

(start of excerpt...) Material culture is symbiotic with the construction of identity and, in turn, identity becomes the root of what defines nationalism. Overall, this paper discusses the role material culture plays in the formation of identity. The concept of identity is discussed in many disciplines – from political science to art history – and is deeply connected to the ideologies of nationalism. Yet, there is clearly room, and a need for, a comprehensive discussion about the function and development of a national identity through a cultural lens. Material culture enables a society to capture moments and styles and adopt them as a way to express character and culture – a collective identity, which lays the framework for defining a nation.^[1]

As Colette Beaune suggests in her studies of pre-modern national consciousness, the earlier mythic structures of medieval France, much like the adoption of a unique use of material culture (particularly textiles) by the Commonwealth serve to create a “firmly united nation” and, subsequently, are looked to as a way to validate a historical legacy when nationalism emerges in secular Europe.^[2] In tracing continuity in ideology of modern nationalism, I build upon Beaune’s argument to suggest that an examination of material culture is essential in understanding not only the formation of more modern national identities, but also the formation of European ideologies used to define nations.

Semiotics is a tool used to discover the representations buried in the depths of aesthetics and incorporates the hidden meanings attached to the visual to create a well-rounded narrative. Every element of an object can be an important source of knowledge and, through analysis one can identify and discuss the parts that create an identity.^[3] According to Erwin Panofsky material culture connects the mind with the world, and “semiotics sees signs as evidence of an unbreachable chasm between them.”^[4] Material culture, as my primary form of evidence, highlights the relationship between the study of identity creation and the Polish noble nation. I look to aesthetic formulas as a means to understand the complex history, cultures, and societies of the region. In identifying and discussing the parts (the objects) I present the whole (the history). Yet there is a challenge that lies within this semiotic analysis when evaluating material culture’s role in the historical canon. It is ultimately my responsibility to address each aspect and layer of visual evidence and recognize that my examination of material culture’s role as a historical source does not end in a singular interpretation. In the case of Poland, material culture brought together varying influences – secular, religious, Eastern, and Western – to create a visual representation of the Sarmatian noble. The Sarmatian national identity, in terms of semiotics, challenges the readily used historical methods applied to discussions on early modern identity creation. In looking at Polish Sarmatianism there is a call for a more nuanced discussion of the different levels in which the identity was created and experienced. The construction process of the Sarmatian identity, therefore, works in a sphere, conceptualized by Homi K. Bhabha as the third space, where a society recontextualizes identity and fuses multiple identity markers in a new manner.^[5] Therefore, the objects assist as evidence to produce alternate viewpoints of a city, society, culture, or nation as well, as corroborate the textual evidence from the same periods in time.

Using objects as evidence to learn, discover, and highlight a historical past, I concern myself less with “with any individual utterance or interpretation and more with the larger context which makes the meaning possible.”^[6] In recognizing the cyclical nature of this historical consciousness, I pull from the past to understand the present and future.^[7] In the role of a material culture historian, I closely examine an array of sources, whether presented in text or as artifact, to widen the lens on historical analysis and offer critical perspectives on identity creation. The idea that material culture works to provide a narrative of a society is evident insofar as historians call upon objects to tell particular stories about a society. These objects become a part of a larger collective identity of a people, a dynasty, or an empire, which are recorded in many documents such as diaries, government papers,

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business transaction, for example. For that reason, through this dissertation, my objective is to peel back the layers that surround aspects of Polish and Near Eastern particularly, Ottoman material culture to create a new historical context to depict how nation is represented, not just textually, but visually. This dissertation suggests that material culture acts as a transmitter of national ideals and values in centuries' worth of societal politics and imperial conquest. And, thus, an aesthetic element becomes a potent symbol of nationhood/culture. The relationship between an object, Sarmatian clothes for example, and the wearer (object) exemplifies, "how we make sense of shapes, colours, textures, strengths and channeling of energy and so determines how we make use of and live with things." [8] Physical objects, therefore, wield tremendous authority and power as they serve as evidence to identify cultural exchanges associated within a society, a nation, and a culture. Material culture acts as a way to research the interplay between cultural exchange and identity creation.

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[1] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*. London: Penguin, 1991, p.25.

[2] Colette Beaune, *Birth of the Nation France*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985, p.339.

[3] I rely on leading scholars' perspectives for my understanding of semiotic theory, such as

Roland Barthes (1964). *Elements of semiology*. New York: HILL and WANG; Ferdinand De Saussure. (1974). *Course in General Linguistics*. In Gottdiener, M., Boklund-Lagopoulou, K. & Lagopoulos, A.P. (2003). *Semiotics*. London: Sage Publications; Charles Sanders Peirce (1965). *Basic Concepts of Peircean Sign Theory*. In Gottdiener, M., Boklund-Lagopoulou, K. & Lagopoulos, A.P. (2003). *Semiotics*. London: Sage Publications; and Umberto Eco (Eco, 1979; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993; Panuti & Zoest, 1996; Chandler, 2002).

[4] Panofsky was an early 20th-century German art historian trained in the iconographical method. See Panofsky, Erwin (1955). *Iconography and iconology: An introduction to the study of Renaissance art*. In Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the visual arts* (pp. 51-81). Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.

[5] For more on cultural hybridity, see Bhabha, Homi K. 2007. *The Location of Culture*, New York, NY: Routledge.

[6] Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods*, Manchester University Press, 2006, p. 200.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Tim Dant. 2008. *Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles*. Buckingham: Open Univ. Press. p. 13. ffffffff