

## The Tau Cross and the mysterious stone statue enshrined as *Gongen*

A stone Tau Cross, similar to the cross from the Kutami family, is enshrined with the *Gongen* (the incarnation of a deity or Buddha) in Miyado-kujuno. A stone statue that reminds one of an ancient Greek warrior stands protectively against the Tau Cross. What, then, is the true identity of the pentagonal *Inari* deity that the descendants of Francis Xavier had spoken of?

We have previously explained about the INRI stone monument in Naoiri. However, there is a remarkably similar stone Tau Cross at the Kagome *Gongen* located in Miyado, although this cross comes with no text inscriptions. This cross is enshrined upside-down at an outlet where torrents of water gush from like a waterfall. A vertical line and a raised cross motif have been engraved onto the cross. (Background, top of Photo 1)

A character measuring about 30cm in height stands before this cross, taking the stance of a guardian deity. The appearance of this character resembles an ancient Greek warrior (center of Photo 1), and seems to have been modeled after a foreigner from the right from the start of its creation. (A renowned person affiliated to the Catholic Church has once remarked that this stone statue resembles an ancient Roman warrior rather than a Greek warrior, because the Tau Cross is unique to Italy.) A semicircular pedestal remains on the left side of the monument, while many pieces of stone fragments carved with the kanji character *kami* (meaning “god”) are strewn around randomly. What were the kinds of gods that were enshrined at this pedestal in olden times?

A strange stone statue stands close by. It is made up of two women with wide smiles, flanking both sides of a man. This man has a missing nose, while a bushy beard grows on his chin. His brows are thick, his eyes large and deep-set like a foreigner’s, and his hair is set far back from his forehead, bearing close resemblance to the stone statues of St. Jacob. He is also dressed like European people from olden times. It is an intriguing and mysterious statue that looks neither Japanese, nor like a typical stone Buddha. How are this foreign-looking stone statue and the *Gongen* related to one another?

Some say that in the past, there was a custom for new brides in this area to perform cold-water ablutions using water falling from the *Gongen*. The sight of purifying oneself before the Tau Cross is strikingly similar to that of baptism in the Christian tradition. If this were true, it would be interesting to note that several Christian tombs can be found in Kujuno and Hinatame, providing some supporting evidence for this story.

There are also other interesting stories. It is said that crystals were once produced in this area back in olden times. Crystals were one of the important resources that early European missionaries had sought for in Japan. This was because the beauty of the rosary, which was made with crystals, could help missionaries win over believers. In fact, there are records of crystals found in the religious tools of female believers who were captured in Taketa. The Kagome *Gongen* is a mysterious place that somehow exudes the sense of a foreign country.

### Stories from the descendants of Francis Xavier The true identity of the castle town’s *Inari* deity

Luis Fontes (Photos 2 and 3), the descendant of Francis Xavier, was introduced in the second part of the section about Naoiri. The following is his description about the castle town’s *Inari* deity. “Many of the cave shrines for the *Inari* deity found in Taketa are shaped like pentagons, probably because the number five has a very special significance in Christianity.

In actual fact, particular attention was paid to pentagonal shapes in the construction of the cathedral of Zelená Hora in the Czech Republic, both inside and outside the building as well as the terrain of the land. Additionally, the triangular part on the top of pentagon is believed to symbolize the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost), but it could also simply be an imitation of the church building.

It resembles the Baroque Gothic architectural style preferred by the Society of Jesus in the construction of their churches during the Middle Ages. However, since no Japanese had ever seen a European church at the time, we cannot deny that there is a possibility that missionaries from the Society of Jesus had provided guidance for the design of the shrine caves for the *Inari* deities when these were being dug. In any case, in view of the large number of believers, it would not be strange at all even if the building had been a chapel during the time of

the Christians”.

It is believed that the caves had been dug because caves could not be destroyed, while church buildings could. A second possible reason was that the statue of the Virgin Mary could be replaced by the figurine of a fox figure when it became necessary to escape from trouble or danger. Taketa is not the only example where the suppression of Christian symbols had triggered a change in the form of these symbols, transforming them into shrines or temples. There are also actual examples where hidden Christians used the *Bon* dance as a cover for their faith. Hence, even in Taketa, the anti-Christian edict could have motivated believers to convert chapels into places of worship for the *Inari* or other deities.

Surprisingly, however, ancient picture panels show an extremely small number of *Inari* deities as compared to the number existing in the present day. Many *Inari* shrines were built after the Meiji era. Why did people choose the *Inari* from amongst all the deities? It is believed that people then had strong affinity with the *Inari* deity and were familiar with it because they prayed to it for rich harvests. But was that the only reason? One of the hypotheses states that adding the vowel “A” to “INRI” forms the word “INARI,” and this appears to be a strangely convincing theory. A traditional Taketa festival, which celebrates the coming of the *Inari* deity, used to be held in the period approaching Christmas Eve. As such, it is also believed to be a remnant from the days of Christianity. If that were true, the conversion of the Christian faith to the worshipping of the *Inari* deity would have been an act of great wisdom undertaken by our forefathers.

Ultimately, it is up to the sole discretion of each person to decipher and interpret what Fontes had said. However, there is something strongly convincing about his words that is lacking in theories put forth by others. This may be because he is a descendant of Francis Xavier as well as an active priest under the Society of Jesus. If his hypothesis—that the large number of *Inari* shrines in Taketa had originally been Christian chapels—were true, it would constitute a true mystery in our history.

(GOTO Atsumi)

Reference: “The World Heritage 100 Series” by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) – Zelená Hora pilgrimage chapel in the Czech Republic”

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①The Tau cross is set upside-down. It has another cross shape on its surface. The mysterious stone statue that seems to guard the Tau cross. It appears to be an ancient Roman warrior.



②Luis Fontes staring at the bell of Santiago.



③Luis Fontes of the Society of Jesus, Fukuoka. He is the fifteenth generation since Miguel, the older brother of Xavier.