

Kurume History Walks

No.35 Jizo Relief Sculptures of the Oei Era 応永地蔵板碑を訪ねて

Jizo Worship

Jizo is regarded as a Bodhisattva, who comes to save people when they are in trouble and also after they die. It is depicted as a monk with a halo around his head.

In Kurume, a lot of Jizo relief sculptures on stone tablets remain. Most were made about six hundred years ago, during the Oei era (1394-1428).

① Jizo relief sculpture

(A Prefectural Cultural Property in Miyanojin)

It is the oldest Jizo sculpture in Kurume with an inscription dating from the 22nd year of the Shohei era (1367). Originally it was placed in the inner sanctuary of Atago-jinja Shrine in Mt. Kora, then, it was moved to the Kokubunji temple in Miyanojin in 1869.

Jizo standing on a lotus pedestal and having a pewter staff in the right hand and a sacred gem in the left hand was elaborately line-engraved on a stone tablet one meter high.



② Nanaki Jizo relief sculpture

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Nagatoishi-machi)

It bears an inscription dating from the 3rd year of the Oei (1396). It is said that after the victory, to give his thanks to the jizo, Ryuzoji Takanobu, a

military commander of Hizen Province moved it to a hill free from flood. But it returned in one night to the original place where was near the Chikugo River.

Jizo standing on a lotus pedestal and having a pewter staff in the right hand was carved in high relief on a stone tablet 1.83 meter high.

There are also about ten Jizo relief sculptures, which were modeled on it, in Tosu City and Miyaki Town.



③ Jizo relief sculpture of Io-ji temple

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Tera-machi)

It is located in a cemetery behind the Io-ji temple. Jizo was carved on a natural stone sixty centimeters high and was inscribed with the year, 5th Oei (1398). After this, all Jizo relief sculptures in Kurume were made with the same objects: standing on a lotus pedestal, having a sacred gem in the left hand, and forming the right hand in wish-granting mudra.



④ Jizo relief sculpture at Iwai Spring

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Yamakawa-machi)

On a natural stone 1.25 meters high, Jizo was carved in half-relief and has a cocoon-shaped halo, a hole on the forehead, and an inscription dating from February 11th Oei (1404). On its back, fifteen of the worshiper's names were engraved.



⑤ Jizo relief sculpture at Shirakuchi

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Araki-machi)

This Jizo, carved in half-relief on a natural stone 85 centimeter high, is enshrined on the eastern side of the Tsurukame Bridge. Standing on a lotus pedestal, it is similar to the above-mentioned one at Iwai Spring. And, it bears an inscription of the year 11th Oei (1404) and 13 worshiper's names.



⑥ Jizo relief sculpture at Yokobaba

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Korauchi-machi)

It used to be located on a field path at the foot of Mt. Kora. On a natural stone about one meter high, Jizo was carved in relief with an inscription of



November, 11th year of the Oei era (1404). It has a hole on the forehead but does not have an expression of ears and clothes' detail.

⑦ Jizo relief sculpture of Henjoin Temple

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Tera-machi)

It is located at a cemetery of the Henjoin Temple. The lower half was lost. But, on the remaining half, which measures fifty centimeters high, it is carved in half-relief. A single character engraved remains on the stone. It is 應(応) which pronounces O, then which should be from Oei. And it is very similar to those of the last three Jizo. These are presumed to be made by the same craftsman in the same period.



⑧ Jizo relief sculpture of Nichirin-ji Temple

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Kyo-machi)

In the precinct of the temple, there is Nichirin-ji *Kofun* (mounded tomb), from the late 5th century - the early 6th century. And on that mound, a wooden building houses a Jizo relief sculpture sixty centimeters high.

This sculpture bears an inscription dating from August, 22nd year of the Oei (1415). It was carved in low-relief, then is so abraded that its expression is today unclear. And next to this, there is one more sculpture, thought to be made hundred years later than it.



⑨ Jizo relief sculpture of Kuriya*

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Higashiaikawa-machi)

On a flat side of a natural stone sixty centimeter high, Jizo was carved in low-relief with simple lines. The details are not clear. It bears inscriptions of two worshiper's names and the year 25th Oei (1418).

According to a document from the 18th century, originally, it was erected in the Anyoji Temple (in today's Miimachi) and was worshiped as a god of fishermen and luck (*Ebisu*) in a market.



* It was relocated to Kyomachi in 2012.

⑩ Jizo relief sculpture of Shomyoin Temple

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Daizenji-machi)

Jizo was carved on a stone tablet 1.2 meters high. On the stone, Small Buddha on its lower right, three Sanskrit characters which represent Buddha, Akshobhya, and Amoghasiddhi on its upper side, an inscription of the year 28th Oei (1421).



⑪ Jizo relief sculpture of Nakashima

(A Municipal Cultural Property in Daizenji-machi)

Standing Jizo with a Sanskrit character of Amitabha on the upper side is carved in low relief on a stone tablet 92 centimeters high.

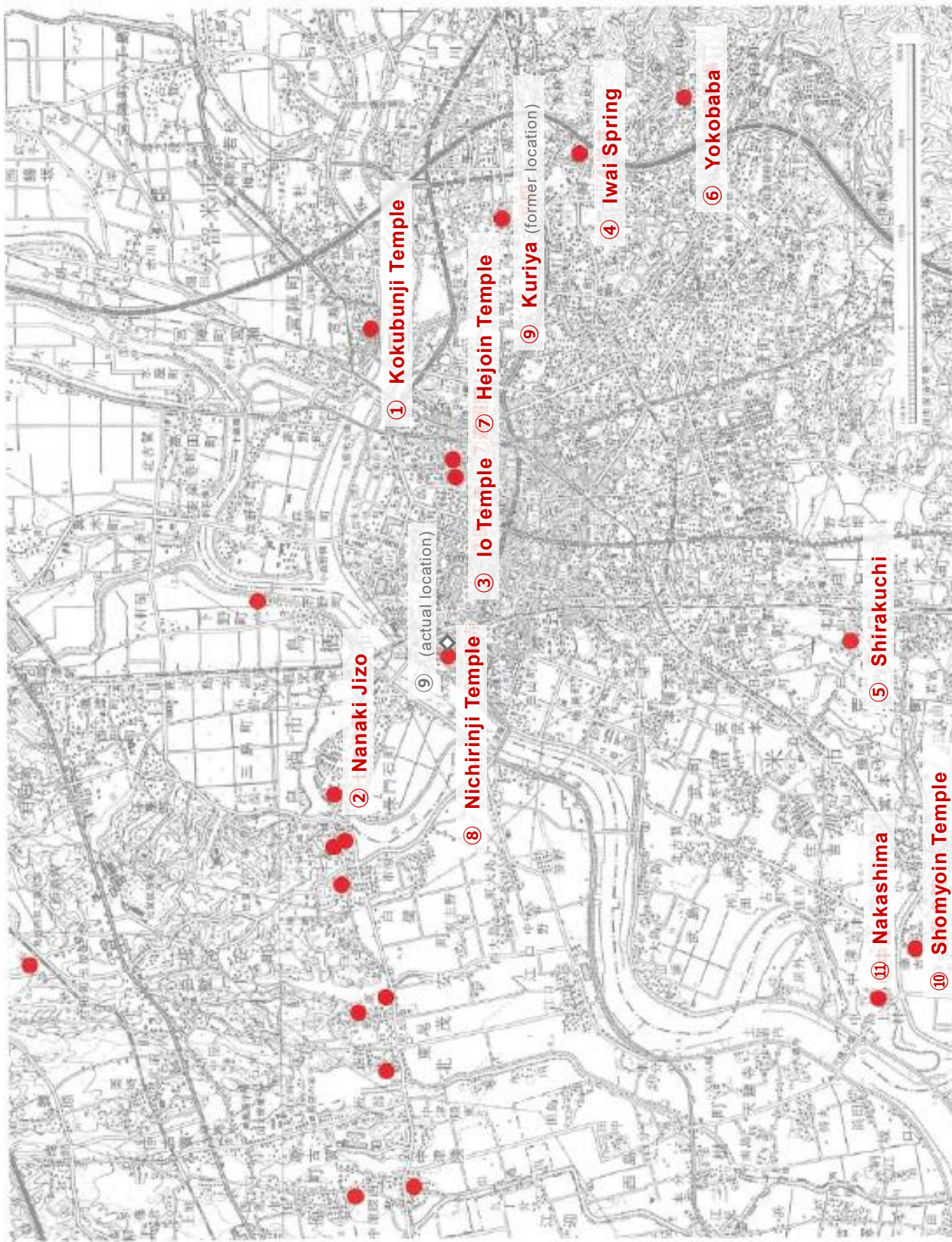
It is similar to that of the last Jizo. Then, it is presumed to be made by the same craftsman in the same period.



Overview

Jizo relief sculptures of the Oei era are distributed around Kurume. (See the figure on the next page) Those on the right side of the Chikugo River are characterized by Jizo having a pewter staff like Nanaki Jizo (②) and those on the left are characterized by Jizo forming the hand in wish-granting mudra.

The Oei era was a period soon after the end of the sixty years' war of two Imperial courts and their following in Japan. But in Chikugo Province, the time of peace did not come yet. Because there were still many battles against the remnants of a defeated clan who tried to invade the province. Jizo relief sculptures could be said to represent the people's wish for salvation.



Map of Jizo Relief Sculptures Figures in circle correspond these in the text.

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