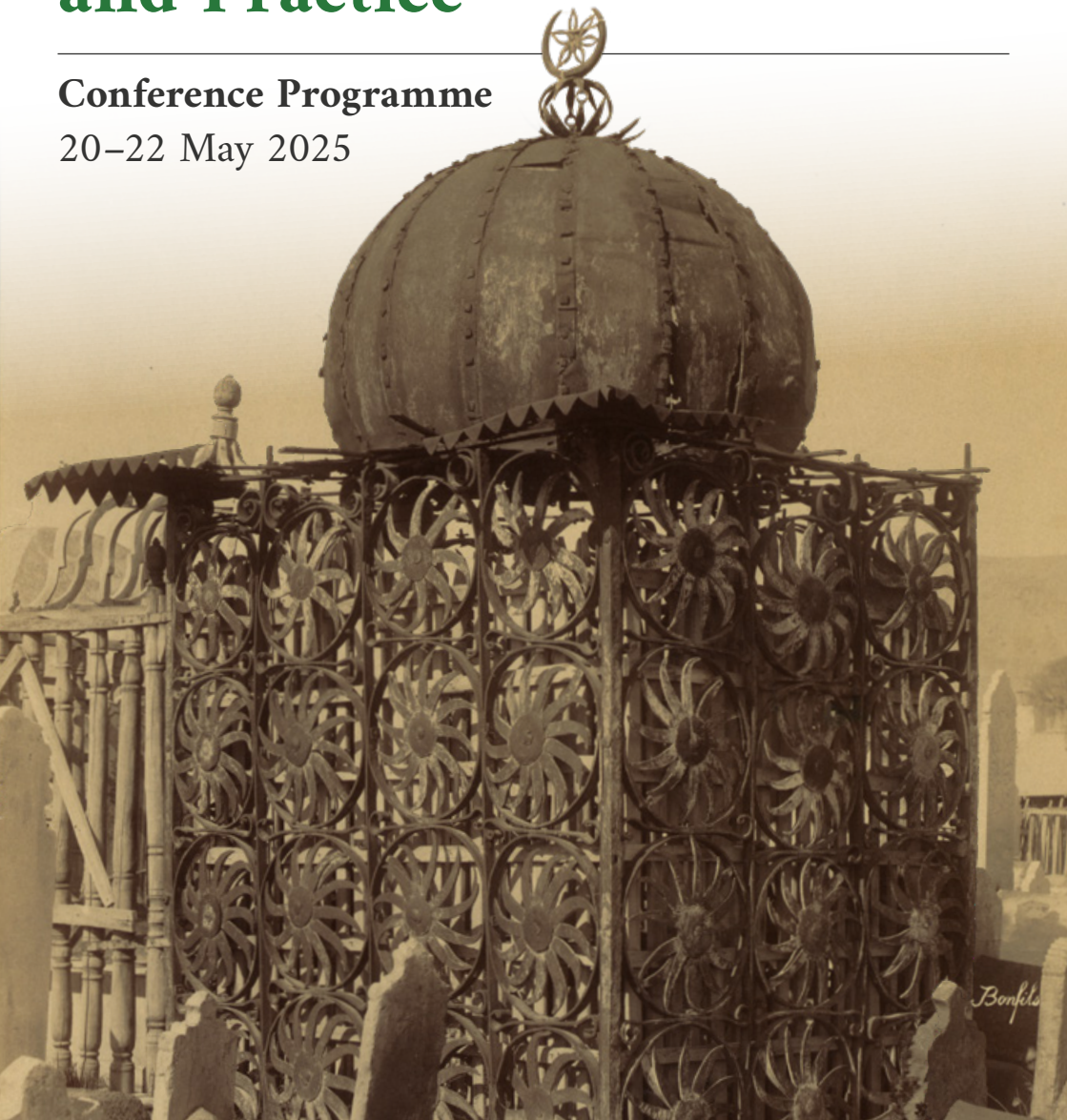
The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Devotion to the Prophet's Family in Islamic Thought and Practice

Conference Programme

20–22 May 2025



Cover image: Damascus. Photograph by Sebah, labelled 'Tomb of the daughter of Mahomet', c. 1870–1899. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress ppmsca 04346 https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.04346

Inside image: Detail from the interior of the tomb of Shāh Niʿmat Allāh Walī (d. 843/1431) in Mahan, Iran, showing *Dhū'l-fiqār*, the sword of ʿAli b. Abi Talib. Image reproduced under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

Organising Committee

Shiʿi Studies Unit, The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Dr George Warner
Dr Maria De Cillis
Nigina Mirbozkhonova
Naushin Premji

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AGA KHAN CENTRE

10 Handyside Street, London N1C 4DN
www.iis.ac.uk

Welcome

The remit for this conference is potentially vast. Since the first Islamic century, devotion to the Prophet's family has been a widespread and complex facet of Muslim religiosity and, over fourteen hundred years, it has found expression in an immense array of ritual, literary, mystical and philosophical traditions. I must begin by expressing my delight on behalf of the organising committee at the multifarious breadth and depth of subject matter that our presenters have gathered for us all to explore over the next three days.

The starting priority of the conference was to seek a fuller account of the ritual traditions of Shiʿi Islam. While some Shiʿi rituals, especially in the Twelver tradition, have received considerable attention, this has overshadowed a much wider range of practices. Not only have the rituals of other Shiʿi traditions remained little-studied, but even better-known practices, such as pilgrimage to the imams' tombs, are seldom sustainedly integrated into broader accounts of Shiʿi thought and practice.

As we set out to address this, a natural inflection point was the porosity of 'ritual' as a category. When does a poem become ritual speech? What of the theological concepts that inform and justify ritual performances? Meanwhile, to behold Shiʿi ritual is inevitably to behold devotion to the Prophet's family (*ahl al-bayt*) as an enduring animating concern that refracts across myriad pious acts and utterances. This, in turn, bids the researcher reflect upon the fact that such devotion is by no means exclusive to Shiʿi traditions, even if its presence therein is deemed denser and more definitive.

These considerations lead us to the need for a broader conception of devotion to the Prophet's family. This, first, may afford essential context to the study of Shiʿi ritual. Wherever the boundaries of 'ritual' are set, it is clear that a full understanding of a practice like the visitation of Husayn's tomb at Karbala cannot be reached without understanding the broader spectrum of practices and discourses

in which Muslims recollect, represent and encounter the Prophet and his family. Second, as many of our assembled papers illustrate, *ahl al-bayt*-centred devotion can constitute a crucial medium for the enunciation and negotiation of group identities, Shiʿi and non-Shiʿi. Third, to acknowledge the preceding points is to engage with the profound, pervasive importance of *ahl al-bayt*-centred devotion within Islam's history and its present; *loci classici* such as Iranian *taʿziya* dramas are only the best-known instances of a phenomenon that is both near-ubiquitous and effervescently various.

Accordingly, with this conference we set out to affirm the importance and integrity of *ahl al-bayt*-centred devotion as an object of study, both as the epicentre of diverse Shiʿi ritual traditions and as a near measureless continuum of narrative and practice across Islamic history. While a variety of exemplary scholarship over the past few decades has addressed *ahl al-bayt*-centred devotion within particular contexts and traditions, it has remained only a marginal presence in accounts of Islam as a whole, too often consigned to sectarianised silos, to the 'non-canonical' or other such peripheries. Here, conversely, we aspire to a conversation about devotion to the Prophet's family that is more cohesive, more representative, and better represented in the wider study of Islam. I am, once again, delighted by the wealth of different materials and methodologies, from textiles to *tafsīr*, from ethnography to poetic elegy, from Europe to Southeast Asia, that our presenters have brought together for this task. My thanks to all of them, to my tireless fellow organisers, and to all those in attendance.

Dr George Warner

Research Fellow
Shiʿi Studies Unit, IIS

Schedule

Tuesday 20 May 2025

8:30 – 9:30

Registration

9:30 – 9:35

Director's Welcome

Zayn Kassam

9:35 – 9:45

Introduction

George Warner & Maria De Cillis

9:45 – 10:00

Opening Address

Devotion to the People of the Prophetic Family (*Ahl al-Bayt*)

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

10:00 – 11:30

Panel 1: Place, Pilgrimage and Materiality

Chair: Tazim Kassam

Contested Geographies: Iraq's Great Shiʿi Shrines Amidst the Ottoman–Safavid Rivalry (1508–1648)

May Farhat, Lebanese American University, Beirut

Shiʿi Objectologies: Towards a Relational Theory of Shiʿi Materiality

Karen Ruffle, University of Toronto

The Reflection of Muḥarram Rituals in Late-Safavid Silk Textiles

Mohamad Reza Ghiasian, University of Kashan (presenting author)
and Mohammad Mashhadi Noushabadi, University of Kashan

11:30 – 12:00

Health Break

12:00 – 13:30

Panel 2: Reconstructing Early Devotion: Sources and Methods
Chair: Gurdofarid Miskinzoda

Scions of the Prophet Muhammad: The Fatimids and their Veneration of the *Ahl al-Bayt*
Shainool Jiwa, IIS

Listening with Longing: In Search of Early Shiʿi Devotional Narrative
George Warner, IIS

Maintaining Early Islamic Imperial Sovereignty in the Face of the *Ahl al-Bayt*
Mohammed Allehbi, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

13:30 – 15:30

Lunch and AKC Tour
Tour at 14:30

15:30 – 17:30

Panel 3: Mapping Modern Devotion: Sources and Methods
Chair: Dagi Dagiev

The *Ahl al-Bayt* in Recent Popular Literature from Khwārazm/Uzbekistan
Ingeborg Baldauf, Humboldt University Berlin (Emerita)

Aspects of Devotion to the Prophet's Family among the Ismailis of Badakhshan
Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev, IIS

Devotion to the Prophet and His Family in 20th-Century Bosnia and Herzegovina
Dženita Karić, University of Amsterdam

#AhlulBayt: Narratives of Devotion to the Prophet's Family on Instagram
Akif Tahiiev, Goethe University Frankfurt

Schedule

Wednesday 21 May

9:30 – 11:00

Panel 4: *Ginān*s and Ismaili Devotion

Chair: Daryoush Mohammad Poor

Sing a Song to Udho, the Messenger of God: Krishna and his Companions as the *Ahl al-Bayt* in Ismaili and Chishtī Sufi Hindi Poetry
William Rees Hofmann, IIS

Poetry and Performance: The Devotional Life in Satpanth Ismaili *Ginān*s
Tazim Kassam, Syracuse University

***Pīr Muḥammad* and *Shāh ʿAlī*: The Teacher–King in Satpanth Ismaili Literature**
Imran Visram, University of Oxford

11:00 – 11:30

Health Break

11:30 – 13:30

Panel 5: Ritual Senses and Sentiments

Chair: Orkhan Mir-Kasimov

Fatima Goes to a Wedding: Veneration through Humour in Women's *Taʿziya* of Qajar Iran
Lucy Deacon, University of Fribourg

Acoustic Ahl al-Baytism: Rethinking Sectarian Boundaries through Sonic Devotional Practices
Stefan Williamson Fa, University of Cambridge

From Tribal Kinship to Covenantal Duty in 7th-Century Kufa: The Tawwābūn, al-Mukhtār and Loyalty to the *Ahl al-Bayt*
Hasan Al-Khoee, IIS

***Duʿāʾ Zaman al-Ghayba*: An Instance of Messianic Devotional Literature in Twelver-Imāmī Shiʿism**
Vinay Khetia, Shiʿa Research Institute

13:30 – 14:30

Lunch

14:30 – 15:30

Special Lecture

'We are what we can remember': Reflections on Siting (Ismaili) Heritage, Identity, and Devotion

Fayaz Alibhai, IIS

15:30 – 16:00

Health Break

Group Photo

16:00 – 17:30

Panel 6: Storytelling and the Devotional Imagination

Chair: Lucy Deacon

Where Shall I Send my Invitation? The Imams' Succession in Ismaili Devotion

Shafique Virani, University of Toronto

Unseen Devotion: A Family of Jinn and Imam Husayn

Uzair Ibrahim, University of Exeter

Husayn, al-Azhar and the Socialist Underpinnings of Modern Egyptian Devotional Literature

Hawraa Al-Hassan, University of Cambridge

19:00

Dinner for Participants (meet at 18:30)

Schedule

Thursday 22 May

9:00 – 10:30

Panel 7: Scholarly Authority and the Regulation of Devotion

Chair: Fouad Marei

Contesting Devotional Practices in Contemporary Twelver Shiʿism
Oliver Scharbrodt, Lund University

***Ahl al-Kisāʾ* as a Source of Protection and Polemics: *Li Khamsatun* Devotional Poetry in the Pandemic Era**
Siti Sarah Muwahidah, University of Edinburgh

Sunni Devotional Traditions Centred on the *Ahl al-Bayt* in Premodern Egypt: Muḥammad al-Sabbān's *Isʿāf al-Rāghibīn fi Sīrat al-Muṣṭafā wa-Faḍāʾil Ahl Baytihi al-Ṭāhirīn* (1185/1771)
Rachida Chih, CNRS, Paris

10:30 – 11:00

Health Break

11:00 – 12:30

Panel 8: Defining, Debating and Revering the *Ahl al-Bayt* Between Sunnis and Shiʿis

Chair: Maria De Cillis

***Al-Naʿīm al-muqīm* in Context: A Mid-7th/13th-Century *Manāqib* of the Prophet, Fatima, and the Twelve Imams**

Kazuo Morimoto, University of Tokyo

Sunni Sufi Devotion to the *Ahl al-Bayt* and Sunni–Shiʿi Relations between Dissociation and Rapprochement in Modern Iraq and Yemen

David Jordan, Ruhr University of Bochum

Seeing the Imam in his Luminous Form: 13th/19th-Century Shiʿi Sufi Devotion to the *Ahl al-Bayt* between Doctrine and Practice

Alessandro Cancian, IIS

12:30 – 12:45

Closing Remarks

George Warner

12:45

Lunch

16:30

Concert

Abstracts and Bios
Opening Address and Special Lecture

Devotion to the People of the Prophetic Family (Ahl al-Bayt)

Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi

PROFESSOR MOHAMMAD ALI AMIR-MOEZZI is Emeritus Director of Studies at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE). An Officier des Palmes académiques and Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, he taught at the EPHE from 1984 to 2024, holding from 1996 the Chair of Classical Islamic Thought previously held by Louis Massignon, Henry Corbin and Daniel Gimaret. A Senior Research Fellow at The Institute of Ismaili Studies (London) and a member of the Ambrosian Academy (Italy), he is a specialist in Shiʿi theology, the history of the Qur'an and classical Persian poetry. He is the author of nearly 300 articles and 20 personal and collective books, several of which have been translated into multiple languages, including classics of Islamic studies such as *Le Guide divin dans le shiʿisme originel* (1992, 2005), tr. as *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʾism*: *The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (1994); and *Le Coran parlant et le Coran silencieux*: *sources scripturaires de l'islam entre histoire et ferveur* (2011), tr. as *The Silent Quran and the Speaking Qur'an*: *Scriptural Sources of Islam Between History and Fervor* (2016). His most recent books are *La Preuve de Dieu. La mystique shi'ite à travers l'œuvre de Kulaynî (9e–10e siècle)* (2019), winner of the Prix Pierre-Antoine Bernheim d'Histoire des Religions de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, tr. Maria De Cillis & Orkhan Mir-Kasimov as *The Proof of God. Shiʿi Mysticism in the Work of al-Kulaynī (9th–10th Centuries)* (2023); and *Ali. Le secret bien gardé*: *Figures du premier Maître en spiritualité shiʿite* (2020), tr. Francisco José Luis & Anthony Gledhill as *Ali. The Well-Guarded Secret*: *Figures of the First Master in Shiʿi Spirituality* (2023).

'We are what we can remember': Reflections on Siting (Ismaili) Heritage, Identity, and Devotion

Fayaz Alibhai

FAYAZ ALIBHAI is originally from Kenya and holds Bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Religion (University of Florida), a Master's in Social Anthropology (University College London), and a PhD in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies (University of Edinburgh). He is currently a Research Associate at the IIS where he heads the Ismaili Heritage Project, a tripartite collaboration between the IIS (London), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (Geneva), and institutions of the Ismaili community (Lisbon). The project aims to document, protect, conserve, and celebrate the built and associated tangible heritage of the global Shia Ismaili Muslims. Aside from Shi'ism, Edinburgh, culture, and heritage, Fayaz's broader research interests include leadership and authority, public space, and technology. Fayaz is a trustee of the Edinburgh Iranian Festival, which aims to increase the understanding of Iran's culture, history, and people to audiences in Scotland, as well as of JustRight Scotland, a human rights organisation working with people and communities to change broken systems as well as individuals' lives.

Papers

Husayn, al-Azhar and the Socialist Underpinnings of Modern Egyptian Devotional Literature

Hawraa Al-Hassan

This paper discusses the devotional works of an Egyptian nationalist writer at a key juncture in the modern history of Islam in the Arab World. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī (1920–1987) is primarily known as a journalist and novelist, whose literary works express nationalist ideals within a socialist framework. He was accused at various moments during his prolific career of being either a communist or an Islamist, and his interest in both religious and secular traditions challenges that binary. In terms of his devotional literature for the *ahl al-bayt*, this encompassed a variety of genres, from his two-part play entitled 'Al-Ḥusayn: Revolutionary and Martyr', which was banned from performance by Egypt's highest authority al-Azhar, to arguably the best modern biography of the first Shiʿi imam in the Arabic language: 'Ali the Imam of the God-fearing'. Similar to how he depicts the protagonists in his nationalist novels, al-Sharqāwī presents these imams primarily as warriors for social justice and heroes for the poor and downtrodden, rather than merely being spiritual guides. In so doing, he provides a refreshing lens through which readers can access a 'pre-sectarian' world at the beginning of Islamic revivalism in the 1970s and 1980s and allows us to envision a future of Sunni/Shiʿi rapprochement rooted in a common view of history and love for the *ahl al-bayt*.

HAWRAA AL-HASSAN is an affiliated researcher with the University of Cambridge specializing in the modern Arab novel as a form of cultural history that intersects with the discourses of religion and nationalism. She is the author of *Women, Writing and the Iraqi Ba'thist State*: *Contending Discourses of Resistance and Collaboration, 1968–2003* (2020) and recently contributed a piece on popular religious novels to an edited volume entitled *Narratives of Dislocation in the Arab World*: *Rewriting Ghurba* (2023). She is currently working on a project charting the history of modern Islamic revivalism as reflected in narrative genres including prison writing and religious biographies.

From Tribal Kinship to Covenantal Duty in 7th-Century Kufa: The Tawwābūn, al-Mukhtār and Loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt

Hasan Al-Khoee

That the emergence of Islam initiated fundamental transformations in the structure of tribal society and notions of tribal loyalty in 7th-century Arabian society is well-known. Similarly well-known is the centrality of mechanisms of mutual obligation and collective liability that undergirded the Arabian tribal system of the 6th–7th centuries. Less examined, however, are the tensions and resolutions that characterised this transition from 'a tribal to a Muslim society' in eras where clan bonds and tribal loyalties were fractured due to divergent beliefs in legitimacy for the caliphate, particularly during eras of civil strife (*fitna*). These tensions became particularly acute in the era where membership of a tribe remained the central organising principle and identity marker in the social structure of the early Muslim polity, especially in the new-founded garrison towns (*amṣār*).

The emergence of the movement of Kūfan *Tawwābūn* in 684 and that soon after of al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd al-Thaqafī (d. 687) have frequently been located in scholarship as pivotal milestones in the emergence of a Shiʿi confessional identity in the first century of Islam. This paper argues that the navigations and public proclamations of the Tawwābūn and al-Mukhtār critically demonstrate both the tensions and the resolutions emerging from the larger structural reorientations of early Muslim society. Predicated on a historiographical discussion of the reliability of the extant *akhbār,* it demonstrates how both movements negotiated such tensions by explicitly subordinating and discarding clan fidelity in favour of an overriding belief in the primacy of loyalty (*walāʾ*) and duty toward the household of the Prophet. For adherents of the Tawwābūn and al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd therefore, a duty once owed exclusively to one's kinsmen became above all a duty to the *ahl al-bayt* of the Prophet Muhammad.

HASAN AL-KHOEE is currently a Research Associate at the IIS, where he works on the cultural ecology of early Islam and on early Shiʿi and Fatimid historiography. He received his PhD from SOAS University of London in 2021, with a thesis focusing on early Arabic historiography and the political communicative cultures of the early Muslim caliphates (7th–8th centuries).

Maintaining Early Islamic Imperial Sovereignty in the Face of the Ahl al-Bayt

Mohammed Allehbi

Despite the tense and fraught relationship between the late-Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs and prominent descendants of ʿAli b. Abi Talib, the relationship was not merely confrontational but far more complex. Between the 8th and 10th centuries, late-Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs understood why Shiʿis considered some ʿAlids as imams and gave them ritualised obedience (*bayʿa*). These caliphs acknowledged the illustrious lineage of ʿAlids, which goes back to the Prophet Muhammad. However, these rulers' need for expansive caliphal authority dictated that they be considered superior to the ʿAlids or part of this family. This paper will examine letters from three caliphs, Hishām b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 724–743), al-Maʾmūn (r. 813–833) and al-Rāḍī (r. 934–940). Each interrogated the notion of *bayʿa* and devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* as they dealt with rebellions or matters of public order. By tracing how they navigated the thorny political–religious issue of the *ahl al-bayt*'s sanctified existence, I will show that Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs' relationship with ʿAlids was not monolithic but ever-evolving.

MOHAMMED ALLEHBI is a Research Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. He was previously a PIL-LC Research Fellow at the Program in Islamic Law at Harvard Law School and the Library of Congress for the 2023–2024 academic year. He specializes in law and governance in the Islamic Near East and the Mediterranean during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. After earning his master's degree in Middle Eastern studies from the University of Chicago in 2014, he received his doctorate in history from Vanderbilt University in 2021, where he was a senior lecturer in the Department of Classical and Mediterranean Studies. His first article, 'It is Permitted for the Amīr but not the Qāḍī': The Military-Administrative Genealogy of Coercion in Abbasid Criminal Justice', was published in *Islamic Law and Society* in the Autumn of 2022. It explores the emergence and rationalization of coercive interrogations in late antique and early medieval Islamic criminal justice.

Currently, he is working on his first monograph, about the formation of Islamic criminal justice and policing in the Near East and the Mediterranean between the 8th and 12th centuries.

The Ahl al-Bayt in Recent Popular Literature from Khwārazm/Uzbekistan

Ingeborg Baldauf

Devotion to the Prophet's Family (Ahl al-Baytism) is not confined to Shiʿi communities. Even at times of intense political rivalry, which played out in heated interconfessional strife nurtured by prominent literati, Sunni rulers would eternalize the memory of members of the Family in magnificent edifices. Less conspicuous to the public eye, but of major importance for people's everyday lives are minor genres of popular literature which adorn lifecycle rituals and make them meaningful – and many of these literary texts commemorate the remarkable deeds and tragic fates of members of the Family.

In 1993, together with Sigrid Kleinmichel, studied local literary culture in Khwārazm and photographed manuscripts held by ladies (*xalpa*) who performed selected texts at commemorative feasts. Sigrid Kleinmichel has published a richly annotated inventory of the texts; other scholars have investigated the *xalpa*s' activities from religio-ethnological and ethnomusicological perspectives. However, *xalpa*s have come under pressure from Salafis and state authorities, creating major difficulties in the field. Our 1993 materials document a religio-literary practice which may be on the verge of extinction.

I should like to discuss from our corpus some prosimetric narrations which present the early history of Islam, and hence important elements of the creed, through the lens of Ahl al-Baytism: 'Baba Rawshan' (about ʿAli), 'Imāmlar' and 'Maqtalnāma' (about Hasan and Husayn), and in particular 'Qiyāmatnāma' and several other stories featuring Bibi Fatima. Compared with other variants from Central Asia and, even more so, from Anatolia, some of these anonymous and auctorial versions from Khwārazm take a remarkably strong anti-Sunni stance and/or particularly highlight the importance of Bibi Fatima.

INGEBORG BALDAUF studied Turkology, Islamic Studies and Arabic Studies at the University of Vienna, where she received her doctorate in 1981 with a dissertation on the Uzbek folk song of northern Afghanistan. In 1992, she was awarded the Venia Legendi for her habilitation thesis on alphabet reform among Turkic peoples in Russia and the Soviet Union as an example of intellectual and political activism in the 19th and early 20th centuries. She has held fellowships at Indiana University Bloomington and the National University of Uzbekistan, and positions at the University of Freiburg and Humboldt University Berlin. Since her retirement in 2021, she has been working on Turkic narrative texts from Anatolia to Central Asia.

Seeing the Imam in his Luminous Form: 13th/19th-Century Shiʿi Sufi Devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt between Doctrine and Practice

Alessandro Cancian

The idea that the Qur'an was revealed about the twelve imams, and even as a repudiation of their enemies, is nothing original or new in Shiʿi exegesis. In fact, it features prominently in the pre-Buwayhid Imami *tafsīrs*, which in turn rely heavily on the corpus of the traditions of the imams. The moment this idea is professed by a Sufi master, however, it assumes a range of different implications, especially when the master happens to operate at a time and in a space (Qajar Iran) where Twelver Shiʿism has become dominant. In this presentation, I look at some of these implications by examining the idea – not exclusive to Shiʿi Sufism at that time – of the 'luminous form of the Imam'. This idea is developed in conjunction with the notion of *walāya* throughout the work of an important 19th-century Shiʿi Sufi master, the Niʿmatullāhī Sulṭān ʿAlī Shāh Gunābādī (d. 1909). Far from being only a theoretical construct, the idea is rooted in the practical devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* professed by the masters of the order, as well as in practices that are believed to open the gate of supernatural perception and allow for the Imam to appear to the inner eye of the faithful in his 'luminous form' (*bi'l-nūrāniyya*).

ALESSANDRO CANCIAN is a Senior Research Associate at the IIS, London, where he works on Shiʿi Sufism, Qur'anic exegesis and the intellectual and religious history of early modern Iran. A historian of religions and an anthropologist by formation, he has published books and articles on religious education in Shiʿi Islam, Shiʿi Sufism and Qur'anic exegesis. He edited *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Iran* (2019), and his monograph *The Emergence of Shiʿi Sufism* was published in 2023.

Sunni Devotional Traditions Centred on the Ahl al-Bayt in Premodern Egypt: Muḥammad al-Sabbān's Isʿāf al-rāghibīn fī sīrat al-Muṣṭafā wa-faḍāʾil ahl baytihi al-ṭāhirīn (1185/1771)

Rachida Chih

This paper will focus on the role of the ulema in promoting and disseminating Sunni devotion to the family of the Prophet in Ottoman Egypt. My argument will be based on an 18th-century work taught at al-Azhar University throughout the 19th century: *Isʿāf al-rāghibīn fī sīrat al-Muṣṭafā wa-faḍāʾil ahl baytihi al-ṭāhirīn* (Help for those who wish to know the life of the Chosen One and the merits of the members of his noble family) by Muḥammad al-Sabbān (d. 1791). This work is a collection of biographical notes on members of the Prophet's family buried in Cairo. These notices are preceded by a life of the Prophet and an account of the merits of the *ahl al-bayt* and the duties of Muslims towards them. Sabbān composed this text in honour of his patron, the emir ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhūda (d. 1776), to celebrate the completion of his vast project to renovate the mausoleums of the *ahl al-bayt* in Cairo. His sources were 15th-and 16th-Century ulema who, like him, were Sufis. Although the work reveals a love shared with the Shiʿis for the family of the Prophet, Sabbān takes care to distinguish this Sunni veneration from that of the Shiʿis. The defence of the dignity and privileges of the members of the Prophet's family is part of the broader context of devotion to the Prophet and the rise of the group of *ashrāf* (descendants of the Prophet), to which many Sufis claim to belong. In the Sunni tradition, the sacredness of the *ahl al-bayt* is not linked to ʿAli, but to the figure of the Prophet, a portion of whose light they are perceived as having inherited.

RACHIDA CHIH is a Senior Researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and a member of the Centre for Turkish, Ottoman, Balkan and Central Asian Studies (CETOBAC), part of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. Her research focuses on the history, literature and anthropology of Sufism and Sufi orders in early modern and modern Egypt and Morocco. Her most recent publications include *Sufism in Ottoman Egypt: Circulation, Renewal, and Authority in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (2019) and 'The Apogee and Consolidation of Sufi Teachings and Organizational Forms'. She also co-edited the ANR-DFG PROPHET research program, which explores the construction and perception of the figure of the Prophet Muhammad in modern Muslim societies. This project resulted in a co-edited, three-volume series: *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam* (2021–2023).

Fatima Goes to a Wedding: *Veneration through Humour in Women's Taʿziya of Qajar Iran*

Lucy Deacon

Veneration of Fatima al-Zahrāʾ through humour may sound surprising, particularly when the practice in question involves a story told by women who act out the roles of all characters including the Prophet Muhammad and angel Jibrāʾīl. But this is a reality in *taʿziya-yi zanāna* (women's *taʿziya*), part of the Iranian tradition of *taʿziya-khānī*, or *shabīh-khānī*, a form of devotional drama best known for representing the Karbala narrative during the month of Muḥarram. In Qajar Iran, while large-scale public *taʿziya* performances were delivered to gender-mixed audiences by all-male casts, in private, female-only spaces, performances were devised and staged by women. While such performances included renditions of the episodes treating Karbala, *taʿziya-yi zanāna* had its own wider calendrical repertoire. The memoirs of Muʾnis al-Dawla, maid to Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh Qajar's wife Anīs al-Dawla, tell of a special play being performed every year to mark the date of Fatima al-Zahrāʾ's birth, and that the performance of nuptial narratives such as the weddings of Bilqīs and Sulaymān, Yūsuf and Zulaykhā were customary in the month of Rabīʿ al-Awwal, after the mourning season was over. This paper discusses a play that belongs to this genre, *ʿArūsī raftan-i Ḥaẓrat-i Fāṭima*, in which the pagan women of the Quraysh invite Fatima to a wedding. It is not a warm invitation; nevertheless, as the plot unfolds, Fatima's resplendence and irrefutable virtue see the pagan women embrace Islam, but not before they are lampooned, their absurdly opulent taste juxtaposed with Fatima's humble beauty to comedic effect. I will examine this play both through accounts of its performance and reference to a 19th-century version of its script, attempting to catch a glimpse of these women who, in their devotion, pushed the boundaries of the *taʿziya* as a genre beyond mourning, including humour in their veneration.

LUCY DEACON (PhD, University of Edinburgh, 2022) is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. She has an advanced knowledge of Persian and a background as a performing arts professional. Her book *Karbala in the Taʿziyeh Episode*: *Shiʿi Devotional Drama in Iran* (2024) looks at the Iranian tradition of *Taʿziya-khānī*, or *shabīh-khānī* between the 17th and early 20th centuries C.E., focussing on the content of the plays, their compositional features, and their role in conserving popular wisdom relating to Karbala. Her approach combines fieldwork with examination of historical accounts and playscripts. Many of the latter are in manuscript form, and she has worked extensively with the Vatican Library's Cerulli Persian Collection. Her current research concerns the lesser-known plays of the *taʿziya* repertoire that feature women as principal characters, and women as performers and creators of devotional drama. This is informed by a comparative approach; within Fribourg's WOMARD project (SNSF funded) she is collaborating with specialists in the Christian and Jewish drama of medieval and early modern Europe. She is currently co-authoring a volume of editions of playscripts from the Cerulli Collection that treat the life events of Fatima al-Zahrāʾ, Maryam, Shahrbānū, Zaynab, and others.

Contested Geographies: Iraq's Great Shiʿi Shrines Amidst the Ottoman–Safavid Rivalry (1508–1648)

May Farhat

As centres of Shiʿi devotion and repositories of charismatic power, the tombs of Shiʿi imams and their descendants in Iran (Mashhad, Qom) and Iraq (Karbala, Najaf, Samarra, and Kazimayn) held significant political and religious importance for the Safavid shahs. From 1508, the year Shah Ismail (r. 1501–1524) conquered Iraq-i Arab, to 1639, when the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV (r. 1623–1640) reconquered Baghdad, the Iraqi Shiʿi shrines found themselves at the heart of the military conflict between the Ottomans and Safavids, changing hands three times. During this period, the shrine cities became a cultural and religious contact zone, benefiting from the patronage of both dynasties.

This presentation examines the architectural and urban transformations of the Iraqi Shiʿi shrine cities amidst the dynamics of the Safavid-Ottoman rivalry during the 16th and early 17th centuries. The shrines of Najaf, Karbala, and Kazimayn underwent extensive construction projects aimed at renovating their sacred complexes, alongside substantial investments in waterworks, including the digging of canals to provide these cities with water. Both the Ottomans and the Safavids supported these projects as part of their efforts to assert territorial claims over Iraq's sacred landscape.

While it is often assumed that the Safavids were primarily responsible for shaping the architecture of these Iraqi shrines, the historical context of Safavid patronage and the existing Safavid material evidence have not been critically examined. Additionally, Ottoman patronage and management of Iraq's Shiʿi shrines are frequently overlooked. Drawing on both Safavid and Ottoman historical, archival, and visual sources, this presentation explores the architectural, material, and infrastructural refurbishments of these shrine cities within the broader ideological, religious and geopolitical context.

MAY FARHAT received her PhD in Islamic art and architecture from Harvard University. She has taught Islamic art and architectural history at the American University of Beirut, the Holy Spirit University in Kaslik, and the Lebanese American University, where she is Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Design, teaching in the MA program of Islamic Art.

Her research interests cover the architectural history of the Middle East, with a focus on medieval and early modern Iran and the late Ottoman visual culture in Bilād al-Shām. She is the author of many articles on the architecture of the Muslim world, including 'Beirut's Great Umari Mosque: History, Memory and Post-War Reconstruction' for *Articles of Faith*: *Visual Cultures in the Byzantine and Islamic Worlds*, ed. Eva Boubala, Lesley Jessop and Marcus Milwright (2023); 'Shiʿi Piety and Dynastic Legitimacy: Mashhad under the Early Safavids', *Iranian Studies* 47, 2 (2014); and 'A Mediterraneanist's Collection: Henri Pharaon's "Treasure House of Arab Art"', *Ars Orientalis* 42 (2012).

The Reflection of Muḥarram Rituals in Late-Safavid Silk Textiles

Mohamad Reza Ghiasian and Mohammad Mashhadi Noushabadi

This paper examines a group of inscribed silk textiles from the Safavid period that all contain the name of Imam Husayn. Despite their very different dimensions, previous scholars have considered these pieces to be tomb covers, but the present study offers an alternative hypothesis regarding their origin and function, interrogating such questions as changes of content in their inscriptions over time and their relationship with changes in Safavid society. The production of these artworks coincided with the development of Muḥarram rituals in the Safavid era, as well as the construction of Husayniyya buildings during the reign of Shah Sultan Husayn (r. 1694–1722). Moreover, until the end of the 17th century, the Shiʿi formulae inscribed in textiles usually take the form of the *ṣalawāt-i kabīra* and place emphasis upon Imam ʿAli, but thereafter the name of Imam Husayn becomes more prominent. With recourse to written sources, manuscript illustrations and the inscriptions of the textiles themselves, this paper therefore argues that these pieces were in fact processional banners (*ʿalam*), specifically, mourning banners for Muḥarram commemorations. The analysis will focus on twenty pieces, eleven of which are dated between 1545 and 1740–41, and several of which were woven by Kashani artisans and, it will be argued, produced in Kashan.

MOHAMAD REZA GHIASIAN holds a PhD in Islamic Art and Archaeology from the University of Bamberg and is currently Associate Professor of Islamic Art at the University of Kashan. His books include, in English, *Lives of the Prophets*: *The Illustrations to Hafiz-i Abru's 'Assembly of Chronicles'* (2018), and, in Persian, *Facsimile of the Topkapi manuscript H. 1653* (2018), *Illustrations to the Jamiʿ al-tawarikh and Majmaʿ al-tawarikh* (2024), *Persian Book Painting in Shahruk's Royal Court* (2024) and *Shiʿi* Material Culture (2024). He has also published more than forty papers on the material culture of the Islamic world.

MOHAMMAD MASHHADI NOUSHABADI, Associate Professor of the Department of Religions and Philosophy at the University of Kashan, holds a PhD in Comparative Religions and Mysticism from Qom University. His expertise includes Shiʿi art, mourning rituals, Sufism, and religious symbols in Iranian culture. His notable works include the books (all in Persian) *Iranian Tūghs* (2016), *Iranian Sufism and ʿAshura Commemorations* (2017) and *Shiʿi Material Culture* (2024). He has published more than forty articles and has participated in numerous conferences.

Sing a Song to Udho, the Messenger of God: Krishna and his Companions as the Ahl al-Bayt in Ismaili and Chishtī Sufi Hindi Poetry

William Rees Hofmann

While intense devotion to the family of the Prophet Muhammad is a well-known component of Islamic practice and often seen as an axis of difference between Shiʿi and Sunni forms of Islam, less attention has been paid to these forms of devotion in Sufism. This paper will explore the various ways in which such devotion was articulated in South Asian Islam, particularly amongst the Nizari Ismaili communities of Gujarat and Sindh and a lineage of (ostensibly Sunni) Chishtī Sufis based in Bijapur in the Deccan (South India). Particularly, I look here at how both Chishtī Sufi and Ismaili expressions of devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* were similarly folded into an assemblage of theological, cosmological and eschatological symbolism borrowed from Hindu Bhakti worship. This symbolism is a central feature of the main texts of Ismaili devotion in South Asia known as *ginān*s, while much modern scholarship on South Asian Ismaili traditions have made claims for its uniqueness in this regard. Such translations of Bhakti eschatology into Islamicate terms focused particularly on the role played by Imam ʿAli, cast here as an avatar of Vishnu known as Kalki, as well as by other members of the Prophet Muhammad's family, on the Day of Judgement (*qiyāma*). However, Indian Sufi communities such as the Chishtīs made similar engagements, not only with this eschatological worldview, but also with the lyrical and devotional symbolism surrounding another Vishnu avatar, Krishna, and his companions (such as Udho). While the Ismaili *ginān*s have often been seen as a means of appealing to local communities of Hindus, thus gaining converts, I argue here that when seen in light of other engagements with Bhakti eschatology and cosmology, particularly by Chishtī Sufis, they are better understood as one of the many varied ways in which Islamic mystical communities in South Asia enhanced their own spiritual practice.

WILLIAM REES HOFMANN is a Research Associate in the South Asian Studies Unit at the IIS. His research explores music, poetry and early Sufi practices in South Asia, particularly as they relate to Nizari Ismaili and other Shiʿi devotional thought and practice. His PhD in Music from SOAS (2022) was a cultural history of music and performance practices between the Sufi environments and the Sultanate courts of South Asia from the 13th to 16th centuries. He is currently working on turning this research into a book.

In 2022–2023 Dr Hofmann was an American Institute of Indian Studies Senior Performing Arts Fellow based in Gujarat and New Delhi, working on turning his research on early Sufi song text collections into a performance, recording and lecture/demonstration.

William is also a multi-instrumentalist and composer specialising in both the Indian sarod and the Afghan rubab, and is the director of Ensemble Khusrawi, an Indo-Persian musical ensemble. He earned a BA in Hindustani Vocal Music from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in Gujarat, and also holds an MMus degree from SOAS in Sarod and Rubab Performance, for which he was awarded the Frederick Richter Memorial Prize. William has performed internationally both solo and with Ensemble Khusrawi, as well as running workshops on the classical music of Kabul.

Unseen Devotion: *A Family of Jinn and Imam Husayn*

Uzair Ibrahim

The poetic genre-form of the *marsīya* in Urdu is perhaps the most widely known textual and performance tradition in the language of devotion to the imams, particularly Imam Husayn, rife as the genre is with elaborate depictions of the Battle of Karbala. The genre-form itself has been studied amply, but there is not much literature on how the genre poets draw from particular intellectual genealogies to present devotion to the imam(s) in particular ways. In one of his *marsīyas*, the eminent poet Mīrzā Salāmat ʿAlī Dabīr (d. 1875) introduces an uncommon character: a jinn woman. While mentions of the jinn and their interaction with imams have a long trajectory in Muslim intellectual history, the mention of women in *marsīyas* is typically limited to those from the family of the imam. This paper attempts to address why Dabīr should take this road not taken and the gendered implications of such a move. In recent years, there has been a welcome increase of attention to gendered aspects of Shiʿi devotion; however, the results of that attention have generally tended to approach devotion through lenses of such notions as symbolism, performance, textual/literary analysis, public participation of women, and so on. Without disregarding the importance of those approaches, this paper instead situates its argument in within the burgeoning subfield of the Islamic occult (*ghayb*) by conversing with comparative examples.

UZAIR IBRAHIM is currently a Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholar in Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. His doctoral research intersects engagement with the *ghayb*/occult/esoteric/metaphysical, commemoration of the event of Karbala, and Shiʿi intellectual and ritual history primarily in the Indian subcontinent from the early modern period to the present. He employs tools from anthropology, history, philosophy, and the critical study of religion to investigate the life of a jinn named Zaʿfar, who is the protagonist of his study. Before joining Exeter, in 2020 he completed an MA with distinction in South Asian Studies at SOAS, University of London, funded by the IIS as part of their flagship Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities. He arrived at the IIS from Habib University, Pakistan, whence he obtained a BSc (Honours) in Social Development and Policy in 2018.

Scions of the Prophet Muhammad: The Fatimids and their Veneration of the Ahl al-Bayt

Shainool Jiwa

The *raison d'etre* of Fatimid rule (909–1171) was the restoration of the religious and political authority of the *ahl al-bayt* over the Islamic world. The Fatimids presented themselves as the rightful heirs to the Prophet Muhammad, from whom they claimed lineal descent through his daughter Fatima and his cousin and son-in-law, ʿAli b. Abi Talib. They asserted this claim in the inaugural declaration of their caliphate in Qayrawan and continued to reiterate it across a range of public media including banners, coins and public orations as well as on textiles, buildings and in public ceremonials, through the course of their two-and-a-half-century reign across the southern Mediterranean littoral and beyond. Drawing on primary Ismaili as well as other sources, this paper will examine ways in which the Fatimids promoted devotion to the Prophet and his *ahl al-bayt* as an integral expression of their vision of righteous rule (*dawlat al-ḥaqq*).

SHAINOOL JIWA (PhD, University of Edinburgh) is an Associate Professor at the IIS who has lectured and published on Fatimid studies for over three decades. She has authored *The Fatimids 1*: *The Rise of a Muslim Empire* (2018) as well as *The Fatimids 2*: *The Rule from Egypt* (2023). She has co-edited *The Shiʿi World*: *Pathways in Tradition and Modernity* (2015) and *The Fatimid Caliphate*: *Diversity of Traditions* (2017). She has also translated key medieval Arabic texts relating to Fatimid history, including *Towards a Shiʿi Mediterranean Empire*: *Fatimid Egypt and the Founding of Cairo* (2009) and *The Founder of Cairo*: *The Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Muʿizz and his Era* (2013).

Sunni Sufi Devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt and Sunni–Shiʿi Relations between Dissociation and Rapprochement in Modern Iraq and Yemen

David Jordan

The emergence of Sunni forms of devotion to the *ahl al-bayt*, ranging from strong similarities and overlaps with the Shiʿi tradition to a clear distinction and dissociation from the Shiʿa, was a gradual process over several centuries and has been rather neglected in scholarship. What role has Sunni Sufi devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* played in sect-coded forms of identity construction in different historical and regional contexts? This paper will focus on Sunni Sufi articulations of devotion to the *ahl al-bayt*, here including the twelve imams and their descendants, in poetry, genealogical literature, Sufi doctrine and ritual practice in Iraq and Yemen from the 19th century to the present. It will show how representatives of the Iraqi branches of the Rifāʿiyya and Qādiriyya Sufi orders, as well as the Yemeni ʿAlawiyya, explicitly defined love of the *ahl al-bayt* as a central component of Sunni Islam. Interestingly, these orders drew heavily on the traditional Shāfiʿī love of the *ahl al-bayt* during the 12th and 13th centuries, when an 'Ahl al-Baytism' and 'moderate Shiʿism' gained popularity among Sunnis. Depending on the historical and regional context, this Sunni devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* was mostly used for a clear dissociation from the Shiʿi faith, as in the case of the Iraqi Rifāʿiyya in the late 19th century. But in several cases, the veneration of the *ahl al-bayt* could also lead Sunnis to adopt pro-Shiʿi attitudes and even to convert to the Shiʿa. The Sunni Qādiriyya-Kasnazāniyya, with its strong ecumenical devotion to the *ahl al-bayt*, for instance, successfully attracted Shiʿi members even from the scholarly circles of the Hawza in Najaf and grew to become the largest Sufi order in contemporary Iraq in the second half of the 20th century. Ḥaḍramī diaspora families such as that of the Sufi scholar Abū Bakr b. Shihāb, in turn, developed pro-Shiʿi attitudes and converted to the Shiʿa in modern Indonesia.

DAVID JORDAN is a Research Associate at Ruhr University of Bochum. He holds an MA in Islamic Studies and Philosophy from the University of Hamburg and completed his PhD with the doctoral thesis 'A History of Baʿthist Politics and the Revival of Sufism in Iraq' in spring 2019. Dr Jordan's research focuses on the entanglement of religion and politics in the early modern and modern era in the Middle East, particularly Iraq and Iran. His research interests include the development of Islamic teachings, practices and movements of Sufism between Sunni and Shiʿa, and confronted with the reformist challenges posed by modern Salafism. He is equally interested in the growth of modern nationalist currents, primarily the Arab Socialist Baʿth Party, its ideological roots, and state politics towards religion. Currently, his research interest concentrates on Sharifism in modernity and the descendants of the Prophet between Sunni and Shiʿa in a global historical context.

Devotion to the Prophet and His Family in 20th-Century Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dženita Karić

This paper will focus on forms of devotional piety centring around the figure of the Prophet Muhammad and his family among 20th-century Bosniaks by primarily looking at the popular texts and practices that helped in its cultivation. The texts include widely circulated *mawlid*s and poems commemorating the death of the Prophet and his daughter Fatima, which were the basis of the ceremonies and rituals centred on these two figures and performed in different social contexts. By analysing the production of texts related to the Prophet's family (Fatima, but also other members) in Bosnian urban and rural contexts, I want primarily to point out the cohesive role these rituals and textual materials had both in the preservation of religious values in politically turbulent times, and in holding the Bosniak community together. Secondly, through the analysis of the print reports on *mawlid* rituals, as well as ceremonies dedicated to *hazreti* Fatima, the educational and didactic aspects will be studied, particularly against the background of encroaching secularism and state pressures of the 20th century.

DŽENITA KARIĆ is Assistant Professor in Religious Studies and Cultural Heritage at the Department of History, European Studies and Religious Studies (Faculty of Humanities) at the University of Amsterdam. She is the author of *Bosnian Hajj Literature*: *Multiple Paths to the Holy* (2022). She holds a PhD in Near and Middle Eastern Studies from SOAS University of London (2018). Prior to her position in Amsterdam, she was a teaching fellow at the University of Tübingen (2019–2020) and a postdoctoral researcher at the Berlin Institute for Islamic Theology, Humboldt University Berlin (2020–2023).

Poetry and Performance: The Devotional Life in Satpanth Ismaili Gināns

Tazim Kassam

At the heart of the South Asian devotional literature of Satpanth Ismaili Muslims called *gināns* is the veneration of and reverence for the living Imam. Regarded as the sacred poetic and narrative compositions of spiritually elevated Ismaili *pīrs* (guides), *gināns* have been recited for centuries as an integral part of daily religious life. This paper will trace the contours of devotion expressed through these communal singing rituals by examining select themes, symbols, and metaphors in the poetry, and their melodic, aesthetic, and emotional performance.

TAZIM KASSAM is Associate Professor of Islam and Religion at Syracuse University, New York. She is the author of *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance: Hymns of the Satpanth Ismaili Muslim Saint, Pir Shams* (1995), co-editor with Eliza F. Kent of *Lines in Water: Religious Boundaries in South Asia* (2013) and co-editor with Françoise Mallison of *Ginans: Texts and Contexts. Essays on Ismaili Hymns from South Asia* (2010).

Duʿāʾ Zaman al-Ghayba: *An Instance of Messianic Devotional Literature in Twelver-Imāmī Shiʿism*

Vinay Khetia

This paper will examine an instance of devotional theology as it pertains to the occultation of the twelfth Imam as found in a Twelver-Imāmī liturgical collection of the 5th/11th century. This will entail a textual analysis of a supplication entitled *Duʿāʾ zaman al-ghayba* (The Supplication for The Time of the Occultation) which was transmitted by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) from the first deputy of the twelfth Imam, ʿUthmān b. Saʿīd al-ʿAmrī (d. c. 267/880). Upon analysis of its textual contents, I assert that this supplication embodies a commitment to a doctrine of apocalyptic messianism amidst the profound challenges posed by a prolonged occultation to the faith of the nascent Imāmī community under siege from the changing political climate that coincided with al-Ṭusī's compilation of the *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid*, in which this supplication is to be found. This was a particularly arduous period due to the waning power of the Buwayids in addition to the now prolonged absence of the Imam. Hence, this supplication reflects the entrenched anxiety of a community in search of spiritual and intellectual succour. In doing so, they are commanded to turn to God to make meaning in a world with a hidden Imam coupled with a set of forbidding political and social circumstances in Baghdad. This paper will also examine the valuable historical details found in the supplication's chain of transmission in order to shed light on al-Ṭūsī's possible source(s) for this supplication and to provide a window into the devotional theology practiced by the Imāmī scholarly elite who dictated this supplication to one another. Lastly, this paper will include a critical Arabic edition and translation of the supplication based on the earliest manuscripts of the *Miṣbāḥ*.

VINAY KHETIA is the academic director of the Shiʿa Research Institute located within the Toronto School of Theology at the University of Toronto. He has a PhD in Religious Studies from McMaster University and an MA in History and Philosophy of Religion from Concordia University.

He has published in the areas of Islamic law, Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic theology. His areas of interests lie in Islamic intellectual history with a focus on Twelver Shiʿism and the vast corpus of liturgical material. He has previously taught as a lecturer at McMaster University and the University of Toronto. He has a forthcoming monograph entitled: *Prayer and Devotion in Shīʿī Islam*: *An Insight into its Historical and Spiritual Legacy* with Brill in the Islamic History and Civilization Series.

Al-Naʿīm al-muqīm in Context: A Mid-7th/13th-Century Manāqib of the Prophet, Fatima, and the Twelve Imams

Kazuo Morimoto

This study offers the first in-depth examination of *al-Naʿīm al-muqīm li-ʿitrat al-nabaʾ al-ʿaẓīm*, a mid-7th/13th-century work on the virtues of the Prophet Muhammad, Fatima, and the twelve imams. Composed by ʿUmar b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Mawṣilī in the name of Badr al-Dīn Luʾluʾ, the ruler of Mosul at the time, the text consists of three chapters: the first on the Prophet, and the second and third on the biographies and virtues of Fatima and the twelve imams. The author's Sunni self-identification, evident throughout the text, situates the work within early extant expressions of Imamophilism (Melvin-Koushki), Twelver-Imami Sunnism (Dānish-pazhūh and Jaʿfariyān), or the Sunni-Shiʿi devotional hybridity described by Masad, alongside works such as Ibn Ṭalḥa's *Maṭālib al-saʾūl*, al-Kanjī's *Kifāyat al-ṭālib*, and Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī's *Tadhkirat al-khawāṣṣ*. Drawing on the work's unicum manuscript and two printed editions derived from it, this study analyses the author's portrayal of the twelve imams and their imamate. It also contextualizes the text within the religious and scholarly landscape of its time, incorporating internal and external evidence, including comparative insights from the aforementioned works.

KAZUO MORIMOTO is Professor in Islamic and Iranian History at the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia, University of Tokyo. His primary research interest lies in 'sayyido-sharifology', the study of the roles and positions of the putative kinfolk of the Prophet Muhammad in Muslim societies, both past and present. While advocating for sayyido-sharifology as a distinct field of inquiry, Morimoto focuses on genealogical literature and *faḍāʾil* literature concerning sayyids and sharīfs. His recent publications include *ʿAlī*: *The Legendary Lion of God* (in Japanese) (2024), 'An *Ijāza* for Examining Genealogies of Sayyids and Sharīfs from Fifteenth-Century Najaf', in Rasūl Jaʿfariyān, Gūdarz Rashtiyānī, and Shahrām Yūsufī-Far, eds, *Zī hāmūn sū-yi gardūn*: *Jashn-nāma-ʾi Duktur Manṣūr Ṣifat-gul* (2025); 'A Compendium of Sayyid/Sharīf Genealogy in Diagrammatic Format from the Late Tenth Century', in Markus Friedrich and Jörg B. Quenzer, eds, *Genealogical Manuscripts in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (2025).

Ahl al-Kisāʾ as a Source of Protection and Polemics: Li Khamsatun Devotional Poetry in the Pandemic Era

Siti Sarah Muwahidah

This paper examines the increased prominence of the *Li Khamsatun* devotional poetry among Indonesian traditionalist Sunnis, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The extended Javanese vernacular version of *Li Khamsatun* is traditionally recited before prayer congregations in many mosques in Java by Sunnis despite its alleged Shiʿi origins. In 2020, leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Sunni organization (in Indonesia and globally), even officially instructed their followers to recite this prayer. In response to arising polemical critiques of this practice, they disassociated the prayer from its Shiʿi roots. This paper will explore three key areas: the historical and contemporary practices surrounding this devotional prayer, the sectarian dynamics involved, and the Shiʿi elements embedded within the prayer's content, such as the veneration of the *ahl al-kisāʾ* (People of the Cloak): their intercessory power, and their sanctification. It will unpack the polemics and the NU leaders' tactical de-Shiʿitisation processes: re-constructing the prayer's sectarian identification while maintaining its spiritual significance. Additionally, it highlights the intersections between text, practice and material culture, illustrating how the prayer acts as a focal point for collective rituals within both Sunni and Shiʿi communities. It argues that the walking performance of the prayer through villages infuses the protective power of the five infallibles into the community and its surroundings. The paper also posits that *Li Khamsatun* recitation practices serve as a site of inter-group encounter, fostering dialogue and shared spiritual experiences among diverse Muslim communities. It underscores the complex interplay between devotion, identity and communal co-existence, offering insights into the ways traditional practices adapt and thrive amidst contemporary challenges and cross-sectarian engagement while reflecting a broader love and devotion for the *ahl al-bayt* that transcends sectarian boundaries.

SITI SARAH MUWAHIDAH is a teaching and research fellow at the Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, the Department of Islam and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Edinburgh. She holds a PhD in Religion (2020) from the Graduate Division of Religion, Emory University, Atlanta, USA. Her PhD dissertation examined Sunni–Shi'i relations and the development of sectarianisation in Indonesia. She obtained an MA in Religious Studies from Florida International University and an MA in Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies from the Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS), Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia. She has conducted research in the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia and has written academic articles on interfaith dialogue, religious conflict and peacebuilding, political theology, and identity politics. She has published several articles in, inter alia, *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies, Political Theology, Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies*, and *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*. Apart from this, she also edited and contributed to several publications on Islam and politics, Islam and human rights, and interfaith dialogue in English and Bahasa Indonesia.

Aspects of Devotion to the Prophet's Family among the Ismailis of Badakhshan

Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev

Devotion to the Prophet's Family – the *ahl al-bayt* – is central to the beliefs of the Ismailis of Badakhshan. It is expressed in various forms such as composing poetry, singing devotional hymns, visitation of tombs and sacred places, the use of musical instruments, and in the configuration of domestic spaces and dwellings. In this presentation, I will look at two interrelated aspects of expressing devotion to the Prophet's Family. Drawing on data from various sources, this study examines how devotion is manifested in religious practices, cultural expressions and community life. Firstly, I will look at expressions of devotion to the Prophet's Family through the architecture of the Pamiri house. Selected sections of the Pamiri house that constitute the core of this dwelling place are used to express devotion to the *ahl al-bayt*. Nonetheless, I will argue that this is a shifted devotion, where the pre-Islamic notions attached to aspects of the architecture are retained while the names are changed. The second case study is the traditional musical instrument *rabāb*, and its symbolism. The linking point between these two aspects is the devotional literature, *maddāḥ-khānī*, which strengthens loyalty and love towards the *ahl al-bayt* and promotes belief in them through personal relationship and spiritual practices.

NOURMAMADCHO NOURMAMADCHOEV is a Research Associate and Projects Coordinator in the Ismaili Special Collections Unit at the IIS. He obtained his BA degree in Oriental Studies specialising in Arabic and Persian languages and literature from Khorog State University, Tajikistan. He taught Arabic language and theories of translation at Khorog State University and worked as a researcher at the Institute of Humanities in Khorog. In 2002, he was one of the Khorog English Programme graduates to be enrolled in the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) at IIS.

Nourmamadcho holds an MPhil in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies from Cambridge University and a PhD in History from SOAS University of London. His doctoral thesis is an in-depth study of the history of Badakhshan entitled *The Ismāʿīlīs of Badakhshan*: *History, Politics and Religion from 1500 to 1750*, which was supervised by Dr Heidi A. Walcher and Dr Konrad Hirschler.

Shiʿi Objectologies: Towards a Relational Theory of Shiʿi Materiality

Karen Ruffle

What is a 'Shiʿi objectology' and how does it contribute to an expanded understanding of a relational theory of South Asian Shiʿi material and ritual practice? Expanding on art historian Avinoam Shalem's concept of a medieval Muslim iconology of objects having an inherent corporeality and even anthropomorphism, wrought by the ways we describe them (*waṣf*, verbal description of a place or thing) through their physical reality, through their utility, and through the ways they activate memory, belief and feeling, my concept of a Shiʿi objectology focuses on the intersection of materiality (objects and spaces) and the sensorium in the production of religious meaning.

For South Asian Shiʿis, the focus of this presentation, devotional objects and ritual implements such as relics (*nishān* or *tabarrukāt*), *ʿalam*s (standards), *taʿziya*s (replica of Imam Husayn's Karbala tomb), and *turba*s (prayer disks made of Karbala's soil), have world-making, place-making, and practice-making functions. These objects simultaneously connect South Asian Shiʿis to other places (Karbala or Najaf) and other times (the battle of Karbala in 680 CE) and to the present moment and local, lived experience through such context-specific practices as reciprocal gazing (*naẓar* or *darśan*), vowing (*mannat mānnā, nazr karnā*), and hapticity (touching, garlanding, dressing). These objects activate intimate contact between the Imams and the *ahl al-bayt* for Shiʿi and other devotees, mediating petitions for healing, obtaining work, success in studies or finding a spouse. South Asian Shiʿi devotional objects obtain their power in their capacity for a devotee to have a connection to them, which is achieved through *im/presence*, or the periodic inhabitation of the devotional object by the Imam or member of the *ahl al-bayt* it represents, and by the agency with which they are endowed as 'co-protagonists of a bigger story'.

KAREN RUFFLE is Professor of South Asian Shiʿism in the Departments of Historical Studies and the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. Her research focuses on ritual practice and Shiʿi material and sensory cultures in the early modern Deccan and contemporary South Asia. Among her publications are *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice in South Asian Shiʿism* (2011), *Everyday Shiʿism in South Asia* (2021), and (as editor) *Sensing Muḥarram in Asia: Shiʿi Poetics of Space and the Religious Sensorium* (Special Issue of *Asian Ethnology*, forthcoming 2025).

Contesting Devotional Practices in Contemporary Twelver Shiʿism

Oliver Scharbrodt

This paper discusses modern contestations around the performance of key Twelver Shiʿi rituals commemorating the events of Karbala. Despite the solemn character of the occasion, the experiential dimension is more complex and possesses a carnivalesque character, as the scholar Hamid Dabashi suggests when reflecting on his own childhood memories in Iran:

> 'Here we were, commemorating by far the most traumatic and tragic events of the history of our faith as a people, as Shiʿis, and yet there was an unmistakable air of joyous frivolity, of playfulness – a gaiety of soul, an open-ended exhilaration, a sense of freedom from inhibitions and reticence – about the whole spectacle.'

Influenced by the intellectual parameters of Islamic modernism, reformist Twelver Shiʿi thinkers have targeted the carnivalesque character of 'Ashura' rituals as emotional public spectacles of Twelver Shiʿi sectarian assertion which potentially antagonise Sunni Muslims. Informed by the discursive parameters of Islamic modernism, reforms of such rituals were meant to align them with modern values and post-Enlightenment paradigms of religiosity which emphasise interiorised faith and ethical self-cultivation and rationalise religious beliefs and practices. Reformist interventions rejecting particular styles of ritual performance raise questions of what is the appropriate way of performing and articulating Twelver Shiʿi identity in the modern world, and are also intertwined with ideological and political rivalries among different clerical actors in contemporary Twelver Shiʿism.

OLIVER SCHARBRODT is Professor of Islamic Studies at Lund University. He has published on the intellectual history of modern Islam, Sufism, Twelver Shiism and Muslim minorities in Europe. Together with Yafa Shanneik, he co-edited the volume *Shi'a Minorities in the Contemporary World*: *Migration, Transnationalism and Multi-locality* (2020). His latest book, *Muhammad 'Abduh*: *Modern Islam and the Culture of Ambiguity* (2022), illustrates 'Abduh's complex engagement with Islam's diverse intellectual traditions in his reformist discourse. From 2018 until 2023, he was the principal investigator of the project 'Creating an alternative umma: clerical authority and religio-political mobilisation in transnational Shii Islam', funded by a Consolidator Grant of the European Research Council.

#AhlulBayt: Narratives of Devotion to the Prophet's Family on Instagram

Akif Tahiiev

Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, serve as dynamic spaces for the articulation and transmission of religious piety, offering a unique lens through which contemporary forms of devotion may be observed, studied and understood. This research will focus on how Instagram posts under the hashtag #AhlulBayt (along with its various forms) blend personal and public devotion, as users create visual, textual and symbolic narratives to celebrate and venerate the Prophet's family. I plan to examine how Instagram accommodates these narratives of devotion, analysing the types of content commonly used under this hashtag—including images, videos and text—and how these contribute to the construction of devotional meaning.

Through thematic and content analysis of these posts, this study aims to understand how digital devotion fosters both personal piety and communal identity, exploring the ways in which Instagram serves as a medium for religious engagement and community-building among global Muslims. This research also considers how these practices intersect with concepts of identity construction, cultural expression, and shared memory.

In analysing #AhlulBayt posts, this study seeks to contribute to a broader scholarly understanding of devotional practices as they evolve in digital contexts, recognising social media's potential to both preserve and transform traditional expressions of Muslim devotion. By situating #AhlulBayt-centred content within the broader scope of *ahl al-bayt* reverence in Islamic history and practice, this research will provide valuable insights into how digital platforms shape and sustain contemporary expressions of devotion across diverse Muslim communities.

AKIF TAHIIEV is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Goethe University Frankfurt. Previously, he served as a research and teaching assistant in the Department of Human Rights and Legal Methodology at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University (Kharkiv, Ukraine), and as a Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen, Germany), the University of Religions and Denominations (Qom, Iran), the University of Vienna, and the IWM (Vienna, Austria).

He holds a PhD from Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University, where he completed a thesis on Shiʿi Islamic Law and its contemporary application. His broader research interests encompass Shiʿi Islam, Digital Religion, Islam in Europe (with a particular focus on Eastern Europe), Minorities, and Islamic Law.

His current research project 'Images of Early Shiʿism in the Digital Space', part of the AIWG/BMBF-funded initiative 'Islam and Digitality: Media, Materiality, Hermeneutics', investigates how events and narratives from early Shiʿi Islamic history are utilised and reinterpreted within digital spaces and media, including Instagram.

Where Shall I Send my Invitation? The Imams' Succession in Ismaili Devotion

Shafique Virani

A Gujarati song popular among South Asian Ismailis portrays a villager yearning to invite his beloved ʿAli to his home. Bewildered, he exclaims, 'A thousand names have you, O ʿAli! You keep moving from place to place. Where shall I send my invitation?' He reflects on ʿAli's various identities: in Arabia, as ʿAli; in Egypt, the Fatimid Caliph; then the master of Alamut; Islamshah at Kahak; Aga Khan Mahallati; and Sultan of Karachi. Ultimately, he sees ʿAli in the present Imam (*hājar jomo*). Naming the current Imam, he proclaims, 'To him shall I send my invitation!' In one live recording, the audience's rapturous applause at this line underscores its emotional resonance.

This song encapsulates a central theme in Ismaili literature across temporal, linguistic and geographical lines: how devotion passes to each new Imam. In an Arabic poem, al-Muʾayyad (d. 470/1078) sorrows at Imam al-Ẓāhir's passing but celebrates the accession of Imam al-Mustanṣir at the tender age of seven. In Persian, Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd (d. after 640/1243) writes of Imam ʿAlāʾl-Dīn Muḥammad as the "Ali of the time', contrasting his spiritual enthronement to those of earthly kings. Following Prince Karim's succession to Imam Sultan Muhammad Shah, the Ismaili poet 'Suman' (d. 1990) penned in Hindi:

> One lamp ignites the next, yet eternal glows the light
> Sultan proclaimed Karim Shah his successor shining bright
> Rejoice, rejoice, O faithful, for the Imamat will live on
> Just as after every night, forever comes the dawn

This paper explores how, at times of the Imamat's transition, Ismaili authors throughout history have addressed the villager's poignant question: 'Where shall I send my invitation?'

SHAFIQUE N. VIRANI (PhD, Harvard University) is a Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Toronto and was the founding director of its Centre for South Asian Civilizations. His research focuses on Ismaili and Twelver Shiʿism, Qur'anic Studies, Sufism, and Arabic, Persian and South Asian Muslim literatures. Translated into over 20 languages, his work has received awards and recognition from the American Academy of Religion, the Middle East Studies Association, the British Society for Middle East Studies, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, among others. He is the author of *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages*: *A History of Survival, A Search for Salvation* and co-author and editor of *Islam's Spiritual Pillars*: *The Meaning of Muslim Practice in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Face of Religion* (forthcoming).

Pīr Muḥammad and Shāh ʿAlī: The Teacher–King in Satpanth Ismaili Literature

Imran Visram

The Satpanth is a branch of the Ismaili Shiʿi movement that flourished in the western regions of North India between the 13th and 16th centuries. The movement is characterised by a body of lyrical literature known as the *ginān*, whose songs are attributed to a lineage of mystic teachers (*pīr*s). These *pīr*s introduced their listeners to the core doctrines of Ismaili Shiʿism by imaginatively retelling the popular mytho-historical stories of India.

Although most of the narratives that feature in the *ginān* literature concern figures and events that we today associate with Hindu mythology, several of the Satpanth lyrics also retell stories about personalities known to the Islamic tradition. In this respect, the Prophet Muhammad and Imam ʿAli become crucial in these retellings of Indian mytho-history. The current paper explores the lore about these two figures that surfaces in the *ginān* literature, discussing how the Satpanth mystics at times reformulate them both into a cosmic, single entity of the 'teacher–king'. The *pīr*s taught that it is through the knowledge imparted by this eternal and living teacher–king that an escape from the deceptive, worldly life is possible.

IMRAN VISRAM is a DPhil candidate in Theology and Religion at St Antony's College, University of Oxford. His doctoral research examines central themes and teachings that are conveyed in religious song-poems of North Indian provenance, of a genre known as the *ginān*, which have been preserved by Ismaili Muslims for over seven centuries. His broader areas of research interest include Indo-religious mythology, devotionalism in South Asia, and the revival and regeneration of living, oral traditions.

Listening with Longing: In Search of Early Shiʿi Devotional Narrative

George Warner

Narrative texts abound in the literature of Islam's early centuries, and scholarship has been produced in corresponding abundance to explore their historiographical utility and literary significance. When it comes to the composition and use of narratives for devotional purposes, however, the pre-Mongol period remains startlingly blank in the academic record, despite the centrality of narrative in later Shiʿi devotional literature and practice. It is known that early Shiʿis, too, told stories of imams' exploits and martyrdoms for a variety of devotional purposes in public and private contexts, seeking heavenly rewards and political self-assertion, but the exact nature of these narratives remains obscure. Much like the wider output of religious storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*), they were seldom preserved in the written record; devotional texts that do survive – such as pilgrimage litanies and elegiac poems – seldom feature sustained narrative, while the kinds of narratives common in literary sources are largely composed of semi-emplotted hadith and are replete with technical apparatus, thus little befitting devotional use.

This paper, therefore, seeks to offer an agenda for the construction of early Shiʿi devotional narrative as an object of study. It will first present the historical evidence for the importance of narratives and their recital in early Shiʿi devotion. Second, it will set out key avenues of source material for identifying and recovering the narratives themselves; focussing on the 4th/10th and 5th/11th centuries, it will show how a variety of textual resources such as preachers' manuals, epic poetry and records of commemorations can together supply a workable corpus of devotional narrative from this period. Comparing this corpus both with non-narrative devotional texts and non-devotional narratives, the paper will plot a route towards assembling an imaginative and emotional vocabulary of Shiʿi devotional narrative and assessing its role within Shiʿi practice and identity formation under the Abbasids.

GEORGE WARNER studied Assyriology, Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge before completing his PhD at SOAS University of London in 2017. He has published peer-reviewed articles on topics including Sunni–Shiʿi relations, hadith, ritual and devotional literature in Arabic and Persian, and his first book, *The Words of the Imams*: *al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq and the Development of Twelver Shīʿī Hadith Literature*, was published in 2021. Prior to arriving at the IIS, he held positions at SOAS, Exeter, and Ruhr University of Bochum in Germany.

Acoustic Ahl al-Baytism: Rethinking Sectarian Boundaries through Sonic Devotional Practices

Stefan Williamson Fa

This paper examines how sonic devotional practices centred on the *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet Muhammad) challenge conventional understandings of sectarian boundaries in Islam. Historically, the Sunni–Shiʿi schism has been framed through doctrinal or political lenses, emphasising rigid divides. However, devotion to the *ahl al-bayt*—known as *Ehl-i Beyt* in Turkish—remains a prominent feature of Islamic piety across diverse communities in Turkey, including Sunni, Sufi, Twelver Shiʿi, and Alevi traditions. Drawing on Ottoman Turkish devotional poetry, historical accounts of Muḥarram mourning in Istanbul, and multi-sited ethnographic research, this study examines how sound and poetry have been employed to commemorate and invoke the *ahl al-bayt* in both Ottoman and modern Turkey. Today, reverence for the *ahl al-bayt* is cultivated through sensory-aesthetic practices, including the poetic and vocal recitation of laments (*mersiye*) that commemorate Imam Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala. These sonic practices transcend doctrinal divides, acting as both shared and contested markers of religious identity. Through an analysis of *mersiye* and other devotional forms, this paper argues that sectarian divisions in Islam cannot be reduced to primordialist interpretations. Instead, such divisions must be understood as dynamically shaped by sensory, aesthetic, and embodied practices. This research repositions devotion to the *ahl al-bayt* as a central and integrative component of Islamic piety, offering a more nuanced framework for understanding intra-Muslim relations and challenging reductive narratives of sectarianism.

STEFAN WILLIAMSON FA is an anthropologist whose work examines the intersection of Islam and the senses, particularly sound and taste, across Turkey, the Caucasus, Iran and Europe. He completed his PhD in Social Anthropology at University College London in 2019. He has held research positions at the University of Birmingham, Lund University and the University of Oxford. Stefan's first major ethnographic project explored the role of sound in Twelver Shiʿi Muslim devotional practices and everyday life in Turkey and the Caucasus. His findings have been featured in leading academic journals, including *Cultural Anthropology* and the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. His forthcoming monograph, *Sonic Relations*, will be published in 2025. Currently, at the Centre of Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge, Stefan leads Food Encounters, a project examining changing Muslim foodways in the UK and Spain. This research explores responses to food insecurity and environmental challenges while investigating food as a medium for fostering interfaith and intercultural relations.

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