
THE INSTITUTE OF ISMAILI STUDIES

UPDATE



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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Accessible Series**Published by:** Department of Communications and Development, The Institute of Ismaili Studies**Managing Editor:** Aqil Dhanani | **Editors:** Lisa Morgan, Tara Woolnough, and Russell Harris**Designed by:** Stephanie de Howes.**Front Cover:** THE ILLUMINATED CARPET, 2019 by Elisabeth Deane. Italian gold leaf, palladium leaf, shell gold, natural pigments and Arabic gum on handmade Indian hemp paper. 146 x 94 cm. Photo credit: Justin Piperger. Private collection. Part of *The Quran: Form, Fragrance, & Feeling* at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery.

The conceptual basis of the Institute's symbol is the word 'Allah'. Visually, the interlacing design incorporates the numbers three, five, and seven which are of special significance in Islam. The overall pattern, which is in Kufic calligraphic style, is centred on the figure five in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu.

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In Memoriam

Welcome



**Professor Zayn Kassam,
Director**

As I approach the end of my first year as Director of the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), I find myself reflecting on 2023 and the achievements of the Institute. This year has confirmed what I already knew: that there are inspiring and committed people in every department at IIS, regardless of the role they occupy, whether they be students, designers, teachers, researchers, librarians, or support staff. Their work towards our mandate has continued to impress me as we have extended our academic and accessible outputs and pursued exciting new projects. At the same time, we are refining our next ten-year strategy that will ensure we continue to support the needs of the global Ismaili Jamat in the third decade of the twenty-first century.

To navigate the circumstances of the present, and to bolster our foundations for the future for the community, we are preserving as well as producing materials that are grounded in knowledge. The Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU) was founded in 2013 and manages the heritage collections housed within the Aga Khan Centre (AKC) while working with local Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards (ITREBs) to steward the resources under their care. ISCU staff are also collecting oral histories and creating a platform where people can upload accounts of their families and photographs, which we will curate and eventually make accessible. Earlier this year, ISCU launched a video series in which scholars share insights into manuscripts in the collection which has been extremely well received.

In 2023 we have published one book in each of our accessible series, World of Islam (WI) and Living Ismaili Traditions (LIT). In the latest WI publication, *The Fatimids 2: The Rule from Egypt*, Dr Shainool Jiwa continues the story of the Fatimids begun in her previous publication, *The Fatimids 1: The Rise of a Muslim Empire*, which details the Fatimid impact on history, archaeology, philosophy, linguistics, and more. In the newest book in the LIT Series, *Experiences of the Jamatkhana: Stories of the East African Jamat*, Dr Aliaa Remtilla explores how life for East African Ismailis revolved around the Jamatkhana space and how that space grew and evolved with the Jamat.

We have also published several academic titles this year: *The Emergence of Shi'i Sufism* by Dr Alessandro Cancian; Professor Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi's *The Proof of God*, translated into English by Drs Maria de Cillis and Orkhan Mir Kasimov; and *Women, Households, and the Hereafter in the Qur'an* by Drs Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza. Meanwhile, Dr Farhad Daftary is busy on his two encyclopaedia projects: *Encyclopaedia Islamica* and *Encyclopaedia of the Ismailis*.

At AKC we have hosted several conferences. Notably, for the first time, graduate students from both IIS and the Aga Khan University's Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC) came together for our first IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Student Conference. This was student-led and organised by a small group of young people from both institutes. The presentations were well prepared and of high calibre, and I am proud that we were able to support and nurture the next generation of scholars in this way. We have also hosted a two-day conference titled, *Rethinking Texts and their Contexts in Muslim Societies*, organised by Dr Wafi Momin, and a two-day colloquium titled, *Shi'i Encounters with the Mu'tazila*, organised by our Shi'i Studies Unit headed by Dr Gurdofarid Miskinzoda.

Our new secondary curriculum module, *Connecting Worlds*, was published this year. It examines the transformations that took place in Muslim societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, engaging with themes such as the shifting power dynamics in Muslim states with the spread of colonialism and redefining of notions of authority. It is available both in print and on our digital curriculum platform.

Through the Department of Community Relations, the Institute continues to enhance the capacity of ITREBs to fulfil their mandate. We do this through training and professional development initiatives for a wide range of educators including wa'ezeen, academic directors and secondary RE teachers in the field, as well as primary-level teacher educators. Our collaboration with ITREBs remains an important channel through which our intellectual and academic output reaches the Jamat.

In addition to the short courses offered online and at AKC, we also offered three immersive short courses that took participants to Tunisia (*Walking in the Footsteps of the Fatimids*), Portugal (*Religious Symbolism in Islamic Art and Architecture*), and Tanzania (*Ismaili Communities in Migration: The East African Experience*). Nearly 100 Ismailis from across the world attended the field-based courses. While these will be on hiatus for 2024, we hope to offer them again in future years.

I am extremely proud of the two exhibitions held at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery this year. The current exhibition is titled, *The Quran: Form, Fragrance & Feeling*. It includes items from the Aga Khan Library and ISCU and is a striking multisensory experience that explores the impact of the Quran on Muslim literature, poetry, and culture. It highlights the diversity of artistic expressions inspired by the Quran, including calligraphy, painting, wood-block carving, printing, textiles, and ceramics.

This year we sadly marked the passing of two preeminent IIS scholars. Aitmedi Dr Mohamad Ismail Adra was one of our founding fathers, playing a role in the discussions leading up to the foundation of IIS and in the review of research in the Qur'anic and Hadith studies in its early years. He was a scholar and translator who published an English translation of Fatimid Chief Da'i al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi's collection of poems. Professor Wilferd Madelung, whose association with IIS spanned over two decades, greatly enriched our understanding of early Shi'ism, and he edited many Ismaili texts that were previously unknown. In the words of Dr Omar Ali de Unzaga, "He has had a deep impact on the study of Ismaili doctrines and history and his legacy will be long-lasting." In July, we hosted a celebration of Professor Madelung's life and work with scholars from around the world paying tribute to his contributions to Islamic Studies.

The scale of achievements in the Institute's first forty-six years is immense: it helped to establish Ismaili studies as a field in its own right, created resources for the Ismaili community to engage with its own heritage and literature, and brought some gems of Muslim civilisation to a wider audience. There is yet much to accomplish, and I am excited about the work we will do together in 2024 and beyond and am grateful for your ongoing support of the Institute and its mission.

Voices of Impact

**Ruth Francis, Interim Head,
Department of Communications and Development**

The Institute of Ismaili Studies has had a significant impact in the forty-six years since its founding. Five years after moving into our stunning new building, the Aga Khan Centre, a small selection of IIS's amazing community share their stories of how a millennium-long history and the challenges of the modern world are being addressed by the great minds with whom we are so fortunate to work.



Dr Fayaz S Alibhai

**Research Associate and
Co-ordinator of the Ismaili
Heritage Project**

Heritage can be lost in many ways, deliberately and through neglect.

In our work to document Ismaili heritage both from the distant past and more recent times, we underpin the strength of communities by protecting their collective memories and histories. More than a thousand sites documented in our database remind us of our heritage and the impact of Ismailis as Shi'a and as Muslims both in the past and in the contemporary world. The work of the project led directly to the publication of *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History*, by Dr Farhad Daftary, and is increasingly incorporated into our teaching, into heritage tours, new books, brochures, pamphlets, blogs, and newsletters.



◆ The courtyard of al-Azhar Mosque, showing the extant Fatimid portal, Cairo, Egypt. Courtesy of Russell Harris, 2018 for the Ismaili Heritage Project.



◆ 1975 Meeting in Paris to discuss the establishment of what would become IIS. From ISCU.



Dr Gurdofarid Miskinzoda
Head of the Shi'i Studies Unit

Collaborating with a diverse group of scholars from around the world is a gift that we deeply cherish. We strive to cultivate and enhance these relationships and broaden our network of colleagues and institutions globally. Within the Institute, the faculty possess an exceptional ability in teaching to extend their specialised knowledge beyond the subject matter. The design of course modules is centred around affording students the opportunity to engage in critical explorations of key concepts in Islam and to explore the interconnected disciplines that contribute to the field. The team demonstrates a genuine dedication to the holistic development of our students as adult learners.



Dr Hakim Elnazarov
Head of the Central Asian Studies Unit

The study of Central Asian cultures, dissemination of knowledge about the traditions of the Central Asian Muslims, and provision of intellectual resources for the community in the region have been an integral part of IIS's endeavour in the last twenty years. We have produced publications in Russian, Tajik, Chinese, and English that are accessible both to Central Asian communities and to academics. Our scholars have undertaken extensive research in Central Asia, documenting the oral traditions of the Ismaili communities in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, generated from over 2,000 interviews that we are now analysing and making accessible to the Jamat through publications, the Ta'lim curriculum, and other forms of educational materials.



◆ Maria De Cillis teaching graduate students. Photo credit: Jonathan Goldberg.



◆ Vladimir Ivanow exhibition in St. Petersburg, 2019. Students of the Ta'lim curriculum are attending the exhibition. Courtesy of NUR organisation, Moscow.



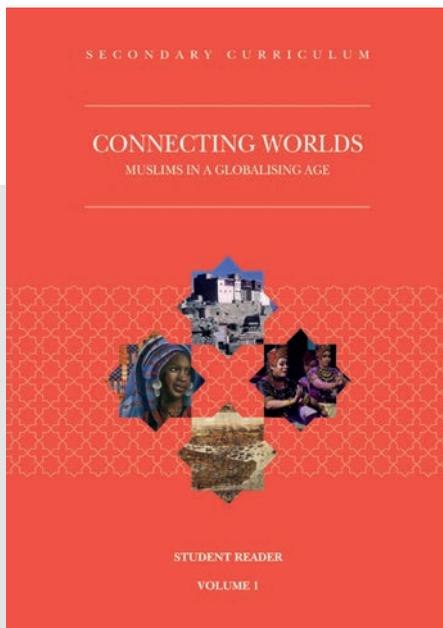
Dr Nadia Eboo Jamal
Board of Governors

The secondary curriculum tells the tale of Muslim societies and civilisations, and of their encounters and connections with other communities and societies through time. It connects a present rooted in the past and a past shaping the present, recounting the rich spiritual, intellectual, and cultural legacy of Muslims from all over the world. It enables a sensitivity to the spiritual dimension in human existence, guiding students in the formation of attitudes, values, and ethical principles so that they understand the role of faith in their daily lives. The curriculum also develops conceptual frameworks situating the Ismaili Imam, the authority and mandate of the Imam of the Time. It encourages an understanding of Ismaili heritage and contexts, its history, intellectual and spiritual traditions, customs and cultures, situated within the broader mosaic of Muslim and Shi'i diversities.



Davlatbakht Qiyomiddinova
STEP Teacher

The Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) provided me with a unique opportunity to become a reflective teacher as I learned how to apply effective teaching and learning methods in teaching students in different contexts. My cohort of STEP teacher trainees was very diverse. We represented a variety of cultures as well as academic and professional backgrounds. Studying together enabled us to engage with each other's assorted educational and life experiences, to embrace and to better understand diversity, and to transform as people and practitioners. The nurturing environment in which I was educated, and in which I am employed, motivates me to work hard and take a similar approach and nurture in my students a sense of belonging in the community.



◆ *Connecting Worlds: Muslims in a Globalising Age.* The newest Secondary Ta'lim module.



◆ Davlatbakht Qiyomiddinova presenting to IIS staff and stakeholders. Photo credit: Rehana Virani.



Zulfiqar Khimani
 Manager, Educational Programmes

It takes time, resources, and scholarly dedication to nurture a community of teachers capable of profoundly impacting the religious development of the community. To this end, we provide teachers and their mentors with extensive continuing professional and leadership development programmes to improve their teaching and educational management skills. In addition, our programmes, delivered in multiple languages, enhance the capacity of the professional staff of the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards (ITREBs), wa'ezeen, and Jamati leaders. My colleagues and I are passionate about lifelong learning and knowledge sharing. Our mission is to empower the Jamat through our teachers, wa'ezeen, ITREB professional staff, and leaders to help the community better engage with their faith in a meaningful and purposeful manner.

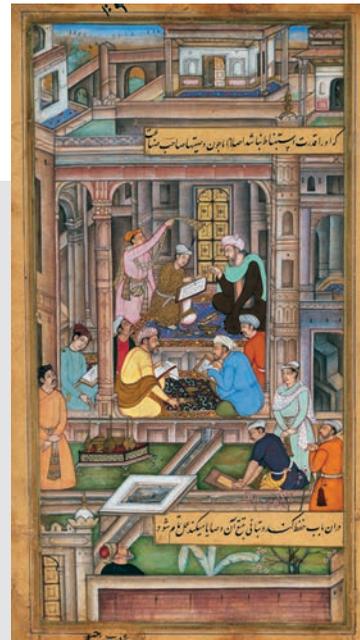


Uzair Ibrahim
 GPISH Graduate, Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholarship recipient

I applied for the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) because I had a teacher who opened up hidden vistas of Ismaili history to me and who had been a GPISH student himself. When I arrived in London, I met other graduates with similar experiences. Much of IIS's work can be said to be related to the hidden: documenting Ismaili heritage sites; bringing Shi'i studies to the fore; properly understanding contexts such as Central Asia; introducing our Jamat to the hidden treasures of our past and present through the curricula, teacher training, and competency building. This involves uncovering, revealing, and unravelling what has become obscured as a result of sometimes deliberate obfuscation or simply because not enough attention has been paid to it. IIS is supporting people like me to actively remedy this.



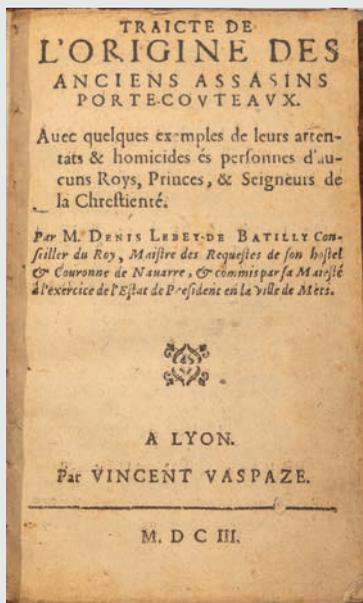
◆ A meeting of international ITREB members in Dubai, UAE.



◆ Illustration from *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* dated 1590-1595. From the Aga Khan Museum. Public domain.

Ten Years of ISCU

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

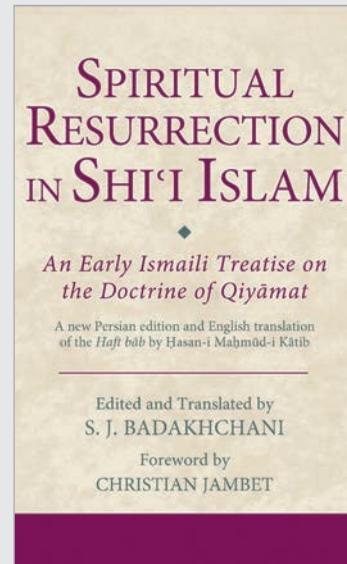
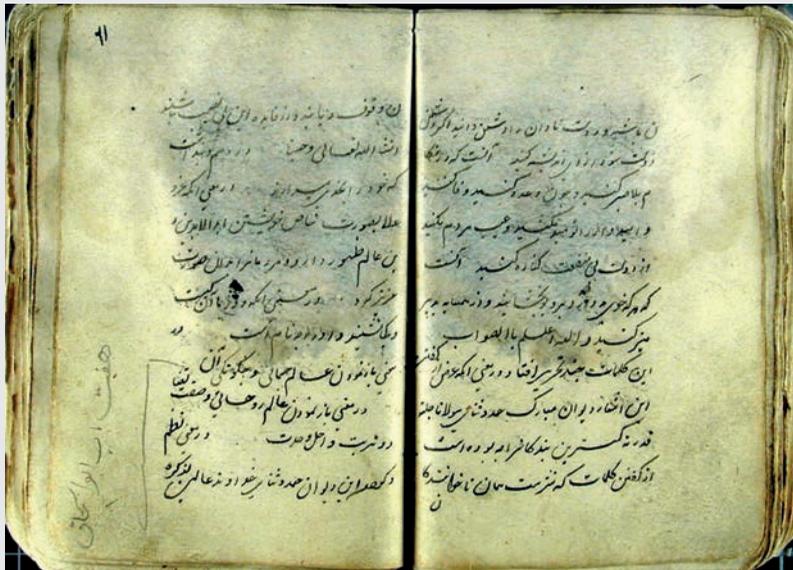


ISCU was also formed to study and facilitate research on these materials, and to contribute to IIS's vision of promoting and disseminating scholarship on the heritage of Ismaili and other communities. The heritage and special collections consist of manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, and Indic languages, as well as coins and artefacts, archives, rare and special printed materials, photographs, audio-visual and digital collections, among others.

Over the last ten years, the heritage collections have continued to grow through active acquisitions and generous donations from members of the Ismaili communities and other scholarly families. In addition, we have continued to receive heritage materials as loans from the Ismaili Imam which are being used for our research and educational programmes. Our approach towards collections development during this time has also entailed developing capacities within our sister institutions, like the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards, to work in partnership towards creating an awareness about the urgent need to preserve heritage collections globally at a time when such heritage in its varied forms has been adversely affected due to climatic changes, migration, displacement, war, and other factors.

◆ A rare book by Denis Lebey de Batilly, published in Lyon in 1603, dealing with the topic of Assassins and Nizari Ismailis (acquired 2019).

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the creation of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU). The Unit was established in 2013 as part of the Institute’s continuing endeavours to systematically preserve, develop, digitise, and catalogue heritage and special collections housed at IIS.



◆ An image from a *Haft Bab* manuscript, and the critical edition and translation of the text published by IIS in 2017.

TEN YEARS OF ISCU

In the past decade, our heritage collections have continued to be at the heart of the research, publication, and educational programmes undertaken at IIS. Many of the Institute's publications, like those in the Ismaili Texts and Translations Series, are directly based on these sources and such publications aim to make manuscript sources available to a broader readership through critical editions and translations. A large body of our heritage and special collections is also accessible through our online catalogue, launched in 2021, now featuring over 4,000 items along with the digital images of hundreds of these items. Together with our annotated print catalogues of manuscript collections, this searchable online catalogue provides an important access point for information about the heritage and special collections.

Our heritage collections have, furthermore, regularly featured in exhibitions curated at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery, as well as in teaching and learning activities

and educational sessions conducted by the ISCU team for our students, for participants of short courses, and for our supporters. One of the "bestseller" sessions is that in which students explore the varied facets of Ismaili history and Islamic civilisation through the lens of heritage collections. Pedagogically, such sessions unpack the complex layers of history embedded within each of the manuscripts and artefacts, and transport students through time and space, allowing them to better appreciate the historical significance and contemporary relevance of such objects. More recently, ISCU has launched, in partnership with the Department of Communications and Development, a short video series, "Islamic Heritage Past and Present", featuring illuminating discussions about manuscripts and other collections by specialists. We have also embarked on a robust programme of collecting and preserving oral histories of Ismaili communities globally, facets of which will be continually shared through a podcast series.

◆ Dr Wafi Momin conducting an educational session. Photo credit: ISCU/IIS.





◆ Presenters at Rethinking Texts and their Contexts in Muslim Societies. Photo Credit: Rehana Virani.

It was very timely for ISCU to organise its second conference, on the theme Rethinking Texts and their Contexts in Muslim Societies, held on 23–24 October 2023. This interdisciplinary conference featured a keynote address by Professor Wendy Doniger, a pre-eminent scholar of Hinduism and the history of religions at the University of Chicago. Additionally, specialists and younger scholars from a variety of disciplines presented papers and held discussions on the diverse trajectories and contexts of texts in Muslim societies, from oral cultures and manuscripts to print technology and the digital age. They examined how texts have shaped knowledge production, dissemination, and consumption in Muslim societies.

As we look ahead, we are excited to build upon our work and programmes, and we are inspired to continue our endeavours to preserve our heritage, to conduct research, and to disseminate knowledge and educational materials for the benefit of our diverse constituencies and stakeholders.

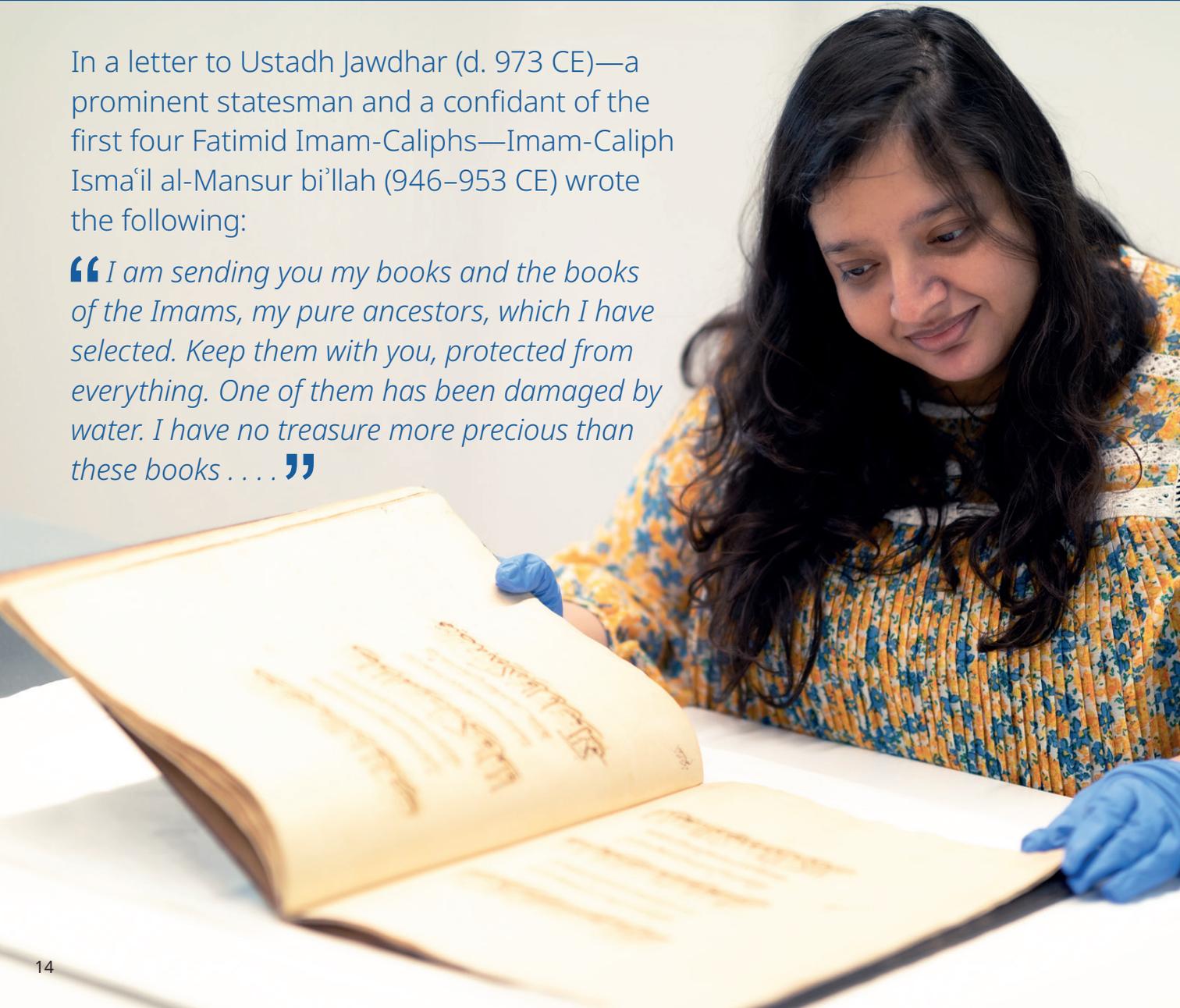
Preservation Initiatives for Ismaili Special Collections

**Naureen Ali, Cataloguer and Adlib System Officer,
Ismaili Special Collections Unit**

Photos by Rehana Virani

In a letter to Ustadh Jawdhar (d. 973 CE)—a prominent statesman and a confidant of the first four Fatimid Imam-Caliphs—Imam-Caliph Isma‘il al-Mansur bi’llah (946–953 CE) wrote the following:

“*I am sending you my books and the books of the Imams, my pure ancestors, which I have selected. Keep them with you, protected from everything. One of them has been damaged by water. I have no treasure more precious than these books . . .*”



This is just a short extract from *Sīrat ul-Ustād Jawdhar*, a biographical account compiled by Jawdhar’s private secretary, Abu ‘Ali Mansur al-‘Azizi al-Jawdhari, around 975–996 CE which includes archival material such as correspondences and letters from the Imams to Jawdhar, spanning over sixty years of Fatimid rule. *Sīrat ul-Ustād Jawdhar* has been translated by Hamid Haji as part of the Ismaili Texts and Translations Series, titled *Inside the Immaculate Portal*.

The extract highlights the importance that was placed on caring for the treasure trove which that particular special collection of books represented more than a millennium ago. The letter speaks of the Imam-Caliph’s concern over water damage to his books, and this is just one of many factors that can lead to the deterioration of such collections. Other factors include dust, pests, insecticides, and red rot, to name a few. Besides being a risk to the items themselves, they pose a hazard to those handling them. Consequently, managing these factors is key not only in preserving collections but in protecting the health of those working with them.



◆ A conserved page of a manuscript with cracking along the inked text resulting in loss of text, which can worsen with handling in its prior state.

Let us now turn to our special collections at IIS and consider our own care initiatives. How do we care for these weary travellers that have been passed down to us and need special attention as we avail ourselves of the knowledge they hold?

Over the years, IIS has implemented various initiatives to care for its own special collections (“special collections” here being a term that refers to items that are rare and considered to be significant to the Ismaili and other Muslim communities). One such initiative was the establishment of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU) in 2013. This unit was tasked with preserving this collection and facilitating its study for research and for educational initiatives.

ISCU houses a manuscript of *Sīrat ul-Ustād Jawdhar*, along with close to 3,000 other rare texts in Arabic, Persian, and Indic. Other items included in the special collections are rare printed material, coins and weights, and memorabilia, as well as other artefacts, photographs, and audio-visual materials.

Let us take a look at what is involved in caring for, and preserving, these collections. The process begins upon receipt of heritage materials, when they are checked for fragility and for any signs of deteriorating factors and/or hazards such as mould, dust, and powders. Depending on their condition, they may be sent for specialised cleaning to ensure they are safe for handling by staff and researchers.



◆ Page from a manuscript where pest damage has caused significant loss of paper which would continue to deteriorate with further handling without any conservation initiatives.

PRESERVATION INITIATIVES FOR ISMAILI SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Besides preservation initiatives, which are more preventive in nature, items may need to be conserved to repair deterioration, a task that requires specialist analysis and attention. Along with these initiatives, care is taken to protect the items in the special collections. So, depending on their specific requirements, they are stored in acid-free paper and boxes in a dedicated, stable environment where elements such as temperature and humidity are carefully controlled to limit further deterioration.

Once these steps are completed, heritage materials, depending on their conditions, are processed for access and study. A small selection of tools used in the preservation process is shown below.



Handling collections responsibly upon access is a significant aspect of collection care. The following components are part of this exercise when the items are consulted for study.



◆ Acid-free boxes and acid-free tissue paper help to protect the heritage material from environmental damage and help to stabilise the storage environment.



◆ Snake weights help hold down the pages of special items without placing extra pressure on the items.



◆ A manuscript of *Sirat ul-Ustad Jawdhar*, copied c. 19th century, sits on cushions which support the manuscript when it is open, especially its spine

During the course of my work, I have found a printer's mark (pictured below) from a seventeenth-century rare book to be an inspiring symbol of the collaboration involved in the material production of knowledge. As per one perspective, it is said to depict a scholar near a vine-entwined elm tree bearing the fruit of knowledge. The image, along with the Latin phrase "non solus" ("Not alone") is meant to represent the collaboration of scholars and publishers in creating and then disseminating knowledge. But beyond that, it is important to remember that there is another level of collaboration, which comes about with the preservation of knowledge. This requires various people working together on different levels—the donors who provide the collection items, the institutions that house and preserve them, the staff that work dedicatedly to care for the collections, and the scholars and readers who ensure best practices in handling the items while consulting them.



◆ Gloves protect the item from the oils on our fingers and protect the wearer from any potential contaminants in the collection.



◆ The printer's mark from *Itinerarium Benjaminis*, Benjamin of Tudela (1633)

In this spirit, we at ISCU welcome you to delve into these collections, and we look forward to working with you as we each play our own part in preserving the collection items even as we extract the fruits of their knowledge.

Visit iis.ac.uk/special-collections

Coming Out into the Light: The Ismaili Heritage Project

Dr Fayaz S Alibhai, Co-ordinator of the Ismaili Heritage Project



It would be another 200 years before the Ismaili Imams emerged in the period of the Anjudan Revival. This hiding was as necessary for Ismaili survival and independence as much as it was an act of freedom from the misunderstanding of others. And even though we have now come out into the light, Alamut reminds us of our hidden (often even to ourselves!) history and heritage.

“ The disappearance of physical traces of the past deprives us of more than memories. How do we protect the past and inspire the future? ”

His Highness the Aga Khan, 2003

We have seen increasing geopolitical conflict over the last ten years, rising tension between countries and peoples of Sunni, Shi'i, and, indeed, other beliefs. Material culture is often the first casualty of war and conflict. Destroy heritage and you begin erasing individual identities. You erode the strength of communities. You forget collective memories and histories. Whereas deliberate destruction is one thing, lack of knowledge about our history is another. Add in the threat from neglect, lack of access, and, increasingly, climate change, and it becomes easier to understand the vital role of heritage in human flourishing.

◆ Photo credit Rehana Virani

On 19 November 1256, 767 years ago, Rukn al-Din Khurshah, the twenty-seventh Ismaili Imam, and eighth and final lord of Alamut, descended from the castle of Maymun-Diz in Iran and surrendered to the Mongols. Alamut submitted a week later. The Mongols took over, sacking Ismaili castles, burning libraries, and displacing and massacring thousands. Not for the first time in Ismaili history, the Ismaili Imams went into hiding.

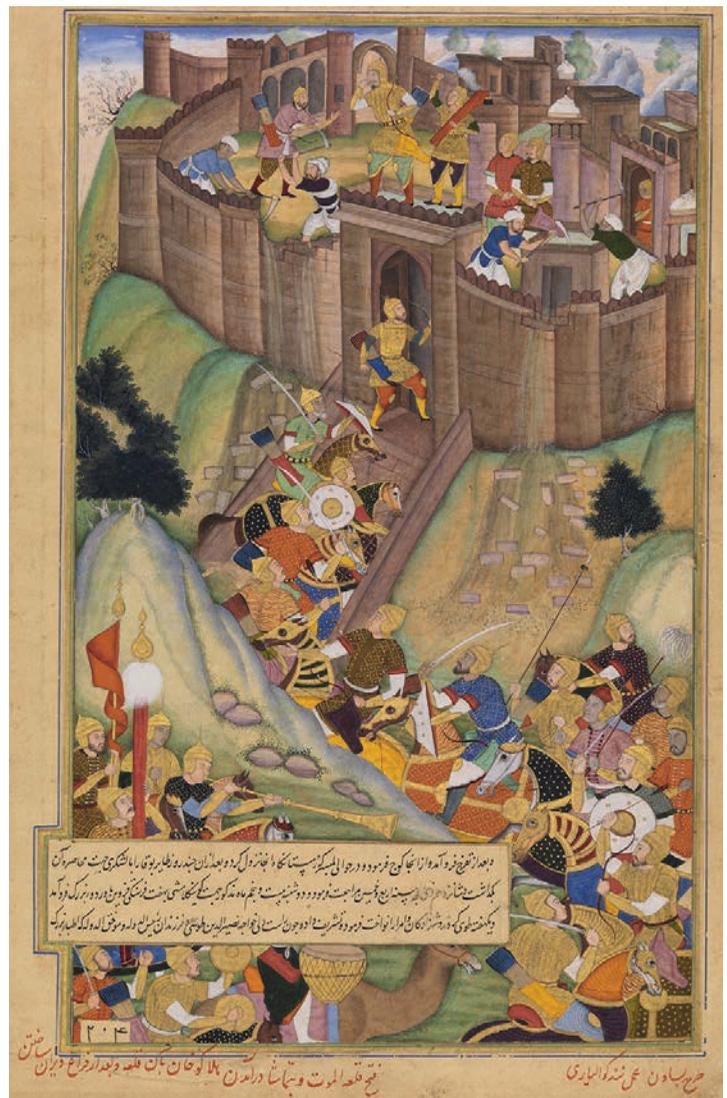
Why is heritage important?

Heritage is not about idolising the past. It is about how we understand the past through the lens of our present and prepare our children for the future. Every day at IIS, we gather to learn, to protect, and to celebrate this heritage.

The Ismaili Heritage (IH) project focuses on the built heritage of the Jamat. Since 2015, it has been a joint project between IIS in London, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) in Geneva, and the Jamat, as represented by the Department of Jamati Institutions (DJI) in Lisbon and the Leaders International Forum (LIF).

The project is guided by key principles from His Highness the Aga Khan, who wanted us to do three things:

- develop an “encyclopaedic database” of sites
- take pride in the symbols of Ismaili history, and
- validate Shi’i voices and understand our contributions to Islamic civilisation.



◆ “Hulagu Khan Destroys the Fort at Alamut” from *The Book of Chingiz Khan*. Public Domain.



◆ Map showing progress of documentation of Ismaili Heritage project sites. Credit: Ismaili Heritage project

Over the last eight years, we have identified over 1,500 Ismaili heritage sites across fifty-six countries around the world. Of these, we have documented over a thousand in twenty-eight countries, and every year we identify more, and we document more.

Great, give me some examples!

Many of the sites that IH has documented are old, beloved, and familiar. Cities, castles, forts, mosques, palaces, and universities are just a few examples of obvious relevance from our history, as are more recent Jamatkhans, Darkhanas, and Ismaili Centres.

But many other sites are new, surprising, and unexpected, and still hold meaning and significance for us today. Shrines, gardens, bridges, procession routes, and diplomatic sites are the examples here.

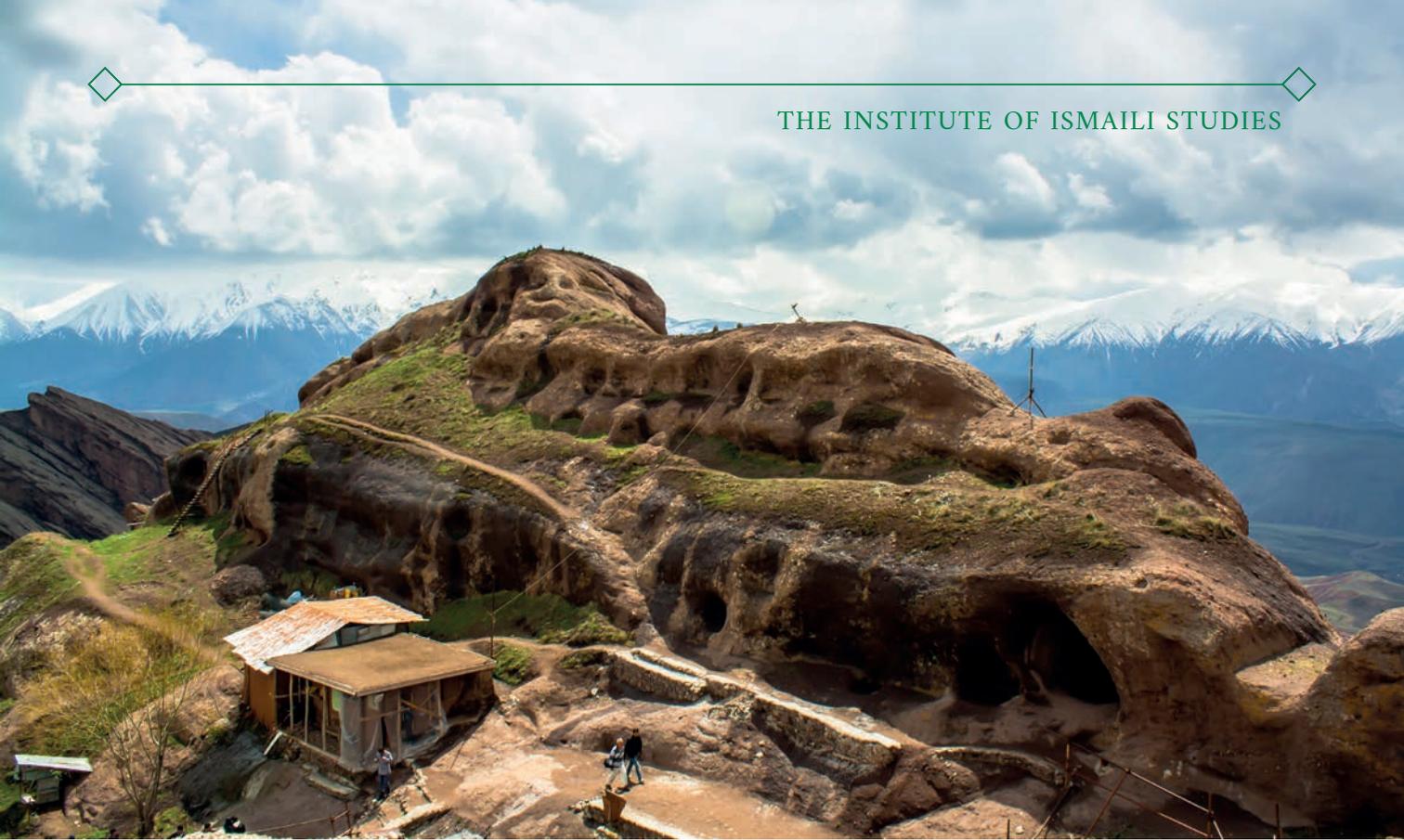
And we all know—and love—the enormous work of sites that make up all the various Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) buildings and institutions such as hospitals, schools, and infrastructure and industrial projects.

What have we learned from the project?

First, we have learned that “mere” stones tell as many Ismaili stories as “proper” buildings. We tend to think that buildings matter more than stones. And we make this same problematic binary judgment for high culture versus popular culture, belief versus practice, and so on. This can lead us to think—mistakenly—that one type or category is better than the other and, therefore, more worthy of study, attention, and resources.

The second thing we have learned is that there is much more to our built heritage than the iconic edifices of the Fatimid and Alamut periods we all know so well. Cities, castles, cemeteries, forts, mosques, mausoleums, palaces, libraries, universities and other centres of learning, shrines, villages, residences are just a few examples.

The third lesson we have learned is an ethical one. This is our practical duty as stewards, custodians, guardians of the gifts of creation, as well as of the lessons of history. We accept, learn, build, and pass these on to the generations that come after.



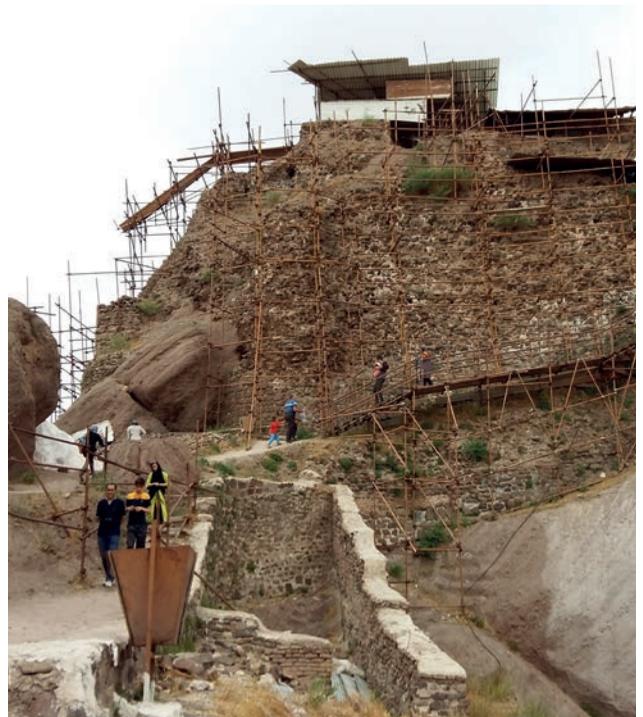
◆ Restorations of Alamut Castle, Iran. From Elaheabed, 2016

So what?

At the highest level, we have gentle rain—the direction and vision of His Highness. At the lowest level, we are putting in the work, preparing the ground for seed, and planting. This includes working together with and learning from my remarkable colleagues at the Aga Khan Library, the Ismaili Special Collections Unit, the Department of Curriculum Studies, and the Global Encounters programme.

This work, these sites, show us how we as Ismailis, as Shi'as, as Muslims, make a difference to where, how, and when we live. And this research is gradually being incorporated into our teaching and Ta'lim curriculum, Al Ummah, Horizon and Global Encounters programmes, heritage tours, and in new books, brochures, pamphlets, blogs, and newsletters.

“ We’re not hiding now.
We’re remembering.
We’re writing.
And we’re celebrating. ”



◆ Restorations of Alamut Castle, Iran. From S Mary Gh, 2016

The Quran: A Curator's Perspective

Esen Kaya, Curator of the Aga Khan Centre Gallery

I have curated many exhibitions in my career, but this is the only exhibition for which my ambition to realise it, went hand in hand with utter anxiety about getting it perfect. So much so, I regularly prayed for Allah's guidance and blessing with many 5am starts ruminating over my choices. In writing about the exhibition, I first thought I could provide an academic description but there is much information on this in other sources that I have decided to share how much this exhibition meant to me and describe how it came to fruition.



◆ IIS Director, Professor Zayn Kassam, opens the Quran Exhibition. Photo credit: Rehana Virani



Curating an exhibition about the Quran is not an endeavour to be taken lightly. The sheer magnitude and gravity of the subject conjure deep contemplation on what approach to take and how to make sense of the material. Quite early on it became apparent this would be the first of many exhibitions on the Quran, as no single exhibition can do the subject justice.

The journey began with scholarly expertise from colleagues Dr Walid Ghali, Head of Aga Khan Library (AKL) London and two colleagues from his team Shah Hussain and Pedro Sanchez who surveyed the library collection, bringing a diverse range of items to focus our thinking. Dr Wafi Momin and his team in Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU), Dr Karim Javan, Dr Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev and Naureen Ali brought breadth of precious items from their collection to attention. Dr Omar Ali de-Unzaga, Head of IIS's Quranic Studies and other distinguished colleagues, and collaborators had an esteemed overview of proceedings. It was to be a multilayered collaboration notably including Dr Taushif Kara of King's College London who worked with me on focusing the narrative, so we could express the Quran through the concepts of *form, fragrance and feeling* and Russell Harris whose linguistic expertise identified and meticulously transcribed the Arabic texts.

My desire was to curate a multi-sensory exhibition; a confluence of the variety of *forms* the Quran comes in, the *fragrance* of its sophisticated vocabulary and hence the *feeling* it can instil in those who read it, see it, and consume its sublime majesty.

The exhibition was an opportunity to share carefully selected Quran-related materials from AKL's collection and ISCU alongside items from private collections and commissioned contemporary art made by renowned artists with whom I worked closely with over several months.

My job as curatorial alchemist was to channel these collaborations into a focused, informative, imaginative, and ultimately beautiful exhibition. I intended it to be a multi-sensory and accessible exhibition that would draw a smile, a breath of wonder and provoke inspired thought to all who engaged with its subject. Sharing the astonishing impact of the Quran on the history of the Muslim world was the exhibition's central focus. After all, the Holy Quran has been, and remains, an inexhaustible source of intellectual and spiritual reflection as well as the inspiration behind a vast corpus of literature, poetry, art, and calligraphy.

The Quran: Form, Fragrance & Feeling embraces this complexity and explores the axial power of the



◆ Gallery Curator Esen Kaya applying vinyl motifs to the gallery wall.

Quran by focusing on three ways in which Muslims have engaged with the sacred text across time. As these dimensions of experience transcend time and place, their forms are as diverse as the world of Islam. The exhibition brings together a selection of books, artefacts, artworks, and a recitation recording that emphasise the Quran's spiritual force, its divine language, and its diversity of expression.

The exhibition brings into conversation a diverse range of works from books, manuscript folios, seals, scrolls, and objects used to adorn the domestic environment. The chosen artefacts aim to encourage the viewer to reflect on the ways in which the Quran exists beyond the page and in many languages reflecting its diversity for example, AKL's intriguing modern American Quran with images depicting everyday life, the pocket size and beautifully illustrated book with Quranic verses in German and the intricately crafted Alifi Quran, with 23 lines per page, each commencing with the Arabic alphabet's first letter (Alif) and showcasing the Basmala at the start of each of 113 suras (chapters) in as many calligraphic styles takes the devotion to the holy book to another level.

These alongside ISCU's incredulous miniature Quran measuring around 7cm x 4cm and the decorative Quran from the Mamluk period among many others, demonstrate the Quran's revered global footprint.



One significant item I desired to exhibit is a facsimile of leaves from the famed *Blue Quran* from Aga Khan Museum's collection. I decided to present this as a unique lightbox as a way of quite literally, illuminating its power to intrigue. This double page of the *Blue Quran* provided the exhibition's colour palette, with the gallery walls a combination of lapis lazuli and white, edged with gold lines as if the walls themselves were pages of a manuscript. Clusters of framed manuscript folios spanning a millennium adorn the walls alongside their contemporary counterparts—commissioned artworks intended to create a harmonious dance of light, colour, form and reverie. Each wall was designed with a considered sense purpose, in this exhibition, nothing was by incidental, yet serendipity was also quietly at play.

The variety of artistic expressions includes painting, printmaking, gold work embroidery, textiles, and ceramics, with the artists using classical techniques and materials that marry beautifully with historical artefacts and create a rhythmic balance across the gallery space. The designed aesthetics include margins of decorative gold motifs, bookmarking the walls—an acute detail contributing to the lusciously jewel-like nature of the exhibition.

Upon entering the Aga Khan Centre Gallery, the viewer is greeted by the most significant phrase in Islam, which is also the opening of almost every verse of the Quran: *Bismillāh al-rahmān al-rahīm*. The *bismalah*, also called *basmalah* or *tasmiyyah*, is the

name given to the oft-repeated phrase *In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

It is voiced by Muslims the world over before starting daily actions such as eating or performing good deeds, and during prayer. Below the Arabic text and English translation is a piece of intricately exquisite goldwork embroidery of the same phrase by textile artist Jung Byun.

There are discreet gems throughout the exhibition that may not be obvious contemporary additions which have been included to add an extra layer of detail and an opportunity to do something out of the ordinary—an approach I like to take when designing exhibitions. These gems include elaborate and refined decorative artefacts such as embroidered gold manuscript snakes (used as weights) presented as if they were always part of the manuscript to manuscripts resting amid a bed of brightly coloured dried flowers—a nod towards the Quran's suggested fragrance—to embroidered floral tiles and ceramic plates made using modern techniques but inspired by manuscripts from the various collections.

There is an intimate chamber where the pages of Saad Qureshi's *Silent Quran* can be viewed while listening to a twentieth-century vinyl recording of Quranic recitation from Egypt while gentle wisps of IIS' Scholar Alessandro Cancian's bespoke fragrance infuses the space.





Especially commissioned for the exhibition, this fragrance includes extracts and oils that were commonly traded throughout the Arabian Peninsula: musk, ambergris, and frankincense, as well as the Damascene rose, much beloved by the Prophet Muhammad. Along with notes of milk and honey, these are reinforced by an underlying mossy, earthy scent, created through a blend of Geosmin (a synthetic molecule that mimics the scent of humid soil), Indian Mitti Attar, and Patchouli, embodying the cave of Hira, where the Prophet received his first Qur'anic revelation.

The outside of the chamber is dedicated to the revelation itself, with IIS Scholar Daryoush Mohammad Poor's calligraphy of chapter 96 of the Quran, traditionally believed to have been Prophet Muhammad's first revelation while in Cave of Hira. Either side of the calligraphy are graphite wings set within 'breath of the Compassionate' Islamic geometry border by Veeda Ahmed, a nod toward Angel Gabriel and ascending above, a canopy of trees looking into gold leaf sky of heaven by Jethro Buck. All gentle gestures toward the spiritual and sublime.

Describing its unique place in global history, one of the Quran's contemporary translators has called it an "axial text" because of its distinct role in shaping not only the history of Islam but also the contours of spoken and written languages and cultures around the world. With its reticence toward figurative art, the script of Arabic itself has been developed into a highly sophisticated and beautiful art that endeavours to convey the sublime majesty

of the Quran. This exhibition provides a delightful experience on the wonders of Quran-related materials curated from a variety of collections, and those poetically produced to provoke contemplative thought.

It is not possible to mention everyone, but I am humbly grateful to have worked with artists Mobeen Akhtar, Veeda Ahmed, Jethro Buck, Samantha Buckley, Jung Byun, Khulood Da'mi, Elisabeth Deane, Yasmin Hayat, Rizwan Ahmed Khan, Saad Qureshi, Masako Newton, and Daryoush Mohammad Poor whose breathtaking works feature magnificently among historical artefacts making this a truly inspirational exhibition.



The Quran: Form, Fragrance & Feeling will be exhibited at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery, in the Aga Khan Centre, London, until 20 May 2024.



Writing for the Jamat

Dr Shainool Jiwa, Head of Constituency Studies Research Unit, Series Editor of the World of Islam

◆ Dr Jiwa and Mr Naguib Kheraj, Senior Member of the Board of Governors, discuss the World of Islam Series. Photo credit: Rehana Virani

The IIS launched the World of Islam Series in 2018, and this was followed by the Living Ismaili Traditions Series. Both series seek to share the history, culture, and ideas related to Islam with non-specialist audiences. Dr Shainool Jiwa, the Series Editor for the two series, introduced them to the Jamat in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on 27 October.

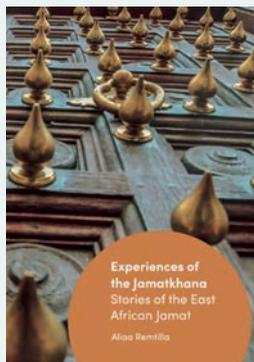
His Highness the Aga Khan, over several decades, has actively guided the work of the Institute, and his guidance over the last few years to us has been that, as we have made scholarly achievements in Ismaili studies, in Shi'i studies, in Qur'anic studies, in Central and South Asian studies, we should now look at how we can synthesise this knowledge and make it available to our Jamat who live across several regions of the world, as well as to those among whom they live, such that this knowledge is inspiring, engaging, and of relevance to them. In responding to this guidance, the Institute has established two accessible series. The first one is called Living Ismaili Traditions. In this series, we are directly speaking to the Jamat and responding to their interests and concerns. Dr Shiraz Kabani's book *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration* is the first book in the series. In relating stories of celebrations, we are aiming to address the frequently asked questions of our Jamat, such as: Why do we practise in particular ways? What spaces do we practise in? What occasions do we celebrate? How come there is such a wide diversity in these practices across the different traditions and geographies in which our Jamat lives?

Our second book in the series is by Dr Aliaa Remtilla, titled *Experiences of the Jamatkhana: Stories of the East African Jamat*. This personable and well-informed book helps us to understand the story of the arrival and settlement of our Jamat in East Africa. And, in telling the story of the Jamat, we are also telling the story of the Jamatkhana, a key marker of our identity as Ismailis, both to ourselves and to the world at large.

There are several other titles in progress in the Living Ismaili Traditions Series. There is one on Ismailis in Syria, their history, their traditions and lived experiences; and there are others on Ismailis in the northern areas of Pakistan, Ismailis in Iran, Ismailis in Tajikistan. Over the next two, three, four years, you will see several such titles appearing. And the reason for that is that, as we were seeking from the Jamats an understanding of what kind of materials they wish to read, we were told "We want to learn about our own tradition, but we are also keen to learn about our Jamats from diverse traditions and from different parts of the world." As you know, the world is today a global village; there are so many of us who live together, but we have come from very different backgrounds. And, so, how do we really get to know each other? And this series allows us to do that while also informing us about our identity, about our faith, about our practices, and more.

The World of Islam is a series which we have launched for the world at large, including the Jamat. These are books that you can share with anyone you wish, in any sphere of life, that you interact with. And the purpose of the World of Islam Series is to showcase the plurality of lived Islam, the fact that Islam is not simply a theology, it is also civilisational. It has given impetus to knowledge—to the sciences, the arts and cultures, as expressions of our shared humanity.

Living Ismaili Traditions



Experiences of the Jamatkhana: Stories of the East African Jamat

(2023) Aliaa Remtilla charts her rediscovery of the origins of the East African Jamat, the emergence of community infrastructures, and the building of Jamatkhana during the early twentieth century. Available in paperback and eBook



Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration

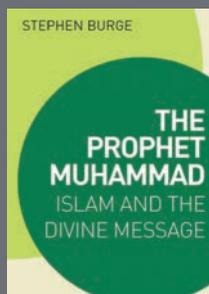
(2021) Shiraz Kabani takes us on a journey of celebration and self-reflection. Relating accounts of festivals from his own lived experience as an Ismaili, he shares some of his most compelling memories, questions, and insights. Available in paperback, eBook, and audiobook. Also available in Portuguese

World of Islam



The Fatimids 2: The Rule from Egypt

(2023) Shainool Jiwa continues the story of the Fatimids from their newly founded capital of Cairo. She tells of the Fatimid expansion, the reasons behind its ultimate fall at the hand of Saladin, and the legacy that continues with the living Ismaili communities today. Available in paperback, eBook, and audiobook



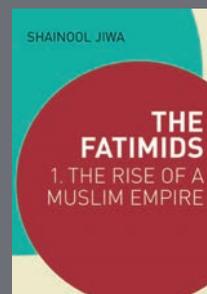
The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message

(2020) Stephen Burge presents an illuminating portrait of Prophet Muhammad in his capacity as God's messenger and an exemplary figure to Muslims. Available in paperback, eBook, and audiobook. Also available in Persian



Beyond the Mosque: Diverse Spaces of Muslim Worship

(2019) Rizwan Mawani encounters diverse communities and their sites of worship, including the mosque, *husayniyya*, *khanqaah*, and Jamatkhana. Available in paperback, eBook, and audiobook. Also available in Persian and Russian



The Fatimids 1: The Rise of a Muslim Empire

(2017) Shainool Jiwa tells the story of the birth and expansion of the Fatimid Empire in the tenth century. Available in paperback, eBook, PDF, and audiobook in English, Gujarati, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, and Urdu

Capturing the Experiences of the Jamatkhana

Aqil Dhanani, Department of Communications and Development

This year's addition to the Living Ismaili Traditions Series highlights an impactful chapter of recent Ismaili history. Dr Aliaa Remtilla expertly weaves personal narrative with historical descriptions in a way that's easy for readers to follow along.

"One of my questions was: 'How do we take serious academic research and make it something mom wants to read?'" Dr Remtilla explained, pointing to her own mother in the audience at a book launch event in Upanga Jamatkhana. "When I think about the stories that we shared growing up, they were always real-life stories of people. There's a magic to biographies." She explains that data and personal experiences can illuminate history in different ways, which is why she combined both when writing her book *Experiences of the Jamatkhana: Stories of the East African Jamat*.

Dr Aliaa Remtilla is an anthropologist. Her PhD thesis explored the everyday lived experiences of Ismailis in Tajikistan. Her startup, Storytilling, helps people speak authentically in recorded video messages—so that families can preserve their life stories and so that businesses can connect authentically with their employees. "Capturing people's voices is

really important to me," Dr Remtilla explained in an interview with IIS. "We talk about the importance of human connection all the time, often by bemoaning the lack of it." She then described the importance of sharing stories that we otherwise consider mundane. "There's research out there that indicates the ability to reminisce is extremely therapeutic. Each time the same story is told, there's a new gem that comes out or a new opportunity to ask a different question."

Dr Remtilla brings her personal expertise and passion into this publication. "Previous work on Jamatkhana [conducted by IIS elsewhere in the world] focused on the architecture and history of the space," she explained at the book launch. Pulling from similar research, IIS published *Beyond the Mosque* by Rizwan Mawani in 2019, which explores the physical diversity of prayer spaces in the Muslim world; Dr Remtilla wanted to take that one step further. "I'm interested





in the contemporary lived experience of the space, and that was reflected in my work.” Each chapter of the book is punctuated by the personal stories of Dr Remtilla’s grandparents, grounding the history in the experiences of those who lived through it.

“For my grandmother’s 90th birthday, we decided to write a book about her life,” Dr Remtilla explained in the interview. “There are little bits of Dadima’s story brought over to this new book.” This way, she tells a complicated story of economics and politics in a way that is extremely easy to follow. “[Merging the historical data with personal stories] made for easy reading,” she remarked at the book launch, “so let’s craft this into a more personal narrative.”

“The fact that these books have very few footnotes doesn’t mean it’s not steeped in sources,” Dr Shainool Jiwa explained at the same event. *Experiences of the*

Jamatkhana pulls from a variety of primary sources, written and oral, to provide a comprehensive illustration of Ismaili migration to, through, and ultimately out of East Africa.

“*Experiences of the Jamatkhana* is an excellent addition to the Living Ismaili Traditions Series,” notes Aqil Dhanani, Communications Officer for IIS. He explained that the book reminded him of similar stories from his own grandparents: “I think this book is important for Ismailis, especially those who may share this East African heritage, because it starts a conversation about our shared heritage that many of us may not think to have. Hopefully this book can help others to connect with their parents and grandparents, like it does for me.” In line with other books in the series, *Experiences of the Jamatkhana* is slated to be translated and published in digital forms so the wider Jamat has access to such an impactful text.



◆ Above: Dr Aliaa Remtilla signing a copy of *Experiences of the Jamatkhana: Stories of the East African Jamat* at the book launch in Dar es Salaam. From *The Ismaili Tanzania*

◆ Left: Town Jamatkhana (now Darkhana) in Nairobi, Kenya. Courtesy of Tove and Akbar Hussein

◆ Middle: Mbale Jamatkhana in Uganda. Courtesy of Tove and Akbar Hussein

◆ Right: Dodoma Jamatkhana in Tanzania. Courtesy of Tove and Akbar Hussein

Opening the Book of IIS

Tara Woolnough,
Head of Publications and Operations



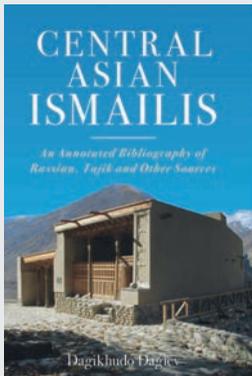
“When I have a little money, I buy books; and if I have any left, I buy food and clothes”

(Erasmus, 1466–1536)

I have come across that quote only once, nearly thirty years ago, and it resonated so strongly that it has always stuck in my mind. It reflects exactly the (admittedly eccentric) position held by my dad, an avid scholar despite not being an academic. His every wall was covered with books from floor to ceiling. And not just any books: really recondite reads, often from the remainder section of academic bookstores or sometimes bootlegged from university libraries. As I was growing up, I was acutely aware of the preciousness of book-knowledge (though by no means the only variety) and the potential barriers to obtaining it, such that many would not even seek it out. Open Access (OA), which makes research available online without financial and other barriers, is therefore something that fascinates me and in which I believe strongly.

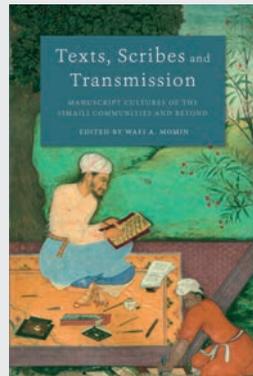
In the constantly expanding and evolving landscape of academic research, the call for accessible knowledge in all fields resounds loudly. Amid the deluge of data and mire of misinformation that we face today, it is more important than ever to be able to find reliable and responsible sources of information. As we delve into the rich yet complex tapestry of Islamic thought, history, and culture—and into the associated politics, polemics and propaganda—the necessity of breaking down barriers to information is especially evident.

OA publishing has the potential to democratise knowledge and empower people, transcending



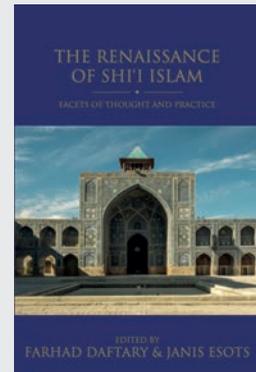
***Central Asian Ismailis:
An Annotated Bibliography of
Russian, Tajik and Other Sources***

Author: Dagikhudo Dagiev



***Texts, Scribes and Transmission:
Manuscript Cultures of the
Ismaili Communities and Beyond***

Editor: Wafi A Momin



***The Renaissance of Shi'i Islam:
Facets of Thought and Practice***

Editors: Farhad Daftary, Janis Esots

borders and socio-economic backgrounds. By enabling an inclusive exchange of ideas, knowledge production can truly thrive. In Islamic studies and related fields, this in turn supports the accommodation of diverse perspectives and nuanced narratives, builds understanding and tolerance—especially valuable for minority communities like the Ismailis—and enriches society.

In the UK, the recent policy shift of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) towards OA further underscores the recognition of its transformative potential. Aligned with the broader global movement advocating for transparency and openness in research, the UKRI policy requiring publicly funded science and scholarship to be published OA serves as a catalyst for change in the academic publishing landscape.

For authors, this means broader reach and increased visibility and impact for their work. It liberates research from the confines of subscription-based journals and high-priced books, which are often hard to discover at all outside a research context, allowing authors to share their findings with far more diverse global audiences. For those audiences, the benefits are clear, and the question may be “What to read first?”

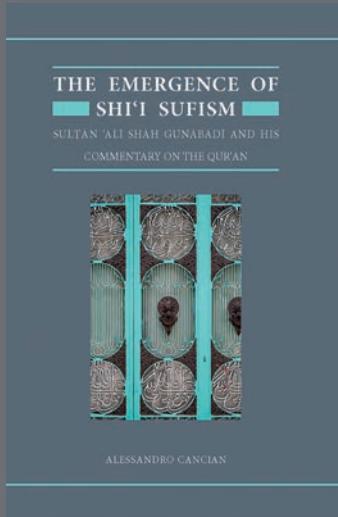
Might I humbly suggest an IIS publication? In 2022, we published our first three OA titles, and in 2024 we will bring out two new OA books, in addition to fifteen older titles covering a range of series and topics.

It is our hope that by publishing OA, IIS research stands the opportunity to better inform adjacent fields, as well as widening the focus within Islamic studies, which remains predominantly Sunni-centric. Our publications can find their way into more digital collections and into students’ hands (or, at least, onto screens). And we can offer an unparalleled resource to the Jamat, as OA content can be readily shared, reused, and adapted as required.

Yet, it is important to recognise that not all content ought to be available to everyone. A phrase that has gained currency as OA has developed is “As open as possible, as closed as necessary”. This expresses the need to balance openness with protection of the subjects involved. Safeguarding the potentially vulnerable, whether this means individuals, communities, or heritage sites, for example is a critical responsibility that the Institute bears in its capacity as an Imamatus institution that seeks to inform both academic scholarship and the Jamat through its research. Alongside enthusiasm for OA, we will therefore continue to be judicious in our outputs and the channels through which these flow.

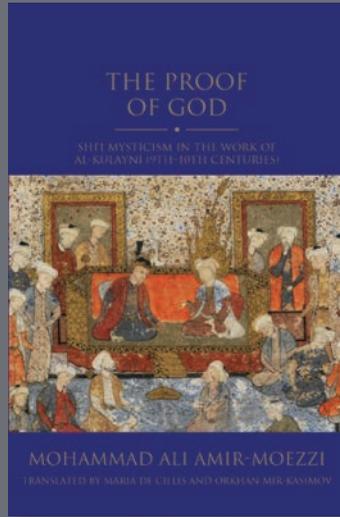
OA publishing is not merely a trend but a transformative force that aligns with IIS core values of knowledge dissemination. As we navigate this era of change, it is crucial to recognise the value of OA in unlocking the treasuries of knowledge and enabling access to those who seek it.

Recent Publications



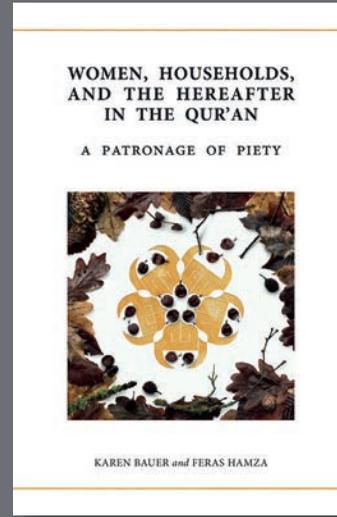
The Emergence of Shi'i Sufism

Alessandro Cancian explores the work of Sultan 'Ali Shah Gunabadi (d. 1909) and the formation of a Shi'i Sufi tariqa, making a credible claim for Ni'matullahi Sufi legitimacy within the Twelver Shi'i establishment and influencing subsequent Qur'anic exegesis in Iran.



The Proof of God

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi explores Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni's (d. ca. 940 CE) *Book of the Proof* (*Kitāb al-ḥujjah*), part of *The Sufficient Book* (*Kitāb al-Kāfi*), considered the first among the four most important works on Shi'i hadith. This award-winning French translation and commentary is here translated into English by Maria De Cillis and Orkhan Mir-Kasimov.



Women, Households, and the Hereafter in the Qur'an

Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza offer a fresh perspective on the social and religious transformation accompanying the initial revelation of the Qur'an by undertaking the first historical-critical study of all the Qur'an's verses on women, and by offering an initial overview of households and patronage.

Other Publications

Encyclopaedia Islamica, Volume 8
Farhad Daftary (ed.)

Nimūd-i bāwar-hā-yi Īrānī dar shikl-gīrī-yi ikhtišāšāt-i kalāmī Ismā'īliyya
Abbas Masiha

Fāṭimiyān wa 'Abbāsiyyān
Pari Malekipour

Tabyīn-i nisbat-i siyāsāt-i dīnī dar tawsa'a-yi ijtimā'ī shahr-i Qāhira dar 'aṣr-i Fāṭimiyān
Narges Malek

Upcoming Publications

Accessible Series

Adab and the Ethics of Living

Wen-chin Ouyang

Ismailis in Iran

Shayesteh Ghofrani

Shi'i and Ismaili Heritage Series

The Book of Unveiling

Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman (attributed);
Fares Gillon (tr.)

The Nizaris and their Neighbours in the Caspian Provinces

Miklós Sárközy

Ismaili Texts and Translations Series

The Banquet of the Brethren

Nasir-i Khusraw; Rahim Gholami (ed. and tr.)

Epistles of the Brethren of Purity

On Ethics and Character Traits

Omar Alí-de-Unzaga (ed. and tr.)

On Magic, Part 2

Godefroid de Callataÿ et al. (ed. and tr.)

The Comprehensive Epistle

Carmela Baffioni and Mourad Kacimi
(ed. and tr.)

Catalogues

Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts Housed at the Institute of Ismaili Studies

Karim Javan

Catalogue of Khojki Manuscripts

Wafi Momin

Other Publications

Encyclopaedia of the Ismailis

Farhad Daftary (ed.)

Keys to the Arcana, Volume 2

Muhammad al-Shahrastani; Toby Mayer (tr.)

The Hazara Ismailis of Afghanistan and Their History

Yahia Baiza

Fatimid Cosmopolitanism

Gregory Bilotto, Farhad Daftary, Shainool Jiwa (ed.)

Visit iis.ac.uk/publications

Unveiling the Gem: A Transformative Educational Journey

Asma Ehsanyar, STEP Student, Class of 2024

As an Afghan girl studying at IIS in London, my educational journey has been filled with unique challenges, but it has also strengthened me, built my resilience, and driven me to create positive change, both in my own life and in the wider world.

One of the most significant challenges I have faced is being far away from my family and home country, especially given the turbulent situation in Afghanistan. The distance has made it difficult to stay connected with loved ones, and the constant worry for their safety has sometimes overshadowed my academic pursuits. However, it has also taught me the importance of adaptability and finding support within my new community.

Amid these challenges, I have found immense support from my university community. Faculty members, counsellors, and fellow students have offered guidance and friendship, helping me navigate the complexities of academia and life in London.

Balancing a busy schedule with diverse tasks and courses is challenging yet rewarding. This experience has broadened my skill set, fostering adaptability, problem-solving, and critical thinking. It has been a crucible for personal growth, teaching me to manage stress and tight deadlines, making me more resilient and confident.

One of the most remarkable aspects of STEP is the emphasis on practical experience. I have had the opportunity to work in mainstream schools in London, which has equipped me with invaluable real-world skills. It allowed me to apply theoretical knowledge in real classrooms and learn new strategies of engagement from my colleagues and the school's staff. This experience was both eye-opening and deeply insightful. It not only challenged my pedagogical skills but also reshaped my perceptions of education and the diverse student population in the city.

This experience was transformative, broadening my perspective on education, diversity, and inclusive teaching practices, shaping my approach to teaching and advocacy for educational equity.

Another crucial skill I'd like to discuss is my proficiency in research. In my comprehensive research project, I focused on examining the dynamics and effectiveness of group work in educational settings. I chose this topic because group work has a significant impact on educational practices and student learning. It is a prevalent teaching strategy with the potential to enhance student engagement, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, which are crucial in today's world. The study revealed that well-structured group work not only improves academic performance but also nurtures teamwork and problem-solving

Studying at IIS has been an incredible, life-changing experience for me. This Institute has opened a world of opportunities that I never could have imagined and has contributed to my personal growth. I am not just pursuing a master's level degree; I am being given the opportunity to be part of something truly exceptional.



abilities. This research provides valuable insights into the nuances of group work, offering guidance for educators and enriching the overall educational experience for students.

The library and online databases have expanded my access to quality sources and advanced research techniques, enhancing my interdisciplinary skills. The library and databases continuously update their resources, keeping me current in my field. My dedicated research supervisor's guidance ensured quality, ethics, and sound methodology. This research journey pushed boundaries, highlighting the potential for meaningful contributions to academia and real-world challenges. I have come to realise that research is not just about finding answers but contributing to the betterment of society and the advancement of my chosen field.

In other words, discovering one's true self requires diligent effort and digging deep within. Without dedication, and deliberate action, the inner gem remains concealed and lacks its radiance. When the gem does not shine, it fails to fulfil its inherent purpose, and its intrinsic worth must be unveiled. I do believe that STEP will help me to unveil my hidden gem. Also, STEP gives me a deep sense of satisfaction and fulfilment, and it enriches my life.

To conclude, Nasir Khusraw (d. between 1072 and 1088) said:

“ We are jewels in the mine, buried beneath tons of muck and dirt, but surely there. Each person contains a piece of eternity, a soul that is the true self. ”

The Voice of the Students

Aqil Visram, GPISH Student, Class of 2025



A Graduate Conference has been “a long-held dream of many students at AKC,” according to Uzair Ibrahim, GPISH Alumnus and current doctoral scholar at IIS. And on 21 September 2023, this dream was finally realised with the inaugural Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) and Aga Khan University’s Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC) Graduate Conference.

Marking a historic collaboration between two leading institutions housed at AKC, the event showcased the groundbreaking research of twelve students across four thematic panels. The presenters delved into medieval and contemporary Ismaili community histories, explored new ways of envisioning Muslim pasts, and illuminated various forms of Muslim cultural expression. The day culminated in a concert entitled “Musical Aesthetics of the Muslim World”, where student performances vividly portrayed the diversity within Muslim traditions. The Graduate Conference stood as a beacon, spotlighting the high-calibre, innovative, and boundary-defying scholarship of students at IIS and AKU-ISMC.

The genesis of this conference traces back to the success of the “State of the Field” conference in November 2022, where students were invited to attend and participate between their hectic class schedules. Inspired by the research presented by leading scholars in the field, students sought to continue the discussion and contribute their own ideas to the rich tapestry of scholarship on display. Thus, the IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference was born.

The initial focus was on selecting a date that would ensure students were able to fully participate. Given the rigorous schedules of IIS programmes, we initiated discussions with the Department of Graduate Studies—which oversees STEP and GPISH—to address this challenge. These conversations swiftly expanded to involve our new Director, Professor Zayn Kassam, whose support for this event was pivotal in bringing it to fruition, along with our valued partners at AKU-

ISMC. Internally, calls for papers were circulated, leading to the formation of a selection committee which encompassed distinguished scholars, recent alumni, and engaged students from both IIS and AKU-ISMC. Meanwhile, a dedicated organising committee emerged within the student body, overseeing conference logistics, from marketing and coordination with AKC staff to concert preparations and post-conference initiatives. Partnerships with the South Asian Studies unit at IIS and the Association for the Study of Ginans further enriched the evening’s musical showcase.

On conference day, roughly twenty students from across cohorts ardently volunteered, assuming responsibilities that ranged from being roving ushers and meticulous timekeepers to overseeing an overflow space which was arranged in response to continued demand for a sold-out event. The student volunteers were joined by AKC staff and the Ismaili volunteers, who collectively ensured the day’s success. We extend heartfelt appreciation to everyone who contributed in ways big and small for their key role in putting together IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference.

The success of this inaugural Graduate Conference underscores the shared vision to spotlight student research excellence at IIS, marking the beginning of a tradition set to remain a cornerstone event in our calendar. For numerous decades, IIS has been training aspiring scholars, nurturing their potential to contribute pioneering research at the vanguard of scholarly inquiry. Now, the Graduate Conference provides a platform for them to step into the spotlight and manifest precisely that.

A Journey of Love

Farhan Feroz Ali, GPISH Alumnus,
Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholarship
Recipient

“Love is not a destination; it is a journey.”



I found this note inside a fortune cookie around the time I was writing my dissertation for GPISH in 2022. I must say, first of all, that that cookie was not good at all. But the message . . . it took the entirety of my education, the entirety of the time I have spent with people, spaces, and ideas that have crossed my path, to realise two very simple truths it had to offer: sugary cookies are bad for your health; and being human is a process, however messy and uncertain. The latter, as I write the present piece in 2023, has been a journey that has had a profound impact on my intellectual and spiritual being. And it has not been an easy journey.

I applied to GPISH first in 2016, right after I finished my bachelor's degree. I was rejected, and I am so glad that I was—I was not ready to accept what this scholarship held for me. I had to experience the real world outside of academia, the real-world issues that challenged my being and identity. I had to go out and see for myself how these issues manifested themselves in the everyday lives of people. I write all this in retrospect, yes; but if memory is merciful, I was not happy with what I experienced.

I applied to GPISH again in 2020 and this time I was granted a place in the programme. A bittersweet relationship—the programme, Victoria Hall, where the students stay, and the pandemic—transpired in what I have experienced to be the most aesthetically pleasing part of London; a place, which I called home for two years, a place in constant flux. As was I.

So much diversity, both in terms of peoples and ideas, surrounded me, each a universe within itself, each with an abundance to offer; I have not encountered this abundance any place else. I will need space amounting to a book's length to list all the people I have learned from and all the knowledge I have gained during my two years. But to be honest, it was a bit overwhelming—unlearning and relearning everything from scratch, responding to prompts that only made sense after the response had been submitted for grading, and of course, learning a new language all at the same time. I spent many a night

awake reading or writing, sometimes cooking, other times venting. There was always someone, though, a friend or a teacher, to put things in perspective. And this place houses some of the finest “someones”.

Perhaps most importantly, the institution allowed me the freedom to pick my own focus in research and provided any and all kinds of support I needed to apply myself to my heart's content. This included the third-year choice of a master's. For me it was History of Art and Architecture at SOAS. I continued the thread I picked up during my dissertation in GPISH, that of the human body and aesthetics in communion with the Divine and developed it to a point where I felt the need to pursue a doctoral programme to unravel the many pieces that belong together.

Credit where it's due: it was during GPISH lectures and seminars that I understood the importance of approaching research through many different lenses, understood the importance of appreciating the messy nature of human and material cultures. And my doctoral research echoes this: it is research involving art, architecture, music, religion, and poetry, among others, in and around the shrine of Shah Abdul Latif in Sind, known as Bhit Shah. I understand the shrine as a place that amalgamates within itself the many constructions of knowing and being, one that allows for an experience of the Divine. One of my aims with this research is to make space for lived experience in the broader construction of knowledge, the many voices that are overlooked in academia.

None of what I have written would have been possible without IIS, even my doctoral aspirations (I have been granted the 2023 Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholarship and am able to pursue my research at SOAS). I have immense gratitude for the institution and its programmes, for without it, I would not have been in that place and time holding the message and chomping on the fortune cookie. I would not have been here writing this piece. I owe my journey of love to the people, the places, the community, the institution, and above all, to my Imam.

In Memoriam

It is with great sadness that we mark the deaths this year of noted scholar Professor Wilferd Madelung (1930-2023), and one of our founding fathers, Aitmadi Mohamad Ismail Adra (1935-2023), both of whom contributed greatly to IIS's publications and projects. Additionally, we mourn the loss of Iradj Bagherzade (1942-2023), a friend and publishing partner of the Institute.



During his academic career, **Professor Wilferd Madelung** made major contributions to many aspects of early and medieval Muslim history and thought. With particular reference to religious schools and movements in early Islam, his studies, based on a vast array of primary sources, enriched understanding of almost every major Muslim movement and community.

“Madelung’s scholarship in Islamic studies is unrivalled in modern times . . . It is no exaggeration to state that rarely has any contemporary Islamicist made as many original contributions as Madelung to such a diversity of areas within the field of Islamic studies.”

Dr Farhad Daftary, IIS Governor and Director Emeritus

Born in Stuttgart in 1930, Professor Madelung moved to the United States after World War II. He obtained his PhD in Islamic History from the University of Hamburg and held positions at leading universities across America including the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Chicago. Professor Madelung’s initial publications, dealing with early Ismaili doctrines and relations between the Fatimids and the Qarmatis of Bahrain, were based on his doctoral thesis.

Madelung was Professor of Islamic History at the University of Oxford from 1969 until 1978 when he held the prestigious chair of Laudian Professor of Arabic and Fellow of St John’s College. Since 1999, Professor Madelung had been affiliated with IIS as a Senior Research Fellow.

He received numerous honours and taught as Visiting Professor at many academic institutions such as the American University in Beirut and the University of Toronto. His standing in the field received recognition in his election as Fellow of the British Academy in 1999.



Aitmadi Dr Mohamad Ismail Adra led a long life of service to his country, his community, and to His Highness the Aga Khan. He occupied various positions in the Syrian Ismaili community and was appointed as Chief Mukhi of the Syrian Jamat, and President of the Ismailia Association for Syria. He acted as Chairman of the Education Board for Syria for two full mandates.

Mohamad Adra, known as Abu Nu'man, was born in Tal al-Dara, a small village close to Salamiyah, Syria, in 1935. He was an English language teacher in his home country and travelled to the United States and Canada to deliver sessions on the history, culture, and traditions of the Syrian Jamat.

Due to his deep knowledge and his intellectual and leadership qualities, Mohamad Adra was involved in the momentous discussions and committees that contributed to the foundation of IIS. In 1975 he participated in the Ismailia Associations Conference in Paris where the formal plans for the establishment of the Institute were finalised. In 1978, he was appointed as a member of the Review Committee to review research in the areas of Qur'anic and Hadith studies.

The subject of the Fatimid Chief Da'i al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi was close to his heart. He spent many years studying and translating his works. In 1983 he delivered lectures to the first cohort of the Institute's students on the life and thought of al-Mu'ayyad among other topics, and in 2011 his annotated English translation of al-Mu'ayyad Diwan, or collection of poems, was published by IIS, under the title *Mount of Knowledge, Sword of Eloquence*.

Those who knew him were privileged to enjoy his mild-mannered, gentle personality as well as his thorough knowledge and understanding of the Ismaili Arabic literary and intellectual traditions. We are deeply thankful for his contribution and dedication.



The IIS community was also deeply saddened to learn of the passing of our dear friend and long-time publishing partner **Iradj Bagherzade**. He was founder and chair of I.B. Tauris (IBT), which he shaped to become a major publisher and leader in the fields of Middle East and Islamic studies.

Iradj was integral to the success of the burgeoning publishing programme of IIS in the 1990s, supporting Dr Farhad Daftary who then was leading its Department of Academic Research and Publications. The first book in the Institute's Ismaili Heritage Series, *Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary* by Paul Walker, was published in 1996, inaugurating the IBT-IIS publishing partnership, which has thrived and continues today.

Dr Daftary, IIS Director Emeritus, said:

“ Iradj was an extraordinary Iranian. I was always amazed by his depth of knowledge on so many subjects, as I was by his high standards of professionalism as a major publisher in the fields of Islamic and Iranian studies. I shall never forget our weekly walks in Regents Park during the recent pandemic years, when we exchanged our knowledge on English and Persian histories. The Iranian community in London has lost a distinguished member. I shall sorely miss him for the rest of my own days. ”



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