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Dana Wessell Lightfoot
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Dear Professor Brunk,

I am writing to apply for the position as tenure-track assistant professor of Spanish History. I recently completed the requirements for my doctoral degree at the University of Toronto. My dissertation “Negotiating Agency: Labouring Status Wives and their Dowries in Early Fifteenth-Century Valencia” was directed by Dr. Mark Meyerson.

I am confident that the combination of my research specialization—Medieval Spanish History with a focus on gender— and my teaching experience thus far— Western and World Civilization, European Women’s History and more specialized courses in Early Modern History— provides me with an academic background that will be well suited to the stated requirements of the position.

The center of my dissertation on women and marriage in early fifteenth-century Valencia is an examination of laboring status women’s control of their marital assets. I argue that although the prevailing legal code in Valencia, the Furs, appeared to give women little influence over this property, the reality of the situation was much more complex. Women of this status were able to negotiate the patriarchal laws regarding their marital assets to their advantage.

Using evidence from the court of the Civil Justice as well as notarial records, my work demonstrates that women of lower status in fifteenth-century Valencia were actively pursuing claims against their husbands for the restitution of their dowries, clearly demonstrating an awareness of their legal rights. In many cases, these women were pursuing suits on their own, or with the help of neighbors, not family members and my dissertation therefore re-examines the role of the family in Valencian laboring status marital strategies. I have an article forthcoming in the Women’s History Review which looks specifically at this issue of familial involvement in dowry restitution cases and argues that it provided women with the agency to protect their marital assets from harm. I plan to develop my dissertation into a book and have already attracted interest in this work from Manchester University Press and Brill Academic Publishers.

In the course of my research, I have examined hundreds of civil court cases and notarial records from fifteenth-century Valencia. As my dissertation work focused on the lives of lower status women in this period, for my next project, I would like to use this material to examine the position of elite women in comparison. Continuing my work on Valencian women, I would like to explore the connections between converted Muslim, converted Jewish and Old Christian women in the medieval and Early Modern periods.

As my CV demonstrates, I have had excellent opportunities to teach both survey courses and more focused upper division courses in European History. Currently, I am teaching three fourth-year seminars on the theory and methods of history at the University of Toronto. This is a course which I also taught this past summer. In addition, I have taught courses on the History of the Witch Hunts in Early Modern Europe and the

Western Civilization survey course at the University of Lethbridge, the University of Toronto at Mississauga and the University of Toronto St. George Campus. This coming January, I will be teaching the early modern Europe survey course at the University of Toronto at Mississauga and Women in Western European History to 1800 at Brock University.

Alongside my experience as a course instructor, I have an extensive background as a teaching assistant, directing small seminars in the examination of primary and secondary historical sources. In the 2004-2005 academic year, I worked as a teaching assistant for the World History survey course at the University of Toronto St. George campus. For four years, I held the position of teaching assistant in a course on European Women's history from the Renaissance to the Modern Period.

As a teacher, I have always encouraged an open dialogue between students and instructor in both large lecture courses and smaller seminars. I stress to my students the need to think critically about historical concepts and use assignments such as primary source evaluations, article reviews and examinations of historical novels as a method of encouraging analytical thought. At the graduate level, my involvement in creating and administering a mentorship program at the University of Toronto has provided me with the opportunity to counsel graduate students regarding course selection, preparing grant proposals, writing and editing course papers and planning for research trips.

The broad range of subjects in medieval and early modern history that I covered in my comprehensive exams, as well as my teaching experience has prepared me to teach a wide variety of courses in European History. As a historian of medieval Spain, I have an extensive background in Mediterranean History and European interaction with Muslims and Jews.

I have found teaching both survey courses and upper division courses very rewarding. I would look forward to teaching the undergraduate World History survey course as well as courses on borders within Europe and the Islamic world. Some of the more specialized courses I am interested in teaching explore the topics of gender history (sex and gender in the medieval Mediterranean; women in medieval society), legal and institutional history (the development of the Inquisition), family history, Spanish history, social (marginals in medieval society) and cultural history.

I have included a copy of my CV. Three letters of recommendation from Dr. Mark Meyerson, Dr. Barbara Todd and Dr. Natalie Zemon Davis as well as my transcripts will be forthcoming. I would be happy to send any additional materials such as course syllabi, teaching evaluations and a writing sample. Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dana Wessell Lightfoot