



An Imperial Concubine's Tale: Scandal, Shipwreck, and Salvation in Seventeenth-Century Japan

G. G. Rowley

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Japan in the early seventeenth century was a wild place. Serial killers stalked the streets of Kyoto at night, while noblemen and women mingled freely at the imperial palace, drinking saké and watching kabuki dancing in the presence of the emperor's principal consort. Among these noblewomen was an imperial concubine named Nakanoin Nakako, who in 1609 became embroiled in a sex scandal involving both courtiers and young women in the emperor's service. As punishment, Nakako was banished to an island in the Pacific Ocean, but she never reached her destination. Instead, she was shipwrecked and spent fourteen years in a remote village on the Izu Peninsula, before being set free in an amnesty. Returning to Kyoto, Nakako began a new adventure: she entered a convent and became a Buddhist nun.

Recounting the remarkable story of this resilient woman and the war-torn world in which she lived, G. G. Rowley investigates aristocratic family archives, village storehouses, and the records of imperial convents to re-create Nakako's life from beginning to end. She follows the banished concubine as she endures rural exile, receives an unexpected reprieve, and rediscovers herself as the abbess of a nunnery. As she unravels Nakako's unusual tale, Rowley also profiles the little-known lives of samurai women who sacrificed themselves on the fringes of the great battles that brought an end to more than a century of civil war. Written with keen insight and genuine affection, *An Imperial Concubine's Tale* tells the true story of a woman's extraordinary life in seventeenth-century Japan.

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