

## Palace Prisons in Tang Dynasty

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People who lived or served in the palace, in the event that they broke the law, violated a prohibition, or caused an incident, would be detained in the palace prison. They were handled by the prison officials directly without the need for disciplinary action from juridical authorities outside of the palace. People in the palace were forbidden to leave the palace at will, and word of events that happened inside of the palace were not to be leaked to the outside world. This was especially so regarding stories about members of the royal family; these could not be discovered by the external juridical authorities as it would jeopardize the imperial reputation. There were two major systems of prisons within the palace; these belonged to the Imperial Household Bureau and Imperial Guards respectively. The prisons were run under the principle of separating prisoners into different locations according to their social status, such as noble and poor, or male and female. When nobles such as members of the royal family committed a crime, they were not detained in a general prison; they would be sent to a cell somewhere in the imperial palace that was specifically for detaining such offenders. There were three ways to handle the crimes committed in the palace. The first was under administrative supervision by the law enforcement officials. The second was direct adjudication by the emperor. The third was to reach a verdict via a trial in a judicial court. Even though the prison system within the palace had an independent jurisdiction, from the mid-Tang on, the cases it handled were no longer limited to people in the palace and to incidents that occurred in the palace; it even fought over jurisdiction with external juridical authorities and the county governments. This was definitely related to

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imperial protection and eunuch interference. In matters of prison administration, the palace prisons might not follow the regulations and laws; the juridical relief measures that could prevent injustices from happening were not possible since it was extremely difficult for external officials to enter the palace prisons for inspection. This allowed the palace prisons to become places that were shut off to the outside world and not bounded by the laws.

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