

## The Martyrdom at Hokusanpara, Yonezawa

The Christianity that was first brought into Japan in 1549 by a Portuguese Jesuit, Padre Francisco Xavier, rapidly propagated eastward from Kyushu and gained some two hundred thousand followers by the time of Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1582-1600). Fearing the influence to the politics, namely of the Spanish Franciscans from Manila, the Senior Regent issued a “foreign-missionary expulsion edict (1587)” and in 1596-97 executed 26 members as an example to others. In spite of the anti-Christianity policy toughened by the Tokugawa Shogunate government (1600-1868), they did not stop their activities and the number of Christians increased to over seven hundred thousand in early seventeenth century, leading to the Great Martyr at Nagasaki in 1622 in which 55 faithfuls were burnt at the stake or beheaded.

During my stay in Yonezawa, I have learnt that the Christianity had diffused up into the north-east district of Honshu and many members, suffered also there. In the town, the former home of the Uesugi Clan, there was a devotee named Louis Yemon Amagasu among the high vassals who preferred to be martyred rather than abandon his religion. A letter by Rev. Joan Baptista Polo (dated 2 July 1629) filed in the Jesuit Annual Report recorded the detailed story. On the eve of the final day, Amagasu told the messengers, “Receiving a death as a Christian is the great grace of my Lord and the largest wish of myself.”, and asked them to send his thanks to sympathisers, laying his pair of swords in his front. Not only his family members that included his two sons, their wives and three grandchildren but also most of his retainers and servants said to follow him at their own accord, declining to receive keepsakes from their master. Around the time of sunrise on 12 January 1629, the first group of fifteen started from Amagasu’s residence and walked solemnly in a line on the snowy road, wearing a white dress and carrying a rosary, bearing their standard and singing hymns. Amagasu and women were permitted to be unbound. At the execution site at Hokusanpara, they knelt together around the flag of Santa Maria and offered their last prayer before the time came. Amagasu was the last one beheaded. The bodies of his family members were put into coffins but those of others were wrapped with new straw mats because their coffins were not ready. The members of the second and the third groups were executed in the same day.

In 1928, the exact site of execution was found in a wasteland not far from the city centre by Rev. Josef Schuintek and his colleagues, and a memorial was erected. The statues of Jesus, Mary and John were presented from Germany in the next year. There is a stone inscription which lists the names of 57 martyrs. Around Yonezawa, martyrdoms were taken place also in several villages but the sites are not clearly known.

- Amen -

### Reference:

A.Yokoyama Ed., History of Yonezawa City Vol.2, Yonezawa City 1993; Sofia University Ed., Catholic Encyclopaedia I, Fuzanbo Publ., Tokyo 1940; Michael Urakawa, Tohoku Kiristan History, Gannando-shoten., Tokyo 1957; etc.



Peter Kaerius, Iaponia, Mercator Atlas 1630

(裏面日本語訳)

## 米澤,北山原の殉教

葡萄牙系イエズス會のフランシスコ・ザヴィエル神父によって1594年に最初に日本に齎された基督教は九州より急速に東方に擴り,豊臣秀吉の時代(1582-1600)には20萬人の信者を得ておりました。その政治への影響,取分けマニラから來た西班牙系フランシスコ會士による影響を恐れた太閤関白は伴天連\*追放令(1587)を發し,1696-97年に見せしめに26名の神父等を處刑しました。徳川幕府(1600-1868)になって切支丹彈壓政策は強化されましたが彼等は活動を止めず,切支丹の数は17世紀の初期には70萬人に増加,55名の教徒が火刑または斬首に遭うといふ長崎大殉教が起るに至りました。

米澤に滞在中,私(井口)は基督教が本州の東北地方の果てにまで浸透し,そこでも多くの信者が受難したことを学びました。上杉藩の所領であった米澤には,重臣の中に自分の信仰を棄てるより殉教死することを選んだルイス甘粕右衛門といふ人がおりました。イエズス會年報に収録されたジョアン・バプチスタ・ポーロ神父の手紙(1629年7月2日付)は詳細な話を傳へておます。最後の日の前夜,甘粕は使者に「切支丹として死を受けることは主の偉大な恩寵であり,余の最大の願望である」と述べ,同情を寄せてくれた人に謝意を傳へてくれるやうに頼み,一対の大小を差出しました。彼の家族(2人の息子と彼等の妻,3人の孫)だけでなく,彼の家來や召使の殆どが主人に従ふと自分達の意志で申し,形見を受取ることを拒みました。1629年1月12日の日の出の時,最初の15人の組は,白衣とロザリオを着けて甘粕の屋敷を發ち,教團の旗を立て,賛美歌を歌ひながら,一列になって嚴かに雪の道を歩きました。甘粕と女性達は繩を掛けられませんでした。北山原の刑場では,豫定の時刻が來る前,彼等は聖マリアの旗の周りに一緒に跪き,最後の祈りを捧げました。最後に打首になったのは甘粕でした。彼と家族の亡骸は柩に収められましたが,他の人達のは棺が間に合はなかつたので,新しい筵で包まれました。第二,第三の組の人達も同じ日に處刑されました。

1928年,刑場の正確な場所が町の中心から程遠からぬ荒地に立つ六地蔵のところであったことが,シュインテク神父と仲間によって見出され,碑が建てられました。翌年にはイエス,マリア,ヨハネの像がドイツから贈られました。石碑には57名の殉教者の名が刻まれておます。米澤周辺では,殉教は他の二,三の村でも行はれましたが,場所は明らかではありません。

—アーメン—

\*) 伴天連 ← Padre(=Father=神父)

文献:

横山昭男監修「米沢市史(II)」米沢市 1993; 上智大學編「カトリック大辭典」富山房 1940; ミカヅ川和二郎「東北キリシタン史」巖南堂書店 1957; 他。

(表面写真説明)

1629年1月12日 米澤北山原殉教碑(375年後の2004年1月12日,井口撮影)。