# HAA 18j: Japanese Architecture

Lecture 2: The Ise Shrines

# The Ise Shrines

The Ise shrine complex is located near the northeastern coast of the Kii Peninsula, in what is now Mie Prefecture in the west-center of Japan’s main island. It consists of a total of 125 shrines centered around two compounds, an Inner Sanctuary (Naikū) and an Outer Sanctuary (Gekū).

Both compounds have multiple buildings associated with them, but the main shrine in each is known as the Shōden. It is the **Main Shrine of the Inner Sanctuary** that you will be viewing most often in lecture.

The origins of the shrines at Ise are obscure, but by the late seventh century they had been appropriated into the ancestral cult of the imperial clan (the **Yamato clan**) based in the **Asuka basin**, to the northwest of the Ise region. The Inner Sanctuary is a place of worship for **Amaterasu**, the Sun Goddess and ancestress of the Imperial clan, and also houses the three sacred imperial treasures: a curved jewel, a sword, and a mirror. The Ise Shrines derive their basic structure from early raised-floor granaries, and are reconstructed at twenty-year intervals, after a ceremonial program consisting of 32 rituals over 8 years known as the Shikinen Sengū. The imperial clan sponsored the **first official reconstruction in 690**, and since then the shrines have been renewed 62 times over 1300 years, the last in 2013.

# Historical Background

* Asuka period (593 To 710), earliest Buddhist architecture, rise of the imperial (Yamato) clan
* animism and *kami* worship, ***torii*** gates, development of shrine cults, Shinto (“Way of the Gods”)
* Emperor Tenmu (d. 686), the figure most responsible for the formalization of the Ise complex

# Inner Sanctuary

* Courtyards are symmetrical, aligned along north-south axis, series of enclosures, Chinese infl.
* Inner Sanctuary measures 100m north-south, 60m east-west, elevated 4-5m above ground
* Two smaller sacred storehouses behind the Main Shrine of the Inner Sanctuary
* Right next to the sanctuary is the alternate site to begin the next rebuilding

# Architecture

* Materials: unpainted Japanese cypress (*hinoki*), thatch reed (*kaya*), and gold ornaments
* Raised-floor rectangular structure (three by two bays) with gable roof, 15m x 10m x 9.7m (H)
* Ridge pole has ten cylindrical billets (“bonito fish timbers”) surmounted by forked finials
* All columns sunk directly into the earth, at either end pillars support the ridgepole

**Other Sites**

* Toro, reconstructed (3rd century CE) Yayoi village, Shizuoka Prefecture
* Kasuga Shrine, Nara City, established 768 and renewed every 30 to 50 years until the mid 19th century. Several buildings recently renewed in 2015-16.
* Izumo Shrine, Izumo City, Shimane Prefecture. Formalized as shrine compound as early as 7th century, subject to occasional renewal; long hiatus in renewal from 1744 to 2013.
* Hōryūji Monastery (Western Precinct), Nara Prefecture, buildings date from ca. 670 to 711.