

Wakimoto

Located in the city of Sakurai in the southeastern portion of the Nara basin, this is a multicomponent site with remains from the Jōmon through the Nara periods. Unfolding atop a narrow terrace between the southern base of Mt. Miwa and the north bank of the Hase river, it held down the entranceway to the east, leading through Haibara and on to the eastern provinces. In particular, it is well-known as a strong candidate for the Hatsuse Asakura palace, the royal residence of Emperor Yūryaku at the end of the Middle Kofun period.

Features at this site, dividing broadly into groups of three periods, have drawn attention. Namely, these three periods are (1) from the latter half of the Late Yayoi to the Shōnai period (bridging the Yayoi and Kofun periods), (2) from the latter half of the Middle to the Late Kofun periods, and (3) the Asuka period.

1. Within an area 400 m in length, more than 20 pit-structures have been detected. In particular, artifacts related to bronze casting and to iron implement production, found in the vicinity of structure SB13004, are noteworthy. For this period, artifacts related to bronze casting are found in the Nara basin only in the southeastern portion sites of Wakimoto and Daifuku. Moreover, as signified by the presence among these artifacts of fragments of *dōtaku* (bronze bells) and defective bronze arrowheads resulting from casting failures, it may be presumed that symbolic implements of the Yayoi period were being broken up and used as part of the raw materials for the manufacture of new implements. This is most likely an event symbolizing the start of a new era. Incidentally, while the Makimuku site, where the nucleus of kingly authority at the time is inferred to have been located, is also situated in the southeastern portion of the basin, at present no artifacts related to bronze casting have been recovered. But as *dōtaku* fragments have been found, there is still room for further examination.
2. After a short interval following the situation in (1) above, within the same area more than five pit-structures, more than five embedded-pillar buildings, plus a large-scale stone-lined pond or moat-like feature were detected. This group of features is very possibly related to the Hatsuse Asakura palace. The pond or perhaps moat was built to the western side of the area leading to the Nara basin, and at the eastern end on a slightly higher location was the group of embedded-pillar buildings, with the group of pit-structures placed just below, so that a royal residence was possibly set up in the manner of a checking station at the entranceway to the eastern provinces.
3. In the environs of the location where the embedded-pillar buildings of (2) above spread out, a large-scale embedded-pillar building was detected, with eight inter-pillar spans along the main east–west axis by three transverse spans. Around this unfolded a feature in the shape of a fence aligned to true north, and it is inferred that a group of large-scale embedded-pillar buildings spread over an area of nearly 100 m square. This is possibly a group of features related to the Hatsuse Itsuki palace of the Tenmu court.

In this manner, particularly in the three periods described above, features having strong political tinges developed atop a narrow terrace corresponding to the entranceway to the eastern provinces. This would

appear to be a phenomenon that occurred when there was need to secure the channel to the eastern provinces, at different times during the span from the Kofun to the Nara periods when the nucleus of kingly authority was located in the Nara basin. In that sense, while the site itself is certainly not large, it may be said to have been a strategically vital location for the monarchy.