
THE INSTITUTE OF ISMAILI STUDIES

UPDATE



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

2024 | EDITION 23

3

Welcome

Professor Zayn Kassam

4

Reopening the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity

8

Seven Pavilions of Love

Esen Kaya

12

Assassins: The Legends Live On

15

Digital Futures at IIS

21

Speaking the Language of IIS

33

Great Conversations at IIS

42

IIS Alumni Profile

44

Publications

Published by: The Department of Communications and Development, The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Managing Editor: Aqil Dhanani | **Editors:** Russell Harris, Tara Woolnough, Dr Shiraz Kabani

Photos by: Rehana Virani **Designed by:** Stephanie de Howes **Printed by:** Regent Print Ltd

Front Cover: AKM288.12, A Court Atelier, Folio from a manuscript of the Ethics of Nasir (*Akhlaq-i Nasiri*), Fol.195r. © The Aga Khan Museum.

Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274) was a Muslim polymath who resided in Alamut castle in the 13th century CE. Learn more about Alamut and its residents [page 8] and translations of Ṭūsī's work into Russian [page 31]. The piece featured on the front cover was recently on display at the Aga Khan Centre as part of the *Seven Pavilions of Love* exhibition by Farkhondeh Ahmadzadeh, curated by Esen Kaya [page 13].

Welcome



Professor Zayn Kassam Director The Institute of Ismaili Studies

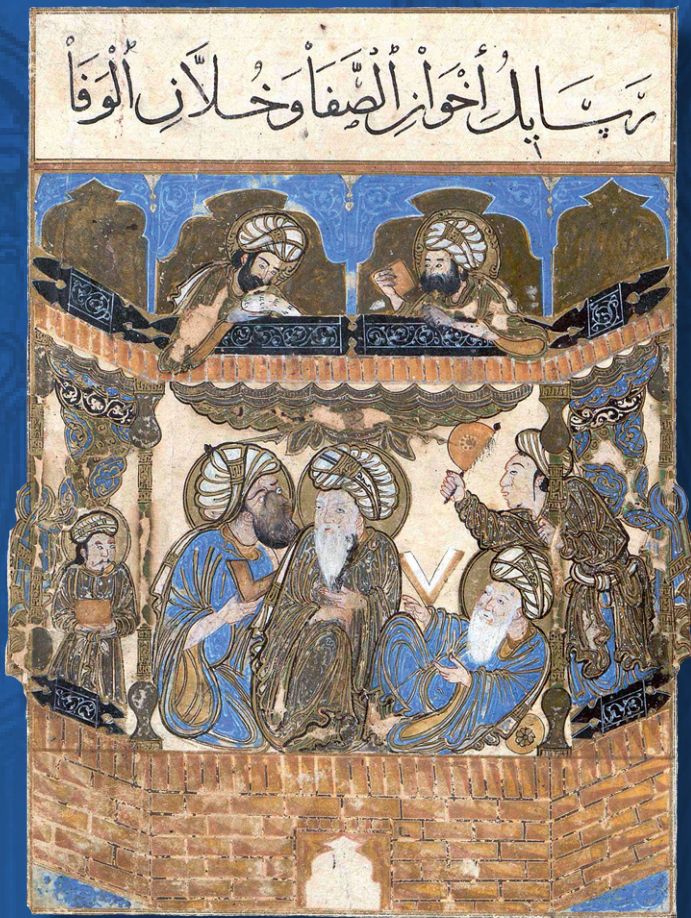
As my second year as Director of The Institute of Ismaili Studies comes to a close, I find myself overcome with optimism.

When I first joined IIS as a research fellow in 1998, I was able to witness the early stages of a massive wave of innovation: the development of the Secondary Ta'lim, the cataloguing of manuscripts in what would become the Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU), and a reshaping of our training and graduate programmes, among other initiatives. When I rejoined as Director in January 2023, I was given the herculean task of fortifying IIS at our historical crossroads as an academic and community organisation while facing an ever-changing social, political, and environmental milieu. My own experience has taught me to look to the wisdom of our forebears to inform our approach to the challenges of the future. IIS is a repository of that wisdom, so how can we rise to challenges such as climate change, mental health, and social issues that affect our constituents in a manner consistent with our heritage and values?

This is the challenge that IIS will face now and in the decades ahead. And I am truly honoured to be leading IIS at this pivotal time.

In this magazine you'll find a handful of these initiatives. Our Ta'lim forms the backbone of religious education offerings for our children and youth, and our digital initiatives will make those works more accessible to Ismailis around the world. With our Arabic and Islamic History Lecture Series, we hope to bridge the gap between Euro-American and Middle Eastern Islamic studies and foster a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the Muslim societies historically and today. Our many conferences bring together scholars from fields as varied as anthropology, history, linguistics and art and architecture. It is my sincere hope that these initiatives, and more that we will share in the coming years, will help carry the field of Ismaili studies well into the future.

Reopening the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*



Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (The Brethren of Purity) were an incognito group of thinkers in 9th- and 10th-century Basra, Iraq. Their most influential work, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (*Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*) is a 52-volume encyclopaedia containing detailed discussions of various natural and spiritual sciences.

◆ Frontispiece from *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, Baghdad, c. 1287. Süleymaniye Library MSS Esad Efendi 3636, fols. 3b-4a. This manuscript image is used on the cover of each publication in the series.

The Brethren's connection to the Ismailis has been hotly debated; the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mūn (d. 833) accused readers of the *Epistles* of being Ismaili. Professor Carmela Baffioni, who has translated around a third of the works featured in this IIS series, bases the argument over authorship on timing: the Brethren's sympathy for the Ismailis depends on whether Ismailis existed at the time the *Epistles* were composed, a chronology that is still not definitively confirmed. On the other hand, Professor Abbas Hamdani argued that Epistle 48: The Call to God (which he translated with Abdallah Soufan) was written by a hidden Ismaili Shi'i Imam. Notwithstanding the circumstances or timing of the text's origins, the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* is still an important body of texts for the Ismailis today, especially for the Tayyibi Ismailis who claim stewardship over the texts. Since the mid-2000s, IIS has been publishing critical editions and translations of these epistles with contributions from leading academics in the field. When the series launched in 2009, Professor Azim Nanji noted the importance of the series in "enabl[ing] a greater demographic to access the works of [the] Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', as well other Muslim thinkers of past civilisations". So far, 15 volumes have been published incorporating 40 of the 52 epistles. As a result of IIS and its collaboration with both internal and external scholars working diligently to establish, preserve, and promote the epistles, the texts are relevant to a number of linguistic, scientific, theological, moral, social and ethical areas and issues, just as the originals were around a thousand years ago.

The *Epistles* themselves have been traditionally described as scientific texts, laid out in "scientific" categories, i.e. the mathematical, natural, psychological, and nomic sciences. While at first glance, the topics covered by the *Epistles* do not conform to our modern understanding of science, as the pages of the *Epistles* are also replete with discussions of music, art, philosophy, and government, as well as ethics and even magic, they conform to an understanding of science as the systematic study of a subject. For a full list of topics, see the following pages.

Dr Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, editor of the upcoming translation of Epistle 9: *On Ethics and Character Traits*, points out that the *Epistles* are not just about sciences and academia, but also about philosophy, rationalism, and humanism. The *Epistles*, according to Dr Alí-de-Unzaga, act as an invitation towards the purification of the soul and the improvement of society. He compares this *Epistle* to a self-help book such as we might see today, offering advice on how to organise one's thoughts, behave, and govern, in order to live a fulfilling life and create a civil society. Moreover, it offers discussions on humanitarian and cosmopolitan ethics.

The *Epistles* also do not pretend to be exclusionary texts. In Epistle 22, for example, the Brethren describe a "perfect" person as an amalgamation of different cultures and traditions:

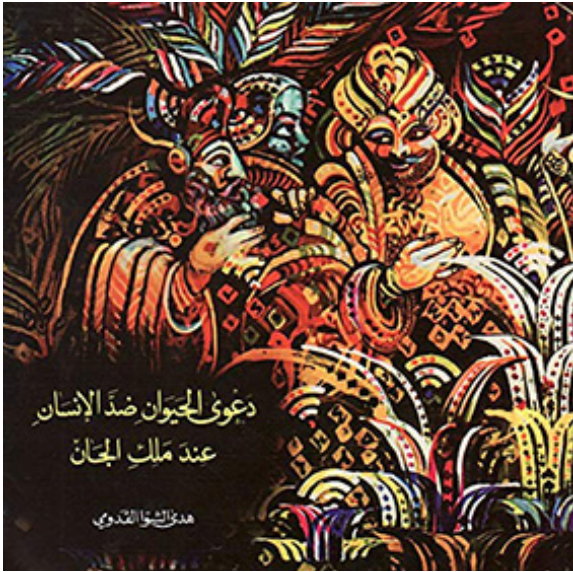
a learned, accomplished, worthy, keen, pious, and insightful man... Persian by breeding, Arabian by faith, a ḥanīf by confession, Iraqi in culture, Hebrew in lore, Christian in manner, Damascene in devotion, Greek in science, Indian in discernment, Sufi in intimations, regal in character, masterful in thought, and divine in awareness.

The ethics of governance the *Epistles* present are just as cosmopolitan. While their foundations lie in Islamic thought and scripture, the *Epistles* demonstrate an awareness of the traditions of the Babylonians, Classical Greeks, Indians and Persians, as well as Jewish and Christian thought.

Just as they did when they were first published, *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* can serve as a guiding light for Muslims today, not just in scientific understanding,



◆ An illustration from *A Fountain of Stories*, part of IIS's Ta'lim curriculum.



◆ The cover of Hudā al-Shawwā Qaddūmī's *Da'wa al-hayawān ǧidda al-insān 'inda malik al-jānn*

but also in ethical behaviour, social consciousness, and more. “The *Epistles* were originally written for everyday people to read”, remarks Aqil Dhanani, content supervisor for an upcoming video series on the *Epistles*. “And despite being labeled as ‘Critical Editions’ and having ‘Technical Introductions’, the texts are still for everyday people to read.” IIS’s translation of Epistle 22: *The Case of the Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinn* is one such example. In addition to being included in IIS’s Ta’lim curriculum, as part of Primary 4’s A Fountain of Stories, the Arabic text was turned into a children’s book in 2010 by author Hudā al-Shawwā Qaddūmī and illustrator Hassan Musa. Not only is this series likely an important piece of medieval Ismaili thought, it is also just as relevant to the Ismaili community today.

Introductory Texts

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafa’ and their Rasā’il: An Introduction — ed. Nader El-Bizri

The Comprehensive Epistle (forthcoming)

Part 1 — Carmela Baffioni and Mourad Kacimi

Part 2 — Carmela Baffioni and Mourad Kacimi

Part 3 — Carmela Baffioni and Mourad Kacimi

Mathematical Sciences

01–02 On Arithmetic & Geometry — Nader El-Bizri

01: On Arithmetic

02: On Geometry

03 On ‘Astronomia’ — F. Jamil Ragep, Taro Mimura

04 On Geography — Ignacio Sánchez, James Montgomery

05 On Music — Owen Wright

06–08 On Composition and the Arts — Nader El-Bizri, Godefroid de Callataÿ

06: On Ratios and Proportions

07: On Scientific Arts and their Object

08: On Arts and Crafts

09: On Ethics and Character Traits — Omar Alí-de-Unzaga (forthcoming 2024)

10–14: On Logic — Carmela Baffioni

10: On the Meaning of the *Isagoge*: An Introduction to the Science of Logic

11: On the Meaning of the *Categories*

12: On the Meaning of the *On Interpretation*

13: On the Meaning of the *Prior Analytics*

14: On the *Posterior Analytics*

Natural Sciences

15–21: On the Natural Sciences — Carmela Baffioni

15: On Matter and Form

16: On the Heavens and the World

17: On the Explanation of Generation and Corruption

18: On the Explanation of Meteorology

19: On the Explanation of Minerals

20: On the Quiddity of Nature and the Quality of its products

21: On Plants

22: The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn — Lenn E. Goodman, Richard McGregor

23-28 On Human Beings — Carmela Baffioni (forthcoming)*

23: On the Composition of the Bodily System

24: On the Sense and the Sensible, with respect to the refinement of the soul and the reforming of the characters

25: On the Place Where the Drop of Sperm Falls

26: On the Claim of the Sages that Man is a 'Microcosmos'

27: On the Modalities of Birth of the Particular Souls in the Natural Human Bodily Systems

28: Where One Accounts for the Capacity of Man to Know, which limit [he] can arrive at, what he [can] grasp of the sciences, at which end he arrives, and to which nobility he rises.

29-31 On Life, Death, and Languages — Eric Ormsby*

29: On the Quiddity of the Wisdom of Death

30: On the Quiddity of Bodily and Spiritual Pleasures and Pains

31: On the Reasons for the Difference in languages

Psychological Sciences

32-36 Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, Part I — Paul E. Walker, Ismail K. Poonawala, David Simonowitz, Godefroid de Callatay

32: On the Intellectual Principles According to the View of Pythagoras

33: On the Intellectual Principles According to the View of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'

34: The Universe is a Macroanthropos

35: On the Intellect and the Intelligible

36: On Cycles and Revolutions

37-38 On Love and Resurrection — Arzina Lalani (forthcoming)*

37: On the Quiddity of Love

38: On Resurrection and Anastasis

39-41 Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, Part III — Carmela Baffioni, Ismail K. Poonawala

39: On the Quiddity of Motion

40: On Cause and Effect

41: On Definitions and Descriptions

Nomic Sciences

42 On Opinions and Creeds — Shatha al-Mutawa (forthcoming)

43-45 On Companionship and Belief — Toby Mayer, Ian Richard Netton

43: On Nature and the Path to God

44: On the Belief of the Brethren of Purity about the Immortality of the Soul after its Separation from the Body

45: On the Mode of Companionship of the Brethren of Purity

46-47 On Faith and the Divine Law — Arzina Lalani (forthcoming)*

46: On the Essence of Faith and the Characteristics of the Believers who Realise [those things]

47: On the Quiddity of the Divine Nomos, the Conditions of Prophecy and the Quantity of Characteristics (the Prophets); on the doctrines of the Divine Men and of the Men of God

48 The Call to God — Abbas Hamdani, Abdallah Soufan

49-51 On God and the World — Wilferd Madelung, Cyril Villarosa Uy II, Carmela Baffioni, Nuha Al-Sha'ar

49: On the Modality of the Actions of the Spiritual Beings

50: On the Quantity and the Quality of the Species of a [Proper] Attitude

51: On the Arrangement of the World

52a On Magic, Part I — Godefroid de Callatay, Bruno Halfants

52b On Magic, Part II — Godefroid de Callatay et al. (forthcoming 2025)

* Please note titles may change on forthcoming translations. The titles included in these cases are from Table 3 of "The Classification of the Sciences according to the *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'*" by Godefroid de Callatay, available in the IIS Learning Centre.

Seven Pavilions of Love

Esen Kaya, Gallery Curator, Aga Khan Centre
Photos by Jonathan Goldberg

A timely exhibition, given the tensions in world affairs with the need for peaceful dialogue and the re-establishment of human values, *Seven Pavilions of Love* is inspired by the *Haft Paykar* (The Seven Beauties), a romantic allegorical poem written by the Persian poet Niẓāmī Ganjavī in 1197. The miniatures in this series depict the transformation of the Sasanian King Bahrām from a worldly ruler dominated by earthly desires to one guided by wisdom.



In the *Haft Paykar*, King Bahrām falls in love with seven princesses and wins them as his brides. He orders his architect to construct seven domes, one for each of his new brides. The architect tells him that each of the seven climes is ruled by one of the seven planets and advises him to assure good fortune by adorning each dome with the colour associated with each clime and planet. The seven princesses then take up residence in their own individual splendid pavilions and the king visits each one on successive days of the week. Through his encounters with the seven princesses, King Bahrām gains a deeper understanding of love as the guiding force for justice and spiritual enlightenment.

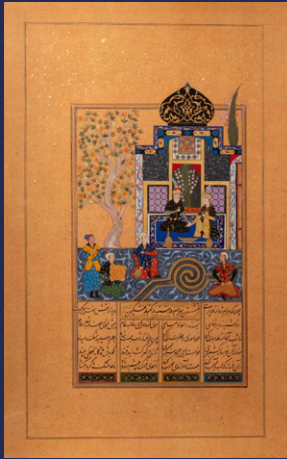
I was struck by Farkhondeh's masterful miniature paintings when I saw the first painting of a triptych series based around Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's *Canticle of the Birds* story, which I swiftly included in the Making Paradise exhibition at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery in 2020. This stunning work became an obsession of mine and since then I have been somewhat desperate to show all three works of the triptych. Farkhondeh promised me that we will be the first to show all three and so, I wait patiently for that day... in *shā' Allāh*, they will be shown in another group exhibition soon.

I had to share this because I speak about curating with my own sense of passion — for the artist's work, the

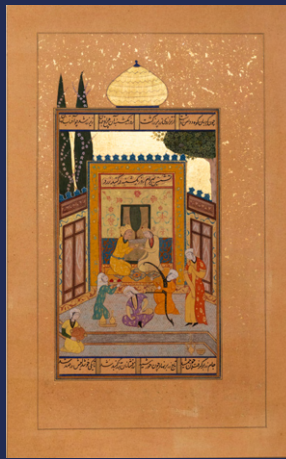
exhibition subject matter, our partners AKDN, how the overall aesthetic will be and how our audiences will engage with this, and indeed, what they may glean from the exhibitions too. These elements all seem to follow a similar rhythmic pattern — reflecting His Highness the Aga Khan's ambition around pluralism and ultimately to engage, inspire and enthuse people of all ages and backgrounds. This exhibition is no different.

Persian miniature paintings take considerable time, energy, passion, and incredible skill — all mastered and acquired over many years. Each of Farkhondeh's paintings, created between 2014–2016, depicts one of the princesses in her domed pavilion that represents a specific day of the week and the colour of one of the seven planets. An essential feature of Farkhondeh's miniature paintings is the way she brings together calligraphy, geometry and Islamic (biomorphic) motifs, regarding them as the 'pillars of Persian illumination'.

The *Haft Paykar* is a story about the journey to enlightenment and, for Farkhondeh, the experience of working on the paintings over many months, deep in concentration and contemplation, became also a kind of spiritual journey, from darkness — symbolised by the black dome of Saturday — to light, symbolised by the white dome of Friday.



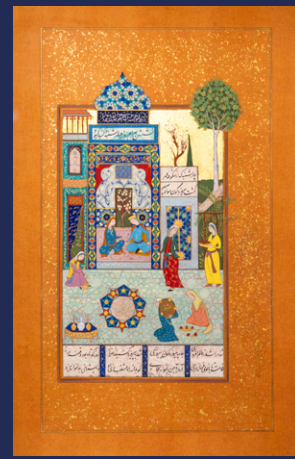
Saturday: The Black Dome.



Sunday: The Yellow Dome.



Monday: The Green Dome.



Wednesday: The Turquoise Dome



Tuesday: The Red Dome. Two large candle holders with hand-made polymer clay miniature bouquet of flowers in Persian vases commissioned from miniatures artist Jan Southerton. I asked Jan to choose flowers depicted in Farkhondeh's paintings, extending the painting outside the frame.



Thursday: The Sandal Dome. Small candle holders sourced from a maker in Finland sit either side of the paintings, as if their light may be needed to see the works when dusk starts to fall.



Friday: The White Dome.

SEVEN PAVILIONS OF LOVE

Along with calligraphy, illumination and ornamented borders, miniature painting is one of the primary 'Arts of the Book.' It is not considered one of the central sacred arts of Islam — such as reciting the Qur'an and Qur'anic calligraphy — but is rather a courtly art, traditionally reserved for private viewing only. Within this capacity, this art may be considered sacred since its non-realistic heavenly beauty may lead those with an open heart to contemplate the hidden mysterious world within, the world that is invisible to the naked human eye. Thus, one could say that the most important aspect of miniature painting is that it transports the viewer to an imaginal, dreamlike world which, at its best, may afford us a glimpse of Paradise.

The exhibition achieves this through not attempting to create a third dimension where there are only two: there is a flat surface and the brush or pen — the artist does not try to give the illusion of depth but seeks to convey the inner essence of the thing portrayed rather than just the visible exterior:

What gives the miniature its almost unique kind of beauty is not so much the scene it portrays as the nobility and simplicity of the poetical atmosphere that pervades it.



There is no doubt that Farkhondeh's miniatures, with their jewel-bright hand-made pigments highlighted in gold-leaf depicting the seven princesses in their pavilions surrounded by gardens abundant with flowers, trees and flowing water give us, for a fleeting moment, a taste of the Heavenly Garden "underneath which rivers flow" (Qur'an 14:23).

Farkhondeh has conducted vigorous and thorough investigations of the authentic and original sources in Iran and London for making grounds and supports, dyeing paper, deriving pigments from natural plants, insects, earth, rocks and metals; observing their 'alchemical' ennoblement to make works of truth and beauty.



Farkhondeh took calligraphy lessons from the age of 18 and learnt the art of illumination from several different teachers in Iran, her home country. Having moved to London in 2007, her exploration of miniature paintings was largely inspired by pouring over old, illustrated manuscripts in the British Library and the Victoria and Albert Museum. For the last 20 years, Farkhondeh has regularly spent time living and studying under calligraphy masters in Iran. She was awarded the Jerwood Prize in 2011 for Islamic Traditional Art and continues to teach Islamic manuscript and Persian miniature painting at the King's School of Traditional Arts. Her painting showing the stages of Reza Abbasi's 'seated youth reading' is on permanent display at the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World in the British Museum, London.

Seven Pavilions of Love was on display at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery in London from 5 September to 1 December 2024.



- ◆ The narrative of an opulent palace interior is extended beyond the walls, to include a Persian carpet, presented as a floor vinyl, that is a circa-1920 Persian Bakhtiari rug courtesy of Nazmiyal Auction House, New York. The rug sits at the centre of the space lit by a glittering chandelier. Two of Farkhondeh's paintings are adorned with large vintage candle holders, each with miniature hand-made polymer bouquet flowers in Persian vases made by artist Jan Southerton.

Farkhondeh's miniatures also share the gallery with facsimiles of works from the Aga Khan Museum (AKM) depicting stories by Nizāmī. I was delighted to have chosen works in collaboration with Bitā Pourvash, Associate Curator at AKM.

Assassins: The Legends Live On

The Assassin Legends have captured the imagination of countless generations over the centuries, and for good reason. The accounts of a secretive group of mystical (allegedly drug-fueled) vigilantes who feared nothing, not even death, leave plenty of room for imagination and imputations of intrigue.

The stories of rogue knaves and espionage spread through mediaeval Europe during the Crusades, consistently (although not accurately) associated with the Nizaris of Syria. Eventually the mythology grew through both quasi-historical accounts and orientalist fantasy until Marco Polo dictated his version of the legend in 1297–98 in his *Livres des Merveilles du Monde*: setting the scene in Iran and adding the use of a hallucinogenic beverage and the existence of a secret garden of Paradise. After Marco Polo, the character of the “Old Man in the Mountain”, originally a reference to the Nizari leader in Syria, Rashid al-Din Sinan, was merged into the legends surrounding the founder of the Nizari state in Iran, Hasan Sabbah. And thus, the story became embedded in the Western imagination, being retold and reimagined in books, plays, video games, and most recently an Arabic-language Ramadan TV series in Egypt.

While the Assassin Legends have been a staple of orientalist literature since their inception in the late 13th century, a few works of literature have

brought them to the forefront over the years: the aforementioned travelogue of Marco Polo being one of the first. Then, the 1930s saw the publication of *Alamut* by Vladimir Bartol and *The Valley of the Assassins* by Freya Stark, both claiming to be well-researched while retelling the age-old tale in a new light. In 2006, Ubisoft’s *Assassin’s Creed* video game franchise sought to provide a more sympathetic portrayal of the Assassins of Syria while also distancing them from their religious roots. More recently, TV shows such as *Uyanis: Büyük Selçuklu* (The Awakening: the Great Seljuks) and *Kudüs Fatihî Selahaddin Eyyubi* (Saladin: The Ayyubid Conqueror of Jerusalem), both produced by Akli Film, portray the Assassins of Iran and Syria as consistent nuisances to their protagonists. This year, Synergy Art Productions and United Media put \$12 million towards retelling the story of Hasan Sabbah, the founder of the Nizari state in Iran in an epic series called *al-Ḥashshāshīn* (the Assassins). The show met with wide attention, both positive and negative, with some countries (including Norway and Pakistan) rushing to have it translated and distributed, while Iran banned the series claiming that it was historically inaccurate.

IIS with its association with the Nizari Ismaili community is uniquely positioned to address the Assassin Legends. While the stories have evolved in Western literature over centuries, researchers have only recently been able to uncover and decipher historical documentation that can winnow myth from fact.

In *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma’ilis* (1997), Dr Farhad Daftary outlines the evolution of these legends and deconstructs them, highlighting not only their internal contradictions but also their infidelity to the historical record. *Eagle’s Nest: Ismaili Castles in Iran and Syria* (2001), by Peter Willey, takes an archeological

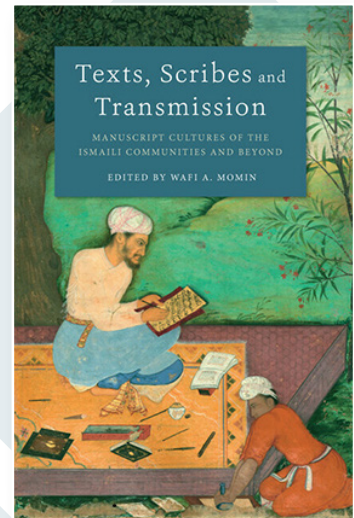
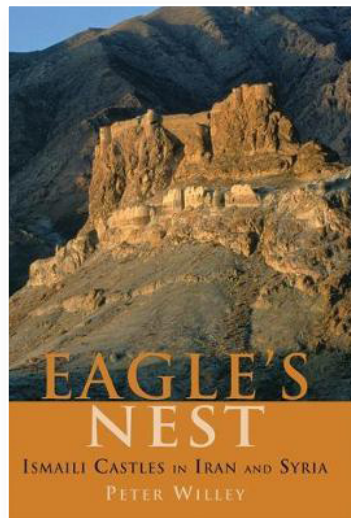
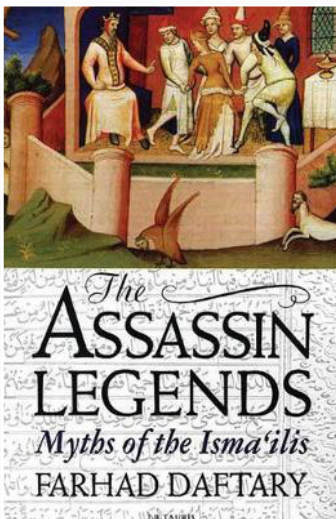


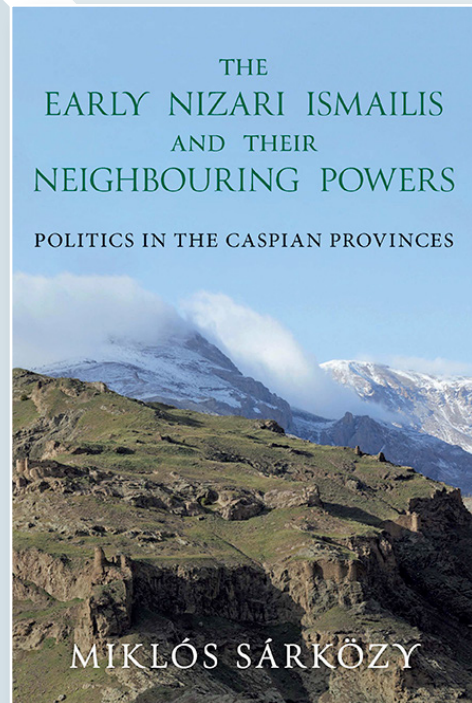
◆ Hasan Sabbah, portrayed by Karim Abdel Aziz, establishes Alamut as the centre of Ismaili da'wa in *The Assassins* (produced by Tamer Morsi, Synergy Art Productions, and United Media).

approach to history, providing a narrative about these so-called “assassin fortresses” and the people in them. IIS research has formed the backbone of a modern Assassins discourse, with newspapers and podcasts now consulting Dr Daftary and other IIS scholars for more accurate details, and researchers and artists alike citing extensively the findings of IIS.

This new research has only been made possible by the recovery and preservation of previously lost historical texts. One of the most pivotal texts is the alleged biography of Hasan Sabbah, *Sargudhasht-i Sayyidnā* (The Biography of Our Lord, also called *Sīrat al-Mawlā* in *al-Ḥashāshshīn*, the Egyptian TV series). Previously thought to have been lost, researchers had relied on the unfavourable reports from ‘Aṭā Malik al-Juvaynī and Rashīd al-Dīn Hamadānī who excerpted

the work in their *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushāy* (The History of the World-Conqueror) and *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh* (The Compendium of Chronicles), respectively. The Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU) at IIS has recently come into possession of multiple transmissions of the *Sargudhasht* from private collections in Central and South Asia that have provided the foundations for new research. Miklós Sárközy has written about his findings in our collections in his chapter in *Texts, Scribes, and Transmission: Manuscript Cultures of the Ismaili Communities and Beyond*, edited by Dr Wafi Momin. ISCU’s Dr Karim Javan has researched another work recounting the same events, *Ahd-i Sayyidnā* (The Covenant of Our Lord), which he describes in his chapter.





As the Assassin Legends continue to be presented in varying degrees of sensationalism on screen and in print, the need to set straight historical misrepresentations remains ever present. A few of our recent publications cover the topic of the Assassin Legends:

The first chapter of *Ismailis in Iran: History and Traditions* recounts the history and myths of the assassins in Iran. The author provides an overview of the setting and the legends that emerged from it, as well as their importance to the perception of Ismailis and Muslims in general in the West. She cites the above-mentioned works by Daftary and Willey as well as the work of Marshall Hodgson, making this an excellent starting point for anyone who wants to learn more about the Assassin Legends and the political and spiritual history of Ismailis in Iran.

While not explicitly about the Assassin Legends, Sárközy's *The Early Nizari Ismailis and their Neighbouring Powers: Politics in the Caspian Provinces* provides detailed insight into the political, economic, and social background leading to the politically necessary assassinations for which the Nizaris became legendary. In addition to the Nizari-Seljuq conflict that we often see described in books and played out in dramatic

serials, Sárközy delves into their rare economic and military allegiances. He also details the relationship between the Nizaris, Bāwandids, Bādūspānids, and Khwārazmshāhs who occupied the mountains and fortresses of historic Mazandaran.

Hasan Sabbah, the founder of the Nizari state, is also covered in the latest volume (vol. 8) of *Encyclopaedia Islamica*. Learn more about these and our other publications this year on page 44.

Karim Javan's further exploration of *'Ahd-i Sayyidnā* as well as two other letters ascribed to Hasan Sabbah will be published in 2025 as part of our Ismaili Heritage Series in a book entitled *The Formation of the Nizari Ismaili Tradition*.

The Assassins: Beyond the Legend is a new, multi-lingual video series directed by IIS's Rehana Virani. Scholars Farhad Daftary, Nuha Al-Sha'ar and Shainool Jiwa discuss the nuances of the Assassin Legends, their history and evolution through literature, and their impact on global perceptions of the Nizaris. This series, with episodes in Persian, Arabic, and English, will be released in 2025.

Digital Futures at IIS

"New tools, techniques, and technologies now exist that were the stuff of dreams only a few years ago and there are far greater opportunities today to collaborate across borders and languages than ever before."

**Princess Zahra Aga Khan,
2024 convocation of the Aga Khan University,
Kenya, 17 February 2024**

After the COVID lockdowns of the early 2020s, our lives and work have increasingly shifted online. Though not without its challenges, the online frontier offers new opportunities to IIS as well as access to a much wider audience than we can host in the physical space of the Aga Khan Centre. Digital technology and distribution also offer creative ways to express ourselves as an academic institution that is also supporting the knowledge needs of a faith community, namely the Ismailis. This year, we are exploring new avenues of education and engagement online.

Digital Curriculum

Department of Curriculum Studies:

Alnoor Nathani
Design and Production Manager

Shameer Ali Prasla
Digital Education Officer

Zuleikha Haji
ECD and Primary Curriculum Manager

Erum Hamid
Primary Curriculum Officer

Zahra Jiwa
Early Learning Officer

The IIS Digital Curriculum (IISDC) platform is a transformative initiative designed to make curriculum resources accessible as e-books for educators, students, parents, and the wider Ismaili community.

IISDC, introduced in 2020, has quickly become a valuable educational tool for both primary and secondary religious education teachers in all Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board (ITREB) jurisdictions, and has been made available to the wider Ismaili community across thirteen jurisdictions. The platform's expansion is set to continue with further rollouts planned in the coming months. To facilitate access for diverse users, the IISDC platform is now available in ten languages — English, Arabic, Dari, Farsi, French, Gujarati, Portuguese, Russian, Tajik, and Urdu — with German to be added soon. Significantly, a right-to-left (RTL) functionality has been integrated,



◆ Religious education students record an audio version of the digital curriculum. Each student plays a different character in the story “A Holiday in Hunza”, part of the Primary Ta’lim book: *The Wonderful World of Allah*.



◆ Qudsia Shah, Senior Research Officer from the Constituency Studies Unit, narrates a Primary Ta’lim book: *Allah the Creator*.

meeting the demand for curriculum e-books in RTL languages such as Arabic, Dari, Farsi, and Urdu, with intuitive RTL navigation and pagination features. Curriculum material in these languages is in the process of being added to the platform.

To support users with intermittent internet access, the IISDC platform, which initially required an active internet connection, has been adapted to include offline accessibility. New mobile and desktop applications for Android, iOS, macOS, and Windows allow users to securely download e-books to their devices, providing flexible, on-the-go learning without a constant internet connection. Currently in pilot testing, these apps are expected to be fully available to users early next year, enhancing convenience for learners in remote areas or those frequently on the move.

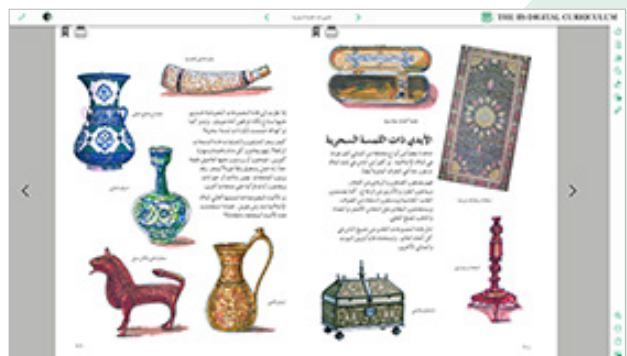
Building on this foundation, the Department of Curriculum Studies (DCS) at IIS is moving forward with phase two of a three-phased digital strategy focused on increasing interactivity within the platform. This planned development aims to convert static e-books into interactive learning resources, broadening the scope of digital education and adapting to the varied learning needs of community members. Digital features being developed include read-aloud options for Primary Student Readers, interactive activities, introductory videos, and resource links within Teacher’s Guides for each primary level. An initial prototype for Primary One material is already in progress, developed

collaboratively with ITREBs from various cultural backgrounds to ensure its relevance and accessibility.

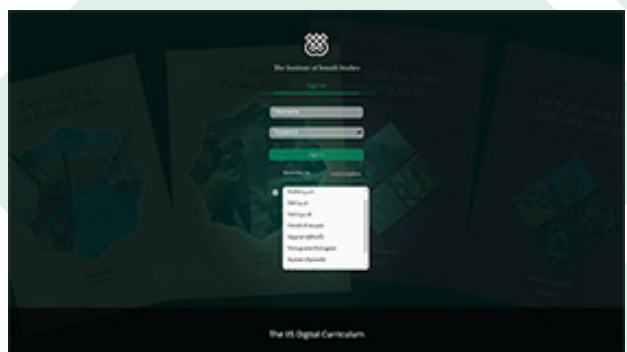
The overall aim of these digital enhancements is to broaden access to the Primary Ta’lim Curriculum for Ismaili students worldwide, particularly benefiting those with limited physical resources or restricted access to face-to-face classes. By supporting a range of learning styles and abilities, the IISDC platform will empower students, parents, and teachers to engage more deeply with the curriculum, regardless of their location or circumstances.

Please check with your local ITREB if the IISDC platform is available in your jurisdiction.

DCS expresses its gratitude to the ITREBs, Ta’lim teachers, and Time and Knowledge Nazrana volunteers whose invaluable feedback and contributions have been integral to the development and refinement of this platform. Their collective efforts have helped create an essential educational resource for teachers, parents, students, and the wider Ismaili community.



◆ Arabic text on IISDC utilising the RTL text integration



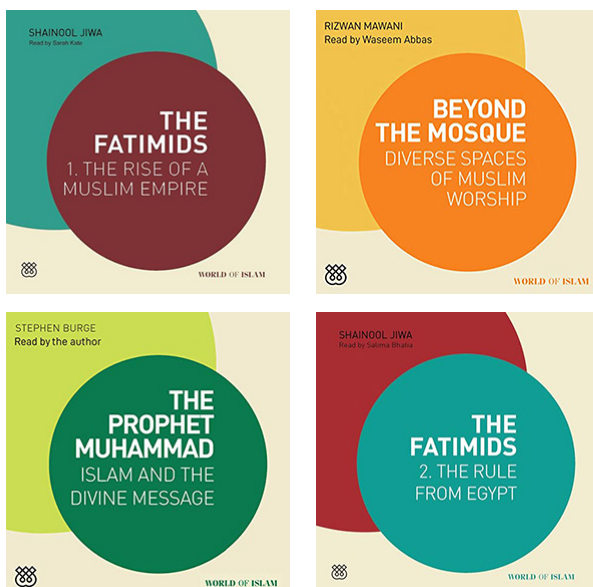
◆ Language selection on the IISDC platform.

IIS Brings New Voices to the Web

As the world of digital content continues to grow and evolve, people are constantly searching for new ways to reach and engage with audiences globally.

For IIS, which prides itself on its long form, academically researched scholarly outputs, this poses a new creative challenge: that of reaching audiences beyond the classroom and the library.

In 2017, one of our solutions was the *World of Islam* series, a collection of pocket-sized books that introduce our research in easy-to-understand language. We expanded that approach in 2021 with the *Living Ismaili Traditions* series that consists of slightly larger format books that focus on the diversity of traditions in the Ismaili community globally. However, making our publications accessible was not just a matter of their size; we needed to transcend physical media entirely. Hence, we introduced our *World of Islam* series as audiobooks downloadable through Audible. Now, you can learn about the history of the Fatimids or the architectural diversity of Muslim spaces of prayer while you drive, cook, or play video games. We have also started recording audio versions of our Ta'lim curriculum with the help of local students and teachers.



We did not stop at audiobooks. This year, we launched our inaugural podcast channel, *The Voices of IIS*, on Spotify. Our initial roster of four shows provides a more personal insight into the people of IIS, the field of Ismaili studies, and the wider Ismaili community:



In **Alumni Voices**, host Imran Khan sits with former IIS students to discuss how the Institute has positively impacted their career and life goals. You can learn more about our alumni and their life after graduating from IIS on page [30].



In **The Voices of History**, host Rizwan Karim sits with people representing diverse voices from Ismaili institutions and communities around the world to uncover our history as a community.

The Voices of History is just a small part of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit's Oral History Project, which seeks to record and preserve the personal stories of Ismailis from around the world.



In **The Voices of IIS**, host Selina Ramji interviews the people who make IIS what it is, today, uncovering the stories that inspire us in our daily work.



In **Shi'i Studies in Focus**, scholars from around the world come together to discuss the state of the field of Shi'i Studies and its growth over recent years. *Shi'i Studies in Focus* is a collaborative project between the Shi'i Studies Unit of IIS and Harvard Divinity School's Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs.

Through these four podcast series, we hope to bring the stories, research, and voices of IIS to your home, work, and travels.

Logging into IIS

This year, IIS launched its official Instagram account. This was joined by an increase in interaction on LinkedIn and our first YouTube Shorts. With over a thousand followers in the first month, IIS is very optimistic about this new way to share its research and experiences with academic and Ismaili communities. We sat with Aqil Dhanani, the External Communications Officer, to talk about this new opportunity.

As an academic institution, why is it important for IIS to be on social media?

We're not just an academic institution; we also have responsibilities to the Ismaili community. Yes, we have research and publications, graduate programmes and short courses. But to access our work, historically people have had to come to us: come to IIS in London, go to religious education classes, or literature desks or libraries in Jamatkhana. But now, with our accessible series, along with our Open Access publications, we're trying to take that first step and reach out to our constituencies, both in the academic and Ismaili communities. And social media is a part of that.

What are your goals with IIS social media?

The goal for social media influencers and social media platforms is to keep people "on platform". "On platform" just means that the users stay on the site, scrolling from one post to the next, to the next. However, studies are now coming out suggesting how harmful this is to mental and physical health, even literacy rates are going down because of this.

As an academic and religious institution, we cannot participate in encouraging that practice. So, all our social media posts have the goal of getting people "off platform". I want people to see an IIS post while they're scrolling and be inspired to put their phone down and pick up a book or attend a lecture (even our digital lectures [about which you can learn more

on pages 20 and 30] or just sit back and think. Social media algorithms are not designed for that: they spurn any post that makes someone close the app.

What do you hope for the future of IIS social media?

Obviously, we want to share everything IIS has to offer in an engaging (and regular) way, and we're working on internal processes to turn things around quickly. But at its core, social media is about making connections and that is the missing ingredient. We have a number of academic partners on Instagram: @oxunipress and @bloomsburypublishing help us publish our books, @soasuni and @ioelondon help with our graduate programmes; we have also shared initiatives with @themuslimnews, @harvardshiism, @orientalismhistory, and @aispharvard; as well as with artists such as @the.rtist, @journajouna, @ahimsaz_music, and @farkhondehatharmony (see her work on page 8). Social media gives us a unique opportunity to spark conversations. I hope we will get to hear what our audience is saying and the questions they are asking. We have so many different avenues of research and knowledge to share, it is sometimes hard to decide what to say. I hope interaction from our audience can guide that conversation in the future.

You can watch the full interview on our YouTube page, @TheInstituteofIsmailiStudies, along with our lectures, conferences, book launches, and our original series.

Islamic History and Thought Lecture Series

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Associate Professor, Shi'i Studies Unit



The Islamic History and Thought Lecture Series (IHTLS) was developed in 2020, when the COVID lockdown pushed us further to explore the newly discovered potential of digital technologies, such as Zoom, that were already largely used for teaching and communication.

◆ "The Great Abu Sa'ud Teaching Law", Folio from a *Divan* of Mahmud 'Abd-al Baqi. From the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Public Domain.

Initially, the IHTLS series was envisaged as a low-budget online-only lecture series, providing scholarly level lectures falling within the scope of the core research interests of IIS. Making these lectures accessible to members of the Ismaili community and to a broader public remains among the IHTLS's main objectives. The lecture series is also intended as a valuable resource for our students and alumni.

Topics related to Ismaili history and thought, and to other branches of Shi'i Islam, comprised the main focus of the lecture series. However, the growing understanding that Shi'i Islam cannot be fully understood outside its complex relationships with other Islamic groups led us to diversify the subject matter and to include lectures related to the broader context of Islamic Studies. Other objectives of the lecture series include developing academic networks and inter-institutional collaborations as well as highlighting the visibility of IIS and its scholars as a leading research hub and a scholarly discussion platform.

It turned out that the lectures were consistently well attended, even beyond the lockdown era. The use of digital technologies has brought two important advantages over the traditional, face-to-face only lecture format: the possibility of reaching much larger audiences all over the world. Today, the series combines the best of two worlds: the lecture sessions take place at the Aga Khan Centre (AKC) where the lecturers, discussants, and audience can join us in person, while the sessions are broadcast live on Zoom for an online audience, thereby extending the reach of the lecture and discussion beyond our walls. We also continue to offer a Zoom-only option when the lecturers cannot travel to the AKC, allowing us to invite scholars to speak virtually from across the world. In addition, many of the lectures are made available on the IIS YouTube channel, making them accessible for use by teachers and students, as well as interested audiences. According to the Department of Communication and Development (DCD): "IHTLS is our most successful lecture series online, with almost 20,000 views on YouTube [as of publication]."

Speaking the Language of IIS

Because of the diversity of the Ismaili community worldwide, IIS is uniquely positioned to explore several languages spoken by Ismailis around the globe and throughout history.

Some of these languages provide insights into Ismaili history and thought, such as the substitution cypher used by early Fatimid *dā'īs* to transmit their teachings covertly, or the liturgical script used by Nizari Khojas to document their finances and devotional literature. Other languages, such as the regional dialects of Northern Pakistan, which you can learn about in the following pages, carry the history of their land and its people but are now at risk of disappearing forever. IIS not only endeavours to preserve these languages but also disseminates our research in the diverse languages of our audiences through publications, translations, and a new digital lecture series.

Linguistic Diversity, Accessibility and Ismaili Written Heritage

Wafi A. Momin, Assistant Professor and Head of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit



◆ Folios from MS 711, *Mukhtaṣar al-āthār*, Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The renowned Fatimid jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān (d. 974) wrote a book titled *Kitāb al-dīnār* (‘Book for One Dinar’). In al-Nu‘mān’s own words, he compiled it as an accessible guide at the request of judges, students and other interested individuals to provide statements made by the Prophet’s family (*ahl al-bayt*) in a concise manner for easy reference and memorisation.

A prolific writer, al-Nu‘mān had previously authored many books on the topics of Islamic law and legal theory which formed the basis for the crystallisation of Fatimid jurisprudence, utilising a wealth of prophetic traditions and sayings of the Imams as a source of guidance on legal matters. *Kitāb al-dīnār* was a step forward in that direction.

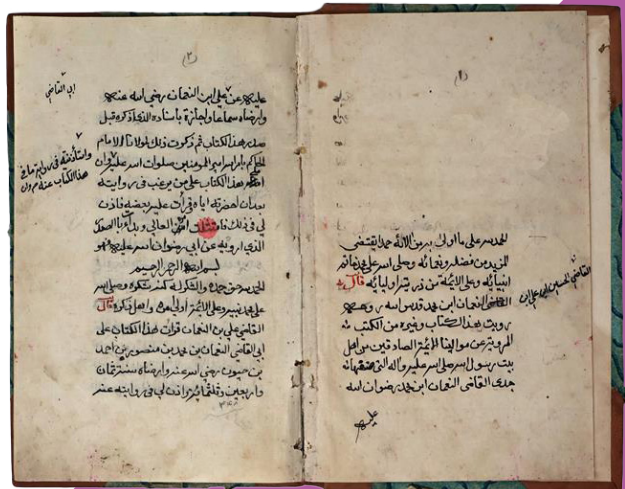
Al-Nu‘mān, moreover, wanted his book to be not only a concise, accessible guide, but also affordable. In calling it *Kitāb al-dīnār*, he had hoped the book would be such that those requiring a copy could have it transcribed for one dinar or less. As with his many other books, he presented it upon completion to the Imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz who praised it for its brevity and for losing nothing of its soundness. Al-Mu‘izz, however, instructed al-Nu‘mān to explain certain difficult words for ease of wider understanding, and to name it *Kitāb al-Ikhtisār li-saḥīḥ al-āthār ‘an al-a‘imma al-āthār* (The Summary of the Authentic Hadiths of the Pure Imams). The work is now more popularly known as *Kitāb Mukhtaṣar al-āthār* (The Abridged Book of Hadiths).

What the case of *Mukhtaṣar al-āthār* shows — and there are many such examples — is that Fatimid intellectuals like al-Nu‘mān and, indeed, many Ismaili authors across different times and places, were cognisant of the learning needs of diverse groups, adapting their writings according to the capabilities and requirements of their audiences, which ranged from specialists to students and lay members. From this perspective, the notion of language and linguistic diversity worked in a dynamic way in theological, philosophical and esoteric works produced within widely spread Ismaili circles. On the one hand, we see the development and adoption of a specialised idiom suitable for the subject matter under discussion and its epistemological system. On the other hand, this very specialised language was molded to make the embodied knowledge accessible to a cross-

section of groups, either in writing or through sermons. It is thus no surprise that among the requirements for being an ideal missionary (*da‘ī*) within the highly organised Ismaili *da‘wa* structure were a sound knowledge of the languages of the people among whom the missionaries engaged in teaching and preaching, as well as a greater familiarity with the backgrounds of the people among whom they worked.

At the same time, as intellectual and learning activities spread far and wide, the Ismaili written heritage came to bear the imprint of a diverse range of cultural and geographic settings, from Egypt and Syria to India, and from Central Asia to Yemen. This process entailed speaking and writing in the cultural language and idiom of the respective regions, which included concepts and vocabulary from diverse religious traditions such as Christianity, Judaism, Indic religions and Shamanic traditions, as well as the actual languages and script systems of those cultures and regions.

As the study of this written heritage forms the backdrop of a variety of educational and research projects at IIS, the efforts to embrace linguistic diversity and accessibility continue to be at the heart of such work that IIS aspires to undertake and build upon.



◆ Folios from MS 710, *Mukhtaṣar al-āthār*, Ismaili Special Collections Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies

References:
 Ismail Poonawala, 'The Chronology of al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān's Works', *Arabica*, 65 (2018), pp. 84–162.
 Verena Klemm and Paul Walker (ed.), *A Code of Conduct: A Treatise on the Etiquette of the Fatimid Ismaili Mission* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

Preserving Language and Heritage in North Pakistan

**Rizwan Karim, Oral History Project Coordinator,
Ismaili Special Collections Unit**

The Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan regions in Northern Pakistan are home to a vibrant mountain Ismaili population, rich with centuries-old cultures and traditions that date back to the era of the historic Silk Road which traversed these areas.





◆ Zhano Yar Khan interviewed in Meragram-2 in Upper Chitral Pakistan in Khovar by IIS alumnus Abdul Wahid Khan.

Beyond their historical significance, these regions are geographically and environmentally unique, nestling in the foothills of the mighty Himalayas and Hindukush mountains that feature the highest concentration of glaciers outside the polar regions.

The Wakhan Corridor has connected these regions with Badakhshan in present-day Afghanistan and Tajikistan historically through mountain passes. As modern scholarship suggests, it was through these passes that Ismaili *dā'īs* and their pupils introduced Ismaili Islam to these regions. Hence the Ismaili communities in North Pakistan share many cultural values — such as traditional forms of leadership of *pirs* and *khalifas*, socio-religious traditions, rituals and devotional literature — with those of Central Asia and they adhere to the Central Asian or Nāṣir Khusraw Ismaili tradition.

Of the many languages spoken in these regions, seven are used by Ismaili communities: Burushaski, Dawoodi/Domaki, Khovar, Madaklashti Dari, Shina, Wakhi, and Yidgha. Nearly all of these are primarily

oral languages without a standardised written script. Burushaski, spoken in dialects in the Hunza, Nagar, and Yasin areas, is particularly unique as a language-isolate with no known linguistic relatives worldwide. Dawoodi is an endangered language spoken by only a few hundred people in Gilgit-Baltistan. While younger generations increasingly speak Urdu and English, indigenous languages remain vital to preserving intangible cultural heritage — including local histories, folklore, poetry, and devotional literature — which is embedded in these languages.

For communities in these geopolitically complex regions, these languages are deeply intertwined with their identities. Yet, forces of globalisation such as colonial legacies, national boundary definitions, linguistic hierarchies, and the passing away of elders, contribute to a growing fear of losing this intangible heritage and, with it, a key source of identity.

The Oral History Project at IIS's Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU) is dedicated to capturing the contemporary histories of Ismaili communities

◆ Ali Mojood was interviewed for the project in Hunza.



◆ Family of late Pir Karam Ali Shah (wife Shamim Zaman and son Syed Jalal Shah) were interviewed in Chatorkhan, Ghizer GB Pakistan

worldwide, with a particular emphasis on marginalised regions such as Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan. Recognising the cultural and historical significance of these areas, the project seeks to document, preserve, and celebrate the voices and stories of community elders, capturing oral histories in the native languages of the people. These narratives offer unique insights into the lived experiences, cultural heritage, and the profound wisdom passed down through the generations. By producing documentation in these indigenous languages, the project not only preserves the content of these histories but also maintains the linguistic traditions in which these memories are best expressed.

In Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan, elders from the Ismaili communities with a focus on the traditional leadership of *pir* and *khalifa* families, pioneers in education, health and contemporary scholarship are interviewed in the comfort of their homes, creating an environment conducive to sharing rich,



◆ Bibi Ayesha was interviewed in Sandi, Yasin by Siraj Bibi in the Yasin dialect of Burushaski

personal stories. These life-story sessions are led by interviewers, many from the communities themselves, who contribute valuable cultural and linguistic insights. IIS alumni, alongside volunteers and consultants, play an essential role in offering both academic expertise and personal connections to these communities. In addition to building an accessible archive for research for posterity, the project celebrates the life stories of Ismaili elders through multimedia outputs such as write-ups and podcasts.

Through these efforts, the Oral History Project aims to preserve and present the intangible heritage of Ismaili communities, providing future generations with a bridge to their cultural roots. This work not only enriches the collective memory of Ismaili communities but also lays a foundation for research and engagement, fostering appreciation for the diversity within the global Ismaili communities and their lasting legacies across regions and generations.



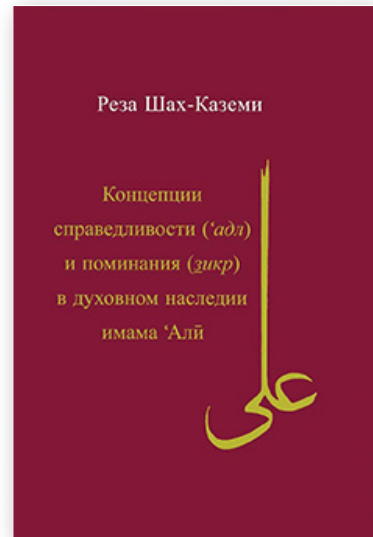
◆ Khonza- an Ismaili elder from Chitral interviewed by Abdul Wahid Khan in Khowar at her home in Chitral in 2022



◆ Khalifa Darvesh Sadaat was interviewed in Thui, Yasin Ghizer in the Yasini dialect of Burushaski

Russian Translations of our Publications

Hakim Elnazarov, Head of the Central Asian Studies Unit



Since its inception, IIS has engaged with the Jamat, scholars, and academic institutions in Tajikistan and Russia through research, academic forums, and publications.

Russian remains the dominant language in ex-Soviet regions and largely defines the intellectual discourse in the former Soviet republics. The Russian Federation also hosts a large section of the Ismaili community that has originated from Central Asia. The influx of Tajik-Ismaili migrants to Russia has accelerated over the last few decades, enabling the community to forge vibrant diasporas in the Russian capital, Moscow, and in other Russian cities such as St. Petersburg and Ekaterinburg. The migration of the Ismaili community to Russia became largely feasible due to their shared Soviet legacy and knowledge of the Russian language. The common Soviet heritage and language familiarity allowed the community to integrate into the

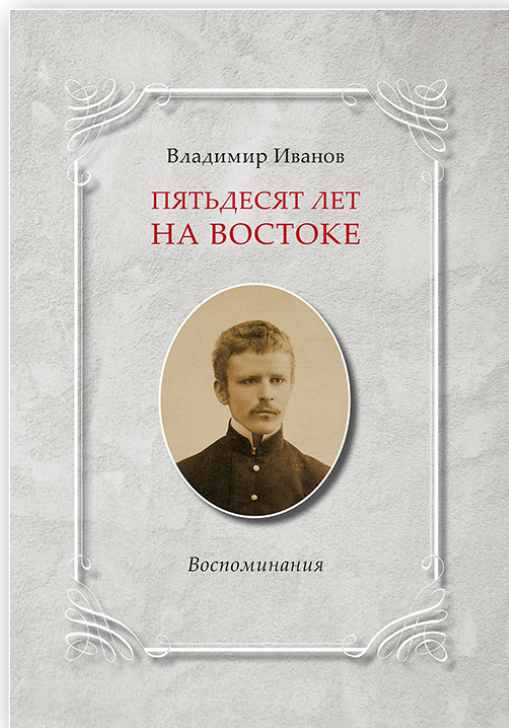
cosmopolitan Russian society. At the same time, the community deals with the challenges of acculturation and the preservation of its own identity and culture.

In the prevailing circumstances, IIS stepped up to provide resources for the Ismaili community in an accessible language so they can learn about their own traditions and culture, as well as about the history of their faith and their intellectual heritage. Over the years, the Central Asian Studies Unit (CASU) of IIS has produced 26 publications in Russian, including translations of IIS publications such as Farhad Daftary's seminal works on the history and doctrines of the Ismailis, Reza Shah-Kazemi's *Spirituality of Imam 'Ali*, and Arzina Lalani's *Early Shi'i Thought*. Our publications have been well received by the Jamat and wider audiences, and particularly by scholars engaged in Islamic studies. The translations of IIS's accessible publications — including *The Fatimids, vol. 1: The Rise of a Muslim Empire* by Dr Shainool Jiwa and *Beyond the Mosque: Diverse Spaces of Muslim Worship* by Rizwan Mawani — have also garnered positive remarks from

the Jamat in Russia. In addition, CASU has also translated and published original works of Ismaili intellectuals in Russian, such as the philosophical works of Nāṣir Khusraw and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, as well as original works by modern Russian and Tajik scholars related to the Ismailis and their intellectual heritage.

Our Russian publications have been supplemented by book launches, conferences, and exhibitions. A momentous event was the launch of the Russian edition of *Fifty Years in the East: The Memoirs of Wladimir Ivanow*, the Russian orientalist who was so instrumental in the development of modern Ismaili studies. To commemorate Ivanow's 125th anniversary, IIS together with the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in St. Petersburg organised an international conference on Ismaili Studies in December 2011. The conference proceedings were published in a work titled, *Russian Scholars on Ismailism* (Nestor-Historia, St. Petersburg, 2014), edited by Sergei Prozorov and Hakim Elnazarov.

Russia has a long history of interaction with the Ismaili Imamate. Aga Khan III vividly recounts in his memoirs his friendship with Russian elites and his visit to St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1911. At the end of the 19th century, Russian military contingents in the Pamirs played a crucial role in ending the atrocities of Afghan forces against the Ismailis. Russian explorers of the Pamirs such as Count Aleksey Alexeyevich Bobrinskoy, Aleksandr Semenov, and Ivan Zarubin initiated the systematic study of the traditions and the written heritage of the Ismailis of Central Asia. Their contributions to Ismaili studies have been highlighted in our publications.



There is still a vast amount of material in Russian on the Ismailis awaiting exploration. The analysis and publication of these materials will further broaden our understanding of the history and traditions of the Central Asian community today. IIS will continue translating relevant literature into Russian, making it accessible to the Jamat through various platforms. We also recognise that some original works by Russian and Ismaili scholars in Russia will be of interest to the Ismailis worldwide and will be translated into English.



Arabic and Islamic History Lecture Series

Nuha Al-Sha'ar, Associate Professor, Qur'anic Studies Unit

English is, without doubt, the dominant academic language of our time, but the idea of developing a lecture series at The Institute of Ismaili Studies where scholars can present their research in Arabic (or in Persian, Turkish, Urdu, etc.) has been something that we have wanted to organise for several years.



The idea was driven by the desire to provide a platform for scholars from the Arab and Islamic world, especially those who do not speak English, to present their research in Arabic and make their knowledge accessible to a wider audience. We have always believed that it is important to give these scholars an opportunity to present their work, and to challenge the hegemony of scholarship produced in the English language over scholarship produced in other languages. I also thought that such a series may also allow us to promote cultural understanding and to bridge the gap between academia in the Western world and that of the Arab and Islamic world.

The need for such a series became more obvious in light of the work of the Department of Community Relations and ITREBs in providing educational opportunities and programmes for Arabic-speaking Ismailis in Syria and worldwide. The lack of resources available for them, especially those who cannot speak English, was noticeable.

Thus, it was obvious to me that we scholars at IIS should do more to engage with local communities, and to cater for the needs of the Jamat, especially those in Syria, who have been deprived of interaction with the outside world due to years of war and Syria's political ostracisation. We thought that the best way to break this isolation would be to organise a lecture series in Arabic via Zoom, and to invite scholars to present in this series.

With the support of the Director, Professor Zayn Kassam, as well as many scholars, particularly Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, and staff such as Naushin Premji and those from the Department of Communications and Development, the series has been a tremendous success. ITREB in Syria broadcasts the lectures of this series to more than eight centres in various cities in Syria. The lectures have also attracted participants worldwide. We have been told that the Ismailis in Syria wait for these lectures like "the parched landscape that awaits the rain."

We have featured five lectures thus far. The first two lectures, delivered by the Lebanese scholar Said Najdi and the Tunisian scholar Naçeur Seddiki respectively, were extremely topical. The two scholars highlighted the positive contributions of the Ismailis to Islamic culture and civilisation and provided a counter-narrative to the Assassin Legends and false accusations against the Ismailis. (Learn more about the Assassin Legends on page 12).

We hope that the series will continue to provide the Ismaili community and the wider public with access to scholarship produced in languages spoken by Muslims, namely Arabic in this context, and will highlight the quality of this scholarship. I hope that future lectures will continue to promote dialogue and cover wider topics including Ismaili studies, Qur'anic studies, philosophy, and literary traditions, among others.

The series will continue to highlight the pioneering role of IIS in hosting such a series. My goal for the series is to consolidate the IIS mission to enhance academic and international collaboration and do more to disseminate knowledge to Ismailis and the wider public.

IIS Translations in 2024

Persian:



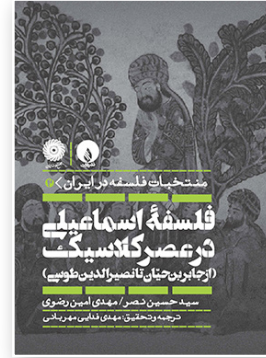
Fāṭimiyān 2: Farmānrawā-yī az Miṣr

- Translation of *The Fatmids 2: The Rule from Egypt* by Shainool Jiwa
- Translated by Khashāyār Bahārī
- Published by Farzān Publishers



Imāmān-i Ismā'īlī: sharḥ-i ḥāl-i tārikhī

- Translation of *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History* by Farhad Daftary
- Translated by Khashāyār Bahārī
- Published by Farzān Publishers



Muntakhabāt-i Falsafa dar Īrān, Vol. 2: Falsafa-yi Ismā'īlī dar 'aṣr-i kilāsīk

- Translation of *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, Vol 2: Ismaili Thought in the Classical Age*
- Translated by Mehdī Fidāyī Mehrabānī
- Published by Falat Press
- (Vol 1: *Az Zaratusth tā Khayyām* also available)

Urdu:



Ismā'īlī Tihwār: Taqrībāt aur Riwāyāt

- Translation of *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration*
- Translated by Sher Zamān Khān
- Published by the Institute of Ismaili Studies, in partnership with ITREB Pakistan



Ismā'īlī Tihwāro: Ujwañini wārtao

- Translation of *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration*
- Translated by Abdulali Dhanani
- Published by the Institute of Ismaili Studies, in partnership with ITREB India

Great Conversations at IIS

"An important goal of quality education is to equip each generation to participate effectively in what has been called 'the great conversation' of our times. This means, on one hand, being unafraid of controversy. But it also means being sensitive to the values and outlooks of others."

His Highness the Aga Khan
Evora University Symposium, 12 February 2006

This year, IIS hosted six conferences (collaborating with three international organisations), continued "Season Two" of our digital lecture series inaugurated in 2020, started a new digital lecture series, and hosted a handful of occasional lectures across a variety of subjects. Each of these provides an opportunity to share ideas across educational, cultural, and linguistic boundaries, fostering a deep diversity of thought.

We have asked the organisers of these conferences and series to reflect on the 'great conversations' they have nurtured this year.

The Historical and Contemporary Migration of Central Asian Muslims: History, Culture and Identity

Muzaffar Zoolshoev, Research Assistant,
Central Asian Studies Unit



Global migration remains a widely discussed topic in nearly all corners of the world. Central Asia is no exception: the region has witnessed a rise in migration caused by various socio-economic, political and environmental reasons.

To reflect this context, the Central Asian Studies Unit (CASU) of IIS organised an international conference entitled: *The Historical and Contemporary Migration of Central Asian Muslims: History, Culture and Identity*, which took place on 3–4 April 2024. One of the major aims of this conference was to take stock of the existing scholarship on the migration of Central Asian Muslims. The conference attracted scholars and researchers (online and in person) from various disciplines and countries to discuss and analyse a wide range of fascinating topics

related to the historical and contemporary migrations of Muslims throughout Central Asia. The discussions enhanced our understanding of the history, culture and traditions of Central Asian Muslims, and contributed to our knowledge of the complex processes of migration in their various manifestations.

It was a privilege to be part of the organising committee and to participate in the planning, discussions and realisation of almost all aspects of the organisation of the conference. Particularly fulfilling to be engaged with interested candidates and participants and responding to their queries in the run-up to the conference. More importantly, there was a true collaboration between CASU and many other departments at IIS. Without their immense support it would have been impossible to organise a conference of such magnitude. Alongside relishing our collaborative work, we shared ideas and skills that enabled us to gain new experiences and create a more efficient working environment, which will also allow the successful accomplishment of similar projects in the future.

45th MELCom International Conference

Pedro Sanchez, Library Coordinator, Aga Khan Library

Hosting the 45th MELCom International Conference at the Aga Khan Library was a gratifying experience.

The Middle East Librarian Committee (MELCom) International, a community of librarians dedicated to Islamic and Middle Eastern collections, represents more than just the sharing of best practices; it embodies our collective commitment to preserving cultural heritage and supporting research that deepens our understanding of complex and diverse societies.

Welcoming over 110 attendees from 23 countries reminded us of how global our librarian community truly is. The conference's success was not merely about participant numbers but the diverse perspectives we brought together during discussions on what it means to be area specialists in our ever-changing world.

The presentations spanned a wide array of topics, from digital humanities projects to the intricate challenges posed by looted artefacts. We were particularly captivated by the panel discussing the role of Artificial Intelligence in libraries which ignited lively debates among participants. While technology presents exciting new possibilities, it also raises critical questions about how we can balance innovation with a profound respect

for original materials. Our responsibilities as librarians extend beyond cataloguing collections; we must foster a deeper understanding of the histories and cultures these collections represent and support the scholars and researchers exploring them.

The conference was not just about formal talks; it also provided opportunities for personal connection during lunches and guided tours such as our trip to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. Sharing meals and strolling through the gardens reminded us that our work — preserving Islamic and Middle Eastern collections — goes beyond the confines of our institutions.

As we look forward to next year's conference at the Sorbonne Nouvelle Université in Paris, we are reminded of our commitment to building ties across borders and time, and fostering collaboration and dialogue among librarians and scholars. Our professional roles enable us to connect people to the rich stories and diverse cultures reflected within our collections, and by supporting research that explores these narratives, we help keep them alive and relevant.

In retrospect, we feel grateful for the chance to learn, connect, and reflect with so many like-minded colleagues. This conference was not just another event in the diary; it was a reminder of why we do what we do and the importance of continuing our work together.

◆ Photo by Jonathan Goldberg



International Qur'anic Studies Association Annual Meeting

Karen Bauer, Senior Research Associate,
Qur'anic Studies Unit



In July 2024, The Institute of Ismaili Studies hosted the International Qur'anic Studies Association (IQSA) Annual Meeting.

In recent years, IQSA has become the largest academic meeting for Qur'an scholars in the West: over 130 scholars gathered from all over the world, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Egypt, to discuss the Qur'an and its interpretations. Parallel panels ran for all four days of the conference. The meeting opened with a welcome address from Professor Zayn Kassam, and an introduction to Qur'anic Studies at IIS by Dr Omar Alí-de-Unzaga. The topics of papers delivered ranged from studies of Qur'anic manuscripts, and the variants found in them, to a panel and a roundtable discussion of Qur'anic ethics,

to Ismaili approaches to the Qur'an. Ahmad Al-Jallad (The University of Ohio) delivered a keynote entitled **The Quran in light of 1,500 years of pre-Islamic Arabian epigraphy.**

IQSA attendees were impressed by the beauty of the Aga Khan Centre and many commented on the success of the meeting. We hosted book stands for IIS publications and other publishers of Qur'anic studies, such as Brill and De Gruyter. IIS's own scholars Dr Stephen Burge, Dr Orkhan Mir-Kasimov, Dr Nuha Al-Sha'ar, Dr Karen Bauer and Dr Mohammad Rasekh, in presenting at the meeting. The IIS's organising committee included Dr Karen Bauer, Dr Stephen Burge, and Naushin Premji. We are grateful for the support of IQSA, the AKC Events team, DARP, and the brilliant Ismaili volunteers, who facilitated the logistics behind the scenes to make this conference such a great experience.

IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference: Challenges in Muslim Societies

Noor Mansour (GPISH), Nabila Esmail (STEP),
Zeinab Nikookar (AKU-ISMC)

The second annual IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference brought together The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) and Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC) in a collaborative academic forum.

Focused on the theme "Challenges in Muslim Societies", the event brought together graduate students, academics, and researchers from both institutions to explore pressing issues affecting Muslim communities globally. A notable aspect of the conference was its emphasis on giving students a voice, offering them an invaluable platform to share their interests and showcase their research, sparking lively discussions and fostering a supportive academic community.

With 13 presentations conducted through a blend of online and in-person sessions, the conference featured panellists from both IIS and AKU-ISMC, enriching the dialogue with diverse perspectives and expertise. The event concluded with a concert, seamlessly combining academic rigour with cultural engagement, which left a lasting impression on both the presenters and convenors.

The organisers thoroughly enjoyed the cross-institutional collaboration and are enthusiastic about building on this success with more joint initiatives. This conference not only underscored the value of interdisciplinary scholarship but also forged connections and memories that will resonate with participants for years to come. The success of this unique, student-centred experience has generated high anticipation for next year's gathering, solidifying its reputation as a meaningful platform for addressing contemporary issues in Muslim societies.



Listening in Many Tongues: Multilingual Interpretive Communities and Acts of Translation in Early Modern South Asia

William Rees Hofmann, Research Associate,
South Asian Studies Unit

On 21–22 October, the South Asian Studies Unit held its inaugural conference, titled “Listening in Many Tongues: Multilingual Interpretive Communities and Acts of Translation in Early Modern South Asia.”

Co-convened by Hussain Jasani, Dr William Rees Hofmann, and Ayesha Sheth, the conference featured 18 paper presentations by both early-career and established scholars in the field of South Asian Studies, as well as a keynote by Dr Imre Bangha (Oxford) in discussion with Dr Katherine Butler Schofield (King’s College London).

At the conference, we invited presenters to reflect on the production and transmission of vernacular and multilingual texts and on the varied strategies





of translation at play between diverse communities of contact and exchange. The conference generated many productive conversations and debates around these themes, and we hope to publish the conference proceedings in the coming year.

The seed for this conference was planted in a panel co-organised by Dr William Rees Hofman and Ayesha Sheth at the European Conference on South Asian Studies in 2021, in which we invited scholars to submit papers re-examining the multilingual spaces and contexts relating to the production, circulation, and reception of performative traditions in mediaeval and early modern South Asia. I was honoured to have the support of Hussain Jasani, Head of South Asian Studies, in bringing the idea for a conference expanding on these themes to IIS.

As the inaugural conference of the unit, the event helped to both place Ismaili studies in South Asia within its larger context and to introduce scholars within the wider field to IIS and its work. Inspired by the scholarship of Francesca Orsini, Tony K. Stewart, Aditya Behl, and Barry Flood, amongst others, the conference reflected on ideas of translation across multilingual communities and between a wide variety of languages in conversation. As a testament to this, papers traversed geographical and linguistic boundaries to encompass Persian, Sanskrit, Avadhi, Urdu, Arabi-Malayalam, Dakani, and Apabhramsa, to name but a few.

The conference was also marked by the recent loss of two scholars, both giants in their field, and whose influence on South Asian and Ismaili studies cannot be understated. Zawahir Moir sadly passed away in February 2024, and we dedicated a panel on Pranami and Ismaili studies to her memory, which was also graced by a moving tribute to her by Hussain Jasani. With great sadness we also learned that Professor Tony K. Stewart, whose scholarship was key to conceptual foundation of the conference, passed away a week before the conference. We dedicated a panel on Bengali and Malayalam literary translations to his memory.

As part of the conference, we organised a concert for conference participants and community members, featuring the IIS Student Ensemble who performed songs from across South Asia's Ismaili communities in multiple languages, including Wakhi, Khowar, Gujarati, Urdu and Farsi. Dr William Rees Hofmann presented a brief demonstration of musical translation between the Afghan *rubab* and the Indian sarod to show how musical techniques were translated across instruments and traditions. The sold-out event helped to showcase the importance of not only studying multilingual texts but also how these texts often circulated — through performance. We would also like to recognise and thank the Events team, Mafe, Fernanda, and Csilla for going above and beyond in their work for this conference.

Afghanistan: Continuity and the Persistence of Tradition, Culture and Identity

**Yahia Baiza, Senior Research Associate,
Central Asian Studies Unit**

Organising a conference is a rewarding and satisfying experience. However, this would not have been possible without the hard work of a dedicated team, comprising our co-organising partner, the Collective for Afghanistan Studies, and several departments and units at IIS.



When we received the initial request from our co-organising partner this summer to co-convene a conference on Afghanistan, we accepted without hesitation. The Central Asian Studies Unit supported the idea for the conference and asked me to take the role of convenor. Initially, the conference was planned for one day. After receiving a significant number of quality abstracts, we decided to hold the conference over two days, on 8 and 9 November 2024. Eventually, from the large pool of submitted abstracts, we selected 25 papers and invited five scholars to deliver keynote addresses as well as welcome and closing remarks. Our panelists included new and established scholars from around the world, many of whom travelled long distances — from New Zealand, Afghanistan, Iran, India, the United States, and many European countries — to attend the conference in person. Others presented their research both to a large in-person audience and to viewers tuning in online, via Zoom.

Decades ago, Afghanistan studies were primarily dominated by external interpretations by orientalists with political and economic foci. Over the last forty years, the country has been reduced to a mere ‘zone of conflict’ and studied for security purposes with multiple strategic interests. Deciding to move away from such cliché themes, the conference consciously focused on the *continuity and the persistence of tradition, culture and identity in Afghanistan*. It provided a space for new and established female and male scholars to share their research findings beyond politics and history.

The diversity of themes, disciplines, and the geographical areas from where individual scholars have approached the themes of the conference, was proof that the field of Afghanistan studies has undergone a significant transformation over the decades. The conference not only highlighted the fact that we have entered a new era of scholarly research but also underlined the immense importance of cultural and intellectual diversity, local voices, and cross-border and international academic collaborations in this part of the world.

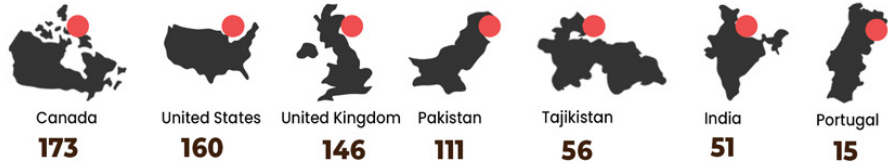


IIS Alumni Profile

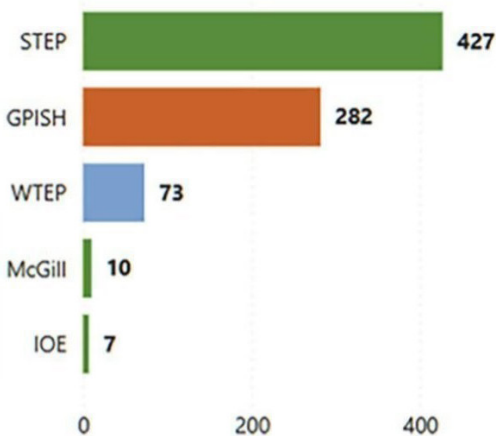
IIS Alumni at a glance

In addition to conducting the triennial survey, the Alumni Relations Unit regularly updates alumni information on employment, chapter group membership and demographics through various sources, including LinkedIn profiles and alumni portal.

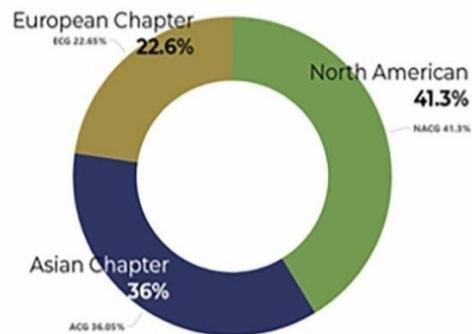
799
Alumni Worldwide



IIS Programmes



Chapter Groups

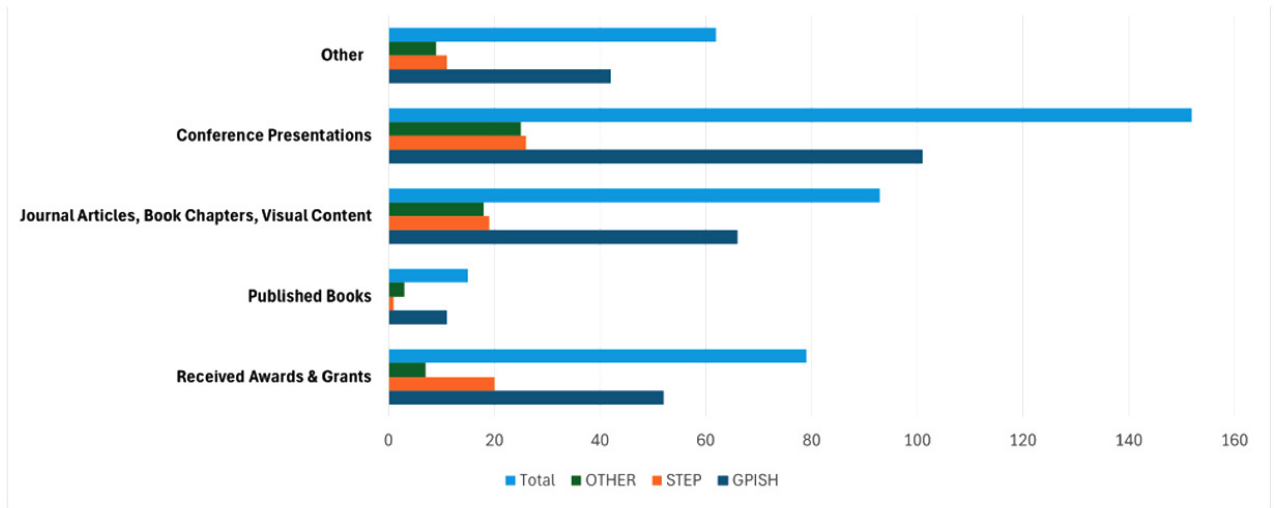


Academic Contributions

2021-2024. Data Based on alumni survey 2024

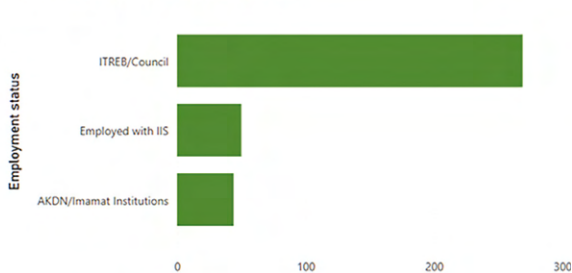


Figure 4: IIS alumni academic contributions since 2021. Data from 2024 profile survey

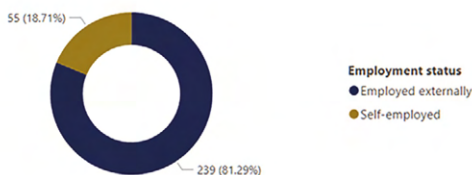


Other: Blog posts, articles for online newsletters, opinion articles in newspapers, poems, articles for digital libraries, articles for the IIS website, and articles for educators and general public.

Alumni Working with Jamati Institutions



Alumni working outside Jamati Institutions

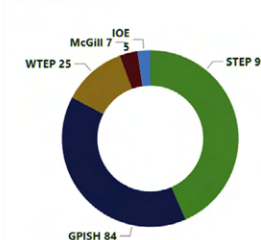


Volunteer Appointments

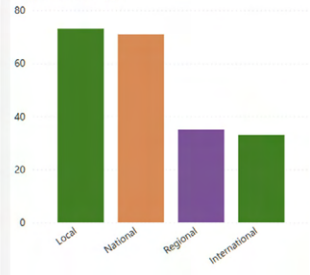
2021-2024. Within Ismaili and AKDN Institutions
Data based on alumni survey 2024



IIS Programme



Appointment Type

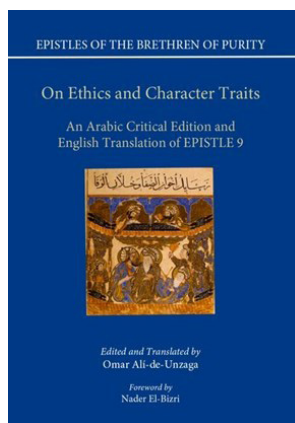


Publications



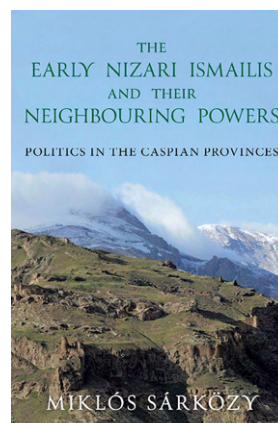
Living Ismaili Traditions

From the arrival of Hasan-i Sabbah at Alamut to the departure of Imam Hasan Ali Shah, Aga Khan I, from Iran to India, *Ismailis of Iran: History and Traditions* retraces the nearly thousand-year-long history of the Nizari Ismailis in Iran. Drawing from recent academic research and communal memory, Shayesteh Ghofrani explores the Assassin legends surrounding the Ismaili *da'i* Hasan-i Sabbah and his legendary stronghold of Alamut in the Alburz mountains. She contrasts historical literature with contemporary research to provide insight into the circumstances of the time. The author touches upon the rich tradition of *qasidas* and ghazals which have become integral to Ismaili practice in Iran and around the world, infused with the influences of mystic-poets such as Attar, Sa'di, Hafiz, Shams-i Tabrizi, and Rumi. Finally, Ghofrani follows the historical thread to the present time, showing how Ismaili traditions are reflected in both the practices and the structure of the Ismaili community today. *Ismailis in Iran* is a refreshing reflection on the lived experience of Iranian Ismailis.



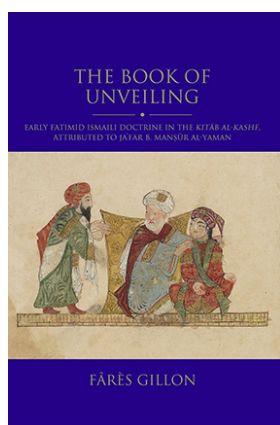
Epistles of the Brethren of Purity

On Ethics and Character Traits: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 9 is a major treatise on ethics and character traits, which drinks from two sources: the Greek tradition, especially Plato, Aristotle, and Galen; and Islamic revelation. A true repository of virtues and vices, the Epistle explores four causes for the diversity of characters, defines five types of souls, and divides society into eight classes. The authors emphasise the dichotomy “inward/outward”, elevating the guides of the inner interpretation of revelation. They also evince a sophisticated understanding of the symbolic meaning of Satan, which could be described as ‘spiritual psychology’. The concept of renunciation of worldliness dominates the second half, as do descriptions of the ‘Friends of God’ as epitomes of moral virtues. Overall, the epistle contains numerous illustrative stories, an unusual number of Qur’anic verses and hadiths, and also rare examples of pseudo-quotes from the Biblical tradition and *munājāt*-style texts.



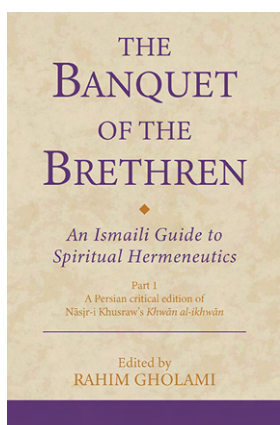
Ismaili Heritage Series

The Early Nizari Ismailis and their Neighbouring Powers: Politics in the Caspian Provinces presents a fresh investigation of the Alamut period through a detailed examination of regional Caspian histories, providing an important contribution to our understanding of the development of the early Nizari Ismailis and their Imams in Iran. The book considers the effects of neighbouring regional powers on the formation and adaptations of the Nizari state whilst it was continuously subjected to the assaults of the Saljuq Turks. The result is a new perspective on how the Nizari Ismailis were able to survive and flourish through difficult times and to establish themselves as a significant polity of the Muslim world.



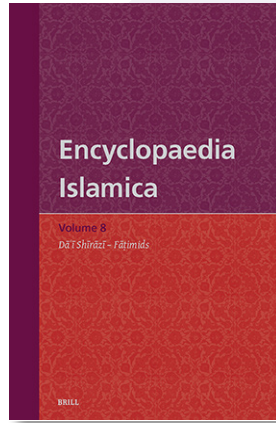
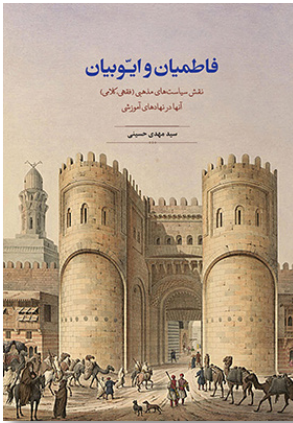
Shi'i Heritage Series

The Book of Unveiling: Early Fatimid Ismaili Doctrine in the Kitāb al-Kashf, attributed to Ja'far b. Maṣūūr al-Yaman by Fâres Gillon is one of the earliest Ismaili texts to have reached the present day. Transmitted by the Ṭayyibī Ismaili tradition, it is composed of six treatises, most of which, as this open access study and first English translation argues, go back to the early years of the Fatimid rule.



Ismaili Texts and Translation Series

The Banquet of the Brethren: An Ismaili Guide to Spiritual Hermeneutics; Part 1, A Persian critical edition of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Khwān al-Ikhwān by Rahim Gholami includes a précis of ideas found in the *Kitāb al-Yanābī' (al-ḥikma)* (The Wellsprings of Wisdom), written by the earlier *dā'ī* Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 971). Nāṣir-i Khusraw recast these ideas in Persian and then expanded them into 100 chapters (or 'courses' of a banquet). The text presents a sequence of dynamic arguments for divine unicity (*tawḥīd*), while also asserting the authority of the Prophet Muhammad, his legatee and son-in-law 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and the subsequent Imams from the line of the Prophet's descendant Ismā'īl b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.



Other publications

Fāṭimīyān wa Ayyūbiyān: naqsh-i siyāsat-hā-yi madhhabī (fiqhī, kalāmī) ānhā dar nahād-hā-yi āmūzishī is a Persian work by Sayyid Maḥdī Ḥusaynī. The first chapter provides a general introduction to the relevant topics. The second chapter explores the religious policies of the Fatimids and Ayyubids. The third chapter seeks to elucidate the nature of these religious policies, examining their underlying principles and motivations. The fourth chapter investigates the function and implementation of these policies within the educational system. Finally, the fifth chapter examines the consequences and implications of these religious policies

Encyclopaedia Islamica Volume 8 covering Ḥabīb al-ʿAjamī to al-Ḥuwayzī, contains a range of articles of an original and analytically significant nature, with special attention given to Shiʿism and Sufism. There are biographies of seminal figures in Islamic history, including the Prophet’s grandsons, Imams al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, as well as the great Persian lyric poet, Ḥāfiz; the Ithnāʿasharī scholar, al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī; the founder of the Nizārī Ismaili state in Persia, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ; and arguably the most renowned mystic in the entire history of Sufism, Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj. Regarding the esoteric traditions, there are also articles on Hujwīrī, author of *Kashf al-mahjūb*, the first Sufi manual in Persian; the early ascetic, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; the ‘sage of Herat’, Khwājah ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī Harawī; and the Malay Sufi master, Ḥamza Faṣṣūrī. Core Islamic disciplines are also addressed, including the foundations of Islamic history, scholarship, religious practice and theology, in articles on subjects such as Ḥadīth, Ḥawza ʿIlmiyya, Ḥajj, Ḥaqīqa, and Ḥayra. As with previous volumes, the articles demonstrate above all the richness of the Shiʿi traditions in Islam.

Future publications

World of Islam

Ethical Living Through Stories: Encounters with Adab
Wen-chin Ouyang

Ismaili Heritage

*The Formation of the Nizari Ismaili Tradition:
New Texts on Alamūt Literature: ‘Ahd-i Sayyidnā
and two Letters by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ*
Karim Javan

Shi‘i Heritage

Greater Khurasan
Ed. Dagikhudo Dagiev

Epistles of the Brethren of Purity

The Comprehensive Epistle, Part I
Ed. Mourad Kacimi and tr. Carmela Baffioni

On Magic, Part II (52b & c)
Godefroid de Callataÿ et al

Qur’anic Studies

Keys to the Arcana, Vol. II
Tr. Toby Mayer

Ismaili Texts and Translations

The Banquet of Brethren, Part II
Tr. Rahim Gholami

Other Publications

Fatimid Cosmopolitanism
Ed. Gregory Bilotto

Rethinking Sharia for the 21st Century
Hadi Enayat and Mohamed Keshavjee

Muslim Inheritance Jurisprudence Revisited
Mohammad Rasekh

Encyclopaedia of the Ismailis
Ed. Farhad Daftary

The Ismailis of Central Asia
Ed. Hakim Elnazarov

Catalogues

*Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts Housed at the
Institute of Ismaili Studies, Vol. 1*
Karim Javan

*A Descriptive Catalogue of Indic Manuscripts
Housed at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, Volume 1*
Wafi Momin

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