

## CHAPTER 8

### SHIRNES, STATUES, AND SCROLLS

#### THE ART OF EARLY JAPAN

##### Summary:

This chapter details the formative years in Japanese early history. This chapter recounts the early

pottery peoples of Japan and their subsequent development into a sophisticated and stratified society.

##### I. Lecture Model

Timeline:

Jomon Period c. 10, 500-300 BCE

Yayoi Period c. 300 BCE-CE 300

Kofun Period c. 330-552 CE

Asuka Period 552-645 CE

Hakuko Period 645-710 CE

Nara Period 710-794 CE

Heian Period 794-1185 CE

Kamakura Period 1185-1392 CE

The Jomon Period is the earliest distinctly Japanese culture. Their architecture was extremely simple. They were hunters-gatherers; however, their natural environment was richly endowed and their existence was relatively easy. This combination of natural and generously provisioned environment allowed for the development of a ceramic tradition before an agricultural technology could be established. The ceramics created are modeled and decorated with a wealth of motifs.



**8-01 Vessel, from Miyanomae, Nagano Prefecture, Japan, Middle Jomon period, 2500–1500 BCE. Earthenware, 1' 11 2/3 " x 1' 1 1/4". Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo.**

The Jomon vessel (8-1) is a heavier and thicker vessel than its Chinese counterpart (7-1). The Yayoi Period saw a change in the ceramic industry, imported from China via

Korea was the wheel for pottery production. Also this period saw the development of rice cultivation and a society, which was the precursor to the clan system developed later. The vessels produced during this period were tall and elegantly shaped. Another consequence of contact with China and Korea was the importation of bronze cast objects; this led to the Japanese creating their own style.



**8-2 Dotaku (bell) with incised figural motifs, from Kagawa Prefecture, Japan, Late Yayoi period, 100–300. Bronze, 1' 4 7/8" high. Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo**

The dotaku or bell (8-2) is the Japanese version of the Han bell; the dotaku were used for ceremonial occasions. Many of the bells had surface decoration that is still open to scholarly discussion regarding their meaning and interpretation.

The next period, the Kofun, sometimes referred to as the Great Tomb Period is named after the tombs, which are key-shaped and massive in size. These tombs did spread throughout Japan and indicates perhaps, a consolidation of power and the beginnings of an organized hegemony of regional clans. The aerial view of the tomb of Emperor Nintoku, Sakai, Osaka Prefecture late 4th century CE does give an indication of the effort these constructions undertook. The contents of these tombs show a relationship with Korea, many of the goods, headdresses, weapons and jewelry, excavated thus far reflect a similarity in the grave goods found in Korean tombs (7-26).

In addition to the grave goods, Haniwa figures were also set in a row around the tombs and grave pits as well as topping them. It is thought that these figures are guardians protecting both the living and the dead.

There is no evidence that suggests these figures are taking the place of living attendants; but the Chinese influences could account for the figures to maintain a guardianship quality (8-4).



**8-04 Haniwa (cylindrical) warrior figure, from Gunma Prefecture, Japan, late Kofun period, fifth to mid-sixth century. Low-fired clay, 4' 1 1/4" high. Aikawa Archaeological Museum, Aikawa.**

The Kofun shrine dedicated to the sun goddess, Amaterasu, at Ise is considered the greatest of all Shinto shrines (8-5).



The shrine is rebuilt every 20 years and follows the original design and plan. Shinto is an ancient nature religion that is predicated on agriculture, it has no formal scriptures; the religion developed as Japanese society developed. The sun goddess, Amaterasu is the ancestor of the emperor, thus the need to maintain the shrine in its original format is a mandate, that promises to keep the emperor safe, and the empire prosperous. The construction is post and lintel and it is thought the building represents a granary; its ancient origin would support that idea. The link between the land and the people and the emperor as the liaison between the gods and the people would further that idea and emphasize the relationship of emperor to national prosperity.

During the Asuka Period Buddhism came to Japan as a gift from the Paekche ruler. This Korean ruler from the Three Kingdoms period sent a statue of the Buddha to the Japanese emperor in 552 CE. For a number of years the Paekche ruler sent along sutras or sacred

scriptures based on Buddha's discourses. Missions from Korean Three Kingdoms and Tang China periods also came to Japan with the express purpose of spreading Buddhism. A civil war victory for Prince Shotoku allowed him to proclaim Buddhism as the state religion and he had constructed the Shitennoji in Osaka and the Wakakusadera on the outskirts of Nara as tributes to Buddhism. But one of the most important Buddhist complexes is the Horyuji, Nara.



**8-06 Horyuji kondo (Golden Hall), Nara, Japan, Early Nara (Hakuho) period, ca. 680.**

During the Hakuko Period the Kondo (8-6), the main image hall was constructed. The silhouette presents a graceful and elegant image. In addition to an active architectural program, sculptures of the Buddha were being commissioned.



**8-07 TORI BUSSHI, Shaka triad, Horyuji kondo, Nara, Japan, Asuka period, 623. Bronze, 5' 9 1/2" high.**

Tori Busshi was commissioned to cast the Shaka Triad (8-7) for the Horyuji Kondo. The center figure is Shaka or the historical Buddha, he is seated on a throne and has his hand raised in blessing and acknowledgement, on either side are Bodhisattvas who also are raising their hands in gentle benedictions. The commission was originally intended as a votive offering to the Buddha for the healthy recovery of Prince Shotoku and his consort.

That year, 623, both succumbed and the Empress Suiko dedicated the Shaka Triad to their spiritual well being. The work shows the influence of Tang China but is also shows the adaptations Tori Busshi made as a Japanese artist. The bronze presents an illusion of animation; the great mandorla framing the figures allows the light to play across its surface suggesting flames. The platform the Buddha is seated on falls in patterns and waves resembling the movement of water. In the Nara Period, the Yakushi Triad showed the legacy of Tang China and Three Kingdoms Korea but also the Gupta inheritance from India as well. A Gupta torso of a Bodhisattva 5th century CE could very well have been a model for a Tang Bodhisattva. The curve of the Gupta figure is soft and graceful; the gentle sway of the hips is seen in the Tang Bodhisattva as well. This elegant posture and graceful stance is repeated in the Nara Bodhisattva from the Yakushi Triad (8-8). The movement of the figure is augmented by the flow of the drapery across the body; the circular movement of the cloth causes the eye to move in a gentle flow across the pattern as well. All three figures in the triad raise their hands in healing benediction.

During the Late Heian Period, the court produced Japan's most admired literary classic the *Tale of Genji*. Lady Murasaki, a member of the court, penned it. Her tale of romance details the story of a prince of the house, Genji; it recounts his life as a prince and his many love affairs. The author also portrays Genji as a man of sensitivity and compassion, she details for the reader court decorum and rules, and the effect such rules can have on behavior. More importantly Lady Murasaki has given us a glimpse into the court of Late Heian Japan.



**8-13 Scene from Minori chapter, Tale of Genji, late Heian period, first half of twelfth century. Handscroll, ink and color on paper, 8 5/8" high. Goto Art Museum, Tokyo.**

In the Minori chapter of the *Tale of Genji* (8-13), the scene depicted is a meeting between Genji and his one true love, who is dying. It is now thought the Genji illustrations was a team effort involving a nobleman who was the calligrapher, a chief painter and his assistants. This particular scene has been executed to convey the emotion of sad reflection. Genji has returned to his dying love too late to enjoy her company. The quiet color and lack of ornament convey the subdued emotion. Genji himself is garbed in a restrained robe; the garden to the left is also dying and choked with weeds. This was the garden that Genji had constructed for her to enjoy year round, it, too, is making a statement on the faithlessness of Genji. However, the author is not too condemning of

Genji, for he has returned. The artists have also conveyed his grief, again by using quiet color and the placement of Genji before his dying love. The compression of the space emphasizes emotion of grief as well.

During the Late Heian Period between 1156-85, Japan was in a state of civil war. The warring factions were two powerful families, the Taira and the Minamoto, both striving for ultimate supremacy. The Minamoto eventually won and the Kamakura period ensued. The Kamakura saw the military nobility growing more powerful. Feudalism became entrenched. This feudalism started as a way to combat the lawlessness of the civil war years and also by the absentee landlords who lived in the capital rather than their country estates. The managers for their estates had to arm the small populations in order to protect them from the harshness of the times. As the absenteeism continued these country estate managers began to usurp the authority of the owner and started to band together for more protection and power. Alliances were formulated among themselves and between the two powerful families, Taira and Minamoto. Feudalism is predicated on the need for protection and the accumulation of power both political and social, and a robust military. The period also encouraged realism, a style favored by the ruling elite.



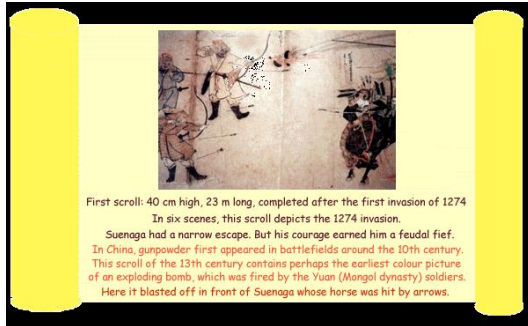
**8-16 Detail of The Burning of the Sanjo Palace, Kamakura period, thirteenth century. Handscroll, ink and colors on paper, 1' 4 1/4" high; complete scroll, 22' 10" long. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Fenollosa-Weld Collection).**

For example, *The Burning of the Sanjo Palace* (8-16) is an account of the opening of strife between the two clans, Taira and Minamoto during the Late Heian period. The scroll details the death of Fujiwara Shinzei and the escape of Emperor Nijo from the Minamoto forces.

The artist has depicted the massing of the cavalry and the infantry moving in a steady progression across the scroll. A horseman is leading the troops into battle; he is framed by the single archer ahead of him and the two foot soldiers behind him. The effect of the scene is to give a sense of the battle that has taken place, which we cannot see, and the coming battle. The military is ready and marching forward.

In another scroll, the Kamakura artist has captured the triumph of Japan in turning back the Mongol forces. In 1266, Kublai Khan (successfully completed military occupations

in China and Korea) now sent envoys to Japan and demanded fealty. In 1274 the Mongol army landed at Hakata, Kyushu, but aided by a timely storm, the Mongols were repulsed by government forces. The Mongols continued their demands of surrender during the next year, but now the Japanese summarily executed the Mongol envoys. In 1281 a larger and more powerful expeditionary force landed in Kyushu again. This time they were met by a prepared Japanese defense, which brought the Mongols to a stall in their hopes of conquest. Once gain another storm destroyed most of the fleet and after a ferocious two months of fighting, the defeated Mongols left Japan and ceased their demands for fealty.



In the *Illustrated History of the Mongol Invasions* (Moko Shurai Ekotoba) late 13th century, a scene depicting both combatants illustrates the ability of the Japanese painter to create an image of combat. Mongol archers are on the left and a single mounted Kamakura warrior is on the right. He is fully armored and his horse, at a gallop, is charging the Mongols. The same powerful statement made in the *Burning of the Sanjo Palace* is repeated in this scroll as well.

Japan had evolved into a dynamic art producing culture. Japanese art is rich in color and

texture and it has become an integral component of the work. The Japanese absorbed ideas from

China and Korea and reconstituted them to fit the Japanese aesthetic vision.

#### **Resources:**

##### **Videotapes**

*Buddha in the Land of Kami* 53 min. BVL2151 \$159

*Tale of Genji* 60 min. BVL4061 \$159

Films for the Humanities

1-800-257-5126

<http://www.films.com>

##### **Books**

Barnett, William K. and John W. Hoopes. *The Emergence of Pottery*. Washington, D.C.:

Smithsonian Press, 1995.

Cunningham, Michael E. *Buddhist Treasures from Nara*. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998.

LaMarre, Thomas. *Uncovering Heian Japan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.

Washizuka, Hiromitsu. *Transmitting the Forms: Early Buddhist Art from Korea and*

Japan. New York: Japan Society, 2003.

Wood, Donald A. Echizen. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.

**Web Resources**

[http://sgwww.epfl.ch/berger/First/english/start\\_japan.html](http://sgwww.epfl.ch/berger/First/english/start_japan.html)

<http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/>

[http://www.lacma.org/art/perm\\_col/japanese/sculpture/haniwa.htm](http://www.lacma.org/art/perm_col/japanese/sculpture/haniwa.htm)