

## HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND FUNCTIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF MUSEUM INSTITUTIONS DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD

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### Abstract

The article analyzes the formation of museum work in the Soviet period, the concept and development trends of museology, the policy of museology, and the institutional characteristics of cultural and educational activities.

**Keywords:** Soviet period, museum work, museology, museology, cultural policy, ideology, development trends.

### Introduction

During the Soviet period, museum practice emerged as one of the key spheres within the cultural and ideological life of society. In this era, museums functioned not only as institutions for the preservation of historical heritage but also as instruments for the dissemination of state ideology. Consequently, the scholarly examination of both the theoretical foundations and practical implementation of museology in the Soviet context remains a relevant and significant field of research.

This study is grounded in the methodological principles of historicism and objectivity, which serve as its primary analytical framework. A systemic approach, comparative-analytical method, periodization analysis, and source criticism were employed in examining the topic. Normative-legal documents of the Soviet period, governmental resolutions, archival materials, statistical data, and relevant scholarly literature were comparatively analyzed to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-based interpretation of the development of museum institutions during this period.

### RESULTS

The findings of the study indicate that during the Soviet period, museum practice was formed within a highly centralized institutional framework. The activities of museums were systematically oriented toward fulfilling ideological functions, reflecting the priorities of state cultural policy. Furthermore, the process of museification developed in close alignment with governmental directives, demonstrating the direct interdependence between museum institutions and state ideology.

### DISCUSSION

The Soviet period represents a distinct stage in the history of museum practice, during which museum activity acquired a clearly defined institutional framework. It was in this era that museology as a discipline became systematized, and the practice of museification developed



within a coherent conceptual orientation shaped by state cultural policy.

This transformation marked the consolidation of museums not merely as repositories of collections, but as multifunctional cultural institutions performing ideological, educational, and social roles. Museums became integrated into the broader system of state governance, serving as instruments for shaping historical narratives, promoting officially sanctioned interpretations of the past, and contributing to the formation of collective identity within the framework of Soviet ideological discourse.

With the establishment of Soviet authority, museum activity became one of the cultural sectors directly administered by the state. Its development was carried out within a centralized administrative system, regulated by normative-legal acts and guided by a unified scientific-methodological framework.

During this period, the conceptual foundations of museology were shaped in close alignment with the principles of historical materialism, a class-based interpretative approach, and the objectives of socialist social education. As a result, ideological content occupied a dominant position in museum exhibitions and in the broader process of museification.

At the same time, significant institutional advancements were achieved in the professionalization of museum work. The formation of museum collections, the scientific classification of exhibits, inventory documentation, and preservation procedures were, for the first time, standardized according to unified scientific criteria and regulatory norms [1:183].

During the Soviet period, the practice of museification was characterized by a dual orientation. On the one hand, it was directed toward the scientific study and preservation of historical and cultural heritage; on the other, it served to reinterpret the past through the prism of newly established socio-political doctrines. Through museum exhibitions, specific conceptual models of historical reality were constructed and transmitted to the public consciousness. Although this framework imposed certain limitations on academic independence, it simultaneously contributed to strengthening the organizational, methodological, and technological foundations of museum work.

As principal repositories of state cultural assets, museums were regarded, by the nature of their functions, as both research and educational institutions. As research centers, they collected, studied, preserved, and systematized cultural and historical monuments, as well as primary sources related to nature and society. As scientific-educational institutions, museums disseminated the results of their research through exhibitions, publications, and public outreach initiatives [2:11]. The analysis of these processes enables not only a deeper understanding of Soviet museum practice but also the identification of the conceptual foundations underlying post-independence museum policy and museological development. In this sense, museums functioned as multifunctional institutions that safeguarded cultural heritage, advanced scholarly inquiry, and contributed to the preservation of historical memory and spiritual development.

Efforts to enrich museum collections and strengthen their material and technical infrastructure have served broader educational objectives, including fostering patriotism, loyalty to national independence, and respect for cultural values among younger generations [3:282]. Exhibitions were typically designed in accordance with the profile of a particular museum and its regional context. In local history and historical museums, strict adherence to the principle of historicism was maintained, with artifacts arranged in chronological sequence. Museum exhibitions



represent a form of visual communication aimed at conveying information through artifacts, works of art, written documentation, labels, and explanatory texts [4:89]. In addition to their educational mission, museums also functioned as key research centers within their respective regions.

The establishment of Soviet authority in the 1920s led to fundamental transformations in museum policy in Uzbekistan. Museums were redefined not only as custodians of cultural heritage but also as instruments of ideological work. Special emphasis was placed on creating museums that reflected the achievements of the socialist system and promoted educational initiatives aligned with state objectives. In the southern regions of Uzbekistan, new museums were opened to present local culture, history, and everyday life. These developments contributed both to the preservation of unique heritage and to the construction of a new national-social identity.

The 1930s, marked by political repression and systemic transformations, posed challenges for many museums, including resource shortages and shifts in ideological orientation. Nevertheless, this period was also characterized by active collection and systematization of exhibits, laying the groundwork for the creation of scientific collections and specialized libraries that would later support further development of museum scholarship.

Scientific research within museums was conducted through the study of artifacts as primary sources of historical knowledge possessing artistic and ethical value [5:289]. For example, in 1930 the Hermitage Museum significantly expanded archaeological activities in Central Asia, often in cooperation with other institutions. The Zarafshan Expedition, organized in 1934 under the leadership of A.Yu. Yakubovsky, collaborated with Uzkomstaris [6:312]. Subsequent expeditions to Uzbekistan included those conducted by B.Z. Gamburg, who organized twelve research missions focused on the ethnography of Kashkadarya and Bukhara regions, assembling significant collections, including materials related to the Arab communities of Kashkadarya. In 1961, an expedition led by B.Ya. Stavisky conducted archaeological research at Kara-Tepe in Old Termez; these investigations continued until 1994 with the participation of the State Museum of Oriental Art and other institutions [7:37].

The emergence of the first museums in Turkestan created the foundations for preserving the region's natural environment, rich history, and material and spiritual culture. However, the consolidation of collections and the establishment of museums were complex processes. The Tsarist administration regarded the broad dissemination of historical and cultural knowledge among the local population as potentially conflicting with colonial policy. Although the Russian Empire lacked a unified museum administration or specialized museum legislation, certain positive developments occurred. The charter of the first museum in Turkestan was drafted and approved in 1888, defining its specialization, objectives, and operational framework [8:13]. Museum departments expanded, collections increased, and cataloguing practices were introduced, particularly in ethnography, zoology, numismatics, and archaeology.

The earliest museums in Central Asia primarily functioned as repositories of rare objects, manuscripts, and works of art and craftsmanship. The Russian conquest of the region and growing scholarly interest in its natural and cultural wealth led to the establishment of the first local history museum, which later became the foundation of the present-day State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan, with a history spanning nearly 150 years. Prior to the October



Revolution of 1917, the “Tashkent Museum” was the only museum in the region. Following the revolution, museums with broader thematic specializations and extensive exhibitions began to emerge. Official archaeological research in Uzbekistan commenced between 1926 and 1928 [9:5], accompanied by excavations at ancient urban sites and investigations of architectural monuments [10:17]. Archaeological research was also conducted at Afrasiab, part of ancient Samarkand.

The formation of museum practice in Uzbekistan was closely associated with the scholarly activities of Russian researchers of Central Asia, including A.P. Fedchenko, I.V. Mushketov, V.F. Oshanin, and V.V. Bartold. In 1876, the first public museum in Tashkent was established, housing more than 1,500 exhibits in mineralogy, zoology, numismatics, and ethnography. Public museums were subsequently opened in Samarkand (1896) and Fergana (1899).

By October 1917, only three museums operated in Turkestan—the Tashkent Local History Museum, the Samarkand People’s Museum, and the Fergana People’s Museum—and their collections were limited and often unsystematic. After October 1917, museums became public property. Under Soviet decrees, major museums and cultural monuments were nationalized and placed under state protection [11:7].

In conclusion, during the Soviet period, museum practice developed within the framework of state cultural policy and acquired a pronounced ideological character. While museums continued to preserve cultural heritage, they simultaneously fulfilled ideological functions. This historical experience remains essential for analyzing the evolution of contemporary museology and museum policy in the post-Soviet context.

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