

## ***Oji*: Subsidiary Shrines along the Kumano Pilgrimage Route**

*Oji* were subsidiary shrines of the three Kumano grand shrines. They were located along the pilgrimage route, and while some were simple places of worship, others offered accommodation and even baths to weary pilgrims. There were many *oji* between the capital and Nachi Waterfall. They were commonly referred to as the “ninety-nine *oji*,” although this is not an exact number.

### *Origin of Oji*

*Oji* means “prince,” and the deities worshiped at these subsidiary shrines were considered children of the deities worshiped at the Kumano grand shrines.

Historical and literary sources offer glimpses of the *oji* network’s early development. A tenth-century pilgrimage narrative by a monk named Zoki describes *tamuke-no-kami* (traveler’s shrines) “at the base of every tree.” These traveler’s shrines, established and tended by local ascetics, were likely the predecessors of *oji*. By the twelfth century, accounts of Kumano pilgrimages routinely mentioned dozens of *oji* by name.

Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the new government ordered that Shinto and Buddhism be strictly separated, the *oji* became independent shrines with new names. The age of *oji* was over, but many survive to this day as local centers of faith.

### *Tafuke-oji Shrine*

This *oji* stood beside Daimon-zaka Slope. By the Edo period (1603–1867), it was well known as the last *oji* on the Nakahechi pilgrimage route before Nachisan. Because it is not mentioned in any lists of *oji* found in medieval guidebooks, scholars believe it may have retained its original character as a traveler’s shrine until relatively late.

### *Ichinono-oji Shrine*

Ichinono-*oji* was probably one of the oldest *oji* in Kumano, appearing in pilgrimage diaries from the early twelfth century. It can be seen in the 500-year-old painting called the Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala, and by late medieval times it was known as the second-

to-last *oji* on the Nakahechi route. *Ich*i means “market,” and the shrine may have doubled as a marketplace.

Today, Ichinono-*oji* is a village shrine called Ichinono-*oji-jinja*. There is debate, however, about whether this shrine stands on the *oji*’s original site. About 100 meters away is a small patch of hallowed ground called Osugi-yashiro. Osugi-yashiro contains old foundation stones and a rock that is a *shintai* (the physical object in which a deity resides) of the sun goddess Amaterasu-no-Okami. Tradition holds that this was the original site of Ichinono-*oji*.

### *Hamanomiya-oji Shrine*

In medieval times, Hamanomiya-*oji* was celebrated for its views of Fudaraku Beach and the open sea. It formed a single complex with neighboring Fudarakusan-ji Temple, but this link was severed in the nineteenth century. The *oji* was renamed Kumano Sansho Omiwa-yashiro Shrine.

Hamanomiya-*oji* enshrines the three deities of Kumano in its main sanctuary, and also has two auxiliary shrines. One of these enshrines Nishikitobe, a local chieftain said to have unsuccessfully resisted the legendary first emperor Jimmu upon his arrival at Kumano. The other enshrines a deity of food and rice production called Mike-tsu-Kami, or Sankoshin.