

### ***Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity (Kasuga Gongen Genki-e)***

*Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity*, or the *Kasuga Scrolls*, is a set of fourteenth-century handscrolls (*emaki*) depicting stories of the five deities that are collectively known as the Kasuga Gongen. *Emaki* depict stories through a combination of pictures and text that is revealed from right to left as the scroll is unrolled. *Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity* contains a wide range of genre stories from religious episodes to historical tales brimming with action, adventure, and miraculous events. The aristocrat Saionji Kinhira (1264–1315) commissioned the scrolls as an offering to the deities of Kasuga Taisha Shrine in Nara, and they were completed around 1309.

Kinhira was the head of the Saionji family, which was a branch of the powerful and aristocratic Fujiwara family. In the beginning of the fourteenth century, Kinhira became involved in a dispute with Retired Emperor Gouda (1267–1324), and his position in the imperial court became unstable, culminating in his dismissal in January of 1306. Two months later, however, he had regained his courtly position, and in 1309 he was promoted to Minister of the Left (in practice, the most powerful role in the courtly bureaucracy). Kinhira's good fortune at court after the near destruction of his political career instilled in him a deep sense of gratitude and inspired him to commission this set of splendid scrolls for Kasuga Taisha, the patron shrine of the Fujiwara family.

The *Kasuga Scrolls* are considered to be a masterpiece of the *emaki* medium. The court artist Takashina Takakane (dates unknown) undertook the painting of *Illustrated Miracles of the Kasuga Deity*, producing 20 scrolls of stories describing the miracles associated with the Kasuga deities. As befit a religious offering, the scrolls were painted on silk instead of paper. In addition, they are exceptionally large and are difficult to unroll by hand. This was not an issue, however, as the scrolls were dedicated to Kasuga Taisha and were never meant to be read regularly.

Since the *Kasuga Scrolls* were rarely opened, they are remarkably well preserved, retaining their original vivid colors. Takakane's paintings are lauded for their remarkable detail and faithful rendering of architecture. From light snow dusting autumn forests at the turn of the season to a humorous depiction of a man tossing out foul-tasting food, the scrolls reveal charming surprises and a reverence for the commonplace minutiae of life.