

The Shimabara Rebellion and the Ban on Portuguese Ships

In 1637, a combination of famine and the despotic policies of Matsukura Shigemasa and his son Katsuie, lords of the Shimabara Peninsula, prompted the outbreak of the Shimabara Rebellion. It was led by Christian village heads, former vassals of Christian daimyo, who had become farmers after the ban on Christianity.

The rebel army consisted of something over 20,000 men, who barricaded themselves in Shimabara's Hara Castle. The shogunate had a force 120,000 strong, supported by Dutch ships. After four months of fighting, the rebel forces were defeated and most of them massacred. The shogunate, which had chosen to see the uprising as a Christian revolt from the start, subsequently cracked down on the Christians with even greater severity.

In 1639, in an effort to prevent more missionaries slipping into the country, the shogunate banned all Portuguese ships from entering Japan and made a policy decision to trade exclusively with the Dutch, shutting out other Europeans. In 1641, they compelled the Dutch to move their trading post from Hirado to Dejima in Nagasaki. This policy on external trade, together with the prohibition on religion, was to last for over two centuries, finally ending in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Introducing Family Registries

A *terakatamontochō* is a written record of local residents forced to convert and become temple parishioners. The first of these records is thought to have been compiled in Nagasaki in 1616. The oldest extant family registry dates from 1634. Subsequently, family registries with a religious element were introduced, in which the names of people who had completed the *ebumi* trampling ceremony were stamped, establishing an anti-Christian form of religious census along with the temple-affiliation certification system.

Exposing Hidden Christians

Despite the strict ban on Christianity, numerous missionaries tried to enter Japan. Ultimately, they were all captured; most were martyred, though some actually renounced their faith. The last missionary to Japan, Konishi Mansho, was martyred in 1644, and the Catholics of Japan were then left with no missionaries to guide them.

In 1657, at a time when most Christians had been either executed or forced to convert, some followers of the faith were found in the Ōmura domain. The seventeenth Nagasaki magistrate, Kurokawa Yohei Masanao, rounded up 608 people and beheaded 411 of them.

PICTURE 1

Detail from *Picture of the Sacrament of the Eucharist*

(battle flag of Amakusa Shirō), 1637

(Amakusa Christian Museum)

PICTURE 2

Detail from “Trampling on a Christian Image”

Philipp Franz Balthasar von Siebold, *Nippon: Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan und dessen Neben- und Schutzländern: Jezu mit den südlichen Kurilen, Krafto, Koorai und den Liukiu-Inseln*, 19th century

Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture Collection