

Seated statue of the Buddhist priest Shikijo (1158–1242),
Tangible cultural property designated by Fukuoka Prefecture

(Height 78.6 cm; Koshoji Temple collection, in deposition to Munakata Taisha)

Shikijo (1158–1242), a Buddhist priest serving at Munakata Taisha, transcribed the Issai-kyo (a set of a large number of Buddhist sutras) on his own. This wooden statue, painted and dressed in actual priestly attire, reflects the influence of the Song dynasty (960–1279).



Ippitsu issai-kyo sutras transcribed by Shikijo

(Koshoji Temple collection; housed at Munakata Taisha)

Important Cultural Property

These sutras were transcribed by Shikijo Hoshi alone. He began transcribing the sutras in 1187 when he was 29, completing it in 1227 at the age of 70. In the postscript it is written that the Issai-kyo sutras, printed in the Southern Song dynasty in China using a woodblock printing technique, was donated to Munakata Taisha by the Chinese captain of a trading ship



Record of annual events of Munakata Taisha

Important Cultural Property

This record, compiled in the twenty-third year of the Shohei era (1368), lists the main and branch shrines of Munakata Taisha and the ceremonies observed there. The record reveals that a total of 5,921 ceremonies were held annually at the main and branch shrines.



Sword donated by Kuroda Mitsuyuki, the third lord of the Fukuoka Domain



Photograph by Fujimoto Kenpachi



Framed pictures of “Sanjuroku Kasen” (Thirty-Six Poetry Immortals)

Tangible cultural property designated by Fukuoka Prefecture

Photograph by Fujimoto Kenpachi

Domaru armor with white shoulders and indigo leather strings for lacing together metal plates

Important Cultural Property



Compass from the Japanese battleship Mikasa

On the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List

The Sacred Island of OKINOSHIMA

and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region

Ritual Artifacts of Okinoshima





Excavation of small Nara-style three-colored jars with lids

Small Nara-style three-colored jars with lids

(Body diameter 6.1–7.0 cm; Site 1)

Using the technology for making Tang-style three-colored ceramics, these Nara-style multicolored jars were produced solely in Japan's Kansai region. Their presence among the excavated relics testifies to the involvement of the ancient court in the Kansai region in rituals performed on Okinoshima, where five lids and twelve jars have been unearthed



“Fujushimpo” coin

(Diameter 2.2 cm; Site 1)

Fujushimpo coins are among the ancient copper coins minted by the ritsuryo state, which adopted the Chinese monetary system. Since Fujushimpo coins were first minted in 818 CE, their presence among the unearthed relics indicates that open-air rituals were performed on the island until the ninth century.



Photograph by Fujimoto Kenpachi

Perforated earthenware

(Site 1)

These earthenware bowls with four to nine holes bored in their sides were produced for a ritual purpose, rather than for practical use. Primitive styles were deliberately adopted for these bowls, which are unique to the Munakata region.



The Munakata Daiguji family and overseas exchange

People in the Munakata region continued to worship Okinoshima and the deities associated with the island even after rituals were no longer performed there. The family of the Munakata Daiguji (high priest) governed the Munakata region and the marine route connecting the region with the Korean peninsula. Benefiting from trade and interactions in East Asia, the family flourished.

After the passing of the Munakata high priest in the late sixteenth century, the twelve other Shinto priest families affiliated with the shrine carried on the tradition. The successive lords of the Kuroda family revered the shrine deities and helped maintain the shrine buildings. The Kuroda family also presented many offerings to the shrine. The Shimpokan Museum exhibits artifacts unearthed from Okinoshima and other offerings donated to the shrine.

Smaller Sukhavativyuha-sutra (Amida-kyo) Stone

Important Cultural Property

(Height 106.6 cm)

On the front of this stone monument an image of Amitabha Buddha is carved in relief, while the Sukhavativyuha-sutra is inscribed on the back. In 1195 the high priest of Munakata Taisha commissioned Chinese sculptors of the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) to create the monument



Song-style guardian dog statues

Important Cultural Property

Statue with open mouth: Height 60.0 cm

Statue with closed mouth: Height 60.3 cm

A pair of statues of guardian dogs, one with its mouth open and holding a puppy and the other with its mouth closed and playing with a ball, were produced in China during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Inscriptions on the backs of the statues indicate that they were donated to the tertiary shrine of Hetsu-miya, in 1201.



Articles of Consultation for Munakata-sha (Munakata Shrine) (33.6 x 214.7 cm)

Important Cultural Property

In 1313, Munakata Ujimori gave these 13 articles to his young son, who had just succeeded the office of daiguji (high priest). The articles prohibit the private use of armor and horses, and stipulate the governance of the high-priest family over the ports, islands, and mountains in the Munakata region. The articles also stipulate the naidan (lit. “internal discussion”) system, under which decision-making was conducted by vote at meetings of the naidan members.





Excavation of gilt-bronze miniature pentachord

Tang-style three-colored bottle-shaped vase with a long neck

(Diameter of mouth 8.6 cm; Site 5)



Photograph by Fujimoto Kenpachi



Tokyo National Museum Collection
Image:TNM Image Archives

Tang-style three-colored ceramics, in which three different types of glaze (green, white, and brown) have been applied, were produced only in China from the late seventh to mid-eighth centuries. This vase was probably brought to Japan by a Japanese envoy to the Tang dynasty. Okinoshima is the first place outside of China where such Tang glazed ware have been unearthed.

Gilt-bronze miniature spinning tools

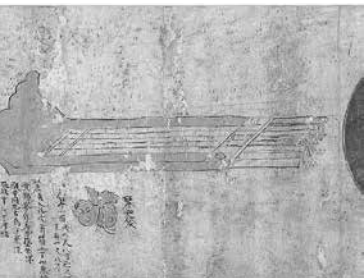
(Yarn hanger, upper right corner: height 13.7 cm; Site 5)

Yarn hangers were used to hang yarn, and "I"-shaped reels were used to wind it. Spindles, each comprising a ring and axle, were used for spinning. Buckets were used as containers for the yarn. Comb-shaped items called tojo are parts of a loom. All these items are also found among the "divine treasures" of Ise Grand Shrine.



Courtesy of Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo; photograph by Sugimoto Kazuki

▼ Tobinoo-no-koto (kite-tailed pentachord)



Jingu shimpo zukan

This drawing, dated 1410, depicts 41 "divine treasures" in the collection of Ise Grand Shrine. The miniature pentachord, loom, and spinning tools discovered from the ritual sites on Okinoshima share common features with those found in the Ise collection. The similarity between artifacts used in seventh-century rituals on Okinoshima and the "divine treasures" used at ritsuryo rituals established from the eighth century onward, indicates that the rituals performed on Okinoshima eventually developed into the ritsuryo rituals enacted by the ancient state.



Open-air rituals

(eighth to ninth centuries)



Site 1

Steatite figures

Steatite figures were produced as offerings to deities in place of living people, animals, and objects. Although in other regions the custom of offering such items died out during the eighth century, steatite figures continued to be used in Munakata. On Okinoshima, figures representing people, horses, and boats were developed for use in open-air rituals. These new figures share features in common with wooden figures used in other regions during the ritsuryo period (late seventh to tenth centuries). The steatite used for these figures was available in the region.



Steatite figures unearthed from Mitakesan ritual site

Steatite figures representing people

(Length 7.6–22.6 cm; Site 1)

Among these steatite figures, those representing people are considered the most valuable. On each side of each steatite piece, two cuts have been made to shape the head, body, and legs. Some figures have carved eyes, noses, and mouths.



Photograph by Fujimoto Kenpachi

Steatite figures representing horses

(Length 6.5–15.0 cm; Site 1)

Deities were believed to use horses as avatars when they descended to earth. These figures represent the heads and bodies of horses, without their legs.



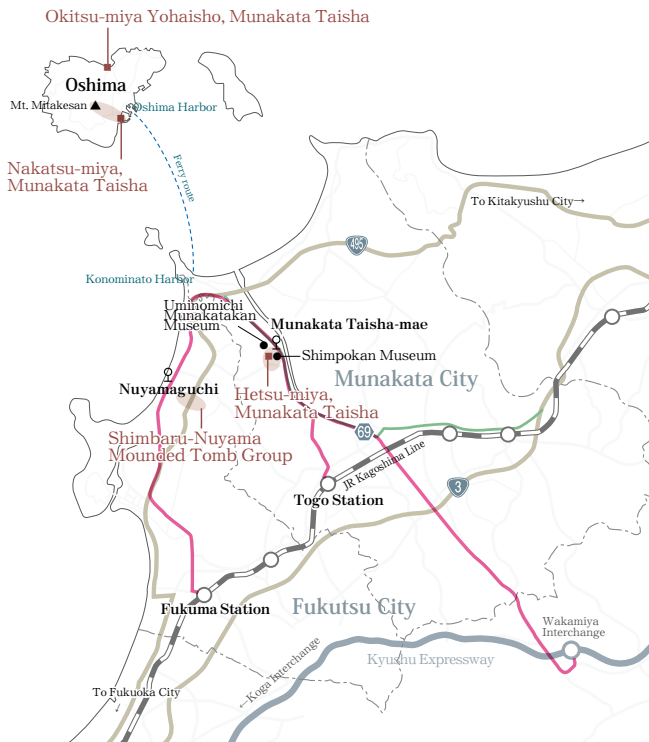
Steatite figures representing boats

(Length 9.6–21.2 cm; Site 1)

Boat-shaped figures were used as offerings to deities in prayers for safe voyages and successful overseas missions. In that sense they are particularly relevant to the rituals performed on Okinoshima; the boat-shaped steatite figures outnumber those of other shapes.

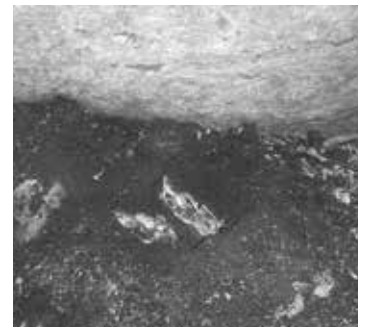


Okinoshima



Partial rock-shadow rituals

(Late seventh to early eighth centuries)

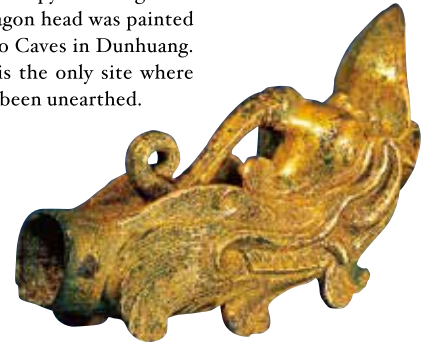


Excavation of gilt-bronze dragon heads

Gilt-bronze dragon head

(Length 19.5 cm; 20.0cm; Site 5)

This dragon head was attached to the end of a pole, and a banner or canopy was hung from its mouth. A similar dragon head was painted on a mural in the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang. In Japan, Okinoshima is the only site where this type of artifact has been unearthed.



Gilt-bronze miniature pentachord

(Length 27.1 cm; Site 5)

This miniature pentachord has features in common with those of the tobinoo-no-koto (kite-tailed pentachord), a "divine treasure" of Ise Grand Shrine, which is described in the Engishiki (a tenth-century legal text that describes the detailed procedures and customs for implementing ritsuryo laws). It also resembles another pentachord, illustrated in the Jingu shimpo zukan.



Exhibits of unearthed artifacts from Okinoshima ritual sites

Shimpokan Museum, Munakata Taisha

2331 Tashima, Munakata city, Fukuoka prefecture, 811-3505, Japan

- Fees: Adults: 500 yen
- High school and college students: 300 yen
- Elementary and middle school students: 200 yen
- ※ Free for children who are preschool-age or younger
- ※ 100 yen discount per person for groups of 15 or more

Hours of operation: 9:00–16:30 (last entry: 16:00)
Open year-round, seven days a week



3D images of Okinoshima

Uminomichi Munakatakan Museum

Munakata City Museum for the Study of Local Culture

588 Fukata, Munakata city, Fukuoka prefecture, 811-3504, Japan

- Free admission
- ※ Admission may be charged for certain special exhibitions.

Hours of operation: 9:00–18:30
Closed Mondays (or on Tuesday when Monday falls on a national holiday)

Access

From Togo Station on the JR Kagoshima Line, take the Nishitetsu bus bound for Konominato Hatoba and get off at the Munakata Taisha-mae stop (12-minute ride).

《Contact Information》

World Heritage Promotion Committee of Okinoshima Island and Related Sites in the Munakata Region

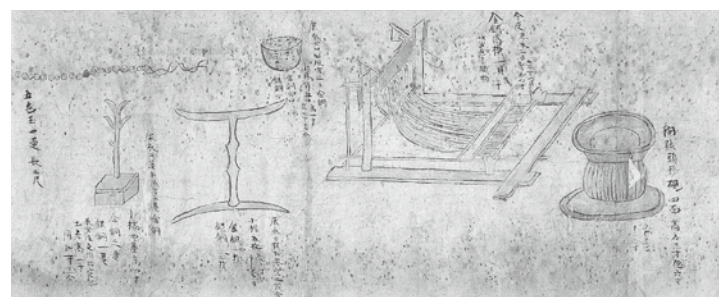
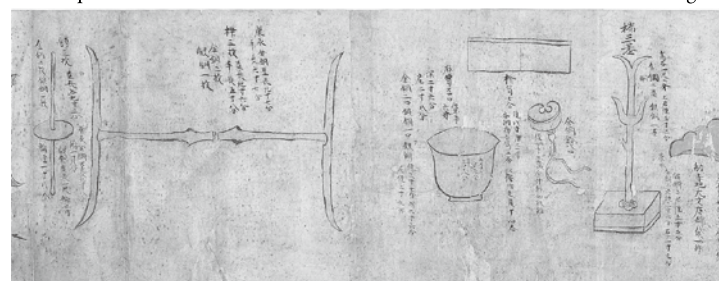
Tel : 092-643-3162 Fax : 092-643-3163

Email : sekaisan@pref.fukuoka.lg.jp

www.okinoshima-heritage.jp

Munakata Okinoshima Search

▼ Spindle ▼ Reel ▼ Bucket ▼ Yarn hanger



Maeda Ikutoku-kai Collection

▲ Loom

Rock-shadow rituals

(Late fifth to seventh centuries)



Site 8



Site 22

Gold ring

(Inner diameter 1.8 cm; Site 7)

This gold ring has a diamond shape on the front with a floral design made of four petals. A ring of the same type as this was excavated from the royal tomb of Silla in the southeast region of South Korea, indicating that it was brought from the Korean peninsula.



Gilt-bronze flat pendants

(Thorned-leaf-shaped pendant length 13.4–15.3 cm; heart-shaped pendant length 9.0 cm; Site 7)

These ornaments were hung from a strap that attached the saddle to the horse's chest and buttocks, brought from the Korean peninsula. The leaf-shaped pendants feature dynamic Chinese floral (honeysuckle) patterns, whereas the heart-shaped pendants feature openwork depicting figures with human faces and bird wings.



Gilt-bronze crupper strap dividers with spangles

(Strap divider with four hands: height 10.6 cm; Sites 7 and 8)

Crupper strap dividers are ornaments attached to the intersection of straps that secure the saddle to the horse's buttocks. These fittings were brought from the Korean peninsula. They are categorized according to the number of hands in the design of each one.



Shards of a cut-glass bowl

(Length 5.6 cm; Site 8)

These two shards are part of a cut-glass bowl with wheel-cut facets. Since similar products were unearthed from Gilan Province in Iran and from China, this bowl was probably brought to Japan from Sasanian Persia via the Silk Road.



Cut-glass bowl with wheel-cut facets

Collection of Okayama Orient Museum



Gilt-bronze miniature spinning tools

Yarn hangers were parts of a loom used for hanging yarn. Miniature versions of these spinning tools came into use at the end of the period of rock-shadow rituals. Subsequently, they were used for *ritsuryo* state rituals.



Site 22

Site 4

This site is located beneath a huge overhanging rock. Various artifacts have been unearthed from its cave-like terrain, including those offered in medieval times and during later periods, as well as offerings that had been collected from nearby ritual sites and which were then donated once again. Since the end of the eighteenth century local people have been aware of this ritual site, which was commonly known as *okanagura* (lit. "treasure house").



Gilt-bronze miniature loom

(Length 48.0 cm; reportedly unearthed from Site 4)

This miniature loom is very precisely constructed and can actually be used to weave cloth. A similar loom has been preserved at Ise Grand Shrine.



Rock-top rituals

(Late fourth to fifth centuries)



Site 17



Site 21

TLV mirror

(Diameter 27.1 cm; Site 17)

A square is carved around a central knob with a hole meant for inserting a string. In the area surrounding the square, designs resembling the letters “T,” “L,” and “V” are carved, which represent a compass and ruler. A spiral pattern between the square and the letter-like designs depicts birds.



Mirror with arc design

(Diameter 18.7 cm; Site 17)

A series of inward arcs arranged in a circle forms a floral pattern. A total of five mirrors of this type have been unearthed from ritual sites 16, 17, and 19.



Mirror with tuo-dragon design

(Diameter 23.7 cm; Site 17)

This bronze mirror, produced in Japan but modeled on a Chinese mirror, displays a design composed of tuo-dragons, imaginary animals similar to crocodiles, arranged around four embossed dots that encircle a central knob.



Beads

(Comma-shaped and jujube-shaped beads, 1.2–6.3 cm in length; white beads, 0.3–0.8 cm in diameter; cylindrical beads, 0.9–8.5 cm in length; Site 19)

A wide variety of beads made from various materials, including jadeite, glass, crystal, agate, amber and steatite were used as offerings on Okinoshima.



“Beast-band” mirror

(Diameter 17.6 cm; Site 21)

Three Chinese characters are inscribed around a central knob. The mirror features seven animals, including dragons, each arranged around an embossed circle. In China, this type of mirror from the later Han Dynasty (25–220) was reproduced during the Six Dynasties period (220–589). This mirror may have been brought to Japan via Baekje, one of the Three Kingdoms in ancient Korea.



Deity-and-beast mirror with band of images

(Diameter 20.7 cm; assumed to have been unearthed from Site 21)

It is likely that a Japanese envoy dispatched by one of the five Yamato sovereigns received this mirror as a gift from the Southern Dynasty (420–589) in China either during or after the mid-fifth century.



Courtesy of Toyo Bunko

Triangular-rimmed deity-and-beast mirror

(Diameter 22.2 cm; Site 18)

This mirror has a triangular rim and relief work on its back, featuring mythical beasts and immortal figures. The mirror was produced in China during the Wei Dynasty (220–265). The design features two deities and two beasts facing each other around the central knob.



Iron ingots

(Width 5.0–6.8 cm; Site 21)

Obtaining iron was one of the major reasons for the Yamato court to initiate interactions with people on the Korean peninsula. The fact that iron ingots were unearthed from Okinoshima indicates that the most valuable objects were used as offerings to deities.



A.D.

Site 21



On the flat surface of a huge rock, stones are laid out in a square formation, with a large stone placed in the center of the square. This rock is believed to have been used as an altar, where deities were expected to descend from heaven.

Site 17



Twenty-one bronze mirrors have been discovered among the huge rocks on the island. These mirrors, produced in Japan but modeled on Chinese mirrors, have been preserved in the original state as when they served as ritual offerings



400

Rock-top rituals

Site 22



This site comprises a small area beneath an overhanging rock. Since the rock stands on a slope, many offerings were placed in the narrow flat area directly beneath the overhanging rock. Miniature spinning tools were discovered at this site.

Sites 7 and 8



At Site 7, a gold ring and various harness ornaments brought from the Korean peninsula have been unearthed. Among the artifacts found at Site 8 are harness ornaments and shards of a cut-glass bowl produced in Sasanian Persia.



500

Rock-shadow rituals

600

Site 5

Ceremonies were held in an area spanning both the narrow area in the shadow of a rock and a broader adjacent open space. In addition to the gilt-bronze dragon head and Tang-style three-colored bottle-shaped vase both brought from China, various artifacts similar to those used in ritsuryo state rituals have been unearthed.



700

Partial rock-shadow rituals

Site 1

Rituals were performed in a flat, open area set apart from the huge rocks where earlier rituals had been conducted. This site features an altar made of many square stones (each measuring about 20 x 20 cm), with one large stone (measuring 1.6 x 1.4 m) placed in the southeast corner. The number of artifacts unearthed at this site surpasses that of any other site on the island.



800

Open-air rituals

900

Ancient Rituals of Okinoshima

Ritual sites on Okinoshima are unique because they bear witness to the transition from nature worship to the emergence of personified deities and the establishment of present-day Shinto. The sites also demonstrate the evolution of ritual styles, which were initially influenced by overseas cultures and eventually developed into Japan's *ritsuryo*-style rituals.

Ritual site transitions

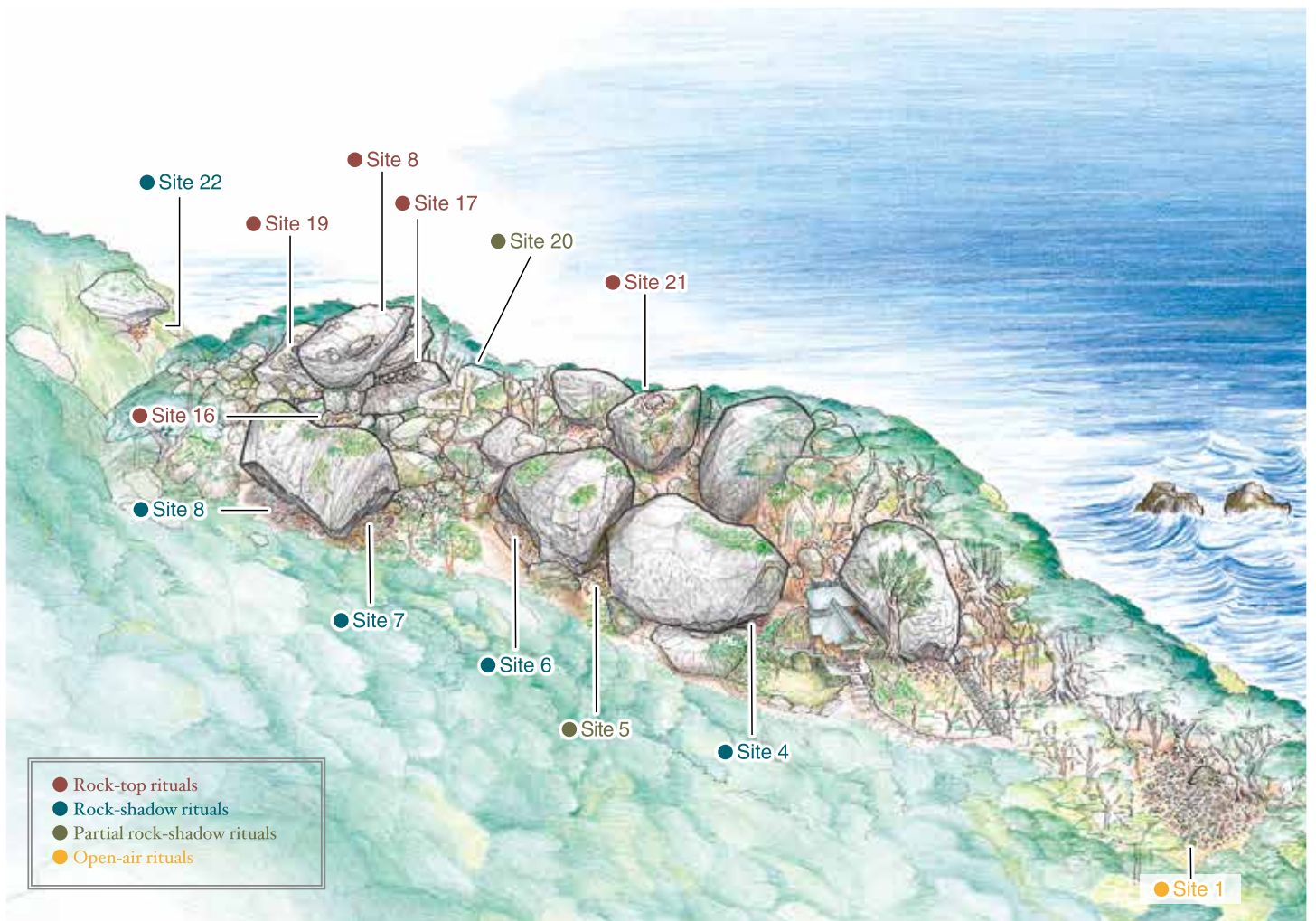
The style of the rituals performed at the 22 ritual sites on Okinoshima changed over a period of some 500 years, from the late fourth century to the end of the ninth century, in four stages. The rituals were first performed atop huge rocks on the island; then in the shadows of these rocks; then partly out in the open; and finally entirely out in the open.

Evidence of overseas exchange

The archaeological excavations have yielded some 80,000 precious ritual artifacts, which have been collectively designated as a National Treasure of Japan. Many of these artifacts were brought to the island from the Korean peninsula and China. The artifacts, unparalleled in both quantity and quality, confirm that the rituals on Okinoshima were performed as “state rituals” sponsored by the ancient Japanese state, which was engaged in foreign trade and cultural exchange.

From nature worship to personified deities

Ancient people worshiped the huge rocks on the island, regarding them as divine or as sacred places where deities would descend from heaven. Over time, however, people gradually began to select places set apart from these rocks to conduct rituals; and personified deities—the Three Goddesses of Munakata—had emerged as objects of worship.



Illustrated by Kitano Yoko

Features of ritual artifacts

Many types of artifacts that were used in rock-top rituals are similar to those that have been discovered in mounded tombs. This similarity suggests that deity worship rituals and funerary rituals were deeply connected during this historical period.

By the period in which rituals were being performed in the shadows of rocks, more ritual artifacts were being imported from the Korean peninsula; and these same types of artifacts were also buried in tombs together with the deceased.

Sites on the island dating to the seventh century indicate that new *ritsuryo*-style state rituals emerged there toward the end of the rock-shadow ritual period.

Various types of artifacts used in rituals performed partly in the shadows of rocks resemble treasures that were used for *ritsuryo* rituals. Archaeologists believe that rituals performed on Okinoshima during this period featured the burgeoning style of new rituals performed by the ancient state.

In the open-air rituals performed on Okinoshima, many earthenware items were offered to deities. Most were of the same type as those used for *ritsuryo*-style rituals; but some are unique to the Munakata region which provided a basis for the development of state rituals. Around this time, in the early ninth century, Okinoshima appears in Japan's earliest historical chronicles, the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*.