

## Section 6. Theory and history of art

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### THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE FORMATION OF ISLAMIC ART IN THE LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURIES

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#### Abstract

This article analyzes the role and significance of international organizations in the formation and development of Islamic art in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The article highlights the activities of major cultural and religious organizations such as ISESCO, IRCICA, UNESCO, and MIAH in the preservation, promotion, and contemporary interpretation of Islamic artistic heritage.

**Keywords:** *museum, international organizations, ISESCO, IRCICA, UNESCO, MIAH, Islamic civilization, monument, foundation, cultural heritage, exhibition*

From the second half of the 20th century onward, the scholarly study of Islamic cultural heritage, as well as its promotion and preservation on a global scale, became one of the key priorities of international cultural policy. This process has been supported by the United Nations (UN), the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), IRCICA, UNESCO, and a number of other organizations.

Through the scientific, cultural, and educational programs of these organizations, a systematic process of museumification, digitization, and coordination of scholarly research on Islamic cultural heritage has taken shape.

In particular, the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Convention concerning the Protection), as well as ISESCO's programs on the preservation of Islamic cultural heritage in the 1980s and 1990s, have contributed significantly to the protection of historical monuments at the international level. Meanwhile, IRCICA has evolved into a leading center for fundamental research on Islamic art and architecture, implementing numerous cataloguing projects, academic publications, and exhibition initiatives.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is one of the largest and most influential

international intergovernmental organizations uniting Muslim countries in the modern era. The organization was established on 25 September 1969 during a conference of leaders of Muslim countries held in Rabat, Morocco. This historic event marked an important milestone in ensuring the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world.

Over the course of its activities, the OIC has undergone several stages of institutional and nominal reform. On 28 June 2011, during the 38th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC held in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, the organization's name was officially changed from the "Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC – Organization of the Islamic Conference)" to the "Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC – Organization of Islamic Cooperation)" (Makhsudov D., 2024).

This change was not merely a terminological update, but also a factor that stimulated the organization's further expansion in modern political, economic, and cultural directions, as well as the strengthening of the position of Islamic civilization in global processes. Today, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is recognized as the largest and most influential intergovernmental organization of Muslim countries in the world. The organization comprises 57 member states, covering the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Uzbekistan was admitted as an observer to the organization in October 1995, and since 2 October 1996 it has been accepted as a full member (Organization of Islamic Cooperation... 2020). One of the main objectives of Uzbekistan's membership in the OIC is to ensure the protection of the Republic's national interests within the Islamic world by making effective use of the organization's potential (Raxmonov K., 2024). According to the decision of the 9th Conference of Ministers of Culture of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Bukhara (Uzbekistan), Cairo (Egypt), and Bamako (Mali) were designated as the capitals of Islamic culture in 2020 (Eshonqulova D., 2022). Uzbekistan has been developing cooperative relations with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in various fields, including political, cultural, and educational areas.

One of the most important research centers operating in this field is IRCICA (Research

Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture), which was established in 1979 in Istanbul, Türkiye, as the first cultural subsidiary organ of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Makhsudov D., 2024). IRCICA was established directly drawing on the international experience of organizations such as UNESCO and ISESCO, and it emerged from the need to create a unified scholarly platform for the study, preservation, and promotion of Islamic cultural heritage.

The main objective of the center is to conduct in-depth research on the historical, cultural, and artistic heritage of the Islamic world, to scientifically document and restore it, as well as to carry out fundamental studies in the field of Islamic art and architecture. Therefore, IRCICA has today become a prestigious research institution that plays a central role in the academic study and global promotion of Islamic culture. The monographs, catalogues, and the journal "Journal of Islamic History, Art and Culture" published under its initiative serve as important scholarly sources in introducing Islamic cultural heritage into academic discourse. At present, the center is recognized as one of the most prestigious research institutions in the study of Islamic civilization history, as well as in the preservation and global dissemination of cultural heritage.

Since the 2000s, IRCICA has intensified its relations with the countries of Central Asia. The first congress was held in 2007 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. Scholars from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Türkiye participated in this congress and discussed issues related to the specific features of the formation of Islamic culture in Central Asia, historical sources, written heritage, the development of madrasas and educational systems, as well as architectural and artistic monuments. This event marked the beginning of the active involvement of Central Asian countries in IRCICA's activities.

As the next major event, the international symposium titled "Islamic Civilization in Central Asia" was held on 12–15 October 2012 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in cooperation between IRCICA and Kyrgyz-Turk "Manas" University (Rakhmonov B. Activities of the Center ...2019).

At this symposium, discussions focused on the role of Islamic civilization in Central Asia, the activities of religious and educational institutions, the depiction of the region in Arabic and Persian sources, as well as the scientific restoration of Islamic architectural monuments. As a result of the symposium, a continuous scientific information exchange between IRCICA and the countries of the region was established, and a regional network program for the study of Islamic cultural heritage in Central Asia was developed.

One of the most important directions of IRCICA's activities in Central Asia is the strategic scientific cooperation established with the Republic of Uzbekistan. In 2016, the initiative put forward by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to establish the International Research Center named after Imam al-Bukhari marked a new stage in IRCICA's activities in Central Asia. This initiative was presented at the meeting of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held on 18–19 October 2016 in Tashkent (Rakhmonov B. Activities of the Center ...2019). It was officially endorsed at the 43rd session of the Council of Foreign Ministers. This decision laid the foundation for strengthening international scientific cooperation in the in-depth study, preservation, and promotion of Islamic cultural heritage in Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan.

On 25–28 January 1981, the Third Islamic Conference held in the holy city of Mecca adopted a historic decision, issuing a resolution to establish a new international scientific and cultural institution under the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO). This initiative aimed to unite the capacities of the Islamic world in the fields of education, science, and culture, to deepen cooperation among member states, and to develop the intellectual heritage of Islamic civilization on a scientific basis (Makhsudov D., 2024).

The term ISESCO is formed from the initials of its English name, “Islamic World Education, Science and Culture Organization”, and it means “the Organization for Education, Science and Culture of the Islamic World.” This organization operates as a subsidiary institution of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and has served to strengthen cul-

tural integration and intellectual cooperation among Muslim countries.

A new phase in the organization's activity began during the 40th session held on 29–30 January 2020 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. At this session, new conceptual directions of the organization were discussed, and its name was changed to the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) (Convention concerning the Protection). This change more clearly reflected that the organization's activities are not related to religious propaganda, but rather focused on the development of scientific research, cultural progress, and educational integration.

The organization's headquarters is located in Rabat, Morocco, and it is currently headed by Dr. Salim bin Mohammed Al-Malik. Under his leadership, ICESCO has implemented major initiatives aimed at strengthening the scientific and cultural potential of the Islamic world, developing digital education systems, establishing scientific exchange programs, and promoting cultural heritage at the international level.

The Islamic Heritage Committee operating under ICESCO coordinates, on a scientific basis, the processes of studying, cataloguing, preserving, and restoring historical monuments of Islamic culture. Through the activities of this committee, many historical sites, written sources, and religious architectural monuments have gained international recognition.

In January 2007, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) declared Tashkent the Capital of Islamic Culture (Eshonqulova D., 2022). In 2017, the Republic of Uzbekistan became a full member of ICESCO. This historic event clearly demonstrated the country's openness and active initiative in developing international cooperation in the fields of Islamic civilization, science, culture, and education. As a result of Uzbekistan's membership, the country began to actively participate in scientific conferences, cultural programs, and educational projects implemented within the framework of ICESCO initiatives.

As a logical continuation of these international initiatives, The Barakat Trust, established in 1987 in the United Kingdom, has

become one of the most prestigious charitable foundations dedicated to the preservation, study, and promotion of Islamic cultural heritage. The foundation's main activities include the restoration of art, architecture, and cultural monuments in the Islamic world, as well as the financing of archaeological research and educational projects. Through scientific grants, conservation training programs, and international exhibition initiatives, it contributes to integrating both tangible and intangible aspects of Islamic heritage into global academic discourse.

Over the course of its activities, The Barakat Trust has supported hundreds of museum projects in Egypt, Morocco, Iran, India, Jordan, Syria, and Türkiye. It has also played an important role in training young specialists by providing scholarships in Islamic art museums, restoration courses, and academic research grants.

In addition, other prestigious non-governmental organizations focused on the preservation and scientific study of Islamic cultural heritage have also been established. One of them is the Al-Turath Foundation (Saudi Arabia), which was founded in 1996 on the initiative of the ruling family of Saudi Arabia (<https://barakat.org/> (Date of application: 22.03.2023)). The main objective of the foundation is to document, preserve, and restore Islamic architectural monuments in the country. Through its "Heritage for the Future" program, the organization has implemented the digitization of national heritage in accordance with international scientific standards.

The foundation's collaborative projects have contributed to the international recognition of historical monuments and their integration into the global cultural heritage system. In particular, Al-Turath has actively participated as a technical advisor in the documentation and restoration of the Historic Jeddah urban complex. In addition, through publications such as "King Salman" and various cultural initiatives, the foundation has widely promoted the historical significance of Saudi cultural heritage.

Another major international organization operating in this field is The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which specializes in cultural heritage preservation, restoration, and the development of cultural tourism. Since

1990, the organization has implemented more than 350 projects focused on the preservation of Islamic art museums, architectural monuments, and urban heritage.

Among its most notable projects are the restoration of the Citadel of Aleppo (Khalaf al-Aleppo Fortress in Syria), the restoration of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, the reconstruction of the Zahiriyyah Madrasa, and the establishment of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada. These museums today function as global centers for education and research, promoting Islamic art and science.

The Foundation for Islamic Art and Heritage (MIAH) is a charitable organization established in 2020 (<https://miahfoundation.com/> (Date of application: 19.11.2025)). The organization aims to promote the history, art, culture, and heritage of the Islamic world through exhibitions, education, workshops, and events. Among its key initiatives, the "Digital Museum of Islamic Heritage" project holds a special place. This project seeks to digitize examples of Islamic art in 3D format and make them accessible to researchers and the public worldwide. In addition, through the annual exhibition and academic conference titled "Islamic Art Week London," the MIAH Foundation has established an effective dialogue between Western and Eastern schools of art.

In the second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century, the processes of preserving, studying, and promoting Islamic cultural heritage on a global scale developed in close connection with the activities of international organizations. Intergovernmental institutions such as the UN, UNESCO, ISESCO/ICESCO, and IRCICA, as well as non-governmental organizations such as the Barakat Trust, the Al-Turath Foundation, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and the MIAH Foundation, have played a significant role in safeguarding the scientific, cultural, and artistic heritage of Islamic civilization.

As a result of the programs implemented by these organizations, a modern system of museumification, digitization, restoration, and scientific documentation of Islamic heritage has been formed. In addition, through international exhibitions, academic conferences, grants, and educational projects, Islamic art and culture have been actively integrated into global scholarly discourse.

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