

Artifacts Related to Hidden Christians Formerly Housed in the Nagasaki Magistrate's Office

Until the start of the Meiji era, articles connected to the Christians were kept under lock and key in the *shūmongura* (religious-sect storeroom) of the Nagasaki magistrate's office, which was located where the Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture now stands. These included *fumi-e* (religious images used to uncover Christians by forcing believers to step on them), religious images missionaries had brought to Japan, and items confiscated in the Third and Fourth Urakami Crackdowns. In the Fourth Urakami Crackdown in 1867, the authorities of the various prefectures to which the Christians were exiled confiscated any devotional items believers were wearing and sent them back to Nagasaki.

In 1874, all the items were transferred from Nagasaki Prefecture to Tokyo, where they were managed first by the Meiji government's Ministry of Religious Education, then by the Bureau of Shrines and Temples in the Ministry of Home Affairs, then by the Exposition Bureau in the Ministry of Home Affairs (which managed museums), then by the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce and the Ministry of the Imperial Household, which was put in charge of museums at the time. In 1906, they were exhibited to the public for the first time in *Interesting Articles Imported from the West before the Kaei Era*, the fifth special exhibition at the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum. After World War II, the collection was moved to the Tokyo National Museum. The items were designated nationally important cultural properties in 1977.

Categories of Christian Artifacts

In December 1879, the Ministry of Home Affairs' Exposition Bureau took over the collection from the Ministry of Home Affairs' Bureau of Shrines and Temples. Some items had their provenance recorded in a ledger and some did not.

1. From the *shūmongura* (religious-sect storeroom) of the Nagasaki magistrate's office
2. Deposited in the Nagasaki magistrate's office in 1856
3. Taken from the Christians in Urakami Village, Nagasaki, in 1867
4. Taken from Urakami Village, Nagasaki

The response of the Tokyo National Museum was to categorize anything belonging to the four categories above as “formerly in the possession of the Nagasaki magistrate’s office” and anything else whose provenance was unclear as “received from the Ministry of Home Affairs’ Bureau of Shrines and Temples.” In 1977, most of the items in the former category were designated as nationally important cultural properties.

In addition to artifacts linked to Nagasaki, the Tokyo National Museum also has a collection connected to the Christians of Fukuchiyama in Kyoto and the Christians of Fukui.