

Goddess of Mt. Fuji

Worshipping Asama no Kami

The earliest records of devotion to Mt. Fuji are poems in the eighth-century *Man'yōshū* anthology. Courtiers in faraway Nara praised Mt. Fuji as a sacred peak, aloof and eternal, and prayed to it for the peace of the nation. The smoke that rose from the peak was metaphorically linked with smoldering passions, and overall the mountain seemed to evoke more awe than fear.

But the mountain had another side. Eruptions like those reported in the ninth century revealed the terrifying, destructive power of Mt. Fuji. The people interpreted those eruptions as the wrath of the mountain deity, and responded by constructing new shrines and redoubling their worship in an attempt to appease the raging mountain.

The deity of Mt. Fuji is known by the name “Asama” or “Sengen.” Because there are other active volcanoes in Japan named “Mt. Asama” (*Asama-yama*), it seems that the origins of this name are related to volcanic activity. Little attention was paid to the gender of Asama no Kami (“the deity Asama”) in the age of the *Man'yōshū* poets, but during the repeated eruptions of the ninth century, it came to be understood that Asama no Kami was a specifically female deity.