

THE INSTITUTE OF ISMAILI STUDIES

UPDATE



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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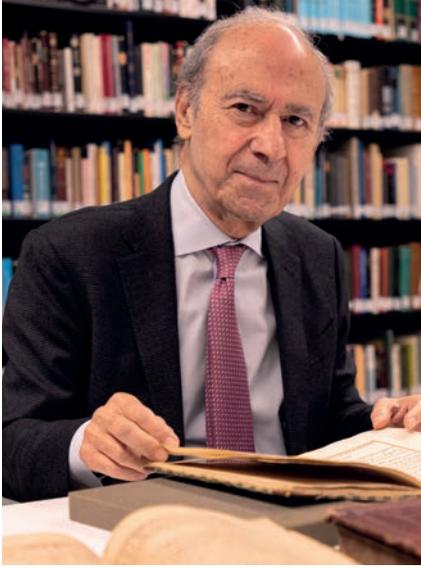
In Memoriam: Nabila Walji
(1993-2022)

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Front Cover: Page from a manuscript of the *Mantiq al-tair* (*The Conference of the Birds*) of the poet Farid al-Din 'Attar, produced c. 1009/1600 in Isfahan under Safawid patronage. *Image credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1963, 63.210.11.*



Welcome

This year I write to you as I prepare to step down from my managerial responsibilities at the IIS, after 34 years in various leadership positions with the Institute. Over my final year as Co-Director, the staff and students of the IIS have inspired me once again with their commitment to our core goal of supporting and furthering the study of Islam, particularly its Ismaili and broader Shi'i traditions.

I am proud to be able to update you one more time on all the valuable work the Institute has done over the past year, our forty-fifth. I am also pleased to say that my stepping down is not a retirement: I will continue my scholarly research, writing and teaching activities at the IIS indefinitely, under the lifetime title Director Emeritus. Alongside this, I am honoured to be joining the IIS Board of Governors, so many aspects of my working relationship and engagement with the Institute—which has been such a core, enriching part of my life—will continue.

The IIS has continued to develop its offerings in the digital space over the past year, most notably with the launch of a new website in April. I hope you have enjoyed the cleaner, more intuitive design and made use of the website's improved features. Our faculty also gained access to the Aga Khan University's award-winning Continuous Professional Development scheme in May, enabling them to benefit from developments in the field of education, including in the digital sphere, and keep their teaching practice current and dynamic.

Our research and publications work has continued unabated, with the landmark release of three titles in Open Access: *Central Asian Ismailis* by Dagikhudo Dagiev; *Texts, Scribes and Transmission* by Wafi Momin; and my own book with the late, much missed Janis Esots, *The Renaissance of Shi'i Islam*. These are all available to download or read for free online, which we hope will bring the Institute's research to new and wider audiences.

At the end of the year we held a milestone conference at the Aga Khan Centre on "Ismaili Studies: The State of the Field". The conference took stock of the field of Ismaili studies in terms of a broad range of themes

from history, literature, philosophy and the intellectual traditions of Ismailis, to topics on contemporary Ismailism. It also showcased the contributions the Institute has made to this field since its establishment in 1977, spearheading efforts to correct misinformation and myths and raising awareness about Ismailis and Ismailism.

I would like to take the opportunity now to pay tribute to Dr Shiraz Thobani, Head of the Department of Curriculum Studies, who is retiring from the IIS after many years of service to the Institute. Dr Thobani has been instrumental in the research and development of our curriculum on Islam informed by cultural and humanistic perspectives, and we thank him for sharing his great insight and expertise with us. I would also like to take a moment to remember our bright and passionate GPISH student Nabila Walji, who sadly passed away this year. Nabila was an exceptionally promising student, with a passion to improve the lives of others, and is much missed by her IIS family. I hope you will find the time to read the heartfelt tribute to her in these pages written by her friends and classmates on the GPISH programme.

Finally, it only leaves me to thank you for your continued interest in and support for the work of the Institute. I am confident that, led by its new Director, Professor Zayn Kassam, the IIS will only continue to further develop in the coming years. Professor Kassam is a highly accomplished scholar and academic leader, having spent the last 27 years in a variety of positions at Pomona College in California. Let us give her our full support as she takes up her role in January 2023.

Farhad Daftary,
Co-Director, IIS

Doyen of Ismaili History

A Tribute to Dr Farhad Daftary as he Steps Down as Co-Director

Dr Farhad Daftary is set to step down at the beginning of January 2023 from his duties as Co-Director of The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) and Head of the Department of Academic Research and Publications (DARP) at the IIS. Here Dr Omar Alí-de-Unzaga, Head of the Institute's Qur'anic Studies Unit, reflects on his lasting impact as a manager and ongoing influence on the field of Ismaili studies.



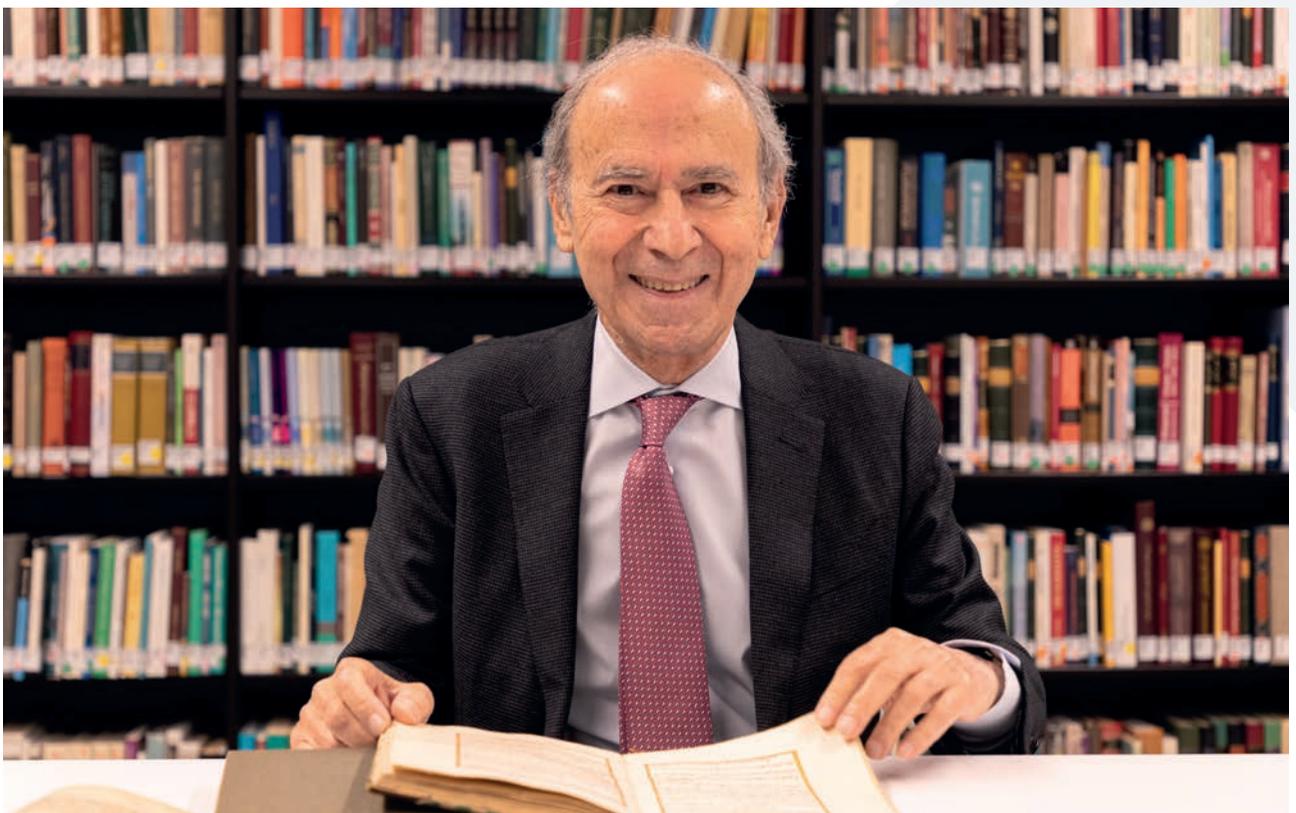
During his mandate, Dr Daftary has accomplished two great things. First, he has steered the helm of the IIS with calm pragmatism and an unwavering commitment to high-quality research. Second, he has become the foremost scholar in the field of Ismaili history-writing.

With regard to his managerial duties, Dr Daftary served as Associate Director of the IIS between 2007 and 2008, in the last two years of Professor Azim Nanji's directorship. After a short stint as Acting Director, in September 2009 he was appointed as Co-Director together with Professor Karim H. Karim. He has been holding this position solely since May 2011. He has been the Head of DARP for three decades, since 1992. During this time Dr Daftary launched a number of successful book series, such as the Ismaili Heritage Series in 1996 (with fifteen volumes published so far), the Ismaili Texts and Translations Series in 2000 (twenty-five volumes), and the Shi'i Heritage Series in 2013 (nine volumes), to name a few.

Even more impressive is Dr Daftary's own output, which speaks for itself, with a staggering total of almost 300 publications. These include twenty-three books (ten authored, two co-authored, four edited

and seven co-edited by him). His best known works, which have been translated into a total of sixteen languages, include *The Ismā'īlis: Their History and Doctrines*, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Ismā'īlis*, and *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community*. Three volumes have been published by other scholars in his honour.

Now almost 84, he has devoted the best part of his life to the IIS. He has taught and inspired generations of students in the past 30 years. One of the achievements he is most proud of is, in his words, having placed Ismaili studies "on the map". When asked about his own contribution, Dr Daftary, modestly, always refers to the efforts of his predecessors, notably Wladimir Ivanow (d. 1970), but also Marshall Hodgson (d. 1968) and Samuel M. Stern (d. 1969). If Ivanow was the pioneer of modern Ismaili studies, we can now safely refer to Dr Daftary as the doyen of the field of Ismaili history. Together with his contemporaneous scholars Abbas Hamdani (d. 2019), Wilferd Madelung (b. 1930), Hermann Landolt (b. 1935), Ismail K. Poonawala (b. 1937), Paul E. Walker (b. 1941) and Heinz Halm (b. 1942), Dr Daftary has excelled at pushing Ismaili studies to a level of recognition unimaginable only a few decades ago.



◆ Dr Farhad Daftary with a manuscript from the IIS's Ismaili Special Collections. Image credit: IIS.



◆ Dr Farhad Daftary with some of his recent publications, including *The Ismaili Imams: A Biographical History*. The framed photograph in the background is a portrait of the young Wladimir Ivanow (1886-1970), now known as the “father of modern Ismaili studies”. Image credit: IIS.

One of his most enduring contributions is *The Ismāʿīlīs: Their History and Doctrines*. He published the book in 1990, after about two decades of research and almost one decade of writing. He later revised it and augmented the text with a second edition seeing the light in 2007. For the first time, an in-depth, thorough and comprehensive historical account of the Ismaili Imams and their followers was written. What was the main challenge that confronted Dr Daftary in this enterprise? Undoubtedly, as a historian he was confronted on the one hand with a majority of primary sources that were either extraneous to the Ismailis or simply hostile to them; on the other hand, he had recourse to a minority of Ismaili texts, many of which had hitherto been secret, unknown or poorly understood. In that regard, Dr Daftary's first challenge was epistemological and historiographical: how could we know whether what we knew about the Ismailis was truth or legend, fact or fabrication? His second challenge was one of presentation. Luckily, Dr Daftary possessed a plethora of qualities that rarely meet in one person: clarity of language, lucidity of argument, moderation of judgement, a well-organised brain, dispassionate fair-mindedness, a commitment to academic principles, bibliographic exhaustiveness, scrupulousness for details, punctiliousness with

references, an encyclopaedic knowledge, and an extraordinary memory!

In his famous book *What is History*, E. H. Carr (1961, 2nd ed. 1987) critiques previous historians' attitudes to historical “facts” and makes the role of the historian the focus of attention, reminding us that “the facts speak only when the historian calls on them”. In that spirit, Dr Daftary's history of the Ismailis speaks as much about his own perspective of history as about the subject itself. Indeed, two doctoral theses have been recently produced studying his approach to Ismaili history.

Dr Daftary's oeuvre and legacy will certainly be a reference point for generations to come. His contribution to Ismaili and Persian studies has recently been further strengthened by the generous donation of his private 5,000-book collection to the Aga Khan Library. Far from retiring any time soon, Dr Daftary has been appointed to the IIS Board of Governors, and will remain focused on his research, thereby continuing to be a role model and an inspiration to Professor Zayn Kassam, the IIS's newly appointed Director, to its research and teaching faculty, and to its staff, students and alumni.

“ I remember receiving a copy of Dr Daftary’s seminal, groundbreaking tome *The Ismā’īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* from my uncle in 1992. Having eagerly read his work, I was keen to meet the scholar who embodied academic rigour with sensitivity for a community whose history he had written. A few years later, I found myself being interviewed by Dr Daftary for the IIS Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH), and the rest is history. Over the past 27 years, he has been a teacher whose encyclopaedic knowledge is legendary, a mentor whose words of wisdom have guided me in my academic and professional journey, and over the past nine years, a supportive and empowering line manager. The world recognises him as a great and unparalleled scholar who placed the IIS on the global map of leading institutions in the field of Ismaili studies and Shi’i studies. Those of us who have worked closely with him also know him as a kind-hearted, gentle soul, with a wonderful sense of humour, a spring in his step and a twinkle in his eye. We look forward to his continued contributions to the field of Ismaili and Shi’i studies for years to come. ”

Laila Halani, Head of Graduate Studies

“ Dr Daftary holds a prominent place in the annals of Ismaili and Shi’i studies, not only because of his own writings but for a staggering wealth of monographs, texts and translations, edited volumes and encyclopaedias that he has planned and commissioned. Future generations of scholars and students will continue to engage with the categories and structures that his writings have left us with, and the course of Ismaili studies will continue to evolve through a dialectical relationship with his writings. ”

Wafi Momin, Head of Ismaili Special Collections Unit

“ It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to work by the side of a great scholar and a charming human being. I always found Dr Daftary to be empowering and encouraging, with the wisdom to allow people the space and latitude to do their work effectively. He is a man of few words, but with enormous stores of knowledge. His contributions to the Institute will be remembered for generations. It is my fervent hope and prayer that he enjoys a long, healthy and happy life. ”

Shiraz Kabani, Head of Department of Community Relations

“ Dr Daftary often likes to say that “work speaks for itself”; a man of sharp dress and sharper intellect, his texts are as immaculately turned out as his appearance. Well known for his prolific scholarly output and prodigious memory, he also has a keen sense of humour which makes him a pleasure to work with. ”

Tara Woolnough, Head of Publications and Operations

“ He is simply the best boss I have ever had and that’s why I never wanted to leave. ”

Julia Kolb, PA to Dr Daftary

New Director in Profile

In conversation with Professor Zayn Kassam

Professor Zayn Kassam will become the IIS's new Director in January 2023. Here she reveals what led her to the Institute and her hopes for its future.

Please could you tell us a bit about your background?

I was born and raised in Kenya, and then my family moved to Canada in 1973. I completed my PhD at McGill University in Montreal in the History of Religions, with a double-barrelled specialisation in Islam and Hinduism focusing on medieval philosophy. My studies in Islamic and Ismaili philosophy and Islamic mysticism were undertaken under the tutelage of Hermann Landolt, Paul Walker, and Mohamed Alibhai, and for Hinduism with Katherine Young, while Charles Adams set me on the path of studying Islam. I landed a position teaching Islam at Pomona College, one of the premier liberal arts colleges in the United States located near Los Angeles, California, in 1995 and have been there since. The Ismaili thinkers I have worked on are Nasir-i Khusraw (d. c. 1070 CE) and Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1274 CE).

What has led you to join the IIS?

I still remember the excitement many of us felt when the Institute was inaugurated in 1977. Ali Asani and I were completing our bachelor's degrees, he at Harvard and I at McGill. Both of us were students of religion and went on to complete our PhDs and entered the professoriate. There was already a small but growing body of Ismaili scholars working on Ismaili studies—people such as Zawahir Noorali, Gulshan Khakee, Aziz Esmail, Azim Nanji, Parin Dossa, Mohamed Alibhai, Faquir Hunzai, and Diamond Rattansi come to mind. The establishment of the Institute was perceived as a significant move on the part of the 49th Imam harkening back to the intellectual florescence of medieval Ismaili thought connected to the Dar al-Ilm in Cairo during the time of the Fatimid caliphate roughly a millennium earlier.

We felt we stood at the brink of an exciting new era in which the study of Ismailism would be revitalised to carry Ismailis forward into the next millennium.

In 1998, I came to the Institute to spend a year as a research fellow, and taught a course on gender in Islam while I was there. Azim Nanji was beginning his term as Director of the Institute, and Sumaiya Hamdani was also spending a year there as a research fellow while people such as Shainool Jiwa, Arzina Lalani, Toby Mayer, Faisal Devji, Faquir Hunzai and many others were already at the Institute, each engaged in their own work under the leadership of Aziz Esmail as Dean. It was both an exciting and challenging time to be there. It was exciting for the work being done on the Fatimids, developing the secondary curriculum for Talim, collecting and cataloguing manuscripts for the library, developing the training modules for waezeen and Islamic Studies graduate programmes. It was challenging with respect to both charting a way forward and the scale of work that had yet to be undertaken.

Now, some 25 years later I am thrilled to be returning to the Institute in a different capacity. As the premier institution devoted to the preservation, production, and transmission of knowledge about Ismailism and its connections not only to Islam and Muslims but also to the global context in which we live, I believe it has much to add to the significant contributions it is already making as we learn from the past while navigating the future.

What do you see as the strengths of the IIS?

Now, some 45 years after its founding, the Institute has made some significant strides in fostering scholarship on Ismailism, extending to Shi'ism and to Qur'anic studies, and adding further specialisations in



South Asian, Central Asian, and Constituency Studies. One can now fill almost an entire bookcase with its publications, numbering over 160 titles, along with occasional papers. It has engaged in gathering and cataloguing manuscripts numbering about 3,000 items. It has fostered the training of students in academic methods germane to the study of Islam and Ismailism with its GPISH programme and supports students in continuing on to doctoral programmes at British universities. Through its STEP programme, it has remained mindful of the needs of the global Jamat in preparing teachers who can offer both intellectual and spiritual guidance to members of the Jamat.

In what areas do you see the IIS developing over the next few years?

“Over the long term, I would like to build on the Institute’s significant strengths to consider how we might respond and perhaps even shape the conversation on the many global issues facing the Jamat, the communities in which we live, and indeed the world itself.”

I am deeply concerned about climate change and the devastating impacts it has already begun to have in the loss of habitat, climate refugees, species loss, and increased political turmoil. At a time when many nations are retrenching in narratives and practices of ethnocentrism and otherisation, how can we highlight the value of diversity and pluralism to building stronger societies?

“How can faith, indeed religion and its institutions, be a vehicle for liberation and social justice and embody our values as we address issues pertaining to gender justice, refugee resettlement, increased migration, economic destabilisation, conflict? In what ways can we foster inter-agency collaboration and support?”

What are your priorities for your new role?

My immediate priorities include continuing to build a culture of support, best practices, and wellbeing for the many people who give tirelessly of their time and effort to work at the Institute. Scholarship is, and will remain, the hallmark of what the Institute does, and in that regard, I would like to pay attention to the untapped resources of our manuscript collection, and to further developing our programmes for graduate students in building capacity for the next generation. I would also like to foster greater collaboration between the Institute and Jamati institutions.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work?

I find it difficult to compartmentalise between work and play as everything I do is geared to being the best I can be at any given time, and the joy experienced at feeling engaged and interested. A constructive conversation, working on a project, a walk by water, listening to a *ginan* (religious lyrical literature by Satpanth Ismaili Muslims) recited by my late father, Huzur Mukhi Rahim Count Kassam Jivraj, curling up with a good book, a British whodunnit, chai and samosas...



A Journey Inside Fatimid Egypt



The Fatimids: 2. The Rule from Egypt, sequel to *The Fatimids: 1. The Rise of a Muslim Empire* and the fourth book in our World of Islam series, continues the story of the Fatimids from their newly founded capital of Cairo. We sat down with the book's author, Dr Shainool Jiwa, for an insight into the rise, flourishing and demise of Fatimid rule in Egypt and beyond, and a glimpse of the people and places of the caliphate.

◆ Map of the Fatimid empire at its height. *Image credit: IIS.*



◆ Al-Juyushi Mosque. The monument overlooks the city of Cairo. It was built in 1085 by Badr al-Jamali to celebrate the return of Fatimid order after a series of revolts. *Image credit: Russell Harris, Institute of Ismaili Studies, London.*

How does *The Fatimids 2* continue the story started in *The Fatimids 1*?

The Fatimids 1 relates the inception of the only Shi'i caliphate to reign across the medieval Mediterranean world, from the tenth to the twelfth century. It traces the 60-year rule centred in Ifriqiya (present-day Tunisia and Eastern Algeria) of the Fatimids, Ismaili Imam-caliphs who asserted their descent and their inherent religious and political authority from the Prophet Muhammad through his daughter Fatima and Ali b. Abi Talib, the first Shi'i Imam and the cousin and son-in law of the Prophet.

The Fatimids 2 builds on this narrative, charting the rise, efflorescence and demise of over a century of Fatimid rule in Egypt (969–1171 CE). Drawing on a range of Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian, North African and Yemeni primary sources, it vividly recounts the major figures, milestones and vicissitudes of the Fatimids' statecraft, socio-economic policies and religious networks, as well as their intellectual and cultural encounters and architectural imprints.

“ The book brings to life the bustling Egyptian port cities, with peoples across the Mediterranean and Red Seas and beyond plying myriad goods from Andalusia, the Italian and Balkan states, Central Asia, India and China. ”

It presents an eyewitness account of the founding of the Dar al-Ilm, a renowned centre of learning that housed the famed Fatimid manuscript collections, which were made accessible to scholars from all faiths and disciplines. It speaks about delicate rock crystal mined and shipped along the Indian Ocean from Madagascar and crafted in Egypt, and relates chronicles where pilgrims en route from North Africa, Andalusia, Iraq and Syria to Mecca and Medina admire the precious-gem-studded *shamsa* (lit. little sun; intricately decorated shapes) and the richly decorated white *kiswa* (cloth covering) that adorned the Ka'ba, displayed at the palace, which the Fatimids gifted to the holy cities for over a century. The book ends with the protracted decline of the Fatimids in Egypt, while also acknowledging its scions, the Nizari Ismailis at Alamut in Iran and the Tayyibi Ismailis in Yemen.

Can you give us an insight into what Fatimid Cairo was like?

Cairo was founded by the Fatimids as their caliphal city immediately upon their arrival in Egypt in 969 CE. The city was initially called al-Mansuriyya, from its namesake in Ifriqiya, which served as its architectural prototype, as did the first purpose-built Fatimid capital city of al-Mahdiyya. It was renamed al-Qahira al-Mu'izziyya—The City Victorious of al-Mu'izz—in commemoration of the settlement of the fourth

A JOURNEY INSIDE FATIMID EGYPT

Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah in Egypt in 972 CE, a name which it retains to this day, albeit it is now shorted to al-Qahira. Like its two predecessor Fatimid capitals, Cairo housed two palaces, one for the Imam-caliph and the other for his designated successor, with the vast expanse in between known as the *bayn al-qasrayn*, serving as the ceremonial space for state processions which became a hallmark of Fatimid Egypt.

In time, Cairo became a flourishing city inhabited by the Imam-caliphs, their families and retinue, as well as senior *da'is* (summoners to the Ismaili mission) and administrators, merchants and the literati of Egyptian society. Some of the magnificent Fatimid monuments have become part of the fabric of the Egyptian landscape over the millennium, enduring landmarks that attest to their glorious age.

Who were some of the figures who moulded the empire?

Among the enduring figures who shaped the course of the Fatimid empire in Egypt were Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (953–975 CE), who meticulously planned the Fatimid campaign to Egypt as well as

the founding of Cairo, alongside his veteran chief commander, Qa'id Jawhar al-Siqilli, or al-Saqlabi (d. 992 CE). While al-Mu'izz reigned for just over two years in Egypt, it was his son and successor, Imam-caliph al-Aziz bi'llah (975–996 CE), who laid the institutional foundations of their centurial rule in the country, distinguishing them as the only Shi'i dynasty to have ruled over Egypt in its millennial history.

Cairo became a beacon for the flourishing Ismaili *da'wa* (religious mission and administration), drawing luminaries such as Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani (d. 1021 CE), al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Din al-Shirazi (d. 1078 CE), Nasir-i Khusraw (d. 1088 CE) and Hasan-i Sabbah (d. 1124 CE), among others. It also served as a major centre of learning where renowned scientists such as Ibn al-Haytham (d. c. 1040 CE) made ground-breaking discoveries.

Distinguished women in the Fatimid period include al-Sayyida Arwa (d. 1137), who reigned over Yemen for more than 50 years, while also occupying the position of *hujja*, the senior-most rank of the Ismaili *da'wa*, and Sitt al-Mulk (d. 1023 CE) who provided stewardship to the Fatimid state during a critical juncture and was among the most savvy and affluent entrepreneurs of her age.

◆ Sayyida Nafisa Mosque. Sayyida Nafisa (along with Sayyida Ruqayya) is considered a patron saint of the city of Cairo. Her mosque-shrine complex is a popular site for the performance of Sufi rituals, as well as for weddings and celebrations. *Image credit: Sayyida Nafisa Mosque 005, CC-BY-SA-4.*





◆ Roundel from the façade of al-Aqmar Mosque (cropped) showing the names of Muhammad and Ali in the centre. *Image credit: Mohammed Moussa, Aqmar Mosque 238, CC-BY-SA-4.*



◆ Three pendants from the Fatimid period. These are examples of the type of jewellery that would have been transported by the Serçe Limani before its shipwreck in the eleventh century. *Image credit: Aga Khan Museum, Accession No. AKM594.*

What is the legacy of the Fatimids among Ismaili communities today?

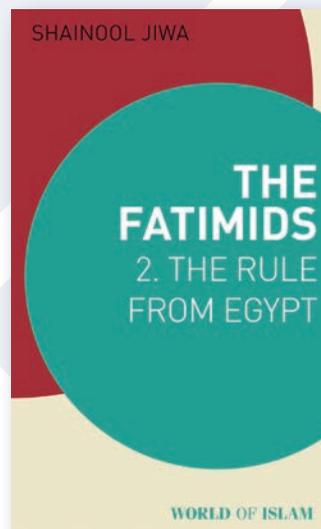
The Fatimid period is salient in Ismaili history and thought, as a time in which the Ismaili Imam-caliphs reigned across vast swathes of the Islamic world—from the Atlantic shores of North Africa, across the southern Mediterranean, down both sides of the Red Sea, and over Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. Their political dominance, economic affluence, intellectual acumen, and cultural creativity placed them at the centre stage of the world.

Following the dynasty's demise in Egypt in 1171, the Fatimid mission found renewed articulation in Iran and Syria among the Nizari Ismailis, with Alamut in the present-day province of Qazvin in Iran serving as its nerve centre until 1256 CE, and in Yemen and subsequently India among the Tayyibi Ismailis. Both these Ismaili communities, which have, over time, found expression in several sub-branches, thrive today in various parts of the globe.

“ Among these communities the achievements of the Fatimids are recounted with pride and glory, and the values they espoused of promoting amicable relations among Muslims of various persuasions, as well as with the People of the Book (that is, Christians and Jews), and enhancing knowledge production and dissemination are seen as values that are pertinent for our times. ”

Who is the book for?

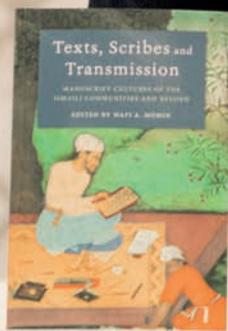
The book will be of interest to all those who wish to delve deeper into the world of the Fatimids, as well as to explore the geographical, commercial and cultural interlinkages of the medieval Mediterranean milieu, which in addition to the Ismaili Shi'i Fatimids in Egypt included the Sunni Maliki Umayyad empire in Andalusia with its capital at Cordoba, the eastern Christian Byzantine empire with Constantinople as its hub, and the Abbasids with Baghdad as their thriving metropolis.



***The Fatimids: 2. The Rule from Egypt* is published on 12 January 2023 and is available to pre-order now from Bloomsbury.**

Texts, Scribes and Transmission

**Manuscript Cultures of the Ismaili
Communities and Beyond**



Texts, Scribes and Transmission: Manuscript Cultures of the Ismaili Communities and Beyond edited by Dr Wafi Momin—the IIS's second Open Access title—brings together studies offering insights on different aspects of manuscript cultures nurtured by Ismaili communities throughout history. Here, Dr Momin introduces the book and reveals the ways in which the study of manuscript cultures offers “a holistic glimpse into the transmission of knowledge” in premodern societies.

Please can you tell us a bit about the manuscript cultures that the book addresses?

In the last few decades, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to examining the manuscript cultures of the Muslim world. The study of manuscript cultures, as opposed to texts and their authors alone, has brought to light refreshing findings and new perspectives not only on the transmission of texts but also on larger questions surrounding cultural practices passed down within the learned circles of premodern Muslim societies.

The intellectual and literary heritage of Ismaili communities has until recently been preserved in private libraries or passed down within closely knit literary circles. As in the case of other Muslim and non-Muslim communities, the written heritage of the Ismaili communities in premodern times was largely preserved and disseminated in manuscript form. Manuscripts are, in simple terms, hand-written books, each of which is by its very nature unique, even when we have multiple manuscripts of the same text. This is because each manuscript is produced under different circumstances by different scribes using different source copies, for example.

The range of textual materials transmitted via these manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Indic languages not only reflects the doctrinal, intellectual and literary concerns of the Ismailis but also bear the imprint of the respective cultural contexts where they lived, namely a number of regions from the Near East to Central and South Asia. Hence, in addition to engaging with multifaceted problems surrounding the processes of textual transmission, the chapters in this book deal with a host of other aspects connected to the wider study of manuscript cultures, like codicology, scribal and reading practices, educational and social history, authorship, communal script, religious identity and interactions of ideas across ideological denominations.

Why is it important to explore these manuscript cultures? What can we learn from them?

“ The study of manuscript cultures provides a holistic glimpse into the transmission of knowledge and circulation of texts and books in premodern societies when printing facilities were not available on a large scale in the Muslim world. ”





◆ Title page of the first treatise (*On Arithmetic*) from the *Epistles of the Pure Brethren (Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')*, MS 1040, housed at the IIS Ismaili Special Collections Unit. The manuscript is dated 953/1543. Image credit: ISCU.

It further enables us to explore the role of a range of players and factors, moving beyond an exclusive focus on authors and their works that has conventionally been at the heart of textual scholarship.

When considering the manuscript cultures nurtured among the Ismaili communities across time and space, we can appreciate the role of such learned groups as scribes and copyists who were primarily engaged in copying and transmitting texts long after the time when they were first composed. We also learn a great deal about the context and circumstances of the production and consumption of certain texts by examining the provenance of the manuscripts through which they were disseminated, the patrons and institutions involved in supporting such works, as well as the larger historical questions and economic considerations discernible from the para-textual or material aspects of the manuscripts. For example, the workings of literary networks across regions, or the kind of practices involved in the production of manuscripts in a given context. Moreover, through the study of manuscript cultures

we are better able to appreciate the chequered history of textual production and dissemination (a problem addressed by many chapters in the book) and to answer questions such as under what circumstances certain texts were put in circulation and what forms they took in the process of their transmission.

What can readers expect from the book?

This Open Access book offers perspectives on different aspects of the manuscript cultures developed among the Ismaili communities and beyond. It examines several questions surrounding textual production and transmission, scribal practices and learned traditions cultivated and passed down among these communities in different times and regions.

Some of the topics the book covers include: the role of the large-scale availability of manuscripts in the shaping of the field of Ismaili studies in the twentieth century; manuscript traditions of the encyclopaedic compendium *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, and of Abu Hatim al-Razi's (d. 934-935) *Kitāb al-Zīna*, a lexicon of religious

terminology with an account of Muslim sects; issues of textual transmission and reading culture in the Tayyibi Ismaili tradition; the history and doctrines of the Nizaris of Alamut times, as viewed through the lens of certain texts and their manuscripts; issues surrounding communal script, scribal practices and the manuscript culture of the Satpanth communities of South Asia; questions relating to the emergence and growth of the Ismaili communities in Central Asia and their relationship with other socio-religious groups as viewed through the lens of certain manuscripts and textual productions; and finally the problems encountered in approaching the transmission of Qur'anic text.

How does the book relate to the work of the Ismaili Special Collections Unit at the IIS?

The book came out of an Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU) research project and conference in 2017 entitled "Before the Printed Word: Texts, Scribes and Transmission", focused on the study of manuscript collections housed at the IIS. The conference brought together twenty-one scholars from diverse fields but all working with manuscripts from different cultural contexts. Eighteen of those papers were subsequently developed and now form part of this book.

The mandate of ISCU is to develop, preserve, study and facilitate research on heritage materials relating to the history and traditions of the Ismaili and other sister communities. These materials include manuscripts, coins, medals and other artefacts, historical documents and archives, rare printed materials, photographs and oral history. These materials are made available for research and educational purposes through published and online catalogues. In 2021, we launched an online catalogue of heritage materials housed at the IIS accompanied by a number of photographs and galleries (see special-collections.iis.ac.uk). In addition to the published catalogues of Arabic manuscripts, those of our Indic and Persian manuscripts are forthcoming.

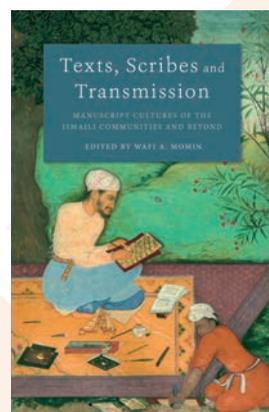
Who is the book for?

With contributions from specialists and early-career scholars, I hope the book will be of interest to those working on textual scholarship, manuscript and literary cultures and Islamic studies more broadly. In addition, for students and younger researchers who are interested in understanding the intricacies of working with manuscripts and the kind of issues one encounters in studying them, the book will hopefully provide a rich array of perspectives.

“ Finally, members of the Ismaili and other sister communities would find something of interest in it as they reflect on their own traditions and how heritage materials (like manuscripts) from the past connect their own lives with those traditions in the present times. ”

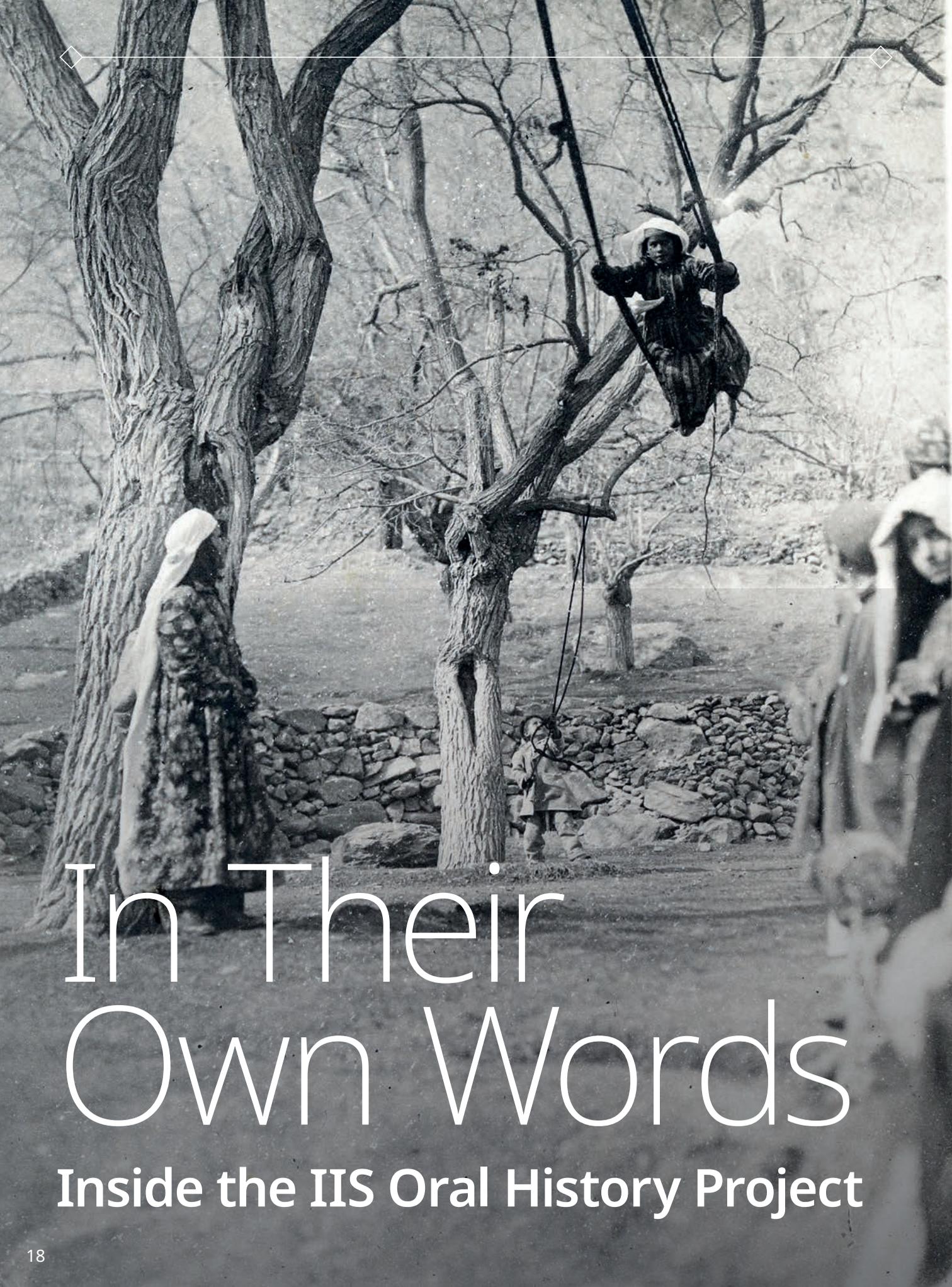


◆ A folio from a Qur'an manuscript from Mamluk times, housed at the IIS Ismaili Special Collections Unit. Image credit: ISCU.



Texts, Scribes and Transmission is the IIS's second Open Access title and is available to download or read online for free at www.bloomsburycollections.com.

The book launch took place in October 2022 at the Aga Khan Centre and is available to watch on the IIS YouTube channel.



In Their Own Words

Inside the IIS Oral History Project



We sat down with Rizwan Karim, Oral History Coordinator, to find out more about the IIS Oral History Project—which seeks to collect, preserve and present the voices of Ismailis across the world—and why he thinks the research method is so valuable.

What is the IIS Oral History Project?

The IIS Oral History Project run by the Institute's Ismaili Special Collections Unit (ISCU) aims to preserve the history as well as the intangible cultural heritage of the diverse Ismaili communities around the world. Intangible heritage refers to the oral traditions, devotional literature transmitted orally, languages, performing arts, rituals, festivals, and indigenous arts and crafts of a community. The project will endeavour to record the voices of individuals who have heard about (from their elders) and witnessed and participated in significant events that have shaped the global Ismaili communities today.

This said, oral history isn't new to the IIS, as a lot of our work has used the testimony of the communities across the globe on focused research areas. For instance, a considerable amount of work on recording oral tradition has already been undertaken in certain Ismaili contexts such as Tajikistan and parts of Afghanistan by the IIS's Central Asian Studies Unit. More recently, ISCU have conducted in-depth interviews with Ismaili leadership in a number of contexts using the oral history method. We are now placing additional emphasis on collecting the memories of elders following the losses due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

◆ Spring festival known as *Khidir ayyom* (Nawruz). From the 'Pamir' photo album (c. 1930s), part of the IIS Ismaili Special Collections Unit. On the eve of Nawruz young Ismaili girls and women in Badakhshan, Tajikistan and Hunza in today's Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan hang ropes on trees and spend considerable time swinging, which marks the arrival of Spring and joy. *Image credit: ISCU.*

How will the project work? What do you hope to achieve?

The main objective is to establish a searchable and accessible digital research resource of recorded memories covering diverse themes within the contemporary history and heritage of Ismaili communities. This would benefit historians, future scholars, and the Ismaili leadership, as well as members of the community (and the public) interested in this era of Ismaili history.

The project has two components. The first is the capturing of voices through recorded interviews. Given Ismaili communities are spread across the globe, and the diversity in languages and faith traditions, the project will naturally require volunteers from across all communities. In addition to conducting recorded interviews, we are in the process of developing a web-based portal to receive and present stories in text and audiovisual forms from communities with digital access. This portal will provide an opportunity for people to share their stories and memorabilia in written or self-recorded forms.

The second component is preserving, processing, and presenting the data captured through recorded interviews and the digital portal. In addition to preserving, we are keen to present these stories through a variety of media that include accessible articles, podcasts and other similar audiovisual products using voices. People also have treasure troves of memorabilia in the form of photographs, letters, medals, and other material that we'd like them to share to complement their narrative. We hope the combination of voices speaking about the events captured in this memorabilia will bring the history to life.



Are there any particular themes or regions you will be looking at?

“ We aim to capture and present the geographical, linguistic and historical diversity of the Ismaili communities around the world. ”

The immediate focus will be on those communities that have been “doubly marginalised”, firstly in the history itself and secondly in the recording of the history, by exclusion from the conventional processes of written and documented historiography due to geopolitical reasons and the orality of their languages and literatures.

The areas that we will be focusing on include experiences of significant events, traditions, customs and rituals, institutional memories, migrations and settlements, encounters among faith traditions, Ismaili literati, Ismaili women, the AKDN, Ismaili oral literature, and the challenges of modernity and urbanisation in the lives of Ismaili communities. These themes are overarching strategic areas to help us categorise the data though. As each community has gone through unique experiences in the course of their histories and now, in retrospect, the narrators make meanings of those experiences, these nuances will guide and shape the themes of the IIS Oral History Project as it progresses.

What are the benefits of oral history as a research method?

Oral history as a research method offers a number of unique benefits over other historical research methods.

“ Oral history is humanising, inclusive and empowering, as it allows us to learn about the perspectives of individuals or communities who might not otherwise appear in the historical record. It provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to people whose voices might not otherwise be heard to share their experiences of change in their communities. ”

◆ Siramdaam, an Ismaili woman from the Gilgit-Baltistan region in Pakistan, with her collection of medals, shields and other memorabilia in 2022. *Image credit: Hasan Ali Shah for IIS OHP.*

◆ Siramdaam’s old volunteer badge with text that reads “H.H. the Aga Khan [Volunteers] Corps [Centre] Jamat Khana Gilgit” on Ismaili flag. *Image credit: Hasan Ali Shah for IIS OHP.*



◆ Dr Farouk Topan reciting from the Qur'an at the foundation-laying ceremony of the Ismaili Centre, 1979. From the Amirali Mamdani Collection, part of the IIS Ismaili Special Collections Unit. Dr Topan's memories and reflections relating to this event were captured in oral history interviews conducted by ISCU this year. *Image credit: ISCU.*

By including these otherwise marginalised voices, oral history rounds out and fills the gaps in the story of the past.

Oral history can also enhance interaction between various constituencies of a community and strengthens interviewees' and interviewers' connections with the community. It enriches our understanding of significant events and other forces of change experienced at both community and individual level.

Finally, one of the most important features of oral history is the way it connects our past and present with our future through the preservation of memories, stories and experiences for future generations, researchers, and historians.

Can you give us an insight into any of the interviews you've conducted so far?

I conducted an interview with an Ismaili man in his 70s who comes from the remote mountainous region of north Pakistan (where I too come from). Despite being an "insider" to the context, I was amazed by the stories he told which showed how the society had evolved over the course of time. The interviewee walked me through the evolution of a male-only, extremely limited education system, which was accessible by only a few in his society. His first open-air school was miles away and he used to walk there, as he was inspired by his first teacher. His telling of the arrival of the first jeep and its reception by the people was particularly interesting and told of the remoteness of that society. The man's memories of significant events, such as the first visit of an Ismaili Imam in 1960 by the current 49th Imam Aga Khan IV and his interaction with the Jamat, took me to a whole different world.

The interview contained stories of the interviewee's multiple migrations, from remote rural areas to cities in search of education and work, and ultimately coming to the IIS in the early 1980s. My interviewee recalled a nascent IIS in a three-room campus in Holborn. His experience as a young scholar and recollection of the challenges of working on a prototype of religious education with an evolving Ismaili institutional network shed light on the shift from traditional to modern leadership and institutions. His story of marrying outside his ethnic group and faith tradition within the Ismaili community offers insight into the coming together of different faith traditions. The memories of his later years include his engagement with the AKDN and the global Jamat while he progressed in his career as an established educationist and scholar. He was kind enough to share photographs, educational certificates, letters, and other memorabilia to enrich his narrative.

The story of this individual may not necessarily be fully representative of the Ismaili community in North Pakistan, but it gives us a broad outline of how socio-cultural change was experienced in that community from one man's perspective. Thanks to the Oral History Project, the story will be preserved for our future generations in the individual's own voice, and I look forward to connecting people with the rich details of his life story soon.

Visit the IIS website or sign up to our newsletters for updates on the Oral History Project.



◆ A primitive house-mill. From the 'Pamir' photo album (c. 1930s), part of the IIS Ismaili Special Collections Unit. *Image credit: ISCU.*

Landmark IIS Conference Takes Stock of Field of Ismaili Studies

The conference “Ismaili Studies: The State of the Field” was held at the Aga Khan Centre and online in late November 2022. Its convenor, Dr Daryoush Mohammad Poor, explains why the conference was such a landmark event for the Institute.

The recent conference “Ismaili Studies: The State of the Field” was of particular importance for the IIS because it reflected some of the key academic achievements outlined in the vision of the Institute’s founder, His Highness the Aga Khan. Over the four decades since its founding, the IIS has placed the academic and rigorous study of Ismailism on the map in a manner which is neither dominated by Orientalist approaches nor exclusivist or polemical. Compared to four decades ago, there is now available a massive number of publications, journal papers and texts of the highest academic standards which have endeavoured to correct many of the common misperceptions about the Ismailis. Our special collections and manuscripts (held in the Ismaili Special Collections Unit), our own publications as well as those with major academic publishers, the many academic conferences and workshops we have held, and a high concentration of specialist scholars (Ismaili and non-Ismaili alike) are all a testament to this achievement. The output of the IIS includes our publications of primary sources from the Fatimid, Alamut and post-Alamut periods, and research carried out by our Qur’anic Studies, Shi’i Studies and Central Asian Studies units. These academic outputs cover a multiplicity of fields and disciplines such as philosophy, history, theology, the intersection with Sufism and also various contemporary areas of study.

By maintaining the highest academic standards, in the light of its publications and the various research

units that have contributed to the work of the IIS and continue to do so, the IIS has demonstrated powerfully how the original vision of establishing an academic institution has produced results in tangible terms. This conference was able to capture a range of these achievements.

Over the course of its existence, the IIS has had not only a research and publications department but also various units which have contributed to the life of the Ismaili community and high-quality education of its leadership, educators and students.

“ Alongside renowned scholars in the field, many of those who participated in and contributed to this conference are the direct product of the IIS as an academic institution, offering direct proof of how our Graduate Studies department has contributed over the decades to the development of a generation of scholars. ”

Many of these scholars either work for the IIS or have contributed to its work, including the recent conference.

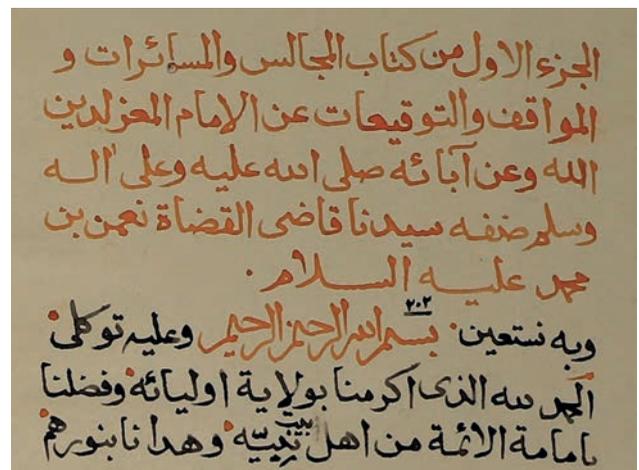


◆ A group of Ismailis, including Dr Poor's mother, in Gulunabad, east of Birjand. Photograph published in 1960 by Wladimir Ivanow in his archaeological study *Alamut and Lamasar*. Image credit: Dr Farhad Daftary.

We expect to publish the proceedings of the conference in the form of a book. The field of Ismaili studies is now very large and we cannot presume to have covered even a small part of the extensive research materials now available. As such, the conference is only the start of a longer series reflecting on various aspects of Ismaili studies. Moreover, the conference was hybrid which allowed the benefit of having participants from around the globe attend. The conference has also been recorded and will in due course be made available online.

In the next few years, with the publication of many primary sources of Ismaili studies in different fields, along with our ongoing publication of critical editions and translations of these texts, we hope to be able to use these sources more extensively in classroom settings for our own students, in broader academic settings as part of reading material and coursework, and within community institutions as regular references for the understanding of Ismaili intellectual heritage over the centuries and in vastly varying contexts. The secondary literature based on many of these texts is also critically important for understanding Ismaili thought and heritage. In our conference, we sought to offer and gain an insight into all of these issues, and proceedings of the conference will also contribute to the richness of the already available secondary literature.

The full proceedings from “Ismaili Studies: The State of the Field” will be available to watch on the IIS's YouTube channel soon.



◆ Manuscript: Opening of *Kitāb al-Majālis wa'l-musāyarāt* (The Book of Sessions and Excursions) by al-Qadi al-Nu'man (d. 363/974). This manuscript was copied in 1355/1966. Image credit: ISCU, MS 541 (Ar).

A Tribute to Dr Shiraz Thobani on his Retirement

After four decades at the IIS, educationist and academic Dr Shiraz Thobani retires as Head of the Department of Curriculum Studies in December 2022.

Dr Thobani obtained his undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto and a Master's in Education at the IoE, University of London, before completing an M.Phil. and a PhD at the University of Cambridge. His doctoral research focused on a sociological and policy study of Islam as school knowledge in the English education system.

Dr Thobani has been involved since the 1980s in the development of curriculum materials for the Preschool, Primary, and Secondary levels for the global Ismaili community. His contribution has been significant in the development of the IIS's educational programmes aimed at Ismaili children and youth.

Complementing this has been his input into projects and publications on cultural, humanistic and civilisational approaches to the curriculum linked to the AKDN and other international institutions. He has published widely on Muslim education, including *Islam in the School Curriculum: Symbolic Pedagogy and Cultural Claims* (Continuum, 2010; author) and *Narrating Islam: Interpretations of the Muslim World in European Texts* (I.B. Tauris, 2010; co-editor). His research interests are in contemporary Muslim education, the political sociology of the curriculum, and modern educational thought.

With Dr Thobani's retirement, the Department of Curriculum Studies will lose its long-standing head of department, his guiding leadership, and his role in nurturing the careers of staff and students over the decades. This is evident in the growing contribution of colleagues who have served the department since

the 1990s as well as those who have joined in recent years, a testament to Dr Thobani's investment in the professional development of his colleagues.

“ Dr Thobani has worked closely with educators at the IIS and in the Ismaili community to develop pioneering approaches to the curriculum which can prepare the young for the challenges they face today and help them take their place as active citizens in a pluralistic world. ”

The Talim and Secondary curricula have been long-term synergistic endeavours which have drawn upon the talents and skills of a wide range of researchers, writers, editors, translators, picture researchers and designers. The materials are being used in over 25 countries and are available in ten languages. Currently, they are being converted into a digital format.

Dr Thobani leaves the IIS at a point when it is embarking on a new phase in its history. Having contributed to the IIS's educational programmes in their formative phases, he looks forward to seeing these ventures grow in their efficacy and sophistication as a new generation of educators commit themselves to giving realisation to a vision of education that addresses the emerging needs of the coming decades.

Student Voice

STEP Empowers me as a Woman, Mother and Teacher

Rehana Hafeez is a second-year Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) student. In a blog written for International Women's Day this year, she explored the ways in which STEP has allowed her to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher while being a mother, and her desire to "ignite the spark of motivation and confidence in young girls who want to pursue their dreams and serve their communities".



It is said that a woman is an embodiment of love, affection, care and nurturing. I truly adhere to this saying, yet I also think that the status of women goes beyond preconceived roles attached to them by society. A woman can be a nurturer, caregiver, home-maker and, at the same time, she can achieve her dreams, be a role model, an agent of change and, above all, an excellent educator. My STEP journey encompasses both trajectories. In the beginning, I was a little nervous about leaving a toddler behind and pursuing a Master's degree abroad. It wasn't easy initially, but strong support from my family, the IIS community and friends has enabled me to pursue my dream career.

When I came to London, I saw how vast the world could be. With each day passing, I learned something exciting and worth exploring: meaningful engagement with the culture, opportunities, and people complimenting my leadership skills. I learned better communication and interpersonal skills by engaging with students from different countries and programmes. STEP has enabled me to trust in my strength as a woman to come forward and contribute towards the intellectual development of the community where I belong. The curriculum and nature of the delivery of the content are designed in such a fantastic way that both men and women find equal opportunities to learn. STEP is in excellent alignment with the vision of His Highness Aga Khan IV. In a conversation with Harvard Professor Diana Eck in 2015, His Highness Aga Khan mentioned that leadership qualities are not gender-driven. Instead, both genders may have the same leadership competencies and capabilities. If discrimination occurs in a particular community based on gender, it will damage its interests by not allowing women to deliver according to their capacities.

All the courses on STEP have enabled me to prepare younger generations to respect diversity in terms of

religion, race, ethnicity and gender. For example, one of the courses, "The Qur'an and its Interpretations", has enabled me to support the idea of the dignity of women in Islam, as opposed to the majority view of women being discriminated against and pushed back in the name of religion. An in-depth understanding of Qur'anic literature gained through multiple scholastic perspectives has enabled me to understand various Qur'anic interpretations on matters related to women. STEP has helped me to grasp the holistic view of the Qur'an towards women, which is gentle and inclusive. There is a dire need to improve awareness among youth on such matters, to enable them to make wiser decisions for their communities in the future.

STEP has also helped me to understand that the Qur'an's message is universal and not static; it can be adapted, keeping in view the current needs and demands of societies. Therefore, I am now quite enthusiastic and, at the same time, determined, with a strong sense of responsibility to ignite the spark of motivation and confidence in young girls who want to pursue their dreams and serve their communities. I am now completing the programme and have gained enough insights to deliver and work as an educator with the community. I believe that an innate ability to be patient and resilient, and also to adapt to different circumstances, is what makes women unique.

I strongly recommend STEP to all Ismaili women inspired to become educators and pursue their dreams. You could be a mother, a caregiver, and at the same time achieve your dreams, have strong faith in your abilities and show your true worth by excelling in leadership roles across the globe.

Visit www.iis.ac.uk/study/graduate-studies/step to find out more about STEP.

Meeting Again A Year in Photos

In 2022 we were delighted to be able to hold in-person events and activities on a regular basis again. Please enjoy some highlights from the past year.



◆ Clockwise from L > R

Dr Daftary and members of staff at an afternoon tea at the Aga Khan Centre in July

Dr Daftary at a lunch for outgoing Governors in late 2021

The speakers at an IIS conference on “Mu’tazilism and the Qur’an” in July

Dr Shiraz Kabani at the launch of his book *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration* in February
Students at Victoria Hall

The IIS Board of Governors and Dr Daftary

Students at the Aga Khan Centre

All images belong to the IIS



The World Transformed

Poetry at the Aga Khan Centre and the IIS

On World Poetry Day (21 March) this year, Dr Karim Javan, Research Associate, and Naureen Ali, Cataloguer and Adlib Officer in the IIS's Ismaili Special Collections Unit, discovered poetry in the walls at the Aga Khan Centre, in the manuscripts housed at the IIS, and in the Nawruz celebrations that coincided with the day.



◆ A girl playing a ball game during the Spring festival known as *Khidir ayyom* (Nawruz). From the "Pamir" photo album (c. 1930s), part of the IIS Ismaili Special Collections Unit.

World Poetry Day was introduced by UNESCO to celebrate linguistic diversity through poetic expression, honour poets and foster the convergence between poetry and other art forms.

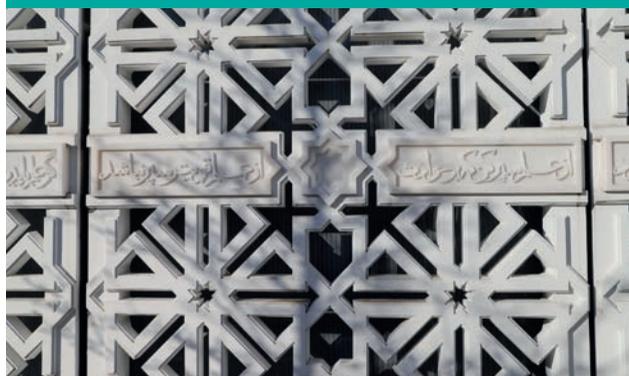
A multiplicity of poetic expressions through different art forms can be found at the Aga Khan Centre (AKC), home to the IIS, in transcriptions and inscriptions of poetry.

Poetry at the AKC

One of the various Islamic Gardens at the AKC, the Garden of Light, is inspired by the Islamic courtyards of Andalusia in Spain, and includes pattered screens with a ribbon of white marble inscribed with verses by different Persian poets, including the following by Nasir Khusraw:

از علم سپر کن که بر حوادث
از علم قویتر سپر نباشد

Make a shield from knowledge
For there is no stronger shield against
calamities



◆ The inscription of the quoted verse by Nasir Khusraw in the Garden of Light. *Image credit: Dr N. Nourmamadchoev.*

Nasir Khusraw, an Ismaili philosopher, theologian and poet, was born in Qubadyan, Khurasan, in 394 AH/1004 CE. According to the introduction in his *Safarnama*, at the age of forty he experienced a spiritual transformation, after which he travelled to Fatimid Cairo. He spent four years there and studied Ismaili theology. After being appointed as the *hujat* (head of the Ismaili *da'wa*—missionary organisation) of Khurasan, he returned to his homeland to propagate the Ismaili *da'wa* (lit. “summons”, “mission”). He wrote on different subjects of Ismaili theology and philosophy, both in verse and prose.

Poetry in the IIS Special Collections

At the AKC, the IIS also houses its Special Collections, which include the following manuscript of Nasir Khusraw's *Diwan*.



◆ A manuscript of Nasir Khusraw's *Diwan* (c. late 18th/early 19th century), part of the IIS Special Collections. *Image credit: Rahim Kara.*

This manuscript of *Diwan-i Nasir-i Khusraw* is transcribed in fine black *Naskh* (a style of Arabic and Persian calligraphy) within multiple rulings and gilded frame. The heading on the first page is illuminated in purple, blue and gold and the first two pages have floral decoration in the margins and between the lines. This *Diwan* has no colophon so the date and name of the scribe cannot be identified. Based on the illumination style and the calligraphy, it was produced in Iran in the Qajar period (late 18th/early 19th century).

Poetry and Nawruz

World Poetry Day also coincides with the arrival of Nawruz (a Persian word meaning “new day”), which marks the beginning of Spring and is celebrated as the start of a new year by more than 300 million people around the world.

There are various forms of celebration in different regions such as family feasts, exchange of gifts, children playing with painted eggs, and preparation of a Nawruz table with symbolic objects signifying happiness, fertility and abundance. You can discover more about some of these celebrations and rituals in Dr Shiraz Kabani's book *Ismaili Festivals: Stories of Celebration*. Along with cultural performances, writing and recitation of poetry is a common feature of Nawruz celebrations.

Nasir Khusraw's poetry includes various symbols from nature. All signs of transformation in life and nature for him are inspirations to reflect on his faith and beliefs. On the occasions of Spring and Nawruz, he writes:

بهار دل دوستدار علي
همیشه پراست از نگار علي
دل زو نگار است و علم اسپرم
چنين واجب آيد بهار علي

The spring in the heart of Ali's lovers,
is always illuminated by his love,
My heart is adorned by him, shielded
by knowledge,
Such ought to be the spring of Ali.

جهان را دگرگونه شد کار و بارش
برو مهربان گشت صورت نگارش
به ديبا بپوشيد نوروز رويش
به لولو بشست ابر گرد از عذارش

The world was transformed by its affairs,
And kindly graced by its Curator,
Nawruz put on its silky dress, as clouds
washed away dust from its face.

The last line captures the spirit of renewal ushered in by Spring and Nawruz: it is a time to celebrate and look forward to a fresh, new year—with joy and poetry.

An exploration of themes and techniques used by Nasir Khusraw, along with an English translation of some of his poetry, can be found in *Make a Shield from Wisdom: Selected Verses from Nasir-i Khusraw's Diwan* (Bloomsbury, 2001), by Annemarie Schimmel.

Alumni: Highlights from Annual Profile Report 2021

The global IIS alumni body comprises **734 graduates** living in **37 countries**. In 2021, **66 alumni** engaged with the IIS in various ways, e.g., supporting curriculum development; participating in or presenting on our short courses, the STEP Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme, and the Mentor Development Workshop with the Department of Community Relations; assisting in the Postgraduate Preparatory Programme application and student recognition process with the Department of Graduate Studies. In addition, **260 alumni** volunteered on significant projects or assignments within Ismaili Imamats institutions and external organisations.



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

20 alumni published papers in academic journals.

24 alumni presented papers at international conferences.



A significant majority of our alumni (**625 or 85%**) reported themselves as employed, with more than half (**373 or 51%**) in professional employment with Imamats institutions.



Employment

Academic Achievements



74 alumni

conducted training sessions in a voluntary or professional capacity.



67 alumni completed further studies on a part-time or a full-time basis.

24 alumni

earned promotions in their professional roles.

2 alumni

completed their doctoral studies.



71 alumni

participated in conferences and workshops related to their professions.

Taushif Kara –

GPISH 2017

University of Cambridge

Thesis: *Abode of Peace: Islam, Empire, and the Khoja Diaspora (1866–1972).*

41 alumni

were involved in organising conferences, serving as board members in various organisations, raising funds for and setting up their own companies.



Azzam Al Kassir –

GPISH 2014

Birkbeck University

Thesis: *Change and Continuity in the Thought and Praxis of Salafi-Jihadism: Studying the Case of al-Nusra Front in Syria between 2012 and 2018.*



Other Achievements

Continuing Education



Applications for 2023 Short Courses Open

The IIS continues to provide exciting educational opportunities through its short courses for adult members of the global Ismaili community. Our short courses are designed to introduce participants to a social, cultural and civilisational approach to the study of Islam and Muslim societies, with a particular focus on Ismaili contexts. In 2023 we are offering three online and two face-to-face courses at the Aga Khan Centre in London, and four field-based short courses in Egypt, Portugal, Tanzania and Tunisia.

COURSE TITLES	PROGRAMME DATES* (BOTH DAYS INCLUSIVE)	APPLICATION DEADLINE**
Introduction to Islam	26 April - 11 May 2023	28 Feb 2023
Shari'a: Development of Fiqh and Ethics in Muslim Contexts	08 May - 26 May 2023	
The Qur'an and its Interpretations	05 Jun - 16 Jun 2023	
Shi'i Islam: Thought, Beliefs and Practices	23 Mar - 27 Mar 2023	3 Jan 2023
Exploring Ismaili Traditions	21 Jul - 25 Jul 2023	21 Mar 2023
Religious Symbolism in Art and Architecture	9 Sept - 13 Sept 2023	
Exploring Ismaili History: Walking in the Footsteps of the Fatimids	6 Oct - 11 Oct 2023	
Ismaili Communities in Migration: The East African Experience	26 Oct - 30 Oct 2023	
Understanding Culture	9 Nov - 14 Nov 2023	

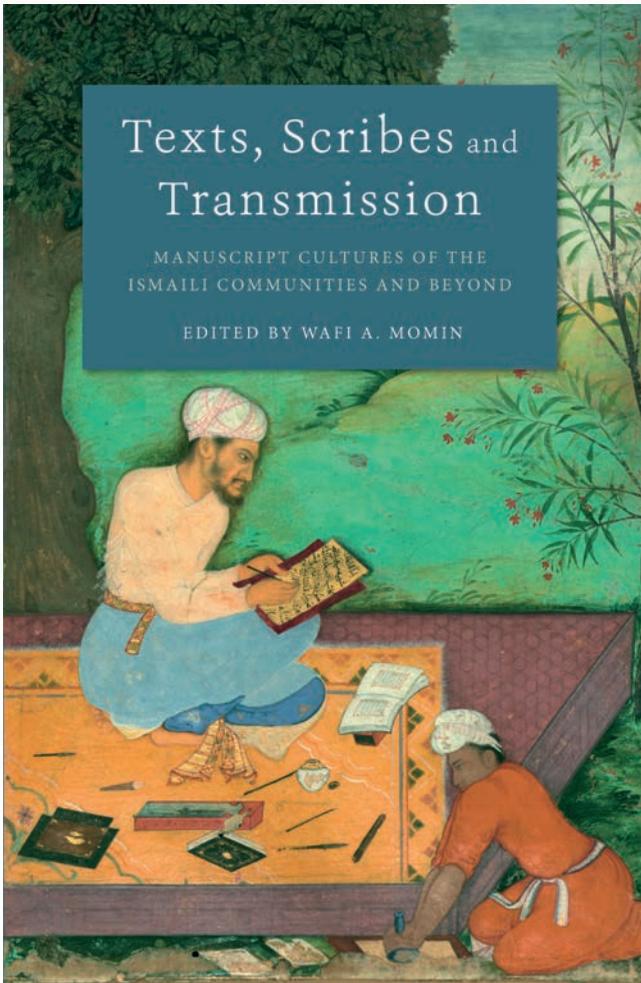
*For face-to-face and field-based courses, check-in for the accommodation will be one day before the course start date, and check-out will be one day after the course end date. For example, the check-in date will be 20 July for a course starting on 21 July, and the check-out date will be 26 July for a course ending on 25 July. Online courses will be offered on alternate days, with each day lasting around four hours.

**The selection of participants is needs-blind. Applications for all courses are considered on a first-come-first-served basis.

Apply now at iis.ac.uk/short-courses

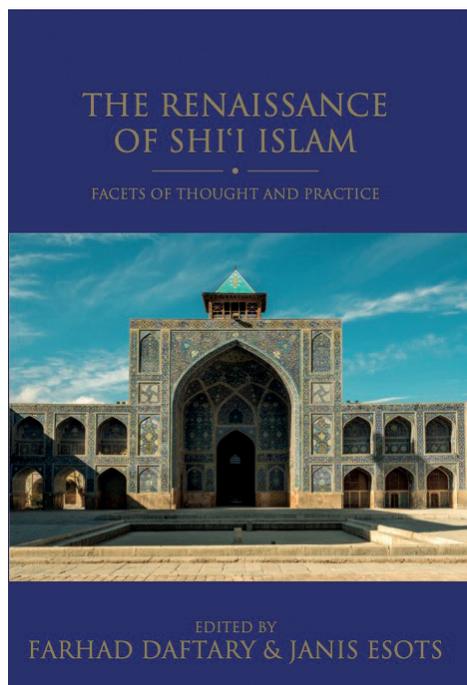
New

Publications



*Texts, Scribes and
Transmission: Manuscript
Cultures of the Ismaili
Communities and Beyond*
Edited by Wafi Momin

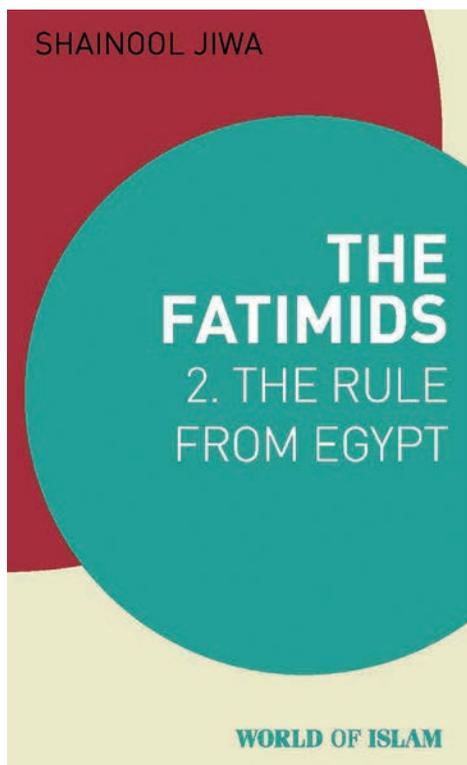
This Open Access volume brings together studies offering insights on different aspects of manuscript cultures nurtured by Ismaili communities. The range of materials transmitted via these manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Indic languages reflects the doctrinal and literary preoccupations of Muslims at large and of other groups from the societies in which Ismailis lived. In addition to engaging with multifaceted questions surrounding the processes of textual transmission, the book's chapters deal with other connected aspects, like codicology, scribal and reading practices, educational and social history, authorship, communal script, religious identity and interactions of ideas across ideological denominations. With contributions from specialists and early-career scholars, this volume will be of interest to those working on textual scholarship, manuscript and literary cultures, and Islamic studies.



***The Renaissance of Shi'i Islam:
Facets of Thought and Practice
(Shi'i Heritage Series)***

Edited by Farhad Daftary and Janis Esots

The renaissance of Shi'i Islam began in the 9th/15th century when the Ismailis experienced the Anjudan revival and Twelver Shi'i traditions were also renewed. This renaissance gained further strength when the Safavids succeeded in establishing a state in the early decades of the 10th/16th century, making Ithna 'ashari Shi'i Islam their official religion. Although the political and artistic developments of the Safavid era of the 10th–12th/16th–18th centuries have been extensively studied, the complexities of the different groups, movements and strands of thought in the renaissance of Shi'i Islam still remain largely unexplored. The chapters in this book represent the most recent scholarship on the intellectual and spiritual life of the age and discuss what prepared the ground for the revival of Shi'i Islam as well as its achievements. This book is available through Open Access.

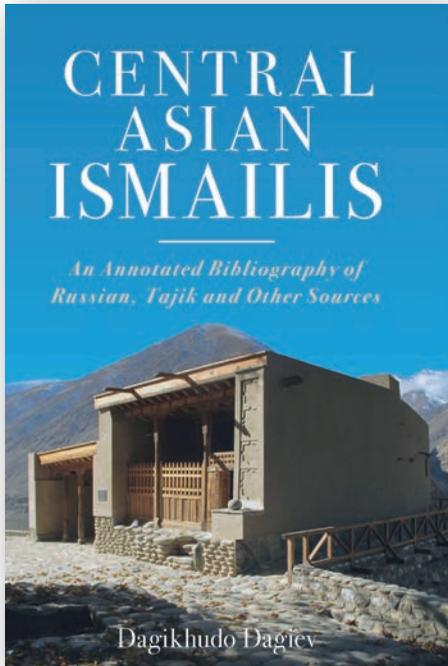


***The Fatimids: 2. The Rule from Egypt
(World of Islam)***

By Shainool Jiwa (available 12 January 2023)

One of most prosperous and influential dynasties of the Muslim world, the Fatimids (909–1171) were distinguished by their Imam-caliphs, who asserted spiritual as well as political authority in direct descent from the family of the Prophet. Their conquest of Egypt in 969 marked the inception of a burgeoning Mediterranean empire. This book continues the story of the Fatimids from their newly founded capital of Cairo. This lively and engaging work, including maps and colour images, draws on a broad range of primary sources to lead readers through two centuries that witnessed the triumphs and trials of the only sustained Shi'i caliphate to rule across the medieval Islamic world.

Other Recently Published Titles



***Central Asian Ismailis:
An Annotated Bibliography of
Russian, Tajik and Other Sources
(Ismaili Heritage Series)***

By Dagikhudo Dagiev

Forthcoming Releases

***On Ethics and Character Traits:
An Arabic Critical Edition and
Annotated English Translation
of Epistle 9 (Epistles of the
Brethren of Purity)***

Ed. and tr. by Omar Alí-de-Unzaga

***Building Ismaili Identity:
The Jamat and the Jamatkhana
in East Africa (Living Ismaili
Traditions)***

By Aliaa Remtilla

***Women in the Qur'an
(Qur'anic Studies Series)***

By Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza

Encyclopaedia of the Ismailis

Ed. by Farhad Daftary

A portrait of Nabila Walji, a woman with long, dark, curly hair, wearing a black top. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a street.

In Memoriam: Nabila Walji (1993-2022)

This tribute to Nabila was written by her friends and classmates on the GPISH programme.

Nabila Walji was a student of the IIS's Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH), writer, photographer, and anthropologist-in-training, born in Calgary, Canada, in 1993. She completed her early education in Edmonton and her undergraduate degree in Anthropology and International Development Studies at McGill University in Montreal, graduating in the top 10% of her class. In between her undergraduate and graduate studies, Nabila received the Aga Khan Foundation Canada International Development and Management Fellowship, an Engineers without Borders internship as well as other opportunities, which enabled her to work in various capacities in Nairobi, Kenya.

Nabila was the founder and manager of "Uniting through Differences", a platform through which she worked at the intersection of education, media, culture and heritage for over ten years. As part of this effort, she established her Instagram page @nabilawanders where she used her photography and story-telling to engage followers in these conversations. She also co-founded "Brush Your Cheek. Save a Life", an organisation that works towards addressing the lack of ethnic diversity in worldwide stem cell databases. In addition to serving as Communications Manager, she organised stem cell registration clinics worldwide to improve numbers.

Nabila was an avid volunteer and was involved in various capacities in different organisations. She tutored refugees in Edmonton, served as a volunteer for a local distress line in Montreal, and was a Youth Camp facilitator for Al-Ikhwan in Kenya and Global Encounters (GE).

Nabila pursued her graduate studies through the IIS's GPISH programme, in the final year of which she was enrolled in the University of Oxford's Visual, Material and

Museum Anthropology MSc. She was active during her time at both the IIS and University of Oxford, volunteering with the IIS Alumni Working Group, Uncomfortable Oxford Tours, the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Oxford University Anthropology Society, and more.

She also loved capturing the world around her through her photographic lens, which lent us a window to look at the world through her eyes. Her most famous work "Unbelonging in my Fatherland" tells the story of her unique positionality in her homes: Canada, East Africa, and her elusive "fatherland". She continued to explore this theme in her GPISH dissertation, which focused on the Ismailia Hotel in Nairobi, Kenya, and its role in the historical, urban, olfactory, and culinary fabric of the city.

IIS faculty members who taught Nabila remember her vividly as "one of the most promising students" who—in their words—"has touched so many with so many good things"; as "talented", "bright", "gentle", "kind", "modest", with "an excellent mind" and "an eye for beauty". Dr Laila Halani, Head of Graduate Studies at the Institute, said: "Nabila embodied the struggle of belonging and unbelonging that many immigrant youth face today. She was unique in her ability to seamlessly integrate her intellectual and academic understanding with her creative and artistic expressions of her experiences that resonate with immigrant youth today. She was determined to bring these two strands together in her proposed doctoral studies which we discussed on several occasions including in March 2022, and I am confident that she would have made a unique and original contribution, if only The IIS, Oxford, and the community have lost a budding anthropologist, photographer, and much-loved student and colleague. We will miss her lively, creative, and warm presence."

Dr Alex Henley, GPISH Programme Leader, said:

“*Nabila was one of the first to show me what is so special about the IIS as a place for people committed to learning as a form of service. Whether we were talking about her research interests, career aspirations, or something as mundane as an essay deadline, Nabila always seemed to be guided by a strong moral compass, seeing the ethical dimensions of everything she did. When she came to see me about possible career paths in academia, we ended up chatting for hours about her main concern: on what path could she do the most good for others? As a teacher I always feel proud of a student's success, but that day I felt honoured to have been given a small role in Nabila's journey.*”

But Nabila was much more than her resume and her accomplishments, though those were numerous. Nabila was also a sister, daughter, friend, wanderer, poet, traveller, artist, roadtripper, cat lover, *ginnan* and *qaseeda* enthusiast, passionfruit yoghurt-eater, *kuku paka* aficionado, avid reader, box collector (but out-of-the-box thinker), stuffed animal connoisseur, global citizen, map analyst, cross-cultural communicator, problem solver, professional ideator, and multimedia storyteller.

Nabila spent, in her own words, “most of her days and nights ... contemplating, researching and dreaming about societies and cultures”. She had the ability to see so much beauty in the mundane. She would stop while walking to admire a particular fallen leaf or make a new dog friend. Nabila would always contemplate things that most people take for granted. For instance, many fantasise about travelling through Europe and putting a checkmark on a list of European countries visited, but travelling, for Nabila, was instead a way to “understand one's place in the universe”. She took inspiration from Ibn Battuta's travelogue and tried to instil meanings in everything that she did. She found peace and joy in exploring her backyard and her neighbourhood, just walking, appreciating, and capturing moments that struck her.

Nabila also loved to get lost in the colours of her surroundings. She was completely in love with the world and enchanted by it. She would give names to her plants, her stuffed animals, even the spiders in her room. She could talk for hours about maps, Pakistani truck art, the sunsets in Nairobi and the photographs she had taken of the sunlight reflecting off of buildings there, the importance of public

libraries, and watching the leaves change colour. She loved telling stories and she loved hearing stories. Nabila was so drawn to anthropology as a way of storytelling, especially when it came to stories that were less heard.

Nabila lived every day like she somehow knew it wasn't promised. She prioritised her relationships over everything else. Nabila always endeavoured to see the best in people. She would constantly give people the benefit of the doubt. In the face of unkind or unfair behaviour, she tried hard to put herself in other people's shoes to understand their position. She was balanced, kind and generous in her assessments of people, and was very vocal in appreciating the people around her. She never let anything else get in the way of being there for the people around her. She was kind in a way that left you feeling loved – she often wrote small snippets of encouragement for her friends when they were struggling and poured her love into notes she would send to us on days of celebration.

Nabila always tried to shed the “worldliness” that most of us find ourselves so entangled with. She radiated the kind of calmness that was contagious and practised, in her own words, “slowing down and listening, smelling, tasting, feeling and seeing what the world around us says about everyday life”. She had an observant eye and a kind and open heart to observe and understand both the obvious and the hidden in plain sight.

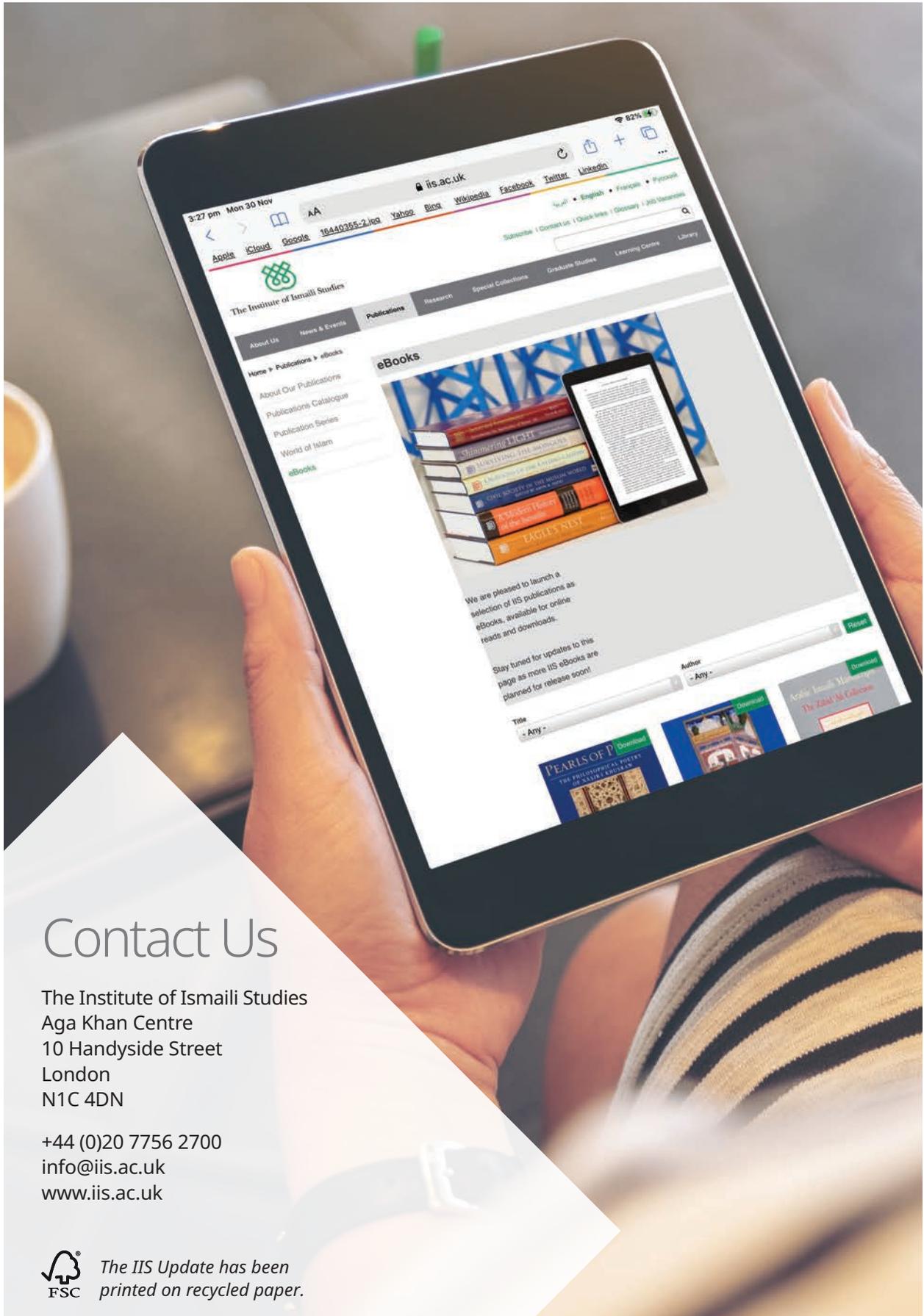
When Nabila's grandmother, her Dadi ma, passed away, she wrote a touching tribute for her. It is as if a younger Nabila is telling us how to process her present absence. She writes of the beautiful intimacy of her grandmother's loved ones gathering under one roof, and then going to watch the sunset together. The new normal sets in, but the sun continues to fill the sky with colour. Nabila writes about reciprocal goodbyes. When we say goodbye, those who have left us find ways to respond. So, when we are saying goodbye, she is responding. In the sunset we can see her Dadi ma, and now her, shepherding us into the future—living on in our hearts, our memories, and our sunsets.

Nabila shared the feeling of uprootedness that seems so common in the diaspora. Not really belonging to here or there, not really having a home anywhere on this earth, or perhaps having too many. After a lifetime of looking for a home, Nabila has found one and she is there—in her eternal home writing little notes for her new neighbours, naming the spiders around her, continuing to speak to us through the sunset, and filling the heavens with as much love and care as she filled our lives with.

The Nabila Walji Foundation has been set up by Nabila's family as a living expression of its namesake's passion for equity, social justice, and supporting vulnerable communities. Visit www.nabilawaljifoundation.com.



◆ Students chatting in the Aga Khan Centre.
Image credit: Rehana Virani/IIS.



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