

Purpose

In Hokkaido, the northernmost part of the Japanese archipelago, the culture of hunting, fishing, and gathering continued even after the Jomon period. In the first half of the Epi-Jomon period (2300–1800 years ago), it was common that beads of the same material and shape were connected with each other, like flat amber beads and cylindrical jasper beads. However, there were exceptions where beads of various materials and shapes such as shells, bones, and stones were put together. The purpose of this presentation is to understand the regional characteristics of beads in the period in question and then elucidate the uses (as accessories or magical items) of exceptional beads made of multiple materials.



Method

1-1. Classification of beads by their material and shape

Classify beads into four groups according to their material and shape: a. flat shell beads; b. cylindrical jasper beads; c. flat amber beads; d. ring-shaped talc articles.

Identify pit graves where beads were unearthed from pit graves in the Epi-Jomon period that were found in Hokkaido and Aomori Prefecture (n = 151), and show the number of unearthed articles for each group of beads.

1-2. Regional distribution and indication of cases where beads were found together

Divide Hokkaido and Aomori Prefecture into eight areas, A to H, and grasp the distribution of beads depending on their material.

For each group of beads classified according to their material and shape, find the percentage of pit graves in which there were accompanying beads.



Picture 1
 a. flat shell beads b. cylindrical jasper beads c. flat amber beads d. ring-shaped talc articles

2. Showing an example of beads of multiple materials and shapes and comparing it with folk materials

Observe the excavated state of shell, bird-bone, animal-bone, and stone beads unearthed from pit graves at the Usumoshiri Site, and restore them to a connected state.

As a folk example, show the material and shape of Irataka no Juzu, a string of prayer beads used by shrine maidens in the main island of Japan in the pre-modern and modern periods, and compare it with beads from the Usumoshiri Site.

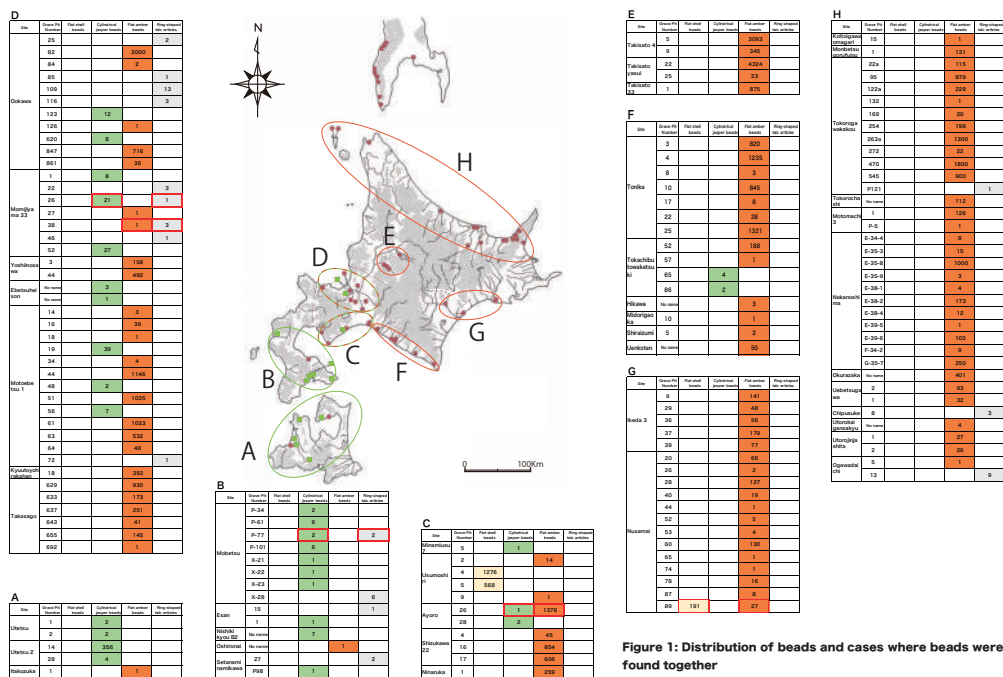


Figure 1: Distribution of beads and cases where beads were found together



Picture 2: Beads unearthed at the Usumoshiri Site in Hokkaido (about 2000 years ago)

Analysis and Results

1-1. The relationship between the region and the material and shape of beads was such that cylindrical jasper beads predominated in areas A and B, while flat amber beads predominated in areas

E, F, G, and H. This is because production areas for cylindrical jasper beads were on the main island of Japan whereas those for flat amber beads were distributed from the central part of Hokkaido to Sakhalin.

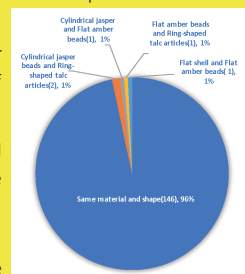


Figure 2: Percentage of pit graves where beads were found together (n=151)

1-2. In areas C and D, there are 44 pit graves in which cylindrical jasper or flat amber beads were unearthed, but there is only one pit grave where both were found; there is an exclusive relationship.

1-3. For the four kinds of beads, the percentage of beads that were found independently is as high as 96%, and basically, beads of different materials and shapes tend not to be put together.

2-1. Of the articles unearthed from the bottom of the 2023 1st grave at the Usumoshiri Site, striped bonnet shell (Phalium flammiferum), distal phalanges of bears, and two mudstones have artificially made perforations. The two mudstones are natural stones with holes. Sculpted needle cases made of bird bones contained no needles and thus are considered to have been repurposed as beads. Radius of the short-tailed albatross (Diomedidae) were unearthed near perforations of other beads and are likely to have formed a string.

2-2. "Iwaya Jyuuhachiya Kannon folk belief materials", which are tools for folk magic that were used in the Edo to modern periods, are kept at the Nakayama Town Museum of History and Folklore in Yamagata Prefecture in the Tohoku region on the main island of Japan. Among those materials, "Irataka no Juzu" is a tool used when a shrine maiden prays and is made of a string of soapberry seeds, antlers of Japanese deer, cowries, lower jawbones of Japanese bears, jade balls, and ancient bronze coins. The beads are characterized by being made of various materials found in nature. "Juzu" is put around a person's neck only at the time of ritual and is a tool for ceremonial practices, not an accessory.

Consideration and Conclusion

Beads in the Epi-Jomon period typically comprise a string of beads of the same material and shape, like jasper and amber beads. By contrast, beads unearthed at the Usumoshiri Site are made of various materials and shapes and are not typical as beads in the period in question. Striped bonnet shell, which inhabit warm seas, were a precious species that could not be caught in adjacent waters and were considered to be a symbol of birth and life because of its shape. Considering that shells, bear bones, stones, and bird bones, which were materials of beads, indicated places in which they were found, such as seas, mountains, rivers, and the sky, respectively, it can be said that a string of them symbolized the natural world. This use and function are clearly different from those of cylindrical jasper and flat amber beads that tended to be used separately from beads of other materials and shapes. Referring to folk examples, it seems highly likely that the beads were not accessories but rather tools for ceremonial practices related to spiritual life.

Acknowledgment

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Pictures 1 was reprinted from "Esan Culture and Trade" written by Tomoya Aono and Naoyuki Oshima, Shin Hokkaido no Kodai 2 [New Hokkaido's ancient times 2] (2003). Pictures 2, and 3 were taken by the author.



Picture 3: Irataka no Juzu (Edo to modern periods), a folk material in Yamagata Prefecture; owned by the Nakayama Town Museum of History and Folklore