

Christian Grave of Lucia at Tanigawa

Reaching the grave of Lucia requires a short walk up a steep hill to a small graveyard sitting above a picturesque cluster of rather higgledy-piggledy old farmhouses. The gravestone itself is a flat horizontal slab of andesite in an unusually good state of preservation. There is a cross fleury (an ornate cross with three petals representing the Holy Trinity at the end of each arm) on the front face and a completely legible inscription on the back. Reading from left to right, the inscription says: “January 17, Lucia, 20 years of age, Keicho Year 15 (1610).” The baptismal name is written with one kanji and two hiragana characters. Every face of the gravestone has a raised border.

This graveyard is located only a kilometer from the site of Hinoe Castle. This was the clan castle of Arima Harunobu (1567–1612), the Christian daimyo who controlled Shimabara. The only people who could afford stone gravestones came from the upper echelons of society, so it seems likely that Lucia had some association with the Arima clan. She died just before a bribery scandal led to Harunobu falling out of favor with the shogun and being beheaded in 1612. (As a good Christian, he was not permitted to commit ritual suicide.) In order to stay in the shogun’s good graces, Harunobu’s son and successor Naozumi repudiated Christianity and began persecuting the very people his family had been responsible for converting.

About Christian Gravestones in Japan

Of the 192 confirmed Christian gravestones from the early days of Christianity in Japan, 146 are found in Nagasaki Prefecture, all dating from the early seventeenth century. (The oldest Christian gravestone in the country, dating from 1581, is in Shijonawate, near Osaka.) Most of the Christian gravestones in the Nagasaki region are horizontal—either flat or gabled slabs, or semicircular or rectangular pillar shapes—reflecting European gravestone designs of the time. While Buddhist gravestones are inscribed with a posthumous name (*kaimyo*) of the deceased consisting of multiple kanji characters, Christian gravestones often feature a Western baptismal name. They may be decorated with a floral cross (cross fleury), a double-barred cross (patriarchal cross), or the trigram IHS, an abbreviation of the name of Jesus. Since stone grave markers were an expensive luxury, it is safe to assume that they belonged to the wealthy and powerful. After Christianity was prohibited, some of the horizontal gravestones were upended and converted into Buddhist monuments, hollowed out to make stone vessels for handwashing (*chozubachi*), incorporated into dry stone walls, or simply

swallowed up by the ground. Few of the Christian gravestones in Nagasaki remain in their original locations, though they are often found nearby.