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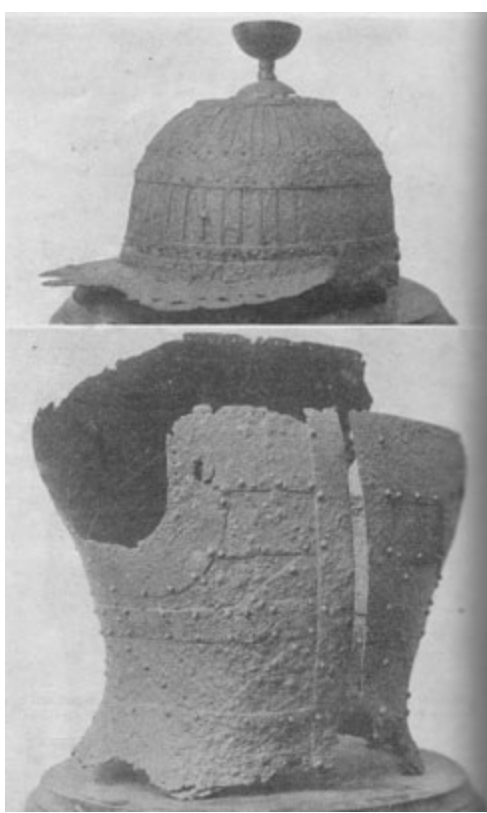
**By NORITAKE TSUDA
(EXPERT IN THE TOKYO IMPERIAL MUSEUM)**

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TERRA-COTTA FIGURES SHOWING ARMOUR, FOUND IN DOLMENS



IRON HELMET AND CUIRASS FOUND IN PROVINCE OF ECHIZEN

SOME PREHISTORIC SWORDS

**By NORITAKE TSUDA
(EXPERT IN THE TOKYO IMPERIAL MUSEUM)**

THE sword has always been one of the most important of war weapons in the past, though present methods of warfare have begun to discount its utility. But certainly it remains one of the most conspicuous war weapons of history. Some have called it the soul of Japan; and it is true that in old Japan the sword was dedicated to the gods, even great numbers of swords being so honoured; and there are cases where the sword has also been deified under the name of *Futsunomitama*. This custom arose from a belief that the sword possessed a spirit, and so may be taken as but a phase of animism. The Isonokami Jingu in the province of Yamato and the Kashima Jingu in the province of Hitachi are both famous shrines dedicated to *Futsunomitama*, the god of the sword.

Though many ancient swords have been found preserved in old Shinto shrines, prehistoric swords are found only in burial mounds and other prehistoric forms of sepulture. Many of these ancient specimens have been exhumed and are now to be seen in the Tokyo Imperial Museum. No one can examine them, however, without doubting whether they were made in prehistoric Japan, so perfect are they both in utility and beauty.

In these ancient swords the blade is of iron, and straight, lacking the curve of later periods. Some of the weapons are double edged, and others single. The length of the blade is usually about 3 feet, but some run to a length of four feet. It must be remembered that in Japan the iron age appeared immediately after the stone age, omitting the bronze age of other races. These old swords belong to the earlier part of the iron age. The iron blades of the old Japanese swords were not cast, as in China, but they were hammered out and tempered. To prove this requires only a little expert examination. According to our ancient records, *kanuchibe* or families of sword smiths, were organized in remote ages; which shows how ancient is our art of sword making. We read in the *Hidachi Fudoki* that an iron mine was discovered in the province of Hitachi, and that swords were made from the metal found there.

In the oldest specimens of these swords there is a hole in the blade near the hilt, the use of which is not accurately known, though it may have had something to do with the handle. The hole, however, is sometimes decorated and inlaid with silver at the edge. The better blades can take a remarkably fine polish, showing the degree which the art of forging was then advanced. Moreover the hilts and scabbards often have quite artistic decorations on them. In fact all the more highly decorated portions are about the hilt. Of course only the metal part of these decorations now remains, and no one can say what decorative portions are lost. The greater part of the decorations are in gilt bronze; but iron and silver decorations are also used, as well as plain bronze. Some of the handles end in a ball shaped pommel, called the *kabutsuchi* form. Some of the ball shaped pommels are gilded and are furrowed like the Borneo orange. Each has a hole in it for a cord. Another striking form has a ring with a phoenix or a pair of dragons catching a gem within. These are also of gilded or plated bronze and highly artistic in design and execution, some, however, being conventionalized. Many, on the other hand are most simple in every way.

It is interesting to note here that in China the phoenix and the dragon are also conspicuous in decorations, both being mystic symbols regarded as sacred.

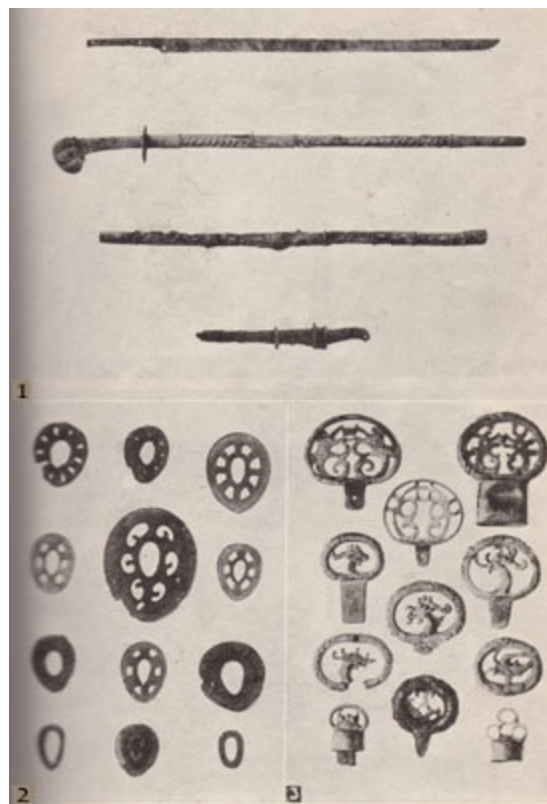
Other forms of decoration on the hilts are arabesque wave designs running in dotted lines, while others are wound about with slender gold or silver wire; and a few have leather cord and some horn or bone, the latter but rarely. The sword guards are all elliptic or oval shape, and made of iron or gilt bronze or silverplated, and sometimes inlaid with silver. Some of these sword guards are perforated in the most artistic manner. The scabbards were of wood overlaid with gilt plate, the designs on them being hammered out, or similar to those on the hilts. The larger scabbards have four rings, two for banging the weapon at the girdle, the other two to keep the scabbard out of the way of the legs.

In Japan prehistoric armour is usually made of iron, and very rarely is gilt bronze used in it. Cuirasses and helmets are also found among the ancient relics of warfare. There are two kinds of cuirass, one of iron bands or plates and another kind made of smaller pieces of iron. The latter form is always found in an extremely decayed condition, there being no complete example extant. The Imperial Museum has one unique specimen of the larger iron cuirass riveted together with iron and drawn together in front. The height is 1 foot 6 inches. The small holes for leather thongs to fasten it in position, are yet seen. It is different from other specimens in having no hinge for making it easy to wear. It was found in a stone sarcophagus together with swords, deer horn ornaments and cylindrical jewels at Iwafuniyama in the province of Echizen. Another cuirass at the Tokyo Imperial Museum has

two hinges enabling half the front to open to receive the body.

The helmets are also of two kinds, after the manner of the *curiass*; but the forms also differ in two ways, one being round, and the other pointed in the crown toward the front. There is one fine specimen of a round helmet made of small iron bands and plates well riveted, the visor being formed from triangular perforations. An iron gilded poll projects from the middle of the crown, having tiny holes at the point as if it once had a plume. The helmet was evidently intended to protect both head and neck, part of the neck protection being now lost. This helmet was excavated from the same tomb as the *curiass* already described.

An interesting question is how this armour was worn in ancient times. This can best be illustrated, perhaps, from the *haniwa* or small terra cotta figures often found in ancient dolmens. These figures were used in place of living persons to bury with great men, often being set up around the completed dolmen or burial mound, usually forming a circle as a guard. Some of these figures are men and some are women. The men are often armed and the manner of wearing the armour is clearly visible. It is evident from these that there existed forms of armour that have not come down to us. One specimen of these clay figures shows how ancient armour was worn, as may be seen in the illustration accompanying this article. This *haniwa* is 4 feet 7 inches high, and shows, quiver, sword, cuirass and helmet, with hand and arm protection.



1. ANCIENT SWORDS OF PREHISTORIC MAKE, FOUND IN DOLMENS
2. SWORD GUARDS FOUND IN DOLMENS
3. SWORD HILT ORNAMENTS FOUND IN DOLMENS