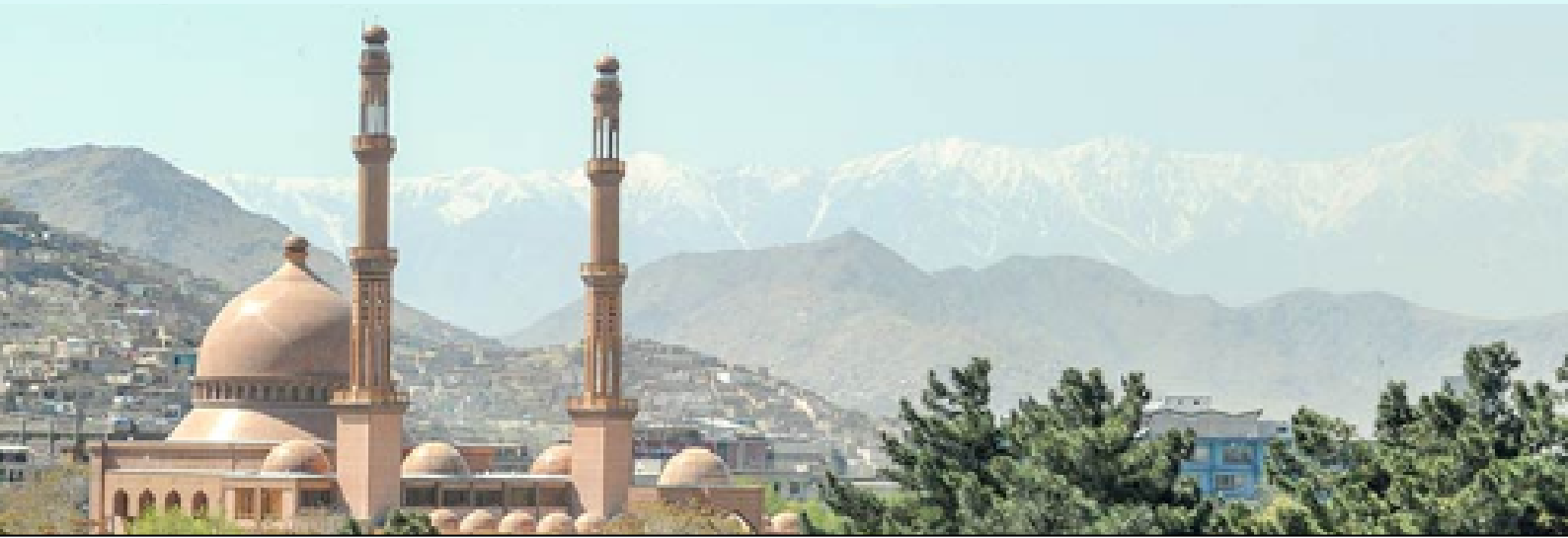


THE AFTERLIVES OF URBAN MUSLIM ASIA: ALTERNATIVE IMAGINARIES OF SOCIETY AND POLITY



## Introduction

Welcome to the fourth, and final, edition of the Afterlives of Muslim Asia Newsletter.

The project began back in January 2022 and, as it draws to a close, the researchers are working hard to bring together their research that will help shine a light on the vibrant lives of the diaspora communities, especially those who contributed so wonderfully to the project throughout its lifespan.

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. Our project photographer is Moska Najib.

## Public & Academic Engagement

On October 23rd, Magnus Marsden presented a talk to the Forum for Uzbek and Silk Road studies organised by Westminster International University Tashkent. The title of his talk was *"This crazy but completely fascinating business: The Karakul Trade in London and Beyond, 1924-1970."*

On 15th November, Magnus presented another seminar at the Sussex Asia Centre (University of Sussex), where he is Director, entitled *"After the Silk Road: the Karakul Fur Trade and the World."*

This was shortly followed by another talk on 18th November that Magnus gave to students at Varndean College in Brighton about the *Afterlives* project and its insights into understanding Afghanistan's place in the modern world.

*"Belonging Flexibly"* - the photographic exhibition has travelled to Copenhagen, Denmark

In November, Moska Najib travelled to Copenhagen to curate the exhibition at the Royal Danish Library, South Campus. The exhibition was sponsored by the Asian Dynamic Initiative at the University of Copenhagen. At the opening, it was welcomed by Dr. Trine Brox, Head of Research at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies. Vera introduced the "Afterlives" project to an audience that included members of the Danish Afghan community. The opening also featured a talk between Moska and Professor Mette Sandbye from the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, who specializes in photography and memory in contemporary art and society more broadly. Professor Sandbye highlighted the ground-breaking nature of the Afterlives project in that it has brought a professional photographer on board for the ethnographic research project and acknowledged the importance of visual storytelling from the start.

The exhibition will remain on display until mid-January 2025.



Above: Mette (left) with project photographer Moska (middle) and Vera (right) at the "Belonging Flexibly" exhibition, Copenhagen



Left: Vera addressing attendees and media at the opening of the exhibition, Copenhagen

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On Tuesday 10th December 2024 Magnus was invited to the Farsi Action Foundation office in Uxbridge to discuss his research on the Karakul fur trade. He was fortunate to meet several people from northern Afghanistan in London who were active in the Karakul trade in the 1980s and 1990s.



Above: Magnus at the Farsi Action Foundation

## Fieldwork

Between the 1st and 4th December, Magnus visited Leipzig and Berlin for some end of project fieldwork. In Leipzig he consulted documents relating to the Karakul fur trade in the State archives and visited sites of historical importance to the trade. In Berlin, he held a meeting with staff at the Haus der Kulturen Der Welt who have commissioned him to write a book chapter exploring the relevance of his work for the *Afterlives* project to the forthcoming exhibition "*Musafiri: Travellers and Guests.*"



Above: Magnus stood outside the Leipzig State Archives, Leipzig, Germany



Above: Thorer Villa. The Villa was constructed by Curt Thorer in 1897. The Thorer family were the leading traders in Karakul fur in Leipzig from the middle of the nineteenth century until World War II. In the early 1900s, they also opened offices in Tashkent.

Magnus has spent his research time in the final months of the project conducting archival research into the trade in Karakul furs. Having explored documents in the India Office Records (British Library), the Hudson's Bay Company (Manitoba Archives) and the National Archives (Kew) he sifted through the professional journals of the fur trade in order to glean insights into the dynamics of the trade in Karakul skins and the role of actors from Central Asia and Afghanistan in it between the 1920s and the 1970s. Magnus has read in particular consecutive issues across this period of the *British Fur Trade* and *Fur Review* journals in the British Library and consulted the *Women's Wear Daily* available at UCL Library. Magnus has also held meetings with people from Afghanistan involved in the fur trade in the 1980s who currently live in London, including people from villages in which the sheep were raised and a former executive of the Pashtany Tijorati Bank that financed traders involved in the export of Karakul skins between the 1950s and 1980s.



Right: Magnus visiting the Haus der Kulturen Der Welt in Berlin, Germany

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Meanwhile Vera conducted fieldwork in several locations in Uzbekistan, focusing on the former Jewish neighbourhoods in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara, as well as the reconstruction and maintenance of Jewish cemeteries. The centrally located former Jewish mahalla in Tashkent has become a popular destination for affluent foreigners and, more recently, Chinese property investors, rapidly altering the visual character of the neighbourhood. In Samarkand, the new owners of former Jewish properties have reconstructed old buildings (some classified by UNESCO as cultural heritage) to make them livable and/or adapt them to different cultural aesthetics and commercial demands.



Above: Graves at an old Bukharan Cemetery



Above: A Chinese hotel, in the former Jewish mahalla (neighbourhood), Tashkent

The Jewish cemeteries have undergone significant gentrification, financed by the global Bukharan Jewish diaspora and, in the case of the city of Bukhara, supported by the regional administration. This gentrification has, however, not only improved the cemeteries' infrastructure and taken care of abandoned graves but has also generated new tensions regarding entitlements, reconstruction templates and the distribution of resources.



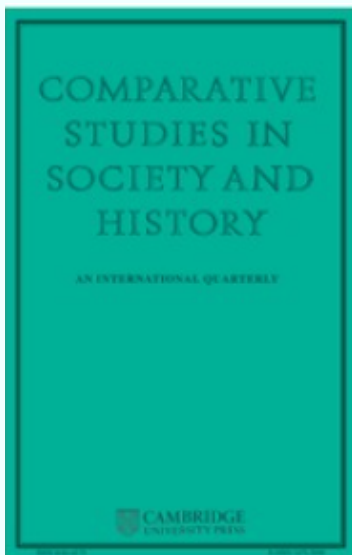
Right: A new Uzbek owner of a former Jewish property in the mahalla Shark shows Vera her new book about her noble family's history

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## Publications

At the end of October, Magnus had an article published titled “*Beyond Long-Distance Nationalism: Khorasan and the Re-imagination of Afghanistan*,” by Cambridge University Press. The article explores the geographical imagination of diasporic activists from Afghanistan. It examines the significance of the historic-geographic region of Khorasan for their attempts to re-imagine Afghanistan and its place in the region and wider world. The article is available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/comparative-studies-in-society-and-history/article/beyond-longdistance-nationalism-khorasan-and-the-reimagination-of-afghanistan/F01A5C2E324408822523A0CA82F471FD>



Over the course of 2024, two Research Reports have been published: “*The Social Institutions of the United Kingdom’s ‘Afghan’ Communities*” and “*The Transformation of Afghanistan’s Commercial Networks Post 2021*.” A third and final report titled “*Non-Muslim Heritage of Muslim Asia*” is in the final stages of being produced by the researchers. The reports pull together the findings of the research team and offer recommendations to policy-makers and relevant institutions and organisations.

Magnus, Paul and Vera are currently completing a draft of a major monograph that reports on research undertaken for the project and is tentatively entitled ‘*The Afterlives of Urban Cosmopolitanism in Muslims Asia*’. Magnus has recently completed a draft of an 80,000-word single-authored book tentatively entitled ‘*The Sheep Road: Karakul Fur and the Globalisation of Modern Central Asia*’.

Project photographer, Moska Najib, has been working alongside the researchers to create a vibrant website based around the “*Belonging Flexibly*” exhibition. The website will feature photographs and visual material collected over the course of the project, along with research findings and information about the communities who participated in the project. It also features a digital archive containing numerous oral interviews, recorded by the researchers, of the first-hand experiences of the research participants, along with transcripts.

On the *Afterlives* project webpage, video interviews with alumni of the Whittingehame Boys School reunion, that took place in Brighton in September 2023, can be viewed, featuring the reflections of the alumni who studied back in the 1950s and 1960s.



Above: New, Muslim interior design in the former Jewish mahalla ‘Shark’.

## 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



## Publications

### REPORTS AND WORKING PAPERS

[The social institutions of the United Kingdom's "Afghan" communities](#)

Sussex Asia Centre. Oct. 2024  
Co-authors: Marsden, M., Khan, R.

[The transformation of Afghanistan's commercial networks post 2021: perspectives from the region](#)

Sussex Asia Centre. Sept. 2024  
Co-authors: Marsden, M.,

[Non-Muslim Heritage of Muslim Asia](#)

Sussex Asia Centre. Dec. 2024  
Co-authors: Anderson, P., Marsden, M., Skvirskaja, V.

### ARTICLES

[Foreword](#) (Special Issue, Journal)

The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies 41(2). 9 May 2024  
Co-authors: Anderson, P., Marsden, M., Skvirskaja, V.

[A Circulation Society, Reconsidered: Syrian Jewish Merchant Networks After the Exodus from Aleppo](#)

The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies. 31 Aug. 2024  
Co-authors: Anderson, P.

[Beyond long-distance nationalism: Khorasan and the re-imagination of Afghanistan](#)

Comparative Studies in Society and History, Cambridge University Press. 31 Oct. 2024  
Co-authors: Marsden, M.

[The legacies of Afghanistan's urban cosmopolitanism: Sikhs, Muslims and markets in London](#)

Afghanistan: Journal of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies 7(1):22-45, Edinburgh University Press. April 2024  
Co-authors: Marsden, M.

[The merchant networks of Afghan Sikhs: The Cold War, its legacies and beyond](#)

Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies 41(2), University of Copenhagen. 29 Feb. 2024  
Co-authors: Marsden, M.

[Twisted Trajectories and Jewish-Muslim Interfaces: Bukharan Jews of Central Asia in Vienna](#)

The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies 41(2): 57-81, DOI: 10.22439/cjas.v41i2.7107. 2023  
Co-authors: Skvirskaja, V.

[Adjusting scales: Jewish trading networks in and beyond Afghanistan, 1950-present-day](#)

History and Anthropology, Taylor & Francis. 19 Dec. 2023  
Co-authors: Marsden, M.

[Beyond state-centrism, towards acknowledging relationality: understanding Afghanistan from an inter-Asian perspective](#)

Ethnoscripts 24(1), Institute of Ethnology at the University of Hamburg. 13 Dec. 2022



## Publications

### CHAPTERS

#### Tensions in the art of Afghan hospitality

The Central Asian World 800 pages, Routledge. 12 Oct. 2023

Co-authors: Marsden, M.

#### Intellectual exchanges in muslim asia: Intersections of history and geography

An Anthropology of Intellectual Exchange: Interactions, Transactions and Ethics in Asia and Beyond, 113-137. 15 Sept. 2023

Co-authors: Marsden, M.

#### Introduction: an anthropology of intellectual exchange

An Anthropology of Intellectual Exchange: Interactions, Transactions and Ethics in Asia and Beyond 15: 396 pages, Berghahn. Sept. 2023

Co-authors: Long, N., Copeman, J., Cook, J., Chau, L., Marsden, M.

#### Stadt und Transnationalität in Zentralasien. Neuer und Alter Kosmopolitismus als Medium regionaler und globaler Volksdiplomatie

Zentralasien-Analysen (157): 2-5 Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen. 5 April 2023

Co-authors: Marsden, M., Skvirskaja, V.

#### Global mobile Afghanistan, c1900 to the present

Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History, Oxford University Press. 21 Dec. 2022

Co-authors: Marsden, M.