

The Ancient Tango Village Museum

Kyotango Municipality

～ The World of the Tango Kingdom ～



Introduction

-----About the Ancient Tango Village Museum, Kyotango Municipality



We exhibit a variety of implements, earthenware, beads and specimens of the Jomon, Yayoi and Kofun periods on a permanent basis. We also introduce the legends and folklore about the expedition to slay the ogres of the Tango area. A tour of the museum gives a general impression of the lives of the ancient people of this area. You might feel as if you've slipped into antiquity, surrounded by restored pit dwellings (Tateanashiki jukyo) and raised-floor buildings (Takayuka soko)

Ancient and Legendary Tango

Excavations have uncovered many ancient tombs in the Tango area. These include the Akasaka-Imai Tomb, one of the biggest in Japan, as well as the Amino Choshiyama Tomb and the Shinmeiyama Tomb, which are two of the biggest keyhole-shaped burial mounds along the coast of the Sea of Japan. These ancient tombs vividly depict the important roles of the Tango area and its people played in Japanese history.

Moreover, abundant legends and folklore of this area tell of such stories as the expedition by His Imperial Highness Maroko to slay ogres. These legends shed light on the dreams, desires and agonies of the people who lived in the ancient Tango area along the beautiful, but sometimes very harsh, Sea of Japan. We hope our exhibition of these ancient times will teach you something new.

The Jomon Period

-----Living on the beach and in the mountains

This period is marked by the firing of Jomon earthenware, which began about 12,000 years ago. The Jomon period lasted 10,000 years. People survived by hunting animals in the mountains, by catching fish and shellfish in the rivers and seas, and by gathering fruit and nuts in the fields.



Jomon earthenware

The Yayoi Period

-----The introduction of rice cultivation

More than 2000 years ago, people developed a stable agrarian society based upon rice cultivation with techniques introduced from the Asian continent. During this period, life in ancient villages changed drastically and developed not only in the field of rice cultivation, but also with innovative ideas and techniques making it possible to produce ironware and blue-colored glass beads which evoke the transparent and clear water of the Sea of Japan.



Ironware

Blue glass necklace



The Establishment of the Tango Kingdom

-----The appearance of regional kings

Economic strength based on stable rice cultivation led some people with wealth and influence to emerge as regional kings. When a king died, his followers would construct a large tomb in which to bury him surrounded by various kinds of precious goods such as iron axes and glass beads. In the Tango area, for example, numerous precious goods were excavated from the Ogidani ruins in Mineyama. It is apparent that at an early stage of the ancient period, advanced cultures were introduced to this area through trade with the Asian Continent, the Korean peninsula, and Northern Kyushu, and that regional kings with the means of producing ironware and beads established bigger and more stable power structures. Increasing stability allowed the construction of greater tombs, such as square-shaped tombs with stone panels and raised square-shaped tombs, which had not been seen before.

----- Burial goods of the Kings

Later in the Yayoi period, even greater tombs containing a greater variety of goods began to be constructed.

In the Oburo-Minami No. 1 Tomb, for example, burial goods included a crystal-blue glass bracelet that can also be found in such countries as India and Vietnam, 11 iron swords (ironware was regarded as exceptionally rare and precious during this period), 13 bronze bracelets, and various kinds of beads. No other burial site has been found containing so many precious items buried in one place. Moreover, the fact that items similar to the 13 bronze bracelets were also excavated from the Hara-no-Tsuji site in Iki, Nagasaki Prefecture, shows that the kings of the Tango Kingdom had already established control over trade across the Sea of Japan.



Crystal-blue glass bracelet

The Akasaka-Imai Tomb in Akasaka, Mineyama Town, built in the latter half of the Yayoi period, is one of the biggest from that period. Wooden coffins were buried in the grave, which is 14 meters long by 10.5 meters wide and located at the center of the burial site. Alongside from the second biggest coffin (7m x 4.2m), a magnificent head ornament was found a pair of ornaments with crimson mercurial pigment to be worn on the ears. The head ornament consists of dark green comma-shaped glass beads, light blue tube-shaped glass beads, and tube-shaped jasper beads. They were sewn on a slip of cloth similar to a headband to be worn by the tomb owner. Judging from those ornaments, the tomb may have belonged to a woman.

-----The Birth of the Tango Kingdom

The Oburo No. 1 Tomb, built late in the second century, and the Akasaka-Imai Tomb, built around the beginning of the third century are sites where kings of the Tango Kingdom were buried. These great tombs show that the kingdom was established around that time. Kings' tombs of the Yayoi period have been found in Tsukushi in Kyushu, Izumo in San'in and Kibi in Sanyo. These discoveries show that many regional kingdoms had already been established before the Yamataikoku State, an ancient kingdom ruled by Queen Himiko.

Furthermore, the early Yamato regime is thought to have been formed out of a confederation of regional kingdoms in which the Tango Kingdom probably played an important role in establishing the central government. This fact is also supported by the descriptions of marriages between emperors and the princesses of the Tango Kingdom in ancient documents such as the Kojiki and Nihonshoki.

The Kofun Period (The Period of Ancient Mounded Tombs)

-----The appearance of giant tombs

Of the numerous ruins scattered in the Kyotango area, the Amino-Choshiyama Tomb and the Shinmeiyama Tomb (both are about 200 meters long) are two of the greatest keyhole-shaped mounded tombs along the Sea of Japan. They were the tombs of the heads of powerful clans that reigned over the Tango area from the 4th century to the 5th century. It is thought that they established the Tango Kingdom and that they were deeply involved in maritime trade.



Shinmeiyama Tomb
(Tango's greatest keyhole-shaped tombs)

The Legends and Folklore of the Tango Kingdom

A number of legends and folklore tales have been passed down in the Kyotango area. They, along with the many ruins, provide a long history of the Tango area. One legend is the story of an expedition to slay the ogres of Tango. With the help and protection of the healing Buddha called Yakushinyorai, His Imperial Highness Prince Maroko of Empress Yomei defeated the ogres that lived in the Oeyama Mountains and had been threatening the people of the nearby villages.

In the Tango area, there still remain temples where Prince Maroko enshrined seven Yakushinyorai sculptures that he himself carved. There are also some shrines known to be connected with him.



Gangoji Yakushinyorai



The place name of Taiza, located near this museum, is said to have originated from the name of Her Empress Anahobe Hashiudo, mother of the well-known Prince Shotoku Taishi. She fled here from the capital where the conflict between the Soga and the Mononobes had become serious. When Her Highness decided to return to the capital after the ceasefire, she left a part of her name, "Hashiudo", in order to express her gratitude to the local residents. The residents, however, felt unworthy to speak her name. Instead, they kept the original written Chinese characters but pronounced them as "Taiza", which literally means to "take leave", because that is what she had done. That is the history according to one legend.