

 Toronto, August 10, 2022

To whom it may concern

I am writing this letter in support of Ted Good’s application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship.

I have been the primary co-supervisor of Ted’s research since he started his doctoral studies at our university in the 2015–16 academic year.

Ted specializes in the history of Zoroastrianism between the Sasanian period (3rd–7th century, the period in which the religion reached the peak of its power) and the 9th–10th centuries (the period to which most of the Zoroastrian sources in Middle Persian / Pahlavi date). His research branches out to the study of different cultures of the Near East, the Mediterranean world, and South Asia, which had contacts with Iran between the late antique and early Islamic periods.

When he started his doctoral studies, Ted already had a very sound knowledge of Middle Persian language and sources, as well as Zoroastrian theology. Since beginning his PhD studies, he has shown an interest for the cultural exchanges between the Zoroastrian world and the classical, Indian, and Islamic civilizations during the Sasanian and early Islamic periods.

During his first two years as a PhD student, Ted took three courses with me (these dealt with Zoroastrian cosmology, Zoroastrian apocalyptic, and pre-Islamic Iranian astronomy and astrology, respectively), which allowed him to further strengthen his knowledge of Pahlavi literature and the history of Zoroastrianism. In these courses he demonstrated an exceptional ability to critically analyze and present original insights on scholarly questions of various kinds. During his first two years in our university, Ted also took a variety of courses, and participated in scientific activities held at different departments of our university. This allowed him to consolidate his knowledge of languages (Greek, Arabic, and Sanskrit) and topics (classical philosophy, Indian philosophy, and early Islamic theology) relevant to his research interests.

I must emphasize that due to the numerous difficulties in the study of the Middle Persian language and Middle Persian sources, it is extremely rare for scholars at an early stage of their career, as Ted is, to be able to read Middle Persian, Greek, Sanskrit, and Arabic. Furthermore, not many scholars of Zoroastrianism are as interested as Ted in comparatively analyzing Zoroastrian sources with those in other languages.

Ted’s doctoral thesis, titled “Zoroastrian Philosophy in the Islamic World,” reflects his exceptional research skills and broad scholarly interests. The thesis studies the theology of Pahlavi sources dating from the late Sasanian period to the 9th–10th centuries. The sources dating to the 9th–10th centuries constitute its main focus. The thesis comprises the edition and translation of many passages of Middle Persian texts, including extremely difficult passages of texts for which no reliable edition exists. Ted provides in-depth analyses of these passages, including a close comparison with Greek, Indian, and early Islamic texts. His most original scholarly contribution is the reconstruction of a network of thematic connections among some of the main Pahlavi texts of the 9th–10th centuries. Ted labels the school to which the authors of these texts belonged as the “*Dēnkard* school,” in reference to the Zoroastrian religious encyclopedia entitled *Dēnkard* (Acts of the Religion), the largest and most important Pahlavi text that has come down to us. He highlights how the texts of these authors reflect the contacts between the Iranian world and classical, Indian, and Islamic civilizations between late antiquity and the early Islamic period. To demonstrate such contacts, Ted provides evidence that had previously been unidentified or under-explored. For example, he points out that the disquisitions on the nature of the world found in the *Dēnkard* reflect a familiarity with Aristotelian and with Neoplatonic philosophy; he hypothesizes that some cosmological themes described in the text reflect an influence from John Philoponus’s *On the Creation of the World*; he points out that some passages of the *Dēnkard* discussing the nature of God are similar to theological passages by Mu‘tazilite authors of the early Islamic period; and he identifies the affinities between some passages of the 9th-century Pahlavi apologetic text *Škand Gumānīg Wizār* (“Doubt-Dispelling Disquisition”) and Sanskrit philosophical texts.

Ted’s thesis will be completed by the end of this academic year. His thesis will represent an invaluable contribution to our knowledge of the intellectual history of Zoroastrianism, and of the exchanges between Zoroastrian culture and neighboring cultures during the late Sasanian and the early Islamic periods. It will be of especial interest to specialists in pre-Islamic Iran and scholars of late antiquity and early Islamic civilizations.

All of the colleagues who had Ted, or currently have him, as their TA are impressed with his pedagogical skills. Moreover, in interacting with his instructors and colleagues, Ted demonstrates an outstanding level of respect, collegiality, and helpfulness.

I want to conclude by pointing out that thanks to his active participation to in-person and online scholarly activities, Ted is already well-known and kept in high esteem by many of the world’s preeminent scholars of Zoroastrianism. I foresee a brilliant academic career for him. He will contribute greatly to the study of the intellectual and religious history of the Iranian world and its neighboring cultures between late antiquity and the early Islamic era.

He is highly deserving of the fellowship, and that is why I recommend him in the strongest possible terms.



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