

THE USE OF TOBACCO AND SNUFF BY SOUTHERN AFRICAN BLACKS

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Tobacco was probably introduced into southern Africa by traders on the east and west coasts and it had spread to the south before the Europeans settled at the Cape. It was, and in some places still is, grown in small gardens next to the homestead. The cultivation of tobacco was the work of the men and sometimes old women, but never young women, probably because of beliefs about ritual impurity, connected with child-bearing, which might have an adverse effect on the tobacco crop.

In the past tobacco was an important trade item. Among the Transvaal Sotho and the Venda it was shaped into blocks and balls to use as items of exchange. In the south and east, standard quantities for exchange were made up into rolls wrapped in matting. In Owambo, tobacco was the main medium of trade and was so precious that only the rich could afford enough of it to smoke, while ordinary people only had enough to snuff. The San (Bushmen) and Khoi (Hottentots) rarely cultivated their own tobacco, but obtained it by trade from their Bantu-speaking neighbours.

Traditionally tobacco plays an important part in the lives of the Bantu-speaking peoples. It is not only smoked, but is ground and mixed with some type of charcoal, such as burnt prickly pear leaves, to make snuff. In some areas it is still used mainly as snuff rather than for smoking. Most adult males smoke and/or use snuff, either snuffed up the nose or placed under the lip. In some groups the men are more inclined to smoke while the women are more inclined to take snuff. Among the Pedi, tobacco is taboo to a woman until she is past child-bearing age, but she may take snuff, which is considered to be a remedy for headache, toothache and nosebleed.



Decorated cloth smoking 'pouch'.

Tobacco, especially in the form of snuff, is of special importance in dealings with the ancestral spirits who traditionally are responsible for the well-being, or misfortune, of their living kin. The ancestors are generally appealed to or appeased at ritual feasts, and ideally tobacco is a prerequisite of such a feast. The ancestors demand meat, sorghum beer and tobacco to keep them well-disposed towards the living. Snuff



(a) simple bone pipe

(b) pipes carved from stone

(c) old-fashioned stone bowl pipe

(d) wooden pipe inlaid with metal

(e) carved wooden pipes

(f) wood and metal pipe

may be left in a special place in the back of the hut for the ancestors to use its essence. It is later used by the living kin who say that the ancestors have left it for them after taking what they need.

Any snuff spilt is not picked up, but is left as an offering to the ancestors, as it is believed to have spilt because the ancestors wanted it. Snuff is also used to aid communication with the ancestors. Diviners especially use it to clear their heads in order to allow the ancestral spirits to enter and guide them in their divining.

Among some groups there is a special etiquette involved in giving and receiving snuff. There are special formulas for asking for snuff and polite ways of receiving it, as well as rules deciding who may give or receive it. No man may ask another man's wife for snuff in case it contains magical charms that may harm him. For the same reason it is considered dangerous to accept snuff from a stranger.



Items of trade: a moulded block of tobacco, a ball of tobacco, and a roll of tobacco wrapped in matting.

Among the South Sotho tobacco, like sorghum beer and meat, is symbolically connected with the life-stages of the individual. The maturing of tobacco is viewed in terms of fermentation, growth and change, as is the procreation of life in the sexual act and the formal development of the individual through rites of passage. For example, initiation is aimed at making a boy 'grow fierce', just as tobacco 'grows fierce' as it matures. *Kwae* is the word used for tobacco and the *kwae* sheep is a sheep that is slaughtered in the ritual to accept a new bride into her husband's home, changing her into a daughter-in-law belonging to her husband's people. Tobacco and smoking also carry a sexual symbolism among the South Sotho and terms used for tobacco and smoking are used idiomatically and euphemistically in sexual matters.

The importance of tobacco and snuff resulted in an array of smoking and snuffing equipment:

The simplest pipe was a short piece of decorated bone. Pipes, beautifully carved from stone were used by the Khoi, San, Tswana and Herero. A type of pipe modelled on the old-fashioned European pipe had a rough stone or clay bowl. In Lesotho mealie cobs were hollowed out to make pipe bowls. Pipes are also carved from wood, often decorated or shaped in human or animal forms, and sometimes inlaid with metal or bone. Metal pipe bowls are also found. Today the wooden European pipe often replaces the more elaborate traditional pipes. Among the Cape Nguni, e.g. the Xhosa, Mpondo, etc., women smoke long-stemmed pipes, often decorated with beadwork. The higher a woman's status, the longer the stem of her pipe. Men's pipes have shorter stems. Smoking is usually a communal activity. A pipe may be passed around and it is a matter of good manners to share the little tobacco one may have. There is also no embarrassment involved in asking for tobacco



Snuffboxes made from a variety of materials



Snuffspoons

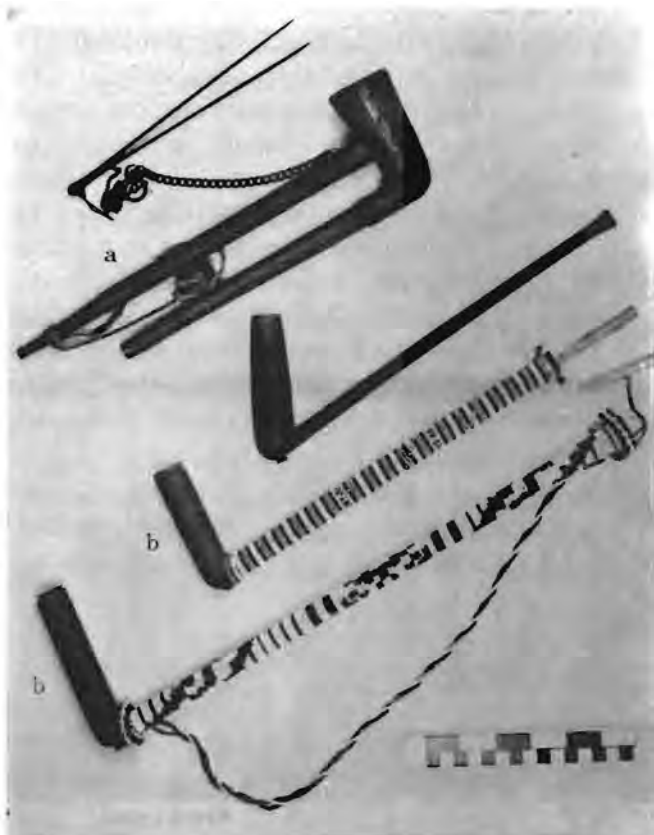
from someone who has it. A feature of many pipes is the detachable mouthpiece which the owner does not part with, even if he sends his pipe round. This is not so much for hygienic reasons, but because a mouthpiece comes into such intimate contact with a person that evil influences could be transmitted through it according to the principles of sympathetic magic.

Cape Nguni men and women carry elaborate 'pouches' to contain their smoking equipment. The most attractive type is made from the skin of a small animal removed whole from the animal and often decorated with beads. Others are made from white cloth decorated with black stitching or heavily beaded. These 'pouches' are part of the traditional dress of the Cape Nguni.

Snuffboxes are numerous and varied, made from a variety of material such as horn, wood, cocoons, small gourds, small tortoise shells and, in recent times, tins and glass bottles. They are often decorated with carvings or burnt etchings or covered with beadwork or wirework.



Smoking 'pouch' made from a whole goatskin.



(a) wooden pipe decorated with brass wire and tin strips – tongs are for picking up a live coal to light the pipe.

(b) pipes decorated with beadwork – note the detachable mouthpieces.

Snuffspoons, made of ivory, bone, horn or metal, are used by the Nguni and South Sotho to convey snuff to the nose, while other groups simply shake snuff into the hand. Snuffspoons are usually pointed at one end and carried stuck into the hair or headdress, serving a secondary purpose as headscratchers.



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SOMMER NET SWAELTJIES?

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Een swaeltjie maak miskien nie 'n somer nie, maar dan is 'n swaeltjie ook mos nie sommer net 'n swaeltjie nie. In Suider-Afrika, die gebied suid van die Kunene- en Zambesirivier, kom 20 swaelsoorte voor. Van hierdie 20 spesies broei slegs twee nie in Suider-Afrika nie.

Alhoewel die meerderheid van die swaelspesies slegs in die somer in die Vrystaat gesien kan word, is die Afrikaanse Oewerswael volop regdeur die jaar en kan die Kransswaer ook in die winter in die Vrystaat gesien word. Swaeltjies kan dus 'n winter ook maak!

Die Europese swaer, die Huisswaer en die Europese Oewerswaer is die enigste swaels wat "oorsee" gaan deur na Europa en Asië te migreer

in die winter. Al die ander spesies migreer, of glad nie, of hulle is intra-Afrika-migrante. Twee van die mees algemene swaels in die Vrystaat, die Groot Streepswaer en die Familieswaer, migreer tydens die winter na sentraal Afrika en terugvindings van beringde Familieswaels het getoon dat dié spesie in 'n baie klein gebied in die laer lope van die Kongorivier in Zaïre hulle winter deurbring. Die algemene opvatting dat "... wanneer die swaels eers terug is, is die somer hier ..." is natuurlik ook ver van die waarheid af. Die eerste Familieswaels van die "somer" kom selde later as die eerste paar dae van Augustus elke jaar in die Vrystaat aan en hulle kan die somer lank uitrek tot diep in April voordat hulle weer hulle vertrek neem.