

Chapter 4

Stone Buddhas and Stone Stupas of Kunisaki

The Kunisaki Peninsula's natural landscape brought forth powerful, simple stone structures. Hornblende andesite produced at Mt. Futago and welded tuff found near the Tashibunosho manor are both soft stone materials that

are well suited to carving. It was stone from this rich endowment that was carved in Rokugo-manzan, giving shape to the area's religious belief in all its variety. The Magaibutsu Stone Buddha, which is carved in relief on the surface of cliff, countless stone Buddhas and stone stupas, and two guardian kings that protect the area's temples and shrines are all manifestations of Kunisaki's stonework culture. The moss-covered stone Buddhas and stupas found in these verdant hills and valleys, and in their beautiful mountain settlements, tell the tale of Rokugo-manzan's prosperity.



Tangible cultural property designated by Kunisaki City

Two Guardian Kings at Futagoji Temple

Numerous stone guardian kings remain at temples and shrines in Kunisaki. An embodiment of the prayers of their builders, these stone sculptures, which have never decayed, communicate a prosperous time in the history of the Rokugo-manzan region to contemporary viewers.



Even as Buddhist and other imagery was destroyed at Shinto shrines nationwide during the anti-Buddism Haibutsu-kishaku movement at the beginning of the Meiji Period, many statues were safeguarded in this region as a result of the deeply rooted folk beliefs found here. These stone guardian kings survive as symbols of a deep religious devotion that has been maintained and passed down over the generations, and as regional treasures.



Tangible cultural property designated by Bungotakada City
Seated Ksitigarbha
 Nanboku-cho Period
 1368
 Stone
 H: 54.0
 Fukiji Temple, Bungotakada City

This stone statue of Ksitigarbha was relocated to Fukiji Temple from a nearby temple. It sits in front of a halo holding a cane in its right hand and a ball in its left hand. It was carved in relief from one piece of andesite. The workmanship is bar none. The musculature of the face is gentle, and the overall balance is excellent. Based on an inscription on the back, we know it

was made in 1368. This is an invaluable piece that sheds light on the development of the stonework culture of the Kunisaki Peninsula. In the 14th century, the worship of Ksitigarbha, the Bodhisattva that saves the dead from Hell, was prevalent in the Kunisaki Peninsula. In this sense, this statue is also a valuable historical resource.



Seated Ksitigarbha

Tangible cultural property designated by Oita Pref.
Seated Ksitigarbha with Seated the Ten kings of Hell and Standing Deity Gushoshin
 Muromachi Period
 1394
 Stone
 Ksitigarbha - H: 63.5
 Ten kings - H: 41.0–45.0
 Gushoshin - H: 52.0 & 55.0
 Shigefuji Juo-kogumi Association, Kunisaki City

In Buddhist mythology, the ten kings of hell judged the dead for the sins they committed while alive. The dead would pass through the realms of each king to receive judgment at set intervals of every 7 days after death until the 49th day and then again on the 100th day, the first year, and the third year after death. The relatives of the dead had to hold memorial services for each king in turn. Ksitigarbha, the statue in the middle, is the Bodhisattva that saves the dead from Hell. In the Kunisaki Peninsula, the worship of Ksitigarbha and the

ten kings flourished in the 14th century. All of the statues were carved from andesite. Ksitigarbha, who sits on a lotus pedestal in front of a boat-shaped nimbus, has plump musculature. The ten kings were fully carved, including their backs, and their expressions and sense of movement are both rich. The year 1394 is inscribed on the back of the Ksitigarbha statue, making this an excellent example of a standard stone Buddha from the Muromachi Period in the Kunisaki Peninsula. The ten kings were likely carved around the same time.



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



The ten kings of hell



Deity Gushoshin



Deity Gushoshin



Standing Guardian King

Edo Period
1843
Stone
H: 78.0
Oita Prefectural Museum of History, Usa City

This guardian king statue used to stand at a temple in what is now Bungotakada City. The stone base that the statue originally stood on remains at the former site and bears an inscription that it was donated in 1843. A second statute that completes a pair with this one also remains at the former site.

The statute's mouth is open wide as if shouting in extreme anger, and its eyes look ahead but angled to the right. It holds a vajra (a ritual weapon) in its left hand, which is raised above the shoulder, and its right hand, which makes a fist, is held behind the lower back. Its right foot is slightly angled forward but solidly planted on the ground. The entire statue was carved from one piece of andesite. At 78 cm tall, it is small for a guardian king statue, but the powerful and imposing pose makes it seem bigger.



Tangible cultural property designated by Bungotakada City

Lantern with Two Monks

Edo Period
18th–19th c.
Stone
H: 42.0
Orekiji Temple, Bungotakada City

This stone lantern is supported by two monks: a fat one wearing only a skirt and carrying a large *taiko* drum on his back and a second one holding up the drum from behind. The monk in front has his mouth open, while the one in back has his mouth closed, as if uttering the sounds “a” and “un,” the Japanese transliteration of the first and last letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, which symbolizes the beginning and the end of all things (similar to Alpha and Omega in the Christian tradition). The middle of the drum is probably where a plate of oil was hung and lit. There is a indentation carved on the inner edge of the

drum where a round paper screen could be inserted. The entire lantern, including the monks and the drum, was carved from one piece of andesite. The facial expressions of the monks are quite unique. The eyes of the monk with the drum on his back are popping out, as if he is struggling under the weight of the drum. Meanwhile, the face of the monk behind him is distorted because it is pressed against the drum. This type of odd-shaped stone lanterns in the Kunisaki Peninsula can only be found in the Matama district where Orekiji Temple is located.



Important cultural property / Historic site

Kumano Magaibutsu Stone Buddhas

After ascending the hundred-plus roughly piled stone stairs that legend says were built by an ogre in one night, the *magaibutsu*, relief sculptures of the Buddhas carved into perpendicular cliffs, suddenly come into view. The path through the dark forest gives way to light, leaving many visitors to gasp in awe at these massive sculptures.

On the site, the carving on the viewer's right is Mahavairocana, which measures

nearly 7 m in height. The long narrow eyes appear to be looking into the distance, and the large, arching eyebrows, wide nose, and downturned corners of the mouth all make for a powerful expression. This is thought to be the oldest Buddhist sculpture in the region, dating back to around the 10th century.

On the left stands a carving of Acalanatha, which is thought to date back to the

Kamakura Period. It stands nearly 8 m in height, making it one of the largest such sculptures in Japan. Acalanatha is usually depicted with a stern, severely angry look on its face, but this sculpture, with puffy cheeks and a gently contoured mouth, shows the deity with a humorous expression. This approachable style is common to the folk beliefs of the Kunisaki Peninsula.



Important cultural property
Kamagasaki Kunisaki Stone Stupa
Nanboku-cho Period
1335
Kunisaki City



Important cultural property
Iwatoji Kunisaki Stone Stupa
Kamakura Period
1233
Kunisaki City



Important cultural property
Ishimaru Kunisaki Stone Stupa
Kamakura Period
1330
Kitsuki City

Kunisaki Stone Stupas

Numerous stone stupas are scattered throughout what used to be Bungo Province, especially in the Kunisaki Peninsula. The Kunisaki Stone Stupas are renowned for their distinctive construction. All of them have holes carved into them to hold sutras. The latter half of the Kamakura Period, when the Kunisaki Stone Stupas were first being built, was a time of great unrest due to two attempted invasions by the Mongols. Given this, it is believed that many prayers were offered from the temples of Rokugo-manzan, and the storing of Lotus Sutra in these stone stupas may have also been a response to the trends of the times. As time passed and the social landscape changed, the original meaning of these stupas was lost. Later, they were built as memorials where living individuals could pray for their souls after death, and the devotion of prayers to these stupas spread from the monks to the general public. Concurrent with this, the stupa structures became simpler, but the early Kunisaki Stone Stupas, which were built to look like symmetrical lotus petals, had a more dignified aesthetic.

Itabi, Buddhist Steles

Itabi steles were constructed against the same social backdrop as Kunisaki Stone Stupas. This one bears a large Sanskrit character that symbolizes the Buddha, under which is carved a smaller devotional request in Japanese. *Itabi* steles are found throughout Japan, but many of those on the Kunisaki Peninsula are larger and more imposing than their counterparts in other regions. The Naruitabi reaches 3.83 m in height, making it the largest such stele in western Japan. The superbly executed Sanskrit character delivers the depth of the devotional spirit behind the stele.



Tangible cultural property
designated by Oita Pref.
Naruitabi Buddhist stele
Kamakura Period
1321
Kunisaki City



Historic site designated by Oita Pref.
Sentoji Temple site
Nanboku-cho Period to Edo Period
Kunisaki City

Gorinto, Five-elements Stupas

Most of the stone stupas built in Japan during the Middle Ages were *gorinto*, five-elements stupas. Most were used as either memorial stupas or grave markers. Their five parts symbolize the five elements that make up the universe in Buddhist belief: earth, water, fire, wind, and air, represented by the shapes of cube, sphere, pyramid (roof shape), semisphere, and jewel (onion shape), respectively. *Gorinto* stupas can often be found beside the road in Kunisaki, which is considered as a testament to the region's religious belief. Some gravesites, for example the site of former Sentoji Temple, were filled with countless *gorinto* stupas.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the following organizations for their support in compiling this guidebook.
(Organizations are listed alphabetical order.)

Bungotakada City
Choanji Temple
Fukiji Temple
Futagoji Temple
Ganjojui Temple
Hachiman Nadagu Shrine
Hiji Town
Himeshima
Himeshima Village
Hokeji District, Hiji Town
Iwatoji Temple
Jinguji Temple
Kamemine Shrine
Kitsuki Castle Town Historical Museum
Kitsuki City
Kunisaki City
Kuro District, Usa City
Kyushu Historical Museum
Kyushu National Museum
Makiodo Temple
Mantokuji Temple
Monjusenji Temple
Mudoji Temple
Oita Prefectural Museum of History
Orekiji Temple
Rokugo-manzan Association
Rurikoji Temple
Sentoji Temple
Shigefuji Juo-kogumi Association
Usa City
Usa Jingu Shrine

Celebrating the 1,300th Anniversary of the Founding of Rokugo-manzan
Kunisaki-Usa and Rokugo-manzan in Oita Prefecture
The Home of Shinto Gods, Buddhist Deities and Ogres

Edited and Published by Kunisaki Peninsula-Usa Region and Rokugo-manzan Tourism Council

Supported by Kyushu National Museum

Produced by The Nishinippon Shimbun Co., Ltd

Designed, Printed, and Bindod by The Nishinippon Shimbun Insatsu Co., Ltd

Date of Publication: March 13, 2020

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