

## ON THE HISTORY OF STUDYING MUSEUM COMPLEXES

**Zhanerke Askhatovna Imanbayeva, Aiman Mukhtarkhanovna  
Assylbekova, Lyazzat Tuleuvna Nurkusheva, Inna Ivanovna  
Ostapenko, Dina Abilmazhinovna Amandykova  
International Education Corporation, Kazakhstan  
Kazakh National University of the Arts, Kazakhstan  
Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Construction,  
Kazakhstan**

**Abstract:** *This article underscores the important role of museum complexes and introduces historical figures of Shokan Ualikhanov and his father Shingis Ualikhanov. The article analyzes the architecture of the memorial museum complex of Kazakh scientist, enlightener and writer Shokan Ualikhanov. It also explores the project for the Museum of Nomadic Turkic Sculptural Art. The two architectural solutions employ similar ways for aesthetic exhibition.*

**Keywords:** ethnography, Kazakh folklore, ethics, aesthetics, nomads, a memorial complex, artwork, philosopher, architecture, sculpture museum, balbal, natural sculpture.

The critical role of museums as a source of historical information and ideological and aesthetic education cannot be overestimated. Modern philosophical and humanistic ideas pose new challenges for the museums: to enlighten the public, to expand their horizon, to introduce and promote ethnic and foreign cultures. The modern museum is not just a repository of artefacts but also a significant educational and research institution.

In the XIX century, the primary requirement for the museum was the equivalence of architecture and artworks. The museum architecture had to be a work of art worthy of storing and exhibiting valuable artworks. The interior design had to correspond with the historical style of displayed objects. As museums grew their collections, there was a need for expanded functionality of museum halls.

At fin de siècle, museums could include administration offices, a secured storage facility, a library with reading rooms, an auditorium, study rooms, temporary exhibition rooms, restoration workshops, laboratories, equipment rooms. The expanded functionality resulted in their more complex layout. Museums acquired additional functions besides storage and exhibitions and responded to new challenges. For example, in the first half of the XX century, many museums added musical rooms and concert halls.

Museums can compete with theatre, cinema and television. The museum experience is different because a visitor is an active participant. He sets the duration of his visit. Viewing the exhibition, a visitor may linger at some of its sections, leave, and return, walk in circles. The museum gives a visitor a chance to experience the artworks or artefacts in stasis: most of the exhibitions assigned a fixed place to the object. In this respect, the museum is like a book. Modern museums also rely on architecture, painting, sculpture, cinema, and music to attract a visitor and create a unique experience. Exhibitions are carefully prearranged for visitors to walk through the halls and see, hear, perceive, compare.

State Memorial Museum of Shokan Ualikhanov was opened in 1985 for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the prominent Kazakh scholar, writer and thinker in Almaty. Shokan Ualikhanov applied ideas of Enlightenment to the social studies. He offered his original interpretation of many problems of social development and developed his social theory. According to his anthropological materialism, man and human society are defined as the product of the natural growth. In such case, social development is subject to laws of nature. Shokan Ualikhanov viewed historical events not as a consequential chain of events but insisted that they follow some general pattern. Therefore, in his works, he always used the terms „*social conditions*”, „*social needs*”, „*social laws*”, etc.

Shokan Ualikhanov assigns a special important role to ethics and aesthetics. The Kazakh enlightener developed his ethical and aesthetic theory and contributed to the fundamental principles of ethics and aesthetics. He was interested in the natural basis of people's moral behavior and thus the physical foundations of their aesthetic preferences and the laws of artistic creativity in general.

Shokan Ualikhanov credited his father, Shingis Ualikhanov, for supporting his interest in social science and philosophy. His father was one of the most educated Kazakhs of his time, who promoted Kazakhs in Russia and the world. He supported archaeological and research expeditions studying Northern Kazakhstan. He also supported folklorists and ethnographers interested in Kazakh culture. He even gifted some items from his collection to professor V. V. Grigoriev for the ethnographic collection parts of which are in the museums of Saint Petersburg, Moscow and Hamburg.

The direct descendant of Genghis Khan, Shingis Ualikhanov was the son of the last khan in the Kazakh steppes. Born in 1811, he

graduated from the Omsk Cadet Corp in 1834, and he held an office of the senior sultan for more than 30 years in the Siberian districts.<sup>1</sup>

Researchers M. P. Malyshev and V. S. Poznansky studied Shokan Ualikhanov biography and discovered materials about Shingis Ualikhanov in archives. The correspondence of scientific institutions and administrative bodies of Western Siberia mentioned Shingis Ualikhanov. They praised him for his merits and interest in science. He also had a rich collection of artefacts of Kazakh culture. For example, on August 29, 1850 the Russian Geographical Society Council expressed „*the sincere gratitude of the Society*” to Kishmurun Sultan, major Shingis Ualikhanov for sending „*a festive male ethnic suit*” for an ethnographic collection of folk costumes of different tribes inhabiting Russia.<sup>2</sup>

One can claim that the museum’s architecture carries semantic meaning. The modern memorial museum complex represents ethical and aesthetic principles of Shokan Ualikhanov’s philosophy.

The State Memorial Museum of Shokan Ualikhanov is located in the Shokan village, Kerbulak district of Almaty region. It is only a few kilometers from the site of his burial. The museum was opened in 1985 to celebrate his 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Its area is about 629,4 square meters. The architecture of the museum is based on sagan-tam: a mausoleum without a dome, a popular form in Kazakhstan inherited from ancient pre-Islamic traditions. The sharp corners of the museum replicate the sloped roof of its historical prototype-yurt. The museum is decorated with water drains made in the form of phallic symbols of Kazakhs ancestral culture.



Figure 1: The Shokan Ualikhanov State Memorial Museum, Almaty Region

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<sup>1</sup> O. A. Segizbaev, *Kazakh philosophy of the XV-early XX century*, Gylym, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Sh. K. Utenova, *Interpretation of the traditional form in modern architecture of Kazakhstan*, The author’s summary of doctoral dissertation, Moscow, 1989.

The architects R. Seidalin, B. Ibraev and S. Rustambekov offered a unique design for the museum in pink limestone. The corners of the museum have different sizes and heights to symbolize the „four corners of the universe”. The museum includes exhibition halls, lecture halls and a storage facility. It also has temporary exhibits from museums and archives of Moscow, Almaty, St. Petersburg. The first attraction of the museum is a wall-sized tapestry map of Ualikhanov’s expeditions in the entrance hall.



Figure 2: Interior of the Shokan Ualikhanov State Memorial Museum

The architects intended to design the museum according to traditional Kazakh cosmogony. For this purpose, they approached architecture as a reflection of the structure of the universe. The main hall has three levels: the world of the dead, the world of the living and the world of the gods. It symbolically conveys the Kazakh people’s beliefs in the universe triple structure. The central staircase carries the idea of temir kazyk-the central axis of the World. Architects described the symbolism of the museum: „In fact, total symbolism is characteristic of all ancient art”.



Figure 3: Interior of the Memorial Museum of Sh. Ualikhanov

Designing the museum, we decided to follow the ancient traditions because Ualikhanov devoted his life to traditional culture. All four corners of the structure are of different height according to the value in the symbolic universe. „*Seven levels of the universe*” correspond to the number of museum levels. To reach them a visitor walks up to a spiral staircase around the central axis. It is not surprising that the yurt inspired the interior of the museum. The yurt is an essential architectural element of the ancient nomadic culture. It embodies the nomadic aesthetic ideals and artistic perception of the world in the decorative synthesis. To emphasize analogy to the yurt, the architects designed many open spaces with a lot of skylights.

The Ualikhanov’s exhibition is located on the low level: it consists of his things, books, and other works. The visitor can learn about the political, social and cultural life of the epoch, Ualikhanov’s education in the Omsk Cadet Corps, his career, his friendship with the Russian intelligentsia, his scientific heritage, and literature, painting and films about him.



Figure 4: The interior of the Memorial Museum of Sh. Ualikhanov. The photo shows a part of the exposition devoted to the friendship between of Sh. Ualikhanov and the Russian writer Fedor Dostoyevsky

The choice of interior colors also has symbolic meanings. The walls are red following traditional aesthetics. It is a classic color for yurt interior and carpets. The red designates the human dimension of the world. A combination of black and red colors correlates with the underworld. The multi-level ceiling is colored in white to symbolize heaven. Color palette complements ancient Kazakhs artefacts: tapestries, baskur, koshms. The exhibition of baskur allows for their unfolded view in full length.



Figure 5: Interior of the Memorial Museum of Sh. Ualikhanov

The exterior and interior design of Sh. Ualikhanov Memorial Museum yields to symbolic interpretation. The impressive architecture of the museum conveys pride of Kazakh national culture.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> M. P. Malyshev, V. S. Poznansky, *Ethnographic materials of Chinggis Valikhanov. All-Union session on the results of field ethnographic and anthropological studies 1988-1989: Thesis report*, Alma-Ata, 1990.

The editors of the journal „Japanese Architect” announced an international competition and an initiative to create the Museum of Ancient Nomadic Sculptural Art dedicated to the sculptural and plastic arts of the Kyrgyz tribes. The task of the architecture contest was to reveal the plastic and figurative sculpture utilizing architecture. In the museum, each sculpture often requires a separate space. The task was to design architectural solutions complementing the sculptures. The additional condition was to create a museum for the history of ancient Kirgiz sculptures. The architects of the project D. Omuraliyev and A. Abishev write: *„Given the absence of such a museum in Kyrgyzstan, the problem is of ethnographic, cultural and scientific importance. To create the museum of nomadic Turkic sculptural art is a challenge that calls for scientific and theoretical research, the study of the history of ancient Turkic sculptures, as well as the aesthetic and mythic poetics embedded in nomadic sculpture and architecture. Why were the ancient Kyrgyz fascinated with sculpture? What did it mean for them?”*<sup>4</sup>

The architects based their project for the museum on their explorations in the history, culture and art. They began with the description of the artefacts for the exhibitions before they offered a design for the museum.

They assigned a special place in the museum to traditional stones. Balbals are idiosyncratic stone idols; their meaning remains a mystery. All balbals fit the same artistic gestalt which sets them aside from other stone sculptures. A large number of stone balbals are still present in Kyrgyzstan. Usually, balbals were placed on the burial mounds and tombs. The cult of the dead presupposes their sullen architectural and spatial interpretation. The architects expressed the following opinion: *„It is unfortunate to see a frivolous use of balbals in the design of restaurants, cafes or other entertainment institutions because it is misleading for the public. Kyrgyz stone sculptures should form a gallery in the museum. Balbals are unique sculptural works and require a special architectural solution”*. The architects emphasize that the ancient concept of „sculpture” differs from the modern view.

The architects designed the museum space for balbals to convey their magical power and draw the visitor’s attention to the spiritual meaning of balbals. Besides balbals, other sacred stone idols are included in the museum exhibitions as well. They differ from balbals because they are not human-made but created by nature and „sanctified” by the mythopoeic imagination of Kyrgyz people. Examples of the nature-made

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<sup>4</sup> D. Omuraliyev, *Modern ethnoarchitecture of Kyrgyzstan (origins, objects, trends)*, Bishkek, Publishing House of KSUCTA, 2003, 180 p.

idol are Manasa or stone with Batyr's handprint, kozhomkuldun tashy, etc.



Figure 6: Kozhomkuldun tashy (The Stone of Kozhumkula)

Given the religious reverence by Kyrgyz people to such stones, their relocation to the museum is out of the question. Many sacred idols are natural monuments located in remote places. Therefore, it is challenging to imagine such exhibit. Perhaps, their replicas can be part of the future exhibition.

Another artefacts for sculptural exhibitions should be altyn-bakan and kumish-bakan. They are crafted wooden standing hangers with metal details. Traditionally, they were placed symmetrically inside the yurt at the entrance. Altyn-bakan symbolizes the male, and „kumush-bakan”-the female. Many mythological images, nomadic rituals and beliefs are associated with bakans. The ancients believed that the bakan represents the World Tree connecting the earth, heaven and underground. The vertical line of the bakan resembles symbolic sculptural solutions used in the interior space of the temples or palaces. Therefore, the separate exhibition of bakans can enrich the museum and represent the Kyrgyz wooden sculptural art.

Kyrgyz people loved wooden and stuffed dolls: they also can be viewed as sculptural objects. A stuffed doll often was used at night as a protective amulet. At night a children's toy became a sacred object and a mystical being. Traditionally, nomads shunned huge monumental forms it is hard to find large sculptural objects in Kyrgyz and Turkic cultures. So a collection of dolls can take a remarkable place in the museum of sculptural arts.

An interesting addition to the museum exposition could be the cult stones or kuts, which often are meteoric stones. Kuts were worshiped



and revered. Kyrgyz believed kuts bring prosperity, happiness and health to the family. Kuts were stored and locked in a box away from strangers' eyes and passed from generation to generation. Kuts and their history can be an exciting part of the museum exposition.

Besides stones, Kyrgyz also assigned a sacred meaning to the horse skulls. Whitened and dried by sun and wind, skulls can be described as „*sculptures made of bone*”. They inspire thoughts of mortality and brevity of life as a skull in the legend Tolubai synchy. Nomadic cultures worshipped horses. The horse skulls included in a sculptural exhibition can offer a fresh look at nomadic legends and stories. The technique of „dry brush” can be viewed as ritualized and scared.

The sculptural exhibition should also include „dry trees” that often serve as mazar. They are ubiquitous in Kyrgyzstan and still used as places of religious worship. Creative artists can turn the sacred object into the museum's centerpiece. The proponents of the museum envision a collection of small sculptural artefacts done in so-called „animalistic style” belonging to nomadic Saks, Usun, and Hun tribes. There are many random archaeological artefacts in Kyrgyzstan museums that could be organized into an extensive collection. The sculptural miniatures require a particular form of preservation and exhibition.

The museum would not be complete without the contemporary Kyrgyz sculptures. In the combination of history and modernity, the museum can expand and grows its collections.

Only after defining parts of the sculptural collection of the future museum, the architects proceeded to the architectural design based on the ancient Saks cosmology. The geometry and layout of the museum is based on eastern mandala that represents „the map” of the ancient universe.<sup>5</sup>

The three levels of the universe-underground, earth and heaven-find their reflection in the architecture and exposition plan. The underground part of the museum is reserved for Scythians, Saks, and other Usuns tribal art, „the earth” part will house traditional and modern Kyrgyz sculpture, and heaven will be reserved for the sculptures of birds.

The three levels will be connected vertically by a sculptural „tree of life” with a reflection in the pool of water. The underworld space will be constructed as caves. The airy spacious museum will resemble kumbez and yurt.

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<sup>5</sup> B. A. Glaudinov, M. G. Seidalin, A. S. Karpykov, *The architecture of the Soviet Kazakhstan*, Moscow, Stroyizdat, 1987.

The analysis of the two museums (the former is functional and the latter is in a project stage) reveals similar architectural solutions. It can be explained by similar ideological and theoretical functions of the museums as sources of history, philosophy, and culture for modern people.