

Research Article / Научная статья

УДК 903.2(5)

[https://doi.org/10.14258/tpai\(2025\)37\(3\).-08](https://doi.org/10.14258/tpai(2025)37(3).-08)

EDN: HULMMJ

## NEW MATERIALS ON SARMATIAN TAMGA-SIGNS

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**Abstract.** 8 artifacts with Sarmatian tamgas, which have not yet attracted attention or require additional analysis, are considered. Most of them were not identified by colleagues as tamgas. The signs are presented in chronological order, from the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BCE to the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. CE, throughout the territory of Sarmatia from Western Kazakhstan to Romania. These were (except plot 8) household items; of the imported Greek-Roman artifacts, only vessels were used. The places of residence of almost all the studied clans were the Lower Don, the Middle Kuban and the foothills of the Crimea; these were the contact zones of nomads with sedentary peoples. The representatives of these clans partially settled in cities (Pantikapaion, Tanais, Scythian Neapolis). The migration of clans-owners to neighboring regions (plots 3, 5) or over long distances (plot 4) is noted. The rare long-lived clans from Don and Crimea, which existed for many centuries, despite the rapidly changing military and political situation, are interesting. These clans, probably, had influential supporters in neighboring countries. The stele of Šargas patiāxēs from the necropolis of the capital of ancient Georgia — Mcheta (Fig. 2.-1) is historically informative. It demonstrates good interaction and marriages of the nobility of Caucasian Iberia with the group of Don Alans in the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE. The votive stone slab from the fortifications of Karakabak city of the 3rd century CE on the northeastern coast of the Caspian Sea (Fig. 6) reflects the participation of Sarmatian groups of the Northern Black Sea Region in the early history of the city.

**Keywords:** Sarmatians, tamgas, identification issues, contact zones, presence in cities, long-lived clans, migrations of nobility

**For citation:** Yatsenko S. A., Marchenko I. I., Tuallagov A. A. New Materials on Sarmatian Tamga-Signs. *Teoriya i praktika arheologicheskikh issledovanij = Theory and Practice of Archaeological Research.* 2025;37(3):160–184. (In Engl.). [https://doi.org/10.14258/tpai\(2025\)37\(3\).-08](https://doi.org/10.14258/tpai(2025)37(3).-08)

## НОВЫЕ МАТЕРИАЛЫ ПО САРМАТСКИМ ЗНАКАМ-ТАМГАМ

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**Резюме.** Рассмотрены восемь артефактов с сарматскими тамгами, которые пока не привлекали внимание или нуждаются в дополнительном анализе. Большинство из них не были идентифицированы коллегами как тамги. Знаки представлены в хронологическом порядке, от II–I вв. до н. э. до IV–V вв. н. э., по всей территории Сарматии от Западного Казахстана до Румынии. Это были (кроме сюжета 8) бытовые изделия; из импортных греко-римских артефактов использовалась только посуда. Места проживания почти всех изучаемых кланов были на Нижнем Дону, на Средней Кубани и в предгорьях Крыма; это были контактные зоны кочевников с оседлыми народами. Представители этих кланов частично оседали в городах (Пантикопей, Танаис, Неаполь Скифский). Отмечена миграция кланов-хозяев в соседние регионы (сюжеты 3, 5) или на большие расстояния (сюжет 4). Интересны редкие кланы-долгожители с Дона и Крыма, существовавшие много веков, несмотря на быстро меняющуюся военную и политическую ситуацию. Эти кланы, вероятно, имели влиятельных сторонников в соседних странах. Исторически информативна стела патиахша Чаргаса из некрополя столицы древней Грузии — Мцхеты (рис. 2.-1). Она демонстрирует хорошее взаимодействие и браки знати Кавказской Иберии с группировкой донских аланов к концу I в. н. э. Посвятительная плита укреплений города Каракабак III в. н. э. на северо-восточном побережье Каспия (рис. 6) отражает участие сарматских группировок Северного Причерноморья в ранней истории города.

**Ключевые слова:** сарматы, тамги, проблемы идентификации, контактные зоны, присутствие в городах, долгоживущие кланы, миграции знати

**Для цитирования:** Яценко С. А., Марченко И. И., Туаллагов А. А. Новые материалы по сарматским знакам-тамгам // Теория и практика археологических исследований. 2025. Т. 37, № 3. С. 160–184. [https://doi.org/10.14258/tpai\(2025\)37\(3\).-08](https://doi.org/10.14258/tpai(2025)37(3).-08)

### ***Introduction***

In recent years, many interesting materials have been published on Sarmatian clan emblems (Ossetian *nysæn*, close to the common Iranian term *nishan*; more popular in literature today is Turkic *tamga*). Here we will consider eight plots associated with them. These finds (except for the one considered in plot 3) have been published in recent years and sometimes briefly commented on; however, often, due to the specificity of their appearance, they are not even recognized as tamgas. Nevertheless, these are precisely new materials on emblematics, which still need to be worked on. The analyzed artifacts were found throughout the vast expanse of the Sarmatian World from Western Kazakhstan to Romania, and represent three main, successive archaeological cultures and their periphery.

### ***Methods of Searching and Documenting***

The methodology for tamgas' studying of Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the last two or three decades has been developed by the main author of the article and A. E. Rogozhinskii for the Iranian and Turkic Worlds, with the active involvement of ethnological and historical data (Yatsenko, 2001, p. 11–26, 45–92; Yatsenko et al., 2019, p. 8–42). In this case, materials from the territories of the Sarmatians' sedentary neighbors — the Khorezmians, Kangju, Maeotes, Late Scythians of Crimea, Bosporan Greeks, early Goths and tribes of the Eastern European Forest-Steppe Zone — were taken into account. With regard to the Sarmatians (as well as their distant descendants — the Ossetians), it is quite clear today that tamgas, with rare exceptions, were emblems of clans of noble origin (even if sometimes impoverished by the will of fate).

Our analysis of tamgas material is based on the use in each case of the most complete database (including unpublished ones) of synchronous, as well as earlier and later images of emblems within the vast Sarmatian World and its politically significant neighbors with whom there were close contacts or with whom ethno-cultural continuity is assumed. It is important to understand what is a sign *identical* to the one under study (taking into account individual handwriting), and what (and to what extent) can be considered a *close analogy* to it (see, for example: Yatsenko, 2001, p. 19–21). *In clusters and pairs* of such signs, it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of their placement, size, sequence of application, proximity to non-tamga images and texts. Some authors sometimes deliberately declare almost all “non-standard” signs in the contact zones of Bosporan settlements to be Greek (comp.: Emets, 2012).

The artifacts with Sarmatian tamgas are today, as a rule, objects made of inorganic materials (the exception is plot 6, when a wooden chest with metal and bone overlays has been preserved). A special place among the categories of products is occupied by stone slabs of fortifications and tombstones, clay vessels and bronze mirrors-pendants (they provide the greatest amount of information in other publications on the Sarmatians). We have arranged the plots under consideration according to the chronological principle — from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE to approximately the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. CE.

#### ***Plot 1.***

An aristocratic additional catacomb grave 19 of adults (male) from Kuban Sarmatians-Siraces in barrow 1 near Dyad'kovskaya stanitsa (on the right bank of the Middle Kuban, near the Zhuravka River flowing into the Beisug Estuary of the Azov Sea) survived the robbers. This barrow, which recently had a height of more than 7 m, was filled up at the beginning of the Bronze Age. The grave dates back to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE (the time of active migrations in most of the Eurasian Steppe). Before us is a princely burial with a large number of ceremonial, status items, a considerable part of which were made in the neighboring Bosphorus (Bespalyi, 2024, p. 130–132; ill. 9–10). Among them: a gold torque, bracelet, brooch and costume appliques of 6 forms; a long sword and a gorytos with gold cover; a silver (including gilded) cup, horse harness parts, a short sword with silver overlays, a glass skythos and a bronze cauldron; clay pottery of 4 forms. In this, the most luxurious of the preserved burials of the Siraces, the same sign in the form of a circle is carefully reproduced three times on two important vessels (a cauldron and a skythos) (Fig. 1.-1–2). This simple sign did not attract the attention of either the researcher of the complex or other colleagues. However, on the cauldron it is presented symmetrically precisely in those two areas at the

upper edge under the bases of the handles, where tamga was placed in other graves. On the skythos it is very carefully drawn with a double line on the bottom. Meanwhile, it was precisely the simple circle that was clearly the tamga of the Sarmatians in the Bayte III sanctuary, and among the Kangju people associated with the Sarmatians — in the Beskepe rock sanctuary; in Chach (Shaushukumtobe, Kanka, Ushbastobe), which was subject to Kangju, it is presented on ceramics among other tamga-type signs (Yatsenko et al., 2019, p. 82, Fig. 6.1-13; p. 193, Fig. 5.3-4, no. 22; p. 204, Fig. 2.1-3).

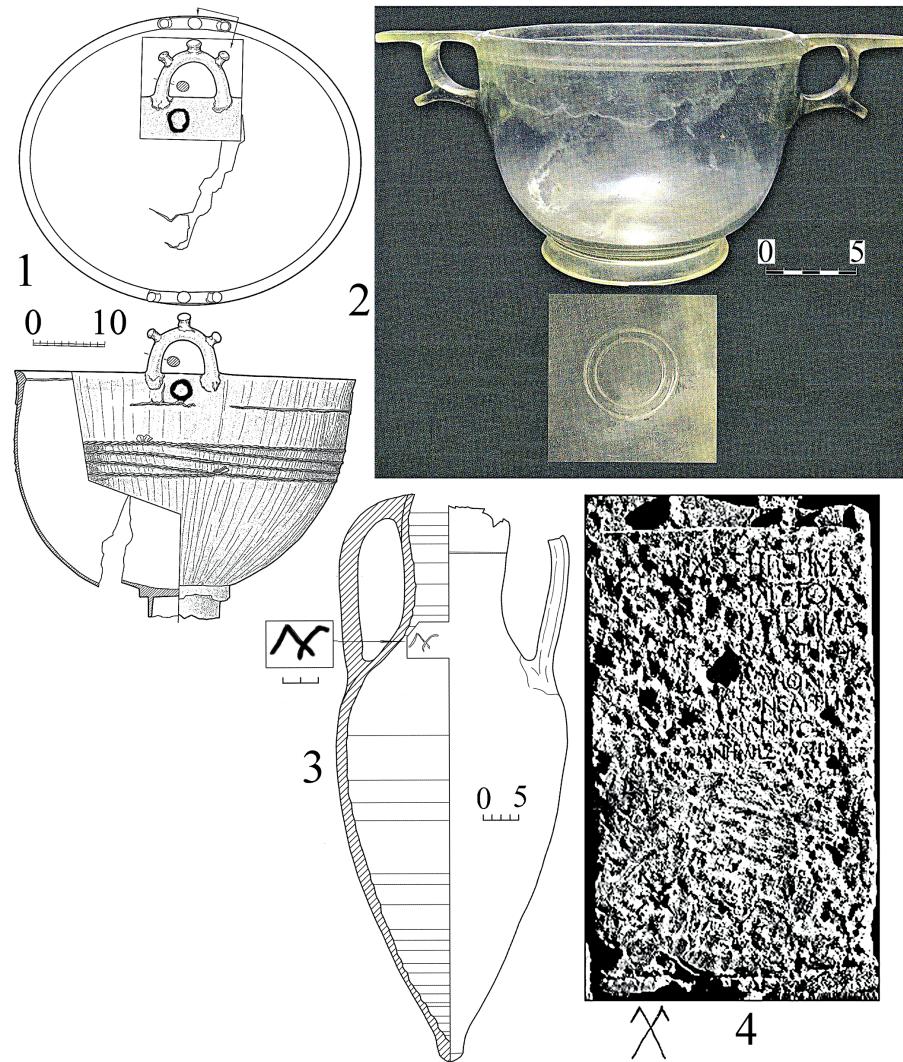


Fig. 1. Burials of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE: 1–2 — burial mound 1 near the village of Dyadkovskaya; 3 — amphoras from grave 185 2012 of Tanais western necropolis; 4 — tombstone of Macarios, son of Hermogenes, Kerch

Рис. 1. Погребения II–I вв. до н.э.: 1–2 — курган 1 у станицы Дядьковской; 3 — амфоры из могилы 185 2012 г. западного некрополя Танаиса; 4 — надгробие Макария, сына Гермогена, Керчь

The Sarmatians and their eastern neighbors have known about a tamga in the form of two circles placed next to each other since the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE. In the Chu-Ili Mountains, on the border of Semirechye and the future eastern regions of Kangju, in Kulzhabasy, in a series of “Post-Saka time petroglyphs” of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC (which can be associated with the Yuezhi), there is also an image of a future “typical Sarmatian” mirror-pendant with such a tamga in the same composition with images of wild and domestic animals and humans (Yatsenko, Rogozhinskii, 2021, p. 736; Fig. 2-5). Two such circles, with a short line next to each other, are presented on the Olbian lion No. 2 (Drachuk, 1975, pl. LI.-119).

### **Plot 2.**

In 2012, to the west of the urban zone of the ancient Bosporan city Tanais (a large series of 727 graves was examined, 266 of which belong to the Hellenistic Tanais of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE (the largest of the four chronological groups identified here). At that time, the city already had a Sarmatian component, in particular, a group of women-warriors buried with Sarmatian weapons (Yatsenko, 2018c, p. 62-63; Fig. 12). In the well preserved ordinary burial 185, made in a pit with shoulders in an oak log, only two items of imported ceramics were found: an amphora from Sinope and the bottom of a Megara bowl. In the upper part of the shoulder of the amphora, graffiti is inscribed, not related to Greek inscriptions, etc., which have no analogies among Bosporus graffiti (Emets, 2012) not found.

This find was left without comment (Bespaly, 2023, 1, p. 103-104; 2, Pl. 111) (Figs. 1.-3). Meanwhile, such a Sarmatian tamga is known in the Bosporan capital of Panticapaeum, and is depicted on slab No. 67 in the “Corpus of Bosporan Inscriptions”, on the former tombstone of Macarius, son of Hermogenes, from the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE, purchased in 1894 in Kerch from E. Zaporozhsky (Corpus, 2004, No. 67) (Fig. 1.-4). Like other individual tamgas on Bosporan slabs from Kerch in this collection (Ns. 270, 281, 565), the tamga is depicted during the secondary use of a tombstone (one of them belonged to a courtier), just below the old Greek inscription and very carelessly; usually we are talking about signs of the Middle Sarmatian period on previous tombstones from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE. The cluster of signs on the slab from Tanais (Novocherkassk Museum, inv. No. II-238-1), where this emblem was also found, can be dated to the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE (Yatsenko, 2001, p. 74; Fig. 23.-b). There is also a “marriage” mirror with such a sign on a woman from the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE in the South-Western Crimea, in the Ust-Alma necropolis, in grave 559 in its northern, late part, adjacent to the “Barbarian city” (Palakios of Strabo or Dandaka of Ptolemy). Here, tamgas were found on only 4% of the deceased and mark rare Sarmatian outsiders (Yatsenko, 2018b, pp. 102, 104; Fig. 4, No. 36).

### **Plot 3.**

In 1940, during excavations of the elite necropolis of the Patiakhshis — the highest officials of Caucasian Iberia (Kartli) near the Armaziskhevi River near the capital, Mcheta, a former stele of Šargas / Šrgs patiāxēs, son of Zewah the Elder, who was active during the time of King Mithridates / Mihrdat I, was discovered in secondary use for a grave 4 (Fig. 2.-1). As is now clear, this nobleman occupied at one time (apparently, this was in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE) the second position in the state, similar to a modern prime minister (Apakidze et al., 1958, p. 72-73; Preud'Homme, Frank, 2023, Figs. 1-2). The stele was then reduced at the top and left edges; in this form, its height is 163 cm, its width is 70 cm. The text, in the “Armazi script”

of the Aramaic alphabet (its competent translation with commentary was made recently), lists Šargas' services to the state, in particular — in the difficult time before and during the invasion of Georgia by the nomadic “Massagetae” (Msknyt), including the construction and strengthening of the important “heroes' fortress” (Preud'Homme, Frank, 2023, p. 345).

It is now believed that the names of a number of high-ranking Iberian dignitaries, Zewah (two are mentioned) and Šargas, are of Sarmatian origin, as are Ksefarnug, the royal Saurmag and others. Thus, the name Šargas may be derived from the Ossetian *særægas* — “having an intact head”, from *cærgæs* — “eagle” or from *sær* — “head” + *gæs* — “watchman, guardian” (Abaev, 1949, p. 86–87, 150, 180; Abaev, 2020, p. 51–52; Khurshudyan, 2015, p. 43; Preud'Homme, Frank, 2023, p. 365–366). However, in addition to the Sarmatian nature of the names of some of the first persons of Georgia in ancient times, the Šargas stele also depicts a series of Sarmatian tamgas, which have so far received almost no comment from historians and archaeologists; only a cautious assumption was made that these could be unknown “religious symbols” or emblems of the ruling family of the Iberian Mithridates I (Preud'Homme, Frank, 2023, p. 342). These conclusions were made, alas, not by specialists in this subject (for example, there is no factual evidence that the kings of ancient Iberia had emblems of the tamga type, and the signs of the neighboring Sarmatians are clearly unknown to the authors of the idea). Let us now turn to the tamgas themselves. These emblems (to which one of the co-authors, A. A. Tuallagov, recently drew attention) are quite recognizable. Let us try to understand the representatives of which Sarmatian group were so thoroughly integrated into the Iberian elite (after all, the highest positions were already occupied by Šargas' father, Zewah the Elder).

First of all, one of the two symmetrical lateral projections (the one that survived, apparently, was used specifically for placing the tamga) was subsequently cut off together with tamga 2, and there should have been three tamgas at first; their placement is well thought out. A composition of three Sarmatian tamgas with a larger central one is also known in another region of Transcaucasia — near Beyuk-Degne Village (Azerbaijan) (Yatsenko, 2001, Fig. 26.-a). In the center of the Šargas stele is depicted the largest of the signs (tamga No. 1), clearly belonging to Šargas himself with a Sarmatian name. The upper end of the tamga was then filed off, but the shape of the emblem was clearly symmetrical: a central element and two identical signs connected to it — at the edges; this is how some of the complex tamgas were formed. In the center there is an S-shaped sign, tilted to the left. At the edges, apparently, there were two simple elements (initially — separate tamgas) in the form of a curl. The latter signs (and with such a tilt of the curl) are well known in clusters in Panticapaeum and Olbia (Drachuk, 1975, Pl. III.-42–43), as well as on dishes (including cauldrons) from Sarmatian burials of the Lower Don already around the turn of the erae (Yatsenko, 2001, Fig. 4, Ns. 5–6, 12). An exact analogue of this emblem has not yet been identified in Sarmatia, but typologically close examples (an S-shaped sign, also tilted to the left, with two identical tamgas attached to its ends) are well known in the world of Iranian nomads of Central Asia. In the 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE, such a sign is represented in a group of Post-Saka petroglyphs on the western border of Semirechye — in the Chu-Ili Mountains (Fig. 2.-2), and later — in Karakabak Canyon on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea (since the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE, an unusual Karakabak City was founded near this canyon, but the tamgas in the canyon are apparently earlier (Yatsenko et al., 2019,

p. 153, Fig. 4.1–3; Yatsenko, Rogozhinskii, 2021, Fig. 7). The first tamga is associated with the arrival of the Great Yuezhi group in the region; a later and western find of the same tamga already refers to the Sarmatians. Thus, tamgas of the same type with Šargas sign are known from approximately the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE in Central Asia.

No less interesting is the tamga on the right side projection of the stele (tamga No. 3). This is an S-shaped sign, also tilted to the left. In other words, this is a sign of the same type as the one described above, but of a simpler appearance (possibly of earlier origin). It should be noted that the Sarmatians could have used horizontally mirrored versions of the sign under one owner (Yatsenko, 2001, Fig. 3.-c, d). At the same time, for example, during the late use of the Bayte III sanctuary, tamgas in the form of an S-shaped sign tilted to the left were applied to the walls to the left of the entrance, and tilted to the right — to the right of the entrance as a kind of symmetry (Yatsenko, Choref, 2022, Fig. 3.-IV). Naturally, the question arises: which Sarmatian groups developed and widely used this emblem? The answer to this is simple: this emblem is originally associated with the Kuban Siraces. As early as the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE, such a tamga is presented among the 10 tamgas with the monograms of the Pontic Neoptolemos and Macharos along the edges (Fig. 2.-4) on the foundation slab of the Artesian Fortress (probably Parosta in Ptolemy). And in 46/47 CE in the territory of the Syraces, a “Barbarian” version of a gold coin was minted in the name of Mithridates III of Bosporus with such a tamga (Yatsenko, Choref, 2022, p. 143–144; Fig. 1; Vinokurov, Yatsenko, Choref, 2024, p. 84; Fig. 4, No. 4) (Fig. 2.-5). This tamga is also applied in a small size on the end of the stele-sanctuary near Krivoi Rog, where emblems were engraved from the turn of the erae (Yatsenko, Shevchenko, Usenko, 2022, Fig. 11, No. 28). It is then represented on the famous slab of 1871 y. from Kerch (four times) and on the Olbian lion No. 1, on several early ritual Gothic spears from Gotland and Southern Poland with a series of “allied” Sarmatian emblems (Yatsenko, Choref, 2022, p. 143–144). This clan is among the 18 most active in Sarmatia in participating in various actions in different parts of this vast region, reflected in clusters of tamgas (Yatsenko, 2001, Fig. 9; 10; 19). By the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> c. CE, such a tamga is also known in the lands of the Southern Kazakhstan’ Kangju, and on the ceremonial ceramic flask from Bata-tobe, two such emblems (neatly applied with the aforementioned stamps for branding!) also frame the central part, forming three visual elements (Fig. 2.-3). For Kangju, we are talking about a small clan fortress with poor finds (which does not mean that the owners were not of noble birth). It was then depicted on the coins of the Khorezm king Artramus (Yatsenko et al., 2020, p. 161; Figs. 6–10–6–11; Yatsenko, Choref, 2022, Figs. 3.-III, V, VII).

#### **Plot 4.**

In the alcove grave 70 of the Eastern Necropolis of Scythian Neapolis turn of the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE, a female “marriage” mirror-pendant with an interesting tamga was found, with a dot in the center of the circle (see its type: Fig. 3.-2) (Yatsenko, 2018a, p. 226; Fig. 4, No. 4). In Scythian Neapolis, two more such mirrors are known from random finds (Drachuk, 1975, pl. XVIII.-4, No. 2, 8). Another example of it is seen on the mirror from the alcove grave 46 in Belbek IV necropolis in South-Western Crimea; this grave is reliably dated to 100–125 CE — the peak of burials of Sarmatian women with tamgas there (Yatsenko, 2018a, p. 221; Fig. 1, No. 14) (Fig. 3.-1). Thus, both early finds are associated with Sarmatian women who ended up in Late Scythian settlements in the foothills of Crimea; apparently, their relatives roamed

nearby. However, much later, three centuries later, in the 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE, such mirrors with the same sign were used by women buried in Reims in Northern France (Fig. 3.-2) and in grave 214 in Sacco di Goito in Northern Italy (Kazanski, 2013, Fig. 2, 6, 14; Chibirov, 2023, Figs. 1–2).

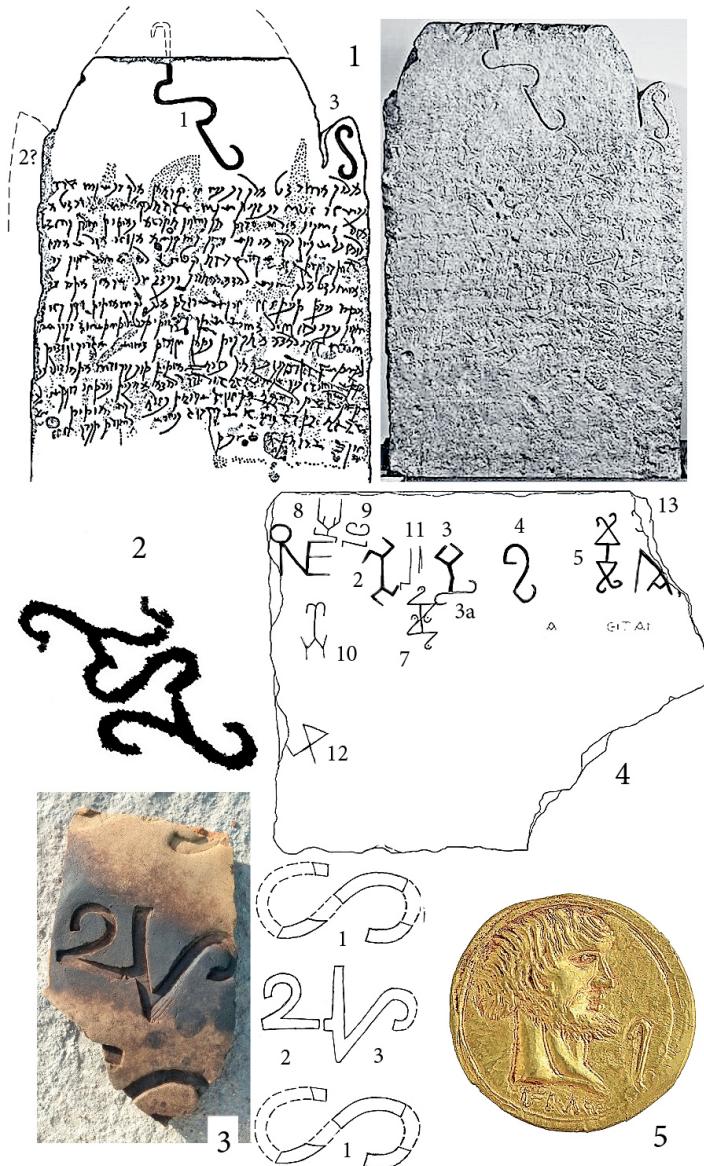


Fig. 2. Šargas stele from Mcheta and analogies for tamgas: 1 — stele of Šargas; 2 — Chu-Illi Mountains; 3 — flask from Baka-tobe; 4 — Artezian Hillfort; 5 — coin of Mithridates III, 46/47 yy.

Рис. 2. Стела Чаргаса из Мхеты и аналогии тамгам: 1 — стела Чаргаса; 2 — Чу-Илийские горы; 3 — фляга из Бака-тобе; 4 — городище Артезиан; 5 — монета Митридата III 46/47 гг.н.э.

A variant of the tamga of a related clan is also known, almost identical, but without a dot in the center of the circle. A sign with exactly the same tamga rotation as the previous one is known on a mirror in Chechnya (Bratskie-I, burial 1364) (Chibirov, 2023, p. 81; Fig. 4) (Fig. 3.-5). But there was also a variant in which such a sign was “laid on its side”: in the Ukrainian Mayaki (Fig. 3.-3) and in the Moldavian Markautsi (Bârcă, 2021, Fig. 4, Ns. 4, 12) (Fig. 3.-4). This variant was encountered repeatedly in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE in the Lower Don’ Kobyakovo (grave 14 of the KNT excavation trench of 2000 y. and grave 11 of excavation trench 2 of 1961 y.) (Yatsenko, 2018a, p. 230; Fig. 7, Ns. 10–11).

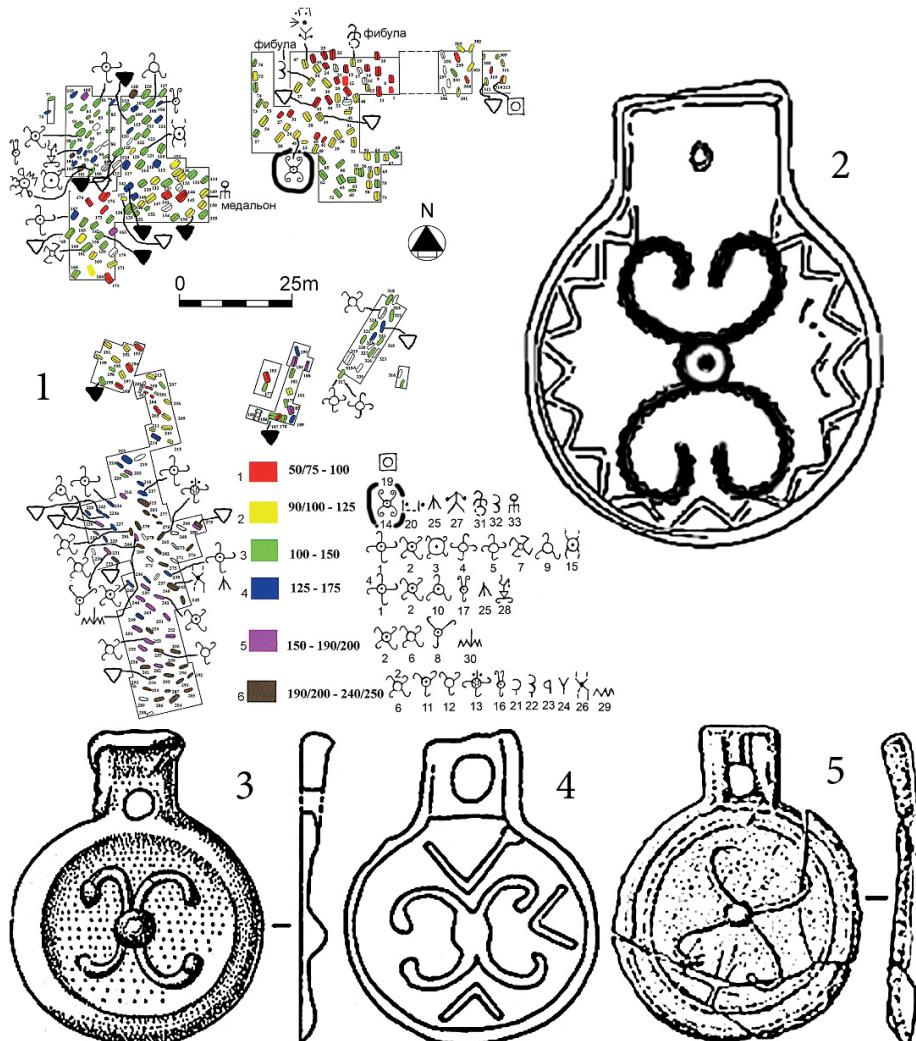


Fig. 3. Two tamgas of related clans on mirror-pendants: 1 — Belbek IV, grave 46; 2 — Reims; 3–4 — Mayaki and Markautsy; 5 — Bratskie-I, grave 1364

Рис. 3. Две тамги родственных кланов на зеркалах-подвесках: 1 — Бельбек IV, могила 46; 2 — Реймс; 3–4 — Маяки и Маркаузы; 5 — Братские-I, погребение 1364

### **Plot 5.**

In 1975, A. M. Zhdanovsky excavated burial No. 31 of a horseman with a sword, chain mail and helmet, accompanied by three horses and a “servant” at the ground burial ground of the Leninokhabl aul in Adygea. In addition, gold jewelry, a silver cup, a wooden box with metal and bone details, an iron candelabrum, etc. were placed with the deceased.

The silver cup is 7.1 cm high and has a mouth diameter of 8.9 cm; there were traces of a second handle being attached. Its stem was separated from the body and lay separately (next to the foal). The bottom of the tray was scored by a blow from a sharp object; in the burial, the cup was in a heavily deformed state (Archive AI, RAS. F. R-1. No. 6524; p. 36). V. I. Mordvintseva and M. Yu. Treister attributed this vessel to the type of cups and bowls of handicraft forms imitating ancient ceramic and metal vessels. They included two silver cups from burials 1 and 2 of the burial ground of the Gorodskoy Farm in this type, limiting their chronology to the first half — middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE (Mordvintseva, Traister, 2007, p. 27; Cat. No. A127.1, Tab. 31).

Taking into account the chronology of the fibulae, the glass balsamarium, the typological closeness of the cups and the tamga of Julius Tiberius Rhoemetalces (132–153) on the handle of one of the cups, the vessels from the latter are dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE (Simonenko, Marčenko, Limberis, 2008, p. 389; Cat. Ns. 191–192). In general, the chronology of Leninokhabl burial No. 31 can be limited to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE.

On the bend of the vessel’s handle, two tamgas are applied with a punch (Simonenko, Marčenko, Limberis, 2008, p. 273–274; Abb. 1) (Fig. 4.-1). Such a pair of signs next to each other is not uncommon in the Sarmatian World and most likely symbolizes the union of two clans (Yatsenko, 2001, p. 81–83).

An identical specimen to tamga No.1 is presented on one of the two bulls for a model of a Sarmatian tent (it contained the ashes of a deceased child after cremation) in child’s grave 312 of 1903 in Glinishche, Kerch (Solomonik, 1959, No. 143; p. 158) (Fig. 4.-2). This find was long dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE, until A. M. Butyagin examined the entire series of similar finds in Pantakapaeon, re-dated these items to around the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE, and associated them with a compact group of Sarmatians who settled in the Bosporan capital at that time and were subjected to Hellenization (Butyagin, 2021, p. 109). At first, S. A. Yatsenko believed that this was a single double sign, but as more material was collected, his opinion changed. It is interesting that on both items, where two signs are placed vertically one above the other, tamga No. 1 is located as if inside, further from the outer edge. This place was possibly more significant. An identical tamga was also found in synchronous monuments of Khorezm, closely connected with the Sarmatians, of the “Kangju period” (2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE — 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE). These are ceramics of the 2<sup>nd</sup> group in the Elharas Fortress and later bricks in the High Palace of Taprak-kala of the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> cc. (Yatsenko, 2001, Fig. 28, No. 28)<sup>22</sup>.

A similar tamga (its upper elements are connected at the base) is depicted in relief on a dedicatory (and obviously construction) slab about 50 cm wide, found by chance in

<sup>22</sup> For the second tamga in this pair on the bull’s body, its other finds are also associated with the Middle Sarmatian period. It is presented at the end of this period in a series of signs on a mirror-pendant from grave 102 of the 1999–2000 y. excavation trench in Kobyakovo (Yatsenko, 2018a, p. 233; Fig. 7, No. 26; 9, No. 7) and is engraved on the end of a stele depicting the conclusion of an alliance from the Olbia region (Yatsenko, Shevchenko, Usenko, 2022, Fig. 4, No. 5).

Tanais, most likely related, like similar ones there, to the city fortifications (Solomonik, 1962) (Fig. 4.-3). Similar slabs, mounted in fortress gates, in reliable cases belonged to the first persons of the Bosporan state. It is also represented in the cluster of signs on a small unpublished fragment of a slab found by B. Böttger at the southern gate of Tanais in 1994; in total, more than 20 small fragments of different slabs with tamgas were found there. In the cluster of tamgas on the slab from Tanais (Novocherkassk Museum, No. II-207), where the sign of Sauromates II (174–210) is also present; this sign is also known in a small size on the periphery (Yatsenko, 2001, p. 74; Fig. 22.-A). In the former Scythian Neapolis (which ceased to be a city), this emblem was carved in the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> cc. on the plaster of the wall in building A (Drachuk, 1975, Pl. VI, No. 424). Thus, tamga No. 1 is initially associated with one of the clans of the Middle Sarmatian period, which settled (partially?) in the Bosphorus. In Khorezm, such an emblem is associated with ordinary complexes, and its owners there, apparently, had no relation to the Bosporans.

Tamga No. 2' situation is more complicated. There are no exact analogues to it in Sarmatia or Central Asia, although there are similar examples. So far, all such examples have been found only in large and small clusters of signs. In Sarmatia, they are represented on the Olbian lion No. 1 (Drachuk, 1975, Pl. XLVI, Ns. 64–65), and here they form figures similar to, as it were, mirror-reflected versions of ours horizontally. On the Kerch slab of 1871 y. (Drachuk, 1975, Pl. XXXVIII, No. 244), a similar emblem is both turned upside down and reflected horizontally compared to ours. Another version is seen on a mirror-pendant of the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> cc. from grave 6 of 1956 y. in Kobyakovo (Yatsenko, 2001, Fig. 5, No. 46) (Fig. 5.-3, No. 25).

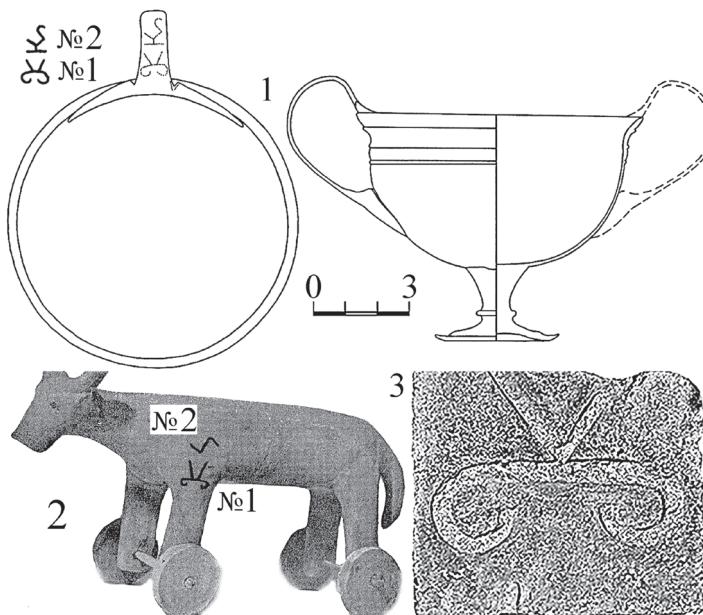


Fig. 4. Tamga 1 on the cup from Leninokhabl Village and analogies: 1 — Leninokhabl, burial 31; 2 — Kerch, grave 312, 1903; 3 — Tanais

Рис. 4. Тамга 1 на кубке из Ленинохабля и аналогии: 1 — Ленинохабль, погребение 31; 2 — Керчь, могила 312 1903 г.; 3 — Танаис

**Plot 6.**

As already mentioned in connection with plot 2, in 2012, a series of 727 graves were excavated to the western part of Bosporan Tanais, 39 of which belong to the Late Sarmatian period (the smallest numerically of the four chronological groups identified here). Of particular interest is the grave of a 30-year-old noble woman from the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE in an oak coffin in a catacomb. The grave was robbed by contemporaries, but fortunately, much organic matter was preserved in it (Bespal'yi, 2023, 1, p. 27–34; 2, Tab. 28–36). Despite the robbery, it is clear that the woman had many characteristic items associated with the Sarmatian tradition (a wooden vessel with several figures of animals with metal covers; gold applications with a very realistic ram's head; an ornamented censer; a bone spoon; items of ancient cultures, such as a stone chisel).

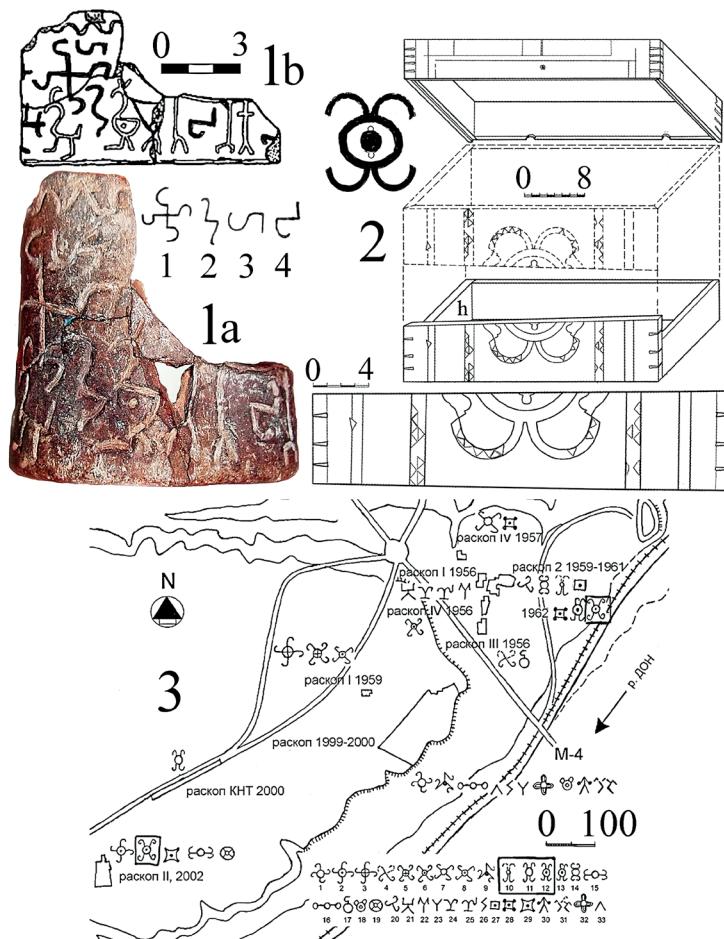


Fig. 5. 1 — Timișoara-Cioreni; a — censer from Cioreni;  
2 — casket from grave 30, 2012, Tanais western necropolis; 3 — Kobyakovo

Рис. 5. 1 — Тимишоара-Чиорени; а — курильница из Чиорени;  
2 — ларец из могилы 30 2012 г. западного некрополя Танаиса; 3 — Кобяково

We can also see an unusual set of objects of a cult nature. Of particular interest to us is a casket made of dense dark-brown wood (14 of its parts have survived). It was about 30 cm high and was richly decorated with a pattern of small triangles made of wooden veneer of two colors and bone overlays, and also had a gold cover, nailed with gold nails (they were torn off by robbers). The design of the casket was carefully recorded and restored by the remarkable field archaeologist N. E. Bespalaya (Fig. 5.-2). Around its lock, an “ornamental composition” 14.5 cm high was cut in with inlay. Together with the circle of the keyhole, it forms the outline of the well-known tamga. And this sign is known precisely at this time and precisely in the area of the mouth of the Don. It is represented by the “marriage” mirrors-pendants of Sarmatian women who married Maeotes in the large Kobyakovo Hillfort, in grave 11 of 1961 y. and in grave 39 of excavation trench II of 2002 y. (Yatsenko, 2018a, Fig. 7, No. 12) (Fig. 5.-3). The well-documented excavation trench II is indicative. Many mirrors-pendants were found here, but all the samples with tamgas come from only one of several types of graves (catacombs, as in Tanais) and also date back to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE (Yatsenko, 2018a, p. 233; Fig. 8).

### **Plot 7.**

In 2019, during excavations of the so-called Baylama Wall (which enclosed agricultural lands of the inhabitants of Karakabak City in a desert area on the north-eastern coast of the Caspian Sea, which emerged in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE with the participation of neighboring Khorezm and the Sarmatians), a fragment of a limestone slab measuring 81×36×11 cm was found, which was apparently placed at the upper edge of the defensive wall and then ended up on the bottom of the ditch. The authors of the excavations believe that all the images densely covering the slab date back to the same time within the end of antiquity (Bogdanov, Astafyev, 2023, p. 133; Fig. 1) (Fig. 6.-a). The Baylama Wall was originally a stone wall with towers 3 m high, a 1.5-2 m wide, and a rampart 3 m wide, protecting from raids the suburban territory of transhumance (sheep grazing) with an area of 15 sq. km — a rocky Endy remnant, stretching to the north, to the city and Kochak Gulf of the Caspian Sea, for 5.5 km. Unfortunately, the fragment of the slab has apparently preserved about half of its original area; in the part known today, the surface of the stone has peeled off in places along the edges.

In our opinion, two later (early medieval) images clearly stand out here, which, as the publishers admit, firstly were applied using a different technique, and secondly, partially overlap the earlier signs (in Fig. 6, highlighted in black). This is, first of all, the image of a Turkic horseman, the type of which for the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> cc. is well known in a number of places in Kazakhstan (see, for example: graffiti on a votive vessel of the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> cc. in the Post-Kangju sanctuary of Sidak: Smagulov, Yatsenko, 2010, 2013) (Fig. 6.-c). This is also a large tamga in the center of the surviving part of the slab. It seems that in the early Middle Ages the slab that ended up in the ditch was accessible to visitors to the ancient fortification. We are now interested in the remaining images that densely cover the slab (two disorganized horizontal rows of tamgas have been preserved) (Fig. 6.-b). Judging by the identical tamgas of related clans Ns. 5-7, such emblems were placed at different angles. Let us ask ourselves: are there any tamgas on the slab that have an exact analogy in the samples of Antiquity in Central Asia or Sarmatia? Yes, there are such emblems, and they are known only among the Sarmatians of the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> cc.— the period that reaches the construction of the Baylama Wall.

A special place in the composition of the slab is occupied by tamga No. 1, presented in two copies in its central part. This sign is depicted on the horse's thighs of the rider standing before the goddess (they are accompanied below by a scene of two dogs confronting a boar) on the famous Scythian-Sarmatian stele discovered in 1909 in the necropolis of Kozyrka Settlement, 12 km from Olbia (Solomonik, 1959, p. 82–83; No. 36). Sign No. 2 (reflected horizontally) was engraved during the secondary use of the tombstone of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE of Mamia, the mother of Memios from Panticapaeon (Corpus, 2004, No. 281). Tamga No. 3 is engraved in a group of signs from the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> cc. at the entrance to the famous Bosporan crypt of 1872 y. in Kerch (Solomonik, 1959, p. 108; No. 52a, in the upper right corner). The preserved half of sign No. 4 is very interesting. Signs of this type ("Aspurgos king of the Bosporus", 11/14–37, and similar ones) were known in the Bosporan territory as early as the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE, long before his birth, and clearly belonged to his clan, being preserved after his reign (Vinokurov, Yatsenko, Choref, 2024, Fig. 3, Ns. 1–3; 4, No. 2). However, most of the signs here, as often happened in Sarmatia, represent local clans among the guests who arrived for some event. This is a series of similar emblems Ns. 5–7 and Ns. 2, 8, 10. In addition, a close analogy to tamga No. 9 is engraved in the Kangju rock sanctuary of Beskepe (Yatsenko et al., 2019, p. 193; Fig. 5, 3–4, No. 23).

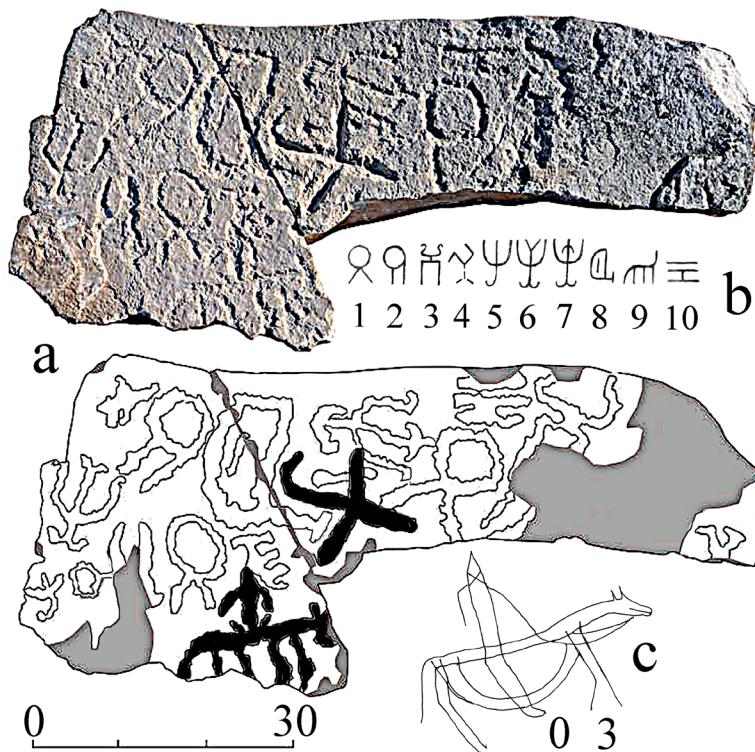


Fig. 6. Slab from Baylama Wall in Karakabak (a–b) and analogies.  
C — vessel from Sidak sanctuary, 2005 (drawing of E. A. Smagulov)

Рис. 6. Плита из Вала Байлама г. Каракабак (а–б) и аналогии.  
С — сосуд из святилища Сидак, 2005 г. (рис. Е. А. Смагулова)

### ***Plot 8.***

A large fragment of a Sarmatian censer in the form of a cylinder, 6 x 6 cm in size, with a series of images, is exhibited in the Banat Regional Museum in Timisoara (Romania). It was found during explorations in the Timisoara — Freidorf/Cioreni archaeological complex and glued together from several fragments (Benea, 1996, Fig. 1a; Ishtvánovits, Kulcár, 2017, Fig. 193) (Fig. 5.-1). By analogy with other censers, they are dated to the turn of the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> cc. and are associated with the Pre-Hunnic Sarmatian population (Grumeza, 2016, p. 78; Pl. 21.-2). There are a number of figurative images here (two bird figures at the bottom left of the spread, the legs and belly of a ungulate (?) figure on the right; along the upper edge there was a strip of wave-like ornamentation, which was taken for a snake (apparently by analogy with a synchronous and co-cultural pot with a ritual scene from Ciria: (Grumeza, 2016, Pl. 21.-5)). Between the bird figures there is a complex figure, which is a variant of swastikas, which Romanian colleagues consider to be exclusively a solar symbol; however, numerous examples of complex swastikas among reliable Sarmatian tamgas (Yatsenko, 2001, Fig. 5, No. 130; 7, No. 20; 22A; 23A; 2018a, Fig. 1, No. 13; 5, No. 10; 6, No. 21; 2018b, Fig. 4.-17-18; 2020, Fig. 3, No. 27; Bârcă, 2021, Figs. 4.-7; 11.-4) allow us to think otherwise (No. 1). Indeed, tamgas were also found on another ritual vessel of that time in this region — the aforementioned pot from Ciria, where five such emblems were compactly scratched.

Around the swastika and the body of the ungulate there is a row of at least six different types of signs, of which only three have survived completely, while other complex figures have survived in fragments; we are also clearly talking about tamgas. These signs, apparently, were not repeated; however, the surviving emblems Ns. 3-4 are close. Tamga No. 2 in a mirror-reflected horizontal version is visible on the mirror from Neyzats (grave 235) of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> cc. (Yatsenko, 2018a, Fig. 12.-3). Signs Ns. 3 and 4 (including mirror-reflected horizontal ones, sometimes with an additional line) are known in large clusters of Sarmatia (Drachuk, 1975, Pl. VII, Ns. 546-547), on the stele from Krivoi Rog and later on the slab of 236 CE in Tanais (Yatsenko, Shevchenko, Usenko, 2022, Fig. 17.-II). They are also known in Khorezm since the Hellenistic time (Yatsenko, 2001, Fig. 27, No. 32; 28, No. 17) and in Kangju (Yatsenko et al., 2020, Fig. 6-10, Ns. 2-3).

### ***Results of Research***

Here, 8 different plots with Sarmatian tamgas are considered in chronological order.

#### ***Plot 1.***

A simple sign in the form of a circle on two vessels (imported and Sarmatian) from an elite burial near Dyad'kovskaya stanitsa in Kuban (Fig. 1.-1) can be reliably considered a tamga, including because they are presented on a cauldron in the usual area for the placement of tamgas. This sign was also reliably a tamga in Kangju, associated with the Sarmatians (petroglyphs in Beskepe), and in Chach (Tashkent Oasis), which was subject to it.

#### ***Plot 2.***

A Sarmatian clan that had a tamga, first presented on an amphora from Tanais in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE in grave 185, 2012 y. (Fig. 1.-3), was apparently Lower Don, and in the Middle Sarmatian period was known on slabs from the Bosporan Tanais and Panticapaeon

(Fig. 1.-4). He turned out to be a long-liver for those turbulent times, and his emblem was used for about 3–4 centuries, until the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE.

*Plot 3.*

Two preserved (out of three before the secondary use of the slab) Sarmatian tamgas on the stele of the second person in the then Kartli (Caucasian Iberia) Šargas *patiāxēs* (Sarmatian name) in the necropolis of Mcheta are of great interest (Fig. 2.-1). The central and largest of them clearly belonged to Šargas himself. A structurally close analogue to it was discovered in the previous time in the known region of distribution of petroglyphs of the Post-Saka type (2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE) on the border of Semirechye and Southern Kazakhstan (Fig. 2.-2) and later — on the eastern outskirts of the Sarmatian lands, on the north-eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. Tamga No. 3, located next to it and genetically related at an early stage (before the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE), today may be initially associated with the Kuban Ciraces (Fig. 2.-4-5). The subsequent fate of the tamga owners looks like a kind of historical detective story. It is full of sharp turns. It has been suggested that in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE, representatives of this clan moved to the Lower Don, which had just been occupied by a group of Alans. Soon, the last male representative of this clan found himself on the lands of the Lower Don Alans and was therefore buried in the Kirsanovskii III necropolis along with a brand for marking valuable cattle at the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cc. (Yatsenko et al., 2020, p. 161; Figs. 6–11, 1–2). Then, after 236 and up to 252 CE (before the destruction of the city), this sign was applied to the upper platform of the slab with the construction inscription of 236 CE on behalf of king Inensimeos in Tanais (Yatsenko, Shevchenko, Usenko, 2022, Fig. 17, No. 5), so that the people of this clan survived on the Don (despite the establishment of power there in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE by the “Late Sarmatians” who came from the Southern Urals), and the placement of the brand in the grave is associated with some special circumstance.

*Plot 4.*

The tamga described in it is associated with a Sarmatian clan of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE from the foothills of Crimea, and a series of its finds relates to Scythian Neapolis (Fig. 3.-1). The history of this emblem is unusual. Contrary to the typical situation when Sarmatian clans died out rather quickly (Yatsenko, 2001, p. 33), Sarmatian bearers of this tamga survived until the period of the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and, together with the Alans and Huns, migrated far to the west. In the 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE, such mirrors were used by women in Gaul and Northern Italy (Fig. 3.-2).

A different fate was with women from a close clan, whose tamga was almost identical, but without a dot in the center of the circle. Their “marriage” mirrors were scattered very widely, at the mouth of the Don (repeatedly), in Right-Bank Ukraine and in Moldova (Fig. 3.-3-5). This, of course, does not indicate migrations of the clan as a whole, but rather distant matrimonial ties, important for some reason (see other similar evidence: Yatsenko, 2001, p. 36–37; Fig. 8). It can be assumed that we are talking about the Lower Don clan of the late Sarmatian period.

*Plot 5.*

Tamga No. 1 on a silver cup from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE from Leninokhabl (Adygea, left bank of the Kuban) (Fig. 4.-1) is associated with the Kuban (?) Sarmatians who settled in the Bosphorus. It appears with a small group of settlers in Panticapaeum in the Middle Sarmatian

period. Direct inclusion in the elite of the Bosporan Kingdom was achieved in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE by a related clan with a similar tamga (Fig. 4.-3), which was repeatedly noted in Tanais (its only single image is seen on the ceremonial slab-insert in the fortress wall) and participated in a certain action in the former Scythian Neapolis.

Sign No. 2, firstly, is unique to Sarmatia (that is, the clan — its owner did not show noticeable activity in contacts and marking of valuable objects), and secondly, it is not represented in Central Asia.

*Plot 6.*

An interesting find is a sign highlighted by inlay on the front side of a wooden chest that belonged to a noble lady of the Late Sarmatian period with many items of Sarmatian appearance from the catacomb 30 of 2012 y. in Tanais (it was placed in half on the lid and the body) (Fig. 5.-2). The object was recreated thanks to the talent of N. E. Bespalaya, but the image was not recognized as a tamga. Meanwhile, this same sign was repeatedly noted on synchronous mirrors in the neighboring Meotian-Sarmatian Kobyakovo (Fig. 5.-3). Thus, this emblem belonged to a late Sarmatian clan that lived in the lower reaches of the Don. Judging by the fact that the Kobyakovo' mirrors come from quite ordinary graves, in this noble clan (as is often noted among nomads), there were both successful families and impoverished ones (women from the latter settled in Kobyakovo due to marriage).

*Plot 7.*

The “foundation slab” (apparently from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE) in the Baylama Wall, which guarded the lands of the port Karakabak city in the north-eastern Caspian Region, is of considerable interest. Two late, early medieval images clearly stand out here (Fig. 6.-a, c — highlighted in bold), and attempts to see traces of only one cultural layer here do not seem convincing.

Exact analogues of some of the signs (Ns. 1, 2, 3) are found only on Sarmatian graffiti from the 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE (respectively — on the stele from Kozyrka near Olbia; in Panticapaeon — on a tombstone purchased in 1892 y. and in a crypt of 1872 y. in Kerch). Emblem No. 1 is found here twice, and it plays a special role in the ritual associated with the construction of the fortress wall. Of interest is tamga No. 4 of the circle of “signs of the Bosporan king Aspurgos” (or rather, his clan, noted already at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE). The other emblems clearly belong to local clans and are still unique.

*Plot 8.*

On a Sarmatian of Hunnic period censer from the Banat region on the middle Danube, in the vicinity of Timisoara, a series of images has been preserved only partially; among them are three figurines of ungulates and birds, a strip of wave-like ornament (Fig. 5.-1, a-b). In those figures in which Romanian colleagues see some sacred (solar and other) symbols, in particular in signs Ns. 2, 3, 4, we note the usual tamgas that were in use earlier, in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE in Crimea and at the mouth of the Don. At an earlier time and synchronously, they are also known in the east — in Khorezm and Kangju.

### ***The Results Discussion***

It is interesting that in most situations (plots 1, 2, 3, 6, 8) the obvious images of tamgas were not recognized as such by very experienced and qualified researchers of the Sarmatians

and neighboring territories. This makes one wonder what stereotypical ideas on this matter are common among colleagues.

The historical interpretation of the facts on plot 3 seems important, when Sarmatian tamgas accompany the stele of the second person of Georgia — Šargas *patiāxēs* in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE. Particular attention is drawn to the sign of Šargas relative next to the main one (Fig. 2.-1, No. 3). Both its distribution and the fate of its owners are surprising. It seems that it all depends on the fame and connections of this group of related families. Their tamga in the Bosphorus and Khorezm is represented on coins (including gold ones), in the Bosphorus and Iberia — on stone steles and foundation stones created in connection with important events. Only this emblem was repeatedly presented throughout the Iranian world either as an imprint of a clan brand (Kangju) (Fig. 2.-3), or as the branding tool itself (Don Alans). This tamga is represented in the main states on the borders of Steppe Sarmatia (Kangju, Khorezm, Iberia, Bosphorus). These facts emphasize the connections and influence of the host clan.

Thus, the Šargas stele presents a group of related tamgas, originally associated with the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE with the neighboring Sarmatians-Siraces, whose area of residence by the beginning of our era reached exactly the Main Caucasian Ridge (Strabo, XI, 2, 1), and then with the Lower Don Alans. As early as the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE, the Sarmatians of the Ciscaucasia (Ovses in “Kartlis Tskhovreba”) willingly helped the Kartlian Saurmag with a Sarmatian name during the rebellion of the eristaves against him, since the Sarmatian king was his cousin (Mroveli, 1979, p. 30). After the defeat in 49 CE in the Bosporan War, the influence of the Siraces in the Northern Black Sea Region and the Northwestern Caucasus clearly weakened, and their territory was reduced, and some of them migrated from the best black soils of the Kuban region in the Northern Black Sea region to the lower reaches of the Dnieper. However, for the survival of the clan-owner of our tamga (or part of it), all this clearly did not become a big problem. In the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE, in the lower reaches of the Don, it was still rich, and its members were buried with signs of high status. It was suggested that Šargas belonged at that time to the most influential group of (Don) Alans in Sarmatia (Khurshudyan, 2015, p. 44), and we can agree with this. At the same time, Šargas spoke out against the “Massagetae” (otherwise Maskuts, Msknyt) who invaded Kartli. Massagetes were apparently the name given back in the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE to the group of Alans of the Central Ciscaucasia that was taking shape at the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> cc. (comp.: Yatsenko, 1998), about whom until the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE there were no records (before their attacks on the lands of the Meotians and the Aziatic Bosphorus), the rest of the world knew mainly from one episode. In Roman sources, the Alans, called Massagetae, are first mentioned as serious enemies of Armenia and the border regions of Rome in 134–135 CE (Dio Cass. LXIX, 15, 1). After the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE, the migration of part of the Central Caucasian Alans to the northern foothills of Dagestan and the emergence of a separate polity there, which the main sources call the country of Maskuts, have been archaeologically traced.

In the situations we have analyzed, examples of obvious migrations of clans — owners of tamgas over considerable distances are interesting. In plot 3, this is a move from Kuban to the lower reaches of the Don, in plot 5 — from the same Kuban to the capital of the Bosphorus

(both of them occurred in the Middle Sarmatian period). Even more interesting is the arrival of Sarmatian women from Crimea to Gaul and Italy by the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. (plot 4). We also see a completely understandable connection between the Sarmatians and related groups in Central Asia — with Kangju (plot 1) and with the group of Yuezhi who settled on its future border with Semirechye (plot 3).

The “tamgas” activity of the Sarmatians on the eastern borders is also characteristic, in particular in the port and trading Karakabak city (plot 7); this was previously noted in the same region and during the secondary use of the Bayte III sanctuary (Yatsenko et al., 2019, p. 82, 85; Fig. 6). In the next, Hunnic period, the Sarmatians of the Northern Black Sea region played a significant role in the formation of the elite of the Hūñā groups in the south of Central Asia — the north of Hindustan (Yatsenko, 2024, p. 485–486).

The facts of the centuries-long existence of some noble clans of nomads, despite the difficult military and political situation, are quite impressive. This is the Lower Don clan, which survived the dramatic change in the region from the Early Sarmatian culture to the Middle Sarmatian, and then to the Late Sarmatian (plot 2). No less indicative is the long life of the clan from the foothills of Crimea at the turn of the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE, which existed until the 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE, although it ended up in Western Europe (plot 4). It can be assumed that we are talking about not quite ordinary clans, which rivals considered it possible to preserve, and which had influential allies in neighboring countries.

### **Conclusion**

We have examined a very interesting series of artifacts with tamgas, on many of which colleagues did not see such signs at all, considering the images to be incomprehensible religious symbols or not commenting on them at all. Usually these are household items (only in plot 8 does an incense burner appear); among them, only the dishes were imported (amphora, prestigious silver and glass cups: plots 1, 2, 5).

In seven out of eight cases, the identified tamgas were initially associated with necropolises of settlements at the mouth of the Don (plots 2, 4, 8), with Sarmatian burials on the Middle Kuban (plots 1, 5) or with necropolises of settlements in the foothills of Crimea (plots 4, 8). This fact once again demonstrates the importance of the named regions for understanding the picture of Sarmatian tamgas' use. All of them were contact zones of Sarmatian groups with sedentary “Barbarian” peoples (Don and Kuban Maeotes, Late Scythians), which made the use of “identity marks” especially relevant.

In several plots (1, 3, 5, 8) we note the role of the Yuezhi of the Balkhash Region of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE, the Southern Kazakhstan' Kangju and Khorezm in the general corpus of analyzed Sarmatian tamgas.

Perhaps the most interesting is the stele of Šargas patiāxēs from the necropolis of the capital of ancient Georgia — Mcheta (more precisely — from the elite necropolis of Armazishevi) (Fig. 2.-1). It confirms the close ties of the nobility of Caucasian Iberia with the groups of the Kuban Siraces and Don Alans. A dedicatory slab from the fortifications of Karakabak city on the north-eastern coast of the Caspian Sea speaks of the role of Sarmatian groups of the Northern Black Sea region in the foundation and early functioning of the city.

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## CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS / ВКЛАД АВТОРОВ

S. A. Yatsenko: idea, formation of the article structure, selection of the main analogies for tamgas, ethnological analogies in the Iranian World, interpretation of artifacts, selection of illustrations for printing, scientific editing of the text.

Яценко С. А.: идея, формирование структуры статьи, подбор основных аналогий тамгам, этнографические аналогии по иранскому миру, интерпретация артефактов, подбор иллюстраций, научное редактирование текста.

I. I. Marchenko: Attracting materials for plot 5: description of the complex, dating and analysis of its cultural context, illustration.

Марченко И. И.: привлечение материала по сюжету 5: описание комплекса, датировка и анализ его культурного контекста, иллюстрация.

A. A. Tuallagov: attraction of material on the plot 3, interpretation of the artifact, bibliography.

Туаллагов А. А.: привлечение материала по сюжету 3, интерпретация артефакта, библиография.

There is no conflict of interest / Конфликт интересов отсутствует.

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*Статья поступила в редакцию 13.06.2025;  
одобрена после рецензирования 08.09.2025;*

*принята к публикации 18.09.2025.*

*The article was submitted 13.06.2025;*

*approved after reviewing 08.09.2025;*

*accepted for publication 18.09.2025.*