

September 12, 2023

To the Selection Committee, Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship,

This letter is in support of Sanaz Safari's application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship. I have been their supervisor for five years. Safari began doctoral work with me at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and then applied to move to become a PhD student at the University of Calgary when I moved positions. Safari is a dedicated, determined student, one who will go far in their chosen field of Sasanian/Late Antique studies. They are at the point of finishing their dissertation (I am expecting two chapters shortly), and needs both the support that this fellowship would provide and the resources available at the University of Toronto.

Safari's research interests lie in the interaction between the Sasanian and Late Roman worlds, with particular emphasis on the architecture of the Sasanian world. Their thesis proposal has been approved by the dissertation committee, and their work focuses on the architectural history of the period of Shapur II, one of the longest-lived kings of Sasanian Iran. Although well-known from both Sasanian and Roman sources, his architectural legacy is poorly understood – largely due to the misdating and misidentification of Sasanian architecture by earlier western scholars. This an important topic which reflects mature understanding of an important lacuna in the field of Late Antique studies; it has the potential to substantially change the field. While Late Antiquity has been discussed from either the Sasanian or the Roman side, few scholars have the academic background and expertise to cover both. Safari brings a new perspective to the field and will be an important addition to the discipline.

Safari has an encyclopedic knowledge of ancient Iranian history and Zoroastrianism that is exceptional. The applicant's training in Iran was primarily in art history, at which they excel. Since moving to the University of Calgary, Safari has been introduced to various fields, including Late Antique studies, theory, and ancient Greek. The candidate has met each challenge with excitement and perseverance. Safari's presentation and analytical skills are excellent; they ask great questions; and they do not shy away from collegial disagreement in class. In addition, Safari and I (along with another graduate student) have just had an article published on the interplay of animal imagery in Late Antiquity (Marica Cassis, Sydney Burton and Sanaz Safari, "Sharing Animals: Animal Imagery as Late Antique Intercultural Dialogue" in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Material Religion in the Ancient Near East and Egypt*. Edited by S. Steadman and N. Laneri; pp 315-323 Bloomsbury, 2023)

Safari is a professional and engaged member of the academic community. The candidate works well with fellow students and faculty, and is poised to make a considerable difference in Late Antique studies.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Marica Cassis

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