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Founding the Shogun's Capital

ON a clear day in the late summer of 1590, the ambitious warrior Tokugawa Ieyasu strode across the expansive Kanto Plain. Rimmed by mountains and the waters of the Pacific, this area in the eastern reaches of the Japanese realm had recently become his dominion – a reward for his contributions to the seizure of land from rival samurai. To consecrate this sizable acquisition, Ieyasu had planned his ceremonial trip for this particular date, considered auspicious for coinciding with the first harvest of new grain. Around midafternoon he stopped at a temple for a meal, and a short while later he made the approach to his new home. People had gathered along the route, and regional powerholders had assembled to witness this occasion: the ascendant Tokugawa Ieyasu's official entrance into the castle at Edo.[1]

When Ieyasu stepped foot in the castle, on the spot where the Imperial Palace now stands in the middle of what is now Tokyo, he laid eyes on a building that was more of a fort than a command center suitable for a warrior of his stature. He was, after all, a shrewd and skilled samurai who had amassed might and wealth by aligning himself with the preeminent warlords of the era, first Oda Nobunaga and then Toyotomi Hideyoshi. By 1590, Ieyasu was a principal vassal of Hideyoshi, who was well on his way to consolidating control over much of the realm and bringing an end to over a century of almost constant warfare between feuding samurai. But

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while Ieyasu was bestowed much of the Kanto region by Hideyoshi, he didn't inherit an imposing castle that projected his newfound power. The footprint of what would become the three central enclosures of the castle did exist. But the fortification wasn't encircled by a stone wall, just an earthen embankment about three meters tall covered with grass. In a handful of spots around this perimeter, simple wooden gates allowed passage. The floors were made of dirt in some places; in others, the ground was covered with planks salvaged from old ships. And the roof wasn't tile, but a patchwork of wood shingles and thatch.[2]

Looking out from this modest fortress perched atop a bluff, someone other than Ieyasu might have found it difficult to envision this land as the site for their military headquarters and castle town. To the southeast was the Hibiya Inlet whose waters at the time lapped close at the castle's feet. Scattered along the shores of this inlet of Edo Bay were fishing villages of thatched-roof homes. To the northwest were hills and to the east marshy lowlands, leaving little space to house an army or build much of anything. And there was no abundant source of drinking water. It's hard to know from the scant sources on medieval Edo just how many people called it home, much less how exactly they lived. What's certain is that Edo was distant from the bustling capital in Kyoto and the centers of Hideyoshi's power. For Ieyasu, the granting of this land in the east removed him from the Tokugawa family's hereditary base to the west. Given all of these drawbacks to the Kanto region, Hideyoshi's transfer of Ieyasu may not have been a generous reward so much as a farsighted attempt to contain a potential competitor.[3]

But Ieyasu had his reasons for choosing to settle in Edo and not in the historical Kanto strongholds of Kamakura or Odawara further south. Perhaps he appreciated Edo's location at the innermost point of the bay, a strategic position that was easily

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defensible and protected from naval assault. Or its link to other areas by way of major roads like the Tōkaidō that ran down the coast to Kyoto.[4] Whatever his rationale, Tokugawa Ieyasu treated the allotment from Hideyoshi as an opportunity to bend upward the arc of his career and transform Edo into a proper castle town befitting one of the realm's most powerful warriors.

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The breathtaking metamorphosis spurred by Tokugawa Ieyasu in the late sixteenth century was a pivotal chapter in the story of the place that would become early modern Edo and then modern Tokyo, but it was not the first. This sprawling area already had a long history of multiple lives, as people and things and ideas from elsewhere came and left their imprint on the Kanto Plain. In its very early incarnation, well before there was any sense of a politically organized realm, this land was the stomping ground of animals. Elephants and large deer came from Eurasia when the Japanese archipelago was still a crescent-shaped mass attached to the continent, and they tread upon the soil that hundreds of thousands of years later would sit below Tokyo. (In the mid-1970s, three elephants would be discovered more than twenty meters below ground by crews building a subway line near Hamachō Station.) Giant mammals like the Palaeoloxodon elephant were eventually overhunted by people who followed the same route from the continent as the animals and plants before them. And around the time that ocean waters severed the crescent from the continent and broke it into a string of islands, about 12,000 years ago, people became less nomadic and started to lead more settled lives on the Kanto Plain.

When the seeds of a political body were sown, it wasn't here in the east but in the west. And there the realm's administrative center of gravity would remain for more than a millennium.

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Over the 600s and early 700s, an emergent state in the western region now known as the Kansai adapted Chinese legal codes as the basis for its rule, the monarch came to be called *tennō*, or emperor, and the nascent entity came to be known as Nihon, or Japan. Distant from this kernel of governance, the Kanto existed in its own sphere and followed its own rhythms, coming more gradually to agriculture, bronzeware, and political organization. But as the state's administrative apparatus developed, the province of Musashi was established and its borders defined to include almost all of today's metropolis of Tokyo as well as neighboring Saitama prefecture to the north and parts of Kanagawa prefecture to the south. The Kanto was still at the edges of the realm, but it was no longer beyond administrative reach.

In its medieval incarnation, Musashi province and the greater Kanto Plain became a prime arena for warriors jockeying for land, wealth, and power. These conflicts were part of a larger story of the rise of samurai, who came to challenge and would eventually usurp the political strength and authority of the state in the west. In the mid-800s to mid-1000s, these warrior families had emerged through military service to the emperor, who was the sovereign ruler at the apex of the governing imperial court in Kyoto. Court politics, culture, and intrigue were a world unto itself that revolved tightly around the capital. From this vantage point, the province of Musashi was a distant frontier, imagined as unpopulated and backward, beyond civilization and culture. Even the name Kanto, meaning "east of the barriers," was a description from the perspective of Kyoto. With some disdain for life outside of the capital, a court aristocrat who was appointed to serve as a governor was more likely to make his home not in the province but in Kyoto and to oversee his land from afar, hiring warriors to serve not just as guards but also as administrators. These empowered warriors came to eclipse the

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court aristocrats in the provinces and became ever more powerful in areas such as the Kanto.[5]

One such Kanto warrior, a man named Chichibu Shigetsugu, decided at some point in the 1100s to set up residence in a strategic spot – on a bluff overlooking an inlet. Inspired by this location, he changed his name from Chichibu to one meaning "mouth of an inlet." And he conferred upon the land around him this new name: Edo. The Edo family became formidable warriors in this region after the first samurai government, or shogunate, was founded in the 1180s at Kamakura in the southern Kanto. The Kamakura shogunate tipped the balance of power away from the emperor and the imperial court in the long-established capital of Kyoto and toward the samurai, like the Edo family, of the Kanto region.

In the mid-1400s, the Kanto became the stage for a civil war between samurai in which one warrior family after another gained and then lost dominance. One such family was the Uesugi, who erected the castle at Edo that Tokugawa Ieyasu would claim over a hundred years later. In 1457, the Uesugi decided to shore up their position on the plain and commanded a chief retainer – Ōta Dōkan – to build and administer the fortress at Edo. For this, he would become a fixture in stories told about the history of Tokyo. In the mid-1950s, a bronze statue of Ōta Dōkan was created to commemorate the putative five hundredth anniversary of the founding of Tokyo. This likeness now resides in the soaring glass and steel trussed atrium of the Tokyo International Forum, a strangely incongruous reminder of the medieval past. In Ōta Dōkan's day, Edo Castle was both a military fortification and a social hub. The fortress had three enclosures that were separated by a deep moat and encircled by a barrier. There were archery grounds where warriors gathered each morning to test their skills with the bow and arrow. And Dōkan hosted gatherings for guests

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who together composed *renga* or linked verse poetry. Near the castle, fishing boats and merchant ships would dock, bringing wares from other provinces and even overseas. There was rice from Awa, tea from Hitachi, bamboo arrows from Echigo, and copper from Shinano, as well as fish, lacquer, and medicines.

As the civil strife of the mid-1400s stretched into a prolonged period of almost unceasing war, the Kanto continued to witness the fortunes of competing samurai families wax and wane. It was the Hōjō of Odawara who were losing their grasp of Edo and its fortress when Toyotomi Hideyoshi launched his campaign to wrest control of the region. In early 1590, as his forces advanced and dealt one crushing blow after another, the castle at Edo fell quickly to the Toyotomi assault.[6]

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After Tokugawa Ieyasu received the surrendered Hōjō provinces and officially took claim of Edo in 1590, he oversaw its transformation from a strategic outpost into a full-fledged medieval castle town, designed to function as his military headquarters and the administrative center of his territory. Over the next ten years, Edo pulsed with the efforts of those who came to remake this modest place into a regional powerhouse.

One of the first orders of business was to tackle the shortcomings of the built and natural environments by repairing the castle and laying the groundwork for the town. The footprint of the castle's core was expanded, and over a dozen Buddhist temples to its west were relocated to make room for the construction of its western compound. Paired with these renovations were infrastructure projects, many of which sought to control the water of this swampy land crisscrossed by rivers. To create more buildable soil, the Hibiya Inlet was partially drained and filled with dirt from the excavation of a moat around the castle's new western

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enclosure. To ease the transport of goods by boat, new waterways were dug. Prime among them was a canal called the Dōsanbori that connected the Hirakawa River to the center of Edo, making it possible for things like rice to be sailed down the river and through the canal to arrive near the castle's main gate. To ease travel over land, bridges were built. And to provide drinking water for the town's residents, Ieyasu ordered the development of a system of waterworks.

The town that developed around the castle was shaped by the logics of military defense and the societal supremacy of samurai. At a time when Toyotomi Hideyoshi was demanding that clearer distinctions be made between samurai, farmers, and townspeople, areas of Edo came to be designated for particular occupational groups and began to form distinct identities. Direct retainers of Ieyasu charged with defending the castle lived on its northwest flank, lower-ranking vassals were placed close around the castle, and those of higher rank were given larger estates on the periphery. Townspeople who catered to the various needs of the samurai set up shop and home along the Dōsanbori canal, with specific neighborhoods specializing in certain goods and services like lumber and shipping. There was a periodic market where people could shop, and a brothel. Townspeople also took up residence in already established villages and squeezed around the samurai homes, temples, and shrines in the periphery.[7]

As laborers, lumberers, boatmen, and merchants set the pillars of the castle town, Tokugawa Ieyasu protected and strengthened Edo through a combination of adept management of his relationship with Hideyoshi, administrative skill, and a dose of good luck. In the years following their defeat of the Hōjō, Ieyasu continued to prove himself a dependable vassal to Hideyoshi. He spent a year and a half in Hizen province, on the island of Kyushu, which was a base for Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea in 1592. Ieyasu

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helped organize the massive number of soldiers and laborers mobilized for the assault but avoided deployment to the peninsula as one of the half million soldiers who fought against Korean and Chinese troops in the devastating six-year conflict. Instead, he spent some of this time with Hideyoshi in Osaka and near Kyoto. When in Edo, he tended to ceremonial responsibilities like holding banquets and to administrative tasks like promoting vassals, issuing licenses, and distributing fiefs.[8] When Toyotomi Hideyoshi died in 1598, Tokugawa Ieyasu was well positioned to fight for the reins of power and emerged as the leader of one of the two camps competing for control of the realm. At the decisive Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu's "eastern army" defeated the rival "western army." The consolidation of power started by Oda Nobunaga and advanced by Toyotomi Hideyoshi culminated in the victorious Tokugawa, and Japan was as unified as it had ever been. In 1603, Ieyasu was granted by the emperor the title of shogun (literally "generalissimo"), making him the foremost military ruler of the realm and ushering in the era of the Tokugawa shogunate and the elevation of Edo from a castle town to the shogun's capital.

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The triumphant Tokugawa family cast the foundation and frame of early modern Edo. Doubling down on Edo as their base, the Tokugawa reenvisioned it as the seat of their rule – Edo was to be the military headquarters, administrative nucleus, and political hegemon of a unified realm. For the first time in over a thousand years, the political and administrative center of gravity would unequivocally be in the east. Power was to be concentrated in the Tokugawa family and its warrior government at Edo, drawn away from the imperial court in Kyoto and from the daimyo lords around the country. A daimyo was a samurai who governed one

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of the 260 some domains across the land, ostensibly serving the shogun but also exercising autonomy and amassing power through rule of his domain. The Tokugawa shogunate sought to control and weaken the daimyo not just to assert its political supremacy but also to ensure that its newly established order would endure. We now know that Tokugawa rule would last for over two and a half centuries and that this period would be characterized by relative peace. But in the early 1600s, after over a century of almost constant warfare, the stability so recently won seemed fragile. To prevent disorder and assert authority, the first few Tokugawa shoguns – Ieyasu (r. 1603–1605), Hidetada (r. 1605–1623), and Iemitsu (r. 1623–1651) – built mechanisms and symbols of their power into the city of Edo.

The consolidation of power in the shogun's capital created a tremendous centripetal pull toward Edo that was felt across the realm. People, money, natural resources, and goods streamed into the town, sometimes by government coercion and sometimes by sheer magnetism. This potent combination of force and opportunity propelled the construction and growth of a city that was, in these early Tokugawa decades, a very male and quite rough and tumble place to be. There were the many samurai who were called to the military capital to serve as warriors and government bureaucrats, as well as thousands of masterless samurai who, without a lord to employ and pay them, came in search of work.

Edo Castle was the lodestone of the shogun's capital: a visual symbol of the shogunate's power, authority, and centrality. The very process of building this castle served as a way for the shogunate to control daimyo, drain domain coffers, and generally flex its muscle, mobilizing people and resources on a vast scale. Laborers were requisitioned by the shogunate for its various engineering and construction projects, with each domain's contribution calculated by its tax base. These men dug canals, built

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bridges, leveled Kandayama hill in the north, and used that soil to completely fill the Hibiya Inlet and create today's area of Nihonbashi from Shinbashi to Hamachō. Peasants came to work as day laborers, and carpenters, painters, lacquerers, stonemasons, plasterers, and metalworkers spent decades renovating the castle. With stone scarce on the Kanto Plain, major daimyo further west were ordered to provide 1,120 pieces of large stone for every hundred thousand *koku* of rice capacity in their domains. To send a single large stone to Edo, stonemasons first had to extract the block, weighing up to several tons, from a quarry in the mountains; then about a hundred laborers pulled it to the port where it was loaded onto a ship that could carry only one or two stones per trip; seamen took a week or so to transport this cargo to Edo; and laborers met the stone at the recently created wharves at Edo Harbor and pulled it to the castle, directed by men who rode atop the block, waving flags and beating drums to coordinate the whole effort. The expense of paying and feeding thousands of men, the cost of the stone itself, and some of the burden of procuring the 3,000 or so transport ships were borne by the daimyo.

Most of the timber for the castle was also provided by daimyo. Carpenters would first determine the dimensions of the logs they needed; given the immense scale of the castle, some of the logs had to be more than thirty meters long and over one-and-a-half meters in diameter. Foremen then found the right trees and lumberers cut them, in places like the northern Kanto and to the west in present-day Nagano and Shizuoka prefectures. A log might then be carried over land by hundreds of men to a river, perhaps one that had been dammed to create a current strong enough to carry such weight. The timber was then rafted right into Edo or else to a spot where it could be loaded onto a ship that traveled the last leg of the

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