

IIS

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# The Institute of Ismaili Studies

**The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) aims at promoting scholarship and learning on Islam in the context of civilizational studies in general. Utilizing all relevant modern disciplines, it encourages research into Islamic history, with particular reference to its significance for the Muslim societies in contemporary times. While the IIS' interests encompass the Muslim world as a whole, it pays particular attention to Shi'ism and to Ismailism due to the relative neglect of these fields in modern Islamic scholarship.**

Founded in 1977 by His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, who also serves as the Chairman of its Board of Governors, the IIS has grown from an educational establishment to a recognized academic centre of learning on Shi'ism and Ismailism.

The Institute's programmes and activities are informed by the full range of diversity within Islam and explore the relationship of religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture. Particular attention is given to issues of modernity and ethics that arise as Muslims seek to relate their heritage to contemporary circumstances.

The Institute's diverse constituencies include scholars and students of Islam and Ismailism, universities and educational establishments, as well as the Ismaili Community. Reflecting these diverse constituencies, the IIS collaborates with several prominent institutions of learning in the West and in the Muslim world. It also maintains

close affiliation with the Aga Khan Development Network.

The Department of Academic Research and Publications (DARP) facilitates original research and publications of works by its faculty as well as scholars from outside the Institute. These fall into several different categories such as occasional papers, monographs, editions, translations, conference proceedings, bibliographical works and Ismaili studies.

Recent publications include:

- Nasir al-Din Tusi's spiritual autobiography, *Contemplation and Action* (edited and translated by S.J. Badakhshani, 1998);
- Farhad Daftary's *A Short History of the Ismailis: Traditions of a Muslim Community* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998); and
- Aziz Esma'il's occasional paper on *The Poetics of Religious Experience: the Islamic Context* (1998).

The IIS Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities involves teaching by an international faculty of distinguished scholars, including members of DARP. Attracting students from diverse backgrounds and regions – from Central Asia to North America – the programme prepares individuals for important roles in academic, public and community life. Former students have gone on to obtain Master's and PhD degrees from the Universities of Oxford and Cam-

bridge, the School of Oriental and African Studies and the University of Edinburgh, among others. In addition, the Institute offers scholarships for post-graduate studies in pertinent fields and organizes seminars and conferences on themes of contemporary relevance.

The Department of Education produces teaching and learning materials on Islamic education. It is guided by a two-fold objective. On the one hand, it aims to make the religious, cultural and historical traditions of Islam available to young Muslims. On the other, it draws upon modern principles of education and technology to make religious learning a creative and appealing process for the young mind, commensurate with advances in other branches of learning. In so doing, it faces the challenges of how to understand and present Islamic culture in a way that narrows and overcomes the gap between secular and religious learning; how to relate modern principles of child-centred and experiential learning with allegiance to a given historical and religious tradition; how to reconcile the development of the individual with moral responsibility to society; and how to bridge intellectual development with spiritual life and ethics. The department's materials are produced in eight different languages (English, French, Arabic, Persian, Tajiki, Urdu, Gujarati and Portuguese) and aim to meet a diversity of cultural contexts.

Supporting all these programmes is the IIS Library, which has one of the most valuable and comprehensive collections in the Western world of manuscripts, books and audiovisual materials relating to Ismaili studies in particular. This collection serves as a major resource centre for scholars and students, and aspires to become the most significant central archive of Ismaili materials in the world. ◆

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