

Taketa Christians sacrificed at the Kagami execution ground

Taketa Christians stayed true to their faith throughout their lives, against the oppression imposed by the Tokugawa Shogunate.

They have been martyred for their faith and called to heaven from the Kagami execution ground.

The festival commemorating the 400th anniversary of the castle town of Oka clan began with a mass for the repose of the souls of Christians at the Kagami execution ground in Aiai, on April 1st, 2012. The bell of Santiago is a Christian bell, and the idea had been to comfort the spirit of the Christians who had been martyred for their faith at this execution ground. I have introduced many Christian relics but today, one year from that day, I will touch on the topic of oppression this time.

As many are already aware of, after the imposition of the anti-Christian edict, unforgiving brutality, cruel torture, and execution awaited Christians. The most cruel methods of execution were burning at the stake and beheading, and these were conducted at the Kagami execution ground. Three stone monuments were built during the Tenmei period to comfort the spirits of Christians who had been executed (Photo 1) (The stone monument on the far left, which has only two kanji letters “無阿” inscribed on its surface, originally had the kanji characters “南無阿弥陀仏” inscribed on it, but these were destroyed in a flood.) The establishment of courts of law was permitted in the 10th year of Kanbun (1670) in the Oka clan, which had many Christian believers, and the punishment of other crimes other than serious crimes was also allowed.

How many Christians were executed? I will provide a breakdown of the number of Christians executed after the establishment of courts of law. (Figures for the post-Shotoku period (after 1712) are believed to include criminals other than Christians.) According to “Reference documents of Christians in Oita Prefecture” written by Kitamura Seiji, the breakdown of the number of Christians executed at the Kagami execution ground is as follows: 1 person was sent to prison, 29 people were burnt at the stake, 5 were crucified, 8 were beheaded, and 1 was punished in other ways. This was out of a total of 95 Christians from the Oka clan who had been executed during the Meireki era (the third Lord Hisakiyo) to the Anei period (the eighth Lord Hisasada), and included women and children. They never feared death, and believed that having martyrdom for their faith brought them happiness. Hence, these people came to the execution ground with joy in their hearts.

This is my personal opinion, but the execution of Christians had probably been a painful decision to make for the successive domain rulers. It could not have been possible to make the false report that there were no Christians to be punished in Taketa, because the feudal government knew that there are many Christians in Taketa. Perhaps a minimal number of victims had been unavoidable. The Christians were never criminals, but their freedom of faith and religion had been robbed by those in power during the respective eras. This was the only sorrow for the Christians.

Jesus believed in the miracle of God until the final moment of his crucifixion, but the miracle never happened and he could only face the fear of death coming toward him. He could not hold back his words and screamed to the heavens, “Eli, Eli, Lema Sabachthani! (My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)” Christians who were martyred for their faith felt the same way. The only thing that we can do now is to pray for the peaceful repose of the Christians who had been martyred for their faith, and closed their eyes for eternity.

The ruins of the Kagami execution ground now belongs to the city, and has undergone a park improvement project. It is now a clean and fun place to be in, but it is an unforgettable place when one thinks about the Taketa Christians.

(NANBAN Culture Promotion Division GOTO Atsumi)



↑ Ceremony for comforting the spirits, conducted on April 1st, 2012 (Photo 1)

Monument for comforting the spirits in the Kagami execution ground
This area has undergone improvements and is now a park.

