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THE INSTITUTE OF ISMAILI STUDIES

# UPDATE



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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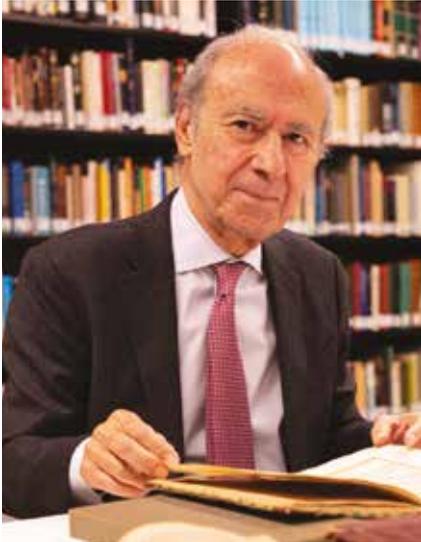
## Credits

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**Front Cover:** Detached album folio (cropped): Woman with a spray of flowers, Safavid period, c. 1575.  
*Image credit:* Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase – Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.296.



# Welcome

I am pleased to be updating you, our valued supporters, once again on the Institute's progress over the past year, and I hope you remain well and in good health. In 2021 the IIS benefited from the gradual resumption of in-person working and collaboration, and launched several exciting digital projects that will extend the reach of its educational offerings.

This year the IIS community has slowly begun to come together again in person. Our staff and researchers have been able to meet and collaborate once more in the inspiring environment of the Aga Khan Centre (AKC). It has been especially uplifting to see the return of our graduate students to face-to-face learning. We are proud to welcome students from countries in Asia, Africa, North America, Europe and Oceania this year. It is a pleasure to see the way in which these young people from Afghanistan to Kenya, New Zealand to Syria, have come together to create their own thriving student community. After the long periods of isolation of the previous year, I certainly am not alone in being delighted by the return to the convivial atmosphere of the AKC and the everyday life of the Institute.

We are keen to draw upon the opportunities and lessons learnt from the recent pandemic. We continue to build on the integration of a digital approach in all aspects of our work. One of the most significant developments is set to be the launch of the IIS Digital Curriculum e-book platform. This adopts a multilingual approach, with e-books in ten languages, and will ensure that the IIS curriculum materials will be accessible to members of the global Jamat in even the remotest areas. This year we have also launched an online catalogue for our Ismaili Special Collections, allowing members of the community and researchers across the world to explore thousands of precious items of Ismaili heritage.

Our research and publications work has continued apace, with the release of several new books and the launch of our first in-house series, *Living Ismaili Traditions*, created specifically for the Jamat. The first title in the series, *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration*, by Dr Shiraz Kabani, is a rich and personal exploration of different Ismaili traditions around the world. We have also recently published the second volume in our groundbreaking anthology of

Qur'anic commentaries series that explores a critical theme: women in the Qur'an. *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries, Volume 2: On Women* (Oxford University Press) represents a unique new resource for all scholars and students of the Qur'an and its interpretations, Islamic studies, and gender studies.

We end the year with two particularly exciting events: an online conference on Fatimid Cosmopolitanism and an exhibition on Wladimir Ivanow, a pioneer of modern Ismaili studies, at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery. The conference invites world-renowned academics to share their research on a period central to the history of Shi'i Ismailis. I will be speaking on Ivanow himself, whose life and work—which traces the contours of a transformative period in modern history—is the subject of our next exhibition at the AKC Gallery. I hope you will be able to visit it if you are in London.

I would also like to take a moment to remember our colleague and esteemed scholar, Dr Janis Esots, who sadly passed away in 2021. Janis joined the IIS in 2013 as a Research Associate in the Shi'i Studies Unit and, aside from his native Latvian, he was a master of the English, Russian, Arabic and Persian languages. During his lifetime he published a significant number of scholarly editions, translations and commentaries of Islamic philosophical and esoteric texts. We will miss him as a friend, colleague and rare scholar.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your continued support and interest in the work of the Institute. Promoting a better understanding of Islam continues to be our core endeavour and I look forward to updating you on the ways we continue to work towards this goal, with your support, in 2022.

**Farhad Daftary,**  
Co-Director, IIS

# A Fresh Look at Women in Qur'anic Interpretation

Building on the success of *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries, Vol. I: On the Nature of the Divine*, the second volume in the series focuses on a critical and contentious theme: Women in the Qur'an and traditional Qur'anic commentaries. *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries, Vol. II: On Women* comprises analyses of the female subject in the Qur'an, annotated translations of Qur'anic commentaries spanning twelve centuries, interviews with contemporary Muslim scholars and extensive introductory materials, which frame the work throughout and render these technically complex materials accessible to the reader.

◆ Dr Feras Hamza and Dr Karen Bauer, the editors of *On Women*. Image credit: IIS



We sat down with the book's editors, Dr Karen Bauer and Dr Feras Hamza, to find out how the tradition of Qur'anic commentary views women in the Qur'an, how it continues to influence many Muslim women's lives today, and why it was so important to feature contemporary women's voices.

### What were your motivations in choosing the theme of women for the latest anthology?

**Karen Bauer** My academic specialty is in women and gender in Islam, so it came about very organically. But I think it's worked well in a lot of ways, especially given the social impact of some of the issues that have to do with women.

**Feras Hamza** The *Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries* series has several other themes always in play, so one way of rephrasing your question is, why was this topic pushed up in the sequence? I think there's an immediate social urgency to it.

### What can readers expect from the book?

**Karen Bauer** The textual tradition dedicated to interpretation of the Qur'an (*tafsir*) is very male centred and scholastic. We've provided introductions to make it more accessible to the reader. We've also provided a counterfoil to it, by including some modern voices—interviews with reformists and women themselves. So a reader can expect to become acquainted with this tradition that's had an effect on many people's lives, and which, in some cases, has shaped laws in Muslim-majority parts of the world. And then we introduce the idea that there are alternatives to that and there probably always were, but those alternative voices are missing from what we read of the medieval scholastic tradition.

### Why did you choose the verses you used in the book?

**Karen Bauer** Three of the verses were chosen because they represent pressing social concerns for Muslim women today. The first relates to spousal roles and this very vexed question of the rights of the husband over the wife. The second is on women's testimony. Again, it's something that actually still affects women in some Muslim-majority countries today, and in *sharia* courts. The third is on the veil, and that, of course, is also of great interest to Muslim women themselves. The other verses are about women's spiritual equality and creational equality with men.

**Feras Hamza** There's a sense of responsibility, as editors, that we don't just present the medieval tradition, because we know that they're restricted in their worldview. So we wanted to give some indication of how the subject of 'women' could be read otherwise through the text of the Qur'an, and sometimes even through the medieval tradition itself, by including other instances.

**Karen Bauer** Take a verse like Qur'an 4:1, which talks about God creating humans from a single soul. This is a verse that for a lot of modern readers indicates creational equality between men and women. What's so fascinating is that the medieval commentators will say that the verse proves the creation of Eve from Adam and that women are a secondary creation. It's one of those moments where, within the Qur'an, one thing is being put forth, and within that commentarial tradition, cultural assumptions are being put forth. And those cultural assumptions have had a very heavy weight for women who've had to live with them.

### How did commentators interpret these verses over the years?

**Feras Hamza** Well, as their predecessors did. The medieval Muslim commentarial tradition has a kind of stability of opinion that you can probably trace into the 20th century. It's only really with the 20th century that you begin to see a slight rupture, in the sense of other voices emerging.

**Karen Bauer** And because women's own voices are absent, and because any alternative perspectives are absent, you get a certain rigid way of reproducing the power and authority that's vested in those scholars. It's precisely their dismissal of women's rational ability that continues to marginalise women from that tradition. Because, essentially, you're looking at a tradition where the scholars had absolutely no incentive to let anyone else in. That's how power and authority end up working, and it calls into question how much authority should be vested in that medieval tradition today.

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Karen Bauer

“ When we started to write about women in the Qur'an itself, to provide a bit of counterbalance to what's going on in the tradition, we were very surprised by what we found. I was surprised by how intrinsic women are in the whole Qur'anic narration and how the discourse on women in the Qur'an changes through time. ”

Karen Bauer

**Feras Hamza** There are many modernists who would say that you can throw out that medieval tradition, but there's no denying that it continues to exert a huge amount of influence where people really do believe that this authoritative tradition represents what God wants from them.

**Karen Bauer** We were teaching the other day and one of the students said that in her home country, a woman couldn't testify to her own rape because she needed four male witnesses to that. Laws like that are directly related to the medieval interpretations that we have now translated, and that is one of the reasons why it's so important to point out how that tradition was shaped, who was writing that tradition and how power and authority create interpretations that further marginalise the marginalised: in this case, women themselves. We had to say to that student, well, that is not from the Qur'an, that is from the medieval tradition.

### What new insights do you hope to bring with the book?

**Karen Bauer** The chapter on women in the Qur'an has the potential to offer new insights into the way that women were a part of the initial Qur'anic community. When we started to write about women in the Qur'an itself, to provide a bit of counterbalance to what's going on in the tradition, we were very surprised by what we found. I was surprised by how intrinsic women are in the whole Qur'anic narration and how the discourse on women in the Qur'an changes through time, and that's what we document in that chapter.

**Feras Hamza** There would have been a potential intellectual delinquency if we had left this subject in the hands of the commentators alone. We were really surprised in a positive way that a lot of that dismissive attitude towards the subject of women is not actually merited at all by the Qur'anic narrative.

### How does the book help us to understand contemporary issues for women in Islam?

**Feras Hamza** This is not just an armchair issue that one can just discuss without any real-world repercussions. We're talking about situations of real violence that women can find themselves in. I think that's the thing we were most conscious of: the responsibility of what happens when an anthology is sealed in writing and has a stamp of Oxford University Press and a prestigious institute. If that's unqualified, it's almost like saying, that's how it is and that's how it's always going to be and that's fine. There's a sense of urgency to rethink, because if you just look at the Qur'anic narrative, it actually offers a lot more than what the medieval tradition says. This is the context in which we can then begin to look at issues to do with contemporary life for Muslim women across the world.

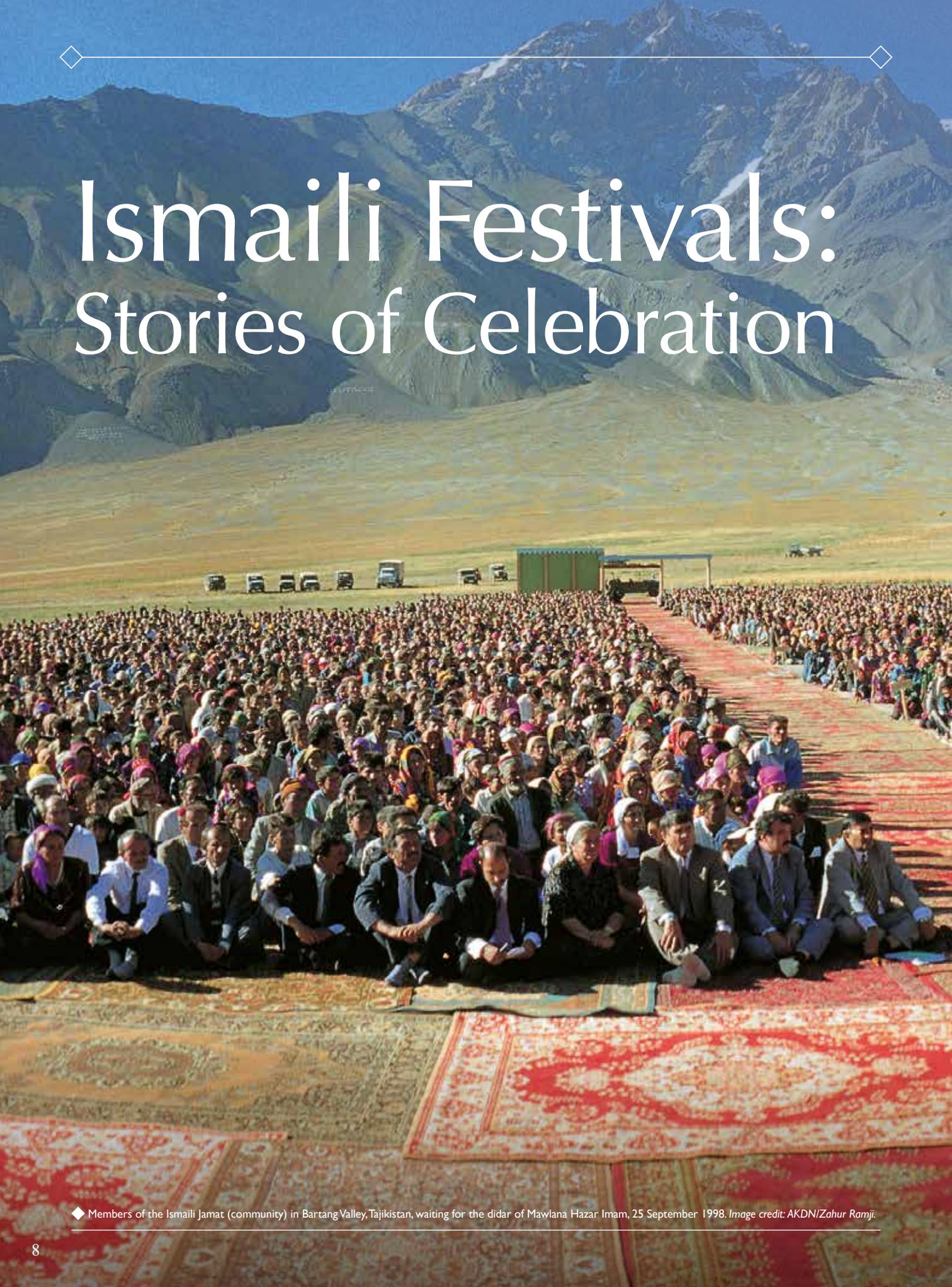
*An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries, Volume 2: On Women is published by Oxford University Press (2021).*

“ There's a sense of urgency to rethink, because if you just look at the Qur'anic narrative, it actually offers a lot more than what the medieval tradition says. ”

Feras Hamza



◆ Qur'an manuscript *Surat al-Nisa* (Chapter of the women), showing part of verse 4:1. The fragment appears to date from the Ilkhanid period (c. 1250–1350) and may have been produced in the imperial centre of Tabriz in north-western Iran. Image credit: Unknown author, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

A large crowd of people, including men in suits and women in colorful headscarves, are sitting on a long red carpet that stretches across a valley. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains under a clear blue sky. The scene is set in a vast, open landscape.

# Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration

◆ Members of the Ismaili Jamat (community) in Bartang Valley, Tajikistan, waiting for the didar of Mawlana Hazar Imam, 25 September 1998. Image credit: AKDN/Zahur Ramji.

*Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration* by Dr Shiraz Kabani is the first title in the IIS's new Living Ismaili Traditions series. The book is a unique and personal account of festivals and traditions from the author's own lived experience as an Ismaili. Here Dr Kabani—who heads the IIS's Department of Community Relations—reflects on the aims of the series, who it is for, and the importance of storytelling.

A large crowd of people is gathered for a festival in a mountainous region. In the foreground, a camera operator is visible, and the ground is covered with red and white patterned carpets. The background shows a vast, open landscape with mountains and a clear sky.

Returning to the festivities at London Olympia, the round of *rasda* was followed by *dandiya raas*, which is often part of the Imam Day and other celebrations among South Asian Ismailis. This traditional folk dance is performed with one or two *dandiyas*, which are foot-long wooden sticks. Although it has many forms, it generally involves two individuals striking their sticks in a rhythm, while stamping their feet on the ground, like in a sword fight. Some believe it is a symbolic re-enactment of a sword fight between the forces of good and evil. After two strikes, the partners swirl to exchange sides and repeat the motion. The striking of sticks and stamping of feet correspond to the beat of instrumental music. When many couples perform this dance together, the swirling and circular movements are quite mesmerising. I have rarely played *dandiya raas* myself, but watching it enhances my joy in celebrating the blessing of Imam Day in my life.

From *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration*, Chapter 9: Imam Day and the Spiritual Leadership of Mawlana Hazar Imam, pp.169–170

**Please could you tell us about the genesis of the Living Ismaili Traditions series?**

For a number of years the Institute has been working on developing publications that will appeal to individuals who are not academics in the field of Islamic studies, where we could bring together a lot of the research and scholarship that has been undertaken by the Institute. The Living Ismaili Traditions series was conceptualised specifically for the Ismaili community to address some of the issues of contemporary relevance to the community. And given that most communities are made up of people who have shared narratives, shared stories, shared festivals, we thought that the first book could take this up as a subject to communicate certain important ideas to the community.

There is much in Ismaili history, particularly in terms of the recent past—stories of migration, stories of settlement, how communities in different parts of the world have developed—that has not been talked or written about, at least not in very accessible language. Unless they are scholars in the field of Ismaili studies, many in the community are not familiar with parts of the history of the community, except what is commonly known. And so it is our hope that these books will shed light on important episodes and personalities in Ismaili history, so that the Jamat is better aware and understands its own past and present better.

◆ Families break their fast in front of the Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, during Ramadan. Image credit: Ton Koene / Alamy Stock Photo; ID CY33E0.

**Can you tell us about the role of storytelling in *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration*?**

Anthropologists tell us that human societies have told stories to each other since time immemorial. I remember reading a research study where students in a classroom were shown certain geometrical figures as part of a film, and they were asked to make sense of it. Every single person, except for one individual, made a story out of those patterns. What that tells us is that we tell stories to make sense of things. We are meaning-makers by nature, and we need to tell stories to ourselves, to see patterns, because that helps to make sense of the world around us.

In the book you will find three different types of stories. First, stories that are closely associated with the festivals have been included. So, for example, the story of Prophet Abraham and his son, and their sacrifice, is associated

“ I’m hopeful that when people read this book, they will be encouraged and motivated to read more of the stories, but also to tell more stories among themselves. ”





◆ An outdoor Nawruz celebration, with food and newly grown sprouts in Hisor, Tajikistan. Image credit: ITAR-TASS News Agency / Alamy Stock Photo; ID M8X8B6.

with Eid al-Adha and is therefore narrated. The second type of stories are those that have come down to us in history, mostly through oral tradition. These are stories that you find in the *Hadith*, stories that you find in the *Mathnawi* of Rumi, for example. These were selected on the basis of their contemporary relevance. The third are stories from my own life, some funny, some sombre, but events that taught me lessons that may be of relevance to the readers of the book.

### Can you give us a taste of one of the festival experiences you write about in the book?

In the chapter on Imam Day, which is the celebration of the anniversary of the present Imam's accession to the Imamate, I describe celebrations in London. Beyond the gatherings in Jamatkhana, on this occasion there are usually exuberant celebrations where a large number of Ismailis get together in a spirit of joy and camaraderie. During those celebrations, there are certain songs that are sung and dances that are performed in large groups. In the book, I have tried to describe that scene and then explore the purpose and meaning of the celebrations. In this context, I have also discussed how such celebrations are frowned upon in some Muslim interpretations and why this is not perceived as an issue amongst the Ismailis.

### What are some of the ideas you explore in the book?

The first idea that I've tried to communicate in the book is about diversity and its beauty, for people to understand the astonishing diversity that exists in human societies, more specifically in the Muslim world, and also amongst Ismaili communities. The second, related idea is that, within this diversity, there is also a unity. There is much among the Ismailis in terms of their culture, their festivals, and their

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stories that they share with other traditions of Muslims, and indeed, with other religious communities. And the third idea is to reinvigorate this notion of storytelling, which is an art that, in my view, we seem to be losing. And I'm hopeful that when people read this book, they will be encouraged and motivated to read more of the stories, but also to tell more stories among themselves.

### Who is the book for?

If you are someone who wants to know something more about the Ismaili tradition, its cultures, its stories, its festivals, then this book is for you. If you are faced with questions about your tradition and are looking for ways to respond, then this book is for you. I've specifically written it for people who don't have academic expertise in the field of Islamic studies. Wherever there is a complicated idea, I've provided contemporary examples for readers to understand those ideas. So, if you feel that you want to better understand your own Ismaili tradition, then this book is for you.

*Ismaili Festivals* is available to order from local ITREBs.



# Explore Ismaili Heritage Material Online

◆ A manuscript of Urdu commentary on *Mathnawi* of Rumi, nineteenth century. Image credit: IIS.

The launch of an online catalogue of special collections housed at the IIS enables exploration of many precious examples of Ismaili heritage material. Naureen Ali, who looks after the collections management system (Adlib) and the online catalogue for the Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU), presents highlights now accessible via the new online collection.

“ This online catalogue represents a key milestone in making accessible the rich heritage of Ismaili communities from around the world to a varied audience including researchers, students and interested members of the public. It is hoped that the catalogue will be an important tool in facilitating research and educational activities on various aspects of the intellectual and literary heritage of the Ismaili communities. ”

Dr Wafi Momin,  
Head of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit

The Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU) has launched an online catalogue of special collections housed at the IIS. Featuring information on thousands of items, the catalogue will enable a wide range of audiences, including researchers, to explore heritage relating to Ismaili communities online.

The IIS holds a significant repository of special collections related to the heritage of Ismaili communities and other Muslim traditions. These collections include nearly 3,000 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Indic and other languages, as well as coins, glass weights, medals and other historical artefacts, photographs and audio-visual materials, rare and special printed materials (including periodicals) and archival collections.

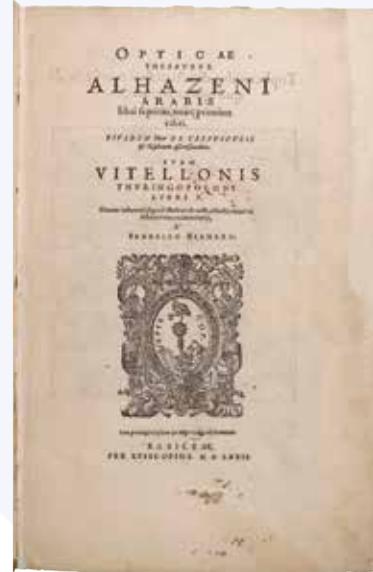
In 2013 the IIS established ISCU as part of its continuing endeavours to systematically preserve, develop, digitise and catalogue these collections; ISCU was also founded to study and facilitate research on these materials, in order to contribute to the IIS's vision of promoting scholarship on the heritage of Ismaili communities and that of other Muslim groups. These special collections have been at the heart of the research, publications and educational programmes undertaken by the IIS over the years.

The following are some of the unique items now catalogued and available for researchers to learn more about as part of the IIS online special collection.

***Kitab al-manazir (Opticae Thesaurus)* by  
Abu 'Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham**

Known as Alhazen in Europe, Abu 'Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham was born in Basra in the tenth century and later moved to Cairo. Owing to his work on human visual perception, he is considered the father of modern optics. In 2015 UNESCO celebrated the International Year of Light by marking the 1,000-year anniversary of his most famous work, *Kitab al-manazir* (Book of Optics), which was translated into Latin in the thirteenth century and influenced European thinkers and scientists.

Fatimid Cairo in al-Haytham's lifetime was home to a dedicated institution of higher learning known as the Dar-al-Hikma (House of Wisdom). Built in 395 AH/1005 AD by the Fatimid Imam-Caliph Abu 'Ali al-Mansur al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (386–411 AH/996–1021 AD), the institution served those who specialised in non-religious sciences. Being a polymath, al-Haytham not only worked on the principles of optics but also produced works on mathematics and astronomy.



◆ A Latin translation of *Kitab al-manazir* (*Opticae Thesaurus*), by Abu 'Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham, published in Basileae in 1572 AD. Image credit: IIS.



◆ A set of two rock crystal three-faced seals and two metal seals from Aga Khan I (c. 1258–1283 AH/1842–1866 AD). Image credit: IIS.

**Seals from Aga Khan I**

The inscription on the rock crystal seals includes a line from the invocation, *Nada 'Ali*, which is a prayer used by Shi'i Muslims, along with some Qur'anic verses. The inscriptions on the metal include the name Muhammad Hasan al-Husayni, also known as Hasan 'Ali Shah (Aga Khan I).

Hasan 'Ali Shah was born in Kahak in 1804 AD and arrived in Gujarat, India in 1845 AD. According to Dr Farhad Daftary, in his book *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History*, he was the first Imam of his time to set foot in India and his permanent settlement in Bombay in 1848 marked the beginning of the modern period in the history of the Ismailis. A manuscript of his autobiography entitled *'Ibrat-afza* about his life in Iran and India is part of the IIS special collections and was critically edited and translated into English by the IIS in 2018.

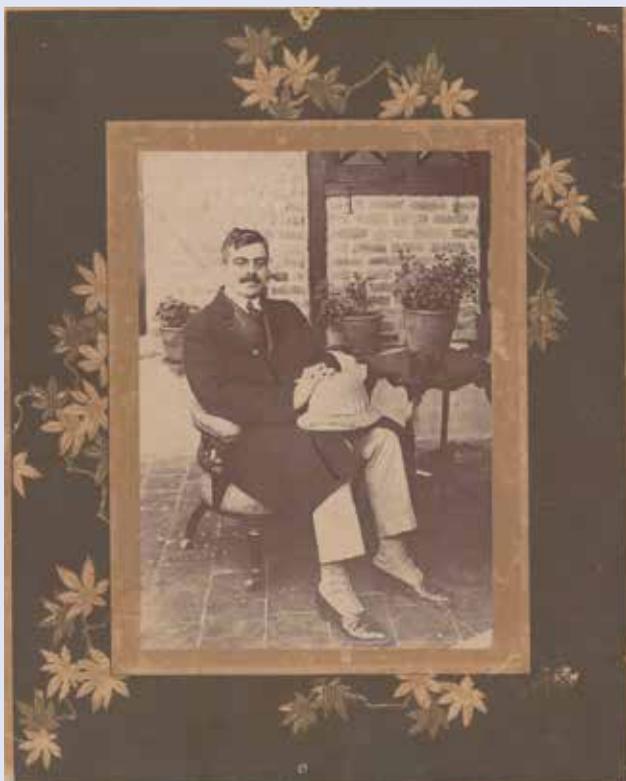
### A dinar of Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-'Aziz

The special collections housed at the IIS include coins from the Fatimid and Alamut periods. Featuring a variety of mints, types, years of production and associated rulers, these coins help enhance our understanding of historical events.

The featured dinar from Fatimid Imam-Caliph Nizar Abu al-Mansur al-'Aziz billah was minted in Palestine in 382 AH/ 992 AD. An excellent administrator, Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-'Aziz sought to expand the Fatimid empire during his rule. According to Dr Farhad Daftary, in his book *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History*, "By the end of his reign, the Fatimid empire had attained its greatest geographical extent, with Fatimid sovereignty recognised from the Atlantic and western Mediterranean to the Red Sea, the Hijaz, Syria and Palestine."

Coins from the Fatimid era reflect the expanse of the Fatimid state and the regions they ruled. The quality of the coins is also indicative of the strength and power of the Fatimids. Fatimid coins were particularly valuable in terms of their gold content and were renowned across Mediterranean lands, as well as along international trade routes.

◆ A dinar of Fatimid Imam-Caliph Nizar Abu al-Mansur al-'Aziz billah (r. 365–386 AH/975–996 AD). Image credit: IIS.



### Photograph of Aga Khan III

Photographs (in digital and print format) form a significant part of the special collections at the IIS. As a repository of the heritage of Ismaili communities, the special collections housed at the IIS include memorabilia relating to the 48th Imam of the Nizari Ismailis, Aga Khan III, and the present Imam, Aga Khan IV, such as printed material, commemorative coins, badges and medals relating to their various Jubilee celebrations.

◆ A photograph of Aga Khan III, dated 1919. Image credit: IIS.

### Photo of Women Playing *Daf* from 'Pamir' Album

This photograph is from a 1930s photo album that includes photographs of the Shughnan and Rushan regions of Soviet Tajikistan. Containing around 100 photographs, the album highlights the social and cultural life of the peoples of Gorno-Badakhshan, including images of children, musicians, local famous dancers and religious dignitaries. Photographs of the remains of the Vamar castle, which used to be the residence of the local rulers, are also included, along with the castle of Bar-Panja, the residence of the local rulers of Shughnan.

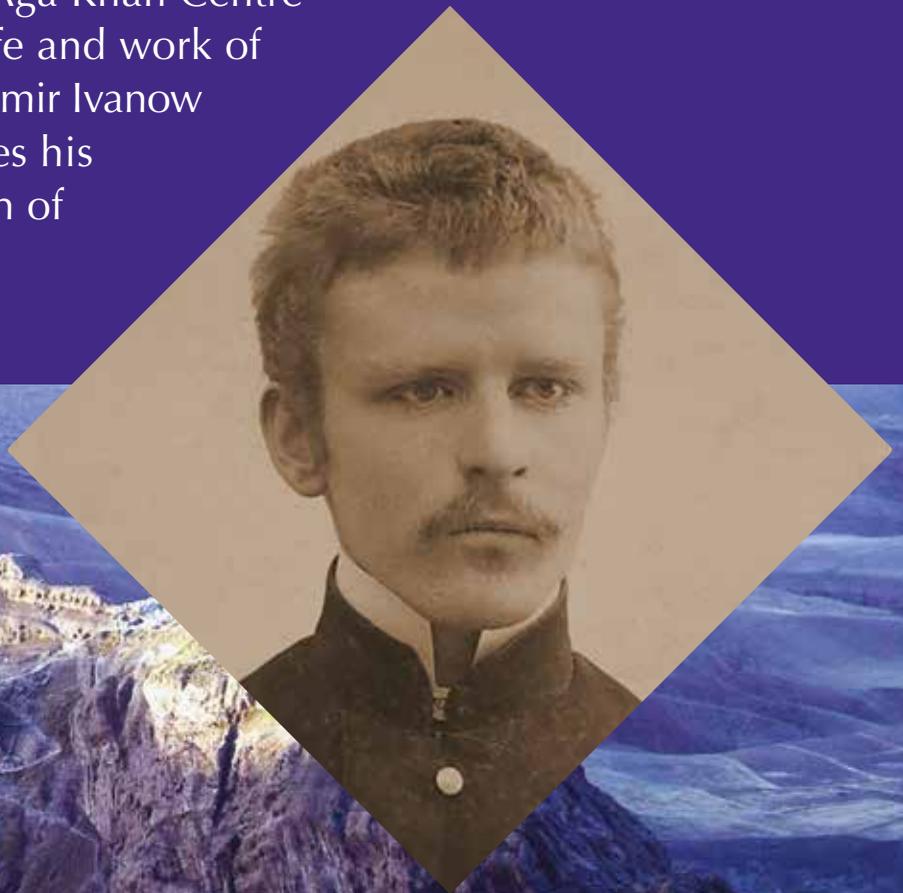
**The ISCU online catalogue will launch in December.**  
Please visit [www.iis.ac.uk/special-collections](http://www.iis.ac.uk/special-collections) for access.



◆ A group of women playing the drum (*daf*) (from the photo album, 'Pamir', c.1930s). Image credit: IIS.

# Wladimir Ivanow and Modern Ismaili Studies

A new exhibition at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery introduces the life and work of the Russian scholar Wladimir Ivanow (1886–1970) and explores his vital role in the formation of modern Ismaili studies.



- ◆ Wladimir Ivanow, photograph taken c. 1907 in Tsarskoe Selo by the photographer M.A. Kahn. *Image credit: Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg.*
- ◆ A view of Alamut, the most famous fortress of the Nizari Ismaili state in Iran. *Image credit: Alamut Cultural Base.*

The exhibition traces the contours of a transformative period in modern history, from the October 1917 Revolution in Russia to the height of the Imperial Russian and British empires and their dissolution into the new nations of Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. This radical territorial rearrangement had long-lasting ramifications across the Muslim world, which over the span of just a few decades saw both the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924 and the establishment of the twentieth century's first avowedly Muslim nation state, Pakistan, in 1947. This is paralleled by a significant shift in the academic study of Islam, with an increasing interest in Shi'ism, and Ismaili Shi'ism in particular.

Following Ivanow across the world—from his early travels in Iran to his arrival and sojourn in colonial Bombay—the exhibition positions the scholar and his research at the very heart of this transformative epoch. The exhibition illustrates the historical context of the period but also sheds light on how Ivanow's life was directed by his chosen field of study: Ismaili history and thought. Visitors will be introduced to the history of Ismaili studies and aspects of the history of Ismailism itself, while also discovering the crucial role Ivanow played in the formation and consolidation of the emerging discipline of Ismaili studies, most particularly with reference to his recovery of manuscripts long kept hidden by the various Ismaili communities with whom he came into contact.

"Ivanow's excitement must have been palpable as he examined the contents of manuscripts that had lain unstudied for centuries, and perhaps this was what provided the adrenalin for him to produce his prolific academic output," says Russell Harris, an editor at the IIS who has assisted with the exhibition. Mr Harris also worked with Dr Farhad Daftary, Co-Director of the Institute, on *Fifty Years in the East*, Ivanow's memoirs, and finds Ivanow's academic rigour, dedication and sense of adventure impressive and inspiring. Dr Daftary also commented that "it is about time for us to properly recognise the contributions of Wladimir Ivanow as the foremost pioneer of Ismaili studies."

The exhibition also features photographs of academic personalities who either influenced or collaborated with Ivanow, as well as showcasing a selection of relevant printed works, manuscripts and correspondence. Ivanow's journeys and the body of work he produced during his lifetime are illustrated with a timeline and map. According to Dr Taushif Kara, the exhibition's co-curator, "The formation of modern Ismaili studies was intimately linked to the life and work of Wladimir Ivanow. But what I did not realise prior to working on this exhibition was just how crucial he was in the development of Islamic studies as well. Many of the individuals who came to dominate the academic study of Islam in the twentieth century—from Bernard Lewis to Marshall Hodgson—began their scholarly careers studying Ismaili history, and so were indebted to Ivanow's pioneering research in different ways.

"Helping to curate this exhibition pushed me to reflect on the significant connections between the study of Ismaili history

and the wider study of Islam in the twentieth century. We hope to discuss these fascinating but often unexplored connections further at a forthcoming workshop on the topic at the Aga Khan Centre in 2022, held in collaboration with the Centre of Islamic Studies, Cambridge, and The Institute of Ismaili Studies."

The exhibition is accompanied by a short documentary film featuring interviews with historians and academics, including Dr Farhad Daftary, who himself has been greatly influenced by Ivanow and has continued to build on his legacy and work.

In many ways, the endeavours of Ivanow prefigured the scholarly work of The Institute of Ismaili Studies more broadly, and his prolific output to a great extent mirrors the current areas of research at the Institute, particularly the disciplines of Central Asian, South Asian and Shi'i studies.

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"Wladimir Ivanow and Modern Ismaili Studies" is the second exhibition that the IIS has organised in honour of Ivanow. Dr Hakim Elnazarov, Head of the Central Asian Studies Unit at the IIS, who initiated the first Ivanow exhibition, in St Petersburg, Russia, in October 2019, says "Ivanow was a Russian orientalist, whose ground-breaking research in Ismaili studies has not yet been fully appreciated. The first exhibition, in St Petersburg, highlighted the contribution of Ivanow and Russian scholarship to Ismaili studies. The London exhibition builds on this vision and showcases the origins of modern Ismaili studies, which was driven by Ivanow. The exhibition provides a visual illustration of the journey Ismaili studies made in the last century, and it strives to inspire a new generation of students and scholars to advance Ismaili studies in the modern age."

**Wladimir Ivanow and Modern Ismaili Studies will run at the Aga Khan Centre Gallery, London, until 31 March 2022.**

**For further information on the exhibition and associated learning programme please visit [www.agakhancentre.org.uk/gallery/wladimir-ivanow-and-modern-ismaili-studies](http://www.agakhancentre.org.uk/gallery/wladimir-ivanow-and-modern-ismaili-studies).**

# IIS Set to Launch Digital Curriculum Platform

We are excited to announce that, as part of its long-term digital strategy, the IIS's Department of Curriculum Studies is soon to start a phased roll-out of the IIS Digital Curriculum (IISDC) e-book platform.

“The IIS Digital Curriculum opens up exciting possibilities for the creative use of the curriculum materials. In the coming years, we look forward to increasing the technical sophistication of the digital platform to make the educational process even more engaging and fulfilling for students, teachers, parents and other members of the Ismaili community.”

Alnoor Nathani, Design and Production Manager | Shameer-Ali Prasla, Digital Education Officer

The IISDC aims to make the curriculum materials published by the IIS available as e-books to pre-school, Ta'lim and Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) teachers, and to students, parents and members of the Ismaili community in general. The e-book platform is intended to facilitate teaching under the current pandemic and also, crucially, to widen access to the curriculum in remote areas.

The curriculum developed by the IIS presents a graded programme of instruction which examines Islam as both faith and civilisation, historically and today. Its overall aim is to educate young Ismailis in the faith, ethics, history and cultures of Muslim societies, and the Ismaili Muslim community in particular.

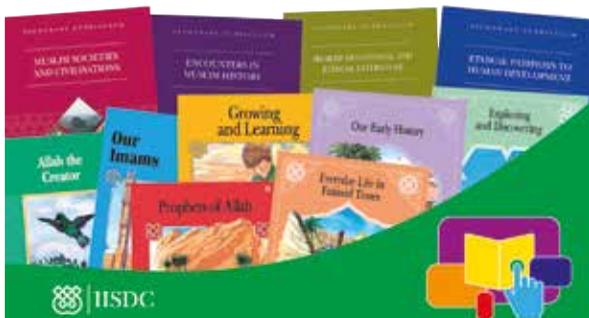
The curriculum draws on modern principles of education, with the intention of making learning a creative and engaging experience for young minds, as well as seeking

to bridge religious and secular education. The teaching and learning materials include student readers and textbooks, guides for teachers and parents, and learning resources such as activity books, posters and picture cards.

The new digital curriculum platform adopts a multilingual approach, aiming to make the e-books available in ten languages on a phased basis. The user interface in English, French, Portuguese and Gujarati has been completed, with the interface in another six languages under development.

The IISDC platform benefits from multiple navigation features, annotation tools, and search facilities within and across e-books. It will also offer downloadable offline apps for Windows and Mac OS operating systems. Apps for Android and iOS, currently under development, will allow the e-books to be downloaded onto the user's personal devices for offline reading. A custom registration app has also been developed to assist ITREBs to create and manage user accounts.

The IISDC has been pilot tested with the help of STEP and Ta'lim teachers in different regions. Their comments and suggestions have been instrumental in refining the e-book platform. The DCS would like to thank all the ITREBs, STEP and Ta'lim teachers, and TKN volunteers for their assistance and support in bringing this vital new educational tool to the Jamat.



Further details on accessing the e-book platform can be obtained from ITREBs.

Hear about teachers' experience:

“ I think the IISDC e-book platform is such an amazing initiative [which aims] to have essential curriculum books on one platform. They are easy to access and use—facilitating not only the teaching and learning process but also [for] easy reference whenever one needs.”

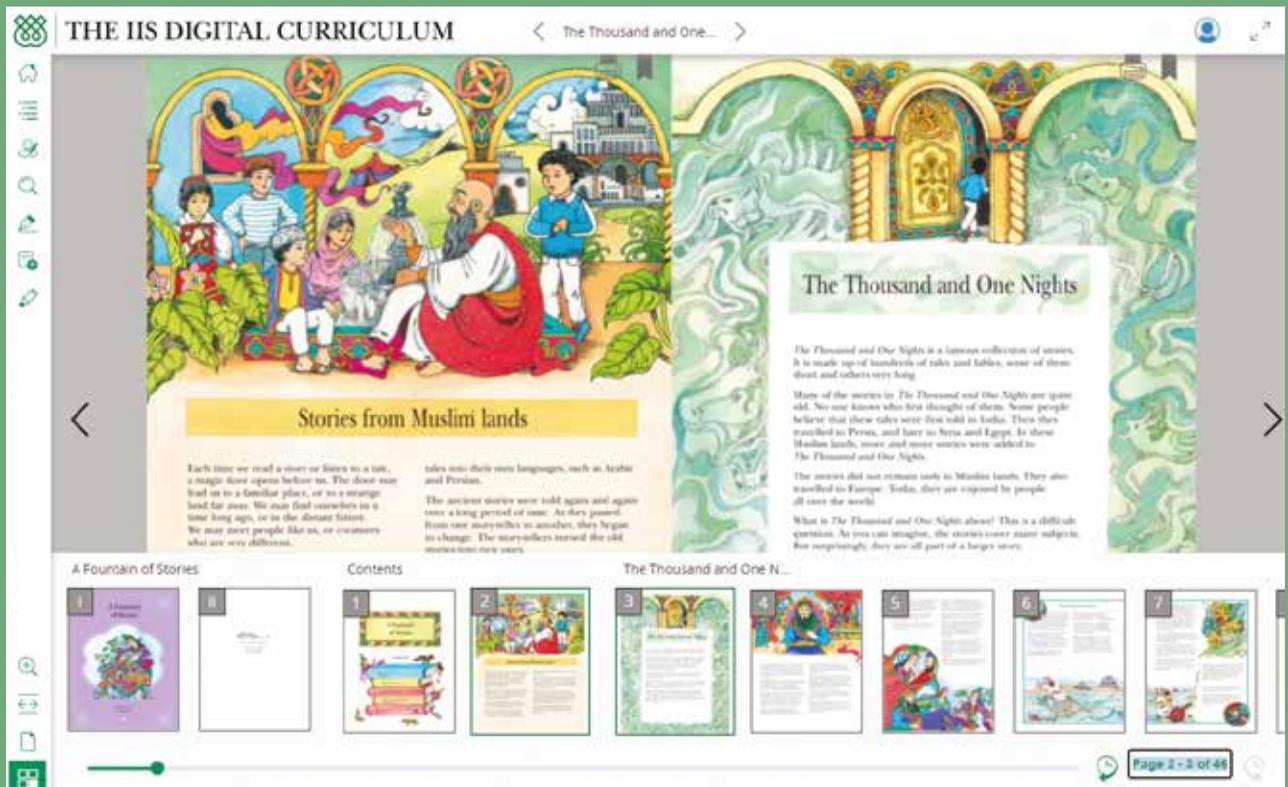
Participant, ITREB Pakistan

“ Overall, it is very accessible and effective in design. I liked the way it has eased [how] one navigates through pages of the books through search, notes, highlight options.”

Participant, ITREB Canada

“ I think the e-book platform is very useful for teachers and teacher educators, not only in teaching but in making lesson plans, and as a resource and tool to make teaching and learning meaningful and productive.”

Participant, ITREB D.R.Congo



◆ A page from the new IIS digital curriculum. Image credit: IIS.



# Student Voices: Exploring Identity Through Art and GPISH

◆ Nabila on Kenyatta Avenue in Nairobi, Kenya. Image credit: Nabila Walji.

Nabila Walji is a third-year student on the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) and in 2021 opened her first exhibition—*UnBelonging in my Fatherland*—with Calgary’s Arts Commons. Here she talks about her combined academic-artistic photographic and writing practice, which explores identity, culture, discrimination and community, with a focus on her partly East African heritage.

**Please could you tell us a bit about your exhibition *UnBelonging in my Fatherland* and the subject matter it covers?**

The exhibition is about evoking that sense that I think everyone feels to differing degrees, of not belonging in a place that they’re from, or that they live in—and about that universal search for a home. But on a more specific level, it’s about my own journey of being a Canadian, who always

grew up thinking that they’re part South Asian and part East African, but in going to my East African fatherland finding that un-belonging could be found in the place that I thought was my homeland as well. I think, for any diasporic or migratory peoples, including Ismailis, there’s a huge resonance, in terms of the story that the exhibition is telling, because many of us have been migratory or have had to move.

**What prompted you to start the project or start asking those questions?**

It comes partly from my youth, of being a person of colour in a Canadian society, where many people are told—whether they’re born there, they’re first, second, third or fourth generation—they’re still told: go back to where you came from. And so I guess for me, subtly or not so subtly, it made me ask: where is that place? And I found that it is kind of elusive, that there’s no actual origin point. The next layer then comes from my own experiences living and working in East Africa and reflecting on my positionality in that society when I was there. And the complexity of being what they call Asian, or what they call Indian, in that society and finding that, even if we’re fifth generation there, we still don’t really belong there either. The last part of this question would be just having an interest in documenting my family history in the area. Once I lived in Nairobi, I discovered that

there's this very vibrant, creative community that isn't stuck in silos, where art belongs in one category and social impact belongs in another. They're engaged with their society through their creativity. Through them, I was able to learn how to document these places.

### Could you say a bit about your combined academic, artistic, photographic and writing practice?

I always was a writer, and I did photography as a hobby. I got more into street photography during my undergraduate studies living in the very vibrant city of Montreal. I integrated these to some extent in my anthropological studies, because it provided that space to do visual anthropology and explore the image, and combine art and academics in writing through ethnography. It started to more concretely bridge in my internship with Aga Khan Foundation (East Africa) in Nairobi, because I was put in a communications position and was required to take pictures and write. And then I met a lot of these creatives there, that I mentioned earlier. Through GPISH, I realised I enjoyed the intellectual rigour of the academic world, and the ability to really research an issue. I've realised that there's space to combine my artistic practice with academic approaches, and do applied research. That's hopefully what I'll be pursuing more in my third year, because I've chosen an anthropology programme at Oxford that has a lot of experience in visual, material and museum anthropology. And so I'm hoping, through engagement with that programme, I'll be able to find that space and more deeply engage with issues of identity and racism I'm interested in.

### Could you say a bit more about how your experience on GPISH has influenced your practice and vice versa?

This idea of applied practice or applied research has influenced a lot of my GPISH experience. And a lot of my papers have been about the visual or art. I'm trying to think of ways to practise in this field and to challenge my thinking on it too. GPISH has given me the space to better understand racism and discrimination as they relate to the wider questions of culture, identity and development. Through it, I have gained a much better understanding of the roots of Islamophobia

and the systemic factors that underlie a lot of the issues in Muslim-majority areas. I think I didn't even appreciate coming in how much more depth I was going to get. I've now got a different layer of understanding on colonialism and its impact. I'm looking forward to taking that learning forward with other projects.

My GPISH research project is focusing on the idea of place, memory and identity in Nairobi using my family's restaurant, which was an iconic establishment in the city. I'm looking at how, through people's memory, the restaurant represents cultural heritage in the city. There's an image of it in the exhibition: it's directly across from the iconic town Jamatkhana in Nairobi.

### What do you hope visitors take away from your exhibition?

UnBelonging in my Fatherland is kind of an ode to the Ismaili community and is reflective of many of our experiences. And so in that sense, I'm hoping that for people who might have roots in East Africa, they're looking at it critically. The exhibition does tell stories about recognisable places, but there is commentary throughout, on colonialism, racism and some political issues that challenged me as a Canadian outsider who also was kind of an insider. I hope people whose families are from the region or who have heard about it and identify with the region, also get to learn about what everyday life is like, rather than just be too caught up in the nostalgic element of it. Part of the goal is also to counterpoint the ways in which Africa as a continent is usually represented by showing its internal diversity, focused on this region. More broadly, I think it is about reflecting on your own positionality in your societies and thinking through un-belonging, which stems from racism.

You can read more in our Student Voices blog series at [www.iis.ac.uk](http://www.iis.ac.uk).

Take a 3D virtual tour of UnBelonging in My Fatherland and watch the exhibition's multimedia component by visiting [www.artsccommons.ca](http://www.artsccommons.ca).

“GPISH has given me the space to better understand racism and discrimination as they relate to the wider questions of culture, identity and development. Through it, I have gained a much better understanding of the roots of Islamophobia and the systemic factors that underlie a lot of the issues in Muslim-majority areas. I think I didn't even appreciate coming in how much more depth I was going to get.”

# Alumni: Highlights from Annual Profile Report 2020

Our alumni are a growing body of professionals working in diverse sectors, including academia, development, media, education, government, and arts and culture. There are currently around 700 IIS alumni dispersed across more than 35 countries. Find out what they've been doing in these highlights from our annual alumni profile report 2020.\*

**67 alumni** were appointed to senior volunteer roles within Jamati institutions, AKDN, and external organisations

**109 alumni** engaged with the IIS in various capacities

## Employment



The global IIS alumni body comprises **697 graduates** living in **37 countries**

A significant majority of our alumni (**588 or 84%**) reported themselves as employed, with more than half (**367 or 53%**) in professional employment with Imamat institutions

## Voluntary Contribution



**287 alumni** were able to contribute as volunteers to significant projects or assignments of Imamat institutions and external organisations

**113 alumni** provided support during the pandemic independently or in collaboration with AKDN agencies, government organisations, the United Nations, or other civil society agencies

\* 549 alumni responded to the IIS Alumni Survey 2020.

**27 alumni** received awards and grants, including fellowships and scholarships

**27 alumni** were involved in organising conferences, initiating fundraising projects and artistic endeavours, as well as establishing not-for-profit organisations

**58 alumni** published papers in academic journals

**30 alumni** presented papers at international conferences

**121 alumni** are pursuing or have completed further studies on a part-time or full-time basis

**3 alumni** published books

## Achievements

## Continuing Education

**14 alumni** earned promotions in their professional roles

**73 alumni** conducted training sessions in a voluntary or professional capacity

**61 alumni** participated in non-academic conferences and workshops

**2 alumni** completed their doctoral studies:

**Rahim Gholami** (GPISH – 2002)  
University of Exeter

*Thesis: The Wayfarer's Sojourn at the Banquet: The Hermeneutics of Nasir-e Khusraw's Esoteric Guidance*

**Nazmin Halani** (GPISH – 1998)  
University of Warwick

*Thesis: Religious Nurture of Ismaili Children in the UK*

# Three New Short Courses on Offer in 2022

We are delighted to announce that some of our short courses are returning to a face-to-face format at the Aga Khan Centre in London next year, and our popular field-based programmes in Egypt and Tunisia will resume (subject to Covid-19 travel restrictions). We are also introducing three brand new courses in 2022.



◆ Previous course participants in Tunisia. Image credit: IIS

SHORT COURSE	PROGRAMME DATES	APPLICATION DEADLINE	FEE (£)	COURSE DIRECTOR
<b>ONLINE, ZOOM</b>				
Introduction to Islam	19 – 29 Apr 2022	28 Feb 2022	175	Dr Daryoush Poor
Shari'a: Development of Fiqh and Ethics in Muslim Contexts	9 – 27 May 2022	28 Feb 2022	175	Dr Mohamed Keshavjee
The Qur'an and its Interpretations	13 – 24 Jun 2022	28 Feb 2022	175	Dr Omar Alí-De-Unzaga
<b>FACE TO FACE, AGA KHAN CENTRE, LONDON</b>				
<b>NEW</b> Community Libraries: Planning, Management and Promotion	13 – 16 Jul 2022	21 Mar 2022	600	Dr Walid Ghali
<b>NEW</b> Studying and Preserving Manuscripts and Other Heritage Materials of the Ismaili Communities	18 – 22 Jul 2022	21 Mar 2022	750	Dr Wafi Momin
Shi'i Islam: Thought, Beliefs and Practices	25 – 29 Jul 2022	21 Mar 2022	750	Dr Shainool Jiwa
<b>NEW</b> Exploring Ismaili Traditions	2 – 6 Aug 2022	21 Mar 2022	750	Mr Hussain Jasani
<b>FIELD-BASED**</b>				
Exploring Ismaili History: Walking in the Footsteps of the Fatimids – Tunisia	8 – 12 Oct 2022	21 Mar 2022	1050	Dr Shainool Jiwa
Understanding Culture – Egypt	12 – 17 Nov 2022	21 Mar 2022	1050	Professor Yudhishtir Raj Isar

\*\*Applications will close before the deadline if a specific number of applications are reached. For all face-to-face and field-based courses, flight, visa and dinner costs are not included.

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

New

# Publications

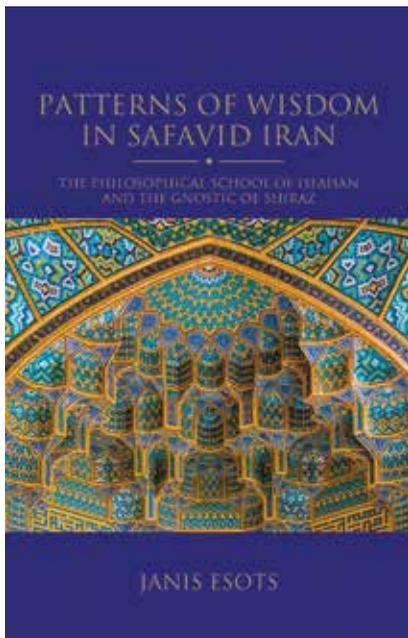


## *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration* By Shiraz Kabani

The Muslim calendar is enriched by festivals observed by the *umma* as a whole, such as Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. Some occasions, like Eid al-Ghadir, are commemorated by the Shia in particular, and others, like the *Salgirah* of the Imam-of-the-Time, are celebrated expressly by the Ismailis.

In this unique and personal account, Shiraz Kabani takes us on a journey of celebration and self-reflection. Relating accounts of festivals from his own lived experience as an Ismaili, the author shares some of his most compelling memories, questions and insights. We learn about his days as an inquisitive schoolboy in Pakistan, as well as his more recent experiences as a well-travelled *alwaez*, including late-night contemplative drives across Texas on Laylat al-Qadr, and vibrant Imam Day festivities in the heart of London. Through these lively stories and reflections, *Ismaili Festivals* presents a novel approach to these auspicious occasions and their traditions, highlighting just how powerful they are in uniting and reaffirming the identity of the diverse global Jamat.

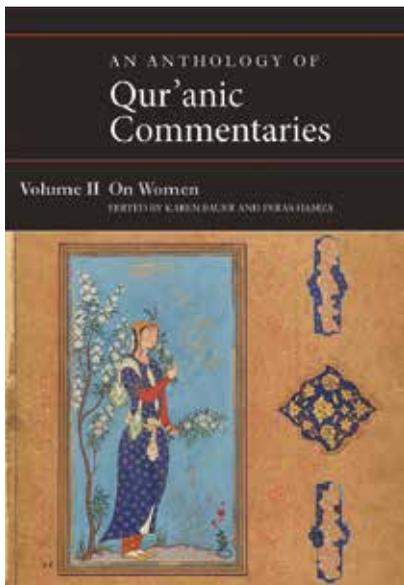
*Ismaili Festivals* is the first title in the IIS's new Living Ismaili Traditions series. The series will spotlight Ismaili histories and cultures, and through author reflections explore what it means to be an Ismaili and part of the global Jamat.



***Patterns of Wisdom in Safavid Iran: The Philosophical School of Isfahan and the Gnostic of Shiraz***  
**By Janis Esots**

The exceptional intellectual richness of seventeenth-century Safavid Iran is epitomised by the philosophical school of Isfahan, and in particular by its ostensible founder, Mir Damad, and his great student Mulla Sadra. To their respective platonic and existentialist doctrines can be added the apophatic wisdom of Rajab ‘Ali Tabrizi.

In this highly original work, Janis Esots delves into the complex philosophies of these three major Shi’i figures and draws comparisons between their doctrines. The author makes the case that Mulla Sadra’s thought is independent and actually incompatible with that of Mir Damad and Rajab ‘Ali Tabrizi. This not only presents a new approach to how we understand the ‘school of Isfahan’, but it also identifies Mir Damad and Rajab ‘Ali Tabrizi as pioneers in their own right.

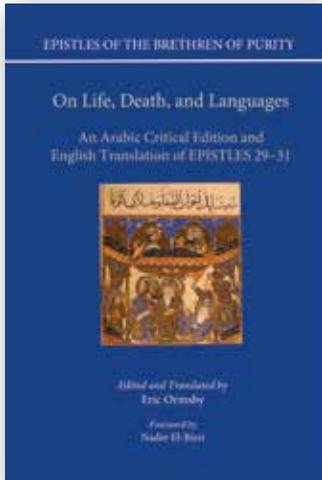


***Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries, Volume II: On Women***  
**By Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza**

Building on the success of *An Anthology of Qur’anic Commentaries, Volume I: On the Nature of the Divine*, this second volume in the series focuses on a critical and contentious theme: Women in the Qur’an and traditional Qur’anic commentaries. It comprises analyses of the female subject in the Qur’an, annotated translations of Qur’anic commentaries spanning twelve centuries, interviews with contemporary Muslim scholars and extensive introductory materials, which frame the work throughout and render these technically complex materials accessible to the reader.

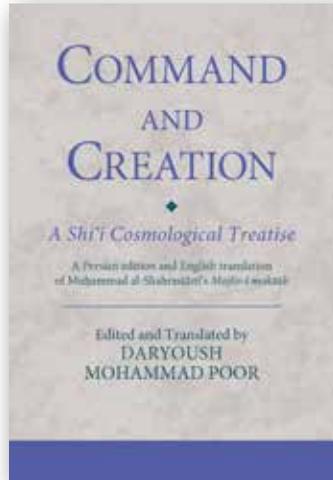
While highlighting variation, continuity, and plurality in the genre of Qur’anic commentaries, *Volume II* goes beyond medieval interpretive paradigms to include perspectives marginalised by that tradition, such as the voices of women themselves.

# Other Recently Published Titles



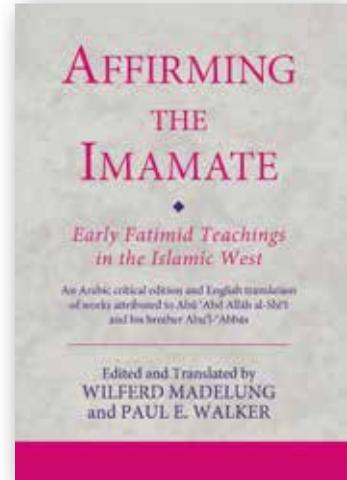
***On Life, Death and Languages: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 29–31***

Edited and translated by Eric Ormsby



***Command and Creation: A Shi'i Cosmological Treatise***

Edited and translated by Daryoush Mohammad Poor



***Affirming the Imamate: Early Fatimid Teachings in the Islamic West***

Edited and translated by Wilferd Madelung and Paul E. Walker

## Forthcoming Releases

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

By Dagikhudo Dagiev

***On Ethical Differences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 9***

Edited and translated by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga

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

Edited by Wafi Momin

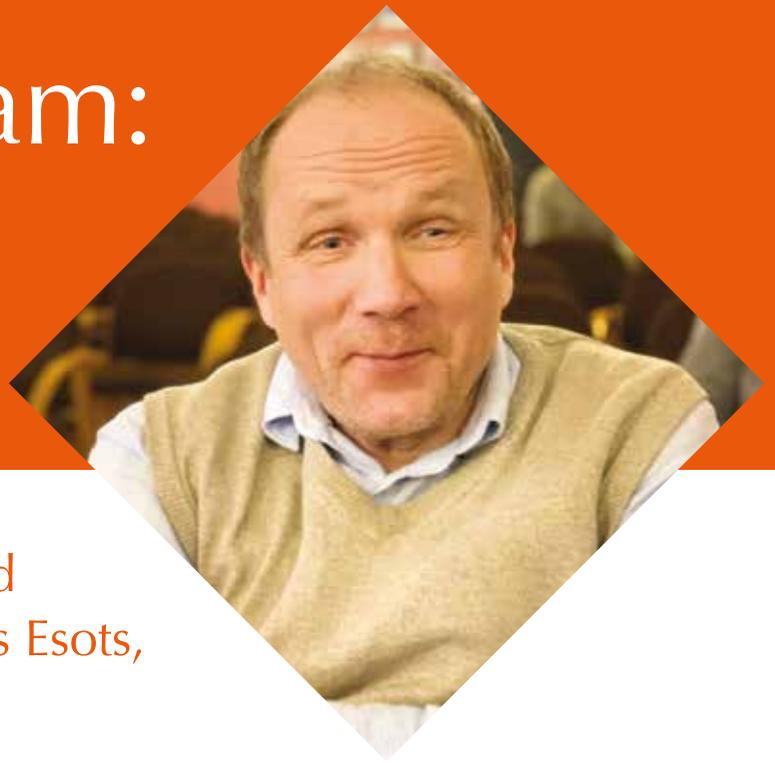
***The Fatimids 2: The Rule from Egypt***

By Shainool Jiwa

***Encyclopaedia Islamica, Volume 8***

Edited by Farhad Daftary and Wilferd Madelung

# In Memoriam: Janis Esots (1966–2021)



In 2021 our colleague and esteemed scholar, Dr Janis Esots, sadly passed away.

Born in Jaunpiebalgas, Latvia, in 1966, Janis received his first degree in 1991 from the prestigious Moscow Institute of Literature (Department of Translation, Persian language group) and obtained his doctorate in 2007 from Tallinn University, Estonia, with the thesis: “Mulla Sadra’s Teaching on Wujūd: A Synthesis of Philosophy and Mysticism”.

Janis joined the IIS in 2013 as a Research Associate in the Shi’i Studies Unit of the Department of Academic Research and Publications (DARP). He was also concurrently Associate Professor at the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Latvia, Riga, having assumed that position in 2010. As well as these institutions, Janis had also previously held lectureships at the Islamic College in London and the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Aside from his native Latvian, Janis enjoyed a true mastery of English, Russian and Persian, to the extent he was able to author monographs and edit complex philosophical texts in these three languages, as well as translate between them. His command of Persian was so well recognised in his native Latvia that once, during the visit to the capital Riga by the then Iranian President, Mohammed Khatami, he was invited to act as an official interpreter. He also knew classical Arabic, classical Greek, Latin, French, German and Turkish. His background and his command of so many languages afforded him the rare ability of working across a broad range of international academic networks—particularly those of Russia, Iran and Europe—and he undoubtedly helped to forge connections between different traditions and scholarly circles. Perhaps this is best illustrated by his *Ishraq: Islamic Philosophy Yearbook*, the trilingual journal published in Moscow which he founded in 2009. A collaboration between the Institute of Philosophy in Moscow, and the Institute of Philosophy and the Ibn Sina

Islamic Culture Research Foundation (both in Tehran), its editorial board boasts thirty scholars of global renown in the fields of philosophy and mysticism.

For Janis, the Persian language was not just an academic endeavour, he also delighted in its poetic wordplay and elaborate conventions. In the words of Professor M. A. Amir-Moezzi:

“What struck me about him, apart from the contrast between his extreme gentleness and his Baltic robustness, was his way of speaking Persian. He spoke the delightfully antiquated Persian of traditional scholars, old *hommes de lettres* and dervishes.”

Janis would often sign his emails with the self-deprecating epithet “*haqir*”, meaning “the wretched or lowly one”, while addressing others with praiseworthy titles that emphasised their status and learning.

Aside from the language, Janis also had a deep appreciation for other aspects of Persian culture, particularly its classical music. His friend Mahyar Alinaghi recalled that Janis had been to many international concerts of Iranian music, particularly those of Mohammad-Reza Shajarian, and had a deep knowledge of Khorasan’s *maqami* musical traditions. He had also made personal contact with Maestro Nurmohammad Dorpour, one of the last bards of Khorasan and a Sufi master of the Naqshbandi order.

At the time of his passing, Janis was working on a number of IIS publication projects which he pursued with his usual

dedication and commitment. The first of these was *The Renaissance of Shīʿī Islam in the 15th–17th Centuries: Facets of Thought and Practice*, the edited proceedings of the international conference he organised at the IIS in October 2018. He was also working on a monograph, *Patterns of Wisdom in Safavid Iran: The Philosophical School of Isfahan and the Gnostic of Shiraz*, and updating, with Farhad Daftary, the second edition of *Historical Dictionary of the Ismailis*. In addition, Janis was managing editor of *Encyclopedia Islamica*, a project for which he also made contributions as author and translator.

Janis had also published a significant number of scholarly editions, translations and commentaries of Islamic philosophical and esoteric texts, as well as articles in journals and edited collections. His authoritative status was such that he was often invited to write encyclopaedia articles and book reviews. Janis was also a member of various editorial boards, had won awards and had been the recipient of a number of research grants. His long-standing friend and associate, Professor Carmela Baffioni, describes him as someone of “vast knowledge and endowed with great acumen—he was a tireless worker and a tireless traveller. I believe that Janis cannot be replaced by a single person in all his many scientific endeavours, but I am sure that we will all try to work together to carry on his legacy”. The IIS’ Co-Director, Dr Farhad Daftary, described Janis as a rare scholar with many skills and accomplishments, akin to the orientalist of an earlier age. He said: “I was always amazed by his knowledge of Islamic traditions as well as the Persian language. His absence will be very noticeable for all of us at the IIS.”

As a complement to his work, Janis was also a keen traveller and enjoyed attending conferences to present academic papers. In recent years he had travelled to Dushanbe, Khorog, Marrakech, Isfahan, Berlin, Tehran, Paris, Palermo, Venice, St Petersburg, Baku and Kalamazoo, to name but a few of his destinations. His friend Roy Vilozny recounts: “Travelling was one of Janis’ greatest passions and, as in other domains, he totally immersed himself in it. Shortly after I landed for the first time in Baku, Azerbaijan, the starting point of one of the journeys on which I embarked with Janis, one of his friends told me: ‘You don’t realise how lucky you are. You came here with the key to Azerbaijan—Janis Esots.’ Thanks to Janis, Azerbaijan was revealed to me in a very special way, accessible only through his mediation and generous initiation. As years went by, I realised that Janis was not only ‘the key to Azerbaijan’. Wherever on the globe I met him, whether in Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus or Russia, he was key to a unique, intimate acquaintance with the local religion, history, literature and poetry, politics, food and drink and, above all, with people who deeply loved him and highly appreciated him.”

Janis was always quiet and courteous, with a diffident and humble manner that belied his elevated level of intellectual learning. Although he did not openly profess any religious affiliation, he evidently had a deep affinity with Sufism and conducted himself with characteristic *adab* (formal correctness,

etiquette). He engaged in acts of great kindness and had an exceptional generosity of spirit. Just one example of this generosity is recounted by Roy Vilozny: “When, on another occasion, after landing in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, Janis found out that his luggage was missing, the only thing he was really upset about was that the medicine he had brought from London to a parent of a friend would not reach its destination in Badakhshan. A week or so later, when we were already back in Dushanbe from our trip to Badakhshan, the luggage was traced. The first thing Janis did, even before putting on a new shirt, was to find a way to send the medicine safely to his friend’s parent. Janis was a friend you could always count on and his many friends worldwide, who knew it, never hid their affection for him.”

Indeed friendship, or *subha* as he termed it, was a major source of joy for Janis. As his colleague and friend, Dr Fàrès Gillon, describes:

“Not only did Janis have many friends, but he practised the art of friendship to the highest degree. As a friend of Janis, one could measure the full extent of the generosity of someone who would spare no effort to help, yet always presented his willingness to help as a duty: *la shukran ‘ala al-wajib*, ‘it is not necessary to thank for something that is due’, he would say.”

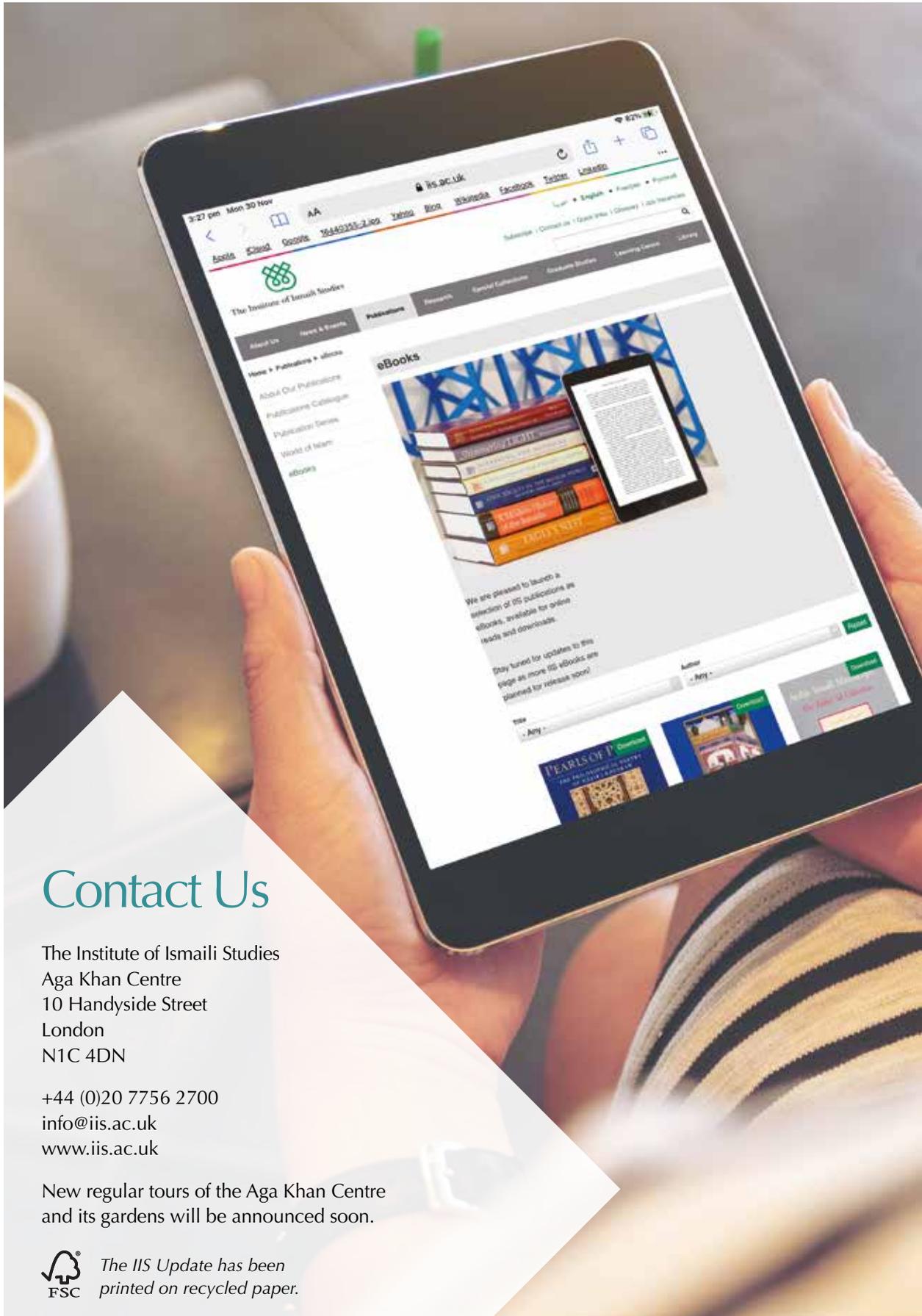
In conversation, Janis was a man of few words but his powerful baritone voice conveyed both weighty ideas and an infectious chuckle. IIS Senior Research Associate, Dr Toby Mayer, remarks: “Janis was outwardly reserved and seemed contentedly solitary, but as soon as you engaged with him he would regale you with his dry sense of humour, and his interest in topics beyond Muslim intellectual history, such as Baltic paganism. He spoke to me of his early enthusiasm for archaeology, expressed in a childhood project to excavate tunnels under the family home in Latvia, which was put a stop to because of the danger caused to the house’s foundations. He was amazingly generous, both with sharing his copious philosophical expertise and also in bringing back gifts of books, wine and delicacies for friends and colleagues whenever he returned to London from his travels.”

Janis enjoyed nature and particularly walking holidays; he would sometimes, apparently quite spontaneously, take himself off on adventures to places such as the Scottish Highlands. It was sadly on one such solitary walking holiday in Polperro, Cornwall, that on June 12th he suffered a medical emergency and help was unable to reach him in time.

Janis is survived by relatives in Latvia and Australia, and is fondly remembered by a large, international community of people who can say they had the privilege of calling him a friend.



◆ IIS students enjoying the gardens at Victoria Hall. Image credit: Rehana Virani/IIS.



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New regular tours of the Aga Khan Centre  
 and its gardens will be announced soon.



*The IIS Update has been  
 printed on recycled paper.*



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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