

September 14, 2023

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

I am very pleased to nominate Mehdi Mousavi for an Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship. Mehdi came to the University of Delaware in 2017 after completing an MA degree in History at the University of Strasbourg, France. Since joining our program, he has distinguished himself as an excellent student and a productive scholar. Gifted, studious and articulate, and with an excellent command of both French and Persian archival and primary sources, Mehdi has all the attributes of a first-rate historian in the making. Writing as his main advisor, I can say with full confidence that he is poised to make a significant contribution to Iranian history as well as to the history of French imperial ambitions and influence in the Middle East and Asia.

Mehdi's particular interest is commerce and diplomacy in Qajar Iran, 1790s-1925, and more specifically Franco-Iranian connections in the post-Napoleonic period. His dissertation takes on the neglected topic of the role the French played in early nineteenth-century Iran—a role that evolved from great political and commercial ambitions to lasting cultural influence and that has been overshadowed by the machinations of other powers, notably Russia and Britain. When it comes out as a book, his work is bound to be recognized as an important contribution to the question of “informal” French imperialism.

Mehdi is an exceptional student. He already published two well-researched and peer-reviewed articles, one of which, “France among the Most-Favored Nations: The French Commercial Policy and Influence in Iran (1815–48),” *Iranian Studies* 53: (2020), at <https://www-tandfonline-com.udel.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/00210862.2020.1760713>, sets the tone for his dissertation. He also came out with a critical edition of the travel account of the embassy of the Iranian diplomat Mirza Mohammad ‘Ali Shirazi to Paris in the 1840s, *The Travel Account of Mirza Mohammad-Ali Shirazi in France, during the reign of Mohammad Shah Qajar* (in Persian). And he co-edited a Festschrift for his father, who was a celebrated archaeologist in Iran known for his excavations at Persepolis. He has authored several entries for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* as well.

To date, Mehdi has finished the introduction of his thesis as well as the first and second chapters. He is well prepared to complete the remainder of the work in a timely fashion, certainly by summer 2024. I should also mention that his progress has been hampered by

circumstances well beyond his control. In November 2019, he was forced to leave the United States to have his student visa renewed. He has been living in Canada ever since, still waiting for word about the status of his file from the American consulate. This has put him under tremendous financial hardship, forcing him to take out time to earn money. Living with an aunt in Vancouver has also cut him off from any kind of scholarly community.

Mehdi is a scholar's scholar, extremely serious and determined to finish his work as soon as he can. An Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship would help Mehdi to concentrate on his writing and submit his dissertation in a timely fashion. It would also give him a tremendous psychological boost by enabling him to reconnect with and operate in an academic environment. I can't think of a student-scholar more deserving of this award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R. Matthee', with a stylized, flowing script.

Rudolph Matthee
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