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TAMGA KAIP TIURKŲ TARPGENTINIŲ IR TARPKULTŪRINIŲ SANTYKIŲ ELEMENTAS SENOVĖS ISTORIJOJOS IR VIDURAMŲŲ LAIKOTARPIAIS

Tamga as an Element of Intertribal
and Intercultural Relations of the Turks in the Periods
of Ancient History and the Middle Ages

SUMMARY

The study of the history and culture of different peoples, especially their intercultural interactions, deepens our understanding of world history. The aim of this article is to determine the role of tamgas in the intertribal and intercultural relations of steppe peoples during the ancient and medieval periods. A systematic analysis of various sources identifies tamgas as tribal distinguishing marks, artisan symbols, signs of aristocracy, and indicators of allegiance to Mongolian rulers. The study highlights the interactions of the tamga with the ancient Hungarians, the Indians, the Chinese, and the Rurik dynasty. The study presents a generalised view of the role of the tamga for the Turks in specific historical periods.

SANTRAUKA

Nagrinddami įvairių tautų istoriją ir kultūrą, ypač jų tarpkultūrinę sąveiką, gilineame pasaulio istorijos supratimą. Šio straipsnio tikslas – nustatyti tamgų vaidmenį, plėtojantis tarpgentiniams bei tarpkultūriniais stepių tautų santykiams senovės istorijos ir Viduramžių laikotarpiams. Sistemingai analizuojant įvairius šaltinius, tamgos šiame tyrime traktuojamos kaip genčių skirtumai, amatininkų simboliai, aristokratiniai ženklai ir ištikimybės Mongolijos valdovams rodikliai. Be to, atskleidžiama, kaip tamga susijusi su senovės vengrais, indėnais, kinais ir Ruriko dinastija. Atlikus tyrimą, pateikiamas apibendrintas požiūris į tai, kaip tamgos paveikė tiurkus tam tikrais istoriniais laikotarpiais.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: ženklas, sarmatai, Tiurkų kaganatas, Mongolų imperija, Girėjų dinastija.

KEY WORDS: sign, Sarmatians, Turkic Khaganate, Mongol Empire, Giray dynasty.

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of tamgas has a historical context that spans thousands of years. Evidence suggests ancient Turkic, Mongolic, and even some Indo-European tribes used tamgas. Their purpose was multifaceted. Tamgas marked property, especially livestock, indicating ownership and tribal affiliations. They also functioned as signatures on official documents and represented familial, clan, or tribal identities. Furthermore, tamgas were crucial in tribal diplomacy as different tribes recognized each other's symbols, facilitating diplomacy, trade, and alliances. The design of these marks was typically geometric, unique to each clan or tribe, and evolved over time with the merging or splitting of tribes (Koshymova and Mensitova 2022). Tamgas bear significant scientific and cultural importance in the study of Eurasian nomadic cultures. They're found on various artifacts, from rocks to manuscripts, and can aid researchers in tracing tribal interactions, deducing historical events, and understanding cultural exchanges between nomadic and sedentary populations. In contemporary times, remnants of the tamga tradition persist in emblems and symbols of regions and nations with historical connections to Turkic or Mongolic tribes. Within the scientific literature, tamgas feature prominently in discussions related to archaeology, anthropology, history, and ethnology, especially concerning Central Asian, Turkic, and Mongolic studies. An artifact bearing a tamga can unveil invaluable insights into its origin, age, and the cultural milieu of its creation.

The culture of the Turkic peoples is a rather complex and versatile phenomenon, attracting the attention of many scientists and is a topical topic for study in the present. In turn, tamga is one of the most essential cultural elements of the Turks. Tamgas at all times of history have been essential in peoples' lives, however their meaning was no single and was changing in the course of historical events. Thus, the research of tamgas is essential in the context of studying the culture and history of the Turkic peoples. Moreover, as it will be depicted in this scientific work, tamgas were an element of intercultural relationships with other peoples, so the study of this aspect allows a further comprehension of certain historical processes. The problem of this study lies in the fact that tamgas, although they are signs that look simply, they have a deep content basis, so it is often complicated to determine the purpose of a particular tamga. What is more, as it has already been noted, Turkic symbols carried various functions in different time periods, which also creates a few problems in the study of tamgas.

In the research on tamgas, the first stage involved selecting and analyzing abundant literature on Turkic symbolism to discern between accurate and outdated information. The next stage synthesized the diverse data across a broad timeframe to derive new assumptions and conclusions. This was followed by a critical comparison of Turkic tamgas with symbols from other cultures to understand intercultural influences. Finally, after examining a multitude of sources,

the study aimed to distill specific insights and generalize findings to arrive at concrete conclusions about tamgas.

The examination of tamgas has begun recently since it was in the 2000s that several archaeological artefacts with images of tamgas were discovered (Baddam et al. 2022; Revesz 2022). This has attracted the attention of numerous researchers, attempting to determine the meaning of these symbols. N. Galimova in her work attempted to give a general description of the Turkic signs and considered them as patrimonial symbols (Galimova 2022). In her work, the researcher studied the historical period of the Middle Ages in the context of the development and exploitation of tamgas by certain noble families. Another researcher, having made a significant contribution to the study of tamgas is S. K. Samashev who in his work carried out an analysis and description of specific discoveries of tamgas, dating back to the ancient period of history (Samashev 2020). During the study, the author managed to extend the general information about the origins and emergence of Turkic tamgas. The study by the historian B. Lyonnet who in his work studied the artifacts with images of tamgas on Roman armament is vital (Lyonnet 2022).

This research created the hypothesis of cultural exchange between the Romans and the Sarmatians, which will be described in more detail in this paper. The study by A. Baddam et al. presents an examination of the discoveries of tamgas in Govi-Altai (Baddam et al. 2022). The study allows unveiling of the traditions of using tamgas not only as patrimonial or tribal symbols, but also certain charms, due to which it is possible to expand knowledge about the scope of the exploitation of tamgas. In the context of considering the role of tamgas as an element of intercultural relationships, it is necessary to consider the achievements studies the artefacts with tamgas on the border with modern China, indicating the relationship between the Turks and Chinese peoples.

The purpose of this article is to study the role of tamgas in the history of the Turkic peoples and their cultural exchange with other ethnic groups in the period of ancient history and the Middle Ages. During the study, it was necessary to determine general facts about tamgas, describe and analyse certain discoveries of tamgas, determine their significance in the life of the Turks in different time periods, and explore their role in intercultural relationships with other peoples.

RESULTS

The history of the tamga has deep roots, since this element of social relationships began to be used much earlier than representatives of the Turkic peoples started doing it. Archaeological data prove that such symbols were used

by the nomadic tribes of the Bronze Age and the Scythians in the territory of Central Asia and the Northern Black Sea region (Samashev 2020). However, based upon the materials of the study, during which the ancient Scythian and Turkic

signs were compared, it may be said that these symbols are not related to those applied by the Turks. The very first signs that can be called tamgas appeared in the 2nd century BC (Before Christ) and were exploited by the representatives of Sarmatian tribes. Then these signs were used as an element of intertribal relationships for the purpose of self-identification of people and marking of property. Subsequently, the Turks adopted these symbols into their culture and started applying them in intertribal relations. It should also be noted that at that time tamgas were used as an element of writing (Vasilache 2022). Findings of tamgas, which were used as a writing (Revesz

2022), are common in the south of modern Kazakhstan, on the border with the People's Republic of China. Particularly, in the Kazakh regions of Almaty and Zhetysu. Given the geographical spread of these artefacts and the discovery of similar ones, however not identical petrographs in China, it may be concluded that there is a certain level of cultural interaction between the Chinese and Turkic peoples.

Another significant artefact dates to the period of the 1st century AD (Anno Domini). This artefact was found in the rock inscriptions of Altai Mountains (Figure 1; 2). Scientists consider this discovery and the writing language to be



Figure 1. A tamga artefact in the Altai Mountains. *Source: Revesz 2022.*

Old Hungarian. It should be clear that the Old Hungarian language is also called the language that was common in the kingdom of Hungary in the period from the 10th to the 16th century AD. However, in this case it is talking about the language used by representatives of the Hungarian tribes living in Asia until the moment when their individual groups migrated to Europe. An essential point in this study regarding the artefact is that among these inscriptions there is a certain number of symbols identical to the Turkic tamga of the Kuns clan. The Kuns were Turkic people living in the period of the 7–13th centuries. It should be noted that it was not possible to decipher the meaning of the tamga under study in the context of this discovery (Revesz 2022).

There are discoveries in the Gobi-Altai region that are necessary for consideration. This area is in a mountain range, and is characterised by finds of stones, which were most likely placed by people specifically at the crossroads. Additionally, runic inscriptions were found on these stones. During further analysis, it became clear that these runes are illustrations of tamgas, however the question of their meaning remains open (Galimova 2022). Based upon the information that these stones were at the crossroads and far from settlements, it may be assumed that the depicted tamgas functioned as amulets for travellers. Another significant discovery is a Turkic burial called Karakabak, which is in the northwestern region of modern Kazakhstan – Mangistau. During the excavations and research of this site, tamga symbols



Figure 2. Tamga of the Kun tribe. *Source: Revesz 2022.*



Figure 3. A tamga discovery in Mangistau. *Source: Samashev 2020.*

carved on stones were found. This discovery dates to the 4–5th centuries AD, that is, during the period of activity of the Hun nomads on this territory (Samashev 2020). The very design of the discovered tamga is interesting, since it is almost identical to another well-known symbol – the swastika (Figure 3). Thus,

there is good reason to assume that there was the cultural interaction of the Turkic tribes with the Indians, since this symbol may often be found during the research of Indian monuments. Given the above, it can be talked about a certain influence of the Indo-European culture upon the culture of the Turks.

The question of how the term “tamga” is translated remains an issue. The essence of this problem lies in the fact that the word tamga is translated differently in various Turkic languages. Thus, this definition may be translated as a mark, seal, symbol, patrimonial sign, etc., and each of these translations is correct, since tamgas were used as a symbol of one or another clan or tribe and were applied in clerical work (Galimova 2022). Given the above-mentioned facts, it may be concluded that the tamga is a patrimonial sign that representatives of the Turkic peoples exploited to designate their own property and conduct clerical work. In historiography, the 5th century AD is marked by the beginning of the Middle Ages, during which changes took place in numerous areas of life. Central Asia is no exception. The period from 552 to 602 is essential, since at that time there was a large Turkic state – the First Turkic Khaganate. One of the factors in the formation of this state was the establishment of the trade artery of the Silk Road by the Chinese (Novozhenov 2023). In addition, during this period, feudal relationships arise, because of which the influence of certain clans on other populations increases. Subsequently, the Turkic Khaganate disintegrates, and at the same time, military activity begins

against neighboring countries. As a result, one can observe the rise in the authority of military commanders.

The factors mentioned above are essential in the context of this study, since with the strengthening of the role of certain clans, a transformation of the role of the tamga from a tribal symbol to a patrimonial sign is observed. Thus, the tamga may be considered a heraldic element that was applied at the level of coats of arms in European countries. In addition, it is worth noting that there were not so many skilled craftsmen on the territory of the Turkic Khaganate since this difficult craft could not be mastered by everyone. This was especially true for blacksmiths, who were in demand, since it was they who made things needed in military campaigns. In particular, the elements of horse harness were distinguished by a high level of craftsmanship. For nomads, the horse was not just an animal, however the main resource for survival and having a traditional lifestyle. Thus, cavalry armor was of great significance in the life of the Turkic peoples, and all of them were designated by special tamgas, which were applied as a hallmark of one or another master.

Subsequently, at the beginning of the second millennium AD, the strengthening of the Mongolian state was observed. It started conducting active expansion, during which it was possible to seize and include the lands of the Turkic Khaganate. It is important to note that the Mongols were not barbarians, demolishing everything on their way; on the contrary, they were tolerant towards all

peoples who voluntarily decided to become their subjects (Koniratbay et al. 2023). Genghis Khan had some kind of legal code called the Great Yassa. According to this document, it was forbidden to discredit cultural and religious objects. Thus, tamgas as tribal symbols not only were not lost, but increased their significance, since numerous Turkic aristocrats sided with the Mongols (Man 2014). During this period of history, the tamga acquired another function. Noble families started exploiting it in the paperwork as a signature and seal. Thus, the tamga ceased to be just a symbol of one kind or another and acquired the meaning of a separate element of paperwork and social relationships. In addition, the application of tamga on the documents of the Golden Horde was a sign of the commitment of the Turks to the Mongols (Galimova 2022).

Recent scientific research, based upon the study of a few French book miniatures, indicate that tamgas played a significant part in the history of the Golden Horde. Such conclusions were reached by means of analysing the miniatures depicted in the books and showing the battles of Mongols against Christians. Thus, in the mentioned miniatures, several images of geometric figures were found, almost identical to numerous Turkic tamgas (Shishka 2021). Since tamgas were exploited in several areas of human life, it can be concluded that they conveyed a deep symbolic meaning. However, the problem is that there is no consensus as to what exactly this meaning was. If we consider the tamgas, which looked like a circle, as the artefact

from the Karakabak burial, then we may assume that these symbols are associated with pagan beliefs of the life cycle. In the culture of numerous nations, the circle is a symbol of life-giving power and recurrence. Also, the circle is often interpreted as a symbol of the sun, in particular, such examples can be found in the culture of the peoples of almost the entire world, for instance, the Irish, Peruvians, Africans. Regarding the Turkic people, the symbol of the circle was rather popular and is found in numerous tamgas. Particularly, the mentioned symbol was widely exploited among the peoples inhabiting the territory of the North Caucasus.

Additionally, the Turkic tamgas basically had not only images of a circle, but also other shapes. Thus, bident or trident were common, and was often exploited by representatives of the reigning families. Therefore, in the 13-14th centuries AD, numerous Golden Horde families applied these symbols, which is confirmed by a significant number of tamgas minted on coins (Galimova 2022). Among the most famous representatives of the reigning Turkic aristocracy, who exploited the tamga of the trident in their heraldry, was the Khan family of Giray. Giray-Kerey is the common name of one of the Turkic clans, their descendants, in question, ruled in the Crimean Khanate under the name of Giray. Their patrimonial sign looked like an inverted trident, in which the limbs of the lateral cusplets pointed in different directions (Figure 4). The interpretation of this symbol is quite broad. On the one hand, based upon the fact that tamgas of this and similar type



Figure 4. Tamga of the Giray family. *Source: River 2020.*

in the Crimean Khanate were applied only on luxury items and symbols of power, it may be assumed that this tamga was exclusively a symbol of power. One should also pay attention to the similarity of this sign with the symbols of the princely families of the Varangian Rurik dynasty. In particular, the trident was a symbol of the power of Svyatoslav and his son Vladimir. Thus, a certain Norman influence on the symbolism of the Turks may be observed (River 2020).

Summing up the above-mentioned information, the author designed it as Table 1, in order to better illustrate the purpose of tamgas during several time periods.

The visual embodiment of tamgas was inspired by the embodiment of various elements of sacred content, spiritual values, and ideas. The patterns of the tamgas often acquired images of complex calligraphy, the elements of which were various ornamental motifs, particularly, circles, pentagons, crosses, tridents, crescents. Another essential factor is that there was a prohibition on changing the shape of the parental tamga, and only a partial modification was possible (River 2020). Tamgas were various signs of complex forms, thus it may be argued that the Turkic craftsmen had a high level of artistic skill, since to create or modify a tamga, it was necessary to have knowledge of the laws of its creation and have creative intuition. Also, the craftsman had to consider the symbolic meaning of

Table 1. The purpose of tamgas during several time periods

Time period	The purpose of the tamga
2 nd c. BC – 1 st c. AD	The exploitation of tamga by the Sarmatians as a symbol of difference between tribes.
1 st c. AD – 5 th c. AD	The exploitation of tamgas by Turkic tribes as spiritual and cultural symbols.
5 th c. AD – 12 th c. AD	The exploitation of tamgas by aristocrats in the Turkic Khaganate for political relationships. Also used by artisans as marking their products.
12 th c. AD – 15 th c. AD	The exploitation of tamga by noble Turkic families as a symbol of commitment to the Mongol power.
15 th c. AD – 18 th c. AD	The exploitation of tamga as the coat of arms of the Giray family and later as the coat of arms of the Crimean Tatars.

Source: compiled by the author.

the tamga and in their work they had to make every effort to maintain it.

These symbolic images are deeply rooted in the culture of the Turkic peoples, since their exploitation was common not only in the Middle Ages, but also in subsequent time periods. Particularly, this can be traced based on the history review of such representatives of the Turkic ethnic groups as Kalmyks, Yakuts and Udmurds. Representatives

of the mentioned groups actively exploited tamgas in foreign policy relationships with other countries during the 17–19th centuries during the period when the Russian Empire was actively expanding eastwards. Moreover, until now, the tamga of the Giray family, which was described in detail in this article, is applied as the official coat of arms of the Crimean Tatars (Baddam et al. 2022), as well as an element of their national flag.

DISCUSSION

During this scientific study, it was found that tamgas were essential in the history of the Turkic tribes and peoples, therefore this topic is popular among numerous scientists. In addition, this article noted that in the history of the Turkic symbols under study there are several topics about which there is no consensus. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the overviews and main ideas of certain scientists who were engaged not only in the study of tamgas, but who also described general historical conditions.

Samashev S. and Sirazheva B. in their study considered two horn overlays with tamga-like symbols found in the Altai region of Kazakhstan at a site attributed to the Hunnu Xianbian people who inhabited the Eurasian steppes (Samashev and Sirazheva B. 2022). Although tamgas on bones and horn are found at Turkic sites, these signs do not coincide with known writings or tamgas. Traceological analysis has shown that these are deliberate engravings rather than accidental scratches. The meaning of the symbols is still unclear, but they may represent good

luck charms, incantations, or magical symbols important to the owner of the item. Their presence on the remote weapon suggests a deeper meaning than property markings or initials (Kulgildinova et al. 2018). Most likely, these signs had ritual significance during life, not burial.

M. Khoza and S. Abzhalov devoted their research to the general aspects of the history of Central Asia, during which there is also mentioning of tamgas (Khoza and Abzhalov 2022). The scientist claims that, given the visual similarity of the letters of the Turkic alphabet and tamgas, the latter had a significant impact upon the formation of the alphabet and became its basis. However, this opinion is inaccurate, since, as it was already indicated in the article, tamgas had a different meaning during the Middle Ages, they were exploited as an element allowing to mark one's own property and tribe. In addition, it should be clear that the meaning of numerous tamgas (especially ancient ones) is still unknown, however, if they were really exploited as a runic writing, then it

would be much easier to decipher their meaning (Lukomskiy 2023). As an argument against the author's opinion, one may consider the fact that there were a significant number of tamgas that are visually like the letters of Latin and Cyrillic alphabet. To illustrate, the tamga found in the Altai Mountains, which was described in detail in this article, is visually like the Latin letter "Z". However, given this, it cannot be said that tamgas are the basis of the Latin or Cyrillic alphabets. Thus, the opinion that the Turkic alphabet originated from the tamgas is not precise. Perhaps it should be considered in the context of the similarity of certain tamgas with letters.

N. Galimova examined the understudied sociocultural practices and spiritual/cognitive heritage of national cultures, focusing on the historical and aesthetic specificity of graphic symbolism like the tamga family ownership symbol. The author identified key artistic features of social and symbolic forms, which as visual representations have penetrated across creative systems, shaping the semantic and aesthetic content of cultural images. Symbolic ideographs play an important role in intercultural interactions and continue to carry coded representations of world culture values (Moldabek et al. 2016). Her study highlighted the socio-cultural significance of symbolic images as carriers of historical information and spiritual ideals of national cultures.

The opinion of the scientist A. Musain who in his scientific work investigated the origin of the bident as one of the symbols of the Rurik dynasty, is interest-

ing (Musain 2020). The author claims that the tamgas had a direct impact upon the formation of this Varangian coat of arms. The researcher states that during the reign of Svyatoslav Igorevich, and the active military campaigns of the prince against the Khazars, a symbol shaped as a bident was borrowed. However, this idea is not entirely precise, since if we analyse the history of the Rurik family, we understand that it has Norman roots; and in their culture runic symbols were quite common. In turn, it is known about the existence of runic signs shaped as a bident. Therefore, it should be mentioned that the idea of the the researcher should be considered as one of the possible theories, not as a statement. In addition, it is worth noting that the version of the origin of Svyatoslav's bident coat of arms from the Norman runes is more likely since the runes were vital in their culture. However, it is difficult to imagine how the prince could get carried away with the symbolics of his enemy, which he made his own (Raffensperger, 2012).

Baddam et al. in their study examined around 170 ancient Turkic and Uighur runic inscriptions found across Mongolia, categorized by region. It focused on 18 inscriptions from the Govi-Altai province, analyzing their reading, lexical features, and associated tamga ownership symbols. The inscriptions were mostly short texts on rock faces conveying blessings and notes from travelers, containing titles and names. Linguistic analysis revealed they were often written by third parties. Over 90 tamgas were documented, with the most com-

mon designs and variants appearing across multiple sites.

P. Petrov studied silver dirham coins discovered in Kazakhstan featuring unusual tamga ownership symbols, focusing on a type with two connected circles known since the early 20th century (Petrov 2023). Dating and mint attribution has been challenging, but dirhams of around 1 gram were identified in three types, with one dated to 685AH/1286CE. The tamga was previously linked to Ogedei Khan but new evidence indicates it belonged to the dynasty of Chingizid ruler Konichi of the Ordu ulus from the 670s -701s AH. Coins were concentrated near medieval towns in the Aral Sea region, with some minted on existing Khwarazm dirhams. The 688AH dirham retains its original date. This opens a new avenue in Juchid numismatics and Chingizid history, identifying a new tamga and mint under Konichi's authority. The study establishes the tamga as a mark of Konichi rather than Ogedei, with two-coin types identified but the mint location and duration remaining unclear.

Regarding the influence of tamgas on the culture of other peoples, the study of B. Lyonnet is important. In the scientific research, the author, based upon tamgas, determines the influence that the Sarmatians had on Roman culture. The researcher refers to several finds of Roman horse weapons, which were marked with images of tamgas. Thus, the author notes that the wars of the Romans against the Sarmatians influenced the military culture of the former. However, this influence was not widespread. First-

ly, the depicted tamgas were found only on elements of cavalry weapons, and secondly, the area of these discoveries is the eastern borders of the Roman Empire. Given the above, it can be concluded that the hypothesis of B. Lyonnet is quite attractive and can significantly expand knowledge of tamgas, but it requires improvement and further research.

Another scientist A. Pirtea in his article explored a similar topic as previous authors. However, this researcher did not study the influence of tamgas upon the culture of European peoples, but, on the contrary, the influence of Byzantine traditions upon the role of tamgas in Turkic society (Pirtea 2021). Thus, the author focuses upon the similarity of the tamgas found on the coins of the Turks and the Byzantine traditions of the mint. It is to be understood that the author's hypothesis is based upon artefacts related to a certain region of the then Turkic Khaganate. Therefore, one may not claim that there was a large-scale influence of Byzantium on the culture of using tamgas. What is more, as it has been already mentioned in the article, the tradition of creating tamgas forbade changing them, due to which the Byzantine influence could not be too significant. So far, the question of the history of the Mongol Empire remains debatable. Particularly, the historian M. Prawd (2014) argues that the Mongols were able to strengthen their own state positions through the exploitation of powerful force and the destruction of everyone who was on their way. However, this opinion is erroneous. It is correct, in history there are documented

cases of the destruction of entire cities and settlements, however, there were single cases in the background of all other conquests. In this article, Genghis Khan's "Great Yassa" was mentioned, according to which it was forbidden to exterminate cities and population, except for certain cases.

The mentioning of the wrong view of the history of the Mongol Empire was not accidental, since it is the basis for further research in this area, in which the concept of tamga appears. Thus, S. Özyurt Ulutaş in his study argues that during the period of active military expansion, the Mongols exterminated the cultural heritage of the Turks, and the tamgas that the latter used during this period are established by Mongols. However, this opinion is not precise, since, as it has been already mentioned in this article, during the Mongol invasion, the application of tamgas by noble families meant their commitment to the Mongol authorities. In addition, in the "Great Yassa" it was mentioned that in no case should the cultural heritage of certain peoples be destroyed. Given this, it may be stated that the Mongols were quite tolerant towards the Turkic peoples and the significance of tamgas only increased during this period. In this article, the image of tamgas on French frescoes was mentioned; this topic is also the basis of a few studies. I. Lebedinsky argues

that the discoveries of tamgas on the mentioned frescoes may confirm the Turkic influence on French culture. However, this is not entirely true, since the French applied tamgas not as their own signs, but as a symbol to depict a collective image of the opponents of Christians. At the same time, in all French frescoes, where there are images of tamgas, fragments from battles are illustrated. Therefore, it can be stated with certainty that tamgas did not have a significant impact on French culture, and even more so the French did not apply tamgas as symbols.

It should be noted that tamgas are a unique cultural phenomenon. No other people, except the Turks, applied such signs. Additionally, for each tribe, tamgas conveyed a special semantic meaning in the context of spiritual beliefs and self-identification. Thus, it can be stated that tamgas are not just an element of Turkic life, but a part of a great culture and a symbol of the identity of the Turkic peoples. These signs have overcome a long way of formation and occupy a significant place in the history. In addition, tamgas are a sign of cultural interaction not only between Turkic tribes, but also with many other peoples. Therefore, due to the study of tamgas, one may examine not only the history and culture of the Turks, but also several other peoples.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of tamgas reveals their importance as identifying symbols and cultural markers for ancient Turkic peo-

ples. Though tamga-like symbols predate the Turks in Central Asia and around the Black Sea, the specific Turkic

tamga tradition emerged around the 2nd century BC. Tamgas initially served as property marks among Turkic tribes before evolving into more complex emblems associated with clans, families, and social status. Discoveries of ancient Turkic tamgas in locations like the Altai Mountains and on Roman military artifacts point to cross-cultural exchanges with Hungarians, Sarmatians, and other groups during the ancient period. The adoption of tamgas by Mongol rulers also shows how Turkic cultural identity endured and adapted under the Mongol Empire, contrary to notions of Mongols destroying Turkic heritage.

The longevity of historic tamgas into contemporary times as national and regional symbols (e.g. Crimean Tatar flag)

demonstrates their lasting cultural significance for Turkic peoples. More archaeological research on tamgas in border areas like Byzantium and China can further clarify the extent of cross-cultural borrowing and influence. Interpretation of the symbolic meaning behind geometric tamga designs remains an open question, likely representing sacred beliefs and concepts. In summary, the tamga tradition that emerged among ancient Turkic tribes served as multifaceted symbols of identity, status, ownership, and spirituality while also marking Turkic cultural exchange across Eurasia over centuries. Their persistence as cultural emblems highlight the unique Turkic heritage embodied in these ancient symbols.

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