

Yoshinogari Ruins Could be the Next World Heritage Site for Japan

World heritage sites are sites throughout the world which are considered to have outstanding, unique, values and significance. World heritage sites are either natural or man made sites. The man made sites include those that represent a masterpiece of human creative genius or exhibit an important interchange of values within a cultural area of the world. They can also represent a unique culture or civilisation, either still living or disappeared. The man made world heritage sites can display exceptional examples of architecture which illustrate significant stages in human history. These sites also show the unique relationship between those human settlement and human interactions with the environment. Natural world heritage sites, of which there are only currently three in Japan, are those sites which contain exceptional natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty. Japan currently has 14 world heritage sites. There are many sites within Japan which could potentially become world heritage sites. The Yoshinogari Ruins are an important cultural site. They date from the Yayoi period in Japan and detail an ancient society, they have important historical significance as they represent the formation of a society which was rich in traditional cultures. The Yoshinogari Ruins would be classified as a man made/cultural world heritage site, however, they would also contain some components of a natural world heritage site as they are a place of significant natural beauty. The Yoshinogari ruins show how a human society influenced the natural landscape, this is demonstrated by the impressively large moats surrounding the villages. The loss of any world heritage site would mean that humanity as a whole was deprived of an important site of the cultural and environmental development of the world. Due to their cultural and historical value the loss the Yoshinogari Ruins would deprive the entire world of an invaluable site.

During the Yayoi period of Japanese history, which spanned six centuries from three centuries BCE to the third century CE, two very important events occurred. The first was the switch from a primarily nomadic lifestyle to living in permanent settlements; the second was the beginning of the cultivation of red grained rice, which was adopted from Korea. Yoshinogari is the largest of all the Yayoi period ruins to have been excavated in Japan. The Yoshinogari Ruins are located throughout the Kanzaki area of the Saga prefecture (Mitigawa town, Higashisefuri village and Kanzaki town). The Yoshinogari Ruins are the centre of the nation state; it is considered a nation state as Japan was not yet formed as a country. The nation state eventually developed and became modern day Japan. The nation state of Yoshinogari has proved to be an invaluable source for understanding the 600 years of the Yayoi period. The country referred to as Yamatai, which is actually modern day Japan, was first noted in the Chinese chronicles "Gishi Wajinden." As the location, size and layout correspond to the description given in the Gishi Wajinden chronicles the Yoshinogari Ruins are believed to be this ancient country (Yamatai), making it the centre of the nation state and a site of significant cultural and historical importance. Yamatai has further significance in that it was the realm of Queen Himiko. Queen Himiko created a state in the first half of the 3rd century by forming allegiances and conquering political opposition.

The Yoshinogari Hills, the location of the Yoshinogari Ruins, were originally designated for one of Saga Prefecture's industrial areas, however the project was suspended upon discovery of ancient relics in the site. In 1986 the site was researched and it was concluded that the Yoshinogari area was of important cultural and historical significance. Bronze and copper knives found in the Yoshinogari Ruins illustrate their significance as an academic site for the study of early societies. In 1992 the Yoshinogari Ruins were designated a National Historical Park with the nearby surrounding area made in to a Saga prefectural park. The park (including the national land) contains 73.7 hectares (38.3 hectares of national land, in which Yoshinogari is located) and 35.4 hectares of prefectural

land. The relics discovered at the site of the Yoshinogari Ruins have shown characteristics of different stages in the Yayoi era. This has helped to date and classify the Yayoi period into three distinct stages. In the early Yayoi period, villages were formed over a stretch of hills in Yoshinogari. A moated village was created and there are signs of the transition from a village to a nation state. In the middle Yayoi period, a large circular moat was created around the southern hills. Burial mounds were created for the leaders of the society and many of the burial jars discovered within cemeteries in Yoshinogari date to this period. In the late Yayoi period, Yoshinogari developed and became the largest moated village in the country and was encircled by a large moat. The village featured two areas, the Northern Inner Enclosure and the Southern Inner Enclosure. The Northern Inner Enclosure was particularly remarkable for its large buildings during Yoshinogari's golden age.

The Yoshinogari Ruins attract over 900,000 visitors every year, with many visitors being tourists from foreign countries. While many of the buildings have been reconstructed to give visitors an example of life in Yoshinogari, the excavated ruins, with many still showing the actual structures of the buildings, are also preserved. If the Yoshinogari Ruins were to become a world heritage site the preservation would need to be continued. It would also be important to maintain the prefectural land around the national land to provide a buffer zone to protect the Yoshinogari Ruins.

The Yoshinogari Ruins have many of the attributes of world heritage sites. The Yoshinogari Ruins have immense historical and cultural significance, they could easily be nominated to become Japan's next world heritage site. As they are considered by many historians and also Japanese people, to be the site of the legendary nation state of Yamatai, realm of Queen Himiko, they have special historical and cultural significance. Archaeological digs are also revealing close ties with Korea, from which rice farming was adopted in the Yayoi period in the Yoshinogari area. Links to Chinese culture and customs are also being discovered. The Yoshinogari Ruins represent a unique civilisation with cultural significance for the whole of Japan. The Yoshinogari Ruins also display an example of exceptional architecture from the period. The distinctive moat encircled villages located within the Yoshinogari Ruins are characteristic of the Yayoi period. Moats first appeared in the country of modern day Japan a little under 100 years before the beginning of the Yayoi period. The Yoshinogari Ruins meet the criteria necessary to become a world heritage site and have great potential to be the next world heritage site for Japan. The Yoshinogari Ruins are an important cultural and historical site to many people. They are also of historical interest to many tourists as they detail the early creation of the nation state of Yoshinogari and of the Japanese society as a whole.

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