

Navigating Through Kofun Imagery An Analysis of the Boat Depictions Found in Decorated Tombs in Northern Kyūshū

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Abstract The *sōshoku kofun* 装飾古墳 (decorated tombs) is a phenomenon of protohistoric art that developed during the Late Kofun Period (475-710 CE) from Northern Kyūshū. This paper will discuss the data personally gathered from the iconographic and iconological analysis of the subject of the boat in seventeen *sōshoku kofun* in Northern Kyūshū, i.e. the present-day prefectures of Fukuoka, Saga, and Nagasaki. The aim of this research is to understand how the subject of the boat developed artistically in this particular phenomenon of protohistoric art, why the boat was reproduced in a funerary context, and what information on the behind culture can be obtained by analysing the style, the iconography, and the links the subject of the boat has with both local and mainland symbolism.

Keywords Japanese archaeology. Protohistoric art. Boat symbolism. Decorated tombs. Kofun Period.

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1 Introduction

Archaeological evidence from the Jōmon (ca. 14.500 or 11.500-1000 BCE) and Yayoi (900 or 400 BCE-250 CE) Periods shows that a society based on navigation and contact with mainland cultures existed on the northern shores of Kyūshū island.¹ The boat was an essential means of transport for activities that departed from the island's shores: activities that were not only commercial but also political for relations between the island's chieftains with the peninsular ones.² The importance of navigation within the social hierarchy of the Yayoi and Kofun Period (250-710 CE) is still disputed (Habu 2010, 167). Likewise, due to the rare archaeological finds, the type of boat in use is still uncertain. To date, there is very little archaeological evidence of boats dating back to the prehistoric period. Only four examples have been found in the whole of Kyūshū: one dated to the Early Jōmon in Saga Prefecture, two in Fukuoka and Kumamoto Prefecture dating from the Yayoi Period, and only one example from the Kofun Period in Miyazaki Prefecture (Habu 2010, 164-5). Furthermore, the presence of boat reproductions in the funerary material culture of both the Yayoi Period and the Kofun Period underlines the importance of the boat in the culture, society, and beliefs of ancient Japan.

1 Contacts began during the Early Jōmon Period (5000-3000 BCE) between northern Kyūshū populations and Peninsular Chulmun populations because the latter needed to obtain obsidian from northern Kyūshū (Shin, Rhee, Aikens 2012, 95; Nishitani 2020, 15). Currently, 27 archaeological sites have been identified in northern Kyūshū where fragments of Chulmun pottery have been found, and 24 sites on the southern coast of Korea with fragments of Jōmon pottery (Shin, Rhee, Aikens 2012). Throughout the Jōmon Period, pottery from both cultures, obsidian arrowheads, cores and flakes were found on the coasts of northern Kyūshū and Tsushima Island, as well as on the coasts of the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. Among the major sites are: Koshidaka 越高, Koshidaka-Ozaki 越高尾崎, Myōtoishi 夫婦石, Yoshida 吉田 and Nukashi スカン in Tsushima Island, and Tongsamdon in Korean Peninsula. See, in this regard, Miyamoto 2008; Shin, Rhee, Aikens 2012; Bausch 2016; Hudson *et al.* 2021. During the Yayoi Period, due to the pre-existing contacts between the North Kyūshū Jōmon and the people of the peninsular coast, new technologies of agriculture, new aspects of culture and thought, easily entered the archipelago. Several examples of hybridisation of both potteries (both Yayoi and Mumun) show contact and probably co-existence between the two populations (Mizoguchi 2013; Barnes 2015; Rhee, Aikens, Barnes 2021). Among the major sites are: Haru-no-Tsuji 原ノ辻 and Karakami カラカミ on Iki Island, the village of Etsuji 江辻遺跡 (Fukuoka Prefecture), Nuk-do Island in the southern Korea.

2 During the Middle-Late Yayoi Period (300 BCE-250 CE), the political relations between North Kyūshū chieftains and the Peninsular ones was among 'peers', that is two poles that considered themselves on the same level (Barnes 2007). They sought, therefore, to obtain and/or reproduce by 'competitive emulation' those continental symbolic objects that would be used to enhance individual status within the emerging Yayoi social hierarchy (Seyock 2003; Barnes 2007). This is visible through a whole series of symbolic objects found within grave goods (e.g. sword, beads, horse harness) in both southern Peninsula and North Kyūshū that belong to a homogeneous repertoire. The use of the same symbolic objects meant to identify oneself as being part of a specific political status, of a specific *élite*. The person buried was considered and perceived by both its society and Peninsular society as a member of a specific hierarchical *élite* that was emerging.

Specifically, in the Late Kofun (475-710 CE) artistic phenomenon of *sōshoku kofun* 装飾古墳 (decorated tombs), representations of different types of boats have been identified, as well as their depiction in scenes where there is interaction with other subjects (such as human figure and animals), and they seem to reproduce a belief/ideology of the time. The society related to the *sōshoku kofun* was a society that was not yet fully literate, where images and symbols represented an important channel of information for understanding the shared and extra-communicated cultural codes. The reproduction of the boat can provide important information about society, and the meaning of the boat within the cultural practices of the time. This paper will discuss the information personally obtained from the study of the iconography and iconology of the subject of the boat in 17 *sōshoku kofun* of Northern Kyūshū (the area of the present-day prefectures of Fukuoka, Saga, and Nagasaki),³ whose data were acquired in my previous research analysis. The information discussed is a personal elaboration of the data and materials kindly provided by Dr. Kawano Kazutaka (Kyūshū National Museum) and Prof. Maria Shinoto (University of Heidelberg). Furthermore, the data described here come from a personal analysis of the images at my disposal, using Erwin Panofsky's (1892-1968) method of iconographic and iconological analysis (Panofsky 1972),⁴ adapted by combining the critical-interpretive archaeological basis. This paper takes the subject of the boat in the *sōshoku kofun* of Northern Kyūshū as a research case study to demonstrate how differences and similarities in style and iconography can provide new information on the iconology of the boat in the funerary art context. The aim is hence to understand how the artistic style and iconography/iconology of the boat evolved in terms of time and geography in Northern Kyūshū area, and what information on the funerary culture of the period we can get from the analysis of these tombs. The literature on the theme (cf. Shiraishi 1999; Yanagisawa 2004; Tatsumi 2011) considers and analyses the subject of the boat

3 The choice to focus only on Northern Kyūshū is due to the fact that this area has the highest concentration of decorated tombs, and on this island the boat is among the most frequently depicted subjects, unlike in other areas of the archipelago.

4 The analysis of a work of art, according to Panofsky, must first deal with a pre-iconographic analysis of the subjects, i.e. the pure forms that represent objects, human figures, animals, flora, and everything that is easily identifiable. Human figures can be divided into the factual subject matter (whether a man or woman is depicted) and expressive subject matter (e.g. the relationship between objects, the pose assumed by human figures that conveys certain feelings). Next comes the actual iconographic description, i.e. establishing the conventional meaning of an artistic motif or subject. Here, the forms and style analysed in the first stage are studied to define the history of the subject and the context around it. The iconological description aims to identify the intrinsic meaning, symbolic values, or 'content' embedded in the visual image, which is closely linked to the historical, cultural, and social context of the artist.

as a symbol or link to the world of the afterlife,⁵ whereas this paper will examine also other aspects, such as the connection with the life activities of the deceased, and the possibility that the boat does not assume the same significance throughout the North Kyūshū area. In the analysis of the tombs, I have disregarded the borders of the present prefectures, considering the latter as a single territory: northern Kyūshū. The results obtained will show iconographic differences at a spatial level.

In particular, the first paragraph will briefly explore the mortuary architecture of the Late Kofun Period in order to understand the context of the cult of the dead in the period of interest of this paper. The second paragraph will briefly show the depiction of the boat in the funerary art of the phases preceding the sōshoku kofun phenomenon: the Yayoi Period (900 or 400 BCE-250 CE), and the first two phases of the Kofun Period (Early 250-400 CE, and Middle 400-475 CE). This will emphasise the iconography of the subject and its context of reproduction. The third paragraph will introduce the artistic phenomenon of decorated tombs. The last paragraph will finally discuss the reproduction of the boat within the sōshoku kofun of Northern Kyūshū, and the information obtained from the iconographic and iconological analysis.

2 Mortuary Architecture of the Late Kofun Period

The Kofun Period is characterised by specific socio-political developments that led to the formation of the Japanese state (Barnes 2007; Steinhaus, Kaner 2016), and is normally divided into three sub-phases: Early (250-400 CE), Middle (400-475 CE) and Late (475-710 CE). On the one hand, the distinction of these sub-phases is built upon the developments of the Kofun Period burial architecture and on the repertoire of grave goods; on the other hand, it is closely related to the socio-political events that took place in the Japanese archipelago during that time (Tsude 1987, 55; Barnes 2007, 9). Kofun building is closely linked to a rising *élite* status, in contrast to the common people who were not granted a preferential or elaborate burial (Barnes 2007, 8). Shape and size were classified according to regional political hierarchy, and symbolised a sphere of both cosmological rituals and ideologies about dominant clans (Barnes 2007, 8). According to Hudson

⁵ This association arises because in the funerary culture of the Kofun Period the boat was used as a shape for coffins/sarcophagi and for the terracotta figures placed at the edges of burials (*haniwa* 埴輪). In addition, in 2006, a late fourth/early fifth century CE mourning boat was found in the moat of Nara's Suyama tomb (*Suyama kofun* 巢山古墳). This artefact will be discussed in the final paragraph of the paper. See, in this regard, Tatsumi 2011.

(1992), within the hierarchy of the burial forms, the *zenpōkōenfun* 前方後円墳 (keyhole) was considered the most prestigious: during the Middle Kofun it was used almost exclusively by the dominant Yamato clan. The difference in tomb sizes and shapes between the three phases of the Kofun Period reflects important changes in society. In fact, during this period, the monumental tombs served as a symbolic expression of the Yamato clan's authority (Tsude 1987, 55). As a result, they needed to possess specific characteristics that were easily recognisable and carried a significant impact, effectively conveying the grandeur of the rulers. These tombs had to be perceived as distinct from other shapes by the subordinate clans. When in Late Kofun the Yamato clan had definitively established itself as the dominant clan, there was no longer any need to build monumental tombs, and temple-building overtook tomb-building as an *élite* endeavour (Tsude 1987, 55, 70; Mizoguchi 2002, 215). For this reason, the size of burials decreased, tombs with simpler shapes such as the *enpun* 円墳 (circular) began to be built, and it is typical of this period to find clusters of kofun where several people from the same family or clan were buried (Mizoguchi 2013, 309-12).

The building of kofun, especially the most majestic ones, was not a rapid process and it is believed that various ceremonies were officiated at the various stages of construction up to the actual burial (Steinhaus and Kaner 2016, 168). It has been hypothesised that the purpose of the funeral rituals of the Kofun Period was to legitimise the transfer of power from the old to the new leader (Steinhaus, Kaner 2016, 168).

The rituals were initially performed on the rectangular surface of the mound (Farris 1998, 80), from where the coffin was lowered into the burial chamber. Nevertheless, between the fourth and fifth centuries (Late Kofun Period), a new type of chamber was introduced – *yokoanashiki sekishitsu* 横穴式石室 (corridor-style stone burial chamber) – with an entrance on one wall of the stone chamber leading to the outside, and a passageway leading to the chamber where the deceased was laid to rest (Steinhaus, Kaner 2016, 169). This structure allowed entry to the tomb, and the various chambers from the side. This was the main feature of the Late Kofun Period tombs. Narrow corridors led to large interior spaces that allowed for the burial of several people, probably members of the same household (Steinhaus, Kaner 2016, 255). Actually, tombs with a gallery leading to the burial chamber referred to as 'gallery mortuary chambers' seem to be a typical feature of North Kyūshū kofun imported from Paekche and in use since the early stages of the Kofun Period, later evolving into the stone corridor burial chambers (Farris 1998, 89; Mizoguchi 2013, 256-8). This structural change also modified the burial ritual. In *yokoanashiki sekishitsu*, the entrance to the burial area being sideways, rituals were performed at the entrance and inside the grave (Mizoguchi 2013, 309), and no longer on its top. The entrance

to the burial area, as it was no longer sealed, thus provided the opportunity to reopen the grave (Steinhaus, Kaner 2016, 169). From the Late Kofun the tomb was perceived as “the monumental indicator of the status of the deceased” (Mizoguchi 2013, 309). The deceased buried within the kofun from this Period were regarded by the community as:

those who were buried in the stone-built gallery-type mortuary chambers of the small tumuli constituting the PTC [packed tumuli clusters] were buried not only because they were members of a sub-lineage-scale grouping but also because as individuals, they had done and achieved certain things in their lifetime; the biography of the buried individual came to be represented in the form of differences in the grave goods deposited with the individuals who were buried together in individual chambers. (Mizoguchi 2013, 299)

In addition, the fact that the grave could be reopened suggests that, in the case of the decorated tombs, the decorations were meant to serve not only the deceased, but could also the community that could visit the burial site.

Another burial type originating in Northern Kyūshū in the fifth century is the *yokoana* 横穴 (rock-cut), a type of tomb made by digging a hole in the rock face of a natural mountain or hill, and whose shape is similar to that of a cross-shaped stone chamber; they are usually found in clusters of several tombs together.

3 The Reproduction of Boats in Prehistoric and Protohistoric Art

To understand whether the iconography of the boat in decorated tombs is a new iconography, typical only of this artistic phenomenon, it is important to identify and examine the iconography of boats in earlier periods. The boat representations described here have all been identified within the funerary art of both the Yayoi and Kofun Periods. They represent a useful tool for understanding the extent to which the iconography and style of boat depiction in a funerary context remained unchanged even within *sōshoku* kofun. The following examples come from sites in other areas of the archipelago. In this respect, it should be stressed that prehistoric and protohistoric funerary cultures not only had regional differences but also a common thread in terms of art and symbolism.

3.1 Depiction of Boats in Yayoi Art

Examples of boats have been found engraved on the surface of Middle Yayoi (450 BCE-50 CE) pottery (cf. Shiraishi 1993) where we identify a type of boat that would later be reproduced also in the decorated tombs. For instance, on the vase from the Sumita site (Tottori Prefecture, Middle Yayoi) an entire narrative scene is engraved where the boat is the protagonist [fig. 1]. Elements that would also be depicted in some *sōshoku* kofun paintings are reproduced, and this makes the vase very interesting. A concentric circle is depicted at the top left of the scene, which, in the case of decorated tombs, often symbolises the sun. A gondola-style boat with triangular decorations on the hull sails to the left with four human figures. On the ends of the boat is depicted a *warabitemon* 蕨手文 (fern frond) motif.⁶ On the boat, four human figures wear long feathered headgear and each holds an oar. Central to the scene is a stilt building and another element that should be a second grain building, but could also be close to an early prototype of a *yugi* 鞞 (quiver), considering the later iconography of the Kofun Period. On the left side, a tree is depicted with hanging spindle figures attributed to *dōtaku* 銅鐸 (ritual bronze bell),⁷ and an animal, possibly a deer. The scene is probably a depiction of a traditional festival (*matsuri* 祭り) or prayers related to the rice cultivation cycle.



Figure 1 Reproduction of the scene on the Sumita vase. Middle Yayoi (450 BCE-50 CE). Engraving. © Author

The reproduction of a composite monossil pirogue engraved on a vase found at Arao-Minami (Gifu, Late Yayoi 50 CE-250 CE) is considered to be among the most important examples of boat depiction in Japanese prehistoric art. The boat, reproduced with 81 oars, has a depiction of a small boat with raised ends at the extremities: only the one on the left has banners similar to those of the central longboat (Habu 2010, 166).

⁶ A type of botanical pattern. A pattern in which one end curves inwards in a spiral shape or similar to the shape of a ram's horns.

⁷ Bronze ritual bells typical of the Yayoi Period.

The boat is shaped like a gondola because of the oars and two separate extensions spreading out from the central body and, in *dōtaku* ritual bell engravings, there are two men at the stern as depicted at the Imuka site (Fukui Prefecture, Late Yayoi) [fig. 2a]. In the *dōtaku* of Inomukai (Fukui Prefecture) [fig. 2b], three boats are engraved: the left and right boats seem to resemble the gondola type with a sail or at the stern holding a large oar, while the central boat is closer to a canoe without a visible elevation of the ends. Animals are reproduced around the boats.

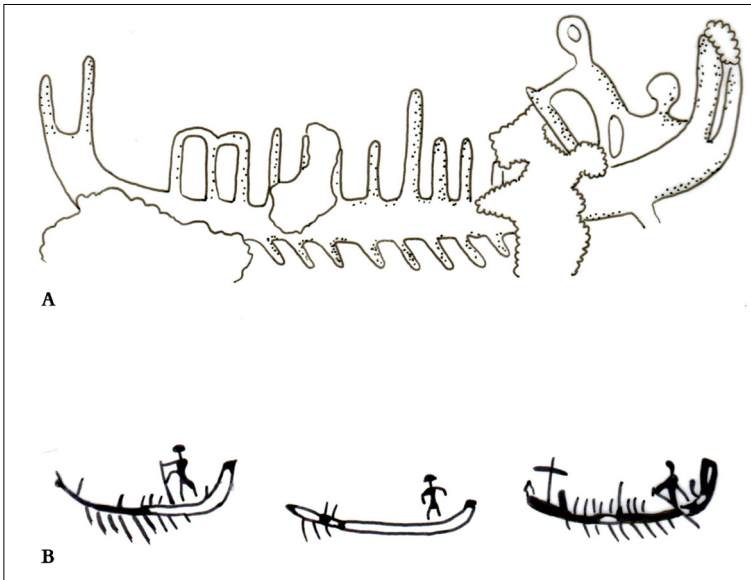


Figure 2 (a) Reproduction of the boat on the *dōtaku* of Imuka, Fukui Prefecture. (Late Yayoi 50 CE-250 CE). Engraving. (b) Reproduction of the boat on the *dōtaku* of Inomukai, Fukui Prefecture. (Late Yayoi 50 CE-250 CE). Engraving. © Author

In conclusion, the boat was reproduced in the Yayoi Period on material culture – pottery and ritual bells – that belonged to the funerary-ritual context. However, in some of these objects, the boat may have represented a specific feature of contemporary daily life without symbolising a connection to other beliefs such as the world of the afterlife. Moreover, a fixed and repeated iconography is already beginning to emerge in the various areas of the archipelago: a simple gondola-shaped boat, and a gondola-shaped boat with two separate elements at the edges.

3.2 Depiction of Boats in Kofun Art

In Kofun Period art, the boat has been reproduced either as an engraving on a cylindrical *haniwa* 埴輪 (terracotta clay figures),⁸ or as a boat-shaped *haniwa* itself (cf. Tatsumi 2011). An important example of the former case is the three boats' depictions on the *haniwa* of Higashi Tonozuka (Tenri, fourth century CE) [fig. 3]. Analysing the image, the three boats have the left oar larger than the others, and in the centre of the boats is a pole to which flags are hoisted, similar to the banners on the Arao-Minami boat. A superstructure with a trapezoidal roof is recognisable on boats 1 and 3, which also have abruptly rising ends similar to the boat with two extensions as depicted on the Imuka *dōtaku*. In this case, however, the two ends appear to be tied, perhaps by ropes. Boat 2, on the other hand, does not have the two curvatures at the ends. An important element that will also be discussed further on, is the presence of a bird perched on the top of the prow in boats 1 and 2.

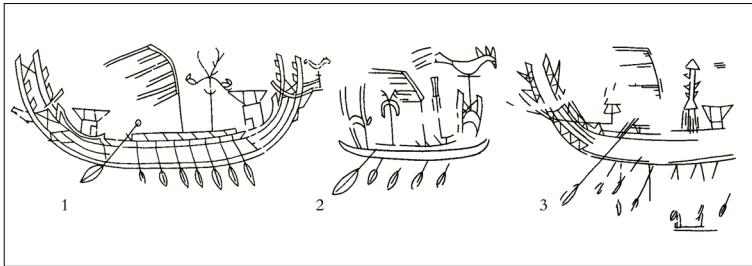


Figure 3 Reproduction of boats on the surface of the Higashi Tonozuka *haniwa*. Fourth century CE. Tenri. Middle Kofun. Engraving. © Author

The most interesting examples of boat reproduction in Middle-Late Kofun art are provided by the boat-shaped *haniwa* especially found in Ōsaka and Nara area, which are assumed to represent the prototypes in use during the Kofun Period and can be divided into two main groups [fig. 4]:

- a. a boat with two separate elements - upper and lower - at the stern and bow. It represents a pirogue hollowed out from the short side, to which a large upper structure almost as long as the dugout was attached. A reproduction of this boat was made in 1988, and in 1989, as a commemorative project for the 100th an-

⁸ Terracotta figurines placed on the edge of kofun tombs whose purpose was twofold: to separate “the world of the dead from the world of the living and to protect the dead by ensuring peace for their spirits” (Vesco 2021, 27).

- niversary of the city's municipal organisation, Ōsaka City recreated the ca. 700 km journey from Osaka to Pusan. This voyage revealed several problems with the open sea (Tatsumi 2011, 230-1).
- b. a gondola-shaped boat similar to the model of the engraved depictions on pottery and *dōtaku*. It is still unclear whether this type of vessel was only used for river and/or ritual navigation or also for longer journeys.

In conclusion, in the art of the first two phases of the Kofun Period, the boat was reproduced in the material culture of the specific funerary context, that is the *haniwa*.⁹ This reveals that it may have changed its iconology from a means of transport to a symbol of an element related to the belief of the time about the cult of the dead.

This analysis has therefore demonstrated that it is already possible to identify precise iconographies of representations of boats in Yayoi and Kofun Periods. It is to understand whether these representations were also depicted in the decorated tombs or if the iconography has changed.

⁹ If during the first two phases of the Kofun Period *haniwa* either symbolised prayers for the common welfare or formed the material environment for officiating rituals designed for the welfare of the community, during the Late Kofun their representation and use changed (Mizoguchi 2013, 308). It is believed that *haniwa* evolved from the cylindrical clay jars of the Late Yayoi and later developed into figurative sculptures (Barnes 2015, 348). The cylindrical *haniwa* placed around the sacred area of the kofun were sometimes decorated with inscriptions of representations similar to those found on Yayoi pottery and *dōtaku* bells, representations connected with rituals for the good harvest of rice (Mizoguchi 2013, 308). Initially, the shapes of the figurative *haniwa* represented shields, parasols, houses (Barnes 2015, 348), thus reproducing the life and (ritual) activities of the deceased chief (Mizoguchi 2013, 308). From Late Kofun onwards, the production of *haniwa* with human features began, portraying the leader and those who served him (Mizoguchi 2013, 308).

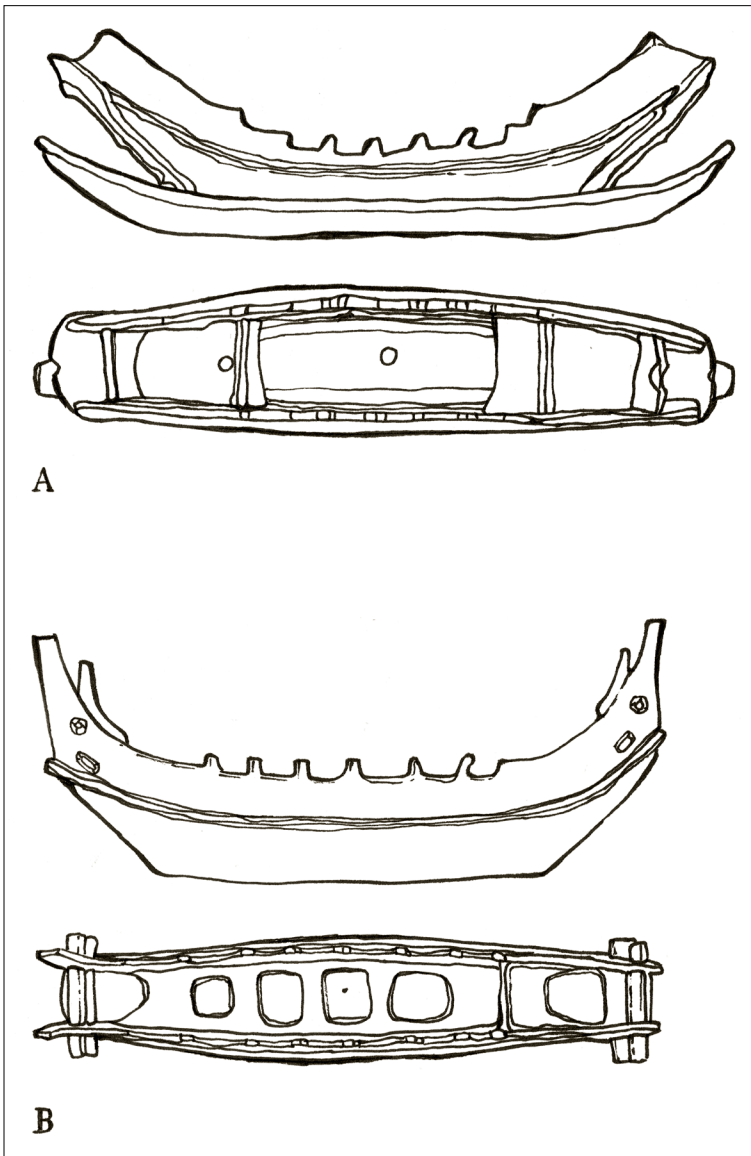


Figure 4 Reproduction of *haniwa* representing the two-boat models probably in use during the Kofun period: (A) a boat with two separate elements – upper and lower – at the stern and bow; (B) a gondola-shaped boat. © Mariapia Di Lecce, architect and illustrator

4 The Artistic Phenomenon of Sōshoku Kofun

4.1 Definition and Early Studies

The phenomenon defined as ‘sōshoku kofun’ developed from the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century CE until the seventh century, starting in Kyūshū and then spreading to the island of Honshū.¹⁰ Around the Chikugo and Yabe rivers, and in the Ariake Sea area, there is the highest concentration of decorated tombs. At present, around 800 decorated tombs found throughout the Japanese archipelago have been discovered and catalogued, but this is a provisional number as some may have been destroyed without having left a mark on society’s memory, just as many may still be undiscovered. The term sōshoku kofun refers to those Japanese ancient tombs that have decorative motifs in relief, engraved and painted on the inner and/or outer surface of the sarcophagus, on the inner walls of the stone burial chamber, and/or on the entrance of the mound. Tombs where the entire surface of the sarcophagus or stone burial chamber is painted with red pigment without any other decoration, or has only external artefacts such as *haniwa*, do not fall within this category (Kawano 2021, 226). In addition, the tombs of Takamatsuzuka 高松塚古墳 and Kitora キトラ古墳 in Nara Prefecture, although broadly included in sōshoku kofun, are distinguished as simple *hekiga kofun* 壁画古墳 (mounds with wall paintings) – cf. Kawano 2021 – that are part of the Chinese-style painting tradition: cf. Barnes 1992.¹¹ Sōshoku kofun tombs are normally divided into four types depending on where the decorations were placed (Shiraishi 1993a; Ikeuchi 2015; Kawano 2023) as the following table shows [tab. 1]:

10 Studies (cf. Yanagisawa 2022) indicate that the earliest examples of decorated sarcophagi are in the Ōsaka, Fukui and Okayama areas. Nevertheless, the real phenomenon of decorated tombs developing into wall paintings emerged on Kyūshū island.

11 Kitora and Takamatsuzuka tombs (dated to the seventh-eighth century) are located in the Asuka area (Nara Prefecture), where the central power of the Yamato clan was established. Due to the style, and the subjects depicted (e.g. animals of the four directions, scenes of nobles), the paintings are considered to be of direct continental influence and therefore part of the Chinese-style painting tradition.

Table 1 Division of sōshoku kofun of Kyūshū into the four categories

Typology	Chronology	Main characteristics	Main motifs
<i>sekkān-kei</i> 石棺系	end of the fourth c. CE-fifth c. CE	engraved or relief decorations on the stone sarcophagi. Decorations were sometimes painted.	<i>chokkomon</i> 直弧文 (straight line and arc pattern); circle-concentric circle; triangles; armour (quiver, sword)
<i>sekishō-kei</i> 石障系	fifth c. CE	engraved or relief decorations on the stone barrier. Decorations were sometimes painted.	<i>chokkomon</i> 直弧文 (straight line and arc pattern); circle-concentric circle; armour (quiver, sword)
<i>hekiga-kei</i> 壁画系	sixth c. CE-beginning of the seventh c. CE	decorations were directly painted or scratched on the walls of the tomb chambers.	Geometric patterns; armour (quiver, sword, shield); human figure; boats; animals; narrative scenes
<i>yokoana-kei</i> 横穴系	sixth c. CE-seventh c. CE	decorations were painted and/or engraved not only on the inside of the tomb chamber, but also on the walls near the entrance of the yokoana-style tombs.	Geometric patterns; armour (quiver, sword, shield); human figure; boats; animals.

Decorated kofun began to be referred to as ‘sōshoku kofun’ from 1917 by Seiryō (Kōsaku) Hamada, a pioneer of Japanese archaeology (Shirai-shi 1993), and the term came into use from the Taishō Period (1912-26), although interest in decorated tombs had begun in the Edo Period (1603-1868): cf. Ōtsuka 2014. In this period, decorated tombs were recorded mainly using sketches, which, although not based on accurate surveys, nevertheless provided valuable data for the reconstruction of now-lost decorative motifs (Kawano 2021, 234). In 1769, one of the first decorated tombs was discovered: the tomb of Kamao 釜尾古墳 located in Kumamoto Prefecture in Central Kyūshū (Ōtsuka 2014, 12).

Academic and systematic research on decorated tombs in Fukuoka and Kumamoto prefectures began during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō Period with studies conducted by the College of Letters of Kyōto Imperial University (Kawano 2021, 233). Public interest in decorated tombs increased significantly with the 1934 discovery of 王塚古墳 (Ōzuka tomb) and with the 1956 discovery of 竹原古墳 (Takehara tomb) in Fukuoka Prefecture (Kawano 2021, 233). In the 1970s, real concern arose and awareness was raised about the problems of preserving the paintings on tomb walls: problems of fading

and damage to the paintings and the deterioration of the conservation environment were highlighted. Also, from the 1980s onwards, several both local and national programmes for the preservation and protection of the paintings were instituted (Kawano 2021, 234). In the 1990s, a special exhibition dedicated to decorated tombs – *Sōshoku Kofun no Sekai* 装飾古墳の世界 (Special Exhibition Decorated Tombs Japan) – was created and organised by the National Museum of Japanese History. In recent years, thanks to new technologies, it has been possible to create an entire e-heritage programme recreating some of the tombs in virtual reality and 3D, which can be accessed with apps or PC programmes (cf. Ikeuchi 2015). New technologies have also made it possible to create simulations to investigate the paintings and their pigments in depth.

4.2 Origins

The origin of *sōshoku kofun* is still uncertain. Some scholars (cf. Shiraiishi 1999) believe there may have been an influence from the mainland, and in particular with the kingdom of Koguryo in the Korean peninsula from which some symbolic figures,¹² the composition of some scenes, and probably elements connected with the conception of the afterlife were adopted. On the other hand, an alternative hypothesis suggests that the Iwai rebellion (*Iwai no ran* 磐井の乱) marked the appearance of narrative motifs in tombs. This rebellion involved a powerful clan from Kyūshū that rebelled against the central power of the Yamato clan in the sixth century CE. The narrative-style motifs replaced the *sekijinsekiba* 石人石馬 (stone sculptures of human figures and horses),¹³ which were considered as symbols of this rebellion, and used in the burials of the various members of the Iwai clan and areas of its influence.¹⁴ According to Yanagisawa (2004), the oldest decorated tombs of the *sekkān-kei* and *sekiishō-kei* type were discovered in the Higo area (Kumamoto prefecture), indicating that the first Kyūshū decorated tombs appeared here, and then spread to the Northern area. Some of these tombs would, in fact, have features typical of Higo (such as internal structural elements made of Aso stone, distinctive of the Higo region). Furthermore, it is assumed that art-

¹² Such as the toad-moon, the crow-sun, the animals of the four directions, star-dots.

¹³ Typical of the Northern Kyūshū area only, *sekijinsekiba* are stone sculptures depicting men, horses, weapons and armour, and were arranged like *haniwa* along the burial ground. Made of lava tuff from Aso, they developed between the fifth and sixth centuries CE in the prefecture of Kumamoto and Fukuoka: areas where this material was readily available.

¹⁴ Cf. Brown 1993, 149-52; Shiraiishi 1993, 82-3; Ikeuchi 2015, 16-18; Nishitani 2020, 130-1; Kawano 2023, 78-101.

ists/craftsmen from this area of Kumamoto were called in to decorate the tombs in North Kyūshū (Yanagisawa 2004, 16-18).

The sōshoku kofun were probably related to the burial of people belonging to a specific social status or members of a specific powerful family line (Ōtsuka 2014, 28). This is because the production of paintings, engravings, and relief figures, some of which endowed with a rather complex symbolism, required the labour of skilled people and the availability of pigment materials. Ordinary people probably did not have the means to afford such complex works:

the socially significant aspect of knowing about the *hekiga* [painting] was the acknowledgement that here was a family that could afford to employ a mural painter. Here was a family that had possessions and position to represent in images. Their presence served to enhance the family's status. (Barnes 1992, 3)

Nonetheless, Barnes (1992) considers that the construction of the tomb itself was a sufficient symbol of *élite* position and that the painted motifs were therefore not connected with promoting the status of the deceased and his family.

4.3 Depicted Motifs

From the data obtained by investigating both the material provided to me by the Kyūshū Museum and Prof. Maria Shinoto's database (Shinoto 2015), the motifs depicted throughout the sōshoku kofun phenomenon can be divided into four main groups:

- geometric motifs, such as: circles, concentric circles, triangles, arcs, and lines.
- figurative or narrative motifs, such as: weapons (shield, sword, and quiver), animals (horse, bird, toad, and fish), boat, and human figure. Often, the various elements interact with each other to create a narrative form of the depicted image.
- motifs linked to the world of spirituality and rituality of the period, such as: the *chokkomon* 直弧文 (straight and arc lines), found especially on sarcophagi and *sekishō* (stone barrier) of the first phase of the sōshoku kofun, the *sōkyakurinjōmon* 双脚輪状文 (circular pattern with two legs), and the *warabitemon*.
- continental iconography: crow, toad, stars, animals of the four directions.

5 The Depiction of the Boat in the Sōshoku Kofun of Northern Kyūshū

This paragraph will investigate the case study of this research, namely the analysis of decorated tombs where the boat motif was depicted. I have chosen to explore the sōshoku kofun of Northern Kyūshū – specifically the area of the present-day prefectures of Fukuoka, Saga, and Nagasaki – as they have some of the most important examples of the depiction of the boat motif. Care must be taken when speaking of prefectures and their boundaries as, in the period of the development of sōshoku kofun, such concepts did not exist. An attempt has therefore been made, where possible, to take an open geographical view and assess any differences/similarities/developments by areas without considering contemporary boundaries [fig. 5]. The subject of the boat has been categorised into 30 sōshoku kofun. However, the present discussion will focus on 17 of these tombs, whose clear image analysis was possible thanks to the available material [tab. 2]. The tombs will therefore be analysed by location and within the same area in chronological order. The subdivision is as follows:

- Northeast. Tomb no. 1: Takehara (竹原古墳); tomb no. 2: Seto yokohana no. 14 (瀬戸14号横穴); tomb no. 3: Kurobe no. 6 (黒部古墳群6号).
- North Central. Tomb no. 4: Hinooka (日ノ岡古墳); tomb no. 5: Haru (原古墳); tomb no. 6: Mezurashizuka (珍敷塚古墳); tomb no. 7: Torifunozuka (鳥船塚古墳); tomb no. 8: Tashiroōta (田代太田古墳); tomb no. 9: Gorōyama (五郎山古墳); tomb no. 10: Togamikannon (観音塚古墳); tomb no. 11: Kitsunozuka (狐塚古墳).
- Southern area of North Kyūshū. Tomb no. 12: Haginoo (萩ノ尾古墳).
- Northwest. Tomb no. 13: Imyōji no. 2 勇猛寺古墳 (2号石室); tomb no. 14: Kitanomori (北の森古墳/北坊古墳).
- Iki Island. Tomb no. 15: Ōgome (大米古墳); tomb no. 16: Hyakutagashira no. 5 (百田頭 5 号); tomb no. 17: Oniyakubo (鬼屋窪古墳).

The final consideration of the data will be addressed through the iconographic and iconological analysis of my previous research (Zancan 2022) on the depiction of the boat where it is possible to read a more in-depth examination of the individual tombs.

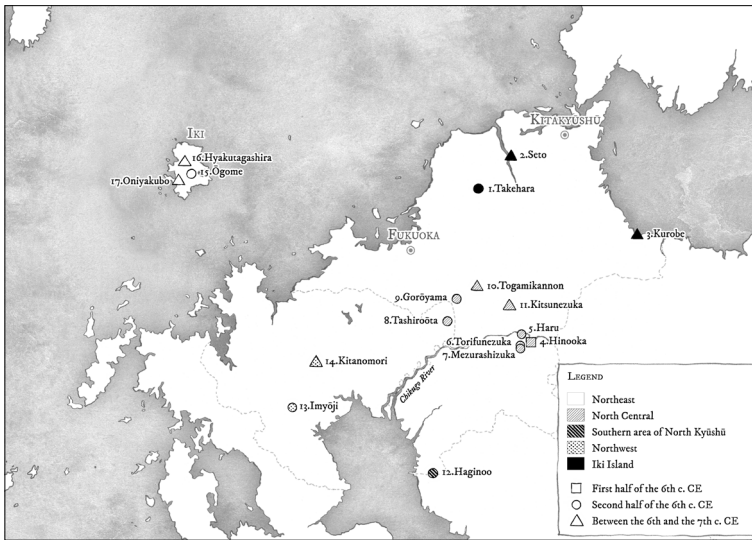


Figure 5 Map of North Kyūshū and location of the tombs analysed in this paper.
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Table 2 Database of the analysed tombs

ID no.	Name	Dating	Location	Typology	Kind of decoration	Colour of the boat	Other decorations	Spatial location of the boat	Narrative or single scene
1	Takehara 竹原古墳	second half sixth c.	Fukuoka-ken Miyakawa	<i>enpun</i> (round)	painting	red	human figure; horses (one horse and one legendary horse); waves; Chinese fans triangles; animals of the four directions	front wall of the burial chamber	narrative
2	Seto yokoana no. 14 瀬戸14号横穴	first half seventh c.	Fukuoka-ken Nakama	<i>yokoana</i> (rock-cut)	painting	red	animals (birds, quadrupeds); circle; half circle; horse rider archer	front wall	narrative
3	Kurobe no. 6 黒部6号	first half seventh c.	Fukuoka-ken / Buzen		engraving	/	/	/	single
4	Hinooka 日ノ岡古墳	first half sixth c.	Fukuoka-ken Ukiha	<i>zenpōkōenfun</i> (key hole)	painting	red black	triangles; concentric circles; <i>warabitemon</i> ; quivers; shields; swords; fish; horse	right wall of the burial chamber	single
5	Haru 原古墳	second half sixth c.	Fukuoka-ken Ukiha	<i>enpun</i> (round)	painting	red	human figures (with weapons); quiver; <i>tomo</i> ; horse	front wall	narrative

ID no.	Name	Dating	Location	Typology	Kind of decoration	Colour of the boat	Other decorations	Spatial location of the boat	Narrative or single scene
6	Mezurashizuka 珍敷塚古墳	second half sixth c.	Fukuoka-ken Ukiha	<i>enpun</i> (round)	painting	red	human figures (one is a navigator); concentric circles; shield; quiver; <i>warabitemon</i> ; dots; toads; birds;	front wall	narrative
7	Torifunetsuka 鳥船塚古墳	second half sixth c.	Fukuoka-ken Ukiha	<i>enpun</i> (round)	painting	red	human figures (one is a navigator); concentric circle; shield; quiver; birds	front wall	narrative
8	Tashirōōta 田代太田古墳	second half sixth c.	Saga-ken Tosu	<i>enpun</i> (round)	painting	red	human figures (two in prayer position, one on a horse); shields; swords; <i>warabitemon</i> ; triangles; flowers; <i>sōkyakurinjōmon</i> ; comma-shaped patterns	front wall of the burial chamber (3rd room); right wall of the antechamber (2nd room)	narrative
9	Gorōyama 五郎山古墳	second half sixth c.	Fukuoka-ken Chikushino	<i>enpun</i> (round)	painting	red	human figures (with weapons, on horses, in prayer position, simple); animals (horses, quadrupeds); concentric circle; quivers; <i>warabitemon</i> ; dots; buildings; arches;	front wall of the burial chamber (2nd room); right and left walls of the burial chamber	narrative
10	Togamikannon 観音塚古墳	first half seventh c.	Fukuoka-ken Chikuzen	<i>enpun</i> (round)	painting	red	several different boats	front wall of the burial chamber (3rd room)	single
11	Kitsunezuka 狐塚古墳	first half seventh c.	Fukuoka-ken Asakura	<i>enpun</i> (round)	engraving	/	circle; concentric circle; quadrupeds	front wall of the burial chamber (2nd room)	single
12	Haginoō 萩ノ尾古墳	second half sixth c.	Fukuoka-ken Ōmuta	<i>enpun</i> (round)	painting	red	concentric circles; shield; triangles	front wall	single
13	Imyōji 勇猛寺古墳	second half sixth c.	Saga-ken Takeo	<i>enpun</i> (round)	engraving	/	abstract-geometric motifs	/	single
14	Kitanomori 北の森古墳 / 北坊古墳	second half sixth c.	Saga-ken Taku	<i>enpun</i> (round)	engraving	/	animal	/	single
15	Ōgome 大米古墳	second half sixth c.	Nagasaki-ken Iki	<i>enpun</i> (round)	engraving	/	lines	/	single
16	Hyakutagashira no.5 百田頭5号	early seventh c.	Nagasaki-ken Iki	<i>enpun</i> (round)	engraving	/	/	/	single
17	Oniyakubo 鬼屋久保 (窪) 古墳	early seventh c.	Nagasaki-ken Iki	<i>enpun</i> (round)	engraving	/	human figures (in the act of fishing); two big fish (possibly whales)	/	narrative

5.1 Style and Iconography

As a result of the iconographic analysis, it has been possible to determine certain characteristics of the boat representation in the sōshoku kofun both in terms of the style used, and the similarities and differences at a local level concerning the type of boat reproduced. As shown in [fig. 6],¹⁵ the style used for all boats is highly stylised, especially for the painting; whereas for the engravings – tombs nos. 3, 16-17 –¹⁶ details and features were added to make the boat more complex. Furthermore, for the painting of the boat, the colour red was almost exclusively used,¹⁷ accompanied in some cases by black to define details (tombs nos. 4, 8-9).

As far as the type of boat reproduced is concerned, it can be differentiated as follows:

- I. boat with two separate elements at the stern and bow (like boat 9a), four examples of which have a rectangular element that can be traced back to a cabin or a coffin (like boats 9a-d). Same iconography as the boat-shaped *haniwa* in [fig. 4a].
- II. gondola-like boat (like boat 6), seven examples of which were also reproduced with oars. Same iconography as the boat-shaped *haniwa* in [fig. 4b].
- III. boat with mast and sails (like boat 16) [fig. 6].

15 The boats depicted in the image is an elaboration created from the photos of the representations. The boats are numbered according to the order used in the map. Tombs nos. 13-15, the reproductions of the boat on the side walls of tomb 8 (Tashirōōta) are absent as it was not possible to reproduce the boat from the images in my possession.

16 The engraved boats are dated late sixth century early seventh century, while the painted boats are mainly sixth century (except for tombs nos. 2, 10).

17 The red colour was made from a natural material common in the area called 'bengal', a red mineral containing iron, naturally produced in the soil, hence the name 'bengal red' (Ikeuchi 2015, 38-9).

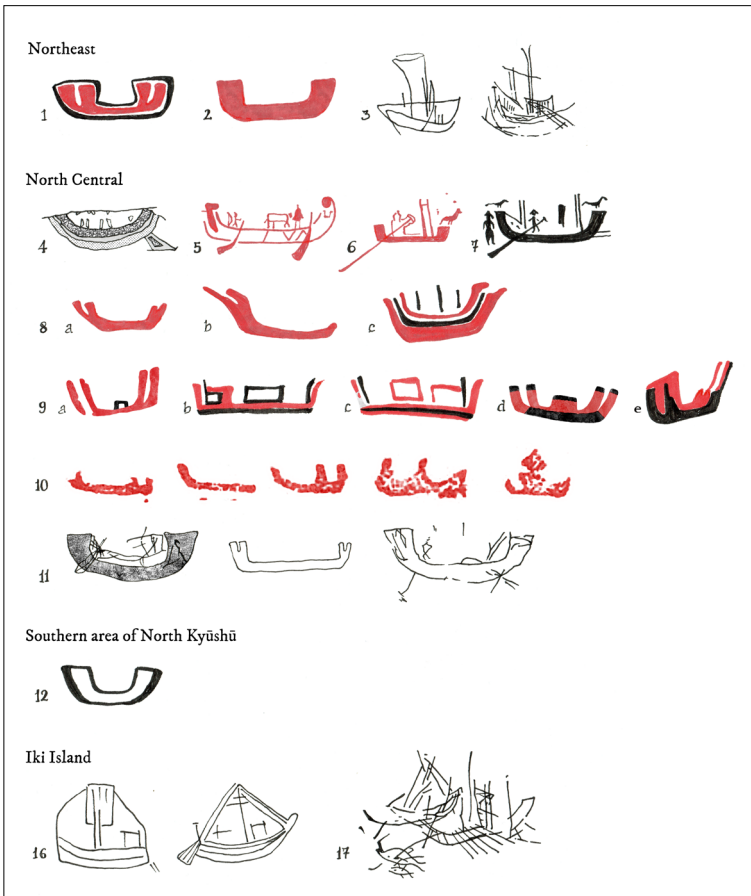


Figure 6 Reproduction of the boats of the North Kyūshū sōshoku kofun analysed in this paper: (1) Takehara tomb; (2) Seto tomb; (3) Kurobe tomb; (4) Hinooka tomb; (5) Haru tomb; (6) Mezurashizuka tomb; (7) Torifuneshizuka tomb; (8) Tashiroōta tomb; (9) Gorōyama tomb; (10) Togamikannon tomb; (11) Kitsuneshizuka tomb; (12) Haginoo tomb; (16) Hyakutagashira tomb; (17) Oniyakubo tomb. © Mariapia Di Lecce, architect and illustrator

Temporal and local differences within the reproduction of the boat in sōshoku kofun in the different areas of Northern Kyūshū provide further information. The first finding concerns the use of the engraving technique, which is found almost exclusively in tombs from the late sixth and early seventh century CE (tombs nos. 3, 11, 14, 16-17). Furthermore, these boats have elements that can be traced back to the presence of sails, and thus a more complex boat than the previous ones. Engraving is also the exclusive technique used in decorat-

ed tombs from the Northwest and Iki Island.¹⁸ In particular, these boats have important similarities (long hull, sails, oars) that differentiate them from the pictorial representation of other areas of North Kyūshū. Another important similarity was found in the three tombs around the Chikugo River (tombs nos. 5-7) that not only depict exactly the same type of boat, but also other elements such as the bird and the oarsman - absent in other tombs in the area - that suggest a desire to represent the same narration. The reproduction of the boat with two separate elements at the stern and bow is mainly found in the North Central tombs (tombs nos. 8-10), above the Chikugo River area.

The analysis of figure 6 reveals that the iconography of boats reproduced in the sōshoku kofun of Northern Kyūshū has general similarities with the depiction of the boat in both the Yayoi Period and Kofun Period art described in the previous paragraph. Therefore, it is the continuity of the same cultural practice that can be traced back to centuries before the advent of decorated tombs, specifically with the engraving of boats on the dōtaku during the Yayoi Period. This practice is characterised by the use of the same artistic style. It is possible to refer to 'the same style' since it falls within the terms expressed by Sanz, Fiore (2014): a repertoire of common motifs (the same iconography of the boat), the same way of displaying the subjects on the surface where they were reproduced (lack of three-dimensionality), the same techniques for reproducing the image (engraving and painting technique are the same). Furthermore, the deliberate use of the same style and iconography can be attributed to the intention to convey specific cultural information or to indicate affiliation with a particular identity group (Sackett 1977, 170). If certain images, with specific meanings and symbols, were shared over a long period time within a certain geographical area, that was a way for the society of the time to share certain meanings in a context that was considered culturally shared. During the Late Kofun Period, North Kyūshū had direct contact with the peninsular realities both because it sent men for the battles that were taking place among the Three Kingdoms,¹⁹ and because it had been engaging in trade relations with the southern part of the peninsula for centuries. Therefore, because of direct contact with the peoples of the Peninsula, Northern Kyūshū had access to the style of painting used in mainland tombs, as it absorbed, although in few tombs, certain iconographic elements (such as the toad-moon, the crow-sun, the ani-

18 Only sōshoku kofun with the subject of the boat are here considered.

19 In the wars of the fifth century CE among the Korean kingdoms of Koguryo, Silla and Paekche, the Yamato kingdom allied with Paekche against Silla by sending several troops from the coast of North Kyūshū (Brown 1993).

mals of the four directions, the star-dots). However, it was chosen the pre-existing well-known local style and iconography, easily recognisable by the society. As stated by Sackett (1977, 170), the choice of a specific style is a choice made in order to convey the same information that style represents to the community and is a conscious choice made by the artist. Style is also used as a way of creating new cultural meanings and making sense of the world around us (Conkey 2006, 357-60). Changes in style are not only related to practical reasons but play an active role in the exchange of information (Wobts 1977, 321) where the motifs of the decorations must be encoded by their creators and decoded by viewers who know the meanings of the visual images (Hays 1993, 81). A variation in style can thus be read as the transmission of a specific piece of information, connected with possible changes in the society and culture where it was formed, or as a desire to differentiate oneself from an ongoing social transformation. Style is considered to be closely linked with belonging to a specific social group, of which it transmits and possesses certain information. In this specific case, since there was no change in style, such as having shifted to the peninsular art style to which the people of Northern Kyūshū had access, it indicates that the related society wanted to transmit the same identity/cultural information that the pre-existing local style possessed. In other words, the same cultural codes shared and decoded by the society of both the Yayoi and Kofun Periods that, even in the form of decoration in the sōshoku kofun, were understood, recognised, and correctly read by the local population. Since the subject of the boat can be found in different areas of Northern Kyūshū, the information conveyed does not concern a single individual - hence a single depiction of a specific tomb - but rather an entire local identity group that, through the use of a specific pre-existing and known iconography and style, wanted to send a specific message. Nonetheless, the decision to reproduce the iconography of the boat in the form of a new artistic expression - wall painting and engraved decorations on the walls - could represent a desire to affirm a different internal local affiliation to the central culture of the Kinki area (Nara Basin, Honshū).²⁰

To conclude, the style and iconographic analysis of the boat of the 17 sōshoku kofun of North Kyūshū led to the following considerations:

- a. the style and iconography used follow the local tradition.
- b. at the time of decorated tombs, different types of boats were known in North Kyūshū.

20 As explained in the previous paragraphs, in fifth century northern Kyūshū, local political forces - specifically the figure of Iwai - rebelled against the central power of Yamato. For more information on the symbolism of the adoption of the sōshoku kofun as a materialisation of the local society's ideology, cf. Zancan 2013.

- c. engraving was preferred to paint in late-phase tombs and in certain areas such as Iki Island.
- d. the use of the colour red is probably related to the belief at the time that it was a colour to drive away evil entities and protect the deceased, and/or because the natural material was common in the area.
- e. the presence of sails only in boats made with the engraving technique may suggest that they were easier to make than painting.
- f. a different iconography per location - the tombs of Chikugo and Iki Island - may reveal a different significance of the boat within the local iconology.

5.2 The Boat in Narrative Scenes and as a Single Subject

The analysis showed that the subject of the boat was reproduced both within narrative scenes,²¹ and as a single subject.²² It is important, therefore, to examine the other relevant elements interacting with the boat, as well as to understand in which tombs the boat was preferred to be reproduced individually. Firstly, when the boat is engraved, it is almost always a single subject (tombs nos. 3, 11, 13-16) sometimes with geometric/abstract motifs or subjects such as animals reproduced on different walls. Nonetheless, neither human figures nor motifs such as quiver or *warabitemon* are depicted. In the tombs of Gorōyama (boats 9b-c) and Tashiroōta (tomb no. 8), however, large boats are also reproduced outside the central scene with two separate elements at the stern and bow and with cabin-like rectangles. This choice of depicting a specific type of boat separately from the other elements indicates that it may have had a different meaning from the boats in the central scene. A special case is the Hinooka Tomb (tomb no. 4) as it is rich in geometric and symbolic decoration, which reproduces subjects such as boats that not are not related to each other.

A real direct interaction between the various subjects depicted on-ly occurs in the three tombs in the Chikugo River area (tombs nos. 5-7) and in tomb no. 17 on the Iki island. In the first group, the boat explicitly represents a voyage as an oarsman is depicted on board in addition to other subjects such as a perching bird or a horse on the boat. It is peculiar that only these three tombs so close to each other

21 Scenes in which an interaction between the boat and other subjects is reproduced, mainly with the human figure.

22 The boat is the only decorative subject in the tomb or is located on walls/stones where there are no other elements interacting directly.

present a narrative scene with the same setting and elements (three quivers, concentric circle, human figure). On two of them is depicted a perching bird which, according to some studies, would represent the three-legged crow (the sun/world of the living), a symbol from the continental tradition.²³ This specific composition of the boat with a perching bird is not exclusive to the sōshoku kofun of the area but was also found engraved on the Higashi Tonozuka *haniwa* of the Tenri area in Honshū, dating back to the fourth century, thus two centuries before the tombs of Mezurashizuka and Torifunezuka. In addition, a boat-shaped *haniwa* with a perched bird was also found at the Hayashi site, in Ōsaka area, fifth century (Tatsumi 2011, 154-5). This detail echoes the concept of how the reproduction of the same image in the art of non-literate societies was intended to convey specific information about the cultural codes of the time. The boat-bird composition, therefore, was already known and understood by the Japanese not only in the Kyūshū area. The fact that it was reproduced in the form of a painting is probably due to the desire to convey an already existing concept in another artistic form. Another relevant element represented together with the boat is the iconography of the star-dots reproduced around the boats in the tombs of Gorōyama (9b-c) [fig. 7] and Mezurashizuka (6) in the North Central area.²⁴

23 Cf. Harunari 1999, 226; Shiraishi 1999, 86; Ōtsuka 2014, 119; Shinoto 2015, 7; Kang 2020, 127; Nishitani 2020, 39.

24 Stars in Koguryo tombs have been reproduced as large dots as is visible in the tombs of Jinpari Tomb No.4 진파리4호분 and Deokhwari Tomb 덕화리 which feature a reference to constellations such as Ursa Major (Nelson 1993). In North Kyūshū tombs, the iconography of stars is the same, namely large coloured dots. However, the true presence of constellations is identified only on the ceiling of Ōzuka tomb, which, from the analysis made on the arrangement of the dots, would also seem to reproduce the Ursa Major (Hirai 2018). In the other paintings analysed here from Northern Kyūshū (Mezurashizuka and Gorōyama), stars were reproduced around boats, probably to symbolize the night with starry skies and the deceased's boat journey to the afterlife.

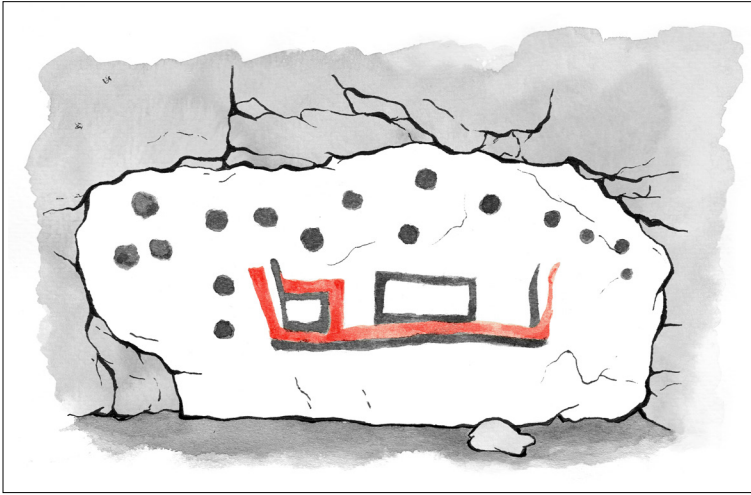


Figure 7 Reproduction of one of the boat depicted in Gorōyama tomb (9b) with star-dots.
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Of considerable interest is the representation of the boat in the tomb of Oniyakubo (tomb no. 17) on Iki island. In this tomb, the human figure interacts directly with the boat, which is explicitly used as a means of fishing, and is therefore outside the symbolic context of being considered the means of transport of the deceased to the afterlife. This fact implies that the boat not always represents a means of transport to the other world: it may also represent some connection with the deceased's life activities.²⁵

In the other tombs decorated with narrative scenes (tomb no. 1, tomb no. 2, tomb no. 8, tomb no. 9) the boat is depicted in a context where there are several other subjects, including human figure, but they have no direct interaction. In this case the boat could have been reproduced as a symbol of the afterlife (like tomb no. 2) to recall the funerary context of the whole painting, or be an active element of the scene reproduced (like boat no. 9a from Gorōyama tomb or boats nos. 8a-c from Tashiroōta tomb), for example representing a simple means of transport. The depiction of different types of boats in the same scene (like tombs nos. 8-9) reveals that the intention was to represent the different uses of the boat. However, new discoveries

²⁵ There are two main theories about the depiction of Oniyakubo tomb. The first hypothesis states that the deceased was involved in fishing or that he was a powerful figure who united fishing communities during his lifetime. The second, on the other hand, sees the fishing scene as a way of wishing the deceased prosperity as he would obtain a new life in the after world (Yanagisawa 2022, 135).

and data from maritime archaeology would be needed to be able to state with certainty the actual use according to type.

The reproduction of the boat in tomb no. 10 appears rather singular: in this case the boat is the protagonist as it is reproduced as if it were a fleet, with different types of boats and on several levels of the scene. Other individual elements are also depicted, but do not seem to interact directly.

In conclusion, the depiction of the boat within the scenes reproduced in the decorated tombs of Northern Kyūshū led to the following conclusions:

- a. real direct interaction with the subject of the boat occurs only in four tombs where the human figure explicitly uses the boat as a means of transport for a journey or for fishing.
- b. in the other tombs with narrative scenes, the boat may have been reproduced both as a symbolic element of the concept of the afterlife, and as a link to the deceased's life-time activities (sailing, fishing, frequent travel including river travel).
- c. the boat as a single subject is only depicted when engraved and in the tombs of the last phase in the Northwest, on the island of Iki, and an example was also found in the North-east (tomb no. 3).

5.3 The Symbolism of the Boat Representation in Northern Kyūshū Culture

Having examined the data from the analysis of the sōshoku kofun, it is important to investigate why the boat was reproduced in a funerary context. Indeed, prehistoric visual arts – such as wall and cave painting – are often employed “to signal and negotiate an identity” (Hays 1993, 88) but can only be truly effective in relation to a specific audience (Bradley 2002, 231). In non-literate cultures, images, and symbols can be just as eloquent as written words. The meaning they convey is taken from two sources: the first is the artist or the person who first conceptualised the original image, the second is the person or group of people who will see it (Martin, Nakayama 2007, 336-7). The artists and/or conceptualisers may therefore decide to attribute a certain meaning or message to the image they create. In anthropology, images and symbols are considered to be tools that a society can use to convey certain messages and information (DeMarrais, Castillo, Earle 1996, 16; Schelach 2009, 81). The repetition of certain standardised images leads to the creation of a discourse in the Foucauldian sense within that specific community where both parties can clearly understand what is being communicated only and exclusively if creator and audience share the same codes, background, and cultural elements. The messages they can convey are manifold,

including intangible aspects of a society such as ideologies, beliefs and values, thus becoming what DeMarrais calls “the materialisation of ideology” (DeMarrais, Castillo, Earle 1996, 17). It is precisely thanks to symbols that a certain identity can be created and recognised (Schelach 2009, 78).

Furthermore, the choice of subjects to be depicted inside the tombs is always symbolic both for the commissioner and for the deceased (cf. Barnes 1992; Bradley 2002). Some scholars (Wada 2009; Kawano 2023) believe that the deceased was placed inside the decorated burial chamber in order to be ‘shown’ to others, as if the deceased was totally immersed in the decorations and was part of them. The reproduced motifs, therefore, not only accompanied the deceased towards the belief of the time about the afterlife, but were also directly visible to the community of the living who could enter during the ritual burial ceremony officiated directly inside the tomb (Mizoguchi 2013). Also, it was believed that the deceased or his soul was free to move within this space (Wada 2009, 264), and that the deceased or his spirit could also observe the decorations on the walls, which must have been familiar and easily decipherable to him.

Several scholars (cf. Harunari 1999; Shiraishi 1999; Wada 2009; Tatsumi 2011) suppose that the boat was the deceased’s means of transport to the afterlife. This is due to the fact that in the Kofun Period there was a belief that the soul of the chieftain went to the afterlife on a boat: there were rituals where the body was towed on a full-sized decorated boat to the entrance of the tomb (Wada 2009, 261; Tatsumi 2011, 291-5). Confirming this theory, a ritual boat with symbolic motifs such as the *chokkomon* carved in the hull and with red pigment was discovered in the ditch of the *Suyama kofun* 巢山古墳 (Nara, late fourth-early fifth century CE) in 2006 [fig. 8]. This boat is of the semi-structural type with two separate elements at the stern and bow also reproduced in *sōshoku kofun*.

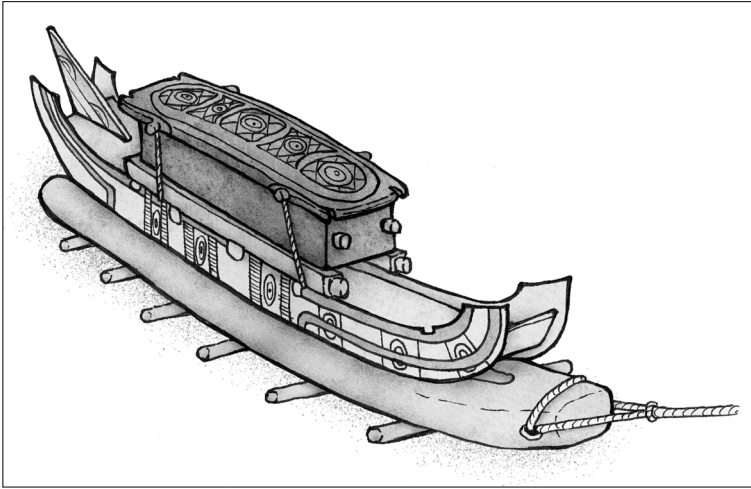


Figure 8 Reproduction of the 'mourning boat' from Suyama tomb. Nara. Middle Kofun (late fourth -early fifth century CE). Revised from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtmGf7RTmNM.0'28>.
© Mariapia Di Lecce, architect and illustrator

A 'mourning boat' is also mentioned in Sui dynasty documents (581-618 CE) in reference to Japanese funerary practices of the Kofun Period (Wada 2009, 260; Tatsumi 2011, 291):

「死者は斂むるに棺槨を以てし、親賓、屍について歌うず舞し、妻子兄弟は白布を以て服を製す。貴人は三年外に殯し、庶人は日を下して瘞む。葬に及んで屍を船上に置き、陸地これを牽くに、あるいは小輿を以てす」.
(Wada 2009, 260)

The dead are buried in coffins, the guests of honour sing and dance in homage to the dead, while the wife, children and siblings dress in white cloth. The nobles hold public mourning for three years while the common people mourn for one day. When they bury their corpses, they lay them on a ship and haul them on dry land, or on small palanquins. (Transl. of the Author)

Therefore, the boat would not symbolise the beginning of the journey, but would rather represent the arrival in the other world, that is the burial chamber. In fact, the interior of the chambers of the Late Kofun tombs in Northern Kyūshū were designed to make the dead free to move about, as if these chambers were real dwellings (Wada 2009, 264). Furthermore, the archaeological discovery at Suyama provides an interesting fact: the boat with two separate elements at the stern and prow was actually used in a funerary context and it indi-

cates that even when it is found reproduced within decorated tombs, it could represent this burial rite. On the basis of this information, it is possible to state that boats 9b-c from Gorōyama tomb, and the boat of Tashiroōta tomb side wall, being of the same type as the remains of the Suyama boat and having a rectangle on the boat (thus not a cabin, but a coffin), would represent the rite of the arrival of the deceased in the other world. It is to be understood whether only one type of boat was used to transport the coffin of the deceased or whether several were used. Another relevant fact is that, according to Wada (2009), the ritual of transporting the deceased to the grave in a boat was reserved only for chieftains. It is likely, therefore, that in the sōshoku kofun where this type of boat was reproduced, an important local chieftain was buried.

According to Shiraishi (1999), the presence of the boat within the sōshoku kofun decorations is related to the mainland belief that the boat was the means of transport for the deceased to reach the afterlife, thus representing not the arrival, but the departure to the other world. Nevertheless, also Shiraishi's theory could be confirmed as there was also the practice of using boat-shaped sarcophagi (cf. Wada 2009; Tatsumi 2011).²⁶ In this case, the boat would carry the deceased on another journey, so the burial chamber would not be the point of arrival, but the intermediate route to the other world. The representation of such a scene can be observed in three tombs located in the Chikugo River area (tombs nos. 5-7). These tombs contain additional elements that symbolise the protection of the deceased during their journey, including motifs such as the *warabitemon* pattern and the presence of three quivers.²⁷ In this representation, the elements that make up the scene point to the beginning of a journey rather than to its ending. In fact, there are elements such as the circle-sun, bird-guide and toad-moon that would represent the passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead.²⁸ This interpretation is also applicable to the tomb of Seto (no. 2), whose symbols (sun with birds and a boat with a moon) recall the world of the living and the world of the dead. It is to be understood, in the case of

26 The practice of using wooden boat-shaped coffins was common throughout the archipelago as early as the Late Middle Yayoi Period, a practice maintained even for the Kofun Period with the addition of stone boat-shaped sarcophagi (Tatsumi 2011). Among the boat-shaped stone sarcophagi is the one found at the tomb of Tamatsukuritsuki-yama 玉造築山古墳, Matsue, Shimane Prefecture, fifth century CE.

27 It is believed that these two motifs were considered talismans to protect the deceased from evil forces (cf. Yanagisawa 2004).

28 In mainland tradition, the crow represents the sun (thus the world of the living), while the toad represents the moon (the world of the dead). In the paintings of the Korean kingdom of Koguryo (like the tomb of Ssangyeongchong 쌍영총) they are depicted together in representing the sun-moon/life-death opposite.

the other representations, whether it is always a matter of symbolism directed towards the world of the afterlife or can also recall the life of the deceased.

Based on the data obtained and discussed, I assume that it is limiting to consider the boat to be exclusively a symbol of the afterlife. This is proven by reproductions such as the fishing scene in the tomb of Oniyakubo (no. 17). As North Kyūshū was an area that was interested in navigation for centuries because of its relationship with the continent, in some tombs the boat could be a symbol of the deceased's life as a sailor or fisherman. This may be the case in graves with an engraved boat rather than a painted one, as painting required a greater and more sophisticated effort in terms of material and labour, and consequently a higher cost than an engraving. Painting was probably an artistic form reserved only for the families of chieftains. Moreover, the type of boat reproduced in engraving differs from the one painted, and appears to be a simpler boat as a hull whose presence of sails could be connected with long-distance sailing. Besides this, only a very small percentage of sōshoku kofun in Northern Kyūshū (30 out of 141) have the subject of the boat reproduced on the walls. If the boat really only symbolised the connection with the afterlife, it is not clear why most decorated tombs do not have this subject. The depiction of the afterlife or its symbolic apparatus should appear in mortuary practice throughout the area. In fact, the presence of a certain motif and subject has a symbolic value, as does its absence (Theuvs 2009), since images and symbols are channels through which a society can convey specific messages and information (DeMarrais, Castillo, Earle 1996; Schelach 2009).

In conclusion, the symbolism of the boat in the sōshoku kofun of Northern Kyūshū can be summarised as follows:

- a. the type of boat with the two separate elements at the stern and bow can be traced back to the boat used for the funeral rites of some chieftains, and could therefore also represent this practice in some decorated tombs.
- b. the context where some boats have been reproduced is explicitly non-funeral, hence the boat cannot absolutely be considered as a symbol of the afterlife alone.
- c. within the sōshoku kofun phenomenon itself, the boat may take on a different meaning depending on the identity affiliation of the individual.
 - boat with two separate elements at the stern and bow, and with a rectangular element in its centre: considering the correspondences with the archaeological evidence of the remains of the Suyama 'mourning boat', the identity affiliation is linked with the burial of an important chieftain, or important member of a clan.

- gondola-like boat: depending on the context of other subjects depicted, here the boat can be connected either to the identity of someone who in life was involved with navigation activities or as a symbol of the concept of the afterlife.
- boat with mast and sails: as in Late Kofun tombs, the kofun was always a symbol of the 'élite', but not necessarily connected with lineage to a clan, identity affiliation is connected with those who in life had done important actions probably related to fishing and/or navigation.
- boats in narrative scenes around the Chikugo River: considering the depiction of continental symbolism intertwined with local symbolism and style, identity affiliation is connected with a 'mixed' society and culture.²⁹

6 Conclusions

The first important result in this research concerns the connection between the style and iconography of the boat used in sōshoku kofun and local Japanese art. The style analysis indicates that the choice was made to continue using the pre-existing local style. Analysing the reproductions of boats on Yayoi pottery, *dōtaku*, and *haniwa*, it emerged that the boat reproduced in decorated tombs is a *continuum* of an already existing artistic phenomenon. Therefore, since the society related to the sōshoku kofun was a society that was not yet fully literate, the images reproduced in the decorated tombs must necessarily have been well understood and decoded, and were thus already well-known to the related society. The iconography and style of the reproduction of the boat did not change within the phenomenon of sōshoku kofun, but referred to the symbolism of a shared cultural code that was already easily decoded by the society.

The second important result is that the type of boat reproduced in sōshoku kofun can be linked to a certain identity affiliation according to the technique and iconographic differences. The discussion of the data in the previous paragraph shows how the presence of the boat subject is not always connected with the belief in the afterlife, as many scholars have claimed, but it may represent a scene of everyday life. It turns out that one of the types of boats reproduced – a boat with two separate elements at the stern and bow with a rectangular element – can be traced back to the so-called 'mourning boat' whose archaeological remains have been found in Suyama site and have also been mentioned in Chinese Sui chronicles. This boat was

²⁹ For more information on the hybrid culture and society related to sōshoku kofun, cf. Zancan 2022.

used for the journey of the clan-leader to the world of the dead and was therefore used by a specific social class. This indicates that in the tombs where this type of boat was reproduced, there was a clear intention to represent the conception of the time regarding the afterlife, and also that a clan leader or member was probably buried there.

Nevertheless, during the Late Kofun Period, not only chieftains were buried in kofun, but also people who had distinguished themselves through exploits of notable value in life (Mizoguchi 2013). This would explain why some *sōshoku* kofun reproduce scenes with boats that cannot be linked to the afterlife. One hypothesis I advance is that some boat reproductions were connected with important actions in the life of the deceased as a navigator, skilled fisherman, or warrior who travelled by boat. This is the case for boats with a mast and sail reproduced using the engraved technique, and gondola-like boats reproduced according to the context. The style of boat reproduction remained unchanged from the art of earlier phases, but its iconological significance may have been adapted to the new customs of the time. Symbols and images may also represent a form of materialisation of certain identity affiliations and/or of a specific ideology.

The final result is that the influence of mainland symbolism and art is not as predominant as some theories claim. In depictions where the boat is also reproduced with elements of continental origin (such as the boat with the star points in tomb no. 9 or the boat with the crow and toad in tomb no. 6), the style remains local and the mainland elements are always intertwined with autochthonous symbolism. This is probably due to the fact that there was no intention to totally identify with peninsular culture from an artistic and iconological point of view, but to continue with a more local tradition.

In conclusion, the subject of the boat in the decorated tombs of Northern Kyūshū explored here recalls a pre-existing local tradition in terms of iconography and style, but the meaning of its presence in the funerary context changes according to the identity affiliation that was being transmitted. This could be either directly related to the vision of the afterlife or to the life of the deceased.

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