



President's Message

The American Institute for Afghanistan Studies has for the past twenty years played a vital role in expanding the scope of research on and about Afghanistan and served an ever-larger number of scholars, both Afghan and international. During this period AIAS became a home for a whole new generation of scholars across a wide range of disciplines, so much so that we have been able to sustain for many years the first peer reviewed journal devoted to Afghanistan that includes contributions from both the humanities and social sciences.

While the collapse of the Republic and return of the Taliban in 2021 has upended many lives and brought new suffering to Afghanistan, it has not broken our commitment to its people.

Since I began my study of the country in the 1970s, I have seen seven governments with very different ideologies come to power and none has been able to bring stability to Afghanistan. Despite this political instability, the Afghan people have never lost their unity, pride in their culture, or resilience in the face of difficulties.

Scholarly research on Afghanistan remains vital to understanding its people, culture and politics in good times and bad. With this new newsletter AIAS seeks to broaden the connections within the scholarly community, whose members have much to contribute to the future of Afghanistan, as well as make their work better known to the rest of the world.

Thomas Barfield
President, AIAS

Country Director's note

I am writing this update with a heavy heart: nearly four years after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, women and girls remain banned from pursuing secondary and higher education. The ruling Taliban regime has been discouraging academic scholarship within the country by replacing qualified professional scholars and teachers with semi-literate clerics. The ruling group has also made significant changes to school curricula, restricting or banning the study of a wide range of academic subjects.

The mass exodus of Afghan scholars, university lecturers, activists, and researchers following the return of the Taliban regime, has further deteriorated Afghanistan's academia. Scholars, professors and educators continue to leave the country due to the Taliban's repression and authoritarianism. Many research institutions, including the Kabul office of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), have either had to close or forced to cease all their operations.

Despite immense challenges, Afghan researchers and scholars continue their work, offering a glimmer of hope for Afghanistan and its scholarly community. AIAS is proud to be among the very few organizations which continues its operations in exile to support scholarship on Afghanistan despite facing enormous challenges.

As a member of AIAS, I am proud to say that we continue to be one of the leading organizations for academic workshops, seminars and colloquia that allow Afghan and international scholars to present their research and exchange ideas. AIAS continues to provide various fellowship opportunities for scholars conducting work within the field of Afghanistan studies.

Through this newsletter, I am excited to share AIAS's work and broaden our network within the Afghan and international scholarly community to continue the vital work of preserving and developing Afghanistan studies.

Omar Sharifi
Country Director, AIAS

Who are we?

The American Institute for Afghanistan Studies is a private, scholarly institution founded in 2003 to support research on all aspects of Afghanistan's history and culture and to promote scholarly ties between Afghanistan and the United States. Since 2008, the Institute has been a member of the [Council of American Overseas Research Centers](#) (CAORC).

Read more about our objectives and bylaws [HERE](#).

AIAS JFR Fellowships 2025

Every year, AIAS awards a series of fellowships through the John F. Richards Fellowship program. In this edition of newsletter, we have featured our John F. Richards 2025 fellowship recipients.

No	Name	Affiliation	Education Level	Research
1	Bashir Mobasher	American University	Post Doc/Junior Lecturer	A History of Recurring Tragedy: Examining Cycles of Instability in Afghanistan
2	Munazza Ebtikar	University of Oxford	Doctoral Candidate	Gendered Dimensions of Memory Politics in Wartime Afghanistan
3	Maegan Taylor	University of Oklahoma	Graduate Student	Afghan Community in Oklahoma City: Creating Belonging and Home Through Material and Visual Culture
4	Nasema Zeerak	University of Minnesota	Doctoral Candidate	Afghanistan as Method: War, Peace, and Resistance from the Margins
5	Omar Sadr	University of Pittsburgh	Ph.D.	Human Rights and Sharia Controversy in Afghanistan
6	Sohrob Aslami	Syracuse University	Doctoral Candidate	The Work of Urban Dreams: A Critical Political Economy of the Kabul New City Project
7	Sarajuddin Isar	Radboud University Nijmegen	Post Doc/Ph.D.	Negotiating Taxation: A Comparative Analysis of Tax Administration under the Republic and the Taliban (2001-2025)

About recipients:

1. Bashir Mobasher

Bashir is a Postdoctoral Fellow at American University in Washington, D.C., and an adjunct faculty member at New York University's Washington, D.C. campus. He has been awarded the John F. Richards 2025 Award to support research for his forthcoming book on the recurring cycles of instability in Afghanistan.

The book explores four key cycles: the repeated emergence of rentier regimes, the politics of exclusion, the pursuit of an ideal Islamic state, and the centralization of power. Through this analysis, the work aims to shed light on the roots of Afghanistan's ongoing crises and offer insights into the potential consequences if these destructive patterns persist under current and future leadership.

2. Munazza Ebtikar

Munazza is a Doctoral Candidate in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford. She has been awarded the John F. Richards 2025 Award to support the dissemination of her research on women's memory practices in Afghanistan.

The funding will specifically support her presentations at two major academic conferences: the American Anthropological Association (AAA) Annual Meeting in New Orleans and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Her presentations will share findings from extensive fieldwork in Afghanistan and follow-up digital ethnography conducted after the fall of the

Islamic Republic in 2021, highlighting how women's memory practices have evolved from wartime experiences within Afghanistan to exilic contexts abroad.

3. Maegan Taylor

Maegan is a Master of Arts student in Socio-Cultural Anthropology at the University of Oklahoma. She has been awarded the John F. Richards 2025 Award to support her research on how Afghans cultivate a sense of home and connection to family, history, and tradition in everyday life.

Her study focuses specifically on homemaking, material culture, and visual culture among Afghan communities in Oklahoma City, United States.

4. Nasema Zeerak

Nasema is a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. She has been awarded the John F. Richards 2025 Award in support of her doctoral dissertation research, which seeks to deepen our understanding of war and its associated forms of violence from the perspective of those who experience it directly.

Focusing on the case of Afghanistan, her work explores how Afghans make meaning of war through literature, art, poetry, and memoir—both published and unpublished—in Dari/Farsi and Pashto. Her dissertation highlights the intellectual and creative contributions of Afghans in shaping knowledge and meaning within our shared social world.

5. Omar Sadr

Omar holds a PhD from South Asian University. He has been awarded the John F. Richards 2025 Award to support his research on the contested interpretations of human rights among various Islamic groups and actors during Afghanistan's Third Republic (2001–2021).

His study employs a mixed-methods approach—integrating historical, philosophical, and empirical analysis—and centers on four case studies across key domains: women's rights, children's rights, freedom of conscience (including issues of blasphemy and apostasy), and corporal punishment.

6. Sohrob Aslamy

Sohrob is a Doctoral Candidate in Geography and the Environment at Syracuse University. He has been awarded the John F. Richards 2025 Award in support of his doctoral dissertation, which investigates the planning and implementation of “Kabul New City” (KNC), or Kabul-e Jadeed (کابل جدید)—a large-scale urban development initiative on the outskirts of Kabul.

His research offers a new perspective on the complexities of state-building, economic reconstruction, and urban development in post-2001 Afghanistan. The dissertation focuses on the work behind the urban vision of the KNC project—examining the actions, negotiations, challenges, and motivations of the managers, planners, and public employees involved in its realization.

7. Sarajuddin Isar

Sarajuddin is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. He has been awarded the John F. Richards 2025 Award to support his research on tax administration under both the Republic and the Taliban (2001–2025).

His study will analyze the evolution of taxation policies and political settlements before and after 2021, with a particular focus on how shifting power dynamics have shaped both formal and informal taxation practices. The research aims to identify the key drivers behind these changes and offer insights into the broader political economy of governance in Afghanistan across regimes.

About AIAS Fellowships:

AIAS offers a variety of [fellowship](#) opportunities for scholars conducting work within the field of Afghanistan studies. These fellowships can be used towards short-term projects or other research programs to advance scholarship on Afghanistan.

The Richards Fellowship program is named in honor of belated Professor John F. Richards, one of the founding members of AIAS and a proponent of scholarship on South Asia.

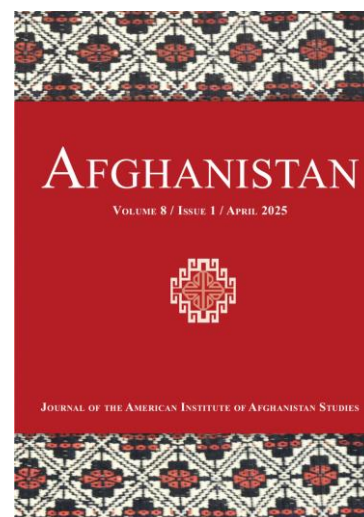
Publications

Afghanistan Journal with Edinburgh University Press

The Journal's Volume 8, Issue 01, published in April 2025, is now available online and is open access. In this volume, you can read the following content:

Articles:

- *The Afghan Jamiat-i Islami's Aims, Ideology, and Discourse in the 1980s* by Elisa Giunchi. Access [HERE](#).
- *Internal Colonialism and Ethnocultural Alienation: A Case Study of Hazaras in Afghanistan* by Sayed Reza Hussaini. Access [HERE](#).
- *Migration and its Impact on Ritual Performance: The Shughnani Ismaili Diaspora of Montréal and the Ceremony of Chirāgh-i Rāwshan* by Murid Shah Nadiri. Access [HERE](#).
- *From "Unruly" to "Peaceful and Law-Abiding": Writing Punishment in Afghanistan, 1901–1919* by Sabauon Nasser. Access [HERE](#).



Cover of the *Afghanistan Journal*, Volume 8, Issue 01

Recent Books relating to Afghanistan

- Bhalla, A.S. *Art of Ancient India and the Aegean. Fortuitous Parallels or Cultural Contacts?* Oxford: Archaeopress, 2024.
- Cottrell, Stephen, Dafni Tragaki, and Stephen Wilford, eds. *Ethnomusicology and Its Intimacies: Essays in Honour of John Baily*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024.
- Csirkes, Ferenc, and Benedek Péri, eds. *Mongols, Tatars, and Turks in the Persianate World. Essays in Honor of István Vásáry*. Leiden: Brill, 2025.
- Farrington, Anthony J., and Penelope Tuson, eds. *British Intelligence on Afghanistan and Its Frontiers, c. 1888–1946*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.
- Féaux de la Croix, Jeanne, and Madeleine Reeves, eds. *The Central Asian World*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024.
- Hyland, John, and Khodadad Rezakhani, eds. *Brill's Companion to War in the Ancient Iranian Empires*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.
- Kotyk, Jeffrey. *Sino-Iranian and Sino-Arabian Relations in Late Antiquity*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.
- Kreutzmann, Hermann. *Pamirian Crossroads and Beyond. Human Geography and Geopolitics*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.
- Kuwayama, Shoshin. *Collected Articles on Ancient Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan*. Kyoto: Rinsen, 2024.
- Nölle-Karimi, Christine, et al. eds. *Literary Modernity in the Persophone Realm: A Reader*. Sitzungsberichte (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse); vol. 942. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2024.
- Rahiminezhad, Vida, and Faeze Mohammadianroshan. *Diaspora, Literature, and Writing of Afghan Lives in Iran*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2024.
- Thomas, David, and John Chesworth, eds. *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Volume 20. Iran, Afghanistan and the Caucasus (1800–1940)*. Leiden: Brill 2023.

- Wang, Helen, and Robert Bracey, eds. *Look at the Coins! Papers in Honour of Joe Cribb on his 75th Birthday*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2023.
- Wink, André. *Al Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World. Volume IV: Age of the Great Mughals, 16th–17th Centuries. Part One: Afghans and Mughals in the Struggle*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.
- Wordsworth, Paul D. *Moving in the Margins: Desert Travel and Power in Medieval Central Asia*. Leiden: Brill, 2024.
- Wyndham, Constance. *A New Politics of Heritage Reconstruction in Afghanistan: In the Shadow of the Buddhas*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024.

About Afghanistan Journal

Afghanistan is the [journal](#) of The American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, dedicated to the cross-cultural study of Afghanistan and its surrounding regions. It explores Afghanistan's rich history from a variety of humanities-focused perspectives, covering subjects such as history, art, archaeology, architecture, geography, numismatics, literature, religion, social sciences, and contemporary issues from both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods.

Afghanistan Studies bridges Near Eastern, Central Asian, and South Asian Studies, publishing articles that connect these areas' pre-modern histories and cultures. The journal aims to engage scholars and students with the region's rich past, highlighting Afghanistan's role in major cultures and empires throughout history and its significant architectural and art-historical legacy.

You can submit your work to the Afghanistan Journal. A quick submission guide is available [HERE](#).

Events & Updates

Nowruz* and Politics: From Ritual Appropriation to Identity Reclamation

Dr. Omar Sharifi, Country Director of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), participated as an expert speaker in a virtual webinar titled “*Nowruz and Politics: From Ritual Appropriation to Identity Reclamation*,” organized by the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) on March 23, 2025.



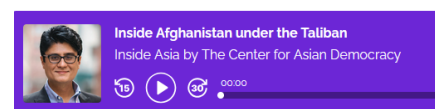
Photo of the webinar @AISS

The panel brought together historians, poets, academics, and political voices from Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan to explore the political and cultural dimensions of Nowruz. Dr. Sharifi emphasized that in Afghanistan, Nowruz is the only celebration that has endured across communities—transcending language, sect, and political divides. He highlighted how, in Mazar-e Sharif, people mark Nowruz at the shrine of Ali not in opposition to religion, but through it. “*For them, Nowruz is part of faith, but not of ideology*,” he noted. “*Nowruz is where faith, culture, and time are not at odds, but in union*,” he added.

*Nowruz (نوروز, meaning “New Day”) marks the first day of the solar new year, typically falling between March 19 and March 22 on the Gregorian calendar. Rooted in Zoroastrianism, Nowruz has been celebrated for over 3,000 years by diverse communities across West and Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Black Sea Basin, the Balkans, and South Asia.

Inside Afghanistan under the Taliban

Dr. Omar Sharifi, Country Director of AIAS, joined the podcast hosted by the Center for Asian Democracy at the University of Louisville to analyze Taliban rule and reflect on his work to strengthen democracy in Afghanistan. He specifically discussed how Taliban governance compares to earlier periods of power and explores lessons learned from the failures of the republic period (2001-2021) in the country.



You can listen to the podcast by clicking [HERE](#).

Governance & Empire in Afghanistan: Contemporary Lessons from History

Dr. Thomas Barfield, President of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies (AIAS), was invited as an academic speaker by the Center for Asian Democracy at the University of Louisville on January 15, 2025. His talk, titled “*Governance and Empire in Afghanistan: Contemporary Lessons from History*,” explored the historical roots of political authority and instability in Afghanistan.



Dr. Thomas Barfield @Boston University

Addressing the question of why the British, Soviets, and Americans found Afghanistan easy to invade but difficult to govern, Dr. Barfield argued that a deeper understanding of how Afghans historically governed themselves—often maintaining stability without reliance on violence—is essential to envisioning future prospects for peace and effective governance. He examined the factors that have made Afghanistan both stable and unstable over time, discussed varying perspectives on government legitimacy, and shared lessons drawn from different historical periods.

You can watch the full talk [HERE](#).

Nationalism and Nation State in Afghanistan

Dr. Omar Sharifi, Country Director of AIAS, joined the podcast Kitchen Talks with Waheed Omer to discuss nationalism and the concept of the nation-state in Afghanistan. He addressed questions such as: Are we a nation? and Is there a national identity? The conversation, conducted in Persian/Dari, runs for 1 hour and 18 minutes.



The Interview cover image @Kitchen Talks

You can watch the full episode [HERE](#). Dr. Sharifi's earlier discussion on the same podcast, focusing on Nowruz, is also available to watch [HERE](#).

Central Asia Information Aspire

Dr. Omar Sharifi, Country Director of AIAS, participated in the Central Asia Information Aspire event, a platform dedicated to fostering nuanced dialogue on Afghanistan and Central Asia. The event aimed to bridge rigorous academic analysis of Afghanistan with accessible public discourse, ensuring that insights resonate broadly while maintaining scholarly integrity.

How to become an AIAS member?

Members of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies are connected to a growing network of American and foreign scholars interested in promoting scholarship in Afghanistan. Members also receive exclusive rates and access to AIAS facilities. You or your institution can become a member.

For more information, please click [HERE](#).

Stay in Touch!



Visit Us:

Boston University
232 Bay State Rd, #426
Boston, MA 02215 USA

Get in Touch:

Email: americaninstituteofafghanistan@gmail.com
Phone: +1 (617) 358-4649