

The Last Major Arrest: The “Fourth Urakami Crackdown” and the Suppression of Christianity around the Nagasaki Region

Secret Preaching by the Paris Foreign Missions Society

Immediately after the Discovery of the Hidden Christians, the leaders from the Christian communities in Nagasaki, starting with Urakami and extending to the Gotō Islands, visited Ōura Cathedral, taking care not to draw the attention of the Nagasaki magistrate’s office. At the same time, the French missionaries secretly visited the communities to preach. In Urakami, which had a particularly large Hidden Christian population, four secret churches were established: Saint Mary, Saint Joseph, Saint Clara, and Saint Francis Xavier.

The Fourth Urakami Crackdown

In 1867, a succession of burials took place at Seitokuji, the parish temple for the Christians of Urakami, without the involvement of the temple monk. This culminated in the local Hidden Christians revealing their true faith unbidden to the village headman. With the presence of Christians out in the open, spies were sent to investigate and the results relayed to the authorities in Edo.

In June 1867, the 125th Nagasaki magistrate, Tokunaga Iwami no Kami Masayoshi, sent 170 officers who broke into the secret churches and arrested 68 people, including community leaders like Takagi Senemon. Later, more people were arrested and jailed, where they were viciously tortured. This prompted complaints from the consuls general of the Western powers, starting with the Prussian consul. Meanwhile, the French consul general opened direct negotiations with Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the last shogun, and managed to get the Christians released, albeit under strict monitoring.

Large-Scale Repression

The Christians of Urakami were not alone in being treated harshly. In the final days of the shogunate and the early days of the Meiji era (1868–1912), Christian communities in Sotome and the Gotō Islands were persecuted, with anyone arrested likely to be tortured. (The latter case is referred to as the Gotō Crackdown.) Even after the changeover to the Meiji government, there was no modification to the complete prohibition of Christianity. A particularly notorious incident occurred in November 1868, the first year of the Meiji era, on Hisaka, one of the Gotō Islands. Around 200 Christians were crammed into a 20-square-

meter space known as *rōya no sako* and brutally tortured for eight months. Forty-two of them died during their confinement. Upon hearing about this savage repression, the British consul general embarked on a fact-finding mission to the Gotō Islands in 1870.

The “Journey”: An Entire Community Banished

In 1868, Sawa Nobuyoshi, the newly appointed pacification governor-general of the Kyushu district, arrived in Nagasaki with Inoue Kaoru, his staff officer. They launched an investigation into the Urakami Christians and produced a report. Based on this report, the Imperial Council ruled that the Christians of all the Urakami villages should be sent into exile. Kido Takayoshi, an imperial advisor, was dispatched to Nagasaki, where he arranged for 114 key figures to be scattered to the Hagi, Tsuwano, and Fukuyama domains. The persecution of the Urakami Christians shocked the Western powers and eventually developed into a serious diplomatic issue.

Despite energetic protests from Great Britain, France and the United States, 700 men and their families were sent into exile in January 1870. In total, some 3,394 Urakami Christians were banished to 20 domains. In their new locations, they were pressured to convert, tortured, and forced to perform hard labor. Repeated requests from other countries for the government to improve their treatment and send them home were disregarded. This particular crackdown, which lasted around five years, is known as *tabi*, or “the journey.” Many of the Christians stuck to their beliefs throughout the ordeal. Six hundred and thirteen of them died in exile, meaning only 2,911 were able to return to Urakami.

PICTURE 1

Sketch of Yamazato in Urakami in the last years of the shogunate

PICTURE 2

(left) Portrait of Takagi Senemon
(Private collection)

(right) Floor plan of Saint Joseph’s Church inside Takagi Senemon’s house as drawn by a government spy
(Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture)

One night, the 126th Nagasaki magistrate, Kawazu Izunokami Sukekuni, secretly summoned Takagi Senemon from prison to the great hall of the Tateyama office (on the site of the Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture) and did his best to convert him. Senemon resolutely refused.

(Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture)

PICTURE 3

Jail used for Christians in Kusuvara

(Miiraku Church Museum)

Thirty-three Christians were confined in this house in Fukue, one of the Gotō Islands, in 1868, as part of efforts to repress the Christians.

PICTURE 4

Where Christian exiles were sent in 1868 and 1869

The first number refers to 1868 and the second number refers to 1869. The number in parentheses is the number of deaths.