

Lord Hisakiyo's memories of his beloved daughter, Natsu-hime, sealed into a Christian temple in Kamakura

Natsu-hime was the beloved daughter of the third lord, Hisakiyo Nakagawa. When she passed away, he had retrieved her body from the family that she had married into, and buried it with great sorrow in a Christian temple in Kamakura.

A temple related to the Oka clan had existed in Daimura, Kamakura City, in Kanagawa prefecture until the fifth year of the Meiji Era (1872). The temple had previously been called "Tokei-in". It was located in the far depths of a valley, on the top of a small hill. The location would probably have resembled Kudo in Taketa. Tokei-in did not have any Buddhist followers and only served the Oka clan, but was recognized as a Christian temple in Kamakura. The building itself was destroyed during the abolishment of the feudal system and the establishment of the prefectural system in Japan, but the temple gate, the deity enshrined in the temple, and some Buddhist relics have been passed on. Today, they are still kept in the temple "Koshoji temple" nearby. (Photo 1) (Koshoji temple is also widely recognized as a Christian Temple.)

Why was Tokei-in known as a Christian temple? There are several reasons. Firstly, the temple gate is decorated with a Nakagawa cross (Photo 2), and the bronze candleholder casts the shadow of a cross on the wall when it is lit (Photo 3). The bronze incense burner designed in a European style, is another reason. The Nakagawa cross has the letters "IHS" (emblem of the Jesuit order) cleverly hidden in its design, and was seen as a holy cross in kamakura. It was apparently used as an object of worship for Christians. Incidentally, while Tokei-in had been designated as the official temple for the Oka clan, no remains of the official family emblem ("Kashiwa-mon", or the shape of an oak leaf) of the Nakagawa family have been found. The second reason is that Tokei-in was a branch of Sounji temple, which was also a Christian temple located in Odawara. Furthermore, the Sounji temple was a branch of the Daitokuji temple in Kyoto, where many Christian samurai warriors such as Gamo Ujisato, Kuroda Nagamasa and his son, and Hosokawa Tadaoki have been laid to rest. In other words, the three temples of Daitokuji, Sounji and Tokei-in are all linked by the fact that they are Christian temples. The third reason is that many Christian who lived around the Kamakura area used to gather at Tokei-in or Koshoji temple to pray in secret. Official records show the fact that there had been a surprisingly large Christian population in the Kamakura area. These are the reasons that Tokei-in must have been a Christian temple. Tach of them is a mystery, but the biggest question for people of Taketa City remains unanswered, Why Kamakura? Probing deeper into this mystery brings us to the story of Lord Hisakiyo and his daughter.

Lord Hisakiyo had a daughter named Natsu-hime. She was married to MAEDA Masatoshi, who has 100,000 goku(15,000ton)/production of rice in Toyama, but died at the age of 23. Usually, a bride would be laid in the same grave as the family she had married into, but Lord Hisakiyo laid her to rest in the Kotokuji temple in Edo (Tokyo) instead (other documents indicate that she had been buried in Kaizenji temple). After that, he built Tokei-in so that her spirit tablet could be placed in Kamakura. Essentially, Tokei-in was the temple he had built to enshrine Natsu-hime. The question lies in why he had done so. Reference documents from a local historian in Kamakura stated, interestingly, that "The reason for building Tokei-in was because his heart followed the path of Christian beliefs, and he could not bear to place the body of Natsu-hime, who had been a Christian, in the Buddhist grave of the family she was married into." If this were true, it would mean that he had taken these actions in order to "hide his daughter's Christianity in Kamakura, far from their hometown, and hidden from others". Furthermore, some researchers had pointed out that "inshu" in Natsu-hime's posthumous Buddhist name of "Tokei-in denkiku inshu eizen ni" could mean "hidden religion" in Japanese. Some researchers speculate this could mean nothing but Christianity.

It is surprising to know that Lord Hisakiyo and Natsu-hime have been the subject of research in Kamakura for such a long time, but we have uncovered even more interesting information through our research. Mysteries surrounding the Lord Hisakiyo and his daughter, as well as the Christians of Kamakura, have thickened than before.

(NANBAN Culture Promotion Division / GOTO Atsumi)

References... Omaru Shunyu "Hidden Christians in Kamakura" (1983) (unpublished)

Reference websites... "Kamakura, a land of illusions" (blog)



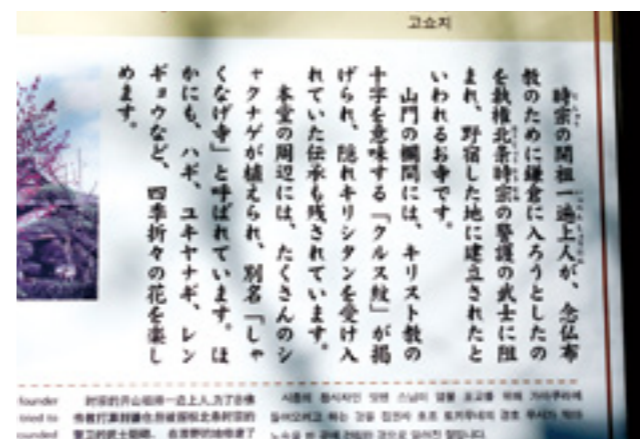
↑ Today, the Nakagawa Cross passed down from Tokei-in to Koshoji temple is kept in the main hall.



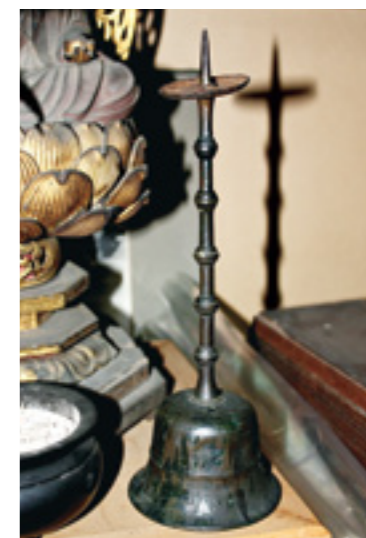
↑ (Photo 1) Koshoji temple in the Jishu-seidaisan mountains, which had taken over the temple gate and candleholder from Tokei-in. (Kamakura City, Kanagawa Prefecture)



↑ (Photo 2) The temple gate of Koshoji temple, decorated with the Nakagawa cross.



↑ The explanatory board for the "Cross emblem"



← (Photo 3) Bronze candleholder crafted in the shape of a cross. A shadow shaped like a cross appears on the wall at certain angles of light.