

The “Social Lives” of Tuareg Bracelets and Tent Posts in the Collection of the Spencer Museum
of Art

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the “social lives” of Tuareg bracelets and tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art. My goal is to examine each phase in the “social lives” of these objects from their production and use within Tuareg society to their collection and subsequent exhibition in the museum. Because the objects were collected during the colonial era, emphasis will be given to a late 19th and early 20th century perspective. Part 1 is devoted to an examination of the social position of the *Inaden* and an analysis of the production of the bracelets and tent posts within Tuareg society. I pay particular attention to the gendered production of the objects and the meanings they held in the production phase of their “social lives.” In this part I also explore their gendered uses and the meanings they held for the Tuareg peoples who owned them.

Part 2 of the thesis examines the “diversion” of the bracelets and tent posts from their “paths.” In this section I focus on how meanings were made by cultural brokers and colonial era collectors. Again, gender and materiality had an impact on how the objects were collected and interpreted. I also concentrate on the meanings and representations of the Tuareg objects in the museum context. In this phase of the “social lives” of the bracelets and tent posts, gender and materiality influenced how museums represented the objects.

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Introduction

The Tuareg are pastoralists who reside in areas in Libya, Algeria, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. They are linguistically and culturally linked to the Amazigh peoples of North Africa. They are believed to have descended from Amazigh peoples who migrated south and intermarried with sub-Saharan African peoples and to be the southernmost of the Amazigh groups (Seligman 2006: 19). Evidence of the relationship between the Tuareg and the Amazigh can be found in the northern Tuareg origin myth of Tin Hinan. In the story, Tin Hinan, a noble woman of Berber descent, and her servant travelled to Abalessa and settled (Brett and Fentress 2007: 208). Both women had daughters and several Tuareg groups claim descent from these women (Brett and Fentress 2007: 208). The Tuareg are not a single group; they are a “confederation of groups of pastoral nomads, settled agriculturists, and today, city dwellers” (Seligman 2006: 22).

The pastoral Tuareg have long inspired fascination in the Western imagination. They have often been romanticized due to their image as mysterious veiled warriors thriving in harsh desert environments (Bernasek 2008: 53). Historically, the Tuareg noble class dominated the trans-Saharan caravan trade; they bred camels, and engaged in raiding for wealth and prestige. During the colonial era they fiercely fought against colonial militaries and in many cases, refused to be pacified. Their societies and cultures have been the subjects of numerous studies, popular novels, and popular films, and their material culture has received the same attention. Many museums house endless amounts of beautiful, intricately decorated Tuareg objects such as swords and shields, camel saddles, jewelry, household objects, and tent components.

I was first introduced to the Tuareg bracelets and tent posts at the basis of this thesis in the beginning of the fall semester of 2012. I was offered the opportunity to research the bracelets

in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art as my final project of the semester (figures 1-3). The bracelets were not on display when I initially went to view them. They were being housed in the former Kansas University Anthropology Museum at Spooner Hall. When I arrived, the bracelets were laid out for me and they immediately captured my attention. They appeared extremely heavy and were made from solid metal. Their form was interesting in that they were all hinged and had polyhedral knobs on the ends. I was intrigued by the holes drilled through each bracelet behind each of the polyhedral knobs. The bracelets did not have clasps and I wondered how they had been worn. The geometric motifs chased into them were also interesting. In contrast to the bulk and heft of the bracelets, the designs were delicate. One of the bracelets featured two prominent, six-pointed stars on the flat surfaces of its polyhedral knobs (figure 3). During my visit, I was informed by Angela Watts, the Collections Manager, that the bracelets were thought to have been produced by the Tuareg, but that there was little information about their provenance except that they were collected somewhere in Niger.

It was not until the end of the fall semester of 2012 that I was introduced to the three wood Tuareg tent posts (figures 4-6). I was visiting the Spencer Museum of Art's teaching gallery with my class and the tent posts were on display there. One of the posts (figure 4) was a dark brown color and carved in a cylindrical shape. It featured geometric motifs, four spokes that stood out from the post, and carved knobs that also stood out. The other two tent posts (figures 5 and 6) were a dark reddish-brown color and had geometric motifs cut out of flat oval tops. They were topped by geometrically carved crests and set atop cylindrical posts. The bottoms of all of the posts were pointed and extremely worn. They were simply displayed in clear plastic cases and were identified as Tuareg tent posts.

My first introduction to the bracelets and tent posts engendered many questions. How had they come to be in the collection of the museum? Why was there so little information about their provenance? What meanings did they have for the artists who produced them, the people who used them, the collector who collected them, and the museum that housed them? My initial inquiry focused on the determination of provenance and an analysis of the materials, processes of production, and uses of the bracelets. The research paper I submitted at the end of the semester did not answer these questions adequately, but served as my introduction into the production of art in Tuareg society.

Preliminary Research:

The three Tuareg bracelets were collected between 1925 and 1975 in Niger, while the tent posts were collected between 1925 and 1990 in Burkina Faso. These objects were once in the collection of the former Kansas University Anthropology Museum and were not accessioned into the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art until 2007. The bracelets were tentatively labeled “Tuareg??” indicating that their origins were uncertain. The tent posts, however, were clearly labeled “Tuareg” and there did not seem to be any doubt as to their provenance.

Through my analysis of the bracelets, I attributed them to the Tuareg peoples. In order to give credence to my estimation of their provenance (which was just as tentative as the museum’s records) I delved deeper into the materials and processes of Tuareg art production. My findings included a formal and iconographic analysis of the bracelets and I compared them to known Tuareg jewelry forms and styles. A comparative analysis proved to be difficult because similar forms were prevalent throughout West Africa. The motifs present on the bracelets were common throughout North and West Africa as well. Furthermore, I focused on the *Inaden* class of blacksmiths among the Tuareg and examined their modes of jewelry production. Finally, I

explored the roles of jewelry within Tuareg society. Catalogues of previous museum exhibitions of Tuareg art, such as *The Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World* (2006), Loughran's (1995) *Art From the Forge*, and Bernasek's (2008) *Artistry of the Everyday: Beauty and Craftmanship in Berber Art*, were indispensable references for my research. My final paper concluded, that despite similarities and differences in form, style, and iconography, the bracelets could be attributed to the Tuareg.

It was less difficult to determine the probable provenance of the tent posts in the museum's collection. I began with a formal and iconographic analysis and compared these to photographic examples from museum catalogues of former Tuareg art exhibitions. I also inquired into Tuareg tent types and the components of Tuareg tents using written as well as photographic evidence from several ethnographies. Prussin's (1995) *African Nomadic Art and Architecture: Space, Place, and Gender* and Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen's (1997) *The Pastoral Tuareg: Ecology, Culture, and Society* were useful to my inquiry. The tent posts in the museum's collection were compared stylistically and formally with examples of known Tuareg tent posts presented in those two volumes. The form, style, and iconography of the museum's tent posts were similar to the form, style, and iconography of tent posts known to have come from Niger. My investigation extended into the materials and processes of production and their significance in Tuareg society. However, while there was a preponderance of literature devoted to jewelry styles, production techniques, and materials, I found very little in the literature devoted to Tuareg tents and tent posts in particular. As I will discuss, this lack of scholarly material on wooden tent posts led me to delve deeper into the multiple ways Tuareg arts have been gendered.

Historically, among the Tuareg of the Sahelian and Saharan regions of North and West Africa, society was stratified into socioeconomic classes that, until recently, remained mostly endogamous. The *Inaden* class of blacksmiths, who practiced endogamy the most strictly, produced most of the commodities for the Tuareg such as household items, tent components, tools, weapons, and jewelry. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the *Inaden* lived in cities as well as in rural areas. According to Loughran, blacksmiths in rural areas worked in organized workshops with family members (1995: 8). They worked with a minimum amount of tools that could be moved with them (Bernus 2006: 76). Although the *Inaden* were indispensable members of Tuareg society, they were typically marginalized due to their ambiguous social status.

Artistic production among the Tuareg blacksmiths was gendered; only the *Inaden* produced metal objects and most wood objects, while the *Tinaden* (wives of blacksmiths) produced leather goods and occasionally some wood objects. Gender was also an important factor in the use of items the *Inaden* and *Tinaden* produced. Metal commodities produced by the *Inaden* possessed monetary value and functioned as markers of identity and were also linked to the warrior class. Leather commodities and some wood components for tents produced by the *Tinaden* and noble Tuareg women were linked to female domestic space.

Bracelets and tent posts served specific purposes in Tuareg society and were imbued with cultural meanings that conveyed messages both internally within Tuareg society and externally to outsiders. Because artistic production was gendered, the bracelets and tent posts both occupied different spheres as commodities. After their production, the bracelets continued to exist in a commodity phase, while the tent posts were relegated solely to domestic use. Bracelets were not just ornamental; their worth was also measured monetarily. However, tent posts were considered purely functional despite both their aesthetic and symbolic value. The bracelets and

tent posts possessed distinct, gendered “social lives” and followed different paths from their production in Tuareg society to their accession into the Spencer Museum of Art. Gender and materiality were significant elements in the “social lives” of the objects and in the meanings that were attributed to them. Their meanings changed as they moved through time and space.

In order to understand the gendered meanings of the bracelets and tent posts throughout their “social lives,” it is necessary to examine the ways in which meaning was created during their production among the *Inaden*, their uses within Tuareg society, their collection during the colonial era, and their representation within the museum. My preliminary research and initial questions led me into the world of current debate surrounding the commodification of African art and the impact of colonialism and colonial thought on the meanings, representations, and valuations of African material culture. These current issues are linked to the pervasive paradigms that have dictated scholarship on African art since the colonial era, though they are slowly being overturned.

Seminal Scholarship on African Art

The ways in which African art has been approached has, historically, been through myths and paradigms prevalent in the discipline of colonial era anthropology first, and later in African art history. In her article, *Enduring Myths of African Art*, Suzanne Preston Blier (1996) outlines several myths about Africa and, by extension, the arts of Africa. She argues that these traditions still inform scholarly approaches to African art and that they extend into the museum setting (Blier 1996: 26). These understandings govern which museums exhibit African art objects and how the objects are displayed. In turn, this influences the ways in which Western viewers perceive Africa and African art (Blier 1996: 26).

According to Blier, one of the most prevalent myths concerning Africa is that it is “primal and timeless” (1996: 26). This fable denies the rich and diverse histories and cultures of Africa and, by extension, the diversity, innovation, and influences on African art through time. Another legend is that African art is “rigidly bound by place,” implying that there was no movement of peoples, objects, styles, and ideas in Africa (Blier 1996: 27). The idea that Africa was “tribal” and “communitarian” has also been propagated. This view implied that African communities constituted only simple villages that lacked economic and political structure (Blier 1996: 29).

One paradigm in particular has had far reaching consequences for how African material culture is theorized. In her article *One Tribe, One Style: Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art*, Sidney Littlefield Kasfir (1984), analyzes the “one tribe, one style” paradigm that dominated 20th century scholarship on African art until the 1990s. Her assertion is that this paradigm is so deeply embedded in how African art is perceived that it is rarely questioned (Kasfir 1984: 163). The “one tribe, one style” paradigm did not originate in the discipline of art history, but in the discipline of anthropology (Kasfir 1984: 163). In her article, Kasfir argues that, despite current recognition that this paradigm is fundamentally flawed there has been little progress in creating more appropriate paradigms (1984: 163).

One of the many problems with this model when used in the study of African societies and by extension, African art forms, is that it treats African history as ahistorical (Kasfir 1984: 166). Kasfir explains that this is partly due to the absence of written historical records prior to the colonial period and that studies of African art have typically been the domain of anthropologists and ethnologists whose fieldwork involved the “ethnographic present” and acted solely as a snapshot in time (1984: 166). Anthropologists have historically tended toward the

classificatory category of “tribe” and this tendency has been echoed by African art historians (Kasfir 1984: 166). She argues that the application of this paradigm in the study of African art history ignores the fact that African material culture collected in the field and found in museum collections is “a product of a post-contact, transitional phase in African culture” due to contact, in some cases with Islam, and with European colonialism (Kasfir 1984: 171). I will discuss this further in the following pages.

Recent Scholarship on African Art

Until the 1980s, art historians continued to focus on the “traditional” and “pre-modern” arts of “so-called non-Western cultures” as well as those art forms considered to be “unspoiled by colonization and modernization” (Meier 2010: 12). Since then, there have been new modes of thought engaging “post-colonial criticism to interrogate . . . hegemonic assumptions” (Meier 2010: 12). Scholars have been “considering how to write about cultural production in/from formerly colonized territories without resorting to Eurocentric taxonomies of cultural difference” (Meier 2010: 13). This shift in focus has been orchestrated by museum curators and scholars such as; Salah M. Hassan, Okwui Enwezor, Sidney Kasfir, John Picton, Kamal Boulatta, Salwa Mikdadi, and Nada Shabout (Meier 2010: 14). Scholars such as Appadurai, Goankar, and Gilroy “focus on the relationship between diverse actors who encountered and reworked each other’s ways of being at the interstices of global networks of exchange” (Meier 2010: 19). The groundbreaking work of these scholars has had a significant impact on the study of African art.

Recent scholarship on African art is focusing on and building upon the theories and methodologies created by many of the scholars listed above. In her article *Thinking Through and With African Objects: Perspectives on the Study of African Material Culture*, Mary Jo Arnoldi summarizes more recent perspectives on African art scholarship. She states that recent

scholarship can be divided into the areas of “technology and the production of form, the analysis of the relationship between form and world view, ideology, and cosmology, and studies which locate objects within larger scale processes and changing patterns over time” (2000: 32). The scholars that I have chosen to reference in my thesis use various approaches encompassing these areas of current scholarship and expanding upon them, as I will now discuss.

In her article *One Tribe, One Style: Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art*, Kasfir advances a “historical process-model” for the study of African art (1984: 184). In this model, Kasfir argues for the application of a historical dimension in order to illustrate the impact of outside influences on African art styles (1984: 185-186). Her solution is to incorporate a time frame into considerations of styles and genres (Kasfir 1984: 186). She argues that style alone may not be an appropriate category for investigation and her alternative is “to concentrate upon the introduction, diffusion, and demise or survival of particular institutions which are directly symbolized by concrete forms such as sculpture or regalia of office” (Kasfir 1984: 186). This would result in the linkage of African art objects to the “historical parameters of technological innovation” whereby “style and iconography can be added to technology and institutional change as vehicles for making comparisons” (Kasfir 1984: 186-187).

In her article *African Art and Authenticity: A Text With a Shadow*, Kasfir (1992) explores the still current debates surrounding authenticity and meaning in African art. She argues that the concept of the “traditional society” in Africa was a colonial era construct that implied that African communities were ahistorical, contained entities that never had contact with other groups (Kasfir 1992: 42-43). This view of African society enabled collectors and museums to claim that “authentic” African art predated colonialism (Kasfir 1992: 42). This view of “authenticity” is contradictory because even early colonial contact influenced African art production in various

ways (Kasfir 1992: 42-43). Kasfir argues that African art production has always been influenced by cultural contact with other societies and that African artists have always innovated. In her opinion, Western collectors and museums created the meanings of African art, as did African middlemen and cultural brokers (Kasfir 1992: 52). She argues that Western collectors and museums determine what is “authentic” African art and often ignore the historical, social, and cultural influences involved in art production.

In his introduction to *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Arjun Appadurai approaches African art objects as commodities (1986: 3). In his essay he argues that commodities possess “social lives” and that commodities go through different phases within those lives. Igor Kopytoff (1986) also contributes important scholarship to enhance Appadurai’s theory of the “social life” of a commodity. Kopytoff similarly asserts that objects go through phases in their “social lives” and that commoditization is processual (1986: 64). In his view, commoditization does not constitute the whole of an object’s “social life;” rather, objects possess “life histories” and collect “biographies” (Kopytoff 1986: 65-66). In his view, the biographies of objects are similar to biographies of people. They can be investigated through an examination of the phases in their “social lives;” such as production, commoditization, use, collection, and exhibition.

I also draw on seminal scholarship linking material, gender, and cosmology. Eugenia Herbert’s (1993) book, *Iron, Gender, and Power: Rituals of Transformation in African Societies*, and Labelle Prussin’s (1995) *African Nomadic Architecture: Space, Place, and Gender* both explore technology and form and their relationship to gender. While Herbert’s work deals with the processes, materials, and cosmologies of metallurgy, Prussin focuses on the processes, materials, and cosmologies of the nomadic built environment. These works

emphasize the materiality (materials, processes, and meanings) of both metal and wood objects. Throughout this paper I define materiality as a combination of the materials chosen and the symbolic aspects of the processes of production. In Tuareg art, materiality is linked to the uses of the objects. Patrick R. McNaughton's (1988) book, *The Mande Blacksmiths: Knowledge, Power, and Art in West Africa*, focuses on the social status of male blacksmiths in Mande society. He explores Mande social status through cosmology, technology, and material culture. I will discuss these works further in Part 1.

Kasfir's (2007) book, *African Art and the Colonial Encounter: Inventing a Global Commodity*, explores the ways colonialism fundamentally changed art production among the Idoma of Nigeria and the Samburu of Kenya. In their edited volume, *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, Enid Schieldkrout and Curtis Keim (1998) explore the colonial politics behind the collection of art in the Congo under Belgium's administration. Christopher B. Steiner's (1994) book *African Art in Transit*, examines the role of African art traders in the commodification and circulation of African material culture in the international market. In *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, Annie Coombes (1994) explores the relationship between museums, anthropologists, and the objectives of the British colonial administration in Africa. I will elaborate further on these works in Part 2.

Anthropologist Susan Rasmussen, a preeminent scholar of Tuareg culture, has published numerous books and journal articles that have informed much of this thesis. Her studies of the *Kel Ewey* Tuareg of Niger are some of the most recent and most comprehensive English language works concerning Tuareg history, culture, and society. Jeremy Keenan's work, regarding the northern Tuareg groups, has provided supporting evidence throughout this thesis.

Johannes and Ida Nicolaisen's research among pastoral Tuareg groups has also served to provide much of the evidence used throughout this thesis. These authorities have contributed extensively to scholarship on Tuareg history, society, and culture.

Thesis Objectives and Outline

My objective in this thesis is to examine the “social lives” of the Tuareg bracelets and tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art. My goal is an analysis of each phase in the “social lives” of these objects from their production and use within Tuareg society to their collection and subsequent exhibition in the museum. Because the objects were collected during the colonial era, emphasis will be given to a late 19th and early 20th century perspective. Part 1 is devoted to an examination of the social position of the *Inaden* and an analysis of the production of the bracelets and tent posts within Tuareg society. I pay particular attention to the gendered production of the objects and the meanings they held in the production phase of their “social lives.” In this part I also explore the uses of the bracelets and tent posts in Tuareg society during their “biographical” stage. I explore their gendered uses and the meanings they held for the Tuareg peoples who owned them.

Part 2 of the thesis examines the “diversion” of the bracelets and tent posts from their “paths.” In this section I focus on how meanings were made by cultural brokers and colonial era collectors. Again, gender and materiality had an impact on how the objects were collected and interpreted. I also concentrate on the meanings and representations of the Tuareg objects in the museum context. In this phase of the “social lives” of the bracelets and tent posts, gender and materiality influenced how museums represented the objects. In my conclusion, I briefly summarize my thesis and examine the legacy of colonialism in the study of African art. I argue that museums need to trace the “social lives” of African art objects in order to accurately convey

their meanings. I also include a catalogue of images with photographs and descriptions of the six Tuareg objects.

Methodological and Theoretical Limitations

There are two issues that need to be addressed regarding the methodological and theoretical limitations of this thesis. The first is the issue of assigning a Tuareg provenance to the six objects that are the subject of my thesis. Although this is in opposition to Kasfir's argument in her article *One Tribe, One Style: Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art*, I attempt to avoid many of the problems associated with this paradigm by providing a historical timeframe for my study and by acknowledging the diverse influences affecting the phases of the "social lives" of the objects. I have attempted to analyze the production of the objects, their uses within Tuareg society and their cosmological, ritual, and aesthetic significance. By doing this, I hope to restore some of the "layers of meaning" that were lost when the objects were removed from their socio-cultural context. To this end, I have attempted to focus on the materials themselves (metal and wood) as an organizational method.

The second problem is the issue of dates. The bracelets and tent posts were collected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but it is not possible to narrow down a more specific timeframe. Likewise, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine when the objects were produced. This is not an unusual occurrence when working with African objects in a museum setting. Many of the African pieces in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art were collected by private collectors, during the colonial and post-colonial eras and were donated with few records.

This is a messy situation and the lack of specific dates does have an impact on my use of Appadurai's framework. However, I have attempted to situate my analysis of the bracelets and

the tent posts within a late 19th and early 20th century framework. In Part 1, I analyze and discuss the production of Tuareg art within this time period. I focus on the materials and technologies that were relevant to that period. In the section devoted to the use of the objects within their socio-cultural context, I make it clear that I am taking a historical perspective. In Part 2, I analyze colonial collecting practices and museum and exhibition practices within the appropriate timeframes.

Part 1

Bracelets and Tent Posts: Meaning in Tuareg Socio-Cultural Context

Materiality and Gender in Tuareg Art Production

Introduction

Historically, the production of Tuareg art objects was deeply rooted in Tuareg cosmology. The role of the *Inaden* in Tuareg society and the materials and processes of artistic production reflected and shaped systems of belief characterizing Tuareg social structure, cultural practice, and ritual. Thus, in order to examine the meanings that have been attributed to the bracelets and tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art throughout their “social lives,” it is necessary to begin this analysis with their production.

In his introduction to *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Arjun Appaduari argues that the examination of commodities in the production phase is essential because “technical knowledge is always deeply interpenetrated with cosmological, sociological, and ritual assumptions that are likely to be widely shared” (1986: 42). He also notes that artistic production is likely to be monopolized by certain groups based on social factors such as age, gender, and class (Appaduai 1986: 42). Among the Tuareg, the *Inaden* comprised a distinct social group of blacksmiths and artists, who produced most Tuareg material culture. Within their social class, art production was further divided by gender. The *Inaden* possessed specific cultural, technological, and spiritual knowledge that enabled them to fulfill their societal roles. However, the knowledge and skills they possessed also relegated them to an ambiguous status within Tuareg society. I will discuss this further in the following pages.

The Ambiguous Social Status of the Inaden

I have chosen to introduce Patrick R. McNaughton's (1988) research on Mande blacksmiths and Kasfir's research on the Samburu *Ikunono* first, in order to provide a framework through which to view the ambiguous social status of the *Inaden*. McNaughton's (1993) book, *The Mande Blacksmiths: Knowledge, Power, and Art in West Africa*, offers important insights into the study of the social position of blacksmiths in African societies. His work is far reaching in that his conclusions can inform the study of blacksmiths from many different cultural groups. Kasfir's (2007) research on the *Ikunono* is also based on insights from McNaughton's work. As I will illustrate, the *Inaden*, like the *Nyamakala* and the *Ikunono*, inhabit an ambiguous social position due to the roles they perform and to the materials they work with.

Historically, Mande and Tuareg societies shared similar cosmological beliefs. Both the Mande and the Tuareg were Muslim. Mande society was stratified into three main socioeconomic groups consisting of nobles, professionals, and slaves (1988: 1). The Mande blacksmiths belonged to the *Nyamakala* group of professionals who formed an endogamous class whereby endogamy functioned as a corporate monopoly and also served to protect members of other classes from the powers of the *Nyamakala* (1988: 3). Secrecy and formulas were essential to the *Nyamakala* in order to keep knowledge and power within the profession (1988: 14). The blacksmiths were able to "smelt and forge iron" in order to create household implements and weapons, but they also produced acclaimed masks and figurative sculptures (Frank 2010: 3-4). The *Nyamakala* blacksmiths were also associated with "wild space" where it was necessary for them to gather raw materials such as wood and iron ore for use in smelting and art production (McNaughton 1988: 18). According to Frank, the *jineu* are spirits that inhabit the bush (where the Mande potters must gather clay) (1998: 81).

Mande cosmology was made up of a complex syncretism consisting of Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs. Belief in the world of spirits, and of supernatural forces, permeated Mande cosmology (1988: 11). There existed an opposition between “the wild” and inhabited space. Power could be good, bad, or neutral, and the *Nyamakala* possessed the ability to harness and wield that power (1988: 12-13). McNaughton argues that most Mande believed that blacksmiths had a working relationship with spirits and that those relationships were essential to survival (1988: 18). He states that the *Nyamakala* entered into treaties with spirits to obtain access to specialized powers (1988: 18). Thus, the *Nyamakala* were seen as mediators between spirits and the living.

Importantly, some members of the *Nyamakala* were bards who possessed the power of social commentary and were held in high esteem while being simultaneously feared (1988: 7). The bards, through their power and songs, were believed to be able to incite people to action (1988: 7). As mediators and advisors, they also possessed the ability to “reshape the conditions that define relationships between people” (1988: 64).

The most important power of the *Nyamakala*, according to McNaughton, was their status as “intermediaries between nature and culture” (1988: 40). In order to perform their roles as intermediaries, they were, historically, “prohibited from positions of political leadership, and were protected from enslavement by their peculiar status” (Frank 1998: 3). The Mande blacksmiths created the items essential to daily life and were considered “facilitators, articulators, and transformers” (1988: 151). The products of their work were essential to the daily lives of the Mande people. They possessed a virtual monopoly over the production of these much-needed goods, leaving them open to hostility and jealousy (1988: 161).

McNaughton surmises that the work of blacksmiths was enhanced and facilitated by the various roles they performed within Mande society (1988: xiii). According to Frank, “blacksmiths, potters, leatherworkers, and bards were respected, feared, and disdained for the skills and capacities that distinguished them from others” (1998: 1). Blacksmiths possessed an ambiguous status within Mande society due to their professions, the power they wielded, the materials they worked with, and the secrecy surrounding their work. The power the smiths held over the Mande population could be “mitigated or at least rationalized, by rendering it unsavory” (1988: 160).

The ambiguous social status of blacksmiths was not confined to the Mande *Nyamakala*. The Samburu blacksmiths (*Ikunono*) in Kasfir’s (2007) work shared some similarities with the *Nyamakala*. Like Mande smiths, Samburu smiths comprised an endogamous social class that controlled technological production (Kasfir 2007: 153). The *Ikunono* were ritual specialists and also mediators between the Samburu and outsiders (Kasfir 2007: 167). They also possessed supernatural powers that enabled them to cast curses upon people and animals if they were angered (Kasfir 2007: 167). Their ambiguous status, like that of the *Nyamakala*, was a result of their power over technological production as well as the indispensability of the objects they produced. One of the most important objects produced by the Samburu blacksmiths was the spear, which was ritually tied to warriorhood (Kasfir 2007: 154). In the case of the Samburu, the social distance of the blacksmiths served to protect other members of society from the dangers associated with smelting (Kasfir 2007: 141).

The *Inaden*, like the *Nyamakala* and the *Ikunono*, possessed an ambiguous social status attributable to the various roles they performed in Tuareg society. The *Inaden* were attached to noble families through patron-client relationships, which were generally maintained over

generations (Rasmussen 2006: 26). They were often referred to through fictive kinship terms and were likened to cross cousins in order to firmly establish loyalty (Rasmussen 1988: 10). In exchange for their services, *Inaden* were provided necessary staples and protection by the noble class in return for the materials they produced. Like the *Nyamakala* and the *Ikunono*, the *Inaden* comprised a mostly endogamous social class.

Tuareg cosmology, like Mande cosmology, consisted of both Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs and practices. Tuareg cosmology consisted of the belief that supernatural forces and spirits were real, and that there was an opposition between inhabited space and “the wild.” *Baraka* was thought to be possessed by all living things and functioned as a benediction from God, which inspired, among the Tuareg, the observance of many taboos (Keenan 1977: 149-150). The belief in *Iblis* (the devil) was the antithesis to the belief in *baraka*. *Iblis*, like *baraka*, could be found in all things, including people and, moreover, he was credited with control over the procreative powers of people and animals (Nicoalisen 1997: 683). *Baraka*, among the Tuareg, was similar to Muslim beliefs in *baraka* in North Africa (Rasmussen 2004: 316). In Tuareg cosmology, *baraka* was a force for divine blessing possessed by *marabouts*, chiefs, and some medicine women who were past childbearing age (Rasmussen 2004: 316-317). In the Tuareg context, *baraka* was the antithesis of *tezma* (the powers of the *Inaden*). However, *baraka* could cause harm in certain circumstances. For example, the positive *baraka* associated with the tombs of *marabouts* could become dangerous and attack people after dark (Rasmussen 2004: 322). The pre-Islamic *Kel Essuf* spirits also featured strongly in Tuareg cosmology and were believed to inhabit “the wild” (Rasmussen 1996: 17).

The *Inaden*, like the *Nyamakala* and *Ikunono*, acted as mediators between the living and the spirits, between culture and nature, between the Tuareg and outsiders, and between members

of different socioeconomic classes, or more broadly, between the known and the unknown. As mediators, the *Inaden* were required to conform to specific behaviors expected of their socioeconomic status in order to effectively perform their roles. They were, traditionally, supposed to be poor and eschew jewelry and adornment, were supposed to demand gifts from nobles, and were supposed to “behave disrespectfully; namely, to tease, insult, and beg” (Rasmussen 1988: 12). Thus, the *Inaden* were seen as lacking the most important virtues among the Tuareg: reserve and respect (Rasmussen 1988: 10).

In addition, smiths also possessed the power of social commentary, which served to uphold proper behaviors among the different social classes. This role also served to protect and preserve the traditions and culture of the Tuareg through the reinforcement of social values (ag Ewangaye 2006: 61). The *Inaden* were considered the guardians of Tuareg culture due to the roles they performed as intermediaries and social commentators (ag Ewangaye 2006: 60-61).

The *Inaden* and the *Ineslemen* (*marabouts*/Islamic scholars) had an opposing antagonistic relationship. Due to their work as blacksmiths, the *Inaden* were thought to be “polluted” and dangerous (Rasmussen 2007, 50). *Ineslemen* possessed the power of *baraka* while the *Inaden* possessed *tezma*, which manifested as an automatic curse upon those who refused their requests (Rasmussen 1998: 465). Smiths were associated with pre-Islamic or extra-Islamic origins, and they were believed to be related to subterranean “fire” spirits (Rasmussen 2007: 50). These “fire” spirits may have been related to *djinn*, though it is more likely that they were related to the *Kel Essuf* spirits. *Djinn* were Islamic spirits who could be controlled by *marabouts* while the *Kel Essuf* were pre-Islamic spirits who could be controlled by the *Inaden*. Thus, the neighborhoods and tents of smiths were located far from mosques, *marabouts*, and nobles (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997, 57).

Smiths also acted as healers for conditions caused by pre-Islamic *Kel Essuf* spirits because these illnesses could not be healed by the *Ineslemen* and Qur'anic medicine (Rasmussen 1995: 598). The *Inaden* also presided as drummers over spirit possession rites, opposed by *marabouts* (at least officially); while they were not forbidden by *marabouts*, the performance was restricted to smith neighborhoods (Rasmussen 1995: 600). They also consulted on "most matters concerning local traditions and customs, particularly with regard to festive and ceremonial activities (Keenan 1977: 95).

Like the *Nyamakala* in Mande society and the *Ikunono* in Samburu society, the *Inaden* inhabited an ambiguous social position among the Tuareg. The origins of the *Inaden* were uncertain, but whereas the *Inaden* and the *Ikunono* inhabited a low social class, they were also considered professionals. The *Nyamakala*, the *Ikunono*, and the *Inaden* acted as intermediaries between the world of the spirits and the world of the living, as well as between people. In this way, they were responsible for creating and preserving culture. They were also indispensable for the tools, weapons, and other materials they produced; yet at the same time, they were resented because they possessed great control over other members within their societies. All three groups of blacksmiths were respected and feared for the power they wielded. As I will now elaborate, the position of the *Inaden* in Tuareg society was also a result of the materials and processes employed in their work as blacksmiths.

Materiality and Cosmology

Blacksmithing, in Tuareg society, was a male occupation with rules and taboos aimed at the exclusion of women and other members of Tuareg society. For the *Inaden*, blacksmithing was steeped in cosmology and ritual. Eugenia W. Herbert's (1993) book *Iron, Gender, and Power: Rituals of Transformation in African Societies*, is a seminal work focusing on the

cosmologies inherent in the transformative processes of smelting and smithing in Africa. Her theory is that the smelting of iron is a transformative process heavily imbued with the cosmological constituents of gender, age, and procreative powers (Herbert 1993: 2-3). She proposes a paradigm that “highlights the close association of iron with fertility and with sources of power seen as both ancestral and female” (Herbert 1993: 5). She also argues that, paradoxically, comparable female production does not “invoke the same ‘power field’ even though the procreative paradigm is applicable” (1993: 5). Her research is applicable to this study because her theory can be utilized to highlight the gendered division of labor in Tuareg cosmology, the ritual uses of metals, and the importance of metals to the socioeconomic structure of Tuareg society. Her work also contributes to the definition of materiality that I employ throughout this thesis. For the purposes of this thesis I use the term materiality to encompass materials, processes, and meanings of both metal and wood. These aspects of production are relevant not only to the production of jewelry among the *Inaden*, but they are also relevant to the production of tent posts.

Herbert begins her examination of the relationship between ironworking and cosmology by stating unequivocally that within African societies “the smith and smelter are always male” (1993: 25). However, she argues that women can participate in other aspects of ironworking that have nothing to do with the actual technology or ritual involved with the process (1993: 25). Blacksmiths seek to exclude most of the population from the knowledge of smelting and smithing, and secrecy is endemic to the profession (1993: 27). She points to the anthropomorphic furnace (shaped in the form of a woman) as evidence of the smelter harnessing the powers of female procreativity (1993: 32). However, she argues that sometimes there is no visible allusion to the anatomy of the furnace, in which case the feminization of the furnace can

be illustrated through the “terminology given to its parts and above all in the rituals acted out by the smelters, rituals that bring the furnace to life and create its “gender” and “social status” (Herbert 1993: 40). Smelting rituals involve transforming the furnace into a female form that is capable of reproduction and then controlling this reproductive capacity to produce iron (Herbert 1993: 56).

The widespread exclusion of women from smelting is predicated on her life stage. Specifically, Herbert acknowledges that in some instances, prepubescent girls and postmenopausal women could be exempt from taboos (1993: 79). These women were not excluded because they “were sexually unavailable” (Herbert 1993: 79). Taboos exist against sexual relations throughout the smelting process because the smelting furnace is, metaphorically, the wife “impregnated by the smelter husband and gestating a fetus of raw iron in its womb” (Herbert 1993: 85). Sexual relations outside of this relationship can be seen as adulterous resulting in impotency for the smelter (Herbert 1993: 80). Menstrual taboos were also prevalent, barring menstruating women, and occasionally the husband of the menstruating woman, from the smelt (Herbert 1993: 85). Aside from prohibitions excluding women from smelting, there were a number of restrictions related to diet, clothing, violence, and the phases of the moon.

Very little of Herbert’s work is devoted to smithing due to the fact that ritualization in smithing is more difficult to ascertain, due to the demise of smelting and the disappearance of the rituals surrounding the practice. Herbert argues that the most elaborate rituals associated with smithing surround the “manufacture of the basic tools and the consecration of the new forge” (Herbert 1993: 99). The author theorizes that, “it is in the personifications of the hammer and the anvil that we find the most intriguing parallels with smelting as far as the reproductive paradigm is concerned” (1993: 99). She quotes a Tuareg blacksmith who claims that the

hammer and anvil are representative of a mother and father (the hammer being the father and the anvil being the mother) (1993: 99). Smithing is also subject to taboos, especially those barring women from the occupation (Herbert 1993: 107). She illustrates that, “smithing invokes the reproductive and ancestral paradigms at certain key junctures, especially those involving the “birth” of a new forge and its primary tools” (1993: 111). In her summary, Herbert offers a paradigm for theorizing about transformative processes. Her model includes the gendered division of labor, anthropomorphism of aspects of process and product, and ritual behavior spanning taboos, invocations, and spirits (1993: 220).

Labelle Prussin’s (1995) book *African Nomadic Architecture: Space Place and Gender* also lends an important element to the discourse surrounding materiality and gender. Whereas Herbert (1993) focuses on the male dominated work surrounding the forge, Prussin focuses on the female dominated work surrounding the built environment. Like Herbert, she argues that female work and art production is not as highly valued, both internally within Tuareg society and externally, as that of male dominated production in nomadic societies (Prussin 1995: xix). Her observation is that “women’s labor time is part of the reproductive cycle rather than the productive cycle of labor time” (Prussin 1995: 58). However, like smelting and smithing, the gathering of materials, the production of wood objects, and the construction of the tent are highly ritualized in nomadic societies, and are subject to a strict division of labor (Prussin 1995: xix). Prussin’s observations are integral to understanding the processes underpinning the production of tent posts and their importance as decorative, functional, and protective objects.

Conversely, in his essay, in *The Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, Mohamed ag Ewangaye, who is both a member of the *Inaden* class and a Tuareg scholar, vehemently denies the existence of an underlying relationship between the harnessing of

procreative power and metalworking (2006: 59). He argues that artistic production among the *Inaden* is based in science and the technological knowledge inherent in metalworking (2006: 59). His belief is that the rituals and paradigms mentioned by Herbert (1993) disappeared with the arrival and acceptance of Islam because Islam was “largely unencumbered by spirit worship and related rites” (2006: 59). He also argues that Tuareg arts are purely aesthetic and functional rather than “representations of local beliefs” (ag Ewangaye 2006: 59).

While I value ag Ewangaye’s perspective, I disagree with his denial of the existence of rituals associated with metalworking because the presence of ritual in smelting and smithing was widespread among many different cultural groups in Africa. Moreover, the echoes of the ritualization of smithing could still be observed through the continued existence of taboos relating to metals. Furthermore, spirit worship and the representation of local beliefs were prevalent among the Tuareg in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was and is observed through Tuareg participation in spirit possession ceremonies.

Metalworking Among the Inaden

Like the smiths and smelters discussed in Herbert’s (1993) work, the *Inaden* excluded women from smithing activities. Metalworking in Tuareg society was subject to the gendered division of labor within the *Inaden* class. Women were not allowed to participate in forging metal objects or use many metal tools. According to Rasmussen, forging was historically “associated with the male warrior society and a number of taboos still exist in relation to women handling or manufacturing certain metal objects” (1987: 9). The *Inaden* were believed to be “closer to the spirit world” due to their profession (Rasmussen 2007: 49). Their work, in transforming metals into usable objects, granted them access to the realm of spirits (Gattinara 2006: 31). Other members of Tuareg society believed that the *Inaden* were related to “fire

spirits” who “inhabit a subterranean abode where they work on tiny forges; they are the patrons of the smiths, on whom they confer a degree of protection” (Rasmussen 1991: 761).

The ritualization of the process of smithing may have extended to the tools the *Inaden* used. The tools of the *Inaden* were similar to those of all blacksmiths and consisted of the hammer and anvil, bellows, files, crucible, scraper, punch, and burin (Bernus 2006: 77). There is little existing evidence that the *Inaden* attributed anthropomorphic qualities to any of the tools or processes of production except for the example quoted by Herbert (1993). In fact, this is Herbert’s point. With the demise of smelting, rituals and practices surrounding the process began to disappear. However, some evidence, in the form of a riddle, may suggest that the bellows were anthropomorphized at one time. Bernus records it thus:

Riddle me, riddle me:
My goat’s chest is the *adaras* tree
Its neck is iron;
Its head is clay;
Its breath is fire;
Its hooves are the *aboragh* tree
What can it be? The bellows. (1988: xiii)

This example alone does not prove that the *Inaden* anthropomorphized any tools or materials related to smithing and there is little existing evidence suggesting the presence of ritual behavior except for the menstrual taboos the Tuareg observed in relation to women touching certain types of metal. There is no mention of the *Inaden* offering prayers or incantations in the course of their work. However, the continued existence of the menstrual taboos may indicate that other rituals and practices may have existed at one time.

The processes of production involved in making jewelry, weapons, and household implements varied among the *Inaden* and depended on the form of the object. Jewelry was often either cast, using the lost wax casting method, or forged and tooled (Loughran 2006: 169). In a

short documentary entitled *Tuareg Jeweler of the Desert*, on his website, Elhadji Koumama, an *Enad* (sing. *Inaden*) from Niger, demonstrated the lost wax casting technique employed for generations in his family.¹ For heavier pieces, he carved the shape from wax and covered it in a clay mold. After he baked the clay in a small forge the wax melted leaving behind the shape of the object. He then melted the metal (in this case broken pieces of jewelry) in a small clay crucible and poured it into the clay mold. When the metal hardened, the mold was broken open with a hammer and the object was removed. The piece was then ready to be polished and decorated by stamping or engraving. For smaller, thinner pieces he used a hammer to shape and flatten the metal, then used screwdrivers to engrave the designs. This short narrated documentary made no allusions to any specific rituals involved in the lost wax process. However, the absence of rituals in this context does not mean that they were not present in late 19th or early 20th century production.

Metals and Cosmology

Historically, metals have been particularly important in Tuareg ritual and socioeconomic structure. In Tuareg cosmology, metals were regarded as having innate powers. The Tuareg believed iron to be impure and sought to contain its impurities by covering it with other metals, such as copper, which would neutralize its effects (Herbert 1984: 122). Iron was also associated with protective properties as well, for it was used to repel *Kel Essuf* spirits. The Tuareg believed copper possessed healing properties and the power to “protect against the *Kel Essuf* and illnesses attributed to these spirits” (Rasmussen 1987: 10).

Metals were often prevalent in rituals associated with life crises rites. During spirit possession ceremonies, Tuareg women, possessed by the *Kel Essuf*, would hold an iron sword

¹ www.tuaregjewelry.com

² www.tuaregjewelry.com

³ <http://www.spencerart.ku.edu/exhibitions/empire-of-things.shtml>

(*takuba*) belonging to a Tuareg man in order to “cut and separate spirits” (Rasmussen 2005: 30). Iron knives were also laid beside women who had just given birth in order to protect both the mother and the child from the *Kel Essuf* spirits (Rasmussen 1997: 59). Likewise, throughout the wedding ritual, Tuareg men and women were both vulnerable to attacks by the *Kel Essuf*, and iron knives were driven into the ground beside them for protection (Rasmussen 1997: 59).

Silver has historically been the preferred metal of adornment among the Tuareg noble class due to its aesthetic properties, its monetary value, and the prestige attached to it. White was considered the color of purity and happiness, and the Tuareg have always associated the color of silver with the color white (Rasmussen 1987: 10). Colors have played an important part in Islamic symbolism as well. Sufi robes are white, as are the robes and cloths of the *Ismkhan* of Becker’s (2006) study. In many instances, white was linked to goodness and prosperity (Bloom and Blair, eds. 2011: 16). White was also considered the be “the manifestation of light in its full purity (Bloom and Blair, eds. 2011: 20).

The use of silver can be linked to Islamic beliefs among the Tuareg. According to a quote in the Hadith, “the Prophet said: Oh women, bedeck yourselves in silver, but any woman who adorns herself with gold and displays it openly shall be punished” (van Roode 2010: 35). The *Inaden* and the *Iklan* classes would not have worn silver because it was expensive; silver was reserved for the noble class. However, they may have worn copper or brass jewelry featuring the same forms, styles, and motifs as those in silver (Loughran 2003: 53). In West Africa, the traditional metals of workmanship were copper and iron, but silver and gold were considered more luxurious (Herbert 1984: xix). Silver was believed to have become popular after the introduction of Islam into West Africa because there were few sources for silver in Africa prior to the establishment of trade with North Africa (Herbert 1984: xx). The earliest

evidence for the presence of silver jewelry was found, in a tumulus, in Senegal and was dated to the 12th-13th centuries (Herbert 1984: 122).

During the colonial era, the preferred type of silver, among the Tuareg, was the Maria Theresa Thaler. It was used throughout Africa and the Middle East and was popular for its aesthetic and monetary value (Tschoegl 2001: 452). The Maria Theresa Thaler was the most important trade currency throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and was still in use in the 20th century (Tschoegl 2001: 452-456). However, the Maria Theresa Thaler was an alloy of copper and silver and contained the lowest percentage of silver among trade coins of the time (Tschoegl 2001: 456). Silver may have also been obtained from North Africa in the form of coins or ingots.

The Bracelets in the Collection of the Spencer Museum of Art

The bracelets in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art (figures 1-3) were likely produced using the lost wax casting method, then decorated with their motifs through the technique of chasing. Bracelets 1 and 2 were probably produced from a silver alloy containing a higher percentage of silver than bracelet 3. Both bracelets 1 and 2 are heavily tarnished and feature a reddish purple stain that may be attributed to firescale, which affects metals containing both copper and silver. When oxygen and copper mix, it creates a build-up resulting in staining. Bracelet 3 is a lighter color than the others and appears to contain a high percentage of copper, due to the presence of a green patina in the grooves on the inside of the bracelet. These bracelets may have been produced using pieces of Maria Theresa Thalers, but in order to prove the composition of the metals, they would need to be tested in a conservation lab.

Iconography of the Bracelets

The iconography present in Tuareg art and jewelry is deeply bound to Tuareg cosmology and the motifs present on the bracelets in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art highlight this. The motifs present on bracelets 1-3 are geometric, and some may be connected to the influence of Islam. The triangle designs present on all three bracelets have been linked to the “seated female form” which is believed to guard against the evil eye (Rasmussen 1987: 10). The bands of x shapes, crosses, or stars on bracelets 1 and 2 may be “astral representations” that convey the Tuareg’s “intimate relationship with the cosmos” (ag Ewangaye 2006: 59).

The hash marks present on bracelets 1 and 2 may be linked to designs referred to as “the seven seals,” (often found on Islamic amulets) which may have been borrowed from “Hebrew Cabbalistic traditions” (Hassan 1992: 210). These designs can be found independently or linked with others (Hassan 1992: 211). The significance of the “seven seals” is that they may represent “the seven days and the seven planets” or they may be the “seals of different prophets and represent, when placed together, the mysterious name and seal of the almighty” (Hassan 1992: 211). The Seal of Solomon, which is prominent on bracelet 3, is also one of the “seven seals.” The Seal of Solomon is a protective symbol and “is believed by Muslims to have been cut on the bezel of King Solomon’s ring” (Hassan 1992: 211). King Solomon’s ring is mentioned in *1001 Nights*, in “The Tale of the Fisherman and the Jinni.”

All of the bracelets in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art (figures 1-3) feature either independent or clustered double circles or half moons. According to the wall text of the exhibit entitled “*Un art secret: Les écritures talismaniques de l’Afrique de l’Ouest*,” on display at the Institut du Monde Arabe in July of 2013, small balls or circles may have been derived from “the nail heads of Cuneiform writing” dating back to ancient Mesopotamia. These designs

were believed to be magic and were coopted by Hebrew, Semitic, Arabic, and European peoples over time. According to the text, Muslim ritual specialists attempted to Islamize these symbols by associating them with the Arabic letters *mim* and *ha* (Jessica Gerschultz, personal communication, 10 August 2013). Furthermore, according to Prussin, Arabic and Tifinagh script are both easily manipulated into geometric designs (1986: 74). Letters and numbers are both charged with magical powers and can appear independently or grouped together (Hassan 1992: 212). An example of this would be the use of magic squares in amulets. In magic squares, or *khawatem*, Arabic letters were assigned numerical values and were then arranged in geometric configurations (Prussin 1986: 75). *Tifinagh*, the Tuareg script, could be similarly manipulated into geometric designs similar to magic squares.

Woodworking Among the Inaden

Historically, wood has been very important in the lives of the Tuareg. In the Sahara desert environment, wood was a rare and valuable material and certain types were termite resistant. Wooden implements such as bowls, utensils, tools, and tent components were essential commodities in daily life. However, woodworking and wood commodities were never accorded the same status as metalworking and metal commodities. This was likely due, on the one hand, to the relationship between metals and the warrior class, and, on the other hand, to the link between wood commodities and female domestic space. Despite the fact that woodworking did not possess the same occupational status, more evidence concerning the gendered division of labor in the gathering of materials and the processes of production exists for woodworking than for metalworking. There is also much more evidence of the role of ritual in the process of gathering materials and in the construction of the tent.

In woodworking, there historically existed a strict, gendered division of labor, which was evident in the processes of gathering materials, producing the wooden components of the tent, and constructing the tent itself. Different parts of trees were utilized in different gendered ways. Women typically gathered roots, leaves, and barks, while men were responsible for gathering branches and stems (Prussin 1995: 28-30). This gendered division in labor was attributed to the fact that cutting and carving required the use of metal tools, which were the domain of men; thus women were responsible for gathering those parts of the trees that did not require the use of those tools (Prussin 1995: 59). The woodworking tools of the *Inaden* consisted of axes and adzes, which were historically made of iron. These tools were necessary for working with the branches of trees. Since women were barred from using iron tools (except in the circumstances discussed on page 14), they often used rock, stone, or shards of clay to harvest roots and barks (Rasmussen 2006: 130).

The process of producing wood tent posts was also subject to the division of labor, but there was some overlap between men and women regarding who produced which components and who carved them after production. Since the *Inaden* usually dominated the use of metal tools used for carving, the production of tent components and other wood objects was quite complex, and was divided between men and women depending on the parts of the trees from which the objects were made from. Women produced most of the components of the tent such as the mat coverings (made from palm fibers), the *esebar* wall mats placed around the sides of the tent, and the arches of the tent frames (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997: 436-451). Typically, according to Prussin, “bending is in the hands of women; carving is in the hands of men,” meaning that women were responsible for the production of those parts of the tent that did not require the use of tools, but were bent in order to produce them. These would have consisted of

the arched poles used to support the mats (or skins) covering the tent, which were made from the roots of acacia trees (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997: 436).

The male *Inaden* were responsible for carving the main structural supports of the tent, the ridgepoles and ridgepieces, and these were intricately carved with geometric designs (Prussin 1995: 92). However, Tuareg women who owned the tents were known to have carved incantations, in Tifinagh script, into the ridgepoles and ridgecaps (Prussin 1995: 92). Some evidence suggests that the noble women among some Tuareg groups may have been skilled at woodworking and may have produced these tent components themselves (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997: 473). The intricately decorated entrance posts, and the posts that supported the *esebar* mats, were most likely the work of the male *Inaden* as they were likely carved from solid pieces of wood. However, it is possible that carving tent components was, at one time, a female occupation. In her work among Mande potters and leatherworkers, Frank noted that Islam might have had an impact on the gendered division of labor, whereby women were excluded from some aspects of artistic production (2010: 17).

The construction of the tent was intricately tied to Tuareg women's identity and was highly ritualized. Women were solely responsible for building the tent and, significantly, the work was considered an extension of their reproductive roles in Tuareg society (Prussin 1995: 58). According to Prussin, the tent was not a temporary home and despite the fact that it was continuously built and rebuilt "the space it contained was permanent" (1995: 42). The tent was constructed in the exact same manner and order each time it was built with the woman's body used as a form of measurement (Prussin 1995: 42).

Wood and Cosmology

The main types of wood that were utilized by the *Inaden* and Tuareg women in the construction of tent components were limited to those species available within their environments. These consisted mainly of types of acacias and palms. The roles of wood in Tuareg ritual and cosmology are analyzed in Susan Rasmussen's (2006) work with Tuareg medicine women in her book *Those Who Touch: Tuareg Medicine Women in Anthropological Perspective*. According to Rasmussen, medicine women, who are ritual specialists, many of them members of the noble class, gathered roots, leaves, and barks from trees in order to make medicines to cure women and children of many different types of illnesses and diseases (2006: vii-viii). The tree species most commonly used were the *Agar*, the *Afagag*, and the *Tiboraq*, all of which were believed by the Tuareg to house spirits and to possess powers that could be either good or bad (Rasmussen 2006: 126). The spirits that were thought to dwell within these trees were considered to be "matrilineal ancestral spirits" as well as the *Kel Essuf* spirits of "the wild" (Rasmussen 2006: 120).

The work of Tuareg medicine women and the ways in which they were conceptualized in society share some similarities with the *Inaden*. Medicine women were seen as mediators between the tent (where healing rituals took place) and the wild (where they gathered their medicines) (Rasmussen 2006: 129). They were typically past their childbearing years and were said to be able to communicate with and listen to trees (Rasmussen 2006: 120). Unlike the *Inaden*, medicine women did not utilize iron tools to harvest wood. Instead they used clay shards or sharpened stones because they believed the trees and the spirits residing inside them disliked metals; for the purposes of medicine these spirits were considered beneficial (Rasmussen 2006: 121). The *Inaden*, on the other hand, used iron tools to cut branches and

wood and it was believed that these weapons either rendered the spirits powerless or repelled them (Rasmussen 2006: 125). Rasmussen's (2006: 131) research indicates that tree imagery was prevalent in life crisis rites such as spirit possession ceremonies, in Tuareg poetry and songs, and in Tuareg myth.

Like the Tuareg medicine women, Mande potters also performed ritual services and mediated between spirits. *Numumusow* (Mande potters), became *negetigiw* (women who perform excisions on young girls) after they had gone through menopause; and were thought to act as mediators between spirits and the "wild" (Frank 1998: 130-131). *Jeliw* spirits were thought to reside in the clay pits where potters gathered their clay for pots (Frank 1998: 81). These women possessed *nyama*, which enabled them to perform sacrifices to the *jeliw* and to control them in order to protect those digging in the clay pits (Frank 1998: 81). Since the *Jeliw* have their own personalities, the *numumusow* would offer them specific prayers and greetings (Frank 1998: 81).

The Tent Posts in the Collection of the Spencer Museum of Art

The tent posts (figures 4-6) in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art were made from the wood of some type of acacia tree or palm tree. Tent post 4 measures 111.76 cm x 8.89 cm, tent post 5 measures 124.46 cm x 15.24 cm, and tent post 6 measures 134.62 cm x 19.05 cm. They are all between three and four feet tall. An *Enad* (sing. *Inaden*) may have carved tent post 4 from a single piece of wood using an adze and he may have incised or burned the geometric designs into the wood. Tent post 4 is stained a dark brown color, either with plant-based or chemical stains. The blacksmith may have carved tent posts 5 and 6 from single pieces of wood using an adze. The geometric cut out designs were likely fashioned by him with a knife or adze. Tent posts 5 and 6 are stained a bright red color, either with plant-based stains or chemical ones.

Iconography of the Tent Posts

Many of the motifs present on the tent posts (figures 4-6) are similar to those present on bracelets 1-3. Tent post 4 is a cylindrical post with a knob at the top surmounted by a disc shape, then a lozenge shape, and then another disc shape all carved as part of the post. These are followed by three bell forms, which increase in size with the smallest on top and the biggest on bottom. Below these are four triangular spokes protruding from the post that are incised with a pattern of hash marks. Following those are three ridges with a chevron pattern that was either incised or burned into the post. These hash marks and chevron patterns were common motifs present in Tuareg art and may be related to those patterns, in Hassan's work, described as the "seven seals" (1992: 210).

Tent posts 5 and 6 appear to have been carved from single pieces of wood. They have wide, flat, oval faces mounted on straight, unadorned poles. Intricately carved crests top the oval faces of the tent posts. These tent posts appear to be anthropomorphic figures. They are intricately carved and feature nearly identical cutout geometric designs. The designs present on these tent posts are similar to those present on the bracelets and consist of cutout rectangles, triangles, circles, and half circles.

The designs on figures 5 and 6 may have derived from Arabic or Tifinagh scripts, but may also relate to the "seven seals," some of which were present on the bracelets. Small *mim* shapes can be discerned in several of the patterns. The small circles present throughout the oval faces of these tent posts could be related to "the nail heads of cuneiform writing" which was discussed previously. Small triangles are scattered throughout the patterns and, as was previously noted, they may represent the "seated female form" which is used as a protective symbol. Both tent posts are decorated with half moon cutouts, each with a small "foot"

protruding from the flat side. They are very interesting, but I have not found any references to indicate what they could represent.

The Socio-Cultural “Biographies” of Tuareg Bracelets and Tent Posts

Introduction

The meanings of bracelets and tent posts in Tuareg society were culturally specific and widely shared. The uses of jewelry and tents were tied to Tuareg cosmology through the beliefs and rituals surrounding them. In order to examine the functions and meanings of both bracelets and tent posts among the Tuareg, it is necessary to consider the “paths” they follow after their production and initial commission. In his introduction to *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Arjun Appadurai argues, “the flow of commodities in any given situation is a shifting compromise between socially regulated paths and competitively inspired diversions” (1986: 17). He suggests, “in looking at the social life of commodities in any given society or period, part of the anthropological challenge is to define the relative and customary paths” (Appadurai 1986: 29). In his essay *The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process*, Igor Kopytoff (1986: 65-66) states that commodities possess “life histories” and he posits that commoditization can be seen as a process that shapes the cultural biographies of things.

The “life histories” of bracelets and tent posts begin with production and continue through their initial commodity phase to serve the purposes of their Tuareg patrons. Appadurai (1986: 34) states, “the cultural biography perspective, formulated by Kopytoff, is appropriate to specific things, as they move through different hands, contexts, and uses, thus accumulating a specific biography, or set of biographies. Using the example of slavery as a process, Kopytoff (1986: 66-67) illustrates how commodities move in and out of the commodity phase and acquire

specific biographies. He observes, “biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure” (Kopytoff 1986: 67). He notes, “a culturally informed economic biography of an object would look at it as a culturally constructed entity, endowed with culturally specific meanings, and classified and reclassified into culturally constituted categories” (Kopytoff 1986: 68). After their production, the bracelets and the tent posts did not remain in the commodity phase. They entered into the “biographical” phase in their “social lives” where they began to collect “life histories.” Their “life histories” were strongly influenced by their materiality and gendered uses, as will now be discussed.

Patron-Client Relationships Among the Tuareg

Historically, the Tuareg engaged in a patron-client system that enabled nobles to acquire the goods and art objects they needed from the *Inaden*, while providing the latter with support in the form of food and protection. Blacksmiths and nobles, especially in rural areas, were closely connected through joking relationships and fictive kinship status whereby the *Inaden* were referred to as cousins (Rasmussen 1995: 596). In order to obtain items, the nobles directly commissioned them from the blacksmith. Typically, once the item was finished, the noble would give the blacksmith payment in the form of food or money. According to Rasmussen, blacksmiths had the right to request gifts at any opportunity, and nobles were obliged to comply with their requests (1995: 597).

Jewelry: Identity, Status, and Cosmology

In 1972, Roy Sieber acted as the guest director of the *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* exhibition and wrote the exhibition catalogue for the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His exhibition and catalogue established him as one of the first pioneers in the study of African dress and adornment. The exhibition, and the catalogue covered a wide range of dress including

costume, jewelry, head and hair ornaments, as well as scarification patterns and tattoos. The exhibition sampled dress and adornment from the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, and spanned a century (Sieber 1972: 10-11). He argued that African dress and adornment were works of art (Sieber 1972: 10-11). He emphasized that dress and adornment in Africa were never static and unchanging, but that they were influenced by history, cultural contact, and religion (Sieber, 11). His exhibition and publication addressed the functions of “fashion” in distinguishing ethnic identity, socioeconomic class, and age (Sieber 1972: 12).

More recently, in their work *Cloth, Dress, and Art Patronage in Africa*, Judith Perrani and Norma H. Wolff (1999) study the uses of cloth in Africa. Through an analysis of art patronage systems, they view cloth and dress as both art and commodity (Perani and Wolff 1999: 1). The authors argue that cloth and dress have many functions aside from protection from the elements. Cloth and dress “defines ethnic identity and social status, articulates sacred and secular boundaries, and acts as a measure of value” (Perani and Wolff 1999: 25-26). Dress communicates culturally specific information symbolically (Perani and Wolff 1999: 28). Perani and Wolff (1999: 29-41) analyze the importance of cloth and dress in the communication of personal taste, social status, politics, and cosmology. The authors also note that cloth and dress can communicate important social and cultural change (Perani and Wolff 1999: 46). In Tuareg society, dress and adornment functioned in all of these ways.

In Tuareg society in the late 19th and early 20th century, jewelry was not considered simply adornment; it was regarded as an important part of appropriate dress. It was also thought to be the “visual counterpart of performative utterances (Rasmussen 1987: 18). Adornment also constituted “an attribute of power” (Rasmussen 1987: 18). Both men and women wore jewelry, but men limited their jewelry to stone arm bands and Islamic amulets of leather or metal. Women

wore necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and veil weights. Rasmussen argues that dress and adornment were “central to self-definition” (1995: 49). Tuareg women believed that proper dress required adornment (Loughran 2006: 179). In order to be considered beautiful and poised, Tuareg women donned a significant amount of jewelry, especially on festive occasions such as weddings and naming ceremonies (Loughran 2006: 180). Noble Tuareg women’s dress was based on the opposing principles of reserve and “opulence and conspicuous display” (Loughran 2006: 186).

Dress and adornment in Tuareg society represented stages in the life cycle. Loughran (2006: 179) notes that women were continually gifted with jewelry from infancy until middle age. Newborn Tuareg girls were gifted with cloth and beaded jewelry at birth (Rasmussen 2009: 98). It was common for infant girls to wear amulets and necklaces of beads (Loughran 2006: 179). Around age seven, Tuareg girls began to receive and wear more jewelry particularly the *chatchat* necklace (Loughran 2006: 179). Puberty marked the age when girls began receiving large amounts of jewelry and women of marriageable age were showered with jewelry from their parents and suitors. Loughran (2006: 179) observes that it was the “duty” of Tuareg parents to provide their daughters with jewelry. Rasmussen (1995: 72) notes that the gift of jewelry represented the love and value bestowed on girls in that stage of their lives. Engaged and married women received large amounts of jewelry from their mothers and their husbands, notably, bracelets, rings, and necklaces (Loughran 2003: 53).

A Tuareg woman’s marital status could also be observed through her jewelry. Loughran (2003: 53) notes that jewelry forms could denote whether a woman was single, married, divorced, or widowed. Women inherited silver jewelry from their mothers when they reached marriageable age, and they received gifts of jewelry from their husbands when they married

(Rasmussen 1995: 72). During the first years of marriage, bridewealth payments were paid to the bride's parents and jewelry was conspicuously worn by the women in the family to show off their good fortune (Rasmussen 1995: 49). The *elkiss* style of bracelet was typical of the type inherited from a woman's mother or given as bridewealth from a woman's husband. Loughran (2003: 61) observes that the *elkiss* bracelets were always paired when worn, were extremely heavy, and were recognized by the polyhedral ends decorated with geometric patterns.

In addition, Tuareg jewelry could also denote socioeconomic status, which was, and still is one of the most important social markers within Tuareg society. Rasmussen (1995: 112) notes, "conspicuous consumption by men and women of the aristocracy at one time reflected their control of productive resources." Loughran observes, "each social class had its own kinds of ornaments; in some instances, pieces were similar in form, and class distinctions were conveyed by differences in materials" (2003: 53). Noble Tuareg women believed their choice in jewelry would "embody their aesthetic and cultural ideals, represent standards of taste, and convey social status and prestige" (Loughran 2006: 167). Rasmussen argues that the noble class embodied "values of reserve and refinement, and, not surprisingly, as nobles disdained manual labor, Tuareg dress and ornaments implied freedom from manual labor" (1995: 49).

Jewelry also functioned as protection from spirits. As a result of the syncretic nature of Islamic and pre-Islamic beliefs, the Tuareg strongly believed in the presence of the *djinn* and of the *Kel Essuf* spirits. The *djinn* were spirits that had long been associated with Islam and were discussed in the Quran, while the *Kel Essuf* ("people of solitude" or "people of the wild") were older pre-Islamic spirits prone to attack vulnerable people (Rasmussen 1995: 129). Noble women tended to be the targets of the *Kel Essuf* while they were in liminal phases in their life cycles (Rasmussen 1995: 51). The stages of birth, puberty, and childbirth were times when

women were considered especially susceptible to spirit possession (Rasmussen 1995: 51). Those stages of life also corresponded to the gifting of jewelry. Rasmussen (1995: 51) argues that older women were not considered to be in danger from spirits so thus required less jewelry. Many Tuareg believed that beauty was an important factor in the effectiveness of amulets and protective jewelry (Loughran 2008: 195). Protective symbols were often present in Tuareg jewelry, especially amulets.

Within Tuareg society jewelry could also function as a form of currency. Loughran (2006: 182) notes that ornaments acquired from a woman's husband were considered her personal property. Van Roode (2010: 25) stated that a woman's jewelry constituted her own personal money, and women were free to save or spend it at will. She observed that a woman's silver jewelry was the "family's savings account" (Van Roode 2010: 25). Rasmussen argues that bracelets had "exchange value, like livestock and money" and that "the exchange value of the ornament is a function of its weight in silver" (1987: 18). Jewelry, from this perspective, would have functioned both as currency and commodity in Tuareg society.

The Tuareg aesthetic emphasized beauty in craftsmanship, quality of materials, symmetry, and size. Tuareg noble women preferred silver for its white color, sheen, and protective properties, which were believed to be inherent in the metal itself (Rasmussen 1987: 9). The Tuareg belief in the protective properties of silver was a reflection of their Islamic beliefs. Tuareg jewelry forms were heavy and bulky and delicately engraved (Rasmussen 1987: 9). Loughran notes that Tuareg jewelry was "striking for its clean lines, for the delicacy of its engraved decorations, and for the consistency of its geometrical shapes" (2006: 169). Prussin notes that the nomadic aesthetic was a "quintessential expression of balance and symmetry" (1995: 200).

The Bracelets and Their Functions

The bracelets in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art (figures 1-3), share some formal and stylistic similarities to the *elkiss* style of bracelet. Photographs of this style of bracelet are featured in *The Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World* (2006: 174, 205, and 206). The *elkiss* bracelet is incredibly heavy, features polyhedral flared ends, and is decorated with geometric patterns featuring circles, triangles, and diagonal lines. The *elkiss* is a cuff bracelet with a fairly wide space between each of the polyhedral ends so that it can be slipped on. In *The Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, the description of the bracelet beneath the photograph states that the bracelets are “considered part of the bridewealth” and that “women usually wear them in pairs, with the end knobs pointed toward the side of the wrist” (2006: 206). Although bracelets 1-3 share slight formal and stylistic similarities to the *elkiss* style, they are also different. Bracelets 1-3 are larger and the polyhedral ends are more prominent. The geometric motifs are spaced symmetrically around the whole of the bracelets and are separated by smaller negative spaces. They are also hinged in the middle and there are holes pierced through them directly behind the polyhedral ends. When they are placed on a flat surface they do not sit flat. Bracelet 3 also features the Seal of Solomon on both the flat faces of the polyhedral ends. The *elkiss* bracelet features some geometric design, but only along the corners of the flat faces of the polyhedral ends.

There are three photographs of a metal bracelet, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which is nearly identical to the three bracelets in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art. It features polyhedral flared ends, a hinge in the middle, and holes pierced through both ends behind the polyhedral knobs. It is photographed in two positions. In the first photograph, it is stretched out at the hinge and lies flat with a metal pin laid in the middle, while

in the second, the ends are overlapping and the pin is inserted into the holes behind the knobs. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has dated it to the 20th century and has attributed it to the Tuareg peoples of Niger, and listed that it is made of silver. There is no mention as to a specific Tuareg name for the style of bracelet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection. More research into museum collections is necessary in order to record the varieties of *elkiss* designs.

With this information, it is possible to make certain assumptions about the use and meaning of bracelets 1-3 in their sociocultural context during the “biographical” phase of their “social lives.” The bracelets conform to the aesthetic and cosmological ideals of the Tuareg. They are heavy in form, are most likely made of silver, and are delicately decorated with geometric motifs and, in the case of bracelet 3, with protective symbols. They are symmetrical and, when new, would have been lustrous with a beautiful sheen. They would have been worn in pairs with the knobs arranged at the wrists.

The bracelets communicated the social status of the woman who owned them. The quality of the material used in the production of the bracelets indicated that they belonged to a Tuareg woman from the noble class. If they had been made from copper or brass they would likely have belonged to a woman from a lower socioeconomic class. The woman who owned these bracelets was probably of marriageable age (puberty or older). This style of bracelet was typically worn by married or engaged women and was often part of the bridewealth. These bracelets were likely given as gifts from a Tuareg woman's husband, or received as an inheritance from her mother. The presence of the Seal of Solomon on bracelet 3 indicates that the woman who owned it was Muslim and may have been in a transitional phase of her life when she was most vulnerable to attacks by *Kel Essuf* spirits. These bracelets would have signified her wealth and social status while functioning as property with monetary value. They would have

functioned as currency in difficult economic times or as financial security in the event of a divorce.

Tents: Gendered Space, Boundaries, and Cosmology

The nomadic tent was essential to the existence of all nomadic and seminomadic groups throughout Africa. Interesting parallels can be drawn between the centrality of the tent in the rituals and identities of Tuareg women and Amazigh women. These parallels are possible because of the linguistic and cultural relationship between the two groups. According to Seligman, Amazigh peoples from North Africa intermarried with sub-Saharan peoples who migrated south. Their descendants are thought to be the Tuareg peoples who inhabit the Saharan and Sahelian regions today (2006: 19). Seligman argues that Tuareg oral histories indicate North African ancestry (2006: 19). The Tuareg language (*Tamashek*) and the Amazigh language (*Tamazight*) both belong to the Afro-Asiatic linguistic group (Maddy-Weitzman 2011: 3). There has also been a movement toward the adoption of *Tifinar* script as the script for *Tamazight*. These similarities in language and culture allow for a comparison of the importance of ritual and identity surrounding tents among Ait Khabbash and Tuareg women.

Cynthia J. Becker (2006), in her book, *Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Women Shaping Berber Identity*, explores the role of Ait Khabbash women's art in the preservation and shaping of their Amazigh cultural identity. Her work, concerning the centrality of the tent in Ait Khabbash wedding ceremonies, is applicable to this study. The Ait Khabbash marriage ceremony and the Tuareg wedding ceremony share some ritual and cosmological similarities. Furthermore, the existence of the tent in Ait Khabbash society, despite their mostly sedentary lifestyle, indicates the continued importance of the tent to the identity and rituals of Ait Khabbash women.

This comparison will enable me to analyze the centrality of the tent to Tuareg women's identity and rituals.

The Ait Khabbash peoples are now mostly sedentary, but they keep the nomadic tents, historically made by women, for the purposes of the wedding ceremony (Becker 2006: 95). Prior to the three-day ceremony, the Ait Khabbash bride is packed onto a mule by members of the husband's family, an act that strongly evokes the image of the tent being packed onto a mule or camel for transport (Becker 2006: 97). The roles in the construction of the bridal tent are reversed in the Ait Khabbash marriage ceremony, but while men build the tent, women sing songs about women building the tent (Becker 2006: 99). Becker claims that role reversal is a common feature of Ait Khabbash weddings (2006: 99).

The tent is built outside the home of the groom, and upon her arrival, the bride is escorted to the tent where she will stay during the three-day ceremony. The bride circles the tent three times and sprinkles milk on the ground for protection from the *Djnoun* (Becker 2006: 139). The first night of the wedding, the marriage is consummated in the groom's tent. The second day of the wedding is marked by celebrations centered on the bride who is ensconced within the tent (Becker 2006: 145-148). The last day of the wedding again centers on the bride, and her hair and makeup are done in traditional styles denoting fertility (Becker 2006: 156-158). After the final celebration on the third day of the wedding, the bride cracks an egg (fertility symbol) on a tent pole or the doorframe (Becker 2006: 159).

In the Ait Khabbash context, the wedding tent is still ritually connected to the bride despite the fact that it is built by men. The tent houses the bride throughout the three-day ceremony and is a site of feminine ceremony, and ritual. Women's songs throughout the wedding draw attention to the construction of tents as a traditionally female occupation. The

multiple connotations of *ehen* in Tuareg society functioned in similar ways. In Tuareg ritual and cosmology tents were the domain of women. The nomadic marriage tent was owned by, built by, and maintained by Tuareg women. The word “*ehen*” was used to denote the tent and the Tuareg wedding ceremony (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997: 449). “*Ehen*” also described the wife (owner of the tent), household possessions, and members of the family (Keenan 1977: 109). The tent was the site of courting rituals, marriage rituals, childbirth and naming ceremonies, as well as female healing rituals. Courtship rituals took place inside the tent, typically after dark. A Tuareg man would enter a woman’s tent and “awaken” her in order to spend time with her (Rasmussen 1996: 22). Within Tuareg society, socializing between men and women was not discouraged and men could visit women’s tents as long as they were gone the next day, before the woman’s parents woke (Rasmussen 1996: 22). However, women had the right to evict men from their tents if their attentions were unwanted (Rasmussen 1995: 34).

In Tuareg marriage ceremonies, the tent was supplied by the mother of the bride and was initially erected during the Tuareg wedding ceremony by female relatives (Rasmussen 1997: 58). While the mother of the bride supplied most of the components of the tent such as the mats and the arched frames, the groom purchased the structural poles from an *Enad* (Rasmussen 1997: 58). In the first stage of a Tuareg wedding, a small hill of sand was built up and a woman laid down on it holding two tent poles while two men threw the covering over the top (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997: 750). Although the literature does not specify who held the poles, it may be assumed that the woman was a relative of the bride since female relatives typically erected the marriage tent. Once the tent was built, the groom awaited the bride inside the tent. Like the Ait Khabbash bride, the Tuareg bride circled the tent three times before entering it (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997: 58). Before the tent was taken down the next morning, both the bride and the

groom held iron weapons upon leaving the tent to protect them from the *Kel Essuf* spirits (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997: 751). The repeated building and tearing down of the tent would continue daily until the last day of the wedding. After the wedding ceremony, the couple would remain in the bride's camp for a period of some years while the husband finished paying the bridewealth (Rasmussen 1996: 16). The living arrangements after the wedding were likely rooted in pre-Islamic matrilineal practices.

The space within the tent was arranged in the exact same way each time it was built. Women first laid out the interior of the tent and assembled the single bed before erecting the tent around the space (Prussin 1995: 105). The interior of the tent was divided into two sides, the male side and the female side, and the possessions of each were stored on their respective sides (Prussin 1995: 98). According to Rasmussen (1996: 15), the husband and wife dwelled within the tent while adolescent boys and the elderly inhabited grass housing structures that formed part of family compound. It is unclear whether adolescent girls remained in their mothers' tents or whether they lived separately in other shelters within family compounds before marriage.

Childbirth rituals were performed in the tent, in the company of the mother's female relatives. After the birth of the child the windscreens of the tent were unrolled to enclose the tent in order to shield the new mother and child from the *Kel Essuf* (Prussin 1995: 98). While screens afforded them some protection, they also had amulets and iron knives as an extra precaution. The mat screens protecting the mother and child were held up with intricately carved wooden tent posts. The female relatives of the new mother and child would take care of all their needs for the period of seclusion (Rasmussen 1997: 91). The naming ceremony at the tent of the new mother was an unofficial ceremony and preceded the official Islamic ceremony. This ceremony attracted female members of the family and was presided over by an *Enad* playing the *tende*

drum (Rasmussen 1997: 91-92). Healing rituals also took place within the tent, as women and children were typically the patients of female medicine women.

The Tuareg inhabited a world where spirits and supernatural powers were very real. Tuareg cosmology and ritual, like Mande cosmology and ritual, centered on the belief in the dichotomy of inhabited space in opposition to “the wild.” The Mande believed that the “greater the distance from one’s mother’s home, the greater the social dislocation and potential for disaster” (McNaughton 1988: 17). To the Mande, “the wild” was perceived as exceptionally dangerous and was avoided by remaining close to civilization (McNaughton 1988: 17). The Tuareg believed that exposure to “the wild” outside of the tent made them more vulnerable to attacks by the *Kel Essuf* (Rasmussen 1996: 16). Thus, tents served as safe havens from the dangers associated with “the wild.”

Tuareg women continually reproduced the bounded space the tent represented. This space fulfilled a psychological need for boundaries among the nomadic Tuareg (Prussin 1995: 40). In the lands occupied by the Tuareg, there were few permanent landmarks and the environment was constantly changing. The configuration of the tent was dependent upon the nomadic environment and was influenced by the landscape, weather patterns, and the seasons (Prussin 1995: 22). Tents provided the Tuareg “the only place in which constancy (and predictability) could be maintained in a continually changing physical environment” (Prussin 1995: 42). Thus, the orientation of the tent and the space it contained was fundamentally important in the lives of the nomadic Tuareg.

Tent posts were integral components of the contained space and the boundaries the tent represented. These intricately carved posts were structurally and ritually important. The *ehel* posts were elaborately decorated posts used to support the wall mats that protected the

inhabitants of the tent from the elements (Nicolaisen and Nicolaisen 1997: 450-451). These posts were also featured in childbirth rituals by supporting the wall mats used to seclude new mothers and their babies within the tent in order to protect them from the *Kel Essuf* (Rasmussen 1997: 91). The *igem* posts were also structurally and ritually important. This type of post was also intricately carved and served as “central exterior pole” which marked the entrance of the tent (Prussin 1995: 95-96). According to Prussin, “this elaboration at the entrance was an aesthetic expression of both enclosure and entrance,” it served as a doorway and delineated the bounded space of the tent (Prussin 1995: 96).

In many ways, tent posts, such as the *ehel* and the *igem*, and the bracelets, served similar purposes. Their elaborate decoration conformed to noble Tuareg aesthetic ideals. They were made of wood, which was scarce in many areas inhabited by the Tuareg, and they were ornately decorated (Bernasek 2008: 94). Because the materials were rare and bore beautiful decorations, they may have been the property of a noble Tuareg woman. These posts would have highlighted the high socioeconomic status of the noble class of Tuareg.

The Tent Posts and Their Functions

The tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art (figures 4-6) share formal and stylistic qualities with *igem* and *ehel* tent posts. Tent post 4 shares formal and stylistic qualities with an *igem* tent post featured in *African Nomadic Architecture: Space Place and Gender* (1995: 99). The *igem* tent post is long and narrowly carved in a cylindrical form. It has bell shaped protrusions and geometric decorations covering the approximate top third of the post. In *African Nomadic Architecture: Space Place and Gender* (2006: 99), the caption beneath the drawing of the *igem* states that it is an entrance post. Tent post 4 is a dark brown color and stands at about four feet tall. It has three protruding bell shapes decreasing in size. Tent posts 5

and 6 share formal and stylistic qualities with *ehel* tent posts featured in *The Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World*, where the caption reads; “this particular type of tent pole is used to secure a wall mat” (2006: 94). *Ehel* posts have wide, flared oblong shaped crested tops. They are intricately carved with geometric motifs.

With this information, it is possible to make certain assumptions about the use and meaning of tent posts 4-6 in their sociocultural context during the “biographical” phase of their “social lives.” The tent posts conform to the aesthetic and cosmological ideals of the Tuareg. The materials they were made from were likely rare among some groups, and the elaborate motifs attested to their quality.

Tent posts 4-6 were likely the sole property of a noble Tuareg woman and constituted part of her dowry. They were particularly important in defining and upholding the gendered space of the tent and in serving ritual purposes. Tent post 4 would have been used to mark the entrance to the tent while tent posts 5 and 6 would have been used to support the wall mats surrounding the tent. These tent posts would have been considered prestigious objects due to the quality and rarity of their materials and their elaborate decorations.

Conclusion of Part 1

The first and second stages in the “social lives” of the bracelets and tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art highlighted the importance of the objects in their initial sociocultural setting. The *Inaden* class produced the bracelets through culturally specific knowledge regarding their uses. Noble Tuareg women likely owned the bracelets. Moreover, for those women, the bracelets communicated identity, functioned as markers of socioeconomic status, held ritual significance (in the marriage ceremony), and served as a form of currency. The *Inaden* also produced the tent posts, which noble Tuareg women also owned. The tent posts

were important to the structure and function of the tent through childbirth rituals, marriage ceremonies, and through their protective properties. The meanings that these objects conveyed were specific to Tuareg culture and were widely understood between the *Inaden* and the noble Tuareg women who used them.

In Part 2 of this thesis, I will explore the ways in which African art objects, such as the bracelets and tent posts were removed from their initial sociocultural setting through the activities of colonial collectors and museums. As I will show, in the third phase of their “social lives,” the meanings attributed to the bracelets and tent posts in Tuareg society were lost or changed through the ideology surrounding colonial collecting practices and through the activities of African cultural brokers who provided the link between the collectors and the objects. The fourth phase in the “social lives” of the bracelets and tent posts was their exhibition in the Spencer Museum of Art. In this section I will examine the roles of the colonial era museum in the making of paradigms that still influence the representation of African art in museums today.

Part 2

From the Sahel to Kansas: Colonial Collecting and the Museum

Colonial Collecting Practices

Introduction

In order to understand how new meanings were created after the bracelets and tent posts were removed from their sociocultural setting, it is necessary to examine what Appadurai describes as the “diversion of commodities from specified paths,” whereby “diversion” is “a sign of creativity or crisis, whether aesthetic or economic” (1986: 26). In his introduction he states that “crisis” is typically driven by economic factors, wars, and theft (Appadurai 1986: 26). The author claims the “diversion is frequently a function of irregular desires and novel demands” (Appadurai 1986: 29). During the colonial era, many African societies experienced “crisis” in the form of colonialism, and the “diversion” of their material culture through collection and pillaging. Western anthropologists, colonizers, and missionaries typically drove the collection of African art. The original meanings of the objects were subsequently lost or changed. However, the collectors were not the only actors in the “diversion” of material culture. African middlemen acted as cultural brokers and assisted in the diversion of African objects (Schildkrout and Keim, eds. 1998). Cultural brokers were also influential in the formation of new meanings for the objects they sold.

The tendency of collectors in the colonial era to romanticize Tuareg history and culture may have been a significant factor in the collection of the bracelets and tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art. These perceptions may have stemmed from colonial era perceptions of pastoralists as fierce warriors and their physical and moral resemblance to certain traits valued by European colonizers. Their collection may have also stemmed from the

colonial era ideology that hierarchically elevated pastoralists above other sub-Saharan African peoples.

Colonialism

Colonialism had an enormous impact on every aspect of African society and culture and caused numerous disruptions and transformations in African art production and rituals. Kasfir's (2007) research on the Idoma and the Samburu, in *African Art and the Colonial Encounter: Inventing a Global Commodity*, is useful for understanding the changes colonialism brought to Tuareg patron-client relationships and art production, as well as the ways in which these artists circumvented colonial laws and navigated new markets. It is also useful in the examination of colonial collectors and their fascination with the noble Tuareg class.

Using the concept of warriorhood, Kasfir (2007) illustrates how British colonial policies changed cultural practice, artistic production, and the representation of African art. In the case of the Idoma, the pre-colonial concept of warriorhood was linked, through the taking of enemy skulls and the Oglinye masquerade, to Idoma ideals of manhood (Kasfir 2007: 74-82). The British eventually banned the practice but the ban led to the creation, by Idoma woodcarvers, of masks that eventually took their place (Kasfir 2007: 99). In the case of the Samburu, spears were similarly an extension of manhood and warriorhood and were also linked to Samburu ritual (Kasfir 2007: 27). The British colonial administration prohibited the use of spears, but the injunction did not end their manufacture. Samburu smiths simply modified the types of spears they produced and sold them to neighboring groups (Kasfir 2007: 110).

Differing colonial perceptions about both Idoma and Samburu warriorhood led to the creation of different colonial policies. The Idoma were viewed as being backward and barbaric and the taking of enemy heads was equated with cannibalism, which fascinated colonial

Europeans even though the practice did not exist (Kasfir 2007: 59). In colonial discourse, the Idoma warrior was viewed as a threat (Kasfir 2007: 67). Colonial attitudes regarding the Samburu warriors were completely different than those expressed towards the Idoma. The Samburu were romanticized by the British colonizers (Kasfir 2007: 39). The British aristocracy drew correlations between themselves and their romantic image of the pastoral Samburu warriors (Kasfir 2007: 38-39). Colonial fascination with Samburu pastoralists shaped the policies the British attempted to implement. While the Idoma were viewed as cannibalistic barbarians who needed to be controlled, the Samburu were viewed in a favorable, if paternalistic light (Kasfir 2007: 52).

As Kasfir demonstrates, British colonial discourses, policies, and the *Pax Britannica* had a major effect on the artistic production of the Idoma and Samburu. Among the Idoma, the Oglinye masquerade and the use of skulls was banned (Kasfir 2007: 73). In the case of the Samburu, the British colonial administration attempted to contain “spear blooding” and spears in Samburu rituals (Kasfir 2007: 95). The changes in artistic production in both societies brought about changes in patronage and materials. In Idoma society, artists replaced skulls with carved masks (Kasfir 2007: 120). In Samburu society, spears were banned and Samburu blacksmiths relocated to make spears for neighboring cultural groups (Kasfir 2007: 110-111). Although colonial policies influenced Idoma and Samburu artistic production, both groups retained the rituals relating to masks and spears in a modified form.

The policies and attitudes of the British colonial administration directed toward the Samburu shared similarities with French colonial attitudes and policies aimed toward the Tuareg peoples. French colonialism in the Sahelian and Saharan regions of North and West Africa had a major impact on Tuareg society, which in turn affected patron-client relationships and the

production of art. Prior to the arrival of European colonization, the noble class of the Tuareg dominated the caravan trade, bred camels, and engaged in raiding and warfare to augment wealth and prestige (Seligman 2006: 27). French colonial policies were aimed at the enculturation and pacification of the peoples in their territories. Furthermore, the colonial military and administrators wanted control over lucrative trade routes, with the intent to build a trans-Saharan railroad (Keenan 1993: 34-35). Over time, diminished control of the trade routes and resistance to French dominance took a toll on the economy of the Tuareg. The creation of independent nations, the ending of slavery, and the rerouting of trade routes, along with economic factors, contributed to the increased sedentarization of the previously nomadic Tuareg (Seligman 2006: 27). Consequently, the wealth of the Tuareg noble class began to diminish. The nobles were pastoralists who despised manual labor and looked down on those who performed it (Rasmussen 1987: 9). However, without control of the caravan trade, they faced increasing poverty and eventually sought work outside of caravanning.

Historically, the *Inaden* lived with and accompanied the noble families who were their patrons in nomadic camps and rural villages. After the changes in Tuareg socioeconomic structures, the *Inaden* began to migrate to the cities (ag Ewangaye 2006: 62). According to Rasmussen (1995: 595) the *Inaden* in the cities continued to seek patron-client relationships, but on a wider scale. Thus, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, *Inaden* turned to foreign expatriates and tourists for patron-client relationships (Rasmussen 1995: 602).

Changes in patron-client relationships influenced forms and styles of the art of the *Inaden* in both colonial and post-colonial contexts. According to Loughran (2003: 55), the *Inaden* continued to sell “traditional” jewelry forms to Tuareg clients, but they expanded their repertoire for new foreign buyers. They not only fashioned jewelry from silver with “traditional” designs

for foreign buyers, but they also expanded upon the materials they used prior to colonialism (Loughran 2003: 55). Jewelry pieces produced for sale to Westerners were usually lighter than those of the Tuareg, and were adapted to fit Western requirements (Loughran 2003: 55). For example, some of the larger and heavier pieces, such as the cross of InGall, were miniaturized and produced as earrings or necklaces (Loughran 2003: 55).

Cultural Brokers

The *Inaden* have always been experts at innovating and marketing their arts for new patrons. Their established roles as mediators enabled them to adapt to the changes colonial policies inflicted upon “traditional” patron-client relationships. Christopher B. Steiner’s (1994) book *African Art in Transit* is useful for an analysis of the roles the *Inaden* have long played as mediators and cultural brokers. His work analyzes the roles of Africans as cultural brokers in the transnational African art trade in Cote d’Ivoire. His research focuses on the art markets of Cote d’Ivoire and New York and examines both the economic and cultural aspects of the transnational trade. He argues that African art traders “are not only moving a set of objects through the world economic system, they are also exchanging information – mediating, modifying, and commenting on a broad spectrum of cultural knowledge” (Steiner 1994: 2). In this respect, traders mediate between African artists and Western buyers by disseminating knowledge about Western tastes to the artists, and about African art and culture to Westerners.

In his study, Steiner (1994: 87) notes that most African traders in Cote d’Ivoire are ethnic minorities and that they are from three major ethnic groups: the Hausa, the Wolof, and the Dioula. Historically, these three groups acted as cultural brokers because they were deeply involved in trade and were instrumental in spreading Islam throughout West Africa (Insoll 2003: 343). He argues that they use their ethnicities to influence Western perceptions and to make

themselves seem like more legitimate authorities on African art (Steiner 1994: 90). Often, art traders manipulate their appearances through clothing and accessories in order to comply with Western assumptions of authenticity (Steiner 1994: 90). They also engage in altering art objects and their meanings. According to Steiner, they provide the “linkages at crucial points in a series of cross-cultural exchanges” (1994: 130). They manipulate art objects through presentation, description, and alteration to meet the demands of Western collectors for authentic African art (Steiner 1994: 131).

Cultural brokers often attribute meanings to the objects they are attempting to sell by explaining how they were acquired, their meanings in traditional society, and their uses (Steiner 1994: 136). In these cases, the cultural brokers are not members of the cultural groups in which the objects were created. The meanings they create are usually based on stereotypes they have heard regarding Western tastes for authenticity (Steiner 1994: 136). Thus, cultural brokers typically link objects to royalty, ritual associations, or “ancient” origins (Steiner 1994: 136).

The *Inaden* have historically acted as mediators, middlemen, and “cultural brokers” between the noble Tuareg and outsiders. According to Rasmussen, (1995: 598) the *Inaden* acted as “buffers” between the noble Tuareg and outsiders. They were regarded as the guardians of Tuareg identity, history, and culture (ag Ewangaye 2006: 60). According to ag Ewangaye (2006: 62), the objects produced by the *Inaden* were traditionally traded within Tuareg society; they were not sold. With the arrival of colonialism and the changes it wrought, the noble Tuareg were no longer able to provide for the *Inaden* and uphold the patron-client relationships that had dictated their transactions (ag Ewangaye 2006: 62). Thus, the *Inaden* sought new patron-client relationships with outside groups. According to ag Ewangaye (2006: 62), the *Inaden* first began making objects for groups who were in close contact with the Tuareg, such as the Fulbe. Camel

saddles, weapons, tools, and tent components were sold or traded to these external groups. They also expanded their production for colonial administrators and later, for tourists.

Like the cultural brokers of Steiner's study, the *Inaden* engaged in manipulating the meanings of the items they were attempting to sell in cities. They also manipulated their appearances in order to secure patron-client relationships. The best examples of Tuareg culture brokers can be clearly seen in the entrepreneurial pursuits of the modern day *Inaden*. In chapter one, I used a narrated documentary from Elhadji Koumama's Tuareg jewelry website to examine the lost wax casting process. In his documentary *Tuareg Jeweler of the Desert*, the first glimpse of Koumama is of him fully dressed in "traditional" Tuareg clothing consisting of indigo dyed robes and turban. His face is fully veiled by his *tagelmust* (face veil) made of indigo dyed cloth. The video also portrays the surroundings of the Sahara desert landscape and a caravan of camels. Koumama is pictured within his workshop crafting a piece of jewelry using only minimal tools. He describes his process and explains his history as a member of the *Inaden* class. He expresses a link between his process of art production and that of his ancestors.² His documentary plays into the desire of western collectors for "authentic" Tuareg art. He manipulates his self-representation through dress and through the surrounding environment of Agadez, Niger, without showing the modern city, in order to capitalize on his ethnicity, culture, and history.

In her article *Performing Culture: A Tuareg Artisan As Cultural Interpreter*, Susan Rasmussen (2010), relates her experience with Aliou Mohammed, a Tuareg *Enad* (singular *Inaden*), and the representation of his culture and art at a Texas-based import shop called Ten Thousand Villages. Ten Thousand Villages is part of an NGO that is involved with artisanal workshops in Africa (Rasmussen 2010: 231). The advertising for his visit consisted of

² www.tuaregjewelry.com

stereotypical representations of Africa as “underdeveloped” and of African art as “craft.” These terms are examples of the wider tendency of Westerners to view Africa and African art through colonial era constructs of evolutionary ranking (Rasmussen 2010: 231). The advertisement’s representation of the *Enad* was equally rooted in colonial era ideas. He was represented as simply a silversmith, despite the fact that the *Inaden* perform many roles aside from artistic production. However, the purpose of the advertisement was to feed into Western perceptions of exotic Africa in order to attract customers (Rasmussen 2010: 232).

When he presented his work, Aliou Mohammed sat on the floor and surrounded himself with a forge and examples of his jewelry (Rasmussen 2010: 236). As he spoke, he described his life as a member of the *Inaden* class of Tuareg and he linked his work to the work of past family members (Rasmussen 2010: 236). He mediated between his culture and the Texan audience by answering questions about his profession, about Tuareg women and their position in society, and religion (Rasmussen 2010: 237-238). He also discussed Tuareg dress, but refrained from explaining the nuances of the meaning of the *tagelmust*, a face veil worn to establish social distance as well as for protection from both spiritual and environmental factors (Rasmussen 2010: 238). In constructing his appearance, he controlled access to his culture through what he chose to emphasize. Much like the cultural brokers of Steiner’s study, Mohammed created meaning through how he represented himself, his culture, and his artistic production.

As cultural brokers, the *Inaden* in these instances used the Western fascination with Tuareg culture to influence Western perceptions and to appeal to the Western tastes for authentic African objects. In his documentary, Elhadji Koumama did this through a combination of dress, environment, and the linkage of his art production to the past. Aliou Mohammed accomplished this through his public presentation of Tuareg culture, history, and artistic production. All of the

strategies employed were also utilized by the cultural brokers involved in the international trade in African art in Cote d'Ivoire. However, the *Inaden* were representing their own cultures as opposed to representing other cultural groups. They mediated between the Tuareg and the audience through the knowledge they chose to reveal.

It is possible that the bracelets in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art were purchased directly from an *Enad* because the *Inaden* acted as buffers between other members of Tuareg society and outsiders. Furthermore, they tried to form patron-client relationships with foreign buyers. Yet, given the upheaval colonialism caused in Tuareg society, such as by a woman in financial duress, it is equally likely that the objects were bought directly from other members of Tuareg society. Unfortunately, there is a lack of records regarding the provenance of the Tuareg bracelets, so it is impossible to know how they were purchased.

The tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art were purchased in the United States through an African trader. The anonymous donor of the tent posts began purchasing "utilitarian" objects, mostly pottery, through galleries first. However, he turned to African art traders who traveled between Africa and New York. He purchased large quantities of African ceramics, which encouraged them to bring other "utilitarian" objects. In effect, the anonymous donor acted as patron to the African art trader.

Colonial Collectors

Collectors of African art were fascinated with pastoral/warrior societies during the colonial era and, in turn, their fascination had an impact on the types of art that were collected. In the case of the Samburu warriors of Kasfir's study, British colonial administrators idealized pastoralist groups and considered them to be superior to other Africans such as the Idoma (Kasfir 2007: 31). The European aristocracy believed them to be more like themselves because they

participated in stock breeding, were independent, did not engage in manual labor, and engaged in leisure (Kasfir 2007, 38). They were romanticized by colonial Europeans because they refused to be assimilated and pacified, and remained visibly tied to their ways of life (Kasfir 2007: 37). The Western fascination with pastoralists still persists to this day, and has caused controversies in the film, fashion, and automobile industries.

The noble class of Tuareg also existed as romantic figures in the minds of Westerners. Like the Samburu, they were idealized due to their occupations as camel breeders and caravan traders. Their appearance was also striking and a cause for fascination. Historically, the Tuareg dressed in billowing robes of indigo dyed cloth. Noble Tuareg men veiled their faces with indigo dyed cloth attached to towering turbans. They presented themselves as fiercely independent warriors who engaged in raiding and who repeatedly fought against French colonial rule. These romantic and idealized depictions of the Tuareg influenced the collection of their material culture and created a sort of canon of noble Tuareg objects in museum collections (Bernasek 2008: 52).

The collection of African art was driven by many factors other than the idealized images of certain ethnic/cultural groups. In their book *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, editors Enid Schildkrout and Curtis A. Keim (1998) explore the motivations behind the colonial collecting of African art. They focus on the activities of collectors in Central Africa and analyze colonial era perceptions of African art, the different types of objects collected, and the ways in which these objects were categorized. They also focus on the collectors themselves, explaining the motivations and factors driving anthropologists, colonizers, and missionaries. Their work is far reaching in that it can be applied to colonial collecting practices throughout the African

continent. Their insights are useful in theorizing how Tuareg art may have been collected and how the meanings of Tuareg art were created, manipulated, or lost.

During the colonial era, there were many influences effecting the collection of African art. In the late 19th century, the Berlin Conference initiated the “scramble” for the African continent because it was mandated that “a European country could only claim a territory in Africa after having occupied it” (Schildkrout and Keim, eds. 1998: 12). The Berlin Conference set in motion the colonization of Africa, which was accomplished by the early 20th century (Schildkrout and Keim, eds. 1998: 12). African objects became the means through which Europeans understood Africa. They were necessary to the “project of describing, defining, and apprehending Africa” (Schildkrout and Keim, eds. 1998: 12). African objects were useful in categorizing African ethnic identities and cultures, proving theories of cultural evolution, and staging imperial ambitions.

Prior to the Berlin Conference, there were several types of collecting practices tying European patrons to African artists. In the first type, collecting was typically in the form of souvenirs and curios collected by explorers and traders, which served as evidence of cultural contact (Schildkrout and Keim, eds. 1998: 21). Another practice was the collection of trophies, which consisted of weapons and hunting prizes and served as a “tangible means of showing penetration, conquest and domination” (Schildkrout and Keim, eds. 1998: 21). Scientific collecting was another type of collecting and involved the collection of specimens in order to advance the fields of anthropology and ethnology (Schildkrout and Keim, eds. 1998: 29).

The story behind the Tuareg art collection of Lloyd Cabot Briggs is an excellent example of colonial era collecting practices among anthropologists. In her book, *Artistry of the Everyday: Beauty and Craftsmanship in Berber Art*, Lisa Bernasek (2008) examines the collecting practices

of anthropologists and military personnel in Algeria during the colonial era. She focuses on the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology's impressive collection of Tuareg material culture collected by Harvard anthropologist Lloyd Cabot Briggs. Briggs served with the Office of Strategic Services during World War II and was stationed in Algiers (Bernasek 2008: 47).

After WWII, Briggs finished his PhD. in anthropology and stayed in Algeria as a research fellow for the Peabody Museum and also worked in the Bardo Museum of Ethnography and Prehistory in Algiers (Bernasek 2008: 47).

Throughout his time in Algeria, Briggs collected numerous examples of Tuareg material culture. Since he was a collector as well as an anthropologist, he kept and displayed many of the objects he acquired from Algeria, but he also donated many of the objects to museums (Bernasek 2008: 48). While in Algeria, he collected Tuareg objects such as household implements, clothing, and jewelry. He purchased these objects in market places, from Tuareg people, and from other collectors such as colonial era administrators, French military personnel, and researchers (Bernasek 2008: 50). Many of the objects he obtained from French officers included swords and shields, daggers, and spears (Bernasek 2008: 50-51). He also acquired many of his objects through a French administrator in Algiers, Maurice Reygasse, who was also a collector (Bernasek 2008: 51). Reygasse was purportedly involved in the discovery of the tomb of Tin Hinan, and was the founder of the Bardo museum of Ethnography and Prehistory (Bernasek 2008: 51). The objects in Briggs's personal collection were donated to the Peabody Museum upon his death. There were, however, difficulties in determining the provenance of some of the objects that were in his collection (Bernasek 2008: 48).

The Briggs collection of Tuareg art is, in some respects, representative of colonial era collecting practices outlined by Schildkrout and Keim (1998). The weaponry he purchased from

the French military personnel had likely been collected as trophies in the early 20th century. In his role as an anthropologist in the early to mid 20th century he would have likely been engaged in the collection of cultural “specimens” or “artifacts” to be studied. But, as a collector himself, he would have also been drawn to Tuareg material culture as souvenirs of his work among the Tuareg of Algeria. Unlike Lloyd Cabot Briggs, the collectors of the bracelets and tent posts were not trained anthropologists seeking cultural specimens; they were private collectors.

The Bracelets and Tent Posts

The motivations surrounding the collection of the bracelets in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art were unknown. The motivation of the collector of the tent posts was his personal interest in “utilitarian” African objects such as pottery. However, once the objects were collected and removed from their sociocultural context, they were disconnected from their roles in ritual and cosmology. The meanings of the bracelets and tent posts in their sociocultural context were initially linked symbolically to gender, marriage, socioeconomic status, and identity. Once they were commodified, they were decontextualized, and much of the information surrounding their production and use was lost. In her discussion of the Samburu spear, Kasfir notes, “once a traditional Samburu spear is collected, it passes from complex representation to utilitarian object” and is thus “depleted of its complexity because its symbolic representations existed only in the minds of its original owner” (2007: 199). Her argument may apply to both the Tuareg bracelets and the tent posts, which may have been viewed as artifacts instead of art due to their designation by collectors as utilitarian objects.

The material composition of the bracelets and tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art may have had an impact on how they were collected and the meanings that were attributed to them in this stage of their “social lives.” The bracelets may have been collected as

souvenirs because of their status as commodities within Tuareg society and their aesthetic value. They had monetary value because of their silver content and collectors would have had access to them because they were used as currency within Tuareg society. Moreover, they would have continued to serve as commodities despite the fact that they were tied to female use through marriage rituals, markers of socioeconomic status, and inheritance. They could have been purchased directly from an individual, or they could have been commissioned from an *Enad*. Either scenario is likely due to the economic upheaval in Tuareg society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Due to both their aesthetic appeal and their function as currency, it is difficult to theorize about the meanings that were attached to the bracelets during this third phase in their “social lives” with the scant information regarding their provenance. However, given the tendency of Westerners to romanticize the Tuareg way of life, the bracelets may have functioned as proof of Tuareg racial and cultural superiority. It is also possible that their utility and function in Tuareg society influenced their collection as specimens to be studied.

The tent posts were viewed as utilitarian objects as opposed to “art” due to their relegation within Tuareg society to domestic use. Within their sociocultural settings, the tent posts served as structural components of tents. Tents were the domain of women, and tent posts were ritually tied to women through marriage ceremonies, birthing rituals, and the need for bounded and contained space. Despite their aesthetic, structural, and ritual uses, they did not possess any monetary value. After their initial purchases, they ceased to function as commodities.

Their materials and use within Tuareg society impacted their collection. In her book *African Nomadic Architecture: Space, Place, and Gender*, Labelle Prussin theorizes that

collectors of African art, who were typically male, would not have had access to the female domain of the tent (1995: xix). Colonial era collectors, in her view, were more concerned with weapons, tools, and “durable,” permanent artifacts” (Prussin 1995: xix). Prussin argues “if what women do as a subdominant group is devalued (i.e., domestic work or ‘interior design’), then the ‘nonpermanent’ products (such as quilts, weaving, and baskets) that they produce would occupy a lower position in the hierarchy of their aesthetic value system” (1995: xix). However, this would not have been an issue for the collector of the tent posts since they were purchased from an African art trader in New York. The tent posts were collected as examples of “utilitarian” objects.

The Museum: Meaning and Representation

Introduction

The Tuareg bracelets were donated to the Kansas University Museum of Anthropology in 1975, along with over two hundred other objects by Mr. and Mrs. H. Kenneth Palmer. The collection was very diverse and contained objects collected throughout West Africa, with some items from Sudan. The collection featured Senuso *kpeli-yehe* masks, Oyo *egungun* masks, Bini *iyoba* heads, Asante gold weights, *Shilluk* “dolls,” various metal bracelets, and many other objects. The tent posts were donated by an anonymous donor along with a collection of ceramics, and other “utilitarian” objects. The Kansas University Museum of Anthropology closed in 2002 due to a lack of funding, and access to the ethnographic collection was limited to scholarly research. In 2005, the collection was renamed the Anthropological Research and Cultural Collection, but was ultimately transferred to the Spencer Museum of Art in 2007. At that time, all of the objects from the ethnographic museum were accessioned into the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art. The move encouraged greater access to the collection, as well as

the opportunity for the objects to be exhibited. The shift of the objects from the anthropology museum to the art museum reframed the categorization of the objects from “artifact” to “art.” This shift represents an important phase in their “social lives.”

The transfer and accession of the ethnographic collection to the Spencer Museum of Art presented some challenges. In some cases, records pertaining to the donors and the collections were missing, incomplete, or indecipherable, making it very difficult to accurately identify the objects. As an intern at the museum, under the supervision of Dr. Cassandra Mesick, the Global and Indigenous Arts Curator, I have been conducting research on various objects and collections to help ensure that they are more accurately represented. Many of the problems that I have been confronted with have arisen from collecting practices. In many instances, the dates and locations of production and collection are not known or are not accurate.

The challenge is to represent and exhibit African art in a way that recovers the original meanings of the objects while paying attention to the various influences that have shaped them over time. In most cases, this is a difficult task. Kasfir (2007) acknowledges the difficulties inherent in the representation of African art. She argues that objects in their sociocultural settings are “imbued with deep cosmological significance and are linguistically richly nuanced” (Kasfir 2007: 189). When objects are removed from their cultural context and are transposed into a Western art museum setting, the cosmological significance of the object becomes invisible because the significance of the object is not related through its form or technical qualities, but through layers of meanings known only to those who produced it and those who used it (Kasfir 2007: 189). Susan Vogel argues that the difficulties inherent in exhibiting African art stem from the fact that “almost nothing displayed in museums was made to be seen in them” (1991: 191).

She also argues that, “we have attributed to the art or artifacts of all times the qualities of our own” (Vogel 1991: 192).

During the production phase in the “social lives” of the Tuareg bracelets and tent posts, their meanings were created through the knowledge the *Inaden* possessed regarding their uses in Tuareg society. Materiality and gender were extremely important factors in their production and influenced their uses within Tuareg society as well. In the second phase of their “social lives,” the bracelets and tent posts were used within their initial sociocultural setting. Bracelets marked social identity, functioned as currency, and were present in marriage rituals. While tent posts were relegated to private domestic space and had no monetary value, they were deeply connected to Tuareg women’s rituals. In the third phase of their “social lives” the objects were “diverted” through colonial administrative activities, cultural brokers, and colonial collectors. The bracelets and the tent posts were decontextualized and new meanings were created for them as they reentered the market. The fourth and final stage in the “social lives” of the bracelets and tent posts to date was their acquisition by and exhibition within the museum. I will now focus on the museum as an institution rather than on collectors and I will begin by examining the roles of the colonial era museum in creating meaning and representing African art.

The Colonial Era Museum: Myths and Paradigms

The work of Annie E. Coombes is useful in examining the reasons that there is little information regarding the provenance of the bracelets and tent posts in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art. It is also useful in explaining the accession of both the bracelets and the tent posts into the collection of the Kansas University Anthropology Museum as opposed to the art museum. Her book, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, examines and analyzes the colonial

museum and its roles in the colonization of Africa, the collection of African material culture, and the representation of both in museum exhibits. She links the formation of the disciplines of anthropology and ethnology to the rise of the ethnographic museum as a vehicle to legitimize both fields (Coombes 1994: 3).

In the early 19th century, the colonial government did not recognize anthropology or ethnology as academic sciences and, as ethnography was situated within the museum, curators tried to draw attention to their disciplines by promoting “anthropology as both ‘popular’ and ‘scientific’” in order to gain a wide range of support (Coombes 1994: 4). Anthropology and ethnology played an important role in defining Africa during this time period. Race was the foundation on which the justification of colonization was built (Coombes 1994: 9). African art was used to “create a hierarchy of racial and cultural “types” based on evolutionary models, with North Atlantic peoples at the apex and “non-Westerners” occupying the lowest rungs” (Meier 2010: 22-23). According to Karp and Lavine, “decisions about how cultures are presented reflect deeper judgments of power and authority and can, indeed, resolve themselves into claims about what a nation is or ought to be” (1991: 2).

Anthropologists and ethnologists were, in turn, instrumental in the formation of paradigms used to study African art. According to Coombes, anthropologists and ethnologists within the colonial museum sought to educate the public through “scientific” knowledge about Africans and African material culture (1994: 44). Ethnographic collections were the tools through which they attempted to accomplish this. The role of anthropologists and ethnologists was to prove the “racial inferiority” of Africans in order to justify colonization (Coombes 1994: 44). However, the knowledge they possessed was mediated by their goals of recognition and validity (Coombes 1994: 62).

In the introduction of this thesis, I highlighted some of the colonial era myths about Africa and African art. These myths were the direct result of the activities of colonial anthropologists and ethnologists. Two of the most damaging myths that emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries charged that Africa was “primal and timeless” and that African art was “rigidly bound by place” (Blier 1996: 26-27). Prita Meier argues that African art was “defined by the colonial lexicon of ethnic groups, each seen as autonomous pre-modern universes” (2010: 26-27). These myths led to the creation of theories and paradigms that negatively impacted the study of African art. However, though they are persistent, these old theories and paradigms are being overturned.

One of the most tenacious paradigms directing the study of African art was the “one tribe, one style” paradigm described in the introduction. The most detrimental aspect of this paradigm was that it was ahistorical and ignored the fact that late 19th and early 20th century African art had many influences throughout history, including the influences of both Islam and colonialism (Kasfir 1984: 161-171). As Meier argues, “many of the objects celebrated as canonical . . . were created and used during the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, the height of the colonial encounter” (2010: 27). The tendency to identify African art objects with a single tribe and a single style was linked to ethnographic fieldwork focusing on the ethnographic present. Paradigms such as this had far reaching consequences for the display and representation of African art in both colonial era and present day museums.

The representation of African art in colonial museum exhibitions relied upon the meanings created for the objects by anthropologists and ethnologists. According to Karp and Lavine, “every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it” (1991: 1). Often, these exhibitions

utilized a “series of well-worn tropes able to masquerade as authenticity and a neutral and academically sanctioned objectivity” (Coombes 1994: 64). Exhibitions functioned to serve the purposes of various agendas and they typically “featured colonized races as an integral part of the proceedings” (Coombes 1994: 64). According to Meier, “visual schemas became tools for the management of colonial and imperial interventions” (2010: 22-23).

The Western fascination with African aristocratic warriors can also be viewed in the context of the museum. In many instances, colonial era museums favored the exhibition of art from African warrior societies such as the Zulu and the Dahomey (Coombes 1994: 115). In the case of the Tuareg collections at the Peabody and the Bardo Museums, the collection of noble Tuareg art constituted a veritable “canon.” Likewise, the Western fascination with the Samburu of Kenya, in Kasfir’s book, led to the commodification of the warrior body through film and popular culture.

The colonial museum was concerned with elevating the disciplines of anthropology and ethnology to the level of “science” and gaining recognition as an academic field. Anthropologists and ethnologists shaped the meanings of African art, but they were influenced by their own goals and by the politics of the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras. The myths and tropes regarding Africa and African art objects were spread through the vehicle of the museum, thus impacting the ways in which African art was interpreted and displayed.

An essay written by Lisa Bernasek highlights the ways in which colonial ideology still shapes the representation and exhibition of Tuareg art. In her essay “*First Arts*” of the Maghrib: *Exhibiting Berber Culture at the Musee du quai Branly*, Lisa Bernasek (2010) analyzes and critiques the Musee du quai Branly’s exhibition entitled *First Arts*. She argues, “Berber arts and

material culture – textiles, pottery, jewelry, weaponry, and other objects of daily life – have been collected and exhibited by French museums since the twentieth century” (Bernasek 2010: 172).

Colonial scholars, collectors, and museums had an important impact on what objects were collected, categorized, represented, and displayed. The North African objects were typically divided between ethnographic museums, colonial museums, and museums of decorative arts (Bernasek 2010: 174). A canon of Islamic art was, however, displayed in the Louvre in Paris. North African arts and artists were, like the arts of sub-Saharan Africa, judged on a hierarchical and evolutionary scale. Islamic arts were classified as fine arts and Berber arts were classified as ethnographic arts despite the fact that Berbers are Muslims (Bernasek 2010: 174-175).

The objective in the creation of the Musee du quai Branly was to refute the earlier practices and paradigms that had underpinned the exhibition of the Berber collection in the ethnographic museum. But, as Karp and Lavine argue, the exhibition of “non-Western” art in a Western art museum complicates things (1991: 4). They argue that, “despite the increasing diversity incorporated in art museums, curators and exhibition designers still are struggling to invent ways to accommodate alternative perspectives” (1991: 4). Bernasek, however, argues that the new museum “locates itself in a liminal zone between the traditional art museum and the ethnographic one” (2010: 178). She argues that the term “*arts premiers*” is “meant to replace outdated terms like “primitive” or “tribal” art” (Bernasek 2010: 178). However, the name of the exhibit has received scholarly criticism because of the “evolutionary assumptions and the sense of spatial and temporal distance embedded in them” (Bernasek 2010: 178).

Much of the focus of the Musee du quai Branly is dedicated to North African Berber art and the layout of the exhibition highlights this. According to Bernasek, “in an arrangement that

reproduces the colonial-era categories ...the main part of the exhibit is organized around three “poles” of artistic production – urban, rural, and nomadic – that tend to slip into ethnic divisions – Arab, Berber, and Saharan” (Bernasek 2010: 182). The cases also focus on divisions that continue to evoke the colonial era treatment of African material culture; such as “Prehistory and History; Expressions of the Sacred; and Rituals” (Bernasek 2010: 182). Connections are continuously drawn between rurality and Berbers and between the Tuareg and nomadism in these exhibitions (Bernasek 2010: 182).

The Musee du quai Branly’s attempts to transform colonial era exhibition strategies have been largely unsuccessful. The curators have focused their attention on the same categories of objects that colonial era ethnographic museums displayed, while ignoring the art that does not fit in with their construction of Berber culture. The idealization of the rural Berber populations and the nomadic Tuareg populations is another extension of colonial era representations. The use of poles to organize art by ethnicity and by genre again evokes the tendency of colonial era museums to do the same.

The Spencer Museum of Art and Exhibition

The Spencer Museum of Art’s current strategy for displaying global and indigenous art objects (including African art) is in direct contrast to the Musee du quai Branly’s “*First Arts*” exhibit strategy. The Spencer Museum of Art displays objects from around the world in themed exhibits; the most interesting of which, for the purposes of this thesis, is *The Empire of Things* exhibit. This exhibit evokes commentary on colonialism and collecting activities through the use of themed arrangements placed throughout the exhibit. The strategy behind the exhibit includes an examination of the “social lives” of the objects displayed. Like this thesis, *Empire of Things*

explores contact between cultures, colonial desires for exotic art, peoples who produced the objects, and meanings of the objects as they passed through each phase in their social lives³.

The Bracelets and Tent Posts On Display

The bracelets and tents posts have only been displayed once since their accession into the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art, but the exhibit they were featured in can be viewed in contrast to the “*First Arts*” exhibition at the Musee du quai Branly. During the Spring 2012 semester, the exhibition was held in the teaching gallery and featured art relating to Africa and Islam. Dr. Jessica Gerschultz personally selected the art for her two courses, African Islamic Art and Architecture and Contemporary African Art.

The objects she included in the exhibition were geographically and culturally diverse, but were linked through African origin and Islam. During the tour of the exhibit, I gave a brief talk about the Tuareg bracelets on display, while another graduate student discussed the Asante gold weights she had researched. The items on display included a Hausa Quran and Quran case, a carved ivory tusk, and a wool textile from Mali. Paintings by Yelimane Fall and reverse glass paintings by Mor Gueye were also highlighted. Interestingly, Maasai spears and an elephant ear shield were also displayed. The exhibit displayed contemporary objects alongside objects from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Conclusion and Future Research

In the introduction of this thesis I began my inquiry with three questions regarding the bracelets and tent posts in the museum’s collection. How had they come to be in the collection of the museum? Why was there so little information about their provenance? What meanings did they have for the artists who produced them, the people who used them, the collector who

³ <http://www.spencerart.ku.edu/exhibitions/empire-of-things.shtml>

collected them, and the museum that housed them? Working backward from their presence in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art, I was able to piece together a probable sequence of phases in their “social lives,” using Appadurai’s (1986) paradigm in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. His model enabled me to examine the various meanings attributed to both sets of objects from their production in the Sahel to their exhibition in the Spencer Museum of Art. Furthermore, I was able to show that the meanings of the objects changed over time and through space as they passed through each phase.

Through an analysis of the production phase in their social lives, I highlighted the gendered nature of artistic production among the *Inaden* in Tuareg societies. Materiality and gender were the most salient factors affecting the production of the bracelets and tent posts. Male smiths were the producers of the bracelets due to culturally specific gendered beliefs governing the materials and processes involved in metallurgy. The production of the tent posts, on the other hand, was more ambiguous. My research indicated that gender was an important factor governing both the gathering and the carving of wood. Women were involved in collecting those parts of trees that did not require the use of metal tools while men gathered and carved the parts that required their use. My research also indicated that Tuareg women may have carved motifs and Tifinagh script onto tent posts and they may have, in some instances, carved some of the posts themselves.

My research on the uses of the objects within their sociocultural setting also highlighted the importance of gender and materiality. Silver bracelets functioned as adornment, currency, and protection, but were also tied to noble Tuareg women through marriage rituals. The tent posts were used architecturally as support for wall mats (windcreens) and to mark the entrance to the tent. Like the bracelets, they were also ritually significant to women through their

presence in marriage ceremonies, birthing rituals, and in the physical and spiritual protection they afforded women. However, despite their importance to Tuareg women, tent posts have not inspired as much scholarly interest as Tuareg jewelry. I attribute this to the fact that bracelets were visible symbols of Tuareg culture and identity as well as a form of currency, whereas tent posts were relegated to private female domestic space. These factors were integral to the discrepancies between the collection practices surrounding jewelry and those surrounding tent posts.

In the third phase in their “social lives,” the bracelets and tent posts were “diverted” from their original trajectories within Tuareg society through their collection. Colonial era collectors tended toward collecting objects as souvenirs, as scientific specimens, and as trophies. The bracelets may have been collected as souvenirs or as specimens; and were eventually donated to the Kansas University Anthropology Museum in 1975, along with more than two hundred other African art objects. The tent posts were collected as examples of “utilitarian” objects along with ceramics, baskets, and other “traditional” art objects.

The final stage in the “social lives” of the bracelets and tent posts was their accession into the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art. This stage represented another shift in their “social lives;” from “artifact” to “art.” Prior to 2007, they were part of the ethnographic collection of the University of Kansas Museum of Anthropology, which closed due to budget cuts in 2002.

There are several aspects of this project that could be expanded upon in the future. The bracelets in the museum’s collection are unique. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has one bracelet in its collection that shares striking formal and stylistic characteristics with the three bracelets in the Spencer Museum of Art’s collection. As I previously stated, the bracelets share some formal and stylistic qualities with the *elkiss* style of bracelet. It would be fascinating to do

further research by comparing museum collections of these types of bracelets in order to ascertain a range of styles of *elkiss* bracelets. It would be interesting to discover whether or not the styles of the bracelets correspond with specific artists, regions, drum groups, or timeframes.

Another interesting trajectory for this project would involve both fieldwork and museum collections. Very little research has been devoted to Tuareg tent posts and the research that does exist is ambiguous. Fieldwork, among the various nomadic Tuareg groups, and especially, the *Inaden* and *Tinaden*, might illuminate the mysteries behind the tent posts. Tent posts are found in many museums in the United States, and yet there is little information about who made them, how they were made, their forms and styles, and their uses and significance. It would be incredibly useful to compare museum collections of tent posts and to record the range of styles and forms. As with the bracelets, it would be fascinating to discover links to specific artists, regions, or timespans.

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Catalogue of Images

Tuareg Bracelets

Figure 1 a.



Tuareg Culture
bracelet, 19th-20th Centuries
metal

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. H. Kenneth Palmer 2007.3395
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This hinged alloy bracelet features polyhedral ends incised with geometric motifs. It resembles the *elkiss* style of bracelet, which is inherited from mother to daughter or given as a gift from a husband to his bride. This style of bracelet was typically worn in pairs and its size was meant to emphasize slender and graceful hands. It was meant to be worn with the ends overlapping and pinned closed. This bracelet would be considered a prestigious piece and would have been owned by a Tuareg woman from the noble class.

Figure 1 b.



Tuareg Culture
bracelet, 19th-20th Centuries
metal

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. H. Kenneth Palmer 2007.3395
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This hinged alloy bracelet features polyhedral ends incised with geometric motifs. It resembles the *elkiss* style of bracelet, which is inherited from mother to daughter or given as a gift from a husband to his bride. This style of bracelet was typically worn in pairs and its size was meant to emphasize slender and graceful hands. It was meant to be worn with the ends overlapping and pinned closed. This bracelet would be considered a prestigious piece and would have been owned by a Tuareg woman from the noble class.

Figure 2 a.



Tuareg Culture
bracelet, 19th-20th Centuries
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This hinged alloy bracelet features polyhedral ends incised with geometric motifs. It resembles the *elkiss* style of bracelet, which is inherited from mother to daughter or given as a gift from a husband to his bride. This style of bracelet was typically worn in pairs and its size was meant to emphasize slender and graceful hands. It was meant to be worn with the ends overlapping and pinned closed. This bracelet would be considered a prestigious piece and would have been owned by a Tuareg woman from the noble class.

Figure 2 b.



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Figure 3 a.



Tuareg Culture
bracelet, 19th-20th Centuries
metal

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. H. Kenneth Palmer 2007.3397
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This hinged alloy bracelet features polyhedral ends incised with geometric motifs and the Seal of Solomon, indicating Muslim influence. It resembles the *elkiss* style of bracelet, which is inherited from mother to daughter or given as a marriage gift from a husband to his bride. This style of bracelet was typically worn in pairs. Due to the quality of the materials and its craftsmanship, it would have been considered a prestigious piece and would have been owned by a Tuareg woman from the noble class.

Figure 3 b.



Tuareg Culture
bracelet, 19th-20th Centuries
metal

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. H. Kenneth Palmer 2007.3397
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This hinged alloy bracelet features polyhedral ends incised with geometric motifs and the Seal of Solomon, indicating Muslim influence. It resembles the *elkiss* style of bracelet, which is inherited from mother to daughter or given as a marriage gift from a husband to his bride. This style of bracelet was typically worn in pairs. Due to the quality of the materials and its craftsmanship, it would have been considered a prestigious piece and would have been owned by a Tuareg woman from the noble class.

Tuareg Tent Posts

Figure 4 a.



Tuareg Culture
igem, 20th Century
wood

Anonymous donation 2008.101
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This intricately carved wood tent post features an engraved chevron motif. The mats or skins used to cover a Tuareg tent would have been secured to this post, making it structurally significant. It could also have served to mark the entrance to the tent. Due to its high quality, it would have been considered a prestigious piece.

Figure 4 b.



Tuareg Culture
igem, 20th Century
wood

Anonymous donation 2008.101
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This intricately carved wood tent post features an engraved chevron motif. The mats or skins used to cover a Tuareg tent would have been secured to this post, making it structurally significant. It may also have marked the entrance to the tent. Due to its high quality, it would have been considered a prestigious piece.

Figure 5 a.



Tuareg Culture
ehel, 20th Century
wood

Anonymous donation 2008.102

Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This wood tent post is intricately carved with geometric motifs and was used to support the wall mats that enclosed Tuareg tents. This piece is not only decorative; it is structural as well. It would have been considered a prestigious piece due to its high quality craftsmanship and beautiful designs.

Figure 5 b.



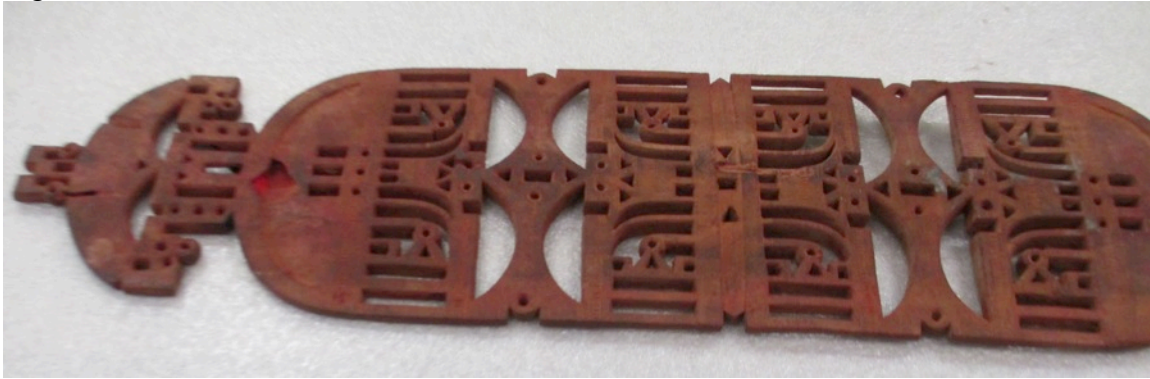
Tuareg Culture
ehel, 20th Century
wood

Anonymous donation 2008.102

Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This wood tent post is intricately carved with geometric motifs and was used to support the wall mats that enclosed Tuareg tents. This piece is not only decorative; it is structural as well. It would have been considered a prestigious piece due to its high quality craftsmanship and beautiful designs.

Figure 6 a.



Tuareg Culture
ehel, 20th Century
wood

Anonymous donation, 2008.103
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This wood tent post is intricately carved with geometric motifs and was used to support the wall mats that enclosed Tuareg tents. This piece is not only decorative; it is structural as well. It would have been considered a prestigious piece due to its high quality craftsmanship and beautiful designs.

Figure 6 b.



Tuareg Culture
ehel, 19th Century
wood

Anonymous donation 2008.103
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS

This wood tent post is intricately carved with geometric motifs and was used to support the wall mats that enclosed Tuareg tents. This piece is not only decorative; it is structural as well. It would have been considered a prestigious piece due to its high quality craftsmanship and beautiful designs.