

[Applicant's Name]

[Mentor's Name]

Project Title: Interpreting Functions of Tuareg Jewelry: A Case Study of the Tuareg Art Collection at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University

Project Proposal: In the academic realm of art history, the study of body adornment has significantly contributed to defining all kinds of historical events. The crusaders of Europe made prolific amounts of jewelry and the study of their metal work has contributed a great amount to what we know about the medieval era. Generally, nomadic groups focused their arts on small-scale productions because mobility of the art was necessary. Like the crusaders, the nomadic groups of the Tuareg have produced elaborate artwork in the form of jewelry. The Tuareg have been thoroughly studied. Yet the study of their body adornment remains underdeveloped.

I propose to research the collection of Tuareg jewelry at the Peabody Museum at Archeology and Ethnology under the guidance of [my mentor]. The Tuareg are Berber speaking, nomadic pastoralists who live in the Western Sahara and northern parts of Western Sudan, namely Algeria, Niger, and Mali (Nicolaisen, 1997: 41). The collection of Tuareg art holds numerous pieces of jewelry from the 19th and early 20th centuries that have neither been fully examined nor documented and remains untouched in the museum's reserves. I will examine the Peabody's collection and compare individual pieces to those seen in photographs from the 19th and 20th centuries found in various photographic archives, including the on-line collection of the Eliot Elisafon Photographic Archives at the Smithsonian Museum of African Art. My supposition is that the photographs will reveal information that will allow me to decipher the purpose and function of the jewelry. In addition to photographic archives, I will study literature (see bibliography), which will allow me to contextualize the pieces of jewelry. Combining photographic observation with literature research, I will make inferences about the original cultural context of the jewelry; I will also attempt to identify the appropriate date, region, and function of the pieces. Most importantly, I will draw conclusions on the role that the jewelry plays within the culture, consider how jewelry forms have evolved over time, and ask what the different patterns and motifs communicate about the social roles of Tuareg women.

The study of the collection would be invaluable to the field of art history as it would contribute to our knowledge of body adornment and allow others to further their research in many areas, i.e. African art, Tuareg society, the history of jewelry, Islamic influence in north and west Africa. etc. Additionally, research of the collection could offer the Peabody Museum an opportunity to display the jewelry with better knowledge of its history, function, and cultural, context and, share the value of the jewelry with the public.

Goals:

1. Become familiar with the Tuareg collection of jewelry at the Peabody Museum.
2. Identify photographic archives that document the Tuareg and show evidence of their jewelry being worn.
3. Gain an understanding of Tuareg culture and artistry in order to understand the function of body adornment through the reading of published Sources.
4. Draw conclusions based on my related research that contextualizes and historicizes the collection's jewelry.
5. Produce results that might contribute to publications.

Methodology:

1. Visit the Peabody Museum (access to the collection has already been approved for my mentor, who will accompany me during my first visits). During these Visits, I will survey the Tuareg Collection and all the paperwork related to the collection.
2. Identify a focus group of jewelry from the more than 250 artifacts within the collection. After viewing the jewelry, I will compose a list of guidelines that will determine which pieces will be in the focus group. Most likely, the guidelines will involve type (ring, pendant, etc.), female jewelry, and frequent use among the Tuareg.
3. Identify major photographic records of the Tuareg. I will look through the archives of particular museums and libraries. I will search electronic databases of the Smithsonian Museum of African Art in Washinton, D.C. as well as the Museum of African Art in New York.
4. Contextualize and historicize pieces in the focus group according to research and evidence found in photographic archives. I will draw conclusions based on patterns found among the photographs and the collection of jewelry. Then, I will match these findings to evidence found in literature.
5. Write a condensed analysis of the results for the museum's records.
6. Possibly publish findings under the guidance my mentor.
7. Submit project to various undergraduate research symposiums with the hope of presenting my findings to larger audience.

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