

## The cross that was hidden in the house of a powerful village headman

Crosses were found when the house of a powerful village headman in Ogi was demolished.

Until the late 1960's, there was an old, noble family named Kakita living in Ogi town. The Kakita family was a powerful leader in the village, and both Kakujiro and Ikuma from the family had been heroes in the local community. Kakujiro had built the Iwato Bridge at the end of the Edo period, while Ikuma had successfully dug through the Ogikashiwaru drainage system later using his own money. The other day, I had visited the Iwato Bridge (Photo 1) with a member of the Society for the Study of Ogi's History. According to this member of the Society, "The railings of the Bridge look as if they were made of semi-cylindrical stones. Taking into overall consideration the shape of the family's tombstones and other anecdotes and stories that have been passed down, the Kakita family had likely been Christian". When I pressed for more details, the member offered the following explanation. "A cross was found in the hole of one of the pillars of the house when the Kakita residence (Photo 2) was demolished in 1965. On top of that, the pathway near the house is now a school route, and elementary school students had picked up other crosses made from copper along this path. There are also many who hold the view that the tombs of the Kakita family had been built along the lines of Christian style".

While I was surprised to hear about the discovery of the crosses, I quickly visited the tombs of the Kakita family that the local historical society had identified as Christian tombs. The sight that greeted my eyes was a series of tombstones that were not in typical Buddhist style (Photo 4). Even so, there was no immediate evidence to confirm that these were Christian tombs. Still, I could not fully disown this possibility. This is because my ancestors had also been hidden Christians from Nyuta, and when I had visited their tombs last year for the first time in decades, I had found a series of tombstones that were similar to those from the Kakita family.

Generally, it is said that if the kanji character *ten* (meaning "heaven") is carved onto the tombstone after the inscription showing the date of death, it represents the secret code for hidden Christians. Most of the tombstones I saw had this kanji character carved onto their surfaces. Taken together with the discovery of the cross in the pillar of their house, it is then quite likely that the Kakita family had been Christians.

The members of the Kakita family had been descendants of the Ashikaga Shogun family during the Muromachi era, and they had asked Bungo Otomo for help in moving to Ogi to avoid family estate conflicts. After the move, they had taken on the name of Kakita. Therefore, it is entirely conceivable that the Kakita family may have converted to Christianity under the influence of the Otomo Sorin era.

There is another unusual story that I had heard from someone else. Apparently, whenever elementary school students walked past the Kakita family's tombs, one or another of the students would suddenly feel sleepy and actually fall asleep on the embankment nearby. One of these students then found a cross that was made from copper. The grown-ups began to whisper that perhaps children, with their innocent and kind hearts, are called to Christ. Had the Virgin Mary showed up in the dreams of the children and entrusted the cross to them with a smile? What a mysterious and strange, yet beautiful and gentle story.

Even supposing that the Kakita family had been Christians, it is unclear how long their faith had lasted. What we would like to find out is the standing that they had held in society. Since the family had been the powerful leader of the village, the feudal lord would have been a visitor to their house. How had they kept their faith after the anti-Christian edict was issued? Had they pretended to abandon their faith and welcomed the lord, then retrieved the cross from the hole in the house pillar at night and continued with their religious rituals? Or had the lord actually seen through their pretense but acted as if he had not? In any case, where were the crosses found from the hole in the house pillar and picked up by the elementary school students? Today, figurines of the Virgin Mary and rosaries may still be buried under the ground of the former residence of the Kakita family. The Taketa Christians had left behind signs of mystery in Ogi town as well.

(GOTO Atsumi)

◇References

· History of Ogi / Author: Society for the Study of Ogi's History

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↑ The "Iwato Bridge" built by Kakita Kakujiro, who was a powerful village headman in the Kashiwaru area. (Important Cultural Asset Designated by Oita Prefecture/Completed in the second year of Kaei (1849))



↑ The railings of the Bridge look as if they were made of semi-cylindrical stones.



↑ Former residence of the Kakita family (around the 13th year of Taisho (1924)) (Collection of the Ogi Mirai-kan Museum /Donated by Sato Shigeru)



↑ The land that the Kakita family's residence had previously sat on is now a cypress forest



↑ Kakita family tomb



↑ There are also Christian tombs in the Eraharu area in Ogi town