



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. 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.

Takeshi Arthur Thornton, School of Business Administration, Yokohama National University, 79-4 Tokiwadai, Hodogaya-ku, Yokohama 240-8501, Japan. Email: thornton@ynu.ac.jp

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

by 1100. For both towns the late pre-conquest period is described as the original medieval period of growth. The authors strongly defend the idea of pre-conquest town-planning activities, which would have included the removal of physical objects (ditches) and the expulsion of livestock markets to extramural locations, as well as the founding of a large number of churches. The authors' approval of this vital early urban landscape is palpable and the impact of the Norman Conquest is described as a physical and mental intrusion into the established urban landscape.

In the conclusion to the book the authors courageously present their findings in quantitative terms: in Gloucester the total late-medieval built-up area consisted of 137 acres and of these 63 per cent seem to have originated in planned urban extension. Of the total built-up area, 28 per cent came into existence as the result of town planning by church institutions before the conquest. In Worcester the comparable figures are 129 acres of built-up area, of which 46 per cent was the result of planned urban extension. Of the total built-up area, 39 per cent was sponsored by successive bishops as ecclesiastical lords of the city.

The book has a clearly defined focus on the church's direct contribution to the physical shape of the early town. Well drawn maps are one of the advantages of this book, but the authors obviously considered them as self-explanatory. It would have been user-friendly to label the minster church and the smaller churches on Map 3.3 which shows the principal features of the medieval city and suburbs of Gloucester. But these are minor quibbles. The book is well produced and has a helpful index. It offers important insights into the early origins of English towns based on the sustained interdisciplinary approach through the full length of this exemplary monograph. The volume shows convincingly that the early physical development of English towns can be reconstructed even when contemporary texts do not exist and archaeological excavations are not available on a large scale.

Reference

Slater, T. R. and Rosser, G. (eds) (1998) *The church in the medieval town* (Ashgate, Aldershot).

Anngret Simms, Department of Geography, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland. E-mail: Anngret.Simms@ucd.ie

Capital's Utopia: Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, 1855-1916 by *Anne E. Mosher*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, USA, 2004, 249 pp. ISBN 0-0818-7381-9.

In this book Anne Mosher builds on her 1989 dissertation to lucidly and engagingly examine the locational situation, industrial circumstances, and social and economic milieu that gave rise to the steel-industry company town of Vandergrift, Pennsylvania in 1895-1896. The author makes a convincing case that as a result of a confluence of forces, the steel industry felt a pressing need by the mid-1890s to revamp its operations in response to the challenges to profitability set off by industrial growth and technological change and the labour actions which ensued. The case study of this book analyses those forces as they affected the Apollo Iron and Steel Company, its big new sheet mill and its associated company town. As this integrated, multi-disciplinary work makes clear, Vandergrift was not just any company town, the sort that in various guises once existed well distributed throughout the United States in significant numbers. With a layout that broke from the standardized rectilinear street grid, and its focus on private ownership of houses rather than tenancy in company dwellings, Vandergrift was to be a form giver for many of the industrial towns that were to follow.

Although the book's title covers a time span of six decades, the focus is the latter half of that period. The book is arranged in three, two-chapter parts; the first part is the Vandergrift background story. The first chapter follows the early development of sheet-iron production and establishment of the mill towns in the Kiskiminetas Valley some 40 miles north-east of Pittsburgh. The second chapter examines the troubled switch to sheet steel that started with the mid-1880s technological changeover from puddled wrought iron to open-hearth steel that de-skilled the traditional craft methods of the iron puddlers and rendered them redundant. They lost their jobs, but the skilled (and unionized) men who actually operated the rolling mills at the Apollo Company survived, only to be permanently replaced by non-union workers during an industry-wide strike in 1893. Meanwhile, during this same period demand-inspired production increases led to unmanageable densities in both the old hillside mill town of Apollo and the hemmed-in mill itself.

The chapters of the second part examine the development of, and initial life in, the new town of

Vandergrift and its satellite communities. Chapter 3 deals with the conceptualization of the new mill and its adjacent and equally new company town by the strike-breaking Apollo Steel President George McMurtry and his engagement of the landscape architectural firm of Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot to design the town. The author shows that this commission turned out to be an unhappy one for both client and designer, and that the latter's application of their firm's signature curvilinear street layout and lower density suburban approach was not at all appreciated by McMurtry's board of directors, whose intent for the project was more as a stand-alone real estate investment along the prosaic lines of a standard Pennsylvania steel town. As the author points out, they were expecting an industrial town, but not a model industrial town. The result was a compromised, incomplete plan, but one that, with its curving streets and strong architectural unity along them, was touted and sold as a model town nonetheless. This is recounted in the fourth chapter, where the author also painstakingly analyses deed, tax, and census records to establish ownership and use patterns, and samples family, ethnicity, and employment characteristics to determine the social dynamics in play in the model town. Then a similar evaluation is done for two associated communities of lower status that were laid out in simple grid patterns: the nearby Vandergrift Heights and along the river bottom, East Vandergrift. The residents of Vandergrift Heights, like the Vandergrift borough proper, tended to own their houses and were originally almost completely American born. But segregated East Vandergrift was limited almost exclusively to Eastern European immigrants, most of whom were renters. In essence, these three communities mirrored the ethnic and wage-rate divisions of the mill.

The two chapters in the final section of the book measure Vandergrift's relationship to events that transpired in the mill and mill town during the generation following their construction. Chapter 5 analyses how the mill's employees, most of who resided in the Vandergrift communities, reacted to the 1901 steel strike. Not only did they not strike or attempt to organize, rather they served as strike breakers at nearby mills. The last chapter indicates how Vandergrift grew and changed, especially the filling in of the unrealized half of the Olmsted firm's plan with subdivisions that ignored the designers' original layout for it. Those additions and Vandergrift Heights were annexed to Vandergrift proper in 1916, by which time the enlarged borough had come in aggregate to look like most other Pennsylvania steel towns.

In *Capital's Utopia*, the author makes a convincing case that Vandergrift's original make-up should be understood as probably the first significant reaction to company-town development that set in following the 1894 strike-induced failure of Pullman, Illinois. There the Pullman Company, which controlled the housing stock in its entirety, refused to reduce rents to their wage-cut and laid-off workers during the severe recession that followed the Panic of 1893. This knowledge and the Apollo Company's own reaction to the steel industry strike prompted by the same recession helped foster what the author terms 'industrial restructuring'. As a result Apollo rebuilt their operation with new technology at a new plant served by a new company town conceived as a real-estate venture rather than on the old paternalistic landlord-tenant model. As such it is not surprising that the Apollo Company sought out a landscape design for Vandergrift that embodied the novelty of this approach to provide housing for its workers. This strategy of home ownership focused on the single-family house, but the author surmises this did not completely remove the paternalistic relationship between management and workers because home ownership equated with a financial and emotional investment that tended to reduce worker solidarity and lessened willingness to place their jobs in jeopardy through labour action. Thus the author concludes that social control retained a presence in Vandergrift, and the numerous industrial towns that followed were set up on the same 'own your own home' model.

Since the completion of the author's work on Vandergrift, the catalogue of the Olmsted firm's drawings has been completed and placed online, although the general availability of the drawings to researchers, including the Vandergrift drawings, still awaits the reconstruction of the archival facility at the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site. Study of these drawings is unlikely to call into question any of the author's conclusions regarding the design of the town. But the fuller understanding of it that they should elicit may allay the generally dismissive view of Vandergrift's plan that planning and design historians have typically held because of its seemingly compromised layout and ultimate failure to be completed according to Olmsted, Olmsted and Eliot's original concept. But in any event, seldom, if ever, was a master-planned industrial community conceived without compromises or completed as originally envisaged. Therefore it is to be hoped that limited view will now be revised by Anne Mosher's careful elucidation of Vandergrift's seminal place in the

evolution of the company town from one of complete paternalistic control to one where the agency of homeownership brought the housing of the industrial worker into the mainstream of American domesticity.

Charles Parrott, Lowell National Historical Park, United States National Park Service, Lowell, MA, 01852, USA. E-mail: charles_parrott@nps.gov

Specular city: transforming culture, consumption, and space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973 by *Laura Podalsky*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, PA, USA, 2004, 288 pp. ISBN 1-56639-947-5.

Laura Podalsky offers in this book an analysis of the physical and discursive transformations that took place in Buenos Aires between 1955 and 1973, a period marked by the fall and return of Perón. Following in the footsteps of David Harvey, Edward Soja and Frederic Jameson – as the author informs us in the introduction – *Specular city* is a cultural urban study that combines a revision of new architectural typologies and urban practices with contemporary literature, painting and film analyses.

The book is broken down into four main chapters that deal with large cultural and spatial phenomena, as well as five intervals, entitled *interruption*, *interstices*, *interlude*, *interspersion* and *intervention*, which focus on more discrete questions. Throughout these four ‘cityscapes’ and five ‘snapshots’ (as Podalsky introduces them) the book builds its main argument, which is that after the fall of Perón the middle-class sectors of Buenos Aires renegotiated their position in society. According to the author, after a decade in which the working-class sectors were the main protagonists of the public space, the 1960s were characterized by the predominance of an urban-consumer discourse addressed to the privileged middle classes, which thus became the protagonists and main users of the new public spaces in Buenos Aires. This new hegemony, according to Podalsky, opened the field for the subsequent implementation of the neo-liberal project in Argentina in the mid-1970s.

Interruption (pp. 28-47) sets the tone of the main argument as it reviews the urban events that took place in 1955, during and immediately after the fall of Perón. Its purpose is to stress the political significance of the use of public space – in

particular the use of the urban spectacle – and to interpret the clash between Peronists and anti-Peronists as – among other conflicts – a struggle for the material city.

The first chapter (pp. 48-99) discusses the controversial Peronist legacy in Buenos Aires through the lens of literary works and films, as well as concrete government measures. It also describes how cultural changes during this period tended to foster a trend towards consumerism and a new kind of domesticity away from the previous traditional public spaces.

Interstices (pp. 100-17) introduces the issue of the living conditions of the new urban poor. Through an analysis of the work of the visual artist Antonio Berni, Podalsky explores the proliferation of shanty towns and downgraded hotels that became the home of the new inhabitants – mostly provincial immigrants – and the conflicts that emerged there.

The second chapter (pp. 118-37) outlines the appearance of new architectural typologies and reports a significant increase in the use of private cars. These changes are discussed in light of new patterns in the use of space, and in particular the changes in the division between public and private space recorded not only in social-science literature but also present in various films and literature works. According to the author, this preoccupation – in both material and discursive dimensions – expresses the anxieties of the middle class about their place in a post-Peronist social order.

Interlude (pp. 138-47) is the ‘snapshot’ that suits Podalsky’s definition of snapshot best. This short section looks at an emblematic cultural centre in Buenos Aires in the 1960s, *The Di Tella*, and its effect on society. While analysing contemporary artistic trends and the increasing connection between the worlds of culture and business, these pages manage to exude the excitement and novelty of the art scene in Buenos Aires during this decade. The chapter also underscores one of the book’s beliefs, which is that this period was marked by the progressive advance of a commercial rationale invading all social and cultural spheres.

In the third chapter (pp. 148-75) Podalsky continues to develop her case by using as evidence the emergence of new cultural industries, in particular the weekly magazine *Primera Plana* and the publishing house EUDEBA (Buenos Aires University Press), in the context of a general publishing boom that witnessed the multiplication of new publishing houses and readers in only a few years. Her point here is that in spite of their democratizing rhetoric, these new cultural

industries were intended chiefly for the privileged middle classes with a discourse that only represented their own needs and desires. Podalsky questions the efficacy of their democratizing project and argues that, on the contrary, these institutions were quite effective in crafting the new hegemonic project. This is perhaps the least persuasive argument in the book, as it seems somehow problematic to combine *Primera Plana* with EUDEBA in order to sustain this hypothesis. In the case of the former, it is clear by the evidence provided that the magazine was not engaged in a democratizing project, but in the case of the latter, it is difficult to arrive at the same conclusion, at least based on the information provided here.

Interspersion (pp. 176-83) brings back the discussion to the physical dimension by describing the appearance of other new typologies in Buenos Aires: commercial skyscrapers and multi-family dwelling units for social housing at an unprecedented scale.

The fourth chapter (pp. 184-207) begins by illuminating one of the book's key conceptual components: its understanding of cultural hegemony. Building on the book's introduction, Podalsky explains that her usage of the concept of hegemony differs from the classic Gramscian theory and instead is aligned with that of Laclau and Mouffe. In Gramscian terms all political indicators in Argentina from 1955 to 1973 (for example, constant oscillations between military and democratically elected administrations) would suggest that a new hegemony was never consolidated after the fall of Perón. But, as shown in the previous chapters, other signs are taken into consideration here to present the case of a different type of hegemonic project expressed in a set of discourses that articulate the needs and desires of a particular social group. Following the same line of argument developed formerly, this hegemonic

project is mostly articulated by a new consuming and mercantilist culture. In this chapter the pieces of evidence discussed are the new attitudes towards sexual behaviour and the increasing commercialization of sex through the culture industries.

Intervention (pp. 208-27) analyses an emblematic political film in the same light – *La hora de los hornos* – and another booming business – the advertising industry. Podalsky's analysis of *La hora* is impeccable as are all her film accounts in general: this is a terrain in which she shows great erudition and where the book reaches its sharpest and deepest analyses.

The epilogue (pp. 228-38) lastly closes the loop by arguing that the 1960s served as an incubator of the urban-consumer culture of the 1990s, the quintessential Argentine neo-liberal decade.

From the enunciation of her first hypothesis, Podalsky is careful not to fall into cultural-deterministic positions. She argues that the hegemonic project exposed throughout these pages 'helped' to constitute or has 'laid the groundwork' for the neo-liberal projects that would begin to flourish in the late 1970s. She also warns that the concept of a 'middle-class hegemony is problematic' as it may suggest a sort of 'homogeneity and coherent social agency' that she – along with Laclau and Mouffe – rejects. There are no simple conclusions about cause and effect. It remains open to what extent the role of the Buenos Aires middle classes – in their particular contexts – did help to develop a neo-liberal project similar to many of those implemented worldwide in different cultural contexts.

Daniel Kozak, Department of Architecture, Oxford Brookes University, Headington Campus, OX3 0BP, Oxford, UK. Email: dkozak@brookes.ac.uk

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