



<https://publications.dainst.org>

iDAI.publications

DIGITALE PUBLIKATIONEN DES  
DEUTSCHEN ARCHÄOLOGISCHEN INSTITUTS

Das ist eine digitale Ausgabe von / This is a digital edition of

Speidel, Michael – Fukushima, Tomoko

## **Dawn of Japan: Emperor Jimmu with his gods and warriors on third-century bronze mirrors**

der Reihe / of the series

**Forschungen zur Archäologie außereuropäischer Kulturen; Bd. 10**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34780/a13t-adf9>

**Herausgebende Institution / Publisher:**  
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut

**Copyright (Digital Edition) © 2022 Deutsches Archäologisches Institut**  
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Zentrale, Podbielskiallee 69–71, 14195 Berlin, Tel: +49 30 187711-0  
Email: [info@dainst.de](mailto:info@dainst.de) | Web: <https://www.dainst.org>

**Nutzungsbedingungen:** Mit dem Herunterladen erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen (<https://publications.dainst.org/terms-of-use>) von iDAI.publications an. Sofern in dem Dokument nichts anderes ausdrücklich vermerkt ist, gelten folgende Nutzungsbedingungen: Die Nutzung der Inhalte ist ausschließlich privaten Nutzerinnen / Nutzern für den eigenen wissenschaftlichen und sonstigen privaten Gebrauch gestattet. Sämtliche Texte, Bilder und sonstige Inhalte in diesem Dokument unterliegen dem Schutz des Urheberrechts gemäß dem Urheberrechtsgesetz der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Die Inhalte können von Ihnen nur dann genutzt und vervielfältigt werden, wenn Ihnen dies im Einzelfall durch den Rechteinhaber oder die Schrankenregelungen des Urheberrechts gestattet ist. Jede Art der Nutzung zu gewerblichen Zwecken ist untersagt. Zu den Möglichkeiten einer Lizenzierung von Nutzungsrechten wenden Sie sich bitte direkt an die verantwortlichen Herausgeberinnen/Herausgeber der entsprechenden Publikationsorgane oder an die Online-Redaktion des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts ([info@dainst.de](mailto:info@dainst.de)). Etwaige davon abweichende Lizenzbedingungen sind im Abbildungsnachweis vermerkt.

**Terms of use:** By downloading you accept the terms of use (<https://publications.dainst.org/terms-of-use>) of iDAI.publications. Unless otherwise stated in the document, the following terms of use are applicable: All materials including texts, articles, images and other content contained in this document are subject to the German copyright. The contents are for personal use only and may only be reproduced or made accessible to third parties if you have gained permission from the copyright owner. Any form of commercial use is expressly prohibited. When seeking the granting of licenses of use or permission to reproduce any kind of material please contact the responsible editors of the publications or contact the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut ([info@dainst.de](mailto:info@dainst.de)). Any deviating terms of use are indicated in the credits.

## Conclusion

Jimmu's Mirror in the Tokyo National Museum, ranks as *Important Cultural Property*, but it may deserve the highest rank, that of *National Cultural Treasure*, for with its vast imagery of the first emperor, his warriors, gods, and myths, it stands not *at* the beginning of recorded Japanese history but *as* the beginning of recorded Japanese history. It is our earliest narrative-documentary evidence for a time otherwise known only from archaeology and legend<sup>738</sup>.

Underpinning the legend with unassailable detail, the Mirror proves that Japan's ancient records on the whole faithfully report the events at the foundation of the country in the third century. As Heinrich Schlieman's archaeological finds proved the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to be outstanding sources for the history of early Greece, so the Mirror proves the *Kojiki*, the *Nihon shoki*, and the *Kujiki* likewise to be epic narratives of a culture and of events over four hundred years earlier and outstanding sources for the history of ancient Japan<sup>739</sup>.

As a work of art full of detail as well as grand in structure and meaning, the Mirror opens rich new historical insights about the troops, the weapons, and tactics of Yamato warriors at a time when men still fought on foot with swords and shields, not yet on horseback with bows and arrows. It offers glimpses of such early ethnic

Japanese as the tooth-gapped, stringy-haired Hayato from Kyushu and the hot-blooded Kume. It is the key for understanding much of Kofun art and religion, from the second Higashi-no-Miya mirror that depicts the Great Gods of the creation to the Gorōyama battle paintings that record Jimmu's decisive Battle of Tomi. Above all, it shows that in Jimmu's conquest of Yamato the Japanese state and its imperial dynasty have a firm, heroic beginning in the mid-third century of our era.

Linking, like other epics, the worlds of god and man, the Mirror's tale of *Ten Who Founded Japan* also lets us see the presence of the gods at the birth of the country such as the monkey god Sarutahiko, the dancing shaman of the sun goddess, the *wani* sea-steed of Hiko-Hohodemi, and the Orochi dragon-snake of Susanoo of which we, so far, had no images. With the hitherto unknown tale of Sarutahiko rousing the Kume it restores one of the lost myths of Japan, while with the heroes dancing in the palace of the sea gods it reveals ancient Japan's vision of afterlife.

'The gods', says Homer, 'spin threads of death through the lives of mortal men, all to make a song for those to come'. For the dawn of Japan, Jimmu's Mirror is that song.

<sup>738</sup> Compare Edwards 1999, 105: 'While the temptation to look for verification of historic personages in the archaeological record is understandable, the likelihood of such efforts meeting with success in a third-century context is practically nil'.

<sup>739</sup> Compare the Kume songs as 'a poetic sequence of quasi-epic character': Miller 1983, 264. For a comparison of ancient Japanese and Greek heroes see Matsugi 2001, 66; 104.

