



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

## **Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities**

### **Modules Year One**

#### **1. Language Study: Arabic or Persian**

**Credits: 30**

The study of Arabic is central to the programme as it enables students to read and understand the Qur'an and other primary texts. The study of Arabic is compulsory in the first two years of the programme for all students not proficient in this language.\* Three levels of Arabic are offered, and students are placed in a class based on their prior knowledge and experience. The overall aim is to equip students with the skills needed to read primary texts in Arabic. Students undertake a four-week intensive pre-session course at the IIS before the start of the first year.

*\* Students who are already proficient in Arabic will be required to study Persian in order to read and understand core Persian texts.*

#### **2. The Qur'an, Parts 1 and 2**

**Credits: 30**

These modules aim to acquaint students with the necessary conceptual tools to deal with the complexities related to the study of the Qur'an and its reception in Muslim intellectual history. They will be based on constant reflection on epistemological, methodological and historiographical issues. Students will be invited to analyse the concept of revelation, prophethood and scripture, and will need to examine the intellectual, religious and socio-political context in which the Qur'an came about. Attention will be paid to the interaction between Prophet Muhammad's life, including his relations with his contemporaries, and the unfolding of the revelations. Focus will thus be given to the difficulties of contextualising the Qur'an. In addition, the module will cover the main concerns and issues found in the revelations and will devote some attention to the type of language and style deployed in Qur'anic suras and ayas. Later interpretive traditions will be explored; students will thus have the chance to delve into the various debates and controversies that theologians, philosophers and other thinkers generated around the Qur'an, its nature and its language. Finally, students will consider the discussions around the Qur'an in contemporary scholarship. The module aims first of all to position the Islamic notions of prophecy in the wider context of the modes of divinations found across many cultures and particularly in the ancient Near East. It shall then examine our knowledge of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali as historical personalities. In this regard, various historical interpretations by modern scholars, including debates about Muslim sources and revisionist versions of the history of the early Muslim period, will be explored. A study of the changing image of Prophet Muhammad in mainstream Muslim sources, and with it the changing theological doctrines will also be undertaken. The module will analyse the diverse ways in which the image of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali have become integral to Muslim and Shi'i Muslim identity respectively. The module explores various ways in which their memory is celebrated, invoked and appropriated in rituals, poetry, everyday language and political symbolism. In addition to looking at the role of the Prophet and



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Imam Ali as an intercessor, their depiction in the hagiographic imagination, poetry and painting, and as a mystical paradigm. The module will then examine the ways in which the figure of the Prophet has come to be a central and sensitive element of Muslim identity in contemporary times, while exploring current psychological research on the notion of prophecy. At the end of the module, students should be able to revisit the current widespread understanding of prophethood and approach it in its shifting and contested historical context.

### **3. Ritual, Worship and Practice**

**Credits: 15**

Employing an interdisciplinary approach including anthropology, sociology, history and religious studies, this module aims to provide students with a framework to understand the role of ritual, practice and spaces of worship in human societies with a particular focus on the Ismaili community. The module will first explore sociological and anthropological theories on ritual and religious practice as categories of experience and analysis. Students will familiarise themselves with key academic figures in the study of such pivotal yet elusive concepts; and will become aware of the latest developments in this field. As a second step, through a series of case studies of specific ritual practices and forms of worship, students will engage in an in-depth understanding of various ideas and concepts associated with ritual and worship, such as continuity and change; communal vs. individual; essence vs. form; ritualisation; performance and meaning-making; emotion; the ritual body; negotiation between 'local' and 'global'; authority, legitimation and social control through ritual; gender and ritual space. Last, focused case-studies will shed light on how rituals and forms of worships developed and evolved historically amongst Muslims; and particularly within the Ismaili community.

#### **4. The Muslims in History series, comprising:**

- **Muslims in History 1: Late Antiquity**
- **Muslims in History 2: Middle Period**
- **Muslims in History 3: Modern and Contemporary**

**Credits: 15 for each module**

Combining a broadly chronological approach with thematic explorations and case-studies, these three modules aim to help students develop a sound scholarly narrative of the histories of Muslim cultures from their emergence in the seventh century to contemporary times. Starting with an exploration of historiography and philosophy of history, the first module will focus on understanding history as a form of knowledge, recognising the meaning and role of interpretation in any historical writing and reading. The modules situate the early history of Muslims in the socio-historical context of Late Antiquity, examining salient political, cultural and religious developments of the Near East in the first millennium. Modules two and three analyse key developments in Muslim history, including the exploration of how certain events were constructed



and interpreted as key moments. The modules will approach Muslim history as part of broader world history and thus in a historical and comparative context. A key feature of the modules will be to bring out issues such as the diversity and historicity of norms, institutions and conceptions; the dialectic of thought and material forces; and the contested nature of authority, identity, symbols and legitimacy. The third module in particular will focus on the nature of modern philosophical, cultural and sociological developments in Muslim contexts through investigating case studies of selected movements and figures and the uses of history in religious, political and social discourses.

#### **5. Key Moments in Shi'i History, Thought and Society**

**Credits: 15**

The aim of the module is to provide students with a basic grounding in the key moments and turning points in the history of Shi'i Islam, with special reference to Twelver Shi'i Islam. The module will start with an overview of the formative period of Shi'i Islam until the death of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq and then cover aspects of the subsequent history of the Twelver Shi'a, with some attention to Zaydi Shi'ism. Shi'i communities will be studied in the broader context of Islamic history, with due attention to the socio-economic factors that contributed to the articulation of Shi'i identity and sentiments in different regions and in different periods of Islamic history.

#### **6. Key Moments in Ismaili History**

**Credits: 15**

This module provides a survey of key moments and developments in Ismaili history, from the earliest times to early modern times. The module aims to integrate the perspectives of history, theology and social sciences to illuminate critical junctures and intellectual developments, also covering Ismaili contributions to Islamic thought and culture, and contextualising Ismailis within the broader framework of Islamic history. Following an introduction to Ismaili historiography and the general nature of the source materials on the Ismailis, the module will concentrate on the early history of the Ismailis from the 8th century to the foundation of the Fatimid caliphate in 909. The next part will be devoted to the history of the Nizari Ismailis during the Alamut period (1090-1256), while the final part will cover certain key patterns in the history of the post-Alamut Nizari Ismailis until the middle of the 19th century. The module will conclude with an investigation of the circumstances under which the Nizaris emerged in modern times as a progressive religious community under the leadership of their Imams, known internationally as the Aga Khans.

#### **7. Religion, Literature and Identity in South Asian Muslim contexts**

**Credits: 15**

South Asia is home to the largest concentration of Muslims in the world. This module surveys the historical development of Muslim communities in the region focusing on various articulations of their identities. Using the Satpanthi Khoja communities of Gujarat, Sind and Punjab and their ginan literature as a case study, the module considers issues and themes related to constructions of identity within religious and socio-political contexts, as well as the broader framework of South



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Asian cultures as expressed in language, literature and the arts. The module also examines the various ways in which the terms "Islamic" and "Muslim" have been defined in pre-modern and modern discourses in South Asia, particularly those of colonialism, nationalism and "Islamisation."

## **Modules Year Two**

### **1. Language Study: Arabic or Persian**

**Credits: 30**

The study of Arabic is central to the programme as it enables students to read and understand the Qur'an and other primary texts. The study of Arabic is compulsory in the first two years of the programme for all students not proficient in this language.\* Three levels of Arabic are offered, and students are placed in a class based on their prior knowledge and experience. The overall aim is to equip students with the skills needed to read primary texts in Arabic. Students undertake a four-week intensive pre-session course at the IIS before the start of the first year.

\* Students who are already proficient in Arabic will be required to study Persian in order to read and understand core Persian texts.

### **2. Research Design and Methods (assessed by Dissertation)**

**Credits: 60**

The purpose of this module is to equip students with the necessary background knowledge and skills to proficiently plan and undertake research activity within the field of the Social Sciences. The module will begin with a short introduction to the intellectual history of the Social Sciences, including a critical overview of the debates and developments surrounding some of the disciplines involved. In the following phase, an in-depth examination of issues and approaches to qualitative research design will be undertaken, taking into account recent advances in the field. The module will then focus on the development of a number of key practical skills, including the design of research questions and proposals, literature reviews, surveys, fieldwork activities, data collection and analysis.

Students undertake a series of practical exercises during the three terms of Year 2 in which they are assisted by individually allocated Research Supervisors. Supervisors also guide each student in planning, preparing for and conducting their field research and in writing up their dissertation. Throughout the module, students examine techniques and approaches for writing a professional-level research paper, thus enabling them to proficiently translate their Field Research Project experience into an academic piece of an excellent standard.

Following approval by committee, students carry out their Field Research Project during the summer of their second year and produce an original piece of research in the form of a dissertation of 10,000 words. Approved projects are awarded modest funding to contribute to the cost of travel to and from the place of research and other project-related expenses.



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### **3. Ismailis in Modern Times**

**Credits: 15**

This module explores the key events, personalities and texts that have shaped the history of Ismaili communities in the modern period (from the late modern period, roughly late eighteenth century until present day) and considers the continuing relevance, perception and impact of this legacy on today's concerns. The emphasis will be on situating Ismailis within the larger framework of the ummah and other global communities. How do political and social theories related to transnational communities, global and local communities and minorities apply to Ismailis around the world? Particular attention will be paid to regional studies of Ismailis residing in different parts of the world, following diverse traditions. Adequate attention will also be paid to the Imamate of Aga Khan IV; the work of Imamate and Ismaili institutions and its subsequent impact on the social, economic and educational development of the community.

### **4. Law, Ethics and Society, Parts 1 and 2**

**Credits: 30**

This module aims to bring clarity to the use of notions such as ethics, morality, religious law, positive law and other similar widely used categories. It then offers an introduction to the emergence, during the so-called 'Axial Age', of important questions about the universe, the place of humanity in it, the meaning of life and the norms that should guide human behaviour. The ways those questions were addressed by various individuals and groups, some invoking the sole authority of reason, while others claiming some form of inspiration like religious revelation or mystical intuition, will be discussed. The processes by which some of these answers were institutionalised and gave birth to specific regulation systems and to the erection of particular social orders or political systems will also be examined. The module concludes by highlighting the idea of a sharp division between "is" and "ought" as it emerged in the 18th century, and how this idea brought an important shift to the discussions, in our time, about ethics, law and the social order.

### **5. Art, Literature and Religion, Parts 1 and 2**

**Credits: 30**

The course will explore the literary and artistic dimensions of the world's Muslim societies, focusing on the role that literary genres (scriptures, panegyrics, love lyrics, epic romances, folk songs and folk tales) and the arts (music, dance, drama, architecture, calligraphy, miniature painting) play as expressions of piety and socio-political critique. Broadly speaking, it will explore how works of literature and art function within a given society and ways in which culture is produced, interpreted, and disseminated. A primary objective is to examine the relationships between religion, literature, and the arts in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. Case studies will highlight ways in which Arabic and Persian literary and artistic traditions have



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profoundly influenced the frameworks within which Islam, its texts, its rituals and practices have been interpreted and expressed. It will also explore the manner in which Arabic and Persian literary and artistic traditions interacted with those beyond the Middle East as Islam became a global religious tradition. This will illustrate how a literary and artistic approach to studying a religious tradition allows access to voices and interpretations that are often unheard, rendered marginal or declared “heretical” by those who claim to represent “official” religious institutions.

## **6. Intellectual Traditions in the History of Muslims**

**Credits: 15**

This module aims to shed light on fundamental currents of thought which prospered in the History of Muslims, by taking stock of recent advances in scholarship. Traditional historians of Islam used to focus on religious learned traditions and their role in shaping the social order and in facing, supporting or opposing those who seize political power. However, recent historical studies – particularly some works which attempted to build a comprehensive understanding of the whole spectrum of cultural developments in Muslim contexts, such as those by Marshall Hodgson and Mohamed Abed Jabri – have highlighted the diversity of intellectual traditions which thrived in predominantly Muslim environments, their interactions and their role in shaping intellectual outlooks among the elites as well as key aspects of the everyday life within the population at large. The module will offer an understanding of the continuities that link those traditions with areas of interest and disciplines cultivated in the history of mankind across cultural and religious divides, as well as the diversity of forms and expressions these traditions have taken. Geographical and periodical classifications will be objects of close scrutiny in order to uncover assumptions that they may convey, and in order to help situate intellectual traditions which emerged in Muslim contexts within the wide framework of humanity’s intellectual development.

## **7. Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali in the Discourse of Muslim Communities**

**Credits: 15**

The module aims first of all to position the Islamic notions of prophecy in the wider context of the modes of divinations found across many cultures and particularly in the ancient Near East. It shall then examine our knowledge of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali as historical personalities. In this regard, various historical interpretations by modern scholars, including debates about Muslim sources and revisionist versions of the history of the early Muslim period, will be explored. A study of the changing image of Prophet Muhammad in mainstream Muslim sources, and with it the changing theological doctrines will also be undertaken. The module will analyse the diverse ways in which the image of Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali have become integral to Muslim and Shi’i Muslim identity respectively. The module explores various ways in which their memory is celebrated, invoked and appropriated in rituals, poetry, everyday language and political symbolism. In addition to looking at the role of the Prophet and Imam Ali as an intercessor, their depiction in the hagiographic imagination, poetry and painting, and as a mystical paradigm. The module will then examine the ways in which the figure of the Prophet has come to be a central and



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sensitive element of Muslim identity in contemporary times, while exploring current psychological research on the notion of prophecy. At the end of the module, students should be able to revisit the current widespread understanding of prophethood and approach it in its shifting and contested historical context.