Hipogrifo. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro
ISSN: 2328-1308
revistahipogrifo@gmail.com
Instituto de Estudios Auriseculares
España

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Hipogrifo. Revista de literatura y cultura del Siglo de Oro, vol. 9, núm. 2, 2021, Julio-Diciembre, pp. 927-947
Instituto de Estudios Auriseculares
Pamplona, España

DOI: https://doi.org/10.13035/H.2021.09.02.63

Disponible en: https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=517569474062

On Christian Martyrdom in Japan (1597-1658)

El martirio cristiano en Japón (1597-1658)

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[*Hipogrifo*, (issn: 2328-1308), 9.2, 2021, pp. 927-947]
Recibido: 11-01-2021 / Aceptado: 03-02-2021
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.13035/H.2021.09.02.63

Abstract. This essay deals with the collective episodes of Christian martyrdom that took place in Japan in the Early Modern Time. On February 5, 1597 six Spanish Franciscans, seventeen Japanese catechists and three Japanese Jesuits, a priest and two brothers were martyred by crucifixion on the Nishizaka Hill, Nagasaki. This episode of collective martyrdom of Christians was the first of many such episodes that occurred to a great extent during the so-called *Christian Century* or *Namban* Era (1549-1639). The formation of communities of *Kakure Kirishitan* (*Hidden Christians)* or *Sempoku Kirishitan* (*Underground Christians*) was a main consequence of these episodes. The *Kirishitan* communities developed a very syncretic religiosity marked by the veneration of their ancestors killed for their faith. In 1627 the martyrs of Nagasaki in 1597 were declared blessed, as an overall recognition of this episode within a time characterised by such gruesome episodes in Europe and beyond. The atomic bomb thrown over Nagasaki in 1945 revived the memory of past martyrdoms dating back to 1597 among the local Christian communities. In June 1962, the Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum and Monument built on the spot of their martyrdom on the Nishizaka Hill in Nagasaki, Japan, opened to commemorate the centenary of the canonization of these martyrs. The subject remains actual in the 21st century. Hundred and eighty-eight *Kirishithan* martyred for their faith, and who

were mostly laypersons, were declared blessed in 2008. The film *Silence* directed by Martin Scorsese and based on the novel by Shisaku Endo opened the debate on the significance of Christianity and martyrdom in early modern Japan to the wide public in 2016.

Keywords. Japan; Persecutions; *Kakure Kirishitan*; Jesuits; Franciscans.

Resumen. Este texto analiza los episodios colectivos de martirio cristiano que ocurrieron en Japón en la Época Moderna. El 5 de febrero de 1597, seis franciscanos españoles, diecisiete catequistas japoneses, un padre y dos hermanos fueron crucificados en la colina de Nishizaka, Nagasaki. Este episodio de martirio colectivo de cristianos fue el primero de muchos semejantes que ocurrieron en su gran parte durante el *Siglo Cristiano*, también designado como *Era Namban* (1549-1639). La formación de comunidades de *Kakure Kirishitan* (*cristianos escondidos*) o *Sempoku Kirishitan* (*cristianos clandestinos*) fue una de las principales consecuencias de estos martirios. Las comunidades *kirishitan* desarrollaron una religiosidad muy sincrética caracterizada por la veneración de los antepasados, muertos por su fe. En 1627 los mártires de Nagasaki de 1597 fueran beatificados, como reconocimiento de la importancia de este episodio en una epoca caracterizada por tales crueldades dentro y fuera de Europa. La bomba atómica lanzada sobre Nagasaki en 1945 reavivó la memoria de estos martirios pasados en 1597 entre las comunidades cristianas locales. En junio de 1962 fueron inaugurados el Museo y el Monumento de los veinteséis mártires de Japón construidos en el mismo lugar del martirio, que tuvo como objetivo la conmemoración del centenario de su canonización. El tema permanece actual en el siglo XXI. Ciento ochenta y ocho *kirishitan* mártires por su fe, en su mayoría laicos, fueran beatificados en 2008. El film *Silence*, dirigido por Martin Scorsese y basado en la novela de Shisaku Endo, abrió el debate sobre el sentido del cristianismo y del martirio en la Época Moderna en el Japón a un público más vasto en el 2016.

Palabras clave. Japón; persecuciones; *Kakure Kirishitan*; jesuitas; franciscanos.

> «Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends» (Jn, 15:13)

Introduction

This paper analyses Christian martyrdom in early modern Japan from both a chronological and a diachronic perspective. The relevance of martyrdom as part of *Kirishitan* (Japanese Christians) identity until the 21st century will be firstly traced. The role played by these episodes of martyrdom in the definition of this community will be discussed next. Christian martyrdom in early modern Japan will be eventually inserted within the coeval culture and time characterised by the proliferation of such episodes in Europe and beyond.

Christianity, martyrdom and the *kakure kirishitan* (1597-2016)

On the 15th August 1549 Francis Xavier landed at Kagoshima, a city in south-east Kyūshū, introducing Western Christianity into Japan. In 1580 Ōmura Sumitada conceded the exploration of the port of Nagasaki to the Jesuits. These developed the small fishing village founded in 1570, into an international commercial port[1].

In 1585, Pope Gregory XIII' brief *Ex Pastoralis Officio* attributed the monopoly of the Japanese missionary field, under the *Padroado Português do Oriente*, to the Jesuits. However, in 1587, Sixtus VI, who was more favourable to the Franciscans promulgated the Bull *Dum ad uberes fructu.* This bull created the Franciscan Province of Saint Gregory the Grand of the Philippines with the faculty to found convents and churches in the whole Asia.

The mendicant orders understood this bull by Sixtus VI as a derogation of Gregory's brief. Consequently, the Dominicans entered Japan in 1592. The Franciscan presence in Japan was officially opened in the same country the next year. The friars were quite insensitive to the delicate situation of Japan. Moreover, they engaged in disputations and intrigues, in particular, with the Jesuits[2].

The mendicant friars entered Japan, coming from the Philippines, a territory ruled by the *Patronazgo Español del Oriente*. This event had immense political implications. The Japanese rulers feared that as in Philippines the sword (political dominance) would follow the cross (missionary activity). This move, in addition to a variety of economic and political reasons, such as the concurrence of other European colonial countries eager to participate in Japanese trade, the ongoing unification of Japan, and the hostility of the Buddhists and Shintoists towards Christianity, unleashed the wrath of Japanese authorities against Christians, no matter if European or Japanese.

Fig. 1. Macau painter (?), *The Martyrs of Nagasaki*, oil painting, 17th century, Museum of the Ruins of St. Paul, Macau, China. Photo by the author

1. Hesselink, 2016, pp. 4 and 6, and Pacheco, 1970.
2. Uçerler, 2018, pp. 323-324, and Jacquelard, 2011.

Fig. 2. Wolfgang Kilian, *The Martyrs of Nagasaki*, 1597, engraving, Augsburg, 1628. http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00064463/images/index.html

On February 5, 1597, six Spanish Franciscans, *i. e.*, three priests: Pedro Bautista, Martin de la Ascensión, and Francisco Blanco, and three brothers: Francisco de la Patrilla, Gonçalo García, and the Mexican Felipe de Jesus, and eighteen Japanese, among them, the Jesuit brother Paulo Miki; the two Japanese Jesuit *dojukus* (lay catechists) João Gotō and Diego Kisai, and three young boys were tortured to death on the hill of Nishizaka, Nagasaki. This city was the core of Christianity in Japan.

The 27th January of 1614 the Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) enacted an edict initiating a systematic national policy with a view of the eradication of all traces of Christianity in the country. This document especially instilled the fierce persecution of Christians. It proscribed Christianity, claiming that Japan is the land of the gods. Diffusion here from the *Kirishitan* Country of a pernicious doctrine was most undesirable.

It moreover condemned Christianity as the opponent of the Japanese cultural and devotional background fusing Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism. Christianity, a new foreign religion, would thus not be allowed. Ninety - eight out of hundred fourty-five *shinpus* (Catholic priests), sixty-five out of two hundred and fifty *dōjukus*, and three hundred and fifty prominent *Kirishitan* families were exiled to Macau and the Philippines, and their churches were destroyed. C. 150,000 Japanese Christians went underground, forming the community of the *Kakure Kirishitan (Hidden Christians)* or *Senpuku Kirishitans (Underground Christians)*[3].

3. Dougill, 2015, p. 92, and Morris, 2018, p. 410.

Fig. 3. Anonymus Japanese painter, *Jesuit Martyrs in Japan* (c. 1635). Chiesa del Gesù, Rome, Italy. Photo by the author

In particular, a series of collective martyrdoms of mainly lay Japanese followed. Twenty-three Christians were killed in Edo in August 1613; fourty-three in Kuchinotsu, Arima, in November 1614; fifty-three in Kyoto in 1619; and fifty-five were executed in Nishizaka in 1622[4]. In 1635, more than seventy *Kirishitan* were put to death at Neshiko, and five hundred were martyred near Omura in 1658[5].

At the beginning of the 17th century, a maximal number of 800,000 converts out of a population of 20, 0000 000, had converted to Christianity[6]. Charles Boxer counted hundred fourty-three priests active in Japan during the whole *Namban* age[7]. He estimated the number of martyrs between 2,000 and 5,000, whereas Yakichi Kataoka established the number of 4,000 martyrs[8].

Once welcome in the country, Catholics became *personae non gratae*. In 1639, the *Christian Century* came to an end. Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (ruled from 1632 to 1651) instituted the policy of *sakoku* (closed land), breaking diplomatic and commercial relations with the Iberian monarchies. This policy barred all foreigners, except the Chinese and the Dutch, from entering Japan. The same ban interdicted the practice of Christianity in Japan.

The *Kakure Kirishitan* remained a community unknown to the world until Japan opened up to the word, and Catholic missionary activity resumed during the second half of the 19th century, concluding the *senpuku jidai* (underground period). Japan and the United States of America signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1858. The following year, Japan opened its ports. In 1862, the Vatican re-es-

4. Higashibaba, 2001, pp. 135-140, and Tronu, 2012, p. 248.
5. Turnbull, 1996, p. 63, and Turnbull, 1998, pp. 45 and 129.
6. Üçerler, 2015, p. 52.
7. Boxer, 1951, p. 361.
8. Boxer, 1951, p. 358 and 448, and Kataoka, 1967, pp. 32-33.

tablished the Mission of Japan. The construction of a cathedral in Yokohama was commissioned, and the twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki, who had been beatified in 1627, were declared saints.

Fig. 4. Basilica of the 26 Martyrs of Nagasaki, Oura, Japan, 19th century. Basilica of the Twenty-Six Holy Martyrs of Japan (Nagasaki). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_of_the_Twenty-Six_Holy_Martyrs_of_Japan_(Nagasaki)

In 1864, the French Priests from the Foreign Missions Society built a church dedicated to these martyr saints in Oura, Nagasaki. One year later, in March 1865, a group of *kirishitan* from Urakami, Nagasaki, addressed spontaneously Father Bernard Petitjean. In 1873, upon the diplomatic pressure of other countries, the Meji government eventually authorized the Christians to publicly profess their religion.

The USA launched the first atom bomb over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Three days later, on August 9, 1945, they dropped a second atom over Nagasaki. Urakami, a suburban area of Nagasaki that was mostly inhabited by an important Christian community, descendants of the *Kakure Kirishitan,* was the area of the greatest impact. C. 8,500 Urakami Christians out of the 27,000 dead caused by the detonation of the atom bomb, *i. e.,* 60% of this community, were killed. The bomb also destroyed their cathedral, built in the centre of the area they inhabited[9].

9. McClelland, 2021, p. 4.

Fig. 5. Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki destroyed by the atomic bomb.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immaculate_Conception_Cathedral,_Nagasaki

In their responses to the enquiries made still in 1945, Christian survivors of the Atom Bombing of Nagasaki stressed their collective memory of past martyrdom, persecutions and discrimination, reaching as far back as 1597. They interpreted the 1945 mass killing as another episode of martyrdom. The Museum and Monument of the Twenty-Six Martyrs of Nagasaki in 1597 opened in June 1962 to commemorate their canonization by Pius IX.

The so-called *Urakami Punishment Theory* spread among them. According to this theory, the Christians victims of Nagaski atom bomb should be seen as «the *Pure Lamb*, who expiated the sins of sinful humanity and thereby saved many millions of lives from the ravages of war, spread among them»[10].

Early modern martyrdom episodes of Japan remain actual in the 21st century. In December 2016, the film *Silence* directed by Martin Scorsese, and based on the novel by Shusaku Endo from 1966 relaunched the debate on a broad basis.

Previously, on the 24th November 2008, the Portuguese Cardinal António Saraiva Martins, *cardinal emeritus* for the causes of the saints, presided over the mass beatification ceremony of hundred eighty-eight Japanese tortured and killed throughout Japan (more precisely in Yonezawa, now Yamagata, Edo, now Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Hiroshima, and Yamaguchi) between 1603 and 1639.

They were mostly laypersons aged from 1 year old to 80 years old (sixty of them were women; thirty-three were under the age of 20; eighteen were children under the age of 5) and including whole families. Thereby, the Catholic Church eventually

10. Alberg, 2017, p. 27.

re-established truth of facts four centuries after their occurrence. This canonization was a tribute to the Japanese laypersons, who formed the overwhelming majority of martyrs of persecution in Early Modern Japan.

Deepening the faith

The need to camouflage and conceal, in addition to insufficiency or even inexistence of priests, and the separation of the *Kirishitan* communities from Rome and the rest of the Catholic world led to the formation of a highly syncretic religiosity (see, for instance, Christian devotions illustrated as Asian devotions, such as the Virgin Mary disguised as the goddess Kannon). Catholicism in Japan, indeed, strongly borrowed from Buddhism, Shinto as well as local habits. The *Kirishitan* drew their main distinguishing element, the ancestors´ worship, from the Japanese religious context. Japanese Buddhists and Shintoists believe that their ancestors will reach eternity when becoming *kami* (deities). Ancestors' martyrs form a special community of *kami* known as *muenbotoke*, Buddhas of no affiliation or wandering spirits, and who had a violent death for the *Kirishitan*[11].

Fig. 6. The Virgin Mary disguised as Kannon, Kirishitan cult, Japan, 17th century. Salle des Martyrs, Paris Foreign Missions Society. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirishitan

11. Turnbull, 1996, pp. 199-200.

In 1630 Shichiroemon and Maguemon, two Urakami-Nagasaki *Kirishitan* observed that ten or twelve years have passed since the expulsion of missionaries from Japan. Their return remained uncertain. Therefore, Shichiroemon and Maguemon created the Ohatsuhoage ritual, to replace the conventional Eucharist ritual, and also as a ritual of communication with *Kirishitan* saints and ancestors. It called back their deeds and, in particular, their martyrdom. Pieces of cloth of those martyrs were accordingly venerated on the table-like altar[12].

Kakure Kirishitan organized themselves in confraternities, also - called sodalities or congregations, given the small number of priests and the lacking ecclesiastic structure. Most lay martyrs had been members of confraternities. These associations honouring Japanese martyrs, such as the *Maruchiriyo no kumi* (Confraternity of the Martyrs) and *atosama-nakama* (Confraternity honouring the Japanese martyr baptised António) were especially popular in times of persecution.

Kirishitan confraternities had a program of penances and confession, preparing their members for martyrdom. Their members were constantly reminded of the Crucifixion of Christ, and of both old and coeval Martyrs, in particular the *Kirishitan* martyrs. The statues of the Congregation of the Martyrs in Arima, with more than 3,000 Christians in 1612, stated that its *confrères* committed themselves to die for their faith, following the example of Christ on the Cross[13].

Kirishitant adapted immediately to the new circumstances marked by persecution and martyrdom. They created specific rituals, shrines, objects and a religious literature and art. They paid a special reverence to the execution place at Nishizaka as a special site of miracles. According to the Spanish Franciscan friar Marcelo de Ribanedeira, who was a witness to the martyrdom of 1597, the faces and bodies of the Christians hanging on the crosses stayed incorrupt for three months and weren't devoured by the crows.

On the 14th March of the same year lights spread from the crosses towards the centre of Nagasaki. The blood of the martyrs taken by some Portuguese to Macau remained fluid and without emitting any bad smell during the whole trip. Relics of the martyrs were also credited with miraculous healings of ill people[14].

Kirishitan leaders, who considered themselves as descendants of martyrs, assured that due reverence would be paid to relics related to their heroic ancestors. The *Kirishitan* believed that the martyr's letters, the pieces of their clothes stained with their blood, their holy pictures, crucifixes, medallions, and rosaries possessed natural powers. They called theses relics either *osugata* (images) or *nandogami* (closed deities).

12. Munsi, 2019, pp. 11 and 21.
13. Gonoi, 2010, pp. 127 and 134, and Satoshi, 2017, p. 261.
14. Ribadeneira, *Historia de las islas del Archipiélago Filipino y reinos de la Gran China, Tartaria, Cochinchina, Malaca, Siam, Cambodge y Japón*, pp. 498-499.

Their immense quest for relics met the bitter opposition of Japanese authorities. Immediately after the 1597 massacre, believers stole the bones and skulls of the martyrs and torn their dresses violently away[15]. Thereafter, the Japanese authorities put their efforts in avoiding the replication of events such as this. They punished the collection of relics, a superstitious profanation of corpses for the Japanese, from the 1620s. Similarly, Christians would be rather burnt to death instead of being crucified. Their bodily relics and their relics of contact (objects owned or touched by the martyrs) were immediately burnt. The corpses or ashes would be eventually scattered into the sea[16].

Martyrdom pervades Christian writings. Letters and sermons by the Christians facing imminent death give a glimpse of their feelings and fears. Their sacred book (a Bible-like narrative) called *Tenchi hajimari no koto* (*Concerning the creation of Heaven and Earth*) includes the biographies of several Japanese martyrs[17]. Treatises on martyrdom, such as the *Maruchirio no susume (Exhortation to Martyrdom)* and *Maruchirio no kokore (Readiness for Martyrdom),* instructed the *Kirishitan* in their readiness to support torture and be killed for their faith[18]. In Goto, *Kirishitan* convicted to death were advised to read the *Konchirisan no Riyaku* (*Benefits of Contrition*), 1603. This text would help them to appropriately confess their sins in the absence of a priest[19].

As *Silence* brilliantly showed, not necessarily convinced apostates trampled on medals with the Virgin Mary or the Crucifixion, the *fumi-e*. The Mater Dolorosa, the Crucifixion and Japanese Christian martyrs were extremely popular subjects in early modern Christian Art in Japan. The *gozenzama*, hanging rolls depicting Christ, the Virgin Mary, saints and both recognised and local martyrs, ranked first among the *nandogami*[20].

Fig. 7. Fumie.e with the Virgin Mary. https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fumi-e

15. Fróis, 1935, pp. 106-107, and Ellison, 1988, p. 140.
16. Rappo, 2017, pp. 259-260.
17. Turnbull, 1998, p. 63.
18. Turnbull, 1998, p. 20 and p. 34.
19. Gonoi, 2010, pp. 129-130.
20. Nosco, 1993, p. 13.

Fig. 8. Fumi-e with the Crucifixion. https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fumi-e

The repercussion of Japanese martyria worldwide

Early modern martyrdom was a global reality. Japanese *martyria* occurred in a period when plenty of Christians met the same fate due to the wars of religion in Europe (c. 1528-1634) and as missionaries to non-European people. The martyrdom of Nagasaki in 1597 was probably the first event in Japanese history with a wide diffusion beyond the Japans' borders. On the 14th September of 1627, Urban VIII canonized the six Franciscans and the seventeen Japans killed in 1597. The next day, he canonized the three Jesuits, who had perished on the same occasion[21].

The Japanese context stood out within the coeval culture of martyrdom due to the number of martyrs and the ferocity of the episodes in *odium fidei*. The Catholic Church received news about the martyrs in Japan with great fervour. In addition to the official hagiography established by Rome and the orders involved with missionary activity in Japan, this event found its way into poetry and drama. C. 1621, the Dominican Order commissioned the comedy *Los Mártires del Japón* to the Spanish poet Lope de Vega. This comedy is the most well-known poetic piece dedicated to the subject[22].

In 1621, the Duke of Bavaria commissioned fine engravings with Christian martyrs of Japan. Catholic parties would extensively use copper-plate engraving and oil painting and fresco cycles (which existed in original and copied form), as a useful way to educate Europeans and non-Europeans in the heroic values represented by martyrs[23].

21. Conover, 2020, p. 246.
22. Lee, 2014, p. 229.
23. Hsia, 1998, p. 130.

The fresco murals depicted in the former Franciscan church in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico and dated to the mid 17th century constitute the most celebrated paintings of the Japanese episodes of martyrdom in the early modern art of the Viceroyalty. A close link can be established between Japanese martyrdoms and this geographical area as distant as Mexico.

Fig. 9. Mexican School, Watercolours, 1620s, Cuernavaca, Mexico.
Photo by the author

The Mexican Franciscan Felipe de Jesús was the first martyr in Nagasaki in 1597. The Franciscans translated his bodily remains to Mexico in 1629. He was the first Mexican declared blessed, and was chosen as the patron saint of Mexico City, his home city. Two other Mexican Friars, Bartolomé Laurel and Bartolomé Gutiérrez were also distinguished with the crown of martyrdom in Nagasaki in 1627 and 1632, respectively[24].

24. Arimura, 2019, p. 42.

Fig. 10. Unknown. *Saint Philip of Jesus (San Felipe de Jesus)*, 18th century. Oil on canvas, 16 1/2 x 11 1/2in. (41.9 x 29.2cm). Brooklyn Museum, Frank L. Babbott Fund, 44.47.2 (Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 44.47.2.jpg) Brooklyn Museum

The Jesuit *magus opus* on martyrdom *Societas Iesu ad sanguinis et vitae profusionem militans* by the Bohemian Mathias Tanner (1675) is particularly illustrative about the pain and torture suffered by Jesuits missionaries in Japan during the 1620s. Arguably, the fact that most Jesuits were slowly immolated (engravings in pages 290, 303, 305, 317, 322, 327) was due not only to the wish of persecutors to avoid relics, but also to the extreme pain inflicted to the condemned Christians.

Being poured with boiling water (engraving in page 333) and to freeze to death in ice water (engraving in page 313) would be also extreme harsh and painful ways of facing one's death. Worst of all, missionaries and laypersons suffered the martyrdom of the pit, *i. e.,* being hung upside down in the pit with the head stuck in excrement (engraving in page 349).

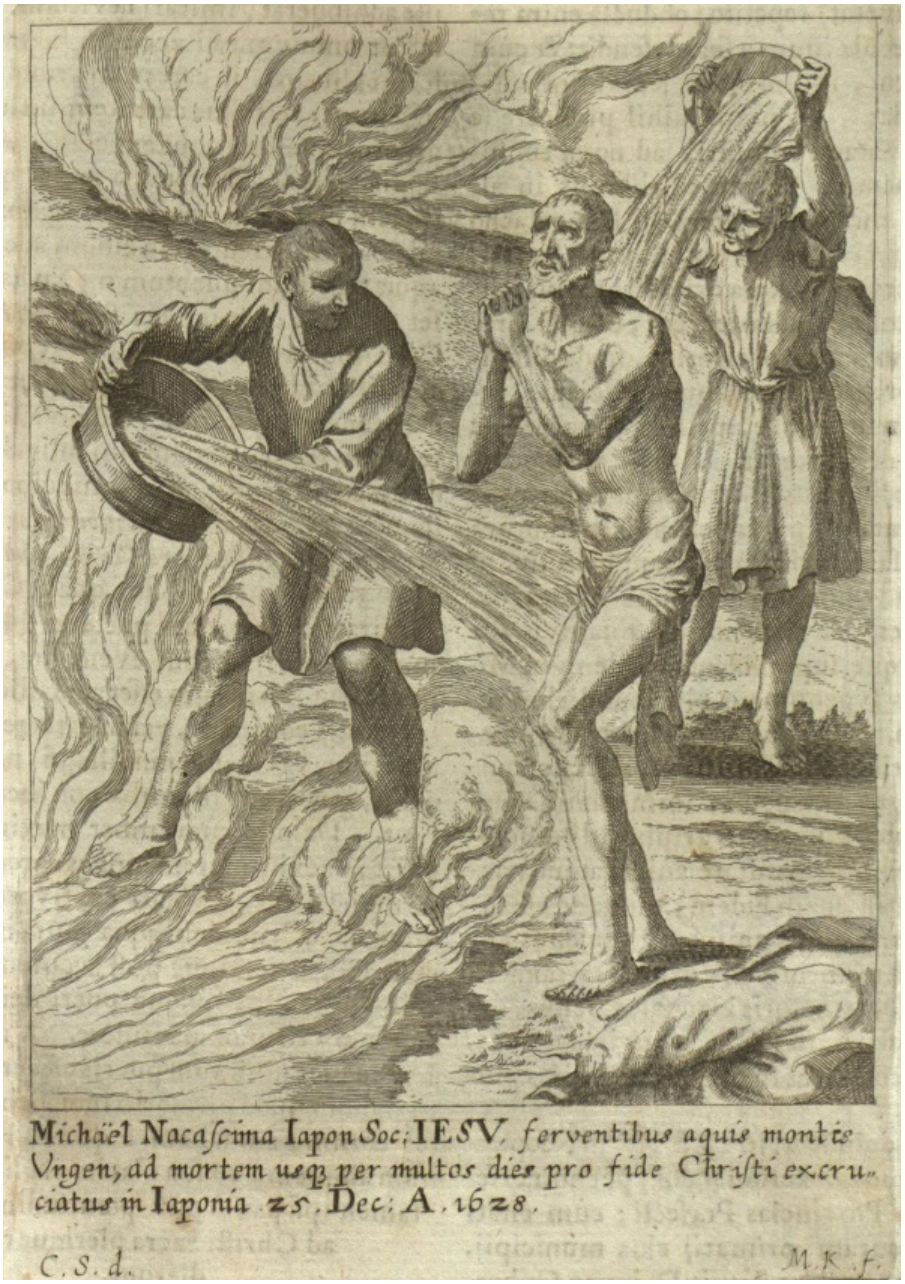

Fig. 11. Melchior Küsel, engraving with the martyrdom of Michael Nacascima by pouring boiling water in Japan on December 25, 1628, in Mathias Tanner, *Societas Jesu usque ad sanguinis et vitae profusionem militans*, Prague, Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandeae per Joannem Nicolaum Hampel factorem, 1675, p. 333. (Private collection)

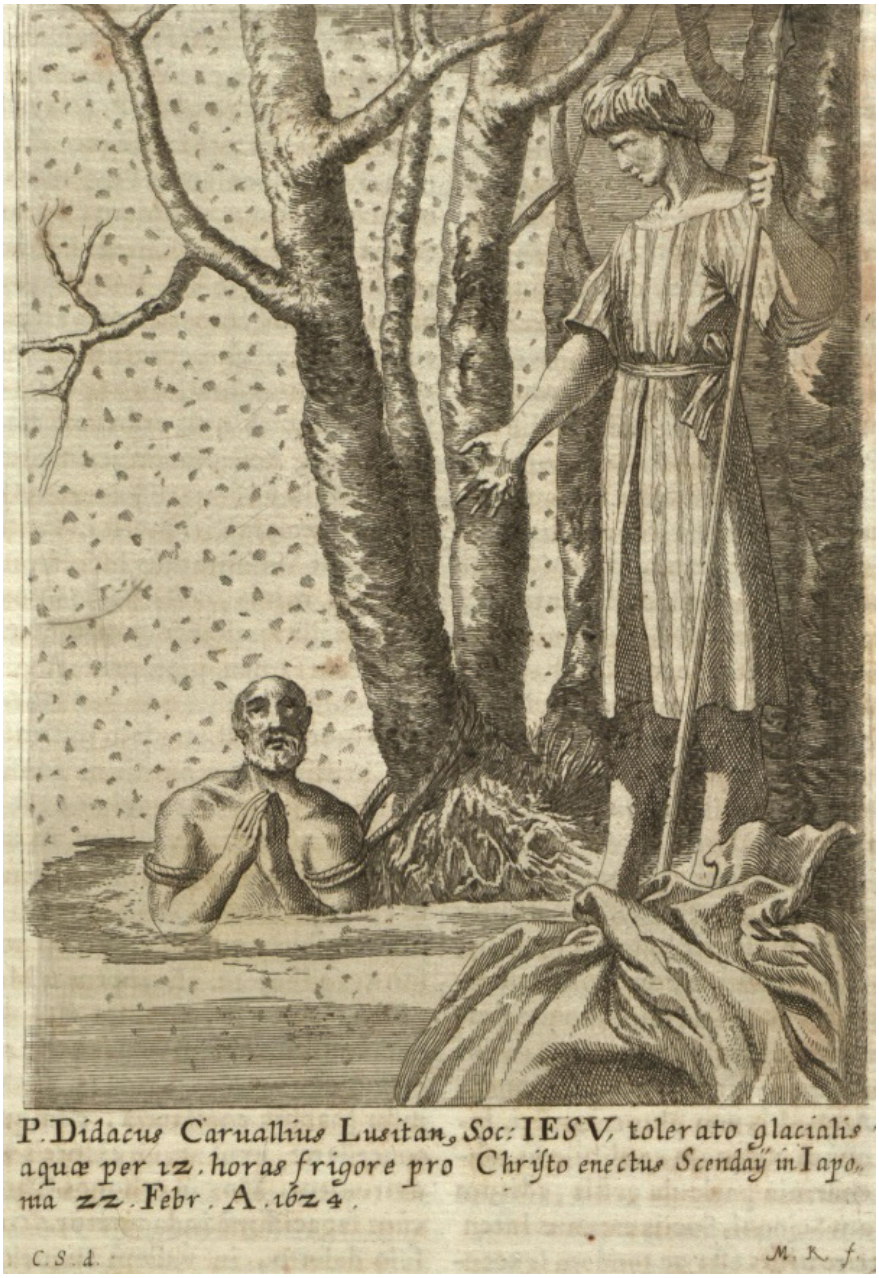

Fig. 12. Melchior Küsel, engraving with the execution of Father Diogo Carvalho by submersion in a frozen lake in Japan on February 22, 1624, in Mathias Tanner, *Societas Jesu usque ad sanguinis et vitae profusionem militans,* Prague, Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandeae per Joannem Nicolaum Hampel factorem, 1675, p. 313. (Private collection)

Fig. 13. Melchior Küsel, engraving with the martyrdom of a Jesuit in Japan by hanging upside down in Shimabara, August 28, 1633, in Mathias Tanner, *Societas Jesu usque ad sanguinis et vitae profusionem militans,* Prague, Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandeae per Joannem Nicolaum Hampel factorem, 1675, p. 351. (Private collection)

The official Catholic narrative distorted reality! The overwhelming majority of martyrs were *Kirishitan* lay women, men and children. However, Jesuits and friars were the heroes of the official narrative. Official discourse indeed treated layperson as secondary actors or even omitted them. The Jesuits and mendicant friars, such as Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians, commemorated their martyrs locally and then sent the reports to Rome and to Europe. The printed reports on great and new persecutions and accounts of the state of Japanese Christianity and the depiction of cycles illustrating early modern martyrdom in Japan should certainly awake new conversions and missionary vocations.

These written and visual accounts were moreover instrumental in the order's efforts to affirm themselves in Japan as in Rome. An engraving by the French artist Jacques Callot probably open in 1627 to support the canonization of the Franciscan martyrs of Nagasaki in 1597 omits the Jesuits martyrs on the same occasion. The next year, the Jesuits initiated the circulation of artistic representations of the three Jesuits martyrs.

Fig. 14. Jacques Callot, The Martyrs of Japan, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Manhattan, New York, United States of America. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Les_Martyrs_du_Japon_(The_Martyrs_of_Japan)_Met_DP890514.jpg

As the Franciscans, the Jesuits were extremely efficient in spreading worldwide the cult and the iconography of the members of their order, who had perished for their faith in Japan. In his report on the 1597 martyrdom, the Jesuit Luís Fróis accused the Franciscans of having caused the death of these three Jesuits[25]. The later were the real heroes in his viewpoint, as for the rest of the Jesuits. The decoration program of high altar at the church of La Profesa in the vice-regal capital of New Spain.

Images of these martyrs were also displayed at the novitiate church in Tepotzotlán[26]. The Jesuits and the Mendicant friars diffused texts and images of their own members, by norm[27].

Fig. 15. Anonym Painter, *The Three Japanese Jesuit Martyrs of Nagasaki 1597 Juan Goto, Diego Kisai and Pablo Miki*, oil painting, first half of the 18th century, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, México. Photo by the author

25. Fróis, 1935, p. 32 and p. 87.
26. McClelland, 2021, p. 152.
27. Osswald, 2009, pp. 486 -487.

Conclusions

To conclude, the first period of Catholicism in Japan was marked by torture and mass killings of missionaries and, in particular, lay Christian Japanese. A complex set of religious, political and economic reasons instilled these episodes of martyrdom. Martyrdom defined the identity and the religiosity of *Kakure Kirishitan*. These episodes occurred in a time when similar episodes occurred were also taking largely place even in Europe. The significance Rome gave to Christian martyrdom in Japan can explain the quick beatification of the 1597 Nagasaki martyrs. The collective memory of the survivors of the Nagasaki atomic bomb in 1945, the construction of the Museum and the Monument of the twenty-Six Martyrs of Japan, the 2008 mass canonisation and the discussion launched by the film *Silence* in 2016 demonstrate the actuality of the Christian martyrdoms in early modern Japan.

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