

Don Paolo “Shiga Chikayoshi” Sleeps in the Nagato country

The master of Oka castle, “Don Paolo Shiga Chikayoshi,” fought off more than 30,000 Satsuma soldiers with just 1,000 men. The site of his death, which had been unclear till now, had unexpectedly been in Ube, Yamaguchi.

The master Don Paolo Shiga Chikayoshi, who fought off more than 30,000 Satsuma soldiers with just 1,000 soldiers, had also been a great leader of the Bungo Christians. However, his life after his departure from Oka castle could not be traced, and has remained a mystery for more than 400 years.

This is described in *Japanese History - Otomo Sorin Edition*, written by Luis Frois. The book ended when Chikayoshi left Oka castle, leaving the site of his death completely unknown. Coincidentally, however, I obtained information that “the tomb of Chikayoshi is located in Ube City, Yamaguchi,” so I headed there.

Chikatugu’s tomb was located up on a small hill about two kilometers into the mountain from the national route in Ube City (Photo 1). A signboard states, “The lord of Oka castle of Bungo-taketa, Shiga Chikayoshi,” and I was overcome by a profound sentiment when I read this sentence in Yamaguchi. The tombstone is a large natural stone measuring three meters high and one meter wide at its largest section. There is a detailed epitaph about Chikayoshi’s life on the back of the stone (Photo 2). It is a stately tombstone that matches the status of the former lord of Oka castle. It is surrounded by beautiful countryside, and the residence of the Shiga family where the family head now lives is visible in front of it. Family and relatives of Chikayoshi from all over the country had built the residence during the time of Chikayoshi’s great grandchild. The name of the residence, linked to Oka castle, is “Oka residence” and remains as that today.

I looked quickly to see if there were any Christian relics on Chikayoshi’s tombstone, but could not find anything specific. It is no wonder that the tomb had been built by the tenth family head Shiga Kinpei, who is a descendant of the Shiga family, together with other relatives in the 8th year of Showa. Well then, where was the true graveyard?

Chikayoshi had wandered through various countries for 26 years after he left Oka castle, and was eventually left with Mori Terumoto in the fifth year of Genna (1619). He settled at Otashiro (*note 1), north from Arataki mountain as seen from present graveyard. His life ended when he was 93 years old, in the third year of Manji (1660). Otashiro was an enclosed village and a good place to hide Chikayoshi, who was wanted by the Toyotomi people. Thus, Chikayoshi’s tomb was supposed to be located here in Otashiro, but unfortunately has not been found even till the present day.

The purpose of this interview was to prove if Chikayoshi had kept his faith as a Christian, and until which point of his life. Chikayoshi had participated in the battle when Otomo Yoshimune attempted to take Bungo back for him at Ishigakibaru, Beppu. Old Otome troops were lost as a result, but Chikayoshi ran away to Fukushima Masanori in Hiroshima castle, leaving his wife and children behind.

It would appear that he had abandoned his own faith and erased the cross tattoo on his arm when he left his wife, who was also a devout Christian. If so, the grief and sorrow of tens of thousands of the Christians who had been left behind in Taketa would have been immeasurable.

On the other hand, the Shiga family continued to protect the cross family emblem (Photo 3) for generations even amidst the anti-Christianity society, so Chikayoshi had probably kept to his faith until the end of his life.

Therefore, when his life ended, it is uncertain if he had been summoned to heaven as the Christian Don Paolo, or as the Buddhist Shiga Chikayoshi.

The eternal leader for Taketa Christians, Don Paolo, slumbers for eternity on the hill of Nagato while holding on to his secrets. However, his spirit will always desire to go back to Oka castle and see his fellow Taketa Christians.

(NANBAN Culture Promotion Division GOTO Atsumi)

(Note 1) Otashiro is now called Daicho
References

The life of Shiga Chikayoshi, the master of Oka castle of Bungotaketa, who rests in Nagato-Ono area / Author: Hirayama Tomoaki (2011 Hometown travel story, editorial department)

Shiga Family Tree, provided by the thirteenth family head, Shiga Yasunobu

History of Japan / Editor: Otomo Sorine, Author: Luis Frois

Historical Records of Oita Christians / Author: Kitamura Seiji (1961)



(Photo 1) Tombstone of Shiga Chikayoshi. “The master of Oka castle, Shiga Shozaemon Chikayoshi’s tomb” is inscribed on the tombstone.



(Photo 2) The back of the tombstone
Epitaph engraved on the back of the tombstone



志賀親次墓碑の碑文



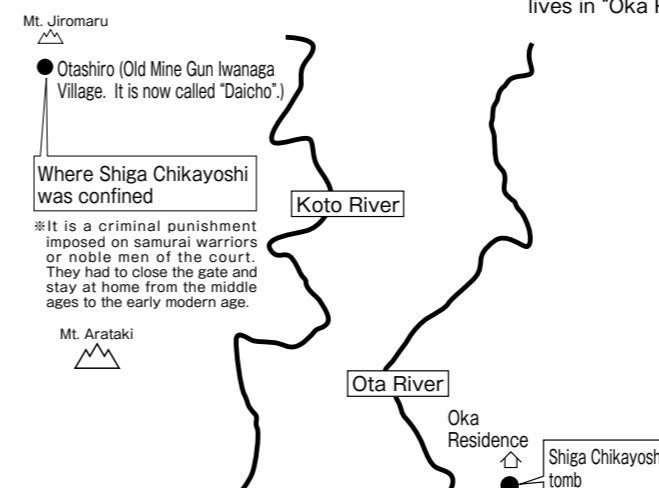
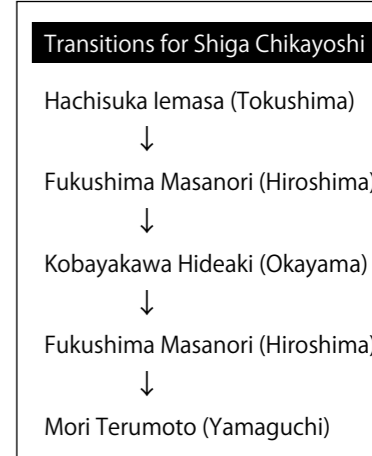
↑ Otashiro, where Shiga Chikayoshi was confined



(Photo 3) The family emblem “Cross” that has been passed on for generations.



↑ Hirayama Tomoaki (left), the local history researcher, provides explanations. Shiga Yasunobu right), the family head who now lives in “Oka Residence.”



↑ A view of “Oka Residence” from the graveyard (Kamiunai)