



THE ACTIVITIES OF MUSEUMS IN UZBEKISTAN DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD AND THEIR SOCIO- POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Mirhakimova Feruza Kholdorjonovna

University of Business and Science,
Department of Social Sciences, Acting Associate Professor,
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in History.
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4333-8295>
mirhakimovaferuza7@gmail.com

Annotation: *This article analyzes the formation and development of the museum system in Uzbekistan during the Soviet period, as well as its socio-political significance. Particular attention is given to the transformation of museums into instruments of ideological propaganda, the training of professional personnel, and the changes in museum activities during the years of the Second World War. Additionally, the article highlights both the positive and negative aspects of the nationalization policy, which contributed to the enrichment of museum collections while also causing certain social issues.*

Keywords: *museum, Soviet period, ideology, nationalization, cultural heritage, Second World War, museum collections, exhibition, history, Uzbekistan*

Introduction: The museum system in Uzbekistan began to develop rapidly in the first half of the 20th century, particularly during the Soviet era. This process was closely linked to the political, social, and cultural transformations taking place in the country. Museums became not only institutions for preserving historical and cultural heritage but also important tools of ideological influence on the broader public. At the same time, efforts were made to train professional specialists, organize museum work on a scientific basis, and systematically study cultural heritage. Especially during the Second World War, museum activities underwent significant changes, requiring adaptation to new conditions.

During the preparation of exhibitions, large collections of weapons and clothing were assembled. Museums acquired not only awards, commemorative

badges, and photographs of front-line soldiers but also memoirs and stories describing acts of bravery.

Museum staff appealed to schoolchildren, workers, collective farmers, and employees to assist in collecting and preserving war-related materials. Extensive explanatory work was carried out locally, emphasizing the duty of contemporaries to preserve and collect all items and materials that could convey the heroic struggle at the front and in the rear to future generations.

Letters written by war heroes from the front, commitments undertaken by labor heroes, and resolutions adopted at meetings in collective farms regarding assistance to the front were collected for museum purposes. Along with documentary materials about the front, collections of front-line newspapers such as “Вперёд на врага”, “Красноармейская правда”, “Во славу Родины”, “Музейство” were also assembled.

The exhibition section included a letter from the regional party committee describing the immortal heroism of 11 Central Asian soldiers who died in the battles near Stalingrad. A number of documents reflected the assistance provided by the Uzbek people in the reconstruction of Stalingrad.

Scientific staff of museums began collecting materials from industrial enterprises across the republic. From the Tashkent Textile Combine, overalls, padded jackets, complete sets of military uniforms, and other significant materials were gathered. Museums also received combat leaflets, wall newspapers, and multi-copy publications describing production competitions and individuals awarded the honorary title of “Guardians of the Home Front.” A military hospital was located near the combine’s dispensary. After work, employees regularly visited wounded soldiers and officers, providing them with necessary assistance. Letters expressing sincere gratitude from soldiers and officers who returned to service were also preserved in the museum collections.

Main part. In the early years of the war, organizing stationary and traveling exhibitions became a widely распространенный (popular) form of mass educational work. Among the most notable were exhibitions under the theme “The Chronicle of Our Motherland’s Heroism” (1942). Museum staff frequently held lectures and discussions in industrial enterprises, schools, and teahouses about events at the фронт, the international situation, the heroism of soldiers, and the dedicated labor of people on the home front. At the same time, they conducted extensive ideological and educational work in collective and state farms, industrial enterprises, and construction sites aimed at increasing labor productivity and strengthening support for the front.

Public holidays were marked by the organization of traveling exhibitions. The themes of these exhibitions were diverse and included: “1812,” “Heroes of the Civil War,” “Suppression of the Osipov Rebellion,” “We fought, we are fighting, and we will continue to fight,” “Fascism is the vile enemy of humanity,” and “The heroism of Shirok,” among others. In 1942, the Museum of the History and Art of the Peoples of Uzbekistan organized 12 exhibitions [1; p. 28].

During the Second World War, a wide network of scientific research institutions covering various fields of science was established in Uzbekistan. By 1943, there were research institutes, 23 scientific stations, 2 observatories, 1 museum, and various other scientific-research institutions operating in the republic.

Following the decree of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR dated 27 September 1943 “On the Establishment of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR,” the History Museum, along with other institutions, was separated from the Art Museum and incorporated into the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR under the name Museum of the History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan. The Natural History Museum was also included in the Academy. Thus, a new and important stage began in the activities of these institutions in the republic.

In addition to exhibitions, museums also actively engaged in creating traveling displays. Lecture-based propaganda intensified, and republican museums became true centers for conducting ideological and educational outreach among the population. They carried out significant work in the ideological and political education of the masses.

The difficulties of the war period also affected the condition of museums. Many museums were either reduced in activity or completely closed. A large number of museum workers died on the fronts of the Second World War, leading to a shortage of specialists.

In order to reorganize museum work, the government of Uzbekistan adopted a number of resolutions. In implementing these decisions, museums began to develop exhibitions highlighting the history of advanced collective farms, state farms, and machine-tractor stations, showcasing the best examples of industrial and agricultural production, and familiarizing visitors with the working methods of production leaders.

The Museum of the History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan began developing a permanent exhibition on the history of the peoples of Uzbekistan. Leading specialists from the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and the Central Asian State University provided significant assistance in this work. Initially, the sections “February Bourgeois-Democratic Revolution” and “Soviet Uzbekistan” were prepared. In 1948, the sections “Primitive communal and slave-owning systems in the territory of Uzbekistan” and “Feudal states” were opened. In 1951, the section “Turkestan under Tsarist Russia” was established, which, albeit one-sidedly, covered issues related to the economy, everyday life, and culture of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the conquest of Central Asia by Russia, and its consequences [2; p. 30].

In subsequent years, all sections of the exhibition were expanded and enriched. As a result, in 1954, a comprehensive exhibition was created that

consistently presented the history of Uzbekistan from ancient times up to the end of the Second World War.

Most museums in Uzbekistan during 1946-1953 followed the approach of creating exhibition-type displays. However, in many cases, these remained superficial. To address this situation and fundamentally improve museum operations, a permanent methodological seminar was established under the Main Directorate for Cultural and Educational Institutions of the Ministry of Culture of Uzbekistan to coordinate museum activities. From 1953 onwards, a noticeable shift occurred in the development of exhibitions in many museums. However, the main focus increasingly turned toward the comprehensive presentation of the Soviet period. For example, the Soviet-era exhibition of the Surkhandarya Museum included the following sections:

- 1.The Great October Revolution
- 2.The Civil War
- 3.National-territorial delimitation of Central Asia
- 4.Land and water reform
- 5.The USSR as a country liberating women
- 6.Socialist industrialization
- 7.The national economy during the Third Five-Year Plan
- 8.The Great Patriotic War
- 9.The Soviet Union – a pillar of peace, democracy, and socialism
- 10.Industry, agriculture, and culture of Surkhandarya region [2; p. 34].

A similar situation could also be observed in the museums of Samarkand, Namangan, Fergana, Khorezm, and Kashkadarya. During this period, the network of regional studies (local history) museums in the republic also expanded. For example, the Chirchik local history museum was established in 1959, and the Angren city local history museum in 1960. In the following years, several other city and district local history museums were also founded [2; p. 16].

In 1964, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the formation of Uzbekistan, a stationary exhibition of achievements in the national economy of Uzbekistan was opened, which was of great importance. The exhibition reflected all branches of the republic's economy, including cotton production, mechanization of agriculture, industry, science, and cultural achievements.

The exhibition was located in one of the largest and most beautiful parks of Tashkent and was equipped with special pavilions and technical display systems. The equipment and exhibition materials were skillfully presented, leaving a deep impression on visitors and contributing to a better understanding of the content.

In the 1960s, new museums were established in the republic, and existing museum exhibitions were completely reconstructed. In this process, the latest archaeological and ethnographic discoveries, as well as achievements in historical science, were taken into account.

During these years, a number of memorial museums were also opened. These include the Ulugbek Museum (1963), the S. Ayni Museum (1964), the Y. Akhunbaboev Museum (1964), the Hamza Museum (1967), the Lenin Museum (1970), the U. Yusupov Museum in Fergana (1972), and the U. Yusupov house-museum in Yangiyul (1974) [1; p. 55]. In terms of their purpose and orientation, the exhibitions of these museums not only presented the life and work of scholars, poets, writers, and political figures, but also reflected the spirit and character of a particular historical period.

For example, the exhibits of the Ulugbek memorial museum in Samarkand provide insight into the Timurid era and demonstrate the greatness of Ulugbek as a representative of that dynasty, while also reflecting his life as an astronomer and individual.

The exhibition of the S. Ayni Museum in Samarkand was created in a distinctive style. Without excessive display techniques, it naturally reveals the

creative environment of S. Ayni, the renowned Uzbek and Tajik writer, scholar, and poet, vividly portraying the surrounding life and conditions.

Museum studies in Uzbekistan in the 1960s-1970s were characterized by the large-scale expansion of the museum network and a fundamental improvement in material and technical infrastructure. Museums in Uzbekistan began to move into newly built, specially designed buildings. For example, the State Art Museum began a new stage of its existence in a modern, comfortable building. Here, masterpieces of Western European and Russian art, as well as works by Uzbek artists, were widely exhibited. A new building was constructed for the Museum of Applied Arts.

The Museum of the Turkestan Military District began a new phase in a building showcasing the strength and military history of the armed forces of Central Asia. The Museum of the History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan was placed in a historically significant 19th-century architectural monument. In Margilan, a multi-story building was constructed for the Y. Akhunbaboev memorial museum, and in Samarkand, a special building was erected for the history museum at Afrasiab and for the republican museum of culture and art history.

The following figures clearly demonstrate the steady development of museums and their strengthening with qualified personnel. In 1973, there were 30 museums of various types in Uzbekistan, including 4 historical, 4 memorial, and 15 local history museums. In Tashkent city and region, there were 10 museums; in Samarkand and Fergana, 5 each; and in Andijan, 4 museums were in operation. By 1980, the number of museums in the republic had increased to 33, and the number of visitors had reached 3.7 million people [4; p. 262].

In subsequent years, all sections of the exhibition were further expanded and enriched. As a result, in 1954, a comprehensive exhibition was created that consistently presented the history of Uzbekistan from ancient times up to the end of the war.

Most museums in Uzbekistan during 1946–1953 followed the approach of creating exhibition-type displays. Under the Main Directorate of Cultural and Educational Institutions of the Ministry of Culture of Uzbekistan, a permanent methodological seminar was established to coordinate museum activities. On 12 May 1964, the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted a resolution “On increasing the role of museums in the communist upbringing of working people.”

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The emergence of museums as scientific and educational institutions engaged in collecting, preserving, studying, and promoting historical, material, spiritual, and cultural heritage in Uzbekistan dates back to the end of the 19th century. The establishment and enrichment of the first museums were greatly contributed to by prominent Russian scholars such as V. Oshanin, N. Maev, V. Vyatkin, and N. Severtsov, as well as amateur researchers like L. Smirnov and K. Mauzer, and local enthusiasts such as Mirza Kosimov, Akrom Askarov, Mirza Abdulla Bukhari, and Abu Said Makhzum. They collected remarkable collections related to the region’s mineralogy, zoology, numismatics, ethnography, flora, and fauna. In 1876, the first local history museum was opened in Tashkent, followed by Samarkand in 1896 and Fergana in 1899. The museum collections initially consisted of randomly gathered items, and rare and scientifically valuable exhibits were often sent to central museums and libraries in Russia [1; p. 19].

In 1918, based on the collection of Prince Romanov, the first art museum in Central Asia was established (now the State Art Museum of Uzbekistan). In the 1920s and 1930s, local history museums were opened in Namangan, Khiva, Bukhara, Kokand, Andijan, Termez, Nukus, and other major cities. A system of state museum governance was formed, and commissions for the protection of historical

monuments and works of art (Turkkomstaris in 1922; Uzkomstaris in 1927) were established. These institutions organized scientific expeditions across the country and collected materials for museums. Later, museums were mainly subordinated to the Ministry of Culture of Uzbekistan, while three museums (the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan, the Museum of Literature, and the Museum of Nature) operated under the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. In the 1940s–1970s, a wide museum network was developed in Uzbekistan: in 1940 there were 17 museums, and the building of the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan later became the Museum of the “Victims of Repression” [6; p. 35].

By 1975, there were 34 state museums, including 4 historical, 4 memorial, 2 art, and 15 local history museums. Museum-reserves were established in Khiva (1969), Samarkand (1982), and Bukhara (1985). These were designed for the integrated study and promotion of archaeological, ethnographic, cultural-artistic, and architectural monuments. Alongside state museums, folk museums of local history significance also operated.

In conclusion, during the Soviet period, the museum system in Uzbekistan underwent a complex yet important stage of development. On the one hand, museums played a significant role in preserving cultural heritage and conducting scientific research; on the other hand, they became instruments for promoting state ideology. As a result of nationalization policies, museum collections were enriched, but this process also created a number of social issues. During the Second World War, museums managed to maintain their activities and played an important role in boosting public morale and promoting patriotic ideas. Overall, this period can be regarded as a contradictory yet significant stage in the history of museums.

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