

Toyotomi Hideyoshi's three letters from the Province of Harima

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Out of the 95 private letters written by Toyotomi Hideyoshi^[1] in the years 1574–1598,¹ there are three which are concerned with the conquest of the province of Harima^[2] in 1577–80 and which are addressed respectively to Koderu Yoshitaka^[3] (Pl. 1), to Koderu Yoshitaka and Bessho Shigemune^[4] (Pl. 2), and to Koderu Takatomo^[6] (Pl. 3).² These three letters (as far as I know not yet translated into any Western language),³ although roughly relating to the same main subject, have the great merit of presenting us with three different aspects of the figure of the future *taikô*^[10].

In fact, in the first one we can see Hideyoshi's interest in one person. While it is clear that his words are dictated by the political need to bind an ally more firmly to his cause, nevertheless his efforts to demonstrate his friendship are also evident. The second letter is more formal and includes a suggestion that we could more properly call an order. The third one is different again. Hideyoshi is engaged in simultaneous war actions in many places in the province of Harima: he is then obliged to entrust a delicate mission to one of his allies, hence the detailed suggestions and advice he gives.

Let us now take a quick glance at the events which form the background to these letters.

Oda Nobunaga^[11] had been thinking of an offensive against Môri Terumoto^[12] in the Western part of Honshû^[13] since 1575 and he planned a two-pronged attack

1 For a complete account of Hideyoshi's private correspondence see A. BOSCARO, „An Introduction to the Private Correspondence of Toyotomi Hideyoshi“, in: *Monumenta Nipponica*, XXVII (1972), 4.

2 The reproductions of the originals in *Hô Taikô Shinsekishû*, Tôkyô, Teikoku Daigaku Shiryô Hensan-jo^[6], 1938, 3 vols., nos. 2,3,4, from which these plates are taken. A transcription with a comment is given by KUWATA Tadachika^[7] in *Taikô shoshin*^[8] (Tôkyô: Chijinshôkan, 1943, nos. 8,9,10) and in *Taikô no tegami*^[9] (Tôkyô: Bungei Shunju shinsha, 1959, pp. 34–41).

3 For the translation of other letters see A. BOSCARO, „Due lettere di Hideyoshi dai Kyûshû“, in: *Il Giappone* (Rome, 1970), X, pp. 145–156. Also a letter written to his wife from Kyûshû in 1592 is reproduced and transliterated as document no. 35 in KANAI Madoka/NITTA Hideharu/Joseph K. YAMAGIWA, (eds.), *Forty-Nine Manuscript Documents from Japanese History*, U.S. Office of Education & The University of Michigan, 1965, 2 vols. Some references to Hideyoshi's correspondence are given in G. SANSOM, *A History of Japan* (London, 1965), II, pp. 313–315, 323–324, 363–369.

on it in order to seize the whole of Chûgoku^[14]. He ordered Akechi Mitsuhide^[15] to proceed north along the San'indô^[18] and, some months later, Hideyoshi to go south through the San'yôdô^[19]. One of the first conquests of Hideyoshi, in 1577, was of the castle of Himeji^[20] in the province of Harima, a strategic point where the San'yôdô and two other highways met. Himeji became Hideyoshi's base, from where he moved for the next campaigns.

The first of the three holograph letters that I am giving here in translation is addressed to the very man who had helped him in taking Himeji, the mediator to whose good offices he owed his success. This man is Kuroda (Kodera) Kanbyôe Yoshitaka^[21].⁵ His relations with the Kodera⁶ who possessed Himeyama^[25] (only later called Himeji), were very close as he had married a daughter of Kodera Masamoto^[26], and he himself took for some time the name of Kodera. He sided with Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, trying to convince the Kodera not to join Mōri Terumoto. Hideyoshi greatly appreciated Yoshitaka's efforts and trusted him completely. The letter is dated August 8th, 1577:⁷

I have duly received your private letter. Needless to say, though it is not the first time it has occurred, your courtesy is highly appreciated. As far as your case is concerned, as I consider you as intimate as my younger brother Koichirô,⁸ though anyone can say anything, you must judge the various

4 (1526–1582). One of Nobunaga's generals, he betrayed him in 1582 when he attacked the Honnôji^[16] in Kyôto, compelling Nobunaga to kill himself. Soon after this he was defeated by Hideyoshi in the battle of Yamazaki^[17] and was killed while escaping.

5 Born in Himeji in 1546. In 1584 he was given the baptismal name of Simeon, hence the name of Simeon Quanbioyedono Condera under which he appears in the reports of the Jesuits. From 1589 he was also called Josui^[22]. He died in Fushimi^[23] in 1604. Far more famous is his son Kuroda Kai-no-kami Nagamasa, one of Hideyoshi's best commanders (see note 17).

6 The Kodera had formerly been entrusted by the Akamatsu family^[24] with the castle. They were independent when Hideyoshi entered Harima and at first chose to side with Mōri Terumoto regardless of Yoshitaka's advice.

7 See Plate 1: *Nainai no gojô uketabesôrô ima ni hajimezaru to môshi nagara gonengoro no dan zehi ni (w)oyobazusôrô sono hô no gi wa warera ototo no Koichirô me dōzen ni kokoro yasuku zanjissôrô aida nanigoto wo minamina môsu tomo sono hô jikidan no mote shōji [= shoji] osabaki arubekusôrô kono kuni ni oite wa sejo [= sejô] kara wa goryōnin no ochisô no yōni môshinashisôrô mama sono hô mo goyudan sôrôte wa ikaga ni sôrô aida gotaikutsunaku zeshi [= zehi] onkokoro gatesôrôte gochisô arubekusôrô gojô no omote ichiichi kokoroe zanjissôrô/kashiku shichigatsu nijūsannichi Chikuzen yori Kokan mairu gohenji / Naonao sono hô to warera aidagara no gi wa yoso yori hito to sagesumi mo arumajikusôrô aida nanigoto wo mo sore e makasemōshisôrôte mo yoso yori no hidachi arumajiku to hito mo haya mioyobisôrô to zanjissôrô warera nikumimôsu mono wa sono hô made nikumi môsu koto arubekusôrô sono kokoro esôrôte yōjin to aru bekusôrô saisai wa nengoro niwa môsarezusôrô aida tsuide wo matte nengoro ni môshi resôrô kono fumi miemôsumajikusôrô aida sagesumi nite oyomi arubekusôrô ijô.*

8 Koichirô (1540–1591)^[27] is Hideyoshi's step-brother. First called Hashiba Koichirô Naga-hide^[28], he was later known as Hashiba Hidenaga^[29]. He was appointed Mino-no-kami^[30] (hence the Mindono of the Jesuits) and Yamato Dainagon^[31]. He participated in all the campaigns led by Hideyoshi, who was very fond of him. To have associated Yoshitaka with Koichirô in his heart is a great acknowledgement of the former.

matters by personal approach. As there are, furthermore, rumors in this country⁹ that everything here is apparently being schemed by both of you,¹⁰ it is no good being so inattentive; thus it is expected that you carry on with everything without any sense of boredom and with a proper attention.¹¹ I have completely understood your letter. Sincerely,

Chikuzen¹²

7th month, 23rd day [Tenshō 5]
to Kokan¹³ 13 in reply

Again: as for the relations between you and me, since there ought not to be any misunderstanding among outside persons [about us], I am sure that people will at last understand that there must not be any adverse criticism from outside even if I trust you in everything.¹⁴ The persons I hate you should hate in the same way. Be aware of this and take every precaution. Because I will not always be able to express my intimate feelings to you, I am availing myself of this opportunity to express my warm feelings. As such feelings may not be visible in this letter, I hope you will read it in all its humility.¹⁵ Here closing.

Hideyoshi's concern to make himself completely understood by Yoshitaka appears very clearly from his words. He offers him the most open friendship, but once Yoshitaka has decided on which side to stay, it must be forever.

The second letter is completely different in tone. Nearly five months had elapsed,¹⁶ Hideyoshi was more firmly settled in Harima and in a position to give orders to his local allies. One of these was Bessho Shigemune (?–1591)^[34], uncle and tutor of Bessho Nagaharu (1554–1580)^[35], lord of Miki^[36]. While Nagaharu supported Mōri against Hideyoshi (and this is the subject of the third letter), his uncle Shigemune sided with Hideyoshi. The latter, to strengthen his alliance, wanted Kōdera Yoshitaka and Bessho Shigemune not only to be friends but to tie their families by marrying Yoshitaka's son to one of Shigemune's daughters. Finally, this marriage did not take place, but all the same the letter is indicative of Hideyoshi's plans. In fact he was inclined to form a close net of alliance around

9 Harima, or Banshū, which Hideyoshi had just begun to subjugate.

10 This refers to Yoshitaka's father Noritaka or Mototaka. For his name there are some discrepancies in the texts, in so that the first *kanji* is written sometimes as^[a] and sometimes as^[b], while the *furigana* differs from „Nori“ to „Moto“ regardless of the ideogram. The second *kanji* is always^[c] and the reading „-taka“.

11 As Yoshitaka sided with Hideyoshi, this is a spur not to give ear to rumors, to work hard against all adversities and to stand firmly by Hideyoshi's side.

12 Kokan (or Kokwan)^[33] is an abbreviation for Kōdera Kanbyōe.

13 *Chikuzen-no-kami*^[32] was the title given to Hideyoshi in Tenshō 2 [1574].

14 This is a clear warning for anyone who is against Hideyoshi in Harima.

15 The expression here used is *sagesumi nite* (= *keibetsu de*). In this context it refers to Hideyoshi's friendly attitude towards Yoshitaka: „I hope you can read this letter with a humble sentiment towards me.“

16 The letter is dated Tenshō 5, 12th month, 10th day, i. e. 17 January 1578. Quite a rare fact, the *nen-go* as well appears in this letter. Hideyoshi used to write the month and the day, sometimes only the day.

him: this is one of the reasons why he was so merciful towards the people he overcame and why he tried to avoid arousing hatred through needless slaughter. As treachery was very usual and the shifting of allegiance quite normal, gratitude could be the only true tie, this being a very strong feeling in the Japanese mind. Furthermore, having to proceed westwards, Hideyoshi had to leave a loyal party behind to keep the way back to the capital free for him.

When we compare the first letter to Yoshitaka with the following one we can see a difference even in his mode of expression. The sentences are here more incisive and definitive: no repetitions, no roundabout expressions, no explicit ‘hope’ that the recipients understand his words well. In fact, they are orders.

As for the relations between you two, I have determined that from now on you must be ready to be like brothers, and Magoë [= Bessho Shigemune] shall send one of his daughters to Kanbyôe [= Koderu Yoshitaka] to be married to Matsuchiyo.¹⁷ Doing thus, I believe that you two and myself will not be abandoned by Hachiman and Atago.¹⁸ Sincerely yours,¹⁹

Hideyoshi (cipher)
Chikuzen

Tenshō 5, 12th month, 10th day
to Magoemon and Kanbyō

Again: if a matter of dispute should arise between you two, you must settle it by reporting to me whatever it is about. Here closing.²⁰

Three months later, Bessho Nagaharu definitely sided with Mōri Terumoto and barricaded himself in Miki castle. Hideyoshi began the siege on the 28th day of the 3rd month (May 5th, 1578), but without success. In vain Nobunaga sent reinforcements headed by Araki Murashige²¹ (who later betrayed him going over

17 Matsuchiyo^[37], also called Shoju or Matsutoshi^[38], was later called Kichibe Nagamasa^[39] and finally Kuroda Kai-no-kami Nagamasa^[40] (1568–1623). He was baptised Damian in 1587, but he was not fervent and abandoned religion. In 1600 he sided with Ieyasu^[41] at Sekigahara^[42]. He never married Shigemune's daughter, but a daughter of Hachisuka Masakatsu^[43] (1525–1585), a *daimyō* who served both Nobunaga and Hideyoshi.

18 Hachiman^[44] is the well-known god of war, namely the emperor Ōjin^[45]. One of the gods of the Atago-jinja^[41] in Kyōto is Shōgun-Jizō^[47], particularly worshipped by the warriors, to whom Hideyoshi most probably refers.

19 Also the expression *kyōkyō kingen* („fearfully and sincerely speaking“) used by Hideyoshi to close his missive instead of the more intimate *kashiku* reveals the different tone of this letter.

20 See Plate 2: *Goryōnin onaida no koto warera mōshi sadamesōrō ue kore igo wa kyōda[i] no onkakugonasare Magoë musume wo hitori Kanbyōe kata e tsukawasare Matsuchiyo ni oshiwase arubekusōrō sayōnisōrote goryōnin no gi warera Hachiman Atago mihanashi mōsumajikusōrō / kyōkyō kingen Tenshō go junigatsu tōka Magoemondono Kanbyōdono goryōnin Hideyoshi [kaō] Chikuzen / Kaesugaesu nanigoto mo goryōnin no aidagara ni mōshigoto gozasōrawaba nado gi mo warera kata e otodokenasaresōrō ue nite sumashimōsuekusōrō ijō.*

21 Araki Murashige^[48] (1535–1586), first served the Ikeda and the Miyoshi families^[49], then Oda Nobunaga. He was appointed Settsu-no-kami^[50] and given the castle of Itami^[51]. In 1578 he rebelled against Nobunaga, joined Mōri Terumoto and shut himself in the castle. After the

to the enemy)²² and others, including his own son Nobutada^[54]. The situation remained unchanged until the 17th day of the 1st month of Tenshō 8 (February 3rd, 1580) when Bessho Nagaharu – the last one to resist – committed suicide and the castle surrendered.

The third letter is dated Tenshō 7, 10th month 28th day (November 16th, 1579), that is, some three months before the end of Nagaharu) and is addressed to Kōdera Kyūmu Takatomo^[55],²³ an uncle of Kōdera Yoshitaka. Hideyoshi's policy is here underlined once more: to try to overcome the enemy in any way before resorting to killing him as he might always be a potential ally. Hideyoshi's worry about „the hostage at Gochaku“ is quite understandable, the hostage being Kōdera Yoshitaka. Sent as a messenger to Araki Murashige, he was being kept prisoner in the castle of Gochaku^[58].

The text reads:²⁴

I am dispatching Hiratsuka²⁵ [to you] promptly ordering you to consider the situation and save the life of [the lord of the castle of] Miki.²⁶ And, if you manage to isolate [it] completely, you can take Miki by shortage of

defeat, he took refuge with Mōri. In his late years, we find him joining some tea ceremonies given by Hideyoshi.

- 22 In this case the Buddhist monks of the Honganji. For the relationships between Nobunaga's enemies (Mōri Terumoto, Bessho Nagaharu, Araki Murashige, etc.) and Kenyō Shōnin^[52], chief abbot of the Ishiyama Honganji^[53], see G. RENONDEAU, *Histoire des moines guerriers du Japon* (Mélanges publiés par l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, Tome I), Paris, 1957, pp. 159–346.
- 23 He was loyal to Hideyoshi and became his adviser during the Kyūshū campaign. He followed him also in Nagoya (Hizen)^[58] at the time of the Korean expedition. Fond of the tea ceremony, he was included among the number of Hideyoshi's *otogi* (entertainer). See KUWATA Tadachika, *Daimyō to otogishū*^[57] (Tōkyō: Seijisha, 1942), p. 25.
- 24 See Plate 3: *Isogi Hiratsuka wo shinzēsōrō (susumesōrō) sokomoto yōsu ni yori Miki no gi inochi wo tasukēmōsubekusōrō mata minamina meshidashisōrawaba hoshikoroshi ni Miki oba itashimosubekusoro inochi no gi wo to wabisōrō koto kagirinakusōrō Miki yurushisōrawaba Gochaku Shigata no koto nokesaru yōni itashi hoshikoroshi ka mata wa semekoro-shimōsubekusōrō aida nokesaru yōni saikakusōrōte tamōbekusōrō isai Hira Sanbyōe mōsubekusōrō / kashiku jūgatsu nijūhachinichi Tōkichirō Hideyoshi (kaō) Kyumu / Kaesugaesu Gochaku hitojichi Itami yori uketorimōsubeku kore mata onkokoro yasukusōrō-bekusōrō Itami no koto wa go san nichi no aida to miemōshisōrō hayabaya hori wo ume-sashiraresōrō Gochaku no hitojichi shiro no uchi nite mo hatemōshisōrō aida warera uketorimōsubekusōrō to mōshiagesōraeba warera ni watashisōrae to omōshinasaresōrō mata Kanbyō gi mo warera shidai to omōhisōrō aida onkokoro yasukusōrō bekusōrō kono gohenji ni yori Miki yurushisōrōte shiro wo u[ke]torisōrōte inochi wo tasukesōrō ka mata hoshikoro-shisōrō ka ryōdo ni ichidō kiwamemōsubekusōrō.*
- 25 Hiratsuka Tōsō^[59], a vassal of Hideyoshi, later Inaba-no-kami^[60]. He remained faithful to the Toyotomi family joining Ishida Mitsunari^[61] at Sekigahara where he died in battle.
- 26 Hideyoshi wanted Bessho Nagaharu to live and to side with him again, not to die in the besieged castle. But finally Nagaharu killed himself. If we examine the original (Pl. 3) we can see one of Hideyoshi's peculiar ways of writing: the *ateji*, i. e. the phonetic equivalent of a *kanji*, easier to write. In this case he writes *Miki no gi*^[d] using the *ateji*^[e] for^[f].

food and water²⁷ as there have been many occasions on which they have pleaded for their lives. After you have finished with Miki,²⁸ please do not neglect to conquer Gochaku and Shigata^[62]: as you can take them either by starving them or by killing them, please do your best in order not to neglect these. The details will be given by Hira Sanbyôe [= Hiratsuka].

Sincerely,

Tôkichirô
Hideyoshi (cipher)

10th month 28th day [Tenshō 7]
to Kyūmu

Again: as for the hostage in Gochaku,²⁹ he must be received from Itami and for this too please rest assured. As for what concerns Itami³⁰ it seems to me [it will be defeated] in three or five days because you have filled the moat so quickly. Being afraid lest the hostage at Gochaku dies in that castle, I have suggested to you that we must have him back and you [must] have approached them asking them to send him back to us. Furthermore, as Kanbyō [= Yoshitaka] too has trusted us, please rest assured. In your reply please tell me your decision on one of the [following] two cases: whether you will negotiate with Miki, taking the castle and sparing their lives or will kill them by starving them.³¹

Later events proved Hideyoshi right: the castles of Miki, Gochaku, Shigata and others were taken; Kōdera Yoshitaka set free; Besshō Nagaharu killed himself; Araki Murashige took refuge with Mōri Terumoto: the way to the next provinces to be conquered, Bizen and Bitchū^[63], was open.

27 *Hoshikoroshi*, i.e. to cut the supply of water (and also not to permit provisions to reach the sieged castle) was a customary tactics of Hideyoshi.

28 The verb here used is *yurusu* which has various meanings. In this case it gives the idea of succeeding in conquering Miki by means of negotiations or a protracted siege, but without fighting.

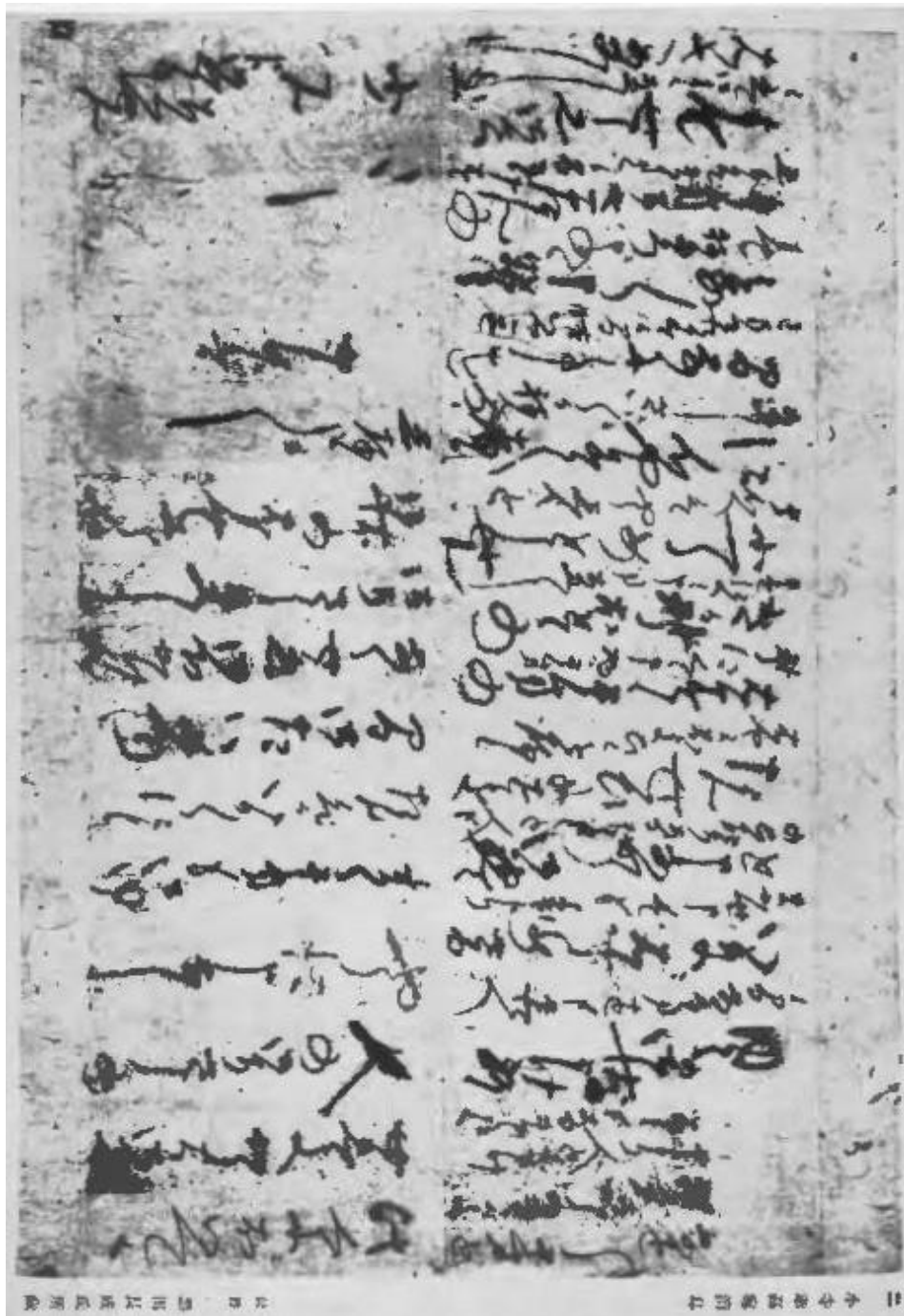
29 Kōdera Yoshitaka.

30 The first time Hideyoshi speaks of Itami he is referring to its lord, Araki Murashige, and the second time to the castle itself.

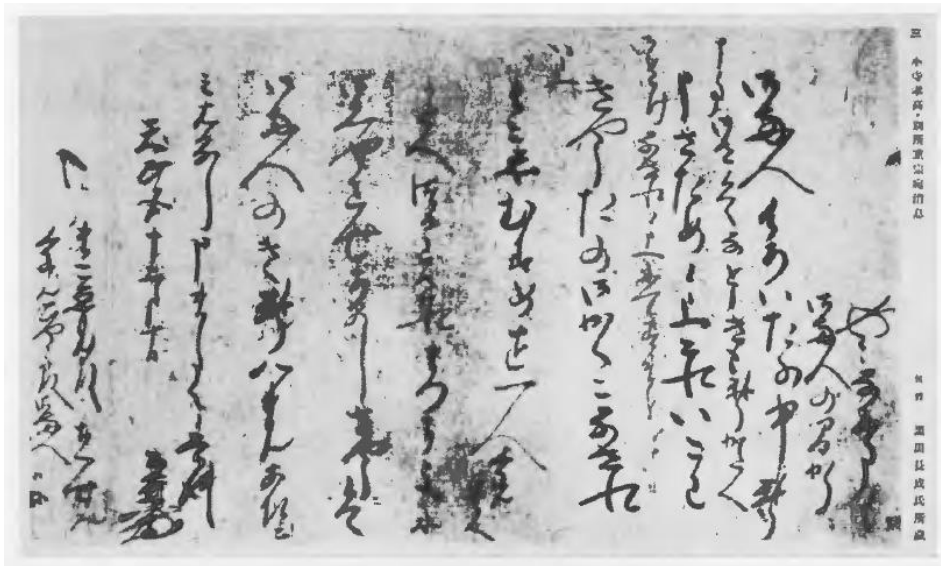
31 This rather complex passage shows how Hideyoshi used to write without revising, following his thoughts and consequently repeating himself very often. He was probably still waiting for a reply to a previous letter and therefore the passage can be paraphrased like this: „Considering that the hostage in Gochaku [Kōdera Yoshitaka] might die while he is in the castle if we do not do something to rescue him, I have suggested to you that we should have him back before he dies. Consequently, I am sure you have contacted the people in Gochaku telling them that they must send the hostage back to us before the castle surrenders. As Kanbyō trusts us and has left us free to work out the matter as we think best, feel free to act in your way.“ Needless to say, Hideyoshi was eagerly awaiting the reply.

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| (1) 豊臣秀吉 | (22) 如水 |
| (2) 播磨 | (23) 伏見 |
| (3) 小寺孝高 | (24) 赤松 |
| (4) 別所重宗 | (25) 姫山 |
| (5) 小寺高友 | (26) 小寺政職 |
| (6) 豊大閣真蹟集 東京帝國大學史料編纂所 | (27) 小一郎 |
| (7) 栗田忠親 | (28) 羽柴小一郎長秀 |
| (8) 太閤書信 | (29) 羽柴秀長 |
| (9) 太閤の手紙 | (30) 美濃守 |
| (10) 太閤 | (31) 大和大納言 |
| (11) 織田信長 | (32) 筑前守 |
| (12) 毛利輝元 | (33) 小官 |
| (13) 本州 | (34) 別所重宗 |
| (14) 中國 | (35) 別所長治 |
| (15) 明智光秀 | (36) 三木 |
| (16) 本能寺 | (37) 松千代 |
| (17) 山崎 | (38) 松壽 |
| (18) 山陰道 | (39) 吉兵衛長政 |
| (19) 山陽道 | (40) 黒田甲斐守長政 |
| (20) 姫路 | (41) 徳川家康 |
| (21) 黒田(小寺)官兵衛孝高 | (42) 関ヶ原 |

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| (43) 蜂 頃 賢 正 勝 | (57) 大 名 と 御 伽 象 |
| (44) 八 幡 | (58) 御 著 |
| (45) 應 神 天 皇 | (59) 平 塚 藤 藏 |
| (46) 愛 宕 神 社 | (60) 因 幡 守 |
| (47) 勝 軍 地 蔵 | (61) 石 田 三 成 |
| (48) 荒 木 村 重 | (62) 志 方 |
| (49) 池 田 , 三 好 | (63) 備 前 , 備 中 |
| (50) 攝 津 守 | |
| (51) 伊 丹 | (a) 職 |
| (52) 顯 如 上 人 | (b) 識 |
| (53) 石 山 本 願 寺 | (c) 隆 |
| (54) 信 忠 | (d) 三 木 の 木 |
| (55) 小 寺 休 夢 高 友 | (e) 木 |
| (56) 名 護 屋 肥 前 | (f) 儀 |



Pl. 1: The letter to Kōdera Yoshitaka. From *Hō Taikō* ..., no.2



Pl. 2: The letter to Koderu Yoshitaka and Bessho Shigemune.
From *Hō Taikō*..., no.3



Pl. 3: The letter to Koderu Takatomo. From *Hō Taikō* ..., no.4