

The Nagasaki Magistrates' Special Mission to Eradicate Christianity

The Expulsion of Missionaries and Destruction of Churches

In 1614, the shogunal ambassador Yamaguchi Suruga no kami Naotomo was dispatched to Nagasaki. Working with the fourth Nagasaki magistrate, Hasegawa Sahyōe Fujihiro, he destroyed 11 churches, including Santa Maria do Monte (which stood on the site of the Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture, where you are now) and Santa Maria da Assunção (which stood on the site of the old Prefectural Office). The missionaries and powerful converts of high rank, like Takayama Ukon, were sent to Nagasaki and thence expelled to Macao and Manila.

Toward the Eradication of Christians

The fifth Nagasaki magistrate, Hasegawa Gonroku Fujimasa, further ratcheted up the suppression drive, destroying the churches and hospitals belonging to the misericordia brotherhoods that remained in Nagasaki in 1620. In 1622, two missionaries planning to infiltrate the country were found in a shogunate-licensed trading ship captained by Hirayama Joachim that was captured by an English navy vessel and towed into Hirado. That incident led to the Great Genna Martyrdom, when 55 Catholics were burned alive or beheaded at Nishizaka in Nagasaki. The victims included Carlo Spinola and other missionaries who were being held in the Suzuta jail in Ōmura and in the jail in Kurusu, as well as the laypeople who had given them shelter, including the children.

The sixth Nagasaki magistrate, Mizuno Kawachi no kami Morinobu, took up his post in 1626. Following strict orders from the shogun to eradicate Christianity, he intensified the crackdown. He offered a reward of 100 bars of silver to anyone willing to inform on missionaries and ordinary Catholics, and in 1628 introduced the practice of testing people's belief by making them trample on Christian images (*ebumi*). He drove people who refused to apostatize from their homes, and imitated Matsukura Shigemasa, lord of the Shimabara domain, by torturing people with boiling water at Unzen Jigoku volcanic springs.

Expectations for further success in catching Christians were high when Takenaka Uneme no Kami Shigeyoshi, the seventh Nagasaki magistrate, took up his post in 1629. Not only did he increase the ferocity of the tortures used at Unzen, but he also devised a new ordeal in which people were boiled alive in a large pot. These ferocious suppression measures meted out by the magistrates meant that the inhabitants of Nagasaki, most of whom were Christians, were forced either to abandon their religion or die as martyrs.

PICTURE 1

Torture at Unzen Jigoku Volcanic Springs

Arnoldus Montanus, *Ambassades de la Compagnie Hollandaise des Indes d'Orient, vers l'empereur du Japon* (1750 edition)