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RECONSTRUCTION AND MUSEUMIFICATION OF THE REMAINS OF THE GOLDEN MAN: CONTEMPORARY METHODS OF RESEARCH AND DIGITALIZATION

Abstract. The article is devoted to the theoretical and practical aspects of the musealization, conservation, and digital representation of the Golden Man (*kaz: Altyn adam*), a unique archaeological monument of Saka culture discovered in the Issyk burial mound in 1970. It considers the monument's place in Kazakhstan's national cultural heritage system and its role in shaping historical memory, symbolic politics, and national identity. Based on an interdisciplinary approach, the study analyzes the main stages of research and museum presentation of the Golden Man, as well as the existing reconstructions by K. Akishev, A. Akishev, A. Tanabayev, and K. Altynbekov. Special attention is given to methodological issues of reconstructing the monument's appearance and interpreting its historical and cultural status within contemporary museum practices and digital humanities.

The article addresses the scientific reliability of visual reconstructions, criteria for their verification, and the role of digital technologies in preserving, transmitting, and popularizing archaeological heritage. It argues for unified scientific principles for conservation, reconstruction, and digital representation, grounded in international heritage standards. The article concludes that a scientifically grounded interpretive model is essential for preventing pseudoscientific reconstructions, preserving authenticity, and improving communication between museums and the public.

Keywords: Golden Man, Issyk necropolis, burial mound, archaeological reconstruction, museumification, Saka culture, anthropology, digitalization, museum exhibition, cultural heritage.

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Introduction

Archaeological research conducted in Kazakhstan in 1969-1970 brought about significant changes in the field of archaeology and raised new tasks related to the preservation and presentation of cultural heritage. The discovery of the Issyk burial mound occupies a special place in this context. The complex that became known as the Golden Man was a sensational find that changed the outlook of the scholarly community. The uniqueness of this archaeological site lies in the high degree of preservation of the burial, which made it possible to reconstruct the visual image of a Saka warrior. This, in turn, raised the question of the limits of scientific reconstruction and the relationship between

factual data and interpretation. The reconstruction of the Golden Man is an interdisciplinary process that includes archaeological recording, restoration, technological analysis, and comparative-historical interpretation. Thus, reconstruction functions not only as a visualization but also as a form of scientific knowledge.

Contemporary museum practice understands museumification not only as a process of exhibition, but also as a process of scientific preservation. In accordance with ICOM and UNESCO recommendations, particular attention is paid to preserving the context of archaeological finds. The problem of the dispersal of the Golden

Man complex remains relevant and requires an institutional solution.

Materials and methods

2.1 History of the Discovery and Study of the Issyk Burial Ground. Excavations of the Issyk burial mound were carried out as part of rescue archaeological work undertaken in connection with the construction of a new vehicle depot on the site of a facility that had been destroyed by a mudflow in 1963. In the course of investigations conducted in 1970, the Golden Man was discovered during the excavation of the third mound, proving to be one of the most significant archaeological finds of the XX century.

The Issyk burial mound represents a rare example of an elite burial in which researchers recorded not isolated objects, but an integral system of markers of high social status. The spatial arrangement of gold plaques, weapons, vessels, ornaments, and skeletal remains made it possible to interpret the complex as a structured model of a Saka ceremonial costume. At the same time, not all of the secrets of the burial have been revealed to this day, and the complex itself has become dispersed: objects found together with the Golden Man are kept in different museums, which contradicts the principles of the integrated storage of archaeological objects.

2.2 Formation of the Museum Concept and the First Reconstruction. The idea of recreating the image of a Saka warrior in ceremonial costume emerged quite unexpectedly in 1973, during preparations for the opening of the first archaeological museum of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR in Alma-Ata. In the course of this work, the decision was made not simply to place the Issyk finds in display cases, but to recreate the image of a Saka chieftain in full ceremonial attire. For the first time, and in contrast to the traditional practice of displaying individual finds, the concept of an integral reconstruction of the complete image was implemented. The Golden Man complex thus became the key scholarly and ideological foundation of the museum, presented as a unique archaeological source reflecting the social hierarchy of Saka- Wusun society, its worldview, and its high level of artistic culture [Akishev, Baipakov 1973].

This work initiated a new direction in the comprehensive reconstruction of costumes and weaponry from the Saka-Wusun period. During the reconstruction of the ceremonial costume of

the Golden Man, Kemal Akishev and Vladimir Sadomskov decided first to produce full-size molds for all the decorative elements. Plastic champagne corks obtained from a distillery were used for this purpose. On the basis of these molds, 45 in total, stamping and embossing techniques were employed to produce more than 3,000 aluminum copies – plaques, appliques, and plates – replicating the artistically decorated originals. Made of anodized aluminum, the finished pieces were technically almost indistinguishable from the gold originals.

Owing to the almost perfectly preserved arrangement of the costume elements, although the leather base had completely decayed, the gold plaques retained their original positions, and researchers were able to carry out a fairly accurate reconstruction of the funerary attire. The graphic reconstruction of the costume and headdress was produced as a life-size drawing by the artist Tamara Vorobyova-Trifonova. The material reconstruction of the costume was executed by the restorer Vladimir Sadomskov, while the scholarly development of the concept was the work of Kemal Akishev [Akishev 1978].

Work on the first reconstruction took approximately three years; the restoration workshop was located in the basement of the «Gylym» publishing house on Pushkin Street. Once all the appliques had been completed, a special mannequin was created, a leather jacket, trousers, and boots were sewn, and the appliques were then painstakingly hand-sewn onto the clothing. In 1973, the reconstruction was presented in a specially created display at the Archaeological Museum of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, where original gold items from the Issyk burial mound were exhibited in the same hall. When the Golden Man was unveiled, the sight made an unexpected impression even on the archaeologists themselves, and the exhibit became both a scholarly and cultural sensation. [Khabdulina 2004].

Later, the model of the Golden Man was successfully presented at the Museum of Oriental Art in Moscow, as well as at international exhibitions in Leipzig (1974), Cairo (1975), and Damascus (1976) [Akishev, Baipakov 1973]. In 1978, the book *The Issyk Burial Mound: The Art of the Saka of Kazakhstan* was published; it describes in detail every object found together with the Golden Man and reveals the symbolism and semantics of the ornaments [Akishev 1978].



Discussion

Evolution of Reconstructions. In 1993-1995, restoration work was continued by the prominent artist-restorer Anatoly Tanabayev. In 1996, Krym Altynbekov produced the third reconstruction of the costume of the Issyk warrior. Whereas the classical reconstruction by K. Akishev and V. Sadomskov was executed with maximum archaeological accuracy in a scholarly-analytical style, Tanabayev's version is artistic and interpretive in character, representing an attempt to synthesize elements of Iranian traditional culture with imagery drawn from Saka culture. Altynbekov's reconstruction, by contrast, combines scholarly rigor with detailed technological analysis. In developing his version, Altynbekov drew not only on the initial reconstruction model, but above all on authentic archaeological finds, excavation materials, and all available scholarly publications. [Altynbekov 2016]. Although the general silhouette of the costume was preserved, the elements of clothing, the headdress, and the weaponry were clarified and supplemented. The evolution of the reconstructions of the Golden Man reflects the transformation of scholarly approaches, while their plurality indicates not contradiction, but the gradual development of scientific knowledge.

The most significant differences between the reconstructions are most clearly visible in the form of the headdress. This is attributable to the fact that the collapse of the wooden structures of the mound displaced the original arrangement of the headdress ornaments. According to A.K. Akishev, the destruction of the burial structure led to a partial alteration of the original placement of the gold ornaments. This circumstance complicates the exact restoration of the headdress composition and may introduce certain scientifically justified approximations in the reconstruction process. The scholar, therefore, emphasized that in reconstructed versions, absolute precision in the placement of gold ornaments cannot always be achieved [Akishev 1979]. Answering G. Benditsky's (journalist) question, «What is the margin of error in restoration?», the archaeologist noted that deviations of approximately 15-20% are possible, mainly in relation to the arrangement of gold ornaments on the headdress [Memoirs of the Participants of the Expedition 2016].

A comparison of the different reconstructions shows that, while preserving the general form of the headdress, researchers interpret the arrangement

and semantics of its details in different ways.

The principal differences between the interpretations appear in several aspects: the spatial organization of the elements, the degree of compositional symmetry, the reading of zoomorphic images, and the overall level of scholarly rigor. For some researchers, the headdress is primarily a cosmogonic model, whereas for others artistic expressiveness or the technological reconstruction of the image comes to the fore. However, these approaches should not be regarded as mutually exclusive; on the contrary, their comparison makes it possible to understand more deeply the multilayered symbolism of the Saka ceremonial complex.

Thus, despite differences in composition, semantics, and degree of symmetry, all authors generally interpret the headdress, with its complex symbolic structure, as a cosmogonic model of the world.

K. Akishev's headdress interpretation is not merely an attribute of ceremonial costume, but a complex symbolic model of the universe. The lower tiers of the composition correspond to earthly space and the animal world; the middle tiers to the image of a mountainous landscape and the «tree of life», and the upper tiers to the celestial sphere, birds, and signs of sacred power. This interpretation allows the kulah to be considered as a visualized cosmogonic scheme in which each element performs not only a decorative but also a worldview function. In Kemal Akishev's reconstruction, a strict vertical hierarchy of zones dominates: the diadem, the mountain belt, the heavenly level, and the final.

Later, in 1984, his son, the archaeologist Alisher Akishev, published a new version of the kulah (crown) in his book *Art and Mythology of the Saka*. While preserving the basic composition, he redistributed a number of elements between the levels, strengthening the motifs of the mountain landscape, snow leopards, and mountain goats. As a result, it is not the form as such that changes, but the logic of the semantic accents. In particular, the author's judgment that the kulah is «designed as a kind of diagram of the Cosmos» is quite convincing [Akishev 1984].

In A. Tanabayev's reconstruction, the orientation of certain details changes, particularly the wings; some compositional links are simplified, and the strict symmetry characteristic of the classical version is weakened. As a result, the image becomes more plastic and visually expressive, but

it preserves the archaeological rigor of the original model to a lesser extent.

K. Altynbekov's reconstruction demonstrates an evident effort to synthesize archaeological reliability with the technological logic of form construction. While preserving the main elements of the classical version, the researcher proposes a more systematic organization of certain details, including the cross-shaped arrangement of plates on the front part. This strengthens the structural integrity of the reconstruction and emphasizes the interrelationship of the individual components of the headdress.

In creating the reconstruction of the Golden Man, K. Altynbekov relied not only on the first model, but above all on the original archaeological finds, excavation materials, and all available scholarly publications [Altynbekov 2016]. Over time, however, a number of clarifications and additions were introduced into the clothing, headdress, and weaponry complex. The reconstruction of the Golden Man was carried out under conditions in which undisturbed burial complexes of the Saka elite in Kazakhstan were extremely rare. Nevertheless, some of the discovered ornaments were not used in the reconstruction, which later became the basis for further scholarly research and the emergence of new interpretive versions. Thus, the reconstruction of the costume of the Issyk warrior is aimed not only at clarifying his external appearance, but also represents a comprehensive scholarly study focused on an in-depth interpretation of the worldview and ideological system of the Saka period [Altynbekov, Altynbekova 2020].

Since 1974, several scholarly reconstructions of the Golden Man have been exhibited in museums, financial institutions, and cultural and scientific organizations across Kazakhstan and abroad. One of the first scientific reconstructions, carried out under the direction of archaeologist K.A. Akishev, is housed in the Museum of Archaeology of Gylm Ordasy. The reconstruction proposed by A. Tanabayev is among the versions widely used in museum practice. In recent years, however, the scientific reconstruction by K. Altynbekov has become more widespread in the professional sphere and in museum practice, becoming one of the most frequently used contemporary versions.

Thus, the headdress of the Golden Man is not only the most important element of the reconstructed costume, but also an independent object of scholarly analysis. Its study shows how

closely factual data, interpretation, and visual representation are intertwined in archaeological reconstruction. For this reason, the comparative consideration of the versions by K. Akishev, A. Akishev, A. Tanabayev, and K. Altynbekov is a necessary condition for a more accurate understanding of the semantics of the image of the Golden Man.

Museumification of the Archaeological Complex. In the permanent exhibition of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» established in 2010, a special comparative showcase presents photographic materials of the reconstructions of the Golden Man proposed by K. Akishev, A. Tanabayev, K. Altynbekov, and A. Akishev, enabling visitors to visually compare different scholarly viewpoints. The basis of the exhibition created in the administrative building of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» (Fig. 1) is also directly connected with the history of the Golden Man. In developing the exhibition, the objective was to present the history of the discovery and study of the Golden Man in a systematic and conceptual manner. The comparison of several reconstructions helps explain to visitors that historical scholarship works not through the mechanical «recreation of the past», but through data analysis, hypotheses, verification, and refinement. In the case of the Golden Man, this creates an opportunity to turn the object of display itself into a means of popularizing the scientific method.

It is especially significant that different reconstructions do not simply replace one another, but coexist in museum and public space. For visitors, this often creates the illusion of contradiction: which of the images should be considered the «real», «original» one? From a scholarly point of view, however, the plurality of reconstructions is a normal situation. The archaeological material remains authentic, whereas reconstruction is always a scientifically motivated model whose degree of completeness and clarity depends on the author's aims.

The exhibition can demonstrate the sequence: archaeological recording in the grave, cleaning and restoration, construction of a scientific model, and modern digital visualization.

It is in this context that the reconstruction of the Golden Man should be understood as a complex interdisciplinary procedure combining archaeological recording, restoration, technological

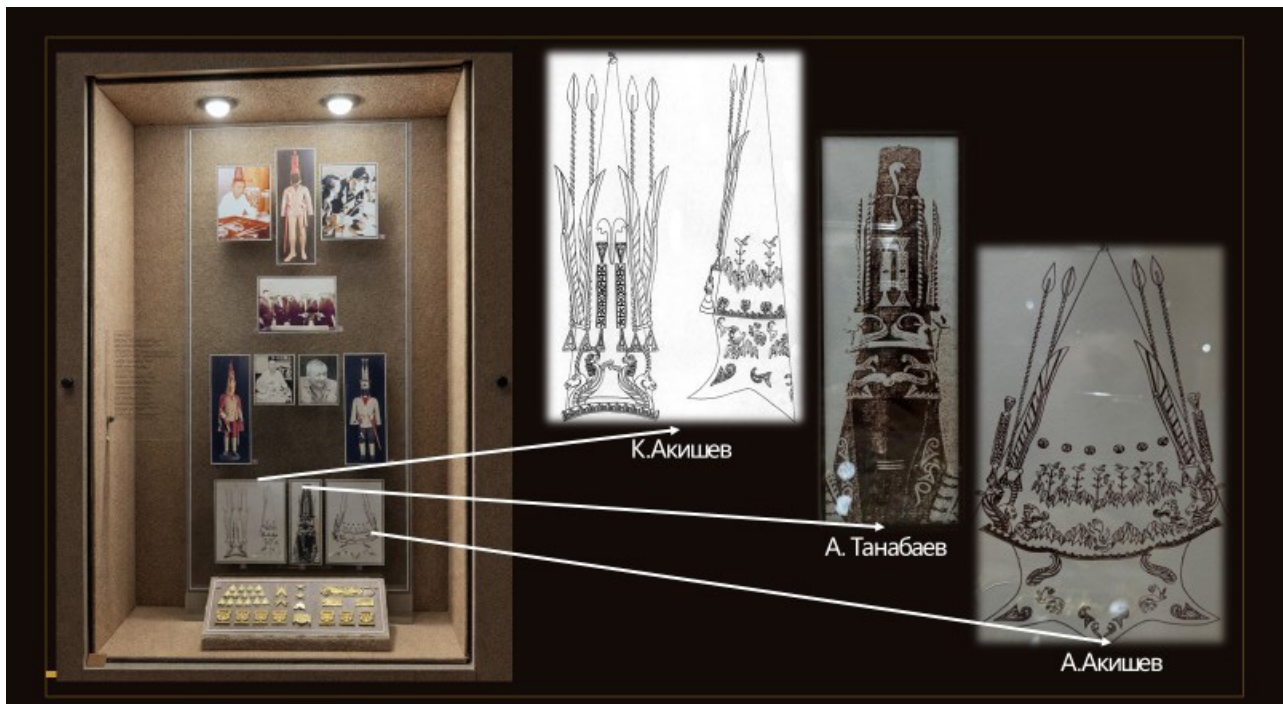


Fig. 1. Exhibition hall devoted to the history of the discovery and study of the «Golden Man» at the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik»

analysis, comparative-historical interpretation, and exhibition modeling. Its reliability was ensured not by direct analogies, but by the possibility of a scholarly reading of the archaeological complex itself – through accurate recording of the position of the finds, analysis of the methods by which the ornaments were attached, and the use of comparative materials on Saka-Wusun culture. At the same time, the museum representation of such a monument inevitably takes the problem of reconstruction beyond the limits of strictly archaeological research. An exhibition requires a visual and coherent image, whereas scientific knowledge retains a probabilistic character and is based on varying degrees of evidentiary support for individual elements. In this regard, reconstruction functions not only as a means of recreating a lost appearance, but also as a form of scholarly interpretation in which it is necessary to clearly distinguish what has been archaeologically established, what has been analytically inferred, and what has been hypothetically restored. Consequently, turning to the history of the reconstruction and museumification of the Golden Man allows this monument to be viewed as a revealing example of the interaction between archaeological science, museum practice, and

mechanisms of cultural memory formation.

The Problem of Reconstructing the Appearance of the Golden Man in the Context of the Loss of Anthropological Material. One of the key problems in the study and representation of the Golden Man is the impossibility of a scientifically grounded reconstruction of his facial appearance due to the loss of the skull, the main source of data for craniofacial modeling. Unlike classical cases, in which reconstruction is carried out on the basis of a well-preserved skull using anthropometric methods and soft-tissue markers, in this case researchers are forced to rely on descriptive data: individual craniological characteristics, the archaeological context, analogies with neighboring Saka cultures, and iconographic sources. This means that reconstruction becomes probabilistic and inevitably includes elements of scholarly interpretation. Under such conditions, craniofacial modeling functions not as an exact reproduction of an individual appearance, but as a generalized representation of a social and cultural type reflecting the current level of knowledge about the Saka period.

Methods of facial reconstruction in physical anthropology and forensic medicine are based on the assumption of a correlation between skull

morphology and the soft tissues of the face. Classical approaches, including the anatomical method developed by Mikhail Gerasimov, involve the layer-by-layer reproduction of muscles and tissues on the basis of osteological landmarks.

Later studies have shown that reconstruction may be carried out manually or with the use of digital technologies; in all cases, however, it relies on data on soft-tissue thickness and anatomical markers derived from the skull. Even when complete craniological material is available, reconstruction remains probabilistic. Contemporary studies emphasize that one and the same skull can serve as the basis for several different reconstructions, since a significant part of individual facial features is determined by soft tissues that are not preserved in archaeological material. Moreover, the scholarly literature specifically stresses methodological limitations: reconstruction is more accurately described as «facial approximation» than as an exact reproduction of appearance.

In the absence of the skull, the situation changes fundamentally. The loss of the craniological basis excludes the possibility of applying both classical and modern methods of reconstruction, including 3D and statistical methods, since all of them require initial osteological data for modeling. Consequently, the plurality of reconstructions of the Golden Man should be regarded not as a contradiction, but as the result of methodological development, the expansion of the source base, and the rethinking of scholarly approaches to visualizing the past; any visual images of the face of the Golden Man cannot be considered scientific reconstructions and should be classified as artistic-interpretive models.

A particular problem is the effect of visual authenticity that arises in museum and digital environments. The high degree of realism of contemporary 3D models creates an illusion of scientific precision for viewers, despite the absence of an empirical basis. As a result, scientific knowledge is replaced by a visually convincing but unprovable hypothesis.

Thus, with regard to the Golden Man it is more accurate to speak not of reconstruction, but of representation or interpretation of external appearance. From a scholarly point of view, either a refusal to visualize the face or a clear designation of such images as hypothetical appears justified. As an alternative, attention should be focused on aspects that can be reliably reconstructed: the burial complex, the costume, social status, and cultural-

historical context.

Overall, this problem illustrates a broader methodological challenge for contemporary anthropology and museum practice: the need for a strict distinction between scientific reconstruction based on verifiable data and artistic visualization that performs primarily a representational function.

The absence of a reliably established appearance of the Golden Man has in some cases led to free interpretations. For example, when creating the image of the Golden Man for the Independence Monument, the architect Shota (Shot-Aman) Ualikhanov relied on the visual image of cosmonaut Tokhtar Aubakirov, according to interview materials with T. Aubakirov (Fig. 2). According to Qazaqstan TV, the image of the Golden Man placed at the top of The Golden Warrior Monument (also known as the Golden Man Statue, Statue of the Golden Warrior and Independence Monument) in Almaty was created by sculptors under the direction of Shota (Shot-Aman) Ualikhanov. The face of the first Kazakhstani cosmonaut Tokhtar Aubakirov was used as the prototype, with minor changes introduced, particularly to the shape of the nose. The Independence Monument, located on the central square of Almaty, is included in the list of monuments of national significance and is made of bronze. The sculpture of the Golden Man crowning the composition is approximately six meters high (Source: Qazaqstan TV, program *Qaiyrly kesh!* YouTube channel, URL: <https://qazaqstan.tv/videos/219628>).

On October 25, 2025, a modern park complex covering five hectares was opened in the Karagaily microdistrict of the city of Semey (Abai Region). Within its structure, a monument to Altyn adam, presented by Almaty Region and executed in the iconographic image of a young warrior, was installed (Fig. 3).

In individual cases, representations of the Golden Man are recorded that do not correspond to contemporary scholarly views of his anthropological and cultural-historical appearance. Thus, the stone monument installed in the Turgen Gorge (Almaty Region, Enbekshikazakh District) demonstrates significant iconographic and stylistic distortions: proportional characteristics, typological features, and age attribution of the image are violated. As a result, instead of reconstructing the appearance of a youth, the figure presented possesses morphological features of a mature individual. Such discrepancies indicate a lack of a scientifically



Fig. 2. The Independence Monument of Kazakhstan, crowned with the figure of the Golden Man (kaz: Altyn adam), is located on the central Republic Square in Almaty.

grounded approach in creating this artistic representation and lead to a distorted perception of an important cultural and historical symbol.

The experience of the Republic of Turkey, enshrined in Law No. 5816 «On Crimes Against the Memory of Atatürk» (1951), demonstrates that the image of a key national figure may serve not only as a historical and cultural object, but also as a legal object of protection. In the context of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Golden Man is regarded as one of the symbols of the independent state, reflecting its historical continuity and cultural identity (e-history.kz URL: <https://e-history.kz/ru/news/show/50000831>). The costume is of particular significance in this respect, having become a stable visual marker of state identity and cultural heritage.

Under conditions of the active replication of this image in museum, educational, and commercial spheres, the question arises as to whether normative regulation of its use is advisable. This would not mean strict restriction, but rather the formation of legal and methodological frameworks ensuring correct scientific interpretation and respectful treatment of this symbol. Such an approach would



Fig. 3. Altyn adam, Semey, Abai Region

minimize the risk of distortions and arbitrary stylizations that do not correspond to scholarly data, and would also consolidate the status of the costume of the Golden Man as an object of national significance requiring a special form of representation in public space.

Results

Anthropological Research. The skeletal remains of the Golden Man were long considered lost, but as a result of search and research work in 2013 they were returned to the collection of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik». From that time, systematic studies began, aimed first of all at proving that the remains belonged to the Golden Man, and then at conducting molecular-genetic analysis (DNA) to determine sex, age, and population-genetic characteristics, including with the involvement of Russian and foreign specialists. In particular, the Russian anthropologist A.O. Kitova was involved in the work, and DNA studies were organized in leading laboratories in Copenhagen (Denmark) and Germany.

In August 2015, Peter Damgaard, a specialist

at the Centre for GeoGenetics of the University of Copenhagen, took a sample (a small phalanx of a finger) – for genomic analysis (Agreement No. 2, Act of Temporary Transfer of the SHCMR dated August 12, 2015). However, in November 2015 the researcher reported that the proportion of human DNA in the sample was only 0.33%, making a full genomic reconstruction impossible. In 2016, a second sampling was carried out, this time from the right clavicle (Act of Temporary Transfer No. 1 dated August 12, 2016).

Within the framework of the applied research project «Ideology and Mythology of the Saka of Zhetysay» A.O. Kitova, an anthropologist of the N.N. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IEA RAS), was invited to conduct a comprehensive expert study. This included an analysis of the state of preservation of the skeletal remains and their morphological characteristics, with comparison to photographic materials obtained during the archaeological excavations. As a result, a conclusion was reached confirming that the skeletal remains belonged to the Golden Man [2016].

In 2015-2016, DNA analyses were conducted by the Centre for GeoGenetics of the University of Copenhagen; in 2019-2025, research was carried out jointly by the Laboratory of Population Genetics of the Institute of General Genetics and Cytology (Almaty, Kazakhstan) and the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History (Jena, Germany). According to the preliminary conclusions of the latest studies, the remains belong to a male [State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve “Issyk”: Album-Report 2020].

Researchers are now faced with the question of whether the remains of the Golden Man should be reburied or museified. The museumification of archaeological and anthropological material is one of the areas of contemporary museology with particular scholarly and ethical significance. Skeletal remains, as an integral part of an archaeological complex, are a key source of data for determining the chronology of a monument, anthropological type, social status, funerary rite, and worldview concepts.

In this regard, the question of their reburial or preservation within museum space should be considered not only from a traditional and ethical point of view, but also from the standpoint of scientific preservation and public significance.

In international museum practice, including

ICOM and UNESCO recommendations, the museumification of human remains is understood not so much as their exhibition, but as the provision of a special regime of scientific storage, the preservation of context, and access for future research. In this case, museumification is understood not as display but as a process of conservation, documentation, and scholarly interpretation.

The skeletal remains of the Golden Man are not only an individual anthropological object, but also the semantic center of the entire archaeological complex discovered in the Issyk burial mound. Only in unity with the gold costume, weapons, ornaments, and grave goods can they be fully interpreted scientifically. From this point of view, the museumification of the skeletal remains fully corresponds to the principle of preserving the phenomenon of the Golden Man as an integral cultural and historical phenomenon.

The practice of placing anthropological material in temporary or permanent capsules is widespread in international museum work. It makes it possible to ensure preservation while observing ethical standards, stabilize microclimatic conditions, and reconcile exhibition and research objectives. Such an approach ensures a balance between respect for traditions and scientific responsibility.

In this regard, the museumification of the skeletal remains of the Golden Man appears to be the most justified solution, allowing his status as historical and cultural heritage to be preserved, his scientific potential not to be lost, and the remains to be passed on to future generations as a full-fledged source of knowledge.

Digitalization and Contemporary Approaches. Contemporary technologies open up new opportunities not only in the digitization of museum objects, but also in the introduction of digital solutions into exhibition space for the purpose of preserving originals and expanding forms of interpretation. Such technologies include 3D modeling, photogrammetry, virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), interactive multimedia installations (touch screens, holographic showcases, projection technologies), and the creation of digital twins and electronic catalogs. Their application makes it possible not only to minimize physical impact on authentic artifacts, but also to form a multilayered visual representation of the image, ensuring a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical context in a more accessible public

format.

Digitalization of museum activity in the context of studying and representing the Golden Man is of particular importance, since it makes it possible to compensate for the limitations of traditional reconstruction methods and expand the possibilities of scholarly interpretation. Under conditions of partial loss of anthropological material and the debatable nature of the visual appearance, digital technologies play a special role by enabling the creation of multiple reconstructions, but only in their scientifically grounded visual aspect. In particular, 3D modeling and photogrammetry make it possible to record with a high degree of accuracy the elements of the costume, the structure of the burial complex, and the technology of manufacture of the gold objects, which corresponds to contemporary approaches to digital heritage [UNESCO 2003; Parry, 2007].

Contemporary digital solutions – virtual or augmented reality, interactive exhibitions, and electronic catalogs – can create new forms of representation of the Golden Man, making it possible not only to demonstrate the artifact, but also to reveal its cultural and historical context, symbolic meaning, and scholarly interpretations. As R. Parry notes, the digital museum is transformed into a space of communication in which the object becomes part of a complex information system of knowledge [Parry 2007; URL: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203347485>]. In this respect, digital technologies facilitate the transition from static display to dynamic interpretation, in which the user interacts with the object through different levels of data and visualization.

At the same time, digitalization requires strict adherence to the principles of scientific reliability and a critical approach to visualization. In the case of the Golden Man, this is especially important because any digital reconstructions of the face or external appearance are inevitably hypothetical. In accordance with international recommendations [ICOM 2017; Charter 2009], such visualizations should be accompanied by an indication of the degree of reconstruction and the source base. Thus, in this case digital technologies serve not only as an instrument of popularization, but also as a means of scholarly reflection, providing a more accurate, multilayered, and methodologically transparent representation of one of the key symbols of Kazakhstan's cultural heritage. For example, with UNESCO support, in the virtual gallery «The

Shared Heritage of the Silk Roads» on the Google Arts & Culture platform [Google Arts & Culture. URL: <https://artsandculture.google.com>], the Golden Man is presented as an interactive 3D model supplemented by a brief scholarly-information description and audio accompaniment.

Reconstruction as an Instrument of Museum Communication. The exhibition of the Golden Man demonstrates that historical scholarship is built on analysis and interpretation rather than on the direct «recreation of the past». The plurality of reconstructions makes it possible to show the process of scientific cognition through analysis, interpretation, and scholarly modeling. At first glance, the coexistence of different reconstructions in museum, public, and digital space may create a sense of contradiction among visitors and raise the question of the «authentic» appearance. From a scholarly point of view, however, such plurality is natural and reflects the development of research approaches [Cameron, Kenderdine 2007]. The archaeological material remains authentic, whereas reconstruction is only a scientifically grounded model whose degree of reliability is determined by the level of the source base and the author's methodology. In this context, the exhibition performs not only a demonstrative but also an educational function, allowing the process of scientific cognition itself to be visualized. The absence of a comprehensive anthropological study of the skeletal remains is of particular significance, since it limits the possibilities of accurate craniofacial reconstruction and strengthens the interpretive character of existing visual images. In response to visitors' persistent interest in the question of the «real» Golden Man, since 2011 the staff of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» have carried out targeted research aimed at studying the history of the discovery and subsequent representation of the complex of finds. A significant stage was the implementation in 2015 of the applied research projects «Ideology and Mythology of the Saka of Semirechye» (Project Leader: G.R. Mukhtarova), within the framework of which the museum collection was supplemented with new archival and scholarly materials. The result of this work was the publication of the collection *Mysteries of the Golden Man*, in which documents from the archives of Gylym Ordasy and the personal archives of participants in the Issyk detachment/expedition were introduced into scholarly circulation for the first time.

At present, the construction of the Issyk Visitor Center is in its final stage; the facility is approximately 80% complete, while the scientific concept of the future exhibition has already been developed and approved. This creates real prerequisites for forming a new type of exhibition space that combines historical and archaeological reliability with the possibilities of digital technologies. At this stage, it is possible from the outset to build the exhibition in both traditional and digital formats, integrating scholarly interpretations, reconstructions, and visualizations into a single conceptual system. It is important that, when designing exhibition halls, priority be given not to external spectacularism or following technological trends, but to the substantive accuracy and scientific validity of the material presented. Digital solutions in this context should not be an end in themselves, but an instrument that ensures the accessible and visual communication of complex scholarly information. With such an approach, digitalization does not replace the authentic museum object; rather, it makes visible and understandable the scholarly argumentation underlying its interpretation. Thus, the key reconstruction in this case functions not only as a means of visualization, but also as an important instrument of scholarly communication, allowing new data, interpretations, and sources to be integrated into the public space of the museum exhibition.

Conclusion

The discovery of the Golden Man stands as one of the landmark events in the archaeological science of Kazakhstan, having exerted a profound influence on the study of the Saka-Wusun period of Central Asia. This archaeological complex not only broadened scholarly understanding of the socio-political structure, ideology, and artistic culture of the early nomads, but also gave rise to new methodological approaches in archaeology, anthropology, restoration, and museum studies. Over several decades, research devoted to the Golden Man has encompassed a wide range of scholarly problems, including questions on genealogical affiliation, anthropological

identification, the reconstruction of costume and physical appearance, and the semantics of the funerary complex. The actuality of decipherment of the «Issyk inscription», discovered alongside the Golden Man on a silver bowl, remains an open and pressing question, one that calls for the engagement of specialists in comparative-historical linguistics, digital epigraphy, and international research collaboration. There is likewise a pressing need to establish unified scholarly approaches to the interpretation of the Golden Man's appearance, his historical and cultural status, and his digital representation, with a view to preventing pseudoscientific imagery and the distortion of historical evidence.

An unresolved institutional problem is the dispersal of the Golden Man burial complex: the finds are currently held across several museums and museum-reserves in Kazakhstan. This situation is at odds with international standards for the integrated storage of archaeological collections and requires a coordinated institutional response.

Of particular importance is the continuation of comprehensive research into the origins of the Golden Man in the context of studying the autochthonous population of Kazakhstan, the cultural continuity between the Saka-Wusun and early Turkic periods, and the broader historical and cultural heritage of the peoples of the Great Steppe. Future research prospects lie in the comprehensive analysis of archaeological materials using contemporary natural-scientific methods, the adoption of digital technologies for three-dimensional modeling and visualization, and the integration of the dispersed elements of the archaeological complex into a unified scholarly information system. The development of international research cooperation remains an important priority, as it contributes to a deeper understanding of the monument's cultural and historical context. The phenomenon of the Golden Man thus continues to hold high scholarly relevance, serving not only as a unique archaeological source, but also as one of the most significant symbols of Kazakhstan's historical and cultural identity.

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АЛТЫН АДАМНЫҢ ҚАНҚА СҮЙЕГІН ЖАҢҒЫРТУ ЖӘНЕ МУЗЕЙЛЕНДІРУ МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ: ЗАМАНАУИ ӘДІСТЕРІ МЕН ЦИФРЛАНДЫРУ

Аңдатпа. Мақала 1970 жылы Есік қорғанынан табылған сақ мәдениетінің бірегей археологиялық кешені – Алтын адамды музейлендіру, консервациялау және цифрлық репрезентациялау мәселелерінің теориялық және практикалық аспектілеріне арналған. Зерттеуде бұл ескерткіштің Қазақстанның ұлттық мәдени мұрасы жүйесіндегі орны, сондай-ақ тарихи жадыны, символдық саясатты және ұлттық бірегейлікті қалыптастырудағы рөлі қарастырылады.

Пәнаралық тәсіл негізінде Алтын адамды зерттеу мен музейлік экспозицияға енгізудің негізгі кезеңдері, сондай-ақ К. Ақышев, А. Ақышев, А. Танабаев және Қ. Алтынбеков жасаған реконструкциялар талданады. Ескерткіштің сыртқы келбетін қалпына келтірудің әдіснамалық мәселелеріне және қазіргі музейлік тәжірибе мен цифрлық гуманитаристика контекстінде оның тарихи-мәдени мәртебесін интерпретациялау ерекшеліктеріне ерекше назар аударылады. Сонымен қатар визуалды реконструкциялардың ғылыми дәлдігі, оларды верификациялау өлшемдері және цифрлық технологиялардың археологиялық мұраны сақтау, тарату және дәріптеу үдерістеріне ықпалы зерттеледі.

Мақалада мәдени мұраны сақтаудың халықаралық стандарттарына негізделген Алтын адамды консервациялау, реконструкциялау және цифрлық репрезентациялаудың бірыңғай ғылыми қағидаттарын әзірлеу қажеттілігі негізделеді. Зерттеу нәтижесінде ескерткішті ғылыми тұрғыдан негізделген интерпретациялау моделін қалыптастыру жалған ғылыми реконструкциялардың алдын алудың, нысанның тарихи түпнұсқалылығын сақтаудың және оның ұлттық әрі халықаралық мәдени кеңістіктегі музейлік және қоғамдық коммуникация тиімділігін арттырудың маңызды шарты екендігі туралы қорытынды жасалады.

Түйін сөздер: Алтын адам, Иссык қорымы, оба, археологиялық жаңартпа, музейлендіру, сақ мәдениеті, антропология, цифрландыру, музей экспозициясы, мәдени мұра.

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РЕКОНСТРУКЦИЯ И МУЗЕИФИКАЦИЯ ОСТАНКОВ ЗОЛОТОГО ЧЕЛОВЕКА: СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ МЕТОДЫ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ И ЦИФРОВИЗАЦИЯ

Аннотация. Статья посвящена теоретическим и практическим аспектам

музеефикации, консервации и цифровой репрезентации Золотого человека (Алтын адам) – уникального археологического комплекса сакской культуры, обнаруженного в Иссыкском кургане в 1970 году. Рассматривается место данного памятника в системе национального культурного наследия Казахстана и его роль в формировании исторической памяти, символической политики и национальной идентичности. На основе междисциплинарного подхода анализируются основные этапы изучения и экспонирования Золотого человека, а также существующие реконструкции, выполненные К. Акишевым, А. Акишевым,

А. Танабаевым и К. Алтынбековым. Особое внимание уделяется методологическим проблемам реконструкции внешнего облика и интерпретации историко-культурного статуса памятника в контексте современных музейных практик и цифровой гуманитаристики. Исследуются вопросы научной достоверности визуальных реконструкций, критерии их верификации и влияние цифровых технологий на процессы сохранения, трансляции и популяризации археологического наследия. Обосновывается необходимость выработки единых научных принципов консервации, реконструкции и цифровой репрезентации Золотого человека, основанных на международных стандартах сохранения культурного наследия. Сделан вывод о том, что создание научно обоснованной модели интерпретации памятника является важным условием предотвращения псевдонаучных реконструкций, сохранения исторической аутентичности объекта и повышения эффективности его музейной и общественной коммуникации в национальном и международном культурном пространстве.

Ключевые слова: Золотой человек, Иссыкский некрополь, курган, археологическая реконструкция, музеефикация, сакская культура, антропология, цифровизация, музейная экспозиция, культурное наследие.

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