

“A landscape of illusion” What Natsu-hime’s spirit saw in Kitakamakura

Lord Hisakiyo, who could not take his daughter back to Bungo-oka, set her tomb at Kitakamakura. The views at Kitakamakura were reminiscent of Bungo-oka, and the father hoped that this comfort her spirit. After Hisakiyo’s death, the Kamakura Christians could have been the ones who had continued to protect Tokei-in temple and Natsu-hime.

Why did Lord Hisakiyo choose Kitakamakura as the resting place for Natsu-hime’s memorial tablet? With this question lingering in my mind, I looked down at the view from the ruins of Tokei-in temple (which is now used as a gallery) (Photo 1), and a surprising sight met my eyes. Indeed, Kitakamakura looks very similar to Taketa. There are common points between the scenery of Kitakamakura and the views from the Oka Castle, and even in the towns that are surrounded by narrow streets from olden times. If you look in a northwesterly direction from Oka Castle, you would be able to see Mt. Taisen, where Lord Hisakiyo’s tomb was placed. In the same way, if you look northwest from the ruins of Tokei-in temple, you would see a small hill called Mt. Ofuna, written in the same Japanese characters as Mt. Taisen despite having a different pronunciation. A huge white statue of the Kannon Goddess (Photo 2) that measures 25 meters high stands on this small hill. This Kannon statue was built in the early period of the Showa era on the premises of Tokei-in temple, but there is also a hypothesis saying that during the Edo period, the crosses of many Kamakura Christians had been erected on this hill, giving it the name of “Mt. Cross”. Moreover, there are also places called Okamoto and Ueki near to Ofuna, which have the same names as other locations in Taketa. Even if this were mere coincidence, the similarity is simply too remarkable. One might even think that Kitakamura had been built in the likeness of Taketa.

The Taya Cave is situated further northwest from the Ofuna Kannon statue. (Photo 3) This is a massive underground cave originally used for the ascetic training of Shingon esoteric Buddhists during the Kamakura period. Measuring 1km in length, the cave looks just like a maze. As one proceeds forward in the pitch-black darkness of the cave while relying solely on candlelight, a handmade pentagonal altar that resembles a Kudo Inari shrine emerges from the darkness. The ceiling of the cave is dome-shaped, like the cave chapel of Tono-machi. A Buddha statue has been placed in the altar, giving it an identical look to the cave chapel of Taketa. In addition, there are multiple pentagonal altars in this cave. Some of the aisles leading to the altars are closed, apparently for “religious reasons”. While this is purely my personal speculation, I imagine that if the aisles had to be closed because of something that was in contradiction to the faith or from a religious other than Shingon esoteric Buddhism, it probably meant that Christian relics had been left there. This could be one of the reasons that explain why this cave was completely sealed off for a temporary period at the beginning of the Edo period, when Christianity had been banned.

Also I had heard an unexpected story from the local people. According to this story, Lord Hisakiyo had made a bargain to protect the Kamakura Christians from oppression if they in turn would protect Tokei-in temple, where his daughter is enshrined”. But the truth of this story remains shrouded in mystery.

What was Natsu-hime like? Unfortunately, her features are unknown, but descriptions of her younger sister Kane-hime, had been found. According to these descriptions, she had unusual facial features, amazingly big, sparkling eyes, and skin that was so fair it was almost translucent. She was also tall and had a well-rounded figure. It would appear that Kane-hime had been a glamorous woman, with beautiful European features just like her father, Lord Hisakiyo. If so, Natsu-hime, the sister of Kane-hime, had probably looked similar, and there was no doubt that he had been proud of his daughter. Lord Hisakiyo must have been immeasurably sad when he lost Natsu-hime. However, only a year after building Tokei-in temple, Lord Hisakiyo passed away himself, leaving behind many wonders and mysteries. I could not find a definite reason why Lord Hisakiyo had chosen Kitakamakura, but there is no doubt that there had been strong and special ties between Kitakamakura and Bungo-oka. The view of Kitakamakura seen from Tokei-in temple by the spirit of Natsu-hime, who was wrapped in a cocoon of her father’s love, was a “landscape of illusion” reminiscent of “Bungo-oka”, their hometown that lies far, far away.

(NANBAN Culture Promotion Division / Atsumi GOTO)

References

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↑ (Photo 1) Ruins of Tokei-in temple



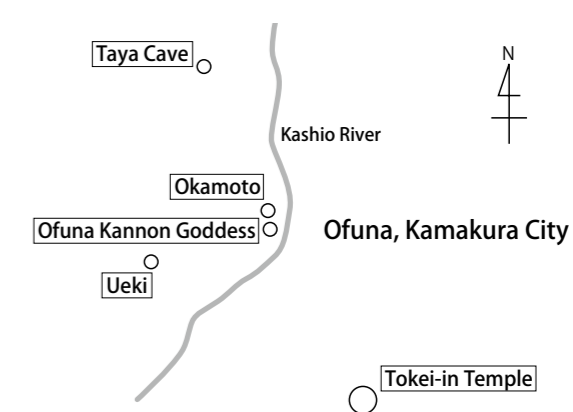
↑ (Photo 2) A huge white statue of the Kannon Goddess stands on the mountain called Ofuna



↑ (Photo 3) Entrance to Taya Cave



↑ Ofuna, Kamakura City



↑ Map showing the locations of the Ofuna Kannon Goddess, Ueki, Okamoto and the cave of Taya, seen from Tokei-in temple