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**TITLE:** The Spiritual Significance and Conservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History

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Tsela tsweu!!

Thokozani!!

Camagu!!

# The Spiritual Significance and Conservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History

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## ABSTRACT

*There is a lot of published literature in the disciplines of Archaeology and Anthropology on ceramics that amongst others focus on their typologies, dating sequences, manufacture and trade with reference to groups of people that inhabit the Southern African region. Additionally, several studies have focussed on the use of ceramic objects including figurines in ritual practices of these societies. However, the emphasis has been differential and skewed as it has largely been focussed on certain cultures such as that of the Zulu group or linked to archaeological sites, to the exclusion of other groups. For example, there is scant literature that focuses on the description or discussion of ceramic vessels by the Basotho-Batswana people of Southern Africa, who, like the Zulu have an active ceramic tradition. Additionally there are few studies that look at the intangible value and significance of ceramic vessels used for rituals and ceremony. As such all ceramic vessels in museum collections tend to be classified and stored as household wares for the transport, storage, preparation and serving of food, thus neglecting the possibility that some of these vessels should be treated as sacred objects and thus different protocols applied for their continued storage, access, handling and care in the museum environment. The thrust of this dissertation is therefore to widen our understanding and knowledge of the spiritual significance of certain African ceramic vessels by focussing particular attention on Sotho-Tswana ancestral vessels in the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History, with the ultimate objective of encouraging the appropriate recognition and preservation of traditional African ceramic vessels.*

## KEYWORDS

African ceramics vessels, Basotho-Batswana spirituality, Cultural heritage, Heritage conservation, Conservation of sacred objects, Indigenous knowledge systems, Museum collections, Spiritual objects.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**DNMCH:** Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History

**ICOM:** International Council of Museums

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**SAMA:** South African Museums Association

**SAIHSC:** South African Institute for Heritage Science and Conservation

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to the mini-dissertation by outlining in broad brushstrokes its concerns and motivating an argument for the study. Firstly, it introduces the terminology used in the research as numerous Sesotho-Setswana<sup>1</sup> terms and phrases are repeatedly used. It then formulates the context and aims of the research and discusses the key research questions which guide the research and its limitations and delimitations. Finally, the chapter concludes with an outline structure of the chapters.

### 1.1. Clarification of the terminology used

The focus of the research is on the ceramic vessels of the Basotho-Batswana people, and as such Sesotho and Setswana terminology is repeatedly used. The research focuses on cultural heritage aspects of these two groups as they represent my personal and familial heritage, as I am a South African with both Sesotho and Setswana ancestry from both my maternal and paternal side of my family. Using the appropriate cultural terminology not only pays homage to the people that created the vessels but also assists in popularising the terminology for use within the greater, mostly anglicised, South African context. This is not a new approach and can be seen in many cross-cultural heritage texts where indigenous terminology and phrases are used to refer to the material culture of that particular indigenous group such as First Nations, Native Americans, Maori etc (Peters, 2017).

On a more practical level, it is not always possible to accurately convey meaning across languages, and concepts run the risk of being lost in translation. As such wherever possible and without losing meaning, I have translated these words and phrases as closely as possible; whilst where this was not possible, I have opted to retain the original Sesotho-Setswana terminology.

The title of the research refers to ‘The Spiritual Significance and Conservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History’. ‘*Dinkho*’, is the plural form for ‘*Nkho*’, the Setswana-Sesotho<sup>2</sup> name for a ceramic vessel. *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are special ceramics used for ancestral ceremonies. Mönning (1967:11) describes the tribes of the Sotho

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<sup>1</sup> The Basotho and Batswana people are found in Southern Africa. Basotho reside mostly in the Free State and Gauteng Provinces of South Africa and in the independent kingdom of Lesotho, which is a land locked country surrounded by South Africa. The Batswana people are mainly found in Botswana and the North West province of South Africa..

<sup>2</sup> Setswana-Sesotho refers to language, whereas Basotho and Batswana refer to the people.

group as “scattered over a vast area of southern Africa, and largely as a result of geographic isolation, as well as certain historical factors, including diverse external influences, they developed into three distinct ethnic sections, namely the west Sotho or Tswana of Botswana and western Transvaal; the south Sotho of Lesotho and the Orange Free State; and the Transvaal Sotho or East Sotho of the northern and Eastern Transvaal.”

## 1.2. Contextualisation and aim of the research

Ceramic vessels for centuries have been used across the world by different cultures and groups for various purposes. *Dinkho*, likewise, have many uses that include being used as decorative objects, for the preparation, cooking and storage of food and beverages. Typically, the vessels’ function is inferred in its name, thus for instance, *Nkho ya metsi*, is a ceramic vessel used to carry water from the spring and stored for household use specifically for drinking and cooking. *Nkho ya bojwala*, stores traditional beer and *Nkho ya dijo* stores food. Ceramic vessels also find use during ancestral ceremonies as containers to carry different offerings to the ancestors that include traditional beer, blood from sacrificed animals, cow dung, food and water. These vessels are referred to as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, translated as ancestral vessels. Although these practices are still relevant and regularly practised today, they were regarded as ‘dark’ and ‘heathen’ by European settlers during colonial and missionary times. As a result, people from many cultural groups, including the Basotho and Batswana, were encouraged to give up these perceived ‘heathen’ practices, as well as the objects of ritual and worship connected to them, such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, and accept Christianity instead (Rakotsoane, 1996, Amanze, 2003, Thondlana, 2020). During the 1930’s, the South African State reinforced this separation from heritage through the *Witchcraft Suppression Act* which actively encouraged the confiscation of “articles connected with forbidden practices”. In the 1940s the South African Museums Association (SAMA) lobbied for such confiscated objects to be sent to the nearest public museum, instead of being burned by the police as was the practice at the time (Shaw, 1940:58).

As a result, of the above-mentioned practices being rife in southern Africa, many ceramic vessels which have entered museum collections, such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, have lost their identity and their connections to the people who considered them as sacred/spiritual objects. (Seabela, Interview January 30, 2020). With this in mind, it is conceivable that objects accessioned as a result of research activity, would have all the appropriate associated cultural information such as origin and function noted down in museum accession registers. Where

conversely, this may not be the case of objects that were obtained through confiscation, or ‘willingly’ and *anonymously* abandoned for fear of stigmatisation. These ‘orphaned’ vessels later entered museum collections through donations, or active collection where associated information was not captured, an all too common occurrence as Motsmayi (2019) encountered when researching *Difala* vessels of the Sotho-Tswana. The poor documentation methodology employed by museums may account for the classification of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* vessels as general household wares. This sadly negates the spiritual dimension of these vessels, and fails to alert museum staff of the sensitive nature of these objects as religious wares in terms of storage, handling, conservation and exhibition. Museological practice tends to treat all objects according to the same standard procedures, irrespective of the culture from which they originate or their past value and significance to those cultures. “The items are seen as artifacts, separate from their culture, rather than as cultural links between the past, present and future” (Ogden, 2004: 1). Additionally, this lack of information affects their interpretation for research and exhibition, and negates alternate narratives beyond the appearance of a kitchen vessel. Sadly, this has also been the case at Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (DNMCH) where the case study is based.

The purpose of the research is thus to address this knowledge gap and contribute an original body of knowledge on the Basotho-Batswana ancestral ceramics. The purpose of the research is achieved by drawing attention to this previously misattributed category of objects and encourage the identification, documentation, and preservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*<sup>3</sup> as a separate grouping of ceramic vessels. Through interviews and research based on a selection of vessels from the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History in the City of Tshwane, I hope to further the growing interest in African sacred objects research by offering guidelines for the continued preservation of their materiality, while being mindful of appropriate protocols to preserve their spiritual importance and power. In addition to contributing to knowledge of African sacred objects generally, and *Dinkho tsa Badimo* specifically, the research also hopes to reveal indigenous knowledge practices of care and maintenance of traditional artefacts, to inform current institutionalised conservation practice. Although traditional modes of built heritage conservation and maintenance have been explored in Africa (Joffroy, 2005; Sidi, 2012), little research appears in the academic record on similar practice for objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

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<sup>3</sup> Plural name for ancestral vessels.

### **1.3. Key research questions, limitations and delimitations**

#### **1.3.1. Key Questions**

Three main key questions were identified which prompted this research, namely:

1. *Dinkho tsa Badimo* have traditionally had spiritual significance for the Basotho-Batswana group in that they are used for ritual purposes. Are *Dinkho tsa Badimo* regarded as sacred by originator communities and those that use them?
2. Identifying *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as sacred objects has both curatorial and conservation implications including protocols for access, use, handling and treatment to retain their spiritual significance. Can *Dinkho tsa Badimo* be identified as a specific category of ceramics that can be separated from other cooking, serving and storage vessels?
3. Are there cultural protocols that guide the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History in the upkeep of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*? To what extent have they been used in the access, storage, handling, and conservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*? Have they been effective in the conservation of the spiritual value of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*?

#### **1.3.2. Limitations of the Research**

This research was done under lockdown due to the COVID 19 global pandemic which made it difficult to meet and conduct interviews face to face with all the prospective interviewees. The lockdown also affected the amount of time that I could spend at DNCHM at the collection and thus limited my sample size. In order to lessen the effects on the study, I was in constant communication on the telephone with the interviewees and Staff members at DNCHM.

#### **1.3.3. Delimitation of the Research**

The research is strictly limited to the study of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* used by the Basotho-Batswana during ancestral ceremonies and rituals. Thus, it does not cover any other ceramic vessels used by the two groups and does not focus on other groups such as for example the Venda, Swati, Zulu etc.



#### 1.4. Chapter outline

Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of the research by contextualising it and outlining the content of the different chapters. This chapter clarifies terminology used in the study and contextualises the research. It also outlines the aim of the research and discusses key research questions as well as the limitations and the delimitations of the research.

Chapter 2 reviews available literature on traditional Southern African ceramics similar to *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. The chapter explores how the ceramics are produced, and briefly discusses those artists and craftspeople that produce them. The beliefs associated with *Dinkho tsa Badimo* and the care of sacred objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are then highlighted.

Chapter 3 reviews the methodological approach used to achieve the identification, and documentation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* in order to help conserve them as a distinct grouping of ancestral ceramic vessels.

Chapter 4 is based on both a literature survey on the subject, as well as personal interviews. The chapter discusses the intangible qualities associated with ceramic vessels such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* to gain a better understanding as to why they should be considered as sacred or religious objects. These discussions aim to indicate the importance of taking into consideration the intangible qualities of sacred cultural objects, to maintain their spiritual integrity, in addition to preserving their physical integrity. The chapter uses the data generated during interviews to formulate initial ‘typological’ characteristics that may assist in characterising and identifying *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

Chapter 5 is laid out as catalogue entries for a selection of ceramic vessels from the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (DNMCH) as examples of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* in a museum collection. The vessels were selected on visual characteristics identified from the literature survey and interviews.

Chapter 6 examines *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as museum objects. The museum’s collection management practices are discussed, including the general conservation practices applied to these, and similar low-fired ceramic vessels. These range from surface cleaning of loose dust and dirt, to the adhesion of fragments for reconstruction, and full restoration with aesthetic integration. The chapter then examines collection records for past interventive treatments applied to low-fired ceramic vessels within DNMCH, as well as the selected vessels themselves for clues of past treatments. The chapter further discusses the current protocols for general

maintenance, reconstruction and restoration of ceramic vessels at the museum. DNMCH's conservation approach to other objects of spiritual significance such as spiritual texts, books or relics in addition to legislative documents and available codes of ethics are used as the basis for establishing guidelines for *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as sacred objects.

Chapter 7, which is the conclusion, presents the results of the research to answer the initial research questions around the identification, correct attribution, documentation and conservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. The chapter also discusses the role that conservation-based research can play in supplementing archaeological, anthropological and art historical research to better understand and care for the objects in our national collections. The chapter finishes off with recommendations for the different role players in the conservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* (museums, local heritage institutions and conservators) on how *Dinkho tsa Badimo* should be kept in order to retain respect for the objects because of the significance that they carry from the communities they originate from.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews written literature on traditional Southern African ceramics similar in manufacture to *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. It explores how the ceramics are produced, discusses the artists and craftspeople that produce them, the beliefs associated with *Dinkho tsa Badimo* and their care.

It is divided into four sections: the first section reviews sources that address the traditional manufacture of *Dinkho*, from how the clay they are made of is sourced, to the taboos and practices surrounding their manufacture as recorded in Lawton's Master's thesis 'Bantu Pottery of Southern Africa' (Lawton, 1967). The second section, reviews sources on *Dinkho tsa Badimo*'s typology and functions, and discusses some of South Africa's renowned potters who continue to manufacture *Dinkho* in traditional means and forms. The chapter then explores what defines sacred/ritual objects. Lastly, the fourth section of the chapter discusses conservation treatment as a practice guided by codes of ethics and guidelines, which conservators have to follow when conserving heritage objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

### 2.2. Earth, air, water and fire: the making of ceramics

Ceramic making is an ancient craft in Africa. For many centuries, clay has been one of the most abundant and cheap raw materials that has been utilised in many forms and for many purposes. Some of the oldest pottery remains were found in Niger in West Africa dating to around 10,000 BCE<sup>4</sup> (Haour 2003: 182). Pottery, the most common artefact in African Iron Age sites, arrived in Southern Africa about 2000 years ago (Huffman, 1980: 7). Later Stone Age<sup>5</sup> ceramics predate Iron Age wares by as much as four centuries. In South Africa thick walled pottery<sup>6</sup> is more recent, while thin walled pottery<sup>7</sup> may have been invented independently in the region (Sadr & Sampson, 2006: 19). Despite its antiquity, pottery production which retains 'traditional' characteristics of manufacture is still alive in many parts of the continent (Gosselain, 1992: 560)

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<sup>4</sup> BCE is the abbreviation of Before the Common Era. This notation of time has been used increasingly since the 1980s as the reference point for time, replacing the previously used BC (*Before Christ*) and AD (*Anno Domini: the year of the Lord*). (Safire, 1997: [sp]).

<sup>5</sup> First occurred in Africa around 50,000 and 39,000 years ago (Van Schalkwyk, 2016, pg. 9)

<sup>6</sup> Large pots usually need thick walls, to support the pot's structure. Large pots are mostly used in the region for storage of water, grains, food etc.

<sup>7</sup> Smaller pots usually have thin walls for the pots to be easy to use and move around. Smaller pots are mostly used in the region to serve water, food or give offering.

Ceramics are quite a durable material, and despite occasional breakages, well fired ceramics do not easily deteriorate in stable environments and are often part of the archaeological context. As such, there were a number of early attempts to understand ceramic identity, style and technology (Laidler 1929). By studying pottery, archaeologists gain an understanding of people from the past. It helps them understand how they lived. Pottery also yields important evidence unlike objects made of organic materials such as baskets, blankets, wooden tools, ropes and clothing, ceramics can survive under the soil for thousands of years (Pye, 2006: 19). Writing late in the 2000s, Sadr (2008:104) observed that “Ceramic studies are relatively recent in southern African archaeology with two main approaches: technical and stylistic methods. Technical methods look at the technologies available to the potters, as well as technological analysis which provide valuable data about the variation in vessel forms, classification systems, and the origins of the materials used to construct the pots. The stylistic methods consist of stylistic analysis which focuses on the decorative styles applied to ceramic artifacts, including painted designs, incisions, embossing and other surface treatments” (Sadr 2008:104). According to McGregor (1937:78), Ceramic studies are “an attempt to set a standard for determining the texture of pottery, to be hailed by all archaeologist interested in ceramic studies.”

Fowler (2008) states that “the early studies of African ceramics are ethnological accounts, combining a study of objects in museums and a very limited discussion with potters or observation of practices, and, much second-hand information.” (2008, 477), this could thus be supplemented with additional in-depth interactions with originator communities. As Fowler further comments that over the past 30 years, the study of modern ceramic production from an archaeology perspective has seen significant contributions from research in Africa.

There has been “ethnographic<sup>8</sup> interest in southern African traditional pottery since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century; however, systematic ceramic research in the archaeology of the subcontinent only began in the late 1920s.” (Thebe 2017: 15). Gertrude Caton-Thompson<sup>9</sup> is well known for an interdisciplinary survey and excavation project at Great Zimbabwe<sup>10</sup>. Known since the 16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ethnography is defined as branch of anthropology which tries to understand a particular culture, society or community by spending a lengthy or repeated amount of time immersed in the cultural setting as participant-observer to learn and understand a particular way of life. The practice of ethnography has been heavily criticised as having played a part in the colonial project, where objects, dress, customs identified cultural groups within territories targeted for imperial rule were used to define colonial boundaries (Fabian, 2006: [sp]).

<sup>9</sup> Caton-Thompson was a British female archaeologist (1 February 1888 – 18 April 1985)

<sup>10</sup> Caton-Thompson was invited by the British Academy to investigate the origins of ruins in south-eastern Zimbabwe near Lake Mutirikwe, the site known as Great Zimbabwe. The site is spread widely and contains

century, Great Zimbabwe had been previously excavated and the origins of the site and its architects and builders were quite controversial, with few believing that it could have been the work of Africans. With her research and excavations in 1929, Caton-Thompson dug through the hut floors down to the bedrock in order to expose the entire stratigraphy and chronology of the site (Cohen & Joukowsky, 2006: 364). Glass beads confirmed the dates of the site; similarities of the ceramic sherds to what modern villagers were using; as well as the similar construction of structures like terrace walls were all used by Caton-Thompson in her 1931 report as evidence that the builders of the ancient structures of Great Zimbabwe were a “native civilization” of Bantu origin (Drower, 2006:364). Modern archaeologists now agree that the city was the product of a Shona-speaking African civilisation (Loubser, 1989; Garlake, 1978)

Around the time Caton-Thompson’s excavations were taking place, other archaeologists and researchers were also interested in researching Southern African pottery. In 1929, P.W. Laidler<sup>11</sup> published the first comprehensive archaeological and ethnographic classification of Southern African pottery (Laidler,1929). Schofield<sup>12</sup> made another major attempt to classify pottery from southern Africa, which resulted in him publishing several papers in *The South African Journal of Science*. Schofield’s research looked at ceramic pottery in the region from the different cultural groups such as the Batswana, Herero, Shona, Xhosa and Zulu. For example, *Pottery from Natal, Zululand, Bechuanaland and South West Africa* (1938) and *A preliminary study of the pottery of the Bantu tribes of the Union of South Africa* (1943).

Lawton’s (1967) *Bantu pottery* on the other hand takes a step further and expands the scope of the groups researched. Lawton (1967) explores traditional ceramic making of the people of Southern Africa including South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Lawton’s thesis discusses the production of *Dinkho* extensively through the observations she made during field visits to different Basotho and Batswana clans in South Africa, Botswana and Lesotho. The thesis discusses the production, function, and the taboos surrounding ceramic vessels and their associated meanings for the Basotho-Batswana people.

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three sets of structures of stone walling including the Great Enclosure, the Acropolis or Hill Complex and the Valley ruins (Drower, 2006:363)

<sup>11</sup> Was a medical doctor, writer, editor and socio-cultural historian. He wrote one of the first works on Southern African pottery in the *South African Journal of Science*, XXVI, “Hottentot and Bushman pottery of South Africa” in 1929.

<sup>12</sup> John F. Schofield, was a South African engineer and amateur archaeologist wrote several papers on Southern African pottery. His most renown paper “Primitive pottery: an introduction to South African ceramics, prehistoric and protohistoric” in the South African Society Handbook series, no.3 in 1950.

The production of *Dinkho* begins with the collection of clay. According to Thebe (2017:295) “clay collection is most often undertaken collectively. During wet seasons, access to clay sources located in river banks can be difficult; therefore, the general practice is to collect clay during the dry season (May-September)”. Thebe further elaborates, stating four types of clay collection practices exist: “1) individual collection, where a potter goes on her/his own to collect raw materials; 2) group collection by an association of potters; 3) family collection, where the collection of clay is done by the nuclear or extended family; 4) clay obtained indirectly through exchange for water, wood, grain or money. Potters normally collect enough clay in a single trip to last for the whole season” (Thebe, 2017: 297).

Lawton observes individual collection amongst the Basotho people from a female potter from the Bafokeng clan<sup>13</sup> in South Africa. “She collects clay from digging from a riverbank, four hundred yards from her house, she only collects as much as she needs. She pounds and kneads the clay alternatively until she is satisfied with the clay’s consistency then she uses immediately” (1967: 456).

Lawton (1967) observes a range of different tools used by Basotho-Batswana for the production of *Dinkho*. Some of these tools are everyday utensils such as knives and combs, whilst some are specialized objects such as baskets and blades. For example, the support on which to build a *Dinkho*, a basket and an iron pot lid are used. “Once support is established, the clay is shaped by coiling to create the vessel. Once the vessel is fully shaped, it is left to dry to a leather hard consistency before smoothing. The joins are worked on and smoothed to ensure they are well adhered and won’t crack, you then wait for it to harden a little, then scrape the exterior and smooth it” (1967:450). To smoothen *Dinkho* different objects are used. For the outer surface a blade from a knife, a piece of calabash or a smooth piece of wood are used. For the inner surface a piece of calabash and smooth wood are used. Once you have finished smoothing, the vessel is then sealed with animal fat to make it watertight (Lawton, 1967:53).

Lawton (1967) during her visit, makes an observation that the potters in Sekhuthlong village<sup>14</sup> don’t seal their pots because after the pots are well burnished and fired, they become waterproof. Lawton’s research however has no specific information on how Basotho people from South Africa seal and test their *Dinkho*.

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<sup>13</sup> Basotho clan and the women are known for their pottery skills (Lawton, 1967)

<sup>14</sup> Village in the Leribe district, west of Lesotho. Leribe borders on the Free state province of South Africa.

Mulaba-Bafubiandi (2015) and Rankin's (1990) contributions on the other hand solely explore the physical side of the production of *Dinkho*. Their papers explore the firing technique used by the Basotho-Batswana in an open pit and the finishing and burnishing of the vessels. Firing takes place on a still, clear day either in the morning or the evening. Dried cow dung is used as a fuel, either in natural pots or prepared cakes. Four or five pots are fired at a time, they are placed between layers of dung in a shelter built of stones. The firing takes one to ten hours depending on the size of the pots.

During the firing process, the pots turn an ochre red with different size black spots referred to as firing clouds (Tiley-Nel, 2013: xv) or carbon flashes (Motsamayi, 2019:71). These differences in colour are attributed to a low oxygen atmosphere (Buys & Oakley, 1993:10), or insufficient duration of firing (Tiley-Nel, 2014: xv). Buys and Oakley (1993:10) describe, this firing atmosphere because the fuel (in this case cow dung) not being fully consumed, thus creating a lot of smoke, which may be deposited as soot on the surface of the vessels. Organic matter added to the clay as temper may also not be fully incinerated and this leads to a distinct black core<sup>15</sup> within the thickness of the ceramic shard. In addition, as a result of a low amount of oxygen in the pit firing, some of the ingredients within the clay are reduced, "Red iron oxide ( $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ), for example, may be reduced to the black iron oxide ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ ), to the point where an otherwise red bodied ware may become completely blackened" (Buys and Oakley, 1993:10). As the atmosphere is uneven in pit firing, this differential oxidation is a common occurrence.

Sometimes, firing cracks appear in the vessels during the firing process. Where quartz is present in the clay, it is the most common cause of cracking, as heating or cooling causes reversible alteration at  $573^\circ\text{C}$ , which, as Buys and Oakley (1993:9) describe "involves a molecular rearrangement in its (the quartz's) crystalline structure, resulting in a slight increase in volume (2%), or shrinkage of the same amount on cooling" if the temperature fluctuation is not carefully controlled. The open-pit firing technique requires considerable skill and knowledge to manage this heating and cooling process carefully to avoid firing cracks and other weaknesses. Cracking of ceramics are explained by the Basotho as a) the potter's inefficiency or carelessness, b) moisture reaching the pots during firing, c) the use of incorrect fuel, d) poor quality clay, e) exposure to wind during shaping or firing and f) the presence of an evil person (Lawton, 1987:480). As a result, there are a number of taboos and practices

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<sup>15</sup> "*Black core* refers to the dark zone that sometimes occurs in the middle (thickness) of sherds found in many open or pit-fired pots, usually with a distinct red or brown colour on either side of this central black core, visible as the inner and outer surfaces of the sherd (Tiley-Nel, 2014: xv).

connected to pottery manufacture by the Basotho-Batswana. It is believed that clay stolen from another potter's clay hole will yield damaged or poor-quality vessels and be unsuccessful (Lawton, 1987:483). According to tribal custom, adolescents up to about 20 years of age who indulge in premarital sexual practices, or those who practice witchcraft may cause the pots to crack; either by their mere presence during the modelling and firing operations, or by touching these pots during the manufacturing process (Lawton, 1987:483).

Lawton's (1960) records of the taboos and practices of the Basotho-Batswana people also show evidence of buried/forgotten sacred objects such as the *Nkho tsa pula*<sup>16</sup> which are buried under *Morula* trees<sup>17</sup> as part of the rain and ancestor rites performed by the Phalaborwa clan<sup>18</sup>. These vessels are new and specially made for the ritual. Ideally, once the ritual is performed and the vessels are buried under the *Morula* trees, they should remain buried however with archaeological excavations happening in the region as early as the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some of these sacred items may have been moved and made their way to collectors and museums.

Despite ceramics being a lasting material, they are prone to physical damage through knocks and other physical forces, as well as general deterioration. Buys and Oakley (1993:49) state that "it is in the nature of all composite materials eventually to become degraded into their basic constituents. This degradation occurs as a result of reactions, either with factors in their environment, or between the elements or compounds from which the object is made. In the case of ceramics, degradation is due almost exclusively to environmental factors, and although mechanical degradation can be rapid, chemical degradation is generally extremely slow."

Ceramics are known to have been restored in order to continue a useful life. Lawton (1967) briefly mentions mending of pottery amongst some of the groups in Southern Africa that she visits. The reason for the little information on mending may be because "Information about the development of repair techniques and the professional restoration of ceramics before the 18th century is scarce and fragmentary. Archaeological finds are the most important source of datable information. Excavations at sites in the Middle East and Europe dating from around 7000 B.C. have turned up earthenware objects that show traces of repairs with bitumen, animal glues, plaster, lead, and iron rivets" (Garachon, 2010: 3).

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<sup>16</sup> Direct translation rain pots

<sup>17</sup> Scientific name *Sclerocarya birrea*, medium-sized deciduous tree, indigenous to the miombo woodlands of Southern Africa, the Sudano-Sahelian range of West Africa, and Madagascar.

<sup>18</sup> Northern-Eastern Basotho clan based in Limpopo, South Africa



I could not locate information on the mending and conservation of *Dinkho* for the Basotho in South Africa, and it is highly likely that such information has not been recorded. There is a single brief mention of mending of *Dinkho* among the Basotho in Lesotho in Lawton (1967:489). Lawton interviewed a very old woman, who used to make pottery in Sekhuthlong village. She tells Lawton that “a mixture known as *boka* was made from *Ammocharis falacat*<sup>19</sup> is used to mend the pots that crack during firing” (Lawton 1967:489).

### **2.3. Ceramics, from function to Art: Southern African potters**

The exercise of clay pot making is an indigenous skill of the Basotho-Batswana and helps to create sustainable income for the potters from the rural areas. Similarly, to other cultural groups, this knowledge and skill of pot making also runs the risk of being lost for the Basotho-Batswana because the majority of the current generation finds no interest in acquiring these pot making skills. This may result from many young people living in urban areas where obtaining clay may be difficult and possibly also the separation of families between rural and urban areas making following of all traditions, rituals a challenge as they lead separate lives.

According to Motsamayi (2018:65) “the actual learning of pottery making is based on mastering the skill of forming and shaping pots. As a result, the shaping and forming phase of pottery provides the best marker of stylistic and technological boundaries. The apprentice learns how to make pots by starting with the manufacture of small pots that mimic those of the teacher. Learning can last from a few months to several years. Prior to engaging in this stage, learners participate in communal activities of pottery production as assigned by the master potter including clay extraction and fuel collection.”

Environmental and seasonal factors play a role in the production of the vessels. Enge and Smith (2010:2) argue that “the concept ‘environment’ is usually understood as referring to surrounding conditions that affect organisms living there. Instead, the environment is the surroundings that connects organisms to each other. Factors of an environmental or seasonal nature are among the reasons why only women make certain vessels and men have no part in their production.” Many resources, needed for making the vessels, are domesticated, easy to harness and used by women on a daily basis. This practice is informed by the socio-cultural roles played by women in households. Lawton (1967: 29) notes the production of vessels

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<sup>19</sup> Wild flower found in many Southern African regions

amongst the Basotho-Batswana is traditionally undertaken only by women like many other groups in the Southern African region such as the Shona in Zimbabwe, the Venda in South Africa, the Tonga in Mozambique and the Herero in Namibia.

In recent years, “transmission of knowledge in pottery making in Africa is not a visible activity” (Herbich, 1987: 78). In most of the continent, the skill of pottery making is often only acquired from one teacher in a specific geographic location and at a particular time. Training of an apprentice is often transmitted by close relatives including biological mothers and grandparents, and occasionally learners can acquire skills from sisters, cousins, aunts and nieces. Of all the stages of pottery production, technological skills and gestures learnt in forming and shaping pots are at the centre of knowledge transmission (Gosselain 2008; 2011).

In some cases, potters are not trained locally from the region they are from or by family members. Motsamayi observes that amongst the Batswana in Botswana, potters often travelled considerable distances for training purposes, yet always returned to their places of origin to put into practice the skills they had learnt (2018: 67). Thebe in his research identifies a pattern of teaching networks amongst the potters in Botswana. “Kgwarape and Otse display intra-location teaching networks. Otse is a new pottery centre so its apparent isolation is probably not due to sampling bias. Kgwarape, however, has been a centre of pottery manufacture for many years and it seems unusual that it has not attracted learners from outside” (Thebe, 2017: 20).

Rice (1987:113) observes that “The number of communities in which pottery manufacture continues to flourish within the technological systems is dwindling, however, as a consequence of the availability of durable metal and plastic containers. The popularity of these goods has reduced the demand for traditional pottery and the children of the potters see little future in pottery making, so the craft is rapidly disappearing in many areas.”

Despite this decreasing interest in traditional clay pottery production in Southern Africa, as described by Rice (1987:113), some families and individuals continue to use the traditional production methods for contemporary times and clients, for example, the Nala family based in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. For generations, the Nala family has been producing traditional Zulu clay pots with a modern twist to attract modern clients. The vessels are not only sold locally but are also sold in international markets, this in return has made Nesta Nala a respected acclaimed ceramicist. Nala has trained her daughters in the craft and they continue the family business as ceramicists in their own right (Ian, 1994). As mentioned previously, traditionally *Dinkho* are only produced by women potters. This has however changed as male children also

help produce these vessels. Clive Sithole is an example of such a potter. He was introduced to traditional ceramics at the age of eight by his grandmother Alina Maoetsa. Thirty years on, he can boast of having exhibited in all major South African cities, as well as in Chicago, New York and Britain, and of winning a host of local and international awards (IOL, 2009).

Motsamayi (2018) in his research identifies two key elements that drive the use of natural resources in rural communities in South Africa, particularly as related to the gender roles that prevail in many societies, namely environmental change and adaptation mechanisms. “Processes of change are affecting South Africa as a whole. They are the results of socio-economic factors that touch, not only on people’s cultures, but also on the material resources they use for making their traditional artefacts which, themselves, are also undergoing modifications. Vessel makers increasingly adopt new ways of producing their art works” (Motsamayi, 2018:73).

Motsamayi further observes that “this development is pertinent to the need to advocate for the sustainable preservation of available items of material culture for the benefit of future generations. A society and its material culture are intertwined and connected with the state of the ecosystem that determines the environment, because the environment is the catalyst that allows the existence of life on earth. (Motsamayi, 2018: 73). Hence, “it is important to be aware of how various components in ecosystems are interlinked in a state of mutuality that allows certain cultural practices to occur” (Argyrou 2005: 9).

#### **2.4. Ritual and Ceramics for the Sacred**

Ceramics are not only manufactured as kitchenware, or art. They have another functional use, implicit in their name. *Dinkho* have many uses that include the preparation, cooking and storage of food and beverages; as well as for gifts and being used as decorative objects.

The vessels’ function is inferred in its name, thus for instance, *Nkho<sup>20</sup> ya metsi*, is a ceramic vessel used to carry water from the spring and stored for household use specifically for drinking and cooking. *Nkho ya bojwala*, stores traditional beer and *Nkho ya dijo* stores food. Ceramic vessels are also used during ancestral ceremonies to carry different offerings to the ancestors that include traditional beer, blood from sacrificed animals, cow dung, food and water (Lawton,1967). As such this is a category of ceramic vessels that can be regarded as ritual vessels.

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<sup>20</sup> Singular name for *Dinkho*

“Ritual Pottery” was the special theme of the 51st International Symposium on Ceramic Research, held in Sibiu, Romania, September 23-28, 2018. At that event, Wilke’s (2018) research paper discussed the importance of recognizing ritual pottery, the term ‘ritual’ thus first needs to be defined. According to Wilke (2018:20) “in religious studies a ritual is a set or sequence of proscribed acts in a rite. Ritual and rite are almost synonymous. Typically, the sequence of the individual acts, if it is not just one, is not deliberate but binding. Rituals are thought to be founded in myth and tradition, established by ancestors or predecessors of the actual performers. The practitioner may be a ritual specialist or an ordinary person, elite member or non-elite, performing the ritual in private space or in public, with or without others joining him as a group of performers [...]Ritual is also considered as a regular (re)enactment, recall and (re)presentation of religious traditions, concepts and myth” (Wilke,2018: 21).

Religion, spirituality and/or belief plays a number of significant roles in the everyday life, providing structure, meaning and understanding, as well as support in difficult times, by being a source of strength, comfort and hope and bringing about a sense of community and belonging (Malone & Dadswell, 2020: [sp]). Throughout the ages though, religion has been used to justify things and motivate others, such as the removal of ritual objects during missionary times, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Typically, though, rituals and ceremonies are practised to show dedication and faith to a religion, and in the case of the Basotho-Batswana, to show belief in and respect for the ancestors.

*Dinkho tsa Badimo* are used for different rituals and ceremonies such as calling ancestors for assistance and guidance, funerals (van Schalkwyk, 2016; Opong,1997), and births (Opong,1997). These vessels can have different shapes and appearances, depending on the ritual/ceremony they are used for, and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4. For example, ‘*Go Phatla*’, translated as ‘to bring the light of God’ is a ritual that is used to communicate with the ancestors. During this ritual, a small wide open *Nkho ya Badimo* is used to burn *Imphepho* and clan names are called out to ask for blessings, guidance and protection from the ancestors. Simultaneously, medium sized *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are used to offer food, water or traditional beer.

## **2.5. Conservation of ceramics**

The next section discusses the concept of heritage, and then moves on to a description of conservation in general, before zeroing into the specificities of the conservation of ceramics.

Heritage is a broad field, with an equally expansive description which can encompass both natural heritage (biodiversity) as well as cultural heritage. Broadly speaking ‘heritage’ can be ‘intangible’ including stories, myths, belief systems, song, dance and oral history; whilst ‘tangible’ heritage can be physically seen, touched and experienced. Tangible cultural heritage itself is further divided into movable and immovable heritage. Movable heritage includes masks, statuettes, textiles, and ceramics to name a few; whilst immovable heritage consists of buildings, monuments and land (Junuz, 2018). All tangible heritage is prone to damage and deterioration through the so-called ‘agents of deterioration’, a term coined in the mid-1990s. The agents of deterioration are those variables in the environment that can precipitate or cause damage and deterioration in cultural heritage material (both immovable and movable tangible heritage), and these include 1) physical forces, 2) thieves, vandals and displacers, 3) fire, 4) water, 5) pests (insects, vermin, mould and fungi), 6) pollutants, 7) light, 8) incorrect temperature and 9) incorrect relative humidity. In addition to these agents of deterioration certain artefacts can be said to have internal weaknesses or ‘inherent vice’ which accelerates the normal ageing and deterioration processes of materials. This is generally due to an incompatibility of materials used or poor manufacture and sadly, makes for a weaker object that is more susceptible to damage and deterioration from the afore-mentioned agents of deterioration. The advantage of movable heritage is that once removed from their ‘life in service’, they are brought into collections where they can be looked after through conservation efforts, which entails both preventative and remedial care.

Preventatively, access control, appropriate stands and display cases can help to avoid or minimize potential damage from physical forces, such as accidental knocks and vibration, as well as the action of ill-intentioned people such as thieves and vandals. Damage from fire, water, pests, pollutants, light, incorrect temperature and incorrect relative humidity can all be minimised and to a large extent managed or prevented. This preventive care is defined by the Canadian Conservation Institute (2007) as “actions taken to minimize or slow the rate of deterioration and to prevent damage to collections; includes activities such as risk assessment, development and implementation of guidelines for continuing use and care, appropriate environmental conditions for storage and exhibition, and proper procedures for handling, packing, transport, and use.”

Objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are classified as movable tangible heritage. Due to the nature of the clay material, there are potential physical risks associated with ceramics. Ceramics are hard, brittle, and can easily be damaged through physical forces such as bumps, knocks,

falls which will cause the vessels to scratch, abrade, chip and break. The general, common-sense rules for handling museum objects also apply to ceramics such *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. Storage and display areas must be designed to prevent unnecessary handling. According to the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) notes, 2007: “Before picking up an object, study it carefully—particularly noting its condition and the extent of any restoration. Old repairs maybe hidden and may have weakened over the years. A repaired object is always weaker than one that has not been broken. Do not pick up ceramic objects by their handles or spouts because these can easily breakoff. Remove loose lids if necessary. Avoid touching applied labels or decoration. Use two hands to pick up objects”. CCI (2007) further notes that “Ceramic objects are easily broken when dropped or jarred. Store these objects so they are protected from physical damage. Also, protect them from dust and grime to reduce the need for cleaning”, as this too can cause damage. Buys and Oakley (1993) remains a seminal text on the care, handling, storage, cleaning and restoration of ceramics, from low-fired archaeological wares, to high fired porcelain.

As these vessels are low-fired, they remain quite porous and can be at further risk of incorrect or fluctuating temperature and humidity, where the porous fabric can become water logged and harbour a mould outbreak. Although “ceramics are generally less sensitive to extremes or fluctuations in humidity, temperature, and light than other materials (e.g. wood, ivory). However, this applies only to objects in good condition [...] Identifying the early stages of deterioration can be difficult, so treat all pieces as if they are potential problem cases.” (CCI, 2007: [sp]).

In the event that such damage occurs, it can to a large extent be remedied through remedial or interventive conservation treatments. Dust, grime and dirt can be removed, fragments can be re-adhered, however, harm to the interpretation and research potential of these objects are not so easily remedied. This is because it goes along with the loss of value of the object. The tenth ‘agent’ (not mentioned above) refers to ‘dissociation’ where the information or context of a particular heritage object has become separated and/or lost. In the case of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* the spirituality value associated with the object has been lost to many Basotho-Batswana living in urban areas. When objects lose their value, it becomes difficult to include them in exhibition and research because they may lack the context and story to tell. This loss of research and interpretation value can have a number of potential consequences including misclassification and misinterpretation, and more severely neglect, or in extreme cases can lead to the de-accessioning, or permanent removal of that object from the museum collection. In the case of

*Dinkho tsa Badimo*, which have been misinterpreted and misclassified because of a lack of associated information, dissociation has already occurred, as the vessels are no longer associated with their original cultural meanings. In order to prevent damage through neglect or deaccessioning, it is thus vital to reinstate their correct meaning and interpretation.

In addition, in order to retain the cultural and spiritual value of some types of objects in museum collections, the associated intangible values need to be recognised, acknowledged and respected. Standards of best conservation practice, should then work with cultural standards defined by the originating community, thus achieving a type of care based on consultation and shared decision-making that protects both the tangible and intangible attributes of the heritage object. (Clavir, 2015: 1). Thus, the care and conservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as objects of ritual, connected with spiritual beliefs, requires additional guidelines informed by originator communities. In order to better understand this concept, the meaning of “sacred” and “holy” need to be correctly interpreted, as these words may not be easily applicable to different belief systems. “Sacred” may include objects or places that are venerated, consecrated, dedicated or protected. “Holy” is often associated with a religion or a deity. Although not all ceremonies, or the objects used in them, are religious, they may remain highly culturally significant. Sacred places and objects may be revered in a larger sense, such as those associated with the actions of cultural ancestors, or those used in the individual sense of “sacred to the memory of” (Clavir, 2015;1).

The term ‘culturally sensitive’ broadens concepts embodied in “sacred” and “holy” to include any objects demanding special respect because of their significance within their cultural context. The object’s associations with a particular individual or group invoke protocols recognized by the whole community, which is again, a demonstration of respect. For example, a New Zealand Maori cloak may still possess the mana or personal power of its owner, and an exact museum replica would be a different object. Over the last few decades, much museological work has been done in co-operation with indigenous or originator communities to better understand and respect indigenous heritage and improve both conservation and curatorial practice in Australia, New Zealand, the U.S.A and Canada (Clavir, 2015;14). “Traditionally [western Plains] bundles are not the only objects which can be imbued with medicine or power. Certain types of shields and shield covers, head-dresses, pipes, drums, and various articles of clothing and personal adornment, can also function as physical manifestations of this concept of medicine” (Moses,1998). Often, catalogue records do not describe the significance of the object as it is now. The records may also be incomplete, but in

some cases, especially with older documentation, the information itself may be considered sacred/sensitive heritage that should be restricted (Clavir, 2015: 5).

Traditional care encompasses those aspects of indigenous daily living which apply to the safekeeping of ritual or ceremonial objects, as directed by the appropriate indigenous community members, and may be integrated into a museum's routine collections care practices and exhibition techniques. These can include 1) ensuring that exhibition content is appropriate when discussing indigenous cultural issues, 2) requesting that certain objects be removed from public view or that access to them in storage be subject to additional restrictions, in order to maintain appropriate cultural protocols, 3) examining the potential for repatriation claims, 4) introducing joint custody arrangements or co-management schemes within the museum setting, 5) allowing community members the opportunity to make use of meaningful objects and perform traditional care on behalf of portions of collections, as well as 6) allowing community members to delegate certain aspects of traditional care to museum staff, where they are comfortable to do so (Clavir 2015, 6).

Conservation and collections management policies of individual museums must always be considered alongside the moral and legal rights of Indigenous peoples to gain access to ritual objects for the purposes of enacting traditional spirituality. In fact, current conservation ethics require that the physical and conceptual integrity of objects be preserved (Clavir, 2015;15).

## **2.6. Conservation practice and Ethics**

Conservation as a practice and profession is governed by codes of ethics and guidelines for practice. In Europe the European Confederation of Conservators-restorers Organisation (E.C.C.O.) code of ethics has attempted to standardise practice, but individual countries can also have their own codes such as the Dutch Veres Code of Ethics for Restorers, or the American Institute for Conservation (AIC) code of ethics and guidelines. Most codes of ethics advocate a general restraint in action, minimal intervention and regard for original material to respect authenticity, these documents are particularly important when it comes to the care of sensitive and sacred heritage objects, such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. In South Africa, the conservation code of ethics used by South African Museums Association (SAMA) is guided by the ICOM Code of Ethics, and the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999. "The legislation aims to promote good management of the national estate, and to enable and encourage communities to nurture and conserve their legacy so that it may be bequeathed to



future generations” (Act xxi). An object is considered to be a part of the national estate if it has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons. However, the act, gives very little practical guidelines for the treatment of objects.

There is likewise no literature specifically dedicated to giving recommendations for conservation protocols to guide treatments with regard to African sacred objects is scarce or limited. Much of this type of scholarly research has been carried out in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia as institutions in those countries grapple with increasing demands by indigenous communities for the repatriation of sacred materials (including the skeletal remains of ancestors). As a result, acts such as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, 1990 (NAGPRA) in the USA have been enacted, which allow for the repatriation of human remains as well as culturally affiliated items identified by claimant communities.

When NAGPRA was initiated over 5000 museums were forced to re-examine, identify, catalogue and inform Native American communities about the objects held within their collections (Haakanson, 2004: 3). NAGPRA has led institutions to increase consultation with originator communities as standard practice when establishing protocols for the appropriate exhibition, care and handling of indigenous artefacts, including consultation for conservation treatments. Wolfe and Mibach (1983:3) writing about ethical considerations when conserving Native American sacred objects state that “sacred objects are considered by some to be living sources of power; as such we must be as careful of their spiritual integrity as we are of their physical integrity.” The National Heritage Resources Act (Act no 25 of 1999) identifies cultural material that can be classified as part of South African Heritage, along with ascertaining under which circumstances. The Act also specifies that the collection, research, storage and conservation of identified cultural heritage material aligns with relevant ethical considerations and the best possible scientific standards. The *Draft National Policy on the Repatriation and Restitution of Human Remains and Heritage Objects* (National Department of Arts and Culture, [sa]:7) gives further recommendations for the appropriate handling of human remains in South Africa, where human remains are identified as “all forms of material or remains of anatomically modern humans” whether skeletal remains, preserved remains, or parts of human remains. Additionally, the draft national policy makes similar recommendations for heritage objects comprising objects recovered from the soil (including archaeological objects); objects of cultural and historical significance; objects to which oral traditions are attached and which are

associated with living heritage; as well as funerary objects, items believed to have been intentionally placed with an individual at the time of death, as part of a death rite or cultural ceremony; and lastly, grave goods, which include any objects or specimens directly associated with gravesites, cemeteries, or human remains (National Department of Arts and Culture, [sa]:7-8). Although the practical guidelines are just as limited in the draft national policy document, there is an allusion as to how human remains and objects ought to be treated by scientists and museums professionals, stating that “policy approaches should be clear about the respectful treatment of the remains and objects by everyone concerned, as well as the appropriate long-term management, whether that involves curation or reburial” (National Department of Arts and Culture, [sa]:15). The document is quite explicit about the respectful treatment of human remains and that the goal should be reinternment, stating “All matters relating to human remains must be over-seen by appropriate staff and remains must only be handled by appropriate personnel. Steps must be taken proactively to bury the remains. Human remains must be isolated, deaccessioned and stored according to best practice until reburial is possible, with no access by the public. Human remains should not be displayed or exhibited or used in public programmes, or photographed, filmed or used in any other way for commercial gain” (National Department of Arts and Culture, [sa]:15). The document is a lot more relaxed with regards to objects, stating that “Associated artefacts may be displayed, under suitable circumstances” (ibid). Thus, the recommendations for the treatment of sacred objects, including objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* which are spiritually significant, and is still a grey area.

There are rites and customs regarding *Dinkho tsa Badimo* such as *Go phatla* and sacrifice offering to the ancestors. These spiritual vessels are central to Sesotho-Setswana spirituality and spiritual practice and are considered as sacred/spiritual objects by the communities they originate from. It is important that they should be recognized as such by other custodians. As Mellor (1992:3) states “Many people in western cultures view African objects as culturally foreign and aesthetically challenging while readily acknowledging their non-tangible attributes. Yet these non-tangible attributes are often poorly defined and considered not only incomprehensible but also potentially dangerous. These attributes might include the concepts that objects embody supernatural spirits, personify ancestors, or maintain power inherently.” Mellor (1992:3) goes on to observe that although conservators who work on these objects may understand the physical and chemical properties of the objects with which they work, the

intangible aspects are often feared and disregarded, or sometimes partially addressed through “courteous but uninformed acknowledgement”.

To ensure that certain reverence and protocols are observed when using such objects in collections, which would be in line with those observed by originator communities, it is necessary for custodians to increase their understanding of the ritual importance and practices involving these objects. This however starts with re-examining and correctly identifying objects, to correct misattributions and research provenance.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

Research is a systematic investigation to establish facts and reach new conclusions on a given subject. The main purpose of this mini-dissertation is to address a deficit in the understanding and significance of ancestral ceramics by contributing an original body of knowledge that draws attention to this previously misattributed category of objects. This can be achieved by encouraging the identification, documentation, and preservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as a separate, distinct grouping of ancestral ceramic vessels.

There are a number of methodological approaches available in research, this study has adopted a qualitative research approach. *Qualitative research* looks at meaning making, narratives and understanding people's beliefs, ideas and values on a particular topic; whilst quantitative research is applicable to phenomena that can be measured and expressed in terms of comparable quantities. This qualitative approach is suitable to the present research which focusses on a literature review supplemented with interviews, and applies the information gleaned to the examination of a series of vessels from the DNCHM collections as a case study.

There are mainly four research designs/approaches that are used in qualitative research which are case study, ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory. For this study, I used the phenomenology approach because of my personal experiences in this research and my links with the Sotho and Tswana ancestry and *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

This chapter discusses the aim and selection methods of the study. The chapter explores the ceramic anatomy of *Dinkho* and finishes off with ceramic analysis used to analyse vessels used for this study.

### **3.2. Aims and selection of methods**

As outlined in the Introduction to this research, museums have accessioned sacred ceramic vessels such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as household wares and have not recognised these objects as a separate group of vessels. This disregards their spiritual nature and has impacted on curatorial practices. Additionally, the lack of awareness of potential protocols in handling and

caring for these objects has implications for research as residues evidencing their use may be inadvertently masked or removed by conservation treatments.

The aim of the research is thus to highlight the importance of correctly attributing *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as sacred vessels. The starting point for the research included my own experience of the appearance of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, along with descriptions of characteristics of traditional ceramics as highlighted during the literature review. These initial descriptions were further enhanced or confirmed by those objects shown or described to me during targeted interviews as part of data collection. These ‘typical’ characteristics of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* could then be applied to the selection of ceramics from the Anthropology collection at Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History (DNMCH) located in Tshwane (Pretoria).

### **3.2.1. Oral history and interview-based research**

African knowledge systems have been reliant on oral traditions for many years and although much anthropological and ethnographical research has been carried out across many subjects, such as initiation rites (Barnard, 2001), religion (Smith, 2016) and gender relations (Madlala, 2009), there are still gaps in the published record, particularly regarding sacred objects and objects of ritual ceremonies from Africa. According to Alubafi and Kaunda (2019:2), where there have been objects-based studies they are focussed on the symbolism of these objects and the ancestral motifs they are decorated with (see for instance Arnoldi et al., 1996).

In many African societies’, cultural practitioners are usually the carriers of traditional knowledge, and thus the majority of the additional data collected for the mini-dissertation is based on unstructured interviews with cultural practitioners such as traditional healers in Sotho-Tswana communities. Traditional healers in the Basotho-Batswana communities are respected for the knowledge and healing powers they possess, which are associated with ancestors. Therefore, one does not just walk up to healers and start asking questions on rituals and the objects associated with them. One has to build some form of a relationship with the healer in order to ask sensitive questions. This is further complicated by the present situation of the covid-19 pandemic which has not only seriously restricted movement, particularly in the early phase of the hard lockdown in South Africa. In addition, the fear of contracting the virus has also led to many people being more cautious of coming into contact with persons they do not know. In order to carry out interviews as part of the research of this project, I initially approached my own contacts to refer me to others I could interview using a snowball technique,

where research participants recruit other participants for a test or study. It is used where, or when, potential participants are hard to find. Initially, I thus spoke to personal contacts Amanda Khumalo<sup>21</sup> and Semameleng Matsoso<sup>22</sup> who referred me to Khethiwe Mbongwa<sup>23</sup> and Gogo Khanyakude<sup>24</sup> who are traditional healers, and Tankiso Matsotso<sup>25</sup> who owns a *Nkho ya Badimo*, which dates back to the 1960s, that was passed down from to her from her maternal grandmother. In addition, two museum practitioners were interviewed Gertrude Seabela - the curator of ethnography collection at DNCHM and Rebecca Mawela - a ceramic conservator at DNCHM. The interviews were recorded by using voice note recorder and writing notes.

Guiding questions (Appendix 3.1) were used as a starting point, followed by open-ended questions as the interview progressed. The open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to narrate their experiences with increased freedom and minimal interruptions or redirections. Additional questions were developed as the conversation grew as '*Dinkho tsa Badimo*' vessels are personal and have different meaning to different individuals, these additional questions were unique to each context. The aim of the interviews was to understand the common theme between those that regard these vessels as sacred objects and how they view and care for them.

### 3.2.2. Selection of ceramics for a case study

After initial data was collected through the literature review and interviews, this allowed for a selection of criteria for a preliminary identification of potential *Dinkho tsa Badimo* vessels. As the University of Pretoria and the DNCHM have a Memorandum of Understanding in place and the museum is conveniently located in Pretoria, this was a logical selection for a potential case study. In addition, the museum has a rich pottery collection of *Dinkho* in the Anthropology collection. This collection dates back to 1898 and is representative of cultural groups in South Africa, including some of Sotho-Tswana origin. The first clear record of Sotho-Tswana ceramic acquisition at the museum is registered in 1912. These include a great variety of

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<sup>21</sup> Amanda Khumalo, age 27. She is a traditional healer based in Pretoria. She has been practicing as a traditional healer for the past 3 years.

<sup>22</sup> Semameleng Matsoso, age 66. She is based in the south of Johannesburg; she grew up under the guidance of her grandmother who was a healer and still performs ancestral rituals the same way her grandmother taught her to. Semameleng Matsoso, age 71, is also my maternal grandmother.

<sup>23</sup> Khethiwe Mbongwa, age 26. She is currently preparing to go in for her initiation as a healer and she is based in Pretoria.

<sup>24</sup> Gogo Khanyakude, age 34, He is a traditional healer based in Pretoria and Mpumalanga as he initiates traditional healers and has been a healer for more than 10 years.

<sup>25</sup> Tankiso Matsotso, age 70. As the oldest member of the family, she leads and performs ancestral rituals in her family.

household vessels, storage vessels, drinking containers, as well as ancestral ceramic vessels, which are the focus of this research. The majority of the ceramics in the Anthropology collection were collected by DNMCH researchers over the years (Seabela, personal interview, 2020), with varying levels of accompanying information. As Motsamayi (2019:21) points out, this poor documentation and cataloguing is a challenge with many museums in South Africa, where rare objects were often collected as ‘curios’ (Figure 1) and placed in storage with minimal accompanying information on provenance, author or originator community, ownership, and local name amongst others, being added to the registers; and in certain instances it was not even known why these items were kept at the museum. This was indeed my experience as well, with a clear distinction in the amount of information noted in the accession registers. The period in which South Africa is under the British rule (1930s -1961), the registers are written in English and have full detail of where the objects were obtained, the price and sometimes the region where the objects were collected. During the Apartheid years (1948-1994) the information is written in Afrikaans, and the information about the object is less than in the prior years, generally only including a vague description, for example “swart Basoetoe pot” (black pot from the Basoete).

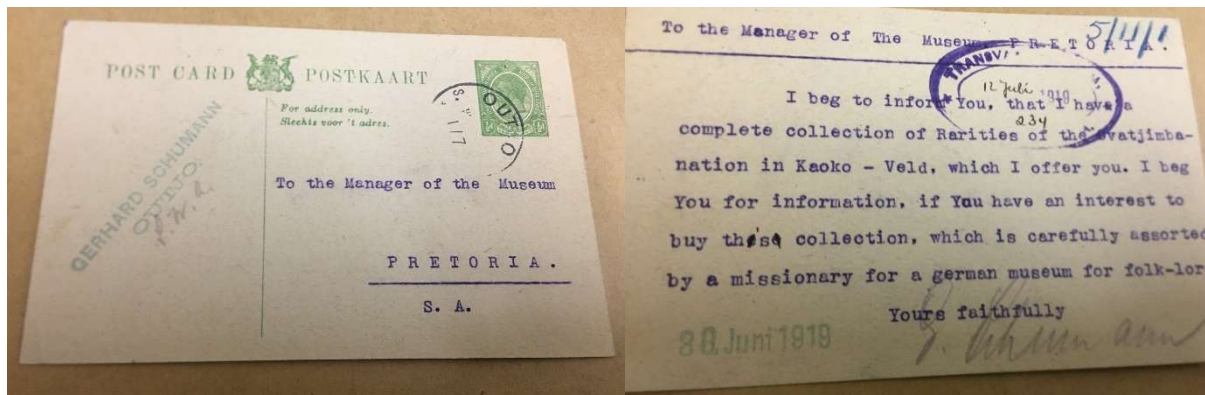


Figure 1 - Example of a donation letter dated 1919, addressed to 'the Manager of the Museum' (left) recto, (right) verso

The initial selection method I used was however based on a survey of the DNMCH accession registers, from the year 1911 to 1980, to identify possible entries of ceramics accessioned under the title of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. This survey revealed four objects specifically labelled *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, collected between the 1930s and 1960s and accessioned as donations. As this number appeared to be too restrictive to contemplate identification characteristics, I further

supplemented this with two additional objects selected based purely on their physical appearance as suggested by the literature review, and interviews. The literature review revealed that there is a scarcity of published references on the identification of ancestral ceramics in Southern Africa, such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, as well as there being insufficient recorded oral history available on the subject. My research thus relies heavily on Lawton's (1960) work on classifications of *Dinkho*, which I supplement with information from interviews.

### 3.3. Ceramic Anatomy

In describing ceramic vessels, several scholars use anthropomorphic terms (Rawson, 1971:100; Richard, 1999:197; Braithwaite, 2007:4), therefore following Motsamayi (2014:23), I will use the same terms to describe the anatomy of the ceramics including the head, mouth, neck, shoulder, belly and foot, as illustrated in figure 2.



Figure 2 - Descriptors used in the research to denote anatomical features of the vessels



### **3.4. Ceramic analysis**

As the aim of the research is to provide guiding characteristics of what typical *Dinkho tsa Badimo* look like, a range of variables had to be examined which could be standardised in order to be applicable to the present research. Antonites (2020:254) describes how morphological characteristic such as shape, size and surface treatment can assist in understanding vessel function. Antonites (2020:254) further notes that “ceramics are more than functional food containers. They are also deeply imbued with symbolic meanings and play an important role in maintaining social order.”

This section provides the range of the analytical variables or morphological characteristics used interpret ceramics. The choices of morphological characteristics used for this study have been adapted from analytical variables proposed by Tiley-Nel in *A Technological study and Manufacture of Ceramic Vessels from K2 and Mapungubwe Hill, South Africa* (2014) and Antonites (2020) *Cooking, serving and storage: ceramics vessel function and use contexts at Schroda*. Although Tiley-Nel (2014: 70) describes 12 variables in her research, as some of these analytical variables were not applicable to the present study, these are limited to vessel form, wall thickness and rim, orifice diameter, vessel colour and decorative techniques. These variables are discussed in further detail below and will be examined for each vessel in Chapter 5.

#### **3.4.1. Vessel form**

Classification of ceramics are generally done according to vessel shape and shape follows function, as certain designs are more appropriate than others for particular uses. As Hendrickson and McDonald (1983:631) note of cooking vessels, they “tend to be short and squat with large basal surface for efficient heat transfer, but usually with a somewhat restricted mouth to prevent rapid evaporation from boiling foods.” Antonites (2020:254) notes that “a high-necked vessel, on the other hand, may constrain access to contents but enable more controlled pouring of liquids.” Furthermore Antonites (2020:254) suggests that “the combinations of different vessel forms may reveal contexts related to specific activities” such as cooking, serving, storage...or perhaps ritual use.

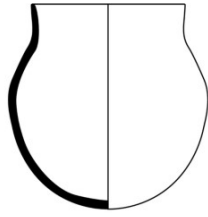
For the purpose of this study, combinations of existing ceramic classification systems are used to define the ceramic forms or types (Antonites, 2020; Tiley-Nel, 2014; Calabrese 2005; Huffman 1980; Meyer 1980; Schofield 1948). However, these individual researchers have used

different terms for the same form for example, shouldered or incurvate jars. As type-variety systems (e.g. Willey and Sabloff 1980) or multi-dimensional approaches (e.g. Huffman 1989) are continuously being developed, revised and modified and can lead to confusion.

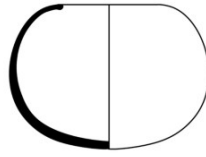
The typological or classification approach, which will be used here draws upon the premise that since the morphology of all vessels vary, and none are identical or an exact replica of another, the ceramics in this study should not be grouped too rigidly into specific ceramic types. Therefore, the simplest definition of a vessel form as it relates to the shape of the overall vessel and sub-divisions are kept to an absolute minimum. The major vessel forms distinguished within this study can be closely linked to Antonites (2020) definition of Schroda<sup>26</sup> ceramics. Antonites divides and categorizes the vessels used for cooking, serving and storage of goods into recurved jars, incurvate (spheroidal) bowls, deep (hemispherical) bowls, shallow (hemispherical) bowls, very shallow bowls and plates. *Dinkho tsa Badimo* appear as shallow bowls, deep bowls, sub-spherical bowls and incurvate jars as illustrated in figure 3.

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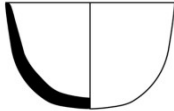
<sup>26</sup> Schroda is a Zhizo/Leokwe settlement in the Limpopo Valley, 300 years earlier than the famed world heritage site of Mapungubwe which dates



**Recurved Jar**  
Necked, globular vessel with height greater than mouth diameter. Shoulder sometimes distinct



**Incurvate Bowl**  
Spheroidal vessel with constricted mouth. Vessel height as ratio of mouth diameter varies, but can range from one-third to two-thirds



**Deep Bowl**  
Hemispherical vessel with height one-half of mouth diameter or greater



**Shallow Bowl**  
Hemispherical vessel with height one-third to one-half of mouth diameter



**Very Shallow Bowl**  
Hemispherical vessel with height between one-third and one-fifth of mouth diameter



**Plate**  
Nearly flat ellipsoid vessel with height one-fifth or less of mouth diameter



**Beaker**  
Small vessel with nearly vertical sides and flat base. Height equal to or greater than mouth diameter

Figure 3 - Examples of different ceramic vessel shapes as classified by A. Antonites (2020:255)

Both deep and shallow bowls have unrestricted openings, and in the case of the shallow bowls, a stable lower centre of gravity. These types of bowls may be used to burn *Imphepho* or carry herbs inside. The sub-spherical bowls have a more restricted openings than deep and shallow bowls and usually have a short neck as they are used to carry liquids such as traditional beer, called *mageu* (Setswana spelling) or *maheu* (Sesotho spelling), and water. This category appears to have the opening and base characteristics of a recurved jar, with the general body shape of a spheroidal or sub-spherical bowl. Beaker bowls on the other hand are characterised by straight sides have high shoulders, and are usually used by the Basotho-Batswana to drink milk.

### **3.4.2. Size, wall thickness and rim**

Overall size, wall thickness and rim measurements are a variable relating technology to use (Rice: 226-227), usually in association with orifice diameter, vessel form and size and can be used sometimes to assess vessel function. The thickness of the vessel wall is related to the size and shape of the ceramic since the walls serve as structural supports. During the shaping and drying process, the rim is also made thinner or thicker as a strengthener to the vessel body to avoid cracking and for stability (Rice 1987; 226-227). Size is important to my study because the thickness of the wall gives an idea to what type of material the vessel was created to carry. For example, vessels that are used to burn sage inside of them are thinner than objects that are used to carry liquids such as water, beer and blood. The rim is measured in millimetres using a digital calliper.

All measurements are carried out and noted in millimetres. Vessel height measured as the vessel sits on the workbench, is measured from the base to the highest point on the rim, and noted as (h). Diameter (d), is measured from the widest point side-to-side for both the opening, as well as for the belly, measured at its widest point. Circumference (c) is measured with a soft tape held at the widest point at the mid-section of the belly. As most of the bases are rounded, base measurements were not taken.

### **3.4.3. Mouth diameter**

Related to both size and function, the size of the mouth opening diameter at the top of the vessel is important as it determines the effectiveness of the vessel for function or use as a container. The opening is also the space through which materials must go that relate to its function (Tiley-Nel, page 72). For example, a narrow-restricted vessel may serve as a water container as its rim diameter is small enough to avoid spillage and restricts the flow of liquid, or a wider diameter opening for use as an open serving dish. Orifice can be described as restricted or unrestricted (Rice,1996). Restricted refers to the opening which is less than the maximum diameter of the vessel and unrestricted if the opening is equal to or greater than the maximum diameter of the vessel. The unrestricted opening allows for easy accessibility to the vessel's contents whilst a restricted opening complicates. Orifice measurements will also be recognized as rim diameters as it relates to utilization and function (Orton et al 1993; Rice 1996; Shepard 1980).

#### **3.4.4. Vessel colour**

When speaking of vessel colour, I refer to the colour of the clay after firing in its general appearance. The colour of the vessel surface and of the ceramic fabric is largely determined by the composition of raw materials (Shepard 1980: 102-103), but also to the firing technique. As traditional ceramics are typically pit fired, there is usually an uneven oxidation of the clay leading to uneven, mottled surface colours and firing clouds. Vessel colour will then highlight the most prevalent tonality and hue of the surface and will be characterised according to the Munsell Soil Colour Chart (2000) as opposed to generic colour observations, i.e. brown, grey and black which are deemed insufficient (cf. Meyer 1980; Schofield 1937). The use of the Munsell chart allows for standardisation and comparison in a consistent manner (Shepard, 1980:107). The Munsell chart provides a means of measuring the similarity of different colours by placing colour charts with a cut-out viewing hole over the surface of the ceramic until a match is obtained, or a reasonable similarity has been reached (Figure 4). It is accepted, however, that differences might exist in the way individuals record colour from the chart. Colour will be recorded, where possible, from both the interior and exterior surfaces and on exposed edges to provide an informative record of the colour range of the vessels. As mentioned before in Chapter 2, traditionally Dinkho tsa Badimo are dark in colour because that is the colour that attracts ancestors at night. However, this has changed as people have changed their preference colour and decorations for Dinkho tsa Badimo. The vessels come in different colours and decorations depending on the taste of the owner.








Figure 4 - Use of the Munsell soil chart to identify the colour of ceramics. Image courtesy of Isabelle McGinn, UP Museums 2015.

### 3.4.5. Decorative techniques





Decoration on a vessel is considered a secondary manufacturing technique (Rye 1981; Shepard 1980), which takes place after the initial manufacturing and forming process. Rice (1987:144) defines decoration as an embellishment of a vessel beyond procedures used in forming the clay mass into the final vessel shape and finishing its overall surface. Surface decoration is a key element in the manufacture of ceramics as they can accentuate visibility over utility, they serve as visual identifiers, marking the maker as an individual or denoting group affinity; alternatively, decorative motifs can be wholly subjective and intended to please (Motsamayi, 2019: 55). Motsamayi (2019:55) suggests that designs and motifs are learnt and passed down from family members, along with knowledge shared with other ceramicists from within, as well as beyond the community.

Two types of ceramic decoration i.e. decorative techniques are distinguished by Rice (1987: 144-152). The first penetrates the ceramic surface, and is known as plastic decoration, like incised or engraved motifs (Table 3.1), and the other referred to as additions or form elements, such as lugs and spouts which are added to the surface (Table 3.2). A third category not mentioned by Rice, includes the addition of decorative layers such as paint, ochres and other minerals (Table 3.3).

**Table 1 Examples of plastic decorations, including incisions and impressions in traditional vessels**

	
<p><b>Shallow incisions</b></p>	<p><b>Round tool impressions decorations</b></p>
	
	
<p><b>Deep incisions</b></p>	<p><b>Shallow and deep incisions</b></p>

**Table 2 Examples of form element decorations including nodules, pellets and lugs in traditional vessels**

	
<p><b>Pyramid shaped nodules</b></p>	<p><b>Pressed on round pellets</b></p>
	
<p><b>Round pellets</b></p>	<p><b>Lugs</b></p>

**Table 3 Examples of applied decorative layers such as paint and haematite**





**Applied PVA paint**



**Applied PVA paint and incisions**



**Applied haematite with crescent shaped incisions**



**Applied paint with round tool impressions**

### 3.5 Conclusion

In addition to the above-mentioned visual characteristics which can hint at function of the vessel and therefore assist in correcting misattributed vessels, physical evidence of use-wear, damage and deterioration can indicate the use and possible function of the ceramic (Rice,1987). For example, some of the ceramics exhibit erosion on the base of the vessel which may indicate that organic matters such as food, blood or water stayed inside the objects for long periods of time, indicating the vessel was used for storage. Visual differences in the appearance of a vessel can be also be the result of numerous factors following burial conditions, environmental changes, previous interventions, i.e. plaster fills. *Dinkho tsa Badimo* carried organic matter frequently and for long periods of time and this could result in erosion or water damage. Organic matter residues given as sacrifice to the ancestors such as animal blood and cow dung offered to be blessed by the ancestors during rituals was searched for in the vessels by using a flashlight. However, due to limited access to these vessels, time and resource constraints, use wear and residue analysis could not be carried out for this study. I did however feel that it was important to examine the vessels and note if residues or marks were visible as this could form part of future research on these ceramics.

## **Chapter 4: Addressing the Intangible: The Setswana-Sesotho indigenous Knowledge System of Dinkho**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Hammond-Tooke (1994:2-3) describes four major linguistic and cultural groups in Southern Africa, namely the Nguni, the Sotho, the Venda and Tsonga. These major groups can be further sub-divided, for example the Sotho group comprises both the Northern and Southern Sotho, as well as the Tswana. Although there are significant differences in terms of social organisation, these sub-groups have similar views on the role and importance of ancestors and ancestral worship in daily life (Bae, 2008:40). This belief in the importance of ancestors can be seen as an extension of a belief in, and respect for, elders as guardians and guides for the community (Kopytoff, 1972:131).

Despite Christianity being a dominant religion in many Southern African countries, most cultural groups such as the Batswana, still firmly believe in, and practice, ancestral worship. As Amanze (2003:43) notes “belief in and veneration of ancestors continues unabated to the present day... the belief in ancestors in Botswana is based on the fact that it is the core of Tswana Traditional Religion. It gives the people a sense of self-identity.” Thus, the role of ancestors in the lives of their living relatives has been the basis of numerous scholarly studies on African spirituality and culture (Jindra 2005; Koloss 2000; Kopytoff 1997; Mbiti 1969; Nürnberger 2007; Setiloane 1976). In his seminal work on ‘Ancestors as Elders in Africa’, Kopytoff (1997:412) argues that ‘African spirituality is experienced through a continuous relationship between the living-alive relatives and their ancestors who ‘are vested with mystical powers and authority’.

Ancestral worship can take many forms, however this is often facilitated and mediated through the use of material objects which link the living community with the spirit world (Alubafi & Kaunda, 2019:1). These objects can take various forms from drinking cups to stools (Alubafi & Kaunda, 2019), drums (Lebaka, 2007), masks (Huang, 2011), and power figures (Kingdon, 2019) amongst others.

“Objects become meaningful through the acts of making, acquiring, using, and viewing. They have the power to evoke, connect, and trigger collective memories. However, objects encountered in museum exhibitions and collections have often been separated from their

stories. The artist's identity, the community of origin, and the economic, creative, and practical functions of an object are often forgotten replaced by generic and tentative identities, becoming a source for academic speculation" (Racette, 2007: 15). The use of ceramic vessels in communicating with and worshipping ancestors is vital to both the Basotho and Batswana, yet removed from their 'living' context and relegated to museum storerooms, this power and significance is diminished, particularly if their spiritual value is not recognised.

As outlined in Chapter 3, *Dinkho* have many uses including the preparation of food, storage, gift and ancestral worship, and the function is inferred in the name. Ceramic vessels used for ritual and ancestral worship are thus referred to as '*Dinkho tsa Badimo*' (ceramics of the ancestors) are considered to be special ceramic vessels by the Basotho-Batswana because they are associated with ancestors. As these vessels are associated with the ancestors, particular reverence should be paid in the manner in which they are approached. As Augustine (2007:3) suggests "All cultural ancestral material should be treated with respect no matter to whom it belongs or in what context the object was used. However, sacred or ceremonial materials carry with them additional protocols related to the gender of the handler and daily, seasonal, and annual cycles that dictate when the materials can be handled or stored." With this in mind, it is thus of paramount importance to preserve both the physical and spiritual integrity of ceremonial objects, that both the intangible and tangible aspects of the objects are explored, documented and understood, particularly when these objects require conservation treatment by consulting the communities in which the objects come from.

This chapter discusses the intangible qualities associated with ceramic vessels such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, by looking at the gifting and receipt of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as well as the ritual use of the objects. These discussions aim to indicate the importance of the intangible aspect of sacred cultural objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* in conservation.

#### **4.2. Gifting and receipt of *Dinkho tsa Badimo***

*Dinkho tsa Badimo* in as much as they are tangible objects, their real significance and importance is in the intangible aspects connected to the object.

Traditionally, every girl in Sesotho-Setswana culture is given an '*Nkho tsa Badimo*' by their grandmothers either maternal, paternal, or sometimes both. This significant 'gift' indicates that the girl is now entering a new phase of life, where she will increasingly acquire additional

responsibilities. Thus, this giving is a form of a rite of passage and hence is not given to young girls as they may not understand the significance of the vessel, nor are they ready to care for their ceramic. '*Dinkho tsa Badimo*' are significant in that they are used in rituals that are deemed to be sacred by those that perform them. As a Sesotho-Setswana woman, '*Nkho ya Badimo*' (ancestral ceramic) represents my personal and familial heritage and is an essential part of my life. I was given my '*Nkho tsa Badimo*' by my maternal grandmother at the age of 21, but some girls may get '*Nkho ya Badimo*' at a younger or older age, this depends on the family, maturity and understanding of the young adult.

### 4.3. Ritual use of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*

'*Dinkho tsa Badimo*' are special in that they are used in religious rituals that are deemed to be sacred by those that perform them. "In African spirituality, ancestor engagement with the community is always mediated through material objects. Ancestral objects are an embodiment of the ancestors or ancestral meaning-making, which links the visible community to the world of the spirits" (Alubafi and Kaunda, 2019, pg. 1). Basotho-Batswana perform different rituals using *Dinkho tsa Badimo* to connect and communicate to their ancestors. '*Go phatlha*' is one such ritual an African herb known as '*Imphepho*'<sup>27</sup> is burnt and used alongside with other materials such as lit white and red candles used to '*kganyisa*'<sup>28</sup>(light the way), '*Senefi*'<sup>29</sup> which is poured inside the '*Nkho ya Badimo*' whilst calling out the names/clan names of the ancestors and '*Bojwala ba setso*'<sup>30</sup> as an offering/gift for the ancestors. '*Go phatlha*' is performed for many reasons but mainly for prayer purposes and also on special occasions like the birth of a child, death of a family member, announcing the arrival of a bride into a new home to your ancestors. It is the heart of African spirituality. The process of '*Go phatlha*' is very sacred and a delicate process hence it needs special attention when it is performed and '*Dinkho ya Badimo*' are the main object in its performance.

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<sup>27</sup> *Imphepho* or *mphepo* refers to an indigenous flowering plant of the family Helichrysum. The stalks and flowers are widely used as a ritual incense in South African traditional medicine. A survey of plants in *umuthi* shops in the Johannesburg area by Williams, Balkwill and Witkowski (2001:91) revealed several species are sold as *Imphepho* including *Achyrocline stenoptera* 1, st *Helichrysum cymosum* subsp. *calvum* 1, st *H. decorum* 1, st *H. epapposum* 1, st *H. gymnocomum* 1, st *H. natalitium* 1, st *H. nudifolium* 1, st *H. odoratissimum* 1, st. The plants have many uses including to induce calm and reduce anxiety, anti-inflammatory, pain-relief, anti-septic, and organic pesticide (Abalimi Bezelkhaya website, 2017: [sp]).

<sup>28</sup> Term can be loosely translated into English as to shine light so that the ancestors can find their way into the room or location

<sup>29</sup> Traditional homemade snuff (fine crushed tobacco dark brown in color)

<sup>30</sup> Traditional beer made of sorghum

In Sesotho-Setswana culture the ancestors are contacted by burning specific herbs in the '*Nkhoa tsa Badimo*', with the belief that the scented smoke lifts up into the air and awakens the ancestors. "Communications with our ancestors is very important to us. We communicate with them for every major event in our lives from birth to death. We also communicate with them to ask for blessings and protection. The communication is also important in keeping the ancestors happy because when neglected we believe that one can attract bad luck. During the ritual which is known as '*Go phatlha*', you offer traditional beer and food. The vessels that carry the offerings are called *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. These vessels are only used for ancestral ceremonies and nothing else (Interview: Semameleng Matsoso, 2020 pers.comm.). According to Sithole, '*Dinkho tsa Badimo*' are always dark or black as they are associated with ancestors. Since it is believed that ancestors visit at night, the pot must be black (Sithole, 2009: 2).

Matsoso (Interview: Semameleng Matsoso, 2020, pers. comm.) explains specifically why traditional beer is offered to the ancestor inside *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. "In the past, our ancestors didn't have modern cups and plates like we do now. *Dinkho* were used to serve everything. My grandmother trained me that when elders come and visit your home you serve them traditional beer and *Mageu*<sup>31</sup> as a form of respect." By offering the ancestors the same traditional beer which they drank alive she believes it pleases them and therefore brings blessings to her life. "Beer is also considered food for the ancestors, and whenever they are to be consulted or communicated with, beer is offered to them in a special vessel that is only used for sacred ceremonies. Beer is left inside the pot at the ancestral shrine in the courtyard, in other cases, the family would gather in the cattle kraal, where prayers are directed to the relevant ancestor who in all probability is buried there, and the beer is offered" (Van Schalkwyk, 2016: 35).

*Dinkho tsa Badimo* as objects were not meant to last forever, once the vessel is broken it is replaced with a new one. The broken *Dinkho tsa Badimo* is buried to connect with the ancestors. "When the *Nkhoa ya Badimo* I inherited from my grandmother broke, I buried it back home at our family homestead so that it can connect to my ancestors. After this I had a ritual to introduce the new *Nkhoa ya Badimo*, this was a special event because I had to sacrifice a goat, so that my ancestors can accept the new *Nkhoa ya Badimo*. (Interview: Semameleng Matsoso, 2020, pers.comm.).

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<sup>31</sup> Non-alcoholic drink made from sorghum

As mentioned previously, *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are also used in other rituals such as funerals, Van Schalkwyk (2016:34) notes that amongst the Basotho in Limpopo, beer that has been brewed for a funeral is shared in the following manner:

“Pots full of beer known as *tima molato* (extinguish the problem) are consumed by family members and in laws of the deceased, implying that problems that might have risen amongst them are resolved. A second set of pots with beer, are referred to as *bjalwa bja diphiri* (beer of the hyenas) is consumed by the men who dug the grave and is drunk outside the yard. These men are viewed to be ritually impure and as a result have to keep their distance from others until they are ritually cleansed. The third set of pots, are referred to as *banyaki ba ditonki*, The beer is consumed by people who are chance passers-by, for example if they go to look for their donkeys and then decide to join the event.”

Van Schalkwyk (2016:34) further notes that in such instances there is no distinction made on the type of vessel used between the three different groups. The only thing that might differ is the size of the pots because of the different numbers of people the vessels serve.

Van Schalkwyk (2016) also identifies similar sacred pots that play an important role during various communal rituals amongst the Basotho-Batswana. “Rain medicine is prepared in large clay pots. On the day when the rain-making ritual takes place, young uninitiated girls gather at the chief’s courtyard from where they are sent, with small clay pots, to collect water from all water points. This is taken back to the chief’s place, where it is added to the vessels containing the rain medicine. Some of this medicated water is then again transferred to the smaller vessels of each of the girls, who go out and sprinkle it on all agricultural fields and at strategic places such as water points, access roads to the region as such” (Van Schalkwyk, 2016: 6). For almost every ritual for the Basotho-Batswana, *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are central because they carry the offerings given to the ancestors.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

Although the tangible aspects of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, as well as the vessels themselves can have a finite life, the intangible aspect becomes a legacy, and carries on from generation to generation. When *Dinkho tsa Badimo* age and break, they are customarily returned to the earth and the ancestors. *Dinkho tsa Badimo* that have entered museum collections are thus denied this respect to rest and reunite with their owners, as was intended when the vessels were created.

With this in mind, agendas of heritage organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) need to give these vessels the much-needed respect by reflecting the intangible aspects of cultural objects in their conservation principles and guidelines. However as there is such diversity of context throughout the world's various peoples, perhaps local museums are better suited to drafting and implementing such practice on a local level.



## Chapter 5: Identifying Sacred Objects: *Dinkho tsa Badimo*

### 5.1. Introduction

Determining the most important features of a specific object in preparing for conservation treatment is complicated if its values and roles are not properly understood and appreciated. This chapter will discuss broadly the morphological characteristics of sacred ceramic vessels and pottery of the Basotho-Batswana, known as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

### 5.2. Four forms of ownership of *Dinkho tsa Badimo*

The context in which one receives *Dinkho tsa Badimo* may vary from person to person and from family to family. Ownership of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* takes on three different forms as discussed below.

The first one is when the *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are passed down from generation to generation, when one inherits the vessels from a deceased family member.

The second form of ownership is when the vessels belong to the family as a collective and are stored at the main family homestead. These *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are used for special family rituals/ceremonies that all members of the family participate in. This is usually at births, funerals and weddings or when the family does a thanksgiving ceremony to thank the ancestors. The oldest member of the family usually leads these rituals/ceremonies.

The third type of ownership of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* is personal one, when the owner purchases or gets the vessel made on their behalf. Usually, in this kind of ownership, the person may stay far away from the family homestead and may need the *Dinkho tsa Badimo* to perform personal rituals/ceremonies in their own space and may not be able to do this at their family homestead.

The fourth form of ownership is when one is gifted with *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

The *Nkho ya Badimo* that I own is an example of the fourth form of ownership. Where the vessel is gifted to celebrate a special milestone in one's life. My maternal grandmother gifted me with my *Nkho ya Badimo* when I turned 21 years old. This *Nkho ya Badimo* was given to me so that I could still communicate with my ancestors whilst living away from family

homestead<sup>32</sup>. My *Dinkho* is a small (130mm h x 500mm c), incurvate bowl with a wide opening, made of red clay. There are two wide haematite bands applied just below the rim and again just above the midsection. In addition, it has several incised arcs and short diagonal lines on the shoulder (figure 5). I use my *Dinkho* mainly for *Go Phatla* to burn *imphepho*.



Figure 5 - *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, M. Hoeane. Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

### 5.3. Talking about *Dinkho tsa Badimo* with the interviewees

As ownership of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* varies from person to person and family to family, this was one line of questioning posed to the interviewees.

Semamaleng Matsotso has had more than one *Nkho*. She inherited her first *Nkho ya Badimo* from her maternal grandmother when she passed away in the 1970s. This *Nkho ya Badimo* later broke into pieces in the early 2000s and as is customary, she buried it at her family homestead,

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<sup>32</sup> As a result of South Africa's migrant history, as most black South Africans, I spend the majority of my time in one part of the country, and only get to return to the family homestead during Christmas and some festive holidays when most families are reunited and perform ancestral rituals and ceremonies.

and purchased a new *Dinkho tsa Badimo* from Pitsane village in Botswana, where her family originates from (Figure 6). The *Nkho*'s design and shape was based on the vessel that had broken and was buried. The new *Nkho* is small, 170mm (h) x 630mm (c), made of dark brown to black clay and decorated with patterned arcs just above the mid-section of the belly, as well as a few widely spaced short diagonal lines just below the rim. The vessel can be classified as a recurved jar with a globular body, a slight straightening of the indistinct shoulder to the rim and a height greater than the mouth diameter.



Figure 6 – (my grandmother) Semamaleng Matsotso's personal *Nkho ya Badimo*. Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

Gogo Khanyagude and Amanda Khumalo both received their *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as a gift during their initiation to become traditional healers. Their *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are considered more sacred and culturally significant because as healers they use their vessels on a daily basis and use these vessels to communicate to the ancestors. During the telephonic interviews, we spoke about their objects and from a prior visit (pre-covid), I had seen their vessels, but they were unwilling for photographs to be taken and shared. Both of their vessels are small to medium in size, very shallow bowls. Both were dark and undecorated. These bowls are used to burn *Imphepho* on a daily basis as a cleansing ceremony. As they are practising traditional healers, they often perform other rituals, but use different objects for those purposes.

Tankiso Matsotso is the oldest person I interviewed at age 70. She is the main care giver of her family's collection of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* because she lives at the family homestead. "When one family member feels that things are not going well for them, they are welcome to come home and perform ancestral rituals at any time to fix this" (Tankiso, 2020: pers. comm). She recalls that the vessels have been in her family before she was even born which would date as far back as the 1930s. Figure 7 shows the family *Nkho* kept outside in a quiet corner of the yard of the family home. This vessel is again of modest size, 110mm (h) x 2600mm (cir) and a distinct recurved jar (height greater than mouth diameter) made of dark coloured clay. The jar has a globular body shape, short neck, and indistinct shoulder with three sets of double bands encircling the body, just above the midsection, on the upper body and at the base of the neck, where the latter joins into the body.



Figure 7 – Family *Nkho ya Badimo* kept in the yard at the Matsotso family home. Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

Based on the above-mentioned interviews and data collected on practitioners' *Dinkho*, along with references from the literature study, I propose a set of characteristics to identify possible *Dinkho tsa Badimo* in museum collections. The walls of the vessels are usually thick because of the contents they carry such as food, traditional beer, water cow dung, medicine and blood.

The vessels are usually dark in colour because of the belief that ancestors like dark colours that resemble the night, because that is when they come out. The vessels are also usually decorated. Residues may be found on the vessels because of the prior use, if these have not been inadvertently removed.

#### **5.4. DNCHM case study**

Using the above characteristics, I then surveyed the DNCHM collection registers and selected objects accessioned as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. These objects were identified to have been used by traditional healers prior to accession, to carry medicine, snuff and cow dung. The other vessels were picked out on shelf based on the above characteristics. For example, Vessel 1 was chosen because *boloko* (cow dung) residues was found inside the object. Traditionally, Basotho-Batswana huts were plastered with cow dung as a form of paint or plaster for decorations, or as a repellent to keep insects away. Before the cow dung could be applied, it was offered to the ancestors for them to bless the dung, so that once it was applied it served to protect the inhabitants from evil and unwanted spirits.

#### **5.5. Dinkho tsa Badimo at the Anthropology Collection at DNMCH**

In order to supply a visual guide of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* to curatorial staff, the identified DNMCH vessels have been illustrated and documented as a base catalogue.

### 5.5.1. Vessel 1



Figure 8: Vessel 1: Profile view, Image M. Hoane, 2020.

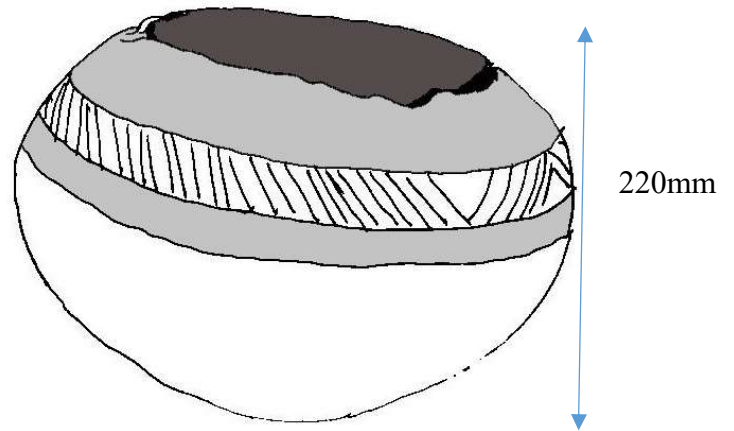


Figure 9: Vessel 1 Sketch Image M. Hoane, 2020.



Figure 80: Vessel 1: Inner view, M. Hoane, 2020



Figure 11: Vessel 1: Profile view, Image M. Hoane, 2020

Museum data	Physical measurements
<b>Accession number:</b> ET.1982/131/14	<b>Height:</b> 2200mm
<b>Object name on register:</b> <i>Dinkho tsa Badimo</i>	<b>Diameter:</b> 293mm
<b>Date of acquisition:</b> 1982	<b>Circumference:</b> 920mm
	<b>Mouth diameter:</b> 180mm
	<b>Rim thickness:</b> 5mm

<p><b>Museum storage place:</b> Anthropology Collection</p> <p><b>Name of donor/collector:</b> collected during field work done by Van Schalkwyk</p>	
<p><b>Description:</b> Medium sized spheroidal vessel with constricted mouth. The vessel is dark brown in colour with reddish tones, decorated with both applied and incised decorations.</p> <p><b>Vessel form:</b> Incurvate bowl (vessel height 1/3 to 2/3 of mouth diameter)</p> <p><b>Vessel colour:</b> Munsell soil chart 7/3 (light reddish brown)</p> <p><b>Decorative techniques:</b> incised lines and applied hematite</p> <p><b>Current physical condition of vessel:</b> The vessel is in a good stable condition, with no prior repairs. There are several small to large sized chips around the mouth. Several hairline cracks extending from the chips visible on the outer surface of the vessel and not the inner surface.</p> <p>Interior surface appears to have been smeared and there is a green-brown residue with fibres that resemble cow dung.</p> <p><b>Examination:</b> visual examination alone using a flashlight and overhead lighting. A soft-haired brush was used to determine if the interior layer was a residue laying on the inner surface or part of the manufacture with a sealant layer applied. Additionally, the layer did not appear dry, but rather damp.</p>	<p><b>Provenance of vessel</b></p> <p><b>Place of origin:</b> Sekhukhune village, Limpopo</p> <p><b>Place collected:</b> Sekhukhune village, Limpopo</p> <p><b>Method of collection:</b> Excavation as part of the museum's fieldwork in 1982, lead archaeologist was J. van Schalkwyk.</p>

### 5.5.2 Vessel 2



Figure 9: Vessel 2: Profile view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

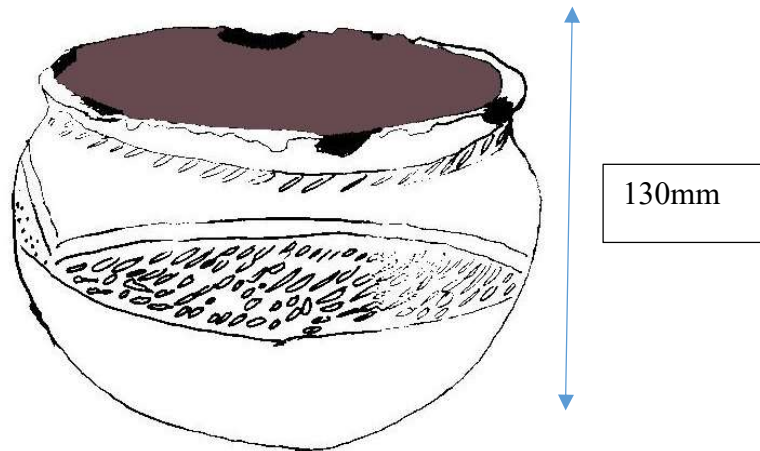


Figure 10: Vessel 2: Sketch showing overall size, M. Hoeane, 2020.



Figure 11: Vessel 2: Inner view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.



Figure 12: Vessel 2: Evidence of damage on the rim, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

Museum data	Physical measurements
<b>Accession number:</b> E.T. 1977/3/ ba Mahlo	<b>Height:</b> 130mm
<b>Object name on register:</b> <i>Dinkho tsa Badimo</i>	<b>Diameter:</b> 156mm
	<b>Circumference:</b> 490mm



<p><b>Date of acquisition:</b> 1977</p> <p><b>Museum storage place:</b> Anthropology department</p> <p><b>Name of donor/collector:</b> Unknown</p>	<p><b>Mouth diameter:</b> 120mm</p> <p><b>Rim thickness:</b> 6,3mm</p>
<p><b>Description:</b> Small spheroidal vessel with large open mouth, slightly constricted with an indistinct shoulder and short neck with recurved rim. The vessel is dark brown in colour with reddish tones, decorated with incised decorations.</p> <p><b>Vessel form:</b> the form includes the neck and opening style of a recurved jar, along with a tapered and rounded base. However, the body is spheroidal in shape similarly to an incurvate bowl. Although Antonites (2020:257) includes various profiles for the vessel opening ranging from very restricted to open, the sides described are not everted as is the case in this vessel. Perhaps a new classification of ‘recurved bowl’ could be proposed, where the mouth diameter measures approximately 2/3 of the height of the vessel.</p> <p><b>Vessel colour:</b> Munsell soil chart 2.5/2 (very dusky red)</p> <p><b>Decorative techniques:</b> Incised lines</p> <p><b>Current physical condition of vessel:</b> Vessel is in a fair to good condition and stable, with no evidence of prior repairs. There are several small to medium chips along the rim. Interior surface had dust and sand loosely adhered.</p> <p><b>Examination:</b> Visual examination alone using a flashlight and overhead lighting.</p>	<p><b>Provenance of vessel</b></p> <p><b>Place of origin:</b> Sekhukhune land</p> <p><b>Place collected:</b> Sekhukhune land</p> <p><b>Originator community:</b> ba Mahlo</p> <p><b>Method of collection:</b> Donated to the museum in 1977.</p>

### 5.5.3 Vessel 3



Figure 13: Vessel 3: Profile view, Image M. Hoane, 2020.

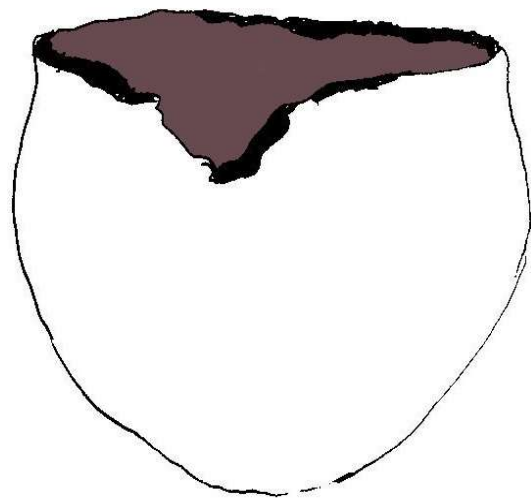


Figure 14: Vessel 3: Sketch with overall view, M. Hoane, 2020.



Figure 15: Vessel 3: Profile view, Image M. Hoane, 2020.



Figure 16: Vessel 3: Inner view, Image M. Hoane, 2020.

<p><b>Museum data</b></p> <p><b>Accession number:</b> E.T 1937/9</p> <p><b>Date of acquisition:</b> 1937</p> <p><b>Museum storage place:</b> Anthropology collection</p> <p><b>Name of donor/collector:</b> Unknown</p>	<p><b>Physical measurements</b></p> <p><b>Height:</b> 120mm</p> <p><b>Diameter:</b> 146mm</p> <p><b>Circumference:</b> 460mm</p> <p><b>Mouth diameter:</b> 410mm</p> <p><b>Wall thickness and rim:</b> 5,6mm</p>
<p><b>Description:</b></p> <p><b>Vessel form:</b> the form includes the neck and opening style of a recurved jar, along with a tapered and rounded base. However, the body is spheroidal in shape similarly to an incurvate bowl. Similarly, to the previous vessel, perhaps a new classification of ‘recurved bowl’ could be proposed.</p> <p><b>Vessel colour:</b> Munsell soil chart 3/32 (darkish reddish brown)</p> <p><b>Decorative techniques:</b> undecorated</p> <p><b>Current physical condition of vessel:</b> Good stable condition, with the exception of a large chip in the rim and upper body.</p> <p>A large white round mark is visible on the exterior surface of the base of the vessel.</p> <p>The accession number ET.37/9 and the word ‘BASOETO’ in capital letters have been written onto the exterior surface on the lower belly in large characters in thick white ink/paint.</p>	<p><b>Provenance of vessel</b></p> <p><b>Place of origin:</b> Basoeto land<sup>33</sup></p> <p><b>Place collected:</b> Basoetho land (modern day Lesotho)</p> <p><b>Originator community:</b> not recorded</p> <p><b>Method of collection:</b> Donated to the museum, 1937.</p> <p>Accession register notes: Originally purchased by the donor for 6d (sixpence) “Potjie waarin veral medisyne gekook word” (translated as: small pot in which especially medicine was cooked).</p>

<sup>33</sup>Lesotho’s name under colonialism

#### 5.5.4 Vessel 4



Figure 17: Vessel 4: Profile view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

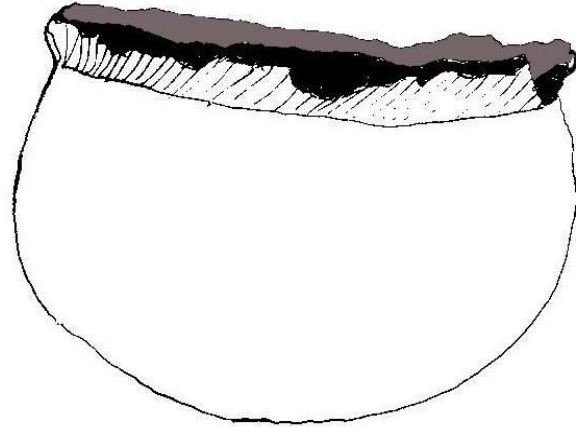


Figure 18: Vessel 4: Sketch with overall view, M. Hoeane, 2020.



Figure 19: Vessel 4: Profile view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.



Figure 20: Vessel 4: Inner view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

<p><b>Museum data</b></p> <p><b>Accession number:</b> E.T. 37/34 TAU</p> <p><b>Date of acquisition:</b> 1937</p> <p><b>Museum storage place:</b> Anthropology collection</p> <p><b>Name of donor/collector:</b> collected during field work by the museum</p>	<p><b>Physical measurements</b></p> <p><b>Height:</b> 160mm</p> <p><b>Diameter:</b> 261mm</p> <p><b>Circumference:</b> 820mm</p> <p><b>Mouth diameter:</b> 240mm</p> <p><b>Rim thickness:</b> 5mm</p>
<p><b>Description:</b> small spheroidal vessel, with a constricted shoulder, short neck with everted rim and wide mouth opening. The vessel is decorated.</p> <p><b>Vessel form:</b> the form includes the neck and opening style of a recurved jar, along with a tapered and rounded base. However, the body is spheroidal in shape similarly to an incurvate bowl. Similarly, to the previous vessel, perhaps a new classification of ‘recurved bowl’ could be proposed.</p> <p><b>Vessel colour:</b> Munsell soil chart 2.5/2 (dark reddish brown)</p> <p><b>Decorative techniques:</b> Incised lines arranged in long deep diagonal lines on the neck of the vessel.</p> <p><b>Current physical condition of vessel:</b> good stable condition with no visible prior repairs. Small to large chips on the rim mouth. No cracks visible. Two small deep marks are visible on the lower body above the base, but appear to have been made during manufacture prior to firing and are thus not considered damage.</p> <p>The accession number E.T.37/34 TAU in capital letters have been written onto the exterior surface on the upper belly in large characters in thick white ink/paint.</p>	<p><b>Provenance of vessel</b></p> <p><b>Place of origin:</b> Marisane, Limpopo</p> <p><b>Place collected:</b> Marisane, Limpopo</p> <p><b>Originator community:</b> not recorded</p> <p><b>Method of collection:</b> collected during museum fieldwork but no details on the lead archaeologist/anthropologist. No further records.</p>

### 5.5.5 Vessel 5



Figure 21: Vessel 5: Profile view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

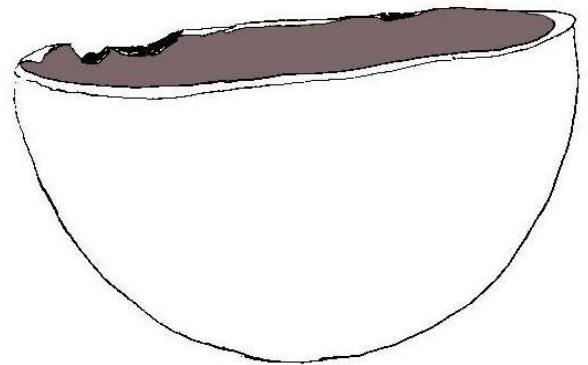


Figure 22: Vessel 5: Sketch with overall view, M. Hoeane, 2020.



Figure 23: Vessel 5: Profile view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.



Figure 24: Vessel 5: Inner view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

<p><b>Museum data</b></p> <p><b>Accession number:</b> U.P. 34:426</p> <p><b>Date of acquisition:</b> 1934</p> <p><b>Object name:</b> pot confiscated from the King</p> <p><b>Museum storage place:</b> Anthropology collection</p> <p><b>Name of donor/collector:</b> Confiscated during field work by the museum</p>	<p><b>Physical measurements</b></p> <p><b>Height:</b> 900mm</p> <p><b>Diameter:</b> 178mm</p> <p><b>Circumference:</b> 560mm</p> <p><b>Mouth diameter:</b> 170mm</p> <p><b>Rim thickness:</b> 4.8mm</p>
<p><b>Description:</b> hemispherical vessel of a dark red-brown colour, with deep sides and a wide opening. The base is rounded and the vessel undecorated.</p> <p><b>Vessel form:</b> the vessel is a deep bowl as described by Antonites (2020: 255) with height measuring half of the diameter of the mouth.</p> <p><b>Vessel colour:</b> Munsell soil chart 2.5/1 (reddish black)</p> <p><b>Decorative techniques:</b> undecorated</p> <p><b>Current physical condition of vessel:</b> the vessel is in a good stable condition with no evidence of prior repairs. A large chip is visible on the mouth, with no associated cracks.</p> <p>The inner surface exhibits a whitish series of drip marks and ring in the lower third of the belly.</p> <p>U.P. 34:426 is written on the shoulder in large capital letters in red ink/paint.</p>	<p><b>Provenance of vessel</b></p> <p><b>Place of origin:</b> Belonged to King Mapogo in Limpopo</p> <p><b>Place collected:</b> Limpopo</p> <p><b>Originator community:</b> Northern Basotho</p> <p><b>Method of collection:</b> The accession register notes the vessel was confiscated from King Mapogo, king of the northern Basotho. Acquired during museum field work in 1934.</p>

### 5.5.6 Vessel 6



Figure 25: Vessel 6: Profile view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.

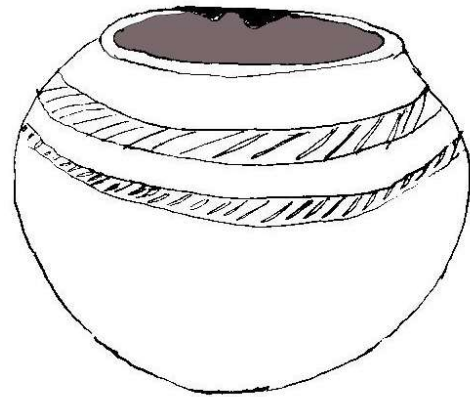


Figure 26: Vessel 6: Sketch with overall view, M. Hoeane, 2020.



Figure 27: Vessel 6, Inner view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.



Figure 28: Vessel 6: Profile view, Image M. Hoeane, 2020.



<p><b>Museum data</b></p> <p><b>Accession number:</b> E.T 1982/131/3 Pedi</p> <p><b>Date of acquisition:</b> 1982</p> <p><b>Object name:</b> <i>Lefiswana</i> (Sepedi term for small vessel)</p> <p><b>Museum storage place:</b> Anthropology collection</p> <p><b>Name of donor/collector:</b> collected during field work done by Van Schalkwyk in 1982</p>	<p><b>Physical measurements</b></p> <p><b>Height:</b> 100mm</p> <p><b>Diameter:</b> 162mm</p> <p><b>Circumference:</b> 510mm</p> <p><b>Mouth diameter:</b> 130mm</p> <p><b>Rim thickness:</b> 6.1mm</p>
<p><b>Description:</b> small, spheroidal vessel of a dark brown-black colour. The vessel has a sort slightly straightened rim and wide opening.</p> <p><b>Vessel form:</b> vessel is an incurvate bowl described by Antonites (2020:255) as spheroidal in shape with a constricted mouth and height 1 to 2/3 of mouth opening.</p> <p><b>Vessel colour:</b> Munsell soil chart 2.5 (greenish black)</p> <p><b>Decorative techniques:</b> two patterned bands of incised lines on the upper belly and shoulder. The first (upper belly) consists of incised diagonal lines, the upper band on the shoulder has both incised diagonal lines and cross hatching.</p> <p><b>Current physical condition of vessel:</b> good stable condition, no evidence of previous repairs. Single small rim chip.</p> <p>It appears that the surface has been polished or sealed.</p>	<p><b>Provenance of the vessel</b></p> <p><b>Place of origin:</b> Sekhukhune land, Limpopo</p> <p><b>Place collected:</b> Sekhukhune land, Limpopo</p> <p><b>Originator community:</b> Pedi (Northern Sotho)</p> <p><b>Collection method:</b> Collected during field work done by Van Schalkwyk in 1982, accession register further notes that it was taken from <i>Ntlo ya Badimo</i> (house of the ancestors).</p>

### **5.6. Traditional care of *Dinkho tsa Badimo***

One other aspect of the interviews was to know how the practitioners stored and cared for their *Dinkho* in order to develop culturally appropriate protocols for collections. The general consensus amongst the interviewees was that *Dinkho* need to be stored separate from other household ceramic vessels. Although the same food and beverages are served to the ancestors and the living, as these offerings are blessed before they are kept separate to avoid contamination (Interview: Tankiso Matsotso, 2020).

Therefore, generally, the vessels are stored in out of the way spaces with low light or dark space, that is also cool in temperature. The family vessels as illustrated in figure 7 are often stored in a corner of the yard, outside the house, under a shady tree or bush. This is also usually the place where damaged or broken vessels are laid to rest (Interview: Tankiso Matsotso, 2020; Interview: Gogo Khanyakude, 2020).

*Dinkho* are only taken out from their designated storage spot when rituals need to be performed, and only the owner is permitted to retrieve the vessel (Interview: Amanda Khumalo, 2020). In the case of family or heirloom vessels, these are retrieved and handled by the oldest member of the family (Interview: Semamaleng Matsotso, 2020).

The offerings are not allowed to putrefy within *Dinkho*, as Semamaleng Matsotso described (Interview, 2020), the offerings have to be consumed by someone over the age of 65 years. Usually, this will be the same person who is allowed to handle the vessel and its keeper, but in the event this person is younger than 65, the offerings are presented to an elder within the community (Interview: Semamaleng Matsotso, 2020).

After use, the vessels are cleaned immediately with clean water to remove all residues. Even greasy residues and materials that have dried, such as blood or cow dung are systematically and meticulously removed (Interview: Semamaleng Matsotso, 2020). Sand is also sometimes used as a scrubbing and abrasive agent to remove any leftover residues. From these practices, residues may be difficult to identify, and residue analysis as suggested previously may not yield any results. However, use-wear analysis could potentially be instructive as sand and regular cleaning would leave definitive abrasion marks on the inner surface of the vessel. Additionally, vessels which are used for boiling or cooking of offerings would likewise exhibit some characteristic use wear on the exterior.

Traditionally these vessels have a useable life and when they are broken or damaged to such an extent that they are no longer useable, they are buried in the same space where they would

customarily be stored, “to become one with the ancestors and previous owners” (Interview: Semameleng Matsotso, 2020). This attitude and belief could explain why traditional repair is rarely encountered in the literature (Lawton, 1967: 489).

These few customary practices outlined above suggest the basis for culturally sensitive and respectful treatment of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* that could inform museum practice and provide guidelines for the storage, handling and care of these vessels as sacred objects.

### **5.7. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the pottery of the Basotho-Batswana broadly as well the characteristics that make ceramic vessels such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* sacred to the Basotho-Batswana. The chapter explored *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as museum objects at DNCHM. The chapter also discussed the traditional care of these objects with efforts to help with the conservation and curation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* in museum collections.

## Chapter 6: *Dinkho* as museum objects

### 6.1. Introduction

Chapter 6, discusses *Dinkho* as museum objects by first reviewing the historical context of museum collections in South Africa. The chapter then looks at the current museum practices at DNCHM. The chapter concludes by discussing the role that heritage organisations such as UNESCO, ICOMOS and SAMA play in developing conservation practices for sacred objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

### 6.2. Historical context of museum collections in South Africa

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the historical context in which museums acquired objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* were largely not by consent with their owners by missionaries and both colonial and apartheid governments. As Wallace (2014:49) notes of the missionary activity during the colonial period, “the conversion of Africans to Christianity was advancing in mission school education, with the assumption that their widespread traditional beliefs and practices would be supplanted through the conversion to Christianity.” Smith (2005: [sp]) writes how, irrespective of their religion, origin or destination, “the missionaries acted as agents of cultural change that was part and parcel of the Victorian era of colonialism and imperialism.” The missionaries would immerse themselves in the language, culture and customs of the local indigenous groups, go out on collecting expeditions for natural history specimens which they would send to friends, colleagues and academics back home (Smith, 2005: [sp]).

Indigenous objects were often taken forcefully from their owners through acts such as the *Witchcraft Suppression Act, 1957*<sup>34</sup>. Many of these indigenous objects were sacred objects used for religious rituals. Under colonial rule the collection of indigenous objects and artefacts which were easily traded or bartered, bought or taken formed as much part of the colonial project as they were seen as ‘curiosities’ both by settlers locally, as well as by the academics, collectors and curators abroad. As Fabian (2004:4) notes, collecting can be considered as a largely a political practice, allowing the colonisers a way of identifying and separating cultural

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<sup>34</sup> The WSA (3) of 1957 is available at <http://www.justice.gov.za/salrc/dpapers/dp129.pdf>. (Accessed on 6 October 2020.) This Act was later amended by The Witchcraft Suppression Amendment Act (50).

groups and territories based on the visual markers they exhibited through their cultural material, which eventually allowed the administrative subdivision of territories into cultural units earmarked for imperial rule, within new colonial boundaries.

The religious practices of the African people across the continent were demonised through religion, education and social structures that Europeans had set as their agenda. By demonising African religious practices, it became easy for the Europeans to loot indigenous objects associated with religious practices of the Africans. By implementing laws such as the *Witchcraft Suppression Act*, 1957, museum collections were enriched with looted sacred indigenous objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

Museums were able to justify acquiring sacred objects because “in contrast to the predominant view that Africans had no religion at all, this process led to what Chidester (1996:219–266) discusses as the ‘discovery’ of (a primitive) African religion. Documenting the beliefs of ‘African Religion’ was conducted in the search for similarities with already established Christian denominations. With magic practices positioned outside the category of ‘religion’ and denounced in Christian orthopraxy, African beliefs and practices garnered accusations of superstition, and, importantly, were associated with witchcraft in legislation in various European countries” (Wallace, 2014. pg. 45), as well as their colonies. The practice of burning confiscated indigenous objects by the police in the 1940s as mentioned in Chapter 1, also made it easy for South African public museums such as the then Transvaal Museum<sup>35</sup> to acquire indigenous sacred objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

### **6.3. Current museum practice at DNCHM**

Traditional African ceramic vessels such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are stored at the Anthropology collection at DNCHM. The vessels are classified and stored according to the tribes that they originate from, for example vessels made by the Nguni tribes (Zulu, Xhosa, Swati) are stored in one section and vessels made by the Basotho-Batswana are stored in a different section. This makes it easy when one needs to access and retrieve the vessels from the shelves.

According to the Anthropology collection curator Gertrude Seabela (Interview: 2020), regarding the general collection management procedure at DNCHM “once the museum receives an object whether through donation, acquisition or collected from field work, the

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<sup>35</sup> Transvaal Museum was later renamed Ditsong National Museum

registrar catalogues the given provenance of the object in the accession registers. The information includes where the object originates from, how much it was acquired for (if applicable), a short description of the object and the maker of the object including age, gender etc. During this process the object is given an accession number". Whilst going through the register it is noted that the general practice at the museum has been the same throughout the years except in the 1940s and 1950s. The practice of the museum during those years failed to give much information on African objects including the specificities of origin and provenance. In most cases, information on creators and originator communities is missing and vessels are usually ascribed to the general locality. For example, as described in chapter 5, vessel 4 (E.T, 37/34 TAU) Tau refers to a specific clan (tribe), however vessel 6 (E.T.1982/131/3 PEDI) Pedi refers to the northern Sotho as a group of peoples. During 1940s and 1950s, field work was encouraged at the museum and many excavations took place. Few records appear to have been made or kept, or at least the cross-referencing between the object registers and these reports and publications are not noted.

### **6.3.1. Conservation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo***

These incomplete records and poor record keeping extends to the conservation of museum objects, where conservation files could not be located for the objects selected. In addition, conservation practice, and in fact the department as a whole, appears to be waning at DNMCH. Although on my introductory tour to the museum with Ms Seabela, I was shown two conservation spaces including the ceramics studio and the metals conservation space, these do not appear to be functional, and only a single ceramics conservator is currently employed. Rebecca Mawela who holds this position and has been at DNCHM for the past 25 years, was trained on the job by conservators that have since left the museum. Mawela supplemented this experience with additional training through the South African Institute for Heritage Science and Conservation (SAInst), including a course on low-fired archaeological ceramics, but she has no other formal training and relies on her past experiences and learning. One of the reasons for this may be because of the lack of trained conservators at the museum in particular, but also in South Africa in general (McGinn, 2017: 10).

There are several options to be considered in material choice for the conservation and restoration of ceramics (Buys and Oakley, 1993:106). This is dependent on the material that the ceramic is made of and its level of firing as this affects the strength of the ceramic body

and its porosity, which in turn determines the extent to which a ceramic undergoing treatment will absorb conservation materials and the likelihood of staining and irreversible damage to occur. As Buys and Oakley state, “Poor workmanship or the use of unsuitable materials at this stage may undermine any further treatment, causing unnecessary work in the later stages of restoration and making it more difficult to achieve a good end result” (Buys and Oakley, 1993:106). In addition, when selecting adhesives for bonding it is generally accepted that the restoration materials ought to be weaker than the original material in order to avoid damage from stress or pressure caused by the different materials, thus it is preferable for the restoration to break afresh rather than causing additional fresh breakages in the material (Buys and Oakley, 1993:107).

Low-fired ceramics such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* tend to be highly porous and sensitive to the application of materials in liquid form. This can affect otherwise simple and straight forward treatments such as cleaning, beyond the removal of loose surface dirt (Sease, 1994:29), and are best left to trained conservators in the lab. As mentioned previously though, most low fired ceramics collected during fieldwork and excavation have previously been treated or prepared for research or exhibition. Many archaeologists however used to clean ceramics in the field, a task often delegated to untrained labourers, students and/or visitors (Eloff, 1979). This is potentially problematic as decoration, paint, and fine details of manufacture could easily be removed by inadvertent scraping, rubbing, harsh brushing or even immersion in water. In addition, fine details of residues, wear, damage and deterioration can give clues as to the past use of the vessel (Rice, 1987). As Tiley Nel (2014:65) suggests “ceramics which exhibit major pitting on the base of the vessel may indicate that the bottom of the vessel was probably placed over hearth stones during use.” Additionally, use-wear marks on the interior surface created prior to deposition can serve as an indication of the tools used in contact with the ceramic surfaces such as bone or wood, as well as the actions carried out such as scraping, grinding, stirring, cleaning or eating from which one can infer the use of the vessel (Tiley-Nel, 2014:65).

‘Cleaning’ actions post museum acquisition are necessary to prepare objects for use, whether this is for research purposes with cleaning of fragments for reassembly to determine shape and typology; or exhibition which would entail cleaning, reassembly, filling and aesthetic integration. These treatments, carried out thoughtlessly and without prior documentation and sampling, can remove residues which through analysis can give evidence of past use and ‘ingredients’ (Tiley-Nel, 2014). Cleaning should therefore only be carried out after examination, documentation and sampling (if necessary) to prevent the inadvertent removal of details with

research significance. Education for objects-based studies such as conservation or archaeology should include basics in chemistry and materials science so as to understand the materials under research: how they age, deteriorate and decay; as well as analytical methods to ensure that the evidence of these changes reflected in the materials is visible and documented. These basics form the core of art and heritage conservation studies, but are lacking in most archaeological programs (Sigurðardóttir, 2003:221). Although conservators and archaeologists often work on the same materials, it is rare for both professions to work collaboratively (Tiley-Nel & Antonites, 2015:7) and conservation training has led to some archaeologists relying on “conservation treatment recipes” to tackle problems, however without the understanding of material science, these recipes cannot be ‘adapted’ and this has sometimes had disastrous consequences such as the use of acid baths to soak objects in an effort to remove calcareous layers; gluing potsherds with industrial or inappropriate, and often irreversible, adhesives (Kötken, 2003:224).

As Sease quoted in Rotroff (2001:138) states, “conservators have their own ethical guidelines and standards of practice, but they work within a variety of frameworks, and the standards of those frameworks inevitably have an impact on how effectively conservators can practice their profession.” Conservators often deal with the objects and material that have been previously treated, whether in the field or in the museum, both by trained and untrained staff resulting in the removal and potential loss of research significant deposits. In the case of the *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, these deposits could differentiate between functional cooking and storage vessels and objects of spiritual significance, making the need for restraint in approaching the examination, handling and conservation all the more necessary.

There are no analytical facilities at DNCHM and the conservator is not trained to carry out research. Her examination of the vessels is purely visual under indoor lighting conditions and based on her experience. “Most of the times when objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* comes to me, no information accompanies them detailing if they are sacred objects or not” (Mawela, 2020). Mawela then has to make a judgement call, based on her own experience of ritual vessels, certain characteristics such as shape and colour, and the presence of visible residues to inform her treatment of the ceramic. Mawela primarily uses a standard western conservation approach as she was taught by the SAInst and past conservators at DNCHM (Mawela, 2020). Although Mawela differentiates her treatment of ceramics between western treatments she applies to household objects and her ‘traditional’ treatments that she applies only to ceramics



she suspects of being ancestral vessels, there is only a slight difference in approach and material between the two.

Cleaning can be classified into two steps, including dry surface cleaning or removal of particulate matter which is loosely adhered to the surface of the object by electrostatic forces or weak chemical bonds (Buys and Oakley, 85); while ‘wet’ or chemical cleaning treatments are focussed on the removal of material that “has become more deeply lodged in pores, cracks, ingrained along a break edge or have been absorbed into the body of the ceramic causing staining (Buys and Oakley, 1993: 91). Today, cleaning of the Anthropology collection ceramics by Rebecca Mawela usually consists of dry surface cleaning with soft brushes to lightly dust and remove loose material from the inner and exterior surfaces of the vessels. Further cleaning is then carried out using cotton swabs dampened in acetone due to the quick evaporation of the solvent (Interview: Rebecca Mawela, 2020).

Where vessels require consolidation, bonding or adhesion, Mowital® B30H, a vinyl aldehyde polymer, in a mixed ratio of polyvinyl butyral (76) and polyvinyl alcohol (20) is used as consolidant, binder and adhesive. The mixing ratio and concentration of the Mowital® dissolved in Butyl Alcohol is however not standardised or noted and is applied indiscriminately to all low-fired ceramics. There are many different adhesives that are appropriate for use on ceramics, however as Buys and Oakley (1993:106) describe “an adhesive that is suitable for use on one type of ceramic, e.g.: hard-paste porcelain, may not be entirely suitable for use on other types, e.g.: tin-glazed earthenware, or unglazed pottery. Before making a choice of adhesive, the conservator must consider carefully the type of ceramic object that is being dealt with, its composition, form and dimension, and also the condition of the object and the demands in terms of environment and handling that will be made on the repair.” Factors to consider when selecting an adhesive include the strength of the adhesive bond which needs to be strong enough to keep the pieces together, and allow handling. The adhesive also needs to be durable, to retain this strength and stability over time, not shrink, become brittle or peel away to avoid damage to the object, but also to avoid the failure of joints and the need to re-treat an object frequently, as repeated treatment processes increases the risk of damage to the object (Buys and Oakley, 1993:106). Compatibility of the adhesive with the material to be adhered has been mentioned, to ensure the materials age sympathetically, and that the thermal expansion coefficients of the adhesive and ceramic are matched to avoid stress (Buys and Oakley, 1993: 108). The viscosity of the adhesive as well as its curing time need to likewise be appropriate to the ceramic being treated, e.g.: using a low viscosity adhesive with a highly porous ceramic is

unsuitable as the adhesive will be drawn into the porous structure, possibly causing staining, shadowing, and being difficult to remove from the ceramic fabric if a retreatment is required in the future (Buys and Oakley, 1993: 108). Therefore a high-viscosity adhesive should be used for low-fired ceramics and this can be achieved by using a high solid: solvent ratio when mixing solvent systems such as Mowital® B30H. Reversibility of the adhesive used is lastly one of the most important considerations and although this may be more idealistic than realistic, as true reversibility is unattainable, according to Applebaum (1987) “even if an internal consolidate is easily soluble, it is unlikely that much can ever be removed”, however the more readily an adhesive is able to be re-solubilised over time, the easier it is to remove if retreatment is ever required (Buys and Oakley, 1993: 108). Mowital® B30H has good shrinkage resistance and has been shown to produce minimal colour changes on matt earthenware on first application (Buys and Oakley, 1993:102), although it is noted as relatively stable (Carrot et.al, 2015:95), it does cross-link over time making future reversal difficult.

Although suitable, it seems that the use of Mowital® B30H as a single adhesive or ‘cure-all’ for different ceramics, albeit of similar material and manufacture, is less than ideal, particularly as there is no standard preparation or monitoring of mixing ratios and strength, one batch may be stronger than another and is not tailored to the particular requirements of each individual object.

Mowital® B30H is used as a binder to fill areas of loss as well. Mowital® B30H is solubilised in Butyl alcohol and bulked with a mixture of Fumed Silica and Phenolic Resin (Micro balloons) as fillers when carrying out fills. Here too there is not exact proportion and no notes of mixtures taken during the restoration process. For household vessels, Mowital® B30H fills are further tinted with dry pigments supplied by the SAInst; however, Mawela alters her treatment for vessels she suspects of being sacred, such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. For these, she uses what she terms her ‘traditional’ method, adding water and soil that she collects from near her home in Mamelodi to the Mowital® mixture, in order to match the colour and texture of the vessel she is treating. In this method, the dry pigments are left out but the fumed silica and phenolic resin are included. Once the fills have cured, there is no further painting or visual integration.

### **6.3.2. Access, storage, handling and use of *Dinkho tsa Badimo***

Curatorial practice with regards to storage, handling and exhibition is likewise not specific to *Dinkho tsa Badimo* and these are treated in the same manner as all the ceramics. Unfortunately, currently *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are not exhibited at DNCHM neither are they stored separately from other ceramic vessels in the Anthropology collection.

### **6.4. The role of heritage organisations in setting conservation principles with intangible heritage consideration**

The main agenda of heritage organisations concerning conservation has been tangible heritage. Alpha Oumar Konare remarked at UNESCO's *First Proclamation of Masterpieces of The Oral and Intangible Heritage*, Paris, 2001, that "the protection of intangible heritage is a long struggle". The inclusion of intangible heritage in the protection of cultural property has not been as prominent as tangible heritage in the agendas of heritage organisations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS. Munjeri (2004) and Ahmad (2006) argue that these international heritage organisations need to take both the intangible and the tangible aspect of cultural objects into consideration when coming up with conservation principles and guidelines of cultural heritage. Munjeri (2004: 17) suggests that "each individual piece of cultural heritage should not be considered in isolation but within its whole context with an understanding of the multiple reciprocal relationship it has with its physical (i.e. tangible) and non-physical (i.e. intangible) environment."

Historical monuments, buildings, groups of building, sites and towns which form part of tangible heritage have been the main focus of conservation principles in the heritage agendas for international heritage organisations. "The development of conservation principles in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been regarded by many as the most significant achievement of conservation activities, internationally" (Ahmad, 2006. Pg. 292). These principles or guidelines have been adopted as charters, resolutions and declarations. The *Venice charter* in 1964<sup>36</sup> was the first charter to be adopted by UNESCO. The Charter set a benchmark for principles governing architectural conservation and restoration. The Charter also helped to broaden the concepts of historic buildings, the application of modern technology in conservation works, which all focused in tangible heritage. Since the adoption of *the Venice*

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<sup>36</sup> International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (the Venice Charter) CATHM, 1964

*charter* similar charters focusing on tangible heritage have been adopted, such as *the Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas* by ICOMOS in 1987 and the *Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage* adopted by ICOMOS in 2000. No fewer than 40 such documents exist both internationally and at national levels, and those listed above focus on immovable heritage.

UNESCO first adopted a standard setting-instrument mentioning intangible heritage, the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural heritage* at the General meeting in 1972. It was only years later in 2003 that UNESCO finally approves and adopts the *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* at the General Conference. The convention recognized the importance of intangible heritage (Munjeri, 2004, pg. 12) and defined intangible heritage as follows:

“The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills- as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith-that communities, groups and, in some cases, individual recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environments, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity” (Article 2:2). This included oral traditions and expressions, language, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events and traditional craftsmanship (Ahmad, 2006: 299).

SAMA<sup>37</sup> follows the guidelines of UNESCO as well as the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property. The Code of Ethics and Guidance for Practice of CAPC, 2000 discusses the handling of sacred cultural material. In this document, it is stated, under general obligations, to include respect for sacred integrity as an important principle guiding the practice of conservation. The sacred integrity refers to the emotional and spiritual associations that are attached to ancestral material. In the code, the term “conceptual integrity” is used to refer to the integrity of the objects’ meanings, including their sacred or spiritual values. (Augustine, 2007, Pg. 6).

It is a prerogative of every country to formulate its own terminology and interpretation of heritage, however some common terms and terminology should be followed. It is

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<sup>37</sup> South African Museum Association

recommended that UNESCO and ICOMOS lead the intellectual discussions on terms, scope and terminology: and international countries adopt them at national level (Ahmad, 2006: 299). However, this has not been the case with South African museums in which objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* fall under their museum collections. This could be mainly because of the colonial and apartheid systems used in South Africa which did not see the value in African sacred objects but rather viewed the objects as curios. African sacred objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* have been disassociated from their intangible aspect. This is an injustice for the objects, to the originator communities and to the visitors who don't get to see these vessels.

At international level, heritage organisations such as UNESCO and ICOMOS can help create conservation principles, however it is up to individual museums to use these guidelines to address the importance of intangible heritage in museum collections. National Museums should be given the agency to create their own unique conservation principles because every museum collection is different and may contain sensitive objects that need unique conservations and curation. National heritage organisations such as SAMA should take the responsibility of ensuring that the conservation principles that national museums decide to implement in their museum's collection are respectful to sensitive objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* and reflect the guidelines given by the international heritage organisations.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

In order to properly conserve sacred objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, many aspects need to be taken into consideration such as the intangible aspect of the object, the role that heritage organisations play in ensuring that such objects are protected and treated with respect as all cultural heritage should be and the context in which the objects were acquired in museum collections. The choice of the conservator to conserve sacred objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* is also important. The conservator needs to be sensitive to these objects as they are spiritual materials. If the conservator feels that the material is too sensitive for them to deal with, they should be given the space to give another conservator with more knowledge on sacred objects to handle the conservation of the objects. Sacred objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* have been dissociated from their intangible aspect which is an injustice to the objects because for the people that objects come from the intangible aspect is important. Museums are meant to preserve and cherish different cultures in which they serve and addressing the conservation of such sacred objects would be a start.

## **Chapter 7: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **7.1. Introduction**

Chapter 7, as the concluding chapter for the mini-dissertation starts by summarizing the chapters of the mini-dissertation. The chapter then gives recommendations and concludes with the findings and a few final remarks.

### **7.2. Summary of chapters**

Chapter 1, served as the motivation for and contextualisation of the study. Using Basotho-Batswana terminology not only pays homage to the language and the people, but using the terms and concepts as used by the Basotho-Batswana is also an example of decolonisation in practice, as is the recognition of the spiritual aspects of these vessels as a class separate from household wares.

The literature survey in Chapter 2, gave insight to the traditional methods of production that have since changed, and why these changes have occurred. Understanding production allows an understanding of and differentiation of damage due to production, i.e.: flaws in the material or processes that are inherent to the object, and noticeable ‘flaws’ as part of the natural process of ageing and deterioration. Likewise understanding the use of the vessel during rituals assist in identifying potential markers and residues as evidence.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the research of this study, based on the literature review and supplemented by interviews to draw a possible set of morphological characteristics to assist in identifying *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, as outlined in 5.

In order to better guide DNCHM and other museums in the appropriate care of these spiritual vessels, interviews were conducted to identify the practices and other intangible characteristics applied to *Dinkho* and are outlined in Chapter 4, which leads into chapter 6, which in turn discusses *Dinkho* as museum objects. Chapter 6 discussed the historical context in which

museums acquired objects such as *Dinkho tsa Badimo* were largely forceful, with missionary activity, and under both colonial and apartheid governments.

Throughout the research I have tried to stress the importance of recognising *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as a separate class of ceramics. The first step in this process was to identify if these objects are seen by their users as spiritual or sacred objects and needing to be subjected to specific protocols in order to retain their spiritual significance. Such a recognition would naturally have implications for access, use, handling and treatment to retain their spiritual significance. The second question to be answered would then be, how could curatorial or conservation staff be guided to correctly identify misattributed *Dinkho tsa Badimo* in order to respect these protocols.

Museums need to store *Dinkho tsa Badimo* in a cool and dry place separate from other ceramic vessels in the museum collections. When the vessels need to be cleaned, fresh water should be used to gently wipe the objects if it is necessary. The use of chemicals on the objects should be avoided. By following these protocols, the museums would be following the protocols that the originating communities use to take care of the vessels.

### **7.3. Recommendations**

Following are a few basic recommendations that would allow a more culturally sensitive and appropriate manner of working with *Dinkho tsa Badimo*. These recommendations are in no way prescriptive and are merely a suggestion. DNMCH already has protocols in place for the access, use and treatment of other culturally significant spiritual or sacred materials. Objects recognised as having spiritual or religious significance, such as religious manuscripts and African drums are stored in a dedicated area in DNMCH's storage, access is restricted, as is handling and cleaning, which usually only consists of light dusting. In addition, these objects are rarely exhibited, and if they are requested for exhibition, permission is asked from the originator community.

The recommendations I would like to suggest are thus based on those existing guidelines which include the following two general recommendations:

- Currently, the documentation of *Dinkho tsa Badimo* and other African sacred objects is incomplete at DNCHM and could be an area of research focus to re-examine and identify sacred objects.

- Museums need to engage with source communities on how they expect their sacred objects to be treated in terms of conservation and curation.

In addition, I would like to suggest that once identified as *Dinkho tsa Badimo*, these sacred objects should:

- Be stored along with other sacred objects in DNCHM's storage specifically dedicated to other culturally sensitive and spiritually significant objects.
- If the above is not possible, then the *Dinkho tsa Badimo* should be grouped together on a separate shelf.
- The shelf should be clearly labelled as containing sacred objects to make staff aware that there are potential protocols to be followed when accessing and handling these particular objects.
- Isolating each ceramic in its own custom-made archival box, and clearly labelling the box could also be a possibility to separate the sacred from other household vessels, keep them in dark and contaminant free. However, this does have serious resource implications for a collection as large as DNCHM's.
- Handling of these objects should be done by an older staff member, preferably trained to deal with spiritual objects, or with assistance of a traditional healer. There are no gender-based cultural restrictions and so this should not limit staff from handling *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.
- As best museum practice already involves handling objects with clean or gloved hands, this should be observed when handling *Dinkho tsa Badimo*.

It is important to keep in mind that the above-mentioned guidelines apply only to *Dinkho tsa Badimo* as ancestral vessels of the Basotho-Batswana and that different cultural groups may have different guidelines to be followed. In addition, guidelines for these ceramic vessels may differ within a cultural group between the types of object under discussion.

#### **7.4. Conclusions**

The observations that I made through the study is that ancestors and ancestral-worship are key to African religious beliefs and the objects and vessels associated to ritual practices are deemed to have strong spiritual significance. As such, *Dinkho tsa Badimo* are sacred to the Basotho-Batswana because they play a major role during rituals that are associated with ancestors. As a



conservator the research has highlighted the importance of being sensitive to cultural material in museum collections, and how invaluable cultural insight is to respecting the intangible values associated with artefacts. This is however only possible if proper documentation and research has been carried out on the objects, and if staff are aware of the status of objects requiring additional care and respect. Thus, the research needs to be made available to staff. Objects as well as their enclosures or storage systems should be clearly labelled. To achieve this, I would recommend that community engagement is extended beyond the communities that museums serve on a local level, and include originator communities wherever possible. This would maximise the potential of creating harmony on how sacred objects should be conserved and treated in museums, and additionally create awareness of the role of museums for communities.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 - Letter of informed consent



Tangible Heritage Conservation

### Letter of Informed Consent

I am Mabafokeng Hoeane (Student number: 13407547) currently studying for a degree in Masters of Social Sciences M(Soc)Sci in Tangible Heritage Conservation at the School of Arts at the University of Pretoria (UP). As part of the degree, I have to produce a research mini-dissertation that addresses the spiritual significance and conservation of Dinkho tsa Badimo (Basotho-Batswana spiritual ceramic vessels). Thus, for the purposes of this study, I need to complete field research which will take the form of open-ended interviews with individuals with first-hand or expert knowledge of information relevant to my dissertation. To this end therefore, have identified you as one of the people who can assist me and I hereby wish to obtain permission to interview you.

If you agree to take part in this study the data collected will be used for conservation and academic purposes only and will be stored and archived at the School of the Arts of the UP in documentation format for a period of 15 years. There is no compensation for your participation in this study although the information you will provide will be greatly appreciated as will hopefully contribute to the knowledge base of African spiritual objects and the techniques of their conservation and curation.

Any questions you have about this study can be directed me ( Mabafokeng Hoeane ) at telephone number ; 0766809695 or e-mail address ; [u13407547@tuks.co.za](mailto:u13407547@tuks.co.za), or the dissertation supervisor Isabelle McGinn at telephone number; 0839530587 or e-mail address; [isabelle.mcgin@up.ac.za](mailto:isabelle.mcgin@up.ac.za)

Statement of voluntary consent:

When signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily participate in this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw my participation at any time. A copy of this letter of consent has been given to me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AMH', enclosed in a hand-drawn oval.

Mabafokeng Hoeane

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I, \_\_\_\_\_ (the undersigned) agree to participate in the Mini-Dissertation research project of Ms **Mabafokeng Hoeane** (student number 13407547) at the University of Pretoria

<input type="checkbox"/>	I give permission for my name to be used in this research.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I wish to remain anonymous in this research.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2 – Preliminary interview questions



### RE: Questions regarding M. Hoeane *Dinkho tsa Badimo* Research

#### A) Category of interviewees: traditional healers (2); possessor of Nkho (2)

1. Age: [20-30] [30-40] [40-50] [50-60] [60 +]
2. Gender: Female
3. Occupation:
4. Place of Residence:
5. Cultural group:
6. Reason for participation in the study:
7. Description of your Nkho:
8. When and how did you acquire your Nkho:
9. Object (Nkho) meaning to you:
10. How do you take care of your Nkho?
11. Do you ever clean your Nkho and how?
12. How/where is your Nkho stored:

#### B) Category of interviewee: Museum curator ( Ethnography collection at Ditsong)

13. Name of the collection(s)
14. Size of the collection(s)?
15. Provenance (origin, acquisition date and method, collector, donation to the museum) of the items in the collection?
16. Where and how is the collection(s) stored, does this storage meet conservation standards?
17. What are the current curatorial and conservation guidelines and practices at Ditsong (if any) for these ceramics with regards to storage, handling and display?
18. Does Ditsong house sacred, spiritual or religious materials in other collections?
19. What are the current curatorial and conservation guidelines and practices at Ditsong (if any) for sacred, spiritual or religious materials with regards to storage, handling and display?
20. Does Ditsong hold any human remains?
21. What are the current curatorial and conservation guidelines and practices at Ditsong (if any) for human remains with regards to storage, handling and display?

## Appendix 3 – Letter of permission to work on the DNCHM collection



Chairperson  
Ethics Committee  
University of Pretoria  
Pretoria  
0001

Dear Sir or Madam

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT DITSONG MUSEUMS OF SOUTH AFRICA

This communication serves to confirm that Ms Mabafokeng Hoeane has been granted permission by the Ditsong Museums of South Africa: Cultural History Museum to conduct her research at the museum ANTHROPOLOGY COLLECTION, for her mini-thesis titled: The Spiritual significance and conservation of Dinkho tsa Badimo.

Her supervisor, Ms Issabelle McGin had several meetings with the museums explaining the objectives of the thesis and the ethical consideration and requirements of the University of Pretoria.

We wish both the supervisor and her student well in this journey.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noel Solani", written over a light blue circular stamp.

Dr Noel Solani  
Ditsong Cultural History Museum  
28 May 202

