

rula.abisaab@mcgill.ca

August 1, 2024

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am delighted to write this recommendation on behalf of my student, Dr. Saleh Pezhman in support of his application to your academic institution.

Dr. Pezhman is an excellent student who ranks among the top 10% of the graduate students at the Institute of Islamic Studies. Among the central courses he took with me were **ISLA 681** on Sufism, Ritual Practice, and Universal Truths: Readings in Mullā Ṣadrā's *Kaṣr Aṣṇām al-Jāhiliyya* (*Shattering Pre-Islamic Idols*); and **ISLA 788** on Theological-Philosophical Developments from the Mongol to the Safavid Period, co-taught with Professor Rob Wisnovsky. Dr. Pezhman was a diligent student who participated fully in class discussions and always came prepared, raising important questions on the readings and offering his unique insights on the main themes of these courses. He wrote excellent papers that reflected his advanced research and analytical skills.

His Dissertation titled, "From 'Alidism to Spiritual Shī'ism: The Kubrawiyya Sufi Order's Creedal Evolution in Late Medieval Persia" was successfully defended in July 2024. The external and internal reviewers gave Dr. Pezhman superior marks for originality, background knowledge, and research skills. The Kubrawiyya Sufi order, named after the luminous Persian saint Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221), formed one of the earliest mystical communities that assimilated distinct Shī'i ideas and pro-'Alid sympathies. Dr. Pezhman's dissertation studied the transformation of the Kubrawiyya in Persia through its relationship with the Shī'i tradition from the late Khwārazmshāhī period until the rise to power of the Safavids in 906/1501. Through an in-depth analysis of the writings of leading Kubrawī figures and their interactions with other Sufis and Hadith and legal scholars, he captured the complex adaptation of distinct Shī'i doctrinal elements by Kubrawī Sufism. His study underscored the Kubrawīs' deep engagement with scholarly and devotional aspects of Twelver Shī'ism, and their integration of *ahl al-bayt*ism, certain *futuwwat* ideals, and messianic expectations. Dr. Pezhman investigated the ideas and Sufi careers of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, Sa'd al-Dīn Ḥamūya (d. 649/1251), Ṣadr al-Dīn Ḥamūya (d. 722/1322), 'Alā' al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1336), Sayyid 'Alī Hamadānī (d. 786/1385), and Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 869/1465). He made extensive use of the *tadhkiras*, *ijāzas* (licenses), *asnād-i khirqā* (Sufi lineages), hagiographies, letters, and *waqf-nāmas* (endowment deeds) of both Kubrawī and non-Kubrawī provenance.

Undoubtedly, his dissertation is a major contribution to the field, especially since it challenges long-held views about the relationship of Sufism to "Shī'ism" and "Sunnism". It destabilizes prevalent narratives about the normative features of Sufism within the Persian context. Dr. Pezhman is an accomplished young scholar in his own right and has published academic articles in refereed Iranian and western journals. He is also dedicated to refining

the conceptual features of Sufi Studies and developing our understanding Sufism and Shi`ism in Iran during the post-Mongol period. He examined key sources for his dissertation topic, including Islamic manuscripts in Persian and Arabic, and translated sections from them, which tied with his major arguments on Sufism and Spiritual Shi`ism during the Mongol and post-Mongol periods. It goes without saying that he has a superior knowledge of Arabic and Persian and can navigate difficult texts as well as archival and manuscript sources quite effectively, especially given his deep knowledge of the Islamic manuscript tradition.

Through his letter of application and CV, you will recognize Dr. Pezhman's important experience in teaching at the Institute of Islamic Studies and the significance of his other research interests in subfields pertaining to Islamic Studies, Iranian Studies and Sufism. I have no doubt that he will grow even further, intellectually, and benefit greatly from interacting with distinguished professors in your unit and at the university at large, turning his excellent dissertation into a book, and planning for his next academic project.

Finally, Dr. Pezhman is a considerate and amiable person who related well to his professors and classmates. I support his application wholeheartedly, knowing that he will be an asset to your academic institution and benefit greatly from his exchanges and experiences there.

Cordially,

Rula Jurdi Abisaab