



Dear colleague,

11 August 2024

I write to enthusiastically recommend Dr. Seyed Saleh Pezhman's application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship for 2024-2025. I served on his dissertation committee as the internal examiner as well as on his comprehensive exam committee where I examined him on the scholarship on pre-Safavid Sufism.

I will first recount Saleh's scholarly virtues. He is *exhaustive and meticulous in his philological command of primary sources and in his close reading of the scholarship on them*, a trait already in evidence in my 2019 course on the medieval Persian poet Amir Khusraw for which Saleh prepared an annotated critical edition, based on multiple Iranian manuscripts, of a heretofore unedited portion of Khusraw's compendium of prose treatises titled *I'jāz-i khusravī*. This scholarly virtue looms larger in his dissertation which supplies an important scholarly lack by painstakingly tabulating the increasingly Twelver creedal content in the doctrines of the pre-Safavid Kubrawiyya, "the oldest mystical community where distinct pro-ʿAlid sympathies and crucial Shīʿī ideas have taken root." Specifically, it tracks the growing Twelver doctrinal commitments in six Kubrawiyya thinkers who lived in the two centuries before the Safavids, thus setting them apart from the generally pro-Alid Sufi tendencies of their milieu. To this end, this dissertation expands on the insights of Marijan Molé and others but differs from some of their conclusions, comprehensively and critically working through scholarship in Persian, Arabic, English, French and German.



Another of Saleh's scholarly virtues, drawing on the foregoing one, is his *intellectual bravery*. During his dissertation defense my colleague Professor Robert Wisnosvky and I challenged him to justify his dissertation's assumption that what it meant to be Twelver Shi'i in Iran throughout the two pre-Safavid centuries under study was an invariant cluster of doctrinal positions. To this he responded by citing the example of 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī, saying that he had read everything Simnānī had ever written and nothing in that oeuvre suggested Simnānī's more than basic awareness of Twelver positions, notwithstanding contemporaneous Ibn 'Arabi-informed Twelver theological innovations. This is to say that I have only ever seen Saleh being open to intellectual challenges and confronting them with a confidence and humility informed by his philological rigor.

Finally, a word on his personal virtues. He is widely popular in my department for his helpfulness to fellow students; immediately likeable for his humility, intellectual generosity and respectfulness; and stolidly dependable for his conscientiousness with coursework and meeting deadlines. I have no doubt that this fellowship, if you choose to award it to him, will let him complete what I know will be a remarkably thorough and valuable book-length contribution to Shi'i Studies and scholarship on Persianate Sufism.

Sincerely,

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