

## Death's Head Mound

There are three theories about the mound's origins, but as Oratio is a Christian site, we will only cover the Christian one here.

In 1637, the peasants of Shimabara revolted against local daimyo Matsukura Katsuie (1598–1638), whose cruelty and rapacity were made intolerable by a famine-inducing series of bad harvests. In January 1638, more than 20,000 rebels occupied Hara Castle and, in part thanks to the skilled leadership of samurai loyal to an earlier daimyo, held out against a shogunate force of some 120,000 men supported by Dutch ships. When the castle finally fell in April of that year, everyone in it—men, women, and children—was massacred. While the women and children were generally killed where they were found, men of fighting age were rounded up and beheaded, their heads tallied as a means of keeping score. Five meters high and ten meters wide, this *kubizuka kofun*—literally “heaped-up severed-head mound”—contains the heads of such executed men.

Shocked by the scale of the Shimabara Rebellion and interpreting it purely as a Christian revolt, the shogunate responded the next year by implementing a policy of national seclusion, banning Portuguese ships from Japanese ports.