

## On the Qara Tamgha (Black Seal) of the Ilkhanate: Its Meaning, Image, and Semiosis

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The Ilkhanate adopted the sphragistic system derived from Chinese one administratively. It is considered that the great seal of the Ilkhan, *al-tamgha* (vermilion seal) of great *amīrs* and *wazīrs*, and *qara-tamgha* (black seal) of *amīrs* were originally brought from Chinese sphragistic system of the Yuan Dynasty. However, these seals were not always used in Ilkhanid-Iran as they were in Yuan-China. The Ilkhanate not only used original seals of the Yuan but also the copied seals that they made themselves and used them in their own value system. The dimension of the Ilkhanid sphragistic system differed from age to age. The whole picture of the system has not been fully uncovered.

The administrative document of the Ilkhanate was written in Mongolian, Turkic, Persian, and Arabic languages—sometimes multilingually—, that situation was a reflection of multiracialism in Ilkhanid Iran. On the other hand, letters and languages of *al-tamgha* and *qara-tamgha* in the Ilkhanid administration were also of great variety—in Chinese, Uigur, ‘Phagspa, and Arabic letters and Chinese, Mongolian, Persian, and Arabic languages. Nevertheless, any person—regardless of linguistic or racial difference—could judge a level of document’s importance when he looked at the color and size of a seal. Therefore, sharing the semiosis of the seals made it possible for the people issued a decree to communicate across a language barrier in the multiracial empire.