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ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION AND LOCAL TRADITIONS: THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MAWARANNAHR DURING THE EASTERN RENAISSANCE

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Abstract. The article examines the intangible cultural heritage of Mawarannahr (Transoxiana) that took shape in the 9th–12th centuries, during the Eastern Renaissance, as a result of the interaction between Islamic civilization and local traditions. The study draws on the works of al-Biruni, Narshakhi, Mahmud al-Kashgari and Yusuf Khass Hajib, the musical treatises of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, the accounts of Arab geographers, and archaeological evidence. Festivals and rituals, oral traditions, musical theory and performance, traditional craftsmanship and knowledge concerning nature are examined according to the classification of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. The study shows that some pre-Islamic Sogdian, Khwarezmian and Turkic traditions survived by adapting to the new religious and cultural environment, others acquired Islamic content, and Islamic civilization in turn introduced new forms of heritage to the region. The intangible heritage of the Renaissance era is characterized as a product of cultural synthesis. The findings can be applied in preparing nomination files, in education and in cultural tourism.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, Eastern Renaissance, Mawarannahr, Islamic civilization, local traditions, cultural synthesis, al-Biruni, musical science, craftsmanship.

INTRODUCTION

The 9th–12th centuries hold a special place in the history of Mawarannahr and Khurasan as a period of unprecedented flourishing in science, literature and culture. In Uzbek historiography this period is called the “Eastern Renaissance” or the “First Renaissance,” while international scholarship often describes it as Central Asia’s “golden age” [1]. Under the Samanids, Qarakhanids, Ghaznavids and Khwarazmshahs, Bukhara, Samarkand, Urgench, Merv, Shash and the cities of the Fergana Valley became major centers of learning and culture in the Muslim world. Scholars who made outstanding contributions to world science and culture, among them Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Abu Ali ibn Sina, Mahmud al-Kashgari and Yusuf Khass Hajib, lived and worked during this period.

The study of the intangible cultural heritage of this period is important for two reasons. First, it was in this period that local authors for the first time systematically described the traditional festivals, rituals, customs, music, oral traditions and crafts of the region’s peoples. Earlier information on the culture of the region’s population had relied mainly on the external observations of Greco-Roman and Chinese authors. Now scholars who came from the very communities that bore these traditions began to describe them from within, with an understanding of their meaning and origins.

Second, this period was a time of transition in which Islamic culture and ancient pre-Islamic traditions merged into a new cultural synthesis. Ancient festivals such as Navruz, Mehregan and Sada, rituals of ancestor commemoration and some local customs adapted to the new religious environment and survived into later centuries. Studying this process makes it possible to uncover the historical roots of many elements of intangible cultural heritage that are still practiced today. Sources from the Renaissance

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era serve as key evidence for substantiating the historical roots of elements inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, such as Navruz, Shashmaqom, Bakhshi art, and the art of crafting and playing the rubab.

Certain aspects of the topic have been studied in previous scholarship. V.V. Bartold examined the cities, economy and cultural life of Mawarannahr on the basis of Arabic and Persian geographical and historical works [2]. G.P. Snesarev, drawing on ethnographic materials, revealed survivals of pre-Islamic beliefs and rituals that persisted in an Islamic setting among the Uzbeks of Khorezm [3]. However, the sources of the Renaissance era have not yet been analyzed comprehensively from the perspective of the concept of intangible cultural heritage, that is, as heritage produced by the interaction between Islamic civilization and local traditions.

The aim of this article is to identify and classify, on the basis of written and archaeological sources of the 9th–12th centuries, the elements of intangible cultural heritage that took shape in Mawarannahr through the interaction of Islamic civilization and local traditions, and to show their historical links with present-day living heritage.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on the principles of historicism and objectivity. Information from the sources was grouped according to the five domains defined by the 2003 UNESCO Convention: oral traditions and expressions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship [4]. Comparative-historical analysis, source criticism and the retrospective method were employed.

The sources of this period, including encyclopedic and scientific works, local histories, dictionaries and literary-didactic works, treatises on music theory, and the writings of Arab geographers and travelers, are remarkable for their level of detail. At the same time, they require a critical approach. Many works have come down to us only in later copies or translations. For example, Narshakhi wrote his History of Bukhara in Arabic in 943–944, but the work survives only in an abridged Persian translation made by Abu Nasr al-Qubavi in 1128–1129 [5]. For this reason, the written evidence was analyzed in comparison with archaeological and ethnographic data and with later sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Festivals and rituals: the continuation of pre-Islamic traditions in a new environment

In his Vestiges of Past Ages (al-Athar al-baqiya), Abu Rayhan al-Biruni describes the calendars and festivals of the Persians, Sogdians and Khwarezmians in separate chapters, explaining the origin and meaning of each [6]. By tradition, Navruz is associated with the name of the legendary king Jamshid. Al-Biruni describes customs observed during the festival, such as exchanging gifts of sweets and sprinkling water, and explains their symbolic meaning [7]. He also records that at the end of the month of Khshum the Sogdians mourned their deceased ancestors, weeping and scratching their faces, and set out food and drink for the souls of the dead [7]. This custom continues in its own way today in the practice of commemorating the deceased on the eve of the two Eids and other festivals, preparing fried food "for the spirits" (is chiqarish) and arranging for the recitation of the Qur'an [3]. Here the structure of an ancient ritual has been preserved while its content has taken on an Islamic form.

Al-Biruni shows that Khwarezmian festivals were likewise tied to the agricultural and pastoral seasons. According to him, one of the Khwarazmshahs, noticing that the months had drifted away from the seasons, had the calendar corrected in order to return the festivals to their proper seasons [6]. This indicates that the ritual calendar was closely linked to the economic life of the population. Notably, al-Biruni, a Muslim scholar, recorded pre-Islamic festivals objectively and with scholarly curiosity. This

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shows that the scholarly tradition of Islamic civilization helped to preserve knowledge about local heritage.

Abu Bakr Narshakhi's History of Bukhara preserves valuable information on rituals and traditions inherited from the pre-Islamic period [8]. According to the author, the people of Bukhara sang laments devoted to the death of Siyavush, which musicians called Kin-i Siyavush ("The Vengeance of Siyavush"), and every year on the day of Navruz, before sunrise, the Magians sacrificed a rooster at Siyavush's tomb. This evidence is consistent with reports of Sogdian mourning rituals in Chinese sources. In particular, the Tongdian encyclopedia records that the people of Samarkand mourned annually for the "son of the heavenly god," weeping in black clothes and barefoot and symbolically searching for his bones in the fields [9]. These parallels demonstrate the antiquity of the tradition of lament songs in the region.

Narshakhi writes that the market at the village of Varakhsha lasted twenty days at the end of the year and that on the twenty-first day the "Navruz of the farmers" was celebrated, while the Navruz of the Magians came five days later [5]. Different social groups within the same area thus had their own ritual calendars, and the farmers' Navruz was directly tied to the agricultural year. The author also reports that a fair at which idols were sold was held twice a year at the Makh market in Bukhara, and that the Makh mosque was built on the site of a former fire temple [8]. The persistence of a sacred site's sanctity under a new religion is a vivid example of cultural continuity. The same phenomenon can later be observed in the history of many shrines and pilgrimage sites in the region [3].

2. Oral traditions and social practices

Mahmud al-Kashgari's Compendium of the Languages of the Turks (Diwan lughat al-Turk) is an important source that records the oral traditions, rituals and economic practices of the Turkic peoples in the 11th century [10]. To explain the meanings of words, the author cites folk proverbs and songs, poetic passages such as the debate between winter and summer, and the elegy for Alp Er Tonga. This shows that the tradition of laments and mourning songs (yo'qlov) also had ancient roots among the Turkic peoples. Together with the Sogdian sources cited above, this evidence confirms that mourning songs in the region have multilayered roots, both Iranian and Turkic.

The Diwan also contains wedding-related terms such as arquqï ("matchmaker") and sep (the property given with a bride, a dowry) [10]. The word sep is still used in exactly this sense in Uzbek wedding customs today. Terms recorded in the work, such as süt ("milk"), ayran and qımız (kumis), reflect knowledge and skills associated with the preparation of dairy products. The wide use of names such as sut, qatiq, suzma, ayron and chakki in present-day Uzbek dialects testifies to the continuation of this tradition for more than a thousand years [11].

Yusuf Khass Hajib's poem Wisdom of Royal Glory (Qutadghu bilig) clearly expresses the system of crafts and occupations in 11th-century society and the attitudes towards it [12]. In advising the ruler how to treat farmers, merchants, herders and craftsmen, the author describes each of them as a group necessary for society and insists that craftsmen be paid promptly for their work. These views show that values such as esteem for crafts and trades, respect for the master and observance of work ethics were already an integral part of the moral norms of society at that time. The ideological foundations of the master–apprentice tradition, later codified in the craft treatises (risola), can also be seen here.

3. Musical science and performance traditions

Abu Nasr al-Farabi's Grand Book of Music (Kitab al-musiqi al-kabir) shows that in the 10th century the musical art of the region was highly developed in both theory and practice [13]. Al-Farabi describes instruments such as the ʿud, the Baghdadi and Khurasani tanburs, the mizmar (reed pipe), the surnay, the rubab and the harp (chang), and explains how theoretical scales were performed on them. His particular

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attention to the Khurasani tanbur shows that local performance practice had become an object of theoretical analysis. Ibn Sina continued al-Farabi's tradition in the music section of his Book of Healing (Kitab al-shifa), addressing questions of frets, rhythmic cycles and melodic structure [13].

The theory of frets and rhythmic cycles developed by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina was later elaborated in the treatises of Safi al-Din al-Urmawi, Abd al-Qadir al-Maraghi, Abd al-Rahman Jami and Darvish Ali Changi, and became one of the theoretical foundations of the maqom system. Abdurauf Fitrat drew precisely on this chain of treatises in his account of the history of Uzbek classical music [14]. At the same time, the Diwan lughat al-Turk records the names of Turkic instruments such as the qobuz, the sıbızɣu (pipe) and the boryu (trumpet) [10]. The musical culture of the Renaissance era thus took shape as a synthesis of Greek theory, the Arabic and Persian scholarly tradition, and local Sogdian and Turkic performance practice. This confirms the millennium-old theoretical and practical roots of Shashmaqom (inscribed in 2008) and of the art of crafting and playing the rubab (inscribed in 2024), both on UNESCO's Representative List [15].

4. Traditional craftsmanship

Narshakhi writes that zandaniji cloth, woven in the village of Zandana near Bukhara, was valued not only by the local population but was also carried for sale as far as Iraq, Fars, Kirman and India [8]. This shows the high level of Bukharan textile craftsmanship and its place in international trade.

Abu Mansur al-Tha'alibi, who lived in the early 11th century, singles out Samarkand paper among the city's characteristic products in his Book of Curious and Entertaining Information (Lata'if al-ma'arif) and writes that it displaced papyrus and parchment [16]. The traditional paper-making craft revived today in the Konigil quarter of Samarkand is a continuation of this heritage.

The 10th-century Arab geographers al-Istakhri, Ibn Hawqal and al-Muqaddasi describe Akhsikath, the capital of the Fergana Valley, as a large city consisting of a citadel (kuhandiz), an inner city (shahristan) and suburbs (rabad). According to their accounts, the inner city had five gates, gardens lay beyond the outer wall, the city was supplied with water by canals drawn from the Syr Darya and by underground channels (qanats), and viticulture flourished in its surroundings [17]. This information indicates a highly developed culture of irrigation and horticulture in the valley.

According to archaeological research, in the 9th–12th centuries Akhsikath covered an area of up to 400 hectares, and craftsmen's quarters were located in its suburbs [18]. Hundreds of thousands of crucible fragments found at the site confirm that Akhsikath was a major center for smelting high-quality crucible steel; specialists call this technology the "Ferghana process" [19]. Pottery and glazed ceramic vessels also attest to the wide scope of the city's crafts. Written and archaeological sources thus show that traditional crafts and horticulture in the territory of present-day Namangan region have a history of more than a thousand years.

5. New forms of heritage introduced by Islamic civilization

During the Renaissance era, Islamic civilization not only transformed local traditions but also introduced new forms of intangible heritage to the region. Qur'anic recitation (qiroat) and the art of calligraphy, the system of education based on the master–student relationship in mosques and madrasas, and the customs associated with Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha became an integral part of the region's cultural life. Crafts associated with architecture also reached a new stage: the patterned brickwork of the Samanid Mausoleum in Bukhara and the carved ganch (stucco) panels found in the Samanid palace at Afrasiab form the roots of the ganch-carving and ornamental painting schools of later centuries.

In the 12th century, Sufi traditions of dhikr, the recitation of hikmat poems and pilgrimage took shape through the hikmats of Ahmad Yasawi and the Khwajagan order founded by Abd al-Khaliq

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Ghijduvani. These practices acquired distinctive forms in the Turkic and Sogdian cultural environment: Yasawi's hikmats were composed in a Turkic language understood by ordinary people and spread widely through oral performance. In this way, Islamic civilization and local traditions complemented each other and, in later centuries, formed one of the principal layers of the intangible cultural heritage of the Uzbek people.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study lead to the following conclusions.

First, the sources of the Renaissance era were the first to record the intangible cultural heritage of the region systematically and from the perspective of local authors. They provide valuable information on all five domains defined by the UNESCO Convention.

Second, pre-Islamic traditions continued in the new environment in different ways. Navruz and the seasonal festivals retained their essence. Ancestor commemoration, mourning songs and the cult of sacred places continued while acquiring Islamic content. Some customs incompatible with the new religious environment, such as the idol fair, gradually disappeared.

Third, Islamic civilization introduced new forms of heritage, such as Qur'anic recitation, calligraphy, madrasa education and Sufi practices. In fields such as musical science, a synthesis of Greek, Arabic-Persian and local Sogdian and Turkic traditions emerged.

Fourth, the historical roots of present-day living heritage elements such as Navruz, Shashmaqom, the art of the rubab, wedding customs, dairy-processing traditions, weaving, paper-making and metalworking can be clearly traced in the sources of the Renaissance era. This evidence can be used to provide historical substantiation for nomination files, in education and in cultural tourism, in particular to enhance the tourism potential of Namangan region through the example of Akhsikath.

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