

NARA NATIONAL CULTURAL PROPERTIES
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

THE WOODEN TABLETS
FROM THE NARA
PALACE SITE

II

English Summary

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NARA PALACE EXCAVATION AND
RESEARCH REPORT VIII

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3)	SD1900, SK1979	Documents, Tallys	Relating to a kind of nail	1929-1931, 1934-1942
4)	SD1900	Documents		1932, 1933
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6)	SK2101	Baggage tallys	Items presented as taxes from <i>Wakasa</i> 若狭 Pro- vince, now part of <i>Fukui</i> Prefecture	1948-1953
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- 35) SD3035 Baggage tallys Goods submitted as taxes by provinces of the *Tōkaidō* 東海道 and by the Province of *Okī* 隱岐, now part of *Shimane* Prefecture 2246-2249
- 36) SD3035 Baggage tallys Rice for making wine 2250-2254, 2263
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- 39) SD3035 Baggage tallys Rice for making wine 2264-2266, 2271-2274
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WOODEN TABLETS EXCAVATED FROM THE NARA IMPERIAL PALACE SITE (II)

This report is a continuation of the previously published volume entitled "The Wooden Tablets from the Nara Palace Site (I)". There we discussed the wooden tablets excavated by the Fifth Excavation Survey of 1961, when wooden tablets were first found at the Nara Palace Site, through to the Thirteenth Excavation Survey of 1963. 1925 objects were included. The area excavated was to the north of the Emperor's domicile, an area in which the *Daizenshiki* 大膳職, the government bureau in charge of the preparation of food for the Emperor and government officials, and other offices of the *Kunaishō* 宮内省 or Imperial Household Ministry were found.

The present paper takes up from that point and covers 922 wooden tablets excavated between February 1964 and July 1965 in the fourteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, twentieth, twenty-first, twenty-second north and twenty-second south excavation surveys of the Nara Palace Site. In 1964 the work teams in charge of the Nara Palace Excavations were re-organized and expanded in scope. The surveys carried out at that time had as their primary object the task of ascertaining the true size and scope of the Nara Palace Site. This was partly to obtain data for designating it as a national historical site for purposes of preservation and also because it was urgent to ensure that the construction of the then-planned National By-pass Highway, which would have run even with what was then believed to be the eastern boundary of the site, would not destroy any of the Nara Palace. The survey was also intended to ascertain by archaeological methods the scope of the Nara Palace Site, which earlier scholars had deduced roughly from documents and the geographical contours of the area.

As a result of the survey it was reconfirmed that the southern and western boundaries of the Nara Palace were just as had previously been supposed, but completely new facts came to light regarding the location of

the eastern limit. In the north and south twenty-second surveys, the area hitherto supposed to be the *Higashi-Ichibō-Ōji* 東一坊大路, the first of the six great avenues running north to south to the east of the *Suzaku-Ōji* 朱雀大路, the central avenue, was found to contain the remains of clusters of government offices, wells and drainage ditches. This gave us new knowledge, widening the scale of the palace further to the east. Later surveys revealed that the eastern limit of the Nara Palace was 250 meters further east than had been thought.

The classification as to shape and information recorded on the wooden tablets that was used in "The Wooden Tablets from the Nara Palace Site (I)" will be used in the present report as well. First we will deal with the excavation sites in which wooden tablets were found and then discuss a few of the wooden tablets themselves. Descriptions are given for each excavation area.

Wooden tablets were found in seven excavation areas, as shown in the accompanying chart.

Investigation Number	Area Investigated	Sites at which Wooden Tablets were found	Number of Wooden Tablets shown in the Plates. Figures in () show the total number of tablets found
(1) 14	6ADI <i>Nan-men Ōgaki</i> 南面大垣, the southern boundary wall of the palace	SD1250	0 (7)
(2) 16 17	6ABX, 6ABY <i>Suzaku-mon</i> Gate 朱雀門, the main entrance to the palace	SD1900	7 (9)
(3) 18	6ADF <i>Sei-men Ōgaki</i> 西面大垣, the western boundary wall of the palace	SK1979	10 (19)
(4) 20	6AAO Government offices to the	SK2101 SK2102	151 (522)

		north of the Imperial domicile	SK2107	
(5)	21	6AAC-H <i>Higashi-Ômizo</i> 東大溝, the principal north to south drain running through the eastern part of the palace	SD2000 SD2700	140 (292)
(6)	22N	6AAC-V <i>Sake-no-tsukasa</i> 造酒司, the government office for brewing rice wine	SD3035 and three other sites	327 (582)
(7)	22S	6AAE, 6AAF Government offices to the east	SD3410 and 60 other sites	297 (518)
				total 922 (1942)

(1) **Excavation Area 6ADI** Excavations in this south-western corner of the palace site were carried out in order to ascertain the scale and location of the outer moat along the southern wall of the palace. Seven wooden tablets were found along with other wooden objects in the bottom layer of accumulated soil in the moat. These tablets were in an extreme state of decay and could not be read, so they have been omitted from this report.

(2) **Excavation Area 6ABX, 6ABY** This survey was carried out in order to discover the layout of the *Suzaku-mon* 朱雀門, the main gate of the Nara Palace and of the portions of the palace just north of it. The gate was found to be 25.3 meters or five span across and 10 meters or two span deep, measuring between the outmost pillars. Just north of the *Suzaku-mon* Gate was found filled in drainage ditches that ran on each side of an old north to south road. This road was built by the government in the seventh century and when the Nara Palace was built later became the datum line in its plan. The drainage ditches were filled in the process of building the palace. That portion of the road north of the *Suzaku-mon* Gate became part of the palace yard. Nine wooden tablets were found in the western ditch. It follows that these wooden tablets go back to the time before the construction of the Nara Palace or to the period when it was under construction.

The tablet found here revealing the most noteworthy information was a *Kaso* 過所, a passport or transit certificate. At that time people were required to have such a transit certificate showing their status when leaving a province. This transit certificate was carried by farmers from *Ômi* 近江 province going to *Fujiwara-kyô* 藤原京, which was the capital city before *Nara*. It can be dated to the time between 701, the first year of *Taihô* 大宝, and 715, the first year of *Reiki* 靈龜, from the method of transcribing the official rank of the farmers' master. The tablet states that one man and woman passed with a seven year old brown male horse carrying baggage.

The reason that this tablet was thrown into the ditch was very likely because before the building of the Nara Palace, this area was the northern entrance to *Yamato* 大和 Province, present day Nara Prefecture. There must have been a provincial barrier here that would have been the last point at which the two farmers would be examined.

Until this find, we had no actual example of the transit certificates of ancient Japan. They were known of only by the format stipulated for them in the laws of the time. The discovery of a transit certificate datable within narrow limits now makes it possible to investigate the transit certificates of ancient times with reference to a concrete example.

(3) **Excavation Area 6ADF** This survey was conducted in a long narrow area along the inside of the western wall of the palace to locate the position of the wall precisely. Traces were found of an old bed of the *Akishino* River prior to the building of the Nara Palace. Most of this river bed was filled in at the time the palace was built, but a long narrow depression of some depth remained. Wooden tablets were recovered from disposal pits in this depression along with the mouthpieces of a bellows, slag and other artifacts relating to iron-working. These tablets were badly decayed fragments and most were impossible to decipher, but several could be, including one inscribed with the names of various kinds of nails.

(4) **Excavation Area 6AAO** This survey was of a supplementary nature, undertaken to the north of the Imperial domicile. The site is in the approximate center of the northern block outlying the Imperial domicile. Here were the facilities in which the officials close to the Emperor and the ladies of the court carried out their daily duties. Wooden tablets were recovered from a cluster of disposal pits in the eastern half of this area. The site of these disposal pits was the filled in moat of a tomb mound. Traces

of building here were few and except for a well most of it was vacant land.

The most important tablet found here was a document bearing the date 729, the sixth year of *Jinki* 神龜, relating to the manufacture of metal door fittings. It records in detail the numbers, size and amount of iron used in the manufacture of six kinds of metal door fittings. Other tablets from this area include several documents giving the names of kinds of wood used in building, showing that work must have been going on in the palace area during the above period.

(5) **Excavation Area 6AAC-H** This survey was carried out along the outside of the eastern outline of the Imperial domicile. Twenty-two meters east of the corridor of the outlying eastern quarter was a large north-south drain lined with rounded stones. Wooden tablets were found in this drain. The drain was 2.6 meters wide and 1.5 meters deep. The sides were lined with rounded stones about 30 cm. in diameter piled up seven high. This was the basic drainage ditch for the eastern palace area. This survey only investigated a small part of it. Accumulated soil in the drain could be distinguished into six layers. Wooden tablets were found in all layer. The top layer revealed tablets dated 783, the second year of *Enryaku* 延暦, which is toward the end of the Nara period, while the lowest layer near the bottom of the drain gave up tablets dating back to 729, the first year of *Tenpyō* 天平, in the first half of the Nara period. We therefore consider that the drain was built during the early phase of construction of the Nara Palace, and that subsequently soil and sand were allowed to accumulate so that by the end of the Nara period it was in such condition that it no longer served the purpose of a sewer drain. Among the information given on the wooden tablets we find the name of the Imperial Household Ministry which was in charge of procuring supplies of goods for the Imperial domicile and names of government offices under it. We take this as showing that these offices were located near this drain.

(6) **Excavation Area 6AAC-V** This survey was carried out in the north-eastern part of the palace area. Two wells were found close together. Of these, one was rectangular, being 5.15 meters east to west and 3 meters north to south and was completely enclosed in a building. The drains leading from the two wells both ran south and joined together. Water overflowed to the west of the drain, leaving a large depression. A large number of wooden tablets were excavated from this depression. The contents of the

tablets largely consist of orders and reports relating to the *Sake-no-tsukasa* 造酒司, the rice wine brewing department of the Imperial Household Ministry and of tallies to be attached to the rice paid to the government by the several provinces surrounding the *Kinai* 畿内, the central provinces. This rice was the chief ingredient of wine. If we consider also that the above-mentioned wells were here and that large *Sue* ware wine jars were excavated from this area too, we must suppose that this is the site of the *Sake-no-tsukasa*. This is one of the few cases in the excavation of the Nare palace in which we can be sure of the location of a government office. Notable among the contents of the wooden tablets are the large number concerning the *Daijōsai* 大嘗祭, ceremony which was held after the accession of the Emperor *Shōmu* 聖武, in 724, the first year of *Jinki* 神龜. Several tablets bear the date first year of *Jinki* when the ceremony was performed and others list the names of plants offered to the shrine on the first day of the ceremony.

(7) **Excavation Area 6AAE, 6AAF** This survey was carried out on the western side of the eastern extension of the Nara Palace. The purpose of the survey was, as stated before, to judge the possibilities that would be entailed by the construction of the proposed National By-pass Highway. In this area, wooden tablets were found sporadically in about 50 sites consisting of holes for the pillar posts of buildings, drains, wells and walls. In exceptional cases 30 to 40 tablets were found at one site, but most sites held only a few tablets. The most noteworthy were tablets recording matters relating to the *Nuidono* 縫殿, an office that controlled women working in the Imperial domicile and the sewing of clothing for persons of high rank. There are documents that report the names of persons taking the night watch in the *Nuidono* to their superior officers and detailed documents reporting the amount of cloth used in the clothing worn by the Emperor and court aristocracy. The area also yielded the oldest dated wooden tablet found so far at the Nara Palace, a tally for tribute rice with the date 709, the second year of *Wadō* 和銅. There are also documents listing the number of workers assigned to gather wood. Some were part of the laborers recruited two from each village from all over the nation for government work, others were slaves owned by the government. These documents show that some such persons had escaped even before beginning their work.