Emmett & White
ANTIQUES & INTERIORS

19th-Century Oromo Ethiopian Carved Wooden Headrest

£225

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REF: 7095

Height: 16 cm (6.3")

Width: 16 cm (6.3")

Depth: 6 cm (2.4")

Diameter: 12 cm (4.7")

Description

A finely carved 19th-century wooden headrest from the Oromo people of Ethiopia. Formed from a single piece of timber, it has a beautifully restrained sculptural presence, with a gently curved upper support raised above a solid base. The simple, balanced profile reflects the skill of its maker and the long tradition of functional woodcarving in the Horn of Africa.

Headrests such as this served a practical role as portable pillows, keeping the head elevated while resting or sleeping. In doing so, they helped preserve carefully arranged hair and offered welcome protection from dust and insects. Yet they were also highly personal objects, often made to last for generations and valued for the quality of their carving, their tactile surfaces, and the distinctive character developed through use.

The form is both utilitarian and quietly expressive: every curve and proportion is shaped for comfort, stability, and ease of carrying. Its hand-worked surface and natural patina give the piece a warmth and immediacy that only time and handling can achieve. The understated silhouette also makes it an especially compelling example of African vernacular design, where everyday function and sculptural beauty are inseparable.

Now presented as an object of display, this headrest would make an evocative addition to a collection of African art, ethnographic objects, or antique woodwork. It would sit equally well in a thoughtfully assembled interior, on a bookshelf, console, or cabinet, where its architectural form and rich surface can be appreciated.

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