

***Yagura*: Ashikaga Family Graves**

There are three arched caves along the hillside behind Kashodo Hall. Known as *yagura*, these caves were dug into the cliffs for use as tombs. They are distinctive to the Kamakura area and filled with stone monuments.

In traditional Japanese graves, the deceased's remains are buried in a vertical shaft. In contrast, the pit inside a *yagura* is shallower and runs horizontally along the floor of the cave. Each *yagura* accommodates multiple urns of ashes. The monuments stand on top of the grave, serving as tombstones.

It is believed that *yagura* tombs originated in Kamakura because of the lack of flat land in the city. The mountains and hills surrounding Kamakura are tuffaceous sandstone, a soft rock, making it easy to hollow out spaces for burial.

From its founding in 1334, Hokuji Temple was closely linked to the influential Ashikaga family. Thanks to the efforts of a loyal retainer, Uesugi Shigekane (d. 1375), the temple was dedicated to the spirit of Ashikaga Ietoki (d. 1284), who died in a political struggle. Ashikaga Takauji (1305–1358), Ietoki's grandson, became shogun just four years after Hokuji Temple was founded, establishing the Ashikaga shogunate (1338–1573). A branch of the family served as rulers of Japan, and several prominent members of the Ashikaga family, including Ietoki himself, are believed to be buried in the *yagura*.

In autumn, the foliage of the Japanese maple trees in the area surrounding the *yagura* makes an impressive scene.