

Niizawa Senzuka tomb group

The Niizawa Senzuka tomb group is located in Kazu-chō and Kawanishi-chō in the city of Kashihara, in the southern part of the Nara basin. Approximately 600 tombs, including small-scale keyhole-shaped, square, and round tombs, were built clustered on the hilltops, and it is one of the preeminent examples of clustered tombs in the archipelago. Excavations were carried out on about 100 tombs between 1962 and 1966, and in 1976 it was designated a National Historic Site.

The majority of the burial facilities consist of the direct interment of a wooden coffin and grave goods in a grave pit dug into the hilltop, but tomb No. 221 was one of the few examples of a horizontal stone chamber, and can be assessed as belonging to the final portion of the Middle Kofun period, when such stone chambers were being introduced. The formation of the tomb group began in the latter half of the Early Kofun period, with the construction of tombs such as Nos. 213 and 500, and tomb building reached its peak in the Middle Kofun.

In tomb No. 126, built in the Middle Kofun period, a set of grave goods that was in the top class for East Asia at the time was recovered, including personal ornaments such as gold earrings with decorative chain pendants, gold spiral-shaped pendant decorations, gold hair decorations, gold and silver rings and bracelets, a gilt bronze belt buckle, plus a rectangular gold plate with a dragon motif in openwork carving, a bronze mirror, a glass bowl and dish, a bronze clothes iron, a lacquerware tray, and so forth. These items have been designated an Important Cultural Property by the national government, and are held by the Tokyo National Museum. From tomb No. 109 as well, along with artifacts such as iron weapons, a triple ring bell, and bronze mirrors, a gold earring with a decorative chain pendant was found. Also, at tombs Nos. 115, 139, 281, 510 and elsewhere, armor was recovered along with its accoutrements, and tombs rich in weapons and armor are numerous.

Further, tomb construction continued in the Late Kofun period, and Sue ware items came to be placed in the burial pits as grave goods. Also, gilt bronze equestrian gear was yielded by tombs such as Nos. 178, 206, and 328. In addition, tomb No. 262 of the Late Kofun period had a twisted ring pommel sword, No. 327 had a sword with silver inlay images in the shape of a tiger, and No. 323 had agate beads (comma-shaped, cylindrical, and oblong shapes) and quartz crystal cylindrical beads, so examples of superlative articles with few parallels are many.

Among tomb groups built in clusters, this group saw construction peak at a relatively early period, and thus holds an important place for considerations of the start and background regarding cluster tomb construction, which is generally regarded as indicating a widening of the social strata of persons interred in elaborate tombs.

Niizawa Senzuka tomb No. 500

This is a keyhole tomb 62 m in length. Built on a hilltop on the southern side of the Senzukayama district, its period of construction is considered to be the latter half of the Early Kofun period (latter half of the fourth century). As burial facilities, a total of 3 clay compartments and a ceramic *haniwa* coffin were

detected, with the main facility at the center of the round portion being composed of a principal clay compartment 7.85 m in length in which a corpse was interred, and a subsidiary compartment on its southern side thought to have been built as a facility for grave goods.

The central main facility had a large wooden split-log coffin, and from the interior which had not been robbed numerous beads and koto-bridge-shaped stone objects and other items made of jasper were recovered. From the subsidiary compartment, which had a container inferred as similar in structure to a box-shaped wooden coffin, in addition to 5 bronze mirrors the following were recovered: bronze objects, including cylindrical items and an ornament in the form of a large palmate leaf; jasper objects, including wheel- and ring-shaped bracelets and spear butts; weaponry and armor, including a laced rectangular plate cuirass, bronze arrowheads, iron swords, a socketed spear and other spears of iron; iron tools including hoe blade tips and axes. It is unclear whether there was a human burial. This is a rare example of a keyhole tomb of this period for which the entirety of the grave goods can be seen.