



# IIS Alumni

Newsletter 2014

## MESSAGE FROM THE CO-DIRECTOR



*To all IIS alumni,*

It gives me great pleasure to address this message to the alumni of The Institute of Ismaili Studies. The year 2014 marked the 20th anniversary of the launch of the IIS' Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH). Since

its inception in 1994, when we welcomed the first cohort of 13 students from five countries, 17 cohorts comprising a total of 197 individuals have graduated from this programme and are now part of our alumni body. This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the IIS Alumni Association, which has grown steadily and become increasingly vibrant.

Throughout the past two decades, we have continuously examined ways to improve our programmes. In September 2014, we launched a new curriculum for GPISH, which was developed under the guidance of the IIS' Academic Steering Committee. Having received positive feedback from both students and faculty, the revised curriculum aims to keep the programme aligned to its original philosophy. In 2015, a similar review of the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP) will be undertaken

An important landmark achievement on our path to academic excellence will be the accreditation of our graduate programmes. To help us achieve this, I am happy to announce the establishment of a Quality

Assurance and Enhancement Unit, operating within the Director's Office.

We have recently joined an exciting initiative called the Knowledge Quarter. Led by the British Library, this initiative brings together 35 academic, cultural, research, scientific and media organisations involved in promoting learning in the King's Cross area of London. Part of the group's mission is to foster collaboration and networking that will drive research, economic development and entrepreneurship for the benefit of various knowledge seekers. Our involvement allows the IIS to contribute to discussions between organisations and create a greater awareness of our own academic work amongst other prominent educational and research institutions in London.

I am delighted to report that the planning of permanent facilities for IIS and AKU-ISMC at King's Cross is progressing well. In early 2016, we look forward to moving our students to the new student accommodation facility at King's Cross. Plans for the Academic Building are being finalised and construction is expected to start in the near future. The IIS and AKU-ISMC libraries were joined in 2014 and we have begun to share our language faculty across the graduate programmes run by both institutions. We look forward to further collaborations with the ISMC.

I would like to express my gratitude for your support of the IIS. I encourage your continued engagement with us on this exciting journey towards academic excellence and service to the global *Jamat*.

**Dr. Farhad Daftary**

In his message, Dr Farhad Daftary has highlighted the two milestones of 2014: the twentieth anniversary of the launch of GPISH and the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the IIS Alumni Association. For me, personally, it is indeed most pleasing that I have been the Alumni Relations Coordinator for six of those ten years.

The year 2014 was an exciting year, with chapter group meetings held in Atlanta, Lahore and Mahdia. While Mahdia has less than 100,000 inhabitants, Atlanta, with a population of nearly 500,000, is the ninth largest metropolitan area in the USA, and Lahore is one of the most densely populated cities in the world, with nearly 10 million inhabitants. Although there is a huge disparity in the population figures, all three locations are culturally and historically significant. Lahore is referred to as the cultural heart of Pakistan and has been a regional capital of various Muslim dynasties in history. Atlanta is the childhood home of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., and has played a vital role in the history of

the Civil Rights Movement. And Mahdia, although the smallest in terms of population, is perhaps the most significant from an Ismaili perspective; it was founded nearly eleven hundred years ago by Imam-Caliph 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi and became the first Fatimid capital city.



The alumni body is growing and is vibrant. However, for it to remain an exciting and relevant organisation, your continuing support is not only necessary but vital. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome new alumni and wish them the very best as they begin their careers. Congratulations!

**Shellina Karmali, Alumni Relations Coordinator**

## NORTH AMERICAN CHAPTER GROUP



Alumni from across North America met in Atlanta, USA, for their annual meeting on 20-22 June. The meeting brought together over 50 alumni to explore “*Women and Gender in Islam.*” Speakers at the meeting included Professor Rumeen Ahmed (Assistant Professor of Islamic Law, University of British Columbia), Professor Ayesha Chaudhry (Assistant Professor of Islamic and Gender Studies, University of British Columbia), Mr Alim Fakirani (STEP Class of 2009), Mr Shiraz Kabani (Head of Community Relations, IIS), Ms Shenila Khoja-Moolji (Teachers College, Columbia University), Mr Steve Lewitt (Head of HR, IIS) and Mr Adil Mamodaly (STEP Class of 2010).

## EUROPEAN CHAPTER GROUP

Alumni from across Europe met in Mahdia, Tunisia, for their annual meeting on 4-7 May. The meeting brought together 32 alumni to explore “*Culture, Art and Architecture of the Fatimids and its reflection in Modern Mahdia.*” Speakers at the meeting included Professor Moncef Ben Abdeljelil (University of Sousse), Dr Otared Haidar (GPISH Class of 1998), Dr Shainool Jiwa (McGill Class of 1984), Mr Shiraz Kabani (Head of Community Relations, IIS), Professor Faouzi Mahfoudh (Manouba University), Mr Alnoor Merchant (McGill Class of 1987), and Dr Stephane Pradines (AKU-ISMC).



## ASIAN CHAPTER GROUP



Alumni from across Asia and Africa met in Lahore, Pakistan, for their annual meeting on 14-17 August. The meeting brought together over 30 alumni to explore “*The Role of the Arts in Social Development.*” Speakers at the meeting included Mr Rafiq Ajani (GPISH Class of 2006), Professor Naazish At-Ullah (Beaconhouse National University, Lahore), Mr Salman Beg (CEO, Aga Khan Cultural Services, Pakistan), Mr Nayyar Ali Dada (Architect), Mr Amin Gulgee (Artist/Sculptor), Mrs Mooneza Hashmi (President of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association), Mr Shiraz Kabani (Head of Community Relations, IIS), Mr Aziz Kabani (GPISH Class of 1999), Mr Kamran Lashari (Director General, Walled City of Lahore Authority), Ms Farrah Musani (GPISH Class of 2005), and Professor Arfa Zehra (Forman Christian College, Lahore).

## SULTONBEK AKSAKOLOV (GPISH 2002)



Sultonbek Aksakolov received his first degree in Tajik Philology from Khorog State University in Tajikistan in 1997, following which he completed a graduate course in Islamic Studies and Humanities at the IIS in 2001. In 2002,

he was awarded an MPhil in Sociology and Politics of Modern Society from the University of Cambridge. After working for several years (2004–2010) as a Research Assistant in the Institute's Central Asian Studies Unit (CASU), he was granted a doctoral scholarship and, in 2013, he earned a PhD in History from SOAS, University of London. His PhD thesis, entitled 'Islam in Soviet Tajikistan: State Policy and Practice of Religion (1941–1991)', is based on the analysis of the Soviet state archives preserved in the Russian Federation and Tajikistan. In the past, Sultonbek has worked as a researcher at the Institute of Humanities in Khorog, Tajikistan, from 1997 to 1999, and in the Silk Road Studies Program at the Uppsala University, Sweden, in 2004.

His interest in the modern history of Central Asia, Islam and the former Soviet Union were fostered through extensive research in the archives and libraries, as well as ethnographic field research in Tajikistan and the Russian Federation. As a researcher with the CASU, he completed major projects on: (1) religious identity among migrants in southern Tajikistan; (2) the formation of Ismaili migrant organisations in the Russian Federation; (3) Soviet scholarship on Ismailis; and (4) Post-Soviet Russian and Tajik publications on Islam in Central Asia. He has presented peer-reviewed papers on these topics at several international conferences.

In addition to conducting independent research projects, Sultonbek has gained substantial teaching experience. From 2006 to 2010, he worked in a collaborative team at the CASU to design syllabi and to teach: (i) a course on Islam in Central Asia; (ii) a module on migration in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods; and (iii) a module on the Ismailis of Central Asia, all as part of the modern history course for graduate students at the IIS. Between 2012 and 2013, he worked as a Teaching Fellow at the Department of History, SOAS, University of London.

In February 2014 Sultonbek completed his postdoctoral fellowship with the Department of Academic Research and Publications at the IIS. He is now finalising his book for publication, which builds upon his doctoral dissertation. The book examines the ways in which Soviet religious policies were implemented among Muslim communities in Soviet Tajikistan between 1950 and 1985.

During his time at the IIS, Sultonbek has also provided methodology workshops for early career researchers and

postgraduate students from Central Asia and the Russian Federation; mentored graduate students from the UK for their field projects in Central Asia; assisted in the organisation of conferences and seminars. Additionally, he has translated educational materials for the IIS and publications by the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundations in Tajikistan. He also helped with annotations for the memoir of Wladimir Ivanow, *Fifty Years in the East* (2015), which was edited by Dr Farhad Daftary.

## ZAMIRA DILDORBEKOVA (GPISH 2008)

Zamira received her BA (Hons) in English and German Language and Linguistics from Khorog State University, Tajikistan, in 2000. Prior to pursuing further studies, she taught Academic English as well as modules in Islamic Studies and the Humanities at the Khorog English Programme (KEP) in Tajikistan between 1998 and 2005. From 2000 to 2001, she worked as a Programme Officer at the Aga Khan Foundation (Education), providing methodology training to secondary school teachers in the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan. She completed the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) at the IIS in 2007, and an MPhil (by research) in Development Studies at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, in 2009.



Zamira's interest in the field of Islamic Studies and the study of contemporary Muslim societies led her to pursue a doctoral degree in Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter in 2009. Her PhD thesis, entitled 'The Dynamics of Islam and Modernity in Tajikistan', examines the contemporary religious renewal and discourses on modernity of the Nizari Ismailis in Tajikistan. It covers the period between 1991 – when the Tajiks gained independence from the Soviet Union – and 2012. The work examines the ways in which the Tajik Ismailis reconnected with their spiritual leader, the Aga Khan IV, and reintegrated with the transnational Ismaili community after seventy years of Soviet isolation. The subject of 'religious renewal' among the Ismailis in post-Soviet Tajikistan remains barely explored, both in post-Soviet and Western academia; thus Zamira's research contributes to the furthering of knowledge in this area.

In addition to pursuing her studies and conducting research, Zamira has worked as a graduate teaching assistant for two GPISH modules at the IIS (2010–2011) – 'Islamic History: Authority, Power and Body Politic' and 'Muslims in the Regional Context: South Asia' – and again as a teaching assistant in 2012 at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, the University of Exeter, for the module 'History and Society in the Middle East, 610–1980s'. During her time as a PhD student, Zamira presented papers at several conferences on the subject of

Central Asian Islam and on the theoretical frameworks used to study it. Since 2012, she has contributed to teaching the ‘Research Methods’ module for GPISH and STEP students at the IIS. In 2010, she was made an associate member of the Higher Education Academy in recognition of her teaching, and she is presently a member of the Regional Seminar for Excellence in Teaching, titled ‘Islam: Religious and Social Practices. Universality and Locality’.

Currently, Zamira works at the IIS, in the Department of Curriculum Studies, where she is responsible for the development of educational materials – primarily, teachers’ guides and supporting resources for the Institute’s Secondary Curriculum. She continues to be involved in supervising MA research projects, mentoring lesson planning, and teaching graduate students at the IIS.

### LAILA KADIWAL (GPISH 2009)



Laila Kadiwal is originally from a small settlement in India called Gadhchiroli. Armed with a change of clothes and her certificates, she left home to pursue her dreams, despite her family’s resistance, seeking an education and career. Without

any knowledge of English and very little money, she could never have anticipated that she would find herself teaching and researching at a prestigious university in the UK a decade and a half later.

For Laila, the life-changing opportunity came in 2006, in the form of the IIS’s Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH). She completed the programme with the highest marks in her cohort, and then went on to obtain a Masters in Educational Studies from the University of Oxford (with distinction in the exam); and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education in Research Methods in 2014, and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Sussex in 2015.

Laila’s PhD thesis, entitled ‘Religious Pluralism in Ismaili Muslim Religious Education: From Difference to Diversity’, investigates Ismaili trainee teachers’ attitudes to plurality in the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP). Laila’s research was conducted over a span of three years, and involved in-depth interviews, focus group activities, observations and textual analysis. Twenty-one trainee teachers from thirteen different countries participated in the study. Alan Race’s (1983) typology ‘inclusivism–exclusivism–pluralism’ serves as a key theoretical lens through which she examines the trainees’ attitudes to religious others.

Laila has taught research methods and sociology in well-known universities in the UK, Sweden and China, and

conducted research in diverse countries such as China, UAE and Tajikistan. She worked as the South Asian Student Support Officer at the University of Sussex and a Research Assistant at the IIS. She has published a paper entitled ‘“Selective Cosmopolitans”: Tutors’ and Students’ Experience of Offshore Higher Education in Dubai’. She has also presented papers at high profile conferences, such as the annual conferences of the European Association for the Study of Religions, the British Sociological Association, and the British Association for International and Comparative Education.

In October 2014, Laila joined the University of Sussex as a Research Fellow on the Education and Peacebuilding project. Working in collaboration with her colleagues at the university, Laila’s research focuses on the role of teachers in post-conflict societies in South Africa, Pakistan, and South Sudan. The research aims to inform the national and global policy dialogue on, and the understanding of, teachers as agents of peacebuilding programmes. It also aims to uncover and communicate new knowledge to policy experts, policy makers, and civil society organisations at local, national, regional and international levels on the effects and outcomes of peacebuilding interventions through education.

### SHAYESTEH GHOFRANI (GPISH 2006)

Shayesteh submitted her PhD thesis in October 2014 to the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, the University of Exeter, under the supervision of Prof. Robert Gleave. Her thesis, entitled ‘Comparative Analysis of *Wilāya* in the Formative Period of Shi’ism and Sufism’, looks at the development of the concept of *wilāya*, particularly between the eighth and the tenth centuries CE. The word *wilāya* literally means to be near to someone or something, and it is a term with a range of meanings in the political, religious and legal spheres.

Shayesteh’s inspiration to conduct this research came from the well-known fourteenth-



century Muslim historian and author, Ibn Khaldūn (d. 784/1382). Ibn Khaldūn was the first to notice the close affinity between the Sufi concept of *wilāya* and the Shi’i concept of the *imām*. He looked at the early histories of both Shi’ism and Sufism, and concluded that Sufism was virtually saturated with Shi’i ideas. Surprisingly, such a comparison, broached by a historian in the fourteenth century, has received only scant attention in academia.

Thus, Shayesteh’s research can be seen as an extension of Ibn Khaldūn’s project. Her focus is not on the general practices, as Ibn Khaldūn’s was, but on the conceptual development of the notion of *wilāya*. Her research is therefore a small step towards redressing the balance, in that it focuses on the sources earlier than the tenth century to see how the notion of *wilāya* came about and to uncover

the doctrinal aspects that gave initial shape to the form of *wilāya* within Shi'ism and Sufism.

Her findings show that, in the formative period, the ideas of the Shi'is and the Sufis were remarkably similar regarding the scope of the concept of *wilāya*. From the beginning of the history of the usage of the term, both groups required an acceptable justification in advocating *wilāya* for the *imām* or the *walī* (pl. *awliyā*), respectively.

The word *wilāya* is quite unique in the sense that, in its most basic understanding, it designates a type of relationship between persons of equal or unequal stature. Shi'is appropriated the concept of *wilāya* to express their understanding of the role of the *imām* as well as the role of the Shi'i community with respect to the *imām*, whereas Sufis appropriated the same concept to express the role of the *awliyā*' and their spiritual distinctions. Shayesteh's research demonstrates that *wilāya*, within Islamic discourse, is a fundamental concept that underlies notions of spiritual identity and community in a variety of Islamic contexts, which is still evident today.

Shayesteh is a graduate of the GPISH class of 2006. She is from Iran and obtained her BSc in Engineering from the Amir Kabir University in Tehran in 2002. She received her Masters in Continental Philosophy from the University of Warwick in 2006. Having recently defended her PhD thesis, Shayesteh now works in the Department of Academic Research and Publication (DARP) at the IIS as a postdoctoral research fellow.

### **NOURMAMADCHO NOURMAMADCHOEV (GPISH 2005)**

In 1997 Nourmamadcho Nourmamadchoev was awarded a BA in Oriental Studies (Arabic and Persian Language and Literature) from Khorog State University, Tajikistan.



Subsequently, he went on to teach Arabic and Persian at his alma mater, and also started working as a researcher at the Institute of Humanities in the Khorog branch of the Tajik Academy of Sciences. During this time, his interest in the study of Islam grew, particularly the systematic study of Islam and its Ismaili *tariqah* in Badakhshan. This interest came to inform his later research.

In 2001 Nourmamadcho enrolled in the intensive one-year Khorog English Programme and, upon successfully completing this course, he was offered a place in the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities at the IIS. In the third year of this programme, he joined the Oriental Studies Department at the University of Cambridge. There, he received an MPhil in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies in 2005, after submitting his thesis – entitled ‘The Political and Social History

of Badakhshan up to the End of the 11th Century’ – which was supervised by Prof. Charles Melville. In that same year, he was awarded an IIS Doctoral Scholarship which enabled him to pursue a PhD at the Department of History, SOAS, University of London. He successfully completed this in 2014 – under the supervision of Dr Heidi A. Walcher and, later, Dr Konrad Hirschler; his thesis was titled ‘The Ismailis of Badakhshan: History, Politics and Religion from 1500 to 1750’.

Nourmamadcho currently works as a research and administrative assistant at the IIS's newly established Ismaili Special Collections Unit in London. In addition to his duties there, he is presently preparing to publish a monograph on Badakhshan, based on his doctoral dissertation. The forthcoming monograph concentrates on the history, politics and religion of the Shi'a, including Ismailis, minority groups in Badakhshan between 1500 and 1750, and examines these aspects within the wider context of the history of Central Asia and the Persianate world.

The work is divided into three parts. Part One, ‘The Geography and People of Badakhshan’, describes the geography of the region and the ethnic composition of those dwelling within its borders. Part Two, ‘The Political History of Badakhshan’, explores the origin and the reign of the *mir*s and *shah*s of Badakhshan; traces the transfer of political control of the region from the local rulers to the invading powers, such as the Timurids, the Shaybanids and later on the Tuqay-Timurids; and charts the rise of Mir Yaribeg Khan and the establishment of the Yaribeg Khanid (or Yarid) dynasty that brought relative peace to the region. Part Three, ‘Ismailism in Badakhshan’, is devoted to the study of the religious composition of the region, particularly the spread of Ismaili teaching in Badakhshan and the Pamir districts.

The history, politics and culture of medieval and early modern Badakhshan is still largely shrouded in mystery, being understudied areas in the fields of Islamic Studies, Central Asian Studies, and the studies of Persianate societies. The forthcoming monograph is therefore Nourmamadcho's attempt to fill this gap in the scholarship.

### **SHARAF OSHURBEKOV (GPISH 2004)**

Sharaf Oshurbekov received his undergraduate degree in history from Khorog State University, Tajikistan, in 2000, and completed the Graduate Program in Islamic Studies and Humanities at the IIS in 2004. In 2005, he was awarded an MA degree in Near and Middle Eastern Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies, and in 2014 completed a PhD in Social Anthropology at York University, Canada.



Sharaf's doctoral dissertation examines the ways in which the Ismaili Muslims in the Badakhshan region of modern-day Tajikistan understand and relate to the sites in their landscape that they deem 'sacred'. His dissertation is based on the ethnographic data that he collected during his fieldwork in Badakhshan from 2011 to 2012. It also draws from the data on the various religious practices of the Ismailis of this region, which was collected by local researchers and stored in the archives of the Khorog Research Unit of the IIS' Central Asian Studies Unit. Through these stories and narratives, sacred sites validate and confirm the presence of the transcendent in the lived environment of the people. Sharaf's research thus contributes to the conceptualisation and understanding of the relationship between human societies and places in their lived environment.

While studying for his PhD, Sharaf also took part in the Regional Seminar for Excellence in Teaching project, 'Anthropological Approaches to Religion and Secularism', which ran from 2010 to 2013. In collaboration with forty other scholars from different countries, he analysed and discussed the existing literature on the subject of religion and secularism, identified new avenues for the study of this issue, and conceptualised innovative approaches to teaching religion at institutions of higher learning. Sharaf led a number of sessions dealing with Islam and secularism in Central Asia. In this project, he also presented papers based on his PhD research on the sacred sites of Badakhshan and developed a graduate course on Anthropological Approaches to Islam in Central Asia.

Throughout his PhD studies, he also attended and presented papers at various international academic conferences, including the conference organised by the IIS in December 2011 in St Petersburg, Russia, which was dedicated to the memory of one of the most prolific and prominent scholars in Ismaili Studies, Vladimir Ivanow. Sharaf's paper critically examined the ethnographic representations of the Ismailis of Badakhshan and Ismaili religious practices in the works of Russian scholars. More recently, in August 2014, he attended the Tenth Biennial Iranian Studies Conference in Montreal, Canada, where he presented a chapter from his PhD dissertation, titled 'Places Beyond the Real: Chronotope of the Sacred Sites of Badakhshan'.

In addition to his research activities, Sharaf worked as a teaching assistant, from 2008 to 2013, for various undergraduate courses at York University. In this capacity, he conducted seminar sessions, evaluated students' progress, graded exams and assignments, and provided oral and written feedback to students. His broader research interests include the study of Islam – particularly Ismaili Islam, Sufism and Shi'a Islam – in the historical and contemporary contexts.

### **AMIER SAIDULA (GPISH 2003)**

Amier Saidula holds a degree in Chinese Laws from Northwest University of Politics and Law, Xi'an, China, and a diploma in Chinese Culture and Chinese Language from the Northwest University for Nationalities

in Lanzhou, China. For several years, he worked in China as a state prosecutor in the High Procuratorate of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, where he was in charge of international cases.



Amier joined the IIS as a student in 2000

and obtained a Master of Laws degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 2003. In 2005, he started working with the IIS as a Research Associate. His academic research interests include the history, culture and traditions of Muslims in China, in general, and of the Ismaili community, in particular.

In 2014, Amier was awarded a PhD in Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh. His thesis is about how an ethnic minority group produces a sense of community and a space of social order in the face of an authoritarian state: it examines the process by which Tajiks in the far west of China manage disputes and maintain internal order in a Han-dominated political environment. By looking at the micro-politics of the dispute, the thesis focuses on the ethics of Tajiks' sociality, and the ways in which they organise their internal relationships, as well as their relationships with the state. The thesis is therefore broadly concerned with the dynamics of legal and political change among minorities in marginal areas of China.

Drawing comparative lessons from Laura Nader's work on Mexico (1991), and Fernanda Pirie's work on Ladakh, India (2007), the thesis focuses on the significance of 'harmony ideology' in Tajik society, whereby there is a normative stress on avoiding open conflict. In his thesis, Amier argues that the Tajik society in China's focus on 'harmony' is an attempt to produce stability and a measure of autonomy in the context of rapid social and economic change, and in the face of an increasingly intrusive Han-dominated state. However, he maintains that the same 'harmony ideology' can also serve to reproduce internal Tajik inequalities, particularly in relation to gender and age. The thesis therefore addresses issues of ethnic difference, Islamic morality, and the everyday life of those on the margins of the Chinese state.

The fieldwork upon which the thesis is based was multi-sited within the Tashkurgan region of Xinjiang, and was conducted between May 2010 and September 2011. The thesis is based on interview data, life stories and case files obtained in the region.

Amier's long-standing aim is to promote knowledge about Islam in China in general, with a focus on the Ismailis in the Xinjiang region. He is working towards building a comprehensive database on the topics mentioned above while publishing his findings as academic articles and monographs.

## HUMANS OF MALL ROAD

by

Ambreen Barwani (STEP 2012)

Zara Mohammad (STEP 2014)

Let me tell you a tale about humans of Mall Road  
It's bright vibrant and full of colours  
But it's a bit grim too

As the sun seeped through the yellow leaves  
We saw a few kids collecting wood  
Nooria was one of them and she worked hard for  
her livelihood  
She looked kind of cool  
But she didn't go to school

Next we met Shainoor and Ali Raza  
They made popcorn, with some twist and *maza*  
They worked hard every day  
But why they didn't go to school, they didn't say

Walking along this busy road  
We met an old man, wise and bold  
Mohammad Rafiq was his name  
He sat on a chair with a stick in his hand  
Those beautiful blue eyes  
Which didn't belong to this land

In this cold weather  
When people shivered  
A hot cup of green tea  
Is what Abdul Waris served



Then we spotted a corner shop at the end of the street  
Where antiques, handicrafts and jewelry were sold by  
Haseeb  
He was 21yrs old; and determined to leave his job to  
study abroad

In the midst of this busy street  
We spotted Khurshed  
He had something to offer  
Pink fluffy clouds of sweet

Ali, Ahmed, Zain and Fatima  
Hanging alongside each other against the wall  
Crafted with wood, they swayed in the air  
Because they weren't humans at all





Sitting aloof in a corner  
A cute boy named Hassan sat  
He sold toys bought by his dad  
Moving on we saw Arshad with a charming smile  
He collected garbage all this while

Up on the hill in the midst of this hustle and bustle  
We saw a sight rarely seen  
Engrossed in a book  
A carefree girl of about fourteen

The tale does not end here  
There's more to tell  
All that we bought and we thought was ours  
Got taken away from us in the blink of an eye

What more can we tell you  
About humans of Mall Road  
They are bright, vibrant and full of color  
But definitely a little grim too.



*Images by Al Jalil Ajani and Ambreen Barwani*

**EXHIBITION REVIEW**

Maha Yaziji (GPISH 2010)

I recently visited the exhibition, *Cairo to Constantinople: Early Photographs of the Middle East*, at the Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London. The exhibition displays a collection of some of the rarest and most exquisite photographs of the Middle East, as well as some of the oldest artefacts in the Royal Collection. The photographs, representing the first-ever visual record of a royal tour, were produced by Francis Bedford (1815–1894), an accomplished and respected professional photographer of his time. Bedford's resulting images depict the four-month tour of the Middle East which the Prince of Wales undertook in 1862 as part of his education as heir to the throne.

In an attempt to mirror the route of the future King Edward's tour, the curator has divided the exhibition geographically and chronologically into four main sections presented in two rooms. The initial section presents the context of the expedition as well as background information on the Prince of Wales, Francis Bedford, and other members of the tour. The rest of the room is then devoted to Egypt, where Bedford's photographs capture fine examples of Islamic architecture and Pharaonic ruins. Interestingly, some of these images show sites where excavations were still ongoing at the time of the tour, thus providing valuable records of the different stages of the excavations.

The second room of the exhibition takes the visitors through the Holy Land, the sites of the Druze-Maronite Massacre of 1860, Syria and Lebanon, and lastly Turkey and Greece. The first area highlights photographs of places with strong biblical associations, such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Galilee. During this tour of the Holy Land, the prince also visited the two Islamic sites of the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of al-Khalil; he is believed to be the first Christian to have been allowed access to these sacred sites. Bedford is also marked out as one of the very few photographers to have received permission to photograph the Dome of the Rock. Accordingly, the three displayed images of its interior and exterior are some of the earliest photographs of this historical building.

*Top right image: View from the Sevaskier Tower (Sultanhamet Quarter, Istanbul, Turkey)*  
*Bottom left image: West Front of the mosque of Omar (dome of the Rock, Jerusalem)*  
 Images from: Royal Collection Trust/copyright Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2015



Before moving on to the next geographical area of the tour, there is a collection of photographs featuring sites closely associated with contemporary events in the region at that time. Bedford's images capture scenes of the places affected by the Druze-Maronite conflict as well as a portrait of 'Abd al-Qadir, 'the Algerian' (1808–1883), who was believed to have protected many Christians during the conflict.

The next leg of the tour was Syria and Lebanon, and the photographs from these regions feature a number of castles and fortresses which were occupied by the Crusaders in the twelfth century. They also show views of the Roman ruins at Baalbek in Lebanon and the Great Mosque of Damascus (or the Umayyad Mosque). The three images of the Umayyad Mosque presented in this section are particularly fascinating as they were all taken before their restoration from the late nineteenth century onwards. Moreover, the black and white photography shows the natural beauty of the mosque and its pure structure and form, which is rarely seen in colour images.

The final leg of the prince's tour was Turkey and Greece. Presented here are photographs of the towers, palaces, mosques and amazing landscapes of what is now called Istanbul, plus a photograph of the military hospital, Scutari, that received injured allied troops during the Crimean War (1853–1856). Greece is captured through photographs of ancient temples, the city of Athens, and views from several islands.

Alongside Bedford's fascinating black and white images, the exhibition features corresponding extracts from the young prince's journal, reflecting the impact these places had on him. Further insights into the tour are provided by the display of archaeological objects and other artefacts acquired by the prince throughout his journey, largely from Egypt and the island of Rhodes.

*Cairo to Constantinople* is a well-curated exhibition, though it would benefit from better guided pathways and better positioning of labels. Apart from the contested views of the purpose of the prince's tour in the first instance and the showing of the exhibition today, the displayed images provide an early visual documentation of the Middle East. They also reflect the interest of the British public, at that time, to connect with places of religious, historical and cultural significance in that distant part of the world.



## BOOK REVIEW

Zuleikha Haji (GPISH 2012)

Coffee is so commonplace in today's society. However, contemporary consumers may be unaware of just how controversial this beverage was in its early years. Initially, its appearance in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Arab and Turkish Muslim societies was opposed by several jurists and medics who made a futile attempt to ban coffee consumption. This controversy serves as the point of departure for Ralph Hattox's book, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East*. In it, he describes the emergence of coffee in the region and examines the social institutions that developed around the beverage, and the intellectual and legal debates that emerged in its wake.

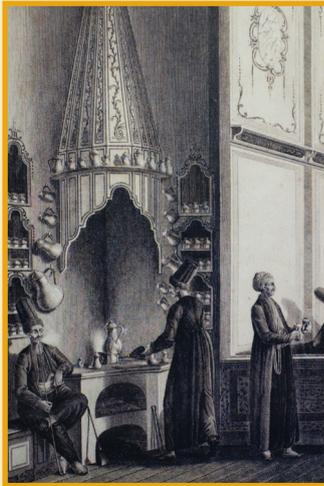
In *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, Hattox provides an overview of how Islamic religious law and *hadith* were applied in the legal debates over this particular societal issue. However, by sifting through a combination of contemporary chronicles, legal writings and opinions, contemporary treatises by Muslim scholars and accounts from European travellers – and unravelling the contradictions between all of them – the author is able to extend his treatment of the question far beyond the formal issues of law. Hattox thus uses the legal dispute as an indicator of “the way in which the urban intellectual of the sixteenth century saw his society and why some saw a threat to that society through the use of coffee” (p.5).

The author traces the process of legal reason by which coffee was originally condemned and how this ban was overturned. He makes a convincing case for the origins of coffee as a beverage used by Sufi mystics in Yemen, who integrated coffee-drinking into *dhikr* ceremonies to stay alert for their night-long meditation and invocation. Coffee drinking then spread quickly beyond the Sufi orders to the broader Muslim society, where it soon grew in popularity.

In order to help us understand the different reasons for opposition to the practice of coffee drinking, the author gives detailed definitions of intoxication and stimulation

through substance use. He presents the pros and cons of the debate – offered on medical, moral and social grounds – with comprehensive thoroughness, and arrives at the same conclusion as others who have studied the problem. Legal opinion was divided on nearly all grounds, with jurists being unable to agree on the matter of whether the coffee ‘high’ was equivalent to being intoxicated by wine.

The initial controversy, as Hattox suggests, was not engendered so much by coffee itself as by the emergence of the coffeehouse, which was seen as a derivative of wine taverns. This, in turn, raised concerns among the political authorities who were suspicious of the respectability and legality of the social gatherings that accompanied its use. When coffee and coffeehouses were condemned, the fundamental critique always seemed to have sociopolitical underpinnings. According to the author, however, coffeehouses offered a respectable place for hospitality outside the home – and in doing so, transformed the social fabric of urban Muslim society by offering a new public forum where citizens from different quarters and classes could interact with each other. In the end, the efforts to ban coffee ultimately failed, and it soon became a common part of Muslim societies.



Hattox concludes that this examination of the reaction to the appearance of the coffeehouse is useful not only because of what insights it might provide into the changes in society at that time, but also because it provides a good case study of the mechanisms and dynamics by which that society dealt with and, eventually, accommodated change. The author maintains that the reactions of early detractors were not just hyper-conservative, legalistically stagnant objections to *bid'a* (innovation), but sensitive responses to real social change. In his opinion, these debates provide proof that the Muslim world was not dead to innovation in the sixteenth century.

This book will appeal to those interested in viewing the societal attitudes of the time through an anthropological lens. Were these signs indicative of a social or moral change – of which the coffeehouse was a symptom, a catalyst or both – that produced a shift in the relations among men and gave rise to new habits and attitudes reaching beyond the cafe? To find out more, read the book and enjoy!

Middle image: Turkish coffee house (detail from an etching); Bottom image: Coffee Culture (details from a miniature)



**ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW**

Tanya Panjwani (GPISH 2012)

Anyone who drives along the Don Valley Parkway in Toronto cannot miss the eye-catching architecture of the Aga Khan Museum (AKM). It is not unusual to see drivers slow down to catch a glimpse of the breath-taking structure, surrounded by lush green trees and placid reflecting pools.

This pristine, powder-white building is, in fact, the first-of-its-kind museum of Islamic art in North America. It houses over 1,000 pieces in its permanent collection, offering its audience a chronological and geographical view of the arts of the Muslim world. The museum also hosts temporary exhibitions that explore specific themes and take an in-depth look at artists from different parts of the world.

Dr Henry Kim, the Director and CEO of the AKM, notes that, ‘In terms of the scene within Toronto, [this museum] is unique for many reasons. One of them is that it is a very impressive building.’ Unlike many museums around the world, this one is a work of art not only within, but also on the outside. Common themes that are apparent throughout are the minimalist design, the use of reflections, the play of light, and the continuous repetition of shapes, patterns and textures. These are seen in the architectural elements, such as the angled façade exterior made of Brazilian granite, the white-washed walls and high ceilings, the lattice-patterned windows surrounding the centre courtyard, and the majestic dome in the wood-panelled auditorium.

The building has been designed to both suit and reflect the various purposes for which it would be used. This highlighted Dr. Kim’s second observation that it was one of the few museums that had been ‘built from scratch’. Hence, the purposes of the building are not forced to suit the space, but rather

the space has been designed to suit the purpose. The auditorium, for instance, has a warm ambiance, offering the audience an intimate experience with the musical and artistic performances featured from around the world. The education and learning centres are tucked away in a corner that provides a serene space in which to learn from educational seminars or other activities. The Bellerive Room houses a breath-taking set of ceramics that date back to the eighth century; this room



is a replica of the room in Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan’s Chateau Bellerive in Switzerland where these ceramics were housed before they were donated to the museum.

The courtyard is an elegant and simple space, thoughtfully appointed so that one can tell the time by the way in which the sunlight and moonlight cast shadows onto the ground. The mashrabiyya designs (the lattice-like panels) on the glass walls are also placed with purpose to allow the light to filter through.

Dr. Kim noted that the AKM ‘is the only museum in North America dedicated to Islamic art and Muslim cultures’. The permanent collection takes visitors on a journey through the history of Islam and Muslim societies, whether it be through a glass jar, an ivory tusk, a brass bowl, a gold inlaid Qur’anic manuscript, or an exquisite illustration of Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh. Each piece silently, yet powerfully, unravels a story, whether it be of royal courts or battles fought to expand territory or even ceremonial hunts.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s vision is echoed throughout the museum and the exhibitions themselves. Dr. Kim articulates this vision in the following words: ‘You have to understand your past in order to understand your current state and your future . . . A museum like ours . . . [is] trying to change people’s perceptions of the Muslim world; we are trying to improve people’s lives.’



Images by Shellina Karmali

## **FILM REVIEW (SIX CENTURIES AND SIX YEARS)**

Ghazaleh Moradian (GPISH 2012)

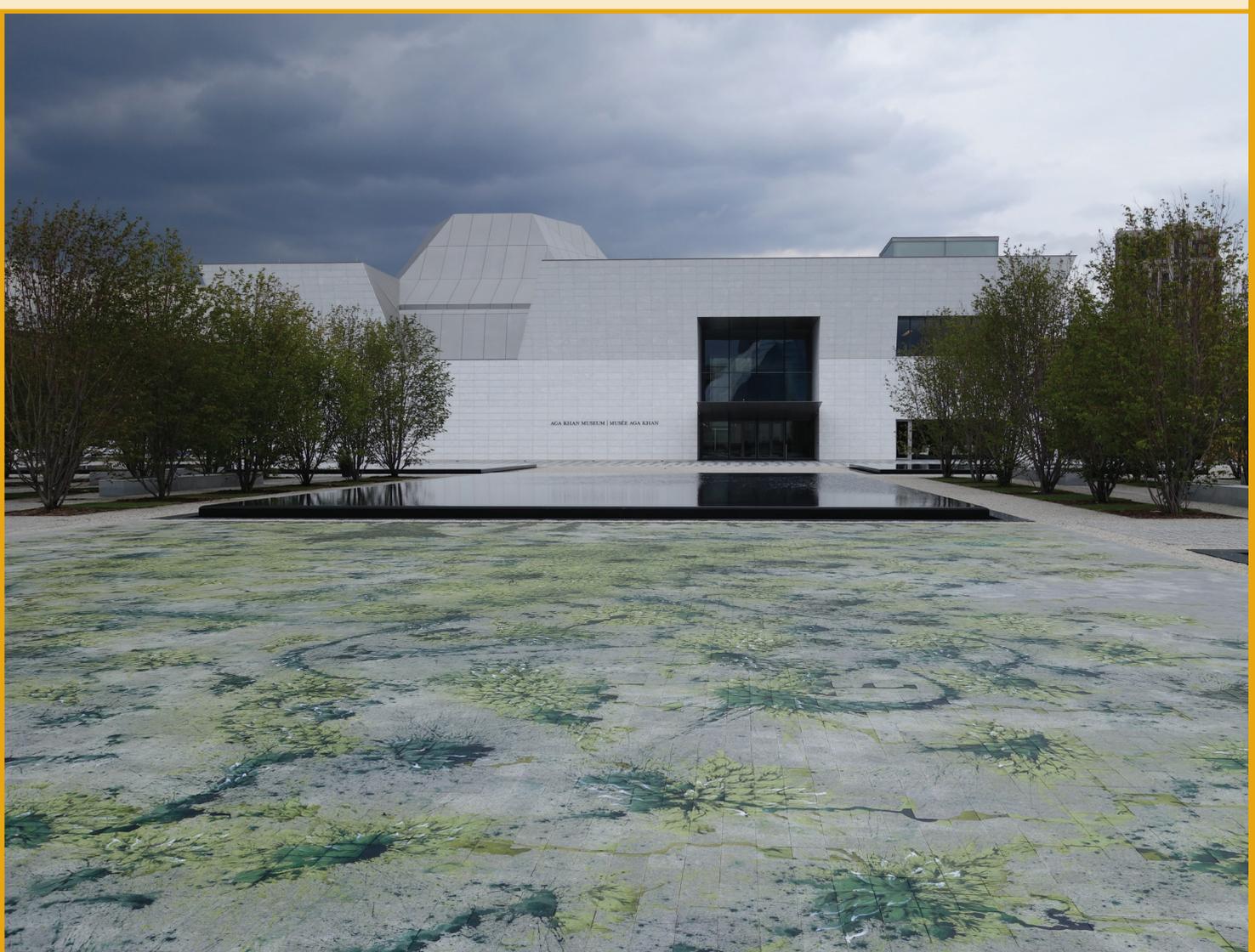
This documentary film, which was released in 2013, depicts the collective efforts of professional musicians and music students (Mohammadreza Darvishi, Homayoun Shajarian, Negar Booban, Sanaz Nakhjavani, Ali Samadpour, Siroos Jamali, Arash Shahriari, Siamak Jahangiri, Behzad Mirzayi, Saamer Habibi, Ehsan Zabihifar and Mohammadreza Shajarian) to explore and discover the forgotten patterns, rhythms and melodies of traditional Iranian music. The group of musicians undertake the challenging project of tracing and retrieving the lyrics attributed to Abd al-Qadir Maraghei, a great Persian music theorist, writer, and poet who flourished 600 years ago. They search within the historical books and documents of Iranian, Turkish and Arab literature and history to find the musical pieces attributed to Maraghei. After six years of research, work and practice, they succeed in performing, recording and publishing their version of his music.

This is a remarkable film which captures the highs

and lows of the journey taken by these musicians in their labour of love. The director and co-producer, Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, who has several documentaries under his belt, brings a great deal of skill to the filming, managing to be both an objective observer and an active participant: he stands back and allows the work of the group to unfold at its own natural pace, without interfering, yet he also facilitates the research process by enlisting the musicians' help in reflecting on the story of Maraghei's life and work – a storyline which unfolds parallel to that of the musicians' quest to find and perform Maraghei's music.

The majority of the film takes place at private and public recording studios, in people's houses and so on. While the sameness of the setting could cause the film to seem static and repetitious, Mirtahmasb overcomes this potential limitation through his use of interviews, historical pictures, characterisation of the musicians, and the smart use of camera techniques, all of which inject a sense of flow and novelty into the documentary.

The film leads the audience through the very first months of the project to the last fascinating minute when the record of Maraghei's music is made. It is moving to see the final result of the musicians' years of work come to fruition and to hear the strains of traditional Iranian music, just as it might have sounded six centuries ago.



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*The Implementation of Soviet Religious Policy among Muslim Communities in Soviet Tajikistan (1943–1991)*, presented at the ASEES-CESS (Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies-Central Eurasian Studies Society) Joint Regional Conference, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan, 22–24 May 2014.

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*Rethinking Fatimid Textiles: A Case Study of the Central Mediterranean*, presented at the seminar ‘Les Fatimides et la Méditerranée Centrale, X–XII Siècle’, École Française de Rome, 11–12 September 2014.

*Secrecy as Adornment: Transmitting Knowledge during the Weaving Process in Rural Morocco*, presented at the Fourth Biennial Symposium of the Historians of Islamic Art Association (HIAA), The Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, 16–18 October 2014.

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**Al-Shaar, Nuha.** *The Citation of the Qur’ān and Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih’s al-Iqd al-Farid*, presented at the First Annual Conference of the British Association of Islamic Studies (BRAIS), ‘Showcasing Islamic Studies in the UK’, University of Edinburgh, 10–11 April 2014.

**Baiza, Yahia.** ‘Suksesser og utfordringer [Success and Challenges (of Education in Afghanistan, 2002–13)]’, *Afghanistan 2014: Et temahefte* [Afghanistan 2014: A Pamphlet], pp. 26–29. Available at <http://www.afghanistan.no/Artikler/2285.html>

‘Madrasa Education Reform in Afghanistan, 2002–13: A Critique’, in *Reforms in Islamic Education: International Perspectives*, ed. Charlene Tan. London, Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 77–95.

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*Pamir-i Ethnic Identity and its Re-emergence in Post-Soviet Tajikistan*, presented at the ASEEEES-CESS (Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies-Central Eurasian Studies Society) Joint Regional Conference, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan, 22–24 May 2014.

**Datoo, Aliyyah.** *How a School-Based Summer Day Camp for Shi'a Ismaili Muslim Children met the Early Learning Framework (ELECT), Case Study of Camp Discovery Quebec 2013*, presented at the CSSE (Canadian Society for the Study of Education) Annual Conference round table discussion, Brock University, St. Catharines, Canada, 24–29 May 2014.

**Datoo, Al-Karim.** *Predominant Narratives Shaping Education in Pakistan: Historical and Sociological Perspectives*, presented at the CIEP-*Revue Internationale D'éducation de Sevres International Conference*, 'Education in Asia in 2014: What Global Issues?', Paris, 12–14 June 2014.

*Globalization and Social Imagination of Youth: Re-imagining Teacher Development for the Future*, presented at the 17th UNESCO-APEID (Asia-Pacific Programme of Educational Innovation for Development) Conference, 'The Powerhouses of Education: Teachers for the Future we Want', Bangkok, Thailand, 29–31 October, 2014.

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*Overcoming Religious Illiteracy and Fostering Pluralistic Values: Quebec as Case Study*, presented at the International Journal of Arts and Sciences Conference, Ryerson University, Toronto, 19–22 May 2014.

**(with Arzina Zaver.)** *The Role of Religious Literacy in the Context of State Neutrality*, presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Religions' (CSSR) Annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Brock University, St. Catharines, Canada, May 2014.

**Gillani, Karim.** Review of Cachemire: Le sūfyāna kalām de Srinagar/Kashmir: Sūfyāna Kalām from Srinagar: Ustad Ghulām Mohammad Sāznāvāz, in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 46, 2014, pp. 243–244.

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**Haidar, Otared.** *The Syrian Ismailis and Salamiyah: From the Fatimid Prototype to Modern Representation*, presented at the annual meeting of the European Chapter Group of the IIS Alumni Association, Mahdia, Tunisia, 4–7 May 2014.

**Hamid, Bilquis.** *How Does Teacher Questioning during Debriefing Sessions Encourage Learners to Think Critically About the Lesson?*, presented at the International Journal of Arts and Sciences (IJAS) Conference, Harvard Medical School, Boston, 26–30 May 2014.

**Hayat, Perwaiz.** *The Theme of Siddha in Dārā Shukōh's Writings*, presented at the Second Perso-Indica Conference, 'The Persianisation of Indian Learning: Texts, Approaches and Forms of Expression', University of Bonn, Germany, 7–8 February 2014.

**Hemani, Shumaila.** *Performing Folk Tales in the Sung Sufi Poetry of Pakistan: A Lecture/Demonstration*, presented at the Singing Storytellers Symposium, University of Cape Breton, Canada, 9–12 October 2014.

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*Religious Pluralism and Pragmatic Governance: The Fatimid Mediterranean Experience (10th–11th Centuries)*, lecture given at Harvard University, Boston, 21 October; University of Texas, Austin, 23 October; Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, 26 November 2014.

*Realpolitik or Sectarian strife: A Re-appraisal of Fatimid Rule in Syria during the Reign of the Fatimid Imam-caliph al-Aziz bi’llāh (365–386/975–996)*, presented at the MESA (Middle East Studies Association) Annual Conference, Washington, 22–25 November 2014.

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**Kadiwal, Laila.** *Rethinking the Theology and Philosophy of Pluralism in the Public Sphere*, presented at the British Sociological Association (BSA) Annual Conference, University of Leeds, 23–25 April 2014.

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*Western-Muslim Relations and the Clash of Ignorance*, presented at the Canadian Communication Association Annual Conference, Brock University, St. Catharines, Canada, 28–30 May 2014.

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*Does Cain Have to Kill Abel? Challenging the Metanarratives of Conflict among Indigenous Peoples in Afghanistan*, presented at the University of Calgary, Canada, 12 February 2014.

*Socio-Cultural and Environmental Change in the Pamir Mountains and the Role of Indigenous Knowledge*, presented at the University of Calgary, Canada, 6 March 2014.

*Process and Method of Learning How: A Case Study of Climate Change in the Arctic*, presented at the University of Calgary, Canada, 11 March 2014.

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*Visioning Food, Health and Energy Sovereignty: Ways Forward for Research and Practice*, presented at the workshop, organised by the Kassam Research Group, at the 14th Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology, Bumthang, Bhutan, 4 June 2014.

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**Kotadia, Parvez.** *Use of Problem Based Learning Approach to Teach Islamic Ethics: An Action Research in the Indian Context*, presented at the Second European Conference on the Social Sciences, organised by the International Academic Forum (IAFOR), Brighton, 3–6 July 2014.

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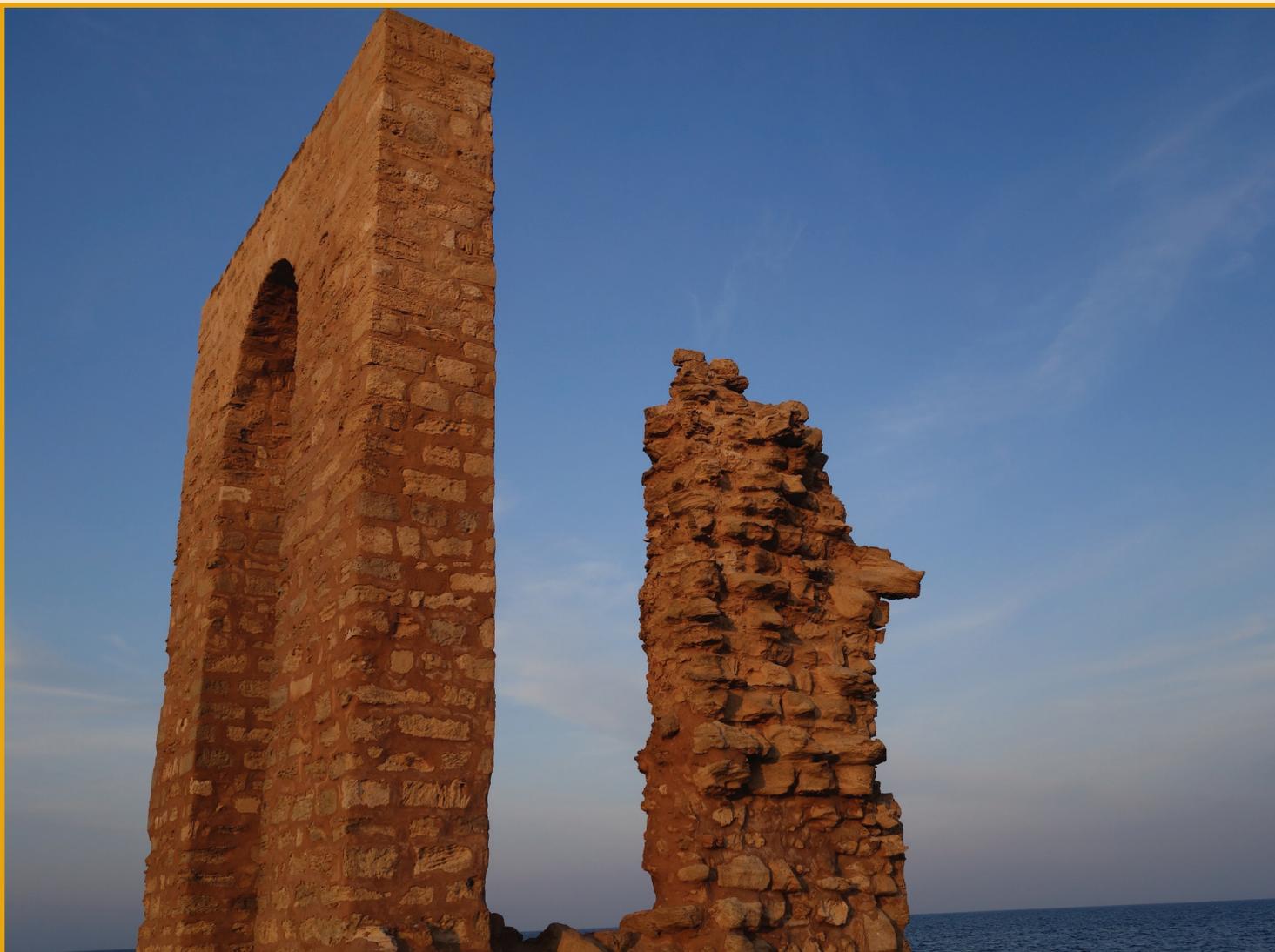
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*Ruins of a fortification near entrance to the Fatimid harbour, Mahdia, Tunisia. Image by Shellina Karmali*





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