The Great Pillars

The museum's central lobby displays the remains of two monumental wooden pillars that once supported the thirteenth-century *honden* (main sanctuary) of Izumo Grand Shrine. The pillars were found near the shrine's Yatsuashi Gate (the entrance to the *honden* compound) during a year-long archaeological excavation that began in 2000. Like the modern *honden*, the historical sanctuary was constructed with nine pillars arranged in a three-by-three pattern. The excavation unearthed the remains of three of the nine: the central pillar (*shin no mihashira*), the front gable-end pillar (*uzubashira*), and the southeastern side pillar (*gawabashira*). It is likely that the remnants of the other six pillars are still buried beneath the fenced compound enclosing the current main sanctuary.

A tenth-century children's textbook describes the main sanctuary of Izumo as the tallest building in the country—a towering 48 meters in height—but there was limited physical evidence to support this claim until the discovery of these enormous pillars. Each pillar is a trio of cedar logs that were bound together with metal bands to create a single column 3 meters in diameter. Both their size and the locations where the pillars were found are similar to those recorded in *Kanawa no gozōei sashi zu* (Diagram for the Placement of Metal Rings during Shrine Construction), which dates to sometime between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Further analysis through radiocarbon dating has revealed that the pillars were likely installed during a rebuilding of the shrine in 1248.

The pillars' state of preservation is remarkable. Findings from the excavation indicate that at some point in the past, two streams merged near the sanctuary. The wood became waterlogged, slowing the process of decay.

The exhibit includes the actual remains of the gable-end pillar and a full-size replica of the central pillar (the original is displayed in the Hōmotsuden at Izumo Grand Shrine). The side pillar was reburied in its original location.