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**SURVEYS ON SITE OF 2ND WARD OF THIRD
AVENUE OF THE EASTERN SECTOR, HEIJŌ
CAPITAL (ANCIENT NARA)**

ENGLISH SUMMARY

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SURVEYS ON SITE OF 2ND WARD OF THIRD AVENUE OF THE EASTERN SECTOR, HEIJŌ CAPITAL (ANCIENT NARA)

1. Progress of Research Work

The current report concerns excavation studies carried out on grounds formerly belonging to Mikasa Junior High School, on the area designated by the City of Nara for the construction of a housing complex for municipal employees. After the decision was taken to transfer the Nara Municipal Employees Housing Complex now located at Higashi-terabayashi-chō to grounds of the Mikasa Junior High School at Kita-Shinmachi 61-banchi, Nara City, questions were raised in regard to the possible existence there of buried materials of cultural interest, especially structural remains connected with the Heijō capital. In the spring of 1972, consultations were held regarding the possible existence of buried cultural materials, and during one month between August 1 and September 2 of that year a preliminary study, preparatory excavation, was carried out in parallel with a geological survey of the area. This preliminary study, carried out under the direction of Toshio Kishi, Hitoshi Sawamura, and Tetsuya Nakamura, brought to light the existence of streets running checkerboard-type in both an east-west and a north-south direction (in keeping with the checkerboard-type *jōbō* system of street layout

used in the Heijō capital) and also the existence of structural remains dating from the previous Kofun period. Based on the results of this preliminary survey, it was decided that, at the very least, a fullscale excavation study should be carried out on the site in question, and on April 17, 1973, an Excavation Committee for the Site of the Nara Municipal Housing Complex was established.

At the first meeting of the committee on May 10, 1973, Seiichirō Yoshimura was selected as chairman. In keeping with a general policy of avoiding insofar as possible the building of new structures over structural remains in close proximity to the point where the two streets of the ancient capital intersected, decisions were made regarding the location of the new municipal buildings and the surface areas to be excavated. It was decided to give the task of surveying to The Heijō Imperial Palace Site Excavation Section of the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, and it was furthermore decided to divide the site in question into an eastern and a western sector and to similarly divide the survey itself into two parts, one to be carried out during the summer and the other to be carried out during the the winter.

The first survey, corresponding to the 83rd excavation study of the Heijō Imperial Palace Site Excavation Section, was carried out during a 2-month period between August 1 and October 9, 1973, and covered an area of approximately 3,200 square meters. The survey revealed structural remains related to residences occupied in the Nara and early Heian Periods. These were located in what were once known as *tsubo* no.15 and *tsubo* no. 10, on either side of a small north-south street within the ward (*bō*) in question.

The second survey, corresponding to the 86th excavation study of the same survey group, took nearly four months to complete (February 12 to June 4, 1974), and covered a surface area of approximately 3,000 square meters. This survey revealed structural remains from the central section of *tsubo* no. 15, together with a trench along the western side of the large street (*Nibō Oji*) forming the ward boundary. At the Excavation Committee meeting of May 13, 1974, it was decided to propose no changes in the plans for new construction as brought to light by the excavation study.

2. General Description of Research Work

The survey was carried out at Kita-Shinmachi 61 (Nara-shi) on an area of approximately 6,200 square meters, designated as the site for a Nara municipal employees housing complex. The ground in question is alluvial soil typical of the northern edge of the Nara Plain. The surface presently has an elevation of approxi-

mately 61.3 meters, but this includes a surface layer added in laying the school grounds to the site formerly belonged. It is believed that before its inclusion in said school grounds it had an elevation of approximately 60.9 meters, the same as that of surrounding rice paddies. The site in question, located in the area between two small rivers, the Sahogawa to the east and the Komogawa to the west, corresponds to *tsubo* no. 10 and *tsubo* no.15 of the 2nd Ward of the Third Avenue of the “left” (or eastern) sector of the Heijō capital, according to the *jōbō* system of enumeration then in use. The southern edge of the site borders the ancient *Sanjō Jōkanji* (present-day Ōmiya-dōri) running through the center of the ward, and the eastern side borders the ancient *Nibō Ōji* on the eastern ward boundary. The area occupied by the Mikasa Junior High School and its grounds previously corresponded either wholly or in part to four *aza* (small neighborhood divisions, in this case having the name Myōden (明田), Takahi (高樋), Takekaito (竹垣内), Ōkura (大蔵), the boundaries of which for the most part faithfully the ancient land divisions under the *jōbō* system.

For purposes of the survey, the site in question were christened as belonging to Areas 6AFI-G and 6AFI-H, primarily the latter. The eastern area was divided into a long north-south strip provisionally called the “eastern section,” a similar strip along the western side known as the “western section,” and a “center section” between them (see fig. 2). The survey revealed two small streets (*kōji*), one running in a north-south direction and form-

ing the division between *tsubo* no.10 and no.15, and the other running in an east-west direction and marking the boundary between *tsubo* no. 15 and 16. Part of a trench running along the west side of *Nibō Ōji* was also discovered. It is possible, as a result of these findings, to estimate the east-west width of *tsubo* no.15 at 410 *shaku*. The survey brought to light the fact that *tsubo* no.15 had fences and roofed mud walls (*tsuiji*) around its outer edges. These served to shelter the inner residential area from the streets outside. In the case of *tsubo* no.10, only a relatively small portion was excavated. Due to this fact, and also to the fact that the structural remains found there were very sparse and unordered, it is not possible to offer a reconstruction of the arrangement which the buildings in that residential area once had. It is, on the other hand, possible to reconstruct the arrangement of buildings on the residential block known as *tsubo* no.15, an area whose central portion was included in the excavation study. It may be seen from the excavation study that *tsubo* no. 15 was occupied during approximately 100 years, a space of time which may be roughly subdivided into 4 periods, demarcated by alterations in the structure and placement of the various buildings within the block.

Together with structural remains from the Nara Period, a large trench from the Kofun Period was discovered. A large number of earthen and wooden utensils were found piled together in this trench, and these have become valuable materials for surmising living conditions, on the northern edge of the Nara Plain during the 5th

and 6th centuries. The eastern part of *tsubo* no.15 showed traces of a great river flood which occurred around the 15th century, after the site had been abandoned as a residential area. From the sandy soil washed in at that time, there were excavated portions of sutras written on shingles (*kokerakyō*), together with other objects related to medieval religious beliefs.

3. Structural Remains from the Nara Period

The excavated site of *tsubo* no.15 in the 2nd Ward of the Third Avenue of the eastern sector of the Heijō capital is counted among the larger areas so far excavated within ancient Nara. The excavation survey proved especially valuable in that it has enabled us to grasp in their essential features the inner structures of the residential block. The most prominent set of structural remains indicates occupancy for a period of about 100 years, from the beginning of the 8th century until the early part of the 9th century. It is apparent that building alterations were carried out at various times in such a way as to mark, in rough terms, 4 periods within the larger time span. On the basis of what may be deduced from the structural remains of *tsubo* no.15, let us here, by way of summary, give some general conclusions regarding this example of an urban residential lot in ancient Japan.

During the Nara Period, the block known as *tsubo* no. 15 in the 2nd Ward of Third Avenue in the “left” (or eastern) sector of the capital was located some 500

meters to the southeast of the Heijō Palace. It occupied a choice piece of land, bordering two important streets, *Sanjō Jōkanji* on the south and *Nibō Ōji* on the east. The block was not subdivided into small subsectors, and it seems appropriate to view it as having been granted as an entire *one-tsubo* lot for residential purposes. Reasons for supporting this view are: 1) no evidence of efforts to build substantial structures (earthen walls, etc.) in order to realize a full-scale subdivision; 2) the structures thought to be the central buildings seem to have formed something approximating a set of two buildings each, aligned in rows to the east and west, respectively, of the open space running north and south through the center of the block; 3) even if one should divide the area into 4 sub-areas in accordance with the placement of fences within the *1-tsubo* block, the number of buildings per sub-area would be smaller than one should expect if each sub-area corresponded to an independent household. One of the buildings was a very large structure with 10 support posts (forming a wall 9 *ken* in length) along its longer side, suggesting a residence of a scale for which an entire *tsubo* lot was likely seen as appropriate. Among the excavated artifacts, there are few which give us any indications of the status of the householder, but the fact that there were unearthed pottery glazed in two or three different colors should be seen as important in this regard. Based on the precedent of usage at the Fujiwara capital (694-710), this fact would indicate a household of the lower fifth rank or below. However, from considerations of the choice

location of the site, it is possible to surmise that the householder was of very high rank.

The arrangement of buildings and other structures on the *1-tsubo* residential lot (equal to 1.4 hectares, or 1 *chō* plus 2 *tan* plus 24 *bu*) differed according to the period of occupancy. During Period A, fences (SA870, SA990) were constructed along lines which were approximately 50 *shaku* inside the roofed mud walls (*tsuiji*) built around the outer sides of the *1-tsubo* block. These fences did not, however, completely surround the four sides, but were open in various places. They seem to have functioned as a sort of screen to break the line of sight between the inner buildings and the outer walls. Such fences were built not only around the outer edges of the compound but were also erected in interior locations (SA961, SA969). From the fact that relatively small-scale buildings were found toward the northern edge of the compound, and also from that the various structures were arranged in rows on the east and west sides of the compound, respectively it is surmised that the main entrance to the *1-tsubo* lot was found along the south side. In other words, a gate opened in the roofed mud wall along the *Sanjō Jōkanji*, and there may have been another inner gate opening in the fence thought to have been erected about 50 *shaku* in front of the outer wall. The buildings within the inner fence were divided into an eastern and western group. In the eastern group were three buildings, designated, from the south, SB974, SB980, and SB989. In the western group, the buildings are designated, from the south, SB

862, SB964, and SB868. Among the two groups, SB 974 and SB862, while different in scale and somewhat different in structure, may, from considerations of their positional relationships, be reasonably considered to have been buildings of the same type. In the case of SB980 and SB 864, the same observation made, SB989 and SB868, located toward the north side of the compound, do not, however, show any strong points of mutual correspondence and should be seen as having distinct functions. The excavated well (SE968) is located between the eastern and western groups and may reasonably be thought to have been used in common by the inhabitants of both sides of the compound.

A well-known piece of written information that gives some indication of the arrangement of buildings on urban residential lots during the Nara Period is the *Kaoku Shizai Seihen no Gean* (家屋資材請返解案) with its description of a house hold in the 3rd Ward of Seventh Avenue in ancient Nara's western sector. According to this description, the main house had a floor and a roof of thatched cypress bark (*hiwada*). It was located in the center of the lot, which also included a structure serving as a kind of barn, a grass-thatched kitchen (*kuriya*), and a storehouse for foodstuffs. Based on this example, we may suppose that both SB980 and SB864, both of which had overhanging eaves and probably had floors, were "main houses," while SB974 and SB862, to the south of the main houses, may be seen as supplementary houses forming part of the living premises of the main houses. In the unexcavated area remaining to the south

of the two structures surmised to be supplementary houses, there is space on which another structure could have been built on both the east and west sides. However, if one conceives of an open space serving as a sort of courtyard, within the inner fence then it seems likely enough that there may have originally been no other buildings in this area. While it is impossible to make any definitive statements regarding the functions of SB989 and SB868 on the north side, they may quite likely have served as kitchen and barn. According to such a scheme, one may surmise that within *tsubo* no.15, there were on the east and west sides, respectively, a "main" and "supplementary" house, while the kitchen, barn and well similarly formed a kind of set. It may be further surmised that the compound as a whole was occupied by two families who shared the same kitchen and other outbuildings. The compound as a whole would, for official purposes, have been considered as one "household" (*he*), even though living arrangements within the compound were shared by the family registered as the "householder" (*henushi*), together with a family in some sense subordinate to it. within the excavated area there were found no traces of small structures that might be designated as rice storage bins. It is possible, however, that such structures might have been built in one of the unexcavated areas beyond the inner fence. (See fig. 36.)

During Period B, that is to say, around the middle of the 8th century, a reconstruction took place. During this process, two new buildings, SB987 and SB980,

which may Perhaps be considered as replacements for SB864 and SB980, respectively, were built in the area to the north of the former "main houses." The supplementary houses SB974 and SB861 (corresponding to SB862, modified in the interim) were similarly removed, and one may posit their reconstruction to the south of the former locations. In other words, the "main" and "supplementary" houses were reconstructed on sites outside their Period A locations. On the other hand, the outbuildings of the former period seem to have been moved from their locations at the north side of the compound to new locations (SB964, SB962, etc.) near the center of the compound, perhaps because of a functional consideration of bringing them closer to the well. It was from this period that the roofs of the "main houses" were covered with tile instead of thatch. Certain of the principles of building arrangement of Period A were carried over into Period B, and the structure of the "household" appears not to have changed greatly.

During Period C, toward the end of the 8th century, *tsubo* no.15 underwent an east-west division and buildings no longer stood on the western part. The arrangement of buildings in the eastern part was different from that of the previous period, indicating a change of occupants. It is noteworthy that the beginning of Period C seems to correspond with the move of the capital to Nagaoka. The "main house" during Periods C and D was SB986 and SB970, respectively. Each had a number of outbuildings at its rear, but the total extent of the area in use by the household during the latter two periods

is not clear. However, it is important to note that this area was being used for residential purposes even after the abandonment of Heijō as the national capital, and indeed similar structural remains of the early Heian Period have been recognized both within the area of the Heijō Palace itself and in various other places throughout the northern part of the one-time capital. This indicates that in the early years of the Heian Period they remained in Heijō persons with the economic power to maintain residences within the blocks of the former capital and to erect new buildings there. It also provides us with an indication that the attempts on the part of retired sovereigns to return the capital to Heijō were not schemes built purely on idealism but no doubt had the backing of various persons of influence who remained behind in the old capital.