

The Mystery of Inari and the Caves That Surround the Castle Town

I was really surprised at seeing a nameless Inari shrine at Kudo area of Taketa. When I happend to drop at the shrie last fall. Its shape was very similar to the Christian cave chapel in the Tonomachi area of Taketa. An artistic pentagon was chiseled into the Inari shrine. At the top was a rectanglendent and there were many round holes along the upper sides of the pentagon. Seeing the carvings on the altar-like two-tiered stage, I became fasci-nated by the mysterious beauty and couldn’t help but wonder, “If this is just an Inari shrine, why did they take the trouble to carve into the rock like that?”

I contacted the landowner and asked him about the Inari shrine. I received a surprising answer. “Somewhere along the line it became an Inari shrine without my realizing it. I don’t know who did it. From childhood I had always thought of it as a beautiful cave but up until 15 years ago (1997) it definitely wasn’t an Inari shrine.”

Lord Hideshige Nakagawa allowed many vassals to live in the Kudo area. Many Christians also lived there. This is just a guess, but I wonder it the shrine was originally a Christian chapel.

“A Study of Christian Relics,” written by Satoru Takemura published in 1964 indicated the presence of second cave chapel and other caves in Tonomachi and wrote that these were also cave chapels. After this visit, I sent photos of the Inari shrine to a leading Japanese university professor. “The Inari looks similar to the cave chapel in Tonomachi,” he said. “I think it may have been dug during the early years of the Genwa era (1615-1624).” However, he did not conclude that it was a Christian chapel.

Later, I walked around, to visit all of the Inari shrines in Taketa. I discovered that many resembled the chapel in Tonomachi, and also found a number of caves. Some were enshrined as Inari after the Meiji era, and others after the Second World War. There were many caves: one had altar-like carvings; one had rooms off to the left and right; one had marks where an inlaid frame had been; one had holes on the left and right that I only could assume they were used to hold a bolt. One reminded me of the inside of a priest’s house; and one had water gush-ing forth from a spring.

I marked more than 100 places on a map of Taketa where I found caves. It is interesting to note that between Numerize Bridge and the Otemon Gate of Oka Castle, there were two caves on the curve of an uphill road. When combined with the number of caves in other areas such as Toyo’oka, Tamarai, Meiji, etc., the total increases greatly. It’s a mystery who dug these caves and for what reason. I have often heard that those caves were used as air raid shelters. I belive this is because these caves had been already there thus used as shelters duing the war. In past, Taketa, used to have more than 15,000 Christians so it is no wonder that there are so many chapels. It’s a shame, though, that there is no extant literature or materials pertaining to Christians in those days. I cannot safely conclude that what I saw were ruins of chapels. Nevertheless, much like the Santiago Bell and the statue of Saint James the Greater, when I see these caves and the Inari shrines I just caut help thinking of the hidden Christians in the past. It’s truly mysterious.



←The local street that was widened by digging the old tunnel. There are relics dug into the pentagonal shape at the entrance.

The distribution map of “Inari shrines” and “Caves” remaining in the castle town Taketa.

This map shows “Inari Shrines” and “Caves” marked as ● (known locations as of now) in Taketa.  
※The size of the ● symbolize the scale of the remains.



③Manjin god



①Kudo Inari Shrine



②Hibuse Inari Shrine at the back entrance of the station

Major “Inari Shrines” and “Caves” that remain in the castle town Taketa.

①Kudo Inari Shrine (Kudo)	⑩Hitokoto Inari Shrine (Shitag)
②Iwashita Hibuse Inari Shrine (Shitag)	⑪Nakahira Inari Shrine (Uetsuno-nishi)
③Manjin God (Tabaru)	⑫Hibuse Inari Shrine (Mizogawa)
④Ikime Shrine (Yamagawa)	⑬Hirate Inari Shrine (Kudo)
⑤Chaya no Tsuji Shrine (Chaya no Tsuji)	⑭Nishi no miya Shrine (Kami honmachi)
⑥Christian Cave Chapel (Tono machi)	⑮Karasudake Inari Shrine (Tera machi)
⑦Kotobuki Inari Shrine (Keijyun machi)	⑯Kosegadake Inari Shrine (Byobu-ga-fuchi)
⑧Yaka Inari Shrine (Akasaka)	⑰Tonomachi Inari Shrine (Tono machi)
⑨Akasaka Inari Shrine (Akasaka)	⑱Chochindani Inari Shrine (Chochin dani)