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Nagasaki's 'Bombed Maria' to visit Spain

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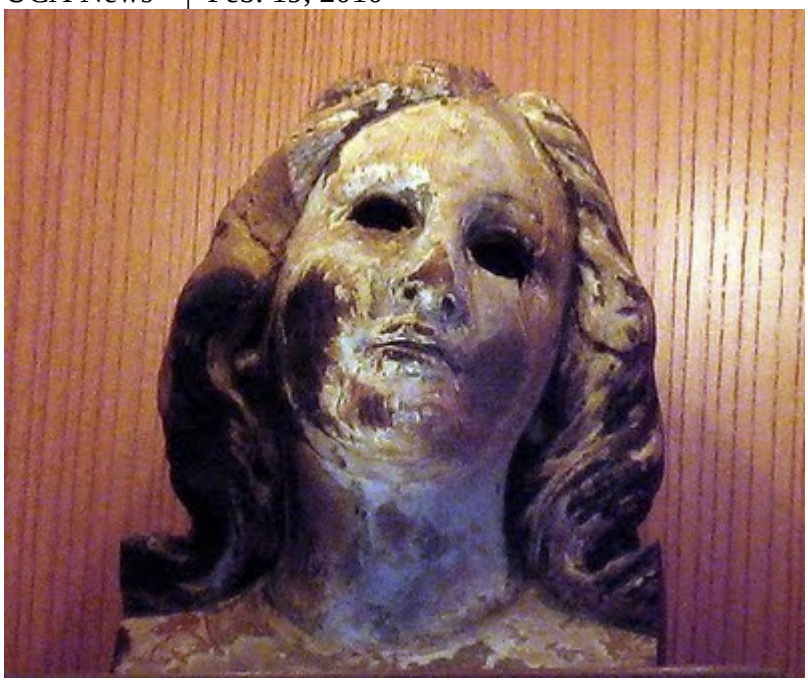

Nagasaki's 'Bombed Maria'

TOKYO ? A Marian statue, damaged during the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Japan, is set to meet its counterpart in Spain as part of a "peace pilgrimage" marking the 65th anniversary of the bombing.

The two-meter-high statue, known locally as "Bombed Maria", which was shipped from Italy in the 1930s, was damaged when Urakami Cathedral was destroyed during the atomic bombing of Aug. 9, 1945. The head was later found amid the rubble.

Archbishop Mitsuaki Takami of Nagasaki, who will lead the pilgrimage to Guernica, Spain, in April said: "I learnt that Guernica was the first city in history to suffer from [carpet] bombing. In the process of contacting the people there, I also learnt that there is still the head of a Madonna statue found in the rubble of a church destroyed by the bombing in 1937. We also have one here. It is incredible."

Guernica, in the Basque region of Spain, suffered heavy damage during the Spanish Civil War when it was bombed by German and Italian bombers on April 26, 1937. The bombing became the subject of one of Pablo Picasso's most famous paintings.

"Peace can never be created by violence," Archbishop Takami said. "The abrogation of nuclear weapons has not progressed very far. My close relatives were killed by the atomic bomb too ? I hope the pilgrimage not only lets more people know about the suffering caused by the atomic bombing, but it also becomes an appeal for peace using non-violent methods."

The Marian statue at Urakami Cathedral has been taken overseas twice but never on a pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage was suggested by a Catholic in Nagasaki and will take in other Spanish cities including a visit to the Holy Family Church in Barcelona before it reaches Guernica.

Along the way, the pilgrims will stop in Rome where they will have an audience with Pope Benedict XVI.

On arrival in Guernica, the pilgrims will visit the city's Peace Museum where an exhibition on the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki is to be held from early March to late May.

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