

Izumi Shikibu Memorial Stupa

Izumi Shikibu (ca. 976–1036) was a court lady and renowned literary figure of the Heian period (794–1185). She is especially known for her *waka*, a poetic style in which each poem has 31 syllables grouped into five lines of 5-7-5-7-7. This stone stupa was erected to honor Shikibu and celebrate one of her most famous verses. The poem is thought to have been composed between 1002 and 1005, when Izumi Shikibu is said to have sought the guidance of Engyōji's founding abbot, Shōkū (910–1007), after turning to Buddhism in search of spiritual solace.

From darkness I come
To set out along a path
Of greater darkness;
Illuminate my dark path,
O, moon on the mountain's peak.

The verse draws on familiar poetic allusions to highlight the relationship between suffering and salvation. The “moon,” for example, is a symbol of Buddhist enlightenment, but also of Shōkū himself. The poem was selected for inclusion in an imperial anthology, the highest poetic honor of the day. Shōkū was so deeply moved by Izumi Shikibu's appeal that he sent an immediate reply:

Though the sun has set
The moon has not yet risen;
In the growing dusk,
I illuminate the night
With the beacon of the dharma.

Temple records state that when Izumi Shikibu died, she was laid to rest in a robe sent to her by Shōkū.

The stupa was erected in 1233, making it the oldest inscribed stone monument in Hyogo Prefecture. However, virtually every piece of it has been replaced or repaired over the subsequent centuries.