



MUSEUM ACTIVITY DURING THE FORMER SOVIET UNION PERIOD

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Annotation: *This article analyzes the nationalization policy implemented during the early years of Soviet rule and its impact on the museum system. In particular, it highlights the transfer of material and cultural assets into state ownership, the confiscation of private collections, the centralization of museum activities, and their transformation into mass educational institutions. The study also examines the formation of museum work in Turkestan, the activities of organizations such as TurkKomstaris and Uzkomstaris, and their role in the preservation of cultural heritage on a scientific basis.*

Keywords: *nationalization, museum, cultural heritage, TurkKomstaris, Uzkomstaris, Soviet policy, collection, archaeology, monument, preservation, Turkestan, RSFSR, decree*

Introduction: At the beginning of the 20th century, political changes in Russia, particularly the rise of the Bolsheviks to power, had a profound impact on all spheres of society, including culture and the arts. In its early years, the Soviet government pursued a policy of transferring material and cultural wealth into state ownership. This process was widely implemented in the territory of Turkestan as well. The museum sector was reorganized as one of the key directions of this policy. Existing museums were registered, scattered collections were gathered, private properties were confiscated, and new museums were established. At the same time, special organizations were created to ensure the protection and control of cultural heritage.

Main Part: In October 1890, in Petrograd (St. Petersburg), the Bolsheviks led by Lenin came to power through a coup d'état and began to establish their governing

bodies. Shortly thereafter, similar developments took place in Turkestan, which was a colony of Russia. Soon after, under the slogan of nationalization, the Soviet government began to forcibly confiscate material and cultural wealth from their legal owners across the country and repress those who resisted. This situation also affected the museum sector.

The Bolshevik government developed a set of measures that included:

- registering all existing museums and collecting dispersed museum collections;
- confiscating well-known private foundations, large estates, and mosques from their owners and converting them into museums;
- registering all notable private collections, inspecting ancient fortresses, identifying historically significant mosques, and prohibiting any alterations to them;
- combating illegal archaeological excavations carried out for theft;
- transforming museums into mass educational institutions, removing irrelevant materials, and clearly defining the role and functions of each museum [1; p. 35].

The Soviet government entrusted the responsibility of supervising museums to the People's Commissariat for Education (Narkompros), specifically to the “All-Russian Collegium for Museum Affairs and the Protection of Ancient Monuments and Art” established under it. Later, in May 1918, this collegium was transformed into the museum department of Narkompros and was assigned the task of unifying all museums and providing centralized leadership [1; p. 120]. Accordingly, various departments and subdivisions were established.

It is well known that on May 23, 1918, a decree on the separation of religion from the state was adopted [2; p. 42]. Following this, based on special decrees, former royal palaces, large public and private museums, and artistic collections in landlords' estates were forcibly confiscated from their owners. These rich collections became the foundation for the newly established museum funds.

During this period, nationalization processes also began in Turkestan. In particular, by the decree of April 19, 1918, issued by the Council of People's

Commissars of the Turkestan Republic, the complexes belonging to Prince Nikolai Romanov in Tashkent were declared state property [4]. His residence was converted into a public museum. Subsequently, on July 31, 1921, the government of Turkestan adopted a resolution prohibiting the export of antiquities, works of art, and scientific collections that could threaten the loss of the cultural heritage of the peoples of Turkestan. According to this decision, expert commissions were tasked with monitoring the sale of household antiques in markets and shops.

On October 5, 1918, the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars issued a decree "On the registration, accounting, and protection of art and antiquities owned by private individuals, societies, and organizations." According to this decree, all cultural monuments, regardless of ownership, were placed under state protection. Similarly, on July 31, 1921, the Council of People's Commissars of the Turkestan ASSR adopted a resolution "On the registration, accounting, and protection of art and historical monuments held by individuals and organizations in the Turkestan Republic." According to this resolution, museum authorities were assigned the important task of conducting an initial state registration of all monumental and material works of art and antiquities, regardless of ownership, both as complete collections and as individual items.

As stated in the resolution, once registered, the collections and individual monuments under the jurisdiction of TurkKomstaris were placed under state control. Thereafter, their sale, export abroad, or transfer from one person to another was prohibited. Their restoration and repair were assigned to local authorities and carefully recorded. This resolution primarily concerned monuments held in private ownership. Owners were required to provide information about their collections within three months of the decree's adoption. Particularly valuable monuments of artistic, scientific, or historical significance could be compulsorily confiscated and transferred to state protection if their preservation was at risk, if owners treated them negligently, or if they lacked the means to ensure proper conservation.

If valuable items were put up for sale, TurkKomstaris was granted the right to purchase them at preferential prices determined by a special expert commission. For this purpose, a special financial fund was established under its authority.

In addition, TurkKomstaris obtained the right to exhibit and publish private collections belonging to individuals. To identify museum objects, a scientific-artistic expert commission was established, chaired by A. M. Mironov, head of the museum sector of TurkKomstaris. As a result of the commission's active work, the museum fund of TurkKomstaris was rapidly enriched with numerous objects of artistic and historical significance.

Among the measures undertaken by the Soviet government to preserve cultural heritage were also efforts to protect and study archaeological monuments. As early as 1918, the Main Committee for Museum Affairs and the Protection of Ancient Monuments, Art, and Nature of the RSFSR was established. On May 23, 1921, the Turkestan Commission and the Council of People's Commissars of the Turkestan ASSR established a "Committee for Museum Affairs and the Protection of Ancient Monuments, Art, and Nature" under the People's Commissariat for Education [3; p. 26].

TurkKomstaris (Turkestan Commission for the Protection of Ancient Monuments of Art) was a body responsible for safeguarding ancient artistic monuments and nature. On May 22, 1921, a regulation was approved establishing TurkKomstaris within the structure of the People's Commissariat for Education of the Turkestan Republic. The commission was tasked with unifying and managing all museums in the republic, as well as protecting, preserving, and restoring ancient monuments, art, and nature.

The tasks assigned to museums were reflected in the resolution "On Museum Construction," signed by M. I. Kalinin on August 20, 1928, by the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR. This resolution addressed the uneven distribution of museum networks and proposed the large-scale

establishment of museums in national regions, the creation of historical-revolutionary museums, and the organization of revolutionary history departments within local history museums. It also raised issues concerning the nature of exhibits, the intensification of collection activities, and the redistribution of museum collections.

On April 7, 1928, Sredazkomstaris was abolished, and its institutions—the Central Asian Main Museum, the Central Art Museum, the zoo, and the Revolutionary Museum—were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Main Scientific Department of the People's Commissariat for Education of the Uzbek SSR. As a result, the scope of museums' scientific collecting and research expedition activities narrowed and became limited to the territory of Uzbekistan.

According to the order of the People's Commissariat for Education of Uzbekistan dated March 28, 1928, the Uzbekistan Committee for Museum Affairs and the Protection of Monuments of Antiquity, Art, and Nature—Uzkomstaris—was established in Samarkand [4; p. 260].

In addition to the chairman and his deputy, a representative of the Central Executive Committee of Uzbekistan was included in the permanent structure of the committee. According to its statute, Uzkomstaris was the successor of the former Sredazkomstaris, but its sphere of activity was limited to the territory of Uzbekistan. Its main tasks included the study, registration, restoration, and conservation of ancient monuments of art and culture, the publication of existing literature, and the dissemination of scientific knowledge through the interpretation of museum exhibits. The committee supplied museums with antiquities, natural objects, and works of art reflecting the culture of Uzbekistan, as well as the specific features of the development of productive forces and everyday life. It was also responsible for organizing archaeological surveys and excavations of significance from the perspective of history, culture, and environmental paleontology. The committee had

the authority to supervise the activities of all individuals and organizations arriving in Uzbekistan to study the historical past, way of life, and nature of the republic.

On December 1, 1930, the First Congress of Museums began its work in Moscow. The congress considered issues such as dialectical materialism and museum construction, political-educational work in museums, and the publication of general guidelines corresponding to different types of museums [7; p. 100].

The congress defined the specific tasks of various types of museums. It emphasized that historical museums (including palace museums and house museums) should not be limited to presenting cultural history alone, but should also demonstrate the dialectics of social development, including the emergence, development, crisis, and transformation of social systems. In this regard, illustrative materials were to play a key role. Local history museums were tasked with studying the productive forces of the region, labor resources, and material capacities, identifying unused opportunities, and assisting in sociological planning. An analysis of the issues discussed and decisions adopted at the First Congress of Museums shows that an incorrect tendency emerged replacing authentic natural-historical and cultural-historical objects in exhibitions with auxiliary scientific materials. The congress failed to resolve the issue of how to properly use authentic and illustrative materials, which later led to the impoverishment of museum exhibitions in terms of genuine artifacts and documentary exhibits. The congress emphasized the need to display processes rather than objects, considering museum work as defined by specific processes.

Although the First Congress of Museums did not entirely deny the use of authentic objects, it failed to provide clear methods and approaches for combining objects with schematic representations in creating thematic exhibitions.

In addition, the congress's decision to publish a specialized journal, "Soviet Museum," was of great significance [5; p. 26]. The journal began publication in 1931 [9; p. 90].

In 1933, the first Republican conference of museum workers was convened in Tashkent to discuss the main directions for further development of museum work. The conference sessions were organized into three commissions:

1. Planning of the museum network and construction in the Uzbek SSR;
2. Scientific research activities of museums;
3. Mass educational activities of museums.

The conference emphasized the necessity of closely linking museum activities with scientific and public organizations [3; p. 19]. Although the general regional (local history) museum was identified as the main type, permission was also granted to establish specialized museums, primarily in large cities considered cultural centers.

The conference focused primarily on the scientific research activities of museums, including the organization of expeditions, the systematic collection of materials, the scientific inventory and study of incoming museum items, as well as the development of general issues related to museum methodology and techniques.

Scientific collecting was recognized as the weakest area, and it was emphasized that the collected materials should be subjected to critical analysis. All participants of the conference pointed out the shortage of highly qualified museum specialists.

In the 1940s, changes in museum development brought the issue of training qualified personnel to the forefront. At the First Congress of Museums, the training of qualified staff was considered a crucial issue. This is because museum studies require the integration of scientific knowledge with museum practice. Each museum encompasses two scientific domains.

The first is determined by its specialization: history is studied in history museums, literary studies in literary museums, and art in art museums.

The second domain is museology itself, which studies the theory and methodology of collection building, preservation, restoration, scientific description

of exhibits, экскурсион (excursion) activities, exhibition art, as well as other forms and methods of museum activity [3; p. 21].

The composition of scientific staff in the museums of Uzbekistan consisted, on the one hand, of older employees who had worked in museums for 10–15 years or specialists who had transitioned into museum work, and on the other hand, of young employees without museum experience. There were also many temporary workers who were waiting for better opportunities to move to other jobs.

The condition of museum personnel in the republic was characterized by:

1. A lack of employees with sufficient work experience, and in some cases, an excess of unqualified staff;
2. A shortage of national кадров (local specialists);
3. Incomplete staffing of scientific personnel in some museums;
4. Unsatisfactory training of new personnel [1; p. 90].

It should be noted that during the 1920s, when museums were supervised by TurkKomstaris and Sredazkomstaris, museums in Uzbekistan had highly qualified personnel, including prominent archaeologists, source studies specialists, ethnographers, anthropologists, and natural scientists. However, by the 1930s, the development of science, as well as the growth of higher educational institutions and research organizations in the republic, attracted many specialists away from museums. As a result, museums were left with young personnel who often lacked specialization in museology and sometimes even higher education. This situation was not unique to Uzbekistan but was characteristic of the entire country. It necessitated the implementation of serious measures for training museum specialists.

In 1929, according to a decision of the People's Commissariat of Education, nine-month advanced training courses for museum employees were organized at central higher educational institutions [13]. In addition, in 1932, two groups of postgraduate students specializing in museology and art history were selected.

In the autumn of 1934, the People's Commissariat of Education of the RSFSR established higher museum courses, which were later transformed into a permanent higher educational institution for museum studies. These courses consisted of two tracks: natural-historical and historical. However, the small number of specialists trained by these courses was insufficient for the entire country. Therefore, in 1937–1940, short-term museum courses began to be organized. Starting from 1930, such courses were also established in national republics, including Uzbekistan [6; p. 20]. These courses were designed for a duration of six months. Similar courses were organized at the Central State Museum in Samarkand.

In 1939, the People's Commissariat of Education of Uzbekistan adopted a resolution to organize six-month advanced training courses for museum employees. However, after revising the program, the duration of study was reduced to four months. Training of specialists for the regions of the republic began to be carried out at museums in Tashkent.

The training of specialists through higher educational institutions also continued. In particular, museums in Uzbekistan were increasingly staffed with graduates of the history faculties of pedagogical institutes in Andijan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and Fergana.

It should be especially emphasized that regardless of how scientifically museum work was developed, museums ultimately became centers for promoting the ideology of the Soviet state and were heavily politicized.

In June 1941, with the involvement of the USSR in the Second World War, the peaceful life of the population was disrupted. Many museums vacated their buildings to accommodate evacuated institutions.

The network of museums in the republic temporarily decreased: the Art Museum, the Literature Museum, the Museum of the History and Nature of Uzbekistan, and the Polytechnic Museum were merged under the single name of the Museum of the History, Culture, and Art of Uzbekistan. The Museum of Atheistic

Propaganda was put into conservation. Exhibitions in many museums across the republic were dismantled, and both research activities and staff numbers were reduced. From the History Museum alone, nine employees went to the фронт (front), while more than ten employees from the Samarkand Museum joined the war effort.

Museum workers who remained on the home front fulfilled their duty to the nation with honor. Within a short period, they organized a series of excursions in the halls of art and history departments and arranged numerous exhibitions. They conducted extensive mass political work among workers, demonstrating the heroic courage of both the фронт and the people in the rear. At the same time, all museum collections accumulated over the years were successfully preserved.

The exhibitions that were organized used historical examples to highlight the love of freedom of the people and their struggle for independence. The main emphasis was placed on demonstrating and promoting examples of heroism from the past. During the early stages of the Second World War, many cities and industrial enterprises fell under enemy control, making it difficult to objectively present military events. On the one hand, such realities could demoralize the population; on the other hand, the political system of the country did not allow such impartiality. As the situation on the фронт improved, themes such as the successful operations of the army and the liberation of occupied territories found appropriate representation in the exhibitions of central and republican museums.

In conclusion, the nationalization policy carried out during the early years of Soviet rule played an important role in the formation of the museum system. On the one hand, many historical and cultural assets were brought under state protection, enriching museum collections. On the other hand, since this process was carried out through coercive means, it caused serious harm to the interests of private property owners. Institutions such as TurkKomstaris and Uzkomstaris, established in Turkestan, played a significant role in the development of museum work, the

preservation of cultural heritage, and its scientific study. Overall, this period can be assessed as a complex yet important stage in the history of museums.

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