

### *Kuramoto Ato*: Site of the Yaeyama Headquarters

The building that once stood in this thickly shaded clearing with its spreading banyan tree was the first unified seat of power governing the Yaeyama Islands in the name of the Ryukyu Kingdom. The man who first unified the islands from this regional headquarters was himself from Taketomi. His name was Nishito, and the people of the island remain justly proud of his achievements.

Nishito first came to the attention of King Sho Shin when he was a boy. While suppressing the rebellion led by Oyake Akahachi from Ishigaki Island in 1500, the captain general of the king's forces met Nishito. The boy's capabilities impressed the military commander so much that he took Nishito back to Shuri. Nishito excelled both academically and as a stonemason, engineering the celebrated stone gate *Sonohiyan Utaki Ishimon* and other structures.

In 1524 the king conferred on him the title of *Taketomi Oshuri Oyako*, and he returned to Taketomi as the first chief administrator of the Yaeyama Islands. He held that post for two decades, governing the island of his birth until the functions of the office were transferred to the larger Ishigaki Island.

The location was chosen for its proximity to the nearby *Kaiji Hama* (Kaiji beach), which at the time was a maritime hub for the transport of crops and people between the islands.

Nishito introduced new technology from Shuri, including the first iron foundry in Taketomi; its ruins are near the site of *Kuramoto Ato*. This enabled the fabrication of new agricultural tools, and Nishito encouraged and promoted their use.