It is midday in the medieval city of Ichijōdani, a community of roughly 10,000 people nestled in a valley in the northern region of Echizen Province, Japan. A doctor welcomes a patient into his large residential and clinical complex situated among temples and capacious warrior homes. The patient, who walked hours from her village south of the city, looks around with wide eyes at the large gate, the grand buildings, and the impressive decorated interior. The structures are larger even than the homes of the wealthiest village elders in her community. Then again, she is in the capital city, home to the lord of the province. She describes her symptoms to the doctor, who listens carefully and makes notes: pain and vomiting in the morning, bad enough that she has found it difficult to work. She is worried that she may be dying, and other than her husband, she has no one in her village to turn to, as she was raised in a different region. The doctor reassures her that her symptoms are consistent with morning sickness. It seems she is pregnant; she expresses relief.

1 Eileen Katō, “Pilgrimage to Dazaifu: Sōgi’s Tsukushi no michi no ki,” Monumenta Nipponica 34.3 (Autumn, 1979): 351.
he thinks of his large store of medical materials. Is it licorice (ganzō) that he needs in this case? No. Perhaps rhubarb root (daīō)? No, not that. Then he finds it: pinellia rhizome (hange), the tuber of the plant *Pinellia ternata*, good for the suppression of nausea. He retrieves the dried ingredient from another imported Chinese treasure, a lidded porcelain bowl, places it in his druggist’s mortar (yagen), and asks his assistant to grind it into a powder. He then uses a copper spoon to mix the ingredient and administer it to the patient, and also gives her a small packet of additional medicine to use until the morning sickness passes. She drinks the concoction, thanks him profusely, pays him a small fee (taken from her own modest dowry), and departs. He discusses the case with his assistant while drinking a bowl of tea, waiting for his next patient.

The above scenario is speculative, as the city of Ichijōdani was almost entirely destroyed by the armies of the warlord Oda Nobunaga in 1573. The people who lived in this thriving urban center fled or were ruthlessly killed, washing the streets of the provincial capital in blood. Written records of the lives of the residents were completely lost, with the exception, of course, of documents about Ichijōdani held in other locations, which are few. The elimination of Ichijōdani and its residents was so thorough, in fact, that it was never resettled as an urban hub, but returned to a kind of originary state as an isolated and pastoral valley, dotted here and there by material remains of the agglomeration that had once made it the most important city in the province. These ruins stood largely untouched, until modern archaeologists became interested in the site as a potential source of information about medieval Japan. Preliminary digging occurred in the early twentieth century, and thorough, scientific excavations began in the 1960s and continue at the time of the publication of this book. As a result, although the passage above is in one sense notional, in another it is based on tangible, material evidence. Archaeologists carefully unearthed the doctor’s residential and clinical complex with a remarkable degree of granularity, and the tools of his trade as I describe them are based on real excavated objects that the doctor used in the pursuit of his profession. Even the description of the Chinese medical text is based on the rare find of fragments of a book that scholars were able to analyze and identify.

The range of surviving material evidence in Ichijōdani is startling: from domestically produced and imported ceramics to stone religious sculptures; from wood and metal tools to the remains of vegetable, marine, and animal foodstuffs. More than fifty years of excavations have revealed Ichijōdani’s stone foundations, roads and bridges, city gates, palace walls, cemeteries, tea houses, gardens, wells, and toilets. This panoply of material remains, which archaeologists have assiduously mapped and
reconstructed, endures as a conspicuous archive of a historical community that is now lost. Many aspects of life in Ichijōdani are legible in these excavated edifices. Seemingly inconsequential objects such as broken earthenware dishes reveal patterns of ritual behavior. Widely dispersed stone Buddha statues suggest the scope and depth of religious practices. Excavated Chinese and Korean ceramics point to patterns of trade and elite consumption of goods. The unearthed materials from Ichijōdani, particularly as interpreted by archaeologists and then situated against a range of documentary and visual evidence, transcend their seemingly static and passive state as artifacts. Instead, we can read them as constituent elements of the city of Ichijōdani, agents in the production of a space and a community that prospered for a century.

The thriving city of Ichijōdani is the subject of this book, which considers daily life in this provincial urban center in a period usually associated only with political incohesion and endemic warfare. The chapters that follow examine the archaeological evidence from Ichijōdani, often in conversation with excavated materials from other urban sites in Japan, in order to illuminate the rhythms and logic of life and death for the many medieval Japanese who lived in urban agglomerates other than the capital city of Kyoto. The book is also concerned with the destruction of this provincial city and the meaning of that erasure for our understanding of both the period in which it took place and the larger flow of Japanese history. According to standard treatments of premodern Japanese history, this chaotic and violent period of provincial wars known as Sengoku (literally, “warring states” after the earlier Chinese era) was brought to an end only by the actions of three warlords, sometimes known as the Three Heroes of the Age of Unification: Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616). In an incremental process of war, alliance building, and cultural patronage, these men unified the nation and set the platform for the unfolding of the early modern age, which in turn prepared Japan – as much in the failures of supposed isolationism as in the success of national networks of travel, communication, and trade – for its entry into the modern world in the second half of the nineteenth century.

I have argued elsewhere that the “three heroes” historiography is overly teleological, too focused on the actions of a few individuals, and insufficiently attentive to the role of early modern hagiography and historical reinvention in producing the history of the Age of Unification in a dramatic and highly mythologized fashion.3 In the present volume

3 See Morgan Pitelka, Handmade Culture: Raku Potters, Patrons, and Tea Practitioners in Japan (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005), particularly 14–17, and Spectacular Prologue 3
I seek to consider the Age of Unification from a different vantage point, of those who were lost in the wars of the late sixteenth century and have been left out of the story of the progress of the nation. Although the canonical narrative of Japanese history is populated by a lively cast of celebrated losers, ranging from the Taira in the twelfth century to the forty-seven rōnin in the eighteenth century, the massive destruction and loss of life of the second half of the sixteenth century has usually been elided in English writings to make way for rather triumphalist accounts of unification.

Focusing on provincial communities like Ichijōdani affords a profoundly different view of the final century of the medieval period. The Ōnin War of 1467–1477, a violent conflict over succession disputes that spilled destructively into the provinces, is usually identified as the beginning of a tragic period of political instability in the history of Japan, the Sengoku, or “Age of Warring States.” Yet for many it was a moment of rebirth, an opportunity to build new settlements and form new alliances. International trade increased in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, bringing, for example, more Chinese ceramics into provincial centers than ever before. The relative political volatility of Kyoto was a boon of sorts for regional communities, as performing arts troops, artists, and poets traveled across Japan, stimulating cultural production in provincial cities and leading to a more balanced relationship between Japan’s center and its peripheries. Many of these regional hegemons actively resisted the unification efforts of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi.

This book uses one of the most significant examples, the Asakura house of warlords, to zoom in on the city that functioned as their headquarters, Ichijōdani. The Asakura served the Shiba, governors of

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4 See Michael Wert, Meiji Restoration Losers: Memory and Tokugawa Supporters in Modern Japan (Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), and Mikael S. Adolphson and Anne Commons, eds., Lovable Losers: The Heike in Action and Memory (University of Hawai’i Press, 2015), for two recent examples.

5 The Asakura were a multigenerational house (ie) of samurai warriors; they controlled a large samurai organization, or what many authors would refer to in English as a “war band.” This organization included the main Asakura line, led by a chieftain who for the main period of this book was a daimyō or warlord; collateral lines located outside the capital city, placed strategically throughout the province of Echizen; and a range of allies and vassals inside and outside Ichijōdani who reported to the main line. For more detail on the naming conventions and organization of warrior families in the late medieval period, see John Whitney Hall’s formative essay “Foundations of the Modern Japanese Daimyo,” The Journal of Asian Studies 20.3 (May 1961): 317–329. More recently, David Spafford examines these issues in “The Language and Contours of Familial Obligation in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Japan,” in What Is a Family? Answers from Early Modern
a large territory including Echizen Province, from at least the early fourteenth century. During the Ōnin War, which hinged in part on a conflict over the succession of the headship of the Šiba house, the Asakura switched sides and effectively displaced their masters as rulers of Echizen. For five generations the Asakura governed the province from the provincial city of Ichijōdani, safely nestled in a valley about 20 miles inland, while also maintaining regular contact with cultural and political institutions in Kyoto about 100 miles to the south. The Sengoku period, it turns out, was for the Asakura and their subjects an age defined less by war and destruction than by stability and prosperity. It was instead the rise of Nobunaga and his grandiose attempts to pacify the realm, which involved breaking up alliances as often as forming them, that led to the destruction of Ichijōdani. The Asakura were killed, the city itself was destroyed, and the valley of Ichijōdani became a deserted site. Unfortunately, the focus of historians here has almost universally pivoted quickly from the moment of destruction to the ostensible world-building of Nobunaga and his peers as a kind of historical inevitability. The meaningful lives and sudden deaths of tens of thousands of urban inhabitants over multiple generations are subsumed into the larger narrative of progress toward the modern as “unification” – a seemingly necessary precondition for early modernity and thereafter the creation of imperial Japan – unfolds.

Thinking about the flow of Japanese history, it is hard to resist the urge to leap forward from the destruction of the Asakura in 1573 to Nobunaga’s subsequent string of victories such as his defeat of the Takeda in 1582, the rise of Hideyoshi and his inexorable pacification of the entire archipelago, the Japanese assault on Korea in 1592, the victory of Tokugawa Ieyasu at Sekigahara in 1600, and so on. Few periods contain more drama on an epic scale than the sixteenth century. Yet what if we counter the teleological pressure to rush forward through this story of “unification” and instead allow our thoughts to linger on the rhythms of daily life in Ichijōdani before its destruction? What would result from careful consideration of the archaeological evidence to investigate the landscape of the city, the relations among its residents, the deployment of power over the agglomeration by the Asakura, the city’s religious and cultural practices, and ultimately the untimely end of the community? It is not, of course, an empty gesture to scrutinize a community that is now gone; quite the opposite, it is the very purpose of the

discipline of history to recover lost subjects, to read the experiences of people who lived before us from the ruins they left behind. This book pursues this purpose by proposing first that the material remains in Ichijōdani contain a deep and profound message regarding life in late medieval Japan, which I read and interpret in stages over the course of each chapter. Second, this book argues that mainstream historical narratives of premodern Japan are compromised by their failure to take seriously the diversity of experiences in provincial cities. Rehabilitating the worldview of the residents of Ichijōdani and incorporating it into our understanding of the Japanese medieval is a vital step in resisting the normalization of an anachronistic and monolithic vision of Japanese national identity. The unification of Japan in the late sixteenth century was not preordained, but both contingent and contested.

Urban Life

The mention of urban life in medieval Japan immediately evokes images of Kamakura, the headquarters of the first warrior government from 1192 to 1333, and of course Kyoto, the imperial capital since 794 and the headquarters of the second warrior government after 1336. These were unquestionably the largest and the most significant cities in medieval Japan, yet their prominence has perhaps been exaggerated by the tendency even of contemporaneous writers to use them as signifiers of the larger polities they harbored. Medieval authors substituted place names for institutions, a habit that is revealing in terms of the power relations that inhere in linguistic practices but that produces a documentary record that overemphasizes these two cities. We tend to think of whole swaths of Japanese history in reductionist geographical terms, so that our imagination of the Heian period (794–1185) rarely strays beyond the boundaries of the city of Heian-kyō (Kyoto), and our perception of the diarchy of shared power between the imperial court and first warrior government during the Kamakura period concentrates on activities in the cities of Kyoto and Kamakura. I do not mean to suggest that we lack scholarship in English on parts of medieval Japan other than Kyoto and Kamakura. From John Whitney Hall’s foundational work on Bizen Province to Peter Shapinsky’s work on the sea lords of the Inland Sea to David Spafford’s writing on the Kantō region, historians have been appropriately attentive to the interplay between capital and province, the fundamental reliance of urban elites on estates in the provinces and on religious institutions located outside urban centers, and the agency of nonstate actors from provincial regions. Rather, I want to
suggest that in the English-language field of medieval urban history, our gaze has rarely wandered far from Kyoto and Kamakura.6

The Japanese scholarship on medieval urban centers, by contrast, is extremely robust, and the development of the field is worth following in some detail. At the end of the nineteenth century, historians in Japan began to turn their attention to the impressive monolithic structures at the heart of cities across the archipelago, and the study of castles (shiro) – including medieval structures – emerged as a distinct scholarly field.7

As Japan pursued its aggressive course of growing its national wealth and strengthening its military (fukoku kyōhei), highlighting the role of these military fortresses in early modern urbanization was a natural trend. After the war, by contrast, historians shifted their attention to the urban settlements that developed around castles and particularly to the complex social and economic relationship between urbanization and warrior rule. The historian Toyoda Takeshi foregrounded the emergence of professional groups (za) in medieval villages and urban centers,8 ultimately offering the Marxist analysis that Japan’s urban growth had been dependent on the exploitative power of feudal proprietors.9 Toyoda also articulated the typology of urban centers that had become widely accepted by the 1950s: historical capitals, temple towns, post-station towns, port towns, and castle towns (including centers like Ichijōdani, though I have chosen to label this a provincial palace city rather than a castle town, for reasons explained below).10

Of most interest to Toyoda and many of his peers was the tension between the emerging activities of workers and merchants, who displayed flashes of collectivism, the increasing stratification of urban elites into distinct classes, and the ongoing dominance of military leaders over other social groups. The emergence of “free cities” such as Sakai, which allowed comparison with

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6 I know of two exceptions. First, Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan’s Hiraizumi: Buddhist Art and Regional Politics in Twelfth-Century Japan (Harvard University Asia Center, 1998) is a marvelous study of a northern city and its art and architecture. The book focuses on an aristocratic family (the Northern Fujiwara) at the height of their pomp and power at the tail end of the Heian Period and doesn’t engage with the Japanese literature on medieval cities. Second is Bruce Batten’s Gateway to Japan: Hakata in War and Peace, 500–1300 (University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), which is overwhelmingly focused on the history of the port city of Hakata before the medieval period. Its concluding chapter does introduce archaeological evidence from the medieval period, and was extremely useful as I prepared my own study of Ichijōdani.

7 Two of the earliest publications were Nihon jōkaku shi in 1899, followed by Jōkaku no kenkyū in 1915, and the survey of early archaeological work on castles, Buhe jidai no jōkaku to shiro ato in 1930.

8 Toyoda Takeshi, Toshi oyobi za no hattatsu (Chō Kōronsha, 1948).

9 Toyoda Takeshi, Nihon no hōken toshi (Iwanami Shoten, 1952).

10 Toyoda, Nihon no hōken toshi, 17–36.
Weberian notions of urbanization from European history, was also a topic of significant debate, though Toyoda and his contemporary Harada Tomohiko seem to agree that this ostensible freedom was in fact quite constrained by a weak economic system and the power of samurai landholders.\(^\text{11}\) John Whitney Hall summarizes these debates well in an early article, writing, “In Japan of the sixteenth century the truly significant institutional development was not the free city nor the rising merchant community, but rather the maturation of a new type of feudal ruler, the daimyo.”\(^\text{12}\) Most of these studies of medieval urbanization were primarily interested in the early modern urban landscape, and thus read the medieval period with a teleological urgency that had as its objective the explanation of the large cities and vibrant urban marketplaces of the Tokugawa period.

In the 1960s, the sociologist Takeo Yazaki provided a sweeping study of Japanese urbanization that appeared in two English translations: an abbreviated summary, in 1964, and a full translation of the 487-page monograph in 1968. In the chapters that consider pre-Tokugawa urbanization, the author examines organizational structures of villages and towns, the rise of new political structures in the medieval period that led to increased urbanization, and the aforementioned tension between urban autonomy and the increasing concentration of power in the hands of warlords. On the rise of castle towns after the Ōnin War of 1467–1477, he writes that “to facilitate the integrative functions of the castle in controlling political, economic, and social life throughout each domain, the castles were sometimes located at already established towns such as temple towns, highway stations, port and market towns.”\(^\text{13}\) Yazaki also notes that

\[\text{castle and town were not fully united in the Middle Ages and, when wars broke out, the town’s houses were often burned to the ground to obstruct the enemy’s advance or cut off his supply routes. The sacrificed towns were rebuilt only when the integrative functions of economy and transportation were resumed. Castle towns built solely for political aims tended, if destroyed, not to be restored, having had only an unstable basis to begin with.}\]^\(^\text{14}\)


\(^{14}\) Yazaki, *Social Change*, 106.
The author details the forms of stratification that occurred in castle
towns, the rise of markets and regional trade centered on these towns,
and the increasing integration between market activities and the power of
the warlord; it is worth noting, for the purposes of this study of
Ichijōdani, that Yazaki sees 1572 as the key moment in the development
of the early modern urban form.

Some historians in the 1970s began to focus on provincial cities as
sites of significant political consolidation. Matsuyama Hiroshi employed
historical documents to look at the activities of the medieval warrior
leaders known as governors (shugo) who often established early urban
centers referred to in the Japanese literature as “governors’ residences”
(shugosho), an appellation for the fortress, palace, or early castle of the
ruler of a province. Likewise, the historian Ishii Susumu – who would
become one of the most influential scholars of medieval cities, as we shall
see below – began to consider urban locations as sites of significant
political activity, examining the ways in which medieval warrior authority
and organization were rooted in residency in a particular place, bringing
a kind of geographic, spatial dimension to the analysis of the intersection
of warrior history and politics. The governors were ostensibly
empowered by their assignment to a bureaucratically determined parcel
of territory, but over time this responsibility was trumped by the need to
have direct control over vassals and their parcels of land, which led to
the emergence of the warlords of the Sengoku period. Only with
reunification and the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate did this
political geography change, in a shift that we might identify as part of the
movement from medieval to early modern, and in the return to a top-
down system of state-sanctioned control. In the same period, John
Whitney Hall commented in his seminal study of Bizen Province on
the particular situation of the Sengoku rulers like the Asakura: “In actual
practice, therefore, the domains of the Sengoku lords formed from the
inside out, not as administratively defined subdivisions of the state. Their
shape conformed, in other words, to the territorial limits of the combined
holdings of the vassals over which they exercised control, not to the
abstract boundaries of provinces or districts.”

The historian Amino Yoshihiko, one of the most original voices in the
study of premodern Japanese social history in the postwar era, turned his

no kenhyō are prominent examples.
16 Ishii Susumu, Chūsei bushi dan (Shōgakkan, 1974).
17 John Whitney Hall, Government and Local Power in Japan, 500 to 1700: A Study Based on
attention to cities with increasing frequency beginning in the late 1970s, making the first attempt to provide an overview of the trends in the field of Japanese medieval urban studies.\(^\text{18}\) He noted that two main scholarly schools have been prominent: Marxist approaches, which focused on theories regarding the authority of feudal lords and their relationship to the land that they occupied; and the \textit{kenmon taisei} approach, which looked at three power blocks in medieval Japanese society: temples, the court, and the warrior class.\(^\text{19}\) He began to articulate a new theory of urban space in medieval Japan, one that was dependent not on warrior authority but on integrated networks of trade. Amino’s method was characteristically innovative; he cautioned against looking only for the usual markers of a “city” such as the concentration of political power in a single site or the density of the population. Instead, he advocated scouring available sources for evidence of horizontal trading activities and associations, not only in large communities but even in rural sites that would usually be considered towns or villages, to reveal the diverse forms of urban space that were produced by medieval itinerants, agriculturalists, artisans, and workers.

The field of medieval urban studies in Japan underwent a transformative \textit{material turn} in the 1980s, when a wave of new archaeological research (initiated in the 1960s and 1970s) washed across Japan, and excavations of medieval urban sites increased dramatically.\(^\text{20}\) Initially, the two most important sites were Kusado Sengen, a commercial town located near the Ashida River in Fukuyama, Hiroshima Prefecture; and Ichijōdan, the subject of this book. Excavations of many other sites soon followed, allowing research that integrated archaeological materials with documentary study to advance. Port towns such as Hakata in Kyushu, Sakai near present-day Osaka, and Tosa Minato at the northern tip of


\(^{20}\) An early commentary on this shift that clearly expresses the excitement and enthusiasm of researchers is Murata Shūzō’s article from 1980, “Jō ato chōsa to Sengoku shi kenkyū,” originally published in \textit{Nihonshi kenkyū} 211 (3/1980) but also available as a chapter \textit{Tenbō Nihon rekishi}, vol. 12: \textit{Sengoku shakai}, ed. Isegami Hiroko and Inaba Tsuguharu (Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 2010), 246–266.