

## Noblemen Who Prayed to Mt. Fuji

In the eleventh century, burying sutras emerged as a new act of faith. The oldest known example is a set of sutras in a gilt bronze case buried in Yamato Province (modern-day Nara Prefecture) in 1007. This offering was made by Fujiwara no Michinaga (966–1028), a nobleman at the center of the court society that produced classic works of literature like *The Tale of Genji*. This new practice was inspired by *mappo* thought, the Buddhist idea of a coming Degenerate Age.

Buddhist clergy calculated that the Degenerate Age would begin in 1052. During this age, they warned, Buddhist teachings would be lost, and despair would reign until the coming of the bodhisattva Miroku in the distant future. For those with the means, one way to lessen the impact of this catastrophe—and earn spiritual merit—was to have Buddhist sutras copied and buried for rediscovery in the age of Miroku.

Fujiwara no Akinaga (1118–1167) was a nobleman who served as a local administrator in several rural provinces, including Mikawa (the eastern part of modern-day Aichi). Urns inscribed with his name have been unearthed in locations with excellent views of Mt. Fuji from the east, west, and south. Researchers believe that these urns contained sutras, and that another urn buried in Akinaga's name may await discovery to Mt. Fuji's north.

Also active in the twelfth century was the Shugen ascetic Matsudai. Matsudai climbed Mt. Fuji hundreds of times during his life, and was also known as Fuji Shonin (Holy Man of Fuji). He conceived a plan to bury sutras on Mt. Fuji's summit and collected many donations for this purpose. His biography states that he even visited the capital and successfully sought the patronage of the retired Emperor Toba (1103–1156). In modern times, buried sutras written in vermillion ink were indeed discovered at Mt. Fuji's summit. There is no proof that Matsudai buried them, but they have been dated to the twelfth century.

Buried sutras have also been unearthed on the northern face of the mountain, at a key pilgrimage site on the Yoshida Ascending Route. The impact of *mappo* thought evidently reached as far as Mt. Fuji.