

# No. 4 Building Ruins of the Guigong Palace in the Han Chang'an City

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and  
Nara National Cultural Properties Institute

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Western Han period

Following the excavation of the Nos. 2 and 3 ruins of the Guigong Palace 桂宫 in 1997, the Sino-Japanese Joint Archaeological Team of IA, CASS and Nara National Cultural Properties Institute continued excavating the No. 4 building ruins from the autumn of 2000 to spring of 2001. It lies at Liucunbu 六村堡 Village of Liucunbu Township in Weiyang 未央 District, Xi'an 西安 City, 25 m northeast of Tiesuo Village 铁锁村, 182 m east of the western palace-wall and 215 m south of the northern palace-wall of the Guigong Palace, Han Chang'an 长安 City. The Han period ruins above the ground surface were damaged, only the Han floor and beneath it remain.

The excavation exposed 4 square pits 60 × 62 m, covers an area of 14880 sq m. The cultural deposit can be divided into 3 layers. Layer 1 is cultivated soil; Layer 2 is disturbed soil; and Layer 3 contains Han cultural artifacts. Layer 3 superimposes upon the building surface. A layer of cultivated earth covers the thick Han cultural remains. Layer 4 is the Han ground.

## I. Building Ruins

No. 4 building ruin measures 124 m long from west to east and 120 m from north to south. It consists of two architectural parts separated by a central road (Fig. 1).

The road situated in the middle of No. 4 building ruin. Its western side is the western building and its eastern side is the eastern building. It measures at present 95 m in

length from the north to south and 8.92 m in width from the east to the west.

### 1. The western part of architecture

Situated in the west of north-south oriented road, it measures 40.6 m from the west to the east and 95.2 m from the north to the south. The western part of architecture consists of the foundation of the main hall, those of

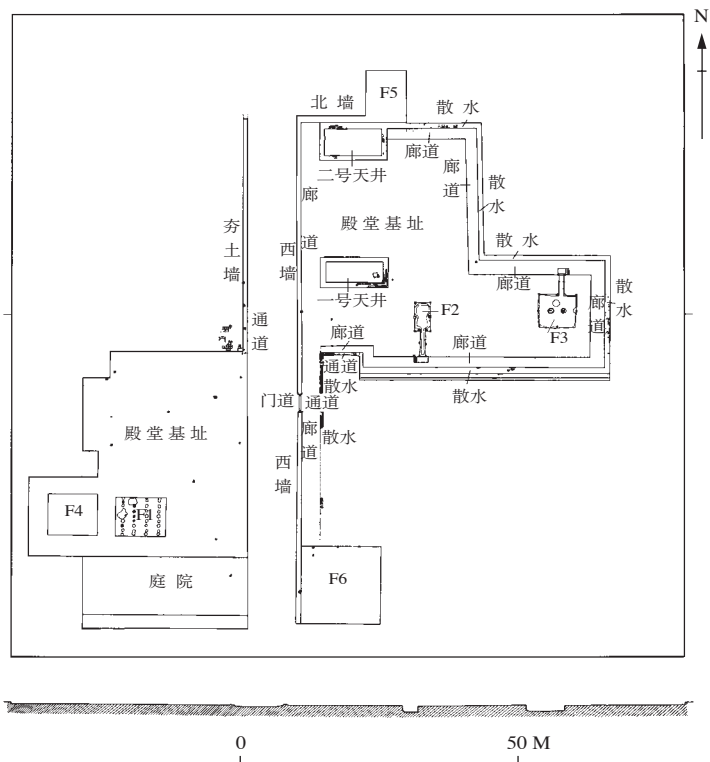


Fig. 1 Plan and elevation of No. 4 building ruins of the Guigong Palace in Han Chang'an City

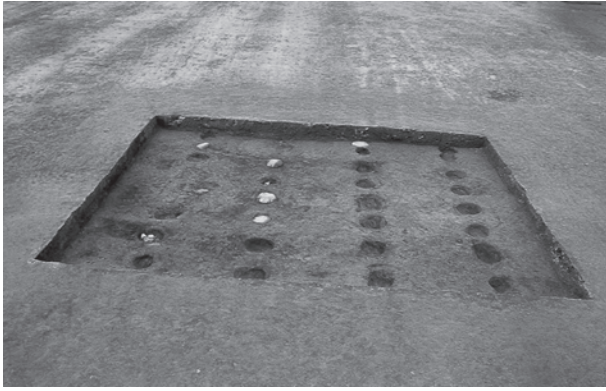


Fig. 2 F1 (Photo taken from south to north)

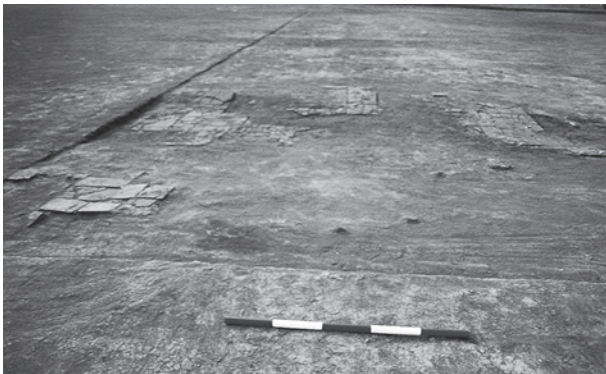


Fig. 3 Bricks in the courtyard of the western building  
(Phototaken from south to north)



Fig. 4 The east-west oriented apron and passage of the eastern building (Photo taken from south to north)

its auxiliary buildings F1 and F4, and a court to its south.

(1) Foundation of the main hall is rectangular shape measuring 40.6 m from the west to the east and 38.18 m from the north to the south.

(2) Auxiliary buildings F1 and F4 lie on the southern foundation of the main hall.

F1, situated to the southwestern of the western part of architecture, is a subterranean building, the construction beneath the ground survived. Shaped like rectangle, it measures  $9.28 \times 7.2 \times 0.48$  m. Four walls were built by rammed earth and their exterior sides were laid with adobe. Then they were smoothed by earth and painted by lime.

There are 36 post stones on the surface, arranged in 4 rows from the east to the west and 9 lines from the north to the south. The row spacing is 2.3 m and the line spacing is 0.75 m (between the central points of two posts). The post stones are all made of granite. F1 is filled with fired debris including large amount of fired clay, broken adobes, and fragments of wall surface (they were fired into brick-red). The densely distributed post

stones should be supports for the wooden floor or ground building (Fig. 2).

F4 is situated in the west of F1 3.37 m, shaped like rectangle. It measures 9.2 m from the east to the west and 7.7 m from the north to the south.

(3) Court lies to the south of the main hall and consists of surface ground and revetment. The northern surface ground, shaped like rectangle, measures 30.4 m in length from the east to the west and 11 m in width from the north to the south. The southern revetment measures 30.4 m in length from the east to the west and 2.65 m in width from the north to the south. The slope is 5 degrees.

(4) Brick-paved vestige is situated to the north of the east end of the northern wall of the main hall and west side of the north-south oriented rammed wall. The vestige is flat paved with geometric patterned brick and the patterned side down. The vestige measures 4.12 m in length from the east to the west and 4.95 m in width from the north to the south. It falls 13 rows from the north to the south and 12 lines from the east to the west. The brick is of square shape, each side 0.36 m in length and 0.045





Fig. 5 The eastern building F2  
(Photo taken from north to south)



Fig. 6 The east post of the main room of F2  
(Photo taken from west to east)



Fig. 7 Doorway and passage of the eastern building F3  
(Photo taken from south to north)



Fig. 8 Southwestern collar post of the main room of F3  
(Photo taken from northeast to southwest)

m in thickness (Fig. 3).

## 2. The eastern part of architecture

Situated to the east side of the central road, it is of irregular shape and measures 103.55 m in length from the north to the south and 57.85 m in width from the east to the west. It consists of the foundation of the main hall, those of its auxiliary buildings F2 and F3, two courts, the west wall and east wall.

Shaped like L-shape, the foundation of the main hall measures 50.08 m in length from the east to the west and 40.8 m in width from the north to the south. It is surrounded by corridors and aprons (Fig. 4). Auxiliary buildings and 2 courts are lie on the foundation of the main hall.

(1) F2 lies to the center of the eastern part of architecture and measures 6.25 m in length from the north to the south and the maximum width 3.2 m (Figs. 5 and 6).

(2) F3 lies to the east of the eastern part of architecture. It is an underground building facing south. It consists of doorway, passage, and main room. Shaped like a rectangle, the main room measures 6.8–7.15 m in width and 6.02–6.2 m in depth. The present four walls are 0.97–1.15 m in height. There are four corner posts in the four corners. A pair of pilasters were placed symmetrically in the east and west walls; the south and north walls are the same. The floor of the main room also has the east and west posts. The post stones are made of granite. There are vestiges of second tier platform around the main room (Figs. 7 and 8).

(3) No. 1 court lies to the west of the eastern part of architecture and shapes like a rectangle. It measures 12.65 m from the west to the east, 5.55 m from the north to the south, and consists of patio and apron. Shaped like a rectangle, the patio measures 10.6 m in length from the west to the east and 3.9 m in width from the north to the



Fig. 9 Tile-end with animal pattern (T1 ③:21)



Fig. 10 Tile-end with characters (T3 ③:22)

south, and surrounded by apron. The central surface ground of the patio is smooth and a leaching well to its east.

(4) No. 2 court lies to the northwest of the eastern part of architecture and shapes like a rectangle. It measures 12.3 m from the west to the east, 6.9 m from the north to the south, and consists of patio and apron. The patio is shaped like an west-east oriented rectangle and measures 10.6 m in length from the west to the east and 4.96 m in width from the north to the south. It is surrounded by apron.

(5) The auxiliary buildings of the east part of architecture also include F5 and F6. F5 lies to the northwest of the east part of architecture. It shapes like a rectangle and measures 7.4 m in width from the west to the east and 9.8 m in depth from the north to the south. F6 lies to the east side of the southern west wall of the east part of architecture. It shapes like a square and measures 14.55 m each side.

(6) Drainage implements consist of leaching well and drainage pipes. The leaching well lies in the east of No. 1 court and 1.05 m west of its west apron; the north of No. 2 court and 2.1 m south of its south apron. Its opening and bottom are square shape and measures 0.69–0.72 m each side and 1 m in depth. The drainage pipes lie in No. 2 court and 3.7 m east of its eastern patio; the north of the foundation of main hall, 0.27 m south of its southern apron. It is north-south oriented and two sections of pentagon-shaped pottery

pipes are survived. The pipe is 0.553 m long.

## II. Unearthed Artifacts

The unearthed artifacts mainly include architectural material and a number of household wares. They are made of pottery, jade, stone, bronze, and iron. In addition, there are coins recovered.

The pottery artifacts mainly comprise architectural material, household wares are few. The types consist of brick, tile, tile-end, ball, support pad, and pellet. The bricks include slab brick, square brick, and hollow brick. The tiles comprise flat tile and semi-cylindrical tile. The tile-ends are of round shape decorated with patterns or characters. The cloud pattern is premium; sunflower pattern and animal pattern are few. The characters decorated on the tile-ends are “*Yutian wuji* 与天无极,” “*Changle wuji* 长乐无极,” “*Changle weiyang* 长乐未央”(Figs. 9–12).

The jade and stone artifacts include one stone bird, agate balls, and one jade tablet. The stone bird is an auxiliary part of an ornament. It is shaped like an eagle with two standing claws, two round eyes, and vivid feather. Its beak was lost. The bird is 9 cm in height (Fig. 13). The jade tablet is rectangular shaped in green color, polished, and black surface. The present dimension is 13.8 × 9.4 × 2.7 cm. Its one side was intaglio with red-written characters in official and seal scripts arranged in 5 vertical lines, only 29 characters survived (Fig. 14).

According to historical document, jade tablet was





Fig. 11 Style I tile-end with four leaves and cloud pattern (T1 ③:8)



Fig. 12 Style CI tile-end with cloud pattern (T1 ③:62)



Fig. 13 Stone bird figurine (T4 ③:14)

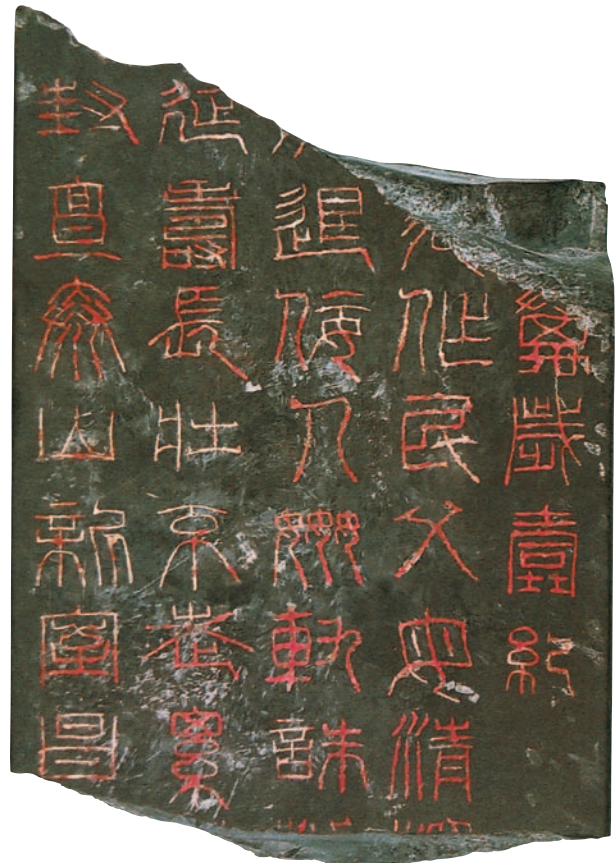


Fig. 14 Jade tablet unearthed from No. 4 building ruins of the Guigong Palace in Han Chang'an City

used to enfeoff the Mount Tai 泰山. It is made of green stone carved with red-written characters. The jade tablet unearthed from No. 4 building ruins of the Guigong

Palace in the Han Chang'an City is close to the record. The war flame at the end of Xinmang 新莽 reign period destroyed the Guigong Palace. The cultural deposit of

the Guigong Palace comprises of the Western Han and Xinmang periods. Wang Mang 王莽 usurped the Han court and built a new reign period “Xin 新” or called “Xinshi 新室.” This discovered jade tablet carved with a couple of “Xinshi” which clarifies that present one belonged to Wang Mang. The historical record said “Wang Mang planned to enfeoff the Mount Tai four times and he could not carry out” matched with this find. To present, this tablet is the earliest one used to sacrifice heaven and enfeoff the Mount Tai and has important significance in exploring ancient Chinese ritual system.

Iron artifacts include arrowhead, axe, nail, broken hollow-shaft knife, spear, and cross-mechanism.

Bronze artifacts comprise finials of canopy, arrowheads, rings, iron shaft arrowheads, tubes, fragments of mirror, cup-shaped vessels, and broken artifacts.

Coins include *wuzhu* 五铢, *huoquan* 货泉, *daquan wushi* 大泉五十.

### III. Conclusion

Layer 3 superimposed upon the No. 4 building ruins of the Guigong Palace, except the present foundation superimposed by the cultivated layer. The artifacts recovered from Layer 3 dated to the middle to late Western Han and the early Western Han objects were never occurred. For example, the coins of *wuzhu*, *daquan wushi*, and *huoquan*, large amount of tiles decorated with rough, middle or fine cord patterns, and tile-ends with comb or cloud patterns all have characteristics of that period. Therefore, the deposit of Layer 3 dated to the middle to late Western Han period. The rammed foundation of No. 4 building ruins superimposed upon the sterile soil and its architectural material belonged to the middle to late Western Han times; consequently No. 4

building ruins dated to that period. The upper limit of the artifacts recovered from Layer 3 was no early than the middle Western Han period matched with historical document that the Guigong Palace was built in the Emperor Wudi 武帝 reign period of the Western Han. The debris, particularly the large quantity of fired red clays unearthed from F1, F2, and F3 informed that No. 4 building ruins of the Guigong Palace was destroyed by the war flames in the end of Wang Mang reign period.

The central road of the north-south oriented divides the site into a western and an eastern part. The foundation of main hall of the former part is irregular shaped and protruded westward and has two auxiliary houses. One of them is subterranean. The foundation of the latter one is irregular shaped and the northern part is L-shaped. It has two subterranean houses and two courts. In addition, there is one auxiliary house to the south and north of the foundation respectively. From a point of architectural structure, the layout is quite loose, free, irregular, and complicated, which is very rare in the former palace architecture. Judging from the layout, the No. 4 building complex must have been the auxiliary place of the queen and maids of honor of different ranks' palace activities and the main area of their living.

Many tile-ends decorated with double lines across the middle cloud pattern were recovered, which is different from its counterparts from Nos. 2 and 3 building ruins of the Guigong Palace. In No. 4 building ruins, 66 pieces of tile-ends among 113 are decorated with double lines across the middle cloud pattern, 58% in the whole collection. It is worthy that this special tile-end is first discovered in the Guigong Palace and there is also not occurred in the Weiyang Palace. The backside has no cord-cutting trace; therefore it should be a new type appeared in the middle to late Western Han period.

Note: The original report is published in *Kaogu* 考古 2002.1: 3–15, with 9 figures and 5 pages of plate, written by Li Yufang 李毓芳. The present version, an abridgment from the original, is prepared by the author herself, English-translated by Yi Nan 亦囡, and revised by Cao Nan 曹楠.