

## Faith in Kanayago, Kami of *Tatara* Ironmaking

Kanayago Jinja Shrine is the foremost shrine dedicated to Kanayago, the guardian kami deity of *tatara* ironworking. By the late 1700s, faith in the deity had spread widely among ironworking communities in the Chūgoku region (now Hiroshima, Okayama, Shimane, Tottori, and Yamaguchi Prefectures). The documents displayed here are records of donations made in 1791, 1807, and 1819 for repairs to the shrine.

According to an eighteenth-century text called *Tetsuzan hisho* (Secret records of the Iron Mountains), Kanayago descended to Harima Province (now Hyogo Prefecture) from the heavenly realm of the kami. Riding on the back of a white heron, she searched the region for a suitable residence and alighted on a katsura tree in the mountains roughly 35 kilometers southwest of where Wakou Museum now stands. A man named Abe Masashige was hunting in the mountains, and he was startled to see Kanayago descend from the heavens. Kanayago ordered Abe to build a shrine, and when it was complete, she taught him how to make iron using the *tatara* method. The shrine now stands in the Hirose district of Yasugi.

Kanayago is frequently described as a particularly finicky deity who is unhappy with her own appearance and jealous of other women. In fact, women were often prohibited from approaching the furnace during the smelting operation to avoid angering Kanayago. She is sometimes depicted riding a fox.