

Haniwa

Haniwa (literally, “clay circles”) are earthenware ceramics that were placed on top of and adjacent to tomb mounds (*kofun*) from the third through seventh centuries. The earliest were cylindrical works decorated with bands of raised clay and holes cut in various geometric shapes. Scholars posit that these ceramics evolved from specialized pedestaled vessels used for ritual offerings of food and drink to the dead.

Initially haniwa were arranged in rectangular formations located on top of the circular portions of keyhole-shaped kofun, directly above the grave. Archaeologists theorize that haniwa delineated the space where funerary rites were performed and served as a protective barrier safeguarding the entombed chieftain from evil spirits. Some scholars speculate that haniwa were also understood to keep the soul of the dead from wandering away from the tomb. The inhabitants of prehistoric Japan may have believed that rulers continued to serve their community after death by fostering growth in the agricultural lands that surrounded their grave sites.

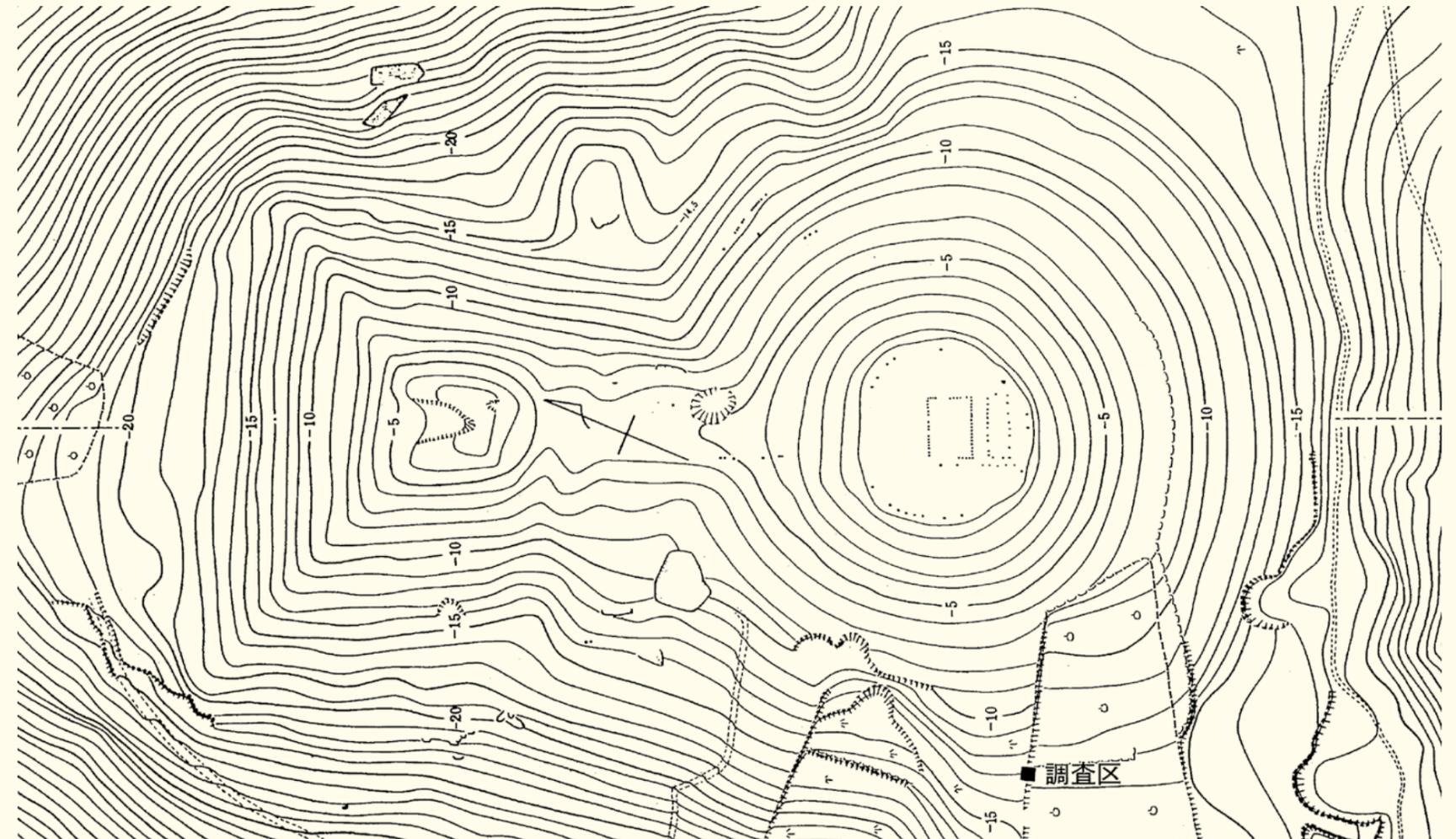
Shortly after the start of the Kofun period, haniwa makers began to add forms modeled to resemble tools, military equipment, and animals on the tops of cylindrical haniwa. Elaborate house-shaped haniwa are thought to have served as symbolic dwellings for the soul of the dead. During the fourth century, new arrangements of haniwa began to appear atop ritual spaces on or adjacent to many kofun. Scholars believe that these locales were used in funerary rites intended to further protect the soul and to guarantee abundant harvests at nearby rice paddies.



House-shaped haniwa from Saitobaru tomb no. 170, Saito, Miyazaki prefecture. *Saitobaru Archaeological Museum of Miyazaki Prefecture.*



Replica haniwa arranged atop Mitsuyoshi Ishizuka Kofun, Koryo, Nara prefecture. *photolibrary.*



Topographical map of Kanagurayama Kofun, Okayama prefecture. *Illustration from Survey of Kanagurayama Kofun (Okayama Prefecture Board of Education, 2008).*

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Human Figures as Haniwa

By the middle of the fifth century, the sculptural repertoire of haniwa expanded to include human figures portrayed as warriors, shamans, farmers, entertainers, falconers, or other social types. At first these figural works were relegated to the outer embankments encircling tombs. They later came to adorn the mound itself, forming rows with other sculpted and cylindrical haniwa on the flat terraces constructed along the slopes of a tomb mound (*kofun*), and partially embedded in the soil at the base of the tomb.

At larger sites, the haniwa aligned in rows would sometimes number in the hundreds or thousands, their quantity serving to display the wealth and authority of the deceased. The human-shaped ceramics may have been intended as depictions of funerary processions, or of the celebrations that were held at tombs accompanying the burial rites. At some kofun, haniwa formed elaborate dioramas, which archaeologists propose served as representations of the mortuary rituals themselves, or even the journey of the dead into the afterlife.



Reconstruction of haniwa atop Tsukamawari Kofun, Ota, Gunma prefecture. *Suzuki Tomo's Mukidoan blog.*

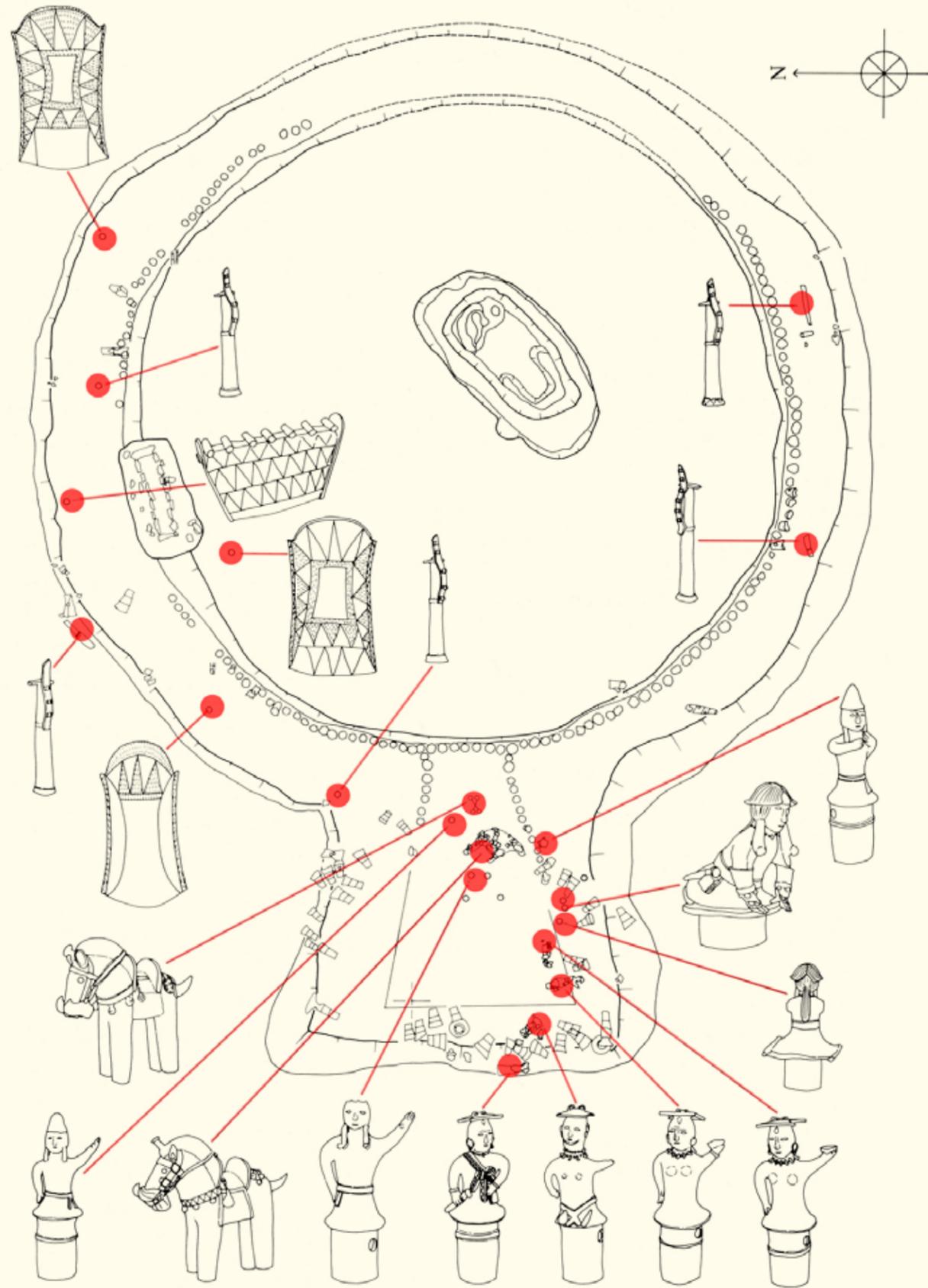


Diagram of locations where haniwa were excavated at Tsukamawari Kofun, Sakai, Osaka prefecture. *City of Ota.*