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# Stone Circles in Northern Japan

By MARTIN GUSINDE and CHIYE SANO

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Preface. My trip through the northern section of Honshu and throughout Hokkaido in the summer of 1959 had a twofold objective, namely to renew friendships with several Ainu families whom I had visited in 1955, and to view and inquire into some of the so-called prehistoric stone circles.

In Oyu, Akita Prefecture, I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. T. SUWA, a long-time resident of that town, who had discovered and made known to the general public, almost three decades ago, the existence of the stone monuments nearby. In the neighborhood of Otaru, Hokkaido, Mr. NAOKICHI NAKAMURA, who has been exploring the stone monuments there for many years, was my guide to some of the seven sites at Nishizaki-yama, also to Mikasa-yama and Jichin-yama. In Sapporo I met again my old friend, Dr. S. KODAMA, professor of Anatomy and Anthropology at the University of Hokkaido. He was kind enough to give me a copy of a monograph just published four weeks before by the renowned archaeologist Dr. KAZUCHIKA KOMAI. It is entitled "Otoe", and contains the results of K. KOMAI's ten years' conscientious field-work among the stone circles of Northern Honshu and Hokkaido<sup>1</sup>. It was the desire to make this research, as well as that of other Japanese scholars, available to scientists who do not read Japanese, that prompted me to prepare this paper, and I have been fortunate in having the invaluable cooperation of Dr. CHIYE SANO, Lecturer in the Anthropological Institute at Nanzan University.

The stock-taking of all details relating to the stone monuments in Northern Japan is still in its initial stages, and it is not possible yet to draw any definite conclusions concerning their origin. We have some suggestions, however; and with all due respect for the work done by K. KOMAI and others, we cannot agree with their theory that the stone circles were tombs built by Ainu. Instead, we propose the following:

- 1) That the stone circles in Japan are a special type of megalithic monument.
- 2) That they were not built by Ainu.
- 3) That they were probably built by Tungusic invaders.

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<sup>1</sup> KAZUCHIKA KOMAI, *Otoe, a Study on the Stone Circles of Hokkaido* (in Japanese, summary in English). Tokyo 1959.

These are still only suppositions based on slim evidence. But we believe that the evidence is strong enough to warrant further investigation, and we hope that other researchers as well as ourselves will follow it up. (M. G.)

### Introduction

The assumption of a very wide distribution around the globe of megalithic culture has been winning more and more support from archaeologists in recent years. Megalithic monuments of various types have been found in Europe, in Africa, and in parts of Asia from the Mediterranean to the Polynesian islands<sup>2</sup>.

It should not surprise us, therefore, if megalithic monuments were to be found also on the Japanese islands. Traces of cultures, both prehistoric and historic, are numerous in the Japanese archipelago, and we are inclined to think that the stone circles belong to the megalithic world of thought, and are not an isolated product of a culture indigenous to Japan.

"Stone Circles" of course do not include circle-like arrangements of stones which have been found on top of a simple grave, or which were fortuitously brought together by the blind forces of nature. One of these fortuitous arrangements, for example, has been discovered in the neighborhood of Tokyo<sup>3</sup>. Another site of this kind is at Hachimambara near the highway crossing Sagae, Yamagata Prefecture. It is now under the protection of the local authorities as an object of cultural value. GUSINDE visited this spot in November, 1959, and learned from an aged teacher there that about 36 years ago, in 1922, when laborers were excavating sand on this spot, at the depth of about 130 cm, 21 heavy stones were unearthed, of various shapes and sizes and measuring from 80 to 140 cm in length. There seemed to be no pattern in their arrangement. Had they been brought to this spot by forces of nature or by man for a certain purpose? Nobody could tell. Professor GIKEI HORIBA, for one, believed that they were a monument of some kind, erected for the same purpose as the stone circles in Northern Japan; but opinions of experts differ<sup>4</sup>. It is too late now to find out the truth, because a few years ago workers moved the stones and arranged them in an irregular circle. This arrangement was a deliberate imitation of the genuine stone circles which are admired in the northern districts. At some distance from the above mentioned spot at

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<sup>2</sup> DOMINIK WÖLFEL, *Die Religionen des vorindogermanischen Europa*; in: F. KÖNIG, *Christus und die Religionen der Erde*, I, pp. 161-538. Wien 1951. — ROBERT HEINE-GELDERN, *Die Megalithen Südostasiens und ihre Bedeutung für die Klärung der Megalithenfrage in Europa und Polynesien*. *Anthropos* 23.1928, pp. 276-315. — PAUL ARNDT, *Die Megalithenkultur der Nād'a (Flores)*. *Anthropos* 27.1932, pp. 11-63. — GLYN DANIEL, *The Megalith Builders of Western Europe*. London 1958. Cf. VICTOR ROSNER, *Dolmens in the Anamalai Hills*. *Anthropos* 54.1959, pp. 169-182; also: GISELA ODERMANN, *Holz- und Steinsetzungen in Australien*. *Paideuma* 7.1959, pp. 99-114.

<sup>3</sup> M. ABE, E. OHONO, R. TORII, *Chichibu-chiho ni okeru Jinruigakuteki Ryoko* [Anthropological trip in Chichibu District]. *Jinrui-Gaku-Zasshi* [Journal of Anthropology] 10.1894, pp. 293-308.

<sup>4</sup> *Sagae. Kyodo Kenkyu Zosho* [Local Study Series]. Edit. by Yamagata-Ken Kyodo Kenkyu-Kai, July 1932.

Hachimambara, neolithic pottery of a common type has been discovered and is displayed in the small museum of the same village. The villagers believe that the stone circles in Northern Japan, which served as a model for the artificial arrangement of stones in their own village, date back to a very remote period and that they might have served as centers for feasts, councils, or religious meetings.

Another object of somewhat dubious nature is the stone fence at Kogoriyama in the valley of Okitama, near Takahata, Yamagata Prefecture. The villagers call it either by its older name, "Jadan", or by the newer one, "Izujinja"<sup>5</sup>. It is composed of erected stone slabs, flat and rectangular, each measuring about 55 × 70 cm, and surrounds an irregular square yard of 10 × 12 m. In the center of the yard are two small stone lanterns of Buddhist style and seven cypress trees, all of rather recent date. In April, 1934, Dr. SHINJI NISHIMURA expressed his belief, based on his discovery nearby of some pieces of pottery of Tunguse origin, that this stone wall had originally been round, and that it had been built during the Stone Age, not by Ainu, but by some Tunguse tribe. K. KOMAI disagrees with this <sup>6</sup>.

Both stone structures in Yamagata Prefecture, dubious as they are, may represent, for all we know, the southernmost limit of the distribution of stone circles. In some central and southern sections of the island of Honshu real dolmens are to be found which were built around the beginning of the Christian era. These are relatively easy to recognize because they are the products of a historical period, and were destined, without exception, for the burial of distinguished personages. They are distinct from the stone circles, however, and it is not our intention to deal with them in this treatise <sup>7</sup>.

The stone circles proper are to be found only in Northern Japan. They can be recognized as intentionally planned and executed constructions, but not monumental or huge as some of the dolmens are. They are often composed of small round stones the size of two fists, laid on the surface of the ground more or less touching each other, with, in some places, a bigger stone or a special arrangement of several stones occupying the center of the circle. Some of the circles are built with big, elongated stones vertically erected with one

<sup>5</sup> Cf. FR. BIERBÜSSE : *Inu no miya*, Der Hundetempel (eine japanische Mythe). *Anthropos* 54.1959, pp. 229-231.

<sup>6</sup> All details in *Higashi Okitamagun-shi, jookan. Okitamabonchi no kodai bunka*, 1, pp. 55-64. Yamagata 1938.

<sup>7</sup> A. CONRADY, Zu der Frage nach Alter und Herkunft der sog. japanischen Dolmen. *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift* 4.1916. 4. — S. UMEHARA, *Nippon kofun kyodai ishimuro shusei* [Corpus der japanischen Megalithgräber]. *Kokogaku Kenkyu Hokoku* [Report upon Archaeological Research] 14. Kyoto 1937. — MAX LOEHR, summing up, states in "Abriß der Vorgeschichte" (München 1957), p. 148 : "Die Dolmen-, Steinkammer- oder Ganggräber unter mächtigen Erdaufschüttungen, wie sie sich vor allem in Yamato, im Kinai und um die östliche Inlandsee finden, sind die Hauptdenkmäler der gegen 300 n. Chr. einsetzenden Frühen Eisenzeit. Kein erkennbarer Bruch trennt diese schon halb-historische Phase von der Yayoi-Kultur." The monument of Ishibutai, excavated in 1934, belongs to the latest of this kind. It is "one of the most gigantic megalithic corridor-tombs in Japan", and was built in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century A. D. KOSAKU HAMADA, *Megalith Tomb Ishibutai at Shimanosho in the Province of Yamato*. Kyoto 1937, p. 9.

third of their total height sunk into the ground <sup>8</sup>. The stone circles are considerably extended on nicely chosen spots ; they are circular or oval, or even rectangular ; and they are clearly built for a religious cult, for special worship of the dead, for civic festivities, or for social gatherings.

It is true that their purpose has not yet been ascertained with any satisfaction. But these stone circles of Northern Japan have so much in common with similar structures in north-eastern Asia and other parts of the world that they can hardly be considered an isolated instance. In Japan they always appear in groups of two or more. Under some of them there were what might have passed as tomb-pits in which corpses could have been deposited in a contracted position. In one or two of them were actually found pieces of bone which could have come from human skeletons.

It is only a few decades since Japanese archaeologists began to investigate the stone circles ; and today these monuments have attracted the attention of the general public <sup>9</sup>, and are kept under the careful protection of local authorities.

### 1. Some Historical Remarks

In 1886 an article on the stone circle at Mikasayama, Oshoro (in western Hokkaido), was contributed to the "Japanese Journal of Anthropology" by SHOZABURO WATASE, a zoologist, the first Japanese scientist to publish reports on the type of monument which we consider a product of the megalithic culture, and the first to apply to it the term "megalithic", obviously in view of the external shape. The Japanese *kanjō resseki* (or *kanjō sekiri*) is a literal translation of "stone circle".

In 1894 GIICHI TAKABATAKE published his report on the stone circles at Otoe, interpreting them as structures whose function was chiefly ritual.

In 1911 the stone monument at Mikasayama was investigated by a British ethnologist, Dr. N. G. MUNRO, who tentatively decided that the vertically erected central stone and some of the surrounding ones must have been used by some ancient people to "survey" the sun on certain days ; somewhat later NISHIMURA tried to explain the stones as a monument related to sun-worship.

In 1919 Dr. RYUZO TORII surprised many archaeologists with his conviction that the stone monuments at Otoe were tombs built by some Tungusic people who had either invaded Hokkaido or come by chance upon its shores.

In 1947 K. KOMAI began his methodical field-work at Mikasayama. His first impression was that the stone monuments there were tombs of ancient Ainu (KOMAI, p. 2), and he tentatively classed them with the dolmens and cromlechs of Europe. The next year he began examination of the newly

<sup>8</sup> The general impression they give is the same as that of the megalith site in the Chingleput District, described in "Ancient India" 15.1959, pp. 4-42, Plate IV.

<sup>9</sup> The luxuriously illustrated monthly review "Asahi Camera" 12.1959, pp. 27-31, published some gorgeously coloured photos and a short description under the headline "Stone Remains of Oyu".

discovered monuments nearby at Jichinyama, and considered them also, from their general structure, to be classifiable as tombs, in spite of the fact that no artifacts or other remains were unearthed on that site.

In 1950 he was lucky enough to excavate seven more sites at Nishizakiyama, Yoichi (near Otaru). In none of these were discovered any objects that might be distinctly associated with burials, except some pieces of broken Jomon pottery. The same year he went to Kaributo, not far from either Yoichi or Oshoro, where he examined some stone circles which had been discovered there previously. In view of many details, this restless investigator came to be convinced that these structures were definitely tombs. For one thing, underneath the circles of stone were found regular tomb-pits at the bottom of which were discovered one stone perçoir (borer ? KOMAI, Plate 21, No. 9), jade beads and some broken pieces of bone which might have belonged to human skeletons.

Between 1951 and 1958 KOMAI continued research work on the shell-mounds at Oshiranai, Hokkaido. Among the shell-mounds he found a tomb-site with a human skeleton buried in a contracted position. The tomb seemed to be in the tradition of those he had found under the stone circles in other parts of Hokkaido (KOMAI, p. 4). In 1952 he examined the standing stones at the back of the police station in Yoichi, and stone circles on the top of Inamiyama Hill, Koyo, in the village of Otoe. The results of these extensive research activities are contained in his monograph entitled "Otoe" (Tokyo 1959).

Meanwhile other work was being done by SEISUKE OKUNO, who found some standing stones at Naganuma-machi, Yubari-gun, Hokkaido, but was not able to determine their precise nature (KOMAI, p. 5) ; KINSHU OYE, who collaborated with KOMAI in exploring a small site (80 cm in diameter) in Gifu Prefecture ; TSUNEKICHI KONO, SOJI MIYASAKA, and KASHIWA OYAMA, who reported on stone circles in Hokkaido, but did not follow modern methods in excavating them (KOMAI, p. 9).

The first accurate investigation on any considerable scale of prehistoric sites in Hokkaido was conducted by HIROMICHI KONO and other scientists at Shari in 1948-49. Here they discovered genuine tomb-pits containing cremated human bones, stone objects, jade beads, lacquered pieces and earthenware (KOMAI, p. 9). The Shari sites were rather irregular in shape (KOMAI, Fig. 5), but may have had some relationship with the stone circles at Oshoro.

YASUO KITAMIZO excavated similar sites at Nemuro, north-eastern Hokkaido, and MASAO YAMAMOTO explored the monuments at Rausu on the Shiretoko peninsula in eastern Hokkaido (KOMAI, p. 10).

Some stone structures reported from southern Japan, viz., Fukuoka, Nagasaki, and Saga, all in Kyushu, are to be classified with the dolmens found in South Korea and India, and are therefore not discussed in this paper.

## 2. Stone Circles of Oyu

At the end of 1932, SUEKICHI ASAI, a resident of Oyu-machi, Akita Prefecture, a well-known poet and also a student of local history, noticed several unusual groups of heavy stones where laborers were at work for a readjust-

ment of farmland at Nonakado, Oyu. As he had long been interested in stone circles, he made a big issue of his discovery. The stones seemed to be in a belt of 2 to 3 m in width and 20 m in length, which looked like an arc of a circle <sup>10</sup>.

Excavations were started in June, 1942. In September of the same year another site of similar pattern but of even larger scale was discovered at Manza, only a short distance from the first. The excavations revealed 1,146 stones, 9 stones apparently marking cardinal points, 69 "sun-dial" type arrangements, and so forth. War halted the investigations until July, 1951. Then a special committee was formed of Ministry of Education officials and scientists, including K. KOMAI, who conducted the excavations into 1952, when some shuffling in the set-up of the committee took place <sup>11</sup>.

Further excavations revealed several patterns of grouping for 46 stone "circles" (some of which were not circles at all) at Manza and for 44 at Nonakado. On the whole the former site was much better preserved than the latter. Each site was composed of two concentric circles, or belts, comprising small groups of stones arranged with definite patterns. The stones were either standing or laid horizontally. The most striking feature at these sites was the so-called "sun-dial" type of grouping, i. e., with one conspicuous piece standing at the center, and flat-lying, elongated stones laid horizontally around it as if radiating from its base. The most elaborately and carefully worked out specimens of this type were one 2.9 m in diameter, located close to the outer belt at Manza, and one about 2 m in diameter just outside the inner ring at Nonakado.

Another frequently encountered type was a circular or square piece of ground covered by heavy stones with two or more upright pieces at corners or along the circuit. Sometimes these upright stones were placed as if they marked the four cardinal points.

Two groupings at Manza were unique in pattern. In each of them, low stones were arranged in the shape of a horse-shoe, leaving the enclosed ground conspicuously empty. This type was not duplicated at Nonakado.

The outer belt at Nonakado measured about 40 to 42 m in diameter, while that of Manza was 45 to 46 m in outer diameter. The width of the belt at the first site was 4 m at the widest spot, while that at Manza ranged from 3 to 10 m. When measured on the inner edge of the outer ring, however, both sites proved to be of about the same size, being 34 m in diameter. As far as was clearly distinguished, 8 groupings were 1 m or less, 19 were between 1 and 2 m, and 9 were more than 2 m in diameter at Manza. The stone "circles" at Nonakado were either so irregular in shape or so considerably disturbed that they defied accurate measurement. The only one grouping which was preserved relatively intact measured 0.7 m in diameter.

<sup>10</sup> The Stone Remains of Oyu (Oyu-Machi, Kazuno County, Akita Prefecture). A Report on the Archaeological Excavations by The Commission for the Protection of Cultural Properties, II. Tokyo 1953. — *Oyu-Machi Kanjo Resseki Hakkutsu-shi* [Proceedings on the Excavation of the Stone Circles at Oyu]. Edit. by *Oyu Kyodo Kenkyu Kai* [Oyu Society for Study of Local Culture]. Towadamachi, Akita 1958.

<sup>11</sup> *Oyu-Machi Kanjo Resseki* [Stone Circles at Oyu]. A Report on the Archaeological Excavation, 2. Edit. by *Bunka Hogo Inskai* [The Commission for the Protection of Cultural Properties]. Tokyo 1953.

The committee selected 9 of the stone "circles" at Manza for excavation. Under 6 of them, they found a small, oval-shaped pit which could have contained a corpse in a contracted position, but they found no skeletal or other remains that might be associated with a burial. Under three others, including the two of the horse-shoe type, they found a number of narrow holes, 20 to 30 cm in diameter. Some of these small but deep holes were found just outside the stone "circles". The meaning or function of these holes could not be ascertained.

At Nonakado, 5 groupings were selected for excavation. Oval-shaped pits were discovered under all of them. The smallest of them was  $85 \times 12$  cm and 75 cm in depth; the largest one measured  $125 \times 70 \times 60$  cm. Another measured  $110 \times 88 \times 75$  cm. A fourth was accompanied by a deep but narrow hole, and a fifth was an irregular-shaped pit, which nevertheless could have contained a corpse in a contracted position. The second one mentioned above was accompanied by small holes in four corners, the meaning of which was not clear. No artifacts or other remains were found in those pits.



Fig. a) Location of Stone Circles in Hokkaido and Northern Honshu.

### 3. Stone Circles of Otoe

In his investigations at Otoe KOMAI found, in all, ten stone circles, more or less arranged along a straight line, extending from N to S (KOMAI, Fig. 11). The smallest circle measured 1.5 m in diameter, two were 2 m, three measured 3 m, three more were 4 m, and one was 5 m in diameter. Six of these were



excavated, and all six revealed a tomb-like pit under them. The smallest pit, under a stone circle with a diameter of 4 m, measured  $0.5 \times 1.2$  and 1.1 m in depth. It yielded no remains, to say nothing of a corpse or bones. One pit, which was  $2.1 \times 1.5$  and 0.5 m deep, yielded some broken pieces of red lacquer from the bottom of the pit. Two of them, measuring  $1.45 \times 1.45 \times 0.87$  m and  $1.0 \times 1.4 \times 1.0$  m respectively, yielded one jade bead in the north-western corner of the pit-bottom. Also one obsidian arrow-point was discovered in the surrounding ground of one of them. In another pit, measuring  $1.8 \times 1.5 \times 1.18$  m, were found two jade beads at about the center of the pit-bottom. The largest pit, measuring  $2.5 \times 2.5 \times 1.0$  m, which was located approximately in the middle of the whole group and under a circle of 4 m in diameter with 10 upright pieces, the largest of which measured 1 m in total height, yielded 10 jade beads in the north-western corner of the pit-bottom, one scraper of chert, and some broken pieces of pottery around the pit. No other remains were excavated.

In 1956, KOMAI located three more stone circles to the south of the above ten. They were aligned on a north-south axis and were surrounded by four earthen walls or banks on four sides partly broken. Characteristic of this group, distinct from the northern group, was the absence of standing stones. Only some rather conspicuous natural stones were piled up on the ground. When they were excavated, all of them revealed finely worked-out floors each measuring  $2 \text{ m} \times 1.5 \text{ m}$  and evenly paved with flag-stones. The pits were 0.4 m deep, except one which was 0.7 m deep. In one of them, in the north-eastern corner of the paved floor, were found 17 jade beads, with 6 more scattered elsewhere. Eleven obsidian arrow-points were arranged in a row facing east, and two more facing west. To the south of the rows of arrow-points was a short bow lacquered in Chinese red. The color effect of black (obsidian), red (lacquer), and green (jade) against the greyish white of the stone-paved floor was exquisite, KOMAI reports (KOMAI, p. 36). The other two pits yielded 9 and 6 smaller jade beads respectively, and one obsidian arrow-point. In the surrounding ground were found many broken pieces of red lacquer.

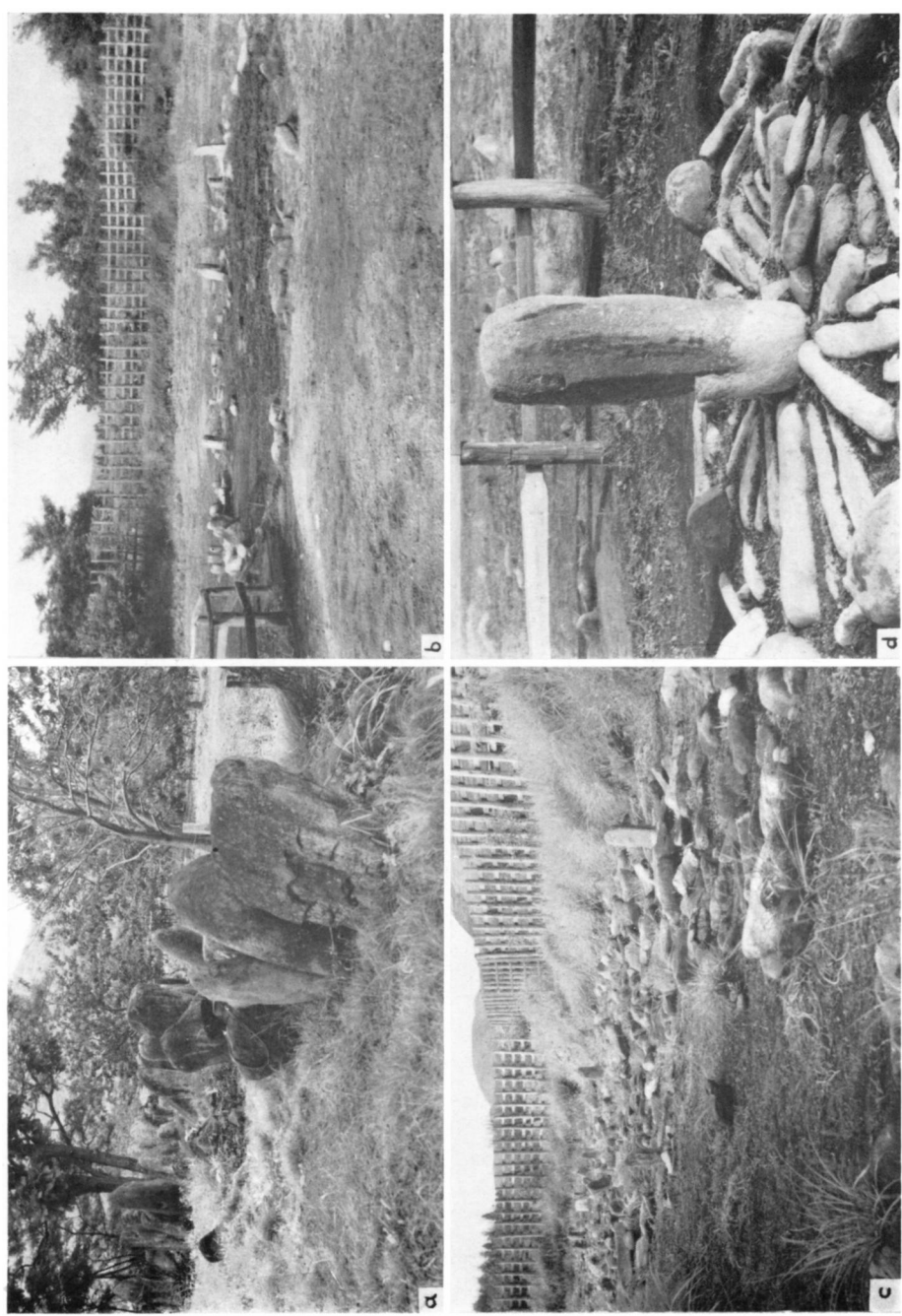
It is to be noted in this connection, KOMAI remarks (pp. 48-49), that the bows of Japanese and ancient Chinese are long, six feet or more in length, but Ainu and some tribes living in the north-western districts of China used short bows, 3 to 4 feet long.

#### 4. Other Stone Circles of Hokkaido

In 1951, KOMAI excavated five stone circles at Kaributo. All of them were of a horned cairn type, with seven to nine rather low, heavy stones surrounding a spot thickly covered with small stones. Three of them measured 1.5 m in diameter, one measured 2.5 m, and a fifth, somewhat isolated from the other four, measured 2.4 - 2.8 m in diameter.

All revealed a pit underneath, the measures of which were as follows:  $1.5$  (or  $2.0$ )  $\times 1.5$  (or  $2.0$ )  $\times 0.6$  (or  $1.0$ ) m (deep). In one of those pits nothing was discovered. In two of them were found two jade beads each, while in

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*a* Mikasayama  
near Otaru  
*b* Nakadori near Oyu  
*c* Manza near Oyu  
*d* Manza near Oyu

another five jade beads were discovered. In the last and biggest, one large jade bead was found. In one pit yielding two jade beads, were also found one stone perçoir, in the south-western corner of the paved floor, and a mass of rotten black soil clearly marked out from the surrounding red earth that filled the pit. The size of the black mass was 1.2 m  $\times$  0.9 m. That could have been the size of a corpse buried in a contracted position. In two others, yielding two and five jade beads respectively, some broken pieces of bone were found but it was impossible to determine whether they were human or not.

In 1950 and 1951, KOMAI examined the stone circles at and near Nishizakiyama, Yoichi, which is about 20 km to the west of Otaru. Some of the circles had been previously excavated by TAKEICHI NATORI and MASAO MORI. The large stone circle here at Nishizakiyama, about 11 m east-west, and 17 m north-south was discovered first, then, as the excavations continued, seven smaller circles, each measuring one to two meters in diameter, were discovered standing within this range. Four of them had a more or less clearly distinguishable shape. No remains could be unearthed at any of them. All had a pit underneath, about 1 m deep, and some broken pieces of Jomon pottery were found in the surrounding ground. The largest circle in this group measured 1.5 m, the next largest, 1.3 m, the other five 1.0 m in diameter.

KOMAI also found three piles of stones on a hill to the west of the circles, beyond a small marsh. The stones happened to be chopped ones, but one of the upright pieces was securely planted in the ground. The removal of loose earth and stones revealed three stone circles of the Oyu type, i. e., one big upright stone at the center, with a consolidated base made up of flat river-stones laid lengthwise on their narrower edges and radiating from the base of the center piece, covering an area of 70 to 80 cm in diameter. Under two of them were found no pit-like structures, but under a third was a pit measuring 80  $\times$  90 cm and 1 m in depth. This could have been a tomb, but the other two could not be regarded as tombs, KOMAI concluded.

In 1949, he had been told by N. NAKAMURA, an influential local resident and an amateur archaeologist, about a stone circle at Jichinyama, a hill of about 50 m above sea-level in Oshoro, near the well-known stone circle of Mikasayama. The newly-found stone circle was similar to the old one.

The whole area of Jichinyama was covered with thick groves of chestnut, oak, and maple trees. When part of the bush was cleared, a circle of 12 upright andesite stones with a diameter of 8 to 10 m was revealed. The circle was elongated in the north-south direction, and in the south-eastern corner was a pile of small river-stones. When these were removed, a pit of about 1 m in depth was discovered. The bottom of the pit was found to be a square floor, 2.12 m  $\times$  1.75 m, paved with stones from the river-bed. No remains, either bone or artifact, were discovered, but KOMAI did not hesitate to call this a tomb. The paved floor seemed to be in the same tradition as those in the southern group at Otoe.

Mikasayama is located at the foot of Jichinyama, about 10 m above sea-level. This stone circle measured 22 m on its east-west and 30 m on its north-south axis. KOMAI noticed that each of the standing stones had small

river-stones piled around its base for support. Probably each of these upright pieces had the same structure as the three sites at the back of Nishizakiyama, viz., of the Oyu type.

### 5. The Builders

Who were the builders of the stone circles in Northern Japan? It is a challenging question. The history of the human races who, in the remote past, crossed the archipelago between the Asiatic Continent and the Pacific Ocean is not yet clear. Even the racial ancestors of the present Japanese are not known exactly. As for the prehistoric man who inhabited these islands, it is becoming more and more likely on the basis of finds of stone implements that he belonged partly to a palaeolithic and microlithic culture. But his specific racial types are still obscure.

With nearly unwavering perseverance, a general opinion persists that those who established the Jomon culture were the first settlers of the Japanese islands, that they were driven by Yayoi invaders to the northern districts, and that they survive, until our day, as the Ainu people of Northern Honshu and Hokkaido. In other words, the Ainu are generally claimed to be the first inhabitants of Honshu and Hokkaido. At the beginning of this century, Dr. Y. KOGANEI declared his conviction that "Das japanische Reich war einst ein Aino-Reich"<sup>12</sup>, that during prehistoric periods only the Ainu race occupied the Japanese islands; and his fame as a scholar has tended to disarm any opponent of his theory.

H. MATSUMOTO, another partisan of this theory says: "The goodly number of skeletons hitherto found in the stone-age sites of Japan, all show a uniformity in certain characteristics, with a considerable divergence in certain other characteristics. . . . Almost all these common characteristics are also represented in the skeletons of the modern Ainu"<sup>13</sup>. Among the stone age skeletons, he says, there are three racial types, the Aoshima, the Miyato dwarfs and the Tsukumo Tall types. And among the modern Ainu "there are two racial types; the first. . . appears to correspond well to the Aoshima type and the second. . . to the Miyato Dwarf type of the stone age." But it seems that Japanese anthropologists today no longer maintain this theory.

A more recent statement also concedes that Ainu are distinct from the Japanese, and that Ainu inhabited Hokkaido and Northern Honshu at the beginning of modern times. Professor H. SUZUKI writes, "daß die Ainu seit altersher in Hokkaido autochthon sind. Einige von ihnen kamen jedoch über die Meeresstraße von Zeit zu Zeit in den äußersten Norden von Honshu und hinterließen dort ihre Spuren. Das würde das Vorhandensein von Ainu in Nord-Honshu erklären"<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Y. KOGANEI, Über die Urbewohner von Japan. Mitt. d. Deutschen Ges. f. Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens 20.1903, p. 329.

<sup>13</sup> H. MATSUMOTO, Notes on the Stone Age People of Japan. American Anthropologist 23.1921, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> HISASHI SUZUKI, Physische Anthropologie in Japan. Homo 9.1959, p. 42.

SUZUKI does not, however, reject the possibility that in an earlier period some other racial group or groups were present on the same island as occasional visitors. Such a group, for example, may be the bearers of the Moyoro Culture, so named from the 1947 excavations of the shell-mounds at Moyoro near Abashiri (eastern Hokkaido), where three layers of culture types were discovered. SUZUKI says of the skeletons found in these three layers: "In der obersten Schicht wurden mehrere Ainu-Skelette in ausgestreckter Lage gefunden"; which is exactly the custom of the Ainu of our modern times. "In der mittleren und unteren Schicht dagegen [wurden] den Ainu unähnliche Skelette und zwar in Hockerstellung gefunden. Neben den Skeletten wurden Gegenstände aus Ton, Stein und Eisen gefunden, Harpunen und Pfeilspitzen des Okhotsk genannten Typus, auch Schwerter, Äxte und andere Eisenwerkzeuge, die der Nara-Zeit (8. Jhdt. A. D.) oder der Heian-Zeit (9.-12. Jhdt.) zuzuschreiben sein dürften." Consequently "ist der Moyoro-Mensch sowohl von den alten Japanern wie von den Ainu völlig verschieden. Professor KODAMA nimmt an, daß es sich um Aleuten handelt. . ."<sup>15</sup> SUZUKI himself "ist geneigt anzunehmen, daß der Moyoro-Mensch eher Eskimo als Aleute ist. Es ist sicher von großem Interesse, daß Eskimo-ähnliche Skelette an der Nordküste von Hokkaido gefunden wurden".

The important point for us here is not the relationship of Moyoro man to the Eskimo or the Aleut, but the fact that, in bodily type as well as in the custom of burying the dead in contracted positions, Moyoro man was a foreigner in Hokkaido, not related to the Ainu. Further, the presence of his mortal remains and cultural relics in the lowest layer of the shell-mounds at Abashiri confirms his priority in that district at least. And the fact that he left shell-mounds only along the north-eastern section of the Hokkaido coast might suggest that he visited that spot frequently during a remote period, but it does not preclude the possibility of his exploring the interior of the island. We tend to believe that Moyoro man could have penetrated Hokkaido in a westerly direction almost as far as the opposite coast, where the majority of the stone circles were built; that he could, in the remotest past, have been the contemporary of the Ainu in the western part of Hokkaido as well as in the east, and that the Ainu later invaded and occupied Abashiri and its vicinity. But these are only conjectures; and if Moyoro man had anything to do with the stone circles in western Hokkaido he did not leave any other traces to show his connection with them.

The question then arises: if we cannot prove that Moyoro man built the stone circles, are we forced to believe that the Ainu did? We think not, although again there are no conclusive arguments. The Ainu themselves deny that the stone monuments are their own work; they claim that the Koro-pok-guru built them<sup>16</sup>. When KOMAI showed an obsidian scraper to an Ainu

<sup>15</sup> Cf. S. KODAMA, *Moyoro Shell-Heap* (in Japanese). 112 pp. Sapporo, Hokkaido, 1948.

<sup>16</sup> Concerning the same tradition, KOGANEI quotes (p. 326): "TORII hat auf Etorupp [= Etorofu] zwei alte Ainofrauen darüber ausgeforscht; sie erzählten diese Sage in ganz

woman and asked her if it was an Ainu artifact, she said that it was not, but that it was left in her territory by Koro-pok-guru. KOMAI quotes many Ainu as saying that they do not use stone tools but that the Koro-pok-guru did; he believes, however, that Ainu must have used them until some time ago, because objects of stone were unearthed in considerable quantities in the Ainu country, e. g. in the shell-mounds at Oshiranai. But Ainu tradition and the attitude of the modern Ainu disclaim any part in the building of the stone circles.

Now what about the Koro-pok-guru to whom the Ainu attribute the ancient monuments, and who are so often mentioned in Ainu myths? Did they really exist? There is no positive evidence that they did. But Ainu tradition has persistent references to foreign races from whom they consider themselves strictly distinct. KOGANEI (1903, p. 319) is of the opinion that "die sog. Koro-pok-guru, resp. Tonchi die Ainu selbst waren"<sup>17</sup>. TSUBOI, on his part, "nimmt ein anderes Volk dafür an" (ibid. p. 303); he compares their anthropological type as well as some cultural properties with those of the Eskimo; he also presumes their migration from Honshu to Yezo (= Hokkaido) and further north<sup>18</sup>. Is it a mere coincidence that KODAMA (1948) considers the bodily type of Moyoro man to resemble that of the Eskimo? It is still not possible to identify the Koro-pok-guru, yet there is clear evidence that a group of people other than the Ainu spent short periods of time in Hokkaido.

Culturally as well as anthropologically, close similarities do exist between Ainu and the majority of the native tribes further north, especially with those living along the sea of Okhotsk. But our natives in Hokkaido have been threatened and overrun in sudden attacks by northern tribes. Impressive fortifications, such as those in Kushiro, built in former times by the Ainu against the foreign invaders can still be admired today along the northern coast of Hokkaido. We are convinced that the invaders were natives of the Saghalien island and its vicinity. Gilyaks and Tunguse tribes live there, and records of Japanese historians often refer to them as having invaded Hokkaido. GUSINDE saw some engravings, or designs looking like a script, in the Fugoppe Cave near Otaru, which are believed to be of Tungusic origin<sup>19</sup>. In short, historic evidence for Tunguse invasion and temporary stay in Ainu territory seems sound.

Are we justified in claiming that Tunguse built the stone circles which are so numerous in the western half of Hokkaido, and which only occur in

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derselben Form, wie sie auf Yezo verbreitet ist, und sie nannten dieses Sagenvolk *Toishokuru*. . . Weiter nordwärts hört aber diese Sage auf".

<sup>17</sup> KOGANEI (ibid., p. 329) has consulted the opinion of other authors. . . and has found out that the majority of them refused the Koro-pok-guru hypothesis. He therefore repeated that the stone-age man in Japan was Ainu.

<sup>18</sup> KOGANEI quotes further (p. 303): "TSUBOI behandelt die Frage betreffend das Schicksal der Koropokguru, ob sie in Yezo ausgestorben sind oder ob irgendwo ihre Nachkommen noch existieren. . . Unter den jetzt existierenden Menschen im Norden haben die körperlichen Eigenschaften und die Sitten und Gebräuche der Eskimo große Ähnlichkeit mit denen der Koropokguru. . . Es ist doch nicht mehr zweifelhaft, daß zwischen beiden ein inniger Zusammenhang besteht. . .".

<sup>19</sup> Cf. T. NATORI, Wall Engravings of the Fugoppe Cave in Hokkaido, Japan; Excavated in 1951 (in Japanese). The Japanese Journal of Ethnology 16, 1951, pp. 85-89.

isolated spots in the northern part of Honshu ? To us, this claim seems to be fairly well-grounded. First of all, the Ainu themselves are out of the question, on the basis of their own testimony as well as of other evidence, e. g. the fact that originally they were food-gatherers. Then, in addition to the historical evidence for Tunguse invasions, there is the fact that the mass of stone circles are found on a relatively narrow strip in north-western Hokkaido, and that their number in northern Honshu is comparatively small ; finally, that this kind of stone monument is wanting in the south of Honshu, supports the conjecture that some foreign factor was working particularly in the north of Japan. Therefore, chiefly by dint of an "argumentum per exclusionem", we propose a Tungusic tribe as the probable builders of the stone circles in the northern Japanese archipelago <sup>20</sup>.



Fig. b) Tombs of Orkhon, Mongolia (designed by RADLOFF, R. TORII, *Les Ainou*... p. 311).

Forty years ago the explorer R. TORII, with reference to RADLOFF's monograph, "Atlas der Alterthümer der Mongolei", published in 1892, regarded the stone circles as definitely Tunguse, and as almost certain evidence, therefore, of Tunguse colonization of parts of Japan : "... que du 5<sup>e</sup> au 9<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'ère chrétienne, les Tounougousses de Mandchourie et de Sibérie, les *Po-hai-Mahat*, influencés par les Tokouïés de l'Orkhon, ont dû créer plusieurs établissements dont quelques-uns permanents, semble-t-il, dans le bassin du fleuve Ishikari [Western Hokkaido] et sur d'autres points de la côte du Sud et du Sud-Ouest de l'île de Yezo. Bien qu'à ce sujet, les traditions Ainou et les historiens japonais soient absolument tous muets, nous croyons cette idée très fondée, voir même certaine. Si les hommes ne parlent pas, les 'circles of stone', les tombeaux, et les 'blockhaus' en terre encore en place aujourd'hui, eux, parlent assez haut pour nous convaincre. Ces ruines ou vestiges laissés par les *Mahat*, relativement nombreux, n'ont rien de commun, ni de près, ni de loin, avec ceux laissés par les Ainou, et les Japonais encore moins ; mais, par contre, ils sont identiques à ceux que nous voyons sur les rives de l'Orkhon en Mongolie et de l'Jenisseï dans la Sibérie méridionale". And further (1919) : "Il ne nous semble pas nous aventurer beaucoup, en affirmant que du 7<sup>e</sup> au 10<sup>e</sup> siècle, les Tounougousses *Po-hai-Mahat* de Mandchourie et de Sibérie ont réellement occupé et colonisé au Yézo, tout le bassin du fleuve ou rivière Ishikari... et aussi de nombreux points sur la côte S.O. et Sud de l'île."

TORII was not able in his time to determine the scope and function of the stone monuments in Northern Japan, nor have any documents or written

<sup>20</sup> Cf. AKIYOSHI SUDA, Bibliography of Physical Anthropology of the Tunguse. *Jinrui-Gaku Zasshi* 61.1949-50, pp. 147-151.

explanations left behind by Tungusic invaders yet been discovered to tell us any more about their purpose. Evidently certain types of monuments in Siberia and Mongolia served as tombs. But it is by no means certain that those in Japan served as tombs; because, although pits have been discovered under many of them, remains of human bodies have not been found. Recent investigations in other parts of the world have shown how multifarious the scope of megalithic monuments really is, and to us it seems likely that the stone circles in Northern Japan have served as have similar monuments elsewhere, for meetings and assemblies of the tribesmen, the pits in the ground being separate spots for a gathering of the souls and ancestors' spirits on those occasions <sup>21</sup>.

KOMAI declares (KOMAI, p. 4) that "Hokkaido and Siberia were closely connected with each other from ancient times", that "the stone circle was a type of tomb prevailing in the Eurasian Continent for many centuries", and that the circles in Japan (KOMAI, p. 3) "are relics left by the Ainu". But we are convinced that the Ainu are of substantially the same culture type as the old Siberian food-gatherers, that they came from North-East Asia to Hokkaido very early, and that not they, but Tunguse who invaded Hokkaido many years later, shortly before the beginning of the Christian era, left behind them the stone circles, products of their megalithic creed. Megalithic ceremonial included rites for maintaining close contact with the dead. Such rites are foreign to the feeling and practice of the Ainu, who took special care to prevent souls from returning to their homes <sup>22</sup>. It is out of the question for any Ainu to try to renew his relationship with a departed soul.

To go back again to the legendary people of Ainu folklore, the Koro-pok-guru, it is quite possible that they really were Tunguse, distorted by the lapse of time and by tradition passed on from one generation to another, into fantastic personalities. According to Ainu tradition they were small people dwelling in pits <sup>23</sup>. In reality there is no noticeable difference in the size of the Tunguse and the Ainu today; both are small races. Such a distortion may have been the work of fear and fancy. After all, people tend to minimize the

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<sup>21</sup> R. HEINE-GELDERN (Das Megalithproblem. In: Beiträge Österreichs zur Erforschung der Vergangenheit und Kulturgeschichte der Menschheit. Horn 1959, p. 163) demonstrates "die formale Übereinstimmung dieser steinernen Denkmäler... [und zwar] die ungeheuer weiträumige und durch alle Zeiten gehende Verbreitung solcher megalithischer Grundformen, wie der Menhire, Menhirreihen, dolmenartigen Denkmäler, Steinkreise und Steinvierecke...".

<sup>22</sup> ITSUHIKO KUBODERA, The Antiquated Funeral Customs in Yezo-Ainu. — The Japan Science Review 9.1958, pp. 72-77, writes: "It is beyond the bounds of our imagination that the Ainu are in extreme fear of death and take it as impurity... It can safely be said that [the] funeral customs of the Ainu have been developed to escape from the terror and calamity that might be caused by the departed souls, by means of throwing away the dead body into the grave on a mountain, sending him away to the other world which they believe is under the ground, and thereby making it impossible for him to come back to this world again."

<sup>23</sup> It is a strange coincidence that native tribes in Southern India also declare the megalithic monuments there, which are true stone boxes in shape, to be the work of pygmies, i. e. people of very short stature (cf. V. ROSNER, p. 182).



size and/or capacity of their enemies, at least through their subconscious desire. Moreover it is significant that this myth enjoys a very limited range of geographic distribution <sup>24</sup>.

### Conclusion

Our readers should not be disappointed if we have not been able to explain precisely the meaning or scope of the stone circles in Northern Japan. Their builders themselves did not leave any kind of explanation behind. For our analysis there was no other way than to compare them with similar constructions elsewhere, preferably those in Asia. There are similarities in megalithic monuments found all over the world, and the great variety in type and shape of the stone objects as well as in related ceremonies and their interpretation must have its origin in one ideology. In general terms, it might be said that megalithic monuments are a memorial to or tombs for the dead. They are also spots where heroes and distinguished ancestors receive homage, which comes close to religious veneration. No wonder the same spot has been used for civic festivities as well as for mourning and religious performances.

The origin of this nearly universal complex of practices, ceremonies and monuments, can be only one, and in principle the same for its enormous entirety <sup>25</sup>.

As to the time when that complex of megalithic ideology might have reached Northern Japan (cf. LÖHR, *op. cit.* p. 148), we are again not sure. It can be said with historic certainty that the first megalithic vestiges in Southeast Asia appear in the Iron Age. This is also the time at which the genuine dolmens in Southern Honshu are dated. Consequently the stone circles in Northern Japan were probably built more or less contemporaneously, i. e., about the middle of the first millenium of the Christian era.

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<sup>24</sup> J. MILNE writes in his article entitled "Notes on the Koro-pok-guru or Pit-Dwellers of Yezo and the Kurile Islands" (*Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 10.1882, p. 194 : "The Ainos say that the Koro-pok-guru lived in cone-like huts, built over holes dug in the earth... They were short in stature, and the Ainos say that they exterminated them...").

<sup>25</sup> R. HEINE-GELDERN (*Das Megalithproblem*, p. 163) formulates the result of his investigations as follows : "Alle diese Übereinstimmungen sind so zahlreich und betreffen vielfach solche Einzelheiten, daß sie nur durch die Annahme der Herkunft aller echten Megalitherscheinungen aus einer gemeinsamen Wurzel erklärt werden können."

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