

B.E. Satayeva^{1*} , B.A. Sirazheva² ¹ *Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Ankara, Turkey;*² *Farabi Eurasian Studies Practice and Research Center, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey*
(E-mail: satayeva.botakoz@ogr.hbv.edu.tr; bsirazheva@gmail.com)

The Legacy of “TANBA” and “DAMGA” Symbols in Turkish Society: Insights from Turkic and Altai Kazakhs

This study explores the profound cultural, social and spiritual significance of tanbas in Turkic societies, with a particular focus on the Altai Kazakhs. These symbols transcend their initial function as mere property markers and evolve into potent representations of ethnic identity, social hierarchy, and spiritual beliefs. Originally used to identify property, tanbas were transformed into symbols of power, unity and territorial control, deeply integrated into the Turkic worldview. Associated with shamanism, they also assumed protective and metaphysical roles, embodying the link between the material and spiritual realms. The linguistic and geographical diversity of tanbas underlines their adaptability and widespread influence in Turkic-speaking regions from the Caucasus to Central Asia. Their presence in ancient texts, such as the Orkhon Inscriptions and Kutadgu Bilig, highlights their continuing importance in both historical and contemporary contexts. The continued use of tanbas by Turkic peoples demonstrates their resilience and ability to preserve cultural identity across generations. This study demonstrates that tanbas are not only signs of ownership, but also cultural emblems that communicate social status, affiliation, and worldview, providing important insights into the spiritual and political dynamics of ancient and modern Turkic societies.

Keywords: Tanba, stamp, Turkic culture, Altai Kazakhs, social structure, ethnic markers, religious symbolism, Turkic tribes, runes.

Introduction

Stamps and tanbas are of particular significance in the study of the cultural heritage and social structures of Turkic peoples. These symbols represent the uniqueness of each tribe, clan, or state, serving as important cultural elements that reflect their way of life, worldview, and historical development. In the Turkic world, tanbas are not merely symbols; they are also highly valued for their social, cultural, and political significance. These symbols functioned as tools of communication among the general populace, markers of property rights, and preservers of cultural and spiritual heritage [1; 115–132].

Stamps occupy a unique place in the cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples, including the Altai Kazakhs. They serve not only as indicators of ethnic distinctions but also play a crucial role in preserving historical, social, cultural, and political values. In the Turkic world, the significance of tanbas as reflections of social structure and spiritual worldview endures to the present day. The primary objective of this research is to undertake a comprehensive exploration of the history of tanba and damga usage among Turkic peoples, with a particular focus on the Altai Kazakhs, and to elucidate their symbolic, social, and cultural significance. The research objectives are as follows:

- Determining the historical significance of tanba usage among Turkic peoples.
- Understanding the importance of tanbas in ancient Kazakh society.
- Analyzing the role and function of tanbas in society.
- Demonstrating the significance of tanbas in the development of Turkic culture.

During the research process, certain methodological challenges may arise in studying the history of tanba and damga usage among Turkic peoples. This is because the meanings of tanbas have evolved over time, and there may be differing interpretations regarding their usage and significance [2; 2]. Currently, research on tanbas is not sufficiently deep or comprehensive. In particular, there is a need for systematic analysis of tanbas from a semiotic perspective and their social roles [3]. Moreover, the cultural and ethnographic study of tanbas remains incomplete. In ancient Turkic society, tanbas frequently appeared alongside ancient runic inscriptions and petroglyphs, forming a symbolic system that not only represented material culture but also reflected their worldview, playing a significant role in indicating an individual's status in society and articulating ethnic hierarchies within the sociopolitical order [4; 14].

* Corresponding author's e-mail: satayeva.botakoz@ogr.hbv.edu.tr

This article examines the concepts of tanbas and stamps within Turkic culture, focusing on their social, ethnic, and spiritual significance. These symbols are shown to preserve the spiritual and cultural distinctiveness of society and to serve as cultural heritage passed down through generations [5]. The article highlights the deep symbolic and spiritual meaning of tanbas, beyond their material significance.

Materials and Methods

In this study, the materials and methods used to explore the profound cultural, social, and political significance of Turkic tanbas and stamps were carefully designed to capture both the historical and semiotic dimensions of these symbols. The approach combined a multidisciplinary framework, integrating historical analysis, semiotic theory, and anthropological fieldwork to create a comprehensive understanding of tanbas in different Turkic cultures, particularly among the Altai Kazakhs.

To trace the origins and development of tanbas, historical documents and inscriptions were analysed, including the Orkhon Inscriptions, the Kutadgu Bilig, and various archaeological finds [6]. These sources provided important insights into the use of tanbas as markers of property, political authority, and spiritual beliefs in ancient Turkic societies. Particular attention was paid to the linguistic variations of the term 'tanba' in different Turkic languages, reflecting the adaptability and cultural impact of these symbols in different regions, from the Caucasus to Central Asia.

In addition, the study incorporated archaeological materials, specifically rock inscriptions and petroglyphs found in Kazakhstan and surrounding areas, to further explore the deep-rooted use of tanbas in marking kinship, social organisation and spiritual practices among nomadic tribes. These tangible symbols from ancient rock art were compared with ethnographic surveys and interviews with contemporary Kazakh and other Turkic tribal communities, allowing a connection to be made between the historical significance of tanbas and their continuing relevance in modern society.

A semiotic approach was central to the analysis of these symbols. By examining the geometric forms and symbolic meanings embedded in the tanbas, the study applied semiotic theory to decipher the cultural and spiritual messages conveyed by these symbols. The research also relied on visual analysis to understand the aesthetic and symbolic evolution of tanbas across Turkic groups, exploring how these symbols adapted and evolved in response to changes in political structures, economic relations and religious beliefs, particularly in the context of shamanism and its metaphysical associations.

Finally, the study incorporated comparative cultural analysis to contextualise the tanbas within the broader framework of nomadic Turkic societies, examining their significance in both internal and external relations. This approach provided a richer understanding of how tanbas served not only as markers of ethnic identity, but also as dynamic symbols of power, unity and cultural heritage over centuries.

By integrating a variety of materials, including historical texts, archaeological evidence, ethnographic surveys, and semiotic theory, the study provided a multidimensional analysis of the tanba, shedding light on its cultural, spiritual, and social functions within Turkic societies. The methodology was thus designed to highlight the enduring legacy of these symbols and ensure their continued relevance in understanding Turkic identity and cultural continuity.

Results

The examination of the historical and cultural significance of the Turkic «tanba» and related stamps reveals profound insights into the social, political, and spiritual frameworks of ancient Turkic societies. These stamps, which served as personal and collective identifiers, transcended simple markers of ownership to become intricate representations of the cultural, spiritual, and socio-political identities of their people. The consistent use of stamps across the Turkic world, from the steppes of Central Asia to the Caucasus, underscores their essential role in binding communities together through shared cultural and spiritual heritage. As demonstrated in the Orkhon inscriptions, these stamps were not only functional in marking property or animals but were deeply embedded in the worldview of the Turkic peoples, linking their identity with the broader cosmos and their belief systems. The application of these symbols to cattle, household items, and in governance illustrated their enduring relevance in social organization, distinguishing between tribes, clans, and political entities.

A central theme emerging from the analysis is the evolution of «tanba» from its early use as an ownership mark to a symbol of social status, power, and ethnic unity. This transformation signifies the increasing importance of stamps in defining not only the material and economic aspects of Turkic life but also the intangible realms of power, status, and spiritual connection. The case of the Turkic Khaganate,

where "Tughyrak" and "Tughri" marks denoted royal power and political control, highlights the symbolic function of "tanba" in asserting territorial and administrative dominance.

The linguistic variety and etymology of the term "tanba" across Turkic languages — ranging from "Damga" in Azerbaijani to "Tanba" in Kazakh — further attest to the shared but regionally distinct cultural elements within the Turkic world. This diversity, while maintaining common roots, underscores the adaptability of these symbols in the varied socio-political contexts of the Turkic peoples.

The earliest known Kazakh tanbas are found among petroglyphs (rock carvings). In domestic dictionaries, the term "tanba" is defined as a mark, sign, stamp, or seal. Linguists have posited that the variations in the terms "tanba," "damga," and "damga" can be attributed to metathesis, a phonetic phenomenon. According to Bazylkhan Bukhat, the sounds "m," "n" (ŋ), "gh," and "b" underwent mutual shifts and transformations. For instance, the ancient Mongolian words "tamak-a," "tamakalagu," and "tamakatu" evolved into the modern Kazakh terms "taŋba" (tanba), "taŋbalau" (to stamp), and "taŋbali" (stamped) [7].

Among the steppe nomads, kinship-based groups were referred to as "ru" (clan), and their smaller subdivisions were called "taipa" (tribe) [7; 264]. The Kazakh people are generally divided into several major tribes, which are composed of smaller clans. This brief overview highlights the deep historical roots of Kazakh tamgas, their linguistic evolution, and their role in defining kinship and social structures among the nomadic tribes of the steppe.

Moreover, the stamps' association with Shamanism and their role as totems or spiritual emblems offer critical insights into the religious and metaphysical dimensions of Turkic life. These symbols acted as protectors, ensuring the safety of the community while simultaneously connecting the physical and spiritual realms. Over time, as Turkic societies evolved, these stamps integrated into the broader cultural fabric, maintaining their foundational role in reinforcing group identity, social hierarchy, and power structures.

The enduring legacy of "tanba" and similar marks in contemporary Turkic cultures demonstrates their resilience and continued cultural relevance. These stamps, whether engraved in stone or branded onto animals, remain a testament to the historical continuity of Turkic cultural practices, linking the past with the present. The study of these marks reveals not only the unique worldview of ancient Turkic peoples but also their capacity to communicate identity, belonging, and status through symbols that have transcended generations.

Discussion

The tanba is an ancient sign that has been transmitted across generations, centuries, and kinship lines and has cultural, social and political significance among the Turkic peoples. These stamps, not only in their external form but also through their internal content, shape the spiritual world, existence, and worldview of the individual, becoming a foundational element of collective identity. A symbol is not just a sign; it is the path to self-knowledge for a people, a philosophical foundation that defines the attitude of the past and the perspective of the future [8]. The symbols, patterns and designs of the Turkic peoples are primarily seen as symbols of great changes and new possibilities in human history. The use of iron in the creation of these symbols further ensured their durability and stability, thus expanding their scope of application. In the Anatolian region, symbols were widely used on domestic animals such as cows, horses and sheep, as well as on household tools, and even the ancient tribes and communities inhabiting the region, including those in Anatolia, widely used (names in Old Turkic language "Damga", "Tanga" and "Таңба") symbols [8].

In the work "Kutadgu Bilig" by Yusuf Balasagun, written between 1069 and 1070 in the city of Balasagun and completed in Kashgar within eighteen months, the word "tanba" was widely used in meanings such as symbol, stamp, seal, engraver, and impressioner. The word "Tanba" was used alongside "Tamka" in Old Turkic. In Chagatai, the term "Tanba" was used; in Kumyk Turkic, "Tamna"; in Oirat and Soyen, "Tanma"; and in Kazan Turkic, "Tanba" [8].

In addition, the word "Tanba" was widely used among Turkic-speaking peoples in the Caucasus, including the Kyrgyz and Azerbaijani peoples. For example, the Kabardians call it "Damyge", the Adyghe "Tamyga", the Abkhaz "Adamyg", and in Russian literature it is written as "Tavro" or "Tanba". In the Kyrgyz language, the word "tam" also has meanings related to ignition or combustion. In the Azerbaijani language it is called "Damga" [9; 153–174]. In Kazakh, the word "Tanba" is synonymous with "tutan" and "jan", both of which pertain to symbolic representation. The etymology of the word "Tanba" may contain meanings, such as knowing, solving or revealing a secret. The root of this word may be "Tany" [9; 153–174], which also means knowledge or resolution.

In Turkic tribal and clan traditions, the term *tanbaa* (or *damga*) denotes a handcrafted emblem functioning as a symbolic signature or identity marker. Of particular significance are the ancient Turkic alphabet symbols—especially those preserved in the Orkhon-Yenisey inscriptions from the Göktürk period—which compellingly illustrate the enduring cultural and communicative role of *tanba* across centuries.

The “Orkhon Inscriptions” first came to light in 1889. (The 1 figure illustrates the ancient runic inscription discovered on a stone tablet from the Yenisei region, which reads: “Orkhon Warriors”. Figure 1. H. Nurgül Begič, Hamdiye Önal Çapık. Taken c from page 161 of the article published in 2020, “Orkhon Inscriptions” have taken a significant place in history). The famous monument was first read by one of the pioneers, the Danish Turkologist Vilhelm Ludvig Peter Thomsen (1842–1927), who, after studying the inscriptions in 1893, concluded: “The monument was erected under the orders of Kultegin and Bilge Khagan, and the inscriptions on the stone have been proved to be written in Old Turkic”. The symbols used in this script have been referred to as runic and their similarity to the symbols of the ancient Scandinavian alphabet has also been noted. In addition, near the Hacı Bayram Mosque in Ankara’s Altındağ district stands the Temple of Augustus, originally constructed on the site of a Phrygian sanctuary. According to historical accounts, it was commissioned around 25–20 BCE by Pilamenes, son of the last Galatian ruler Amintas, as a gesture of allegiance to the Roman Emperor Augustus. Thomsen was particularly surprised to find that the inscriptions on both monuments contained common symbols written in the ancient Turkic “runic” script. Thomsen was particularly surprised to find that the inscriptions on both monuments contained common symbols written in the ancient Turkic “runic” script.

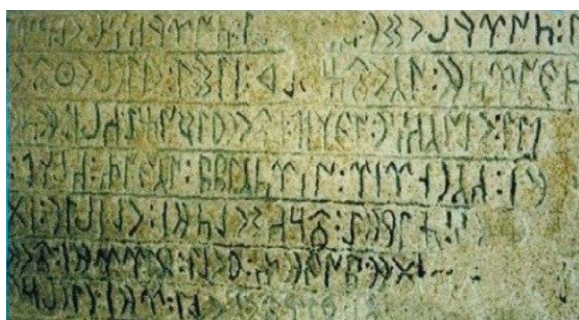


Figure 1. Orkhon inscriptions

In 1072–1074, Mahmud Kashgari, in his work *Diwan Lughat al-Turk*, written in Baghdad as a dictionary in both Turkic and Arabic languages, specifically noted that the word “*Tanba*” is derived from Persian and that the Turkic people currently use both the words “*Tanba*” and “*Damga*” interchangeably [10; 679].

In the context of Kazakh society, the evolution of clan and tribal *tanbas*, influenced by the progression of traditions and ideologies, has resulted in the preservation of their fundamental forms. This preservation has been observed even during periods of significant historical upheaval, with modifications to *tanbas* being confined to minor additions. The alteration of a clan's *tanba* was considered a loss of its value or independence, underscoring the cultural significance and the resilience of these symbols. The evolution of *tanbas* can be categorised into two primary forms: branching, involving the addition of lines to the primary *tanba*, and merging, entailing the amalgamation of two *tanbas* into a single entity. However, it is noteworthy that *tanbas* belonging to related clans, such as those shared between Kazakhs and Nogais, frequently exhibit significant disparities. For instance, the Naiman *tanba* among the Nogais is depicted as a “hammer,” while the Kereit *tanba* is a “sword,” and the Argyn *tanba* is a “comb”—distinct from their Kazakh counterparts [11; 265].

(Fig. 2. *Tanba Symbols of Kazakh Clans and Tribes*. Adapted from the article “Review of Clan Symbols of the Altai Kazakhs” by Shynarbek Seitkhan and Samat Kairollayevich Samashev, available at <https://www.archeokz.com/index.php/archeokz/article/view/457>).

№	Ру атаулары	Монгол деректеріндегі қазақ ру таңбалары	Қытай деректеріндегі қазақ ру таңбалары	Түркия деректеріндегі қазақ ру таңбалары	Қазақстан деректеріндегі қазақ ру таңбалары
	КЕРЕЙ				☐+X
1	Итегі	☉			
2	Жәдік	⌋		⌋	⌋
3	Жәнтекей	※ # } ?	† 卅		3
4	Шеруші	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ		//	
5	Қаракас	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ
6	Молқы	ㄗ			ㄗ ㄗ
7	Шыбарайғыр	ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ		
8	Меркит	ㄗ			
9	Жастабан	ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ
10	Сарбас	// //		//	
11	Көңсадақ	Δ		Δ	Δ
12	Құлтайбозат	ㄗ ㄗ		ㄗ	ㄗ

	НАЙМАН	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
1	Терістанбалы	ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
2	Сарыжомарт	ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
3	Бағиналы	ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
4	Баятлы		ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
5	Қаракерей	ㄗ	ㄗ		ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
6	Матай	ㄗ ㄗ	ㄗ		ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
7	Садыр		ㄗ ㄗ		ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
8	Ергенекті				ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ

9	Бура				ㄗ
	АРҒЫН	ㄗ ㄗ		ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ
	Жоғарғы шекті			ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ
	Төменгі шекті			ㄗ	ㄗ ㄗ
	УАҚ	ㄗ ㄗ ㄗ			ㄗ
	ТӨРЕ	ㄗ ㄗ			

Figure 2. Tanba Symbols of Kazakh Clans and Tribes

The tanba symbols of the Altai Kazakhs have not previously been the subject of specialised research. Consequently, a new scientific project has been initiated, and research efforts are in their infancy. The tanba symbols of the Altai Kazakhs have not previously been the subject of specialised research. Consequently, a new scientific project has been initiated, and research efforts are in their infancy. The Kazakhs have historically inhabited the Altai region, and today they can be found in Kazakhstan, Russia, Mongolia, China, and Turkey (Kazakhs who migrated from Altai to Anatolia). A two-year archeo-ethnographic expedition to these regions is currently planned, and for the time being, the research team is reliant on extant written sources.

The tanbas of the Kazakhs of the Mongolian Altai has been addressed in the works of Gagaa Ovogtoi Zolbayar [11; 271]. However, no dedicated study has been conducted on the tanba of the Kazakhs living in the Russian Altai to date.

In addition to tanbas, rock inscriptions offer a rich reflection of the spiritual and cultural life of ancient Turkic tribes. These carvings function not only as artistic expressions but also as invaluable historical sources, shedding light on the worldview, social structures and belief systems of the era. Significant contributions to the field have been made by researchers such as A.Kh. Margulan and A.I. Shrenk, whose studies of rock inscriptions in Kazakhstan have yielded profound insights into the lifestyle and history of the Turkic peoples. During his 1842-1843 expeditions in Betpakdala, Shrenk linked these inscriptions to the Oghuz period, thereby extending the historical boundaries of the Turkic world and offering evidence of their migrations from Kazakhstan to Anatolia [12; 51]. These findings underscore the deep cultural and historical connections of the Turkic peoples, thus providing new avenues for understanding their ancient migrations, way of life, and cultural heritage.

These findings underscore the deep cultural and historical connections of the Turkic peoples, thus providing new avenues for understanding their ancient migrations, way of life, and cultural heritage.

In the historical development of the Turkic peoples, the term “symbol” or “tanba” was considered not only a mark or symbol, but also an important cultural heritage and a tool for social identification, playing a distinctive role in the differentiation of individuals and groups over the centuries, embodying both social and political significance.

In the early periods of nomadic warfare and throughout the history of the Turkic peoples, symbols were used in animal husbandry as identification marks on various parts of animals. The tradition of using symbols in Turkic culture spans from early periods till present and is considered an important phenomenon that has found its place in many elements of material culture. In addition, in order to regulate relations between neighbouring tribes, each tribe or clan displayed its unique characteristics by imprinting its specific symbol. In this way, the tradition of “imprinting symbols” became a significant mark representing the social structure and cultural values of the people. Along with the tradition of “stamp printing”, the tradition of “branding” animals, especially large or small species, to distinguish them from each other was also widespread. (The Figure 3 shows the moment of “branding” a lamb: Reference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2O81f21JubU>, taken from the YouTube channel).



Figure 3. the moment of “branding” a lamb

The most common methods of branding cattle are as follows: ear piercing or tattooing (marking the inner part of the ear with inked numbers), applying ear tags, marking the neck with leather tags (collars), cutting the ear or burning the horns to apply a number, etc. The most common methods of branding cattle are as follows: ear piercing or tattooing (marking the inner part of the ear with inked numbers), applying ear tags, marking the neck with leather tags (collars), cutting the ear or burning the horns to mark a number, etc. In the context of dairy farming, the most effective method is to mark the ears using a specialized device, known in scientific literature as the Ivanov method. The cutting and numbering of ears follows a specific, well-established pattern. For instance, the incision or notch in the centre of the ear denotes a specific number. The Ivanov method involves the use of a branding iron (identification implement) that is cooled to a temperature of 196 °C, employing either cold nitrogen or a mixture of alcohol and ice (a powerful cryogenic medium) as a cooling agent [13; 78].

The branding marks (numbers) on woolly animals are visible from a distance. This method is notable for its non-invasiveness, zero effect on animal’s integument, and its absence of scarring or other adverse effects on the quality of the skin [13; 78]. The application of the brand should be directed toward the visible and firm parts of the body. In Al-Iqna, it is stated: “The brand should be applied to the firm and visible parts of the body where wool does not grow much [14]. It is also recommended to brand the ears of sheep and the hips of camels and cows. This recommendation is based on the premise that the hip region is considered to be the body part that is least prone to discomfort. Additionally, the sparse wool in this area ensures that the branded mark will be clearly visible. To ensure optimal visibility of the mark, it is imperative that the animal is securely tied to a stand, its wool is shaved, and the area is meticulously cleansed with 96°C denatured ethyl or isoamyl alcohol. The duration of application of the branding iron to the animal’s body should be 30–35 seconds for a 6-7 month old calf, 35–40 seconds for a 6–18 month old heifer and 50–80 seconds for an adult cow, depending on its age. Initially, the branding iron is heated in a fire. It is important to note that coal and fuel oil are not utilised in the heating process, as they may cause severe damage to the animal’s skin. The

men of the household then prepare the animal for branding. The animal to be branded must be at least six months or one year old. In certain instances, adult animals may also undergo branding, particularly if they have been recently acquired. The preferred areas for branding are the dorsal region or the right and left hip area (Fig. 4: “A branded cow in the district of Kızılırmak near the city of Samsun, Republic of Turkey” from the article by Gül Seyfullah, 2024, page 123).



Figure 4. The symbol is printed cow. (Kızılırmak)

Following the completion of the branding process, the brands are subjected to a heating procedure involving exposure to fire. Thereafter, they are immersed in cartwheel oil for the purpose of cleansing. Subsequent to this, the brand is suspended in a location that is both dry and devoid of precipitation, whether on the grass or in a corner of the stable. The application of brands to animals is primarily indicative of the clan to which the family belongs. (Fig. 4) (Figure 5 is taken from page 123 of the article written by Gül Seyfullah in 2024). The brand design, crafted to mirror the clan's insignia, served to underscore pivotal aspects of the social structure, power system, and tribal relations of that era, preserving these elements through successive generations.



Figure 5. Ayiboğan (Ayıboğan) is a stamp of the dynasty for the animal. “Ram-headed stamp”

The evolution of the concept and function of brands has been a subject of interest for scholars in various fields. The evolution of the concept and function of brands has been a subject of interest for scholars in various fields. The transformation of brands from mere symbols of ownership to instruments for delineating individual rights and social status has been a focal point of analysis. As the role and prestige of brands in society became more clearly defined, their influence in shaping social inequality within a “private property” society became particularly significant. These brands have been employed across a variety of domains, including as emblems and logos, and have become integral components of traditions that encapsulate diverse facets of culture. Recent advances in the comprehensive study of the social and cultural functions of brands underscore their special place in the historical development of Turkic peoples. It was observed that brands had become not only symbols of ownership but also key tools representing national identity and cultural values.

In Central Asia and the Eurasian steppes, as well as in the Caucasus, brands functioned as a medium of communication, embodying a variety of meanings including cosmogonical, mythological, religious, economic, and cultural. In Turkish culture, the terms brand, mark, and “İm,” “En” were widely used, being common

in the neighbouring Azerbaijani region. These terms were recognised as shared concepts in the cultures and languages of both countries. The historical origin of the word “İM” [14; 153–174] in Old Turkish underscores its role as a cultural stamp, resonating not only in Anatolia and Azerbaijan but also among all Turkic-speaking communities. Such branding practices reveal deep-rooted cultural affinities between the two regions, with the term «İm» frequently appearing alongside expressions like “Uanış,” “Uanğış,” and “Uaneş” [14; 168], all connoting luxury and ornamentation. Closely embedded within the Turkish linguistic tradition, brands convey their meanings through material culture and their spiritual and symbolic significance.

Moreover, within the context of Turkish culture, there has been a preservation of cultural values such as brands, symbols, and marks from antiquity to the present era. In addition, the concept of “brand” [15; 168] is identified as a significant factor contributing to enrichment of the folkloric and ethnographic heritage of Turkic society. Despite the evolution in the scope of brand utilisation following the advent of Islam in Turkey, these elements continue to be widely employed across diverse domains, particularly in the realms of art and craftsmanship, manifesting in novel forms. In this regard, it is evident that Turkish individuals not only utilize their native languages but also preserve their distinctiveness and semantic nuances through artistic expression. Consequently, Turkish culture and art have played a pivotal role in shaping the inner nature and cultural values of diverse peoples and nations across various historical periods. In the context of Turkic society, brands have assumed a particularly salient role, serving as a tangible symbol of the profound connections and mutual understanding between the state, tribal and clan communities. These brands have emerged as pivotal conduits for comprehending the linguistic nuances of the nation, its ethnic and cultural differences.

In Central Asia, brands, especially those related to Shamanism, were widely used as representations of totems, gods, and spirits. The followers of the Shamanic religion utilised symbols and marks to safeguard sacred areas, defend against external threats and delineate their communities. According to the Shamanistic worldview, the utilisation of symbols and marks was regarded as a pivotal action aimed at establishing connections with the external world, summoning ancestral spirits to their aid, and fortifying the unity and protective power of the community. These symbols, in their capacity as symbolic representations, served not only as reflections of their beliefs and spiritual worldview but also functioned as tools to ensure the life and safety of the community.

As time passed, these symbols evolved to embody not only religious and cultural significance but also to become an integral component of the economic and social structure. In Central Asia, these marks not only served to identify cultural and ethnic differences but also functioned as indicators of economic relationships and social statuses. With the evolution of trade and socio-political structures, these marks transitioned into instruments that conveyed coded information pertaining to social order, superseding their mere visual symbolism.

It has been asserted that a brand constitutes an eternal symbol of history and functions as a spiritual bridge connecting the past and the present. The utilisation of brands by the Turkic peoples served primarily as an instrument for distinguishing, identifying, or expressing their distinctiveness to the external world, including domestic animals and household items of specific clans and tribes. Each brand and ornament, providing its own history, made people feel the distinctiveness of their culture and their civilizational existence.

The inscription of a brand on paper or stone constitutes more than a mere symbol; it is the code of a nation’s cultural existence. This code is a manifestation of geometric symbols, religion, mythology, and spiritual worldview. For the Turkic peoples, the brand symbolises unity and strength, spiritual uniqueness, and cultural development. In its historical context, the brand functioned as a marker of social inequality, representing a new image of society and history in the process of evolution and renewal.

From the moment of its selection, the brand thus came to embody not only culture and civilisation, but also a reflection of the psychological state and existence of the society during a particular era. The interpretation and utilisation of brands have been subject to constant evolution in response to the demands of the prevailing socio-cultural environment. Nevertheless, the brand has consistently retained its status as a spiritual value, serving as a guardian of uniqueness and distinctiveness within society. In the context of Turkic culture, the brand functions not only as a conduit for interaction with the external world but also as a mirror of the inner world, wielding considerable influence over the spiritual realm of the individual and shaping their behaviour and perspectives. The brand is underpinned by a series of ideas and values that are widely recognised. These ideas have had a profound impact on the collective consciousness of society, shaping its historical, political and cultural development.

The brands used by tribes and clans were primarily intended to distinguish ethnic groups from each other and highlight their characteristics. However, for Turkic tribes, these brands not only served as means of

distinction but also played a role in becoming the main symbol that defined their ethnic unity and common existence. The creation of the "we" concept by the Turkic tribes, through the use of these symbols to distinguish themselves from foreign nations and neighboring tribes, was a step toward strengthening their national unity. According to the provided information, these brands functioned not only as cultural and domestic markers but also as instruments for transmitting economic information. In other words, brands in the lives of Turkic peoples were not just symbols of ethnic distinction but also became important communication tools for regulating economic and trade relations.

In the early medieval Turkic states, which were composed of tribal and ethnopolitical unions, the role of brands was elevated to a special status. In particular, brands played a unique role in the administrative governance system, foreign policy, and other state affairs. The concept of a brand is predicated on encoded graphic information, which reflects the ancient philosophy of the proto-Turks. The deciphering of this information necessitates the application of the laws of nature and logic.

In the ancient Turkic states, a brand was not only a symbol of ruling power and the state system but also a mark representing the nation's spiritual independence and cultural heritage. The significance of the brand is such that it serves as a repository for the spirit of a particular generation, its values, and worldview, enduring continuity and cultural transmission.

The utilisation of the brand in the Turkic Khaganate served as a primary symbol of power. For instance, the Khagan's brand was known as "Tughyrak," and subsequently, within the Western Turkic Khaganate, it was designated "Tughri" [15; 171]. This concept was pivotal in defining power and social status, thereby illustrating the precise structure of political and social relations.

The article discusses the historical and cultural significance of the Turkic peoples' brands and their role in the social and political context. The author's observations reveal that brands not only served to denote ethnic distinction but also functioned as symbols of social status and power. The utilisation of these brands as instruments for establishing connections between disparate periods and cultures is also highlighted.

The symbols of the Turkic world possessed unique symbolic meanings and played an important role in cultural, political, and economic relations with neighbouring peoples. These symbols were utilised as a means of determining social status and marking one's place in society [15; 171]. Through their symbols, each tribe and clan expressed their strength, spiritual world, character, and culture. Despite the variability in the specific meanings attributed to these symbols, their overarching significance remained consistent across diverse Turkic communities. These symbols served not only as mere marks but also as conduits for expressing the nation's inner essence, its national spirit, and its cultural identity.

The emergence of symbols in the history of brands functioned not only as a conduit for establishing connections with the external world but also as a pivotal element in defining the evolving worldview of society, the spiritual realm of individuals, and their position within societal structures. The role of symbols is of particular significance in this regard, given that they evolved over time, acquiring new meanings and assuming an important place in social, political and cultural contexts.

The cultural heritage of the early Turks has not lost its philosophical depth or historical significance even today. These symbols and marks, preserved in traditional arts and design, continue to exert a profound influence on the future of Turkic culture. Each symbol serves as a cultural conduit, connecting the past and future of the Turkic peoples.

In order to uncover meanings of these ancient symbols, it is necessary to analyze symbolic system of medieval Turks from semiotic point of view [15; 172]. Each geometric line in ancient Turkic symbols carries special historical significance and represents a specific system [15; 173]. In this analysis, it is important to consider current methodological achievements and shortcomings and explore comprehensive research approaches.

As time passed, the use and meaning of symbols underwent a transformation, evolving from a mere mark of ownership into a means of delineating individual rights and social status. As the role and prestige of symbols in society became clearer, their significance in shaping "private property system" and social inequality became particularly pronounced. These symbols manifested in diverse domains, including emblems and logos, and became integral components of traditions that traditions that codified and differentiated cultural practices and values.

Conclusions

The utilisation of symbols and marks by Turkic peoples is not merely an exercise in aesthetic and symbolic significance; rather, it is a vital element that regulates cultural, social, and political structures. From

ancient times to the present, symbols have played a multifaceted role in Turkic society, defining the unique characteristics of individuals, their social status, and their place within the community. As a component of cultural heritage, these stamps serve to preserve the historical and developmental narratives of Turkic peoples, thereby ensuring their transmission across generations and honouring their rich past [15; 178]. The systematic study of marks in Turkic culture offers profound insights into the spiritual and material heritage of these societies. Symbols have become a cornerstone of Turkic folklore and ethnographic traditions, illuminating diverse aspects of their culture. Their contemporary application in traditional arts, crafts, and modern design continues to foster the renewal and evolution of Turkic cultural expressions. This research deepens our understanding of the historical culture of Turkic peoples, exploring the interplay between symbols and social structures, economic relations, political systems, and spiritual worldviews. It recontextualizes Turkic history and culture while providing a foundation for revitalizing the use of symbols and cultural traditions in modern contexts.

The findings are applicable across multiple disciplines, including archaeology, history, ethnography, and cultural studies. They also serve as a valuable resource for promoting and preserving the cultural heritage of Turkic peoples, shaping national identity, and inspiring modern symbol and stamp design. By comparing existing studies on the tanbas of the Altai Kazakhs abroad with current Kazakh tanba research, we conclude that: The tanba symbols of the Altai Kazakhs have not been the focus of specialised research until now, calling for systematic investigation and interdisciplinary analysis. The Kazakh people, whose historical roots are firmly established in the Altai region, are now dispersed across a number of countries, including Kazakhstan, Russia, Mongolia, China, and Turkey. A two-year archeo-ethnographic expedition to these regions is currently planned, although the present research relies on written sources. The tanbas of Kazakhs in Xinjiang Altai, Turkey, and Mongolian Altai have been documented by scholars such as Su Beihai, Khalifa Altay, and Gagaa Ovogtoi Zolbayar. However, the tanbas of Kazakhs in the Russian Altai remain underexplored. This research underscores the cultural and historical significance of tanbas and paves the way for future studies, ensuring the preservation and revitalization of Turkic cultural heritage.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my profound gratitude to S.K. Samashev, the scientific leader of the “AP23486716: The Sign System and Stamps of the Altai Kazakhs” project, and the Berel State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve. The scientific significance and importance of this project are immense, and these studies provide a valuable opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the history and cultural heritage of the Kazakh people. I am deeply appreciative of the funding and resources provided by the project, which made this research possible.

References

- 1 Gül S. Türk kültüründe hayvan damgalama geleneği: Samsun yöresi örneği / S. Gül // Milli Folklor. — 2024. — № 18(141). — C. 115–132.
- 2 Massaget.kz [Электронный ресурс]. — Режим доступа: <https://massaget.kz/blogs/kone-turklerdn-tanba-dastur-tarih-jane-sabaktastyik-29746/>
- 3 Rıza N. Tanba ou tag marque au fer chaud à Sinofé / N. Rıza // Journal Asiatique. — 1928. — № 212. — C. 148–151.
- 4 Kairjanov A. Türk runik alfabesinin kökeni hakkında yeni yaklaşımlar / A. Kairjanov // Kültür Sanat Edebiyat Dergisi. — 2014. — № 5(28). — C. 141–150.
- 5 Karatayev O. Damgalar ve onların işlevleri (fonksiyonları) / O. Karatayev, K. Janibekova // Türk Uluslararası Dil, Edebiyat ve Halkbilimi Araştırmaları Dergisi. — 2016. — C. 163–179.
- 6 Yıldırım A. Sosyal bilimlerde nitel araştırma yöntemleri / A. Yıldırım, H. Simsek. — Ankara, 2008. — C. 113–118.
- 7 Fossey E. Understanding and evaluating qualitative research / E. Fossey // Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry. — 2002. — № 36(6). — C. 717–732.
- 8 Yalçın R. Anadolu’da Türk damgaları. Uludağ’dan Toroslar’a / R. Yalçın. — Bursa, 1943.
- 9 Begiç H. Anadolu kültüründe damga / tanba / dövme: Mardin örneği / H. Begiç, H. Çapık // Milli Folklor. — 2020. — № 16(126). — C. 153–174.
- 10 Duran R. Motiflere dönüşmüş Türk damgaları — geometrik motiflere farklı bir bakış / R. Duran // 21. Uluslararası Ortaçağ ve Türk Dönemi Kazıları ve Sanat Tarihi Araştırmaları Sempozyumu Bildirileri. — 2019. — C. 679–698.
- 11 Сейтхан С. Алтай қазақтарының ру танбаларын қарастыру / С. Сейтхан, С.К. Самашев // Қазақстан Археологиясы. — 2024. — № 3(25). — Б. 262–273.
- 12 Архив РАН. — Ф. 317. — Оп. 1. — Д. 1–54. — Л. 1–142.

13 Тореханов, А.А. Ірі кара шаруашылығы / А.А. Тореханов, Ж.Қ. Каримов, Ш.Д. Даленов, Д.Қ. Найманов, Н.О. Жазылбеков. — Алматы, 2006. — 408 б.

14 Ihsan.kz [Электронный ресурс]. — Режим доступа: <https://www.ihsan.kz/kk/articles/view/10717>

15 Korman M. Sinop at damgalari. Konya Mecmuası / M. Korman. — 1941. — Т. V, № 36. — С. 13–17.

Б.Е. Сатаева, Б.А. Сиражева

«ТАНБА» және «ДАМГА» таңбаларының түркі қоғамындағы мұрасы: Түркі және Алтай қазақтарының мысалындағы көзқарас

Мақалада тамғалар мен мөрлердің Түркі қоғамдарындағы, әсіресе Алтай қазақтарындағы терең мәдени, әлеуметтік және рухани маңыздылығы зерттелген. Бұл белгілер алғашында тек меншік иесі ретінде қолданылғанымен, уақыт өте келе этникалық сәйкестік, әлеуметтік иерархия және рухани сенімдердің қуатты бейнесіне айналды. Алғашында меншік идентификаторы ретінде пайдаланылған таңбалар, уақыт өте келе билік, бірлік және аумақтық бақылау белгілеріне айналып, Түркі дүниетанымына терең сіңіп кетті. Олар шаманизммен байланысты болып, материалдық және рухани әлемдер арасындағы байланысты бейнелейтін қорғаушы және метафизикалық рөлдерге ие болды. Тамғалардың тілдік және географиялық әртүрлілігі олардың бейімделу мүмкіндігін және Түркі тілдес аймақтардағы кеңінен таралған ықпалын айқындайды. Тамғалардың Орхон жазбалары мен Құтадғу Біліктің «Құтты білік» сияқты ежелгі мәтіндерде кездесуі олардың тарихи және қазіргі контекстегі маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Түркі халықтары арасында тамғалардың қазіргі таңдағы қолданылуы олардың мәдени сәйкестікті ұрпақтан-ұрпаққа сақтай алу қабілетін дәлелдейді. Бұл зерттеу тамғалардың тек меншік белгілері емес, сондай-ақ әлеуметтік мәртебе, қауымдастық және дүниетаным туралы ақпарат беретін мәдени белгілер екендігін дәлелдейді, сонымен қатар ежелгі және қазіргі Түркі қоғамдарының рухани және саяси динамикасы туралы маңызды мәліметтер береді.

Кілт сөздер: тамға, мөр, түркі мәдениеті, Алтай қазақтары, әлеуметтік құрылым, этникалық белгілер, діни символизм, түркі тайпалары, руна.

Б.Е. Сатаева, Б.А. Сиражева

Следы наследия «ТАНБА» и «ДАМГА» в турецком обществе: взгляд на примере тюркских и алтайских казахов

В статье рассматривается культурное, социальное и духовное значение тамги и штампов в тюркских обществах, с особым акцентом на Алтайских казахов. Эти символы выходят за рамки их первоначальной функции как простых маркеров собственности и становятся значимыми маркерами этнической идентичности, социальной иерархии и духовных верований. Изначально использовавшиеся для обозначения собственности, тамги трансформировались в символы власти, единства и территориального контроля, глубоко интегрированные в тюркскую мировоззренческую традицию. Связанные с шаманизмом, они также приобрели защитные и метафизические роли, олицетворяя связь между материальным и духовным мирами. Лингвистическое и географическое разнообразие тамг подчеркивает их приспособляемость и широкое влияние в тюркоязычных регионах, от Кавказа до Центральной Азии. Их присутствие в древних текстах, таких как Орхонские надписи и «Кутадгу Билиг», свидетельствует о продолжающейся важности этих символов как в историческом, так и в современном контексте. Продолжающееся использование тамг тюркскими народами демонстрирует их устойчивость и способность сохранять культурную идентичность на протяжении поколений. В статье доказывается, что тамги являются не только знаками собственности, но и культурными эмблемами, которые передают социальный статус, принадлежность и мировоззрение, предоставляя ключ к осмыслению духовной и политической динамики как древних, так и современных тюркских обществ.

Ключевые слова: тамга, печать, тюркская культура, алтайские казахи, социальная структура, этнические знаки, религиозный символизм, тюркские племена, руны.

References

1 Gül, S. (2024). *Türk Kültüründe Hayvan Damgalama Geleneği: Samsun Yöresi Örneği* [The Tradition of Animal Branding in Turkic Culture: The Case of the Samsun Region]. Milli Folklor, 18 (141), 115–132 [in Turkish].

- 2 «Massaget.kz». *massaget.kz*. Retrieved from <https://massaget.kz/blogs/kone-turklerdn-tanba-dastur-tarih-jane-sabaktastyik-29746/>.
- 3 Rıza, N. (1928). *Tanba ou Tag Marque au Fer Chaud a Sinofo* [Branding or Hot Iron Marking in Turkic Culture: The Case of Sinop]. *Journal Asiatique*, 212, 148–151 [in French].
- 4 Kaiyrzhanov, A. (2014). Türk Runik Alfabetesinin Kökeni Hakkında Yeni Yaklaşımlar [New Approaches to the Origins of the Turkic Runic Alphabet]. *Kültür Sanat Edebiyat Dergisi — Culture Art Literature Magazine*, 5 (28), 141–150 [in Turkish].
- 5 Karatayev, O., & Janibekova, K. (2016). Damgalar ve Onların İşlevleri (Fonksiyonları) [Symbols and Their Functions]. *Türk Uluslararası Dil, Edebiyat ve Halkbilimi Araştırmaları Dergisi — Turkish International Language, Literature and Folklore Researches Journal*, 163–179 [in Turkish].
- 6 Yıldırım, A., & Simsek, H. (2008). *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri* [Qualitative Research Methods in Social Sciences]: Kitap, Ankara [in Turkish].
- 7 Fossey, E. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 36 (6), 717–732.
- 8 Yalçın, R. (1943). *Anadolu'da Türk Damgaları. Uludağ'dan Toroslar'a* [Turkish Symbols in Anatolia: From Uludağ to the Taurus Mountains]. *Kniga: Bursa* [in Turkish].
- 9 Begiç, H., & Çapık, H. (2020). Anadolu Kültüründe Damga / Tanba / Dövme: Mardin Örneği [Symbols/Tanba/Branding in Anatolian Culture: The Example of Mardin]. *Milli Folklor*, 16 (126), 153–174 [in Turkish].
- 10 Duran, R. (2019). Motiflere Dönüşmüş Türk Damgaları — Geometrik Motiflere Farklı Bir Bakış [Turkic Symbols as Motifs — An Alternative Perspective on Geometric Patterns]. *21. Uluslararası Ortaçağ ve Türk Dönemi Kazıları ve Sanat Tarihi Araştırmaları Sempozyumu Bildirileri — 21st International Symposium of the Middle Ages and Turkish-Period Excavations and Art History Researches* (pp. 679–698) [in Turkish].
- 11 Seitkhan, S., & Samashev, S. K. (2024). Altai qazaqtarynyn ru tanbalaryn qarastyru [Examining the Clan Symbols of the Altai Kazakhs]. *Qazaqstan Arkheologiiasy — Kazakhstan Archeology*, № 3(25), 262–273 [in Kazakh].
- 12 RAN [Russian Academy of Sciences Archive]. — F. 317. — Op. 1. — D. 1–54. — L. 1–142 [in Russian].
- 13 Torekhanov, A.A., Karimov, Zh.K., Dalenov, Sh.D., Naimanov, D.K., & Zhazylbekov, N.O. (2006). *Iri qara sharuashylygy* [Beef Cattle Farming]. Almaty [in Kazakh].
- 14 «Ihsan.kz». *ihsan.kz*. Retrieved from <https://www.ihsan.kz/kk/articles/view/10717>.
- 15 Korman M. (1941). *Sinop At Damgaları Konya Mecmuası* [Branding of Horses in the Sinop Region]. 13–17 [in French].

Information about the authors

Satayeva Botakoz — PhD Student, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Letters, Department of Archaeology, Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Ankara, Turkey, <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4454-9380>

Sirazheva Bulbul — PhD Student, Farabi Eurasian Studies Practice and Research Center, Istanbul University, Istanbul, Turkey, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7013-415X>