

## Monument to Omura Yoshiaki

Omura Yoshiaki (1568–1616) rejected Christianity and navigated a tumultuous chapter of Japanese history as different factions fought to gain control over Japan. The monument on the grounds of Omura Shrine celebrates the pragmatic way he steered the Omura family through perilous political times.

### *The first lord of Omura*

Yoshiaki was 19 when he joined the campaign of imperial regent Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) to conquer Kyushu in 1587, taking the place of his sick father. The campaign was successful, but Yoshiaki's father died the same year. Yoshiaki was confirmed as the daimyo of the Omura domain under Hideyoshi's leadership.

On Hideyoshi's death in 1598, Yoshiaki took steps to maintain his rule of Omura, anticipating the power struggle between the rival Toyotomi and Tokugawa families. He ordered the construction of Kushima Castle on Omura Bay, and moved his family from their smaller inland castle to this more fortified position after it was completed in 1599.

### *Shifting alliances*

As Yoshiaki predicted, conflict ensued as daimyo families loyal to the Toyotomi family opposed those who supported Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) and hostilities came to a head at the Battle of Sekigahara (1600) in what is now Gifu Prefecture. Although Yoshiaki had supported Hideyoshi, he opted to fight on the Tokugawa side along with three other daimyo families from Hizen Province (modern-day Saga and Nagasaki Prefectures). Ieyasu and his allies emerged victorious, and with this victory Ieyasu unified Japan under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867). Ieyasu rewarded those warlord families loyal to him with elevated status as daimyo lords of Japan's local domains.

### *Yoshiaki and Christianity*

Yoshiaki was the son of Japan's first Christian daimyo, Omura Sumitada (1533–

1587). Like his father, Yoshiaki was baptized by Jesuit missionaries, who first arrived in southern Japan in the mid-sixteenth century. Shortly after Yoshiaki became daimyo, however, Toyotomi Hideyoshi issued an edict limiting the propagation of Christianity, which Hideyoshi likely perceived as a threat to the political and social institutions of Japan.

Soon after the edict was issued, Yoshiaki expelled all Christian missionaries from his domain. In 1602, Yoshiaki publicly renounced Christianity, well ahead of the Tokugawa shogunate edict outlawing Christianity, and converted to Nichiren Buddhism. He ordered the destruction of the churches that his father had built in the Omura lands and constructed temples and shrines in their place. Yoshiaki fell ill in 1615 and passed the leadership of the domain to his son Sumiyori. Yoshiaki died a year later, aged 48.