

**S.K. Samashev** 

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan  
e-mail: [ssamashev@gmail.com](mailto:ssamashev@gmail.com)

## HORSE BRANDING TRADITION AMONG THE TURKS

The horse branding has deep roots. Some scholars refer the origin of tamga-like signs to the period of clan system. Some researchers associate their origin with the era of formation and development of pastoral nomadism.

In the Middle Ages the Turkic and other peoples of the Eurasian steppes used the horse marking as a sign of ownership. They were applied on the neck under the mane, on the hoof, on the back slightly above the saddle, on the left or right thigh, on the cheek, in rare cases behind the elbow (with the aim to hide tamga) by using a special hot-iron. There is information about temporary branding (by painting or haircuts) for horses, intended for sale or exchange.

There is one more sign of distinction for horses – “en”. “En” and “tamga” are equivalent categories.

One of the most reliable evidences of horse branding are petroglyphs of the Middle Ages.

The horse branding topic is mentioned in written sources of 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC. According to the researchers, tamgas on horses among the medieval rock carvings are comparable in appearance to the signs found in Mongolia and the Altai Mountains.

The horse branding is a common phenomenon for all Turkic peoples. The continuity of some tamgas has been under observation since ancient Turkic times. In our time, this tradition has undergone significant changes.

**Key words:** Turks, Middle Ages, tamga, sign, symbol, tamga studies, horse branding, Kazakh steppes.

С.К. Самашев

А.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Қазақстан, Нұр-Сұлтан қ.  
e-mail: [ssamashev@gmail.com](mailto:ssamashev@gmail.com)

### Түркілердегі жылқы таңбалау дәстүрі

Таңбалау – түп тамыры тереңде жатқан көне дәстүрлердің бірі. Таңба тәріздес белгілер рулық қауым кезінде-ақ пайда болған деп саналады. Кей зерттеушілер олардың шығу тегін көшпелі мал шаруашылығының қалыптасуымен байланыстырады.

Ортағасырлық Еуразия далаларын мекен еткен түркі тайпалары және басқа да халықтар жылқыға таңбаны меншік белгісі есебінде салған. Оларды жылқының қолдауына, сауырына, жағына, мойнына, бас арқасына және тірсегіне (таңбаны жасыру үшін) темір аспаппен күйдіріп түсірген. Сатуға немесе айырбастауға арналған малға уақытша белгілер (бояу жағу немесе жүнін қырқу арқылы) қойылғаны туралы мәліметтер кездеседі.

Сондай-ақ жылқыға салынатын айырым белгілерінің қатарына «ен» де жатқызылады. «Ен» таңбамен қатар жүретін ұғым.

Жылқыға таңба басуды Қазақстан жерінен анықталған алғашқы археологиялық деректері – ортағасырлық жартас суреттері. Қазақ даласында жылқы таңбалау дәстүрінің болғандығын айғақтайтын жазба деректердің ең ертесі V ғ. жатады. Ал орта ғасырлармен мерзімделетін жартас суреттеріндегі жылқы таңбалары ұқсастықтары жағынан алғанда Монғолия және Таулы Алтай жерлеріндегі таңбалармен ұштасатындығы белгілі болып отыр.

Жылқы таңбалау – мал өсірумен айналысқан барша түркі халықтарына ортақ құбылыс және кейбір таңбалардың сабақтастығы көне түркілер дәуірінен бері үзілмей келе жатқандығы байқалады. Қазіргі уақытта бұл дәстүр түбегейлі өзгеріске ұшыраған.

**Түйін сөздер:** түркілер, орта ғасырлар, таңба, белгі, нышан, таңбатану, жылқы таңбалау, Қазақ даласы

С.К. Самашев

Евразийский национальный университет им. А.Н. Гумилева, Казахстан, г. Нур-Султан  
e-mail: ssamashev@gmail.com

### Традиция таврения лошадей у тюрков

Таврение имеет глубокие корни. Зарождение тамгообразных знаков некоторые ученые относят к периоду родового строя. Некоторые исследователи связывают их происхождение с эпохой формирования и развития кочевого скотоводства.

В средневековые тюркские и другие народы Евразийских степей лошадиное клеймо использовали как знак собственности. Их ставили на шею под гривой, на копыто, на спине чуть выше области седла, на левое или правое бедро, на щеку, в редких случаях за локтем (чтобы скрыть тамгу) лошади путем прижигания с помощью железного инструмента. Есть сведения о временных метках (путем покраски или стрижки) для лошадей, предназначенных для продажи или обмена.

Существует еще один знак различия для лошадей – «ен». «Ен» и тамга являются равнозначными категориями.

Одним из наиболее достоверных свидетельств тамгирования лошадей являются петроглифы эпохи средневековья.

В письменных источниках V в. н.э. упоминается тема таврения лошадей. По мнению исследователей, тамги на лошадях среди средневековых наскальных изображений по внешним признакам сопоставимы со знаками, обнаруженными в Монголии и Горном Алтае.

Таврение лошадей – общее явление для всех тюркских народов. Преемственность некоторых тамг наблюдается с древнетюркских времен. В наше время данная традиция претерпела существенные изменения.

**Ключевые слова:** тюрки, Средневековье, тамга, знак, символ, тамговедение, таврение лошадей, казахские степи.

### Introduction

The branding of domestic animals is a long-standing tradition, typical for the major part of pastoralist societies. It was occurred in Turkic, Mongolian, Slavic and Finnish tribes, in the Caucasus and in the Crimea, in ancient Greece and etc. Each owner marked his animal by making incisions in the ears or horns and applying some images, signs or letters on the animal's body using a special hot-iron (Solomonik, 1959: 27). The most common of them is the horse branding. There is reason to believe that the nomadic way of life had a direct effect on the widespread use of horse branding in the territory of ancient Kazakhstan. As known the process of climate aridization took place within the territory of Kazakhstan before the medieval period. As a result, the nomadic people could have been engaged in animal husbandry in more than 90% of the territory of Kazakhstan, consisting of desert, semi-desert and steppe regions for almost three thousand years (Masanov, 1995: 64). Therefore, for the medieval nomads, the cattle, including horses, became the main source of existence. The nomad of the steppe eats and drinks, wears thanks to the cattle, for them the welfare of domestic animals are more precious than their own well-being. For Kazakh people the assurance of well-being begins with the animal's safety. The first question about the welfare of cattle

before the family well-being describes the life of nomads more clearly than several pages of writings (Valikhanov, 1985: 28). At first glance, it is very simple. The nomads had their own cattle as the means of subsistence, and with the aim to identify it among the cattle of other people, they applied their own signs of distinction. In other words, the tamga played an important role in the lives of medieval nomads, became a means of information and communication between tribes, allowing distinguishing the exact ownership of land and livestock in conditions of constant change of the pastures (Samashev, 2020: 66 – 80). At the same time, the tamga was the possession indication of horse herd owner. The works of Yu.A. Zuev (Zuev, 1960: 96 – 97), L.I. Lavrov (Lavrov, 2009: 15), T. Gulensoy (Gulensoy, 1989: 97 – 105) and other authors confirm this fact.

However, it is possible that the horse branding was not the ownership sign and probably, it was served as a protection from mystical forces. This opinion is based on N.A. Aristov's point of view "originally tribal symbols were images of tribal deities and patrons, and, possibly, were transformed into simple geometric shapes so that they could be easily applied (Aristov, 1896: 285 – 286). Taking into consideration the fact that the horse served as a mediator between a man and the other world according to the ideology of the Eurasian peoples in ancient times and in the medieval era (Zhumataev,

2019: 68), it is possible that the signs except a practical meaning in everyday life, as well as had another functions.

This ancient tradition has been closely associated with the Kazakh steppes since the time of the ancient Turks until the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> c., during the ethnographic period preserved only its remnants. In the Soviet period, in connection with the transition of cattle from private to state, the color and meaning of the symbols on domestic animals changed. For small horses, the first letter of an owner's name was often printed in Cyrillic. Therefore, the tradition of horse branding is a topical issue in the field of tamga studies, archaeology and ethnography, requiring specialized research and introduction into scientific turnover. The given article provides a general overview of the important aspects of this issue.

### Materials and methods

One of the aspects of the branding tradition, which is a historical and cultural phenomenon typical for the peoples of the medieval Kazakh steppe – the collection of the available written and archaeological data and their detailed analysis using the comparative-historical method during the study of horse branding issue. In particular, it was determined how many stages the horse branding as a historical phenomenon has gone through and what changes it has undergone. In addition, the use of comparative-historical analysis allowed identifying common features and differences in the tradition of horse branding among the Turkic peoples.

It was possible to develop historical parallels of horse branding in the pre-medieval and post-medieval times, and even before the ethnographic period, using a retrospective approach. The content analysis made it possible to determine the interconnection between the symbols and signs on horses, namely, “basic” and “derived” symbols. And the correspondence of the social environment and the categories at that time was studied through discourse analysis.

### Results and discussion

The earliest written information about the tradition of horse branding in the medieval Kazakh steppes is Haihu or Gaogui, that is, the Chinese chronicle of the Uyghurs in the Weishu, dates back to the 5<sup>th</sup> c. The domestic animals were branded (tavro, tamga); although the marked animals were grazed in the lands of other owners, no one touched them (Iakinfi, 1851: 250). The next data is the work

of the German orientalist Liu Mau-Tsai “On the Turkic-Tukues” (Tukyue). This work describes that Tu-kue horses were extremely hardy, graceful and very suitable for hunting, they were marked with different symbols and some these symbols were given as example (Liu Mau-Tsai, 1958: 453 – 454). The author wrote this work on the basis of the Chinese inscription “Tanhuiyao”. According to Yu.A. Zuev who studied Tanhuya in detail, it dates back to the third quarter of 8<sup>th</sup> c., as well as he considered the most complete version of the horse marks (Zuev, 1960: 132).

The next data is the work of Makhmud Kashgari “Divan lugat-at-turk” that dates from 11<sup>th</sup> c. He named 22 tribes of the Oghuzes and made a drawing of signs of 21 tribes. As well as he emphasized that these marks were a symbols of domestic animals, including horses and wrote that the tribes were divided into several branches, giving only a brief description of all of them without fully describing all these tribes (Dankoff, 1982: 101 – 102). The analogous information can be found in the works of Rashid ad-Din (Rashid-Ad-Din, 1952: 88–90) and Abilgazi (Ebulgazi, 1980: 48 – 52).

The next collection of written data about the tradition of horse branding includes the works of researchers of the Imperial Russia that began to study the medieval Kazakh steppes from the late 18<sup>th</sup> c. (Samashev, 2018). Although these works are mainly about the Kazakh tribal symbols, they mention that the system of symbols identified in Kazakhstan, was formed much earlier than the Kazakhs and the medieval signs had a direct impact on the origin of real Kazakh symbols (Aristov, 1896: 286).

The horses have held a significant and specific place among the Kazakhs since the earliest times. As evidenced by the images of horses with tamgas on the Bronze Age petroglyphs of Kazakhstan. The domestic researcher R.S. Zhumataev suggested that they may be an element of decoration or an attempt of ancient inhabitants to describe the animal image. He also noted that his predecessors interpreted this phenomenon as a sacrifice to the gods and even gave it a cosmic character by associating it with stellar constellations. It should be considered that the images of horses in the complex of rock paintings of Kazakhstan, especially those, depicted in complex compositions, as a manifestation of a worldview idea about a horse, as an animal that was first tamed by man and then turned into a transport, common for the whole Eurasian space (Zhumataev, 2019: 68).

Historically proven date of the formation of the horse branding tradition in the Eurasian steppes is the first centuries of AD. (Drachuk, 1975: 42). Ac-

According to E.I. Solomonik, the animal branding began with the process of property classification and the first stage of community formation, when the private possession appeared (Solomonik, 1959: 16). According to L.I. Lavrov's opinion, the signs began to appear after the tribal community disintegration. The tamgas were primarily created for identification of horses among different herds of horses before the late 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Lavrov, 2009: 16). Referring to V.S. Drachuk and G. Enikhen, he suggests that the origin of the symbols should be associated with the nomadic animal husbandry (Drachuk, 1975: 42).

It is believed that the Sarmatian signs on horses were strongly influenced by Iranian symbols (Drachuk, 1975: 43). Among the archeological data on the distinctive features of the Scythians on horses,

the closest to us in terms of territory and chronology are the types of signs in the ears of horses, found in the Pazyryk burial grounds in Altai. "Marking" and "tamga" are equal categories and preserved in all Turkic peoples from the early Middle Ages to the ethnographic period (Samashev, 2019: 148).

The first archeological data of the horse branding tradition are rock carvings, depicting animals with signs on the croup, identified in Tarbagatay and Semirechye regions.

Two horsemen with two conjoint triangular symbols on the croup of their horses are depicted in the medieval petroglyph, found in the Oralbay gorge in Tarbagatay (Figure 1). One of them has a symbol, as though a mountain goat outline with an arc-like element at the top of it (Samashev, 2013: 290).



**Figure 1** – The image of a horse with a symbol on its croup. Oralbay. Tarbagatai (according to Z. Samashev)

Similarly, a horse marked with a symbol, but without an arc-like line, where a vertical line, protruding from one side of a two combined triangles (Figure 2) was led by a kneeling man, is depicted in the Eshkiolmes petroglyph in Semirechye (Samashev, 2010: 52).

Another such symbol was identified by D.V. Cheremisin among the ancient Turkic rock arts in the south-east of the Russian Altai (Cheremisin, 2004: 44). Such symbols have recently been found and introduced into scientific circulation in the Altai

Mountains of Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

The symbol depicted on the croup of harnessed horse in the Kogaly site, located in the south-east area of the Shu-Ili Mountains, is one of the rarest signs. The researchers conventionally call it an "anchor-shaped" symbol (Rogozhinskij, 2019: 255). The similar symbol is found in the rock carvings in the valley of the Chagan River in Russia, which was applied on the croup of a horse which is depicted in a "sacrifice" scene (Cheremisin, 2019: 363).



**Figure 2** – The image of a horse with a symbol on its croup. Eshkiolmes. Semirechye (according to Z. Samashev)

The next symbol is marked on the right thigh of a harnessed horse, depicted in a rock painting in the Kulzhabasy site, located in the south-western part of the Shu-Ili Mountains. The researchers assimilated it to the symbols, discovered in Suuk-Dyobe on the Fergana ridge, along the middle reaches of the Talas River, on the eastern slopes of the Karatau and among the cave paintings of

the Shu-Ili Mountains and classified it as a rare (Rogozhinskij, 2012: 105).

Returning to the written data, in the works of Yu.A. Zuev and Liu Mau-Tsai with reference to the ancient Chinese source Tanhuyao, the comparison of the Turkic horse symbols with the Oghuz symbols, described in Makhmud Kashgari, Abilgazy and Rashid ad-Din works, gives the following results (Table 1).

**Table 1** – Comparative table of the Turkic horse symbols, given in medieval data (according to Yu.A. Zuev, Liu Mau-Tsai, Makhmud Kashgari, Abilgazy and Rashid ad-din)

No	Name of the tribe	According to Yu.A. Zuev the symbols are given in Tanhuya		According to Liu Mau-Tsai the symbols are given in Tanhuya	Oguz symbols
		new edition	old edition		
1	cze-gu (kirguz)				
2	tun-lo (tongra)				 According to Abilgazy the symbol of the Alkayli clan
3	jan'-to (tardu?)	identical			
4	pu-gu (bugu)				
5	ci (-bi) (kybir)				

Table continuation

No	Name of the tribe	According to Yu.A. Zuev the symbols are given in Tanhuya		According to Liu Mau-Tsai the symbols are given in Tanhuya	Oguz symbols
		new edition	old edition		
6	(ci-) bi-juj (kybir)				
7	ci-bi (kybir)				
8	a-de (jediz)				
9	fu-li-juj (bokli?)				
10	fu-li-juj (bokli?)				 According to Abelgazy – the symbol of Doger tribe
11	huj-gje (ujgur)				 According to Mahmud Kashgari – the symbol of the Karauyli tribe
12	czjuj lo-bo (kurabor)				
13	juj-mjej-hun' (jomut gun)				
14	chi (chig)				
15	a-shi-de (?) a-shi-te				
16	sy-cze (sygir)				
17	si-cze (ajgyr)				
18	hu-se (koksa?)				
19	nu-la (dulaf?)				
20	su-nun (?)				

Table continuation
















No	Name of the tribe	According to Yu.A. Zuev the symbols are given in Tanhuya		According to Liu Mau-Tsai the symbols are given in Tanhuya	Oguz symbols
		new edition	old edition		
21	da-a-shi-dje (tat-ashidje?) ta a-shi-te				
22	ba-jan'-a-shi-dje (?) pa-jen a-shi-te				
23	shje-li (shary)				
24	chje-li (cherig)				
25	chje-li (cherig)	identical			
26	a-shi-na (ushin)				
27	gje-lo-chzhi (alachin)				
28	cho (chog?)				 According to Mahmud Kashgari – the tamga of the Baimdyr tribe
29	hje-lu (halluh) ho-lu				 According to Rashid ad-din, the tamga of the Bayat tribe
30	kan-hje-li (kangarlyg)				
31	an'-mu-lu-chzhen' (?)				
32	an'-shje-hje (?) en-ki (si-ki)				
33	sha-to (sart)				
34	chu-bi-shan' (Chubyl mountains)				 According to Mahmud Kashgari – the tamga of the Yuregir tribe
35	hun' (kun)				
36	ci-dan' (kytaj)				

Table continuation

























No	Name of the tribe	According to Yu.A. Zuev the symbols are given in Tanhuya		According to Liu Mau-Tsai the symbols are given in Tanhuya	Oguz symbols
		new edition	old edition		
37	si (kai)				 According to Abelgazy – the symbol of the Kyzzyk tribe
38	ki-pi			𐰇𐰏	
39	haj-ki			𐰇𐰏	
40	hu-si			𐰇𐰏	

The analysis of the literature in scientific circulation shows that the horse branding is a common tradition of the Turkic peoples, and this tradition parallel between them, was formed before the collapse of the Turkic Union. It is worth noting the horse symbols of Turks, Tatars, Kyrgyz, Azerbaijanis and others among deeply studied signs. We can name the horse symbols of the Turkic peoples. Many of them spread the tradition of horse branding from the ancient Turks (Tezcan, 1990: 166 – 169; Islaev, 2016: 8 – 14;

Karatayev, 2016: 163 – 179; Agasioglu, 2014: 134 – 139).

Let us give rare and interesting information without describing all of them. For example, about a century ago in Paris, the “Asian Journal” published an article by Turkish researcher Riza Nour entitled “Horse symbols in Sinop”. The author associated the symbols (Table 2) with the Orkhon inscriptions, the symbols of the Oghuz tribes, the symbols of the Golden Horde and Crimean khans and the Latin alphabet (Nour, 1928: 148 – 151).

Table 2 – Horse symbols in Sinop (according to R. Nour)




Another interesting fact (Table 3) was given by the Tatar researchers (Islaev, 2016: 8 – 14).

**Table 3** – Horse symbols preserved among the baptized Tatars (according to G. Makarov)



The stone horse statues with  $\equiv$  sign similar to the symbol of the Alauyintili tribe of the Oghuzes, were discovered near the villages of Malybey and Gulyabirt in the Lachin district of Azerbaijan (Neimat, 2007: 28). This confirms the scientific conclusion that the land of Azerbaijan was inhabited by the Alauyintili tribe of Oghuzes (Ibrakhimov, 2019: 1 – 7).

The Sulek inscription, a monument of rock art in southern Siberia, depicts the Yenisei Kyrgyz  symbol on the back of a horse of a flag bearing warrior on horseback (Khudiakov, 2019: 52).

## Conclusion

In general, the Turkic horse branding tradition is a wide-ranging, in-depth, large-scale topic that requires special dissertation research. It is impossible to consider it all in detail in one article, so, as noted in the introduction, it is a general overview for the identification the important aspects of the issue.

The preliminary research shows that the horse symbols in medieval nomads are a sign of ownership. It means that depending on the type of symbol (main or derived symbol) it is the possession of a certain tribe, clan or prince-warrior.

The area of distribution of ancient Turkic horse symbols – “from Altai to Anatolia”, the territories inhabited by Turkic-speaking peoples.

Undoubtedly, the cultural and trade-economic relations influenced on the emergence of “foreign” traces in some ancient Turkic horse symbols, absorbing elements of the signs or inscriptions of adjacent states. On the contrary, it also influenced on the transformation of the symbols of foreign peoples, subordinated to the Turks in Eurasia.

The horse branding tradition has been preserved in almost all Turkic peoples until the ethnographic period and we can clearly see that there was a continuous succession until the early 20<sup>th</sup> c. However, the current political and economic situation has left only a remnant of this tradition.

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