

Relics that Convey the Jomon Spirituality

One of the most typical examples of a relic that represents the Jomon spirituality is the “dogu” or clay figurines. At first, the figurines had breasts and were created to represent a woman, but as the figurines later changed into the shape of a pregnant woman, they are thought to have been used to represent prayers for birth or rebirth. However, towards the end of the Jomon Period, figurines featuring beards, flat chests and other male elements came to represent both sexes. Many of the figurines found were purposefully broken. This “destruction,” which symbolizes death, may have represented the Jomon philosophies about rebirth.

A clay tablet featuring the imprint of a child’s footprint was also excavated from a 6,500-year-old grave. This kind of relic is unique to Hokkaido and is thought to feature the imprint of an infant who died at a young age. Stone clubs dating back 5,000 years have also been excavated. These relics were thought to have been made in the shape of male genitalia as a symbol of fertility. By examining these relics which give us a glimpse into Jomon festivals and ceremonies, we can feel their respect and admiration for life itself.



Top: Clay figure, Nishishimamatsu Site 5 (Eniwa City)
Bottom: A plate-like figure Fugoppe Shell Midden (Yoichi Town)



Foot printed clay tablet and burial stone tools, Toyohara Site No. 4 (Hakodate City) Important Cultural Property



Stone sticks and pottery excavated from the Earthwork Burial Circles Shuen Burial Circles (Shari Town) Tangible Cultural Property Designated by Hokkaido Prefecture

Post-Jomon Hokkaido

While the Jomon culture was persevered for over 10,000 years even through environmental changes such as changes in climate and large-scale natural disasters, it saw its sudden demise around 2,500 years ago. This was due to the rice-farming that was introduced into northern Kyushu via the Korean peninsula and the Yangtze River basin in China. The Yayoi culture, which brought about the production of metal products and the cultivation of grains as key industries, spread rapidly through the Japanese archipelago.

After this occurred, the cultural sphere that had spread from the southwest of Hokkaido to the north of Tohoku and had been preserved for several thousand years since of the Jomon Period disappeared, but the traditions of Jomon culture stayed alive in a hunting-gathering culture in Hokkaido, known as the “Zoku-Jomon (Post-Jomon) culture”. Between the fifth and seventh centuries, the equivalent to the Kofun Period in Honshu, the “Okhotsk culture,” which specialized in fishing and the hunting of marine mammals, spread from Sakhalin down the east coast of Hokkaido to Okushiri Island in the south. Furthermore, when a centralized government was established south of Honshu in the seventh century, the “Satsumon culture,” which incorporated the cultivation of millet and other grains was born in Hokkaido. The “Ainu culture” soon followed. Many sites have been discovered mainly in Hokkaido’s northeast in which depressions from pit-dwellings from the post-Jomon era remain. These sites are preserved as part of an important cultural heritage that conveys the unique history of Hokkaido to the present day.

In this way, a unique history runs in Hokkaido different from the mainstream Japanese history we know today.



Depression from pit dwellings, Shibunotsunai Pit Dwelling Site (Yubetsu Town)



Artifacts from the Okhotsk Culture, Matsunorikawa Hokugan Site (Rausu Town) Important Cultural Property, Photo:Masahiko Sato



Ainu clothing made from bark called Attus in the Ainu language (The Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture)