

The significance of ancient rituals in Okinoshima in Munakata region and their transformation through to the medieval period

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Introduction

This paper will discuss three broad themes. First is the question of why people think about and believe in divine beings, and the significance of rituals. This question will be reconsidered from the perspective of cognitive religious studies based on recent cognitive functions of the human brain. The task of this theme is to position the rituals of Okinoshima in Munakata region and the “view of the divine” in terms of the way in which *kami* (deities) are perceived, in the context of the whole of human history. (Fig. 1)

The second point is that from around the latter half of the seventh century, rituals changed to use large quantities of earthenware and steatite objects. The second theme of this paper is therefore to consider the significance behind the change in the ancient rituals.

The third point is that from the late ninth to tenth centuries remains from ancient rituals at Okinoshima in Munakata region cease to be found, indicating that the practice came to an end. The third theme of this research is therefore to assess why the rituals came to an end at that particular time and how this led to beliefs and rituals practiced at Munakata Shrine in the medieval period, including some



Fig. 1 : Okinoshima (Photo: the author)

historical background.

I . Human cognitive functions and the notion of the goddesses in the Munakata region and Okinoshima rituals

1. Why do humans believe in deities and worship them?

Firstly, let us attempt to consider the question, “Why do humans believe in deities and worship them?”

From the late 20th century to the 21st century, a new movement within the study of religion has been developed in the field of the cognitive science of religion. This field seeks to approach religious study based on the cognitive functions of the human brain. According to the results of this research, humans intuit the actions of “agents” as being the cause of certain movements and phenomena, and at the same time, they also intuit that these agents have a will or mind of their own. This is a basic cognitive function of the brain that humans have acquired in the course of their evolution as a means of survival. This observation has been made by multiple researchers of the cognitive science of religion, including Pascal Boyer. This “agent” with a will or mind of its own becomes a “deity” or similar presence capable of causing and controlling particular phenomena (e.g. sunlight, rainfall, springs and water supplies, safety or danger of travel and transportation, etc.).

A further important observation has been made by Stewart E. Guthrie, concerning the “attribution of human characteristics to agents in non-human phenomena.” Since humans intuit it, their gods or deities have been imagined and personified in human form since ancient times. Based on this premise, it is necessary to consider

the way in which gods or deities are perceived, or the “view of the divine.” Neuroscientist E. Fuller Torrey observes that approximately 40,000 years ago the brain of proto-humans (*homo sapiens*) was finally ready for complex thought. Accordingly, our ancestors intuitively perceived and were aware of the presence of invisible beings such as gods or deities and spirits back during that time.

If we consider gods or deities in this way, the next issue is how to consider rituals. If the agent of a specific phenomenon, i.e. a god, is intuitively perceived in human form, then the relationship between God or deity and man is likened to a relationship between persons. We intuit that if humans provide precious goods and delicious foods, the agent of the phenomena (God or deity) will express, maintain, and expand the desired phenomena in return. In other words, this relationship, namely the process of exchange between the divine and humans, could rightly be called a “ritual.”

At the same time, the intuition that if you are rude to someone, that person will be angered is also applied to rituals. For this reason, humans intuit that any disrespect or impurity (*kegare*) in the exchange (ritual) between gods or deities (agents) and humans will serve to only enrage the gods or deities, leading to disaster. This is the reason why divine festivals place emphasis on *saishiki*, the structure and etiquette of rituals that do not cause disrespect to the deity, and *harae* (purification) to ensure and maintain purity in festivals.

This perspective is extremely useful when considering the view of the divine throughout the Japanese archipelago as being intuited from the workings of the natural environment, and this ancient view of the divine is concretely illustrated by the expression “here stays (坐), resides (居), or exists (在) the *kami*” as seen in the *Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki*, and *Engishiki*. It is perceived that the *kami*—the agent behind the workings of the natural environment (phenomena)—“resides (stays)” in the place/environment where these phenomena of the natural environment manifest. Therefore, the place or

environment where the works of *kami* appear is the place where God resides (stays), and is accordingly the place where rituals are performed.

2. The workings of Okinoshima and Oshima and rituals

The focus of this paper are the three goddesses of Munakata, which according to the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* are described as *kami* (divine beings) staying (or resides) in Okitsu-miya (Okinoshima), Nakatsu-miya (Oshima), and Hetsu-miya (the seashore around the Tsurikawa River mouth). It could well be said that the basis for the divine nature of and the rituals relating to the three goddesses of Munakata can be found in the workings of the islands and seashore environment.

If that is the case, then what was the function of the three goddesses of Munakata? In the first addendum in the sixth paragraph in the first volume of the *Nihon Shoki*, the sun goddess (Amaterasu-omikami) is recorded as having instructed the three goddesses to “descend to the road and help the descendants of Amaterasu and be worshiped by the descendants of Amaterasu ” In the second addendum in the sixth paragraph it is also written that, “the three goddesses...currently resided on the road north of the sea.” From these descriptions in the *Nihon Shoki* we can understand that the three goddesses of Munakata are therefore considered to reside along the “road north of the sea,” or in other words, the maritime route linking Kyushu and the Korean Peninsula, that they help the descendants of Amaterasu (the emperors of Japan) and that the emperors of Japan worship them. The presence and workings of the three Munakata goddesses are thus spoken of in relation to the shipping routes and maritime traffic to the Korean Peninsula. So it is that the workings of the environments on and around Okinoshima, Oshima and the seashore (at the mouth of the Tsurikawa River) in the maritime traffic of the Genkai Sea are directly connected to the three Munakata Goddesses.

Let us take a more detailed look at the workings of maritime transportation in the context of Okinoshima.



Fig. 2 : Ichinodake, Okinoshima

Okinoshima is an isolated island lying in the middle of the Genkai Sea, and can be seen in the distance even from Tsushima. Recent studies have found that the rocks that make up this island are not quartz porphyry, but white tuff. The highest mountain on Okinoshima shown in Photo 1 is Ichinodake, which is comprised of huge white tuff rocks. The white rocks rise up out of the blue waters

of the Genkai Sea, reaching an elevation of 243.1m. This is why it can be viewed from afar on a clear day and why one of its workings (roles) was to act as a navigational guide point on the route between Kyushu and the Korean Peninsula (Fig. 2 : Ichinodake, Okinoshima). Travelling from Tsushima, heading south towards Okinoshima by boat, once Okinoshima is passed the next maritime marker is Oshima, where the goddess of Nakatsu-miya resides. From there it is possible to reach the mouth of the Tsurikawa River of Munakata on Kyushu. The most prominent maritime guide point on Okinoshima is Ichinodake, the island's highest peak.

Looking at the relationship between Ichinodake and the ritual site on the island, the oldest ritual site is located directly below Ichinodake on the flat surface of the southwestern flank of Okinoshima (Fig. 3 : Map showing positing of Munakata and Okinoshima ritual sites). The oldest ritual sites are sites 19 and 17 and within these sites, in the vicinity of Rock I, which is at the highest elevation, it is possible to gaze upon

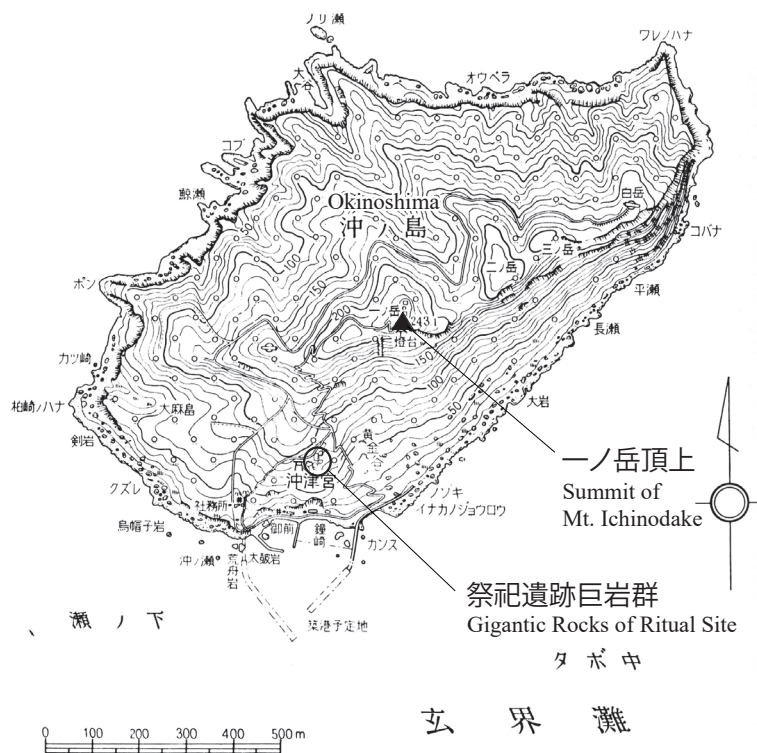


Fig. 3 : Positing of Munakata and Okinoshima ritual sites
(Additions to the map in "Okinoshima Island (1958)")

Ichinodake directly above. Based on their location, it can be inferred that the objects from the oldest group of ritual sites, comprising a large number of copper mirrors and iron weapons, were likely presented in offering towards Ichinodake. This makes the assumption possible that rituals on Okinoshima began as offerings to the mountain (Ichinodake) itself. In the sixth paragraph of main chapter in the first volume of the *Nihon Shoki*, the goddess said to reside on Okinoshima is given the name of Ichikishima-hime-no-mikoto, signifying that this is the *Itsukishima-hime-no-mikoto*, or in other words the “goddess of the purifying island” (*Itsukishima* refers to an “island of purification”). It could be said that the island itself was thus recognized as a divine being. The route linking Kyushu with the Korean Peninsula was an important maritime transportation route for the Yamato Kingdom. The character and workings of Okinoshima and Ichinodake, performing a role as a navigational guide point, could have been intuited by sailors to be a goddess guiding them on their journey through the stormy waters of the Genkai Sea. Mt. Mitake-san, the highest peak on Oshima, where resides the goddess of Nakatsu-miya, had the same role of acting as a maritime guide point. Ritual sites dating from the late seventh century onwards are also located at the summit of Mt. Mitake-san.

3. Notion of the goddess at Hetsu-miya and location environment

The continuation of the line that links Ichinodake on Okinoshima and Mt. Mitake-san on Oshima leads to the mouth of the Tsurikawa River in Munakata on Kyushu, where Hetsu-miya is located. The goddess that dwells there, just like Okitsu-miya and Nakatsu-miya, is presumed to be directly related to the workings of the environment in which it is located, therefore, when considering the character of the goddess that is enshrined there, it is necessary to think in terms of the ancient environment in the vicinity of Hetsu-miya, particularly the ancient topography. Fig.4 shows a detailed topographic map created using Kashmir 3D to give a

sense of the topography around Hetsu-miya used to look (Fig.4 : Recreation of the shoreline in the vicinity of the Tsurikawa River mouth in Munakata). Looking at this map we can see that to the north of Hetsu-miya is a broad low lying area, to the north of which at the boundary with the shoreline there are three rows of beach ridges (sandy heaps deposited on the beach) stretching from east to west. The current mouth of the Tsurikawa River was created in 1791 during the “Tsurikawa Dredge,” when the two northernmost beach ridges on the ocean side were cut through to form the mouth of the river. Prior to that time the mouth of the Tsurikawa River had been blocked by the two rows of beach ridges on the ocean side and had instead meandered eastward before emptying into the sea.

A clue to reconstructing the ancient coastal topography is provided by the Hamamiya shell midden, located on the innermost (southern) of the three rows of beach ridges. Archaeological excavations at this site have confirmed remains and artifacts dating from the late 5th to the 7th century of the Kofun period, and in addition to fishing tools (iron multi-pronged fishing spear) and Genkai Sea-style salt making pottery, fish bones including those of shark and snapper, and shells such as turban shells and abalone have been uncovered, indicating that this area was a fishing settlement, where people engaged in fishing and salt-making activities. Given these discoveries, due to its character it is natural to assume that this settlement was located on the sea shore, and that the ancient shoreline can be estimated to have been in the vicinity of the northern edge of the beach ridge where the Hamamiya shell midden is located. Next, if we trace the elevation of the estimated ancient shoreline around the mouth of the Tsurikawa River, we can reconstruct the ancient shoreline as it would have appeared during the 5th to 7th centuries, as shown in Fig.4.

Looking at this topographic map it is possible to reconstruct the topography of a large lagoon that stretched out directly north of Hetsu-miya. The lagoon was separated from the rough waters of the open sea by the beach ridges

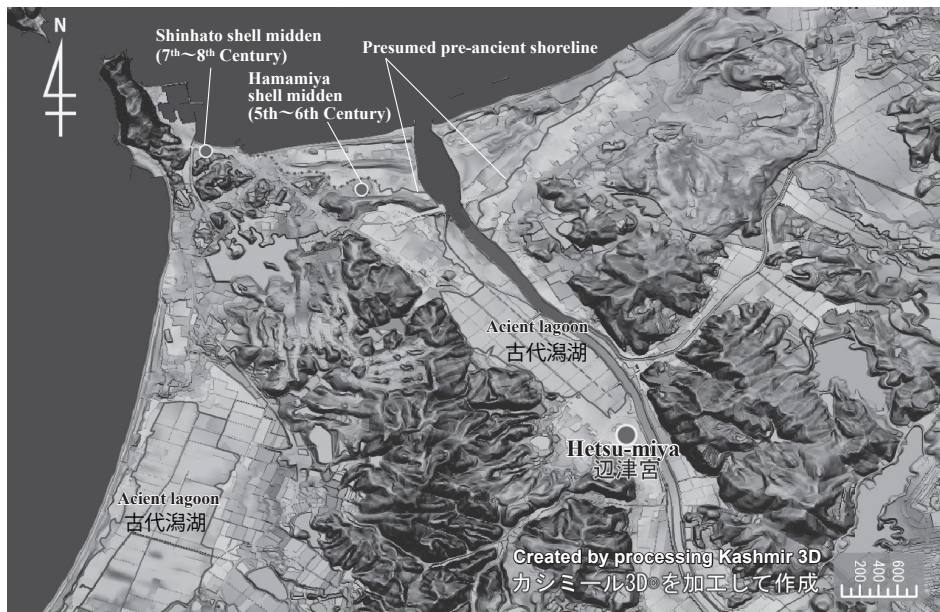


Fig. 4 : Recreation of the shoreline in the vicinity of the Tsurikawa River mouth in Munakata

and likely served as a quiet harbor, where ships could dock. The role of this lagoon in providing safe harbor to ships from the open sea was thus intuited to be the workings of a goddess, and the enshrined goddess resided at Hetsu-miya.

Fundamental to the perceived divinity of the three goddesses of Munakata were the workings of Okinoshima and Oshima as maritime transportation routes and navigational guide points that were so important to the Kingdom of Yamato, as well as the role of the lagoon that lent itself as a harbor at the mouth of the Tsurikawa River. Therefore, in the environment where these workings (phenomena, roles and functions) manifested it was thought that goddesses resided and in turn these became the place where rituals were conducted.

II . Changes in rituals in ancient Okinoshima in Munakata region

1. Development of a system for conducting rituals and the establishment of *shingun*

The ancient rituals of Okinoshima in Munakata region started around the late fourth century, but underwent

significant change in the late seventh century. This change was characterized by a shift to using large volumes of Sue ware (unglazed stoneware pottery fired until hard in a kiln). Some Sue ware is perforated before firing, such as the perforated pottery (Sue ware) shown in the photo (Fig. 5 : Perforated pottery from Site 1). This perforated pottery is not practical and cannot be used for alcohol or other beverages due its holes. It can therefore be surmised that this Sue ware was made purposefully and solely for ritual use. This indicates that a system for making ritual tableware, including Sue ware specifically for the purpose of rituals, had been established by the late



Fig. 5 : Perforated pottery from Site 1 (Collection of Munakata Taisha Shrine)



Fig. 6 : Salt-making pottery from Site 1 (Collection of Munakata Taisha Shrine)

seventh century.

In the Munakata region there is the Munakata Kiln Complex (including remains of Sue ware kilns) dating back to the end of the fifth century. The production of Sue ware for ritual purposes had developed against a background of Sue ware production since the Kofun period onwards. The same situation can also be confirmed in ancient rituals performed at Ise Grand Shrine, as recorded in the *Kotai-jingu Gishikicho* (a register of ceremonies of Kotai-jingu shrine, established in 804). The production of Sue ware and Haji ware (unglazed earthenware) there has a tradition that dates back to the sixth century, and it is thought to have been prepared and incorporated into rituals in the seventh century.

Another important point relates to the discovery of Genkai Sea style salt-making pottery uncovered at Sites 1 and 5 on Okinoshima. This fact would imply that salt was brought from the salt production sites to the ritual sites (Fig. 6 : Salt-making pottery from Site 1). According to the *Kotai-jingu Gishikicho* a person had a role known as “Misaki monoimi,” which was to bake salt for rituals, and this specially baked salt would be offered in rituals. Given the existence of salt-making pottery, it can be assumed that at the time of Sites 1 and 5 on Okinoshima, that is to say, from the late seventh to eighth and ninth centuries, in a similar way to Ise Grand Shrine salt was offered in rituals on Okinoshima.

A structure similar to that developed to support the rituals

of Ise Grand Shrine was therefore probably developed for the ancient rituals of Okinoshima in Munakata region around the late 7th century. According to the *Kotai-jingu Gishikicho*, at Ise this structure was developed in the mid 7th century during the reign of Emperor Kotoku, and for the purpose of supporting the Ise Grand Shrine and its rituals *miyake* (administrative offices) were established in Watarai and Take districts. These *shingun* (district for deity), or districts supporting the Ise Grand Shrine, were the progenitors of Watarai-gun and Taki-gun. In the case of Munakata Taisha too, it can be confirmed that Munakata-gun was similarly designated a *shingun* in the early 8th century. This is confirmed by the “Dajokan Shobun (Grand Council of State Disposition)” of November 16, 723, as cited in the *Ryonoshuge* (which set out an exceptional provision approving the concurrent holding of the position of *Gunji* (administrative official) of a *shingun* by a family within the third degree of consanguinity). This indicates that after Ise grand shrine, in the late 7th century Munakata-gun (district) was established as *shingun* for Munakata Taisha. It can be inferred from the Sue ware and salt-making pottery at Sites 5 and 1 on Okinoshima that this designation was in parallel with the development of rituals.

2. Character of steatite objects and changes in rituals

Along with the establishment of the *shingun*, another change in ritual practices in the latter half of the 7th century was the appearance of the new steatite objects. Many such steatite objects have been excavated from Site 1 on Okinoshima. According to the excavation report *Munakata Okinoshima*, a total of 1,140 objects were found, including 68 human-shaped objects, 40 horse-shaped objects, 108 boat-shaped objects, and also comma-shaped beads (*magatama*), beads (*usudama*) and disc-shaped objects with holes (imitations of mirrors) (Fig. 7 : Steatite objects excavated from Site 1, Okinoshima). The production of steatite objects in the Munakata region dates back to around the 5th century,

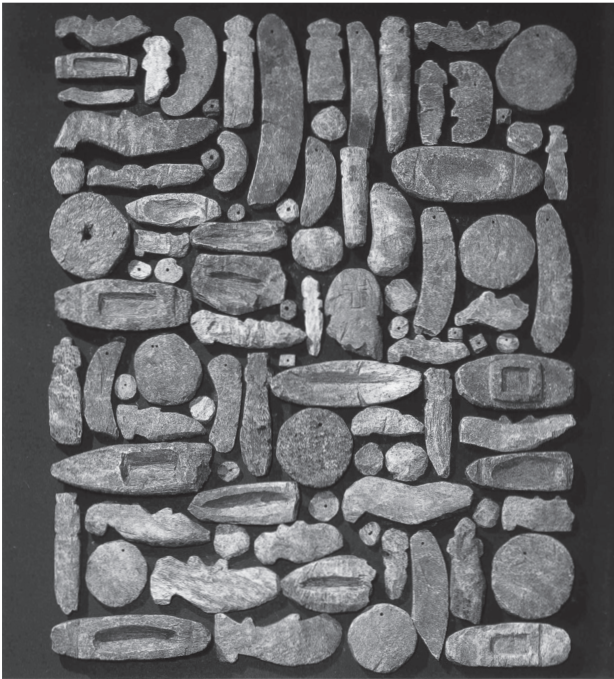


Fig. 7 : Steatite objects excavated from Site 1, Okinoshima
(Collection of Munakata Taisha Shrine)

where examples have been uncovered at the Fujiwara-kamiyazaki site in the middle reaches of the Tsurikawa River. This tradition led to the production of a large number of steatite objects, and around the late 7th century new combinations of these steatite objects were added, including human figurines, horses and ships.

Combinations of human figurines, horses and ships have also been found at the Aoya-yokogi site in Tottori Prefecture. Archaeological excavation at this site have discovered remains of the ancient San'in Road, along which wooden imitations have been unearthed from the site of the ancient ditch and river. The era in which these were made is the same as for Munakata, dating from the late 7th century to the 10th century, and upwards of 22,500 items have been discovered. Among these there are 748 human figurines, 1,747 horse figurines, and 72 ship-shaped steatite objects have been discovered.

With regard to the character of the human and horse figurines of the eighth and ninth centuries, KANEKO Hiroyuki linked them to the Oharae purification rituals of the Nara period and the Onmyodo-harae (Yin-yang) purification rituals of the Heian period, hypothesizing that

they served as ritual purification tools. This interpretation subsequently became mainstream. However, the character of the Oharae purification ritual in the eighth century, in which precious items were offered to atone for sins, is different from that of the Onmyodo-harae purification ritual in the 10th century and thereafter, which was performed for the purpose of warding off calamities and prolonging the life of individuals. In particular the human figurines used in the Onmyodo-harae purification ritual trace their origins ceremony for the purification of *Yamato and Kawachi no Humibe* (immigrant families) conducted at the imperial palace for the emperor, which in turn were derived from the Chinese Taoist scripture *Sekishoshi-shoreki*, and were used as figurines to pray for the good fortune and long life of the emperor. It is for this reason that the metal and wooden human figurines that appeared in the latter half of the 7th century have been understood as purification tools based on Taoist beliefs to remove personal sins and uncleanness.

However, we cannot simply perceive of these human figurines as merely ritual purification tools. As demonstrated by the earthenware figurines excavated from the lower levels of the Myogajima No. 5 tumulus in Shizuoka Prefecture, examples of such figurines date back to the first half of 5th century, and earthenware human and horse figurines from the 6th century have been found at the Narai site in Osaka Prefecture. Wooden imitations of ships dating back to the 5th century has also been excavated at the Yamanohana site in Shizuoka Prefecture. There is no doubt, therefore, that human and horse figurines and ship-shaped steatite objects were used as ritual objects with a history that can be traced back to the Kofun period and thereafter.

A story that is helpful in examining the character of these human and horse figurines can be found in the *Hizennokuni Fudoki*, a report on the province of Hizen dating back to the early eighth century. In the chapter of this *fudoki* describing Saga district, it is related how a raging *kami* in the upper reaches of the Sagakawa River would kill half the people who passed by and let the

other half live, but that when the *kami* was worshipped using human and horse figurines made of clay, the *kami*'s raging subsided. This shows that the clay figurines were not ritual tools, but offerings to calm a wrathful *kami*. If we apply the content of this story, we can see that the same type of clay human and horse figurines were used as offerings to the gods as early as the fifth or sixth centuries, and that the same can probably be said for the ship-shaped steatite objects, examples of which can be found as far back as the fifth century and thereafter.

If we then consider the location of the Aoya-yokogi site, we see that it was adjacent to a river crossing on the ancient San'in Road, lying on the east side (right bank) of the Hiokigawa River that flows into the Sea of Japan. At the Zendabojigasaki site on the opposite (left) bank, similar wooden human and horse figurines have been found in large quantities. If we combine the environment of these archaeological sites with the story of the raging *kami* on the Sagakawa River as related in the *Hizennokuno Fudoki*, we can see that the human and horse figurines and ship-shaped steatite objects were *nusa*, or offerings made by people, who intuitively perceived dangerous phenomena at challenging areas on a journey or at river crossing points to be a "raging *kami*." In the late seventh century, the San'in Road was constructed as the official road of the Ritsuryo State, and it is thought that the ritual of offering a human and horse figurines or ship-shaped steatite objects, etc., at difficult way points along the road also began at this time.

Examples of offerings of human and horse figurines can also be confirmed in iconographic materials of the Heian period. Photo 5 is a scene from Imamiya Shrine in the *Nenju-gyoji-emaki* (picture scroll of annual events; copy from Kyoto City University of Arts), the original of which was established in the late 12th century, depicting a lively scene in the shrine precincts during a festival. An enlarged view of the three main shrines standing side by side shows multiple *ema* (votive picture tablet) hanging out in front. Enlarging the picture still further we can see that there are two types of *ema*, one depicting

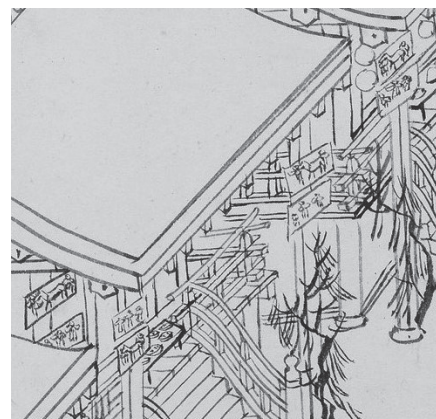


Fig. 8 : *Nenju-gyoji-emaki*, Human and horse figurines at Imamiya Shrine (Kyoto City University of Arts, Model Books)

a horse and the other a human figure (Fig. 8 : *Nenju-gyoji-emaki*, Human and horse figurines at Imamiya Shrine). From their iconography, these can be judged to be ancient human and horse figures and horses in plate form, and given that they are located at the front of the main shrine building along with the sacred ritual offerings, they cannot be considered to be purification tools for the purpose of removing sins and uncleanness. It is therefore reasonable to consider that they were hung before the *kami* as offerings. Given this reality, as previously observed by OBA Iwao, the steatite objects of human figures, horses and ships that have been excavated in considerable numbers from Ritual Site 1 on Okinoshima, were in all likelihood not purification tools, but rather *nusa* (offerings) made to the *kami* at ritual sites on maritime transportation routes. Given that numerous ship-shaped steatite objects at Site 1 on Okinoshima have

been discovered, it is likely that the rituals were related to maritime transportation.

The overall transition that occurred at ritual sites on Okinoshima can be clearly seen through the remains at the various sites there, from the late 4th century (Sites 17, 18 and 19), to the mid-5th century (Site 21), and the 6th century (Sites 7, and 8). At these ritual sites, precious and luxurious items such as bronze mirrors, iron weapons, armor and tools, as well as highly decorative horse harnesses and armors have been excavated, which were presumably offerings from the Kingdom of Yamato. Each of these ritual sites is thought to have corresponded to a special ritual associated with a national external event of the Kingdom of Yamato, such as exchanges with the states of the Korean Peninsula, or even in response to international tensions and military actions, or the dispatch of envoys to imperial China.

However, from the late seventh century rituals changed to include the use of large volumes of Sue ware fired in the Munakata region and steatite objects that had been produced locally. It was in the late seventh century that the *shingun* was established and a structure developed whereby ritual tools and offerings could be produced and supplied locally. At this stage, it is clear that the rituals of Okinoshima were in character rituals for regular maritime traffic routes, and it is possible that the Munakata goddesses also became objects of worship for the local people. What was so symbolic of these changes in the nature of the rituals on Okinoshima was the use of large quantities of Sue ware for sacred victual offerings and the many steatite objects that were offered as *nusa*.

III. From the demise of ancient rituals through to the medieval period

1. Changes to the environment and landscape in the vicinity of Hetsu-miya, Munakata Taisha

Finally, let us examine how belief in and rituals related to the ancient three goddesses of Munakata were passed

down to the medieval period. Closely involved in this transition is the physical changes that took place to the environment and landscape in the vicinity of Hetsu-miya. As noted above, prior to the “Tsurikawa Dredge” in the late of the Edo period, the mouth of the Tsurikawa River meandered significantly eastwards, and traces of the old river road still remain today. This was due to the formation of two additional rows of beach ridges on the seashore after ancient times, which led to the sedimentation of a broad lagoon facing Hetsu-miya and the beginning of the formation of the present topography in the vicinity. As a result, the function of the lagoon as an ancient port for the region was ultimately lost. This then raises the question as to when the two rows of beach ridges were formed. It is my contention that the timing is most likely to be around the 10th century, for the following reasons.

Similar topographical changes can be confirmed in various regions throughout the Japanese archipelago around the 10th century. On the seashore of Tsuruga in Fukui Prefecture on the Sea of Japan, the ancient shoreline can be estimated from the location of salt manufacturing sites dating back to the ninth century, and it can be assumed that Kehi Shrine was established facing to the beach. In the early 14th century, the western approach to Kehi Shrine became marshy and muddy, so a monk of the Jishu sect, Taa Shonin Shingyo, renovated the western approach by carrying sand from the seashore using the “osunamochi” (sand-carrying) technique. This is hypothesized to be because by the 13th century, a new beach ridge had been formed on the north side of the ninth century shoreline, with the western approach to the shrine becoming a low-lying hinterland (Fig. 9 : Topography of Tsuruga and position of remains and the shrine). Also, at the Jike site at Hakui in Ishikawa Prefecture, the remains of an ancient settlement related Keta Shrine and its ritual-related remains have been discovered on a dune on the beach. These remains were buried at some point between the end of the ninth century and the early 10th century due to the movement of the

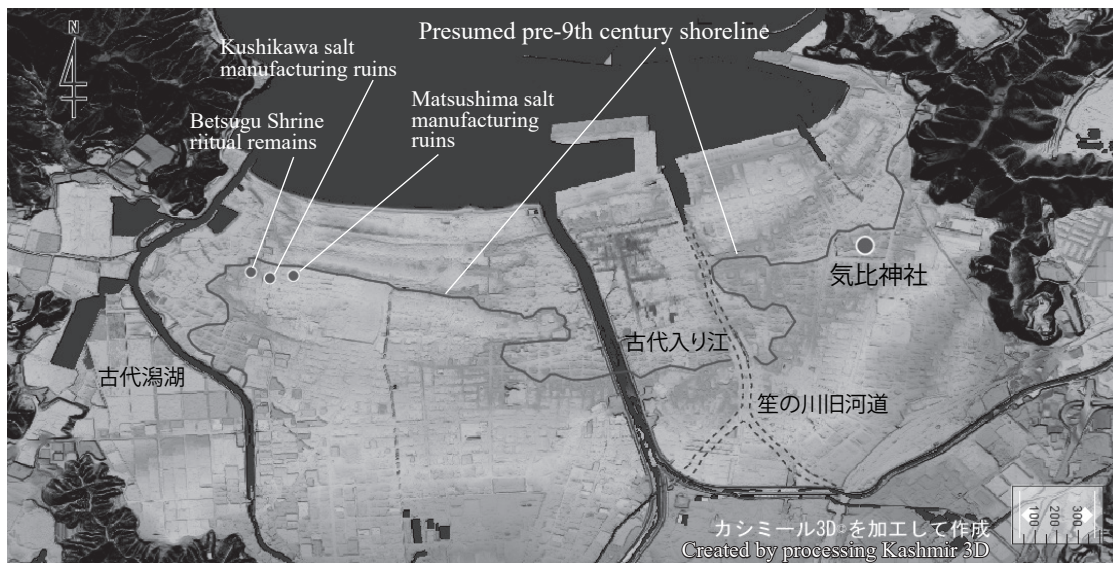


Fig. 9 : Topography of Tsuruga and position of remains and the shrine

large sand dunes on the shoreline.

In addition, at the Shiotsuko site on the northern shores of Lake Biwa in Shiga Prefecture, fine sand and clay soil were deposited on the remains of the ancient harbor from the late 9th to the 10th century, and the water level of Lake Biwa changed during the same period, with the result that the ancient harbor seems to have become submerged. Furthermore, it has been confirmed that the riverbed of the Kamogawa River in Kyoto Prefecture, adjacent to Heian-kyo (ancient Kyoto), was lowered in the 10th century, forming a two-meter-high terrace along the river. This may have been due to erosion caused by flooding and other factors.

Similar phenomena have also been discovered along the shores of Tokyo Bay in the southern Kanto region. At the Kitsunozuka and Isamudai sites in Chiba Prefecture, from 10th century onwards settlements located on the seashore had become covered with a layer of sand. In addition, in the middle reaches of the Koitogawa and Obitsugawa rivers, which flow into Tokyo Bay, the migration of tributary river channels and the siltation and erosion of surrounding waterways indicate that the riverbed level lowered after the 10th century, which was once again most likely due to flooding or other erosion. It can be assumed that in floods vast quantities of earth and sand would be

eroded away and flow from the river mouth into the sea, causing a rapid buildup of sediment along the shoreline. Across the nation Japan's rivers are susceptible to sudden and violent flooding events, and it is in this way that the topography of rivers and shorelines came to change. The 10th century was just such an era.

Corresponding to this is the analysis of climate change using tree-ring cellulose oxygen isotopic ratio, as discovered by NAKATSUKA Takeshi. His research reconstructs summer rainfall trends from year to year based on the ratio of oxygen isotopes in the cellulose of tree rings. According to this research, the 10th century was the driest period for 1,000 years before and after a peak in 948. Conversely, in the late 9th and 10th centuries, there were some years that were particularly wet, including 867, 896, 913 and 992 (Fig. 10 : Rainfall trends by year from the 8th to 13th centuries). In other words, from the latter half of the 9th century to the 10th century, while there were years with a strong tendency toward dryness and a high risk of drought, there were also years with extremely wet conditions and long rains and floods. These years coincide with the droughts, long rains, and flooding recorded in the *Nihon Sandai Jitsuroku* and *Nihon Kiryaku*. Given such circumstances, the topography of the rivers and beaches throughout the Japanese archipelago changed,

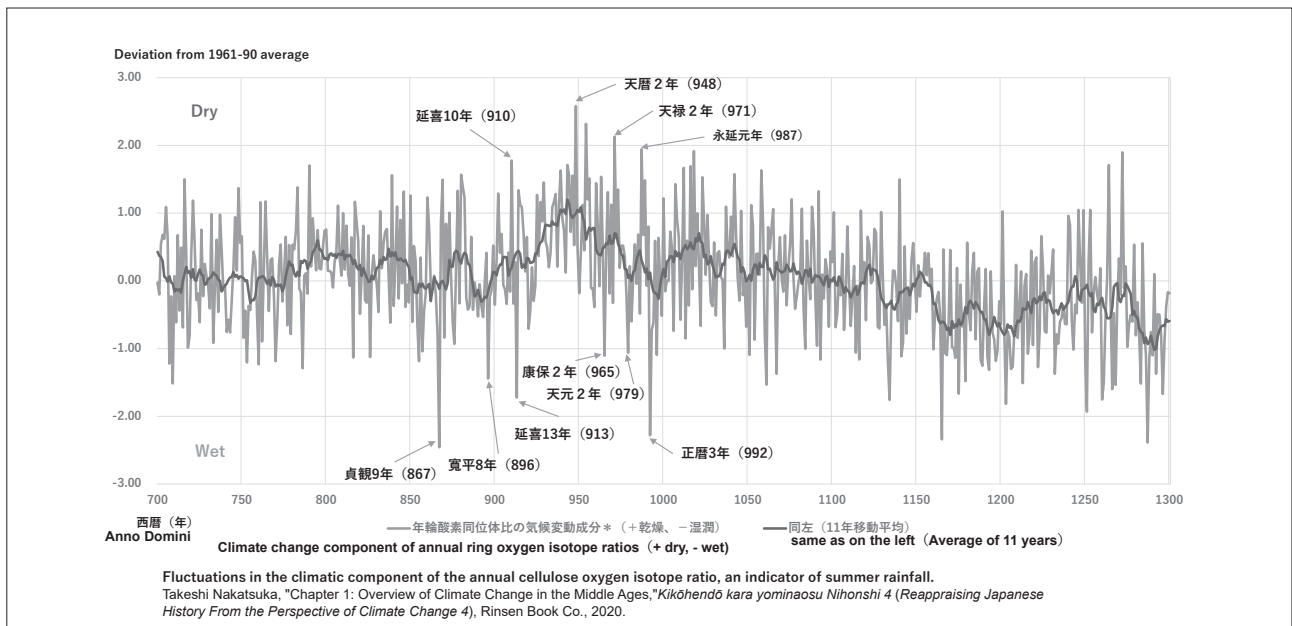


Fig. 10 : Graph “Rainfall trends by year from the 8th to 13th centuries”

and the formation of new beach ridges and the silting up of the lagoon around the mouth of the Tsurikawa River in Munakata region are thought to have progressed around this time.

2. Response to disasters in the 10th century and the influence of Buddhism in the notion of the divine and rituals

During the 10th century, drought, long rains and flooding were among the frequently occurring natural disasters and together with these phenomena disease became endemic. As a religious response to these disasters, the Imperial Court made offerings to the *kami* and dispatched envoys to imperial mausolea, as well as implementing *Ninnoe* ceremonies.

Among these *Ninnoe* was a Buddhist service in which the contents of the *Ninnogyo* (Humane King Sutra) are read aloud and praised in order to protect the nation from disaster and bandits. The *Ninnogyo* was brought to Japan from Tang Dynasty China in 806 by the Buddhist monk Kukai, and was the most recently completed translation of the *Ninno Gokoku Hannya Haramittakyo Sutra* by the Tang Dynasty monk Amoghavajra (Fuku in Japanese) following the An-Shi Rebellion that plunged the Tang

Dynasty into turmoil. Then, in the first half of the 9th century, during the reign of Emperor Junna, a “Great Once-in-a-Generation *Ninnoe*” was held to pray for the peace of the country following the emperor’s accession. In the fifth chapter (*Gogoku-bon*) of the *Ninno Gokoku Hannya Haramittakyo Sutra* there is this interesting passage.

Within each of the lands of the Great King, there are many gods(deities), each of whom is followed by many dependents. If the gods(deities) and their dependents listen to the Ninogyo, the lands of the Great King shall be protected by the gods(deities) and their dependents.

If you replace “Great King” with “Japanese emperor” and “land” for “Japan,” the “many gods(deities) throughout the land” can be given to mean the *kami* of Japan. This passage adds a new Buddhist interpretation to the *kami* of Japan, noting that if the *kami* were made to listen to the *Ninnogyo* they would protect the lands of Japan. In addition, the intensification of natural disasters and the spread of disease through the 10th century, as well as the outbreak of large-scale civil disturbances during the Johei and Tengyo Rebellions, are consistent with the teachings of the *Ninogyo* Sutra regarding bandits, great

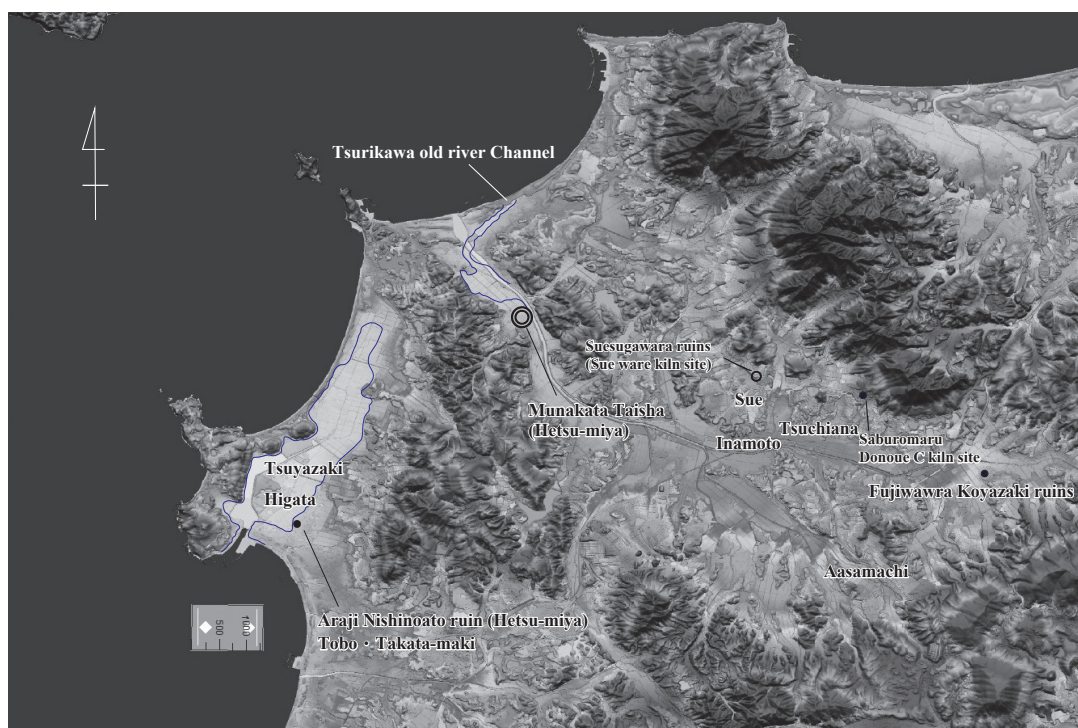


Fig.12 : Map showing the relationship between Hetsu-miya, Takata-maki and Konpon-Jinryo

seven shrines are also included in the list of devas to be invoked (Fig. 11 : Wooden invocation table from the Shiotsuko site). Around the same time Soja shrines were established to invite in and enshrine the important *kami* of each province near the ancient provincial government offices, and in the 12th century the *Kokunai-jinmyocho* was compiled, containing a list of the names of the *kami* who were to be invoked.

As noted above, the character of the ancient deities (*kami*) of Japan, including the three goddesses of Munakata, was based on the special features and workings of the natural environment. Therefore, the place/environment where their workings manifest and the places for rituals were closely related. However, the deities that were invoked eventually became independent from the place and environment where they had been enshrined since ancient times, coming to be worshipped as the guardian deities of the nation or provinces. A representative example of this is the Shinto *kami* and shrines that were invoked as guardian deities in medieval domains, manors, and fiefs, and the landscape of the precincts of the medieval

Munakata shrines came to be deeply connected with the invocation of the three Munakata goddesses.

3. Transition to medieval Munakata Taisha

So how did the Munakata Shrine of antiquity change as time progressed to the medieval period? In addition to natural disasters and environmental changes, another element that is also strongly linked to the transition of the shrine is overseas trade.

From the 10th century onwards a new beach ridge was formed on the seashore, and the sedimentation of the lagoon facing Hetsu-miya progressed to the extent that the harbor functions of this lagoon were greatly reduced. However, to the west of Hetsu-miya lie the Tsuyazaki tidal flats. The formation of the beach ridge here would have created a large lagoon, isolated from the open ocean, which would have enhanced the location's function as a safe harbor (Fig. 12 : Map showing the relationship between Hetsu-miya, Takata-maki and Konpon-Jinryo). At the entrance to the Tsuyazaki tidal flats is the Arajinishinoato Site, where large amounts of Chinese



Fig. 13 The stone *shishi* and *komainu* (guardian lion and dog) of Munakata Shrine's Teisangu pavilion (Collection of Munakata Taisha Shrine)

ceramics used in trade have been excavated. HATTORI Hideo has observed that the writing of “Takata” in ink on one of the white porcelain plates excavated there, coupled with the fact that the place name of Tobo (lit. “Chinatown”) is recorded, would suggest that this site was the center of Takata-maki(pasture), a hub for Japan-Song Dynasty China trade.

The *bokushi* (proprietor of pasture) of Takata-maki included people such as Munakata Myochu, who had also served as the chief priest of Munakata Shrine. According to the *Shoyuki*, the diary of Fujiwara Sanesuke, in 1025 Munakata Myochu made an offering to Fujiwara of Chinese goods, including two celadon vases and three tea urns and jars, which would indicate that already by the 11th century Takata-maki had become a hub for Japan-Song China trade. HATTORI Hideo has noted that this maritime trade route is thought to have passed by Iki and Orojima before arriving at Munakata and Tsuyazaki, with Tsuyazaki bypassing Hakata to become a direct overseas trading hub with Song Dynasty China. The chief priest of Munakata Shrine was deeply involved in this trade. The stone *shishi* and *komainu* (guardian lion and dog) of Munakata Shrine's Teisangu pavilion (Fig. 13), which came from Song Dynasty China and were passed down to present-day Munakata Taisha, symbolize the deep relationship between the Japan-Song China trade and

Munakata Shrine at that time.

The maritime route linking Song China with Munakata that follows a course via Iki and Orojima to Munakata and Tsuyazaki actually misses out Okinoshima. This would suggest therefore, that Okinoshima had, by this time, come to be a place symbolic as the residing place of a deity since ancient times, and as a sanctuary and forbidden place where ordinary people were not allowed to set foot, with rituals no longer being performed as they had been in ancient times. This, along with the shift of rituals to Buddhism in the 10th century, is probably what led to the archaeological phenomenon of the demise of ancient rituals in Okinoshima in Munakata region.

In contrast to Okinoshima, Hetsu-miya, now closely associated with the new Japan-Song China trading hub at Tsuyazaki, become a central location for the rituals of medieval Munakata Shrine. In ancient times Hetsu-miya had faced out onto a lagoon that had served as a harbor and was known as the residing place of a goddess. However, from the 10th century onwards, as the silting up of the lagoon progressed and the major trading port functions shifted to the tidal flats of Tsuyazaki, Hetsu-miya took on a central role as the location for rituals performed by the chief priest of Munakata, who was deeply involved in Japan-Song China trade. It was at this time that the three shrine pavilions enshrining the three Munakata goddesses, Teiichigu (first shrine), Teinigu (second shrine), and Teisangu (third shrine), were built side by side to form the precincts of the shrine (Fig. 14 : Medieval painting depicting Munakata Tashima Shrine (Hetsu-miya)). The inscription on the *komainu* stone guardian dogs of the Teisangu reads, “donated and dedicated to the Teisan Pavilion of Munakata Shrine by Fujiwara-no-Edafusa, 1201,” which would definitely suggest that rituals were taking place already before 1201 in the 13th century (Photo 7: *Komainu* guardian dogs of the Teisangu, Munakata Taisha, Figure 6: Rubbing of the inscription on the *komainu* guardian dogs of the Teisangu, Munakata Taisha).

According to the *Kenji-sannen Gochinza Shidai*

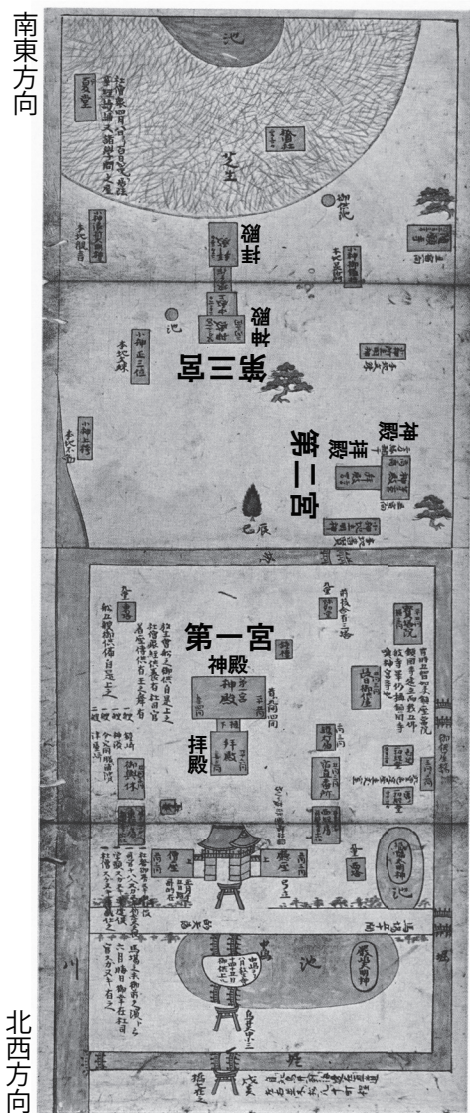


Fig. 14 : Medieval painting depicting Munakata Tashima Shrine (Hetsu-miya)
(Collection of Munakata Taisha Shrine)

(Introduction of history of enshrinement of 1277) from the Kamakura period, the Teichigu was termed the Soja sansho, where in the central hall the Daiichi (first) Bodhisattva (Okitsu-miya) was enshrined, and the Teinigu was referred to as the Chuden, where in the central hall the Daini (second) Bodhisattva (Nakatsu-miya) was enshrined, and in the Teisangu the Daisan (third) Bodhisattva (Hetsu-miya) was enshrined in the inner sanctuary of the main hall as a *jinushi* landowner goddess. The Teichigu in particularly is referred to as

Soja. This name (惣社 Soja) is the same pronunciation as 総社 Soja, a shrine to which *kami* from around the each province were invoked or invited near the each provincial government office, and regardless of the island or seashore environment, a new ritual space was established in the 12th century where all three Munakata goddesses were invited and enshrined within the shrine precincts of Hetsu-miya.

In recent years, from the perspective of cognitive religious studies, Ara NORENZAYAN has noted that when people from different environments and cultures engage in trade over a wide area, whether or not they have faith in a “Big God” (transcendental surveillant) is an important indicator to confirm the credibility of the trading partner. In the 11th and 12th centuries, when trade at the civilian and private level was active in East Asia, it is thought that the role of the “Big God” (transcendental surveillant) was played by the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and devas of Buddhism, which had spread as a common faith throughout East Asia. It was against this backdrop that wooden religious oath writing tablets such as those found at the Shiotsuko site were made, which promised the Buddhism devas and *kami* (deities) to faithfully transport goods, etc. It was also during this period that the character of the three Munakata goddesses as Bodhisattvas most likely came to be emphasized.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a look at the concept of the Munakata goddesses and the character of their rituals, tracing their transition from ancient times to the medieval period, and looking at the changes and character of each period. During that time, the ancient beliefs and rituals relating to the three Munakata goddesses were influenced by domestic strife, natural disasters and environmental changes in the 10th century, after which, in the 11th and 12th centuries, they were incorporated into Buddhist faith and rituals as part of an East Asian trading bloc formed around the Song Dynasty, in turn creating the medieval

precinct landscape of Munakata Shrine.

On the other hand, some ancient traditions were also passed down. One such aspect is the existence of the Konpon-Jinryo, a shrine fundamental manor affiliated with and which supported Munakata Shrine in the medieval period. This manor is adjacent to a group of Sue ware kiln sites in the middle reaches of the Tsurikawa River (villages in the vicinity of Sue, Inamoto, and Tsuchi-ana), where Sue ware was actively produced from the fifth century onwards and particularly after the sixth century, according to a medieval document of Munakata Taisha. This manor, which had possessed various tradition since the Kofun period and supplied the instruments for rituals continued to be positioned as the Konpon-Jinryo from the 12th century onwards. It is probably due to the fact that there was a clear recognition of the history and tradition of the region that the area was referred to as “Konpon” (fundamental) Jinryo.

Belief in Munakata Taisha has subsequently continued from medieval times up to the present day. There is no doubt that the foundation for this belief lies in belief in the ancient Munakata three goddesses, and the places used for rituals, as well as the connections among the people who supported these rituals. This is a point that bears emphasizing.

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