

## SACRED AND MYTHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE IMAGE OF A RIDER AND A HORSE IN THE ART OF CONTEMPORARY KAZAKH TAPESTRY

*Baurzhan Tattibekovich DOSZHANOV*

T.K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, 050005, Almaty, Panfilova St., 127, Republic of Kazakhstan  
e-mail: Dos\_Baur@mail.ru

*Malik Floberovich MUKANOV*

T.K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, 050005, Almaty, Panfilova St., 127, Republic of Kazakhstan  
e-mail: malik\_flober@mail.ru

*Bolat Syrlashuly TURGYNBAY*

T.K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, 050005, Almaty, Panfilova St., 127, Republic of Kazakhstan  
e-mail: BolatTurgynbay@mail.ru

### ABSTRACT

*Contemporary Kazakh tapestry art employs multiple images of traditional nomadic culture with the sacred image of a rider on a horse remaining one of the most exciting and inspirational for artists. The critical art analysis and interpretation of original works by Kazakh tapestry artists explore sacred and mythological aspects of the rider and horse images. The artistic tandem is highly valued for its powerful symbolic capacity by contemporary Kazakh artists who borrow it from the traditional set of nomadic archetypes of Kazakh civilization to transform it into a model for modern Kazakh fine arts.*

**Keywords:** contemporary Kazakh fine art, Kazakh tapestry, nomadic mythology of Turkic people, rider and horse images, archetypes of traditional nomad culture

## ASPETTI SACRI E MITOLOGICI DELL'IMMAGINE DI UN CAVALIERE E DI UN CAVALLO NELL'ARTE CONTEMPORANEA KAZAKA DELL'ARAZZO

### SINTESI

*L'arte contemporanea kazaka dell'arazzo utilizza varie immagini della cultura tradizionale dei nomadi, con l'immagine sacra di un cavaliere su un cavallo che rimane per gli artisti una delle più stimolanti e di ispirazione. L'analisi critica e l'interpretazione di opere originali degli artisti di arazzi kazaki esplora gli aspetti sacri e mitologici delle immagini del cavaliere e del cavallo. Per la sua forte carica simbolica il tandem artistico viene molto apprezzato dagli artisti kazaki contemporanei che lo prendono come modello dalla tradizionale serie di archetipi dei nomadi della civiltà kazaka per trasformarlo in un modello per le moderne arti kazake.*

**Parole chiave:** arte contemporanea kazaka, arazzo kazako, mitologia nomade del popolo turco, immagini di cavalieri e cavalli, archetipi della cultura nomade tradizionale

## INTRODUCTION

In his book from the series “Masters of World Cinema” (Kurosawa, 1977) the Japanese director, playwright and scriptwriter Akira Kurosawa employs the image of a samurai on a horse to allegorically reflect his career in cinematography. He describes the samurai as a sacred old man in a dusted and dented shabby armour. The travellers are walking through a dense low fog. They are slowly making their way along an invisible path on a moonlit night as if sailing towards the unknown. There is no one else except the silent trees with live trunks and branches surrounding and hiding the travellers as they disappear in the fog.

The concept of “Kaidan” helps to comprehend Kurosawa’s choice of the sacred imagery fully. As a literary and folklore genre represented by short novellas, it is an integral part of traditional Japanese culture. The word “kaidan” can be translated from the Japanese language as an oral story about the supernatural. The heroes of such short stories are often the legendary figures of medieval Japan such as a lone samurai, warrior, wandering monks. They face supernatural creatures endowed with mystical powers: ghosts, demons and witches, capable of taking a human form or appear as various animals, such as cats, foxes and snakes. Kaidan’s plots are marked with pronounced fatalism because they rely on the Buddhist concept of karma and retribution. With the development of the art of cinema, kaidan transformed into a horror film genre.

In kaidans, levitating ability is a recognizable feature of vengeful ghosts and demons when they disguise as humans. They move to imitate the human gait, but in fact, they hang in the air and do not touch the ground. The presence of fog in the picture of the samurai on the horse walking in a forest suggests their otherworldly hypostasis. The hero faces a challenge to discover the true essence and motives of the actions of a rider.

Besides mystical aspects of his artistic image of the rider and horse, the Japanese director implies another allegorical layer dealing both with the psychology of creativity and with artistry in general. In his life, the artist-creator overcomes not only obvious difficulties and contradictions but also deals with constant inner struggles with his egocentrism and various “demons” that threaten to destroy him from within like a dense fog descends upon the soul.

The example from classical cinema is just a starting point for further artistic exploration of the imagery of the tandem of the rider and horse filled with sacred mystic meaning. In different forms, it is present in classic films based on Mein Reed’s “The Headless Horseman” and Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”. It is interesting that in the original literary sources, the tandem lacks spiritual implications but rather refers to the ancient Indian North American legends of ghosts and funeral rites of the Indians of North America.

Akira Kurosawa concludes his book with the samurai exiting the forest on the country road before dawn and continues his journey further without looking back. The author does not mention whether the samurai met someone at night in a fog or not. For Kurosawa, the image is more important than the story because it accurately captures the essence of his life and the artist’s self-awareness.

## A HISTORY OF THE QUESTION

The cinematic example foreshadows the range of artistic works that will be analysed in this article. There is a great variety of creative works employing and developing the theme of the rider and his horse. Most of them are either a sculptural composition or a beautiful ceremonial portrait made in a realistic pictorial manner and dedicated to famous personalities whose actions determined the historical chronicles of human civilization. The article will examine only artistic works with the military imagery of the rider on the horse to explore and explain their symbolic and mythological implications. A brief look at the historical past serves as a point of departure for the further exploration of the artistic sacred imagery under consideration.

The history of various world civilizations proves that a rider was often associated with mystical, and sometimes even fantastic, supernatural abilities. The first and foremost references are to the history of the settlement of Eurasia by the nomads, which will be discussed later after the Conquista.

In 1519, the Spanish nobleman and adventurer Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) landed on the coast of Mexico. His small but technically well-equipped army consisted of 400 infantrymen armed with muskets and a dozen guns and only 16 cavalrymen. The chronicles mention the number of 20,000 to 50,000 of Aztec warriors who came forward to meet the Spanish conqueror. They also say that the battle was won before it even began. The entire indigenous army of Native Americans scattered, as they were overwhelmed with fear at the sight of the Spanish cavalry consisting of 16 knights in shiny iron armour on their horses. The armour made knights invisible to Indian spears and bone and stone tip arrows. Since the Aztecs had never seen horses before the encounter with the Spanish conquerors, they perceived the horsemen and the horse as a terrifying supernatural creature. Facing no resistance Cortes conquered and plundered the city of Sempoal – the capital of Mexico, commencing the era of the conquest of South America (Mirza, 2007).

Mexican artist José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949) rendered phantasmagorical images of knights on horses seen through the eyes of the Indians in the series of his monumental frescoes: “Horses”, “16th Century Spain”, “Cortes.” The same approach also dominates the imagery in his most famous and large-scale work – the painting of the chapel of the hospital “Hospice-Cabañas” in Guadalajara (1936–1939) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: H. Orozco, *Horses* (<http://baci1.livejournal.com/10274.html>)

#### EUROPEAN ARTWORKS THAT INTERPRET THE IMAGE OF A RIDER

Now let us examine a number of famous European artworks that employ the image of the rider in a symbolic and allegorical way. It has to be mentioned that horse as an archetype is a usual symbolic compositional image of entire structure of “steppe mosaic” (Mukanov et al., 2017, 513) as well as the fictional concept of the warrior. The first example under consideration is the engraving “Knight, Death and the Devil” (1513) by the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Durer (1471–1528). In this work (Fig. 2), the artist creatively merges the phantasmagorical setting and the convincing realism of actions, portraits and clothes of the central figures. The engraving is so detailed and realistic that a historian can study the armour of medieval knights and refer to the print as an accurate document of that historical era.

In the engraving, Death offers an hourglass to the knight as a symbol of the brevity of human life. However, the knight does not dignify Death with a look as he passes the devil with the boar’s muzzle, the ram’s horns, the bat’s wings and keeps moving without looking back or turning around. It seems that the horse is strolling, but the dog has to run to keep up with the knight. The knight keeps moving: he and his horse are unstoppable. Neither Death nor the Devil can frighten or stop him.

*When the artist mentioned his work he did not explain anything about the knight. He called him simply “The Knight.” His weapons and armour are not*

*the markers of his knightly estate but rather symbols of the firmness of spirit, courage, and fearlessness. It is noteworthy that Durer’s engraving lacks Christian symbols. It is not a prayer that helps the knight to defeat his fear of the devil and death, and he relies on his courage and unstoppable movement forward. The knight on the horse can be interpreted as a symbol of time and a symbol of the artist’s desire to overcome all fears and leave the ghosts of the past behind. The image glorifies the strength of the spirit striving for truth. The engraving can be interpreted as a self-portrait of the artist even though it does not depict the appearance but rather reflects Durer’s inner state of mind during difficult decisions. Whatever terrifying encounters the future holds for him, he is full of firm determination not to step off the path, not to abandon the search for high perfection, the unity of the beautiful and moral [...]* (Lvov, 1985, 228–231).

In 1912 the Russian artist Kuzma Sergeevich Petrov-Vodkin (1878–1939) presented his artwork “Bathing of a Red Horse” (Fig. 3) to the public attention at the art exhibition “World of the Arts.” Now the picture is a part of the exposition of the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. The complex figurative-symbolic artistic concept and composition of the artwork reflects the stylistic and spiritual quests of the era. Yuriy A. Rusakov notes that “[...] the first version of the picture was destroyed by the author, [...] and the final version of the picture presents a complex image – a symbol that embodies issues, ideas and challenges of the time at the turn of the XIX–XX centuries” (Rusakov, 1975, 42).



**Fig. 2:** A. Durer, *Knight, Death and the Devil*, 1513 (<http://art.1september.ru/article.php?ID=200800306>)

K. Petrov-Vodkin's artwork powerfully renders the incredible power of a horse. The red horse represents a natural force that the young rider cannot tame and control. As a viewer examines the picture, he notices that a looming figure of a horse "breaks out" from the space of a pictorial canvas. The particular illusion is created by the artistic techniques of spherical perspective. The horse is "cut off" by the frame of the canvas to create striking diagonals of the composition that suggests swift moving of the central figures in the scene.

*The unreal red horse becomes a symbol of the era; it can be seen as an image of the inevitability of the approaching historical events. However, there is no sense of tragic despair. The image of the "radiant" youth rider is not accidental: it goes back to the traditional image of St. George the Victorious in ancient Russian art. "Bathing of a Red Horse" embodied hope for the victory of high ideals and the dream of the "Golden Age", and the hope for a revival of peace and art which were part of the spiritual quest for the era (Balitskaya, 2009, 119–120).*

The quote belongs to an art critic Tatyana Balitskaya who emphasizes the deep connection of the traditional image of a rider with the dream of humanity about the



**Fig. 3:** K. Petrov-Vodkin, *Bathing of a Red Horse*, 1912 ([https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kąpiel\\_czerwonego\\_konia](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kąpiel_czerwonego_konia))

"Golden Age". Likewise, Kazakh epic folklore tales often render the eternal search and hope for the ideal by the heroes: batyrs Koblandy and his battle horse Tayburyl, batyr Alpamys with Bayshubar, and legendary hero Ablai Khan with the horse Kok-Balak.

#### THE IMAGE OF A RIDER IN THE ARTWORKS OF MODERN KAZAKH ARTISTS

The art of contemporary Kazakh tapestry demonstrates the variety of traditional nomadic cultural subjects and images with the sacred rider remaining one of the most exciting and attractive for artists.

*The idea of the horse and the rider was, is and will be reflected in Kazakh sculpture and painting. Artists strive to find a new and current embodiment of this original image, at the same time they united in their emotional yet serious approach to the interpretation of the complementarity of the image. [...] The horse and the rider become both a symbol and an identity marker of national culture and tradition for Kazakh sculptors and painters transforming from the archetypes of the traditional horse-nomadic civilization of Kazakhs to the models of Kazakhstan's professional art (Ergaliyeva, 2002, 129).*

For the sake of further discussion, it is important to emphasize the social significance of military traditions in the nomadic community. The social institutes of nomadic life were designed in a way that military service was one of the most important and typical duties. In fact,

it can be said that the male population of nomadic peoples represented a well-trained army.

*Wearing arms was not only the legal right of a free nomad but rather a duty. For example, at the tribal meetings, an unarmed man did not have the right to vote, and the younger men could not yield to him (Klyashtorny & Sultanov, 2004, 270).*

Being the central character of the epics of Eurasian nomadic peoples, the rider on a horse is a poetic hero endowed with outstanding personal qualities. He earned his fame due to his excellent military training and belonging to a select group. In this sense, idealized by the nomadic epic tales the steppe Batyr warriors are in many respects comparable to the Knights of the Round Table - the characters of the medieval story of the British King Arthur and his knights.

Since we mentioned medieval knight culture, it is necessary to make a small digression from the research topic to introduce the original and unconventional hypothesis of the Kazakhstan historian, writer and playwright Zhumabai Bayzhumin. In his third book of the series "Turan. A Look at the History of Human Society", the author persuasively argues that the European chivalry is not just a technological successor, but also a direct ethnocultural descendant of the heavily armed cataphracts of Turan.

The modern Kazakh language has the words "seri" for a knight and "serilik" for chivalry. Like the paladins, the "warriors of faith" and the knights fighting for the Christian faith, the steppe knights cherished the concepts of honour and fidelity above all. They led an ascetic life and had no property, except for a good fighting horse, weapons and armour. They also could not marry because they took a vow of celibacy.

*Discussing this phenomenon Lev Gumilyov writes that the nomadic society, which had a solid and stable clan structure, nevertheless continually generated a particular category of people for whom the framework of the clan system was too tight. According to him such individuals in the Middle Ages were called "people of free status" by the Turkic nomads, and they united in steppe knight brotherhoods (Bayzhumin, 2012, 72).*

According to Zh. Bayzhumin, the ancient knightly tradition of Turan survived and was revived in medieval Europe. Therefore, various descriptions of Western European wandering knights carry the strong resemblance to their steppe ancestors-warriors, who preserved the macro-segment of nomadic military culture for centuries.

*[...] The ancient Greek historian Strabo (I century BC–I century AD) mentioned ancient Greek knightly*

*Serov culture. He writes about free people, descendants of the nomadic Thracians – "[...] celibate marvelous owners of mares [...]" they were deeply revered by their people. Such knightly brotherhoods were associations of rather unordinary people, belonging to the steppe nobility. Each of the Serov representatives was a brave warrior and poet, musician and composer, singer and talented speaker, a preserver of the cultural traditions of ancestors and defender of the interests of ordinary people (Bayzhumin, 2012, 76).*

It is believed that the code of knightly honour originated in the XII century in France and spread to other countries. According to it, a true knight had to be not only brave and skilled with weapons, but also well educated, generous and kind to protect the weak. He had also to appreciate poetry and music.

However, in Europe and the Great Steppe the warrior, first of all, symbolized the noble and sacred values associated with the victory over the forces of evil. Also a whole set of beliefs relating to the other world, travel to the realm of the dead and the immortality of the soul was associated with the image in question.

In nomadic culture, the role of the horse is evident in the burial rites of tribal leaders, practiced by the peoples of the Scythian world. The horse was sacrificed and buried with the deceased to help him to get to the last destination and serve him in the other world. *"The task of the horse was to escort a nobleman to another world. It transformed into highly revered mythological creatures"* (Samashev, 2006, 134).

The heroic epic tales of the Eurasian nomadic peoples idealize the main characters of Batyr and his horse. They often are shown to grow up together. The horse is described as a faithful and devoted friend of Batyr. They have a similar significance for the plot as the horse is often endowed with self-consciousness and the gift of communication in human language. Therefore, the horse had a significant influence on the actions and deeds of the main character.

In Turkic epics warriors embody the people's ideals of military strength and valour: they are handsome, courageous, wise and just. Their artistic statute is monumental despite the individualization of their appearance. Their physical strength, dignity and beauty are split into the opposition: Batyr-hero and Batyr-enemy. The poetic description of their qualities in the Turkic tradition is laconic:

*[...] the appearance of the hero is not reduced to the description of his face, body structure, etc., but is rather presented by a list of several features like voice, eyes, armour [...]. The ancient Turkic iconography of the warriors suggests an iconic appearance replacing the individual characterization. The whole set of details of the stone sculptures of Altai (hats, weapons, jewellery, belts, bags, containers) do not*



**Fig. 4: A. Bapanov and S. Bapanova, *Warrior* (Bapanova & Bapanov, 1999, 32)**

contribute to a portrait but present an iconographic warrior (Lvova et al., 1989, 208–209).

In 2000 the Bapanovs presented to the public a tapestry entitled “Warrior” with the central figure of the Batyras a powerful iconographic sign (Fig. 4). The artists capture the beautiful stylized figures of rider and horse in dynamics. As in the description of heroic epics, the stallion leaps over the range of the three mountains that dominate the entire pictorial plane. The tandem of a rider and a horse is overwhelming in its physical strength and plastic grace creating the illusion of the lack of space in the compositional frame. The rider has the whole set of weapons, typical for the military culture of nomadic peoples. The curved sword is tied on his thigh; a quiver of arrows and a bow are behind his shoulder.

The main hero of the story is Batyr, slightly leaning back in the saddle. In his right hand he squeezes the shaft of a short spear, and in the left hand, he holds a large round shield. A dark circle of the shield in the figure of the rider becomes the compositional centre of the tapestry, drawing the viewer’s attention. Visual solu-

tion contributes to the original macro effect of spherical perspective. It is similar to the optical methods of contemporary art cinema when the camera zooms on the face or the figure of the main character and blurs the surrounding. The artists managed to achieve the same effect in the tapestry. First of all, they altered the ratio of the physical dimensions of the rider and the horse: the warrior is disproportionately larger than his horse, so the horse seems like a graceful pony. Secondly, by the frame of the tapestry, the artists cut off the front and rear legs of the horse as well as the tail to create an impression that they do not fit into the overall composition.

From the visual and stylistic point of view, the “Warrior” belongs to the best tradition of minimalist aesthetics – a cultural trend, which is well developed in the art of contemporary Kazakh tapestry. The colour range of the fabric is very succinct and accurate consisting of interconnected distinct blue-grey, cream, ochre, green and black colours.

In the Bapanovs’ tapestry, Batyr is not only an archetype but also an iconographic sign. Above all, as an artistic image, he is “a warrior of light” – a steppe Pala-



Fig. 5: A. Bapanov & S. Bapanova, *Archer*, 2007, 205x295 cm (Bapanov et al., 2010, 28–29)

din led by the ideals of dignity and honour. He is not dressed in white, nor he resembles angels and prophets. Despite the lack of religious symbols, the image of a warrior is filled with inner spirituality, courage and strength. The qualities correspond to Kazakh idiom “Naryz zhigit segizkyrly–birsyrlybolu Kerek” – “a knight must have eight skills (eight talents) and united will”. It is usually used to describe Sals – the steppe knights - the defenders of democracy that prevailed in a nomadic society (Kazhgali, 2004, 46).

Without a doubt, the Bapanovs’ artwork follows the tradition of the heroic epic and presents a memorable artistic image of Batyr – a steppe knight, endowed with numerous sacred values of Kazakh traditional culture.

Let us turn our attention to the next example– the tapestry “Archer” (Fig. 5). The compositional structure of the weaving is done in a conventional manner with a big surprise of the positioning of the leading figure in the plane of the monumental canvas. The traditional figure of the archer has never been depicted in such a way before. In the tapestry, the archer shoots an arrow from a bow hanging on the side of a galloping horse. To shoot an arrow, he uses both his hands and his legs. The composition reminds of the sculpture by Buryat artist Dasha

Namdakova who cast a bronze hero in the heat of the battle shooting an arrow in a bend position with the elbows almost touching the ground. Yet, in the sculptural representation, the archer’s feet are firmly planted on the ground.

Only skilled riders could turn and sit back on a galloping horse to shoot arrows. It was a required military tactical skill during the battles. In this way, the archer on a horse could inflict significant damage by arrows flying into the face of the enemy. However, traditionally the archer uses his hands to shoot arrows while in the tapestry the rider uses his legs to press against the base of the bow. He uses a technologically more sophisticated version of the bow – a crossbow. In fact, it cannot be used on a galloping horse. It is mainly used to siege or defend cities. In the warfare a crossbow performed the task of moral and psychological pressure on the enemy than the physical destruction. The crossbow lacks the primary qualities of this type of weapon – lightweight, mobility, shooting speed and accuracy.

The artists chose the crossbow for their tapestry series for its symbolism rather than realism. They also were attracted by the image of a man shooting a bow. Surprisingly, the tapestry does not show the target since



**Fig. 6: M. Mukanov, *Blue Rider*, 1996, 130x210 cm**  
(<http://www.gobelens-kz.com/pages/244.html>)

the artists are not interested in it. It is no accident but rather a calculated move to draw the viewer's attention to the archer at the moment of a maximum concentration of his physical and mental strength. Besides, one can argue that the authors associate the image of the warrior with creativity and the search for the truth. The artist is like an archer aiming for a target.

The protagonist of the tapestry is the Night Archer who reminds of the ancient archetype of the hunter Argy-Mergen from the "Argy-Mergen" by Serikbol Kondybay. The Night Archer is a mythological hero of an ancient hunter in Kazakh archaic tales. His name means an ancient, otherworldly archer where *argy* comes from an ancient root *arig* meaning "otherworldly, ancient, from another world, from the opposite side" (from the Greek *arche* – the most ancient, archaic).

In the mythology, Argy-Mergen is a primordial hunter before the existence of humans. Kazakh folklore has many fairy tales about them. They have similar appearance and act the same constituting a mythological archetype of ancient hunters (Kondybay, 2005, 72).

In the tapestry, the dramatic tension of the scene is achieved by an ascetic combination of only two colours: black and milky cream. In this case, the black colour is used for a background: it fills the top and bottom, left and right side of the tapestry. The central part of the tapestry is weaved in milky cream colour. The border between colours creates a space for the central character and his arrows. The intricate composition highlights the psycho-emotional state of the hero.

The moon in the upper right corner of the tapestry suggests that the scene takes place at night. The choice of night implies that the creative process is a sacred mystery hiding under the cover of darkness. Besides, setting the scene in daylight would create an undesired realistic effect.

In the spring of 1996, a muralist Mukanov Malik (the author of this study) presented as his thesis a series of tapestries – a triptych under the title "Nomads" ("Keshpendiler"). He was the first student to submit a tapestry artwork to complete his training in Monumental Painting at the Kazakh State Academy of Arts (T. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts after re-organization).

The supervisor of his project inspired Mukanov. In 1979 Alibay Bapanov also created the tapestry as his diploma work of professional muralist to graduate from the Moscow Surikov State Art Institute.

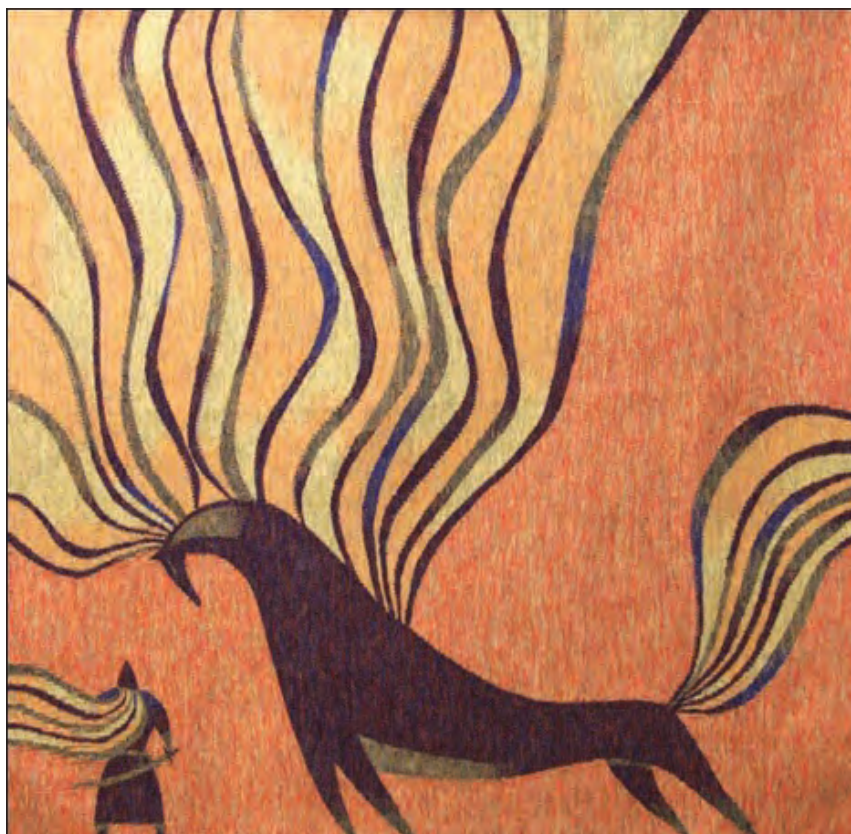
The central part of the triptych of Mukanov's tapestry is "Blue Rider" ("Kokzhauynger"), its size is 130x210 cm. It presents an artistic image of Turkic Khanate rider (Tyurkyut Khanate, Göktürks – Celestial Turks). It was the largest state of nomadic Turkic tribes led by the rulers of the Ashina clan that existed in the vast territory of the Eurasian steppes in the V-VI centuries BC (Fig. 6).

The artist depicted a highly stylized rider and horse galloping at full supports and managed to render high intensity of their movement. The rider is leaning forward and clutching the shaft of the spear-flag decorated the blue wolf head. His horse turning his head back at full speed is depicted at the moment when the horse for a split second hangs in the air with all four hooves not touching the ground. The composition contributes to the emotional dynamics of the tapestry with the detailed, expressive mane and tail of a horse, as well as the braided hair of the rider.

According to the ancient tradition, "Celestial Turks" worshipped the Blue Wolf – a mythological animal capable of taking human form. She saved their ancestor Ashina from death in childhood, when the enemy had killed the family of the boy and left him wounded and dying. The blue wolf saved and raised Ashina. She becomes his wife and gives birth to 5 or 10 male children according to different sources. So when

*the mythical forefather of the Turks Ashina became the head of the "people" (tribe), he put a wolf's head on his flag. Chinese chronicles mention Turk banners with a*





**Fig. 7: B. Doszhanov, *Warrior of Wind*, 2013, 125x125 cm (In the catalogue to the exhibition of tapestry artists (Mukanov et al., 2016, 47))**

golden wolf head. The banners of the ancient Turks originally had the figure of the wolf that later was replaced by the image of a wolf head (Bayzhumin, 2012, 76).

To emphasize the “sky” origin of his people a warrior wears blue attire and golden-yellow helmet. He carries a stylized set of weapons and armour typical for heavily armed horsemen of the historical epoch. He has a wide belt and breastplate, iron and bronze scaly plates are sewn on the attire to protect his arms, thighs and neck, a small compact shield, curved in the shape of a bird’s wing, a straight sword and long spear-flag with a wolf head.

Mukanov’s tapestry was influenced by the work of his mentor and teacher Alibay Bapanov. It explains the excessive use of abstract patchwork elements in the visual structure of the fabric: the horse and the rider seem to be fragmented and lacking pictorial integrity. On the other hand, the rhythmical architectonic placing of abstract shapes behind the central figure organizes landscape into the broken lines of hills and the distant mountains with the rising scarlet-red sun, passing clouds and nascent moon.

The rider wears a black mask with a narrow slit for the eyes. In the military culture of ancient nomadic civi-

lizations, its purpose was to intimidate the enemy and to protect the face during the battle. Usually, warriors wore masks made of leather, iron or bronze.

“We looked at the world through the eye slits [...]” – it is a line from a poem “The Earth, Worship Man” (1961) by the Kazakh poet, writer, literary critic and public figure Olzhas Suleimenov. The poem was devoted to the first space man flight. In a way, the poem informs the proposed Mukanov’s artistic image of a warrior as a symbol of nomadic culture and identifies it with the universal human courage and will to overcome the fear of the unknown.

In 2013 a young Kazakh artist Bauyrzhan Doszhanov created a work entitled “Warrior of the Wind” (“Gel Batyr”), 125x125 cm in size, in the spirit of the canons of aesthetics of minimalism (Fig.7). The visual composition of the tapestry is extremely laconic and distinguished by the graphic unity of the form, all parts of which are interrelated and subordinated simultaneously, based on the logic of the image. Its central figure of the horse is depicted without the mane and tail resembling a hound. The striking stylized image is essential to the composition. A relatively small figure of Batyr stands on the horse with his back turned to the audience. His right hand is positioned on the hilt of the curved swords. Both

figures are strategically positioned in the lower right corner of the tapestry.

The minimalistic colours of the fabric combine deep black-purple with grey-green for the central figures and coral-pink, ocher-pink and cream for the background. Figurative elements and decorative style of curved lines contribute to unity of the theme of a rider and his horse. The tapestry captures the wave-like movements, special plastics and rhythmic organization to enrich its iconic structure and highlight the dynamics and spiritual and metaphysical implications of the imagery.

The image of the wind is a particularly fascinating element of the tapestry. It acquires symbolic meaning in the authorial interpretation of the warrior and his horse. Doszhanov creates a complex artistic image filled with numerous subtexts reflecting sacred and mythological aspects of traditional Turk culture. Therefore,

*[...] one of the most important characteristics of life in the Turk ritual and mythological tradition was the category of tyn ("spirit", "soul", "life", "breath"). It belongs to all living things on earth, be it a plant, animal or human, and it is used for the name of the "soul" of folklore characters. [...] Breathing was the semantic basis that formed a complex set of ideas, which inextricably intertwined reality and mythological images (Grintser, 1982, 237).*

The gift of breath was the final act of the creation of man. It is also the beginning of life. The Altai group of Turkic peoples have a creation myth in which the Ulgen, deity of the Upper world, creates the palace in the white pine forests and mountains to populate it with men. Then he goes to the World Tree to gather the souls in the form of leaves that fell from the tree and instructs the Crow to bring them to the palace. However, on the way, the bird drops the souls from its beak. They fell on the pine forests making them into evergreen ones, and they fell to the ground to be collected by Erlik – a lord of the Underworld. At night, when Ulgen has no power in the Middle World, Erlik comes out of the Underworld to find the palace with the bodies of the first humans. *"They will belong to me",* – said Erlik and breathed souls into the bodies. First people came to life: they were children, boys, girls, men, women, old men and old women. So the first humans came into being (Lvova et al., 1989, 80–83).

Careful examination of the tapestry "Warrior of the Wind" suggests the idea that the protagonists are positive characters and their vibrating energy of life exists in harmony with the environment. As a rule, heroic epics of the Eurasian nomadic peoples balance the plot with the oppositional model: Batyr-hero and Batyr-enemy. They are different not because of their association with

forces of good and evil, but rather by their physiological existence. A representation of dark forces, Batyr-enemy was devoid of such characteristic as breathing.

*Breath-wind filled the body during life and left after death, returning to its primordial element. [...] Here archaic consciousness approaches the idea of the absolute in the supernatural perfection (Lvova, 1989, 76).*

In the tapestry "Warrior of Wind" by Bauyrzhan Doszhanov (Mukanov et al., 2016) the wind implies the sacred and mythological aspects of the ancient Turkic category of *tyn* ("spirit", "soul", "life", "breath") creating an extraordinary and memorable artistic image of the riders.

The conclusion allows for the following insights. Contemporary Kazakh textile art often employs and develops the theme of a rider and his horse to reveal and explore many sacred and mythological aspects of traditional Kazakh nomadic culture. Among many artistic works examined in the article, the Bapanovs' tapestry "Warrior" presents the most creative and striking iconography of Batyr and his horse. Since 2000, it became a creative model and visual inspiration for many tapestry artists.

## CONCLUSION

Globalization erases the boundaries between ethnic groups and dissolves traditional national culture. Traditional sacred values are disappearing into oblivion and *"[...] mythology and symbolism [...] are the areas of knowledge with its real relevance and importance yet to be discovered. The image of the hero in pursuit of ambitious goals and search for the truth, the spirit of Titan, loses significance in modern art"* (Nurpeisova, 2005, 78). Therefore, artists search for artistic images of free, independent, vibrant and creative heroes, "Titans of spirit", to inspire people to great deeds and actions.

Transformation of a warrior into a knight or a *seri*, Batyr of the steppe, took place in the process of historical events and everyday life, social and ethical rules of military nomadic culture. The consciousness of steppe warriors combines courage, physical strength, wisdom and justice. It proved to be *"[...] able to overcome the threshold of the Middle Ages and, following unknown to us unconscious and winding paths of semantics, enter the current value system, which we try to live by to this day. Perhaps, it can explain the reason why the virtue of a medieval knight for us, the people of modern times in the desacralized world, is more beautiful than a bank employee"* (Cardini, 1987, 360).

SVETI IN MITOLOŠKI VIDIKI PODOBE JEZDECA IN KONJA V SODOBNI UMETNOSTI  
KAZAHSTANSKE TAPISERIJE*Baurzhan Tattibekovich DOSZHANOV*T. K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, 050005, Almaty, Panfilova St., 127, Kazakhstan  
e-mail: DosBaur@mail.ru*Malik Floberovich MUKANOV*T. K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, 050005, Almaty, Panfilova St., 127, Kazakhstan  
e-mail: malik\_flober@mail.ru*Bolat Syrlashuly TURGYNBAY*T. K. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, 050005, Almaty, Panfilova St., 127, Kazakhstan  
e-mail: Bolat\_Turgynbay@mail.ru

## POVZETEK

Zgodovina različnih svetovnih civilizacij dokazuje, da je bil jezdec pogosto povezan z mističnimi, včasih celo fantastičnimi, nadnaravnimi sposobnostmi. Mehiški umetnik José Clemente Orozco je npr. prikazoval fantazmagorične podobe vitezov na konjih, kot so jih videli Indijanci. Umetniška dela K. Petrov-Vodkina prikazujejo neverjetno moč konjev. V nomadski kulturi je vloga konja razvidna iz pogrebnih ritualov plemenskih voditeljev, ki jih izvajajo ljudstva iz skifskega sveta. V članku so predstavljeni in analizirani primeri Bapanovih in Mukanovih likovnih del. Umetnost sodobne kazahstanske tapiserije prikazuje številne tradicionalne nomadske kulturne predmete in podobe pri čemer sveti jezdec ostaja ena najbolj zanimivih in privlačnih tematik za umetnik. V tapiseriji se dramska napetost scene doseže z asketsko kombinacijo le dveh barv: črne in mlečno bele. Globalizacija je zbrisala meje med etničnimi skupinami in razrešila tradicionalno nacionalno kulturo. Tekom zgodovinskega razvoja ter vsakdanjega življenja, je prišlo do sprememb družbenih in etničnih pravil vojaške nomadske kulture, kar je botrovalo k preoblikovanju bojevnikar v viteza, »Batyra« iz stepe.

**Ključne besede:** sodobna kazahstanska likovna umetnost, kazahstanska tapiserija, nomadska mitologija turških ljudi, slike jezdeca in konjev, arhetipi tradicionalne nomadske kulture

## SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Balitskaya, T. V. (2009):** Creativity of K.S. Petrov-Vodkin in the context of contemporary artistic searches. Bathing of a Red Horse. In: Conference proceedings: UNESCO and study of the phenomenon of the Great Silk Road in the modern world. Almaty, 119–120.
- Bapanov, A., Bapanova S., Bapanov, A. & A. Bapanova (2010):** Catalogue. Almaty, Saule & Alibay Bapanovs' indexed album.
- Bapanova, S. & A. Bapanov (1999):** The album-catalogue. Almaty, Saule & Alibay Bapanovs' indexed album.
- Bayzhumin, Z. (2012):** Turan. A glance at the history of human society. 3<sup>rd</sup> book. Almaty, Arys.
- Cardini, F. (1987):** The origins of medieval chivalry. Moscow, Progress.
- Ergaliyeva, R. A. (2002):** Ethnocultural traditions in contemporary art of Kazakhstan. Almaty, Gylym.
- Grintser, T. P. (1982):** Myths of the Peoples of the World. Moscow, Soviet Encyclopedia.
- Kazhgali, A. U. (2004):** Oyu I Oy. Almaty, Laskin & Co.
- Klyashtorny, S. G. & T. I. Sultanov (2004):** States and peoples of the Eurasian steppes. Antiquity and the Middle Ages. St. Petersburg, Orientalia.
- Kondybay, S. (2005):** Kazakh mythology. Brief dictionary. Almaty, NurlyAlem.
- Kurosawa, A. (1977):** Masters of Foreign Cinematography. Moscow, Art.
- Lvov, S. (1985):** Albrecht Durer. Moscow, Art.
- Lvova, E. L., Oktyabrskaya, I. V., Salagayev, A. M. & M. S. Usmanova (1989):** The traditional worldview of the Turks of Southern Siberia. Human. Society. Novosibirsk, Nauka.
- Mirza, R. M. (2007):** The Rise and Fall of the American Empire: A Re-Interpretation of History, Economics and Philosophy: 1492–2006. Bloomington, Trafford Publishing.
- Mukanov, M. F., Doszhanov, B. T. & M. S. Suleimenov (2017):** Artistic archetypal images of the Turkic universe models in the art of modern Kazakh tapestry. *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia*, 27, 3, 505–517.
- Mukanov, M., Zhamkhan, A. & B. Doszhanov (2016):** Turkic images of Eurasia. Almaty.
- Nurpeisova, S. (2005):** Introduction to the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of the anthology "The World Culturological Thought. Mythology: Structure and Symbols". *Ruh-miras*. Almaty, Ex-libris, 1, 4, 77–78.
- Rusakov, Y. A. (1975):** Petrov-Vodkin. Leningrad, Art.
- Samashev, Z. S. (2006):** Necropolis of Berel. In: Baipakov, K. M. & Z. K. Taimagambetov (ed.): *Archeology of Kazakhstan*, Almaty, Kazakh University, 133–134.