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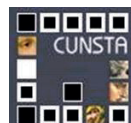
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Classico

Museum development in the Ukraine*

V.K. Legkoduĥ

There is much to tell about museum development in the Ukraine since the first museum was opened there some hundred and fifty years ago. Strictly speaking, the first efforts to collect and preserve cultural objects were private or semi-private collections made in the Kiev period, and housed in the palaces of princes and boyars and in the sacristies of churches and monasteries.

The 17th century – a period when Ukrainians were fighting for their freedom – furnishes other examples of collections of antique objects with the express purpose of making the people conscious of their own history. In other words, they began to assume a specifically historical role, though they could scarcely be called systematic collections, most of the items being objects that simply happened to be in the possession of a castle or monastery.

The foundation of the first museums was closely bound up with archaeological finds. Because of the great interest aroused by ancient monuments in the south of the Ukraine, archaeological research was extended to the ancient Greek cities in the Crimea, and this in turn produced unique collections, most of which became the basis of the first permanent museums.

* Si propone qui il contributo di Legkoduĥ V.K. (1966), *Museum development in the Ukraine*, «Museum», vol. XIX, n. 3, pp. 142-146.

Some early museums of this kind were the Nikolaev (1809) and the Feodosia (1811), archaeological museums that mostly contained old coins, marble sculpture, pottery and architectural fragments.

Between 1894 and 1899, the Kiev Museum of Antiquities and Art was established thanks to M.F. Bilyashevsky, V.V. Khvoiko and some other outstanding citizens, and concentrated on making a correctly classified collection of objects.

The Chernigov Historical Museum was based on the collection of an outstanding Ukrainian amateur, V.V. Tarnovsky.

All this helped historical studies and aroused interest in practical museology. Other museums, and other kinds of museum were already in existence: Kharkov, Sumy, Lvov, Nikolaev; an art museum at Ekaterinoslav, natural history museums at Simferopol and Nikolaev, and local museums at Poltava, Kamenets-Podolsky, Volinsky, Nezin and Ostrog, which have now become regional museums. The first military museum – the Black Sea Fleet Museum – was set up in the Ukraine, at Sevastopol.

Eminent historians, with reputations extending far beyond the Ukraine, worked in these museums: Academician T. Yavornitsky, N. Bilyashevsky, D. Shcherbakovsky, F. Ernst and V. Khvoiko. Yavornitsky organized the well-known Ekaterinoslav Museum, with its richly documented collections on the history of the Zaporozhskaya Sech. Bilyashevsky introduced important innovations in Kiev Museum, organizing archaeological excavations and ethnographic expeditions, and encouraging co-operation with other museums and associations. Exhibitions of art fabrics, embroidery, handicrafts, art and archaeology were held from time to time in the museums, especially in the Kiev Museum of Antiquities under Bilyashevsky. In those days, however, the exhibitions tended to be somewhat haphazard, organized as individual curators thought fit, and arranged on the basis of aesthetic considerations and outward appearance rather than scientific significance.

A little later came the “typological” approach, exhibits being arranged according to type and form, objects found in different places being sometimes grouped together so as to display a complete dwelling or burial-ground. But this kind of exhibition was based on quite unscientific principles.

One great weakness was that the earlier museums were not accessible to the general public, and seldom catered for anything outside specific scientific purposes. The State took practically no interest in them.

The October Revolution radically changed all this. Museums rapidly became real educational centres. Government decrees and enactments nationalized private collections, existing museums were taken over by the State, and the study and preservation of monuments (closely associated with museum work, and becoming an increasingly important feature of it) placed on a systematic basis.

This means that museums are responsible not only for their own collections

but for local monuments as well. In 1919, the All-Ukrainian Committee for the Preservation of Art, Antiquities and Nature (Voukopsis) was set up, with departments in all provinces, under the Ukrainian S.S.R. People's Educational Council, and has done a great deal for the preservation and upkeep of historical monuments.

Museums then considered a new approach that aims at interesting a wider public, including the present as well as the past-new developments in the economy, in industry, agriculture, science and culture.

Government initiative provided a new landmark in the history of museum work in the Ukraine.

The ancient Greek city of Olbia (6th-5th century B.C.) was declared an historical monument in 1921, as was the famous Pecherskaya monastery in Kiev in 1926. Others followed: the unique 15th-17th-century Kamenets-Podolsky fortress, the inimitably beautiful 11th-century cathedral of St. Sophia, in Kiev, the Decimal Church, with its grounds, in Kiev, the 11th-12th-century churches in Chernigov (Church of the Transfiguration, convent at Elets and Church of the Trinity), the Starokonstantinov castle in Ostrog, and the beautifully landscaped Sofievka gardens in Uman.

The museums of the Ukraine were badly damaged during the Second World War. Some of the collections were evacuated, but most museums were destroyed and pillaged by the invaders, a fate shared by the Kiev, Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk and Chernigov historical museums and the Shevchenko Museum in Kiev. The beautiful 11th-century Uspensky cathedral, part of the Kievo-Pechersk monastery, was blown up; the Berdichev, Starokonstantinov, Novgorod-Seversky, Korosten and Glukhov museums were too badly damaged to survive as such.

Many of the nation's treasures were carried off to Hitler Germany and lost. Great architectural buildings were ruined, and many statues broken. Even the revered tomb of Shevchenko, in Kanev, was desecrated.

After the war, the State and museum staffs had the tremendous task of reconstructing the old museums and building new. Within a comparatively short time this work was completed and the museums can now function normally.

There are 136 museums in the Ukraine-historical, historico-cultural, Revolution and war history, regional, fine arts, memorial, literary, natural history and science museums.

Historical museums deal with the general history of the whole country or a specific part of it. The twenty-three Revolution and war history museums cover similar ground, but concentrate on the whole revolutionary movement or specific episodes in the war.

One of the best historical museums is the Museum of the Ukrainian S.S.R., in Kiev. In fifty years, a collection of over half a million items that illustrate its history from ancient times to the present day has been built up. The museum is particularly rich in the early records of what is now the territory of

the Ukraine: the Kiev period (from 2nd century A.D. to the Tartar-Mongol invasions in the 13th century), the feudal period (14th-19th century) and modern history. It thus constitutes one of the most valuable sources of information about the nation's history. No less interesting are the Kharkov and Lvov historical museums.

The purpose of the regional museums is to provide as full and comprehensive a picture as possible of local life. They are the largest group (forty-eight) and are general in character, dealing with the natural environment, history, economy and culture.

A good example is in Uzhgorod, Sub Carpathian-Ukraine. It houses over 23,000 exhibits, including unique collections of rock minerals and flora, extensive archaeological collections, items connected with the history of handicraft workshops in the 17th-18th century, and a large ethnographical collection of great scientific and historical interest.

The twenty-five fine arts museums specialize in Ukrainian, Russian, Western European or Oriental painting, sculpture and drawing, and contain outstanding examples of these arts; this category also includes museums of architecture, folk art, applied art and drama.

The twenty-six memorial museums deal with the life and work of various scientists, writers, actors and political leaders; usually housed in a building associated with the person concerned, they put the visitor into intimate touch with the memorable lives of such men of genius as Shevchenko, Franko, Chekhov, Ukrainka, Cheremshina and Zabolotny.

The twenty-four science and natural history museums are more highly specialized, being mostly attached to research institutes, universities or industries.

Despite their range and number, the Ukrainian museums are alike in their up-to-date approach, their concentration on specific themes, and their scientific and educational purpose; their collections are used scientifically to explain and illustrate the material and intellectual aspects of particular cultural themes, showing, clearly and comprehensively, the origins, development and historical significance of the events and phenomena with which they are concerned.

The organization of an exhibition has its theoretical and practical aspects. A good deal of research is needed to prepare the thematic structure and the general plan. Phenomena and events must be illustrated in such a way that their interrelationship and sequence is clear. Each exhibit must help the viewer to understand another, each must in some way exemplify the general laws that underlie development in nature and in society. The problems of practical arrangement are no less important, particularly the need to ensure aesthetically satisfying arrangements of rooms, furnishings and the actual exhibits themselves.

Regional museums usually have three main divisions: natural phenomena, pre-Revolutionary history, socialist construction. Some may also have art, literature or memorial sections. Their material is mostly local, but regional history is shown to be part of the history of the country as a whole.

The art museums are arranged chronologically, so that the viewer can not only appreciate the artist's work but see how art has developed.

A most important aspect of museum research is scientific research. It involves the organization of field expeditions; the systematic study of certain problems of history, economics, natural history, culture or technology; publications; the compilation of guides and catalogues; and the development of museological principles. Ukrainian museums today go more than half-way to meet their public, by arranging guided visits, lectures and discussions. Provision is made for visitors to meet and consult the scientific staff. Traveling exhibitions provide another popular service.

One of the characteristic features of Ukrainian museums is that they are divided in two categories: State and people's museums, the latter being staffed voluntary workers-students, workmen, collective farm employees, pensioners-indeed, anyone willing to give up his free time to science.

The people's museums are under the direct supervision of State museums, and their collections are organized according to the same scientific principles. This explains why the people's museums are held in such regard. There are about a thousand of them, in all parts of the country.

The museum administration is quite small; the Department of Museums and Monuments is directly responsible to the Ukrainian S.S.R. Minister of Culture.

In the provinces, the cultural department of each regional executive committee has its own inspector of museums and monuments.

The regional museums are managed by museographers, the preservation of monuments being the responsibility of specialized technicians. District and city museums are closely linked with regional museums as to working methods, but are not subordinate to them.

The scientific and methodological administration is highly complex. A scientific and methodological committee of the Ministry of Culture has sections which deal with the historical, regional, art, literary, memorial and natural history aspects of museum work.

The scientific and methodological department of the Kiev State Historical Museum has a service which provides up-to-date information on museum practice, illustrates methods of exhibition planning, and displays photographs of museum arrangement. Visitors can consult handbooks and treatises on methodology, and a card index of historical and archaeological monuments and sculptures.

The staffs of the Ukrainian museums are called upon to combine careful attention to detail with a constant awareness of contemporary problems and the real requirements of the public. With these objects in mind they are continually engaged in improving the collections and making them more attractive and effective.

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