

1. New Dates for Early Pottery in Japan

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There has been an understandable reluctance, outside of Japan at least, to accept the 9450-year radiocarbon dating determined by the University of Michigan laboratory for the early ceramic levels at the Natsushima site near Tokyo. Though corroborative results were obtained on specimens of two different materials, the implications were simply too far out of line with our current understanding of human cultural evolution. That the oldest known pottery in the world should appear on the outer periphery of the *oikoumene*, in a clearly food-gathering context and at a date approaching the close of the Pleistocene, strained belief. Nothing in our present knowledge of Far Eastern prehistory and chronology had in any way prepared the scientific world for such a startling development. Rather than rearrange our entire picture of this part of the world, we all awaited further evidence to confirm or deny the Natsushima dates—it is now at hand.

During the past year the authors of this note (representing respectively the Archæological Research Programme of Hokkaido University and the Japanese Prehistory Project of the University of Wisconsin) undertook to determine the age of the early ceramic complexes of Hokkaido in a joint effort to establish a firm chronology for the prehistory of northernmost Japan. Charcoal samples were obtained in June 1961 by the senior author from the bottom level of a circular pit house at the Kojohama site near Shiraoi, southern Hokkaido, in association with pottery believed to represent some of the oldest known wares on the island. These and other Hokkaido samples were processed by Isotopes, Inc., under an arrangement made by the junior author with funds provided by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., and the Research Committee of the Graduate School, University of Wisconsin—their support is gratefully acknowledged here. The two Kojohama samples (I-550, I-551) yielded ages of 7680 ± 200 and 7700 ± 200 years, respectively. Despite this (to many) surprisingly early date, it does not necessarily represent the very first appearance of pottery on the island. In view of Hokkaido's marginal position in relation to Honshu, and the consequent acceptable time lag, these new findings therefore lend strong support to the general validity of the Natsushima dates.

The historical implications of this early time-level for Far Eastern ceramic technology is beyond the scope of this note. We wish merely to say that a drastic reassessment of cultural development in eastern Asia can no longer be put off.

A report of the 1961 excavations at the Kojohama site by Oba, Masayasu Ogiya and Teruo Takeda, with descriptions and illustrations of the pottery and artifacts, appeared in *Hoppo Bunka Kenkyu Hokoku*, 17: 61-106 (Sapporo 1962). For the reader who has no ready access to the publication, the Kojohama ceramics will be briefly described here.

The commonest ware from the lowest level of the site consists of tall vessels of truncated-conical form (flat-bottom) with undulating rims, decorated over the entire surface with incisions and impressions of shells. No trace of cord-marking has been noted. To the excavators the ware appears to be much like the well-known early Sumiyoshi ware of southernmost Hokkaido, except for the flat rather than pointed base and the all-over rather than limited decoration. Like all the Kojohama pottery, it is grit tempered.

Two undecorated types are also present: one is possibly round-bottomed in form; the other, represented only by a single specimen, has a rounded-conical base. Five cord-impressed sherds were also recovered from this early level. The excavators think the undecorated wares were an older type, on typological grounds, but the radiocarbon dates indicate that all of them were in use at the same general time.

The shell-marked Kojohama pottery is one of a number of flat-based shell-marked wares known in Hokkaido; all are regarded as early (Initial Jōmōn). The types at each major site differ and the relationship between them is not clear. Occasional vessels at some sites show a limited use of cord impressions. Associated lithic remains include a few preceramic artifact types. The sites yielding these wares are never shell middens like other Initial Jōmōn sites, but the population is considered to have been coastal, engaged probably in fishing.

Distinct from these wares is the Sumiyoshi type characterized by its pointed base (conical or breast-shaped) and various decorations incised or impressed with shells. Its distribution is limited to four sites in the Hakodate area, and its relation to the flat-based wares is uncertain. The two varieties have never been found in association, nor present in the same locality. [For illustrations and further details on the Hokkaido shell-marked wares, see Oba and Takeda in *Minzokugaku Kenkyu*, 26(1); 39-46, 1961.]

Further work is required to get a clearer picture of these distinctive wares of northern Japan and their place in Jōmōn ceramic development. Meanwhile, the early placement of at least one of them has been substantiated, and at a far earlier time level than was generally suspected.