The Magical Power of Coins from the Perspective of Their Provision

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A study of the practice of giving coins to others as seen in the Rikkozushi (Six National Histories) reveals a relationship between coins and their providers, who include the imperial authority and the state. A study focusing on that fact that newly minted Jogan Elho coins (dating from 870) were given as offerings (hatsho) to kami (deities) near the mint, and a comparison with the cases of other coins indicate that great importance was attached to giving newly minted coins as offerings to kami.

According to imperial rescripts on new copper coins, imperial decrees on gold mining in Michinoku, and articles on Taiho gold mining, precious metals existed in lands ruled by the emperor, and with their production heavenly and earthly kami and imperial spirits assured the legitimacy of the emperor's rule over the land. It was believed that the land was created to provide the precious metals from which coins were made, and it was for this reason that they were seen as offerings.

The emperor's giving of newly minted coins as offerings to kami confirms to the kami the emperor's legitimacy in ruling the land. Moreover, the emperor gave offerings to members of the imperial family and their retainers, which signified confirmation of the emperor's rule over the land to the recipients of these offerings.

A general examination of articles on the giving of coins in the Engishiki and Rikkokushi shows more than a few examples of the use of coins as offerings to heavenly and earthly kami. As previously mentioned with regard to the offering of coins to heavenly and earthly kami, through the giving of Buddhist-related coins, coins function as objects that link imperial rule with Buddha, but this is not mediated by the coins' magical powers.

It is significant that in Japan coins were recognized as products of the land. The source of the magical powers of coins in Japan should be understood in this context. Coins were recognized as having magical powers because they were created by the land.

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