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J. Christopher Gillam

*University of South Carolina - Columbia*, [gillamc@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:gillamc@mailbox.sc.edu)

Junzo Uchiyama

Oki Nakamura

Tomohiko Matsumori

Carlos Zeballos

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# Jomon Period Research in West-Central Honshu, Japan

By J. Christopher Gillam, (Savannah River Archaeological Research Program), Junzo Uchiyama, Oki Nakamura, Tomohiko Matsumori, and Carlos Zeballos (Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Kyoto, Japan)

The Jomon Period of Japan is best known for its fabulous array of pottery styles spanning nearly 14,000 years of time (ca. 16,500 to 2,400 calendar years before

fertility.

The Jomon Period can be broken down into six sub-periods based on pottery and lifestyle: the Incipient Jomon

(e.g. ducks), fishes (e.g. carp and salmon), and shellfish (e.g. clams and oysters) that were easily exploited from the shore, or by netting, trapping, and by canoe (Seguchi 2009). Their homes were typically small, circular (10-12 feet / three-four meters in diameter) semi-subterranean pit houses with floors dug a few feet (ca. one meter) beneath the surface of the ground and could house four to six people (although exceptionally large examples could hold many more). The houses contained excavated pits for storing food and other goods and often had central hearths for cooking and heat in winter months (Fig. 2). The walls and roof were thatched and anchored to wooden poles. Most archaeological sites contain four to five houses arranged in a circle and facing a small central plaza, often representing a small population of 30 to 40 people.



Fig. 1: Jomon pottery from central Honshu, Japan. (Photo by Christopher Gillam)

present, CYBP). The term “jomon” literally means “cord-marked” reflecting the early and long-lasting tradition of using cord-impressed decorations on clay pots (Kobayashi 2004) that are very similar to later Woodland Period decorations here in eastern North America. However, Jomon pottery took on many forms over the millennia, from simple bowls and conical-based cord-marked forms to very complex flame-style pots (Fig. 1). These ranged in function from storage and cooking to ceremonial, and in addition to vessels the Jomon potters created clay figurines, Dogu, that represent fertility and other ceremonial forms (Kaner 2009). Dogu figurines take on such exotic forms that many UFO enthusiasts claim they represent extraterrestrial beings and cartoonists in Japan have portrayed them as living beings with special powers. However, these portrayals are fictional and fantasy, the real meaning of the figurines is much closer to humanity than their odd forms suggest, often representing human

(16,500-11,500 CYBP), Initial Jomon (11,500-7,000 CYBP), Early Jomon (7,000-5,500 CYBP), Middle Jomon (5,500-4,400 CYBP), Late Jomon (4,400-3,200 CYBP), and Final Jomon (3,200-2,400 CYBP).

The people of the Jomon period lived primarily as hunters, gatherers, and fishers. The land offered a variety of nuts, such as acorns and chestnuts, herbs, and seeds for gathering, and large game, such as boar and deer, for hunting. The waterways, lakes, and coastlines offered aquatic water-fowl

The Neolithisation and Modernisation of East Asian Inlands Seas (NEOMAP) project of the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (RIHN), Kyoto, is exploring the development and change in prehistoric cultural landscapes throughout the region and beyond (Uchiyama 2009). Geographic research by the NEOMAP GIS research team (AKA G.I.S. Joes) is exploring the



Fig. 2: Jomon pithouse features and shell midden. (Photo by Christopher Gillam)



shifting cultural and environmental setting of Jomon archaeological sites over time near Toyama Bay, the Hida Mountains, Lake Biwa, and other regions of west-central Honshu. Initial results from statistical and geographic analyses indicate that Jomon people lived in clustered settlement patterns throughout the region (Fig. 3), suggesting that frequent group interaction and multi-family organization was common. Frequent communication,

differences in settlement patterns along the sea coast, lowland plains, mountains, and lake shore settings of central Honshu (Gillam et al. 2010; Nakamura and Matsumori 2009), and the significance of trade and interaction between these various groups (Bausch 2004). Geographic models of trade networks across the landscape are illustrating possible trails used by Jomon people thousands of years ago for the exchange of raw and finished

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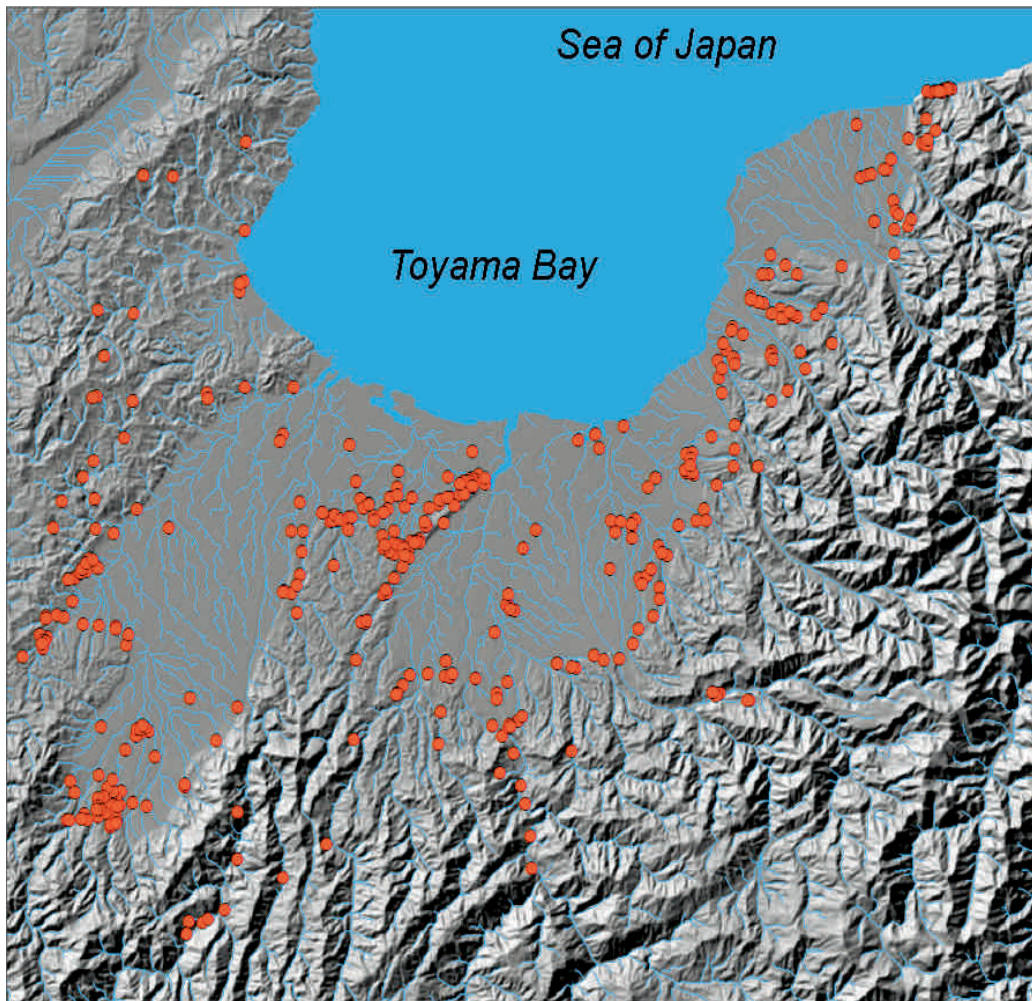


Fig. 3: Middle Jomon site clusters near Toyama Bay. (Drawing by Christopher Gillam)

exchange of goods, and close-kinship ties between settlements likely ensured the long-term success of small local populations (ca. 30 to 100 people).

Near Toyama Bay in Toyama Prefecture, the geographic center of settlement migrated north eastward from the mountain-plains interface onto the fertile lowland plains, this may suggest a shift from hunting and gathering to horticulture over time (Gillam 2009). Current research is examining the

materials, such as jadeite and obsidian, and local foods, such as fish and venison. After more than four years of background research and extensive data development by an international team of scholars, the NEOMAP project is shedding new light on the development of complex prehistoric cultures throughout East Asia.

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