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C/O Library Award Administrators
The University of Maryland Libraries
7649 S Library Ln
College Park, MD 20742

Re: Application essay for the UMD Library Award (2020)

To whom it may concern;

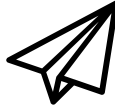
Summary. The following essay was produced for the purpose of applying for the University of Maryland's Library Award for Undergraduate Research. I have submitted for consideration my HIST408Q seminar paper, titled "'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld': A centennial survey of scholarship, artifacts, and translations,'" where my supervisor was Dr. Matthew J. Suriano (Spring 2019). The paragraphs hereafter address the following areas: (i) topic development; (ii) research sources and techniques; (iii) lessons learned, and; (iv) a post factum assessment. Each is taken up in turn.

(i) Topic development. I began my research by exploring potential topics that had gaps in the literature. First, I asked my professor, Dr. Suriano, about which topics were extensively written about and which ones were fit for further inquiry. As I discovered, Sumerian literature was not a common topic of study until the late 1800s, despite being the first attested example of human writing. My initial efforts, therefore, were to gain a general understanding of the scholarship in the field. This step included reading a wide array of casual sources (i.e., non-scholarly material), followed by journal articles, books, and surveys. Next, I discovered a Sumerian afterlife myth named "Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld," which is, perhaps, the world's first afterlife myth (ca. 2800-2500 B.C.E.). I selected this myth as the basis of my paper because I regard man's¹ earliest writings as psycho-historical records of immense importance.

Upon further inquiry, I struggled to find a recent resource that included a summary of all prior scholarship. It was therefore necessary for me to make such an attempt with the production of a centennial survey of scholarship, artifacts, and translations for this myth.

(ii) Research sources and techniques. I discovered my sources by using the library, online search engines, other digital tools, and the guidance of Dr. Suriano. The strategy I used relied on attaining a list of credible authors from Dr. Suriano, followed by searching for these authors on the library's website. When I could not locate specific works, I requested them through interlibrary loan (ILL). In short, I tried to access resources digitally, then in print, and with ILL as a last resort. I vetted the sources based on the following criteria: author reputation, source reputation, topical depth, the number of citations, and respectability among other scholars.

¹ Here, "man" refers to *Homo sapiens*, and without prejudice to skin color, gender, race, sex, anatomy, or even the shape of the skull (following Carl G. Jung, cf. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, New York: Harcourt, 1933, p. 125ff.).



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I sought guidance from Dr. Suriano on a weekly basis, whose feedback directed my research for the better. Dr. Suriano's feedback was incredibly important; specifically, with respect to his candidness about my project's scope, as well as its general shortcomings. These interactions impacted my research process by means of forcing me to take a step back to reassess my direction. The direction of my paper changed several times as well.² My chief animus was to write something that would be useful to others, and this meant that I had to be realistic about what I could feasibly contribute. Given that I had no prior experience in the field of study, it was both humbling and difficult to settle on the fact that it was in my best interest to only produce something that reflected research by others. That is, my paper attempted to summarize prior findings, not make an argument or claim.

(iii) A lesson in practicing patience. Throughout the research process, I learned an important lesson about technology's limitations. While I preferred to utilize digital resources or print resources that have been digitized, it appears that much human knowledge is still in print format. I thus discovered that works like theses, dissertations, obscure journal articles, and others are only available by means of cooperation with the library. My final paper relied heavily on such sources, such that I would not have been able to complete the work without them. Admittedly, however, I was apprehensive toward utilizing resources that required waiting (e.g., I waited almost a month for a single article). Thanks to Dr. Suriano's encouragement, I learned that it was necessary to look beyond digital resources, despite relying on them for artifact data. It appears, to me, that this lesson in patience extends beyond academia, but touches on critical procedural facets of life itself.

(iv) Post factum assessment. In thinking about my research procedure on a post factum basis, I would change my approach by engaging with the library's resources sooner—particularly with respect to hard-to-get sources. If I had known then what I know now, I would have begun my research process by asking for the library's recommendations to begin with. This would have saved me precious time toward the end of my project. Additionally, it would have reduced the amount of time I spent revising my work on the basis of new information.

Finally, while I wish I had feedback for the library with respect to what they could have done better to serve me, the truth of the matter is that I received exceptional guidance, attention, and help. Consequently, I have nothing to offer.

Thank you for the time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Boban Dedović

² I also owe a significant debt of gratitude to Dr. Philip A. Mackowiak, MD, MBA, who encouraged me to write something that I could share with others. Initially, I had no intention of producing something for the purpose of dissemination. However, Dr. Mackowiak's wisdom, experience, and guidance was so illuminating, such that his fine example motivated me to escape my own comfort zone. At the risk of sounding glib, I may assert that this paper would not be in consideration for the library award without his influence during a conversation we had at lunch.