

## **Origins and Development of Decorated Tombs in Higo (Kumamoto Prefecture), Kyushu**

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This paper explores the origin and spread of Kofun Period decorated tombs in the ancient province of Higo where some 190 decorated tombs, the highest number in Japan, have been discovered. To this purpose, the author proposes a relative-chronological framework for these tombs, that takes into consideration the structure of burial chambers and regionally specific decorative patterns.

The earliest decorated tombs are in present Yashiro City, where the decorations feature engraved circular patterns. These circular patterns probably symbolized bronze mirrors, and were engraved on the surface of stone partitions and inside the stone coffins situated in corridor-style stoned burial chambers. Apart from the circular patterns, there were also engraved designs of bows, quivers, cuirasses, and long swords. These probably date to the early fifth century A. D.

The spatial distribution of decorated tombs expanded as far as to Amakusa and the Uto Peninsula. The expansion continued to the north in the fifth century to present northern Kumamoto City. The colors of blue and yellow were adopted at this stage in addition to engraving, relief, and the use of red paint. The decorations became more elaborate.

In the early sixth century, decorated tombs appeared in the northern Higo region, such as the areas of present Tamana City and Yamaga City. Decorations were applied to a stone structure shaped like a house and its vicinity, found to the rear of a corridor-style burial chamber. The decorations on it were done with colors applied simply to line engravings, and by simple painting. Along with the structure of a corridor-style burial chamber unique to Higo, the decorative tombs originated from Higo diffused to the entire northern Kyushu.

In the mid-sixth century, decorative patterns influenced by ideology of continental origin may have been added. I end with the hypothesis that decorative tombs of Kyushu had an impact on the construction of decorative tombs in the rest of Japan.