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THE INSTITUTE OF ISMAILI STUDIES

# UPDATE



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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## Credits

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**Front Cover:** Dinar of Imam al-Mustanşir bi'llah, Mişr (427/1035–1036), with the inscription, "There is no god but God, the One who has no partner, Muhammad is the Prophet of God and Ali is the friend of God" (*la ilaha illa Allah wahdahu la sharika lahu Muhammad rasul Allah Ali wali Allah*). Image credit: IIS.



# Welcome

In what has been a challenging year for higher education and academia, The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) adapted swiftly to ensure that its essential work in fostering understanding of Muslim societies and cultures has continued to thrive.

The Institute's educational programmes were quick to respond to the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. Our two graduate schemes are currently combining some face-to-face with virtual learning, and we have provided extra support to ensure that students continue to receive an interactive and intellectually rigorous educational experience. Our short courses for adults in the Ismaili community have also moved online, most recently with "Trends in Education about Islam". It has also been our priority to ensure that all staff have been able to continue to work in a safe, supportive way and maintain connections in the new virtual working environment. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one for their efforts in maintaining the Institute's outputs in such challenging circumstances.

As an international institution, building bridges of understanding across borders and, particularly in this past year, creating virtual networks of learning, are pivotal to the work that we undertake. In this regard, the Aga Khan Library has launched its Digital Collections website in collaboration with Bloomsbury Publishing, showcasing manuscripts, rare books, photographs and maps. I hope this digital endeavour will encourage scholars, students and other interested users to access a treasure trove of sources for research and educational purposes. Even before the pandemic, we were leveraging the use of technology for remote teaching purposes. With the help of trained Time and Knowledge Nazrana (TKN) volunteer teachers, we are now teaching a number of students in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Syria and Tajikistan, equipping them for the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP).

The IIS continues to convene forums that bring together pre-eminent thinkers and researchers in the field of Muslim cultures and societies. Last year, we worked with the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Manuscripts to host a conference, exhibition and book launch in honour of the late Russian scholar of Ismaili studies, Wladimir Ivanow, in his home town of St. Petersburg. The same exhibition will hopefully travel to the Aga Khan Centre, London in 2021 and back to Russia, to Moscow in 2022. Through our research and publications programme, we have also continued to generate essential conversations about the history of diverse Muslim traditions, and the legacy of this rich heritage. My own book, *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History*, presents for the first time the biographies of all 49 of the Ismaili Imams and, through them, the Ismaili community's history and heritage. In *People of Faith: Essays on a Historical and Contemporary Profile of the Ismailis*, Shams Vellani deftly explores how the Shi'a Ismaili Muslims unite their spiritual traditions with the demands of living in the modern world according to the ethics of Islam.

Shams has worked at the Institute for over 40 years, and the book is a fitting legacy in this his retirement year. He has been instrumental in the establishment of the Institute, its strategic direction and growth, including the forging of new partnerships that sustain the IIS's vital work. Aziz Esmail, who also retires this year, has likewise been integral to the Institute's development since its inception, and has informed the philosophical and intellectual foundations of our work in all aspects. The IIS would not be the global academic institute it is today without them, and I thank them both.

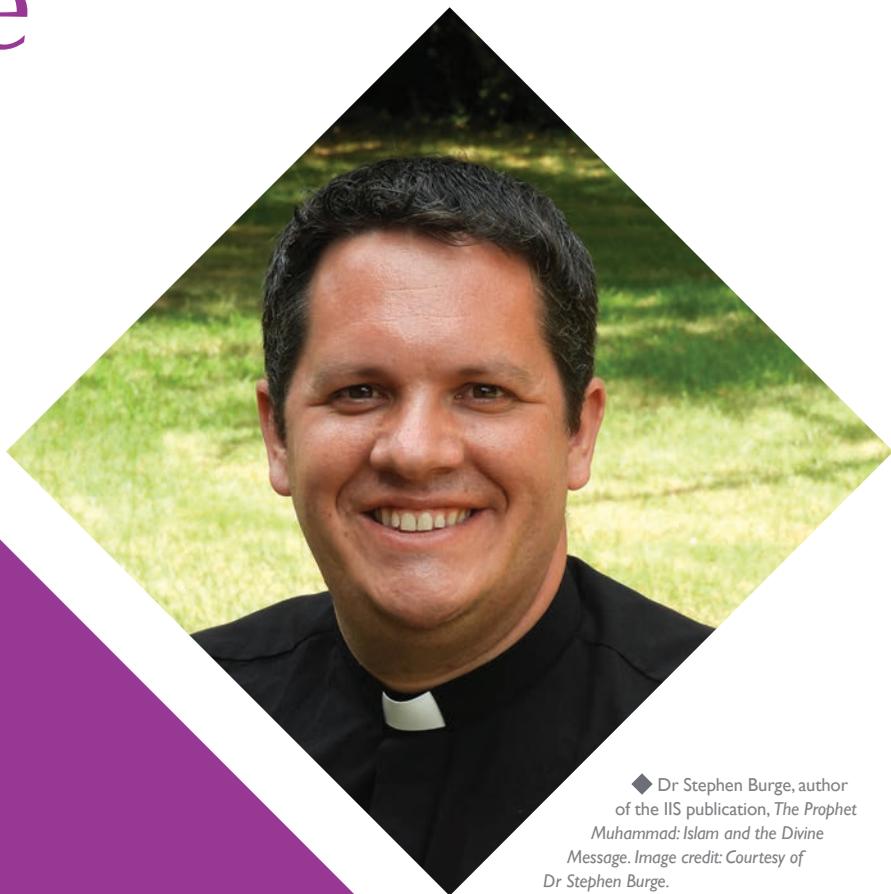
I would like to take a moment to fondly remember the valuable contributions of three scholars and friends who are sadly no longer with us. Kutub Kassam faithfully served the IIS and the Ismaili community for over forty years. As a judicious editor, he had a meticulous regard for the conventions of language, and contributed with academic rigour to the intellectual content of IIS publications and curriculum materials. Raficq S. Abdullah, a lawyer, writer, poet and broadcaster, made contributions to the body of knowledge on the sharia and interfaith dialogue. As a trained barrister with a poetic sensibility, Raficq always supported constructive dialogue. Abbas Hamdani, who hailed from an eminent family of scholars, had taught Middle East and Islamic history at a number of renowned institutions around the world. He generously donated the Hamdani Collection of Ismaili manuscripts to the IIS, which represents one of the most significant collections of Ismaili writings. Each of these colleagues dedicated their lives to scholarship and in service to others, and they will be greatly missed.

Finally, from 13 December 2020 the IIS will be stewarded by a newly appointed Board of Governors, who take over from a retiring Board that has served the Institute with dedication and care for 25 years. Overseeing a period of significant development across our education, research and publication programmes, as well as the IIS's move to its permanent new premises in the Aga Khan Centre, the retiring Board of Governors have helped to position the IIS as a leader in the field of Ismaili studies. The new appointments made by the Chairman of the Board, His Highness the Aga Khan IV, come from a mix of academic and commercial backgrounds and include for the first time alumni of IIS's graduate programmes.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to our friends and supporters for your generosity, material assistance and commitment to the work of the Institute, as we continue to promote a better understanding of Islam in today's world. I invite you to remain engaged with our work, as we journey on the path of academic excellence and in service to our global communities.

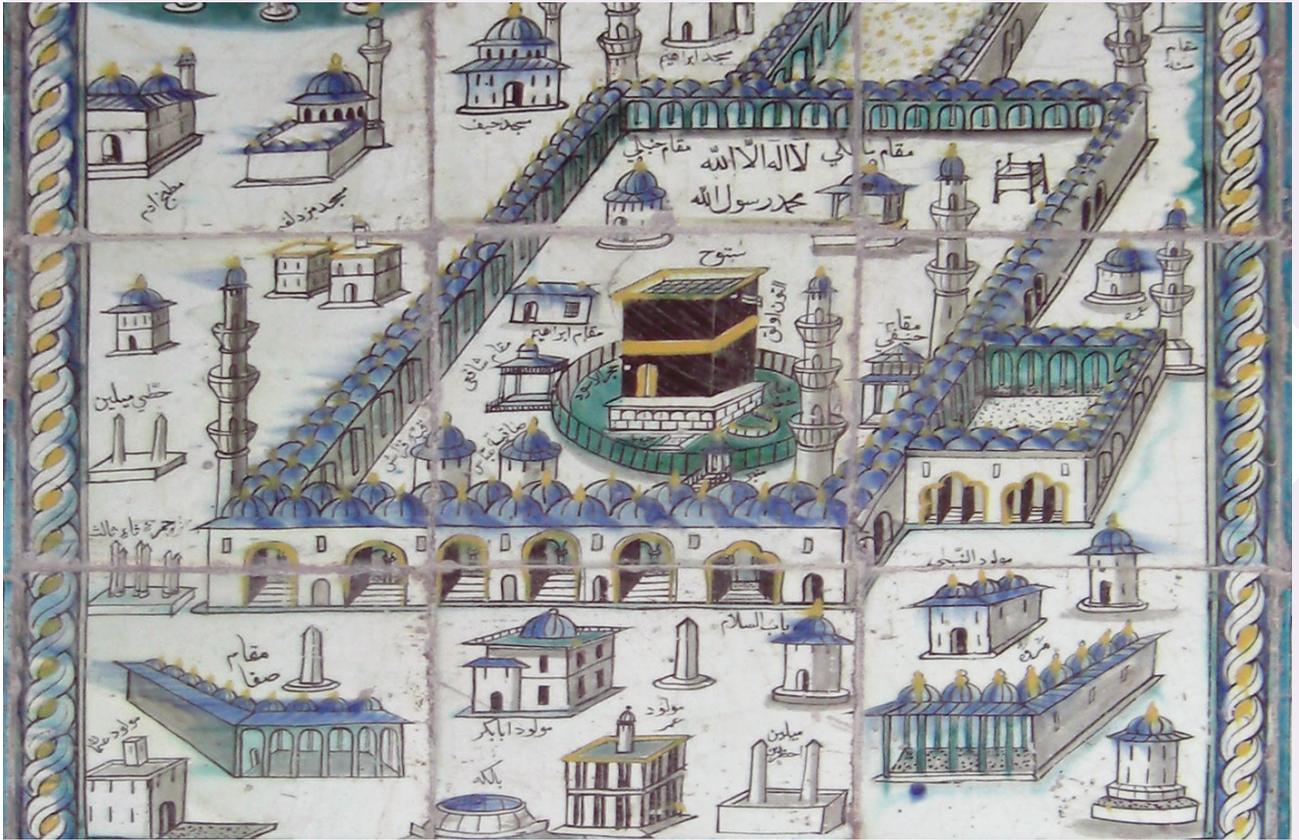
**Farhad Daftary**  
Co-Director, IIS

# The Universality of the Prophet Muhammad's Message



◆ Dr Stephen Burge, author of the IIS publication, *The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message*. Image credit: Courtesy of Dr Stephen Burge.

Dr Stephen Burge, IIS Senior Research Associate and Christian minister, is the author of the new IIS publication *The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message*. We sat down with Dr Burge to find out more about his own curiosities concerning the Prophet Muhammad, his personal motivations to write about this subject, and what he thinks non-Muslims can learn from the Prophet.



◆ Ceramic Tile of the Ka'ba in Mecca. An interior detail of a tiled panel found at the Sabil-Kuttab (a public fountain and Qur'an school) of Katkhuda, a famous construction in Cairo named after its patron and architect, Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda (d. 1776). The tile features a view of the holy sanctuary in Mecca. Image credit: Russell Harris, *The Institute of Ismaili Studies*.

### What were your motivations to write a book on the Prophet Muhammad?

Over recent years a number of books have been published about the life of Prophet Muhammad, so when I was asked to write a book on the subject, I wanted to approach it in a new way and say something different. Even before I started, I knew that I did not want to write a straightforward biography of the Prophet – there are so many of them about these days that another one was really not required, and there was little new that I could say.

When I looked back at the work that I had done in the past, particularly on angels in Islamic tradition, I came to realise that the questions that interested me most were: What makes a prophet a prophet? What was the experience like of being a prophet? How did the people living in Mecca, Medina and the surrounding areas know that the man they simply knew as Muhammad, the husband of Khadija, had received a message from God? And what was so special about this particular man that God should choose him and not somebody else? I am not a Muslim, but these questions – and the ways in which Muslims have answered them over the years – are ones that interest me a great deal. I soon came to realise that this is how I wanted to explore the

Prophet's life; and so, *The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message* slowly began to emerge as a biography of the Prophet Muhammad, that was focused thematically on Muhammad's own experience of prophethood, and how the Muslim community has experienced the life of the Prophet Muhammad through time.

“ I hope that anyone who reads *'The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message'* will be inspired by his life and the example that he set. *The Prophet's life and preaching challenged people to value the community over individualism, to look after one another, and to seek truth in God, rather than oneself.* ”

Dr Stephen Burge

“ In a world in which there are many strains and conflicts between different communities of faith, an increased understanding of one another is very much needed. It is only through educating and understanding each other that we can live together harmoniously. ”

Dr Stephen Burge

### What can readers expect from the book?

The book asks questions about the nature and signs of prophethood, exploring what makes a prophet. It asks how people knew that prophets were prophets – by their character, or their actions? This has meant that the book's scope is a little wider than simply a retelling of the Prophet Muhammad's life; instead, it is a journey through prophecy and what prophecy meant to those who first heard Muhammad's preaching. It also looks at the significance of the Prophet to those who knew him, and to the generations of Muslims who came after.

### Has your own experience of faith informed your work on the Prophet?

I have already mentioned that I am not a Muslim, but I am not simply that: I am also an Anglican priest. I split my time between working at the IIS and serving in a small, rural parish in Bedfordshire over the weekend. I often get quizzical looks (from Christians and Muslims alike), when I reveal that I am both a priest and someone who studies Islam. Why would I want to study Islam, if I am a Christian minister? To be honest, my career in Islamic studies came first, and although I have always been an active member of a church, Islam and the Arab world has always fascinated me. I am a firm believer that, as the Prophet said himself, we seek knowledge wherever we may find it. More importantly, however, in a world in which there are many strains and conflicts between different communities of faith, an increased understanding of one another is very much needed. It is only through educating and understanding each other that we can live together harmoniously. However, over the years I have drawn much inspiration in my own faith from studying Islam. It is my firm belief that discussions and beliefs about God and faith transcend narrow parochialism, and that we can always learn, if not always *need* to learn from others around us, even if we do not fully agree with all the positions that the other takes.

### What do you hope readers can take away from the book?

Many of the values that Muhammad proclaimed and preached – the care of the poor and disadvantaged, the sense of ethical duty, the need to pray, the struggle that faith entails, the need to reflect on the timelessness and eternity of the divine – are all things that Christians and Muslims hold in common. Each may differ on specific points of doctrine, but at their heart both Christians and Muslims want, desire and need to know more about God, more about the nature and purpose of life, and the best and most ethical ways of living.

The life of the Prophet Muhammad provides opportunities for people of all faiths, and none, to reflect on their own values and beliefs. I hope that anyone who reads *The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message* will be inspired by his life and the example that he set. The Prophet's life and preaching challenged people to value the community over individualism, to look after one another, and to seek truth in God, rather than oneself. This message is one that resonates with the world today, and can speak to all people, regardless of faith or culture.

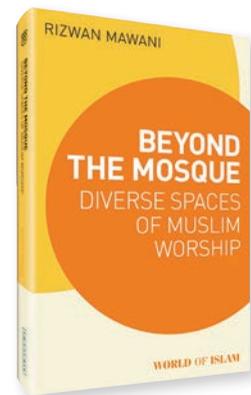
***The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message* is the third book in the World of Islam series, and is available in paperback and eBook formats from Bloomsbury.**

**Visit the IIS website to learn more about the World of Islam series at [www.iis.ac.uk/series/world-of-islam](http://www.iis.ac.uk/series/world-of-islam)**

◆ Ottoman *Hilya* of the Prophet Muhammad. A *hilya* refers to both the Ottoman literary genre and calligraphic art form that describe the appearance and characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad. In its artistic form, a *hilya* followed a standard layout which could be framed and presented in houses as symbols of Muhammad's presence that were believed to provide protection. The 19th-century *hilya* pictured here depicts a list of Muhammad's qualities given by his son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib (601–661), a prayer invoking the protection of the Prophet, as well as a view of the holy sanctuary at Mecca. Image credit: Khalili Collections, Khalili Family Trust.



# Beyond the Mosque: Diverse Spaces of Muslim Worship



Spaces used for piety and prayer have increasingly become part of our itineraries when we travel. Our reasons for visiting these sacred structures are as diverse as the sites themselves, and include: self-exploration, enlightenment, inspiration, peace, the lure of history or simple curiosity. These sometimes unfamiliar and monumental spaces can provide us with a window into many of the world's diverse cultures and religions.

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◆ Ni'matullahi Gonobadiye Shrine and Khanaqah, Gonobad, Iran. This shrine is an important and active site for the Ni'matullahi community in Bidokht, Gonobad. The large complex contains the tomb of a previous *qutb* (spiritual leader) of the community, Sultan Ali Shah-e Gonobadi, a library, and a *husayniyya*. Image credit: Rizwan Mawani.





whose stories existed in texts of history and theology, but whose practices and spaces had remained relatively unknown to those outside their communities. Without them, I realised, our knowledge of Islam was impoverished, and we didn't have an anchored sense of what lived Islam actually looked like. We had inherited a narrative about Islam, which flattened and excluded the lived experiences of many of the world's Muslims. Across the globe, from Iran and Pakistan to China and Turkey, as well as contemporary examples from Muslim communities in Europe and North America, the spaces of worship used by communities became a way by which I could bring many of these visions of Islam to a larger audience. I wanted to explore and share what these diverse spaces of worship tell us about what it means to be a Muslim, the way in which communities use these spaces for their own practices, and how these spaces communicate the values and identity of a community.

### Why should people be interested in Muslim spaces of worship?

Many of us find it easy to talk about diversity when we're speaking about languages, geography or food. Yet when it comes to speaking about a faith tradition it can become a struggle. The book allows people to think about their own faith through the lens of diverse practices of worship. Exploring sacred spaces enables us to think more deeply and broadly about what it means to be religious and how religion, translated into faith and belief, is intricately woven into a fabric that involves community and the spaces that we pray in, amongst other things. I wanted to showcase the diversity of Islam's communities and the diversity which exists across the Muslim *umma*. For these spaces give form to values and beliefs, empowering communities to articulate their identity and create a dialogue between the local and

◆ The King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC). The community mosque pictured here is situated in the centre of the site. The glass cube structure comprises the main prayer hall that sits beside the stone-clad minaret, complementing one another in their display of abstract motifs. *Image credit: A. D. Alolyan (photographer) and HOK (architect).*

“ This book offers a compelling insight into Muslims' worship in different kinds of buildings around the world. The author introduces readers to the basic historical, religious and architectural backgrounds, enlivened with eye-opening illustrations. Drawing upon vast first-hand experiences, he outlines in fluent, accessible prose the wonderful variety of sacred rituals and spaces that Islam espouses. ”

Professor Robert Hillenbrand of St Andrews and Edinburgh Universities





◆ The Great Mosque of Tuban is located in East Java, an Indonesian province known for its volcanic peaks. With six minarets and three large domes, the mosque boasts a spectacular array of eye-catching colours that proclaim its presence in the scenic town of Tuban. Image credit: Image used in the public domain.

the global. The Hui and Uighur Muslims in China are a prime example of two major communities exploring their identities through the incorporation of different influences in their spaces of worship. Interestingly, although Britain has enjoyed a long association with Islam, the first mosque in Britain was only established in 1889 in Liverpool. It is notable that this was founded by an English convert, William Quilliam, rather than by a migrant community. At the same time, the country's first purpose-built mosque, the Shah Jahan Mosque, was commissioned by the Jewish-born Hungarian orientalist, Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner, in Woking, Surrey. From these examples alone, we understand the plurality and richness of the lived histories of a variety of Muslim communities.

### Keeping diversities aside, what commonalities did you discover within the sacred spaces that you encountered?

Love and devotion are at the core of each and every space of worship, whether it's a large, small, persecuted or outward-facing community. A group's practices, rituals and architecture are often testaments to the ways in which they think about, engage with and find comfort in their relationship with the Divine. The Holy Qur'an also refers to the sanctity and nobility

of spaces of worship. In *Surat al-Nur* (24:36), Allah says:

*"(Lit is such a Light) in houses, which Allah hath permitted to be raised to honour; for the celebration, in them, of His name: In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again)."*

The intent to glorify the name of Allah is universal throughout the *umma*, it is only the form that varies. Remembrance (*dhikr*) may be expressed internally, in a ritual context, as a congregation, in a circle or when people gather together after prayers. Ultimately, every community follows a path whose road is paved and defined by its lineage of spiritual masters or religious predecessors. As a result, people are able to create connections, across time and space, creating a sense of community and anchoring themselves to a tradition through a spiritual family and a community's history.

***Beyond the Mosque: Diverse Spaces of Muslim Worship* is the second book in the World of Islam series, and is available in paperback and eBook formats from Bloomsbury. The audiobook is also available on reputable audiobook platforms.**

# Coinage in the Golden Age

“Coins and the discipline of numismatics which deals with them, lie at the crossroads of so many historical, cultural and artistic concerns that hardly anyone studying a traditional civilisation or an earlier period of history has been able to avoid handling or dealing with these thousands of small gold, silver or copper objects. ...Historians of art have many reasons for being fascinated by coins, but a methodologically important one is that most are dated and thus provide benchmarks for the art historian's maniacal passion for chronological sequence. In addition, coins are visual messages carried to a vast public, and their sheer number gives a sense of what was meant to be part of the natural visual language of a culture or of a historical moment.”

Oleg Grabar, 'Introduction' in Elisabeth Darley-Doran, ed., *Centuries of Gold: The Coinage of Medieval Islam*. Zamana Gallery, London, 1986.

Established in 297/909, the Fatimid caliphate stretched across Sicily, Egypt, Palestine, and Syria under the reign of the eighth Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mustansir bi'llah (d. 487/1094). Spanning over almost two centuries, the Fatimids were well known for their achievements in scholarly production, interreligious coexistence, and artistic and architectural expressions. Commonly acknowledged as the 'golden age' of Ismaili history, the Fatimid era witnessed the establishment of some of the most renowned centres of learning, for instance, al-Azhar and the Dar al-'Ilm in Cairo, promoting a vibrant culture of learning and transmission of knowledge.

A number of primary sources housed in the IIS's special collections – manuscripts, rare books, coins and photographs – enrich our understanding of the varied socio-political and intellectual life during the Fatimid era and offer insights into theological discourses, religious

doctrines, philosophical debates, scientific discoveries and legal practices prevalent at that time. The Institute's rich collection of almost 2,100 Fatimid and Alamut coins shed valuable light on important facets of Ismaili history during the Fatimid and Alamut eras. The surviving corpus of Fatimid coinage bears witness to a staggering variety of coin types issued during the long span of the Fatimid caliphate. Numismatic evidence helps us to understand aspects of Fatimid political power and its fiscal history, as well as the religious ideology of the state. Fatimid coinage had played a critical role in the economic history of the Middle East and North Africa, as these coins were minted at a high standard that was reflected in the quality of their dinars (gold coins), which also inspired other rulers to imitate them.

Known for their high quality and for being so invaluable, Fatimid coins became the most widespread trade coins of



the Mediterranean world. The early Fatimid coinage was modelled on the Aghlabids of Tunisia. The first Fatimid coins typically resembled Aghlabid coins. However, once the Fatimids had firmly established themselves as the new ruling dynasty, they started incorporating new features on their coins which included emphasis on the spiritual authority (*wilaya*) of Imam Ali. This is demonstrated on many of the coins through the inscription of the words, "Ali is the friend of Allah" (*Ali wali Allah*), which became one of the main features in the later stages of the Fatimid rule. Another common feature on many of the Fatimid coins was the Qur'anic inscription citing a verse from *Surat al-Tawba* (9:33):

*“It is He who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may uplift it above every religion, though the unbelievers be averse.”*

Known as the 'Prophetic Mission,' the verse emphasises the importance of guidance and the role of a guide in making the religion of truth (Islam) triumphant over other religions. Its appearance on Fatimid coinage also reinforced the Fatimid Imam-caliphs' claim of providing continuity of guidance through their lineal, designated descendants.

Coins from this era reflect the expanse of the Fatimid state and the regions that they ruled. The quality of these coins is also indicative of the strength and power of the Fatimids. For example, Fatimid coins were particularly valuable in terms of their gold content in comparison to neighbouring Islamic caliphates, and thus were renowned across the Mediterranean lands as well as along the international trade

routes of the time. It is a testament to their quality that some of them have survived to the present day. The Fatimid coins in the Ismaili Special Collection at the IIS provide a unique insight into the artistic, political and religious aspects of this remarkable phase in Ismaili history, and as such the Ismaili Special Collections Unit takes great care in preserving these coins for future generations.

The mandate of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit centres on developing, maintaining and preserving a unique collection of materials which are representative of Ismaili traditions and heritage, and the Fatimid coin collection fits well within this mandate. The IIS has spent over forty years building one of the largest Fatimid coin collections available and its goal is now focused on cataloguing this rich collection of coins and making them more widely available for research, scholarship and education purposes.

A selection of coins are currently on display at the Aga Khan Library, London.

*“The coins collection at the Institute includes some rare examples of Fatimid and Alamut coinage. Supplementing other types of surviving sources, these coins shed valuable light on important facets of Ismaili history during the Fatimid and Alamut eras. With the completion of the ongoing cataloguing project, these coins will be made better accessible for wider research and study, and I am confident that new insights will be generated through scholarship on them.”*

Dr Wafi Momin, Head of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit.



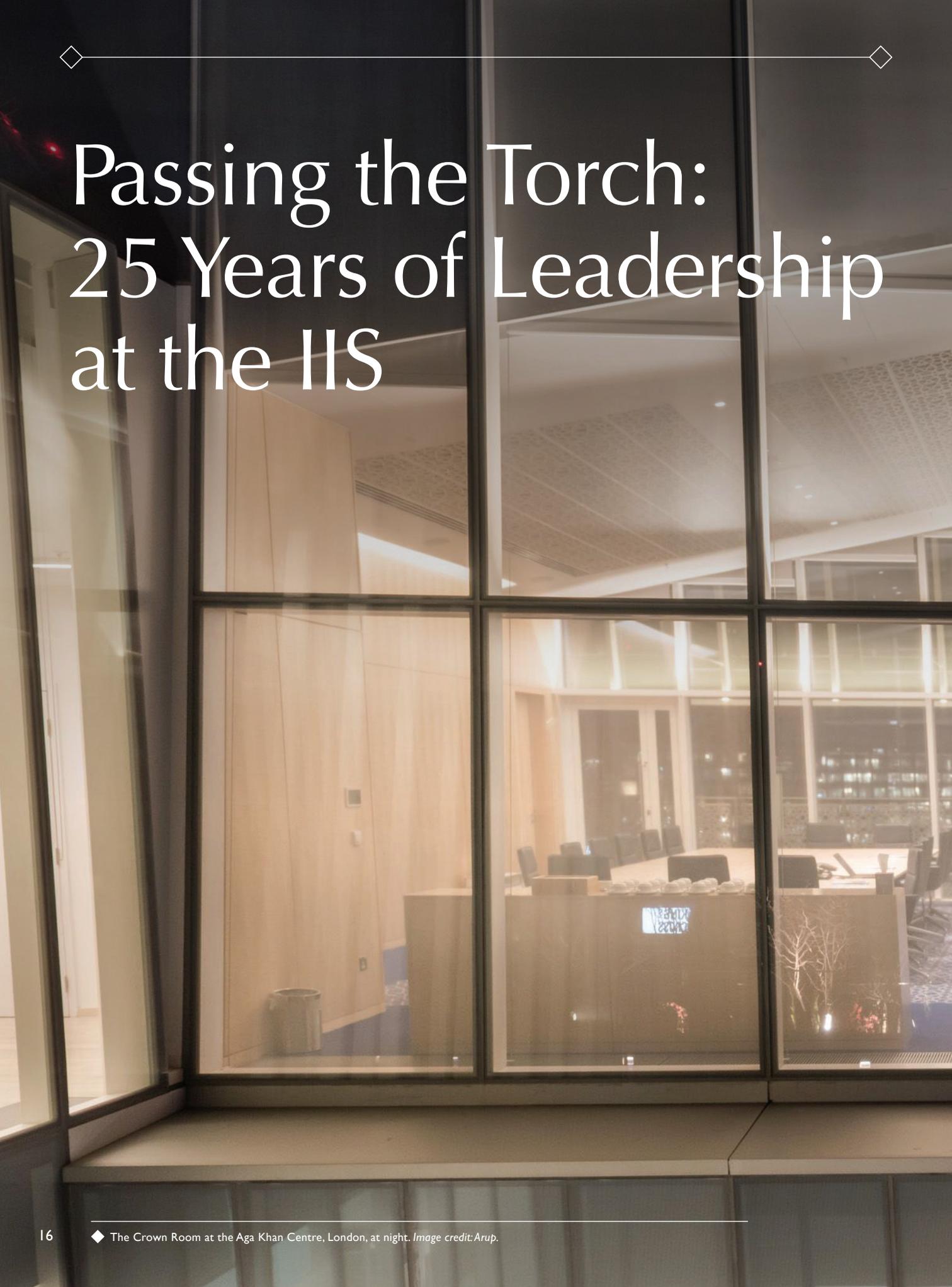
Side A: "There is no God but Allah, the One who has no partner; Muhammad is the Prophet of God and Ali is the friend of Allah."

*(La ilaha illa Allah wahdahu la sharika lahu Muhammad rasul Allah Ali wali Allah.)*



Side B: "Imam Ma'ad Abu Tamim al-Mustansir bi'llah, Commander of the Faithful."

*al-Imam Ma'ad Abu Tamim al-Mustansir bi'llah Amir al-Mu'minin.*



# Passing the Torch: 25 Years of Leadership at the IIS

“ If you would light a  
lamp within your heart,  
make knowledge and  
action your wick and oil.”

Nasir Khusraw (Divan, 78:16)



Over the past 25 years, the work of the IIS has been stewarded by a group of individuals on the Board of Governors (Afzal Ahmed, Aziz Esmail, Mohamed Keshavjee, Naguib Kheraj, Zauhar Meghji and Shafik Sachedina) who have served the Institute with great care, commitment and creativity, under the guidance and leadership of the Chairman of the Board, His Highness the Aga Khan IV. On 13 December 2020, they will pass the torch to a newly appointed Board, leaving a legacy of remarkable development at the IIS.

Over their tenure, the outgoing Board have overseen the growth and deepening of the Institute's various education, research and publications programmes, as well as the expansion of their reach to Jamati and academic audiences across the world. The IIS is playing an instrumental role in the Jamat's education, through the curriculum for children and adolescents, its two MA programmes and its Continuing Education initiatives. The Board has helped to consolidate the Institute's work in research, publications and manuscripts, which has positioned the IIS as a critical reference in the field of Ismaili studies and, more recently, as a pioneer in Shi'i and Qur'anic Studies. And with the generous support of Mawlana Hazar Imam and Jamati donors, the Board has secured a level of financial and organisational stability that will enable the Institute to continue to build on this strong foundation in the future. The work of the Board has culminated in the Institute's move to its new permanent home at the Aga Khan Centre in London, an inspiring space for the intellectual exchange and expansion of knowledge that is at the heart of the IIS's work.

Two figures who have been integral to this evolution, and who both retire this year, are Dr Aziz Esmail and Shams Vellani. Dr Esmail was appointed by His Highness as the Dean of the IIS in 1988, before subsequently being appointed to the Board of Governors. He has been central in the development of the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings of the Institute's work in all its aspects, and his broad thinking was the impetus behind the establishment of the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) in 1994.

Mr Vellani has played an instrumental role in the strategic direction and growth of the IIS from its inception. Joining in 1976, he was the first Executive Officer, and most recently has worked on special projects on behalf of Mawlana Hazar Imam. He has been a pre-eminent figure in institution-building and the nurturing of partnerships that underpin the work of the Institute. Both Mr Vellani and Dr Esmail have made a significant contribution to the strength, reach and impact of the IIS today.



◆ Members of the IIS Board of Governors (1995–2020). Left to right: Naguib Kheraj, Dr Mohamed Keshavjee, Dr Shafik Sachedina, Dr Aziz Esmail, Zauhar Meghji and Professor Afzal Ahmed

# Introduction to the New Board

With the IIS now settled into its new home at the Aga Khan Centre, and with a stable and well-established platform for its future development, the Chairman of the Board, His Highness the Aga Khan IV, felt that now was the right time to make new appointments to the Board of Governors of the IIS.

The new appointments made by His Highness internationalise the make-up of the Board and enhance the diversity among its members, including improving the gender balance. They come from a mix of academic and commercial backgrounds and include for the first time alumni of IIS's graduate programmes.

The new Board will officially take up their responsibilities in mid-December, ready to both navigate the IIS through the continuing challenges of the pandemic and steward the Institute through the next stage of its evolution with an exciting programme of research, publications and education initiatives in 2021 and beyond. The members are as follows:



## Professor Ali Asani

Professor Ali Asani is Murray A. Albertson Professor of Middle Eastern Studies and Professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures at Harvard University, and a specialist on Ismaili

and Sufi traditions in South Asia. He has been engaged in promoting literacy about Islam and Muslim cultures in various educational and public forums, and is a recipient of the Harvard Foundation medal for his outstanding contributions to improving intercultural and race relations.



## Mrs Karina Govindji

Karina Govindji is Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Google, covering Europe, Middle East, Africa and Latin America, and is a member of Google's global employee engagement leadership

team. She has many years of voluntary service, with a particular focus on human resources, including supporting recruitment for the Aga Khan Development Network and serving as a member of the Ismaili Council for the UK.



## Dr Nadia Eboo Jamal

Dr Nadia Eboo Jamal is a lecturer, historian and author of *Surviving the Mongols: Nizari Quhistani and the Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Iran*. She has been actively involved with the IIS over the past

15 years, providing her expertise on the history of Muslim civilisations and lecturing for a variety of IIS programmes, including the Secondary Teacher Education Programme. She is currently developing educational materials for the IIS secondary curriculum on Muslim societies and civilisations.



## Dr Arif Jamal

Dr Arif Jamal is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Law at the National University of Singapore, with interests in the fields of law and religion, Muslim legal traditions, comparative law, and legal

and political theory. A graduate of GPISH at IIS, after which he went on to complete his PhD at the Faculty of Laws, University College London, Dr Jamal has also held senior appointments in the institutions of the Ismaili community in the Far East.



### Mr Rahim Karim

Rahim Karim is the Head of the Financial Services Equity Research team at Liberum Capital, an independent investment bank, where he works with a broad range of UK-listed companies.

He has previously served as Honorary Secretary of the Aga Khan Education Board (UK) with responsibility for the financial and operational planning and delivery of programmes aimed at improving access to quality education by the Ismaili community.



### Professor Tashmin Khamis

Professor Tashmin Khamis is Vice Provost (Quality, Teaching and Learning) at the Aga Khan University, where she oversees academic quality with a particular focus on transformational and professionalised

teaching, including with technology. She is a past member of the Aga Khan Education Board (UK) and Grants and Review Board (Pakistan), and currently serves as a Director for Aga Khan Education Services, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.



### Mr Alykhan Kassam

Alykhan Kassam is a chartered accountant by profession and the current CEO of Crimson Hotels, where he leads on acquisitions, financing and development, and strategic growth. He

is actively engaged within the Ismaili community and has held a number of senior roles, including chairing the Grants and Review Board for Ismaili institutions (UK) since 2015. Between 2006 and 2017 he served on the Aga Khan Foundation UK National Committee and was chairman of its finance sub-committee.



### Mr Naguib Kheraj

Naguib Kheraj is Chairman of Rothersey Life, a specialist pensions insurer, Deputy Chairman of Standard Chartered, an international banking group, and a member of the Finance Committee

of the University of Cambridge. He spends a substantial proportion of his time as a Senior Advisor to the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and serves on the Boards of various entities within the Network, including the Aga Khan University and the University of Central Asia, and is Chairman of the AKDN Endowment Committee. Mr Kheraj has been a member of the IIS Board of Governors since 1995.



### Mr Aryn Kassim-Lakha

Aryn Kassim-Lakha is a senior staff member at the Department of Jamati Institutions at the Diwan (Seat) of the Ismaili Imamat, based in Portugal, where he is responsible for co-ordinating the

activities and programmes of the Ismaili community's institutions around the world. He also serves on several executive and advisory committees within the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), in the domains of education, scholarships, health and habitat.



**Dr Sharofat Mamadambarova**

Dr Sharofat Mamadambarova has been affiliated with the Aga Khan Agencies since 1995, in the capacity of a Member of ITREC for Tajikistan (1995 – 2012), the Aga Khan Humanities Project (AKHP) under AKTC (1997 – 2007) then at the University of Central Asia (UCA) since 2007 – present, Member of the Board for First Microfinance Finance Bank (FMFB) 2004 – 2006, Member of the Board of Trustees of the UCA (2017 – present). Between 2009 and 2019 she was a Member of the Leaders’ International Forum and the first President of the Ismaili Council, Tajikistan, with the responsibility for the Jamat in four countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.



**Dr Shogufa Mir Malekyar**

Dr Shogufa Mir Malekyar is a lecturer in German language and literature and an author, poet, humanitarian and public speaker. She is currently a lecturer at the community college in Heidelberg and has also taught at the University of Heidelberg. She has travelled extensively to Afghanistan for teacher training programmes run by GIZ, the German development agency, and has led various committees and forums focused on issues concerning women, immigration and culture.



**Mr Habib Motani**

Habib Motani is a consultant at the international law firm Clifford Chance and a Visiting Professor at the School of Law at the University of Edinburgh. He has served as the Legal Member of the Ismaili Council for the UK and Member and then Chair of the International Conciliation and Arbitration Board. He has also been Vice-Chair of the National Committee of the Aga Khan Foundation (UK) and is its company secretary, and is a trustee of The Aga Khan University in the UK.



**Professor Nacim Pak-Shiraz**

Professor Nacim Pak-Shiraz is Personal Chair in Cinema and Iran, and Head of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and has published in the fields of visual cultures, constructions of masculinity, and the engagement of religion and film. She is an appointed member of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Board member of the Academic Council of the Iran Heritage Foundation, and National Committee Member of the Aga Khan Foundation (UK). Professor Pak-Shiraz is an IIS GPISH graduate.



**Professor Farid Panjwani**

Professor Farid F. Panjwani is Dean of the Institute for Educational Development, Aga Khan University, Karachi. In 2012 he founded the Centre for the Study of Education in Muslim Societies at the Institute of Education, University College London, the first of its kind in any UK university. He has published widely in the areas of philosophy of education, citizenship, teacher education, imagination, religious education, hermeneutics and Islamic Studies. Professor Panjwani is an IIS GPISH graduate.

# The Siyu Qur'ans

In this article, Dr Zulfikar Hirji, editor of *Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa*, sheds light on Islam's diverse heritage through three illuminated Qur'ans from coastal East Africa.

Dr Hirji proposes that the three manuscripts, now located in Los Angeles, London and Muscat, provide evidence that there was a distinctive and sophisticated scribal tradition on the East African coast – located in the historic town of Siyu – before the nineteenth century. This raises further questions about the town's connections to other manuscript production centres in the region and beyond, and its relationship with locally produced Swahili language manuscripts in Arabic script.

"I shall never forget holding a rare illuminated Qur'an manuscript from East Africa. In late 2012, I was working on a biography of the late scholar and *liwali* (governor) of the East African Coast, Sheikh-Sir Mbarak al-Hinawy (d. 1958) in Muscat, Oman. Sheikh Mbarak's son, my host, was chatting and casually asked if I had seen his father's Qur'an. When he showed it to me, I was struck by its opening pages, with chapter headings decorated in brilliant red and deep ochre brown and the calligrapher's confident hand. Then, turning to the back, I saw a colophon – a supplication with the name of the scribe:

*'By the hand of the poor servant, the submissive, the weak, the hopeful of his Lord's*

*forgiveness with [his] mortal fingertips*

*[A]l-Khatīb bin 'Abd al-Rahmān bin Khatīb bin 'Ali al-Siyawī*

*Allah forgive him, his parents and all of the believers .'"*



We may think that such manuscripts are fairly common. After all, the East African coast is renowned for being a place steeped in Islamic learning. Yet, Qur'an manuscripts from the region are quite rare. I noted that the manuscript in front of me closely resembled two, of the only known, and published East African Qur'ans. One is in the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS Arabic 12a) in London, and the other is in the Fowler Museum in Los Angeles (FMCH90.1840A-B). Through a multi-year and multi-sited research project involving comparisons of three manuscripts' distinctive calligraphic style, decorative elements, ink, binding, covers, paper, and the manuscripts' inscriptions marking the name of the copyist and named endowment record, I concluded that all three were copied and made between ca. 1750–ca. 1820 by the same scribe, scribal family or group in Siyu – a historic town in the Lamu archipelago.

The Lamu archipelago, a group of islands off Kenya's northern coast, is home to many of East Africa's historical and contemporary Swahili Muslim settlements. Lamu's Old Town, a UNESCO world heritage site, is amongst the oldest and best-preserved Swahili settlements in East Africa and is considered an exemplar of Swahili cosmopolitan culture (i.e., architecture, social traditions, and language). Lamu also hosts one of the region's annual Maulidi festivals, a time when Muslims gather to celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Northeast of Lamu lies Pate Island and the town of Siyu. During its heyday, from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, Siyu was a bustling Swahili city-state with a population of more than twenty thousand. Like many other Swahili settlements dotted along the East African coast, from Kilwa in southern Tanzania, up to southern Somalia, Siyu's residents comprised patrician elites, freedman and



◆ Hinawy Qur'an: Frontispiece with illuminated sura heading of Surat al-Fatiha. Image credit: Courtesy of Al Hinawy Family Trust

clients, and slaves. In order to elevate their social status, hold political power, assert religious authority or social and economic ties to people and places around and beyond the Indian Ocean, the town's elites often claimed to be descendants of people who had travelled to East Africa from other locations including China, India, Persia, Somalia, Arabia and Portugal. Siyu was also the crossroads for different Muslim communities of interpretation and was reputed to be an important centre of Islamic religious teaching and learning. Like the majority of Muslims in the Lamu archipelago, the residents and rulers of Siyu were Sunnis belonging to the Shafi'i juridical school (*madhab*). The town was also home to *sharifs* of the Ba'alawi Sufi *tariqa* who originated from Yemen, as well as sheikhs from Somalia. Siyu's residents supported themselves through agriculture, trade and a range of craft industries including leather-making and bookbinding. Like other Swahili

settlements, Siyu's elite resided in houses built from coral stone and lime while other groups lived in houses of mud and thatch. Many of the established neighbourhoods were centred around a local mosque. Siyu is reported to have at least eight historic mosques. A surviving wooden pulpit (*minbar*) in Siyu's Friday mosque, a rare occurrence on the East African coast, contains a carved step with an inscription date of 930 AH (corresponding to 1523–24 CE).

Between the mid-1800s to the 1900s, due to the ongoing disputes and war between the various city-states of the Lamu archipelago, incursions by the Sultanate of Zanzibar into the region, pressures from German and British imperial powers aiming to establish a foothold in East Africa, and the long-standing problems of access to fresh water and resources, Siyu suffered rapid political and economic decline. Its ruling families and citizens dispersed to other parts of the

coast, and soon the city was almost abandoned. Over time, Siyu's histories were also forgotten including its history as an important centre of Islamic learning and manuscript production. Some East African and European scholars studied these aspects of Siyu's history, but few were able to provide significant evidence. Hence, the identification and study of the three high-quality illuminated manuscripts from Siyu confirm that the town was an established centre of Islamic manuscript production and learning. Additionally, comparisons between the Siyu Qur'ans and other local and regionally produced manuscripts and material culture (i.e., artefacts and architecture) suggest the possibility of a range of complex historical interactions between the manuscript producers of Kenya, Somalia, Oman, India, and possibly as far as South East Asia. These findings open up research possibilities for new generations of scholars working on the Qur'an, East Africa, Islam in Africa, Islamic Art and material culture, and the worlds of the Indian Ocean. I have recently identified several additional manuscripts in Oman's state and private collections that bear striking resemblances to the Siyu Qur'ans – these manuscripts may yield additional knowledge through which communities in East Africa and elsewhere may gain an understanding of their rich and diverse heritages of Islam.

So why did it take almost a century for Siyu's three illuminated Qur'ans to be reunited, and by chance? Or, to put it another way, why has the study of the Qur'an, Islam and Muslims in East Africa and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa been so limited? Some answers lie in the fact that European imperialism and colonialism regularly regarded the places and peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa as regressive, primitive and thus possessing no histories or no noteworthy histories. Such forms of racism also informed post-colonial European and non-European scholarship including academic studies of Islam and Muslims. This perspective, coupled with the view that anything worth knowing about Islam could only be found in the Middle East, has resulted in limited scholarly study of Islam and Muslims in Africa, particularly south of the Sahara. *Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa* discusses some of these issues through the twelve case-studies presented in the book. They explore a variety of media and modalities that Muslims in Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania use in their engagements with the Qur'an – seeking to contribute to the growing scholarship on Islam in Africa.

It is not without some irony that academia is turning the full circle of history. It may be recalled that the Qur'an's presence on Africa's soil dates back to the year 616 when the Prophet Muhammad instructed around one hundred of his supporters to leave Mecca and emigrate across the Red Sea to the Christian kingdom of Aksum (an area that included much of present-day Eritrea and northern Ethiopia). It was in the



◆ A colophon – supplication with the name of the scribe on the back of the Hinawy Qur'an manuscript. Image credit: Courtesy of Al Hinawy Family Trust.

court of Aksum's ruler, known as the Negus that the Prophet's cousin, Ja'far b. Abi Talib (d. 629), spoke about the Prophet, God's message to mankind, and recited verses from *Surat Maryam* (Q. 19). So moved were the Negus and members of his court by what they heard that they wept profusely. The ruler then vowed to protect and shelter the Muslims. Hence, although Africa was considered to be the first place outside the Arabian Peninsula where verses from the Qur'an were uttered, some 1400 years ago, it is only in recent decades that the histories of the Qur'an, Islam and Muslims in Africa are coming to light.

To learn more about *Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa* and to read Dr Hirji's introduction to the book, visit the publications page on the IIS website.

# Alumni: Driven by Knowledge and Inspiration

Alumni are our ambassadors, representing the values, principles and work of the IIS in their chosen fields, from education and development to government and the arts. Supporting the growth and development of IIS graduates is crucial to the Institute's vision.

In this article, we speak to alumni from the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) and the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP), who like many of their peers are making positive contributions around the world.

**His Highness the Aga Khan spoke about his aspirations for the graduates and their potential impact in society at the IIS's 25th Anniversary Graduation Ceremony:**

“As these young men and women grow into leadership positions in their own societies, including teaching future generations through their schools and universities, it is my hope that it will be these new generations of our intelligentsia, who, driven by their own knowledge and their own inspiration, will change their own societies and will gradually replace many of the external forces who today appear, and indeed sometimes seek, to control our destinies. These young men and women will become leaders in the institutions of civil society in their own countries, in international organisations, and in all those institutions, academic, economic and others, which cause positive change in our world.”



◆ Zahira Virani handing over ballot boxes to the President of the National Electoral Commission of São Tomé and Príncipe as part of the UN's support to free and fair elections. Photo credit: Courtesy of Zahira Virani.

**Zahira Virani** completed GPISH in 1997. She has been working at the United Nations (UN) for 18 years and is currently a UN Resident Co-ordinator.

## What does your role entail and what are your key responsibilities?

As the UN Resident Co-ordinator, I am the Secretary-General's most senior designated official in Angola and Head of the UN Team. In my current role, I lead a UN Country Team of 19 agencies who work on a variety of initiatives ranging from promoting youth entrepreneurship to supporting COVID-19 response and recovery, to providing social protection for vulnerable children and families. My primary responsibility is to ensure that these agencies are working in a co-ordinated, efficient way in collaboration with the government, partners and civil society in order to implement projects, policies and strategies that lead to sustainable, just and equitable development for the people of Angola.

I joined the UN in 2002 through their Leadership Development programme. Since then, I have worked in various capacities as a Programme Manager, Policy Advisor and Head of Agency. I have had opportunities to live and work across the globe in places such as Geneva, Panama, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Fiji, Bosnia and Herzegovina, São Tomé and Príncipe and now Angola. Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to have been in many interesting roles, for example, as the Head of External

Relations for the UN Development Programme, Afghanistan. In this role, I managed the resource mobilisation and partnerships for the entire office, which at that time was the largest UNDP operation globally with an annual budget of around US\$1 billion. Over the years I also developed a technical specialisation in crisis prevention and recovery and worked as a Policy Advisor with the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, as well as in the field in post-conflict settings.

In 2015 I successfully passed the highly competitive UN Resident Co-ordinator's assessment, and in 2016 I was nominated by the Secretary-General to lead the UN Country Team in São Tomé and Príncipe, where I served until earlier this year, at which point I received a promotion and was posted to Angola as UN Resident Co-ordinator.

### How does your work impact or make a difference to the lives of others – locally and globally?

I am blessed in that my work impacts thousands of lives – it's a dream job! Whether it is working closely with partners like the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina to undertake the largest recovery effort after the most devastating disaster the country had seen since the war, or being the driving force behind an accord amongst opposing political factions of São Tomé and Príncipe, as the UN's most senior leader in country, I am able to not only take direct actions in terms of projects but also influence laws, policies and programmes of governments and partners alike. Despite all the challenges, my work gives me the opportunity to continue serving, to create positive change in people's lives, to make the world a better place – making it without a doubt, the best job in the world for me.

### Tell us about the most rewarding experience of studying at the IIS?

There were so many rewarding experiences while studying at the IIS, but by far the most rewarding experience was spending the summer in India working with the Aga Khan Trust for Housing researching and writing my final paper on turning low-income housing projects into policies.

### What exciting projects do you have in the pipeline in 2020-21?

To say that 2020 has been a challenging year is an understatement. UN Country Teams have been at the forefront of supporting developing countries with response and recovery efforts as the world faces the COVID-19 pandemic. As we go into 2021, the UN will continue to work on supporting COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, while also carrying out essential "regular" programmes. In addition, as the UN marked its 75th anniversary in 2020, we have embarked on the biggest and most comprehensive reform process in its history, with the UN Resident Co-ordinators at the centre of how we move the system to be fit for purpose and support member states to deliver on the bold and ambitious Sustainable Development Agenda.



◆ Amaan Pardhan at the University of Central Asia. Photo credit: Courtesy of Amaan Pardhan.

**Amaan Pardhan** completed GPISH in 2007. Originally from Canada, he currently works as the Board Secretary and Chief of Staff at the University of Central Asia (UCA) and has been with the university for four years.

### What does your role entail and what are your key responsibilities?

In my current role as Board Secretary and Chief of Staff at the UCA, I provide high-level support to the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, the Trustees and the Rector of the University, monitoring progress on key projects, conducting research, preparing reports and managing the office of the Chairman. My key responsibilities include: planning and implementation of Board and Board Committee meetings and all follow-up resulting therefrom; and oversight of data management and documentation including policies and decisions made by the Board, minutes and records from Board meetings. In addition, as a member of the Management Executive Committee of UCA, I also support strategic planning of the University.

### How does your work impact or make a difference to the lives of others – locally and globally?

UCA, as with all other Aga Khan Development Network agencies and institutions, is committed to improving the quality of lives of the communities within which they operate. The University is focused on the development of mountain societies, and as such, many of our programmes and projects directly impact the lives of mountain society communities. In August 2018, UCA's Education Improvement Programme (EIP) conducted professional development workshops – which focused on teaching competency-based education and lesson planning for curriculum development – for over fifty English, maths and chemistry teachers from EIP partner schools from seven Khatlon districts and three Republican Subordinate Districts of Tajikistan at the International Presidential School in Dushanbe. Furthermore, as part of UCA's Cooperative Education Programme, three UCA undergraduate students worked as Research Interns at the Rural Support Programmes Network (RSPN). The RSPN is the largest development network in Pakistan which has positively impacted over 53.5 million rural people.

### Tell us about the most rewarding experience of studying at the IIS?

Studying at the IIS was one of the most memorable and unforgettable experiences of my life. From an academic and learning perspective, I truly believe the IIS enabled me to enhance my critical thinking skills and my ability to communicate to the wider community about my heritage, as an Ismaili Muslim, particularly at a time when Islam was, and still is, not always portrayed in the most positive light in the media. I greatly appreciated the opportunity to learn Arabic through immersion in an Arabic-speaking country, Syria. In addition to the formal instruction we received in class, the learning experience outside of the classroom was just as rewarding – history, art and culture. Having the opportunity to study in London with my brothers and sisters from Canada, the US and UK, Iran, Tajikistan and Pakistan, enabled me to appreciate just how diverse and united the global Jamat is.

### What exciting projects do you have in the pipeline in 2020-21?

One of the most exciting events planned for 2021 is the graduation of UCA's first cohort of undergraduate students. This will indeed be a milestone for our institution and one which the entire university community, including the parents of these bright young learners, are in great anticipation of.



◆ Yasmin Merchant delivering her valedictorian speech at the STEP graduation. Photo credit: IIS.

**Yasmin Merchant** completed STEP in 2018 and is a STEP teacher at ITREB Canada and has been an Instructor at Mount Royal University (MRU), Calgary, for just under one year.

### What does your role entail and what are your key responsibilities?

At present, I am fortunate to hold teaching positions at both ITREB Canada as a secondary religious education teacher, as well as at Mount Royal University (MRU), as an Instructor in the Department of General Education in Calgary. My role as an RE teacher is multifaceted and includes, inter alia, helping students to probe and reflect on contemporary issues and ideas, while drawing guidance and inspiration from their faith in engaging and responding to those issues. Faith, in this way, is understood as search, and also in terms of its connections with other dimensions of human life. In the "Texts and Ideas" course that I teach at MRU, students encounter and examine ideas – such as the self, truth,

mortality, social justice, evil or the good life – through the critical reading of key texts. I help students critically explore these ideas that are shaped by human experiences. They come to appreciate the plurality of approaches that can be taken to explore these ideas, and hopefully realise that this exploration is also a search for meaning and relevance in their own world and lives. Furthermore, the themes and ideas that emerge from these texts are related to issues and problems confronting our world. Like many educators, one of my goals is that students learn to think clearly and reason well about pressing human and environmental problems.

### How does your work impact or make a difference to the lives of others – locally and globally?

It goes without saying that both of my teaching positions are fulfilling and challenging in their respective ways, and although each is different, they share some striking similarities. My ethos resonates with the philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, who had said that the higher, humanistic ideals and purpose of education is to "cultivate humanity" and produce "world citizens" who see themselves "bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern."

In the context of religious education, students learn about the nobility and oneness of humanity (rooted in the Qur'an), which inspire and require us to identify with the world community as global citizens, and reach beyond our imagined borders to help those in other societies live better lives. This is the humane vision of Islam which calls upon Muslims to actively address social inequities to create a fairer, more just and equitable world.

In my course at MRU, the literature that we study raises important issues and questions concerning our world and its future. Critically engaging with the range of viewpoints found in this literature not only deepens students' thinking about these questions, but also increases their sensitivity to diverse peoples. The stories encountered in these texts call for students to reach beyond their spheres of experience and consider the lived reality of others, while also learning how common needs and concerns are addressed in different societies and circumstances.

### Tell us about the most rewarding experience of studying at the IIS?

The experience of studying at the IIS was a unique and highly rewarding experience. Aside from classes, my best hours in London were spent at the Institute's library – intellectually and personally – that was the most gratifying time for me.

### What exciting projects do you have in the pipeline in 2020-21?

At present, I'm working on turning a conference paper into a journal article. The paper examines the Arabic tradition of storytelling and its implicit and explicit reflections on the nature and meaning of a good life.



◆ Faheem Hussain mentoring STEP students at the IIS. Photo credit: Jonathan Goldberg

**Faheem Hussain** graduated from STEP in 2012. He served as a STEP teacher at ITREB Pakistan for five years. For the past two years, he has worked as a Teacher Educator at the IIS.

### What does your role entail and what are your key responsibilities?

I'm a Teacher Educator for the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) at the IIS. In this role, I design and deliver the teaching and learning enrichment sessions for STEP; organise Professional Learning Communities (PLC); support the MA Seminars; and design the annual educational field visit to Spain. I collaborate with the University College London, Institute of Education's faculty to plan and deliver the Post Graduate Diploma (PGDip) in Teaching and Reflective Practice which is part of STEP. Having been through the same journey that the STEP students I teach are embarking on, I'm better able to support them in getting the best out of their experience at the IIS.

My own journey started in 2003, when I was teaching history at an Ismaili community religious education centre in Karachi in a voluntary capacity. I realised that I enjoyed teaching much more than accountancy and decided to switch careers; I completed a Master's degree in International Relations and began teaching history in a mainstream school. During His Highness the Aga Khan's Golden Jubilee, I heard about STEP, applied and got admitted into the programme. After completing STEP, I returned to Pakistan to work as a professional secondary education teacher. I was also given the responsibility of working as the Teacher Lead and was assigned the task of starting STEP classes in Gilgit, Northern Pakistan.

After five years in the field, I was honoured to be appointed as a Teacher Educator for STEP. My experiences of working with adolescents and local communities in the field have given me a much broader perspective on teaching. It is these experiences that have helped me to prepare my students better in my role at the Institute.

### How does your work impact or make a difference to the lives of others – locally and globally?

In the last few years, I have tried to demonstrate good teaching practices and develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum for pre-service teachers who are part of STEP. When we model good teaching practice, we provide avenues of reflection where teachers can come together and reflect upon their own development and growth, and in a way design their own models of excellence, and what that would look like in their context. When you do that you see how teaching is deeply ingrained in an inseparable combination

of content and pedagogy. In a way, teaching is a form of self-development, as the educator and author Parker Palmer would say, "we teach who we are." If we teach who we are, then we also need to think about how we develop ourselves while we are teaching, and that's where the learning and teaching goes hand in hand. I think once a teacher embarks on their own journey of learning, then the magic happens in the classroom. Whenever I travel, I make it a point to meet and connect with STEP teachers who are in the field and see how they are now bringing the curriculum alive in the classroom. During these conversations, I can observe the ripple effects of our work at the Institute, transfusing themselves to a very local level, whether you're talking to students and teachers in Vancouver or Northern Pakistan. That's when you can see the impact your work is having.

Another example that I would like to give is that of Global Encounters. This is a global Ismaili youth camp, where I am one of the faculty members. Over the last six years, I've worked with Ismaili youth from twenty different nationalities. When I observe these participants' life trajectories over the years, it gives me a real sense of satisfaction and understanding of the impact that my profession can have on the lives of adolescents. The thoughtful career choices they make, the social initiatives that they engage with, the positive impact that they generate through social media and the empathy they demonstrate towards the community are some such instances of satisfaction.

### Tell us about the most rewarding experience of studying at the IIS?

The most rewarding experience was to be part of a diverse close-knit cohort and having Dr Farouk Mitha as a Programme Leader for STEP. Through him, the cohort discovered the art of learning about learning. Dr Mitha taught us that teaching was not just about subjects, it was about developing an attitude of curiosity and wonder towards life. We were reminded not to get caught up by our local contexts, because there is a world out there with many contexts that we can learn from and through which we can enrich our own local contexts. In a way, he was removing the blinkers from our eyes so that we could not only understand, but engage more effectively with the world within and around us. It was the most rewarding experience having him as our mentor.

### What exciting projects do you have in the pipeline in 2020-21?

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, students may not be able to go on their annual field visit to Al-Andalus (Spain), so I am thinking about the design of a virtual field-based learning experience for the STEP and GPISH students that entails a coherent pedagogical, technological and content framework. I would like to explore ways in which virtual museums, 3D site tours, literary reading circles and online meetings with local architects, historians, anthropologists and archaeologists can help students to critically interrogate representations of the past found in a variety of media. I would also like to enhance the work and scope of a peer-support platform for effective online teaching we have initiated in recent months for faculty and TKN volunteers, especially considering the current transition to online teaching and blended learning models.

# IIS Short Courses Take Lifelong Learning to New Levels

Learn about the latest research on Islamic history, culture and education in workshops led by leading scholars

“The most important thing we can learn – or teach – at any school – in a world of perpetual change – is the ability to go on learning. None of us have all the answers – quite often we don’t even know what questions to ask. Nor can we discern the road ahead by looking in a rear-view mirror. Past lessons must constantly be renewed and reapplied, as we adapt to new technologies and new expectations.”

His Highness the Aga Khan, at the Foundation Ceremony for the Aga Khan University’s Graduate School of Media and Communications, Nairobi, Kenya, 2011.

Since 2001, the IIS has been delivering residential courses to enable adult learners from diverse professional and entrepreneurial backgrounds to enhance their understanding and knowledge of Muslim cultures and societies in general and Ismaili history and heritage in particular. Through an academically rigorous curriculum, accessible resources and specialist faculty, participants from across the globe get to explore and understand a variety of themes related to Islam and Muslim societies.



◆ Participants learning about Islamic art and artefacts in an interactive session at the British Museum. Image credit: Shaheena Ormerod-Sachedina.

“Islam is not a monolith; Islam is a mosaic.”  
Reshma Lakhani, India, attended *Trends in Education 2019*.

In 2020, the unprecedented circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic prompted the Department of Community Relations to move these courses online. Over the year, 212 individuals from 29 countries participated in one or more of the six online IIS Short Courses on offer. The series culminated with old-time favourite *Shi’i Islam: Thought, Beliefs and Practices* in October. Before the pandemic, a new five-day short course, *Understanding and Appreciating Culture*, was held in Cairo and led by the Education Director for the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Dr Yudhishtir Raj Isar.

Listening to feedback from participants, we are beginning to see the ripple effect that the short courses are having within the Ismaili community, as course attendees are inspired to share their knowledge with others in their personal and professional networks. By making the IIS’s research and approaches to education directly accessible to participants via these courses, we hope to create a compound effect on lifelong learning about Islam and Muslim societies throughout the Ismaili community.

Hear about the participants experiences:

“ This is my first interaction with IIS scholars directly through virtual classes from the remotest region of Passu, Gojal-Hunza, Pakistan, and I am really happy to be a part of them. These virtual sessions really provide an opportunity for the global Jamat, and I would suggest more online classes and sessions to keep the far-reaching Jamat updated about existing trends and approaches in the world. Thanks IIS for providing and considering us for the precious programme. ”

Student, Pakistan, attended *Trends in Education about Islam* (online) 2020.

“ Being a Member of ITREB, Far East, I deal with youth in the region on a daily basis. My agenda is to increase the understanding of Islam in our youth. The knowledge acquired from the course has already helped me in having a healthy discussion with them and to show them a more balanced side of Islam where we have room for freethinking, difference of opinions and debate. ”

Rahim Feroz Meghani, Kuala Lumpur, attended *Introduction to Islam*.

“ The course has given me a structured framework as an introduction to Islam. It has helped me develop a language to better articulate our faith and the role of Islam within the modern world. I will attend more of these courses as they are an excellent way of increasing my knowledge base, whilst meeting Ismailis from diverse backgrounds. ”

Liaquat Suleman Verjee, UK, attended *Introduction to Islam*.



◆ Dr Shainool Jiwa teaching an online short course on the thought, beliefs and practices of Shi'i Islam. Image credit: IIS.

“ The intent of these courses is not to provide basic knowledge, but tools of comprehension, that is, ways of thinking about issues and ideas. The Muslim world today is trying to find answers to many questions and issues by drawing upon its texts, traditions and history. To do so, requires one to understand the questions and issues at a sophisticated level. That is what these courses are all about. For participants, it feels like intellectual archaeology – carefully digging into texts, ideas, and cultural expressions – to determine their origin and trajectory in history so that we can understand them better and use them to develop intelligent and informed responses to issues of contemporary relevance. ”

Dr Shiraz Kabani, Head of the Department of Community Relations, IIS.

◆ Participants learning about specially selected manuscripts from the Ismaili Special Collections Image credit: Shaheena Ormerod-Sachedina.





◆ Participants on a guided tour of Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia, Aga Khan Award for Architecture recipient in 1980. *Image credit: Zulfiqar Khimani.*

Short Course	Programme Dates*
Shari'a: Development of Fiqh and Ethics in Muslim Contexts	12 – 30 April 2021
Shi'i Islam: Thought, Beliefs and Practices	17 – 28 May 2021
Introduction to Islam	09 – 25 June 2021
The Qur'an and its Interpretations	05 – 16 July 2021
Trends in Education about Islam: Opportunities and Challenges	02 – 13 August 2021
Educational Evaluation	01 – 15 September 2021
Exploring Ismaili History: Walking in the Footsteps of the Fatimids	07 – 11 November 2021
Understanding Culture	26 November – 01 December 2021

\*Dates are currently being finalised and may be subject to change.

To learn more and to apply, visit [www.iis.ac.uk/short-courses](http://www.iis.ac.uk/short-courses)

# Leadership in Profile

## In Conversation with Liz Geary, Head of Human Resources



◆ Liz Geary, Head of Human Resources. Image credit: Shaheena Ormerod-Sachedina.

### Where were you working before joining the IIS?

I've worked in Human Resources for over thirty years now, in a variety of private- and public-sector organisations; the last three roles have been as HR Director. Two of these roles were in further and higher education, where my remit covered all aspects of HR – workforce planning, recruitment, employment relations, staff engagement, learning and development, and also payroll and pensions.

### What are your primary responsibilities at the IIS?

I have a similarly broad remit here at the IIS. There were two aspects of my role which initially needed particular attention, recruitment and our shared services. During the first two years, we had a significantly larger volume of recruitment than previously, but were able to ensure that the majority of our campaigns were successful. There were different challenges for our shared services – Estates and Services, IT and the Library – because they support the needs of AKF UK, AKU-ISMC as well as the IIS, and ensuring that all stakeholders receive a high-quality service and value for money is more challenging.

This year has of course been completely different and plans and priorities have had to change accordingly. So my focus

has also been on supporting our employees to work from home and making training and wellbeing services available.

### What are your top three priorities for the department going forward?

First, I would say organisational development. We need to ensure that we have the structures, systems and processes in place to allow the Institute to operate more effectively. Second, staff engagement and communication. With very strong participation rates in both of our staff engagement surveys, and some challenging feedback, there is clearly a lot of work to do, to listen to and act on employees' concerns and ideas. Finally, the development of metrics. We need to collate and analyse data available on all our people processes and activities so that we know what is working and what needs attention – and use the data to drive improvement and efficiency.

But, given the year we've had, I have to first and foremost highlight the importance of supporting a phased return to our workplace, when it's possible, and re-establishing working practices and relationships. Our workplace is about much more than the bricks and mortar of the AKC; it's about a community of people with common values and a shared purpose. So many employees have said they have missed colleagues, the face-to-face collaboration and the social interactions that are an essential part of office life, and I certainly feel the same.

### Are there any exciting projects in the pipeline for 2021 and beyond?

We have invested a lot of time this year researching a new HR system and selecting a replacement for PEP and this will be implemented next year. This change will make a real difference to our capacity to deliver the level of customer service that is needed, to act on the data that the system will provide on our processes and operational effectiveness, as well as to deliver the projects mentioned earlier. I've also been working closely with the 16 HR leads across the AKDN agencies. We are sharing best practice and learning from each other about how to address common organisational issues and I'll be introducing some of the resources we've been developing together, e.g. an onboarding platform, a leadership competency framework and recruitment and performance management guides.

## Introducing Dr Tullio Lobetti, Head of the Quality Assurance and Evaluation Unit



◆ Dr Tullio Lobetti, Head of the Quality Assurance and Evaluation Unit *Image credit: Russell Harris.*

### Where were you working before you embarked on this role?

I was the Special Projects Manager in the Department of Graduate Studies at the IIS. In this role my duties were quite varied: I would mostly be responsible for the new or non-ordinary enterprises, such as the development of a new programme or the writing of new policies.

### What are your primary responsibilities as the Head of the QAE Unit?

My key responsibilities in this role include, of course, quality assurance from overseeing the annual quality cycle to dealing with the sector regulator, as well as developing processes for the evaluation and enhancement of our current practices and activities. Another significant responsibility is to act as the Prevent Lead for the Institute. Prevent is about safeguarding and supporting those vulnerable to radicalisation.

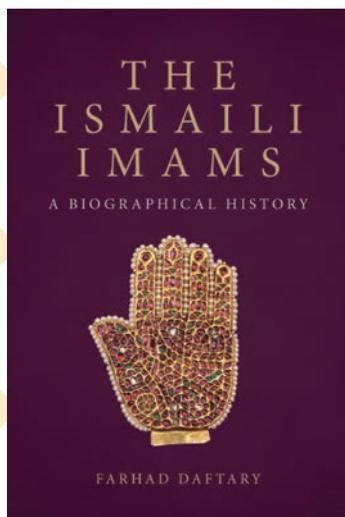
### What are your top three priorities for your unit going forward?

A constant priority is to assure our continued compliance with the Office for Student's conditions of registration. Equally important is to develop a solid overarching methodology for evaluation of our educational programmes, towards the achievement of our strategic priorities. Last but not least, to prepare the Institute to apply for Taught Degree Awarding Powers in the near future.

### Are there any exciting projects in the pipeline for 2021 and beyond?

Achieving Taught Degree Awarding Powers will be a major turning point for the Institute, and we are all looking forward to it. It is a complex process and, needless to say, it requires a solid team effort and collegial spirit. I have full confidence in the Quality Assurance and Evaluation team in this sense, as well as in the support of the Institute's staff at all levels.

# New Publications



## *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History* by Farhad Daftary

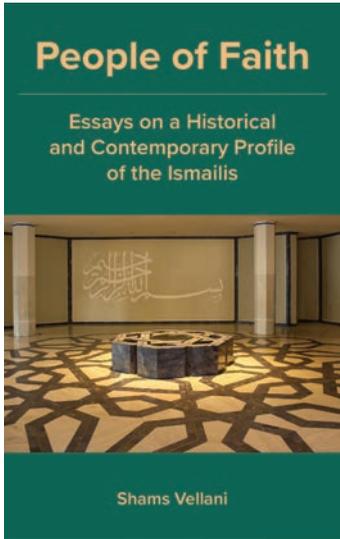
In a series of concise, richly illustrated narratives, this book sheds new light on the lives and legacies of the Ismaili Imams and, through them, the history and heritage of the Ismaili community.

The Ismailis are a major Shi'i Muslim community in the world today, and the only Muslims to have a living hereditary spiritual guide, the Nizari Ismaili Imam. This book brings together for the first time the biographies of all 49 of the Ismaili Imams, from those living during the formative period of Islam, through to the hidden Imams of the first 'period of concealment' when their public identities remained guarded, to the Imam-caliphs of the illustrious Fatimid dynasty, and those of the Alamut period, up to the Aga Khans of modern times.

An authority in Shi'i studies, with special reference to its Ismaili tradition, Dr. Daftary is Co-Director of The Institute of Ismaili Studies and Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publications. In *The Ismaili Imams* he ties together the scattered results of modern scholarship in the field of Ismaili studies, to provide a simple and clear resource for both Ismailis themselves and general readers, as well as a useful work of reference for scholars.



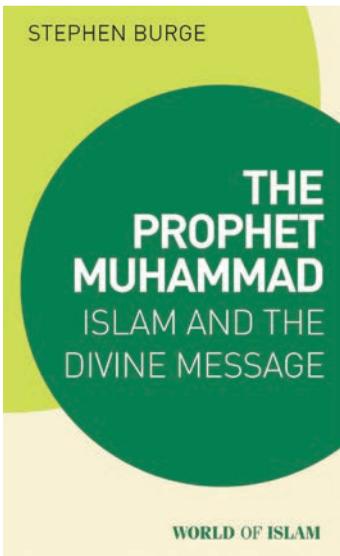
◆ 1945 Diamond Jubilee stamp. Image credit: IIS.



***People of Faith: Essays on a Historical and Contemporary Profile of the Ismailis***  
by Shams Vellani

Showing how the Shi'a Ismaili Muslims unite their spiritual traditions with the demands of living in the modern world according to the ethics of Islam, this collection of essays imparts good sense on topics including an overview of Shi'i Islam, a profile of the Ismaili Jamat and models for contemporary living. Under the guidance of the hereditary Imam of the Time, Aga Khan IV, the Jamat embraces a rich diversity of traditions which collectively strive towards the betterment of self and society. These clearly written essays highlight the crucial Ismaili traditions of philanthropy, voluntary service and self-reliance, while touching on the activities and achievements of the institutions of the Ismaili Imamat.

The author, Shams Vellani, is a highly respected Jamati leader who has worked at The Institute of Ismaili Studies for over 40 years. Readers will benefit from the careful observations and keen insights he shares from a lifetime of service in the Ismaili community.



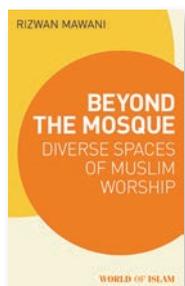
***The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message***  
by Stephen Burge

The third book in the World of Islam series, *The Prophet Muhammad* presents an illuminating portrait of Muhammad in his capacity as God's messenger and an exemplary figure to Muslims. Revealing the challenges and triumphs of prophecy, Stephen Burge examines how prophets have inspired faith communities' relationship with the Divine, and one another. In doing so, this engaging account elucidates the enduring influence of prophecy and the profound legacy of the Prophet Muhammad.

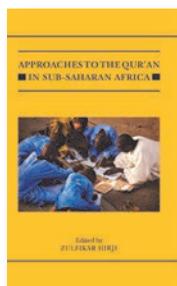
“Thoroughly interesting. A novel, vivid approach, both learned and imaginative, *The Prophet Muhammad* explores faith and feeling through literature, myth and psychology as well as traditional scholarship and Muslim challenges to tradition, with the bonus of illustrations that take us on a world tour of lived Islam. All readers will be enriched by Burge's discussion of prophethood and surprised by its renewed relevance today.”

Julia Bray, Laudian Professor of Arabic, University of Oxford

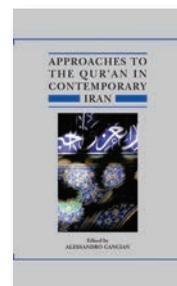
# Other Recently Published Titles



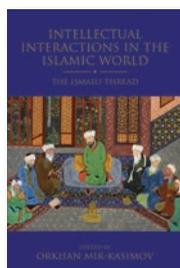
*Beyond the Mosque: Diverse Spaces of Muslim Worship*  
by Rizwan Mawani



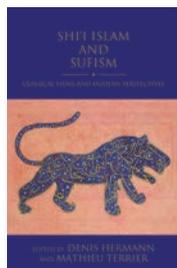
*Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa*  
Edited by Zulfikar Hirji



*Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Iran*  
Edited by Alessandro Cancian



*Intellectual Interactions in the Islamic World: The Ismaili Thread*  
Edited by Orkhan Mir-Kasimov



*Shi'i Islam and Sufism: Classical Views and Modern Perspectives*  
Edited by Denis Hermann and Mathieu Terrier

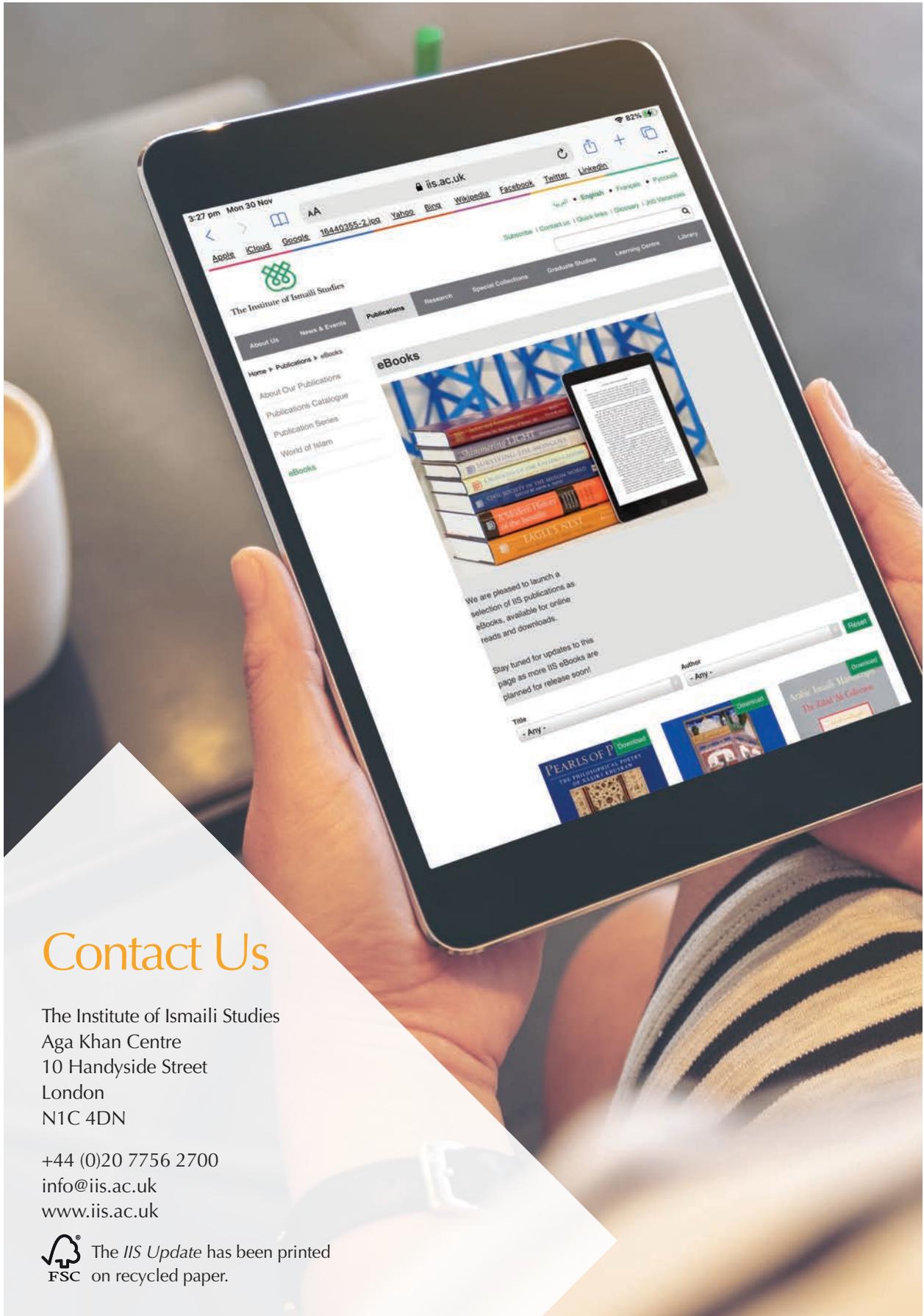
# Forthcoming Releases

*Affirming the Imamate: Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West. An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Works attributed to Abu 'Abd Allah al-Shi'i and his Brother*  
Edited and translated by Wilferd Madelung and Paul E Walker

*An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries, Volume 2: On Women*  
Edited by Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza

*Command and Creation: A Shi'i Cosmological Treatise. A Persian Edition and English Translation of al-Shahrastānī Majlis-i maktūb*  
Edited and translated by Daryoush Mohammad Poor

*On Life, Death, and Languages: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 29–31*  
Edited and translated by Eric Ormsby



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The IIS Update has been printed  
on recycled paper.



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