Dear Committee Members

In search of an opportunity to further my studies on Shāhnāme, mythology, and anthropology and after some months of eagerly waiting I found out about the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali postdoctoral fellowship in Iranian Studies for 2023-2024 and am writing to apply for this position.

For the last couple of years I have been engaged on studying Shāhnāme and understanding the subtext(s) of some concepts which play an important role in different stories of this influential epic poem of Iran. As anthropology and mythology go hand-in-hand in understanding myths and stories and the societies who created/ are creating them, I tried to expand my research by studying anthropology alongside mythology.

I tried to complete my doctoral thesis with the use of Marcel Mauss’ “General Theory of Magic” and Lévy-Bruhl’s theory about primitive mentality. With this interdisciplinary approach, concepts like revenge, which is the core reason of most of the wars in Shāhnāme, magic and its function in wars, family and its structure in Shāhnāme, and space can be analyzed and understood in a new way.

In the story of “The Great War between Keykhosrow and Afrasiab,” the mythical thinking of the creators of the story and their belief in magic and its function in conquering the evil beings, plays an important role in the narrative. My findings are that Keykhosrow is a magician who belongs to a society in which taking revenge is a vital responsibility for every member of the group and he as the Shah/ magician must use his mystical powers to defeat Afrasiab who is a witch and uses his dark powers to kill and dominate the world in favor of Ahriman.

I am working on my thesis and trying to revise it and improve my findings by studying anthropology and mythology in depth. I am eagerly writing this letter for the postdoctoral fellowship since I think through this opportunity and joining your team I can advance my research and strengthen my interdisciplinary approach in reading Shāhnāme.

I have attached a CV, including emails of two references, and a synopsis of my thesis.

With Best Regards,

Arman Fateh Dowlatabadi