

# CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

## AFRICAN SMOKING PIPE

Angola, 20th century

Wood and metal

L 60,5 x H 7,5 x W 6 cm

MAH R.1996.0120

The smoking pipe here in exhibition belongs to the Angra do Heroísmo Museum. It was collected in the central plateau region of Angola, during the Great War (1914-18), and, with a large number of other African objects, was donated to the Central Administration of the former Angra do Heroísmo Autonomous District, by Dr. Joaquim Corte-Real e Amaral. From 1933 until 1960, the mentioned set of objects was in exhibition at the Colonial Gallery of the old High School, that occupied the Saint Francis Building.

This item has its origin in the Chokwe people of the Bantu ethnic group, whose geographical area stretches from the Northeast to the South, covering a vast range of the Angolan territory.

On this smoking pipe, three figures of “The Thinker” (Samanhonga) stand out, portraying male or female elders. The head figure is the one that, with arms stretched and hands over the divination basket (Ngombo), invokes and auscultates the spirit of the ancestors. The other two figures, also seated, in an introspective pose and facing each other, seem to await the diviner's revelations.

The tobacco plant is native to the American continent, but before it was introduced and cultivated by the Portuguese in their African colonies, in the 17th century, already the cannabis plant, of Asiatic origin, was being used by various African peoples in their ritual practices.

Although we could associate the act of smoking to a recreational activity, we cannot ignore that in “primitive” societies and cultures, and at an individual or collective level, even the simplest acts are usually characterized by a strong symbolism.

Being an iconic figure of the Angolan and African culture, “The Thinker” is printed on the money bills of that country, and, in a sculpture form, it is also present at the seat of the African Union, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.