

## Significance of Uda Mercury Mine in Ancient Japanese History

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Uda district of Yamato Province—now Nara Prefecture—used to be the oldest and largest source of mercury in Japan. The site of the early mining is located in a valley still called Niu-dani, or “valley where cinnabar is found,” where existence of a mercury ore deposit has been confirmed. There also remains Niu Jinja or a shrine of Niu-tsu-hime, patron goddess of Niu tribesmen who specialized in mercury mining. This shrine, however, is not to be confounded with Niu Kawakami Jinja, as was frequently the case in the past, for the latter shrine was dedicated only in 675 to commemorate a rite allegedly performed by Emperor Jimmu on the River Niu, and has no connection with the goddess whatsoever. This rite by the legendary ruler of Japan is referred to only in *Nihon Shoki*, while *Kojiki* totally ignores it. It might be that the authors of *Nihon Shoki* made use of this legend in combining three other, unrelated stories into one—a legend of a hero who moved from Kumano to Yoshino, a story that explained old tribal distribution in Yoshino district in connection with Jimmu’s march, and a legend of another hero who arose in Uda and gained power in Central Yamato. The story of Jimmu’s life seems to have been composed of parts taken from several heroic legends, at the nucleus of which lies the one concerning Iware-hiko, a hero who marched from Uda into Central Yamato and established his power there.