

## **Despite Forced Conversion to Buddhism, Many Hidden Christians Maintain Their Faith**

The Shimabara Rebellion was a shock to the shogunate. In 1639, it adopted a policy of isolation, completely banning Portuguese ships from Japanese ports. The Protestant Dutch, who were hostile to the Catholics, replaced the Portuguese as Japan's trading partners, though they were made to relocate their trading post from Hirado to Dejima, a man-made island in Nagasaki, in 1641.

Between 1617 and 1644, 75 missionaries and more than 1,000 Japanese Catholics were executed. Repression was intensifying all the time, with the shogunate working to uncover believers by forcing them to trample on religious pictures, medals, and other articles of devotion (a practice known as *efumi* or *ebumi*). Another method of control was forcing them to convert to Buddhism and registering their names in religious census books, so temples would have to manage them. Despite this, many continued to believe in secret.

With the ban being enforced ever more strictly, 10 missionaries who had slipped into Japan were captured in 1642 and 1643. When Konishi Mansho—supposedly the last Catholic priest in the country—was martyred in 1644, the contact between missionaries and the Japanese people that Xavier had initiated finally came to an end. Thanks, however, to the Hidden Christians secretly continuing with their faith, the flame he had lit was never completely extinguished, and the European influence lingered on.

## **CHRONOLOGY**

1543 Introduction of firearms from Portugal. First contact of Japanese and Western cultures.

1549 Francis Xavier lands in Kagoshima.

1550 First Portuguese ship arrives in Hirado, launching the *nanban* trade. Christianity comes to the Nagasaki region.

1563 Ōmura Sumitada is baptized at Yokoseura.

1571 Port of Nagasaki opens.

1579 Alessandro Valignano comes to Japan.

1580 Nagasaki is ceded to the Jesuits.

1580 Arima Harunobu is baptized in Hinoe Castle.

1580 Seminary is established in Arima.

- 1582 The Tenshō embassy leaves Nagasaki.
- 1584 The Tenshō embassy has an audience with the King of Spain.
- 1584 Arima Harunobu donates Urakami to the Jesuits.
- 1585 Tenshō embassy has audiences with two popes.
- 1587 Edict to expel Christian fathers is issued.
- 1597 Twenty-six Catholics, including six foreign missionaries, are martyred.
- 1603 The Tokugawa shogunate takes power.
- 1614 The Tokugawa shogunate issues edict banning Christianity.
- 1637 The Shimabara Rebellion breaks out.
- 1644 The last missionary in Japan is martyred, leaving the country without any priests.