

RESEARCH REPORT OF NARA NATIONAL CULTURAL
PROPERTIES RESEARCH INSTITUTE NO. 44

EXCAVATION REPORT ON THE SIXTH
BLOCK IN EAST SECOND WARD
ON THIRD STREET, ANCIENT NARA
CAPITAL

ENGLISH SUMMARY

NARA NATIONAL CULTURAL PROPERTIES
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ENGLISH SUMMARY

The Study of Nara-no-miyako (Heijō-kyō) or ancient Nara city, which had been the capital of Japan during Nara period (710-794 A. D.), was established by Sadamasa Kitaura in the middle of the 19th century. He published a report on the basic plan of the central part of the ancient city (*"Heijō-kyū Daidairi Tsubowari no Zu"*, 1852.) which was the fruit of his precise field investigations and examinations of existing manuscripts. The study on the city was then succeeded and developed by such scholars as Tadashi Sekino in the following Meiji period. And the actual state of the site was firstly revealed by excavation work in 1954. Since then, on account of recent urbanization nearby, the opportunities of excavation survey preceding the constructions of new structures have been increasing, which declared urban planning of the ancient capital from the viewpoints of road pattern, use of the estates, etc. On the other hand, circumstances such as temples, markets, and government offices in the city have been ascertained.

This report presents the results of four excavations, numbers 96, 109, 121, and the one with conservation work in order to open this site to the public, carried out between 1975 and 1984. The site located in the 6th block of 2nd ward on 3rd street, the eastern sector of the city (Sa-kyō San-jō Ni-bō Roku-no tsubo). It means that the site situates southeast neighborhood to the Nara Palace. The amount of excavation area was 6,600 square meters.

The result of main excavation (96th) uncovered that there was a magnificent garden pond with stone pavement at the center of the block. Preserved quite well, the pond not only has a marvelous value but is a good historic material in order to restore the way of gardening and constructing a pond at that time.

After Agency for Cultural Affairs had designated this area as a special historic site in 1978, it was owned by Nara municipal authorities with a state subsidy to preserve this precious cultural heritage. Then the site was prepared for the opening to the public, reconstructing a replica above the original pond. It was completed in 1984.

Topographically, the site is on an alluvial apron. At the center of the block there flowed a stream (SD1525) from north to south until the beginning of the Nara period (phase A). Once it had been a river and was changed its function to a drainage canal of the block at the time of city construction. The buildings to the west of this canal (SB1570, SB1571, SB1571, SB1573, SB1542) then possibly seemed to form an office complex. The direction of them equally based with the planning of the block. (phase B)

Then at the middle of the Nara period, the stream was filled up and the garden pond (SG1504) was constructed on the trace of it. The pond was enclosed by three sides with wooden fences and buildings. Some new buildings and a well were added. This state shows that the block was fully used as a large residential estate with a garden. (phase C)

The next stage was represented by the construction of a large building (SB 1540) with base stones. It was accompanied by a small hut (SB1470) and was facing to the pond. The southern side of them and the pond were closed newly with a wooden fence. It was possibly built as a place for official ceremony with the pond in the latter half of the Nara period. (phase D)

In the end of the Nara period the pond was deserted with the abandonment of the city, but some little houses (SB1471, 1472, 1476, 1975) were still built around it.

Some of the artifacts found from the site shows the character of the area. For example, a wooden tablet found from SD1525 has letters including 'North Palace' (北宮) which possibly show the name of the place north to the site. And that might relate to the office-like arrangement of the buildings at the early stage of the site. Meanwhile, statistic analysis of the roof-tiles show that here they used the same types of tiles as those used in the Nara Palace in the middle of the Nara period (phase C). That might also add official character to the site at the time.

For the plant remains, some seeds of such fruits as peach and plum, corns of a sort of pine tree, and leaves of Japanese bead tree etc. were unearthed from the accumulated soil in the pond, which are useful to restore the garden planting around it.

As the result, it became clear that this block was continuously inhabited whole through Nara period, but the character of it seemed to change fairly concerning the construction and use of the pond. The discovery of the pond which has such a greatness in its scale and design has ever been one and only example at that time in garden history of Japan.