Introduction

‘Royal capital’ is a term applied to the capital cities of pre-modern states. It designates the site from which the state was governed and consequently carries great political significance. Silla’s royal capital was located in what is now the city of Gyeongju and was known by various names, including Geumseong (金城), Daegyeong (大京), Geumgyeong (金京), and more. The history, culture, and spirit of Silla, a kingdom that survived for nearly one thousand years, are preserved there.

The Namsan District has been regarded as an outdoor museum of sorts for its numerous Buddhist remains. In the Wolseong District where the Silla royal palace once stood are various sites including Wolseong Fortress, the East Palace grounds, Wolji Pond, and Cheomseongdae, the oldest astronomical observatory in the Eastern world. The Daereungwon District is home to a complex of great tombs where the kings, queens, and elite of Silla were laid to rest. The Hwangnyongsa Temple District encompasses both the eponymous temple and the stone pagoda of Bunhwangsa Temple. Finally, Myeonghwalseoseong Fortress served as the main mountain stronghold protecting the royal capital.

These traces of Silla’s cultural heritage were designated the Gyeongju Historic Areas UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. No longer to the exclusive property of the Korean people, they have become a global legacy to be appreciated, enjoyed, and protected by the entire world.

The Silla royal capital remained in one location for a thousand years after the state’s foundation. Multiple spatial reorganizations of the city were undertaken in several phases. It is, however, difficult to establish the details of these reorganizations due to the limited nature of written resources available. Fortunately, the continuous excavations carried out in the royal capital area have uncovered a stream of new sites and artifacts. By integrating information from written sources with the results of excavations, this paper aims to trace the development of the royal capital over time until its reorganizations were finalized in the seventh century. In addition, it aims to highlight the historical significance of Silla’s royal capital. The results of this research will contribute to expanding the foundation for the understanding of Silla history and culture.
A Brief History of the Silla Royal Capital

The origins of Silla can be traced back to the statelet of Saroguk, which was founded in 58 BCE when the heads of six villages (the yukchon) chose a figure named Hyeokgeose as their ruler. The political center of Saroguk at this time appears to have been located south of the Namcheon River, in the area of the Changgrimsa Temple site. Saroguk subsequently expanded its territory by conquering and consolidating neighboring polities, including Eumjeupbeolguk (located in present-day Angang), Apdokguk (located in present-day Gyeongsan), and Golbeolguk (located in present-day Yeongcheon). As a result, the Saroguk heartland (the Gyeongju Basin, where Saroguk’s capital was located) emerged as the royal capital and the newly consolidated areas became Saroguk’s ‘local’ regions.

Saroguk officially changed its name to Silla in the fourth century and established a political center in Wolseong Fortress. A moat was dug around the fortress to enhance its defenses. The area of the royal capital at this time was bordered by the foot of Namsan Mountain to the south, the Seochoen River to the west, and the Bukcheon River to the north. A palace, administrative quarters, and settlements were all established within this area. Also located here were royal tombs in the form of wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds, a type of large tomb with a high mound that was commonly constructed up until the fifth century. This cluster of such tombs is now known as the Daereungwon Tomb Complex (Fig. 1).

In the fifth century, the strengthening of centralized power led to efforts to reorganize the urban structure of the royal city based on the bangri (坊里) unit. However, the great tombs that had already been constructed and the presence of waterlogged areas made it difficult to systematize the urban layout. In the sixth century, a full-fledged reorganization of the royal capital was undertaken. The impetus for this was the need to create space for Buddhist temples following the official recognition of Buddhism. As a result, levees were constructed along the banks of the Bukcheon River for flood prevention and waterlogged areas were filled to create usable land.

The adoption of Buddhism triggered a change in the perception of death, based on which royal tombs that had previously been constructed within the city limits came to be established in mountainous locations along the peripheries of the royal city. This freed up useable land within the urban center. The newly available land was organized in a grid-like manner wherever possible, and districts for government administration and temples were established in accordance with the grids. The units of space that were marked out according to such a system

Fig. 1. Aerial photograph of the Gyeongju city center and key sites
are referred to as bangri.

In the seventh century, Silla conquered neighboring Baekje (18 BCE–660CE) and Goguryeo (37 BCE–668 CE) to achieve the unification of the Three Kingdoms. Its territory and population increased significantly and yet another reorganization of the royal capital took place. One of its key objectives was to display the royal authority of what was now a unified kingdom. The new layout for the capital referenced Changan, the capital of the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE).

Changan faithfully adhered to the urban planning guidelines laid out in the ‘Kaogongji’ (考工記) section of the ancient Chinese ritual text Zhouli (The Rites of Zhou). Its city wall, which features twelve gates, measures 9.7 km along its east-west axis, 8.6 km along its north-south axis, and five meters tall. Taiji Palace (太極宮), where the emperor resided, and Huangcheng (皇城), where the central administrative agencies were concentrated, were located in the northern section. The main street of the capital city, which ran north-south, was referred to as “Zhuque Dajie Street” (朱雀大街). Fifty-four spatial units known as bangri (坊) were respectively established to the east and to the west of this main street in a symmetrical fashion. Each bangri unit featured various facilities and residences (Fig. 2).

A roof tile with the inscription ‘Uibong sanyeon gaeto’ (儀鳳四年皆土) establishes that the reorganization of the Silla royal capital in reflection of the layout of the capital of Tang China took place on a wide-scale basis around the fourth year of the Yifeng (儀鳳) reign period (679 CE). These efforts involved the expansion of both the palace district and city limits.

Palace facilities had originally been limited to the area within Wolseong Fortress. However, due to a lack of space, the moat surrounding the fortress was filled in and the boundaries of the royal palace were extended to beyond the former perimeters of the moat (Figs. 3–4). As a result, the East Palace and the Imhaejeon came to be located outside the boundaries of Wolseong.

The population of the capital city increased significantly after unification and necessitated an extension of the city limits. The newly expanded royal capital was bordered by Namsan Mountain to the south, Myeonghwalansan Mountain to the east, Seohyeongsan Mountain to the west, and Hyeonsan Mountain to the north. Seohyeongsan Mountain was located beyond the Seocheon River, and Hyeonsan Mountain beyond the Bukcheon River. The bangri system was applied to establish a grid-like network of roads throughout this newly enlarged area. This is evidenced by the fact that bangri units have been identified in areas beyond the Namcheon, Seochoen, and Bukcheon Rivers.

Zones around the royal capital which provided economic and military support to the capital were known as ‘royal domains’ (王畿). Two units, Daeseonggun and Sangeonggun, were set up as royal domains and six military camps were established within them to guard the capital city. These are known as the six royal domain camps (六畿停, yookgijeong).

The Samguk sagi (三國史記, History of the Three Kingdoms) states that the Silla royal capital was 3,075 paces long and 3,018 paces wide, equivalent to 5,424 meters in length and 5,323 meters in width. Alongside the royal palace at Wolseong were various administrative institutions, ritual facilities, temples, roads, ponds, domestic complexes and villas of Silla aristocrats, commoner’s dwellings, and areas for production. Mountain fortresses were constructed for defensive purposes along the perimeters of the royal capital. It is said that there were luxurious seasonally occupied villas (四節遊宅) and 35 opulent domestic complexes within the royal capital. According to the Samguk yusa (三國遺事, Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), the population of Silla’s royal city peaked at 178,936 households.
Geumseong (金城), Wolseong (月城), and Manwolseong (滿月城) are the names of the palaces established within the royal capital. They reflect the changes that the Silla palaces underwent. Geumseong was Silla’s first palace, but its location remains unclear. Wolseong, also known as Banwolsong (Half-moon Fortress) or Sinwolseong (New Moon Fortress) for its shape reminiscent of a half or crescent moon when seen from above, emerged in the fourth century as the main palace (Fig. 5). The discovery of a roof tile featuring the inscription ‘jaeseong’ (在城) confirms that a royal palace had indeed been situated within Wolseong Fortress. The surviving sections of the fortress measure 890 meters in length (east-west), 260 meters in width (north-south), and 10–20 meters in height. The circumference of the outer walls is 2,340 meters, and the area within the walls measures 193,845 square meters. Twelve gate sites have been identified thus far; the northeast gates were single-story roofed structures measuring one kan in the front and two kan along the sides.

Following the unification of the Three Kingdoms, the palace boundaries were extended beyond Wolseong to include Anapji Pond to the east, Cheomseongdae Observatory to the north, and Woljeonggyo Bridge to the west. The Namcheon River formed the southern boundary of the palace. ‘Manwolseong’ is the name applied to this newly expanded palace in order to distinguish it from earlier iterations. With its expansion, Wolseong became a ‘main palace’ (大宮) and auxiliary palaces were constructed in the form of the South Palace (南宮), where the Gyeongju National Museum now stands, and the North Palace (北宮) or Yanggung Palace (壤宮) in the area of the Old Building Site in Seongdong-dong (城東洞殿廊址, Seongdongdong je-ohrangji). In addition, an ‘East Palace’ (東宮) was newly established in the area of Wolji (月池) Garden and Pond (Fig. 6).
Various palace buildings, including Pyeonguijeon (平議殿), Jowonjeon (朝元殿), Sungryejeon (崇禮殿), Gangmujeon (講武殿), and Imhaejeon (臨海殿) were constructed within the expanded grounds. Palace gates, such as Gwijeongmun (歸正門), were also erected. Finally, a structure containing the drum that was struck to announce the time was established, along with Cheonjeongo (天尊庫), which housed royal treasures.

A ground-penetrating radar investigation of the area within Wolseong has revealed structures of various sizes and forms, including gates, large buildings, and structures with floor plans shaped like inverted triangles. In addition, excavations are currently being carried out on the area within Wolseong. These will hopefully provide further information on the palace buildings that once stood within its grounds (Fig. 7).

Various structures have also been identified within the Old Building Site in Seongdong-dong, which measures 225 meters along its east-west axis, and 93 meters north to south. These include six palace buildings, six long covered corridors, two gates, three walls, and a single well. These structures appear to have been associated with the North Palace.

**Government Offices**

The central area of the royal city was home to various government offices, including the Chancellery Office (Jipsabu, 執事部) that oversaw state affairs, the Office of War (Byeongbu, 兵部), the Office of Finance (Jobu, 調府), and the Office of Rites (禮部). The Naeseong (內省) was the department that oversaw palace operations. Under its auspices were offices such as the Naesejongjeon (內司正典), which inspected palace personnel, the Sangmunsaa (詳文師), which was responsible for diplomatic documents, and the Cheonmunbaksa (天文博士) which made astronomical observations. Cheomseongdae Observatory was overseen by the Cheonmunbaksa. The Royal Guards, or Siwibu (侍衛府), who protected the palace were headquartered here as well.

Excavations undertaken on the area between Wolseong and Cheomseongdae Observatory (i.e. the eastern, southern, and northern portions of the Gyerim area and the zone south of Cheomseongdae) have revealed the presence of approximately fifty buildings with stone post foundations and covered corridors. The building cluster located in the eastern section of Gyerim, situated to the south of an artificial waterway, consisted of buildings standing in four rows parallel to the north wall of Wolseong Fortress. The buildings located beyond the west wall were also laid out parallel to this wall. These structures are likely to be government buildings dating to the Unified Silla Period.

Government offices associated with the East Palace include the Donggunga (東宮衙), which oversaw administrative duties, and the Eoryongseong (御龍省) and Setaek (洗宅), which were responsible for documents. Excavations in the eastern section of the district known as ‘Wolji Pond and the East Palace of Gyeongju’ have revealed the presence of large buildings, walls, roads, a drainage system, and stone foundations. These facilities all appear to have been associated with the East Palace (Fig. 8).

**Ritual Facilities**

**Royal Ancestral Shrine, Altar for the Gods of Soil and Grains, Shrine to the Dynastic Founder, and the Divine Palace**

State rituals were among the most important procedures for pre-modern societies. Jongmyo (宗廟) is the term for a shrine where the spirit tablets of previous rulers were housed, and jongmyoje (宗廟祭) refers to the rituals carried out for them. In Silla, the onmyoje (五廟制) system of performing ancestral rites for the dynastic founder and four direct generations of ancestors came to be established in the seventh century. The Sajik was an altar for the
Gods of Soil and Grain, with ‘사’ (社) meaning the God of Soil and ‘稷’ (稷) referring to the God of Grain. When establishing the layout of the capital city, the royal ancestral shine was placed to the left of the royal palace, and the Altar for the Gods of Soil and Grains was sited to its right.

The Shrine to the Dynastic Founder (시요묘) was dedicated to Hyeokgeosae, the founding father of the Silla Kingdom. The coronation ceremonies for Silla rulers were carried out here. The Divine Palace, which was established after the Kim clan claimed the Silla kingship, was a shrine to their ancestors. The precise location of these ritual facilities remains unclear, but excavations in the northern section of Gyerim and the area south of Cheomseongdae have revealed the presence of one building aligned east-west and fourteen running on a north-south axis (Fig. 9). Of these, twelve were constructed after the end of the seventh century. Five jars, which appear to have been votive offerings intended to ward off evil spirits during the construction process, were found nearby alongside a linear stone feature to the south of the area. The distinctive layout of the buildings and the presence of these jars seem to indicate that this complex was in fact the royal ancestral shrine. If this is the case, then the Altar for the Gods of Soil and Grains would have been located to its west.

The well where the dynastic founder Hyeokgeosae is said to have been born has also been investigated. Excavations carried out in the area of the well, known as Najeong (蘿井), revealed the presence of an octagonal building dating to the seventh century (Figs. 10–11). The scale and shape of the building suggest that it may have been used for rituals. It is highly likely that the building was the Divine Palace, the shrine for the ancestors of the ruling Kim clan.

Three Mountains and Five Peaks
The Silla royal family believed that the Mountain Gods residing in the mountains and streams held the power to protect the kingdom and the royal family. Rituals for the Mountain Gods were organized into Great Rites (大祀), Middle Rites (中祀), and Small Rites (小祀). Great Rites were held for the Three Mountains (三山): Nangsan (狼山) (also known as Naryuk (奈歴)), which was located within the royal capital; Golhwa (骨火), located in Yeongcheon; and Hyeollye (穴禮), found in Cheongdo. Nangsan appears to have been revered as a sacred mountain since it was also referred to as ‘Sinyurim’ (神遊林), meaning ‘forest where the Gods wandered’ (Fig. 12).

Middle Rites were held for the Five Peaks (五岳), Four Rivers (四瀆), Four Seas (四海), and Four Mountains (四鎭), which were the most important mountains, rivers, and seas in the local regions. They were evenly distributed throughout the northern, southern, eastern, and western reaches of Silla territory. Of central importance were the Five Peaks, which included Tohamsan Mountain (the East Peak), Seondosan Mountain (the West Peak), and Geumgangsan Mountain (the North Peak)—all close to the royal capital in the period prior to the unification of the Three Kingdoms. With the expansion
of Silla territory following unification, the Five Peaks were reassigned in order to incorporate mountains from the former lands of Gaya, Goguryeo, and Baekje. Tohamsan Mountain remained the East Peak, but Gyeryongsan Mountain (once in Baekje) became the West Peak, Jirisan Mountain (formerly in Gaya) became the South Peak, and Taebaeksan Mountain (previously held by Goguryeo) became the North Peak. Palgongsan Mountain, which was located within Silla’s original territory, became the Central Peak.

**Urban Structure of the Royal Capital**

**Bangri**

Up until the sixth century, the limits of Silla’s royal capital extended to the area of Myeonghwaesan Mountain to the east, the Seochon River to the west, the southern section of Gyerim to the southeast, and the Bukcheon River to the north. This zone was incorporated into Silla’s administrative system and consisted of six bu (部, districts established according to traditional political divisions), 55 ri (里, villages), and 360 bang (坊, blocks). In the seventh century, the boundaries of the royal capital pushed out to Geoncheon in the west, the area stretching from Sacheonwang Temple to Mangdeoksa Temple in the south, and the area extending from Hwangseong-dong to Yonggang-dong in the north. As a result, the number of bang units in the royal capital surged to 1,360.

The bangri system was influenced by the Chinese capital model (都城制) in which roads are laid out in a grid with a main boulevard extending along a central north-south axis. Due to
the pre-existing urban structure of the Silla capital city, it was impossible to organize all of the urban districts to suit. Instead, the bangri system was simply adopted wherever possible. The distinctive layout of the city, which can be identified through aerial photography, provides evidence of the application of the bangri system (Fig. 13).

The basic unit for the bangri system was the block, referred to as a ‘bang’. Bang were formed by straight roads running north-south and east-west. Bang units have been identified through excavations at the Hwangryongsa Temple site (locations S1E1 and 376), the Dongcheon-dong 7R/L location site, and the Moryang-ri urban site. The bang units were not uniform in size, but differed according to their locations. At the S1E1 location, the distance between the center points of roads was found to be 172.5 meters (from north to south) and 167.5 meters (from east to west). The bang identified at Dongcheon-dong measured 160 meters by 125 meters. Each side of the bang identified at Moryang-ri was 120 meters long (Fig. 14).

Roads

The individual bangri units were connected by roads. Some of the names of these roads are known, such as ‘Road that passes in front of Heungryoonsa Temple’ (興輪寺前路), ‘Road that passes in front of Yeongmyosa Temple’ (靈廟寺前路), ‘Northeast road of Yeongmyosa Temple’ (靈廟寺之東北路), and ‘Great Road that passes in front of the Sacheonwangsa and Mangdeoksa Temple sites.’ The fact that the names of many of the roads are associated with temples indicates how temples served as an important reference point in laying out the road network.

The royal capital’s central road ran north-south from Wolseong, where the main palace was located, to the area of the Old Building Site in Seongdong-dong to the north. It was ten meters wide, and therefore appears to have been the main road. King Jinheung’s plan to construct a new palace in an area outside of Wolseong in the sixth century resulted in the establishment of a new central road running north-south. Reaching from the perimeters of the Hwangnyongsa Temple site to what is now the grounds of the Gyeongju National Museum, this avenue had a width of 23 meters and can be regarded as a secondary main road.

Over forty road sites have been identified through excavations. All of them were found to be straight and paved with pebbles mixed with a clay or sandy soil mixture that was subsequently tamped and reinforced. Drains were also established alongside the roads. The widths of the roads vary from three to 23 meters. Large roads are usually more than 15
meters wide, medium roads around ten meters wide, and small roads around five meters wide (Fig. 15).

Several bridges were also constructed around the royal capital, with major examples including Muncheongyo Bridge, Chunyanggyo Bridge, and Woljeonggyo Bridge. All three of these spanned the Namcheon River near Wolseong Fortress. The piers and foundations of auxiliary facilities have been identified for Chunyanggyo Bridge and Woljeonggyo Bridge. The latter, which has recently been reconstructed, had four piers and a length of 60.5 meters (Figs. 16–17).

In the period after unification, five main traffic routes known as the five tong (通) connected the royal capital to the local regions. They were the Bukhae Route (北海通), Yeomji Route (鹽池通), Donghae Route (東海通), Haenam Route (海南通), and Bukyo Route (北徭通). The entrance gates of the royal capital, known as the five munyeok (門驛), were the Geon Gate (乾門驛), Gon Gate (坤門驛), Gam Gate (坎門驛), Gan Gate (艮門驛), and Tae Gate (兌門驛). Located in the center of the royal capital was an additional gate, the Gyeongdo Gate (京都驛).

The Bukhae Route began at Gan Gate and reached the East Sea coast in the northeast region. The Donghae Route stretched between the Gon Gate and Ulsan in the southeast. The Haenam Route ran from the Tae Gate to the southern coast via Yangsan. The Bukyo Route connected Geon Gate and Daegu. The Yeomji Route began at Gam Gate and proceeded toward Uisong. These tracks allowed Silla to mitigate its geographical limitations as a capital located in the southeast corner of the Korean Peninsula.

Aristocratic Residential Complexes, Domestic Houses, and Production Spaces

Aristocratic Residential Complexes

Aristocratic urban complexes, temples, and purely domestic homes were built within the urban areas divided by roads according to the bangri system. Silla society was rigidly organized along the bone rank system, which included rules on the permitted size and decoration of houses. The walls surrounding the houses of jingol (true bone) aristocrats, who were of the highest rank, could not exceed 24 chuk (尺) in height. The limits were 21 chuk for those of the sixth head rank and 18 chuk for those of the fifth head rank. The houses of commoners of below the fourth head rank could not exceed 15 chuk. One cheok is equivalent to 30 centimeters.

In addition, jingol aristocrats could not use dangwa (唐瓦) roof tiles or have eves that curved up (飛簷). They were forbidden from decorating their houses with gold, silver, brass, or any of the ochae colors (五彩) (blue, yellow, red, white, and black). Dual stairs could not be used in the houses of those under the sixth head rank, and house gates and doors facing in all four directions were forbidden to those under the fifth head rank. The walls surrounding the grounds of the house could not exceed 8 chuk for those of the sixth head rank, 7 chuk for the fifth head rank, and 6 chuk for the fourth head rank (Fig. 18).

Dangwa roof tiles are green-glazed roof tiles. Such tiles have mainly been found on the grounds of palaces (such as Wolseong Palace, Wolji Pond, and East Palace) and at temple sites (such as the Hwangnyongsa Temple and Gameunsa Temple sites). This demonstrates that the regulation prohibiting even jingol aristocrats from using dangwa roof tiles was indeed obeyed.

During the Late Silla Period, government authority was weakened by conflicts over the succession to the throne. As a result, the above regulations were no longer followed and dangwa tiled houses abounded in the royal capital. The luxurious villas of high-ranking aristocrats, referred to as ‘villas for each season’ (四季遊宅), and opulent residential complexes decorated with gold (represented by the ‘thirty-five gold covered houses’) (35金入宅), came to be built around this time.
Bang Unit Houses

The houses in the royal capital were established within bang units. A typical example of a bang unit was identified at the Hwanhryeongsa Temple site S1E1 location, which measured 172.5 meters north to south and 167.5 meters east to west for an area of 28,700 square meters. The area of the domestic space within the walled bang unit totaled 18,500 square meters. Eighteen households resided within this demarcated domestic space, with each household possessing a well and between five and eight buildings. Of the buildings serving the households, approximately thirty-five were aligned along an east-west axis, and seventy-one along a north south axis (Figs. 19, 19-1).

Household 1 was the largest, with a central building measuring about fifty-three pyeong in area (one pyeong measures approximately 3.3 square meters), and around ten lesser buildings of ten to twenty pyeong. However, no indoor heating facilities were found. In the case of Households 2 and 8, the layouts of the respective gates were well preserved. Located

Fig. 18. Brick with decoration of buildings. Silla. 8th century. Excavated from Nongso-dong Tomb, Ulsan. Earthenware. W. 6.3cm. Gyeongju National Museum, Korea

Fig. 19. Hwangnyongsa Temple site S1E1 location after excavation and plan of the bang unit

Fig. 19-1. Map of Hwangnyongsa Temple site S1E1 location, showing bang unit
within Households 3 and 6 were foundations of rectangular buildings with a single or double layer of river stones, each measuring around 30 centimeters in diameter. Such a foundation was also observed in Building 5 of Household 4. In Household 13, a jar was discovered dug into the ground and neatly surrounded by stones. Such findings have been interpreted as toilets. Each household had its own well. In the case of Household 2, a drain was located next to the well and would have expelled household wastes from the domestic complex into the public drainage that had been established between the roads and the bang units that comprised the urban space (Fig. 20).

**Wells and Ponds**

Wells were a necessity for ensuring a constant supply of drinking water and over 245 wells have been investigated at sites within the royal capital. Some of these wells were well preserved, such as the stone well in Bunhwangsa Temple, the well located within the grounds of Gyeongju National Museum, the well serving Wolseong Fortress, Jaemajeong Well (財買井), and the stone well at the Namgansa Temple site, making it possible to examine their structures. The majority of these wells were lined with stones.

The well located within the grounds of Gyeongju National Museum is 11 meters deep. A roof tile with the inscription ‘南宮之印’ (stamp of the South Palace) was found at a point 7.5 meters from the mouth of the well; the skeletal remains of a child were found alongside numerous animal and fish bones at a point eight meters deep; and a well bucket and a wooden strip with the characters ‘龍王’ written upon it, which means the ‘Dragon King,’ was discovered at a point nine meters down. The animal bones are likely the remains of offerings made during rituals carried out at the well, and the child’s skeleton seems to indicate the practice of human sacrifice. The rituals that took place at this well, located in what would have been the grounds of the South Palace, are likely to have been dedicated to the Dragon King God of the well (Figs. 21–22).

Ponds have generally been found within palace and temple grounds, and several of them have been identified in excavations. Wolji Pond, created in the fourteenth year of the reign of King Munmu (674), was located within the grounds of the Palace Garden. Three artificial islands representing the three sacred mountains of the Taoist Sages located in the seas (海中仙山) were built within the pond, and exotic birds and animals are said to have been kept on them. Several buildings
were erected around Wolji Pond, the central one of which was the structure known as “Imhaejeon” (臨海殿), which means “building situated along the shore of an island located within the sea of the Taoist Sages.” Excavations at the pond have yielded numerous artifacts that help shed light on the daily lives of those who used it, including gilt-bronze Buddhist figures and other gilt-bronze objects, wooden building materials, iron locks, iron helmets, pottery inscribed with “辛心龍王,” an ink stone featuring the characters “椋司,” and a large jar inscribed with “十石入甕.” Wolji Pond was where the king or queen interacted with the Silla aristocracy, celebrated events of national significance, and hosted banquets for foreign envoys (Fig. 23). Poseokjeong Pavilion was a leisure villa that formed part of Poseoksa Shrine, which was responsible for rituals of the Royal Palace (Fig. 24).

The pond at Yonggang-dong possessed a curved shoreline made of stacked stones and featured two artificial islands. The fact that a pavilion once stood at the site and the traces of bridges that would have connected the artificial islands to the shoreline make it highly likely that this pond was part of the North Palace. The pond at Guhwang-dong was found to have a two-tiered, overlapping stacked-stone shoreline and auxiliary facilities, as well as a ‘ㄷ’-shaped waterway system and a plaza. Approximately 1330 artifacts were recovered from this pond, including a gilt-bronze panel with a seated Bodhisattva, roof tiles decorated with lotus flower patterns, and a handle in the shape of a duck’s head. This pond is likely to have been either associated with Bunhwangsa Temple or part of an aristocrat’s garden. The petite pond located on the present-day grounds of Gyeongju National Museum appears to have been a component of a small garden attached to the South Palace.

Production and Distribution Spaces
Located within the urban space of the royal capital were a number of craft production workshops supporting the daily activities of the capital’s inhabitants. According to historical records, there were workshops affiliated with the royal household, including for creating silk cloth (錦典), combs (梳典), brassware (鐵鍮典), fur clothing (毛典), and leather (皮典).

The main spaces for production activities in the period prior to unification were located in the areas of Songgok-dong and Mulcheon-ri. Excavations at these locations have revealed the presence of clay pits, workshops, kilns, and various tools related to craft activities. These facilities appear to have been in operation from the fifth to seventh centuries. Production facilities dating to the period following unification have been identified at Cheonbuk-myeon, Geumjang-ri, and Hwacheon-ri, respectively located in the northeast, northwest, and southeast regions of the royal capital (Fig. 25).

Workshops where bronze items were produced were mainly centered in the Dongcheon-dong area. These workshops appear to have been part of a bronzeware production complex operated by the royal household. The five pits associated with bronzeware production discovered in the area of a garden pond in Guhwang-dong and the smelting furnace found at the Bunhwangsa Temple site appear to have been facilities associated with workshops overseen by Buddhist temples. The traces of burnt earth, charcoal, slag, and bronze crucibles discovered at Building 6 of Household 8 in the Wanggyeong SIE1 area indicate that a crafts workshop producing items for jingol aristocrats was located here.

Markets provided a space for the buying and selling of goods. The first market was established in the Silla royal capital in 490 CE. It is recorded that the increase in the population of the royal capital following unification led to the establishment of the West Market (西市) and South Market (南市) in 695, but the exact locations of these markets remain unknown.
Buddhist Temples of the Royal Capital

Establishment of Buddhist Temples and Seongjeon Monasteries

Buddhism was officially recognized as the state religion of Silla in 531 CE following the martyrdom of Ichadon. Silla kings encouraged the spread of Buddhism as it could be used as a means of displaying royal authority and dignity. Consequently, many Buddhist temples came to be established around the royal capital (Fig. 26). Heungryunsa Temple was established in 544 CE, and the construction of Yeongheungsa, Hwangnyongsa, Siljesa, Bunhwangsa, and Yeongmyosa Temples followed soon thereafter. Among these temples, the grounds of Hwangnyongsa Temple and Bunhwangsa Temple have been excavated, revealing that they were organized according to the ‘single pagoda and three main hall’ layout.

Following unification, numerous temples, including Sacheonwangsa, Gameunsa, Mangdeoksas, Goseonsa, Bulguksa, and Seokbulsa Temples, were established in the peripheral areas of the royal city as its borders expanded. They were organized according to a ‘twin pagoda’ layout in which a pair of pagodas were established to the right and left of a central main hall. The twin pagodas of the Gameunsa Temple site and Bulguksa Temple’s Seokgatap and Dabotap Pagodas provide prominent examples of this layout (Fig. 27–28).

A seongjeon was a managerial department established within a temple to oversee the operation and repair of temples. Following unification, such managerial facilities were established in Sacheonwangsa, Bongseongsa, Gameunsas, Bongdeoksas, Bongeunsas, Yeongmyosa, and Yeongheungsas Temples. As a result, these temples became known as seongjeon monasteries (成典寺院). In the Late Silla Period, a managerial department was also established at Hwangnyongsu Temple. Buddhist rituals for the well-being of the royal family and state were carried out at...
such monasteries.

Hwangnyongsa and Sacheonwangsa Temples
The central state temple in the Silla royal capital prior to unification was Hwangnyongsa Temple. The site of Hwangnyongsa Temple had originally been intended to house a new royal palace, but the project was switched to a Buddhist temple after a yellow dragon (‘hwangnyong’) made an appearance at the construction site in 553 CE. An East Main Hall and West Main Hall were added in 583, resulting in a ‘one pagoda and three main hall’ layout. A nine-story wooden pagoda, reaching a height of approximately 80 meters, was erected within the grounds of Hwangnyongsa Temple in 645. Its construction was an expression of Silla’s determination to unify the Three Kingdoms through the power of the Buddha. However, Silla’s builders of the time did not have the expertise to erect such a large pagoda and the Baekje master craftsman Abiji (阿非知) had to be invited to Silla to assist in its completion.

Three Buddha statues measuring sixteen chuk units were enshrined within the Central Main Hall of Hwangnyongsa Temple, and a sarira casket was placed in the center of the nine-story wooden pagoda’s foundation stone. Along with the Jade Belt of King Jinpyeong Received from Heaven (天賜玉帶) (r. 579–632), the Sixteen Chuk Buddha Statues and Nine-story Pagoda of Hwangnyongsa Temple were revered as the Three Treasures of Silla. The Hwangnyongsa Temple wooden pagoda was lost to fire in 1238 during the Mongol Invasions of Korea and has yet to be reconstructed. Excavations undertaken at the
The site of Hwangnyongsa Temple have made it possible to identify the limits of the temple grounds, along with the locations of the main halls, pagoda, and covered corridors. The temple site has been presented to the public accordingly (Fig. 29).

The central state temple in the period after unification was Sacheonwangsa Temple. This temple was established in 679 CE based on a desire to harness the power of the Buddha to defeat Tang forces. It was located at the foot of Nangsan Mountain on the outskirts of the royal capital. The ‘twin pagoda’ layout, which would become widespread after unification, was first applied here. Excavations at the temple site have revealed the presence of an East Pagoda and a West Pagoda flanking the main hall with a Left Sutra Pavilion (左經樓) and a Right Sutra Pavilion (右經樓) to their north. Bricks featuring the inscription *sacheonwang* were found at the sites of the pagodas. In addition, fragments of a stele which appears to have recorded the history of the temple were discovered in excavations conducted in the area of the tortoise-shaped stele base stone (Fig. 30).

**Royal Burial Grounds**

**Royal Burial Grounds in the Center of the Royal Capital: Wooden Chamber Tombs with Stone Mounds**

The royal burial grounds represented the realm of the dead, an area in which deceased kings resided in their tombs. The layout and distribution of these royal burial grounds changed over time, as did the types of tombs that were created. From the first century BCE to the first century CE, wooden coffin tombs were used in the Gyeongju region. Such wooden coffin tombs have been identified at the Tap-dong site in the heart of present-day Gyeongju; in the surrounding areas they have been found at the Hwacheon-ri and Sara-ri sites (Geoncheon area), at the Jukdongsan-ri and Ipsil-ri sites (Owe-dong area), and the Deokcheon-ri site (Naenam area).

From the mid-second century until the early fourth, wooden chamber tombs were constructed in the Gyeongju region and its environs. They have been excavated at sites including Gujeong-dong, Deokcheon-ri, Hwangseong-dong, and Joyang-dong in Gyeongju.

Wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds were used from the late fourth century until the early sixth century. These tombs are concentrated in the Wanggyeong District and in Geumchuk-ri in the Geoncheon area. The cluster in the Wanggyeong District, the heart of the royal capital, were formed as the Silla elite once scattered throughout the Gyeongju Basin began to congregate in the center and establish burial grounds there (Fig. 31).

One of the wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds of enormous scale is Hwangnamdaechong Tomb, a gourd-shaped double tomb 120 meters in length, and 22 in height. A great volume of grave goods was recovered here, including gold crowns, gold belts, gold earrings, horse tack, and iron weapons (Fig. 32–34). Another, Geumgwanchong Tomb, also yielded a gold crown, which inspired the tomb’s name (‘*geumgwon*’ means ‘gold crown’). Houchong Tomb was so named due to the discovery of a Goguryeo *hou* vessel within it. At Cheonmacong Tomb, saddle flaps decorated with paintings of a heavenly horse, called a *cheonma*, were uncovered.

**Transfer of the Royal Burial Grounds to the Outskirts: Stone Chamber Tombs with Corridor Entrances**

Through the promulgation of rules and regulations and the
Fig. 31. Distribution of mounded tombs within Gyeongju’s city limits
official recognition of Buddhism, Silla came to establish the foundations of a centralized government system in the early sixth century. The wooden chamber tomb with stone mound type of interment facility came to be replaced as the stone chamber tomb with corridor entrance became the representative tomb type of this period in conjunction with these changes. Stone chamber tombs with corridor entrances were constructed in the mountainous outskirts of the royal capital, a key example being the Tomb of King Muyeol and four other tombs, which together form a row in the Seoak-dong area of Gyeongju (Fig. 35–36).

The presence of a corridor entrance in these tombs made it possible for additional burials to be conducted at a later date. In addition, these stone chamber tombs with corridor entrances were smaller in scale and contained fewer grave goods compared to the preceding wooden chamber tombs with stone mounds. It is believed this change was associated with the stabilization of royal authority, which no longer required ostentatious displays of power. Cremation also made an appearance in this period due to the influence of Buddhism. The fact that King Munmu was cremated and his ashes spread into the East Sea indicates that this new burial practice was adopted in Silla.

In the eighth century, the earthen mounds of some of the royal tombs came to be surrounded by protective stonework consisting of stone slabs decorated with images of the twelve animals of the Chinese Zodiac. Stone handrails were constructed around the protective stones in some cases. In addition, altar
stones, stone lion statues, stone guardian statues depicting civil and military officials, and a ‘spirit road’ or epitaph stele stones were erected in front of the tombs. One informative illustration of this is Gwareung Tomb.

### The Royal Capital’s Defense System

**Dodangsanseong Fortress, Jakseong Fortress, Myeonghwalsanseong Fortress (earthen wall phase), and Guseong Fortress**

Capital cities in East Asia were typically furnished with city walls (*naseong*) that served to demarcate the inner and outer areas of the royal capital. However, no city walls were ever constructed for Silla seat of power. Instead, defensive fortresses were established in surrounding areas. With the expansion of the royal capital’s city limits, the location of these strongholds also changed.

Fortresses constructed in the fourth and fifth centuries include Dodangsanseong Fortress, from which a broad view of the royal capital could be obtained; Jakseong Fortress in the area of the Geocheon River, which defended the western side of the royal capital; Myeonghwalsanseong Fortress (earthen wall phase), which looked after the eastern section of the royal capital; and Guseong and Yangdongsanseong Fortresses, which together were responsible for the north. The walls of Dodangsanseong Fortress were made of rammed earth, but Namsantoseong Earthen Wall Fortress had earthen walls over a stone core (Fig. 37).

Among these, Myeonghwalsanseong Fortress (earthen wall phase) functioned as a palace fortress for thirteen years from 476 to 488 CE. Faced with a growing threat from Goguryeo, the Silla king at the time judged the defensive capacity of Wolseong Fortress in the flatlands to be insufficient and removed the Silla royal palace to Myeonghwalsanseong Fortress.

**Fig. 34. Key artifacts recovered from Hwangnamdaechong Tomb**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crown from the north mound.</td>
<td>Gold and jade</td>
<td>H. 27.3 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wing-shaped ornament for conical cap from the south mound.</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>L. 49.0 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wing-shaped ornament for conical cap from the south mound.</td>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>L. 56.0 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Necklace from the south mound.</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>L. 66.4 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rings from the south mound.</td>
<td>Gold and glass</td>
<td>Diam. 1.8–2.4 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belt with pendant ornaments from the north mound.</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>L. 120 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair of earrings from the north mound.</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>L. 10.6 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>L. 10.6 cm</td>
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<td>Home-shaped ornament for conical cap from the south mound.</td>
<td>Silver</td>
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Myeonghwalsanseong Fortress (stone wall phase), Seohyeongsanseong Fortress, Namsansinseong Fortress, and Goheoseong Fortress

Defensive fortifications came to be established in the zone beyond the Namcheon, Seocheon, and Bukcheon Rivers in the fifth and sixth century. These were all large-scale mountain fortresses, and the majority were equipped with stone walls. Located in the cardinal directions around the royal capital, these defensive structures functioned as a *naseong* of sorts.

The pre-existing earthen walls of Myeonghwalsanseong Fortress were renovated into stone walls in 551 CE. Subsequently rebuilt in 593, Myeonghwalsanseong Fortress defended the eastern portion of the royal capital in the pre-unification period (Fig. 38). Seohyeongsanseong Fortress, which featured stone walls encircling a mountain peak, was built in 593 and extended in 673. This fortress was responsible for the western portions of the royal capital.

Namsansinseong Fortress, constructed in 591 near the northern peak of Mount Namsan, was a stone fortress with stone walls encircling a mountain valley. At present, a total of ten steles associated with the construction of this fortress have been found. They feature inscriptions containing the names and titles of those who were involved in the fortresses’ construction along with the *bu* groups to which they belonged, the length of the fortress walls, the construction date of the fortress, and a vow that those involved in the fortress’s construction would be punished if the walls collapsed within three years. In 663, Silla made emergency preparations by establishing storage buildings for military rice supplies and items collected as taxes within Namsansinseong Fortress. Goheoseong Fortress was constructed in 626 to defend the royal capital from the south and west.
Busanseong Fortress, Sindaeriseong Fortress, and Gwanmunseong Fortress

Defensive fortresses were constructed in the peripheral areas around the royal capital starting in the seventh century. These formed the royal capital’s first line of defense against attack from the outside.

Busanseong Fortress is located near the summit of Mount Busan, but its walls also encircle valleys running down the mountain. Due to the rugged topography of the areas surrounding the walls, it would certainly have been difficult to approach the fortress. Built in 663, it was a large-scale mountain fortress with a dual-walled structure and outer walls measuring 7.5 km in length. It was designed to protect the royal capital on the west.

Sindaeriseong Fortress is a stone-walled fortress on the
summit of a mountain to the east of Gwanmunseong Fortress. Broad views of both the East Sea and the Ulsan Gulf could be obtained from here. Measuring devices used in its construction were found at the fortress. In addition, ten inscribed stones were uncovered at the fortress with inscriptions that provided information on the respective regions from which the groups that provided labor for fortress construction had come and the length of the sections of the fortress walls for which they had been responsible (Fig. 39).

Gwanmunseong Fortress was constructed in the tenth month of 722 CE in order to defend against Japanese invaders. The walls of this fortress extended across the landscape to link mountains, and its outer walls measured 10.9 km in length. This large-scale mountain fortress also provided a gate for the major road that led from Ulsan to the royal capital.

Characteristics of the Silla Royal Capital

The Silla royal capital was formed when the capital of Saroguk was designated as the capital of the newly established kingdom of Silla. In the sixth century, it was known as “Geonmora” (健牟羅), but from the seventh century onwards, it came to be called “Geumseong” (金城) or “Geumgyeong” (金京). Over the thousand years that followed, the Silla royal capital remained in the same location. This is nearly unprecedented in human history. The limits and organization of the royal capital’s urban space changed over time. The reorganization of the capital under the influence of the Chinese capital model took place in a series of stages. The characteristics of the Silla royal capital around the seventh century can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, royal burial grounds were established in the center. Such a layout cannot be observed in other capital cities structured according to the Chinese capital model. The surrounding landscape appears to have been planned in a way that maximized human and natural conditions.

Secondly, the main palace, Wolseong Fortress, was located
in the southern portion of the urban center. This meant that a palace layout in which it faced southwards and looked down upon the urban center could not be adopted. As such, although the north-south main street extends ‘northwards’ and not ‘southwards’, it should still be regarded, conceptually, as the ‘main street’ stipulated in the Chinese model.

Thirdly, city walls (naseong) demarcating the city limits were never established. King Munmu attempted to undertake the construction of such walls, but he failed due to opposition from the Silla aristocracy.

Fourthly, the extent of the royal capital increased over time. Up until the fifth century, it had been limited to the area south of the Namcheon River at the foot of Mount Namsan (to the south), the area of the Seocheon River (to the west), and the Bukcheon River (to the north). However, by the sixth century the city had extended beyond the Seocheon River to the foot of Mount Seohyeongsan (to the west) and beyond the Bukcheon River to the foot of Mount Hyeongsan (to the north). Such an expansion was possible because no city walls had been erected.

Fifthly, the bang units in the Silla royal capital were small compared to those created in China. The bang identified at the Hwanyeongsa Temple site S1E1 location was 172.5 meters along its north-south road and 167.5 meters east to west, making it only one-third of the size of a typical Chinese version. The reason for their restricted size may be because the royal capital was established in an area that was already urbanized and the open space available for construction was therefore limited.

Sixthly, it has been possible to confirm through excavations that the bang units were not demarcated with walls. The domestic buildings located within each bang were accessed through doorways opening onto the roads. This open nature of the Silla bang structure contrasts with its closed nature in China.

The Silla royal capital shares similarities with the royal capitals of Goguryeo and Baekje. The maintenance of two royal palaces—Wolseong Fortress in the bottomlands and Myeongghwalsanseong Fortress in the mountains—can be observed in Goguryeo (Gungnaeseong Fortress and Hwandoseong Fortress; and also Anhakgung Palace and Daeseongsanseong Fortress in Pyeongyang) and Baekje (Pungnabtoseong Fortress on the flats and Mongchontoseong Fortress as a refuge). In addition, the way in which Hwangnyongsa Temple, Silla’s central state temple, was aligned along the axis of the royal capital’s main road is similar to how Jeongrimsa Temple, Baekje’s central state temple in the Sabi Period, was aligned along the axis of the urban center.

The Silla royal capital also appears to have influenced Japan’s capital city model. Fujiwarakyo (藤原京), an ancient Japanese capital, was established in the late seventh century according to the model of the Tang capital city of Changan, but it was not surrounded by city walls similarly to Silla’s capital city. Given the close diplomatic relations that had been established between Silla and Japan at the time, it seems likely that the urban structure of Fujiwarakyo was influenced by the Silla royal capital.

The structure of the Silla royal capital also influenced the layout of Gaegeyeong, the capital city of the subsequent Goryeo Dynasty. The administrative organization of the Silla royal capital into 6 bu districts, which were in turn divided into 55 li villages, provided the roots of the 5 bu and 35 bang system that was applied in Gaegeyeong. In addition, Silla’s system of establishing ‘five secondary capitals’ (五小京) became the model for Goryeo’s ‘three capital system’ (三京制) featuring two regional capitals—Namgyeong (南京) in Hanseong and Donggyeong (東京) in Gyeongju—in addition to Gaegeyeong.

Furthermore, the establishment of Hwangseong Great Palace, Suchang Palace, and Yeongyeong Palace in Gaegeyeong reflected the system that had produced Geumseong Fortress, Wolseong Fortress, and the East Palace in Gyeongju.

In this way, the Silla royal capital is characterized by distinctive elements that set it apart from the other ancient capitals of East Asia. At the same time, it maintained an inter-relationship with these other cities that compounded its complex nature as a royal capital. As such, a more systematic understanding of the Silla royal capital can provide a foundation for future comparative research on ancient capital cities across East Asia.

Translated by Ko Ilhong

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