

Sonohyan-utaki Stone Gate

The Sonohyan-utaki Stone Gate was erected in 1519 by Sho Shin, the third king of the Second Sho Dynasty, to guard the entrance to one of the most important sacred forests of the Ryukyu Kingdom. This forest has served as a guardian shrine to the people of Ryukyu since ancient times. It was presided over by the highest royal priestess (*kikoe-ōgimi*) and remains the site of important rituals even to this day. Built of intricately carved stone that mimics Ryukyu wooden palace architecture, the Sonohyan-utaki Stone Gate embodies a unique blend of architectural principles and design elements introduced from Japan and China. These have been modified and are expressed in unique local materials. Ryukyu coral limestone is used for the main structural members and the roof and fine-grained sandstone for many of the details. The doors are of wood. Like every monument at Shuri, the gate suffered damage during the Battle of Okinawa in World War II but has been carefully restored. During the postwar period, the sacred forest was reduced in size in order to make room for a school and roads and has lost its former magnificence, but the gate is still an important object of devotion.