

## Special exhibit

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### Another form of money

*The invention of the coin in Asia Minor around 600 BC, in China around 500 BC and in India around 450 BC set off a process in most of the world which was to make this new form of money the most widely used right up to the present. However, in some regions of the world – notably Africa and South-East Asia – the history of money took another course. In these areas vegetable, mineral, animal or metal objects became objects of value, which we today call traditional or pre-coin payment media.*

*In many cases the exact function of individual items is difficult to define, if at all. The records which were passed on solely by word of mouth have often been lost in the darkness of history. Consequently, one can no longer say for certain whether a particular object was used as money or whether it was a purely ritualistic or status symbol or one of adornment. The distinctions between jewellery, money, and cult and status symbols are frequently fluid, ie the same object could sometimes fulfil several functions. By contrast, certain objects were sometimes used only for quite clearly defined purposes such as the payment of a dowry or a fine or the purchase of land. For other things another form of money was necessary.*

*It would be both wrong and condescending to regard this “other form of money” as primitive or at best curious. In the highly varied forms of earlier monetary and economic systems these objects performed their required functions perfectly. The diversity of thought as well as the variety of forms and materials show us that the use of money is not subject to any generally valid absolute norm. We only have to recall that in Germany, for example, cigarettes were highly prized as a medium of payment during the first few years after the Second World War and for a time actually took on the function of a key currency.*

*[In addition to the exhibition items in the special showcase, there is a representative cross-section of the world's traditional payment media in the permanent exhibition of the Money Museum.]*

Some African and Asian countries portray traditional national payment media on their modern banknotes and coins. In two countries the names of objects that were commonly regarded as valuable in earlier times have been given to their present-day currencies: the kina (a species of mussel) in Papua New Guinea and the cauri (a species of snail) in Guinea (West Africa). The following are some of these banknotes and the corresponding traditional payment media.



paradise

Bird of



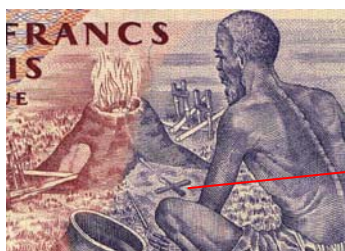
Bangle



Cowrie shells



Boar's tusk



crosses



Katanga

*Recommended reading*

Ute I Greifenstein, *Fremdes Geld. Tauschmittel und Wertmesser außereuropäischer Gesellschaften*. Frankfurt 1990.  
 Charles J Opitz, *An Ethnographic Study of Traditional Money*. Ocala 2000.  
 A Hingston Quiggin, *A Survey of Primitive Money. The Beginnings of Currency*. London 1949 [Reprint Ocala 1992].