



**THE MOVEMENT OF RARE BOOKS BETWEEN
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES IN THE SOVIET PERIOD:
THE CASE OF UZBEKISTAN**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the formation of rare book and manuscript collections within the framework of museum and library systems in Uzbekistan during the Soviet period, with particular attention to their inter-institutional movement and institutional characteristics. The study is conducted within a qualitative research framework, employing historical-source analysis, comparative-historical methods, and systemic analysis. The empirical basis of the research consists of materials from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, covering the period from the 1920s to the 1950s.

The research findings indicate that during the 1920s–1930s, the movement of rare books was primarily carried out through mechanisms of centralization and inter-institutional redistribution. From the 1930s onwards, the processes of scholarly study and systematization of these collections intensified significantly. In the 1940s–1950s, the centralization and specialization of collections deepened further, resulting in the redistribution of written sources within the system of scientific institutions.

The article substantiates that the formation of rare book collections was shaped by three key factors: the establishment of a centralized governance system, the expansion of scientific institutions, and the evolution of scholarly approaches to written sources. At the same time, the study identifies that the integration between museum and library collections remained insufficiently developed. The results of the research provide an important scientific basis for improving the management and integration processes of rare book collections within contemporary museum and library systems.

INTRODUCTION



In recent years, there has been a significant increase in scholarly interest in the study of rare books and manuscripts within the fields of museology and source studies. This trend is closely associated with a shift in perspective, whereby written heritage is no longer viewed solely as textual content, but rather as a complex object possessing material, cultural, and institutional characteristics. Rare books preserved in museum and library collections are increasingly recognized as important sources for reconstructing historical knowledge and understanding past intellectual traditions.

In Uzbekistan, the formation and development of rare book collections are directly linked to the Soviet period. It was during this time that large-scale processes of collecting, redistributing, and systematizing written sources were carried out within the framework of museum and library systems. As a result of these processes, rare book collections acquired an institutional structure, and their preservation and management were organized within a centralized administrative system. This period thus represents a crucial stage in the institutionalization of written heritage.

At the same time, the movement of rare books in the Soviet period was not limited to the accumulation of collections. It was also characterized by inter-institutional exchange, redistribution, and functional specialization of collections. This phenomenon constitutes a distinct scholarly problem in the study of relationships between museums and libraries. In particular, the institutional mechanisms governing the movement of

collections, their administrative frameworks, and the processes through which they were incorporated into scholarly circulation have not yet been sufficiently examined in a comprehensive and systematic manner.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the fact that the issue of integration between museum and library collections remains highly relevant in the present day. The study of historical experience plays a key role in developing modern models for managing and integrating written heritage. From this perspective, an analysis of the characteristics of rare book movement during the Soviet period is of both theoretical and practical significance, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the institutional foundations of current systems.

The aim of this study is to identify the formation of rare book movement within the framework of museum and library systems during the Soviet period, as well as to determine its main stages and institutional characteristics. To achieve this aim, the following research objectives were formulated:

- to analyze the process of formation of rare book collections based on archival sources.
- to identify the institutional mechanisms underlying the movement of collections.
- to demonstrate the transformation of approaches toward written sources during the Soviet period.
- to evaluate the process of integrating collections into scholarly circulation.



This study provides a systematic analysis of the development of rare book collections based on archival documents and scholarly literature and reveals their scientific and institutional significance within the broader context of cultural heritage management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of rare books and manuscripts is increasingly emerging as an important scholarly field within modern museology and source studies. Research conducted in this area demonstrates the necessity of interpreting written sources not merely as carriers of information, but as complex objects possessing material, cultural, and historical characteristics.

Fundamental studies devoted to the culture of Eastern manuscripts emphasize that manuscript books have a structurally complex nature, both in terms of content and form. They are interpreted as elements of cultural heritage that embody historical, religious, scientific, and literary knowledge (Kultura narodov Vostoka, 1987, pp. 478–479). At the same time, manuscripts are regarded as important indicators reflecting the level of scientific and cultural development of a given society.

Research on the historical formation and development of written heritage highlights that manuscripts were created within diverse linguistic and writing systems. Written sources in the territory of Uzbekistan were predominantly produced in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic languages, with the majority based on the Arabic script (Khabibullaev, 2008, pp. 8–11). This perspective substantiates the necessity

of studying written sources in close connection with their historical and cultural context.

At the same time, studies focusing on the material aspects of the book emphasize the particular importance of elements such as binding, decoration, writing style, and material composition as historical evidence. Specifically, both external and internal features of a book serve as important sources for determining its period of creation and cultural environment (Ziganshina, 1978). This approach underscores the need to analyze the book not only as a text, but also as a material object.

In Soviet-era scholarly literature, issues related to the management and centralization of cultural heritage objects are considered as priority directions. In particular, the close relationship between museum and scientific institutions and state policy is emphasized, as well as the influence of ideological factors in the selection and interpretation of historical sources (Chebotareva & Rajapova, 1982, p. 45). This approach indicates that the study of written sources was characterized by selectivity and ideological orientation.

Studies devoted to the formation and development of museum collections highlight their multi-source nature. Collections were formed through contributions from state institutions, private collections, and various organizations, a process closely linked to the policy of centralizing cultural heritage (Sadykova, 1975). This reveals the institutional characteristics underlying the formation of collections.

Furthermore, some studies address the scientific and educational functions



of museums and their role in society, interpreting museums as primary institutions responsible for preserving material and spiritual cultural heritage (Sadykova, 1975). This provides an important theoretical basis for understanding the role and significance of rare books within museum collections.

However, an analysis of the existing literature shows that most studies have examined manuscripts and rare books as isolated objects, while their movement within the framework of museum and library systems has not been sufficiently analyzed in a comprehensive manner. Research on the inter-institutional redistribution of collections, their governance mechanisms, and their institutional characteristics remains limited.

From this perspective, the present study expands existing scholarly approaches by analyzing the formation of rare book collections within the context of interactions between museums and libraries. This approach makes it possible to interpret written sources not merely as objects of preservation, but as resources that move and are managed within an institutional system.

METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted within a qualitative research framework, employing a combination of historical-source analysis, institutional analysis, and comparative-historical methods. The primary objective of the research is to identify the mechanisms underlying the formation of rare book movement within the museum and library systems during the Soviet period, to reveal its institutional characteristics, and to

provide a scholarly substantiation of its gradual, stage-by-stage development.

The empirical basis of the study consists of materials from the Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan. In particular, the following archival fonds from the 1920s–1950s were analyzed: f. 396, inventory 1, file 2; f. 396, inventory 1, file 8; f. 94, inventory 5, file 3014; f. 412, inventory 1, file 37. These documents contain primary data on the formation, redistribution, inventory processes, and inter-institutional movement of museum and library collections. Based on these sources, the historical trajectory of collection movement was reconstructed.

During the analytical process, the comparative-historical method was applied to examine documents from different periods in relation to one another. This approach made it possible to identify the dynamics of collection movement, its stages of development, and its distinctive features across different time periods. Redistribution processes characteristic of the 1920s–1930s were compared with the tendencies toward scientificization and specialization observed in the 1940s–1950s.

Through the application of a source-critical approach, the content of the documents, the conditions of their creation, their functional roles, and their institutional context were examined in detail. This made it possible to interpret them not merely as sources of information, but as reflections of specific historical processes. As a result, the formation of rare book collections was analyzed in close connection with



institutional structures and governance mechanisms.

In addition, a systems-based approach was employed, whereby rare book collections were considered as elements of an interconnected system linking museums, libraries, and scientific institutions. This perspective enabled the analysis of collection movement not as an isolated phenomenon, but as part of a broader network of institutional relationships.

Attention was also given to the material characteristics of written sources. Manuscripts and rare books were interpreted as complex objects, considering their script type, decorative elements, binding materials, and other physical features. This approach contributed to the analysis of books not only as textual entities but also as cultural and historical artefacts.

To ensure the reliability of the findings, archival materials were systematically compared with existing scholarly literature. This allowed for the generalization of results and their interpretation within a broader academic context. At the same time, certain limitations should be acknowledged. In particular, the incomplete preservation of some archival documents and the fragmentary nature of certain data restrict the possibility of fully reconstructing specific processes. Nevertheless, the available resources made it possible to identify the main trends through systematic analysis.

Furthermore, the author's practical experience in working with museum collections served as an important contextual factor in interpreting the results. This made it possible to relate

theoretical conclusions to actual museum practice.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The formation of rare book studies in Uzbekistan is directly linked to the Soviet period, which represents a significant historical stage characterized by the formation, accumulation, and institutionalization of rare book and manuscript collections within the framework of museum and library systems. In reconstructing this process from a scholarly perspective, archival documents serve as an essential primary source base. Archival materials from the 1920s record the redistribution of collections within museum holdings among various institutions, thereby revealing the institutional characteristics underlying the formation of collections (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 396, inventory 1, file 2, pp. 45–48). Moreover, this process was regulated through administrative decisions, with the functional specialization of institutions serving as a key criterion in the redistribution of collections.

Archival records also indicate that certain historical and ethnographic materials were transferred to other museums, which suggests that collections were redistributed within a unified institutional system (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 396, inventory 1, file 2, pp. 45–48). At the same time, museums were assigned the responsibility of supplying other institutions with exhibits (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 396, inventory 1, file 2, pp. 63–64). This demonstrates that the movement of collections was



implemented through a centralized and vertically structured system of governance.

Documents from subsequent years, particularly those dated to 1927, emphasize the process of inventorying and registering collections (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 396, inventory 1, file 8). The introduction of inventory procedures indicates that rare books and other materials were transformed from mere objects of storage into resources that were systematically recorded and managed. In this context, the documentation system was shaped not primarily as a tool of scholarly description, but rather as a mechanism of ownership control and administrative regulation.

On this basis, it can be concluded that in the 1920s–1930s, the movement of rare books developed as a mechanism of institutional redistribution (i.e., a systematic process of reallocation). In other words, the movement of collections evolved from a function of preserving knowledge into an instrument for managing and redistributing it across institutions.

From the 1930s onwards, a qualitatively new stage can be observed in the development of rare book collections. During this period, alongside the processes of collection formation and redistribution, issues related to their scholarly study, description, and systematization began to acquire priority significance. Rare books came to be interpreted not only as objects circulating between institutions, but also as objects of scientific research. This shift reflects a transformation in the conceptual approach to the book itself. It

ceased to be regarded merely as a carrier of information and instead began to be understood as a complex object possessing material and cultural characteristics. Elements such as decoration, binding, writing style, and material composition came to be recognized as key factors in determining the historical value of a book.

At the same time, within museum practice, the processes of scholarly description and cataloguing of collections developed, creating conditions for the systematic inclusion of rare books into academic circulation. As a result, collections gradually evolved into structurally organized source bases for scientific research (Sadykova, 2012). This historical development marked a qualitatively new stage in the functioning of rare book collections.

In subsequent years, these processes became more clearly defined and intensified. The 1937 museum report provides detailed information on the sources of collection acquisition, among which state publishing houses, the book trade system, and private collections are specifically identified (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 94, inventory 5, file 3014, pp. 12–14). These data indicate that the formation of rare book collections was not a linear process, but rather a multi-layered system shaped by diverse social and institutional sources.

The report particularly highlights the incorporation of private collections into state holdings. As a result, rare books that had previously existed within non-state environments were transferred into collections under state control, thus functioning as a practical



mechanism of cultural heritage centralization (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 94, inventory 5, file 3014, pp. 12–14). This process contributed not only to the quantitative expansion of collections, but also to their institutional consolidation.

Furthermore, the report documents processes related to the internal structuring of collections and their division into specific departments (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 94, inventory 5, file 3014, pp. 18–20). The classification of collections according to thematic and functional criteria demonstrates their systematic organization. However, this classification was oriented more toward ensuring administrative control over collections than toward achieving bibliographic depth, reflecting the managerial nature of documentation practices during this period.

In addition, the report records instances of inter-museum exchange and the transfer of certain items to other institutions. This indicates that the movement of collections had a continuous and systematic character and was not limited to processes of acquisition alone. As a result, collections evolved into dynamically managed systems, with their composition being continuously updated over time.

On this basis, it can be concluded that during this period, the formation of rare book collections was carried out within a multi-source and centralized system, characterized by the integration of mechanisms of acquisition, classification, and administrative control. As a result, rare book collections began to

take shape as managed and systematized scholarly resources.

The transformations observed in the context of the 1940s were not limited to organizational or institutional changes alone but were also associated with shifts in the system of knowledge production. In other words, rare books and manuscripts were no longer perceived merely as passive elements of historical heritage but increasingly emerged as active components contributing to the formation of scholarly discourse. In this process, approaches to working with written sources also evolved, with greater emphasis placed on scientific methods of selection, description, and interpretation (Kultura narodov Vostoka, 1987, p. 478).

Increased attention was given to the provenance (i.e., the origin and history of the source), physical condition, and content-related characteristics of primary sources. This led to the recognition of rare books not simply as catalogued units, but as complex objects embodying multiple material and cultural layers. Consequently, scholarly significance began to be attributed to the external features of books, including binding materials, script types, decorative elements, and marginalia (Khabibullaev, 2008, pp. 10–11).

During this period, the process of systematizing collections also deepened. Alongside thematic and functional classification, efforts were made to define the internal structure of collections. However, this classification system had not yet reached the level of full scholarly description and remained primarily oriented toward the needs of collection management and



administrative control (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 94, inventory 5, file 3014, pp. 18–20).

At the same time, in the 1940s–1950s, the expansion of scientific institutions led to an intensification of the centralization of written sources and their concentration within specialized research institutions. This process is particularly evident in the transfer of manuscripts and Eastern literary works into the system of the Academy of Sciences (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 412, inventory 1, file 37).

This development produced a dual effect. On the one hand, the centralization of collections created opportunities for more in-depth scholarly research. On the other hand, the fragmentation of collections across different institutions limited their comprehensive study within a unified system.

In addition, during this period, alongside the incorporation of rare books into scholarly circulation, their ideological interpretation also acquired significant importance. Within the framework of Soviet scholarly paradigms, written sources were often interpreted as instruments for substantiating socio-political concepts (Chebotareva & Rajapova, 1982, p. 45).

As a result, the system of working with rare books in the 1940s–1950s can be characterized by the following key features:

- the centralization and specialization of collections;
- the intensification of scientific research and the formation of a source-critical approach;
- the development of documentation

systems, albeit with a strong orientation toward administrative control; — the ideological interpretation and selective use of written sources.

These characteristics make it possible to interpret the development of rare book collections not only as an organizational process, but also as an integral component of the broader system of knowledge production and its governance.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that the formation of rare book collections in Uzbekistan took place within a complex institutional and governance framework. During the 1920s–1930s, the movement of collections was primarily regulated through mechanisms of centralization and redistribution, which were grounded more in administrative governance principles than in scholarly needs. This situation corresponds closely to the broader characteristics of Soviet cultural policy. During this period, cultural heritage objects, including rare books, were brought under state control, and their management through centralization was regarded as a priority direction. As a result, collections did not develop as freely evolving inter-institutional systems, but rather within a top-down administrative model of governance. This indicates that the movement of rare books was determined less by organic scholarly demand and more by institutional decision-making processes.

However, from the 1930s onwards, the process of scientificization introduced a qualitatively new dimension to this system. Rare books



came to be interpreted not merely as objects of preservation or redistribution, but as primary sources for scientific research. This shift reflects a broader transformation in approaches toward written sources. Manuscripts and rare books began to be analyzed as complex scholarly objects, incorporating their material structure, script type, and decorative elements (Khabibullaev, 2008, pp. 8–11).

At the same time, the findings indicate that the systems of documentation and classification of collections were initially oriented more toward administrative management and control than toward scholarly description. In other words, cataloguing practices were directed not at in-depth scientific analysis, but rather at the registration and identification of collections. This reflects the existence of a “record-based documentation model” characteristic of the Soviet period. As a result, although information on rare books was systematized, its scholarly depth remained insufficient.

The processes of centralization and specialization observed in the 1940s–1950s marked a new stage in the development of rare book collections. In particular, the concentration of written sources within specialized scientific institutions expanded the possibilities for their systematic study (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, f. 412, inventory 1, file 37). At the same time, however, the fragmentation of collections across institutions limited their comprehensive analysis within a unified system. This highlights a problem that remains relevant today—the

insufficient integration between museum and library collections.

The findings also demonstrate that, during the Soviet period, the management of rare books was not only a scholarly process but also an ideologically conditioned one. Written sources were often interpreted as instruments for substantiating specific socio-political perspectives (Chebotareva & Rajapova, 1982, p. 45). This indicates the presence of a selective approach in the selection, classification, and inclusion of sources into scholarly circulation. As a result, certain materials were extensively studied, while others remained marginalized.

Furthermore, the results underline the necessity of studying rare books not only in terms of their content but also as material objects. Within the traditions of Eastern manuscript culture, the book is understood as a complex cultural object formed through the integration of text, script, and decorative elements (Kultura narodov Vostoka, 1987, p. 478). From this perspective, it can be argued that the system of working with collections established during the Soviet period did not fully incorporate this comprehensive approach.

Overall, the findings of this study make it possible to explain the formation of rare book collections through three interrelated factors: first, administrative governance and policies of centralization; second, the development of scientific institutions; and third, the evolution of scholarly approaches to written sources. These factors, operating in conjunction, shaped not only the organizational structure of collections,



but also their scientific and cultural significance.

On this basis, it can be concluded that the development of rare book collections during the Soviet period had a dual character. On the one hand, centralization and administrative control led to the systematization of collections; on the other hand, the gradual formation of scholarly approaches transformed them into objects of scientific research. It is precisely the intersection of these two trajectories that can be regarded as the key historical factor shaping the present condition of rare book collections.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the formation of rare book collections in Uzbekistan during the Soviet period constituted a complex and multi-stage institutional process. During the 1920s–1930s, the movement of collections was primarily carried out through mechanisms of centralization and inter-institutional redistribution, driven more by administrative governance principles than by scholarly needs.

From the 1930s onwards, a significant shift occurred in the approach to rare books, as they increasingly came to be regarded as objects of scientific research. This transformation was closely associated with the development of systematization, description, and cataloguing practices, which expanded the possibilities for incorporating

written sources into scholarly circulation.

In the 1940s–1950s, processes of centralization and specialization intensified, leading to the redistribution of rare books within the system of scientific institutions. While this facilitated deeper scholarly study, it also resulted in the fragmentation of collections across institutional boundaries.

The results indicate that the development of rare book collections during the Soviet period was shaped by three key factors: centralized governance, the expansion of scientific institutions, and the evolution of scholarly approaches to written sources. These factors, in interaction, determined the formation, movement, and scholarly utilization of collections.

At the same time, the study reveals that the integration between museum and library collections remained insufficiently developed. This issue remains relevant today and highlights the need to strengthen the integration of collections and to ensure their study and management within a unified system. Consequently, the formation of rare book collections in the Soviet period can be interpreted not only as a historical process, but also as an important source of experience for improving contemporary museum and library systems.

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