Cotlow Award Application 2011

Department of Anthropology
The George Washington University
Washington, DC 20052

1. Personal Information

Applicant’s name: Kristina Short

Degree sought: Master of Arts

Field of study/major/minor/concentration: Anthropology (Museum Training)

Expected date of graduation: May 2011

Faculty advisor(s) (who have served as your mentor or mentors for this proposal): Jeffrey Blomster

2. Language Skills

Does the proposed project involve the use of a “field language”? yes or no
Yes

If yes, state what the language is and your degree of fluency in speaking, reading, and writing it:
Language: Spanish

Proficiency:
Speaking: Elementary
Reading: Proficient
Writing: Elementary

3. Title of the Project and Abstract

Project Title: Materializing Social Identity: Ceramic Figurines at Middle and Late Formative Etlatongo

Abstract of the Project (provide a summary description of the project’s goals, location, methods, and relevance to anthropology) [80 word maximum]:

The study aims to understand changes in the production and use of ceramic figurines as they relate to social identity during the later Formative Period (850-200BCE) at Etlatongo, Nochixtlán Valley, Oaxaca, Mexico. Changes in figurine frequency will be compared to the documented decline in Valley of Oaxaca (ca. 500BCE) figurines that coincides with political and ideological shifts at Monte Albán. Figurine frequency will be used to infer how individuals at Etlatongo
resisted or embraced ideological changes associated with state-like political organizations (80 Words)

4. Description of the Project (describe your overall research goals, what the project is generally about, and where you will conduct the research and why) [250 word maximum]:

The production of and use of ceramic figurines in Mesoamerica began during the Early Formative (1500BCE-850BCE) and lasted at least through the end of the Middle Formative (850BCE-500BCE) in Mesoamerica. Their active use in household and public ritual has provided one lens through which archaeologists have sought to understand social identity in the context of emergent complexity (Lesure 1997; Marcus 1998). Figurines from the site of Etlatongo in the Nochixtlán Valley (Blomster 2002, 2004, 2009), having emerged through scientific excavation and possessing well-documented context, provide an optimal scenario for studying the transformation and negotiation of communal versus regional identity.

Joyce Marcus (1998), in her comprehensive study of figurines from the Valley of Oaxaca, notes that figurine production declines dramatically at the start of the Late Formative and posits that changes in ritual practice and elite ideology accompanied the rise of state society at Monte Alban ca. 500BCE (Flannery and Marcus 1996; Joyce 2010). Public ritual became dominated by elites and provided an ideological justification for rigid social stratification. The proposed decline in figurines suggests that similar, large-scale phenomena may apply to other politically complex societies, such as those emerging in the Mixteca, and may have similar material correlates.

By analyzing changes in the frequency and style of ceramic figurines, as well as their context, I aim to clarify the degree to which Nochixtlán Valley figurines reflect broader transformations in the expression social identity documented for the Valley of Oaxaca during the of Monte Alban. (243 words)

5. Significance of the Project to Anthropology (in this literature review describe how the proposed research relates to other anthropological research on the topic, and/or region as relevant; use American Anthropological Association style for works cited--no footnotes) [500 word maximum]:

The proposed research concerns issues of social identity formation and expression during the later Formative Period (850-200BCE), in the Nochixtlán Valley, Mexico. It draws from broader anthropological understandings of individual identity as comprising multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities whose expression or performance is context-dependent (Cohen 1978, in Janusek 2004). Understood through a praxis perspective (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984), social identity is recognized as discursively structured, shaped by and shaping the actions of individuals within the framework of social interaction.

The Formative Period, characterized by a rapid increase in social complexity, emerges as a dynamic arena in which shifting identities are materialized through the deployment of objects. Several previous studies (Blomster 2009; Lesure 1997; Marcus 1998) have highlighted the role played by ceramic figurines during the Early Formative in household and community rituals. Through their production and use figurines provided visual markers of identity and social status.
The construction, maintenance, and negotiation of identity was further enacted through the acquisition and emulation of non-local styles (Blomster 2002) as exotic and finely-crafted objects connected local elites (or emerging elites) to distant sources of supernatural power (Helms 1993, 1979).

Around approximately 500 BCE and corresponding with the rise of the Monte Alban polity in the Valley of Oaxaca, the production and use of figurines appears to rapidly decline before vanishing. One explanation for the rapid disappearance of figurines posits that the ideological underpinnings of Monte Alban social identity, particularly elite social identity, led to a decrease in household ritual in favor of large, state-controlled rituals (Flannery and Marcus 1996). Taking into account Early and Middle Formative ties between the Valley of Oaxaca and the Nochixtlán Valley, changes in the frequency and context of ceramic figurines after 500 BCE may therefore reflect the degree to which elements of Monte Alban elite social identity were actively embraced or resisted in outlying regions.

As John Janusek (2004) reveals in his study of identity and power during the formation, duration, and collapse of the Tiwanaku state in Northwestern Bolivia, ceramic styles can embody the complex negotiations between state and communal, or ethnic, identity. Taking into consideration the above model, the presence of ceramic figurines in late Middle or Late Formative contexts could be viewed as reflecting an active attempt to maintain local identity. Furthermore, the contextual associations of these figurines may reveal attempts by some members of society to assert local identity while others embrace connections to the more distant Monte Alban polity.

The contributions of this project are not, however, merely theoretical. While providing increased understanding of the Nochixtlán Valley ceramic sequence, this project will also serve in expediting greater accessibility to ceramic data from the Nochixtlán Valley through organizing the Etlatongo ceramics in a coherent manner. Methodologically, then, the proposed research will assist in making a wealth of comparative materials available for scholarly research by those working within and outside the Nochixtlán Valley. (476 words)

6. Methods (clearly outline or list your research questions; describe the data you will collect and how you will collect it; discuss your analytical methods; and show how the data will address the research questions) [300 word maximum]:

This study is predicated on the broad question of the relationship between social identity and material culture. How is identity negotiated and performed through the production and use of objects? How (and does) this change during the later Formative at Etlatongo? After documenting changes in ceramic figurine frequencies for Middle and Late Formative contexts, then comparing the results to chronologically contemporaneous assemblages from the Valley of Oaxaca, I will assess the extent to which ideologically-driven Valley of Oaxaca trends in figurine production are reflected in Nochixtlán Valley.

In early June I will travel to Oaxaca City, where I will be based for the duration of this project. Initially, I will familiarize myself with the Nochixtlán Valley ceramic sequence and gain familiarity with methods of ceramic analysis, including thin-section analysis and artistic rendering.
For organizational purposes, I will create a database that details the ceramics excavated from each unit. Analyzing the total weight of ceramics excavated, the total weight of figurines excavated, and the percentage of figurines, by weight, of the total ceramic corpus will aid in determining whether a significant decline is present for later Formative contexts. If possible, minimum numbers of figurines will be estimated for each unit. In addition, associated features and/or materials will be included so as to better understand changes in depositional context (if any) over time.

This database will prove invaluable in understanding changes in ceramic style, composition, and use patterns at Etlatongo during the Formative Period as well as how those changes reflect or contrast broader trends in the Valley of Oaxaca region. Taking into account the expression of social identity in material culture, this information may point to transformed perceptions of local vs. regional identity. Broadly speaking, this database may also assist in refining the Nochixtlán Valley ceramic sequence as a whole. (299 Words)

7. Research Ethics (describe how you will ensure that your research project is conducted in accordance with anthropology guidelines and the guidelines of your particular field within anthropology, and in the case of “Human Subjects Research,” according to the criteria of GW’s Institutional Review Board. For the former, consult the Web site of the American Anthropological Association (http://www.aaanet.org). For the latter, discuss requirements with your faculty mentor and/or with Professor Barbara Miller, the IRB rep in the Anthropology Department. Most student projects involving living humans fit in the IRB category of “excluded” meaning that IRB forms do not need to be submitted, if they follow AAA ethical guidelines in terms of informed consent and avoidance of harm to participants, do not involve medical topics and do not identify particular individuals. In some instances, IRB approval does need to be sought, usually in the “expedited” category.” Information on these categories is also available at http://www.gwumc.edu/research/human/aboutus/html) [150 word maximum]:

This project will be conducted in adherence to the ethical guidelines set by the American Anthropological Association and the Principles of Ethics set out by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA). In accordance with the SAA’s focus on stewardship, this project will contribute to the preservation and facilitate the dissemination of data gathered through archaeological investigation. While conducting this project, I will also be engaging with archaeologists from the United States and the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) as well as interested members of the local community in an effort to promote scholarly collaboration and public interest. As this project will not involve living human subjects, it does not require IRB approval. (114 Words)

8. Research Product (discuss how you will use and present your findings including, for example, a presentation at a professional meeting, a film, a museum exhibit, a publishable paper, a thesis) [150 words maximum]:

The results of my research will initially be presented in October, 2011 at Lewis N. Cotlow Conference at the George Washington University. During July and August I also intend to organize my findings to submit for presentation, poster or paper, at the 2012 Society of
American Archaeology Annual Meeting. Following presentation at such a venue and taking into consideration feedback from colleagues during previous presentations, I would hope to develop a paper to submit for publication. (76)

9. Timetable (briefly describe the schedule of your research activities week-by-week or as appropriate):

June 1st – Arrive in Oaxaca City

June 2nd-7th – Acquire familiar with the Nochixtlán Valley ceramic sequence and, more specifically, the Formative Period materials from Etlatongo.

Week of June 8th-15th – Ceramic analysis (thin-section analysis) and artistic rendering of sherds

Week of June 16th-23rd – Begin work on organizing ceramic figurine data into a coherent database. This database is intended to work as a digital guide to formative figurines, integrating qualitative changes in form and style with quantitative changes in figurine frequency.

Week of June 24th-30th – If feasible, I hope to study chronologically contemporaneous materials from the nearby site of Yucuita (pending approval from and availability of director, Dr. Marcus Winter). If this is not possible, this week will be devoted to analyzing data assembled during previous weeks.

10. Budget Amount and Projected Expenditures

Total Amount Requested: $1550

Projected Expenditures (list the expenditure categories for your project, for example, transportation--international, domestic, local; room and board; and research supplies). Funds from a Cotlow award cannot be used for tuition, academic fees, or for purchasing equipments such as a laptop or camera [awards range from a few hundred dollars to $1800]

Transportation: $800
   International: Flight from Washington-Reagan National Airport to Oaxaca $680.00, including taxes and fees (based on 2-stop flight as of 3/2/2011)
   Local transportation: $50 (To be used for travel within Oaxaca City, from Oaxaca City to Cuilapan, where research materials are housed, and to relevant sites within the state of Oaxaca if necessary)

Room: $400 (Cost for one month accommodation at Casa Arnel, Oaxaca City, as of 3/2/2011)

Board: $300

11. Staff (if others are to participate in the project as researchers or research assistants, please give their name and qualifications):
   N/A
12. **Outside Financial Support** (list any other sources of funding for the project, either obtained or applied for, with amounts and restrictions):
N/A

13. **References Cited/Select Bibliography** (list the sources you have cited in the proposal and/or used as background research. Use the style defined by the American Anthropological Association [see http://aaanet.org]; list a minimum of 10 sources cited to a maximum of one page; more than 10 references are expected in proposals submitted by MA and PhD students).

Blomster, Jeffrey P.

Bourdieu, Pierre.

Giddens, Anthony.

Helms, Mary W.

Janusek, John W.

Joyce, Arthur.

Joyce, Arthur A. and Marcus Winter
Joyce, Rosemary.  

Lesure, Richard G.  

Marcus, Joyce.  

Marcus, Joyce and Kent V. Flannery  

Spores, Ronald.  

14. **Permits** (demonstrate that you have, or are seeking, any necessary permits such as a research permit, a research visa, an antiquities permit, letter of welcome from an institution, etc. Attach copies to this proposal). 
N/A