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# Did Christ Visit Japan?

SPENCER J. PALMER\*

The strangest and most incredible tale ever to come out of East Asia is that Jesus once lived in Japan. The story deserves critical consideration.

In the year 1937, during a time of intense nationalism in Japan, a rather bizarre book appeared on the stands of the Japanese book stores. Its author was a Japanese woman, Yamane Kikuko, a Christian who selected for her book the pretentious title *Light Comes from the East*,<sup>1</sup> an obvious reference to Rabindranath Tagore's celebrated expression.

In this book, Mrs. Yamane claimed that a testament "inspired" by Jesus of Nazareth had been found among a set of family documents in the possession of Mr. O-Maru Takenouchi or Isohara, Ibaraki Prefecture (see Figure 1). He claimed to be the sixty-sixth descendant of Takenouchi no Sukune, a nobleman who had been active in the court of the twelfth emperor, Keiko, and of Takenouchi Shikibu, the eighteenth-century Confucian student who had sought to deify the Mikado's personage at a time when the emperors were being eclipsed by the power of the military governors.<sup>2</sup> Thus materials referred to as "the Isohara Papers" have appeared in Japanese under the

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<sup>1</sup>*Hikari wa Toho Yori (Light Comes from the East)* Tokyo, 1937, reprinted in 1957. This latter edition contains a generous number of snapshots, including a picture of Mr. Takenouchi of Isohara in regalia suggesting a Shinto priest.

<sup>2</sup>Takenouchi no Sukane conquered the "Eastern Lands of the Yenishi" on behalf of the Emperor Keiko. Reportedly, he was the first Prime Minister in Japan's recorded history. Takenouchi no Shikibu is described as a pupil of Yamazaki Ansai and as an extremist agitator for the restoration of the Emperor's divine status. Died 1771. These data according to Brinkley, *A History of Japan* (London, 1914), p. 85.



Figure 1. The first Latter-day Saints to draw attention to the story of Christ in Japan, pictured here surrounding O-Maru Takenouchi and wife of Isohara in July 1959, are LaDon Van Noy, Masao Watabe, and cameraman Darrell Longsine.

title *Secret History of the Age of the Gods*,<sup>3</sup> and although precise data on their origin and authenticity seems never forthcoming, it is generally claimed that certain hieroglyphic inscriptions called *Jindai Moji* (Figure 2 is an example) are the

<sup>3</sup>*Shindai hisshi* (Secret History of the Age of the Gods), Tokyo, Kokkyo Senmedian, 1935. The first volume, "A Survey of Ancient Times," contains an alleged genealogy of the Imperial Household, according to which the Emperor Jimmu is the ninety-eighth Emperor, not the first (making the present Japanese emperor twenty-second.) The frontpiece of this volume quotes the following scripture from Jeremiah; "Thus saith the Lord, the maker thereof, the Lord has formed it, to establish it, the Lord is his name: Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show the great and mighty things which thou knoweth not." Chapter 1 contains a very brief reference to Jesus Christ and his arrival at Hachinohe. Also, on page 45, is a presumed prophecy given by Christ in Japan when he was 37 years of age.



Figure 2. One of numerous stones and "relics" containing inscriptions of the so-called *Jindai Moji* type.

most important, since Christ himself presumably helped prepare these when he lived in Japan. The Takenouchi family maintains that this secret history provides a true account of the Japanese people going back to an Age of the Gods, antedating the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, the earliest known chronicles of Japan. At the time of Bureutsu, the twenty-fifth emperor, who was enthroned in 505 A.D., Buddhism had become so prosperous that the sacred history was in danger of being neglected and destroyed. Thus Sukune Takenouchi, a general and scholar, took this history, which at that time apparently was inscribed only on stones, and turned it over to his grandson Heiguri no Matori, who thereafter took it to Toyama Prefecture. It has remained with the Isohara family ever since.

It is claimed that the now deceased Japanese artist, Banzan Toyo of Aomori, successfully deciphered some of the hieroglyphic writings and thereby ascertained that two grave mounds, each approximately fifteen feet in diameter and located on top of a remote hillock near a small Japanese village in northern Honshu, contain the remains of Christ and a lock of hair said to have belonged to his brother. These two grave mounds are located at Herai village (renamed Shingo village in 1955) in Aomori Prefecture, four hundred miles north of Tokyo on the Tokyo-Aomori railroad. The villagers of Herai call one of these graves Toraizuka and the other Judaibaka or Judaibo. It is in the former that the body of Christ is said to have been interred (see Figure 3).

A published statement of Christ's arrival in Japan, of his training and teaching, his marriage and offspring, and of his Japanese ministry, are given as follows by the Herai village fathers:

Christ was born in Judea and lived in Egypt with his parents. But later he returned to the small village of Nazareth and was raised there. However, when he was 21 years old he disappeared. Nevertheless in his 33rd year he suddenly reappeared and preached about Heaven and the existence of God. Needless to say, nothing is mentioned in the Bible for that lost 11 years. However, in the discovered death statement of Christ, the information pertaining to that period is given.

He came to Japan for the first time in the period of the Emperor Suinin, the 11th emperor, and landed at the Port of Hashidate, on the Japan Sea Coast, and then went to Ecchu (now Toyama Prefecture), and became a disciple of honorable and learned Japanese and received various training.

After 11 years, in his 33rd year, he left Japan and landed at Monaco, thence returned to Judea. The returned Christ preached the sacredness of Japan, God's country, to John the Baptist and others.

His teachings were not accepted by the Elders of Israel and also he encountered the opposition of the Pharisees. Finally he was arrested by Roman soldiers and was sentenced to be crucified. However, according to the statement, the one who was crucified was his brother. It was he who uttered that ungodlike expression: "Oh, God, why has thou forsaken me?" The escaped Christ disappeared.

After much tribulation, on February 26th, four years after his reported crucifixion, Christ boarded a vessel on the

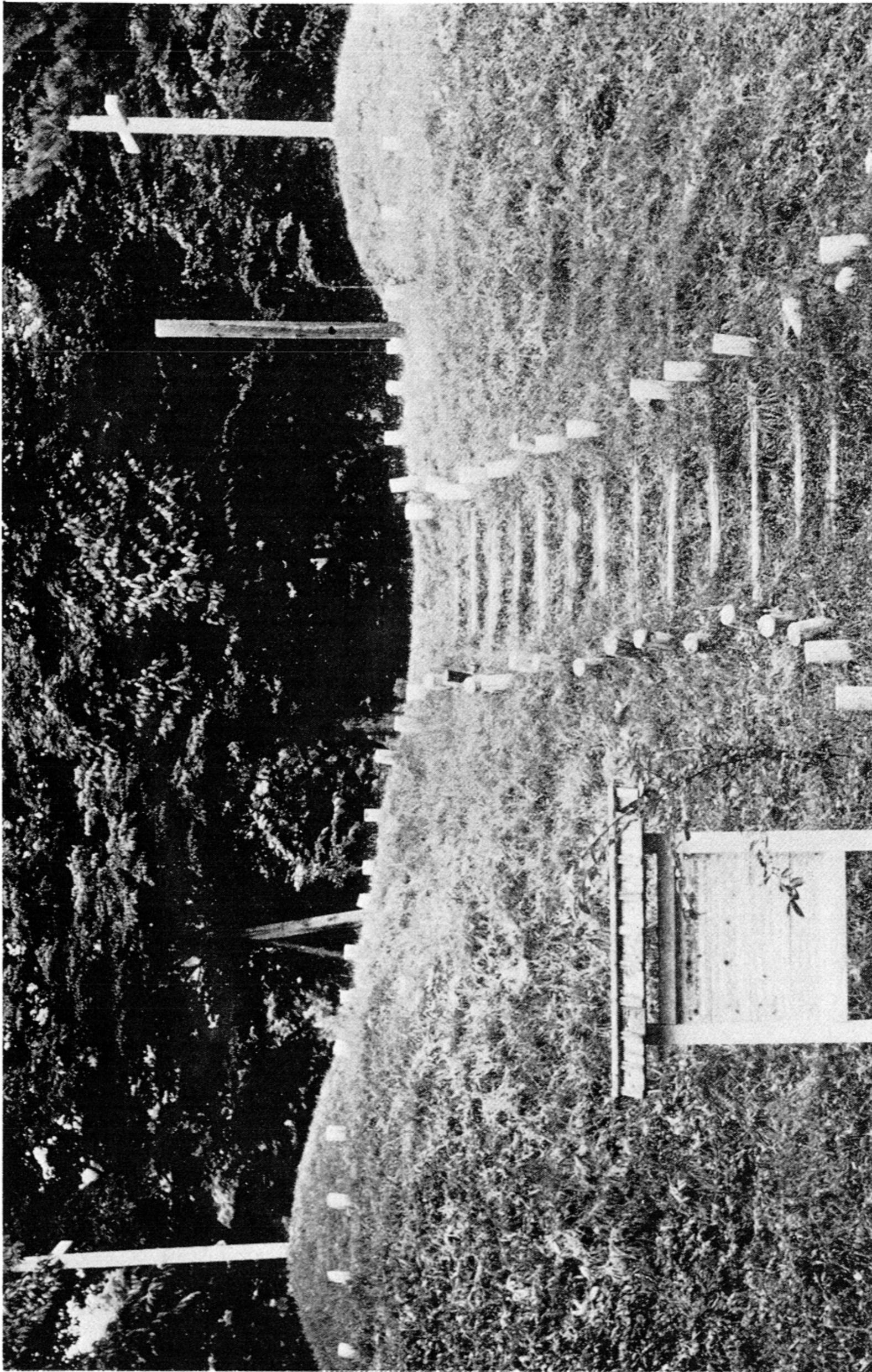


Figure 3. A recent photograph of the grave mounds the legend claims contain the remains of Christ.

Pacific coast of North America and travelled by water, eventually arriving at the present Hachinohe harbor.<sup>4</sup>

Not far from Hachinohe City, Yamane discovered a small Shinto shrine called Kaikura Jinja, where, she claims, the wooden boat in which Christ arrived in Japan had been enshrined until recently. There a wooden Shinto prayer tablet was reportedly uncovered, bearing the inscription: "The village master prays through Ishikiri [Christ] that God will grant prosperity to the village." Using this as a premise, Yamane postulates that Christ himself must have stopped there at one time, particularly so, since the local villagers are said to call this place "Ishikiri Tomaru" or "Christ Has Stayed Here."

I have not personally visited this shrine, and I have been unable to find anyone who has seen the boat that reportedly was once kept there. But Mr. Conrad Roger, who has done serious research on this aspect of the Herai legend, has provided these first-hand observations:

The Kaikura Jinja is a small shrine, rather oldish in appearance erected on a piece of flat, marshy land not far from a river. The site, Shiriuchi, if translated into English means river estuary. If the structure still standing today is the original shrine, then the boat which it is said to have housed at one time must have been very small indeed. Without having dated it professionally, I would estimate that the building is not very old, perhaps going back a century or two at the most. But I do not know what foundation lies underneath the present building. I would translate the kanji for "Kai-kura" as meaning "shell storage," or something along those lines. So, presumably at one time this must have been the site where shells, clams, and the like were gathered, stored, or traded. It may have been a boat-house or enclosure of sorts. I have met no one who has either personally seen this boat, or heard of any reputable person having seen it. This does, of course, not necessarily mean that a boat did not exist at one time. Someone may have arrived in it, thereby giving substance to what today has become the Herai legend. It would be interesting to locate this boat or whatever may be left of it and to date it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See "The Christ that Arrived at Mito," in *Shingo*, 1967, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup>From a letter dated June 17, 1969. I should say here that I have relied very heavily on the work of Conrad Roger in this paper, particularly in the development of the thesis that the Herai legend might be explained in terms of sixteenth century Christian influence. Also, I am very much indebted to brothers Kan Watanabe and Masao Watabe who accompanied me in travels through Japan in February of 1969 in search of answers to the Herai story.

According to the Herai story, when Christ revisited Japan he adopted an indigenous name, that of Torai Taro Tengu or Hachinohe Taro Tengu, which translated means "the long-nosed Taro of Torai (Hachinohe)." This appears to be a popular name such as might have been given to a foreigner by simple country folk. Taro is a very common Japanese first name and is often used to designate a first-born male child. In Japanese folklore, Tengu were fabulous beings with extremely big noses and with miraculous properties attributed to them.<sup>6</sup> Believers in the Herai legend are quick to point out that since Christ reportedly travelled and preached from place to place in Japan, folklore associated with the red-faced, long-nosed Tengu (see the Tengu folk mask on the cover of this journal) is another affirmation of his visit.

Following the myth further, Jesus married Miyuko, a Japanese lady, raised three daughters, and lived in Herai to the age of 118, when he died in the eleventh year of the reign of Keiko. His first daughter married Mr. Sawaguchi of Herai; the second daughter, Mr. Kaimori of Togocho; and the third, Mr. Noguchi of Nishogoshi.

According to Yamane, the descendants of this Christ were known by the villagers throughout the centuries as the Miko no Ato (Descendants of the August Ones), and also as having carried this honorific title as their clan name until the beginning of the twentieth century when the present surviving descendant's name was registered by his father as Sawaguchi Sanjiro. To give substance to this story, Yamane emphasizes what she calls decidedly non-Japanese features in the face of farmer Sawaguchi (see figure 4). She describes this man and

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<sup>6</sup>There is a prodigious literature in Japanese, by individual scholars, in prefectural and *gun* collections, and in the bulletins of the folklore society of Japan on Tengu, and particularly about the Yama-no-kami and the Yamabushi, the sprites of the mountains. The only study in English with which I am familiar is M. W. de Visser, "The Tengu," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Vol. XXXVI (Yokohama, 1908), Part II, pp. 25-99. This excellent article surveys Japanese attitudes toward Tengu from the eighth century to the present. It would appear that during most of this period, Japanese have regarded them as fearsome spirits of the mountain and the forest, full of tricks, and apt to resort to incendiary action. They were as elusive as foxes, but they were very powerful—even the great military lords feared them. They were inveterate enemies of Buddhism, always haughty towards priests in order to discredit the Buddha's law. In the nineteenth century the Tengu became gods of the forest to whom offerings were made. If woodcutters neglected to pay them homage they often met with all kinds of accidents, even calamities. On the other hand, these elusive Tengu gave success to hunters who gave them food and fish. Except obliquely I see no connection between Tengu folklore and Jesus Christ, nor even the properties of the Herai legend.



Figure 4. A 1952 photograph of Sawaguchi Sanjiro, who claims to be a direct descendant of Christ.

his fellow villagers as steadfastly maintaining the veracity of the Herai tradition, as illustrated through a number of ritualistic customs and observations which the villagers claim to have maintained for generations.

The first is the practice of the Sawaguchi people, the so-called descendants of Christ, to place the emblem of Judea, the six-pointed star of David over their doorways and the practice of sewing it on the back collar (of the *chanjanko*) of their children's coats. Another is the placing of red crosses on the foreheads of newborn infants. Although this latter custom has apparently completely disappeared in the area today, a very elderly native named Sasaki Kozo told me on February 24, 1969: "When I was a young boy, boys used to put a cross on their foreheads. I remember seeing young people with this mark on their foreheads. It was a custom that when a baby boy was one year old they put the cross on the forehead the first time they took them out of the house."

The extent to which the "Christ in Japan" group has gone to substantiate its claims is suggested in the announcement of the late Eiji Kawamorita, a theologian of Seattle, Washington, that the *bon* song (of the annual lantern festival) used in Herai is not Japanese, but rather Hebrew. He claims that the chant used by the local people, goes as follows: "Haniyado-yaroyo . . . Naniyadonaa . . . Saaredaadesai . . . Naniyadoyaro-yo," and that translated this really means: "Hallowed be Thy Name."<sup>7</sup>

Following the publication of Yamane's book, Japanese and English language newspapers and periodicals in Japan picked up this story and gave it sporadic play. One such article, prepared by an *Asahi* staff-writer, Richard Iwatate, appeared in illustrated form under the title of "Did Jesus Christ Die in Japan?" in the October 1939 issue of the *Orient*. In this article, Iwatate describes the Herai villagers as "fervently" insisting that their legend was founded on truthful facts and that the two graves contained the remains of Christ and the ashes of his mother, Mary. Iwatate further states that, steadfast in their faith, the villagers had invited numerous archaeologists, historians, and philologists to search for scientific evidence and to conduct a thorough investigation of Herai. However, little has been heard since then concerning

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<sup>7</sup>*Shingo*, p. 50.

tangible scientific investigations or discoveries having been made at the controversial site. But the story has not died out in course of time; instead, it slumbered in the suppressed and skeptical interest of those who had heard of it.

On December 24, 1952, the *Nippon Times* revived the story in a lengthy article supported by illustrations and prepared by its senior English-language reporter, Kiyooki Murata. Mr. Murata appears to have personally made a visit to Herai after his interest had been aroused by the endeavors of a Seventh Day Adventist, a Mr. Shikiss of Tokyo, who had sought to inaugurate a decisive study of the Herai legend in an effort to uncover the source of the myth. But the sensitive nature of such an investigation (particularly when conducted by a Christian missionary), the unwelcomed publicity attached to it, and the crude and tactless manner in which the *Nippon Times* wrote its story and published it on Christmas Eve, induced Shikiss to abandon his former interest in this legend. Murata's story corresponds in substance with the thesis propounded by Yamane and to the coverage given to it by Iwatate in 1939. However, on one major issue Murata seems to differ from his predecessors. After observing that the Sawaguchis live together as one household unit comprising three generations, which include two branch families and the immediate nuclear family headed by Sanjiro as the household head, Murata points out that this farmer regards himself as a Buddhist in spite of the difference existing between his mode of worship and that of the average Buddhist sects. Moreover, Murata quotes Sanjiro as saying that prior to the interferences of the Yamane group, he had not known of the "Christ in Herai" story, although many of the expressions of his faith are more akin to those propounded in the Bible than elsewhere. This farmer also concedes that the two graves had for a long time been associated with his family and that he and his ancestors had obeyed instructions handed down through the generations to "take good care of the tombs because they were the graves of important people."

My first newspaper acquaintance with the Herai legend came through an article which appeared in the *Fremont Times* of California on July 7, 1965. The headline reads "Japan Mystery Graves—Lost Line with Religion? Old Papers List Strange Clues, Puzzle Experts." Though garbled and inaccurate in

places, the report raises a number of provocative questions. The writer, Erle Howery, doubts that the story is a complete hoax. No one has yet capitalized on it, and the story has been circulated despite government opposition. As a legend, it has several interesting aspects: Recent so-called discoveries pertinent to Christian history tell us that Peter became enraged when Judas betrayed Christ, and smote him with his sword. In his anger, Peter almost missed, but cut off Iscariot's ear and a lock of hair. This idea has survived in the Herai story that a lock of Christ's hair has been preserved in one of the graves.<sup>8</sup> The writer further argues that it is not impossible that Christ could have actually visited Japan in his youth. Partial translations of Dead Sea scrolls indicate he may have spent a number of his younger, unchronicled years in an unspecified Asiatic country.<sup>9</sup> Father Gerhard Huber, a Franciscan linguist, author and missionary to Japan for thirty years, thinks the answers may be linked up with the Ainu—the mysterious white people who occupied Japan before their race was decimated by invading ancestors of the present-day Japanese. But as Howery concludes, it is significant that not a single present-day occupant of Herai professes to be a Christian.

#### EVALUATION OF THE HERAI LEGEND

Contemporary students of Japanese affairs react differently to this story, but the majority deny the authenticity of any of the proofs introduced by the Yamane circle. Some scholars categorically refuse to discuss it. Of course no true Christian can believe that Christ was buried in Japan. This is out of the question. But regarding the claim that Jesus made an appearance in Japan some time after his ministry ended in Judea, I would like to suggest three possible interpretations or lines of approach.

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<sup>8</sup>Professor Russell Horiuchi of Brigham Young University has observed that the idea of enshrining a loved one's hair, handkerchief, or some other part of the body is customary in Japan when the entire body is not available. For example, when young men have been killed in battle it is not extraordinary to bury them symbolically simply by interring a personal memento. Therefore, in accordance with this venerable traditional custom, the grave of Christ could be thought of as a symbolic effort to show respect for someone whose death has been reported. It does not necessarily mean that the physical body of Christ must be in the Herai grave in order for the Japanese to believe that he is buried there.

<sup>9</sup>This thesis is fully developed by Rev. Dr. Charles Francis Potter, *The Lost Years of Jesus Revealed* (New York: A Crest Reprint by Fawcett World Library, 1962). See also Hugh W. Nibley, "Early Accounts of Jesus' Childhood," *The Instructor* (January, 1965), pp. 35-37.

From the vantage point of the scriptures, the Lord *could have* made a visit to the inhabitants of the Japanese islands, and for that matter, to other peoples of Asia as well. During his earthly ministry Jesus frequently reassured the Jews that he was the Good Shepherd, always mindful of his sheep, and known of them. He explained that he had other sheep not of their fold whom he would visit (see John 10:14-16). This promise was fulfilled when the resurrected Messiah appeared on the American continent as recorded in the Book of Mormon (see 3 Nephi 15:21). But while still among the Nephites, Jesus made a further promise that he would also visit other tribes of the house of Israel, neither of the land of Jerusalem nor of the land of the Nephites, whom the Father had led away. He had been commanded of the Father to administer to the needs of these sheep, and they would hear his voice. Eventually they also would be numbered among the true fold, and ultimately gathered from the four quarters of the earth. Then would the great covenant with Israel be consummated.

And verily, verily, I say unto you that I have other sheep which are not of this land, neither of the land of Jerusalem, neither in any parts of that land round about whither I have been to minister.

For they of whom I speak are they who have not as yet heard my voice; neither have I at any time manifested myself unto them.

But I have received a commandment of the Father that I shall go unto them, and that they shall hear my voice and shall be numbered among my sheep, that there may be one fold and one shepherd; therefore I go to show myself unto them.

And I command you that ye shall write these sayings after I am gone, that if it so be that my people at Jerusalem, they who have seen me and been with me in my ministry, do not ask the Father in my name, that they may receive a knowledge of you by the Holy Ghost, and also of the other tribes whom they know not of, that these sayings which ye shall write shall be kept and shall be manifested unto the Gentiles, that through the fulness of the Gentiles, the remnant of their seed, who shall be scattered forth upon the face of the earth because of their unbelief, may be brought in, or may be brought to a knowledge of me, their Redeemer.

And then will I gather them in from the four quarters of the earth; and then will I fulfill the covenant which the Father hath made unto all the people of the house of Israel. (3 Nephi 16:1-5)

These prophecies lend meaning to the words of Zenos concerning events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ, the God and Shepherd of Israel. For the prophet declared that three days of darkness would be a sign of the Lord's death, particularly to those of the house of Israel living upon the isles of the sea. And after the crucifixion

. . . . The Lord God surely shall visit all the house of Israel at that day, some with his voice, because of their righteousness, unto their great joy and salvation, and others with the thunderings and the lightnings of his power, by tempest, by fire, and by smoke, and vapor of darkness, and by the opening of the earth, and by mountains which shall be carried up.

And all these things must surely come, saith the prophet Zenos. And the rocks of the earth must rend; and because of the groanings of the earth, many of the kings of the isles of the sea shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers. (1 Nephi 19:11-12.)

In his great parable of the olive tree, Zenos describes the visit of the Christ to the branches of Israel transplanted in "the nethermost parts of my vineyard." After discussing the work in connection with the main trunk of the "tame olive tree" (Israel), he describes the Lord's visit to the other branches:

And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Come, let us go to the nethermost part of the vineyard, and behold if the natural branches of the tree have not brought forth much fruit also, that I may lay up of the fruit thereof against the season, unto mine own self.

. . . and he beheld the first that it had brought forth much fruit; and he beheld also that it was good. And he said unto the servant: Take of the fruit thereof, and lay it up against the season, that I may preserve it unto mine own self; for behold, said he, this long time have I nourished it, and it hath brought forth much fruit.

And it came to pass that the servant said unto his master: How comest thou hither to plant this tree, or this branch of the tree? For behold, it was the poorest spot in all the land of the vineyard. (Jacob 5:19-21.)

The Lord's encompassing regard for the welfare of the human family is evident in the predictions of Nephi that Jesus would speak not only to the Jews and Nephites, but to all other tribes of Israel in all the nations of the earth. A significant feature of this prophecy, which follows, is that various peoples

have been expected to record the Lord's sayings to them so that they may be judged out of that which is written:

Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth? . . .

Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written.

For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; *and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.* (2 Nephi 29:7, 10-12 Italics added.)

Another vital consideration in the question of Judeo-Christian influence in formative Japan, one which may provide a key to the meaning of the Herai story, rests on the fact that the Japanese are of mixed ancestry. The accessibility of the Japanese archipelago by sea permits them to have come from widely separated geographic regions. A strong strain of immigrants has come from the northern parts of the Asian mainland and another major strain, perhaps less dominant, has come from the coastal regions of southeast Asia and from Polynesia in the Pacific.<sup>10</sup>

According to current archaeological findings, the earliest known immigrants to the islands included the enigmatic Ainu (anciently called Ezo), a Caucasian people today surviving only in small numbers in the northern island of Hokkaido, in

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<sup>10</sup>Isao Komatsu, *The Japanese People: Origins of the People and Language* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1962), contains a concise anthropological discussion of early proto-historical sculpture, weapons, pottery, and anatomical specimens, particularly of the so-called Jomon and Yayoi periods. See also George Sansom's *A History of Japan to 1334*, (Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 12, 91.

Sakhalin, and in the Kuriles. They have light skin color, thin lips, wavy hair, heavy body hair, etc. There is really no way of knowing what they originally believed, but surviving beliefs are saturated with concern for the power of the spirits, and their society has been regulated by taboos and rites of purification.<sup>11</sup> Originally these Ainu were a tribal, food-gathering people. Before 1854 the mainstream Japanese (Yamato) culture had little effect upon them, but thereafter a government policy of assimilation greatly changed them so that today "pureblooded" Ainu are practically extinct.<sup>12</sup>

In saying that Japan is an amalgam of races and cultures and that at least minor strains of influence have derived from the far reaches of the Pacific, we are reminded of Hagoth and other seafaring explorers who set out from the shores of the American continent towards the Pacific and were "never heard of more" (Alma 63:5-8). In substantiating the theory behind his famous Kon-Tiki expedition, Thor Heyerdahl, Norwegian anthropologist, presents an array of evidence in his *American Indians in the Pacific*<sup>13</sup> to show that early voyages into the Pacific have had a predominant tendency to take a western course from America, and these historic expeditions have reached southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. No doubt some of these were descendants of Israel who carried memories of the gospel, knowledge of the Lord's sacred promises to Abraham and Jacob, and an awareness of the divine mission of Jesus Christ—themes broadly diffused among the inhabitants of Bible and Book of Mormon lands. There should be no question that in addition to the mainstream dispersion of Israel across the land masses of Asia (suggested by vestigial communities in the Tarim Basin and at Kaifeng in China),<sup>14</sup> and reaching out as far as the islands of Japan, other remnants of Israel reached the vital waterways of northeast Asia via the American continent. All of this seems clearly to have been a part of the plan of the great Jehovah, as affirmed by Jacob:

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<sup>11</sup>Neil G. Munro, *Ainu Creed and Cult* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), *passim*.

<sup>12</sup>Yamato-Japanese contacts with the Ainu were slow in developing, but these are carefully considered in John A. Harrison's translation of Ainu Seisaku Shi in *The Ainu of Northern Japan*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, April, 1960.

<sup>13</sup>Thor Heyerdahl, *American Indians in the Pacific* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1952).

<sup>14</sup>These communities are discussed in a section entitled "Israel in Asia" in a forthcoming monograph.

. . . great are the promises of the Lord unto them who are upon the isles of the sea; wherefore as it says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren.

For behold, the Lord God has led away from time to time from the house of Israel, according to his will and pleasure. And now behold, the Lord remembereth all them who have been broken off . . . (2 Nephi 10:21-22.)

Unquestionably the Lord's ancient command that the house of Israel be sifted among all nations (see Amos 9:9) has reached historic fulfillment. Japan is a model example of that fact, a place where the descendants of Abraham and Jacob have combined with other mainstream ethnic groups to make up the Japanese race as we know it today. The Japanese therefore are rightful heirs of the covenants and promises belonging to Israel. Thus it is possible that the Herai story, despite its several fantastic and extremely unlikely claims—some of which are absolutely impossible and others of which can be easily dismissed—could nonetheless represent an historical fact: that servants of the Lord have landed by ocean craft in ancient Japan. One such group could certainly have drifted or have been led away to Japanese shores at Hachinohe, as the legend claims. They could have been Jews, Nephites, Lamanites, or even of the tribe of Dan, as some Japanese have preferred to believe. Tengu legends of big-nosed, ruddy-skinned strangers having suddenly appeared among the natives of ancient Japan, the continuing use of the star of David on clothing at Herai village, the placing of a cross on the forehead of newborn babies, and perhaps even the alleged Hebraic influence upon local folk music—all can be thought of as curious anomalies lending weight to such a claim. And, of course, the Sawaguchis, the Ainu, and many others as well, are living reminders of settlers from far-flung places.

Even the most cursory inquiry into the Herai story must take into account its historical background. In so doing, we reach a third basic interpretation, one which takes the guesswork out of certain claims and puts everything else into much clearer perspective. First, in a careful reading of this legend it is obvious that the ideals of Christ are really presented as a Judaized version of Shinto in which Jesus is depicted as a student of things Japanese. He becomes the disciple-exponent of a grand imperial tradition.

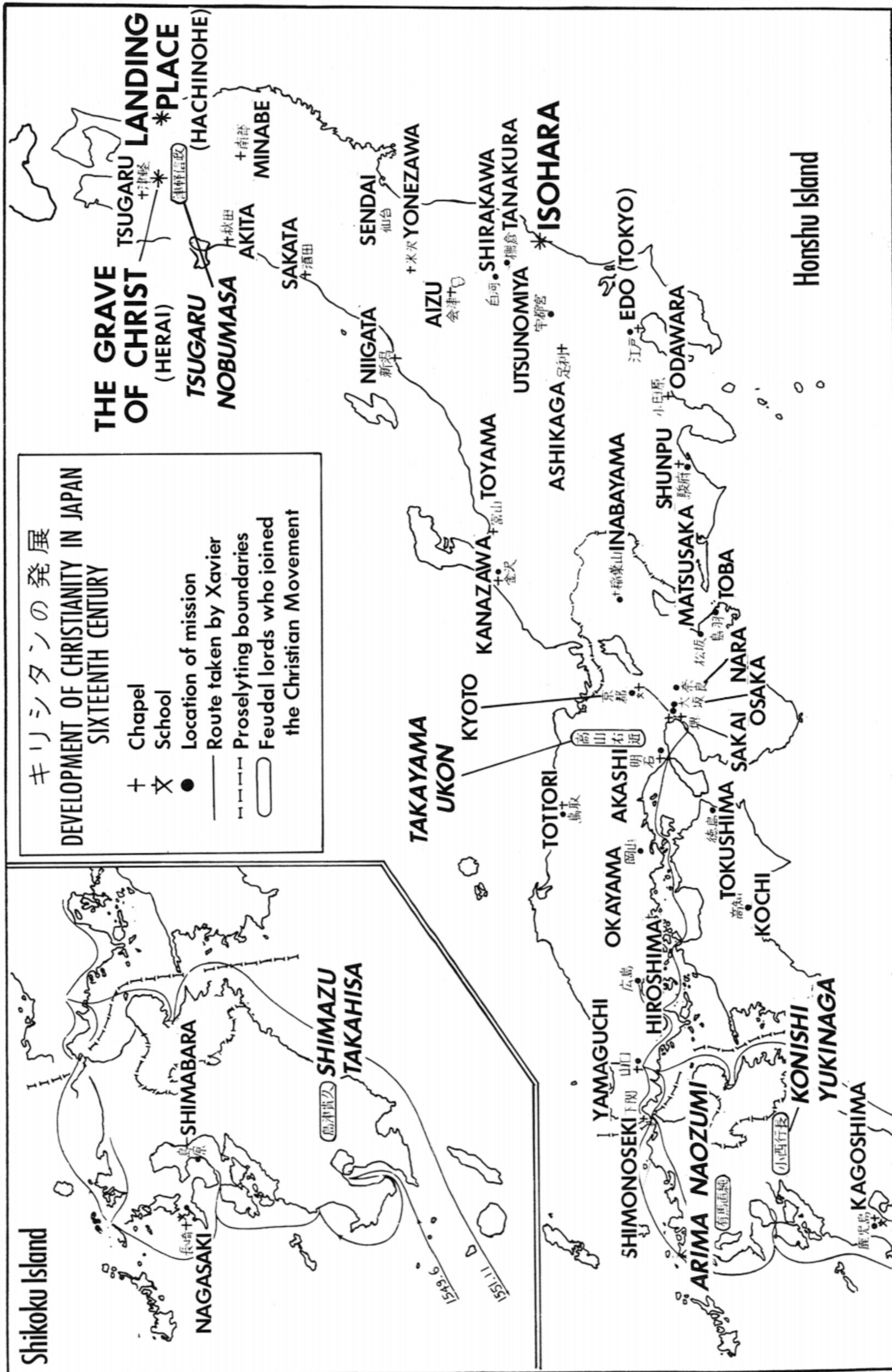
Shinto, the Way of the Gods, is the primitive religion of Japan. It has been followed by Japanese from times of remote antiquity, dating back to the so-called Age of the Gods. Amaterasu, the mystical Sun Goddess, was worshipped as the first imperial ancestor of the Yamato people, and as such, she has been regarded as the founder of all Japanese, the Imperial clan being the principal family.

The introduction of Christianity during the sixteenth century under Francis Xavier and associates was viewed with toleration and curiosity at first. Wide-ranging missionary labors resulted in the "conversion" of considerable numbers of prominent feudal lords (*Daimyo*) and the establishment of mission schools and churches throughout Shikoku and Honshu (see map, Page 152). The northeast provinces, including the areas adjoining Herai, were far removed from the main centers of influence. However, the ubiquitous Franciscan, Diego de San Francisco, who regularly traveled throughout Japan disguised as a samurai, claimed that there were 26,000 Christians in the northeast provinces in 1629, whereas there had been less than 100 converts 15 years previously. He made a dangerous trip to Sendai to reassure local Christians in 1627. He also complained of the uncooperative attitude of the Jesuits towards the Franciscans in Nagasaki and Kyushu, and the Franciscans transferred most of their efforts to the less-cultivated but more promising mission fields in the northeast.<sup>15</sup>

The period of toleration was soon followed by a harsh repressive reaction after Christianity had become the scapegoat for contemporary power struggles and political intrigues. Looking upon foreign intrusion with jealous hostility, Shinto priests and Buddhist monks were endeavoring to guide public opinion and political authority against this alien faith. The insurrection at Shimabara in 1638 convinced the Tokugawa military government that the potential threat to state hegemony was lurking in this new religion and led it to embark upon a policy of ruthless suppression. The resultant persecutions reached a frenzied intensity during Tokugawa Iyemitsu's attempts to exterminate completely all vestiges of Christianity from every nook of his realm.<sup>16</sup> Arrests, confiscations, deportations, tor-

<sup>15</sup>C. R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), pp. 358-359.

<sup>16</sup>Masaharu Anesaki, "Prosecution of Kirishitans after the Shimabara Insurrection," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 1-2 (1938), pp. 276-283.



tures, forced confessions, and coerced apostacies became the order of the day for any known Christian who did not voluntarily deny his faith. Although there were many martyred victims of this hunt, there were also those who chose the easier road and recanted. The official journal, *Kirishito-ki*, which gives a detailed record of these investigations and of all confessions made, lists the names of two foreign priests who had apostatized and had then entered the service of the Inquisition Office.<sup>17</sup> It was common for such recantors to adopt Japanese names and to take to themselves Japanese wives. The latter practice, in fact, was prescribed to them by the authorities as a test of their sincerity. It was a government policy to discredit the Christians and their religion wherever and whenever possible. With this in mind, participation of private interests in the anti-Christian campaign was encouraged. As a result, many deliberately created falsifications, fantastic "confessions," allegations, forged protestations, and conveniently distorted legends were picked up and widely circulated among the populace. These instruments of deception had one common purpose: discrediting the Christian faith and its members while at the same time encouraging a Japanization wherever feasible.

Notwithstanding the severity of the anti-Christian edicts, Japanese annals bear witness to the fact that Christianity was not entirely rooted out. It continued to be practiced stealthily in remote districts by converts and their families who had resorted to ingenious frauds in order to avoid official persecution. The substance of such frauds was found in an external modification of their faith: assuming local native customs and practices, such as making small statuettes of the Madonna to resemble the Buddhist divinity Avalokitesvara (Kwannon), or the hiding of a crucifix and other Christian emblems inside a god shelf (Kamidana).<sup>18</sup> With the gradual lifting of repressive edicts, as the Tokugawa regime began to totter, thousands of believers were found in the south, mostly centered around Nagasaki, who for seven or eight generations had preserved in secret the faith of their forefathers. Deprived of clerical

<sup>17</sup>Anesaki, *History* . . . pp. 252-253. The two clerics in question are Ferriere and Guiseppe Chiara. The latter assumed the Japanese name Okamoto Saniemon and died in 1685 after having taken a Japanese wife. The *Kirishito-ki* is only one of the many similar records kept by the government. It lists arrests, confessions, names of all apostates, and brief commentaries and statements of Kirishitan doctrine.

<sup>18</sup>George Sansom, *A Short Cultural History of Japan* (New York, 1943), p. 449.

guidance and left entirely to themselves, these simple folk, mostly farmers and fishermen, had absorbed in the course of time indigenous elements into the body of their faith. As Latin and Portuguese words and names lost their meaning, new interpretations appeared which in their own time were distorted by the use of unwieldy Japanese scripts. The substance of the doctrine was kept alive by word of mouth, and in the course of repetitious retelling, it underwent a thorough mutilation. The ensuing conglomeration of Christian, Buddhist, and Shinto elements, and local folklore, resulted often enough in such pathetic distortions that the original tenet became utterly unrecognizable. Such Japanized and popularized sects of Christians have survived to this day in the so-called Kirishitan buraku (villages) of South Honshu and Kyushu islands.

An interesting study of one of these Kirishitan communities is one on the Kurosaki buraku conducted in 1935 by Professor Tagita Koya of Nanzan University of Nagoya. As a rule, these pseudo-Christians are extremely reticent and wary on matters pertaining to their faith. After winning their confidence, however, Tagita was allowed to make a full copy of their version of the Bible, the "Tenchi Najimari no Koto," which appears to be a crude though well-intentioned Japanization of the *Doctrina Christam* published by the Jesuits in 1600 as a guide to native converts. The Kurosaki "Bible" in essence is a digest of the story of creation and of some of Christ's sermons. In it, God is identified with the Confucian concept of Tenchi, that of "Lord of Heaven and Earth," and is concurrently referred to as Ikibotoko or "Free, Independent, Living Buddha." The identification of the soul of mankind with the Moon, and the identification of Lucifer with the "God of Thunder" as personified by Izanagi (the father of the Sun Goddess), indicate the presence of Shinto influences as well.<sup>19</sup>

In the late nineteenth century a sweeping nationalistic reaction against the influx of Western ideas began to assert itself in Japan. Pioneered by young Buddhists and Shintoists, this resentment had by 1880 penetrated into every area of Japanese thought and life. Proponents of this "anti-foreignism" were closely affiliated with a Shinto cult as propagated a century

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<sup>19</sup>Tagita Koya conducted a thorough study of Kirishitan communities throughout Japan. His findings were published in 1954 in a book titled: *Showajidai no sempuku Kirishitan* (Hidden Christians of the Showa Period), Tokyo: Nihon gakujutsu shinko-kai.

earlier by men like the Inari priests, Kada, Mabuchi Kamo, Motoori Norinaga, and Hirata Atsutane, all of whom had preached the ideal of a return to the original purity of Shinto as it had been practiced in the mythical "Age of the Gods." Native chronicles, notably the Kojiki and Nihongi, were bibliofied as heavenly ordained guides to the "pure Japanese life" as it should be led under the dominion of theocratic rule which could trace the line of Japanese emperors back to the all-illuminating Sun Goddess. The cry of these die-hards became "Sonno-Joi" or "Revere the Emperor and Eject the Barbarians."<sup>20</sup> On the purely religious side, this clamour for the ousting of Western influence was directed against Christianity as a whole, at first for its complete suppression, and when that failed, for its systematic Japanization.

Associated with this Shinto revivalism of the late Tokugawa period was the promotion of *Jindai Moji*, a mode of writing allegedly used in the "Age of the Gods." First mentioned in the Shoku Nihongi, it has been much discussed by such notable writers as Arai Kakuseki, Teinin Shiyaku, Hirata Atsutane, Tsurumine Boshin, Uchiai Masumi and Okuni Ryusei, all of whom have sought to prove, by means of these writings, the existence of chronicles written by the gods themselves, even before Chinese writing was brought to Japan. *Jindai Moji* writings have been a popular pastime in Japan for nearly a century, and have generally been discredited by Japanese savants as total forgeries. If there were even a modicum of validity associable with *Jindai Moji*, such Japanese, no doubt, would be the first to legitimize them in order to demonstrate that they already had their own form of written language prior to the introduction of Chinese.

In the decades preceding the publication of Yamane's first book (1937), Japan was beginning to seethe with its own version of Manifest Destiny. The reluctance of the Western Powers to modify the Unequal Treaties, the humiliations sustained after Japanese victories over China in 1895 and Russia in 1905, and an ever-growing Japanese-Western scramble for concessions and privileges in Asia, as well as the later American exclusion laws against Asiatics, deeply provoked the sensitivity and pride of the Japanese. This nationalistic trend manifested itself in an intensified suspicion and resentment of Western

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<sup>20</sup>For a list of such organizations, see Anasaki Masaharu, *Ibid.*, p. 360.

Christianity. As the turbulent twentieth century progressed, the pressure of an Asiatic consciousness upon the teachings of Christ became an important force within the indigenous Christian movement, and a Japanese interpretation of Christianity began to develop.<sup>21</sup> It was expressed in a systematic endeavor to emancipate the Japanese Christian churches from outside influences and to place them under complete native control. Many reasonable Japanese Christians desired eagerly to "restore" Christianity to an Oriental consciousness for, as they argued, had Christ himself not been an Oriental? In their eyes, it was the Occidental civilization which was not entirely Christian and therefore, it was the duty of Japanese Christianity to develop a superior theology to which European Christians in the future would be able to look for guidance and support. Japan became to them the focal spot on which world problems of Christianity were gradually to be solved.<sup>22</sup> The rise to power of ultranationalist interests (those very same which had consciously or unconsciously tried to pervert Japanese Christianity) was followed by a line of fanatics and self-appointed messiahs, directing an avalanche of missives at the public and exhorting them to arise and follow the road of Armageddon, which would lead their nation back to the glory for which it was destined by the gods. Their attacks were frequently directed against all that was non-Japanese in Christianity. Pushing aside the liberal and well-intentioned elements within the Japanese Christian movements, they sought to pervert it to the extreme by insisting that the purity of Shinto was anterior to the appearance of Christ, and that Christ's message to mankind was nothing but the Judaization of the older and purer Way of the Gods of Japan. When viewed in the light of this background, the strange story of Christ at Herai becomes more understandable. Reduced to its proper proportions and divested of some of its "mystery," it assumes the negligible role of one more manifestation of a general trend of chauvinistic perversion.

Bizarre rumors have persisted that there are Hebrew characters engraved on the back of the sacred mirror of the Sun Goddess at the Grand Shrine at Ise. This was allegedly first revealed in the early part of the Meiji era by Minister of Education Yurei Mori. He was said to have been a man versed in five foreign languages, including Hebrew. After inspecting the

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<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 365-370.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 374.

sacred mirror, he declared the characters on it definitely Hebrew. But out of this came tragedy when an enraged nephew of the chief priest of the Shrine stabbed Yurei Mori to death at his home. A Japanese student of Hebrew affairs has reportedly concluded that this sacred mirror, the most important Imperial treasure in the accession of the Japanese emperors as a material evidence for the preservation of their throne, is an article of Jewish origin brought over to Japan or that the ancient emperors of Japan, being of Jewish blood, had the characters of their mother tongue engraved in the islands of Japan.

But in understandable reply, Mrs. Yamane has written a new book in which this strange report of Jewish origins for the Japanese Imperial Family is no longer a mystery wrapped in an enigma.<sup>23</sup> For "the truth" is that Japanese Emperor Takamimusubi, the tenth in line from "the real" first and founding Emperor, created a new series of "Hi-Fu" characters and gave them to the Hebrew people as a gift. She further declares that the Hebrew language originated amazingly in Japan, mother country of the world and hearthstone of civilization. This is all revealed in the 2,400 different kinds of ancient characters inscribed on sacred stones stored away at the new "Imperial Ancestor's Grand Shrine" (Koso Ko Taijingu) at Isohara. Originating from the "true" Age of the Gods, these writings are prototypes of all characters and writings known to modern man.

Surely there must be authentic, unretrieved records of antiquity stored away in the lands of Asia containing information on the origins of the people, but in all the mystification associated with the *Jindai Moji* stone inscriptions kept by the Isohara family of Japan, I have yet to see one that has borne up under scrutiny. The one illustrated in this study, which was represented to me as a relic of ancient times, is plainly no more than

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<sup>23</sup>It is titled *Sekai no seishi* (Authentic History of the World), "as secreted long ago in Tokyo, Japan," 1964. Copies of this completely unrestrained tome were inscribed and distributed among participants of the Tokyo Olympics. Among other claims, Yamane pictures a Japanese chrysanthemum on the upper facade of Herod's gate in Jerusalem, which is a reminder that the Messiah "shall one day come riding a white horse from the country of 'Mizuraho'," i.e., Japan. Jesus is portrayed alongside inscriptions carved in wood blocks of his creation, now in the possession of the Takenouchi family. Beside a portrait of Jesus Christ as King of Israel this explanatory note is found: "Before his departure for his native land from his first stay in Japan, Jesus Christ was appointed king of the Jewish people and was conferred the Seal of Kingship by Emperor Suinin."

a quaint specimen of the Korean *onmun* script which could date no earlier than the mid-fifteenth century, when Korea's King Sejong first devised that system of writing.

In summary then, what can be said of the Herai myth? Certainly it would be fascinating to learn the identity of the foreigner who introduced Christianity to the community centuries ago. Was Christ that mysterious foreigner, as the legend claims? Some speculate that he was, but I think the evidence (or the lack of it) precludes that interpretation. Did the foreigner come by boat? Was he of the dispersed of Judah or Israel? This is an interesting possibility since children of Israel have no doubt migrated and settled in Japan, and their blood is a component of the Japanese race today. Was he a Catholic priest or missionary? Was he from a shipwrecked vessel? When did he land there? Or, were the founders of Herai village members of a Japanese Christian community who fled from the south to Aomori during the time of the persecution, and one which had been deprived for many generations of leadership, even to the extent that the village master, a layman, filled the void as suggested by the prayer tablets found in the Kaikura Shrine?

In any event, basic answers to the mystery no doubt lie somewhere along this line of investigation. The sources of the Herai legend, if not entirely the product of forgers of the twentieth century, may have predated the arrival of the first Catholic missionaries in the sixteenth century (the scriptures certainly allow that possibility). Yet the general outline of the legend and some carried-over customs as practiced in Herai today make this highly unlikely. Perhaps the most meaningful thing that can be said about the Herai legend is that it may be unique only to the extent that it has today assumed such fantastic proportions. Otherwise, it should be regarded as another example of the struggle of Japanese nativists to preserve the "Way of the Gods" from external assault.