

Күн мен жылқы бейнелерінің символизмі: көне Тамғалы петроглифтерден қазіргі ұлттық дискурсқа дейін

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Аңдатпа: Бұл мақалада күн мен жылқы бейнелері Тамғалы петроглифтерінде қандай мағынаны білдіретінін және екі элементтің бейнесі бүгінгі Қазақстанның ұлттық саяси болмысында қандай мағына жеткізетінін қарастырамын. Мен Розвадовски (2001), Германн (2011) сияқты авторлардың зерттеулерінен алынған сканерленген суреттерге, ЮНЕСКО фотосуреттеріне және Таңбалы мұражайының фотосуреттеріне негізделген визуалды талдау жасаймын. Тамғалы трактатын зерттеген археологтардың ізімен жылқы мен күн бейнелерінің киелі және рухани мәнін талқылап, екі элементтің қазіргі бейнесі рухани символикадан Қазақстанның саяси және ұлттық символикасына айналғанын салыстырамын.

Зерттеу барысында теориялық негіз ретінде агенттілік және докса ұғымдары, сондай-ақ мәнмәтіндік және символдық антропология әдістері қолданылған. Осы мақалаға сүйенсек, Тамғалы шатқалындағы күн мен жылқы таңбасының рухани символизмді білдіреді, атап айтқанда, мүйізді жылқылар мен «күнбасты» фигуралар қастерлі мағынаға ие. Сонымен қатар, осы мақалада күн мен жылқыны қолға үйрету туралы пікірталасқа ритуалистік көзқарас ұсынамын, — ертеде белгілі бір білімі мен тәжірибесі бар бақсылар жылқыны қолға үйретіп, басқаруды жақсы білген және өздерінің білімі мен мәртебесін ритуалистік мақсатта пайдаланған мүмкін деп қарастырамын.

Түйінді сөздер: *жартастағы суреттер, Қола дәуірі, ерте Темір дәуірі, шаманизм, күн мен жылқы бейнесі, Тамғалы петроглифтері.*

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Символизм образов солнца и лошадей: от древних наскальных рисунков Тамгалы до современного национального дискурса

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Абстракт. В данной статье я анализирую какой смысл несли изображения солнца и лошади в петроглифах Тамгалы и какой смысл изображения этих двух элементов имеют сегодня в национальной и политической символике Республики Казахстан. Проведя визуальный анализ сканированных изображений, взятых из исследований таких авторов, как Розвадовски (2001), Германн (2011), фотографий ЮНЕСКО и фотографий музея Танбалы, и следуя археологам, исследовавшим урочище Тамгалы, я продолжаю дискуссию о сакральных и духовных значениях изображений лошади и солнца. В качестве теоретической основы я использую концепты агентности и докса, а также контекстуальный и символический антропологические методы. Кроме того, в этой статье я рассматриваю вопрос одомашнивания лошадей с ритуальной перспективы — возможно, шаманы, обладавшие особыми знаниями и опытом, также знали, как приручить и контролировать лошадь, и использовали свои знания и статус в ритуальных целях.

Ключевые слова: *наскальные рисунки, Бронзовый век, ранний Железный век, шаманизм, изображения солнца и лошади, Тамгалы петроглифы.*

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The symbolism of sun and horse imagery: from ancient Tamgaly petroglyphs to modern national discourse

Adiya Baimurzina¹

Abstract. This article examines the Bronze Age context of the Tamgaly Valley petroglyphs and the modern context of sun and horse imagery. In my article, I try to answer the question what the sun and horse imagery symbolized in the context of the Bronze Age — early Iron Age period, and what it symbolizes today in the national political imagery of Kazakhstan. The research uses the concepts of agency and doxa, as well as contextual and symbolic approaches, as theoretical frameworks. The methodology is the visual analysis of scanned images taken from Rozwadowski (2001), Hermann (2011), UNESCO photographs and Tanbaly Museum photographs. The article suggests that the sun and horse imagery at Tamgaly Valley portrayed the ancient spiritual symbolism, in which horned horses and ‘solar-headed’ figures had sacred meanings. Furthermore, I add the ritualistic perspective to the horse domestication debate — perhaps, the shamans who held specific knowledge and experience also knew how to tame and control the horse, and used their knowledge and status for ritual purposes.

Key words: *rock art, Bronze Age, early Iron Age, shamanism, sun and horse imagery, Tamgaly petroglyphs.*

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Introduction

The horse and the sun are essential visual elements in Kazakh culture. They are often used together for the national branding, in which a horse symbolizes nomadic spirit, while the sun — the spiritual richness and nomadic energy. This article examines the possible origins and reasons behind persisting images of horses and sun in Kazakhstan. My research suggests that the imagery of the horse and sun is used to define Kazakh national identity and may date back to the the Bronze Age — early Iron Age rock art (*Rozwadowski, 2001*).

There are interpretations that the horse and sun were primary shamanic elements of people from the archaeological complex of *Tamgaly*, located in the Almaty region of South-East Kazakhstan.

This article will compare the modern meanings of horse and sun imagery, such as their depictions on the national flag of Kazakhstan, with the possible meanings of the horse and sun imagery in rock art of Tamgaly petroglyphs.

I use contextual and symbolic approaches and concepts like shamanism, agency and doxa as theoretical frameworks. The research methodology is the visual analysis of petroglyphs; my data includes imagery of horned horses and ‘*solar-headed*’ figures from Groups III and IV.

The main research question is as follows: *How was the sun and horse imagery symbolized in the Bronze Age — early Iron Age and what does it symbolize today?*

The Tamgaly Valley

To clarify and avoid confusion, I want to highlight two names for the famous petroglyph site in Kazakhstan — Tamgaly and Tanbaly. The local people named the petroglyphs Tanbaly and called them this way throughout the years, until 1957, when the first archaeological expedition, led by Anna Maximova, began at Tamgaly. Maximova and the scientists named the val-

ley Tamgaly, as well as the petroglyphs and the burials found in the valley region. However, the museum that was opened up to maintain the conservation of the valley holds the name of Tanbaly — Tanbaly Museum. Although sometimes both names are used in the literature, I will use Tamgaly.

In 1957, the archaeological expedition led by Anna Maximova excavated Karakuduk II burials, dated to be in the I century AD, in the Tamgaly Valley, near the river Tamgaly, at the Chu-Ili mountains. During this expedition, the photographer A. Popov accidentally discovered the petroglyphs in the valley — this exact year the first archaeological expedition to study Tamgaly petroglyphs began and was conducted by Anna Maximova, the KazSSR archaeologist who led the Southern-Kazakh archaeological expeditions (*Rogozhinsky, 2004*).

The Tamgaly Complex consists of Tamgaly petroglyphs, Tamgaly I-VII and Karakuduk II burials (*mogilniks* — the archaeological term for a burial), settlements, ritual altars and burial mounds (*kurgans* — *mogilniks* that are covered with artificial hill of soil and stones) (*Figures 1-2*). The Complex is located at the southeast of the Chu-Ili mountains.

The Tamgaly I-VII and Karakuduk II burials are located at the center of the Complex, same as the I-V groups of Tamgaly petroglyphs (*Figure 2*).

The burials and kurgans from the Tamgally Valley included material culture specific to terminal Andronovo Culture, like bronze jewellery, unornamented and ornamented pottery and stone burial constructions of the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age (*Rogozhinsky, 2011*). In addition, some of

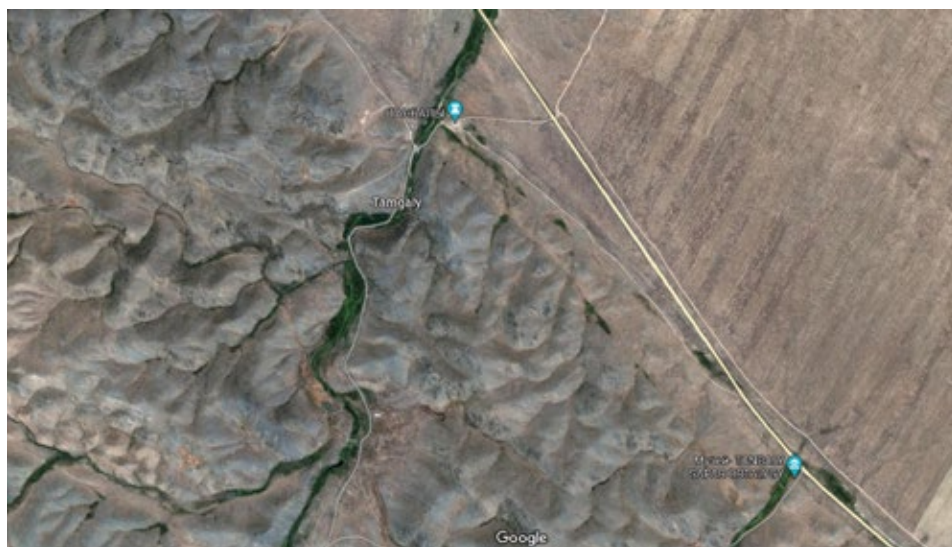


Figure 1. Tamgaly Valley (Google Maps)

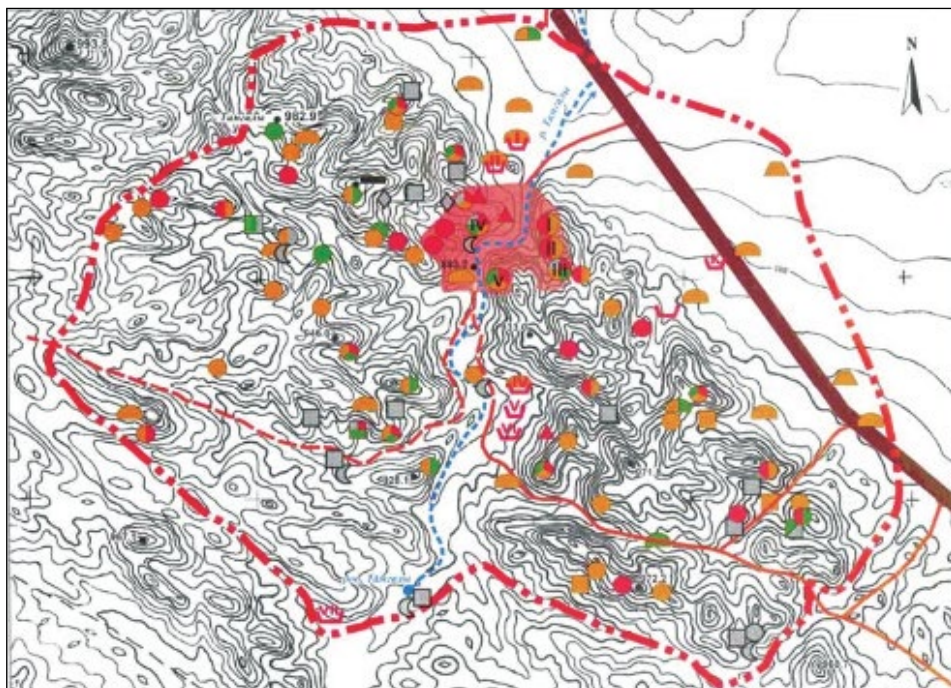


Figure 2. Tamgaly Valley (Rogozhinsky, 2009)



Figure 3. Three ritual altars (Zapovednik muzey "Taňbaly", n.d)

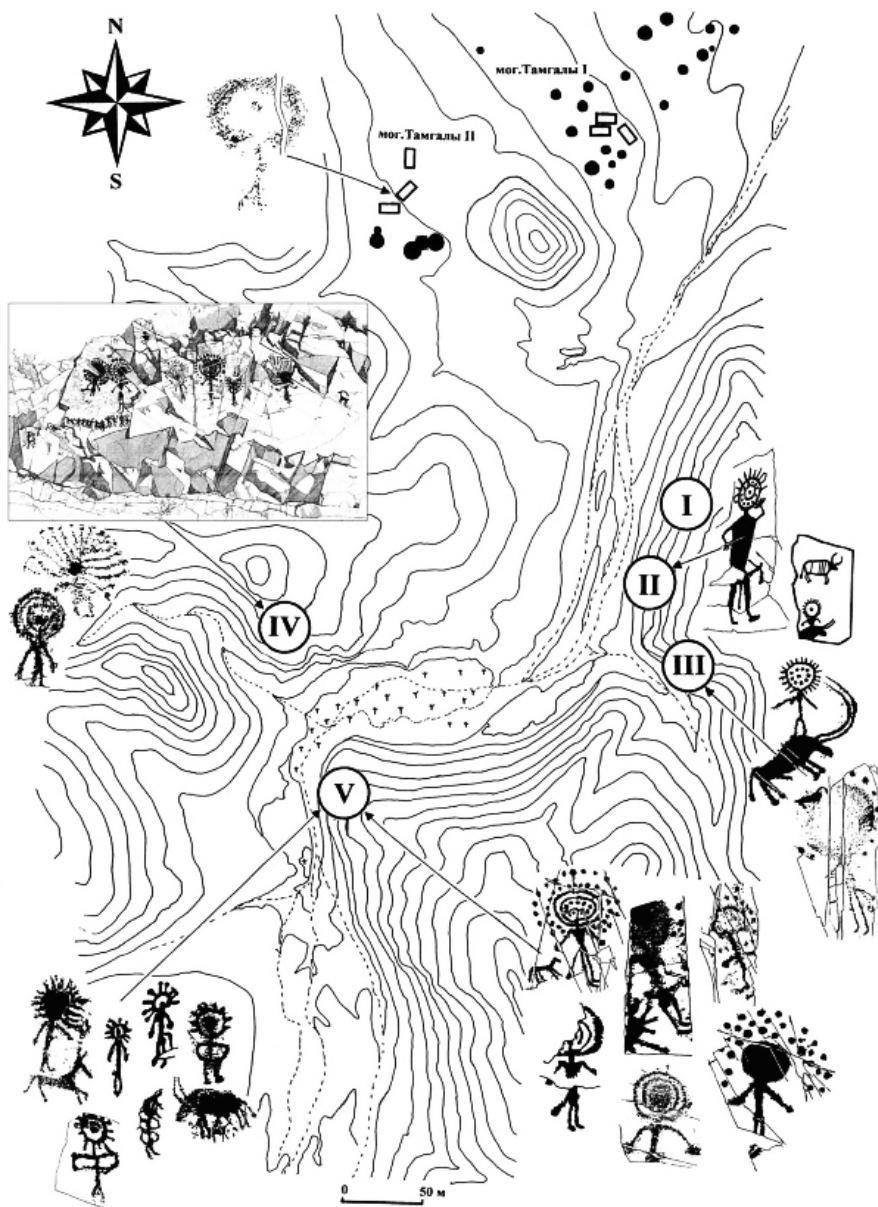


Рис. II. Расположение изображений «солнцеголовых» в каньоне Тамгалы

Figure 4. The geographical spread of Tamgaly petroglyphs depicting 'sun-headed' figures (Rogozhinsky, 2009)

the bones of adults and juveniles found were located in specific directions (on the left side of the body, heads directed to the west), which are further indications of the Andronovo Cultural tradition. In contrast, some bones

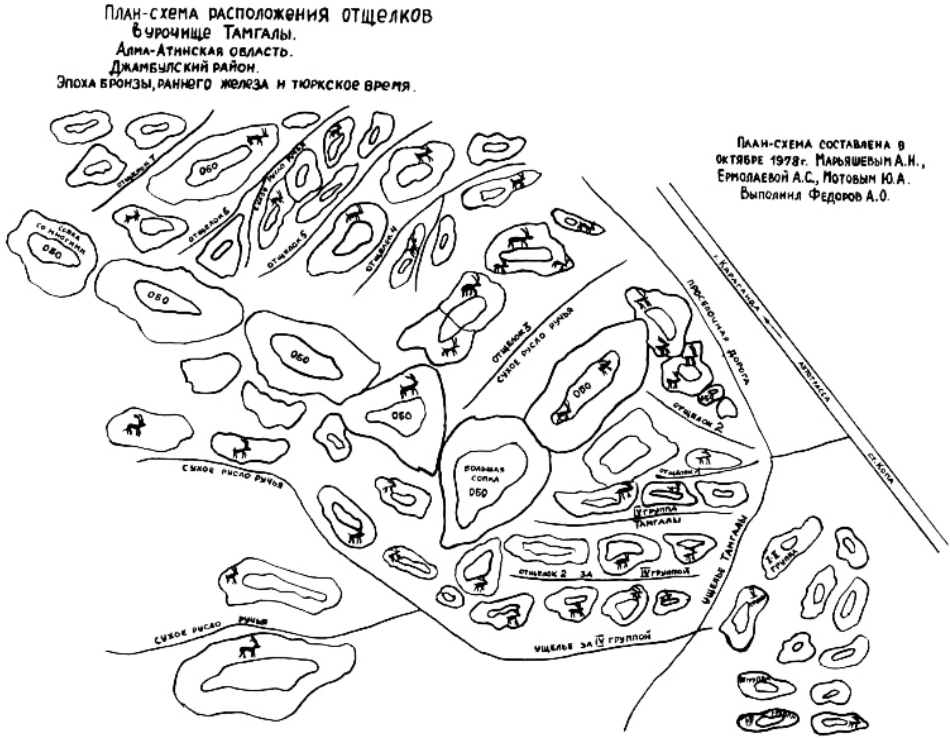


Figure 5. The schematic map of Tamgaly petroglyph concentration (Rogozhinsky, 2011)

were burned outside the burials and spread inside the kurgans (Zapovednik muzey "Таңбалы", n.d.). There are also significant uses of the area during the Iron Age and Medieval periods (Rogozhinsky, 2011).

Interestingly, near Karakuduk II burial there were found three ritual altars assigned the Bronze Age formed as stone fences, used for ritual performances for the deceased. Inside the middle ritual altar there was found a rock with petroglyphs similar to the Tamgaly ones, which allowed scientists to establish a minimum date for the in-situ petroglyphs throughout the complex (Figure 3).

The Tamgaly Valley occupies an area of approximately 3x10 km; however, the majority of the petroglyphs, about 2000, are concentrated in an area of about 250x500 m (Nabiulina, n.d.). The Tamgaly petroglyphs are spread over the mountainous valley and are classified, according to period and style, into different groups (from I to V; Figure 4; Figure 5); the size range is from 25-75 cm to 1 m (Zapovednik muzey "Таңбалы", n.d.). Alexey Rogozhinsky (2009), a Kazakhstani archaeologist who wrote numerous works about rock art sites in Kazakhstan and who continued the expeditions at the Tamgaly Valley in the 1980s, claimed Tamgaly rock art to be unique in comparison

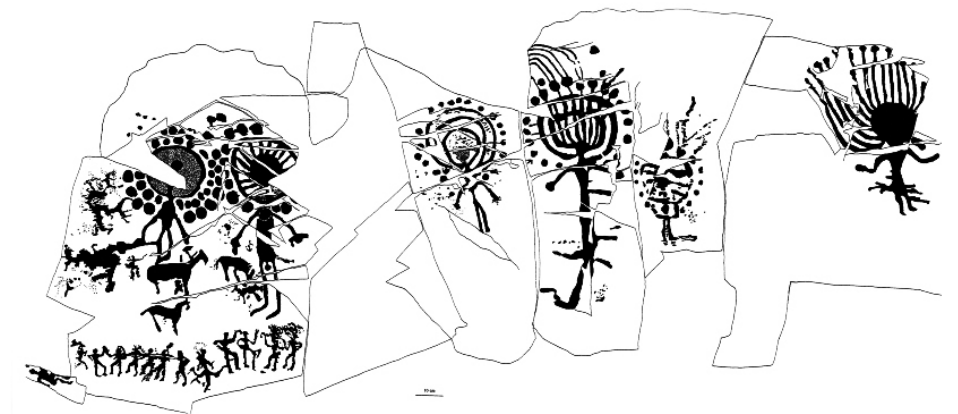


Figure 6. Ritual scene (Rozwadowski, 2001)

to other petroglyphs in Kazakhstan in its style, technique and narrative and suggested assigning them as a separate type of petroglyphs — the Tamgaly petroglyphs (*Zapovednik muzey "Tańbaly", n.d.*)

Tamgaly petroglyphs are engraved on the rock surfaces with stones; as has been investigated, most face south. This fact has been discovered from the largest petroglyph scene from the valley — the so-called *open-air temple* containing the ritual scene of 6-7 ‘sun-headed’ anthropomorphic figures, ten dancing men similar to each other and a woman in labor. The so-called “Pantheon” of the Bronze Age belongs to group IV (Figure 6).

Relevance of the Research

The horse and sun construct a particular narrative in being included in the National symbols of contemporary Kazakhstan — the state flag and the state emblem. The sun on the national flag takes up all the central space and is also represented as the *shanyraq* in the National emblem (Figures 7-8). *Shanyraq* is one of the essential symbolic architectural parts of a *yurt*, the Kazakh traditional house; it is a circular open roof built with wooden stripes to imitate the sun with its rays (Figure 9). The horse can be seen in the State emblem (Figure 8); *tulpars*, winged horses equipped with horns, take up both sides and represent the nation’s bravery. However, the question remains: why are these elements interpreted this way and used in national symbols?

The images of the horse and sun have always had deep meanings in Kazakh culture. The meaning of the sun often symbolizes spiritual wealth, the



Figure 7. National flag (Akorda.kz, n.d.)

meaning of the horse — both wealth and warrior culture. This way, horses and the sun were frequently represented or mentioned in Kazakh history and culture. It led to the perception of local culture and the construction of a national identity from these two elements.

However, this raises the question of whether people from the past assigned the same meaning to these two figures. I want to start with the interpretations of Andrzej Rozwadowski (2001), who is an associate professor at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. Rozwadowski (2001) conducted fifteen expeditions on rock art sites in Central Asia and Siberia. In his chapter (“Sun Gods or Shamans? Interpreting the ‘Solar-Headed’ Petroglyphs of Central Asia” in *Archaeology of Shamanism*), he discusses visual representations of shamanism from rock art of the Bronze Age in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Siberia. He argues that solar-headed figures



Figure 8. National emblem (Akorda.kz, n.d.)



Figure 9. The view on the shanyraq from inside the yurt (Freepik, n.d.).



Figure 10. Tamgaly petroglyphs. The 'solar-headed' god (Oers, 2009)



Figure 11. Tamgaly petroglyphs. The ritual scene (Vincent, 2008)

represent the shamans who were “equal” to gods. By making a visual analysis of different images and figures of rock art of the Tamgaly Valley, such as the ‘sun-headed’ petroglyphs or images that show the whole ritual scene (Figures 6, 10-11), he states that shamanism of Central Asia might have identified with a horse — used as a transport, the horse could help the shaman to transport the souls of the dead to the other world (Rozwadowski, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

This research relies on several theoretical concepts: shamanism, agency and doxa.

Shamanism is a system of religious practices performed by a shaman. Archaeologically, shamans are identified by particular clothing (fur/leather coats) and tools (tambourines, drums and horses); in rock art, they can be depicted as anthropomorphic figures, accompanied with rays dots and various lines around their heads (Britannica, 2024; Devlet, 2001). Therefore, a shamanic ritual can include various tools, conditions and requirements for performing a ritual. First, the shaman, a person “*who knows*” (Britannica, 2024), must have a particular knowledge of nature or must be of a specific

gender and age — in some communities, female shamans are more prevalent, or a shaman has to be someone wise, “with experience”, meaning an old individual can become a shaman; sometimes, shamans are people who learn this practice through generations (Price, 2011). The shaman is the mediator between people and gods, thus the shaman “guards” one’s soul (Eliade, 1992). With this particular knowledge and experience, shamans were the elite of their society.

There is also the symbolic significance of the horse in shamanic mythology and ritual. The horse is considered a funerary animal — the mystical image of death. Riding a horse helps a shaman to achieve ecstasy or the state of “*coming out of oneself*” when performing a ritual (Eliade, 1992). Therefore, as a means for the mystical journey, the horse helps a shaman to “*fly through the air*” and reach the sky (Eliade, 1992).

Eliade (1992) also explains how shamanism is connected with cosmological concepts. According to him, the world is divided into three cosmic zones, in which the middle part is the “*true world*” — the “*Center of the world*”. The Center is the axis mundi, a “*portal*” between the other worlds, through which a religious person can travel (Eliade, 1992). Therefore, a shaman can travel through the portal, which usually appears as the “*break-through in the plane*” (Eliade, 1992). The “*Center*” could also be a historically and culturally significant mountain or even the central pillar of one’s house — this means that every human can have a connection to the “*Center of the World*”. In the same way, the Tamgaly petroglyphs site could have been the “*Center*”, or as Rogozhinsky (2009) argues — an open-air temple, where shamans performed the rituals to travel between the worlds.

The theoretical concept of agency is significant when speaking about the Tamgaly petroglyphs as the product of people’s actions and intentions. Discussing the context of Tamgaly petroglyphs would help to see the agency of the people who made the rock engravings to reflect their lifestyle and beliefs. The anthropomorphic figures and the horned horses at Tamgaly could bring more insights into understanding the agency of the people who made the rock art.

The concept of doxa is crucial in this study’s later parts and applications. Doxa means unquestioned truths or beliefs that society takes for granted (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Silliman (2001), doxa can be a mundane activity, but doxic practices can also be intentional activities that share specific motivations or life histories. I believe that sun and horse imagery in today’s Kazakh society is one of such doxic practices that is not questioned. In this article, I am suggesting that such doxic practice can possibly originate from the Bronze Age — Iron Age petroglyphs found in Kazakhstan — the Tamgaly petroglyphs.

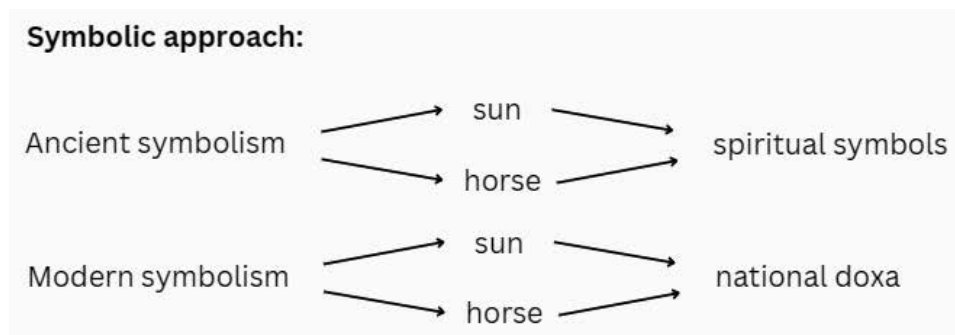


Figure 12. Symbolic approach

The theoretical framework of this research relies on two approaches: the symbolic approach and the contextual approach.

The contextual approach allows me to view, study, and interpret Tamgaly petroglyphs through the combinations of various factors. The Tamgaly burials, the Tamgaly petroglyphs, and the landscape of this complex create a specific context, and through this, I interpret the symbolic connection between the sun and the horse.

For example, Arsenault and Zawadzka (2014) explore Algonquian-speaking people from Canada and their spiritual systems of belief through rock art, using contextual procedures. Specifically, they observe how the landscape's acoustic and visual aspects and natural rock formations create a particular context that places specific meanings on rituals and their representations in rock art. For instance, the petroglyphs of Algonquian groups were made near the water which forms specific acoustic and visual contexts — the sun-rays that reflect from water to the petroglyphs shed shimmering lights to the drawings adding the effect of animated movements. Moreover, natural rock formations, such as whitish rock deposits on the mountain, also add the specific perception of the rock art — there, the white rocks were perceived as the god depicted on the mountain surface, the Thunderbird, which demonstrated how the place and the setting also played a crucial role in rock art. Thus, the contextual approach helps understand how the ritual was performed and practiced in a specific time and a specific place.

The symbolic approach (Figure 12) is used to theorize the ancient symbolism of sun and horse imagery at the Tamgaly site and the modern symbolism of sun and horse imagery that is used in construction of the national identity. Using the symbolic approach, I interpret the ancient and contemporary symbolism and conclude that ancient sun and horse imagery was about spiritual elements and that modern sun and horse imagery reflects the Kazakh national doxa.

Methodology

The research design is based on the visual analysis and interpretations of the images, particularly rock art. This article focuses on petroglyphs that represent and connect the sun and horse imagery. That is why I use the Tamgaly images of 'sun-headed' figures and horned horses as my primary data. These specific pictures are from Group III and IV petroglyphs, located almost at the center of the Tamgaly Valley (*Figures 2, 4*). Luc Hermann (2011), who is a Belgian archaeologist specializing in rock art in Europe and Asia and who has published works on Tamgaly petroglyphs, visually analyzed the petroglyphs and made some conclusions. Due to anatomical differences, particularly different phallic features, horned horses are distinct from deers and bulls (*Hermann, 2011*), while 'solar-headed' figures carry connections to the sun. Many scholars, including Rozwadowski (2001; 2014), Hermann (2011) and Rogozhinsky (2009) agree on such conclusions.

The photographs and scanned pictures are taken from articles by Rozwadowski (2001) and Hermann (2011), as well as photographs from UNESCO and the official website of the Tanbaly Museum.

The Tamgaly petroglyphs are from the Bronze Age and early Iron Age (*Rozwadowski 2001; Hermann 2001*). However, it has to be noted that dating in archaeology has to be claimed and interpreted carefully — it is hard to date petroglyphs, and scholars cannot always be precise in calculations of the period.

Therefore, the petroglyphs at Tamgaly, particularly from Group III and IV, might not necessarily be from the Bronze Age. In fact, Rogozhinsky (2009; 2011) states that the 'sun-headed' figures might date back to the Bronze Age, while the horns were actually added to the horse images during the early Iron Age. Such statement may also be justified with the beliefs that horned animals were highly appreciated during the *Saka period* (Iron Age), as many Iron Age Kazakhstani sites include goat iconography, antler cheeks or other indications to horns as material goods. This makes the further discussion complex in a way how sun and horse imagery from different time periods (Bronze Age and Iron Age) are perceived in a single Tamgaly site as ancient symbolic elements, and can be traced until the days of modern Kazakh national iconography.

Strict assumptions might lead to interpretations that are not accurate and reliable. This is why it is crucial to notice how the dating of the Tamgaly petroglyphs can be relative.

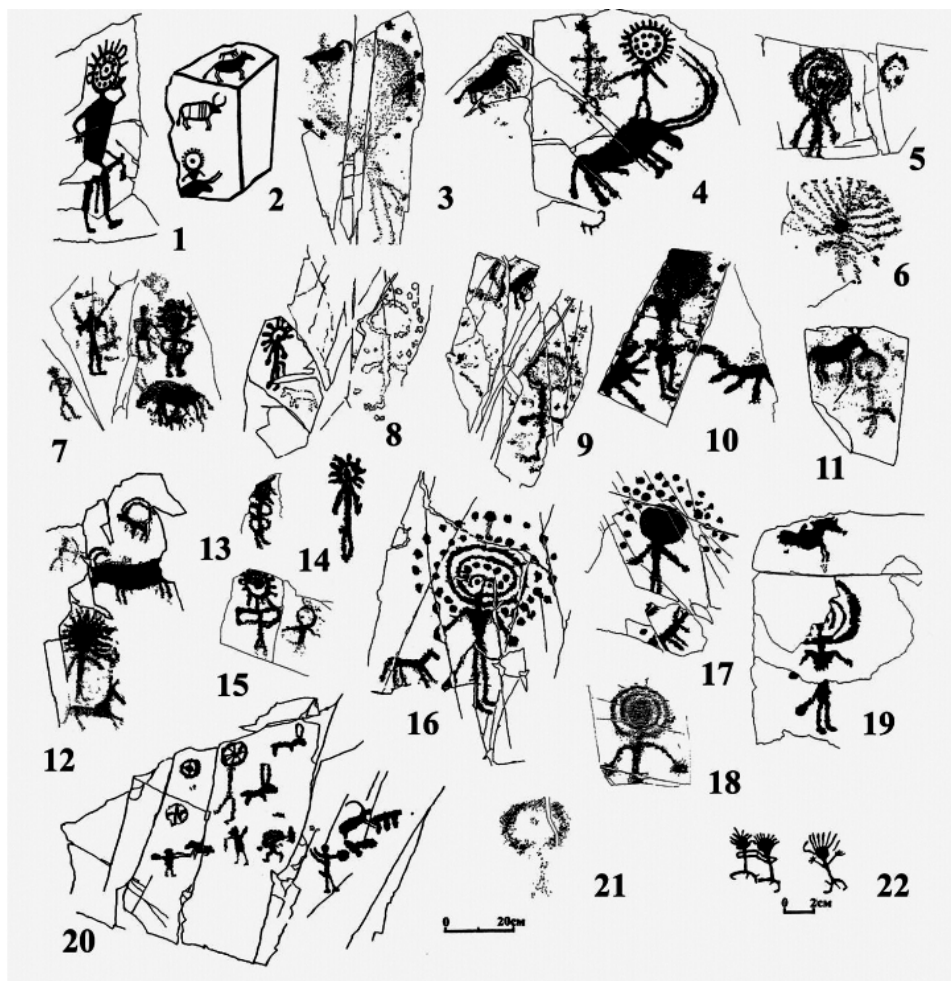


Рис. 1. Изображения «солнцеголовых» из Тамгалы:
 1, 2 – группа II; 3, 4 – группа III; 5, 6 – группа IV; 7–19 – группа V; 20, 22 – периферия каньона;
 21 – мог. Тамгалы II (1, 8, 14 – рисунки автора по фотографиям 1957 г.; 7 – по: Марьяшев и др. 1979; рис. 1;
 остальное – копии автора)

Figure 13. Tamgaly petroglyphs — image variation (Rogozhinsky, 2009)

Findings

The petroglyphs at Tamgaly Valley are divided into five groups according to their location and what images are more frequent there. *Figure 13* shows how various images of animals and ‘solar-headed’ figures were divided into groups (Rogozhinsky, 2009). Moreover, *Figures 4-5* shows how the groups of petroglyphs are spread over the whole Tamgaly Valley (Rogozhinsky, 2009).






Figure	Group	Image	Description	Reference
14	III		Horned horse, a rider, human beings with weapons	Hermann, 2011
15	III		Horned horse, a rider, and a shaman	Hermann, 2011; Rozwadowski, 2001
16	III		Horned horse, a rider with a weapon	Hermann, 2011; Rozwadowski, 2001
17	III		A bull, a 'solar-headed' figure as a rider, a human being	Hermann, 2011; Rozwadowski, 2001; UNESCO
6	IV		A cult scene: animals, 10 dancing men, a woman in labor, 6-7 'solar-headed' figures	Hermann, 2011; Rozwadowski, 2001; UNESCO

Table 1. Mini-catalogue

For the visual analysis, I chose five scans of the petroglyphs available online. I made a mini-catalogue with descriptions of the figures (*Table 1*). The catalogue includes the group to which the petroglyphs belong, the scan, the description, and the sources.

Horned horses

There are eleven petroglyphs that represent horned horses at the Tamgaly rock art site (Hermann, 2011) (Figures 14-16). Although bulls are also represented at Tamgaly (Figure 17), archaeologists specify that horned horses refer to horses and not bulls due to some clearly inferred anatomical differences. In particular, Hermann (2011) states that some features identify these animals as horses: “the tail, the ears, the position of the penis and sometimes the position of the reins”. Why would horns be added to the horse if deer and bull (animals that naturally come with horns) are also present at the Tamgaly site?

Tamgaly paintings are highly associated with cult scenes, specifically shamanic rituals. Rozwadowski (2001) analyzed the art on Tamgaly rocks, indicating several associations with shamanic practices. The physical appearance of the depicted humans suggests they are shamans; in addition to that, Rozwadowski (2001) makes an ethnographic analogy between Siberian rock art and shamans depicted in petroglyphs at Tamgaly. Another shamanic reference would be the ‘Sun-head’ figures, which Rozwadowski (2001) interprets as high spiritual and central figures (Figures 6, 10-11). In addition, the last shamanic reference would be the ‘cult scene’ at Tamgaly — the 6-7 ‘sun-headed’ figures, ten dancing men and a woman in labor, and ‘worshippers’ (Figure 6).

Hermann (2011) suggests the reason for adding horns to horses is that the horns may be a necessary piece for the ritual, while horses are also the easiest to ride (compared with bulls and deers). Indeed, in Figures 14-16, we see that people are riding the horned horse. My interpretation suggests that these circular horns in these shamanic rituals are connected to the sun.

Discussion

Ancient symbolism

One of the essential instruments of the shaman is the tambourine (Rozwadowski, 2014). The tambourine’s functional role was to protect the shaman when entering the “other” world and not be noticed by the spirits. Moreover, the shaman used a tambourine to perform rituals for acoustic purposes since singing and using drums to make certain rhythmic sounds was crucial in shamanism. In my opinion, another functional role of the tambourine was to complete the unique figure and personality of the shaman — to be recognized and respected by other people and to have a particular reputation for the skill and talent.

In addition to that, the tambourine holds a symbolic significance. According to Rozwadowski (2014), the tambourine was a metaphorical equivalent to a horse's hooves clattering when transporting the shaman into the world of spirits. However, the problem is that the tambourine is rarely represented on the Bronze Age petroglyphs. He suggests that the reason for that is either the tool was somehow prohibited or shamanism represented on the petroglyphs was another form of a religious practice that held another symbolic significance too (Rozwadowski, 2014).

In any case, there is a resemblance between the symbolism of the horse and the tambourine. As the tambourine played the role of camouflage for the shaman in the world of the spirits, other instruments, like the coat and the headdress, were used for the same purposes. It is believed that a shaman's headdress sometimes also has horns attached to it to imitate the head of an animal, while at Tamgaly petroglyphs, we see how a shaman rides a horned horse (Rozwadowski, 2014). I suggest that these rock images probably portray the process of a shaman entering the world of the deceased. Since the Tamgaly petroglyphs have no tambourine and a headdress that would particularly identify the man as a shaman, the horse with horns might play this role. Perhaps people portrayed how the horse is used to disguise the shaman.

The context of the horse at Tamgaly petroglyphs has to be discussed too. Since the chronology of the Tamgaly petroglyphs dates to the Bronze Age and early Iron Age, it correlates with the period of horse domestication in the Kazakh lands. This raises the question: *did the Tamgaly horse, probably already domesticated at that time, construct an important part of horse riding in the shamanic ritual?*

It was argued that *Botai* people from northern Kazakhstan were considered first to domesticate horses — the archaeological records showed the bit wear of the horse tooth that could indicate a horse harness. Outram *et al.* (2009) discovered a clear parallel-sided band of bit wear on the enamel of the horse premolars found at Botai — such morphology is usually present in the bridled animals. Moreover, there were found Equine milk fats on the Botai vessels, which also indicates to mare milking at the site (Outram *et al.*, 2009; Taylor and Barron-Ortiz, 2021).

However, recent studies tend to debate such an argument. Taylor and Barron-Ortiz (2021) researched that the osteological peculiarities in horse teeth enamel from Botai are similar to the remains of Pleistocene wild horses from North America.

Therefore, the recent study argues and questions if the Botai horses were domesticated or not.

The horse domestication discussion among scholars usually include such topics as economy, subsistence, diet; in my article, I want to add the ritualistic perspective to the discussion. Perhaps, the shaman with particular spiritual knowledge and wisdom might be the one who knew how to “*spearhead*” a wild horse to perform their rituals of transporting the souls of the dead.

Another question arises — how significant are the horns? As mentioned in the section on findings, archaeologists specifically distinguish the horse on Tamgaly petroglyphs from bulls and deers (*Hermann, 2011*). I suggest that people intentionally added the horns to a horse to make a symbolic connection with the sun, to make them “closer” to the sky.

The horns on the petroglyphs (*Figures 14-16*) are unnaturally elongated and become rounded starting from the middle. The horns could represent the sun, as they could also symbolize the nature of vitality of the horses.

The “*deification*” of the sun has been prevalent throughout the history of Kazakh people. Rustem Dosmurzinov (*2023*), a Kazakhstani scholar from L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, states that the house of a Kazakh was “*inspired*” by the celestial star and reflects how people associated their lives with it (*Dosmurzinov, 2023*). Shanyraq, an open rooftop of the yurt, is built to resemble the sun and its rays as it includes wooden sticks (*uyiq*) put all together to create a symbol of togetherness (*Figure 9*) (*Dosmurzinov, 2023*). Shanyraq allows the sunlight to light up the yurt, reminding us how the sun is constantly a part of Kazakh daily life. Such construction of the yurt has been a tradition for generations, as it portrays cultural values and significance. Also, shanyraq was like a compass and a daily calendar for Kazakhs; with the sunlight and the shadows, people could identify different directions and the time of the day (*Dosmurzinov, 2023*). In addition, the traditional Kazakh houses correspond to the nomadic lifestyle, as the yurt is easy to construct, unfold and transport. Furthermore, the sun is present in traditional art — the round ornaments, spirals and circles symbolically refer to the sun (*Kemelbekova & Bukharova, 2002*). The circular form is the most used because the circle is considered the perfect form and “*movement*” of life (*Kemelbekova & Bukharova, 2002*). Representing the sun spatially and temporally implies the “*endless*” steppe and endless circle of life (*Kemelbekova & Bukharova, 2002*).

At Tamgaly petroglyphs, there are images of the ‘*sun-head*’ figures, some anthropomorphic figures that represent the body of a human. Still, the head resembles the sun, with rays circling it and several dots inside it (*Figures 6, 10, 11, 13*). The solar-gods/shamans participate in the cult scene at Tamgaly petroglyphs (*Figure 6*), which might strengthen the argument of their shamanic nature, given the importance of the sun in shamanism.

Thus, the sun was an essential element for the people who inhabited the territory of the modern Kazakhstan. Considering this, I suggest that the horns on the horse (Figures 14-16) were added to highlight the mystic nature of the ritual. It is one thing to be able to ride the horse and the other thing to be able to ride the horse with horns, or any other “godly” creature.

The horse is a crucial shamanic element, used functionally for the shaman to ride it and transport souls into the world of the deceased (*Eliade, 1992*). It is used symbolically to “hide” the shaman and make this ride safe for the shaman. That is why perhaps the horns resembling the sun were an additional element for the shamanic ritual, adding “safety” to the ritual.

I suggest that the horse was not just an instrument during the ritual but also held more symbolic significance in obtaining the cosmological powers to serve the shaman and be worshipped by the people. By drawing the horned horses and shamans as the riders, people create the symbolic significance of Tamgaly petroglyphs, representing the horse and the rider as separate entities.

The meanings put into the drawings are essential when considering the agency of the site. This poses the following question: Was the process of drawing the anthropomorphic figures, horses, and ritual scenes also somehow a ritual? It is difficult to identify what came first: did the place obtain the sacred and religious meaning, and then people decided to “commemorate” the place with petroglyphs or did the petroglyphs happen to be first, and the sacredness appeared later?

This further leads to mentioning the phenomenological factor when studying the Tamgaly site. It was discovered that the engravings on the rock surfaces of the Tamgaly Valley face the south. This means that the petroglyphs always remain exposed to the sun. In archaeology, scientists use the phenomenological approach to experience and perceive a certain site or artifact by including specific settings or environmental conditions. Thus, the Tamgaly petroglyphs can also be perceived phenomenologically — considering that Tamgaly petroglyphs have many images of ‘sun-headed’ figures, I assume that the exposition to the sun may be intentional.

Ethnographic and archaeological examples

A connection between ethnographic and archaeological comparison can be made with one of the significant archaeological findings from Trundholm Bog — the Chariot of the Sun, a “highlight of the Danish Bronze Age” (*Kaul, 2018*) (Figure 18). It consists of the horse figure attached to the solar disc, representing the sun, all pulled by the wheels on which they stand. Archaeologists make divine and cosmological connections between the horse



Figure 18. The Chariot of the Sun (Kaul, 2018)

and the disc. Specifically, the disc is constructed to show the sun's travel during the day and night.

In both cultural examples, the Tamgaly and the Danish, we see how both horse and sun participate in some ritual action, with features like specific physical appearance (shamans at the Tamgaly site) and repetition patterns (*day and night on the solar disc of the Chariot of the Sun*).

Jacobson-Tepfer (2012) provides a study on vehicle-horse rock art depictions in Mongolian Altai during the Bronze Age — this study appears to show another horse-sun connection. The petroglyphs there show a chariot, typically with four wheels, the horse attached, and sometimes a charioteer. Jacobson-Tepfer (2012) studies how these figures were drawn and portrayed precisely. The exciting thing about these petroglyphs is that all of them were drawn as if the creator was looking at the figures from above (Figure 19). Jacobson-Tepfer (2012) suggests that this was because the riders were actually “transporting” the dead using chariots and horses as tools of the ritual; archaeological findings in Mongolia and Kazakhstan, where chariots with horses were buried with the deceased, strengthen this argument (*the Tamgaly petroglyphs of chariots and the example of Berel kurgans*).

In addition, I thought about how the depicter represents the sun looking at these figures from above, which is why they are drawn this way.

The perspective of looking at the drawings from above highlights the intentionality of the people who made the art, and this highlights the agency of the artists. It is also known that Siberian shamanism was widespread in the pre-Islamic period, which is why an alternative interpretation might include the perspective of ancestors watching people from the “upper world”.

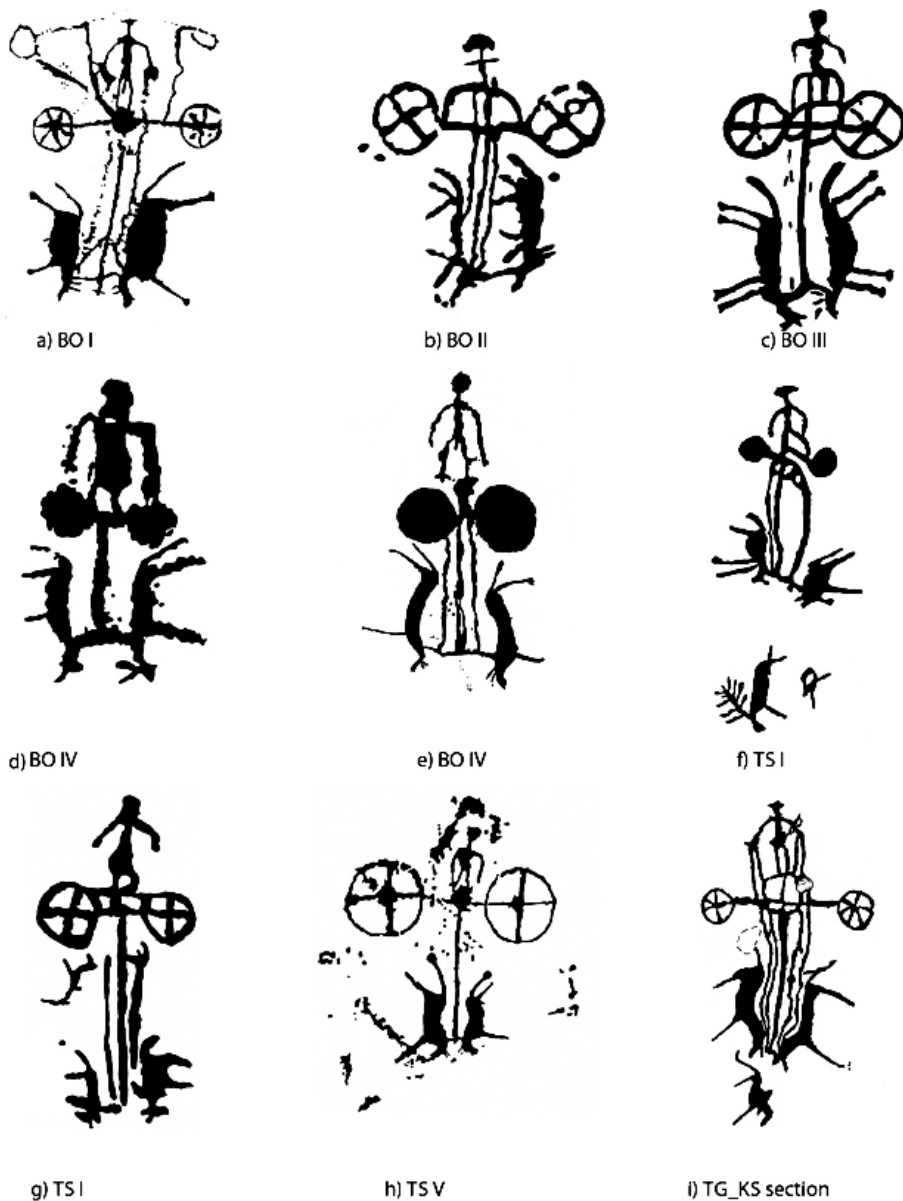


Figure 19. Mongolian Altai rock art of wheeled vehicles (Jacobson-Tepfer 2012)

Similarly, the Chariot of the Sun from Trundholm Bog, which is also dated to the Bronze Age, intentionally portrays the chariot cosmologically and divinely as the sun attached to the horse that pulls the chariot and the sun (Figure 18).

Another ethnographic example of the connection between the sun and horse is the archaeological site of the Berel burial mounds (kurgans) in Kazakhstan. Berel is dated to the Iron Age and is located in eastern Kazakhstan, in the Katonkaragay region. The site has about eleven burials mounds; the archaeological excavations were led by Kazakhstani scholar Zainolla Sarmashev in the 1990s. What is interesting about this site is the presence of horse bones buried with the deceased in one kurgan. Moreover, one of the significant burial mound sites, *Burial 69*, has about sixteen horses buried with two people, female and male (*Samashev et al., 2000*). The horses were buried in special gear (horse ammunition) made of textile, wood and gold. One such attribute is the wooden horn attached to the horse mask (*Figure 20*); scholars reconstructed the ammunition and figured out what Berel horses looked like (*Figure 21*).



Figure 20. The wooden horns attached to the horse mask, Berel (*Samashev et al., 2000*)



Figure 21. The Berel horse, reconstructed (*Samashev et al., 2000*)

The Berel horses were particularly significant to these people — they were buried with them, and people made special harness from gold and bronze for them. The horns attached to the horse masks resemble the ones present at the Tamgaly petroglyphs that date to the early Iron Age — they also look elongated, forming the circle. This ethnographic example makes us think of how horses were symbolically connected with the other world across time and space.

Samashev (2011) highlights that the horns, attached to the horse masks, resemble and imitate the goat horns, which was considered the “*elite*”, well-respected animal, as it lives in mountains close to the sky. Symbolizing the sky, the mountain goat was an inspiration for the Berel harness and specifically the horns — the horns highlighted the god-like nature of the horse, an association of the horns with the spirits of ancestors who inhabited the sky (Samashev, 2011).

Modern symbolism

Today, the horse and the sun remain vital in Kazakh history and national identity. Certain traditions in Kazakh culture remain from pre-Islamic practices, like the shanyraq in the yurt, which performs the same role. At the same time, the horse is the national symbol of a nomadic spirit, portraying freedom and a close relationship with the landscape and nature of the Kazakh identity.

It has to be mentioned how the symbolism of the horse imagery appeared after the independence of Kazakhstan. As the part of the policy of Kazakhisation, the state paid special attention to creating the image of the nomadic lifestyle that the spirit that was “*taken away*” from the Kazakhs during the Soviet times has returned. Thus, the horse became a symbol of the “*romanticized past*” of Kazakh nomads (Sarbassova, 2015). Accompanied by traditional themes, like traditional clothes, the yurt, traditional cuisine and customs, as well as the steppe and mountains as main settings, the visual Kazakh imagery always contains horses — as transport, as a source of food and as a life companion.

The sun, centered on the national flag and emblem, holds a special place in constructing the national symbol of the Kazakh people (Figures 7-8).

It seems that current representations of sun and horse imagery do not portray spiritual symbolism, like in Tamgaly Valley, where the imagery was connected with shamanism. Instead, even though the sun and horse represent the historical knowledge and heritage of the Kazakh nation, this imagery has gained another significance — national and political. This change might be due to the disappearance of the shamanic context in the sun and



Figure 22. Fifth World Nomad Games logo

horse imagery. Perhaps horned horses were the specific case that held and portrayed this spiritual symbolic message.

The modern symbolism of sun and horse imagery possesses political and national significance, and here, the concept of national doxa is applied. To be more specific, the intentional doxic practice makes the sun and horse imagery unquestioned in Kazakh society — the Kazakh nation becomes undoubtedly associated with the sun and the horse, and this is observed in how the National Flag and National Emblem (*Figures 7-8*) are designed.

The sun and horse imagery at Tamgaly Valley held spiritual context; the horse and the sun were essential sacred symbolic elements incorporated into the lifestyles of people who used the Tamgaly landscape. Today, sun and horse imagery has changed ancient symbolism to represent its elements as national symbols: politically, nationally, and historically. For the “*insiders*”, the nation and the Kazakh community now identify themselves with these symbols; for the “*outsiders*”, it shows how these symbols are essential to the Kazakh nation.

Today the uniqueness of Kazakh identity is displayed through various visual imagery. These are often Kazakh ornaments — for instance, they are represented in school history textbooks, and they are an essential part of any Kazakh felt art (usually carpets) and nowadays so-called ethno-jewelry. There are various visual images of traditional ornaments, including the im-

agery of the Tamgaly petroglyphs, at many places in the country — at cafes, museums, educational institutions and even as tattoos.

The recent World Nomad Games, that took place in Astana, 8-13 September, have drawn inspiration from the ancient Tamgaly petroglyphs to symbolize the rich heritage and spirit of nomadic cultures. In the image of the 2024 games, there is an anthropomorphic figure, a “solar horseman” (5th World Nomad Games Astana 2024, n.d.), which rides a horse (Figure 22).

We can associate how stylized figures of warriors on horseback, animals, and ritualistic dances seen in the carvings are echoed in the competitive events of the games, which showcase skills such as archery, horseback wrestling, and traditional horseback riding disciplines. By incorporating these ancient symbols, the World Nomad Games not only celebrate physical prowess but also honor the spiritual and cultural values of nomadic life that have endured across centuries. This connection serves as a reminder that the values of harmony with nature, endurance, and the celebration of communal traditions continue to define the identity of nomadic people, bridging past and present through these global competitions.

Another interesting case is the Krym Altynbekov Shop — a shop, established in 2000 as a project by Ostrov Krym Laboratory. The Laboratory is a Kazakhstani institution that reconstructs archaeological findings; it is most famous for reconstructing Berel and Urdzhar artifacts. So, the Krym Altynbekov Shop portrays itself as a shop manufacturing gold and bronze jewelry with “ancient history”, based on the artifacts stored in the Ostrov Krym Laboratory. Most of the jewelry represents Tamgaly petroglyphs and the horned horse is one of them — there are pins, tumars (a symbolic protective

amulet, necklace against evil) and tie-tumars (Figure 23).



Figure 23. Krym Altynbekov Shop

The visual imagery of Tamgaly petroglyphs, specifically the ‘sun-headed’ figures and horned horses, seems to “raise” the national spirit, remind people of the nomadic past of Kazakhs and connect the landscape with our ancient history and Kazakh identity. Therefore, I believe that this is the reason for

the modern usage of ancient petroglyphs as decorative visual elements by both the state and society — to feel closer to our ancestors and their spirits.

Conclusion

This article draws attention to the persistence of horse-sun imagery; it suggests the use of horse and sun in petroglyphs was a spiritual way of connecting two elements as the sacred elements of their daily lives. The Tamgaly rock art site serves as a case study to highlight the presence of spirituality and shamanic rituals at the Tamgaly Valley. I provided a new ritual shamanic perspective on the horse domestication debate in Kazakhstan — perhaps, horseriding was within the realm of shamanic practices to transport the deceased to the other world. Therefore, horseriding should not only be discussed within the realm of economic subsistence among early agropastoralists of Kazakhstan. I also examined how ancient symbolism of sun and horse imagery has changed into modern symbolism. Horse and sun were considered spiritual and sacred elements before, and now they hold other meanings to illustrate and depict the Kazakh national identity.

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