

The Gravestone of Madareina

Unlike the vast majority of Christian gravestones in Shimabara, which are horizontal, this one is upright. The rounded slab of dacite is 91 centimeters high (with 74.5 centimeters standing above ground and 16.5 centimeters below), becoming thicker toward the base.

Carved on the front is an embossed patriarchal cross with the distinctive double crossbars. At the bottom left, you can just make out the baptismal name *Ma-da-re-i-na* (from Madalena in Portuguese)—an allusion to Mary Magdalene, the female follower of Jesus who was the first person to see him after his resurrection.

The gravestone is assumed to be from the early Edo period (1603–1868). Although we know nothing about Madareina, we can safely assume that she belonged to a wealthy family, as only the more wealthy and powerful could afford stone grave markers at this time.

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.