

IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference: Methodologies in Islamic Studies

21 SEPTEMBER 2023



The Institute of Ismaili Studies



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY
(International) in the United Kingdom
Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

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Welcome Notes

Welcome to the inaugural IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference: Methodologies in Islamic Studies. It is the first time that graduate students from the two institutes housed in the Aga Khan Centre have come together to create the opportunity for their peers to share their research with the broader community. It is a great pleasure to support this initiative.

We are delighted to host this conference that celebrates the spirit of inquiry of aspiring scholars.

Across the two Institutes, students have gathered to share their research across a diverse range of topics in Islamic studies and the study of Muslim societies. Today's event will showcase eleven young scholars presenting their work. It was conceived as an exchange of ideas, and I look forward to seeing both the presentations and the discussions that they provoke, whether in the conference room or over refreshments.

In the ever-evolving landscape of knowledge, the work of graduate students is of great value and not to be underestimated. Whether on medieval or contemporary Ismaili communities, Islamic history or the many ways in which Islam is lived and experienced in the world, these papers contribute to our understanding of our heritage and of Muslim communities in the 21st century. I am extremely thankful for the time that our presenters have put into these sessions and am impressed with and proud of the team who coordinated the conference itself. I would like to give a special shout out to Aqil Visram, who conceptualised the idea of a student-led conference and who has put in countless hours of work towards its realisation so that it could be the best conference possible given the parameters he had to work with.

Thank you to all attendees, in person and online: I look forward to your participation in the conversations stimulated by today's event.

Professor Zayn Kassam

Director

The Institute of Ismaili Studies



In today's world, there are about 2 billion Muslims. Islam, the religion that grew out of the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century, exists in all corners of the world. The contemporary demographic focus is in South and Southeast Asia. The largest Muslim population in one country is in Indonesia and Islam is the largest religious minority within a single state, found in India. However, the history of the religion is intimately connected to the region that is today called the Middle East, where many of the texts that formed the foundation for Islam originated.

In most of Europe and North America, the religion of Islam was for a long time something distant and exotic for most people. Today, Islam and Muslims are part of most societies. In geographical terms, the contemporary 'Muslim world' includes Muslims in the urban areas of capital cities in Europe as well as countries of Muslim majority. The connections between different parts of the world, through migration and the flow of ideas and trade, make it problematic to divide the global context into separate geographic and cognitive 'worlds' such as an 'Islamic' one and one called 'the West'. In recent decades, Islam and Muslims have been increasingly present in societies and most people are aware of terms like *shari'a*, movements like the Islamic State and al-Qa'ida and/or have a knowledge of Islamist leaders like Osama bin Ladin (d. 2011).

In response to these developments, the academic study of Islam and Muslims at European and American universities has expanded greatly. It has become a passionately debated and divided field, developed from several academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, history and political science. Additionally, knowledge about Islam and Muslims has increased in Europe and North America on a public level. Various Islamic practices have a larger presence and Muslim communities are more common in European societies today.

In conclusion, Islamic Studies examines recent developments in scholarly disciplines that study Muslim societies in both past and present. This is vital in today's world in order to foster harmony across peoples. The research of all our students is of great importance, and I would like to thank all of you who have organised this conference.

Professor Leif Stenberg

Dean

Aga Khan University – Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations



Welcome to the inaugural IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference: Methodologies in Islamic Studies, the first-ever graduate conference showcasing student research at the Institute of Ismaili Studies and the Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations. This event marks a significant milestone, fostering cross-institutional dialogue and collaboration within the realm of Islamic studies.

This conference serves as a beacon of scholarly excellence, highlighting the remarkable contributions of emerging voices in the field of Islamic Studies from the IIS and AKU. Our panels delve into medieval and contemporary Ismaili community histories, explore new ways of envisioning Muslim pasts, and illuminate various forms of Muslim cultural expression. Collectively, the inaugural IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference offers a rich tapestry of perspectives that collectively enrich our understanding.

With an unwavering commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, we celebrate the diligent efforts of our presenters whose research advances the discourse on methodologies. We are also grateful to our esteemed selection committee of established and emerging scholars for ensuring the highest quality of presentations.

In the spirit of fostering cross-institutional dialogue and engaging wider communities, we invite you to participate actively in the discussions, share insights, and forge connections that transcend this event. Whether attending in person or virtually, your presence adds immeasurable value to this global platform.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to The Institute of Ismaili Studies and Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations for their support in bringing this conference to fruition. Let us connect, learn, and celebrate together as we navigate the diverse and vibrant world of Islamic Studies.

Welcome, and may our shared exploration ignite new perspectives and open doors to endless possibilities!

Aqil Visram

Convenor, IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference
On behalf of the Conference Organising Committee



Aqil Visram



Sana Alsayed



Saad Barcha



Qays Batada

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

9:30-9:45 BST Welcoming Remarks by Prof. Zayn Kassam, Director, IIS

9:45-10:35 BST **Panel I: Contemporary Ismaili Communities** | Chair: Dr. Laila Halani, IIS

Understanding the Formation and Perception of Identities among the Gupti Ismailis of Gujarat: The Case of the Guptis of Khambhat
Qays Batada, IIS-GPISH 2024

Examining the Aga Khan Garden Edmonton Using a Critical Theory of Place-Conscious Inquiry
Hanifa Hakimi, IIS-STEP C14

10:35-10:50 BST **Health break**

10:50-12:30 BST **Panel II: Living Islam and Muslim Engagements with the World**
Chair: Prof. Jonas Otterbeck, AKU-ISMC

Folklore and its Audiences: A Case Study of Hir-Ranjha through the Works of Bulleh Shah
Anusha Ali, IIS-GPISH 2023

Transformative Powers of Qawwali through a Performance Framework
Saad Barcha, IIS-GPISH 2025

Methodological Utilisation of the Concept of “essential accidents” in Islamic Philosophy: Insights from Ibn Khaldun and Muhammad Abduh
Hossein Mousavi, AKU-ISMC 2023

Visuality, Experience, and the Invisible in Muslim Material Culture
Farhan Feroz Ali, IIS-GPISH 2023

12:30-2:00 BST **Lunch**

2:00-3:15 BST **Panel III: Rethinking Islamic History** | Chair: Dr. Shainool Jiwa, IIS

A System of International Relations in the Precolonial Islamic World
George Beck, AKU-ISMC 2023

First Islamic Hospital: Myth or Reality?
Muhammad Ali, IIS-GPISH 2025

Time Out of History: Islam and the Ghayb
Uzair Ibrahim, Alumnus, IIS Doctoral Scholarship Recipient, University of Exeter

THURSDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

3:15-3:45 BST **Health break**

3:45-5:00 BST **Panel IV: Medieval Ismailis and Peoples Under Their Rule** | Chair: Dr. Farhad Daftary, IIS

"I did not purchase anything for him because of the prevailing hunger, and because food prices were higher in the countryside (al-Rīf) compared to Fustāt": History from Below, Geniza Documents, and the Egyptian Famines in 10th-12th Centuries

Yusuf M Umrethwala, AKU-ISMC 2023

Al-Ghazali's Doctrinal Confrontation with the Ismailis

Muhammad Salim, IIS-GPISH 2024

Methodological Approaches to the Post-Mongol Ismailism: The Case Study of Nizari Quhistani (d. 1320)

Kasra Shiva, IIS-GPISH 2023

5:00-5:15 BST **Closing Remarks by Prof. Leif Stenberg, Dean, AKU-ISMC**

5:15-5:30 BST **Stretch break**

5:30-6:15 BST **Musical Aesthetics of the Muslim World**

A collaborative endeavour of the South Asian Studies Unit (DARP, IIS) and the Association for the Study of Ginans

Speaker Biographies



Anusha Ali

Anusha's academic career started with a thesis that focused on Spaces of Imagination, formed and found at thresholds of the real and unreal, an interest that led her to GPISH. She explored the human imaginary through folktales, and is currently learning ways to transform this foray into the imaginary into a visual language.



Muhammad Ali

Ali, a dedicated scholar, is pursuing his MA in Islamic Studies at the esteemed Institute of Ismaili Studies and SOAS. Intrigued by digital platforms' impact on collective memory within the realm of civil society, he aspires to contribute significantly to academia through rigorous research and enriching discourse.



Saad Barcha

Saad is dedicated to exploring the rich tapestry of diverse cultures in the Muslim world and the unravelling cultural intricacies, through delving into languages, poetry, and music as avenues to understand and celebrate the multifaceted beauty of these societies, offering fresh insights into their vibrant heritage and fostering cross-cultural understanding.



Qays Batada

Qays Batada is pursuing the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) at the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Currently, Qays is studying for an MSc in International Development and Humanitarian Emergencies at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His research interests include Islam in South Asia and Ismaili history and thought.



George Beck

George Beck comes to the dual degree program between Columbia and AKU-ISMC after having completed his Juris Doctor at St. John's University School of Law. His research interests revolve around better understanding the structures underpinning trade and international relations in the Islamic world before the advent of the nation-state.



Farhan Feroz Ali

Farhan graduated as a designer in 2015, worked five years in the field of architecture in Pakistan before joining GPISH, and is currently studying history of art and architecture of Islamic Middle East. His interests lie in exploring embodied aesthetics, and devotional practices in the South Asian region.



Hanifa Hakimi

Hanifa Hakimi is a STEP educator based in Quebec, Canada. She graduated from Concordia University with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. She also has a Bachelor of Education from the University of British Columbia. Hakimi will be presenting her STEP MA dissertation in which she examined the Aga Khan Garden, Edmonton from a critical theory of place-conscious perspective.



Uzair Ibrahim

Uzair Ibrahim is currently a Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholar in Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. His research focuses on the narrative of Za'far the jinni, employing tools from anthropology, history, philosophy, and critical theory. Uzair holds an MA in South Asian Studies from SOAS and a BSc in Social Development and Policy from Habib University, Pakistan.



Hossein Mousavi

Hossein Mousavi is a philosophy graduate student with a background in Islamic intellectual history. He joined ISMC in September 2022 to explore the diverse aspects of Muslimness, particularly the interplay between politics and culture. His MA thesis delves into the social identity of Islamist grass roots in Iran.



Muhammad Salim

Muhammad Salim is a 3rd-year GPISH student. Currently, he is studying for an MSc in Science, Technology and Society at University College London. Muhammad did his undergraduate degree in Social Development and Policy with a Minor in Philosophy at Habib University Karachi, Pakistan. His research interests include medieval Muslim intellectual traditions, Islam in cyberspace, politicization of religion(s) in virtual space and philosophy of technology.



Kasra Shiva

Kasra Shiva has a Master's in Islamic Studies and History from the Department of Asian & Middle Eastern Studies at Oxford University (2023). He joined the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) in 2020. His field of interest covers Persian medieval literature and Ismaili history.



Yusuf Umrethwala

Yusuf Umrethwala is pursuing his dual Master's in Islamic Studies at Columbia University and Master's in Muslim Cultures at AKU-ISMC. He is a research assistant at the Princeton Geniza Lab and is currently working as a visiting researcher at Princeton University with Prof. Marina Rustow. His Master's thesis examines "Written Petitions and the Administration of Justice in Fatimid Egypt."



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