

Portrait of Kensho

This statue serves as both a memorial and a posthumous portrait of the seventeenth-century monk Kensho (1597–1678), one of the most important figures in Ninnaji's premodern history. The temple was mostly burned down during the Onin War (1467–1477) and remained in a dilapidated state for many years thereafter. Finally, in 1634, during a visit to Kyoto by Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu, another monk, Kakushin Nyudo, successfully petitioned for the funding and permission to reconstruct the temple. Yet it was Kensho who oversaw the design and building of the new temple facilities. His diary, which survives, includes details of his supervision of the design and other decision-making processes. He also recounts his concerns that the project would be delayed to the point that it might never even occur at all. And it did take a long time for the reconstruction to come to fruition. Though Nyudo secured the necessary funding in 1634, construction itself did not begin until 1640, and was only completed in 1646. The layout of the temple as it exists today has not changed much since.