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THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTER OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION IN UZBEKISTAN: AN ANALYSIS OF 2018–2020

Abstract. *This article provides a scholarly analysis of the international cooperation activities of the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan during the period of 2018–2020. It examines the principal areas of collaboration established by the Center with leading foreign research institutions, libraries, museums, archives, and prominent international organizations, highlighting their objectives, substantive content, and practical outcomes. Particular attention is given to the scientific and cultural events organized abroad, bilateral memoranda and cooperation agreements, joint research and cultural projects, and their contribution to the institutional development of the Center. The study evaluates the role of international cooperation as an effective instrument for the preservation, research, and promotion of Islamic cultural heritage and for strengthening Uzbekistan's scientific and cultural engagement within the international community.*

Keywords: *Center of Islamic Civilization, international cooperation, scientific diplomacy, cultural heritage, manuscripts, Uzbekistan, memorandum, ICESCO, IRCICA.*

INTRODUCTION

From its very first years, the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan began to participate actively on the international stage. One of the principal tasks of the Center was defined as the preservation and study of the national cultural heritage, together with the establishment of international cooperation in this field. In 2018–2020, the Center

carried out systematic work to develop international cooperation, one of the main forms of which was the signing of memoranda with foreign research and cultural centres.

MAIN PART

Cooperation memoranda with foreign institutions

In 2018, during a visit of a delegation of the Center to Turkey, a memorandum of cooperation was signed with Ibn Haldun University. In 2019, an international symposium on the theme “The First Turkey–Uzbekistan Relations” was held in cooperation with Kastamonu University of Turkey, and the Turkish side expressed its readiness to support the Islamic scholarly schools of Uzbekistan. Also in 2019, a delegation headed by the Director-General of IRCICA, Professor Khalid Eren, visited the Center (“Turkey to Support Islamic Scientific Schools,” 2019).

In 2019, the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan further expanded the geography of its international scholarly cooperation, signing memoranda of cooperation with the Center for Islamic Theology of the University of Münster and with the University of Hamburg in Germany. These documents created an institutional and legal basis for scholarly research, academic exchange, the study of manuscripts and cultural heritage, and the implementation of joint scholarly projects (Center of Islamic Civilization, 2019).

In 2020, the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Freie Universität Berlin brought the Center’s cooperation with prestigious scholarly and educational institutions in Europe to a new stage. This agreement expanded the opportunities for exchanging scholarly experience, conducting joint research, and studying and promoting, on an international scale, the scholarly heritage relating to Islamic civilization.

Despite the conditions of the pandemic, in 2020 the Center consistently continued its international cooperation activities in a remote format. In particular, international video meetings were organized with the Imam Bukhari Foundation of Malaysia, the Institute for the Understanding of Islam in Malaysia, and other scholarly and religious organizations. At the conclusion of the negotiations, memoranda aimed at developing mutual scholarly, cultural and educational cooperation were signed online, which served to ensure the continuity of international relations through the effective use of the instruments of digital diplomacy.

Within the framework of scholarly cooperation with Kazakhstan, in 2020 representatives of the Center took part in an international scholarly conference organized in Nur-Sultan by the Center for Interreligious and Inter-Civilizational Dialogue on the occasion of the International Day of Tolerance. This forum was of great importance from the standpoint of developing interreligious and intercultural dialogue, strengthening the principles of religious tolerance, and expanding the Center's participation in the international scholarly community (Center of Islamic Civilization, 2020).

Cooperation with international organizations (IRCICA and ICESCO)

In 2018–2020, the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan consistently developed cooperation with international organizations and established stable relations with prestigious institutions specializing in the study and promotion of Islamic civilization. In particular, scholarly cooperation was established with the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) under the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and representatives of the Center regularly participated in the work of the IRCICA Governing Board. This cooperation formed an important institutional platform serving the exchange of scholarly information, the advancement of joint initiatives, and the study of the heritage of Islamic civilization on an international scale.

In 2020, representatives of the Center took part in an international virtual conference on the theme “The Contribution of Islamic Art to the Building of Human Civilization and the Dissemination of the Values of Peace,” held in Rabat, Morocco, on the initiative of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO). This international forum was devoted to the place of Islamic art and cultural heritage in the development of universal human civilization, to intercultural dialogue, and to the promotion of the ideas of peace and tolerance.

Work with European manuscript collections

The relations established by the Center with the leading scholarly and cultural institutions of Europe were of great importance in the process of identifying, scholarly describing, and introducing into international scholarly circulation the written heritage relating to Islamic civilization.

Within the framework of a working visit carried out in 2018, negotiations were held with scholarly centres in Oxford and Cambridge, as well as with major libraries and museums of Great Britain. As a result of these negotiations, official cooperation

was established with the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. As a result of joint research conducted with specialists of the University of Cambridge, the manuscript and lithographic works relating to the heritage of the scholars of Mawarannahr that are preserved in the university's collections were systematized and a scholarly catalogue of them was prepared. This work expanded the opportunities for studying the heritage of the scholarly schools formed on the territory of Uzbekistan on the basis of sources held abroad.

As a result of the relations established with the scholarly libraries of France that possess large manuscript collections, work was carried out to identify and scholarly describe sources relating to the thinkers of Mawarannahr. In the course of these studies, more than 385 manuscripts preserved in the collections of the National Library of France were recorded, and a bibliographic description of them was compiled. In addition, the exchange of experience in working with Eastern manuscripts and Central Asian sources was established, and a practice of professional development for Uzbek specialists at French scholarly centres was arranged. This made it possible to master modern experience in the fields of codicology, source studies, and the preservation of cultural heritage ("Researchers from Uzbekistan," 2018).

Cooperation with the Middle East and South Asia

The Center also developed effective relations with prestigious scholarly and religious institutions of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, India, and Iran. Within the framework of this cooperation, particular attention was given to the exchange of scholarly information, joint research, the development of academic dialogue among specialists, and the study of sources relating to the history of Islamic civilization. In particular, the relations established with scholarly centres in Saudi Arabia, the scholarly milieu of al-Azhar in Egypt, and the scholarly institutions of India and Iran significantly expanded the international scope of the Center's activity.

As a result of these forms of cooperation, systematic activity took shape for identifying, scholarly describing, digitizing, and studying the written heritage preserved in foreign collections. At the same time, important results were achieved in the effective use of the instruments of scientific diplomacy, the expansion of the network of international experts, and the presentation of Uzbekistan's heritage of Islamic civilization to the world scholarly community.

Participation in international conferences and academic forums

Participation in scholarly conferences and academic dialogue platforms took shape as one of the priority directions of the international activity of the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan. Through these events, the Center not only promoted Uzbekistan's scholarly heritage relating to Islamic civilization on an international scale, but also created effective platforms for developing long-term cooperation with foreign scholarly institutions.

In 2018, an international scholarly conference on the theme “The Challenges of the 21st Century and the Ideas of Islamic Enlightenment” was organized in Istanbul, Turkey, in cooperation with Ibn Haldun University. At this forum, scholarly discussions were held on Islamic enlightenment, religious tolerance, and the place of spiritual values in the development of society under the conditions of contemporary global challenges.

In 2019, an international symposium on the theme “The First Turkey–Uzbekistan Relations” was held in cooperation with Kastamonu University of Turkey. The symposium served to analyse the historical, cultural, and scholarly relations between the two countries on the basis of new scholarly sources, to develop joint research, and to expand academic cooperation.

In 2020, under the conditions of the pandemic, modern digital platforms were used in order to ensure the continuity of scholarly cooperation. In particular, an international online conference on the theme “The Contribution of Bukhara to Islamic Civilization and Its Place Therein” was organized, in which nearly 160 scholars and specialists from 20 countries of the world participated. This forum made it possible to discuss, with the participation of the international scholarly community, the historical place of Bukhara in the development of Islamic learning, thought, and culture.

That same year, a prestigious international scholarly conference on the theme “Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and the Maturidi Teaching: Yesterday and Today” was held in the city of Samarkand. The conference was devoted to studying the scholarly and philosophical foundations of the Maturidi teaching and its significance in contemporary religious and enlightenment processes, and it activated international scholarly dialogue in this field.

In 2020, the establishment of a secondary specialized Islamic educational institution named after Imam al-Tirmidhi in the city of Termez, and the declaration by ICESCO

of the city of Bukhara as the Capital of Islamic Culture for the year 2020, became among the important events on the path to the international recognition of Uzbekistan's heritage of Islamic civilization. The scholarly and organizational activity of the Center occupied an important place in these processes.

In addition, specialists of the Center regularly participated in international scholarly conferences, forums, and round-table discussions organized in Germany, France, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Russia, the USA, and other countries, presenting the results of the scholarly research being carried out in Uzbekistan for discussion by international experts. These participations proved to be an important factor in expanding international academic cooperation, exchanging scholarly experience, developing joint research, and accelerating the integration of the Uzbek school of Islamic studies into the world scholarly space.

Identifying and digitizing the written heritage

In the international activity of the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan, the identification, digitization, and introduction into scholarly circulation of the scholarly heritage of the scholars of Mawarannahr preserved in foreign libraries, museums, and scholarly centres was defined as one of the priority directions. The work carried out in this direction in 2018–2020 provided important results in the formation of the Center's scholarly-resource base and in the process of restoring the national written heritage.

Within the framework of the cooperation conducted with Great Britain, the Center's collections were significantly enriched with rare scholarly sources. In particular, a collection of 4,923 titles of rare publications on Oriental studies, Islamic civilization, and Eastern learning, published in Europe from the thirteenth century onward, was donated to the Center by Alisher Usmanov. The inclusion in this collection of works of special scholarly value, such as the first Latin edition of "The Canon of Medicine," further enhanced its historical and bibliographic significance. In addition, the gratuitous provision of more than 4,000 rare books by EPION HOLDINGS LIMITED served to expand the content of the Center's library collection ("Alisher Usmanov Donates Books," 2019).

As a result of the scholarly cooperation established with France, electronic copies of more than 350 manuscripts and works belonging to Abu Ali ibn Sina, Muhammad al-Khwarazmi, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Ahmad al-Farghani, and other scholars, preserved

in the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, were obtained. Furthermore, the creation of the opportunity to copy ancient Qur'an manuscripts dating from the 8th–11th centuries expanded the prospects for the scholarly study of the Islamic written heritage. At the same time, in order to enrich the “Uzbekistan Corner” collection within the Bibliothèque universitaire des langues et civilisations (BULAC), the Center provided scholarly publications and albums, which served to promote Uzbekistan's cultural heritage within the international scholarly information space.

As a result of this work, by the end of 2020 the Center's library collection was formed with 11,986 copies of literature, of which 5,463 were rare books, manuscripts, and lithographic publications. At the same time, the electronic library collection was consistently developed, and the database of electronic books and scholarly abstracts came to encompass more than 64,000 resources. This significantly increased the Center's potential as a scholarly information-resource centre on Islamic civilization and created a firm source base for future fundamental research.

CONCLUSION

These years were an important stage for the Center of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan in forming and strengthening international cooperation relations. During this period, the Center established wide-ranging cooperation with prestigious research centres, libraries, and museums of the world, actively participated in international scholarly events, and achieved significant successes in collecting rare manuscript heritage and introducing it into scholarly circulation.

The achievements outlined above were of great importance in strengthening the Center's scholarly and cultural potential, raising the country's prestige on the international stage, and preserving and promoting the national spiritual heritage. By 2020, the Center had created a firm foundation for international cooperation, and this foundation has continued to serve, in subsequent years, to transform the Center into an important scholarly and cultural centre on a global scale.

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