

Toronto, August 12, 2024

To whom it may concern

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

I am writing to offer my support for Sepideh Najmzadeh’s application for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship. I have known Sepideh for nine years. She has been a dedicated and exemplary student, excelling in multiple graduate courses I have taught. Currently in her sixth year of the Ph.D. program, Sepideh has consistently demonstrated excellent scholarly abilities and a profound commitment to her research.

Sepideh’s dissertation, titled “The Description of Zoroastrian Divine Beings in the New Persian Texts of the Vaṣf-e Amšāsfandān,” represents a significant and original contribution to the field of Iranian studies. Her research focuses on the New Persian Zoroastrian text Vaṣf-e Amšāsfandān, a text that has not received the attention it deserves in the broader landscape of Zoroastrian studies. Through her work, Sepideh is filling a critical gap in the understanding of how Zoroastrian divine beings are depicted in New Persian literature.

One of the hallmarks of Sepideh’s research is her meticulous and comprehensive approach. She has conducted an extensive comparative analysis of the Vaṣf-e Amšāsfandān with a wide range of sources in Avestan, Pahlavi, and New Persian. In this comparison, Sepideh engages deeply with these texts, uncovering nuances and drawing connections that have previously gone unnoticed. Her mastery of the Pahlavi language is particularly noteworthy, as it allows her to draw from primary sources with a high level of precision and insight. Additionally, her strong command of classical Persian literature enriches her analysis, enabling her to situate the Vaṣf-e Amšāsfandān within a broader literary and cultural context.

Throughout her time in the Ph.D. program, Sepideh has proven to be a hard-working and diligent scholar. Her intellectual curiosity drives her to explore complex and challenging questions, and her analytical skills are of high caliber. The faculty members who have had the opportunity to teach Sepideh have consistently praised her for her rigorous thinking, her attention to detail, and her ability to engage critically with the material. These qualities are clearly reflected in her dissertation.

Sepideh’s research is not only valuable for its scholarly contributions but also for its broader implications for the field of Iranian studies. The Vaṣf-e Amšāsfandān is an important yet understudied text, and Sepideh’s work is bringing it to the forefront of academic discourse. More generally, there is a significant amount of research still to be done on Zoroastrian New Persian literature. Sepideh’s analysis contributes to filling this gap and sets a precedent for future scholarship in this area.

Given Sepideh’s achievements as a student, and her unwavering dedication to her research, I have no doubt that she will complete her dissertation with the same level of excellence that she has demonstrated throughout her academic career. The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship would provide her with the essential support needed to finalize this important work.

For all these reasons, I wholeheartedly support Sepideh Najmzadeh’s application for this fellowship.

Thank you for considering her application.

Best regards,



Enrico G. Raffaelli

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