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Kyoto: An Urban History of Japan's Premodern Capital
MATTHEW STAVROS
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The English-language literature on Kyoto is surprisingly sparse. Indeed, one can comfortably state that this is the first explicitly urban book-length study of the city in English (disregarding pre-war publications). This makes Stavros' work particularly welcome; this is a concise and well-illustrated study that retains a strong sense of thematic coherence and brings a range of Japanese-language scholarship to a wider audience. The book presents itself as an excellent vehicle for undergraduate and Masters level teaching, and will provide a fruitful starting point for scholars embarking on deeper explorations of Japanese urban history.

Stavros' task in piecing together a history of this factious city is not an easy one. One of the delicate questions that teases the historian of Kyoto is that of naming. By what name should the city today called Kyoto be referred? It seems that the city was seldom referred to as Heian-kyō, even during the Heian period itself (xv). Later references were simply to 'the capital', *kyō* or miyako. But the most evocative and significant name is *rakuchū rakugai*, a compound term that incorporated both a reference to China (raku signifying Luoyang) and the sense of the city as a bounded entity (*rakuchū*) and a broader area in which powerful officials could build residences that displayed their wealth (rakugai). Stavros refers to *rakuchū rakugai* as 'a material manifestation of the dichotomy of public authority and private power' (78), a theme to which the book returns frequently.

If naming the city is tricky, placing it represents an even greater -- and more distinctive -- difficulty. The original plan was for an orthogonal city, modelled on Tang Dynasty design, of huge scale, its central Suzaku-dōri measuring 85 metres wide. As is well known, the western half of this rectangular set of grids was never drained and developed. But in later centuries the city retrenched severely into two linked urban islands, Kamigyō, where court officials and the tradesmen who served them lived, and Shimogyō, the commoners' town some distance to the south. Meanwhile, the centre of power had moved at various times to different sites in the urban outskirts (rakugai).

A third challenge for historians of the early city is to understand its appearance, let alone convey its smells and its sensory apparatus. For this, we are better off reading Sei Shōnagon and Murasaki Shikibu. Nor does the problem become any easier when in later centuries the city shrinks in size and suffers through long periods of turmoil. The historian, then, is constrained, all the more so for a lack of documentary material that is particularly inhibiting when it comes to attempting to decipher the city's early stages of development. Stavros' study is particularly acute in the way it captures both in words and maps the changing geography of the city.

Despite the constant transformations in the city's physical and social structure, there are a couple of related themes that dominate the history of Kyoto and that animate the chapters of Stavros' book. One is the shifting dichotomy between official position and private wealth (but is private the right word?), and the other is the gradual weakening of the city as an exclusive domain of imperial authority in the face of growing warrior power. This is evident right from the start. On his first page, Stavros argues that, unlike its Chinese prototype, in Kyoto 'real power, even from the outset, rested more with private political actors than the state'. The city's primary function, he writes, was to house the aristocracy and keep them away from their private estates.

In his second chapter, Stavros describes how the unstitching of the city began even as the urban tissue was being put in place. Officials moved increasingly from the Daidairi (imperial palace complex) to the private residences of the court aristocracy. 'From the time of Heian-kyō's establishment,' Stavros writes, 'the Japanese state itself had already become a profoundly privatized operation' (40). The reality of the city fell far short of the ideal parameters as they are set out in the first chapter.

Chapter Three describes a growing concentration of people and business, in the broadest sense, around sites of private power. Stavros refers to 'clusters of commoner communities around palaces and aristocratic kenmon' (53), and to a 'clustering of people and institutions … related to the pooling of wealth and influence almost entirely outside the purview of the statutory state' (44). And again, Kamigyō is referred to as 'a conglomeration of heterogeneous nodes of power' (55). Such clustering of housing and commercial activity also occurred around the increasingly powerful temple complexes and *betsugyō* ('retreats'), founded by retired emperors, by influential court members, by shoguns and powerful warrior families, and by the main Buddhist centres of power. As time went on, these rakugai communities became ever more important players in the city's power constellations.

Despite the constant erosion of urban form, the centre continued to hold, at least in certain respects. For a start, as Stavros argues in Chapter Four, 'the state's traditional hierarchy continued to be the universal benchmark of elite status, and the capital city … the formal venue of imperial ritual and statecraft' (75). Even, for example, during the Kamakura Period, 'the imperial institution continued to represent ultimate authority within the physical space of the capital' (88), and this despite the shogunate's construction of its Rokuhara complex in the ex-urban *rakuchū* area.

Kyoto, the city of official ritual and statecraft, was slowly encroached upon and infiltrated by members of the warrior class. As Stavros describes in Chapter Five, Emperor Godaigo rewarded generals such as Kusunoki Masashige by granting them land within the city. This was followed by 'an influx of warriors that occurred in the wake of Godaigo's restoration [which] caused the displacement of thousands of commoners' (106). Measures then had to be taken to protect the rights of the displaced Shimogyō commoners as well as those of the property owners, many of whom were courtiers from Kamigyō. As the city underwent its long period of civil strife, so it receded further into its two rump settlements. At the same time, however, and most conspicuously in the early decades of the sixteenth century, Shimogyō came to be surrounded and increasingly suffused with the power and the spiritual influence of Nichiren Buddhism.

Despite the city's fissiparous history, various attempts were made to reconstitute it in its urban coherence. One early project was that of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, who sought to restore to the city a 'unified, largely symmetrical urban matrix, centered on the imperial palace' (p. 131). But it was only with the closing years of the Age of Warring States, as Stavros writes in his Chapter Seven, that these attempts were successful, and despite the ruthless nature of Oda Nobunaga's treatment of the city, by the time of his death Kyoto had 'once again become a whole and integrated city' (156), marking the start of a new prosperity for the city.

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