

THE ACTIVITIES OF RESEARCHERS AT THE BUKHARA MUSEUM IN ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the analysis of the activities of researchers of the Bukhara Museum in the 1920s-1930s based on archival documents preserved in the museum's collection. During the period under study, the museum was undergoing a stage of formation, and its structure, as well as approaches to scientific and exhibition work, were in the process of formation. Special attention is paid to the role of the Bukhara Committee for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (Bukhkomstaris), which played a key role in the restoration and reorganization of the museum after a break in 1927. One of the first researchers was Polina Andreyevna Goncharova, an ethnographer who studied gold embroidery. She published the work "Bukhara's Gold Embroidery Art," in which she used museum materials and introduced the term "Darham" into scientific circulation.

A significant contribution to the development of museum work was made by P. E. Kornilov, who, having arrived in Bukhara in the early 1930s, organized a scientific council under the museum. It included A. S. Amitrov, P. A. Goncharova, and V. A. Shishkin. The latter actively participated in archaeological excavations, replenished the collections with archaeological and jewelry items, and supervised the exhibitions at the Sitorai Mohi-Hossa summer palace. His work on describing archives related to the history of the Bukhara Emirate was of particular importance.

Alexander Sergeyevich Amitrov, an ethnographer by education, actively corresponded with the Central Anti-Religious Museum, engaged in scientific and methodological activities. Mustafo Abdurahmanov, a researcher and deputy director of the museum, maintained connections with major museums and institutes of the USSR, enriching the collections of the Bukhara Museum with new exhibits.

Archival sources record the stability of the museum's staff in the 1930s, the participation of staff in scientific expeditions, the systematic acquisition of collections, the study and inventory of objects, as well as proposals for the transfer of the museum from the Kukeldash Madrasah and the museification of architectural monuments. All this testifies to the high professional activity of the collective and its contribution to the development of museum work in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Bukhara, exhibit, fund, museum, main inventory book, V.A. Shishkin, P.A. Goncharova, archaeology.

Introduction

Museum work in Bukhara began in the early 20th century. On November 8, 1922, the first museum was officially opened. It was named in honor of the enlightener of his time – “The Museum (House of the Muses) of Qori Yuldash Pulatov”. Unfortunately, the activity of the Bukhara Museum was short-lived and lasted only two years. In 1924, the museum was closed to visitors due to a lack of financial resources. However, thanks to the initiative of Musa Saidjonov and Butkevich, the museum was reorganized in 1927 and relocated to a European-style building situated in the courtyard of the Kukeldash Madrasa.

Today, the museum-reserve, which holds more than 135,000 artifacts, consists of 16 branches and 2 permanent exhibitions – a total of 18 divisions – covering fields such as history, art, culture, ethnography, archaeology, and religion. The origin and exhibition of each museum could serve as a subject for separate research.

Methods and Materials.

The study employs the historical-archival method and content analysis. The primary sources include archival documents from the Bukhara Museum, such as business correspondence, inventory books, official memos, and photographic materials from the 1920s–1930s. The biographical analysis method was used to examine the activities of individual researchers, including P. E. Kornilov, P. A. Goncharova, V. A. Shishkin, A. S. Amitrov, and M. Abdurakhmanov. Comparative analysis made it possible to identify the dynamics of the development of the museum structure, personnel changes, and scientific work during the period under study. Additionally, methods of source analysis were applied.

Literary (historiographical) review. The study of the history of the Bukhara Museum and the activities of its researchers in the 1920s–1930s remains an important yet comparatively underexplored topic in the historiography of museum work in Central Asia. To date, the main sources for such research are the museum's internal archival documents, including official correspondence, inventory books, minutes of the academic council, reports, photographic materials, and personal recollections of participants. These materials make it possible to reconstruct the institutional development of the museum, its personnel policies, and the contributions of individual specialists to the formation of its collections [3].

Early research on the history of museums in Uzbekistan was predominantly descriptive in nature and was published during the Soviet period as part of commemorative or institutional reporting literature. Such publications typically outlined the general stages of museum development but did not analyze the individual contributions of museum researchers. Studies on the cultural and ethnographic history of Bukhara, including works on decorative and applied arts and gold embroidery crafts, have partially addressed the activities of P. A. Goncharova. However, her role as a researcher and museum staff member still requires more in-depth analysis [2].

The figure of P. E. Kornilov has been considered in the context of the history of Soviet art history and museum development in Tatarstan and Russia. His work in Bukhara, although short-term, is mentioned in a few studies, but it has yet to be fully examined. Similarly, V. A. Shishkin is known as an archaeologist and expedition participant, but his role as an organizer of museum collections in Bukhara also remains insufficiently studied [1].

Results indicating the author's thematic subdivisions.

Based on archival documents from the Bukhara Museum dating to the 1920s–1930s, the research yielded the following results, grouped by thematic areas:

1. Formation of the museum's research staff;
2. Organization and development of scientific work;
3. Contribution to the development of museum collections and exhibition activities;
4. Inter-museum and academic cooperation;
5. Archival and archeographic work.

Discuss.

During the existence of the first museum in Bukhara, the number of its research staff was relatively small. Moreover, the museum resumed its operations in 1927 after a short hiatus. A significant contribution to its reorganization was made by *Bukhkomstaris* – the Bukhara Committee for the Preservation of Cultural Monuments. One of the first researchers hired by the museum was Polina Andreevna Goncharova, the wife of the renowned archaeologist Vasily Afanasyevich Shishkin. Her work was associated with the historical department, which became the foundation for the development of the museum [6].

Goncharova began working at the museum in 1928. At the time, she spoke only Tajik. Based on gold embroidery items preserved in the museum, she wrote her book *The Gold Embroidery Art of Bukhara*. In this work, the author uses the term *Darakham*, referring to the robes of rulers

transferred to the museum from the former Emirate collection. *Darakham* represents a sample of ornamental composition featuring a continuous pattern across the entire embroidery surface.

While at the museum, Goncharova was engaged in ethnographic research, but in 1933, she actively participated in the archaeological exploration of the historical site of Chor-Bakr. According to her, her duties included scholarly research on exhibition objects, as well as their documentation and inventory work.

The photo archive of the Bukhara Museum also contains a collection of photographs by the well-known scholar Rempel, including an image of Goncharova working with an artist in front of a wall painting of a griffin discovered during archaeological excavations at the palace of the rulers of Varakhsha.

At that time, the museum's researchers established cultural ties not only at the republican level but also internationally.

In 1931, the "Kushbegi Archive" was discovered in the Ark Fortress, the former residence of the Bukhara rulers. Following the discovery, the museum administration sent letters to various institutions requesting the return of this collection of documents. In subsequent years, a special commission was established within the museum to study the archive. As a result of joint efforts with staff from the Central State Archive, museum researchers translated a number of documents on selected topics. After the discovery of the Kushbegi Archive, museum staff member Ismail Sadri actively participated in the study of the materials, while Goncharova was responsible for compiling the document inventory. Based on these archival materials, the museum's researchers independently prepared several treatises for publication. At that time, the deputy director of the museum was Pyotr Yevgenyevich Kornilov, an outstanding scholar of the Soviet era.

The Kushbegi Archive is an important source for studying the history of the Bukhara Emirate as well as the scholarly and research work of the Bukhara Museum staff. It began to take shape in 1865 within the Ark Fortress. The archive reflects the activities of the central administration, including finance management, personnel appointments, foreign and domestic affairs. The materials of the Kushbegi Archive were actively used by researchers of the Bukhara Museum of History and Local Lore in preparing exhibitions, compiling catalogs, and conducting thematic studies. The documents made it possible to identify reliable information about historical figures, state institutions, craft guilds, the tax system, and the urban policy of the Emirate. The archival data contributed to the in-depth scholarly attribution of museum objects and the verification of information obtained from oral and written sources. Furthermore, working with the Kushbegi Archive provided the museum with a high degree of credibility in interpreting historical processes, which, in turn, strengthened the educational and enlightening role of its exhibitions.

P. E. Kornilov – his contribution to art history and museum studies in Russia, the Republic of Tatarstan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan is significant. In the early 1930s, he arrived in Bukhara [6]. Upon his arrival, Kornilov established a scientific council at the museum, which included P. A. Goncharova, A. S. Amitrov, and V. A. Shishkin from *Uzkomstaris* (the Uzbek Committee for the Preservation of Monuments). This council remained active in the following years. Its sessions addressed pressing issues related to the museum, edited scholarly articles and brochures, and prepared for the opening of new exhibitions. At that time, museum work was still in its formative stages and lacked a clearly defined structure. Notably, during this period, an article by a museum researcher was published in the journal *Soviet Museum* [3]. In that article, Kornilov provided valuable information about the museum's general profile, its collections, visitors, and exhibitions.

P. Kornilov was an advocate for applying a scientific approach to museum work. In his reports, he raised important issues such as the need for strict cataloging, maintaining proper temperature conditions in storage facilities, and expanding the ethnographic collection through the acquisition of traditional household items, clothing, and crafts. Under his leadership, the museum began to engage more actively with archival sources, including the Kushbegi Archive, to provide documentary support for exhibition activities.

The Minting Industry of Bukhara is one of Kornilov's works, which served as the basis for lectures and presentations prepared by the museum's research staff. He also compiled the museum's annual report, which included data on the total number of visitors, including guided tour groups. Kornilov's creative and scholarly activity, though brief during his tenure at the Bukhara Museum in the 1930s, was covered in the periodical press of that time. His research contributed to some of the foundational work in the field of museology.

From 1930 to 1933, the museum was headed by Halim Ashurov, who, before the fall of the Emirate regime in Bukhara, was part of the local intelligentsia and enlightenment movement. After being appointed museum director, he assigned specific tasks to the staff. During his leadership, the museum underwent significant changes. Notably, collaboration was established with the archaeologist and renowned scholar V. L. Vyatkin, who came from Samarkand. Director Ashurov also sent a letter to all institutions and enterprises in Bukhara requesting immediate information—primarily on achievements—needed for organizing an exhibition [4].

In 1931, the museum received a letter from the Central Anti-Religious Museum informing them of a planned re-exhibition titled *Islam*, and requesting exhibits on the following themes: the hierarchy of the clergy, the Jadid movement program, portraits of leaders, the costume and belongings of a dervish, the *Kalon* congregational mosque during holidays, venerated mazars, and others [5]. In April, an agreement was signed with SAMIIR (the Central Asian Museum of History and the History of the Revolution). On May 9, a meeting was held at the museum to discuss the upcoming exhibition *The Revolution in Bukhara*, where the museum director gave a report. On November 1, 1931, like the rest of the museum staff, Halim Ashurov also received a certificate confirming his employment at the Bukhara Museum.

In the same year, the Bukhara Museum was granted the status of an inter-district local history institution, which opened up new organizational and educational opportunities. One notable example of the museum's activity was the exhibition dedicated to International Women's Day — March 8. It was held at the People's House in Bukhara. Archival documents include a report from the museum's deputy director dated August 12, 1931, with the name of then-director H. Ashurov indicated at the top.

The preparation of the exhibition was carried out with the support of various institutions. Some of the exhibits were provided by the museum itself, while others came from the Bukhara City Committee and several organizations. For instance, the District Cooperative Union expressed its willingness to contribute a photograph of a woman silk worker, highlighting the aim of including materials that reflected the labor and everyday life of contemporary women.

To ensure broad representation and informational outreach, the museum sent collaboration requests to a wide range of institutions, including the Old Bukhara branch of the OGPU, the District Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks), the silk-reeling factory, the Bukhara Library, and other organizations. This practice illustrates not only a high level of coordination but also an effort to institutionalize museum work within the ideological and cultural framework of the time.

After the museum's reorganization, the position of director was temporarily abolished, and museum management was entrusted to representatives of *Bukhkomstaris* (Bukhara Committee for the Preservation of Monuments). Following Musa Saidjonov, this responsibility was assigned to V. A. Shishkin, whose name frequently appears in the museum's archival documents. He made a significant contribution to the development of museum work, enriching the museum's collection not only with archaeological finds but also with jewelry items. In the early 1930s, he was also tasked with organizing an exhibition at the summer palace *Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa*. By 1931, the palace had been placed under the museum's authority, and an exhibition dedicated to the life of the Bukhara emirs was organized in the main building of the palace. The concept of this exhibition may not have fully aligned with the ideological directives of the time, which was likely one of the reasons for its dismantling in the 1940s.

Based on archival documents, it can be concluded that Shishkin was one of the museum's leading specialists. According to museum staff member Amitrov, Shishkin possessed deep knowledge of

the history of Eastern peoples and was fluent in several Eastern languages. In 1934, he also served briefly as acting director of the museum, as by that time the position had been reinstated. At the time, the museum's collection was not as extensive as that of major institutions worldwide, and the small staff made a complete inventory of the exhibits difficult. As a result, external expertise was likely needed. Shishkin was among the first to assist in this effort and contributed to the creation of scientific catalog cards for the museum's artifacts.

Like other museum staff, Shishkin considered the archive discovered in Bukhara a major scholarly find. He also took part in organizing the archeographic description of the archive, which held great significance and was directly related to the Bukhara Emirate. This archive was also stored in the Bukhara Museum. As an archaeologist, Shishkin contributed approximately 100 archaeological objects to the museum's collection and continued to support the institution with his advice. Most of these artifacts were discovered during the 1934–1935 expedition and are now displayed in the *Ancient and Medieval History of the Bukhara Oasis* section of the history department. His research is reflected in the museum's scientific archive. In 1939, he delivered a presentation titled *The Culture of Ancient Sogdiana* at a meeting of the museum's scientific council, and in the post-war years, he worked on creating maps for the museum [8]. In an issue of the *Bukhoro Haqiqati* (Bukhara Truth) newspaper from the 1950s, Shishkin provided a detailed overview of an exhibition he had reinstalled in 15 halls of the *Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa* Palace.

On July 15, 1929, archaeologist Vasily Afanasyevich Shishkin donated to the museum's collection four *Arabak* earrings, which were designed to be worn on the nose. These items are unique not only in form and function but also in their historical and ethnographic value. They became the first objects in what would become the museum's collection of precious metalwork, laying the foundation for the systematic formation of its jewelry holdings. One of these items is currently on display in the *Art and Ethnography* department, where it showcases the refinement of Bukhara's jewelry craftsmanship and the distinctiveness of its decorative tradition.

Aleksandr Sergeyevich Amitrov began his professional career on February 10, 1931. He graduated from Moscow State University and worked as an ethnographer. A.S. Amitrov maintained scholarly correspondence with the Anti-Religious Museum, exchanging letters regarding the artifacts held by both institutions [5]. He also served as the secretary of the museum's Scientific Council. Archival documents confirm that Amitrov received paintings from the State Tretyakov Gallery, which likely attests to his active role in shaping the museum collection and his efforts to enrich its art section. Furthermore, his connections with Moscow-based institutions suggest an intention to integrate the regional museum into the broader scientific and museological network of the time.

Based on preserved materials, A.S. Amitrov played a significant role in establishing inter-museum cooperation as well as in the ideological transformation of the museum space to meet the goals of the 1930s. His collaboration with the Anti-Religious Museum, along with his interest in artistic heritage, reflects a characteristic trend of the era: the use of museums as instruments of cultural policy, including the reinterpretation of religious and monarchical heritage. In 1934, A.S. Amitrov was appointed acting director of the museum [2].

Mustafo Abdurakhmanov was a research associate in the history department and also served as deputy director of the museum. He received his education at Moscow State University, specializing in ethnography. He began his career at the museum on April 1, 1934 [7]. His contribution to museum work was considerable. He collaborated with various institutions, including museums, research institutes, and libraries. Among them were the library of the Communist Academy in Moscow, the State Central Museum of the Uzbek SSR, Uzkomstaris (partially represented by V.A. Shishkin), the State Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg, the Samarkand Museum, and others. He also contributed to the development of museum work in Bukhara by enriching the collection with various artifacts.

By 1936, the total number of research staff, including the director, had reached seven. In a letter addressed to Director Kamalov from the head of the museum department, dated February 14,

1936, it was stated that Abdurakhmanov's business trip to Moscow could not be approved, as the ongoing work on the historical department's exhibition could not be interrupted at that time.

In the 1930s, the composition of the museum staff was more stable compared to later years. Most researchers had their own academic topics and delivered presentations on various subjects. According to the museum's registration books (Main Inventory Book), it is evident that during this period the staff made significant efforts to expand the museum collection. They purchased objects sold at Bukhara markets, participated in archaeological expeditions, and submitted their finds to the museum as exhibits. They also scientifically studied and selected manuscripts stored in the archives of various institutions.

The museum staff, including Abdurakhmanov, proposed relocating the museum from the Kukeldash Madrasa. By that time, the museum's exhibition and collection had significantly expanded, and the building that housed the institution had become unsuitable for museum purposes. At the same time, a distinctive trend emerged in the museification of historical monuments. In addition to the Kukeldash Madrasa, several other architectural sites were transferred to the museum's administration: the Nodir Devonbegi Khanqah (used as the Department of Natural History), the Abdulaziz Khan Madrasa (hosting an exhibition of architectural ceramics, *ganj* and woodcarving), and the summer palace of Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa (dedicated to Folk Art). The exhibitions held at these sites generated considerable public interest. During the 1930s, the staff of the Bukhara Museum actively participated in field expeditions that covered various parts of the region, including Gijduvan, Vabkent, the Bukhara District, and other settlements. These missions were both research-oriented and collection-driven. As a result, a substantial number of new ethnographic, artistic, and everyday life artifacts were acquired, many of which became integral to the museum's collection.

Simultaneously, work was underway on projects for permanent exhibitions, which reflected the museum's commitment not only to systematizing cultural heritage but also to sharing it with the broader public. As part of this initiative, museum staff traveled to remote rural areas, offering local communities access to museum materials that had previously been inaccessible outside the urban context. These outreach activities had an educational purpose and effectively represented a form of mobile museum pedagogy aligned with the cultural policies of the 1930s.

Museum staff showed particular interest in items believed to be connected to the treasury of the last Emir of Bukhara. Among these were traditional garments and footwear—such as *chapan* coats, robes, boots, and other elements of palace life. The staff sought to authenticate these objects and to assess both their historical-cultural and material value, which reflects the museum's early efforts toward scientific systematization and attribution of collection items.

Conclusion

The activities of the museum during the 1930s were highly productive, as evidenced by the contributions of its staff. In addition to the publication of scholarly articles in the journal *Soviet Museum*, one of the most sensational events was the discovery of archival documents in the Ark fortress—the former residence of the Bukhara rulers—and the subsequent research based on these materials. Moreover, museum employees enriched the collections at their own expense. In terms of museification, several new historical sites were transferred under the museum's administration, and by 1939, a government decree was issued ordering the relocation of exhibits to the Ark fortress.

In conclusion, it may be argued that the museum work of the 1930s was conducted at a higher professional level than that of subsequent periods. Notable contributors to this era included Natalia Eduardovna Schmidt, Ismoil Sadri, Zatvornitskaya, Fyodor Borisovich Rostopchin, and Lazar Izrailevich Rempel. More detailed information on their professional activities within the museum will be presented in our forthcoming studies.

Notes

The archival materials referenced in the text are primarily drawn from the State Archive of the Bukhara Region (GABO) and the National Archive of Uzbekistan (NAUz).

The names of staff members are given in the original orthography as recorded in the archival sources.

Some archival documents remain unpublished and require special permission for citation or reproduction.

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