

Site of the Arima Seminary

This is thought to be the site of one of Japan's first seminaries. Father Alessandro Valignano, the Jesuit Visitor responsible for overseeing the activities of the order throughout Asia, came to Japan in 1579. In the course of that visit, which lasted three years, he baptized Arima Harunobu (1567–1612), the daimyo who controlled Shimabara. Valignano's primary goal, however, was to establish a robust framework for the propagation of Catholicism in Japan. It became obvious that more priests would be needed, and a decision was made to start training Japanese Christians for the priesthood as the only way to achieve the necessary numbers. Valignano set up two seminaries, one here in Arima (Nagasaki Prefecture) and another in Azuchi (Shiga Prefecture), as well as a college in Oita, in eastern Kyushu.

Scholars have struggled to pinpoint the location of the Arima seminary. Not only has the topography changed since the sixteenth century, but the oldest available maps date from the 1640s—six decades after the seminary was founded—and are not very detailed. We know from written records that the students could walk from the seminary to the sea. Based on that information, Father Diego Pacheco (1922–2008), a Jesuit priest and historian who was the founding director of the Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum in Nagasaki, worked out that the actual location of the Arima seminary was likely to have been on this spot.