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DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAMIC CULTURE IN THE FIELDS OF SCIENCE, ART, AND LITERATURE

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Abstract. *This article explores the historical and cultural evolution of Transoxiana from the emergence of Islam in the seventh century to the early twentieth century, emphasizing the decisive role of Islam in shaping the region's political, spiritual, and intellectual life. The study identifies four major stages of cultural development, with particular focus on the ninth–twelfth centuries as the early phase of the Central Asian Renaissance and the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries as its most advanced stage during the Timurid era. Special attention is devoted to the development of the madrasa system as a central institution of education, outlining its structure, curriculum, and social significance. In addition, the article highlights achievements in science, literature, music, and the arts, as well as the contributions of prominent poets and scholars within the broader framework of Islamic civilization. In the seventh century, the final universal religion, Islam, emerged in the Arabian Peninsula.*

Keywords: *Islam, Transoxiana, Central Asian Renaissance, madrasas, Islamic education, Arabic culture, science and literature, Islamic civilization*

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the eighth century, Arab forces led by Qutayba ibn Muslim, after advancing through Iran and Khurasan, initiated the conquest of Transoxiana, the land between the two rivers. In this region, Zoroastrianism and other religions were gradually suppressed, while Islam, together with the principles of its sacred book, the Qur'an, as well as Arabic script and the Arabic language, was systematically established. Islam steadily sought dominance in all spheres of culture and spirituality. In this process, the Arabs attempted to eliminate the local population's cultural heritage, spiritual traditions, religious practices, writing systems, and customs.

From the ninth century onward, written monuments in the Arabic script began to emerge in Transoxiana. From the period of the Arab conquest namely, from the eighth century until the beginning of the twentieth century religious, cultural, and spiritual development based on Islam and the Arabic script predominated in Transoxiana, including the territory of present-day Uzbekistan.

This cultural development can be divided into four major periods:

the cultural flourishing of the ninth–twelfth centuries;

the cultural renaissance of the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries during the era of Timur and the Timurids;

cultural life in the sixteenth to the first half of the nineteenth centuries; and

cultural life during the period of Russian colonial rule in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

MAIN PART

The first period is characterized politically by the emergence of independent states of the local populations in Central Asia as a result of prolonged resistance to the Arab conquest. From the early ninth century, during the reign of Caliph al-Maʾmun as the ruler of the Arab Caliphate over Transoxiana and Khurasan, governors loyal to Islam and the Caliphate were appointed from among the local aristocracy to administer cities and regions (G‘aniyev, 2022: 36–41).

Among these, the Samanids declared their independence from the Caliphate by the end of the ninth century. However, the formation of local states based on the rule of various dynasties occurred amid intense rivalries and fierce military conflicts between these ruling houses. From the ninth century until the 1120s, Central Asia was ruled successively by the Samanids, Karakhanids, Maʾmunids, Ghaznavids, Seljuks, and Khwarazmshahs.

By the twelfth century, the Khwarazmshah Empire had established its dominance over vast territories of Central Asia and, more broadly, the Middle East. Nevertheless, this independent state was brought to an end as a result of the Mongol invasion led by Genghis Khan in 1220.

As is well known, during the reign of Caliph al-Maʾmun (813–838), science and culture developed rapidly in Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphate. Ancient Greek sciences were studied on a wide scale, and numerous works by Greek scholars were translated, particularly achieving significant progress in the natural sciences and philosophy. Under the influence of scientific inquiry, various schools of thought and interpretations within Islam gained prominence; notably, Muʿtazilism, which emphasized rational

thought and engagement with natural sciences and secular philosophy, rose to the level of state ideology. This period has been interpreted in Western Orientalist scholarship as the "Arab Renaissance." From the tenth century onward, however, religious sciences and traditional currents gained strength within the Caliphate (Landa, 2005: 84). Consequently, the center of scientific and cultural advancement shifted from Baghdad to Transoxiana and Khurasan. This era produced outstanding figures across various fields of science and literature.This cultural wave led Transoxiana to gain recognition as a major scientific and cultural center of the entire Islamic world. The period may be described as the Central Asian Renaissance, or more precisely, as the early phase of this Renaissance. The cultural achievements of this era also exerted a positive influence on the development of Western European culture, becoming one of the significant factors contributing to the Renaissance and cultural flourishing of Western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The late fourteenth century, and especially the fifteenth century, constituted the second and most advanced phase of the Renaissance in Central Asia in the sphere of culture. This period should be interpreted as a new and independent second stage in the history of Central Asian culture. During this time, the natural and Islamic sciences, art, and literature achieved results that gained renown throughout the Muslim East, and their fame spread widely even into medieval Europe. From a cultural and spiritual perspective, particular emphasis was placed on utilizing Islam its legal principles and leading figures as a means of preserving peace and enhancing state prosperity, relying on its unifying power in governance and social life. Sufism, especially the Naqshbandiyya order that developed in Transoxiana, served as an important ideological foundation for ensuring intellectual freedom and independent mental activity.The status of the Turkic (Uzbek) language was significantly strengthened, and literary as well as scientific works were produced in both Persian and Turkic languages. Urban development also flourished during this period: numerous madrasas, roads, and various architectural structures were constructed. Major achievements were attained across diverse fields of knowledge. As a result, Central Asia particularly Transoxiana and Khurasan became renowned as one of the most developed regions of the world during this era (Yodgorov, 2012:29–33).

The scientific and cultural achievements of this period were realized at a rapid pace on the basis of the cultural heritage attained in the ninth–twelfth centuries, through the creative assimilation and further development of earlier intellectual traditions. Madrasas were regarded as educational institutions of exceptional prestige throughout the Near and Middle Eastern regions. The term madrasa derives from the Arabic word darasa ("to study") and literally means "a place of learning."

From the earliest days of Islam, mosques began to be constructed; however, it is difficult to determine precisely when madrasas first appeared. Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, madrasas became widespread in countries adhering to Islam, including Central Asia. Some scholars maintain that the first madrasa was built in Bukhara in the tenth century. According to Narshakhi, the Farjak Madrasa, which suffered damage in a fire in 937, was among the earliest madrasas in Central Asia.

Madrasas existed in various forms, including royal madrasas, eshon (religious leader–sponsored) madrasas, and private madrasas. The founders of madrasas allocated special endowment property (waqf) to support these institutions and appointed a trustee (mutawalli) to administer the endowment.

A portion of the income derived from waqf property was used for the maintenance of the endowment and the repair of madrasa buildings, while another portion was distributed among the mutawalli, teachers (mudarris), students, mosque imams, muezzins, barbers, caretakers, and other service personnel. Admission to madrasas was granted to those who had completed elementary schooling. The age of students ranged from ten to forty years. Students were entitled to reside in madrasa dormitories. They were divided into full-time students and external students who attended classes without permanent residence. The general structure of the madrasa curriculum was developed between the tenth and twelfth centuries and was subsequently refined over time. Instruction typically began in September and continued until March, while summer months and the month of Ramadan were designated as vacation periods.

In madrasas, instruction was conducted on Saturdays, Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays, while Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays were regarded as days of rest. Classes began at sunrise, shortly after the dawn (fajr) prayer. Education in madrasas was organized into three levels: elementary (adno), intermediate (avsat), and advanced (a‘lo). The adno level continued until students began studying the text ‘Aqa’id; the avsat level started with the study of ‘Aqa’id and continued until the completion of Sharh-i Mulla. Those who proceeded to study more advanced and complex texts were considered students of the a‘lo level. Depending on individual aptitude, the duration of study in madrasas generally ranged from seven to twelve years.

In the madrasas of Central Asia, textbooks written in Arabic and Persian were taught, while instructors (mudarris) provided explanations in the Turkic language for students. The curriculum usually began with the Persian-language manual known as Avvali ‘Ilm. This was followed by the study of Arabic grammar, which was regarded as the principal scholarly language of the medieval period. After Arabic grammar, the curriculum was divided into two major branches: the general educational course (mushkilat) and the jurisprudential course (mas’ala). Alongside the fara’id (inheritance

law) section of the jurisprudence (fiqh) curriculum, mathematics was also included as a compulsory subject. Depending on their interests and abilities, students could complete either the mushkilat or the mas'ala branch, or, if they wished, both. To complete the full madrasa course, students were required to master approximately 137 textbooks related primarily to philosophy and law. The majority of these works were authored by scholars from Central Asia, including the hadith collections of Imam al-Bukhari and 'Isa al-Tirmidhi; Kitab al-Tawhid by Abu Mansur al-Maturidi; al-Hidaya fi Sharh al-Bidaya by Burhan al-Din al-Marghinani; al-Risala al-Shamsiyya fi al-Qawa'id al-Mantiqiyya by 'Umar al-Qazwini; al-Fawa'id al-Diya'iyya by 'Abd al-Rahman Jami; Wiqayat al-Riwaya fi Masa'il by Mahmud ibn Ahmad al-Mahbubi; and al-Nuqaya by 'Ubayd Allah ibn Mas'ud al-Mahbubi, among others.Depending on student interests and the availability of instructors, madrasas also offered instruction in astronomy, geometry, medicine, chemistry, geography, history, literature, prosody ('ilm al-'arud), architectural fundamentals, calligraphy, music, ethics, and rhetoric. Madrasas in the major Central Asian cities Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Kokand, and Khiva were distinguished by differences in their educational systems (National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan, 2005: 414).

In the following discussion, attention is directed to the educational structures of madrasas in each of these major cities. Samarkand was renowned as one of the foremost centers of learning and scholarship in Central Asia. In the ninth and tenth centuries, there were seventeen madrasas in Samarkand; however, none of them have survived to the present day. By contrast, madrasas constructed during the Timurid period have been preserved and continue to retain their architectural grandeur (Ghaniyev, 2022: 36–41).

During the ninth–eleventh centuries, Arab-Muslim culture particularly music reached a high level of development. On the basis of the practical musical traditions of the peoples of Central Asia and Iran, as well as the critical study of ancient Greek musical theory, great thinkers such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Ibn Zayla produced outstanding works on the science of music in the Arabic language.

In Muslim art, decoration, ornamentation, and the craftsmanship of embellishing everyday objects played a crucial role. Arab artists developed the arabesque, a decorative style based on the harmonious and intricate combination of geometric (handasī) and vegetal (islimī) motifs, in which these elements were fused in an elegant and imaginative manner. The applied arts and crafted objects produced by artisans from Mosul and other regions of Iraq; Syrian textiles and enameled, ornamented glassware; and Egyptian rock crystal, ivory works, and finely carved objects made from precious woods gained widespread renown not only within the Islamic world but also far beyond its borders (Landa, 2005:84).

Military campaigns during the mid-seventh century, under the Umayyad period, found wide expression in literature. Poets praised the courage of Arab warriors and extolled the wisdom and military prowess of Arab commanders. They harshly criticized the enemies of Islam and elevated to the skies the martyrs who had sacrificed their lives for the faith. At the same time, literature reflected the political struggle between the Umayyads and their rivals for the caliphal throne. Poetry seemed to serve as a weapon in this political contest. Poets who supported the Umayyads were highly honored by the members of the dynasty. Among these poets, al-Akhtal, al-Farazdaq, and al-Jarir stand out as particularly notable.

Al-Akhtal (640–710), one of the leading poets of his time, served as a court poet during the reigns of Mu‘awiya and Yazid. Caliph Abd al-Malik awarded him the title of “Poet of the Umayyads.” Al-Akhtal’s poetry functioned as a literary instrument affirming the Umayyad dynasty’s authority on the caliphal throne. In his verses, the Umayyads were depicted as possessing a firm character, generosity, and all the positive qualities befitting rulers of the Muslim community. The pride expressed in al-Akhtal’s poetry was also political in nature: he celebrated his tribe’s loyalty to the Umayyads, their services to the caliphate, the heroes and great men originating from his tribe, and the victories his tribe had achieved.

In addition, al-Akhtal was known as a poet of banquet poetry, and Arab literary tradition praises him as an unparalleled composer of verses in honor of wine (may). He also composed satirical poems ridiculing other poets living in Iraq, particularly al-Jarir and al-Farazdaq. Al-Farazdaq (641–732) is primarily recognized as a poet of satire. Over the course of his long life, he composed works both as a supporter of Ibn Zubayr and as a poet aligned with the Umayyads. He wrote mainly in the genres of praise (madḥ), elegy (ritha’), panegyric (fakhr), satire (hija’), description (wasf), and the ghazal. For approximately fifty years, he considered al-Jarir his rival and engaged in a political and poetic contest with him. Thus, al-Farazdaq’s life was deeply intertwined with political and literary struggle, and his poetry reflects this dual character. His works are of historical significance because they provide insights into the social conditions of the period, the life and customs of Arabs under Umayyad rule, and the poet’s own life and that of his contemporaries and opponents.

Al-Jarir (653–753), another court poet, celebrated the Umayyads as rulers chosen by God, composing works in their honor. He regarded al-Farazdaq as his personal adversary and openly mocked him in his satirical poems. The rivalry between these two poets entertained the caliphs and intensified the literary and political competition between them. Loyalty and affection toward one’s tribe, alongside hatred of enemies, formed central themes in their poetry.

CONCLUSION

Beyond poetry serving political purposes, lyrical poetry also flourished under the Umayyads. Lyrical works celebrated love, emotional experiences, and pleasure, diverging from some pre-Islamic literary traditions. Among the most remarkable lyric poets of the period was Umar ibn Abu Rabia (644–711), whose work primarily focused on women. Those accustomed to praising caliphs in poetry were astonished by Umar's lyrical compositions, and he reportedly stated: "I praise women, not men." In his verses, Umar celebrated the beauty of women, the virtues of renowned women, and the intensity of passionate love.

Oratory also became highly prominent during the Umayyad period. The rise of political conflicts increased the demand for orators who could captivate the populations of major cities with their speeches. Since Iraq was the center of religious and political opposition at the time, orators held particular importance there. They supported their arguments with Qur'anic verses. One of the most famous orators, al-Hajjaj, was known for the sternness and vigilance of his speeches, which impressed listeners with their imagery, logic, and resonant delivery. For example, in one of his speeches, he stated: "O people of Iraq! Truly, Satan has made his dwelling in your veins and nerves, reaching even your brains. Through this, he has influenced your minds and subjected you to conflicting ideas."

During the Umayyad era, prose writing of small scale also developed. These works can be classified into three types:

Oratory (khitabah) – speeches delivered publicly;

Sermons (tawqīʿat) – concise interpretations discussing the caliph's and officials' acts of approval or disapproval; and

Epistles (rasaʾil) – short prose works containing moral, philosophical, historical, or legal reflections (Yodgorov, Sh., 2012:29-33).

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