

**THE ANCIENT BURIAL
MOUNDS OF
JAPAN, PP. 511-522**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649336067

The Ancient Burial Mounds of Japan, pp. 511-522 by Romyn Hitchcock

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ROMYN HITCHCOCK

**THE ANCIENT BURIAL
MOUNDS OF
JAPAN, PP. 511-522**

Museum
Anthrop.
Chicago Ill.
11-24-26
32207

THE ANCIENT BURIAL MOUNDS OF JAPAN.

By ROMYN HITCHCOCK.

It would appear that when the famous Jimmu Tennō, the divinely descended first Emperor of Japan, the child of the sun and the ancestor of the present reigning dynasty, began his journey through the land, he met with two kinds of inhabitants. There was a race of Tsuchi Gumo, described as people with tails, who lived in underground burrows or caves. I have elsewhere endeavored to show that there probably was, in fact, a race of pit dwellers who disappeared toward the North, leaving traces of their existence in the pits of Yezo.* In addition to these, there was a race of "hairy savages" which we have no difficulty in identifying as the Ainos,† who are known to have formerly lived in southern Japan.

I have only alluded to these two peoples in order to remove any possible question which might arise as to the Japanese origin of the tombs of which I am to speak. Although many of them are very ancient, they are certainly Japanese. This we know partly from tradition, but more certainly from the articles interred with the dead. Had they a pre-Japanese origin, we would expect to find within them vessels of pottery of a more ancient pattern, such as the predecessors of the Japanese left behind them in the shell mounds.

One of the earliest modes of burial in Japan was in artificial caves, hewn out of the solid rock on hillsides. It has been said that the early Japanese lived in caves. This is very doubtful, for although there are natural caves in certain parts of the country, they are not found where the history of the people begins, in Idzumo and Yamato.

Nevertheless, the idea of cave life was familiar to the Japanese, for the legend of the Sun goddess who entered a cave and closed the entrance with a stone, leaving heaven and earth in darkness, is a very early and important myth.‡ It is also said, that in the reign of Jimmu

* The Pit Dwellers of Yezo, by Romyn Hitchcock. Report U. S. Nat. Mus., 1890, p. 417.

† The Ainos of Yezo, by Romyn Hitchcock. Report U. S. Nat. Mus., 1890, p. 429.

‡ Shinto, or the Mythology of the Japanese, by Romyn Hitchcock, Report U. S. Nat. Mus., 1891, p. 489.

Tennō "the inhabitants were still plunged in barbarism and mostly lived in caverns." (Klaproth.)

Prof. Milne has brought together many allusions to the early cave dwellings* of Japan taken from native writers, but all of these may as readily have reference to the aborigines as to the Japanese themselves, and it seems to me with greater probability.

The Chinese character which is translated "cave" means "apartment," or "a cave or pit dug into the earth." It is uncertain what kind of dwellings or caves are thus designated. Some chambers were built with stones and may have been the dolmens which will soon be described; others were made of turf and recall the dwellings of the Kuriles. While much of this uncertainty is due to the use of an ambiguous Chinese character in writing, the examination of the true caves, natural and artificial, indicates that if ever the Japanese were cave-dwellers it was before they migrated to Japan.

The observations here brought together are the result of considerable travel and intimate association with Mr. W. Gowland, formerly chemist of the Imperial mint at Osaka. Mr. Gowland has spent several years in the study of the Japanese mounds, and he is the only person who possesses sufficient accurate and valuable information upon the subject to prepare a comprehensive monograph. It is to be hoped that the results of his years of labor and observation will be published. His fine collection of relics from the tombs, now in the British Museum, is unique and of great value. It can never be duplicated. Many a day we have tramped together on the rough mountain sides, searching for tombs or sepulchral caves, and at evening compared notes and recounted experiences in Japanese hotels. I recall the cozy comfort of those neat matted floors, the bronze *hibachi* with its steaming kettle, the savory and unsavory dinners, both varieties of which are furnished in Yamato, and many other incidents familiar to the traveler in the interior of Japan.

Several distinct methods of burial have prevailed in Japan at different periods. These may be distinguished as follows:

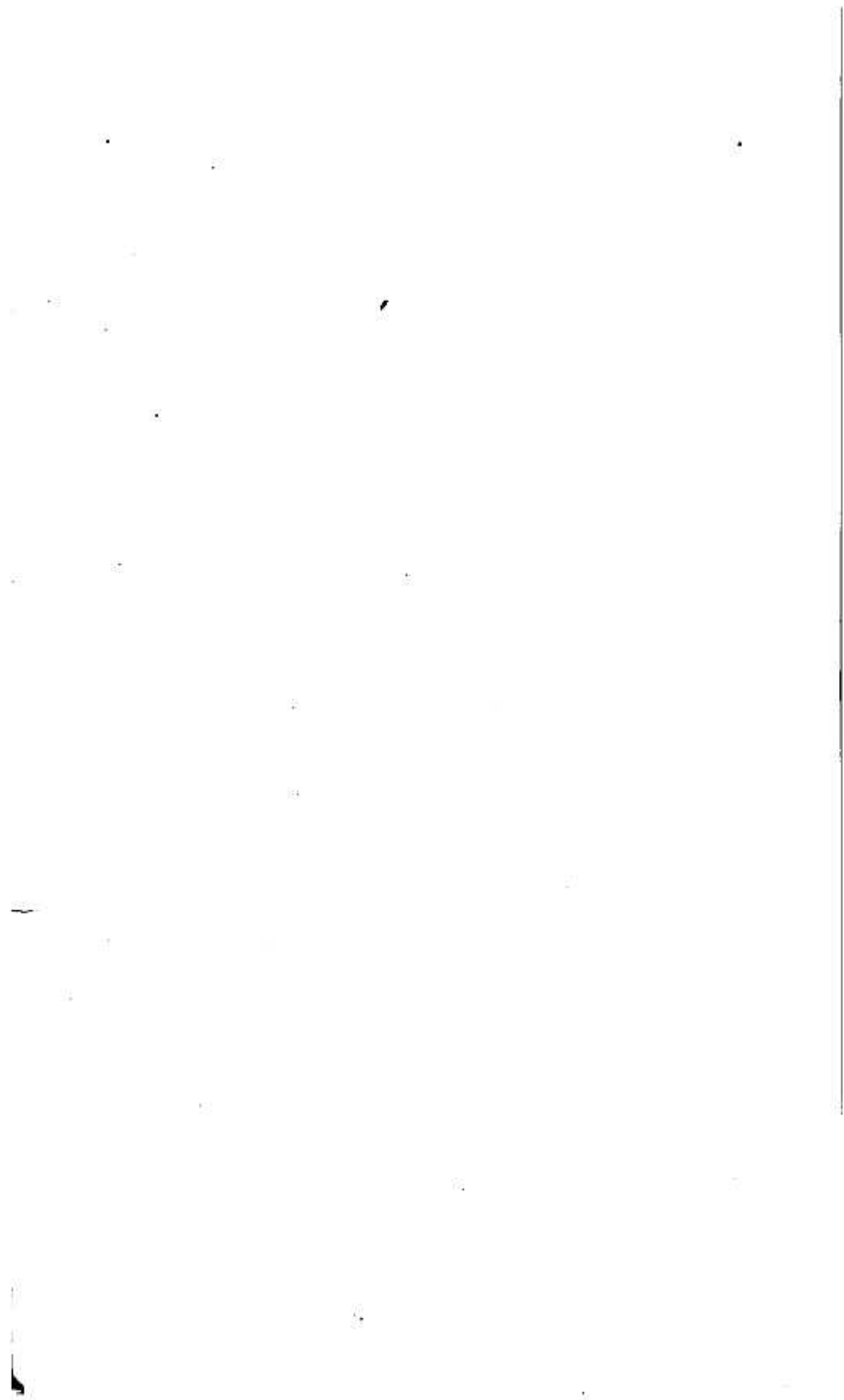
- (1) Burial in artificial caves.
- (2) Burial in simple mounds of earth.
- (3) Burial in mounds with rock chambers or dolmens.
- (4) Burial in double mounds or imperial tumuli.

The chronological sequence of these different modes of burial is largely a matter of speculation. Among the earliest was interment in artificial rock caves. Such caves are quite numerous in various provinces. In Pl. XXXIII we have a view of four such caves in Kawachi. The fronts are crumbling away and we look directly upon what were originally the dark interiors. The largest of this group shows the remains of a stone coffin cut from the rock *in situ*. Originally the caves were entered through small apertures, which were doubtless at one time closed

* Trans. Asiatic Soc. of Japan, VIII.



CAVES IN KAWACHI.





CAVE SHOWING REMAINS OF STONE COFFIN.

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

with stones. Probably all were provided with either stone or clay coffins, but now only fragments of these remain. Pl. XXXIV shows the remains of the coffin just referred to. Usually the coffins are placed at the back of the caves, raised on a shelf a few inches from the floor.

The caves vary greatly in size, but they never reach very large proportions. Perhaps they average 5 feet in height and 6 to 10 feet square. They contain no remains whatever except the fragments of coffins. If they ever did enclose articles of pottery or treasure interred with the dead, the vandalism of the peasants has robbed every one of them. I have crawled on hands and knees into many of these gloomy recesses, inhabited by bats which fly unpleasantly near one's face, and searched by the light of a candle for what might be found, but with no further reward. I well remember one occasion when Mr. Gowland and I were long entombed in the close, damp atmosphere of a cave, not far from Kokubu. We proposed to photograph the interior with the flashlight. To place our two cameras at the mouth of the cave required several hours of hard digging with hammer and knife, and the contortions required in focusing were too wonderful for description. We focused on a burning candle held at different points to outline the field of view. Finally the light flashed; and if the spirit of the departed ancient still hovered around its tomb, as the people believe, and if it had progressed far enough in the transcendent thought of the western world to grasp the fantastic idea of a bodily rising from the dust, I think it must have believed the resurrection day had come.

The most we can say of the caves is, that they are numerous in some sections, that they were used only for burial, and that probably they preceded in time the rock-built dolmens. No date can be assigned to them. There is not a vestige of a skeleton, not a line of inscription, nothing but the soft, half-decomposed rock remaining, to bear witness of the veneration bestowed upon the dead in ages past. The great question presented now for the ethnologist to solve concerns the origin of the custom of cave-burial among the Japanese.

The God Take-mika-dzuchi was famous for his desperate combats with demons. On the island of Kashima there is a mound known as *Oni-dzuka*—demon mound. It is said that the God killed a devil there and buried him, heaping the earth above him. This was before the time of Jimmu Tennō. Such a mound doubtless represents the earliest form of burial among the Japanese.* Examples of such simple mounds, averaging about 4 to 8 feet in height, are numerous in the country. Such is the character of the traditional mound of the first emperor, dating from the seventh century B. C.

* H. Von Siebold has described a small mound 8 feet in height and about 20 feet in circumference, without any coffin, in which six coins were found, two of which were recognized, the first as from the time of Shōfu Gempo, 1004 B. C., the second of Seiso Gempo, 961 B. C. The importance of this find is easily overestimated, and it cannot be regarded as very significant of the age of the mounds.