

**The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,  
Union Theological Seminary, New York**

Missionary Research Library Archives: Section 7

Finding Aid for

**Anti-Christian Edict Board, 1682**

**Also known as Sadame: Kirishitan shu**



Image Credit: MRL 7: Anti-Christian Edict Board, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Finding Aid prepared by: Gregory Adam Scott, January 2010

Reviewed and updated by Brigette C. Kamsler, July 2014 with financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

**Summary Information**

Creator: Untraced. See Provenance: Missionary Research Library  
Title: Anti-Christian Edict Board  
Dates: 1682  
Abstract: Wooden board, 26" x 12", with inscription detailing the prohibition of Christianity and the reward offered for reporting offenders. Board has added strips of wood to protect from rain, and shows signs of an original central dovetailed post for display on reverse.  
Size: 1 OS box, 3.00 linear feet  
Storage: Onsite storage  
Repository: The Burke Library  
Union Theological Seminary  
3041 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
Email: [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu)

### Administrative Information

- Provenance:** This piece was part of an untraceable donation to the independent Missionary Research Library prior to its closure in 1976, when its records were accessioned to the Burke Library.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu), or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible. [Burke Library Staff](#) is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions:** The piece is very fragile and extremely heavy and is thus restricted. Digital images of the piece are available, as is a translation and transcription of the text, below.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, MRL 7: Anti-Christian Edict Board, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

### History

The first organized Christian mission to the Japanese came in 1549 with the arrival of the Jesuit, Francis Xavier. Early attempts at converting the Japanese were quite successful, and several daimyo, or feudal lords, converted along with their families. After Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 unified the warring domains of Japan, however, he issued a ban on Catholicism in 1587, one of many subsequent prohibitions against Christianity. The motivations behind the ban were related to the military and political power of the missionaries, and the potential threat they represented to the new centralized government. By the early seventeenth century, all Christian missionaries had been expelled and people were obligated to register with a local Buddhist temple to ensure their religious orthodoxy.

During the Edo period of Japanese history (1603 - 1868) Japanese Christians continued to practice in secret, passing down oral traditions through the generations and retaining sacred images either disguised as Buddhist deities or hidden from public view. Public pressure against Christianity was strong. People were sometimes forced to trample on an image of the crucifixion or the Virgin Mary in order to prove their faith. Those who were discovered to be Christians were punished, and if they still did not turn apostate, they were executed.

### Collection Scope and Content Note

This edict board is an example of a public statement outlining the prohibition on Christianity, the punishments for defying the ban, and the rewards offered to those who reported transgressors.

The text of the board is clear and concise, stating the law without entering in to much detail about what the Christian religion was. This board is unique both for its age, and for the signature of the local district leader. As the board was displayed outside and exposed to the elements for centuries, where the dark paint of the text did not cover the wood it has been worn away, even though a narrow roof was built on the top of the board to protect it.

A transcription of the Japanese text, written in ink with a traditional calligraphy brush, is included in the collection.



Sections of the Edict Board. Credit to: MRL 7: Anti-Christian Edict Board, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Similar boards can be found at the Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum in Nagasaki, and at Sophia University in Tokyo. Although their text differs somewhat, the main message and their date of creation are the same as this piece.<sup>1</sup> Similar boards, called *kōsatsu* 高札, were erected in the same year to encourage loyal and filial conduct among the people.<sup>2</sup>

### Processing

The board was placed in a custom protective acid-free box from which it can be displayed. Photographs are available of both front and back.

### Contents list

Box	Contents
1 OS	Anti-Christian Edict Board, 1682

### Translation

#### Regulation

The Christian religion has been prohibited year after year. If any suspicious case be found it should be reported, and the reward shall be:

- 500 pieces of silver to anyone who reports of a *bateren*<sup>3</sup> case;
- 300 pieces of silver to anyone who reports an *iruman*<sup>4</sup> case;
- Ibid to anyone who reports a backslider;
- 100 pieces of silver to anyone who reports anyone staying with the offender;

The above shall be awarded, and up to 500 pieces of silver shall be given to one who reports someone staying with the offender according to the importance of the case. If a covered offender be found by anyone living in another district, then the mayor of the district and the offender, as well as the company consisting of five families, of which the offender himself is one, shall be severely punished.

May in the second year of Tenwa<sup>5</sup>  
Governor

All the people of the district should keep the above regulation  
Shuzen<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See <<http://www1.bbiq.jp/martyrs/LRDKosatsu.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Frank Brinkley, *A History of the Japanese people from the earliest times to the end of the Meiji era* (New York; London: The Encyclopedia Britannica Co., 1914), p. 643.

<sup>3</sup> Refers to a Christian missionary. From the Portuguese *padre*.

<sup>4</sup> Refers to a non-ordained monk. From the Portuguese *irmão*.

<sup>5</sup> The Tenwa era, sometimes pronounced as "Tenna," lasted from 1681 to 1684.

<sup>6</sup> Shuzen was the name of the mayor of the district.

Transcription

定

きりしたん宗門わ累年御禁制たり[ ] 自然不審為者これ有らば[ ] 若出べしご褒美として

ばてれんの訴人[ ] 銀五百枚

いるまんの訴人[ ] 銀三百枚

立かえり者の訴人[ ] 同断

同宿並宗門の訴人[ ] 銀百枚

右の取り下さるべし書くし置きたしよより同宿宗門の内たりというとも訴人に出しなにより銀五百枚

之を下さるべし書くし起きたしよよりあらわるるにおいては其所の名主並五人組迄一墨共に厳科に処せらるべき者也

天和二年五月日

奉行

右の趣領内之輩家宅お守るべき者也 主膳