

Section 3. Museology

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HISTORICAL FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS IN THE SAMARKAND STATE MUSEUM-RESERVE

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Abstract

This article analyzes the emergence of museums in Samarkand in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and the process of formation of paleontological, zoological and botanical collections in them. The factors of collections, their connection with scientific and expeditionary activities and their institutionalization as museum funds are covered. The educational, scientific and cultural significance of natural collections is also revealed.

Keywords: *natural-scientific collections, museum fund, botanical and zoological items, expedition, concept*

Introduction

In the second half of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century, the scope of scientific research in Central Asia expanded significantly. This process led to the activation of expeditions and scientific observations aimed at studying natural resources in addition to historical and cultural riches in the Samarkand region. As a result of archaeological, ethnographic and natural-scientific research carried out during this period, many unique items began to be collected. The need to systematically store these items and introduce scientific treatment has led to the establishment of museums. The first collections were

often formed by foreign scientists, scientific societies, educational institutions that organized scientific expeditions, and later local enterprising intellectuals also contributed.

Materials and methods

Many intellectuals also contributed to the establishment of the first museum in Samarkand and the enrichment of its collection. A. K. Abramov, Borzinkov, M. N. Rostivlavov, Barshevskiy, Vyatkin, translator Mirza Abdurahmon, merchant Mirza Abdulla Bukhoriy, Hafiz, Mirza Barot, Mulla Qosim, Abu Said Makhsums can be mentioned (M. Yunusov 2023). It is known from history that the Sa-

markand Museum carried out activities to form its collections and preserve existing items until its official opening. According to M. E. Masson, who served as the director of the museum, the Samarkand Museum was founded in 1874, completed in 1883 during the reign of M. G. Chernyayev, and reopened in 1896. (M. E. Masson 1956) V. A. Shishkin also stated in his research that the museum was “reopened” in 1896. The demand for a new building has increased due to the increase in the number of collections and the large number of visitors in the museum, which has been operating for years. After much effort, the new building was commissioned in 1911. The library operated simultaneously with the museum in the building. By the 1920s, the museum had become an independent institution. From this period onward, the museum’s collection was significantly expanded and systematically organized. By the early twentieth century, educational institutions established in Samarkand began to develop natural science cabinets and small collections. This process later laid the foundation for the creation of large-scale museum holdings. In particular, during the 1920s–1930s, the intensification of scientific research in the field of natural sciences led to the systematic registration of collections and their formal establishment as museum funds.

The transformation of natural specimens from simple assembled collections into scientific collection-level holdings was associated with the introduction of classification systems, inventory procedures, and standardized preservation requirements. Throughout the twentieth century, the legal and organizational foundations of museum activity were progressively strengthened, and natural collections were formally designated as separate funds. As a result, the natural museum holdings formed in the region acquired not only exhibition value but also considerable significance as fundamental scientific resources. Within the museum, a Natural History Department operated, comprising subdivisions in mineralogy, botany, and zoology. The mineralogy subdivision, however, was relatively limited in scope, with the total number of collections amounting to only thirty-three items. The Botany Department was established in 1921. Compared to the other departments, it developed rapidly

and accumulated a particularly rich collection. For instance, in 1922 alone, the department received 321 specimens. (Scientific Archive of the Samarkand State Museum-Reserve, n.d.) The Zoology Department was also founded in 1921 and, in 1922, accepted 6,500 items into its collection.

In 1923, all museum holdings were officially declared state property, and the museum collections underwent a comprehensive inventory process. Specifically, 6,384 items were registered in the Zoology Department, 250 items in the Botany Department, and 203 items in the Mineralogy Department. (National Archive of Uzbekistan, n.d.) In 1930, pursuant to a government resolution, the museum was relocated to the Ulugh Beg Madrasah in Registan Square. Unlike many other museums in the republic, the Samarkand Museum established both a photographic laboratory and a laboratory within its Natural History Department.

Results and Discussion

During this period, prominent scholars such as M. Yu. Saidjonov, I. A. Sukharev, and Zakharov were active at the museum. Under their initiative, scientific expeditions to various regions of the country were systematically organized. In particular, as a result of an expedition to Iskanderkul led in 1932–1933 by P. F. Ripl, a staff member of the Natural History Department, 127 bird specimens and 9 mounted animal specimens were prepared, and 5 animal skins along with skulls were collected. (Scientific Archive of the Samarkand State Museum-Reserve, 1933) The museum’s herbarium collection was also expanded, exceeding one hundred catalogued sheets. The first official guidebook to the exhibitions of the Samarkand Museum was prepared by I. A. Sukharev and was dedicated specifically to the Natural History Department.

As a result of ongoing scientific research and field expeditions, the museum’s departments gradually expanded. In 1936, the collections of the Natural History Department were transferred to a private residence confiscated from the merchant Avraam Kalandarov. The collections of the Nature Department are currently preserved in the former courtyard of the merchant Kalandarov, where they continue to be stored and maintained.

The taxidermied bird specimens exhibited in the Nature Department's display halls constitute an essential and inseparable component of its zoological holdings and represent a significant part of the museum's scientific and educational resources. The core of the ornithological collection was transferred to the Samarkand Regional Museum of Local Lore during the mid-1930s and the mid-1970s. These materials were primarily formed on the basis of the collections of the prominent Uzbek ornithologist Alexander Nikolayevich Bogdanov, who initially served as the museum's director and subsequently continued his work there as a research associate. His scientific and field activities made a substantial contribution to the development and systematization of the museum's zoological and ornithological collections.

At present, the ornithological holdings of the Nature Department of the Samarkand Regional Museum of Local Lore comprise 858 specimens. This collection represents important scientific, educational, and cultural value, serving as a source for research, exhibition activities, and the study of regional avifauna. The main part of the collection was assembled by A. N. Bogdanov and P. F. Ripl between 1931 and 1940. During this period, 841 bird specimens were accessioned into the museum, accounting for approximately 72% of the total ornithological holdings (Urmanova T. G. 1982). At present, more than half of the taxidermied bird specimens are displayed in the exhibition halls of the Nature Department of the Regional Museum of Local Lore. The remaining specimens are preserved in the departmental collections storage, where they are kept in specially designed cabinets and drawer-type wooden cases in the form of study skins (carcasses), ensuring their long-term conservation and protection.

The bird displays in the exhibition halls are organized according to ecological principles. Specimens are arranged by ecosystem and presented within thematic sections representing mountain, tugai (riparian woodland), foothill (adir), and desert ecosystems, thereby reflecting the ecological diversity of regional avifauna. Among the most valuable museum holdings are the ornithological collections. These collections represent a systematically organized body of specimens of birds (Class

Aves), assembled for scientific research, educational purposes, and exhibition activities. They serve as an important source for the study of species diversity, distribution, and ecological characteristics of birds.

In addition to mounted specimens, the museum fund also preserves a unique collection of bird eggs, which is of considerable scientific and museological significance. In the exhibition, the eggs are arranged by orders and families and displayed in glass showcases. The collection currently comprises more than 765 specimens, which are stored and exhibited across four display shelves.

Conclusion

The formation of natural science museum collections in Samarkand during the 19th and 20th centuries was closely associated with scientific research activities, field expeditions, and the work of educational institutions. Collections that initially emerged as private and small-scale assemblages gradually evolved into systematically organized museum holdings. This process laid the foundation for the development of an institutional system for the preservation and conservation of the region's natural heritage. Analytical observations indicate that the establishment of museums based on natural collections proceeded through several successive stages. These included an initial period of collection and primary systematization, followed by the introduction of a scientifically grounded collections management policy, and subsequently the implementation of modern methods of storage, conservation, and exhibition. Particularly significant changes occurred during the years of independence, when natural science collections entered a qualitatively new stage of development. During this period, their legal protection was strengthened, and the scientific cataloguing and documentation of museum holdings were significantly improved. These measures contributed to enhancing the preservation, accessibility, and research value of natural science collections within the museum system.

Thus, the development of museums in Samarkand has been intrinsically linked with natural collections, which serve as an important institutional foundation for the preservation, study, and public dissemination of

the region's natural heritage. These collections play a significant role not only in safeguarding biodiversity and geological diversity, but also in supporting scientific research, educational activities, and public awareness. In this context, the further development of museum activities should prioritize the digitization of natural collections, the introduc-

tion of scientific documentation and documentation standards, and the expansion of international scientific cooperation. The implementation of these measures will enhance the accessibility, preservation quality, and research potential of museum holdings, and will facilitate their integration into the global scientific and cultural information space.

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