MONEY FROM MELANESIA

By Albert B. Lewis
Assistant Curator of Melanesian Ethnology

In Joseph N. Field Hall (Hall A) are many examples of money used by natives of Melanesia. These people engage in much trading, and so need a medium of exchange, and standard of value, neither bulky nor perishable. For this purpose various things were formerly used, such as mats, strings of teeth, bands of feathers, and especially shells. The shells were usually strung, except the larger ones, which were made into shell arm-rings. The large rings were very valuable, and used only for important transactions.

For ordinary money small, perforated flat disks were strung like beads. Value depended upon the length of the string, and the different kinds of disks used, some being much more rare and valuable than others, as in the case of the different metals used for our coins. Sometimes seeds were mixed with the shell disks, thus making a cheaper "alloy"; or the string might be knotted to keep the disks farther apart, and so reduce the value of a particular length.

Each district or region had its own money. In each region the size of the disks was fairly uniform. They usually were thin, and about one-eighth of an inch in diameter. In New Caledonia they were more like beads, with a diameter of one-sixteenth of an inch or less; but in eastern New Guinea they might be five-sixteenths of an inch or more in diameter.

In making these disks two methods were employed. Some were made from small spiral shells broken or ground off, till only a thin disk or ring remained, the hole being formed by the shell's original cavity. Others were pieces of shell roughly broken into shape with a stone hammer, ground to a thin flat plate, and bored with a stone drill. After stringing the pieces tightly together, the whole roll of disks was ground to a uniform size, smoothed and rounded. These were then re-strung to the proper length.

In the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain another type of shell money was used, and is still occasionally found. This was made by stringing shells on a strip of rattan. The strip could be lengthened indefinitely by overlapping the ends of two pieces an inch or two and drawing a few shells tightly over the joint to hold the pieces together. Thus strips several hundred feet in length were made, and coiled into rolls which looked like an automobile tire. When used the money was measured, the unit being the distance between the ends of the fingers of a man's outstretched arms. Smaller units used were the length from the end of the fingers of one arm to the middle of the chest, to the elbow, and so on. As the shells were tightly wedged on the rattan any length could be measured and broken off. For ordinary use short lengths were made, the large rolls being broken only on special occasions. There was often a special treasure hut in the village where these rolls were kept. This might be regarded as the local bank, and the owner in charge of the deposits was usually the most powerful and influential man in the village. Rarely was the trust placed in him betrayed.

This money served the purpose of a true currency. Prices of many commodities were fixed; others varied according to supply. Money was frequently loaned, the charge being 10 per cent, the time not being considered. If a man refused to repay, however, he became a marked man. While there was no law but custom, there were ways by which such pressure was brought to bear that an offender was usually glad to settle.

SKELETONS OF MONKEYS, APES AND MAN EXHIBITED

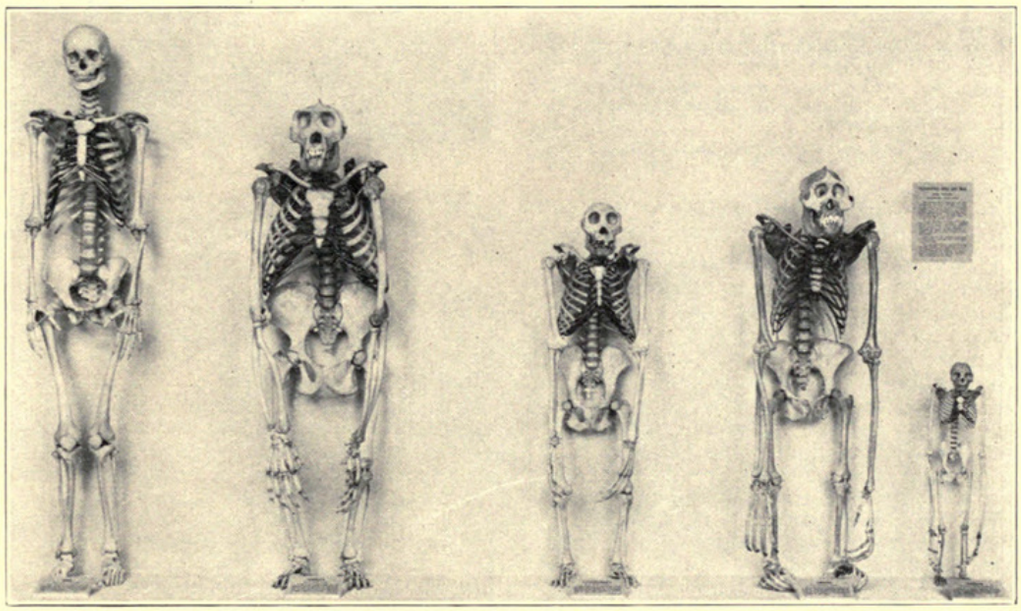
By D. Dwight Davis
Assistant in Osteology

A museum which exhibited only mounted skins would present an incomplete picture of the relationships existing between animals. It would also be misleading, for fishes, snakes, birds, and mammals would appear to have little in common with each other. To round out and give depth to the picture it is necessary to exhibit also skeletons.

A properly organized exhibit of skeletons should demonstrate two things: the fundamental structural plan which prevails throughout the vertebrates; and the wonderful flexibility and infinite variation in this plan.

As a nucleus for a hall of comparative anatomy, the entire exhibit of vertebrate skeletons in Hall 19 is being reinstalled. A number of important changes have been made in the method of display. The black-lined cases have been replaced by buff-colored screens, and brief explanatory labels have been introduced. Two cases have been completed to date. One is the case of skeletons of the carnivorous animals which was described in the February issue of Field Museum News. The second case is especially interesting as it contains the skeletons of man and his nearest relatives, the apes and monkeys. On one side of this case a series of skeletons of the great anthropoid apes is placed beside a human skeleton, so that the marked similarities in structure are readily seen, and some of the evidence upon which is based the theory of evolution is presented. The other side of the screen shows representative monkeys and lemurs.

One of the most interesting exhibits in this group is a skeleton of the "aye-aye," a peculiar lemur from Madagascar in which the front teeth have become greatly specialized for gnawing, and in which the second finger on the hand has developed into a remarkably long and slender appendage for extracting insect larvae from the bark of trees. The structure of the teeth in this animal is so rodent-like that it was originally classified among the rats and mice.



Evolution Theory at a Glance

Part of exhibit of skeletons in Hall 19 which illustrates structural similarity of man and the higher apes. From left to right the skeletons shown are man, gorilla, chimpanzee, orang, and gibbon.

Important in the exhibit are a skeleton of the gibbon, which is the most primitive of the apes, and a skeleton of the curious tarsier, a lemur-like animal. The tarsier has aroused a great deal of interest among scientists during the last fifty years because of its primitive structure, and because of the important part its extinct ancestors are believed to have played in the evolution of man. The specimens of both the gibbon and tarsier were obtained in Borneo by the Cornelius Crane Pacific Expedition in 1929.

The exhibit was prepared by Edmond N. Gueret, Assistant Curator of Vertebrate Skeletons, assisted by the writer.

New Peruvian Plants

In the German botanical journal, *Repertorium Specierum Novarum*, Dr. R. Knuth of the Berlin Botanic Garden has published five new species of *Dioscorea* from Peru, four of which were collected by the Marshall Field Expeditions of Field Museum. These plants are related to cultivated yams, whose roots are a staple food in the tropics.

Fellowship Winner to Sail

Karl P. Schmidt, Assistant Curator of Reptiles at Field Museum, who was recently appointed to a fellowship of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation in recognition of his herpetological researches, will sail for Europe in July to pursue the studies for which the fellowship was granted.

Skulls of Rare Fossil Animal

Skulls of *Macrauchenia*, a rare species of tall camel-like prehistoric animal of South America, have been placed on exhibition in Ernest R. Graham Hall (Hall 38).

Although this animal strongly resembles a camel superficially, it is not directly related to the modern camel, according to Elmer S. Riggs, Associate Curator of Paleontology. It is likewise not related to any modern animal of the entire world, nor to any prehistoric animal known from North or South America, Mr. Riggs says. It thus occupies a unique place in the series of early animals, and in the study of evolution.

The specimens were collected in Argentina by the Marshall Field Paleontological Expedition which was led by Mr. Riggs.