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Ancient Ships of Japan

MA, 2004-2006

Ancient ships of Japan are little known outside of the country. They were the object of this study, presented based on the studies of past researchers, together with a comprehensive analysis of their archaeological remains. The process of development from logboats to extended logboats and finally to assembled craft was traced. This study covered evidence from the Early Jomon period (4000 – 3000 B.C.E.) through the Kofun period (300 – 700 C.E.). A large number of logboat remains date to the Jomon period, and it is these logboats which become the foundation of later Japanese ships. The number of ship remains from the Yayoi period diminishes. Therefore, iconographic evidence, mainly clay ship figures and drawings, was used in order to reconstruct the ships from that time.

Introduction

Japan is an island country from where it is impossible to cross over to the continent without ships. This has been taken for granted and therefore, until the mid-twentieth century, little attention has been focused on ships and their history.

However, the concern with nautical history has been growing, and a considerable number of studies have been conducted on this subject, and have brought about substantial results.

Logboats have been broadly used since the prehistoric times and are generally the same from Europe to China. The earliest example of a logboat was found near Pesse in

the Netherlands, and dated to about 6300 B.C.E.

Although it seems that most complex ships developed from logboats, the process of development

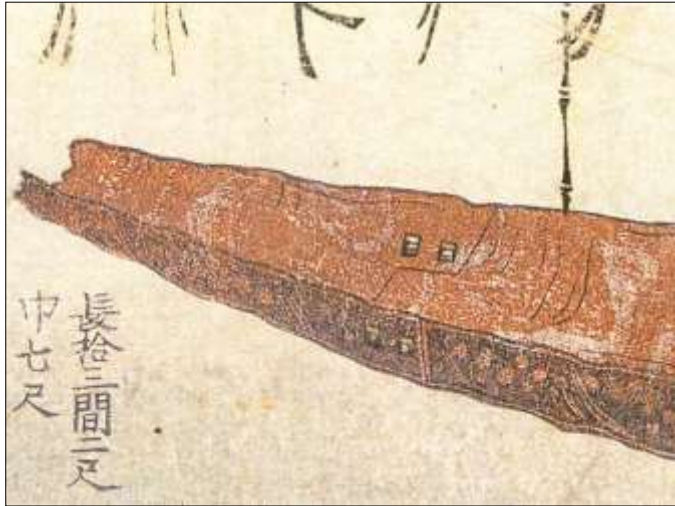
from the primitive stage to a more sophisticated form is different in different areas. Ships in Northern Europe or in the Mediterranean developed first into shell-first or plank-built ships, then to skeleton-first or frame-first ships. Meanwhile, ships in China seem to have developed from logboats to extended log-

boats, and after that to

junks, which were characterized by their structural bulkheads.



Ishii's development process of ships in the Seto Inland Sea



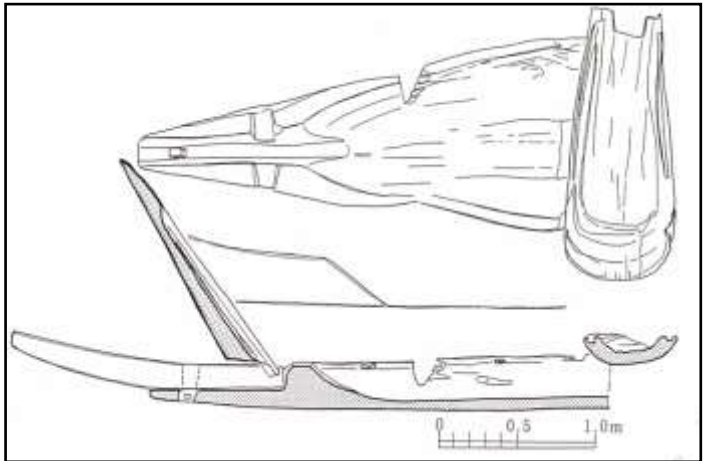
Morokuwa

Ships in Japan developed differently from those in other countries. Abundant archaeological evidence has been found from ancient times, unlike the medieval period (1167 – 1568 C.E.) and later, for which there is no evidence as yet.

Studies of ancient ships in Japan have been earnestly undertaken by Japanese archaeologists, historians, and folklorists since the second quarter of the twentieth century. The development process of

Japanese ships has been roughly explained.

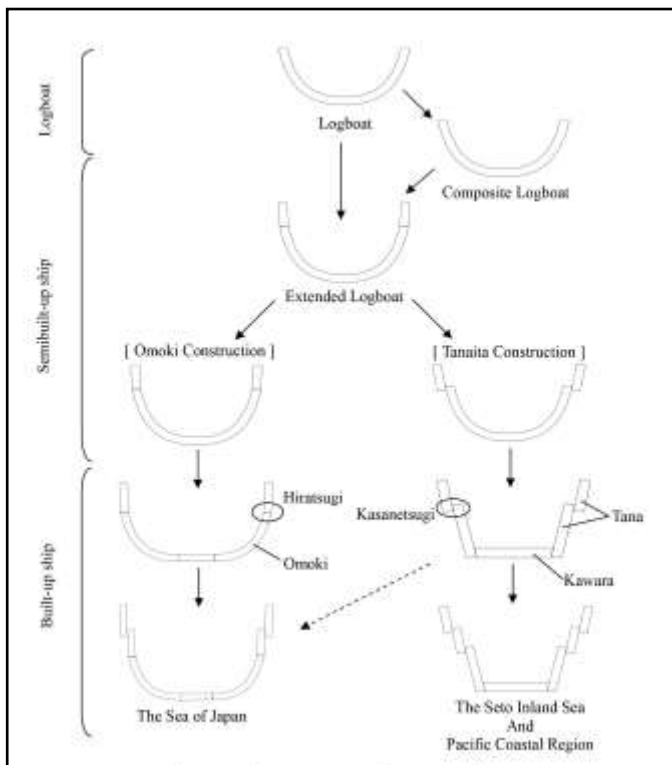
It is generally said that ships in Japan evolved in the following order: logboat, extended logboat and assembled craft. In this project a typology of the early Japanese watercraft was presented, based on both archaeological and ethnographic evidence.



Kyuhoji (after Okita 1995, 284.)

Citation

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Evolution of the Japanese boats, from logboats to extended logboats, to semi-built , and to built up ships