

The Christian Ties Between Taketa and Nagasaki

When the Otomo family fell into ruin, the Shiga family from the Oka clan and Kuwahime (Princess Kuwa), the granddaughter of Otomo Sorin, were expelled from Bungo. Eventually, they arrived at Nagasaki.

There are several unexpected ties between Nagasaki and Taketa. One of these is Kuwahime, who is enshrined at the Fuchi shrine in Nagasaki city as a Christian *Inari* deity.

The Nakagawa family had been under the domination of the Shiga family in the period before Taketa came under the rule of the Oka clan. The last lord of Oka castle was Shiga Chikatsugu. Chikatsugu was the grandson of Otomo Sorin and a passionate Christian feudal lord. He had been baptized as “Don Paolo”, and had tattooed a cross on his arm.

There was a woman named “Onishi-gozen” who was a close relative of Chikatsugu’s family. This was Kuwahime, who had also been a Christian baptized with the name Máxima (some also say “Maxima”). Chikatsugu and Kuwahime were neither siblings nor cousins, but they were both the grandchildren of Otomo Sorin and as well as Christians, and were therefore believed to have had a close relationship.

Kuwahime had been living a leisurely life as the grandchild of Otomo Sorin, but was expelled from her hometown of Bungo when the Otomo family fell into ruin. Heartbroken and seeking a place of refuge, she eventually arrived at Nagasaki.

There is another connection with Taketa. Kuwahime had been sheltered at the house of the powerful village headman in Fuchi village of Urakami, Nagasaki. This powerful village headman was none other than Chikanari, the elder brother of Don Paolo (Shiga Chikatsugu). Chikanari had also been expelled from Bungo. He had sought assistance from the Christian feudal lord Omura and escaped to Nagasaki. Despite being expelled from Bungo, members of the Shiga family had been senior officials of the Otomo family and retained their powerful influence even in Nagasaki. The area around Fuchi shrine today is said to have once belonged to the Shiga family, and they had even owned a castle. The Shiga family relocated from Oka in Bungo to Nagasaki, and continued with their lives out in Nagasaki with Chikanari as the head of the family.

After Kuwahime settled in Fuchi village, she encouraged the villagers to take up silk farming to revitalize the local industry. Armed with her noble upbringing and Christian behavior, she also taught etiquette to girls in the village. She was named “Kuwahime” for her involvement in the silk farming activities, and continued to be thus called till the present day. Although she was beautiful, kind and adored by many people, she unfortunately died from illness at the age of eighteen. In grief at her passing, the villagers built an *Inari* shrine to enshrine and commemorate her memory. These are still standing today at the Fuchi shrine. The family emblem of the Otomo family was engraved on her shrine as if to symbolize that she had been a princess of the Otomo family. A brief story about her life was also inscribed into the side of the shrine.

However, there are also secrets and mystery to Kuwahime’s shrine. The unusual X-shaped cross of St. Andrew is embossed on both sides below the family emblem of the Otomo family. Hidden in the pedestal below that is a statue of the Virgin Mary and a stone carved with the words “Dedicated to Kuwahime”. This is why the hidden Christians living in the Urakami area came to worship at the shrine after the issuance of the anti-Christian edict. While pretending to pray for Kuwahime, they had actually been praying to both Kuwahime and the statue of the Virgin Mary.

While it was strange for the tomb of a Christian to be placed inside a shrine, it was even more mysterious that this was a shrine for an *Inari* deity. The relationship between Christians and the *Inari* deity has been discussed in this series as well, but it seems to share a common mystery with Nagasaki. Even though it is occasionally spoken of as a joke, the *Inari* deity (INARI) does really appear to be a camouflage for INRI.

(GOTO Atsumi)

References / Interpretation of the Shiga Documents, History of Nagasaki City
Photographs / Kenji UMEMOTO

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↑ Shrine for Kuwahime
The mark of the St. Andrew's cross is found under the family emblem of the Otomo family



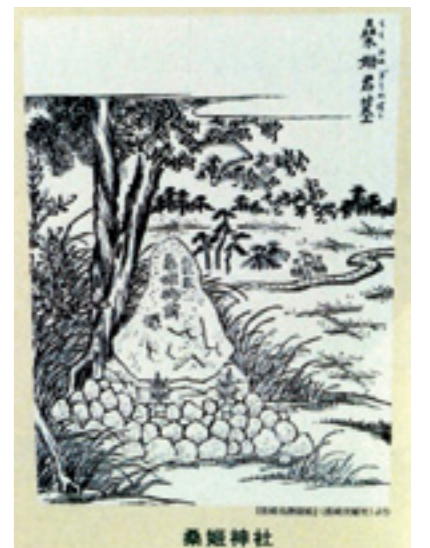
↑ A short description of Kuwahime's life is inscribed on the side including "...the second daughter of Otomo Yoshimune"



←The tombstone on the right is enshrined to the *Inari* deity



↑ The gate of the shrine where Kuwahime is enshrined



↑ Kuwahime's Tomb (Scenic Spot of Nagasaki)