



Graduate School Statement of Purpose Example for Anthropology (899 words)

One of the greatest gifts my parents gave to me, very early on, was a keen sense of just how unique my childhood was. Though by no means a position of high stature, my mother's clerking post at the American consulate in Cairo provided us with an immense array of benefits, and those that impacted me most were, unsurprisingly, the plethora of cultural institutions a short walk away from our home. Whether the Coptic, Luxor, or the Grand Egyptian, the first thing I wanted to do each afternoon after getting out of school was to zoom into the cool air of a museum. Even at a young age, I was aware of the complexity of being a light-skinned American kid wandering through these halls, gazing at artifacts of a civilization that far preceded the origins of what I understood to be "western" civilizations. How did I end up here? What was the nature of my relationship to this rich and vast culture that both fascinated me and exacerbated my feelings of being somewhat alien in its midst?

This intersection of cultural and political analysis expanded as I got older and began to unpack the complicated colonial forces that played a part in both early and contemporary Egyptology. As I matured as a student, I became able to articulate questions that had hitherto lived as abstract uneasiness in my head. Curators and guides of many Egyptian museums were reluctant at first to really open up about the pervasive presence of English and North American archaeologists in the 19th century's antiquarian boom, but I was fortunate to have longstanding relationships with many such officials, both through my own wanderings and my parents' work.

As I began to ask more pointed questions and gained the ability to explore museum records on my own, I became overwhelmed by how drastically the Egyptian archaeological "industry" had been shaped by British colonialism, and how this resulted in a still-developing tension between international exhibition and the local or indigenous preservation of civilizational artifacts. My undergraduate work in anthropology has sought to develop a number of theses in this regard, most importantly the need for efforts of artifact repatriation and return from the British Museum as a step toward more complete reconciliation after centuries of extraction.

Throughout my undergraduate research with Professor X at [undergraduate university], I sought to utilize careful historiographical analysis to better support repatriation efforts popularized by former Egyptian antiquities minister Dr. Y. These efforts helped mobilize the X museum in Boston to return a priceless bust of Prince Ankhhaf under Dr. Y's insistence, which was not only one of the most satisfying moments in my academic career so far but of my life overall.

In addition to the historiographic focus of my work, I'm keen to shift into the present politics around artifact repatriation and reclamation of physical heritage, specifically relating to



Graduate School Statement of Purpose Example for Anthropology (899 words)

how contemporary North African political struggles utilize cultural and anthropological discourses. Professor Z's work in this realm has been hugely influential and inspiring to me, and were I to be admitted to your PhD program it would be an incredible honor to assist her ongoing research in contemporary cultural discourse in Egyptian and Islamic political movements.

I was fortunate to be selected for the American University in Cairo's Presidential Internship program in 2019, just after graduating. Returning to Cairo for the first time since I was 13 years old was incredible but bittersweet in some ways. The lens through which I observed many of the institutions I'd mythologized as a child was far more critical, and I realized that my graduate work would necessarily be inflected by this added layer of complexity and disillusionment. If admitted to this PhD program in anthropology, I would seek to capitalize on this personal experience. I think it's incumbent upon people who have lived in anthropological intersections like this—in my case specifically as an unwitting addition to longstanding "Western" colonial presence in North Africa—to produce academic work that illuminates the political and cultural tensions that they've hitherto experienced as largely subjective phenomena.

To this end, I propose utilizing modeling techniques common to digital-archaeological projects in Egyptological studies to support a more culturally-focused analysis of the flow of expropriation during the heyday of colonial extraction in the early 20th century. I believe that object-oriented models of provenance can be utilized to support analysis of ongoing repatriation discourse. This would build on Professor X's work mentioned above, providing more graphic and tangible insights into emancipatory nationalist and post-nationalist movements in contemporary Egypt and North Africa in general.

If admitted to _____'s graduate program, I would not only seek to contribute to the program's ongoing scholarship as a student, but would hope to continue working collaboratively with the department once I move into independent scholarship and teaching following graduation. I feel especially passionate about forming long-term relationships with faculty given the scarcity of nuanced scholarship that addresses the intersections of anthropology, political science, and archaeology in Egyptological studies. Teaching and research have guided every step of my journey so far, and I know without a doubt that this is my path forward as well. As such, I would seek to serve as a paragon not only of _____'s interdisciplinarity and intellectual inventiveness to my future students, but to continue to be a productive and prominent member of _____'s research cohort no matter where I end up teaching.