

## Kissi Penny, Salt and Manilla: Traditional Money in Africa

The attempt to pack the various means of payment differing from western coins into one term is ethnocentric, and moreover rather difficult. For many years, the expression "primitive money" has been ordinary. This name is, even though unfortunate, regrettably still frequent. The common name "pre-coinage currencies" is more neutral, but insufficient for uncoined forms of money, as it refers to means of payment before the development of coins, to cultural-historical pre-stages of coined money thus. Yet uncoined forms of money form a much wider field: Its most important and long-lasting representative was the cowry currency, which circulated in many countries parallel to coins; in some places, cowry shells were even a fixed denomination within the currency system.

Also often used, but wrongly so, is the term "natural money" for uncoined forms of money. Yet manilas, Katanga crosses and many other uncoined monies are made from metal, and thus not more natural than western gold and silver coins. In fact, natural money is a specific level of development of these means of payment, just as tool money, ornamental money, and bar money.

To pay tribute to the diversity of uncoined forms of money, the MoneyMuseum compiles these means of payment under the term "traditional money." Such currencies were developed in virtually all cultures. With the following tour, we will introduce a small selection of African forms.

## Cowrie Shell *Cypraea moneta*



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Cypraea moneta (Money Cowrie)</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	
<b>Mint:</b>	
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>1900</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>22.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Cowrie shells were used as money in China, India, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, the Maldives, in New Guinea, the Pacific and in Africa for centuries. In some parts of Africa cowrie money was used until well into the 20th century.

The value of a cowrie shells varied according to the time, place and season. In general is true: the earlier in time and the further from the sea, the higher was the value of a cowrie. In Uganda, for example, a wife is said to have cost 2 cowries in 1600, 30 in 1810, and 10,000 in 1857.

## Africa, Bundle of Paludina Shells



<b>Denomination:</b>	Ten Strings of Paludina Snails
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Undefined
<b>Mint:</b>	Undefined
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	1800
<b>Weight (g):</b>	80
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	272.0
<b>Material:</b>	Others
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Money consisting of snailshells or seashells (mollusc money) has been used in many cultures. Sometimes only whole shells were used, sometimes only parts of them, in all imaginable shapes. The use of shells as money was not limited to any particular part of the world – in one form or another it was well-nigh universal.

In large parts of Asia and Africa shells of the cowrie *Cypraea moneta*, a marine mollusc, were used for centuries as a means of payment for small amounts. The native Alaskans, on the other hand, used *Dentalium pretiosum*, a shell resembling a long tooth; the length of the shell determined its value. The shells were often used in one piece, but were also cut into slices, filed down, pierced and strung on strings. The value of these money-strings varied according to their length.

## Kongo, Batetela Tribe, Musanga Shell Disc Money



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Musanga</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Batetela Tribe</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>1800</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>1.4</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>20.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Traditional African money is often made of shells. This one consists of the shell of a land snail living in the Congo. The shells are broken into more or less equal-sized pieces, pierced and strung together. The strings, called musanga, cannot be used as adornment because of the sharp edges and serve no other purpose than money. Musanga is little used in trade but forms an important part of the traditional bride price. The more attractive the bride and the higher her social status, the longer are the strings paid for her.

## West Africa, Necklace of Bauxite Beads (Abo)



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Necklace from Beads of Bauxite (Abo)</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>1800</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>850.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Necklaces are some of the oldest forms of jewellery money. In Africa they were originally made of snail shells, seashells, ostrich-egg shells or coconut shells. In West Africa however, mainly in Ghana, beads from bauxite have been made for centuries. The bauxite beads were produced in different sizes and worn in girdles of certain lengths. Strings of bauxite beads were not only used as decoration, but also as means of payment. In the 1940s one string was worth about 1 shilling 6 pence sterling – today, that would amount to about 3 pound sterling, or 6 dollars.

## Angola, Quiranda de Dongo Shell Disc Money (Achatina Money)



<b>Denomination:</b>	Quiranda de Dongo
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Undefined
<b>Mint:</b>	Undefined
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	1800
<b>Weight (g):</b>	125
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	850.0
<b>Material:</b>	Others
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

This money-string went under the wonderful name "quiranda de dongo" in West Africa. It consists of finely polished slices of shells of the giant African land snail *Achatina* and is therefore also known as *achatina* money. Quiranda de dongo were principally used in West Africa to pay bride-prices or to pay fines and taxes. The Portuguese colonial administration accepted tax payments in the form of quiranda de dongo into the second half of the 19th century.

## Africa, Cowrie Shell Necklace

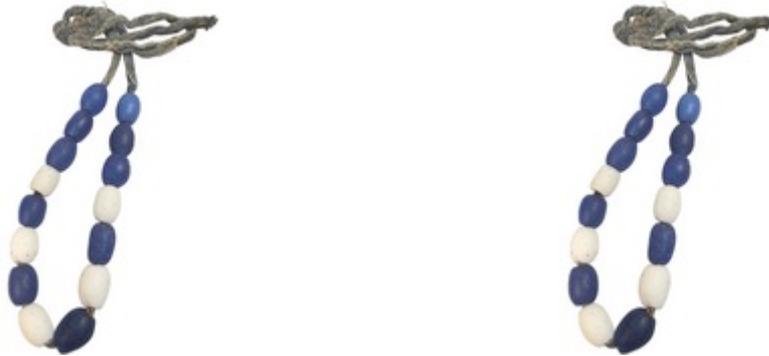


<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Cowrie Shell Necklace</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>1800</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>420.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

This necklace from cowrie shells was made in Africa, supposedly during the late 19th or early 20th century. Cowries circulated in Africa well into the 20th century.

Cowries were worked up to adornments or used as decorations for weapons and garments over centuries. Moreover, cowries were said to have magical power – especially to guarantee a long life and female fertility. To wear cowrie jewelry guaranteed this magic; besides, it was also a comfortable way to always have some money at hand.

## West and Central Africa, Necklace from Pigeon Egg Beads (also Dogon Beads or Dutch Beads)



<b>Denomination:</b>	Necklace from Pigeon Egg Beads
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Undefined
<b>Mint:</b>	Undefined
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	1800
<b>Weight (g):</b>	166
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	62.0
<b>Material:</b>	Others
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Beads are the most common traditional monies. They exist in an infinite variety of materials, shapes and colors. Worn as girdles or necklaces, strings of beads were not purely decorative objects. The beads often had a magical aspect, for instance the force to exorcise evil spirits. Both, beauty and magic, made strings of beads desirable, and thus valuable, objects.

Pigeon's egg beads from Holland, like the ones shown here, were very popular among the Dogon people of Mali. Accordingly, these beads are also known as Dogon beads or Dutch beads. The Dogon used pigeon's egg beads for especially valuable transactions, for instance to pay the bride price, or for religious ceremonies.

## Ghana/Togo/Sierra Leone, Sokpé Quartz Disc Money, c. 1600 to 1950



<b>Denomination:</b>	Sokpé
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Undefined
<b>Mint:</b>	Undefined
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	1600
<b>Weight (g):</b>	87
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	55.0
<b>Material:</b>	Others
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Money made of stone was used in various parts of the world. The most famous – and most impressive – are the money-stones of the Micronesian island of Yap, which are found in weights from 1.76 ounces (50 grams) to 3 tons!

Stone money was widespread in many parts of Africa. In pre-colonial times, people in Togo and parts of Ghana used flat, rounded discs of quartz with a diameter of about 3 to 10 centimeters (1.2 to 3.9 inches) and a hole in the middle as money. This stone money was called sokpé (thunder stones) because African legends had it that they fell from the sky during thunderstorms.

## Ethiopia, Amole Salt Bar, until mid-20th Century



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Amole Sat Bar</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>1900</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>1,283</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>237.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Others</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Salt was used as means of exchange in some form or other on all continents; the Ethiopian salt bars had the widest distribution as money, however. They were called amole and were packed in wood shavings to protect them. Until the mid-20th century, amole served as a currency almost throughout Black Africa.

Amoles were popular not least due to their double use as means of exchange and as raw material. In Ethiopia around the mid-19th century, one paid the following prices: for a horse 3 amoles, for 8 to 10 chickens 1 amole, for 5 kilograms of tobacco 1 amole, for a wife 1 to 2 amoles, for a pig 1 to 2 amoles.

## Liberia/Sierra Leone/Guinea, Kissi People, Kilindi (Kissi Penny), until Mid-20th Century



<b>Denomination:</b>	Kilindi (Kissi Penny)
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Kissi People
<b>Mint:</b>	Undefined in West Africa
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	1800
<b>Weight (g):</b>	35
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	420.0
<b>Material:</b>	Iron
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

The name of this money is Kilindi. But because these rods were made by the Kissi people, the Europeans used to call them Kissi pennies. The Kissi people live in the hinterlands of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The length of the individual iron rods varies between 25 and 40 centimeters. They are about as thick as a pencil, twisted and with hammered ends; one end is T-shaped, the other beaten to a flat disc. Iron that can be hammered and twisted is always of high quality.

A single Kissi penny had only a limited purchasing power, which is why they were mostly used in whole bundles – for example, a cow was worth 100 bundles each of 20 rods.

## Congo, Katanga Cross, until early 20th century



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Katanga Cross</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Katanga</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>1800</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>600</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>200.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Copper</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Among the best-known African forms of currency were the so-called Katanga crosses. They were cast copper bars in the shape of a cross or an H, which were produced as a means of payment in the copper-rich areas of southern Congo (formerly Katanga) and in central parts of Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia). The area in which they circulated was considerably larger, and their value increased in proportion to the distance from their place of production – an elephant's tusk cost hundred large Katanga crosses among the Ndembu tribe of Zambia, but only five crosses among the Kuba tribe, who lived further away.

## Mali, Dogon Tribe, Bangle for Arm or Leg



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Bronze Ring Bar</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>Dogon Tribe</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Undefined</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>1600</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>1,130</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>109.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

The Dogon people in Mali used such ornamental rings as means of payment. They were used for trade on the market as well as for the bride price, to pay diviners or as funerary objects. The rings were in general richly decorated and above all wearable, unlike manillas and ring bars.

## Nigeria, Sokoto Province, Diverse Tribes, Mondua (Copper Ring Bar), until 1948



<b>Denomination:</b>	Mondua Copper Ring Bar
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	Undefined
<b>Mint:</b>	Undefined
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	1600
<b>Weight (g):</b>	1,250
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	150.0
<b>Material:</b>	Copper
<b>Owner:</b>	Sunflower Foundation

Ring bars are varieties of manillas. They are a form of ornamental currency, a type of money that mostly retains its original shape. Unlike strings of pearls, however, where the quality of the beads relates to the purchasing power, the value of ring bars was linked to their weight and their copper content, which naturally led to extreme developments – namely to rings so heavy that hardly anyone was able to wear them.

This ring bar from Nigeria weighs 1.25 kilograms (2.76 pounds) and was thus obviously not part of the everyday jewelry of its owner. This was nothing, however, compared to the really valuable pieces, which could weigh up to 14 kilograms (30.9 pounds) and were definitely not wearable any more. Additionally to the weight, the value of ring bars also depended on the beauty of the workmanship and of the ornamentation.

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Denomination:	Copper Ring Bar
Mint Authority:	Undefined
Mint:	Undefined
Year of Issue:	1600
Weight (g):	450
Diameter (mm):	105.0
Material:	Copper
Owner:	Sunflower Foundation

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## United Kingdom of Great Britain for West Africa, Manilla, until 1948



<b>Denomination:</b>	<b>Birmingham Manilla</b>
<b>Mint Authority:</b>	<b>United Kingdom of Great Britain</b>
<b>Mint:</b>	<b>Birmingham</b>
<b>Year of Issue:</b>	<b>1800</b>
<b>Weight (g):</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Diameter (mm):</b>	<b>52.0</b>
<b>Material:</b>	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Sunflower Foundation</b>

Europeans produced manillas to exchange them for African slaves and goods too. In the 18th century the British imported so many of them to West Africa that they caused inflation. At the beginning of the 16th century, about 15 manillas would buy a slave in Nigeria. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, one manilla was only worth some English pennies. In 1948, the British colonial government in Nigeria withdrew manillas from circulation and prohibited them as legal tender.