







## Asuka Palace Site

As archaeological surveys of the palace site located at the center of ancient Asuka progressed, strips of wood which indicated discrepancies with dates were discovered. This perplexed researchers, but further detailed research showed that multiple newer and older palace sites existed in several layers. These were thought to be the Asuka Okamoto Palace, the Asuka Itabuki Palace, the Nochino Asuka Okamoto Palace, and the Asuka Kiyomihara Palace. This tells us that the palaces which formerly moved with each change of emperor, came to be situated in one place.



Asuka Pond Garden Site

The site of the garden attached to the northwest part of the Asuka Palace. There are two ponds in this spacious garden, one to the north, the other to the south. What resembles a gallery was found in the south pond, as well as a central island and a fountain sculpted in stone. This sort of water feature landscaping predating Asuka had not previously been discovered. It is thought to have been influenced by East Asian designs. Ritual related features discovered in the area of the north pond provide evidence of banquets which could well have been aimed at demonstrating political authority. This is the oldest example of a style of garden associated with the subsequent evolution of Japanese garden culture.



Asuka Water Clock Site

Remains were found here, and nowhere else, at a site the name of which remains a mystery. It's known as 'Mizoochi'. A fragment of a lacquered wooden box and a pedestal were excavated, from which it was clear this was a rokoku or water clock of the type invented in ancient China. Conduits and copper piping which carried water from underground to the clock were also unearthed. As well as this site bringing to light evidence of the very latest science and technologies at the time, the site shows that the concept of 'time management', as used in the Chinese court, was indeed introduced.

\* Rokoku or water clock  
Making use of the characteristic of water flowing in a certain direction, water traveled from higher to lower steps in stepped water tanks with pipes running through them. The device was designed with the volume of water in the lowest level indicating, visually, the time. The mechanism was invented in ancient China.



### Asuka-dera Temple Site

The family temple of the pro-Buddhist Soga clan which defeated the Mononobe and Nakatomi, clans that had held onto Shinto court ritual duties since time immemorial. It was the first ornately decorated Buddhist temple in Japan to feature vermilion pillars and tiled roof. This was the only temple to have a Kondo (Main Hall) surrounding, on three sides, temple precincts with a tall pagoda in the middle. The Statue of Shakyamuni Buddha (the Asuka Daibutsu), completed in 609, still sits today, 1,400 later, as it did then, on the site of the Central Main Hall in the middle.

Sakafuneishi Ritual Site



The people, forced to do the strenuous work, called the very long canal Taburegokoro-no-Mizo (literally, The 'Ditch of Despair'). This sort of canal was dug to transport the carved stone used to make the structure on which the Sakafuneishi was sited. A tortoise-shaped stone vessel for carrying water was discovered in the center of an open area surrounded by flagstone steps laid in the valley. On top of hillock at the head of the valley sits an irregularly shaped giant oval rock from the Asuka Period with a geometrical square design with rounded edges on it. It is assumed that these were connected in some way to rituals involving water. Empress Saimei, who ordered these installations, was also a priest whose job was to pray for the rains.



This giant stone, about 11m wide and 4.7m tall, stands, as though just dropped there, in the middle of a mountain. Two oblong cavities have been carved into the top surface. There are various explanations, but the most likely is that it is an unfinished burial chamber. The question is asked about why it left unfinished.



Fudotaki stone quarry site

A theory holds that this was the place where the massive rocks used for the Ishibutai Mounded Tomb and others, carved from granite which generally referred to as 'Asuka stone', were taken from. A Yakushido Hall stands at the entrance to the waterfall.



Takamatsuzuka Mounded Tomb

This mound, with beautiful murals decorating the walls of the burial chamber, was unearthed in 1972. The images are grouped; constellations on the ceiling, the four gods giving protection in the four cardinal directions and, on the east and west walls, male and female attendants. It is clear from the brush strokes that many artists were involved. Furthermore, we know that extremely fine techniques were used from, for example, the depth of coloration on the lips of the women which have deep crimson overlaying grey coloration.





### Asuka gigaku children's workshop

Gigaku are silent masked dance performances which were brought to Asuka from the continent 1,400 years ago. Gigaku was abandoned during the Middle Ages and how it was performed was not passed on. Today, children in Asuka enjoy freely recreating classical culture using their imagination.



### Asuka kemari

It is said that kemari was brought to Asuka capital from China during the Asuka Period. It is recorded that kemari played by Prince Naka-no-Oe and Nakatomi-no-Kamatari took place in a clearing in Japanese zelkova trees. Members attending Asuka kemari gatherings enjoyed playing at west of Asuka-dera Temple Site where the zelkova wood is thought to have been.





Shobuike Mounded Tomb

A square mound with 30m sides which, in a corridor-type tomb, housed two fine stone sarcophaguses with lacquered internal sides. Having a moat which was filled in at the time of the Fujiwara Palace, traces have been found of large scale landscape modifications which resulted the existence of the tumulus becoming lost. From evidence including the location of the Soga clan residence being in the Amakashi-no-oka area, those entombed would have included members of the Soga clan, although this remains unclear.



Kengoshizuka Mounded Tomb

An octagonal (in plane view) tomb was discovered on a raised platform in the western precincts of the Asuka Palace. This was a compound burial mound carved out of one giant rock and having two chambers. The other mound was found in the adjacent area. Referencing the Nihon Shoki has increased the possibility that this was where Empress regnant Saimei and her daughter the Empress consort Hashihito-no-himemiko were buried, and her grand daughter Ota-no-himemiko was buried in the other tomb. The imposing octagonal mound covered with carved stones on top of the hill must have amazed people at the time.



Tomb of Kibihime-no-okimi  
Saruishi



This is a stone carving that was unearthed from a nearby rice field at the beginning of the 18th century. These four stone statues, or what has become known as the Saruishi or Monkey Stone, stand quietly inside the fence of the grave of Kibihime-no-okimi, the grandmother of Emperor Temmu.

Ishibutai Mounded Tomb



This roughly 5m long corridor-type tomb constructed from massive stones known as Asuka stone, with an overall length of about 19m, is one of the largest in Japan. The burial chamber is 7.7m long, 3.5m wide. It is most likely that, as recorded in the Nihon Shoki, this is the Momohara Tomb of Soga-no-Umako from a very powerful, highly ranked family. Being an outstanding head having spent much energy in concentrating power in the one family, he had a tomb mound equal to those used for the imperial family.

Empress Saimei temporarily residing in Asuka Kawara Palace whilst the palace buildings, which had burned down, were rebuilt. Kawara-dera Temple was built at the site to commemorate Empress Saimei who died in 661. There is notable connection between the temple, and Asuka Palace, the two being situated on opposite banks of the Asuka River.

The family temple, built in the latter half of the 7th century, of Yamatonoaya clan. A platform and foundation stones of the temple's pagoda have been excavated from within the precincts of the Omiashi Jinja Shrine where a member of the family —Achi-no-Omi — is housed. The design of the platform with layered tiles which had been used for the lecture hall originated in Paekche. Many features notably associated with migrant culture, including relics of ondol, have been found in the vicinity.

Kawara-dera Temple Site



Hinokuma-dera Temple Site





Mt. Unebiyama



Thought to be the vibrant mountain protecting the west side of the Fujiwara Palace mentioned in the Mii no Uta. It is also described in a poem about the news of treason in the Kojiki, and appears in a poem about a love quarrel in the Man'yōshū. Being the highest of the three mountains, it was deemed to be 'manly'.



Mt. Miminashiyama



A mountain, like Unebiyama, created by volcanic activity. The prefix 'Mi', added since early times at the beginning of important name, is here repeated. There are various theories about the origins of the unusual name. Empress Suiko's palace was located nearby. The Mii no Uta refers to a sacred mountain to the north of the Fujiwara Palace, where it would have protected the rear of the palace.

Three Mountains of Yamato



Mt. Kaguyama

A mountain at the tip of the Ryumon Range which includes Tonomine in the east of Asuka, it was the mountain exalted as one to which the gods descended from heaven, the soil of which was considered the soul of the nation, the most sacred and revered of the three mountains of Yamato. It was lauded as the mountain on which trees flourished in spring in the poem Mii no Uta.

—Facing the East Gate, vivid Kaguyama in Yamato Appears a mountain draped in lush spring foliage.

Facing the West Gate, fresh Unebiyama, Appears a most beautiful mountain. Standing before the North Gate, immaculate Miminashiyama rises to the heavens.—

Amanoiwato Shrine



Tsukinowa-ishi

There are many massive rocks on Kaguyama. They all have stories associated with them and are said to be vestiges of an ancient Shinto belief in rocks.

Moon birthstone



It is known from the Nihon Shoki and Man'yoshu that Tachibana-dera Temple was a nunnery. As well as foundations on a platform for the only remaining Asuka Period five-story pagoda in the precincts, excavations have revealed an underground base stone. Unusually shaped pillar holes which held semi-circular supporting pillars had been dug in three directions around the central pillar in the base stone, a feature catching many people's attention.

Tachibana-dera Temple Site



The family temple built by Soga no Kurayamada-no-Ishikawa-Marō. He followed Prince Naka-no-Oe, at the time of the Isshi Incident. In 649, Ishikawa-Marō, charged with treason, whilst appealing against it, but not having chance to present his plea, committed suicide, resulting in Yamada-dera Temple becoming the scene of a tragedy. As time passed, doubts began to surface, and 14 years after the incident rebuilding of the temple buildings started. On an anniversary day, in 685, of the death of Ishikawa-Marō, a Joroku Buddha was dedicated, and the temple was visited by Emperor Temmu.

Yamada-dera Temple Site





A new capital flourished to the north of the Asuka Palace, referred to in the Nihon Shoki as Aramashi-no-miyako. This was the first and also the largest fortified capital city in our country, built on a site chosen as it was protected by the three mountains of Yamato. A very large capital with city blocks spread out in a grid pattern, the Suzaku Oji avenue, running north to south, was the central axis. Being the center of imperial power, the Daigokuden, or Hall of State at the heart of the capital housed the seat of the emperor. This was the center of government during the reigns of three imperial reigns; Empress Jito, Emperor Mommu, and Empress Gemmei, and gained distinction as being the place where the legal codes known as Taiho Ritsuryo were promulgated, missions to Tang China restarted, and the naming of the country 'Nihon' took place. This was, in essence, where Japan as a centralized state was first established.



Mausoleum of Emperor Temmu  
and Empress Jito

This is the joint burial mound of Emperor Temmu and his Empress Jito, victors in the Jinshin War, the largest in ancient times, and the founder of the state under the Ritsuryo Codes. It is an octagonal mound, of a style unique to Japan and designed to demonstrate absolute imperial status. This tumulus was planned by Emperor Temmu and later completed by Empress Jito, and very carefully located on a line extending from the central axis of Japan's first capital's Fujiwara Palace.



The Taiho Ritsuryo Codes were promulgated in 701 during the reign of Emperor Mommu. Daikandaiji Temple was so called as it was the emperor's temple, constructed in Fujiwara-kyo, state capital in name and in reality under the Ritsuryo system. It was the most highly revered state temple in Fujiwara-kyo. The nine story pagoda, a symbolically protecting the state, would have been a mighty impressive landmark. It was burned down immediately after the move of the capital to Heijo-kyo, with only the Kondo (Main Hall) and pagoda platform of the largest temple building in the capital left. The broad, terraced rice field landscape, free of electric wires, remains as it was since the medieval times.

Daikandaiji Temple Site



Motoyakashiji Temple Site

Emperor Temmu began construction of the temple in 680, dedicating it to the recovery from illness of his empress. After Emperor Temmu died, in 698, Empress Jito completed the temple building. The design of the temple, with two pagodas, was the first of its kind in Japan. The two Buddhist pagodas stood in front of the Kondo (Main Hall). At the time, with relations with Tang China broken, we know that emissaries regularly went to and forth between Japan and the capital of Silla on the Korean peninsula, where many twin pagoda temples began to be built, thus introducing the new style to both countries.





Nakaoyama Mounded Tomb

From the very small burial facility (corridor-type tomb) which cannot accomodate the sarcophagus, it is assumed that the vessel placed there contained cremated remains. The fact that it was an octagonal mound, and from records Shoku Nihongi that indicate cremations took place, means there is a high possibility that this was the imperial tomb of Emperor Mommu who died in 707.



Kitora Mounded Tomb

In addition to the four guardian deity murals in the four cardinal directions —Suzaku (Vermilion Bird), Genbu (Black Tortoise), Seiryu (Blue Dragon), Byakko (White Tiger), and the twelve zodiac animal-headed figures, there is a detailed astronomical map on the ceiling of the stone chamber. 13m in diameter, among the mounds, constructed over more than 400 years, is a very small round tomb which, having the guardian deities in the four cardinal directions, the twelve zodiac animal-headed figures which govern passing time and points of the compass, and the astronomical chart of the stars on the ceiling, makes it easy to imagine, when we see the small, yet technically accomplished, universe created as a space for the deceased to sleep, that whoever was buried here was of very high rank.



Oni no Manaita

According to legend, this was the chopping board that ogres, who would create mists, catch travelers who got lost in the mist, used to cut up their victims preparing to feast on them. Below the hill is, as legend would have it, the large Oni no Secchin rock, where an ogre would relieve himself after his meal. Why such a legend came about is of endless interest, but it is clear that this set of two stones were an element of a burial in a single tumulus.

TIMELINE

East Asia		year	Japan	Related properties
	Kofun Period	457	Yamatonoya clan who was immigrants started to live in Asuka.	P13 Hinokuma-dera Tempe Site
		538	Buddhism transmitted from Paekche.	
		587	Soga-no-Umako attacked Mononobe-no-Moriya. <a href="#">Asuka-dera Temple</a> constructed.	P3 Asuka-dera Temple Site
Sui Dynasty unified China.		589		
		592	Empress Suiko ascended the throne as first empress in the nation's history.	
		607	The Japanese second envoy dispatched to the Sui Dynasty.	
	Asuka Period	609	Completion of Asuka Great Buddha, called Asuka Daibutsu.	P3 Asuka-dera Temple Site
		612	Gigaku was transmitted by Mimashi from Baekje.	
Sui Dynasty collapses, Tang established.		618		
		626	Soga-no-Umako died.	P12 Ishibutai Mounded Tomb
		630	The first Japanese envoy to Tang China.	
		632		
Accession of Princess Seondeok as First Queen of Silla.		641	Soga-no-Kurayamada Ishikawamaro started construction of <a href="#">Yamada-dera Temple</a> .	P17 Yamada-dera Temple Site
King Uiji ascended the throne in Baekje, and invaded Silla.		643	Empress Kogyoku relocated to <a href="#">Asuka Itabuki Palace</a> .	P1 Asuka Palace Site
		644	<i>Kemari</i> is held in an open area to the west of Asuka-dera Temple.	
		645	Soga-no-Iruka was killed. New political authority was established as a result of the coup d'etat.	P10 Shobuike Mounded Tomb
Tang invaded Koguryo.		655	Empress Saimei acceded to the throne for the second time at the age of 62.	
		656	The palace was relocated to <a href="#">Nochino-Asuka Okamoto Palace</a> . A rectangular palace and surrounding facilities were worked on.	P1 Asuka Palace Site P4 Sakafuneishi Ritual Site P2 Asuka Pond Garden Site
		660	Prince Naka-no-Oe built water clock.	P2 Asuka Water Clock Site
The allied forces of Wakoku (Japanese) army and Baekje battled against Tang and Silla in the Baekmagan (Hakusonko) of Korean Peninsula.		663	Japan defeated at the Battle of Hakusonko(Baekmagan) by historically the first major East Asian war.	
Tang and Silla destroyed Koguryo.		668	Empress regnant Saimei and her daughter, Empress consort Hashihito were buried in the imperial mausoleum.	P10 Kengoshizuka Mounded Tomb
		669		
The war breaks out between Silla and Tang.		672	Jinshin War broke out. Prince Oama was moved to the <a href="#">Asuka Kiyomihara Palace</a> , and new political authority established.	P1 Asuka Palace Site
		673	Prince Oama acceded to the throne as Emperor Temmu. The first sutra copying in the country was done in the <a href="#">Kawara-dera Temple</a> .	P13 Kawara-dera Temple Site
Tang expelled from the Korean Peninsula, and was unifies by Silla.		676		
		680	<a href="#">Motoyakushiji Temple</a> was constructed, praying for recovery from illness of the later Empress Jito. The nunnery's residence of the <a href="#">Tachibana-dera Temple</a> was burned down by fire.	P21 Motoyakushiji Temple Site P17 Tachibana-dera Temple Site
		685	Emperor Temmu visited Shiranishiki-no-misono ( <a href="#">Asuka Pond Garden</a> ). <a href="#">Yamada-dera Temple</a> completed.	P2 Asuka Pond Garden Site P17 Yamada-dera Temple Site
		686	Emperor Temmu died.	
		688	Emperor Temmu was buried in the <a href="#">Imperial Mausoleum</a> .	P19 Mausoleum of Emperor Temmu and Empress Jito
Wu Zutian ascended the throne as the only empress in Chinese history.		690		
		694	Empress Jito moved to the <a href="#">Fujiwara Palace</a> . A formal capital city, Fujiwarakyo, established. It is considered that it was about this time that the Poem of the Imperial Well at the Fujiwara Palace was recited.	P18 Fujiwara Palace Site P14-15 Three mountains of Yamato
		697	Accession of Emperor Mommu	
Zhen, predecessor of Bohai, established.		698	<a href="#">Motoyakushiji Temple</a> was completed.	P21 Motoyakushiji Temple Site
		699	Massive nine story pagoda of <a href="#">Daikandaiji Temple</a> was built. <a href="#">Kitora Mounded Tomb</a> was thought to have been built in about 700.	P20 Daikandaiji Temple Site P22 Kitora Mounded Tomb
		701	New Year's day morning ceremony was held at the <a href="#">Fujiwara Palace</a> . Taiho Ritsuryo Codes completed.	P18 Fujiwara Palace Site
		702	Missions to Tang were revived after 30 years. The eighth Japanese envoy to Tang Dynasty were transmitted the country name 'Nihon' externally.	
		703	Empress Jito died. Historically, the first cremation for an emperor in the country, and jointly entombed with Emperor Temmu in the <a href="#">Imperial Mausoleum</a> .	P19 Mausoleum of Emperor Temmu and Empress Jito
Empress Wu Zutian died, and Tang revival.		704	Eighth mission emissaries to Tang returned. Bringing with them the most recent literature and knowledge.	P7 Takamatsuzuka Mounded Tomb
		705		
		707	Emperor Mommu died. He was cremated and buried in the Imperial Mausoleum.	P22 Nakaoyama Mounded Tomb
		710	Capital relocated to Heijokyo.	

# FROM NARA PREFECTURE

Having been engaged in the preservation of cultural assets for many years, we had an opportunity to travel the world, to sites including the Mogao Caves on the ancient Silk Road trade route, tasked with investigating various cultural properties. Then turning back to look again at Asuka and Fujiwara, we were convinced that they were indeed the end point of the Silk Road. Tang China, a strong state which at the time controlled areas as far away as Uzbekistan, meant it was in a very powerful position. The Tang dynasty flourished magnificently while absorbing western cultures along the Silk Road. Our small archipelago, lying at the time at the very eastern extremity of a continent where major cultural exchanges were taking place, we now know held a position of considerable geopolitical significance. For that reason, at the same time as being caught up, in spite of being separated by a sea, in the turbulent times in history that were happening across East Asia, we also progressed with the development of our own culture in a quiet and steady way. Namely with Asuka and Fujiwara, the sites we are responsible for looking after. Our knowledge does not extend to knowing everything about ancient times. However, one thing we can say is that ancient times and the present are historically connected. Take, as an example, the Ishibutai Tumulus. The giant, smooth stones we see today were once buried under the soil in a burial mound. At some point, for some reason, people removed the earth revealing the stones, leaving them as they are today. A scene of the giant stones is clearly depicted in the Edo Period Meisho-zue showing the soil had already been removed by then. Changes such as this are, I feel, records of history. These historical records build up in many layers buried in the soil. If we can overcome our limited ways of viewing history by compartmentalizing it, then we should begin to appreciate the vestiges, the timeless nature of these sorts of historical record. They will also result in people duly feeling a sense of humility. Living in Nara Prefecture I really do appreciate that 'Indeed, this was where Japanese civilization was born'. One example of this is to be felt in the ancient Yamato remains, place names which one comes across daily and cannot read, such as with the reading of Asuka – written using the characters meaning 'Flying Bird'. It's quietly satisfying for me when, every weekend when traveling around, I come across place names I can't read. There are many places where people have lived since ancient times, and where religious beliefs have been transmitted. Among them is here, where the state we know as 'Japan' was established, and which, all Japanese people can appreciate the particularly enigmatic, many layered depths of history. Without doubt, each of the many visitors who come appreciate Asuka and Fujiwara in their own way, and I would be most happy if you enjoy doing so too.

Asuka today is a quiet rural village spread across in a narrow basin surrounded by mountains, but it was once a center of government and other facilities, an area densely packed with something that has been artificially constructed.

The moment you cross Amakashi-no-oka Hill from Asuka, a plain opens out, surrounded by the Three Mountains of Yamato. It was there that court officials lived, and the nation's first, ancient capital, Fujiwara-kyo, was established. I feel that this is the moment when an era took off, like a small chrysalis hatching and a butterfly spreading its beautiful wings. If you visit, I recommend first of all you climb Amakashi-no-oka Hill and appreciate the scenery changing as you ascend. Ancient Asuka may fade from people's memories, but the remains of the capital have always existed, buried below the rice fields. Unknown numbers of locals across the generations have said 'I don't know much about it, but this was an important place'. They venerate a shrine on an earth mound where the Fujiwara Palace imperial throne was once placed, praying and looking after it. When the earth mound was excavated in the Showa Period, remains of the Daigokuden Imperial Main Hall came to light, and once again existed in everyone's minds.

Moreover, you will also become aware that ancient Asuka was a cosmopolitan center as you encounter the extensive evidence of influences received from the continent. For better or worse, the crushing defeat suffered at the Battle of Hakusonko on the Korean peninsula changed people's spirits. Being an island nation separated by a sea, news coming from the continent was limited but, on the other hand, at the same time information was concentrated. Changes which had been taking place with absorption of culture from the continent, and had spurred the development of our nation, were suddenly, and dramatically, speeded up. It took a mere 100 years from the time cultural exchanges with the Sui and Tang dynasties started to the foundation of our nation state. In my fifth-grade of elementary school was when, taken to Asuka by my father, I first encountered the ancient world. I still remember eating kaki-no-ha-zushi in the open area adjacent to the Ishibutai Mounded Tomb. Following that, I embarked on my archaeology path, a youth dedicated to history, over several decades getting involved in the Asuka Pond Garden Site and Fujiwara Capital Site, as well as in ancient East Asian research in Korea. As a researcher, I am still in my infancy. However, I'm not sure there's anything below these feet, but the actual remains of stages in ancient history lie sleeping in the earth'. I still feel the great excitement I did as a youth. When it comes to the World Heritage, I regard myself as 'A representative of what is important and should be preserved in the future for the good of all humanity living on this planet'. Believing that Asuka and Fujiwara, in aiming for World Heritage list inscription, are one piece of that puzzle.

Director of the Nara Prefecture World Heritage Office

MORII Masayuki

Nara Prefecture World Heritage Office

YAMADA Takafumi