

## **Sugawara no Michizane's Rock**

The rock now occupied by Mizukake Fudo, a stone statue that worshipers pour water on before offering prayers, is said to have once provided a place of rest for a legendary figure in Japanese history. Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) was an intellectual and bureaucrat who rose to prominence at court during the reign of Emperor Uda (867–931). After losing a power struggle, Michizane was sent into de facto exile in Kyushu in the year 901. Before departing Kyoto, he visited Ninnaji to say farewell to the retired Emperor Uda, his former supporter, and then the first abbot of the temple. But the abbot was busy conducting rituals, and his guest was made to wait and sat on this rock for an entire day. Michizane eventually left without receiving an audience with the abbot. Michizane died while in exile, and soon after, the capital was struck repeatedly by disease and natural disasters. These calamities were attributed to the vengeful spirit of Michizane, whom the court quickly appeased with the building of a new shrine, Kitano Tenmangu. Tenmangu shrines, which honor Sugawara no Michizane as the patron deity of scholarship, are found throughout Japan.