

Jade Monument

The Jade Monument (Tamaudun-hi) is a carved stone stele that was erected when the Tamaudun Royal Mausoleum was completed in 1501. The stele still stands in the inner courtyard in front of the eastern crypt. It is made of diabase, which originally had a slightly greenish hue, now weathered to a dark gray and covered with moss. Written in Japanese hiragana script, which could capture both Ryukyuan court dialect and formal Japanese terms, it lists the name of King Sho Shin and eight of his male and female offspring who were involved in the mausoleum's construction. It also describes rules for who is allowed to be buried in Tamaudun, with a curse for violating them. A notable feature is a symbolic panel at the top of the stele featuring an auspicious engraved design of a pair of phoenixes, the sun, and clouds.

In Ryukyu court tradition of the time, the sun symbolized the king, while the phoenix, believed to appear during a peaceful and prosperous reign, symbolized the royal high priestess (*kikoe-ōgimi*). This is tied to the Chinese imperial tradition wherein the phoenix, which originated in the sun and symbolized the cosmos, represented the justice, obedience, and fidelity of the imperial house. In Chinese and Japanese artistic prototypes, when pairs of phoenixes were depicted, they were male and female, distinguishable by their tail feathers. These paired phoenixes symbolize the yin and yang of the cosmos. The phoenixes of the Jade Monument do not have such distinguishing features and appear to be a unique Ryukyuan interpretation of this motif.