

CTS Domestication Seminar

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(Center for Theoretical Study)

Praha 1, Husova 4, Monday 23rd February 2026

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SEA PEOPLES:

Animal Domestication and Animal Rituals among Medieval Maritime Hunter-Gatherers

During the Middle Ages (6th to 12th centuries), a unique maritime hunter-gatherer culture spread across the northern Japanese archipelago, from Hokkaido Island to Sakhalin Island, centred along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. This culture is known as the Okhotsk culture. The basis of their subsistence economy was coastal fishing and the hunting of large marine mammals. They maintained economic ties with the continental and central Japanese archipelago state societies and were also long-distance traders. In settlements on remote islands, pigs and dogs were domesticated and served as food sources. Stable isotope analysis of excavated animal bones reveals that pigs and dogs were maintained on distinct diets. They also held a bear cult, and this animal ritual is continuous with the bear rituals of later Ainu culture. This report discusses how medieval maritime hunter-gatherers utilized domesticated animals as a means of adapting to the environment of remote island regions. It also presents the current understanding of how these archaeological materials can help reconstruct the spiritual culture of medieval maritime hunter-gatherer societies, focusing on the distinction between animals used for domestication and animals used in animal rituals.

While this report explains archaeological phenomena along the North Pacific coast, it shares common aspects with the spread and migration phenomena observed in the Viking world of Northern Europe and the Thule culture of the far north of North America during the same period.