



University of Toronto

Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
4, Bancroft Avenue, Toronto M5S 1C1

Professor Katja Goebs

Telephone: (1-416) 946-0740

Fax: (1-416) 978-3305

E-mail: katja.goebs@utoronto.ca

Re: Letter of Reference for Chana Algarvio, applicant for an Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute Graduate Scholarship

Toronto, 28 June 2025

To whom it may concern,

I am writing today in full support of Chana Algarvio's application for an Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute Graduate Scholarship in conjunction with her participation at the Connected Past 2025 conference in Coimbra/Portugal. Chana will be presenting a part of her thesis research on the Egyptian iconographic influence in the material culture of the Achaemenid Empire at that conference, and specifically the preliminary results of her application of a network science approach to this phenomenon. This is a new methodology to be applied to the materials and thus represents original research of Chana's, and it will be a great experience for her to present her work and receive the feedback of colleagues as well as discuss her findings further.

Chana has completed both a BA (2019) and an MA (2020) in the Department of NMC, where she specialized in Egyptology; she then went on to a Master of Information Studies at U of T's ISchool, focusing on Library and Information Science. Following successful completion of the latter in 2022, Chana was working as an Assistant Librarian at Massey College's Robertson Davies Library until she was admitted to NMC's PhD program starting in September 2024, where I am acting as her advisor; I have also been her TA supervisor in a recent course, Egyptian Myths (NMC 253H), and, during her BA, her course instructor in a number of courses.

In the courses she took with me, including Egyptian Myths (NMC 253H) and Egyptian Literature in translation (NMC 352H), Chana quickly stood out as one of the most active students in class, always prepared and ready to answer essentially any question that was put to her. She scored an A+ mark in NMC 253 as well as an A- in NMC 352, where she submitted a very nice essay on the development of Egyptian literature out of certain funerary compositions. I recommended admission to the MA program on the basis of this paper. During that period, I only had Chana in one course, NMC 1416 Egyptian Iconography, but she continued the solid performance that I had come to expect from her, and it is in the context of this course that Chana's interest in the interactions of Egyptian and Persian / Achaemenid art was founded. She wrote a very comprehensive essay on the mutual interchange between Near Eastern and Egyptian art that also included some

Achaemenid examples, and the latter angle now informs her proposed PhD thesis topic; a reworked version of this paper appeared in 2023 in a long article in the *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*. She has since published some other work in student and other academic journals (most recently a paper in an edited volume, focusing on Egyptian book culture, 2025), and has also presented many papers at student and other academic conferences. The sheer number of her publications at this early stage of her career is certainly exceptional.

Chana's proposed research is very promising indeed: there is to date no in-depth study of the interactions between Egyptian and Achaemenid Persian art, and especially so for the regions outside the capital and center, so her thesis, which I have no doubt she will finish in good time, will fill a significant gap in our understanding of cultural transfers in the later 1st millennium BCE. The department of NMC, having specialists in all the relevant fields, is a perfect location to pursue such research, and in her first year in our PhD program, she immediately began to take relevant courses, such as Aramaic language and – in the Anthropology Department – a course on interregional exchanges of culture. Her transcripts and CV speak for themselves and do not need too much reiteration here. She completed her BA with a Double Major in History and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations and was a Dean's List Scholar; she also completed her two MAs with high distinction. She took many relevant courses in that time, including NMC listings as well as offerings in Anthropology, Archeology, and Classics, coming away with A grades in most of them. Chana is moreover fluent in French, one of the required languages of scholarship in Egyptology, and has a sound basis in Middle Egyptian (having completed our Intermediate course (NML 340) as well as Introductory Coptic. She is, therefore, excellently prepared to do both text-based research as well as studying archaeological and art historical topics for her proposed thesis.

Chana further has copious TAing experience (most recently as lead TA in my Myth course NMC 253, where she was reliable and meticulously attentive to her duties, albeit she sometimes expects a little much from 200-level students – but this may be seen, perhaps, to reflect the high standards she sets for herself). As evident from her CV, she has assisted, on average, in 3 courses per term – both at the St. George and the suburban campuses of U of T. Her course supervisor for another TA-ing role, Andreas Winkler, has indicated to me her conscientiousness and self-directedness also in this context). She moreover has taught a short topics-course for the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities, Toronto (in 2022) as well as a number of courses and workshops on manuscripts for St Michael's College, U of T. In addition, she has completed summer schools and courses for several years in a row – all of this she is accomplishing whilst being a young mother and living in relatively long commuting distance from campus.

Chana is, therefore, highly deserving of funding, even at this very early stage of her PhD. She is the kind of hardworking, self-directed student who will succeed in any context, is reliable and insightful in her academic approach.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any more questions regarding this applicant.

Sincerely,

Katja Goebbs

Katja Goebbs