

Kongoin Temple

Kongoin is a Shingon Buddhist temple that has witnessed Yunotsu's transformation from a modest fishing village to the prosperous port town that became the main source of supplies for the Iwami Ginzan silver mine. According to the temple records, there has been a Kongoin in Yunotsu since 1337, when a sanctuary was built somewhere in the town to house a statue of Senju Kannon, the thousand-armed bodhisattva of compassion. That statue remains the main deity of the temple, which has probably stood on its present site since at least the seventeenth century and whose cemetery—behind the main hall, which was rebuilt in 1760—contains some of the oldest tombstones in the area. These predate the year 1561, when the Mohri family built a harbor and coastal fortifications at the mouth of the long narrow valley, opening the way for Yunotsu to become the silver mine's primary port. Some of the stones are of a type found only in and around what is now Fukui Prefecture in the Hokuriku region, further north on the Sea of Japan, suggesting that maritime trade flourished along the coast more than a century before the town's greatest period of affluence in the late 1600s. One such stone, slightly darker than those around it, can be seen underneath a statue of the bodhisattva Jizo, covered by a stone overhang near the entrance to the cemetery. The conical tombstones further up the hillside mark the graves of Kongoin's former priests.