



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Jokamachi-toshi (Japanese castle towns)** by Shigeru Satoh and *Jokamachi-toshi Study Group*, Kashima Shuppankai, Tokyo, Japan, 2002, 173 pp. ISBN 4-306-07233-9

Japanese cities are not easily explained or satisfactorily elucidated by standard Western urban morphology models such as the concentric zone, wedge or sector, or even the multiple nuclei. These models in combination effectively explain the structure and land uses of Western cities. The lack of success in applying them to Japanese cities is not because numerous attempts have not been made, but because assumptions and theories about city structure tend to be culture-bound, and therefore not especially applicable outside that culture. With regard to the morphology of early modern Japanese castle towns, the difficulties are especially evident. Land-use patterns, street arrangements, and neighbourhood layouts are incompatible with Western urban experience. As Shigeru Satoh's newly-translated book demonstrates, Japanese castle towns are the physical products of deep-rooted indigenous cultural beliefs and conditions.

The book considers 53 castle towns, all currently still thriving, from Matsumae, in the country's northernmost island of Hokkaido, to Kochi in the southern island of Shikoku. The changing shape and size of each castle town is documented over time with high quality maps, detailed diagrams and photographs that capture representative street scenes. Ongoing local projects to conserve, adapt, and revitalize the historic cores of these towns are assessed, and the potential sources of economic income inherent in the cultural heritage are considered. What Western readers will probably find most intriguing, however, is Satoh's discussion of the pre-formal shaping forces and morphological design principles that gave birth to the castle towns' distinct built environments.

Satoh identifies three basic compositional principles underlying the design of early modern

castle towns: first, an emphasis on the wider natural topography including, for example, mountains looming in the distance; secondly, an emphasis on 'geometrically' integrating important sites in the town with their wider natural surroundings; and thirdly, a sensitivity to local topographic and climatic conditions. Satoh's discussion of the street layout of the 400 year old castle town of Tsuruoka, in Yamagata prefecture, is highly illuminating in this regard. Apparently, many of Tsuruoka's north-south streets deviate sharply from their original north-south axes. This odd fact, according to Satoh, can be explained by the traditional Japanese reverence for mountains as repositories of symbolic meaning. Tsuruoka's crooked streets, he argues, were strategically laid out so as to offer pedestrians numerous unobstructed views of three distant mountain peaks, Mt. Kinpo and Mt. Hokari to the south, and Mt. Chokai to the north. A notion of city making akin to landscaping was at work here. Distant vistas were recognized as decisively important elements in the overall design of the town. Even today, standing on Miyuki Bridge near the centre of Tsuruoka, one can apparently enjoy unobstructed views of all three summits.

Today, the failure of modern town planning in fulfilling its promise is becoming increasingly evident in Japan, as elsewhere. In this context, interest has revived in the age-old wisdom of traditional urban design principles, hitherto considered as 'backward'. Satoh's book is an invaluable contribution to this ongoing reassessment. Arguing that restoration of key individual buildings and monuments without conserving or rehabilitating the historical environments that sustain them makes little sense, Satoh calls for comprehensive developmental plans that can reconcile, as far as possible, traditional design principles with contemporary needs. To be sure, the message of his book does not imply that modern planning methods are to be rejected *in toto*; only that urban conservation and planning of castle towns should be guided by a strong awareness of

the local cultural identity and the historic urban fabric.

The English translation was privately published and can be acquired for US\$30.00 by directly contacting the author at his e-mail address: [gerusato@waseda.jp](mailto:gerusato@waseda.jp). There is one serious drawback, however: the translation is extremely clumsy and difficult to follow. It is greatly hoped that a revised English version of this valuable achievement will become available from a regular publisher in the near future. The contents of the book are well worth wider diffusion.

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**Urban growth and the medieval church: Gloucester and Worcester** by *Nigel Baker* and *Richard Holt*, Ashgate, UK, 2004, 413pp. ISBN 0 7546 0266 4.

This book continues the debate on the contribution of the church towards the formation of medieval towns in England. This topic had been the subject of a major interdisciplinary project sponsored by the Leverhulme Trust directed by T.R. Slater and Gervase Rosser at the University of Birmingham in the 1990s. The two authors of this volume were the main researchers on the project.

The virtue of this book lies in its self-imposed limitation. Nigel Baker, now an archaeological consultant in the English Midlands, and Richard Holt, a medieval historian at the University of Tromsø, show how the medieval institutional church as property holder was involved in the early topographical development of the two towns which they studied in great detail: the royal town of Gloucester and the episcopal town of Worcester. They do so by successfully applying the Conzenian method of establishing principal plan components in the respective town plans in association with very careful exploration of archival sources. The premise is that the distinct plan units are the result of discrete episodes of urban growth.

The book consists of fifteen chapters, which present research findings in relation to the two case-studies under the following headings: the church before 1100, the landscape of the respective towns, churches, chapels and parishes, development of the parishes, major religious institutions, ecclesiastical

precincts, suburbs and the church, the church, town planning and public works. The volume is a perfect advertisement for the old-fashioned monograph, which in this case allowed the authors to go very carefully, step by step, through a great deal of detailed evidence. It is not easy reading, but very exciting in what it reveals: the importance of the pre-conquest period in determining the important features of the later medieval townscape. In Gloucester very few features of the medieval geography depart from the alignments of the underlying Roman fortress. In Worcester, High Street is interpreted as the result of a town-planning episode associated with the foundation of the burh in the 890s by the bishops of Worcester, who were very active in secular affairs. The book contains a fascinating diagram of the chronology of church building in the two towns. The importance of the Anglo-Saxon period is obvious. There are also comparative diagrams of church plans. Here the lack of uniformity is astounding. The book deliberately excludes architectural discussions.

One of the probing questions in the book is the problem of relative chronology in the growth of the different parts of the two towns. Methodologically this was achieved by establishing the relationship of different plan units to each other. This is serious detective work as the following quotation from the analysis of the town plan of Gloucester indicates: 'On the east side of St Peter's Abbey the boundary of the precinct and the lane following it and thus the extent of the plots outside were determined by an underlying Roman road' (p. 42).

A difficult question that underlies the book is whether town planning is solely the result of higher-order decision making or whether organizing attributes on a more individual basis also count? In the case of Gloucester the first sign of planned intervention comes with the Anglo-Saxon project of levelling Roman earthworks surrounding the minster church by filling a ditch about 90 feet wide and 20 feet deep. In order to achieve this 41 000 cubic metres had to be moved. Detailed information like this, which can only be got from archaeological excavations, is the precondition for our understanding of the creation of a new townscape. It is suggested that the transformation of the burh at Gloucester is possibly associated with the reform of the Minster as a house of Benedictine monks by Bishop Wulfstan I in 1022. It is arguably interpreted as a co-operative town-planning exercise between the Old Minster and the pre-conquest Crown.

The book confirms that the major and lesser churches were nearly all in place in the two towns