

EXCAVATIONS OF LATE KAYA PERIOD TUMULI IN KORYONG, KOREA:
CHISAN-DONG TOMBS 32 - 35 AND ASSOCIATED BURIALS

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THE PLACE OF THE KAYA STATES IN KOREAN HISTORY

Received Korean historical tradition tells us that in the early centuries of the first millenium A.D. there were three ancient kingdoms, Koguryo occupying the southern half of Manchuria and northern Korea, Paekche occupying the south-western part of the Korean peninsula, and Silla the south-eastern part (Figure 1). It has been clear for some time, however, that Silla could not have been a unified, powerful state until much later. It has also become clear that the Kaya federation of city-states between the Paekche and Silla areas played a far greater role in the cultural development of the southern half of the peninsula than previously suspected.¹ Until very recently our knowledge of the Kaya states

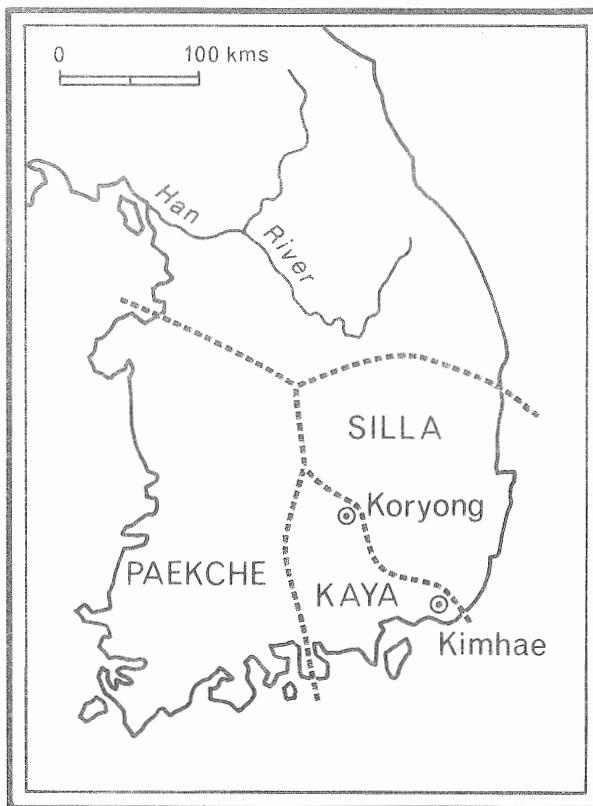


Figure 1. The Kaya States in Relation to Paekche and Silla in the Fifth Century. After Sohn P-K, Kim C-C. and Hong Y-S., The History of Korea (Seoul: Korean National Commission for Unesco, 1970), p. 43.

has been limited to mentions in three historical works; the Samguk sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms) written by Kim Pu-sik (1075 - 1151), the Samguk yusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) by the monk Iryon (1206 - 1289), and the Nihon shoki (Chronicles of Japan) compiled in 720. Each of these historical sources suffers from various defects.

The Samguk sagi, written by a descendant of the royal house of Silla, was created in part to argue against northern expansion to recover lost lands in Manchuria. In so doing, the role of Silla was emphasized as a great power from an early period, neglecting the role of the Kaya states and their development. The Samguk yusa, a collection of legends and stories about the ancient times, does help to rectify our knowledge of these early states, but it does not give us significant historical material with which to create an outline of the political and cultural development of the Kaya area. The Nihon shoki, while more politically oriented, is perhaps the most problematic of all the ancient sources. Presumed to have been written by descendants of Paekche nobility who sought refuge in Japan after the demise of the Paekche state in 660, it presents an image of Japanese rule of the Kaya area which Koreans on archaeological grounds as well as for patriotic reasons deny altogether. Generally, the historical material contained in these sources raises three kinds of problems: the relationship of Kaya to Paekche, the relationship of Kaya to Koguryo, and the relationship of the Kaya states to Japan.

The Samguk sagi and the Samguk yusa both clearly indicate that the state of Paekche was founded by members of the cadet branch of the ruling clan of the tribal states of Koguryo and Puyo. The evidence that horse riding warriors established themselves as rulers over the settled tribes in the Han river valley and the south western portion of the Korean peninsula is quite clear. Paekche was thus different from Koguryo and Puyo, in that the ruling class was drawn from an ethnic group different from that of the citizens of the state. If there was a continuous movement southward of the horse riding warriors, then what was the relationship between them and the elite who established themselves as the rulers of the city states in the Kaya area? The Nihon shoki clearly shows that an ethnic relationship existed between the ruling Yamato clan in Japan and the rulers or governors of the Kaya states. The idea has been put forward that this indicates Japanese colonialism on the Korean peninsula in the third and fourth centuries. Other scholars have suggested that the reverse is indicated; that the rulers of the Kaya states were related to the ruling elite of Paekche and that these groups launched invasions of the Japanese islands which led to the creation of early states in Japan and the foundation of the present imperial house.

Recently there have been important archaeological excavations undertaken in the region of the ancient Kaya states, and these should help to fill in some of the hiatuses in the written record.

Of these excavations, perhaps the most significant have been conducted jointly by archaeological teams from Kyemyong University and Kyongbuk National University at Koryong-up in North Kyongsang Province.

THE LOCATION AND SURROUNDINGS OF THE EXCAVATION SITE

The site chosen for excavation by the Kyemyong team was one of a series of tumuli located on a ridge in the area called Chisan-dong to the southwest of Koryong, county seat of Koryong-gun. The site and its vicinity contain numerous tumuli dating from the Kaya period and it has long been supposed that the tombs on this ridge and its immediate slopes formed the royal cemetery for the state of Taegaya. On a ridge above the site selected by the Kyemyong team stands the largest tumulus in the group which has been traditionally described as the burial mound of 'King' Kumnim. This is the only tumulus to have an association with a known historical figure. The tombs on the lower ridge excavated by the Kyemyong team had been previously recorded and were identified as Tombs 32, 33, 34 and 35 (Figure 2).

Taegaya was one of the two major city-states which formed the Kaya Federation, the other state being Pon'gaya or modern Kimhae. There are numerous historical relics which confirm the importance of this city state, including the remains of the fortress which formed its core. This is presently the site of the Koryong hyanggyo or Confucian shrine. Another important relic is a chambered tumulus with ravaged wall paintings containing lotus motifs. The date of this tomb is important for the establishment of the date of the entrance of Buddhism into this region of Korea, and as it is similar in style to tombs from the Paekche area it takes on added importance in regard to the general question of early state contacts. In addition to these sites, there are a few remains in Koryong-up itself of the palace gate of Taegaya, and the alleged home site of the creator of the kayagum, a 12 stringed zither-like instrument. Not far from the Chisan-dong site is a well which has royal associations and which was also excavated by the Kyemyong team. Outside the immediate vicinity of Koryong are several mountain fortress sites, nine other tumulus groupings, and several pottery sites.

The information contained in this article is taken exclusively from the book written and edited by Kim Chong-jol entitled Koryong Chisan-dong kobun-gun, issued by Kyemyong University Press in 1981. This contains precise reports of Tombs 32 - 35, a linking tomb between Tombs 34 and 35, and 15 other burials which were uncovered in the course of excavating the tumuli. The artefacts described are presently on display in the museum of Kyemyong University, Taegu, located on the third floor of the East-West Center. General views of the excavation site and of the excavation in progress are displayed in large color photographs hung at the entrance to the display room. Each tomb has a separate cabinet devoted to its

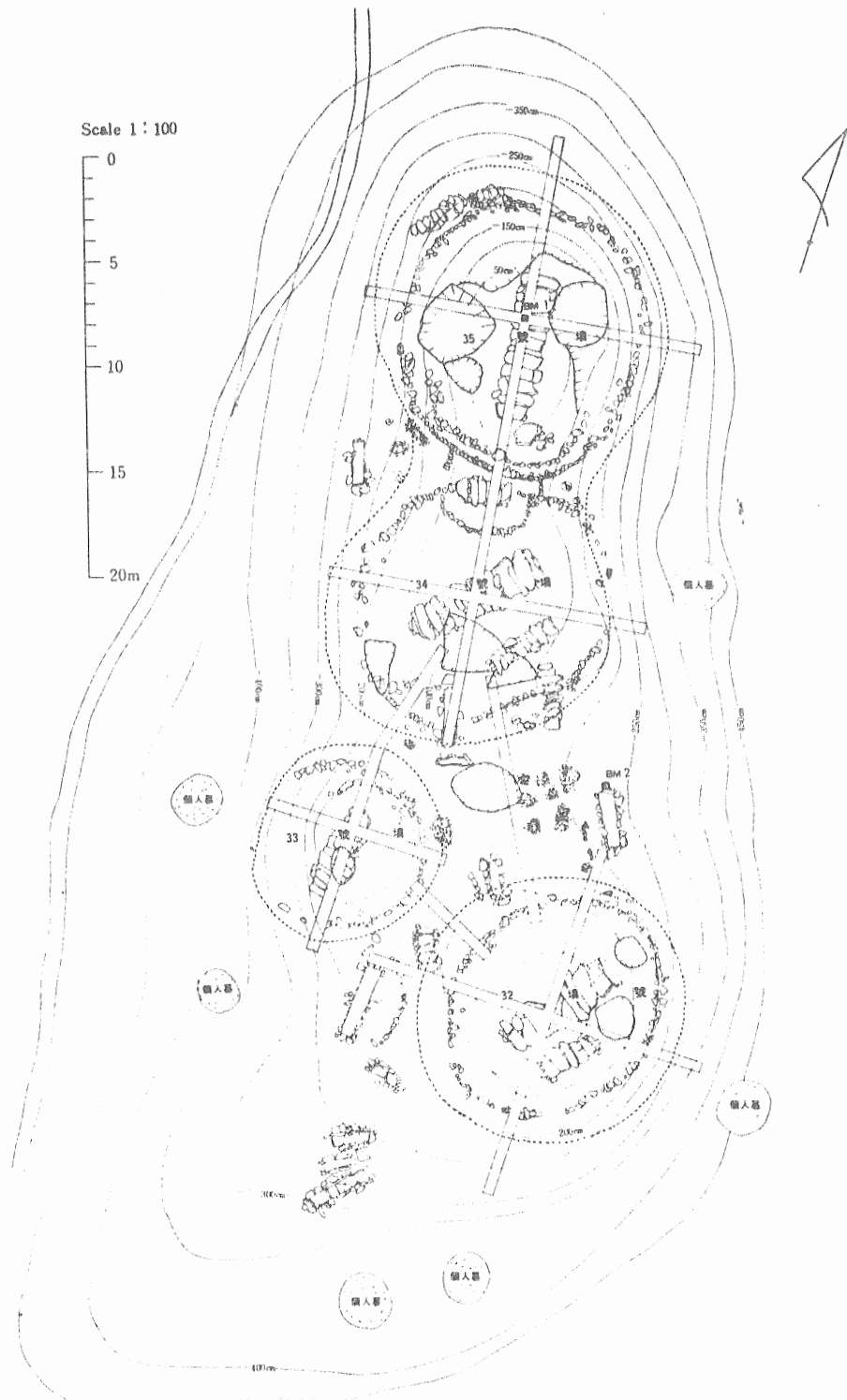


Figure 2. Plan of Chisan-dong Tombs 32 - 35. Reprinted with permission from Koryong Chisan-dong Kobun-gun.



Figure 3. Plan and Section Drawings of Chisan-dong Tomb 32. Reprinted with permission from Koryong Chisan-dong Kobun-gun.

contents with pictures portraying the tomb at the time of excavation.

SUMMARY REPORT OF IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE EXCAVATION

Tomb 32 (Figure 3)

The principal monuments excavated were of course the great tumuli. Although Kaya tumuli share certain similarities with those found to the east, particularly those in the area of Kyongju, the former capital of Silla, the position of them is entirely different. While Silla tombs are found in clusters on level ground or occasionally at the base of a hill, Kaya tombs are most often found on the ridge of a hill. Such is the case with the Koryong tumuli. Tomb 32 is typical of those which were excavated nearby and may be taken to be a standard example. It is also the tomb from which some of the most important materials were excavated.

Inside the mound constituting Tomb 32 was a stone burial chamber oriented on a northeast to southwest axis, and a subsidiary chamber. The chamber of the principal burial had dry stone walls on all four sides, a floor of large river stones, and several large sealing capstones. The dimensions of the chamber are given as 6.54 metres long, 98 cm wide at the northeast end, 86 cm wide at the southwest end, and 116 to 120 cm deep. The capstones extend to a length of 6.12 and a width of 1.95 metres. In the center of the chamber propped up on stones was a wooden coffin, most of which had decayed before excavation began. This coffin was estimated to have been 2.60 metres long and 60 to 70 cm wide. In various places near the site of the coffin there were hooks or clamps for affixing wooden planks together. Although no human remains were discovered, a large sword was unearthed in the center of the coffin site oriented with its tip to the southwest. The location of this sword indicated that it could have been placed by the waist of the personage buried in the coffin.

It was from the southwest side of the chamber, however, that the most important materials were retrieved. These included the first suit of Kaya armour to be recovered intact, and a Kaya gold crown, one of the few known to exist and the first for which there is an accurate description of its location and removal.² The suit of armour comprises a helmet and the breast and back plates. The helmet in turn consists of two parts; a cap, and the protective plates which were attached at the base and which fell in three layers to the shoulders of the wearer. The suit of armour itself is composed of plates affixed to form a series of body-shaped protectors for the breast and the back.

The placing of the gold crown near the suit of armour outside the coffin is unusual in comparison with Silla discoveries, where the crown is normally found in a position indicating that it was

worn by the occupant. The position in the Kaya tomb could indicate that it was placed in a treasure 'chamber' at the foot of the coffin itself. In comparison with the Silla crowns the Chisan-dong example is quite simple, although it exemplifies similar construction methods and motifs.

Besides the gold crown and the suit of armour, other items of interest included stirrups, horse bits, bells to be attached to reins, and harness cinches and buckles. These discoveries confirmed the importance of horse riding in the society of Kaya.

Tomb 33

Tumulus 33 proved to be similar in form to Tomb 32, although the contents did not prove to be as spectacular. Considerable quantities of pottery were removed from the stone chamber, including fine examples of typical Kaya ware such as lidded vessels with perforated stands. Other items of interest included equestrian stirrups, bits, cinches and buckles. Remains of a disintegrated large sword were also revealed, and also small glass beads, a faceted piece of jade, and pieces of kogok. The latter, curved pieces of jade similar in form to the Japanese magatama, are diagnostic artifacts from Kaya and Silla burials. Silla gold crowns are covered with these kogok dangling from the gold uprights.

Tombs 34 and 35

The report of the excavation of these two tombs has been treated in a single section in the Koryong Chisan-dong kobun-gun. They lie side by side and are linked together by a smaller tomb referred to by the excavators as the Linking Tomb. Like Tomb 32, Tomb 34 consists of a mound with a principal and a subsidiary stone chamber. Both tombs appear to have been looted at some point in the past, and materials recovered included pottery vessels and a single glass bead.

Adjoining Tomb 34 to the north is Tomb 35. This contains only a principal stone burial chamber and no subsidiary chamber. The stone chamber lies on a north-south axis and proved to be undisturbed. Considerable amounts of pottery of the types found in Tomb 33 were uncovered, neatly stacked at the southern end of the stone chamber in rows. In addition to these vessels the remains of a number of weapons were also discovered, including portions of a great sword. The most important relics from this tomb, however, were equestrian artifacts, especially a remarkably intact saddle which consisted of two portions made of metal which would have been connected together by pieces of wood shaped to the form of the horse's body. As elsewhere, stirrups and bits were uncovered, together with decorative iron plates in the shape of apricot leaves.

The Linking Tomb

Between Tombs 34 and 35 lay a smaller stone chamber, 2.6 metres long, with a central stone coffin 1.75 metres long, 45 cm wide and 45 cm deep. This contained teeth of a five-year-old child, together with an iron sword with a disintegrated hilt. Because of the location of this tomb it was presumed by the excavators that Tombs 34 and 35 belonged to the child's parents.

Other Stone Chamber Burials

Tomb 32 NE-1

Located to the north of Tomb 32 is a separate stone chamber called 32 NE-1, which did not contain a stone coffin. In addition to pottery, a small sword, spear points and arrow heads, the most significant discovery was a large sword which was laid on the left side of its owner. This has an overall length of 89 cm and measured 60.9 cm from the hilt to the tip. The width of the blade varies from 2.4 to 3.1 cm. The top of the handle ends in a loop which is covered with delicate silver inlay in imitation of a fern motif. X-ray photography of the sediment clogging the loop revealed in its center a delicately molded phoenix head with the beak facing to the sharp side of the blade. The phoenix head measures approximately 2 cm in height.

Tomb 32 NW-1

Located to the northwest of Tomb 32, this small chamber contained the usual types of pottery, a great quantity of arrowheads, and a small ceremonial sword. In addition, a large sword measuring 71.1cm in overall length was discovered; like the sword in Tomb 32 NE-1 this has a loop end to its handle, but lacks decoration on or inside the loop.

Tomb 32 NW-2

Also located to the northwest of Tomb 32 this chamber is considerably smaller than the others. Like 32 NW-1 it is a stone lined tomb with slabs forming the walls and floor, and its contents included teeth and 1 permanent tooth of a child of about four years of age.

Tomb 34 SE-3

Located to the southeast of tomb 34, this slab tomb contained arrow heads, blades, and buckles, and also an unusual gilt bronze object. This belongs to a class of items termed horok (lit., barbarian record) and is shaped somewhat like the character for mountain or the letter 'W'. Around its exterior edges it has small gilt bronze rivets. There are two known examples of horok in Japan,

and the first one to be excavated in Korea was discovered in the winter of 1980 by Pusan University in Pokch'on-dong, Pusan.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

These excavations showed that there were three types of tombs at Chisan-dong; stone slab tombs, pit tombs, and the great chambered tombs or tumuli. Of the 21 tombs excavated 12 were of the stone slab type, in which the burial pit was lined with stone slabs on the walls and the floor. Believed to be the earliest of the tombs excavated at the Chisan-dong site, the Korean archaeologists thought them to be the direct descendants of Bronze Age stone cists. Tomb 32 NW-1 is an example of this type of tomb and is believed to date no later than the middle of the fourth century A.D. 32 NW-2 has been given a similar dating while 34 SE-3 is believed to be from the later part of the fourth century.

Unlike the slab tombs, the pit tombs have been dug into the ground and have walls lined with stone courses. Burials were placed directly on the exposed earthen floors, often without a coffin. 32 NE-1 is an example of a pit tomb. The Korean archaeologists believe that this type occupies a central position in the tomb chronology between the earlier stone slab type and the tumuli with chambers. This order of development is confirmed not only by tomb structure but also by the types of burial goods.

It is thought that the pit tombs found in association with the tumuli are burials of sacrificial victims who were interred at the same time as the personage in the great chamber. The tumuli have been dated to a period between the early and middle part of the fifth century.

The results from Chisan-dong point to the need for more complete archaeological investigation of the Kaya area. Clearly, the tumuli at this site show that there was a continuous development of culture in the region which was perhaps related to political developments and population movements elsewhere on the peninsula. Thus, contrary to the view found in the Nihon shoki, the source for cultural development of the Kaya area is to be found in the first instance on the Korean peninsula and not in Japan. The burial items of the tumuli reveal that the elite of Kaya society were horse riding warriors with very sophisticated equestrian weaponry. This observation contradicts the popular supposition that the Kaya states were more pacific in character than Koguryo or Puyo. If there was a warrior elite in Kaya society, how were they related to the horse-riding rulers of Japan, who suddenly emerged in the fourth century? Only more extensive excavation will enable us to move beyond speculation.

FOOTNOTES

1. Prior to the emergence of Silla as the dominant power in the Korean peninsula, the archaeology of the southernmost part of Korea might be divided into three eras. Chronology, however, is a highly problematic issue at present and the following definition is only tentative. The first and second centuries A.D. would constitute the Early Iron Age, the third century the Early Kaya Period, and the fourth to the sixth centuries the Late Kaya Period. In its early stages the center of the Kaya League was at Pon'gaya, modern Kimhae, on the south coast. Later, the center of gravity shifted towards the north with the center of the league being located at Taegaya, modern Koryong. Much interest in the intermediary role of Kaya in the process of culture transfer to Silla and Japan has been aroused by the Chisan-dong excavations. Kim Won-yong has discussed the implications of Tombs 44 and 45 at Koryong, which are located above the tumuli discussed in this article. See Kim, Won-yong, Recent Archaeological Discoveries in the Republic of Korea (Seoul, UNESCO, 1983), pp. 46-52.
2. There are at least two other Kaya gold crowns which are known to exist. One is in the collection of the Hoam Museum of Art in Nungin near Seoul. The other crown was discovered during the excavations at Pokch'on-dong in Pusan in 1980.