



Africa in movimento / Africa on the Move

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TITLE: PEOPLE WITHOUT POCKETS: ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND MONETARY PRACTICES IN EARLY COLONIAL UGANDA.

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant institutional changes of the colonial period was the introduction of a single currency issued by the colonial state. Building one currency in the place of regional, locally circulating African currencies was a necessary step towards "civilization", as its use implied the recognition of the institution that had issued it. The "currency revolution" literature has interpreted this transition as the rise of a monetary economy that facilitated exchanges and the expansion of trade. Critics of this approach have however underlined how Africa was already monetized long before the colonial period and that the colonial monetization was only a phase in a long history of monetary changes that characterized African societies. This paper engages with this literature, mainly focusing on West Africa, and discloses the mechanisms behind the introduction of currencies in early colonial Uganda. It situates the process of currency change in a longer process of historical change and monetary dynamism of the societies involved. The paper argues that the monetary system that resulted from this transition was not a replacement of the old currencies with a new one, but rather the result of the convergence of different systems of value and monetary practices. This paper uses evidence on changing monetary practices at the local level to show how the concurrent circulation of commodity and colonial currencies became a critical instrument to negotiate value in a period of change.