

The Mystery of the Statue of Saint James the Greater

This statue of Saint James the Greater was discovered in 1961 on a hill in a valley behind a residential area when a local boy went in search of a lost ball. The location of the statue was directly under where the nishi no maru, or western citadel, of Oka Castle had once been. In 1964, this statue was featured in the book, "A Study of Christian Relics," written by Professor Satoru Takemura of Kurume University. According to Prof. Takemura, the statue was likely taken to Taketa from Nagasaki in the same manner as the Santiago Bell. St. James the Greater means Santiago in Spanish, so one can assume there is a close connection between the two. According to the Japanese Christian faith statues of saints should be worshipped. Because of the severe suppression against Christianity at the time in Nagasaki, there was a need to move it to the relatively peaceful Taketa in order to protect the statue.

There is no historical records that this statue was made by the Japanese, so Prof. Takemura indicated that the statue could have been made in a foreign country. No similar statue has been found so far in Japan. Saint James the Greater, was one of the 12 original disciples of Jesus Christ. He is worshipped as a saint in Europe. Every year, more than 500,000 people visit the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, where the saint is reputedly buried. Although it may be related to the Santiago Bell, why was the statue of Saint Jacob left in Taketa? My guess is it was intentionally hidden there.

If it was in fact hidden in Taketa, then where? Prof. Takemura speculated that the place where the Saint James the Greater statue was hidden was as follows. "In the period during which Christianity was banned, the Tokugawa shogunate and the clans built warehouses known as fujougura, or unclean warehouses. These were used to house relics confiscated from Christians. However, the Oka clan converted its fujougura warehouse into a shrine for the god Inari and there housed the Santiago Bell and other relics. This shrine was likely located just above where the Saint James the Greater statue was found. After the abolition of the Oka clan, it's possible that the statue was thrown down from the hilltop shrine towards the valley below during the dismantling of the castle.

Why was the Santiago Bell moved to the Nakagawa Shrine but not the Saint James the Greater statue? Were Christian relics hidden inside the castle following direct order from the lord of the Oka clan? Perhaps the reason why the warehouse was converted to an Inari shrine was to make it easier for them to worship the relics hidden there?

Perhaps other Christian relics remain buried still. Imagination and mystery are endless. It is truly a mystery.



St. Jacques Statue in Santiago de Compostela, Spain

