TOWNS IN FEUDAL SOCIETY ---FRANCE AND BELGIUM---

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Introduction

For a long time Japanese historiography of the medieval European towns has been influenced by the theories of Henri Pirenne. His famous hypothesis that the medieval towns were born in the 11th century by "the rivival of the long-distance trade" and by the growth of the "free" merchant classes has been widely accepted by many of the Japanese historians. During the decades of 1950 and 1960, when the problem of the establishment of feudalism in Western Europe gave rise to much controversy among Japanese scholars, his theories on early and high middle ages gave the important grounds for their arguments. Besides the European medieval towns themselves have been considered as a unique existence which had realized the autonomy in the feudal world. A so-called "freedom and autonomy" of the medieval towns were thought to have been achieved mainly by the initiative of the "free" urban people. In this view the medieval towns were clearly distinguished from the "unfree" countryside (rural area), and as a whole they were recognized as a heterogeneous existence in the feudal world.

But nowadays the approach to medieval European towns by Japanese scholars seems gradually to have changed since 1970 under the influence of new academic trends in Western Europe. As a result of recent research in France and Belgium, the origin of the town and the urban "freedom and autonomy" has been reconsidered. Consequently much attention has been given to the more closer relation between the towns and the feudal system. In this paper we try to describe the state of research on medieval French and Belgian towns in these trends.

I. Origin of the medieval town

Speaking first on the physical origin of the medieval town in France and Belgium. Since 1945 research on this topic in Western Europe has already seen some change of opinion about the theory of Pirenne. Especially based on the use of archeological, toponymical and numismatical sources as well as on the systematical use of documents, Belgian scholars have criticized his theory and have tried to explain the origin of the town in different way.

First recent research tends to think much of the aspects of continuity of urban life throughout the early middle ages. Contrary to the theory of Pirenne, new urban settlements which appeared in Carolingian period are thought to have continued to develop until the 11th century by the growth of the rural economy surrounding them. Although long-distance trade and industry were the major elements in growth after a town had become estab-

lished, the urban progression seems to have found its origin in local, agrarian trade, just as G. Despy has clearly shown on the Meuse region (Belgium) in the 9th and 10th centuries.

Secondly, recent research emphasizes the role of pre-urban cores ("castrum" or "burgus") of the feudal or ecclesiastical authority particularly since 9th century. These pre-urban cores were not only political, administrative and military center, but also included industrial and commercial functions. In France "burgus" (bourg) is thought to have played an important role in the formation of the towns. Some Japanese scholars have also payed attention to this settlement. French medievist A. Chédeville classifies this settlement into four types (bourgs ruraux, bourgs monastiques, bourgs castraux, bourgs suburbains). These bourgs did not always become real towns in the middle ages. Some were staying in half-rural, half-urban settlement, but even if so, it's clear that they had mostly certain urban character (military function, market function, concentration of non-agrarian population, etc.). In fact most of the small and medium sized towns in medieval France had their origin in these bourgs (especially bourgs castraux by the feudal lords). In Flanders the policy of Count of Flanders in the 11th century shows that the construction of the new castle which contained church and regular market in its bourg gave an important moment

for urbanization of this area (Cassel, Ieper, Lille, etc.). In 8)
Lorraine the same policy by the Duke can be found (Nancy).

On these points mentioned above general conclusion has not yet been given to us. But at least it can be said that a certain topographic and economic foundation of the medieval town in France and Belgium had been established partly by the initiative of the feudal lord, before the juridical transition to genuine urbanism was made in the 12th century onwards. And besides it seems rather remarkable that the recent research tries to explain urban genesis and development in connection with the sourrounding rural economy.

II. Social and juridical aspects of the medieval town

Social and juridical aspects of the medieval town in France and Belgium have been discussed from the various angles. Since 19th century especially much attention has been given to the movement of the commune ("communia") in Northern France in the 11th and 12th century, because the "freedom and autonomy" of the medieval town was thought to have been realized by such a movement.

In 1947 Ch. Petit-Dutaillis argued that the <u>commune</u> was originally a sworn association ("conjuratio") as a institution of peace ("institutio pacis") of the inhabitants, but from the end

of the 12th century it changed its character and became the vassal of the French king ("servitium regis"). In this context he made it clear that in the beginning the <u>commune</u> did not mean any autonomy of the town.

On the other hand, in 1966 Belgian medievist A. Vermeesch showed that the <u>commune</u> was not only an urban popular movement as a sworn association, but also a local parish movement. Both of them appeared from the 11th century under the influence of the movement of <u>Paix de Dieu</u> by the church. According to him the essence of the <u>commune</u> consists in the original way of the guarantee of peace in feudal world. Namely the <u>commune</u> is defined as a institution of the peace guaranteed by the popular troops. 11)

From these views it can be said that the <u>commune</u> was not a revolutional movement for urban autonomy against the feudal domination, but was a institution for the establishment of the peace in feudal society. 12)

Since 12th century onwards the relation between the <u>commune</u> and the Capetian Royal power shows an important aspect in the history of the <u>commune</u>.

Research on this topic recognizes that in the first phase of the reign of Louis VI and Louis VII (1108-1180) the royal power simply tried to keep the local peace and order by confirming the

communal charter which had been previously granted by the local lord (bischop). But in the reign of Philippe Auguste (1180-1223) the commune was integrated into the growing process of the royal power. Phillipe Auguste took care to grant charters including a certain "autonomy" to the towns in the region of the feudal lords against him. In return he required the military service from the towns as well as from the other vassals, and used the commune as a means of the magnification of the royal power. K. Saito has clearly shown such a policy of the royal power in the case of Rouen and Tournai. She emphasizes that the "freedom and autonomy" of the communal towns were guaranteed by such an interdependent relation between the royal power and the town. Therefore according to her the contents of the communal charter (charte communale) of the each town could be a certain measure to show the position of the town in the feudal society. Y. Inoue also discussed on the "freedom and autonomy" of the commune in his book of 1976. According to him the "freedom" of the commune meant a certain emancipation from the seignorial arbitrary ("voluntas domini"), but it only derived from the institution of peace. Besides the degree of the political "autonomy" of the commune was diverse in each communal charter, and in most of the case the "autonomy" was rather limited except the case of Tournai.

Thus recent research emphasizes that the communal charter reflected on more or less the seignorial dominance and leadership. Even in Flanders, where the urban "freedom and autonomy" had been emphasized since Pirenne, recent research has pointed out that the Flemish towns in the 12th century owed their charters (Grande Keur) to the policy of the count of Flanders rather than to the result of the communal movement. In this point it's considered that the counts granted the urban charters to each Flemish town in order to establish the public peace in his domain. 160

On the other hand, the communal charter was originally thought to have preceded the franchise charter (charte de franchise; charte de coutume) granted to the rural community, and have influenced on the latter. But in 1966 J. Schneider pointed out that the communal charter was only a special form of the franchise charter, and besides the former was often been granted to the rural settlement as well as to the urban settlement at the same period. Therefore it seems not more right to make a clear distinction between them. According as the reality of the "freedom and autonomy" in the rural community has been made clear, recent scholars tend to think the the degree of the "freedom and autonomy" of the settlement could not be measured any more by the simple distinction between town and countryside,

framework. In this context G. Despy showed the spread of the charte-loi de chef-lieu (droit urbain de Louvain) in the rural community in the Duchy of Brabant, and K. Saito also examined the similar process in the County of Hainaut.

In short it seems apparent that neither the urban freedom nor the rural freedom was achieved one-sidedly by the requirement of the inhabints, but by the bilateral contract between the feudal lord and the inhabitants.

As for the origin and the character of the early burgher ("burgenses"), recent research first shows that the notion of the "burgenses" had rather various meanings. In Belgium "burgenses" meant a certain privileged status of the inhabitants in the urban settlement before 1300. Especially in the small towns this term included even peasants. In France the same conclusion can be found on this point. A. Chédeville pointed out that the legal status of the "burgenses" was different depending on the diversity of the bourgs where they lived, and it could not be more possible to define the "burgenses" simply as merchants ("mercatores") just as Pirenne had emphasized before. 21)

Secondly the relation between the burgher and the rural world has been reconsidered. Many scholars have recognized that most of the urban population in the 12th and 13th century had come from

the surrounding rural areas, and that they often had possessed the land outside the town wall since 12th century.

Such a close relation between them seems to have been reflected on the origin of the upper burgher (patriciat urbain)

who held the municipal government. As K. Saito has shown in

1978, the main leading strata of the commune of Tournai were the member of "Homme de Sainte Marie" who came from the familia of the Notre-Dame church. They were landed proprietors as well as professional merchants, and at the same time they were connecting with the local lords and the ecclesiastical authority by becoming their officials or by the marital ties. The importance of the officials ("ministeriales") of the seignorial authority as the origin of the upper burgher is also pointed out particularly in the case of the bishopric towns (Reims, Metz, Chartres, Arras, Liège, etc.).

Besides the relation of the burgher with the rural nobility ("milites") cannot be neglected. The latter also participated in the financial business and often formed an alliance with the burgher family from the 12th century onwards. They were not antagonistic to the urban development, on the contrary they could grow up by having a share in the urban economic development.

Finally it's also necessary to mention the fact that the

medieval town made up a new urban culture and social relation among the inhabitants (university, confraternity, etc.) since 12th century onwards. Recent Japanese historiography has also paid attention to these aspects, but further research based on the original documents would be required.

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In conclusion, recent research has modified and nuanced interpretations of the medieval urban reality in France and Belgium which were generally held before 1970 in Japanese historiography. We think now that the medieval town should be considered as the necessary component in feudal society instead of regarding it as the heterogeneous existence. In other words the medieval town could be placed in the relation with the surrounding area, though there were some diversities in size and form of the towns. As Jacque Le Goff has described impressively as "la symbiose entre ville et féodalité", the medieval town was integrated in the feudal system.

- 1) Cf., H. Pirenne, [11].
- 2) In this point see Y. Morimoto (21) 1-10, 241-245; S. Kimura (16) 160-161.
- 3) Cf., G. Duby (6); R. Fossier (7); Colloque Spa 1966 (17).
- 4) D. Nicholas [8] 113-114; A. Verhulst [15] 52-53; Y. Morimoto [21] 211-216.
- 5) G. Despy [4].
- 6) A. Verhulst [15] 41-49.
- 7) Y. Inoue [7]; [8]; [9]; [10]; H. Miyamatsu [17].
- 8) M. Yamada [54] 64-68 .
- 9) This point is emphasized in Y. Morimoto [21] 201.
- 10) Ch. Petit-Dutaillis (10); K. Takahashi [46] 295-306.
- 11) A. Vermeesch [13]; K. Takahashi [46] 306-322.
- 12) Y. Inoue [9] 175-183; K. Takahashi [46] 322-325.
- 13) J.W. Baldwin [2] 59-64.
- 14) K. Saito(Mizuno) [29]; [30]; [32]; [33].
- 15) Y. Inoue [9] 184-188.
- 16) R.C. Van Caenegem, Coutumes et législation en Flandre aux XIe et XIIe siècles, in: [17] 245-279.
- 17) J. Schneider, Les origines des chartes de franchises dans le royaume de France (XIe-XIIe siècles), in: [17] 29-50.
- 18) G. Despy [5]
- 19) K. Saito [34]; [35]; [36]; [37]; [40].
- 20) K. Saito [38] 125-126; Y. Fujii [4] 263-264.
- 21) A. Chédeville, De la cité à la ville 1000-1150, in: [6] 180-181; M. Yamada [54] 71-72.
- 22) K. Saito [31]. On franchise town see also A. Kawahara [14].
- 23) M. Yamada [54] 74-75.
- 24) For example, A. Egawa [1]; M. Tanaka [48]; [49]; K. Takahashi [47]; H. Katsura [13].
- 25) J.Le Goff, L'apogée de la France urbaine médiévale 1150-1300, in: (6) 244.

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