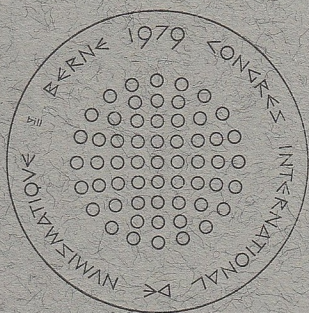


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Primitive money in Africa

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Primitive money, especially African primitive money, is a field of research that has been neglected, anthropologists and numismatists alike providing scant scientific analysis until very recently.

Firstly, what is primitive money and how do we distinguish it from money proper? GRIERSON finds the conventional concept of primitive money unsatisfactory. In his thoughtful attempt at tracing the general processes of the evolution of money, in the light of social customs such as 'bridewealth' and 'wergeld', Grierson insists on the need for money proper to be a measure of value and not necessarily an exchange medium.

SCHOONHEYT² in his short article tries to dispense with the term 'primitive money', a term, which, according to him, has become very confusing, and he tentatively substitutes the term 'non-conventional' money for primitive money, i.e. money needing to be verified (by weighing etc.) before becoming accepted. The theoretical concepts have not been worked out, but the article usefully includes several early definitions of money.

Many African scholars, historians and anthropologists, have in recent research insisted on a re-assessment of the nature of African, more especially West African, societies. They reveal West African market development, trade and money as far more advanced than previously

1. GRIERSON, P., *The Origins of Money*. The Creighton Lecture in History (1970). Athlone, London 1977.
2. SCHOONHEYT, J., Monnayage conventionnel ou non, in *CENB* 13 (1976), 4 76-81.

believed. They believe many of the West African currencies to be 'general purpose' currencies, i. e. currencies suitable not only for a specific purpose, like bride-buying, but developed currencies capable of encompassing many sorts of exchange.

Among such works is the book by HOPKINS.³ He provides a good bibliography on African currency and presents the West African monetary system of gold/cowries as an advanced and flexible system, in the light of the whole substantivist/formalist controversy as to methods of analysis of African societies. MEILLASSOUX⁴ was a pioneering scholar in these new studies and his work contains references to African money such as the bar, cowrie, manilla, guinea, nabuo and sombe. LOVEJOY's⁵ article is in the same vein and "attempts to explore some of the implications of a common currency..." (author).

Other economic histories of Africa which contain useful pictures of pre-colonial trade and money are the books by KONCZACKI, JULY, GRAY, BIRMINGHAM and SUNDSTRÖM. Konczacki's⁶ book usefully includes four very good earlier written articles on money: on Nigerian currencies by JONES; on the cowrie in Dahomey by POLANYI; on the West African ounce by JOHNSON and, lastly, on the salt currency of Ethiopia by ABIR.

JULY⁷ refers to the West African currencies of salt, iron hoes, manillas etc. in the context of Euro-African trading contact through the Slave Trade while GRAY⁸ and BIRMINGHAM's book contains many references to the currencies of Angola and the Congo, such as copper crosses and palm-cloth, SUNDSTRÖM's⁹ work is more empirical but contains a great deal of material on salt, textiles, iron and copper as mediums of exchange.

3. HOPKINS, A. G., *An Economic History of West Africa*, Longman, London 1973.
4. MEILLASSOUX, C., (ed.), *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa*. Oxford University Press, London 1971.
5. LOVEJOY, P. E., Inter-regional monetary flows in the pre-colonial period. *J African Hist* 15 (1974), 4, 563-85.
6. KONZACKI, Z. A., and J. M. (eds.), *An Economic History of Tropical Africa. The Pre-Colonial Period, Volume 1*. Frank Cass, London 1977.
7. JULY, R. W., *Pre-colonial Africa, An Economic and Social History*. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1975.
8. GRAY, R. and BIRMINGHAM, D. (eds), *Pre-colonial African Trade. Essays on Trade in Central and Eastern Africa before 1900*. Oxford University Press, London 1970.
9. SUNDSTRÖM, L., *The Exchange Economy of Pre-colonial Tropical Africa*. Hurst, London 1974.

Among the more general, empirical surveys of African money, the most comprehensive and the standard work on the subject, is still QUIGGIN's¹⁰ survey. Of course the book requires up-dating in view of recent research and a clearer analysis of the concept of primitive money. Other short articles, dealing in general empirical terms with African primitive money, are those written by SCHULMAN,¹¹ EADS¹² and DODSON.¹³

Let us proceed now to break down the coinages into their different areas of origin.

Ethiopian primitive money is dealt with extensively by PANKHURST¹⁴,¹⁵ in two works in which he presents the three main types of currency, namely, salt-bars or amoles, iron and cloth. He mentions how cartridges even circulated as a medium of exchange and how salt and the dollar functioned together in a single system.

The currencies of the Congo are covered in two recent articles. The one by CRAWFORD,¹⁶ listing the many varieties of Congolese primitive monies and the other is by BISSON,¹⁷ dealing with the copper currency as evidenced by archaeological finds.

The Angolan 'zimbo' is treated in an article by COUTO¹⁸ and RUPAREL's¹⁹ article describes the cowrie coinage of Uganda.

10. QUIGGIN, A. H., *A Survey of Primitive Money. The Beginnings of Currency*. Methuen, London 1949. Revised edition (1963). (A re-print by Spink's due this year).
11. SCHULMAN, H. M. F., Money from axes to elephant tails. The strange forms of primitive wealth — in a unique collection, *Coinage* 6 (1970), 10. 38-40 pl.
12. EADS, O. W., Jr., Africa's coinage: from colonialism to nationhood, in *CW* 17 (1976), 838, 81, 84, 90 pl.
13. DODSON, O. H., The Coins of changing Africa, *Coinage* 10 (1974), 6. 14-16, 18, 20 pl.
14. PANKHURST, R., The history of currency and banking in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa from the Middle Ages to 1935, *Ethiopia Observer* 8 (1965), 4. 358-408.
15. *ibid.* *Primitive Money, Money and Banking in Ethiopia*. Commercial Bank of Ethiopia 1967.
16. CRAWFORD, J. R., Congo rich in odd, curious items, *W Coins* 88 (April 1971). 422, 424, 426, 430 pl.
17. BISSON, M. S., Copper currency in Central Africa; the archaeological evidence, *World Archaeology* 6 (1975), 3 276-292 pl.
18. COUTO, C., O Zimbo na historiografia angolana. Instituto de Investigacao Cientifica de Angola. Luanda 1973 pl.
19. RUPAREL, J. J., The cowrie coinage of Uganda, *NI* (1974), 12 355-6.

West Africa, having given birth to the most economically advanced societies in Africa, witnessed too the most sophisticated currency systems, before European expansion into Africa had begun. The coverage of her coinages is also the most comprehensive, though many of the works remain largely descriptive.

Nigeria abounded with indigenous currency forms. JOHANNSON²⁰ presents a comprehensive survey of Nigerian currencies and has included several pages of tables, listing the different provinces, their currencies, their values, and the dates when the exchange rates were noted. Another general survey of Nigerian currencies has been done by MILEWSKI.²¹

HOPKINS²² in his article, covers Nigerian currencies, but from the point of view of the impact of European colonial trade on them, the demonetization of the dollar, the depreciation of the cowrie, and the collapse of the old monetary system of the cowrie/dollar, in the late 19th century.

Let us now deal with works that cover only particular currencies of West Africa. Firstly, the 'ounce' which developed originally as that unit of goods which could be exchanged for an ounce of gold and which arose as a unit of account out of Euro-African trading contact through the Slave Trade. The two articles on the subject, written by POLANYI²³ and JOHNSON²⁴ present different conclusions, but both are fresh and careful studies of the subject.

The copper currency of West Africa is covered in two articles. One is by HERBERT²⁵ and lists the different functions of copper in pre-colonial West Africa and contains a fairly short-piece on copper as a medium of exchange. The other is by LATHAM²⁶ which, in the light of recent re-

20. JOHANNSON, S.-O., *Nigerian Currencies*. Norrköping, Sweden 1967.

21. MILEWSKI, J., *Formy pieniądza pozamonetarnego W Nigerii na pizetomie XIX i XX wieku*. (Certain non-monetary currencies in Nigeria at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th centuries), *Kwart Hist Kult Mater* 15 (1966), 4 641-665.

22. HOPKINS, A. G., The currency revolution in South-West Nigeria in the late nineteenth century, *J. Hist. Society of Nigeria*, 3 (1966), 3 471-483.

23. POLANYI, K., Sortings and "Ounce Trade" in the West African Slave Trade, *J African Hist* 5 (1964). 381-93.

24. JOHNSON, M., The ounce in eighteenth century West African trade, *J African Hist*. 7 (1966), 197-214.

25. HERBERT, E., Aspects of the use of copper in pre-colonial West Africa, *J African Hist*, 14 (1973) 179-194.

26. LATHAM, A. J. H., Currency, credit and capitalism on the Cross River in the pre-colonial era, *J African Hist*, 12 (1971) 599-605.

search, disputes the belief that the copper rod currency of the Cross River was a 'primitive rationing system' and insists on its use as a 'general purpose' currency, a currency devised by the Nigerians themselves and not imposed on them by European trade.

The cowrie currency of West Africa has been dealt with by a number of authors, HISKETT,²⁷ DE NEGRI²⁸ and most recently by NZEMEKE.²⁹ But the most comprehensive article is that written by JOHNSON.³⁰ She deals with the cowrie's import, transport, variations in value according to area, cowrie arithmetic and the impact of European colonialism on the cowrie currency.

Liberian iron kisi pennies are described in an article by WOLD.³¹

The Tiv of Nigeria used cloth as a standard of value and an article by DOWARD³² describes how the narrow, white, undyed cloth, consisting of about 22-4 narrow strips, together with a 30-strip and 9 10-strip piece, functioned as a general purpose currency.

The Gold currency of West Africa was a currency of paramount importance in the history of Ghana, and, to a lesser extent, the Ivory Coast. The gold weight system of the Akan people in Ghana has received much attention of late. The brass weights, used to weigh the gold dust, and manufactured by the lost wax process, rank amongst the most lively artistic creations of Africa and are perhaps the most beautiful money weights in the world. GARRARD^{33, 34} has presented a careful and well-researched analysis of these weights, dealing with their origin,

27. HISKETT, E. M., Materials relating to the cowry currency of the Western Sudan, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29 (1966), 122-42 and 339-66.
28. DE NEGRI, E., Small currency: blue shells and manillas, *Nigeria Magazine* 102 (1969) 504-11 pl. Lagos.
29. NZEMEKE, A. D., The cowrie and the development of Euro-African trade in Lagos 1851-1861, *Africana Marburgensia* 10 (1977), 1.471-483.
30. JOHNSON, M., The cowrie currencies of West Africa, *J African Hist* 11 (1970) 17-49 and 331-53.
31. WOLD, J. G., Coins replace iron kisi pennies, *W Coins* 83 (1970) 1378-80, 1384, 1386, 1388. pl.
32. DOWARD, D. C. Pre-colonial Tiv trade and cloth currency. *Int. J. of African History Studies* 9 (1976), 4.576-591.
33. GARRARD, T. F., Studies in Akan gold weights, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 13 (1972), 1 1-20, 13 (1972), 2 149-62 and 14 (1973), 1 1-16 and 14 (1973), 2 149-68.
34. *ibid.* *Akan Weights and the Gold Trade*. Longman 1978.

weight standards, weight names and dating. His work is the most recent and probably most exhaustive account of the weights. Other articles and books on the subject have been written by GIDAL,³⁵ MENZEL,³⁶ OTT,³⁷ and HOLAS.³⁸ ABEL'S³⁹ work is interesting too and is based on much fieldwork.

JOHNSON⁴⁰ deals with the gold currency in a very interesting article on the African mithqal or dinar. She presents a picture in which North and West African trade is shown to be linked by this Islamic trading unit of account, though showing how the mithqal, nevertheless, varies from area to area and changed over the years. DUVIN⁴¹ surveys the mithqal briefly too in his article on the Tafilalt trade.

As is evidenced from this bibliography, truly scientific, historical analysis has only begun in this field of research.

35. GIDAL, N. T., Goldweights of the Ashanti, *Ariel* 30 (1972) 112-9. pl.
36. MENZEL, B., *Goldgewichte aus Ghana*. Museum für Völkerkunde. Berlin 1968.
37. OTT A., Historical significance of Akan Gold Weights, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 9 (1968) 17-42.
38. HOLAS, B., Les poids à peser l'or, *Notes Africaines* 104 (1964). 113-6. Dakar University.
39. ABEL, A., Utilisation des poids à peser l'or en Côte d'Ivoire, *J. Soc. Africanistes* 43 (1973), 1.33-109 ill., tableaux, carte (English summary) Paris.
40. JOHNSON, M., The nineteenth century 'Mithqal' in West and North Africa, *J African Hist* 9, (1968), 4.547-69.
41. DUVIN ROSS E., The trade of Tafilalt: Commercial change in south-east Morocco on the eve of the protectorate, *African Historical Studies* 4 (1971), 2.271-304. Boston University.