HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

HISTORY REFLECTED IN MUSEUMS

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doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22865536

Abstract. This article examines the historical, educational, cultural, and digital significance of museums through the case of the State Museum of History and Culture of the Fergana Region, one of the oldest museum institutions in Uzbekistan. Preserving the core factual material of the original institutional account, the study systematizes the museum's formation from the 1894 agricultural and industrial exhibition in New Margilan to its present role as a scientific, educational, and cultural center. The analysis focuses on the growth and composition of the museum collection, including more than 100,000 holdings, an archaeological collection of over 11,000 objects, a rare late nineteenth-century furniture ensemble executed in the European classical tradition, and natural-history displays representing the landscapes and fauna of the Fergana Valley. The article also considers the museum's contemporary transition toward digitization through electronic cataloguing, 3D modelling, and virtual access. Methodologically, the study combines historical-descriptive analysis, institutional case-study analysis, source comparison, and museological interpretation.

Keywords: museology, Fergana Museum, cultural heritage, historical memory, archaeological collection, museum education, digitization, 3D modelling, electronic catalogue, virtual museum, conservation.

Museums are not merely repositories of old objects. They are institutions in which material evidence, historical memory, scientific interpretation, public education, and cultural identity intersect. Through collections and exhibitions, museums enable society to encounter the tangible traces of earlier periods and to connect them with contemporary cultural experience. This function is especially important for younger generations, because museum objects can transform abstract historical knowledge into a visible and emotionally meaningful experience. In this sense, the museum serves simultaneously as a site of preservation, a research environment, and an educational space. For Uzbekistan, the protection and modernization of museum activity has been supported by a developing legal and institutional framework. The Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 975 of 11 December 2017 approved a comprehensive programme for improving the activity and material-technical base of state museums for 2017-2027. The Presidential Decree No. PF-6000 of 26 May 2020 further emphasized the role and influence of culture and the arts in public life. These measures place museums within a broader process of strengthening cultural institutions, safeguarding heritage, improving infrastructure, and expanding public access [1, 2]. Within this national context, the State Museum of History and Culture of the Fergana Region has particular significance. The museum is one of the oldest institutions of its type in Uzbekistan. Its origins are connected with the agricultural and industrial exhibition held

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in New Margilan, present-day Fergana, in 1894. The museum charter was approved in 1897, and on 26 May 1899 the institution was ceremonially opened as the People's Museum of the Fergana Region. Historical accounts indicate that 2,223 objects and books had been accumulated by the time of the opening [3, 4]. The institution subsequently developed from a relatively small regional collection into a museum system with extensive historical, archaeological, ethnographic, artistic, documentary, and natural-history holdings.

The relevance of studying the museum today lies not only in its age or the size of its collections. The institution represents a useful case for examining how a regional museum connects three temporal dimensions: the preservation of evidence from the past, the interpretation of heritage for present audiences, and the digital transmission of collections to future users. The original manuscript on which this article is based provides valuable institutional descriptions of the museum's collections, branches, distinctive furniture ensemble, archaeological holdings, natural-history displays, and current digitalization initiatives. The present article preserves these factual foundations while reorganizing and strengthening them within an IMRAD-oriented academic structure. The aim of the study is to analyze the historical development, collection profile, educational-cultural role, and digital transformation of the State Museum of History and Culture of the Fergana Region. The research questions are: (1) how did the museum's institutional development shape its present role; (2) what types of objects most clearly demonstrate its scientific and cultural value; and (3) how can digitization increase access to the collections without weakening the museum's core preservation and interpretive functions?

The study uses a qualitative historical-institutional case-study design. The primary factual basis consists of the authors' original institutional manuscript describing the history and collections of the State Museum of History and Culture of the Fergana Region, including information on its founding stages, collection size, branches, archaeological holdings, distinctive furniture, natural-history exposition, and digitization work. These source-derived data were preserved as the core empirical content of the article. To strengthen the scientific framing, the institutional material was compared with publicly available historical and regulatory sources. Information concerning the 1894 exhibition, the approval of the museum charter in 1897, the 1899 opening, and the initial collection of 2,223 objects was cross-checked against regional tourism and historical reference materials [3, 4]. The legal context was clarified through the relevant national regulatory acts on the development of museums and culture [1, 2]. The interpretive discussion of digitization and museum accessibility was expanded using UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections and UNESCO materials on culture and digital technologies [5, 6]. Three analytical procedures were applied. First, chronological analysis was used to identify the main stages in the institution's formation and development. Second, collection-based analysis was used to group the most representative museum holdings according to their historical, archaeological, artistic, and natural-history functions. Third, functional analysis was used to examine the museum's role in preservation, research, education, public communication, and digital access. The method does not attempt to produce new quantitative claims beyond the figures contained in the institutional materials or corroborating sources. Instead, it interprets the available evidence and identifies the museum's principal development trends.

The historical analysis shows that the museum developed through a sequence of institutional stages rather than as a single act of foundation. The 1894 agricultural and industrial exhibition created an initial material basis for collecting. The approval of the charter in 1897 formalized the institutional

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framework, while the ceremonial opening of 1899 established the museum as a public cultural institution. The presence of 2,223 objects and books at the time of opening demonstrates that the museum already possessed a meaningful documentary and material base. Over subsequent decades, the holdings expanded substantially, and the present collection exceeds 100,000 museum objects according to institutional and regional information [3].

Table 1. Key stages and functions in the development of the Fergana museum

Period / date	Institutional development	Collection / activity evidence	Museological significance
1894	Agricultural and industrial exhibition in New Margilan created the initial collecting basis	Objects remaining from the exhibition and donations formed the early core	Beginning of systematic regional collecting
1897	Museum charter approved	The institution acquired a formal organizational framework	Transition from collection initiative to structured museum activity
26 May 1899	Public opening as the People's Museum of the Fergana Region	2,223 objects and books recorded by the opening period	Public access and institutional recognition
Contemporary stage	Expansion into a regional museum system with five branches and digital initiatives	More than 100,000 holdings; over 11,000 archaeological objects; 3D modelling and electronic cataloguing in progress	Integration of preservation, research, education, and digital access

Among the most distinctive objects described in the museum collection is a late nineteenth-century furniture ensemble associated with the office of the regional military governor. According to the institutional account, the furniture later passed through several functional contexts: after the October Revolution it was used as stage scenery by a drama troupe, after the Second World War it remained for a long period in the regional administrative building, and in the 1990s it was transferred to the museum by decision of the regional administration. This object biography is itself significant. The ensemble is not only an example of furniture craftsmanship; its changing use reflects the political and institutional transformations of the region.

The furniture was made in Europe from oak in a classical idiom and is distinguished by elaborate carving and decorative imagery. Anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, vegetal, and geometric motifs are visible in the composition, including representations described by the museum as lion, snake, and dragon heads. The combination of architectural forms and carved ornament demonstrates the aesthetic and representational function of official furniture in the late nineteenth century. At the same time, the museum record notes that the complete ensemble has not yet been reunited, since some components are believed to remain in private possession. From a museological perspective, this makes provenance research, documentation, and possible future identification of dispersed elements important tasks. The archaeological collection constitutes another major research resource. The source manuscript states that more than 11,000 archaeological objects are preserved in the museum. These holdings provide material evidence for the history of the Fergana region from the Stone Age onward and include objects

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of both scientific and artistic importance. Archaeological collections are especially valuable because they connect museum exhibition with field research, typological study, chronology, material culture, and the reconstruction of settlement and everyday life. The collection therefore has a dual function: it supports public interpretation while also serving as a source base for scholarly investigation.

The natural-history exposition complements the historical collections by presenting the environmental context of the valley. Rare stones, taxidermy specimens, and landscape dioramas represent mountain, foothill, desert, and cave environments. These displays expand the meaning of regional history by situating human life within a specific ecological landscape. For visitors, dioramas provide a spatial and visual method for understanding the relationship between geography, flora, fauna, and settlement patterns. The history section, in turn, uses archaeological and ethnographic objects, craft products, applied arts, documents, and other relics to create a chronological encounter with the life of earlier generations. The museum also performs an active educational and communicative function. School pupils, university students, researchers, and general visitors use the museum as a learning environment. Temporary exhibitions of artists and photographers diversify the permanent display and allow the institution to connect historical heritage with contemporary visual culture. This educational role is consistent with the modern understanding of museums as institutions that produce and transmit knowledge rather than only preserve collections.

A further result of the analysis concerns digital transformation. The institutional manuscript reports ongoing work on 3D visualization of selected rare objects, publication of digital models on the museum website, and creation of an electronic catalogue. These initiatives can improve remote access and provide new forms of virtual engagement. However, their greatest scientific value lies in the possibility of producing structured digital documentation that links images, object descriptions, provenance information, conservation data, chronology, and collection identifiers. A well-designed digital catalogue can therefore serve both public communication and professional collection management.



Figure 1. The State Museum of History and Culture of the Fergana Region (image preserved from the original manuscript).

The case of the Fergana museum illustrates a broader shift in contemporary museology: the museum is increasingly understood as a social and educational institution whose preservation responsibilities are inseparable from public access and knowledge transmission. UNESCO's 2015 Recommendation explicitly identifies preservation, study, education, communication, and public

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accessibility as central museum functions. It also states that information and communication technologies create opportunities for the preservation, study, creation, and transmission of heritage-related knowledge [5]. The Fergana museum's work on electronic catalogues and 3D representations is therefore consistent with an international trend toward digitally mediated access. At the same time, digitization must be approached as a professional documentation process rather than only as a promotional tool. UNESCO stresses that the compilation of inventories based on international standards is a priority and that digitization is highly important but should not be regarded as a replacement for conservation [5]. This distinction is fundamental for the museum. A 3D model can expand access to a rare object, facilitate educational interpretation, and support virtual tourism, but it cannot substitute for preventive conservation, material analysis, provenance research, storage standards, restoration, and direct scholarly study of the original object. The museum's collections also demonstrate the importance of interpreting objects through their biographies. The late nineteenth-century furniture ensemble is valuable not only because of style, wood, ornament, or craftsmanship. Its movement from a governor's office to a theatre setting, later to an administrative building, and finally to the museum reflects major political and social transformations. Presenting such biographies can help visitors understand that museum objects are historical witnesses whose meanings change across contexts. This interpretive approach is especially useful in education because it encourages students to ask how objects were produced, used, transferred, preserved, and reinterpreted.

The archaeological holdings offer a related opportunity for strengthening the connection between museum work and research. Digital documentation can support typological comparison and enable scholars to work with structured descriptive data before requesting access to original materials. In the future, digitization could be strengthened through standardized metadata, high-resolution photography, condition records, object-level identifiers, multilingual descriptions, and links between related objects, excavation contexts, and publications. For selected objects, photogrammetry or 3D scanning may be justified where shape, surface, inscription, carving, or construction is especially important for research or public interpretation.

Virtual access also has implications for cultural tourism. UNESCO materials on culture and digital technologies emphasize that digital platforms, virtual museums, immersive experiences, and 3D modelling can broaden access to heritage and engage audiences beyond physical location [6]. For a regional museum, this may be particularly important for diaspora communities, researchers abroad, school groups that cannot travel regularly, and potential visitors planning cultural routes in the Fergana Valley. Nevertheless, virtual access is most effective when it encourages deeper engagement with collections rather than reducing them to isolated images without context.

The analysis therefore suggests a balanced development model for the museum: conservation and research should remain the foundation; documentation should connect physical and digital collections; interpretation should translate scholarly knowledge into accessible narratives; and digital technologies should extend, not replace, the museum experience. Such a model preserves the original mission of the institution while responding to contemporary expectations of accessibility, participation, education, and technological innovation.

The State Museum of History and Culture of the Fergana Region represents more than a century of institutional development in the preservation and interpretation of regional heritage. Emerging from the 1894 agricultural and industrial exhibition and opening publicly in 1899, the museum has developed from an initial collection of 2,223 objects and books into a major regional repository with

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more than 100,000 holdings. Its archaeological collection, rare historical furniture, natural-history displays, artistic and documentary materials, and branch network create a multidimensional representation of the history and culture of the Fergana Valley.

The study confirms that the museum's contemporary importance rests on the integration of three functions: safeguarding original cultural evidence, producing and supporting historical knowledge, and communicating that knowledge to society. The development of 3D models, electronic catalogues, and virtual access creates new opportunities for research, education, and tourism. At the same time, international museological principles indicate that digitalization must remain connected to accurate inventory, provenance documentation, professional conservation, and interpretive quality.

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