**Himejima Island**

**Unlikely home to a long-gone community**

The island of Himejima may seem inhospitable. Compact columnar joints as tall as 100 meters make up the western and northern coasts. The southern shore, while still rocky, is less steep, but the island has very little level land. Nevertheless, it was once the site of a community of hidden Christians who fled persecution by the shogunate government in 1797. Spring water and fertile volcanic soil supported mulberry and *tsuwa*, a native wild plant widely used for food. Shrimp and *kibinago* (*Spratelloides gracilis*), a herring-like fish, were gathered, as were several varieties of seaweed. By the beginning of the Meiji era (1868–1912), the population had grown to 300. Schools and a cathedral, complete with stained-glass windows, were constructed, and a regular ferry service ran three times a week from 1921 to 1935. By 1955, however, only 81 people remained; of these, 15 moved to Brazil in 1959, and the last 38 people finally abandoned the island in 1965. Today, no trace of their presence is visible from the sea or in aerial photos. Even the graves of those who had died on the island were moved to Fukue Island in 1987.