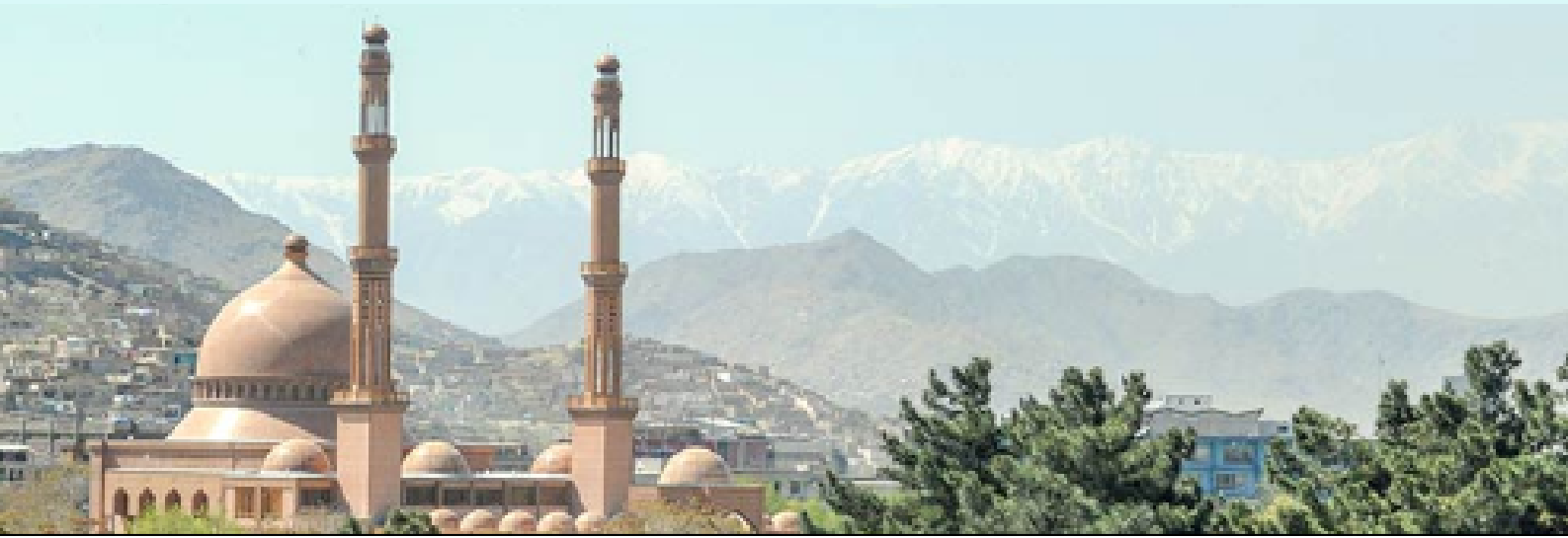


THE AFTERLIVES OF URBAN MUSLIM ASIA: ALTERNATIVE IMAGINARIES OF SOCIETY AND POLITY



About the Project

Welcome to the first edition of the Afterlives of Muslim Asia Newsletter. Funded by the AHRC, the project began in January 2022 and explores the persistence or avoidance of interreligious relations between Muslims and non-Muslims from cities in 'Muslim Asia' who now live in diasporas in the West. We are interested by the shared urban sensibilities such relations invoke and seek to document the vitality of legacies of cosmopolitan urban living and the role in these of diasporic communities. The project entails fieldwork amongst migrant Muslim and non Muslim communities from Afghanistan, Syria and Uzbekistan in London, New York, Vienna, Jerusalem, and Istanbul. 'Afterlives' is lead 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.



To what extent do urban centres in Muslim Asia continue to be a powerful source of identity in diaspora?

In the context of upheaval in Muslim Asia, studies of the region's urban centres and migrant communities can offer critical insights into identities that transcend sectarian and national identity and enable greater sensitivity in heritage preservation.



The Afterlives project examines the legacies of urban life, with particular focus on four cities: Kabul, Herat, Bukhara and Aleppo. Each of these urban centres have historically been home to sizable communities of ethno-religious minorities, including Jews, Christians, Sikhs and Hindus. Each of these centres has also witnessed large-scale migration of ethno-religious minorities over the past century. Political conflict and war have also led to the displacement of the cities' Muslim populations.

What forms of urban heritage are being produced as these cities' Muslim-majority populations suffer the effects of war and displacement? In the aftermath of conflict, how is urban heritage being drawn into new forms of geographical and political imagination?

Rather than focusing on memory and nostalgia, this project will explore the modes of urban life that displaced populations sustain and transmit in the diaspora. We will look both at the cities' dispersed populations and those actively involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge about them.

Inside this edition are the latest updates on the fieldwork activities of the team, outreach and engagement initiatives and publications featuring the research.

The Team

Prof. Magnus Marsden, Principal Investigator (University of Sussex)

Dr. Vera Skvirskaja, Co-Investigator (University of Copenhagen)

Dr. Paul Anderson, Co-Investigator (University of Cambridge)

Ms. Moska Najib, Principal Photographer

The Afghanistan Institute of Strategic Studies, Project Partner

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Community Engagement

Over the past year the researchers have been involved with communities on a number of engagement activities.

During a visit to London in Oct. 2022, Prof. Marsden attended the launch of the Farsi Action Foundation, an organisation dedicated to preserving Farsi culture and heritage and supporting their community - <http://farsiactionfoundation.com/index.html>

He joined the Foundation again in February 2023 for International Mother Language Day to discuss the importance of Persianate culture, in an event held at the University of West London, Ealing.

Back in July 2022, Magnus joined the Afghan cultural organisation to talk about the study of Afghanistan at the Hazara Encyclopaedia book launch. The talk has been widely circulated on social media and drawn invitations to further events by the Afghan community in London - <https://youtu.be/uGRYQJ02Mro>



Magnus at the Farsi Action Launch

In March 2022, Magnus celebrated Nowruz (Persian New Year) with the Afghanistan Turks Association (a diaspora organisation in the UK).

During a trip to Asamai Temple, Southall, in July 2022 Magnus joined the Khalsa Diwan for an event on Afghan religious minorities, which aired on a Sikh TV channel. A second event at the temple in Sept. saw Magnus address a gathering to mark the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The success of the visit led to further conversations about the future of the Afghan Hindu community in the UK, both with community members and local MPs, including Seema Malhotra.

On a trip to the Garib Nawaj Ji Gurdwara in Southall this February 2023, Magnus was joined by project Photographer Moska Najib as they addressed a gathering of Afghan Sikhs. The talk was attended by about 300 members of the community and was also live streamed on the community's website to Sikhs from Afghanistan living around the world. Prof. Marsden spoke in Persian and in English, and following the talk he held extensive discussions with the community who expressed interest in the project, its findings and in future collaborations.

In Feb. 2023, Magnus held a meeting with the leadership of the Union of Bukharian Jews in Tel Aviv to celebrate the organisation's 50th anniversary.

Then in March, Magnus addressed a Nowruz gathering organised by the Afghan Dosti Association in Edgware, London.



Engagement Strategies and Research Impact

The project will deliver a novel approach to the significance of urban heritage to politics and culture in Muslim Asia today by questioning narratives of the loss of Muslim Asia's legacy of coexistence. We will create opportunities for engagement by disseminating bespoke outputs to key beneficiaries such as the communities under study and diasporas, policymakers and practitioners and the broader public and by inviting them to dialogue at different events.

Some of the outputs planned include:

- An Online Oral Archive
- Photographic Exhibitions with our Principal Photographer
- Policy Papers and Workshops
- Research Articles, Monograph and Open Access Volumes

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Magnus at the Union of Bukharian Jews

Oct. 2022, Magnus was invited to take part in a panel to mark the book launch of the memoirs of former Mayor of Kabul, Abdul Karim Misaq (1935-2016). The launch was covered in the Farsi language media (Voice of America Pashto) and has enabled further debate about Afghan history and culture, in addition to extensive conversations between Prof. Marsden and the community - <https://fb.watch/g8aM1qOpX3/>



Dr. Vera Skvirskaja conducted her first round of fieldwork in Uzbekistan, Vienna and New York.

Vera was asked to convey a book written by amateur Bukharan Jewish historian Robert Pinkhasov to the Danish Royal Library.



Vera Skvirskaja presenting the book 'Bukharian Jews in the History of Centuries' to the University of Copenhagen library. The hand-over took place at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, UCPH

At the start of 2023, Dr. Paul Anderson travelled to London to give a talk at the Islamic College in Willesden Green. Examining Syrian and Arab trading networks, including those with connections to Istanbul, and the significance or otherwise of religion and ethnicity to their durability and cohesion, the event was attended by a mixture of postgraduates and faculty at the Islamic College, school educators and governors and students from the University of Cambridge - <https://islamic-college.ac.uk/monthly-seminar-new-silk-road/>

Methodology

It is the aim of this project to produce new understandings of diaspora, perspectives on urban heritage, and histories of cosmopolitanism. Afterlives will bring new theoretical and methodological perspectives to bear on processes of heritage and identity, by exploring the role that historic yet transformed urban centres play as vital sources of contemporary identity and imagination, asking how the heritagisation of urban centres has inflected diasporic relationships between ethno-religious minority migrants and Muslim migrants in the cities in which they currently live. We will -

- Generate empirical data on temporal and geographic dispersal from the selected cities
- Investigate how projects of imagination are produced and sustained, and explore how they transcend and reinforce religious, sectarian, national and ethnic boundaries
- Explore interreligious commercial relationships
- Research the 'doing' of connectivity, and, more generally, the role played by tacit modes of acting across lines of difference in sustaining cultural and religious sensibilities of urban living

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Academic Engagement Activities



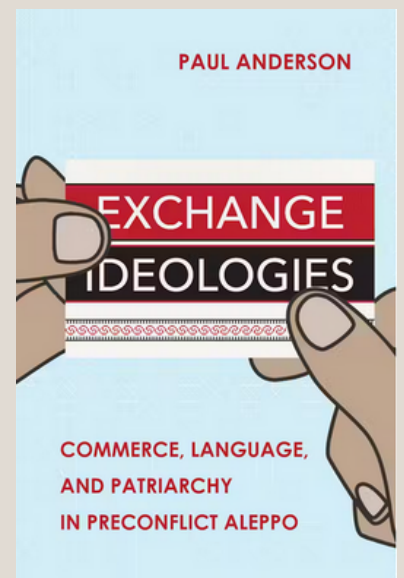
During a fieldwork trip to London in Nov. 2022, the team met up in Southall to discuss and share their initial research findings with community organisations, including the Afghan EKTA cultural association and Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar. They also visited the Afghan Islamic Cultural Centre in Neasden and discussed the project's aims and goals with Imams and mosque officials.

The end of 2022 saw the team involved with a number of academic engagement activities at home and abroad. At a meeting of the CAT (Cambridge Anthropology-Theology) Network, Cambridge, Dr. Anderson joined Divinity faculty's Hina Khalid for a talk on 'The Transcendent Interlocutor: A conversation between Islamic Theology and the Anthropology of Islam', and to give a presentation about his early ethnographic research findings.

At the University of British Columbia in Nov. 2022, Prof. Marsden was speaking with postgrad students about the project, its initial findings and relations to events currently unfolding in Afghanistan - <https://anth.ubc.ca/events/event/save-the-date-coffee-hour-with-visiting-scholar-magnus-marsden-tba/>

In March 2023, Dr. Skvirskaja delivered a lecture at the Folkeuniversitet, Emdrup, Copenhagen on the present-day Bukhara, post-Soviet migration patterns and Bukharan Jews in the region - <https://fuau.dk/emdrup/program/arkaeologi-og-historie/centralasien-i-fortid-og-nutid-2312-447>

In Nov. 2022, Magnus addressed an online event in Uzbekistan to talk about his research to an audience of postgraduate students and faculty at the University of World Economic Diplomacy, Tashkent (UWED), many of whom were also active in the field of policy.



Academic Publications

The Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Asian History (Oxford University Press) has published a chapter by Prof. Marsden called "Global Mobile Afghanistan c. 1900–Present." <https://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-702?jsessionid=65FC7610DF4BA7F3A5937C2AA1065321>

April 2023, Dr. Anderson published his book "Exchange Ideologies: Commerce, Language and Patriarchy in Pre-conflict Aleppo" (Cornell University Press). Book presentations were held at SOAS (March), Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (April), Sussex (May) and the at University of Copenhagen (1 June)

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The talk came off the back of two research visits to Uzbekistan made by Magnus in April and August 2022, during which time he visited Bukhara, Samarkand and Tashkent and spent time with members of the Afghan diaspora visiting the country as heritage tourists. In February 2023, Magnus was invited to attend an online ceremony to mark the launch of the University's Institute of Advanced International Studies (AIS). During it, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the AIS and the Global Studies School at Sussex. The event was attended by UWED's leadership team and the Deputy Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan. A special meeting to celebrate the Memorandum also took place at Sussex on the 24th May 2023.

And in the week previous (May 2023), Dr. Anderson visited Sussex for the launch of his book "Exchange Ideologies: Commerce, Language and Patriarchy

in Pre-conflict Aleppo" (Cornell University Press) as part of a wider book presentation tour.

Media & Outreach Publications

A number of media sources have featured articles and pieces from the team, reflecting their research from the project and its wider impact, such as potential for policy-making.

Danish newspaper Information featured an article by Vera and Magnus, entitled "Afghan refugees were well-adjusted and contributed to society in Ukraine," addressing the connections between the refugee crises in Ukraine and Afghanistan and advocating for better recognition of these in the development of refugee policy -

<https://www.information.dk/debat/2022/04/afghanske-flygtninge-veltilpassede-bidrog-samfundet-ukraine>

BBC Persia used a piece by Magnus on their blog, exploring the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Afghans, including Sikhs and Hindus, living in the country -

<https://www.bbc.com/persian/blog-viewpoints-60623835>

Afghanske flygtninge var veltilpassede og bidrog til samfundet i Ukraine

Ukraines arbj- og assimilationspolitik har været 'tilpasset' i praksis, og den afghanske diaspora har kunnet etablere sig og bidrage til lokale landets økonomi og samhænge i Afghanistan. Det kunne vi lære noget af i Danmark, skriver lektor Vera Skvirskaja og professor Magnus Marsden i dette debatindlæg.



Bukharierne i Ukraine fra den afghanske diaspora, indvandre og adlyde lokale domstole - en af de millioner i Ukraine i marts. De afghanske kvinder har længe været en vigtig del af den afghanske diaspora i Danmark. (Foto: Vera Skvirskaja)

Vera Skvirskaja
Magnus Marsden



افغان-اوکراینی‌ها: 'به گونه‌ای ترک می‌کنم که روزی برگردم'

مکتوب مارشمن
استاد دانشگاه ساکسین
۱۵ اسفند - ۱۴ - ۶ فروردین ۱۴۰۳



June 2023, The Bukharian Times published an article by Dr. Skvirskaja titled 'Samarkand's Secret Recipe: Jewish Shashlik'

http://bukhariantimes.org/06_15_2023/mobile/index.html

In a piece co-written by Magnus and Vera for Zentralasien-Analysen, the researchers examine "City and Transnationality in Central Asia. New and old cosmopolitanism as a medium of regional and global popular diplomacy"

<https://www.laender-analysen.de/zentralasien-analysen/157/die-zentralasiatische-stadt-als-transnationaler-raum-neuer-und-alter-kosmopolitismus-als-medium-regionaler-und-globaler/>



During a research trip to Israel in January / February 2023, Prof. Marsden met with the organisers of Afghan Jewish website Afghanim.co.il. The website threw an event to welcome Magnus and requested 2 articles for their webpages. A report of the welcome event, along with the first article - translated into Hebrew and widely read by Afghan Jews living in Israel and in the diaspora - is available online -

<https://www.afghanim-co-il.translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=iw&tl=en&pt=sc>



Magnus with the website organisers

Cambridge University Press' Blogpost recently released an article from Magnus examining the ethno-religious minorities and diaspora of Afghanistan, in light of events unfolding in the country. The blog is titled "More than just a national treasure": Afghanistan's non-Muslim communities in the diaspora" - <http://www.cambridgeblog.org/2023/03/more-than-just-a-national-treasure-afghanistans-non-muslim-communities-in-the-diaspora/>



Policy Engagement

In April 2023, 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.



An article from Magnus called "Beyond State-Centrism, Towards Acknowledging Relationality: Understanding Afghanistan from an Inter-Asian Perspective," appears in Ethnoscripts, Vol. 24, Issue 1

<https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/ethnoscripts/article/view/2008>

The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 40, Issue 2 features an article from Dr. Skvirskaja titled "Research Note: The New Role of a Central Asian Diaspora. The Case of Bukharan Jews and Uzbekistan."

<https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/cjas/article/view/6783>