



Photo by Myron McGhee

Rahimjon Abdugafurov completes PhD program in Islamic Civilizations Studies at Emory University. Congratulations! – August 7, 2020

Comments from Dr. Abdugafurov

The Program of Islamic Civilizations Studies (ICIVS) at Emory University is an academic environment where both faculty and staff members do tremendous amounts of work to support the growth and success of doctoral students. I was very fortunate to be a student in this perfect academic environment where I was able to pursue my research goals. During my studies in the program, I was able to acquire knowledge on conducting doctoral level research and to engage in discussions on the topics of my research interests in the classroom, and beyond. I was also very fortunate to have great mentors at Emory, who helped me both academically and professionally, such as writing my dissertation and competing in the job market.

Most importantly, ICIVS trained me how to conduct research, teach courses, and engage in public outreach projects. My special thanks go to my advisor Professor Vincent J. Cornell, who is dedicated to graduate student success. I see in him a great example of how to teach, conduct research, and mentor both undergraduate and graduate students. He spent unlimited hours with me advising and offering great support on my numerous projects, and his willingness to help locate necessary resources are praiseworthy. I would say the same things about Professors Rkia

Cornell, Carrie Wickham, Roxani Margariti, and Devin Stewart, who were generous with their time and care, and inspired me in every step of the way reminding of the importance of the work I am engaged in. I hope to continue to benefit from their expertise in my book projects in the future as well. In an equal way, I would also thank staff members Juana Clem McGhee and Tarje Lacy for their continuous support in my academic achievements. Their encouragement and willingness to help added another necessary layer during my studies.

My life's purpose has been to contribute to better understanding of Muslim relations with non-Muslims. Beginning with my undergraduate project on the celebrated Persian poet Jalal al-Din Rumi's humanistic views, and my M.A. thesis on Muslim views about Christianity and Judaism in Uzbekistan, I can say that my dissertation on Islamic Religious Humanism has been the hallmark of my academic career. As the fourteenth century Muslim humanist Abd al-Karim al-Jili stressed, the human truth is in the human being, as the title of my dissertation attests – “This Human Truth, Seek it in Yourself: Islamic Humanism of Abd al-Karim al-Jili (1365-1428).” Jili's views on human centrality, human equality, human freedom and human potential, were revolutionary for his time. The way he interpreted the Islamic sacred sources and offered alternative discourses on the equality of all human beings regardless of their social or religious characteristics continue to remain important. As I am starting a new chapter in my life by joining a great team of scholars at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory Law School, I will continue to pursue my purpose – to contribute to better understanding of Muslim relations with non-Muslims, as understanding can lead to improvement.

Comments from Faculty Advisor, Dr. Vincent J. Cornell

It is my great pleasure to congratulate Rahimjon Abdugafurov on the successful completion and defense of his brilliant dissertation. He is the second scholar to graduate from the ICIVS program. Rahimjon's dissertation— *This Human Truth, Seek it Within Yourself: The Islamic Humanism of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (767-832/1365-1428)*— is nothing less than groundbreaking. It consists of a critical examination of the question of Humanism in Islam, focusing on the writings of the prominent Sufi thinker 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili (d. 1428 CE). Jili traveled widely in his life; he was born in Baghdad, sojourned in Iran and India, and finally settled in the city of Zabid in Yemen. Rahimjon argues in his dissertation that Jili should be considered a “true humanist” in the Western understanding of the term because he represented an Islamic tradition of Religious Humanism that shared many elements in common with the Humanism of near-contemporaneous Western Renaissance figures such as Marsilio Ficino (d. 1499) and Pico della Mirandola (d. 1494). Rahimjon's theoretical approach to Humanism is centered on the famous dictum, “Man is the measure of all things.” He discusses Jili's Humanism in the context of three main varieties of Humanism, which he identifies based on extensive comparative research. These are Scholastic Humanism (exemplified by the *humanitas* tradition of the European Renaissance); Secular Humanism (the Humanism of the Enlightenment and today's academia); and Religious Humanism (advocated by Catholic and Protestant theologians as a form of the Imitation of Christ and Jewish humanists such as Martin Buber). Rahimjon argues for the inclusion of Islamic Humanism as another subcategory of Religious Humanism, and demonstrates that Judeo-Christian Humanism and Islamic Humanism share similar philosophical premises, despite their theological differences.

The centerpiece of Rahimjon's dissertation is an in-depth analysis of the writings of 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili focusing on the concepts of the Perfect Human Being (*al-Insan al-Kamil*), the Muhammadan Reality (*al-Haqiqa al-Muhammadiyya*), and The Muhammadan Image (*al-Sura al-Muhammadiyya*). Through intensive study of Jili's manuscripts, including some that have never before been examined in depth, he demonstrates that in Jili's Humanism the full potential of humanity can be realized by any human being, whether male or female, Muslim or non-Muslim. Although previous scholars studying these concepts have dismissed Jili as a mere follower or cipher of the Sufi Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (d. 1240 CE) because of the latter's writings on the Perfect Human Being and Muhammadan Reality, Rahimjon highlights Jili's originality and points out that besides disagreeing on a number of issues, Jili published an entire treatise criticizing *al-Futuh al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations), Ibn 'Arabi's most important work. With respect to Humanism, Rahimjon also argues that whereas Ibn 'Arabi's concept of the Perfect Human Being was based on a Platonic archetype that was unattainable for nearly everyone, for Jili the Perfect Human Being (personified as Adam) was an Everyman whose potential resided in all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion. This notion is reflected in the title of Rahimjon's dissertation, which is a quotation from one of Jili's works.

Besides conducting first-class primary source research, Rahimjon's discussion of the philosophical roots of Humanism and his use of major contemporary writers on the subject, such as Jacques Maritain, Martin Buber, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Tzvetan Todorov, make his dissertation an important contribution to the fields of Humanistic Studies and Islamic Studies. His dissertation also makes an important contribution to the fields of Islamic Theology, Sufi studies, Religious Studies, and Cultural Studies. Finally, Rahimjon's work provides an important bridge of cultural understanding between Islam and the West because he successfully demonstrates that Islamic Humanism is a legitimate concept and that Jili's Humanism was comparable to one of the key concepts of Western civilization.