Islamic History and Thought Lecture Series, The Institute of Ismaili Studies

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Hosted by the Institute of Ismaili Studies (London), the Islamic History and Thought Lecture Series is designed to invite scholars of various international academic institutions, specialising in intellectual, social and political aspects of medieval and early modern Islamic societies, to present and discuss their research.

Please find below the information on the third lecture of the series, which will be delivered online by Dr Edmund Hayes, and will be followed by a discussion with Dr Fârès Gillon (IIS, London).

Agents of the Hidden Imam: Forging Twelver Shi’ism (850-950 CE)

The traditional account of the early occultation-era Imami Shi’i community depicts a series of four agents as mediating for the hidden Imam between 874 and 940 CE. Hitherto, scholarship has taken the authority of these agents for granted. However, to understand the formation of Twelver Shi’ism, we must understand the ways in which the authority of the agents and other community leaders was contested. Then, it becomes clear that there was no inevitable assumption of authority by the agents.

Instead, authority was contested through different social and intellectual fields: including the legal-theological mastery of scholars; the institutional power of the agents; the leverage of courtiers operating within the supposedly hated Sunni government; and the appeal of charismatic esoteric “gateways” (bāb) to the divine. The crisis of Occultation was contested through institutions, but also caused them to mutate as they were applied to legitimize new models for the era without a visible Imam.

Thursday 22 April 2021
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm GMT

To attend the online lecture, please register here.

Contact Email: