

NARA IMPERIAL PALACE

EXCAVATIONS AT THE HEIJŌ PALACE SITE : RESEARCH REPORT VI

In the period of about one year from the spring of 1969 to the early summer of 1970, the Nara Imperial Palace Excavation Department, a division of the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, excavated the area to the east of the Nara Imperial Palace. The original impetus for this investigation came from the proposed construction of a by-pass designed to relieve traffic congestion on national highway no. 24 which passes through the center of present-day Nara City. According to the 1965 plan this by-pass was expected to run from north to south immediately east of the Nara Imperial Palace, but subsequent investigative excavations revealed the fact that the proposed highway was within the grounds of the Palace. Thanks to the varied efforts of the Ministry of Construction, scholars, and ordinary citizens, the by-pass was quickly shifted to the east, away from the Nara Imperial Palace. The new route was planned to follow Higashi San-bo O-ji (the third great avenue running north to south to the east of Suzaku Oji, the broad central avenue) in the eastern sector of Nara; therefore the area just north of Minami Ichijo-ji (South First Avenue) and the eastern outer embankment of the large fifth century *kofun* called the Uwanabe Mound became sites for excavation. The full costs of the excavation were born by the Kinki Regional Branch of the Ministry of Construction. The actual excavation was carried out by the Nara Imperial Palace Excavation Department. Seven areas covering a total area of 9,210 square meters were thoroughly investigated. This report is a record of those excavations; a summary of the results is presented below.

1. *Kofun*

In gutter SD650 just to the east of Higashi Sanbo Oji two columnar, single-edged stone axe heads of the Yayoi period were discovered leading to the expectation that Yayoi period sites existed in the surrounding area. However, the earliest sites discovered in the subsequent excavations were three burial mounds of the fifth century.

The largest of the three tumuli is the Uwanabe mound. Excavations of the eastern portion of the outer embankment of this mound revealed that the remains have survived in virtually their original form. At the time of construction the mound was surrounded by both inner and outer moats, but the outer moat was filled in during the Nara period and a new gutter (SD734) was dug just outside the outer embankment. On the inner slope of the outer embankment a protective layer of stones was arranged. *Haniwa* cylinders lined the two shoulders of the embankment. These two rows were primarily composed of cylindrical vessels with fin-like projections, while cylinders with lids were placed in important positions. According to calculations made during the survey, as many as 5,357 *haniwa* cylinders may have been set up on the outer embankment. All of these *haniwa* had been kiln fired and are thought to be of the same period as the early-type grey pottery (*sue* ware) collected from the eastern lateral projection at the waist of the mound. This then is the basis for determining the date of the Uwanabe mound.

Assuming that the Uwanabe mound was the tomb of a fifth century member of the aristocracy, Hiratsuka mounds I and II to the south have the character of subordinate mounds which accompany unusually large mounds. All three mounds are keyhole-shaped, but Hiratsuka I is a shortened, scallop-shaped variation of the keyhole shape, to the present the only one of its type to be found in the Saki-Tatenami group. Both Hiratsuka mounds were so extensively damaged during the construction of Nara that only the level, squared-off front ends of the mounds and adjacent moats could be excavated. The *haniwa* sherds which had fallen from the mounds provide an insight into the character of the Hiratsuka tumuli. Close examination of the sherds has revealed that the two mounds are contemporary, but that number I is slightly older. In comparing the Uwanabe mound with Hiratsuka mounds I and II scale is not the only point of contrast; in the case

of Uwanabe mound the protective layers of stone and the *haniwa* cylinders are larger and the technique of manufacture of the *haniwa* is superior.

2. A Nara Period Residential District

After the capital was transferred to Nara in 710, the appearance of the locale was drastically altered. Based on a grid system, a symmetrical criss-crossing of avenues was laid out, and area 6AFB lying at the foot of the northern hills was transformed into a cityscape of houses and streets. The front portions of Hiratsuka mounds I and II became *tsubo* 15 and 16 of the third ward of Higashi Ichijo of the eastern sector of the city and Higashi Sanbo Oji passed through the middle of the back part of the Hiratsuka mounds. During the early period of construction the roads and residential areas of Nara were of a surprisingly large scale. At the north edge of Nara, Kita-kyogoku Oji, the avenue running along the northern-most limit of the city, had to be routed to the south to avoid the embankment of Uwanabe mound. Besides slightly distorting the symmetry of the city plan, this shift to the south resulted in the loss of two-thirds of the northern part of *tsubo* 16. As the proposed by-pass for national highway no. 24 was to come close to only the eastern part of *tsubo* 15 and 16 which are contiguous north to south, the excavation was confined to the east half of the two *tsubo* and did not extend to the central area. In the northern portion of the site the remains of a group of buildings were found and in the southern portion of the site part of a garden pond was unearthed. Although the finds were fragmentary (the buildings and pond continue to the west outside the confines of the excavations), a residence of impressive size and appointments gradually emerged. The privileged rank of the master of this residence can be deduced from the use of roof tiles of the same kind as those on the Nara Imperial Palace. During the early Nara period (circa 708-729) there were two major stages of construction and the roof tiles can be dated to the latter half of the 720's in the second stage. Within the grounds of the residence there stood an octagonal treasure house with a platform terrace of green-glazed brick with a wave pattern, a building material that is also more typically found within the walls of the Imperial Palace.

After the survey of area 6AFB was completed, various other sites within the city were investigated and several buildings arranged on

an east-west axis at the north end of a plot were found providing instructive comparisons for the 6AFB structures. It gradually became clear that these newly located structures consisted of main halls (*seiden*), flanking halls (*wakiden*), miscellaneous outbuildings (*zassha*), wells, etc. Comparing these residential groupings with the 6AFB group we see that none of the buildings examined in area 6AFB resembles a main hall but rather they are of the flanking hall and outbuilding types. It is possible that the main hall lay to the west outside the province of the current excavation.

Artifacts recovered from gutter SD485, which runs through the middle of this group of buildings, concretely established the character of the site. From wooden tablets dating to the 710's and 720's one can conjecture the existence of a residence built for a prince by a government bureau. Prince Nagayao, who played an active role in the politics of the early Nara period, very likely may have been the master of this residence. A further hint as to the identity of the occupant can be seen in his possession of a great quantity of a highly standardized and uniform earthenware pottery, and in the use of three-glaze pottery, both of which are only rarely found at non-imperial sites. Beyond adding a clue as to the status of the master, these groups of pottery have also added important examples to the chronology of early eighth century earthenware.

The various facilities of the early eighth century were practically all destroyed in the 720's and after that from the end of the eighth century to the beginning of the ninth century extensive earthenwork and new construction were carried out. Several buildings are known to have existed in 6AFB during this period, but the complete nature of the buildings is difficult to determine because of the limited area of the excavation. However, on the road surfaces of Kita-kyogoku Oji and Joka Oji, a road running through the middle of the ward, there was a profusion of casually arranged small buildings. From this it was determined that their function as roads had been lost.

3. *Higashi Sanbo Oji and its Eastern Gutter*

In the later centuries the surface of Higashi Sanbo Oji disintegrated from repeated floodings from the gutters and the features of the raised earth of the road and the depression of the gutter are no longer obvious. At the eastern demarcation of area 6AFB-f-west the area of the western gutter of the road was investigated. Within

the narrow limits of the excavation however, the results were inconclusive.

The excavated portion of the eastern gutter (SD650) extends for about 270 meters. It is thought that the gutter was dug at the beginning of the eighth century. Eighth century layers of accumulation, however, cannot be observed, a tendency that was also noted in an earlier investigation of a gutter along Higashi Ichibo Oji. Therefore we may conclude that the road and gutter were maintained in excellent condition throughout the eighth century. The deposits in the roadside gutter began to accumulate at the beginning of the ninth century and were added to by repeated floods. Finally, the road and gutter underwent two major repairs and after lasting into the early part of the tenth century, they were completely buried. Actually Higashi Sanbo Oji continued to function as a road for about one hundred years after the abandonment of Nara. In the ninth century it seems that the lack of maintenance and the foothill location of the gutter combined to block it at its intersection with South Ichijo Oji. The water stagnated and discarded objects accumulated, leaving many piles of remains. It is possible to distinguish in these remains two general periods, and relying on the dates of the wooden tablets and the types of coins one can go one further step in specifying the date of the site. The artifacts are extremely varied but generally they can be divided into the following groups: a) those related to roads and travel, b) those related to food and supplies, and c) those related to artisans' shops.

A. Those related to roads and travel include announcement placards, wooden clogs (*geta*), and every type of ceremonial and ritual object. The announcement placards were sign posts that were placed at the shoulder of a road; they informed passersby of lost and found livestock and requested assistance in locating and identifying the animals. The wooden clogs were broken or one of the pair was lost; they are of a transitional design in which the front hole through which the thong passes is shifted from near the big toe (the earlier arrangement) towards the center (the center position being the later design). Among the ceremonial objects there were ritual wooden blades, wooden human figures, terracotta horses, and miniature pottery for ritual use. Of these various items, only some of the wooden human figures are comparable in size to eighth century examples; generally the objects are smaller than and inferior to most eighth century examples. The nature of the religious ceremonies is not clear, but following ceremonies held on the road or in the ward, objects were

thrown into the water. It seems that the coins were also tossed into the water probably to pray for safe travel.

B. Earthenware pots are the most numerous item in the category of eating utensils. Red pottery, proto-black pottery, and grey pottery were the main types; ash-glazed pottery, green-glazed pottery, and porcelain were less numerous. In addition to pottery, the eating implements also included lacquer and wooden objects. The presence of such aristocratic objects as porcelain and lacquer as well as inscribed pottery indicating a connection with an official office strongly suggests that this place was a public facility associated with a temple or a government office.

C. The existence of artisans' shops is indicated by rusted metal objects and whetstones. Among these objects there is no uniformity and the miscellany of objects included suggests that they may have been collected in order to be recast. Other than the above, there were wooden tablets which allude to public works carried out by officials and wooden objects such as Buddhist implements. These remains have no marks of having flowed a long distance in the water, so they most likely originated from the Ichijo fourth ward contiguous with the eastern gutter. Futaiji, a temple which has continued to maintain its Nara period location to the present day, is in an area which was then the third and fourth *tsubo* of the fourth ward of Sakyo Ichijo. It would not be contradictory if Futaiji were the source of these discarded objects.

The remains after the early part of the tenth century are limited to numerous ditches which run from north to south on the surface of Higashi Sanbo Oji. In some of these ditches a small quantity of sherds of black pottery (*gaki*) has been found. In the middle ages the road was entirely abandoned and the land was used for farming. From that time until recent years the area of the third ward of Sakyo Ichijo was rice fields. In the latter half of the 1960's the area along what is now called Ichijo-dori in the western quarter once again became a residential district, and since 1971, when the by-pass was opened, the remaining rice fields have rapidly given way to residences and the rural landscape has been lost.