

Nina Zhoshevnа KOZBAGAROVA, Yuliya Vladimirovna ONICHSHENKO,
Bakhytzhan Kamalkhanovich SHILDERKHANOV, Atagulova Raushan
AMANGELDIEVNA, Dina Abilmazhinovna AMANDYKOVA

To the History of the Museumification of Burial Mounds

Nina Zhoshevnа KOZBAGAROVA, Yuliya Vladimirovna ONICHSHENKO,
Bakhytzhan Kamalkhanovich SHILDERKHANOV, Atagulova Raushan
AMANGELDIEVNA, Dina Abilmazhinovna AMANDYKOVA

International Educational Corporation, Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan
T.K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, Almaty, Republic of
Kazakhstan

Abstract. *This article substantiates the relevance of the museumification of Kazakhstan's mounds based on foreign experience. The authors present general information about the Issyk mounds and analyze the theoretical concept of the spatial solution of the museum complex around them. A number of studies devoted to the museumification of the Besshatyr burial mound are considered. The history and specificity of the spatial organization of the Ak-Baur temple intended for funeral rites as well as the modern concept of its museumification are analyzed.*

Keywords: mound, open-air museum, exposition, amphitheater, archaeological item, artifact.

The traditional exhibition of archaeological items and artifacts by culture or certain complexes in the hall distribution of collections by museum experts is regarded as an outdated form of display. An archaeological museum based directly on the monument ("an open-air museum") is considered by specialists as a modern and relatively new method of promoting the archaeological heritage. The object of museum display is the archeological object itself in its "native" environment, which adds integrity to the overall picture of the historical period in the life of a certain culture¹. The transformation of monuments into museum display objects in their historical landscape and the attraction of tourists are separate areas of design. G.M. Kamalova in her study on the museumification of the Besshatyr burial mound gives several examples from foreign experience. These are such objects as Les Eyzies and Lascaux in France, Vertesszolos in Hungary, the Tumuli park in Gyeongju in South Korea, Chersonesus and Panticapaeum in Ukraine, etc. In Kazakhstan, the architectural and archaeological museum reserve Azret-Sultan (Turkistan) is the first experience of recreating the historical cultural landscape.

The leading role in the substantiation of the architectural heritage of Kazakhstan is played by archeology and its branch – archeological architecture. Kazakh archaeologists have identified, explored and introduced numerous mounds of different epochs into scientific circulation, among which are the mounds of the Bronze Age and the so-called "royal burial mounds" of the Early Iron Age, where elite representatives were buried. Each of these complexes is a compound architectural structure, including a mound, underground burial chambers, menhirs located nearby, circular constructions as well as ritual fences, creating a common architectural image.

¹ V. Sobolev, *The author's project*: <https://vsobolev.com/ak-baur-neoliticheskiy-hramovyy-komplex>, 2010, accessed 12. 03. 2018.

"To the History of the Museumification of Burial Mounds," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 141-148

The Issyk burial mound (VII century BC - XI century AD) is a monument of archeology of local importance. It is located in the Almaty region, on the northern outskirts of the city of Yesik. Mounds are formations made of earth and stones. Most burial mounds are located in groups, forming "chains", oriented from the northwest to the southeast or from the southwest to the northeast. There are also singly standing mounds and haphazardly arranged mounds. In size burial mounds are divided into small (8 to 20 m in diameter, 0.5 to 2.5 m in height), average (25 to 45 m in diameter, 3 to 4.5 m in height), and large (50 to 100 m in diameter, 5.5 to 11 m in height). Let us consider several examples in the context of the museumification of burial mounds.



Figure 1. The Issyk burial mounds

In this aspect, of particular interest is the project proposal "Museumification of the Issyk burial mounds". The study of the development of this theme is of interest for both students and practicing architects in the work with the heritage. The project "Museumification of the Issyk burial mounds" has not been implemented yet, which is why its ideological and design development is not known to the wide circle of specialists. In her research work *Introduction of a Traditional Form in the Modern Architecture of Kazakhstan*, Sh.K. Utenova studied this design solution in details. The project architects K. Bekzhanov, A. Zolotukhin, A. Kusidi and S. Chufarov (1987) suggested the manifestation of historical memory at the deeper levels— in the system of traditional symbols and archetypes.

The Issyk burial mounds are the monuments of the long-ago era and the symbol of the early awakening of steppe dwellers' propensity (the Saks, the Asian Scythians) to build permanent structures that fixed the expanse of the Great Steppe. In the reserve's territory, it is planned to create a small landscape park with the organization of a number of museum expositions representing the Saxon culture. It requires solving a number of creative tasks, such as to determine the location of museum expositions, to include sculptures in the architectural solution, to frame the visual range, etc. The authors of the project used an interesting

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method: the sightseeing organization as a solemn procession along a special route through the reserve's territory. In the mythology of the Sakas, the concept of "procession" involved a deep meaning: the movement from birth to death, the path of knowledge, the "eternal movement". Modern architects attempted to comprehend the space of fixed land layers considering ancient culture as the formation of the whole, the course of time. Having organized the solemn movement along the broken straight line passing through the two largest burial mounds, architects set out to show the main components of the worldview of the ancient Sakas in architectural images (during the route). After all, one cannot disclose the secrets of mounds without getting acquainted with the cosmogonic symbolics of the ancient people, which reflected integral, highly poetic ideas about the universe, the relation of nature and man, life and death.

By composition, the main route is divided into two sections. The first section, conventionally called the "life line", is located on the surface, and the second one, the "death line", is below the ground level. The beginning of the "life line" – the beginning of exposition – symbolizes the "initial chaos": many paths pass through "a small grove that closes the entrance to the museum complex from the access road"². In order to enhance the expressive means of the idea, the authors of the project use stone sculptures, such as stelae, which are the unique examples of Saka monumental sculpture. These two paths converge into one wide path, which leads to the viewing platform. The site has a square configuration at the corners of which trees are planted. Trees are the sign of the "four sides of the world." Further, the steps of the stairs lead to the amphitheater, designed to conduct lectures in the open air. Behind the amphitheater, there is the main building of the complex – the museum of mounds of the Saka-Scythian culture. The "life line" ends at the first of the two mounds, included in the exposition.

On the "death line", which starts at the foot of the second mound below the existing ground elevation, there are elements of the museum exposition containing objects directly found during the excavation of the reserve's mounds. They include the imitation of the burial chamber "shadow theater", the museum of the Sakagold objects of animal style, the museum of ceramics and everyday life. The sightseeing ends with an exit to a large viewing platform, which provides for an overview of the whole complex and the rest of the mounds, the entire reserve's territory. The authors conceived the idea of representing the Saka culture in the context of modern culture and the emergence of a cultural tradition, developed in subsequent epochs. The museum complex is full of architectural associations that evoke the most famous buildings of antiquity, such as the Babylonian ziggurat, which in this project is presented "inverted" in the form of an amphitheater, the Avenue of Sphinxes in Karnak, narrowing corridors-tunnels of Egyptian pyramids, as well as archaic and ancient Egyptian colonnades.

² Sh.K. Utenova, *Introduction of a traditional form in the modern architecture of Kazakhstan*, The author's summary of doctoral dissertation, Moscow, 1989.

"To the History of the Museumification of Burial Mounds," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 141-148

It was supposed that the refraction of the Saka culture through familiar architectural images would make it more comprehensible to the modern spectator. In other words, the architects consciously focused on a wide range of visitors. It is rational, since it is impossible to help comprehend history and make it alive at the present time without using modern means and working professionally with all the components of "mass culture"³.

The researcher Sh.K. Utenova analyzes the architects' design proposal: "Far from always it is possible to link architectural forms with an exposition idea in a concise and organic manner. Perhaps the project of these young architects from Almaty is one of the rare examples of when the architectural space itself is an exposition. It also seems reasonable enough to use popular visual images from the history of world architecture, designed to evoke complex associations in the viewer, enriching the perception of the museum complex"⁴. Currently, the issues of the integration of traditional heritage and innovative solutions remain one of the topical issues in architectural and design activities. This process is justified by several pressing issues. First of all, it is a question of preserving heritage, the interaction of heritage with modern objects, and the search for national identity.

A unique opportunity to create a museum complex in the open air is represented by such a monument as the Besshatyr burial mound of the 7th-9th centuries BC. This monument of the sacred culture of the Saka tribes is surrounded by the historical landscape, located on the territory of the state national natural park "Altyn-Yemel" in the Almaty region, 170 km from Almaty.

The restoration concept of the Besshatyr museum complex is based on the idea of recreating one of the burial mounds excavated in 1960 to show the burial rite of the Saka nomads. The data obtained during excavations, including a detailed logged vault, made it possible to draw up a reconstruction project for such a mound and make it in the form of a museum exposition of the burial ground in real scale in a natural historical environment. According to the project, the territory of the Besshatyr burial mound is divided into two zones – the northern and southern groups of burial mounds.



Figure 2. The Besshatyr burial mound

³ *Research and preservation of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Collection of articles.* NIPF RGP "Kazrestavratsiya", Almaty, Raritet, 2012, 1, 44.

⁴ Sh.K. Utenova, *Introduction of a traditional form in the modern architecture of Kazakhstan.* The author's summary of doctoral dissertation, Moscow, 1989.

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In the northern group, the Great Mound occupies the dominant position in the burial mound in terms of size and location on the relief. Architectural modeling proposes recreating the First and Third Large Burial Mounds located nearby, excavated in 1960 and 1961. This will allow not only reconstructing the historical landscape, but also enhancing the emotional effect of the visual perception of the Besshatyr panorama, which will give a more complete picture of the spatial structure of the burial mound as a whole. The excavation materials will allow completely recreating this unique burial ritual complex of the Sakas in a natural landscape environment as a museum exhibit. The large Besshatyr mounds are a complex spatial structure of aboveground and underground constructions⁵.



Figure 3. Museumification of the Besshatyr burial mound

The architects G. Kamalova, V. Sadykova and the consultant-archaeologist F.P. Grigoriev first proposed a sketch design of the museumification of the Besshatyr mounds. The authors, based on foreign experience, suggest the development of a tourist complex for year-round tourism of international class. Such a proposal is justified not by the effectiveness of the seasonal nature of tourist centers and by the lack of comfortable accommodation for visitors. The developed center will provide an opportunity to carry out research and study the objects of archeology without being detached from extraction sites.

The project proposed the organization of a full-fledged tourist complex with all associated buildings and facilities outside the museum area of the monument. The tourist and sightseeing center will be located on the shore of the Kapchagay Reservoir at a distance of 12 km to the south-west of the burial mound, at the existing forestry station. It is possible to organize a year-round recreational area in a complex with a museum and excursion service center for all tourist attractions of the Altyn-Yemel nature reserve through the reservoir's convenient and beautiful coastal strip. The architecture of the center is based on the principles of ecological architecture – the synthesis of spatial forms in the surrounding landscape, engineering supply with the use of solar and wind energy. The center includes a museum complex, a hotel, a cafe, a recreational area with the possibility of year-round recreation. In the search for architectural forms the architects relied on the idea of harmonization with the surrounding natural environment.

⁵ E. M. Baitenov, "Kazakh single-chamber mausoleums. Compositional preferences," in *The Bulletin of Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering*, 2001, p. 10-15.

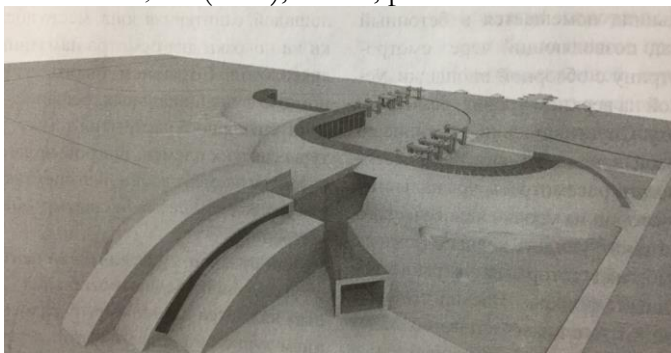


Figure 4. The sketch layout of the tourist complex

According to the authors, the proposed concept of recreating an archaeological object in the natural environment for the purpose of museum exposure is based on a culturological approach to the process of its restoration. G. Kamalova believes that the cultural methodology of restoration presupposes the development of the image and the compositional truthfulness of the object. Thus, in the theory and practice of restoration, the questions remain open, culture constantly clarifies its attitude to the problem of the reproduction item and the validity of reconstructions allowing in a number of cases to argue for the possibility of deviation from the provisions of the Venetian charter as an ethical imperative⁶.

In the context of this study, the open-air temple Ak-Baur is also of great interest, as this complex is closely explored by both archaeologists and architects.

Ak-Baur, strictly oriented to the west, was intended for performing funeral rites, when the deceased as though repeated all the way to a better world. Ak-Baur resembles many other Neolithic churches in England, Brittany, Caucasus, Asia, Kazakhstan. The Stonehenge cromlech was one of the first to have been studied. Scientists came to the conclusion that the rings of stones were places of religious or other ceremonies, and the rows of stones were alleys for ritual processions⁷.



Figure 5. The Ak-Baur temple complex, the wall view

Near the creek there is a place of ceremonies, which is protected by dug flat plates. In the territory of Ak-Baur, the foundations of ancient buildings, burials, a site with a marked sundial as well as an "astronomical laboratory" with preserved

⁶ G.M. Kamalova, *Museumification of the Beshbatyr burial mound. Research and preservation of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, Almaty, Raritet, 2012.

⁷ Z. Zhumagaliyeva. *YK-news.kz*. Available at: <http://m.yk-news.kz/news>, accessed 10. 02. 2018.

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 granite slabs bearing the information of the astrological net with the correct image
 of Ursa Major, were found. According to scientists, the people of the Neolithic and
 Bronze Age watched the Sun and the Moon. The Ak-Baur astronomical complex,
 similar to an amphitheater with a diameter of about 25 m, is surrounded by
 horseshoe rocks with a height of 2.5-4 m⁸.

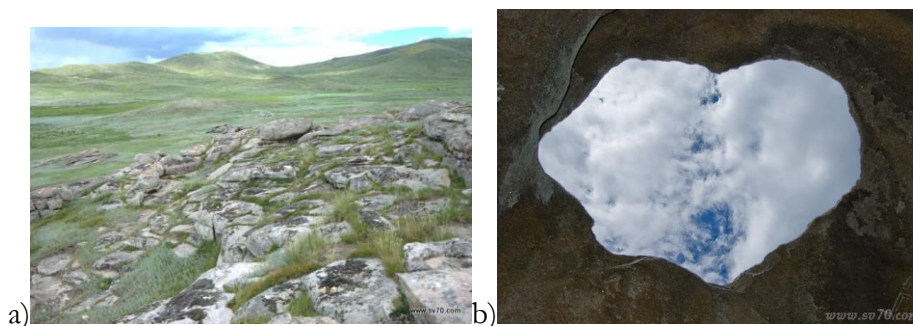


Figure 6. a) The Ak-Baur temple complex, the amphitheater; b) The opening of the "roof" of the grotto in the form of a heart

The architects proposed three variants of the architectural and spatial solution of the complex. The main task faced by the architects was the maximum adaptation of the building to the ideological and constructive solution of the structure and the existing landscape. As a result, the teachers of the Kazakh Leading Academy of Architecture and Civil Engineering, the architects E.I. Baitenov and G.A. Isabayev proposed the project "Ak-Baur", which took into account the peculiarities of the archaeological monument. In the creation of the Ak-Baur open-air museum, the main issue is rock paintings. The project initiators plan using modern technologies to make a virtual excursion, because it is impossible to go around all the monuments around the building even for a whole day. In addition, the construction of the building provides for the penetration of solar rays at a certain angle and their display inside the building. It is this fact that explains how ancient people who used Ak-Baur as an observatory could record these points⁹.

⁸ A.Z. Beysenov, *Settlements and burial grounds of the Saka era of Central Kazakhstan. The Saka culture of Saryarka in the context of ethno-sociocultural processes of the steppe Eurasia*, Almaty, NITsIABegazy-Tasmola, 2015, p. 7-33.

⁹ E.Ya. Kalnitskaya, *Museumification of palaces: actualization of architectural heritage in modern theory and practice*, The author's summary of doctoral dissertation, St. Petersburg, 2009.



Figure 7. Project proposal for the museumification of the Ak-Baur temple complex

Thus, the conservation of monuments in the Republic of Kazakhstan is increasingly becoming important. In order to provide comprehensive measures to preserve the historical and cultural heritage in the country, the program "Cultural Heritage" has been implemented for a number of years. Within the framework of this program, the conservation and restoration of architectural monuments as well as the museumification of archaeological sites is carried out.

Projects of conservation, restoration, protection of zones, museification, historical and town planning plans of Kazakhstan's historical cities, methods of conservation and restoration, technologies for the production of ancient building materials are developed on the basis of comprehensive survey and study of monuments by the specialized Design and Development Institute "Kazproektrestavratsiya", later by the Research and Design Institute of Monuments of Material Culture of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Thus, the museumification of burial mounds is the result of the fruitful work of various specialists. Here the interests of archeologists and specialists in restoration and conservation as well as the city-forming and administrative structures intersect.