

Spring 2003 Medieval Studies Graduate Fellowship Application - Statement

I respectfully request funding from the Medieval Studies Graduate Fellowship to help offset a portion of the \$2,500 program fee required for participating in the spring 2003-summer 2003 College of Liberal Arts Tracking Cultures Program.

The Tracking Cultures Program is an interdisciplinary study abroad program sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts that engages students in the interdisciplinary study of Texas and the American Southwest, tracing aspects of southwestern culture historically into Mexico, Spain, and North Africa. The key goal of the program is to promote a more sophisticated level of cultural awareness and understanding. In 2003, program participants travel through the American Southwest over spring break and to Mexico and Spain during the first summer session, ending the program with a final report on a specific topic related to their individual programs of studies.

The connectivity that Tracking Cultures Program embodies, which fosters mutual understanding and advances knowledge, is a priority for my research on mysticism in medieval Islamic and Christian Spain and early colonial Spanish America. Specifically, I believe the program can assist me with (1) enhancing my understanding of the transmission of ideas between medieval Spain and the Americas, and (2) creating professional relationships with Spanish and Mexican scholars of medieval and colonial religious interaction.

Through the program, I hope to identify scholars in our host Mexican, New Mexican, and Spanish cities to begin creating a strong network of academic relationships. My general programmatic goal is to investigate, with other scholars, issues relating to religion, social status, gender, ethnicity and race. My specific goal is to identify at least one student and one professor in each region that may share an interest in researching and publishing work on inter-faith dialogue in medieval Spain and North Africa, as well as colonial Spanish America.

The research paper I intend to complete for the program is preliminarily titled, "Divine Intersections and Celestial Spheres: A Comparative Investigation of the Cosmologies of Abu Ma'shar, Isidore of Seville, John of Seville, and the Nahuatl of the Mexico (Aztecs)." Within the religious cosmologies of Abu Ma'Shar (9th century Muslim), Isidore of Seville (12th century Christian), John of Seville (12th century Jew), and the Nahuatl of Mexico (Precolumbian Native Americans) exists a persistent allegorical reference to celestial spheres. These spheres describe the nature, structure, and ordering of the divine universe and humanity's relationship to it.

This paper will (1) discuss the Platonic origins of Old World cosmologies; (2) describe the Nahuatl celestial cosmology; (3) present a comparative analysis of the four religious cosmologies; and (4) propose explanations as to why the allegory of the celestial sphere is such a resilient description of the divine

universe. The comparative analysis will utilize a combination of literature and archaeological resources to evaluate common overarching structures, forms, imbedded components, and themes.

In closing, I graciously appreciate the fellowship committee's review of my application.