



Figure 1 (opposite).
Spoon (length 30 cm) and label, Af.3154. British Museum. Label reads 'Spoons made by a chief of the Amacele tribe of Kaffirs; his only tool being a piece of iron or a spear. Natal. Capt. Garden.' © Trustees of the British Museum. Photograph: Catherine Elliott Weinberg

Figure 2 (opposite).
Spoon (length 30.4 cm), Af.3155. British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum. Photograph: Catherine Elliott Weinberg

'The Name of Zulu is Now Given': Provenancing Objects from Colonial Natal in the British Museum's Christy Collection

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This essay focuses on a selection of mid-nineteenth-century objects from the Christy Collection at the British Museum. It considers how the classification of this material first as the work of 'Natal Kafirs' and subsequently as 'Zulu' obscures its complex provenance.¹

The Christy Collection is constituted by the objects amassed by London-based Henry Christy (1810–65), as well as additions made to the collection since it passed to the British Museum. Using a biographical approach to people and objects, and taking the materiality of these largely pristine objects into account, this essay discusses a number of items, mostly from the Colony of Natal, which found their way into the Christy Collection from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and from the London 1862 International Exhibition. The Kew objects in question were collected by three British individuals – the first Anglican Bishop of Natal, John William Colenso (1814–83), Major Robert Jones Garden (1821–70) and John Sanderson (1820–81) – while the 1862 International Exhibition objects were assembled by a fourth, Dr Robert James Mann (1817–86).

By treating the British Museum and archives consulted as field sites, this essay reveals more specific provenance for the objects with regard to the mostly anonymous makers and their loci. Using a biographical approach to people and objects, it also aims to draw out a number of people associated with certain objects and to trace some of the 'life stories' of a selection of items. This endeavour, it is hoped, will help to further illuminate the historical material culture of the Thukela-Mzimkhulu region,² the classification of which, first as that of 'Natal Kafirs' and then as 'Zulu', is misleading.

'The name of Zulu', provenance and the Museum as field site

The objects with which this essay is concerned, mostly items of personal adornment and articles of everyday and ceremonial use made by indigenous men and women in what is now the southern part of South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, were conveyed from the newly established British Colony of Natal to the imperial metropolis. Sent in some

1 This essay restates and develops aspects of my MA thesis, 'The Classification of Mid-Nineteenth Century Natal Objects from the Christy Collection at the British Museum', University College London, 2011. See further elaboration on a facet of this material in C. Elliott, C. Cartwright and P. Kevin, 'Maker, Material and Method: Reinstating an Indigenously Made Chair from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', *British Museum Technical Research Bulletin* 7, 2013: 15–30.

2 I consider these pieces to be works of art, but as this particular twentieth-century reclassification is not central to my argument, I have chosen to refer to them here more broadly as objects of material culture.