

The use of cowry-shells for the purposes of currency, amulets, and charms / by J. Wilfrid Jackson.

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The Use of Cowry-shells for the Purposes
of Currency, Amulets, and Charms.

BY

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XIII. The Use of Cowry-shells for the Purposes of Currency, Amulets, and Charms.

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(Communicated by Professor G. Elliot Smith, M.A., M.D., F.R.S.)

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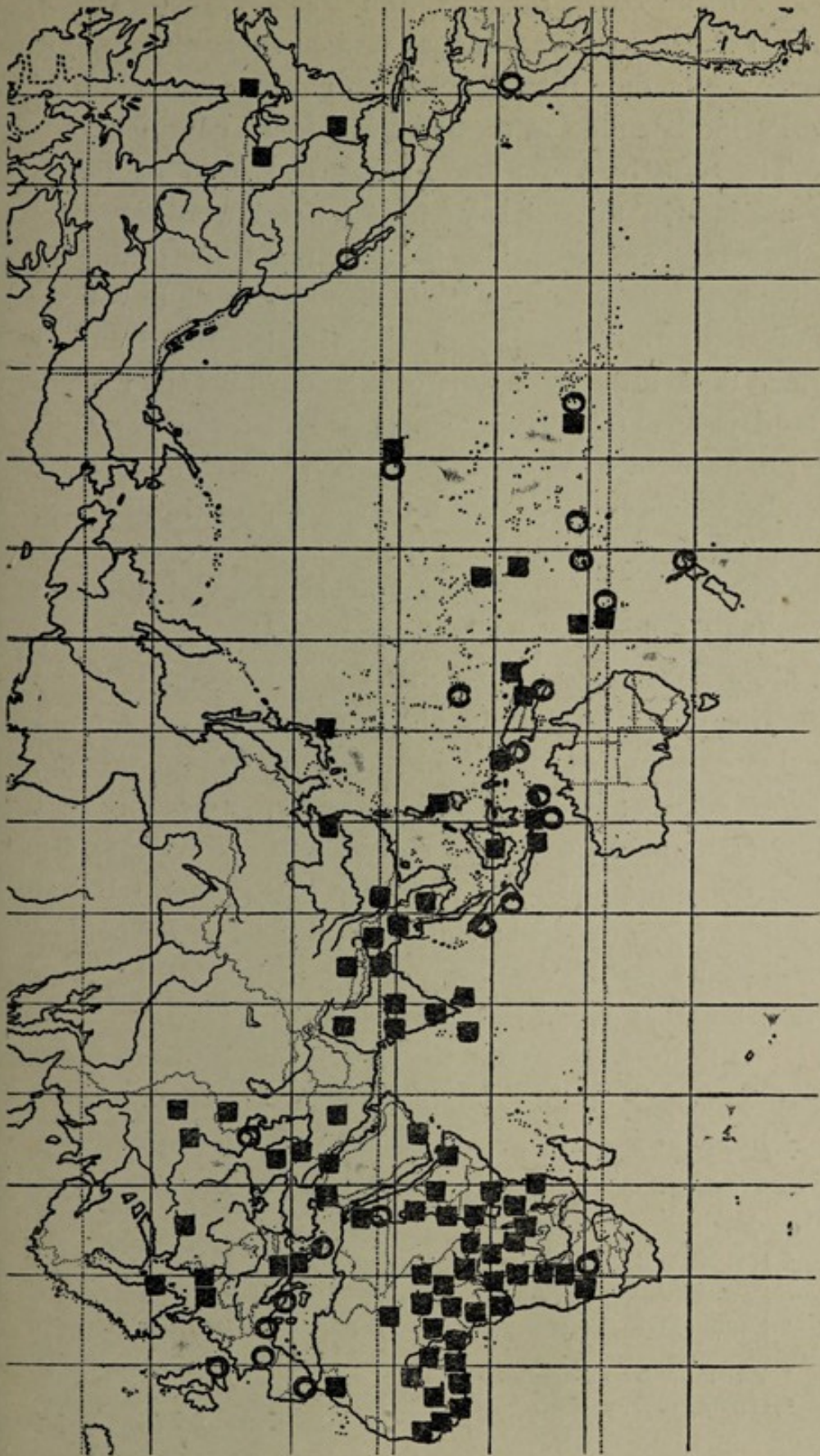
Of the many varieties of shells used for currency and as amulets, by far the most familiar and extensively employed are the cowries, especially the money-cowry (*Cypræa moneta*) and the ring-cowry (*Cypræa annulus*). (Fig. 1, A & B) The small size, shape, and substance of the latter renders them peculiarly adapted for use as money, and no other species of shell or form of shell-money has had so wide-spread and general use. They are distinguished by the fact that they can be and are used in a natural state, most other forms of shell-money being made from portions of larger species. Though known to science under two distinct names, the difference between the two forms is so slight that by some authorities they are considered as merely the extremes of one variable mollusc.¹ Both forms are inhabitants of Indo-Pacific seas, and the specimens used as currency are derived mainly from the Persian Gulf, Maldivé Islands, Ceylon, the Malabar Coast, the Sooloo Islands (between the Philippines and Borneo), and other East Indian Islands; also from various parts of the

¹ Melvill and Standen, *Journ. of Conchology*, ix., 1899, p. 236; S. R. Roberts, "Monograph of the Family Cypræidæ," in Tryon's "Manual of Conchology," vol. vii., 1885, p. 179.

November 30th, 1916.



Map A, showing the recorded range of *C. moneta* and *annulus*. The question marks denote doubtful occurrences; presence at these places may be due to the foundering of ships carrying these shells.



Map B, showing distribution of the Use of Cowries.

■ = *Cypraea moneta-annulus*. ○ = Other Cowries.

East African coast, ranging from Ras Hafun (near the Gulf of Aden) to Mozambique. As currency these shells circulate not only through Southern Asia and certain of the Pacific Islands, but far into the African continent.

The term cowry, cowrie, or gowrie, is said by Dr. J. Cosmo Melvill² to be derived from a Greek word meaning "a little pig," and according to Liddell and Scott this was probably the shell used by the Athenian dicasts in voting. "Following the example of the Greeks, the Romans termed these little shells *porci* or *porculi*, whilst the French nowadays term them *pou de mer*; and in the word *porcelain* we can also trace the same derivation" (Melvill, p. 186). Deniker,³ however, says the term cowry, cowrie, or cauri, appears to be a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Kaparda*, whence *Kavari* in the Mahrattan. Murray's dictionary⁴ gives the Hindī and Urdū equivalents as *Kaurī* (or *Kaudī*). In Monier Williams' "Sanskrit-English Dictionary"⁵ the following interpretations are given: "*Kaparda*, *as*: a small shell or cowrie used as a coin and as a die in gambling, *Cypræa moneta*; braided and knotted hair, especially that of S'iva (knotted so as to resemble the cowrie shell). *Kapardin*, *ī*, *inī*, *i*: shaggy; wearing braided and knotted hair like a cowrie shell; epithet of Rudra, of Pūshan, of the descendants of Vasishtha and of Durgā; (ī) name of S'iva; name of one of the eleven Rudras."

The Portuguese called the cowry *Boudji* or *Boughi*; the inhabitants of the Maldives, *Boli*; the Siamese, *Bios* (which means shell in general in Thai). By the Arabs it is known under the name *ouoadda* or *vadaat* (Deniker, *op. cit.*).

² J. C. Melvill, "A Survey of the genus *Cypræa*," *Memoirs and Proc. Manch. Lit. & Phil. Soc.*, 4th Ser., vol. 1. (1887-8), pp. 184-252.

³ Deniker, "Races et peuples de la Terre," Paris, 1900, p. 324 footnote.

⁴ Murray, "New English Dictionary."

⁵ Oxford, 1872, p. 201.

The use of cowries as currency and as amulets or charms has been frequently discussed in ethnological memoirs. From this literature it is clear, though the fact has not always been realised or sufficiently emphasised by the authors, that cowries have been for ages regarded and even revered as charms in hunting and fishing, and as amulets against the evil eye. In fishing, especially in the Pacific Islands, they are attached to the nets to ensure luck, being misnamed "net-sinkers" by many writers on ethnology. They have been, and in many places are still, associated with marriage, with the object of securing communion with the spirit of fertility, supposed to be indwelling in the cowry. In like manner they are used in some places as offerings to rivers and springs in order to ensure that the rivers will run and springs flow.

In the following pages an attempt is made to show some of the many uses of cowries in different parts of the world. The remarkable manner in which some of the customs, in which cowries play an important part, crop up in widely-scattered localities is very significant, and goes far to prove a common centre of origin for these practices. It is altogether unreasonable to assume that exactly similar customs of so peculiar and wholly arbitrary a nature and identical beliefs concerning the cowry could have arisen independently among isolated groups of people.

The best and most comprehensive work on the subject of shell-money is that by Dr. O. Schneider, on "*Muschelgeld-Studien*."⁶ This work contains some 180 pages dealing with the subject, of which about 72 pages are devoted to an excellent summary of the extensive literature relating to cowry-currency. Some use has been made of this work in the compilation of the present communication, as will

⁶ Dr. Oskar Schneider, "*Muschelgeld-Studien*" (Nach dem hinterlassenen Manuskript bearbeitet von Carl Ribbe). Herausgegeben vom Verein für Erdkunde zu Dresden. Dresden, 1905.

be seen by the footnotes. Much further information, however, not noted by Schneider, is embodied here, more especially with regard to the use of cowries in Ancient Egypt, Eastern Asia, North America, and many other places.

Cowries appear to have been appreciated and used as amulets at a very early period in Egypt. Both *Cypræa moneta* and *Cypræa annulus*—the forms so universally used for currency—have been discovered, along with other cowries, in Pre-dynastic burials, and both forms have been found repeatedly in later graves in Egypt and Nubia. According to Lortet and Gaillard,⁷ the following species of cowries have been found at Karnak: *Cypræa vitellus*, *C. tigris*, *C. pantherina*, *C. camelopardalis* (= *melanostoma*), *C. arabica*, and var. *histrion*, *C. erythræensis*, *C. caput-serpentis*, *C. moneta* and *C. annulus*—all species which occur to-day in the Red Sea. The larger forms are perforated near one end as if for use as pendants. The examples of *C. moneta* and *C. annulus* are of peculiar interest from the fact that they have been rubbed down on the back or convex side—a custom which is still in vogue among the East African people to-day. Of further interest is the figure given by the same authors of a reproduction in diorite of a *Cypræa moneta*. This object, which is perforated for suspension, was found in the necropolis of Rizakat, near Gébélên, Upper Egypt. In a tomb (D 114) at Abydos, of xviiiith dynasty date, large numbers of *Cypræa annulus* were discovered, all of them having been rubbed down on the back, as at Karnak.⁸ The same

⁷ Lortet & Gaillard, "La Faune Momifiée de l'ancienne Egypte: Mollusques," *Arch. Mus. d'Hist. Nat. de Lyon*, vól. 10, Lyon, 1909, pp. 108-111; see also List of Species, pp. 310-311.

⁸ T. E. Peet & W. L. S. Loat, "The Cemeteries of Abydos," pt. III. 1912-1913, 35th *Mem. Egypt. Explor. Fund*, 1913, p. 30, pl. xii., figs. 6 & 9. (The Series is now in the Manchester Museum).

species, *C. annulus* is also recorded from Koptos⁹ and Nagadeh, probably of pre- or proto-dynastic date;¹⁰ it is also associated with other objects, such as papyrus charm pendants, uzat eyes, etc., strung on knotted cords found at Kafr Ammar (xxiii—xxvth dynasty).¹¹ Reisner in "The Archaeological Survey of Nubia (1907-8)"¹² gives a figure of a small cowry, rubbed down on the back, which is probably *C. annulus*; it is recorded as occurring in the C-group, New Empire, and later graves. *Cypræa moneta* occurs in the list of shells found in graves at El Amrah (Pre-dynastic).¹³ Other species of cowries discovered in Egyptian graves are as follows: *Cypræa caurica*? "Pan-Graves" at Balabish;¹⁴ *C. arabica*, Koptos; *C. carneola*, Ballas; *C. erosa*, Ballas; *C. caurica*, Ballas?; *C. pantherina*, Nagadeh;¹⁵ *C. arabica* var *reticulata* Toukh, Upper Egypt.¹⁶

These discoveries of cowries in Ancient Egyptian graves are of great interest as being the earliest evidence of a special appreciation of these shells. That they were worn as amulets by the Egyptians cannot be doubted from the fact that so many are perforated for suspension.

The discovery of so many specimens of the smaller

⁹ Flinders Petrie, "Six Temples at Thebes, 1896," London, 1897, chap. x., p. 30.

¹⁰ *Idem.* "Amulets," 1914, p. 27, pl. xiv., f. 107b.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29, pl. xviii., f. 131b, 131c.; pl. xviii., f. 131e, 131f.; pl. xix. f. 131g.

¹² Vol. i., *Archæol. Rept.*, Cairo, 1910, pl. 66, f. 7 and pl. 70, f. 1. The C-group belongs to a period corresponding to the Middle Kingdom in Egypt.

¹³ D. Randall-Maciver & A. C. Mace, "El Amrah and Abydos 1899-1901," London, 1902, p. 49.

¹⁴ G. A. Wainwright, "The Excavations at Balabish," *Journ. of Egypt. Archæol.*, ii., Oct., 1915, pl. xxv., f. 2 (named from photograph). "Pan-Graves" are Nubian interments in Egypt and may belong to the period from 2000 B.C. onwards.

¹⁵ These five recorded by Flinders Petrie (*vide* Lortet & Gaillard, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-311).

¹⁶ De Morgan (*vide* Lortet & Gaillard, *op. cit.*, p. 310).

form, *C. annulus*, together in one grave (D114) at Abydos, would seem to suggest the possibility that cowries may have been adopted as a form of currency at that early date. According to Del Mar,¹⁷ Egypt "appears to have conducted its exchanges with cowries and scarabs, supplemented possibly at later dates by Lydian or Greek coins for foreign commerce, until the Persian conquest, when it was supplied with a national coinage, probably of very limited extent, by Cambyses and Darius." He further remarks: "The Indians who traded with Egypt used cowries for money; the Chinese, who also traded with Egypt at a very remote period, used 'tortoise' (probably cowrie) shells for money." (Del Mar, p. 147.)

The money-cowry (*Cypræa moneta*) has been found at the famous cemetery of Koban, upon the northern slope of the Caucasus, almost midway between the Black and Caspian Seas, along with bronze and other antiquities.¹⁸ It has also been recorded from a sandy layer above the Tertiaries at Frankfurt-on-Main by Dr. W. Wenz, who reports the existence of extensive prehistoric settlements of different periods in the immediate neighbourhood.¹⁹ Another interesting record is that of Dr. H. Stolpe, who states that, among the foreign objects (Cufic money, etc.) found in the Island of Björkö, were many Upper Silurian fossils from Gothland, and Cretaceous fossils from Skane, also some shells of molluscs from the west coast of Sweden. But the most important shells were five examples of the money-cowry, *Cypræa moneta*.²⁰ Speci-

¹⁷ Del Mar, "A History of Money," London, 1885, p. 149.

¹⁸ "A Guide to the Antiquities of the Bronze Age" (British Museum), 1904, p. 129; see also "Materiaux pour l'hist. prim. et nat. de l'homme," 2nd ser., xiii., June, 1882, p. 260.

¹⁹ *Nachr. Deutsch. Mal. Ges.*, 1911, p. 104.

²⁰ *Congrès internat. d'Anthropol. et d'Archéol. Préhist.*, 1874, vol. ii., Stockholm, 1876, pp. 619-29.

mens of the ring-cowry (*C. annulus*) were found by Dr. Layard in the ruins of Nimroud,²¹ and others of this form, *rubbed down on the back*, were met with in graves at Shusha, in Transcaucasia, associated with numerous carnelian beads, perforated animals' teeth, stone implements, and bronze and iron objects.²²

Another find of special interest was made by Dr. Truhelka at the pile-dwelling of Donja Dolina, on the bank of the Save (Bosnia). Here urn-burials were met with in under-ground vaults which contained the incinerated remains of bodies and a wealth of grave-goods. From the valuable nature of the latter it would appear that the cremated persons were of great social distinction. The objects comprised fibulæ, beads of glass, amber, and enamel, and other articles characteristic of the late Hallstatt period. One of the chief objects of interest was "one urn, which contained a necklet composed of several hundreds of beads of amber, enamel, coloured glass, seven cowrie shells, two perforated teeth, and a large bead of clay without any ornamentation."²³

Dr. Schneider (*op. cit.*, p. 115), quotes many interesting discoveries of cowries in ancient graves, chiefly in the neighbourhood of Danzig—the great amber-producing region. According to this authority they were found at Marienhausen, in the government of Witebsk, where in 1879, some 50 specimens occurred in a grave, doubtless belonging to Slavonic times; also in old pagan Lithuanian graves, at Rügenwalde in Pomerania, in the urn of a "giant's-grave" at Stolpe, on the well-known Pomerellen

²¹ S. P. Woodward, "Manual of the Mollusca," Reprint of 4th Ed., London, 1890, p. 233.

²² *Verhandl. der Berliner Gess. f. Anthrop.*, 1892, pp. 566-8; 1894, p. 216.

²³ R. Munro, "Palæolithic Man and Terramara Settlements in Europe," Edinburgh, 1912, p. 473.

face-urns as earrings; further, several burnt and fractured specimens of *Cypræa annulus* were found in an urn from a stone-cist at Jakobsmühle near Mewe, and in a face-urn at Rheinfeld near Carthaus; *Cypræa moneta* in a grave near Praust, a *Cypræa annulus*, prepared as an amulet, at Seehof near Kulmsee, *C. moneta* as earrings on face-urns at Stangenwalde and at Wilschen in Berent district, as well as in burnt condition in a face-urn at Czapeln; finally, several specimens of a *Cypræa*, too badly damaged by fire for exact specific determination, occurred in a face-urn at Bockau on the river Radaune, West Prussia.

In an essay by Dr. H. Conventz, of Danzig, on the introduction of cowries and related sea-shells as ornament in West Prussia in prehistoric times,²⁴ further mention is made of discoveries, which he refers to the first century B.C., of *Cypræa annulus* in face-urns at Rheinfeld, in Carthaus district, Suckschin, in Higher Danzig district, and Jakobsmühle, in Marienwerder district, as well as in an ordinary urn at Fronza, in Marienwerder district; and of *Cypræa moneta* in the ears of urns from Wilschen, Berent district, and Stangenwalde, Carthaus district, and in a face-urn from Praust, near Danzig; further, of "Roman times," which corresponds to the 1st century A.D., *Cypræa annulus* attached to bronze-strip as a charm, found near Elbing and Seehof, in Briesen district; finally, of the "Arabic-norse epoch," a perforated *C. moneta* on the neck of a skeleton in the grave-field near the Grutschno Burgwälle, in the Schwetzer district.

Cowries of larger dimensions than *Cypræa moneta* and *C. annulus* have been met with in pre-historic pit-dwellings and Saxon graves in our own country; in Franco-Merovingian graves in France; in the Gallo-

²⁴ *Correspondenzblatt d. deutsch. Gesell. f. A. E. u. U.*, xxxiii. no. 2, 1902, (*vide* Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 115)

Roman necropolis of Trion, at Lyons ; and in Pompeii, as well as in other places.

The complete outer lip of *Cypræa tigris*, a species occurring in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, has been recorded by J. R. le B. Tomlin, from a pre-historic pit-dwelling at St. Mary Bourne, Hants.²⁵ The same handsome species is recorded by M. Locard from the Gallo-Roman necropolis of Trion, and by Monterosato from Pompeii.²⁶ *Cypræa pantherina*, a Red Sea shell, has been found in Saxon women's graves, excavated on Kingston Down, and Sibertswold Down, in Kent,²⁷ and in a grave near Wingham, Kent.²⁸ It has also been recorded (under the name *Cypræa vinosa*) by Dr. Ph. Dautzenburg from the Franco-Merovingian necropolis of Nesles-lez-Verlincourt (Canton de Samer).²⁹ Dr. Dautzenburg also refers in the same paper to a record by M. l'Abbé Henri Debout of the presence of this shell (erroneously referred to *C. arabica*) in a sepulchre at Tardinghen ; and from Dr. Tiberi's Memoir on the shells met with in the excavations at Pompeii,³⁰ we learn that many examples of this species were found, and that the shell in question was an amulet which the women carried in order to prevent sterility.

In a footnote in Dr. Schneider's paper (*op. cit.* p. 116), reference is made to a description, by Dr. Koehl, of Merovingian graves at Weisoppenheim, near Worms, where cowries were found alongside the bodies of several women, either hanging from a girdle, or sewn to their dresses. Unfortunately, the specific name of the shell is

²⁵ *Journal of Conchology*, vol. 13, 1912, p. 251.

²⁶ *Fide* Tomlin, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Faussett's "Inventorium Sepulchrale," 1856, pp. 68, 92 & 133. (See also J. W. Jackson, *Journ. of Conch.*, vol. 13, 1912, p. 307, for discussion of species).

²⁸ "Archæologia," vol. 30, p. 551.

²⁹ *Journ. de Conchyliologie*, vol. liv., 1906, p. 260, figs. 1 & 2.

³⁰ "Le Conchiglie Pompeiane," Napoli, 1879.

not given. In the same footnote mention is made of the discovery of a large *Cypræa* in an old German grave at Entbühl, and of an Indian Ocean *Tritonium*,³¹ filled with worked flints at Brunswick.

A further discovery of a shell from the Indian Ocean, *Ovulum ovum*, closely akin to the cowries, was made in a Gothlandic tomb. This specimen had a hole at one end in which was still fixed a little ring of bronze wire.³²

In Crete, black cowries, probably dark forms of *Cypræa pantherina*, were found in excavating the rooms of Mycenæan houses.³³

In a paper on "Cave Explorations at Gibraltar in September, 1910,"³⁴ Dr. W. L. H. Duckworth records the discovery of a Mediterranean cowry, *Cypræa pyrum*, in excavating Cave S. The specimen is remarkable on account of an artificial perforation at one end, as if for suspension as an amulet. On the evidence of the human remains and the pottery found, the cave is assigned to the Neolithic period. In the same cave were found specimens of *Purpura hæmastoma* with the apical parts fractured in a curious manner, suggesting that the mollusc had been used for the preparation of its distinctive product, the Tyrian Purple.³⁵

A perforated specimen of *Cypræa pyrum* is recorded by Lartet and Christy³⁶ from La Madelaine cave, Périgord, along with other perforated shells and teeth of animals, but in this case the cowry is said to be a fossil, probably

³¹ ? *Triton*, the shell employed as a trumpet in many places.

³² Hans Hildebrand. "The Industrial Arts of Scandinavia," (South Kensington Museum Art Handbook), 1882, p. 40.

³³ *Ann. Brit. Sch. Athens*, ix. (1902-3), pp. 291 and 335.

³⁴ *Journ. Roy. Anthropol. Inst.*, xli., 1911, p. 362, pl. xl., fig. 4, 5.

³⁵ See my paper on this subject in *Manch. Memoirs (Lit. & Phil. Soc.)*, ix. (1916), No. 7.

³⁶ "Reliquiæ Aquitanicæ," London, 1875, p. 48 (Description of the Plates), pl. v., fig. 15.

from the Faluns of Touraine. Mention is also made of a collection of objects from the Cave of Bruniquel, comprising carnivore teeth and perforated marine shells, including a *Cypræa* an inch in length, not improbably derived from the Miocene beds of the Garonne.³⁷

Since Christy's diggings in Laugerie-Basse,³⁸ this cave has yielded many other interesting objects, including two species of Mediterranean cowries, perforated for use as pendants. Particulars of the discovery of the cowries are given in a paper by Massenat and others³⁹ dealing with the finding of a human skeleton (the so-called *homme ecrassé*) in this cave. The latter seems to have been a ceremonial interment in the contracted posture. The situation of the objects which accompanied the skeleton was studied with scrupulous attention and a score of shells were found. These were determined by Mortillet as belonging to two different species of Mediterranean cowries, *Cypræa pyrum*, Gmelin (or *rufa* Lam), and *Cypræa lurida* L. The most interesting fact concerning them is that they were arranged in pairs upon the body; two pairs on the forehead, one near each humerus, four in the region of the knees and thighs, two upon each foot. The discoverer dismisses the idea of a necklace or bracelets and suggests they were intended to adorn a garment. Each cowry was pierced with a notch.

Cowries have also been found in the celebrated Mentone Caves alongside human skeletons, which can with

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179 (Text).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 288 (Text).

³⁹ E. Massenat, Ph. Lalande & Cartailhac, "Découverte d'un squelette humain de l'âge du renne à Laugerie-Basse (Dordogne)." *Comptes Rendus de l'Acad. des Sciences*, vol. 74, 1872, pp. 1060-3; also Paul Girod and E. Massenat, "Les Stations de l'Age du Renne dans les vallées de la Vézère et de la Corrèze—Laugerie-Basse," Paris, 1900, pp. 24-5. Sollas (*Ancient Hunters*, 2nd Ed., 1915, p. 509, fig. 288) gives a figure of this interesting burial, with the associated shells. (After Cartailhac).

considerable confidence be correlated with those found in the valley of La Vézère, at Laugerie-Basse, Cro-Magnon, Gourdan, and Chancelade. Villeneuve⁴⁰ records, amongst other shells, one *Cypræa*. from an occupation level (Foyer D), 3m. 15. from the surface, in La Grotte des Enfants. The specific name, unfortunately, is not given. On the same level a remarkable find was made of *Cassia rufa*, an Indian Ocean shell.⁴¹

At Barma Grande, another of the Mentone Caves, various kinds of ornaments of teeth and bone, and perforated shells of *Nassa neritea*, were found, in 1892, near the head of one of the skeletons discovered there; but the most interesting and remarkable find was that "on each thigh bone above the knee was a perforated cowry."⁴² The body is said to be that of an old man. It is of interest to note that all the skulls found here are stated to be of

⁴⁰ "Les Grottes de Grimaldi (Baoussé—Roussé)," Tome i., Fasc. i. "Historique et Description." By M. L. de Villeneuve (p. 65). (Imprimerie de Monaco, 1906).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Tome i. Fasc. 2. "Geologie et Paléontologie." By Prof. Marcellin Boule (p. 123); In a footnote to this page, G. Dollfus remarks: "*Cassia rufa* L., an Indian Ocean shell, is represented in the collection at Monaco by two fragments; one was found in the lower habitation level D; the other is probably of the same origin. The presence of this shell is extraordinary as it has no analogue in the Mediterranean, neither recent nor fossil; there exists no species in the North Atlantic or off Senegal with which it could be confounded. The fragments have the traces of the reddish colour preserved and are not fossil; one of them presents a notch which has determined a hole that seems to have been made intentionally. The species has not yet been found in the Gulf of Suez nor in the raised-beaches of the Isthmus. M. Jousseume has found it in the Gulf of Tadjoura at Aden, but it has not yet been encountered in the Red Sea nor in the raised-beaches of that region. The common habitat of *Cassia rufa* is Socotra, besides the Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, New Caledonia and perhaps Tahiti. The fragments discovered at Mentone have therefore been brought from a great distance, at a very ancient epoch, by prehistoric man."

⁴² Munro, "Palæolithic Man and Terramara Settlements in Europe." Edinburgh, 1912, p. 163. [At p. 235, perforated teeth and shells, *Nassa*, *Cypræa*, *Pectunculus*, etc., are mentioned as being found at the Rock-shelter of Cap-Blanc (Laussel), Dordogne].

the Cro-Magnon type, and that all the bodies had been definitely interred. The discovery of cowries and the relation of these to the body, forms an interesting parallel to the Laugerie-Basse burial referred to above.

The association of perforated cowry shells with men belonging to the Cro-Magnon group is not without interest when it is remembered that these people were members of our own species—*Homo sapiens*, and quite distinct from the earlier Neanderthal people. That they were men capable of formulating ideas and endowed with an artistic sense is unquestionable. The skeletons of this race all seem to have been ceremonially interred, which certain writers regard as implying that they were not without some idea of religion. The fact that they used perforated shells, teeth, and pendants, as amulets, also supports this conclusion. But, of course, the validity of the inference depends upon what is meant by the term "religion."

How this race came into the south of Europe and where it came from is not easy to determine; but the slender evidence at present available disposes us to look to North Africa as its immediate source. It seems possible that these people may have been an early sporadic invasion from, or at least have been in direct or indirect contact with, the region where civilisation first developed—the valley of the Nile and Western Asia.

The skull of the Cro-Magnon man has so many points of similarity to that of Neolithic man in England, that, in defiance of the archæological evidence, the former race was judged at one time to belong to the Neolithic period. Leading authorities now agree in relegating it to an earlier time, which includes the Magdalenian period.⁴³

⁴³ The culture of the Cro-Magnon race is certainly quite distinct from that of the Lower Palæolithic people—Neanderthal man, and on this account Dr. Elliot Smith has suggested the term "Neoanthropic phase of culture," in order to give specific emphasis to the profound break in human history

As Dr. G. Elliot Smith has pointed out,⁴⁴ many similarities exist between Magdalenian and the later Azilian implements, and also of both of these to those of Pre-dynastic Egypt. This suggests the possibility of the Magdalenian period in the west being *approximately* contemporaneous with the pre-dynastic period in Egypt, and that the Neolithic period in Western Europe did not begin long before the third millennium B. C.

In connection with the above it is of interest to note that the cowry is frequently associated with pre-dynastic burials in Egypt.

The numerous discoveries of cowries detailed above serve to show the migrations or intercourse of early peoples. They are not to be regarded as evidence of the shells, even the smaller kind, having been employed as currency in the localities where they were found, nor indeed are they to be looked upon as having been worn from purely æsthetic motives. Their presence may be explained by the part cowries played in early times as symbolic of the generative forces of nature. The shell itself was not worshipped, but rather regarded as an attribute of some goddess. It was due probably to this fact that the cowry was known to the ancients under the appellation of "Concha Venerea,"—the shell of Venus.⁴⁵

As pointed out by Dr. J. C. Melvill,⁴⁶ the generic name of between the Lower and Upper Palæolithic. The Lower Palæolithic, he suggests, may be known as the Palæanthropic, the Upper as the commencement of the Neolithic, Age. (See "The American Museum Journal," vol. xvi., May, 1916, p. 325.)

⁴⁴ Abstract of paper on "The Commencement of the Neolithic Phase of Culture," read before the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, April 4th, 1916.

⁴⁵ As well as the goddess of love, the word Venus signifies the highest throw of the dice. (Horace, 'Carmina,' 2, 7, 25.) It is not surprising, therefore, that we find the cowry—the shell of Venus, used in so many games of chance.

⁴⁶ "Survey of Genus Cypræa," *op. cit.*, p. 184.

this group of shells, "Cypræa, or more classically Cypria, is derived from one of the many attributes of Aphrodité, owing, doubtless, to her worship not only having been inaugurated, but for long years principally centralized, in Cyprus, then a luxuriant and smiling island, teeming with industrial wealth. Horace⁴⁷ addresses her as 'Diva potens Cypri,' and Tibullus,⁴⁸ when apostrophizing the goddess, thus: 'Et faveas conchâ, Cypria, vecta tuâ.'"

As previously remarked, cowries were worn as amulets by the women of Pompeii in order to prevent sterility. The presence of these shells in women's-graves in France and the South of England seems to point to the prevalence of the same ideas in the Middle Ages.

In the 18th century the custom of wearing a large cowry as an amulet or charm was prevalent among Kender Tartar women and girls.⁴⁹ And in the neighbourhood of Naples, cowries, it is stated, are still worn by the poorer class.⁵⁰ Money-cowries are used by the Bedouin women of the Hadramaut, South Arabia, to adorn their girdles;⁵¹ also by the women of the races of the Volga region, as breast and forehead ornaments by the Tshuwash and Mordvins, and as necklaces by the Tsheremis. They are also to be seen on the necks of the Kirghis women, and on the curious head-dresses of the Bashkir women;⁵² and

⁴⁷ Horace, *Od.*, 1, 3, 1.

⁴⁸ Tibullus, *III.*, 3, 4.

⁴⁹ G. A. Cooke, "System of Universal Geography," vol. i. (1801), p. 448.

⁵⁰ Faussett, "Inventorium Sepulchrale," 1856, p. 68.

⁵¹ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Strabo, bk. xvi., ch. iv., par. 17 (Bohn's Ed., vol. iii., p. 202), speaking of the Troglodytæ of the Arabian Gulf says: "The women carefully paint themselves with antimony. They wear about their necks shells, as a protection against fascination by witchcraft."

⁵² Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Ratzel, "History of Mankind," iii., p. 327, gives a figure of one of these Bashkir head-dresses ornamented with small cowries.

in England they are occasionally noticed worn in long strings by travelling gypsies.

According to Professor Ridgeway,⁵³ cowries are still used, combined with a Christian medal, in Corfu as a child's amulet; and also in Montenegro.

In the following pages frequent references will be found to the use of cowry-shells as amulets of magical import in Africa, Asia, Pacific Islands, and elsewhere.

The custom of decorating the trappings of horses with cowries, doubtless with the object of averting the evil eye, is found in Persia as well as in India (where elephants carry such ornament), in Hungary and in Norway. And according to Ridgeway (*op. cit.*, p. 248), Mr. F. W. Hasluck, when travelling in the Morea in 1907, saw a boar's tusk charm on a horse in Triphylia, with a pendant of a cross formed of four cowries sewn on leather.

Lane, in his "Modern Egyptians,"⁵⁴ informs us that cowries are still used by the people of Egypt, and are regarded as a protection against the evil eye. With this object they are often attached to the trappings of camels, horses, and other animals, as well as to the caps of children. Pickering⁵⁵ remarks that on ascending the Nile to Kenneh, the modern capital of the Thebaid, about 30 miles below the site of ancient Thebes, cowries were seen used as money by market women of the Ethiopian [? Soudanese] race. Culin, in his "Chess and Playing Cards,"⁵⁶ reports that in the streets of "Cairo" at the Columbian Exposition was a family of Bishareen from the Eastern desert, near Assouan,

⁵³ W. Ridgeway, "The Origin of the Turkish Crescent," *Journ. Roy. Anthro. Inst., G. B. and I.*, vol. 38 (1908), p. 248, pl. 21, fig. 23.

⁵⁴ E. W. Lane, "Modern Egyptians," vol. i., 1849, p. 343.

⁵⁵ Pickering, "Races of Man" (Bohn's Ed.), 1863, as quoted by Stearns, "Ethno-conchology," *Rept. U.S. Nat. Mus.*, 1887, (1889), p. 303.

⁵⁶ Stewart Culin, "Chess and Playing Cards," *Rept. U.S. Nat. Mus.*, 1896, (1898), p. 815 footnote.

whose headman practised soothsaying with cowries. He threw several cowry-shells, and made his prediction from the manner in which they fell.

At Sennaar, in the Soudan, cowry-ornament still obtains to-day among the Hassanieh Arabs. Caillarud, in the 20th year of last century, saw cowries ornamenting the fringed girdle of the young girls in Sennaar. According to Carl Ritter, they are still found as trimmings for women's girdles in Abyssinia,⁵⁷ and Haldeman⁵⁸ describes a curious Abyssinian necklace composed of European beads, cowry-shells, bits of brass, copper coins, etc.

According to Schneider (*op. cit.*, p. 173), a large leather object from Somaliland, richly ornamented with cowries, is in the Dresden Museum,⁵⁹ and a similar object, ornamented in the same way, was brought from Somaliland by Riebeck in 1883. That the cowry was in use here in early times is proved by the discovery of *Cypræa annulus*, along with glass, enamel, stone and other objects, in the ruins of Bender Abbas, near Berbera. The age of these ruins is still problematic; they may belong to "Persian times."⁶⁰ Presumably this refers to the period of the Persian conquest of Egypt in the sixth century B.C.

In the Upper Nile region cowries, rubbed down on their backs, are used by many negro peoples. The Lango, Latuka, Lur, Shuli and Nuer have very many cowry-ornaments, more especially on their head-coverings. According to Ratzel (*op. cit.*, iii., p. 30), the head-coverings of the Shuli and Lango "consist of strong bass-matting, close set with concentric rows of cowries, with a woven blunt appendage, shaped either like a flat conical cup or like a

⁵⁷ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁵⁸ S. S. Haldeman, "United States Geographical Surveys West of the 100th Meridian," vol. vii., *Archæology*, 1879, p. 263.

⁵⁹ See also Ratzel, *op. cit.*, II., fig. 14 of plate facing p. 533.

⁶⁰ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

helmet enclosing the head and hanging down the back of the neck" (see also Ratzel, *op. cit.*, i., p. 101). Among the Latukas and their kinsfolk heavy wicker helmets, with crests recalling Greek forms, are used; these are ornamented with a ring of cowries all round (Ratzel, III., p. 30, and p. 41, fig. 7). Among the Djibba tribe of the Sobat country, one of the Nile tributaries, *cowries appear to be associated with head-hunting, as among the Nagas of Assam (infra, p. 50). Like these latter people, the Djibba warriors wear the hair taken from the decapitated heads of slain enemies, in addition to wearing goat-skin dresses, ivory armlets and belts of cowries.*⁶¹ *By the Jurs, beads and cowry-shells are considered as essential at betrothals.*⁶²

In East Africa rubbed-down cowries⁶³ are used largely by the Akikuyu, Kavirondo, Akamba and Masai peoples. Kavirondo men are noted for their peculiar and elaborate head-dresses made of these shells. Among the Akamba, Masai and other tribes, cowries appear to be associated with unmarried girls (as among the Chettis of Southern India, *infra* p. 48). The young unmarried girls of the Akamba tribe wear belts and aprons adorned with beads and cowries; but these ornaments are discarded after the birth of the first child. The Masai women also wear a peculiar head-band covered with cowries during the period of "engagement."⁶⁴ The Lumbwa girls' aprons, too, are similarly adorned, doubtless with the same significance.⁶⁵ Ridgeway, in his paper on "The Origin of

⁶¹ Brown, "Races of Mankind," III., p. 16.

⁶² Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁶³ On the East side of Africa, the ring-cowry (*C. annulus*) appears to be the form universally used.

⁶⁴ "Women of all Nations," pp. 266 and 268.

⁶⁵ Specimens in the Manchester Museum; see also *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, vol. 33 (1903), pl. xxix., for illustration of a Lumbwa girl wearing one of these cowry-ornamented aprons.

the Turkish Crescent" (*op. cit.*, p. 253, pl. 25), figures and describes two curious head-dresses worn by the Ja-luo of Kavirondo, one consisting of ram's horns and cowries, the other of reed-buck's horns and cowries. These remind us, Ridgeway remarks, of the combination of boars' tusks and cowries in Greece (*supra* p. 18). Captain R. F. Burton gives us an interesting account of the cowry-trade of the regions north of the 'Land of the Moon,' in his description of "The Lake Regions of Central Equatorial Africa."⁶⁶ The cowries, he reports, are collected from various places between Ras Hafun and Mozambique, the trade being in the hands of Moslem hucksters. They are purchased on the mainland by a curious specimen of the 'round-trade'; money is not taken, so the article is sold measure for measure of holcus grain. From Zanzibar the use of cowries spreads in two directions; one to the regions north of the 'Land of the Moon' where they form the currency, though they are also occasionally in demand as an ornament in Unyamwesi;⁶⁷ the other to the West African coast. That the collecting of cowries on the East African coast dates from ancient times is evident from the list of articles of export at Rhapta in the first century A.D. Among the articles mentioned in the "Periplus"⁶⁸ as exported from this place—the Quiloa or Kilwa of modern times—is an item, *Νάυπλιος ὀλίγος* (*lit.* little sea-shell), a term which has given rise to some discussion. Vincent⁶⁹ says: "It seems to be an inferior tortoise-shell from the context" (which he translates, "tortoise-shell of superior kind, but not equal to the Indian; and a small

⁶⁶ *Journ. Roy. Geog. Soc. Lond.*, vol. 29, 1859, p. 448.

⁶⁷ See Ratzel, *op. cit.*, II., plate facing p. 533, fig. 1, for cowry ornamented head-dress of Wanyamwesi.

⁶⁸ Vincent, "The Commerce and Navigation of the Ancients in the Indian Ocean," London, 1807, vol. ii., p. 172.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 748.

quantity of that species called nauplius.") "It may, however, be a different commodity." As cowries are an article of commerce on this coast to-day, the suggestion naturally presents itself of interpreting the term as a reference to shells (? cowries) intended for ornament.

In Uganda, cowries have been a recognised form of currency from an early date. According to the Rev. John Roscoe,⁷⁰ the standard of currency among the Baganda was set by the value of the cow. During the reign of Suna, he tells us, a cow was sold for 2,500 cowry-shells; a goat for 500; a fowl for 25; a large cock for 50; and an ivory tusk weighing sixty-two pounds was valued at 1,000 cowry-shells⁷¹. Cooking-pots were priced according to size; a large pot was sold for 200 cowries, small ones for 20 or 30 cowries. A milk-pot cost 60 or even 100 cowries; a tobacco pipe from 5 to 10 shells; and a water-pot from 40 to 50 shells.⁷² "Before the introduction of cowry-shells," Roscoe informs us, "a blue bead (*nsinda*) was used; this was very rough and badly made, but it was considered to be of great value; one bead was of equal value with one hundred cowry-shells. Still earlier, before the introduction of the bead, a small ivory disc was used, known as *sanga*; one of these discs was valued at one hundred cowry-shells. When the cowry-shell was first introduced, which was probably in the reign of King Semakokiro, two cowry-shells would purchase a woman."⁷³ By these same people cowry-shells have also been used from the first in religious and other ceremonies. One of the many interesting uses, mentioned by Roscoe, is their employment in the decoration of an amulet called *Luzalo*, which partakes of the nature of a fetish,

⁷⁰ Roscoe, "The Baganda," London, 1911.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 456.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 455.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

and is designed to insure fecundity. This consists of a piece of wood sewn into a small cat-skin bag ornamented with cowry-shells, which is worn round the waist, so that the amulet rests in front of the wearer.⁷⁴ Divination is also practised by means of pieces of leather decorated with cowry-shells. They are also offered to propitiate the spirits of trees ; and sent by the king as presents to each of the important deities. Another most important use is to decorate the jawbones of deceased kings. Some five months after the death and burial of a king the tomb is entered and the head severed from the body and brought away. The jawbone is then removed and placed in an ant hill until all the flesh is eaten away, the skull meanwhile being given special burial in a place near the tomb. The jawbone, after being cleansed and washed in beer and milk, is wrapped in fine barkcloth which has been rubbed with butter, and is decorated with beads and cowry-shells collected during the king's lifetime from people succeeding to chieftainships. A temple is then built to receive the decorated jawbone and umbilical cord of the late king, and also the umbilical cord of the ex-queen.⁷⁵ At the end of the royal mourning cowry-shells are thrown on the fire as if they were fuel ; this is also done at ceremonies to prolong the king's life.⁷⁶

In the marriage ceremonies of the Baganda these shells form an important part of the dowry, the bridegroom having to provide as many as two thousand five hundred.⁷⁷ On the birth of twins it is the custom for the grandmother to make each twin a present of cowry-shells, and everyone coming to see them throws cowry-shells into a basket

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-9.

placed to receive these offerings.⁷⁸ On the death of a twin the body is embalmed and the ghost is caught by the medicine man and made up into a "twin" (mulongo). To do this, the man goes by night into a space in front of the house, spreads a barkcloth on the ground, kills a white fowl, cuts out its tongue, and places it on the barkcloth; he then watches for the first insect that alights on the barkcloth, catches it, and wraps it up with the fowl's tongue, saying that the ghost has come back again. The insect and fowl's tongue are then made up into a "twin" decorated with cowry-shells and beads, put into a wooden pot and preserved.⁷⁹

In addition to the above uses, cowries are employed by the Baganda to decorate the royal drum. Drum-sticks made from human arm-bones are also ornamented with them, as well as the stool of the war-god Kibuka.⁸⁰

According to Stuhlmann, cowries were used in Karagwe, on the west side of Victoria Nyanza, to ornament the leather-cuff which serves as a protection of the left wrist at archery, and in Unyora, north-west of the above lake, the most important personage wears, as token of his rank, a strip of cow-hide adorned with cowries and coloured glass beads. The Wassongona and Wahuma have cowries as neck-ornaments, and the young girls of the latter wear a hip-cord of cowry-shells and beads, which are sewn on leather strips.⁸¹

According to Schweinfurth the Madi and Niam Niam wear cowry-ornaments, but they do not appear to be of great importance among the latter people. Cowries were much sought after in former times by the Bongo, but they have long since fallen out of the category of objects

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 214 and 306, fig. 49.

⁸¹ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

of value.⁸² Schweinfurth also depicts a fashion in hair among the Monbuttus, by which the head is surrounded with a regular saint's halo. The hair, in plaits, is spread out round the whole head and fastened to a hoop adorned with cowry-shells.⁸³

The Wavira of the upper Ituri wear in their ears a wooden plug with cowries at both ends ; this object is in the Lunda Empire an amulet hung by a string from the neck.⁸⁴ Cowries were also seen by Junker used as ornaments by the Bagarambo on the Welle River. And Thonner reports cowries in common use by the Mogwandi north of the upper Dua and by the neighbouring races ; by the Mobali in the hair, and by a Banza man from Bogola as a neck-chain. On the middle and upper Ubangi and on the Welle to its source cowries pass current as money ; they are also in use as such by the Basoko inhabiting the region of the Congo between Stanley Falls and the Aruwimi confluence. In 1886 Lenz saw them used for ornament by the Nkaia at Riba Riba above the Stanley Falls, as well as in other places. According to Johnston cowries were made use of as small-change everywhere on the Upper Congo. Large numbers of them were placed in the graves with the dead. In Nyangwe they were in use along with other objects of barter in Livingstone's (1871), Cameron's (1874), Stanley's (1876) and Pogge's time, and often served as presents for the chiefs and for purchasing necessary articles of food in the districts through which these and other travellers passed. In Uhombo, between the Congo and Lake Tanganyika, they were the current money in Stanley's time. At Mpala,

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 173 ; and Schweinfurth, "The Heart of Africa," London, 1873, vol. i., p. 299 ; ii., p. 9.

⁸³ Ratzel, *op. cit.*, iii., p. 69 ; Schweinfurth, *op. cit.*, ii., p. 7 (Text-figure).

⁸⁴ Ratzel, *op. cit.*, iii., p. 69.

on the western shore of Lake Tanganyika, they were seen by Richard as head-ornaments or sewn on straps ; he also observed them in use by the Nollo Nollo, living north thereof, to ornament the forehead, neck and wrist ; in the latter case, two shells were worn attached to the middle of a thin strap, probably an amulet of some kind. Among the Warua of the Upper Congo similar ornaments were noticed.⁸⁵

On the middle Congo cowries are a recognised currency about Lukolela, Ngowe, Matumba Lake, etc., being used by the Balolo people. On the Mongalla, Thonner, in 1896, found cowries the necessary legal tender for continuing his journey up the river and for the purchase of food-stuffs. Wissmann, Wolf, and other travellers found them highly estimated in the Kassai-Sankuru basin. According to Wolf, in 1885, these shells together with a black and white striped glass bead were used as barter-material by the Baluba people of this region.⁸⁶

In the Lunda Empire, the wooden plug set with cowries at both ends, which the Wavira wear in their ears, is hung by a string from the neck as an amulet.⁸⁷

According to Magyar, cloth in Kimbundaland, about 1850, was reckoned at from 25 to 50 cowries, or busio-shells, per ell or yard, according to the distance from the coast ; and this same observer tells us that the women of the Mondumbe, inwards from Benguela, ornament their hair with small white cowries (*C. moneta* ? *Oliva* ?).⁸⁸

In describing the Ovambo, Ratzel (*op. cit.*, II., p. 541) informs us that they barter ivory for beads, iron, copper, shells, and cowries, with the Portuguese-speaking black traders on the further side of the Cunene River. Such

⁸⁵ Schneider, *op. cit.*, various pages.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Ratzel, *op. cit.*, iii., p. 69.

⁸⁸ Schneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 159 and 172.

articles as they obtain in this way, and do not themselves need, they trade away to the south and east. On another page (p. 553) of the same volume, he gives an illustration (after Serpa Pinto) of Kimbande-Ganguellas with cowry-ornament. It is of interest to note that the shells (*C. moneta* or *annulus*), are employed by the women and girls as a decoration in connection with their curious method of hair-dressing; the man shown in the illustration has no such ornament. According to the observation of Waitz, cowries were usual as ornament among Hottentots and Kaffirs.⁸⁹ Unfortunately no indication is given as to whether these were the small white money cowries, or some other. From Ratzel's figure (II., p. 268) of a Bushman amulet, consisting of large cowries attached to a sort of belt, it would appear that cowries other than those so universally employed for currency are used also in the south. It is impossible to define the species from the illustration, but it appears to be a large spotted one, probably *C. tigris*, whose nearest habitat is off the East African coast, in the neighbourhood of Zanzibar.

Returning north, to the French Congo, we find that, according to Foret⁹⁰ the races on the Tem and on the Ivindo use cowries as ornaments. Lenz, in 1876, found them so employed in the hinterland of Gaboon. Kund also reports cowry-ornaments for the neck among the Bateke, not far from Leopoldville. Dennett⁹¹ figures a Bavili "guardian fetish," called Mpembe, consisting of a wooden image in the shape of a man, the eyes of which are cowry-shells with the apertures outwards. Ratzel

⁸⁹ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 172: According to Peringuey (*Ann. S. Afr. Mus.*, viii, 1911, p. 104), Sparrman mentions and figures Hottentot ornaments of marine shells (*Nerita albicilla*?) and a leather head-dress adorned with three spaced rows of "cowries."

⁹⁰ Le Mouvement Géographique, 1902, No. 9 (*vide* Schneider).

⁹¹ R. E. Dennett, "At the Back of the Black Man's Mind," London, 1906, p. 91, pl. 5.

(*op. cit.*, iii., p. 83, fig. i.), also gives an illustration of a Beneki fetiṣh with cowry-eyes, which has a strong resemblance to the Bavili example.

In the Cameroon district the use of cowries as currency seems to have ceased, but the shells are applied as ornament. Zintgraff writes that in Adamawa and the frontierland such was the case. The Bali warriors were allowed to carry a bandolier upon which the cowries were sewn in two rows, the channelled opening of the shell being to the outside. They were also seen arranged in cross-form on a small, flat, cloth packet, which was worn on a string from the neck, resembling the amulet which the Mahomedan wears. Another interesting use noted by Zintgraff is that by the chief of the Bafut, living on the Adamawa frontier, who had utilized cowries as a sort of mosaic on the floor of his spacious palm-wine hall.⁹² The shells are also worked into the coiffure of the women in the Cameroons, as many as two hundred being required.⁹³

We now reach the chief zone of circulation of the cowry—the western Sudan and Guinea coast. For many centuries the shells have passed as a means of currency throughout the greater part of this region, and in many places they have also played an important part in religious and other ceremonies.

Our earliest knowledge of their employment in this region as currency dates from the 14th century, when the Arab traveller Ibn Batūta saw them in use for transacting business at Kawkaw (Gao or Gagho) on the Niger.⁹⁴ Cadamosto, who visited Cape Verde in 1455, also noted the white shells, "porcellete or cowries," used in exchange

⁹² Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁹³ Joyce and others, "Women of all Nations," p. 351.

⁹⁴ "The Travels of Ibn Batūta," translated by the Rev. Samuel Lee, London, 1829, p. 241.

between the Arabs and the natives of the interior.⁹⁵ Leo Africanus,⁹⁶ who wrote at the beginning of the 16th century, mentions in his description of Timbuctoo that "the natives of this place use small mussel-shells or snail-shells, which were brought from Persia, of which 400 equal one ducat, and six and two-thirds go to a Roman ounce." In Benin, at the end of the 15th century, according to Pereira, cowries, under the name Iguru, were in currency. In the description of Commodore Stewart's embassy journey to Mekines (Mequinez) in 1721, it is stated:⁹⁷ "The goods, which they (the Moroccans) convey to Guinea, are salt, cowries, etc.—Cowries are small shells, which are brought from the East Indies, and they are current instead of ready money, and as such have the highest value."

From Timbuctoo and the Upper Niger⁹⁸ the territory of the cowry-currency extends to Lake Chad, with wide spaces here and there in which the cowries do not, or only in a minor degree, pass as currency. Barth mentions three such places within the great bend of the Niger,—Aribinda, where the shells had no value, and Isaye (Ise) and Bambara, where they were employed only in the sale of milk. The places noted by Barth as having the cowry-currency were Kabara, near Timbuctoo, Saraiyamo, Kubo, Dore, Bundore, Sinder and Say on the Niger; Gando, Sokoto, Wurno, Bamurna, Badarana, Kammane, Bunka, Katsena, Kano, Lamisso, Kukameirua and Gummel, all in the northern part of Sokoto State; Tasawa, immediately north of the Haussa region; as well as Zinder, Wushek,

⁹⁵ Deniker, "Les Races et les Peuples de la Terre," Paris, 1900, p. 324; Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁹⁶ Leo Africanus, "Description de l'Afrique," Lyon, 1556, p. 225 (*vide* Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 119).

⁹⁷ Thos. Winterbottom, "Nachrichten von der Sierra-Leone-Küste," p. 221 (*vide* Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 119).

⁹⁸ Segu, Jenné, Kaarla, etc.

Muniyo, and Kuka in Bornu. In the Haussa States, Clapperton, in 1826, found the shells in general use as money, and his companion, Richard Lander, mentions cowry-currency in Kano, Womba, Catup, Kazigee and Ragada in S.W. Haussa district. Rohlfs, on his 1867 journey from Kuka through Gujeba and the southern Sokoto beyond Yakoba to the Benue, and down this river to its junction with the Niger, and then up to the Rabba, finally passing through Ilorin and Yoruba to the coast at Lagos, moved throughout in the region of the cowry-currency. In the district of the Marghi, cowries did not circulate as money in Barth's time, yet he managed to obtain two fowls with them, owing to the fact that the shells were desired as ornament by the "young ladies."

In the 17th and 18th centuries cowries were used very largely by the slave-traders of the Guinea coast from Senegal southwards; but in later times, English gold and the American dollar, together with other articles of exchange, displaced the shells to a very great extent. Where not actually in use as money, they still continue to be employed for ornamental and other purposes.

The territory of cowry-ornament in Western Africa is of much wider extent than that of the cowry-currency. In Morocco, for example, Lenz saw cowries as ornament on the daughter of a chieftain. Such ornament is also said to be used by the Tuarag of the southern Sahara, and, according to Nachtigal, by the women in Tibesti. The Joloff women string them on their hip-girdle. Clapperton saw cowries frequently on the fringes of the goat- and sheep-skins wound round the hips of the women of "Kufu," and at Wazo he saw them on the collars of greyhounds. According to Staudinger the Fulbes had their numerous hair-plaits frequently decorated with cowries. In Loko, Gurich, in 1885, found children

hung with cowry-shells. The men-folk of the pagan Kado negro in southern Haussa-Land, wear, according to Rohlfs, a skin-apron hung with cowries, and the young girls of the Kedje negro fasten on their leather-girdles a bundle of small shells presented to them by their bridegrooms. Barth mentions shell-ornament as in use by the young women and girls of the Marghi, and in Bagirmi, by the pagan population in the south. The women especially wear such ornament of cowries, and caps too are made thereof, with which to decorate the heads of deceased relations. Nachtigal also states that in this neighbourhood, at the funeral of a chief, "a small gourd-shell full of beads and cowries was placed on the mouth in order to serve to some extent as travelling expenses." According to Rohlfs, the Mahommedan Aulâd Rashîd (Arabs in N.W. Darfur) decorate the hair-plaits of their camels and horses with the porcelain-shells, and the women of Pebu adorn their arms with them. According to Nachtigal, the wood- or tin-trombone, about one and a half metres long, the hollowed antelope-horn, and the short pipes of wood, brass or horn, which emitted such terrible tones at festive processions of the Sheikhs in Bornu, were all adorned with numerous cowries on the surface. The Kawembu in Kanem and the Buduma of the islands of Lake Chad also wear neck-chains of cowries. The shells are a market-article in Kuka. They are taken as an article of barter in journeys from Kuka to Bagirmi and Wadai, where, especially by the native Arab and also by the pagan negro, they are used as ornament. The Mahommedan women in Bagirmi wear cowry neck-chains; the wives of the pagans in the Mofu district wear the shells on the girdle and apron strings. In Abeshr (Wadai), at the wedding of the king's daughter, thirty large baskets, adorned with shells or beads, were carried

in front. Being wishful to journey through the pagan-land of Runga, Nachtigal provided himself with cowries. In Darfur he saw no more cowry-ornament.⁹⁹ In Haussaland Robinson informs us: "The most common form of gambling is a game called by the natives *chacha*. It consists in throwing up five cowry-shells, the player winning or losing according as the shells fall, the right or the wrong way up."¹⁰⁰

Regarding the use of cowries in the region of the northern Guinea coast we have ample material to draw upon in the accounts of numerous observers. In Sierra Leone, at the time of Thomas Winterbottom, three or four necklaces of cowries were worn at the mourning for a wife, and the husband of the deceased woman was also required to wear a necklet of shells. According to Major R. G. Berry¹⁰¹ the shells are used to play a game called jagay, or knuckle-bones. They also form part of the sacred contents of the medicine bag, or Borfimor, used at the initiation ceremonies in connection with the Human Leopard Society of the Sierra Leone cannibals. A Borfimor bag obtained by Major Berry was found to contain four smaller bags, one of which held two tau-shaped iron crosses, the stems of which were lapped with cotton, and to the top of each was tied a cowry-shell, or sign of life. "The tau cross, or *crux ansata*," Berry remarks—and in quoting this passage I do not accept all of the statements—"was the emblem of Osiris, and is called the Sign of Life, the symbol of resuscitation and new birth, expressive of the idea entertained by the Egyptians and

⁹⁹ Schneider, *op. cit.*, various pages (quoting Nachtigal, Barth, and others).

¹⁰⁰ C. H. Robinson, "Haussaland," London, 1896, p. 206.

¹⁰¹ R. G. Berry, "The Sierra Leone Cannibals, with Notes on their History, Religion, and Customs." *Proc. Roy. Irish Academy*, vol. xxx., Sect. C., No. 2, May, 1912, pp. 45, 53, and 67.

other philosophers, that nothing created was annihilated, and that to cease to be was only to assume another form, dissolution being merely the passage to reproduction. In its association with the Borfimor [*and in this connection the presence of the cowry must not be overlooked*],¹⁰² we seem to have the reflection of some such ideas, the fetish being animated by the indwelling life of the victim and the spirit attracted to it." (p. 67).

The Borfimor bag also contained a pebble made of some earthy matter and lime, in one side of which was incorporated a cowry-shell.

The remarkable resemblance in the use of the money-cowry here to that of the Ojibwa and Menomini tribes of North America, who also employ the same shell, has been pointed out already in an earlier paper.¹⁰³

In Liberia, according to Stewart Culin,¹⁰⁴ pierced cowry-shells (*i.e.*, rubbed down on the back) are used in fortune-telling. (*See Fig. 1, E*). Ratzel (*op. cit.*, III., page 105) also gives a figure (f. 6) of a sword-sheath from Liberia which is ornamented with cowries arranged in stars.

Bowdich, who in 1817 was sent on a mission of peace from Cape Coast Castle to Kumassi, mentions that in Accra, as in Gaman, Kong and other neighbouring places, cowries had currency.

North of Ashanti proper, in Koranza and Atabuobo, Perregaux found them in full use and of higher value than on the coast. According to this observer, in Koranza, they were counted per thousand, and 100 cowries were

¹⁰² The italicized sentence is my own. J. W. J.

¹⁰³ J. W. Jackson, "The Money Cowry (*Cypræa moneta*, L.) as a Sacred Object among North American Indians," *Manch. Memoirs (Lit. and Phil. Soc.)*, vol. lx. (1916), No. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Culin, "Chess and Playing Cards," *op. cit.*, p. 815, footnote, and fig. 134 on p. 817.

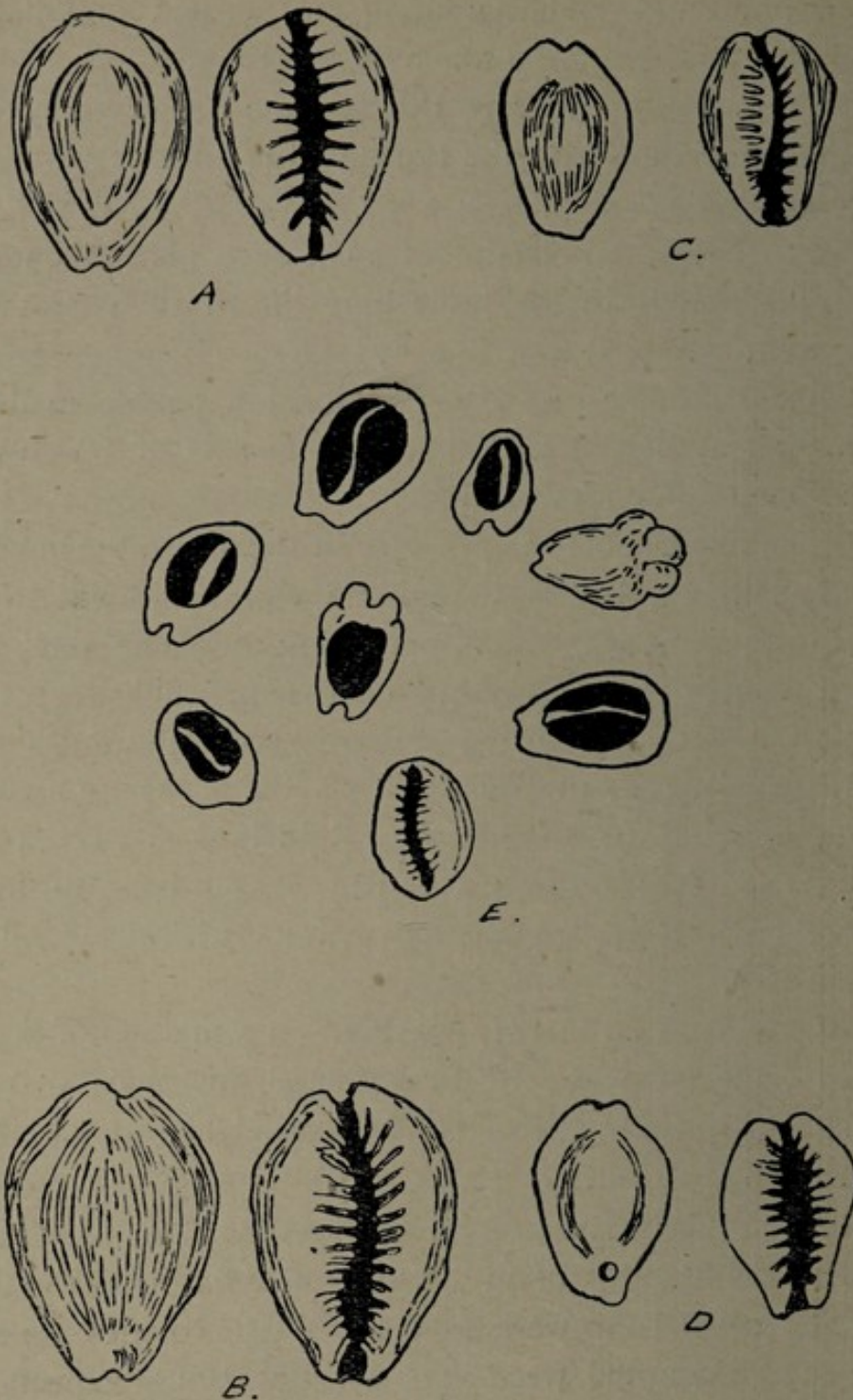


Fig. 1.

A.—*Cypraea annulus* (after Stearns).

B.—*Cypraea moneta* („ „).

C.—*C. moneta* var. *atava* Rochbr. (after Roberts in Tryon).

D.—*C. moneta* var. *atava* Rochbr., used by Ojibwa Indians (after Hoffman).

E.—Cowries (*C. moneta* v. *atava* and v. *ethnographica*) used in fortune-telling, Liberia, Africa (after Culin).

worth 3d. In Okwaon, on the contrary, they were reckoned thus:—

35 cowries = 1 string (Obang).

12 × 35 „ therefore 12 strings = 3d.

50 × 35 „ „ 50 „ (1750 cowries) = 1 Head
(Atramatiri).

In the plural, Atiri, was used for 2-9, and Atramatiri, for 10 or more heads. A game with cowries (obviously the same game as elsewhere in this region) was named Atramaton, *i.e.* to throw cowries. These words are combinations with the word Atrama, which denotes cowries. “They were so named,” says Perregaux, “in the Tshi language in Aquapim and Ashanti, while in Okwaon and the northern lands the designation Serewa was used. A single cowry was called Niwa, because of its likeness to an eye¹⁰⁵ (Oniwa), and ten cowries were called Niwandu.”¹⁰⁶

Among the Mamprusi of the Gambaga country, north of Ashanti, cowries, together with kola nut, figure among the objects distributed to guests and musicians at wedding ceremonies.¹⁰⁷

Apart from their use as currency, cowries play a very important role as amulets and in fetish-worship among the Ewe negroes of Togo district. They are worn on the neck, arm, wrist and ankle, and regarded as amulets against wounds and sickness, and for luck in hunting. Mischlich records that the hunt-fetishes, Gbofu of Dad-ease and Nakuku of Mjooti, both in Adeli, a district in the hill-country of Togo, were ornamented with cowries. Spiess mentions that they were worn in quantity by expectant women, to ward off danger. It was the custom among the

¹⁰⁵ The likeness of the aperture of the cowry to the closed eye may explain why these shells have been applied as eyes for fetishes, etc., in the Congo region, Borneo, New Zealand, etc.

¹⁰⁶ *Fide* Schneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-5.

¹⁰⁷ “Women of all Nations,” p. 344.

Ewe that if a woman died in childbirth she was not given the usual burial treatment, and was not buried in her hut. The same shells are also employed as eyes in the Begbowo idol, as an ornament of the fetish-priests and priestesses at their dance, as offerings to the protective deity and at ordeals, at which it depends upon whether the priest, who has taken two or three cowries in the mouth, retains them there or casts them out.¹⁰⁸ *The similarity of these customs to those current in other parts of the world is remarkable. As will be seen in the subsequent account, the association of the cowry-shell with pregnancy is to be found in places so far away as India and Japan; while the spitting out of cowries appears to be identical with the medicine ceremonial of the Ojibwa and Menomini Indians of North America.*

According to Klose, Togo warriors wear caps ornamented with cowries. As a protection from evil small children have a pair of consecrated cowries interwoven in the hair, while the women of the bush-people of the hinterland fasten cowries as a fetish on the side of the head. Hunters, too, ornament therewith the butt-end of their flint-lock guns, in order to ensure success, and on a much honoured hunt-fetish in the neighbourhood of Soluga lay buffalo- and antelope-horns adorned with cowries. At the entrance to villages frequently stand clay-idols with cowry-eyes and shell-ornament, and in front of them lay abundant offerings of old spirit-flasks and calabashes filled with cowries. At ordeals for the detection of a murderer, the priests blow poison towards the sun out of a cowry-decorated pipe, which, when the suspicion is correct, falls down as blood, while at the trial of a thief two pieces of wood, adorned with a cowry at each end and wrapped round with a long cord, are made use of.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Schneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170 (quoting Mischlich and Spiess).

¹⁰⁹ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 170 (quoting Klose, "Togo.")

In Togo-land cowries are also paid by the relations of a girl seeking admission among the Ewe-priestesses, and when the betrothed Ewe-youth brings his wife home he pays to her parents 4 marks in cowries.¹¹⁰ At death ceremonies, relations, friends and acquaintances, place quantities of cowries in the grave with the dead, in order that the deceased may purchase food and palm-wine, and reward the old ferry-man Akotia who carries him in his canoe over the wide river Assisa to the region of the dead. According to Monrad,¹¹¹ the negroes fully believe that everything expended in the funeral obsequies, such as the goods, coral, cowry-money, etc., placed in the grave, the tobacco used and the wine drunk on such occasions, will be of use to the defunct when he rises up in the future world.

Among the Bassari-people Klose found the previously-mentioned game of chance (cowry-throwing), at which he saw soldiers wager cowries to the value of from 1 to 3 marks at a cast. Cowry-casting for divination was also employed by the priests in the fetish-village Dadease.

According to R. Fr. Müller, at the circumcision of boys the circumciser receives a cowry, conveys it to the forehead of the person about to be circumcised, and finally buries it with the prepuce in a small pit; as a reward he receives 81 cowries. According to the same informer, cowries were offered to the small-pox fetish.¹¹²

That cowry-money has circulated in Togo for ages is proved by an old saying, handed down from generation to generation among the Ewe-negroes, according to which cowries were found in a basket despatched from heaven

¹¹⁰ Herold, "Mitteil. aus den deutsch. Schutzgebieten," Bd. V. (1892), p. 151 (*vide* Schneider).

¹¹¹ Monrad, "Gemälde der Küste von Guinea," p. 11 (*vide* Schneider).

¹¹² Müller, "Fetischistisches aus Atakpama (Deutsch-Togo)," *Globus*, 1902, No. 18, pp. 280-1 (*vide* Schneider).

by Mawu (God), which the black eagerly appropriated for purposes of trade.¹¹³

In Dahomey similar customs to those of the Ewe-negroes prevail. The famous Amazons of the king, who dwell in a house richly ornamented with skulls and cowry-garlands, have a custom of glueing a cowry-shell for each slain enemy to the stocks of their muskets, the shells being glued by means of the blood of the slain man. Another custom of the Dahomeyans takes the form of a "fight for cowries" thrown by the king and his Amazons, this being followed by the sacrifice of a human victim upon which cowries and other objects have been dashed. At the conclusion of these ceremonies a number of cowries are thrown upon the blood-stained earth.¹¹⁴

In Yoruba, as in Dahomey, cowries have been a recognised form of currency for centuries, and in recent years thousands of tons have been imported into Lagos. According to Hoffmann, in 1850, about 40 white cowries (*C. moneta*) were equal to an English penny. In Yoemba, in Lander's time, it was the custom on the death of a chief for one of his wives to destroy all his possessions and shell-money and then destroy herself. On his travels through Yoruba Lander also saw a sorcerer whose cowry-hangings he estimated at 20,000 specimens. Not far off the river Mussa, Forscher saw a hut with a veiled entrance in which it was customary for passing negroes to place cowries, because the god housed therein gave them water, corn, and yams in abundance.¹¹⁵

Among the Egbas, according to Brown,¹¹⁶ it is the custom when a great man dies for slaves to be slain to act as his attendants in the land of spirits. Messengers

¹¹³ C. Spiess, *Deutsch. Geogr. Blätter*, 1899, p. 33 (*vide* Schneider).

¹¹⁴ Brown, "Races of Mankind," vol. iii., N.D., pp. 92 and 100-2.

¹¹⁵ Schneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-6, and 170.

¹¹⁶ Brown, *op. cit.*, III., pp. 114-15.

are also despatched to the dead in the same way. Slaves or prisoners taken in war are richly dressed and laden with cowries, and when they become intoxicated by rum they are slain. In this manner it is believed that not only messages, but the circulating medium with which the victims are laden, can be conveyed to the departed relatives of the people who have performed this pious sacrifice. With these people sixteen appears to be a sacred and mystical number. Thus, for instance, when meditating war the war priest throws into the air sixteen cowries. Much depends upon the way these fall. Those which fall with the aperture upwards portend peace; but if a greater number fall with their apertures downwards, then the divination is considered to be favourable to war.

Some interesting details of the use of the cowry as a medium for the transmission of messages are given by the Rev. C. A. Gollmer in his paper on "African Symbolic Messages."¹¹⁷ In the Yoruba country, he informs us, the natives send messages to each other by means of shells, feathers, corn, stone, coal, etc., through which they convey their ideas, feelings, and wishes, good or bad. Cowry-shells in the symbolic language are used to convey, by their number and the way in which they are strung, a variety of ideas. Thus one cowry, strung on a short bit of grass fibre, or cord, may indicate "defiance and failure"; two cowries, if strung face to face, "relationship and meeting," but if strung back to back, "separation and enmity"; two cowries and a feather, "speedy meeting"; three cowries, with their faces all looking one way, strung with an alligator pepper, "deceit"; six cowries may indicate "attachment and affection."

According to Bloxam,¹¹⁸ cowries are similarly em-

¹¹⁷ *Journ. Anthropol. Inst. Gt. Br. and I.*, vol. xiv., p. 169.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. xvi., p. 295.

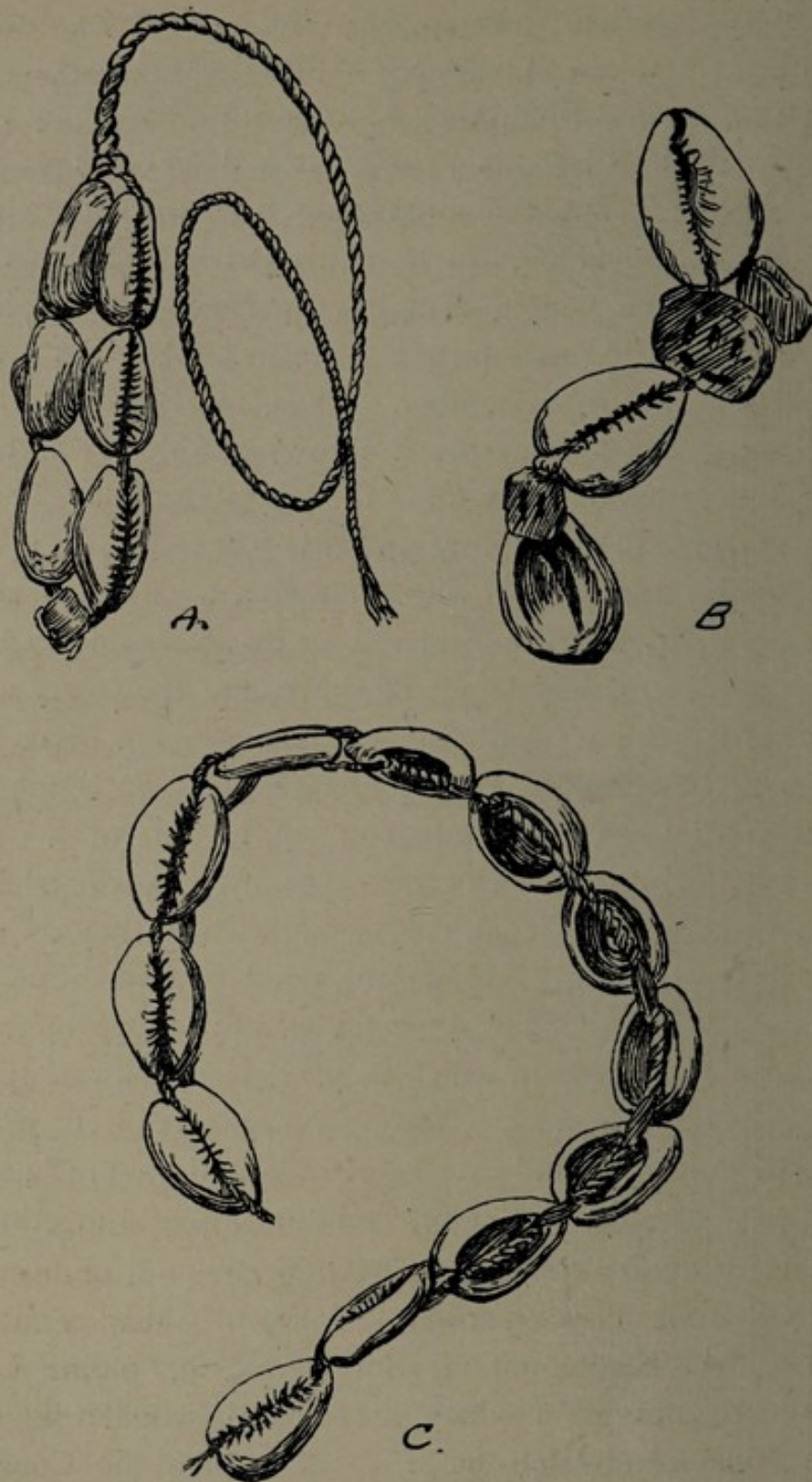


Fig. 2.
A.—West African symbolic message (after Bloxam).
B.—“Amulet for protection,” from Kafr Ammar, Egypt (after Petrie).
C.—String of *C. annulus* from rubbish dating to xxii. dynasty. Medum (in Manchester Museum).

ployed by the Jebu tribe of the west coast. The shells are strung together in varying numbers, odd numbers, as a rule, being of evil import, while even numbers express good will. A single cowry may be sent as an unfavourable answer to a request or message. In some cases other substances besides cowries are included in the aroko or symbolic letters. Thus we find pieces of spice, a piece of mat, and a feather, introduced for the purpose of conveying some significant idea. (See *Fig. 2 A*).

This method of employing cowries for the purpose of conveying certain ideas is of interest in connection with discoveries made in Egypt of knotted cords with the same cowries, papyrus charm pendants, uzat eyes, etc., attached. Several of these cords are figured by Petrie¹¹⁹ in his book on "Amulets," all from Kafr Ammar, xxiii-xxvth dynasty. He places the objects among amulets for protection and says no explanation of their meaning is known in Egypt. (See *Fig. 2 B*.)

The history of the cowry in Africa may be concluded with a few remarks on its use in Benin and about the lower Niger. Dennett, speaking of the customs of the Bini,¹²⁰ informs us that "the people swear by licking and touching stones, iron, cowries, bits of twisted rope, and the crushed leaves of a plant, asking these things to kill them if they are not telling the truth." According to the same authority, every great house has an altar to Olukun—the river spirit of Olukun or Great Benin river—in or near to which is a pot of water, cowries (Igo) and a heap of other objects. At Ewesi, not far from the Sobo plains, is a temple to Olukun, in which are very old wooden figures (like those into which nails are driven in the Congo) covered with cowries and other objects. In front of the

¹¹⁹ W. M. Flinders Petrie, "Amulets," London, 1914, p. 29, No. 131, pl. xvii.—xix.

¹²⁰ R. E. Dennett, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

great figure of Olukun himself sits a priest, half hidden by long strings of cowries hung from the roof. At Igo, a town on the Gilly Gilly road, there is a mound on which is an altar to Olukun with chalk cones and cowries on it, all covered by a shed. The presence of an Odigi, or sacred well, is generally made known along the roads by a tree and a mound of earth and cowries.¹²¹ The shells are also scattered at certain death ceremonies.¹²² Their association with marriage is seen by the fact that among the upper class cowries, together with kola-nuts and palm-wine, are given as presents on betrothal. "Often on the roads one passes a small tree planted by the side of the road, near which are chalk marks and a mound of earth, cowries, yams and plantains. This tree has been planted in memory of the fact that some woman or other has brought forth a child on that spot."¹²³

On the Bonny river, at Ibo on the Niger, and in other places of the Niger-delta, cowries have, or had until quite recently, general currency. In this neighbourhood also it is the custom, at the interment of a chief, to bury all his treasure with him in the grave. The brothers Lander narrate that when they visited Idda, on the left bank of the Niger, much consternation and indignation prevailed, owing to the fact that the new chief had again exhumed and misappropriated for his own use the treasure of cowries which had been buried with his father.¹²⁴

In India the money-cowry seems to have been regarded with special favour for amuletic and currency purposes from very early times. It has been met with on several pre-historic sites accompanied with bangles made from the sacred chank shell, *Turbinella pyrum*, and

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 222-4, and 227.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-9.

¹²⁴ Schneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-7.

other shell ornaments. Its association with chank bangles is specially interesting and seems to imply a similar cultural source for the use of these white shells. Hornell in his work on "The Sacred Chank of India"¹²⁵ informs us (p. 50) that fragments of *Cypræa moneta* and of a *Nerita*, also beads of entire *Paludina* shells, were found near Hampasagra, on the Tungabhadra, 53 miles west of Bellary, along with 18 fragments of chank bangles, Mr. Bruce Foote placing the age of this find as late neolithic or early iron age. Also (p. 51), "from made ground in the north bank of a nullah, at Huvina, near Hadagalli, 65 miles west of Bellary, came a single bangle fragment with two money cowries (*Cypræa moneta*)," and "from an old site north of Bellaguppa, came a fragment of a working section of chank shell, an entire *Cypræa moneta*, four fragments of scraper made of *Unio* shell, and three fragments of chank bangles; associated with these were a neolithic celt, a fragment of a corn-crusher, some pottery, and two metal fragments, one being possibly part of a bronze ring." A further discovery of the money-cowry is recorded from Damnagar, Amreli Prant, Kathiawar, where two examples were found associated with a great number of fragmentary chank bangles, a basalt corncrusher, a bloodstone hammer, and chert and agate cores (Hornell, p. 57). The example of *C. moneta* figured by Hornell on plate V. (3456-13) is of great interest from the fact that the back of the specimen has been rubbed down in the characteristic Ancient Egyptian and East African fashion.

In dealing with the money of India prior to Alexander the Great, Del Mar (*op. cit.*) states that: "In Bengal the principal money finds have been of cowries, the metallic monies being comparatively few" (p. 66). And

¹²⁵ Madras Fisheries Bulletin, No. 7, 1914.

again (p. 90) in speaking of the standard of money in India from Alexander the Great to the Mahommedan Conquest, he says: "In Northern India the copper pieces were supplemented by gold and silver multipliers, in Southern India by dividers of cowrie-shells." In the Manikyala tope in the Punjab, opened in 1830, "were found mingled together cowrie shells, gold coins of the Kadphises and Kanerkes, Roman consular coins shortly before the Christian era, and copper coins of the Sassanian line."¹²⁶ Cowries formed the bulk of the currency between the beginning of the Christian era and the Mahommedan dynasty of A.D. 1203.¹²⁷ In Bengal the system of a copper standard with cowry dividers and gold and silver multipliers remained unchanged after the Mahommedan Conquest. Ibn Batūta, the Arabian traveller of the 14th century, gives an account of the collection of the cowry-shells in the Maldive islands, from whence they were exported to Bengal in exchange for rice. He states that a *bustus* equalled a *lak* of cowries, and four *laks*, or four *bustus*, were estimated as worth one gold *dinar*, but the rate of exchange was so variable that occasionally a *dinar* would purchase as many as twelve *laks* of cowries.¹²⁸

In Orissa, the next kingdom south of Bengal, accounts were kept in cowries, and the following scale of values prevailed during the early part of the Mahommedan rule: 4 cowries = 1 gunda; 5 gundas = 1 boory; 4 boories = 1 pun; 16—20 puns = 1 khawun; 10 khawuns = 1 rupee. In 1740, a rupee exchanged for 2,400 cowries; in 1756, for

¹²⁶ Marsden, "Numismata Orientalia," edited by Edward Thomas, London, 1874, quoted by Del Mar, *op. cit.*, p. 86 footnote.

¹²⁷ Marsden, *op. cit.*, p. 37; Del Mar, *op. cit.*, p. 90 footnote.

¹²⁸ Del Mar, *op. cit.*, p. 99; Edward Thomas, "The Chronicles of the Pathán Kings of Delhi," London, 1871, p. 110 footnote. In Lee's translation of "Ibn Batūta" (London, 1829, pp. 179 & 181) the cowry (Wada) is referred to as alms-gifts and as currency in the Maldives.

2,560 cowries ; in 1833, 6,400 cowries ; and in 1845, 6,500 cowries. Major Rennell, who was in Silhet in 1767-8, speaking of the cowry-money, remarks : " I found no other currency of any kind in the country ; and upon an occasion, when an increase in the revenue of the province was enforced, several boat loads (not less than 50 tons each) were collected and sent down the Burrampooter to Dacca." As late as 1801 the revenues of the British district of Silhet " were collected in cowries, which was also the general medium of all pecuniary transactions, and a considerable expense was then incurred by Government in effecting their conversion into bullion." (Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 110—111 footnotes.)

Lovell Reeve, in his "Conchologia Systematica,"¹²⁹ mentions that " a gentleman residing some time since at Cuttack is said to have paid for the erection of his bungalow entirely in these cowries [*C. moneta*]. The building cost him about 4,000 rupees sicca (£400 sterling) ; and as sixty-four of these shells are equivalent in value to one 'pice,' and sixty-four pice to a rupee sicca, he paid for it with above sixteen millions of these shells."

In the Deccan, up to the thirteenth century, but few coins of any kind seem to have been minted, the currency appearing to consist almost entirely of cowries (Del Mar, *op. cit.*, p. 108).

In early times, cowries, it is thought, were brought to India from the Philippines and Borneo, as well as from the island of Bima near Macassar (Celebes); in later times they were obtained from the Laccadive and Maldive Islands. Of the latter, the Arab Masudi, in the first half of the 10th century, remarked that the queen had no other kind of money than the cowries, which were

¹²⁹ Reeve, "Conchologia Systematica," London, 1842, vol. ii., p. 262 footnote.

obtained by means of rafts made of the branches and leaves of the cocoa-nut lashed together and floated on the surface of the sea. The work was carried out by women. When sufficient animals had become attached to the rafts by climbing aloft among the branches, these were dragged ashore and the shells spread out on the sands to enable the sun to dry up the contained animals. The Arab author, Ebn Beithar, who died in 1248, also mentions the Maldives as a locality from which cowries were obtained.¹³⁰ These islands are also referred to by Ibn Batūta, the Arabian traveller of the 14th century, who speaks of the use of cowries (Wada) there as currency and alms-gifts.¹³¹ At the beginning of the 17th century, François Pyrard de Laval, observed the fishing of the cowries by the women of the Maldives. According to him they were collected twice a month, three days after the new moon and three days after the full moon. The shells were in such demand in India that sometimes 30 to 40 ships were seen loaded with them. In Cambay and other Indian places, the prettiest were used as ornaments along with silver and gold, and held as great rarities, as if they were precious stones. They also passed current there as money under the name Boly, and at burials they were scattered on the way from the house of the defunct to the cemetery as alms for the poor.¹³² Captain Owen, in 1832,¹³³ gives an account of the collecting of cowries in the Maldives somewhat similar to that of Masudi. He further remarks on the similarity of the rafts, or balsas, to those used on the coasts of Chili and Peru.

Bengal seems to have been the great market for the cowries from the Maldives. From there they were widely

¹³⁰ *Ibid* Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹³¹ See Translation by Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 178 & 181.

¹³² Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹³³ *Journ. Roy. Geog. Soc. Lond.*, vol. 2, 1832, pp. 82-3.

distributed over India, not only over the plains of the north and north-west, but also along the east coast and even to the slopes of the Himalayas and to the Deccan plateau.¹³⁴

Besides their use as money in India the same shells are employed to ornament the trappings of horses and elephants, as previously remarked. They are also strung like beads or sewed like buttons on the dresses of the Brinjari women of Nagpur province.¹³⁵ According to Dr. Curt Boeck, they are traded in Indian bazaars, especially for bordering the cloth-masks of shamans.¹³⁶ In many Indian places, *e.g.*, Gahsi, Punjab, one still finds *C. annulus* worn by the native women. The Todas of the Nilgiri Hills, S. India, wear a *C. moneta* on a heavy silver collar (Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 117). According to Thurston, this same species is also worn by Toda women on their thread and silver armlets and necklets. As in Africa, cowries are associated with Toda death ceremonies. When a person dies, various objects such as rice, honey, and other food-stuffs, together with cowries, "with which to purchase food in the celestial bazar," are burned with him. Like the Todas, the Kotas of the Nilgiris occasionally make use of cowries; they are sometimes seen on the necklets of the women; and at funeral ceremonies when the skulls of the deceased are brought to the funeral ground to be burnt, a pole, twenty feet long, decorated with cowries, is also burned in the case of a male. The Nilgiri Irula women, too, sometimes have bead necklets with cowry-shells pendent.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹³⁵ Stearns, "Ethno-conchology—A Study of Primitive Money," *Report U. S. Nat. Mus.*, 1887, p. 302.

¹³⁶ Schneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-7.

¹³⁷ E. Thurston, Madras Government Museum, Bulletin No. 4, 1896, pp. 154, 174 (Todas), 192, 198 (Kotas); Vol. ii., No. 1., 1897, pp. 14 and 16, pl. v. (Irulas).

Thurston¹³⁸ also cites a curious custom among the Chettis (traders) of Southern India of unmarried girls wearing a necklace of the money-cowry and beads, it being "unusual for unmarried girls to wear any badge of their condition." This association of cowries with the unmarried is of great interest in view of a somewhat similar custom in East Africa, to which reference is made on another page. Thurston further states that "when a Hasalara or Hasala (forest tribe) of Mysore dies, somebody's evil spirit is credited with the mishap, and an astrologer is consulted to ascertain its identity. He throws cowry (*Cypræa moneta*) shells or rice for divination, and mentions the name of some neighbour as the owner of the devil. Thereupon the spirit of the dead is redeemed by the heir or relative by means of a pig, fowl, or other guerdon." (Thurston, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-5.)

Turning to Ceylon we find that Hildburgh, in his "Notes on Sinhalese Magic,"¹³⁹ states that cowries are worn as amulets by infants. This same writer also gives illustrations (pl. XI.) of masks worn by devil-dancers in which sometimes the upper, or both upper and lower, teeth are formed of cowry-shells. Culin, in his "Chess and Playing-Cards,"¹⁴⁰ describes a cowry game, Kawadi Kelia, in which cowries of different kinds are used as men, each player also having three cowries as dice. This game is clearly related to the Hindu game of Pachisi, also played with cowries. The shells are thrown as dice and the counts are according as the apertures fall uppermost or not. "The game of Pachisi," says Culin, "may be

¹³⁸ E. Thurston, "Ethnographic Notes in Southern India," Madras, 1906, p. 68; In his article on "Some Marriage Customs in Southern India" (*Madras Govt. Mus. Bulletin*, vol. iv., No. 3, 1903, p. 155) Thurston gives the species as *Cypræa arabica*.

¹³⁹ *Journ. R. Anthropol. Inst.*, vol 38 (1908), p. 193.

¹⁴⁰ *Report U. S. Nat. Mus.*, for 1896 (1898), pp. 851-4.

regarded as an expansion and elaboration of the type of game represented by the Korean *Nyout*, and sacred and divinatory in its origin." *Nyout* is played with staves. "The two faces of the staves, black and white, may be regarded as signifying the dual principles of nature, masculine and feminine. A feminine significance is widely attributed to the aperture of the cowrie shell. Its convex side would naturally be regarded as masculine; hence its substitution for the staves would seem to have been an easy transition."

Games like Pachisi, in which cowries are used as dice, are known in the Maldivé Islands under the name *Dhola*, and in Syria under the name of *Edris a Jin*; also in Burma as *Pasit*.¹⁴¹

In parts of Further India the cowry is still in circulation as money. In Siam and Laos it serves as a form of currency, and in the former country 6,400 cowries are said to equal about 1s. 6d.¹⁴² At the end of the 17th century La Loubère found it in use in all Siam; it was obtained from the Laccadives, from Borneo and the Philippines, where it was taken in as ballast by the ships. About the middle of the 18th century, according to Gervaise, the Siamese small-change consisted of small shells, which the Europeans called cowries and the Siamese Bia. According to Hertz they were no longer in use as small-change at Bangkok in 1881.¹⁴³

In Burma the women of the Taungthas wear a loose skirt adorned with a wide belt of cowries or silver filigree work.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Culin, *op. cit.*, pp. 856-7.

¹⁴² Deniker, *op. cit.*, p. 324: See also "Century Dictionary," ii., p. 1321.

¹⁴³ Schneider, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-8.

¹⁴⁴ "Women of all Nations," p. 574.

In Thibet, according to Carl Ritter, cowries serve as ornaments for women's girdles.¹⁴⁵

Among the Khasias, a stone-using tribe inhabiting the Khasia Hills of Eastern Bengal, cowries are associated with marriage. According to Brown,¹⁴⁶ "the marriage ceremony is of the most primitive type. All that is necessary is for the couple to sit together on one seat and receive their friends, to whom they give a marriage feast. A union so easily contracted is just as easily dissolved. The woman receives five cowries which she throws away; they are then free to be married again, the children remaining with the mother."

Among the Nagas of Assam, head-hunting was formerly a qualification for matrimony, and a warrior, having slain an enemy, had the privilege of wearing a kilt decorated with cowry-shells, collars ornamented with similar shells, tufts of goat hair dyed red, and locks of hair from the heads of the persons killed.¹⁴⁷

A similar custom is prevalent among the head-hunting Patasiwa of Seran, where a warrior is not allowed to take a wife until he can show the head of an enemy he has slain. In proof of his prowess the warrior wears as many little white shells (? cowries) round his neck and arms as he has murdered men.¹⁴⁸ An even more striking identity in the association of cowries with head-hunting is to be found in East Central Africa, where the Djibba tribe wear not only the cowries but also the hair from the heads of the slain enemies (see p. 20).

¹⁴⁵ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹⁴⁶ Brown, *op. cit.*, III., p. 302; quoting Lieut. Steel, R.A., *Journ. Ethnol. Soc.*, VII., p. 305. By some philologists the Khasias are considered to be Thibetans.

¹⁴⁷ "Women of all Nations," edited by Joyce and Thomas, 1909. p. 581.

¹⁴⁸ G. A. Cooke, "System of Universal Geography," vol. i. (1801), p. 609.

Among the Dyaks of Borneo it is the custom to place the small white money-cowries in the eye-sockets of the skulls of enemies, which they keep.¹⁴⁹ The baskets of the Dyak head-hunter are also decorated with the same cowries.¹⁵⁰ Specimens in the Leiden Museum show *C. annulus* as decoration for sword-hangings from West Borneo, and *C. moneta* as decoration for a betel-pouch from South-east Borneo.¹⁵¹

In certain parts of Malaysia, cowries are attached to the fishing-nets, not as "net-sinkers" as recorded by several ethnologists,¹⁵² but in order to ensure success in fishing or to ward off evil influences. In Nias, an island off the west coast of Sumatra, *Cypræa vitellus* is so used; in Engano, an island in the same neighbourhood, the species is *C. ventriculus*; in Timor, *C. arabica*; while off N.W. New Guinea the shells employed are *C. moneta*, *C. caput-serpentis*, *C. erosa*, *C. lynx*, *C. tigris* and *C. vitellus*.¹⁵³

According to Von Martens, the Berlin Museum contains specimens of clothing ornamented with cowries, from Bali, near Java.¹⁵⁴ In Timorlaut the natives adorn cloth-girdles with cowries, and in the same island, four species of cowries, *C. annulus*, *C. isabella*, *C. erosa*, and *C. helvola*, are employed as neck-ornaments.¹⁵⁵

Van der Sande,¹⁵⁶ describes and figures several neck-ornaments from Dutch New Guinea, on which specimens

¹⁴⁹ Stearns, *op. cit.*, p. 302; Ratzel, *op. cit.*, i., p. 135 (fig.).

¹⁵⁰ Ratzel, *op. cit.*, vol. i., p. 448 (fig.)

¹⁵¹ Schmeltz, "Schnecken und Muscheln in leben der völker Indonesians und Oceaniens," Leiden, 1894.

¹⁵² The slight weight of these shells would render them valueless as sinkers.

¹⁵³ Schmeltz, *op. cit.*,

¹⁵⁴ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, and Schmeltz, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁶ Van der Sande, "Nova Guinea," iii, 1907, pp. 83, 117-8, pl. xiii., f. 4.

of *C. annulus* are strung on strips of Pandanus leaf, the whole hanging down from a neck string in front of the chest. Schmeltz (*op. cit.*, pp. 23 et seq.), also cites the use of *C. argus* and *C. lynx* as breast-ornaments, and *C. moneta* on hip-strings in N.E. New Guinea; *C. moneta* on arm band, *C. annulus* as leg- and shield-ornaments in S.E. New Guinea; and *C. moneta* as ankle-ornament in N.W. New Guinea.

In the Philippines, according to Schmeltz (*op. cit.*), *C. annulus* is used as a neck-ornament, as decoration for the coat-of-mail of the Moro, and as the eyes of ancestor-images.

According to Pickering the cowry was formerly in use as money in the Hawaiian Islands. He says¹⁵⁷: "An estimable and intelligent Hawaiian lady gave me the following particulars respecting former customs: . . . Money was certainly known, for with a string of cowries (*Cypræa moneta*) it was possible to buy any article wanted. Specimens of the same shell that were finer than usual, having a high polish and deep yellow colour, were extravagantly valued, and could only be worn by the highest chiefs, who also exclusively possessed wooden calabashes." In the Vancouver collection, British Museum, are Leis of *Cypræa moneta* from these islands.¹⁵⁸

In Oahu, Hawaii Islands, a large cowry, *Cypræa mauritiana*, is attached to fishing-nets in order to ensure success. Specimens of this are in the R. D. Darbishire collection, Manchester Museum. The stone (lava) "net-sinkers" of Oahu are curiously enough all modelled after this shell, being roughly carved with a high round back and flat base, with a groove for the attachment of a cord.

¹⁵⁷ Pickering, "Races of Man" (Bohn's Ed.), 1863, quoted by Stearns, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

¹⁵⁸ "Bernice Panahi Bishop Museum," Honolulu (1898-1902), Report i., p. 43.

Cypræa moneta appears to have been current also in other islands of the Pacific, as Brenchley states:¹⁵⁹ "At Eramango [New Hebrides] a shell called 'Nunpuri,' the *Cypræa moneta*, passes as money, as also in New Caledonia."

In the Bismark Archipelago, says Schneider (*op. cit.*, p. 118), *C. annulus* was found as money in special cases.

In Gilbert Archipelago, the Ellice and Kingsmill Islands, *Cypræa moneta* and *C. annulus* are used as body-ornament and for decorating implements and tools.¹⁶⁰

F. W. Christian, in his article "On Micronesian Weapons, Dress, Implements, etc,"¹⁶¹ figures a cowry-shell used in the Carolines for stripping off the outer skin of the bread-fruit. The figured shell looks like a *Cypræa mauritiana*. He also figures an *Ovulum ovum* shell (often alluded to as the white cowry) pierced for ornamenting prows of canoes. The use of this shell as a canoe-ornament is general throughout the Pacific. Amongst other places it is recorded from the Pelew Islands, Yap, Gilbert Archipelago, Samoa, Niné, Viti Islands, Solomon Archipelago and Torres Straits Islands. In some of these and in other islands it is also worn as an ornament for the neck, breast, or leg, and placed on the outsides of native houses. In Tonga it is used as a grave-ornament, and in the Solomons as decoration of an idol.¹⁶²

In Tahiti, *Cypræa moneta* and *C. talpa* are worn on the neck, and *C. tigris* occurs on the base of an idol from Tahiti, now in the British Museum.¹⁶³ Sir C. H. Read, in his description of specimens obtained on Vancouver's

¹⁵⁹ Brenchley, "Cruise of the 'Curaçoa,'" 1873, p. 299, quoted by C. Hedley, *Mem. Aust. Mus.*, iii., pt. 7, 1899, p. 452.

¹⁶⁰ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

¹⁶¹ *J. Anthrop. Inst.*, 28 (1898-9), pp. 288 et seq., pl. xxiv., f. 5.

¹⁶² Schmeitz, "Schnecken und Muscheln in leben der völker Indonesiens und Oceaniens," Leiden, 1894.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

voyage, figures an instrument of palm-wood, used for splitting bread-fruit in this island, to which are attached two tiger cowries with their inner whorls broken out, and one end cut off.¹⁶⁴

In the Loyalty Islands, the orange cowry (*Cypræa aurora*) is greatly appreciated. The Rev. Mr. Hadfield, in the course of his missionary work, came across a fine specimen in a native hut in Lifu, where it was held in much veneration by the occupant, who considered it a kind of fetish.¹⁶⁵ Mr. Hadfield also gives us some further interesting information regarding this species. He tells us that his wife came upon a specimen which, according to the native report, had been found by an old woman who was struck on the forehead by a demon, who asked her why she took the shell. The woman, it is said, died from the effects of the blow.¹⁶⁶ This fine shell is used as a badge of high rank in Tonga, or Friendly Islands, as well as in Fiji. One of the most remarkable Fijian industries is the working of whales' teeth to represent this cowry, as well as the commoner *C. talpa*, which is more easily imitated.¹⁶⁷

The New Zealanders, it is stated, use *Cypræa asellus* and other shells to form the eyes of their idols.¹⁶⁸

Codrington, in his "Melanesians" (Oxford, 1891, p. 26), tells us that in Aurora, the nearest of the New Hebrides to the Bank's Islands, the natives have a story that the first woman came from a cowry-shell. Somewhat analogous ideas are expressed in the traditions of the Samoans as to the origin of man. By these people it is believed

¹⁶⁴ *J. Anthrop. Inst.*, 21 (1891-2), pp. 105-6, pl. x., f. 5.

¹⁶⁵ Melvill & Standen, "Lifu Mollusca," *Journ. of Conchology*, viii., 1895, p. 112.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁶⁷ A. H. Cooke, "Mollusks," *Camb. Nat. Hist.*, 1895, p. 98.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

that man is formed from a species of mussel and that gods are present in some of the shell-fish.¹⁶⁹ A similar idea concerning the possibility of human beings living in shells is current among the Indians of the N.W. coast of America. According to the Haida and Kaigani the first people sprang from a cockle-shell.¹⁷⁰

In the Far East, cowries, both large and small, were used as a medium of currency long before the Christian era. Frequent allusions are made to them in ancient Chinese literature, but the authenticity of some of these records and of the dates assigned to the period when cowries were in use is open to some criticism. M. Terrien de Lacouperie¹⁷¹ has presented us with some remarkable views on the origin of Chinese civilization, based upon the study of numerous Chinese works, and from his statements it would appear that cowries were used as money in China as early as 2,000 years B.C. But the fact that many of the works which he studied are, to a large extent, based upon tradition renders them unreliable as evidence as to date. It seems certain, however, that cowries were in circulation among the people of Eastern China in the seventh century B.C., and the southern country of Ts'u figures largely in connection with supplies of these shells for currency. Contact with the west through sea-traders of the Indian Ocean (Erythræan Sea), who are claimed to have established a colony in the Gulf of Kiao-chou (South Shantung) in 675-670 B.C., had made them familiar with many western practices, and it is not improbable that the use of the cowry was one of them. Some time about 600 B.C., the king of Ts'u issued two

¹⁶⁹ Turner, "Samoa, etc." London, 1884, pp. 8, 12 and 17.

¹⁷⁰ Niblack, "The Coast Indians of Southern Alaska and Northern British Columbia," *Rept. U.S. Nat. Mus.*, 1887-8 (1890), p. 378.

¹⁷¹ Terrien de Lacouperie, "Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilisation from 2,300 B.C. to 200 A.D." London, 1894.

sizes of small coins, bean-shaped (in the fashion of the Æginætan and Lydian coins of 750-700 B.C.) and inscribed with their respective weights. These coins are known in native numismatics as metallic cowries, *Ho-pei tsien*, because their shape suggested that of the once useful little shells they superseded. They have also received other quaint appellatives, as 'Ghost-heads,' *Kwei-tou*; 'Ghost-faces,' *Kwei-lien*; and 'Ants'-noses money,' *Y-pi tsien*.¹⁷² The introduction of this and other metallic currencies caused the circulation of cowries to disappear gradually in eastern China, and in B.C. 221, the king of Ts'in, having assumed the title of She Hwang-ti, "the first universal Emperor," issued an order forbidding henceforth the use of gems, pearls, tortoise-shells, cowries and tin for currency purposes. Cowries, however, still continued to be regarded as objects of appreciation; and in B.C. 179 we find the king of Nan-yueh sending as presents to the Chinese emperors 500 purple cowries¹⁷³ along with other gifts. At the end of the First Han dynasty an attempt was made by Sin Wang Mang, the usurper (A.D. 9-22), to revive the circulation of cowries and tortoise-shells, but little success rewarded his efforts. According to Lacouperie,¹⁷⁴ the cowry currency consisted of five sorts, regulated as follows:—

- "(1) The great shells; 4 *tsun* or inches, 8 *fen* or 10ths in length; two of which formed a *pang* or pair; value 216 cowries.
- (2) The bull shells; 3 *tsun*, 6 *fen* in length; a pair of which was worth 150 cowries.

¹⁷² Lacouperie, *op. cit.*, p. 118; also "Catalogue of Chinese Coins in British Museum." London, 1892; and "The Metallic Cowries of Ancient China, 600 B.C.," *Journ. Roy. Asiatic Soc.*, xx., 1888, pp. 428-439.

¹⁷³ The money cowry, *C. moneta*, before becoming fully adult, has a deep purple back, and probably these were the objects sent.

¹⁷⁴ Lacouperie, *op. cit.*, 1892, p. 382.

- (3) The small shells ; 2 *tsun*, 4 *fen* in length ; a pair of which was worth 30 cowries.
- (4) The lesser shells ; 1 *tsun*, 2 *fen* in length ; a pair of which was worth 10 cowries.
- (5) The smallest shells (*cypræa monetæ*, or cowries), being smaller than 1 *tsun* 2 *fen*, were not fastened in pairs ; each was worth three *cash*. Those which were smaller than six *fen* were not used for currency."

The shells of groups 1 to 4 seem to have been undoubted cowries, as in group 5, only larger, as the same characteristic Chinese hieroglyph denoting cowry (see *Fig. 3 C.*) appears against each of the groups.

Unfortunately, except for dimensions, the particulars are lacking as to the species of cowries forming these four groups.

If we may take the measurements as more or less approximating to English inches, it is possible to find a series of cowries inhabiting Eastern seas which would come within these dimensions. For example, *Cypræa testudinaria* (the "tortoise-cowry," named by Linnæus from its resemblance to the tortoise) might very well have served for group 1. Of the others, group 2 may have been smaller examples of the same, or even *Cypræa tigris* ; group 3 may have been *Cypræa lynx* ; while group 4 were probably exceptionally large examples of *Cypræa moneta*. The average length of the latter species is about one inch.

Regarding the tortoise-shells re-issued by Wang Mang, Lacouperie informs us that "there were four different sorts, of various sizes and denominations, with different values, but the details have not yet been handed down to our time." It is not a little curious that the larger cowry-shells were also of four different sorts, sizes, and values.

龜貝

D.

貝

C.

大龜

B.

大貝

A.

買

I.

貢

H.

貫

G.

財

F.

寶

E.

Fig. 3.

Chinese hieroglyphs for Cowry and Tortoise.

A.—“Great tortoise-shell,” according to Legge (“Shoo King,” v., xxii., 19); “Great Shells” (=cowries) of Wang Mang currency (after Lacouperie).

B.—“Great tortoise,” according to Legge (“Shoo King,” iii., i., 52).

C.—“Cowry” (after De Groot). D.—“Tortoise-shell” (after Morrison).

E.—Precious. F.—Wealth. G.—Strings of Currency. H.—Tribute. I.—To buy (E to I, after De Groot).

This suggests the possibility of the so-called "tortoise-shells" being really cowries.

From the following facts it is obvious that some confusion has taken place with regard to the interpretation of certain symbols in ancient Chinese works.

In Dr. Morrison's "Dictionary of the Chinese Language"¹⁷⁵ a symbol known as *pei* (see *Fig. 3C*), is translated (p. 622, No. 8471) as "the tortoise shell or pearl-oyster shell": on an earlier page (p. 510, No. 6811) quite a distinct symbol, *kwei*, is translated "tortoise," and the *pei* symbol is attached to denote "tortoise shell"—*kwei pei* (see *Fig. 3D*).

In a Chinese work, the "*Li Ki*," or "Treatises on Ceremonial Uses" (referred to on a later page) the *pei* symbol (*Fig. 3C*) is used to denote a particular object placed in the mouth of the dead. The symbol in this case has been correctly interpreted by the translator of the work as meaning "cowry."

In the "Shoo King" (v., xxii., 19), the same symbols (*Fig. 3A*) as quoted by Lacouperie for the "great shells" (*i.e.*, cowries) of the Wang Mang currency, are used in a paragraph describing a display of various precious relics. But these characters have been translated by Dr. Legge, in his "Chinese Classics,"¹⁷⁶ as the "great tortoise-shell."

The "Tribute of Yu" ("Shoo King," iii., i., 52) refers to a particular object presented to Yü from the country of the nine Këang, the symbol denoting this object being the *Kwei* (No. 6811, p. 510) of Morrison's Dictionary (*Fig. 3B*). It is here translated by Legge as "the great tortoise."¹⁷⁷ In his footnotes to this passage the translator states that "according to the 'Historical Records' the

¹⁷⁵ Dr. R. Morrison, "Dictionary of the Chinese Language," 1819, vol. i., pt. ii.

¹⁷⁶ Dr. J. Legge, "Chinese Classics," 1865, vol. iii., pt. ii., p. 554.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. iii., pt. i., p. 116.

great tortoise attained the size of two cubits and a half. Such a creature would be esteemed very valuable, where divination was much relied on"; and further, according to Gan-Kwō, that "the tortoise was not a regular article of tribute, but was presented when required by express command."

In the "Pwan-Kang" ("Shoo King," iv., vii., 14), the characteristic symbol, *pei* (*Fig. 3C*) occurs in a passage dealing with the hoarding propensities of government officials, and is here translated by Legge as "cowries."¹⁷⁸

From the above remarks it will be seen that the *pei* symbol has been incorrectly interpreted in certain cases.

Some interesting particulars concerning the use of cowries in connection with the dead are given by Dr. J. J. M. de Groot, in his work on "The Religious System in China."¹⁷⁹ The ancient Chinese, he tells us, used several precious articles for preserving their dead. To this end they availed themselves of cowry-shells, which were so valuable in ancient times for currency. This fact, well known to Sinologists, is especially manifest in the ancient hieroglyph denoting the cowry (see *Fig. 3C*), which enters into the composition of most characters signifying things of value and acts connected with trade and barter (see *Fig. 3, E, F, G, H, I*).

These shells were used in association with rice for stuffing the mouth of the dead. They were made to support the last molar tooth on the left and the right side, and the mouth was finally filled up with rice.

According to the "*Li Ki*," or "Treatises on Ceremonial Usages" (an important source of our knowledge of China during pre-Christian times), the mouth of the Son of Heaven was stuffed with nine cowries, that of a

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, iii., pt. i., p. 240.

¹⁷⁹ Vol. i., bk. i., "Disposal of the Dead." Leyden, 1892, pp. 275-6.

feudal lord with seven, that of a great officer with five, and that of an ordinary official with three.¹⁸⁰

In some of the out-of-the-way corners of China cowries remained in circulation for many centuries. In Marco Polo's time (A.D. 1271—91) cowries, called "porcellani" by this traveller, were still in use in the country of Yunnan, the shells being gathered at the group of islands now known as Pulo Condore, off Cochin China.¹⁸¹

In the 16th century the cowry-currency seems to have been officially suspended in Yunnan province. At the present time cowries appear to have completely lost their money value in Yunnan, since Lieutenant Garmer found them nowhere in use north of Luang Prabang, Laos; and in western Yunnan they were worn only as ornament by the Kakhyens. Carl Bock likewise saw cowries on the head-masks of the leaders of the mule-caravans which come from Yunnan into northern Further India.¹⁸²

It is doubtful whether the cowry was used as currency in Japan, though it is possible that in olden times shells from the neighbouring Liu Kiu Islands were so used. The Japanese name, *Takara* (=prosperity, riches), *kai* or *gai* (=shell), may indicate their use as money. In Kampfer's "Description of Japan" (London, 1727, Bk. i., ch. ii.) appears: "Takara gai, called Kauri in India, brought from the Maldives and other islands and imported into Bengal, Pegu and Siam, where it serves as current money." K. Florenz reports that the Japanese women at their confinement hold in the hand a "Koyasugai (Easy-delivery-shell), a species of cowry," in order to ensure certain and easy delivery, a practise analagous to

¹⁸⁰ *Fide* De Groot, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

¹⁸¹ Colonel Henry Yule, "The Book of Ser Marco Polo," London, 1871, vol. ii., pp. 39 *et seq.*

¹⁸² Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

that of other peoples, *e.g.*, the Indian.¹⁸³ Attention has already been called to the similarity of this custom to that of the Togo people of West Africa.

The money-cowry (*Cypræa moneta*) is, and has been for centuries, a sacred object among the Ojibwa and Menomini Indians of North America, and is employed in initiation ceremonies of the Grand Medicine Society.¹⁸⁴

The use of this particular cowry by these Indians is of peculiar interest; in the first place; owing to it being *alien to the American continent*, and in the second place, in view of its intimate association with so many remarkable and fantastic beliefs and practices in different parts of the Old World.

The tradition among the Indians is that the original sacred shell—*mī'gis*,¹⁸⁵ of the Ojibwa; *konā'pamik*, of the Menomini—was introduced by a particular hero-god, who acted as an intermediary between the Great Unknown and the Indians, and founded their Medicine Society. Among the Menomini the sacred shell appears always to be the small white money-cowry, *Cypræa moneta*,¹⁸⁶ but among the Ojibwa, according to Hoffman, it consists of a small white shell, of almost any species: but the one believed to resemble the mythical *mī'gis* is similar to the money-cowry. This fact would seem to imply that the money-cowry is scarce among them, and those they possess, doubtless handed down from generation to generation, are regarded with special veneration as being like

¹⁸³ Schneider, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

¹⁸⁴ W. J. Hoffman, *Bureau of Ethnology* (United States), 7th Annual Report, 1885-6 (1891), and 14th Annual Report, 1892-3 (1896), pt. i.; also J. W. Jackson, *Manch. Memoirs* (*Lit. and Phil. Soc.*), vol. lx. (1916), No. 4. Abstract in *Nature*, January 27th, 1916.

¹⁸⁵ In the Ojibwa language, *mī'gis* = symbolical of life.

¹⁸⁶ The example figured by Hoffman (*op. cit.*, 1891, pl. xi., fig. 1) is interesting, as it is perforated at one end as if for suspension; it is of the dwarf var. *atava* of *C. moneta* (see *Fig. 1D*).

that which came into their possession through the herogod Mí'nabō'zho.

The initiation ceremonies of these Indians are very elaborate: the most important incidents are dancing and the shooting forward by the medicine men of their skin medicine-bags containing the sacred cowries. Mystic powers are attributed to the shells, and it is firmly believed that if they be swallowed by the medicine man, he can transfer his power to the medicine-bag by breathing on it, the mysterious influence being then conveyed to the desired object or person merely by thrusting the bag forward in the appropriate direction. At the initiation ceremonies the magic influence is shot at the candidate's breast, and the cowry—the symbol of life—is supposed to enter his heart; he becomes unconcious and falls forward on his face. The chief medicine man then raises the candidate's head slightly from the ground, and a sacred cowry drops from the candidate's mouth.

The same cowries apparently play an important part at baptismal ceremonies of the Ojibwa. There is much dancing and the same shooting forward of the medicine bags, and after a good deal of facial contortion each medicine man spits out two shells on to a cloth spread in the middle of the medicine tent.¹⁸⁷

The essential part of these ceremonies is the supposed death and survival of the candidate, the whole ceremonial being strongly reminiscent of the St. George, or Mummings', Plays of the Old World.¹⁸⁸ It is remarkable how closely the prevailing idea of the cowries being connected in some strange manner with resurrection and resuscitation agrees

¹⁸⁷ James Greenwood, "Curiosities of Savage Life," London, 1863, p. 24.

¹⁸⁸ For a full discussion of this subject see A. Beatty, "The St. George, or Mummings' Plays; A Study in the Protology of the Drama," *Trans. Wisc. Acad. Sci. Arts and Letters*, xv., pt. ii., Oct., 1906.

with the ancient Chinese belief as evidenced in the ceremonial use of money-cowries in obsequies of the dead. As mentioned previously, in pre-Christian and later times, cowries were used in China, in association with rice, for stuffing the mouth of the dead. Wild rice, it might be added, also enters into the ritual of Ojibwa and Menomini ceremonies. The fact that the so-called "wild rice" of America is not identical with true rice cannot be raised as an objection to the identity of these practices: for the similarity which suggested the name "wild rice" to European immigrants in America no doubt appealed with equal force to the earlier Asiatic rice-using immigrants.

The apparent identity in the spitting out of cowries by the Togo priests of West Africa and by the medicine men of the Ojibwa and Menomini Indians has been noted already. The association of the money-cowry with the medicine bags used by the Sierra Leone cannibals at initiation ceremonies is a further remarkable parallel.

Some interesting evidence of the early use of the money-cowry in North America is contained in an exhaustive account on "Aboriginal Sites on Tennessee River," by Mr. Clarence B. Moore.¹⁸⁹ In his description of the Roden Mounds, Marshall County, Alabama, this author informs us that in Burial No. 44, well in the body of mound A, were the remains of a skull, near which were fragments of a large marine univalve, and five shells, some much decayed, which had been pierced for stringing, like beads. These are pronounced by Dr. H. A. Pilsbry, the well-known American conchologist, to be examples of the money-cowry, *Cypræa moneta*, of Eastern Seas. Such shells have never been recorded before from an aboriginal mound in the United States. The careful investigation of the Roden mounds indicated that they had been built

¹⁸⁹ *Journ. Acad. Nat. Sci. Philad.*, 2nd Ser., xvi., pt. ii., 1915.

before their makers had any intercourse with white persons. The presence of the cowries, therefore, is of special interest.

The shells were sent by the discoverer to Dr. W. H. Dall, another of America's leading conchologists, and the following extraordinary statement was received in reply :—

“ I should incline to the belief that the cowries were imported in or about the time of Columbus' voyages. Bound, as they supposed, for the Indies, where the cowry was formerly (like our wampum) a staple article of barter, the exploring vessels would undoubtedly have carried cowries as well as the other articles of trade we know they carried. It would not have taken them long to find out that cowries did not pass as currency with American natives, and reporting this on their return to Spain later traders would not have carried them for barter. The necklace or bracelet you obtained may have passed from hand to hand as a curiosity (as I have known such things to do) until it reached a people who knew nothing of the whites 'till much later. In fact your cowries may have come off one of Columbus' own vessels ! ”

But an even more remarkable story is that given in “ Harper's Monthly Magazine ” for September (1916, p. 599), by Mr. H. Newell Wardle, of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Science, as follows :—

“ The great Genoese, starting in 1492 on his first voyage to discover a new route to the kingdom of the Great Khan, doubtless stocked his ships with a goodly store of these ivory-white porcelain shells. He had been in Guinea. He knew the requirements of the Gold Coast trade Probably, though he fails to mention it, cowries, strung as for the Guinea trade, were part of his stock—an ill-venture, in competition

with the shell ornaments of the Gulf Coast. . . . So mayhap the five little shells were bestowed, by Columbus's own hands, upon a native of the isles, were carried across to the mainland on some trip of trade or of pleasure, and thence, from hand to hand, as curios, journeyed northward with an ever-growing wonder-tale of the great white chiefs from the East. . . ."

"If not thus, then they had journeyed in dangling from the trappings of one of those noble steeds that shared the perils of the early explorers of the mainland. . . ."

"Certain it is that they date from the close of the fifteenth or the early days of the sixteenth century."

But Mr. Wardle omits the most wonderful episode of his wonder-tale—I refer to the fact that after all these imaginary wanderings and episodes on sea and land, the cowries should eventually have come to rest in the heart of the American continent, and, "of course purely by accident," have become linked up with the identical beliefs and fantastic practices with which they are associated in Africa, India and Eastern Asia!

To such lengths does the American ethnologist go rather than admit the patent fact that these shells and the associated beliefs and practices were taken from Eastern Asia to America long before the time of Columbus!

According to Mr. Charles C. Willoughby, the Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass., contains a dress of a Cree woman, collected by the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1804-5, on which are four dozen cowries (see *American Anthropologist*, 1905, for picture of the dress).

The shells from the Roden mound, Moore informs us, "differ from those on the Cree dress, which are of a larger variety and much more distinctly humped than are our

shells, ours being of the variety *atava*, as described by Rochebrune,¹⁹⁰ who says they come from the Cape Verde Islands" (see *Fig. 1C*).

Notwithstanding Rochebrune's assertion, few students of *Cypræa* admit the possibility of the occurrence of living *C. moneta* at the Cape Verde Islands, or indeed on any portion of the West African coast. The cited occurrences there of this and the allied form, *C. annulus*, may be due to accident. As already stated, enormous numbers of these shells have been carried to this coast during the last few centuries, and it is a well-known fact that ships conveying this commodity have occasionally come to grief, the cargo of shells being lost. Such an occurrence is recorded to have taken place in the year 1873, when the "Glendowra," a four-masted barque, homeward bound from Manilla, was wrecked off the coast of Cumberland. The "Glendowra" had on board some 600 bags of cowries (*C. moneta* and *C. annulus*) and missed the port of Liverpool through an error in her course, and, in the fog which prevailed, ran ashore near Seascale. For years these shells have been picked up, in good condition, on the sandy shore between Seascale and the river Calder, and collectors, unaware of their history, have regarded them as indigenous to the British Isles.¹⁹¹

Unfortunately, the precise distribution of the numerous varieties of *C. moneta* is not very well known. Hence it is not possible to be sure of the exact provenance of the Roden mound cowries, nor of those on the Cree dress. It may be of interest, however, to note that Dr. J. Cosmo Melvill, in his "Survey of the Genus *Cypræa*" (*op. cit.*, p. 240), gives India as a locality for the var. *atava*.

¹⁹⁰ *Bull. Soc. Malac. de France*, i., 1884, p. 83, pl. i., fig. 4 (copied in *Fig. 1C* of the present paper).

¹⁹¹ See *The Naturalist*, London, Nov., 1890, p. 324.

Mr. Willoughby believes that cowry shells were sold to the Indians by the Hudson's Bay Company late in the eighteenth or early in the nineteenth century.

Prof. Henry Montgomery¹⁹² records and figures a cowry found near the so-called Onatonabee Serpent Mound, Peterboro County, Ontario. Mr. C. B. Moore, (*op. cit.*, p. 295) says: "The shell described by Professor Montgomery is a regular *Cypræa moneta*, or money cowry of Africa and the East, and not a California shell. This shell, which, by the way, is not pierced for stringing, is probably one from the Hudson's Bay Company stock. We do not think the sale of cowries to Indians in the North at a comparatively late date by the Hudson's Bay Company indicates a relatively recent origin for the Roden mounds, for, at a period when the supplies of the Hudson's Bay Company could have reached the makers of the Roden mounds, articles of European make could have got among them from all directions and the mounds presumably would have been well supplied with glass beads, brass, iron, and other things obtained from European sources which, as we see, was very far from being the case."

In an old account by G. A. Cooke,¹⁹³ dealing with the habits and customs of the Indians of the most northern parts of America, some interesting particulars are given concerning the ceremonies observed by certain tribes previous to waging war. One of the most hideous of these, Cooke informs us, was the setting of the war-kettle on the fire, as an emblem that they were going out to devour their enemies. A *porcelane*, or large shell, was then dispatched to their allies, inviting them to come along and drink the blood of their enemies. Unfortu-

¹⁹² *Trans. Canad. Inst.*, Toronto, 1910, ix. (i.) No. 20, p. 7, pl. iv., fig. 6 (*vide* Moore).

¹⁹³ Cooke, *op. cit.*, II., p. 21.

nately, neither the name of the tribes concerned, nor the name of the shell employed, are given; but the fact of the latter being called a "porcelane" is not without interest, as "porcelane" is the common French term for cowry. There is no certain evidence, however, to support the conclusion that a cowry was the shell employed as a war signal. Earlier in this paper we have seen that when the Egbas of West Africa meditated war, cowries were thrown into the air by the war-priest; and in the Yoruba country, where cowries are used for symbolic messages, a solitary cowry indicates defiance.

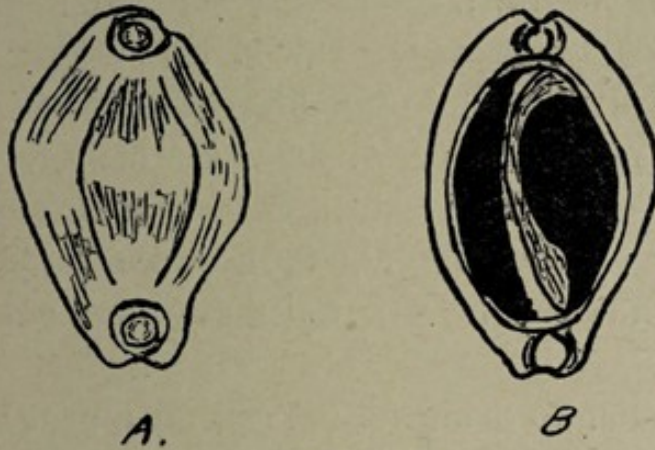


Fig. 4.

Ovula (Calpurnus) verrucosa L.

A.—Philippines (after Reeve).

B.—Ancient American graves (after Holmes).

Mr. W. H. Holmes, in his "Art in Shell of the Ancient Americans,"¹⁹⁴ illustrates in Plate xxxii. a number of perforated marine shells exhumed from ancient graves of North America. Two of these (Figs. 11 and 12) are of special interest as coming within the scope of the present communication. Unfortunately the precise data regarding the site of their discovery are not given; all we are told is

¹⁹⁴ Second Annual Report, Bureau of Ethnology, Washington, 1883, pp. 179-305.

that they are from the Pacific coast. Fig. 11 shows a cowry with a small hole near each extremity, illustrating, it is stated (p. 220), "an ancient as well as a modern method of perforation." The name of the species is not given, but it does not appear to me to be an American shell. Though the illustration is not sufficiently clear to define the species, in general appearance and contour the shell has a look of *Cypræa caput-serpentis*—an Indo-Pacific species.

Holmes' Fig. 12 (see Fig. 4B) shows a shell rubbed down on the back, and is referred, like the last, to *Cypræa*; but this is incorrect, the shell being undoubtedly *Ovula (Calpurnus) verrucosa*, L.¹⁹⁵ (Fig. 4A). This fact is of great importance and has hitherto passed unnoticed. Like the money-cowry, *C. moneta*, which it somewhat resembles, this species is alien to the American continent; it is known to occur only in East Africa, the Indian Ocean, Philippines, New Caledonia and neighbouring Islands.

According to Schmeltz (*op. cit.*, 1894, p. 34), this shell is worn as a neck-ornament in the Viti, or Fiji, Islands; as a hip-ornament in Santa Cruz (Queen Charlotte Islands); and as a leg-ornament in East New Guinea. The Rev. A. H. Cooke¹⁹⁶ also informs us that in Papua, "village elders are distinguished by a single *Ovulum verrucosum*, worn in the centre of the forehead."

The fact that the shell figured by Holmes is ground down on the back, as is done in the case of money-cowries in India, Africa, and other places, is of no little interest. Such an arbitrary method of perforation does

¹⁹⁵ The well-defined tubercles at the extremities confirm this identification. Compare, Tryon's "Manual of Conchology," vii., 1885, pl. 5, fig. 56-58 (Ovulidæ); Reeve, "Conchologia Iconica: Monograph of the Genus *Ovulum*," 1865, pl. i., fig. 2.

¹⁹⁶ "Molluscs," Camb. Nat. Hist., vol. iii., London, 1895, p. 99.

not seem to have been usual in shells other than cowries, either in America or anywhere else.

It is remarkable that after so many years, and with the yearly increase of knowledge, the two shells figured by Holmes should have remained undetermined. They are reproduced along with the other shells of Holmes' plate by H. Beuchat, on page 145 of his "Manuel d'Archéologie Américaine" (Paris, 1912), but no further details are added.

Regarding the use of cowries in Southern California, Frederick W. Putnam¹⁹⁷ gives some interesting particulars, though these are somewhat lacking in detail. He writes (p. 252): "The fact that the Indians of California, in common with savages generally, often decorated their implements and utensils with the same materials which they employed for personal ornament, is proved by articles collected from the graves; as, for instance, the decoration of the rims of the large stone mortars, on which, held in place by asphaltum, are pieces of the pearly shell of *Haliotis*, or sometimes, the perfect shells of two or three beautiful species of *Cypræa*; *C. spadicea* particularly being employed on the mainland. Another method of ornamenting the rims of these mortars consisted in cutting away the dorsal portion of the shells of *Cypræa* and fastening them to the mortar, by their cut surface, with asphaltum, so as to exhibit the lips of the shell, with their serrated edges." Such a cut shell is represented by Putnam in Plate xiii., Fig. 52, of his work, but no specific name is given. Its contour is totally unlike that of *C. spadicea*, or any other American cowry. My colleague, Mr. R. Standen, and I have carefully compared the illustration with various cowries, and the only shell the features of which appear

¹⁹⁷ In "Report U.S. Geog. Surv. west of 100th meridian, vol. vii.--Archæology," Washington, 1879.

to conform to the illustration is *C. vitellus*, an Indo-Pacific species. This suggestion, however, can only be a tentative one, as comparison with the original specimen may reveal other distinguishing characters not visible in the illustration.

A further interesting feature is seen in Putnam's Plate (Plate xiii, Fig. 47-51) in the use that was made by the Californians of cowry-shells for personal adornment. The serrated lips of these shells were cut out and perforated at one end for suspension as pendants. Earlier in this paper reference is made to the discovery of the complete outer lip of a large cowry (*C. tigris*) in prehistoric pit-dwellings in the South of England (*antea*, p. 11)

The discovery of cowries in pre-Columbian graves in Ecuador is recorded by M. H. Saville. In his "Antiquities of Manabi, Ecuador,"¹⁹⁸ this writer reports the finding of a shell of the cowry-type, which had a hole drilled in the top, and a piece of pottery was fitted to the under part by means of some kind of gum. This shell, which is figured by Saville (Plate lxxvii., Fig. 5) as *Cypræa cervinetta* (a Panamic species), was found with a human skeleton in mound 3 at Cerro Jaboncillo.

¹⁹⁸ Contributions to South American Archæology, N.Y., 1910, vol. ii., pp. 48 and 177.



