

MONEY THROUGHOUT HISTORY



3
Rai
(Yap stone)
Yap State, Federated States of Micronesia, Oceania
1400 C.E. to today



1
Tevau
(red feather money coil)
Solomon Islands, Oceania
Before 1700 to 1980 C.E.



2
Amole
(salt block)
Ethiopia, Africa
525 to 1894 C.E.



4
Tajadero
(Aztec hoe and axe money)
Mesoamerica, North America
800 to 1600 C.E.



5
Tea brick
China, Russia, Central Asia
800 to 2000 C.E.



6
Tabua
(whale teeth)
Fiji, Oceania
1800 C.E. to today



7
Cowrie
(shells)
Africa, Asia, Europe
7000 B.C.E. to 1900 C.E.



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Rai (Yap stone)

From the Pacific island of Yap, rai ranged from a few centimetres to four metres in diameter. They were used, beginning over 500 years ago, for significant transactions. Quarried on the island of Palau, rai were transported to Yap on rafts, crossing 500 kilometres of open ocean. These difficult voyages were part of what gave rai their value. These stones did not physically change hands because they were often too big. People simply agreed that the ownership changed. Rai are still in use today for marriages and land transactions.

3

Cowrie (shells)

These were one of the most common forms of currency in Africa, Europe and Asia. In China and Japan, they were used for at least 1,500 years. Cowries were so important in China that they inspired the shape of the Chinese character that means "to buy."



7

Tevau

(red feather money coil)

This currency is from the Santa Cruz islands, which are part of the Solomon Islands in Oceania. The coils were made with the tiny feathers of the Scarlet Honeyeater bird. The island's Indigenous Nandö people would catch the tiny birds, plucking a few feathers and then setting them free. It took between 50,000 and 60,000 feathers to make one coil. The coils were traditionally used for purchasing goods or services or as a wedding gift. They have not been used on the islands since the 1980s.



1

Amole

(salt block)

Before iceboxes or refrigerators, people used salt to preserve food. Salt was quite hard to come by, made for the most part by evaporating sea water. Because salt was rare and valuable, many different cultures used it as money. It is believed the ancient Romans paid their soldiers with salt—or at least paid them a sum of money for acquiring salt. This pay was known as *salarium* and is the root of the English word "salary." This salt brick is from Ethiopia and they were used there until the 1930s.



2



Tajadero

(Aztec hoe and axe money)

While the Aztecs valued silver, they never used it as currency. According to Spanish reports at the time of the conquest, copper and tin axe-shaped objects were used as a form of currency. These items—too fragile to be used as tools—were first made in about 800 C.E.; however, it is likely they were only used as money after European contact. The copper was often mixed with arsenic to make the metal light in colour.

4

Tea bricks

These were used as currency in different parts of Central Asia from the 9th to 20th century C.E. The use of tea as a commercial trade item began with demand for Chinese tea by Russian nobility. Initially, dried leaves were shipped along the silk route; however, over time people found it more convenient to process the tea and form it into solid book-sized bricks. Eventually, tea bricks became an accepted medium of exchange that could be used as easily as silver or other trade items.



5

Tabua

(whale teeth)

Sperm whales have the largest teeth of any whale. As early as 1800 C.E., their teeth were used as a valuable currency on the island of Fiji. The tabua were first rubbed smooth and then stained yellow with spices or smoke. Often a hole was drilled at either end and a braided cord was attached. Tabua are still used as gifts of honour or to commemorate weddings.



6