



Virtually reconstructed image of the mounded tombs in Mozu at the time of construction



Virtually reconstructed image of the mounded tombs in Furuichi at the time of construction

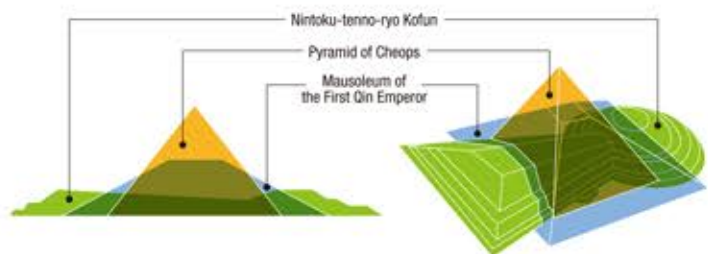
What is kofun?

Kofun is a collective term for the ancient tombs with earthen mounds that were actively constructed in the Japanese archipelago from the middle of the 3rd century to the second half of the 6th century CE.

In those days, members of the high-ranking elite were buried in kofun. A burial mound was constructed by heaping up the soil that was dug from the ground around the mound site. The sloping sides of the mound were covered with stones, and the excavated area formed a moat, descending to a level lower than any other part of the tomb.

Kofun show a variety of shapes: keyhole-shaped mounds (*zempo-koen-fun*); scallop shell-shaped mounds (*hotategai-gata-fun*); round domed mounds (*empun*); and square mounds (*hofun*). Their size also varies, ranging from small examples of around 10 meters to huge tombs of more than 400 meters.

The period in which most of these mounded tombs were constructed is called the Kofun period, and it was at this time that the earliest form of political centralization—the Yamato Kingly Power—started to form in the Japanese archipelago.



	Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun	Pyramid of Cheops	Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor
Length	486 m	230 m	350 m
Height	35.8 m	146 m	76 m
Volume	1.4 million m ³	2.6 million m ³	3 million m ³

Q1 What is a keyhole-shaped kofun?

A1 It is a type of ancient Japanese mounded tomb featuring a unique plan that combines a round mound at the rear and a square mound at the front, looking like an old-fashioned keyhole from above. Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun, Japan's largest kofun in terms of area, and Ojin-tenno-ryo Kofun, the largest in terms of volume, are both representative of keyhole-shaped kofun.

Most of the remaining giant tombs are also keyhole-shaped kofun, the construction of which continued throughout the Kofun period (mid-3rd to late-6th century CE).

Many powerful rulers, such as those of the Yamato Kingly Power, had burial mounds of this type constructed. Keyhole-shaped kofun are unique to Japan, though there are several theories about what this shape is intended to represent.

Q2 What are inside kofun?

A2 A body, placed inside a coffin, along with some personal effects belonging to the deceased. Such grave goods, which might include armor, horse trappings and mirrors, vary according to the social and professional status of the deceased, and to the era in which they lived. In some cases, valuable goods and artifacts from overseas were also entombed.



Gilt bronze saddle excavated from Konda-mariyama Kofun (National Treasure; possessed by Konda-hachimangu Shrine)

Q3 How much labor was required to construct a kofun?

A3 It has been estimated that, today, construction of the Nintoku-tenno-ryo Kofun would require 60 people to work for two and a half years, using modern construction methods and machinery. Employing ancient construction methods and technologies, it would have required 2,000 laborers to work for 15 years and 8 months; that is, 6.8 million man-days. In addition to this, further time would have been required to make *haniwa* clay figures and other supplementary works.

(Source: "Obayashi Quarterly" No. 20 in 1985, estimated by the Obayashi Corporation Project Team)

What is World Heritage?

World Heritage is the common heritage of mankind, which we should together preserve and transmit to future generations. "The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention)" was adopted by the General Assembly of UNESCO in 1972. The objective of the Convention is to encourage international cooperation and assistance to protect valuable properties on the earth from threats of damage and destruction, for the purposes of conserving and bequeathing them to future generations. World Heritage properties are categorized into three types: cultural heritage, including monuments, buildings and archaeological sites; natural heritage, including habitats of animals and plants and natural landscapes; and mixed heritage, having both features.

Only sites recognized as having "Outstanding Universal Value" are inscribed on the World Heritage List. As of July 2017, 1,073 sites are on the list.

World Heritage sites in Japan

17 Cultural [C] and 4 Natural [N] Heritage sites



- Shiretoko [N]
- Shirakami-Sanchi [N]
- Hiraizumi – Temples, Gardens and Archaeological Sites Representing the Buddhist Pure Land [C]
- Shrines and Temples of Nikko [C]
- Tomioka Silk Mill and Related Sites [C]
- The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement [C]
- Qgasawara Islands [N]
- Fujiisan, sacred place and source of artistic inspiration [C]
- Historic Villages of Shirakawa-go and Gokayama [C]
- Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto [C]
- Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara [C]
- Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area [C]
- Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range [C]
- Himeji-jo [C]
- Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome) [C]
- Itsukushima Shinto Shrine [C]
- Ivami Ginzan Silver Mine and its Cultural Landscape [C]
- Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining [C]
- Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region [C]
- Yakushima [N]
- Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu [C]

* The component parts of the Sites of Japan's Meiji Industrial Revolution are distributed in several prefectures (Iwate, Shizuoka, Yamaguchi, Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Saga, Nagasaki, and Kagoshima)

Q4 What did kofun originally look like?

A4 Although kofun now look like forested areas, they were free from trees when they were constructed. The sloping sides of the mounds were paved with stones (*fukiishi*), and a large number of *haniwa* (earthenware funerary sculptures) were lined up on the terraces. In this way, the surfaces of the mounds were elaborately decorated.



Cylindrical haniwa excavated from Zenizuka Kofun



House-shaped haniwa excavated from Kurizuka Kofun

Q5 Where can kofun be found? How many are there?

A5 In the Kofun period, over 160,000 mounded tombs were constructed throughout the Japanese archipelago, between the north of the main Honshu island and the southwestern island of Kyushu. Of these, about 4,700 are keyhole-shaped kofun, which can mainly be found between the Iwate Prefecture in the north and the Kagoshima Prefecture in the south.

Particularly large keyhole-shaped tombs are concentrated in the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group, located in the present-day Osaka Prefecture. In these two areas, Mozu and Furuichi, nearly 90 mounded tombs of various sizes still survive today.

Q6 Are there any kofun that visitors can climb?

A6 Among the component parts of the Mozu-Furuichi Kofun Group, nominated for World Heritage status, the mounds of Tsudo-shiroyama Kofun, Nabezuka Kofun, and Otorizuka Kofun, all located in Fujiidera City, are open to the public.

At Richu-tenno-ryo Kofun in Sakai City and at Mukohakayama Kofun in Habikino City, visitors can get a close view of the tombs from the viewing point and surrounding path, while many tombs are located in park settings. These methods of approaching the kofun allow visitors to get a sense of their original appearance.