The Making of Town in the 11th-Century England

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I

The problem of the English medieval town has covered a wide range of researches. But, its primary concern has been when the medieval town ocurred, although the directions of the study have differed according to the concerns of scholars and the purposes of their study. A question of the formation of medieval town also has been raised by the model of medieval town.

The medieval town took shape when feudalism was established, but its origin was questioned: was it before or after Norman Conquest? Therefore the main question about the origin of the English medieval town concentrated on whether the period was before or after Norman Conquest.

Several important scholars have presented their opinions concerning the English medieval town, specifically, the period in which the town appeared in England. First, F. W. Maitland and C. Stephenson asserted that the English medieval town did not come to completion until Norman Conquest. They emphasized the military character of English medieval town in the late Saxon, and also asserted that the Anglo-Saxon borough was not the essence of medieval town because it was basically military but also administrative center. They added that the early medieval town should not have had military fortification, the peace of king, administrative structure and public market, but new people was made to appear by the revival of commerce. They insisted that the English merchants did not appear in the Anglo-Saxon code of law as well. Therefore they suggested the borough became the medieval town after the late 11th century.[1]

Secondly, there is a theory that the character of medieval town was demonstrated before Norman Conquest. J. Tait maintained that the town during the Saxon period was an administrative center and a market place. He thought that the late Saxon town saw commercial activities.[2] H. R. Loyn argued that the late Saxon towns had commercial and administrative functions, with his attention on

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1) C. Stephenson, *Borough and Town*(Cambridge, 1933), pp. 47ff.

2) J. Tait, *The Medieval English Borough*(Manchester, 1936), p. vii.

the monetary system.[3] In other words, as the medieval town in general had, the late Saxon town had as its essential parts the market place, the mint, the burgage tenure, and the special jurisdictions.[4]

Thirdly, there is a theory which considers urban settlements, in both their spatial and functional aspects, as part of wider patterns of settlement and of utilizing landscape. The systematic analysis of the relationships among early urban places was contributed to their positions within tenurial or territorial units such as manors, parishes and hundreds, as well as shire, tribal territories and kingdoms. In addition, the important aspect of early towns was state and function of places which were described as "proto-urban".[5] Therefore, it is certain that the medieval town had cultural, religious and administrative functions quite different from those of the rural districts. Relying on this theory, some scholars produced good results.[6]

As we have seen, we do not have an established theory about the origin of the English medieval town. I think that the above theories didn't find out the essence of the English medieval town and its origin, although they continued to be developed. I suggest that, first of all, we must study, whether the period before Norman Conquest, that is, the late Saxon period, experienced the essential character of the English medieval town or not. Therefore, I'd like to suggest that the urban places in the Saxon period saw a process of continuous development rather than an abrupt change after Norman Conquest.

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3) H.R.Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*(London,1962), pp.138ff ; 'Borough and Mints,A.D.900-1066', in R.H.M.Dolley(ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Coins*(1961),pp.122-135.

4) H.R.Loyn, 'The Origin and Early Development of the Saxon borough with special reference to Cricklade', *Wiltshire Archeological Mag.* 58(1961), pp.9ff; 'Towns in the Late Anglo-Saxon England : the evidence and some possible lines of enquiry',in P.Clemoes and K. Hughes(eds.), *England before the Conquest*(1971),pp.115-28.

5) M.W.Beresford, *New Towns of the Middle Ages*(1976),pp.273ff: F.M.Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*(1971),pp.527-8: M.Biddle and D.H.Hill,'Late Saxon planned towns',Antiquaries Jour.51(1971),pp.70-85.

6) R.A.Butlin, 'Urban and proto-urban settlements in pre-Norman Ireland',in R.A.Butlin(ed.), *The Development of the Irelish Town* (1977),pp.12-3.

The English borough could hardly have an aspect of urban life because of its emphatically military function during the Anglo-Saxon invasion period. S. Reynolds demonstrated that Germans had no *urbes* (walled towns) because they disliked the town life. So far as the Anglo-Saxons were concerned, we can find in old English poetry some evidences for their dislike of living in built-up areas. We think that the old Roman towns declined under the invasion of the Anglo-Saxon. [7] Some towns—London, York, Exeter—continued the scope of town, although some cases could not determine a general notion of English medieval town. [8]

The history of old towns went back to the Roman periods, but did not continue in the Anglo-Saxon period. Then, we should examine the period and the way in which the English medieval town came into shape. As is mentioned above, the English medieval town originated in boroughs constructed by the Saxon kings. English historians treated town as a synonym of borough (burh in O.E, burgus in Latin) which meant a fortified area or a fortified enclosure. The early borough was the residence of royal and noble families, and legally differed from any other areas. [9]

Except some boroughs, the Anglo-Saxon borough was the residence of royal and noble families. It meant a fortification with constant replenishment of garrisons from surrounding countryside. Vikings that sometimes attacked inland on Britain toward the 8th century, constructed a base camp and extended their scope of domination in Britain in the late 9th century. The Saxon kings seem have changed their policy of borough. They had to construct a strategic post to protect themselves against the enemy, house the refugees and drive back the Danes. It was not a place of residence enclosed by stockade, but a military walled city enclosed by a rampart, trench in water, and stockade in some considerable areas. [10]

The construction of borough resulted from the Dane attacks, but its character varied according to the aspects of the Dane infiltration. In fact, the Danes were plunders before their invasion, but became settlers in Britain after the conquest. This made possible the transformation of borough into local center for

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7) Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval England* (1977), p. 3.

8) *Ibid.*

9) C.A.R.Redford, 'The Later Pre-Conquest Broughs and their Defences, Medieval Archaeology, xiv, 1970, pp. 83f.

10) H.R.Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (London, 1962), pp. 135ff.

protection and settlement rather than strategic post.

The English borough wasn't constructed in the period of peace considering the meaning of the word "borough" or the social situation in its early appearance. It was not a marketing place to attract merchants for commerce, but a military fortification. We can call attention to Saxon England by extracting the tribe name which acquired the supremacy of Wessex from the early 9th century after Kent, Northumbria and Mercia in Heptharchy took the hegemony by turns.[11] The borough was constructed at that time, developed into medieval town, which was related to the strengthening of royal authority.

England was similiar to Germany on the level of general situation, but was in a better position on the level of communal bond and geographical aspect. The ties between the kingship and the ecclesiastical authority which characterized an enlargement of the English kingship appeared under their various forms. This was shown by a Benedictin invocation for a king and a queen.[12] Especially, the idea of coronation played an important role in the strenthening of royal authority. [13] We can find it in an oath of a king under coronation:

> that the church of God and the whole Christian people may by my will
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> preserve true peace for time; second, that I shall forbid to all
>
> ranks thefts and all injustices; third, that the gentle and merciful
>
> God who lives, may grant to me and to you his mercy…[14]

This coronation made a king hold the symbol of kingship[15] and strengthened the sovereignty of England.

The Saxon King dispatched royal reeves to govern borough.[16] They held the military, judicial and financial power of a shire, and had close contact with

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11) W.E.Lunt, *History of England*(London, 1945), p.39f.

12) H.R.Loyn, The governance of Anglo-*Saxon England* 500-1087(London, 1984), p.87.

13) *Ibid.*, p.85.

14) P.H.Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England*(London, 1978), pp.184-5.

15) *Ibid.*

16) *Ibid.* p.195.

the kingship.[17]

The consolidation measures of judicial administrations, which were taken for the benefit of royal power, resulted in the strengthening of the position of borough.

The borough court protected commerce and property of burgesses, prepared for the wall construction and public works under the order of king, differently from court or countryside.[18] The important officials of a judicial administration were royal reeves.[19] The borough court in the late saxon period was not only the symbol of kingship, but a definite concept showing the position of borough and an organization clearly featured in the medieval town.

Constructed in view of the government of localities, the royal borough turned into the center of a region, especially the center of judicial administration. It was such organization for kingship that most of its incomes were given king. Even though an earl constructed a borough, the alloted portion of income and taxes was as a whole 75% and 25% for king and earl respectively.[20]

H. C. Darby in *Domesday Geographies* said that 5 towns—York, Lincoln, Oxford, Norwich, Thetford—with a population of more than 4,000, 11 towns with 2,000 to 4,000, 14 towns with more than 1,000 existed in England with exception of London and Winchester.[21] Even except the smaller towns, the above towns seemed to have the character of medieval town. Because they were unable to be self-supporting, it is true that, for example, only 538 men in Ipswich held the land, and others engaged in commerce and manual works.[22]

The borough had effect on the fortification of the Saxon kingship and served as the center of judicial administration and government over localities. In addition, kings' continuing plan for the construction of royal reeves in borough contributed to strenthening the royal control over a number of inhabitants there.

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17) *Ibid.*

18) H. R. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England,* pp. 150-1.

19) *Ibid.*, p. 151.

20) *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

21) Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

22) E. Lipson, *The Economic History of England, vol,* I (London, 1939), p. 109.

The late Saxon borough was constructed by king, evolved into the center of a region and changed the inside of a town. The borough, as we mentioned, was established originally as a fortification, but in the course of time the enlargement of its scope was made possible by the policy of intensification and the plan of road systems of borough. Now, the borough was not a military fortification but a medieval town, as can be found in the evidences before Norman Conquest. The Saxon kingdom had no sooner constructed boroughs against the Dane attacks than it laid stress on an administration and a government of borough.[23] The theory must be revised that distinguishes the borough tenure from the countryside tenure in the Saxon period, feudal lords and peasants from burgesses on the Norman kingdom.

Almost all boroughs under the reign of Edgar were equipped with mints, and moneyers offered the means for trade settlements. The most active mints were in London, Winchester, York, Lincoln, Chester, Exeter, Oxford, Bristol, and so on. [24]

The mint constructed in borough meant the establishment of money-circulating system in the late Saxon period. The first use under the Anglo-Saxon kingdom was the sceatt of the 7th century. Offa of Mercia did the English currency reform and the standardization of penny, reorganized the coinage south of the Humber and established the silver penny system which was to remain the staple coin of England for the succeeding four and half centuries.[25]

King Ethelstan tried to centralize authoritarian rule of coinage by means of the recognized coin along with the intensification of borough and the reconquest of the conquered land of the Danes. Only twenty eight mints worked at that time. Each mint was sent only one recognized mold, controled by the central government. On the reverse of coin were carved a mint and a moneyer that had the responsibility for the quality of coin. If one violated the regulations or minted a private coin or a bad coin, he would be condemned to capital punishment.

The coin had a relative importance according to the regions during the 10th-11th centuries. The coinage system which was unified by central government,

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23) Loyn, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

24) *Ibid.*

25) Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and Norman Conquest*, p. 120.

was a measure for the growth of town. According to some numismatists, the number of moneyers and the volume of coins guided the rank of town. There were more than eight mints including unknown places in the 11th century. London's mints accounted for 25% of the whole coinage, York 10%, while Lincoln, Winchester, Chester, Norwich, Exeter and so on held a relatively small importance. [26]

It was assumed that about 7,000 pieces of 10th-century coins were excavated in these places in 1840, silver pennies under wessex kings, coins of York, East Anglian coins under a Danish dominion, Carolingian denarius, coins of Italy and Islam included.[27] Moreover, in 991 there was the conclusion of an agreement between Ethelred II and Olaf Tryggvasson, a Norway king for the·protection of English ships, merchants and goods.[28] Moreover, there was also the excavation of English pennies in Gotland of Sweden, which was the center of commerce with Russia.[29] We can see the reduction of customs for the English merchant that Cnut negotiated with The Holy Roman Emperor, Konrad II and Brugunds king.[30] All these considered, England had relationship widely with the Scnadinavian Peninsula and Continent not only through regional trades, but long-distance trades. This was structured after the Danes wars which were obliged to do the enlargement policy of mint and further complicated the origin of medieval town.

The borough that had the military character showed an increasing commercial factors after wars against the Danes. The borough with geographical advantages in commerce protected burgesses from plunders outside and encouraged the settling of merchants.[31]

The Saxon merchants, found in documents, sometimes went from Iceland to the old Roman region. Kings in Wessex granted the borough the privilege to buy and sell. Ethelred and Cnut ordered every borough to recognize a legal act of dealings for merchants having more than 4 pennies, if only they 4 had fair witnesses.[32] The above protection of merchants which was a legal act of dealings

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26) *Ibid.*

27) Loyn, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

28) *Ibid.*, p. 92.   .

29) *Ibid.*, p. 95.

30) *Ibid.*

31) Lunt, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

32) D. C. Douglas(ed.), *English Historical Document*(London, 1953) i, no. 49, p. 458.

showed the vitality of commercial exchange in the late Saxon period.

The borough merchant organized gild to provide the security of its members in the long journey. It guaranteed them mutual benefit not only in small boroughs like Abbtsbury and Bedwyn, but large ones like Cambridge.[33)]

The burgess in Winchester entered at least 4 associations of gilds having their own halls. There also existed gilds for priests and deacons.[34)]

The regulation of gild was a fundamental aspect of the late Saxon borough, which assured trade of commodities. It was proved that the professional merchant appeared in the late 11th century.

The study of the Anglo-Saxon period has been dedicated mainly to the commercial activity. As some scholars pointed out, even though they had little in documents, they grasped the basic natural economy of the Anglo-Saxon period, that is, the exchange and barter characteristic of borough market.

As we mentioned, the borough in the late Saxon period was characterized by commercial center at its incipient stage, which was guaranteed a security of trade and mints.

The first major commodity of borough market was grain. The clause 1043 of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle mentioned the price and trade of wheat in 1039.[35)] The second staple commodity was salt, of which manufacture, transport and trade were often mentioned in the chronicles.[36)] The professional manual trader refined iron dealt in borough market.[37)] Tin was one of the most important comodities,[38)] and pottery was made and dealt on a large scale in eastern boroughs.[39)] In addition, slave was an important commodity in local trade.[40)] Besides, there were wool and cloth.[41)]

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33) *Ibid.*, nos. 136-9, pp. 603-7.

34) Loyn, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

35) *Anglo-Saxon chronicles.*, 1039, 1043 clauses.

36) Loyn, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

37) A. J. Robertson(ed.), *Two of the Saxon Chronicals Parallel*, 2 vols., (Oxford, 1892-99), pp. 253 ff.

38) J. Hatcher, *English Tin Production and Trade before 1550*(Oxford, 1973), pp. 16ff.

39) Loyn, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 ff.

40) Robertson, *op. cit.*, p. 204 ff.

The development of regional market gave stimulus to the long-distance trade, while the expansion of the long-distance trade promoted the regional trade. The commodity of trade was mainly luxury articles in the early Saxon period, which were imported by merchants from Dorsted and the Baltic sea.[42] The articles on long-distance trade were shown in 'Item rex Lundoniae' that the archbishop, Aefric wrote in the late 10th century. We can find out in documents red mantles for clergymen, silkware, jewellery, golds, luxury cloth, wine, olive oil, ivory, copper, bronze, tin, brimstone, glassware and so on.[43] This also would show the situation of London and merchants which had intercourse with Flanders, Pontieu, Normandy, Rouen, Huy and so on.[44]

Sawyer asserted that a mass minting and circulation of silver pennies meant the wealth of England, related with the trade of wool and cloth in the late Saxon period.[45] It must have minted Danegeld and Heregeld for repayment to Scandinavian.[46] England had a rich silver field, from which flowed a large amount of silver for the trade of wool and cloth.[47] It was indirectly shown that the rate of a town population at that time was about 10%[48] while the rate of the 14th century was less than 10%.[49] The expanding trade changed the character of the late Saxon borough. The main function of borough saw a shift from the military one to the privileged center of administration, mint, gild and trade.

IV

In sum, the borough in the late Saxon period experienced a transformation from a military function to medieval town, even though the expansion of urban

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41) Loyn, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

42) Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England*, p. 231.

43) B. Thorpe(ed.), *Analecta Anglo-Saxonica*(London, 1849), p. 27.

44) *Ibid.*

45) P. H. Sawyer, 'The Wealth of England in the eleventh century', *T. R. H. S.*, 5th. ser. vol. 20(1965), pp. 145-164.

46) *Ibid.*, p. 145.

47) *Ibid.*

48) Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, p. 384.

49) J. C. Russel, *British Medieval Population*(Albuquerque, 1948), pp. 140-146.

functions which took place in the succeeding 12th-13th centuries was one of the general foundations for a greater economic growth of town. The coinage system, the existence of trade and gild and so on in the late Saxon period showed that the origin of medieval town in England appeared not after Norman Conquest, but in the late Saxon period, especially in the 11th century.