

Transvaal Tsonga - head - rest

1987.3.112



object type: head-rest	acc no: 1987.3.112		
vernacular:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 20px; text-align: center;"> contact prints </div>		
sub-type:			
community: Transvaal Tsonga			
sub-group:			
	location	[REDACTED]	
	shelf:		
geographical location:	b/w:	c/t:	c/s:
	dimensions:		
date and place collected: Elim, Transvaal, c. 1930	h: 15 cm	diam:	
	w: 42,5 cm	mounted:	
date executed:	d: 7 cm		
artist name, sex: male	medium: wood		
use: for resting the head while sleeping			

~~purchase~~ / donation / ~~bequest~~: Anglo American Johannesburg Centenary Trust

price paid: - (R168 000 incl. GST paid by Trust for Collection)

insurance value: R346 291 (114 objects in Jaques Collection) (1990)

authority: AGC 1987-03-26  
MC 1987-03-30

original collection no: Jaques Coll./  
Africana Mus. 50/1016

object type translation:

catalogues: Wanless, AN&N 27(8):314

physical description:



JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY

ARCHIVE SHEET II

PROVENANCE

ARTIST:

ACC. NO.:

collected by Rev. A. A. Jaques

lent to the Africana Museum in 1950



## ARTIST:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY  
ARCHIVE SHEET IV  
REFERENCE

ARTIST:

ACC. NO.:

Wanless, A Africana Notes and News, see acc. card  
for vol. and page no.



JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY  
ARCHIVE SHEET V  
LOANS / LOCATIONS REGISTER

ARTIST:

ACC. NO.:

placed in [REDACTED] 1987



# VUKA SA

JDL ✓  
NL ✓  
EK  
SS  
TM  
BN  
335

SOUL OF THE RAINBOW NATION  
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VOL 1 NO 2 1995

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- ISSN 1025-2134

The Violence  
OF WORDS

IN QUEST  
of Quin

CONCEPTS  
of Identity

Wie staan pa op  
Paternoster?



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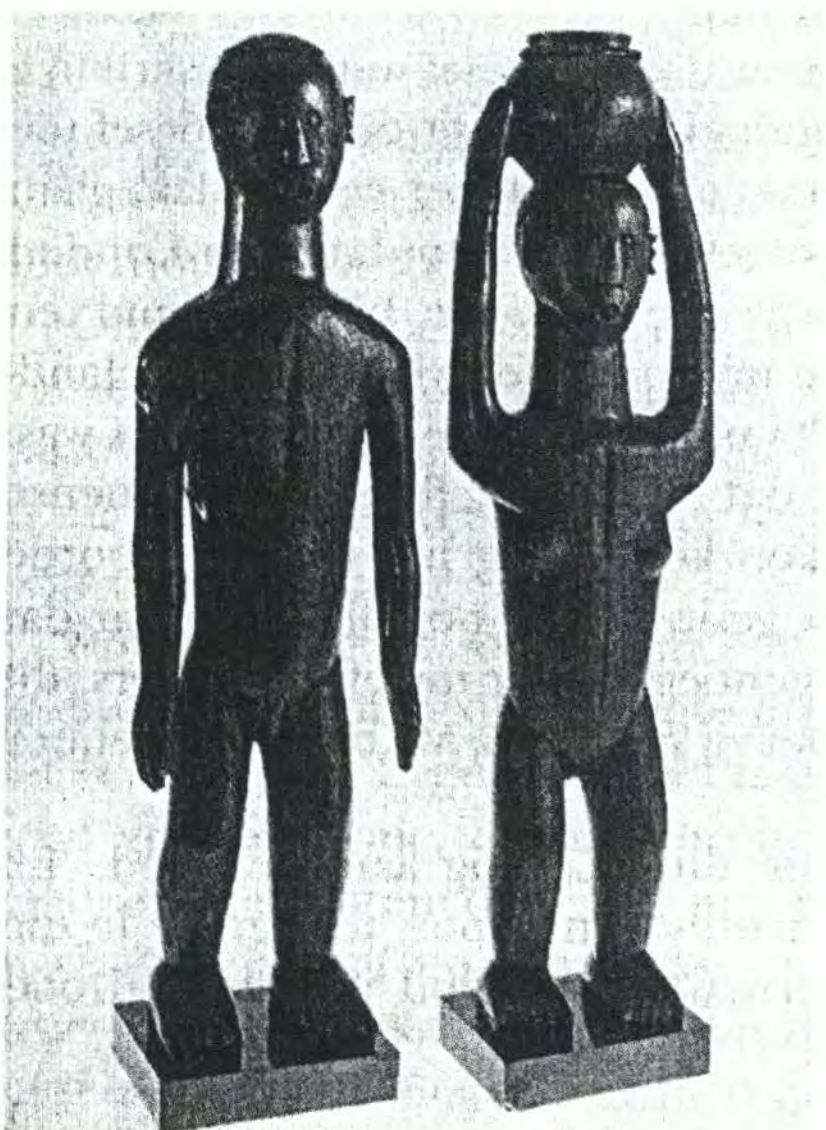
## COLLECTIONS

# IN TOUCH WITH THE ANCESTORS

*Nessa Leibhammer*

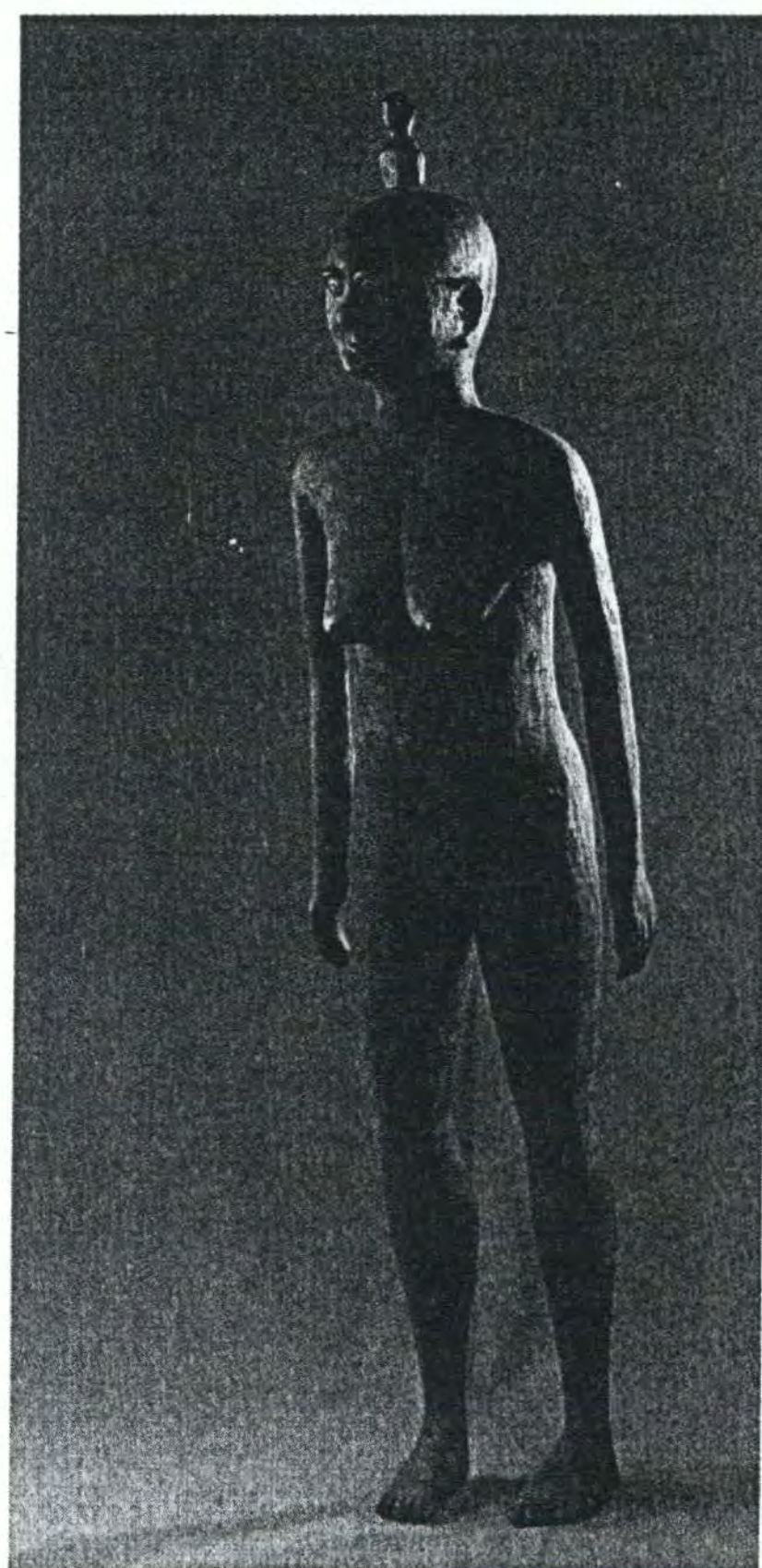
The exhibition of traditional Southern African art presents beautiful objects which are steeped in historic, symbolic, social and spiritual significance.

*Xifaniso xo vatliwa*/male and female figures, Tsonga, Northern Province. Wood. 70 x 20,1 x 10,1 and 71,5 x 19,6 x 11,8



**T**he Johannesburg Art Gallery has dedicated two exhibition rooms to the display of 'traditional' Southern African art. Challenging the notion that Southern Africa has no traditional artistic heritage of note, the Gallery has mounted a number of objects of the finest quality from this area. Similar to other great art productions of the world, these objects are beautiful to look at and at the same time are steeped in historic, symbolic, social and spiritual significance.

Women as creators constitute an important component of the display. Featuring many of the exquisite objects which women make, the first room of the exhibition includes *mincheka* (decorated shoulder wraps)

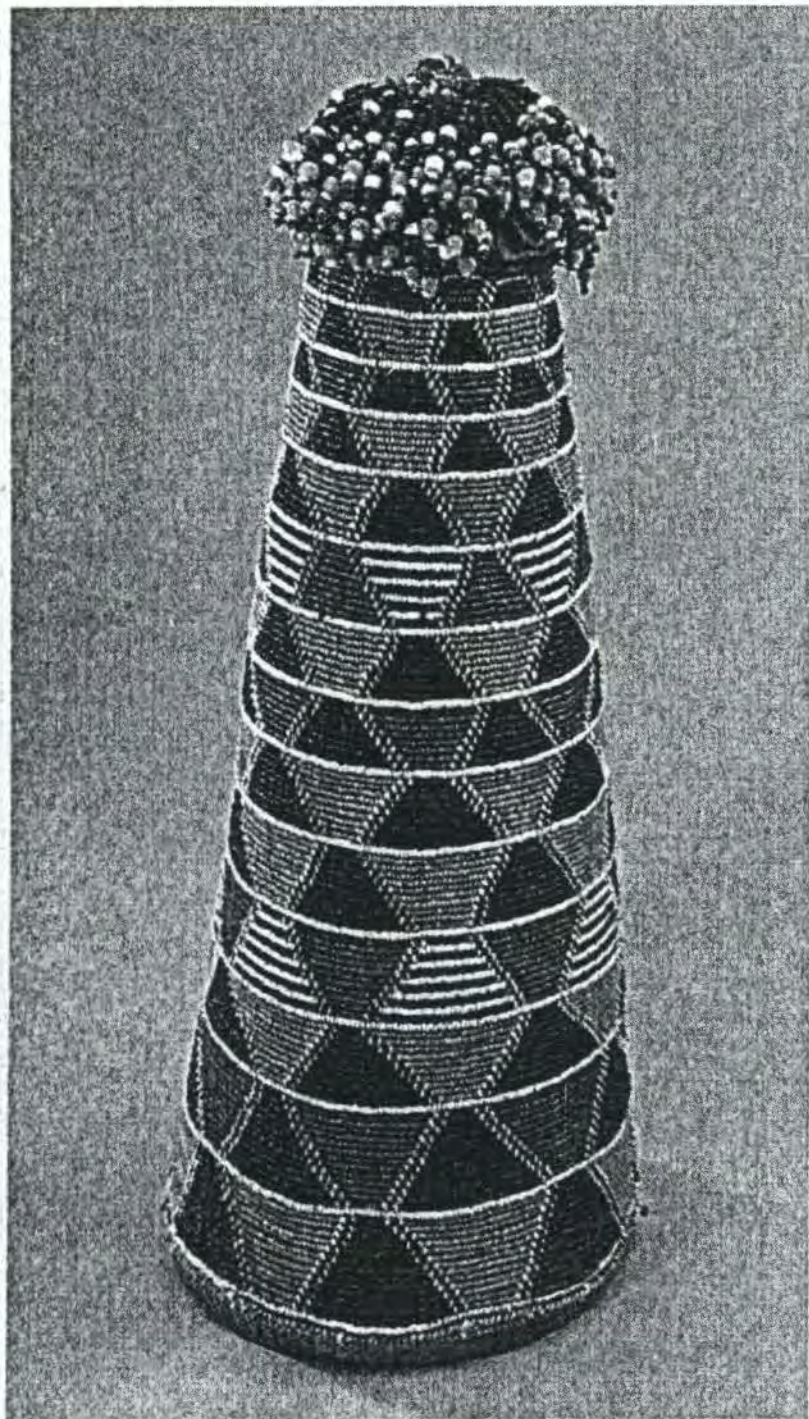


*Ingwabani/gona*/female spirit figure, Ndau, Mozambique. Wood. 135 x 34 x 19,5

made by the Tsonga-speaking women of the Northern Province, a beaded Ndebele *linaga* (ceremonial cape) and *irari* (blanket), a Southern Nguni *ingubo* (ceremonial wrap), other body ornamentations and carved and beaded sticks.

Beaded and embroidered images ranging from flowers, animals and fish to portraits of political leaders and contemporary events are used to decorate the *mincheka*. These are worn in a number of ways and are subject to frequent fashion changes.





They are also useful for carrying babies and other small loads. The highly decorated *mincheke* are worn only on special occasions and boldly declare the name of the maker and her date of birth.

Previously worn everyday and now only for ceremonies and special occasions, beaded Ndebele garments represent some of the most visually spectacular art forms in South Africa. For the Ndebele who were fragmented as a group in the late 19th century, these striking costumes were a way to declare their identity and assert their presence. Changes in colour and style are evident in the work. The earliest Ndebele beadwork used mostly white beads and the designs were small, restrained and geometric. Later work shows more colour usage and bolder designs with figurative elements.

Spiritual significance and colour are sometimes linked: the ochre-coloured earth with which the Southern Nguni (Xhosa) colour their blankets, is believed to be loved by the ancestors. Someone wearing this colour is understood to be in a normal, everyday state. The wearing of white, either as beadwork, clothing or applied to the body, indicates that the wearer is in a 'special' state and may denote a closeness to the ancestors.



**Above left:** *Ngoana*/beaded figure, South Sotho, Lesotho. Wood, seed-beads, mixed media. 36,4 x 14,2

*Umdwana*/beaded figure, Ndebele, Mpumalanga/Northern Province. Grass, textile, seed-beads, mixed media. 20,8 x 11,7

Many objects carved and used by men are also included in the exhibition. Carved sticks or staffs can indicate the status of a chief, identify the owner as a *nyanga*, or 'traditional' healer or may be an accessory for finery worn on a festive occasion.

Personal stools carved by specialist Tonga carvers of northern Zimbabwe are often taken with on social visits. These stools are used by men, women and children. They show a multitude of styles, some geometric, some anthropomorphic and some zoomorphic. Boats, trains and car caryatids are also popular, each carver having

his own recognisable style and favoured range of motifs. Stools from Zambia show a marked similarity of style and format and point to a relatedness in the people living on opposite sides of the Zambezi.

The second exhibition room contains objects which function on a more private level. It contains headrests, spirit vessels, and beaded and carved figures.

Headrests are small carved wooden pillows used by both men and women. They are significant objects which serve many symbolic functions. One of these is to delineate the



relations between a husband and his wife (or wives). For example the Shona headrests which men use evoke the female form and therefore indicate a connection to fertility. One of these headrests may be given as a marriage gift from a wife to her husband. When a husband sleeps on this headrest, his head (the seat of his ancestral line) brings together the fertility of his wife with his patrilineal ancestral line.

The headrest also maintains connections between individuals and their ancestors. For example, as the first sacrifice to his deceased father (now an ancestor) a Tsonga man will rub tobacco onto his headrest as an offering. Furthermore, dreaming while using a headrest is analogous with visiting your ancestors. Many of these small carved objects are masterpieces of three-dimensional form.

Spirit vessels, *nhunguvani* or *gona* figures are containers used in healing practises and to protect their owners against misfortune. Used by people living along the eastern side of the Africa continent, they are found in Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and north eastern South Africa. These are sometimes carved as figures but most often are vessels made from calabashes with carved stoppers assuming anthropomorphic or zoomorphic form. The spirit of deceased ancestors is thought to be contained in a special substance placed inside the vessel. Using the vessel as a sort of 'cell phone' to the



Mutsago/headrest, Shona, Zimbabwe. Wood, 13,2 x 17,8 x 6,5

ancestors, appeals are made for protection, health and fertility.

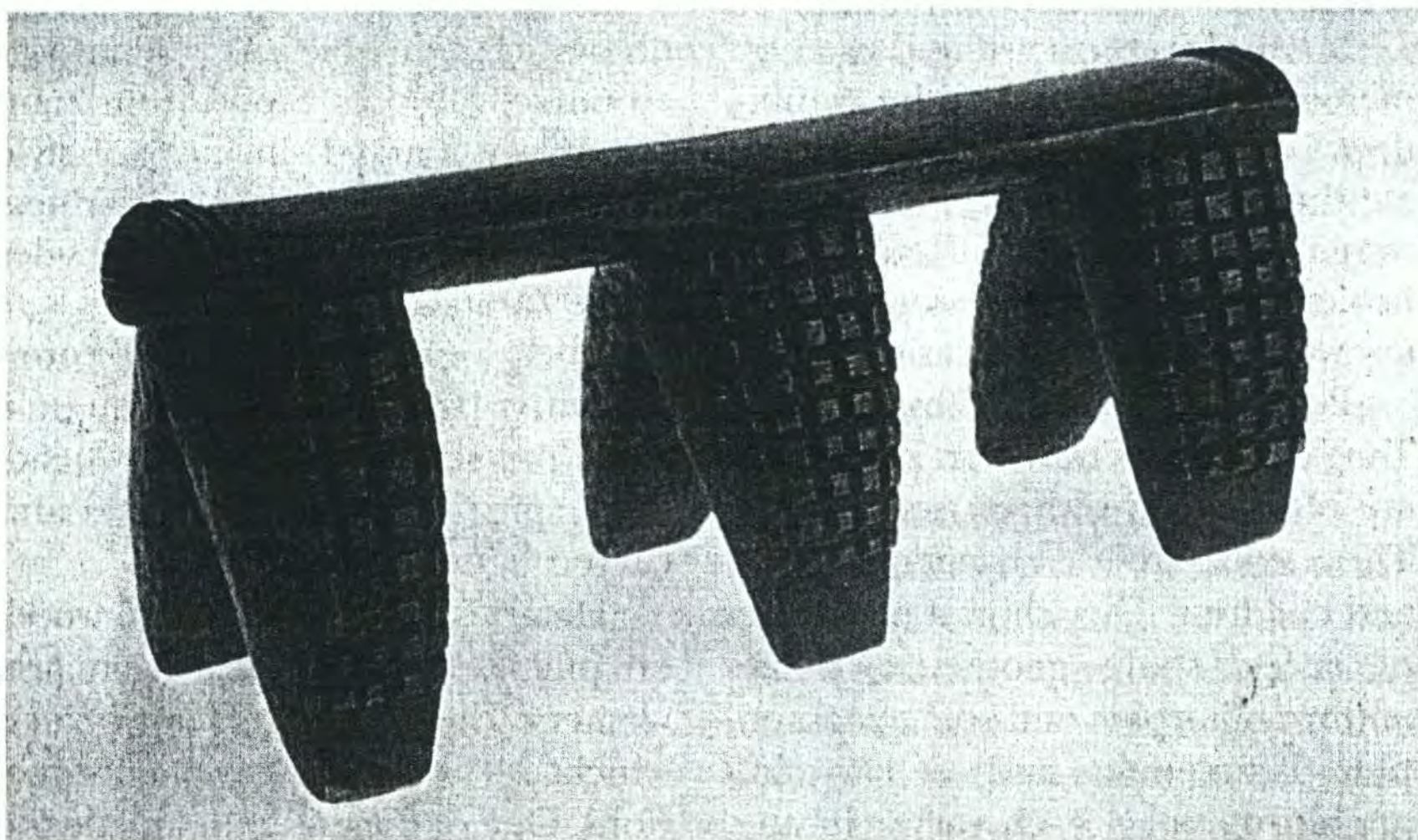
The collection of *gona* which the Johannesburg Art Gallery holds, is extraordinary in that four of these are two-thirds life sized and are carved as human figures. These figures are unusual as they are carved in a 'naturalistic' style and are much larger than any other figures from Southern Africa.

Beaded figures, or 'dolls' from all over Southern Africa are on display. These have many roles and

there is little clarity on many aspects of their use. Early texts tend to refer to them as 'fertility dolls' but their uses and functions are much more diverse than this. Many are toys, others represent 'children' and are used by boys and girls when they enact adult roles as part of a learning process. Some are made by barren women who wish to have children. These figures are created with great care and skill and are infinitely varied.

Objects created in a non-western aesthetic paradigm have often been housed in ethnographic or natural history museums. The technique of displaying multiples of objects in glass cases is reminiscent of specimen exhibits. The exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery breaks with these display techniques which have created inequalities in the way cultural objects from Africa are viewed. Exhibiting each object as an example of individual creative talent and having as many objects as possible free of cabinets, counteracts the ethnographic effect of many previous displays. In addition, locating the exhibition in two adjacent but different spaces, enhances the conceptual depth of the exhibition. ▽

Isiquiki/headrest, Northern Nguni (Zulu), KwaZulu/Natal. Wood, 14,7 x 39,4 x 11,9





✓ 150 50/1014

Size: Height 150 mm  
Length 200 mm  
Width 95 mm  
Length of base 180 mm

*Description: Crossbar:* Rectangular, curved and decorated on the flattened narrow ends with a row of deeply incised grooves. The crossbar is unusually thick.

*Lugs:* None.

*Column:* Two rectangular pillars joined by means of a short bar 15 mm below the crossbar. The surfaces of the front, back and outer sides are decorated with deeply incised triangles, except for the front right, which has incised diamonds on it.

*Base:* Truncated oval cone with a small triangle carved in relief at centre front and back.

*Comments:* Said by the collector to show Zulu influence.

✓ 151 50/1015

Size: Height 140 mm  
Length 425 mm  
Width 55 mm

*Description: Crossbar:* Rectangular, very slightly curved, and decorated at the narrow ends with a raised edge covered with incised cross-hatching.

*Lugs:* Downward-pointing truncated cone at centre of crossbar.

*Legs:* Four open circles, two at front and two at back, flattened at base and decorated with four sections of incised parallel lines. These incisions and the insides of the circles have been blackened.

*Comments:* The central lug, four legs and the lack of a base suggest Swazi or Zulu influence.

✓ 152 50/1016

Size: Height 150 mm  
Length 425 mm  
Width 70 mm  
Length of base 340 mm

*Description:* A double head-rest carved out of one piece of wood.

*Crossbars:* Identical except that one is 5 mm longer. Rectangular, curved and decorated on the flattened narrow ends with a row of zig-zags carved in relief.

*Lugs:* One each, on outer sides. Closed arches facing sides. The lugs on the inner sides have become incorporated into the column.

*Column:* Three grooved pillars. Two stretching diagonally from near the centre of the base to the outsides of the crossbars. The third pillar reaches vertically from the centre of the base to join an inverted open arch which links the two crossbars.

*Base:* Four flat circles in a row, joined by three rectangular bars. The two outer circles support open, front-facing arches.

✓ 153 50/1017

Size: Height 155 mm and 150 mm  
Length (total) 735 mm  
Width 75 mm  
Length of the bases 130 mm and 125 mm

*Description:* Double head-rest with a box in the centre; carved of one piece of wood, except for the lid of the box. One head-rest is 5 mm longer, and higher than the other.

*Crossbars:* Rectangular, curved and decorated on the flattened, and blackened narrow ends with a row of zig-zags carved in relief.

*Lugs:* Two lugs for each head-rest. Blackened rectangles facing sides.

*Columns:* Each has one rectangular pillar, decorated at front and back with the upper and lower thirds being blackened and the central third having two rounded horizontal pleats. The columns are joined by a cylindrical bar to a central rectangular box with a lid which opens on a pin, and which has a handle in the shape of a fin.

*Bases:* Flat ovoids with the edges blackened.

154 74/2611

*Place:* Although collected by the donor's brother in Swaziland, it is not classified as Swazi because in form and design it resembles many Shangaan pieces in the collection. (See especially number 159 below.)

*Tribe:* Shangaan. (See above.)

*Date:* c.1910.

*Source:* Donated by Dr. G. Theiler, Pretoria.

Size: Height 150 mm  
Length 240 mm  
Width 90 mm  
Length of base 205 mm

*Description: Crossbar:* Rectangular, curved and decorated near the