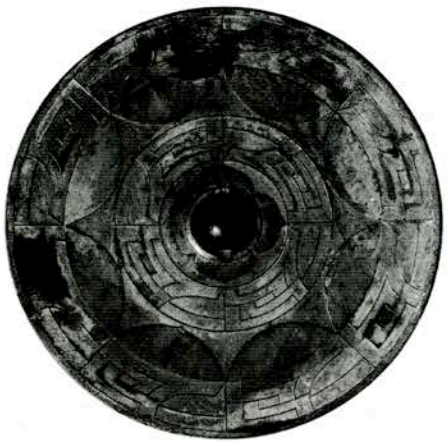


CHAPTER 1

The Birth of Japan

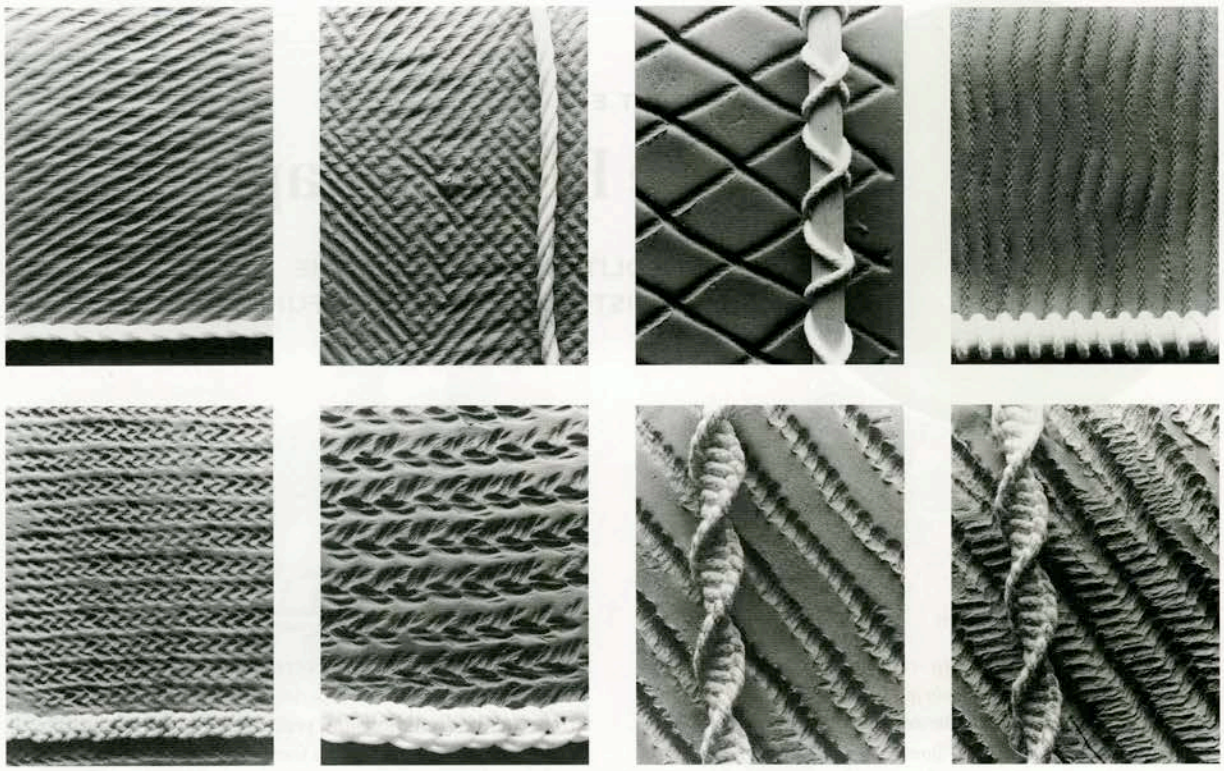
THE NEOLITHIC JŌMON AND THE PROTOHISTORIC YAYOI AND KOFUN PERIODS

According to Japan's primary creation myth, the Heavenly Progenitor ordained that the twin gods Izanami and Izanagi should go forth and procreate to fill the empty space below the heavenly domain. Yet the pair know not how to begin this great work until they sighted a wagtail. The backward and forward movements of the bird's tail feathers suggested the essential technique, and from the joyful union that resulted the eight islands of the Japanese archipelago were born. For the Ainu, living in Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido and considered by many to be remnants of the islands' indigenous population, it is the humble wagtail itself that takes the central role, sent by the Great Spirit down into the marshy quagmire created out of the chaos below heaven. The wagtail piled, pressed, and patted mounds of sand until they came to form the eight islands of the Japanese archipelago. And from that point on earthly life began.

Out of Myth and into the Archaeological Record

Curiously, however, neither creation myth reflects the fact that when humans first came to the Japanese islands, they were not islands at all. Until twelve thousand years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age, the eight islands that now make up the Japanese archipelago were in fact connected to the Asian mainland, enclosing the Sea of Japan as a lake. The large northernmost island of Hokkaidō adjoined the coast of Siberia, and the other main islands, Honshū, Kyūshū, and Shikoku, were an extension of the Korean peninsula. Together with the landmasses of the future islands of Ryukyu and Okinawa to the south, they provided multiple paths of entry for peoples migrating eastward across the Eurasian continent. The preferred route seems to have been through the Korean peninsula into Kyūshū, and current estimations place the first human presence within Japanese territory at the very least around a hundred thousand years ago, around the beginning of the last Ice Age. The stone tools, such as flint and obsidian knives and axes, typical of most paleolithic cultures make their first appearance in Japanese territory approximately thirty-two thousand years ago, much as they did elsewhere. However, a discovery in recent years at Odai Yamamoto in Aomori prefecture, northern Honshū, has demonstrated that at least one paleolithic community in what was to become Japan made pottery vessels some sixteen thousand years ago, making it the world's earliest ceramic-producing culture.

Even before the discovery of these shards, archaeological efforts were beginning to unearth ceramic material at Ice Age paleolithic sites in China and Siberia. However, in Japan it had been assumed that the production of pottery vessels was a phenomenon associated with the end of the Ice Age and the beginning of the neolithic period. This was based on the discovery in 1960 of shards at the Senpukuji and Fukui caves on the island of Kyūshū, dating to around 10,700 B.C.E. Significantly, all of these finds have firmly established East Asia, and Japan in particular, as important centres for the production of the first pottery, laying to rest long-held theories that ceramic production first made its appearance around 9000 B.C.E. with the shift from hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies in the ancient Middle East. It is now clear that, at least in East Asia, ceramic wares were first made by hunter-gatherer communities of the paleolithic period. And in the subsequent post-glacial period, with the rising of the sea level and Japan's isolation from the Asian mainland, it is the hunter-gatherer culture that flourished on the newly-formed archipelago which produced one of the most dynamic ceramic traditions of the ancient world.



1 Cord-marking patterns. Courtesy Mark Lindquist Studio.

The end of the Ice Age coincides with that of most of the paleolithic cultures across the Eurasian continent. The so-called neolithic cultures that came into being as the climate grew warmer are characterized by more refined, polished stone tools, and increasing evidence of social organization within communities. While from China to the Middle East, this is indeed normally accompanied by a departure from hunting and gathering ways and the beginning of animal husbandry and agriculture, in Japan this same material and social progress is achieved within a foraging context. And the most remarkable accomplishment that has come down to us of this neolithic hunter–gatherer culture is, in fact, its ceramic wares. In 1877, the American scholar Edward S. Morse (1838–1925), while excavating some shell mounds, discovered numerous ceramic shards decorated with marks that seemed to have been produced by impressing rope or cord into the wet clay. He referred to these shards as "cord-marked" wares, and the Japanese translation of that term—Jōmon—soon came to be applied to the entire culture. Thousands of Jōmon sites have since been found throughout the archipelago. Extending over a period of almost ten thousand years, each site has been rich in the trademark cord-marked ceramics, and the development of this ceramic tradition over the millennia has helped to illuminate the nature of Jōmon civilization. The ceramics themselves have since been categorized into seventy styles with more than 400 "local" variations (Fig. 1).

The Jōmon Period (c. 11,000–400 B.C.E.)

The origins of the Jōmon people remain shrouded in mystery. Not only is it uncertain whether they were descendants of the Ice Age paleolithic population, but how they relate to the post-Jōmon period Japanese population is also highly problematic. Furthermore, Jōmon development as a culture over ten thousand years is so unwieldy that it is usually divided into six distinct phases:

Incipient Jōmon (c. 11,000–8000 B.C.E.)
Initial Jōmon (c. 8000–5000 B.C.E.)
Early Jōmon (c. 5000–2500 B.C.E.)
Middle Jōmon (c. 2500–1500 B.C.E.)
Late Jōmon (c. 1500–1000 B.C.E.)
Final Jōmon (c. 1000–400 B.C.E.)

What is known about the Jōmon is that they began as a hunter-gatherer society and remained one. Yet the second great mystery of the Jōmon people is how—as a hunter–gatherer society—did they manage by the Middle Jōmon phase to support themselves in relatively large and settled communities, even to the extent of forming a network of communities that traded with each other. There is still a great deal of research being done on whether the Jōmon people's highly organized methods of foraging might not constitute a kind of

agriculture—what is termed swidden cultivation—and whether their methods of fishing and hunting might not have encompassed some elements of animal husbandry. It is clear that they subsisted not only on the hunting of game and collecting of the fruits of the field and forest, but also relied on the sea, even to the extent of fashioning special harpoons for deep-sea fishing. Furthermore, from the Middle Jōmon onward certain of the roots they ate—such as yam, taro, and lily bulbs—seem to be products of cultivation, while in Final Jōmon sites, evidence of different grains has been found, and in particular rice, pointing towards the beginning of their cultivation. During the Incipient and Initial Jōmon—more than half of the long history of the Jōmon period—the overall population did remain small and thinly distributed in foraging groups across all the main Japanese islands, but especially in central and northern Honshū. However, by the end of the Initial Jōmon in the fifth millennium B.C.E., these groups had begun associating in settlements. Often these Jōmon settlement sites seemed to be inhabited only on a seasonal, cyclical basis, but by the Early Jōmon phase more permanently occupied settlements are to be found as well.

The third great mystery of the Jōmon people is that while the shift into settled communities across the greater part of the Asian continent also ultimately brought about the Bronze Age from the fifth millennium B.C.E. onward, and subsequently the Iron Age in the first millennium B.C.E., the Jōmon remained resolutely a Stone Age society. It was not until their replacement by the Yayoi culture, around the fourth century B.C.E., that metalworking and formal agricultural practices came to Japan. With the arrival of the Yayoi, Jōmon culture seems to disappear almost overnight across most of the archipelago. Yet it can be argued that the alternation between a simple elegance and a rough exuberance that characterizes Jōmon material culture, and especially their hallmark ceramics, forms an aesthetic template that will be repeatedly used in every subsequent Japanese artistic period.

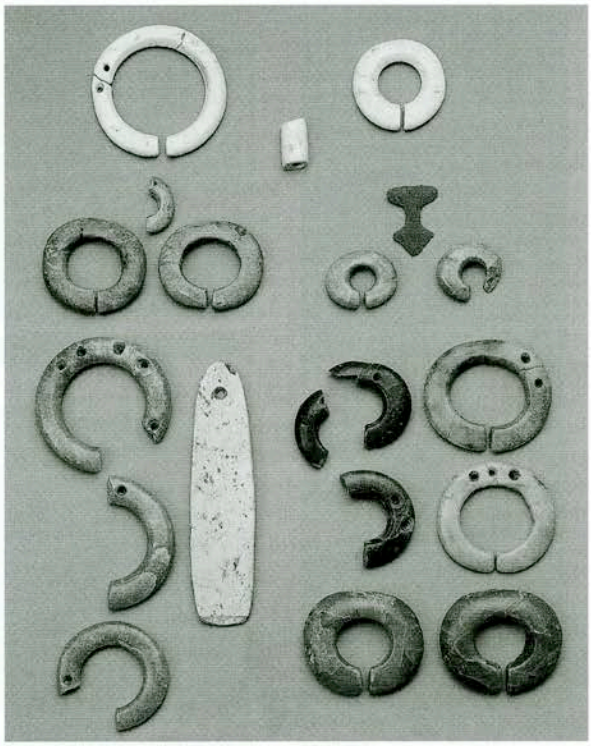
Incipient (c. 11,000–8000 B.C.E.) and Initial Jōmon (c. 8000–5000 B.C.E.) phases

Kato Shinpei has estimated that the Jōmon population during the six thousand years of the Incipient and Initial phases remained at around only twenty thousand, organized in small groupings ranging over a wide area, not unlike hunter–gatherer communities in desert or arctic areas of the present day. In sites dating to the later Incipient phase, evidence of settlements can be found, but always of an ephemeral nature, with at best evidence of recurring, seasonal occupation.

No complete pottery vessels have been preserved from the Incipient phase, but on the basis of shards it is generally assumed that the vessels were small and had rounded bases. This suggests a portability in keeping with a nomadic lifestyle since such designs would be suited to the uneven surfaces of a forest or cave campsite and for use as cooking utensils in the middle of a fire. From the paleolithic shards from Odai Yamamoto onward, it is obvious that the majority of these vessels were meant for boiling food while placed on an open fire or more formal hearth. Like all Jōmon pots, these first Incipient wares were earthenware made of coiled clay and then fired in open fires. The surfaces of Incipient pottery shards commonly have coarse raised lines or ridges not unlike those seen on corrugated cardboard and may result from a simple smoothing of the clay coils from which the vessels were formed. Later in this phase, there is an evolution from these perhaps accidental designs to patterns made by impressing string or fingernails.

By the end of the Initial Jōmon phase, a fairly consistent type of ceramic had developed for boiling food. Many of these typically deep bowls remained relatively small (and therefore portable), measuring about 8–19 inches (20–50 cm) in height, but larger vessels measuring around 30 inches (75 cm) in height are also not uncommon. These larger bowls are significantly less portable than their smaller counterparts, and their appearance is one signifier of the increasing trend towards settlement. One of the most aesthetically pleasing of the smaller cooking pots comes from an undocumented excavation, but is generally believed to date to around the end of the Initial phase, or c. 5000 B.C.E. (Fig. 2). The gentle undulations of its rim are echoed by the pattern of the cord markings. These rim undulations will be seen to become more accentuated in the succeeding phases, as will the character of the cord-marked designs.

2 Conical, round-bottomed vessel, from a site in Hokkaidō. Initial Jōmon phase (c. 8000–5000 B.C.E.), c. 5000 B.C.E. Earthenware; height 6 ½ in. (16.6 cm). Hakodate Municipal Museum.



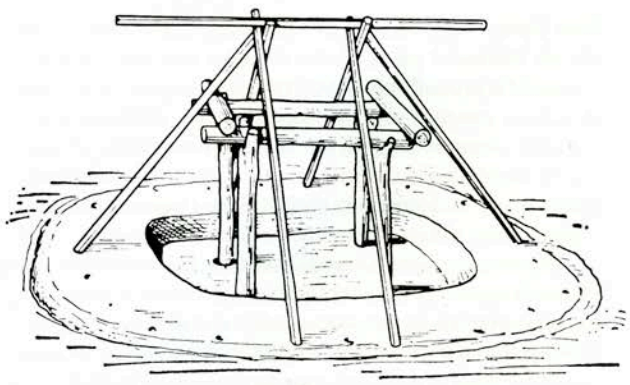
3 Earrings, from Kuwano, Fukui prefecture. Initial Jōmon phase (c. 8000–5000 B.C.E.), c. 6,500–5000 B.C.E.. Steatite; diameter, top left, 2 in. (5 cm). Courtesy of Kanazu Town Board of Education.

Other artifacts of the Incipient and Initial Jōmon phases include small, portable figurines (*dogu*). Of a very rudimentary character, these figurines of stone and clay will in later phases take on much more definite and even flamboyant shapes, and have better defined functions within a ritualistic tradition. However, their presence, no matter how primitive and unformed, in these Incipient and Initial phases points to the fact that ritualistic traditions were being established at this time. Even more advanced are the stone earrings and pendants found among the grave goods of a large cemetery at Kuwano in Fukui prefecture, western central Honshū, dating to the mid to the late Initial phase, c. 6,500 to 5000 B.C.E. (Fig. 3). Their well-shaped and polished circular forms indicate a significant departure from the paleolithic chipped flint knives and axes. They not only demonstrate an already well-developed culture of personal adornment, which would become ever richer as the Jōmon period progressed, but also one with formalized funerary rituals. It is possible as well that possession of these beautifully crafted pieces represent the individual's position within a social hierarchy.

Early Jōmon (c. 5000–2500 B.C.E.) phase

It is not until the Early Jōmon phase, however, that a clear picture emerges of how Jōmon communities were organized. The population during the Early phase began to rise steadily, and particularly on the northeastern coast of Honshū. Numerous village sites have revealed a great quantity of ceramic cooking pots, ceramic and stone figures, wicker baskets, stone tools, stone and bone earrings and pendants, as well as sewing implements of bone. In addition, the first objects in Japan's long and esteemed lacquer tradition were produced, including lacquered pottery, wooden and basketry vessels, and personal ornaments such as combs and thread. Finds of similar age have been made in China, but their presence in Jōmon communities indicates an independent origin for what in future centuries would become one of the most distinctive of Japanese crafts.

Early Jōmon pit houses, so-called because their floors were dug approximately 20 inches (50 cm) below ground level, were usually square in plan, measuring about 13 x 13 feet (4 x 4 m). They were covered by a roof thatched with reeds or bark, supported by posts and beams around the center and by leaning posts around the periphery of the pit (Fig. 4). The organization of these houses into permanent communities now begins to take on a distinctive character. Kobayashi Tatsuo has outlined several types of community organization that were established at least by the Early Jōmon. The first and most important type is the "core" or permanent settlement. It is often built on a terraced hillside and consists of pit houses, storage pits, and burials grouped around a central village green or plaza. A second type of village settlement is smaller in scope, and usually located on the top of a ridge with a very narrow plaza; in some such cases there may be no more than one or two houses. A third type of settlement has no houses but evidence of repeated campsites; these are thought to be the sites of hunting or seasonal foraging grounds. A fourth type of site becomes increasingly common late in the succeeding Middle Jōmon, and includes cemeteries separate from the living settlements, rubbish dumps, quarries for clay and stone, stone-tool manufacture areas, animal pit-traps, and the first stone circles.



4 Reconstruction of early Jōmon pit house.
(Ōta Hirotarō in *Illustrated History of Japan*, published by Shōkuka-sha.)

5 Conical, flat-bottomed vessel with scalloped lip. Early Jōmon phase, (c. 5000–2500 B.C.E.), 3000–2500 B.C.E. Earthenware; height 13 ¾ in. (35 cm). Nanzan University, Aichi prefecture.

Another interesting feature of Early Jōmon phase architecture has been the discovery of a series of enormous structures in some of the core settlements. Most famous is the one measuring around 56 x 26 feet (17 x 8 m) at Fudodo in Toyama prefecture. Dating to around 2800 B.C.E., this building and others like it may also have had raised floors. Watanabe Makoto has proposed they were communal gathering and working areas, meant especially for protection during the winter and inclement weather.

In contrast to Incipient and Initial Jōmon vessels, pots of this phase seem to be intended as more than merely functional cooking vessels. They usually have flat bottoms so that they can be placed on smoothed surfaces, and their decoration, created with a variety of materials, including twisted plant fibers and bamboo stalks, becomes increasingly varied and important. An example from the latter half of the Early Jōmon phase shows an attempt at creating an unusually complicated pattern (Fig. 5). The scalloped rim of the vessel evident in the Initial Jōmon has now become much more accentuated. In the zone immediately below the rim, a bamboo stick has been used to incise diamond shapes and impressed circles, while the body of the pot is decorated with cord markings in a herringbone pattern. It has been proposed by several scholars that pottery production was the province of the Jōmon women, and that these designs and the even more distinctive ones of the Middle Jōmon phase relate to Jōmon systems of belief—ideas often connected to fertility and regeneration. However, while most of these pottery vessels retain a practical everyday use, the clay and stone figures, which in the Early Jōmon also begin to take on more distinctive shapes, have only a ritual role.

Early Jōmon figurines are exemplified by the stone carving found in Akita prefecture, northern Honshū (Fig. 6). The upper part of the sculpture has a head, long hair, and arms folded at shoulder height, while the lower half of the figure is distinctly abbreviated into a shape reminiscent of an inverted phallus. Such phallic figures become more prevalent in the Middle Jōmon, and stone phalluses can be found incorporated into the stone-lined hearths or near them in many of the homes that have been excavated. In some cases these stone objects also incorporate female genitalia. Unsurprisingly, these objects have been interpreted as unashamed symbols of regeneration, just as they have in other cultures. It should be mentioned that such phallic imagery did not die with the Jōmon period, but is an important symbol of regeneration and life force even within present-day Shinto and folk belief.

6 Figurine, from Akita prefecture. Early Jōmon phase (c. 5000–2500 B.C.E.), c. 3000–2500 B.C.E. Earthenware; height 5 ⅞ in. (14.8 cm). Keio Gijuku University, Tokyo.

MIDDLE JŌMON (C. 2500–1500 B.C.E.) PHASE

Probably as a result of the post-Ice Age warming trend of higher temperatures, which peaked toward the middle of the third millennium B.C.E., the Jōmon population shifted from the humid coastal sites of the east and west coasts to highland regions of north/central Honshū, in particular the mountains of Chūbu and the northern part of the Kantō Plain. For the Middle Jōmon peoples, the nomadic lifestyle of their forebears becomes largely a thing of the past. Their villages become larger, and their storage and processing of gathered crops and hunted game more refined and specialized. It is at this period that we find the first evidence of the simple cultivation of such roots as yam, taro, and lily bulbs. Supporting at its height something like a quarter of a million people, the Middle Jōmon population has one of the highest densities a non-agricultural society has ever known. The large number of ceramic vessels and other goods found at Middle Jōmon sites suggests that these people had a stable economy and sufficient leisure to engage in crafts and to truly explore their aesthetic sensibility. The individual pit house also became larger, evolving into a circular form some 16–18 feet (5–6 m) in diameter. These larger dimensions permitted as many as five people—possibly the average number in a household—to gather around the central hearth. Some communities added a stone platform or altar on the northwest side of the house, on which were placed stone phalluses, ceramic fertility images, or broken pots.

8 Vessel with snake-form handle, from Togariishi, Nagano prefecture. Middle Jōmon phase (c. 2500–1500 B.C.E.). Clay; height 6 ½ in. (16.6 cm). Togariishi Archaeological Museum, Nagano.

7 "Flame ware" (*kaen-doki*) vessel, from Niigata prefecture. Middle Jōmon phase (c. 2500–1500 B.C.E.), c. 2500–2400 B.C.E. Earthenware; height 12 ⅛ in. (30.8 cm). Kokubunji, Kokununji City, Tokyo.

Visually, the most dramatic difference between the Middle Jōmon and the earlier phases can be found in ceramic production, and in particular in the exuberantly decorated "flame wares" (*kaen doki*). A broad range of shapes make their appearance in Middle Jōmon pottery, formed according to their function, both practical and ceremonial: the more traditional deep pots for storage and cooking, lamps or incense burners, and goblets and shallow bowls, as well as pedestaled wares. The familiar cord markings of the preceding period appear much less frequently, replaced by a new technique: the application of cordons of clay to the surface to build up strong three-dimensional designs. Most famous of all Jōmon wares are the so-called "flame wares" found at sites along the Shinano River and its tributaries in Niigata prefecture. Typical of the flamboyant shapes of these wares is a pot with a flaring cylindrical body (Fig. 7). The scalloped edge that began so subtly in the Initial Jōmon has now flared into a wildly flame-shaped cockscomb (*keitō*). Although the vessel is only about 12 inches (30 cm) tall, its openwork, sculptural form and almost three-dimensional decoration of parallel grooves and swirls arrest the gaze in a way that prehistoric Japanese artifacts seldom do. But, however emphatic their expression, the meaning of the flame-style decoration is as elusive as the cord markings of earlier vessels. Furthermore, as a style of vessel it did not spread to other areas of the Middle Jōmon world and was relatively short-lived even in the place of its creation.

9 Vessel of "incense burner" type, from Suwa City, Nagano prefecture. Middle Jōmon phase (c. 2500–1500 B.C.E.). Earthenware; height 7 ⅞ in. (20.1 cm). Educational Commission of Sunwa City, Nagano Prefecture.

Before the end of the Middle Jōmon the Shinano River settlements had adopted a less flamboyant and more utilitarian form of storage and cooking vessel, closer in form to Early Jōmon types, but often having four lug handles.

Another and longer-lived development in Middle Jōmon ceramic decoration involves the use of modeled images on the rims of large cylindrical vessels. A snake motif based on the *mamushi*, Japan's only poisonous viper, appears first as a rim design in the mountainous regions of Nagano prefecture and later in Yamanashi prefecture and, less frequently, in the area of present-day Tokyo. A vessel from Togariishi in Nagano displays a snake's head and body curving upward from the rim to surround a circular handle (Fig. 8). A similar motif is the rodentlike head that appears along the rim of vessels, usually overlooking the contents. In both types of pot, the decoration of the body consists of simple cord markings. A particularly charming example of modeled decoration of this phase is a small lamp or incense burner from Nagano prefecture (Fig. 9). It is essentially a sphere with enough of its surface cut away to permit a hand to reach in to fill it with oil or, possibly, incense. The lower part of the bowl has been decorated with simple vertical cuts in the clay; the upper section is a free-flowing design based on a circle surrounding a hole. Spinning off from the largest circles are the heads of a snake or a long-beaked bird, a motif repeated along the lower rim of the largest hole to the left. Theories abound as to what these animals might be intended to convey to the viewer: were they meant to be guardians over the vessel's contents (why else place a poisonous viper on the handle of a jar?), or, as with the seemingly more whimsical imagery of the lamp/censer, were they meant to amuse? As will be demonstrated often in succeeding periods, the playful has often a role to play and is not necessarily excluded even when the most sober topics are being addressed.

The production and variety of ceramic figurines increases considerably during this period, and the detailing of facial features becomes specific enough to suggest both animal and human images or hybrids of the two. The torso and head of a curiously feline figurine has been preserved from a site in Yamanashi prefecture (Fig. 10). The face has an inverted U-shaped outline with holes cut through the clay for slanting eyes and a three-lobed mouth. Incised lines on the cheeks may represent tattoos. Along the shoulders and the upper parts of the arms, a stippled design of circles suggests a spotted pattern on fur. The left arm bends in a curve, pressing a three-fingered hand against the breast. The gesture of placing the left hand on the chest, with the right hand presumably on the hip or abdomen, has been interpreted as indicating a pregnant woman. If this is a female figure, the absence of breasts is puzzling. For the moment it remains an interesting but also a baffling object.

10 Human/Feline figurine, from Kurokoma site, Yamanashi prefecture. Middle Jōmon phase (c. 2500–1500 B.C.E.). Earthenware; height 10 in. (25.2 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

LATE (C. 1500–1000 B.C.E.) AND FINAL JŌMON (C. 1000–400 B.C.E.) PHASES

The middle centuries of the second millennium B.C.E. that straddle the shift between the Middle and Late Jōmon are marked by a catastrophic collapse in population. From a peak of around two hundred and fifty thousand, archaeologists of the period estimate that roughly half that number of people existed in the Late phase, while by the Final phase the population numbered perhaps only around seventy thousand. Theories on the collapse all remain highly speculative, with the mini-Ice Age that occurred at this period often being the focus of blame, as are the age-old curses of disease and famine. Certainly it is true that many of the more upland settlements of the Middle Jōmon are abandoned, and the population centres shift to either the east or west coast of north/central Honshū, with the vast majority grouping on the east coast, or just above present-day Tokyo. If the food sources of the land gave out, then the spirits of the sea did not abandon the peoples of the Late and Final Jōmon phases. Fish was their primary food source, and they developed new and more efficient types of fishing equipment to help them meet their needs, including the toggle harpoon.

Coinciding with the decrease in population is the multiplying of figurines in the Late and Final phases, giving further support to theories ascribing a propitiatory role to these images in Jōmon ritual. One aspect of these images—like their ancestors from earlier phases—is that they are usually either overtly female with prominent breasts, or they have an ambiguous gender. Because Jōmon culture was not shy about representing male genitalia, it has been posited that these less certain images are probably meant to represent females as well. One theory suggests that female figurines represent an Earth Mother to the Jōmon peoples, the being who in later, post-Jōmon periods would be known as Jiboshin. As many of these Late and Final figurines have been damaged, it follows that they might also have acted as votive offerings—the missing or damaged body part representing a corporeal equivalent that the supplicant wished healed. Two types of figurines are characteristic: fleshy, female statuettes wearing what look like snow goggles, and seated figures with their knees drawn up to their chests and arms entwined in specific positions.

11 "Heavily-modeled" female figurine, from Aomori prefecture. Final Jōmon phase (c. 1000–400 B.C.E.). Earthenware; height 15 in. (38.1 cm). Private collection, Japan.

12 "Crouching" female figurine, from Fukushima prefecture. Final Jōmon phase (c. 1000–400 B.C.E.). Earthenware; height 8 ½ in. (21.5 cm). Fukushima Municipal Board of Education.

The heavily-modeled or bulky female figurines are hollow, and often wear a well-defined robe decorated with a large and bold swirling pattern (Fig. 11). The bodies are distorted, as are the faces, which have a tiny down-turned mouth and a single hole for a nose between enormous round eyes bisected by a horizontal line. It has been suggested that the body may have been made hollow to permit the soul to take up residence within, but there is little agreement among scholars about the reason for the eye treatment. Some specialists see the eyes as reflectors of death; others see them as more benign windows onto the soul. As with so much other Jōmon material, their significance remains a puzzle to be solved at some future date.

The crouching, seated figures usually have hands pressed together, as if in an act of propitiation. In contrast, the best known of these images has arms bent so that the right extends across the body, while the left draws the right arm close to the chest (Fig. 12). Discovered in Fukushima prefecture, the charming image has a U-shaped face, bulging circles for its eyes and mouth, a raised triangle for a nose, and appears to wear a large triangular headpiece. Another engaging, but more unusual image is a female figurine from Gunma prefecture (Fig. 13). Unlike typical Jōmon sculptures, this piece presents a complete and freestanding image. Furthermore, it has what appears to be a tiny handle at the back of the head. Seen from the front, its curving body, narrow at the waist and wide at the hips, projects an impression of volume, articulated by shallowly cut horizontal lines interrupted at the shoulder and hip joints and at the breastbone by spiral markings. Its most interesting feature is its heart-shaped head on a plane slightly tipped up from the main vertical of the body, with round eyes and a broad thick nose.

Stone circles with an almost certainly ritual purpose also appear in these last two phases. In the previous Early and Middle Jōmon phases there had been evidence of altars in the home and in the village as a whole, but these circles represent a new development within the ritual life of Jōmon culture. Significantly, they are located at sites close to, but separate from, the living quarters of the villages. The most elaborate of them are two circles on a vast scale found at Ōyu in Akita prefecture: one is 151 feet (46 m) in diameter and the other is 138 feet (42 m) across; they are spaced 295 feet (90 m) apart. Each has a single vertical stone in the center, surrounded by long, narrow stones laid on the ground and radiating out from the central pillar in two concentric circles. This configuration is enclosed by a third ring of stones set at right angles to the radials. The majority, however, are simple circles of stone some 39–49 feet (12–15 m) in diameter, some even smaller (Fig. 14). In addition to having hosted communal ceremonies, these sites also contain burials.

13 Female figurine, from Gunma prefecture. Final Jōmon phase (c. 1000–400 B.C.E.). Earthenware; height 12 ½ in. (31 cm). Private Collection, Gunma prefecture.

14 Stone circle in Towadamachi, Kazuno City, Akita prefecture. Late Jōmon phase (c. 1500–1000 B.C.E.).