

## The Eiko Stone (Eiko-seki)

In the lower garden stands a rock known as the Eiko-seki, the importance of which is indicated by a sacred straw rope (*shimenawa*) with paper tassels wrapped around the stone. In Shinto, *shimenawa* are usually tied around objects to indicate their sanctity, as is the case for the Eiko Stone. Legend has it that when Saihoji was rebuilt by Muso Soseki 700 years ago, one of his assistants was exceptionally large, strong, and diligent, singlehandedly carrying stones that would normally take several people to move. Nobody knew who he was or where he came from. Once the garden was completed, the man asked Muso Soseki if he would exchange his stole for the man's staff. Soseki agreed but, curious to find out more about the strange individual, had him followed all the way to Somedonoin, another Kyoto temple a few kilometers away. Within the temple grounds, Soseki's stole was found draped around a statue of Jizo—a Buddhist deity believed to be the protector of all, and particularly of children, expectant mothers, and travelers. The legend concludes that it was in fact Jizo who assisted Soseki in the building of the gardens, and the Eiko-seki is associated with this legend.