Revealing Processional temporality through digital technology **Aspects of Meaning in the Plan for Medieval Salisbury**

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I have spent the last few years evaluating various aspects of the layout of medieval Salisbury in part by using computer animations of specific processions which were described in thirteenth century texts and have come to the conclusion that that the primary ordering principles of the plan of the medieval city are centred on the processional routes for the Rogation period directly preceding the feast of the Ascension. In this paper I would like to discuss some of the reasons why I think that this may have been the case, i.e. why the manifestation of order within the urban realm at Salisbury was largely structured through a participatory act rather than a static form. I will use the sketch animations and collages in the presentation to illustrate some ways in which these new technologies can be utilised to reveal some aspects of spatial order without challenging the historical requirements for empirical verification. These models were made using information from various sources: the street pattern was drawn from the ordinance survey (Digimap) of Salisbury, the location of buildings from archaeological evidence set out in the RCHM documents, John Speed's map of c.1610 and William Naish's map of c.1716. All these factors combine to indicate an approximate image of the orientation and framing of views within the city during this period.

Salisbury was planned and built on virgin land in the first half of the thirteenth century, between about 1214 (the date of the secession of the papal interdict) and 1264, (the date of the foundation of St Edmunds, the last of the three main

churches built within the city) during what Tout called the 'Golden age of Medieval Planning'.[1] While the move had been mooted before 1214 and some developments occurred later than these dates, they serve as reasonable temporal boundaries for the question in hand, the latter date coinciding with the point at which the Feast of Corpus Christi was introduced into the church calendar (although it was not widely taken up until a further papal decree in 1311). The exact nature of the Feast of Corpus Christi in Salisbury in the fourteenth century is not known, but elsewhere the feast day celebrations included processions and mystery play cycles which extended the influence of the clergy beyond their normal symbolic boundaries and into the towns themselves. There is little likelihood that this feast could have influenced the town plan of Salisbury because the ground for the new city had already been forged before its introduction, and had been laid out by a chapter who were intent upon preaching to the widest possible audience within their own, already established, liturgical tradition. In the end, it seems that the elaborate processional rites which had been shaped by the preceding bishops at the previous site were used by the chapter to establish the primary order of the city and helped reinforce the connection with the first foundation at Old Sarum which, it appears, was considered the chapter's origin.

The manifestation of these processions in terms of the orientation of views and the overall routes taken resulted in clear relationships which would also have been visible for the remainder of the year to burghers who happened to follow particular sections of the path prescribed by the processions while they were engaging in their normal daily routines. The juxtaposition of these normal everyday occurrences and the heightened sacred nature of the processional experience within the same space would not have gone unnoticed by the 'most enlightened chapter in England' who would no doubt have understood the relationship in the context of the creation of order out of chaos in Plato's *Timaeus*:

> Wherefore also finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in irregular and disorderly fashion, out of order he brought order, considering that this was in every way better than the other. (30a)

Therefore these processions must be understood as an important aspect of the periodic revealing and concealing of the authentic meaning of the city which, in turn, mirrored the dialectic at the heart of medieval Christian theology whereby the limits of the earthly realm, bounded by the conditions of the Fall, meant that knowledge and wisdom could be approached through experience, but never absolutely attained. Any manifestation of order in the structure or layout of the city was, therefore, not designed to signal God's presence – because that was believed to be both immanent and eternal whether it was signified or not – but to represent aspects of the relationship between idea and reality, between the world and our understanding of it.

In Salisbury the Rogationtide processions engaged in a mapping of the city in the three days leading up to Christ's Ascension at the same time as introducing themes relating to the temporal boundaries of being through the act of processing itself. Even before the Norman bishops of Old Sarum embellished the rites these temporal horizons seem to have been understood as a part of the rogation rituals, revealed here by Bazire and Cross in a description of some late tenth and early eleventh century Saxon Rogation Homilies from England:[2]

> The repetitions of idea which occur [within the Rogation Homilies] create a picture of Rogationtide as a time not only of severe penance like that of Lent, with which season it has similarities and connections, but also of care for the soul by means of commanded observances. It is a time for listening to the teachers, as stated more than once, and, as noted in the homilies, for taking the warning of the Doomsday to come. The visualisation of Doomsday is created from the popular apocrypha and from other descriptions, and almost becomes a homiletic topos.[3]

The texts referred to above, although Saxon in origin, clearly had some resonance in the unfolding events at Salisbury. Preaching on the first day introduced the idea of Doomsday and then concentrated on the creation – both by God and the word. The second day's homily discussed the daily temptations and vices open to man in his attempts to attain Grace, and the third day reverted back to a discussion of the End of Days using imagery from Revelations and the Apocalypse of St Thomas. In so doing these early homilies revealed a threefold discourse on the beginning and end of time contrasting the Creation, the Incarnation and the Second coming (aspects of eternity), and man's existence limited to the experience of the present. Sentiments which were similarly engendered in the consecration rites of a church throughout the medieval period. These rites were also processional, involving the triple circumnavigation of the church by the consecrating celebrant and entourage prior to their entry into the church. The

rites were believed to enact the birth and transfiguration of Christ as well as the soul's first infusion of Grace.[4] Therefore, in the consecrations of the cathedral and churches of Salisbury, as well as the yearly rogation rituals which re-enacted the bounding of the city itself, the citizens imitated the 'original act' of consecration which revealed the temporal horizons open to man in his desire to communicate with that which is beyond. Han Georg Gadamer describes this 'mimetic' experience thus;

> … the essence of the imitation consists precisely in the recognition of the represented in the representation … When I recognise someone or something, what I see is freed from the contingency of this or that moment of time. For what imitation reveals is precisely the real essence of the thing.[5]

In translating the implications of these comments into our understanding of festive events some care must be taken to distinguish the dialectical experience described by Gadamer with the more divided one often depicted by Mircea Eliade who described this 'freeing' from the contingency of real time as the only 'real existence'. The problem being that, Eliade, in attempting to reveal the symbolic significance of religious rites, demoted the rest of existence to a state of non-being whereas Gadamer explains this relationship as one of differing temporal horizons:

> Even if one speaks of two kinds of temporality, a historical and a supra-historical one … one cannot move beyond a dialectical tension between the two. The supra-historical 'sacred' time, in which the 'present' is not the fleeting moment but the fullness of time, is described from the point of view of existential temporality.[6]

All rituals and rites of the church engage with this dialectical relationship but each rite – moderated by its setting (both spatially and temporally) – reveals it to a greater or a lesser degree. The dialectic was revealed at Salisbury most explicitly through the re-enactments which formed the basis of the meaning of the processions of the Use of Sarum, especially within the newly formed streets of thirteenth century city because they occurred within architectural environments which would otherwise have been outside the control of the church. By that I mean that the mediative qualities of the ritual in the city were explicitly revealed by the enactment of the event because the city spaces which were utilised had many uses and meanings whereas in the cathedral, where the uses were predominantly ritualistic, the processions (and other rites) could rely more on the setting to reveal the relevant meanings. Additionally, in moving through these spaces at particular times in the calendar, the repetitive nature of cyclical and ritual renewal were conjoined. In this regard Gadamer says that any festival has, at its centre, the idea of repetition and that this repetition adds a further dimension to the experience of time underpinned by past, present and future – the threefold makeup of time accepted since Aristotle's *Physics* and Augustine's *Confessions*. Gadamer says:

> It is in the nature, at least of periodic festivals, to be repeated. We call that the return of the festival. But the returning festival is neither another, nor the mere remembrance of the one that was originally celebrated. The originally sacral character of all festivals obviously excludes the kind of distinction that we know in the time-experience of the present; memory and expectation. The time experience of the festival is rather its celebration, a present time sui generis.[7]

It can be fairly assumed that within the chapter at Salisbury in the thirteenth century Augustine's notions of the present of past things - *memoria*, the present of present things – *contuitus,* and the present of future things – *expectatio*, would have been accepted as the three parts of time as experienced. Equally we can presume that the intentions behind the development of the new city encompassed the search for some form of representation of order within the world – the *intentio*, which would have been transformed by the creation of the city into – *distentio* or *affectio*, the yearning for, and the realisation of, the distance from the true urban archetype, Heavenly Jerusalem. Both *intentio* and *distentio* are part of the same phenomenon, the same creative drive which, of necessity, had to occur within the limited world of Creation. But the idea of salvation inherent in festive mimetic re-enactment, and it is in this sense that the true extent of the urban order based on processions must be understood, is that the resonance of the act was believed to take place in the past, the present and the future - Gadamer's festival time sui generis. In Salisbury the explicit association of the initial foundation procession with the iconography of pilgrimage came together with the cosmic iconography of return and renewal at the heart of the rogation ceremonies to help reveal the narrative structure of the events through a transformation of all these events into a plot (*mythos*). Thus the re-enactment of the rogation processions mimetically transformed the experience and the reading of the city beyond its everyday manifestation into a dialectic of movement and stasis which revealed, more explicitly, the nature of the real spatial and temporal horizons. This narrative accumulation of meaning – natural, biblical and historical – appears, by the fourteenth century, to have become too articulated to remain contained within the format of church processions

and developed into the Corpus Christi and Mystery plays where the full spectrum of the narrative could be revealed through processions combined with tragic and comic drama. A development which, by the way, did not contradict the communicative aspirations of the chapter manifested in the earlier processions. The shift towards drama appears to coincide with the re-emergence of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which was translated into Latin by William of Moerbeke c.1255-78, and allowed the possibility of the narratives inherent in the church rites to become the basis of the plots for drama. These new events were then able to reveal the sacred nature of the foundation through explicit references to the imitation of actions (mimesis of praxis) described in the *Poetics* as freeing representations from the restrictions of history – in this case church history. Aristotle's description of the difference between the historian and the poet perhaps best illustrates this:

> The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse – you might put the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and graver than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are particulars.[8]

As well as the increased pressure to release the dramatic potential of the processions into larger, partly civic, festivals, during the fourteenth century the pastoral control over the city, originally the jurisdiction of the chapter, was gradually taken over by the Franciscans and Dominicans. These orders were engaged in the process of establishing a new vision of the *vita apostolica* more relevant to contemporary urban life, in part by 'organising the study of Scripture in its textual simplicity'.[9] Their ministry did not include the rich pageants which had populated the city under the pastoral control of the cathedral and so over time the control of the processions within the city moved away from the church to the civic institutions.

Having said that, the development of the urban order of Salisbury from the chapter's relative incarceration at Old Sarum was acute and, it could be argued, an important step in this overall urban emancipation. Prior to the move, the situation at Old Sarum had comprised a city governed and controlled by the king and his retinue, with the cathedral forced to pay homage to the castle. Following the move, for a brief period before rise of the mendicant orders and the final separation of church and civic life during the Reformation, the chapter's rule of the new city of Salisbury enabled the church to picture a future where they reigned supreme over the urban landscape, and beyond. The beauty of the ordering of Salisbury was that this ordering was only revealed periodically through the enactment of the rogation processions thus allowing the chapter to maintain a subtle influence over urban landscape without suggesting that they exacted absolute power over the burghers or that they could completely fulfil the dialectical nature of Christian representation through static geometrical forms. The order of the city was thus manifested through grounded experiences in which people could move from contemplation within the city (the present of past things) through everyday manifestations (the present of present things) into the inner sanctum of the cathedral (the present of future things) where the meaning of the whole undertaking could be contemplated. The order was revealed by the act of looking, or the act of processing, through the town. The sacred nature of the city did not dominate the structure of the town but radically underpinned it and on the days when the chapter processed through the town this order would have been revealed by the actions of the celebrant as well as the participants in the processions. One can imagine that, heads up, the procession moved through the town and at every turn, at every reorientation, the nature of the meaning of the city was once again revealed. The fact that this visual ordering of the city did not coincide with the street pattern – i.e. you could not walk directly to St Edmunds or St Martins even though they both seem to terminate certain key vistas – is the very point of the ordering. What was at first revealed simply as a direct visual orientation was then complicated by the route one had to take on the ground. This type of organisation was not a rigid geometrical order permanently working at a symbolic level as it did within a sacred enclosure, but a complex relationship between the direct visual connection and the actual path taken. In this way the processions overlaid the world with the temporality associated with festival re-enactment. Returning to the *Timaeus*, a key text upon which much medieval understanding of geometry, movement and time was based, we are faced with a description the creation of order within the cosmos which also has resonance with respect to the movement of the processions through the towns (and churches) activating any geometries whether sacred or lay, created or found:

> The nature of the Living Being was eternal, and it was not possible to bestow this attribute fully on the created universe; but he determined to make a moving image of eternity, and so when he ordered the heavens he made in that which we call time an eternal moving image of the eternity which remains forever at one.[10]

Therefore, what Salisbury teaches us is that given the ultimate opportunity to establish an ordered, geometrical structure on a virgin site, the chapter still persisted in the use of the festive realisation of order rather than the structural one – albeit some 'regulating lines' appeared as a manifestation of this mode of representation. If the order at the heart of Salisbury had been primarily geometrical instead of processional then perhaps there would be some sense in the more general argument that a post-hoc appending of meaning to a city plan by medieval comentators is of little significance in the understanding of town planning of the period. However, the revelation that one of the most important, if not *the* most important, cathedral and city foundation of the thirteenth century was organised around processions suggest that spatial and temporal renewal may have been a primary factor in the medieval understanding of the order of towns and cities of this period. As such it may be more fitting for us to accept that the symbolic order of Salisbury (and perhaps other cities) was revealed by the choreography of the movement through the city rather than through their form even if there were explicit geometrical fragments of order to the plan, and in this debate the question of provenance becomes less critical.

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[1] T.F. Tout, *Medieval Town Planning – A Lecture*. Manc. Uni. Press. 1934. p.29
[2] Bazire and Cross Eds. *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, King's College, London. (1989). p. 7ff. Thought like all rogation to come from Rome feast of Robigo (April 25th) and some of these show knowledge of Alcuin. (735-804)
[3] Bazire and Cross Eds. *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, King's College, London. (1989). p. xxiv
[4] L. Bowen, The Tropology of Medieval Dedication Rites, *Speculum*, Vol. XVI, 1941. p. 473
[5] H.G. Gadamer, 'Art and Imitation', *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, p. 99.
[6] H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 108.
[7] H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 110.
[8] Aristotle, *Poetics*, $1451^{b}1$. The *Poetics* had been translated into Arabic by Averroës c.1169-95 and into Latin by William of Moerbeke c.1255-78.
[9] Chenu, *Nature Man and Society in the 12th Century.* p.254
[10] Plato, *Timaeus,* 37c.

First rogation procession

Second rogation procession

Third rogation procession