O‘ZBEKISTON MILLIY UNIVERSITETI XABARLARI, 2026, [15]
ISSN 2181-7324

TARIX
http://journals.nuu.uz
Social sciences
ISSN 3093-8996(Onlayn)

UDC: 634.8 (572.17)

Abdusamad FAYZIYEV,
Lecturer, Department of History of Uzbekistan and Source Studies, at Termez State University, Termez, Uzbekistan
Email: fayziyevabdusamad40@gmail.com; https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9298-8492

Based on the review by S. Saidov, Research Fellow at the Imam Termizi International Research Center, PhD., in History

THE HISTORICAL TYPOLOGY AND SOCIOCULTURAL ROLE OF CENTRAL ASIAN HORSES

Annotation

This article analyses the classification, morphological and behavioural characteristics, and economic, military, and religious-ritual functions of Central Asian horses on the basis of historical sources. Drawing on the Qabusnama, the Avesta, the Shahnameh, and the Turkestan Collection, alongside the works of historical thinkers and scholarly studies, it examines the criteria used to distinguish horses by coat colour, conformation, gait, endurance, and intended use.

Keywords: Central Asia, horse typology, historical sources, horse breeding, morphological characteristics, functional classification, traditional selective breeding, military horse breeding, religious symbolism, Turkestan Collection.

ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ТИПОЛОГИЯ И СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНАЯ РОЛЬ ЛОШАДЕЙ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ

Аннотация

В данной статье на основе исторических источников анализируются классификация, морфологические и поведенческие особенности, а также хозяйственные, военные и религиозно-ритуальные функции лошадей Центральной Азии. На основе сведений, содержащихся в «Кабус-наме», «Авесте», «Шахнаме» и «Туркестанском сборнике», а также трудов исторических мыслителей и научных исследований рассматриваются критерии классификации лошадей по масти, телосложению, аллюру, выносливости и функциональному назначению.

Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия, типология лошадей, исторические источники, коневодство, морфологические особенности, функциональная классификация, традиционная селекция, военное коневодство, религиозная символика, «Туркестанский сборник».

MARKAZIY OSIYO OTLARINING TARIXIY TIPOLOGIYASI VA IJTIMOIY-MADANIY O‘RNI

Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada tarixiy manbalar asosida Markaziy Osiyo otlarining tasnifi, morfologik va xulq-atvor xususiyatlari, shuningdek, xo‘jalik, harbiy hamda diniy-marosimiy vazifalari tahlil qilinadi. «Qobusnoma», «Avesto», «Shohnoma» va «Turkiston to‘plami» asarlari, shuningdek, tarixiy mutafakkirlarning asarlari hamda ilmiy tadqiqotlarga tayangan holda otlarni tusi, tana tuzilishi, yurish uslubi, chidamliligi va foydalanish maqsadiga ko‘ra tasniflash mezonlari ko‘rib chiqiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Markaziy Osiyo, otlar tipologiyasi, tarixiy manbalar, yilqichilik, morfologik xususiyatlar, funksional tasnif, an’anaviy seleksiya, harbiy yilqichilik, diniy ramziylik, «Turkiston to‘plami».

Introduction. Horse breeding developed in Central Asia alongside agriculture, crafts, and trade from ancient times. Beyond its economic and military functions, the horse occupied an important place in social, religious, and ritual life. Archaeological, visual, and written sources associated with the Sogdians, Bactrians, Saka-Massagetae, and Kushans reflect distinctions among horses according to their physical characteristics, coat colour, functions, and associated social status.

Comparing written accounts of ancient horse types with archaeological finds and works of art contributes to a deeper understanding of the region’s cultural heritage, economic life, and international connections. This article aims to illuminate aspects of Central Asia’s cultural and political life by examining ancient horse types and their representation in historical sources.

Literature review (Mavzuga oid adabiyotlar tahlili). The types of Central Asian horses and their historical and cultural significance have been addressed in both local and international scholarship. The works of Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, and Mahmud al-Kashgari classify animals according to their characteristics, habitats, and behaviour [9; 16-18.]. Studies by O‘. Mavlonov, A. Tashbayev, S. N. Kenjayev, M. A. Rahmatov, A. Azizov, John McLennan, B. Kh. Karmysheva, Deborah Cantrell, and C. Willekes provide information on regional horse breeds and the criteria used to classify them.

Research methodology. The study employs historical-analytical and comparative methods, archaeological source criticism, iconographic analysis, and morphological typology to examine the representation of ancient horse types in sources through an integrated approach.

Analysis and Results. The horse was an important component of socioeconomic life, military activity, diplomacy, and cultural values. Examining its classification according to conformation, breed, and function is therefore significant for historical and cultural-anthropological research. Information about horses illuminates a society’s military capacity, economic connections, and diplomatic prestige. In particular, the designation of Fergana horses as “heavenly horses” in Chinese sources [2] demonstrates their high value and importance in the region’s external relations. Written evidence concerning horse prices, their role in exchange, and their use as diplomatic gifts is important for studying ancient economic relations [18]. Accounts in Chinese chronicles of offers of thousands of bolts of silk and gold objects in exchange for Fergana horses indicate the significant role of the horse trade in the economy of the Great Silk Road.

The classification of horses according to natural, morphological, and symbolic characteristics occupied an important place in Eastern philosophy, natural history, and

traditional ethnographic knowledge. Abu Nasr al-Farabi divided beings into six categories on the basis of their natural characteristics [17]. In his thought, animals, including horses, are described as beings acting through instinct and sensation rather than reason [9]. This approach constituted one of the theoretical foundations for studying animals according to their behavioural and natural characteristics. The works of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, and Mahmud al-Kashgari address animals’ geographical adaptation, physiology, and sensory characteristics. Information on horse names, coat colours, and uses in al-Kashgari’s Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk constitutes an important ethnolinguistic source for studying medieval horse types [9].

Nineteenth-century evolutionism and ethnological typology introduced new approaches to investigating animal origins, behaviour, and ritual functions. Within John McLennan’s theory of totemism, certain animals, including horses, were interpreted as symbols of a clan, tribe, or deity [4].

B. Kh. Karmysheva’s studies show that, among the Lakai and Uzbeks, the horse was valued for its economic importance and as a symbol of courage, honour, loyalty, and sacred power [14]. The differentiation of horses according to coat colour, conformation, behaviour, speed, and symbolic significance is regarded as a typological system grounded in empirical observations accumulated within these communities [13].

Deborah Cantrell interprets horse imagery in Judaism as a symbol of power, victory, and divine will [1]. C. Willekes examines the role of horses in art, ritual, and breeding, comparing ponies, Przewalski’s horses, Akhal-Teke, Iberian, and Caspian horses according to morphological and geographical criteria [7]. Her interpretation of the horse as a mediator between humans and the divine highlights the importance of considering religious and symbolic attributes alongside physical characteristics.

Horse imagery also acquired symbolic meaning in Zoroastrianism. In the Yashts of the Avesta, the white horse is interpreted as a symbol of strength and purity: Varahran is depicted as a white horse [8; 96-100.], while Tishtrya appears as a white horse or a bull [8]. These images illuminate the horse’s religious and cosmogonic significance, demonstrating the need to examine its typology through symbolic and social functions as well as morphological characteristics. The ethical, aesthetic, and social attitudes of Central Asian peoples towards horses are also reflected in Kaykavus’s eleventh-century Qabusnama [11]. The author evaluates horses according to coat colour, conformation, endurance, and temperament. Bay and date-coloured horses are described as adaptable to climatic conditions and capable of enduring long journeys. Black colouring on the hooves, beneath the lips, on the forehead, and around the tail of date-coloured horses is considered a favourable sign [11].

Saman horses are likewise preferred, with dark colouring on certain body parts associated with endurance and beauty. Grey horses are valued less highly, while negative behavioural traits are attributed to horses described as ko‘k and bura. The horse’s height should also correspond to the rider’s stature and status [11]. These views suggest that horses were assessed both for their physical capabilities and as expressions of personal dignity and social standing.

Historical and veterinary sources also classify horses according to coat colour, eye characteristics, leg structure, bodily proportions, and behaviour. Gulgun and adham horses are praised; however, reddish eyes in a black horse are interpreted as a sign of restlessness, while white colouring around the eyes or on the hooves is associated with an ill temperament and difficulty of control [11]. Among horses described as ko‘k, two blue eyes are considered favourable, whereas a single blue eye, particularly the left, is regarded as an unfavourable sign. Horses with black or “crow-like” eyes are described as sluggish [11]. These assessments reflect historically specific empirical observations and symbolic beliefs alongside the animals’ biological characteristics.

Historical veterinary sources evaluate horses according to leg and hoof structure, bodily proportions, and behaviour. White legs in grey horses are considered favourable, while whiteness confined to the left leg is regarded as an “inauspicious” sign. Crooked-legged horses termed ahvar are described as “bow-legged” and prone to falling; asdaf and axnaf horses are characterised by small hooves and weak bones. The afraq, afhaj, and asbaq types are assessed negatively because of joint defects or swelling. The ideal morphological type, termed aston baytara, is characterised by white, smooth teeth, a broad nose and forehead, a straight, thick neck, a broad chest, proportionate legs, a long, firm tail, and black eyelashes. Such horses are considered handsome, enduring, and swift [11]. The ancient belief that differences in rib number affect stability during running requires separate scientific investigation. The classification of crooked-tailed a’zal horses, qoyig‘ horses with upright whiskers, and maqxu’ horses with upright hair in the axillary region as “inauspicious” is rooted in folk beliefs. By contrast, descriptions of shams horses as frequently neighing and biting, and zarrot horses as prone to kicking, reflect behavioural observations.

O‘.Mavlonov classifies horses into three groups according to their physical capabilities, morphology, and intended use: riding horses – Akhal-Teke and Yomud; multipurpose gaited horses – Lakai, Karabair, Kyrgyz, and Don; and heavy draught horses [16]. A. Tashbayev likewise employs a classification based on conformation, physiological adaptation, and specialization [5].

According to Mavlonov, the Akhal-Teke breed, developed by the Teke Turkmens in southern Turkmenistan, is distinguished by its adaptation to desert conditions, speed, and agility; it is reported to have covered 1 km in 1 minute 05 seconds. Yomud horses, bred by the Yomud tribe, are similarly described as a swift breed adapted to hot, arid conditions, with Arabian, Mongolian, Kazakh, and Akhal-Teke horses contributing to their development. The Lakai breed is reported to have been developed 300-400 years ago by crossing local horses of Mongolian type with Yomud, Akhal-Teke, Karabair, and Arabian horses. It is characterized by its ability to travel through mountainous terrain, carry loads, and tolerate heat. Arabian horses, originating in the Arabian Peninsula, are distinguished by their tolerance of water scarcity and capacity for long-distance travel. The source states that they were crossed with Turkmen, Iranian, and Egyptian desert horses during the Middle Ages and records a time of 1 minute 8 seconds over 1 km [16].

Historical sources report that Turkmen horses during Amir Timur’s reign could travel 120-160 chaqirim without resting. Crossing them with Arabian horses to improve their tolerance of water scarcity and heat was important for military campaigns. Court officials known as mirakhurs were responsible for assessing breeding quality, feeding and caring for horses, and preparing them for campaigns [3]. This illustrates the role of horse breeding and management in state administration and the military system.

Conclusion and Recommendations. Throughout Central Asian history, the horse served as a means of transport and a military resource, as well as a symbol of social status, ritual, and belief. The Qabusnama, the Avesta, the Shahnameh, and the Turkestan Collection illuminate horses’ coat colours, physical characteristics, symbolic meanings, and practical uses through different categories of sources. This evidence enables a functional distinction between riding,

gaited, and draught horses, while allowing religious and symbolic classifications to be examined separately. Research into horse typology contributes to a deeper understanding of the horse’s role in the region’s economic, military, and cultural development.

REFERENCES:

1. Cantrell D. “Some Trust in Horses”: Horses as Symbols of Power in Rhetoric and Reality // Warfare, Ritual, and Symbol in Biblical and Modern Contexts. Society of Biblical Literature. – Atlanta: 2014. – P. 131-149.
2. Hasanboyev T.F., Burkhonova E.F. The “Heavenly Horses” of Fergana // The Role of Research and Development Factors in the Progress of New Uzbekistan. – Vol. 13, No. 2. – pp. 28–31.
3. Kenjayev S.N., Rahmatov M.A. Flora and Fauna during the Reign of Amir Timur and the Timurids. Monograph. – Bukhara: Kamolot Publishing House, Bukhoro Determinanti LLC, 2023. – 60 p.
4. McLennan. The Worship of Animals and Plants // Fortnightly Review. – 1869. – No. 4. – pp. 407–427.
5. Tashbayev A. The Role of Horses as a Means of Transportation in the Development of the Great Silk Road // International Journal of Scientific and Applied Research. – 2024. – Vol. 1, No. 2. – pp. 180–189.
6. Uljaeva Sh. Public Administration under Amir Timur. – Tashkent: Akademnashr, 2017. – 248 p.
7. Willekes C. From the Steppe to the Stable: Horses and Horsemanship in the Ancient World. PhD Dissertation in Anthropology. – University of Calgary, Alberta, 2013. – 366 p.
8. Avesta: The Book of Yashts. Translated by M. Ishoqov. – Tashkent: Sharq Publishing House, 2001. – 128 p.
9. Azizov A. Beliefs and Perceptions of the Uzbek People Concerning the Animal World. – Tashkent: Fan Publishing House, 2024. – 208 p.
10. Notes on the Kyrgyz Horse // Turkestan Collection. – Vol. 425. – pp. 8–13.
11. Kaykovus. Qabusnama. Translated from Persian by M. Rizo Ogahiy. 2nd revised and expanded edition. – Tashkent: Istiqlol, 1994. – 173 p.
12. Karmysheva B.Kh. Essays on the Ethnic History of the Southern Regions of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. – Moscow: Nauka, 1976. – 324 p.
13. Karmysheva B.Kh. The Lokay Uzbeks of Southern Tajikistan. Issue 1: A Historical and Ethnographic Study of Animal Husbandry in the Pre-Revolutionary Period. – Stalinabad: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR, 1954.
14. The Kyrgyz Horse // Turkestan Collection. – Vol. 425. – pp. 5–7.
15. Mavlonov U.M. Ancient Routes of Central Asia: Their Formation and Stages of Development. Monograph. – Tashkent: Akademiya, 2008. – 431 p.
16. Essays on the History of Social and Philosophical Thought in Uzbekistan. – Tashkent: Uzbekistan Publishing House, 1995. – 240 p.
17. Khodjaev A., Kuldashev Sh., Djumaniyazova F. Historical Information on Central Asian Statehood (Based on Chinese Sources). – Tashkent: Fan Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2018. – 184 p.