

PREFACE

The present volume of *Al-Rafidan* features a special collection of papers dedicated to Professor Katsuhiko Ohnuma to commemorate his 70th birthday and his retirement from the Institute for Cultural Studies of Ancient Iraq, Kokushikan University. It is our great honour to edit this memorial issue representing the numerous people who have been associated with him for long as his colleagues, friends, and students.

Professor Ohnuma's career in archaeology began in the early 1970s when he became interested in lithic technology at the graduate school of Nanzan University, Japan. His research scope soon expanded considerably after his participation in a series of archaeological excavations in Iraq, immediately after the completion of his master dissertation in 1973 on the Palaeolithic lithic technology of the Japanese archipelago. This blend of two major subjects of archaeology, lithic technology and field research in West Asia, shaped the unique characteristics of Professor Ohnuma's research in the decades that followed.

In his pursuit of lithic technology, Professor Ohnuma was responsible for making considerable achievements during the 1980s while doing his doctoral research at London University. Equipped with great skills in replication manufacturing of lithic artifacts, his research on lithic technology began to incorporate reading of prehistoric stone tools from the perspective of his own experience of knapping. The research eventually shed new light on the nature of the technological transition from the Middle to the Upper Palaeolithic at Ksal Akil, one of the key sites of this period in Lebanon. His expertise in lithic manufacturing yielded unique contributions to clarifying issues on the technology of other periods and regions, including the pressure technology of the late Upper Palaeolithic of Japan. It is also noteworthy that Professor Ohnuma played an utmost important role in developing lithic experimental archaeology in Japan; a number of archaeologists of the younger generation, including both of us, have learned flint knapping at his laboratory.

In terms of the field archaeology of West Asia, Professor Ohnuma's contributions can be seen most prominently in the research on Mesopotamian history. Starting with fieldwork at the Roman sites of Al Tar in the Kerbala desert, he participated in a dozen of archaeological excavations in Iraq during the 1970s and the 1980s, including those at the Early Dynastic sites of Tell Gubba and Kish. Later, in the 1990s, and onward, neighboring countries like Syria and Iran, and most recently, Kyrgyz, Central Asia, have become part of his research field. Among others, like the excavations at the Middle Assyrian city of Tābetu, which resulted in the outstanding discovery of a large collection of cuneiform tablets, one may mention the integrated research project on the Middle Euphrates of Syria as a highlight of Professor Ohnuma's research on Mesopotamian history. Albeit focusing on the Bronze Age site of Ghanem al-Ali, its combination with the multi-disciplinary research of the surrounding region, an approach generated most likely from his academic backgrounds as a prehistorian, made a great contribution to clarify the formation processes of the tribal society of the third millennium BC as a result of the long-term social development starting in an earlier period.

The papers assembled in this special issue are dedicated by archaeologists who have worked with him in any of the above research projects. While belonging to a variety of institutions other than the Kokushikan University, they gather here to acknowledge their enjoyable experience of working with Professor Ohnuma as well as his invaluable academic contributions. All the contributors of this volume wish this truly cheerful gentleman many more fruitful years to come.

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