

Mesuriyama tomb

Keyhole-shaped tombs of the Early Kofun period concentrate in the southeast portion of the Nara basin. From the southern side of Tenri city extending into the northern portion of the city of Sakurai is the Ōyamato group, and positioned another 5 km south from the southern side of that group are two colossal keyhole tombs, Sakurai Chausuyama and Mesuriyama. Both may be considered the graves of a Great King of the initial Yamato polity, or of powerful figures in positions of nearly the same rank.

Mesuriyama is a keyhole tomb 224 m in overall length located in Takada in the city of Sakurai, and in 1959 the burial facility in the round portion of the mound was excavated, along with its rectangular enclosure of rows of *haniwa*. With the tallest cylindrical *haniwa* in the Japanese archipelago, at 2.1 m in height, placed at vital positions, a total of 106 cylindrical and *takatsuki* (pedestaled dish) shaped *haniwa* were lined up.

In the center of the round portion of the mound was a vertical stone chamber (the main chamber) measuring 8.06 m in length and containing a wooden coffin. Having been badly robbed, the condition of preservation of the grave goods was poor. Mirror fragments, stone objects in the shapes of chairs, combs, bracelets, and vessels, plus fragments of swords and other items were recovered. To the east of the main chamber was a 6-m long vertical stone (subsidiary) chamber, which contained large amounts of weaponry including the only known example of an iron bow and arrows, plus iron spears, iron swords and arrowheads, and bronze arrowheads, along with jasper objects in the shapes of arrowheads, staffs, spindle whorls, and large cylindrical beads, as well as an abundant variety of iron tools including axes, chisels, planes, saws, knives, sickles, and needle-shaped implements. The subsidiary chamber is regarded as having been a facility exclusively for grave goods.

The age of construction of the tomb was the end of the third to the beginning of the fourth centuries.

- Jasper staffs

The staff-shaped objects placed in the subsidiary chamber are emblems of authority. Thought to be derived from the *yù zhàng* of Han period China, the same characters have been applied to these items. A total of four were found, dividing into two types by their decorative top pieces as those forming a cross and those shaped as a pair of wings, and the shafts are also of two types, one of jasper with an iron core and the other of organic matter (presumably wood). The items in the regular exhibition consist of the two types of top pieces with reconstructions of the shafts joining them with the stone tips and their lower ends.

- Reconstructed arrows (bronze arrowheads)

An overwhelming amount, 236 items in all, of willow leaf-shaped bronze arrowheads were recovered from the subsidiary chamber. Centered on a position to the south from the middle of the stone chamber, a total of 8 bundles of bronze arrowheads in groups of more than 10 to greater than 80 items were found, and they are inferred as having been buried attached to arrow shafts and inserted in quivers. The regular exhibition has inferred reconstructions of these bronze arrowheads complete with shafts and feathers.

- Reconstructed arrows (stone arrowheads)

Stone arrowhead replicas numbered 50 items in the subsidiary chamber. Of these, 30 were willow leaf shaped and 20 were chisel shaped. The willow leaf-shaped items varied in size and form, but the chisel-shaped replicas were nearly uniform in this regard. Both types showed traces of having been attached to shafts. It is thought that the entire form of shafted iron and bronze arrowheads were thus transformed into items for ritual use having arrowheads of green volcanic tuff fitted onto the shafts.