

## SENDAI AND THE DATE CLAN: A REALITY BEHIND KEICHÔ EMBASSY

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**Abstract:** During the still recent four hundredth anniversary of Spanish-Japanese diplomatic relationships, the Keichô Embassy has been promoted almost as a linking event between the two brotherly countries. However, the Japanese's alleged interest in embracing Christianity hid a series of political motivations which had little or nothing to do with a spiritual approach. In this article, we will explain who was Date Masamune, the last promoter of that diplomatic mission, and to what ambitious plans he tried to aspire by sponsoring it.

**Key words:** Diplomatic relationships, Date Masamune, *Tozama*, Christianity, attempted coup.

## SENDAI Y EL CLAN DATE: LA REALIDAD TRAS LA EMBAJADA KEICHÔ

**Resumen:** Durante el aún reciente cuatrocientos aniversario de las relaciones hispano-japonesas la *Embajada Keichô* se ha promocionado casi como un evento de hermandad que enlaza dos países hermanos. No obstante, el presunto interés de los japoneses por abrazar la cristiandad escondía una serie de motivaciones políticas poco o nada relacionadas con lo espiritual. En el presente artículo explicaremos quién fue Date Masamune, impulsor último de aquella misión diplomática, y a qué ambiciosos planes pretendía aspirar patrocinándola.

**Palabras Clave:** Relaciones diplomáticas, Date Masamune, *Tozama*, Cristianismo, intento de golpe de Estado.

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### 1. Introduction

The Keicho embassy four hundredth anniversary has been used as a special event to commemorate the beginning of diplomatic relations between Spain and Japan although they already had a formal contact through the Philippines government some decades before. Highlighting this fact, we could pick out what is behind this transoceanic travel that “mortgaged many lives for nothing”. For that reason, we are interested in targeting the unclear historiographic truth from an incomplete story, always helping the alleged compromise, almost mystic, between two nations located on each side of the world, but also harmonized with each other, instead of being discussed as what it really is: a step forward to diplomatic, tourist and trading interests.

Thus, why can't we take as a reference this fleet's travel as the first diplomatic relations between the two countries rather than the Father Juan Cobo's meeting with Taico Hideyoshi Toyotomi? What happened when Sir Rodrigo de Vivero y Velasco visited the island? Or the cartographical measurements done in Japan by Sebastian Vizcaíno?

There are some authors setting forth those first contacts as full of tension but also, other authors are pointing out that Spanish first expeditions were not taken into consideration by Japanese authorities, denying a mutual- balanced diplomacy between the two nations. For our interest, to fleet a ship with a crew of 200 people with the aim to establish a friendship with the Spanish king or the Pope would have had without any doubt a more symbolic than real connotation, in other words, Cathartic.

In any case, we believe that almost nothing had happened in Asia could be a risk for the Metropolis, and only when the Japanese showed some interest coming to Spain, the local leaders activated the mechanisms to address the situation as required.

### 2. Date Masamune historiography

Beyond the acrimonious discussions trying to chronicle the Hasekura Odyssey in a detailed way, from those, very few have deepened into the real sponsor motivations. We are neither talking about the Shôgun Hidetada nor his retired father called Ieyasu Tokugawa, we talk about the powerful daimyô from the eastern island. He was

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uncommonly interested in Christianity and all belic, commercial and technologic benefits around it. The Date Masamune character has not properly been described in the numerous academic works that we can find throughout the world dealing with the Keichô embassy. Nevertheless, this fact doesn't necessarily imply a negligence; it is difficult to imagine how such a dense work *Historia de un desencuentro, España y Japón, 1580-1614* written by professor Emilio Sola<sup>2</sup> could have inferred in a case like this. Something similar happens with *Hidalgos y Samurais*<sup>3</sup> by Juan Gil and also Antonio Cabezas work titled *Siglo Ibérico en Japón*<sup>4</sup>, in which, despite some heterodox opinions, he always tried to judge the character roles that formed the third *bakufu*<sup>5</sup>, but omitting Masamune.

Another literary works are just lost in simple anecdotes, either in almost onomastic studies such as *El legado humano de la misión Hasekura*, where the researcher Ana Gallego deals with the origin of the Spanish surname: Japan<sup>6</sup>, or *La misión Keichô (1613-1620): Cipango en Europa: una embajada japonesa en la Sevilla del siglo XVII* (a Japanese embassy in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Seville) it is presented as a local chronicle leaving no doubts why the author Marcos Fernández<sup>7</sup> chose that title for this piece of work. A very different case is presented by Victor Valencia Japón, a direct descendant from those Asian expeditionaries who finally settled in Coria, he is also the author of an extended chapter called *Notas adicionales sobre la embajada enviada a Europa por Date Masamune*<sup>8</sup>. From all written in Spanish language, this one might be the work that best points out the Japanese delegation context, though, with some gaps we will try to solve in this present work.

Revising the Anglo-Saxon historiography, we cannot obtain too much information about this topic since it tries to maintain a negative tendency towards Hispanic studies in Asia, despising them. Reference studies such as the *Christian century in Japan* by Charles Boxer<sup>9</sup> or *Deus destroyed, the image of Christianity in early modern Japan* by George Elison scarcely mention our topic, and even the 4th volume of the *Cambridge History of Japan: Early modern Japan*, without any doubt, it can be considered one of the most reliable works if we want to study this period, though, it reduces Masamune's role to a simple supporter of the Tokugawa clan against the Toyotomi's remains<sup>10</sup>. Only the German writer, Lothar Knauth, in his "valuable" piece of work: "Confrontación pacífica: el Japón y el nuevo mundo hispánico", he presents our main character as a real action man, competing in almost equal terms against Ieyasu for a new political hegemony after centuries of war<sup>11</sup>.

Albeit fleetingly presented, this tendency has been defined by some Japanese authors, such as professor Osami Takizawa in *La delegación diplomática enviada a*

<sup>2</sup> SOLA, E., *España y Japón: Historia de un desencuentro*, Madrid, 2012, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> GIL, J., *Hidalgos y Samurais*, Madrid, 1991, p. 268

<sup>4</sup> CABEZAS, A., *El siglo ibérico en Japón*, Valladolid, 1994, p. 137.

<sup>5</sup> Alternative reference to the Shogun followers. Literally means, "government behind the curtain", referring to the Ibaku (where strategist samurais hatched their war tactics during battle).

<sup>6</sup> <http://pweb.sophia.ac.jp/elenagallego/tesis/hasekura.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> FERNÁNDEZ, M., "La misión Keichô: Cipango en Europa", *Studia Histórica. Historia Moderna*, 20 (1999), pp. 269-296.

<sup>8</sup> VALENCIA, V., "Notas adicionales sobre la embajada enviada a Europa por Date Masamune", in SUÁREZ JAPÓN, J.M., (edit.), *Japones y japoneses a las orillas del Guadalquivir*, Sevilla, 2007, pp. 133-193.

<sup>9</sup> BOXER, R., *The Christian Century in Japan*, London, 1951, p. 137.

<sup>10</sup> WHITNEY, J., "The bakuhan system", in WHITNEY HALL (edit), *Vol IV Cambridge History of Japan. The early modern Japan*. Cambridge, 1991, pp. 128-182.

<sup>11</sup> KNAUTH, L., *Confrontación transpacificca. El Japón y el Nuevo Mundo Hispánico*, México D.F, 1972, p. 171.

*Roma por el señor feudal Date Masamune (1613-1620)*<sup>12</sup>, Oozumi Koichi in his work *Hasekura Rokuemon Tsunenaga: Keichō Ken o Shisetsu o meguru Gakusaiteki Kenkyō*<sup>13</sup> and they are surely some of the few Japanese authors dealing with Keichō's issue. On the contrary, Kiichi Matsuda, following his compatriot ideas, denies any kind of rivalry between the two militaries pointing out that Masamune gave more importance to his loyalty to the Shogun rather than his political interests.

In other words, each historiographic vertex has a different problem which curbs investigation; firstly, from the Spanish authors, we can find a lack of interest when there is no direct relationship with the "physical embassy travel"; secondly, British authors, on purpose, forget most political actions carried out by Spaniards in the Asian border. And finally, we can notice an inner conflict suffered by many Japanese writers that even at the end of the twentieth century, they ambiguously (in a greater or lesser extent) write about characters related with their Holy-Nationalism (of course, Date Masamune and Iesayu Tokugawa are part of this current; The second one in a more intense way than the first but both are part of this historic stage that set in its best the current Japanese citizen, that is, the Edo period<sup>14</sup>.

### 3. The Lord of Sendai

Just as the sophisticated Heian world disappeared, taking a back seat to the typical military dictatorship roughness, some followers of the first Shogun-Minamoto no Yoritomo received a territory called Date (in Mutsu) as a reward for their support during the Genpei wars (1180-1185). That knight called Tomomune, decided to use the manor's name as his own, and that is why Date's gentlemen were succeeding generation after generation until Masamune was born in 1567. He inherited the 16th daimyō clan. As it was common at that time, for the *buke*<sup>15</sup> education, his first learnings were the Buddhist sutras, the Confucian ideals, and the Bushido or the samurai code too. When he was 14, he fought supporting his father Terumune against the Soma family, whose members, were directly related with the Heike clan. They had a relevant role during the Namboku-cho wars (1334-1392) and a later period, Sengoku (1467-1615)<sup>16</sup>. Soon after his first combat, he got sick with smallpox. This fact was never forgotten by the inexperienced samurai who lost his right eye due to this illness. He was known by the nickname of *Dokuganryū* or one-eyed dragon.

Some years later, when he was 17, he became the leader of his manor after his father retired<sup>17</sup>. His first ever taken decision was to fight against the Ashina clan, which it accepted Ouchi Satsuna as a member when he deserted from Date clan. When Masamune broke the Otemori strong defence, where the official traitor was hidden, the young warrior sentenced to death to over 800 people from all ages. Facing a new demonstration of power and determination, the Daimyos from the nearest areas established some ceasefire with their powerful counterpart. After some cruel battleships such as Motomiya (1587), where Masamune and other 7000 men resisted the 30.000 men

<sup>12</sup> TAKIZAWA, O., "La delegación diplomática enviada a Roma por el señor feudal Date Masamune", *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 205 (2008), pp. 137-158.

<sup>13</sup> Koichi, 1999: 13.

<sup>14</sup> Alternative way to called Tokugawa Shogunate. In line with other historic periods it adopts the name of country's capital at that time as Edo, Tokyo, in our days.

<sup>15</sup> Military caste. Samurais.

<sup>16</sup> The Heike lose the Genpei War.

<sup>17</sup> TURNBULL, S., *Samurai Commanders (1577-1638)*, London, 2005, p. 52.

attack from Ashina<sup>18</sup>, Satake and Soma soldiers. In 1589, a short ceasefire was achieved. At this moment, Date gave a final blow against the Ashina clan, conquering the Aizu's daimiati and settling him down inside the unassailable Kurakawa fortress.

The rise of the "one eyed dragon" was not unnoticed by Hideyoshi Toyotomi who was very busy at that time trying to hold back *Late Hojo*<sup>19</sup> clan in Izu province as if leaving an unpredictable force without control. For this reason, he urged to Masamune to reduce his size domain moving it to his native Yonezawa, and therefore, limiting the 200.000 *kokus*<sup>20</sup> per year production.

Shortly after, the Hideyoshi expansionist eagerness made him to pay attention to China and Korea where many enemies that had recently been suppressed werw obliged to serve as members of the troop. Between them, we could find the *Tozama*<sup>21</sup>; they were brave warriors like Mori Terumoto, whose lineage directly came from the same Seiwa Genji<sup>22</sup>; Shimazu Yoshihino, from the always problematic region of Satsuma<sup>23</sup>; and from July 1593, Date Masamune<sup>24</sup> who, along with some of his generals, (they) played an important role to the military engineer commanded by korean admiral's Yi Sun Sin<sup>25</sup>. Initially, the so called Injim wars might be a nonsense act against the most powerful asian nation at that time: China Ming (Korean protective), but Toyotomi got something essential with this manoeuvre; that is, he distracted a big quantity of feudal lords (recently submitted) not taking a risk in terms they might rebel against him<sup>26</sup>. Their belic wishes and their economic resources would be set aside to a sterile war, without any kind of future beyond the *kampaku*<sup>27</sup> megalomaniac ideas. So, did Hideyoshi notice a potential danger in the young northern samurai and that is why he decided to fight against him?

As lonng ago as in 1599, our man established family ties with the rich Tokugawa clan when his daughter got married with Ieyasu's sixth son<sup>28</sup>. Besides, we should not think that this action only benefits the Date clan, but, in the other way around. Having Masamune as a good ally, the future shogûn got the final incentive to start the Sekigahara battleship (1600) this is a remarkable date in the japanese history that can be compared to the reconquest of Granada by spaniards, and it was an excuse to fill the empty space that Taico<sup>29</sup> left after his death in 1598 too. The bout faced by Togawa followers against Ishida Mitsunari supporters in the middle of the countryside in Gifu county. Ishida Mitsunari was supporting Hideyoshi's son, and whence, as we suppose.

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> TURNBULL, S., *Samurai invasion. Japan's Korea war (1592-1598)*, London, 2002, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Volume of rice measure that it is supposed to be enough to keep a grown man during a year (over 150 kgs). In the absence of universal Ryo, a 15-gram gold coin, the Koku was the basic formula calculating someone's wealth. In order to be a good Daimyo, at least, you must have a production of 10.000 kokus per year. Although in fact, the Japanese feudal lords used to far exceed those numbers.

<sup>21</sup> We will mention it later.

<sup>22</sup> Along with the royal family, the Taira and Fujiwara families, represented some of the most important Japanese historic clans.

<sup>23</sup> Problematic Nobility members. They were always a nuisance for Japanese leaders, due to the privileged geographical location they own. To some extent, Date Masamune's conditions were similar, though at the eastern part of the islands.

<sup>24</sup> TURNBULL, S., *Samurai invasion...*, p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> TURNBULL, S., *Samurai Comanders...*, p 54.

<sup>26</sup> TURNBULL, S., *Samurai invasión...*, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Hideyoshi Toyotomi nickname. Literally it means Regent, that is, as he was not descending from the historic japanese clans, it was impossible for him to obtain the Shogun's title.

<sup>28</sup> TAKIZAWA, O., "La delegación diplomática enviada a Roma...", p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> As Hideyoshi was also known.

The curious thing about this fact is, despite the provided services to the winner side received, Masamune was not treated during the third shogunato as we could expect; we are going to analyse it in detail.

#### 4. Masamune at the early beginning of Bakufu

Iesayu Tokugawa knew how minor were the victories during the Sengoku period that is why he decided to undertake reforms and certain laws in order to shield his new acquired position:

*Abolition of clans:* in some way, this fact was something predictable. The real and legal extinction of inconceivable clans inside this new system. We could mention as clear examples, the Ishida clan (defeated after the Sekigahara one, or the Toyotomi, beaten in 1615 after the Osaka castle's siege and Hideyori death. Some families whose members had old family ties with the traitors were forced to abandon their homes and take a "new surname" closer the Shogun, and that it means, their immediate dissolution.

*Daimyō classification after Sekigahara:* due to the implementation of *bakuhau system*, it was needed to create a balanced structure between the Shogun central authority and the daimyō half-governing powers. In other words, trying to keep a strong and everlasting bakufu. It was necessary to establish a strategy where feudal lords were placed depending on their compliance and allegiance to the Tokugawa family. There were three types of feudal lords.

The first one was set up by the *kamon daimyō lords*, also known as *the emblem lords*<sup>30</sup>. These were the highest considered lords, due to their narrow relationship with Iesayu and their efficient services during the war<sup>31</sup>. They own the richest and more productive territories. Between all of these families, we might find the Matsudaira clan, Ieyasu's original family, the Gosanke clan (they were born from different Tokugawa members founded by the younger sons of the leader)<sup>32</sup>.

Secondly, we could find *Fudai daimyō*<sup>33</sup>, they were the winner's accomplices in Sekigahara battleship. Their domains were smaller than the first category lords, and they normally worked as public servants in the central government administration<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, we can refer to the *Tozama daimyō*<sup>35</sup> family, they were unruly commonly noblemen, situated in strategic positions that let them have a wider jurisdiction, power and independence. They had an important influence upon other groups and even Ieyasu agreed an unconditional surrender in exchange, as trying to keep their original territories. The two more influential families were: the Mori, old Hideyoshi allies during the Korean war as well as the Shimazu from Satsuma; they were essential characters if we try to understand the end of the Tokugawa regime during the so called Boshin wars (1868-1870).

After this classification and, as it was an "enormous go board", the Shogun tried to distribute the feudal lords in a way that the potentially dangerous Daimyo members were surrounded by Kanon or Funai's under control territories. But the power's ambition does not end here.

<sup>30</sup> BOLITHO, H., "The Han", in WHITNEY HALL (edit.), *Vol IV Cambridge History os Japan. Early Modern Japan*. Cambridge, 1991. pp.186.

<sup>31</sup> Saving distances, they could be compared to Spanish grandees at that time.

<sup>32</sup> In this way, the Genji clan splits from the imperial family.

<sup>33</sup> BOLITHO, H. *The Fudai daimyo in Tokugawa Japan*. Yale, 1974, p. 169.

<sup>34</sup> Shishitai Kakuhan, URL: <http://jpco.sakura.ne.jp/shishitai1/kakuhan-page1/102.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> BOLITHO, H., "The Han...", p. 186.

*Supervised marriages and destruction of castles.* In search of a balanced power, feudal lords were not allowed to marry without the Shogun's permission. Thus, it was intended to avoid the accumulation of powers through marriages, and taking unnecessary risks for the government. Following this measure, it was also enacted that all military lineages from Japan must limit their number of castles to only one, with the implicit decrease in the number of troops, which it produced the destruction of valuable Japanese buildings. Moreover, all castle reshuffle, inside or outside, had to be supervised by a Tokugawa coordinator.

*The alternating assistance.* The Japanese leaders used to invite the Daimyo coming from different provinces to the capital, in an attempt to control their political movements<sup>36</sup>. When they finished their "voluntary seclusion", it was usual between their relatives to replace them so they could restrict the economy and movility of a clan. It is not easy to imagine how this control measure might determine Japanese nobility actions. As time went on, this effective custom was even institutionalized in 1635 by Sankin Kotai, one of many draconian measures driven by the perfidious third Tokugawa Shogun called Iemitsu.

Regarding Sebastian Vizcaino's travel story written by Alonso Gascón, it is said that after mapping the Japanese northern coast, Spaniards came back to Sendai but they could not have a meeting with Masamune there because he was having "the ore" or yearly visit to the Royal court in Edo, according to Vizcaino statement taken from Alonso's words. This visit had 3 main aims:

"First... to meet the Shogun and give him a present such as a big quantity of gold and silver. Second: to bring support and sustention to their imprisoned relatives in Edo. Third: as a measure to avoid confrontation and wars that could create instability to the empire, the lords must spend part of their wealth on the way to the court or once there..."<sup>37</sup>.

If we go back for a while to remember the moment in which Masamune and Ieyasu's coalition was established, at this point, we should talk about several advantages given to the Date clan as a reward for their military support. Between all of these, we could highlight a special license when having seven castles, as well as a territorial expansion of their manor; the court changed location from Yonezawa to Sendai, a city in the mining region of Tohoku. We can also mention Tadamune's firstborn son who was relieved to be as a forced guest at Edo. And finally, he will be given a territory, at least, half-million kokus big, in addition to his annual rent, he soon became the most powerful and richest man of the islands only after the Tokugawa family.

When analyzing his role in the war against the Toyotomi clan, alongside the fact that Masamune and Ieyasu were fathers in law of their sons, the coherent position would have been granted by the Shogun, but it was not this case. The Shogun only assigned him the city of Sendai, 7 castles and a 400.000 kokus extra rent. The Shogun distrusted him because he was a very powerful warrior and he could represent a problem if he tried to access to the throne. Consequently, Masamune was stigmatized, being classified as Tozama, and therefore, he was considered an under supervision "threat" by the central government.

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<sup>36</sup> TOSHIO, T., *Feudal control in Tokugawa Japan. The Sankin Kotai System*. Cambridge, 1966, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> TREMML-WERNER, B & SOLA, E., *Una relación de Japón de 1614 sobre el viaje de Sebastián Vizcaíno*, Madrid, 2013, p. 56.

## 5. Approach to the Christians

Regarding from the very beginning, Iesu<sup>38</sup> (Jesus) doctrine suffered many changes from the Japanese point of view; There were people who adopted a political intellectual interest towards this religious movement (Nobunaga Oda) though those who accepted it, either faith or trade relationships (Omura Sumitada) or others that firmly followed it with strength and devotion (Hideyoshi Toyotomi). When hostile Taico died, a new chance was opened to Spanish evangelism and Christianity in Japan. Ieasu Tokugawa seemed to start his commandment setting new ideas and projects with the namban. This “alleged” predisposition to have a meeting point will reach its highest level in 1609 when Japanese authorities dealt with Rodrigo de Vivero the possibility to organize each year a nao between Edo and Acapulco.

The Hideyoshi impositions to move from a territory to another, (the) aid in the Korean war along with the failure of some reached agreements with Ieyasu, and also, the Kamon or Funai rejection provoked a natural rift between the Date clan and the central government. Maybe, that is why the new Sendai lord decided to inquire in that “barbaric belief” that was persecuted by the authorities, but, at the same time, providing huge commercial benefits to the western territories lords. Coincidence or not, the truth is that Masamune would contact a Spanish diplomat that came from New Spain (Mexico nowadays) in order to fulfill Vivero’s ideas as well as to map the Japanese coast looking “potential harbours” to use.

## 6. Two Spaniards in the shoguns’ period in Japan

Even though the Probably, if somebody imagined the Spanish frontier soldier’s characteristics one would get an image similar to Sebastián Vizcaíno. He comes from the andalusian middle aristocracy and he possessed a pious and rough character, surely it was not an advantage for working as a diplomatic that he occasionally carried out in the Japanese Islands. On the 22nd June 1611, he arrived in the emergent city of Edo, together with a battery of thirty arcabuceros, which meant a clear example of his roughness when understanding the fine liturgy from that country. The next day, he denied kneeling before the shogun, adducing that the ceremony should be: “...in the Spanish way, performing the reverences and compliances he used to do before his king (and) without taking off weapons and shoes”<sup>39</sup>. In spite of that, the letters presented by the Viceroy Luis de Velasco were read with interest, and the *Daifusama*<sup>40</sup> had to agree with everything except the request of expulsion requested by the protestant dutch. Apart from that, the promise of a future trade between Spain and Japan needed a search of ports that would admit ships, task that Vizcaino would begin to carry out the next year with the consent of Ieyasu.

It is almost impossible to believe that this meeting was accidental, and it is noticeable how a *tozama* took an interest in the *arcabuces de rueda*, much more modern and effective than the *tanegashima de mecha*, whose production also was in *bakufu*’s monopoly. Sometime later, when Vizcaíno was ready to explore the northern coasts, was supremely embraced in the court of Senday, completely opposed to his rough stay in Edo, where the authorities barely defray the accommodation of the delegation<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> That is how Japanese people pronounced Jesus Christ name.

<sup>39</sup> TREMML-WERNER, B & SOLA, E., *Una relación de Japón...*, p. 56.

<sup>40</sup> Ieyasu Tokugawa’s Honorific Title in his political retirement.

<sup>41</sup> TREMML-WERNER, B & SOLA, E., *Una relación de Japón...*, p. 40.



On the contrary, Masamune lavished his guest funding the costs of the explorations, and keeping a direct contact for many months.

Even the 2nd of January in 1612, the lord of Sendai would involve in a pantomime not very common in knights of his elite, since the daimyô not only hosted the marine with honours, not only exchanged a valuable sword for an ordinary vizcaina common among any foot soldier, and not only kissed a cross when he didn't believe in his *kami* and *hotokes*<sup>42</sup>, but also because presumably invited a miserable servant to eat at his house.

According to Cardona's text, the *façade* was so convincing that Sebastián thought that Masamune was close to the christianity's network<sup>43</sup>, which could involve the conversion of his entire community of feudatories.

Otherwise, and before the troublesome events were to happen, the Date clan lent a hand and it was essential both to Vizcaino and his official interpreter, the Franciscan Luis Sotelo. The Father from Seville, fully obsessed with managing a Japanese diocese independent from Nagasaki, noticed that the initial tendency by Ieyasu to keep a *quid pro quo* with the Spanish ones was going back due to two main reasons:

The first one is about the danger that Christianity could cause in a country whose social structure was based on neoconfucianism and buddhism. According to the chinese doctrine, we can say that its characteristics are closer to the social philosophy rather than the religion strictly speaking. The courtier elite and overall the samurai caste adopted the Confucian values, transforming them into a pure civic treatise of good manners. In other words, the most important thing for the user was to fulfill the social role inherent to his class, as well as to obey the upper hierarchy unquestioningly.

If we also add the conformism typical of the budists, who were promised a positive reincarnation if they show a good behavior in life, we obtain a perfect cocktail to ensure the apathy from a rustic class fully exploited. Obviously, christianity's dialectics was extremely at odds with this beliefs system, which was fully shown with the riots rose up wherever the christian doctrine settled down more deeply.

On the other hand, the possibilities of promoting a trade with the spaniards-if any once happened- were affected by the influence the English sailor William Adams had upon Ieyasu<sup>44</sup>.

The religious conflict between catholics and protestants moved commercially to Japan, and here the spaniards did play at a disadvantage. Adams's relationship with the *Dutch East India Company* allowed the Japanese to set a business without running the risk a foreign religion corrupted the Islands' baseline *status quo*.

Owing to the circumstances, the christians, without arousing hidden interests anymore, became a light trouble for the shogun, especially due to a scabrous corruption case related with a Christian position from the bakufu that managed fake *chapas*<sup>45</sup> for money<sup>46</sup>.

As a result, the anti-Christian edict was promulgated in 1612, which only affected Tokugawa territories for the moment. Just in May in 1613, Sotelo would be arrested together with other Christians because of opening a church in a site located in Edo's suburbs.

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<sup>42</sup> Impartial man with not many religious mysticism, his only devotion was dedicated to Hachiman, the God of War, according to the shinto.

<sup>43</sup> TREMML-WERNER, B & SOLA, E., *Una relación de Japón...*, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> MILTON, G., *Samurai William*, London, 1999, p. 71.

<sup>45</sup> Trade licenses.

<sup>46</sup> TREMML-WERNER, B & SOLA, E., *Una relación de Japón...*, p. 62.

Maybe waiting an imminent execution, or an indefinite stay under imprisonment, a letter from Masamune to the shogun arrived asking for Sotelo's freedom.

When the monk and the samurai were safe in Sendai's court, they speculate with certain projects that would have changed the history of the third shogunato, but in the end they didn't succeed. The Franciscan aspired to be Bishop of northern Japan in exchange for invigorating a direct trade with New Spain that made Masamune the most powerful lord in the islands. The popular embassy Keichô<sup>47</sup> was organized to fortify both aspirations, for which Sotelo was a member.

## 7. Embassy interests

Even though the mission project was firstly sponsored by the shogun house, the straining of the relationships with Christians and the alternatives with Hollands led to the gradual inattention of that undertaking. However, as the bakufu lost their interest in the unbreakable relationship between the Spanish trade and its evangelization, the attitude shown by the Date, the owners of these new ports discovered by the General, was each time more obvious. This matter would be set definitely when Vizcaino was ignored by Ieyasu when he came back from his expedition searching islands full of silver. Differently from the central government, Masamune didn't care promoting Christianity if he could get in exchange a profitable trade, among other benefits- for his daimyo government<sup>48</sup>. The matter relates to the fact that our tozama knew Sendai's excellent geographical circumstances, not only to maintain a hypothetical trade behind the shogun government but also to grow economically at light speed. Cedar wood quality from a certain forest, essential to high ship building; the superb natural ports near Shiogama; and mainly the nice climate of the place- sometimes untamable though- were factors to take into account. We cannot undervalue the potential from a region traditionally famous for its gold and silver mines. The ignorance of naval building techniques or the massive exploitations of superficial seams in previous centuries didn't stop Dates from dreaming with the coming of Spanish engineers or miners. After all, if they were defined as a family connected with Christianity, and being their place a bishopric, they wouldn't have any problem to benefit from the naval and mineral extraction for instance technic –for instance, amalgamation technic with mercury– that the Empire had been so much time doing.

The yearnings to expand the trade were connected with the consequences of the great 1611 tsunami. Among those, we could refer to the five thousand people disappeared, almost a thousand eight hundred dead people and a few thousand animals lost. As Reiko Tateiwa says: "rice fields sank into the sea and the peasants asked Masamune for comprehension to delay the delivery of the annual rice tributes"<sup>49</sup>, in spite of the fact that sea salt made those fields unusable for a decade. Obviously the daimyô waived the taxes during that period, which fits perfectly with his yearning to obtain alternatives earnings.

Maybe in that sense we should frame the tendentiousness of a letter sent to the Spanish King, possibly written entirely by Sotelo, even though it was signed by Masamune. In it, it appears a long list of formalisms and praises to the Catholic Sacred

<sup>47</sup> TAKIZAWA, O., "La delegación diplomática enviada a Roma...", p. 137.

<sup>48</sup> TREMML-WERNER, B. & SOLA, E., *Una relación de Japón...*, p. 57.

<sup>49</sup> TATEIWA, R., "La misión Keichô como proyecto del señor de Sendai", in GIL de CARRASCO (ed.), *Actas del Congreso Internacional sobre el español y la cultura hispánica*, Tokio, 2013, p. 8.

Faith, and even it gives the possibility of an annual commercial exchange, the one and only interest of a pragmatic man who had little tendency towards the celestial world.

But if even someone still questions whether the lord of Sendai felt a disinterested sympathy for Christianity, we have the Jesuit Jerome de Angelis, an expert of the episodes that we describe here, and who testified by letter to father Mutio Vitelleschi, the fear of Masamune's generals to the fact that he could convert into namban religion. According to de Angelis, the daimyō reassured his group of notables stating that "it was not possible that he was deceived or lied by someone who knew so much about things of Heaven and despised the World ones"<sup>50</sup>, in clear reference to Sotelo<sup>51</sup>.

For its part, the title of the letter which we refer to it is itself demagogic, not to say forger, since even though it says in its main page: "Letter sent by Ydata Macamune king of Boju, in the Iapon, in which he realizes his conversion, and asks for friendship or other things", we must point out that Masamune never became a Christian or had intended to do it. Another point of interest is that, at some point the document speaks of "serious causes that prevent us from converting by now", obviously referring to the antipathy felt by Ieyasu to the doctrine, as well as the potential danger that other gentlemen given to the bakufu could suspect of the ambiguous game the Date were working on.

Perhaps that is why the ambassador chosen for the Keicho delegation was Hasekura Rokuemon, a low-level samurai, veteran of the Korean Wars, and to make matters worse, he was sentenced to death for a corruption affair in which his father was also involved<sup>52</sup>. While the parent was executed, Hasekura's life was spared in return for an uncertain journey which probably very few had returned from. Furthermore, choosing such a mediocre person to be the official face of a huge affair only highlights interest of Masamune to pass unnoticed among the official chancelleries. Of course, if instead of choosing someone with an income that barely reached the amount of forty *koku*, the appointed person had been a renowned gentleman, the details could have been spread by word of mouth unnecessarily because the Japanese elite is strongly related to each other. In this situation, it is paradoxical how the effigy of a priori condemned individual to historical ostracism adorns some courts of Old Europe, either in the form of a statue, relief, or oil on canvas, where the samurai was captured with illustrious countenance and noble elegance<sup>53</sup>.

Rokuemon's low profile and the supposed mutism of the mission seemed to take effect. Centuries later, when Japan started their Meiji adventure and put their efforts to adapt to the contemporary world, a Japanese embassy headed by Iwakura Tomomi<sup>54</sup> visited Rome and was surprised to see the picture of a fellow dressed in traditional costume. Indeed, no official document or file reflect any trace of the Masamune's embassy because he made it impossible to do so. If finally diplomacy failed and Date contemplated such possibility, they should not be pointed out as alleged pro-Christian, or even worse, as sponsors of a compromising trade in the eyes of bakufu. With all this, we must not forget that a dozen Keicho expeditionary were shogun supervisors, but it is clear that on their return nothing was transmitted about the possible aspirations of the

<sup>50</sup> ARSI, Section Japsin, 34, pp 31-32, PTO Jerome de Angelis to P. General. Oshu 30. XI. 1619. Ch. XIV. Compiled in Valencia: 19.

<sup>51</sup> Although we can not put aside the intrigue and suspicion existing between the Castilian-mendicant and the Jesuit-Portuguese parties. In that sense, we should subjectivize, at least in part, the assertion of the Italian priest.

<sup>52</sup> VALENCIA, V., "Notas adicionales...", p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> The painting from the french painter Claude Deruet called Hasekura in Roma, which we could still visit in The Vatican is an example.

<sup>54</sup> TATEIWA, R., "La misión Keichô...", p. 1.

clan Date, either because Sotelo and the natives of Oshu had the ability to hide them, perhaps because some remained in Europe, maybe because others died during the journey or directly because when they returned, if they were able to do it, what they said was so unimportant that neither deserved to be registered.

## 8. Conclusions

Precisely, soon after the departure of the galleon San Juan Bautista, the new Anti-Christian Edict was drafted in 1614, in which Ieyasu said:

“but the band of Christians has come to Japan not only sending merchant ships that exchange products, but also wishing to disseminate a perverse doctrine, demolishing the true one to overthrow the government and take control of the country...”<sup>55</sup>.

For us it is clear that Date knew the growing hostility of shogun to Christianity before the departure of the mission, but this didn't deter him one iota to go ahead with its plan of rapprochement to the Spaniards. And in the midst of that maelstrom of terror, it was when the remains of the embassy returned to Asia, back in April 1618. After an unexplained two-year stay in the Philippines, Hasekura returned to Japan to die in 1622<sup>56</sup>. Luis Sotelo accompanied him and he was several months preaching the Gospel until he was captured and burned alive, a sad colophon for someone determined to be remembered as the first Spanish bishop in the land of Amaterasu<sup>57</sup>. Regarding Vizcaino, he would stay in New Spain in January 1614, settling down in Jalisco, abandoning diplomatic efforts, and focusing solely on managing their heritage until he was appointed Mayor of Acapulco. He died later in Mexico City, at the age of eighty. Thus, the dream of a Japanese Christianity not only succumbed by the same disinterest of the Spanish authorities, but it also demonstrates its incompatibility with extremist principles taught from Edo, as they showed more intransigent each decade and the boycotted in each step all mobility and of course, the impervious attitude to any kind of foreign religious inclination.

Now it is when one wonders what would have happened if all agreements envisioned by Masamune with the spaniards had come to fruition. Obviously, as a result of the rise of a catholic diocese in Sendai, the maintenance of a prohibited trade or the adoption of a foreign technology, it would not fit other solution than armed confrontation. Masamune knew the impossibility of resisting the shogun army with Ieyasu alive, since that man was the first shogun, patriarch of the Tokugawa winners, and especially the unifying element of all this network of daimyōs placed as desired after the victory of Sekigahara. But we have to point out that the embassy begins to set at the beginning of the second decade of the six hundred, and the mission left in 1613. At that time, Ieyasu Tokugawa was seventy-two years old and the end that finally arrived thousand days after could be already discerned. Facing this situation, it was normal to a certain extend that the Date scrutinized a new civil war, always considering that in that impregnable fortress of Osaka was where Hideyori lived, Toyotomi

<sup>55</sup> CABEZAS, A., *El siglo ibérico en Japón...*, p. 393.

<sup>56</sup> The grave of Hasekura in Enchonzan: <http://www.thr.mlit.go.jp/kamafusa/guide/guide01/top.html>.

<sup>57</sup> BOXER, R., *The Christian Century in Japan...*, p. 436.

Hideyoshi's son, in those times legitimate heir of the country, and certainly with even many supporters to their cause<sup>58</sup>.

In this context, Masamune decided to bet strong and prepare for what all signs seemed to indicate would be a new *Sengoku*. Therefore, he thought about sponsoring a barbaric belief diametrically opposed to Japanese religions but in return, he would ensure a single trade in the islands, the knowledge to build a fleet of ships with which subdues the rest of the country, the technique to extract huge amounts of precious metals from the bowels of the earth and of course, more modern and effective firearms than the Portuguese ones in 1540.

And if the fate of a family so noble would have to prosper, why don't ramble with a Christian alliance that would help their Japanese prince to get a fourth shogunate. All those drowned desires detail the story of a mirage. A dream that gets dissolved only imagining it, and that it beclouded the minds of many men placed in a context of extreme life, sometimes for a fleeting moment and at times for a lifetime.

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<sup>58</sup> During the course of the embassy, in 1615, Ieyasu decided to lay siege to Osaka's castle Osaka Castle to make Hideyori practice himself the seppuku. Paradoxically, the Date clan contributed troops to the siege.