

### **Omori: Rakanji Temple and the 500 Rakan**

Rakanji Temple, built to honor those who lost their lives in the mines of Iwami Ginzan, was founded in the belief that praying to the *rakan* (Sanskrit: arhat) would help the families of the deceased to find peace. In Buddhism, arhats are those who have attained nirvana, or spiritual enlightenment.

Construction on the temple began in 1741 under the patronage of Tayasu Munetake (1716–1771), the central government’s representative at Iwami Ginzan, who was the second son of the shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684–1751). It took 25 years and vast funding to complete, but the result is impressive: three caves dug into the mountainside, filled with more than five hundred stone statues of the *rakan*, each with an individual posture and facial expression. Local people would search for a statue that resembled their deceased family member. The backs of these statues were marked with the names of the donors, who ranged from local believers to Tayasu’s family members and ladies of the shogun’s household in Edo (present-day Tokyo).

Today, visitors can cross the arched stone bridges that date back to the temple’s founding and enter two of the caves, which house 250 statues each. While Rakanji Temple is also known as the “500 Rakan,” this was never meant as an exact figure. The actual number of statues used to be significantly higher, but the centuries have taken their toll, leaving us with the current 500 *rakan*.