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Abstract

This dissertation examines the social, cultural and economic significance of locally forged field-hoes, known as *amageja* in Zulu. A key question I have engaged in this study is whether gender-based divisions of labour in nineteenth-century African communities of this region, which largely consigned agricultural work to women, also affect attitudes towards the tools they used. I argue that examples of field-hoes held in eight museum collections form an important but neglected archive of "hoeculture", the form of subsistence crop cultivation based on the use of manual implements, within the Phongolo-Mzimkhulu geographic region that roughly approximates to the modern territory of KwaZulu-Natal. In response to observations made by Maggs (1991), namely that a disparity exists in the numbers of field-hoes collected by museums in comparison with weapons, I conducted research to establish the present numbers of amageja in these museums, relative to spears in the respective collections. The dissertation assesses the historical context that these metallurgical artefacts were produced in prior to the twentieth-century and documents views on iron production, spears and hoes or agriculture recorded in oral testimony from African sources, as well as Zulu-language idioms that make reference to hoes. I furthermore examine the collecting habits and policies of private individuals and museums in this region from the nineteenth-century onwards, and the manner in which hoes are used in displays, in order to provide recommendations on how this under-utilised category of material culture should be incorporated into future exhibitions.

Key words: field-hoe, *amageja*, gender, iron, power, museums, collections, Zulu.

Steven Kotze, July 2018