

Cover letter for a TT assistant professor position in Roman archaeology/art history

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Dear _____,

I am writing to apply for the position of assistant professor of Roman art, archaeology, and architecture in the [Institute/Department]. After receiving my doctorate in classical art and archaeology from the University of Michigan this year, I joined the Getty Foundation as an intern, where I administer grants relating to art historical research and conservation. My research addresses problems in ancient Mediterranean social history, for which I use methods drawn from classical studies, art history, and archaeology.

Over the last few years, my research has revolved around late antique funerary laborers and the material evidence for their working practices, social relationships, and contributions to urban economies. In my dissertation (*The Business of Commemoration: A Comparative Study of Italian Catacombs*), I use an array of qualitative and quantitative approaches to catacomb painting, epigraphy, and architecture, challenging widely held notions of the primacy of the Christian Church in the development and operation of catacombs. I argue that these complex sites and their contents developed in a context of repetitive interactions among workers, their patrons, and the objects and images they produced in negotiation with each other. Grants from the U.S.-Italy Fulbright Commission and the American Academy in Rome allowed me to research and write in close contact with both my primary materials and a community of Italian scholars in the field of Christian archaeology. My innovative and experimental approach—essentially using catacombs as databases for research on social relationships and economic behavior in late antique urban contexts—builds on the rich documentation and close readings of traditional catacomb scholarship while advocating for more theoretically informed, interdisciplinary, and technological approaches.

At the moment, I am drafting two articles focusing on segments of my data. The first examines the *fossor* (catacomb gravedigger) through the lens of actor-network theory, using social network analysis and visualization to propose new models for understanding the *fossor*'s agency and professional relationships. The second article will contribute to ongoing debates about the nature of artistic workshops in antiquity, applying the theoretical perspectives of primary and secondary agency to epigraphic corpora from catacombs to argue for a flexible workshop model in which workers, patrons, and objects all contributed to the development of site-specific epigraphic styles over time. In my first monograph I will reinterpret the architecture, art, and epigraphy of the massive suburban catacombs as the material manifestations of repeated interactions within networks of workers and patrons, questioning the primacy of religious affiliation in discussions of catacomb cultural production, and instead foregrounding the agency and social relationships of funerary laborers.

My second major project will examine late antique cemeteries in terms of embodied experiences and visuality. The empirical basis of this project will be a group of interactive

plans of selected cemeteries (including catacombs), linking published data about paintings, inscriptions, and objects to their findspots. Unlike existing databases of funerary inscriptions or laser scans of catacomb interiors, these plans will combine several types of published data holistically and spatially, allowing me to tackle questions about the visual and material worlds of catacombs that have been unapproachable with data segregated by discipline. In undertaking this project I hope to build collaborative relationships with other digital humanities scholars on your campus, as well as with student researchers from a variety of academic backgrounds.

In my fieldwork, I seek out projects that deal with broader issues of social history and economy in Roman cities. For the last four years, I have served on the staff of the Pompeii Archaeological Research Project: Porta Stabia, directed by Steven Ellis of the University of Cincinnati. I have contributed three essays on the infrastructure and features of the neighborhood surrounding the Porta Stabia to the first volume of the site publication, which will be published by Oxford University Press. With the Porta Stabia project drawing to a close, I am participating in the planning stages of an upcoming University of Cincinnati project in Sardinia, in which I anticipate playing a directorial role.

Empowering students to express their individual perspectives and to develop their analytical skills is the cornerstone of my teaching practice. I have a deep respect for the variety of my students' backgrounds, knowledge, and skills; I believe that my class should have something to offer every student, and that every student can contribute something valuable to my class. I put this into practice by learning my students' interests and tailoring course content to them, asking them to evaluate evidence and biases in the material at hand, and designing presentations and assessments with a range of learning styles in mind. Students in my courses have conducted mock trials on problems in cultural heritage ethics, studied tombstones to learn about the immigration history of their college town, and written interpretive texts for a museum exhibition. I anticipate facilitating experiences like these for my future students as well.

At your institution, I would look forward to building relationships with the faculty members interested in epigraphy, social history, urbanism, and economy (Prof. X, Y, Z, etc.); digital humanities (Prof. A, B, etc.); and museums (Prof. C, D, etc.). Because interdisciplinarity is central to my work, I would be eager to participate in the [Program], and I would seek out opportunities to collaborate with the [Lab]. I anticipate involving both undergraduate and graduate students in my research, and I envision recruiting as research assistants not only young art historians and archaeologists, but also computer scientists, designers, and others.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,