

<BOOK REVIEWS>An Illustrated Companion to
Japanese Archaeology Edited by Werner
Steinhaus and Simon Kaner

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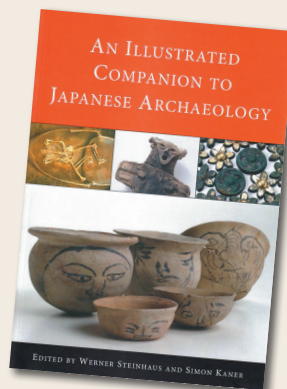
BOOK REVIEW

*An Illustrated Companion
to Japanese Archaeology*

Edited by Werner Steinhaus
and Simon Kaner

Archaeopress, 2015
344 pages.

Reviewed by Gina L. BARNES



In 2004, a special exhibition on Japanese archaeology was sponsored in Germany by the Nara Cultural Properties Research Institute (Nabunken) and the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō). A total of fifty-two Japanese scholars from these institutes and others wrote essays, picture captions, and artefact descriptions that were translated from Japanese to German for the exhibition handbook and catalogue. The book under review here is drawn from these materials, consisting of English translations of the German texts, and lavishly illustrated with photographs specially taken for the exhibit and presented with other maps and drawings. Despite more than a decade separating the original manuscripts for the exhibition and their English presentation, this book is extremely informative, gorgeously photographed, and worth the wait.

The editors state that this book is not intended to be a comprehensive review of Japanese archaeology. Instead, it is an excellent introduction through the eyes of local scholars. The essays are succinct summaries, while more detail is given in long picture captions—especially useful as artefact studies. The text is divided into five period chapters (Palaeolithic, Jōmon, Yayoi, Kofun, Asuka-Nara), each chapter having a site map and a timeline at the beginning. Additional sections on “Accessories and Ornaments” and “Archaeology in Japan” give thematic overviews, and an appendix of archaeological sites in Romanization, *kanji*, and general location is helpful.

Refreshingly, the Palaeolithic chapter does not deal only with stone tool types: both developmental and research stages are defined, stratigraphic contexts of volcanic ash and submerged swamp deposits are elucidated, and two site studies are undertaken. Major tool types are described in detail but often obliquely (a trapezoid is “shell-shaped,” but what kind of shell?). Beyond typology and function, discussion ranges to raw material sources and the development of six regional technological styles in the Late Palaeolithic.

The Jōmon introduction, describing Japan’s early hunter/gatherer/fisher/horticulturalist populations, provides interesting factoids: 76,000 Jōmon sites are known, 85 percent in eastern Japan; these are divided into four hundred local cultures and seventy major cultural traditions. The large number of sites includes settlements but also shell- and bead-working workshops, salt production locales, paths, small water-holding tanks, and shellfish-steaming and dolphin butchering sites; many of these features are described herein. Case studies

include Sannai Maruyama and Korekawa in Aomori, Ōyū in Akita, Satohama in Miyagi, Teranohigashi in Tochigi, Nakazato in Tokyo, and Uenohara in Kagoshima. Isotope studies document a variety of regional diets, with nuts and shellfish predominant, while several plant foods, including chestnuts, were in the process of domestication. Exploitation of *Rhus vernicifera* to produce lacquer dates to 7000 BC, two millennia earlier than China or Southeast Asia. Kagoshima sites reveal that narrow-necked jars and earplugs were known there millennia earlier than in eastern Japan. It is often stated that deer and boar bones account for 80 percent of the faunal remains in the Jōmon, but at Sannai Maruyama only 20 percent of bones were these large mammals. Analysis of Jōmon cookies revealed they were made of nut starch and condiments like *shiso* (perilla), wild onions, yams, and Alpine leeks. The Minerva Debate about the earliest date of Jōmon pottery is mentioned (p. 66) but not elaborated. The interested reader should see Barnes 1990.

The Yayoi chapter is the longest, beginning with an interesting section on Jōmon and continental peoples mixing to produce the Yayoi physical type. Much space is devoted to the coming of rice cultivation and its tools of production. Itazuke, Yoshinogari, and Karako-Kagi are the well-known featured sites, but Kitajima in Saitama and Aoya-Kamijichi in Tottori are new additions. Bronze and iron artefacts and their technologies are woven into the topic of warfare in the islands. Recoveries of wooden armor and shields, as well as many skeletons suffering wounds are new data sources. Wooden vessels from Aoya-Kamijichi illustrate lathe skills.

The Kofun period chapter concentrates on *kofun* (mounded tombs), beginning with the transition from mound burials in the Late Yayoi period. Tomb structures and contents are detailed, clarifying many chronological sequences. Case studies include the tombs Yukinoyama and Shinga (Shiga), Kurozuka, Tōdaijiyama, and Bakuya (Nara), and Higashinomiya (Aichi). Shinga is exceptional for surviving intact, and full details on tomb structure, artefact contents, and placement are knowable. Only one residential site, Mitsudera no. 1 (Gunma), is presented, but it reveals many crafts were carried out at this elite moated compound. State formation and relations with the Korean Peninsula lead into the next chapter.

The Asuka period is formally part of the Kofun period, but shifts to Buddhism and urbanism are discussed together with the Nara period. This chapter perhaps has the newest information to offer, accompanied by photos of models of sites excavated in the last few decades such as Naniwa (Osaka) and the Nara record: Kiyomigahara and Fujiwara capitals, craft workshops at the Asuka-ike site, Prince Nagaya's residence, and gardens at Heijō capital. Architectural constructions, including roof tile series, are an important aspect of both capital and temple. The Yakushiji, Kōfukuji, and an abandoned temple in Naō, Mie Prefecture, showcase the abundant Buddhist materials, while the end of *kofun* construction is highlighted by paintings from the Takamatsuzuka and Kitora tombs (Nara) before the beginning of Buddhist cremations, some with epitaphs.

This text could have benefitted from professional copyediting, as translation has led to various grammatical and spelling errors and erroneous words: for example, 戈 should be “halberd” but is variously described as “sickle-like” or a “tanged spear,” or “spearhead.” Jade artefacts are mis-identified throughout the book as nephrite (see plates 23, 42): they are the rock jadeitite from Itoigawa, one of two sources of the mineral jadeite in eastern Asia. (The other is Myanmar; all true jade sourced in China is nephrite.) This mistake is very

distressing, as it will take years to correct misconceptions drawn from it. Some discrepancies derive from the different authors. For example, on page 27, it states that fifty sites have yielded eighty dugout canoes, but on page 80 the figures are over one hundred boats from sixty sites. There is no glossary, and it is not clear why some terms are given in Japanese but not others. Production problems include reversal of captions for Figures 208 and 209, and the “Archaeology in Japan” section begins on page 324, not page 326 as listed in the Table of Contents.

Still, the message of this volume is clear: Japanese archaeology is a rich mine of information for past lifeways and the emerging state, and this book is the best on the subject in twenty years.

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