

# Introduction

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The period from 1400 to 1519 marked a transition point between the medieval world and the modern world. Despite the differences in Northern and Southern European art, it was an internally consistent period in art history. For material culture studies, it was rich for the study of the changes from a pre-industrial society to an industrial society, the development of capitalism, and the development of more materialistic attitudes. It is a basic assumption of material culture studies that the larger culture is reflected by the material objects produced and owned by that culture. One such set of material objects, men's headdress from 1400 to 1519, is the focus of this research.

Studies of late medieval and early Renaissance clothing have not been abundant. There are many restrictions with the quantity and quality of sources of information that hamper study of clothing and other aspects of material

life during this time. This thesis will use a quantitative approach that has worked well in studies of headdress and other clothing articles for other time periods to help overcome some of the limitations that sources present to the researcher.

## Purpose of Study

### A Material Culture Perspective

Material culture attempts to study objects as historical documents that can give information not readily available through verbal documents. Some of the types of information sought are implicit attitudes, beliefs, or mental structures of the world; things so obvious to a people of a given time and place that they did not feel or see a need to express them explicitly.<sup>1</sup>

In the literature on the purposes and methods of material culture, the goal is

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<sup>1</sup> Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in *Material Life in America, 1600–1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988) 17–38.

to use objects or artifacts as historical documents. However, the differences between verbal documents and artifactual documents have not been sufficiently explored.<sup>2</sup> The study of individual objects, in and of themselves, would be inadequate to discover the kinds of information that material culture analysts would like to find. It is implied, but not stated in much of the literature that the most effective study of artifacts should be in the aggregate, and studied in both the context of changes over time and in the context of other types of contemporary objects. In other words, objects need to be studied in groups by comparing changes in a particular group over time and comparing this group of objects with other contemporary groups of objects. Information from individual objects would need to be combined into some kind of database to enable these types of contextual studies. Only Craig Gilborn, in his study of Coca-Cola bottles, and James Deetz and Edwin Dethlefsen, in their study of tombstone ornamentation styles, have come close to making this inference about studying objects in aggregate.<sup>3</sup>

### Description of Study

This study of fifteenth and early sixteenth century European men's headdress is an attempt to create a database of aggregate information that can be used to re-examine some basic research questions about stylistic change over time and geography and to be used

in further research that involve other aspects of 15th-century life and culture.

The database is to be composed of information on men's headdress derived from fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century artwork that is systematically gathered from a large range of sources over a geographic and temporal range. It is created by defining a series of characteristics of men's headdress and coding each headdress used in the sample for each of these characteristics. Each headdress is also coded with information about geographic area of origin and date. This information could be sorted in a number of ways to examine headdress by type, complexity, color, how the hat is worn, geographic area, time, social class, and other aspects. These data could then be used with other types of information to analyze such issues as literary and verbal correspondences, aesthetic ideals, the relationships between headdress and other articles of clothing, or the social uses of headdress.

### Research Questions

The data gathered for this thesis are grouped into thirteen categories designed to answer basic research questions about late medieval and early Renaissance headdress that either have been neglected or have not been studied in sufficient detail to be of use in material culture studies. These research questions include:

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture Studies in America, 1876–1976," in *Material Culture Studies in America*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth, (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982) 1–75; and Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Manuscripts and Manufacts," in *Material Culture Studies in America*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth, (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982) 101–113.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Gilborn, "Pop Pedagogy: Looking at the Coke Bottle," in *Material Culture Studies in America*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth, (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982) 183–191; and James Deetz and Edwin N. Dethlefsen, "Some Social Aspects of New England Colonial Mortuary Art," *Society for American Archaeology: Memoirs* 25 (1971): 30–38.

1. How did headdress types change over time, and what types were especially associated with a particular region?
2. What were some of the major characteristics of these headdress types? How did these characteristics change over time and by region?
3. How did the physical features of depicted headdress change over time and by region? What do these changes tell us about the practices of wearing headdress, about the preferences for simplicity or complexity, or about the

preferences verticality or horizontality?

4. What were the social statuses of the wearers of these headdress? What associations were there with headdress types with different social classes?

Before any answers can be found, one must have basic understandings of the historical background for the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, of the other types of studies done on medieval and early Renaissance clothing, and of the nature of the sources used in this study and their art-historical background.



