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Wampum and the Origins of American Money

Marc Shell

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Wampum has become a synonym for money, and it is widely assumed that it served the same purposes as money among the Native Algonquians even after coming into contact with European colonists' money. But to equate wampum with money only matches one slippery term with another, as money itself was quite ill-defined in North America for decades during its colonization.
In this stimulating and intriguing book, Marc Shell illuminates the context in which wampum was used by describing how money circulated in the colonial period and the early history of the United States.

Wampum itself, generally tubular beads made from clam or conch shells, was hardly a primitive version of a coin or dollar bill, as it represented to both Native Americans and colonial Europeans a unique medium through which language, art, culture, and even conflict were negotiated. With irrepressible wit and erudition, Shell interweaves wampum's multiform functions and reveals wampum's undeniable influence on the cultural, political, and economic foundations of North America.

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