

## **Goddess of Mt. Fuji**

### **Mysteries of Asama no Kami**

The sculpture of Asama no Kami at Ebara Sengen-jinja Shrine, a replica of which is on display here, is the oldest known example to survive in Yamanashi Prefecture.

However, older examples are known in Shizuoka Prefecture on the southern side of the mountain. Two sculptures of Asama no Kami are enshrined at Sengen-jinja Shrine in Chabatake, Susono. One has four faces, and the other has three. Furthermore, all of these faces are female.

Clearly, the multi-faced depiction of Ebara Sengen-jinja's statue was not unique. But the meaning of this presentation is a mystery. Multiple faces are a common element in Buddhist sculpture, but almost unheard of in depictions of Shinto deities. Researchers have dated all of these sculptures to the tenth or eleventh centuries.

A larger sculpture of a female deity is enshrined at Shibokusa Sengen-jinja Shrine, not far from the Oshino Hakkai. This sculpture was carved in 1315. Unlike its smaller, earlier predecessors, it is accompanied by two male deities, and has only one face. Were any sculptures of the deity of Mt. Fuji carved during the 300 years separating the two forms of depiction? This is a question researchers are still working to answer.