



*Former Imperial Audience Hall
Nara Palace*

Imperial Audience Hall

平城宮
第一次大極殿

大極殿

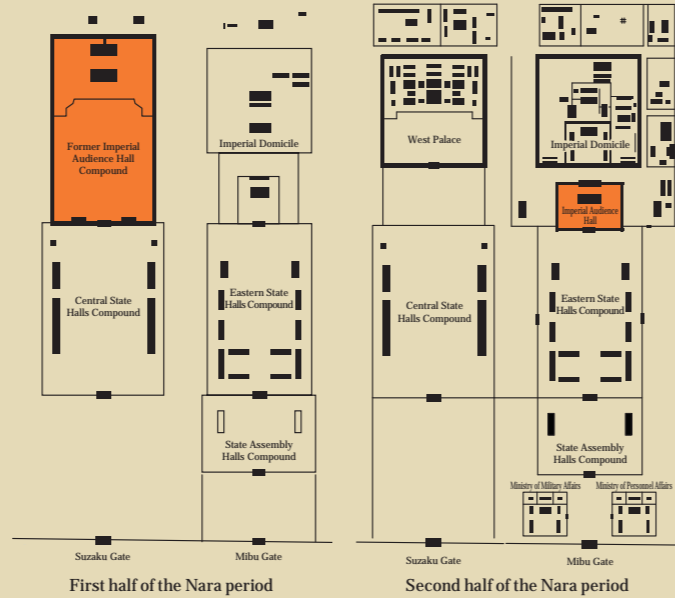
What is the Imperial Audience Hall?

The Imperial Audience Hall was the central facility of the ancient capital, the site at which the emperor attended state ceremonies such as the imperial audience on New Year's Day and the imperial accession. At the Nara palace two imperial audience halls have been identified, the Former Imperial Audience Hall used from the time of the palace's construction to its relocation to Kuni, and the Second Imperial Audience Hall used from the return of the palace to Nara until the move to Nagaoka (in Kyoto prefecture).

The area of the Former Imperial Audience Hall compound measures 320 meters north-south and 180 meters east-west, with the northern part of the compound, on which the Imperial Audience Hall and the rear palace stood on a north-south axis, rising as a platform one level higher than the rest. South of the platform was a plaza where aristocrats lined up during ritual events. The compound may well have been modeled after the Hanyuan Hall of the Daming Palace, at the Tang dynasty capital Chang'an. The compound was surrounded by a cloister with tamped-earth walls, and the South Gate was flanked by two-story watchtowers to its east and west.

The Former Imperial Audience Hall was dismantled along with the cloister and transported to Kuni during the relocation of the capital. Eventually, the Imperial Audience Hall was transferred from the Kuni palace to Yamashiro Kokubunji temple, where its foundation stones remain today.

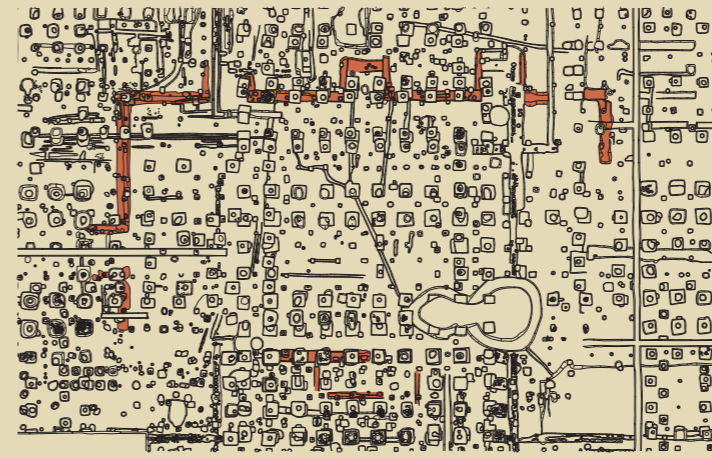
The Latter Imperial Audience Hall, dating to the second half of the Nara period, was constructed in the eastern area where the Imperial Domicile had stood, and not in the area north of Suzaku Gate where the Former Imperial Audience Hall had been located. That area changed drastically in later years, and was used as the western palace of Emperor Shōtoku.



Changes in the central part of the Nara Palace

Excavations of the Former Imperial Audience Hall

Excavations were undertaken at the site of the Former Imperial Audience Hall in 1970, 1971, and 1998. Although both the podium and its pillar base stones had been lost by then, traces were left where the foundation stones on the exterior of the podium had been extracted (red lines).

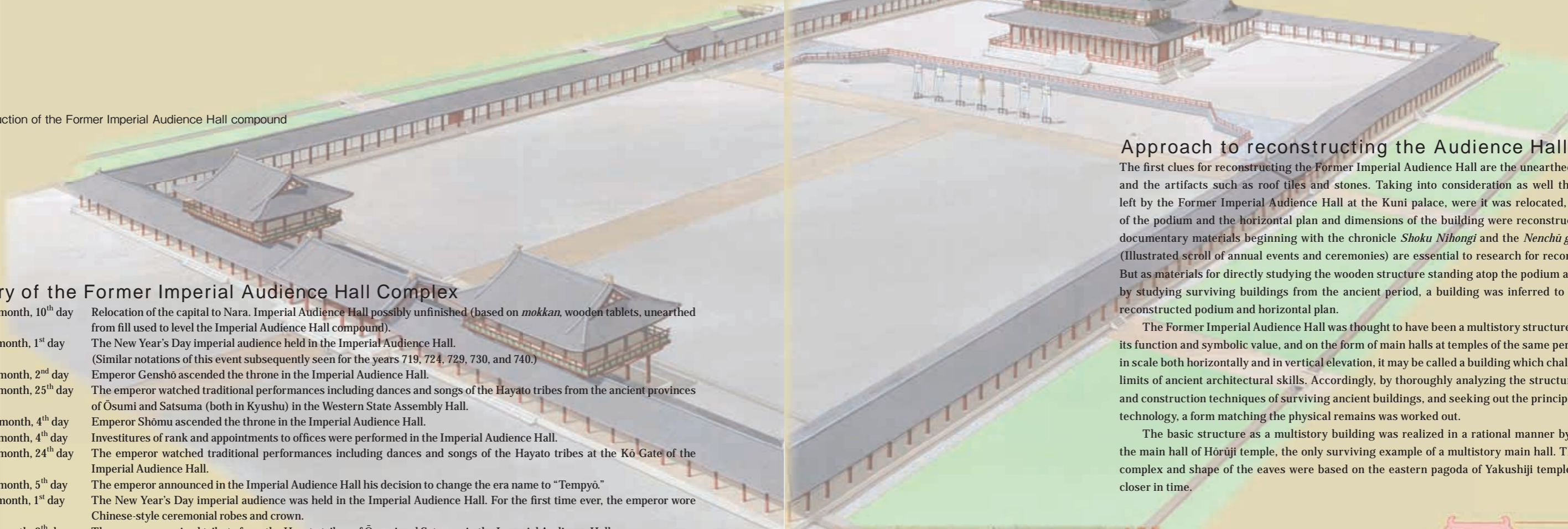


Horizontal layout of the structural remains of the Former Imperial Audience Hall



Identification of structural remains (western half of the building, from the southwest; each person stands at an inferred position a column)

Reconstruction of the Former Imperial Audience Hall compound



History of the Former Imperial Audience Hall Complex

710	3 rd month, 10 th day	Relocation of the capital to Nara. Imperial Audience Hall possibly unfinished (based on <i>mokkan</i> , wooden tablets, unearthed from fill used to level the Imperial Audience Hall compound).
715	1 st month, 1 st day	The New Year's Day imperial audience held in the Imperial Audience Hall. (Similar notations of this event subsequently seen for the years 719, 724, 729, 730, and 740.)
	9 th month, 2 nd day	Emperor Genshō ascended the throne in the Imperial Audience Hall.
717	4 th month, 25 th day	The emperor watched traditional performances including dances and songs of the Hayato tribes from the ancient provinces of Ōsumi and Satsuma (both in Kyushu) in the Western State Assembly Hall.
724	2 nd month, 4 th day	Emperor Shōmu ascended the throne in the Imperial Audience Hall.
729	3 rd month, 4 th day	Investitures of rank and appointments to offices were performed in the Imperial Audience Hall.
	6 th month, 24 th day	The emperor watched traditional performances including dances and songs of the Hayato tribes at the Kō Gate of the Imperial Audience Hall.
	8 th month, 5 th day	The emperor announced in the Imperial Audience Hall his decision to change the era name to "Tempyō."
732	1 st month, 1 st day	The New Year's Day imperial audience was held in the Imperial Audience Hall. For the first time ever, the emperor wore Chinese-style ceremonial robes and crown.
735	8 th month, 8 th day	The emperor received tribute from the Hayato tribes of Ōsumi and Satsuma in the Imperial Audience Hall.
736	1 st month, 17 th day	The Emperor assembled his ministers for a banquet, with singing and dancing, at the southern watchtowers (according to the chronicle <i>Ruiju kokushi</i>). By that time, the watchtowers had been added to the southern tamped-earth wall of the cloister (based on <i>mokkan</i> unearthed from a ditch).
737	10 th month, 26 th day	Lecture on the Sutra of the Golden Light was held at the Imperial Audience Hall.
740	1 st month, 17 th day	The emperor watched an archery ceremony at the South Gate of the Imperial Audience Hall.
	12 th month, 15 th day	The capital is moved to Kuni. The Imperial Audience Hall and cloister were transferred there.
746	9 th month, 29 th day	The Imperial Audience Hall was transferred from Kuni to the Yamashiro Kokubunji temple.
753		Around this time, the two-story watchtowers (east and west) on the southern side of the Imperial Audience Hall compound were probably dismantled (based on <i>mokkan</i> unearthed from the area).
765	1 st month, 1 st day	The New Year's Day imperial audience was held in the front hall of the western palace (according to the chronicle <i>Ruiju kokushi</i>).
770	8 th month, 4 th day	Emperor Shōtoku passed away in the main hall of the western palace.

Approach to reconstructing the Audience Hall

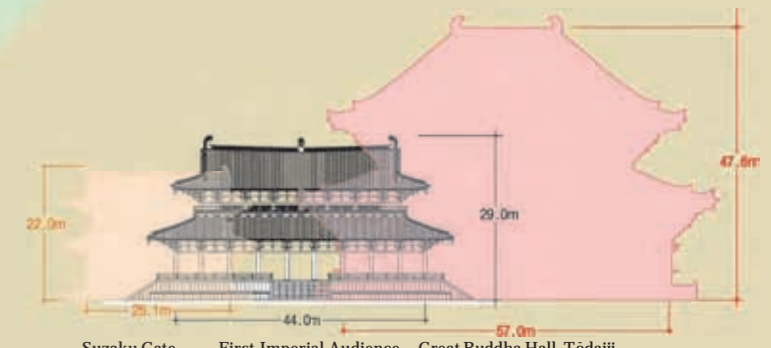
The first clues for reconstructing the Former Imperial Audience Hall are the unearthed features, and the artifacts such as roof tiles and stones. Taking into consideration as well the features left by the Former Imperial Audience Hall at the Kuni palace, were it was relocated, the shape of the podium and the horizontal plan and dimensions of the building were reconstructed. Also, documentary materials beginning with the chronicle *Shoku Nihongi* and the *Nenchū gyōji emaki* (Illustrated scroll of annual events and ceremonies) are essential to research for reconstruction. But as materials for directly studying the wooden structure standing atop the podium are limited, by studying surviving buildings from the ancient period, a building was inferred to match the reconstructed podium and horizontal plan.

The Former Imperial Audience Hall was thought to have been a multistory structure, based on its function and symbolic value, and on the form of main halls at temples of the same period. Large in scale both horizontally and in vertical elevation, it may be called a building which challenged the limits of ancient architectural skills. Accordingly, by thoroughly analyzing the structure, design, and construction techniques of surviving ancient buildings, and seeking out the principles of their technology, a form matching the physical remains was worked out.

The basic structure as a multistory building was realized in a rational manner by imitating the main hall of Hōrūji temple, the only surviving example of a multistory main hall. The bracket complex and shape of the eaves were based on the eastern pagoda of Yakushiji temple, which is closer in time.



The Imperial Audience Hall of the Heian palace (Kyoto) depicted in the *Nenchū gyōji emaki* (Illustrated scroll of annual events and ceremonies)



Suzaku Gate (Nara Palace) First Imperial Audience Hall (Nara Palace) Great Buddha Hall, Tōdaiji temple (present structure)

Comparison of the Former Imperial Audience Hall in size

Railing

The railing encircles the four sides of the podium and the top of the first-story roof. Following the examples of the main hall at Hōryūji and the eastern pagoda at Yakushiji, three horizontal members were used supported by struts, and on the second story three-piece brackets and split-legged supports were used as well.



On the butt ends of members and places where nails were used, metal fittings were fixed to guard against the elements such as rainwater. Jeweled finials with glass balls in colors corresponding to the Five Elements are placed atop the struts.

Framed Nameplate

The framed nameplate is seen to have been matched to the building in shape and size. As fitting for a large-scale ancient building, this item was reconstructed with a frame projecting on all four sides.

The calligraphy used on this reconstruction was taken from the postscript of the "Prince Nagaya votive sutra" (712), written close to the age of the building.



Exterior features

Roof ridge ornaments



Central ornaments on the main ridge of the roof are seen in China at this time period, and also in Japan on the main hall of Saidaiji temple. This is thought to have evolved from a lid atop the center of the roof into a symbolic item. The shape is based on the jewel finial of the Yumedono in the eastern precinct of Hōryūji temple.



Ornaments called *shibi*, placed at the ends of the main ridge and covering its joints with the descending ridges, have the function of keeping out rainwater, while also indicating the building's status. The shape was reconstructed to reflect strong influence of the early Tang style. As no items were recovered from within the palace, it is thought they were gilt bronze. The overall height reaches 2.8 m.

Metal fittings

Wind bells are gilt bronze fittings hanging from the four corner rafters of the first and second story roofs. From the bell-shaped body hangs a flat plate to catch the wind, producing a sound when it quivers.



Butt-end covers, used on the hip, tail and base rafters, were metal fittings to protect the most corrosive parts of these members, and also served as decoration. The design was based mainly on a hip rafter end cover found at the Daikandaiji temple site, and after careful analysis of the characteristics of patterns used around the Nara period, a floral design combining the lotus and other flowers, appropriate for the early eighth century, was newly devised.



Roof tiles



Eaves tiles of the Former Imperial Audience Hall

Roof tiles were reproduced faithfully based on unearthed examples. The characteristic color of such recovered Imperial Audience Hall tiles is a somber black, rather than the ordinary oxidized silver, and it is possible they were made in imitation of the black tiles used at the Daming palace in the Tang capital Chang'an.

In placing the joints and ends of the main ridge, and the descending and corner ridges, and other vital spots susceptible to rain, an ancient style was reconstructed combining form and function, based on the Tamamushi shrine at Hōryūji, and examples from China and Korea.



Pillars and walls

Pillars were made with a diameter of 2.4 *shaku* (709 mm) or 14 percent of the span width, a height of 17 *shaku* (5 m), with the size gradually narrowing above the bottom third. The wood was painted with red ochre.



Walls were reconstructed using traditional techniques, with a mud plaster base applied to a lath of cypress splints, covered with a bonding layer of clay mixed with plant fiber, then a finish of white plaster.

Platform and stairs

Based on dimensions derived from traces of the podium's outer facing and stairs ascertained in excavation, considerations were made of the height of the podium and slope of the stairs. The slope of the stairs was set at 32 degrees, after considering the stair remains at the Kuni palace Imperial Audience Hall, and the facing stones from the Latter Imperial Audience Hall.

The podium height, based on the starting point and slope of the stairs, was set at 11.5 *shaku* (3.4 m). As this is significantly higher than the height considered normal for a single-tiered podium, it was reconstructed in two tiers based on the main hall of Hōryūji temple. The stone is a volcanic tuff called Tatsuyama stone, from Hyogo prefecture.



Two-tiered podium of the main hall of Hōryūji temple

Pillar base stones and flagstones

Pillar base stones were reconstructed based on those remaining at the Kuni palace, where the Former Imperial Audience Hall was relocated. Most of them were volcanic tuff, while those at the four corners were granite. This is an example of an ancient technique, using stronger stones where the load is greatest.



Pillar base stones remaining at the Imperial Audience Hall site of the Kuni palace (Upper: granite; Lower: tuff)

Pillar base stones at the Kuni palace that were made of volcanic tuff have notches at the corners. As this is thought to have been for fitting together with flagstones, the upper surface of the podium was laid with flagstones in brick bond fashion, in rows parallel to the building's main axis.



Interior features

Second story interior

Although the second story has an interior space, it is not floored, and was not made with any intent for use.

For ancient multistory buildings, it is thought that generally the floors above the first were not made to be utilized, but to give the external appearance of a high status building.



Ceiling and supports

The ceiling is thrust high on diagonal supports over the entire core of the building. Thick members are laid in lattice work between the ceiling joists, and covered with boarding. Following the example of the main hall of Hōryūji temple, the ceiling is held up by the joists alone, with no need for beams underneath, giving a unified feeling of standing high overhead, fitting for the interior of the Imperial Audience Hall.

The diagonal supports thrust the ceiling up from the sides. This unconstrained upward vault creates space around the circumference of the ceiling, while serving as a strut for supporting the load of the deep second-story roof of the Imperial Audience Hall.



Ceiling paintings

Spaces between the ribs of the latticed ceiling were painted with a lotus petal design, while the diagonal supports were painted with a colorful lotus plant pattern. Ancient painting used a gradation technique, painting from fainter to darker shades of the same color in parallel. Using this pattern and color choice, master painter Uemura Atsushi created the designs.



Original designs for the paintings on the ceiling and diagonal supports (by Uemura Atsushi)

Imperial throne

The exterior of the emperor's throne, called Takamikura, has been reproduced in full size by consulting historical documents and other sources. The roof covering the top is decorated with a phoenix, mirrors, and other ornaments.



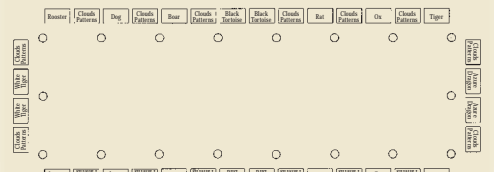
Doors

There are doors at each end, and at three places on the back. They are inferred to have opened inward, because the front of the building is open and they are subject to strong wind pressure. Each is pieced together from five vertical boards, nailed to horizontal slats. Metal fittings are placed at the nail heads and above and below the pivots.

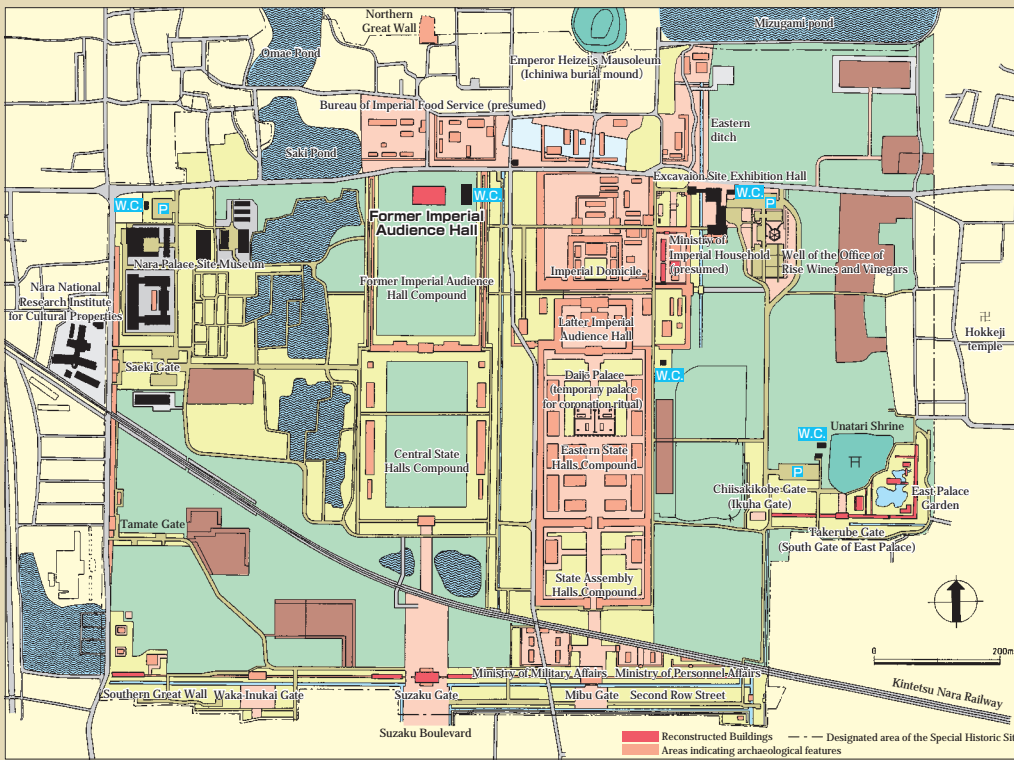


Paintings on the upper walls

The wall spaces above the lintels are thought to have had colored paintings or murals. The themes are inferred as the four directional deities and the animals of the Eastern zodiac, with paired images of a directional deity around the central struts on each side of the building. All of the artwork is by master painter Uemura Atsushi.



Arrangement of paintings on the upper walls



1982	Initial plan for the reconstruction of the Former Imperial Audience Hall (<i>Nara palace site excavation report, vol. XI</i>).
1992	Start of research for reconstructing the Former Imperial Audience Hall.
1993	1:100 scale model made of the Former Imperial Audience Hall compound.
1994	1:10 scale model made of the Former Imperial Audience Hall.
1995–1996	Basic designs made.
1997	Preparations made for developing working designs.
1998–2000	Working designs made (work up to this phase undertaken by the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties).
2001	Start of groundwork for reconstruction (work hereafter done by the Agency for Cultural Affairs).
2004(Feb)	Pillars erected.
2006(Dec)	Roof raised.
2010(April)	Work completed.

Nara Palace Site (World Cultural Heritage, Special National Historic Site)

Progress of reconstruction research and work



Shaping and finishing of architectural members was done with ancient tools. In addition to shaping with a planing tool (*yariganna*, left), pillars are worked with an adze-like *chōna*.



Characteristics of ancient architecture are utilized not only in the external appearance, but also in the structure. While seismic dampers were employed, it was possible to minimize other reinforcement.



After protecting the archaeological features with a layer of fill, the podium was built without using any stakes. Seismic dampers were employed within the podium to lessen the force of earthquakes.



In order to reduce the load of the roof, no layer of soil was used in laying the tiles, which were attached individually to the laths with copper wire.



Japanese cypress was used for most of the members. For the principal bearing blocks of bracket complexes and other parts where load concentrates, the ancient practice of using zelkova was followed.

Former Imperial Audience Hall, Nara Palace April, 2010

2-9-1 Nijōchō, Nara City 630-8577, Japan

Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties

TEL +81 742 30 6753 FAX +81 742 30 6750

Website <http://www.nabunken.jp>