MONGOLIA

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Creation of an Archaeological and Ethnographical Museum in Ulan Bator

by

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CREATION OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND
ETHNOGRAPHICAL MUSEUM IN ULAN BATOR

by Władysław Filipowiak

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mission

1. At the request of the Mongolian People's Republic, the Director-General arranged, under the Organization's Participation Programme for 1981-1983, for a consultant to carry out a mission, from 31 July to 28 August 1981, to assist the Mongolian authorities to set up an archaeological and ethnographical museum in Ulan Bator. The consultant visited all the museums in the area of the capital, and, for purposes of comparison, visited the regional museum in Dzunumod (Central Ajmak), and some monuments in the country such as Mandzszyryn-Chijd and Erdenedzu in Charchorin, where archaeological research into the ancient capital is being conducted.

2. Consultations were held in the Central Museum in Ulan Bator with the Director, Gombo Džab and with the Director of the Ethnographical Department, Sod Norn, and in the Archaeological, Ethnographical and Palaeontological Departments of the History Institute in the Mongolian Academy of Science with the Director, Dr Syrod Džaw. Discussions were also held in the Ministry of Culture with Cend Oczir, Managing Director in charge of museums, with the President of the Mongolian National Commission for Unesco, with the Minister of Education, M.R. Sanjasuren, and the UNDP Resident Representative, Andrei Aborkin. Further discussions were held with the chief architect and designer of museums, G. żuw sandorż, and a study was made of the tourist trade, the topography of the town and the movement of traffic in the town.

The present state of the museums, their collections and staffing.

3. The leading museum is the Central Museum in Ulan Bator, which has six other dependent branches in the town, including the City Museum, the Natsagdordż Museum, the Museum of Religion and the Monastery. Generally speaking, the Central Museum has an historical, ethnographical and natural science character. It consists of the historical ethnographical and natural science and monuments department (with reference collections) and the exhibition service and library department (with 10,000 exhibits). It employs altogether 32 persons, including specialists in the following fields: one ethnographer, two historians, two biologists, one zoologist and four philologists. The museum has neither a photographic-documentary workshop, since all museums are served by the Museum of the Revolution laboratory with a staff of two persons, nor a workshop for the maintenance of monuments. The building of the Central Museum is adapted from a former polytechnical college with an area of about 12,000 cubic metres, including 3,000 square metres of space for exhibitions which serves all sections of the museum together with additional palaeontological exhibitions which do not belong to the museum itself but to the Mongolian Academy of Science.

4. The permanent exhibitions of the museum include small collections of the beginnings of settlement, i.e. the Palaeolithic and Neolithic Ages, and the Bronze and Iron Ages. The culture of the Scythians and Huns, as well as of the states of Ujgurs and Kirghiz is also shown. The culture of the Mongolian state from the Genghis Khan period until the sixteenth century is represented in slightly more important collections. The ethnographical section displays a rich collection of representative objects connected with folk culture and its occupations and art from various regions of Mongolia. Mongolian natural science from various geographical regions is abundantly presented. A series of permanent exhibitions concludes with the historical period, which does not lie within our terms of reference.
5. The museum is visited annually by approximately 95,000 people, including 10,000 foreigners. Since foreign tourism is increasing it is to be expected that in the future the number of foreign visitors will be higher than is stated above. For comparison it can be said that the neighbouring Museum of the Revolution was visited in 1980 by 110,000 people including over 10,000 foreigners. It is estimated that the museum was visited by 150,000 foreigners from 73 countries within the past ten years.

6. Archaeological and ethnographical collections are to be found in two institutions, the former on the whole in the Archaeological Department of the Mongolian Academy of Science, the latter mostly in the Central Museum as well as in the Archaeological Department of the Mongolian Science Academy. The exact size and condition of the collections cannot be accurately ascertained, since the consultant was unable to examine the stores which are not accessible to foreigners. This is not especially important when one considers the shortage of workshops and experts. Objects are maintained only in a very simple way, occasionally and in small numbers. The number of objects, based on the area of the stores (about 60 square metres) is below 50,000. They include materials resulting from systematic research from the Palaeolithic until the Middle Ages, of great importance and scientific range, not only from Central Asia but also Eastern Europe and North America (from the Palaeolithic and Neolithic Ages). The ethnographical objects occupy about 16,000 positions in the Central Museum, 30 per cent on exhibitions and about 5,000 positions in the collections of the Mongolian Academy of Science, making a total of 21,000 positions.

7. The objects were acquired by purchases or searches conducted by the Mongolian Academy of Science in the field of archaeology and ethnography, for it is there that the specialist staff is concentrated.

8. The staffing position is as follows:

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<th>Central Museum</th>
<th>Ethnographers</th>
<th>Archaeologists</th>
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Among these archaeologists are some specially trained historians and four technicians with secondary education in the Archaeological and Historical Department of the Mongolian Academy of Science. From this analysis it is obvious that the museum suffers badly from a lack of expert, trained staff. The absence of curators, restoration experts and laboratory assistants, the lack of maintenance and photographic workshops is especially disadvantageous. The possibilities of holding exhibitions are also limited by the lack of space in the makeshift building, and there is little chance of exhibiting the rich collections or of housing the technical stores.

Current proposal for the design of the palaeontological and archaeological museum

9. The Mongolian authorities are aware of these problems, for they have been designing a new palaeontological and archaeological museum since 1970, at first planned to be only palaeontological, then combined with archaeology. The
initiative probably arose from the Mongolian Academy of Science. In the Institute of Architecture there exists a preliminary design by G. Ñewsandorž, the architect of the already completed Lenin Museum in Ulan Bator. This interesting design is flexible and offers many possibilities for the continuous adaptation of the museum to future needs. The plan envisages an area of 36,560 cubic metres, general space of 6,930 square metres, space for exhibitions of 3,600 square metres, at an estimated cost of 9.8 million tugryks. This new palaeontological and archaeological museum has been tentatively located on the outskirts of the city, a long way from the centre and from other museums, near the Historical Museum of the Mongolian Academy of Science.

10. Before further plans are made it is necessary to determine the nature and function of the museum as well as the needs for space, for exhibitions, for storage facilities and the scientific, economic and administrative workshops. Consideration should be given to the advisability of combining palaeontology and archaeology in one museum. It would be better to combine geology with palaeontology and archaeology with ethnography. It is an extremely complicated problem for directors of the Mongolian Museum in view of their research and their rich collections which are of world-wide importance. Mineral resources and natural science collections are extensively displayed not only in the exhibitions of the Central Museum but also in those of regional museums. The palaeontological research conducted by many international teams has produced materials of world-wide importance, and there is a remarkable group of specialists in palaeontology in Mongolia. Palaeontological exhibitions arouse enormous interest and attract many visitors by their unique specimens. These facts should also be taken into consideration when planning the museums. Thus it is obvious that there are many material and financial problems not only in designing the museum building itself but also in providing it with modern technical equipment which will enable it to function efficiently.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

Design of museum

11. The Mongolian Ministry of Culture, to which the museums belong, should first determine the relationship between the museum and the Mongolian Academy of Science with a view to co-ordinating the work of the two institutions. Because of the nature of the collections, this co-ordination would have an enormous scientific, cultural and educational influence both within Mongolia and internationally. It is therefore proposed that a block of buildings be erected either as a palaeontological, archaeological and ethnographical museum or as a geological, palaeontological and archaeological museum with ethnography, under the name of the Mongolian National Museum. Such a museum would unite the natural and humanistic sciences in a specific way, giving some idea of the evolutionary development of man in the geographical environment as well as in Mongolian culture.

12. At the present stage of planning it is still possible to consider several proposals. Depending on the decision of the Mongolian Ministry of Culture on combining or separating the different disciplines it is recommended that there should be one or several buildings in the shape of a Yurta (Tartar cottage). The Yurta has an old tradition in Mongolian culture, going back at least to one thousand years before Christ. (See several interesting works on the subject by D. Majdar, such as Architektura i gradostroitiełstwo Mongolii, Moskwa 1971, s.15 i n. n.). The yurta shape is also employed in modern architecture. It forms an indispensable element of the Mongolian cultural landscape, which
harmonizes with the geographical environment. By using this traditional form of architecture, the Mongolian National Museum would have its own individual traditional and historical design while using modern architectural techniques known all over the world. The architectural form of the yurta may assume the modern shape of the architecture of the twenty-first century, as is already shown in the design of the Magsarzaw statue in the town of Bulgan (D. Majdar, op.cit. p. 209).

13. Attention should be paid to the interior arrangement of the museum space, dividing it into three sectors:

(a) Administrative scientific and maintenance sections (basement).

(b) Permanent exhibitions.

(c) Storage of collections.

The basement would contain the administrative offices, science laboratories; a library and maintenance workshops with a separate entrance for the administrative section. The main entrance on the ground floor would lead to a large room for lectures and films and to the temporary and permanent exhibitions. The permanent exhibition rooms would be situated along the outside of the building while the storage rooms, more or less on the same level, would form the inside part of the building. In this way difficult and expensive transfers inside the museum could be avoided and would facilitate speedy changes in exhibitions. At the same time the entire storage section would be connected vertically with the technical, scientific and maintenance sections. All the workshops would be separate entities. Likewise the administrative, scientific and maintenance sections, the exhibitions and the circulation of visitors, as well as the popular education work carried out outside museum working hours could also be separated. This would ensure the safety of the collections on exhibit or in storage. In designing the storage-space, a ratio of at least 0.5 square metres in relation to the exhibition space, should be kept, taking into account the dimensions of ethnographic objects as well as prospects for future development. Several yurta buildings, depending upon the number of disciplines to be represented, would be the ideal solution, particularly if they could be interconnected.

Administration

14. It is recommended that there should be one management and one administration for the Mongolian National Museum. In this way full advantage could be taken of the administrative staff, furniture, transport, provisions, expensive modern technical equipment and apparatus and the possibility of interdisciplinary co-operation. One administration would lower the costs of maintaining the museum complex and of remodelling buildings in the future. Separate museums, devoted to one discipline, cause excessive growth in administrative staff to the disadvantage of the number of professional and technical staff.

Site

15. The proposed site of the museum on the eastern outskirts of the town at the end of Peace Street (Ench tajwan gudamdz) where the square of the eastern part of the town is to be constructed in the future, is controversial. The site is at some distance from the city centre, where are to be found all the important buildings, monasteries and existing museums, including those recently built. The journey of several miles, taking into account existing traffic, presents a serious obstacle to visitors and tourism. Another site should preferably be considered. It is recommended that the authorities should choose a perfect site near the centre on the west bank of the Selbe river in Sambu Street, where many building
sites are available. The site is only ten minutes' walking distance from the city centre, hotels and other museums, such as the Centre Museum and the Revolution Museum. The landscape of the area is also suitable for the museum. Some other places, like the region of the Central Park of Culture and Rest, would also be suitable. The buildings of the Mongolian National Museum in the national architectural form would enhance the centre of the capital and at the same time they would be situated near other cultural institutions and monumental buildings, easily accessible to visitors.

Procedures to be undertaken

16. Considering the advanced state of designing and planning the new museum the following decisions should be made and statements issued on:

(a) The essential nature of the museum, based on the collections owned by the Mongolian Academy of Science and the Central State Museum. Clarification is needed on whether it should be a palaeontological and archaeological museum, a palaeontological, archaeological and ethnographical museum, or a geological and palaeontological as well as archaeological and ethnographical museum. The problem should be considered from the point of view of general interests and the development of Mongolian culture.

(b) The choice of the museum site, preferably within the town centre near the existing cultural institutions.

(c) The choice of a design for the museum, selected from at least two proposals, after careful analysis and consultation with foreign experts.

(d) The needs for space for exhibitions, the scientific, technical and maintenance laboratories, storage and administration. These needs should be established in consultation with representatives from the respective disciplines of the Mongolian Academy of Science and the Central Museum. Taking into account the present state of museums in Ulan Bator, it is recommended that the aid of experienced foreign museum specialists should be sought.

Financing of the project

17. At the present stage of planning it is expected that the building of the new museum will last at least five years, i.e. until 1986-1987. This is a satisfactory period of time for the preparation of suitable staff and the provision of proper equipment. The following recommendations are made:

(a) A scholarship should be provided (as soon as possible) for the designer of the future Mongolian National Museum, Architect G. Žuwandaorž, to enable him to study modern museums in such countries as Finland, Sweden, Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic and Poland. He could thus become conversant with the general design of museums and the organization of space within them.

(b) Scholarships should be granted to two or three scientific workers (archaeologists and ethnographers) for a period of 6-12 months to enable them to study in a large multidisciplinary European museum such as Budapest in Hungary.
Scholarships should be granted, as a measure of the highest priority, to three persons for studies in the maintenance of materials, with the possibility of specialization in maintaining metals, wood, paper and textiles. Such scholarships should be available for five years, at the Polish universities of Warsaw, Cracow and Torun for example. The problem of maintaining exhibits in Mongolian museums is a major task because of the complete absence of specialists and laboratories.

Aid should be provided for foreign consultants and experts to assist in the final organization of the scientific, technical and administrative sectors of the museum when it has ultimately been approved by the Mongolian authorities.

Aid should be provided for laboratory equipment - including maintenance, audio-visual and photo-documentary - in the final construction phase.

III. CONCLUSION

18. As is evident from the initial planning that has already been carried out, the Mongolian authorities already appreciate the importance of a museum specializing in archaeology and ethnography as a contribution to the general cultural development of their country. They were, however, unable to overcome several difficulties and decide on the final nature and design of the museum because of the lack of a tradition in the organization of museums, although some marked achievements may be noted in the past twenty years. Taking the above difficulties into consideration, and in full appreciation of the rich heritage of cultural wealth and the initiatives already undertaken in establishing a new institution, it is proposed to establish an institution which meets the needs of its scientific and cultural environment. It is assumed that the general outline of the proposal has been approved by the interested parties. The creation of the Mongolian National Museum based on the rich collections and research and its potential for popular education will be a permanent acquisition to the nation.

19. The museum should undertake the responsibility for the full protection of the nation's cultural wealth in the wider sense. This should include a maintenance service for the whole country, organized through a network of district museums (ajmaks). The protection of monuments against destruction, commerce and export, their registration and stock-taking, should occupy the attention of museums and departments of architecture, cartography and history in the years to come. The stock-taking and documentation of the remains of old cemeteries, towns and monasteries will be in future a precious source of historical research and, if restored, they could provide the material for future exhibitions in the museum. An instructive example in this respect is the ancient capital of the Great Khan (Kharakhorum) which required not only extensive archaeological research and the discovery of remains of the old splendour but also a full documentation before it could be established as "the open air museum".

20. As far as could be ascertained, large groups of tourists from Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the United States of America arrive daily to visit this place of interest. The perfect tourist base is Chudzirt, at a distance of about 50 km, and an air link with Ulan Bator facilitates visits to the magnificent monastery complex of Erdene-Dzu and the remains of Karakhorum, so important for the popularization of knowledge and the culture of Mongolia. Taking into account the international character and the importance of the place, it is recommended that aid be given for the organization of the site as an example of an archaeological open-air museum in Central Asia.
Diagram of the Museum

- Administration
- Maintenance
- Laboratories

- Permanent Exhibitions
- Storage of Collections
- Permanent Exhibitions

Diagram shows the layout of the museum with different sections labeled.