



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Tanegashima: The Arrival of Europe in Japan by Olaf G. Lidin

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Tanegashima: The Arrival of Europe in Japan. By Olaf G. Lidin. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2002. 302 pages. Hardback £45.00/DKK 540; paperback £17.99/DKK 220.

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Olaf Lidin has penned an intriguing book. Those interested in the dissemination of the gun to Japan will find valuable his translation of two narratives, “Record of the Musket” (*Teppōki*) and the variant version, “Kunitomo Record of the Musket” (*Kunitomo teppōki*). The inclusion of transcriptions of the Japanese texts as appendices allows for easy comparison of Lidin’s competent translations with the originals. Lidin also translates excerpts from the Tanegashima family’s genealogy (*kafu*), which recounts the arrival of the Portuguese, and paraphrases *Peregrinaçam*, Fernão Mendes Pinto’s colorful narrative of his travels to Japan. Those familiar with these sources, which figure prominently in Noel Perrin’s *Giving Up the Gun* (Boston: D. R. Godine, 1979) will find this to be a useful companion volume.

Lidin focuses on what he describes as the first years of the European presence in Japan, 1543–1549; he devotes eleven of his twelve chapters to the introduction of Portuguese guns and in the final chapter summarizes the experience of Francis Xavier, who helped introduce a new “world view” to Japan. He resurrects largely forgotten monographs, rich in anecdotal detail, such as James Murdoch’s venerable *History of Japan*, Takekoshi Yosaburō’s *Economic Aspects of the History of the Civilization of Japan*, published in 1930, Delmer Brown’s 1948 article about guns in Japan, and twenty-nine articles and books by the prolific Charles Boxer. Describing the marauders as “Japanese Vikings” (p. 82), Lidin also provides a novel analysis of East Asian piracy.

Lidin’s translations are accurate, but could be more succinct. He translates *Kunitomo teppōki*’s “When the Mongols of the Great Yuan attacked Kyushu,” as “When the Mongols came from the land of Great Yuan (China) to Kyushu” (p. 130). There are a few mistakes in romanization, and he chooses the anachronistic reading Kinbee for the name of a sixteenth-century smith, instead of [Yaita] Kin hyōe no jō Kiyosada (pp. 40, 46), but these minor blemishes do not detract from the overall value of his work.

The structure of the book is, however, confusing. Analysis and translations of primary sources are haphazardly interspersed. After an introduction, “The Arrival of the Portuguese,” translations of *Teppōki* and the Tanegashima family genealogy appear as chapters 2 and 3. Lidin then analyzes the Tanegashima genealogy (chapter 4) and summarizes the historical context for the dissemination of guns (chapter 5). From there, inexplicably, we get his summary of Pinto’s account of the introduction of guns to Japan (chapter 6) and a translation of *Kunitomo teppōki*, written by gunsmiths of Ōmi province (chapter 7). Chapters 8 through 10 reveal how guns were manufactured in central Japan and how they came to be monopolized by the Tokugawa regime during the seventeenth century. Chapters 11 and 12 appear in reverse chronological order, with the former describing the dissemination of guns throughout Kyushu during the later decades of the sixteenth century, and the latter recounting the life of Xavier, who perished in 1552. Of the twelve chapters, only three (the introduction, chapter 5, and chapter 6) are more than twenty-seven pages long. Nine other chapters, one-third of which are translations, comprise fifteen pages or less, with the shortest, “*Teppō* Production at Negro,” consisting of a mere three pages.

Lidin aims to show that Tanegashima played a central role in the dissemination of firearms. He bases his assertions on two of the sources translated in this monograph—*Teppōki* and the Tanegashima genealogy. Unfortunately, neither can be trusted, but Lidin does not fully acknowledge their limitations. He places great faith in Nanpo Bushi, who wrote *Teppōki* sixty-three years after Portuguese firearms were introduced to Tanegashima (p. 24). “Nanpo,” he writes, “was a true Confucian scholar who would not have deviated from the facts as found in the sources. He could elaborate on them and add rhetorical flourishes, but he would not have changed the facts” (p. 24). Such optimism seems misplaced, for Lidin concedes that this chronicle glorifies the Tanegashima family (pp. 71, 101) and that references were “consciously added to prove that Tanegashima was the source of the musketry *all over Japan*” (p. 76; emphasis in original). He likewise recognizes that some of the elements of the Tanegashima genealogy might be fabricated (p. 68), but doggedly asserts that it “must be accepted” that “Tanegashima represented the starting-point and the beginning of the manufacture of the *teppō*” (p. 76). Both *Teppōki* and the Tanegashima genealogy are reliable, he believes, because they “must . . . have had a Tanegashima house chronicle as the basic source” (p. 24). He provides no proof, however, for the assertion that the root source “ought to have been a house chronicle of the Tanegashima family” (p. 71), save for repeating the mantra that the works were “probably based on records kept in the Tanegashima house archive from early times” (p. 101).

By concentrating on the impossible quest of reconstructing the “lost” house chronicle of the Tanegashima, Lidin unfortunately overlooks indigenous documents and material sources pertaining to the dissemination of guns in Japan. He ignores at least twenty-five documents that describe gunshot wounds inflicted from 1563 until 1600. This oversight is all the more glaring because many of these documents are closely associated with the Ōtomo family of Northern Kyushu, who are the subject of chapter 11.

Recent archaeological discoveries bolster some of Lidin’s assertions. On several occasions, for example, he refers to the Mongol Invasion Scrolls, and to one scene in particular that depicts an exploding projectile (*teppō*; pp. 4, 78, 140). This he describes as the earliest “proof” of Japanese knowledge of *teppō*. The excavation of such a device at Takashima, where one of the invading fleets sank in 1281, proves that the Mongols had used them (*Asahi shinbun*, 20 October 2001). Ironically, however, the image of a *teppō* in the scrolls appears to have been added long after they were originally painted, for the brushwork and ink are of inferior quality to the original (see Thomas Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention*, Cornell East Asia Series, 2001).

While Lidin dismisses a 1466 reference to Japanese firearms in *Inryōken nichiroku* as being unverifiable (pp. 77–78), this source in fact provides some notable details, declaring that on 1466.7.28, an official from the Ryukyu kingdom surprised many bystanders in Kyoto with the explosion produced by his *teppō* (written with the characters 鉄放). Recent excavations have confirmed that firearms were used in the Ryukyu islands during the fifteenth century. Stone, earthenware, and iron bullets have been discovered at Katsurenjō, an Okinawan fort (*gusuku*) that was destroyed in 1458 and never rebuilt. Another *gusuku*, at Akenajō, also has portals, designed for snipers, placed low in its stone walls, and a few surviving guns (*hiya*) of great antiquity are stored at the Okinawan Prefectural Museum (See Tōma Shiichi 当真嗣一, “Hiya ni tsuite” 火矢について, *Nantō kōko* 南島考古 14 [December 1994], pp. 123–52). Firearms

had thus been disseminated well before the Portuguese arrived. Lidin alludes to this possibility, but continues to overemphasize the importance of Tanegashima, going so far as to classify Japanese guns as being either “pre-Tanegashima (1543)” or “post-Tanegashima” varieties (p. 77).

Finally, Lidin refers to the transformative power of guns, but he does not show how they influenced battlefield strategy, save for repeatedly praising Oda Nobunaga’s “revolutionary” tactics at the battle of Nagashino (pp. 92, 146). Lidin seems unaware of recent skepticism regarding these Nagashino battle accounts (see Fujimoto Masayuki 藤本正行, *Nobunaga no sengoku gunjigaku* 信長の戦国軍事学; Takarajimasha, 1993, pp. 193–250, particularly pp. 223–32). The degree to which guns determined tactical and organizational change demands further research, based on close analysis of primary documents and material sources.

In short, we have a good translation of well-known but problematic sources, and a somewhat uneven analysis of the events surrounding the introduction of guns at Tanegashima. *Tanegashima: The Arrival of Europe in Japan* is a substantial introduction to the limited sources pertaining to the initial Portuguese encounter. May it encourage further exploration of how guns were disseminated in Japan and how they influenced the course of Japanese history.

A Modern History of Japan from Tokugawa Times to the Present. By Andrew Gordon. Oxford University Press, 2003. xiv + 384 pages. Hardback £28.99/\$35.00; paperback £16.99/\$24.95.

Japanese Political History since the Meiji Renovation: 1868–2000. By Richard Sims. London: Hurst and Company/Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. xxiv + 395 pages. Hardback £39.50/\$65.00; paperback £14.95/\$23.95.

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Andrew Gordon relishes the dichotomies of Japanese history: internationalism v. insularity in the Meiji era, democracy v. imperialism early in the twentieth century, “economic miracle” v. “economic menace” in the 1980s. Richard Sims prefers the flowing narrative: the evolutionary rise of political parties, the gradual emergence of ultranationalism before World War II, conservative dominance after the war. And both of their survey histories illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of today’s changing approach to history.

Gordon works hard at incorporating the era’s new emphases into a broad synthesis, yet reveals his own inner dichotomy in that very process: the hold that traditional approaches maintain on even the most up-to-date students of the past. He is at his best with the newer themes: the role of women, the impact of economics, the participation of Japan in the historical processes of the broader world. Explaining that he cares particularly about “two themes: modernity and connectivity” (p. xi), Gordon argues that Japan’s radical transformation after 1800—its emergence as a modern state, its adoption of capitalism, its military conflicts—can be understood only as part of the larger international scene. While Japan’s experiences may have been distinctive, he asserts,