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Frontispiece: The Mirror Portraiture of Shinran

This simple sketch of Shinran (1173–1262) is said to have been drawn in his lifetime by Sen-amidabutsu (*n.d.*), believed to be one of his disciples. The fact that it was done roughly, using only bold strokes of *sumi* and devoid of any color or ornamentation, suggests that it may have actually been a preparatory study drawn for a more elaborate work. The absence of such daily objects as cane, straw sandals or hide-mat seen in other examples of this genre, has the effect of revealing one aspect of Shinran's inner character—that of a solitary, stern seeker of the Way. As to when or why this portrait came to be venerated as the *Kagami no miya* 鏡御影 (lit., "mirror image portrait"), details are not known. In all probability the image of Shinran was so realistically rendered that, soon after completion, it was referred to in this way so as to distinguish it from other existing portraits.

This scroll is designated a National Treasure and preserved at Nishi Honganji in Kyoto. According to the colophon, it took its present form when it was repaired in November 1310 by Kakunyo (1270–1351), Shinran's great grandson and the third abbot of Honganji.

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