

# AFRICAN HEADRESTS

S.D. Bishop

The National Museum has a collection of eighteen headrests. Five of these beautifully carved objects were apparently made by the Ngwato people of Botswana. Two were bought in Zululand during a collecting expedition in 1923 by the Museum, while another is annotated in the Museum records as Zulu although no further information is given. One, smeared with fat and ochre, is Himba and was collected in Kaokoland, SWA/Namibia, in 1974. A more crude headrest was donated to the Museum by the Union Festival Committee in 1961. Of interest are the headrests joined by a chain of three elongated links. A further link or loop at the other end of each headrest holds a little bell-shaped container. The whole item is carved out of a single piece of wood, and is believed to be a married man's headrest.



Three Zulu headrests.



Three headrests of unknown origin.

Many of the people of Africa use wooden headrests to support the head when resting or sleeping. These are usually made from a single block of wood and are often elaborately carved. They look like narrow little stools, with an average width of about 7 cm wide and averaging about 15 cm high. In length they vary considerably. The overall length of one of the most elaborately carved ones in the Museum collection is 45 cm, while the little Himba one is only 13 cm long. Usually the side of the head rests on the crossbar of the headrest, but sometimes, especially in the case of women with fancy headdresses, the neck is supported rather than the head. The use of a headrest when sleeping may seem very hard and uncomfortable to people accustomed to soft pillows, but to those used to headrests, they no doubt keep the head at a comfortable angle and protect the headdress!





Four Ngwato headrests from Botswana.



"Married man's headrest".



Himba headrest from Kaokoland.

# OOM PIET TREE AF

Oom Piet van der Merwe was 15 jaar en 4 maande verbonde aan die Nasionale Museum. Gedurende hierdie tyd het ons hom leer ken as iemand wat altyd bereid was om te help. Sy uitgangspunt was altyd dat alles gedoen kan word as jy net wil. Sy houtwerk was baie netjies afgewerk en hy was trots op die werk wat hy gelewer het.

Tydens museumgesellighede was hy en tannie Mina altyd van die voorjollers. Hy was ook die eerste voorsitter en 'n stigterslid van die personeelvereniging.

Oom Piet het nou besluit om tant Mina se kas wat al tien jaar "klaar" is se deure te gaan aansit . . . en om sy kleinkinders op te pas . . . ons kon hom nie ompraat om te bly nie.

Die personeel wens hulle alles van die beste toe en vertrou dat hulle nog vele jare van goeie gesondheid saam met hulle familie sal geniet.



Oom Piet v.d. Merwe

**Die Nasionale Museum is ook Vrydag en Saterdaggaande tot 20h30 vir die publiek oop.**

**The National Museum is also open to the public on Friday and Saturday evenings untill 20h30.**

