the same day as suggesting that the mirror was intended to stress the political connections between the tomb's builders and the Late Han dynasty, to which the *naikō kamon* pattern traced its roots (*Asahi shinbun* 1996a).

⁴⁹ Information on Kurozuka comes from: (1) the many press reports published at the time of the discovery; (2) photocopied materials distributed at the public viewing on 17 January 1998; (3) a presentation made by Kawakami Kunihiro at the Japanese Archaeological Association Annual Meeting in June 1998 (Kawakami et al. 1998); (4) an interview with Kawakami at the Kashihara Archaeological Institute on 1 September 1998. A preliminary publication on the find is available commercially (*Kurozuka kofun*).

roughly 40 cm, and were then corbeled sharply inward. While stone for the upper layers was taken from the same distant sources used for the other two tombs, the lower, or vertically rising section of the chamber, was made with round river stones gathered locally. Perhaps due to the weakness introduced by the latter materials, the ceiling and upper portions of the walls collapsed inward early on, leaving most of the chamber filled with a jumble of stones. This serendipitously sealed in the tomb's most precious contents, frustrating grave robbers seeking access to a central cavity. At the chamber's northern end, the deepest disturbance found by the excavators stopped just twenty centimeters short of the nearest mirror.

It was the northern end that held the mirrors (figure 7). The bulk of these lined the eastern and western sides of the chamber, where they had apparently been jammed into the narrow space between its stone walls and the sides of the coffin, itself long since decomposed. Bits of silk still clung to more than half of the mirrors, suggesting that each had been carefully wrapped in a cloth bag before being interred with the reflecting side facing the deceased. A single *banryū* 盤龍 mirror, a sub-style of the triangular-rimmed class having a design composed only of dragons and tigers, was laid at the chamber's northern end, also outside the coffin. Nearby were found bits of lacquer, prompting speculation that it had been laid on a lacquered board; generous amounts of cinnabar in the surrounding soil confirmed that this mirror had indeed been given special attention. But clearly the most singular treatment was reserved for the lone mirror not bearing a triangular rim, the *gamontai shinjūkyō* found propped upright in the center of the chamber's northern end; this undoubtedly had been put inside the coffin. Jewelry, often the best indicator of the position of the body, had not been included in the burial, but it was speculated that the small *gamontai* mirror, just 13.5 cm in diameter, had been placed near the head. Two swords lying just south of this mirror, also clearly within the coffin, would thus have been set to right and left of the torso. A large lump of cinnabar found between these two items may have originally been held in a cloth or wood container and placed near the chest of the interred. The red pigment covering the central part of the chamber floor was also judged to have been cinnabar, whereas the duller red of surrounding areas was iron oxide, a far less precious material.

Swords, spears, and iron arrowheads lay on both sides of the chamber, where they had been jammed together with most of the mirrors. In the space outside the coffin at the chamber's northern end lay a jumble of rusted iron, including the unusual find of two U-shaped bars, whose nature is still not fully understood. A similar area at the south end of the chamber held iron armor, including a lamellar helmet, plus agricultural and woodworking tools, and *haji* 土師 pottery. The remains of several types of organic materials have also been found. Unlike the rest of the chamber, however, at this end the upper portion had not collapsed completely, leaving a cavity where these items had been placed. The excavators found signs that it had once been ransacked by thieves, but thanks perhaps to

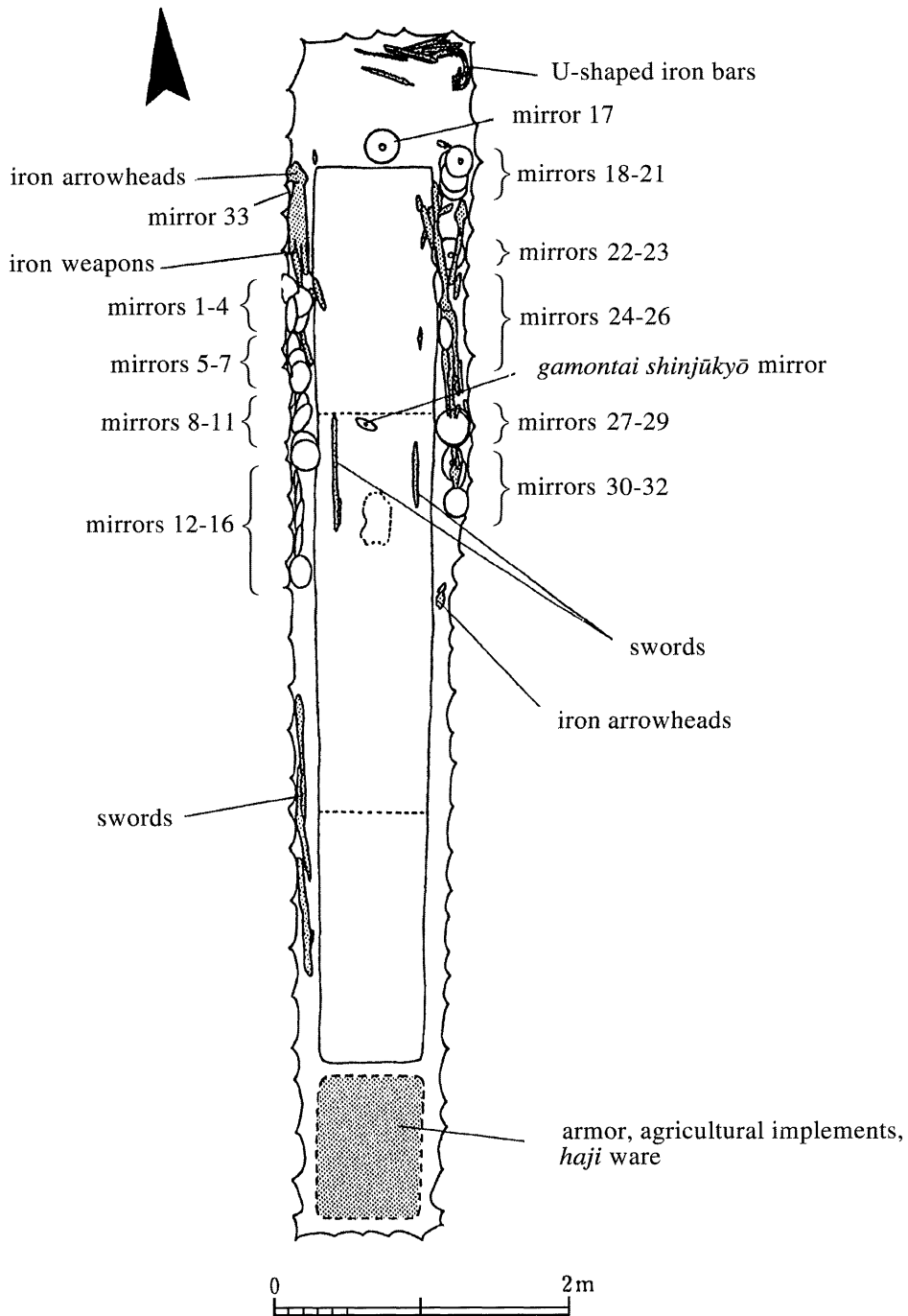


Figure 7. Plan of the burial chamber floor, Kurozuka kofun. Source: *Kurozuka kofun*, p. 15.

their disappointment at encountering only bits of rusted iron, the attempt was never repeated.⁵⁰

Additional discoveries of note were reported well after the initial press releases. In early April 1998, the excavation team announced it had identified a work road that had extended from the west side of the chamber onto the rectangular portion of the mound. Whereas the upper half of Nakayama Ōtsuka had been built up from a natural ridge with dirt brought from the outside, at the lower-lying Kurozuka nearly all of the mound, it is believed, is artificially made. At the time this road was in use, the round portion of the mound was shaped like the letter “C,” with the road leading through the opening; it was thus possibly used for hauling stones to build the chamber, as well as for inserting the coffin.⁵¹ The finding suggests that one aspect of the evolution of the keyhole shape was the functional utility of the rectangular portion of the mound, both as a staging area for work materials and as an approach to the work site.⁵²

The Kashihara Institute also announced in late June 1998 that it believed the coffin had been made of mulberry, based on identifications of wood fragments discovered clinging to some of the mirrors along the chamber’s west wall. If correct, the finding would be unique, as most examples of Kofun-period coffins for which the material is known were made from the species of conifer used for the coffin found at Shimo Ikeyama. At the same time, after treating the rusted iron excavated from the northeast corner of the chamber, the institute declared that much of it consisted of short tubes, carefully wrapped in silk, and strung between the two U-shaped iron bars. Whether this was part of a headdress or some other decorative item was not clear, but it was speculated that the use of silk in this apparatus and the selection of mulberry for the coffin were not unrelated, and that the tomb’s occupant had been connected in some way to the silk-making process.⁵³

Assessments of the Kurozuka Discovery

Our understanding of the Kurozuka find and its significance will no doubt continue to evolve as study of the materials obtained from the excavation proceeds. Indeed, it will likely be several years before a formal excavation report is issued, and any assessment made now can only be tentative. This has not deterred the

⁵⁰ Whereas the thieves’ entrance into the southern end of the chamber raises questions as to how badly it had been disturbed, Kawakami asserts there is no possibility that mirrors had been removed from this area. Wherever mirrors were recovered, chemical reactions had blackened the surrounding soil. No patches of discolored soil were found south of the area where the thirty-four mirrors were situated, assuring the excavators that the cache was indeed intact.

⁵¹ The road’s upper surface was the same level as the top of the river stones piled vertically in the chamber’s lower reaches. After the coffin was inserted, the road was filled in as the chamber’s upper portion was constructed and mounded over with dirt.

⁵² *Asahi shinbun* 1998m. Wada Seigo 和田晴吾 of Ritsumeikan University is quoted in this article as saying that six such examples were already known from Osaka and elsewhere, but this was the first example from central Yamato.

⁵³ *Asahi shinbun* 1998p.

popular media from putting forth a variety of interpretations of the discovery, and they have enlisted the opinions of many specialists. The following is an attempt to summarize, under four broad headings, the spectrum of issues and scholarly views evoked by Kurozuka thus far, while pointing out key questions that remain unanswered.

First, to start with purely archaeological concerns, is the evaluation of the age of the tomb and its contents. As at Nakayama Ōtsuka, the mound of Kurozuka had been reused as a fortress during the medieval period. A survey conducted in 1982 by the Kashihara Institute concluded, nevertheless, that the original form of the rectangular portion exhibited a slight outward flare, a characteristic of very early tombs such as Hashihaka, and the tomb has accordingly been assessed as dating back to the latter half of the third century.⁵⁴ With regard to the chamber, from aspects of its masonry Kawakami considers it to be more recent than Nakayama Ōtsuka but older than Shimo Ikeyama,⁵⁵ and he describes the sherds it contained as an older phase of the Furu 布留 style of *haji*,⁵⁶ views not incompatible with the above evaluation.

As for the triangular-rimmed mirrors, the Kurozuka finds fit into the early end of typologies based on renditions of the deity and beast figures and other design elements.⁵⁷ These classify imported mirrors into either four or five phases; under the four-phase scheme, the Kurozuka mirrors fall within phases 1 and 2. By contrast, the Tsubai Ōtsukayama cache includes several mirrors from the third phase as well, and thus as a set is slightly newer.⁵⁸ Opinions divide, however, as to what these findings mean in terms of absolute dates. While the start of triangular-

⁵⁴ For the significance of the outward flare, see discussion in note 40 above. The 1982 survey concluded that neither *haniwa* nor cobbles were originally present (*Kurozuka sokuryō chōsa*). See Kawakami 1995 for an assessment of the tomb's age as falling in the latter half of the third century.

⁵⁵ *Asahi shinbun* 1998h.

⁵⁶ In an interview at the Kashihara Archaeological Institute on 1 September 1998, Kawakami expressed his view that the subdivision of Furu into phases Furu 0–4 (see Edwards 1996, pp. 74–77) is too fine. It is only possible, he holds, to make a broad distinction between an early versus a newer phase. The pottery in the Kurozuka chamber belongs to the former. If the early phase is seen as extending from the second half of the third century into the early part of the fourth, a late-third-century date for the tomb is possible.

⁵⁷ In addition to Kishimoto's work, see Niiro 1991 for a typological analysis based on changes in the thickness of the rim and the size and number of *nyū*, and the shape of a design element known as *kasamatsugata* 傘松形, commonly found on triangular-rimmed mirrors but rare in other styles.

⁵⁸ There are slight differences in the ways that these phases are defined. Higuchi regards phase 1 as including only mirrors similar in design to those dated 239 and 240 A.D., and puts all of the Kurozuka mirrors in phase 2 (*Asahi shinbun* 1998o). Okamura, by comparison, sees the Kurozuka finds as ranging over phases 1 and 2 (*Asahi shinbun* 1998n). Under a five-phase scheme such as that proposed by Niiro (1991), the Kurozuka mirrors fall into phases 1–3, while those of Tsubai Ōtsukayama include several mirrors from phase 4.

Whereas the assessments made of Tsubai Ōtsukayama agree, despite these minor differences, that its cache of mirrors is on the whole newer than that of Kurozuka, there is an element of uncertainty about the precise nature of the Tsubai Ōtsukayama find itself. This tomb was excavated under emergency conditions in 1953, after part of the mound had already been destroyed during

rimmed mirror production is commonly placed at the time of Himiko's envoys' visit to Wei, Shiraishi Taichirō 白石太一郎 sees it continuing for a half century, whereas Okamura insists all of the mirrors were made in the space of a decade.⁵⁹ If Okamura is correct, then the Kurozuka mirrors were made in the first half of the third century. Higuchi, taking a view similar to Shiraishi's, sees the production of these same mirrors as beginning not much earlier than 250 and ending within the third quarter of the third century.⁶⁰ Any inference about the age of the Kurozuka mound from the above considerations must, of course, take into account the lag, of uncertain duration, between the time of the mirrors' manufacture and their interment in the tomb.

To sum up, while direct evidence to pinpoint the age of the tomb is lacking, a number of inferences based on characteristics of the mound and its contents do not contradict the view, gaining acceptance in recent years and now strengthened by the discovery of a set of mirrors that appears older than the Tsubai Ōtsukayama cache, that very early keyhole tombs such as Kurozuka date from the latter half of the third century.⁶¹

A second set of issues raised by the find bear on Kobayashi's theory about the meaning of triangular-rimmed mirrors. On the one hand, the Kurozuka discovery clearly demonstrates a close connection between these items and the early Yamato court, thereby covering the weakness already noted in Kobayashi's argument. While he had assumed that the mirrors had been parceled out from Yamato to secure the loyalty of regional chiefs, the lack of finds in the area where the Yamato polity had emerged left supporters of this view straining for a suitable reason. "It was said that the Yamato court had given all the mirrors away—a quite tortured explanation," commented Kanaseki Hiroshi, director of the Osaka Prefectural Museum of Yayoi Culture. Accordingly, "it comes as a relief that they have been found at Kurozuka."⁶²

Not everyone saw the find as a straightforward confirmation of Kobayashi's views, however. Whereas Kobayashi had regarded the occupant of Tsubai Ōtsukayama as a principal agent in the politically controlled distribution of the

construction. Although the burial chamber was still largely intact when archaeologists from Kyoto University first arrived, workers reported having demolished another part of the site several meters distant, perhaps a simpler burial or a small chamber that housed only grave goods. It appears possible, in any event, that the mirrors that the archaeologists received from the workers had been taken from two separate facilities (*Tsubai Ōtsukayama kofun*, pp. 1–16). If so, and if there is an appreciable gap in time between the two sections of the site, it is conceivable that the original cache of mirrors buried at Tsubai Ōtsukayama may be no different temporally from that found at Kurozuka.

⁵⁹ *Asahi shinbun* 1998i; *Asahi shinbun* 1998n.

⁶⁰ *Asahi shinbun* 1998o.

⁶¹ This is a significant revision of the influential view advanced by Kobayashi, who regarded Tsubai Ōtsukayama as possibly the earliest tomb, and assigned its construction to the end of the third century or the beginning of the fourth. Kobayashi 1961, p. 127; Edwards 1995, p. 199.

⁶² *Asahi shinbun* 1998d.

mirrors, Higuchi argued that the discovery of a second central tomb with a large numbers of mirrors raises doubts about their presumed political significance. Rather than being bestowed from the center as a means of building alliances, they were, he suggests, perhaps no more than “status symbols like luxury cars, with central authorities and regional powers alike competing to collect them.”⁶³ This view, implying that triangular-rimmed mirrors circulated freely, leaves unexplained their striking absence at Tenjinyama. Okamura points instead to the presence of three members of a single set at Kurozuka (set 74 in figure 8) as evidence that the mirrors entered the Kinai area in sets, presumably under some form of control.⁶⁴ As is true for Tsubai Ōtsukayama, where triplicate members of a single same-mold set were also found, other members of the set in question occur singly in tombs in distant regions (figure 8),⁶⁵ lending weight to the view that the Kinai authorities obtained the sets as a whole, and parceled out portions of them to regional chiefs. In this regard, it should also be noted that Kobayashi’s original argument against random circulation—the sharing of as many as three sets of duplicates between two tombs being too much of a coincidence—applies as much to the Kurozuka cache as it did to Tsubai Ōtsukayama.⁶⁶

The two tombs are also remarkably similar in the geographical range of the duplicate sets shared with other tombs. But the most striking similarity is surely the number of mirrors shared between Kurozuka and Tsubai Ōtsukayama alone: eleven of the thirty-three items found at Kurozuka belong to sets also represented at Tsubai Ōtsukayama. Many took this to signal that the tombs’ occupants played similar roles in the central polity. Tsude Hiroshi 都出比呂志 suggested they were equivalent to cabinet ministers, who received mirrors—rather than doling them out—each time they attended an important gathering in Yamato.⁶⁷ Okita Masaaki 置田雅昭 asserts it is possible to see the two as holding the same office in succession. In this view, the figure buried at Kurozuka was likely the first to serve as “kagami daijin” 鏡大臣 (“minister of mirrors”), charged with management of the central polity’s mirror diplomacy, to be followed, as indicated by the slight shift in chronological age of the two sets of mirrors, by the occupant of Tsubai Ōtsukayama.⁶⁸

⁶³ *Asahi shinbun* 1998g; *Asahi shinbun* 1998l.

⁶⁴ *Asahi shinbun* 1998n.

⁶⁵ Fukuoka and Okayama for the triplicate items at Kurozuka; Fukuoka, Yamaguchi, Shizuoka, and Kanazawa for the triplicates (set 46) at Tsubai Ōtsukayama. See figure 4.

⁶⁶ At the time Kobayashi published his seminal work, there was only one such relationship known for this tomb, namely, the sharing of mirrors from sets 9, 16, and 56 with Bizen Kurumazuka. Subsequent discoveries of triangular-rimmed mirrors at other tombs have increased the number of such relationships to three, as shown in figure 4. Kurozuka shares members of three sets with Ishizukayama 石塚山 in Fukuoka, and Nishi Motomezuka in Hyōgo (figure 8).

⁶⁷ *Yomiuri shinbun* 1998c.

⁶⁸ *Yomiuri shinbun* 1998e. Okita sees the greater number of sets shared with distant regions by the Tsubai Ōtsukayama occupant as an indication of his predecessor’s success: the second “kagami daijin” was able to build upon the foundation left by the figure interred at Kurozuka, and to establish relationships penetrating into regional hierarchies, such as those in Kyushu and Kanto.

Thus, while the Kurozuka discovery covers an obvious weakness in Kobayashi's theory by showing there were mirrors in Yamato itself, acceptance of his views still depends largely on admittance of his argument for political control over the mirrors' distribution. Detractors must find suitable explanations for anomalies such as Tenjinyama or the coincidence of the sharing of multiple sets; proponents must find some way to fit the evidence from two central tombs into a theory of unified control over circulation.

A third set of issues center around the discovery's implications for the location of Yamatai and the related question of the locus of production of the triangular-rimmed mirrors. Supporters of the Yamato theory were nothing short of elated at the discovery. "With this many mirrors found" at Yamato's core, Okamura proclaimed, "the 'Yamatai = Yamato' thesis is secure."⁶⁹ Kondō Takaichi 近藤 喬一 agreed that the find "makes the argument for Kinai unshakable," leaving the advocates for other regions "at a loss for a rebuttal."⁷⁰ Indeed, proponents of Kyushu were notably subdued. Mori Kōichi, an early opponent of Kobayashi's duplicate mirror argument for Yamato, parried that "if the mirrors are regarded as domestic," and thus not part of the Wei dynasty's gift, "their utility for making inferences about Himiko is limited." Mori said accordingly that he prefers to remove the triangular-rimmed mirrors from discussions about Yamatai, which he feels should be based on more solid evidence such as the remains of large-scale settlements.⁷¹

Okuno Masao also attacked the Yamato thesis indirectly by asserting that the mirrors found at Kurozuka are domestic products. Ignoring the distinction recognized by most between the so-called imports and imitations that were made with considerably less skill, Okuno argued that more than five hundred triangular-rimmed mirrors have been found in Japan, far greater than the one hundred mirrors recorded in *Wei zhi*.⁷² The mirrors given Himiko's envoys must therefore have been of a different style, and the Kurozuka find does not link Yamatai with Yamato. Okamura countered that the text recorded only those items included in a formal presentation ceremony made while the envoys were still at the Wei capital. Reason for the ostentatiousness, he asserted, and for the generosity bestowed on Himiko, lay in unstable political conditions on the Korean peninsula. Wei had taken possession of the commanderies at Lelang 樂浪 and Daifang 帶方 in 238, and incidents of warfare with tribes in contact with those two districts broke out in 240. The Wei court's gifts to Himiko were grounded in its desire to secure an alliance with the Wa confederacy, and they were duly recorded as a politically significant transaction. Yamatai continued to obtain mirrors thereafter, but as

⁶⁹ *Mainichi shinbun* 1998.

⁷⁰ *Yomiuri shinbun* 1998d.

⁷¹ *Sankei shinbun* 1998.

⁷² *Asahi shinbun* 1998b. See note 22 for recent figures on the numbers of mirrors known. Counting fragments and adding in the Kurozuka cache, the total of imported triangular-rimmed mirrors and domestic imitations reaches five hundred.

with the more than one hundred mirrors known archaeologically to have reached northern Kyushu during the Late Han dynasty, they left no record in the Chinese chronicles.⁷³

Other assertions, made both for and against Chinese manufacture, are just as easily negated by adroit counterargument. Pointing to the images of a camel and an elephant, animals not known in Japan, drawn in silhouette on one Kurozuka mirror, and the Chinese place name Xuzhou, identified in the inscription on another as the source of the copper, Higuchi proclaimed the items' Chinese origins. But critics have long maintained that such mirrors were made in Japan by itinerant Chinese artisans, an argument that, if true, is sufficient to answer Higuchi's claims.⁷⁴ The dim outlook for these lines of argument ever reaching a convincing conclusion was illustrated by some of the more radical statements made in connection with the Kurozuka find. Even if the mirrors were made in Japan, asserted Naoki Kōjirō, they would still enhance the Yamato theory, representing as they do a tremendous concentration of economic resources in the Kinai region. Okamura concurred, stressing they are without doubt Wei-period products and that they show the supremacy of the Yamato region at the time of their interral regardless of where they were made.⁷⁵ And Yamato supporter Kawakami even argued that the triangular-rimmed mirrors *were* made in Japan. As special funerary items, he was quoted as saying, they functioned quite differently from their Chinese prototypes; Himiko probably received TLV and *naikō kamon* mirrors, but was a Yamato figure nonetheless.⁷⁶

In short, the discovery of a large cache of triangular-rimmed mirrors lends great impetus to the Yamato thesis. Partly as a result, the suggestion that the mirrors are not really Chinese seems less threatening to the Yamato position. But it remains, nonetheless, a nettlesome problem associated with the Yamatai debate, one whose resolution will come only through the discovery of triangular-rimmed mirrors in China or the remains of a workshop, in either China or Japan, where they were produced.

A fourth and final set of questions concern the identity of Kurozuka's occupant. There are two trends in this regard, one turns to the textual frameworks provided by *Wei zhi* or native chronicles, the other relies more on archaeological assessments. The most striking example of the first was a suggestion that the interred was one of the two envoys, Nashonmi 難升米 and Gori 牛利, sent by Himiko to Wei and decorated by the latter with silver seals and blue ribbons. Kondō Takaichi reportedly hoped the excavators would turn up one of the silver seals; Nara University's Mizuno Masayoshi 水野正好 speculated that Nashonmi's tomb would be a little larger, while agreeing that Kurozuka's occupant could be

⁷³ *Asahi shinbun* 1998n; Okamura 1998.

⁷⁴ See Edwards 1996, pp. 66–67.

⁷⁵ *Asahi shinbun* 1998n. Okamura's argument here is clearly rhetorical; as noted above, he is certain that the mirrors' development in north China can be demonstrated.

⁷⁶ *Asahi shinbun* 1998j.

“someone like Nashonmi.”⁷⁷ An interpretation offered by Okamoto Ken’ichi 岡本健一 looks to *Nihon shoki*; he speculates from the presence of armor in the tomb that the occupant may have been a figure like the four generals sent out to pacify distant regions who are described in the annals for Sujin’s reign.⁷⁸ Also a text-based interpretation, although not an attempt to link the finds with a specifically named figure, is Okamura’s assessment of the significance of the armor, and especially the lamellar helmet, which is surely of Chinese manufacture. As already noted, Okamura emphasizes Wei’s concern to forge an alliance with Wa in face of an unstable situation on the Korean peninsula; the lamellar helmets recovered from Kurozuka and other Early Kofun tombs were supplied, he suggests, under the resulting “security arrangement” in the same spirit that gifts were lavished upon Himiko.⁷⁹

Kitano Kōhei 北野耕平 also focuses on the military nature of the grave goods, but limits his interpretation to archaeological observations. Noting in particular that the arrowheads are of a practical iron variety, different from the ritualistic bronze arrowheads found in many Early Kofun tombs, Kitano suggests that the interred was a figure who possessed genuine military skills.⁸⁰ Other interpretations based on archaeological data alone include the views, already mentioned, that the interred was involved in the distribution of mirrors for the central polity, or that he had some relationship to sericulture.

While the temptation to look for verification of historic personages in the archaeological record is understandable, the likelihood of such efforts meeting with success in a third-century context is practically nil. The current and future finds will be best understood in terms of more general assessments of social role (“an elite warrior,” “a high official”) based on archaeological data and integrated with varying degrees of certainty (“probably,” “possibly,” “perhaps”) into frameworks standing on textual and/or archaeological bases (“the emerging Yamato hegemony,” “the early Wa confederacy”).

Concluding Remarks

In an assessment of the Yamatai issue made three years ago, I suggested that although the debate over its location will never be totally settled, in recent years the pendulum of argument—which in the 1980s seemed moving toward Kyushu—has been swinging back to Yamato. The recent discovery has amplified the force of that swing. One factor I pointed to behind the shift toward Yamato has been a reevaluation of the absolute date for the onset of keyhole-tomb construction. While supporting Yamato as the location of Yamatai, Kobayashi assumed that the great tombs were not built until the beginning of the fourth century, leaving

⁷⁷ *Asahi shinbun* 1998e.

⁷⁸ Okamoto 1998, p. 25. The author is on the editorial staff of the *Mainichi*.

⁷⁹ *Asahi shinbun* 1998n. A similar lamellar helmet was recovered from Tsubai Ōtsukayama. Kyōdai Kōkōgaku Kenkyūshitsu 1992, pp. 44–45.

⁸⁰ *Asahi shinbun* 1998l.

a gap of fifty years between Himiko's death and the emergence of a Yamato hegemony. Archaeologist Shiraishi Taichirō began questioning that assumption in the 1980s, raising the possibility that the tombs might indeed date back to the mid-third century, and others have increasingly followed his lead.

If any new development can provide even more impetus to the pendulum's swing, and bring us as close as we may ever come to a final answer, it will be in the dating of the monumental tombs lying in the southeast corner of the Nara basin. One possible scenario is a breakthrough in the application of dendrochronology to Kofun period materials. Mitsutani Takumi 光谷拓実 of the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, who pioneered the use of dendrochronology in Japan, has recently demonstrated that the dates accepted for the Middle Yayoi period are in need of adjustment by as much as one hundred years. In 1996 he obtained dates of mid-first century B.C. for building materials at the Ikegami-Sone 池上曾根 site in Osaka, found in association with Yayoi 4 pottery, widely regarded to have been in use over the first century A.D.⁸¹ The find necessitates a downward revision of not only the age assigned to Yayoi 4, but also that of succeeding styles, reinforcing the movement already underway to assign earlier dates to the beginning of the Kofun period. If a reliable dendrochronological date can be obtained for materials from an early keyhole mound, it could well push the start of tomb construction back to the time of Himiko.

But in all likelihood, that would still fail to lay the matter to rest. As I argued previously, even if Yamato's archaeological preeminence during Himiko's time is shown beyond doubt, there will be room to claim that the Wei envoys who journeyed to Wa never got beyond Kyushu, "where they were duped by a local figure posing as the mightiest authority in the land," the most influential view during the Edo period. And as Higuchi, himself a Yamato supporter, recently suggested, even if Himiko's gold seal is found in Yamato, it could be claimed to have been transported there at a later date—thus no amount of physical evidence may ever exhaust the romance provided by the enigma of Yamatai.⁸²

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⁸¹ *Asahi shinbun* 1996b.

⁸² *Asahi shinbun* 1998f.

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