

## Cover Letter

August 3, 2022

Dr. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi  
Director of the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies  
Department of Near & Middle Eastern Civilizations  
University of Toronto  
4 Bancroft Avenue, Room 329  
Toronto, ON, M5S 1C1

Dear Dr. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi,

I'm writing to apply for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies, as announced on the site of the University of Toronto (<https://iranianstudies.utoronto.ca/awards-and-fellowships/the-elahe-omidyar-mir-djalali-postdoctoral-fellowship-in-iranian-studies/>). I am a specialist of Persian literature with an extensive research background in the reception and domestication of Indian religious and cultural heritage in Persian literary culture of Iran, Central and South Asia, and the multicultural exchange between the Indian and Iranian worlds. Working for the past two years on a monograph about the interactions between Buddhism and Islam in Iran during the Medieval period, I believe to be an excellent candidate for the advertised postdoctoral fellowship.

I completed my PhD in Mediterranean, Oriental and Slavic Studies, specialty of Persianate and Iranian Studies (Études Persanes et Iraniennes) at the University of Strasbourg in France. My dissertation dealt with the Persian translations of Indian narrative literature and the interactions between Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus under the Delhi Sultanates (1206-1526) and the Mughals (1526-1858). I examined socio-historical contexts for Indo-Persian literary developments, and explored patronage and its impact on the formation of a shared narrative arena for both Persians and Indians. I also performed a case study of the Persian adaptation of the Sanskrit *Śukasaptati* (Seventy Tales of the Parrot) entitled the *Ṭūṭī-nāma* (Tales of the Parrot) realized by Ẓīyā' al-Dīn Naḥshabī (d. 570/1350-1351).

Since September 2020, I have pursued my teaching and research activities as a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asian Institute, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy of the University of Toronto (due August 31, 2022). I have been working on a monograph which emerged from an axis of my PhD dissertation that focuses on the encounters between Buddhism and Islam and the translation of Buddhist canonical texts into Persian during and after the Mongol invasion of Iran. My work examines the Persian hagiographies of the Buddha, its fictionality and historicity in the eyes of Persian readers. My project aims at revealing on the one hand, the broad forms of knowledge exchange amongst the religious cultures and literatures in the Medieval and Pre-modern periods, and on the other hand, it aims at bringing to light the importance of Persian as a *lingua franca* and cosmopolitan mediator of knowledge which linked East and South Asia to West Asia and the Eurasian milieu. The book will present significant findings about the existing traces of the lost Buddhist texts in Persian, and will impact our perception of religious identities within

the Persianate World. My previous and ongoing research touches upon various axes of narratology, translation, cultural transfers, and comparative literature.

I enjoy continuous scientific collaboration with significant academic institutions and research projects, such as the Perso-Indica ([www.perso-indica.net](http://www.perso-indica.net)) and the DELI (Dictionnaire Encyclopédique des Littératures de l'Inde) at the Sorbonne Nouvelle Université in Paris, the Kalila wa Dimna Anonym Classic project funded by European Research Council at Freie Universität in Berlin, the Global Mediterranean project at the Japan National Institute for Humanities, the Vihara (Buddhism in West Asia) project at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in Japan, and the Persian Women Poets encyclopedic project at University of Toronto. I also pursue ongoing scientific collaborations with colleagues in Iranian, Middle-Eastern and South Asian studies in Canadian academic institutions including McGill, Université de Québec à Montréal, University of British Columbia and University of Toronto, on mutual research interests about literatures of Iran, Central and South Asia.

As my curriculum vitae illustrates, I have a record of publications in journals, proceedings and compiled books. My articles have been published in major reference works such as *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, *Perso-Indica*, *Analytical Survey of Persian Works on Indian Learned Traditions* and *Routledge Handbook of Persian literary Translation*, and I have a series of articles published and forthcoming in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Iranian Studies Journal*, *Journal of Persianate Studies*, *Journal of Asiatische Studien – Études Asiatiques* and *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*.

I have pursued many teaching opportunities in Iranian, European (France and Germany) and North American Universities; the most recent and prominent among them were my Masters courses on Persian Culture and Literature, and History of the Persianate World at the Sorbonne-Nouvelle Université, and Cultural Transfers in Persianate South Asia at the Asian Institute, University of Toronto. I have a passion for teaching and regularly update my skills by attending training courses for teaching higher education at international standard levels. I am also active in organizing workshops and panels in renowned International conferences in which the most recent scientific findings are shared with experts and students.

Since my current SSHRC postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Toronto ends on August 31, 2022, the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship will be an appealing opportunity for me to continue my work at this top-ranked University, finalize my monograph, and reach an important milestone in my academic career. This is crucial for advancing in my applications for university positions in the future. The Near and Middle Eastern Studies, the Iranian and Asian Studies programs at the University of Toronto have long-standing records in multidisciplinary research, and I look forward to making a significant contribution to these dynamic intellectual communities, and linking them together with my interdisciplinary project.

Thank you very much in advance for your attention. I very much look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Pegah Shahbaz