BSEAA Bulletin of the Society for East Asian Archaeology

Vol. 2 (2008)

Editor: Barbara Seyock

ISSN 1864-6026

www.seaa-web.org

The Beijing 2008 papers

Panel: 'Island Archaeology in East Asia – Interaction and Isolation' (Barbara SEYOCK)

GENERAL REMARKS ON 'ISLAND ARCHAEOLOGY IN EAST ASIA – INTERACTION AND ISOLATION'

Barbara SEYOCK

Asia Orient Institute, University of Tuebingen, Germany

Publ.: April 2009

Questioning the notion of the sea as a barrier or as a means of exchange and communication, the panel on 'Island Archaeology in East Asia – Interaction and Isolation' (Fourth Worldwide Conference of the Society for East Asian Archaeology (SEAA), Beijing 2008) attempted to examine the archaeologies of smaller islands round the East Asian coasts from a comparative perspective. Issues such as movements of people and/or cultural elements, spread of technologies and know-how, seafaring, maritime trade and exchange, development of cultural specifics, island-mainland relations, island landscapes and environmental change were brought together here. The dichotomy of islands as places of interaction and isolation thus served as a framework for a discussion of the distinctiveness of island cultures. We thus tried to question the notion of the sea as a barrier or as a means of exchange and communication.

The situation in East Asia, especially relating to the islands we were addressing in our panel, is of course in many regards different from the concept of isolation and remoteness, and land centred views, which underlies the general perception of island archaeology (in the west). Paul RAINBIRD in his recently published "The archaeology of islands" does postulate criticism in this regard and would rather turn to an "archaeology of the sea" than concentrating on the island itself, thus placing islands in a larger framework better addressed as "maritime communities" and also including coastal areas from neighbouring regions (RAINBIRD 2007:1-3, 163-173).

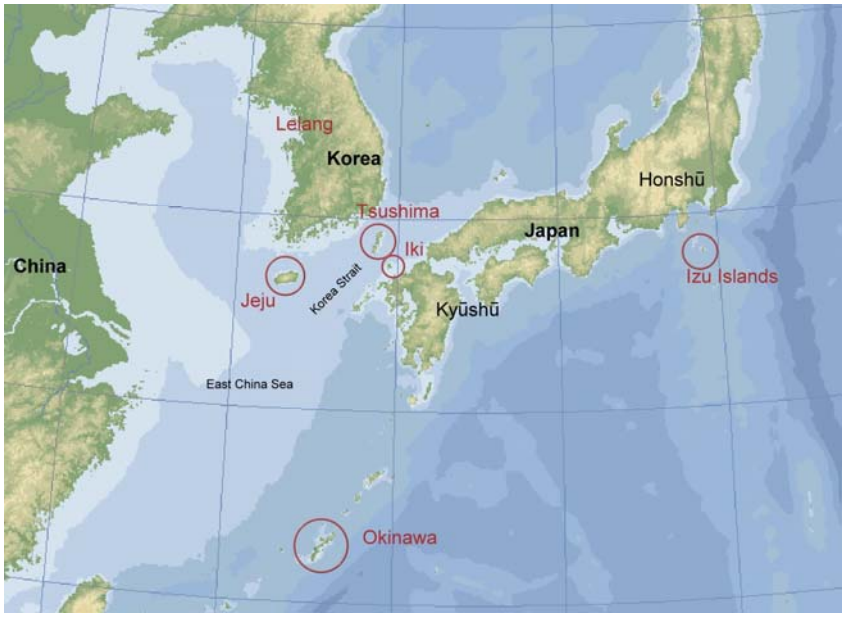
This concept has already been established for East Asia from different scholarly approaches – just to mention the 'sea people' concept of AMINO Yoshihiko, or my theory of the joined Han and Wa culture around the Korea Strait (AMINO 2007; SEYOCK 2003, 2004). Most of our papers contribute to the perception of strong interrelations between the given island/s and the neighbouring coasts.

Did the sea hence really constitute a barrier, or can we regularly neglect it in prehistoric and historic contexts? Are specific cultural elaborations typical for an island framework, and if, what kind of such elements can we perceive? Can islands in the East China Sea and the Korea Straits in consequence serve as key areas for archaeological modelling? Is it possible to apply concepts addressing a certain function of a geographical region, such as a 'passage area', to one or even all of our investigated islands or coastal areas?

Is a model of a specific 'island archaeology' useful at all? Does it make sense in East Asian contexts? Or do we better focus on each cultural region separately regardless of it being an island, a coastal, or an inland area?

The islands and coastal regions the panel participants are geographically focussing on are all situated in Japanese and Korean waters. For Japan and Korea, the islands and coastal regions the following papers are addressing are the Izu Islands (Jap. Izu shotō 伊豆諸島) lying south of the Izu Peninsula in Honshū 本州, Okinawa 沖縄, the main island of what is commonly known as the Ryūkyūs 琉球, the southernmost Japanese island

chain, as well as Jeju Island (Jeju-do 濟州島), the largest Korean island, lying south of Jeolla 全羅 Province. Always in the focus of interest for their geographic position, moreover, are the islands lying in the Korea Strait, Tsushima 対馬 and Iki 壱岐.



Map: Areas of interest. *(Map basis adapted from ENCARTA 2003)*

Kazuo MIYAMOTO 宮本一夫 from Kyūshū University presents a paper on the "Prehistoric Interaction through Tsushima and Iki Islands between the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese Archipelago", focussing on both northward and southward exchange from the Neolithic to the Iron Age and moreover introducing the latest finds from the intriguing Iki Island Karakami カラカミ site, where he has carried out several excavation campaigns.

Cohe SUGIYAMA 杉山浩平 from the University of Tōkyō raises the question why communities disappeared from not only the Bōta 坊田 and Kokoma ココマ sites on Miyakejima 三宅島 but from the Izu Islands in general. In his essay on "The Spatial Distribution Change of Obsidians from Kōzushima in the Yayoi Period" he elaborates on very recently excavated sites in the Izu islands in central Japan and the probable impact of volcanic activity on the environment of the Yayoi settlements.

My own paper on "Jeju Island as a Case Study in Ancient Island-Mainland Interaction" analyses the situation of protohistoric culture on Jeju, questioning in how far Jeju people participated in the general developments of the Korean-Japanese border region.

Kanji TAWARA 俵寛司 from the Tōkyō University of Foreign Studies – his contribution will be published soon in BSEAA – reconsiders the traditional notion of "Tsushima Island as a Boundary Region", emphasizing again the close relationship between peninsular and archipelago cultures by discussing the archaeological data excavated from Tsushima sites.

Two more papers – publication of which may follow – have been given at the Island Archaeology panel in Beijing:

Tomoko NAGATOMO 長友朋子 from Jeonbuk National University broadened the geographical scope of the interrelations between Korean and Japanese coastal regions by discussing the "The Relationship between Lelang, the South of the Korean peninsula, northern Kyūshū and Okinawa" with a focus on the impact of Lelang culture not only on pottery styles, but on the general change of the society in the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands.

The concluding presentation came from Hiroto TAKAMIYA 高宮広土 from Sapporo University who discussed the "Long Distance Exchange and Food Stress in the Prehistory of Okinawa". By re-analyzing sea fauna remains from different periods in Okinawa, he challenges the traditional interpretation of a prehistoric people that lived peacefully and harmoniously on the southern islands for thousands of years.

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