

Isonokami-Toyota tomb group

The Isonokami-Toyota tomb group is a large-scale cluster of tombs located in Isonokami-chō, Toyota-chō, and Bessho-chō in the city of Tenri. A total of more than 200 tombs were constructed on the hilltops of what are called the Toyota hills. Near the Meihan Expressway on the extreme northeastern portion, two keyhole-shaped tombs are located in a line on the hilltop. They are the 107-m long mound of Isonokami Ōtsuka and the 110-m long Uwanarizuka tombs. Both have horizontal stone chambers opening to the south as the burial facility, square projections from the constricted portion of the keyhole shape, and are each furnished with a surrounding moat and a wide outer rampart. While no excavations have been conducted, they are thought to have been constructed in the first half of the sixth century. They are large for keyhole-shaped tombs built at that time, and the prevailing opinion is that they are related to the ancient Mononobe family.

On the hilltops behind these two tombs there are small-scale keyhole-shaped and round tombs distributed centering on the ridge tops, and the majority of these have burial facilities consisting of horizontal stone chambers. They were built mainly in the sixth century, but their formation continued into the first half of the seventh. This tomb group can be divided into several subgroups each with distributions of about 20–30 tombs, and among these, the Isonokami Kita, Ishimine, Horinoo, Takihara, Amidahara and other subgroups were excavated in 1966, 1971, and 1975.

Numerous artifacts were recovered mainly from the horizontal stone chambers, but in particular tombs yielding artifacts related to blacksmithing stand out. As smithing tools from the Horinoo No. 2 tomb, a pair of tongs and a hammer were found. In addition, an iron spearhead and swords, gold and silver earrings, comma-shaped beads of crystalline quartz and amazonite, and crystalline quartz faceted beads were recovered. Also, a bellows nozzle and slag came from the Ishimine Minami No. 2 tomb, and slag was found as well at other tombs including Isonokami Kita No. A5, Isonokami No. B3, and Takihara No. 3.

Further, in addition to gilt-bronze equestrian gear and crystalline quartz faceted beads, a double-spouted *hasō* (wine-server), a rare vessel shape of Sue ware, was recovered from the Horinoo No. 4 tomb.

On the south side of the Isonokami-Toyota tomb group spreads the Kofun period large-scale settlement of Furu. It is known that handicrafts were carried out in thriving fashion within the settlement, and from the recovery of smithing tools in pit-dwellings and finds of slag and bellows nozzles throughout the site, a group of artisans involved in blacksmithing was present. Members of this artisan group of the Furu site are regarded as having been interred in the Isonokami-Toyota tomb group.