



Headrest

Date
20th Century

Primary Maker
Zulu

Medium
Wood

Description

This is a wooden headrest made by the Zulu culture of South Africa in the 20th Century. Headrests were a status symbol for Zulu men and could be carried around during the day as a prestige object and used at night as the men watched over their livestock. These headrests—as with most headrests in Africa—were used to keep coiffures off the ground and elevator the head off the ground while sleeping. Zulu headrests tend to take one of two forms: the first type is a headrest that is supported by two to ten cylindrical legs that taper off at the end; this second type has a series of geometric legs that support the headrest and are covered in relief patterns. Not only were Zulu headrests used at night to sleep on but were also used as stools during the day because of their long length. The Zulu believe that dreams are the means for ancestral intervention. Their headrest would therefore be more than a pillow; it would be an instrument of mediation between the worlds of the living and the ancestors.

Dimensions

7 × 24 1/4 × 4 in. (17.8 × 61.6 × 10.2 cm)