Finch & Co



A FINE SOUTH AFRICAN SHONA/TSONGA HEADREST

A FINE SOUTH AFRICAN SHONA/TSONGA HEADREST
DARK, SMOOTH AND GLOSSY PATINA
19TH CENTURY
SIZE : 13CM HIGH, 6 CM WIDE, 7 CM DEEP – 5 INS HIGH, 6 INS WIDE, 2¾ DEEP

LITERATURE

THE CARVERS OF SOUTH AFRICAN HEADRESTS WERE ALWAYS MALE, BUT NOT NECESSARILY SPECIALIST CRAFTSMEN. AS H.P JUNOD STATES 'MANY CARVED THEIR OWN STICKS, SPOONS, SNUFF BOXES, AND ABOVE ALL WOODEN PILLOWS OR HEADRESTS' (H.P JUNOD 'THE ARTS AND CRAFTS OF NORTH EASTERN TRIBES OF SOUTH AFRICA'. 1958 PG 77) HEADRESTS WERE PERSONAL ITEMS FOR PRIVATE USE AND WERE NOT MADE FOR PUBLIC DISPLAY. THEY WERE NOT INDICATORS OF STATUS OR RANK, OR USED AT COMMUNAL EVENTS, BUT OVER TIME WOULD BECOME ONE WITH THEIR OWNER, CHANGING WITH THEIR LIFE AS THEY BECAME IMBUED WITH THEIR SPIRIT AND WERE OILED AND POLISHED BY THEIR OWNERS HAIR AND BODY. THE HEADREST WAS THEREFORE REGARDED AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF ITS OWNER AND UPON DEATH WAS OFTEN BURIED WITH HIM.
HOWEVER, SOMETIMES HEADRESTS WERE KEPT AS A WAY OF ESTABLISHING A BOND BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THEIR ANCESTORS. ONE DREAMT OF THEM WHEN SLEEPING ON THEIR FORMER PILLOW : 'THE SUPPORT OF DREAMS'.