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THE CENTER FOR ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION IN UZBEKISTAN: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Abstract. *This article discusses the recently established Center for Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan. It seeks to depict the Center as a mirror of Central Asian heritage in science and the arts, as well as its rich cultural dimension. The article clarifies the role and importance of the Center for Uzbekistan and its people as a major cultural site and a driver of economic and intellectual development.*

Keywords: *Center for Islamic Civilization, Islamic Renaissance, scholars, Uzbekistan, Third Renaissance.*

INTRODUCTION

The process of state-building in modern Uzbekistan is inextricably linked to a profound understanding of its historical path and to the institutionalization of mechanisms for preserving its cultural code. One of the most large-scale and significant projects in this area is the Center for Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan. This organization is a complex, synthetic structure combining the functions of a research institute, museum, archive, library, and educational platform. In the context of the development of the “New Uzbekistan” strategy, the Center’s activities are viewed not simply as museum work, but as a fundamental basis for implementing the concept of the Third Renaissance, designed to actualize the achievements of the past in addressing the challenges of the future.

Researching the Center’s activities requires going beyond a narrow art-historical or religious analysis. It is a complex historical and political phenomenon, in which material artifacts – such as ancient manuscripts and architectural forms – serve as vehicles for the state ideology of enlightened Islam and scientific progress. The Center’s transformation into a scientific and educational center in 2021, pursuant to Resolution No. PP-5186, marked a shift from passive preservation to the active generation of meanings aimed at widely promoting the idea of a “Third Renaissance – New Uzbekistan.”

The concept of the Third Renaissance is central to understanding the Center’s mission. Historical analysis allows us to identify two previous periods of flourishing that laid the foundation for regional identity and made a decisive contribution to global science. The First Renaissance (9th–12th centuries) was characterized by the rapid development of the exact sciences, philosophy, and theology; the names of Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, Ahmad al-Farghani, Abu Rayhan Beruni, and Ibn Sina became synonymous with the scientific progress of the time (Ganiyev, 2023:355). The Second Renaissance (14th–15th centuries), associated with the Timurid era, led to a flourishing of architecture, astronomy, and the fine arts, shaping the unique image of Maverannahr as a global intellectual center.

The Center for Islamic Civilization acts as an intellectual bridge connecting these historical layers with the present. Its goal is not to mechanically replicate past achievements, but to identify the keys to that success: the synergy of secular and religious knowledge, openness to international dialogue, and state support for education. In scholarly literature, the Center’s work is interpreted as an attempt to revitalize classical values in the context of globalization.

Table 1. Comparative characteristics of the stages of historical revival in Uzbekistan

| Parameter | First Renaissance (9th–12th c.) | Second Renaissance (14th–15th c.) | Third Renaissance (modern stage) |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Key disciplines | Algebra, astronomy, medicine, hadith studies | Architecture, poetry, applied arts, astrometry | Digital science, innovative education, enlightened Islam |
| Institutional forms | Bayt al-Hikma, Bukhara library | Ulughbek Observatory, Registan Madrasah | Center for Islamic Civilization, Academy of Sciences, IT parks |
| Geopolitical context | Formation of the Great Silk Road | The Timurid Empire; a cultural synthesis of East and West | Development strategy of the “New Uzbekistan”; international integration |

Institutional Development and Mission

The Center’s institutional development has gone through several stages. The initial idea, conceived in 2017, envisioned the creation of a museum and library. However,

the scale of the tasks required deeper integration into the country's scientific system. Presidential Decree No. PP-5186 of July 16, 2021, "On additional measures to further improve the activities of the Center for Islamic Civilization" (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2021), marked a turning point. The document established the Center as the primary institution responsible for scientific research into the rich heritage of Islam and its role in the development of Central Asian civilization.

The Center's updated mission includes preparing media products, creating research resources for young people, and developing a library system with access to global collections. A key innovation is the creation of an expert commission to develop museum exhibits, which guarantees the high scientific quality of the presented material and prevents simplified, journalistic interpretations of facts.

According to the legislation, the Center operates in several interconnected areas:

- **Research vector:** the study of manuscripts, archaeological finds, and archival documents to reconstruct an objective picture of the historical development of the region.
- **Educational vector:** communicating the essence of historical achievements to the general public, especially young people, through modern formats (multimedia, interactive exhibitions).
- **Tourism vector:** training professional guides and interpreters for pilgrimage tourism, possessing in-depth knowledge of Islamic architecture and history.
- **Technological vector:** reviving disappearing crafts such as the production of Samarkand paper and traditional bookbinding.

Main Structures and Departments

- **Museum complex:** halls displaying Islamic heritage, including Qur'an halls.
- **Research departments:** units engaged in the study of manuscripts, the history of Islam, and the contributions of Central Asian thinkers.
- **Library and archive:** a modern repository of manuscripts and books.
- **Restoration center:** a department for the preservation and restoration of ancient manuscripts and museum exhibits.
- **Training and conference rooms:** spaces for seminars, conferences, and educational programs.

The Center also cooperates with international organizations such as UNESCO, the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, and TURKSOY.

The Museum as a Space for Scientific Discourse

Unlike traditional museums, the Center's exhibition is structured according to a chronological principle, with each exhibit serving as part of a larger narrative about the development of human thought. In this context, the Center's exhibits are viewed not only as works of art but also as historical documents.

The Mushaf of Uthman

The central element of the entire collection is the Mushaf of Uthman, one of the oldest surviving copies of the Qur'an. Its significance is multifaceted. Written in Kufic script on parchment, the manuscript serves as a benchmark for the study of early Islamic paleography and epigraphy. In Islam, the Qur'an is not only a sacred text but also a source of inspiration for understanding the world (the verse "Iqra" – "Read"). The exhibition of the Mushaf emphasizes that faith in this region has always gone hand in hand with literacy and scholarship. The manuscript's journey to Tashkent is a separate scholarly topic, linking the history of the Caliphate, Samarkand, and contemporary state policy on the return of national sacred sites.

The Bayt al-Hikma Section and the Legacy of Scholars

An exhibition dedicated to the House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikma) in Baghdad highlights the fact that many of the great minds of the time came from Central Asia. The section on Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, the founder of algebra, not only showcases the instruments of the period but also explains the logic behind the transition from Greek and Indian knowledge to the new mathematical system that formed the basis of modern algorithms.

Research into the achievements of Ahmad al-Farghani in astronomy and engineering (such as the Nilometer) is linked to the practical needs of the Islamic world for accurate navigation and irrigation. In Islam, knowledge of astronomy was critical for determining prayer times and the direction of Mecca (the Qibla), creating a powerful incentive for the development of science.

The Center as a Global Scientific Hub

The Center for Islamic Civilization positions itself as a global hub, a position supported by numerous memoranda of cooperation with leading international organizations. This extends the Center's activities beyond a national project and makes it part of the global scientific process.

Islamic civilization reached its maturity in the Middle Ages. At a time when some representatives of the Western world regard this period as an age of "darkness," the

peoples of this region experienced an age of light. The American historian of science George Sarton, in his work *Introduction to the History of Science* (1927), divided the development of science into successive half-century periods. For the era spanning 750 to 1100 – some 350 years – he listed the names of leading scholars, and a careful observer will note that these scholars were largely representatives of the Muslim world. Among them – Jabir ibn Hayyan, Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, Abu Bakr al-Razi, al-Masudi, Abul-Wafa, Abu Rayhan Biruni, and Umar Khayyam, who worked in chemistry, mathematics, medicine, geography, astronomy, and the natural sciences – were Arab, Turkic, Afghan, and Persian Muslims.

Collaboration with IRCICA (the Research Center for Islamic History, Art, and Culture) is particularly significant for the academic community. The preparation of a special book-album on reforms in Uzbekistan and the joint meeting of the academic council to select authors for an encyclopedia demonstrate a rigorous academic approach to publishing materials.

In the digital age, the Center actively implements Digital Humanities methods. This approach makes it possible not only to preserve but also to analyze vast amounts of data using algorithms. The process of digitizing manuscripts involves the creation of unified principles for data storage and meta-description.

The Center's media activities for 2025 (over 3,000 materials) amount to more than mere reporting. From a scholarly perspective, they constitute the creation of a digital archive of Uzbekistan's modern history. Publications in international media (178 materials per year) shape the country's image as a center of "enlightened Islam," an important argument in geopolitical discourse. The use of interactive exhibits and multimedia technologies in the Center's halls helps to visualize complex scientific concepts of the past, making them accessible to modern visitors.

Architecture as a Materialization of Scientific Thought

The Center's building, covering over 10 hectares, is itself a subject of study for architectural historians. It does not simply imitate the past but interprets it according to twenty-first-century standards. The height of the dome (65 meters) and of the portals (34 meters) corresponds to the scale of the great buildings of the Karakhanid and Timurid periods, creating a visual continuity. The internal structure of the building is strictly functional and subject to scientific logic: research departments are located in close proximity to the archives in order to optimize the work of scholars; the library and manuscript collection are integrated with digitalization laboratories; and the 460-seat

conference hall can host world-class events comparable to conferences in Cairo or Kuala Lumpur.

CONCLUSION

The focus in studying the Center should shift from describing its external attributes to analyzing its functional contribution to modern historical scholarship. The Center for Islamic Civilization is not a “news item” but an institutional response to society’s demand for the preservation of identity in an era of global change. Established in 2017 on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, it is not a simple institution but an international center specializing in science, culture, and education. It combines the cultural systems of Uzbekistan of the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras with modern computer technologies and scientific heritage.

The unique exhibits collected at the Center clearly demonstrate that Islamic civilization developed through science, education, upbringing, and culture on the basis of centuries of Uzbek cultural tradition. Visitors encounter not only priceless material artifacts but also interactive educational laboratories, virtual exhibitions, “time capsules,” and multilingual digital resources open to everyone around the world. In this sense, the Center embodies the practical realization of the Third Renaissance, linking the intellectual achievements of the past with the developmental goals of the New Uzbekistan.

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