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THE AISHA BIBI AND BABAJI-KHATUN MAUSOLEUMS: SOVIET-ERA RESEARCH, RESTORATION WORKS AND ATHEISTIC PROPAGANDA

The Aisha Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums are unique examples of Islamic architecture from the XI-XII centuries and hold a significant place in the historical and cultural heritage of Kazakhstan. This article analyzes the study and restoration of these mausoleums, as well as the impact of Soviet-era atheistic policies on their preservation. The aim of the study is to reveal the historical and architectural features of the mausoleums, assess the effectiveness of Soviet restoration methods, and explore the consequences of atheistic propaganda. The research utilizes documents from the State Archive of Zhambyl Region, the Central State Archive of Cinema, Photo, and Audio Documents of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Scientific Archive of the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology. A historical-comparative analysis of archival data provided deeper insights into the cultural and historical significance of the mausoleums. The article examines the organizational and technical limitations of Soviet-era restoration efforts, as well as the influence of Soviet totalitarian ideology on the spiritual and cultural role of these mausoleums. Particular attention is given to the architectural features, restoration methods, and outcomes related to the Aisha Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums, emphasizing the richness and uniqueness of Kazakhstan's cultural heritage. The study's findings demonstrate the need for systematic and scientifically grounded approaches to preserving the historical and cultural value of these mausoleums. This article contributes to research in the field of cultural heritage preservation in Kazakhstan and can serve as a methodological foundation for future restoration and scholarly projects.

Key words: Aisha-Bibi mausoleum, Babaji-Khatun mausoleum, restoration, research, sacred place, sufism, atheism.

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Айша-бибі және Бабажы-қатын кесенесі: кеңестік кезеңдегі зерттеу, реставрациялық жұмыстар және атеистік насихат

Айша-бибі және Бабажы-қатын кесенелері XI-XII ғасырлардағы ислам сәулет өнерінің бірегей үлгілері болып табылады және Қазақстанның тарихи-мәдени мұрасында маңызды орын алады. Бұл мақалада аталған кесенелердің зерттелуі мен реставрациясы, сондай-ақ кеңестік кезеңдегі атеистік саясаттың олардың сақталуына ықпалы талданады. Зерттеудің мақсаты – кесенелердің тарихи және сәулеттік ерекшеліктерін ашу, кеңестік реставрациялық әдістердің тиімділігін бағалау және атеистік насихаттың салдарын зерттеу. Зерттеу барысында Жамбыл облысының мемлекеттік архиві, Қазақстан Республикасының Орталық мемлекеттік кино-фотоқұжаттар мен дыбыс жазбалар архиві және Ә.Х. Марғұлан атындағы Археология институтының ғылыми архивінің құжаттары пайдаланылды. Архивтік деректерді тарихи-салыстырмалы әдіспен талдау кесенелердің мәдени және тарихи маңызын тереңірек түсінуге мүмкіндік берді. Мақалада кеңестік кезеңдегі реставрация жұмыстарының ұйымдастырушылық және техникалық шектеулері, сондай-ақ кеңес тоталитарлық идеологиясының кесенелердің рухани және мәдени рөліне әсері қарастырылады. Айша-бибі және Бабажы-қатын кесенелерінің сәулеттік ерекшеліктеріне, реставрация әдістеріне және олардың нәтижелеріне ерекше назар аударылып, Қазақстанның мәдени мұрасының бірегейлігі мен байлығы көрсетіледі. Зерттеу нәтижелері бұл кесенелердің тарихи-мәдени құндылығын сақтау үшін жүйелі және ғылыми негізделген тәсілдерді қолданудың қажеттілігін көрсетеді. Ұсынылған мақала Қазақстандағы мәдени мұраны сақтау мәселелері бойынша зерттеулерге үлес қосып, болашақ реставрациялық және ғылыми жұмыстарға әдістемелік негіз бола алады.

Түйін сөздер: Айша-бибі кесенесі, Бабажы-қатын кесенесі, реставрация, зерттеу, қасиетті

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Мавзолей Айша-биби и Бабаджи-хатун: исследования, реставрационные работы и атеистическая пропаганда советского периода

Айша-биби и Бабаджи-хатун являются уникальными образцами исламской архитектуры XI-XII веков и занимают важное место в историко-культурном наследии Казахстана. В данной статье анализируются изучение и реставрация этих мавзолеев, а также влияние атеистической политики советского времени в их сохранении. Цель исследования – раскрыть исторические и архитектурные особенности мавзолеев, оценить эффективность советских методов реставрации и изучить последствия атеистической пропаганды. В исследовании использованы документы Государственного архива Жамбылской области, Центрального государственного архива кино-фотодокументов и звукозаписей Республики Казахстан и научного архива Института археологии имени А.Х. Маргулана. Анализ архивных данных с применением историко-сравнительного метода позволил глубже понять культурное и историческое значение мавзолеев. В статье рассматриваются организационные и технические ограничения реставрационных работ советского периода, а также влияние советской тоталитарной идеологии на духовную и культурную роль мавзолеев. Особое внимание уделено архитектурным особенностям, методам реставрации мавзолеев Айша-биби и Бабаджи-хатун и их результатам, которые подчеркивают уникальность и богатство культурного наследия нашей республики. Результаты изучения демонстрируют необходимость системных и научно обоснованных подходов для сохранения историко-культурной ценности этих мавзолеев. Предлагаемая статья вносит вклад в исследования в области сохранения культурного наследия Казахстана и может служить методологической основой для будущих реставрационных и научных работ.

Ключевые слова: мавзолей Айша-биби, мавзолей Бабаджи-хатун, реставрация, исследования, сакральное место, суфизм, атеизм.

Introduction

The Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums, as bright examples of Islamic architecture from the 11th-12th centuries, represent an important part of Kazakhstan's historical and cultural heritage. These mausoleums not only showcase the unique achievements of Central Asian architecture but also testify to the influence of Sufi traditions and Islam on regional culture. Based on historical sources, a comprehensive study of the religious, cultural, and architectural significance of these mausoleums remains a relevant task.

The history of the study and restoration of the mausoleums is directly linked to the ideological policies of the Soviet era. During the Soviet era, atheist propaganda weakened the spiritual significance of these sacred sites, framing them primarily as cultural heritage objects. Furthermore, organizational and material difficulties in restoration efforts hindered the full preservation of the mausoleums. Despite these challenges, the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums have retained their historical value and have become symbols of Kazakhstan's cultural heritage.

The purpose of this research is to reveal the historical, cultural, and architectural significance of the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums by analyzing their study and restoration during the Soviet period. Additionally, it aims to assess the impact of Soviet-era atheist policies on these mausoleums and their influence on the process of preserving historical and cultural heritage. This study addresses topics that have been largely overlooked to date and provides new scientific insights.

The research examines the effectiveness and limitations of Soviet restoration methods, as well as the impact of atheist propaganda on the societal role of the mausoleums. In this regard, the article contributes significantly to the study of the complex processes involved in preserving and promoting Kazakhstan's historical heritage.

The novelty of the research lies in systematically demonstrating the influence of atheist policies on historical and cultural heritage through an analysis of data on the study and restoration of the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums during the Soviet period. Furthermore, by identifying the architectural features of the mausoleums and the shortcomings in restoration practices, the study seeks to deepen the understanding of their cultural importance.

Materials and Methods

The primary sources for the study were documents from the Zhambyl Regional State Archive (ZRSA), the Central State Archive of Film and Photographic Documents and Sound Recordings of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CSAFPDSR RK), and the SA MIA CQA-SHE MSHE RK. Data obtained from these archives provided an opportunity for a comprehensive study of the historical, cultural, and architectural features of the mausoleums.

The Zhambyl Regional State Archive contributed valuable information on the restoration and study history of the mausoleums through its 399th fund (Executive Committee of the Council of People's Deputies of Zhambyl Region, 1946-1991), 619th fund (State Historical and Cultural Reserve Museum "Monuments of Ancient Taraz", 1978-2004), and 772nd fund (Zhambyl Archaeological Unit of the Kazakh SSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography, 1938-1945). Additionally, the CH005th fund of the Central State Archive of Film and Photographic Documents and Sound Recordings of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Monuments of History and Culture) supplemented the research with visual and textual data related to the mausoleums.

The research employed historical-comparative methods, source analysis, and systematic organization and comparison of archival materials. These approaches facilitated an understanding of the historical significance of the mausoleums, identification of issues related to their restoration, and a comprehensive assessment of the impact of Soviet atheistic policies on these monuments. Through the analysis of archival documents, the study clarified and compared data to delineate the key phases of the mausoleums' study and restoration processes.

Literature review

The Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums, as unique examples of Islamic architecture from the 11th-12th centuries, form an important part of the historical and cultural heritage of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Research on these mausoleums began in the early 20th century, accumulating valuable information about their architectural features and historical significance.

On May 5, 1897, at a meeting of the Turkestan Amateur Archaeologists' Circle, V.A. Kallaur presented a report on the Karakhan and Aisha-Bibi mausoleums (Kallaur, 1897: 1-16). He mentioned a local legend that Aisha-Bibi was the daughter of

Karakhan but dismissed it as implausible. Kallaur detailed several legends about Aisha-Bibi, emphasizing their cultural and historical significance. Additionally, he photographed the mausoleum and sent the images to Tashkent, highlighting the monument's considerable damage and stressing the need for its study by qualified specialists (Toktabay, Dosymbetov, 2022: 1218).

In 1927, B.P. Denike described the Aisha-Bibi mausoleum as an outstanding monument dating to the 11th-12th centuries in his work *Art of Central Asia*. He noted the use of terracotta tiles in its decoration, praising the floral and geometric patterns on the tiles and comparing the mausoleum to the Ozgen and Manas Orda mausoleums in Kyrgyzstan. These similarities confirmed the connection of Aisha-Bibi to the architectural traditions of the Karakhanid era. In his later work, *Architectural Ornament of Central Asia* (1939), Denike highlighted the harmonious composition and symmetry of the mausoleum's facades and portals, characterizing it as an example of architectural sophistication (Denike, 1927: 24-25; 1939: 89).

In 1938, an archaeological survey was conducted in the western part of the Talas plain under the leadership of A.N. Bernshtam. This included a specialized expedition to study, photograph, and create plans for the *Aisha-Bibi and Bibi-Jan-Khatun* mausoleums. Bernshtam emphasized their historical significance and recommended urgent conservation and restoration measures by 1939. This expedition, conducted from August 7 to August 25, formed the basis for recommendations to the monument preservation authorities. Bernshtam regarded implementing such measures as a priority for preserving cultural heritage (ZRSA, Fund 772, Inventory 1, File 2, pp. 7-9). B.N. Dublickij, a member of the expedition, noted in his 1939 report: "*The Babaji-Khatun mausoleum was not previously studied by researchers. Judging by its architectural features, it might have originally been a Nestorian church converted into a mausoleum*" (SA MIA CS MSHE RK, Fund 2, Inventory 1, File 161, p. 13). This perspective, influenced by anti-religious policies of the time, aimed to diminish the sacred status of religious heritage, illustrating how Soviet propaganda shaped academic research to deny the spiritual meaning of historical sites.

In his work *Monuments of Antiquity of the Talas Valley*, A.N. Bernshtam described the structure of the Aisha-Bibi mausoleum in detail. He wrote, "*This is a single-domed building with a cubic base. Although the dome and eastern wall are currently destroyed, the portal facing west and parts of the*

northern and southern walls are well preserved". Bernshtam noted the terracotta tiles adorned with floral and geometric patterns, likening the walls to a decorative carpet. He also highlighted the slightly curved columns and relief bands with Arabic inscriptions (Bernshtam, 1941: 58).

Regarding the Babaji-Khatun mausoleum, Bernshtam described its simplicity and functional design: "*This mausoleum lacks a portal and terracotta tile cladding. It is a plain structure with a square base and a pointed conical dome*", supported by an octagonal drum (Figure 1). The walls feature imitations of windows and doors. Bernshtam considered it the oldest Karakhanid monument and noted its architectural similarities with 11th-12th century Armenian architecture (Bernshtam, 1941: 59). M.M. Mendikulov also mentioned these similarities in his work (Mendikulov, 1950: 7-9).

In 1948, A.M. Belenitsky drew attention to the inscriptions in the mausoleums. He mentioned the preservation of part of an inscription inside the Aisha-Bibi mausoleum that read "*Il [al] Khan Shah...*" and speculated that these inscriptions might provide valuable information about the history and builders of the mausoleum. Belenitsky noted: "*Only a few words can be discerned in the first mausoleum: 'This great tomb is called Abaji Khatun (or Babaji-Khatun)'*" (Belenitsky, 1948: 18).

In 1957, T.K. Basenov emphasized the terracotta frieze with Arabic inscriptions on the main façade of the Babaji-Khatun mausoleum, confirming its sacred purpose. He also described the complex decorative techniques of the Aisha-Bibi mausoleum, stating, "*This monument is distinguished by the intricate use of terracotta tiles, a technique unique to Central Asia and Kazakhstan*" (Basenov, 1957: 30-31).

In her 1963 book, G.A. Pugachenkova described the Aisha-Bibi mausoleum as follows: "*In some northern regions of Central Asia, such as the Karakhanid mausoleum (early 11th century) and the Aisha-Bibi mausoleum (12th century), the architectural design of portals resembles the façade treatment methods of the Samanid mausoleum. The Aisha-Bibi mausoleum features a frame marking the arch extending to impostes at the lower level, with the façade divided into horizontal sections. Its corner decorations are distinctive, replacing slender embedded columns with sturdy, well-proportioned ones whose shafts and capitals echo the wooden columns of the Zerafshan region*" (Pugachenkova, 2021: 136-137).

In her 1972 book *Medieval Taraz*, T.N. Senigova regarded the mausoleums not only as architectural monuments but also as significant cultural heritage

reflecting religious and social transformations of their time. She highlighted their location and architectural style as evidence of Islamic influence and the cultural-political significance of the Karakhanid era (Senigova, 1972).

L.I. Rempel viewed the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums as a synthesis of Islamic and Transoxiana architectural traditions, reflecting the high level of Karakhanid-era architecture. Rempel noted, "*Both mausoleums clearly demonstrate the spread of Transoxiana's art and cultural influence into southern Kazakhstan*" (Rempel, 1978: 89).

The research history of the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums has provided deeper insights into their historical, cultural, and architectural significance. Studying the unique features of these mausoleums is an important step toward preserving and promoting Kazakhstan's historical heritage.

Results

During the early Islamic era, constructing buildings over graves was prohibited. However, this prohibition was broken in the 9th century when a "*mausoleum*" was built over the grave of Caliph al-Muntasir in the city of Samarra. From this point onward, dynastic tombs dedicated to revered figures, as well as "*mazars*" built over the graves of holy religious personalities, began to appear. These structures were considered sacred buildings, and the individuals buried within were regarded as holy figures of Islam (Baipakov, 2012: 57).

I.A. Kastane described mausoleums as "*semi-rectangular structures ending in a conical shape with an opening at the top*" (Kastane, 1910: 49), drawing attention to their architectural features. In his article, A.D. Kalmykov explained that the word "*mazar*" initially referred to a grave but later came to denote a mausoleum (Kalmykov, 1910: 92). In some regions, the terms "*mola*" and "*tam*" are also used (Kastane, 1911: 41), reflecting local traditions and regional characteristics. N.F. Katanov conducted the first studies on the burial customs of Turkic peoples (Katanov, 1894: 109), offering deeper insights into the ethnographic significance of burial traditions.

K.M. Baipakov noted in his 2012 work that mausoleums played a significant role in architectural constructions between the 10th and 18th centuries. He linked the emergence of this tradition in Kazakhstan to the widespread influence of Sufism (2012: 58). Sufism introduced the veneration of "*saints*" into Islam, fostering a tradition of worship at local "*sacred*" sites (Nurzhanov, Akymbek, 2012:

142). This phenomenon demonstrates the synthesis of local culture and religious beliefs.

T.H. Starodub studied the architectural features and construction traditions of religious buildings associated with Sufism. He noted, “*The main architectural features of these buildings (construction materials, masonry methods, structural systems, and decoration) are closely linked to regional and local building traditions. These features can be observed in mosques, minarets, mausoleums, and madrasas*” (Starodub, 1989: 271). Starodub’s research emphasized that Sufi-related buildings were not only religious but also reflections of cultural and regional characteristics.

K.M. Baipakov described the majority of 10th-13th century mausoleums as domed structures with square, polygonal, or cross-shaped plans. From the 11th century onwards, double-domed constructions emerged, with the upper layer often shaped as faceted, conical, or ribbed roofs (Baipakov, 2012: 58). He categorized mausoleums based on their entrance features: centrally symmetrical mausoleums, mausoleums with richly decorated facades, and portal-style mausoleums distinguished by a pishtaq-portal. Some mausoleums deviate from traditional typology, being rebuilt or multi-chambered. Baipakov regarded these architectural elements as achievements of Karakhanid-era architecture.

Several religious architectural monuments dating back to the 7th-12th centuries have been preserved in modern Kazakhstan, valued for their historical and architectural significance. Among the most important are the 7th-8th century Tasakyr Palace, the 10th-11th century Karakhan Mausoleum, the 11th-12th century Taraz Bathhouse, the Myrzarabad Sardobas of Myrzashol (10th-11th centuries), as well as the Aisha-Bibi (11th-12th centuries) and Babaji-Khatun (10th-11th centuries) mausoleums (Margulan et al., 1959: 110).

During the Karakhanid era, many magnificent mausoleums were built in Taraz and its surroundings. Among those that have survived relatively intact are the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums, located in the village of Golovachevka (now Aisha-Bibi) in Zhambyl Region. These mausoleums escaped later restoration and alterations, preserving their historical value and architectural authenticity. In contrast, the Karakhan Mausoleum was “*renovated*” in the early 20th century into a tasteless structure, losing its original features (Baipakov, Erzakovich, 1971: 72).

In 1938, an archaeological station under the leadership of G.I. Patsevich was established near the Karakhan Mausoleum to study and protect archaeo-

logical monuments. Patsevich wrote in his 1943 report: “*I immediately sent a letter to the regional military commissar and the garrison commander requesting the cessation of destruction of the mausoleums in Golovachevka village*” (Rysdaulet, Zeinullauly, 2018: 2). This marked the beginning of systematic attention and archaeological research on these monuments.

In 1938-1939, expeditions by the USSR Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Material Culture History and in 1943 by the assistants of the USSR Academy of Architecture, as well as the 1953 expedition of the Kazakh SSR Academy of Sciences, identified the need to preserve and restore the mausoleums (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, p. 5). These expeditions highlighted the necessity of preserving the architectural structures and aesthetic features of the mausoleums, forming the foundation for restoration efforts.

On September 23, 1947, the mausoleums were placed under the supervision of the Architectural Department of the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh SSR to ensure their protection and preserve their historical and cultural significance. This decision was an important step in safeguarding the national heritage. Consequently, the Architectural Department began organizing systematic protection and restoration efforts for the mausoleums (Zholdasuly, Baizhanova, 2024: 336). These measures not only enhanced the historical value of the mausoleums but also ensured their transmission to future generations. Furthermore, these actions contributed to recognizing architectural art as cultural heritage.

Research and Restoration Works on the Mausoleums Conducted Between 1981-1990

The plan of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum is centralized, constructed in a square shape with dimensions of 7.6×7.6 meters. The main entrance is located on the eastern side. Inside, a stone tomb measuring 3×1.4 meters has been preserved. Despite significant damage over time, the western wall, entrance, and two corner columns remain well-preserved. In 1967, a glass roof was installed over the mausoleum (Figure 2). In 1980, the Kazprojectrestoration Institute conducted archaeological excavations at the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum, revealing that the foundation of the mausoleum is 1.06 meters high (Mahanbayeva, 2007: 268).

The Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum is a cube-shaped architectural structure without a portal, with a base measuring 6.8×6.78 meters. The construction material used consists of square fired bricks measuring

25 × 25 × 4.5 cm. The main feature of this mausoleum is its simplicity in external decoration combined with its uniqueness (Figure 3). Trompe arches at a height of 1.37 meters allow for a transition to an octagonal drum. From a height of 3.8 meters, the complex structure of the inner dome begins, consisting of a 16-sided double-layered curved masonry (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 13, p. 4). The Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum underwent partial restoration for the first time in 1953 under the leadership of T.K. Basenov (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 13, p. 1). This was one of the initial steps aimed at preserving the overall structure of the mausoleum.

Information about the restoration works of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum from 1981 to 1984 is documented in the report of the “Zhambylrestoration” workshop. During this period, funds were allocated for restoration, and some work was planned, but their execution was halted due to various reasons. In 1981, the Kazrestoration Association approved a restoration plan worth 38,000 rubles. However, due to the absence of project-estimate documentation, the main work was not carried out, and only injection work worth 6,100 rubles was completed. In 1982, 17,000 rubles were allocated for restoration, but no work was performed that year either due to the unavailability of documentation. In 1983, Kazrestoration planned to allocate 30,000 rubles for the restoration of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum. However, project-estimate documentation was provided only on October 17, and the total cost was assessed at 116,000 rubles. The delay in submitting project documents resulted in no restoration work being conducted by the end of that year. In 1984, a restoration budget of 50,000 rubles was planned, and on May 28, the Kazprojectrestoration Institute presented a work production plan. Restoration work commenced on June 13 under Order No. 44. By September 1, only 15,400 rubles of the planned budget had been utilized (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, p. 22).

The restoration of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum was carried out by the “Zhambylrestoration” workshop based on a project by the Kazprojectrestoration Institute. A budget of 50,000 rubles was allocated for the work, and by October 17, 21,100 rubles had been utilized. During this period, temporary structures were erected, old walls were dismantled, and restoration and cleaning of the interior surfaces were carried out. In accordance with the climatic conditions, adequate reinforcements were added to the masonry. However, due to unsupervised implementation of the project, the interior walls of the mausoleum were completely damaged, which

was attributed to insufficient oversight. Additionally, poor-quality ceramic materials provided by the Turkestan Ceramic Workshop were used, which exhibited geometric inaccuracies, cracks, and a lack of frost resistance. The required three-day moistening of the construction mortar was not ensured, failing to meet the region’s hot and dry climate requirements. During wall cleaning, it was discovered that a deformed section of the northern wall was damaged in blocks. While it became possible to restore and align these sections to the necessary level, this required a decision from a methodological council. The need for timely delivery of materials for cladding to complete the western wall before the onset of cold weather was also emphasized. To continue the work during the winter, special measures such as heating the pavilion and adding anti-freeze additives were recommended (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, pp. 12-14). The chief builder of the “Zhambylrestoration” workshop, D. Seitbekov, noted in his explanation: *“The interior surfaces of the walls were constructed without mortar, and the bricks were severely damaged. Nevertheless, we reinforced them as much as possible and prepared for concreting at a level of 1.24. However, during the installation of the formwork, it was found that the interior surfaces had completely collapsed”* (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, p. 15).

On January 17, 1985, a letter was sent by the head of the Zhambyl Regional Department of Culture, A. Sarsenbayev, to the Minister of Culture of the Kazakh SSR, Z.E. Erkinbekov, regarding the status of the restoration works on the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum. Although the letter did not emphasize the historical and cultural significance or the physical condition of the mausoleum, it highlighted the complexity and challenges of the restoration efforts. The letter stated that high professionalism from contractors and timely delivery of construction materials were required to ensure quality restoration. However, out of the planned 43,320 bricks for 1984, only 2,000 were delivered, and none of the 8,320 ceramic tiles intended for cladding were received. The project for the dome section of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum had still not been approved. The letter expressed concerns that if such slow and disorganized work continued, preserving the mausoleum might become doubtful. Additionally, it was noted that the Arabic inscriptions for the Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum, sent to the Turkestan workshop in April 1984, had not yet been completed. The Jambyl Regional Department of Culture requested that these issues be resolved promptly (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, p. 30).

In a report by the head of the Regional Department of Culture, A. Amzeev, regarding the restoration works on the mausoleums, it was stated that the total estimated cost for restoring the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum amounted to 134,500 rubles. A significant portion of the planned funds for the specified years was not utilized. For instance, in 1984, only 21,000 rubles out of the allocated 50,000 were spent, 25,000 out of 70,000 in 1985, 34,000 out of 70,000 in 1986, and only 10,000 out of 20,000 in 1987. Restoration efforts were entirely halted over the last two years due to the incomplete preparation of the capital section of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum. Although the restoration of the Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum was completed in 1982, the ethnographic inscription frieze remains unfinished. Despite repeated communications by the Zhambyl Regional Department of Culture with “Kazprojectrestoration” and “Kazrestoration”, no concrete solutions were implemented. The Department emphasized the need to develop and approve the dome section project of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum at the national level. If the Turkestan workshop was unable to produce the required elements, it was suggested that they be manufactured in other republics. Additionally, the preparation of project-estimate documentation for the areas surrounding the mausoleums was highlighted as a priority (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, pp. 31-32).

On January 23, 1985, in Almaty, a conclusion was prepared regarding the selection of the textured surface for ceramic cladding tiles to be used in the restoration of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum. The document discussed the technology of applying an engobed layer to ceramic products, developed by the “NIIstroyproject” Institute. It was noted that this layer enhances the color diversity and physical-mechanical properties of the material, particularly increasing its frost resistance and protecting it from atmospheric influences. However, it was also pointed out that the glass-like texture of the engobed layer, when applied to large surfaces, could significantly alter the historical appearance and perception of the mausoleum. The reflective effect of light on the surface could create shiny streaks, which would differ markedly from the texture of the original cladding tiles. Such a situation would compromise the historical authenticity of the mausoleum and contradict restoration methodologies, especially for a prominent example of medieval architectural art like the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum. As a result, the decision of the Scientific-Technical Council dated October 25, 1984, recommended using only non-engobed cladding tiles for the mausoleum. These tiles are intend-

ed to replace missing parts and accurately match their placement. Samples of non-engobed tiles were carefully selected, and their production was to be executed with guaranteed quality. Additionally, the participation of project authors in the commission overseeing the acceptance of the finished products was mandated (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, pp. 20-21).

On January 25, 1985, a letter signed by A. Kekilbayev on behalf of the Ministry of Culture of the Kazakh SSR highlighted the need to strengthen both authorial and technical supervision during the production of ceramic tiles and bricks for the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums. The letter primarily addressed the need to improve the quality of work at the ceramic workshop located in Turkestan and ensure the supply of necessary materials for restoration projects. The Ministry requested that specialists from the ceramic cladding sector of the “NIIstroyproject” Institute be sent to Turkestan at the beginning of February. Their task was to oversee the production of old-style, particularly ornamental tiles and epigraphic friezes, and to provide practical assistance. Additionally, the need to send a responsible representative from the Kazrestoration Association to help organize the work and improve production efficiency was emphasized. The letter referenced the unique characteristics of the tiles intended for the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum and reiterated the decision made on October 25, 1984. According to this decision, the tiles should not be coated with engobe, as the engobe layer, possessing glaze-like properties, could significantly alter the appearance of the mausoleum. The Turkestan Ceramic Workshop’s samples, approved on July 28, 1963, and later transferred to the “NIIstroyproject” Institute, were recommended as the standard for production. The Ministry supported the proposal of the Kazprojectrestoration technical council to organize an acceptance commission for the ceramics prepared for the mausoleum. The commission’s members were to include representatives from the Ministry, “NIIstroyproject”, “Kazprojectrestoration”, and “Kazrestoration” Institutes, the “Ancient Taraz Monuments” Museum-Reserve, the “Zhambylrestoration” Workshop, and the ceramic workshop. The letter also recommended G.D. Serbayev, a senior expert from the Monuments Protection Department, as the Ministry’s representative in the commission (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, pp. 17-18).

On February 22, 1985, the Ministry of Culture of the Kazakh SSR sent a letter to S.A. Kalymbetov, head of the Turkestan Ceramic Workshop, Z.T. Bektursynov, head of the “Zhambylrestoration”

workshop, and A.A. Apsemetov, director of the “Ancient Taraz Monuments” Museum-Reserve. The letter included the conclusion of the “Kazprojectrestoration” Institute regarding the selection of the textured surface for the ceramic cladding tiles to be used in the restoration of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, p. 19). This document was sent to familiarize the institutions and specialists involved in the restoration work and to serve as a guideline during the restoration process. The conclusion of the project institute was an essential directive aimed at ensuring the historical and aesthetic compatibility of the restoration materials. The letter was signed by A. Zharkynbayev, Chief Engineer of the Kazrestoration Association.

On May 12, 1985, A.A. Apsemetov, Director of the “Ancient Taraz Monuments” Museum-Reserve, sent a letter to the Minister of Culture of the Kazakh SSR, J.E. Erkinbekov. The letter stated that restoration work on the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum and Kali-Zhunis Bathhouse had not commenced due to the lack of necessary materials. Specifically, the Kazrestoration Association had not provided bricks, cladding tiles, or 50 square meters of marble slabs. Additionally, it was noted that the Turkestan Workshop had not completed the frieze for the Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum (Figure 4). The director emphasized the critical importance of promptly resolving these issues and ensuring the delivery of materials for the mentioned sites. The letter concluded with a note indicating that, as a result of their urgent telegram, the 50 square meters of marble slabs had been delivered (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, p. 16).

On June 3, 1985, A.A. Apsemetov, Director of the “Ancient Taraz Monuments” Museum-Reserve, sent a letter to G.A. Bibatyrova, Secretary of the Zhambyl Regional Communist Party Committee, regarding the need for bricks and cladding tiles for the restoration of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum. The letter stated that, according to the decision of the Kazprojectrestoration Institute, bricks and ceramic materials from the Turkestan Ceramic Workshop were to be used for the mausoleum’s restoration. However, the materials supplied by this workshop were found to be of poor quality and unsuitable for restoration work. Additionally, the delivery schedule for materials was consistently disrupted. Although restoration began on June 13, 1984, the lack of material supply delayed the planned work for 1984 and 1985. The letter emphasized that such interruptions negatively impacted the aesthetic condition of the mausoleum, particularly its appeal to tourists. It was noted that 17,800 visitors, including 3,500 foreign tourists,

were expected to visit the mausoleum in 1985, but the current state of the mausoleum could diminish its appearance and leave a negative impression on visitors. A.A. Apsemetov requested assistance in resolving these issues and urged relevant authorities to take necessary measures promptly. The letter also included the delivery schedule for bricks and cladding tiles (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, pp. 27-28).

On November 10, 1985, A.A. Apsemetov, Director of the Zhambyl Museum-Reserve, submitted a report to G.A. Bibatyrova, Secretary of the Jambyl Regional Communist Party Committee, regarding the delivery of construction materials needed for the restoration of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum. The report provided data on the planned and actual indicators for the first ten months of 1985. It was stated that the quality of construction materials remained unsatisfactory. The Ministry of Culture of the Kazakh SSR had been informed of this issue and was reportedly taking measures to improve quality. Additionally, the museum-reserve administration indicated that they were making every effort to resolve the issue (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, p. 26).

On October 1, 1990, N. Shaukharov, Director of the “Ancient Taraz Monuments” State Museum-Reserve, sent a letter to Z.T. Bektursynov, Head of the “Zhambylrestoration” Scientific-Restoration Workshop, outlining several urgent tasks. The letter emphasized the need to install glass cladding on the western part of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum and to conduct partial restoration work on the Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 14, p. 25). This document highlights the importance of consistently monitoring the condition of the mausoleums and taking systematic measures to ensure their preservation. Additionally, the letter stressed the need for the prompt and efficient execution of restoration and conservation work on the historical monuments.

The history of restoration works shows that numerous organizational and material challenges hindered the full preservation of the mausoleums. Between 1981 and 1985, the failure to implement financial and technical plans was primarily due to delays in the preparation of project-estimate documentation and the use of low-quality construction materials. These issues made it difficult to conduct timely restoration and complicated the efforts to restore the aesthetic and historical appearance of the mausoleums. One of the key problems was the poor quality of materials used during the restoration, particularly the bricks and cladding tiles supplied by the

Turkestan Ceramic Workshop, which were found to have geometric inaccuracies and insufficient frost resistance. The consideration of using engobed tiles revealed the potential to disrupt the historical appearance of the mausoleums, emphasizing the need for precise and careful restoration approaches.

Additionally, the long delay in finalizing the dome design of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum posed a threat to the structural integrity of the monument. This issue highlighted the necessity of comprehensive and coordinated solutions in restoration methodologies. According to recommendations in the documents, ensuring the quality of materials and their timely delivery was crucial for continuing the restoration of the mausoleums.

Overall, the restoration and research history of the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums underscores not only their role in architectural heritage but also the complex processes involved in preserving Kazakhstan's cultural and historical legacy. Therefore, systematically continuing restoration efforts and deepening their scientific and research foundation remain vital priorities for the future.

Atheistic Propaganda Conducted at Sacred Sites During Soviet Rule

During the totalitarian Soviet regime, the destruction of cultural and spiritual heritage in Kazakhstan, or its use as a tool for atheistic propaganda, became a widespread phenomenon. Sacred sites such as the Aisha Bibi and Babaji-Khatun mausoleums also became targets of this policy. This section analyzes the actions of the Soviet government concerning these mausoleums and their impact on public consciousness.

In the early years of Soviet rule, a decree was adopted to nationalize religious sites, aiming to weaken religious traditions. During the 1920s, access to the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums for pilgrimage was restricted, and surveillance over these places was intensified (ZRSA, Fund 399, Inventory 4, File 426, pp. 7-8). Within this policy framework, measures were proposed to strengthen secular activities to discourage the public from visiting religious sites. During this period, religious leaders were persecuted and systematically removed from public life.

During the 1930s, atheist propaganda became widespread. Many sacred sites were destroyed, and pilgrims were persecuted. During this period, the Soviets attempted to deny the religious significance of sacred places by assigning them "*scientific*" and "*cultural*" attributes. The main goal of this policy

was to alter the spiritual worldview of the population. In some cases, plans were made to transform sacred sites into atheist museums (Zholdassuly, Baizhanova, 2022: 199). These actions were aimed at reinforcing materialistic perspectives among the populace. Additionally, spreading negative opinions about sacred places among the public became one of the main tools of propaganda.

During World War II, interest in religious sites temporarily diminished. However, after the war, this interest began to grow again. Archival records indicate that the number of visitors to the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum increased during this time (ZRSA, Fund 399, Inventory 4, File 460a, pp. 26-30). The Soviet authorities described this as "*backwardness*" and implemented various administrative measures to stop pilgrimages. For instance, pilgrims were fined, and in some cases, they were detained. While this policy resulted in a decline in visits to religious sites, some individuals continued their pilgrimages secretly.

In 1962, within the framework of a resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, it was planned to establish local commissions to monitor religious practices. However, these commissions were found to be ineffective in fulfilling their roles (ZRSA, Fund 399, Inventory 4, File 439, pp. 13-14). The failure of party organizations in the Shu, Baizak, Merke, and Zhualy districts of Zhambyl Region, as well as in the cities of Taraz and Karatau, to fully implement this resolution indicates, first, the ineffective execution of atheist propaganda and, second, the continued significant role of religious beliefs among the local population. The evidence suggests that although the Soviet regime systematically attempted to control and weaken religious beliefs through scientific-atheist propaganda, these efforts were largely unsuccessful in practice.

In the 1960s and 1970s, scientific-atheist propaganda reached its peak. Pilgrimages to the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums were declared "*scientifically baseless*", and active campaigns were conducted to alter traditional beliefs (ZRSA, Fund 399, Inventory 4, File 463a, pp. 136-137). These campaigns were organized in schools, workplaces, and cultural centers with the aim of fostering a "*modern worldview*" in society. Furthermore, the authorities sought to undermine the religious significance of the mausoleums while emphasizing their architectural value. This policy included presenting the mausoleums as purely cultural objects. For example, local newspapers and radio broadcasts promoted topics such as "*Religion is Poison*" and "*Sci-*

ence and Religion” (ZRSA, Fund 399, Inventory 4, File 463, p. 12).

The Soviet policy of 1974-1975 intensified the adoption of systematic and strict measures against religious cults. According to archival data, a directive was issued to completely halt pilgrimages to sacred sites (ZRSA, Fund 399, Inventory 4, File 460a, p. 28). To achieve this, local authorities were tasked with holding organizers of pilgrimages accountable. Such actions reflect the Soviet regime’s efforts to strengthen scientific-atheist propaganda and entirely eliminate religious beliefs from public life. These measures signify a new level in the struggle against the spiritual and religious traditions of the population and aimed to destroy the spiritual significance of mausoleums by ceasing their function as pilgrimage sites of religious importance.

The Soviet measures directed at eroding the spiritual significance of the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums had a profound impact on the religious worldview of society. As a result of this policy, many people abandoned religious traditions, although some residents continued to revere these sites as sacred places and made pilgrimages in secret. Furthermore, the long-term effects of this policy included the weakening of religious traditions and practices, particularly the veneration of saints, the custom of visiting sacred sites, and the role of Sufi traditions in social life. However, it is also important to note that the spiritual connection and religious beliefs of the people were not completely eradicated.

Discussion

The structural and historical features of the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums prove that they are an integral part of Kazakhstan’s architectural heritage and cultural legacy. The findings of the study highlight not only the religious and architectural significance of these monuments but also the organizational challenges faced in their preservation and restoration processes. The role of these mausoleums in architectural art is distinguished by the uniqueness of their construction materials and design solutions. For instance, the ornate cladding tiles of the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum and the octagonal drum of the Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum testify to the advanced construction technologies of their era.

On the other hand, the atheist propaganda of the Soviet era sought to negate the spiritual significance of these mausoleums and promote them solely as cultural heritage. Archival data attest to the systematic and stringent nature of this policy. The Soviet

government introduced various restrictive measures concerning the mausoleums to weaken public religious beliefs and halt pilgrimages. However, the inefficacy of these efforts is also evident: the local population’s respect for the mausoleums was never completely eradicated.

Examining the history of restoration reveals that unresolved financial and technical issues during several phases hindered the timely restoration of these mausoleums. The poor quality materials and delayed deliveries from the Turkestan Ceramic Workshop, in particular, had a detrimental effect on restoration quality. Additionally, the lack of timely preparation of project-estimate documentation obstructed efforts to maintain the structural integrity of the mausoleums.

The spiritual essence and regional characteristics of these mausoleums, shaped by the influence of Sufi traditions, further enhance their importance as historical and cultural heritage. Despite the challenges encountered in restoring the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums, their preservation as they exist today serves as a vital indicator of national identity in Kazakhstan’s architectural heritage. Thus, the findings of this study underscore not only the historical value of the mausoleums but also the breadth of future responsibilities in their protection and promotion.

Conclusion

The Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums are among the most significant monuments of Kazakhstan’s historical and cultural heritage. The research revealed not only the religious, architectural, and historical significance of these mausoleums but also their exposure to Soviet ideological policies and restoration practices. Although the atheist propaganda of the Soviet era sought to diminish the spiritual importance of these sites, it was unable to completely erase their historical and cultural value.

Archival data obtained during the study highlighted the organizational and material challenges faced in the restoration of the mausoleums. Despite the technical and aesthetic shortcomings of Soviet restoration methods, these efforts ensured the partial preservation of the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums. Archival documents indicate that financial constraints, the use of substandard building materials, and organizational deficiencies posed significant problems during the preservation and restoration of these monuments.

The Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum is distinguished by its terracotta tile decoration, while the Babaji-

Khatun Mausoleum stands out for its simplicity and functional architectural solutions. These features demonstrate their contribution to the development of Islamic architecture during the Karakhanid era. Moreover, the research showed that these mausoleums are not only locally significant but are also closely connected with the architectural and cultural traditions of Central Asia as a whole.

During the Soviet era, ideological restrictions and ineffective restoration efforts hindered the full understanding of the historical and cultural significance of these mausoleums. Nevertheless, the research demonstrated that the local population preserved the spiritual value of these sites. The legends surrounding the mausoleums and their importance as sacred places persisted even during the Soviet period.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of systematic and scientifically grounded approaches to preserving Kazakhstan's cultural heritage. The historical, architectural, and cultural

research of these mausoleums provides a foundation for implementing new restoration methods aimed at improving their current state of preservation.

Today, the Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun Mausoleums serve not only as architectural monuments but also as symbols of Kazakhstan's cultural memory and national identity. This study contributes to the reassessment of Soviet restoration practices and the development of new standards for the preservation and restoration of historical monuments.

Acknowledgments

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Figure 1 – Dome of the Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum prior to restoration (ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 13, p. 41).



Figure 2 – Glass roof installed on the Aisha-Bibi Mausoleum prior to restoration.
Photograph by B. Tilekmetov, 1969 (CSAFPDSR RK, No 3-7979).



Figure 3 – Photograph of the Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum in 1980, prior to restoration
(ZRSA, Fund 619, Inventory 1, File 13, p. 46).

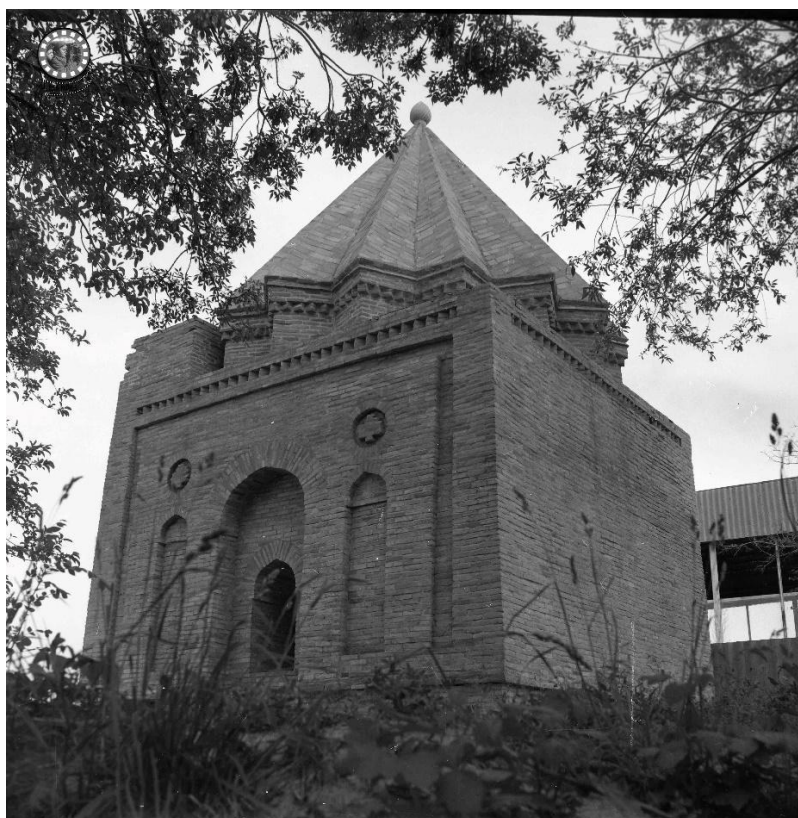


Figure 4 – Post-restoration view of the Babaji-Khatun Mausoleum.
Photograph by M. Nugmanov, 1984 (CSAFPDSR RK, No 3-21863).

Дереккөздер

ЖОМА – Жамбыл облыстық мемлекеттік архиві
ҚР ОМКФДА – Қазақстан Республикасының Орталық мемлекеттік кино-фотоқұжаттар мен дыбыс жазбалар архиві
ҚР ҒЖБМ ҒМ АИҒА – Қазақстан Республикасы Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі Ғылым комитетінің Ә.Х. Марғұлан атындағы Археология институтының ғылыми архиві

Sources

ZRSA – Zhambyl Regional State Archive
CSAFPDSR RK – Central State Archive of Film and Photographic Documents and Sound Recordings of the Republic of Kazakhstan
SA MIA CS MSHE RK – Scientific Archives of the Margulan Institute of Archaeology of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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