

Peter and Ana Lowens University of Victoria Libraries Special Collections Student Fellowship

Proposal:

Representations of everyday life in mesoamerican codices: Linking past and contemporary narratives of maize and cacao through images and texts.

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Context

Mesoamerican graphic manuscript texts, codices (from the Latin codex), are an important source that provides a view of different aspects of life before the Spanish conquest and during the first centuries of the colony. These texts are rare books depicting a myriad of topics, including religious, astronomic, tribute, legal, and everyday life for pre-Hispanic cultures such as the Nahua (Mexico), Mixtec, Purepecha, and Maya. The Special Collections and University Archives hold an important assemblage of Mesoamerican codices and published studies related to these manuscripts. Through receiving this fellowship, I will improve my skills doing primary source research that is highly relevant as an anthropologist. I will complement my research in the master program using the available sources at the UVic library. By taking this program's workshops and receiving advice from archive specialists I will gain experience and develop tools in searching for specific and rare materials.

Project objective

My project will bring to light multiple academic and creative Indigenous perspectives from cultural groups in order to decolonize Mesoamerican narratives through experimentation with culturally specific storytelling of the editors of the published codices in the context of representations of time and history. My research aim is to bring the public closer to the content of relevant Mesoamerican manuscripts kept at the Special Collections and University Archives of the University of Victoria Library.

The main objective of my research proposal is to elucidate the historical dimension of a selection of documents that reflect upon the cultural value of its images and revealing the keys to its reading and interpretation. I will investigate images and narratives related to maize and cacao, production, and form of preparation among the Mesoamerican pre-Hispanic groups represented in the codices.

Methodology

My project methodology involves the analysis of publications and codices related to food and food production. This includes harvesting rituals and food offerings to deities, food tribute, and everyday food/commensality. My research will employ creative methodologies in the form of a graphic production of the results. Through the exploration of cultural subjects based on ancient codices, I will develop an innovative form of communicating and sharing anthropological knowledge and ideas about related subjects in a didactic and interactive way incorporating creative methodologies in the production of visual narratives.

The drawing process is part of an experimental methodology depicting my perception of seeing and communicating ancient Mesoamerica pictographic representations. This experimentation of innovative methodologies including imaginative practices and creative ways (Elliot and Culhane 2017:15-17; *Illustrating Anthropology* 2022) along with the use of the codices and historical sources will result in a graphic non-fiction novel (Boudreault-Fournier 2019). The outcomes will be presented in a digital form presenting the food and food production among ancient Mesoamerican peoples to a broader public.

References

- Boudreault-Fournier, Alexandrine. 2019. *Making Graphic Novels as a Creative Practice in Anthropology: Learning outcomes from the classroom*. Centre for Imaginative Ethnography, July 12. <https://imaginative-ethnography.com/making-graphic-novels-as-a-creative-practice-in-anthropology/>.
- Elliot, Denielle and Dara Culhane. 2017. *A different kind of ethnography. Imaginative practices and creative methodologies*. University of Toronto Press, ON: Toronto.
- Illustrating Anthropology Learning Pack*. Accessed November 12, 2022. [Learning Pack \(illustratinganthropology.com\)](https://illustratinganthropology.com)
- Leon-Portilla, Miguel. 2003. *Codices. Los antiguos libros del Nuevo Mundo*. Mexico, DF: Aguilar.