



THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CENTER OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. This article examines the historical, cultural, religious, and intellectual foundations underlying the establishment of the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan at the Hastimom (Hazrati Imom) complex in Tashkent. The central argument is that the choice of this site is not incidental but historically grounded: the Hastimom complex has functioned for centuries as the religious, scholarly, and spiritual heart of Tashkent, and by extension, of the broader Islamic civilization that flourished in Transoxiana. The article provides a historical overview of the complex and its constituent monuments, including the mausoleum of Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Qaffal al-Shashi, the Baroqkhon and Mo'yi Muborak madrasas, and the Namozgoh, Tilla Shaykh, and Hazrati Imom mosques. Drawing on classical Arabic biographical sources, Russian Orientalist scholarship, and contemporary Central Asian research, the study concludes that the Hastimom complex represents a site of continuous and layered historical significance, making it the most appropriate location for an institution dedicated to the study and promotion of Islamic civilization.

Keywords: Tashkent, Shash, Shoshiy, Hastimom (Hazrati Imom), mausoleum of al-Qaffal al-Shashi, Baroqkhon and Mo'yi Muborak madrasas, Namozgoh, Tilla Shaykh and Hazrati Imom mosques, Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

Ancient Transoxiana (*Movarounnahr*) has long been recognized as a region of remarkable scholarly tradition. Shrines and place names associated with its great

thinkers, found across virtually every part of the country, stand as clear evidence of this heritage (Mukhamedov & Turambetov, 2023:322).

Among the scholars born on this soil, figures such as Imam al-Bukhari, Imam al-Tirmidhi, Imam al-Maturidi, Mahmud al-Zamakhshari (Mukhamedov, 2015b:3), and Burhanuddin al-Marghinani made significant contributions to the development of Islamic thought and jurisprudence.

Notably, a large proportion of the major intellectual and scientific works produced during both the First and Second Renaissance periods originated with scholars from this region. The First Renaissance refers to the remarkable flourishing of Islamic science, philosophy, mathematics, and theology that occurred in Transoxiana and the broader Islamic world roughly between the ninth and eleventh centuries – a period during which scholars such as al-Bukhari, al-Tirmidhi, and al-Maturidi produced their foundational works. The Second Renaissance denotes the cultural and intellectual revival of the Timurid period, spanning approximately the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, when Transoxiana once again became a major center of learning, architecture, and the arts under the patronage of the Timurid dynasty. This periodization, while rooted in Uzbek historiographical tradition, broadly corresponds to recognized phases of intellectual efflorescence in the history of Islamic civilization.

This article argues that the establishment of the Center of Islamic Civilization at the Hastimom complex is not an arbitrary institutional decision, but one grounded in over a millennium of continuous religious, intellectual, and cultural significance. The historical evidence examined here demonstrates that Hastimom has functioned as the spiritual and scholarly heart of Tashkent since the medieval period, making it the most historically justified location for an institution dedicated to the study and promotion of Islamic civilization.

The Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan was established at the Hastimom complex in Tashkent, on the initiative of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. The scholars who lived and worked in this land made lasting contributions to Islamic culture and civilization – contributions that are broadly recognized throughout the Muslim world.

The decision to locate the Center of Islamic Civilization adjacent to the Hazrati Imom (Hastimom) architectural complex in Tashkent is grounded in well-established historical, cultural, religious, and intellectual foundations.

METHODS

This study employs a combination of historical-descriptive and comparative analytical methods. Primary sources consulted include classical Arabic biographical dictionaries – among them the works of al-Sam’ani, al-Subki, al-Dhahabi, and Yaqut al-Hamawi – as well as epigraphic evidence from the monuments themselves. Secondary sources encompass Russian Orientalist scholarship, notably the works of V. Barthold and M.E. Masson, alongside contemporary Uzbek and international research on the Hastimom complex. The principles of historicism, source criticism, objectivity, and comparative analysis guided the evaluation and synthesis of these materials. Where primary sources were unavailable or ambiguous, oral historical accounts and architectural evidence were considered as supplementary sources of information.

MAIN PART

The Hazrati Imom shrine, located in the Sebzor *daha* of old Tashkent, is regarded as one of the principal heritage complexes of the capital. The term “Hastimom” is a contracted form of “Hazrati Imom” (the Venerable Imam). The toponym derives from the main shrine situated there – the mausoleum of Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Qaffal al-Shashi (Mukhamedov, 2014:130), a native of Tashkent (ancient Shash) and one of the foremost imams of the Muslim world. The local population came to refer to this place by this name out of deep reverence for Imam al-Qaffal al-Shashi (Muhamedov, 2015a:119). This sacred site served as one of the religious, intellectual, and cultural centers of the historic capital. Indeed, Tashkent is home to numerous historical monuments of Islamic culture, including the mausoleums of Shaykh Khavand Tahur (Mukhamedov & Turambetov, 2025:761), Zangi Ota, Khoja A’lambardor, Suzuk Ota, and Yunus Khan, as well as the Abulqasim and Ko’kalosh madrasas, and sites associated with Khoja Ubaydullah Ahrar Vali and Shaykh Zayniddin.

The Hazrati Imom (Hastimom) complex encompasses a number of historical ensembles, including the Baroqkhon and Mo’yi Muborak madrasas, and the Namozgoh and Tilla Shaykh mosques.

In the late nineteenth century, Tashkent was divided into four administratively independent *dahas* – Beshyoghoch, Ko’kcha, Sebzor, and Shaykhontohur – each

governed separately. The shrine of Imam al-Qaffal al-Shashi (Mukhamedov & Turambetov, 2024:10) and its surrounding area became directly associated with his name and, as noted above, came to be known as Hastimom (Hazrati Imom).

In its time, Hastimom was one of Tashkent's centers of learning, craftsmanship, and trade. This was due in large part to its favorable geographical location and its well-developed irrigation infrastructure – a network of canals and waterways that spread across the area like veins, long admired for their abundance and clarity.

According to historical accounts, the local population had been renowned for goldsmithing, shoemaking, and pottery since the reign of Kaykovus (also referred to in some sources as Kalkovuz), son of Kaykhusraw I, who ruled over this land. The canal running through the area bore the name of Kaykovus. As its clear waters began to flow through the city, the inhabitants also took up animal husbandry, agriculture, and the cultivation of orchards and gardens. In this way, Hastimom gradually developed into a center of craftsmanship, trade, scholarship, and culture.

The late Mufti Ziyovuddinkhon ibn Eshon Bobokhan wrote the following about the Hastimom neighborhood: *“The Hastimom neighborhood, renowned for its association with Imam al-Qaffal al-Shashi, was known in its time as a religious, scholarly, spiritual, and intellectual center of Tashkent. The building currently housing the library of the Religious Administration is the Mo’yi Muborak madrasa. It was given this name because the blessed hair (mo’yi muborak) of the Prophet, peace be upon him, was preserved there for many years. Historical sources record that Khoja Ahrar Vali – one of the foremost figures of the Sufi tradition – taught at this institution of learning. The area encompassing the Mo’yi Muborak madrasa and the Tilla Shaykh mosque was traditionally referred to as ‘Mahvatai mullayon’ – meaning a place surrounded by scholars and men of learning. Local people, slightly altering the pronunciation, have long called it ‘Mahvota.’ Indeed, in the sixteenth century, directly opposite ‘Mahvatai mullayon,’ the ruler known as Baroqkhon – Nawruz Ahmadkhan – constructed the Baroqkhon madrasa. This fact attests to the significant role the Hastimom neighborhood played in the spiritual life of the population”* (Bobohonov, 2001:265).

The Russian Orientalist Nil Lykoshin (Lykoshin, 1918:1) also made a point of mentioning the name of al-Qaffal al-Shashi with great respect at the opening of the Turkestan People's (Muslim) University, established in Tashkent in 1918: *“On*

this joyful day, when European science has gained civic standing in the old part of Tashkent, the image of a devoted and humble figure – one who gave his life in service to the enlightenment of Tashkent’s Muslims – rises before us. I am reminded of Imam Muhammad al-Qaffal al-Shashi, or Hazrat Imom, who is buried in the cemetery of that name in the Sebzor district of the city. Muslims have every reason to take pride in this figure, and today they would do well to remember their first great teacher with words of honor”.

Unfortunately, the atheistic stance of the Soviet regime, which regarded the shrines and sacred sites of previous generations as relics of the past, resulted in the neglect of such places. Nevertheless, the attachment and interest that each citizen carried in their heart toward the history, customs, and culture of their native land never faded. Independence not only brought about the restoration of ancestral sites, but also opened broad opportunities for scholarly research into the lives and intellectual legacy of those who had lived and worked there.

The following section examines each of the principal monuments comprising the Hastimom complex in turn, tracing their individual histories and demonstrating how, collectively, they have sustained the complex’s role as a center of Islamic scholarship, spirituality, and culture from the medieval period to the present day.

The Mausoleum of Abu Bakr al-Qaffal al-Shashi. This scholar, venerated by his contemporaries as «Hazrati Imom» (the Venerable Imam), bore the full name Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Ismail al-Qaffal al-Shashi (904–977). Medieval Arabic sources (al-Sam’ani, 1980:211; al-Subki, 1999:152; al-Dhahabi, 1999:283; al-Hamawi, 1999:116) frequently appended the epithet «kabir» – meaning «great» or «eminent» – to his name as a mark of particular distinction. Al-Qaffal al-Shashi and his scholarly legacy have attracted the attention of both Eastern and Western researchers. The prominent German Orientalist C. Brockelmann, as well as Russian scholars V. Barthold and S. Prozorov (Prozorov, 2000:46), held his intellectual contributions in high regard.

A funerary monument (dakhma) was first erected over the scholar’s grave during the reign of Amir Temur. The current architectural structure in Tashkent was built in 1542 by Amir Baroqkhon.

In the sixteenth century, when the Bukharan Khan Abdullakhan visited Tashkent, he paid his respects at the mausoleum, presented gifts to its attendants, and allocated funds

for its restoration.

The site originally formed part of the Hastimom cemetery complex in the old Modarikhan neighborhood. The central chamber of the complex is now covered by a two-tiered dome. The rear chamber contains a cenotaph. An inscription above the entrance records the year of construction (1541–1542), along with the names of the architect Ghulam Husayn and the calligrapher Qudrat. The mausoleum was restored in 1960.

The largest cenotaph in the western section of the mausoleum's khanqah belongs to Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Qaffal al-Shashi. Four additional cenotaphs are present, with two positioned on either side of the entrance. The doors are double-paneled and decorated with carved ornamentation, with inscriptions in the upper section that have not been well preserved. New doors have since been installed.

The southern section of the mausoleum contains the cenotaphs of contemporary religious scholars: Eshon Bobokhan Abdulmajidkhan, Bahodirkhan Makhsum, and Ziyovuddinkhon Qori Bobohanov.

The Baroqkhon Madrasa. Built in the mid-sixteenth century, the madrasa contains the mausoleum of Suyunchhojakhon within its premises. Archaeological research has established that the Baroqkhon madrasa was constructed in three distinct phases between 1502 and 1770. In 1917, the building was converted into a dormitory, causing considerable damage to its historical appearance. In 1936, it was handed over to the Society for the Blind, and subsequently used as a storage warehouse. From 1950 to 2007, the Baroqkhon madrasa served as the headquarters of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. It is currently under the administration of the Charitable Foundation for the Preservation and Restoration of Sacred Sites, affiliated with the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, and functions as a center for traditional Uzbek craftsmanship.

The Mo'yi Muborak Madrasa. Originally built in the fifteenth century opposite the Baroqkhon madrasa, the structure was later demolished. It was rebuilt in 1856–1857 on the orders of Mirzo Ahmad Qushbegi. The name derives from the fact that a strand of the blessed hair (mo'yi muborak) of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was preserved in a special glass vessel in one of the madrasa's cells. Adjacent to it stood one of the city's congregational mosques, rebuilt on several occasions, now known as the Tilla Shaykh mosque. Historical sources record that Khoja Ahrar Vali, a prominent

figure of the Naqshbandi order, taught at this madrasa. The institution was also known as «Mahvatai mullayon» – a place surrounded by scholars and men of learning. The madrasa currently houses rooms for the preservation of rare manuscripts and books. All cells are covered with arched vaults, and the madrasa originally contained twelve cells in total. The Mushaf of Uthman manuscript (Shaykh Ismail Makhdum, 1995:59) was kept at the madrasa until 2026, when it was transferred to the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan following its establishment.

The Namozgoh Mosque. The exact date of the mosque's construction is not known. It is likely that the mosque was built before Tashkent's incorporation into the Russian Empire in 1865. According to local oral tradition, it was constructed during the reign of the Kokand Khan Khudoyarkhan (1845–1875). It is known that a mosque by the name of Namozgoh had long existed approximately half a kilometer to the southwest of the Ko'kalosh madrasa in Tashkent, with the surrounding neighborhood bearing the same name. The construction of the new Namozgoh during the period of Kokand Khanate rule over Tashkent reflected the city's broader development and growth. The new Namozgoh mosque was relocated closer to the city, and Muslims performed the Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr prayers there. The mosque building is rectangular in plan, divided into nine sections, with a winter prayer hall (khanqah) located in its central section. The building has since been restored and placed under the administration of the Tashkent Islamic Institute, affiliated with the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan.

The Tilla Shaykh Mosque. According to historical records, the Tilla Shaykh congregational mosque was built in 1899 adjacent to the Mo'yi Muborak madrasa. It was constructed by Tillashaykh, a man widely known for his wealth, sense of justice, and generosity.

In his work «Proshloe Tashkenta» (The Past of Tashkent), published in the 1954 issue of the Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, M.E. Masson wrote that the mosque building had been rebuilt on the same site on several occasions.

The mosque has since been restored and today serves as an active place of worship where Muslims perform the five daily prayers.

The Hazrati Imom Congregational Mosque. In 2007, the capital of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, was designated the Capital of Islamic Culture by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), an affiliate of the Organisation of Islamic

Cooperation. On this occasion, the government constructed the grand Hazrati Imom congregational mosque, capable of accommodating nearly five thousand worshippers at one time. The mosque features a portico supported by twenty tall ornately carved sandalwood columns. The building measures 77 by 22 meters, with two tall minarets rising to a height of 53 meters on either side. The complex of twin domes and minarets, an entirely new feature in Islamic architecture, adds further grandeur and distinction to the historical ensembles of the complex.

DISCUSSION

The historical evidence presented in this study demonstrates that the Hastimom complex is not merely a collection of architectural monuments, but a site of continuous and layered civilizational significance spanning more than a millennium. Three broader analytical points emerge from this evidence.

First, the Hastimom complex represents a rare example of uninterrupted sacred geography. Unlike many Islamic heritage sites in Central Asia that were abandoned, repurposed, or destroyed during the Soviet period, the Hastimom complex retained its identity as a center of religious and intellectual life, even if in diminished form. The fact that the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan operated from the Baroqkhon madrasa from 1950 to 2007 – during the height of Soviet atheist policy – is particularly telling. It suggests that the complex held a symbolic weight that even ideological suppression could not entirely erase. This resilience distinguishes Hastimom from other potential sites in Tashkent and lends it a unique historical continuity that no newly constructed venue could replicate.

Second, the complex embodies the intersection of scholarship, spirituality, and civic life that characterizes Islamic civilization at its height. The presence within a single ensemble of a mausoleum, two madrasas, and multiple mosques – each with its own distinct historical trajectory – reflects the classical Islamic model of the city as an integrated space of worship, learning, and community. The mausoleum of al-Qaffal al-Shashi, one of the foremost jurists of the Shafi'i school, stands alongside institutions where the Naqshbandi master Khoja Ahrar Vali taught and where the Uthmanic Mushaf was preserved for centuries. Few sites in the Islamic world can claim such a concentration of scholarly, spiritual, and textual heritage within a single architectural complex.

Third, the establishment of the Center of Islamic Civilization at the Hastimom complex follows a well-established international pattern of anchoring modern institutions of Islamic scholarship to sites of deep historical and religious significance – as seen in Al-Azhar in Cairo, and the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute in Amman. Situating the Center at Hastimom places it within this broader tradition, grounding a modern scholarly institution in a site whose credentials are historically verified rather than institutionally constructed.

Taken together, these three dimensions – historical continuity, civilizational integration, and international comparability – provide a compelling scholarly basis for the establishment of the Center at this location, and suggest that its significance extends well beyond the national context of Uzbekistan into the broader history of Islamic civilization.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the historical, cultural, religious, and intellectual foundations underlying the establishment of the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan at the Hastimom complex in Tashkent. The evidence presented demonstrates that the complex has functioned as a continuous center of Islamic scholarship, spirituality, and civic life for over a millennium – from the medieval period, through the Timurid and Kokand eras, and into the present day. The mausoleum of Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Qaffal al-Shashi, the Baroqkhon and Mo'yi Muborak madrasas, and the Namozgoh, Tilla Shaykh, and Hazrati Imom mosques collectively constitute a layered ensemble of historical significance that no newly constructed venue could replicate.

The survival of this complex through the Soviet period of active atheist policy, and its subsequent restoration following Uzbekistan's independence, further attests to the enduring depth of its significance in the religious and cultural consciousness of the population.

The establishment of the Center of Islamic Civilization at the Hastimom complex is a historically grounded decision that draws on more than a thousand years of continuous scholarly and spiritual tradition. In situating a modern institution of Islamic civilization at Hastimom, Uzbekistan has aligned itself with a broader pattern recognized across the Muslim world – that the authority of institutions dedicated to Islamic learning is inseparable from the historical and sacred character of the sites they occupy.

Further research is needed on several fronts: the architectural evolution of the Hastimom complex across different historical periods, the role of the Mo'yi Muborak madrasa in the transmission of manuscript culture in Central Asia, and the broader comparative study of Islamic civilization centers established in the post-Soviet space. Such research would deepen our understanding of the relationship between sacred geography, institutional authority, and the revival of Islamic intellectual tradition in contemporary Central Asia.

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