

## Found in the Osaka Castle: Mysterious stonewall of the Nakagawa family from the Oka clan

The Osaka Castle was captured during the summer siege of Osaka. After the battle, the Oka clan took on the job of repairing stonewalls when the Osaka Castle was rebuilt by the Tokugawa family. Many mysterious symbols from this time have been left behind as clues that are linked to Christianity.

News about Osaka Castle and the Oka clan (based on an article from Sankei Shimbun dated November 20th) was delivered from the department of culture, Ibaraki City Government on November 20th, 2013.

An engraved mark inscribed on a stone of wall had been discovered in the Osaka Castle ruins. The news coincided with the celebration of the "sister city" relationship between Taketa city and Ibaraki city.

In November 2013, many stones inscribed with mysterious symbols were unearthed from an excavation site in Osaka Castle. These were stone materials used for the stonewalls that the Oka clan had been responsible for during the rebuilding of Osaka Castle. 19 of the 26 stones unearthed had mysterious symbols inscribed onto their surfaces. There were three types of symbols: "中" (Photo 1), "卍" (Photo 1), "△" (Photo 2). The character "中" comes from the Nakagawa family name, and is usually seen and not an uncommon sighting in the historical materials of the Oka clan. However, the other two symbols remained a mystery.

The "卍" symbol has been used in Buddhism since ancient times but the ones unearthed from Osaka Castle are reversed. This could mean something opposite to the Buddhism world. Such reversed symbols have been observed in Taketa, and are commonly found near the graves of Christian or their surrounding areas. Hence, some say reversed symbols are implications of Christianity.

The symbol showing the kanji character "三" placed inside a triangle (Photo 2), could also be the signature of Miyake Heiemon, who had then been in charge of the construction of stone walls for the Oka clan at the time. However, even if the kanji character "三" represents a part of Miyake's name, why has it been placed in a triangle? Since the design of this inscription is completely different from the Miyake family emblem, it is not realistic to argue that this symbol is related to the Miyake family. According to Christians, the triangle represents the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost), If that were true, it would be very interesting, but there is no evidence if Miyake Heiemon had been a Christian. However, Miyake had the same family roots as the Kami family, who had moved from Settsu-Ibaraki, Osaka, into the Oka clan to serve the Nakagawa family. Setting Miyake aside, the Kami family\* had been Christians, and it was a well-known fact that their family emblem had been a cross. Hence, we cannot be sure that Miyake, who had been close relatives with the Kami family, was never associated with Christianity.

Suppose Miyake had been a Christian, and had inscribed a symbol of Christian it onto the stonewalls of Osaka Castle, it would have been an extremely daring behavior on his part under the strict anti-Christian edict imposed by the Tokugawa shogunate. There would have been no way of avoiding persecution if the shogunate had suspected the connection between the Oka clan and Christianity based on the meaning of the symbol.

What was the real significance of the mysterious symbol? Was it a silent protest against the shogunate that had imposed the anti-Christian edict? Also, had the feudal lord not known that the man in charge of the stonewalls was marking mysterious symbols on stones? Other inscriptions found on the stones excavated at the same time included other engravings, such as the Nakagawa Cross (a circle) and the Latin cross. Could we say that these had merely been prominent designs that were different from those of other clans?

The anti-Christianity move was very strong in the reign of Lord Hisamori. And it was Hisamori who had suggested in the Oka clan to burn Christians at the stake. On the other hand, it was also Hisamori's era that the chief retainer Shigeharu Furuta had sheltered missionaries in the cave chapels at Tonomachi. It is possible that the Santiago-bell and the statue of St. James the Greater had already been hidden inside the Oka Castle around this period. It is certain that no one knows what the truth is. The stonewalls found at Osaka Castle have deepened the mystery surrounding the relationship between the Nakagawa family of Oka clan and hidden Christians.

(NANBAN Culture Promotion Division / GOTO Atsumi)

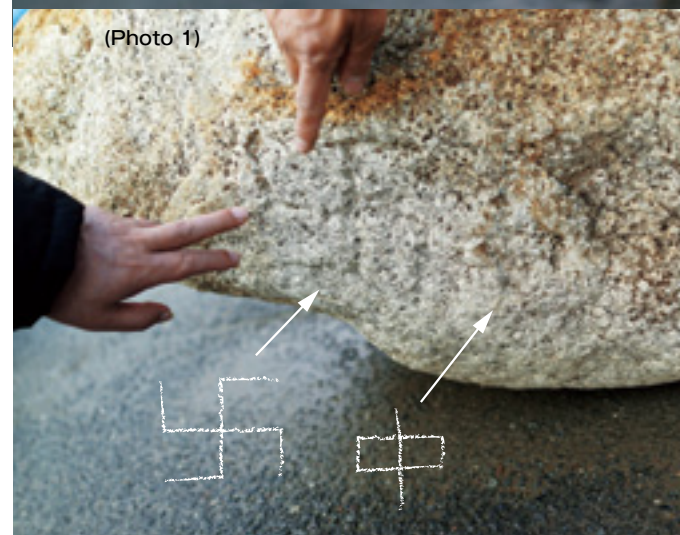
(Note) The Kami family has common ancestry with the Christian, Kamigasa Gohyoe (a Samurai warrior from Settsu-Ibaraki with red hair and blue eyes), who is the lead character of the "Xavier Code". This is a recommended book for the festival of the 400-year commemoration of the Oka clan castle town.

Cooperation for media coverage: Osaka Center for Cultural Heritage

References: Sankei Newspaper (November 20th, 2013, morning edition)

Nihon-kirishitan-shumonshi (Author: Léon Pagès)

Reference websites: "Miyake Rokurobe, the great rebuilder of Oka Castle"



Close-up of photo 1  
Stones inscribed with "卍" and "中" symbols on their surfaces.



Stones with a wide variety of inscriptions.→



←The excavation site at the third guarded area of Osaka Castle is at the nearside. Osaka Castle is for behind it.



↑ (Photo 2) Many stones with the "△" inscription have been found. All the stones were from the same period.