

## Remains of Christianity in Nyuta

Nyuta is a village now known for its spring water but many Christians lived there in olden days. Many items remain such as large Christian cemeteries and strange Jizo statues, so much so that you could almost call Nyuta a Christian village.

When talking about Nyuta, people often think of its famous spring water. However, Nyuta has a different face, with many Christian remains. This time, I would like to introduce Nyuta's mysterious Christian cemeteries and the house of the former village headman. The cemetery has been researched before and there have been two important findings. The first is that a T-shaped cross is engraved in many of the tombstones (photo 6). I have seen a significant number of Christian tombstones but none with engraved crosses, like this cemetery. The second is a tombstone located in the center of the cemetery (photo 3). A shoulder-shaped tombstone has been placed on the top of two-tiered base. Its dimensions, including the base are 1 meter in height and 56 centimeters wide. This is extremely large for this kind. Perhaps it might be the tomb of the leader. This land belongs to the current village headman so the grave might be that of his ancestor. I tried asking him about the tomb but he didn't know much about it unfortunately.

Next I'd like to talk about a strange object that I found in the village headman's house, a roof tile with the Latin letters "SAto" embossed on it (photo 1). This was used for the former house of the village headman from the Edo period until the Meiji period. I was surprised that these alphabets were used in Nyuta in the Edo era. Moreover, when I examined it closely I realized that only the letter "t" was in lowercase. It is my guess that this may have been a hidden representation of the Cross. Hidden Christians tended to hide a cross in kanji. To mention a few, 菊 (chrysanthemum), 青 (blue), and 辻 (crossing) are good examples. I wonder if this roof tile might have been an example of alphabets being used to hide a cross in them. When you think about it, the lowercase "t" does look like a cross. The question is however, who taught these letters to this family in the Edo era? I wonder if missionaries from Spain or Portugal came here. It is a mystery.

After this, I visited another cemetery nearby, one of the typical cemeteries of Nyuta. Unfortunately, some tombstones had been moved from their original locations. However, tombstones with gabled tops, as seen in photo 4, remain and almost unweathered. Such well-preserved gabled tombstones are very rare. After this, I dropped by the home of a local guide and noticed the Jizo statue that had been placed at the entrance of his house. When I looked carefully, I noticed that this Jizo wore a cross around his neck like a pendant. I asked the guide about it and he said that the Jizo had been there for a long time but that he had never noticed the cross. I'm sure that the Christians of this neighborhood had pretended to worship Jizo but were in fact worshipping the symbol of the cross. When I imagine that worshippers were whispering "Amen" to Jizo, I feel like I am wrapped in mystery.

Also on this area there was a rock, which had a cross carved into it; a small stone shrine, which had a cross carved into its door (photo 5); and an unusual, earless Jizo with its hands folded in the shape of the Greek letter omega (photo 6). There is no end to these mysteries once we start talking about them. We just can't go on since space is limited here. Now you can see why Nyuta is known as a mysterious place. If we dig deeper, we will surely find more such things.

In this series, I've introduced a few mysterious things. I hope these Christian remains could be used as a source to revitalize the area. In this regard, this movement seems to be occurring in Nyuta. In the near future, we may see tourists visiting the Christian cemeteries in Nyuta.



① Only the letter "t" is in lower case in the text "SAto"



② Strange Jizo with its hands crossed in alpha style



③ A huge tombstone that seems to be in a leader style and not the Buddhist style.



④ Well-preserved Christian tomb



⑤ A shrine made of stone, with a cross engraved on its surface.



⑥ Tombstones that have the characters 干 or 井. Are these crosses in transformed shapes?