

Finch & C^o



SOUTH AFRICAN TSONGA 'ANTELOPE' HEADREST

A RARE SOUTH AFRICAN TSONGA 'ANTELOPE' HEADREST
CARVED OF REDWOOD WITH SOME OLD DAMAGE TO THE BASE
SUPERB SILKY SMOOTH PATINATION

19TH CENTURY

SIZE: 17.5CM HIGH, 13CM WIDE, 7CM DEEP – 7 INS HIGH, 5 INS WIDE, 2¾ INS DEEP

LITERATURE

ANCESTRAL SPIRITS WERE BELIEVED TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR LIVING DESCENDANTS THROUGH DREAMS AND
THUS THE 'SUPPORT OF DREAMS' (FALGAYRETTES 1989), THE HEADREST, MANIFESTED THIS INTERDEPENDENCE IN A
MATERIAL FORM. HEADRESTS WERE OFTEN GIFTS TAKEN BY A BRIDE TO HER NEW HOME WHEN SHE MARRIED AND THIS
CUSTOM SYMBOLICALLY LINKED HER ANCESTORS WITH HER HUSBANDS.

THE CARVING OF WOOD WAS AN EXCLUSIVELY MALE OCCUPATION AND HEADRESTS PROVIDED CONSIDERABLE SCOPE
FOR THE SKILL OF A CARVER TO ELABORATE ON VARIOUS LOCAL STYLES. REPRESENTATIONAL ANIMAL FIGURES, MOSTLY
OF ANTELOPE AND CATTLE, APPEAR VERY RARELY IN THE ART OF SOUTH AFRICAN HEADRESTS. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF
THEIR APPEAL TO WESTERN AESTHETIC SENSIBILITIES THEY APPEAR IN MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS IN NUMBERS THAT
OUTWEIGH ANY PROPERLY BALANCED SELECTION.