SYMBOLIC SPACES: DECORATIONS AS A CONTEXTUAL RESOURCE

IN THE STUDY OF ISHIYAKATA CHAMBER TOMBS OF THE HIGO REGION

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ABSTRACT

This paper approaches decorative practices as an important context for understanding and exploring the significance of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs of the 6th century in the Higo region of northern Kyushu. The decorations were centered upon the *ishiyakata*, a stone sarcophagus-like structure aligned against the back wall of the chamber. Unlike previous forms of decorated burial in which the structures and decorations created a space shared by the remains of the deceased, the decorated *ishiyakata* was an exclusive, primary burial space often shared by two individuals. The changes in these practices were informed by emergence of local leaders during the 6th century who were buried together with a family unit. These leaders also made use of combinations of motifs and pigments to create affiliations between the individuals buried in *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. There were at least four distinct groups within the Higo region. During the late 6th century, the decorative program of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs was also used to navigate transformations to the tomb space. New decorative motifs and combinations were explored in secondary chambers and long hallways, while motifs applied to the *ishiyakata* were also used within the chamber and archways. These tombs became elaborate spaces designed for both the burial of local leaders as well as for the rituals conducted for them by the living.
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Chapter One

Introduction

During the late 4th century, side entrance stone chamber tombs (横穴式石室 yokoana shiki sekishitsu) emerged and gradually replaced stone sarcophagi (石棺 sekkan) placed in vertical pit graves lined with clay or stones as the preferred method of burial in tumuli known as kofun (古墳 ‘old mound’) in northern Kyushu. This transformation in the construction of the burial space developed within the region for over a century before its spread to the political center in the Yamato Basin located in modern day Nara Prefecture during the Late Kofun period (AD 500-710). One type of tomb emerged during the 6th century in northern Kyushu, falling within the transition from stone sarcophagus to side entrance stone chamber tomb. Ishiyakata chamber tombs were side entrance stone chamber tombs which contained a sarcophagus-like structure. Many of these structures were also decorated, a practice that had developed since stone sarcophagi were first introduced to the region in the late 4th century. These tombs attest to the subtle complexities of regional development during the Kofun period (AD 250-710).

Scholars interpret this adoption of side entrance stone chamber tombs as a herald of the Late Kofun period. Throughout the period, it is believed that tumuli and
their contents reflect the emergence and development of political leaders who were responsible for establishing a Japanese state. Conversely, kofun conferred authority and shaped social order, which, as demonstrated through the variations in form and function, were not fixed concepts throughout the period. In part, kofun achieved this as architectural complexes where a series of rituals and other acts including the burial would take place. Kofun and the funerary structures they contained are fundamentally linked with death and burial and it is these concepts that informed tomb design. The transition from stone sarcophagus to side entrance stone chamber tombs marks a significant shift in these concepts.

The most prevalent view in current Japanese scholarship considers most side entrance stone chamber tombs of Kyushu (including ishiyakata chamber tombs) as ‘houses of the dead,” a term that has a different meanings depending upon the aim of the researcher. In one view, the architecture of the tomb controlled the placement of bodies and limited access to the tomb to the members of a family unit or household.\(^1\) In another interpretation, side entrance stone chamber tombs are dwellings for the soul of the deceased.\(^2\) Both of these views have merits but, while they consider the construction of burial space and the rituals connected to them, they neglect another contextual

\(^1\) Takagi Kyoji. Yokoana shiki sekishitsu no sekizai: Sekishōkei yokoana shiki sekishitsu no rei wo chūshin ni. Kyūshū ni okeru yokoana shiki sekishitsu no dōnyū to hatten II, (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University, 1999), 704.

element: decoration. These two veins of scholarship mention developments in decorative practices as concurrent with the emergence of side entrance stone chamber tombs and related to the same transformations in Kofun period society, yet these writers rarely engage decorations as a resource for their analyses of tomb space. In doing so, such approaches disregard the contribution of decorations to tomb design.

Motifs were first incised upon stone sarcophagi as early as the late 4th century and later were carved and painted upon the inner surfaces of tombs with increasing frequency. Then why aren’t decorations considered within these studies? Kofun with decorations are found throughout the Japanese archipelago, but are fewer in number than tombs without decorations. Since so few exist, soshoku kofun (decorated kofun), or tumuli that contain burial facilities with motifs incised or painted upon their surfaces, are treated as a separate phenomenon. It may not be a coincidence that the highest concentration of decorated tombs occurs in northern Kyushu, which is also the location of the development of early side entrance stone chamber tombs. Many studies of tomb architecture discuss the transition from stone sarcophagus to side entrance stone chamber tombs across various regions, which may be why decorations are often disregarded in such studies. Yet, studies of the meaning of chamber tombs of Northern Kyushu do not treat decorations as part of the entire tomb design, but rather as artistic elements that occur with Kofun period burials. An overwhelming number of Japanese
studies of decorated kofun focus on iconographic choices rather than on the decorations’ contribution to the symbolic environment within the tomb.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the logic of the design of ishiyakata chamber tomb, including their decorations, and the meaning behind its form. In doing so, the decorations provide an additional context for approaching the transformation of funerary structures and burial practices in northern Kyushu. Moreover, decorations can provide us with a deeper understanding of developments in burial practices during the late Kofun period. What we will find is that they were involved in reorganizing an underground burial space. Ishiyakata chamber tombs were constructed and decorated to meet evolving concerns for arranging the deceased in a meaningful way and accommodating the rituals associated with this process. In acknowledging the role of decorations beyond their artistic contribution, we can only further our understanding of the region during this period.

Context

Still decorating the modern Japanese landscape, kofun are the tumuli of an emerging elite dating from the late 3rd to early 7th century. These mounded tombs are so monumental in their construction and role within the communities that created them that this period of proto-history has been named after them. Their structure and
contents are paramount to dividing this period into three main stages of development. The earliest tombs of the Kofun Period are attributed to the Makimuku district of modern day Nara Prefecture. Their keyhole shape and size sets them apart from mounded burials of the preceding period. It is not only the spread of their distinct structure but also the grave goods, like bronze mirrors, and wooden coffins buried atop the tumuli that denote the emergence of a network of local elite. Many regions of the Japanese archipelago were quick to adopt these burial customs, a pattern which researchers use to mark the early part of the Kofun period. The middle part of the Kofun period is witness to the emergence of comparatively larger keyhole tombs which required a great deal of labor to construct. The bronze mirrors and ornaments once buried in wooden coffins were replaced with iron goods and horse trappings within stone coffins. During the late Kofun Period, grave goods did not alter radically.

The late Kofun Period is framed by fundamental transformations in the design of burial mounds with the introduction of side entrance stone chamber tombs at the beginning of the period and the eventual disuse of kofun at its end, concurrent with the spread of Buddhism among the elite. These changes were centered on the Kinai region of the southern Nara Basin and were not immediately adopted in peripheral regions, such as northern Kyushu. Instead, during the 6th century, this southern island continued to develop the regionally distinct practices which had emerged shortly after the spread of burial mounds. These practices were so successful that they spread back through the
eastern part of the archipelago and were appropriated into the tomb culture of other regions. Northern Kyushu was the location for the early development not only of side entrance chamber tombs but also of decorative practices.

Decorated kofun are practically synonymous with Northern Kyushu as 75% of the roughly 400 tombs recorded are located within the region. Of those tombs, 180 are found in present day Kumamoto Prefecture, also known as Higo (Map 1.1) in the old provincial system of Japan. Higo, along with Hizen constituted an ancient administrative division of land referred to as Hi no Kuni. The political leaders of Hi no Kuni were connected to a network of elite throughout the Japanese archipelago responsible for the exchange of burial practices. In fact, the earliest form of decorated burial, the carved stone sarcophagi, was introduced from the northeastern Shikoku region in the late 4th century.

The Higo region also contained the quarries and production centers associated with the stone materials used in kofun throughout much of northern Kyushu. The demand for stone sarcophagi and later materials for side entrance stone chambers may have figured into the development of communities within the Higo region, accounting for the many smaller, circular tumuli often affiliated with local leaders. Many of the

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4 modern day Nagasaki and Saga prefectures
5 Kuni (国) ancient province or country
6 Wakasugi Ryotaro, Kyūshū sekkan kō. Senrekigaku – kōkogaku ronkyō II. (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University. 1997), 73.
decorated kofun have circular mounds, rather than the keyhole-shaped tumuli shared among the regional magnates with ties to the Yamato court. This region is also the center of the development of the *ishiyakata* chamber tomb, and provides a narrow regional scope for this study.

Map 1.1. Map of Western Japan highlighting the Higo, Sanuki, and Kinai Regions.

*Previous Scholarship*

There is a dearth of English publications on decorated kofun and the broader subject of prehistoric Japanese art. The earliest and most extensive materials on decorated tombs in English were written during the mid-20th century by J. Edward Kidder.7

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Decorated tombs compose what is undoubtedly the largest section in his books and are represented by a generous collection of photographs. The motifs are categorized and presented through iconographic studies. Kidder briefly addresses the meaning of space within chamber tombs by comparing it to stories of the underworld from the *Nihonshoki* and the *Kojiki.* He also authored an article on the discovery of the Takamatsuzuka Tumulus in Nara. This tomb is one of the few decorated tombs in Japan that borrowed directly from Chinese and Korean artistic trends. While the article is more of an excavation report than an academic study, it is a good example of English materials keeping in step with trends in Japanese archaeology.

Kidder’s works have provided the foundation for more recent publications that mention decorated tombs, but there has been no recent contribution to the literature that focuses entirely on the subject. Gina Barnes is one of the few modern scholars to bring up decorated tombs in her book *China, Korea, Japan: the Rise of Civilization in East Asia,* referring to Edward Kidder’s work. Her article on a pattern known as the *chokkomon* makes mention of a few decorated tombs among other decorated artifacts

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11 直弧文, *chokkomon*
from the Kofun period. The article advocates the importance of context in the search for meaning of the pattern and is quite relevant to my research.

In Sacred Texts and Buried treasure, William W. Farris also mentions decorated kofun while discussing tombs in a section concerning ties to Korea during the Kofun period. He states that “utilization of large blocks of stone opened the way for further changes in tomb design. Japanese archaeologists have long held that both decorated tombs (soshoku kofun) and tumuli with wall paintings (hekiga kofun), most of which were located in northern Kyushu and date from the 5th century and later, were imports from Korea.”12 Recent scholarship supports this view of late 5th and early 6th century influences from Korea and China on decorative practices in Northern Kyushu.13 However, these examples are associated with the final stages of the development of decorated kofun. Decorative practices did not begin with the introduction of chamber tombs but date back as far as the 4th century from areas east of Kyushu in the Japanese archipelago. While decorative practices might not have been a direct import, Kyushu’s proximity to and exchange with Korea, as seen in the archaeological record may attest to other ways in which this relationship affected decorated kofun.

This thesis seeks to build upon both Japanese and English sources by exploring the relationship between *ishiyakata* chamber tombs of Northern Kyushu and decorative practices. These tombs are located chronologically within the transition from stone sarcophagus to chamber tomb and demonstrate an evolving decorative program. I have attempted to include most of the decorated *ishiyakata* chamber tombs in my research in order provide as many contexts for comparison as possible. The final number was affected by several factors. For one, some tombs within the region suffer from poor preservation, both prior to and after their discovery. There is also inconsistency among the site reports, as some tombs, and their decorative programs, were insufficiently recorded. Most of this thesis relies on site reports and photography produced by prefectural and local government agencies. I was fortunate enough to be able to examine four of the sites and visit a museum that reconstructed three additional *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. These visits provided me a first-hand experience of the space within *ishiyakata* chamber tombs.

*Issues and Methods*

In recent years, archeologists and art historians have engaged in finding the symbolic meaning of space in prehistoric and historic cultures. Both disciplines read beyond the physical remains of a structure and search for possible developments—
political, social, economic, to name a few—in order to elicit an interpretation. In some cases, art has also informed our understanding of the symbolic organization of space. My research was first inspired by art historians like Wu Hung, who produced several works on art within the context of death and burial. My thesis embraces his view that “the tomb was designed, constructed, and decorated as a whole and should be studied as such.”¹⁴ Through a synthetic study, I will explore the relationship between the decorations and the tomb structure as informed by unified principles of design. These principles expressed worldviews tied to burial practices held by those responsible for the creation of the tomb. My research strives to add to the modern understanding of how decorative practices contributed to the construction of the tomb within a fluctuating Kofun burial system.

I have developed several questions to be addressed throughout this thesis to consider the meaning of space in ishiyakata chamber tombs: Do decorative practices corroborate the various modern interpretations of tomb space? How do they refute or elaborate our understanding of this meaning? How did decorations correspond to ishiyakata chamber tombs? Rather than studying motifs independently, I will examine the relationship between the architectural forms within the tomb and the decorative practices.

This thesis will begin by focusing on the relationship between the *ishiyakata* structure and the decorations. It is important to consider why this relationship was so integral to the design of these types of tomb. While many studies of decorated kofun focus on identifying motifs, I will also explore the combination of motifs. Motifs took on a greater meaning when arranged together on the *ishiyakata*. As this thesis deals with the transition from stone sarcophagus to side entrance chamber tomb, it is important to address how the decorative program changed as well. In later tombs, decorations were applied to other areas of the tomb. By comparing the composition and correspondence of motifs of *ishiyakata* to those of other areas of the tomb, we can understand whether these were perceptually linked or incongruous areas. While there are many aspects of meaning within the tomb that are lost or fragmented, this thesis looks to actively engage the role of decorative practices in the exploration design of the tomb.
Chapter Two

Deconstructing the House of the Dead:

Decorated Ishiyakata and the Arrangement of the Dead in Tombs of the 6th Century

Introduction

It is no coincidence that side entrance stone chamber tombs and mural type chamber tombs\textsuperscript{15}, a category of decorated kofun, developed simultaneously in the Higo Region according to Japanese research. These monolithic burials contained an interior surface upon which decorative motifs and patterns could be applied. While decorations were applied to the walls of chamber tombs, as expected, the transition was not as immediate or as uniform as these modern categories imply. The inclusion of various types of tombs in these categories obscures the complexities of architectural and decorative forms explored during the transition from stone sarcophagus to chamber tomb. The \textit{ishiyakata} chamber tomb is one such type of burial that is approached as a continuous architectural space and enfolded within the category of mural type chamber tomb. Yet the stone sarcophagus-like structure erected parallel to the back wall of these chamber tombs provided a very specific function and meaning to this underground space that is better understood when studied together with its decorative program.

Ishiyakata have been identified in 34 tombs within the Higo region attributed to the 6th century. The majority of ishiyakata were located in circular mounds, while only six were associated with keyhole-shaped mounds. Approximately half of these funerary structures had motifs painted upon their interior surfaces, and were the focus of decorative practices within the tomb. The term ishiyakata was coined in 1922 by Japanese researcher Takahashi Kenji, and repeatedly defined as a house-type assembled stone sarcophagus with a horizontal opening, positioned towards the rear end of chamber tombs. These structures were first included as a feature of decorated kofun in research of the early 20th century. However, later archeological research concerning ishiyakata approached them as a distinct type of chamber tomb. Since the early 80’s, their spread and construction has been studied in detail. The most recent definition, put forth by Kurafuji, states that ishiyakata were burial facilities constructed within a stone chamber through the assembly of stone slabs, with a hirairi (平入) or main

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16 Kurafuji does not identify Tanokawachi No. 3 as an ishiyakata chamber tomb although it is included in his study. This thesis adopts the position that it is a hybrid tomb and, as such, it has been added to the selection of tombs. The total count would then be 35. There are 6 additional tombs in modern day Fukuoka Prefecture and are not included within this study. See Kurafuji Hiroshi, Ishiyakatakō: Hira’iri yokoana shiki sekkan no shutsugen to sono igi, Senrekigaku, Kökogaku Ronkyū II. (1997): 138.
17 Takahashi, 1922. From Kurafuji Hiroshi, Ishiyakatakō: Hira’iri yokoana shiki sekkan no shutsugen to sono igi, Senrekigaku, Kökogaku Ronkyū II. (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University, 1997).
18 横穴式家形石棺 yokoana shiki iegata sekkan
19 Kurafuji Hiroshi, Ishiyakatakō: Hira’iri yokoana shiki sekkan no shutsugen to sono igi, Senrekigaku – Kökogaku Ronkyū II. (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University. 1997), 135.
entrance on the long side. The aim of this definition was to remove the word stone sarcophagus\textsuperscript{20} and stress that these structures were not sealed.

All previous definitions establish some tie to the concept of a dwelling, and in some cases make indirect analogies to modern concepts of space. While allusions to architecture within Kofun burials exist in other forms like the building-shaped *haniwa*, the architectural shape of lids of stone sarcophagi and *ishiyakata* does not imply that these structures (or even the *haniwa*) were interpreted as dwellings by those that created them. Both the name and the definition are utilized by modern researchers to interpret not just the *ishiyakata* but the space within the tomb as having house-like properties. However, from a survey of all existing examples, Kurafuji records only 10 out of 34 *ishiyakata* to have a peaked roof-like lid. For the rest, a flat stone slab was used to cover the structure\textsuperscript{21}. There is also no evidence that one particular region demonstrated a preference for the architecturally-styled roof. In southern Higo, a region associated with the origin of stone slab construction, there are no *ishiyakata* structures with the house-style lid. It is not especially useful to define and assign meaning to the *ishiyakata* based upon a feature that occurs infrequently\textsuperscript{22}. The argument that *ishiyakata* were houses could be strengthened by formal studies of Kofun period dwellings in the Higo region.

\textsuperscript{20} 石棺, sekkan, coffin
\textsuperscript{22} Even the use of *hira’iri* is problematic, as it is a term that refers to a traditional architectural structure in Japan.
but evidence and scholarship is lacking. If we are to view these structures objectively, a
new designation ultimately needs to be established. However, for the sake of this thesis,
I will continue to refer to these funerary structures as *ishiyakata*.

The exposed inner structure of the *ishiyakata* has led to a search for the meaning
behind this aspect of design. *Ishiyakata* were funerary structures that contained but did
not conceal the remains of the deceased. Japanese archaeologist Wada Seigo coined the
term *open stone sarcophagus* as another way of interpreting *ishiyakata*. Even assuming
that they are still stone sarcophagi, *ishiyakata* are structurally different from earlier pit
grave stone sarcophagi and contemporary side entrance chamber tombs with sealed
stone sarcophagi of the Kinai region. Wada believes that side entrance chamber tombs
of northern Kyushu were houses of the dead, or spaces where the soul of the deceased
would dwell. This ideological and ritual space (the “house of the dead”) is believed to
have shifted from the top of the burial mound during the early and middle Kofun
period to the space within the chamber during the late Kofun period. Key to this
argument is the disappearance of house-shaped *haniwa*, or clay figurines, atop the
mound and, in some cases, the construction of *ishiyakata* or “house-like” structures

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23 開けた棺 hiraketa kan
25 *haniwa* 墳輪 “clay ring”. It is worth noting that house-shaped haniwa are not characteristic of the Higo area Kofun.
Figure 2.1. General Plan of Chibusan Kofun. Chibusan Kofun is frequently used in the study of space in chamber tombs. The roof-like lid seen here is used in less than half of all *ishi-yakata*.

within the tomb. The lack of a physical boundary also created a uniform space shared by the *ishiyakata* structure and the rest of the tomb. Interestingly, Wada Seigo’s article includes figures of decorated *kofun*, like Chibusan Kofun (Figure 2.1), without addressing the decorative practices as a part of the tomb design. He merely notes that some of these dwellings were even decorated. Scholarship on decorated kofun notes that the influx of new types of motifs occurs at the same time as the emergence of the “house of the dead.” These new motifs are the same as those associated with mural type kofun.

Modern studies of decorated kofun have assigned *ishiyakata* chamber tombs to the category of mural type tombs. Mural type tombs are first and foremost described as side entrance chamber tombs with decorations applied in mineral pigments upon the inner walls. This change is also accompanied by the addition of representational motifs.

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27 There are generally two categories of motifs in the study of decorated kofun. The first and earliest group is composed of geometric and abstract motifs. They continue to be used until the late Kofun period. The second category of motifs is composed of representational or figural motif. They include figures, horses, birds, weaponry, and even symbolic motifs borrowed from the mainland. These motifs were used in growing frequency during the late Kofun period. See Takagi Kyoji, Kyūshū no sōshoku kofun”, *Higashi Ajia to Nihon no kōkogaku II*, (Tokyo: Dōseisha, 2002): 189-220.


29 装飾古墳, *sōshoku kofun*, decorated kofun are burial mounds with decorations painted or incised upon funerary structures or the walls within chambers. See Takagi Kyoji, Kyūshū no sōshoku kofun”, *Higashi Ajia to Nihon no kōkogaku II*, (Tokyo: Dōseisha, 2002), 189-220.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Left Inner Face</th>
<th>Right Support</th>
<th>Left Support</th>
<th>Lid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Daibo**</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>G</td>
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</tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
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<td>G</td>
<td>G R</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
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</tr>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>G R</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G A</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
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<td>-</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Inariyama</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>G</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Kamao</td>
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<td>G</td>
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<td>G</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunigoshi</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanokawachi No. 3</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Motifs corresponding to the different parts of the *ishiyakata* structure in chamber tombs of Northern Higo;
Key: G= Geometric, A=Abstract, R=Representational
* Tombs observed in person  ** Replica tombs observed in person
(human, horse and boat) to the pre-established geometric and abstract motifs. These characteristics are not shared throughout all of the decorated ishiyakata chamber tombs.

Several of the decorated ishiyakata were incised and accompanied by pigment. A comparison of motifs appearing in ishiyakata chamber tombs shows that human figures and boats appear on only two of the ishiyakata (Table 2.1). The human figures are static motifs and not associated directly with a horse or boat, which reduces the likelihood that they represent a journey of the dead. Furthermore, both tombs are also attributed to the latter half of the 6th century and are not representative of earlier motif selections. This category allows scholars to draw upon the motifs seen overwhelmingly in later chamber tombs and use them to interpret earlier tombs.

Structural Key to Ishiyakata

While the ishiyakata structure was part of the tomb design, it was also a unique funerary structure within a larger tomb complex. Besides its architectural form, it had a special relationship with the decorative practices within the chamber. This aspect of the design was not arbitrary but a part of a purposeful composition. The significance of both the ishiyakata and the decorations is better grasped when they are studied together rather than as separate elements within the tomb. Decorations are decontextualized

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Figure 2.2. General Plan of Segonkō No. 3 Kofun

Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokucho
when they are analyzed as individual motifs or categories of motifs that appear within various types of tombs. The motifs were not applied independently, but arranged together with the structure of the *ishiyakata*.

This chapter will highlight the relationship between *ishiyakata* and their decorative programs through the use of a case study, rather than presenting an extensive study of all decorated *ishiyakata*. An analysis of Segonkō Kofun no. 3 will provide a structural key to the decorative program of *ishiyakata*. This tomb is ideal, as it meets the description of an early *ishiyakata* chamber tomb. There is also a decorated stone partition tomb within the same kofun group that will help with a comparison of decorated funerary structures later in this chapter. Moreover, it is located within the central part of the Higo Region and the area of distribution of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs.

The Segonkō Kofun Group lies in the western part of Kumamoto City, located upon the slope of Mount Gongen near the northern bank of the Shirokawa River. Discovered within the remnants of a circle mound once believed to be 15m in diameter, Segonkō No. 3 kofun has a single chamber tomb with a freestanding *ishiyakata* structure (Figure 2). While the tomb is not in the finest state of preservation, field reports describe the *ishiyakata* structure and decorative program in great detail.

The *ishiyakata* was created through the assemblage of several large, flat stone slabs arranged in an open, rectangular floor plan. An inward-facing slab was omitted, as was the case with all *ishiyakata* structures, leaving one side open and exposing the
inside walls of the structure. Two stones were aligned side by side to create the back wall. Two smaller stone slabs were installed perpendicularly at either end of the back wall. These slabs were set into the earth of the chamber floor, keeping them upright. A horizontal stone slab was set across the tops of all four standing stone slabs. The entire structure was composed of andesite, a volcanic rock sourced from nearby quarries. Decorations were only applied to the inner faces of the stone slabs and edge of the top slab that faced the inner chamber.

The back slabs contain the most elaborate combination of motifs. There are three rows of motifs that run horizontally across the back of the ishiyakata structure. The top row contains two boat-like motifs, with the possibility of a third on the far left having worn away due to preservation issues. The boats are basic outlines incised upon the stone surface, representative of the stylistic choice maintained throughout Segonkō No. 3. The second row contains two alternating motifs identified as quivers and bows. Like the boats, the quivers are also rendered by means of an incised outline. Their silhouettes are comparable to motifs found in decorated kofun that both precede and postdate this tomb. Both the boat and quiver motifs found in other tombs are similar in shape but often rendered in more detail. The neighboring bow motifs are smaller than the quivers, and are composed of a vertical line connected at either end by a curved line on the left-

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31 The two slab construction is not typical of ishiyakata structures. A majority of them used a single stone slab along the back wall. It is unclear in the reports if the use of two stone slabs for the back of ishiyakata at Segonko No. 3 was deliberate or if a single slab had broken after its installation.
hand side. The bow motif is identifiable based upon its proximity to the quiver and its repeated appearance in other decorated tombs.

The final row of motifs is heavily damaged; however, an object identified as a sword with blade, handle, and pommel, also in outline, frames the left hand side of the composition, while another quiver is incised on the right. In between these motifs are three sets of concentric circles. The middle set is heavily damaged and partially lost due to the gap between the two stones of the back wall. The bottom two rows of motifs along the back wall continue across the inner surface of the right or southern stone slab. The slab is decorated with a row of quivers and bows above two sets of concentric circles. The left or northern stone slab also has an arrangement of concentric circles, but they are framed by motifs that are identified as swords. The circle motifs along the back face and the left inner face have three concentric circles, whereas those on the right inner face have only one two. A partially intact incised circle was also added to the center of the inward-facing edge of the top stone.

Color was also used to render the motifs, although much of it has been lost to poor preservation. Green, red, and white pigments have been identified upon the inner wall of the *ishiyakata*. Some motifs, like the quiver and the bow, only have one color associated with them. The concentric circles had multiple colors applied to the different rings. The circles of the back face had green outer rings and red inner rings while the circles on left face had red outer rings and green inner rings.
From the description above, several structuring principles emerge regarding the arrangement of motifs and their location upon the ishiyakata structure. The back face of the ishiyakata structure is the location of the most elaborate combination and composition of motifs. There is no attempt to mirror the combination on the inner faces of the side walls of the ishiyakata. Instead, one side face is more specialized than the other. In other words, the right inner face follows the pattern on the back face while the left face has a unique arrangement of motifs. These structuring principles occur with some frequency throughout many of the other ishiyakata chamber tombs of the Higo Region. Moreover, a comparison to other decorated ishiyakata shows that the edge of the lid was often decorated with a repeating geometric pattern from one end to the other (Table 2.1). The circle upon the lid of Segonkō No 3 is unique amongst the ishiyakata, but there is not enough of the decorative program remaining to discern a pattern. There is a perceptible logic to the ishiyakata and its decorative program. Their complex relationship is often presented in stark contrast with previous practices or interpreted as a change rather than a continuation of previous practices.

**Antecedents of Decorated Ishiyakata**

Ishiyakata chamber tombs share the category of mural type chamber tombs with side entrance stone chamber tombs that have decorations applied directly to the inner surfaces of the chamber. The remaining categories of decorated kofun are named for the
specific stone structures the decorative program adorns. This method of categorization has created a division between funerary structures that are decorated and decorated tombs (the mural type and cave type tombs). While the ishiyakata is a funerary structure within a chamber tomb, it is enfolded into the category of mural type tombs. This divide between the categories is tied to the perception of side entrance chamber tombs as singular underground spaces. After acknowledging and analyzing the ishiyakata structure and its decorative program, I would like to reassess previous forms of decorated burials and their design principles, in order to explore their influence upon decorated ishiyakata. It is important to understand what forms of decorated burial preceded them to grasp the foundations of the structuring principles of ishiyakata.

Ishiyakata were similar to assembled stone sarcophagi in their structure but had far less in common with their decorative practices. Stone sarcophagi were introduced to Kyushu from the Kinai and Inland regions through the Sanuki region of central Shikoku. The earliest of these stone sarcophagi were the dug-out boat-type, dating back to the late 4th and early 5th century. The stone sarcophagus discovered in Keidzuka Kofun in Kumamoto has a lid with carved elements incorporated into its design. In particular, the incised rectangular shapes upon the stone sarcophagus’s lid are treated as the first

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33 Wakasugi Ryotaro, Kyūshū sekkan kō. Senrekigaku – kōkogaku ronkyū II. (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University. 1997), 73.
incarnations of a decorative program. Although early stone sarcophagi had to be imported to northern Kyushu from other areas of Japan like the Sanuki region, local production centers emerged in the Higo region during the mid-5th century. A diversification in the structure of stone sarcophagi soon followed. The Higo region is the center of the development of new construction techniques that used carved stone slabs instead of dug out blocks of stone for the base. These new forms are referred to as assembled stone sarcophagi or box type stone sarcophagi. Decorative practices also developed as the use and production of stone sarcophagi spread throughout northern Kyushu. These practices expanded upon the incised shapes on the stone sarcophagi imported from outside of Kyushu.

Decorations were applied to the lid of stone sarcophagi, a feature that served to seal away the burial space. It is this, in part, which prompted Kurafuji to distance stone sarcophagi from ishiyakata. However, there are a few aspects of the decorative program of decorated stone sarcophagi that are also found in ishiyakata chamber tombs. Kamogo Kofun (Figure 2.5) is a tumulus located among a cluster of burials in the center of the Uto Peninsula. While a portion of the lid of the dug-out stone sarcophagus discovered within the center of its circular mound was damaged, enough of it remains

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to decipher the decorative program. The motifs and patterns found on the lid of the Kamogo stone sarcophagus are confined within registers. The pattern wraps around the entirety of the lid, encircling the lid like the patterns that run along the inside of stone partition chamber tombs. The lip of the lid of Kamogo Kofun has a ladder-like pattern running along the edge. A similar geometric pattern appears across the edge of the top, roof-like slab of Chibusan Kofun’s ishiyakata (Figure 2.1). Registers are also used in the decorative programs of ishiyakata chamber tombs, although as the method of application changes entirely to paint, the horizontal registers become far less regimented.

Figure 2.5. General Plan of Kamogo Stone Sarcophagus
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokucho.
Segonkō No. 1 Kofun (Figure 3) predates its neighboring *ishiakata* chamber tomb by roughly half a century based on the development of side entrance stone chamber construction. Instead of an *ishiakata* structure, the burial facility was composed of a pit lined with stone slabs. Smaller stone slabs were erected in the pit to create a series of channels. These channels were used to house the remains of the deceased. A corbelled ceiling of small, thin stones covered the pit while a short, narrow corridor provided access to this space. This type of burial facility is designated as a stone partition chamber tomb\(^{37}\) after the large stone slabs that line the pit. These tombs emerged during the early 5\(^{th}\) century in the southern Higo Region as an expansion of stone lined pit graves. Segonkō No. 1 is a later example of these tombs, and is one of the northernmost decorated stone partition tombs within the region. It has a complex decorative pattern derived from the structuring principles of earlier stone partition tombs.

As in *ishiakata* chamber tombs, the stone slabs that surround the remains of the deceased in Segonkō No. 1 are the focus of the decorative program. Furthermore, the back stone slab is also the location of the most complex patterning of motifs, although this is not always the case in stone partition chamber tombs (Table 2.2). Segonkō No. 1 features a quiver motif within the pattern along the inner face of the back stone slab.

\(^{37}\)石障石室 sekishō sekishitsu, stone partition stone chamber
Figure 2.3. General plan of Segonkō No. 1, a stone partition chamber tomb.
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokucho
These motifs are more than just outlines, rendered in far greater detail than those from Segonkō No. 3. Each quiver contains three arrows. Instead of bows, a pair of vertically stacked concentric circles is placed to the right of each quiver motif with four repetitions of each running from left to right. The sequence ends on the right with squares, each containing an X that divides it into four triangles.

These motifs are organized into registers by four incised lines that run lengthwise across the stone faces. The overall decorative scheme achieves a far more formal and structured pattern than its successor through the use of these registers. Incidentally, the incised lines cut across the middle of the quiver motifs, while the rest of motifs are contained within. The incised lines continue around either side of the tomb; however, the patterns upon both side slabs are less intricate than the one located on the back slab. The patterns on the side slabs would mirror each other, except that the right or southern slab is broken towards the front of the pit. Each register contains five squares alternating with squares containing concentric circles. So, each side slab has ten squares and eight squares with concentric circles. The front wall has no decorations applied to it, although in other stone partition tombs, slabs were frequently decorated (Table 2.2). In many stone partition chamber tombs, including Segonkō No. 1, the stone slab closest to the entrance also had u-shaped notches carved in the center of the top of the stone slab. This carving coincided with the entrance to the tomb, marking it as a point of access.
### Table 2.2. Decorations and their corresponding forms in the stone partition chamber tomb in the Higo Region.

**Key. G- Geometric, A- Abstract, R- Representational**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kofun</th>
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<th>Left Slab</th>
<th>Right Slab</th>
<th>Entrance</th>
<th>Dividers</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>G R</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Idera</em></td>
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<td>G A</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

While stones that divided up the space within the pit were a common feature, they were rarely decorated with motifs. Segonkō No. 1 is one of only two stone partition chamber tombs with decorations applied to these stones. Three stone slabs relatively shorter than the partition stones were arranged to make three chambers within the pit (one of these slabs is missing or destroyed, and does not appear in Fig. 2.3). This arrangement is referred to as a ko-shape after the Japanese character “コ” by archeologists. One slab was placed lengthwise roughly 30 centimeters from the back of the tomb. This feature had a u-like notch that echoed the shape in the stone partition
closest to the entranceway. Two additional slabs were placed within the larger remaining section to create three relatively equal chambers. The outermost chambers are believed to have held the remains of the deceased, while the middle chamber acted as a walkway. Three pairs of concentric circles were applied to the rear stone divider, separated by the ends of the perpendicular divider stones. The concentric circles coinciding with the central channel were spaced on either side of the u-like notch. The divider is partially fragmented and has the remains of a third concentric circle between the two in the middle.

Segonkō No. 1 is recognized as one of the first decorated kofun to utilize multiple colors derived from mineral pigments. Vermilion has been used by itself in burials that predate the Kofun period and was applied liberally to many burial facilities since then. The additional colors in Segonkō No. 1 are used to enhance the designs incised upon the stone slabs that make up the funerary space (Figure 2.4). The pigment reinforces the rhythmic patterning of the motifs rather than being used as a primary type of application. Each motif contains more than one color. The vermilion color dominates the design, expanding outside of the banded zone. It was applied like a base coat to the stone slab. The yellow pigment was applied primarily to the back stone slab, upon the quivers. The blue pigment was used on the side slabs, but only within the registers. Different colors were added to each ring of the concentric circles, a characteristic also found in the decorative scheme of Segonkō No. 3.
There are strong similarities in the decorative programs of the decorated kofun from the Segonkō kofun group. The back wall opposite the entrance of the tomb is the location of the most complex combination of motifs, while the side slabs were decorated with fewer motifs. Decorated ishiyakata chamber tombs demonstrate the tendency for one side wall to continue the decorative pattern of the rear wall while the other features a distinctive arrangement of motifs. The front wall of stone partition chamber tombs is generally the least decorated, while the front slab is completely absent from the ishiyakata structure.

The analysis of both Segonkō tombs has provided similarities in the decorative programs of ishiyakata and stone partition tombs. While the construction of these two types of tombs differs, the arrangement of the bodies shares some similarities. In fact,
the *ishiyakata* is not the only space where bodies were interred within the chamber of an *ishiyakata* tomb. The chamber in Segonkō No. 3 no longer has the remnants of divider stones, but many *ishiyakata* chambers held the same コ-shape pattern that most stone partition chamber tombs did. The *ishiyakata* was erected in a position analogous to the rear chamber of the stone partition chamber tomb. Unlike tombs with only stone partitions, the decorative program of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs was concentrated upon the *ishiyakata* structure. Furthermore, the rear burial space was the only burial space associated with an additional stone structure within the chamber. Whereas stone partition chamber tombs had a burial space that demonstrated a ritual form and decorative program shared equally amongst the remains of the deceased, the *ishiyakata* was a separate, prominent burial space within the chamber.

How can the decorative principles of these three forms of burial share the similarities mentioned above yet be arranged so differently within space? Rather than relying on the ideological view that *ishiyakata* were houses of the dead, I would like to explore these spaces as being structured by the relationship between those buried within these tombs.

**Ishiyakata, Chamber Tombs and Burial Space**

Decorated kofun are referred to as such since they encompass a variety of structures that had decorations applied to them. The tumuli were not decorated, but
they contained stone sarcophagi, stone partitions, *ishiyakata*, and stone chambers that were\(^ {38} \). All of these structures performed the same function within the confines of the kofun. They were created for the containment of human remains. The various shapes and decorations used to create a space to perform this task attest to the variable nature of how the dead should be buried. *Ishiyakata* were one of the many structures used to arrange bodies in a meaningful way within the Higo region. The structuring principles of the decorations and *ishiyakata* were deliberate and informed by changing patterns of burial.

The analysis of the structural key of *ishiyakata* and the comparison to previous forms of decorated burial demonstrates a shift in designs towards an uneven distribution of form and decoration. Bodies placed within the *ishiyakata* were apparently granted privileged status through their association with the structure and decorations when we consider the nature of the entire burial space. In comparison, the decorated stone sarcophagi and stone partition chamber tombs were not concerned with such distinctions. This shift in the treatment of burial space can be explored through shifting patterns of interment during the Kofun Period. Decorated *ishiyakata* were spaces structured by new social categories in life that structured those relationships in death.

The transition of the three forms of burial structures and the decorative practices associated with each of them correspond with patterns of burial identified through

\(^ {38} \) Cliff-carved cave tombs would be the only form of decorated burial without a burial mound.
DNA analysis by Japanese archeologist Tanaka Yoshiyuki (Figure 2.6). The first pattern he identifies is attributed to the early Kofun period. Siblings, most commonly brother and sister, were buried together atop the burial mounds. They were buried separately or sometimes together within stone sarcophagi. The second pattern was one in which a father and his offspring were buried together. During the late Kofun Period the third pattern emerged, represented by a whole family unit, husband, wife, and children, which was buried together. The eldest son in each generation was considered the head of his own family unit and was likely to be buried with them. His order of birth afforded him the preordained position within a chiefly family. The offspring buried within the chamber were dependent on their affiliation in life, as well as death, with the head of this new social unit.

Although Tanaka does not explicitly connect these two later burial patterns with specific types of tombs, I would like to propose that these patterns of burial provide the context for the structuring principles of decorated burial structures. The creation of the burial structures and the application of decorations were informed by social order. The placement of bodies within these spaces conferred ties to their social unit in death. Although few stone partition and ishiyakata chamber tombs were discovered with remains, of those that were, it appears that stone partition tombs held one body in the

Figure 2.6. Basic Patterns of Kin Relations among the dead (from Tanaka, 1995) and a comparison of the floorplans of different forms of burial. Modified from: Tanaka, Yoshiyuki. Hone ga monogataru kodai no kazoku: Shinzoku to shakai. Rekishi bunka raiburari, 252. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Hirofumi Kan, 2008.

back channel. And, where remains are no longer extant, a set of stone pillows attests to the likelihood that the *ishiya* once encapsulated two bodies. This mirrors the difference between pattern 2 and pattern 3 in Tanaka’s formulation.

Decorated *ishiya* were the resting place of the remains of the heads of chiefly households represented in the third pattern. Unlike the stone partition chamber tombs, there is evidence that two bodies often occupied this space, the father and the mother from Tanaka’s research. Besides the set of stone pillows, distinctive patterns of motifs on the one inner face of the *ishiya* may coincide with the end of the facility where the heads of the deceased were laid to rest. In the case of Segonkō No. 1, the two concentric circles on the left face may have been applied for two individuals. The use of concentric
circles is reminiscent of the earlier burial practice of laying bronze mirrors under the head of the deceased. The circle motif has been found in tombs of many kinds, positioned near the head of the corpse. Even the stone pillows previously mentioned had concentric circles incised upon them (Figure 2.7).

Whereas offspring placed within the tomb were not likely to be the inheritors of the rights and responsibilities of the family, it is believed that firstborn sons were buried with their own descendants. The offspring interred within the *ishiyakata* chamber tomb did not receive the same burial treatment as the heads of the family unit. These descendants were laid to rest nearby, in less significant side sections of the tomb. These sections in the *ishiyakata* tombs never receive the same decorative treatment found in the side channels of stone partition chamber tombs. These bodies reside in spaces outside of the primary burial (the *ishiyakata*) yet are included within the same chamber space it occupies. Their placement was another form of inclusion within the family unit and its internal hierarchy.

Just as *ishiyakata* were part of a larger tomb context, the transition to a family unit fits in to larger contexts of the Higo region and beyond. Development in tomb construction is often believed by Japanese researchers to have been informed by changes in the burial system. In essence, these spaces and the structures they contained were designed to facilitate multiple burials. In a very broad sense, these family tombs set in smaller mounds of the late Kofun period coincide with the transformation of local
Figure 2.7. From the general plan of Umade Kofun. Concentric stone circles were incised upon the stone pillow feature within the ishiyakata structure. Modified from: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education. Kumamotoken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa houkokuchō. By Takagi M. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education, 1984.

governing bodies. Power once belonging to a regional elite, indicated by large keyhole shaped tombs shared across the archipelago, was now being divided into local units represented by powerful families. This is certainly seen in the regions with direct ties to the Yamato Court. But was the situation the same for the Higo Region?

Even before the advent of keyhole shaped tombs, Kyushu had a markedly different culture from that of the Kinai area\(^{40}\). As a peripheral region during the rise of

\(^{40}\) There are two spheres of bronze use during the late Yayoi period (0-200AD). Bronze weaponry has been found primarily in the west, or northern Kyushu and parts of Shikoku. Bronze bells (dotaku) were concentrated in the east in the Kinai and Kanto areas.
the Yamato court, Kyushu was loosely connected to the network of elite as seen through the relative size and development of keyhole shaped tombs and the distribution of early Kofun period prestige goods like bronze mirrors. Yet from this exchange, local chieftains acquired stone sarcophagi and early decorative techniques. These differences in early burial practices are seen as a product of access to the same resources as other elite within this network. The adoption and subsequent spread of decorated stone sarcophagi also demonstrates the opportunity to be selective with the burial objects, and the flexibility to alter them.

Soon after the initial spread of Kofun period burial practices, came what Barnes considers a "late 4th century change of dynasty" accompanied by a "new era of peer relations" with shifting powers in Korea and China.41 Decorated kofun, specifically stone partition and *ishiyakata* chamber tombs, were new symbols of status among a growing local elite. These regional leaders were more preoccupied with establishing and maintaining a local network than adopting the practices developed by the emergent dynasty. That does not mean that this exchange was entirely insular. Whether direct imports or influenced by Korean counterparts, chamber tombs were also a part of the region’s involvement with peers on the peninsula.

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In contrast to the preoccupation with massive keyhole-shaped tombs filled with military regalia in the Kanto region, Kyushu, especially the Higo region, developed a distinct system of alliance and affiliation amongst growing regional leaders. While all of this sets the stage for ishiyakata chamber tombs, it does not explain why tomb design shifted to accommodate the emergence of a family unit. A closer examination of the decorative program, specifically the arrangement and relationship between motifs, will assist in in our understanding of this context.

Conclusion

The inclusion of ishiyakata chamber tombs within the category of mural type decorated kofun overlooks important details that inform the development of kofun in the Higo Region. According to this view, the chamber tomb encapsulates the meaningful space, while decorations are no more than an artistic element applied to a stone canvas. The motifs carry their own meaning, but do not alter the meaning of the surface on which they reside. The study of the relationship between the ishiyakata and its decorative practices above has revealed that decorations are more than just ornamental and that their contribution lies beyond their individual meaning. Their significance lies in how the motifs correspond to the ishiyakata form. The structure’s decorative program was involved in creating an exclusive burial space for high-status family members within a tomb that housed several bodies. When compared to earlier
forms of decorated burial, this contrast of decorated and undecorated space in conjunction with multiple burials becomes apparent as a way of indicating differing statuses among the deceased.

The ideological view of this space falls short of explaining why the decorated ishiyakata was arranged the way it was. Instead, Tanaka’s study of the relationship between those buried within the tombs provides us with the symbolic scheme which informed creation of this burial space. Decorated ishiyakata were designed to hold the bodies of the heads of local, a social unit that emerged during the late Kofun period. Through the creation of chamber tombs and the arrangement of the burial features, a new hierarchical space was created. Ishiyakata and their decorative practices were involved in reorganizing space within the tomb to facilitate the transformation in how the dead were buried. Motifs were part of an entire tomb context shaped by prevailing ritual practices; thus, studying motifs removed from their placement within the tomb will not further our understanding of them.
Chapter Three

Decorative Program as a Marker of Regional Affiliations

Introduction

The previous section explored the structural key to decorated ishiyakata and how they were informed by burial practices that emerged during the early 6th century. These burial facilities were more than just stone canvases for the decorations. Together with their decorations, ishiyakata were designed as an exclusive area of interment within the tomb. Other remains placed within the same chamber were not provided with the same ritual structures and decorative practices. This contrasts with previous funerary structures that had a more egalitarian treatment of a group of the deceased. This approach to ishiyakata chamber tombs highlights the importance of engaging decorations as a context for studying side entrance stone chambers.

The last chapter also addressed the prevalent interpretation of chamber tombs as “houses of the dead”. Scholarship that relies upon this view frequently mentions the influx of painted figural and allegorical motifs as a development brought about by corresponding ideological transformations. Depictions of humans with horses and boats are thought to have reflected the journey the soul took to its posthumous life within the
tomb. Yet, as we have seen, these motifs were absent from early 6th century *ishiyakata* chamber tombs and almost entirely so from late 6th century examples. *Ishiyakata* chamber tombs primarily demonstrated the continued use of geometric motifs introduced with the earliest decorated stone sarcophagi and the less frequent use of representational motifs from stone partition chamber tombs. If the decorations within *ishiyakata* chamber tombs were not symbols of evolving worldviews then what significance did these motifs hold? Moreover, based upon the structural key established in the previous chapter, how was the significance of these motifs incorporated into the spatial context?

The answers to these questions lie in comprehending the composition rather than relying on the identification of individual motifs. Whereas the first chapter analyzed how the decorations corresponded to the *ishiyakata*, I will here analyze how the motifs corresponded to one another in early *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. This two pronged methodological approach draws first on Chinese art historical research in which the positional significance of a motif is far greater than its individual meaning. Second, in keeping with the previous chapter, I will compare the decorative program with

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43 Positional significance is defined as “the significance of a given motif, as defined by its position in an entire pictorial composition containing several other motifs and corresponding to the form of a ritual structure.” Wu, 1987. See also Fairbank, Wilma, 1942. “A Structural Key to Han Mural Art.” *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 7, no. 1, 52-88. Reprinted in Fairbank (1972), 89-140.
previous forms of decorated kofun. We will find that certain combinations of motifs demonstrate evidence of regionally distinct decorative programs within Higo. Decorations allowed the dead to retain the affiliations they had in life both within a family and with other families throughout a given area. It was not only the decorations but also the choices in pigment that informed these associations.

I have identified four regions based upon the combination of motifs and pigment choices in *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. These regions will be strengthened by examining ties to previous decorative practices. In a recent article, Takagi established 13 regional groups of decorated tombs within the Higo Region. His survey had a much wider scope than my own, examining 190 burials within the region. It is a more thorough division of the region and serves as a foundation for my division. There are many decorated kofun that, for the aims of this chapter, I will not include within my analysis. The focus will remain on *ishiyakata* chamber tombs of the Higo Region and the motifs applied to them. I will explore the meaning of these regional groups within the internal and external context of the tombs. *Ishiyakata* chamber tombs were increasingly personalized burial spaces in which those who entered would be informed through decorations of the identity of those entombed within.

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44 Takagi examined tomb construction and decorative practices throughout the Higo region in order to establish his groups. Interestingly, several of tombs are associated with multiple groups because of these two factors. See Takagi, Masafumi. “Origins and Development of Decorated Tombs in Higo (Kumamoto Prefecture, Kyūshū ”. *Bulletin of the National Museum, No. 80. (1999), 97-147.*
The Decorative Program of Ishiyakata

The motifs found on decorated kofun are generally divided into two categories that also correspond with stages of development identified in modern scholarship. Some motifs persist throughout all the stages of decorated kofun, but their continued use does not imply that they held the same meaning throughout various spatial and temporal contexts. It is through their combination and application that we gain insight into how these meanings transform.

Geometric shapes and patterns are the earliest and most persistent motifs associated with decorated kofun. Circles, triangles, squares, and diamond-like shapes were incised onto stone sarcophagi and partitions. A more complex geometric design designated chokkomon (Figure 3.1) by Japanese archeologist for its straight (choku) and arched (ko) lines also occurred not only in decorated kofun but on a wide variety of burial artifacts including haniwa, bronze mirrors, and other grave goods. The search for meaning and significance of this pattern has spawned countless articles but, in the end, its appearance in various forms in a burial mounds ties it to a tomb context.

Chokkomon are often paired with concentric circles. These circles are among the most frequently used motifs, found in various regions and types of decorated kofun.

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They are generally seen as representations of bronze mirrors originally imported from the China. Bronze mirrors are believed to have been both badges of socio-political prowess as well as significant ritual tools during the Kofun period\textsuperscript{47}. Within the context of burials from this period, bronze mirrors and the motifs based upon them warded off evil. The large decorative bands that wrapped around the outer edge of the mirrors, and a circular knob in the center, were rendered in stone as nested circles (Fig. 3.2).

A sawtooth pattern composed of interlocking triangles was another decorative element used frequently on decorated kofun. Like the chokkomon, this pattern was applied to other burial objects like haniwa. Its application to the armor of a figural haniwa (Fig. 3.3) has led archeologists to interpret this design as being a protective

Figure 3.2. Examples of Concentric Circle Motifs in tombs. These examples are from stone fragments of the southern Higo Region. 
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education. 
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokucho. 

Figure 3.3. Examples of Sawtooth Patterns of Figural Haniwa. 
symbol.\textsuperscript{48} In general, the motifs of early decorated \textit{kofun} are interpreted as having apotropaic properties for the remains of the deceased.

As early as the late 5\textsuperscript{th} century, motifs representing objects were first applied to decorated kofun. Circular motifs thought to be bronze mirrors were joined by quivers, shields, and swords. These motifs attest to the volatile nature of the period. While large tombs of the Kinai region were filled with stockpiles of weapons, the smaller mounds of northern Higo were decorated with their own gathering of incised and painted weapons. As seen in the previous chapter, the quiver reoccurred throughout 5th and 6th century tombs. Farris points out in his book on warfare in Japan that archery had always been the most popular and advanced form of combat.\textsuperscript{49} According to court histories of the 7\textsuperscript{th} century, quiver-bearers (\textit{yugei}) made up one of two recorded units of troops from western Honshu that served the Yamato court. These motifs may have been the badges of local leaders responsible for a troop of archers. Whether they served the Yamato court or local chieftains is a question that remains to be answered. Another possibility is that local leaders who did not have access to or amass the same goods as the rulers in the Kinai region, utilized these motifs as symbolic grave goods, similar to the use of concentric circles in place of bronze mirrors.


Human figures and animals followed these representational motifs, emerging around the same time as pigment became the preferred method of application. In later tombs, they were depicted in boats or in elaborate combinations depicting a possible allegorical or historical scene. By the end of the 6th century and into the 7th, pictorial images imported from the regions in modern day China and Korea appeared in decorated chamber tombs. This second category of motifs marks the sophistication of the worldview of those responsible for the mural type tombs. These combinations of motifs presented a variety of narratives with sometimes recognizable and sometimes elusive mythological and historical origins.

Decorated ishiyakata are located temporally between these two categories of motifs. These tombs demonstrate a noteworthy expansion in the combination of motifs used, which that coincides in an increase in the number of decorated kofun. Diversity in form and decorative program is one factor used to identify mural type tombs. The relationship established between the ishiyakata and the decorations in the previous chapter afforded the opportunity for various combinations to be explored. If combinations had been regulated then there would have been far less diversity. The spread of decorated kofun to various subdivisions of the Higo Region inspired a diversity of motifs and their combination.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Zone 1</th>
<th>Zone 2</th>
<th>Zone 3</th>
<th>Zone 4</th>
<th>Zone 5</th>
<th>Zone 6</th>
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<td>△▽</td>
<td>△▽</td>
<td>△▽</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>△▽</td>
<td>△▽</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>R, W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Kikuchi River Region</td>
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<td>○+△▽+◇</td>
<td>○+△▽+◇</td>
<td>+△▽</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>R, W</td>
</tr>
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<td>Kumamoto Plain Region</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>△+◇</td>
<td>+△+□ Human</td>
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<td>R, W, B</td>
</tr>
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<td>○+△▽</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>△▽</td>
<td>△▽</td>
<td>△</td>
<td>R, W, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamao</td>
<td>Kumamoto Plain Region</td>
<td>○+△▽+□</td>
<td>○+△▽+□</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>○+△▽+□</td>
<td>○+△▽+□</td>
<td>△▽</td>
<td>R, W, B</td>
</tr>
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<td>○+Sword Quiver + Boat</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>R, G</td>
</tr>
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<td>△</td>
<td>R,B,G</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>⊗</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1. Motifs corresponding to the different parts of the *ishiyakata* structure in chamber tombs of Northern Higo

Key: ○-Circle, △-Triangle, ◇-Concentric Circle, △▽-Sawtooth Pattern, □-Square, ◇-Diamond;
R- Red, B-Blue, W-White, G-Green.
I first broke down the *ishiyakata* structure into 6 areas (Figure 3.4) to study these combinations. As we saw in the previous chapter, the most complex combination of motifs was applied to the back inner face (Zone 1) of the *ishiyakata* structure. This complexity is also present on the front facing slabs that support the lid (Zones 4 and 5). Generally speaking, the inner facing faces (Zones 2 and 3) of the structure were less complex than the forward facing slabs. The horizontal slab atop the structure (Zone 6) was often decorated along the forward facing lip. This arrangement of the decorative program is connected to the orientation of the structure. This *ishiyakata’s* interior was exposed towards the entranceway of the tomb. However, it is more than just orientation of the burial structure that informed the decorative program. The combination of motifs found on these faces will provide the basis for the following study.
I have selected 12 *ishiyakata* chamber tombs (Table 3.1) for study based upon the state of preservation and detail of archeological records. Tombs without intact back faces, front facing slabs, or motifs applied to these locations do not provide enough evidence of the combination of motifs to be compared with the other *ishiyakata* chamber tombs and these have been excluded. Other excluded tombs are either examples from the latter half of the 6th century or were discovered without decorations on the *ishiyakata*. I will consider the selection of motifs, their arrangement, and stylistic choices.

There are primarily three different combinations discernible from this collection of *ishiyakata*. The first combination is composed of the sawtooth pattern or a similar triangle pattern with circles applied over top or within. This is the most widely used combination of motifs. Circles and objects or abstract designs make up the second combination, which is far less prevalent than the first. The final group is composed of only circles combined in patterns and placed upon the *ishiyakata* structure. The distribution of these groupings demonstrates regional ties, which will become much more focused when studied along with other elements of the decorative program such as color and stylistic choices.
Regional Distribution

While the assessment of motif combinations above provides three distinct groups that correspond to certain regions, there are other elements of the decorative design that will help further refine these groups. I have identified four groupings of motifs based upon their regional development: the Kikuchi River Region, the Kumamoto Plain Region, the Central Higo Region, and the Yatsushiro Region (Map 3.1). These regions
are not only aligned with decorative choices made for ishiyakata chamber tombs, but are distinguished by the distribution of previous forms of decorated burial as well. I will examine each regional group of motif combination, elements of style and color choice, and their ties to earlier decorated kofun to show that this expansion in the selection of motifs indeed occurred to meet the demands to personalize the decorative program and the burial space.

**Kikuchi River Region**

Ishiyakata chamber tombs of the Kikuchi River region are spread out along the banks of the river, running from the western coast to the inland area. The only stone partition chamber tomb in the northern part of the Higo region, Densayama kofun, has no recorded decorations. Earlier still, there are few known decorated stone sarcophagi or cairns within the region.

The advent of the ishiyakata tomb was accompanied by a distinct decorative program. Ishiyakata of this region were decorated with sawtooth patterns painted in randomly interchanging colors. Circle motifs were applied in contrasting colors within or over the sawtooth pattern. These tombs primarily made use of red and white pigments. This combination of motif and colors is adapted and modified in other regions but the relationship between the circle and sawtooth motifs is dominant, even

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51 Wakasugi Ryotaro, Kyūshū sekkan kō. Senrekigaku – kōkogaku ronkyū II. (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University. 1997), 73.
defining, in the *ishiyakata* chamber tombs along the Kikuchi River. These tombs are Daibo Kofun, Umade Kofun, Chibusan Kofun, and Tsukabozu Kofun.

Tsukabozu Kofun (Fig. 3.5), which belongs to the lower part of the river region, is designated by Japanese researchers as the earliest *ishiyakata* tomb. This region is believed to have established not only the dominance of painted decorations but the combination of circles and triangles as well. More specifically, the triangles are arranged in a sawtooth pattern rendered with natural pigment-based paint. This tomb used the different colors rather than incised lines to create the interlocking triangles. The circles were then arranged atop the pattern in a haphazard or less formal application than the patterns of stone partition chamber tombs. While Tsukabozu Kofun is credited with the advent of a new method of application, it emerged within a region with a long history of decorated kofun.

This region contains some of the oldest decorated kofun in northern Kyushu. A recent study of stone sarcophagi shows that more than half of the dug-out sarcophagi throughout Kyushu are located in the Higo region with roughly two thirds of those located within the Kikuchi River region. For example, Kyodzuka Kofun, located in the lower Kikuchi River region, is highlighted as housing one of the oldest stone sarcophagi in northern Kyushu, made locally but modeled after stone sarcophagi

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52 This view is prevalent among studies of decorated kofun. See Kurafuji, Hiroshi Sōshoku kofun kō: Sōshoku kofun ni miru futatsu no taipu.” *Senrekigaku-kōkogaku ronkyū III*, (1999): 96.
Figure 3.5. Left- Plan of Ishiyakata including the Decorative Program of Tsukabozu Kofun.
Right- General Plan of Tsukabozu Kofun.
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokuchō
produced outside of Kyushu to the east. This region of Northern Higo had political and economic affiliations with other regions in the east by the middle Kofun period, based not only on the presence of eastern-styled stone sarcophagi but also on the sudden increase in the size of keyhole-shaped burial mounds, which were characteristic of practices originating from the Yamato Basin at the time. Several early decorated stone sarcophagi incised with sawtooth patterns from northern Kyushu were discovered close to the Kikuchi River and may have influenced the development of patterns in ishiyakata chamber tombs.

Regardless of this, Tsukabozu Kofun is often interpreted as an attempt to establish a new paradigm through the use of tomb construction, burial facilities, and the decorative program. This is, in part, because of the tomb’s location and its keyhole shaped mound. While it is not stated directly, the assumption within the research is that these larger tombs were responsible for disseminating practices that originated with powerful members of the community within Kyushu as keyhole tombs of the Yamato Basin informed the network of elite across the Japanese archipelago. The proposition that these forms of burial developed locally and were adopted by regional elite has

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never been suggested. As the oldest ishiyakata tomb in the Kikuchi River region, this tomb certainly had a local impact.

The combination of motifs and method of application were aspects of the decorative program used exclusively amongst tombs of this region. The arrangement of circles over a sawtooth pattern is mirrored in Daibo Kofun (Fig. 4.1) and Umade Kofun while Chibusan Kofun introduces a human figure on a side panel. Other elements, particularly in the construction of the ishiyakata, were not shared amongst these tombs. Chibusan Kofun has a roof-type lid while the ishiyakata of Umade Kofun and Daibo Kofun use flat stone slabs. Curiously, the second burial space in front of Tsukabozu Kofun’s ishiyakata is not found in any of the other tombs. The other three tombs adopt the ko-shape arrangement.

*Kumamoto Plain Region*

Scattered between the Kikuchi River Region and Central Higo regions, the ishiyakata tombs of the Kumamoto Plain region referred to decorative trends in the north while exploring new motifs. These tombs demonstrate ties to the Kikuchi River region through their use of the sawtooth pattern and concentric circles. However these tombs arrange the motifs differently and introduce additional motifs unique to this region. The use of blue along with red and white pigments also sets decorations of the Kumamoto Plain region apart from their counterparts to the north and south. The
Figure 3.6: General Plan of Kamao Kofun.
tombs associated with this region are Yokoyama Kofun, Inariyama Kofun, and Kamao Kofun.

Kamao Kofun (Figure 3.6), located in the upper portion of the Shirakawa River, houses a fragmentary *ishiyakata* structure with an expansive decorative program. Despite its state, the painted decorations have survived in better condition than many other tombs in the region. Kamao Kofun utilized sawtooth patterns to fill in the spaces between the other motifs. The composition demonstrates no uniformity in the size or placement of the motifs overlaying the sawtooth pattern. This is a recurring trend associated with the adoption and production of painted motifs. Concentric circles are placed about the structure, sharing the stone slabs with another motif that dominates the back face and wings. Japanese researchers have given this abstract motif the designation *sōkkyakurinjōmon* (Figure 3.7) or a double-footed ring motif. This motif has only been painted within *ishiyakata* chamber tombs within this region and two other tombs located north in present day Fukuoka. Generally speaking, it has two different forms. The first is a circular motif with two curled legs coming off one side. The second motif has a circular body with radial spikes sprouting outwards from it and two “feet”

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57 Kurafuji (and others) conjecture that stone masons responsible for the production of stone coffins and chamber tombs were also responsible for the decorations, which were applied prior to their relocation to the burial site. On the other hand, painted murals are believed to have been applied upon the completion of the tomb. This point is important because it presents a transformation in the process of tomb construction; however, I believe it is difficult to discern when the tomb was viewed as a complete structure. Moreover, this view presents painted motifs as inconsequential to the completion of the tomb. See Kurafuji, Hiroshi. Sōshoku kofun kō: Sōshoku kofun ni miru futatsu no taipu.” Senrekigaku-koukogaku ronkyu III, (1999): 97.

58 双脚輪状文- double footed circle shape motif
coming from one end. There is no demonstrated preference in how the motif is oriented versions of the motif are seen with feet up, down, and to the side. The second form appears in Kamo Kofun. The four motifs have feet placed on the right side of the motif while one has the feet placed on the top of the motif. Three of these tombs display this motif along the back wall of the burial facility.

The lack of a conventional orientation is something worth exploring. In Ozuka Kofun, located outside of the Higo region in present day Fukuoka, the motif was applied to a stone block outside of the burial facility and a lintel stone on the doorway facing the entranceway. The motif is combined with triangle patterns and a quiver
inside the tomb, while on a lintel stone in the inner archway it frames a pattern of curled motifs that look like just the truncated feet of this motif. Another tomb in Fukuoka arranges the motifs with quivers as well as with concentric circles and triangles.

Returning to the Kumamoto plain, Yokoyama Kofun located farther inland between Kamao Kofun and the eastern Kikuchi River region, suffers from both poor preservation and the collapse of the back wall of the ishiyakata structure. However, two back panels from the ishiyakata structure were painted with decorations. The right panel has a concentric circle placed above one of the footed motifs. The left panel is recorded as having another, smaller footed motif on the left panel. Both panels had remnants of a triangle pattern running around them. The footed motif has sometimes been likened to a Chinese fan in English sources, based on later motifs found in a tomb in Fukuoka and clay haniwa.59 The orientation and appearance of a similarly shaped object worn by figural haniwa suggest a different interpretation for these motifs.

Moreover, haniwa wearing headdresses that resemble both types of this motif have also been found. This suggests a problem with the term sokyakkurinjomon. Calling the projections of these motifs “feet” leads to a reading of the motif that may not be supportable. If the “footed” motif is meant to be an object that is worn, then that might account for why there is no uniformity to how the motif is oriented. Whereas, if it were

a fan, the feet might more likely be oriented toward the ground. However, it could be that both headpiece and motif have a shared symbolic meaning that remains elusive. Haniwa figures wearing this object have been discovered throughout eastern Japan making this motif widely recognizable. Yet, within the *ishiyakata* structure, it was only used in four tombs throughout Northern Kyushu. Within the tomb context it was used primarily on the burial facility, upon the most visible face.
Central Higo Region

Centered at the base of the Uto Peninsula, the Central Higo Region is the location of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs with decorative programs that demonstrate fewer ties to the regions to the north. The combination of the sawtooth patterns and circle motifs is not present in these tombs. The two *ishiyakata* chamber tombs in this region are Kunigoshi Kofun and Segonkō No. 3, which was discussed in previous chapters.

It is difficult to draw parallels between Kunigoshi Kofun (Figure 3.10 and 3.11) and Segonkō No. 3. The only striking similarity is their use of red and green pigments in their decorative program. Quiver motifs are present in both tombs although Kunigoshi’s quiver is located upon a stone used in the archway rather than upon the *ishiyakata* structure. This motif bears similarities to the quiver motifs located on the back wall of Segonkō No. 1 (Fig. 2.3). Prior to the introduction of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs, the *chokkomon* pattern was associated with funerary structures throughout this region. Its final appearance occurred in late stone partition chamber tombs although a carved bead (Fig. 3.9) recovered from Kunigoshi Kofun also bears a *chokkomon*-like pattern

Kunigoshi Kofun contains an *ishiyakata* structure with an unusual version of the *chokkomon* pattern, composed of straight lines and radiating arcs. While the pattern contains a few arcs scattered within other lines, the sense of movement found in the combination of arcs of earlier *chokkomon* patterns is not present. What seems to tie the
Figure 3.10. General Plan of Kunigoshi Kofun.
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokuchō
Figure 3.11. Decorations on the Interior and Exterior of the *Ishiyakata* in Kunigoshi Kofun.

Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education. *Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokucho*

By Takagi M. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education, 1984
Figure 3.9. Bead with incised chokkomon pattern. Discovered in Kunigoshi Kofun.
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokucho

decorations to previous forms of chokkomon is use of the ladder border around the panels containing the design. The decorative patterns of both Kamago Kofun, a stone sarcophagus in the Central Higo Region, and Idera Kofun (Fig. 4.5), a stone partition chamber tomb in the same area, also share such a border around the chokkomon design. Another contrast is the lack of a circle motif within Kunigoshi Kofun. These two motifs are not exclusive but are often paired together in decorated tombs of this region. If this is indeed a type of chokkomon, then it is a deviation from the structure of this motif as it appears on earlier forms of decorated kofun. In a region with a previously active and distinct decorative program, it is worth noting that the pattern applied to Kunigoshi
Kofun’s *ishiyakata* structure is possibly a final, divergent form of the *chokkomon* design within a burial in the Higo region.

*Yatsushiro Region*

The oldest stone partition chamber tombs within the Higo region are located along the upper portion of the Kuma River in modern day Yatsushiro. This region extends west to include islands just off the tip of the Uto Peninsula. Most decorated burials found here have circle motifs incised upon the inner faces of the stone slabs used in their construction (Table 3.2). While many decorated tombs have circles and concentric circles among a variety of motifs, this region primarily used only circular motifs. The placement and size of these motifs is noticeably uniform within a tomb. Unfortunately, there are many fragmentary examples that exist only as stone slabs removed from their burial context. Some of these contain motifs other than the incised circle; however, their condition makes it difficult to include them in this survey.

Tanokawachi No. 3 (Figure 3.12), the only known stone partition-*ishiyakata* hybrid chamber tomb, was discovered south of these kofun in the lower part of the Kuma River. The tomb is similar in construction to stone partition chamber tombs but the chamber is parallel to the back wall. A stone slab was rested upon the top of the back stone slab and supported two additional wing stone slabs arranged in line with the stone divider. The decorative program is analogous to other stone partition chamber
Table 3.2. Motifs Corresponding to Different Features in Stone Partition Chamber Tombs of the Higo Region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Back</th>
<th>Left</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Dividers</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Segonkō No. 1</td>
<td>○ + △ ♣ Quiver</td>
<td>○+ △</td>
<td>○+△</td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idera</td>
<td>○+ !Ch</td>
<td>○+ !Ch</td>
<td>○+!Ch</td>
<td>○+ !Ch</td>
<td>!Ch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odara</td>
<td>○+□+ Quiver</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>!Ch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagasare</td>
<td>○+!Ch</td>
<td>!Ch</td>
<td>!Ch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otobana</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osozowarinomiya</td>
<td>○</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosozo No. 1</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Key: ○- Circle, △- Triangle, ○- Concentric Circle, !Ch- Chokkomon

tombs. A set of three concentric circles was incised on the three slabs surrounding the back of the tomb. The front or entrance stone slab has an approximately centered notch on the top edge with concentric circles on either side. The dividing stone parallel to the back wall also has three smaller circles incised in the middle channel. There are traces of vermilion pigment, which indicate that the surfaces may have been covered.

The decorations of all of the sampled tombs within this region are incised, with only a few accounts of vermilion being used as a base coat upon the domed ceiling of the chambers. As previously mentioned, these circles, especially the concentric circles, bear a likeness to bronze mirrors, which were grave goods during the early and middle Kofun period. There are examples of lines connecting from the top of the slab down to
Figure 3.12: General Plan of Tanokawachi No. 3 Kofun
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokuchō
the concentric circles, as though the motif were hanging from a cord. These motifs may represent grave goods which were not easily obtained within the region. There is only one tomb in this region in which a bronze mirror was recovered, suggesting that actual bronze mirrors were difficult to come by. However, often these tombs are discovered already partially exposed, with either fragmentary or no artifacts, such that this cannot be proved.

The peninsulas in the western part of this region are believed to be the production centers for many of the stone sarcophagi, cairns, and partition tombs throughout most of the Higo region. As all but one of the stone partition chamber tombs were associated with smaller, circular mounds, they differ significantly from the Kofun burial program originating in the Yamato Basin, which was a large, keyhole-shaped burial mound. The circle motif may have been used as a way of participating in a larger Kofun ritual program without direct access to the bronze mirrors. However, another possibility is that the distinctive use of a circle-only pattern was seen as characteristic of the Yatsushiro region. If the population of the Yatsushiro region was tied to production centers then at least during the manufacturing of stone partition chamber tombs, they must have been aware of the use of different motifs, like the chokkomon or quivers, that were incised upon partitions of tombs to the North. Yet no

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other region has demonstrated the sole use of the circle motif within the chamber tomb; therefore it appears that those who came to be interred in this region represented themselves specifically with this motif.

**Positional Significance**

The previous section presented 4 different regions of development for motif selection, combination, and color selection. This study shifted focus away from the individual motifs and the meaning and explored how they related to one another. While certain motifs were shared throughout the different regions, they were composed together to create a decorative program used within tombs of specific areas of the Higo Region. These choices coincided with application style and method. Some regions were informed by early decorative trends, while others established completely original decorative compositions.

The additions and transformations of the decorative program occurred with the expansion of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs throughout the Higo Region. The selection of motifs was limited in early decorated tombs, representing a set of stock motifs which were arranged first upon stone sarcophagi and later on stone partitions. They were motifs shared among a network of communities who understood their ritual context.\(^{61}\)

\(^{61}\) Kurafuji Hiroshi, *Yamato ōken to Kyūshū: kofun jidai chū-kōki wo chūshin to shita seigiteki dōkō, Higashi Ajia no bunka kōzō to Nihon teki hatten*, (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University, 2008), 125.
Chamber tombs introduced concealed ritual spaces wherein personalized burial rituals could take place. The decorative programs were an extension of this new ritual context. The combinations of motifs were used only in tombs within specific regions and no longer shared amongst communities. These decorative programs suggest that *ishiyakata* structures were spaces for the heads of their social units, affiliated with others surrounded by the same regional markers.

Japanese scholars have spent decades attempting to elicit meaning from individual motifs. By contrast, this study and others like it demonstrate that certain combinations of motifs and colors were confined within regions of Higo. If the *ishiyakata* and the burial spaces around it were occupied by a family unit, the specific combinations were shared between the heads of the households buried in tombs spread out across Higo. The question of how these leaders were connected to each other within and outside of these smaller regions has been the subject of much debate. The answers are tied to the political development of the region as well as across the Japanese archipelago and beyond.

While often deemed as unreliable, court histories compiled in the late 7th century present Kyushu as a region gradually being brought into the direct administration of the Yamato court. *Ishiyakata* chamber tombs span a century divided by a rebellion by a local chieftain from north of the Higo region, Tsukushi no Kimi Iwai. Farris states that
the power of the Yamato court over these leaders was certainly not solidified enough to prevent such seemingly treacherous acts.\textsuperscript{62} This account questions the very idea of central control and the extent of inclusion within Yamato politics. The Iwai Rebellion and others like it from the same period could be seen as local leaders challenging their submission, or they could also be echoes of dissent during the process of a tentative unification. If this latter is the case, then these tombs were not just transitional in their design but also within the shifting socio-political context of northern Kyushu.

The archaeological record provides solid evidence for the spread of administrative control of the Yamato court. Kawara, or roofing tiles made of fired clay imported with Korea and Chinese-style temple and palace architecture, and storehouses were firmly established by the latter half of the 6th century in areas just north of the Higo region\textsuperscript{63}. Northern Kyushu would have begun to be organized, or at the very least influenced, by the influx of this new governing system. This view of development within Higo coincides with other views of the emergence of the Yamato state. Piggott posits that its formation took root in the 6th century and that the state did not exist fully until the 7th century.\textsuperscript{64} The alliances and affiliations constructed through the use of decorated \textit{ishiyakata} of the early 6\textsuperscript{th} century demonstrate a concern with local rather than


\textsuperscript{63} Kurafuji Hiroshi, Yamato ōken to Kyūshū: kofun jidai chū-kōki wo chūshin to shita seigiteki dōkō, \textit{Higashi Ajia no bunka kōzō to Nihon teki hatten}, (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University, 2008), 124.

\textsuperscript{64} Piggott, Joan. \textit{The Emergence of Japanese Kingship}. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
far-reaching networks. Tomb design of the latter half of this century, however, marks the move away from the importance of these affiliations and into broader region trends.

Conclusion

This chapter and the previous one have explored the positional significance of motifs in early 6th century chamber tombs. Rather than studying motifs in isolation or treating them as separate developments in the transformation of tombs, I have engaged the decorative practices within their spatial and ritual contexts to show that the decorative practices have a discernible structural program. Decorations were bound to ishiyakata structures, burial spaces within the tomb, rather than just walls. They were involved in a new arrangement of facilities within the tomb, which ordered the bodies of the deceased by status. The structure and the decorations were involved in creating the space that was occupied by the heads of social units, while other tomb occupants were not the recipients of these practices.

The selection of motifs expanded within ishiyakata chamber tombs but did not include the figural and representational motifs mentioned in descriptions of decorated chamber tombs. The specific arrangement of motifs demonstrated the preferences of regional groups and the affiliation of the deceased with them. The heads of household buried in the ishiyakata structures were linked by family ties to the other occupants of
their tomb and at the same time affiliated with other families throughout one of the four regions discussed in this chapter. The significance of these motifs is lost when they are studied outside of their burial context. This development of space, the contribution of motifs, and their ties to early practices are also ignored when ishiyakata are studied within the category of mural type tombs.

The introduction of figural and representational motifs and their expansion to the walls of the chamber tomb occurred during the latter half of the sixth century. Space within the chamber tomb was being renegotiated as well as expanded upon in this period. The decorative program established in the previous chapters provides a foundation for these developments. By comprehending the relationship between decorations and burial structures in the ishiyakata chamber tomb, we can then better understand the transformations in tomb space and ritual context that occurred in the later sixth century tombs.
Chapter Four

Late 6th century Ishiyakata Chamber Tombs and Transformations in the Burial Space

Introduction

In exploring space within chamber tombs, this thesis has focused upon elements of tomb design, specifically the construction of the *ishiyakata* and its corresponding decorative practices. As we have seen, decorated *ishiyakata* were actively transformed, with few attempts to regulate these practices within the Higo region. Tombs shared similarities but were also as individual as those interred within. Common elements were an expression of affiliation both within the tomb as well as with other tombs distributed throughout a specific sub-region. Certain motifs, their arrangement, and the pigments used to render the decorations were all involved in constructing these connections. In death as much as in life, affiliations were asserted through the active manipulation of visual and material culture in *ishiyakata* chamber tombs in the Higo region during the 6th century.

Up to now, this thesis has focused on the decorative program of *ishiyakata*. The relationship between decorations and the burial facility went unexplored in modern scholarship, in part because *ishiyakata* chamber tombs were included in the category of
mural type decorated kofun. Among the characteristics associated with this category of decorated burial, the expansion of the motifs to the walls of the tomb is integral, as it invokes the very meaning of the word mural. This term mislabels ishiyakata chamber tombs and disconnects them from earlier forms of decorated burials. The relationship between the burial structure and decorative practices was established with stone sarcophagi and continued in stone partition chamber tombs before being employed in ishiyakata chamber tombs. The development of chamber tombs did not bring about the end of such practices, but saw them reinvented within an underground space.

That said, the ishiyakata was just one element of the entire tomb design. They were installed within the main chamber, which was often only part of the entire tomb structure. The tombs were never static in their form, much like the ishiyakata structure contained within. The addition of hallways and archways to tombs of the late 5th century were carried into the 6th century and elaborated in later tombs. Secondary chambers were an expansion of tomb design that emerged during the latter part of this period. While the ishiyakata was the focus of the decorative program, this thesis does not mean to imply that the relationship was exclusive within the context of the tomb. The decorative program expanded as the tomb design expanded. This chapter will not focus upon the application of decorations to other architectural features of tombs as the herald of mural type chamber tombs. Instead, I would like to focus on how and why decorations corresponded to new architectural features within ishiyakata chamber tombs.
The expansion of decorations to other areas of the tomb does not imply a transformation in the meaning within the tomb. Such occurrences are noted in the emergence of chamber tombs in China. Wu Hung has explored the reorganization of themes and images which were transferred from individual objects to the architectural space of tombs in China during the first century BCE. In those cases, existing motifs were transferred from their location upon the stone sarcophagi to the walls of the tomb. By contrast, late 6th century *ishiyakata* chamber tombs utilized both preexisting and recently established motifs. The *ishiyakata* preserved motifs that had been in use for over a century while the expansion of decoration to the walls of the tomb was accompanied by an influx of new motifs. This chapter will explore how and why these changes took place while considering the structuring principles they were built upon. Inspired by studies by Wu Hung, I would like to consider how these changes related to the previously established relationship between the decorations and the *ishiyakata*. As with the preceding chapters, I will examine these relationships and explore their ritual context.

There are far fewer chamber tombs at my disposal for this part of the study (Table 4.1), and many of the conclusions must be more speculative than those presented in the first and second chapters. These tombs still contain *ishiyakata* structures, but they

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Main Chamber</th>
<th>Secondary Chamber</th>
<th>Hallway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Back Wall</td>
<td>Side Walls</td>
<td>Archwaly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daibo</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eianji</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umadzuka</td>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Benkeiga-ana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>G + R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yokoyama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utsudzuka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inariyama</td>
<td>G</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kamao</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunigoshi</td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanokawachi</td>
<td>G</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1. The location and type of decorations applied outside of the *ishiyakata* in chamber tombs; G- Geometric, A- Abstract, R- Representational

are often located in a more complex, sometimes multi-chambered space. I will examine how decorations corresponded to three different architectural features and spaces within the chamber tombs: the main chamber, other features such as secondary chambers and hallways, and finally gateways and entranceways. I will compare the use of geometric and abstract motifs with the new representational motifs, and examine at their combination. This section will demonstrate that these three sections of the tomb
had different decorative programs. The decorations were arranged within the main chamber following principles established in the *ishiyakata*, and are linked to transformations that occur with this structure. The decorations that appear outside of the main chamber and on the gateways were involved in creating a space separate from the main chamber. This space was decorated with old and new motifs as well as a combination of both. Decorations in later *ishiyakata* chamber tombs were involved in structuring the transformation and addition of space in chamber tombs, and did so as burial rituals removed from atop the mound to the space within the tomb.

Decorations and the Main Chamber

The *ishiyakata* was initially established as a freestanding structure resembling assembled stone sarcophagi of the northern Higo Region, yet with features distinct enough for a clear division to be made in modern scholarship. The omissions of the inward-facing stone slab, and the alignment of the structure within the tomb, are key characteristics to identifying the *ishiyakata*. *Ishiyakata* attributed to the late 6th century are noticeably different as they are set into the walls of the chamber itself. There was no standard method for incorporation of the structure. In some tombs, the back wall of the chamber is used as part of the *ishiyakata* structure. The lid was set into the wall while

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still being supported by freestanding stone slabs set perpendicular to the wall. This is the case for tombs like Benkeiga-ana (Fig. 4.3) in northern Higo. Other tombs utilized both the back and side walls of the tomb to support the lid, with additional wing stones to support the lid’s weight in the front. This can be seen in the construction of Kunigoshi Kofun (Fig. 3.10) in Central Higo.

The envelopment of the *ishi-yakata* structure into the walls of the chamber is indicative of the process by which its role was also absorbed by the chamber. The use of large stone slabs, originally reserved for building the *ishi-yakata*, in the construction of the walls of the chamber is also associated with this transformation. The corbelled dome of brick-like stones that once surrounded the stone slab structure, as seen in stone partition chamber tombs and early *ishi-yakata* chamber tombs, was set upon a base of stone slabs that acted as part of the wall in later tombs. This method of construction is seen in later *ishi-yakata* chamber tombs like Eianji East Kofun (Figure 4.2) in northern Higo. Given all this, it is generally concluded that the *ishi-yakata’s* eventual disuse arose from its redundancy within the tomb. This transfer of function corresponds to the relocation of the decorations from the *ishi-yakata* to the back wall of the tomb. If the back wall of the chamber was also the back face of the *ishi-yakata* structure, then the decorations were applied using the same structuring principles seen in earlier *ishi-yakata*.

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67 This is part of the process of “chamberization.” See Kurafuji, 1997.
Daibo Kofun (Figure 4.1) is a small keyhole shaped tumulus located along the left bank of the Kikuchi River near the Tamanashi plain. The chamber set within the mound contains an example of the former type of inset ishiyakata structure that is set along the back of the chamber. Large stone slabs were not used in the construction of the rest of the chamber. Instead, the chamber is composed of small, rough cut stones reminiscent of the division in stone materials used in earlier ishiyakata chamber tombs. Therefore, the ishiyakata still appears as a separate structure from the rest of the chamber. While the tomb also has a small antechamber marked with the use of stone slabs in the construction of the archways, Daibo Kofun is associated with the early to middle half of the 6th century. It may be that this tomb is an early stage of the inclusion of the ishiyakata in the construction of the chamber.

The decorative practices associated with the burial structure are also indicative of early ishiyakata chamber tombs. The back wall contains five rows of the sawtooth pattern rendered in white, blue, and red. Circle motifs were also set into some of the triangles and arranged in the second and fourth row from the top. This combination corresponds with the inner faces of the ishiyakata, with remnants of additional decorations along the outward edges and wing stones. Although the method of construction of the ishiyakata has changed, the decorative program has not. The decorative practices are not indicative of an expansion of decorative space but, rather,
the inclusion of the back wall of the chamber into the construction of *ishiyakata*. The four other *ishiyakata* chamber tombs with decorations applied to the chamber walls follow the same decorative program of earlier forms of this burial, although they all demonstrate varying degrees of independence from the chamber.

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There are other tombs, however, that reverse this relationship so that the *ishiyakata* is more dependent upon the structure of the tomb.
The arrangement of circle motifs set into a sawtooth pattern is similar to those found in the other *ishiyakata* chamber tombs of the Kikuchi River Region. The human, boat, and horse motifs associated with later mural type tombs were not applied within the main chamber of late *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. There are only two *ishiyakata* structures and one main chamber that contain some of this second wave of motifs. The motifs identified as boats in Segonkō No. 3 (Chapter 1, Figure 2) are arranged above two additional rows of older motifs, while the sole human figure found in Chibusan Kofun (Fig. 2.1) was applied above the triangle pattern upon the left inner face of the freestanding *ishiyakata*. These motifs appear to be incidental, and not necessarily part of the overall decorative program. Moreover, they are neither the focal point of the combination nor the most prevalently used motif. They are added to tombs that contain pre-established combinations and color choices, and give the impression that they are experimental additions to an established decorative system.

It is difficult to construe any otherworldly beliefs from these few motifs or their arrangement in *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. This identification of such motifs with a new view of the afterlife is only ever achieved through the inclusion of these tombs in the category of mural type tombs. In doing so, the human figures found in Chibusan Kofun and others are studied alongside the more elaborate and unmistakably allegorical scenes painted upon the back walls of later decorated chamber tombs. This inclusive approach undermines our understanding of the development of motifs in late 6th
century decorated *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. The difference in the combination of motifs used in *ishiyakata* tombs and mural type chamber tombs has been demonstrated in another article;\(^70\) however, the differences are presented as a result of physical changes in tomb design, without any consideration of meaning. As shown in the previous chapters, the *ishiyakata* structure and decorative program were deliberately composed together, and the transformation of one did not passively follow the changes to another. It was changes to the burial context which informed both. In late 6\(^{th}\) century chamber tombs, the role of the *ishiyakata* burial facility and the decorative program associated with it were integrated into the design of the main chamber.

**Beyond the Main Chamber**

The addition of secondary chambers, long corridors, and multiple gateways expanded the space within late 6\(^{th}\) century chamber tombs including those that contained *ishiyakata*.\(^71\) Each of these architectural features facilitated movement and actions within this underground space. Many researchers have theorized that these architectural elements reflected changes in burial practices as well as the rituals


associated with these spaces. Rituals that took place atop the mound during the early half of the Kofun period were reinvented to be performed within the tomb. Without historical descriptions, it is impossible to comprehend these rituals fully; however, the artifacts and the sites have been used to make inferences about human activity that once took place within the tombs. As seen with early *ishiyakata* chamber tombs, the study of late 6th century architectural changes tends to overlook decorations as a contextual resource. The motifs, their combinations, and their relationships to these new features provide another aspect to consider in the addition of meaningful space within chamber tombs.

*Secondary Chambers and Corridors*

As early as the latter half of the 5th century, additional chambers were added to the floor plan of various types of chamber tombs throughout the Higo Region. More than half of all the *ishiyakata* chamber tombs in the region were constructed with antechambers. Three of these antechambers were decorated to some extent (Table 3.1). Yet in both their construction and decorative program we can see that these secondary chambers were conceptually different spaces than the main chambers.

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Figure 4.2. General Plan of Eianji East Kofun
Two of the tombs with decorated antechambers are located in the Kikuchi River region within 15 km of each other, and share a unique decorative program. Benkeiga-ana Kofun and Eianji East Kofun (Fig. 4.2) have a greater concentration of motifs within their antechambers and entranceways than upon the *ishiyakata*. Moreover, the choice of motifs and their arrangement bears little resemblance to those of earlier *ishiyakata* tombs. These tombs may be part of an isolated decorative development. A more plausible interpretation is that these tombs or their occupants had ties to areas outside of the Higo region with similar decorative programs. If this is indeed the case, these two tombs may have been informed by structuring principles more characteristic of later mural type chamber tombs. Both tombs are located in the north of the Higo Region, in close proximity to another region that developed chamber tombs with decorations applied directly to the chamber walls. In that case, it is not surprising that the structuring principles of the decorations would differ from those found in the earlier *ishiyakata* chamber tombs.

Eianji East Kofun is a small circular mound, which contains a multiple chamber tomb utilizing large stone slabs in its construction. The main chamber contains an *ishiyakata* structure built into the back wall. Yet another feature that sets it apart from other tombs is the use of two L-shaped stone slabs as wings to support the front of the *ishiyakata*’s lid. This creates a raised gateway at the front of the *ishiyakata*. A sawtooth pattern runs along the side of the capstone and is the only recorded decoration within
the main chamber. Beyond the chamber, the larger secondary chamber is the focus of the decorative program. The decorations were applied primarily to the walls created from a base of large stone slabs topped with smaller brick-sized stones. The large stones on the left side of the chamber were decorated with three rows of large red circles or dots. The stone slabs along the other side have motifs of the same size however there appears to have only been room for two rows.

There are notable differences in the motifs applied to the stone slabs as compared to those applied to the smaller brick-sized stones. They are decorated with a cluster of motifs that are found in mural tombs north of the Higo Region. A horse was painted upon one of the smaller stones, while it is recorded that circles and triangles surrounded it. Several motifs that are identified as boats are interspersed with smaller circular motifs above the two rows of larger circular motifs on the right hand side. The appearance of boats and horses used in decorated tombs is regularly associated with developments of the later 6th century; however, they were primarily painted upon the back wall of the main chamber of mural tombs located in present day Fukuoka. Based on this this tomb and Benkeiga-ana Kofun, by contrast, the tombs of the Higo region typically did not feature these motifs within the burial chamber.

Benkeiga-ana Kofun (Fig. 4.3) is similar in its layout to Eianji East Kofun except for the front facing wings of the of the ishiyakata feature. The ishiyakata was not designed
Figure 4.3. General Plan of Benkeiga-ana Kofun
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokuchō.
to be separate structure. All of the stone slabs, including the lid were set into the walls of the main chamber. Unlike in the previous tomb, the motifs found in the antechamber seem to lack organizing principles, save for maybe a division between arrangements on the lower half of the stone and the upper half of the stone. The decorations are also limited to the structural features outside of the main chamber, although Benkeiga-ana’s archway is also decorated. Unlike other gateways that will be introduced in the next section of this chapter, the decorations were not applied just to the faces of the posts of the archway. The stones used in its construction were thick enough that the reveal, or inner edge of the doorway, also provided a surface for decoration.

The decoration of the reveal of the inner doorway is a unique feature in Benkeiga-ana Kofun. Two quivers adorn the left-hand reveal. They were painted towards the bottom, while above that a concentric circle was arranged above a four-legged animal in a boat. This animal is identified as a horse, since this pairing is regularly featured on other tombs. The right side is in poor condition, and the motif that does remain is too fragmentary to identify. Site reports describe remnants of a sawtooth pattern, a diamond pattern, and concentric circles on the inner archway connecting the antechamber to the main chamber. These motifs and their arrangement have more in common with practices associated with gateways, which will be explored in a later section. More boats, occupied by horse-like animals, as well as one with a bird on the right hand side, decorate the walls of the antechamber. They are accompanied by the
fragments of circular and triangular motifs. Besides the triangular and circular motifs, the quivers are the only trace of the decorative assemblages seen in earlier *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. More motifs were identified upon the left face of the post belonging to the archway facing the corridor. On the bottom a figure appears to be sitting in the boat. Above that, a human figure holds on a long, bowed object; to his left are four smaller animals, while above him is large four-legged animal.

As with Eianji East Kofun, Benkeiga-ana Kofun displays an arrangement of motifs used more frequently in mural tombs north of the Higo Region. Japanese scholars have highlighted that many of these motifs depict a sense of movement. Some

![Diagram of motifs](image_url)

Figure 4.4. Examples of Late 6th Century Combinations of Representational Motifs. 
scholars go so far as to identify these motifs as allegorical, capturing ideologies of the soul’s journey after death.\(^7^3\) This interpretation of these decorations does not explain why the antechamber is decorated when the main chamber is left untouched. The site report suggests that the antechamber may have also been used for the interment of two additional bodies, indicated by the stones set into the floor of the antechamber. These stones also demarcate a central walkway through the room and two spaces for placing remains on either side of the chamber. While there were no remains in either section to confirm this assessment, there are examples of other tombs that have used the antechamber for additional burials. If this chamber is a supplementary burial space then the decorations were still being utilized to surround bodies in another chamber. The second wave of motifs that developed in regions to the north was associated with additional tomb space where the remains of the deceased were arranged. As the antechamber often acted as location of additional burial space, these chambers may have been decorated using practices developed after the occupants of the main chamber were interred. Unfortunately, it is difficult to study the temporal sequence of the application of decorations in ishiyakata chamber tombs.

The boat motif has been a source of constant speculation and debate and serves as a warning for interpretations of motifs that fail to consider their context within the

tomb. For one, the boat is utilized as part of the house of the dead theory. It is interpreted as a vehicle for the soul to travel to its home within the tomb. Yet another interpretation involves travel, but to physical places both locally and abroad. Control of access to trade routes throughout Japan as well as to China and Korea was integral to local elite. The rebellion in northern Kyushu was initiated by denying the Yamato leader passage to Korea. Trade and travel were synonymous with power.

The boat motif flourished during a period which overlapped a transition in themes within the motifs that appear in decorated kofun. In Segonko No. 3 (Fig. 2.2), the boat was paired with quivers, bows, and swords, attesting to the warfare common throughout Japan and on the Korean Peninsula. The boat motif was also used in allegorical compositions in later tombs (Fig. 4.4) that depict a seemingly fantastical journey. It appears that the meaning of the boat motif, along with many other motifs, fluctuated throughout 6th century tombs.

Gateways

Entranceways and gateways are architectural features used to mark the transition from one space to the next. In early stone chamber tombs, entrances granted access and then sealed away the space that contained the remains of the deceased, assuming a similar function to that of the lid of stone sarcophagi. In a way, stone
chambers were not complete without a means of sealing off the underground space. Yet, unlike the decorated lids of stone sarcophagi, the entranceways of early stone chamber tombs were not elaborately designed. So, the development of decorated, structurally unique gateways within stone chambers marks a new method of dividing space both physically and metaphorically. *Ishiyakata* chamber tombs were some of the earliest chamber tombs to include and to modify such features. Besides the burial facilities, gateways and entranceways were the most frequent location of decorative practices in chamber tombs. This section will examine the decorative program of gateways in late 6th century chamber tombs and compare the relationship between form and decoration with that of decorated *ishiyakata*.

Access is an essential feature of chamber tombs, and has manifested in various architectural forms with the emergence and spread of this type of burial. These entrances were not independent features, but were created through modifications made to the stone slabs and domed ceiling. Early stone partition chamber tombs had gaps in the domed ceiling just above the stone slabs that made up the burial pit. Such gaps were often aligned with a u-shaped depression centered on the front stone slab (Fig. 2.3), suggesting they also functioned as part of an entrance. Late 5th century stone partition chamber tombs developed short corridors that ended in entranceways, separating the corridor from the outside world. Unfortunately, most decorated stone partition chambers do not have entranceways, or their entranceways are no longer intact. Only
one tomb features decorations outside of the main chamber, and there is not enough information to study the decorative program of these spaces outside of the main chamber. Entranceways of late 5th century chamber tombs were diverse in form and some of the earliest to be decorated. As with Chapter 1, these early decorated entranceways may help in our understanding of the development of these features in later ishiyakata chamber tombs.

The earliest chamber tomb with decorations outside of the burial chamber is Idera Kofun (Figure 4.5), a stone partition chamber tomb located within the central Higo region. Stone slabs were used to line the short corridor and entranceway of the tomb. A chokkomon pattern that wrapped around the inside faces of the burial facility continued through the corridor and on to the outward facing slabs of the entranceway. There are some noteworthy differences between the patterns outside and the patterns inside the tomb. Inside the main chamber, panels with two stacked concentric circles are placed between one, two or even three panels of the chokkomon pattern. These concentric circles do not continue outside of the main chamber. The panels that line the inside of the entry, by contrast, have three panels of the chokkomon pattern that are oriented lengthwise across the face of the slabs. The stone slabs that act as the posts of the outer doorway display singular, tall chokkomon patterns. Moreover, the patterns in the corridor and entranceway are structurally different from the chokkomon patterns.
Figure 4.5. General Plan of Idera Kofun
Source: Japan. Kumamoto Prefecture Board of Education.
Kumamoto ken sōshoku kofun: Sōgo chōsa hōkokucho.
inside the tomb. The circle pattern is not found outside of the burial chamber. The overall decorative program at Idera Kofun is unified, although the individual spaces within are distinguished decoratively.

Gateways were already separate architectural features when ishiyakata chamber tombs emerged. Like the ishiyakata, they were often composed of large stone slabs, contrasting with smaller brick-like stones or cobbles used for the chamber walls and the hallways. The use of similar materials in both the ishiyakata and the gateways is found throughout tombs of the Higo Region and may have been a means of demarcating the chamber from the hallway and the hallway from the outside. Thus, even without the use of decorations, gateways were architectural features used to mark transitions in conceptual as well as physical space.

There are at least five ishiyakata chamber tombs with decoration applied to one or more of the gateways located within the tomb space (Table 4.1). These tombs, Daibo Kofun, Eianji Kofun, Benkeiga-ana Kofun, Utsudzuka Kofun, and Kamao Kofun, are reported as multiple chamber tombs and attributed to the late 6th century based upon their construction. The decorations are found on either the inner gateways or the entranceways with no distinct pattern of placement emerging between the five tombs. However, decorations are often located on the inside of the chamber or inside the main
entrance, and less frequently upon inner gateways. Despite variations in the design, it is the selection of motif that unifies these tombs.

These tombs demonstrate a recurring structuring pattern in which certain motifs were limited to the *ishiyakata* while the sawtooth pattern was not subject to those restrictions. Each of the aforementioned late 6th century *ishiyakata* tombs used similar sawtooth patterns on the posts of the entry. Evoking the decorative program found in Idera Kofun, these patterns were also applied to the *ishiyakata* within the main chamber. The circle motifs, which were surrounded by the sawtooth pattern on the *ishiyakata*, were not applied to the gateways. Japanese researchers\(^{74}\) have looked at other contexts within the burial program in which this motif has been found. The sawtooth pattern has been identified on armor deposited as grave goods and *haniwa* depicted wearing armor (Fig. 3.3). Thus, the sawtooth is identified as a protective motif. While this identification is repeatedly made, these motifs are also significant for their ability to traverse the tomb space to areas outside of the *ishiyakata*.

The sawtooth pattern is associated with the entranceways, which functioned as points of entry from one section of the tomb to another. This relationship between the sawtooth pattern and entry was shared among *ishiyakata* tombs of several regions. The pattern was even applied to the entranceways of rock cut tombs, another form of burial

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\(^{74}\) Takagi Kyoji, “Kyūshū no sōshoku kofun”, *Higashi Ajia to Nihon no kōkogaku II*, (Tokyo: Dōseisha, 2002), 189-220
facility that emerges within the region during the latter part of the period. Through the use of decorations, gateways of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs were, in a way, an extension of the *ishiyakata* structure. Rather than interpreting the *ishiyakata* as a stone sarcophagus without a lid, we may imagine the gateways, specifically the entrance, as having a lid-like function to close the tomb off from the outside. Moreover, the gateways were linked to the *ishiyakata* through the use of similar stone materials and decorative motifs. But it was not just the need for a lid on a stone sarcophagus that led to the development of the structural elements associated with late 6th century chamber tombs.

**Expansion of the Decorative Program in *Ishiyakata* Chamber Tombs**

As demonstrated in previous chapters, burial practices, primarily those concerning multiple burials informed the design of the *ishiyakata* chamber tomb. The emergence of family units restructured the design of architectural and decorative features within the tomb. Did this same consideration also give rise to multiple chambers, hallways, and gateways? Kurafuji has cited all these elements, including multiple burials and the expansion of decorations within the tombs, reflecting changes

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in funerary rituals. Multiple burials had a hand in these transformations, along with increased activity of the living within the tomb.

The open, ostentatious display associated with keyhole shaped mounds was not replicated in the design of *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. Instead, burial rituals took place within the chamber conducted by a small group of individuals. The introduction of *sue* ware from the Korean Peninsula occurs around this same time. This ritual pottery was found within the tomb, rather than above the tomb like haniwa of early parts of the Kofun period. *Sue* ware also encouraged the development of local production groups, and saw the rise in prominence of their leaders. The use of ritual pottery within the tomb attests to a process of elaboration of the activity that occurred. The tomb design, including the decorative program, became more complex during this period.

**Conclusion**

This section explored the transformation of tomb space within late 6th century decorated *ishiyakata* chamber tombs, analyzing structural and decorative developments. Drawing upon studies in the previous chapter, we are able to see that decorations located in other areas of the tomb follow the same program established in early 6th

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76 Kurafuji Hiroshi, Ishiyakatakō: Hira’iri yokoana shiki sekkan no shutsugen to sono igi, *Senrekigaku–kōkogaku ronkyū II.* (Kumamoto: Kumamoto University. 1997), 162.
77 須恵器, *sueki*, offering ware
ishiyakata century tombs. Decorations did not just expand to the tomb wall, but it was the blending of the ishiyakata with the structure of the main chamber that transformed the back wall of the chamber into part of the burial facility. Moreover, decorations that did appear within the tomb were applied to dividing stones, which bore a resemblance to the earlier stone partition chamber tombs in their arrangement. The architectural features added on to the main chamber did not house the ishiyakata structure and, therefore, were decorated using different structuring principles. Tombs with decorations on the corridors and secondary chambers featured unique compositions that may have been informed by other decorative practices. Gateways were decorated primarily with the sawtooth pattern used in tombs of Northern Higo. This sawtooth pattern was also applied to the ishiyakata, but it was combined with circles and other motifs. This highlights not only the significance of the sawtooth pattern but its ties to gateways as well.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

By the late sixth century *ishiyakata* chamber tombs were already disappearing from the Higo region. Decorative practices, however, continue to develop in tombs of northern Kyushu. Tombs far more befitting the category of mural type chamber tombs were created not far from the Kikuchi River region in Higo. As we have seen, their allegorical nature influenced late *ishiyakata* chamber tombs. It was also during this time that side entrance chamber tombs spread throughout the Japanese archipelago and various regions, like Kanto, produced distinctive decorative and pictorial programs. While incised and carved motifs appeared in a few chamber and cliff-cut cave tombs, painted designs and murals dominated the late 6th and 7th centuries. It appears that these practices were able to add one last burst of color and meaning to chamber tombs of the final stages of the Kofun period.

The longevity of these practices attests to the significance of the decorative practices in the construction of kofun of northern Kyushu. Decorations were more than just aesthetic flourishes; they were created for symbolic purposes. The most commonly held belief is that the meaning of decorations resided in the meaning of individual motifs. This approach required a comparison of many types of tombs across vast...
temporal and spatial divides. It also continually widened the gap between the
decorations and their context within the tomb. From this study of decorated *ishiya*cka* chamber tombs, it is apparent that the design and meaning of decorations is fundamentally tied to the architectural structures they adorn. Their relationship has provided a better understanding of decorations and the *ishiya*kata, as well as the transition from stone sarcophagus to side entrance stone chamber tombs within the Higo region. Moreover, decorated *ishiya*kata attest to the complexity of burial rituals during this period and the contexts affecting these changes.

This thesis also addresses a general need to expand beyond centrist or broad approaches which often make comparisons that require the archaeological record to fit into one category or another. In doing so, aspects of the Kofun period, like *ishiya*kata chamber tombs and their decorations, which are not so easily defined, are marginalized in academic inquiries with a wider scope. But it is also all too easy to become focused on a far too narrow view which fails to include regional developments within the greater picture. Ishiyakata chamber tombs and decorated kofun were structured by individuals navigating both local and large networks during the Kofun period. Interactions with peers throughout the Japanese archipelago and on the Korean Peninsula influenced the formation of these tombs and their decorative practices. We find that the Higo region and the tombs it produced were anything but conventional, expressing the transitional nature of internal and external stimuli.
This approach could lead to more complete studies of other decorated tombs like Takamatsuzuka Kofun, discovered in Nara prefecture, which demonstrates a direct adoption of Chinese decorative conventions. This tomb stands in stark contrast to other mural type chamber tombs of northern Kyushu. Some mural type chamber tombs contain images identified from Chinese and Korean sources, yet the entire tomb does not replicate the composition associated with those elements throughout the tomb. Moreover, the style is far more reminiscent of earlier decorative practices, rendered in outline in one or a few colors. Takamatsuzuka Kofun and the mural tombs of northern Kyushu present different trajectories of tomb design and decorative practices, yet these tombs are also enfolded into the same category of decorated kofun. Even at a superficial glance, various questions arise regarding their design and the concerns involved in their production. These questions remain unanswered as academic focus is preoccupied with the continuous process of defining and redefining the category of mural type chamber tombs.

Many Japanese works on decorated kofun begin, rather than end, with a brief description of entering a decorated chamber tomb. Images emerge from the darkness, creating an air of mystery synonymous with our understanding of the decorations. These statements are also a metaphor for the treatment of these tombs. The motifs appear one by one to be studied in the order they are encountered rather than as part of a larger picture. Our attention is grabbed by the biggest or the best preserved motifs
and images. Meanwhile, the tomb lies in the shadows or the periphery of our attention. This description is meant to captivate our interests, but in its exoticism we also discover what a very limited view it is.

Given the goals of this paper, I would like to also revise the way in which decorated kofun are presented by a modern viewer. Ozuka Kofun in present day Fukuoka Prefecture was the first decorated tomb I had the opportunity to visit. Unlike researchers responsible for its discovery and documentation, I shared this moment with strangers and fellow students all standing together in a sealed viewing chamber. I let everyone else go first, observing them before the tomb. Were the people joining me that day from the nearby towns and villages, or had they travelled from other areas of Japan for the same opportunity? More importantly, what did they choose to see?

Stepping up to the thick window and its metal frame, I noted that Ozuka kofun was being presented as work of art alone in a gallery. A quick glimpse within confirmed it is much more than that. The remnants of the decorations cling to the large stone posts and lintel, through which the *ishiyakata* structure is barely visible. My understanding was limited by my vantage point, a single direction from which I could glimpse the contents of tomb. Aware of the expansive decorative program, I wished to go beyond the glass to examine the quivers upon the walls and the yellow dots upon the red ceiling. It would have required permission to move through the tomb,
something only few people were able to obtain. But I left the site with hope I would be able to continue to visit this tomb and move beyond the paned glass.
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**English Sources**


