

Quantitative research and meaning: The case of Japanese burials with decorations (OR: *sōshoku kofun*)

Among more than one hundred thousand Kofun period burials of various types in Japan, nearly one thousand show drawings, ornaments, or graffiti of highly varied quality and content. This inhomogeneous group is called *sōshoku kofun* in Japanese and has been the subject of intensive archaeological studies since the beginning of the last century. By 1980, traditional research had reached a stage of saturation that was hard to surpass, so scholars increasingly concentrated on documenting regional groups or outstanding singular burials and motifs.

In such a situation, a quantitative study of all relevant findings can provoke innovative research based on insights that cannot be acquired with qualitative research alone. While earlier attempts to create comprehensive databases or data collections lacked the framework for a scientifically exploitable database, they proved an indispensable source for the lecturer in making such a database during the years 2009-2012.

This talk gives an insight into this quantitative study of the entire body of *sōshoku kofun*. The database covers 885 burials with a hierarchical classification of 122 motifs besides the classification of other traits like burial type, location, or chronology, among others.

The first part of the talk covers the actual situation in research on *sōshoku kofun*, its achievements, and circumstances that hinder further advancement, together with some examples from the lecturer's fieldwork in Kyūshū and the San'in region. The second part shall give an insight into quantitative research methods -- data modeling, the concept of "true classification", statistical analysis, and the validity of resulting models. The third and central part of the talk shall discuss how the *sōshoku kofun* database was built and shall introduce the creation process of (a) a valid and useable data model as well as (b) the classification of the iconography. The fourth part discusses the main analyses, while the fifth part presents a model of the meaning and development of iconography and its spread over the Japanese islands until the early historical period.