

PREREQUISITES FOR THE FORMATION OF A MUSEUM NETWORK IN  
KARAKALPAKSTAN.

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**Abstract:** This study examines the preconditions for the formation of the museum network in Karakalpakstan, a region in northwestern Uzbekistan with a rich multicultural heritage. The research identifies four primary factors that shaped museum development: historical-cultural, scientific-research, socio-political, and administrative-legal prerequisites. The historical-cultural foundation stems from Karakalpakstan's position as a crossroads of ancient civilizations, including the Khorezm states, Achaemenid Empire, and various Turkic and Mongol polities, resulting in abundant archaeological sites such as Toprak-Kala, Ayaz-Kala, and the Mizdakhkan necropolis. The scientific-research impetus emerged from the groundbreaking work of the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition (1937-1990), led by S.P. Tolstov, which systematically documented archaeological and ethnographic materials using innovative methods including aerial photography. Socio-political transformations in the 20th century, particularly the administrative reorganizations of 1924-1936 and nation-building processes within the Soviet framework, created institutional support for cultural preservation. The establishment of the Karakalpak branch of the Academy of Sciences in 1959 further strengthened the scientific foundation for museum activities. The study demonstrates that the museum network in Karakalpakstan developed through the convergence of these interrelated factors, serving dual purposes of preserving cultural heritage and facilitating cultural modernization. This research contributes to understanding regional museum development patterns in Central Asia and highlights the role of museums in safeguarding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage in historically complex territories.

**Keywords:** Karakalpakstan; museum network formation; cultural heritage preservation; Khorezm Archaeological Expedition; archaeological sites; ethnographic collections; S.P. Tolstov; Central Asian museology; nation-building; Toprak-Kala; Karakalpak culture; museum studies; historical prerequisites; scientific expeditions.

With the development of cultural tourism in Uzbekistan, the country's museums have become particularly important as exhibitions of national wealth, spiritual, and cultural heritage. The museums of Karakalpakstan are an integral part of the treasure trove of humanity's invaluable global heritage. They showcase the cultural and natural heritage of this region in a wide range of exhibits.

The formation of the museum network in Karakalpakstan is a complex historical and cultural process that is influenced by a variety of interrelated factors. To understand the specifics of the development of museums in the region, it is necessary to examine the historical, cultural, socio-political, research, and administrative-legal background that has shaped the development of museums in Karakalpakstan.

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Historical and cultural background. Karakalpakstan, located in the northwestern part of Uzbekistan, has been a crossroads of ancient civilizations and cultures for thousands of years. The territory of modern Karakalpakstan was part of the Khorezm states, was part of the Achaemenid Empire, and was influenced by the Greco-Macedonian Empire, the Kushan Empire, the Turkic Khaganates, the Arab Caliphate, the Mongol conquerors, and the Central Asian Khanates. These historical processes have led to the formation of a rich cultural heritage in this territory, which includes numerous archaeological monuments, works of fine and decorative arts, and examples of the material and spiritual culture of the Karakalpak people.

Of particular importance are the archaeological sites of ancient Khorezm, located in the territory of Karakalpakstan. These include such outstanding archaeological sites as the ruins of the ancient and medieval cities of Toprak-Kala, Ayaz-Kala, Dzhanbas-Kala, Koy-Kyrylgan-Kala, and the Mizdakhkan necropolis, which testify to the high level of material culture of the ancient peoples who inhabited this territory. In addition, the region has a rich intangible cultural heritage, including epics, legends, tales, traditions, and customs of the Karakalpak people, who have preserved their ethnic identity despite the difficult historical conditions [1].

The need to preserve, study, and popularize this rich cultural heritage became one of the most important prerequisites for the formation of a museum network in Karakalpakstan. The region's historically multi-ethnic and multicultural nature also fostered interest in creating institutions that could present the region's cultural diversity throughout its historical development.

Scientific Research Prerequisites. The development of museums in Karakalpakstan is inextricably linked with the development of scientific research on the region. Beginning in the 19th century, the territory of modern-day Karakalpakstan attracted the attention of Russian and European scholars, travelers, and explorers. The expeditions of A.V. Kaulbars, L.S. Berg, A.D. Arkhangelsky, V.V. Bartold, and other scholars laid the foundations for the scientific study of the region's nature, history, and culture. However, the most significant contribution to the study of the region was made by the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition, which began its work in 1937 under the leadership of the eminent scholar S.P. Tolstov.

The Khorezm Expedition, which lasted for several decades, became the largest scientific undertaking in the history of Central Asian studies. Its work resulted in the discovery and study of dozens of archaeological sites from various eras, and the collection of unique archaeological finds, ethnographic materials, and works of folk art. The scientific discoveries of the Khorezm Expedition radically changed our understanding of the region's history and laid the scientific foundation for the creation of museum collections.

The activities of the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition are divided into several stages: the first stage covers 1937-1940, the main stage from 1945-1970 (the beginning of the use of aerial photographs and research using complex methods), and the final stage spanning 1970-1990. With the outbreak of World War II, the expedition's activities took a break. During the main stage, aerial surveys began to be used, that is, aerial photography was conducted from airplanes. This is how filming was carried out at Toprak-kala in 1945-1950, Dzhanbas-kala in 1945-1946, Koy-krylgan-kala in 1951-1957, and Ustyurt in the 1950s [2].

Ethnographic research on the Karakalpak people developed alongside archaeological research. T.A. Zhdanko, N.P. Lobacheva, I.V. Savitsky, and other scholars collected extensive material on the traditional culture, everyday life, customs, and decorative and applied arts of the Karakalpaks. These studies not only enriched scholarship with valuable information but also

contributed to the formation of unique ethnographic collections, which subsequently formed the basis of museum collections.

The Karakalpak branch of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR (now the Karakalpak branch of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan), established in 1959, played a significant role in the development of scientific research. Its activities included comprehensive studies of the region's natural, historical, and cultural landscapes, the results of which also enriched museum collections and contributed to the development of museum studies [3]. Thus, intensive scientific research activity in Karakalpakstan created the necessary basis for the formation of a museum network, providing it with valuable collections and a scientific and methodological base.

Socio-political prerequisites. Socio-political processes occurring in Central Asia in the 20th century had a significant impact on the development of museum affairs in Karakalpakstan. In 1924, the Karakalpak Autonomous Region was formed as part of the Kazakh ASSR, in 1932 it was transformed into the Karakalpak ASSR as part of the RSFSR, and in 1936 it became part of the Uzbek SSR. These administrative and territorial changes were accompanied by active processes of nation-building, an integral part of which was the development of national culture, education, and science [4]. On the one hand, there was the development of national writing, literature, and art, on the other – radical changes in the traditional way of life associated with collectivization and industrialization. Under these conditions, museums acquired particular significance as institutions capable of preserving the cultural heritage of the past and simultaneously becoming instruments for the modernization of public consciousness.

An important factor in the development of museums in Karakalpakstan was the emergence of a local intelligentsia recognizing the value of national culture and the need to preserve and study it. Representatives of the Karakalpak intelligentsia—writers, scientists, and educators—actively participated in collecting materials for future museums and contributed to the popularization of local history knowledge among the population [5].

An analysis of the preconditions for the formation of the museum network in Karakalpakstan allows us to conclude that the development of museums in the region was conditioned by a complex of interrelated factors: the rich historical and cultural heritage of the territory, intensive scientific research, socio-political processes, and the creation of the necessary administrative and legal framework.

Thus, studying the preconditions for the formation of the museum network in Karakalpakstan represents an important aspect of research into the history of museums in the region, allowing us to understand the patterns of its development and the specific features of its current state.

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