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Jomon World Heritage?

A half-day symposium about Jomon archaeology and the bid to have Jomon sites from northern Tohoku and southern Hokkaido inscribed as a World Heritage Site. Society of Antiquaries of London: Tuesday 17th November 2009

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As the title of the event suggests, this was a symposium held to aid the bid to have Jomon sites inscribed as a World Heritage Site. One of the aims was to promote the bid in Britain and increase the knowledge and understanding of these sites.

The day began with a visit to the British Museum to see *The Power of Dogu: Ceramic figures from ancient Japan* sponsored by the Mitsubishi Corporation which ran from 10 September - 22 November 2009. The exhibition featured 67 pieces including three National Treasures of Japan. The exhibition will be displayed in the Tokyo National Museum 19 December 2009 - February 21 2010.

The symposium then relocated to the Society of Antiquaries of London in Burlington House for lunch followed by an afternoon of papers. The Introduction was given by Dr Simon Kaner, Assistant Director of the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures. Dr Kaner's brief overview of the Jomon period and the archaeological sites connected with it in northern Tohoku and southern Hokkaido offered the audience an insightful introduction to the papers yet to come.

The next paper, 'Character and Identity of the Jomon', was delivered by Professor Kobayashi Tatsuo of the Kokugakuin University, Tokyo. Amongst his discussion of the Jomon way of life, Professor Kobayashi considered the recently excavated clay tablet demonstrating the Jomon understanding of the concept of numbers.

After a break for tea, Professor Okamura Michio, formerly of the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, delivered the paper titled 'Recent Research and the Management of Jomon Sites'. The paper was delivered in Japanese with translation into English provided by Dr Kaner. Professor Okamura's examination of

different areas of the sites, such as the pit-houses, illustrated the way of life during the Jomon period. In particular, Professor Okamura considered the Jomon sites to have produced the oldest lacquered objects in the world, dating from around 9000 years ago and consisting of pieces of lacquered cloth found wrapped around a body in a grave.

The final paper, 'The Inscription of "Jomon Sites in Hokkaido and Northern Tohoku" as a World Heritage Site', was given by Mr Okada Yasuyuki, Director and excavator of the Sannai Maruyama Jomon Site in the Aomori Prefecture. Mr Okada discussed the process by which the bid for World Heritage status is made.

A discussion followed led by Dr John Carman of the University of Birmingham, accompanied by translation into Japanese by Akira Hirano, Librarian of the Sainsbury Institute for the study of Japanese Arts and Cultures. Dr Carman compared the Jomon period with the British Neolithic, noting the similarities between the stone circles of both periods. He noted that the British Neolithic is usually discussed as a fragile way of life emerging from a population escaping harsh geographical and climate changes, whereas the Jomon way of life appears to have been much more relaxed and in harmony with the natural surroundings.

The symposium was rounded off with a small wine reception in the Fellows Room of the Society of Antiquaries of London, prompting continued discussion of Jomon architecture and the Dogu figurines in an intimate but relaxed environment. The whole event was enjoyed immensely by both experienced Jomon archaeologists and newcomers to the subject alike.