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**Name of Researcher**

Cara Tremain

**Department/Faculty**

Anthropology

**Position in Department/Faculty**

Instructor

**Project Title**

Vancouver Museums and the Ancient Past: Uncovering Mesoamerican Collections in the City

**Term of Project**

Spring, Summer, Fall 2020

**Please introduce yourself – include pertinent background information relating to the topic of your research project.**

I am an archaeologist with expertise in Ancient Mesoamerican cultural heritage. I have worked at, and held research positions for, various museums in North America and England. My research focuses on museum collections, the collection and sale of illicit antiquities, and the protection of cultural heritage.

**Please discuss your educational background and your work experience that led you to taking on this research project. If possible, include a quote that helps define your interest in this project.**

I received my B.A. in Archaeology from University College London, my M.A. in Anthropology from Trent University in Ontario, and my Ph.D. in Archaeology from the University of Calgary in Alberta. From the first time I travelled to an ancient Maya site in Central America, when I witnessed first hand the looting and destruction of archaeological sites, I have been interested in helping to protect cultural heritage. Better understanding what material is in museum collections, and how it got there, is an important part of helping to advocate for legal and ethical collections of cultural heritage.

**Please explain the concept for your project in terms that others not in your field would understand, like an executive summary.**

The research project will investigate, document, and increase awareness of ancient Mesoamerican artifacts in Vancouver's museums. Ancient Mesoamerica is a fascinating cultural area that once encompassed much of modern-day Mexico, the entirety of Guatemala and Belize, and the western parts of Honduras and El Salvador. It was once home to the Aztec, Maya, and Olmec (among others), and now home to people of many different ethnicities, groups, and identities. Artifacts from this region have been entering North American collections from the turn of the twentieth century, and perhaps earlier, and many are housed in Canadian museums. Despite the rich heritage of Mesoamerican cultural property cared for by museums across the country, there has yet to be a dedicated study of this material in our national institutions. The driving force of this project is to gain a better understanding of Vancouver's collections of such artifacts, to highlight the rich cultural and educational value of the city's museums.

**Identify goals and objectives for the project, and how the results may be used, perhaps to solve a problem, or to inform further research in that field.**

Key questions that will be addressed by this research project include: 1) What is the quantity and scope of the ancient Mesoamerican collections in our local museums? 2) When and why did these collections appear in our local museums? 3) What do we know, and not know, about the artifacts in these

collections? 4) Where is the best outlet for the digitization of these collections? 5) What research potential do these collections have for the staff and students of Langara College?

**Briefly explain the steps taken to conduct the project research, and the results found.**

Due to the COVID epidemic, the in-person analysis of the collections was not able to be completed. Fortunately, my student aide and I were able to use the digitized information of the collections to compile a useable database of information. Due to the shift to the analysis of documentation, the applicant was able to complete analysis of the history of ownership of the Museum of Vancouver collection, and has an article in press with the journal 'Collections' about this research.

**Who else was involved in this project? How did their involvement help? ie: other faculty, students, community partners**

My student aide assisted with compiling information about the collection from online sources. Staff at the Museum of Vancouver assisted with access to museum records, and staff at the Vancouver Archives assisted with access to information about the history of the museum.

**What were/are you hoping to get from conducting this research?**

Due to the COVID epidemic, the research changed course and largely focused on the Museum of Vancouver collection. I was successful in being able to research the history of the collection, and compile a database of information that can be used for future studies. In the future, when in-person access to museum collections is once again permitted, I hope to research the objects more thoroughly. I also hope to conduct the interviews with museum staff.

**Can you share any personal stories that made this research experience memorable/valuable?**

It was certainly memorable trying to complete the research during the COVID epidemic when most museums were closed!

**Do you have any tips/suggestions/ideas for applying this research in your field? Or for others in their fields? Or for conducting future research of this kind?**

Museums are often under-funded, and under-researched, so they are a great resource for academic study because there is a lot of information waiting to be uncovered. They are also great resources for student involvement.

**Any final comments? What are the “next steps” for this project? And for you?**

To continue to find time to work with the information that was compiled during the research. I believe at least one other publication can be produced from the information.