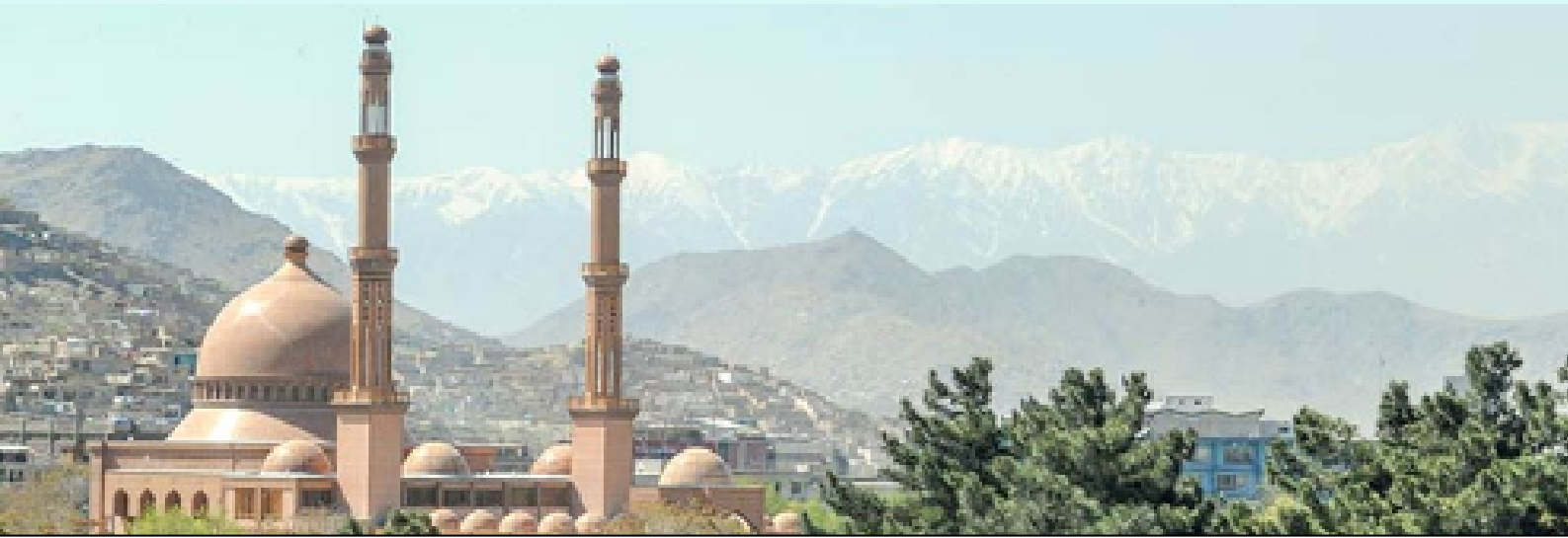


THE AFTERLIVES OF URBAN MUSLIM ASIA: ALTERNATIVE IMAGINARIES OF SOCIETY AND POLITY



Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of the Afterlives of Muslim Asia Newsletter. The project began in January 2022 and as the second year of the project comes to an end, the researchers share updates on some of the engagement and outreach work they have been doing, along with updates on the progress of their fieldwork. In this edition are some of the highlights of the past 6 months from the team's research pursuits and community-focused activities.

The 'Afterlives' project is led by Prof. Magnus Marsden of the University of Sussex, the co-Investigators are Dr. Paul Anderson of the University of Cambridge and Dr. Vera Skvirskaja of the University of Copenhagen.



Research Activity Updates

During a fieldwork trip to Vienna in June 2023, Dr. Vera Skvirskaja took with her project photographer, Ms. Moska Najib, to explore and visually document the vibrant social and professional lives of the Bukharan Jewish community in the city. The photographs taken will become part of a digital collection and archive that accompanies the research of the project.

Below: Moska photographing a collection of Tajik antiques and personal possessions



In November of 2023, Dr. Paul Anderson conducted an initial two-week period of fieldwork among Syrian Armenians who moved to Yerevan, Armenia, from Aleppo and from other places in Syria over the last 30 years, and especially since the Syrian civil war. Paul has been exploring questions of mobility, heritage and identity among Syrian Armenian traders and artisans, and the nature of connections and attachments they have been able to maintain, including with / to Aleppo and Syria.

'Kuche-ye Ma' Book Review

As part of some translation work for Prof. Marsden, MSc student (University of British Columbia, Canada) Ms. Shahla Muram, provided a literature review of Akram Osman's book '*Kuche-ye ma*'. The novel was published in 2004 by Osman, an Afghan intellectual who studied in Iran, wrote for TV and radio in Afghanistan, served in diplomatic posts in Tajikistan and Iran, and eventually lived in exile in Sweden until his death in 2016. *Kuche ma* explores the cosmopolitan nature of life in Kabul across the twentieth century through the prism of the social relationships of one of the city's 'alleys', or *kuche*. It covers the modernising period of the Musahiban dynasty (1929-1978), the fracturing of social relationships and political culture in the context of the Cold War and the country's descent into civil war after the collapse in 1992 of the government led by Dr Najibullah. An especially important aspect of the book is the focus it places on the thinking and identities of émigrés from the Central Asian Emirate of Bukhara who came to Afghanistan in the years following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Challenging nationalist narratives that remain powerful to this day of Afghanistan's Central Asian émigrés as foreigners from 'the other side of the river', the novel emphasises the attachment of these émigrés – both Jewish and Muslim – to Afghanistan, emphasising the extent to which they came to think of the country as their own and built rich social relationships

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with local people. Osman's unique specific background helps to explain the light the novel sheds on social relations between rich and poor in Kabul during the twentieth century, as well as its sensitivity towards and understanding of the issues facing the country's religious 'minority' communities, including Shii Muslim, Sikhs, Jews, and Hindus.

You can read the full essay on the novel at [https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=kuche-ma-blog-\(captions\)-afterlives-\(1\).pdf&site=1](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=kuche-ma-blog-(captions)-afterlives-(1).pdf&site=1)



Street scene in Kabul, Afghanistan in November 1961. (AP Photo/Henry Burroughs)

'Abdullah's Family'

Written by Prof. Magnus Marsden

In October, I visited the small industrial city of Çerkezköy located about an hour's drive to the west of Istanbul. Çerkezköy has become the home over the past five years to several hundred families from northern Afghanistan who have emigrated there from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Having visited Jeddah in 2016, I was keen to explore this community's move to Turkey. Many of Jeddah's Afghans were the decedents of Muslim families that had fled the Emirate of Bukhara in the 1920s after its incorporation within the Soviet Union.

In Çerkezköy, I spent most of my time with a friend from Afghanistan who lives there, Abdullah Kamal. I first met Abdullah in 2012 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, where Abdullah ran a watch repair business. Abdullah's family left Kabul in the early 1980s, thereafter living between Kabul, Dushanbe, and Karachi. In 2016, he and his family moved from Tajikistan to Turkey.

Abdullah is descended from families who had migrated to Afghanistan from Central Asia in the early twentieth century. Abdullah's paternal grandfather fled Bukhara for Afghanistan in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution fearing his high status background would put him at risk. Having settled in the city of Mazar-e Sharif, he capitalised on his expertise in horsemanship and worked in the stables of a Buzkashi player, before moving to Kabul where he found employment as a cook.



Abdullah, Watch Shop, Çerkezköy

Abdullah's maternal grandmother also fled Central Asia in the wake of the Soviet revolution. A young girl, her family soon gave her in marriage to a man from her home region who had studied at the Islamic seminary of Deoband in northern India. After her husband's death, she eventually moved to Kabul, working as a tailor and eventually remarrying. Abdullah's father, the late Kamaludin Kamal, learned the skills of repairing watches. In the 1970s, he opened a shop of his own in the Pul-e Mahmoud Khan area of Kabul's old city. In the early 1980s, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Abdullah's father took the entire family to Karachi.

In the decades that followed, the family established watch and telephone repair shops in Karachi, Dushanbe, and, briefly, Kabul. They lived through intense communal violence in Karachi and civil war in Dushanbe. The family once had an opportunity to move to Canada as part of a



refugee resettlement scheme. Abdullah's grandmother refused to leave the land of her birth. She eventually died a refugee from Afghanistan in Tajikistan, a country in whose territory she had been born.

Abdullah married and established his own family. His children were born in Pakistan, Tajikistan, and in Turkey. 'We have been refugees and moving around for four generations,' he told me. 'My children have been born in three different countries and now we live in Turkey and will soon by the Grace of God be granted Turkish citizenship.' Abdullah family's experiences of dispersal over decades have shaped their approach to life: 'We always stay together,' he remarked to me. 'The last time members of my family opted to travel alone, they lost contact with their families forever. Even if we have opportunities to go somewhere better on our own, we prefer to remain together at all costs.'



Street view of Kizilpınar in Çerkezköy

View the blog at:

[https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=abdullahs-family-blog-afterlives-\(1\).pdf&site=11](https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=abdullahs-family-blog-afterlives-(1).pdf&site=11)

Whittingehame College



Whittingehame College Crest

Written by Prof. Magnus Marsden

On the 9th and 10th of September 2023, the 'old boys' of Whittingehame College descended on a hotel on Brighton's seafront from across the world. A Jewish boys' school located in Brighton and Hove between 1931 and 1958 and in Handcross Park from 1958 until 1967, Whittingehame's founder was the British Zionist, Jakob Halévy (1898 - 1978). According to the school's official biographer, Eric Shanes, Halévy's ambition was to establish a 'Jewish version of Eton' - a school that would enable Jews to cultivate distinctive identities at the same time as playing a leading role in British life. During the years of its existence, the school underwent significant transformations. From educating British Jewry in the early 1930s, Whittingehame attracted Jewish students from Germany and central Europe in the mid-1930s. After

the war, Jewish students from Muslim-majority countries in West Asia and North Africa (especially Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, Iran and Afghanistan) increasingly sought admission to the school. The founding of the state of Israel in 1948 alongside the rise of postcolonial nationalism had led Jewish communities to question their future in the countries in which they lived. In the context of Israel's uncertain future, and the nationalisation of the businesses in which they were active in countries such as Iraq and Egypt, Jewish families in the Middle East and North Africa sought educational and migration opportunities for their children in the UK and the USA. In the 1950s, Whittingehame also granted admission to Muslim students, including those from Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

In the context of an economic crisis, Whittingehame closed in 1967. Yet if the school closed in 1967, it was of continuing significance for the identities, activities and social relationships of its former student body. In 1979, a group of old boys gathered at the Diplomat Hotel in Jerusalem to found the Whittingehame College Old Boy's Club. From the mid-1980s onwards, the Club organised annual events attended by former students. The Club organised such gatherings in Israel, London and, in later years, Brighton.

THE AFTERLIVES OF URBAN MUSLIM ASIA: ALTERNATIVE IMAGINARIES OF SOCIETY AND POLITY



Above: Whittingehame Alumni, Brighton
Below: Alumni showing off his jacket



The school's connections to West Asian Jewry from the 1950s onwards is what makes it of special interest to the Afterlives project. Afterlives is concerned with the migratory and career trajectories of Jews from cities in West Asia. For several of the communities with which we are working, Whittingehame played an important role in such trajectories. Students identifying as Jews from Afghanistan



and Syria studied at the school in the 1950s. During their time at the school, students from these backgrounds not only maintained their connections with Jews from their countries of origin both at school and in the UK, they also established relationships with those from other parts of the world, relationships that would play an important role for the rest of their social and professional lives.

The significance of Whittingehame to the trajectories of Jews from Afghanistan and Syria is evident in the life histories and recollections of three of its former students: Jack Abrahams, David Khafi and Debo Attar.

Jack Abrahams came to Whittingehame from Israel in 1957. He had moved earlier in the decade to Israel from Kabul, Afghanistan, the country in which his families had lived and conducted trade, especially in furs and carpets, for centuries. Jack has warm memories of his time at Whittingehame, especially the friendships he established with his fellow students, "We were away from our families", he remarked, "and so the relationships we established were more than friendship, we became what I refer to as 'brotherly friends' ". While studying at Whittingehame, Jack was also in contact with others Jews from Afghanistan living in London, including a fur merchant who acted as his guarding during his time in the UK. "We would go and see my guardian

Image (Left): Alumni being interviewed

Public & Academic Engagement

In December, a journal article by Magnus titled "Adjusting scales: Jewish trading networks in and beyond Afghanistan, 1950-present-day," was published in *History and Anthropology*. The paper was presented by Magnus to students and colleagues at Cambridge.

4th December - Magnus and Paul joined Vera in Copenhagen for a one day workshop in collaboration with the Asian Dynamic Initiative. The focus of the workshop was on the concept of 'afterlives' and its relevance to intersecting fields of regional and transregional scholarship. The workshop enabled members of the team to bring their work into conversation with scholars in Denmark and Sweden who are specialists in the study of Palestine, Syria, and the Caucasus.

On the occasion of the 554th birthday of Guru Nanak, Magnus addressed the Afghan Sikh Khosti community on Monday 27th November in the Guru Nanak Society of London Trust Gurdwara in Tooting, South London. He discussed the project and also talked about the relevance of the teachings of Guru Nanak for the world today.

THE AFTERLIVES OF URBAN MUSLIM ASIA: ALTERNATIVE IMAGINARIES OF SOCIETY AND POLITY



Above: Prof. Marsden addressing a conference by the Afghan Sikh and Hindu communities of London

during the holidays and for special religious events”, Jack remarked, “and have a good time staying in the family home with his six children”. As with many of the school’s students, leaving Whittingehame in 1962 did not result in the end of Jack’s association with the school community or the ‘brotherly friends’ he had made while studying there. From the UK, Jack did not return to Israel but moved to the New York, the city in which his brother had already established a successful firm engaging in trade with Afghanistan. Jack also embarked upon this line of work, driving visiting Muslim merchants from factory to factory so they could purchase machinery and commodities that his company would then export to Kabul. As with other Jews from Afghanistan, later in the 1960s Jack entered the trade in precious stones. He traded in stones sourced across Asia by family members and friends scattered across the continent since leaving Afghanistan in

the late 1940s and early 1950s. In later decades, Jack had established a jewellery company in New York’s 47th street that became renowned for its collection of rubies and emeralds. Besides his professional activities, Jack has also been an influential figure in New York’s small if active Afghan Jewish community, playing a leading role in the establishment of the Anshei Shalom synagogue, of which he currently serves as President. Jack explains his success not only in relation to the knowledge he gained about trade from working with his family and the broader Afghan Jewish community, but also from his experiences at Whittingehame. “How did I have the courage to invite members of Congress, the Ambassador of Afghanistan to the US, and the President of the US to an event in New York to commemorate 2600 years of Jewish history in Afghanistan?” he asked. “My time at Whittingehame is what gave me the strength to do such things”.

David Khafi was also student at Whittingehame from Afghanistan who attended the Brighton reunion. David moved to the UK from Bombay, where his father conducted trade in dried fruits and nuts with Afghanistan during the 1950s. David remembers how in the excitement of sending his son by flight to London his father had forgot to give him the envelope with cash that he had prepared for the trip. On arriving in London, a Jewish merchant from Afghanistan whom his father had telegraphed met David and give him the sum of cash his father had forgotten to hand over. Having left Whittingehame, David moved to Milan, the city to which members of his family

November 22nd - Vera gave a two-hour lecture followed by a Q&A session on “Post-Soviet coexistence and Bukharan Jews, Uzbekistan” at Københavns Folkeuniversitet, (People’s University), Copenhagen.

November 21st marked the first PhD Workshop on research outline writing for students from Afghanistan studying their MAs and PhDs at the University of Sussex. Students from multiple academic Schools attended the three-hour seminar, including Global Studies, Education, Law and Business.

November 16th - Magnus addressed a conference organised by the Afghan Sikh and Hindu communities of London. The conference focussed on the importance of recognising the contribution of the young professionals of these communities, especially in the field of public health. His talk focused on the significance of medicine to the history of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs and modes of integrating young people within the community.

November 4th - Magnus delivered the keynote lecture at the "Bringing Afghanistan to Scale Conference" held at Merton College, University of Oxford. The lecture explored the trading networks of Afghan Jews between 1950 and the present day.



College alumni Jack Abrahams and David Khafi on Brighton seafront



had also relocated to from Bombay. Over the next decades, David dealt in precious stones sourced in Asia across Europe.

Debo Attar moved to Whittingehame from Milan, though his family were from Aleppo. Debo's father had led a colourful life. A specialist in the textile trade, he had left Aleppo before the war with the aim of making money in Asia and returning to his home city as a rich man who would have status in his community. While in Asia, he was involved in various financial activities in China, leaving Shanghai only the day before Pearl Harbour. He then worked in Bombay, exporting textiles to Manchester during the war. On returning to Aleppo, Debo's father found it difficult to adapt to life in the city and decided to move his family first to Beirut and then to Milan. Debo arrived in Whittingehame aged eight, and remembers feeling lonely and abandoned having been left in the school. After a couple of years, he left the school to join his family, who had moved from Italy to Uruguay. The family returned to Milan some years later, however, and Debo was sent back to Whittingehame, although on this occasion he had siblings and brothers studying at the school, making it a more pleasant experience than his first round. Having left the school, Debo embarked upon a life of trade, living in South and North America, Europe and Asia. For Debo, his time at Whittingehame had been important because it had taught him the importance of trust to building personal relationships, an aspect of being a long-distance trader of immense significance.

One former pupil who had grown up in Egypt before attending Whittingehame in the 1960s recalled different facets of the school's approach to ethical formation. Its approach to kosher rules had emphasised, rather than legalistic doctrine, the spirit of non-cruelty to all creatures. The school had also emphasised the principle of anti-racism: he recalled one occasion where a boy who had made a racial slur against a Muslim pupil at the school had been publicly punished at an assembly and also 'beaten up' by other Jewish boys at the school. He credited the school with the anti-racism stance he had taken



Bill Philipps, Julian Kemble, Harris, 1946
Courtesy of <https://whittingehame.com>

with him into his career, when as a manager he had gone above and beyond organisational requirements in dealing with racism against black colleagues.

Spending time with Whittingehame's Old Boys provide us with a vivid glimpse into the significance of migration for education for the building of multi-



Prof. Mardsen, keynote lecture at the "Bringing Afghanistan to Scale Conference," Oxford

On September 4th, Magnus presented his research findings online at a conference 'Sustainable Development in Central Asia' organised by the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent.

In May the research team joined the project's Advisory Board in Cambridge to discuss the progress of the project.

On Sunday May 2nd, Magnus Marsden attended an event held at the Guru Nanak Darbar in Southall to mark the publication of a book on the history of Afghan Sikhs by Dr Tej Khurana.



national relationships and the formation and stabilisation of transnational networks in the post-War era.

Over the course of the two day reunion event, Prof. Marsden and Dr. Anderson interviewed a number of alumni for their research.

An interview with Prof. Marsden about the project and the reunion was broadcast on The Latest TV, Brighton, by local journalist Ms. Yael Breuer -

<https://vimeo.com/880198306>

<https://thelatest.co.uk/brighton/2023/11/01/latest-news-yael-breuer-interviews/>



Prof. Marsden being interviewed for The Latest TV, Brighton

Publications

December 2023 - The journal of *History and Anthropology*, 1-20, 2023 published Prof. Marsden's paper on "Adjusting scales: Jewish trading networks in and beyond Afghanistan, 1950-present-day."

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02757206.2023.2288649>

The book *An Anthropology of Intellectual Exchange*, Copeman, J. Et al. (Berghahn Books), features the chapter "Intellectual Exchanges in Muslim Asia: Intersections of History and Geography," written by Prof. Marsden.

<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781805390763/html>

At the end of September, Prof. Marsden presented a paper entitled "Intellectual Exchange in Muslim Asia" at a symposium held at Christ's College Cambridge to celebrate the career of Professor Susan Bayly and mark the publication of the book "An Anthropology of Intellectual Exchange: Interactions, Transactions and Ethics in Asia and Beyond" (Berghahn 2023).

In September, an article by Prof. Marsden on the transformations of Afghanistan's commercial networks was published in the 9/11 legacies project - Islamist Radicalism in the Balkans (911legacies.com)



Above: Dr Tej Khurana

In April, Think Tank ODI invited Magnus to attend an expert discussion with Sodiq Safoev, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Uzbekistan and Eldor Tulyakov, Executive Director at the Center for Development Strategy. His contributions to the discussion focused on the significance of heritage to people's diplomacy between Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and other contexts in Central and South Asia 20th.

The Team

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