



McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

The pasts and presence of art in South Africa

Technologies, ontologies and agents

Edited by Chris Wingfield, John Giblin & Rachel King



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The combined funding enabled us to invite Same Mdluli, David Morris and Justine Wintjes, whose work is included in this volume, as well as Mbongiseni Buthelezi and Carolyn Hamilton to participate in the conference. We were especially honoured to hold the

very first launch of Carolyn and Nessa Leibhammer's edited volume, *Tribing and Untribing the Archive*, at the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology as part of the conference programme.

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Chris Wingfield
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Chapter 13

Presences in the archive: *Amagugu* (treasures) from the Zulu kingdom at the British Museum

Catherine Elliott Weinberg

The British Museum houses a particular group of Zulu objects of impressive physical appearance and presence, gifted just over one hundred years ago – three headrests, a meat-platter, four milk-pails and two further vessels (Fig. 13.1).¹ Not unusually for items then deemed ‘ethnographic’, little was documented about these carved wooden objects at the time that the Museum acquired them. Now curated by the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, they form part of the British Museum’s South Africa collections. Although ‘Zulu’ objects are one of the major constituents of these collections, most historical pieces appear to have originated south of the Thukela River, within the British Colony of Natal. Strong evidence, however, suggests that this group of objects comes from within the independent Zulu kingdom, north of the Thukela.

A single milk-pail from this group was included in the British Museum’s major exhibition, *South Africa: the art of a nation* (27 October 2016 to 26 February 2017). In the exhibition the pail was displayed alongside other examples of ‘[a]rtworks as bodies’, where the accompanying text panel drew attention to the vessel’s anthropomorphic, specifically ‘female features’, attributing it to a ‘Zulu’ artist whose name is unrecorded.² The exhibition catalogue describes the pail in a similar way and discusses it alongside two others in the group (Giblin & Spring 2016, 123–4).

By focusing on this distinct assemblage of items, and without wishing to downplay their artistic merits rightly highlighted in the exhibition and catalogue, this chapter aims to trace various forms of agency, of both persons and things, associated with the collection. This extends to the agency of the objects themselves, their presence, and that of numerous players in their life story so far – including a range of individuals, ranging from their possible originating source, to their field-collector, to their donor, as well as

to researchers such as myself. In a further theoretical step, building on recent scholarship that following the ‘archival turn’ seeks to bring ethnography collections ‘into the ambit of archive’ (Hamilton & Leibhammer 2016, 415), this collection is considered as archive. It will be shown that treating the collection as archive facilitates re-engagement, re-historicization and the recalling of obscured presences, thus reclaiming the objects in question as *amagugu* (treasures) of the Zulu kingdom.³

Presences (and absences) in the archive

My first proper encounter with the objects in question was some years back during my master’s degree in Museum Studies, when I had elected to study an aspect of the British Museum’s South Africa collections first hand. Working through the collections in one of the Museum’s offsite storage facilities, I was struck by the workmanship of these objects; in Gellian terms (Gell 1998) one might say I was a recipient of their presence or agency (discussed below). A cursory glance at the computerized catalogue (database) revealed that one Dowager Viscountess Wolseley gave them to the Museum along with other African items, a fact confirmed by the accessions register from which this information had come. Given this provenance, which suggested a link to Field Marshall Garnet Joseph Wolseley, a preeminent colonial-era soldier, coupled with the appearance of the objects themselves, I began to sense their significance; their association with the Zulu kingdom and possibly with King Cetshwayo kaMpande himself (Fig. 13.3).

The items are described in the accessions register as three ‘pillows’ (headrests), a ‘globular 4-footed vessel’, four ‘sub-cylindrical vessel[s]’ (milk-pails), a ‘spherical 4-legged vessel’ and a ‘food-trough’ (meat-platter). They are notably well made, aesthetically



Figure 13.1. Amagugu (treasures): three headrests, a meat-platter, four milk-pails and two further vessels (British Museum accession numbers Af1917,1103.1–10). Note objects are not to scale (for dimensions and other details see https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx). Photographs Catherine Elliott Weinberg, copyright The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

appealing and redolent with status. Stylistically, they appear to conform to what might be considered examples of Zulu material culture, and later annotations in the accessions register give this identification for a few of the objects, bar the four milk-pails, which are ‘said to be MATABILI’. Museum labels tied on to these objects evidence this past uncertainty over their cultural attribution, indicating either firmly or tentatively ‘Matabele’⁴ for just over half and ‘Zulu’⁵ for others. The tribal paradigm, although problematic – not least because it builds on the colonial invention of the notion of ‘tribe’,⁶ whereby the ‘tribe’ rather than the responsible individual comes to be seen as producer (Ravenhill 1996, 266) – is still an inherited feature of the organization of many African collections. Notwithstanding these concerns, this collection might be considered Zulu in the strictest sense, for reasons to be discussed below, unlike many other items described in this way (Elliott Weinberg 2016).

However, before exploring the objects’ pre-Museum life story, it is necessary to briefly turn to consider the theoretical underpinning of the present contribution.

Agency and archive

The meaning of the term ‘agency’ is rooted in the Latin for ‘doing’ (*Oxford English Living Dictionary* (OELD); see also Thomas *in* Gell 1998, ix) and relates to the term ‘agent’, defined as ‘[a] person or thing that takes an active role or produces a specified effect’, in other words, having power to act, while ‘agency’ can be seen as ‘[a]ction or intervention producing a particular effect’ (OELD). Significantly, Alfred Gell’s theory, which he called ‘an anthropology of art’, is geared at ‘everybody’s art’, that is to say it includes objects usually described as ethnographic and more typically studied by anthropologists (Gell 1998, 1), such as the items under consideration here.

Recently, Sarah Byrne and colleagues (Byrne *et al.* 2011) have drawn on Gell's and others' ideas about agency (for a summary see 2011, 7), usefully extending the theory by exploring 'multiple kinds of agency expressed within the complex long-term processes that contribute to museum collections' (2011, 7). This idea of 'multiple agency' is appealing in that it takes into consideration the wide range of agents involved in museum collections, including what they term the 'creator community' as well as what might be considered the field-collector, museum source, 'museum/curator' and 'public' (2011, 7).

In a move informed by the recent work of Carolyn Hamilton and Nessa Leibhammer (Hamilton & Leibhammer 2014; 2016) in particular, this collection might be considered archival. But why bring one type of collecting domain, the museum – in this case, an assemblage of objects formerly considered ethnographic – into the ambit of another collecting domain, that of the archive? Archives and museums have similar histories and functions. Like archives, museums, and especially ethnographic museum collections, are products of uneven power relations and have been shown to be far from neutral repositories. Similarly, archives have conventionally been thought of as places, the buildings or structures that house items, as well as their content where, as Hamilton points out, 'we imagine that...a collection is preserved

relatively unchanged for posterity' (Hamilton 2011, 319).⁷ By contrast, 'the archive' (in the singular and usually including the definite article, sometimes rendered 'the Archive') as a theoretical concept has wider scope. It is used figuratively (Zeitlyn 2012, 462) and often leads elsewhere (Stoler 2002, 87). The archive can be understood as a changing and generative space, not unlike more recent thinking about museums.

The 'archival turn', traceable most notably to the writings of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, has informed critical theory over recent decades. This is not to suggest that use of the archive is a new phenomenon, indeed, the archive has long been seen as a place to 'mine[]... 'nuggets of fact'' (Hamilton *et al.* 2002, 9). What is newer is the figuring of archive-as-subject (Hamilton 2013, 1; Stoler 2002, 86), as 'historical artifact' (Hamilton 2011, 320) and also, as noted above, as a productive space. David Zeitlyn recognizes that while 'Derrida and Foucault...see archives as hegemonic, characterizing ways of thought, modes of colonization, and the control of citizens... they also make clear that archives can be read subversively' (Zeitlyn 2012, 461). He identifies two such strategies adopted by scholars, namely 'against the grain' and 'along the grain' readings. For against the grain reading, Zeitlyn cites the joint work of John and Jean Comaroff who advocate an ethnography of archive that works both in and outside of 'the official record' (2012, 464). Staying within



Figure 13.2. Map showing the sites mentioned in this chapter.



Figure 13.3. ‘Cetshwayo ka Mpande’ by Alexander Bassano, half-plate glass negative, 1882. This studio photograph of a finely attired Cetshwayo was taken in London, where he caused quite a sensation, during his 1882 visit to England. Cetshwayo’s trip was a success – he achieved his primary objective of visiting Queen Victoria, at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, in order to lobby for his return from exile to Zululand. Here we see the royal, remembered for his intelligence and dignified manner (Marks 2004 [2006]), at ease in the studio (props creating a suitably luxurious ambience) and composed before the camera in an act of self-curation. Note especially the sitter’s direct gaze and fine, fashionable formal attire: one hand removed from an expensive, sleek glove in a genteel gesture, a possibly silk handkerchief peeping out of the breast pocket of a sumptuous, tailored double-breasted coat as well as the *de rigueur* top hat, removed to reveal his *isicoco* (head-ring), a potent symbol of his identity as a married Zulu man of high rank. This picture captures and conveys a particular image, that of an individual adept at navigating and negotiating life in two realms, here self-fashioning himself through hybrid attire. Photograph courtesy and copyright National Portrait Gallery, London (Photographs Collection, NPG x96403).

the archive, Ann Stoler’s ethnography advocates an examination of the ‘form’ and ‘context’ of documents, a reading ‘along the archival grain’ (Stoler 2002, 90 & 99). Stoler asserts that ‘[w]e need to read [the archive] for ... regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistakes – *along the archival grain*’ (2002, 100). Importantly, Zeitlyn reminds us that ‘Derida sees the archive as containing excess, disrupting its own bounds’ and that ‘[w]ith care and assiduity, it is possible to understand [subjugated] people from archives in ways never intended or envisaged by those creating or maintaining the archives’ (2012, 464). He suggests that ‘counter-readings allow the excavation of the voices (sometimes names) of subaltern and otherwise suppressed others from the archive’ (2012, 461), which seems particularly relevant to material assembled during the colonial period.

Methodologically, treating a collection – things – as archive entails the close study of the objects themselves, examining them for physical inscriptions and labels. This activity is necessarily undertaken alongside the investigation of the textual deposits more usually understood as archival. Owing to the fact that ethnography moved around at the British Museum (both physically and departmentally), these paper collections comprise material held at various archives across the institution. Employing an extended view of the archive, it has been necessary to gather pertinent information not only from the objects themselves and from Museum documentation, housed both within and without the responsible Department, but also from the wider textual and visual archive.

Biography and backstory

Hamilton (2011) has developed two linked concepts, ‘backstory’ and ‘biography’, to describe what might be considered the life story of an item or collection. Borrowed from the world of theatre, film and television, backstory is a device that creates a background or history for a fictional character. Within the archival context, backstory underscores the history crafted for an object once it is conceptualized as an archival object (Hamilton & Leibhammer 2014, 167; cf. Mbembe 2002, 21), a history left out of the ‘archival script’, i.e. in this instance the Museum records, or only partially glimpsed. Biography, as developed by Hamilton, is the life story of the museum object from the moment that it is recognized as an archival object, which I adapt and take to be the point of its accession into a museum collection. These two concepts, ‘backstory’ and ‘biography’, provide the means of tracking back and forward in time and of opening up what Hamilton and Leibhammer

term the ‘archival potential’ of objects (Hamilton 2013, 13; Hamilton & Leibhammer 2014, 155). This is not unlike Paul Basu and Ferdinand de Jong’s concept of ‘archival affordances’ (Basu & de Jong 2016), whereby we might seek new voices and narratives by revisiting and reworking historical material.

Briefly, the objects’ biography, their life story within the British Museum to date, can be traced from the Museum’s agency in accepting and registering them into the collections in 1917, to various acts of curatorial agency, which includes several ‘outings’ from storage for exhibition. A handful of these objects feature in the British Museum’s 1925 *Handbook to the Ethnographical Collections*, which suggests they were on display at around that time, where they were deployed as illustrative of the ‘fighting’, ‘warlike’ ‘Zulu’, the ‘dominant people’ of ‘British South Africa’ (British Museum 1925, 222–3). Fast-forward to the present and one of the headrests (Af1917,1103.3) can be seen on long-term display in the ‘Woodcarving’ section of the Museum’s Sainsbury African Galleries, its label simply reads ‘[w]ooden headrest Zulu people, South Africa, 20th century’. As mentioned above, a single milk-pail (Af1917,1103.8) from the collection was included in the exhibition, *South Africa: the art of a nation*.

But what of the objects’ backstory, their life story prior to their deposit at the Museum, a narrative seemingly overlooked by their biography thus far and omitted from the Museum’s archives?⁸ Correspondence traced to date within the Museum appears to be partial. It gives no details regarding these ‘African things’, also referred to as ‘South African specimens’.⁹ Rather, the primary information is apparently limited to copies of two letters to the donor (held by the Department of Britain, Europe and Pre-History), a note in the *Book of Presents* (in the British Museum’s Central Archive) and the accessions register entry, which simply states ‘[g]iven by Dow[ager] Visc[ountess] Wolseley... brought from Africa by F.M. [Field Marshall] Viscount Wolseley’.¹⁰ Of the twelve objects gifted by Viscountess Wolseley on this occasion (two are from Ghana), items one to ten are mostly annotated (probably historically) as originating from South Africa.¹¹ Closer inspection of the ten objects themselves also links them to their (field) collector, since the underside of each bears the inscription ‘Wolseley’ in white lettering. Here, we are presented with only a partial aspect of the objects’ provenance, as a further absence, or rather erasure, tantalizingly suggests – next to each inscription is another name, word or phrase, which in every case has been removed. The inscription as it stands, like the Museum documentation, recalls Wolseley’s agency, and to a lesser extent that of his wife as donor. Nevertheless, an exploration of the wider archive – including at the

British Library, online and at Hove Library (which houses the Wolseley Collections) – makes it possible to uncover further traces of agency.¹²

Backstory (pre-museum life story): Wolseley, no ordinary ‘Tommy’, and Cetshwayo kaMpande

Lauded as ‘the leading British soldier of his generation’ (Beckett 2004 [2008]) and ultimately commander-in-chief of the army (1895–1900), Field Marshal Viscount Garnet Joseph Wolseley (1833–1913) was a ‘self-made’ Anglo-Irish army officer and military reformer who became a household name thanks to the Third Anglo-Asante War (1873–4) (Fig. 13.4). Following the so-called Ashanti campaign in present day Ghana, Wolseley served twice in South Africa where he was primarily based in what is now KwaZulu-Natal province: firstly, in an administrative capacity (1875) and, secondly, as the general in charge following British defeat at Isandlwana during the Anglo-Zulu War (1879). Although dispatched to South Africa twice, archival and other material held outside the Museum suggests that the objects in question almost certainly derive from his second visit. The primary purpose of Wolseley’s return visit was to secure victory over the Zulu, but, much to his disappointment, this was achieved before he arrived at the front. Instead, Wolseley was tasked with hunting for King Cetshwayo who had fled his capital, Ulundi (also known as Ondini), which had been burnt at the hands of the British following the Zulu defeat.

Cetshwayo kaMpande (c. 1826–84) was the fourth in a line of kings, succeeding from Shaka kaSenzangakhona, to reign over the Zulu people. Cetshwayo inherited from his father, Mpande kaSenzangakhona, a still largely independent, self-sufficient kingdom, although for tactical reasons he allowed the neighbouring British colony of Natal to become progressively more involved in its affairs from 1861 onward (Marks 2004 [2006]). Cetshwayo had effectively reigned alongside his father as co-regent, but was formally installed as king in 1873, some time after his father’s death, at a ceremony presided over by Natal’s secretary for native affairs, Theophilus Shepstone (later Sir), at the instigation of Cetshwayo. It was this close relationship with the colony that would sow the seeds of Cetshwayo’s downfall, and ultimately see the destruction of the Zulu kingdom. Considering the Zulu kingdom an obstacle to confederation following the British annexation of the Boer republic of Transvaal in 1877, British authorities issued Cetshwayo with an impossible ultimatum in December 1878. Unable, and unwilling, to comply with its impossible demands, which included disbanding his army within 30 days, Cetshwayo became defiant. The British responded by invading Zululand in January



Figure 13.4. ‘Garnet Joseph Wolseley, 1st Viscount Wolseley’ by Paul Albert Besnard, oil on canvas, 1880. In this image Wolseley, the leading figure in the British army at the time, is depicted wearing military regalia. His calm, steely countenance displaying a sense of heroic accomplishment, while behind him smoulder Zululand homesteads, burnt out by British forces during the Anglo-Zulu War (1879). Completed in 1880, this full-length portrait undoubtedly commemorates British victory and what was seen as Wolseley’s success in suppressing the Zulu people by capturing their king and carving up the kingdom, which eventually paved the way for the incorporation of their territory into the Union of South Africa. Like Cetshwayo (Fig. 13.3), the sitter is shown with one glove off. However, Wolseley’s long gloves are decidedly less refined, while his bare hand, which reaches over the back of his spent horse in a gesture of control, suggests he has successfully completed the task at hand. In both the Cetshwayo and Wolseley portraits, dated within two years of each other, the exposed hand signifies the respective subjects’ agency. Photograph courtesy and copyright National Portrait Gallery, London (Primary Collection, NPG 1789). An equestrian statue of Wolseley stands at Horse Guards Parade, London.

1879 and after a series of humiliating British defeats, eventually secured victory at the Battle of Ulundi on 4 July 1879.

Correspondence housed in Hove reveals that during the pursuit of the King, and following his arrival at the ruined royal homestead, Wolseley wrote home to his wife, Louisa, saying ‘I am after bigger game & I hope my bag may not remain empty’.¹³ This hunting analogy relates to his hopes of ‘bagging’¹⁴ Cetshwayo and might equally be applied to his quest for high status ‘curiosities’,¹⁵ which he actively sought for himself and others, including no less a figure than Queen Victoria.¹⁶ Writing to his wife later the same month, once again from Ulundi where he had set up camp, Wolseley advises ‘I am picking up a few [K-word] curiosities to add to our museum’¹⁷ (i.e. the Wolseley’s own domestic display of objects, many of which had been acquired as campaign souvenirs during his career to date). Such was his penchant for collecting, that Wolseley advised his wife to seek the services of a jobbing coachman and carriage at the end of November that year, explaining ‘I shall have a lot of barbaric curiosities by the time I reach home’.¹⁸

While British authorities apparently did not officially condone trophy hunting during the Anglo-Zulu War, the army having ‘a decidedly ambivalent attitude towards loot’ during the nineteenth century (Knight 1992, 39), contemporary accounts suggest that the practice of seeking out and taking battle relics was rife.¹⁹ The rank and file generally picked up what they could, taking ‘pains to conceal anything they did take, as they were afraid of being made to disgorge’ (Tomasson 1881, 139) – presumably into the hands of their superiors. As Wolseley’s above-mentioned letter suggests, officers were more inclined to have the means to transport objects, large and small, and in greater quantity.

That the group of objects in question is by no means ordinary, and that Wolseley was no ordinary Tommy, is of import. Wolseley’s letters to his wife reveal that, true to form,²⁰ he was particularly keen on acquiring royal objects – articles intimately associated with Cetshwayo, including a lock of the King’s hair²¹ and one of his ‘necklaces of lions claws’²² – items charged with agency. However, the letters are strangely silent with regard to his acquisition of the objects now at the British Museum. Be that as it may, further evidence points to the extent of their significance, for Wolseley publicly disclosed further information about these items during his lifetime.

Eager to be kept in the public eye, on several occasions Wolseley welcomed the press into his home where his trophies were featured. Although the Wolseleys moved house a good deal, it seems that care was taken to display the ten objects in question more or less

as a group. Surveying the 'relics of [Wolseley's] latest campaigns' on view in his Mayfair, London home, a newspaper article describes the hall where:

Against the wall is a large slab of Italian marble... on which is placed a reduction in bronze of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius... flanked on either side by Zulu milk pails, while beneath the table repose in peace the Brobdingnagian beef dishes and beer pots of ill fated Cetshwayo (New York Times, 14/11/ 1885, 2).

Several years later, when the Wolseleys were living in Ireland, another visitor described how:

[O]n the marble slab [of a table in the entrance hall] are a couple of Cetshwayo's milk-pails – yellow vases about one-and-a-half feet long. Underneath are more milk-pails, a wooden dish big enough to hold half a sheep, and some Zulu

pillows of wood. These were all taken from Cetshwayo's kraal (How 1893, 157).

Crucially, this article also includes an illustration of the milk-pails, meat-platter as well as two headrests from the collection, in what appears to be an outdoor arrangement, identifying them as 'CETEWAYO'S...' (How 1893, 180) (Fig. 13.5).²³ Two later photographs, now at Hove, dating to 1905 and 1907 respectively, when the Wolseleys were living in a grace-and-favour residence at Hampton Court Palace in greater London, show at least some of the objects in a similar configuration (Fig. 13.6).²⁴

Wolseley was clearly keen to display Cetshwayo's property prominently and did so according to what can be described as the 'trophy method', which Annie Coombes suggests functioned 'to the glory of those Europeans associated with them' (Coombes 1994, 71). In other words, they commemorated Wolseley and his actions, just as his wife's donation of the collection to

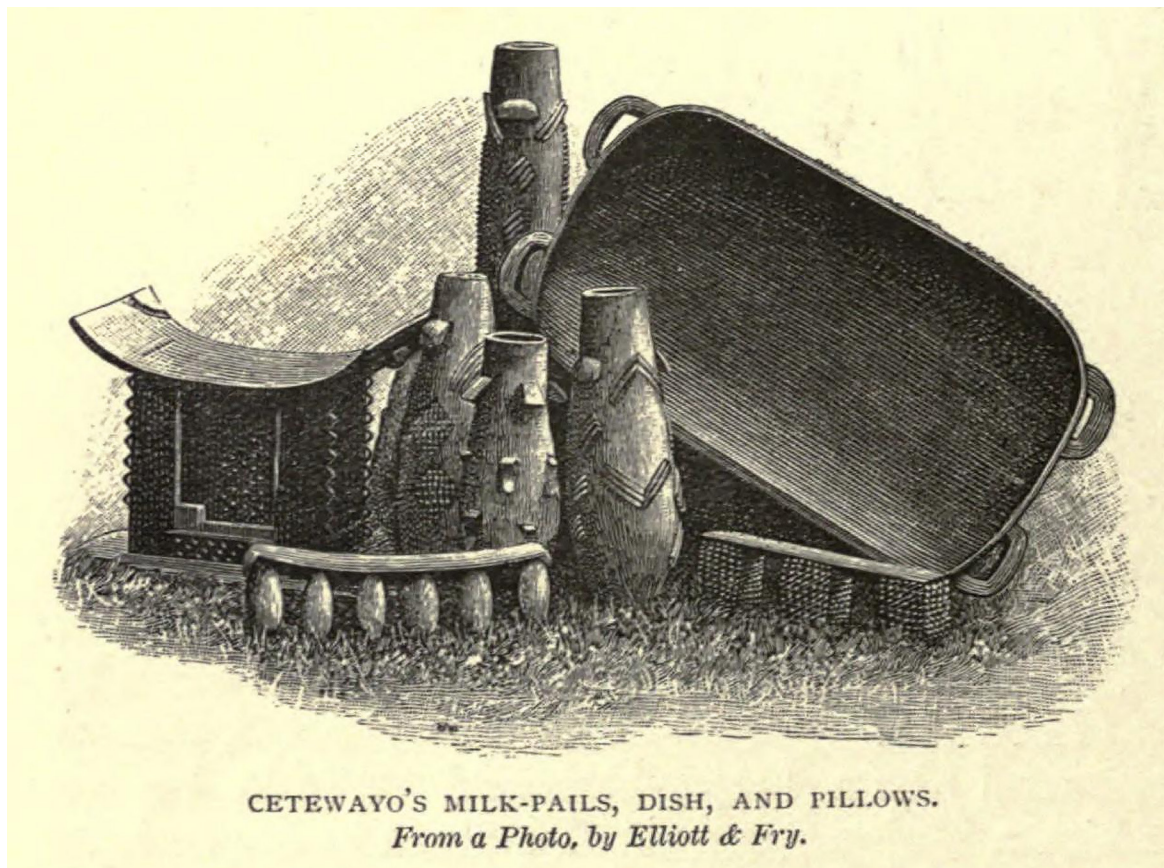


Figure 13.5. An illustration of the milk-pails, meat-platter and two headrests from the collection identifying them as 'CETEWAYO'S...'. This image, copied from a photograph, was published in journalist Harry How's 1893 *Illustrated Interviews* p. 180. The publication featured a chapter dedicated to Wolseley, a famous figure, which first appeared as an 1892 article by the same author in *Strand Magazine*.



Figure 13.6. Two photographs from the Wolseley family, dating to 1905 and 1907 respectively, showing some of the objects on display in their home, then a grace-and-favour residence at Hampton Court Palace. Images courtesy and copyright Wolseley Collection, Brighton & Hove City Libraries (scrapbook vol. 15 [1922], unpaginated).

the British Museum may have been intended to commemorate him, regardless of whether or not she was fully aware of their provenance or significance. For Wolseley, these objects likely served as reminders of his own agency in capturing the King and subsequent 'settlement', or carving up, of Zululand. Rather frustratingly, the exact circumstances surrounding their field collection remain uncertain.

In the personal letters consulted at Hove, which appear to have been weeded and are in places subject to redaction, there seems to be no mention of these important objects. It is likely that, in the face of the British advance, they had been hidden in an attempt at withholding them, which might be regarded as a form of indigenous agency (see Byrne *et al.* 2011, 7).

One possibility is that they were uncovered by British soldiers among other personal belongings in a cave where they had been hidden – an incident depicted in an *Illustrated London News* engraving (11/10/1879, 328) (Fig. 13.7).²⁵ Paulina Dlamini (a Zulu

woman who later converted to Christianity, having formerly served as an attendant to Cetshwayo within the *isigodlo*, the King's private enclosure) is recorded as stating that as the British closed in, the '*isidoglo* girls were ordered to collect all the king's personal belongings and to take them to a safe hiding place' (Filter & Bourquin 1986, 70). With the help of two manservants, whom she names as Lugele Sibiya and Mfezi Thwala, they secreted the King's belongings 'into a deep cave' at Hlophekhulu (Filter & Bourquin 1986, 70). Dlamini continues:

On our return we reported to the king that all goods were safely hidden. In reality, however, the king's possessions had been taken to safety for the benefit of those in charge; because when the king was captured and taken away, his possessions were retrieved by the men who had hidden them, and who enriched themselves thereby (Filter & Bourquin 1986, 70–1).

Dlamini's testimony is striking, for it seems to implicate Sibiya and Thwala as agents in the 'collection' of objects, possibly including those that would end up in Wolseley's hands. While we might reasonably imagine that African agency is absent in the majority of cases of looted material, Dlamini's account may suggest otherwise in this particular instance.

Another possibility is that some or all of the Wolseley objects had been buried within the royal homestead for safekeeping, sparing them from the flames. Writing in his journal on Sunday 10 August, the very day he reached 'the Royal Kraal of Ulundi' (Cetshwayo's homestead) where he set up camp, Wolseley casually remarks: '[t]here are large quantities

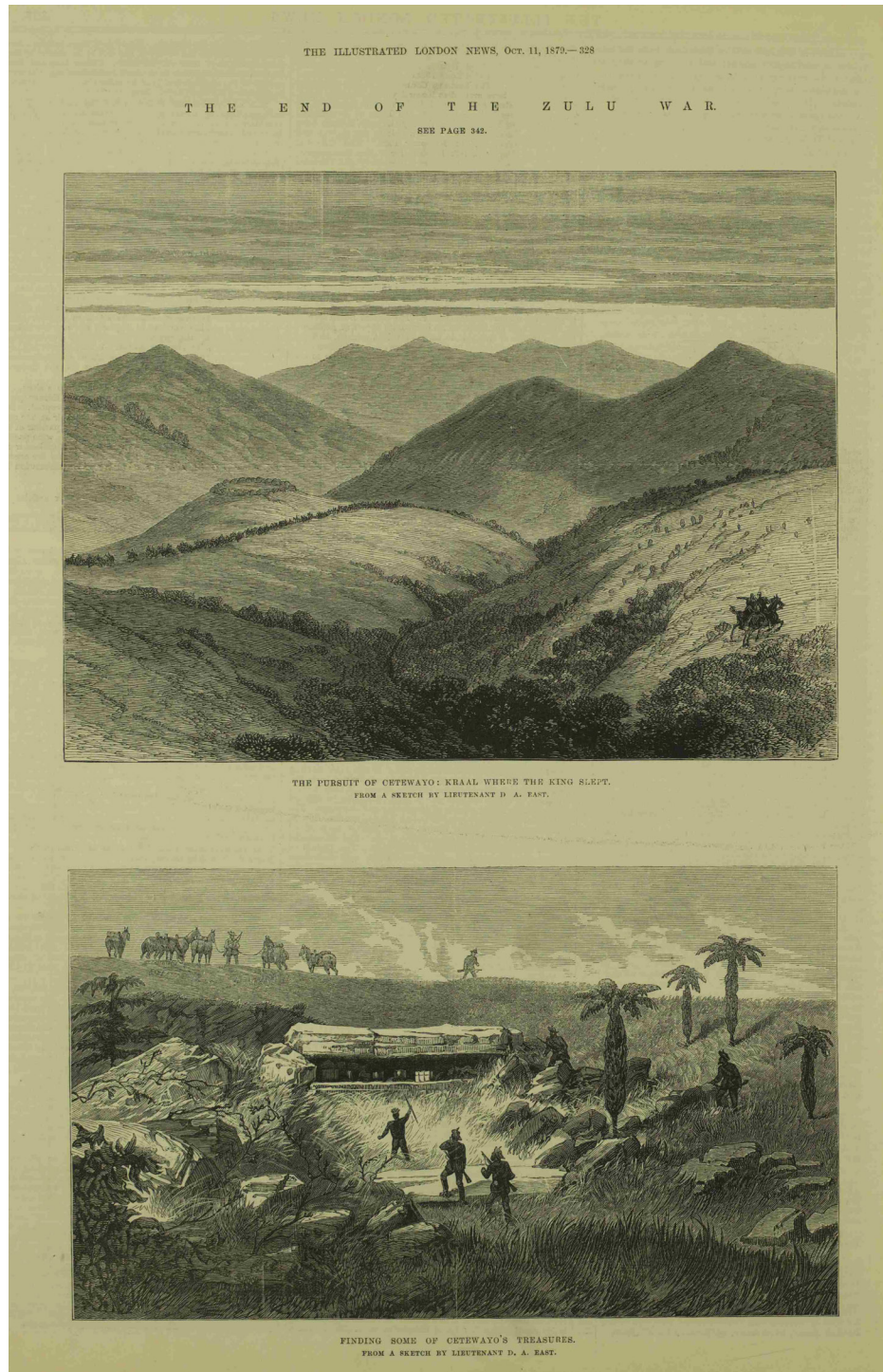


Figure 13.7. Possible find-spot?: 'The End of the Zulu War...finding some of Cetewayo's treasures', Illustrated London News engraving, 11/10/1879, p. 328. Events of the Anglo-Zulu War were closely followed 'back home' and the prospect of Zulu treasures must have sparked interest as the (lower) scene imagined for a popular audience suggests.

of corn here: we opened some of the pits & found all sorts of private property concealed in them' (Preston 1973, 81). Unfortunately, he does not divulge any details regarding the 'private property', although a newspaper reported that '[a] day was spent [after Wolseley's arrival] in unearthing His Majesty's domestic furniture – beer pots, grease pots, beads, spoons, snuff boxes, &c., &c.' (*Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette*, 11/12/1879, 4).²⁶ According to another nineteenth-century source, grain pits were capacious and had fired 'sides...as hard as stone' (Drayson 1858, 28).²⁷ They also had the additional benefit of being secreted within the cattle byre, a 'place visited by the ancestral spirits' (Hooper 1996, 74), making them an ideal hiding place for valuables.²⁸

After more than a month on the run, the fugitive King was captured and sent into exile, while his kingdom was divided into thirteen chiefdoms. Eventually successful in his appeal, Cetshwayo was later allowed to return to Zululand following a diplomatic visit to Britain to meet with Queen Victoria in 1882. He died at Eshowe less than two years later. Wolseley, on the other hand, had swiftly concluded his tour of duty in South Africa and returned to London, presumably with his booty.²⁹

Closer scrutiny of the erased element of the inscriptions underneath each object, almost certainly applied before the collection arrived at the British Museum, reveals that these objects had, at some time or other, been wrongly identified as spoils from another of Wolseley's campaigns, that of 'Coomassie' (Kumasi).³⁰ Wolseley's still visible name acts in much the same way as his name within the Museum records – it underscores his link with the collection, effectively memorializing him by prioritizing his agency, while any mention of Cetshwayo remained absent.

Biography (museum life story): 'ethnographization' and beyond

The association of the collection with Wolseley was not necessarily always the primary one at the Museum, where this material was immediately re-categorized as 'ethnographic'. Since its establishment in 1753, the British Museum has housed African-made material – at least one 'artificial curiosity' from South Africa survives from Sir Hans Sloane's founding collection. Early beginnings notwithstanding, the South Africa collections only began to grow significantly a century later (well after the British wrestled the Cape from the Dutch and started settling in the region), by which time the term 'ethnographical' was increasingly applied to this kind of material.³¹ Although it is not always clear exactly what was meant by the terms 'ethnography'

or 'ethnology',³² the British Museum's own *Handbook* (1910 and 1925), provides some insight:

[e]thnography is that branch of the general science of man (Anthropology) descriptive of the manners and customs of particular peoples, and of their development from savagery towards civilization...especially...those races which have no written records and are unknown to history (British Museum 1910, 10; British Museum 1925, 9).

Ethnography, or museum ethnography to be more precise, which Anthony Shelton critiques as an 'imperial science' (Shelton 2000) and calls the equation of 'material objects with specific cultures' (Shelton 1997, 33) – is embroiled in the colonial past and has had a fraught relationship with the idea of history. History was effectively denied to many non-Western cultures (inasmuch as the existence of written records – a textual archive – were understood to constitute history). Similarly, history was largely denied to their material culture, which was, and sometimes still is, presented as 'frozen in a historyless stasis' (Pietz 1996 cited in Byrne *et al.* 2011, 14). The privileging of tribal identifications in museum records, alongside the details of the (almost invariably white) donor/seller and, where known, field-collector, has left us with collections that are burdened with the weight of inherited colonial frameworks and assumptions.

The ethnographic collections at the British Museum were built up largely through fortuitous donations, as in the present case, and to a lesser extent purchases. These have been closely associated with what British Museum curator Ben Burt broadly defines as 'the colonial enterprise' (Burt 1998, 10). Prior to acquisition by the Museum, African objects had, for the most part, been collected as 'curiosities' in the field by amateur collectors such as travellers, missionaries, colonial officials and, like here, military personnel. Over the history of the British Museum, the ethnography collections were located within various departmental formations, emerging as a defined section in 1866 and finally as a department in its own right in 1946. In 2004 the Ethnography Department, as it was then called, was restructured and given its present name, the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, ostensibly signalling the end of ethnography at the British Museum. However, large parts of the new department's collections, from South Africa and elsewhere, remain the legacy of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial collecting, having been subjected within the Museum to processes of 'ethnographization', which have asserted tribal identifications

over historical ones. These museum practices have served to compound collecting processes, obscuring especially (but not only) forms of African agency.

Conclusion

If, as former Keeper of Ethnography at the British Museum, John Mack has suggested, '[i]t can be argued – indeed it has been argued elsewhere – that there is no such thing as an 'ethnographic' object, merely objects regarded ethnographically' (Mack 2000, 25), then this account has attempted to regard these objects differently. In aiming to uncover an alternative view on this collection, I have drawn upon two distinct critical interventions, namely the current theories of 'agency' and 'archive'. Through sustained engagement with the 'extended archive', the present contribution sets out the type of detailed research into museum collections urgently required amidst the current cultural climate.

Little was recorded or known about these ten objects when they were regarded as 'ethnographic specimens'. However, the present archival engagement has made it possible to re-inscribe the agency of various Africans – including possibly the two alleged artefactual abductors and most significantly perhaps Cetshwayo – in relation to these objects, allowing them to be added to a small corpus of items that can be provenanced to Ulundi, the royal homestead of '[t]he Last Independent Zulu King' (Wood 1996, 62).³³ As head of the homestead, it is likely that Cetshwayo would have commissioned the milk-pails and meat-platter from a highly-skilled carver, who himself as an agent would have made various decisions,³⁴ whereas the headrests were possibly presented to the king as gifts. One of the headrests and the two vessels standing on legs (of a type previously thought to have been made for Europeans) open up intriguing questions as to their function and origin, addressed elsewhere (Elliott Weinberg 2019).

Undoubtedly, Wolseley would have considered these ten objects of commanding presence to be his treasures, but there is every suggestion that they are Cetshwayo's *amagugu*.

Acknowledgements

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access to the British Museum collections. I also wish to acknowledge my PhD supervisor, John Mack, the staff at Hove Library and elsewhere, as well as colleagues who commented on my paper at the conference and particularly Chris Wingfield for feedback on an earlier draft of this contribution.

Notes

1. British Museum accession numbers Af1917,1103.1–10.
2. The text indicated that the piece was made 'before 1880', which is less broad than the Sainsbury African Galleries' date for the headrest (discussed below).
3. For an overview of known objects from the Zulu kingdom see Wood 1996.
4. Suggesting a Northern Ndebele provenance, associated with groups that today occupy western Zimbabwe.
5. Various 'ZULU', 'Natal/Zulu' and '?Zulu'.
6. The notion of 'tribe' has been well critiqued by scholars working on southern African material. See for example Vail (1989) and more recently Hamilton & Leibhammer (2016).
7. See for example Zeitlyn 2012, 462; Enwezor 2008, 11; Mbembe 2002, 19; Stoler 2002, 94.
8. Anitra Nettleton's (2007) discussion speculates that the headrests from this collection were acquired following military action, but does not pursue this line further.
9. See C.H. Read to Lady Wolseley, 13 and 16 October 1917, British Museum, Department of Britain, Europe and Pre-History archive (BEP), 'Letters Out' 1916–1918. Curiously, no letters from Lady Wolseley pertaining to this donation were to be found in 'Letters In'.
10. BM BEP Read to Lady Wolseley 15/10/1917; Read to Lady Wolseley 16/10/1917.
11. 'SOUTH AFRICA' appears against item one (and presumably applies to item two to four); 'S. AFRICA' appears against items five to eight and no country is indicated for items nine to ten. It should be noted that at this time 'South Africa' was often used in much the same way as today's 'Southern Africa'.
12. The Wolseley Collections, housed at Hove Library, East Sussex comprise the Wolseley Papers and Wolseley/RUSI (Royal United Services Institute) papers. The history of the Wolseley Collections (of correspondence and papers) is complex and Hove's holdings are incomplete. However, they form probably the largest part of the greater 'Wolseley archive', now dispersed (see Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts 1970, 2 & 187).
13. 12 Aug 1879, Hove Library W/P 8/12-19.
14. Wolseley to his wife, 13 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/12-19.
15. See for example Wolseley to his wife, 26 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28.
16. Wolseley to his wife, 29 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28.
17. 26 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28. The highly offensive term 'kaffir' (also 'kafir') was commonly used to refer to black South Africans.
18. 30 Nov 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28.

19. Such as examples cited in Knight 1992; Stevenson 2005; Maritz & Maritz 2008.
20. Wolseley acquired Asante royal objects during his previous campaign in Ghana, including famously an umbrella.
21. The lock of hair was intended for Frances, their young daughter (Wolseley to his wife, 30 May 1879; 4 June 1879; 13 August 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/1-11).
22. Wolseley announces to his wife 'I have managed to secure one of Cetewayo's necklaces of lions [sic] claws – none but a very few of the highest in the land were allowed to wear such a distinction' (29 Aug 1879, Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28).
23. The composition includes an Asante stool. There is possibly also a ninth object, obscured.
24. Hove Library, Wolseley Collections, scrapbook vol. 15 [1922], unpaginated.
25. The etching is captioned 'Finding Some of Cetewayo's Treasures. From a Sketch by Lieutenant D.A. East'. The cave depicted bears some resemblance to an illustration of 'Cetewayo's Gunpowder Magazine' in another publication (*Graphic*, 11/10/ 1879, 365).
26. Wolseley's wife accused him of 'composing his letters with an eye on posterity' (Beckett 2004 [2008], 5) and it is possible that Wolseley wished to keep secret the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of these objects. Regarding the find-spot, it is possible, but less likely, that the objects were found elsewhere. For example, Wolseley writes to his wife about 'a pillow [headrest] taken in the hut where Ketewayo [sic] intended to sleep in when he was taken prisoner' (Hove WP 8/20-28, Wolseley to his wife, 3/09/1879). However, he indicates that he would be sending this headrest as a gift to Lady Constance Stanley.
27. This account by Captain Alfred W. Drayson, who records having fallen, along with his horse, into 'an old corn-pit, about twelve feet in depth and seven in diameter. The sides were as hard as stone, for a fire is always kept burning for a day or so in the interior when the pit is first made' (Drayson 1858, 28). Although this incident occurred in Natal (Drayson 1858, 27), rather than within the Zulu kingdom, grain-pits appear to have been of similar construction across the Thukela River in what was termed 'Zulu country'.
28. Here Hooper cites Berglund (1976).
29. It is possible that the objects were sent home at another time. For example, on 29 August 1879 Wolseley writes to his wife telling her that he 'shall send home a few of the claws [from Cetshwayo's lion claw necklace] by Gifford [aide-de-camp, Edric Frederick Gifford] (Hove Library, W/P 8/20-28).
30. Based on my own experience of studying the South Africa collections first hand, these inscriptions are not characteristic of British Museum markings of the period or later and were almost certainly not carried out at the Museum. The inscriptions all appear to be done by the same hand; one particular to this group of objects. The erased inscriptions for objects five through 10 were examined under ultraviolet light and appear to read 'Coomassie 1873'. The erased inscription under object one was illegible, an adhesive label covers the erased portion of object two, while objects three and four were examined with the naked eye.
31. According to H.J. Braunholtz, who from 1913 worked with the collections and eventually became Keeper of Ethnography, the word 'ethnographical' was first used in official reports at the Museum in 1845 (Braunholtz 1938, 5).
32. The British Museum always preferred the term to 'ethnology'.
33. According to Wood's exhibition catalogue 'few authenticated artefacts associated with the [Zulu] kings have survived' (1996, 43) and less that a handful of objects are said to have been taken from the King's homestead following the Battle of Ulundi.
34. For a discussion of these object types, see Kloppe 1991, 85. Historically, within South Africa certain materials and/or technologies would have been the preserve of either men or women, as were the creation of various types of objects. Women, for example, were beadworkers, while men were carvers (Nettleton 2012).

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The pasts and presence of art in South Africa

In 2015, #RhodesMustFall generated the largest student protests in South Africa since the end of apartheid, subsequently inspiring protests and acts of decolonial iconoclasm across the globe. The performances that emerged in, through and around #RhodesMustFall make it clear how analytically fruitful Alfred Gell's notion that art is 'a system of social action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it' can be, even when attempting to account for South Africa's very recent history.

What light can this approach shed on the region's far longer history of artistic practices? Can we use any resulting insights to explore art's role in the very long history of human life in the land now called South Africa? Can we find a common way of talking about 'art' that makes sense across South Africa's long span of human history, whether considering engraved ochre, painted rock shelters or contemporary performance art?

This collection of essays has its origins in a conference with the same title, arranged to mark the opening of the British Museum's major temporary exhibition *South Africa: the art of a nation* in October 2016. The volume represents an important step in developing a framework for engaging with South Africa's artistic traditions that begins to transcend nineteenth-century frameworks associated with colonial power.

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