

RESEARCH REPORT OF NARA NATIONAL CULTURAL PROPERTIES
RESEARCH INSTITUTE NO. 50

THE NARA PALACE SITE
EXCAVATION REPORT XIII

—INVESTIGATION OF THE *DAIRI* AREA
(THE IMPERIAL DOMICILE), PART II—

ENGLISH SUMMARY

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 4. Buildings SB 4790, SB 4831; Ditch SD 4740, SD 4742; Water Tanks SX 4750, SX 4751, SX 4752, from west
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 1. Fences SA 4760, SA 4725, from east
 2. Buildings SB 4830, SB 4835; Ditches SD 4754, SD 4755, and SD 756, from west
 3. Fence SA 4761; Building SB 4800, from west
 17. Excavation no. 36, 6 AAP-M, N, P
 1. Fences SA 4781, SA 782; Buildings SB 4784, SB 4740, from south
 2. Fence SA 4761; Buildings SB 4763, SB 4740A·B; Ditch SD 4810, from west
 3. Fences SA 4792; Ditches SD 4745, SD 4747, SD 4748; Building SB 4746, from west
 18. Excavation no. 36, 6 AAP-O, P
 1. Fences SA 4690, SA 4760, SA 4762; Water Tanks SX 4750, SX 4751,

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2. Fences SA 4690, SA 4692, SA 4760, and SA 4762; Ditches SD 4735, SD 4736, from west
 3. Ditches SD 4739, SD 4740, and SD 4749; Water Tanks SX 4751, SX 4752, from southwest
19. Excavation no. 36, 6 AAP-O
 1. Ditches SD 4740, SD 4741, from west
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 2. Ditch SD 4740, from northeast
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 1. Features in eastern part, from south
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3. Western ditch of Corridor SC 156 and Fence SA 7695, from north
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ENGLISH SUMMARY

This report summarizes the achievements of excavations of the eastern half of the Inner Court or Imperial Domicile (*Dairi* 内裏) of the ancient Nara Imperial Palace (also referred to as the “Heijō 平城” Palace) site (in use 710 to 784 A.D.) in Nara City, Japan (Fig. 2). Not only does this report cover the results of six excavations carried out by the staff of the Division of the Heijō Palace Site Excavations of the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute between 1964 and 1987, but it also re-evaluates the results of three earlier excavations of the Palace Inner Court reported in the *Research Reports of Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, No. 16* in 1963. All these nine excavations completely uncovered the eastern half of the Inner Court, and the change in the arrangement of structures in the eighth century became clear. The results of these excavations also denied our long-held hypothesis that there were two sets of Inner Court complexes—the one in the west was assumed to be occupied in the early eighth century and the other in the east was assumed to be occupied later. Careful chronological analysis of structural features in this area shows that this area was the only Inner Court of the Heijō Palace since its inception in 710 until its end in 784¹⁾.

History of Research

Before the NNCPRI staff placed trenches, it was already a well-accepted theory that the Inner Court of the Palace was located in this area. The inner courts of any ancient palaces were situated to the north of the Great Audience Hall (*Daigoku-den* 大極殿), and an earthen platform which would probably be the foundation of the Heijō Palace Great Audience Hall had been situated in the south of the excavated area. Moreover, this location occupied the highest place in the presumed palace enclosure, suggesting the importance of this particular locality.

As early as 1938, structural remains were excavated at three localities in this area. In 1953 in the process of widening a nearby street, similar remains were discovered, and the national government excavated the surrounding area in January, 1954. In 1960, '61, and '62, three successive excavations were conducted by the NNCPRI staff. The achievements of these

1) An old hypothesis was that there were two sets of central complexes, each of which consisted of the Inner Court, Great Audience Hall, and the Halls of State [*Chōdō-in*] organized vertically from the north. One was located in the north of the Suzaku Gate [South Central Gate] of the Palace, now called the western section, and the other was located in the north of the Mibu Gate, now referred to as the eastern section. Results of recent excavations in these areas show that throughout the Nara Period (710-784) there were always two Great Audience Halls and two sets of the Halls of State (one in each section), rather than the western section being occupied earlier than the eastern section.

excavations showed that the Inner Court was almost square in shape, about three hectares in area, enclosed by a corridor, and that the structural remains discovered earlier were the foundations of an earthen wall demarcating the eastern and northern ends of the Inner Court. The results of investigations presented in this report have added greatly to the knowledge acquired in these previous researches.

Structure of the Inner Court and the Change in It

A 1319 copy of the Inner Court drawing (Fig. 110) shows that the Inner Court complex was divided into three functionally specialized areas: Space A, which was designated as an area for the emperor's daily private life and called *Gozaisho* 御在所; Space B, in which the emperor held rituals, seasonal banquets, parties, and other political activities; and Space C, for the emperor's household.

Space A was situated in the center of the Inner Court complex, Space B to the south of Space A, and Space C around Spaces A and B. Within the individual spaces, the arrangements of architectural structures changed over time. Our investigations revealed that the arrangements evolved through six phases during the Nara Period. Furthermore, our careful examinations of discovered artifacts and historic sources made it possible to correspond each phase to the reigns of individual emperors. Discussion of the Inner Court complex in each phase is as follows:

Phase I (710 to ca. 718; Fig. 113) represents the Inner Court during the reigns of the Empresses Gemmyō 元明 and Genshō 元正. It was a 180 meter long square, surrounded by a wooden fence. Both Spaces A and B were characterized by architectural structures of the same type and the same size. The structures were east-west oriented, and the floors were raised above ground. A distinguishing characteristic of the court arrangement in Phase I was that these main structures were only accompanied by yards in front of them and without any auxiliary structures or dividing fences. Space C was situated to the north of Space A, and in Space C were two large structures with multiple rooms. The structures were east-west oriented and located in the north and northeastern parts of Space A, between which was a yard.

Phase II (724 to ca. 748; Fig. 114) represents the Inner Court constructed for the enthronement of Emperor Shōmu 聖武. The whole complex had been moved slightly southward from Phase I. The plan of the complex became somewhat rectangular with a longer vertical side. The complex was enclosed by a wooden fence, similar to the case during Phase I. What distinguished the Phase II arrangement were: 1) there were auxiliary structures besides the main halls in Spaces A and B, and a few structures were grouped together; 2) Space C was divided into four major blocks;

and most importantly 3) these grouped structures and blocks were systematically divided by a fence or a corridor supported by pillars.

In the case of Space B, the main hall was accompanied by two side buildings which were north-south oriented. These three formed a U-shaped arrangement, with a front yard opening south. The east and west sides of Space B were demarcated by a single corridor, and the north side by a double corridor.²⁾ Space A was similarly characterized by the U-shaped arrangement of three structures with a front yard facing south, and additionally with a back hall and a bath house in the north. The east, west, and north sides of Space A were enclosed by a wooden fence.

Space C consisted of one block to the north of Space A (hereafter referred to as the “northern block”) and three blocks in the east of Space A. In the northern block were large, multi-room structures, as Phase I. A large, east-west oriented structure with roofed verandas (*hisashi*³⁾ 庇) in all four directions was located in the northernmost block to the east of Space A (hereafter “northeastern block”). The middle block of the three (hereafter “middle block”) were the main hall of a large structure with four roofed verandas, which was east-west oriented and accompanied by two auxiliary structures in the front and back of the main hall. The southernmost block (hereafter “southern block”) was an empty space presumably used as a plaza. The main hall in the northeastern block during Phase II was identical to the main hall of Space A, and it is likely that it was the residence of a retired emperor. After Phase II, this main hall was replaced with other structures as time passed, while the structures and their arrangement in the middle and southern blocks remained more or less the same until 784.

Phase III (746 to ca. 759; Fig. 115) represents the Inner Court during the reign of Empress Kōken 孝謙 after the Palace returned from the Kuni 恭仁 Capital south of present-day Kyoto. The structural arrangement remained basically unchanged since Phase II, although some restructuring took place in Space A and the northeastern block of Space C. On the south side of the Inner Court near the eastern end, a pavilion-like structure was newly erected. It was accompanied by wooden stairs behind it and a substructure hiding the stairs. The internal division of the Court was changed from wooden fences to earthen walls. This change probably resulted from similar structural modification to the eastern complex of the Great Audience Hall and the Halls of State situated in the south of the Inner Court; the structures supported by pillars directly planted into the ground in the eastern complex were all replaced by structures standing on foundation stones, and the

2) While a “single” corridor is a narrow corridor supported by two rows of pillars, a “double” corridor is a wide one supported by three rows of pillars.

3) A *hisashi* is a narrow aisle-like area outside of the core of a building. Throughout the text, it is referred to as a “roofed veranda.”

wooden fences were all changed to earthen walls and corridors standing on foundations stones and earthen platforms. Probably architects in the 740's intended to keep the external appearance of the Inner Court similar to that of the eastern complex of the Great Audience Hall and Halls of State.

Phase IV (761 to ca. 770; Fig. 116) represent the Inner Court modified by the retired Empress Kōken. The basic structural arrangement remained similar to that of Phase III with the following exceptions: In Space A, the main hall was moved a little to the east. While the back hall was demolished, a large east-west oriented structure with roofed verandas on the northern and southern sides was built in what used to be a yard. In Space C, the north and northeastern block were combined into one.

Phase V (770 to ca. 781; Fig. 117) represent the Inner Court during the reign of Emperor Kōnin 光仁. The complex during this phase is distinguished by the internal reorganization and enlargement of Space A, resulting in a reduced Space B, with the main hall being moved south and two lesser auxiliary structures being eliminated. Space A was further divided into two sections (hereafter Space A and Space A'). The south section (Space A) adjacent to Space B consisted of the east-west oriented main hall with a roofed veranda on the southern side and two lesser east-west oriented structures. In the north section (Space A'), the main hall which was again east-west oriented but with a roofed veranda on the northern side was surrounded by lesser structures in the front, back and both sides. There were additionally two auxiliary structures further to the north of this section.

Phase VI (781 to 784; Fig. 118) represents the Inner Court complex for Emperor Kammu 桓武. The heart of the complex, Spaces A and B, remained unchanged from Phase V. In Space C, however, structures in the north block were removed, and an east-west oriented main hall structure with roofed verandas on the north and south sides and a lesser auxiliary structure (back hall) were erected in the northeastern block.

Discussion: Historical Background for these Changes

The heart of the Inner Court during Phases I through III are the front yards of Spaces A and B, both surrounded by the main halls and two side halls. In the front yards, the bureaucrats and governmental officials gathered whenever the emperor issued decrees or held other political activities. It is possible to attribute the main hall of Space B to the Taian-den 大安殿 and that of Space A to the Naian-den 内安殿 described in the *Shoku-Nihongi* 『続日本紀』 [*New Chronicle of Japan*, compiled by the government in 797]. These two buildings are often mentioned in some literature before 760 A. D., which corresponds to Phases I through III, but never mentioned after that year.

Our investigations have made it clear that the front yard in Space B

disappeared during Phase IV. This indicates that political activities no longer took place in the *Gozaisho*, i. e., this place was transformed into a purely private space for the emperor.

The expansion and reorganization of Space A during Phase V were, we speculate, a result of the addition of private quarters for the emperors' wives; it is likely that the wives of Emperors Kōnin and Kammu lived in the Inner Court. Before Phase V, except for Emperor Shōmu whose wife resided in her parents' mansion beside the Heijō Palace (Fujiwara no Fuhito's mansion, later turned into the Hokke-ji monastery), only empresses occupied the throne, making it unnecessary to plan private quarters for the wives. In addition, the construction of a new complex in the northeastern block of Space C during Phase VI would indicate the beginning of the emperor's harem.

This basic organization of the Inner Court in Phases V and VI can be considered as the precursor of the Heian Palace Inner Court (794 to ca. 19th century) in Kyoto. A 1319 copy of the Heian Palace Inner Court drawing shows that the Inner Court consisted of three spaces in the center and four in the periphery. The three in the center probably correspond to Space A, Space A' (empress' private quarters), and Space B. The northeastern block of the Heian Palace Inner Court would correspond to the northeastern block of Space C of the Heijō Palace during Phase VI.

Discovered Artifacts

Very few artifacts were discovered because the Inner Court area was always kept clean in the Nara Period. The great majority of the artifacts were a result of discarding during the process of moving to the Nagaoka 長岡 Capital (southwest of Kyoto) in 784. Some pottery and roof tiles were mixed with dirt and earth filling post holes which resulted from restructuring in each phase. These artifacts are an important clue to dating structural features. Taking into consideration the results of other recent archaeological investigations of the Heijō Palace, we have reconsidered chronologies of pottery and roof tiles in this report.

In conclusion, the major gain of these nine investigations is that we have grasped the internal organization of the Heijō Palace Inner Court as well as the changes in the organization over time. We have also confirmed that there was only one Inner Court complex in the Heijō Palace throughout the Nara Period. Moreover, it is important to note that the origin of the Heian Palace Inner Court can be traced back to the 770's.