

IIS Update

March 2002

In this update:

*Preserving Ismaili History
Through Visual Media*

*The Institute's Programmes
in Central Asia*

New Publications

*Revisiting the
Muslim Public Sphere*

*Worlds of Learning
Campaign - EUROPE*

*Graduate Studies -
Field Projects*

*Seminar for ITREB
Personnel*

New Appointments

If you have feedback or
would like to update your
contact details, please email
us at rdc@iis.ac.uk.



The Institute of Ismaili Studies



*Detail of an illuminated frontispiece from a copy of the Holy Qur'an from
Central Asia dated AH 1100/1688 CE*

Message from the Director



Dear Donors
and Friends
of The Institute of
Ismaili Studies,

Twenty-five years ago,
The Institute of Ismaili Studies
was established with a vision and
a mission. In light of the troubling
worldwide events of the past few
months, I thought we might revisit
some of those aspirations to
provide a context of relevance for
the continuing work of the IIS.

Ismaili Muslims have inherited
a history spanning more than
fourteen centuries and diverse
geographical and cultural spaces.
The academic work of the past 25
years has entered the mainstream
of Islamic Studies, taking its proper
place within the field. Additionally,
it represents an effort to study and
connect that history to the present
and the future, and to offer the
possibility to an emerging generation
to be inspired to understand a
changing global environment and
to create a better world, solidly
grounded in cultural and historical
understanding.

Scholarship at the IIS is making
available the full spectrum of the
plurality of identities and
interpretations within Ismaili and the
broader Muslim history and thought.

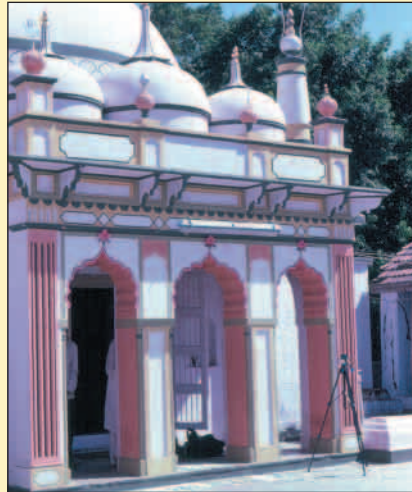
It reflects a dynamic self-conception.
Our most recent publication,
*[A Scent of Sandalwood: Indo-Ismaili
Religious Lyrics](#)*, by Dr Aziz Esmail,
is suggestive of the depth of
religious thought, feeling,
imagination and the lyrical beauty
of the Ginans. Last year's seminar
series on "Civil Society in
Comparative Muslim Contexts"
(whose proceedings will soon be
published) provided a broad range
of perspectives on Muslim societies
and their engagement with
modernity. This year, we plan to
build further through a seminar
series on *[Pluralism and its
Expressions in Islam](#)*.

Everyday in our work at the IIS,
we are made conscious of what is a
moving and profound engagement.
At one level, we celebrate intellectual
and cultural achievements; at another,
we commit ourselves to the pursuit
of knowledge and learning as a
catalyst in the search for harmony
and understanding among peoples
and societies. One cannot, at this
time of Nawruz, ask to be part
of a greater mission than that.
Thank you all for your constant
support in our work to realize
that vision.

Preserving Ismaili History Through Visual Media



Amirali Mamdani, India



Mausoleum of Pir Satgur Nur, Navsari, India (1987)



A monument in Nishapur, Iran (1978)

The Amirali Mamdani Collection

A large collection of original slides, photographs and film belonging to and shot exclusively by [Mr Amirali G. Mamdani](#) was presented to The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Over the past fifty years, Mr Mamdani has traveled extensively, visiting various parts of the world including Canada, East Africa, Egypt, Europe, India, Iran, Pakistan, Syria, and the USA. Mr Mamdani's collection not only

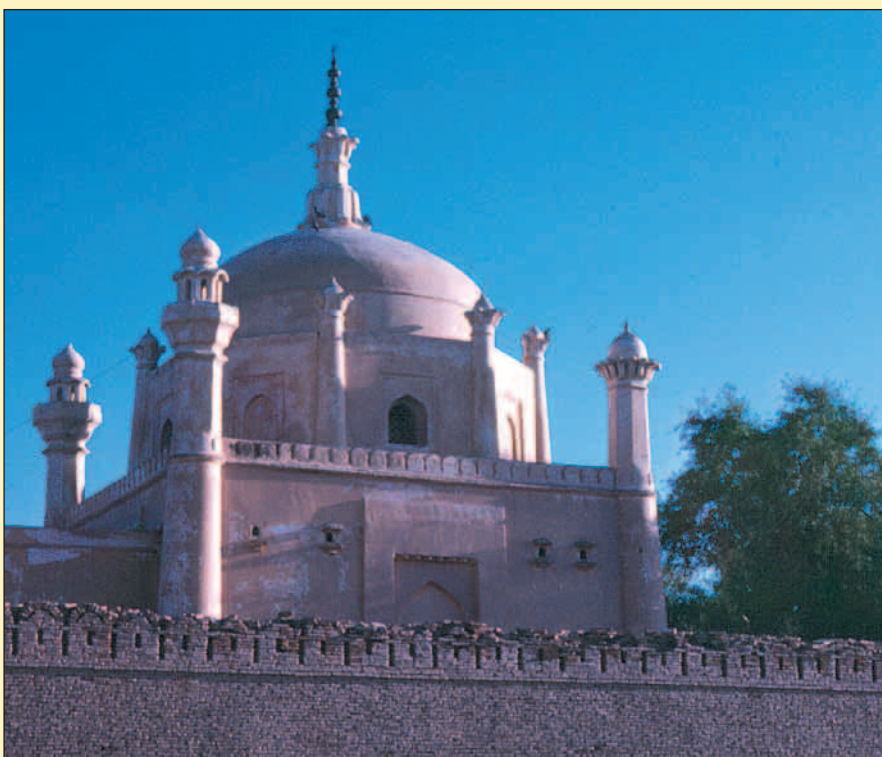
encompasses significant events and sites of historical importance in the life of the Jamat, but also documents various aspects of the communities in these countries. In recording some of the critical periods of Ismaili history in the 20th century, this collection reflects Mr Mamdani's lifelong ambition to preserve history through visual media.

Born in Mwanza, Tanzania in 1934, Mr Mamdani developed a fascination for photography and film after receiving his first camera, a gift from his cousin, at the age of

twelve. Mr Mamdani was educated in Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan, before migrating to the USA in 1974 where he studied film production at New York University. He currently lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with his wife Maleqa.

This collection is presently being catalogued and appropriate steps for its preservation will be undertaken over the next few years.

A small selection of images taken by Mr Mamdani during his visits to Iran and the Indian subcontinent are presented here.



Members of the Mashhad Jamat outside the Jamatkhanah, Iran (1978)

Below: Local residents at the mausoleum (left) of Pir Hassan Kabardin, Uch Shariff, Pakistan (1987)



Through Project Tajikistan, the IIS seeks to address the religious education needs of the Ismaili Jamats in Central Asia. The activities of Project Tajikistan include translations and adaptation of Ta'lim materials into Dari, Farsi, Tajiki and Russian; in-service teacher training programmes; seminars and workshops for parents; youth camps; annual public seminars on themes of contemporary relevance; collection and recording of oral traditions; and identification, listing and digitisation of relevant manuscripts from the region. Some endeavours over the past year are described below.

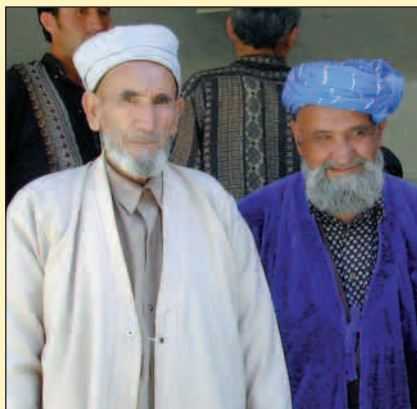
Translation of Ta'lim into Russian

The process of translating [Ta'lim materials](#) (Pre-school – Primary Six) into Russian is near completion. A new administrative unit has been established in Moscow to facilitate the effective implementation of Ta'lim for members of the Jamat in the Russian Federation and other CIS countries.

Oral Traditions

Several hundred members of the Jamat who are over the age of 60 years have been interviewed as part of the endeavour to collect and record the Jamats' oral religious traditions. A number of these interviews have now been transcribed from local dialects into Tajiki and preliminary translations into English are underway.

Elders of the Tajik Jamat



Teacher Training Programme held in Rushan, Badakhshan

Annual Teacher Training Programme

Six hundred and fifty volunteer teachers from across Tajikistan and from Moscow attended the 2001 training programmes. Workshops were facilitated by locally trained teacher educators and held at nine centres, including one in Dushanbe. The majority of teachers were first time participants.

Youth Camp



A young boy doing woodwork at the Youth Camp

This year's Youth Camp comprised of three residential and one day-camp held over the summer. Nearly 1,300 youth from across Gorno-Badakhshan, Southern Tajikistan and Moscow, engaged in cultural and recreational activities at these camps.

Collection and digitisation of manuscripts

Hundreds of relevant manuscripts from private collections of members of the

Jamat in Gorno-Badakhshan have been identified. Two hundred such manuscripts have been scanned and digitally recorded onto CDs, which have been brought to the IIS to be preserved as part of the Ismaili Heritage collection.

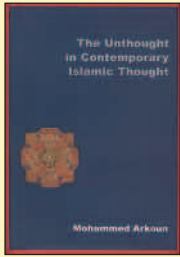
Religious education for Afghan Jamat

As part of the on-going effort to increase access to Ta'lim materials for the Afghan Jamat, Pre-school and Primary One Ta'lim materials have now been printed in Farsi. Eleven RE centres have been established where one hundred and forty-four volunteer teachers provide religious education to nearly 3,000 students in Afghan Badakhshan.

A khalifa and Dr Nouraddin Allahdini viewing a manuscript being scanned

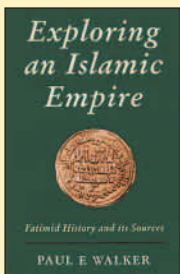


New Publications



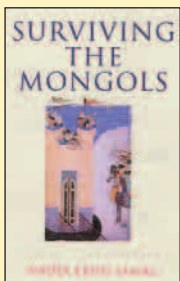
***The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, Mohammed Arkoun.**
ISBN: 0 86356 918 8 (HB).

In this collection of eight essays, Professor Arkoun suggests new approaches to the study of Islam combining a critical review of contemporary studies with a deconstructionist, although always positive, approach to its primary sources. Each essay deals with a set of problems that have not previously been fully discussed either within the framework of traditional Islamic studies, or that of Islamology and the current plethora of political sciences. Bringing new theories from disciplines such as social anthropology and semiotics to bear on issues such as the frontiers of the mind in the twenty-first century; the cognitive status of the Qur'an; civil society and the individual; authority and power; this book proposes new cognitive strategies and options in the rethinking of the Islamic tradition, seen above all as a living tradition, and opens the way towards a unique view of the history of thought systems in the Mediterranean area, bearing the stamp of a truly contemporary vision.



***Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and its Sources*, Paul E Walker.**
ISBN: 1 86064 692 1 (HB).

This work surveys the three main phases of Fatimid history, and then examines various kinds of sources that provide information for historical reconstruction and analysis. These sources range from direct evidence, such as coins, building dedications, documents and letters, eyewitness and contemporary accounts, histories and biographies, scientific and literary writings, to the work of modern scholars. An extensive bibliography of both medieval sources and modern studies, covering most of what has been written to date about the Fatimids, makes this not only a valuable addition to the historiography of the Fatimids but essential reading for students and scholars of Islamic history.



***Surviving the Mongols: Nizari Quhistani and the Continuity of Ismaili Tradition in Persia*, Nadia Eboo Jamal.**
ISBN: 1 86064 432 5 (HB).

The Mongol invasion of Persia in the 13th century caused widespread devastation and, for the Persian Ismailis in particular, brought an end to their political aspirations and economic prosperity. This study of the writings of Nizari Quhistani, an Ismaili poet of the period, demonstrates that, contrary to previous belief that the community was almost eradicated, in fact its organisational structure and internal coherence survived the Mongol catastrophe, revealing the unbroken continuity of the Ismaili tradition.

Publications since our last Update

- ***Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture***
Valérie Gonzalez
- ***Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Ibn Sina's Metaphysics. A New Arabic Edition and English Translation of Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani's Kitab al-Musara'a.***
Wilferd Madelung and Toby Mayer
Ismaili Texts and Translations Series, 2
- ***Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices***
Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani
Translated and edited by Reza Shah-Kazemi
- ***Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam***
Farouk Mitha
Ismaili Heritage Series, 5
- ***The Master and the Disciple: An Early Islamic Spiritual Dialogue***
Ja'far b. Mansur al-Yaman
Edited and translated by James W. Morris
Ismaili Texts and Translations Series, 3
- ***A Scent of Sandalwood: Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics***
Aziz Esmail
- ***Ecstasy and Enlightenment: The Ismaili Devotional Literature of South Asia***
Ali S. Asani

Synopses of these publications have appeared in The Ismaili magazines and are available on the [IIS website](#).

Forthcoming Publications

The Institute continues to promote original, informative and mature thought, scholarship and analysis of relevant issues through its publications. The following are anticipated to be published in the near future:

- ***Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives***
Amin B Sajoo, ed.
- ***The Fatimids and Their Successors: The History of an Islamic Community***
Ayman Fu'ad Sayyid, Paul E Walker & Maurice Alex Pomerantz
Ismaili Texts and Translations Series, 4
- ***Arabic Ismaili Manuscripts, The Zahid Ali Collection***
Delia Cortese
- ***The Paradise of Submission: Nasir al-din Tusi's Rawda-yi Taslim***
S J Badakhani
Ismaili Texts and Translations Series, 5
- ***Culture and Memory in Mediaeval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung***
Farhad Daftary & Josef W Meri, eds.

Further information and synopses of these publications will be posted on the [IIS Website](#) closer to the publication date.



Dr Norani Othman - Associate Professor & Senior Fellow, the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, & Dr Amin B Sajoo - Visiting Fellow IIS



Dr Aziz Esmail-Governor IIS & Professor Abdou Filali-Ansary - Director, ISMC (AKU)



Professor Mohammed Arkoun-Governor IIS & Professor Azim Nanji-Director IIS

“Civil Society in Comparative Muslim Contexts” was an ambitious series of seminars hosted by The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) in London, with leading scholars exploring issues ranging from human rights and engaged citizenship to the interplay of ethics, law, culture and information technology. In the aftermath of the events of last September, these issues have taken on still greater urgency across the Muslim world. The series culminates in a volume of essays this year, aimed at contributing to a vital discourse in and about transitional societies from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Iran, to Pakistan, Turkey and Morocco.

At the inaugural seminar in this series held in November 2000, Professor Mohammed Arkoun asked about the relevance of discussing civil society in contexts where ‘intellectual modernity’ remains at best a Western import - quite aside from the creeping pace of democratisation. From equal treatment under the law to democratic accountability and access to political power, there is more to civic engagement than can be captured by easy normative dichotomies that tend to dominate debates about civil society. For some, this reflects the postmodern disorder that is our shared reality - magnified in a public sphere dominated by ‘new media’, which fuels what Gary Bunt calls the ‘digital umma’. For others, it is the empire striking back, as postcolonial publics find their voices to re-appropriate the most basic elements of democratic discourse.

But whether postmodern or

postcolonial, an aspect of this reality that Muslims are obliged to confront is: What kind of public space is civil society to be located in? If it must be ‘secular,’ as so many observers insist, then what would be the nature of secularity in a milieu whose traditional ethos actively merges *din*, *duniya* and *dawla* (faith, world and state) - yet prizing *umma* and individual alike? Muslim societies offer contrasting and internally contested responses to the nexus between secular/religious space and the prospects for civil society. But there is broad consensus that effective rule of law is a primary condition for any meaningful quest, as a safeguard for citizen, state and ‘civil’ engagement. In a pluri-cultural and multivocal Muslim universe, the seminars have sought to interrogate the concept of civil society in terms of its implications for politics and public squares where tradition and modernity, secular and sacred, are very much

at the forefront of quotidian experience.

No matter what the specific perspectives in a given context, civic discourse will reflect ethical values that draw far more explicitly on ‘Islam’ than any comparable experience one can invoke in a Western society vis-à-vis Judeo-Christian ethics. There is nothing inherently nativist about this notion; on the contrary, an array of Muslim activists and intellectuals have drawn attention to its pluralist and humanist impulses. Moreover, ethical norms are all the more critical in transitional societies and civic contexts where the rule of law is fragile.

Dr Ayn B. Sajoo led the civil society seminar project as IIS Visiting Fellow (2000-1), and is the editor of the ensuing volume of essays, Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives (London, forthcoming).

Audience at one of the seminars



Worlds of Learning Campaign – EUROPE



Members of the Paris Jamat viewing the Library Exhibition

The highly successful *Worlds of Learning* campaign continued in 2001, with the focus of the campaign turning to Europe. This first ever global fundraising and awareness campaign by The Institute of Ismaili Studies, which began in North America in 2000, travelled to 11 countries, including the Ivory Coast in Africa, which are under the jurisdiction of the Councils for France, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

The aim of the campaign was to create awareness within the Jamat about the history and evolution of the Institute as well as its current projects and initiatives, whilst at the same time seeking the support of the Jamat to strengthen the Institute's financial foundation and sustain its work.

In February 2001, the newly

appointed IIS National Committees for France, Portugal and the United Kingdom visited the IIS and underwent a training programme. The delegates were familiarised with the work of the Institute and were able to interact with the Institute's Governors, management and staff. These National Teams went on to train field volunteers in their respective countries - a total of over 200 volunteers assisted in the European campaign and were vital to its success.

The campaign was launched throughout Europe on March 25th, and during the weeks that followed, a total of 20 IIS representatives, including Governors, the Director, Professor Azim Nanji, a number of scholars, librarians and staff from the Department of Resource Development and Communications, made over eighty speeches and

presentations in multiple languages (including English, French, Portuguese, Gujarati, Urdu and Farsi), reaching the vast majority of the European Jamats.

In the United Kingdom, a series of Awareness Evenings were organised at the IIS, where over 400 members of the Jamat were able to visit the Institute, hear presentations from the Director, Faculty and Governors, visit the Library to view artefacts from the Library's collection, and were guests at a reception hosted by the IIS National Committee for the UK.

Specific events were held for the youth in the Jamat in London, Paris and Lisbon, and IIS representatives visited a number of Buyut al-Ilm during the campaign. The authors of some recent IIS publications also visited the Jamats to speak about and to sign copies of their books. The IIS Library exhibition travelled to 11 locations including London, Paris, Lisbon, and Essen.

During the campaign, in excess of 1000 people visited the IIS for various campaign related activities and a large number of families made pledges towards the campaign. It is hoped that having made a connection with the Institute, the Jamat will continue to feel a part of the work of the Institute and will support its endeavours. Through the IIS website (<http://www.iis.ac.uk>), periodic IIS Updates and lecture tours, the Institute will continue to keep the Jamat informed of its current initiatives and future plans.

Members of the Portuguese National Team with delegates from the IIS



A display of IIS materials



During the summer of the second year of study, as part of the Institute's three-year [Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities](#), students embark upon a field project that is designed by them in consultation with their advisors. This field project is an integral part of the Graduate Programme and is designed to encourage students to appreciate the living contexts of their otherwise academic learning. Usually, a field project is undertaken over a period of four to six weeks, often outside of the United Kingdom. It allows students to understand the social contexts



A Pagoda in the Northern Areas of Pakistan

of knowledge and to regard historical and contemporary issues in an interconnected manner. The philosophical framework of the graduate programme is what guides the field research and this leads to an excellent variety of projects. The IIS has encouraged students to undertake projects, when possible, connected with the Aga Khan Development Network. However, the project need not be limited to the current activities of these institutions.

The students of the class of 2002 travelled across the globe, exploring a myriad of issues from education and marriage rituals to poetry and identity.

Khurshid Sana Khan travelled for 6 weeks through the often-difficult terrain of the Northern Areas of Pakistan where she examined structural and functional



A typical classroom in a boys' school in the Northern Areas, Pakistan

issues of the secondary curriculum and explored ways in which to harmonise it with the existing social and cultural environment.

Yahia Baiza also went to Pakistan for his project, where he interviewed Afghan refugees in Karachi, Rawalpindi and Peshawar to see how they are receiving education and to determine whether existing programmes are actually successful.

Sultonbek Aksakolov went to Tajikistan to survey youth as an emerging generation in a post-civil war society.

Rahim Gholami travelled to Toronto to discuss collective memory with Iranian Ismailis living there and looked at how a yearly festival called the Alamut, which brings North American Iranian Ismailis together, reflects their status as a community in diaspora.

Through examining marriage

rituals, **Sharmina Mawani** explored how East African Indian Ismailis living in Britain assert their Indian identity.

Mansour Shakarmamadov went to Badakhshan to study how traditional Ismaili families define themselves and how they might develop in light of the transitional society in which they live.

Minaz Master spent six weeks in Hong Kong exploring the jade trade and looking into the shift in jade's ritual and symbolic significance over thousands of years.

Studying both theoretical and practical knowledge provides the students with a solid foundation. By completing field projects, students also acquire an experience-base that has often assisted them in their future careers, whether this is furthering their education or engaging in professional employment.

A school function in one of the Transit Centres, Karachi, Pakistan





Seminar for ITREB Personnel, 27th July to 2nd August 2001

Last summer, 24 delegates from Bangladesh, Canada, Dubai, France, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Pakistan, Syria, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Uganda, the United Kingdom and the USA attended a [seven-day workshop](#) at the IIS. The participants are affiliated with Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards (ITREBs) either as volunteers or full time personnel. The main objective was to socialise them to

the philosophical underpinnings of the Institute's research and educational endeavours. The seminar also served as a forum for the exchange of views and experiences of those who prepare educational materials and those who deliver them to the Jamat.

Most of the 20 sessions were organised under four themes: IIS perspectives, History, Modernity and Ethics. These were conducted by Professor Mohamed Arkoun (IIS Governor), Dr Aziz Esmail (IIS Governor), Professor Azim Nanji (Director), Dr Karim Janmohamed (Head of IIS-ITREB Liaison Department), Mr. Mohamed

Keshavjee (International ITREB Co-ordinator at Aiglemont), Dr Farhad Daftary (Head of Academic Research and Publications), Dr Duncan Haldane (Head of Library) and a number of other members of academic staff. Professor Ali Asani, Professor of the Practice of Indo-Muslim Languages and Culture at Harvard University, also made two presentations.

The seminar was organised by the IIS-ITREB Liaison Department which, since its establishment in 1996, has served as a point of reference for ITREBs at the Institute.

New Appointments



Dr Sarfaroz Niyozov received his undergraduate education at Tajik State University and graduated

with an Honours degree in Arabic in 1983. In 1995, he graduated from the AKU's Institute for Educational Development with a Masters in Education. Subsequently, Dr Niyozov was awarded a scholarship from the AKF to pursue his PhD in education at the University of Toronto, which he completed in 2001.

Dr Sarfaroz Niyozov, who is currently the Institute's Central Asian Studies Co-ordinator, has received 2 awards for his dissertation entitled "Understanding Teaching in Post-Soviet, Rural, Mountainous Tajikistan: Case Studies of Teachers' Life and Work": the Gail P Kelly Award and the Division B Dissertation Award.



Dr Shiraz Thobani, who has been with the Department of Education at the Institute since

1982, recently completed his doctorate at Cambridge University. His research, which attracted a postgraduate studentship from the Economic and Social Research Council of Britain and support from the IIS, was based on a socio-historical study of Islam as school knowledge in the English education system. Dr Thobani returns to the Institute as a Research Associate where he will be providing input into selected projects in the Department of Education.

Starters 2001 – 2002

Mitra Ghiami
- *Trainee Cataloguer*
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Professor Tazim Kassam
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Yousef Mirshahi
- *Administrative Assistant, Project Tajikistan*
Dr Sajjad Rizvi
- *Postdoctoral Fellow, Qur'anic Studies*
Anna Stone
- *Student Affairs Officer*
Sophia Vasalou
- *Research Assistant, DARP*

Alumni Relations

The Institute would like to keep in contact with its alumni and would request that they keep us informed of their progress, so that we can update our records and keep them informed of the latest news and activities at the Insitute. Please email us at alumni@iis.ac.uk.