

UNCANNY DIVINE BODIES IN LATE MEDIEVAL NARRATIVES OF EMPRESS JINGŪ

LECTURE BY EMILY B. SIMPSON



Legend asserts that the mythic Japanese Empress Jingū conquered the Korean peninsula in the third century with divine aid. While this legend first appeared in eighth century chronicles, narratives of Empress Jingū proliferated in the fourteenth century. After Japan's successful defense against the Mongol Invasions of 1273 and 1281, Jingū's conquest was seen as a precedent at that time. In these late medieval Jingū narratives, however, the Shinto gods (*kami*) manifest very differently than in the original

texts. In the early versions, they speak through human mediums while remaining unseen themselves. In the fourteenth century narratives, however, they appear as humans with a number of uncanny attributes. Jingū herself takes on suprahuman form and switches gender between woman and man in spite of being pregnant, the deity of Sumiyoshi turns into an old yet incredibly strong man, and Azumi no Isora is characterized by an ugly, barnacle-encrusted face. In my talk, I will discuss how and why uncanny aspects of the physical bodies of *kami* became signifiers of their divine nature and relate the Japanese examples to theories of religious studies that postulate a connection between the uncanny and the sacred.

Dr. Emily B. Simpson is an assistant professor in the Department for the Study of Religions at Wake Forest University. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California at Santa Barbara and held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University. In her current book project, "Crafting a Goddess: Divinization and Womanhood in Late Medieval and Early Modern Narratives of Empress Jingū," she explores the creation and structure of Japanese deities, the intersection of religion and gender, and the role of narratives in religious discourses in medieval and early modern Japan.



Please register by May 1, 2024 at office.ikga@oeaw.ac.at if you wish to attend the lecture.

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<https://oeaw-ac-at.zoom.us/meeting/register/u5EufuipqDwrGdaEzWfFJdnUcdPO-DzGe8Qv>

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